From Colonial Student to Postcolonial Elite: Failed Modernities in Kartodikromo and Rosca

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Abstract

This paper places Marco Kartodikromo's *A Student Named Hijo* and Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War* in dialogue as novels of unfinished decolonization. In Kartodikromo, a young Javanese student crosses the sea to Europe, enters the rooms of the colonizer, and discovers that white prestige is neither natural nor secure. Yet he returns to Java not as a revolutionary, but as a colonial official, folded into the very hierarchy his journey had unsettled. Rosca begins where such ascent leads: with a postcolonial elite that has inherited the offices, wealth, and violence of empire. Across Spanish conquest, American rule, and dictatorship, *State of War* traces how colonial power survives in families, marriages, institutions, and bodies. Both novels expose a modernity that offers movement without equality and education without emancipation. One follows the making of the Indigenous intermediary; the other reveals what happens when that intermediary inherits the state. Their failed modernities lie not in the absence of change, but in change that leaves the architecture of domination standing.

Keywords: Southeast Asian literature, modernity, colonial education, postcolonial elite

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Introduction

Colonial modernity in Southeast Asia did not deprive colonized societies of institutions associated with modern life but distributed access to those institutions unequally, making schooling, travel, salaried employment, professional qualifications, and administrative responsibility into privileges that helped sustain empire. The resulting paradox was structural: the educated indigenous subject could contest European claims to civilizational superiority by acquiring credentials the colonial state recognized. But credentials capable of unsettling racial ideology could also prepare their bearers to work within the colonial order. Education produced resistance and compliance, in tension, and even in the same person.

Marco Kartodikromo's *A Student Named Hijo* (2015), serialized as *Student Hidjo* in 1918, brings that tension into a mobile, multilingual colonial world. Hijo, the son of a prosperous Javanese merchant, goes to the Netherlands for education and discovers that the racial prestige attributed to Dutch people in Java is reversed or diminished in Europe. Servants attend to him; women who would seem socially remote in a colonial setting find him desirable; European propriety becomes less imposing at close range. His eventual position, nevertheless, in colonial legal administration and his marriage into an aristocratic network turn an unsettling experience abroad into a credential for advancement at home. The ending invites us to ask whether the student's newly acquired perspective changes the collective distribution of power or primarily his location within it.

Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War* (1988) provides a historically later, formally dissimilar view of the same problem. In its account of authoritarian Philippine life and the colonial generations that precede it, offices, elite households, business fortunes, coercive institutions, and sexual hierarchies have become mutually sustaining. The characters Adrian Banyaga, Anna Villaverde, and Eliza Hansen gather in the Ati-Atihan festival on the island of K, but the present is repeatedly interrupted by the histories of families shaped under Spanish, American, and later regimes. The festival's promise of collective transformation faces the superior organization of military violence. Rosca depicts a former colonized country now a formally independent state in which the successors are already installed.

The comparison is deliberately asymmetrical. The novels do not represent successive chapters in a single nation's history, and Hijo is not a fictional ancestor of Rosca's dictator or his clients. Indonesia's anticolonial political ferment in 1918 and the Philippines' late-twentieth-century dictatorship differ in language, chronology, institutions, and patterns of class formation. The productive comparison lies instead in a shared mechanism: socially restricted access to modern institutions enables an indigenous or national elite to challenge foreign rule's legitimacy without necessarily transforming hierarchical rule itself. The proposed term "failed modernities"[1] identifies not a belated or insufficient modernization but a pattern of institutional change in which entry and succession are mistaken for democratization. In both novels two related contradictions are distinguished: in Kartodrikromo, colonial education produces mobility without collective emancipation; in Rosca, national independence produces sovereignty without the dismantling of colonial power. The term failed refers to these unfulfilled emancipatory possibilities, not to the inability of Indonesia or the Philippines to become sufficiently Western.

"Failed modernities" draw upon Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt's understanding of multiple modernities, Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of Eurocentric developmental history, and Aníbal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power. While Eisenstadt challenges the assumption of a universal path to modernity, Chakrabarty questions the characterization of non-European histories through narratives of deficiency or incompleteness. Quijano, meanwhile, demonstrates

[1] The phrase failed modernities, as employed in this study, does not designate an incomplete approximation of European modernity. Rather, it identifies historically distinct processes through which modern institutions expand without fulfilling their emancipatory promises.

how colonial structures of domination persist beyond the formal termination of colonial rule. These perspectives make it possible to understand the apparent failures in Kartodikromo and Rosca not as failures to achieve Western modernity, but as contradictions internal to colonial and postcolonial modernization itself. Their novels portray societies transformed by education, bureaucratization, mobility, and national sovereignty while remaining structured by inherited inequalities. In this sense, failed modernities names the discrepancy between institutional transformation and social emancipation.

Existing criticism illuminates crucial parts of these narratives without fully developing their cross-national relation. Hary Sulistyo and Endang Sartika emphasize the novel *Student Hidjo* against the hegemony and the canonization of Balai Pustaka which governs the aesthetic and ideological standards of literary works then. It analyzed the attitude of Bumiputra as indigenous authors who did not accommodate the rules and remained resistant to the Dutch East Indies government even though their works were ultimately black listed.[2] On Rosca, Shu-ching Chen traces the formation of affective subjects through imperial intimacy and violence (1–38); Myra Mendible foregrounds the ambivalent politics of festival (30–40); Marie Rose Arong and Daniel Hempel read festival and memory as competing allegories of a heterogeneous Philippine transnation (53–71); and Katherine D. Ojano argues that myth and excess destabilize settled nationalist expectations (170–98). Building on but departing from these readings, this paper asks what becomes visible when the two novels are read as formally different accounts of the conversion of mobility, education, and intimacy into political inheritance. It argues that the difference between a student's formation and an elite's consolidation is the very history that developmental narratives too readily treat as progress.

Mimicry, Capital, Coloniality, and Form

Four related but distinct conceptual tools guide the argument. The first is Homi K. Bhabha's account of colonial mimicry in *The Location of Culture*. Mimicry names the colonial demand that a subject become recognizably educated and "civilized" according to European standards while remaining racially and politically subordinate; this contradictory resemblance can expose the instability of colonial authority (85–92). The point is not that every bilingual or Western-educated person is resisting power. Resemblance may disturb a racial classification at one moment and secure an administrative appointment at another. Hijo's success abroad and his subsequent return to office must therefore be analyzed together, not treated as mutually cancelling episodes.

