

A Project entitled

***THE CURSE OF THE MODERN FILIPINA: EXPOSING THE SATIRICAL
REPRESENTATION OF THE WOMEN IN JOSE RIZAL'S NOLI ME TANGERE
TO SAVE THE MARIA CLARA, SISA AND DOÑA VICTORINA OF TODAY***

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ABSTRACT

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The construction of the modern Filipina's womanhood is threatened by the lingering effects of the Spanish colonization especially in the form of the Catholic faith. Using the reciprocal relationship between power and resistance by Michel Foucault, this paper establishes the contributing factors behind the everlasting socio-cultural influence that the three women in Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* has towards the construction of the ideal Filipina. The formation of the subservient 19th Century Filipina, who falls willingly under a hierarchy of servitude is emphasized in the novel, acting as a catalyst for the reconstruction of the ideal Filipina. The polarizing effect of *Noli* can be seen in the proliferation of the Maria Clara ideal and the vehement advocacies to eliminate her as the embodiment of a true Filipina by women's rights activists. Maria Clara, Sisa and Doña Victorina exemplify how resistance is an integral component for power to function and how it could manifest as its own power to provoke change in pursuit for the rights and liberation of the modern Filipina.

Keywords: modern Filipina . Jose Rizal . "Noli Me Tangere". Power/Resistance.

Michel Foucault .

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INTRODUCTION

It is said that one of them appeared with her habit soaking wet and in tatters and, with many tales of horror, begged for the gentleman's protection against the assaults of hypocrisy. It is also said that she was very beautiful, and had the loveliest and most eloquent eyes that ever had been seen. The representative of the authorities did not see fit to take her under his care; instead, after conferring with the abbess, he abandoned her despite her tearful pleas. She saw the gates close behind him as the damned might see the gates of Heaven close against them, if ever Heaven were as cruel and unfeeling as the world of men. The abbess said the young nun was out of her mind. (Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* 302)

Jose Rizal's satirical representation of nineteenth century Filipinas in *Noli Me Tangere* who embody varying degrees of subservience, dutifulness and submission to authority became the "hallmarks of ideal Filipina femininity" (Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities*, 75). *Noli* is a polarizing work of literature, which attacks the Spanish imperialism in the Philippines and helps further propagate the growing nationalism in the country at that time. Integral to the dismantling of the ailments brought by the Spanish rule towards the consciousness and sensibilities of the Filipinos is Rizal's stereotypical and over dramatic representation of women in his novel, Maria Clara, in particular. The Filipina depicted in the novel submits herself to a hierarchy of servitude: to the Catholic Church, to her home and to her society, which are male-dominated spheres. This paper extrapolates Michel Foucault's power/resistance's reciprocal relationship in order to assert the inextricable link of

Noli's influence in the Philippines' literary canon to the conception of Maria Clara as the embodiment of a true Filipina.

In Mina Roces, *Women's Movement and the Filipina*, the detrimental misreading of the women in the novel paved the way for the construction of the Filipina's womanhood that is comprised of being "obedient, submissive to authority, and meek", which attests to the lingering and prevailing influence of the Spanish patriarchal rule (22). The Spanish domination directly affected the progress for the Filipina (Coulter 8). One example of this is the Catholic faith introduced by the Spanish, which "became women's overwhelming concern and sole refuge...cultivating in woman an infinite capacity for forbearance, suffering, and forgiveness of all venial, mortal, and male sins. This in turn obscured their capacity for involvement in things other than hearth, home, and heaven" (Santos, 27). Roces further elaborates, "the histories of women's movements blamed the Spanish colonial period for shaping contemporary womanhood", becoming the central tenet of the early Filipina feminists that were struggling to demolish this idealization of the Filipina (23).

The pursuit towards women's liberation in the Philippines is unstable to say the least, from its conception in the early 1920s, it has struggled against government regimes and differences in advocacies among various representative groups. The "inability of nationalist paradigms to grapple with other dimensions of women's problems" only serves the able and educated Filipina who mostly belong within the higher social class (Sobritchea 46). The divisive nature of the Filipina movement provides an unclear representation for Filipinas across the social strata, wherein a wealthy Filipina will not identify with the issues faced by the impoverished Filipina.

Moreover, women's groups were primarily focused on locating women's power against the patriarchy "rather than advocating specific feminist or women's issues" (Roces 8). This instability provides the ones in power to further exercise their control and banish uprisings as socially destructive, which inevitably destabilizes any form of progress for the Filipina.

