Inscribing Women Ancestors: Reclaiming Women's Pre-colonial Identity in Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War*

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> *"...her voice [was] joined by the voices of other women who spoke of a time when the world was young, and the sea was simply the sea..., and when women walked these seven thousand one-hundred islands with a power in them" (Rosca 191)*

Abstract

There have been calls to broaden the bounds applied to the analysis of women experience to make it relevant to the struggles of post-colonial women. In response, this paper explores the inscription of women's

struggle in depictions of women characters in fiction of a woman writer from a formerly colonized nation, the Philippines. The purpose is to see how the woman writer in her fictional account articulates colonial women's subjugation as possible consequences of postcoloniality. This paper, which represents a portion of a work in progress, focuses on the inscriptions of women ancestors in the novel State of War by Ninotchka Rosca from the Philippines. The analysis attempts to bring out the specificity of the woman question and women's existence from the Philippines as it claims: (1) that the descriptions of the women ancestors in the novel allude to women of the pre-colonial Philippines, who assumed particular leadership and commanded respect in the pre-colonial community; (2) that the portrayals feature women's identity and stature which are 'lost' in the psyche of Filipino women at present; (3) that the resulting obliterated identity and ruined image are consequences of colonization; and (4) that the pre-colonial traits and qualities still persist in the women's subconscious despite altered reverence brought by repeated history of colonization. Analysis shows that inscriptions of these characters interrogate the social construction of the Filipino woman as ingrained in the Filipino psyche. At the core, the discussions underline the contention that the inscriptions seek to reawaken and reclaim the once empowered identities of the women ancestors, and depict their lives as sources of hope for recovery and redemption of trapped and oppressed women of the present.

Keywords

historical fiction; post-colonial novel; pre-colonial identity; colonialism; *babaylanism* in the Philippines; post-colonial feminism

The shifting arguments concerning frameworks for women studies and the more pronounced advocacy for a specific and contextualized understanding of the experiences of women shape the conceptualization of this paper. The movement for women's emancipation has passed through a number of stages (Hekman 91). From its early concerns of political equality and social rights, it has penetrated the realm of literature. From its adaptation of male-defined theories at the outset, it has developed varied postulations from a woman's perspective. In recent scholarship on women, the felt need to re-explore, re-evaluate

and re-interpret women concerns has obtained emphasis. Women marginalized from dominant and Western power structures have called for inclusion. Diversity has become one of the prime yardsticks to look into the experience of women.

Considering the assumption that significant statements on women's condition may be found in women's writings, the fictive portrayal of women, by women authors, may shed light on a woman's 'acquired' identity or the identity the woman wants to carve for herself. To highlight a distinct woman consciousness situated in the context of *difference* in the analysis of women experience, these writings need to be viewed through a lens independent of men's frame of understanding, and different also from viewpoints of women from dominant social levels and from dominant nations. Supporting this, Johnson-Odim points out that although there is a "fair amount of universality in women's oppression" (318), the location and the context differ. The social and institutional location and the identity of women writers produce positions from where they articulate alternative representations of national difference (Weedon 158). Thus, examining the works of fiction by women of a specific national struggle creates the space for issues of a particular kind of woman's existence.

As such, this paper explores inscriptions of women ancestors in the novel *State of War* by Ninothcka Rosca from the Philippines. The act of inscribing signifies putting into words what the writer wants to be 'archived' in fiction. The written words, pointing to descriptions and portrayals of characters, become the source of meaning-making. These potentially create images, which either reinforce or contest constructed memories of the nation.

This paper contends that *State of War* inscribes historically specific conditions of women's struggles which constitute the specificity of the woman question in this region. With this, the paper examines features and concepts raised by the inscriptions of the lives of women ancestors in the novel. It explores the kind of remembering and memory-making Rosca has interposed in recalling images of the Filipina foremothers. It aspires to provide ground for recalling their existence as interspersed in the struggles of the other women characters in the novel. At the core, the discussions underline the contention that the inscriptions seek to reawaken and reclaim

the once empowered identities of the women ancestors and depict their lives as sources of hopes for recovery and redemption of trapped and oppressed women of present day Philippines.

Postcolonial Novel Writing

The novel's ability to give voice to a people in the assertion of their identity and their history is of primary importance to post-colonial writers and scholars. Thelma Kintanar states that the novel has been hailed as a potential repository of cultural and social documentation of a nation as it "represents an archive of political, historical, cultural and literary values" (2). She explains,

> the novel mediates between the manners and mores of society and the sensibility of the individual, between the external circumstances and internal reality of a person. Its free-wheeling narrative form shapes itself to the contours of everyday experience no less than to the interplay of thought and feeling…its specificity of detail and close delineation of character makes a maximum impact on the ordinary reader. (1)

These details substantiate the novel's merit as material for analysis. Compared to other genres, the novel has been understood as communal and public; "creating its own world inevitably recreates and reflects the world out of which it originates" (Kintanar 2). Thus, this form of literature may be studied for "how it addresses or expresses the particularity of women's lives and experience" (Ryan 101) as these texts articulate woman's individual and communal aspirations.

This study is framed in the postcolonial feminist perspective, summed up by Chandra Talpade Mohanty as "feminism understood in the context of postcoloniality" (qtd. in Hawley 170). This perspective advocates the contextualization of occurrences in the lives of women inhabiting the marginal spaces of the economic and political domains. It stands against the construction of the global environment for women and suggests that criticism needs to accurately describe differences in culture and create a new language to express what may give justice

to a different existence. It perceives the need for representations of women to be gauged, distinct from the universalized notion of women's emancipation. It postulates that women's experiences need to be seen in the totality of their existence and seen in their own world and milieu, according to the categories of what contributes to their oppression. This frame is substantiated by the concept of difference which opens to "the search for that lost, pure, true, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted or Westernized" (Min Ha 932). In this explication, Trinh Min Ha invites introspection, an examination of the self, a recovery of what has been abjured from one's consciousness. The aim is to capture the nature or the personality obscured by time and imperial domination. In this paper, reading the inscriptions of women ancestors in *State of War* is placed within the framework of these postcolonial feminist readings.

Overview of the Paper

The discussion begins with the background of the novel *State of War*, its brief summary, and a review of studies that yield findings on its aspects and merits. It then presents analysis of the inscriptions of women ancestors, the space and circumstances where they exist, the images they allude to, and the implications of the allusions. It expounds on what these portrayals illustrate, probe and interrogate. Finally, the paper imparts implications and inferences of women ancestors' characterization.

As portrayed in the novel, the women ancestors refer to the following: (1) the "women then" (Rosca 192) referring to the women who inhabited the Philippine archipelago during pre-colonial times; (2) Maya, the woman whose characterization is set in the time of Spanish colonization; and, (3) Mayang, who first lived in Spanish times, through the arrival of the Americans, until the Japanese occupation and the ensuing guerrilla warfare. The discussion also mentions the protagonist of the novel, Anna, from whose memory and dreams the women ancestors are invoked. Her friend and cousin, Eliza also figures in the analysis. Anna and Eliza are women in the novel's current time (the period of Martial Law in the Philippines).

Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War*

For more than thirty years after its publication, the novel *State of War* has attracted critical attention. A number of studies have taken note of its social involvement and has underscored its post-colonial value. Its author, Ninotchka Rosca, born in the Philippines in 1946, was raised and educated in this country. She is the founder and director of GABRIELA (General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action), an alliance of Filipino women. She was active in human rights activities during the reign of Ferdinand Marcos. After serving months as a political prisoner during Martial Law, the reign of military rule declared by Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, she went into exile to Hawaii, following a warning for another arrest for her human rights activism. In 1982, and until the present, she resides in New York City where she continues to write and maintain her involvement with human rights advocacy (Leonard 308-12).

In her novel, *State of War,* Ninothcka Rosca unpacks an account of the nation's past as a backdrop to the narrative's present. It describes the nation's long colonial history with reference to the country's trysts with the Spaniards, the Americans, and the Japanese, and concludes with the country as an independent nation. The constant and the distinctive reference to the "seven thousand one hundred islands" (13) throughout the narrative renders Rosca's suggestion of the unfolding of events shared by the quantified number of islands comprising the country, the Philippines.

Much of the written scholarship on this novel by Ninothcka Rosca read the novel's invocation of Philippine colonial history. The recount of Philippine history, according to Leonard, "foregrounds the enduring effects of colonization and imperialism on persons and communities" (308). Campomanes dubs this historical component as a kind of "revision[ing]" of colonial history contextualized in the Marcos era (76). Ruth Jordana Pison contends that *State of War* is "reading against the grain" of established history. This entails the novel as a "'counter-memory' that serves to refute the already accepted and hegemonic historical accounts" (16) of Philippine history.

In a related focus, Rocio G. Davis claims that the novel's use of intertwined histories and linked destinies of characters "converts the telling of Philippine history and culture into a resource for fictionally

constructing a discourse of nationalism" (215). Casper, on the other hand, sees this historical component as Rosca's "basic strategy" to "suggest the chronic intrusion of foreign powers into the lifestream of the Filipino people" (202). This strategy backs up her intention of implying that "Filipinos have been locked in a continuous state of war against military, economic, and cultural invasions ever since Magellan intervened in Lapulapu's tribal affairs and lost his life at Mactan" (203). Also tracing the novel's historical component but on different trajectory, Myra Mendible explicates how the festival in Ninothcka Rosca's *State of War* "serves as a symbolic site of transgressions" (30). She reads the festival as a literary strategy of resistance that "dramatizes the conflicting histories, influences, and myths that have shaped Filipino identity" (30). The presence of women characters in this novel is substantiated by Dolores de Manuel's study. She illustrates how *State of War* mixes memory with current happenings to project reconstruction of the country's history as a means of reaching back through the barriers caused by colonial history and migration. De Manuel claims that, given that the novel's main characters are women, this design aims at recovery and integration of the Filipino woman in Philippine history.

As critical texts that recognize how Rosca's work sheds light on history and recovery of history that relates to memory, identity and nation, these studies confirm *State of War* as a work of socio-historical import. This paper at hand joins these studies in exploring how the novel becomes a vehicle for filling gaps in the historical record of the nation's experiences. However, at the heart of this current study is the focus on women characters, particularly the women ancestors which some of these studies have dealt with only as incidental to the analysis, or have narrowed in their preoccupation with the entity dominant in their path of study.

The novel's plot shows the backdrop of the repressive years when Martial Law was declared in the Philippines. It is set in a celebration of a festival, a phenomenon of merrymaking and gathering which, as the novel suggests, the Philippines has been famous for. The novel tells the story of Anna Villaverde, Eliza Hansen, and Adrian Banyaga. Divided into three sections (*The Book of Acts, The Book of Numbers, and The Book of Revelations*), the novel charts the lives of these three young people starting from their arrival to the Island of K— to attend the annual festival. Anna, a university

graduate, widowed in a rebel struggle, and once detained and tortured by the military, comes as a silent observer of the merriment and later becomes privy to the assassination scheme against the commander-in-chief of the country. The island's festivities serve as the backdrop to the intertwined lives of the three protagonists through flashbacks into the distant and immediate pasts revealing each character's agonies and the history of their families. The flashbacks emerging through Anna's memories merge the tales of the ancestors highlighting the lives of women from the beginning of time. The lives of Maya and Mayang are then chronicled spanning their struggles from Spanish colonization, to the American occupation, the guerrilla warfare and the tryst with the Japanese. Maya and Mayang, who are portrayed as the daughter and the granddaughter of pre-colonial women, are also cast as the great grandmother and the grandmother, Anna and Eliza have not met. When the planned bomb explodes, Adrian becomes paralyzed, Eliza is dead and Anna is exiled to a remote place bearing the son who would, in Anna's dream, be born in the tradition of her foremothers, in the cradle of the women ancestors.

Inscribing the Filipino Foremothers as *Babaylan*

Ninotchka Rosca enshrines the Filipino foremothers in her depictions of pre-colonial women. They are the women who

> when the world was young…walked these seven thousand one hundred islands with a power in them, walking in single file ten paces ahead of the men, their gold bracelets and anklets tinkling, warning that the women were in passage so that strangers could stay clear, for women then were in communion with the gods, praying to the river, the forest spirits, the ancient stones, pouring out blood libations in evening rituals, healing the sick, foretelling the results of war, quarrels, couplings, and the season…[and who] walked with wisdom, dressed simply in an ankle-length piece of cloth, wrapped and knotted about the hips, breasts left bare…. (192)

The passage above portrays the "women then" and reckons the standing they held "when the world was young": their supremacy, wealth and property, their significance, their capacity, competence and potential, their functions, their entitlement and privilege, including their mode of dressing, and more importantly their gift of intuition and close affinity to nature. These images allude to pre-colonial women in the Philippines prevalently called the *babaylan*. Salazar discloses that *babaylan* is a Visayan term for the movers, mostly women, in the spiritual and ritualistic lives of the people in the pre-hispanic era of the Philippines. They are called *katalonan* in the Tagalog-speaking regions (Salazar 209) and are called *agud* or *agod* in some parts of Mindanao (de Jong, par 3). The term *babaylan* doesn't appear in the novel, but the elaborations of attributes and images of women-ancestors-characters signify the descriptions of the *babaylan* in Filipino lore.

