

Culinary Nostalgia and Postcolonial Identity: A Postcolonial Reading of Carmen Guerrero Nakpil's Where's the Patis? Through Edward Said's Orientalism

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Abstract: *This paper examines Carmen Guerrero Nakpil's essay Where's the Patis? through the lens of post-colonial theory, specifically Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. The study explores how Filipino identity, culture, and diaspora are represented in the context of migration, mimicry, and nostalgia. Using a textual analysis approach, the essay is analyzed for post-colonial themes such as mimicry, colonial ideology, diaspora, and the quest for cultural identity. Findings indicate that despite cultural adaptation abroad, Filipinos maintain strong ties to their homeland, particularly through culinary practices, language, and social behaviors, reflecting the resilience of Filipino identity. This study contributes to understanding Filipino diasporic literature within post-colonial discourse.*

Keywords— post-colonialism, Edward Said, Orientalism, Filipino diaspora, mimicry, cultural identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a conduit for human expression, merging heart, soul, and aesthetic sensibilities into artistic forms that capture the human experience (Lewis, 2013). Beyond mere entertainment, literature mediates social perception, allowing readers to engage with different cultures, beliefs, and values, thereby fostering deeper understanding and empathy. As McDougal (2009) emphasizes, poetry and prose provide structured avenues to articulate feelings, beliefs, and socio-cultural realities.

The essay Where's the Patis? by Carmen Guerrero Nakpil reflects the experiences of Filipinos abroad, particularly in terms of cultural nostalgia and identity. Nakpil's work offers insight into Filipino diasporic consciousness, highlighting how expatriates navigate foreign environments while remaining emotionally and culturally tied to the Philippines. This study adopts a post-colonial theoretical lens, specifically Edward Said's Orientalism, to uncover the cultural dynamics embedded in Nakpil's essay.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Philippines has experienced a long history of colonization under Spain and the United States, and Japan resulting in profound cultural, political, and linguistic influences that continue to shape Filipino identity. These colonial encounters produced complex dynamics of cultural adaptation, resistance, and hybridity, particularly evident in the experiences of Filipinos who migrate abroad. As migration increased in the twentieth century, the Filipino diaspora emerged as a significant social and cultural phenomenon,

marked by negotiations between assimilation and cultural preservation.

Literature has become a vital medium for articulating these diasporic experiences. Filipino writers often explore themes of identity, displacement, nostalgia, and colonial mentality, revealing the psychological and cultural tensions inherent in postcolonial societies. Within this context, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil's essay Where's the Patis? reflects the lived realities of Filipinos abroad, particularly their longing for homeland traditions and the subtle ways colonial influence shapes behavior and self-perception.

This study situates Nakpil's essay within postcolonial discourse, drawing on Edward Said's framework in Orientalism to examine how cultural identity is constructed, negotiated, and preserved in diasporic settings. By analyzing the symbolic significance of food and everyday practices, the research highlights how Filipino identity persists despite foreign influence, emphasizing resilience and cultural continuity in postcolonial and transnational contexts.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Filipino diaspora has long been a focus of literary scholarship. Scholars such as Bolosan (1946), Villa (1970), Gonzales (1950), and Santos (1966) have explored the negotiation of identity, assimilation, and nostalgia in the context of migration. These works highlight the tension between cultural preservation and adaptation, particularly in relation to language, social behaviors, and culinary practices (Bloom, 2014).

Food has emerged as a recurring symbol of cultural identity within Filipino diasporic literature. Research indicates that culinary preferences serve as a medium of cultural retention,

reinforcing connections to homeland values and familial structures (Crang, 2010). Nakpil's emphasis on patis, a staple Filipino condiment, epitomizes this phenomenon, symbolizing a tangible link to home, tradition, and collective memory.

Moreover, studies on post-colonial mimicry and colonial mentality reveal how migrants strategically adopt aspects of dominant cultures while maintaining a core indigenous identity. This duality underscores the complex negotiation of identity among Filipinos abroad, who may emulate Western customs while retaining emotional and cultural ties to the Philippines (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1961).

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to analyze Carmen Guerrero Nakpil's *Where's the Patis?* using postcolonial theory, particularly Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine the representation of Filipino diasporic identity in the essay.
2. Identify manifestations of mimicry and colonial mentality among Filipino expatriates.
3. Analyze the symbolic role of food, particularly patis, as a marker of cultural identity and resistance.
4. Determine how postcolonial concepts such as diaspora and hybridity operate within the text.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Post-colonial literature emerged prominently after World War II, becoming a coherent movement by the mid-twentieth century that interrogates cultural, political, geographical, and psychological dimensions of post-colonial experience (Nripen, 2017). Central themes include cultural dominance, racism, identity, and inequality, often articulated through distinct narrative techniques. Prominent theorists include Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, each contributing foundational concepts to the understanding of post-colonial discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2013).

Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) remains central to post-colonial analysis, defining Orientalism as a discursive framework through which the West constructs knowledge about the East. Said argues that representations of "the Orient" are less about objective realities and more about maintaining power structures and cultural hierarchies. Key concepts from post-colonial theory relevant to this study include:

- Othering: Constructing identities by contrasting "us" versus "them."
- Mimicry: Colonized subjects adopting colonizer behaviors to gain acceptance while negotiating identity (Bhabha, 1994).
- Diaspora: Cultural displacement and the ongoing negotiation of identity in foreign spaces.

- Hybridity/Syncretism: Blending cultural elements from multiple sources while retaining native identity.
- Nostalgia and Rootlessness: Emotional and psychological dislocation inherent in migration (Said, 1978).

These concepts frame the textual analysis of Nakpil's essay, revealing the subtleties of Filipino identity formation and cultural retention in transnational contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative textual analysis to examine Carmen Guerrero Nakpil's *Where's the Patis?* The essay was selected for its rich representation of Filipino diasporic experiences, including cultural adaptation, nostalgia, and identity negotiation. Analysis focuses on identifying post-colonial elements: mimicry, colonial ideology, diaspora, and nostalgia using a theoretical lens grounded in Edward Said's Orientalism and supplemented by related post-colonial concepts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first paragraph of *Where's the Patis?*

"Travel has become the great Filipino dream. In the same way that an American dreams of becoming a millionaire or an English boy dreams of going to one of the great universities, the Filipino dreams of going abroad. His most constant vision is that of himself as tourist. It is evident that the element of mimicry is present where the Filipinos are said to aim the same pleasure as other nations, specifically Westerners. "In the same way, that an American dreams of becoming a millionaire... the Filipino dreams of going abroad."

It suggests that most Filipinos want to adapt the same lifestyle as the Westerners, to be tourist and to travel the world. In order to fulfil such dream is to study, work, or migrate to another country (Natividad 2012). "Many Filipinos are becoming hopeless to see the country's economic condition attain significant progress. Let's face it again, having a corrupt government, mismanagement of the country's assets, gross inefficiency in government functions, and other things that stop an entire country from developing due to self-interest and greed, what else can we expect from these? Every one of us will always be frustrated with such condition for we know that we will not grow under these circumstances." Therefore, most of Filipinos view the Philippine economy to be put their trust on other countries for they believe that this will lead them to the delights that they wished to have.

Moreover, in the fourth paragraph of the essay. As stated,

"Consider the Pinoy abroad. He has discarded barong tagalog or "polo" for a sleek, dark Western suit. He takes to the habiliments from Hongkong, Brooks Brothers or Savile Row with the greatest of ease. He has also shed the casual

informality of manner that is characteristically Filipino. He gives himself the airs of a cosmopolite to the credit-card born. He is extravagantly courteous (specially in a borrowed language) and has taken to hand-kissing and to plenty of American "D'you minds?"

The element of colonial ideology is also vivid specifically in the line, "He is extravagantly courteous (specially in a borrowed language) and has taken to hand-kissing and to a plenty of American

"D'you minds?" Filipinos want to learn the American accent to at least deviate themselves from other

Filipinos who do not speak the language artistically, meaningfully, and clearly. According to Jerome (Yomyomy), Filipinos speak the English language worst. That is why Filipinos reside overseas try hard to practice the American accent so that they will not be commended for having a bad accent of the language. Also, Mankey (2001), added that the accent of Filipinos has something to do with the second-language and the native-like speech.

Moreover, the same element (mimicry) is clearly evident in the first three sentences of the fourth paragraph of Where's the Patis?

"Consider the Pinoy abroad. He has discarded barong tagalog or "polo" for sleek, dark Western suit. He takes to the habiliments from Hongkong, Brooks Brothers or Savile Row with the greatest of ease. He also shed the casual informality of manner that is characteristically Filipino."

