

## "Dainty Predators" and "Carnivorous Families": The Representation of Hunger in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*

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### Abstract

The cultural practice of obsessive feasting suggests not only individual attitudes to food but also a collective state of spiritual emptiness. In Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) most male characters' hunger for food is never satisfied. Their expressed desire to eat at any given circumstance is often aligned with vocalized or wishful sexual urges. Their female counterparts either eschew food ascetically or demonstrate a corresponding degree of gastronomic crave. In this novel, hunger and its direct association with consumption do not define a festive, harmonious environment. Rather, satisfaction of desires is set against a violent, politically charged background. The discussion below traces the representation of hunger and food consumption in the novel to gain fresh insights into the problematic nature of the neocolonial modes of living in Manila. To this end, we argue that Manila in Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* is consumed by a collective insatiability and instability fostered by the hegemony of a capitalistic/postmodern dynamic that continues to define the cultural attitudes and practices of the citizenry in the neocolonial city of Manila.

**Keywords:** *Dogeaters*; Food; Hunger; Jessica Hagedorn; Philippines; Postcolonial literature.



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### 1. Introduction

Recent studies of multi-ethnic food in literature highlight the positive aspects of oral consumption and feasting and their association with culture and identity. Almerico (2014) states,

*Food studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field of study that examines the complex relationships among food, culture, and society from numerous disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Food studies is not the study of food itself; it is different from more traditional food-related areas of study such as agricultural science, nutrition, culinary arts, and gastronomy in that it deals with more than the simple production, consumption, and aesthetic appreciation of food. (2)*

This indicates that scrutinizing the habits of food and consumption in any society may lead to understanding the cultural identity and political forces that constitute the culture of that society. As Tarr (2016) States "the process of intentionally nurturing, growing, harvesting, and celebrating food is not merely part of culture but a form of culture". In other words, "food acquires meaning through its place as the product of histories of expropriation and adaptation; within economics of production and consumption...in the mythologies of national and communal identities" (Vlitos, 2018). Thus, considering the rituals of hunger and food in postcolonial fiction helps us to understand the cultural context of the neocolonial habits of consumption.

In a few Asian-American novels and poems, food is often represented as a conduit for language, memory, tradition and folklore, and it usually offers an opportunity for the characters and speakers alike to define and reclaim their ethnic and racial identity. Culinary items and themes of orality usually communicate messages of love, racial solidarity and social harmony. In Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990), most male characters' hunger for food is never satisfied. Their expressed desire to eat at any given circumstance is often aligned with vocalized or wishful sexual urges. Their female counterparts either eschew food ascetically or demonstrate a corresponding degree of gastronomic crave. The cultural practice of obsessive feasting suggests not only individual attitudes to food but also a collective state of spiritual emptiness. The consistent complaint about starvation subsists, and nourishment is never attained: most characters are constantly hungry for more food, and their compulsive habits of cooking and consuming lavish meals at parties attest to their insatiability and impoverishment.

Accordingly, this paper aims at showing how hunger and its direct association with consumption do not define a festive, harmonious environment. Rather, satisfaction of desires is set against a violent, politically charged background. The paper contends that the political drama of hunger, this association between desire and death, food and politics, spotlights the material presence of a problematic cultural present. It is a present that strives to define itself according to an imperial/neocolonial legacy that sustains hunger and expands the parameters of greed and consumption. To this end, we trace the representation of hunger and food consumption in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) to gain fresh insights into the problematic nature of the neocolonial modes of living in Manila.

