

# The Long Stag Party: Women and the Imperialist Game in Manila

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Nature intended women to be our slaves... they are our property; we are not theirs. They belong to us, just as a tree that bears fruit belongs to a gardener. What a mad idea to demand equality for women!... Women are nothing but machines for producing children.

*Napoleon Bonaparte*

That this fervent near-imperialist had been upstaged for more than three hundred years by invaders whose public statements were not at the time newsworthy is evident. The Philippines is a prime example of how the layering process of colonial power distorts the feminine population, for a colonial invasion is not only a theater of carnage, both physical and psychological, but it must be an impregnable realm of men's space in order to perpetuate itself. Imperialism, whether Islamic, Spanish, or Yankee is also a feminist issue, although this specific recognition has been a bit tardy in coming.

Philippine women have belatedly begun to reexamine their own pre-colonial status unlike in the past, not because men have suggested they do so in order to function as support groups during pockets of political rebellion or even in the interest of nationalism. The woman question in Southeast Asia is not contingent on nationalism, unless one accedes to the existence of a distinct Filipina uterus, a Vietnamese uterus, or an Indonesian uterus. The purely anti-feminine content of Imperialist domination is no longer being deflected by masculine political priorities.

The year 1521 is now more than the second date one must memorize after 1492; it is the year of the great abdication, with restrictive meanings for Philippine women.

Europe during the sixteenth century is never noted as an exemplary feminine renaissance, above all in Spain. The Castilian *dama*, except for court ladies, was barely out of the shadow of the chastity belt; witches, mostly women, were being burned by the thousands throughout the continent; and all this inspired by the machinery of the Inquisition, which ground on with no compassion or flexibility.

Yet this was the civilization which was to continue to justify its conquest of the Philippines in 1521 in order to terminate the institution of slavery and other "uncivilized" practices. From the first appearance of the Spanish galleon off the coast of the island of Cebu, from the initial moment when the first *conquistador* clanked down the gangway, cross in one hand and rapier in the other, he was to establish a dynasty of the cassocked and the helmeted, not only for the Spanish crown, but as an impregnable center for the swash-buckler and male mercenary. Immediately he designated surrogate authority figures: the *cabeza de barangay*, who collected tribute and cheerfully rounded up workcrews for a slave labor system to build roads, public buildings and the handsome churches which tourists so admire today; and he reinforced the patriarchal father, who was responsible for keeping women and children in line. The latter were now private property, a relatively unknown concept in tribal society. Apparently, the refurbished father relished his



new role— at his best, a benevolent despot; at his worst, a highhanded tyrant.

Those who trafficked in outright rebellion were hanged or garroted in the most cruel fashion. Thus most cooperated, except for the Northern tribal groups for whom political disenfranchisement meant nothing. They resisted Christian baptism for years by moving farther into the most impregnable reaches of the Cordilleras. But elsewhere the unbaptized *Indio* was now a non-person.

But for the pre-Spanish Filipina, Christian baptism washed away a great deal more than her Original Sin. For the promise of entrance into the Christian chauvinist's heavenly kingdom, she exchanged all the rights she had enjoyed as a matter of course in an earthly one: property rights both before and after marriage; divorce by mutual consent. A 17th century chronicler, Loarca, laments that vanished age of "immorality" in which she could bear children only when she so desired and without necessarily having to marry at all.

But she surrendered in toto to the Heavenly Father's surrogate, and new arbiter of morality her most basic right: control over her own body with its reproductive choices; one which she has not regained after four hundred years. The harsh Spanish Civil Code was to become the basis for law and feminine order.

Early epistolary accounts penned by Spanish priests express general shock at her uninhibited ways, for she was among the free souls of Southeast Asia until Islam had clipped her wings initially in Mindanao. Her sexual inclinations were subject to few cultural restraints. The 1595 Boxer Code contains relevant marginal drawings of the brass or lead wheel ringed with spurs which the Filipino male used during copulation and which, sighs the Venerable Father, their women insisted on. Anthropologists insist that this object has contraceptive value because of a strategically placed exit duct which diverted the seminal flow.

Remnants of this pre-colonial tribal age are still to be seen in the *ulog* of the Ifugaos and the Bontocs, an innocent form of trial marriage among teen girls who sleep in long houses. The boy of her choice is permitted to join her

at night, although pregnancy makes marriage absolutely obligatory.

Or one still finds explicit rituals among the Northern Kalingas in which the symbol of the highest form of sacrifice is sexual intercourse itself. This purely ceremonial rite is conducted under certain well-prescribed taboos. Or for that matter, nudity itself is commonplace in the same region where mixed bathing in mighty rivers is seen as the survival of some primal, uncontaminated innocence.

Gone too, except in remote places where mass was rarely said, was her former prestige as a class of *babaylan* or *dumandang*, or *man-jajawak* the tribal healers so venerated for their psychic penetration into the inner world which so determined much of tribal life. There she presided over the arts and certain tribal rituals. It was she who chanted the ancient epics, which were alleged to have been handed down by the gods in some earlier age.

