

Dog eaters: The Relationships Between Filipinos, Filipino Americans, and Food

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Abstract

This honors thesis focuses on how food represents the complexities surrounding Filipino and Filipino-American identities in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*. *Dogeaters* satirically responds to the effects of a difficult and long history of Spanish and American colonialism. It also depicts the hypocrisies and abusive powers in the lives of postcolonial Filipino characters. Finally, Hagedorn's fictional characters lead to greater understanding of the current status of Filipinos and Filipino Americans and how they function transnationally through the continuation of food traditions. Throughout the thesis, I reflect on my own life as a Filipino American woman living in the United States searching to balance my Filipino ethnicity with my American national identity, in part through my relationship with cooking and food.

Introduction

Blonde hair and blue eyes were all I wanted. On the playground, I recall watching my classmates in envy of their fair skin as mine is a yellowish brown color that did not match anyone else's skin. When another Asian student joined my class, my teacher immediately paired the two of us together because "we understood each other." Ironically, I did not understand my own teacher's reasoning for connecting the two of us. Little did I comprehend my perceived identity as an Asian female. Rather, I only recognized my personal feelings of exclusion, confusion, and repulsion while maturing in a world of whiteness.

Confusion flooded my consciousness throughout my childhood because I did not understand what it meant to be "Filipino" much less a "Filipino American." After finishing elementary school at a private school, I moved from a slightly diverse neighborhood to a completely homogenous town where the "white" population equaled around ninety eight percent. During my first day of school, I befriended an Anglo-American girl and we quickly became friends.

Because of our friendship, I began peering into a culture different than my own. Rather than eating dinner all together, each person ate separately. The father did not do the cooking. The food included hot dogs from the oven. All of these foods and food practices differed vastly from those in my own home. My family's Filipino culture urges families to eat together. The father normally cooks in the household. Rice is bountiful at each meal. Often times, my family would eat with our hands at the dinner table while eating *bangus*. As I witnessed another family's culture, the confusion of our differences began to settle and I felt like the "other" and the "abnormal."

During adolescence, I grew weary of continuing our Filipino traditions in the home. I felt sick eating with my hands and mixing ketchup with my eggs, and I wanted to watch television while my family ate dinner. I even refused to bring dinner leftovers to lunch because of the pungent smells of *adobo* and rice. Once my classmates criticized my Filipino lunches, I immediately begged my parents to let me purchase the cafeteria food that was comprised of tater tots, hamburgers, and lasagna. My parents were perhaps more confused by my actions as they never experienced the terror of the U.S. cafeteria in the Philippines. I viewed my parents as people who would never understand my experience of attempting to conform.

Once I approached high school, my awareness for my Filipino American identity peaked as my classmates defined me as a “fake Asian.” “Coconut” was the most common nickname for me as I was “brown on the outside but white on the inside.” According to my classmates, I “spoke like a white person” but I looked like an Asian which made me a coconut. A sense of falsehood hung above my head as I felt I was betraying my Filipino culture to conform with the culture at my school. I refused to speak Tagalog with my parents and was embarrassed when my classmates asked to hear me speak it. My experience in high school left me with shame and guilt for not upholding my Filipino culture outside of the home. I also felt embarrassed when I did uphold my Filipino values in the midst of my American friends such as putting all the food on the plate at once. The guilt and shame were inescapable.

Each experience in my childhood and adolescence molded my perspective as a Filipino-American college student at Oklahoma State University. When I began my classes, students would often ask me unusual questions, such as, “What are you, Mexican or something?” or simply “What are you?” As I digested these questions, I never knew how to respond accurately without launching into a long discussion about my own identity as a Filipino American.

Separated from home, my distress increased because I lacked people who understood my cultural confusion and I missed my family's cooking. No restaurant could compare to my mother's *pancit*, my father's garlic-fried rice, and my brother's *tocino*. I salivated at the thought of *lumpia* and *halo-halo*. Once I was so desperate to eat Filipino food that I even attempted to make rice in my coffee maker in my dorm room! Though the experiment failed, I realized that Filipino food was integral to my personal identity and livelihood.

After my freshman year, I set out to learn how to recreate my favorite family recipes. I started slowly and simply. I accrued the ingredients needed to create the "comfort" foods of my home. With my mother on the phone, I successfully cooked *lelut manuk*, chicken porridge. I remember us tearing up as my mother told me that her father taught her how to make that particular dish. Though I never knew my grandparents significantly, experiencing the cooking of our food awakened a sense of intimacy with them. My mother's voice, my ingredients, and my grandparents' recipe produced an experience that wholly satisfied quests of my own identity as a Filipino American.

Realizing the centrality of food to Filipino cultural identity motivated me to pursue the research conducted in this honors thesis. With a yearning to grasp the complexities of Filipino and Filipino American identity, I focused on a fictional novel, *Dogeaters*, to understand the correlation between Filipino and Filipino American culture and food. Also of importance is the fact that *Dogeaters* (1990) was written by one of the first widely recognized Filipino American writers. In *Dogeaters*, Jessica Hagedorn satirically addresses the colonial mentality set upon the Filipinos through a long history of exploitation and visitation by European and American colonialism. To explore her argument, Hagedorn specifically uses Filipino foods and food practices to challenge colonial discourse, as well as to expose the overwhelming corruption in a

dictatorial Filipino regime. The foods Hagedorn examines are the exact foods that are present in my life and that generate in me the emotions of guilt, shame, and pride that she expresses in her novel.

In the first chapter of this paper, I discuss the history of the Philippines as it pertains to European and American colonialism. The Spanish colonists' attitude to "civilize" and "fix" the Filipinos through religion created an inferiority complex in some indigenous Filipinos. The three-hundred century Spanish rule on the Philippines left a permanent mark on the culture and traditions. For example, the names of some Filipino foods derive from Spanish words such as *tapas* or *caldereta*, Filipino beef stew. The Spanish also heavily influenced the main religion of the Philippines by implementing Catholic practices and values that center on the family serving as the core of society.

The Spanish control of the Philippines did not survive the 1898 Treaty of Paris as the United States usurped the Philippines. As the United States gained the territory of the Philippines, American culture permeated the mindset of Filipinos. Even today, the strong relationship between the Philippines and the United States is clearly present through the entertainment industry, the economy, and the food. Keeping these colonial histories in mind, I argue that Hagedorn shapes *Dogeaters* as a reply to American influence in the Philippines.

Hagedorn describes colonial influences in *Dogeaters* through the eyes of Rio whose narration is a reflection of her life in the Philippines. In the midst of each memory, Rio recalls the food present during her experiences, as well as how her responses to this food differ from her cousin Pucha's. Each dish articulates a particular aspect of Hagedorn's satirical agenda to undermine the colonial mentality that oppresses Filipinos and that, for example, suggests that the Filipino tradition of eating with one's hands is a sign of inferiority and shame. Through the

weaved narrations of Rio, Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* criticizes the effects of United States colonial history.

In chapter two, I discuss how food in Hagedorn's novel confronts the corrupt and unequal powers present in the Philippines after independence from U.S. colonial rule. Each dish that I discuss highlights the problems in the distribution of powers in the relationships between characters in the novel. Topics such as sexism, racism, and political hegemony are explored as Hagedorn satirically attacks the Filipino government for perpetuating the negative Filipino stereotypes and harming their own people. Particularly popular dishes of the Philippines such as *dinuguan*, expose the painful attempts to maintain political power. Hagedorn parallels a seemingly joyful, food-filled event, a wedding, with a dark and terrifying moment, an assassination, to question the worth of a rebellion and the inner turmoil of the Filipino community.

Given that Rio's Filipino American experience leads to questions regarding the current status of Filipino Americans and their identities, the third chapter focuses on the experiences of first-generation Filipino Americans, second-generation children, and the difficulties of being a *balikbayan*, or a Filipino American who returns to the Philippines. First-generation Filipinos face overt racism and oppression through labor restrictions and immigration quotas. Their children experience the tension of living in both a Filipino home and an American world. However, each generation is confronted with the possibility of returning to the "homeland" as a *balikbayan*. Rio's experiences mirrors the reality of several generations of Filipinos who encounter the difficulty of navigating a world of whiteness.

Through my personal experiences growing up as a Filipino American, I am focused on understanding the potential conflicts in the Filipino and Filipino American identities. Questions

such as “Why are we different than other Asian cultures?” are rooted in the history of European and American colonialism and resistance, as well as in the history of the postcolonial state and Filipino immigration. Hagedorn explores and challenges how shame has played a role in Filipino and American Filipino cultural identity. Through the exploration of her Filipino and Filipino American stories, I search to discover how food characterizes and negotiates the tensions in these identities.