Second, Pierre Bourdieu's distinction among forms of capital clarifies why Hijo's journey matters materially. Cultural capital consists of valued knowledge, competencies, tastes, and credentials; social capital names resources accessible through relationships and networks; economic capital refers to material wealth (241–58). These forms can reinforce or be converted

[2] Hary Sulistyo and Endang Sartika. "Bumiputra Author's Resistance toward Political Hegemony and Canonization of Balai Pustaka in the Novel Hikayat Kadiroen and Student Hidjo." Litera 19:2 (2020). 310–28. 313. https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v19i2.26271.

into one another, although their exchange is never automatic. Hijo's father can finance study, but the hoped-for return is status, marriageability, and recognized administrative competence. This vocabulary makes the novel's marriage plot relevant to education rather than a separate domestic subplot. It also helps explain why the benefits of an apparently universal modern curriculum remain tied to the resources of a particular household.

Third, Aníbal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power identifies patterns of racial classification, labor control, knowledge, and authority that may endure beyond the formal abolition of colonial government (533–80). Quijano developed the concept with reference to Latin America; its application here is comparative, not a claim that the Indonesian and Philippine histories replicate that region. It directs attention to a distinction too easily blurred by the language of independence: the nationality of an officeholder may change while the office's relation to subordinated populations does not. Jini Kim Watson's *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization* (2021) offers a more historically specific understanding of how colonial power was reorganized in postcolonial Asia. Watson argues that authoritarian governments such as the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines and Suharto's New Order regime in Indonesia cannot be explained simply as failures to establish Western-style liberal democracy but that their emergence must be understood within the political and economic conditions of the Cold War, when newly independent Asian nations were caught between the rival geopolitical interests of the United States and the Soviet Union. In the Philippines, the American commitment to containing communism helped sustain political and military alliances that strengthened the country's authoritarian institutions. The Marcos regime consequently combined the language of national development and modernization with anti-communist repression, military control, and the consolidation of economic power. Watson's own reading of Rosca's *State of War* demonstrates how the novel traces the transformation of colonial practices of violence and accumulation into the political and economic structures of the Cold War state (90–100). Her analysis clarifies that the persistence of colonial power does not mean that colonial institutions remain historically unchanged. Rather, these institutions are repeatedly modified and reorganized to serve new ruling classes, economic arrangements, and geopolitical interests. This distinction is central to the present study: what connects colonial and postcolonial modernities is not the simple repetition of colonial rule, but the capacity of inherited structures of domination to survive by assuming new institutional forms.

Fourth, form provides evidence rather than ornament. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque describes festival laughter and bodily inversion as temporary challenges to official hierarchy; a carnival can suspend distinctions without abolishing the institutions to which participants return (*Rabelais and His World*). That qualification is essential to reading Rosca's Ati-Atihan. Lauren Berlant's account of the affective historical present, developed further for Rosca by Chen, concerns the ways public crisis becomes legible as ordinary feeling, embodied habit, shame, and adaptation (Chen 4–10). The two novels organize such pressures differently. Kartodikromo's mobile comedy tends toward the placement of characters in marriages and offices; Rosca's recursion, sensory excess, and fractured genealogy resist closure. The comparison will test whether those formal differences register different possibilities for imagining a future beyond elite succession.

Education as an Unequal Passage to Modernity

The opening decision to send Hijo abroad introduces the connection between aspiration and inequality before Hijo reaches Europe. Raden Potronojo is a prosperous merchant whose wealth does not carry precisely the symbolic authority of hereditary priyayi status. For the family, a Dutch education promises more than scholarly achievement: it may compensate for a difference of rank and reposition the household in a changing social field. The prospective student becomes an investment in a future whose value will be measured by his ability to circulate among officials, families, and the educated public. Education appears as upward mobility while also presupposing the money and connections unavailable to most Javanese subjects.

> *As you well know, I'm just a merchant. Nowadays government officials look down on people like me. Sometimes even members of our own family who have become government officials refuse to mix with us socially. They think they are better than people like us, who are only merchants or farmers. I want to send Hijo to Holland to show them that everyone is equal, that our son, too, can go on to higher studies, just like the sons of aristocrats do.*[3]

The Dutch Ethical Policy and the expansion of indigenous educational opportunity provide a historical frame, but the novel does not illustrate policy as a simple causal diagram. Schools could create clerks and professionals needed by colonial government while also generating readers, journalists, and activists critical of the state. That double function is important for an author such as Kartodikromo, whose journalistic practice and resistance to official publishing conventions belong to the same emergent public sphere that trained young colonial readers. The educated figure in his novel is neither a colonial puppet nor a transparent embodiment of nationalism. He is produced at a crossing where the capacity to recognize injustice and the capacity to occupy a privileged position grow together.

Hijo's arrival in the Netherlands makes this contradiction theatrically visible. In the hotel, Dutch employees handle his luggage and attend to his needs. The mise-en-scène reverses a colonial commonplace: the European is not necessarily the served master, and the Javanese is not necessarily the servant. Sulistyo and Sartika locate the episode within Kartodikromo's critique of racial hierarchy, noting the service relations "particularly when a native Dutch bellboy received and brought Hidjo's bag when he arrived at the hotel or when a Dutch polished his shoes, and the different treatment of Europeans across colonial and metropolitan spaces.[4] The reversal depends on a shift in setting more than a newly discovered equality among persons. In Europe, Hijo's apparent affluence commands service; in the Indies, racial classification could secure prestige for poor Europeans.

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3 Marco Kartodikrono. *A Student Named Hijo*. Trans. Paul Tickell. Jakarta: The Lontar Foundation, 2015. 2.

4 Sulistyo and Sartika 313.

> *When they arrived, Hijo was given every courtesy by the hotel staff. This was because they thought that anyone who had come from the Indies would have lots of money, especially if they were from Java. Hijo laughed to himself as he watched their behavior, thinking of the fate of his people in their own land and the way most Dutch people treated them with contempt.*[5]

The sharpest question is what Hijo learns from this reversal. It is tempting to describe the experience as a complete liberation of consciousness: the young man sees that white people can serve him and ceases to be intimidated by their claims. But the service is an economic exchange in a commercial hotel. Hijo's new confidence rests partly on becoming an exceptional paying customer, not on an encounter with a society in which Javanese people enjoy equal rights. The scene dismantles the mystique of whiteness, yet it does not dismantle class privilege. If anything, it places Hijo in the position of enjoying a hierarchy with its customary occupants rearranged.

