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Cover Page Footnote

An abundance of gratitude to the editors and reviewers for *Beyond the Margins* for their time and generous feedback, and endless thanks to Elaine Castillo for writing a book I can't stop thinking about.

“An eternity or two later”: Family of Choice in Elaine Castillo’s *America Is Not the Heart*

Caroliene E. Cabada

Introduction

In a chapter on scalar literacy in *The Value of Ecocriticism*, Timothy Clark states that “The challenge facing environmental campaigners and ecocritics will be to find ways of relating specific texts or issues of environmental wrong to the complexities of the global environmental crisis, without letting a sense of its conflicts and contradictions become merely paralyzing” (51). In other words, how do we sustain activist work on environmental issues, when activism often requires *unsustainable* amounts of time and energy? The problem of activist burnout is a problem of scale: activists may often attempt to take on big issues with only their own solo capacity. Engaging in environmental activism is always a prime space for burnout, given that the environment encompasses innumerable factors that are hard to account for, solutions are slow to take effect, and there is a seeming lack of popular support in mainstream media outlets: A recent climate report from the International Panel on Climate Change made headlines on the day it was released, and then disappeared below the fold, relegated into obscurity the day after.¹ And yet, environmental activism is still extremely urgent: environmental issues have a direct, immediate, and material impact on people’s lived experiences.

Elaine Castillo’s *America Is Not The Heart* is an interesting case of a work examining activist burnout: Though not strictly a novel about environmental activism, the novel provides a useful counter-story to the narrative of solo environmentalism. *America Is Not The Heart* tells the story of Geronima “Hero” De Vera as she navigates moving to California after living for ten years in the Philippines with a cadre of the New People’s Army, a militant, citizen-led group dedicated to protecting the political and economic interests of the Filipino people. This essay will outline how Hero’s story is an answer to scalar challenges of environmental activism: By developing a “family of choice,” environmental activists can potentially sustain their activities beyond the scope of specific individuals at a given time. Such long-term planning is necessary, as individual activists may leave at any time—whether of their own will or not—though consistent, sustained effort is essential for making progress. In Hero’s case, she was a field doctor captured and imprisoned by the Philippine government, which brought her activist life to a grinding halt long before she was done with her work.

¹ Getting consistent, accurate, and suitably urgent coverage in mainstream media outlets has always been a challenge for environmental activists, especially in regards to climate change. See the *Hot Take* newsletter from Mary Annaïse Heglar and Amy Westervelt, two writers covering climate change issues: <https://www.hottakepod.com/the-news-is-bad-so-take-care-of-yourselves/>

Reading Hero's story through the lens of queer ecofeminism provides the foundation for this essay to examine the role of families of choice in preventing activist burnout. Families of choice are "elaborate friendship networks to compensate for a lack of supportive family ties" (Dewaele et al., 313). Not limited to LGBTQ individuals and their communities, they are also "an expression of resistance to normative family life...intended to challenge heteronormative cultural norms" (Dewaele et al., 313). Hero's activist cadre has characteristics of a family of choice tied together by a queer ecofeminist land ethic. These queer ecofeminist beliefs permeate through the cadre's entire structure, from their larger, long-term goals, to the small scales of their daily lives. This creates a kind of biosphere perception, which is "the ability to see in local phenomena—soil, weather, tree species, a water course—wider regional and global patterns, as well as expanding a sense of the various time frames of what one can see" (Clark 43). In a sense, biosphere perception encourages seeing microcosms of the whole in specific, regional and local parts. Thus the small, everyday actions can provide a template for collective, global environmental justice.

"No such goddess, no such safety": Gender, Sexuality, and Biosphere Perception

Life for Hero was fairly quiet even among the NPA. As a person with medical training, her highly specialized work was of such importance that she was not on the front lines of many demonstrations or protests the group planned. Hero came from a family of immense wealth and privilege—rumors of her true identity while she was imprisoned saved her from even more horrifying acts of torture: Most of the cadre were orphaned, sold by their families who did not have enough money to survive, or else whose parents were murdered by the state ("disappeared" after acting in a way counter to the Marcos dictatorship's wishes) (Castillo 114). Hero's imprisonment and torture had not been the result of her being specifically targeted. Her captors mistook her for Teresa, the unreachable, and yet magnetic, Kumander of Hero's cadre.