The *babaylan* was a 'powerful' and influential position held by women in pre-colonial society. These women were revered as priestess-poets or leaders in the spiritual and cultural lives of the people (Salazar 209-22; Daly 278-83; Mangahas and Llaguno 21-4). Salazar confirms this existence with his discussion of the *babaylan* who, during ancient times was part of a socio-economic structure, which revolved around three main personalities: the *datu*, the *panday*, and the *babaylan* or *katalonan*. Salazar considers the *babaylan* the most interesting, "because she was the central personality in ancient Philippine society in the fields of culture, religion and medicine and all kinds of theoretical knowledge about the phenomenon of nature…a proto-scientist because of her specialization about man and God" (213). They provided healing, wisdom, and direction for the inhabitants of their *barangays* with morality stories, myths, poems, prayers, and chants. They also led the performance of rites and rituals of the community, especially rituals related to religion. Their "knowledge about the phenomenon of nature" (213) also equipped them with the gift of prophecy.

Miclat-Cacayan elaborates the spriritual and cultural role of the *babaylan*:

> presided over all the rituals of her people; from plantings to harvest, from birth, disease, to death; from weddings, hunts,

> wars, victory. Aside from being a priest, she was an empowered healer, midwife, herbalist, a trusted confidante, a reputed and wise counselor/adviser, a mediator (between humans), a medium or bridge (between humans and the spirit world), a historian, a visionary/clairvoyant, an environmentalist and cosmologist. She was not only a mystic/shaman, but also an influential leader grounded in almost all of life's different spheres; she was not only a talented poet/chanter and dramatic artist, but it had also been written that she was a "protoscientist." (60-61)

This means the *babaylan* held a significant role in the psycho-spiritual life of the community she was part of. Quoting Fr. Francisco Demetrio, Miclat-Cacayan stresses the extent of this role as "a person who can engage the foes of the community, especially the unseen ones, enter into struggle with them, and come out usually victorious, cannot but be a psychological pillar for her people" (qtd. in Miclat-Cacayan 61).

To elaborate further, Perla Paredes Daly details the five archetypes representing the roles of the *babaylan*: the Warrior, the Teacher, the Healer, the Sage and the Priestess (283-91). As the warrior, she takes action for survival, for stability and for change to effect "transformation, transmutation, ignition, power and empowerment" (285). The teacher archetype takes action for regeneration and growth. They create systems of storing, holding, keeping, cultivating and conveying knowledge, experience, culture and heritage (286). They are the "culture bearers, dancers, musicians, artists, writers and story-tellers" (287). The healer archetype promotes wholeness, preservation of health and well-being of the community. As visionary or sage, they provide access to vision, ideas, wisdom, and understanding, and relate that which is appropriate and timely. The priestess archetype bridges "the Seen and the Unseen, the spirit world and the physical world to give spiritual meaning to all aspects of life and earthly existence and to create practices and events for raising awareness and consciousness" (290).

These qualities speak of power and privilege through acknowledged and honoured service, of women begetting respect and following from the community, of actualization of value and worth. Such qualities are

represented in *State of War's* invocation of the women in pre-colonial times.

In inscribing and naming subsequent women ancestors, Maya and Mayang, Rosca confers on them the distinctions of being "the child and grandchild" of the "women then." They are depicted as possessing intuition and close affinity to nature.

First, Rosca describes these women with the knack of feeling the "worm of foreboding" (194, 289, and passim). This psychic flair can be taken as premonitions or admonitions, but also falls very closely to presentiments and the gift of intuition. Maya is described as somebody who can notice "a peculiar quality to the sunlight, a tremulous feel to the air" (161) as signals of things to come, of twists to destiny, of disturbing knowledge about to be known. The awakening of the "worm of foreboding" in her heart is made by "successive omens," like the instance when Maya sees that

> the estero boats seemed to float an inch or two above the water; the houses on both sides of the street were unreal enough. She felt she could, had she so desired, push a palm through their adobe walls. The blue, clear sky leaned overhead, so near its breath ruffled the hair on top of her head. (161)

These details give Maya a restless feeling that something is about to happen. The "worm of foreboding" awakens in her heart through progressions of omens: "omens which flashed, like quickly shuffled cards, before her mind's eye" (194-5).

Mayang, in her days, also finds clues from sounds. She hears the cry of the *labuyo*, and of bells, pealing from afar. From these sounds, she predicts harm or safety for the guerilla group, and even predicts that she would not survive the war. This "worm of foreboding" comes to Mayang, when "[t]he *labuyo* shrieked again and from below the mountains, distant but true as bell peals, came the answering chatter of domesticated hens. The *labuyo* crowed twice more. In the abrupt silence that followed, Mayang's heart kicked thrice in her ribs" (289).

This gift of quick and ready insight, immediate apprehension or cognition, enable these women to "read the time, tell the season, foretell wars and harm" (158). They do not recourse to formal decision procedure

but by wide and deep understanding of the self and others and by what is befitting to the situation. They are imbued with a kind of wisdom not bound by rules. This wisdom is an insight that opens to spontaneous and sound judgment or decision. It takes all the particulars of a given situation and the accompanying circumstances. It renders cognition without having to undergo structured enumeration of reasons, empirical evidence and inference. Instead, it is an instinct that emerges when an imminent threat is at hand, or when a decision is to be made. This sense is an endowment from their women forebears that emerges into the consciousness of Maya and Mayang at strategic moments. It is primed by the wisdom through the ages.

Second, Rosca renders the women ancestors as having close affinity to nature. Their intimacy with nature can be seen in their interactions with natural elements, their keen perceptions of sounds, of rustles and flows, of placement and position of the sun, the moon, the blow of the wind and the emotions of men and women. Both Maya and Mayang are sensitive to movements, feelings, seasons, time, and everything connected to nature. They have their own way of "sensing the world and what lay beyond" (159). As shown in the novel, a proper channelling of this trait, closer to intuition, allows the woman to read into the seasons and emotions, or even to summon spirits, to heal ailments and sickness.

Rosca endows Maya with healing prowess, an "accomplished osteopath," "who could set broken bones with such precision that it would seem afterward no damage had even visited the affected limb…" and "who could stroke and caress women's flesh back into an approximation of youth" (159). Mayang, on the other hand, is endowed with practical wisdom and ingenuity, resourcefulness and inventiveness, and a staunch courage for her family's survival. They have been portrayed as resourceful characters that make do with what they have and their naturally given faculties to adapt to the situation at hand.

In the flow of the events in the novel, a shift to what has been regarded as sense of the magical, such as those indicated above, is typically framed by the theoretical term, magic realism. The element of magic realism in the literary text, as explained by Wendy Faris, is perceived when "[t]he narrative voice reports extraordinary—magical—events, which would not normally be verifiable by sensory perception, in the same way in which other, ordinary events are recounted" (7). This indicates that in a magic

realist text, two incompatible codes are put together, that of realism and that of fantasy. Slemon notes that "a battle between these two oppositional systems take place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other" (409).

