

# Queer Love and Urban Intimacies in Martial Law Manila

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This article examines certain representations of Metropolitan Manila and the city's queer intimacies during Martial Law. In particular, it analyzes Ishmael Bernal's film *Manila By Night* (1980) and Jessica Hagedorn's novel *Dogeaters* (1990).

Released during a time when the Marcoses secured rule through an over-production of their "love team," and by IMF supported justifications for molding a "beautiful and efficient" Manila, *Manila By Night* challenges disciplinary plans for the city and its populace through the presence of queer characters that unabashedly love the dirty, dysfunctional and impoverished city. In a similar vein, *Dogeaters* incorporates characters that practice queer love as they navigate a version of Manila antithetical to the one the government and the neo-colonial elite produced for the West. Although coming from different genres, it is perhaps unsurprising that both *Manila by Night* and *Dogeaters* center on Manila as the quintessential space for queer revolutionary politics. Bernal and Hagedorn re-imagine Manila as connecting militant forms of queerness across geo-political spaces and temporalities. Both works also highlight the utility of a queer diasporic framework to understanding revolutionary politics during dictatorial rule.

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*Lahat nga mga tao sa mundo loko-loko, di ba? Yung mga mukhang ihinaharap nila sa atin, di naman nila tunay na mukha, di ba? Maraming mukha yang mga tao, may mukhang pang pamilya, may mukhang pang barkada, pang asawa, pang girlfriend, pang swardfriend, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, di ba? Iba yan ng iba, di ba? Patong-patong. Tulad ko, when my boyfriend tells me "I love you", anong mukha yon? If I know, mukhang pang etsing lang ng datung, di ba?*  
(Everyone in this world is crazy right? The faces that we see aren't their real selves, right? People have different faces. There's a face for their families, friends, spouses, girlfriend, gay friend, etc. etc. etc. right? It keeps changing, right? It's

multi-faceted. Like me, when my boyfriend tells me “I love you,” what face is that? If I know, he’s saying that to get money.”)

- Sister Sharon, from *Manila by Night* (1980)

When I was old enough and going back to the Philippines more often, it was the time of martial law when it was very repressive on the surface. At the same time there was a lot of corruption, and pornography was part of life even though you had this regime that was trying to present itself as being squeaky clean...I wanted to get to that underbelly because I felt like those were the people who nobody cared about and nobody thought about and they were too easily dismissed.

- Jessica Hagedorn, when asked why she decided to include  
Joey Sands in *Dog eaters* (1990)

This article revisits Ferdinand Marcos’ dictatorship in order to examine how certain representations of Metropolitan Manila also display queerness and queer identity that reflect the nation’s economic implosion and a population’s discontent. Queerness in this analysis does not only signify lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) identity. It also marks intimacies between economically and politically marginalized individuals in the city that challenge hetero-patriarchal notions of sexual behavior, affiliation and consanguinity. Queerness can also embody the urban dweller’s willful attachment to the wrong objects of affection, such as metropolitan waste, or to a version of Metropolitan Manila that contradicts the one that the Marcos government paraded for the West. In this regard, queerness is a significant element to cultures of and against Martial Law.

This analysis proceeds in three parts. The first part lays out the political relevance of the metropole—and the presence of nomadic and precarious relationships within it—to a film set during the dictatorship, Ishmael Bernal’s *Manila by Night*. *Manila by Night* was produced during the golden age of Philippine cinema (a period when majority of local films received wide critical acclaim), and is generally touted as Bernal’s best cinematic piece. It follows the lives of more than eight disparate people—a lesbian drug pusher (Kano), a gay clothes maker (Sharon), his lover (Pebrero), a blind masseuse (Bea), to name a few—as they navigate a chaotic and vibrant city. In Bernal’s imaginary

Manila, the city's inhabitants produce fleetingly unstable interactions with each other that escape the clean, sanitary and networked socialities that the Marcos regime demanded. Characters run into each other in dark alleys, Luneta Park, squatter crevices and red light districts during the evenings. The film's perverse spaces, though controlled by corrupt government agencies like the police, offer the possibility of unrestrained pleasure because these spaces are mostly used for drugs and sex. Pleasure is unstable, fickle and deeply powerful. Pleasure cannot be corralled within a linear narrative: it escapes each shot and jumps into others.<sup>1</sup>

In *Manila by Night*, the pleasures that the city and its informal economies offer are uncannily articulated through repetitive, almost incessant, expressions of love. Thus, the second part of this analysis focuses on the representation of love in Bernal's film. More specifically, the characters' way of orienting their love—as love for the impoverished city, as love for being high on drugs, as love for just having fun with each other amidst squalor—presents a powerful counter-discourse to the often rehearsed narratives around love proliferated by the conjugal dictators to maintain a foothold on their rule. Critics have noted that one significant element which sustained the political longevity of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos was their profession of an over-abundant love—for each other as a couple, for Philippine culture and arts and for national stability.<sup>2</sup> Personal love was thus linked to the couple's political desires to achieve economic stability, to rejuvenate a sense of cultural nationalism and to pursue infrastructural development (such as the building of multiple structures within the city aimed to better the lives of the Filipino poor).