Kartodikromo's attention to the humble backgrounds of certain Europeans intensifies the argument. The prestige enjoyed by the Dutch in Java cannot be taken as proof of their uniformly elevated origins or accomplishments; colonial location itself can inflate a person's rank. A former worker or low-status migrant may acquire deference abroad that would not be available at home. This is the logic of a colonial status premium. Hijo's discovery reveals the arbitrary geography of racial dignity, while his own role as affluent visitor suggests that geographical reversal can remain an exchange of privileges.

> *At four o'clock in the afternoon, when all of the passengers took tea, Hijo sat down with his fellow passengers, and it was there that he got to know other passengers in the same class as him. Among these passengers were four Dutch girls and two middle-aged widows. These girls and older women were taken with his appearance, but Hijo didn't take any notice of them.*[6]

The theatre, tram, seaside resort, and lodging house further disrupt the imagined singularity of European culture. Instead of encountering a solemn civilization whose authority can be observed from afar, Hijo watches people flirt, work, move in public, and disagree. Europe becomes a collection of contradictory social practices rather than the seamless ideal displayed by colonial institutions in Java. The novel's attention to everyday spectacle matters because colonial authority relies partly on controlling the distance from which the colonized see Europe. To watch Dutch society closely is to discover that its supposed unity exists most persuasively when mediated by unequal power abroad. In Bhabha's terms, Hijo becomes like the colonizer in competencies but unlike the role assigned to him by colonial racial ideology. That dissonance is politically productive; it is not yet a program for collective transformation.

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5 Kartodikromo 28.

6 Kartodikromo 13-14.

Mimicry and the Limits of Recognition

A conversation about racial identification offers a more direct form of resistance than the consumer's victory in the hotel. Asked to measure himself against Dutch identity, Hijo associates that identity with whiteness but refuses to imagine his brown skin as a disqualification from dignity. Sulistyo and Sartika reproduce a version of the exchange from an Indonesian text and interpret it as a rejection of racial hierarchy (322–23).

> *"Mr. Hijo," Betje asked, "would you rather be an Indies man or a Dutchman?"*
> *"Are you crazy, Bet?" her mother said, visibly angry at what her daughter had just said.*
> *"Not at all, ma'am! If my skin could turn white, like Dutch people's, I would of course love to be a Dutchman," Hijo said forcefully to his hostess, "but because I am brown-skinned, it's best that I am an Indies man."*[7]

The significance of the passage lies in the speaker's insistence that acquiring Dutch education need not produce an inward surrender to Dutch superiority.

Bhabha's mimicry is often treated too quickly as the colonized person's successful parody of the colonizer. The conceptual difficulty is that resemblance has opposed effects. It can expose the false basis of hierarchy when Hijo demonstrates qualities supposedly reserved for Europeans. Yet mastery of the same sanctioned qualifications also makes him legible to the institutions that distribute colonial advancement. Mimicry is ambivalent precisely because the subject may unsettle a hierarchy while acquiring the means to rise within it. Reading only the triumphant Dutch episodes would remove from view the institutional destination for which this transoceanic education was arranged.

That destination comes into focus in the novel's ending.

> *Hijo has married Wungu and they are living happily together. Hijo has become the Police Chief in Jarak.*
> *Wardoyo has become the Regent of Jarak, replacing his father, and he is living happily with his wife Buru in the Regent's residence.*
> *Walter has returned from his home leave and become the Assistant Resident in Jarak. He has a wife – Betje. The Schoolmistress, Miss Jet Roos, has married Administrator Gert Boeren, a close friend of Willem Walter, and they too are living in Jarak*.[8]

The movement of several figures into recognized positions creates an almost symmetrical final tableau. The force of the novel's apparently comfortable resolution is placed against the political and cultural conflicts from which the story arises. Hijo's education has made his family's social ambition realizable, but realization is not equivalent to structural reform.

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7 Kartodikromo 33.

8 Kartodikromo 113.

Recognition occurs when colonial authorities concede that a particular indigenous person can satisfy institutional standards. Emancipation would require changing the political relations that make those authorities the arbiters of indigenous worth. Hijo's profession provides evidence that a Javanese man can enter legal office; it is not evidence that law has ceased to operate through colonial sovereignty. His achievement is real, and it matters that the novel presents it as real. But the narrative's investment in his success encourages the reader to notice the unequal social field that produces the achievement as exceptional.

The ending can therefore be understood as a formal compromise, not simply the author's ideological capitulation. A narrative attentive to racial reversals must eventually decide what to do with the subject who has learned to cross the boundary. It could make him an explicit revolutionary, deny him employment, or restore him to a precolonial household; Kartodikromo does none of these. Instead, the plot confers a future in the hybrid social world already taking shape. The result is not an assertion that nothing has changed, but a discomforting image of changes that have found accommodation within the old order. The novel exposes colonial modernity's absorptive capacity: it can accommodate the talented critic of racial superiority by turning his talent into a credential of governance.

This position also complicates a simple contrast between collaboration and resistance. Hijo's refusal of a racialized inferiority may be sincere, while his professional advancement remains selective. His father's hopes may express legitimate frustration with aristocratic distinctions, while the family's climb leaves those distinctions intact. The narrative's tensions become more legible when read as the interaction of unequal systems rather than the moral weakness of a single protagonist. What fails is not Hijo's intelligence or necessarily his ethical character; the failure resides in an institutional world capable of rewarding his intelligence without yielding authority to the population from which he comes.

Romance, Marriage, and the Reproduction of an Elite

The romantic plot supplies the mechanism by which personal achievement becomes durable class position. Hijo's relations with Biru, Betje, and ultimately Wungu cross distinctions of race, language, domestic expectation, and inherited prestige. Walter's attachments to Jet Roos, Wungu, and Betje create counterpoints through which Dutch desire is made as unstable as Javanese social arrangement. Love is neither absent from the story nor permitted to stand outside material life. Its accidents and disappointments mark the uneasy overlap of emotional experience and socially advantageous marriage.

Betje's attraction to Hijo reverses a colonial sexual pattern familiar from the history of European men's relations with Indigenous women. Where interracial intimacy under empire often dramatizes an asymmetry of male European power, Kartodikromo imagines a Dutch woman attracted to a Javanese man. Her desire challenges an ideology that casts the colonized male as inferior or undeserving of European regard. The novel nevertheless makes this challenge through a relationship in which Hijo can travel onward and eventually return home. Betje's

emotional investment is not secured by an equivalent freedom to determine the future. The reversal of racial valuation does not automatically reverse gendered vulnerability.

