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Philippine Tsismis: Gossip and the Politics of Representation in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*

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Gossip in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) is central to the plotline, whether from official or unofficial sources, gossip and rumor shape the narrative as a running structure both within and outside of real events, as characters act both of their own accord and as rumors dictate they should. The gossip of the novel affects every character at every socioeconomic level and is spoken in every language of the Philippines. Therefore, I here choose to focus on the gossip within the novel due to its pervasive nature and immense power over the characters. Although Hagedorn introduces characters from every level of social strata within the Philippines, their common bond is their reliance on gossip to fuel their actions. Hereon, I argue that gossip, both authentic and inauthentic, represents the Filipino as a subject entirely variable and without solid foundation, but still incredibly powerful and perceived as real and firm. The Filipino holds power due to his or her position as a member of society and agent of change, and gossip holds power due to its ability to affect characters' lives.

Due to its connection to the 'real Filipino,' being created by Filipinos and for Filipinos, gossip holds more power than "official discourse" in the community. As many scholars have pointed out (Lowe 1996, Lee 1999, Gairola 2005), gossip in *Dogeaters* has the ability to shape and/or disrupt 'official discourse.' I intend to further that interpretation by demonstrating how in doing so, gossip within the novel acts as a metaphor for the Filipino identity, molding truth and performance into a powerful force that both shapes and disrupts stereotypes and political culture. Hagedorn's use of gossip demonstrates the heterogeneity and hybridity apparent in Filipino culture and displays the power of those contradictions within the Philippines by giving her readers a multitude of viewpoints from which to view the Philippines and a variety of versions of the truth. In doing so, Hagedorn challenges her readers to recognize that no one discourse is the truth, and that even 'official discourse' and the ideal Filipino do not represent all discourse and all Filipinos.

The discourse of gossip (or 'tsismis') holds an immense amount of power within the Philippine state in *Dogeaters*. As Lisa Lowe explains, Hagedorn "[features] gossip as an element of and an organizing principle for social relations," where every character's life is centered on learning, shaping or sharing tsismis (Lowe 115). Lowe's

observation on gossip is here relevant to my argument in the following way. The gossip of the Philippines acts as the discourse which shapes the 'imagined community' of the Philippines, where, as Benedict Anderson describes, the nation-state only exists as a structure for people who perceive themselves as part of a group (in this case, Filipino): "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion… it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comeradeship" (Anderson 49-50).

Anderson's concept of the imagined community describes a society in which members do not interact on a daily basis; instead, members of an imagined community feel that they belong to a group and therefore socially construct their community, even without anything substantial in common (Anderson 49). In this way, the nation, the city, or any other society is simply a social construct that has no real meaning outside of the context in which it is constructed. Anderson argues that imagined communities developed due to print capitalism, where printers distributed books and pamphlets in the vernacular in order to maximize circulation and make more money (Anderson 52). Without the national identity that Filipinos feel, national gossip would lack its power over their actions. At the same time, without gossip and unofficial discourse, Filipinos would lack the ability to participate in the discourse of their imagined community.

With the use of the vernacular, readers with different dialects learned to understand each other better and a common discourse grew possible. Having this common language allows the imagined community to grow stronger and the resulting nation-state to exercise control through use of this language. Anderson's notion of an imagined community formed through the identity-building discourse facilitated by periodicals is evident in Hagedorn's racy novel. In *Dogeaters*, the languages of the nation-state are English and Tagalog, and all official discourse, from newspaper announcements to radio shows to government statements, are made in one of those two languages. For example, Severo Alacran, the powerful businessman whose nickname is "The King of the Coconuts," is infamous for "[telling] the President what to do" and "[owning] *The Metro Manila Daily*, *Celebrity Pinoy Weekly*, Radiomanila, TruCola Soft Drinks, plus controlling interests in Mabuhay Movie Studios, Apollo Records, and the Monte Vista Golf and Country Club" (Hagedorn 18).

Therefore, it can be inferred that any information disseminated via the media in the Philippines is driven by government interests, and particularly those of Alacran, and this can be considered the official discourse of the nation-state (Lee 1999). *Love Letters*, an extremely

popular program on Radiomanila, always ends with a lesson for the masses, and "even the President boasts of being an avid fan" (Hagedorn 11-12). The government utilizes programs like *Love Letters* and frivolous articles in *Celebrity Pinoy* to distract the Philippine people from any problems in society; this official discourse is used to keep the government's power unchallenged. By keeping society distracted, the government is able to continue with rampant corruption and authoritarianism. Therefore, the people of the Philippines lack the focus and interest to fight for their rights and demand better from their government. Hagedorn demonstrates this most clearly in her chapter titled "The Famine of Dreams," where she transcribes an episode of *Love Letters* with an account of Daisy Avila's rape interspersed in parentheses, almost as an afterthought.

