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Writing the Nation

Transculturation and nationalism in Hispano-Filipino literature from the early twentieth century

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Chapter 5

Cultural Nationalism in Antonio Abad's *El Campeón* (1940)

Apenas tocaron el suelo los dos gladiadores, Tabás se lanzó sobre Banogón con la velocidad del rayo. Se oyó un chasquido, y los dos cuerpos cayeron sobre la arena (...) como si una fuerza los lanzase simultáneamente, ambos se encontraron de pronto a tres pies sobre el suelo, batiendo el aire con alas y chocándose violentamente. Cayó una nube de plumas, pero al llegar al suelo ninguno demostró haber quedado herido. La multitud rugió de entusiasmo.
(Abad 1940: 142)

[As soon as both gladiators touched the ground, Tabás launched himself over Banogón with the speed of thunder. A snap was heard and both bodies fell on the arena. [...] As if a foreign force threw them simultaneously in the air, they found themselves facing each other three feet above the ground, beating the air with their wings and crashing violently. A cloud of feathers fell, but on the ground, none of them showed a sign of having been injured. The crowd roared with enthusiasm.]

Introduction

The two gladiators engaged in combat in this passage are Tabás and Banogón, two of the gamecocks that feature in Antonio Abad's (1894-1970) novel *El Campeón* (1940) [The Champion]. *El Campeón* is written in the form of an animal fable that tells the story of a cockfighting champion named Banogón who returns to a chicken barn in the village where he was born after a successful career in the arenas. Upon his return, he struggles to fit into the community, having to find a new role in it. The various social roles of the other chicken characters and their struggles with the transformations that are taken place in their society allegorically illuminate Abad's vision of Filipino society - as one affected by a political, cultural and identity crisis - and his concerns with reconfiguring Filipino national identity. The novel addresses questions of class, gender and ethnicity in the Philippines, and argues for the impossibility of smoothly translating the prevailing European ideologies of the nation-state, based on cultural homogeneity and racial supremacy, to the colonised context of the Philippines. Through its ending, it articulates the necessity to give voice to an alternative type of nation imagining. Abad's portrayal of the culture of cockfighting through the eyes of the human characters of the novel offers a view on the 'sport' as a traditional Filipino practice that survived the various colonial policies that attempted to eradicate it. In this way, the novel presents cockfighting as an anti-colonial metaphor that not only captures a certain ethos of Filipino culture (at least among the exclusively male audiences that it attracts) but also occupies an important social and even educational role in rural Philippines.

Paz Mendoza's *Notas de viaje* (1929) and Jesús Balmori's *Los Pajaros de fuego* (1945), discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, sought to develop Philippine nationalism primarily by comparing their country to other European nations (including Spain), Japan and the US. Abad's novel, in contrast, locates a basis for nationalism in Filipino rural culture. Mendoza's travelogue calls for a form of cultural emulation (aspiring at modernising the Philippines' institutions and educate its people according to western/universal models) by formulating hypotheses about what the Philippines *could be like if* its industries, education system or national identity were more like those observed in Germany, Italy or Japan. Balmori's novel, in contrast, focuses attention on the impasse that emulating these foreign nations, including the Spanish and American colonisers, had produced in the Philippines, and on the way the imagined alternative of taking Japan as a model ended up shattered by WWII. Abad, a contemporary of Balmori's, shows a similar disappointment with the Filipino intelligentsia and its insistence on perpetuating the unfruitful task of idealising, translating and emulating other nations. The key difference, however, is that in *El Campeón* Abad uses the long-standing Filipino tradition of cockfighting - which is at the same time presented as a transcultural practice - to propose an alternative view on Filipino national identity.

My argument that *El Campeón* can be considered an example of Filipino cultural nationalism is substantiated by Abad's position as an intellectual aiming to excavate the 'essence' of what would constitute the future Filipino nation. He locates this essence in the tradition of cockfighting in the rural Philippines. On the one hand, cockfighting is depicted as a traditional practice that resists Catholic dogmas while reinventing its rituals of blood and martyrdom and contesting the modernising policies of the US, which considered the sport barbaric. On the other hand, the arrogance of the gamecocks is used to criticise western nationalism and the Filipino technocrats who obscure the alternative voices of Filipino people, represented by the village chicken barn. In my reading of the novel, I argue that, at its end, the figure of an ideal national hero is revealed, based on an alternative vision of Filipino masculinity.

I substantiate these claims in the five sections of this chapter. First, I shall explain the main aspects of cultural nationalism, including in the context of the Philippines, and the role of literature as its tool. Second, I will give a brief overview of Abad's work in order to contextualise *El Campeón* and to identify Abad's most important political and social concerns. Third, I will elaborate on the anti-colonial aspects of cockfighting in order to justify its appeal to nationalist writers, in the wake of influential figures such as José Rizal, who dedicates a chapter of his seminal novel *Noli Me Tangere* (1886) to the cockpit, emphasising

its potential for fermenting political dissidence. In the fourth section, I look at the relationship between masculinity and cockfighting, which is addressed by numerous studies on cockfighting and also plays a significant role in Abad's narrative and vision of nationalism. Most of the literature notes that cockfighting is an all-male practice that reinforces heteronormative ideas of masculinity as based on strength, power, honor and domination, but also skill and intelligence. In what is undoubtedly the most-read and -discussed article about cockfighting, "Deep Play: Notes on Balinese Cockfighting" (1972), anthropologist Clifford Geertz highlights the symbolic identification of men with their gamecocks. He claims that cockfighting can be seen as a meta-narrative of Balinese society, reproducing its social hierarchy and acting out a range of values with which the Balinese identify. Without going further into Geertz's theory here, it is important to see the relationship between the cockfight and masculinity as a form of identification between men and the symbolic narratives the cockfight, as a sport and as an aesthetic practice, produces. It is this identification that accounts for its popularity. Looking at *El Campeón* shows that, in the context of the Philippines, the relationship between masculinity and cockfighting can be extended to include a consideration of nationalism and colonialism.

In the fifth and final section, I focus on the last three chapters of the novel, which see Banogón returning to the barnyard, to demonstrate how Abad proposes a new form of Filipino national identity by presenting Banogón as a hero in the mould of Filipino myths of martyrdom, but one no longer exclusively tied to a heteronormative masculinity. In contrast to the nationalist models from Europe, the US and Japan, founded on fascist and imperialist ideologies that base the nation-state in ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity, the Filipino hero, through individual sacrifice, fosters a sense of community in a spirit of tolerance and acceptance of the community's transcultural heterogeneity.

To sum up, in this chapter I will explore the cultural nationalism *El Campeón* mobilises through its appeal to the historical and cultural functions of cockfighting. The novel's use of and reflection on the association of cockfighting with masculinity allows me to read Banogón's return to his rural home as a crisis of masculinity. This crisis symbolically invokes the struggle with the conflicting attachments produced by colonialism that characterises the emergence of a Philippine national imagination. Even though the novel to some extent remains attached to the dominant ideal of a patriarchal nation, its narrative also challenges foreign ideologies of nationalism and their relationship with a virile form of masculinity, instead suggesting a new, local Filipino national ethos that does not imagine itself as pure but as fundamentally mixed.

The Cultivation of the Nation

According to Catalan scholar Monserrat Guimbernau (2013) nationalism is “the sentiment of belonging to a community whose members identify with a set of symbols, beliefs and way of life, and have the will to decide upon their common political destiny” (74). Literature can be a tool employed to the fostering of such sentiment of belonging to a national community and, together with other cultural practices, can constitute cultural nationalism. As an abstract form of community awareness, cultural nationalism can be said to stand in opposition to political or military nationalism, although the lines that separate these forms of nationalism are thin.

Eric T. Woods (2015) highlights the difference between these forms of nation building by contrasting political nationalism’s focus on the achievement of political autonomy with cultural nationalism’s focus on “the cultivation of a nation” (1). Cultural nationalism does not imagine the nation as a political organisation, but as a cultural community grounded on the specific recasting of the nation’s identity, history and destiny. Cultural nationalism is generally perceived as a stage preceding political nationalism, one in which the conscience of a national identity is formed on the premises of retrieved local cultural elements. Hroch (2007) associates it with gestation in his three-stage description of the temporality of national movements:

(a) gestation, where intellectuals excavate cultural remains and reconstruct them for their own sake, with no national claims in mind; (b) patriotic agitation, where cultural claims such as language recognition are tied to political demands by nationalist organizations, led by a middle-class intelligentsia and attempts are made to awaken the masses; and (c) mass mobilization, where nationalism mobilizes urban and rural masses, often with separatist political demands. (qtd. in Hutchinson 2013: 89-90)

This sequence seems logical, but the reality is that most nationalist movements combine elements of the three stages and that appeals to cultural aspects such as language or historical memory also occur in long-established nation-states, especially at times of national crisis. Cultural nationalists aim at rethinking the community’s political status with regards to the nation-state when the nation feels threatened or new political agendas appear. In the case of colonised societies, cultural nationalism mobilises an awareness of the self in opposition of the oppressor, underpinning the shared community among the oppressed that serves as a tool for self-definition and ultimately becomes a political tool, usually in the call for independence.

Regardless of how questionable Hroch’s linear description of national movements is, the three aspects he underscores are useful to identify the role literature can play in them.

Rather than promoting “patriotic agitation” or “mass mobilization,” as fictional literature, the Filipino writers in Spanish I discuss in this study aim to contribute to the period of gestation of Filipino national identity by offering alternatives to the dominant history constructed by the colonisers. As I showed in Chapter 4, Vicente L. Rafael (1988) uses translation as a strategy of nationalism among Spanish-speaking Filipinos. However, the type of nationalism constructed by Filipino writers in Spanish remains problematic, as I argued in the previous chapter, because it is limited to the elite group that can read and write Spanish. It can therefore not be considered truly ‘democratic’ literature.

