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Imagining the Nation, by Martinez-Sicat

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tion, human dignity and solidarity, preferential option for the poor, poverty reduction, grassroots empowerment, sustainable development and international cooperation. It is a challenge both to the Catholic Church and to the governments of Southeast Asia.

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Imagining the Nation in Four Philippine Novels. By Maria Teresa Martinez-Sicat. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1994.

Imagining the Nation in Four Philippine Novels is one of very few critical works by a Filipino critic that uses a poststructuralist framework. Its objects of study are Maximo Kalaw's *The Filipino Rebel: A Romance of American Occupation in the Philippines*, F. Sionil Jose's *Po-on*, Linda Ty-Casper's *The Three-Cornered Sun*, and Alfred A. Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*. Because there is a dearth of such works, the importance of this volume comes from its being one of very few in such an important field. Its use, however, is limited. It may be valuable to students who are meeting up with poststructuralism for the first time. It is also a good illustration of how to locate ideology—the deeply ingrained, sometimes only partially conscious habits, beliefs, values, ideas, and lifestyles of a particular time and place—within a text. Students raised in the humanist tradition, those trained to spot irony or to evaluate plot structure but who are only beginning to get interested in poststructuralism will find *Imagining the Nation* to be a useful, even eye-opening first encounter. A disciple of poststructuralism, however, might have little use for this work since it oversimplifies the many new and complex ideas and theories of poststructuralism.

The first chapter of this book gives us the thesis, framework and an explanation of terms. The thesis reads:

In the Philippine novels in English about the Revolution against Spain and the War against America, the concept of the nation is one that is free of foreign oppression but one that accepts native oppression. The concept of the nation is appropriated by the elite for the hegemonic project of integrating the masses in an unjust political and social system. In the ideological and hegemonic "power-laden significations" that are the novels, the socio-historical forces—*ilustrados* and the *pobres y ignorantes*—are present, but the exploitative relationship between them is absent. (p. 4)

Sicat theorizes that the novels contain a vision that is both liberative and oppressive. Freedom from foreign domination is the highest aspiration in these four novels. Yet the oppression of the masses by the local Philippine elite is depicted as a matter of course and is never problematized.

Moreover, Sicat, in this chapter, defines and discusses terms important in her study: the concept of the nation and the concept of destruction. She defines deconstruction as "that critical operation by which the binary oppositions (involved pairs of two elements revolving around the same center) are betrayed and banished by the text itself" (p. 4). This definition is broad enough to make Sicat's project, at the outset, a legitimate one. However, after plowing through the analysis of four novels and the conclusion, one is left with a sense that the whole project seems to go against the very spirit of deconstruction, since Sicat's undertaking is itself fixated on the binaries of "*ilustrados and pobres y ignorantes*."

For her discussion of the nation, Sicat gives us a slew of quotes from Gellner, Wallerstein, Poulantzas, Benedict Anderson, and others. She fails, however, to "connect the dots"—explain what these quotes have in common in order to draw for us a big picture, a useful and unified definition of the nation. She then narrates to us the history of the formation of the Philippine nation—*La Liga*, the Katipunan, Mabini, Rizal, Bonifacio but then once again, she does not establish a clear enough connection between all this theorizing on the concept of nation and the Philippines. She merely settles for the conclusion that Philippine novels in English "should record the particular concept of nation during that period" (p. 18). This "particular concept," Sicat discovers after over 100 pages of analysis, "defers to the aspirations and needs of the masses [and] is one more attempt by the elite to impose a particular model of the nation on the masses" (p. 133). Thus, her project is a tautological endeavor—the very fact that the literature is in English makes it elitist and the fact that it is elitist obviously means it will have a vision of nation that silences the masses. Once again, the inability of the study to come up with a more cogent discussion of the nation renders the findings ineffectual.

Maximo Kalaw's *The First Filipino* is a historical novel that spans the beginning of American occupation and ends with the Americanization of the Filipinos thirty years later. The novel's principal character, Don Pedro Ricafort, is a romantic figure who valiantly fights in the Philippine revolution, refuses to swear allegiance to the U.S., and goes into exile in Hong Kong from where he orchestrates various campaigns for independence. Sicat sees Ricafort's discourse as "one continuous and firm indictment of American imperialism as it is an unwavering commitment to the Philippine Republic" (p. 42). Through further analysis, Sicat finds the novel "does not conceive of a nation of equals . . . [and] erases internal relations of domination" (p. 50). Sicat will reassert this thesis, given a few variations, in her analysis of all four novels.