Today in several remote barrios on Mt. Banahaw, often called the sacred mountain, one still finds remnants of a potentially matriarchal age in which women functioned as priestesses; where worship in caves still continues as they await the "new age" in which women will again return to dominate culture. The *Ciudad Mistica* is only one of such un-suppressed cults, defining the pre-Spanish role of women.

This is not to say that the pre-colonial Filipina had no gender equality problems. Her daily tasks were spelled out for her with some rigidity, as they were also defined for tribal men. In certain areas arranged marriages contracted by parents bent on forming alliances did exist. Her entire life cycle was marked by various male asserted taboos. One of these still exists today: the *ator* of the Bontocs, a segregated male council chamber for tribal elders, where women may not enter, although non-tribal visitors may. Only last year the women of Suyo, a remote Bontoc barrio "respectfully" petitioned that they now be allowed to enter the *ator*. But this index to the far reaches of modernity received no immediate reply.

The Muslims had swept through Southeast Asia two centuries earlier with ninth century Islamic concepts on the position of women,





which were as alien as those of the Christian chauvinists. Nor were their methods non-violent either, often compelling the southern tribal peoples to embrace Islam. But the long range effects were less damaging, for the area was more limited.

Within two generations, the once free Filipina of the uplands had been reduced to a glorified doormat, with the full weight of Original Sin descending upon her fragrant, hip-length hair, as it had for her Hispanic sisters in far away Europe. The denigration process was deliberate. Daily encounters with mass and confession had taught her to look upon now distant tribal morality as deviant and obscene. Lost totally was her former control of her own body; so much as the hint of freer sexual rights was now equated with eternal damnation. This she no longer questioned. All reproductive rights were now null and void.

The cost to colonized women of this "civilizing" process presided over, not by the Spanish crown, but by the Vatican through surrogates, was retrogressive and can be cited as an example of gender involution, not evolution.

The process is still in evidence today, singling out the Philippines as one of the few countries in the entire world which permits no absolute divorce, yet constantly raises human rights issues. Concubinage is accepted and widespread as the lesser of the evils. Abortion is not only prohibited by the new Philippine constitution, but is regarded as so morally reprehensible that so much as to mention it would constitute political suicide for the politi-

cally ambitious. The Catholic Physicians League is still very much a power, spending long seminars debating on who has the right to life during an obstetrical crisis, the mother or the unborn child: with the latter winning heads down. One still finds women doctors who will refuse to perform tubal ligations or prescribe a contraceptive that works.

Yet common-law, inexpensive marriages are widespread, and a clandestine abortion mill exists in Manila. The rich send pregnant daughters to Hongkong. The poor patronize the herb sellers who congregate, of all places, just outside the door of the hallowed Quiapo Church. The herbs are relatively ineffective; but no dearth of purchasers exists.

As for the middle classes, husbands make effete little jokes about the government-sponsored programs for Family Planning as "Family Planting", seeing it as an affront to their *macho* image of virility, which Mother Spain did little to negate. But their wives learn to live with it. They have an inordinate number of hysterectomies before the age of forty. No unresolvable arguments. No guilt. No more babies.

What survives in mutilated form of the once free tribal ways of women has simply gone underground. The result has been neither productive nor wholesome, producing a feminist schizophrenic break that can be quite damaging.

One sees this in rural communities where one still finds an abundance of quaint, provincial creatures who refuse to bathe totally unclothed, even in the confines of a sheltered *banyo*, lest concupiscent spirits abound to despoil the limits of outright nudity. Urban women students continue to report encounters with home economics teachers who have confided to the Family Life class that they have never so much as divulged the nude contours of their own bodies, even to their husbands. This after ten or so offspring. How those who have never so much as physically viewed their own reproductive apparatus can possibly see the priority of productive rights for other women is a droll question.

In provincial areas where the cult of the Blessed Virgin had been quickly substituted by the Holy Fathers, whose residence was now in the town plaza across from the municipal



building, the approved role for women had little variation by the 17th century. She had now become a perpetual votary, where her calendar was marked by the comings and goings of the holy images which were borne from house to house in small, mostly feminine processions. This would be followed by a ritualized social life, with much flowing of food and drink, the men seated in groups elsewhere. Sexual apartheid was now the rule socially except at dances although women dancing with other women is not uncommon a sight.

Unlike in Europe, where obsession with the cult of the Blessed Virgin eventually secularized itself into the code of courtly love, this was never the case in the Philippines. The feminine routine was now dissected daily by the ringing of the chapel bell and the morning walk to hear mass; or the rhythmic cycle of christenings, marriages, wakes and burials. It was a rigidly patterned theocracy in practice, if not in form.

The dutiful wife, perpetually concerned with ordering food and nursing additional babies, saw her husband very little, for their activities were diverse. Even their meals were not necessarily taken together. If her husband brought home guests, she would wait on them at any hour of the day or night, rarely sitting down with them for the repast. Among the less affluent, it was not uncommon for the husband to be served meat, while the wife, children and housemaids would eat the cheaper forms of fish later on. If her life was hard, he took no special note of it, for she had a retinue of servants, whose servility was unquestioned in those times, who did not eat the same food as the master, except during feasts, and slept on mats in a corner.