Although magic realism is popularly associated with Latin American origins, particularly in the works of Gabriel Garcia Marques, this literary trait has long been depicted in the literary traditions of the Philippines (Patke and Holden 154). The works of Philippine novelists Eric Gamalinda, Alfred Yuson and Antonio Enriquez are noted for venturing into the magic-realist mainstream. Works of Nick Joaquin, particularly his novel *Cave and Shadows* and the short story *May Day Eve*, are prominent in relating extraordinary experiences of characters in the telling of their ordinary lives. Patke and Holden also count those who have engaged in magic realism from the Philippines. Among them are: NVM Gonzales, who, Patke and Holden argue has "pioneered Filipino magical realism in his first novel"(154), *The Winds of April* (1941); Rosario Cruz Lucero in her *Feast and Famine: Stories of Negros* (2003) which documents her childhood days in Negros; and Dean Francis Alfar in *Salamanca* (2006). But notably, among those who have reflected magic realism in their works, Patke and Holden distinguish *State of War* by Ninotchka Rosca for its direct political concerns (155).

In the magic realist frame, the novel *State of War* indeed generates the impression that the pre-colonial past breaks through the realism of the novel – and is inscribed in the characters as a psychic premonition – a form of knowledge that cannot be contained in the rational, scientific knowledge base of the colonizers. Similarly, the form of a realistic novel, with a cause-effect plot, is broken through by strange and incongruous elements (the "worm of foreboding") that interrupt the novel's realistic representation and form.

However, in Rosca's characterization of Maya and Mayang, what has been viewed contemporarily as 'magic' is pulled out from the concept of the magical. This means that Rosca reclaims the deeds stamped as 'extraordinary' and renders them as 'ordinary'. The "worms of foreboding," the knack for intuition, the gift of healing, telling time and predicting future occurrence have been, in the present-day perception, relegated to the notion of the strange, the supernatural, even the absurd

or the bizarre. Rosca takes these deeds away from such notions in this narrative. She renders them as commonplace feats, done by ordinary women as their response to personal or communal needs.

To reiterate, Maya and Mayang as descendants of the "women then" are characterized with the traits of intuition and close affinity to nature. The novel portrays these as typical traits interposed in the daily grind they undergo, not in an aggrandized feat that gives an extraordinary feel. They are deeds done in the non-epic every day. They are acts of ordinary women and mothers, who biologically bear a child and instinctively minister to the child's needs. These women are friends and neighbors who use their wit and wisdom to respond to the needs of their community.

State of War's rendition of these women's prowess and traits points to the reality of womanhood in the Philippines. But, subsequent details in the narrative suggest this was real until the colonizers came. The colonizers had conditioned the Filipino minds to believe these sorts of deeds and the nature of characters are elements of magic and fantasy.

Inscribing Consequences of Colonization

The condition of the women ancestors, the mothers and grandmothers, affect the composition and transmission of individualities of generations of women after them. The novel, however, brings insinuations of discontinuity to the status of the women ancestors. The women after them are not given the same respect and following they have had in their time. While Maya and Mayang's characterizations show the same prowess, the reception of such is no longer the same.

In the novel's current time, the characters Anna and Eliza bemoan how the colonizers have "mess[ed] up language, mess[ed] up memory" (143). They grieve at how "[p]eople forget. Even what they are" (143). A deep regret at "how it all would have been had the Spaniards not arrived three hundred years ago" (289) is echoed prominently in the novel. The image ensuing from the experience and tradition of the pre-colonial or indigenous woman of the archipelago is destroyed, eroded by the colonizing power.

Ruined Image

It has been noted that the existence and the status of the *babaylan* in the pre-colonial Philippines have found their way into the documents and chronicles of the Spaniards. Mangahas and Llaguno reveal that Pigafetta's narrative discloses crucial information on the *babaylan*'s "singular authority, nay, women's tremendous responsibility and influence in the community" (34). Accounts of the so-called women priestesses in the early period of the Spanish colonization are far from negative. In Pigafetta's account, according to Mangahas and Llaguno, the *babaylans* were noted to be warm and accommodating. Brewer, in a review of another Pigafetta's text, opines that "the language Pigafetta uses in relation to the 'old women' and the ritual sacrifice itself is non-judgmental and even, it could be argued, charitable" (84).

However, the early women, told to have occupied a well-respected place in their own community and entrusted with the spiritual and the temporal welfare of the indigenous people, soon found themselves in conflict with the Spaniards. Mangahas and Llaguno convey that the worldview of these women "clashed with that of the Christian and the colonizers' western viewpoint" (34). In addition, the seizure of their lands, the abuse done by the colonizers took their toll on the *babaylans* over the years, so that they came to lead the people in an uprising against the invaders. There are indeed reported instances of armed resistance against the Spaniards, said to have been led by the *babaylan*. For instance, a painting in Xavier University's museum features Salud, said to be the last *Babaylan* standing in *Kagayhaan*, fighting against the Spaniards. In this sense, "the *babaylan* who was a spiritual warrior also became a warrior in the corporeal sense, when time calls for it" (Miclat-Cacayan 61). These uprisings triggered an animosity that made the Spanish priests fight the *babaylans* through religion. In the religious teachings, the *babaylan* and their activities were branded evils.

As leaders in the community, whose words and decisions were heeded by the people, the *babaylans* made it "extremely difficult, for the Spanish friars' taking over [the] people's landholdings, [their] culture, [their] bodies, and [their] psyche" (Mangahas and Llaguno 36). Mangahas and Llaguno observe that conflict between the Spanish friars and the *babaylan* was inevitable since:

> Spanish missionaries, who were themselves spiritual leaders and public servants as well, rightly perceived a formidable rival in the babaylans. They elaborated strategies and acted toward her elimination from that space. For how could the new religion and political order ever take root for as long as the babaylan's dance ritual of drama and power continued to be performed? (36)

The conflict changed the course of life for these women, eventually leading to the ruin of their reputation. In due course, the image of these women was rendered in negative reconstruction. Reasons are traced to the desire of the Spaniards to eliminate the indigenous religion and concomitantly any resistance to the introduction of Catholicism. The famed prowess of the *babaylans* was reduced to a kind of demonic activity, the enemy of the church, and assumed deplorable before the eyes of God.

In the novel, Anna grieves at how "they monkeyed around with language" (149). She pines over the malversation of language which erodes her positive sense of self. Carolyn Brewer writes of the "linguistic annihilation" (84) that changed the reputation of the *babaylan*. Brewer opines that the term used to refer to the *babaylan* has undergone reconstruction from the arrival of the Spaniards to the years of their domination of the country, "by plotting the renaming process from priestess [variations on *baylan/catalonan/maganito*] to witch [*hechicera/bruha*]" (84). Similarly, Jaime Veneracion elucidates the derogatory renaming of the *babaylan* to *bruha*. The adaptation of the Spanish *bruja*, which means witch, to the local spelling *bruha* has rendered an even more extensive negative impact on the indigenous people's retention of the indigenous priestesses.

