

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Colonialism has profoundly shaped the political, cultural, and historical development of societies across the world. Beyond territorial occupation and political domination, colonialism also functioned as a system of knowledge production that influenced how colonized societies were represented and understood. Through historical records, educational institutions, literature, and official documents, colonial powers constructed narratives that largely reflected their own perspectives while marginalizing the histories and experiences of the colonized. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2002) argue, colonial discourse legitimized imperial authority by shaping how colonized peoples were represented and remembered. Consequently, the legacy of colonialism extends beyond political control and continues to influence historical narratives, cultural identity, and systems of representation in many postcolonial societies.

The Philippines provides an important postcolonial context for examining the lasting impact of colonialism on history, identity, and representation. After more than three centuries of Spanish colonial rule, sovereignty over the Philippines was transferred to the United States through the Treaty of Paris in 1898, marking the beginning of a new colonial administration. Although Filipino revolutionaries had already declared independence under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo, the United States refused to recognize the newly established republic, leading to the Philippine–American War. According to Teodoro A. Agoncillo (1990), this conflict was not merely a military struggle but also a contest over national sovereignty and the Filipino people's right to self-determination. The war therefore represents an important moment in Philippine history, not only because of its political consequences but also because it generated competing historical narratives that continue to shape the country's collective memory and postcolonial identity.

One of the most controversial events associated with the Philippine–American War is the Balangiga Massacre of 1901. Although the event has been extensively documented, its meaning and historical significance remain contested because different groups have interpreted it from different perspectives. Many American historical

accounts primarily emphasize the attack on American soldiers, whereas Filipino historians often focus on the devastating consequences of the subsequent military retaliation against the people of Samar. According to Teodoro A. Agoncillo (1990) and Renato Constantino (1975), these contrasting interpretations illustrate how historical narratives are influenced by political interests, ideological perspectives, and the authority of those who produce historical knowledge. Consequently, the Balangiga Massacre is not only a historical event but also an example of how colonial history is constructed, remembered, and contested through competing narratives.

The existence of competing interpretations of the Balangiga Massacre demonstrates that history is not simply a collection of objective facts but is also shaped by systems of representation. This relationship between power and representation is clearly explained through Edward W. Said's concept of Orientalism. In Orientalism, Said (1978) argues that colonialism was sustained not only through military and political domination but also through the production of knowledge about colonized societies. Through literature, historical writings, academic scholarship, and other cultural institutions, colonial powers constructed representations that portrayed the colonized as inferior, irrational, and incapable of governing themselves, while presenting the West as civilized, rational, and superior. These representations were not neutral descriptions of reality but ideological constructions that legitimized colonial authority and influenced how colonized peoples were perceived and remembered. Consequently, colonial discourse shaped not only political domination but also the historical narratives through which colonial events continue to be interpreted.

While Edward W. Said explains how colonial discourse constructs representations of the colonized, his theory pays less attention to the position of those whose voices remain excluded from these representational systems. This issue is further developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak through her concept of the subaltern. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern refers to marginalized groups who are excluded from dominant structures of political, social, and epistemic power. Because they lack access to these structures, their voices are often represented, interpreted, or spoken for by others rather than being heard directly. Spivak further emphasizes that women in colonial societies experience a double marginalization, as they are positioned at the intersection of colonial domination and patriarchal oppression. Consequently, the

experiences of female subalterns are frequently omitted or distorted within dominant historical narratives. Spivak's theory therefore provides an important framework for examining how literature represents marginalized women and explores the possibilities of recovering their silenced voices.

The issues of representation and marginalization have become central concerns in postcolonial literary studies because literature provides an alternative space for questioning dominant historical narratives and recovering voices that have long been excluded from official history. Unlike historical documents, literary texts are not limited to presenting a single authoritative account of the past. Instead, they allow writers to reinterpret historical events, reconstruct suppressed memories, and foreground the experiences of marginalized individuals. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2002) argue, postcolonial literature challenges colonial authority by questioning dominant forms of representation and creating space for perspectives that have historically been silenced. Consequently, literary works become an important medium for re-examining colonial history through voices that are often absent from official historical narratives.