## 2. Relevant Literature

*Dog eaters* (1990), is a postcolonial novel that is often read with reference to specific postcolonial notions, such as race, gender, identity, discrimination, and color. Ashok (2009), for instance, argues that "Hagedorn's feminism opens up a site in the text for a succinct critique of the anti-woman tendencies inhering in nationalism" (1). In other words, *Dog eaters* is fundamentally a feminist *manifesto* about the status of women in the now capitalist nation of Philippines. This viewpoint is significant in the context of post-colonialism; nevertheless, it overlooks the female citizenry's 'fascination' with the same capitalist culture they often want to resist. Similarly, Chang (2003), overlooking the neocolonial/postcolonial nuances of the novel, views the novel as a critique of the use of violence against women in the Philippines and concludes that the narrative emphasizes "patriarchal contradictions [and brings] together the dichotomized icons of idealized femininity and degraded whoredom" (639-640). While this reading is significant, it excludes references to the oppressive hegemonic culture of capitalism that continues to contribute to the racial and gender dichotomies in Manila. In the same vein, Mendible (2002) focuses on the representation of desire in *Dog eaters* and states that the narrative "is textualized to the degree that it is inscribed by a Philippine history of colonization and repressive regimes and loaded with patriotic (patriarchal) imagery" (290). In addition, Mendible contends that Hagedorn's novel "reflects the conditions of its own production by incorporating postmodern features such as disruptive intertextual dialogues, temporal and causal dislocations, unreliable subjectivities, and historical pastiche" (2002, 290). This understanding of the novel as a postmodern piece implies that what the text says is mostly the outcome (i.e. reflection or reverberation) of the socio-political environment in which the text has been composed.

This viewpoint does not highlight the capitalistic nature of the postmodern culture represented in the novel. For critics of postmodernism, such as Fredric Jameson and David Harvey, "modernity and postmodernity represent two different phases of capitalism... post-modernity corresponds to 'late capitalism' or a new multinational, 'informational' and 'consumerist' phase of capitalism" (Wood, 1997). That is to say, it is untenable to discuss postmodernism without accentuating its capitalistic nature. In Jameson's theory of postmodernism (Colás, 1992),

*The 'Third World' performs a paradoxical double function...It is both the space whose final elimination by the inexorable logic of capitalist development consolidates the social moment -late capitalism- whose cultural dominant is postmodernism, and the space that remains somehow untainted by and oppositional to those repressive social processes which have homogenized the real and imaginative terrain of the "First World" subject. The latter function then secretly makes possible that subject's attempts to gain a historical foothold through which to recall the past out of which the seemingly eternal, postmodern, present emerged; that is, to think the present historically and thus to think the possibility of transforming.*

It is more tenable, then, to read the (trans) formation of the cultural/neocolonial identities of the Philippine citizenry in Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* in light of this postmodern/ capitalistic First World hegemony. To this end, we want to argue that postcolonial Manila in Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* is consumed by a collective insatiability and instability fostered by the hegemony of this capitalistic/postmodern dynamic that continues to define the cultural attitudes and practices of the citizenry in Manila.

## 3. Discussion

Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* (1990) describes the consumption of the ideals of Western culture, which is represented by Hollywood aspirations and the capitalistic attitudes of some characters. While lower-class Filipino citizens are already consumed by the ideals of celebrity fame and dreams of public distinction, the industrialist high-middle class ones are influenced by the maxims of capitalism and its attendant disregard for the mal-nourished, sexually exploited members of Manila. Scenes of digestion and feasting stress the materiality of this neocolonial hunger for whiteness, cultural assimilation, and Hollywood-manufactured reputation. Adopting the stance of an imperialist, colonizing power (US and Spain), these Filipinos, lacking in a distinctive definition of identity, assimilate themselves into a hegemonic culture that once defined them in terms of otherness and exoticism.

As a product of assimilating themselves into this greedy culture, Hagedorn's Filipino characters internalize that exoticism. Their identity is already constructed by a former colonizer, whose hunger and greed they embrace as marks of a neocolonialist identity. Their embracing the same traits of a former colonizer sets in motion the discourse of exoticism and the representation of their identity in terms of inferior racial difference. In the novel, high-class Filipino characters do not quite fulfill the representation of true nationalist citizens; their nationalism is motivated by greed and exertion. What seems like an apt self-representation of what constitutes a truly national identity is simply an act of self-exoticization. These hungry Westernized characters simply re-create their exotic difference, which was once institutionalized by the apparatus of colonialism and its racist representations of the colonized.

Consuming the ideology of a former US/ Spanish colonizer (which once created an exoticized Filipino subject for the consumption of others) simply means the perpetuation of the same patterns of representation. Former colonizer was hungry for profit in an exoticized Manila, which is now, in a postcolonial era, hungry for the culture and ideology of this colonizer. It is a consumptive, rather than expansionist, hunger though. Such consumption is brought into a high degree of prominence by the representation of food and scenes of feasting. In Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* (1990), food consumption exemplifies a state of confusion, social and political turmoil. While busy eating ravenously, the characters are usually engaged with discussing pressing questions about the political and economic situation of Manila, and mostly that engagement defines a space of struggle and personal disagreement. More often than not, they are busy consuming huge amounts of food while arguing about the hazards of unequal marriage, class

difference, the torture of political prisoners, assimilation, conflictual issues about ethnic identity, and the assassination of public figures. Food thus defines a contentious space of physical hunger and political debate, both enmeshed together to attest to the public and private commotion of Manila and its hungry citizens.