RESISTANCE AND POWER

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault introduces the "polymorphous techniques of power" (11), which illustrates the complex nature of power in relation to its subjects. Power has no exact beginning, but it is pervasive and is affected by the actions of subjects within the network of power relations. Resistance then is a fundamental component of power, which shares a "reciprocal and integral connection" (Nielsen, 28). Moreover, In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault concludes that the form of power instigating abundant resistance "applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual [and] imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize" (781). To put it simply, power is not controlled by an individual or a group, power operates everywhere in every single interaction within a system that appropriately creates a structure. Within those interactions, resistance is inevitable and a crucial component for power to manifest.

Refocusing on the women in *Noli*: Maria Clara, Sisa and Doña Victorina have all experienced tragic losses influenced by the Spanish patriarchy that were interpreted as heroic and in accordance with the self-sacrificing nature of the Filipina. Their significance as icons and otherwise are products of resistance towards their representations. Cruz exploits the contradictions present in Rizal's literary endeavors and personal political sentiments. Although his depiction of Maria Clara's ignorance

and unquestioning submission to the “parental and filial order represent all that Rizal despised about friar rule and its enslavement of his people”, Rizal also belonged to the intellectual elite that “were heavily invested in controlling men’s and women’s sexuality as a means of maintaining racial, gendered and classed boundaries” (75).

CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Noli’s enigma has significantly shaped the culture and perception of the Filipinos. It’s contribution towards the pursuit of independence and nationalism cannot be argued. Hence, it is imperative to interpret the representation of the three Filipinas in the novel in order to dismantle and elaborate its cultural consequences towards the identity formation of the modern Filipina. This is to illuminate the pervasiveness of the Spanish influence and the main factors contributing towards the unstable pursuit of the Filipina towards liberation and development. By exploring the conditions surrounding the women in *Noli* such as control of the Spanish friars, her expectations in the home and the development of her fragmented identity and interpreting them within the “context of contemporary power relations” (Brannigan, 10), the reasons for the lingering Spanish influence can be explained and a hopeful shift for the conditions of the Filipina can be provided.

WOMEN IN NOLI AND THE MODERN FILIPINA

The celebrated sufferings the women in *Noli* experience show the absurd toxicity that is deeply entrenched in the sensibilities of the Filipinos, which adversely affects the progress and development for the Filipina. In a country that is still predominantly influenced by the Catholic faith, resistance against the patriarchy continues to be the narrative. However, my interpretation of Foucault’s power relations excludes the perception of struggles as a negative product of the preordained

power. Since power and resistance are reciprocal and transformative, the modern Filipina should focus on instigating action that focuses on the woman as an individual rather than attacking the dominant patriarchal power. The power would only see blatant and direct opposition as a threat to the social order. Therefore, the modern Filipina should materialize intentional tactics and non-intentional strategies in the different areas of her individuality such as in education, employment, legal opportunities and social welfare in order to create positive ripples in the vast network of power relations present.

LITERATURE REVIEW

First published in 1887, *Noli* proved to be the catalyst for an uprising of nationalist resistance groups against the Spanish colonial rule. Rizal's unabashed critique of the failures of the Spanish rule resulted to the ruling power to order his death as a punishment for heresy and subversive acts. The novel follows the main protagonist, Crisóstomo Ibarra, who returns to his native home of the Philippines after completing his education in Europe following the abrupt death of his father whom was speculated to have had an altercation with the local Franciscan friar. This paper focuses on Maria Clara, Sisa and Doña Victorina; the ideal Filipina, the ideal mother and the social climber, respectively.

Despite contributing in the country's nationalism, *Noli's* stereotypical representation of women, which is implied to be intentional and satirical, got lost under the nationalistic sentiment of its main protagonist. In separate studies, Paulette Coulter and Denise Cruz explores the representation of women in *Noli* in order to illustrate Rizal's contradicting perspective towards the development of the modern

Filipina. First, the Western philosophical thought of enlightenment heavily influenced Rizal and his works. Having received his latter education in Europe, the freedom and liberation he aspires for his motherland can be associated to the likes of “Alexandre Dumas, père, Émile Zola” (Coulter 7). Moreover, she claims that “Rizal blames the mothers of the Philippines” by raising children through practicing blind faith and by teaching them to be subservient to the authorities (8). Seemingly, Rizal’s interpretation of what a woman should be is to properly raise their children in line with the agendas and notions of the intellectuals, who are predominantly male.