Hispano-Filipino literature as a tool of cultural nationalism does feature an aspect central to both Hutchinson’s and Hroch’s descriptions of the workings of cultural nationalism, namely the attempt to retrieve the “essence” of the nation, the original condition from which to configure the nation-state paradigm. This retrieval is carried out by intellectuals and artists, an “elite” of cultural “revivalists,” and philanthropists armed with innovative research methods, all seeking to “excavate cultural remains” in search of a possible ground that will help to reconfigure or regenerate the idea of the nation based on cultural heritage and past history (Hutchinson 2013: 86). Moreover, Hutchinson argues that the archetype of the cultural nationalist is that of an ‘outsider’ whose “connection to the nation was being challenged” (87). The cultural nationalist belongs to an educated elite but his or her outsider status derives from being “of mixed ethnic descent and conscious of this” (Hutchinson 2013: 87) or from living in exile or in diaspora. I want to suggest that this makes the cultural nationalist not just an outsider but an insider/outsider. This is how I see the position of the Hispano-Filipino authors I discuss. Their double perspective arises not only from their mixed ethnicity (racial, but importantly also cultural) but most crucially by their privileged cosmopolitan, multilingual upbringing and their attachment to the Spanish language. As Balmori’s novel demonstrates, this makes them insiders/outsideers both in relation to the Filipino elite and other groups within the Philippines.

I will argue that *El Campeón* can be read as a form of cultural nationalism because its subject matter, the cockfight, and its practice in the Filipino countryside, are examples of a transcultural tradition that finds a narrative in history capable of providing a sense of continuity through “a connection with previous generations, at the levels of both the individual and the community that he or she identified with” (Hroch 2006: 6). Significantly, however, the novel does not conceptualise the search for a connection to the past that links up with the present in terms of a romantic retrieval of an original, purely indigenous Filipino culture, but rather in terms of the recognition of Filipino national identity as a hybrid of

Hispanic and Asian traditions that foster a sense of belonging compensating for a feeling of cultural loss.

The novel was finished in 1940, in the advent of WWII, with Japanese troops knocking at the doors of *Intramuros*, the walled city in the centre of Manila where most of the creoles lived, which was occupied by the Japanese only two years later, in 1942. Under these circumstances Abad refuses, in *El Campeón*, to imagine a possible independent Philippines, but he also refrains from presenting an apocalyptic vision like that of Balmori's novel. Perhaps because he had already written an urban novel, *Nathan's Sheep* (1936), in *El Campeón* Abad chooses to position local traditions as counterweights to the impasse he felt urban intellectuals had reached in their thinking of Filipino identity, especially in Manila, which he chooses to leave to settle temporarily in Cebu, his place of birth. Before analysing the novel as a work of cultural nationalism, it is necessary to examine Abad's background and nationalist views.

Transitory Hours

Antonio Abad (1894-1970) feared that American modernisation would eradicate the Philippines' Hispanic heritage, most importantly in terms of the language and the Christian rituals that he perceived to be at the core of Filipino identity. Abad studied at the religious Colegio San Carlos in Cebu, where he completed a Bachelor of Arts. He wanted to become a priest and began religious studies at the same school but never completed them. Instead, he decided to take on a more engaged task, working as a journalist for several national newspapers, including *La Opinión*, of which he became chief editor (Young and García 2013), as a fiction writer and as a professor of Spanish. He devoted his life to researching, writing and teaching Spanish, writing Spanish textbooks and dictionaries. He died leaving a Spanish - English - Cebuano - Tagalo dictionary unfinished. His work resonates with the explosion of philological work that characterised cultural nationalism in late nineteenth-century Europe referred to by Hutchinson.

Daisy Young and Salvador García (2014) argue that Abad's dedication to the Spanish language was his way of claiming a Filipino identity and of standing up to American colonialism. According to them, Abad believed that the 'essence of being Filipino' resided in the use of a common language and culture, which, in his view, had to be Spanish:

Como escritor católico entendía la palabra sagrada y la literatura como medio de expresión de Dios en el mundo caótico, huérfano de ideales, y estancado en la miseria que percibía a su alrededor. [...] Para Abad, la religión, cuya expresión más palpable era el lenguaje, se constituía como el elemento de identidad necesario en un

país que buscaba por todos los medios posibles encontrar su propia voz ante las incursiones tanto estadounidenses como japonesas, que trataban de adherir el Archipiélago a sus territorios. [...] No sólo se trataba de luchar por impedir la muerte de un idioma, sino de fomentar además la lengua que haría a los filipinos reconocerse como tales, hallar su esencia, hermanarse con otros semejantes, con aquellos que sueñan y viven y aman en español. (Young and García 2013: xxix)

[As a Catholic writer, [Abad] understood the holy word and literature as the means of expression of God in a chaotic world, devoid of ideals and stagnant in the misery that he perceived around him. The Gospel had arrived in the Philippines in Spanish. To Abad, religion, most tangibly expressed as language, constituted the necessary identity element in a country that was, by any means, looking to find its own voice among the incursions of the American and the Japanese, who were trying to add the Archipelago to their territories. [...] It was not only a question of fighting against the death of a language, but of promoting the language that would make Filipinos recognise themselves as such, find their essence, unite with their fellow men, with those who dream, live and love in Spanish.]

This quote highlights Abad's belief in the intimacy between language and nation, or, more precisely, in a sense of national belonging produced by the use of a common language. For Abad, this meant privileging Spanish (which he felt was intimately linked to his Catholic faith), but also Tagalog and Cebuano (the local language spoken on the island of Cebu and by Abad himself) over English. He felt that Spanish and the Filipino languages already established in the country before the arrival of the new American coloniser constituted the foundation of Filipino identity. He even wrote scientific articles about the phonological similarities between Spanish and some of the native languages of the Philippines to support his defence of Spanish over English (Young and García 2013).

La Oveja de Nathan (1922) [Nathan's Sheep] is Abad's best-known novel and the one for which he was awarded the Zóbel Prize. Its latest edition, dating from 2010, is currently sold at major bookstores in Manila in a bilingual English-Spanish edition. Its story is more explicitly political than that of *El Campeón*. *La Oveja de Nathan*, in a similar way to Balmori's work, criticises the general lack of agency and desire for autonomy on the part of intellectual Filipinos, who, despite witnessing a new invasion by the US, have remained passive. The main character of the novel, a young lithographer who fights for the Allies during WWI as part of the US army, returns to the Philippines and finds a job working for an American company. Eventually, he resigns as a gesture of rebellion against the Americans, giving priority to his nationalist political ideals, despite the difficulty of getting another job. In portraying this individual heroic gesture, Abad calls for small but decisive steps towards social and political transformation, criticising the lethargy and hesitation of those who are

unable to imagine other possible forms of life than the one provided for them by colonial discourses.

This is the same attitude he criticises in an essay from 1940 called “De la Hora Transeúnte” [Of the Transitory Hour]¹⁰⁵:

¿Se han fijado los lectores que en que hace tiempo que en Filipinas nadie discute? ¿Y se ha ocupado alguien de saber por qué? Porque se atiende ante todo a la dogmatización. El dogma es lo único que no admite la discusión. Se es y basta. Y entre nosotros se dogmatiza porque hemos llegado a un punto en las ideas han quedado estandarizadas. Fuera de la idea de dogma no existe la verdad. (Abad, “De la Hora Transeúnte”, 1940, qtd. in Young and García, xxviii)

[Have you noticed, dear readers, that for some time now nobody has been discussing anything in the Philippines? Has anyone tried to find out why? It is because there is an overall tendency towards dogmatism. Dogma is the only thing that is not open to discussion. It is and that is it. Among us, dogmatism occurs because we have reached a point at which our ideas have become standardised. Outside the standard idea, there is no truth.]

In this essay, Abad calls for individuals to awaken and act against the undisputed, standardised dogmas that have come to govern people’s lives. The essay’s title, “Of the Transitory Hour,” speaks to Abad’s perception of time as fleeting. Time should not be allowed to pass by without things being discussed. Instead, action should be taken to challenge dogma before it is too late. However, the temporality of the action required is ambiguous. On the one hand, Abad seems to call for a future-oriented revolution against standardised rules based on dialogue rather than on dogma. On the other hand, however, he expresses nostalgia for the Hispanic past and seems to want to anchor the revolution in this past, which never actually existed, as Spanish was never the common language of the Philippines. Such ambiguity is perhaps better understood from the perspective of cultural nationalism. As a nationalist enterprise, it looks at the future but its cultural revival has to be anchored and follow a past narrative, even if the nation’s history “offers material for this task on multiple and competing pasts” (Hutchinson 2013: 91).

In 1960, Abad wrote another novel, *La vida secreta de Daniel Espeña* [The Secret Life of Daniel Espeña], likely one of the last novels written in Spanish in the Philippines and sadly one that has so far not been found in library archives or private collections. Abad died

¹⁰⁵ “Transeúnte” is a difficult word to translate. As a noun, it refers to a passer-by and in some contexts it is thus translated as *pedestrian*. It can also refer to a temporary resident, such as a student on a visa. As an adjective, it means *temporary* or *non-permanent*, which is slightly redundant in combination with the word *hour*. Translating “De la Hora Transeúnte” as “Of the Temporary Hour” seems too rhetorical, so I have chosen “Of the Transitory Hour.”

in 1970, having witnessed the arrival of the US, the two World Wars and the independence of the Philippines in 1946, and outliving most of the Hispano-Filipino authors of his generation.

In the context of Abad's life and work, *El Campeón* represents a moment of inner exploration facilitated by the author's return to rural Cebu, where he grew up. The novel tells a similar story of homecoming, following Banogón the rooster from the moment he is discovered on the small-town, church-owned farm where he was born until his return to another farm in the same town years later. The story begins when the church keeper, Gervasio Balongoy, who happens to be a cockfighting specialist, witnesses a quarrel between young Banogón and another male, and notices the skills and physical disposition to fight that Banogón displays. Gervasio asks Father Nicolás, the newly arrived priest, for permission to train Banogón as a gamecock. Father Nicolás agrees after much hesitation, for the Catholic Church opposes cockfighting. After months of training, Banogón starts a career as a fighter in arenas in neighbouring villages on Cebu and in Manila. In Manila, he wins his last fight, permanently injuring one of his legs. Having killed his opponent, he maintains his status as a champion but has to be retired. Banogón returns to Cebu, his life spared so that he can produce future champions. He struggles to adapt to his new life in the small-town chicken community and is unable to fulfil his breeding task, but eventually he gains the respect and affection of his peers. In the final chapters of the book, he re-encounters Bakiki, his first sweetheart, with whom he shares his life story; she also tells him hers and recounts what has happened in the town in his absence. The novel ends with the two old friends celebrating life and motherhood on Christmas Eve.

