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**Decentering José Rizal and María Clara:  
Interventions in Filipina Femininity and Nationalist Fiction by  
Transpacific Filipina Writers.**

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Interventions in Filipina Femininity and Nationalist Fiction by  
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**by**

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**Decentering José Rizal and María Clara:  
Interventions in Filipina Femininity and Nationalist Fiction by  
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**Leila Grace C. Pandy, M.A.,**

**The University of Texas at Austin, 2015**

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**This report examines of texts written by Transpacific Filipina novelists who produced literature during and after Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship and scholarship on Philippine literature. The analysis offer a close reading of the ways in which the nation-state has used Rizal, his novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, and his fictional character, María Clara, to develop and promote nationalism and docility amongst Filipinas and to influence the following gender roles: the virgin, the sex worker, the overseas contract worker, and the activist. This report outlines the process of mythologizing Rizal and María Clara and juxtaposes this political and colonial project to the liberatory projects of Transpacific Filipina writers, Linda Ty-**

**Casper's *Awaiting Trespass*, Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, and Gina Apostol's *The Gun Dealer's Daughter*, all produced during and after the Marcos Administration.**

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## **Introduction: Rizal, the Father of the Nation.**

On a winter evening in Madrid in 1884, a group of Filipinos met for a social gathering. One of the attendees, José Rizal, a self-proclaimed Filipino nationalist and an ophthalmologist, proposed a project to his fellow expats, a literary collaboration that documented the experiences of Filipinos. Inspired by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Rizal, a polymath, felt driven to write a satire on the Filipino experience under Spanish colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Having surrounded himself with fellow contributors to *La Solidaridad*, a Madrid-based organization and political literary group that questioned the treatment and condition of Filipinos, Rizal felt as though they could collectively create a literary piece of work with the same force as Stowe's novel.<sup>2</sup> Rizal would eventually abandon the collaboration when it became apparent that the men did not want to focus on the same issues as he did, and spent the next two years writing what would eventually be titled *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), a novel that would be celebrated in the Philippines for the next one hundred years as the inspiration for the nation and its citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Rizal's novel follows the protagonist, Juan Crisóstomo Ibarra y Magsalin, who has returned to the Philippines, after finishing his studies in Europe. Upon learning that

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, Charles Edward, and E.B. Rodriguez. *The Hero of the Philippines: The Story of José Rizal , Poet, Patriot, and Martyr*. New York: Century, 1923. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Russell and Rodriguez 89.

<sup>3</sup> Translation: Touch me not.

his father had died in prison after being accused as a subversive by Fr. Dámaso, a Dominican priest and the novel's antagonist, Ibarra opens a school to educate and liberate his fellow countrymen, a desire that Rizal himself consistently expressed in letters and essays.<sup>4</sup> Eventually identified as a subversive, Ibarra is arrested and thrown in prison, accused of instigating a local revolt. Under the impression that he had died, Ibarra's betrothed, María Clara, confines herself to a nunnery to avoid being married off to another man. The novel ends with Ibarra escaping the prison. Ibarra's friend, Elias, dying from a gunshot wound, states that he would never see "... the dawn break upon my homeland. You, who shall see it, salute it! Do not forget those who have fallen during the night."<sup>5</sup>

Foreshadowed in his writing, José Rizal left Dapitan, Philippines to volunteer as a doctor in Cuba, but was arrested and imprisoned in Barcelona by Spanish authorities on October 6, 1896 and sent back to Manila, where he was tried for rebellion, sedition, and conspiracy against the Spanish government. Both Spanish officials and the leaders of Katipunan, a Filipino militant secret society that would eventually defeat the Spanish army, pointed towards *Noli Me Tangere* and Rizal's writings as the catalyst for the Philippine Revolution, also called the Tagalog War by Spain (1896-1898). Rizal was

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<sup>4</sup> Rizal, Jose. *To the Young Women of Malolos*. Quezon City: R. Martinez & Sons, 1958.