Reiterating further, Cruz explains Rizal’s tie with other Filipino intellectuals called *Ilustrados*, who are collectively doubtful of the modern femininity’s ability and cites their fears as a “challenge to [their] male identity” (p.78). Furthermore, Cruz explains that Maria Clara, “who is a mixed-race female body, stands in for the *ilustrados*’ desire to regulate elite femininity” (79). The constant allusion of Maria Clara to the homeland and being Crisóstomo’s salvation becomes complicated since Maria Clara is not a pure Filipina: “Her embodiment of Mother Filipinas depends upon what Crisóstomo sees as her blending the best qualities of metropole and colony, Spain and the Philippines” (83). The violation and sacrifices endured by the women in *Noli* further questions the real attitude of Rizal towards women.

Apart from Rizal’s ambivalence towards the role of women, Michel Foucault’s arguments on power relations are used to compare the character developments of Maria Clara, Sisa and Doña Victorina in the novel in order to explain their failures towards the conception of the Filipina’s womanhood and how these representations affect the ongoing Filipina pursuit. According to Foucault, resistance is another form of power, which promotes change. However, it can be seen that the three women each

suffers different degrees of loss once she takes herself away from the clasp of patriarchy and her home. Maria Clara succumbs to depression while Sisa suffers from a mental breakdown and last, Doña Victorina adopts another foreign nuance to distance herself from her Filipino identity. These failures the three women endure were profited by the ruling patriarchal power headed by the Church, wherein resistance could only bring ill effects thus, contributing to the advertising of an enduring and God-fearing Filipina. This exemplifies Foucault's power dynamic: "[power] acts upon their action, an action upon action" (789), which entails certain types of reactions by the ones in power and by the ones power is asserted to. Alternatively, the actions taken by the Church were influenced by the novel and influenced the minds of its followers.

In order to provide a holistic explanation of the Filipina movement, a study on the roles of women before Spanish rule is included. Lilia Quindoza-Santiago traces the babaylan roots of the Filipina, wherein she enjoyed equal treatment to her male counterpart and had significant contributions to her community as healers, etc. Women in vast communities of the Philippines lived during the time when "there was no clear division of labor based on gender" (161). However, the arrival of the Spanish overpowered these traditions through physical and political means, Quindoza-Santiago writes, "they forcibly imposed foreign ways of worship among indigenous people, burnt all symbols of old worship and outlawed indigenous rites and rituals" (163). The infiltration of the Spanish influence across communities and the government enabled the induction of the Roman Catholic religion and the proliferation of patriarchy in the country. In the novel, Maria Clara is often compared to the Virgin Mary and other Catholic figures. Her beauty and innocence were

believed to be the outcome of Captain Tiago's, her father, incessant donations to the local parish. Sisa, on the other hand, is poor and a wife to an abusive husband. She brings her two sons to practice as sextons at their local church in order for them to learn how to read and write. Despite living in poverty, her strong Catholic faith is represented constantly. She is often seen as praying for her two sons and thinking of how poverty distracts her from living the proper Christian life.

Moreover, multiple works from Mina Roces on the movement of the Filipina woman are consulted to provide a thorough analysis of the successes and weaknesses of the advocacies of varied women groups in the Philippines. In Rethinking 'the Filipino Woman', Roces writes how the women advocates of the 1920s used Maria Clara as the target for their causes. They believed that Maria Clara "did not resemble the 'real' Filipino women", while 1980s' activists urged to denounce Maria Clara and Sisa as role models since they represent the everlasting effects of the Spanish rule, which were detrimental if the country hopes to progress (42). Alternatively, the sentiment of these groups can be seen as the resistance against the patriarchal idealized Filipina. Although progress is blatantly needed, women's rights in the Philippines have yet to be effectively executed, especially among the impoverished and indigenous sectors.

The sufferings Maria Clara, Sisa and Doña Victorina experienced were all characterized by their resilience, ability to endure and strong Catholic faith. The dichotomy between servitude and suffering has long sparked the debate on whether these women were positive role models for the modern Filipina. Undoubtedly, the women in *Noli* are fiction and are mere stereotypes of the ideologies Rizal wanted to

eliminate. However, they have permeated through space and time and successfully ingrained themselves in the consciousness of the Filipina.

