

## THE FILIPINO WOMAN AND/IN THE FILIPINO REBEL

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Truth is a base in the triangle of discourse and power. Through the “production, accumulation, circulation and functioning” of discourse, power is exercised.<sup>1</sup> Readers are interpellated into accepting truths, which are based on power relations permeating and constituting society.<sup>2</sup> Through discursive power, questionable truths are unquestioningly accepted. Since deconstruction “demands that we rethink the terms in which we formulate” the world, it is particularly effective in the examination of the patriarchal order imposed by literary texts.<sup>3</sup>

Maximo Kalaw's *The Filipino Rebel: A Romance of American Occupation in the Philippines* (published in 1929) is a novel about Philippine history from 1898 to 1929—from the battle of Manila Bay to the establishment of American hegemony in the Philippines. In his preface, the author bestows authenticity on the “events and facts presented” and declares objectivity in the presentation of ideas of “the prominent historical figures of the period”: Emilio Aguinaldo, Apolinario Mabini, Pedro Paterno, Antonio Luna, Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña.<sup>4</sup> Even while truth is presented as truth, even before truth is dressed by fiction, the list of “prominent historical figures” is limited to males and *ilustrados*. Excluded are two vital movers in Philippine history: women and peasants.

The core of indigenous communities in the Philippines were and are women. In pre-Hispanic Philippines, the family was a self-sufficient subsistence unit of production and consumption. Thus, there was no need to create relations of dependence. Since the concept of private property did not exist, the concept of woman as property of man had no social basis for existing.<sup>5</sup> Women enjoyed equality in: access to production resources; “inheritance rights” to communal property; opportunity for education; divorce before the law; liberty of movement; and positions of leadership. The triumvirate leadership of indigenous Philippine society consisted of the economic czar called the *datu*, the technical

expert called the *panday*, and the supernatural mediator and healer called the *babaylan*. The position of *babaylan* was occupied mostly by women; the only men who become *babaylans* were those who were more female than male, such as hermaphrodites, homosexuals and old men.<sup>6</sup>

Since the Filipino woman was the essence of the *babaylans*, and since the *babaylans* performed the function claimed by the friars, women/*babaylans* had to be subdued. People clung to these obstacles to the Christianization of the Philippines. Those who healed, interpreted nature, mediated between God and man were interpellated as *bruha* or *mangkukulam*, capable of *bruhedia* (witchcraft) and *hitchederia* or *kulam*.<sup>7</sup> The term *bruha* cleverly excludes males and accuses females of sorcery. Those who revolted against Spanish rule were similarly interpellated as *tulisanes o ladrones* (bandits, thieves or criminals).<sup>8</sup> *Babaylans* who formed their own communities in areas beyond Spanish control were also called *tulisanes*. Other *babaylans* joined rebellions such as that by Waray Tupung in the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> By the first half of the seventeenth century, the high position of women in the Philippines had been eradicated by the Spaniards. The subjugation of Filipino women heralded the subjugation of the Filipino race.

The high esteem for women in pre-colonial Philippines was affirmed in the vision of the free new nation of *Katagalugan*. The *Kartilya* confirmed that women were part of the *kapatiran* of the people and that they were equal to men. Apolinario Mabini's "*Programa Political de la Republica Filipina*," Section 16 and 17 of Article I' stated that women had the right to: vote, hold office, and study in colleges, and practice professions. It was therefore logical for women to actively participate in the struggle for national independence and sovereignty. The women's branch of the *Katipunan* served not only to deflect the enemy's attention during the meetings of the *katipuneros* but also to expand the membership of the *Katipunan*.<sup>10</sup> Aside from spying, passing information and sewing flags, many *katipuneras* actually fought side by side with men; they operated *Lantakas*, dug trenches, and died in actual combat. Upon the outbreak of war, even those women who were not members of the *Katipunan*, enlisted in the army, donned men's clothes, and joined the battles. Melchora Aquino, Gregoria de Jesus, Gregoria Montoya, Agueda Kahabagan, Trinidad Tecson, are only a few of the many who fought and died in the Revolution against Spain and the War against America. The names and deeds of Filipino heroines must still be inscribed in the annals of Philippine history.

In the historical and literary discourse that is *The Filipino Rebel*, the woman involuntarily becomes part of a small beleaguered guerrilla unit in the continuing war against America. For pretending to be the wife of a fugitive who leaps into her barrio home, the young woman Josefa is taken prisoner, her left hand tied to the right hand of Major Juanito Lecaroz in the American captors' parody of the false marriage and imposition of "a honeymoon". (50-51)

It is Josefa who successfully engineers and leads their escape. As a guerrilla, she is admirable: aside from her "ability to revitalize her comrades by her fortitude and spirit", her stories and her songs, she acts as decoy in ambushes for provisions. She explains her refusal of Juanito's offer of a scholarship after the war: "We women of the barrio. . . find consolation in serving our country." "But the minute we expect material recompense in return, like the one you propose, our work ceases to be patriotic." (61) The peasant woman's commitment to her country is thus simply stated as it is spontaneously practised. However, once wooed and won by Juanito, she focuses her entire existence on him alone, she refuses to join Juanito in Manila where idyllic love between a peasant and an *ilustrado* could not survive. She sacrifices her happiness so as not to tax his precarious financial position and social position by her presence. He vows that once he has arranged his affairs, "I shall come and get you." (75) Because "her happiness depended on her ability to adjust herself to. . . Juanito's world", and because she believed and resolved that she "must be worthy of him", she "threw all her soul" into transforming herself. Considering herself as his legal wife, she enrolls in an American public school and zealously learns the social skills necessary for high government society.

