



Echoes of the Seventies: A Critical Examination of Dekada '70 and the Marcos Regime

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DOI: 10.47760/cognizance.2025.v05i06.025

Lualhati Bautista's *Dekada '70* offers a profound and nuanced exploration of the Philippine experience under the Marcos dictatorship. The novel masterfully interweaves the personal struggles of the Bartolome family with the broader socio-political context of Martial Law, creating a rich tapestry that illuminates the intricate relationship between individual lives and historical events. Bautista's narrative transcends simple storytelling; it serves as a powerful examination of the resilience and resistance of ordinary Filipinos facing authoritarian oppression. The novel's complexity—its multifaceted characters, profound thematic depth, and skillful narrative techniques—makes it an exceptionally rich subject for literary analysis. This study will employ a combined Marxist and New Historicist lens to unpack these multifaceted layers, revealing the novel's enduring significance as both a literary masterpiece and a crucial historical document. The analysis will delve into the socio-economic realities, power dynamics, and the interplay between text and historical context, ultimately showcasing the novel's enduring relevance in understanding the complexities of social and political oppression.

The decision to utilize a combined Marxist and New Historicist framework is deliberate and strategically informed as the narrative directly engages with the socio-economic realities of the Philippines during Martial Law, making a Marxist lens indispensable for understanding the power dynamics, class struggles, and material conditions depicted. This approach allows for a

detailed examination of how economic inequalities, the exploitation of the working class, and the control of resources shape the characters' lives and choices, revealing the pervasive influence of the dominant ideology on individual consciousness. The novel's unflinching portrayal of poverty, social stratification, and unequal wealth distribution provides ample material for a robust Marxist interpretation.

Simultaneously, a New Historicist perspective complements the Marxist framework by emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between the text and its historical context. New Historicism transcends simply situating the novel within its historical period delving into how the text both reflects and actively shapes the historical discourse of the time. Analyzing *Dekada 70* through this lens necessitates a thorough investigation of the interplay between the novel's narrative and contemporaneous political rhetoric, propaganda, and social movements. This approach illuminates how Bautista's representation of Martial Law interacts with and challenges the dominant narratives of the era, enabling a nuanced understanding of the novel's subversive potential and its contribution to the broader cultural conversation. The convergence of these two critical approaches is particularly fruitful for *Dekada 70* because the novel itself is deeply concerned with the intersection of class and power within a specific historical moment.

This analysis aims to: 1) thoroughly examine the socio-economic realities portrayed in *Dekada 70* through a Marxist lens, focusing on class struggle, economic inequality, and the insidious influence of ideology on individual and collective consciousness; 2) analyze the novel's intricate relationship with the historical discourse of Martial Law using a New Historicist perspective, exploring how Bautista's narrative engages with and subverts dominant narratives of the period and examining the interplay between the novel's representation of events and prevailing historical interpretations; and 3) synthesize the findings from both Marxist and New Historicist analyses to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the novel's literary and historical significance, highlighting its enduring power as a critical representation of



the Filipino experience under the Marcos dictatorship and its continued relevance in understanding the complexities of social and political oppression.

This study draws upon the theoretical frameworks of Marxist literary criticism and New Historicism. Marxist literary criticism, as articulated by Terry Eagleton (1976) in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, examines literature's reflection of economic and social structures, focusing on class conflict, power dynamics, and the pervasive influence of ideology on individual consciousness. This approach is particularly relevant to *Dekada 70* given its direct engagement with the material conditions of life under Martial Law. The Marxist lens allows us to analyze how economic inequalities, the exploitation of the working class, and the control of resources shape the characters' lives and choices.

Complementing this Marxist approach is New Historicism, as developed by Stephen Greenblatt (1980) in *Shakespearean Negotiations*. New Historicism emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between a text and its historical context, analyzing how literature both reflects and actively shapes historical discourse. This approach moves beyond simply situating the novel within its historical period; it explores how Bautista's narrative participates in and challenges the broader cultural conversation surrounding Martial Law. By examining the interplay between the novel's narrative and contemporaneous political rhetoric, propaganda, and social movements, we can gain a deeper understanding of the novel's subversive potential and its contribution to the historical record. The combined application of these two theoretical frameworks allows for a rich and multifaceted analysis of *Dekada 70*, avoiding the limitations of a purely historical or literary reading.

Applying Marxist and New Historicist theories to Lualhati Bautista's *Dekada 70* provides a multifaceted understanding of the novel's portrayal of the Marcos regime and its profound impact on Filipino society. A Marxist analysis would meticulously examine the material conditions and power structures that shape the lives of the Bartolome family and other

characters. This involves a detailed examination of the economic inequalities inherent in the societal structure, the exploitation of the working class, and the ways in which these conditions are exacerbated by the authoritarian regime. Specific attention would be paid to the family's financial struggles, Julian's persistent attempts to maintain a middle-class status despite mounting economic hardship, and the limitations placed on Amanda's aspirations due to the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and the harsh realities of economic inequality. The Marxist lens would also critically analyze how the novel depicts the state's absolute control over resources and its systematic suppression of dissent, revealing the inherent class conflict that permeates the narrative.

This Marxist analysis would extend to the ideological underpinnings of the Marcos regime, examining how the dominant ideology of the time is internalized by characters and shapes their perspectives and actions. Julian's initial support for Martial Law, for instance, could be interpreted as a reflection of the pervasive state propaganda and the widespread acceptance of hierarchical power structures. Conversely, Jules's rebellious actions represent a powerful challenge to this dominant ideology, highlighting the inherent conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor. The Marxist perspective would, therefore, analyze the novel as a compelling reflection of the class struggle under the dictatorship, demonstrating how economic forces profoundly shape individual experiences and social relations.

Complementing the Marxist approach, a New Historicist reading would meticulously situate *Dekada 70* within its specific historical context, considering the novel not merely as a reflection of the past but as a text actively engaging with and shaping historical discourse. This would entail a thorough examination of the novel's relationship to other texts produced during the Martial Law era like the government propaganda, oppositional literature, and journalistic accounts to understand how Bautista's narrative participates in and contributes to the cultural conversation. A New Historicist analysis would explore how Bautista's representation of events,

characters, and themes interacts with and challenges the prevailing historical narratives, highlighting instances where the novel subverts or offers alternative interpretations of the period.

The New Historicist approach would also analyze the novel's language and stylistic choices as products of their historical moment. The deliberate use of Tagalog, for instance, could be interpreted as a conscious choice to give voice to the marginalized and to directly challenge the dominance of English in official and intellectual discourse. The novel's narrative structure, character development, and thematic concerns would all be examined in relation to the socio-political climate of the time, revealing how Bautista skillfully uses literary techniques to represent and critique the historical context. The combined Marxist and New Historicist analysis of *Dekada 70* offers a rich and nuanced understanding of the novel's literary and historical significance, revealing its enduring power as a critical representation of the Filipino experience under the Marcos dictatorship.

References

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