Interestingly, *Dog eaters* exemplifies different kinds of hunger, which is emblematic of personal and impersonal struggle. There is hunger for fame (Romeo), for power and public reputation (Gonzaga and Alacran family), for food and sex (General Ledesma), and for tabloid news (Filipino broadcast companies). Contrastively, there is a wish on part of other characters to satisfy that hunger by dint of eradicating its very sources. A revolutionary proponent of anti-assimilative programs in Manila, Senator Avila, quoted rather condescendingly by one of the characters at a dinner party, expresses his strong displeasure at the compulsive state of hunger fostered by colonization and perpetuated by the citizens of Manila:

*He describes us as a complex nation of cynics, descendants of warring tribes which were baptized and colonized to death by the Spaniards and Americans, as a nation betrayed and then united only by our hunger for glamour and Hollywood dreams. (101)*

Senator Avila's apt description exemplifies that state of consistent hunger for the consumption of Western values that were first introduced to the Philippines through forced agendas of assimilation. The introduction of Catholicism by the Spanish colonization as well added another level of complexity to the questions of self-representation. According to the Senator, the Filipino identity is thus a complex of Spanish and American identities. At some point, the Senator makes a clear pronouncement about the political situation of his country, claiming that his nation is "threatened by the legacy of colonialism." It is the legacy of colonialism that fostered this collective hunger for power and extravagance. As [Lacsamana \(2002\)](#) comments, countries like the Philippines "have been transformed into neocolonial appendages" whose legacy continues to shape and "inform the lives of Filipinos as well as other people of color" (134). It is a hegemonic legacy that cuts sharply through the body of Manila and its citizens; neocolonialism produced a generation that is hungry for power, whiteness and authority. Hagedorn depicts the materiality of this postcolonial hunger by dint of spotlighting the consumptive cultural practices of the citizens of Manila.

Generally speaking, food is used as a recurring motif in the novel. A few chapters are full of gastronomic inferences that indicate not only the type of food but also the type of character. For example, while one character's appetite for sweet food is compatible with her/his sympathetic description, another's is well-matched with his/ her antagonistic representation. Food also indicates social status. For expensive dinner parties, high-class societies must purchase expensive imported food such as Hunt's Catsup, Kraft Mayonnaise, Velveeta, and Western American food items. Moreover, scenes of assassination often coincide with scenes of feasting, and consumption is sometimes set against scenes of fasting and vomiting. Food is generally associated with the social/economic (and sometimes psychological) state of most characters that are almost always hungry.

Hagedorn represents this state of consistent physical hunger and its symbolic associations by foregrounding the extravagant lives of three upper-middle class families and the lives of socially poor and sexually exploited underdog citizens. The Alacran family, to begin with, is headed by Severo Luis "Chuchi" Alacran, a morally callous tycoon who owns the country club, a recording company, and soft drink factory. His wife, a former nightclub hostess, is disappointed with her daughter Rosario "Baby" Alacran, who is ugly, has a gross body smell and a pathological nail-chewing habit. Refusing to succumb to her parent's demands of marrying a socially compatible citizen, Rosario flees with the physically repulsive Lieutenant Colonel Pepe Carreon, who is responsible for persecuting political prisoners. Carreon and his boss General Nicasio Ledesma are the Alacran's instruments of terrorizing Manila and its citizens. The ravenousness of the Alacran and their terrorizing practices against the citizens are critiqued in the novel; Hagedorn spotlights the disreputable status of such class of citizens.

This family is thrown into comparative shade with Senator Domingo Avila's. The Senator is the head of the opposition faction that looks back to a more beautiful, and pure past of the Philippines. His wife is even an articulate professor of the Philippine history. Much to her parents' disappointment and embarrassment, Daisy becomes the queen pageant of a beauty contest, which she, later on, renounces and forgoes, much to the embarrassment of the First Lady Imelda. In an interview, Daisy critiques the ruling regime and refuses to be consumed by the public gaze of journalists. After the assassination of the Senator by the regime's forces, Avila is captured and gang-raped. She later joins the guerrilla party with her cousin Clarita, the erotic artist.