> *In a hotel in Amsterdam, Hijo told Betje about his plans to return to Java.*
> *"If you go to Java, I will go with you," said Betje. She started to cry.*
> *"No. I will come back to the Netherlands some day and we can meet again and..."*
> *Behind closed doors they talked and talked until everything was settled.*
> *Then Hijo gave Betje a bank book with a thousand guilders and Betje's name in it.*
> *"You keep this book and use the money for whatever you need," said Hijo, and Betje accepted it*.[9]

The eventual marriage to Wungu is just as consequential. It coordinates the merchant household's resources, the educational prestige of the returning student, and the symbolic authority of an aristocratic family. In Bourdieu's terms, economic capital and educational distinction become more durable through kinship and social capital. The novel does not need to portray the marriage as loveless for this conversion to operate. An alliance may be affectionate and socially strategic at once.

> *"What if we asked Miss Wungu to become Hijo's wife? Would you agree to that? Hijo used to talk to me about Miss Wungu and he does seem to be in love with her. Actually I never thought much about it because I only had one thing in mind: that Hijo must marry Biru*.[10]

To interpret the ending solely as the restoration of tradition would also miss the novelty of the class relation it consolidates: it is through Dutch-certified education that a commercially prosperous indigenous family secures proximity to hereditary authority.

The distribution of women and men in these plots deserves differentiated attention. Young men undertake extended journeys, enter employment, and encounter love as part of an education in choice. Women may exercise preference, refusal, or social calculation, but their futures are more persistently narrated in relation to marriageability and the arrangements of their families. Such gendered asymmetry does not mean that the women are voiceless or that all desire is reducible to property. It means that the plot assigns educational mobility and relational continuity different weights according to gender. Anne McClintock's argument that imperial formations repeatedly naturalize political hierarchies through domestic and familial arrangements offers a productive framework: the household is one site where the public distinctions of empire become intimate common sense.[11]

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9 Kartodikromo 112.

10 Kartodikromo 86.

11 Anne McClintock. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 352.

The romance plot further complicates the notion of "failed modernity." Racial hierarchy becomes less secure while patriarchy remains a means of stabilizing class. Dutch femininity is placed in an unusual relation to an indigenous male subject while Javanese women continue to function within an elite marriage economy. A reading that celebrates Hijo's racial vindication without following the differently allocated costs of its romantic resolution risks reproducing the novel's male-centered scale of accomplishment. Romance is not a digression from colonial politics. It is the institutional continuation of that politics by means of the family.

The Colonial Archive Inside the Postcolonial Family

Rosca changes both the historical location and the narrative grammar of the problem. The Philippines depicted in *State of War* possesses the outward marks of sovereignty: a national government, political families, domestic corporations, armed forces, universities, and the language of public law. Yet the novel continuously disrupts any assumption that these institutions are free of the colonial social relations. There are three books: "The Book of Acts," "The Book of Numbers," and "The Book of Revelation," that move among contemporary repression, ancestral beginnings, and the outbreak of violence around the festival. Shu-Ching Chen's close reconstruction of these sections demonstrates how the three central figures are connected by family lines and by repeated intimacies with coercive power.[12] The novel's temporal method makes inherited violence an active element of present social identity.

In one ancestral sequence, a Spanish Capuchin monk encounters a Malayan girl who has already learned that sexual coercion is part of the world constructed by priestly authority. Rosca's prose surrounds the encounter with mythic imagery, but the image gives way to violence. The narration's description of the setting as "a morning shrouded by antiquity"[13] places conquest within a temporality that feels primordial even as its violence is historically specific. The girl's response is neither free consent nor a purely passive disappearance. She calculates what the encounter will "cost" the priest, exposing the terrible conditions under which constrained agency must operate.[14] Such scenes make it impossible to describe colonial inheritance simply as a succession of legal administrations.

> *The girl, who was fourteen years old, knew enough not to resist the priest, having grown up surrounded by the gossip of elders and taken to heart the admonition that the tenderest of thighs, whether of chicken or of women, belonged to the friars. She yielded her virginity on a bed of pebbles and curled arms and legs tightly about the pain of the unholy entrance, bit her lower lip, and thought of how much all this silliness should cost the stupid priest.*
> *He gave her a gold coin, stamped with the profile of a king no one had ever seen, and having made arrangements for her weekly visit to the church, he turned around,*

[12] Shu-ching Chen. "Affect and History in Ninotchka Rosca's State of War." *EurAmerica* 45:1 (2015). 1–38. www.ea.sinica.edu.tw/eu_file/142710274214.pdf. 11-12.

[13] Chen 13.

[14] Chen 13.

> *humming the "Ave Maria," only to be struck by the enormity of his sin as he approached the shadow of the cross on the ground*.[15]

The genealogy also includes Maya, the friar's mistress, whose place within colonial society is simultaneously protected by ecclesiastical proximity and stigmatized by patriarchal judgment. Maya's public appropriation of the Virgin Mary's image produces the unstable designation "witch, whore, saint, patroness, insane."[16] The condensed sequence is important because it refuses the opposition between acquiescence and defiance. Maya's power takes the form of a borrowed religious image, and her public authority depends on a symbolic world introduced and regulated by colonialism. She cannot stand outside its grammar, and her performance turns an instrument of Catholic discipline into an occasion for disruptive public recognition. The body becomes at once an archive of violation and a site of improvisation.

> *She would stop at intersections and accept rolled-up petitions from peasants, petitions which, for a coin or two, she promised to bring to the attention of the proper saint, prodding the statue with whip lashes every twilight until the request was granted. In the course of these rituals, the peasants somehow inverted the idea of coercing the holy powers and began flagellating themselves instead, in the hope that such a sacrifice of blood would appeal to the white gods*.[17]

Here the concept of coloniality has greater explanatory value than the language of persistence alone. Quijano's coloniality does not claim that a postcolonial state is identical to a colonial one. It names the continued organization of value, knowledge, labor, and difference by hierarchical classifications produced in imperial histories. Rosca's repeated familial encounters show how those classifications survive by being made personal. A surname conveys legitimacy; a marriage joins fortunes; a sexual encounter reassigns social standing; the management of shame becomes part of everyday self-understanding. The political order is reproduced not only when a ruler issues an order but when people inherit relationships whose apparent privateness conceals an institutional genealogy.

Chen's reading of affect illuminates this mechanism. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's analysis of the historical present, Chen argues that colonial conquest, military rule, and changing regimes press into ordinary relationships as shame, fear, and betrayal rather than remaining discrete events in a national timeline.