Among contemporary Filipino writers, Gina Apostol is well known for exploring the complex relationship between history, colonialism, memory, and national identity. Rather than presenting history as a fixed and objective account, her novels challenge dominant historical narratives by exposing their contradictions, uncertainties, and silences. One of her most acclaimed novels, *Insurrecto*, revisits the historical memory of the Philippine–American War, particularly the Balangiga Massacre, through a metafictional narrative that intertwines history, fiction, memory, and filmmaking. Instead of offering a single authoritative version of the past, the novel presents multiple perspectives that encourage readers to question how history is written, interpreted, and remembered. Through this narrative strategy, *Insurrecto* demonstrates that historical truth is not fixed but is continually reconstructed according to the perspectives of those who tell the story.

A significant aspect that distinguishes *Insurrecto* from many historical novels is its emphasis on female perspectives in reconstructing colonial history. Rather than portraying women merely as supporting figures, the novel positions its female protagonists as active interpreters of the past who question official historical narratives

and search for alternative understandings of the Balangiga Massacre. Through their memories, conversations, and storytelling, the novel foregrounds experiences that have often been overlooked within colonial and patriarchal histories. Viewed through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern, these female characters represent marginalized voices that negotiate, challenge, and reinterpret dominant historical discourses. Consequently, *Insurrecto* provides a valuable literary text for examining how female subaltern voices are constructed and represented within a postcolonial narrative.

The discussions above demonstrate that colonial history is not merely a record of past events but also a site where power, representation, and historical memory continue to shape the voices that are remembered or marginalized. Through its metafictional narrative, *Insurrecto* revisits the historical memory of the Balangiga Massacre by presenting female characters who question dominant historical accounts and offer alternative perspectives on the colonial past. Examining these representations through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern provides an opportunity to explore how marginalized voices are constructed and positioned within the novel. Therefore, this study focuses on the representation of female subaltern voices in Gina Apostol's *Insurrecto*, with particular attention to how the novel employs its metafictional narrative to represent marginalized experiences and recover silenced histories. Based on this focus, the following research questions are formulated.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This study examines how *Insurrecto* by Gina Apostol constructs female subaltern voices and how the novel's metafictional structure contributes to the recovery of silenced histories. The research questions are:

1. How are subaltern voices constructed and positioned within the narrative of *Insurrecto*?
2. How do the female characters utilize the novel's metafictional structure to exercise subaltern agency and reclaim their silenced histories?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This research has the following objectives:

1. To examine how subaltern voices are constructed and positioned within the narrative of *Insurrecto* by Gina Apostol.
2. To explore how the female characters utilize the novel's metafictional structure to exercise subaltern agency and reclaim their silenced histories.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study has both academic and cultural significance. Academically, it contributes to postcolonial literary studies by examining how *Insurrecto* by Gina Apostol constructs and positions female subaltern voices through its metafictional narrative structure. It also contributes to discussions on subaltern representation, female agency, colonial memory, and the relationship between literature and history from a postcolonial perspective. Furthermore, this study expands the application of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern theory in analyzing contemporary Philippine literature.

For students and readers of literature, this study encourages critical awareness of how literary texts question official historical narratives and recover voices that have been marginalized in colonial history. It also provides a better understanding of how fiction can serve as a medium for preserving historical memory and representing the experiences of marginalized communities. Culturally, this study highlights the importance of re-examining the history of the Philippine-American War from the perspectives of those whose voices have often been overlooked, particularly women, thereby promoting a more inclusive understanding of Philippine colonial history.

1.5. Methodology of the Study

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using close reading and thematic textual analysis. The primary source of data is *Insurrecto* (2018) by Gina Apostol, while the secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, and scholarly works related to postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, historiographic metafiction, and the Philippine-American War.

The data are collected through repeated close reading of the novel to identify relevant textual evidence related to female subaltern voices, historical representation, and metafictional narrative strategies. The analysis is conducted by interpreting selected passages that reflect the construction and positioning of female subaltern voices as well as the recovery of silenced histories within the text.

This study is primarily guided by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern (1988), particularly the concepts of representation, epistemic violence, and subaltern agency, to examine how female subaltern voices are constructed and positioned in the novel. In addition, the concept of historiographic metafiction proposed by Linda Hutcheon (1988) is applied to analyze how the novel employs metafictional narrative strategies to reconstruct marginalized histories and challenge the authority of official historical narratives.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to provide a focused and coherent analysis of how *Insurrecto* constructs female subaltern agency and recovers silenced histories through its metafictional narrative structure.