<sup>5</sup> Rizal, Jose, and (trans.) Soledad Lacson-Loecin. *Noli Me Tangere*. Makati City: Bookmark 1996.

given the death penalty and executed on December 30, 1986, by a firing squad in what would later be renamed “Rizal Park” after the Philippine Revolution ended. The Katipunan declared independence from Spain on June 12, 1898, and established the First Philippine Republic. Conflict with Spain officially ended in 1897, when Spain and the United States signed the Treaty of Paris. Neither colonial empires recognized the First Philippine Republic, however, and the Tagalog War became the Philippine-American War when the Republic declared war against the U.S. in 1899, ending when U.S. Congress passed the Philippine Organic Act (1902), which gave limited self-governing to the country. For the next four decades from 1902 to 1946, the Philippines functioned as the U.S.’s first and only Asiatic colony and eventual commonwealth. Each decade saw new legislature that granted Philippines and Filipinos more political agency, such as voting rights and elections for Presidents, Vice Presidents, and other government positions. After Japanese military occupation during World War II, the U.S. government granted Philippine independence through the Treaty of Manila, signed by both the U.S. and the Republic of the Philippines (1946).

From 1896 to 1946, the country had gone through four phases of colonial and imperial occupation—Spain, U.S., Japan, and then the U.S. again—before becoming its own nation. The Philippines has spent the last half of the 20th century building the

sociopolitical foundations for the nation state and politicians have worked on creating an origin myth that coincides with the Philippine Revolution. During the 1950s, Filipino politicians returned to the early patriotism of the 1896 Revolution in order to articulate the new nation's specific kind of nationalism. In this period, Rizal's texts were often evoked for their "exemplary" display of citizenry and Rizal's name became synonymous with the nation and with citizenship. This memorializing culminated in the Rizal Law, which was passed in 1956, and by the time Ferdinand Marcos began his first term as President in 1965, the law had already impacted a generation worth of young students. By the time Marcos declared martial law in 1972 to keep his presidency and to protect the nation against communism and Islam, generations of Filipinos who participated in the People's Power Revolution elected Corazon Aquino, the widow of Benigno Aquino, both in 1986, have read this novel, learned about Rizal and the 1896 revolution, and heard this history invoked in both fashion and in political speeches. With the dictatorship over and with a Filipina the first woman president in Asia, it would appear as though the legacy of revolutionaries and activism in the Philippine triumphed, but the colonial patriarchy exemplified in Rizal had already permeated both government and culture as the socialization of Filipino/as into citizens coincided with the remembrance of Rizal.

The process of turning Rizal from a radical revolutionary to a palatable national hero begins from the moment of his death in 1896 and culminates in the passing of the 1956 Republic Act No. 1425, most commonly known as the “Rizal Law.” The full legal name of the law is: “An Act to Include in the Curricula of All Public and Private Schools, Colleges and Universities Courses On the Life, Works and Writings of José Rizal, Particularly His Novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, Authorizing the Printing and Distribution Thereof, and for Other Purposes.”<sup>6</sup> The “Rizal Law” stipulated that all educational institutes, from elementary to higher education, must not only include Rizal’s works in the curriculum but also required his works, originally written and published in Spanish, to be mass produced in both Tagalog and English, and that libraries carry an adequate number of copies.<sup>7</sup> The goal of the law both was to widen access for the general public to Rizal and his work as well as to produce a unified education on civility: “all schools are enjoined to develop moral character, personal discipline, civic conscience and to teach the duties of citizenship.”<sup>8</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, Rizal was a tool used to solidify the Philippines as a patriarchal nation-state, unifying the country under the origin myth of the subversive and his revolutionary novel.

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<sup>6</sup> "Republic Act No. 1425 | Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines." *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*. June 12, 1956. Accessed April 15, 2015.

<http://www.gov.ph/1956/06/12/republic-act-no-1425/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In 1955, when Filipino politicians campaigned for the law or came together to work on the language for the Republic Act No.1425, most commonly referred to now as the Rizal Law, the common agenda was to memorialize Rizal's masculine heroism and place him as one of the nation's founding fathers. Senator José P. Laurel, the chairman for the committee of education and one of the architects of the law, said: "It is, therefore, meet that in recalling them, particularly the national hero and patriot, José Rizal, we remember with special fondness and devotion their words that have shaped the national character."<sup>9</sup> The "them" Laurel refers to are those who have been celebrated and mythologized as the warriors who defeated Magellan and the heroes of the Philippine 1896 Revolution: "From Dagohoy, and Lapu-lapu, to Rizal, Del Pilar, Bonifacio and Mabini."<sup>10</sup> Not only does this senator associate Rizal with those militarized revolutionaries he wrote alongside and fraternized with, such as Del Pilar, the second editor of *La Solidaridad* and Bonifacio, one of the founders of Katipunan, but also with one of the most revered datu<sup>11</sup> from the Visayas in Philippine history, Lapu-Lapu. According to traditional lore, Datu Lapu-Lapu was responsible for the death of the first colonizer, Ferdinand Magellan, at the Battle of Mactan (1521), resulting in the failure of Spain's future attempts at exploration and settlement, until Miguel López de Legazpi