Love is a haunting presence that amplifies and justifies dictatorial will. Perhaps it is not a coincidence, then, that Bernal provides a cautious view of falling in love by queering its iteration. In *Manila by Night*, he stages professions of love that move beyond common tropes in melodramatic Philippine cinema. The “love scenes” that populate the film occur when characters openly profess love during sex, or when they discuss love while being intoxicated, or when they voice their pessimism about love's ethics in a dingy massage parlor. By parodying professions of love, Bernal offers a direct affront to the constricting policies of the regime that disciplined the neocolonial city for its own political purposes. Love's presence can be a mode for queer critique since it resists hetero-normative cooptation by institutional apparatuses such as marriage, the family and the state. Bernal produces legible though veiled criticism of the Marcos regime's policies, as he exhibits just how politically generative Manila queer relationships can be.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly enough, the themes present in *Manila by Night* are also manifested in other artistic imaginings of Martial Law. This essay thus concludes by thinking more broadly of the role Manila and its queer relationships play in diasporic representations of Martial Law. In particular I read *Manila by Night* alongside Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*. *Dogeaters* is a non-chronological, chaotic, and fragmented text that follows the lives of Filipinos coming from different classes, sexualities, and genders as they navigate the city during the period of dictatorship. The novel is primarily narrated from the perspective of Rio Gonzaga, a budding feminist who inevitably moves to the United States, and Joey Sands, a bi-racial and queer hustler who inevitably moves to the mountains to become a guerilla fighter. Both the novel and the film are apt for comparison because of the following reasons: First, Manila is also central to the novel's plot. The city tracks the empowerment of the rich as it also becomes a haven for the poor and sexually marginalized to create spaces of belonging. Second, articulations of love also populate the work, from the love that is found in the radio serial *Love Letters* to the love that produces ethical dilemmas in the novel's most marginalized subjects (as embodied in the queer hustler Joey's relationship with the German director and tourist Rainer or the actor Romeo Rosales' failed idealization of his relationship with sales clerk Trinidad Gamboa). Love is present in the novel's ending through Hagedorn's use of the *kundiman* or the Philippine version of a love song, which she changes into an angry prayer. Discussing what inspired her to write the novel in the first place, Hagedorn notes that by creating *Dogeaters*, she intended to produce a "love letter to the homeland." Perhaps it is no coincidence then that love becomes a significant element in the work. Reflections about love critique the government's collusion with multiple imperialisms that haunt the country, as the former maintains control over the population.

The parallels between both *Manila by Night* and *Dogeaters* highlight the significance of a queer diasporic imagination to representing works about Martial Law. Current scholarship in queer studies define "queer diasporas" as collectivities that transect geographic boundaries and expose how dominant forms of national-ethnic affiliations often get linked to the heterosexual body (Sanchez-Eppler & Patton, 2000; Manalansan, 2003; Gopinath, 2005). Gayatri Gopinath (2005) suggests that as a critical practice, "a queer diaspora mobilizes questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia for radically different purposes" (p. 11). Rather than blunt its revolutionary politics, *Dogeaters'* cinematic pastiche or "cinematextual" qualities make legible meta-narratives that key in on diasporic familiarity and affinity with the queerness that has

always populated Manila's urban sights and sounds (from films to radio serials, to newspaper clippings, to rumors, to television shows like beauty pageants or singing contests). Joseph Ponce (2012) writes that through Manila's urban milieu, "Hagedorn builds a multileveled political allegory: the ideological/imaginative and military/material impact of U.S. imperialism on the Philippines; the violent state repressions imposed by martial law; and the various modes of resistance to empire and dictatorship [...] all the while underscoring how gender and sexuality are integral to those competing forces" (p. 142). Key to the novel's resistant politics is its refusal to be situated from the position of the hetero-normative male subject that often speaks for the subaltern masses in nationalistic discourses.<sup>4</sup> Similar to *Manila by Night*, majority of the political potential in Hagedorn's novel is connected to how sexually marginalized people experience their version of Metropolitan Manila.