Daisy is a symbol of the opposition and her rape occurs at the hands of government and Philippine military officials, but her capture and rape are not the focus of the Philippine people. Instead, they focus on the drama found in *Love Letters*. This media of official discourse, though perhaps unconventional, is extremely successful in keeping the Philippine people preoccupied, so that the government's violent and inhumane response to revolutionaries is accepted and/or ignored. As well, news articles in *The Metro Manila Daily* gloss over the true problems in society, like corruption, crime, and the rising revolution, and focus on minor issues, so that the Philippine people will disregard the larger problems in the community. For example, the newspaper article titled "Floating Bodies" discusses the large amount of dead bodies found in the Makupit River. However, the true tragedy, in the eyes of *The Metro Manila Daily*, is that people are scared of eating the fish from the river:

> According to a government survey, the frequency of headless and dismembered cadavers washing up on shore has reduced demand for fish in Makupit, which was one of the centers of a thriving fishing industry until these recent alarming discoveries. 'It is unfortunate,' Major Rivera said to reporters at a press conference … "Housewives refuse to buy fish caught in Makupit River. We trust that this will prove a temporary situation." (Hagedorn 46)

What is most alarming for the local police chief and for the reporters is not that people have been killed and dumped in the river, but that these bodies might ruin the local fishing trade. This filtering of information, forcing readers to only hear one (relatively harmless) issue out of many, allows the government of the Philippines to remain unchecked. This official discourse tells only one small part of the story, rendering it less powerful. The nation-state's controlled use of language further exhibits this strategy of trying to control and manipulate information within society. All written magazines and newspapers in *Dogeaters* are published entirely in English, and the movies of Mabuhay Movie Studios, music of Apollo Records and programs of Radio Manila are

known as "Tagalog" media, because they are spoken in the Filipino language (Hagedorn 12).

Such clear delineations of language demonstrate the government's desire to filter discourse aimed at the masses in a precise and controlled way. By having official discourses transmitted as such, Hagedorn allows gossip as unofficial discourse to stand in contrast. However, in the novel, gossip is spoken in a mixture of English, Spanish and Tagalog, as the characters create a hybrid language that represents the multiple cultures and influences found within the country. This combination of languages challenges the precise national language by mixing influences and rejecting the controlled, government-enforced use of Tagalog and English. By creating a chaotic, unpredictable and wild form of discourse, the language itself used for tsismis challenges the nation-state's official power. At the same time, however, gossiping in this combination language of English, Spanish and Tagalog together creates an imagined community in which those participating feel a part of the Philippine community (Anderson 49).

As Anderson predicts, the use of the vernacular allows those with different dialects to understand each other better, resulting in a common discourse (Anderson 53). As I will show below, this sense of belonging acts as a counter-community to the official imagined community of the nation-state. Lowe's use of this combination language to discuss tsismis occurs within every level of the Filipino society, and this expansive use further demonstrates the reach and power of the imagined community brought on by tsismis in the disruptive, imperfect language. For example, the poor prostitute Joey Sands and his boss, Andres, the owner of the CocoRico gay club, gossip every day in this mixed language. The members of the upper-middle class Gonzaga family all use this combination language to discuss tsismis, and even comment on their use of the language; in their discussion over dinner one night, Rio's father, in explaining the difference between the Tagalog words *sprikitiks* and *putok*, states, "You might say Congressman Abad *sprikitiks* when he plays golf, but General Ledesma rewards his army with cases of *putok* liquor" (Hagedorn 64).

In this exchange, Rio's family are all not only participating in tsismis, but also sharing its language so that it can grow and continue in future generations. Finally, even the wealthy and powerful Pepe Carreon, Tito Alvarez and Girlie Alacran use this mixed language while sitting at the country club discussing tsismis. As Rahul K. Gairola argues, tsismis acts as a "certain gesture," as discussed in Michel Foucault's "heterotopic" site theory. For Foucault, a heterotopic site is one that both "juxtaposes 'in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible'" and "is 'not freely accessible like a public place… . To get in one must have a

certain permission and make certain gestures'" (Gairola 2005, 32). In this context, Filipino society is a heterotopic site because the country involves over 7100 islands "that are themselves incompatible," and to be a part of society one must demonstrate a level of belonging and connection to the society.