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<sup>9</sup> Africa, Bernabe. "Rizal and Education." Manila: Juan Luna Printing Press, 1961. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Datus is the formal title for chiefs and monarchs in the Visayas and Mindanao.

arrived forty years later. By juxtaposing a novelist alongside guerrilla military leaders and warriors from the Pre-Spanish era, the lawmakers situate Rizal's writing as equivalent of military action and war. Such equivalence had also occurred to the Spanish, who accused Rizal of instigating the Philippine 1896 Revolution with his novel, *Noli Me Tangere*.

Since the lawmakers of the Rizal Law perceived Rizal through a patriarchal, militarized and nationalist lens, the publications of his works were dispersed throughout the archipelago under the same agenda. Even though the women of Rizal's fictional works, specifically María Clara, are the antithesis of the masculine hero, they too become characters in the process of mythologizing Rizal as part of the nation's origin myth and unifying the country under one national remembrance of this Filipino forefather. María Clara, the young daughter of Captain Tiago, becomes emblematic of a westernized concept of Filipina femininity, both in her mestiza appearance and her unfaltering devotion to Ibarra. Ideologically, she serves both concepts of Westernism and nationalism. Her face and her decision become the two points through which politicians, fashion tastemakers, and writers recall the era in which the nation was born.

Her docility dictates the invisibility of Filipina writers and characters in the literature celebrated by the nation. Despite being excluded from the pantheon of

revolutionary authors as their works not only challenged the Philippines as a nation-state but also western ideals of Filipina femininity, Filipina writers create characters that serve as interventions into the canon and the sociopolitical reality of Filipinas. Linda Ty-Casper's *Awaiting Trespass* (1985), Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990), and Gina Apostol's *Gun Dealer's Daughter* (2013), are not popular novels in the sense that they are distributed to and read by the masses to the same degree as *Noli Me Tangere*. These novels' fictional Filipinas, Ty-Casper's Telly, Hagedorn's Lolita Luna and Daisy Alvia, and Apostol's Soledad Soliman and Solidaridad Soledad, have not entered culture the same way María Clara has. Similar to Rizal, all three women wrote either outside or against an oppressive governing body, yet Ty-Casper, Hagedorn, and Apostol, critiqued the Philippine government and its policies. Ty-Casper wrote during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986), and the media restrictions during martial law (1972-1981), resulted in her work being censored or banned in the Philippines, as in the case of *Awaiting Trespass*. Transpacific Filipinas, Hagedorn and Apostol, wrote after the Marcos dictatorship, but still center their own writing on this administration and the human rights violations during this era.

The authors do not evoke much recognition, except for maybe Hagedorn, whose novel, *Dogeaters*, was the first novel by a Filipino/a to be published by a major English

publishing house, Penguin Books, and whose novels and poetry have gained notoriety in both academia and in diasporic Filipina youths. One characteristic that ties these three novels together, aside by being written by diasporic Filipinas, is that all the novels tell the narrative through the eyes of Filipinas. This characteristic has given present day Filipinas a new set of literature to refer to when constructing their cultural identity. Young millennial Filipinas, particularly transpacific and American born ones, have lived experiences that María Clara cannot sufficiently speak to and thus she feels outdated. For example, Bay Area rapper, Rocky Rivera, has turned to Hagedorn's work for her moniker and references historical Filipina activists rather than María Clara in her rap songs. María Clara has become a monument to an old-world femininity that many Filipinas today cannot relate to and yet to which they are still compared.