Chapter 1: The History of Colonialism and its Effects on the Philippines

Dog eaters begins in 1956, approximately ten years after the Philippines received political independence from the United States. Although it is set in the decade following formal decolonization, *Dog eaters* addresses the traces of colonialism that persist in the Philippines. The novel “satirizes the Filipino’s ‘colonial mentality’” through the depiction of ashamed Filipinos who are fearful of being marginalized by Western standards of success (Espiritu 71). Indeed, characters who refuse to conform to Western culture are painfully excluded from the discourse of success. Hagedorn’s satirical approach to the ideals of success subtly criticizes the Western perception of the Philippines’s colonial history. While President William McKinley referred to the colonization of the Philippines as a victorious and necessary action, the Filipinos suffered and were treated as inferior to the invading peoples. Though Hagedorn does not place her novel in the midst of the colonial era, the struggles of her characters highlight the ongoing influence of brutal American colonization. To spark the discussion of neo-colonialism in the post-war Philippines, Hagedorn places food and food practices in the center of each major event of the novel. Specific foods challenge different stereotypes and unravel the complex emotions that only foods can accurately articulate.

To address the significance of colonialism, Hagedorn exposes the folly of a neo-colonial mentality. Hagedorn depicts several characters yearning to forgo Filipino culture to reach for an American Filipino identity. However, the characters obsessed with the idea of abandoning Filipino identity discover the emptiness and fatalism of having faith in American superiority. In *Dog eaters*, Hagedorn crumbles the myth that American beauty, fortune, and fame create satisfaction. A neo-colonial mentality lures Pucha and Rio to believe the promise that Western culture inherently brings happiness and success. To illustrate this notion, Hagedorn discusses

several different encounters between Filipino and American culture. The entertainment industry, ideals of beauty, and food traditions emphasize the tension in negotiating a fine line between being a shamed Filipino and a proud American Filipino. Throughout *Dogeaters*, Hagedorn exposes the hypocrisy evident in the systems of power in the Philippines that emerge due to the complex histories of colonialism. Though Spain and the United States infiltrated the Philippines to “civilize” Filipinos, the true nature of exploitation and economic abuse are fleshed out in *Dogeaters* as Hagedorn satirizes the attitudes of the Filipino characters.

White Man’s Burden

The colonized mentality of characters such as Pucha and Rio originates from the history of Spanish and American colonization. The women’s perception of beauty, fame, and fortune are effects of the Spanish and American control over the Philippines. Essential to understanding the psychology of the characters in *Dogeaters* is an acknowledgement of the colonial past of the Philippines. Before explaining how Hagedorn’s novel critiques the neo-colonial perspective that persists in a politically postcolonial era, it is necessary to provide a brief history of colonialism in the Philippines.

The pride of Filipino culture and identity was diminished and repressed under the religious and economic agendas of Europe and the United States. Essential to understanding of the current Filipino “colonial (or neo-colonial) mentality” is the historical perception of the Filipinos as “savages” and “uncivilized” (Espiritu 57). This attitude can be traced back to Spanish control over the islands. The Spaniards first “discovered” the Philippines in 1521, but did not establish actual control over the islands until 1565 (Galputos 9). The Philippines, more specifically, Manila served as the “direct trade link between Asia and America” (Bjork). However, the Philippines did not offer lucrative cash crops or raw resources. Rather, Spain

remained in possession of the Philippines for religious reasons. According to the Spaniards, if they lost control of the Philippines, Christianity would not endure.

The Spaniards maintained a privileged social sphere in part through racialized exclusion in colonial religious institutions in the Philippines. In the Cortes era of Spanish control over the Philippines, the clergy denied Filipinos access to “religious academies and higher positions in the Philippine clergy” (Kramer 28). The basis for this exclusion rested solely on the “race” of the indigenous population. Spaniards utilized a propaganda movement to depict Filipinos as “savage” and “uncivilized”, characteristics appear later in American propaganda as well. In 1887, Spanish columnist Pablo Feced Temprano wrote an essay titled “Them and Us” (Kramer 51). In the essay, he describes in Spanish how Filipinos should be perceived as “the others” due to the physical differences between the Spaniards and Filipinos. The Spanish media depicted Filipinos as having a “nakedness and agility [that] made them monkeylike” (51). Because of this animalistic perception of the Filipinos, the Spaniards felt justified in limiting the Filipinos to only labor-intensive work. The rampant media campaign in the late 1800s against assimilation furthered the exclusion of the Filipinos and the “abyss between them and us” (51). The Spanish and Filipinos occupied two separate spaces that were not allowed to intermix. As a result, the Spanish shamed the Filipinos in their own territory, rooting the Filipino’s subjugation in the physical landscape of the Philippines.

The United States’ motivation to control the Philippines differed significantly from Spain’s. After a three hundred year rule, Spain lost control of the Philippines to the United States with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898 (Galputos 9). Once Filipinos were free from Spanish control, they were sieged by the United States and fought the Philippine-American War from 1899 until 1902 (San Juan 69). Though the United States was hesitant to break its

isolationist policy, the desire for an American presence in Asia seemed advantageous to Congress. Hence, the United States became adamant for control over the Philippines and placed several military bases in the region. The ideas of “exceptionalism” and “Manifest Destiny” motivated a violent and tumultuous war against the Filipinos solely to gain a large presence in the Pacific Ocean (Espiritu 25). In a satirical essay, Mark Twain addressed the report that revealed “30,000 American soldiers killed one million Filipinos...a most embarrassing circumstance” (San Juan 69). Upon winning the war, the United States annexed the Philippines as a territory.

The United States refused to relinquish control of the Philippines on the basis of perceived “savagery” and ineptitude. Hagedorn includes a portion of President McKinley’s nonfictional address regarding American control over the Philippines, which emphasizes a misconceived notion to “fix” the Philippines: “there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them” (Hagedorn 71). McKinley’s attitude towards the Filipinos parallels the Spaniards’ view of the indigenous people. The “white man’s burden” to stabilize the Philippines is chronicled in Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and The Philippine Island” (1899). Kipling urges his audience “to veil the threat of terror” of the “sullen peoples, half devil and half child,” who represent the Filipinos (8-11). The derogatory religious connotation, which positions the Filipinos as “half devil,” suggests a sense of divine right protecting and guiding the Western culture that is similar to how the Spanish colonized the Philippines to uphold Christianity.

In order perpetuate the “virtue” of the white man’s burden, the United States “infiltrated all segments of Philippine society” (Espiritu 25). The United States reconstructed the Philippine

government to match its own democracy. As a form of good will, the United States also implemented the “policy of Filipinization,” wherein Filipinos gradually substituted American workers and administrators in the government in order to prepare the Philippines for eventual independence (Hagedorn 25). The United States also reformed parts of the Philippines’s economy while preventing change in other aspects. The United States created an “export-import policy and kept the Philippines an unindustrialized export economy” (Espiritu 25). The United States was responsible for purchasing “200,000,000 pesos in 1936 out of total exports of 270,000,000 pesos” (Wheeler 171). The United States purchased “sugar, tobacco, abaca, and coconut products” (171) from the Philippines, which sustained the agricultural industry. American imports were highly prized for their expensive price tags, whereas export products, such as *calamansi* juice or rice, did not offer a level of prestige or wealth. This relationship was advantageous only to the United States: the Philippines needed to focus on agricultural production rather than providing progressive industrial jobs for the native Filipinos.

Besides molding the Filipino economy, the United States also redefined the Filipino education system to promote assimilation and a permanent relationship between the two countries. English became the main language of primary and secondary schools as “an instrument of assimilation or Americanization” (Espiritu 26). Children were shamed from speaking solely Tagalog, one of the major languages of the Philippines. English-speaking children tended to be perceived as successful because schools would teach the children to “regard American culture as superior to any other, and American society as the model par excellence for Philippine society” (26). The racialized discourse transcends the formally colonized generation, as Americanization was evident in subsequent generations of the Philippines.