### **Erasing Manila's Mayhem**

*Manila by Night* immediately posed a threat to the Marcos government and the image it sought to cultivate. Before being submitted to the Berlin Film Festival, Imelda Marcos demanded that the film be censored and "cleaned" of its controversial content. As Roland Tolentino (2001) recalls, the first lady asked that "all footage showing the dying city or any direct mention of Manila be deleted" (p. 166). The city's "dying" property was correspondent with the presence of poverty, crime, prostitution, homosexuality and other "vices." Mario Hernando (1993) writes that these editing changes—the movie's shortening by a full thirty minutes and the cutting of crucial sex scenes—damaged its politics, its filmic "rhythm, texture, and visual power" (p. 243). *Manila by Night* was the only film at that time that the government had banned from all forms of international exhibition. Its censorship is directly linked to representations of Manila that contradicted what Imelda wanted (and needed) to portray abroad. Yet Bernal's imagining of an active, constantly moving metropolis holds the most relevance for the militant politics present in the film.

It is of immense importance that the movie takes place in Manila. The city has always resisted attempts at normalization and restructuring. Because of the demand by international institutions like the World Bank for the metropolis to "modernize," and the Marcos regime's own push to showcase it as a "central destination" in Asia (most resonant in their holding of the ASEAN summit in Manila, and the multiple presidential visits they demanded from the United States), the municipal government enacted the massive clean-up of squatter

areas and fostered controversial development projects throughout the city. The Cultural Center, the Heart Center, the Lung Center and the ill-fitted Metro Rail Transit are some glaring examples. Manila was also expanded to include outlying townships through a “networking” of smaller towns into the larger Metropolitan Manila. Tolentino (2001) explains that “the preparation of the city by the Marcos regime required the development of a national transport infrastructure—to speak metaphorically, a network of developmental grids which might foster the flow and mobility of capital through the nation” (p. 160). Ironically, this gridding was constantly met with failure. For one, Manila’s geographic flatness made it consistently prone to flooding after each tropical storm. This made planning for an architectural systematizing of capital flows highly difficult. In terms of its populace, the quotidian resistance of squatters and other unhinged nomads—individuals who refused to end their viral proliferation—made every effort to “clean” the city of both human and non-human waste impossible (Tolentino, 2001). Imelda’s projects to make Manila “beautiful” have had to rely on purely cosmetic change, such as covering over squatter areas by creating large white walls, rather than their continual demolition. Understanding it in this light, we see how Imelda’s deletion of specific scenes and the word “Manila” in *Manila by Night* registers a disciplinary attempt to normalize the city. Imelda erases any possible readings of the city’s resistance. The seemingly innocuous “cutting” of the movie, in a larger sense, is indicative of how state power continually attempted to control what was considered unseemly about the metropolis and its populace.

Of course there is no limit to how Manila can be imagined. The Manila Bernal creates is antithetical to the ordered metropolis the dictator demanded. In plot alone, *Manila by Night* departs from realist cinema that privileges the linear depiction of characters’ struggles. It does not follow protagonists through a focused chronological story about the overcoming of strife. As Jonathan Beller (2001) notes, the film shows how “progress is not linearly connected with plot development according to a World Bank-approved script, and individuated subjects do not emerge either triumphant or even altogether consolidated” (p. 356). Non-linearity is a strategic move to resist the very elisions of Manila’s properties that Imelda enacted. By connecting the city to its inhabitants, the director taps into the metropolis’s thriving force. In a metonymic sense, Bernal imagines the resistance of the people transecting the gritty and dark Metropolitan Manila as part and parcel of the dissidence that has always characterized the city.

Aesthetically, the camera shots Bernal uses are often unstable. There are no large-scale panoramic frames in the film. The director focuses on

characters that constantly walk, run, or sprint through the city. The screen shots are almost manic, refusing to situate themselves in a comfortable position as stable representations of the setting. Both the people's movement and camera's gaze are, in a sense, nomadic. Nomadic subjectivity is a key site for explicating resistance, because it highlights the failure of state power to police citizens precisely in the spaces where they can be most stealthy and playful.<sup>5</sup>

Adrian Mendizabal (2011) notes that *Manila by Night's* temporal transitions get cut abruptly, and the external colors of red and blue that saturate the background reflect the characters' different psychological states. Thus, any revolutionary politics that can be derived from the film must also draw from Manila itself and of the affective comportment of the citizens that transect it. The film was also heavily censored because it presents an excessive display of sex work and drug trafficking in the city's underbelly. During the regime's height, the government condoned sex work and drug abuse on the city streets with the stipulation that they serve the purpose of monetary gain for the police, which in turn furthered corruption through cronyism. *Manila by Night's* editing shows its audience a paradox they are familiar with (and which Hagedorn alludes to in this article's epigraph): sex work and drug trafficking must in actuality only happen *on the streets* of Manila, but never *on screen*. The interactions of the film's protagonists caused by these excesses—when the lesbian drug addict falls in love with a blind woman who is only interested in the drugs she provides for free, when that same blind woman is almost sold to Japanese businessmen by her failed lover, when the *bakla* figure is able to discern that the “love” for him could only be an illusion, when the prostitute turned pious mother learns that her “love” cannot save a son who has a *bakla* lover—highlight just how generative queer relationships in the city can be.