Mangahas and Llaguno also historicize the character assassination and the persecution of the *babaylan* by the Spaniards. Years after the Spaniards took hold of Filipino communities, these women were discredited before their own community. They were pursued and hunted by the new government and the new religion. The *babaylans* were persecuted as a consequence of their uprising and of their being leaders of a faith that clashed with the religion brought by the invaders. They were murdered and, as if to make their bodies never return, their

bodies were chopped and fed to the crocodiles. In addition, their names were erased so that their memory would be recalled only as the Spanish colonizers wished (12-5).

Marginalized Story

Carmelita Corpuz hints at a reduction of their stories into legends or myths, more like fairy-tales. She says, "*ang tungkulin ng babae sa aspektong pulitikal, higit sa kanyang pamumuno dito, ay pinulaan ng mga nagsasabing hango lamang ito sa mga alamat* (women's role in the political, more than her leadership duties, is criticized by those who said these stories are mere myths)" (2). The propagation of the knowledge of the babaylan has been relegated to a mythic value, easily construed to be unfounded, beyond human, even demonic, a feat of darkness in contrast to what is holy and right. The production of the concept of babaylan as reduced to mere myth or projected as a myth strips it of its actuality and gives it a remote possibility. Lily Rose Tope's statement signifies a justification to this:

> Colonialist discourse mythifies the native's strangeness, his lack of culture and civility, and therefore justifies conquest. Mainstream history, founded on Western logic, rejects the discourse of the 'irrational', and mythifies its 'fanaticism', its 'madness'. (151)

Consigning their stories to the domain of myths and legends may have paved the way for looking at the *babaylan* as unreal. Myths and legends have been regarded as marginalized forms of documentation as they have been categorized as less than factual, as untruth. They have also been classified under oral tradition in the literary domain.

In addition, Ramos-Shahani notes that only very little is written about these women, only very few records have been archived. The tales of these women's feats do not find their way into the mainstream history. The stories of our mothers' mothers are not covered in history books, nor celebrated as part of the affairs of the nation. Their stories are said to have "thrive[d] in an ideological context and is constantly nurtured by a vibrant oral tradition: myths, legends, folk beliefs of great antiquity

which tell about the origin, structure, cosmogony, the sacred places and spirit beings that inhabit the different layers of the world" (151).

Ramos-Shahani opines that the images of foremothers "whose existence could only be gleaned from marginal notes in recorded history or from reading between the lines of historic documents" (11) need to find their place in the mainstream narrative. Since the story of the *babaylan* has been relegated to the sidelines, a number of scholars working on re-discovering the *babaylan* observe how little have been recorded about it. They comment on the difficulty of researching on their lives owing to the lack of materials. Strobel and Mendoza as well as Mangahas confirm Ramos-Shahani's claim that the scarcity of surviving documents about the *Babaylan* has been charged to the religious, the missionaries who launched Catholicism in the islands. Indigenous records and some relics of their existence are said to have been destroyed, burned or altered by the colonizers.

Altered Identity

Rosca depicts the contention that the professed women's prowess recedes when the Spaniards "inflected them with shame and made them hide their strength beneath layers of petticoats, half-chemises, drawers, skirts, blouses, shawls and veils" (192). The character of Maya remembers her mother's tale of grandmothers "raving against what the Spaniards had done, and voices of other women who weep for the loss of what they were when the world was young, and the sea was simply the sea" (191). Mananzan affirms this dynamics:

> The young girl under the Spanish influence became a sheltered, overprotected, timid maiden who received an education confined to church, kitchen and children…Her freedom of choice in important aspects of her life was curtailed by the imposition of new laws and mores. Confined in her area of action, the woman poured all her innate sensibility and energy into the activities allowed her, developing a religious fervor which would verge on fanaticism…On the pretext of putting a woman on a pedestal as an object of veneration and adulation, patriarchal society succeeded in alienating her from public life, public decision and public significance. (qtd. in Guerrero 3)

The lines above indicate the imposition of patriarchy upon the Filipina through the rule of the Spaniards, and the strategy of the patriarchal society to deny the importance and the standing which women held in their respective communities. The patriarchal mode brought by the Spaniards placed men on the pedestal, and curbed the very attributes women had once offered and rendered to the community.

Rosca seems to heap on the Spaniards (the first recorded colonial power that dominated the Philippines for more than three hundred years), the confusion of the Filipino women's identity. This has been reflected in Rosca's characterization of Maya and other "nubile Indias" who suffered from the Spaniards' enslavement, born out of patriarchal and colonial conditioning that subject women to exploitation. Rosca depicts the physical and mental enslavement of the Spaniards through a rape scene:

> the girl, who was 14 years old, knew enough not to resist the priest, having grown up surrounded by the gossip of the elders and taken to heart that the tenderest of thighs, whether of chicken or of woman, belonged to the friars. (154-5)

This scene happens one early morning when the priest goes out for a walk by the river. The friar quantifies the encomienda with his eyes, "[t]he land he passed through—from horizon to horizon—though still unnamed" (154). This scene, where the friar measures the land within sight before proceeding to rape the "nubile india," demonstrates that the colonizers have the female body and the land under their control. Here the rape of the female body is inscribed as an allegory of the possession and the exploitation of the seven thousand one hundred islands in the Philippine archipelago.

Adapting to Spanish Catholicism

The transition that takes place from the pre-colonial to the Spanish colonization and the changing impact brought about by the introduction of a new colonizing religion are further dramatized in Maya's life. Maya becomes the Spaniard's whore. She has been married to the monastery's cook, but the needs of the priest gains primacy over her status as the

cook's wife. The situation might not have left Maya with much choice, given that her own husband is employed by the priest. To protect her family, Maya lives with the priest in the public eyes, ministering to him with all her woman's gifts—"supervising the servants in the monastery, taking care of his mass vestments, fixing herbal potions to ease his dyspepsia, holding his hands as he lay in bed assaulted by heat and rain or other unspeakable climactic tribulations this land brought him" (155-6). As insinuated, this is a better choice for Maya's and her children's survival.

As the priest becomes dependent on Maya's care and ministrations, he intensifies his control over her, using his power to keep her in his company. Maya, trapped in her predicament as the priest's whore, soon learns to live "her shame—both public and private" (191). She learns to make use of his religion to sustain her role as a mother to a brood of children fathered by the priest. The need of her family drives her to take on the priest's corruption. She channels her healing and ministrations through the lifeless statues of saints, invoking their names in the execution of her curative calling, and in return asks for fees in the saint's name (192). 'Fitting' into his religion becomes her means to save herself and to survive from persecution.