Under the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, the Philippines became a separate nation in 1946, although the Tydings-McDuffie act allowed a myriad of American naval bases to be operable until the late 1900s. Despite the formal end of colonialism, however, the Spanish and American influences are still widely relevant in today's Filipino culture. For example, Filipino food reflects the historical presence of the two major colonizing countries. On one hand, while the Spanish occupied the Philippines, they introduced their cooking techniques and names of dishes. Popular dishes such as "*caldereta, empanadas, embutido, and flan*" are evident in Filipino food and featured in *Dogeaters* (Galputos 9). On the other hand, American influence is more apparent in the products of the Philippines such as "processed convenience foods such as spam, corned beef, evaporated milk, and instant coffee" (Galputos 9), which are coveted and prized in some Filipino communities. Sneja Gunew, in "Introduction: Multicultural Translations of Food, Bodies, and Language," references Levi-Strauss who suggests "the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure" (Gunew 2000). The structure of the Philippines rests on its colonization by Spain and the United States. These foods and food names represent the colonial impact of Spain and the U.S. on the Philippines, as well as the symbolic assimilation of multiple cultures to form a unique Filipino identity.

Colonial Mentality and the Entertainment Industry

To engage with colonial discourses in a post-colonial context, Hagedorn satirically addresses the colonial teachings of American "superiority," as some of her Filipino characters aspire to American ideals of beauty, fortune, and fame. Through the imagery of Americanized-Filipino products, Hagedorn explores a binary of Filipino and American culture that is exemplified by the mindset of the Filipino women in *Dogeaters* as they chase after American ideals of beauty in the entertainment industry. Furthermore, the food in *Dogeaters* suggests

a “fakeness” in the American products, as sugary chocolates are without substance, but the Filipino *dilis* Rio eats reveals her raw, authentic, and substantial emotions in secret.

The novel begins with an explicit encounter between Filipino and American culture. Rio recalls sitting inside an “air conditioned darkness of the Avenue Theatre” (Hagedorn 3), a movie theatre praised by Filipinos for showing only American movies with American actors. She remembers the smells of “flowery pomade, sugary chocolates, cigarette smoke, and sweat” (3) that surround her fascination for the American actors on the big theatre screen. The smells of the theatre exemplify several Filipino cultural norms, such as smoking and using hair products to look more American. The “sugary chocolates” are also imports from other countries. Rio’s senses juxtapose a Filipino environment to an American film that emphasizes the glorification of American culture as each audience member gazes up at the screen to be immersed in the film. The space of the theatre offers a temporary “American experience” for Rio and Pucha, who desire to be more like Americans. The movie theatre merges the American entertainment industry with the Filipino people.

Once the movie finishes, the responses of envy and hatred demonstrate the colonial mentality of beauty internalized by the Filipino young women. The atmosphere of the theatre no longer captivates the three women, but rather they are placed in the reality of the Philippines. After the movie, Rio, Lorenza, and Pucha discuss the particular aspects of the film they enjoyed or disliked. The actors and actresses are the only topic of conversation between the ladies because they most prize beauty and fame. Rio admits that the actress Gloria Talbott appeared “inherently American, modern, and enviable” (Hagedorn 4). Rio’s lust for Gloria’s image emphasizes the powerful envy for Americanized beauty and modernity. However, Pucha scrutinizes Jane Wyman: “I don’t like her face...I hate when Rock (Hudson) starts kissing her!”

(4). Pucha's critique of Jane Wyman also reveals her envy towards the American actress. Both reactions signal a desire to imitate American culture. The hierarchy of beauty emphasizes the paralyzing effects of colonization on the psyche of a culture. Rio admits to "hating my cousin...for being so blond, fair-skinned, and cruel" (4). Rio desires to have Pucha's "mestizo nose, the nose she is so proud of because it's so pointy and straight" (4). Rio longs to be "mestizo" like Pucha, whereas Pucha yearns to be perceived as an American modern beauty. Both women attempt to occupy "a certain proximity to the sources of colonial power" through the American or colonial standard of beauty (Rafael 165). Mirroring the image of American beauty establishes a power that exists very little in Filipino society.

"A Delicious Tradition"

The magnitude of the movie theatre diminishes as Hagedorn shifts to the radio as an alternative, non-Americanized Filipino source of entertainment for Rio. In her recollection of her childhood, Rio's emotions are fleshed out as she recalls listening to the Tagalog radio show *Love Letters*. Rio only listens to the radio show with her grandmother, Lola Narcissa, and her servants. The radio show provides Rio a Filipino space where she may "weep without shame" at the inevitable death of the characters (Hagedorn 12). Rio defines her experience listening to the radio show as a "delicious tradition" (12). Rio connects the food and radio show together to form a purely Filipino space.

The space is "Filipino" as the products and people within the space are rooted in Filipino traditions untainted by envy for American products. Lola Narcissa's food centers on Filipino culture as she eats *dilis*, or anchovies with rice (Hagedorn 10). Hagedorn denotes the Tagalog name for the anchovies to emphasize the Filipino context of the food. Lola Narcissa "expertly" eats with her hands (11), an old Filipino tradition that has diminished over time (Llenado 79). As

Lola Narcissa “expertly” eats with her hands, she demonstrates how the Filipino eating traditions have been taught to her. As Lola Narcissa is eating, she experiences a Filipino entertainment radio show that defines Filipino traits: “The serial is heavy with pure love, blood debts, luscious revenge” (12). Rio’s intimate response to the Filipino show suggests a genuine and sincere connection to Filipino culture.

Though Lola Narcissa represents an older generation than Rio, Rio yearns for her Lola’s environment and deceives her own parents to spend time with her grandmother. The tension between Rio’s parents and her grandmother appears when her father asserts “*Love Letters* appeals to the lowest common denominator” (Hagedorn 11). His derogatory perception of *Love Letters* exists because the show is in a space distant from American culture. The lack of similarity between *Love Letters* and *All That Heaven Allows*, the American film, is why the radio show is considered only acceptable for servants and lower class citizens. Rio enjoys the American film but prefers the Tagalog entertainment. Moreover, Rio’s memories and characterization of *Love Letters* and the American film differ greatly. Whereas the American film generates envy towards the actresses, *Love Letters* moves Rio to tears. Hagedorn titles the first chapter “Love Letters” to mark the significance of the radio show to Rio. In her reflection of her childhood in the Philippines, Rio most vividly recalls the nights she spent with her grandmother and her servants listening to *Love Letters*. Rio’s clear memory of *Love Letters* defies her father’s words. Though her father believes the show appeals to the “lowest common denominator” the show is the only memory Rio recalls perfectly (11). Therefore, Rio’s father undervalues Filipino traditions and culture much to the dissatisfaction of Hagedorn.

“*They’re Expensive and Imported*”

While Rio secretly experiences the satisfaction of Filipino foods, Pucha publicly relishes American food over Filipino food. In the public sphere, she rejects Filipino food for American imports because she recognizes its association with success. Hagedorn satirizes the promotion of imported goods by undermining Pucha’s refusal to eat Filipino food and opt for American canned food instead.

During a Filipino party, foods such as *lechon kawali*, *grilled bangus*, and *pinkabet* are served to Pucha and Rio (Hagedorn 62). Each dish highlights the complexity of food culture, as “Philippine cuisine is the familiar blended with the exotic” (Alejandro 12). *Lechon kawali*, or pan-fried roast pork, is considered “the pinnacle of Filipino hospitality and generosity” (Aranas 107). The dish requires an immense amount of time, care, and effort to prepare correctly. *Lechon kawali* is also served as a whole pig and presented in a traditional fashion of being carved in front of the guests. Therefore, *lechon kawali* is not necessarily a standard of Filipino fare, but rather a meal reserved for large gatherings. The whole suckling pig represents the tropical and lavish aspect of Filipino food. Because of the presence of *lechon kawali*, Hagedorn establishes the event as a Filipino celebration for a special occasion. The *grilled bangus*, or milkfish, provides a context of familiarity and comfort for the event. Unlike *lechon kawali*, *grilled bangus* is the “most popular fish” of the Philippines (Alejandro 128). The milkfish resonates with Filipinos as a comfort food, as the dish transcends class and region. *Pinkabet* is the most carefully described dish of the three. Rio distinctly recalls *pinakbet* as her aunt’s “specialty,” comprised of “bitter-melon, squash, okra, and stringbeans stewed with cloves of garlic, bits of pork fat, and salty fermented shrimp *bagoong*” (Hagedorn 62). The vivid taste imagery suggests that Rio strongly associates the specific dish of *pinakbet* with her memory of the Philippines. Rio

recognizes the difficulty of balancing the myriad of flavors and textures in *pinkabet*: bitter, sweet, salty, and fatty. Through the imagery of several traditional Filipino goods, Hagedorn creates a Filipino space that Rio relishes.

