FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Breaking the Sounds of Silence: The Feminist Impulse in Lualhati Bautista's *Bata, Bata... Pa'no Ka Ginawa?*

Helen Lopez

> *To think like a woman in a man's world means thinking critically, refusing to accept the givens, making connections between facts and ideas which men have left unconnected. It means remembering that every mind resides in a body; remaining accountable to the female bodies in which we live; constantly retesting given hypotheses against lived experience.... And it means that most difficult thing of all: listening and watching in art and literature, in the social sciences, in all the descriptions we are given of the world, for silences, the absences, the nameless, the unspoken, the encoded — for these we will find the true knowledge of women. And in breaking those silences, naming ourselves, uncovering the hidden, making ourselves present, we begin to define a reality which resonates to us, which affirms our being, which allows [us]... to take ourselves, and each other, seriously: meaning to begin taking charge of our lives.*
>
> — Adrienne Rich
> *"Taking Women Students Seriously"*

In Maxine Hong Kingston's best-selling novel, *The Woman Warrior* (1975), the female protagonist "talks story" to do justice to the memory of the dead aunt about whom she has been sworn

by her family never to speak. She breaks the family taboo by telling her story in order to set her free from the tyranny of punitive silence and to vindicate women's oppression in old China. Words are her weapon in her struggle against "ghosts" in growing up a girl in Asian America and in her determination to sort out her anger, confusion and helplessness in asserting her own identity both as a Chinese American and a female in the larger American society.

Similarly, in her foreword to *Bata, Bata... Pa'no Ka Ginawa*, (to be referred to hereafter as *BB*) Lualhati Bautista declares how she deals with anger or pain: instead of meeting difficulty by crying like the Virgin Mary, she helps herself by talking. ("Dinadaan ko sa dakdak.") She is not afraid to think and especially not afraid to talk. "At least," she adds, "When women do talk, they have something worthwhile saying." (my translation).

These two writers who have chosen to carry out their mission by "talking story" did not just happen to be women with a cause. As women writing their chosen strategy is fundamental to the programmatic of feminism — that is, to enable women to break out of the woman's rut and make their own way, by naming the unnamed or unnameable, by recuperating from what has been lost through centuries of psychic confinement through telling women's life stories in the diminished and diminishing space allowed women and by breaking the silences imposed on their subjectivity by convention and propriety in a patriarchal society. The ultimate agenda is self-definition and determination through feminism's productive attention to women's subjectivity.

In the following discussion I will argue that Bautista's feminist impulse in prize-winning *Bata, Bata* partakes of the same fever that launched the initial phase of the feminist revolution. It is charged with the dynamic of consciousness-raising, not only of women but of men as well. Women in particular must be awakened to the uses to which their lives have been put not only to become conscious of their subjection but also to understand the causes of their oppression. As Kate Millet puts it in *Sexual Politics*, the seminal book that propelled the upswing of feminist criticism, "the arena of sexual revolution is within human consciousness even more" than in "human institutions" (1970:88). The "social change involved" is "a matter of altered consciousness, the

exposure and elimination of social and psychological realities underlining political and cultural structures" (506). The consciousness of the current "majority" must be "raised" before "liberating radical solutions" can be contemplated" (204:53). *Bata, Bata*'s feminist agenda stems from the awareness of consciousness as power. Through its heroine, the novel affirms that "politics is not something 'out there' but something 'in her' and of the essence of [woman's] condition. (Rich 24) Bautista introduces us to a new Filipino woman: "*Dito'y sasabihin ko nang buong tapat ang larawan ng isang bagong babae.*" [Here I will tell in all sincerity the image of a new woman.] (*BB*: foreword). This new woman is embattled but self-possessed. She stays in touch with herself by breaking the sounds of silence, by rejecting cultural givens and shattering myths surrounding women and by disarming the reiterative character of female stereotypes in her own struggle for internal coherency.

The "sounds of silence" I refer to above and in my title pertain to the kinds of silence which are the focus of a course entitled "Writing as Women" at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. They include: "the voices inside you that tell you to be quiet, the voices outside you that drown you out or politely dismiss what you say or do not understand you, the silence inside you that avoids saying anything important even to yourself, internal and external forms of censorship, and the stress it produces" (Anna's 3-4 qtd. in Flynn 434). Bautista's new woman, I submit, gains moral independence by discarding the self-alienating masks her fellow women have worn for generations and by constantly speaking directly from the "unacceptable" core of her being. Lea breaks through the walls of silence around her by her guileless talking which in the novel turns into an enabling act. Her talking becomes an effective antidote to the androcentric values that society imposes to prevent female subversion of male values. In *Bata, Bata* talking is not done only through the medium of language either. Lea's chosen lifestyle, her job, her family and personal life, her convictions, her open sexuality and willfull submission to truth speak louder than words.