In what follows I will carry out a detailed analysis of the novel as an allegory of cultural nationalism. First, I will look at the way the novel represents the social and political role of cockfighting in the Philippines, through the eyes of the human characters. Second, I will analyse the relationship between masculinity and cockfighting in the novel, using Clifford Geertz's article on Balinese cockfighting and Jerry García's article on cockfighting in Chicano communities in the US. Last, I will focus on the final part of the novel, which tells the story of Banogón and Bakiki's reunion on the farm, in order to elucidate the alternative, transcultural vision of nationalism, connected to established notions of heroic martyrdom but less reliant on traditional masculinity, proposed in *El Campeón*.

The Victory of the Underdog

Los hay quienes convierten la gallera en centro de su vida. En vez de ser un medio lo consideran un fin. Esos son los viciosos de todas partes, los que, los días sin gallera, se reúnen en cualquier parte para jugar. La gran mayoría la compone el pueblo que va a estos centros a distraerse como los ricos se distraen en el teatro, en el cine, en las carreras o en sus clubs. Allí el pobre se encuentra con otros pobres, con quienes cambia impresiones, les cuenta sus problemas, les comunica sus deseos y esperanzas, les expone sus opiniones acerca de cosas y personas; allí se entera de los sucesos del día y los comenta y adoba a su modo, allí se consuela de sus fracasos y dolores, y allí se piden y dan consejos, discutiéndolos libremente en un ambiente libre de suspicacias. Se ha dicho más de una vez que la gallera es el deporte del pobre, y es verdad. Pero los que lo afirman, no han visto más que lo más exterior, lo más visible del deporte, que es la parte que mira a la diversión. La parte más sana de él es que el hombre del pueblo, que no ha recibido ninguna instrucción, aprende allí lo que de virtuoso debe cultivarse y fomentarse en todo deporte. (48)

[I confess that there are some who make the cockfight the centre of their lives. Instead of seeing it as a means, they see it as an end. Such vicious people are everywhere; they are those who, on the days that there is no cockfight, gather anywhere in order to gamble. But these people are not the majority. The large majority is constituted by the people [*el pueblo*], who go to these centres to find some distraction, just like the rich enjoy themselves in the theatre, in the cinema, at the races or in the clubs. There, the poor man meets other poor men, with whom he exchanges opinions, talks about his problems, expresses his desires and hopes, expresses his opinions about things and people; there, he finds out about the daily events and discusses them, seasoning [*adoba*] them in his own way; there, he finds consolation for his frustrations and pains, and advice is given and taken, discussed openly in an atmosphere free of suspicion. It has been said more than once that the cockfight is the sport of the poor and that is true. But those who say this have only seen the most external aspect of it, what is most visible of the sport, the entertaining part of it. The healthiest aspect of it is that the common man, who has not received any education, learns there what is virtuous and what should be encouraged in any sport, [...] the virtue of tolerance.]

This is one of the speeches Gervasio, Banogón's first trainer, gives in defence of the cockfight. In this passage, he discusses his views on the cockfight with Father Nicolás in an attempt to inform the latter of "qué mal se propone combater antes de ir a lanzarse al combate" [what sort of evil he is about to fight before getting into combat] (52). Gervasio describes the cockpit as a social and educational space for rural Filipinos who have no access to other forms of leisure. For him, the social aspect of cockfighting is based on the exchange of personal and public affairs (individual pains, desires and frustrations but also daily events, gossip), "discutiéndolos en un ambiente libre se suspicacias" [discussed in an atmosphere free of suspicion]. The latter comment is reminiscent of Abad's critique of the political and social apathy in "Of the Transitory Hour," where he observes that nobody discusses anything

anymore in the Philippines. In contrast to the urban locations frequented by intellectuals, the cockpit is seen to facilitate an area free from political and social surveillance - by the colonial government and the Church - even though Gervasio's speech reduces the topics discussed in such a space to vague generalisations: daily events, current affairs, opinions, problems.

To understand the role of cockfighting in the novel, it is imperative to look at the way it has been entwined with colonial projects and anticolonial resistance in the Philippines and elsewhere.¹⁰⁶ Numerous scholars who have written about cockfighting have drawn attention to the relationship between this transnational blood sport and colonial politics. With regards to the Philippines, Scott Guggenheim (1982) and Janet Davis (2013) address this relationship. Guggenheim offers a historical review of the perception of cockfighting under Spanish rule, US occupation and the later Marcos government (1965-1986). Davis focuses primarily on the US period, drawing comparisons with other US territories such as Cuba and Puerto Rico, as well as invoking the role of animal protection in ideologies of US nation building. She argues that cockfighting can be read as an anticolonial metaphor, whereas other blood sports such as bullfighting (with its permanent arenas [*plazas de toros*], expensive fighting bulls [*toros de lidia*] and strict protocol) are a much more elitist pastime and a symbol of the Spanish Empire. Both Davis and Guggenheim emphasise how central cockfighting has been to Filipino politics and draw attention to the continuous tension between attempts to curb its practice as part of 'development' projects imposed on the islands by colonial powers and the resistance mounted by cockfighting enthusiasts.

According to Guggenheim (1982), cockfighting legislation in the Philippines changed over the course of the history of colonisation. During the Spanish period, one of the first moves of the colonial government was to establish permanent, privately owned cockpits with the objective of forcing "dispersed, rural populations into permanent, nucleated settlements which could be guarded and taxed" (Guggenheim 1982: 137). Attempting to make the islands self-supporting, the Spanish passed legislation to tax and regulate cockfighting, issuing expensive licences and fining those who did not follow the law. These cockfighting taxes produced important revenues for the government and kept the working classes and peasants that frequented the cockpits "under control" (Guggenheim 1982: 138).

¹⁰⁶ Cockfighting is believed to have originated in South East Asia, but it has long been considered a "local" sport in countries such as the Dominican Republic, Spain, England and indeed the Philippines, where it was already practiced in pre-Hispanic times (Guggenheim 1982). Alan Dundes' *The Cockfight: A Casebook* (1994), in addition to the articles by Davis and Guggenheim about Philippine cockfighting discussed here, contains articles about cockfighting in Ireland, California, London, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Argentina.

The Catholic Church benefitted from the cockfighting tax but still condemned the sport because of its cruelty to animals (it was seen as a challenge to God to kill his divine creatures) and its association with vice and procrastination. Father Nicolás expresses the views of the Church as follows:

¿No te parece una crueldad - le decía- el contemplar desde la seguridad de los tendidos, con esa vuestra ruidosa alegría, cómo se despedazan dos gallos? Dios al criarlos, les ha regalado para que gocen de ella, el supremo don de la vida, y vosotros se la quitáis con crueles demostraciones de entusiasmo. (47)

[Don't you think it is a cruelty - he said - to contemplate from the safety of your seat, with loud joy, how the roosters tear each other to pieces? In creating them, God has given them the supreme gift of life, and you take it away with cruel demonstrations of enthusiasm.]

El juego es un vicio, y el que se deja dominar de él sin hacer ningún esfuerzo para contrarrestar su influencia ofende gravemente a Dios. En el juego se pierde dinero, que es un instrumento dado por Dios para sostener al hombre y mantener a su familia. Tú estás al servicio de Dios, y lo ofendes cada vez que entras en una gallera. (47)

[Gambling is a vice, and those who let themselves be dominated by it without making any effort to resist its influence are seriously offending God. In gambling, money is always lost, and money is an instrument given by God to support man and sustain his family. You are at the service of God, and you offend him every time you enter the cockpit.]

Gervasio keeps quiet while listening to these comments from his superior, even though, as the omniscient narrator informs us, for him “Eso de la crueldad era para el sacristán una cuestión de puntos de vista” [cruelty was a question of perspective] (47). In his opinion, the roosters do not die pointlessly: “Después de todo, los gallos no morían inútilmente: el vencido paraba irremisiblemente en la cocina y con él se hacía un delicioso guiso” (47) [After all, the defeated inevitably ended up in the kitchen producing a delicious stew]. For Gervasio, the gamecocks, like common chickens, ultimately serve the noble purpose of feeding men, with the difference that at least they are awarded a moment of redemption and potential glory by fighting for their life.

Later in the novel, we learn that Father Nicolás' predecessor was the one who introduced cockfighting in the village, driven by his passion for the game and the boredom of life in the countryside. In the same vein, Gervasio asks Father Nicolás: “¿Qué iríamos a hacer en este pueblo triste, donde todo transcurre en medio de la mayor monotonía, si no fuera por la ilusión dominguera de la gallera? Un gallera de pueblo es donde el pobre hace su vida social” (47) [What would we do in this sad village where everything happens by means of the

greatest monotony if it wasn't for the excitement of every Sunday's fight? A village cockpit is where the poor have their social life]. The contrasting attitudes towards the cockfight of Father Nicolás and his predecessor demonstrate the existence within the Catholic Church of an ambiguous religious morality. It is clear, however, that *El Campeón* favours the view that in the rural Philippines cockfighting combats boredom and isolation, and is not in conflict with being a good Catholic.

Notably, there are numerous examples in the novel of a close interweaving of cockfighting and Catholic ritual. A major breakthrough in Banogón's career, for example, occurs during the religious festivals in honour of the local Saint, *La Virgen de la Regla* [The Virgin of Regla] in the village of Opón. On this occasion, Gervasio asks Inggoy, another servant in the house of the priest, to help him to bring Banogón to Opón for a fight without Father Nicolás, who is travelling with them, finding out. Inggoy reacts with enthusiasm at the idea of seeing his rooster fight while presenting his faith to the revered saint:

¡Ir a las famosas y legendarias fiestas de Nuestra Señora de Regla y asistir otra vez al triunfo de Banogón, "nuestro gallo", según acababa de declarar Gervasio Balongoy! ¿Podría él aspirar a otra dicha mayor? Y si ganaba, que sí ganaría sin duda alguna, ¿qué haría si no encender una vela ante el altar de Nuestra Señora? (135)

[Going to the legendary and famous festival of Our Lady of the Regla and witnessing again the triumph of Banogón, "our cock," according to the very words of Gervasio Balongoy! Could he aspire to a greater joy? And if he [Banogón] won, although he [Inggoy] was sure that he would, what better thing to do than to light a candle at the altar of the miraculous image of Our Lady?]

Here, religious devotion and enthusiasm for cockfighting are not antithetical, but come together seamlessly, supporting and reinforcing each other in defiance of the official position taken by the Church.