Contrasted with the complex Filipino dishes are the easily cooked canned goods Pucha prefers to consume. Because the bitter-melon in *pinkabet* “gives her bad breath,” she refuses to eat the dish (Hagedorn 62). Pucha does not reveal any repulsion for the dish, but rather a preference for the American “can of Heinz Pork’n Beans instead” (62). Hagedorn specifically uses the can of beans as a desire for Pucha to highlight the hypocrisy of some Filipinos. The can of beans plausibly gives worse breath than the *pinkabet*. The can of beans costs more than the homemade stew. Also, while the *pinakbet* takes several hours to prepare, the can of beans only takes minutes to open and heat up. Pucha negates the care and hospitality of Pacita, the cook, and chooses to eat the beans because “they’re gooey with molasses, but most of all because they’re expensive and imported” (62). Canned foods were imported into the Philippines as a result of the “shortages of fresh produce and the black market” after World War II (Alejandro 12). The can of beans represents a new food tradition that is not rooted in the Philippines. Accordingly, Hagedorn’s language for the American product differs from the decadent imagery for the Filipino comfort dishes.

In Rio’s rich imagery of the food, she denounces the craving for the beans as she describes Pucha’s love for the beans as deriving from her perception of wealth and status rather than the taste itself. The beans represent the “pervasive cultural Americanization of the population, exhorting Filipinos to regard the American culture...as more prestigious than their own” (Espiritu 24). Whereas the *lechon kawali*, *pinkabet*, and *grilled bangus* developed within a

Filipino space of traditions, cultural complexity, and uniqueness, the can of beans disrupts the space with a simplistic American product that is preferred because of a colonial mentality.

Dogeaters: The Primitive Filipino

Central to the colonial discourse is the perception of Filipinos as primitive people who consume dog meat. Hagedorn reuses the term “Dogeaters” in order to expose the ravaging psychological effects of inferiority and oppression. As the title of her novel is the negative term, she uses the Filipino stereotype to lay the foundation for a satirical attack against the United States, the Philippines, and the corrupt governments and relations between the two countries. Interestingly, not a single character in Hagedorn’s novel consumes dog meat. “Dogeater” functions only as an insult rather than an actual term of identification. The cultural shame originates from the Westernized perception of inferior Filipinos. Hagedorn asserts that Filipinos counteract the colonizer’s claims through their rejection of the term.

In fact, in the novel dog meat is considered not to be Filipino food. When the cook tells Sergeant Planas that they are out of ingredients to make his dish order, he angrily reacts “she can’t talk to me like that! I’ll bet this is some of her dog meat” (Hagedorn 199). Sergeant Planas’s response to the “unappetizing-looking mess” suggests that dog meat is not a Filipino cultural dish. In fact, Sergeant Planas would rather believe the food is “Chinese sausage” before calling it *longanisa*, the Filipino version of sausage. Sergeant Planas reveals the Filipino perception of dog meat as being primitive, cheap, and not Filipino. In this way, Filipinos are resisting the Westernized stereotypes of Filipinos as dog eaters. Hagedorn confronts the worst Filipino stereotype

expose the psychological oppression that exists as an effect of Spanish and American colonialism.

Conclusion

The history of the Philippines includes several colonial powers influencing the Filipino food, culture, and people. Hagedorn's novel suggests how the colonial mentality that Westernized cultures, more specifically Spanish and American, are conceivably more evolved and complex permeates Filipino psychology. To demystify this particular mindset, Hagedorn uses Rio's food memories and experiences in the Philippines as an illustration of the non-Americanized Filipino and Americanized Filipino spaces present in the Philippines. Through her imagery of the Philippines and Filipino American products, Hagedorn establishes specific Filipino and American spaces in order to emphasize the emerging new mixed identities and the many questions that these spaces raise.

In the Filipino cultural realm, Rio recalls her love for her grandmother, Lola Narcissa, which signals an intrinsic respect for the Filipino traditions, such as eating with hands and listening to soap operas on the radio. The scene does not engage with American imported products or cultures. However, Rio also enjoys American entertainment but only experiences envy and anger during her interactions with Pucha afterwards. Rio's memories of her grandmother and the movie theatre call into question the American Filipino spaces she encounters. Furthermore, Hagedorn also deconstructs the accepted notion of Americanization through several other contrasts like comfort foods. Needing a concrete and palatable metaphor for describing complicated histories and identities, Hagedorn uses Filipino food and American

imports to depict the tensions between the two cultures. Food dishes function as the relatable and traceable symbols in *Dog eaters*' satirical perspective on the colonial mentality.

Chapter 2: How Food Represents Power in *Dog eaters*

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, food and food traditions articulate several arguments in Hagedorn's *Dog eaters*. Rio's desire to eat with her hands demonstrates an instinctual inclination for Filipino food traditions even in secret. Pucha's hypocritical preference for beans signifies the warped association between imported goods and wealth. Hagedorn furthers her argument by using food to function not only as symbols for Filipino or Americanized Filipino identity, but also as symbols for the corrupt status of power in the postcolonial Philippines.

In this chapter, I examine how food in Hagedorn's novel indicates a perversion of power in the world of politics, gender, and people. Food serves as a vehicle to continue the satirical agenda embedded throughout *Dog eaters*. Each particular dish in this chapter comments on Filipino identity, as Hagedorn mentions Filipino dishes to depict the particular attitudes of characters such as Pucha, Joey and Rio. Whether a dish breathes familiarity, success, or repulsion, the food symbolizes the Filipino experience. Through references to specific Filipino dishes such as *dinuguan*, *balut*, and wedding cake, Hagedorn exposes the many abusive powers prevalent in the Philippines. The *balut* highlights gendered abuse and deconstructs the stereotype that the famous and powerful are content. The *dinuguan* generates a discussion regarding the hypocrisy of the government and the cost of perpetuating corrupt power over the country.

Hagedorn uses each food dish to reflect the inward thoughts of each character as a response to the unequal distribution of power between the elite and the impoverished, women and men, the famous and the invisible.

Balut: The Dish of Secretly Abusive Powers

In *Dog eaters*, *balut* represents the sexist unequal distribution of economic power. Hagedorn inserts *balut* during the interaction between Lolita Luna and General Ledesma. The chapter title “Surrender” hints at Lolita Luna’s turmoil, as she and the rest of the Philippines must comply with the general’s demands. The opening scene depicts Lolita Luna “on her knees,” while General Ledesma “holds her head up by her mane of unruly hair” (Hagedorn 95). The image of Lolita on the ground with General Ledesma towering over her body yanking her hair depicts an abusive relationship. Hagedorn downplays the interaction by describing the event as simply the two “playing this game” (95). Understating the interplay between Lolita and General Ledesma as merely a game highlights the novel’s sardonic treatment of a general cultural acceptance of gendered abuse. Because both characters are “playing this game,” Hagedorn hints that the general, who is a decorated war hero, will be perceived as a man pursuing another woman rather than physically tormenting and raping her. When General Ledesma unwraps his *balut*, Lolita Luna recoils and states, “I wish you wouldn’t bring that stuff in my apartment” (96). *Balut* carries a distinct smell that is difficult to mask once cooked. However, General Ledesma continues eating unabashedly and retorts, “Who pays the rent?” (96). By referring to her rent, the general “never lets her forget she is a kept woman” (96). The general believes he may control Lolita because of his financial contributions to her lifestyle. In his own thoughts, General

Ledesma admits to an intense jealousy over Lolita's other lovers and refers to her as "his Lolita" (96). Lolita may not be an independent entity; she must always belong to another man.

Consuming the *balut* catalyzes General Ledesma's sexual exploitation of Lolita Luna. General Ledesma considers *balut* as a symbol for masculinity. *Balut* is a fertilized duck egg that is typically eaten warm. Margaret Magat discusses the gendered implications of consuming *balut* in the Philippines in her essay "Balut: Fertilized Duck Eggs and Their Role in Filipino Culture." Magat discusses the folklore of *balut*, which maintains the food functions as an aphrodisiac; the "sexual hunger of a man is supposed to intensify after eating *balut*" (82). Hagedorn demonstrates this belief when depicting the general eating the eggs as him "fortifying himself" with the "pure protein" (Hagedorn 96). The general believes the eggs provide more than nutritional value. The eggs invigorate General Ledesma's sexual drive. When he finishes the eggs, Ledesma immediately asks Lolita to sit on his lap with the question, "What costume are you putting on for me today?" (96). The General does not ask permission to court Lolita, but rather assumes she will be complicit with his sexual demands. While the two are engaging in sexual intercourse, the general "slaps her around just a bit, enough to lightly bruise her complacent face or the insides of her ample thighs" to prove his dominating masculinity over her (96). General Ledesma abuses Lolita to "fortify" himself as the dominant person in control, similar to how the *balut* "fortifies" his sexual appetite.

