

THE IMPACT OF COLONIZATION ON THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE HILIGAYNON NOVEL*

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When the upper middle-class heroine in Ramon Muzones' *Himuga ni Eva* (The Crime of Eva 1957) discovers to her dismay that her husband for whom she rejected a family approved match is a womanizer, she immediately decides to leave him. Her more experienced best friend, Cora, however, urges her to be "realistic" because, from the former's point of view, it is in the nature of men to stray. Therefore she advises Eva to take on the responsibility of making the marriage work. Hoping for a second opinion, Eva takes the same problem to her mother, only to be told by the latter to content herself with the crumbs of her husband's affection since men cannot be expected to remain true to one woman.

When one considers that more than any other Hiligaynon novelist, it was 1989 CCP Gawad sa Sining awardee Ramon Muzones who focused most consistently on the "woman question" in the sixty-two novels he authored, one understands the impact that colonization has exerted on the image of the Ilongga in the eighty-six years of the history of the Hiligaynon novel.

Visayan folk literature is replete with stories of how pre-Hispanic Visayan women held real power. Accounts range from the peopling of the earth which highly fecund Bayi accomplished without masculine help to tales of the awesome power wielded by the

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divinity Lalahon who hurls fire from the heights of the mountains of Negros when displeased, but whom Visayans of old invoked for good harvests. Since folklore, according to Bascom, provides a revealing picture of the people's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, goals and aspirations, it is not surprising to discover that history reinforces these accounts.

Iberian chroniclers confirm that pre-Hispanic Visayan society prized women equally with men. Hence, they were not only educated alongside their brothers, they inherited property equally with them and could succeed their fathers as rulers of the tribe if they were the oldest in the family. Furthermore, after marriage, they held on to their paraphernal property; kept their maiden names; were free to decide on the number of children they would bear and could divorce their husbands if they wanted to.

Visayan women during pre-Hispanic times served not only as heads of barangays but leaders who took up armed struggle against the foreign invaders after the local political elite was coopted by colonial powers. Wielders not only of tremendous political but religious powers, they acted as mediators between the material and spiritual world in their capacity as priestesses or *babaylanes*. Thus Spanish chronicles are filled with frustrated attempts to stamp out indigenous animistic religion due to resistance led by famous *babaylanes* like Dupinagay, Tapara, Monica Gapon and Agustina Hiticon (Regalado and Franco 1975: 115-121). Nevertheless, with the advent of colonization these feisty females eventually gave way to the fragile, helpless, lachrymose heroines of the Spanish period — virginal before marriage, prolific after, and long-suffering to the very end. As the earliest progenitors of the novel, the epic *Hinilawod* and Pedro Monteclaro's *Maragtas* (1907) provide us with glimpses of the position of women in pre-Hispanic times.

More than mere chattels or mediums of exchange, women in pre-contact times were valued for their wisdom and knowledge and not just for their procreative functions. Thus it is the astute-

ness of Sukiang Malayon, guardian of happy homes which saves the commoner — warrior Paubare and his goddess-wife from the great flood and as a consequence ensures the survival of humanity through their children, the three epic heroes of *Hinilawod*: Labaw Donggon, Humadapnon and Dumaladap. Similarly when Humadapnon and his half brother Amarotha fail to work out their differences after a seven year combat for the hand of the fair and sagacious seer Nagmalitong Yawa, it is their wise grandmother, Alunsina who puts an end to the fraternal strife by dividing the object of their desire into two persons. Conversely, when against his brother Dumaladap's advice, the stubborn Humadapnon insists on visiting the isles of the fairies, succumbs to their fatal seduction and gets transformed into a witch, it is Nagmalitong Yawa who with the help of all the *binukots* (kept maidens) comes to his rescue by slaying all the fairies. More importantly, it is through her superior knowledge of magic that she succeeds in resurrecting Humadapnon from the dead.

Likewise in Monteclaro's *Maragtas*, Marikudo, the Negrito chief defers to the wishes of his wife, Maniwantiwan who asks for extra payment for a piece of land sold to the ten Bornean datus. Attracted to the golden necklace worn by Datu Puti's wife, Maniwantiwan demands that aside from the golden *saduk* (hat) and *batiya* (basin) presented to her husband, she be given a necklace like Pinangpangan's. Not to be outdone, Pinangpangan agrees to her husband's prodding to relinquish the necklace to the Negrita but like an astute housewife who knows a good bargain when she sees one, also asks in return for it one *tabungos* (basket) full of crabs, one hog with long tusks and a cross-eyed wild deer.