Bata, Bata is an enactment of a woman's singleminded determination to attain her full share of life, of the life "available to most men, in which sexuality, work and parenthood coexist" (Rich

23). Its female protagonist, Lea Bustamante, discovers, to her chagrin, that this life is not possible for women without a struggle. It is a struggle that ultimately requires her to repudiate the cultural myths about her "essential" otherness as a woman and to subvert the categorical assumptions hospitable to male privilege and comfortable to the male ego.

Lea's circumstances as mother to two children of different fathers cut deep into the romantic tradition that has inscribed the pre-given content of female sexuality, roles and functions in partriarchal society. Her unorthodox lifestyle flies in the face of long-ingrained expectations of women pursuing traditional "careers of domestic perfection" (Rich 22). Thus Lea comes off as a non-deferential woman whose very situation forces us to take another look at our own, which is precisely what her creator, Bautista, intends us to do.

At the heart of the myth-making romantic tradition that *Bata, Bata* undermines is the love-trap metaphor. Conventionally love has been romanticized as a woman's fulfillment, her inevitable destiny. The myth of falling in love is something that happens to one like an accident beyond one's control. Once a woman falls into the love trap, however, and into marriage, she virtually surrenders the privilege of taking charge of her own life. The reductive paradigm of the traditional married woman's world effectively confines her to the space defined by the ideology of domesticity. In the domestic sphere she is often jolted between two conflicting kinds of love, two false claims: womanly, maternal, selfless love — a love "defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture" — and love of self, "a force [also] directed by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of others, but justifiably so" (Rich 24-25).

Lea's story revolves around the fundamental conflict of maternity and individuality, a problem central to a woman's existence but peripheral to man's. That it is a dilemna born of loving, suggests that love is a concept that needs to be revised. Lea's marriage to her wedded husband, Raffy, broke up because she refused to give up her sense of being as a person. As she tries to explain to her son, Ojie, loving someone should not mean loss of one's personhood nor the end of one's individual aspirations.

"May gusto rin akong maging sa sarili ko, Ojie," sabi ni Lea sa anak. "Ibig kong sabihin, may pangarap din ako. Alam mo, maski mahal ng isang babae ang isang lalaki, hindi niya pinapatay ang kaangkinan niya.... Nagmamahalan sila pero bawa't isa sa kanila, may iba pang gustong gawin."

["I would also want to be self-fulfilled, Ojie," Lea says to her child. "What I mean is that I also have dreams. You know, no matter how a woman loves a man, she should not extinguish what is her very own... They can be loving each other yet each one of them separately can have some other thing he or she would want to do.]

"Anong ibang gustong gawin?"

["What other thing?"]

"Halimbawa, magtrabaho. Mag-aral. Mag-presidente ng Pilipinas. Ang importante, magkaroon ng katuparan. Ako halimbawa: kung asawa lang ako ng tatay mo, may katuparan lang ako bilang asawa. Bilang nanay mo, may katuparan ako bilang ina. Pero kailangan ko pa rin ng ibang klase ng katuparan... 'yong katuparan bilang tao."

["For example, work. Study. Be president of the Philippines. What's important is to fulfill one's self. Like me, for example, if I were just your father's wife, my fulfillment would only be as a wife. As your mom, I am fulfilled as a mother. But I need to be fulfilled in other ways... as a person."]

(*BB*, 28)

Here as in many other places and occasions in the novel, Bautista breaks openly with tradition. Raffy demanded her loyalty to him as an allegiant wife, which would have meant giving up her job and joining him in his new post in Mindoro. Raffy expected her to put his career before everything else. Lea however insisted on deciding what to do with her life, to determine what is best for

her. It is certainly not to get tied down to the drudgery of a married woman's traditional existence.