> *Rosca's writing of the affective history of the everyday disrupts the opposition between the public and the private by highlighting the characters' affective responses to, and corporeal adaptation to, public events and historical changes, be they violence, war, or changing political rules, to the extent that the present of these public events becomes available to them in the form of everyday experiences. As such, the violence*

15 Rosca 155.
16 Rosca 156.
17 Rosca 156.

> *and violation conduced from public events such as war, colonization, or military coercion, instead of creating trauma, are turned into affective events of subject-formation. Characters move through the historical events, responding to the intensity of the events in the milieu, making adjustments and adaptation, and undergoing transformation*.[18]

Affect in this context is not simply a list of emotions characters happen to feel. It names the ways embodied responses to unequal encounters help compose a subject's available actions and attachments. Where conventional nation-centered history might tell a sequence of rulers, Rosca tells how rule is lived in the household, at the bedside, in the street, and through bodily memory. The novel's genealogical form nevertheless requires a caution. Descent cannot be used as a biological explanation for political behavior, as though violence automatically passes through blood. Rosca's emphasis lies in socially transmitted structures and stories, not inherited criminality. The three protagonists are related to the same violent history but do not merely repeat one character type. Anna's political engagements, Eliza's negotiations of sexuality and advantage, and Adrian's cosmopolitan privilege diverge. A rigorous comparison with Hijo must preserve these differences: an elite is not a single moral personality, and family history is a field of pressures rather than an irresistible fate.

The Postcolonial Elite, Technocratic Power, and Betrayal

Adrian Banyaga is a crucial figure because he represents elite privilege after the conspicuous figure of the European superior has moved offstage. Educated and connected, he belongs to a world in which possession of metropolitan taste and educational credentials is no longer a rare interruption of colonial expectations. His standing is sustained by kinship, access, and the social authority of an established name. The comparison with Hijo is not a claim that the two men make the same choices. Rather, Hijo's exceptional access and Adrian's inherited access reveal different positions within a reproducible structure. What is a hard-won passage across a hierarchy for the first can become ordinary family entitlement for the second.

> *"Adrian never worries," Julius said quickly. "He was born on the proper side of the morning." [. . .] All were a confirmation of his well-being and he had never questioned how it was possible that all his mornings were on the proper side. He was after all heir to seven major corporations, had been an athlete in college, and was all of twenty-three years old*.[19]

It might be easy to read such entitlement as Westernization alone, but Rosca's critique is more severe. The Philippine elite has adapted imported conventions into its own instruments of national rule. Its legitimacy no longer needs to be granted continuously by a resident European officer; it can be asserted through national institutions, economic development, respectability, and domestic wealth. The central distinction is between the formal transfer of sovereignty and a

[18] Chen 7-8.

[19] Rosca 25-26.

redistribution of the resources through which sovereignty is exercised. Hijo's return reveals the first possibility of indigenous access to office. Rosca shows a world in which local control of office coexists with coercion directed against the national population.

The distinction between formal independence and genuine sovereignty is central to understanding postcolonial authoritarianism. Political independence may transfer governmental authority from colonial officials to national leaders without fundamentally changing who controls political and economic resources or how power is exercised. Yet, as Jini Kim Watson argues in *Cold War Reckonings* (2021), postcolonial dictatorship cannot be understood simply as a continuation of colonial rule. In Asia, decolonization unfolded alongside the Cold War, when anticommunist alliances, foreign military assistance, and capitalist development created new conditions for authoritarian governance. Under Marcos, repression was justified as necessary for national security and economic modernization, while American support reinforced the regime's political and military power. The postcolonial state thus did not merely preserve colonial institutions but reorganized inherited inequalities through new international alliances, coercive practices, and developmental priorities (Watson 6-7).

State of War dramatizes this process by tracing how political and economic power passes through families and institutions across successive colonial and postcolonial regimes. Maya's relationship with the Spanish friar, the Banyaga family's collaboration with colonial authorities, and Luis Carlos's eventual participation in American-backed counterinsurgency reveal how religious, economic, and military authority are inherited and reconfigured. These histories complicate any clear distinction between foreign domination and local complicity, showing how those who resist one form of oppression may become implicated in another. The Marcos dictatorship emerges not as an isolated rupture but as a new arrangement of longstanding inequalities and Cold War political interests. Anna Villaverde's torture by Colonel Amor exposes the violence sustaining this arrangement, while the festival's absurd discussions of economic development satirize the regime's use of modernization to legitimize authoritarian control. As Watson demonstrates, Rosca's novel reveals how the state reproduces itself through interconnected structures of family, capital, bureaucracy, and coercion (97-99). *State of War* therefore presents postcolonial authoritarianism not as the simple survival of colonial domination but as its continual reorganization under changing historical conditions, particularly those produced by Cold War anticommunism and capitalist development.

The figure of Colonel Amor reveals that conjunction. His search for underground opponents produces a compulsive need for identities that can be arrested and interrogated. Rosca gives his administrative desire a startling physical vocabulary: "He needed a face (faces), a name (names), a body (bodies) of flesh and blood. An identity (identities) he could hook his claws into and dissect into information."[20] The novel's Pain Machine and Romance Room combine the vocabulary of scientific procedure, bodily intimacy, and authoritarian discipline. The euphemisms are central to the critique.

[20] Rosca 348.

> *He had offered her a tour of the compound, gallantly, showing her the light meters, the automatic switches, the computers, the electricians on patrol, the soldiers at attention even as he had pointed out the network of bulbs and lamps embedded in the walls and ceilings which provided a subtle but nevertheless pitilessly clear illumination*.[21]

The apparatus promises technical access to truth but operates through the imposition of suffering; it converts modern knowledge into a means of producing submission. The opposition between civilized technique and barbarous violence consequently collapses.

> *Colonel Amor's Romance Room displays the first level of betrayal of the revolutionary ideals of Philippine independence, for instead of protecting and reinstating national autonomy, it robs the people of their chance to deconstruct and reconstruct their identities by subjecting the nation to a terrorist regime. On the other hand, it interferes with the private lives of the people, turning them into sites of contesting feelings and survival instincts, making betrayal a part of everyday lived experience. On the personal level, betraying one's family and loved ones out of the necessity to survive, and pledging one's loyalty to a national ideal embodied in the guerrilla resistance poses a new dilemma for the people in the postcolonial Philippines*.[22]

Anna's husband Manolo Montreal embodies the vulnerability of political and scientific knowledge to this system. A physics professor involved in research into the business interests surrounding the Commander, he initially demonstrates that specialized learning can disclose the economic machinery of dictatorship. Under repression, however, his knowledge and expertise become entangled with the regime's apparatus. Chen shows how his coerced betrayal of the resistance extends into collaboration with the techniques of torture.