A third family is represented in the novel. Gonzaga is an upper-middle class family who are portrayed from the perspective of Rio, the ten-year-old daughter. Rio's father is the central character of the family. He is the vice president of Severo Alacran's international company Intercoco. The two are always seen playing golf. The mother is in love with the Brazilian ambassador. Rio's cousin, Pucha, wishes to marry an Alacran as this should help her to climb the social ladder and to realize her Hollywood dreams of financial success and eminence.

The Avilas, the Gonzagas, and the Alacrans are all part of the ruling class in Manila. Lower class citizens, however, are consumed not only by the exploitiveness of the ruling class but also by their delusions and dreams. Orlando Rosales wants to become a movie star, working hard to prove to himself that he is up to it, but he has neither the talent nor the necessary qualifications for this profession. His lover Trinidad Gamboa works as a cashier in a department store owned by the Alacran. She submissively allows Orlando to take advantage of her physically and financially. She believes in him and cherishes his false Hollywood delusions. Both are victims of the Alacran financial stronghold. For his dreams to come true, he can only work in an Alacran studio since the film industry is already owned by the Alacrans. His dreams are only realized through a direct association with the ruling regime. His wishes never come true, and later on he is accused of being the assassin of Senator Avila and is oppressed not only by the ruling class but also by the deluded mob that kills him.

The social drama of these classes unfolds in a context of greed and frequent practices of consumption. In certain respects, feasting functions as a medium for ineffectively and uselessly arguing about urgent family issues. In his "Gastronomic Theory of Literature," Kessler (2005) maintains that food "opens doors to triple and double meanings" (156). Food for Kessler (2005) can imply notions of pleasure, emancipation and unrestraint. But the unrestraint in Hagedorn's novel is out of proportions and carries along with it negative rather than positive implications. The pleasure attendant upon savoring a meal is a pleasure of neglecting others, and the attendant culinary extravagance represents states of displeasure, dissatisfaction, and irritation. Food does not construct pleasant relationships; rather, it destructs and disrupts the continuation of healthy familial relationship and social connections.

The Alacran family scene is a prime example of this domestic disruption. Announcing her intention to marry Pepe Carreon, Baby Alacran "breaks her customary "silence at the dinner table with her quavering voice "(23). She has already made a decision to marry Pepe, a military cadet who belongs to the lower-class citizenry of Manila. Her mother objects to this proposed marriage and suggests instead that her daughter should get married to a socially compatible citizen. The ensuing discussion about this marriage occurs while the family is having dinner. The father is "preoccupied with the salad on his plate, fresh wild spinach and the red Spanish onions tossed with vinegar and a dab of olive" (23). He has an "unquenchable thirst" and avid hunger for a variety of food that should be served immediately. He consistently "groans, longs for meat, the peppery, greasy taste of pork adobo." He even imagines "the piquant flavor of shrimp wrapped in taro leaves, stewed in mixture of hot chili and coconut milk" (23). Severo Alacran's feeding frenzy is brought into a high degree of prominence. His preoccupation with food, this unsatisfied gastronomic crave, is an indication of insouciance and lack of concern for his family and the well-being of his daughter.

In this scene of domestic disruption and the tangible materiality of greed, Baby Alacran's physical presence is symbolically consumed; she is corporeally diminished and made invisible in the foregrounded representation of this paternal world of feasting. Her physical reduction is set against a magnified masculine gluttony. Expressing displeasure with this extravagance and refusing to partake of this ravenous consumption, she indulges herself in a romantic retrospection about her lover, allowing the intrusion of a privatized world upon the alimentary one. Chewing on her nails is her only preoccupation amidst a space of ingestion.