A woman's endeavor to adjust to the man she loves is deemed admirable in the text—as in life. No longer central to herself and to her community, the new Filipina was constituted to become "her father's meek daughter, her husband's faithful subject, the Church's obedient servant."<sup>11</sup> In *The Filipino Rebel*, the *raison d'etre* of the woman is the man. Josefa becomes a guerrilla not through her own volition but through his capture. From her first encounter with the man, she enters bondage, of which the manacles to him are a perfect if involuntary symbol. She serves as an inspiring and outstanding guerrilla as long as he remains with her. She relinquishes the fight for freedom when he surrenders. She changes from a fiercely independent freedom fighter to a besotted fe-

male training for servitude as a bourgeois wife. She spends four years to transform herself “from the rustic country maiden of the revolution—unschooled, but with inherent intelligence, charming in her simplicity, and unaffected by city life” into “a refined and well-educated city girl, speaking both Spanish and English fairly well.”(96)

Total abdication of the woman to the man—particularly pain and humiliation—is anticipated as a romantic event in the course of life. In the name of love, the woman embraces lifetime vassalage. Her “primary domain” becomes the household of the man; her honorific title is “wife” and “mother”, but she is no more than the head servant, “effectively exploited and subordinated”, her “domestic labor. . .unpaid and undervalued.”<sup>12</sup> It is socialization and not instinct that provides fulfillment to the woman who is a satisfied partner in her own exploitation. “Excluded from all participation in social production,”<sup>13</sup> she accomplishes with zealous fanaticism the narrow sphere of reproduction assigned to her.

However, the ambitious Juanito abandons her and their son to marry the daughter of a wealthy and politically powerful godfather. At the news, Josefa cries, “What is there left for me to do in this world but to die? Life is all darkness to me now.”(106) “To see someone else take the honor of becoming the wife of Juanito for which she had been preparing all these years” would “kill all her incentive.”(109) She therefore flees to the United States. Even in her flight from the private to the public sphere, Josefa names herself “Juanita”, signifying her continuing interpellation of herself as a man-centered woman. In “the land of opportunity”, “she would attain success and distinction so that she could return to the Philippines a woman of whom even Juanito, in his own selfish political ambition, would have to sit up and take notice.”(109) “She would go a nobody, but would come back a somebody. She would show Juanito that the girl who came from the barrio, of a social class below his, if given the opportunity, could rise to a high level.”(111)

Thirty years later, the female peasant—acclaimed as “one of the greatest, if not the greatest” of living Filipino women by Americans and Filipinos alike—triumphantly returns.(201) She “visits” the Philippines in order “to keep her in touch” with her people “whose desires” she intends “to voice in America.”(204) However, she is no longer representative of her “people”. She has become merely the spokesperson and apologist for America:

I am here to bring the glad tidings and best wishes of millions of American women. The women of America are eager to help us in our campaign for women's rights. They are also willing to help us, in return for co-operation [sic], in our struggle for the emancipation of our country. We should not forget that the women of America have equal rights with men, and that they can be of tremendous help in winning America to our cause.(209)

Having contracted nationalist amnesia, Josefa claims that the American people, a “just and liberty-loving people” neglect the Philippine nationalist cause only because Filipinos “have not done enough to arouse their attention.”(203) Since she has returned partly on behalf of the Woman Suffrage Association of America, she campaigns for women's suffrage in the Philippines. The vital cause of Philippine independence is lost in the narrow issue of the political rights of women, which she mistakes for “the cause of my country.” Josefa personifies the assimilation and co-optation of Filipinos, including women, through the combination of the public school and the *pensionado* system. Filipino women's organizations such as the *Asociacion Feminista Ilongga*, the National Federation of Women's Club, the *Liga Feminista de la Paz* and the *Liga Nacional de Damas Filipinas* which supported the suffragette movement were actually essential conduits in the pacification campaign of the Americans. Women were finally granted the right to vote in 1935<sup>14</sup> but Philippine independence was granted legally only after Manila was so devastated as to become the second most ruined city of World War II.

While the elite were thus effectively co-opted by the Americans, the peasants continued resistance through radical anti-imperialist movements such as the *Colorum* and the *Sakdal*. In the anti-Japanese war, peasant women were indispensable; they provided essential support in munitions supply, intelligence work, and communications.<sup>15</sup> Peasants and women were therefore dynamic participants in the making of Philippine history.