The novel also shows how cockfighting is intimately related to pagan beliefs, such as fortune telling. Gervasio's reputation as a cocker is based not only on his expert knowledge of the sport but also on his ability to predict the favourable days for Banogón's fights and his opponents' odds, which he does by invoking old Chinese teachings of "*un horóscopo infalible* (89) [an infallible horoscope] inherited from his father. Gervasio's father had copied the Chinese horoscope from Captain Laloy, a legendary gambler who made a fortune following the writings of an old Chinese merchant he worked for as a servant. This enigmatic Chinese gambler, says the narrator, arrived in the village pushing a trolley full of bags filled with gold and silver coins. Upon his deathbed, he gave his loyal servant Laloy the horoscope

that brought about his fortune. Captain Laloy learned Chinese only to translate the manuscript into Bisayan (the local dialect of Cebu) and subsequently became the richest man in the area.

In addition to depicting cockfighting as intertwined with Catholic practices and pagan beliefs, including beliefs originating from another culture, Gervasio presents it to Father Nicolás as offering a necessary escape from the hardship of agricultural work:

Y en los pueblos pequeños como el nuestro y en las comunidades de los barrios, la gallera no es el centro del vicio, sino el lugar donde el Labrador, *curvado toda la semana sobre la aridez de la gleba*¹⁰⁷ que le da su morisqueta, busca encontrarse con su igual, conoce a otros como él, y con todos hace vida social que en estos lugares sin la gallera sería nula. Y usted mejor que nadie sabe que *el instinto sociable* es innato en el hombre culto, lo mismo que en el palurdo. (49, emphasis added)

[In small villages like ours and in city neighborhoods, the cockpit is not a centre of vice, but the place where the farmer, *after a whole week of bending his body to work in the dry field that supplies his rice*, looks forward to meeting his equals; he meets others like himself, and carries out his social life *in places where there would be no social space without the cockpit*. And you know better than anyone that the social instinct is as innate to the educated man as to the ignorant.]

Working in the fields is presented here as a hardship compensated only by the enjoyment of attending a cockfight and socializing with one's 'equals' on Sundays. Gervasio's comment is crucial to understanding the novel's valorisation of the cockfight's space and culture as something that, especially in the rural peripheries, is essential to maintaining people's "social instinct." Without being as openly critical of the exploitative colonial systems, *El Campeón* shows rural life and rural poverty as made bearable and discussable with others only through a practice, cockfighting, discouraged by the Spanish colonisers and the Catholic Church.

Moreover, the quote from *El Campeón* that opens this section brings the class dimension of cockfighting to the fore: while the rich are said to go to the "theatre, the cinema, the races or the club," the poor - constituting the majority of the population - go to the cockpit. This socioeconomic divide, however, is complemented in the novel by a geographic divide between cockfighting as practiced in the urban centres and in the rural peripheries. Gervasio specifically distinguishes cockpits in villages from those in the big cities, arguing that the belief that the cockpit is a place for gamblers to waste their time, money and energy is informed by the arenas of the big cities, "Pero ustedes no piensan que las galleras de las grandes ciudades son la excepción, no la regla. [...] Confieso que las galleras de la ciudad no

¹⁰⁷ In the Spanish original quoted below, Abad writes *la aridez de la gleba*. *Gleba* refers to a piece of land that is being cultivated, but it is an archaism closely related to the expression *siervo de la gleba*, which means "servant of the land." This expression refers to being condemned to work a piece of land perpetually for its owner; in sum, a form of slavery.

tienen más objeto que la explotación del juego como fuente de ingreso de unos cuantos capitalistas” (49) [But you have not noticed that cockpits in the big cities are the exception and not the rule [...] I must confess that the cockpits in cities have no other objective than the exploitation of gambling as a source of income for a few capitalists]. According to the novel, therefore, cockfighting aficionados are split into two groups: the poor people in the rural peripheries who attend the fight to socialise versus the richer public of the urban centres, which has corrupted the game.

The Spanish colonial government’s attempt to control and dissuade cockfighting rather than banning it outright (which they feared would drive it underground) was attacked by American protestant missionaries, who saw the rituals of the cockfight and those of the Catholic mass as “complementary forms of dependency, emasculation and ‘savagery’ - in which wine and blood comingled in a ‘pagan’ credo of substantiation” (Davis 2013: 560). The Eucharistic ritual of eating Christ’s body and drinking his blood is equated to the bloodshed in the cockpit and the subsequent consumption of the dead rooster. Notwithstanding the grotesque imagery, Davis’ comment again demonstrates a degree of syncretism between the two rituals. Catholicism in the Philippines is a prime example of religious syncretism as the contemporary Filipino admiration for the bloody crucifixions that form part of the staging of the *Pasyon* [passion] of Christ during the Easter Crucifixion Parade demonstrates. It also resonates with the use of bloodletting as a symbolic gesture among “Filipino nationalist heroes opposing foreign occupation (USA, Spain, Japan)” (Rafael 2000: 112).

Peter Bräunlein (2009) offers an illustrative description of how so-called Philippine ‘Calvary Catholicism’¹⁰⁸ has come to be one of the distinct expressions of national Filipino identity aided by the mediatisation of national politics, the press and tourism, which have given it visibility:

Semana Santa, as the main religious celebration of the year, and the bloody Lenten rites give occasion to politicians, representatives of the Catholic Church and journalists to release statements about the meaning of Christ’s death for the communal

¹⁰⁸ Bräunlein follows a sociological study of religion to understand how the flagellation and crucifixion ritual in the Philippines has come into being, proving that it is not a combination of indigenous rituals with the inherited Catholic idea of flagellation as a way of “monastic exercise (disciplina)” (896), he argues that the ritual of self-mortification was unknown in the pre-Spanish Philippines (896). However, he does claim that “self-flagellation has been an interrupted tradition for more than 350 years up to the present day” (896), thus being distinctively recognised as a Filipino tradition. Bräunlein explains that it was in the 1960s that the first enacted public crucifixions took place as a result of the emergence of the New Mysticism embedded in New Religious Movements (NMR). According to these beliefs, the martyrs (the ones crucified) are seen as provided with healing powers by their proximity to God via their sacrifice, thus changing their status from stigmatised subjects (who initially resist participation in the ritual) to charismatic ‘ideal-typical’ prophets in Max Weber’s sense.

whole, for the nation, for “being Filipino.” The sense of “togetherness”, of unity, of a shared cultural heritage and destiny, is evoked and affirmed. Thus cultural identity is negotiated through the interpretation of passional Catholicism. (914)

The US occupation government, however, saw in the cockfight an excuse for not granting Filipino independence. Davis quotes the American Presbyterian missionary Arthur Judson Brown saying that “the warm climate, coupled with the lure of easy money at the cockpit, made the Filipino unfit for self-government or future US citizenship” (557). The president of the League of Moral Progress for Filipinos (established in 1906), Mr. Kinkaid, similarly wondered: “How can people who allow themselves to be known by the barbarous sport of cockfighting be allowed to govern themselves?” (qtd. in Guggenheim 139). The cockfight thus offered a way to validate a discourse of national supremacy that opposed the ‘civilised’ US to ‘barbaric’ Filipino cultural practices viewed as signs that the country remained attached to the Spanish Empire. A similar discourse was evoked in response to Paz Mendoza’s *Notas de viaje*, as I discussed in Chapter 3.

Davis summarises the relevance of cockfighting for the American project of exceptionalism and republicanism, and for Filipino nationalism as follows:

Yet this form of fraternal leisure [cockfighting] was also highly political. [...] Supporters and opponents alike mapped gendered, raced, and classed ideologies of nation and sovereignty onto the bodies of fighting cocks to stake their divergent political and cultural claims about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and national belonging. Cockfighting enthusiasts were cultural nationalists—indeed, cockfight nationalists—who defended their right to fight as a right to preserve their cultural heritage and a right to citizenship and self-determination. Similarly, anti-cockfighting activists implemented their own culturally inflected ideals of proper assimilability and nation building to create an empire of benevolence and animal kindness, which, in turn, bolstered exceptionalism ideologies of the United States as a republic, not a traditional empire like Spain. (550-1)

Thus, American nation-builders and Filipino cultural nationalists alike appropriated the cockfight - as either to be abandoned or preserved - in order to construct competing visions of the imagined national community. These antagonistic visions are brought into the narrative of *El Campeón* through the dialogues between Father Nicolás and Gervasio in the first part of the novel, and between Banogón and Bakiki towards the end, as I will show later on.

Early in the novel, Father Nicolás invokes the discourse of “animal kindness” referred to above and suggests introducing other, more wholesome pastimes to the islands. However, while the American authorities attempted to make baseball an antidote to the moral wrongs of the cockfight (Davis 2013), Filipinos continued to prefer the cheaper, local sports through which they were able to cultivate different sets of values and ideas of community and

sportsmanship. As the novel shows, such values included tolerance and acceptance of life's setbacks:

-[Gervasio] En la gallera, el hombre del pueblo aprende a practicar la virtud de la tolerancia

-[Father Nicolás] ¿Y en qué consiste eso?

-Consiste en la capacidad de poder aceptar sus derrotas con el mismo espíritu ecuánime con el que recibe sus victorias (48)

[...] - Es la primera vez que oigo hablar así a alguien de la gallera.

- Porque es la primera vez que usted se pone en contacto con y se adentra en el pensamiento de un hombre que conoce la razón de ser se su arraigo en el pueblo.

- Pero aún dando por buenas todas las razones que aduces, los tiempos modernos han traído nuevos deportes, más sanos y menos expuestos que la gallera. ¿Por qué no se ha de sustituir esta por aquellos?

- ¿Por qué? Porque en primer lugar todos esos deportes son costosos y, en segundo lugar, porque no apelan a las exigencias psicológicas del pueblo.

- No te entiendo.

- Voy a tratar de explicarme. (49)

[[Gervasio] In the cockpit the village man learns to practice the virtue of tolerance.

[Father Nicolás] What does that consist of?

- It consists of accepting one's defeats with the same unbiased spirit as one receives one's victories]

[...] I never heard anybody talk like that about the cockfight.

- That is because this is the first time you are getting in touch with and trying to understand the way of thinking of a man who knows the reason why [cockfighting] is deeply rooted in the village.

-Well, despite the good reasons that you allege, modern times have brought new sports, healthier and less demonstrative than the cockpit. Why can these not replace it?