## Loving Manila's Nightlife

It is uncanny that Bernal's film begins with the *lesbyana* character's enthusiastic, and unstable, profession of love. Without any hesitation, and in a drugged-out high, the lesbian drug pusher Kano stands on the ledge of a building rooftop. She proclaims her love for the city, her voice conveying a hint of euphoria as she utters in the most carefree tone: “I love you Manila, no matter what you are. Young, old, smelly, ugly, woman, man, *bakla*, or lesbian” (*Manila by Night*, 1990). Kano is covered in darkness. This darkness encourages her to yell what is marked as excessive queer affect. The dark serves as a form of connection to the city removed from the “clean” and



Figure 1. Manila by Night, 1980.

“sanitary” place that the Marcoses desired Manila to represent. Kano’s love is messy, because it moves away from the romantic ideals commonly shown in Philippine melodrama. Melodramatic films often deploy love as that which exists between lovers in a courtship or marriage. Often the plot then revolves around a mistress who attempts to come between this love. It is also often about the idealization of love for another person, one who reciprocates this love. This love is certainly not love for a filthy, dirty, and chaotic city. As a point of departure, one that the film continually restages, Kano’s love is instead about the pleasures of being on a cognitive and geographic high. She sees everything from this dual pedestal, and is able to discern the sensate and carnal experiences the city and its citizens offer. The only hints of color the audience sees come from the neon lights of the clubs above, clubs that further entice contact and unmitigated pleasure through drugs and sex. Aside from Kano, Bea and her guide are standing on the rooftop with her. They are present for only one purpose, to get high with Kano. Although the blind masseuse cannot see the city, she can, however, feel and hear it through her drugged out “trip.” Bea’s tagging along to acquire a similar high also exhibits the pleasures of the metropolis as directly channeled through the city’s inhabitants.

Kano chooses to state her elation as love. Yet her standing on the ledge, which literalizes her own tenuous position on screen, underscores the very instability of the “love” she professes. The love Kano so assuredly mentions in the beginning, as a declamatory statement, starts breaking down after its initial utterance. Kano’s love moves from love of the city to her affection for



Bea. Prompted by Bea's assertion that she plans to go with her boyfriend Greg Williams to Saudi Arabia, Kano feigns suicide, and then angrily asks: "So do you really love me?" (*Manila by Night*, 1990). In response to Kano's question, Bea quips: "Of course, you give me drugs. Come on, let's do shotgun again." This non sequitur highlights the tenuousness of love in *Manila by Night* regardless of its citational recognizability. Bea's love is inherently linked to the sensation that drugs provide through Kano's generosity. Her love for Greg Williams is equally uncertain, since it is based on the hope of a new beginning through his job as an overseas contract worker, which betrays her by the movie's climax.

All of the interactions between characters, especially when they involve sexual intercourse or drugs, are punctuated with a demand for, a profession of, or a disavowal of love. Ishmael Bernal uses love as an allegory and calls on the local audience's recognition of an often-rehearsed narrative in Philippine cinema and Philippine politics.<sup>6</sup> Love is not linked to a romanticized notion of reciprocity but is instead a signifier for excessive pleasure: pleasure despite illusion, pleasure despite contradiction and pleasure amidst suffering. The "love" the characters feel, for the city and each other, is always jaded and precarious precisely since it always depends upon forms of exchange that are never fully achievable. The love in Bernal's film, contrary to the limited phrases, images and narratives the Marcos regime deployed, produces political possibilities inherent in the interactions between citizens that, in their most banal forms, produce complex notions of kinship, militancy, and knowledge. These allow them to enjoy, live, be pained and survive.

*Manila by Night* queers dominant representations of love in order to create a space for revolutionary possibility. Aside from a mode of disciplining, love is also the site of social transformation. Chela Sandoval (2000) has suggested that love has the ability to be "unruly, willful and anarchic" (p. 141). Love's potency gets reproduced in the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Trinh T. Minh-ha, Third World feminists who deploy love's modalities in order to imagine a feminist approach to challenging oppression. As Sandoval notes, "these writers who theorize social change understand 'love' as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement" (p. 142). Love resists teleology. It is thus an essential element in an already resistant methodology for those who experience oppression: resistant to particular forms of expression, resistant to academic and critical reading, resistant to closure and definition, resistant to a seemingly fixed category.