> *In the novel, Anna's husband turns out to be the biggest traitor of all, for not only does he breakdown under physical torture and betray the guerrillas, he becomes one of those who helps Amor run the Pain Machine by providing scientific counsel*.[23]

This is not a simple allegory of the corrupt intellectual; it is a demonstration that expertise is politically undecidable unless we examine the institutions that command, reward, or weaponize it.

The contrast with Hijo thus sharpens. In the Indonesian novel, educational competence disproves a colonial claim of incapacity but is eventually recognized by colonial authority. In Rosca, scientific competence can help expose corruption and also contribute to the means of terror. Neither text supports the proposition that education is inherently emancipatory or inherently oppressive. Knowledge operates through relations of accountability. The question

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21 Rosca 51.

22 Chen 30-31.

23 Chen 31,

becomes: to whom does the trained person owe an explanation, whose knowledge counts, and who can hold the user of knowledge responsible? A postcolonial state may inherit the demand for compliant intermediaries, but it can also manufacture new forms of compliance through fear, surveillance, and the militarization of expertise.

The intergenerational story of betrayal reinforces this institutional account. The war-era relations among the Villaverdes and Montreals recur in altered form during the dictatorship.

> *Manolo's father, Jacobo Montreal, aka Jake, betrays Luis Carlos while they are fighting the Japanese with guerrilla forces in the jungle. In the end, Jake is killed by Luis Carlos. The same pattern of betrayal and punishment/revenge recurs in the relation between Anna and Manolo. In the chaos of the festival, Anna reunites with Manolo only to realize his betrayal not only of the guerrillas, but also of her and their bond of intimacy*.[24]

Rosca does not dismiss betrayal as mere weakness but locates it in an unstable world where attachment to relatives, comrades, and ideals may be violently forced apart. Anna's discovery of Manolo's collaboration culminates in an act that breaks their personal bond and complicates the novel's ethics of resistance. She kills Manolo before she has time to think about the consequences of her actions. The crisis exposes an intimate counterpart to the elite's political consolidation: where offices become secure through family alliances, those same bonds can also carry coercion, concealment, and the price of disloyalty.

> *He leaned his forehead against the side of her head and whispered "I broke." Whispered like a phrase of endearment.*
> *"I gave him everything I knew—names, routes, addresses. Except the Hong Kong address. In return, he let me live, found some use for me. He had the strange idea that since I was a scientist, I could devise better ways of"—again, the voice dropped—"getting at the truth." […]*
> *"Amor said he had to be very careful not to leave a trace. Of the tampering. And I had to do it. Very strange. Amor's sense of humor. Come to think of it"—he stretched out painfully—"he must have known. He wanted me to know it was all useless. My sacrifices, yours."*[25]

Festival and the Limits of Reversal

The Ati-Atihan festival seems to promise a different politics from the education and household alliances that organize elite succession. It brings people into streets where bodies move to music, sacred images mingle with popular spectacle, and social distinctions appear less settled. Its syncretic practices register histories of indigenous ritual, Catholic appropriation, tourism, commerce, and American cultural circulation.

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24 Chen 31.
25 Rosca 374.

> *[T]he festival tells a potentially subversive tale that fosters communal solidarity and purpose, rekindling vital energies that can form the basis of collective resistance. . . offer a respite from oppressive structures, an exuberant affirmation of collective freedom*.[26]

What appears to the authorities as disorder may be an alternative means of telling a people's history.

The relevant theoretical distinction is between inversion and transformation. Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque privileges the temporary lowering of the elevated, the exposure of institutional solemnity to popular bodies, and the possibility of renewal through collective laughter. Yet the existence of inversion does not ensure permanent redistribution. The crowd can parody a ruling hierarchy without acquiring durable control over land, education, wealth, or state force. In this sense the festival resembles Hijo's time in Europe: a changed scene makes privilege appear contingent, but the relations securing privilege are not necessarily dismantled. Both novels stage emancipatory moments that the reader must test against their institutional aftermath. Marie Rose Arong and Daniel Hempel refine this issue through Bill Ashcroft's concept of the transnation, which they use to describe identities and relations crossing the homogenizing frame of the sovereign nation-state. Their reading of the Ati-Atihan shows the festival as a provisional enactment of Philippine heterogeneity rather than a portrait of a culturally pure origin.[27] A transnational or translocal understanding of the festival does not restore a people before colonialism but brings together elements shaped across centuries of coercive and inventive exchange. Its vitality comes from mixture; the danger is in mistaking the visible intensity of that mixture for a secure political community.

Festival violence exposes this danger. As conspiracies and military operations converge, the crowd's precarious freedoms encounter an organized machinery of repression. Rosca's celebration is neither exotic local color nor a simple image of national liberation. It is now a test of whether a collective can convert temporary occupation of space into durable political capacity. As shown in the novel, the festival fails as a protected space for democratic transformation, exposing a gulf between symbolic reversal and command of institutional force.

> *The Festival flung itself at the bus. Men and women—a human wave—rsuhed forward even as soldiers quickly deployed themselves about the vehicle. More soldiers appeared, running from side streets, and from the trapped military jeep in which only the driver and gunner remained . . . She was running, dodging strays from the Festival, the children who could not get through the crush of people. They thought it was a game, this sudden flight of hers, and like a flock of pigeons on the wing they ran with her, laughing.*[28]

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[26] Myra Mendible. "The Politics and Poetics of Philippine Festival in Ninotchka Rosca's State of War." *International Fiction Review* 29:1–2 (2002). 30–40. 30.

[27] Marie Rose Arong and Daniel Hempel. "Towards a Philippine Transnation: Dreaming a Philippines in Ninotchka Rosca's State of War." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 48:2 (2017) 53–71. 54.

[28] Rosca 366.

The festival produces knowledge of an unfinished nation which the colonial archive nor the state's official narrative can exhaust. It allows multiple historical times to inhabit a single present and briefly disorients the relation between spectators and performers. The novel refuses to provide the reassuring conclusion that cultural plurality eventually produces political solidarity. If the crowd's heterogeneity is to sustain resistance, it must find forms of organization, mutual recognition, and memory that endure when exceptional festivity ends.