Lolita Luna refuses the taste of *balut* to resist emotionally engaging in her sexual intercourse with the general. Magat suggests, "Filipino women do not eat *balut* to increase their sexual drives; only the men do" (85). Women tend to be denied *balut* because of the Spanish colonial influence of the "machismo concept" that relegates protein to men (Magat 85). When the general offers Lolita the *balut*, Lolita "shudders at the thought" of consuming it (Hagedorn

96). Lolita fears the masculine sexual drive that accompanies the *balut*. During their sexual encounters, Lolita “enjoys when [the general] weeps in front of her...a broken-down old man with a young man’s body” (97). The weeping is a physical effect of the general’s masculinity disintegrating because of self-doubt. Consequently, the masculinity provided by the *balut* does not, in fact, completely fulfill the emotional needs of the general, which breaks him down to tears. The *balut* cannot make him whole because his insecurities of losing his masculinity cannot be quenched without admitting his vulnerability.

Dinuguan: The Dish of Guilt

Whereas *balut* mediates the gendered abuse between General Ledesma and Lolita Luna, the *dinuguan* highlights a myriad of abuses and feelings of guilt, anger, and sorrow. As a cultural Filipino dish, *dinuguan*, or pork blood stew, stirs a reaction within Joey and Baby Alacran, who are each dealing with the political injustice and corruption throughout a post-colonial Philippines. *Dinuguan* is a “comfort dish” that incorporates the blood and innards of a pig (Besa and Dorotan 208). As a traditional comfort dish, *dinuguan* remains an integral Filipino dish. Because of the dish’s popularity, Hagedorn places *dinuguan* in the center of two significant events—a wedding and an assassination. She sets up this parallel by quoting Senator Avila’s perception of food: “Food is the center of our ritual celebrations, our baptisms, weddings, funerals” (154). Juxtaposing weddings and funerals suggest an intimate bond between the two that only food binds. By crossing over the dish in two major political stories, Hagedorn ensures that *dinuguan* contributes to the novel’s satirical treatment of the tension between the government and its people. Hagedorn urges her audience to confront the cost of a dictatorship and explores how food reveals the darkness and evil of the Filipino militaristic government. Joey and Rosario “Baby” Alacran connect the events of Senator Avila’s assassination and Baby’s

wedding with the blood of the *dinuguan* dish. Unraveling the layers of shame and guilt of *dinuguan* suggests a political tide of corruption that floods the Philippines.

Senator Avila's assassination functions as the climax of *Dogeaters* and stresses the depth of corruption imbedded in the Filipino political system. Though Hagedorn represents a fictional government, her incorporation of Senator Avila's rebellion insinuates a reference to the later Marcos dictatorship. Senator Avila's assassination urges an exploration of the powers controlling and exploiting the Philippines. Specifically, Senator Avila's blood serves as part of the blood trope embedded throughout the novel. Hagedorn uses a stream of consciousness to explore the chaos of political turmoil. While Joey is both critiquing and praising the senator's "fearless" nature against the Filipino government, he witnesses Senator Avila's assassination (Hagedorn 151). Once Joey realizes Senator Avila is shot, he turns around to "see his blood-*His blood, oozing bright and dark on the carpet*" (151). The repetition of the blood signifies the visceral and physical consequences of rebelling against the hegemonic Filipino political powers. The blood being described as "bright" enforces Joey's shock at the quickness of the murder. Hagedorn carefully italicizes the description of the "dark" blood to foreshadow Baby Alacran's wedding feast.

Senator Avila's assassination permanently shapes Joey's perspective on blood in general, as he finds *dinuguan* repulsive after running away from the murder scene. The tantalizing dish now conflicts him. As Joey attempts to disappear from Filipino society as a result of the Senator's assassination, he walks past a food stall selling *dinuguan*. When he smells the "Garlic, vinegar, chocolate meat...He gagged at the thought of his favorite dish" (Hagedorn 192). Joey's dual reaction represents his inclination for Filipino food, yet the food is tainted with the memory

of a terrible event of political savagery. Blood cannot be digested because he witnessed the blood pouring from the senator's body.

To undermine the lavish wedding of Baby Alacran, Hagedorn uses the same violent diction to connect Senator Avila's murder to the food at Baby's wedding. Before the assassination of Senator Avila, Baby Alacran dreams of the food at her wedding: "cakes melt in her mouth, tomatoes and onions ooze out of the slit bellies of grilled *bangus*, silent women baste the roasting flesh of pigs with honey" (Hagedorn 154). The "grilled *bangus*" is mentioned once more as a signifier to the pervasiveness of the Filipino dish. Regardless of socioeconomic status, all Filipinos consume *bangus*. However, the language to describe the dish radically changes from the first description, associated with Pucha (and discussed in Chapter 1). Now, the fish has "tomatoes and onions [that] ooze out of the slit bellies" (154). The word "ooze" is how Joey describes the assassination of Senator Avila. Hagedorn parallels the tomatoes and onions to the blood of Senator Avila by using "ooze" twice. The "tomatoes and onions" also signify the "bright and dark" blood Joey sees spurt out of the dead senator. The "slit bellies" further the violent diction, similar to Joey when he feels his "flesh bursting open" (151). The way in which Joey must remain quiet about the senator's death mirrors the "silent women basting the roasting flesh of pigs with honey" (154). The "roasting flesh of pigs with honey" refers to the dish *lechon kawali*, which is a lavish dish reserved for special occasions. Hagedorn twists the positive connotation of *lechon kawali* with the juxtaposition between the assassination and the wedding. In order for the lavish wedding to occur, the murder of a "rebel" must be carried through. The parallel reflects on the corruption of the government and the reason behind Baby Alacran's nickname, "The Weeping Bride."

Hagedorn continues to satirically present positive aspects of the wedding in order to undermine the Filipino government and showcase the corruption of power. The wealth of the Alacran family is evident through the immense amount of varied and luscious food. The centerpiece of the wedding, Baby Alacran's wedding cake, is designed by a dentist whose son rebelled against the Filipino government. At first, the narrator recalls the cake as a "twelve-tiered, gold and white cake trimmed with silver sugar doves" but recants the description and changes it to a "white and silver cake...with gold filling" (Hagedorn 153). The immediate change in the cake's description renders the narrator unreliable; or, perhaps, the narrator attempts to illustrate a powerful message of corrupt government powers without making it explicit.

The absence of Dr. Benita Zamora, the cake maker, from the wedding is conspicuous. While revealing the dentist's son to be a "poet of the underground," the narrator also raises the point that "*she is not at the wedding*" (Hagedorn 153). The narrator contrasts the "perennially smiling dentist" with "four unsmiling members of the Special Squadron Urban Warfare Unit" to capture the innocence of the dentist. With the understanding that the dentist has been kidnapped and placed under torture, the existence of the dentist is denied at the wedding, as the "cake has actually been designed...by the bride's glamorous mother" (154). However, though the dentist is not physically present at the wedding, her presence is obvious through the cake itself. The cake's appearance mirrors the dentist's work. The cake is comprised of "white and silver cake with white sugar doves and gold filling," hinting at the image of an actual tooth (153). Similar to how the dentist works on teeth, the dentist baked the cake, which cannot be hidden. Even the filling of the cake is made of gold, which is parallel to a gold filling of tooth that has decayed. The dentist's disappearance introduces Baby Alacran's guilt-ridden obsession with the disappearance of Senator Avila. With the two prominent figures missing, Hagedorn depicts a decayed wedding

that occurs at the expense of two lives. Though the center of the wedding is the cake, the cake reveals layers of exploitation, dishonesty, and death.

Upon the senator's assassination, Hagedorn's diction shifts from tantalizing to sickening. Baby admits her past desire to "invite him [the senator] to her spectacular wedding" (Hagedorn 155). However, specific encounters at the wedding suggest an air of disgust towards the major event. The people in Baby's life, such as her mother and fiancé, are described as "beautiful" and "sinister" with "canine teeth" respectively (154). A "beautiful" mother implies wealthy status, as she affords beauty products and contrasts with the "silent women" who are working for the wedding (154). The animalistic characterization of the groom's teeth as "canine" demonstrates the ruthless nature of the wedding. The groom does not discuss his love for Baby. The interactions with her mother and the groom undermine the illusion of the "spectacular" wedding.