Very likely, he himself rose with the cock crow to supervise his fields and his few compensations were *macho* drinking bouts in his now sexually segregated world; or nightly gambling orgies in the mayor's house. Actually, they rarely met, except in the case of the hard-working peasant couples whose small floor space barely accommodated even the sleeping mats. Or if others did, it was in some lumbering, four poster-bed, long after the town was quiet. A baby every year was assumed to be a normal occurrence.

The stag affair that the entire Spanish colonial epoch was to establish for generations made one thing clear. Preeminently, women had little space and no power in that masculine enclave. It was not unlike that in any modern theater of war. Women could be admitted, but only as a support group to supply entertainment, servants, brothel fodder, domestic comforts in an anti-stress role; and certainly as perpetual breeders for both the crown and the future priesthood. They had effectively established a new kind of *illustrado* class which she hosted with charm, and upon demand. Otherwise the Hispanized Filipina was not only unnecessary, but if she stepped out of line, expendable. Very few did.

#### Situationer on Women: Then and Now

The thirty-seven years of American rule until 1946 barely made any cultural dent in those nearly four centuries of Spanish Catholic conditioning. The validity of this assumption is seen during the four years of the Japanese occupation during World War II. By 1943, for the first time, a divorce provision had been instituted by the disbelieving Japanese invaders in Manila courts. But this, along with all other Japanese innovations was regarded with scorn with few women availing themselves of its liberality.

The Filipina now equated divorce with abandonment, both financial and familial. Life was now inconceivable without a male support mechanism, even if always on her husband's terms, and always reinforced by the shadow of the brothel and the *querida* system of a mistress or two. Thus she would continue to supply the husband's bed with babies in exchange for the weekly pay envelope, which good Filipino husbands were supposed to hand over quite meekly; although their skill at domestic malversation of funds was reknown. This often meaningless gesture would, for the next forty years, be equated with "women's liberation". It was actually the purchase price for male freedom and the double standard.

The wife no longer comprehended that fine line between the subsidized spouse, or marriage as licensed prostitution, the high class *querida*, or the crude low class whore. She busied herself with agitation for the vote for women, which was granted rather early; later



with issues like the importance of breast feeding (not how to stop producing all those babies in the first place) and the safe issue of prostitution, particularly child prostitution in the international settlement in Manila. Yet by the 1980s, prostitution had ceased to be a basically feminist issue, for the male prostitute now threatened to outnumber the woman hustler; this because of the tourist avalanche of foreign paedophiles who demanded young boys. The issue had become closer to child abuse by consenting parents; that, too, a part of colonial conditioning.

But as for the unsophisticated creature from some remote barrio, she was entrapped during her entire adolescence by an introduced concept called *disgrasyada*. If sexually molested by a male relative, or assaulted as part of a *macho* expedition by neighborhood males during a drinking spree, or raped by her employer's husband, she had no recourse but to abandon herself to the fringe life of a taxi dancer, an attendant in a massage parlor, or a street whore, for she was forever *disgrasyada*.

Who then was to cancel out four centuries of historic amnesia and remind the Filipina that this had not always been the case? Not her inordinately pious godmothers who now so denounced "foreign" women's liberation movements elsewhere as "immoral" and who had long since donned European dress, including gloves and corsets. Certainly not her husband, her lover, or her son, who knew on which side they were most advantaged in that now thoroughly androcentric pocket of Southeast Asia.

And as for the tribal women, who, even if in time they accepted baptism from some kindly Jesuit, continued to live by their own tribal laws, they had been long repudiated by the Filipina's love affair with "civilization". This fact is demonstrated yearly even by school children. During festivals at least one contingent of mere youngsters can be seen gyrating through the streets in an ear-splitting tempo, their entire bodies smeared black face, and now draped only with rafia anklets, a grass skirt, a few beads and a deadly looking spear. They seem to reiterate the new ethnic constant: that until the conquerors arrived, the archipelago was peopled only by headhunters capable of indulging in Satanic rituals. Yet in point of fact, the tribal peoples are no darker

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in pigmentation than their lowland brothers--those very same ones who proceeded to expropriate all the tribal lands through alien concepts of private property.

This veiled form of contempt is not only generally tolerated, but is never seen in the Philippines as a racial slur. Or even part of the pattern of internal colonialism, which it is.

Historically, the harshest terms for women have always been imposed by monotheistic religions, which among other points assent to being used as a camouflage for conquest.

Unfortunately, women, with a few obdurate exceptions, have too often been the most willing proselytized victims of the imperialist encounter and among the first to accede and even protect the limits of men's space on the conqueror's terms.

Even today, one can find their feminine successors, perhaps massed on the shore of a little village in Antique, earnestly celebrating the arrival of the first Americans almost a century ago. Or one finds them by the hundred thousand massed on the Luneta, the national sea promenade in Manila, celebrating the four hundredth year of the coming of Christianity--the cross, not the rapier, for ends and means have long since ceased to be a moral issue. Tucked in their handbags may be reprints of a recent magazine article authored by Jaime Cardinal Sin on "Mary, The Model Liberated Woman".