Even in the denouement of *The Filipino Rebel*, the woman is vindicated not only by phenomenal success in the public sphere but also by the regained affection and esteem of the man in the private sphere. Because she has remained “sweet, docile, obedient, self sacrificing,” she is loved and admired by all, including the man who scorned her. She is the ideal Filipino woman immortalized by Jose Rizal in *Noli Me Tangere* which according to Carmen Guerrero Nakpil is the “greatest misfortune to have befallen Filipino women in the last one hundred years.”<sup>16</sup>

Literature, history, literary criticism are part of the powerful cultural armory contributing to women's disempowerment. The true ideal Filipino woman—a dynamic productive historical force unfettered by illusions of romance and second to no man—must be drawn in all discourse. Women must begin “to fiction” their own truth.<sup>17</sup> Philippine literature can resonate myths chanted by the *babaylans*. History would record women as active leaders at the core of their communities. Literary criticism would charge the patriarchal order with the insidious colonization and exploitation of women under cover of emotions upheld by institutions. Discourse would contribute to the shaping of a new consciousness and to the articulation of a new order—that for which the women fought alongside the *katipuneros*—an order where all are free and equal regardless of creed, color and gender.

### Endnotes

1. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. and ed. Donald Bouchard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 137.
2. \_\_\_\_\_, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. and ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 93.
3. Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (Bosoton, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 19.
4. Maximo Kalaw, *The Filipino Rebel: A Romance of American Occupation in the Philippines*, with introduction by Pio Pedrosa (Manila: The Educational Supply, 1930; reprinted, Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1964), p. xvii. Subsequent quotations from the text of this novel will be indicated by the page numbers in parentheses.
5. Luz Lopez Rodriguez, “Patriarchy and Women's Subordination in the Philippines,” *Review of Women's Studies* 1: 1 (1990): 18.
6. Zeus Salazar, “Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas,” in *Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on Women's Role in Philippine History 8-9 March 1989*, ed. Thelma Kintanar (Q.C.: U.P. Press, 1989), pp. 35-36.
7. Milagros C. Guerrero, “Ang Kababaihan sa Ika-Labimpitong Siglo,” in *Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on Women's Role in Philippine History 8-9 March 1989*, pp. 46.

8. *Ibid.*, p.47.
9. Salazar, "Ang Babaylan," pp. 38-39.
10. Isabelo de los Reyes' claim that women joined the *Katipunan* due to jealous suspicions of their husbands' absences was disproved by Marina Dizon, the first president of the women's branch of the *Katipunan*, in an interview with historian Teodoro Agoncillo. Romeo Cruz, "Ang Pilipina sa Panahon ng Himagsikan at Digmaang Pilipino-Amerikano," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on Women's Role in Philippine History 8-9 March 1989*, ed. Thelma Kintanar (Quezon City: University Center for Women's Studies, U.P., 1989), p. 60. Marina Dizon was the pride of Tondo and of Sampaloc: she could play the guitar, dance, sing, orate; she was not only attractive but also intelligent. Maria Leocadia Ejercito, "Heroines of Philippine Freedom," (thesis, Philippine Women's University, 1974), p. 32.
11. Aida F. Santos, "Do Women Really Hold Up Half the Sky?" in *Essays on Women*, ed. by Sr. Mary John Mananzan (Manila: St. Scholastica's College, 1987), pp. 38-39. "The indoctrination of women into patriarchal ideology is evident in Rizal's fictional characters: Sisa accepts her husband's oppressiveness as part and parcel of married life; Maria Clara sacrifices her own happiness for that of the men in her life (Padre Damaso and Kapitan Tiago). Purita Gomez plays the role of a sex object to the hilt; Juli chooses to die rather than fight the friar, the symbol of male supremacy; Doña Victorina understands the power of men and struggles to break into their magic circle; Tiya Isabel is quiet, content and happy, an unpaid domestic servant of Kapitan Tiago." Anacleto Encarnacion, "Literature as History," *Solidarity* 114 (Sept.-Oct. 1987): 149.
12. Rodriguez, "Patriarchy and Subordination," p. 17.
13. Albina Pecson-Fernandez, "Why are Women invisible in History," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on Women's Role in Philippine History*, p. 7.
14. Aurora de Dios, "Participation of Women's Groups in the Anti-Dictatorship Struggle: Genesis of a Movement," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on Women's Role in Philippine History*, p. 96.
15. De Dios, "Genesis" p. 96.
16. Carmen Guerrero Nakpil quoted in Sr. Mary John Mananzan, "The Filipino Woman Before and After the Spanish Conquest of the Philippines," in *Essays on Filipino Women* (Manila: St. Scholastica's College, 1987), pp. 7-36.

17. The verb "to fiction" was invented by Michel Foucault to undermine his own use of the word "truth"; "One 'fictions' a history starting from a political reality that renders it true, one 'fictions' a politics that doesn't as yet exist starting from a historical truth." Michel Foucault, in *Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney, Feral Publications, 1979), pp. 74-75, quoted by Catherine Belsey, "Literature, History, Politics" in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, e d. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1988), p. 410.

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