In observing the cadre's leader, Hero understands that Teresa's theory of change² wasn't in "the grand or demonstrably transformative sense, but change in the tectonic sense; change in the tectonic duration" (Castillo 118). This gradual theory of change distinguishes the NPA from other groups in the Philippines. The NPA cadres did not come in with sweeping reform nor inflammatory or rousing rhetoric, but aimed to become "Nice People Around" (Castillo 117), blending in with the locals and being part of their community. This served the dual purpose of addressing truly local concerns—medicine, supplies, ousting drilling and deforestation operations, etc.—but also gave the members of the NPA useful cover in order to escape the scrutiny of the martial regime. The NPA cadre did "small daily work" as local enforcers in lieu of a police force, and also placed "larger regional grievances front and center in their resistance strategies, which served the group's political beliefs, while also pragmatically helping to avoid conflicts by proving their loyalty to the people" (Castillo 116). In other words,

² "Theory of change" can be understood as a way of developing actionable plans for long-term social change by beginning with the end in mind. Instead of reacting moment to moment to shifting circumstances, a theory of change instead uses backwards induction in order to create a durable, but responsive, method of achieving desired outcomes. See Rogers, Patricia. *Theory of Change*, UNICEF, Office of Research-Innocenti.

supporting land reform³ was a larger ideal that informed the everyday actions the NPA took to stop soldiers from removing people from their land. In this way, biosphere perception of the human relationships doesn't move unidirectionally from micro to macro, but in reverse as well: The larger, regional goals can bolster the work on a local level.

The NPA cadre's theory of change seems to be an unusual, but welcome, deviation from the national authorities also present in the region—the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Hero notes that the locals thought that “the cadres were preferable to soldiers, those chicken thieves and brutos, who stomped into people's homes, drank too much beer, groped the women, looked down on mountain people, and protected the interests of wealthy lowlanders and foreigners” (Castillo 117). This reflects the real-life attitudes towards the AFP and the corresponding popularity of the NPA, which grew from humble origins in 1969 to reach ten thousand full-time guerillas in 1981, then fifteen thousand in 1984, twenty thousand in 1985, with an estimated 60 to 70 percent of its ranks comprising people of the peasant class (Rosca 3-10). The NPA would retain its tens of thousands-strong numbers through the February 1986 revolution that eventually ousted Marcos and put Corazon C. Aquino in place as president (Rosca 6). The continued popularity of the NPA is largely due to the group's ethic of respect, especially towards women, that permeates through their daily actions and attitudes towards the people they served.

Treating women well was a sign to the villagers that the NPA were serious in their commitment to land reform. In her essay “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,” Greta Gaard draws parallels between strict, heterosexual yet erotophobic norms that both impose and reflect Western societal attitudes towards the natural world. Erotophobia, as Gaard describes it, is the repressive fear of any sexual intercourse that is not strictly reproductive; the only “acceptable” sex between humans is heterosexual, restricting not only queer sexuality but also female sexuality outside of reproductive needs. Under this erotophobic view, women's bodies are reduced to their reproductive capabilities. Women are “fertile” or “infertile,” similar to the soil from which plants can grow, and men's sperm are likened to “seeds” that can—and in Western, colonialist mindsets of conquest and land enclosure, *must*—be spread. Women are robbed of their childbearing choices, expected instead to adhere to a single ideology of reproduction, hence why, according to Gaard, “From a queer ecofeminist perspective...it becomes clear that liberating women requires liberating nature, the erotic, and queers” (29). In order to free women from becoming simply a means of biological reproduction, the natural world must similarly be freed from the perception that it exists simply as a tool to further humankind. Queerness, and its necessary embracing and expression of non-heteronormative sexual practices, is a crucial lens through which to imagine the liberation of both women and nature from the restrictions of biology and conquest.

³ Land reform during this time period in the Philippines refers to the redistribution of agricultural land to break up large estates: “More than a quarter of arable land was owned by less than four percent of land-owning families” (Francia 274). The 1987 constitution included a specific provision to that recognized the need for land reform, but it did not provide a clear path forward and allowed the issue to fall to the side.