The Philippines is unique among Asian societies in one respect: it is the only one which systematically commemorates the coming of its foreign invaders with any fervor. First, the Muslims skimming across the Sulu sea in their *vintas* armed with ninth century Islamic law. Next, the denizens of the Spanish Inquisition by the galleon full, who lost no time in setting up a new branch in Manila. After three hundred and eighty-five successful proselytizing years came the Yankees, with more, very much more, than a big stick. William Howard Taft called it the Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation. Its outright military price (for among the conquerors, the Americans were by far the most brutal), was the extermination of one sixth of all the inhabitants of the island of Luzon. While in Mindanao, at least 3,000 Moros were killed in only one three-year period.

In October 1900, when the US Army transport, *Thomas*, docked at Manila, loaded with more than six hundred zealous American teachers committed to the popular proposition that "civilization is physically stronger than barbarism", they too were mission-oriented. Within a decade, they had set up a new secular educational system. Unfortunately, it was the right thing for the wrong reason: to proselytize along very different lines, none of which were religious.

The more discerning among the Thomasites, many of whom were women, saw the full extent to which Mother Spain had implanted the seeds of irreparable damage. She had done so chiefly by propagating a virulent form of Christian chauvinism in that outpost of Asia, unlike the Dutch, the British, or the French. The Filipino now viewed other Asians not only with suspicion but a distinct feeling of contempt. As the only Christian nation in the Orient they now surmised they had little or nothing to learn from empires like China or India; rather it should be the other way around.

The Americans were of little help at this point. America was still largely a village society with its own intellectuals and writers in an uproar over its "genteel tradition". For even General Leonard Wood, after whom so many streets are still named, dismissed the Moros as "an unimportant collection of pirates and high-

waymen, living under laws which are intolerable".

A second even more serious consequence of the Spanish colonial epoch was the rigidity with which it reinforced century old class stratification among the *barangays*. For slavery did exist. It has been described by Filipino historians as more benevolent than its European counterparts and by priests as "brutal" with a few examples of slaves being buried alive with their dead master. But in any event, the *conquistador* did nothing to exterminate it. He merely imposed quasi-divine sanctions: there were those who ruled, and those who served rulers and hence served God. Women were automatically demoted into this class, if not already there. This, in addition to their new status as private property: first God's; next the husband's, as earlier they had been part of family capital goods belonging to the father and the clan.

In order to sustain this fiction, a new feminine image had to be superimposed. Absent European models were introduced, not only of feminine pulchritude, but of seemly, humbly regressive behavior. Most of these new symbols of feminine attainment were false, but there was no one to contradict them for she had been effectively isolated from the rest of Asia.

The Spanish *Gobernadorcillos* rarely brought along their wives, unless they were coming directly from Mexico. The tropical climate was something they refused to endure. Thus the Spanish *senora*, although rarely seen in Manila, was established as a beguiling, although patently false norm for the new coastal *ciudad* and a populace that marked time by the comings and goings of the Acapulco galleon trade.

Colonial administrators were encouraged to marry "native" women, who in turn were expected to imitate the Hispanic abstraction which was constantly superimposed.

This was compounded by the fact that Manila was a relatively closed society until the mid-nineteenth century, with a mildly paranoid fear of non-Spanish foreigners. Massacres of the Chinese residents of the Parian had taken place at regular intervals, as had one massacre of non-Spanish foreigners as late as



1820, who had been suspected of having poisoned Manila's water supply. Other European males were admitted as residents only if they had Filipina wives.

Thus there was no one to contradict the charming white lies about the merits of womanhood in Europe, or even the civilizing mission of Spain and Holy Church. In the course of two hundred years the sole European woman exception to this pattern was Dona Luisa de Bustamante, the widow of the massacred governor, Fernando de Bustamante. He had tangled in an intractable collision course with the Archbishop shortly after his arrival from Mexico with his Hispanic wife and son. When Manila's "Gothic Day" arrived

The first was the alleged posthumous *La Loba Negra (The Black She-Wolf)* (Fr. Jose A. Burgos. Malaya Books. 1970) which the clergy still takes pains to prove a forgery. Burgos himself was garroted with two other priests in connection with the 1872 Cavite Mutiny under most questionable circumstances. But Dona Luisa de Bustamante and the entire sequence has fired many an imagination; including several nineteenth century paintings by Felix Ressurreccion Hidalgo and much creditable writing. A Drama, *Itim Asu (The Onyx Wolf)*, based on Dona Luisa and her daughter, staged in 1972, remains one of the more exciting works of contemporary woman poet, Virginia Moreno.

The only other direct refutation by a European woman, although one with considerably less credibility but equal impudence, is the role in Philippine history played by a non-descript Irish mestiza from Hongkong named Josephine Bracken. It was she who married the venerated Jose Rizal, whose statue now stands in every public plaza throughout the nation. But she has never captured the public imagination in quite the same manner. Too often, she has been a minor embarrassment in history books recounting the valor of the Philippine revolution of 1896. She was a waif with doubtful parentage, adopted by a dubious German and therefore devoid of both "class" and family, all important indices. Together in exile in Mindanao, she lived with Rizal without benefit of the intransigent clergy against whom they were rebelling, and was legally married only a few hours before he was executed in Luneta, Rizal's own approval, of course, bracketed. Students are instead introduced by male historians to an *illustrada* from the province of Tarlac whom they would have preferred the national hero to marry. Much saccharine sentiment has been extracted over her later marriage to a British engineer in order to please her family; a most moral decision for the exemplary Filipina of the 1890s.