If love is a site for political consciousness in the movie, one of the routes to this consciousness is mapped out through the ability to gauge when love is only an illusion. In *Manila by Night*, this ability is squarely placed on the shoulders of Sister Sharon, the *bakla* figure who, in its abject representation, produces an undoing of its own phobic re-citation. In one particular scene, Kano and Sister Sharon meet for the first time in Bea's massage parlor. This is, consequently, the only time that the two legibly queer characters will share the screen at all in the entire film. Both are bathed in red light. The music is 70's disco and upbeat. This differs from other background music during other scenes, which is a psychedelic compilation of non-synchronic rhythms often used to signal drugs or sex. After discussing the music, Kano informs Sharon of a curiosity about his "kind." Sharon is offended and Kano attempts to soothe him: "Don't get offended. Don't you ... aren't men hard?" Sharon replies, "Look, that's what makes it delicious." Kano's turn to a double entendre represents an understanding of her own gendered positionality within the streets of Manila as a *lesbyana*. She confronts the difficulty of navigating the streets among men. Unlike Sharon, she is also subject to sex work and prostitution because of her gender and class status. Kano's drug pushing is thus a form of resistance to this normative form of labor expected of poor women. Sharon's reply is meant to be comedic, and consequently, disturbing to its viewers. Bernal confronts homophobic expectations and preconceptions about the *bakla* figure. In the cultural lexicon, a common phobic stereotype about the *bakla* figure is that he is parasitic for "pleasures



Figure 2. *Manila by Night*, 1980.

of the male flesh.” This insatiable desire must be fed in any way, the most common of which entails maintaining a relationship with a “straight” man where the *bakla* figure is a provider. Thus, *bakla* in Philippine culture is also often phobically read through classed narratives of patronage and support. *Bakla* relationships are about classed forms of intimacy.

Kano further asks: “Do you believe in true love?” (see figure 2). This question is consistent with the movie’s beginning. Kano still searches for a logic that adequately describes how she feels for Bea. Initially, Sharon gives in to the question. Ever so briefly, he envisions the love of the men he supports. This moment is a temporary one, since he abruptly comes to a stark realization: “Stop with your love talk, that is already passé. You know true love, that’s just an illusion. They say when you have true love life becomes beautiful. When I fall in love, life goes to shit.” For the majority of the local audience watching this movie, in a majority Catholic country, it would be understandable why Sharon’s love “goes to shit:” the *bakla* figure’s love is morally unacceptable. Yet what is striking about Sharon’s statement is that it comes to voice a noticeable failure of how love has been constituted and re-constituted in the film for all the city’s inhabitants. Sharon becomes a voice of resistance precisely because of the ways in which “queer love” must always be removed from the love of all the other characters. If love is a representative trope for dominant narratives that flatten rich and unstable relationships between individuals, and a larger allegory for the Marcoses themselves, it is then compelling that Sharon sees this flattening out. It is precisely the *bakla* figure’s disposition for being phobically read as someone who can only be loved a certain way, and never in others, that allows him to serve as an epistemological site to question love’s very limitation as a signifier for other forms of intimacy and pleasure in the city.

## **Nostalgic Love and Manila**

Similar to *Manila by Night*, love is an affect that haunts *Dogeater’s* multiple narratives. In fact, Jessica Hagedorn notes that one of the main reasons why she decided to end *Dogeaters* with a chapter titled “Kundiman” was her attraction to the feeling of unfulfilled love that the traditional *kundiman* conjures. As she notes, “it’s very melancholy music. It’s a love song often sung, it seems to me, in a way or played in a way as if the love will never be satisfied” (Hagedorn, 1990). Channeling these feelings, Hagedorn transforms unfulfilled love into resentment, ambivalence and anger—on a personal and national level. These conflicted emotions are articulated by an unspecified narrator towards a female deity or force. In form and structure, Hagedorn’s “Kundiman” is a

modified version of “The Lord’s Prayer,” which is usually spoken in Catholic mass and is often repeated within a group setting. Rather than convey pious adoration, the speaker instead voices conflicted love towards this god, noting at one point: “I would curse you in Waray, Ilocano, Tagalog, Spanish, English, Portuguese, and Mandarin; I would curse you but I choose to love you instead” (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 250). The turn to multiple languages, some of which were spoken by the country’s colonizers, highlight the colonial legacy that haunts the Philippine nation, which quotidian exercises such as praying nonetheless repeat. The speaker resists this repetition by stating her own resentment at the act of recitation. While lamenting on whether Hagedorn’s use of the *kundiman* could be read as having nationalistic implications, Ponce (2012) suggests that underlying this impulse is author’s critique of love’s heteronormativity. As he writes, “Hagedorn challenges the adamant heterosexualism of the traditional *kundiman*, flirting with and overlaying several forms of love—familiar (child-mother), queer (female-female), and national (suitor-beloved)” (p. 147). In other words, by queering the *kundiman*, Hagedorn also questions how dominant nationalism and diasporic memory are calibrated towards heterosexuality. Interestingly enough, the novel’s speaker firmly implants this renewed sense of queer nationalism from the position of the Manila inhabitant, by adamantly stating: “Manila I was born here, Manila I will die here” (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 250). Thus, any semblance of nationalism the prayer conveys is also intrinsically linked to the city’s past, present, and future. Manila is both the site of, and the sign of, the dictatorial rule and unequal class politics that colonial legacies often create.