In a dreamlike effect, the text reminds the readers of Baby Alacran as a very young girl. As a child, she used to "chew on her nails," and consequently, her fingers develop "an itchy rash" (28). The rash later on "develops into hideous, watery blisters and open stores." She is represented as leprotic, physically deformed, grotesquely anorexic, and even unable to respond emotionally to her lover Pepe. She craves neither food nor sex:

*she derives no actual pleasure from the touch of his lean, scarred flesh; she recoils from his gruff, aggressive kiss. She wishes they could remain suspended forever, their only contact on the telephone. Furtive conversations, late at night. It's his voice she truly loves. (25)*

Generally, orality is missing in Baby Alacran's representation as a character; she runs counter to the representation of the greedy father, whose carnivorous appetite for food is neurotic. Female Lack of appetite and the consequent physical deterioration both run counter to the greediness of the masculine figure in this scene. The representation of the grotesque impoverished female body is set against the description of the insatiable masculine appetite whose hunger for food is almost never satisfied.

This alignment between oral fixation and threatening masculinity versus physically reduced femininity yet assumes a more entangled shape in the representation of Severo Alacran's character. His physical hunger is often associated with vocalized sexual desires. Some descriptions in the novel establish a direct association between his sexual delight and gastronomic crave. The following is a prime example of this:

*Severo Alacran asks the 'hovering servant to fetch him another bottle of mineral water and more rice. He follows her with his curious, detached gaze as she exits briskly into the kitchen. She is young enough, not too homely. She is new at her job, He must remember to corner her and ask her name'. (24)*

The afore-mentioned examples describe dynamics of power between the masculine and the feminine. Often, femininity is threatened by the consumptive appetite of a masculinity whose oral fixation is mostly engendered by greed and notable self-indulgence. Quite interestingly, orality is associated not only with the consumption of culinary items but also with the ingestion of the bodily. Baby Alacran's chewing her own nails reflects pathological, rather than obsessive, state of consumption. Both states are revealed in a social/familial context. In this scene, masculine satisfaction is never guaranteed, and feminine emotional and personal stability is disrupted by a menacing predatory behavior. The social function of food does not fulfill terms of harmony and balance.

Now, just as eating can offer an opportunity to discuss private familiar concerns (even though such an opportunity represents a crude dysfunctionality among Manila family members) so does consumption of local and Western food opens up a space for examining the neocolonial policies of Manila. In a chapter called "Spriktik," the Gonzagas family is seen feasting and eating a variety of meals and dishes. In this chapter, food opens up a space for discussing politics and the "torture camps" run by General Ledesma. Feasting is supposed to be an opportunity for talking about happy family memories, but here eating is an opportunity for evaluating the political policies of a dictator. Hunger for food is symbolically associated with hunger for torturing people and humiliating them. The stories about politics and camps in this chapter and some others are digestible pieces of relish for the conversers. They enjoy conversing about the necessity of curtailing the tactics of the opposition party led by the Senator. In the meantime, they enjoy eating Filipino and Western food, commending the taste of the delicious cooking prepared by the skilful cook Pacita.

In another chapter, the Gonzaga family is seen enjoying a lavish dinner party with some relatives. In this extravagant feast, Western and local food items represent a cultural mixture of identities and reflect a neocolonial hunger that is never satisfied. In "Tsismis," the Gonzaga family shares a "lavish" dinner party with other members of the high society—Filipino Spanish ones. Pucha's brother Mikey and Rio's brother Raul are described like animals: "They will always show up just in time to eat—they always do, they are like animals, they smell food from miles away" (59). The animalistic appetite of some of these characters, especially the young ones, reflects the hunger of a generation whose consumption of food is the only "substantial" contribution they can offer.

In this scene, masculine characters are always hungry and can never find the full satisfaction for their desires—oral and sexual. The female ones, on the other hand, are "nibbling," as they do not exhibit the same degree of rapaciousness which is highly seen among the masculine ones. Rio's mother, "sipping her Johnny Walker Black," is seen ordering her servants to bring the lavish amounts of food to the table. She is seen nibbling rather than eating the food. As we are told, "she does not eat; she only nibbles." For this festive occasion, she has to pretend that she is hungry, and to appease her husband, she "pushes the food around her plate, anticipating every wish of Abuelita Socorro's and acting absorbed in Uncle Cristobal's conversation" (92).

For this feast, Pacita, the skilled cook of the family, prepares and cooks "sumptuous feasts," preparing rich foods covered with creamy sauces." In fact, she has to consider the guests' preferences. Abuelita Socorro, a Spanish relative of the Gonzaga, "loathes vegetables and fruits of any kind, and never eats anything raw or green" (90). When she comes for visit, Pacita has to prepare special types of food. Generally, it is a custom in the family to have specially made dishes for the guests. In this chapter, a lengthy description of food is provided, attaching importance to food and its tangible presence in the novel.