Yet Josephine Bracken belongs even more to Philippine history than Bustamante's widow; she joined the *insurrectos* in Cavite in 1896, a few days after Rizal's execution, marching with them for days at a stretch. She is alleged to have stamped her foot in the presence of the Spanish governor general on at least one occasion. Later she became an



NPA Amazons take aim.

that October 1719, he was murdered inside his own palace by hooded monks and street riff-raff; after which he was roped and dragged down the steps of the palace to the royal prison where he expired. His son was also murdered while trying to protect him. In that generation, even the representative of the crown did not question the Holy Church.

The boundary between fact and fiction on what followed is today under dispute: for Dona Luisa "that ironic counterpoint to the Age of Enlightenment" donned men's clothing and joined a rebel band of *tulisanes* to not only confront the Dominicans but to exact revenge for both the murder of her husband and the rape of her daughter by a priest. But undeniably, Dona Luisa inspired both a tradition and artistic flowering that went into the 20th century.



English teacher in one of the first American established high schools in Manila. But Josephine Bracken committed one grievous error: after a time she remarried, totally abandoning the very *illustro* Rizal surname.

A male critic and playwright, Isagani Cruz, has finetuned the general rejection of Josephine Bracken by doing a play about her in which she is seen as a clever little tart with less than average mental equipment, while the great Rizal, with all his accomplishments in the world of science and literature, is reduced to a problem in sexual entrapment.

The early decade of the American occupation might have succeeded in holding up a more accurate mirror of the European *dama*, had it not been for two very naive policies, both official and unofficial: Americans, unlike the Spaniards, did import large quantities of their own women both as wives and teachers. But they had already concluded an agreement with the Vatican, through its representative in Washington, that in the interest of "religious tolerance" they would not destroy the basic structures of the existing Catholic cultural base. And they did not.

The second gentlemen's agreement was apparently in the interest of protecting the purity of American womanhood. Mixed marriages were bluntly discouraged; miscegenation, unlike its pragmatic acceptance by Spain, was eschewed in Yankee Manila. A certain number did occur with some regularity to Filipinas from prominent families. But socially, these "squaw men", as they were crudely called in early American enclaves in Manila, had zero status.

Thus "natives" were not permitted membership in the Army-Navy club in Manila, presaging several decades of "No Dogs Or Filipinos Permitted Here" signs both in the Philippines and in the United States. Not until after World War II did this mentality become an embarrassment to America and begin to change, and apartheid, Manila-style, was ended.

The overseas American woman could not possibly be any kind of reverse prototype. Above all, she could not cry "foul!" over what everyone knew. Nor could the new kind-hearted, but equally conservative new Protestant missionary. She was the perpetual

representative of America's noble intentions and therefore in a constant doublebind. The likes of Mark Twain and other sharp critics of American Manifest Destiny were not wanted in Manila. If she so much as raised the glimmer of a doubt against the American intention or its implementation, she could have shattered her husband's own career as a colonial administrator who would have very likely sent her packing.

An American journalist, Florence Horn, (*Orphans of the Pacific*. Reynal and Hitchcock. N.Y. 1941) during a brief stint in the Philippines before Pearl Harbor, enraged both Americans and Filipinos with her bluntness and transcriptions of segregated table talk. The American, she insisted, "despised Filipinos", finding them to be after all quite alien, and they were there only because they had been assigned to the post. As for the upper class women of the islands, who had enviable domestic leisure because of armies of cheap servants, they idled away hours at the mahjong table. Only one Irish-mestiza journalist so much as merited Horn's attention; and apparently because Yay (Panilo) thumbed her nose in practice at most of the colonial rules of feminine decorum, anticipating a new cross-cultural Eurasian breed of women who would make new rules. In that decade they were apparently the only ones who could get away with it.

In spite of the co-educational American public school system, now presided over by a few extremely competent men and also by a few discharged incompetent military sinecures, the odds were still heavily balanced in favor of Spain and the *convento*. Democracy, it seemed, had triumphed when Slave girls were first sent to American schools in Mindanao; they were, in fact, sent as surrogates with orders to report what it was all about to their masters before they enrolled their sons.

But elsewhere, the convent school with its uniformed *colegialas* prevailed for the landed gentry. Their inbred piety and recessive decorum continued to be an essential qualification for the bride in a well-made *illustro* marriage.

Not too far away from the prestigious Assumption Convent was another perpetual institution, but with less class: the Santa Ana



Cabaret, which recruited poor girls from the barrios as taxi dancers and whores for American servicemen on R & R, except that as time passed, the latter and their many imitations became widespread and recruiting was unnecessary.

That, in a nutshell with minor variations, is still the Feminine Situationer in the Philippines today.