-Why? Well, in the first place because all those sports are expensive, and second because they do not appeal to the psychological needs of the people.

-I do not understand.

-I will try to explain.]

Gervasio continues by asserting that, for a common farmer, "there is nothing cheaper than raising and training a gamecock" (50), after which he elaborates on the ways cockfighting fulfils the "psychological needs of the people":

- Además, ¿no se ha fijado usted que nuestro pueblo, a pesar de su legendario amor a la paz, ama el peligro y adora a los valientes que mueren peleando? En los deportes importados no existe el elemento de peligro que el pueblo encuentra en el combate entre dos gallos que se engarzan. Por eso jamás se harán perpetuamente populares en nuestro país. ¿Se ha fijado usted en la prontitud con la que se agrupa la gente de la sementera alrededor de cualquier fanático que predica doctrinas absurdas que ella no entiende pero que, por instinto, sabe que son aborrecidas por el gobierno? ¿Y por qué ese fanático conquista adeptos? Porque éstos ven en él la encarnación del valor temerario, del que desprecia el peligro sabiendo que las fuerzas del predicador podrían ser aplastadas por la ley en cualquier momento. Así

es igualmente la gallera en las oscuras y anónimas preferencias populares: una encarnación, un símbolo del valor personal, del valor que desconoce el miedo y no siente escalofríos ante el espectáculo de la sangre que tiñe de rojo la arena del ruedo.

- Tú no eres hombre vulgar, Gervasio - comentó el P. Nicolás cuando su sacristán hizo una pausa para dar una chupada a su cigarro - tú, seguramente, has estudiado. (50)
- [Have you not noticed that our people, despite their legendary love for peace, love danger and adore the brave ones who die fighting? In imported sports there is not the element of danger that the people [*el pueblo*] find in the combat between two roosters. That is why they will never be perpetually popular in our country. Have you noticed how quickly people that work in the fields gather around any fanatic who preaches absurd doctrines that the crowd does not understand but knows, by instinct, to be abhorred by the government? Why does such a fanatic man gain followers? Because they see in him the incarnation of reckless courage, one that despises danger while knowing that his preaching could be crushed by the law at any moment. Such is the cockfight in the dark and anonymous preferences of the people: an incarnation, a symbol of personal courage, the courage that knows no fear and does not shiver when contemplating the spectacle of blood that dyes the arena of the ring red.
- You are not a common man, Gervasio - commented Father Nicolas when his sacristan paused to take a drag of his cigarette - you must have surely gone to school.]

Father's Nicolás can only justify his astonishment at Gervasio's convincing, eloquent words by exclaiming that he is 'not an ordinary man,' but 'must have gone to school,' highlighting, once again, the emphasis the novel places on the value of education, which, crucially, unlike Father Nicolás, he sees as not only taking place in schools, but also in the cockpit. Gervasio describes how Filipinos may be perceived as peaceful people (a stereotype transferable to all Asians), but actually enjoy it when normal life is interrupted by violence and dissidence, especially if an underdog is challenging the status quo. A preacher of absurd doctrines whom nobody understands epitomizes the "obscure preferences" of the people, who know, instinctively, that he is pushing his luck. It does not matter that his words are not understood; what matters is the danger inherent in his actions. If the underdog, the fanatic preacher, happens to succeed, he will be a hero; however, if he loses, he will comply with another image of Filipino national pride, that of sacrifice and martyrdom. The literal interpretation of the 'founding myth' or master narrative of Christianity, the crucifixion of Jesús, allows for a different mode of identification (Braunlein 2009). Moreover, the most well-known Filipino literary and political figure José Rizal came to exemplify the myth of the heroic, Christ-like martyr after being killed by the Spanish for writing two anti-clerical novels: *Noli Me Tangere* [Latin for Touch me not] (1896) and *El Filibusterismo* [Buccaneering] (1872). In the words

of Benedict Anderson: “This book [*Noli Me Tangere*] earned him martyrdom in 1896 and later, eternal status as Father of his Country and First Filipino” (2005: 9).

Rizal was the first Filipino nationalist to propose the cockpit as a space of potential anti-colonial dissidence. In the following fragment from *Noli me Tangere* (1886), two brothers are trying to decide if they should join a raid on the Spanish barracks while attending a cockfight in which an underdog defeats the favourite to a loud scream from the crowd:

Whoever heard it from afar would have understood that the favourite had lost. So it is among nations. The small nation that achieves a victory over a larger one tells it and sings it forever after. (qtd. in Guggenheim 1982: 138)

By reading the cockfight as an allegory of (anti-colonial) war in which the unusual but nonetheless possible victory of the “small nation” becomes a story sang “forever after,” Rizal confirms his view of the cockfight as a space for leisure where the enactment of a deadly struggle may also foster political resistance. Yet, at the same time, Rizal loathed the sport, considering it “enervating and parasitic, sapping men of their money and judgment” and not worthy of a “Philippine republic founded on moral virtue” (Davis 557). Abad picks up on both sides of Rizal’s ambiguous view of the cockfight in *El Campeón* through various characters’ viewpoints but he clearly privileges its significance as a space of community formation and potential anti-colonial resistance, as well as emphasising the Church’s double morality towards the cockfight.

It is easier and faster to read in the cockfight an allegory of masculinity than one of anti-colonialism, and this is an aspect that is given importance in *El Campeón*, which does not just present cockfighting as an enactment of masculinity but also draws attention to the gender control that fowl populations are subject to. In the next section, after revisiting key academic discussions on cockfighting, I will address how, in the novel, masculinity is attached to the idea of the patriarchal nation and gendered national roles.

Cocks and Chicks: Masculinity in National Discourses

It is impossible to avoid the question of masculinity when writing about cockfighting, not only because of the many times I have had to write the word ‘cock’ (and think about alternative words that would remove the easy puns) but also because the cockfight is in most contexts an exclusively male practice (Geertz 2005; Marvin 1984) that produces further images generally associated with masculinity: sportsmanship, courage, strength, militarism, domination. Most of the literature that studies cockfighting addresses its relation to masculinity. The three texts I will discuss in this section, by Clifford Geertz (2005), Alan

Dundes (1994) and Jerry García (2007), all focus on the intimate relationship between men and their cocks through a language filled with *double entendres*.

In his psychoanalytical reading of the cockfight, Dundes argues that the cockfight, as a folklore performance, acts out a taboo, bringing the unconscious into consciousness through “a public masturbatory, phallic duel” (1994: 275). He compares cockfighting with other blood sports and asserts that “in all-male sports, one male demonstrates his virility, his masculinity, *at the expense of the male opponent*. One proves one’s maleness by feminizing the opponent. Typically, the victory entails (no pun intended!) penetration” (Dundes 1994: 250). In cockfighting, penetration of the other’s body is achieved by the razor that is attached to the bird’s leg and that literally cuts into the opponent’s body.

The symbolism of the birds fighting and the metaphorical identification of the men with their animals are also at the core of Geertz’s anthropological interpretation of Balinese cockfighting. He claims that the metaphorical becomes partly real due to the enormous amount of time that handlers, breeders and trainers spend with their own and other men’s cocks. This intimacy leads him to describe the handling of gamecocks in a homoerotic manner:

Half or more of them [Balinese men] will have a rooster in his hands, holding it between his thighs, bouncing it gently up and down to strengthen his legs, ruffling its feathers with abstract sensuality, pushing it out into a neighbour’s rooster to rouse its spirit, withdrawing it again towards his loin to calm him again. Now and then to get a feel for another bird, a man with fiddle this way with someone else’s cock for a while, but usually by moving around to squat in place behind it. (61)

Here, Geertz paints a homoerotic picture that departs from common references to the birds’ engagement in their dance-like fight, in which the violence and desire to dominate the other male body also evokes a sexual engagement. By transferring the homoerotic relationship to the birds’ owners, he substantiates his claim that his study of the cockfight is in fact a study of men: “understanding men by understanding cocks” (2005: 62). In addition, Geertz argues that aesthetic enjoyment is derived from the masculine spectacle of the cockfight as a manifestation of honor, competitiveness, courage or strength, and that, as such, the cockfight provides the men watching it with a space for self-recognition and the formation of subjectivities. The narrative of the fight creates a communal ethos that produces a similar emotional and intellectual reaction to the one that drives Westerners (Geertz writes “us”) to go to see *Macbeth* (2005: 84). Accordingly, “what he [the Balinese] learns is what his culture’s ethos and his private sensibility (or anyway certain aspects of it) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text” (Geertz 2005: 83). In the end, for Geertz, “nothing

really happens to anybody” (except for the birds that is) as the men rejoice in a spectacle reflecting and rendering readable, but not challenging, Balinese (masculine) culture.

Cockfighting might indeed create the conditions for participants to come to recognise certain aspects of their culture in a similar way to a play, a music performance or a film, but it is important to acknowledge that the cockfight’s audience, in Bali and elsewhere, does not comprise the entire community: women do not generally attend the fights, nor do all men. Yet in Abad’s novel, Gervasio’s comparison of the fascination with cockfighting and that with a fanatic preacher refers not only to Filipino men but to the Filipino “people” as a whole, *el pueblo*. Cockfighting in Abad’s novel is thus seen to say something about an entire culture, just as in Geertz, where the cock stands for the man and the man for all of Balinese culture. More specifically, Abad uses cockfighting as an allegory for the Filipino fight for nationalism, expanding the possibilities for identification with the victorious underdog cock (against the champion cock, who stands for the colonial power) to all Filipinos.