Tsismis, according to Gairola, in Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* is an example of a "certain gesture" members of the Filipino community use to enter the heterotopic site of Filipino society. In other words, tsismis acts as a gesture that demonstrates power and "insiderness," so that those who know gossip often immediately become accepted in a group (here, Filipino society). Filipino society is the imagined community within the Philippines, because even if the members of the community do not know the people they are discussing, they are using a common language and hold a common identity. As Gairola notes, however, the gay disco is a heterotopic space in which race, class, gender, and sexuality free flow and play with one another in ways that not only enable gossip, but moreover challenge the homogeneity and heteronormativity of post-colonial Manila beyond the walls of the gay bar (Gairola 2005).

Participating in queer tsismis allows the eccentric characters of *Dogeaters* to participate in the community and feel a unified, cultural bond, just like using the combination language allows the characters to feel this connection to the community. For example, Andres tells Joey the story of his one true love, the "hermaphrodite" Eugenio/Eugenia:

> "I believe all the *tsismis* about him. He was absolutely capable of anything. He had no morals. The last rumor I heard is probably the closest to the truth: that he is very much alive, still living in Macao as a woman, married to some wealthy Portugese."
> I toast the memory of the hermaphrodite. "To the love of your life, El Professor —"
> Andres nods, finishing his brandy, "To love, period—" he adds, grimly. (Hagedorn 37)

In that moment, though Andres is Joey's boss and a member of the powerful Alacran family, the pair are bonded over the tsismis and share a drink. The insiderness that the characters feel by participating in this discourse allows them to feel a part of the imagined community and have a sense of belonging to the heterotopic site.

Again, this insiderness is a mode of alternative belonging that arguably all members of all levels of society need to feel. In one exchange, a collection of characters including Joey, Rainer (a well-known German filmmaker in Manila for the city's first international film festival), Chiquiting Moreno (the First Lady's hair stylist), Andres, Lolita Luna (a movie star) and actors Tito Alvarez and Nestor Norales all discuss tsismis together, and no matter their actual level in society they each desire to bring the most important gossip and outdo the others:

> Chiquiting Moreno saves the day. "I've been to the real Studio 54— the last time I went to New York, with Madame's entourage. You should see the pink lights in the toilets! Sooo flattering! *Naku*, I ran into Bianca Jagger coming out of the men's room with Halston. *Dios ko*, I was speechless… 'Bianca,' I said to her, 'you look fabulous.' 'Do I know you?' she said to me. *Talagang bruja*! Aba, I gave her the same look, up and down. 'Everybody knows me,' I said, 'everybody who's anybody knows Chiquiting Moreno…'
> '*Itsura lang*,' Nestor chimes in, relaxing a little.
> '*Bola ka naman*, I don't believe a word you say,' Lolita says.
> '*Ay hija*—that's your problem,' Chiquiting sniffs. We all laugh, including Lolita, the tension temporarily broken. (Hagedorn 138)

All members of the above exchange utilize the mixed language of tsismis, and Chiquiting Moreno feels powerful due to his ability to tell a scandalous story. Chiquiting's ability to be 'in the know' and share his information with his friends grants him power in the conversation, because all are focused on him and trusting of him and his word. Although Lolita Luna is much more famous than Chiquiting, she still feels the need to challenge him in order to feel powerful, and once Chiquiting acquiesces the group is able to feel at ease and together, a community enjoying tsismis together. As Gairola states, "the aforementioned passage demonstrates a kind of 'insiderness' between these Filipino characters in the queer disco" (Gairola 2005, 33).

A similar exchange occurs between Rio's mother, Dolores, and Pucha's mother (Rio's aunt), Florence, in the chapter aptly titled "Tsismis." The pair is chatting in Dolores's sitting room, having *merienda*, and Hagedorn intersperses their pieces of gossip throughout Rio's running description of her family. It is unclear who is speaking at each moment, but the dialogue does involve continued defense of sources for information and a desire to tell the gossip:

> *Hoy*, and how do you think that *alembong* Nestor used to pay his rent? *Aba*, *sino pa*—who do you think told me? Max himself, that's who. *Chica*, they went to the same school and no matter what Nestor says, Nestor is definitely the same age as Max! Exactly, *doña*… Max happened to be right there in the lobby of the Manila Hotel and saw the whole thing with his own eyes… (Hagedorn 56).