This liberation is not unidirectional. Liberating nature requires liberating women—and the erotic and queers—as well. The queer ecofeminist belief described by Gaard is part of the NPA’s foundational operating principles:

To speak politely. To pay fairly for all purchases and offer fair prices for all things sold...No brawls or physical abuse; woman-beating in particular would merit immediate expulsion from the ranks. Anything damaged had to be either repaired or paid for by the person who’d done the damaging. Avoid destruction of crops, even during skirmishes. Humane treatment of prisoners, even if they’d harmed a comrade. All sexual relations had to be undertaken between consenting adults. (Castillo 115)

Here, the intersectionality of queer ecofeminism and environmental justice⁴ comes through: Fair economic practices are connected to anti-abuse practices, particularly towards women. Protecting small-scale crops is connected to protecting even violent prisoners. Sex writ large is allowed *with consent*. Hero’s memories of life with her cadre include instances where these beliefs were tested. During a moment when she and a compatriot were drinking, the other party refused to take Hero up on her offer of sex because of their inebriated state: “I’m too drunk, you’re drunk, it’s not, not—right” (Castillo 114). The NPA’s sexual practices—their emphasis on respecting women and requiring consent—were in stark contrast to the soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Even if located in the same region, the AFP—which upheld the interests of the authoritarian government in power—raped women, brutalized the villagers, stole their goods, and generally displayed gross disrespect and abuse of the people, mirroring the gross disrespect and abuse their bosses enacted on the land in the form of extreme, clear-cut logging or drilling. It was no wonder that the villagers trusted the NPA over the AFP.

The codification of even sexual relations demonstrates the foundational respect that the NPA’s operations are built on, and the range of permitted sexual activities underscore their approaches to liberty. The NPA’s attitudes towards sex are not just limited to heterosexual relationships. The NPA rejects enforcing heteronormativity by forces like the AFP and the interests they protect—enforcement that becomes coercion, that becomes rape. Instead, the NPA in the novel embraces queerness. Hero’s sexual partners have been both men and women, and Hero’s attraction towards Teresa seems to be at least in part fueled by a kind of lust or love. Though she never sleeps with Teresa, this is not due to a ban on homosexuality; Teresa’s own affections seemed to walk the line of desire, as she says to Hero, “That’s one of the things I like about you, anyway, donya. That you have no shame” on page 113 in regards to Hero’s decisions and lifestyle. Instead, the lack of romantic or sexual relationship between Hero and Teresa seems to be a consequence of their different positions of power; Teresa “had never wanted anything like that from anyone” in her cadre (Castillo 113). Instead, Teresa asked for

⁴ Julie Sze in *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger* highlights the connections between “race, class, indigeneity, gender, and environmentalism [which] fundamentally involves social justice” (5). Environmental justice and queer ecofeminism are not necessarily interchangeable, but the overlapping concerns of gender and a non-heteronormative, non-patriarchal land ethic link these two concepts together.

loyalty to the cause, and never complicated that expectation by demanding sex or romance from her subordinates.

“The mountain’s most dangerous inhabitants”: Choosing An Activist Family

Teresa was twenty years older than Hero, and though Hero denies that she viewed Teresa as a mother figure, she does so “too fast, too low” (Castillo 357) when Rosalyn asks if Hero had seen Teresa as such, potentially revealing Hero’s agreement of that assessment. If Teresa is a mother figure, the structure of the NPA cadre could mimic some features of a “traditional” family. The family, though, is not bound together by blood relations or marriage, but instead by a shared commitment and accountability to the cause, essentially creating the foundation for a family of choice.

Though not restricted to individuals who identify as LGBTQ—families of choice or “personal communities” are also useful family structures for low-income individuals (Gazso and McDaniel 372)—families of choice often form the foundational support network for people who have experienced homophobia and queerphobia from their family of origin. Valory Mitchell described in her 2008 essay on lesbian families of choice,

Heterosexual couples and families are constrained and guided by many ‘givens’—expectations, marriage contracts, and visible models. In contrast, LGBT couples and families do not have these givens, and so have both the freedom and the need to define their commitment, boundaries, and expectations of one another (309).

In a sense, families of choice are relationship structures that are available to people for whom “traditional” family structures are inaccessible. This could be because some aspect of their identity exiles them from their family of origin, or a lack of wealth or other resources precludes them from being able to afford the heteronormative nuclear family, or perhaps there was a stark, and sudden, end to an individual’s family of origin, and they must find some way to start anew with a different family, one that could comprise multiple, unrelated individuals.

In the case of the activist cadre of the NPA, it is not necessarily queer sexuality nor penury that bind the people together but shared beliefs in land reform, social equity, and protection of the poor. That the members of the NPA cadre live and work in the same location mirrors a contemporary problem for environmental activists: the inseparability of work and personal life, which can lead to activist burnout. Certainly, activists don’t normally dedicate their time and resources towards advocating for an issue that isn’t deeply personal, but the strong emotional connections to social causes elevate activists’ susceptibility to unsustainable practices. As Kovan and Dirkx note in their 2003 study of environmental activists, “Caring deeply about one’s work sometimes brings with it the risks of feeling overwhelmed, discouraged, and depressed” where activists’ journeys can take them through a “‘dark night of the soul,’ referring to...emotional and often difficult and wrenching conflict and turmoil” (112). Especially for issues of such a massive scale, like intersectional issues of environmental justice, periods of burnout can feel especially difficult to recover from.