Nevertheless, between the time Loarca chronicled the high regard Pintados had for their womenfolk for whom they paid handsome bride prices and for whose sake they cheerfully subjected themselves to years of bride service and the time Graciano Lopez Jaena wrote the proto-novel *Fray Botod* (Father Big Belly, 1874) something happened to the status of Visayan women.

The key lies in the institutions and the value system of the *Siglo de Oro* that the Spanish colonizers brought to the Philippines. When the Spanish masters brought in their own institutions and transplanted them on native soil, the social construction of woman was transformed. From her status as co-equal to man by virtue of her having sprung from the same node of bamboo, she suddenly became his inferior because in the patriarchal Judeo-Christian context she was created later. The implication of all these was:

... the new Filipina (or female indio) was now her father's meek daughter, her husband's faithful subject, the church's obedient servant, and before her marriage, a chaste virgin who would yield only to her husband (and occasionally to the friar). (Mangahas 1991:38).

Thus, women's educational opportunities were diminished. Only upper class women were educated and the sum of their education was embroidery, catechism and other related concerns that were intended to circumscribe their existence around the Church and the home. New laws excluded women from participation in public affairs. Monogamous marriages became the rule and though couples could separate they could not remarry. The new laws deprived women of the right to hold public office, join professions or engage in business without their husband's consent and to dispose of their paraphernal properties. Religion became their obsession developing in them an infinite capacity for tolerance, forgiveness and suffering (Angeles 1991:16).

These patriarchal ideas on the position and the role of women in society were not only preached from the pulpits but were propagated in many books of conduct that were circulated during that time. Examples of these were Clemente's *Paginas de la Virtud: Lectura Moral para Las Niñez*, Jose Ma. Chanco's *Reglamento o Regla de Vida Que Debe Seguir la Mujer, Que Aspire a la Perfection* and *Mga Tagubilin ng Dalaga* which was a translation of Bishop Antonio Claret's *Los Avisos a las Doncellas Christianas*

(Mananzan 1987:26). In the Ilonggo context Bishop Gabriel Reyes authored *Urbanidad Con Maayo nga Pamatasan (Urbanity or Good Conduct)*; Mariano Perfecto translated Paluzie and Catalozella's *Diutay nga Talamdan para sa Kabataan (Little Guidebook for Children)*, while the newspaper *Makinaugalingon (Partisan to One's Own)* serialized from November 27, 1923 to March 21, 1924 a translation of Maria Pilar Sinues *Ang Babae Carun cun Ang Mga Sulat ni Felicia kay Julia (The Woman Today or the Letters of Felicia to Julia)*. Framed in the form of a series of seventeen long letters between Julia, a young orphan and her surrogate mother Felicia, the last named deals with sundry subjects from the fine points of dealing with one's servants to the choice of one's marriage partner. This epistolary novel cum book of conduct proved so popular Imprenta La Panayana printed it in book form in 1925.

Arrogating unto themselves the role of entertaining preachers, most early Hiligaynon novelists wrote novels which were really books of conduct from Angel Magahum's *Benjamin* (1907) to Bishop Reyes' *Capitana Tona* (1918). This is evidenced in their forewords which ranged from Magahum's lengthy disquisitions on the moral value of the novel to Bishop Reyes' cryptic prologue *Ang Makahangup, Maghangup* (Those who can understand, understand). Furthermore, it is evident from many of these books' introductions that most of these novels were addressed in particular to the distaff side.

Thus writes an unknown author of a book entitled *Ang Bahandi sang mga Babae* (The Treasure of the Women):

Ini nga balasahun makabulig sa isa ka iloy, sa isa ka asawa kag sa isa ka anak nga babae sa ila dalagku nga katungdanan, gani amun ginapanugyan sa tanan nga babae ang paghuput sini nga balasahun.

(This book can help a mother, a wife and a daughter on their most important obligations, that is why we recommend to all the acquisition of this book).