WOMEN AS POWER, SAYS MEN

“The history of the Philippines is a history of men” (Hernandez 14). Maria Clara is first subtly introduced in expense of Ibarra’s ignorance. In chapter 5, if Ibarra hadn’t been preoccupied by his personal agendas, he would have witnessed the exceedingly beautiful Maria Clara in the house across his own. The second mention of Maria Clara was after an extensive and elaborate description of Captain Tiago’s divine venerations to countless Catholic figures and churches. Although hoping for a son, Captain Tiago named Maria Clara “after Our Lady of Salambaw and after the second member of the triumvirate of Obando” (*Noli* 27). It is interesting to note that Maria Clara had no girl childhood friends, or Rizal intentionally omitted that fact as when she was sent to a convent “upon the advice of the parish priest” the only persons she said goodbye to were her godfather Father Damaso and her childhood friend, Ibarra (28). It can be argued that Maria Clara’s life revolves around the Church and the men in her life. Her character development is heavily influenced by the actions of men such as Father Salvi, Father Damaso, Captain Tiago and Ibarra. The actions she undertake in the novel reveals the reciprocal relationship of power and resistance according to Foucault. Maria Clara is subjected to making a decision when the Church excommunicated her fiancé, Ibarra, upon involving himself to a physical altercation with Father Damaso. In addition, Father Salvi discloses her true identity that Father Damaso is her biological father. In light of this, Maria Clara urges Ibarra to beg Father Damaso’s forgiveness despite knowing the fact that the latter physically violated her

mother, which contributed to her death. In chapter 61, she discloses the whole truth to Ibarra yet, figuratively, still choosing the Church or her faith over her love and reveals that “[she] could only suffer, keep [her] secret, and die with it” (284). Through this, it can be seen that the friars seemingly control the power, however, it only appears so since the prevailing power enables them to assert their dominance and influence. Eventually, this power can only be seen as oppressive or dangerous as Maria Clara continued to observe her faith despite the violations done upon her.

Sisa is another character whose development and significance are defined by the sufferings she endure on the hands of her abusive husband and from the loss of her two sons. She is described to be “self-sacrificing and submissive, appeared heroic and admirable even though her son’s death at the hands of a Spanish friar drove her to madness” (Roces, 42). The novel first introduces Sisa as “the mother of Basilio and Crispin... She had married a selfish and cynical man, and now lived only for her sons” (61). In chapter 16, Sisa is described to be waiting for her sons and had not left her small house for days in order to earn enough money to prepare a hearty dinner for them: “she needed the money so much she had missed Mass that morning... poverty makes one sin!” (61). Despite her misfortunes, Sisa continues to keep her faith unperturbed and blames herself for her misgivings. This representation reflects Foucault’s pastoral power, wherein the Christian institution had successfully molded the beliefs and sensibilities of its followers hence influencing their individuality. Sisa embodies the enduring mother that is equivalent to being the “Church’s obedient servant”, who does not question nor complain about her sufferings instead endures through them and still give praise (Santos 26).

Although Doña Victorina does not suffer physical death, she represents an individual with a fragmented identity, which leads her to suffer multiple internal deaths. A social fanatic with a superiority complex, she disowns her own Filipino heritage and incessantly tries to present herself as a Spanish woman. In chapter 1, she introduces herself as Madam Doctor and is described to have spoken “in her particular version of Spanish” (8). Her blatant detachment from her fellow Filipinos is further emphasized in chapter 43 where “she had looked with great disdain on her many Filipino admirers; her aspirations were towards another race” (197). Using Foucault’s power/resistance relationship, Doña Victorina’s sensibilities were formed and construed due to the obvious benefits of being affiliated with the Spanish ruling elites. The truth imposed on her by her immediate environment contributed to her identity formation where certain types of behavior are developed by the dominant patriarchal Spanish ruling government. Her mate of choice is Don Tiburcio, described to be kind albeit lame. Their union can be seen as a necessity rather than a marriage based on pure love, despite his physical shortcomings, Doña Victorina couldn’t pass up the opportunity and “needed a husband very badly indeed, and was compelled to make do with a poor man” (197). Her obsession with creating the right reputation can be seen with the jewels she adorns herself with and how she exhausts every opportunity to imply a higher status such as adding “an aristocratic ‘de’ to her husband’s surname; it cost nothing and the name class” (200). In the epilogue, the demise of the Spanish friars are implied along with the insurgence of the American occupation as Doña Victorina is described to be practicing her Southern accent. This can be seen as her effort to survive through another wave of power; “Her short-sightedness caused so many accidents” illustrates the shallowness of her superficial identity and how it

cannot ensure her of a stable place in society (300). Doña Victorina's quest of climbing up the Spanish elite circle did not save her from the downfall of the friars in her town. Her struggles caused her to be a willing recipient of the preordained power, echoing Foucault's argument that "power is not a function of consent" (Foucault, *The Subject of Power*, 788). Doña Victorina willingly submits herself under her own artificial Spanish-ness, which affected her subsequent actions.