*Pacita roasts baby lechon and bakes three-tiered cakes oozing custard, guava jelly, sugar, and cream. She calls them 'Gonzaga cakes.' Pacita also makes the best leche flan in the world—not too sweet, not too eggy, but firm with the bittersweet flavor of her brunt sugar syrup as the perfect counterpoint. Abuelita practically swoons when she eats it. Leche fan's all I can stand to eat at these family parties. I help myself to three to four servings. I refuse to eat leche flan in other people's houses; I never order it in restaurants. After Pacita's ethereal concoction, all the rest is a disappointment. (91)*

This passage is redolent of local and colonial gastronomic delights. The tangibility of food and its association bespeak the high society's attachment with, and detachment from, a colonial past which now seeps through the texture of food as a national/local color. Here, the type of food defines not only personal preferences but also colonial inferences. Characters going on a lechon, a pork Spanish dish, creates a channel of a communication (not necessarily commendable) between a once Spanish colonizer and a decolonized Filipino. The presence of such food item on a Filipino table is a reminder of a colonizer whose physical presence reshaped the cultural matrices of a nation and its identity. This Spanish culinary item brings into realization a decolonized self inclined to commemorate a colonial culture through the inclusion of elements that do not represent a purely pre-colonial past but rather a colonial one.

The half Filipino, half Spanish visitors in the Gonzaga household are taken good care of in terms of what they prefer and what they not prefer to eat. Though Abuelita Socorro is Filipino, she considers herself a Spaniard, a fact which is foregrounded in the type of food she likes—the Spanish meal lechon. Here, the function of food is to represent identities rather than to satisfy hunger and gastronomic desires. If there is hunger, it is a hunger for assimilating oneself into the other through relishing his culture; the main purpose is to create an identity that becomes a cultural conglomeration of selves. There is, as it were, a cultural concoction of identities constructed by a historical colonial past.

The ethereal mixture of food, which Pacita perfects and which the narrator relishes and finds nourishing, mirrors the historical, racial, and political concoction of Manila. The city is an amalgamation of races, genders, classes, histories, and culinary delights. Quite interestingly, the narrative itself is a collage of dreams, reminiscences, phantasmagoric snapshots, and magic realist representations. The textual and the contextual aspects of the novel collide together to bring to the fore a world afflicted with a colonial past and tainted with a neocolonial/imperialist present. At dinner or lunch table, troubled past unfolds to reveal the political/ social complexities of Manila and its citizens.

The social and political contexts of food are associated with the practices of high-class Manila people. In these two contexts, food is a medium of social conflict and political controversies. The politicization of food as a social event and the attendant alimentary extravagance in high-class feasting parties are less predominant modes of representation among lower-class Manila Filipinos, whose hunger stands for spiritual emptiness.

In the previous examples, hunger is solely associated with oral fixation. In the following example, hunger is associated with a sense of spiritual barrenness. Joey Sand's hunger is different and is mainly connected with the spiritual void and the attendant feelings of loss and displacement. Working as a male-prostitute, Joey does not have the power and necessary self-independence to sustain himself financially. Supervised and taught how to steal by Uncle, he perfects a "natural talent" for stealing and shoplifting. Given his racialized identity (he is the son of a whore and a black soldier), he appears as a character who has a troubled past and an unhappy present. His hunger is not traced back to greed and insatiability; rather, it is associated with the apparent lack of self-definition.

His prostitution by the Uncle is a good example of the sexual exploitation and cultural consumption of lower-class citizenry. His objectification can be seen as a representation of the problematic relationship between the Philippines and the US. The Philippines is consumed by Western imperialism. Joey, just like the Philippines, is represented as the exoticized other who is exploited, consumed, and fetishized by the desires of the hegemonic

power. His body, just like the landscape of the Philippines, is consumed by the "fetishing" gaze of the colonial clients. The encounter between the clients and Joey is an encounter between the Philippines and the US as an imperial power consuming the body of Manila, its culture, its traditions and identity, thus leaving its citizens hungry and lacking in a racially realized self.