1.6. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing *Insurrecto* (2018) by Gina Apostol. The analysis is specifically limited to examining how female subaltern voices are constructed and positioned within the narrative and how the novel's metafictional structure enables female characters to exercise subaltern agency and reclaim their silenced histories.

To maintain the focus of the study, the analysis is limited to the textual elements of the novel, including characterization, narrative structure, narrative fragmentation, multiple perspectives, and intertextuality as metafictional strategies. The study employs Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern theory, particularly the concepts of representation, epistemic violence, and subaltern agency, together with Linda

Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction as the primary analytical frameworks.

Therefore, this study does not compare *Insurrecto* with other literary works, nor does it verify the novel's historical events through external historical documents, military records, or archival sources. Instead, the analysis is confined to the representation of female subaltern voices and the metafictional narrative strategies presented within the text itself.

1.7. Status of the Study

Several scholars have examined *Insurrecto* from different perspectives. Robert Ku (2023), in *War by Mediation: The Doubling of Filipino-American History in Gina Apostol's Insurrecto*, analyzes how the novel presents multiple versions of the Philippine-American War through competing historical narratives. The study focuses on the mediation of history and the relationship between Filipino and American perspectives. However, it does not specifically examine how female characters function as subaltern subjects or how they exercise subaltern agency through the novel's metafictional narrative structure.

Another relevant study was conducted by Maria Theresa A. Uychoco (2022) in *Memory, Fantasy, Narrative and Myth: Historiographical Metafiction and the Shifting of Filipina Identities in Three Novels*. This research discusses historiographic metafiction and the construction of Filipina identities through memory, myth, and narrative. While it provides valuable insights into narrative strategies and identity formation, it does not explore how historiographic metafiction contributes to the construction of female subaltern agency or the recovery of silenced histories in *Insurrecto*.

Based on these status of the study, it can be seen that *Insurrecto* has attracted scholarly attention from the perspectives of historical representation, historiographic metafiction, memory, and identity. These studies have contributed significantly to understanding Gina Apostol's novel. However, there is still limited discussion that specifically combines Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the female subaltern with historiographic metafiction in analyzing *Insurrecto*.

This study argues that these two perspectives are closely connected. The representation of female subaltern voices cannot be fully understood only through

historical or political analysis. It is equally important to examine how the novel reconstructs history through its metafictional narrative. The fragmented structure of *Insurrecto* creates space for alternative historical narratives, allowing female characters to challenge dominant colonial discourse and recover marginalized experiences. Therefore, this study combines Spivak's subaltern theory with the concept of historiographic metafiction to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how female subaltern agency is constructed within the novel.

By focusing on the relationship between female subaltern voices and historiographic metafiction, this study offers a perspective that has received limited attention in previous research. Rather than examining history, identity, or colonial politics separately, this research investigates how these elements interact in constructing female subaltern agency and recovering silenced histories. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to postcolonial literary studies by providing a more focused discussion of the relationship between subaltern representation, female agency, and historiographic metafiction in *Insurrecto*.

1.8. Organization of the Study

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter I presents the introduction, which consists of the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, methodology of the study, scope and limitation of the study, previous studies, and organization of the study. This chapter provides the general foundation and direction of the research.

Chapter II presents the review of related literature and theoretical framework. It discusses the historical background of the Philippine-American War, postcolonialism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern theory, and theoretical perspectives on subaltern agency. This chapter also examines historiographic metafiction, particularly narrative fragmentation, multi-perspectivity, and intertextuality, which serve as the theoretical framework for analyzing the novel.

Chapter III presents the findings and discussion based on the research questions. This chapter analyzes how female subaltern voices are constructed and positioned in *Insurrecto* by Gina Apostol. It also examines how the novel's metafictional narrative strategies enable female characters to exercise subaltern agency and reclaim their

silenced histories.

Chapter IV presents the conclusion and suggestions. This chapter summarizes the findings of the study, draws conclusions based on the research questions, and provides recommendations for future studies related to postcolonial literature, subaltern studies, and historiographic metafiction.