García (2007) interprets cockfighting as a cultural practice that expresses a form of resistance to domination and ties such resistance closely to masculinity. Looking at cockfighting in the Chicano community in the US, García associates it with the formation of a “resistance masculinity” that challenges cultural erasure and emasculation in migrant or diasporic communities. His interest in cockfighting is motivated by his male family members’ passion for the fight. As a second-generation Mexican living in the South West of the US, his article is an attempt to understand the meaning of cockfighting for the Chicano culture he grew up in and, specifically, his father’s and uncle’s attachment to its practice. His article begins with the suggestive sentence “I have no memory of the first time I saw my father measuring his cock” and continues as follows: “I remain, however, keenly aware that at a young age I was initiated into a world of manliness unlike any other” (109). With regard to my analysis of Abad’s novel, what is relevant in García’s analysis is, on the one hand, his association of the macho masculinity displayed by Mexican men around cockfighting with a response to the disempowerment associated with being an immigrant in the US and, on the other, his view of the sport as producing a sense of community belonging among Mexican immigrants. He quotes several scholars who argue that macho attitudes, such as hyper-masculine bravado, confrontation, abuse, dominance and posturing (Klein 2000), are often the result of “a futile attempt to mask a profound sense of impotence, powerlessness and ineptitude, an expression of weakness and a sense of inferiority” (Mirandé qtd. in García 118). Thus, Latin machismo, as expressed in relation to the cockfight, can be understood as a form of masculine overcompensation engendered by a sense of powerlessness. In *El*

Campeón, this masculine overcompensation appears in Banogón's confident behaviour and inflated sense of self while he is still a champion fighter. At the same time, the novel highlights the literal and symbolic emasculation to which this overcompensation is a response: male chicks are castrated to obtain quickly fattened young meat and Banogón is forced into abstinence as a fighting cock, causing him to fail at his breeding role upon his return to the coop.

Another relevant aspect from García's article is that it shows how, in the context of US Chicano culture, cockfighting is not a spectacle for the male masses (as in Bali or the Philippines) but a subculture in which a macho ethnic identity is asserted against normative white masculinity. Looking at cockfighting as a form of 'resistance masculinity' works at two levels: it allows an affirmation of Mexican (macho) masculinity against white American masculinity, while simultaneously creating a sense of belonging to the Chicano community. For Mexican immigrants in the US, García claims, cockfighting keeps alive a tradition associated with the homeland, slowing down the process of cultural erasure and challenging the claim to superiority made by white American culture:

Elements of masculinity as defined by Mexican culture are kept alive within the arena of the cockfight. [...] Mexicans males who see masculinity as a positive mechanism for overcoming discriminatory structural forces in the US display a form of assertiveness, responsibility and selflessness. As a result, the cockfight, the means by which Mexican males are able to create a space of their own in a world far from their origins, in some way, slow down the process of assimilation. This "resistance masculinity" becomes a defensive mechanism against the devaluation of the Mexican culture. (García 133)

Cockfighting as represented in *El Campeón* echoes this idea of building a communal identity capable of resisting hegemonic culture within the space of the cockpit, although in the Philippines the cultural erasure that is being fought is that of indigenous and traditional Filipino culture enforced by (resilient) colonialism. In addition, the novel points out how, in the end, the aggressive, hyper-masculine fighting cocks are not successful at resisting those who oppress them; they end up killing each other for the entertainment of others, while the title of "champion" does not convey any real power, as Banogón's story makes clear.

Masculinity in the novel is recurrently conceptualised in terms of virility: the gamecocks display a belligerent-aggressive, dominant form of masculinity (encouraged by forced sexual repression) that makes them good fighters and the roosters' masculinity is virile-fertile-protective, as their role is to reproduce and defend the harem, helping to "perpetuate the species" (261). At the same time, the majority of the male chicks are deprived

of their virility by castration at birth in order to stimulate their fattening - turned into capons, these chickens are depicted in the novel as submissive and lacking willpower: “Toda su ambición consistía en alimentarse bien, enriquecer el tejido adiposo y entregarse sin protesta al sacrificio (238) [all their ambition is to eat well, enrich their fat tissue and deliver themselves without protesting to the sacrifice].

Banogón, upon his return to the chicken yard, observes “the horrific reality” that follows castration:

En un momento olvidó sus hermosas teorías de poco antes para no ver más que la realidad horripilante de unos gallos que, al quedar privados de la virilidad, habían sido condenados hacía tiempo a muerte sin gloria (272)

[He quickly forgot about the wonderful theories as he could only see the horrific reality of some roosters, who, deprived of their virility, had been condemned long ago to a death without glory.]

The ‘wonderful theories’ referred to are the arguments justifying Banogón’s aspirations for glory and the significance of his life as a cockfighting champion as opposed to the lives of other members of the community. ‘Deprived of their virility,’ the capons are condemned to die without glory, that is, without having the chance to fight for their lives and to remain alive in men’s memories; instead, they meet their end “bajo el filo de un infamante cuchillo de cocina” [under the blade of a disgraceful kitchen knife] (231). Such a death without glory is most feared by Banogón, who is repeatedly led to believe that gamecocks belong to a “raza superior” [superior cast] (215) destined to higher deeds than simply becoming food for men:

Tú mismo dime con franqueza: ¿recuerdas los nombres de los que contigo se criaron en aquel corral? Y si de ellos no te acuerdas tú, ¿cómo quieres que sus nombres se perpetúen en la mente de los hombres? En cambio el nuestro perdura aun después de nuestra muerte y lo recuerdan con cariño. ¿Qué nombre de gallo vive en la memoria de los hombres más tiempo que el nuestro? [...] Saben de nuestro valor y destreza, y nuestro nombre es para ellos como un gallardete, como un símbolo de victoria. Nosotros Banogón, somos los privilegiados de nuestra raza, la aristocracia de nuestros semejantes. Si supieras que para ser como nosotros, renunciarían con gusto a todo... [...] Quien no esté dispuesto a aceptar todo esto que no aspire a pertenecer a nuestra nobleza, porque para tal osadía no hay más que una pena, y es la muerte. (179-80)

[Tell me honestly, do you remember the name of anyone that grew up with you in that henhouse? And if you do not even remember them, how can you expect their names to live on in the minds of men? However, ours last even after our death and they remember them fondly. [...] They know about our courage and skills, and our name is for them a prize, a symbol of victory. We, Banogón, are the privileged of our race, the aristocracy among our fellow chicken. If only you knew that to be like us, they would gladly give up everything... [...] Whoever is not ready to accept all this should not

aspire to belong to our nobility; there is only one punishment for such audacity, and that is death.]

In this fragment, an older champion, Pulá, attempts to encourage Banogón to continue fighting when he has a crisis, a moment of doubt about his deadly and demanding profession. Pulá's words reveal the classism the novel addresses, also in relation to Filipino society by incorporating different discourses so as to reflect on how the elitist mentality of upper class Filipinos (founded, in the text, on the discourses of glory, racial superiority and masculinity) comes into being. In having Banogón turn away from this elitist mentality, the novel critiques those collaborating with the colonial regime and gives voice to others who are in opposition to these ideals. Those in the lower parts of society are feminised, another strategy of othering for colonialism to justify its enterprise, the weaker (women and colonized people) have to be protected by the masculine coloniser.

The controlled masculinity of the fowl population results in a sort of gender transformation evidenced by physical changes and a feminisation of the capons' habits:

Extirpada la virilidad, jamás sintieron la necesidad de la hembra y, desviado el instinto sexual, perdían rápidamente las características de la masculinidad. La cresta, símbolo de mando, palidecía y menguaba; la cerviz se humillaba, los ojos se despojaban de su habitual fiereza, la voluntad se quebraba y, apagado en la garganta el grito de guerra con que afirmaban los gallos su personalidad, en vez de cantar, cacareaban al primer atisbo de la aurora o bajo la modorra de la siesta. Estos eran, para Bakiki, los parias de la población, y a tal grado llegaba a veces la desviación de sus instintos que ella conoció capones que se prestaban gustosos a sustituir a las gallinas, cuidando, muchas veces mejor a ellas, de los pollitos demasiado temprano privados de la protección de sus madres. Conocían su destino y lo aceptaban con sumisa mansedumbre (238)

[Having had their virility removed, they never felt the need for a female, and deprived of their sexual instinct, they rapidly lost the qualities of their masculinity. Their crest, a symbol of command, paled and diminished; the backs of their neck sank, their eyes lost their usual ferocity, their will declined, and the war crowing with which roosters affirm their personality weakened in their throats, so that, instead of crowing, they clucked at the sight of dusk or during the drowsy hours of the afternoon siesta. These were for Bakiki the outcasts of the population, their deviation from masculinity was such in some cases that she met some capons who would gladly substitute for the hen, taking care, sometimes better than them, of the little ones who lacked the early protection of their mothers. They knew their destiny and accepted it with submissive docility]

These are the words of the only female protagonist of the novel, Bakiki, who perceives the gender role change caused by the use of biotechnologies in the coop as a threat to her own maternal role, a form of social destabilisation and, most importantly, as leading to the

stigmatisation of the little “outcasts” who seem to be unable to contest their effeminate role but accept it as their “destiny”.

Masculinity - in its various forms: belligerent, dominant, reproductive, protective or effeminate - is mobilised in Abad’s novel allegorically to reflect on the social structure of the Philippines as a result of colonialism. Colonialism and imperialism, like blood sports, are based on the idea of conquest and possession, where subduing the other is conceived of as an act of imposing one’s masculinity over a feminised opponent. This power dynamic is at the core of the second half of Abad’s novel, from the moment Banogón returns to the coop and observes how the chicken community is socially organised with the most masculine at the top and the most feminine at the bottom. Through the character of Banogón, this idea is challenged; he has to find its place at the bottom and imagine a community that is transcultural.

A New Form of Heroism

Banogón is retired to a farm on Cebu Island owned by a journalist. This journalist is the first-person narrator who writes down Banogón’s story as he hears it from the farm’s caretaker, a young man called Andrés. Andrés claims that he can understand the language of the chickens and has overheard Banogón tell his life story to the chicken population. Here we have a frame narrative with multiple frames that goes from Banogón to Andrés and from Andrés to the journalist and owner of the farm. The first-person narrator presents the story in the following way in the novel’s preface:

La historia que os voy a contar es un relato fiel de la vida y hazañas de un viejo campeón del ruedo, tal y como la oyó Andrés de Banogón y tal como me la refirió a mí. Os la transmito sin añadir nada mío, excepto el método con el que deben ir, en mi opinión, hilados sucesos y acontecimientos, para que la historia, por su ordenada y lógica trabazón, sea interesante para el lector. (17)

[The story that I am going to tell is the faithful account of the life and deeds of an old champion in the arena, just as Andrés heard it from Banogón and related it to me. I am transmitting it without adding anything of my own, except for the method by which, in my opinion, the events should be woven together, so that the story, logically arranged, becomes interesting to the reader.]

The story of Banogón is thus framed by the professional pen of the journalist, who ‘logically arranges’ it for the benefit of the reader. In the story itself, Banogón’s early years and his career as a gamecock appear as flashbacks, recounted from the perspective of his retirement on Cebu.