The dynamics of prostitution describe a recurring relationship between Manila and its former colonizer. In the novel, there is a literal and metaphoric consumption of bodies. Manila is consumed by cultural imperialism, and characters are consumed by the attendant notion of otherness and class difference. Joey decides to join New People's Army, thus ending his own victimization and exploitation by others. He feels nourished and satisfied after joining the front. Acquiring a new identity and social/political status, Joey repudiates the neocolonial presence in his life, embodied by the Uncle and his exploitative acts against him (Sulit, 2004).

This state of exploitation engendered by the wheel of capitalism consumes not only the physical but also the spiritual aspects of Joey's life. He belongs to a nation that is negatively influenced by imperialism; Manila is constantly exposed to waves of cannibalistic consumption that feeds upon the flesh of people, especially those who belong to the lower ranks of society. As an agent of such cannibalism, Joey's Uncle represents the neocolonial mentality encoded in the practices of the club and its hiring as many homosexual dancers as possible, ones that are victims either of poverty or of social /racial circumstances. He is a victim of the exploitative practices of high society and its unsatisfied hunger. The high society represents the cultural consumption that is associated with the Manila capitalists and the opportunist industrialists who help maintain the symbolic presence of the American colonizer. As a representation of neocolonialist power, high society reproduces notion of power and authority inculcated by the imperialist projects of economic profit.

Only when Joey decides to join the revolutionary forces is he able to escape from the neocolonial grip of exploitation. His deliberate abandonment of a community negatively influenced by the moral degeneration and profligacy helps him to transform into a new national identity. He leaves the dog-eat-dog world and seeks a more purified environment where national union and non-assimilation are the new identity markers. Joey and his new members abandon the profligacy of the Marcos-controlled world of Manila whose citizens are highly exploited by the system.

In Manila, white supremacy is manifested across a wide spectrum of interests and concrete representations of consumption and utilization. The professed nationalism in Manila is simply a continuation of the patterns of exploitation inherent in the racist system of imperialism. Those nationalists, who are mostly members of the high society in Philippines, take advantage of women and assist in their victimization and oppression in the name of nationalism. Women are consumed physically and spiritually. Daisy Avila, daughter of the revolutionary senator Domingo Avila, is arrested and gang raped. Her becoming a member in the guerilla is an indication of her resistance to the false nationalist Manila impulse inculcated by the dictatorship of Marcos.

Her resistance to Marcos' nationalist ideology is simply a resistance to the cultural hegemonic dictates of a nation that takes advantage of women. Her refusal to continue to participate in Manila beauty contest is an outright repudiation of a neocolonial culture that degrades and objectifies women. Her physical attraction is consumed by the hungry eyes of journalists who are simply cohorts of cultural consumption and greed. The First Lady is appalled by Avila's abandonment of the beauty pageant contest and is indignant about the latter's bringing the reputation of the country to tatters. Avila's rejection is one example by which Hagedorn represents the reaction of most defiant citizens who object to patterns of greed. Hagedorn represents the crave for both flesh and food. Food represents the materiality of greed, while flesh stands for the objectification of desire. In both instances, cultural consumption feeds upon the victimized and the oppressed party in the novel.

The objectification of beauty runs counter to the aestheticization of ugliness. Baby Alacran's physical repulsiveness is thrown into comparative shade with Avila's beauty and attraction. Objectified beauty is consumed by masculine and cultural desires, and ugliness assumes an air of grotesqueness that is celebrated as an example of physical deterioration. Alacran's anorexia is consumed by the public gaze; her ugliness looms large in the horizon of her mother's allure and physical appeal. The fact that she sweats like a man is an indication of her desexualized nature. In fact, she is represented as an item construed in terms of cultural marketability and public consumption.

Grotesqueness and beauty as examples of personal greed mirror the physical filth in the corners of Manila. Joey's mother Zenaida, we are told, committed suicide and jumped into a river: "she jumped in the river, a watery grave black with human shit, every dead thing and piece of garbage imaginable: the rotting carcasses of wild dogs and cats, enormous rats with heads blown off by bullets" (42). Earthly grotesqueness is as pronounced in the text as physical repulsiveness. Joey's mother is reduced to a useless object in a city besmirched with the dirt and filthiness of a high society. Manila is not represented as an Eden; it is rather a place consumed by the sexual and lucrative desires of dictators and capitalists. It is a "counter-Eden, predatory" terrain inhabited by people with lust for power and control (Mendible, 2002).