Maya has to devise ways to survive. She has "dressed as the Virgin Mary for him, a blue mantle on her head" (191) as if to give the Spanish priest the impression she has acceded to his faith. Driving her own *caleche*, she parades around town donning all the bits and pieces from the ornate and extravagant clothing, glittering with enormous jewels from the life-size statue of the Virgin Mary. She drives around to collect petitions for a fee. She gives the assurance that these petitions would be brought to the proper saints. Maya would whip the saints' giant statue as cruelly and hard as she would whip her horses to prod these saints to concede to the demands. Thus, "[l]iving protected by his power and yet outcast by her status as a priest's whore, she was both in the center of and yet outside the half-pagan, half-Catholic society" (156). She has been called "witch, whore, saint, patroness, insane" (156). Maya's image has started to get confused and muddled.

Through these inscriptions, Rosca historicizes how the *babaylan's* prowess has intertwined with Spanish Catholicism. Such a description

of the woman bears testament to the impact of the religion introduced by the Spaniards to the indigenous Filipino women. In these inscriptions, Rosca shows Maya's adaptation; at the same time her indignation, the invasion of her previous self. She negotiates and wrestles for a space for herself. She confronts the clash between her traditional culture and Hispanic Catholicism. These responses can be construed as fitting or manoeuvring herself into the new religion. But at the same time, this also speaks of defiance against the domineering power.

The practice of Catholicism introduced and imposed by the colonizers lives on until the present day. It has become a dominant religion in the country. Its practice is stamped by patriarchy. However, Rosca suggests that pieces of women ancestors' ingenuity, and appearances of their defiance, are intertwined in its course. A huge part of their being has been eroded, their image ruined, but bits of their deeds can be gleaned from the enshrined position Catholicism has occupied in the country.

Faring through the coming of the Americans

The coming of the Americans is told in the life of Mayang. She is also a casualty in the circumstances of her generation. She is married to Carlos Lucas Villaverde, son of the Spanish friar and a native woman. He cruelly neglects her and devotes his time to attending to the troubles posed by his rivalry with the Capuchin monks in the distillery business. A German man, pretending to be a scientist, lures Mayang into stealing her husband's wine and beer formula, superior to the Capuchin monks' brand. Mayang hands over the formula to the foreign man, who in turn hands it to the rival Capuchin monks. This leads to the gradual collapse of her husband's distillery business, and the fall of Carlos Lucas, who had established his fortune from the sound of his Spanish name, Villaverde; the ingenuity of his beer formula; and the industry of his mother who had overseen all his effort to build his empire.

When her husband drifts into frustration and self-destruction, the responsibility of the now meager family finances ironically rests in Mayang's hands. Trapped in her financial dilemma, Mayang is later convinced, and more likely tricked, by yet another foreigner, an American anthropologist, one of her tenants, into selling the properties of her family.

It is shown that the loss of Mayang's properties is due to the American whose offer to help proves to be self-serving. In yet another ironic fate, Mayang trades all that she has for what she hopes would bring her prosperity. With almost nothing left to provide for the family's financial needs, Mayang has to return, finally, to rely on herself for economic survival. Through her resourcefulness, the family survives on the rental of potted flower plants Mayang lends to the Chinese and other rich families during funerals or wakes.

When the war with the Japanese breaks, Mayang volunteers to go with her son, to carry her son's saxophone for him while he joins his guerrilla group engaged in war. From time to time, especially when the group is weary, Luis Carlos would play the instrument. The music from the saxophone entrances the tired fighters as it does when it is played one night in the *Casa Espanol*. Those listening are transported:

> …in the six minutes that it took to begin and finish the song, the Casa's roofs and walls disappeared and it seemed that the entire archipelago lay before them, all seven thousand one hundred islands, and they could focus on that hallowed place—mountainside, seashore, city or town—wherein their birth pillows (as the placenta was called in the native language) had been buried, in a tradition older than the Spanish walls of intramuros, linking them inextricably, despite tortuous journeys, to the stones, dust, and trees of their childhood which called for their return…. (279)

In this description, the saxophone's musical relevance to human existence and its indispensability for endurance is suggested. The human connection to the land of one's birth is evoked, and remains no matter where and how the soul has strayed. The stream of the sound appeals for humanity's return to its roots. Such innate connections could also be the source of resolve for survival and the fuel for courage.

In another light, the stream of music appeals to humanity and transports the listeners back to presences of long ago, such as the presence of the *babaylan.* A spiritual union with the land implies a prior

union with the spirit of the *babaylan*—the pre-colonial reality breaking through the consciousness of the people through the music played.

Bracketed outside warfare

Mayang accompanies her son to where the guerilla unit goes, carrying his musical instrument. Along the route, she eventually serves the group through her ability of spotting edible crops, berries and fruits to feed them. She roams through the forest to source their food. She attends to the wounded, finds herbs to heal stomach-aches and headaches, fever and indigestion. More importantly, she guides her son's group, directing their moves and paths as she starts to foretell seasons and predict harm. Unconsciously, she has been acting like her foremothers, the *babaylan*:

> Having found a dry enough spot for their things, she stepped back into the forest to gather palm fronds and fallen branches—materials for their own lean-to. Automatically, as she circled farther from the camp, the local names of berries and ferns returned, and she began to catalogue what was edible and what wasn't, what virtue each had, not noticing how, by this simple act, she was already reverting to her unwedded days. Whenever she spied and bent to pick up a usable discard of the forest, the fingers of her left hand went to her chest, pressing back the cloth of a remembered wide-neck peasant blouse though she wore a man's shirt and trousers. Catching herself in the gesture, she had to smile ruefully, thinking how strangely indeed time had looped, so that she found herself in her old province once again, breathing that impossibly pure air and wondering how it all would have been had the Spaniards not arrived three hundred years ago. (289)

Mayang reads nature and its aura, listens to sounds and movements of the wind, pays attention to curves of leaves, to birds' flights and coos, to the presence or non-presence of other elements of nature. Through these, she foretells harm to warn the group. The foretelling of harm or

success through clues from nature speaks of Mayang's deep intuition which still persists despite the passage of time. For some time, the guerilla unit listens to her, relies on the wisdom of her instincts, and pays respect to her perceptions. They remain safe in their journey, victorious in their attacks, and unbeaten in their defences. The guerrilla unit where Luis Carlos is appended becomes both famous and feared for two reasons: "its musician, said to summon water spirits with an instrument of unspeakable sadness; and its ferocious leader, Generala Nana or General Old Lady" (293). But, Mayang's contribution is not given credit by her son's unit.

Nevertheless, Mayang starts to see her world and finds her worth in such services, not knowing that, ironically, "in the enemy's territories she was a legend, that the old native title of respect, Nana, had been construed by the ignorant aliens as a guerrilla alias and that they had set a price for her head" (293). But this 'contribution' remains unacknowledged. In a way, her reputation of power among their enemies has protected the unit; the fear of her legend has, for a time, made the enemies hesitant to attack. But among her own people, Mayang meets her death. Jake Montreal, a guerrilla member, strikes her with the butt of his rifle which caught and cracked her side. For him, a woman is useless in the cause. Mayang's presence is treated as non-essential, a burden or a liability to the group engaged in war.