In other words, Filipino overseas want themselves to belong to where they reside abroad. Talking more about the history of traditional Filipino fashion, Gino wrote a book entitled "Fashionable Filipinas: An Evolution of Philippine National Dress in Photographs 1860- 1960. In his interview in PEP.ph, Gino once thought that Instagram have incredible images of current fashion trends and historical fashion but there was no available Filipino traditional clothes. At least from that, 'millennials' who are fond of Instagram and other social media may reflect on what and how traditional clothes evolve along the years. In addition, he remarked "And lakas ng Filipino flavour and we were so proud of it. Hindi kinakahiya, unlike today." Filipinos always want to mimic the current vogue habilitment styles specifically, the Korean fashion clothes that were flaunt in various websites, and social media.

Further, the bleak feeling of being distant from homeland is very depressing. According to Felipe (2014), residing abroad is very hard and delirious. As he had said, he cannot help but to feel sad and nostalgic because he does not have what he really wants to aim especially if his families and special someone are not with him. Also, he noted that, he cannot deny the fact that he does not see the things he also have into his soul he was young, this were mentioned as; foods, traditions, cultures, and even customs.

Going back to the essay, the element of diaspora or affinity of Filipinos is also present in the essay as seen on the third paragraph of "Where's the Patis?"

"Yet having left the Manila International Airport in a pink cloud of despedidas and sampaguita garlands and pabilin, the dream turns into a nightmare very quickly. But why? Because the first bastion of the Filipino spirit is the palate. And in all the palaces and fleshpots and skyscrapers of that magic world called "abroad" there is no patis to be had."

The patis is a representation of the vast array of Filipino taste from different Filipino food.

Certainly in the line "*...and in all the palaces and fleshpots and skyscrapers of that magic world called "abroad" there is no patis to be had.*" The patis provides the taste of saltiness to any food. The salty taste is related to life in some religious text as the bible. As written in the book of Mathew chapter 5:13-16.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how it shall be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trample underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

The salt here is a representation of tantamount of life, without salt in the taste, may not have life. The same idea may be applied where the life of the Filipinos without their culture will be void and empty. The lines depict the Filipinos who are in abroad that wherever they go they still search for the patis. The word patis is not only enclose with its literal meaning thus, patis here is a symbol of Filipino taste and a representation of the Filipino culture that the Filipinos are still affiliated with their identity as Filipinos despite the great distance between them and their country.

On the other hand, in the sixth paragraph of Where's the Patis? As presented,

"But as he sits down to meal, no matter how sumptuous, his heart sinks. His stomach juices, he discovers, are much less cosmopolitan than the rest of him. They are much less adaptable than his sartorial or social habits. They have remained in that dear barrio in Bulacan or in that little town in Ilocos and nothing that is set on the table before him can summon them to London or Paris. The diasporic element was also seen vividly specifically in the line, "They have remained in that barrio in Bulacan or in that little town in Ilocos and nothing that is set on the table before him can summon them to London or Paris".

The feeling of deeply longing on the Filipino cuisine especially, in Bulacan and Ilocos was depicted. Even if sumptuous and delicious food is surrounded to Filipino, they still have the longing for the foods that their palate is used to savored. As Philip Crang (2010) remarked, "First, performing

'diasporic memories', their tasks and smells connect to personal and social memories of Philippines. The food they provide are implicated in the reproduction of Filipino identities, in particular with regard to what is cast as women's role in the ongoing production of a domestic Philippine culture." In other words, Filipinos still yearn for Filipino food because eventhough they are away from their own country, the smell and taste of the food will never slip into their minds.

In addition, on the eighth paragraph of *Where's the Patis?* The Filipinos were defeated because of their strong longingness for Filipino cuisine as mentioned, "...first bastion of the Filipino is the palate". Even if you serve them sumptuous and expensive food, they still seek for food that is sensational for them. Also for that, they cannot detached themselves from their nationality. The traits of Filipinos will always stay regardless how long they have been residing abroad. Also in this paragraph, it was mentioned that different foods were as the same as Philippine cuisine but not as savory as in the Philippines.

Furthermore, in the seventeenth paragraph of the essay,

"Better than a Chinese restaurant is the kitchen of a kababayan. When in a foreign city, a Pinoy searches every busy sidewalk, theatre, restaurant for the well-remembered golden features of a fellowpinoy. But make it no mistake. It is only because he is in desperate need of a Filipino meal and, like a homing pigeon, he follows his nose to a Filipino kitchen that is well stocked with bagoong, patis, balat ng lumpia, gabi leaves and misua."