Here, the characters are upper-middle class women in an entirely different setting, yet the insiderness that the characters feel in knowing information about others is the same, and brings them back to their heterotopic site. Whoever is speaking defends her sources and insists on the legitimacy of her information, and responds to seeming criticism and disbelief from her listener. In this particular example, both participants in the tsismis are women. Gossip is often considered a feminine pastime, and here Hagedorn chooses to present the action with women. However, as all characters in the novel, both male and female, participate in tsismis, she rejects that stereotype overall. As

such, in both this example and the one before, the characters telling the tsismis and the characters listening to the tsismis all want to feel involved in the community, and so participate with tsismis as their ticket to enter.

Gossip also holds power in this community through the spectacle of the 'synopticon.' The synopticon, a term coined by Thomas Mathiesen, is a response to Foucault's analysis of the panopticon power structure. Within the panopticon, the power resides in the center with the individual who can watch everyone else (Foucault 195). Even if the watch guard is not there, or is not watching others at every moment, those others constantly feel his presence and the pressure of his viewership, and therefore believe that they must behave obediently at all times. Their obedience translates to power for the observer, who can enforce discipline simply due to the fear that he or she *may* be watching. In contrast, the synopticon describes the technique of power in which "the many [watch] the few," so that those few in the middle are constantly watched by everyone else (Cheng 103). The synopticon is the power structure for the spectacle, "which seduces people to watch the images of a selected few from far away… in the Synopticon it is the watched, the ones who embody the spectacle, who are craved and desired, and thus hold sway over the masses" (Cheng 103).

Shu-ching Cheng describes the power of the spectacle as "to-be-looked-at-ness," and explains that those who have this power can manipulate those who look at them to act the way they want, and can also manipulate the discourse surrounding themselves through their actions. Within *Dogeaters*, the nation-state deploys the synopticon to produce docile, obedient national subjects, who focus on the doings of those acting as the spectacle and attempt to emulate them. The President's wife, the First Lady, acts as a synopticon. She is watched and spoken of by everyone else in society, and she represents the nation-state to the people of the Philippines. Discourse surrounding the First Lady often comes from 'official' sources, like newspapers, gossip magazines, and radio and television programs that are under the control of the Alacrans, much like the First Lady herself. Therefore, the 'official discourse' surrounding the First Lady is often positive and focused on her beauty and charms instead of her faults. By being able to dictate, disseminate, and thus control, the gossip about herself, the First Lady utilizes her position as a spectacle to help keep the masses in line and her family's power unquestioned. As such, the First Lady is not an insider in the heterotopic underworlds of Manila's urban outcasts.

When the cultural center being built for the Manila International Film Festival collapses on itself and kills hundreds of workers, the First Lady orders the survivors to keep building. Due to the positive narrative spun around her, this order doesn't offend the Filipino

people, who otherwise would be outraged. Joey narrates a description of the ordeal and explains: "The Archbishop gives his blessing, the First Lady blows her nose," and then manages to immediately order that construction resume over the rubble and dead bodies. The First Lady holds this power because she is a spectacle that Filipinos almost worship; they are so keen as to not only watch her but mirror her, hoping to be as cultured and stylish. As Mendible explains, "those who control the means to produce and disseminate image products dictate and generate the pseudo needs and desires of a spectator society" (Mendible, "Dictators"). The First Lady's power as a synopticon allows her to be idolized and adored simply by being beautiful, wealthy and cosmopolitan.

In contrast, if the First Lady acts as the synopticon for official discourse and the nation-state, Daisy Avila acts as the synopticon for unofficial discourse and the masses. Daisy Avila is the beautiful eldest daughter of Senator Avila, the opposition leader to the President, and she is known to be stunning and demure before she is thrust into the spotlight. At age nineteen, she enters a beauty pageant run by the First Lady against her parents' wishes, competing with the daughters and nieces of supporters of the Alacrans (Hagedorn 100). Somehow, Daisy wins the pageant, even though the panel of judges is by far predisposed to choose a supporter of the Alacrans. After winning the pageant, Daisy becomes a national sensation—the most popular and attractive girl in all of the Philippines. Immediately, Daisy becomes a synopticon, as everyone in the country is watching her, and she therefore has immense power. Bitterness surrounding her win creates a discourse within official and unofficial sources:

> There is intense and immediate speculation as to how and why Daisy Avila wins … Some say Congressman Abad had rigged the contest in favor of his daughter, and now he wants his revenge. Some say the perverse General is solely responsible for convincing the other judges to vote for his enemy's daughter. The choice puzzles even Daisy's family. *Tsismis* ebbs and flows. According to a bemused Severo Alacran, richest of all the richest men and therefore privy to most of the General's secrets, the best *tsismis* is always inspired by some fundamental truth. (Hagedorn 101)

The tsismis that forms around Daisy's win demonstrates the immense intrigue the entire country finds in her, even at the highest levels of society, like Severo Alacran. With constant discussion of her, Daisy quickly becomes extremely powerful as a celebrity. The difference, though, is that she does not have the control over her discourse that the First Lady has, so the discourse surrounding her is not entirely positive. Still, those who watch her want to understand her so that they can emulate her, because she is clearly beautiful and powerful. Gossip about Daisy grows as her power grows, but without the ability to control the narrative, Daisy faces a very different, more negative set of rumors than the First Lady.

After winning the pageant, Daisy goes into hiding, refusing to leave her home even in the wake of marriage proposals, movie deals and requests for interviews. The sponsors of the beauty pageant are furious at her for disappearing, as she is scheduled to go on tour throughout the Philippines for a victory lap and appear in a movie with Mabuhay Studios. Because she is denying her fans and sponsors the attention and money they feel they deserve, the discourse around Daisy becomes extremely negative very quickly. She refuses to provide and cooperate in the official discourse surrounding her, and so even though she has become a powerful figure within society, she surrenders all ability to control the narrative around her. Therefore, both the official discourse of corporate and government statements and unofficial discourse of tsismis turn on her. Daisy refuses to act in her position as a synopticon, and without being able to see her, those desiring to watch her feel that they have lost someone to follow. Without their synopticon, the people of the Philippines instead turn to tsismis again to feel connected, and they now have a new subject.

By refusing to give interviews, Daisy and her parents alienate those in charge of 'official discourse,' and the gossip about them becomes more and more damaging. Things come to a head when Daisy's parents refuse to let members of the Alacran Corporation to come to speak with Daisy, and refuse an interview with television personality Cora Comacho:

> They are met at the gate by Daisy's irate mother. 'My daughter is indisposed. GO BACK TO THE JUNGLE!' she shouts at the intruders. The press dubs Daisy's mother 'One Tough Doña.' '*Excuse me lang*, but what is this about a jungle?' Cora Camacho inquires on her TV show, *Girl Talk*. 'Does our foremost nationalist family consider us common *Pinoys* nothing more or less than a bunch of savages?' When Senator Avila politely turns down Cora's insistent demands for an exclusive interview, Cora is outraged. '*Aba*! Who does he think he is?' (Hagedorn 106-107)

Camacho's outrage at the Avilas' refusal to speak with her demonstrates how desperate, not only Camacho but also Camacho's viewers, are to learn what is going on with Daisy Avila. As well, the press's disparaging words about the Avila family suggests a level of understanding of their celebrity status and an institutional desire to make them less popular, so that the opposition party does not gain steam. Though a representative of the official discourse within the Philippines, Camacho here is attempting to stir feelings of anger and resentment among the mass population of the Philippines, hoping to create more gossip and unofficial discourse about the Avilas.

Suddenly, what's official is unofficial and what's unofficial is official: Hagedorn demonstrates that by participating in gossip, even the 'ideal' Filipino's discourse is disrupted. Camacho's desire to damage the Avilas in order to continue a hold on power is proved by the First Lady's appearance on Camacho's show the same week:

> When Cora sweetly suggests taking away Daisy's crown and title, the First Lady's eyes, as if on cue, fill with tears. She stifles a sob and pulls out a handkerchief, which she dabs carefully at the corners of her eyes. '*Walanghiya*!' Senator Avila scowls at the extreme close-up of the First Lady's anguished face. 'Daisy Avila has shamed me personally and insulted our beloved country,' the First Lady sobs. (Hagedorn 107)

The First Lady uses her position as the nation-state synopticon and her ability to manipulate the media to discredit Daisy entirely, so that Daisy will lose any power she has gained and cede it back to the First Lady. Clearly, the entire exchange is planned to ensure maximum sympathy for the First Lady and outrage towards Daisy—even through the camera angles used by the television crew. After the First Lady's appearance, the tsismis about Daisy grows worse and worse: "Daisy Avila is pregnant with Tito Alvarez's baby, Daisy Avila is secretly married to the President's only son, Daisy Avila is a junkie, Daisy Avila is a junkie slowly dying of a sexually transmitted disease" (Hagedorn 107). These rumors ruin Daisy's reputation, painting her as a promiscuous and dangerous woman with no regard for law and order. The people's synopticon has lost the faith of the people, and without the power to influence the gossip stated about her, Daisy allows lies and malicious rumor to spread. It is only when she agrees to face the gossip head on and reclaim her position as one 'to-be-looked-at' that she has the ability to sway the gossip about her.