Mayang's demise could be seen in the light of the conflict between and among men. The conflict among men inside the group, the conflict among the number of guerrilla units, and the conflict between the guerrilla fighters of the nation and the foreign attackers—these conflicts render Mayang a casualty. To spite Luis Carlos, who has bested him in many ways, Jake Montreal resorts to killing Mayang. To clean his way for his plans to betray the group in favor of benefits from the foreign attacker, Jake Montreal finds his way by eliminating one block at a time. Mayang is the first he has to terminate.

The guerrilla warfare can also be seen as a metaphor for gender conflicts. Women's courage is bracketed outside the warfare regarded as the world of males. Perception of the presence of women as a 'curse' for the movement renders them vulnerable to all forms of violence within

or outside the militant movement. The taking of arms, the capacity to fire has taken the lead over the feeding and the guiding that Mayang has given the group. Her capacity has been buried and drowned in the flurry of man's social relations and warfare.

Summing up consequences of colonization

Rosca's inscriptions of the pre-colonial Filipino women speak of their status before the land was colonized. They tell of the power they hold and the respect accorded to them, and how these were eroded when the Spaniards arrived. The abuse of the colonizing power of the Spanish friars in their 'rape' of the native Filipino women reflects, not just literally, but also the de-facing of the image of the *babaylan*. Through depictions of Maya's struggle, Rosca shows how the ancestors grappled with the intrusion of the Spaniards. Maya suffers from the priest's sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual enslavement. Her feats for survival illustrate the fusion of an indigenous prowess and a Spanish Catholicism.

Through Mayang's experience, the novel illustrates how women fared under the residue of the Spanish influence and colonialism, the invasion of the Americans, and the guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. Rosca portrays Mayang's character to suggest the economic downfall of a woman in her attempts to sustain and provide for her family. In an ironic fate, Mayang traded all that she had for what she hoped would bring her prosperity. Mayang suffered from the enterprising exploits of her husband, from the foreign men playing on her weakness, from the American who tricked her to sell and mortgage her properties. She finally dies at the hands of a guerrilla soldier who betrayed his own unit. The betrayal of these men made her divest all her wealth, status, and her life.

With the history of colonization of the nation as its background, *State of War* illustrates how the women characters have inherited a past which has been multiplied as fractured. First, the coming of the Spaniards regressed the Filipino woman. The Spanish rule and religion subsumed the women's prowess under their supremacy. Second, the coming of Americans divested them of properties, rendering them poor and penniless. Third, the ensuing patriarchal stance maintained warfare

which undermined the potential of women's contributions. Even with an independent government, discord and dispute, a state of war between men for advancement of their will, rank and power, continue. The underlying processes of these deals betrayed and deceived women.

Inscribing the Continuity of the Pre-Colonial Qualities

Although the qualities of the *babaylan* are visibly weakened and confused by the mechanisms of colonialism and patriarchy, the narrative shows that both Maya and Mayang retain the qualities they are gifted with. Rosca insinuates that Filipino women's capacity for observation, strength, and leadership lives on through generations. To expound this, Rosca shows the link from woman to woman and implies a connection stronger than blood. Maya herself remembers how she "ha[s] lain with her own mother…absorbing the older woman's knowledge" (191). This manner, a bond between women, opens a channel to the past and connects to future generations. The same "communion" between women takes place when Maya bestows her strength on a girl who would be her son's wife through a "mere touch of the flesh, though it resonated with eternity" (192). Mayang regrets the absence of her daughter, "who would have learned this way, the only way to knowledge, flesh to flesh" (298).

The link between women is rendered through these images: "flesh to flesh" (298), "palm to palm" (191), and daughters who have "lain with [their] own mother" (191). The images are intimate and tactile. It might be remarkable to note that these metaphorically rendered images of intercourse are most likely used to intensify the strength of the "communion," and suggest depth.

Anna is depicted in a powerless and oppressed state. But throughout her ordeal, Rosca reveals that in her confused state, the 'presence' of the foremothers continues to knock at her memory and her spirit:

> For she remembered, the memory that had been her birthright rising to reclaim her….Chains of female voices, emerging from the secret niches of her brain, linked her to the years, back, back, back, even to a time when the tinkle of gold anklets was a message, herald of a passing, one morning of beginnings in a still-young world of uncharted seas. (346)

The lines above portray the 'past' rising to claim 'the present'. The bequeathal of knowledge from the past comes "from the secret niches of her brain," from "the memory rising to reclaim her." Mangahas and Llaguno assert that the *babaylan*, "although ancient and unknown to most feminists in the country, is alive, and lingers as the 'political unconscious' of women in this part of the globe" (15).

Leticia Ramos Shahani in her foreword to *Centennial Crossings, Readings on Babaylan Feminism in the Philippines*, also affirms that "there is a strong connection between those ancient figures and the modern Filipina who continues to have a positive and strong image of herself despite today's threatening environment" (12). This agrees with the observation of Mangahas and Llaguno that "as a form of women's consciousness that antedates the feminist of the suffragist era in the Philippines, *babaylanism* is a homespun concept, rooted in the country's specific historical and cultural context" (15). Rosca's inscriptions of women characters concretize this claim.

The narrative insinuates that the prowess of the pre-colonial *babaylan* is never lost. It remains at the core of the Filipina. The beginnings and the source thrive from a force and a being which refuse to die. It is noted that both women, Maya and Mayang, resort to their core when at one point of their lives, they are divested of their station and their wealth by intruders. Maya, when stripped of all her faculties to serve for the sexual needs of the Spanish priest, channels her healing endowments through his religion. The exercise of her prowess has been coursed through the figures identified with the Spanish faith. Mayang, when caused to be divested of her wealth by the Capuchin monks, by her German lover, and then most extensively by the American anthropologist, restores and reverts to her inner capacity. When with the guerrillas, Mayang finds her worth in the things she is good at and can do: the carrying of the saxophone which can be allegorically seen as a source of spiritual, humanist and moral comfort; the procurement of food for the group; the telling of the season, the movements, the sounds, the shape of the surroundings; and her predictions based on these movements from nature.

The image of Anna projects a trapped woman, raped and subjected to humiliation and torture. However, Anna draws strength from the

memory of the foremothers. As the novel portrays, the distinctive spirit of the ancestor still runs in her subconscious.

Anna restores memories through "visions given her by printed words, by sensuous chants," and "women's voices wailing in her sleep to the tinkling of gold anklets" (336). She recalls those times when women held power and authority. Those are the times when women's traits are equated with trust, with importance, with faith that their ability can steer the community to survival and growth. Those are the times when women's faculty and attributes are recognized and become the well-spring of the governance of a community.