Unlike Rizal, who conceives María Clara as a tool to serve the goals of nationalism and thus allowing politicians to use her as well for the nation's economic, social, and political goals, Ty-Casper, Hagedorn, and Apostol center their writing on Filipinas because they are writing for Filipinas rather than for the nation and its needs. These three Filipina writers are not only negotiating with the devoted docile Filipina trope established by José Rizal on the national level, but are also reimagining Filipinas on the diasporic, global stage, by challenging the ways in which her image has been used to

promote subservient femininity in the Filipina gender roles of the virgin, sex worker, and the overseas contract worker (OCW), so that their bodies and their emotional and physical labor can be socially and politically exploited at both the national and international level. These writers also add the role of the revolutionary and activist to this list of “traditional” gender roles, a role filled by many Filipinas over the centuries that have been left out of patriarchal Philippine history. María Clara was not imagined for Filipinas, but rather, for the construction of an independent sovereignty separate from Spain, and later canonized through politicians to spearhead both independence from and then dependence on the U.S. by the Marcos regime.

These three novels are subversive and critical of Philippine society and the government’s idolization of virginity, the exploitation of sex and sex workers, and the cultural and historical silencing of women activists and rebels in ways Rizal and María Clara was not. Telly’s disregard for virginal femininity, the commodification of Lolita Luna’s body and Daisy Alvia’s rejection of this commodification for militant activism, and Soledad Soliman and Solidaridad Soledad’s youthful negotiation of class status and communist activism, are interventions in both how Filipinas are imagined in literature and also serve as poignant criticisms of how the government has employed María Clara as part of their nationalist project, particularly during the Marcos regime with Imelda

Marcos, the First Lady, wearing modernized María Clara gowns at public appearances both at home and abroad. Even though María Clara was conceived in a novel initially meant to critique Philippine society and Spanish colonial oppression in order to advocate for independence, María Clara and thus *Noli Me Tangere* cannot serve as tools of criticism for the Philippines during and after the 1960s because the Marcos government embraced her image. The focus must be turned towards works of Filipinas who lived during the Marcos dictatorship, either at home or abroad, who use literature as a platform that interrogates and intervenes in the ways in which femininity was utilized by the government to implement both political and social ideologies that harm and haunt transpacific Filipinas beyond the coastlines of the Pacific Ocean.

## Methodology

Through scholarship from the West and Western-inspired institutions of higher education, like the University of the Philippines, scholars and intellectuals validated Rizal's importance as a national hero, and *Noli Me Tangere* as important to the nation-state's identity. The "Rizal Law" was ratified by the Philippine government in 1956, resulting in María Clara being introduced to many Filipinas, for first time, in Tagalog and in English. As more Filipinas attended school, the more likely they became exposed to María Clara and her impeccable docility. The romanticization of María Clara is one of the main instruments of canonizing Rizal as a national hero and pacifying the many women of the archipelago.

At some point, a transpacific Filipina will cross paths with Rizal and/or his works, be it the novel or María Clara's image, and it is this crossroads and the permeation of Rizal's influence in 20th and 21st century literature, as well as transpacific Filipina experiences, that should be interrogated in order to challenge Rizal's seemingly fixed centrality. My decision to use novels by Transpacific Filipina writers is intended to move away from the masculine centric canon and to challenge the ingrained colonial patriarchy in the Philippines. This decision is a feminist and anti-Imperial critique of the Philippine government, the government's relationship with America, and the social norms produced

from this relationship. These three writers focus their novels on Transpacific Filipina experiences, pivoting away from Rizal who roots his nationalist project, *Noli Me Tangere*, in a diasporic Filipino experience. Filipina writers of the late 20th and early 21st Century, such as Ty-Casper, Hagedorn, and Apostol, are not only writing for an underrepresented and misrepresented population in literature but also critiquing and challenging institutional oppression and the masculinist production of history and memories of the nation-state in the ways Rizal and his contemporaries were unable and unwilling to achieve.