Daisy reclaims her position as the synopticon when she decides to grant an exclusive live interview to Cora Camacho, and "the entire country tunes in, even those in the remote reaches of [the] tropical archipelago, places where one battered TV is shared by an entire village" (Hagedorn 109). Suddenly, the entire country is watching Daisy again, and she has the immense power that comes with being the spectacle. With Camacho's first question, Daisy denounces the beauty pageant and the First Lady, and the entire interview is cut short by sensors. With Daisy's scandal, she becomes even more popular, even as the 'official discourse' of the news media and the government denounces her. By speaking out just once, Daisy is able to manipulate the gossip and rumor about her, even if she cannot control the 'official discourse,' and until she goes into hiding again, her public reputation is strong.

The First Lady and Daisy, though extremely different, both use their positions of power as synopticons to control the gossip, rumor and other discourse spoken about them, and their ability to do so is what truly grants them power. The First Lady uses her power to control official discourse throughout the country, so that she can stay in power. In contrast, Daisy uses her power to disrupt official discourse, only to harm those in power. As Daisy works not in her self-interest but in the interest of her community, she holds more sway over unofficial discourse. Gossip, rumor and discourse are all so powerful within

Dogeaters that having the ability to influence it results in immensely greater overall power for those who can influence it, whether official or unofficial.

Gossip can also challenge the legitimacy of official discourse by taking pieces from it, bending those pieces and working within the official speech to deconstruct it. Almost like a game of telephone, by starting with the official discourse and letting people twist words and meanings to say something else entirely, gossip holds the power of ruining any real legitimacy that official discourse might hold. Ashok explains that "gossip feeding on official history erases the binary of legitimacy/illegitimacy" and that "gossip is a stylistic tool that contests the unitary history of hierarchical depictions" (Ashok 6). By operating as a dialogue that works both within and without of official discourse, gossip ruins the legitimacy of official discourse and it becomes just as hearsay and illegitimate as gossip; this is the most important power that gossip has. The ways in which Hagedorn combines official texts and forms of fiction and gossip demonstrates the "mediated status of discourses," and therefore strips them of power (Thoma).

By insisting on its equal legitimacy with official speech and affecting lives in the same way, gossip simultaneously illegitimates official discourse, until it holds no real power. Clearly, gossip holds great power and can grant members of society levels of power they otherwise would not hold. Gossip can also challenge the official discourse by granting power to people deemed powerless by official discourse and by allowing Filipinos the ability to participate in a counter-community to the official nation-state. Although gossip is oftentimes untrue, incomplete or biased, it can still affect everyone in the community and even force change in the way participants act. As Lowe describes, "gossip is parasitic, pillaging from the official, imitating without discrimination, exaggerating, relaying"; once it starts to spread, it may change form or basis but will only grow (Lowe 113). And this ubiquitous and indiscriminate growth and change permits gossip to permeate the entire community. Therefore, each member of the community can gain the power the gossip grants them.

The power structure that exists within discourse is that gossip, though it may not be fully formed, singular in its legitimacy nor aligned with official discourse, still holds great power. I would argue that these power structures for discourse are the same power structures that are found within the idea of the ideal Filipino. Within the novel, the official representation of the Filipino that Hagedorn presents is always either a savage or a Europeanized government official, whereas the unofficial representation of the Filipino could be any Filipino, with any background, cultural influence or income level, because there is no one true Filipino. Hagedorn displays the official representation of the Filipino in two ways, through demonstrations of colonizers' views of the Philippines and through the Filipino government's attempts to

represent the Philippines as an almost mini-Europe. The views of colonizers, imperialists and the West, whether American or European, come from truly official documents: real newspaper accounts from the Associated Press, a speech by President McKinley and passages from Jean Mallat's *The Philippines*.