Although the three women did not choose to suffer by choice, their decisions and actions were predestined by the overarching power, which were the patriarchy and the Catholic faith. These women acted within the possibilities allowed by this power, therefore the struggles they experienced are inevitable. *Noli's* political and cultural significance provoked polarizing discussions of how the Filipina truly should be. The novel romanticizes her sufferings, and in a still predominantly Catholic practicing country, sufferings are necessary to prove one's worthiness for eternal salvation.

FROM EQUALS TO SUBORDINATES TO ICONS: THE FILIPINA'S REAWAKENING

The status of the modern Filipina has improved significantly from *Noli's* inception. In the latest World Economic Forum report, the Philippines is ranked 10th in the world for narrowing the gap between men and women in terms of employment, education and legal opportunities. However, Filipinas, especially the impoverished Filipina, continues to battle with issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment and limited access to healthcare. The lives of women in reality did not improve, "they remain poor, poorer than men. They remain oppressed, more oppressed than men"

(Quindoza-Santiago 168). Patriarchal tendencies continue to proliferate along the class distinctions of the Philippines, headed by a president who has been quoted to utter sexist and misogynistic remarks more than once. Moreover, the influence of the Church can still be seen in the educational institutions, political landscapes and social consciousness of the country.

In *A Century of Women's Activism in the Philippines*, Mina Roces featured the term *babaylan*, which referred to a “pre-Hispanic priestess”, who became the woman to be by early feminist groups in the country (42). This woman did not suffer from the feudal system brought upon by the Spanish colonization, this woman contributed to her community in equal measures as her male counterpart. It is understandable for women's rights activist to call for a resurgence of this type of women, however, as Foucault mentioned, power is transformative and requires a complex action-reaction across the network of relationships that are present. The *babaylan* can only appear as a myth while figures such as Maria Clara and the symbol she embodies are seen everywhere, in the country's culture, traditions and consciousness. The failures of the previous women's representatives are marred by their explicit pursuit to dismantle the Maria Clara icon and to unshackle the Spanish influence over the Philippines. This type of resistance does not advocate change rather it suggests a complete eradication of a particular form of power- the patriarchy. As repeatedly postulated, power is a web of complex relationships. In order to overthrow a power, one has to create and demand action within those connections, which would require a substantial period of time. To put it simply, small increments would appear less harmful within the network of power relations. The subtle changes that could be implemented in the homes, schools and societies would not be seen as detrimental to

the preordained power, but they can still influence the attitude and mindset of those within the network.

The modern Filipina is experiencing countless opportunities for her to better equip her in her individual pursuit. The Catholic faith and a patriarchal society may still restrict her from discovering her full potential but, it can be argued that it is time to shift from the need to isolate the Filipina into a template and realize that she is capable of so much more.

FORBEARANCE: SHIFTING THE TIDES

It is crucial to emphasize that the women in *Noli* are stereotypes of the Spanish influence Rizal wanted to crucify. Although the nineteenth century Filipina dominated the domestic space as their “roles in society were limited to being mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, and/or aunts” anti-Maria Clara activists, then and now, fail to highlight the entrepreneurial Filipina of that time (Hernandez 12). Indeed, the home may be limiting, but it can also be “a site of resistance and empowerment” (13). Using Foucault’s power/resistance dynamic, the condition that these Filipinas found themselves in enabled them to assume their own empowered identity as mothers and such. Moreover, early Filipina activists ignored the contribution of nineteenth century Filipina factory workers, teachers and domestic workers. In Ma. Luisa Camagay’s *Working Women of Manila in the 19th Century*, she gives a thorough insight about the working 19th Century Filipina. In her study, it can be seen that not all Filipinas were confined to her home or the Church, which reiterates Rizal’s satirical intentions that were misread by several feminist activists. Being a cigarrera or female cigar maker became one of the jobs Filipinas were in demand for, “The Spaniards believed that

women were more adept and more patient for this particular task, and they were less prone to commit frauds” (5). Furthermore, the working Filipina flourished as teachers and *las criadas* or servants for the Spanish elites. Although women, teachers in particular, needed the permission and reference of a local parish priest, her contribution to the labour force should not be ignored.