Employing works of fiction as an archive for history is not a new theoretical approach. History and power resonates within literature, writers themselves are historians, and their work can be used to fill in the voids that the process of documenting and archiving history have left open, or unearth what this process has purposefully left behind. Partha Chatterjee offers a way for understanding the necessity for alternative historicizing, expanding on Benedict Anderson's own concept of "serialities," which are social groups, a "series," that individuals partake in. Chatterjee focuses on alternative historicizing from the focal point of Anderson's "unbound serialities," which are serialities that exists outside a governmental institution, such as anarchists. Chatterjee states that:

Unbound serialities are typically imagined and narrated by means of the classical instruments of print-capitalism, namely, the newspaper and the novel. They afford the opportunity for individuals to imagine themselves as members of larger than face-face solidarities, of choosing to act on behalf of those solidarities, of transcending by an act of political imagination the limits imposed by traditional practices. Unbound serialities are potentially liberating.<sup>12</sup>

According to Chatterjee, literature, an “instrument of print-capitalism,” is a platform that allows individuals to participate as citizens beyond governmental structures and processes. Chatterjee argues that historians should look beyond the structures and processes of the state and venture into literature as primary sources, stressing the importance of going beyond physical, or “face-to-face,” interactions between members of a society. Essentially, she argues, members of a nation can participate with one another through literature. History itself can be a tool to silence the past, but novelists, poets, and artists have the potential to resurrect voices that have disappeared from the nation-state’s narrative. In regards to an anti-colonial feminist approach, Filipina writers are more than just alternative historians; they are activists, because to focus a novel on Filipinas digresses from the nationalism articulated in *Noli Me Tangere*.

Focusing on literature written in English and/or published in the U.S. before, or instead of, the Philippines, Denise Cruz argues:

Philippine literature in English presents a unique and previously unaccessed print archive that documents the history of transpacific relations... Even though U.S.

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<sup>12</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. 5.

scholars of empire might include the Philippines as a site or literature in English as an object of critical analysis, works produced in the Philippines have remained unstudied... Building upon and extending these archival parameters, I draw attention to the literary production of the elite precisely because these texts uncover a new plot, one that centers on the transpacific Filipina as its main protagonist.<sup>13</sup> (*Transpacific Femininities*)

Not only does literature present an alternative route to understanding and documenting history, but also, as Cruz asserts, literature, particularly novels that have been written in English, have the ability to recenter literature away from masculine protagonists, and towards transpacific Filipinas. Labor-based export initiatives and immigration agreements with the U.S. by the Marcos administration have created transpacific Filipinas who move back and forth across the Pacific Ocean. Novels, particularly the celebrated *Noli Me Tangere*, cannot speak to this new community. Literature written by Filipinas not only focuses on women, but can also “extend archival parameters” to discuss the nation as a whole and its international relationships.

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<sup>13</sup>Cruz, Denise. *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 10.

## I: María Clara, the Face of the Nation

María Clara, since José Rizal wrote her into the Philippine canon and culture in 1887, has served as the name and face for the epitome of Filipina womanhood. Despite Rizal's intentions to critique and subvert the Catholic institution and Spanish colonialism for Filipino empowerment, María Clara became a tool of disempowerment and docility for Filipinas during the 1900s and 2000s.

Filipinas, both fictional and real, were juxtaposed against the María Clara trope. Filipinas inevitably failed to match the fragile femininity portrayed by María Clara and thus became María Clara's counterpart in the Virgin-Whore dichotomy. This dichotomy is structurally ingrained in the Philippines, starting from the post-Spanish colonial era and onward into present day. When María Clara is first mentioned in Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* in the chapter introducing her father, Captain Tiago, she is described as:

like her mother...[her eyes were] large and black, beneath long lashes; gay and smiling when she played, sad and soulful and pensive when she was not laughing. Since childhood her hair had an almost golden hue; her nose, of a correct profile, was neither sharp nor flat; her mouth reminded one of her mother's, small and perfect, with two beautiful dimples on her cheeks. Her skin had the fine texture of an onion layer, the whiteness of cotton...<sup>14</sup>

From this description, María Clara is a mestiza, a daughter of a native woman and a Spanish man. Yet, despite this mixed origin, everyone from politicians to fashion

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<sup>14</sup> Rizal 50

magazines assert that she encapsulates authentic Filipina womanhood. Even though the novel was conceived as a nationalist project to critique the oppressive nature of Spanish colonialism, ideal femininity is embodied by a woman who is of European ancestry. This adoration of María Clara carries an aura of a saint, one beatified throughout the novel in angelic descriptions:

María Clara, everybody's idol, grew up among smiles and loves. The friars themselves celebrated her when in white, her curled and abundant ringlets interwoven with sampaguitas and day lilies, with two little wings of silver and gold pinned at the back of her dress... she was so gay, her childish chatter so innocent and guileless....<sup>15</sup>

This description repeatedly haunts María Clara throughout the novel, and her docility and beauty haunts Filipinas.