On the farm, Banogón struggles to live the life of a common rooster, which he initially perceives as inferior. He misses the devotion with which his trainers treated him and is unable to abandon his old habits, such as fighting the other chickens for the grain the caretakers throw on the floor. Moreover, as noted earlier, he becomes aware of “the horrific reality” of castration and the social stratification it produces. His disappointment with his new life increases as he realises that he is viewed as an old nostalgic rooster, ignored by the hens and bullied by the younger males:

Iba el viejo campeón arrastrando la tragedia de su pata inútil camino de la casa que consideraba su último refugio y pensando en la brevedad de sus días de gloria, apenado de su soledad. Allí, en medio de aquel mísero corral, ningún gallo había visto los laureles que coronaban su frente jamás abatida por la derrota, ninguna gallina se fijaba en la gallardía de su figura de una raza superior. (220)

[The old champion dragged the tragedy of his worthless leg on the path to the house, which he considered his last shelter, while thinking about the brevity of his glorious days and saddened by loneliness. There, in the middle of that miserable farmyard, no rooster had seen the laurel that crowned a forehead never debased by defeat, no hen admired the bravery of his body of a superior race]

Even worse than being unrecognised as a glorious champion is Banogón’s inability to fulfil his new duty: to provide the owner of the chicken farm with an offspring of future champions. Affected by old age, a permanently injured leg and his inexperience in physical love, Banogón is incapable of impregnating any of the hens. The severity of his crisis of identity, which is ultimately a crisis of masculinity, leads the reader to expect a violent outburst or even a rebellion in the fashion of Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945). However, the story does not culminate in conflict but in a reconciliation based on Banogón’s reconsideration of his role in the community.

On the farm, Banogón reconnects with his old friend Bakiki, who explains to him how things work in the community and what has happened in his absence. In the penultimate chapter, entitled “*Bakiki cuenta su historia*” [Bakiki tells her story], she explains how the arrival of a new species, the American leghorn, has transformed the coop. With regret, she admits her own (enforced) role in the transformation:

Bakiki confesó haber tenido veinte o treinta descendientes de esta raza, habidos de uno de los más ostentosos leghorn del corral. No tuvo más remedio que aceptarlo, ya que no quedaba gallo hábil de su propia raza, y la llamada de la especie era más fuerte que su odio. No sintió mucho la separación de sus hijos blancos cuando ocurrió la desbandada. Pero era eso su gran pecado: haber colaborado en la obra de exterminio de su propia raza (244)

[Bakiki confessed having had twenty of thirty descendants of that race, the offspring of one of the most ostentatious leghorn in the coop. She had no other option than to accept this, since there was no competent cock of her own race, and the call of the species was stronger than her own hate. She did not feel very sorry about separating from his white children when the disbandment occurred. However, her biggest sin was having collaborated in the work of extermination of her own race.]

Bakiki's confession obliquely blames the 'extermination' of the local population on the absence of 'competent cocks of her own race' from the farm. This may be read as a comment on the defencelessness of the (repeatedly) colonised: it is easy for the leghorns to dominate with, on the one hand, most of the local males dispossessed through castration and, on the other, the roosters who became gamecocks having become infertile through years of sexual restraint and injuries. At the same time, the incapacity of the gamecocks to reproduce is also due to the "conciencia de su superioridad" [awareness of their superiority], which causes most gamecocks to not allow themselves to "enamorarse" [fall in love] with any of the hens offered to them (241). This comment applies to Kabiara, another gamecock who retired to the farm before Banogón. Kabiara's inability to adapt earned him and those who followed him the disdain of the community. Banogón only ends the novel as a hero because, unlike Kabiara, he manages to overcome his sense of superiority and chooses to become part of the collective, making it stronger. Considering his story as an allegory of colonialism, this reinforces the idea that a communal voice needs to be developed through which the whole population of the Philippines can come together, resisting the unproductive and ultimately complicit models of heroism offered by the colonial oppressors.

Bakiki's remarks can be seen to question Filipino technocrats and the upper classes, who, in order to lead the comfortable life provided by their collaboration with the American government, ignored or were unable to address the social problems affecting the majority of Filipinos. These elites are the people who do not "discuss things any more" and are unable to think outside the standardised dogma's Abad refers to in his essay "The Transitory Hour." With this implicit critique of the Filipino upper classes, the novel shows a tendency to praise the common man (hardworking, religious, morally virtuous and capable of enduring hardship through resignation), demonstrating what Hroch considers a quality of romantic nationalism: "the idealization of the common man, usually a peasant or countryman, as the vehicle of elementary, universally human, national values" (2007: 6).

Although Bakiki feels guilty about her "contribution" to the "extermination of her own race" and presents blood mixing as a form of cultural erasure and cultural dominance expressed in racial terms, the novel also makes clear that there is no complete erasure or full

cultural dominance on the part of the American leghorns, as Bakiki's children come out not white but multi-coloured:

En el plumaje de sus hijos se repetía la anárquica multiplicación prodigiosa de los colores que caracterizaba los primeros tiempos del corral del cura, indicio, si no de pureza étnica, de abigarrada autoctonidad. Desde el metálico negro de obsidiana que no conseguía delustrar la continua exposición al sol y a las lluvias, al blanco impoluto que le recordaba el dominio de los leghorns, y desde el rojo agresivo del cobalto, con motas negras y amarillas, hasta el gris perla realzado por un pico negro y unas patas de color marfil, todos pregonaban el triunfo de lo indígena. Cada uno tenía su propia individualidad, y aquella algarabía de colores era, para Bakiki, un constante reto a la vulgaridad del color uniforme y único, característica de las gallinas llamadas de raza. (244)

In the feathers of her children the prodigious and anarchic multiplication of the colours that characterised the early days in the farmyard of the priest was repeated, not with ethnic purity but with autochthonous heterogeneity. From the metallic obsidian black that would not lose its glaze from continuous exposition to the sun and the rains, to the spotless white that reminded her of the hegemony of the leghorns; and from the aggressive red of cobalt with black and yellow dots, to the pearly grey enhanced by a black beak and ivory coloured legs, they all proclaimed the triumph of the indigenous. Each of them had their own individuality, and such a symphony of colours was for Bakiki a constant challenge to the vulgarity of the single, even colour of a chicken of pure race.

Here, the novel subverts the colonial discourse of white supremacy, as well as the nativist discourse that seeks to return to an unblemished precolonial time, through the image of a 'triumph of the indigenous' that is based on heterogeneity rather than on the 'vulgarity of the single race.' What is proposed here is a Filipino national identity founded on a fundamental multiplicity and the recognition that the influences of colonialism cannot simply be dispelled, even after independence (anything else would mean the exclusion of those who, like Bakiki's offspring, result from the mixing of the indigenous and the colonial). This idea is reinforced by other aspects of *El Campeón*, such as the harmonious way in which it portrays different nationals coexisting in the Philippines: the Chinese gamblers, the Spanish politician and the priest, the Filipino workers on the farm. This emphasis on the heterogeneity of the Filipino people can be read as signalling *El Campeón's* move from cultural nationalism to transcultural nationalism.

Although the narrative repeatedly portrays anything American as a threat, from the American leghorns taking over the farm to the Texan gamecocks who are the fiercest fighters in the cockpit, in the realms of food and music some American influences are seen in a positive light. Thus, it is noted that "Toda la ciudad se preparaba a celebrar las Pascuas haciendo acopio de los comestibles de rigor: jamones y tocinos de China, de América o

Australia, embutidos y turrónes de España, nueces, castañas, higos, pasas y loterías de todas clases” [The whole city was preparing to celebrate Christmas gathering the required food: ham and bacon from China, America or Australia, cold meats and nougat from Spain, walnuts, chestnuts, figs, raisins and lotteries of all sorts] (256). In a similar vein, the novel emphasises that (Spanish or indigenous) tradition and (American) modernity can be balanced, especially by the young:

Aquel año *los jóvenes de la vieja ciudad* habían acordado resucitar costumbres arrinconadas por la invasión victoriosa de los blues y foxtrot. Asistirían, como antaño, a la misa, y luego, al salir de la iglesia, se dirigirían a una casa elegida de antemano, donde desayunarían con *poto maya*, *bibingka* y chocolate, o con *manga* y *budbud*,¹⁰⁹ ya que aquel año los máncales habían rendido una abundantísima cosecha. Y para que no se dijera que su regresión a lo antiguo era completa, llevarían una orquesta cuyos sonos les recordarían que la tradición, aunque respetablemente hermosa, ya no vigía con tan rígida exactitud para excluir todo obsequio a la modernidad. (255-6, emphasis added)

[That year, the *young people of the old city* had agreed on resuscitating some customs neglected by the victorious invasion of *blues* and *fox trots*. They would attend the mass, like in the past, and then go to someone’s house as previously arranged where they would have a breakfast consisting on *poto maya*, *bibingka* and chocolate, or mango and *budbud*, since that year the mango trees had rendered an abundant crop. In order not to spread the word that their regression to the ancient was complete, they would bring an orchestra whose rhythms would remind them that tradition, even though it was respectfully wonderful, did not prevail with such a rigid accuracy as to exclude all rewards to modernity.]

The idea of merging the old and the new by recognising Filipino traditions as transcultural (Hispanic, Filipino and American) takes on a prominent role in the last chapter of the novel and responds to the urge that Hutchinson finds in the work of cultural nationalists to find a new voice, one that actively seeks to combine tradition and progress in mapping a new national identity:

I argue that the significance of cultural nationalists is that they present populations with new maps of identity and political prescriptions that claim to combine the virtues of historical tradition and modern progress at times of crisis when established practices and identities were shaken. (2013: 87)

Bakiki and Banogón come out of their identity crisis by rethinking their roles in the community in terms of fostering an inclusive sense of belonging and a communal spirit. Significantly, Hutchinson claims that cultural nationalists often employ an idiom of

¹⁰⁹ *Poto maya* (nowadays spelled with a “u” “puto maya”), *Bibingka* and *Budbud* are sweet breakfast foods made of glutinous rice with coconut milk and sugar. The latter is wrapped in a banana leaf (Young and Garcia 255).

regeneration as part of their method of nation imagining, which relies on a reinterpretation of the traditions and cultural ethos from the present rather than on a total revolution in the future. In Hroch's words: "the search for a new collective spirit need not necessarily have the character of a revolutionary dream of a new society: it can lead to a community of a new kind—namely, the nation" (2006: 7). *El Campeón* indeed attempts to reconfigure the rural Philippines as a 'community of a new kind' instead of 'dreaming of a new society' like Paz Mendoza did in *Notas de viaje*, with the new community it envisions incorporating past and present influences, viewed as regenerative forces rather than burdens, in a project of transcultural nationalism.