More importantly, the Visayan woman was suddenly caught between being Eve or Mary. Not surprisingly, by the time Magahum came out with *Benjamin*, the first Hiligaynon novel, women had been dichotomized into the virginal and loyal Innocencia and the seductive and faithless Margarita. This tendency to polarize women into virgin or vamp was especially apparent in the novels of male writers like Serapion Torre and Patricio Lataquin. Best epitomized in two famous tear-jerkers authored by Serapion Torre entitled *Busug nga Bulawan* (*Pure Gold*, 1932) and *Mater Dolorosa* (*Sorrowful Mother*, 1937) the colonized Ilongga with her “learned helplessness” and talent for silent suffering was enshrined in these novels as the new feminine ideal. Thus in the face of her husband Pedro's baseless accusation of marital infidelity, the blameless Adela del Barrio can only run away and suffer in silence until her repentant husband comes to his senses years later. Not so her fellow - sufferer Corazon Villagracia in *Mater Dolorosa* who drowns her sorrows in the convent in the masochistic tradition of Maria Clara.

This ideal of martyred womanhood was to hold sway from the novel's inception to the present in the writings of novelists as diverse in talent as Magdalena Jalandoni and Conrado Norada. However in the face of historical realities like the heroism of revolutionary figures like Nazaria Lagos, Tana Pisca Cabanas of Cabatuan; Patrocinio Gamboa of Jaro and General Teresa Magbanua of Pototan; Purita Villanueva's founding of one of the earliest feminist groups, *Asociasion Feminista Ilongga* in 1907 and the Ilonggas' fight for the right of suffrage in the 1930s, there were stirrings which showed that the ghost of the independent, assertive and proactive Ilongga had not been laid completely to rest. One catches glimpses of this in the spirited Mediong of Bishop Reyes' *Capitana Tona* (1918) who objects to being used as a marriage trap by her mother for the best catch in town, whose intellectual pretensions fail to impress her and the long line of feisty anti-heroines of Ramon Muzones starting with Morgana of *Margosatubig* (1947).

The American regime did little to eradicate patriarchal structures, beliefs and practices engendered by Spanish colonialism. However, education made available to the great majority as part of the policy of benevolent assimilation ushered in new influences notably through mass media which changed the life style, taste and attitudes of the Ilongga. Chief among these was film which exerted a profound influence on the novel from Angel Magahum's *Si Ito Naki, ang Tiktik nga Hapon* (*Ito Naki, the Japanese Detective*, 1925) to Ramon Muzones Charley's Angels-like *Liku sa Wala* (*Turn Left*, 1987).

Film further reinforced the great divide between the virgin and vamp via Hollywood movies by underscoring the role of women as sex objects. How women were portrayed depended much on the manner individual novelists played endless variations on how men chose between the good and the bad woman in the standard love triangle which was at the base of most Hiligaynon novels. The dilemma lies in reconciling two conflicting feelings which men have difficulty relating to the same woman. These are his sexual impulses which a man may feel to be bad and which he may feel had to associate with a woman he considers admirable, and the affectionate impulses evoked by a good woman. Thus, on one hand, he hankers for the sensuous woman who excites his sexual desires while on the other hand, he yearns to marry a respectable woman who answers his affectionate impulse (Wolfenstein and Leites 1970:26). This dilemma is best dramatized in a novel by Ramon Muzones entitled *Dagta* (*Stain*, 1957) where the bemused Berting finds himself caught between the demure Pilar and the earthy Norma:

Yara sa atubangan sang iya hunahuna ang laragway sang duha ka babae: si Pilar nga mabugnaw ang kaanyag, iloynon kag maugdang ang nawong kag pamatasan nga sarang mapabugal sang bisan diin nga puluy-an. Si Norma nga masingkal ang kagayon nga makabato sang dugo kag makabagang sang balatyagon, kilala sa katipunan kag may manggad.

(In his mind are the images of the two women: Pilar's cool beauty, her maternal and modest face whose character could be the pride of any home. Norma with her tempestuous looks who can stir the blood and fire the emotions, [who was] socially renowned and wealthy).