The influence of Maria Clara as the icon that Filipinas should aspire to be is made possible by the patriarchal society and by the women’s rights activists that ignored her resilience and focused on her weakness and ignorance. This can be explained by the everlasting influence that the Spanish colonialism instilled in the county’s sensibilities. Estrada-Claudio writes, “despite the fall of Spanish colonialism, the Philippine Catholic Church has remained a powerful institution...not merely because of its considerable wealth [but] it’s influence on Philippine education” (92). This undoubtedly affected the advocacies that these groups promote, such as GABRIELA, which includes gender equality, a comprehensive legal protection for woman and child and other social welfare benefits for women. However, these needs do not reflect the needs of all Filipinas. There are indigenous Filipinas suffering from illiteracy and often living in remote places without immediate medical help. There are overseas Filipina workers who continue to battle with abuse, and impoverished Filipinas who belongs to the sector that had a higher poverty incidence rate than the rest of the population at 25.6% (PSA). The continued pursuit for the Filipina is an example of Foucault’s idea of power. Resistance is perpetually linked with power, this can be seen in the equality enjoyed by the pre-Hispanic Filipina, the sufferings of the 19th Century Filipina, the lingering influence of the patriarchy over the construction of a Filipina’s womanhood and the developments that Filipinas have eventually achieved

in the recent years. Maybe it is time to celebrate all that the Filipinas have gone through: healers, dutiful, entrepreneurial and self-sacrificing instead of pinning these qualities against each other.

It is imperative for the modern Filipina to be equipped with the mentality that embraces change, accepts the socio-historical implications of her colonial past and to strive beyond the patriarchal narrative. Although Rizal's political beliefs contradicted his literary works, it is important to isolate his determination in educating the minds of his people, especially that of women, as he believes that women holds the utmost responsibility to rear and nurture the minds of the future. In a letter he wrote to a group of women who fought for their rights to receive formal education entitled *A Letter to the Young Women of Malolos*", Rizal expressed his admiration for their bravery and use of intellectual thought in order to fight for their advocacy. Moreover, he stressed the need for the Filipina to not be endowed with "servitude and deference to the words of their so-called 'spiritual father'... due to perhaps ignorance (8). Using Foucault's power/resistance dynamic, the oppression these young women felt instigated their demand for the right to receive education. Although coming from affluent families, these women lobbied for their request, which was eventually granted and can be seen as one of the major progress for women. This, as Rizal saw it, was the role of women to recognize their crucial role in ensuring the growth of nationalism in order to reawaken the Filipino sense of pride and identity. Following women's rights to receive education, the dynamic within the network of power relations has inevitably shifted. It is in ways like these that the modern Filipina can experience more positive effects for her individual growth and sense of belonging to the nation. Social

injustices will still be prevalent and the lives of all Filipinas may still suffer from differing ideologies, but change is possible.

CONCLUSION: SAVE HER, DON'T SILENCE HER

The construction of the modern Filipina continues to depend on the haunting presence of the dominating Spanish influence. Although this paper did not include the American occupation, the narrative of being exploited, abused and manipulated by foreign invaders helped perpetuate the notion that women are secondary to men. In addition, the Catholic teachings that still prevail to this day influences how we perceive the modern day Sisas, who are underprivileged and unequipped. Rizal's satirical representations of these women may have been overshadowed by his own political agendas and manipulated by the dominant patriarchal power, which inevitably defined the women's movements in the Philippines. In light of this, the lingering Spanish idealized Maria Claras are still suffering from the confinements of her faith and her social expectations. The ambitious yet impressionable Doña Victorinas are still distancing herself from the cries for help of her fellow countrymen. These are the representations of women both in fiction and in real life, which need to be saved rather than mocked.

Power is transformative and resistance is a fundamental factor for power to materialize. Maria Clara, Sisa and Doña Victorina were limited to the factors presented to them. It is time to move forward, the modern Filipina is living in a significantly different space and time, despite the presence of Catholicism and patriarchy; she now has more opportunities and a higher degree of autonomy to seek individual pursuits. If power is transformative, it means that power can be changed

and influenced. Therefore, Filipinas should seek to influence the network of relations they are surrounded by and realize they are vehicles of power, who can provoke actions that could potentially see the likes of Maria Clara and Sisa as heroines of their time and not as templates for them to neither nitpick nor abide to. Instead, the modern Filipina needs to define herself with the learning of the past and the needs of the present in order for her to assert herself right here and right now.

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