> *Malaking bagay [iyong bagong karanasan] para kay Raffy pero nangangahulugan naman sa kanya ng pagkatali niya sa puwesto ng karaniwang asawa na nakakahon na ang tungkulin sa buhay: maghintay sa lalaki, magsilbi dito, payari sa kama, manganak...*
>
> [The new exposure means a lot to Raffy but for her it means being tied to the role of an ordinary wife and her prescribed life-long duties: wait for the man, serve him, be there when he wants her, bear his children...]
>
> (*BB*, 28)

In other words, she defies convention by refusing to get caught in the love/marriage trap.

On the other hand, Lea's non-deferential behavior is easily interpretable as selfishness if not downright egotism. A woman, especially a wife and mother, is naturally expected to be selfless. Her family comes before anything else, before her career (if she has one) or her own personal fulfillment (if she realizes the need for or lack of it at all). Through the ideology of domesticity motherhood is glorified as the special vocation of women, associated with nobility, quiet heroisms and edification. In the words of Helene Cixous, the specificity of the female is "to give of herself without reserve" (qtd. in Richman 62).

Again Lea goes against the grain and her rugged individualism results in an "abnormal" family life for her children. Her legitimate first child grows up fatherless, while the second grows up ever conscious of her illegitimacy. While her arrangement with "live-in" husband, Ding, father of her daughter, Maya, leaves her free to do her life's work as a reporter/researcher for a human rights organization, she is nevertheless thrown into the delicate position of "at once child maker and breaker" (Ellmann 135). Since she cannot always be there for her children like most working mothers, anything untoward that happens to them in her absence is her fault. She is either praised for "selfless care" or accused of "consumptive

attachment." Damned if you do, damned if you don't. Lea's motherly predicament is the impossibility of giving or witholding attention to her children without risking their injury (Ellmann 1968: 135-136). However, admirable honesty about her unusual situation, neither justifying nor apologizing for it, stands her in good stead each time she comes to the rescue of an embarrassed child and her children are saved from a rude awakening and protected from the voices outside that can deprive them of their sense of security.

Perhaps the most shattering blow the novel deals which breaks the silence of the system of anonymous rules and regulations formulated by men is its assertion of its heroine's open sexuality. The restrictive, conservative paradigm of women as coy, unassuming, passive, sexual objects has determined the parameters of female sexuality. Whereas the stereotype of the Filipino woman represents her as inherently sexually naive, unassertive and laid back, embarrassed by the discovery of her own passions and afraid to acknowledge her physical desires, Bautista's new woman matter-of-factly confesses her healthy sexual appetite. To her, life without a man is unimaginable. And whereas talk about sex is normally kept off at a measured distance by "respectable" women, Lea discusses it intimately with her male co-worker cum one-night-stand lover aboard a public escalator. A woman in touch with her body, she frankly admits the convenient availability of a sexual partner even in a token husband like Ding.

As the representation of a different Filipino woman, Lea Bustamante is utterly without vestigial traces of traditional thinking about female sexuality. At one point in her story she gets excited at the prospect of knowing what sex would be like with Johnny with whom she has a chance to be alone overnight in Baguio. She is visited by guilt on Ding's account, but her hormones prevail.

> *Hindi na, hindi na nahihiya si Lea sa "kataksilan" niya. Hindi na siya nahihiya sa mga nararamdaman niya. Makapal na siya, sanay na siya sa mga damdamin niya, matagal na niya 'yong tinanggap. Na siya'y isang babae: hindi itim hindi puti, hindi masama't hindi mabuti... basta isang babaing malaya sa kadena ng mga inhibisyon at*

pagkukunwari. May mga pagkakataon siya ng sobrang lungkot, maraming latay ng mga nagdaang sugat... pero buhay pa, tao, may isip at katinuan at kabaliwan....

[Lea is no longer ashamed of her "unfaithfulness." She is no longer ashamed of what she feels. She has become brazen and used to her feelings; she has long accepted them. That she is a woman: not in terms of black or white, neither evil nor virtuous... just a woman free from the chains of inhibitions and pretensions. She's had moments of extreme melancholy, many marks from old wounds... but she's alive, a human being, with a mind and lucidity and madness...]

(*BB.* 152-153)

The opportunity does not materialize, but sometime later after joining a rally with Johnny, she becomes conscious of desire welling up in her again and she brings herself to tell him she wanted to go to bed with him.

"Gusto kong magpaano sa'yo."
["I want to go to bed with you."]

Muntik nang mapalundag si Johnny. "Anooo?"
[Johnny nearly jumped. "Wha-a-at?"]