The Pinoy searches for his kababayan's kitchen to fulfill his complaining stomach. It is the best way to cope with Filipinos affinity. Only a kababayan will truly understand where their longing is coming from. This feeling was depicted in the movie "KITA-KITA" of Emroy and Alexandra de Rossi. The happiness and excitement of finally meeting a kababayan was vividly seen in the movie. The first time that the male main character went to Sapporo, he saw Alexandra and immediately called him "KABAYAN". Without the prior knowledge, the female main character is blind and she is alone in her house. She only eats what is available on the menu of restaurants who offered free delivery. Of course, with the personality and soft-heartedness of Filipinos, the male main character (Emroy) cooks for Alexandra every day. Emroy cannot help but to give a helping hand for Alexandra. His simple efforts showed how caring Filipinos are especially when they met kababayan who needs help. Filipinos are always ready to give a helping hand as seen in the movie.

Moving on, to the ninth paragraph of the essay,

"Now he must make another choice. The waiter, with an air of a prime minister approaching a concordat, murmurs something about choosing a soup. The menu is in French, and to be safe our hero asks the waiter to recommend the specialty of the house. A clear consommé? When it comes, the Pinoy discovers that it is merely the kind of soup Filipinos sip when they are convalescing from "tifus" or "trancazo": Tomato

soup is almost an emetic. Onion soup with bits of bread and cheese is too odd for words but palatable. If he is lucky, the waiter brings bouillabaisse with a flourish. A French classic? Nonsense. We Filipinos invented it. It is sinigang, he tells the astonished waiter, only not quite so good as we do it at home. And where, for heaven's sake, is the patis?"

Specifically, the last four sentences stated as,

"If he is lucky, the waiter brings bouillabaisse with a flourish. A French classic? Nonsense. We Filipinos invented it. It is sinigang, he tells the astonished waiter, only not quite so good as we do it at home. And where, for heaven's sake, is the patis."

Filipinos really feel melancholy especially when their cravings will be forever unavailable where they reside. Specifically, the longing for the patis is always mentioned in the essay.

Moreover, Fernandez (2013) once said, "I think all the dishes here have fish sauce, Ma'am." This response probably show how ubiquitous patis is to Filipinos. CNN wrote an article, "How SAWSAWAN culture has defined us". 'Sawsawan' is not necessarily limited to things we dip piece of food in. It comes in the form of ingredients that adds flavour namely, atchara, buro, bagoong, soy sauce, suka, and patis. These things are not requires but highly recommended for Filipinos as the CNN have said. The sawsawan is an important facets of Filipino traits. It defines the very Filipino culture.

Same dilemma was seen in the paragraph twelve of the essay certainly,

"But this is the crux of the problem where is the rice? A sliver tray offers varieties of bread: slices of crusty French bread, soft yellow rolls, rye bread, crescents studded with sesame seeds. There are also potatoes in every conceivable manner, fried, mashed, boiled, buttered. But no rice."

According to Ronald de Jong (2014), "In the Philippines rice is much more than food, it is sustenance with historical and numerous value that is deeply woven into the Filipino culture. Filipino has several words for rice locally namely, palay (un-milled), bigas (milled), and kainin (cooked)."

Consequently, the deep longing for Filipino cuisine and element of diaspora was also seen in the tenth paragraph of *Where's the Patis?* Certainly,

"...Poulet is chicken. Fillet de sole is a fish, though recognizable neither as apahap nor lapu-lapu. Tournedos is meat done in a barbarian way, thick and barely cooked with red juices still oozing out. The safest choice is steak. If the Pinoy can get it well done enough and sliced thinly enough, it might remind him of tapa."

It is very evident that even if Filipinos are surrounded by many food they still remember the food in their town—their own Filipino cuisine. Filipinos cannot deny the fact that

Filipino Food are very prominent even in other countries because of the taste and smell of the food, that is why most of the people proudly represent it.

Moreover, even though Filipinos were amazed with the food of other country they are also reminded of the Filipino food as seen on the eleventh paragraph of *Where's the Patis?* Specifically in the line, *"If the waiter only knew enough about Philippine cuisine, he might suggest venison"*.

Filipinos desire for Philippine cuisine is inevitable. They are imagining food which are considered exotic food in the Philippines and these kinds of foods can only be found in particular places in the Philippines just like the frog legs of Pampanga. The title gastronomic country is just right for the Philippines because every part of the country has their own specialty.

As they imagine how things happened, their desire to see their family gets stronger just like what the Pinoy also feel in the essay *Where's the Patis*, wherein they are remembering things that made their longing for their country gets deeper.

Moreover, considering the fifteenth paragraph of the essay stated as,

"After a few days of these debacles, the Pinoy, sick with longing, decides to comb the strange city for a Chinese restaurant, the closest thing to the beloved gastronomic county. There, in the company of other Asian exiles, he will put his nose finally in a bowl of rice and find it more fragrant than an English rose garden, more exciting than a castle on the Rhine and more delicious than pink champagne."