As Vincente Rafael explains in *White Love and other Events in Filipino History*, colonizers from the West viewed the people of the Philippines as "only a heterogeneous collection of imperfectly civilized tribes … speaking a bewildering variety of languages, bereft of a common culture and subject to impulsive and irrational behavior" (Rafael 49). Hagedorn's use of real documents only further highlights these positions as official discourse, because they are official not only in the novel but also in the world that readers of the novel are living in. As documents from Americans and Europeans, Hagedorn also emphasizes how colonial influences still hold power over the Philippines. The official documents quoted paint the Philippines in a light quite contradictory with the lives that readers see in *Dogeaters*, as the ways in which Filipinos are described in the documents makes them seem uncivilized and the news reported on the Philippines has little to do with the crises we see within the novel.

For example, an article that the Associated Press runs around the time of Senator Avila's assassination has nothing to do with him or the rebel army, and instead has to do with some garbage building up in Manila. The article seems ridiculous and frustratingly needless, with quotes from a police chief explaining that the city has decided to capture and kill flies to prevent insect-borne diseases, instead of attending to the garbage problem. This official discourse ignores the real problems in Manila and instead just represents Filipinos as both unintelligent and disgustingly surrounded by garbage. The article suggests that the representation of the Filipino throughout the rest of the world, as a stereotype, is one that is filthy and stupid. Though untrue, the false narrative purported only further strengthens the gossip about the Philippines outside of the country.

Quotes from Jean Mallat's *The Philippines*, an anthropological study published in 1846, are all titled "Jungle Chronicle," and demonstrate a condescending fascination with the "uncivilized" Filipinos. Hagedorn quotes as Mallat states, "The most inaccessible lairs of these wild mountains are inhabited by a great number of those small Negroes called 'Negritoes' whom we spoke about earlier; sometimes they are chased out of their homes, taken prisoners" (Hagedorn 41). Mallat's quotes all describe Filipinos as jungle people whose practices are backwards and misinformed, and it is this representation of the Philippines that the West most commonly hears. These stereotypes are confirmed in the quote from President McKinley's speech from 1898, in which he explains:

> And one night it came to me this way– … one, that we could not give them back to Spain – that would be cowardly and dishonorable; two, that we could not turn them over to France and Germany … ; three, that we could not leave them to themselves – they were unfit for self-government – and they would soon have anarchy and misrule … there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them. (Hagedorn 71)

McKinley implies that not only are Filipinos uncivilized and unfit to rule themselves, but that they themselves are property, as he can simply decide who should take control of them and "civilize" them. Clearly, the official representation of Filipinos is often that of uncivilized people who need the help of the West to be even remotely successful. This one stereotype is singular and truly insulting to Filipino society.

The other side of official representation of Filipinos in *Dogeaters* is the Philippine government's efforts to portray Filipinos as extremely civilized and almost European to the rest of the world. This portrayal rejects Philippine culture and the heterogeneous nature of the Philippines and instead exhibits cosmopolitan, high-class Western culture. The government's most obvious attempt at this is through the First Lady's interview with Steve, the American reporter who travels to the Philippines to learn about the brewing revolution. Instead of getting the story he was hoping for, Steve is granted an interview with the First Lady in which she attempts to seem down to earth, Western and stylish, discussing her shoes and travel and refusing to give him real information about the revolution and Senator Avila's assassination. The First Lady even uses English words she does not fully understand in order to seem more Americanized and less like a Filipino: "Madam uses her favorite American expression as many times and as randomly as possible throughout her interview" (Hagedorn 218). This representation of Filipinos, as fully Westernized and ignorant of Philippine culture, denies any unofficial representation of Filipinos as somehow culturally diverse.

By insisting that she is not at all culturally Filipino, and instead as Western as possible, the First Lady fails to give the American reporter a true story about what is happening in the Philippines. Steve goes to an official source in order to learn the truth, and instead receives a false representation and a false explanation of the situation in the Philippines. The gossip and unofficial sources that led him to chase the story of the real revolution occurring are not detailed, but one would assume that they came from more honest representations of Filipinos. Of course, the two official representations of Filipinos that Hagedorn demonstrates for her readers are entirely discredited when placed within the context of the novel, as the characters of *Dogeaters* do not fit these stereotypes and instead represent many different cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic levels and levels of ability and ambition.