Inulit niya. "Gusto kong magpaano sa'yo."
[She repeated, "I want to go to bed with you."]

"Loko ka ba?"
["Are you crazy?"]

"Loko ba pag gustong magpaano?"
["Is it crazy to want to go to bed with somebody?"]

Pinapawisan na nang malapot si Johnny. "Ayoko!" nababakla na.
[Cold sweat ran through Johnny's body. "No way!" he was beginning to feel creepy.]

"Hindi ko naman sinabi sa 'yong anuhin mo 'ko. Ang sabi ko lang, gusto kong magpaano sa 'yo. E di pag gusto mo na, sabihin mo na lang sa 'kin."

["I didn't ask you to make love to me. What I said was I wanted to go to bed with you."]

"Lea, naiintindihan mo ba 'yong sinasabi mo?"

["Lea, do you realize what you're saying?"]

"Kahit kelan, hindi pa 'ko nagsalita ng hindi ko naiintindihan."

["Never before have I said anything that I didn't know about."]

..."Ninenerbiyos ako sa'yo!"

[..."You make me feel nervous."]

"Bakit?"

["Why?"]

"Pambihira ka... hindi ka ba nahihiya?"

["You're a rare one... aren't you ever ashamed?"]

"Ba't ako mahihiya? Ang sarap nga sa pakiramdam e. Biro mo, nasabi ko rin sa wakas! No'n ko pa gustong sabihin sa'yo 'to. Wala lang tiyempo dahil sa opisina lang tayo nagkikita. Magalit man si Kaibigan mo, bago tayo makalabas do'n... hupa na ang galit.

["Why should I be ashamed? The feeling is good. Imagine, I was able to say it at last. I have long wanted to tell you this. But there was just no opportunity because we only see each other in the office. Should your Friend (euphemism for penis) get angry before we get out... its rage would have diminished."]

Equally discomfiting about Lea's franknesss about sex is the language in which it is conveyed — bold and unselfconscious as the above excerpt shows. She herself reacts to the unnatural manner in which sexual intercourse is described in traditional writing.

"It is usually represented as the most artistic act in the world, as if we didn't know that it puts two people in the most awkward positions. And when they express their feelings about it, it is as though lovemaking always proceeds from love; as though people didn't know that lovemaking is sometimes only a physical need" (*BB*, 69 my translation).

Bautista's own description of the "love act" is straightforward, simple and realistic, without frills.

> *Nakipag-lovemaking si Lea kay Ding na ang dala sa sarili'y paghihimagsik kay Raffy, sa ideya na nakabuntis ito ng iba.*
>
> [Lea made love with Ding with her inner feelings revolting against Raffy, at the thought of his having sired a child (by another woman).]
>
> *Hinahawakan siya ni Ding kung saan-saan. Dito, diyan... at nai-imagine niya si Raffy na hinahawakan din si Elinor dito at diyan. Hinahalikan sa buhok, sa mata, sa bibig, sa leeg, sa dibdib, sa tiyan sa mas mababa pa sa tiyan... sa lahat ng putang 'nang parte ng katawan ng putang 'nang Elinor!*
>
> [Ding was touching her everywhere (on her body). Here, there... and she imagined Raffy doing the same to Elinor here and there. He was kissing the hair, the eyes, the lips, neck, the breasts, the tummy and further down the tummy... every son-of-a-bitch part of the body of that son-of-a-bitch Elinor.]

A little while later:

> *"Lea, tulog ka na ba?"*
> ["Lea, are you asleep?"]
>
> *"Ha?"*
> ["What?"]
>
> *"Magdamit ka muna."*
> ["Better put on clothes."]

"Mamaya."
["Later."]

"Makakatulog ka."
["You might fall asleep."]

"Hindi. Gusto ko, isa pa."
["No. I want some more."]

"Anoooo?"
["Whaaaat?"]

"Parang beer, Isa pa."
["Just like beer. One more round."]

Tumawa si Ding at nag-umpisa nilang gawin ang isa pa.
[Ding laughed and they began to make love again.]

Pero tulad kanina ay hindi uli siya nakarating.
[But just like earlier she again failed to come.]

