

**ENGENDERING A NATION:
Gender and Nationalism
in Iluko Literature, 1985-1998***

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ABSTRACT

The study inquired into the engendering — the construction/production and gendering—of the nation in selected Iluko literary texts published in the *Bannawag* from 1985 to 1998. While the study focused on issues of gender and nationalism, it also examined how they are enmeshed in other categories such as class, patriarchy and ethnicity. Furthermore, the study located its critique in the socio-political and cultural contexts that attended the production of the literary works and the factors that necessarily determined the ‘crises’ presented in the texts. Thus, gender and nationalism were located in their specificity, in their articulation within the contexts of US imperialism, patriarchy, class and state oppression, insurgency and militarization, revolutions and martial law, ethnicity, and transnational/migrant labor.

In examining how the nation is engendered, the research focused on two areas or themes where gender and nationalism were most prominently engaged in the literary texts analyzed:

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the *troping and embodying of the nation as woman*, and *national agency*. The first area is a critique of how women characters take on symbolic/metaphorical roles such that even if they are living, moving, speaking characters, their function really is to represent, embody or register in corporeal ways the struggle for, and the violence committed against, the nation. The second area problematizes the construction and representation of women as agents of national formation and transformation. It exposes how even in their construction as such, their agency is severely constrained by the patriarchal ideology that continues to contaminate or haunt the attempts of male writers to create positive representations of women. Also, it details how a woman poet-writer realizes a project in which women are really, truly actors and agents of social and political transformation. The section argues that the poet realizes this by negotiating the sites where women are most oppressed and by engaging the structures that oppress women, thereby critically examining and disengaging them. In re-engaging them, she produces in her creative and poetic intervention a nation formed and shaped by the thoughts, feelings, voices, and actions of women. Thus could she assert alternative relationships among women and men, between women and nation, between gender and nationalism.