Especially the first line "After a few days of these debacles, the Pinoy, sick with longing, decides to comb the strange city o a Chinese restaurant, the closest thing to be beloved gastronomic country." This element of diaspora was also seen in this certain line. The sturdy yearning for Filipino food is inevitable through the line "sick with longing, decides to comb..." This suggests that Filipinos abroad cannot help but quest for available food that will satisfy their delicate taste buds.

Seeing this element of exile to Filipinos abroad, ph.phonebooky listed down "12 Popular Filipino Restaurants abroad Worth Finding". Because Filipino food is love (Bustos, Kathryn, 2012). The restaurants are available in different countries namely, US, Australia, Canada and The Netherlands to at least help Filipino's exile be lessened.

Furthermore, on the first and second sentence of the seventeenth paragraph of the essay, it is stated that, *"Better than a Chinese restaurant is the kitchen of a kababayan. When in a foreign city, a Pinoy searches every busy sidewalk, theatre, restaurant for the well-remembered golden features of a fellow Pinoy."*

The statement highlights the continuous yearning of Filipino food and describe the great desire of the Filipino for a Filipino kitchen. Filipinos are more than willing to search

any part of the country because of their desperate need for a meal. They compare Chinese restaurant from Filipino restaurant which indicates that even a Filipino can found a restaurant which taste even just a little Pinoy style, none of those are good enough.

Additionally, on the third and fourth sentence of the seventeenth paragraph, it says that,

"But make it no mistake. It is only because he is in desperate need of a Filipino meal, and like a homing pigeon, he follows his nose to a Filipino kitchen that is well stocked with bagoong, patis, balat ng lumpia, gabi leaves and misua."

Though it is a desperate move to search every part of a foreign country to look for a Filipino food, it will always be worth searching for. "But make it no mistake" stresses that it doesn't matter how long it takes or how far it can be just to look for a Filipino food because once they found what they are looking for, they will be completely satisfied. Subsequently, this desperate move was compared to a homing pigeon which has an innate homing ability. A homing pigeon can find its way home even from extremely long distances, just like a Filipinos, they are finding their way home through searching for a Filipino food and if they would just taste bagoong, patis, balat ng lumpia, gabi leaves, and misua again they will already feel the Filipino spirit.

In like manner, the research study entitled "Food and The Filipino" says that,

"Even after much travel and acculturation, even after taste-buds have been attuned to wine and caviar and French sauces, the Filipino will speak longingly of silver-grey shrimps jumping in the basket, of bangus stuffed with tomatoes and onions and thrown on a fire till black and crusty, of sawsawan and pamutat and kamayan."

Going abroad gave the opportunity to discover new places, meet other people, and learn their beliefs, traditions, and customs that some Filipinos might adapt. It is true that Filipinos love to travel and explore but despite these, a Filipino will always be Filipino. Based on the findings of the researchers, the Filipinos will never forget their own country because of its food, language, clothing, and its good culture about close family ties which are clearly evident in the three literary pieces that were discussed.

CONCLUSION

Where's The Patis by Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, depicted the life of every Filipino in other country. In the essay *Where's the Patis*, the author vividly showed how Filipino cannot denationalized himself even though he already achieved his dreams. It was explicitly seen in the last paragraph of the essay that Filipino spirit will never be forgotten especially when it comes to food.

Further, being in other country is fulfilling but the longing of a Filipino to his native land cannot be avoided. As has been noted, everything changes when a Filipino is in abroad to the

point that they adapt everything around them. Pinoy will imitate the other people especially the people in the country they reside including the way they act, talk, and dress. Imitating is the best thing to do for a Filipino if he is in another country so that he will not feel oppressed. But, no matter how Filipinos desire to mimic, and imitate other culture, the spirit or affinity of Filipinos can never be forgotten. It is just the Filipino colonial mentality that drives the Pinoy to imitate.

Moreover, following the principle of Orientalism by Edward Said, the presence of elements of orientalism such as mimicry, nostalgia, rootlessness, quest or identity did exist on most part of the text.

These elements were dominant which gave the text a label of anti-colonial mentality. This paper proved that the connection of Filipinos to their homeland is resilient. And it is proven in various parts of the texts.

In the end, there are lots of reasons to be proud about being a Filipino. The simplicity of its culture and the way of life sum it all up. Filipinos do not have to feel oppressed with other countries because the feeling of inferiority is just in mind and based on the essay that was discussed, a Filipino may in other countries but his heart will remain in his nipa hut— The Philippines.

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