### Gate-crashing the Party

The single headlong confrontation by European woman was unforeseen and not according to pattern. It came at the end of the American period by the most unlikely counter-agents of the conqueror race. To begin with, they were refugees, or early twentieth century boat people. Most of them were fleeing from the United States in the same manner and about the same period that White Russians were fleeing from Shanghai and Jewish couples were hurrying in panic out of Vienna and resettling in Manila.

The boat was very likely a third class berth on an American President Liner, for most of them had married very poor Filipino students in the United States. And indeed they were refugees: from that era of anti-miscegenation laws, and racial chauvinism, particularly on the Pacific coast. Marriage to a Filipino husband was not a small matter before World War II; and most had survived a sustained barrage of head shakings, teeth clackings and even in a few cases, street beatings from racial purists who thought there was something obscene about the spectacle of a caucasian woman walking with a Filipino male on an American street.

This was compounded by the fact that it was then depression America; and her Ph. D. husband was very lucky if he qualified for a job as a bellhop in a Los Angeles hotel.

They were Outsiders of a special kind. In that generation, marriage to a Filipino husband meant that they had "passed". Their interracial marriages were an implied affront to the most basic underpinnings of the long imperialist spearhead: the impossibility of equality. Collectively they had declared war on biologists who insisted that racial blood types would not mix; on sociologists who averred that the

children of such unions would be abnormal, on hard-shelled preachers who invoked religion, advising them "not to take the brotherhood of man too seriously" and above all the US State Department. Their mission was not in anyone's strategic study.

So off to far Manila they went with only one fundamental expectation. That Filipinos were not racially cruel as a people. They embraced the Asian scene with zest largely because they had HAD it in American racial enclaves.

The emigre experience was not that simple in the decades that would follow for the several hundred foreign wives who trickled through the port of Manila during the 1930s. A few would be disillusioned and leave; not all would be happy in the tabloid sense, for some husbands would revert under cultural pressure to his father's philandering amusements; but that generation of foreign wives would rarely be bored.

They would not create waves in Manila, for they were essentially oddities. Totally non-Hispanic in their tastes and convictions, many were eggheads of the free thinking variety, spouting heresy at every turn, until they acquired practiced tact. They were a feminine cultural melting pot in a most homogeneous society and many became very influential in an understated way.

The first cultural shock wave engulfing them on arrival in Manila was an odd double standard. Filipinas who had married caucasians, or

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Carrying a gun and a child: the struggle continues.



become their mistresses, were venerated as success symbols. But the reverse was not true, and she was for a time likely to be viewed with very mixed feelings. Was there something wrong with her? A Filipino husband for a European woman? This was no way to go up in the world of racial hierarchies, for these coexisted along with those of class, as the colonized Filipina had learned the hard way. It was as if these newcomers had reversed all her past priorities.

The next jolt for the emigre wife had to do with the standard image of what was expected of a "good" wife. She was expected to totally surrender privacy to a chaperone system not only for young girls but also for matrons. Freedom of movement unaccompanied was out; this was seen as a protective measure in a highly stratified culture. In those times, even teachers went to their classrooms followed by *muchachas* who carried all their books and papers. But it was also a veiled form of wife surveillance and considered quite normal.

But she was very warmly received into the hearts of ordinary Filipinos, who went to great effort to tolerate her strange ways with kindness. Her husband fronted for her when necessary with charming white lies. Very quickly the old racist wounds healed under their warmth. In time she would achieve a credibility which officialdom's wives never quite achieved and become an influential wedge in an understated way.

The majority of Filipino wives of this first wave were immediately absorbed into higher education. One of them, Doreen Gamboa, directed a school which pioneered new concepts in childhood education. "Mrs. G." as she is affectionately remembered authored a minor classic, *Learning To Be Free* (Philippine Women's University, 1980). Upon her death, as she requested, her ashes were scattered from a helicopter over Manila Bay.

An even more gutsy example was that of Sophia Schmidt Rodolfo, who with her scientist husband, secularized high school education in a remote municipality on the coast of the China Sea for more than three decades. Later, she would be voted one of the four most outstanding alumni of Bryn Mawr's Summer Program for factory girls in the 1920s, after which she became the subject of a film,

*Women of Summer*, directed by the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C..

Two other waves of emigre wives of Filipinos would follow, tapering off by 1970 as racial norms and opportunities for the educated of the Third World changed radically in America. Today, few interracial couples migrate to Asia; New York or Chicago is their more likely choice. Few of that generation of icon smashers are left to testify to their uniqueness; not only as boat people, but as women who defied masculine classification systems in the colonial world.

In time, all of them would share with much delight and a little sadness, the undivulged life of the Philippine feminine caste system-- for the colonized woman becomes a sub-class based on pure gender, no matter what her male authorities say. The emigre wife would be limited by the same structures which had produced the Filipina, but could be permitted to be more articulate without social ostracism.

Very early, she learned how the harsher edges of social stratification had conditioned the Filipina to see other women as part of an unofficial caste system, determined by family and reinforced by education; never as a gender cutting across class lines.

Her understanding was sharpened by the denouncements occurring with regularity in her own household. For totally without the domestic conveniences women now take for granted, often including running water, a succession of housemaids were forced upon her. In the beginning, she could not understand why her relatives thrust them upon her in such quantities, for they were not marvels of efficiency; and their very presence involved an undercover agreement to sustain their entire clan through little ministrations.