The dissatisfaction with love’s limited meanings—especially heteronormative ones—saturates the entire novel. Often, characters in the book seem to ask: who controls love and how is love articulated? What forms does love take and for what purposes—personal or political? For example, not only does *Dog eaters* end with a cultural artifact that has queered love as its central affect, it also begins with one that revolves around melodramatic love stories. The novel’s initial chapter is titled “Love Letters,” which is the name of a radio serial that the metropolitan masses have come to listen to religiously. *Love Letters* also serves as the marker of the material conditions that separate the city’s inhabitants according to classes, genders and sexualities. The radio serial is the most accessible medium of communication for the poor, as opposed to Hollywood movies that those from the middle-classes such as Rio and Pucha are able to watch at their whim. Indeed, *Love Letters*’ mass appeal is precisely what irks Rio’s father as he scolds her for listening to a show that the “*bakya*” crowd or the general public can easily partake. This

mass appeal is also manipulated for political gain by the regime, as rumors suggest that even the president is fond of the show. *Love Letters* also serves as a preliminary glimpse into Rio's budding sense of Filipino nationalism. Listening to the show becomes a key quotidian act that she does with her maternal grandmother Lola whose presence is all but erased by the Gonzaga clan because of the former's provincial roots. By listening to *Love Letters* with her Lola and their maids, Rio resists the entreaties of her family to a particular type of forgetting and erasure of Filipino identity, embodied in their fawning over her paternal grandmother *Abuelita Soccoro*.

Rio provides a general schematic of the *Love Letter's* plot: "Just like our Tagalog movies, the serial is heavy with pure love, blood debts, luscious revenge, the wisdom of mothers and the enduring sorrow of Our Blessed Virgin Barbara Villanueva. It's a delicious tradition, the way we weep without shame" (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 12). Linking the melodramatic violence and suffering in *Love Letters* to the literal violence experienced by the city's citizens during the regime, Hagedorn foregrounds the show as Daisy Avila, the daughter of the opposition senator and beauty queen-turned-feminist revolutionary muse, is violently interrogated and raped by Colonel Jesus De Jesus and his men while General Ledesma and Pepe Carreon watch. The general turns up the radio show's volume as he begins to interrogate Daisy: "'Do you like these melodramas *hija*? Kind of sentimental, don't you think?' Daisy stares back at him. 'Your father and I shared a mutual respect of the remarkable culture of this country'" (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 212). The intermingling of the fictional violence and the literal violence Daisy experiences highlight an ambivalent embrace of the love stories within a show like *Love Letters*. That the opposition senator and the regime's main right-hand man can share the same love of the cultural norms that populate the archipelago exhibits the egregiousness of the ways in which these cultural forms are both interpolated and used for different means and ends. In Hagedorn's Manila, these narratives of love can encourage quotidian forms of resistance (as is evident in Rio's choosing to listen to the show with her *Lola*), but also, as is often the case, serve as a tool for disciplinary control (as the radio serial that the masses listen to replaces and often covers the true narratives of violence that the city's citizens experience during the regime, while news of these violence occurrences are covered over and censored by the government). Even the hopeless actor Romeo Rosales, when he decides to leave his girlfriend Trinidad, is warned by his mother, "Sometimes it's not about the kind of love you've learned about from those silly movies and songs you like so much" (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 163). This warning is indeed ominous, because it is Romeo's refusal to heed this advice

that makes him a suspect in the murder of Senator Avila. Rosales' reel version of love becomes the poison that makes him susceptible to real violence.