In *Bata, Bata* one cannot fail to see that the emotions which direct Lea's militant feminism are also invested in her commitment to the political struggle involved in her work. Bautista brilliantly fuses Lea's political consciousness with her feminist perspective to show that they are two sides of the same coin. Lea's passionate dedication to the cause of the poor and dispossessed whose human rights are the most easily violated gives ammunition to her jealous protectiveness of her rights as a woman. Women's oppression is presented back to back with the wanton violation of the human rights of exploited labor groups and other suspected subversives in order to dramatize the inherent political nature of the struggle on both fronts.

Lea expresses the essential sameness of the problem at the heart of her discontent in ironic fashion. After a series of events in which she loses Ding to another woman and Johnny and fellow activist, Sister Ann, disappear, Lea is beside herself with bitterness:

Gusto niyang bawiin si Ding tulad ng ginusto niyang bawiin si Johnny at si Sister Ann at ang

ama't ina at anak na nagsunud-sunud sa libingan, na hanggang huli'y hindi na niya tinandaan ang mga pangalan... dahil 'yong mga walang lakas at walang tinig ay di na kailangan magkaroon pa ng pangalan!

[She wanted to reclaim Ding in the same way that she wanted to reclaim Johnny and Sister Ann and all the fathers and mothers and children who went to their graves one after the other, that in the end she no longer remembered their names... because those who were without strength and without a voice no longer need to have a name.]

(*BB*, 220)

The oppressed who have no need of names referred to here include women in general. Elsewhere in the novel Bautista also takes up the issue of women's virtual anonymity or non-identity because they have no names of their own anyway. They are simply given their father's names at birth and promptly change them for another man's name upon marriage. Powerless and voiceless like the disenfranchised majority and the countless casualties of institutionalized terrorism, what would women do with a name?

The natural outcome of Lea's politicization is a sense of "mulish self-sufficiency" (Rich 194) both in her social and personal lives. Her strong sense of moral independence makes it imperative for her to reach toward the center, to be "an end in herself" (Ellmann 1968:132). Her impatience, outspoken nature and biting tongue often get her into trouble with school authorities, but she never fails to deliver good sense and somehow cows them into attention. She has been able to capitalize on people's conventional attitudes and responses to press her claims upon their consideration. In the face of her unorthodox behavior and "embarrassing" bluntness, her opponents, which include her two husbands and the school principal, are often discomfited enough to be unable to react. As the new woman, therefore, Lea gives the lie to feminine innocence, timidity and self-effacement. She refused to be "happy" with a man in the old way of marriage which required holding herself back and putting his interest above all else. To be happily married demanded a kind of conservatism incompatible with her

strong desire for self-fulfillment. In short, she refused to be a token woman.

The novel's feminist impulse is thus embodied in its attempt to arrest the sleeping consciousness of readers, male and female alike. Through the life story of Lea, the feminist incarnate, Bautista disturbs the silence of the forces that keep women from looking for their own way of being in the world. As a site of alternative construction of femininity, the novel engages the ideologies that seem invisible and silent because of being deeply embedded in traditional ways of thinking and feeling. For women, especially, these are the silences imposed by their "long apprenticeship in negative capability" (Showalter 856) which have kept them apart and estranged them from their own experiences. Bautista's heroine shatters the myth of women's "otherness," euphemistically referred to as "specialness," which has held them separate from but never equal to men and shows them to have the same needs and desires as men. Lea challenges the ideology of domesticity by insisting on having her own sensibility and protecting it from male-centered presences that force women to identify against themselves. She likewise exposes the ridiculous adherence to fatuous norms and social practices that are actually thinly disguised forms of censorship and discrimination against women (e.g., woman's assumption of her husband's family name upon marriage; indication of civil status in official forms or documents; woman's passive role in sex, etc.).

The raising of consciousness desired in the reader and in women, in particular, is implicit in the novel's title question as well. *Bata, Bata... Pa'no Ka Ginawa*? It actually asks: how is a child's sensibility born? The process of a child's becoming is as delicate and complicated as that of discovering a woman's sense of being in a world indifferent, if not hostile, to her. Lea's education in responsible parenting is juxtaposed with her own gradually developing sense of self-realization. She knows she has done some things right in her life as mother, single parent and human rights activist, when, in spite of her "oddity," she was given the honor of being asked to deliver the inspirational talk before the graduating kindergarten class in her children's school. It is on this occasion that Lea explains what growing up means — the discovery of life outside the home and the school; of the answer to

myriad questions about life's many sounds, colors, puzzles, joys, and pains; of what is true, what is real, good and bad. Like the children she is addressing, including her own, she still looks forward to growing up. ("*Hindi porke ina na ko'y huminto na 'ko sa paglaki.*") ["It doesn't mean that now I am a mother I have already stopped growing."]