The presence of *dinuguan* at the wedding illuminates Baby's inner turmoil regarding the senator's assassination. Present at Baby's wedding are "silver tureens filled to the brim with steaming hot, black *dinuguan*" (Hagedorn 156). The smell triggers a memory for Baby, and she reveals *dinuguan* "is the black blood of a pig...Now I can't eat it anymore, without feeling sick" (156). Baby struggles with the dish primarily because her "mother doesn't eat *dinuguan*," but also because she feels a sense of morbid recognition that she is consuming the blood of an animal (156). Hagedorn juxtaposes her memory with the wedding experience to explain Baby's sickening and overwhelmed emotions regarding the food at her wedding. Baby characterizes the food as "a nauseating feast for the eyes, as well as the belly and the soul" (156). The feast of *dinuguan* hurts her eyes because she vividly sees the blood in the dish. The belly and the soul are interconnected in her mind. She cannot consume the blood dish for the guilt she feels towards the dish. Hagedorn inserts that the *dinuguan* is the "black blood of a pig she pours on her head, the

black pig's blood stew she bathes in, to mourn the death of a man" (156). In Hagedorn's description, Baby immerses herself in the guilt of participating in the political corruption that killed Senator Avila. Baby's extravagant wedding has been hosted because of her family's exploitation of the poor classes. In order to maintain the power over the poor classes, Baby's family has eliminated those who challenged or rebelled against the government. Thus, Baby feels partly responsible for the senator's death and cannot enjoy or respect her wedding.

Hagedorn ensures a dominating association between the *dinuguan* and the assassination of the senator by juxtaposing them at the end of the chapter. Hagedorn carefully italicizes certain aspects to highlight the comparison and further the satire of Baby's wedding: "*Senator Domingo Avila has been assassinated. Dinuguan-it's the black blood of a pig*" (Hagedorn 158). The weight of the assassination clearly rests heavily on Baby's shoulders as she morphs into "the weeping bride" as a result of the torturous imagery of Senator Avila's innocent death. The juxtaposition of the news headline and the dish represents an outer and inner perception of the event. Whereas the superficial understanding of the event reveals an assassination, the mention of *dinuguan* demonstrates a more complicated, ugly and sickening story. The "stew of pale pink pig entrails" depicts a visceral image of innocence. In contrast to the pale pink is the black blood of the stew itself. The dish serves as a metaphor for the corruption overtaking the innocence of a Filipino man and Baby in the midst of the entire story.

Joey and Baby are confronted with the death of Senator Avila in different ways, yet their participation in the event reveals a complicated version of Filipino power and the government. Joey is placed in a harrowing situation accidentally, whereas Baby is purposefully situated in the middle of the political corruption. However, each character responds negatively to the assassination. Joey desired to see the senator's blood out of shock. Baby metaphorically bathes in

the blood through the image of the *dinuguan* due to her feelings of being overwhelmed by the corruption surrounding her. Hagedorn uses a politically charged satirical metaphor of *dinuguan* to argue that the shame of the Philippines pervades all realms of Filipino people, as each person participates or is surrounded by the system of cruelty.

Conclusion

Hagedorn places food in the midst of *Dogeaters* to unravel the complex layers of postcolonial Filipino society, identity, and culture. Only through the food dishes are the feelings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment comprehensible and tangible. The food in the Philippines demonstrates the mixed ancestral lines that birth the unique food traditions such as eating with the hands. However, the food dishes such as *dinuguan*, *balut*, and wedding cake generate a self-reflection on corruptness and the unequal distribution of power in the novel. The *balut* emphasizes the gendered abuse that exists even in the upper classes of the Philippines. The *dinuguan* and wedding cake provide a powerful link between the assassination of Senator Avila and Baby Alacran's wedding. Both events are products of a corrupt and malicious government.

Chapter 3: How Filipinos and Filipino Americans Experience Homesickness

Introduction

Towards the end of *Dog eaters*, Rio recalls how her mother “cheerfully announces she is sending me to school in America and moving there with me for an indefinite period” (Hagedorn 244). Hagedorn’s description of Rio’s immigration represents the core of a Filipino diasporic conflict. The “cheerful announcement” suggests the perception of moving to the United States as a happy occasion due to the country’s prestige and many opportunities. Even Rio admits to be “ecstatic, at first,” but later she must “convince myself I am not homesick” (244). Because Rio denies her feeling of being homesick, Hagedorn asserts that Rio in fact does claim the Philippines as her home. Through Rio’s actions, Hagedorn refers to the painful choice some Filipinos make when deciding whether to move from their home in the Philippines or to remain in a constrictive and immobile society. Though Rio is fictional, her story rings true in the lives of many Filipinos immigrating to the United States in the late 20th century.

In this third chapter, the realities of being Filipino American are addressed. First, understanding the difficulties of first-generation Filipino Americans is necessary to comprehend an overt racism that transcends borders. *Dog eaters* presents the challenges and rewards of a transnational Filipino American identity. One particular challenge for Filipino Americans is how

to respond to the “homeland”. Through Rio, Hagedorn presents a complicated perspective of a Filipino American remembering the “homeland” in a partial, not always accurate manner. The relationship between Filipino Americans and the Philippines generates a mixed conversation, as Filipino Americans are responsible for returning as *balikbayans* to support the family and economy in the Philippines. Rio’s experience as a *balikbayan* demonstrates the weight Filipino Americans carry as they leave and return to the Philippines. To counteract this “weight,” Filipino Americans recreate favorite dishes and continue food practices to survive transnationally. Passing down recipes preserves a unique Filipino identity in an American society. Filipino Americans, like Rio, are confronted with many issues regarding responsibility and identity and are comforted by the cultural foods that uphold Filipino flavors and values.

The Invisibility of First- and Second- Generation Filipinos in the United States

In order to grasp Rio’s representation of Filipino American identity, a brief history of Filipino migration to the United States must be explored. Rio’s story of immigration may be classified as a story of a first-generation “pioneer.” First-generation “pioneers” are those people who voluntarily choose to emigrate from the Philippines to reside in the United States. Filipino immigration to the United States has been documented to occur as early as 1898 (Posados 13). Throughout the following decades, Filipinos encountered exclusion economically, politically, and culturally from the United States due to stringent immigration laws, segregation policies, and rampant racism.

The pioneer generation mostly consisted of “working-class immigrants with limited formal education” (Lott 29). As the United States exploited the Philippines for capital goods and Filipinos lacked formal education, Filipinos were constricted to menial labor in the United States. With the absence of “protection from race-based labor exploitation,” first-generation

Filipino people were excluded from the American democratic process and did not have a political voice to remedy unequal treatment until the end of the Tydings McDuffie Act of 1934 (Espiritu 61). These servile positions were constructed out of the colonial mentality that Filipinos were fit only for simplistic physical work. The first-generation pioneers were generally excluded from the middle class of early and mid- 20th century America. Therefore, politically, economically, and socially, Filipinos were treated as invisible in the United States.

With the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century, Filipino Americans are more frequently middle-class, but Filipino American identity continues to be characterized by invisibility. Children of first-generation Filipinos often suffer from confusion between being raised with Filipino collectivist values and American individualistic values. For example, in the Filipino culture, “parents strive to cultivate a sense of *hiya* (shame) within each child...*hiya* will function as a mechanism of self-control throughout life encouraging a Filipino to avoid unacceptable actions” (Posados 46). The internal shame cultivated in each Filipino child differs immensely from the American values of self-reliance and independence. Because of the tension between the American environment and the Filipino home, second-generation Filipinos struggle with racial and social identification. In “Filipino American Identity,” Linda A. Revilla discusses how the “Filipino American ethnic identity is assumed to be the product of our historical and cultural backgrounds and the process of negotiating and constructing a life in the United States” (96). Second-generation Filipino Americans must construct a space for their identities and for understanding the relationship between the colonial Filipino past and their present.

The invisibility of first-generation Filipino Americans created a ripple effect with respect to the identity struggles for second-generation Filipino Americans. When the Philippines is mentioned in an American textbook, the Filipino American child reacts in surprise. Espiritu

contends “the invisibility of Filipino Americans in U.S. culture prompts at least one second-generation Filipino to exclaim, ‘Nobody ever talks about Filipinos’” (193). Filipinos rarely exist in American history textbooks or literature taught in schools. Many Filipino Americans reflect on the confusion during their childhood regarding the absence of Filipinos in the school curriculum. Agnes Estrada felt unsatisfied with the “black-white framework” of the Civil Rights Movement (Espiritu 193). When learning about the segregation policies regarding bus services, Estrada continually asked ‘Okay, where did we sit?’ ...You see you never see Filipinos. I always ask my friends but they’re just like, ‘They are working somewhere else. They are in Hawaii’”(193). However, despite the historical evidence documenting a Filipino presence in North America since the 19th century, Filipinos are just ignored in much American history.