Initially, she was likely to be horrified by well-meaning instructions from her in-laws that she should pay no more than thirty pesos per month salary to the lowly housemaid or *yaya* (\$1.80), not to spoil her by allowing any day off, and to be sure to inspect the girl's luggage first if she went home for a visit; this to check "inevitable pilferage". Every Filipina housewife had a formidable key ring clanking from a belt



on her waist, for everything, they insisted, must be kept under lock and key.

Once a month, she would find her own Socorro's mother sitting on her front porch with that certain look which she had come to know so well. Socorro, a quiet seventeen-year old from a far *barrio* had begun working for other people at eleven. She would then approach to remind "Ma'am" that it was payday. The correct number of pesos would then pass into Socorro's calloused hand; after which she would stride to the front porch and pour the entire contents of her hand into the more vein-marked hand of her mother. An exchange of one sentence would follow, after which the mother would tap-tap her way down the open stairway until the same time next month.

If Socorro were to be asked why she did not keep even a few centavos just for herself for an afternoon at a movie or something she wanted, she would always make the same reply: "It would be *shameful*. We are so poor." The word shameful was the clue to the coercive content of communal morality; and for girl children much more than their brothers. Female infanticide has never been a part of Philippine culture, but when there are too many girl babies, they become marketable commodities, for God may provide, but never contraceptives.

Her insatiable thirst for higher education is partly to escape the feminine treadmill; for at least, she may bargain from a position of strength. Yet she knows it is her brother who has top priority for the family educational funds, in which case, it will be he, not the mother, who will one day be sitting on the front porch on that day when Ma'am settles her accounts.

His sister will say quite cheerfully: "After my brother finishes his course in auto mechanics, I can stop work and he will send me to school." Then comes the day when Luz's face is marked with tears: "My brother got married last week. I cannot go to school next semester; I must help his wife who is pregnant. I hope you will raise my salary to ten pesos, Ma'am."

That was precisely what Ma'am had wished to do for Luz for a long time. Taking advantage of the helplessness of another woman is repugnant to one who has herself never before

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had servants or has had to live with the harsh undertone of a servant class. But she knows her neighbors will be furious with her. She will have demolished the current slave wage system for housemaids in one swoop; and now, the others will complain with some bitterness, that girls will refuse to work for them. Even her husband will advise caution. The transplanted wife may then feel quite trapped in hundreds of little ways. The nuclear family is not only unknown but considered barbaric. Collective ascent is everything. There is so little she can do except moderate such cases with compassion or simply project a counter-image, which she did and often with vigor.

Yet these are the more salutary examples of the feminine exchange market, for the family, which has the unquestioned discretion over the dispensation of their daughters, is invulnerable. It is not above pimping in various ways for its prettier daughters. Prostitution of one sort or another, or making it explicitly by the bed, is an assumed lot of women in general; and if certain limits are followed, not reprehensible. It is even seen as the ultimate in worthy self-sacrifice if it is the family that benefits.

Among the more fortunate Filipinas who go as far as the university, it is not uncommon for a woman honor student as to inform you without so much as the flick of an eyelash, that her parents have enrolled her in the School of Economics in order that she will qualify for US employment, then a green card and then the migration of her entire family to the United States, in that order. This is her assignment. Bright young women are family capital assets



and worthy of educational investment for pretty much the same reasons.

When one remembers that 85% of all economic life in the Philippines today consists of the family-type corporation, with the wife generally the treasurer, one understands why economic miracles have bypassed this area for a number of reasons.

Yet the emigre wife in time came to love the extended family; for it was they who so tenaciously did battle on her behalf, in that generation when no other institution would. Yet she had no illusions: This same, charming, warm-hearted Filipino family, which so dazzles foreign visitors on first encounter, was, unfortunately, the single most tyrannical institution oppressing women for generations. With the Church as its shadow directorate, it had become quite formidable.

Even the most modern Filipina discovers eventually that there is no way of tangling in a headlong collision course with the traditional family. One escapes its tentacles only by going as far away as possible; the face-saving reason being that the daughter can be of more help from a distant land. This tidal wave of feminine migration (women constitute 51% of overseas workers from the Philippines) excludes still another kind: the international marriage brokers and the personal column ads, which can effect a quickie migration through marriage to an Australian or a Canadian or a West German.

There has been much local press indignation recently over the possibility that these overseas brides are being maltreated by their Australian husbands; perhaps even being commandeered like housemaids. Oddly, this peculiarly nationalistic form of indignation has as yet not been applied to the Filipino husband or the family system that conditioned him to commandeer so reflexively.

It has also overlooked the eagerness with which the Filipina has begun clipping these ads. Poverty is always cited. But primarily, it is the absence of other liberating options, specifically, reproductive and sexual rights only for males and the marital steel cage in a society in which only legal separation is tolerated by law.

A second bit of illumination would come to the emigre wife in time: that "liberation" for the few was largely a matter of whether one had the means to pay for it, meaning that one could hire another woman from the servant class as her surrogate. It would be she who would wait hand and foot on the men of the household without so much as grumbling or a pout. Full-time employment did not exempt her from these personal services after office hours. It was the same policy the Spanish military rulers used, called the *polo* system, which used slave labor to build roads, and public buildings. An *Indio*, if he had the means, could hire another man to take his place as a surrogate.