One solution writers resorted to was to satisfy one or the other impulse at the expense of the other by choosing either the good or the bad woman. Another was to satisfy both impulses in different directions by playing around with the bad woman while sowing one's wild oats and later marrying a good woman or marrying a good woman while keeping a *querida*; the third was to combine both impulses in a single relationship. Most novelists solved the problem by opting for the sweet and demure heroine. Bishop Gabriel Reyes early on exemplified this tendency in a novel entitled *Toning* (1925). Few opted for the temptress with her aura of wanton love though Raymundo Defante Jr.'s *Esfeamor* (1971), the first Hiligaynon erotic novel comes close to it. Most intriguing was Ramon Muzones' attraction-repulsion attitude for the *femme fatale* who, in novels like *Balong Itom* (*Black Widow*, 1972) triumph at the beginning but eventually get defeated at the end. Some others like Lino Moles in *Carla* (1971) came up with an eat-your-cake-and-have-it solution to the age-old conflict between sacred and profane love by combining the exciting qualities of the bad woman and the admirable characteristics of the good one wrapped up in one prize package called "the Hollywood good bad girl—an essentially good woman spiced up with a facade of wickedness" (Wolfenstein and Leites 1970:27).

By virtue of his life-long fascination with women evidenced by some thirty-five novels that focused on them, Ramon Muzones mirrored best these three impulses.

Having started his literary career at a time when major cultural changes were making inroads into the traditional concept of the Filipina, Muzones wrote in defensive gesture of the *mujer indigena* in his early novels like *Inday* (1939) as a repository of traditional

feminine qualities. These can be summed up into five Ks: *kaugdang* (dignity), *kaligdong* (modesty), *kabuot* (goodness), *kalulo* (sweetness) and *kaulay* (purity). However, because he was a captive of the American colonial education, his attraction for American culture in time got the better of him. Thus his virtuous rustic maidens were eventually supplanted by his spirited and beguiling sirens to whom his heroes were irresistibly drawn. Influenced by the vamp played in Hollywood movies by actresses like Theda Bara and Marlene Dietrich, this character type who evokes the famous *femme fatales* of history like Delilah, Jezebel, Mata Hari, Cleopatra, Salome and Lucrezia Borgia surfaces again and again in his novels. Hence in many novels like the epical *Margosatubig* (1946), and *Maratabai* (*Pride*, 1950) Muzones fused the sacred and the profane in one woman by creating a new kind of heroine: street-smart, straight-talking, sexually-liberated and more competent than his heroes. His women characters especially in two socio-realistic novels significantly entitled *Babae Batuk sa Kalibutan* (Woman Against the World, 1959) and *Himuga ni Eva* subvert patriarchy by challenging male superiority and questioning such time honored practices as the double standard and the indissolubility of the marriage bond. In certain novels like *Balong Itom* and *Ang Alom* (*The Mole*, 1973), these women characters prove so strong they all but overwhelm the heroes until the latter completely disappear in *Liku sa Wala* (*Turn to the Left*, 1987). However, because they live in a man's world where men appear to have a monopoly of knowledge and power, they only attain social power covertly — through the seduction of the powerful and their adaptation to the unwritten laws of male domination for which they are rewarded with marriage and comfort (Modleski 1986: 126). Nevertheless between the time the battle of the sexes starts and the time it ends, Muzones provides *Hiligaynon* fiction with a gallery of literary heroines ranging from the prim and proper to the predatory. At best, these heroines adumbrate Visayan women of pre-Hispanic folk literature in their resoluteness and strength; at worst, they provide us with some of the most sexist portraits of women for Muzones never resolved

his own ambivalences about his strong women characters. Moved by admiration for these women's intelligence and competence, he makes one beguiled and bewildered male character say in undisguised envy:

Kon babae na gani mangamot ang labing mabudlay nga hilikuton mahapos nga tumanon kag ang daw indi masarangan mamag-an tumanon.

(When women take things into their hands the most difficult work becomes easy and the hardest tasks are easily accomplished).

Nevertheless, because Muzones' personal attraction for feisty women (one of whom he married) tended to conflict with his basically conservative macho temperament, he translated this ambivalence by allowing them to have their way at the beginning of story. However, he clips their wings at the end by making them suffer. Consequently, it is significant to note that he always contrives to destroy his women characters who subvert patriarchy in a kind of patriarchal poetic justice: buried under a pile of rubble like Mei Song, in *Balong Itom*, killed by the very weapon she prepared for her enemy like Candy in *Candelaria* or disfigured by an incurable disease (doubtless caught from a man) like Gina in *Babae Batuk sa Kalibutan*.

Such is the power of patriarchy.

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