The juxtaposition with Kartodikromo clarifies why this is a regional question instead of an analogy of two failed rebellions. Hijo's journey is an individual crossing whose material condition is family wealth; Rosca's festival is a collective convergence exposed to military coercion. The novels' political scales differ. What they share however is the demonstration that an astonishing temporary reversal can coexist with the endurance of a larger order. Hijo discovers the ordinariness of Europeans and then returns to legal office; the festival revelers experience an unsettled social field and then confronts the state's capacity for violence. The comparison is between the capacity of hierarchical systems to survive scenes that appear to discredit them.

Narrative Form against the Myth of Linear Progress

The novels' distinct narrative forms are integral to their historical arguments. *A Student Named Hijo* moves through recognizable episodes of departure, metropolitan experience, emotional complication, return, and social settlement. This structure allows an emergent colonial subject to narrate the world from a displaced point of view. Its humor and geographic inversions demystify Europe, but its final arrangement of offices grants recognizable positions to major characters. The promise of modern development is clear because careers and marriages supply endpoints against which individual growth can be measured.

That readability however is what allows the ending to be read against itself. The apparent closure organizes uncertainty into ranks while leaving unaddressed the majority excluded from the young man's opportunities. The text's politics cannot be determined by treating its final harmony as either entirely sincere or entirely ironic. The list of appointments at the end appear perfunctory and thus a critique that modern readers can understand.

State of War, by contrast, resists the assumption that political life moves in a sequence from conquest to independence to democracy, or from dictatorship to recovery. Historical events recur in forms of sexual violation, collaboration, coercion, economic accumulation, and bodily fear. The Book of Numbers section interrupts the action of the festival, making the contemporary crisis readable only through histories that precede it. Rosca's time is recursive with each recurrence happening through different technologies and social conditions. The narrative's disorder is a way of interrogating how the past remains operative inside a changing present.

Kathrine D. Ojano's reading of *State of War* as mythopoeia offers an important corrective to interpretations that treat Rosca's novel primarily as a fictional reconstruction of Philippine

history. For Ojano, the novel's mythical episodes introduce "formal and substantial problems of excess and incoherence"[29] that challenge both the conventions of historical realism and the nationalist novel's ambition to represent the nation coherently. Her concept of *unreading* does recognizes the limits of historical interpretation: the novel must also be experienced through its orality, fantastic imagery, and recurring movements between past and present.[30] This tension is shown in the legend of Generala Nana, whose reputation as a formidable guerrilla leader emerges from a strategically invented story rather than her actual participation in combat. The exposure of the fabrication however lessens not the legend's significance to the community. As Ojano observes, Rosca's narration "knots and disentangles fact and fantasy,"[31] demonstrating that historical verification cannot fully account for the political and imaginative force of collective belief.

This perspective is especially significant for understanding the novel's genealogies. In the encounter between the older Maya and her younger namesake, physical contact releases memories and ancestral experiences that exceed individual recollection, collapsing distinctions between personal history, inherited knowledge, and mythical time. Ojano interprets this extraordinary transmission as a form of collective wisdom that disrupts conventional systems of knowledge and narration. The genealogies in *State of War* more than trace the transmission of wealth, authority, and complicity across successive colonial and postcolonial regimes. They also disclose forms of memory and historical experience that resist reduction to an orderly sequence of origins and consequences. Ojano's intervention is a reminder that Rosca's mythopoeic imagination continually exceeds the historical explanations through which those commitments are understood. The novel makes structures of domination readable while simultaneously questioning whether any coherent national history can adequately contain the fragmented, embodied, and often contradictory experiences of its people.

The comparative argument advances one step beyond opposing realism and myth. Kartodikromo's satirical and romantic sequencing and Rosca's mythic fragmentation are both experiments in rendering institutions visible, but they make different features visible. The first reveals that racial prestige is contingent and that elite formation has a describable path; the second reveals how that path can disappear into genealogy until inequality seems natural or inevitable. In one novel the structure of opportunity is made observable through a traveler's movement; in the other the structure of inheritance becomes readable through interruptions of ordinary chronology. Neither form is politically innocent, and neither should be treated as the more authentic Southeast Asian mode of narration.

Their languages and routes of publication are important aspects as well. Kartodikromo's lively Malay public sphere was positioned against colonial control of literary legitimacy. Sulistyo and Sartika relate his literary dissent to the regulation of language and ideological content

[29] Kathrine D. Ojano. "Unreading the Novel, or Experiencing Ninotchka Rosca's State of War as Mythopoeia." *Kritika Kultura* 27 (2016) 170–98. 170.

[30] Ojano 175-177.

[31] Ojano 180.

associated with Balai Pustaka.[32] Paul Tickell's English translation adds a further historical layer: an international reader encounters colonial Malay politics through a later language of circulation. Rosca's English, shaped within transnational Philippine literary life, uses the language associated with American imperial power to contest official histories of the Philippines. The novels are consequently not transparent windows onto two nations. They are themselves interventions in the institutions through which Southeast Asian life becomes readable, marketable, and canonizable.

A sustained comparison needs to specify the institutions through which power is reproduced rather than merely asserting that both novels concern elites. The first institution is education. Hijo's movement across the sea is possible because a particular family can finance it. Adrian's sophistication appears within a class whose access to education and transnational culture is already normalized. Manolo's scientific training shows that even critical knowledge requires political and institutional conditions to remain emancipatory. The comparative sequence moves from selective access to inherited expectation to knowledge under authoritarian capture.

The second institution is the family. Hijo's marriage is part of the consolidation of standing across commercial and aristocratic worlds. Rosca's genealogies dramatize a more violent scale of familial reproduction: land, money, religious standing, political protection, and sexual domination cross generations. In both novels, the household translates public distinctions into seemingly personal futures. But where Kartodikromo's resolution depends on marital placement, Rosca's historicization of that placement exposes how legitimacy itself can be founded on acts erased by the respectability of a surname.

The third institution is administrative office. The distinction between Hijo as district attorney and Rosca's authoritarian agents do not translate into an equivalence of professions. Law, governance, intelligence work, and military command have different aims, procedures, and legal forms. The comparison concerns their common dependence on a state's claim to classify, investigate, reward, and punish. An indigenous professional's appointment can be a real disruption of racial exclusion without changing who authorizes the legal system. National independence can transfer that authorization to citizens without ensuring that the state ceases to regard large sections of the population as objects of domination.