This new Philippines emerges at the end of the novel when Bakiki no longer sees herself as having participated in the destruction of her race but rather as the unconditionally loving mother of all her children: "Los amo por igual, y cuando me los quitan es como si a mí misma me quitaran la vida" (259) [I love them all the same, and as they take them away from me, it is as if they take my own life]. She confesses this to Banogón as the Christmas celebrations and the accompanying sacrifice of the chickens she has mothered approach. Banogón, however, has never felt the pain of a loss, not in a fight and not in losing someone he loved. Listening to Bakiki, he realises that he has never truly loved as neither he nor the people for whose amusement and profit he fought ever cared for others, especially not those defeated in the arena: "En su carrera de artista del homicidio, no había visto nunca derramarse ni una sola lágrima sobre el cadáver del vencido" (259) [In his career as an artist of the homicide, he had never seen a tear being shed over the corpse of the defeated]. In Banogón's life as a cockfighting champion he never truly had a reason for living outside himself, caring only about prospering at the cost of his opponents:

¡Vivir! Banogón, que paseaba sus meditaciones por el campo a la sazón inundado de sol, se paró sobre la robustez, todavía atlética, de su pata sana. ¿Qué representaba para él la palabra vivir? ¿No era allí donde radicaba la diferencia fundamental entre su concepto de la vida y el de su amiga? Mientras para ella la vida era un ejercicio cotidiano de excelsas virtudes —la de vivir ella más y mejor para mejor proteger la vida de sus descendientes—, para él era una constante y enérgica afirmación de su propio derecho a ella y una negación hostil de este mismo derecho a los demás, a los adversarios que tuvieron la osadía de ponerse frente a él. (261)

[To live! Banogón, who was strolling while meditating under the blazing sun on the barn field, suddenly stopped, standing on his robust, still athletic, healthy leg. What meaning did the word life hold for him? Wasn't it there where the most fundamental difference between his concept of life and that of his friend [Bakiki] lay? For her, life was a quotidian exercise of excellent virtues - that of living longer and better to protect the life of his descendants -, whereas for him it was a constant and assertive affirmation of his right to it and a hostile negation of that right to others, the

adversaries that would dare to stand in front of him.]

For Banogón the sense of continuity and community preservation is meaningless, for his life has been a sequence of encounters with death, forcing him to rely on his survival instinct and fighting skills. Following this moment of meditation, Banogón heroically defends a little chick from a bird of prey, thus asserting his new role as father-protector of the community:

Ese pollito salvado por mí ya es hijo mío, ¿comprendes, Bakiki? ¡Es ya hijo mío! Tan hijo mío como si lo hubiese engendrado yo mismo, porque lo he engendrado en el corazón...este corazón tan egoísta, que si hasta ahora ha palpitado por la gloria de mis laureles de campeón, de ahora en adelante palpará para él únicamente. (266)

[The little chick that I have saved is already my son, do you understand Bakiki? He is now my son! As much as if I had engendered him myself because I have engendered him in my heart... this selfish heart, that has beat until now for the glory of my laurel as a champion, from now on it will beat only for him.]

For Banogón, kinship is no longer something that only happens by blood but something that can also occur through a cultivated sense of belonging.

Following his rescue of the chick, he turns into a fatherly figure not only capable of physically protecting the community but also dismissing his own desire for glory. He comes to see himself as a spiritual leader:

Porque es ahora - se sinceró el viejo ex monarca de las galleras- cuando he podido dar un nuevo sentido a mi vida. Así como tú eres la madre real y verdadera de todos los que componen la población de este corral, yo voy a ser desde ahora su padre afectivo, su defensor contra todos los peligros. Tú los engendraste según la carne y yo lo he engendrado en espíritu. (267)

[It is now - confessed the old ex-monarch of the cockpits - when I have been able to give new meaning to my life. Just like you are the real and true mother of all who constitute the population of this coop, I will be from now on, their affective father, their defender against all dangers. You engendered them according to your flesh and I have done so in spirit.]

The idea of the “affective father” adds a new notion of masculinity to the ones already presented in the novel, which, when read as an allegory of nationalism, replaces the monarchy with a sovereign king with a family model regulated by a regime of care rather than violence. It also suggests that nationalism is fostered not just by being born of a country or by blood but that it requires a certain spirit or sense of community like the one proclaimed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1991), where he emphasises national belonging as comradeship and fraternity: “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible” (1995: 6-7). The verticality of the hierarchical Filipino social structure expressed in the early parts of the

novel is challenged by Banogón's symbolic descent to become a protector of and guide for the defenseless youth. In the novel, however, it is not fraternal love of those who see each other as equals (horizontally) that produces the sense of national identity but the identification with the father - except in the comradeship between Bakiki and Banogon, which also offers an alternative gendering of national belonging as not exclusively masculine. Despite Banogón's changed attitude, the novel thus maintains the idea of patriarchy at the core of nation building.

The idea of the nation as a family in the novel also continues to be defined by traditional gender roles: the woman remains linked to the procreation of the nation, while the man is seen as providing a spiritual sense of community and its physical defense. The masculine role is, however, reconfigured in as far as the novel calls for a father figure providing leadership, presence and affection. Affection and presence are qualities normally attributed to the female and stand in opposition to the dominant (colonial) idea of masculinity and equally against the Latin American notion of machismo.

Banogón's transformation calls for a new type of Filipino national hero who is a balanced figure as much a fighter as a caring father, but at the same time it calls for a stereotype of Filipino heroism modelled on the premises of Filipino Catholicism and sustained by the symbolism of suffering and martyrdom. Bräunlein (2009) elaborates on the symbolism of suffering in Filipino Catholicism as exemplified in the rituals of crucifixion during the Easter parade in particular areas of the Philippines: "Suffering as evidence of being chosen by God transforms suffering into salvation," he explains, "Jesús, the original charismatic and stigmatic exemplified such fundamental changes of spiritual power and status by altering his position from a slave to a world conqueror" (905). Banogón frees himself from the slavery of the cockfight to become a spiritual leader of his community by sacrificing his egocentric aspirations of glory and adopting what Bräunlein calls a 'pathos of humility' (*Demutspathos*), associated with "the rhetoric of sacrifice, martyrdom, self-denial, enforced charismatic authority, which is diversely illustrated in early Christianity" (905). Banogón's heroism at the end of the novel derives from his surrender to the community, humbling himself to endure with the others. He suffers physically from his injured leg and castration, but is perceived as a hero precisely because of this. Bakiki's expression of unconditional love for her offspring, regardless of how they look, is also an example of this 'pathos of humility.' This conception of Filipino heroism/nationalism is, in the end, an example of acculturation instead of transculturation. The figure of the Filipino patriot has assimilated the values and symbols of Catholicism (fraternity, sacrifice, humbleness).

The novel ends with Banogón's words of consolation in response to Bakiki's sorrow over the approaching killings of her children on Christmas Eve:

“No llores más, que tus lágrimas parecen repudiación de tu nobilísimo destino. ¿No oyes cómo las campanas se han echado al vuelo? Es que acaba de nacer el Niño Dios. ¡Cantan el himno glorioso de la Santa y Fecunda Maternidad!”(274)

[Do not cry anymore, your tears seem a rejection of your noble destiny. Don't you hear how the bells toll? The child of God has just been born. They sing the glorious hymns of the Holy and Fertile Maternity!]

Closing with this celebratory image of motherhood and fertility, and ultimately the acceptance of the two characters' destiny (serving as “regio regalo al apetito de los hombres” (743) [great gift to men's appetite]) suggests a Catholic Filipino fatalism. The novel endorses the Catholic values of resignation and peaceful resistance (the Lord is to decide), with the main character abandoning any type of fight: the cockfight from the top of the social hierarchy and the liberation of the chicken community (symbolically a fight for Filipino independence) from the bottom. Despite the moments in which *El Campeón* gestures towards an imagination of the Filipino nation as a transcultural realm, such as when describing the mixed-blood chicks and when representing the cockfight as entangled with Catholic and Chinese rituals, the novel is prominently an example of Filipino cultural nationalism tied to Catholicism and, by implication, the Spanish colonial influence on the country.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how Antonio Abad's novel *El Campeón* contributes to the repertoire of literary texts written in Spanish that may be considered as seeking to foster a Filipino cultural nationalism. As such, it can be located within the gestational moment of nation building the main objective of which is not to implement social and political change in order to achieve a state-oriented national project, but to cultivate a sense of national belonging. An important trait of Abad's novel as an example of cultural nationalism is his retrieval of cockfighting as a rooted Filipino practice that connects the past colonial history with the present. Abad presents cockfighting in the novel as an anticolonial metaphor, pointing to how it has historically resisted modernisation policies from both the Spanish clergy and the US reformists that sought to eradicate it and positioning it as a site of potential political dissidence that capitalises on the Filipino sensibility towards supporting the underdog, as well as the central space for socialising, educating and entertaining in the rural Philippines.

Through the fable of the rooster, the novel questions the concept of ethnocentricity, instead celebrating hybridity. It addresses the link between masculinity, colonialism and nationalism, and proposes a more balanced model of masculinity in which strength is combined with affection. The story of Banogón also challenges the role of the technocrats, the elite of ilustrados that settled at the top of the colonial hierarchy and refused to adapt to the changing realities of the rural Philippines. The transformation of Banogón from a gamecock seeking glory to a spiritual guide is the novel's nuanced translation of what form of national leadership Abad believes is needed in the Filipino context.

El Campeón's imagination of the nation gives voice to a new form of Filipino national identity that is not singular but multi-coloured, masculine and feminine, Asian, Hispanic, (selectively) American and modern, while also being unequivocally Catholic. The novel's lingering attachment to Spanish (Catholic) values, without showing the Filipino people's agency in reinventing these values, prevents it from fully embracing a transcultural model. In this, it resonates with Balmori's *Pájaros*; neither text shows (non-Hispanic) Filipino characters, except very peripheral ones like Inggoy, who creatively combines his idolatry of the Virgin with his love of the cockfight, having agency in their own transculturation