Because a history of Filipino Americans is not explicitly discussed, second-generation children are confronted with the choice to identify with either their Filipino roots or assimilate with their American environment. A space allowing the blend of a Filipino ethnic heritage with American values is rarely promoted. For example, Rufy Virata rejects his second-generation Filipino American son for having a “Southern accent now...I’m not really happy with it. I don’t think it’s appropriate. I’d rather that my boys have a Filipino accent because I would like them to identify with me” (Posados 107). A divide between the first-generation pioneers and the second-generation children widens with the absence of an open Filipino American discussion and discourse.

The Transnational Filipino American

In *Dogeaters*, Hagedorn depicts the myriad of joys and challenges of living with a transnational Filipino American identity. Speaking from personal experience as a Filipino

American who left the Philippines when she was an adolescent, Hagedorn uses Rio to express her struggles speaking with authority on the Filipino experience.

In *Home Bound*, Espiritu defines transnationalism as “the processes by which immigrant groups forge and sustain strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin” (70). To remain emotionally connected to the Philippines, Rio writes letters to her brother Raul and her cousin Pucha from the United States. Her emotional link to the Philippines, along with her physical presence in the United States, categorizes her as a transnational. Similarly, Hagedorn’s presence in the U.S. and her emotional link to the Philippines, establishes the ways in which she shares in Rio’s transnational identity.

When Rio leaves her home, she forgets the precise details of the stories from her childhood. The reliability of Rio is called into question when Pucha writes a letter to her asking, “how can you lie about such big things?” (Hagedorn 249). According to Pucha, Rio remembers major events in the novel incorrectly, such as the movie from the opening chapter and the year in which events take place. Whereas Rio begins her narration in 1956, Pucha insists the year was 1959. Rio also describes the boy who was flirting with Pucha at the beginning of the novel as “fat,” though Pucha insists that the boy “was so skinny he reminded [Rio] of a broom” (Hagedorn 249). Not only is Rio’s depiction of characters challenged, but also her understanding of motive and intentions. Rio remembers how Pucha left her husband because he physically abused her, but Pucha responds by saying that she left him because she was “tired of supporting him” (249). Rio’s misinterpretation of events emphasizes her absence in the Philippines. Also, Rio thinks poorly of Pucha most likely as an effect of being in the United States and being absorbed into the colonial mentality Hagedorn severely attacks in the novel. The lack of consistency illuminates the blurriness and difficulty of memory for a first generation immigrant

recollecting experiences from home. At the same time, Rio's inconsistent recollection creates doubt as to the accuracy of Hagedorn's novel. *Dogeaters* suggests that a central challenge in transnational belonging is retaining a full knowledge of "home away from home".

Balibbayans and the Return "Home"

On the other hand, Rio's story demonstrates the possibility of maintaining strong connections with the Philippines. Her many trips to the Philippines as a *balibbayan* represents the significant event of returning home that occurs in many Filipino American lives. However, just as a Filipino American risks remembering the Philippines differently, a *balibbayan* risks realizing how the Philippines do not live up to their memories or expectations .

Though the choice to leave the Philippines can be a challenge for Filipinos, returning to the Philippines can create a complicated and difficult decision for Filipino Americans. Filipino Americans, or transnational Filipinos who choose to return and visit the Philippines, are nicknamed *balibbayans*, which means "the returners" in English. *Balibbayans* also have a political connotation, as the Filipino government in 1973 created a "program designed to encourage Filipinos living abroad, especially in the United States, to come 'home' for a maximum of four months around the Christmas holidays" (Espiritu 80). Because of this new policy, the economy of the Philippines improved slightly. In the first six months of the program, "*balibbayans* brought 119 million pesos into the Philippines" (Posados 143). *Balibbayans* consequently had a responsibility to inject money into the Filipino economy. Posados discusses how "going 'home' is not without cost" (142). Fiscally and emotionally, returning to the Philippines can be quite taxing. In the Filipino tradition, the *balibbayans* are responsible for paying transportation and even more importantly the *pasalubong* (gifts) to each family member they visit (142). Not only are *balibbayans* responsible for improving the Filipino economy, but

the individual family's financial status as well. The *pasalubong* brought to the children and family members generally consist of American products and money.

Rio concludes her narrative as a *balikbayan* and returns to the Philippines. Despite her father's warnings that she will be disappointed because "Memories are always better," Rio treks on to visit her old house (Hagedorn 244). Her father's words signify the faultiness of a memory. Hagedorn articulates her argument that perhaps *balikbayans* cast the Philippines in an unrealistic light in their own memories, like Rio has.

Native Filipinos who are inquisitive about the United States are also affected by the *balikbayans*' immigration and settlement stories. When Rio looks upon her old house, her caretaker, Manong Tibo, "studies [her] with his bright eyes. 'You live in America?' ...Someday, he hopes [his niece] will send for him" (Hagedorn 246). Manong Tibo's bright eyes call attention to the luring and bright promise of immigrating to America. Also, because Manong Tibo's niece is the person who is living in the United States, Hagedorn expresses the divide amongst generations that derives from Filipinos and Filipino Americans living transnationally. While the older generation lives in the Philippines, the younger generation grows up in America radically changing their perception of themselves as a Filipino. Filipinos feast on the stories of *balikbayans*, even though the stories may not be positive: "many missed what they perceived to be 'the unhurried, gentle way' of Philippine life and resented the 'work, work, work,' frenzy of U.S. life" (Espiritu 95).

The Comfort of Food

Rio, like many other Filipino Americans, discovers food as a site of memory that does not disappoint. To combat "homesickness", Filipino Americans use food to continue cultural and family traditions. For instance, Rio uses the memory of the *dilis* and eating with her hands to

clearly recall the memory of her Lola Narcissa. Rio also mentions the “ethereal concoction” of *leche flan* and the family gatherings that surround it because food is central to her memory of the Philippines (Hagedorn 91). Consequently, Rio refuses to consume *leche flan* not baked by Pacita as the memory of the food would lose its family connection. Though Pucha casts many of Rio’s memories into doubt, she never questions Rio’s food memories. Filipino food provides a vehicle for precise memories of experience as food is central to each significant event in Filipino culture such as weddings, funerals, and birthdays. Rio’s subjective experience of recalling the “homeland” represents the collective experience of real first-generation and second-generation Filipino Americans. Hagedorn’s perspective on the Filipino American experience is further examined in nonfiction accounts of Filipino Americans remembering Filipino celebratory events and the increase of Filipino American food chains.

To articulate the idea of transnationalism, *Home Bound* discusses how Filipino Americans continue the Filipino traditions through symbols such as food dishes and practices. *Home Bound* is essential to providing a sociological and psychological context for understanding Filipino American identity and the successful resistance to the rampant racism faced by all Filipino Americans.

Particularly in *Home Bound*, Espiritu discusses how Filipino food dishes, such as *adobo*, *pancit*, and *lumpia*, are the “symbolic ties to the homeland as a form of resistance to places and practices in the host country that are patently ‘not home’”(Espiritu 13). Food dishes strengthen cultural identity, as they symbolically tie together ancestral history with contemporary ingredients. When Filipino food is served, an external presentation of the culture becomes palatable. Feasting on Filipino food in the United States is considered “an event.”

The permanence of a the transnational symbol of food is evident in the realities of Filipino American lives and stories. In a nonfiction story in “The Filipino Americans,” a second-generation Filipino American, Armando Alvarez recalls that Filipino eating was only reserved for “a party on the weekend with my parents,” as Filipino food celebrates resistance to the Western world forcing complete integration (Posados 188). Filipinos create “dishes tasted in memory” and reconstruct the “home” into a space to counter successfully against the prevalent racism in the United States (Posados 51). As Filipinos function transnationally, food emerges as the symbol for stability and the continuation of the Filipino tradition. Though Filipinos celebrate American holidays, the food present reflects on the Filipino culture. In another Filipino American nonfiction account, Juanita Tamayo Lott in *Common Destiny: Filipino American Generations* remembers how her “holiday dinner tables are a smorgasbord” comprising of “*lumpia*” and “*pinkabet*” and “*lechon*” (Lott 86). Each dish may be discovered in traditional Filipino cookbooks. The dishes also maintain their Filipino names to demonstrate the lack of assimilation between American and Filipino traditional dishes. Consequently, the table represented in Alvarez’s story is filled with Filipino dishes that serve as a representation of the continuation of the Filipino tradition in the United States.