The feminine front in Manila is, therefore, deceptively complex. Yet as far as most of the nation is concerned, they will declare flatly that gender oppression does not exist. Or if it does, it is an effect, not a cause and will dissolve with national liberation from foreign domination and consequent poverty. In effect, say most cause-oriented males: "Help liberate us first and then we will help you, for our issues are contingent on each other." Their logic sounds a bit like Luz and her brother's course in auto mechanics. The principle is the same, and the fringe benefits as tenuous.

At first glance, the urban Filipina impresses one as the breath of fresh air on the Southeast Asian feminine scene. She radiates an instant charm and an effortless aplomb; all packaged in a cosmopolitan sophistication that is above all articulate. And the statistical backup is impressive: a woman president, a supreme court justice, two cabinet ministers, two senators and several congresswomen. One finds university faculties that are forty percent women, and their enrolments with 65% women students. By graduation time, they will reach out their well-manicured hands for 85% of all diplomas. But this does not mean that they snag 85% of all job opportunities.

But these showcase examples are not typical. The middle class Filipina, she who has just come from or is probably on the way out to another continent, is only the infinitely small top wedge of the social pyramid. Only in rare cases is she an example of feminine power, which, indeed, she may seize, but she will pay its price, which comes as yet rather high: relegation into the ranks of marginal.



As yet, women's liberation is an externalized concept, confrontation being considered crude and self-defeating of possible ends. Out-right cunning is much preferred when dealing with the male-dominated power base.

The exceptional woman achiever is first a wife, a sister, or a mother from an established power bloc, and underwritten by their combined resources. Her family credentials are excellent. In addition, she has never committed the blunder of breaking certain fundamental male ground rules for well-placed feminine achievement: at all times the Feminine Mystique must be publicly respected, even if thrown to the dogs in private. She may press for ambiguous woman power in "nation building" but never advocate anything so unambiguous as Western Women's Lib. The argument for productive rights, she must be quick to agree, does not apply to "our women". She must never raise her voice in the presence of a male colleague and at all times she must look preeminently like a lady, with evidence of meticulous grooming, for she is on exhibition largely as a token of masculine progressive tolerance.

Not a great deal has really changed, for permissiveness for women is still much more a matter of class than gender; except that origins are of less importance. A graduate degree will now suffice.

Yet the milieu is changing like the coming of the whirlwind. Pure demography may yet demolish the old order, for fifty percent of the Philippine population is now under nineteen years of age and with few varieties. Deposed President Ferdinand E. Marcos helped this process in a backhanded way with later revelations of his open manipulation of facts; and by carelessly opining that "women's place was after all in the bedroom".

Pluralism, sexual, religious, and otherwise is in. Small clusters of yellow robed Buddhist groups roam through public parks for the first time in centuries, suggesting alternatives to monotheistic rigidity. The theocratic family and state is under caustic analysis at last. Its initial base of class servitude is threatened by a rapidly shrinking servant class. New hired surrogates are difficult for wives to either find

or afford, as industrialized forms of agro-industry change the old order of hired labor.

Holy Church now apologizes for its past excesses; and at least one Directress of a convent presides over a women's liberation thrust, making certain that pro-life views prevail in public statements.

Less commonly does the former colonial votary consent to be the number one serf of that Cosmic Landlord, who in the 16th century delegated Spain as His *comprador*. At consciousness raising sessions even the Immaculate Concepcion is now somewhat less than immaculate. Their pronouncements now sound less and less like Saint Teresa and more like Virginia Woolf or Dora Black Russell in the 1920s.

Like the latter, they have rediscovered a key term from that generation, *androcentric*; the male designated methodology of compiling history, even Philippine history, with the conquest of power more decisive to them than ideas, unless the latter were products of the masculine brain. They now recognize the new androcentric merchants of nuclear death, disease, and racial chauvinism, whom they have identified in some detail. They have compiled their own lists of androcentric thinkers, ranging from Saint Augustine through Karl Marx. Engels is, of course, excluded.

They have even rediscovered their own nullified productive rights through liberal doses of secular anthropology and mingling with the remote tribal peoples. Archipelagic insularity, which can be as stultifying as the landlocked variety, is disappearing.

Above all, they now ask why: Why did our women ever consent to such an uneven exchange after 1521?

In one sense they parallel the script played by the emigre wives, whose very presence was a reverberated *no* to the entire imperialist legacy, with hangmen of the most unlikely sort, the Church and the extended Family. Doors now open to this bold new breed although they still hear the reverberation of the slammed door. They have no illusions about a decisive role, for they are a fragile minority like the women achievers who make it to the front page daily.



In that sense they are a valid counterculture in one of the more successful interracial societies in Asia. Indeed they no longer represent a "pure" race. But this does not distress women in the way that it does their men. Over

the centuries they have had enough of purist concepts, genetic and otherwise, as part of the power subterfuges of the imperialist cleat.

The stag affair, it seems, is nearly over.