In the case of activists who hold multiple marginalized identities, burnout is especially prevalent due to the belief that one *must* overextend their efforts in order to enact change (Vaccaro and Mena 349). In Hero's case, life among the NPA blurred the lines between her work as an activist and her experience as an individual person so thoroughly that her gradual community-building in the Bay Area "was possibly Hero's first time making friends with no shared cause, whose lives and deaths weren't on Hero's head or under her scalpel" (Castillo 160). The extra stress of being a figure of such high importance—likely the only person in the camp with any surgical training at all—would mean that Hero would likely be the most at risk of burning out. Though not on the front lines, Hero was the person who saw to the injured and ill, and who witnessed, and helped potentially heal, the bloody traumas of the NPA's members.

Despite her high-stress position, it's clear that Hero did *not* burn out, even after ten years as part of the NPA. Instead, she was forcibly taken from the cadre with no way to return, and it is the physical torture she has undergone, permanently damaging her thumbs and leaving her extremely fatigued after her release, which prevents her from returning to activism. While Kovan and Dirkx emphasize the importance of individuation in activist work (108-09), Hero's story provides a different view: instead of individuation, a sense of belonging and shared struggle are key to a sustainable practice. In essence, an activist group *should* feel like a family, though not one bound by tradition and obligation to heteronormativity, but by belief in a common cause and accountability, which Teresa values and desires most from the cadre members (Castillo 113). Failing to meet the responsibility of being accountable to the members of the family—whether through some intentional sabotage or because of some outside force (as in the case of Hero's capture and torture)—results in harm coming to the family and/or its individual members.

"Welcome back, Nimang": Finding Family In and Out of Activism

Imprisonments such as Hero's are not an unusual or infrequent occurrence under an authoritarian regime. The Marcos administration frequently threatened and silenced vocal critics by imprisoning and executing them without due process, and by imposing martial law (Francia 239). The pattern of extrajudicial killings and the imposition of martial law echo through even to the present day: According to a report from Global Witness, 30 of the 164 environmental activists killed in 2019 were in the Philippines, and a third of these deaths occurred in the southern region of Mindanao where current president Rodrigo Duterte had declared martial law in 2017 (Simon). Formal talks to negotiate a peace between NPA insurgents and the Philippine government have repeatedly stalled (Francia 312). Recurring human rights violations, particularly against the most vulnerable populations and their supporters, makes the Philippines one of the most dangerous places to be an environmental activist.⁵

⁵ The Philippines' exact ranking changes year to year, but it has consistently been the most dangerous place in the Asia Pacific region to be an environmental activist. See *CNN Philippines*, "Philippines world's second deadliest country for environmental activists," 29 Jul 2020. URL: <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/7/29/PH-second-deadliest-environment-activists.html>

When Hero arrives in the United States in 1990, however, she is at least two years removed from being imprisoned, and it has been at least three years since the last time she has seen her cadre. Cut off from that group and estranged from her parents and many other extended family members still living in the Philippines, Hero moves to Milpitas, California to stay with her uncle, Tito Pol, his wife Tita Paz, and their daughter, the eponymous Geronima “Roni” De Vera. Hero is traumatized, recovering from the severe injury and torture she had undergone, living with limited mobility in her thumbs as a result, and also undocumented due to the sudden transfer from her family in the Philippines to her Tito Pol and Tita Paz. Feeling indebted to her extended family for taking her in, Hero soon takes up responsibility for cleaning the house, taking care of Roni, and bearing witness to the family’s struggles while making a place for herself in the Bay Area’s Filipino community.

While in the Bay Area, Hero meets Adela Cabugao, the co-owner of the Filipino restaurant where Hero takes Roni every Thursday for her faith healing appointment to cure the severe eczema that affects Roni’s face and arms. The restaurant becomes a safe haven of sorts, not only being the site where Roni gets her “healing” from Lola Adela but also the place that gives Hero a part-time job that shapes and structures her open-ended days. The restaurant is the place where Hero first spends time with Rosalyn, Lola Adela’s granddaughter and a talented make-up artist who has grown up in the area. Rosalyn becomes Hero’s point of entry into the community of Filipinos and Filipino Americans closer to her age.