Love's failure is also used to highlight the unequal politics embedded in the queer relationship between Joey and Rainer. Rainer is in the Philippines because one of his movies is being featured in the film festival that the First Lady sponsors. Joey and others critique the festival and the preparations it entails during their banter in the *Coco Rico*:

The Manila International Film Festival is the First Lady's latest whim. She orders the city and slums rejuvenated with fresh coats of paint, windows and doorways lined with pots of plastic flowers, the streets swept and re-swept by women with 'Metro Manila Aide' printed in big black letters on the back and front. Even Uncle's shack gets the treatment. Funny thing is, it all looks fake. Painted scenery in a slum no one's going to bother visiting. ... Fucking crazy bitch, he calls the First Lady. Talagang sirang ulo. (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 130)

Akin to *Manila by Night*, *Dogeaters* shows that marginal spaces where queer pleasure proliferate also become key sites for locating critique. Although the *Coco Rico* is first introduced as a space removed from Philippine politics, traces of American capitalism (through sex work), hierarchies of gender (through the treatment of women), and unequal class politics (through the clientele) slowly emerge. In this particular moment, the queer clubgoers are gossiping with each other, particularly about how the First Lady's personal fixations morph into a full-on "edifice" complex. Joey's ironic tone vacillates between comedic sarcasm and deeply felt resentment. Sands embodies the influence of U.S. imperialism within the country, something he resents but also benefits from. Similar to the role that queer subjects play in *Manila by Night*, Joey articulates a critique of the regime's policies

Before he decides to steal the director's drugs and money, and before he witnesses the assassination of Senator Avila, Joey hears Rainer ask: "Have you ever been in love?" (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 148). Immediately, Joey remembers his previous lover, the American soldier who eventually left him only to send a postcard of the Sands Casino, Joey's namesake. This memory highlights the failure of love for Joey. Thus, he does not reciprocate Rainer's profession of being a "little" in love with him and is aloof when Rainer asks him whether he will be sorry when the former leaves. Joey nonchalantly mentions that he will be whatever Rainer wants him to be. Thus, the director gets agitated:

“Whoretalk. You are too young to be cynical, Joey. You enjoy hurting me don’t you? This is foolish I suppose. I’m much too old for you, anyway” (Hagedorn, 1990, p. 148). The failure of love in this scene is tied to Joey’s recognition of his role in this relationship. As a hustler, Joey is also all too aware of his place within the scripted economic transaction that he and Rainer have agreed upon. He understands the precariousness of what Rainer sees as their reciprocal intimacy. Rainer’s turn to his age, rather than his economic power in the relationship, ignores the fact that from the beginning, their relationship has always been about a very specific objectification of Joey as an exotic Filipino sex worker to purchase. Even queer love in *Dogeaters*, similar to *Manila by Night*, is contingent upon the relationship between individuals who are always affected by American imperialism, poverty, and governmental control.

It is perhaps unsurprising that both *Manila by Night* and *Dogeaters* center on Manila as the quintessential space for queer revolutionary politics. While discussing the utility of LGBT specific film festivals, Joel David (2006) notes that even as a mainstream endeavor, “what makes a movie like *Manila by Night* so effective, and still threatening, a quarter century after its release, is the fact that its depiction of polymorphous sexualities is recognizable to anyone who has grown up in a Philippine urban milieu” (p. 616). David’s reflection is noteworthy because it calls attention to the political utility of the spaces and places of everyday life where local modalities of queer cultures exist. He also suggests that rather than just serve as a mode for remembering urban realities, nostalgia for Manila’s queer urban life actually performs important political work. Given that David’s reflections were articulated during a talk entitled “Queer Shuttling: Korea-Manila-New York,” his own experience as a the diasporic critic concretizes how memories of Manila’s queer cultures can create a connective thread for a larger diaspora to re-imagine the city’s resistance across multiple locales and temporalities. This sentiment is precisely what Hagedorn channels in the article’s epigraph, as she discusses the desire to understand Manila’s most silenced citizens and what knowledge about the regime their very existence could possibly offer.

*Manila by Night* and *Dogeaters* ultimately exhibit that one cannot understand the expanded power of the national government without understanding how Manila serves as the metonym for the policies of control, direct domination and bodily repression. Abuses to human rights during the regime’s tenure cannot be fully addressed unless local governments after the regime acknowledge the links between the consolidation of power and the continued transformation of the urban space. As critics such as Roland

Tolentino (2000) and Neferti Tadiar (2004) have argued, policies around urban restructuring were not only continued but improved by future governments for the sake of capitalist expansion. Thus, both works also demand a rethinking of current metropolitan queer formations and their attendant politics, especially during the continued expansion of transnational capital through call centers, mall cultures and the ideals of a more achievable middle class life. These past queer formations provide a model for understanding the ways in which queer communities are depolitized in the present, or possibly resist such depolitization. Contributing to growing scholarship that unpacks Manila's globality and its queer politics (Baytan, 2008; Garcia, 2008; Benedicto, 2008), this article provides a somewhat nostalgic look into queer cultures of the past. In so doing, I suggest that although these metropolitan spaces and populations were heavily disciplined, they also fostered queerness that allow for other versions of the city to exist and for other modalities of intimacy to proliferate. Perhaps this politics of a queer past can enlighten us in our metropolitan present.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The pleasure coming from these tactile interactions is reminiscent of a “dying” space in another city, on another continent. In Times Square Red/Times Square Blue, Samuel Delany (2001) writes a treatise on how to revive the generative relationships (sexual and non-sexual alike) that existed in Times Square before it was cleansed of its “seedy” locales. For Delany, although these moments

cannot be categorized as love relationships, they evoke a different discourse of desire, pleasure, and intimacy as potent as love. The pleasure that Delany experiences is, by its very definition, queer. It is queer not only because pleasure moves beyond normative modes of affiliation (heterosexual, procreative, and between people of similar classes). It is queer because, in its vast richness, it stems from relationships that cannot foreclose possibility.