The fourth institution is public storytelling. Kartodikromo's newspaper-based literary world expands the range of persons who can represent colonial experience. Rosca's nonlinear narration contests the state's power to define the nation's usable past. These are different responses to the same political limit: emancipation cannot be implied from the presence of new officeholders if the public lacks the capacity to narrate, contest, and transform the conditions of officeholding. Education becomes democratic when access, interpretation, and institutional accountability cease to be the preserve of distinguished households.

32 Sulistyo and Sartika 321.

This account also requires a stronger recognition of historical difference. In the Dutch East Indies, the hierarchy represented by Kartodikromo is explicitly imperial; in the Philippines, Rosca's dictatorship belongs to a sovereign republic shaped by centuries of colonization and by Cold War repression. Equating postcolonial authoritarianism with colonialism obscures national rulers' agency and the specific international contexts of their alliances. Nor is the return of every educated colonized student to the bureaucracy an ethical failure. Many anticolonial movements depended on specifically the literacy, legal training, and communicative networks colonial schools made possible. The issue is whether such training becomes a collective resource or a private credential reinforcing privilege.

These novels expose the danger of treating the identity of the powerful as a concrete measure of liberation. A Javanese official can hold an important office while Dutch sovereignty remains in place; Filipino elites can command a sovereign state while reproducing coercive relations with subordinated populations. Racial inclusion and national succession are significant historical changes, yet they remain incomplete political tests. The stronger test asks whether institutions have become answerable to those whom they previously excluded and whether the benefits of modern life can be claimed without passage through privileged families. In this sense "failed modernities" names a political relation, not a judgment that Southeast Asian societies have failed to imitate Europe.

Women, Memory, and an Unfinished Future

Neither novel offers an entirely secure alternative, but their unresolved possibilities are instructive. Kartodikromo's literary practice relocates the colonial gaze. He makes the supposedly superior European available to Indigenous description, laughter, and criticism; he also participates in a Malay reading public beyond the boundaries imposed by official literary institutions. What the protagonist cannot accomplish as a single successful student may be attempted through the circulation of stories among readers who do not share his access to European schooling. That possibility should not be made into proof that the novel alone produced anticolonial mobilization. It does, however, identify a social function for writing that differs from the reproduction of credentialed distinction.

Rosca's conclusion shifts emphasis from office and inherited authority toward memory, storytelling, and care. Following violence at the festival, Anna takes refuge in a rural setting and teaches children. The scene is not a retreat from politics into maternal consolation. It opens another possible institution of transmission: education removed from the career-making networks of elite inheritance and reoriented toward the experiences of a community. Chen emphasizes the significance of Anna's radio, recorder, and oral-cultural resources in bringing different kinds of knowledge into contact.[33] Modern communication technology is put to work in a setting where its political value depends on its users and recipients.

[33] Chen 32.

Anna's pregnancy also puts the novel's struggle over inheritance into a final, precarious image. Her anticipated son, Ismael Villaverde Banyaga, belongs to a genealogy shadowed by violence but is imagined as "born innocent, without fate."[34] This is not a declaration that the past can be wiped away but that Anna's future child is to be nourished by legends and stories that preserve it. The aspiration is to free a descendant from compulsory repetition, not to remove him from history. The novel's promise remains visionary instead of institutionally guaranteed; a child's innocence cannot by itself prevent renewed state violence. What it articulates is the necessary distinction between inheriting knowledge of the past and being condemned to its social roles.

This conclusion also shifts the gendered balance of the comparison. Hijo's bildung is measured substantially through movement, professional insertion, and marital consolidation. Anna's future is represented through a form of teaching that is responsive to suffering and through a reproductive metaphor that is powerful and risky. A feminist reading must ask whether the conclusion burdens a woman with repairing the nation through motherhood. The answer cannot be wholly reassuring. Yet Rosca couples maternity with political memory, the critique of betrayal, and the recovery of communal forms of knowledge. The problem for interpretation is to acknowledge the novel's gendered symbolic economy without denying the ethical force of her teaching and survival.

The contrast between the two endings makes a larger theoretical intervention possible. If decolonization is judged by changes of personnel, Hijo's success offers an apparently adequate conclusion. If decolonization is judged by changes in the lived relation between knowledge, institutions, and subordinated populations, the conclusion remains open. Rosca's imagination of an non-predetermined child is not an answer to every institutional problem raised by the novel. It refuses the claim that genealogy must become destiny. Between the two works, an alternative modernity begins to appear: education shared rather than restricted, cultural memory transmitted rather than managed by official history, and public authority evaluated by its obligations rather than its occupants.

The novels accordingly resist two equally unhelpful fantasies. One is the fantasy that colonial domination can be overcome when a gifted indigenous subject masters its cultural standards. The other is the fantasy that precolonial authenticity, once recovered, can settle the struggles of a heterogeneous modern nation. Kartodikromo's modernity is hybrid and socially differentiated; Rosca's counter-history is marked by irreversible encounters and transformations. Their future lies in the ongoing ability to recognize how institutions distribute opportunity and how collective agency might revise that distribution.

Conclusion

A Student Named Hijo and *State of War* make the history of decolonization difficult to narrate as an orderly succession of victories. Kartodikromo shows a Javanese student learning that

[34] Rosca 382.

Europeans are neither intrinsically superior nor immune to the ordinary divisions of class and desire. His journey unsettles colonial ideology but also supplies resources for his incorporation into a privileged legal and marital network. The promise of mobility is fulfilled at the level of one family even as the wider architecture of colonial authority remains. Education reveals equality as an intellectual possibility without making it a generally available social relation.

Rosca starts from a different historical formation: an independent Philippine state whose elites and coercive institutions have absorbed and reworked colonial inheritances. Genealogy, sexual hierarchy, business accumulation, surveillance, and political betrayal connect the modern dictatorship to older forms of power without rendering their histories identical. The festival momentarily gathers a heterogeneous nation, but its disruption shows the limits of symbolic inversion in the face of organized violence. Her narrative's fractured chronology contests both the fiction of a clean national beginning and the claim that sovereignty necessarily delivers emancipation.

The comparative contribution is an account of the institutional conditions under which racial inclusion, professional competence, elite marriage, and national succession can coexist with undemocratic rule. The difference between the novels' endings is decisive: one provides offices and households; the other imagines a child whose inheritance might become knowledge rather than fate. Their shared warning is that the failure of modernity lies less in the absence of schools, institutions, or development than in changes that preserve the unequal relations through which those goods are distributed. Their unfinished hope resides in making knowledge, memory, and authority answerable to a broader public rather than to another exceptionally successful elite.

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