The gifts of intuition and of close affinity to nature have functioned well for the pre-colonial community. The right time to harvest, to gather, to wield decisions, or even when to attack, once depended on women's gift of intuition. With the reverence accorded to them, the "women then" gathered the people to worship, voiced commands and commanded obedience. They held significant positions in the community. Their opinions were respected. Their voices were heard, and their decisions followed.

But in Anna's time, these gifts and services are met with betrayal and are used to advance the interest of those who are in power. In this game of power, women are again, in Rosca's formulation, "inside and yet outcast." In the current world where Anna moves, these traits and gifts which still persist, have been reduced to a conception of woman's frailty, of woman's fickle-mindedness, of woman's unsettled and unstable faculties.

Once, long ago, within the islands—seven thousand one hundred islands but comprising one archipelago—women themselves listened to the talk in their hearts, to the tingling in their veins, to whispers from somewhere outside, or from within. Concurrently, in Anna's time, the mental conditioning of colonized patriarchal society playing against women's knowledge and skill has been so expansive that even women themselves have dismissed those 'tingling' as part of their failings as human beings, because they are women.

However, Rosca suggests the persistence and the awakening of that pre-colonial *babaylan* trait, despite colonial blinding. It has been mixed and fused with foreign traits, but not erased; adapted and appropriated but not totally altered; mangled and fractured but not completely

annihilated. Traces of that *babaylan* capacity persist despite a history of repeated colonization.

From Maya to Mayang, to Anna's character in the novel's current time, Rosca conveys that the prowess of the *babaylan* is never lost through generations of Filipina women. It stays in one's veins throughout one's lifetime even if one is unaware or unconscious of it. Or even when the tales of the women ancestors have been reduced to mere myth, mere imaginative rendering akin to fairy tales and make-believe stories. Or even when the execution of the prowess has been demonized by the Spanish friars in favor of the Catholicism they introduced. Or even when the minds of the populace have been conditioned to regard these *babaylan* traits as women's fickle nature.

Rosca's inscriptions affirm that the inherent prowess of the Philippine *babaylan* woman lives on; what has been altered is the reverence once accorded to those who possess such attributes.

Inscribing Hope for Recovery and Redemption

In the face of violence and injustice in the subsequent years, in spite of her crippled sense of self and dignity, Anna claims hope. Rosca shows hope is at hand, as Anna

> unwilling to admit failure, walked out slowly. Perhaps there was a clue outside…even as what she meets instead were the voices of three girls singing: "Ferdinand Magellan, the crazy old coot, took five ships"… and came to a full halt a few yards away, in some enigmatic understanding of what was right. They let go of their skirts abruptly, spilling what they had collected to the sand….Once more, compelled by a strange sense of rightness, their singing changed and Anna found herself listening to a song about boats sailing the heavens, one which was carrying away the woman who said no, thanks but no thanks…her knees sagged; she herself sank down. (346)

These lines signify Anna's action to find clues, to listen to "the strange sense of rightness" from the women of her past. In Anna's final disposition, Rosca weaves the present and the past, and draws from the

past an inspiration to live in the future with a conscious choice to relive the tradition and the spirit of the "women then."

It is suggested that imprinting the images of the foremothers and forwarding their stories can pave the way to recovery. To quote Estrobel's words, these are means to attain the "dream of putting women back at the center of narration" (152). In the concluding part of the novel, Anna discovers she is pregnant:

> the child was male, and he would be born here, with the labuyo—consort of mediums and priestesses—in attendance… She knew all that instantly, with great certainty, just as she knew that her son would be a great storyteller, in the tradition of the children of priestesses. He would remember, his name being a history unto itself, for he would be known as Ismael Villaverde Banyaga. (382)

The passage above speaks of Anna's resolve to raise her son in the "tradition of the children of the priestesses," hinting at a hope for the future to return to the time when women were accorded reverence. She will name him after Ismael, the man from the underground movement who mixes in the crowd as any man, a policeman, a fisherman, to work for the liberation of the nation. Anna also bestows on her son the family name Banyaga, the family name of his father born "in the proper side of morning," the elite Adrian. In this detail, Anna vows to make her child cut across classes. In her resolve to raise him in the tradition of the *babaylan,* she also envisions her son to cut across genders.

Elaborate descriptions of the traits of the *babaylan* and their existence in the past acknowledge their absence in the present. Thus, inscriptions of the lives of Philippine women include periods, events, wars, attacks, colonisations, taking over of governments, bombings, dominations, capitalist pursuits, even marriages, and migrations. These serve as Rosca's attempt to explain what has happened to the once respected role of the *babaylan*. These histories are significant parts of characterizing the continued strength of the *babaylan* qualities in Philippine women, despite events which might have succeeded in erasing the *babaylan* from social memory. The stories of each time are

significant to fill in the gap of their discontinued existence.

The tales of women ancestors—their lives in the past, their continued existence in the events of the country, their deaths and eventually how their 'existence' has been erased, how they've been buried—are part of the story of the women's oppression and part of the explication of the specific woman question in the Philippines. Remembering them, consequently, says a lot about the women in the present and about the role the present women bear.

The inscription of women ancestors in *State of War* is a celebration of their lives. The inscriptions allude to women of the pre-colonial Philippines who assumed a particular leadership and commanded respect in the pre-colonial community, the *babaylan*. The image of the *babaylan* provides impressions of the traits and peculiarities which, before the coming of the colonizers, were regarded as a source of power, a fountainhead that begot respect and following. Their tales may also postulate the women's history of persistence, resistance, subversion, as well as appropriation. Rosca's inscriptions render the character from which Philippine women may course their roots, may trace the core of their identity as people, and may project their representations and responses to the nation's circumstances, to the distinctiveness of this region and to the challenges of the world.

Rosca situates the power of the *babaylan* through keen observation of the natural and of human nature coupled with innate wisdom. She locates the prowess in the plausible world, not as fantastic or strange or beyond this world, but something within the bounds of human acts. Through these, Rosca aims to prove that the acclaimed prowess is present in every Filipino woman. By narrating their experiences as feasible, palpable and evident in everyday struggle, Rosca humanizes the rendering of *babaylan*. Through this, she has questioned the tales and mental conditioning that place these women in the realm of the 'supernatural' or even of the demonic domain. In illustrating how they figure in the everyday lives of the people, and how they mutate in the coming of the foreign invaders, Rosca aims to foreground that the actions were not unfounded, not of a mythic dimension, but were actual in the past, and are possible in the here and now.

The coming of the colonizers created in the islands an alteration

of the processes and knowledge of one's identity. These have caused a crucial erasure of the fountainhead of women's identity in the Philippine archipelago. The route of how that identity has changed through the years shows how chains of colonial oppression muddle and confuse Filipino women's image. It further reveals how the ensuing confusion impairs the present circumstances of the Filipino women's existence. Rosca's telling of their stories implies indignation over the alteration, the ruin and the annihilation of the woman's image and fate. In retelling their lives in this novel, Rosca has also interrogated the root and the continuance of such displacement.

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