Rio Gonzaga and her grandmother, Lola Narcisa, for instance, are extremely civilized and come from a wealthy family, but still embrace Philippine culture and attempt to make that culture their own. The Gonzagas' attempts to embrace their Spanish heritage, and therefore seem more European, are undermined by Rio's mother's tsismis sharing and Filipino friends, and by the Gonzagas' need to perform when Rio's Spanish grandmother visits: "When my father's mother Socorro Pertierra Gonzaga visits from Spain, we all have to put on our crinolines and white shoes and be on our best behavior. We call her *Abuelita*" (Hagedorn 89). When Rio's grandmother visits from Madrid, the Gonzagas feel the need to act more Spanish, eating different foods, dressing differently and listening to music in Spanish instead of Tagalog. The representation of Filipinos as simply European counterparts denies this language and the Gonzagas' Philippine heritage, and the ways in which they as a family combine these influences to make their own culture.

Joey is another character whose representation in the novel challenges the official discourses given both by the West and to the West by the Philippine government. Joey is not well-educated or wealthy, and therefore could seem uncivilized, but he is extremely smart and has the ability to run in European circles even without a high-class education. When Rainer, the German film director, takes an interest in Joey due to his good looks, Joey is able to entertain him not just physically but mentally. Joey explains:

> Poor guy probably thinks I'm stupid, just because I'm poor and pretty. They usually do, at first. I live for that look of surprise on their faces. These foreigners, especially —they think they can say anything off the top of their heads, that I'll let it go by me and won't remember later. They're the dumb fucks, if you ask me. 'What can you possibly teach me?' I ask the German, the smile gone from my face. (Hagedorn 133)

This exchange and Joey's demonstrated intelligence challenge the stereotype of the uncivilized and unintelligent Filipino. Joey's ability to not only stump and surprise the German but to stay and endure on his level of discourse insists that the stereotype of Filipinos as uncultured is simply untrue, even the poorest ones. Although the German at first seems to hire Joey for his services, their relationship becomes stronger because Joey is smarter and more impressive, and Rainer realizes that he underestimated him. The German's preconceived notions of Filipinos, based on the official discourses outlined above, are proven untrue. Hagedorn's decision to utilize a gay couple in this way is also of note; in contrast to the stern and "Christianized" Anglo-American discussion of McKinley, Rainer provides a reminder that the official discourse of the white, colonizing community is also too narrow, and Joey demonstrates an important and often ignored perspective within the Philippines.

By offering readers so many different viewpoints and narratives from which we can analyze Filipinos, Hagedorn powerfully challenges the notions of both the uncivilized Filipino and the nation-state Europeanized Filipino throughout her innovative narrative and its frenetic structure. Instead, Hagedorn demonstrates that Filipinos cannot be stereotyped or thought of only in relation to the West but must be viewed as a heterogeneous culture teeming with thousands of ideas and types of people. The Filipinos in the narrative who challenge the official, ideal Filipino are not always complete or totally real; they may take their identities from a multitude of backgrounds and cultures, and they may act like the 'ideal Filipino' in one instance and not in another. Either way, they all still count as Filipinos and have the power to effect change in the country, whether via the official structures within the government, through the revolution or through simply living their lives in Philippine society.

This mixture of authenticity and inauthenticity, and the ability to work both within and around the structured stereotypes placed on Filipinos, is what makes Filipinos so like the gossip of tsismis. Gossip, rumor and tsismis have the same power structures as the Filipinos in *Dogeaters*. Gossip challenges the nation-state's official discourse by delegitimizing it and providing members of society with a second space to think and discuss the state. It may not always be "authentic" or "complete," but it nonetheless exercises a subversive power by affecting the ways in which characters act and live. Similarly, Filipinos challenge any notion of an 'ideal Filipino' and though they may be filled with contradictions, they still act, live and hold power within society. Hagedorn's use of gossip in this way emphasizes that no discourse contains the full truth and that the ideal, official representation of Filipinos does not represent all Filipinos.

Hagedorn's message can easily be applied to any minority community, where any stereotype or representation is unable to to do justice to all members of that community. In order to disrupt false, sweeping representations, those whose existence challenges those representations must gain power of discourse. In challenging official discourse, whether through gossip or otherwise, people can put forward representations that challenge 'official representations.' The power of discourse, as shown, can immediately translate to power of people, and as with all representations of people stem from discourse, in order to disrupt stereotypical representations more minority writers, artists and scholars should be encouraged to find their voices. The more narratives and representations are available, the less power 'official' representations hold, until they lose all legitimacy. Only then can a more heterogeneous understanding of communities occur, because only then will those representations be seen, and those discourses be heard.

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