Lott also recalls the mixture of desserts ranging from “Chinese sponge cake; American cheesecake...apple pie; freshly sliced mango and pineapple” (86). The variety of desserts illuminates the emergence of Filipino culture and its ancestral history. The Chinese influence on Filipino food is particularly evident in the noodle dishes such as *pancit* and Filipino fried rice (Galputos 9). The juxtaposition of a Chinese dessert and two American desserts along with Filipino fruit suggest a small merging of all of the influences in the Filipino American food ways. American traditions have not completely taken over the Filipino main dishes, but the

appearance of American desserts shows the acceptance of the American palate into the Filipino diet. The Filipino food in the United States nonetheless emphasizes successful resistance to Americanization and maintaining a unique cultural identity transnationally.

Conclusion

The inter-continental movement patterns between the Philippines and the United States affects the formation of Filipino and Filipino American identity. More specifically, the immigration differences between generations furthers the divide between the “pioneers” and the “ARF,” or American Reared Filipinos. The invisibility of first-generation Filipinos echoes in the second-generation Filipino Americans, as the children search for answers for their identity. The struggle to discover a definitive scope of a Filipino American identity continues even today. In the United States, “only one in ten children are able to speak fluent Tagalog” (Espiritu 194). With the turn to English as the household language, the older generation experiences a lack of understanding with their children who are educated alongside white classmates but go home to Filipino parents.

Central to a Filipino’s understanding of identity is the permanence of food practices and culture across the Pacific Ocean. The existence of Filipino food in the United States serves as a “transnational activity [that] must be understood in part as an act of resistance” to the colonial mentality that Filipinos are inferior to others (Espiritu 212). With the emerging prominence of Filipino food chains such as Goldilocks and Jollibee, Filipino food is gaining traction to be widely known to non-Filipino communities. As the successful resistance against racism towards Filipinos carries on, Filipinos and Filipino Americans are confronted with the difficult questions of where they are placed on the spectrum of race, nationalism, and identity. Rio’s—and Hagedorn’s—story of experiencing adolescence in the Philippines and adulthood in the United

States represents the millions of Filipinos who are today faced with similar challenges. The unique cultural identity of Filipinos and Filipino Americans maintain its integrity through transnational customs such as upholding food traditions and food practices.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed several aspects of the colonial history of the Philippines and its effects on the culture and immigration patterns of Filipinos and Filipino Americans. To explore these colonial effects, I focused on *Dogeaters* to unravel Hagedorn's satirical attack against the corruption of power, politics, and people throughout the Philippines. To expose her argument, Hagedorn incorporates specific foods to tease out her disdain for the unequal distribution of wealth and power. Food functions as a vehicle for each character to confront their feelings of guilt and shame, which are reactions to the systemized coercive powers present in Filipino society.

Dogeaters examines the difficult tension between Filipinos and Filipino Americans as Rio falls under the categories of a first-generation immigrant and a *balikbayan*. Because of frequent immigration, the stories of Filipinos and Filipino Americans are essential to the understanding of the current status of their possible identity crises. Each generation faces a complicated task of balancing home experiences in the center of a normative white world. These stories are now reflected in my own life as they explain the difficulties of conforming and negotiating my Filipino ethnicity with my American national identity. In this conclusion, I reflect on the arguments in the thesis in order to examine my personal experiences and my family's experiences as Filipinos and Filipino Americans.

Rio's envy of Pucha's mestizo nose mirrors my own wish to appear "American" or Westernized. When I was young, my mother refused to leave me outside for an extended period of time for fear of my skin darkening. I would pinch my nose in the belief that I could change its shape eventually. All of these desires are echoed in Rio's jealousy of the Hollywood actresses and Pucha's physicality. The craving to appear "American" represents one psychological effect

of colonialism. Hagedorn asserts that Filipinos long to conform to the American traditions and culture present in the Philippines and in the United States. Hagedorn's claim is evident in Rio's longing to look like Pucha and also in my own experience as a Filipino American in a public school. My classmates already wore makeup, straightened their hair, and visited tanning beds. I always tried to get one shade lighter of my foundation in order to look white. Though I refused tanning beds, I purchased a straightener even though my hair is naturally straight. Because of Hagedorn's depiction of Rio, I now comprehend the conditioned psychological effects of immigration and the colonial mentality. I do not regret my decision to purchase a straightener, but rather I understand why I purchased the hair straightener.

Though my palate preferred the soft white rice, *bagoong*, and *kare-kare*, I always elected for the fish sticks and French fries because I felt my food was inferior to the school cafeteria food. Reflecting on these decisions leave me chuckling as I now wish I could bring Filipino leftovers to my lunches to the Student Union. My mother cooks excellent leftovers. The labor and love necessary to create Filipino dishes cannot be overlooked. My mother's *kare-kare* takes an entire day to create. She pressure-cooks the ox tails for several hours while meticulously stirring the peanut butter stew and chopping the *bok choy* and green beans. As a child, I could not understand the intricacy of Filipino food and the importance of continuing its traditions. Now as a young adult with a kitchen, I find myself pouring over Filipino food blogs and cookbooks trying to cook my comfort foods. Though I have several burned pans of garlic-fried rice, bowls of undercooked *pancit*, and a sheet of *sans rival* on fire, I continue to pursue the art of Filipino food. When I cook, I experience the shared love and labor of many Filipinos who have all accidentally ripped the egg roll wrappers at one time or another.

As Hagedorn challenges the American perceived inferiority of Filipinos, she never poses a solution to the complications of the colonial era. Are Filipinos considered a unique culture even though Spanish, Chinese, and American influences are so apparent in the culture? How should the Filipino people overcome the colonial mentality imposed on them? Instead, she adds more questions to the end of the novel when she exposes the unreliable nature of Rio's narration. How should Filipino-Americans remember their "homeland"? What are the responsibilities of a *balikbayan* like Rio? With all these questions, I focused on the non-fictional stories of Filipinos and Filipino Americans searching for answers to their identity, space, and place to belong.

First-generation Filipino Americans or "pioneers" are faced with distinctive challenges as they immigrate to the United States. When my parents moved to the United States, their lives did not magically improve, but rather much hard work was necessary to survive. My brother and I often joke about my father working at a fast food restaurant; however, with the rampant racism in the United States against immigrants, I understand my father could not find work anywhere else. My father worked tirelessly for very little money to support him, my grandmother, and his other family members. Approximately six years ago, my parents brought my brother and me to California and showed us their first living space in the United States. My eyes widened at the smallest house I had ever seen. My father told me that he lived in the garage of the house without air conditioning or heat. My entire life I have a two-story house with a full refrigerator and a closet that had many toys and clothes to spoil a child. The luxury of my life as a second-generation Filipino American came at the price of my parents' hard work and determination to provide a better life for their children. I cannot comprehend the difficulties of being denied work because of my immigrant status or my "accent", but I am grateful for my parents' efforts to resist successfully and actively against the American racism that tried to suppress them.

Two years ago, my mother went back to the Philippines to say a final goodbye to her dying brother. Her return is the typical *balikbayan* story full of American presents for my cousins, pictures for my titas and titos, and my clothes for my smaller cousins to wear. When my mother came back to the United States, her face glowed with a mixture of joy and despair that cannot be accurately described. Her stories consisted of being treated gloriously by our family, always being well fed and cared for. However, her voice faltered and her eyes clouded as she spoke of saying goodbye to her oldest brother. The stories of a *balikbayan* are told with a rich and invigorating voice, yet with a whisper they are emotionally exhausting and painful. My mother was conflicted with the guilt of leaving her family in the Philippines and with the goal of providing a peaceful and stable life for my brother and me. A *balikbayan* never simply returns as the Philippines takes a piece of her without letting go.

My own eyes are now cloudy and wet as I conclude this massive project that sparked over one year ago. I keep asking myself, “Why are these stories causing my heart to beat faster while my eyes are tearing up?” The emotions are muddled and difficult to tease out but I know that I am prideful of Filipinos for enduring invisibly to American society. We are not necessarily in the American history textbooks. We are not prominent in the cable news networks. We are not in the Hollywood entertainment industry. But, when I see the rare recognition of a Filipino, the overwhelming excitement is unmatched. Langston Hughes worked alongside a Filipino on his way to Africa. Manny Pacquiao became one of the most prominent boxers in the world. Jessica Hagedorn became the first female Filipino American writer and the focus of my research. Though the mass media may not recognize the presence of Filipinos in the United States, Filipinos are rooted in expressing their tradition transnationally through the beautiful foods and food ways. Famous Filipino restaurants like Cendrillon, Goldilocks, and Jollibee demonstrate

how Filipino food appeals to many people. With these transnational symbols, the Filipino people may be encouraged to continue the tradition of love, labor, and community evident in the flavors of Filipino food.

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