Though the Bay Area has a reputation of being a hotspot for intersectional justice and protests,⁶ when Hero arrives, she does not directly engage with any of the activist or organizing work. Instead, she is starting over, doing basically none of what she had done before she came to the United States—not her medical work or her activist work. The loss of the activist family of choice is what has made the years after Hero’s release so difficult, and she attempts to recreate it, at a smaller scale, in the Bay Area. Though Hero does not engage in environmental activism in the Bay Area, she still carries on the work of some of the NPA’s foundational issue areas.

Living in California illuminates the particulars of American life—the ready access to consumer goods, ethnic diversity, relatively benign political discourse (at least, in comparison to the Philippines under martial law)—and the class stratification in the Philippines that has persisted in the Filipino American community. Certain families still hold sway in the Bay Area the same way they did in the Philippines because of their wealth. Hero, though, seeks the company of lower-income Filipinos like Lola Adela and the regulars of her family-run restaurant. The restaurant recreates some of the dynamics of Hero’s life with the NPA, only on a much smaller, quieter scale. Hero gets a job working the register and serving the patrons, a job that allows her to feel useful, similar to what she felt working as her cadre’s doctor (Castillo 165). The restaurant holds together a community of people who *want* to be there. Roni, after her healing appointment with Lola Adela, “started finding excuses to stay in the restaurant—she wanted to watch a video, she wanted to finish her homework, could Adela make sotanghon with more ginger in it, she could wait” (Castillo 157). On Thursdays, the community gathered to

⁶ The Bay Area is a multifaceted region, and looms large in the national imagination of the counterculture of the 60s and 70s. See Ashbolt, Anthony. *A Cultural History of the Radical Sixties in the San Francisco Bay Area*. Routledge, 2013.

sing karaoke in the restaurant, an event that doesn't seem to net the restaurant any profits. The community remains cohesive not because Lola Adela exerts her power over them, but because the restaurant is a central place to meet all kinds of people outside of rigid power structures.

This openness is what heals Roni: Before meeting Lola Adela, Roni's extreme eczema seemed to have no cure, but improves as she spends time at the restaurant. The story implies that Roni's improved condition is tied to spending her time with Lola Adela, away from her Auntie Carmen's—Tita Paz's older sister's—place, where she had previously spent her time after school. When it's suggested that Roni go back to Auntie Carmen's a few days a week, Roni has "a complete meltdown, giving up on the world" (Castillo 210). This reaction gets explained in a pivotal scene during Roni's eighth birthday. Hero finds that Roni had been taken away from the central action of the party by Freddie and Jejo, Auntie Carmen's adult sons. When Hero finds them, Freddie and Jejo are asking Roni "Don't you miss playing?" while tickling her despite her repeated demands that they stop (Castillo 241). Hero recognizes that their actions ignore the young girl's bodily autonomy, an echo of the violations against women that occurred in the Philippines at the hands of the AFP.

The abuse that Roni experiences, and the ways that she is saved from that abuse, further highlight how a family of choice can extend the values of queer ecofeminism and environmental justice. Roni has her agency taken from her by blood-related men in her life who feel entitled to her body and exploit the heteronormative family connection. Though maybe not a direct cause of her eczema, the stress of being placed, day after day, in their care no doubt exacerbated any underlying medical affliction. When she is in the presence of a family of choice who provide a genuinely safe place—a place safe enough for her to want to spend as much time as possible there—her eczema begins to heal, becoming more and more treatable.

That Hero is able to recognize and act, when she witnesses the abuse, is a testament to how Hero's own healing has happened in the presence of this family of choice. That same Bay Area family of choice helps Hero feel more settled: "Hero got used to the words, *Kumusta ka na, mare?* Started to look forward to saying back, *Mabuti, mabuti*, and meaning it" (Castillo 166). Her hands are still malfunctioning, and she still has memories of hard living that come up as she goes through her daily life, but she is able to answer "Good, good" in response to being asked "How are you?" and have the sentiment be genuine. Families of choice, then, are a way for people to heal, at least enough to continue the work that matters most to them. For Hero, in the Bay Area, the work that matters seems to be protecting Roni; as Hero reminisces about a time when she froze while driving in the Philippines after she was released from being tortured, "The next time she drove was when Pol and Paz asked her to drop off Roni at school...Her hands worked. She wasn't afraid" (Castillo 232). The difference between being frozen on the road and being able to drive is not that she is physically healed, but that she has someone—Roni, in this case—to protect and care for.