<sup>2</sup>Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos gained mass popularity through an excessive display of themselves as nurturing duo. Atop Malacañang Palace's entrance for instance, they commissioned a mural that portrayed them as *Malakas* (strong) and *Maganda* (beautiful), the country's mythic father and mother, the root of its inhabitants. Vicente Rafael (2000) writes that "As Malakas and Maganda, Ferdinand and Imelda imaged themselves not only as the father and the mother of an extended Filipino family. They also conceived of their privileged position as allowing them to cross and redraw all boundaries: social, political, cultural" (p. 122). Thus, aside from serving as metaphor for and spectacle through this mythic relationship, the Marcoses saw themselves as destined to run the nation, unify the country through their regime.

<sup>3</sup>Similar to other "New Cinematic" works such as Lino Brocka's *Manila in the Claws of Neon* and *Macho Dancers*, Bernal deftly utilizes what Jose B. Capino (2010) refers to as the bomba genre, or the genre of films most popular from the 1970s to Corazon Aquino's tenure that showed overtly sexual love scenes. Capino suggests that the bomba genre resurfaced after 1986 as an answer to the triumphalism and complacency of the Aquino government. Returning the genre to the period of the Marcos dictatorship, I reframe Bernal's film's use of the same genre as a way of critiquing the triumphalism of the Marcos regime around the rejuvenating of the metropolitan space.

<sup>4</sup>The novel's centering on gender and sexuality, enacted mostly through the perspectives of oppressed women and gay men, has allowed critics to defend *Dogeaters* from accusations of its pandering to a Western audience. Epifanio San Juan Jr. (1995) has suggested that a postcolonial fetishization saturates Hagedorn's work, connected to the novel's cinematic form, to its turn to pastiche and to its postmodern aesthetics. San Juan sees the novel's style as symptomatic of Filipino-American writing geared towards a Western audience and of the unequal politics inherent in representational practices that stem from hybrid lenses. As he surmises, "the novel becomes a Filipino-American testimony of reflexive nihilism" (p. 126). In response to San Juan's hesitations, Rachel Lee (1999) focuses on the marginalized positionalities that populate the novel as a response, noting: "His [San Juan's] critique of Hagedorn's pastiche, then, remains blind to the revisionist qualities of her several stories: they may be re-limning the frame of the postcolonial, transnational culture, but they are doing so from the perpetual nonsubjects of history" (p. 81). The novel's style and narrative voice is precisely what anchors its postcoloniality. Lisa Lowe (1996) suggests that Hagedorn enacts "decolonizing writing", or writing that specifically critiques the effects of U.S. imperialism through attention to hybrid form.

<sup>5</sup>Rosi Braidotti (1994) writes that, "Nomadic shifts designate a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge" (p. 6). We see this form of nomadism existing in *Manila By Night*, furthering the contact of characters with each other, a contact that cannot be easily policed because it inadvertently produces much needed experiences about how characters can survive Martial Law Manila. This nomadic ontology fosters the making and re-making of their world, in ways

that are counterproductive for capital.

“The thematic of betrayal and love is common in most melodramatic movies in the Philippines in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Love teams such as the infamous Nora Aunor/Tirso Cruz coupling catapulted formerly unknown actors into “superstardom.” The government also proliferated this romantic ideal. Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos mass-produced themselves as a “love team,” marketing their marriage as a national conjugal spectacle. Their strong marriage is a metaphor for a unified and stronger nation-state. The production of a veneer of love, especially in its most hetero-patriarchal form, is about disciplining a population to be complicit in their subjection to the dictatorship. Even in the contemporary moment, the Philippine public is obsessed with the country’s bachelor president, Benigno Aquino Jr. The media and the press use every opportunity to speculate, discuss, and gossip about the various women that Aquino has been rumored to possibly date. Who will he marry, and with whom has he been “going steady?” Understanding this cultural milieu, Ishmael Bernal uses love as a place to initiate critique. Bernal breaks with these chains of filmic and political signification; love’s iterability and citational force are dependent upon its constantly changing meaning.

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