Sicat's analysis of F. Sionil Jose's *Po-on* is the clearest and most accessible of the four. This is so probably because *Po-on* itself is the novel with the simplest narrative—the protagonist, Istak, is central to the novel and his transformation is clear. Istak is a peasant-sacristan turned village hero, turned shaman, turned pupil of Mabini, turned Tagalog revolutionary. The novel begins in the small town of Po-on in the 1880s and ends with the Philippine Revolution and with Istak's final words (written in his journal): "The Americans have no right to be here." Sicat argues that *Po-on* documents the development of the *indio* into a citizen aware of a nation. This awareness, however, is inspired and taught to the *indios* by the *ilustrado* class. Istak moves from "My duty is not to the nameless mass you call Filipinas" to "We will defeat [the Americans] in the end because we believe this land they usurp is ours." This transformation is caused by his conversations with Mabini and his experience with del Pilar's bravery. In this chapter, Sicat succeeds in doing not so much "deconstruction" as the much older (and probably more worthwhile) enterprise of identifying the ideology contained in the text.

With Linda Ty-Casper's *The Three-Cornered Sun*, Sicat is unable to come up with as clear and convincing an argument as she does with the other three novels. Instead, she devotes most of this chapter to summarizing the novel and praising the realistic depiction of the degeneracy of the *ilustrados* and the realistic depiction of battle.

For its part, Alfred A. Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* is a postmodern novel within a novel. Its main character, Robert Aguinaldo, writes about Leon Kilat, a Katipunero-cum-trapeze artist who flits from the 1880s to the 1980s to eternity in the Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café. Sicat's criticism centers around the frivolity of Yuson's characters and vision. Sicat disapproves of Leon Kilat's flippancy; womanizing and drinking makes not a serious revolutionary and millenarian. Of the café—one big party where small talk reigns and where gathers the Philippine literati and popular cultural icons like Rizal, Ramon Magsaysay, Rasputin, John and Yoko, Nora and Vilma—Sicat is disappointed. She insists the café could have been a powerful metaphor for an authentic culture or a vision of utopia, but instead it once again privileges the *ilustrados* and marginalizes the *pobres y ignorantes*.

The worth of this volume is to be found in its close character and thematic studies of the novels as well as in its method of locating ideology in a text. Read individually and apart from chapter one's lofty pronouncements, chapters two to five become quite valuable. The failure of this book as a scholarly work comes from a mismatching of the proposal (use of deconstruction) and the actual project (identifying bourgeois ideology). In its desire to use new theories and catchwords in vogue, it silences its actual project, which is a perspective that is older and often called irrelevant. Note

that Gramsci is hardly mentioned; Marx not even once. This is astonishing since the basic concepts of this book—the bourgeois elite, the masses, ideology, the oppression and silencing by the elite of the masses—are Marxist concepts. This project claims to be deconstructive, but it is not. It does not achieve the multiplicity of meanings and the loss of the objective reality central to deconstruction. It does not subvert the binaries but rather reaffirms them by upholding the unfashionable but always relevant idea of class struggle. It claims allegiance to that which it is not and shuns what it is. Thus, the irony of this study is that its failure stems from its desire to be new, but its triumph—a reading not fashionable but always relevant—is in its practice of the old.

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Crime, Society and the State in the Nineteenth-Century Philippines.

By Greg Bankoff. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996.
251 pages.

Filipinos today find themselves amid a sea of changes as the country is ushered into a new millennium. A shift in the economic base with rapid industrialization, population, growth, a rise in the crime rate and a state rapidly realigning its policies to match the country's needs are only a few signposts of these changes. The author, Greg Bankoff, asserts that many of the problems that Filipinos face now are the same ones faced by their forebears in the nineteenth century. His thesis focuses on crime, who committed it and how it was dealt with in the nineteenth century, as a means of analyzing the social situation and the policies and practices of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines.

The book is divided into two major parts. The first part deals with a detailed examination of existing criminal records and statistics on crime. This treatment gives a solid grounding in understanding the social, economic and political conditions in the Philippines during this time. "Crime in the colonial or neocolonial context," Bankoff says, "is explained in terms of the disruption caused to the social fabric of society by large-scale migration, urbanization, and the needs of industry for surplus labor." He points out that the crime rate started to rise when the *indio* started to lose the security of the familiar village structure that set the rules governing his day-to-day existence and social intercourse, and was confronted by the aforementioned phenomena.

Bankoff further classifies crime in its urban and rural setting. Urban crime largely depended on the interaction between the servant, to the Spaniards,