Conclusion: Geological Generations for Activist Found Families

Creating an activist family is not a foolproof solution to the problem of activist burnout, nor the one, ultimate solution to the issues of scale. Family systems, even families of choice, are still precarious and vulnerable to catastrophes: Geographic concentration, smaller and smaller

generational cohorts, or fracturing of the network of support, in combination to a disaster of any kind, can end the work before it has reached its final goals. Storytelling and knowledge sharing provide a crucial piece of the puzzle, and can ensure the vitality and effectiveness of an activist group for generations after.

It is this generational characteristic that seems to be an under-studied aspect of family of choice structures; much of the literature focuses on the act of forming a family unit, with little discussion of generations before or after the unit of study. A survey of bisexual women who form families of choice noted that having nonheterosexual models—specifically older, extended family members like aunts and uncles—helped with their understanding and imagining the possibilities of living within their identity (Tasker and Delvoye 4264). This generational connection is something that many of the NPA cadre members do not have but find ways to create. Teresa, as Kumander, encouraged a shared myth-making among her cadre, asking people to contribute, in addition to their time and talents, “a personal archive of good jokes, creation myths, local folklore from your particular town or village” (Castillo 113). In a family of choice, handing down stories between generations is crucial, when no other mode of “inheritance” is possible, or even desired. These stories make the activist family resilient to disasters. The stories Teresa shared of her family, the NPA’s origins, and the stories of the people she interacted with were ones that gave new recruits the sense “that they belonged to something that depended on them every day to survive; something that they were also in the process of making, slowly and clumsily, on a small, small, practically imperceptible scale” (Castillo 118). Teresa’s own ascent into the Kumander position came about because of the death of her predecessors (Castillo 114), but the knowledge and stories she inherited ensured that she could keep her cadre alive and active in the region.

Even with knowledge sharing and storytelling as tools to continue the work, it’s not a guarantee that these strategies will always succeed. During the two years of her imprisonment and torture, Hero was cut off from all news, including the news of “the Magat Dam in neighboring Cagayan [,which] had made everyone in Isabela aware of the patterns that led to land theft. They joined up with NPA Cagayan and with Aetas from Cagayan to protest against the drilling...By the time Hero got out of the camp in ’88, drilling had begun” (Castillo 297). During her time with the NPA, one of the group’s main concerns was protesting, and stopping, corporate logging and deforestation that was “so dramatic that post-typhoon floods would almost certainly be able to flow unimpeded...whole villages would be buried in mud, worlds swallowed up in minutes” (Castillo 116-17). Before Hero’s capture, the group was planning a large demonstration and sabotage of an industrial logging operation, but her capture, and the lack of news about the action from the group, means that Hero doesn’t know if they were successful.

But Hero reflects on her own role, and the role she passed down to the people she had involuntarily abandoned. In the aftermath of the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo, Hero imagines the work that the cadre would engage in if they were still in the same place she left them, from evacuation and rescue to distributing resources and aid to the people left: “The clinic would be full of the injured...people who’d desperately need treating and Hero—wouldn’t be the one to treat them. There were other cadres with medical experience in Isabela; Hero had reluctantly trained most of them after failing to convince Teresa that the idea of her teaching anybody anything was absurd” (Castillo 298). Though Hero’s teaching was “reluctant,” it would

still be enough for the cadres to provide crucial medical services, allowing the NPA to keep the trust of the people they served. This is reflected in the real-life continuation of the NPA, which retained its popularity among rural communities that have been left underserved and unprotected by the Philippine government (Francia 312). That the NPA remains a strong enough force post-Marcos that the government must formally acknowledge and negotiate with the organization is a testament to generational myth-making; the NPA did not dissolve when the regime changed, and rebounded when the patterns of corruption resurfaced in later administrations.

Through the storytelling and the continued work of the NPA even when Hero was removed from her cadre, she remains connected to that work, and is part of the long, generational, geological story of her time with the NPA: “There were things Hero had hoped to cast off forever, and then there were things that wouldn’t dislodge, no matter how hard she tried, no matter how deep in the mountain she went. And then there were things she thought she’d never lose, dailinesses she hadn’t only taken for granted but taken for eternal” (Castillo 230). The “mountain” of Hero’s memory is not something she is on *top* of, but burrows *inside* of, calling to mind images of mining, or perhaps of the eons-long geological formation of a mountain. The “dailinesses” are so long-lasting they feel eternal, and yet, as Hero muses, “An eternity or two later, you had a volcano” (Castillo 118).

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