In this novel, Manila is not represented as happy festive place. Rather, it is described as a city of filth, desire, and hunger for power. Even those who are not members of the high society are thirsty for some sort of eminence and public luster. Romeo Rosales has dreams of becoming a famous movie star. Working as a waiter, he aspires to leave his small obscure world of deprivation and attain a higher social rank in society. His voracious eating habits reflect his hunger for eminence and stardom. Dining at the restaurant with his lover Trinidad, he "wolves down the food Trinidad served him, while she eats demurely, picking at her food and professing a lack of appetite" (57). Gorging here mirrors Romeo's hunger for fame and publicity as he is already consumed by Hollywood dreams which will never materialize in the story. His being accidentally killed at the very end of the novel represents the unfulfilled hunger for eminence and self-transformation. Gastronomic hunger is somehow seen as a reflection of personal,

unrealized dreams of self-realization—dreams that are based solely upon false notions of public recognition. Romeo upholds whiteness and the ideology of consumerism and thus assists in his own victimization as a member of a lower-class citizenry.

As Casper (1990) observes, food in the novel functions as a symbol of "economic inequality." The "avalanches of food" in the novel describe the ravenous attitudes of the ruling class who "take it for granted their right to be exclusive consumer's of other's labor, although they themselves are not producers of anything substantial or real" (153-155). He notices how this represents the "bodies" of the characters being "in service not of spiritual vision but of voids so desperate for gratification verging on gluttony that they incite, in the ruling class, extreme forms of avarice" (156). It is this greed in the novel that represents the characters as dogeaters consuming the labor of others and exploiting them sexually, emotionally and psychologically.

Such exploitation perpetuates these patterns of difference that were originally created by the former colonizer. Class difference is perpetuated by greed, consumption and sexual exploitation. This act of perpetuation re-creates Manila as a colony that is now colonized not by the physical presence of a colonizer but by the presence of a neocolonial policy of consumption and exploitation. This oligarchy is responsible for perpetuating this gap between the rich and the poor, thus establishing categories of social disparity and exoticization.

Manila is represented as the neocolony where lower-class citizens try their best to guard against the perpetuation of their hunger. Joey Sands has to work to feed himself; Romeo has to work as a waiter, still entertaining hopes of becoming a famous movie star. We as readers are stimulated to read, not because we enjoy the description of the variety of foods and dishes in the novel but because we are engrossed by the narrative of such competing desires of production and consumption.

The industrialist and these professed nationalists do not assist in the production and the manufacturing of a true national identity. Rather, they are assisting in the production of an identity that was once a marker of difference. Simply put, they are exoticizing themselves and thus re-producing colonization by adopting and embracing neocolonial aspects of life. Colonization subsists in a different guise, and the ruling regime is an effective agent of this act of perpetuation and self-exoticization.

#### 4. Conclusion

In her *Consumption and Identity in Coming-of-Age Asian American Novels*, Jennifer Ann Hon contends that food in some of ethnic novels normally functions as "a medium for compliance with and resistance to Americanization, a means for enacting ambiguities of an Asian-ethnic identity that is already in a constant state of flux" (qtd in Williams (2007)). In *Dogeaters*, food never functions as a mode of resistance to Americanization; rather, food, propelled by constant hunger, assists in the process of Americanization, assimilation, and self-exoticization. There is hunger for whiteness and for the adoption of Americanness. The ambiguity inherent in the representation of Filipinos as consumers and consumed is pronounced. Those who are consumed are willing to comply with the demands of the consumer, who follows the dictates of a higher producer of an ideology. Food signifies neither ethnic integrity nor social solidarity. Struggle and conflict are the main representations of feasting and fasting alike.

The representation of the dynamics of hunger and greediness is brought to the fore by stressing the materiality of food and its connection to the history of a decolonized Manila. The unsatisfied hunger in the novel is reflective of the state of impoverishment and spiritual emptiness that most of the characters experience. Class, gender, and history are all represented against a political background of persistent hunger which is mainly fostered by the presence of a neocolonialist/ imperialist oligarchy that feeds upon the remnants of a Western colonialist past. The cultures of colonizer (US and Spain) merge with the cultures of the decolonized (the Philippines), thus creating a Filipino identity that is consistently starving and that always defines itself according to Western parameters of representations. Such definition re-creates the racially inferior other who assists in his own exoticization and subjugation.

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