The novel's political appeal comes out strong in the conclusion Lea arrives at.

> *Oo natuklasan ko ang mga bagay na hindi ko siguro natuklasan kung pinahawakan ko lang sa iba ang pagkatao ko. Hindi ako napakulong, sinikap kong lumaya. At mula sa paglaya ko sa makitid na papel ng isang babae, natiyak ko na ang kalayaan nga pala, sa higit na pangmalawakang kahulugan nito, ay hindi nahihingi kundi ipinakikipaglaban. Hindi lahat ng hinuhuling kriminal, at hindi lahat ng diyos ay may dangal!*
>
> [Yes, I have discovered many things which I wouldn't have if I had allowed others to run my life. I refused to be imprisoned; I strived to be free. And since my liberation from the narrow confines of a woman's role, I found out that freedom, in a broader sense of the word, is never obtained by begging for it; one has to fight for it. Not everyone who gets caught is a criminal, and not all lords have honor.]
>
> (*BB* 239)

It is a conclusion intended to rouse the sleepwalking readers among us. It is the first step in the long and lonely struggle for social change. What is finally at stake is not only wowen's rights but equal rights for every human being regardless of sex.

A final note on the novel's feminist thrust. Its strategy, while effective in breaking the silence of androcentric indifference toward woman, is largely reactive. Its new woman defines her subjectivity from a male reference point. Her character is developed in terms of showing how like a male she thinks and

feels. Her fulminations are a response to the forces outside herself which are often male-controlled. Even her frankness of language about sex is a reaction against the perceived blandness of Filipino femininity.

In several places in the novel Bautista gives away her immasculation even as she actively asserts a woman's right to her own life. For instance, when her husband discovers she has been to bed with another man, Lea explains her implied moral lapse thus:

> *"W-wala... walang kinalaman yon sa damdamin ko sa 'yo Raf," paiyak na sabi niya. "Puwede rin namang magawa 'yon ng isang tao... kahit ng isang babae... nang hindi sangkot ang pakiramdam niya. Ginagawa n'yong mga lalaki 'yon... ba't masama pag kami'ng gumagawa? May mga pangangailangan din kami!"*
>
> ["That has nothing to do with what I feel for you," she said in a crying tone. "Anyone is capable of doing that... even a woman... without getting her feelings involved. You men do it; why does it become wrong when we do it? We have needs too."]
>
> (*BB* 41)

Her reaction to his reaction tells us whose point of view she has internalized.

> *Kitang kita niya ang pagkayanig ni Raffy. Awang-awa siya sa naging itsura ng asawa.*
>
> [She saw clearly how Raffy was shaken. She was filled with pity for the way he looked.]
>
> *Umalma sa loob niya ang kagustuhang bawiin ang sinabi pero huli na.*
>
> [The impulse to take back all that she said came to her but it was too late.]
>
> *"Raffy, naiintindihan mo ba? Nagpaano lang ako sa kanya pero walang ibig sabihin 'yon!..."*

["Raffy, do you understand? I went to bed with him but it meant nothing."]

(41)

Or take Lea's attitude toward Ding. At one time after making love with him with Raffy on her mind, she is hard put to think of anything good to say in Ding's favor except as a sex partner.

Ikaw naman. Mabuti nga, maski ganyan, meron ka. Tuusin mo naman kung wala ka nang Raffy e wala ka pa maski ganyan.

[It's a good thing you have something even if it's just that. Just think; what if you don't have Raffy and you don't even have that."]

E ano? Kung wala 'yan di maghahanap ako ng iba! Alam naman n'yo ako: ako 'yong babae na pagnawalan ng lalaki ay maghahanap ng lalaki!

["So what? If I don't have that, then I'd look for somebody else. You know me: I'm the type of woman who would search for another man once I lose a man."]

(71)

Who is using whom? Who is the sex object this time? One does not have to ask whose kind of thinking shows through here.

Because Lea's feminism is reactive it does not involve active construction. The recreation of her identity is a reflection of male definitions of herself rather than self-generated. Therefore it does not correct the distorted male versions of female reality. While Bautista's novel is written with a strong current of women's criticism, its feminist impetus stays "within the pale of the feminine" (Killoh 31).

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