During the 1930s suffragist movement in the Philippines, it was María Clara that politicians invoked when arguing why Filipinas should not be allowed to vote. In *More Pinay Than We Admit*, Lilia Quindoza-Santiago asserts that María Clara has been evoked throughout history in order to domesticate Filipinas both socially and politically.

Quindoza-Santiago roots María Clara's first appearance in politics during the suffrage movement. In *Our Modern Woman: A National Problem*, an open letter to women, lawyer Perfecto E. Laguio spoke to the Philippine Legislative Assembly in 1932:

“Looking around him, [the Filipino] sees the difference between Filipina women and

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<sup>15</sup> Rizal 50-51

women of other lands. Her splendor immediately comes to mind: her dewy eyes, her raven hair, her demure smile, her soft hands, her attractive figure—he looks up to these in admiration and worships her from afar.”<sup>16</sup> This practice of idolizing María Clara and her fragile femininity still haunts the streets of urban Manila, as the traditional formal garb of a Filipina after the Philippine Revolution in 1896 is actually called María Clara and newsstands still negotiate her femininity in fashion magazines, with her name next to models and modernized versions of the María Clara gown.

The María Clara gown came into fashion during the turn of the 20th century, and closely resembles the traditional Baro't saya, a gown that was prominent during the Spanish colonial era. The dress was named after María Clara because the image of it evoked her valued qualities: delicate, feminine, and Filipino. These shared qualities were seen in many of the gown's characteristics, such as the large bell sleeves, which are often called “angel's wings,” and the multiple layers of fabric on the gown for modesty. The dress and María Clara herself became images of an ideal, pristine womanhood, and one that restricts women and are not reflective of actual lived experiences. When Imelda Marcos appeared in formal public events, such as the opening of cultural centers around the country to diplomatic visits to the United States, she often wore a modernized version

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<sup>16</sup>Quindoza-Santiago, Lilia. "Roots of Feminist Thought in the Philippines." *More Pinay Than We Admit: The Social Construction of the Filipina*, edited by Maria Luisa T. Camagay. Quezon City, Philippines: Vibal Foundation, 2010. 111-112.

of the gown. The large “angel wing” bell sleeves were still on the dress, but the floor-length dress’ silhouette was more fitted to the body and emphasized a woman’s figure, while it also tightened the movements of the legs around skirt. The formal gown of the countryside became sleek and metropolitan friendly. In the 1960s and onward, the image is used to domesticate the unruly “modern” (urban) woman.

Since Rizal conceptualized María Clara in the late 19th century, Filipinas have been expected to practice her very colonial, Eurocentric femininity. Regardless of the era, Filipinas must be virginal but desirable, docile but passionately devoted. These contradictory binaries are reflected in the feminine roles of the virgin, the sex worker, and the overseas contract worker, who is often a nanny or a nurse. Rizal and his contemporaries were limited in the ways they could provide an outlet for criticism of the Philippines as a nation-state; as the site of two major Western Colonial and Imperial forces, the Philippines is portrayed in the context of a critique towards the West, and rarely reflective of the ways in which the people of the nation have betrayed the motherland. Rizal, at the time, could not imagine it and María Clara was created within these limitations. The image and concept of María Clara prevented the ways in which Filipinas could participate in critical and radical thought in the Philippines, as her image was evoked to empower men and to disempower women rather than to liberate them.

The way María Clara was regulated within the confines of the convent, where she is first and last seen in the novel, has haunted transpacific Filipinas. Filipinas are confined as well, to the societal expectations of being a mother, daughter, wife, sex worker, and overseas contract worker, and despite all these expectations they are held responsible for failing to represent the nation. In her introduction to *Women's Movements and the Filipina*, Mina Roces historicizes how colonialism has dismantled pre-colonial forms of feminine empowerment in Philippine society:

To summarize, the histories of women's movements blamed the Spanish colonial period for shaping contemporary womanhood. The Spanish succeeded in destroying the power of the *babayans* and replacing her with María Clara, who was domestic, obedient, meek, docile, religious, beautiful, and charitable, who lived a saintly life accepting and enduring suffering. This idealization of the woman as martyr—an idealization that was a product of the colonial project—cuts across class lines... Even though [Filipinas] succeeded in winning the vote, the suffragists were unable to exorcise this ideal. Consequently, women activists from the 1980s were committed to demolishing this enduring colonial role model.<sup>17</sup>

Ty-Casper, Hagedorn, and Apostol are writing against the government and the dominant history of the nation-state, and so they are part of a historical tradition of activist-writers. Since part of the nation's myth about itself is that Rizal's novel inspired revolutionaries and his death helped spark the Philippine Revolution then there is a historical foundation between activism and literature that these Filipina writers are engaged in. Paralleling the revolution in 1896 with the People's Power revolution in 1986, then these novels, their characters, and their authors are all part of the tradition of activism, one enacted and

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<sup>17</sup> Roces, Mina. *Women's Movements and the Filipina*, 1986-2008. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. 23.

articulated by Filipino/as in exile within and outside the homeland, as established by Rizal. If the writers can only write about their country under a self-imposed exile, then the exile speaks to the socio-political conditions of the homeland, and how despite no longer claiming residency within nation, these Filipinas feel a responsibility for the country. Diasporic Filipinas must be included in the discussion of activism and nationalism as Transpacific Filipinas make up the majority of overseas contract workers, and their remittances have sustained the nation since the early years of Marcos' dictatorship and also Filipinas have been at the center of human rights violations and exploitation as a result of the Philippine's militaristic relationship with the United States.

Even though Marcos' oppressive regime ended in 1986, the continuation of U.S. military presence, particularly the military bases in Olongapo and Angeles City, have created the conditions for rampant sex work, sex trafficking, and sexual violence, with Filipinas making up the majority of the workers and victims. Even though these military bases were closed in 1992, the Philippines and the U.S. have signed laws that allow not only American military presence to continue but also have protected soldiers from any crimes they've committed. In the 2000s, two incidents, the 2005 rape of Filipina by four U.S. Marines, popularly known as the Subic rape case, and the other, the 2014 death of Jennifer Laude, a trans Filipina former sex worker, by a U.S. Marine, have resulted in Filipina feminist and LGBTQ activists both at home and abroad organizing to protest against U.S.'s military presence, heavily critiquing the recent administrations' support of the Visiting Armed Forces Agreement (1998) and the recent signing of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the Obama administration (2014). These two

policies, the former which protects U.S. soldiers from any crimes they've committed in the Philippines once they are onboard a U.S. ship and the other which allows the U.S. to continue their presence for the next ten years, have kept the U.S. both safe and present in the Philippines whilst simultaneously placing Filipinas in danger.<sup>1819</sup> This culture of sexual violence and economic dependency on care and sex work is the end product of a long history of Filipinas being socialized and romanticized as docile and exploited.

While activists in the 1980s fought against the dictator who proclaimed that his portrait must be displayed in all public places, Filipina writers push against an author and novel that is legally required to be read by and readily available to the general public and an image that has been taken up by political and cultural icons, such as Imelda Marcos and her modernized version of the María Clara gown and her utilization of María Clara's femininity on the national and international stage. María Clara is the fantasy of the barrio girl, docile, innocent, almost pastoral and romanticized. Thus, the formal dress that drives its style from the countryside, named in her honor evokes the romanticized provinces outside Manila. Just like the novel, María Clara has been mass-produced for the general public.

Since the Rizal Law went into effect in 1956, Filipinas migrating for better opportunities under Marcos educational and labor initiatives or already residing in Manila, moved throughout the nation and the world having read or heard about Rizal and María Clara. Even if Filipinas did not read Rizal, the image of María Clara is reproduced

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<sup>18</sup> Orejas, Tonette. "The Subic Rape Case." The Subic Rape Case. November 1, 2010. Accessed April 28, 2015. <<http://www.inquirer.net/specialreports/subicrapecase/view.php?db=1&article=20101101-300949/>>.

<sup>19</sup> "Marine Chin Murder of Transgendered Filipino." CBSNews. October 15, 2014. Accessed April 28, 2015. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/marine-charged-in-murder-of-transgendered-filipino/>>

at festivals, circulated in newspapers with first ladies and presidents wearing modern versions of the María Clara dress. In an analysis of a documentary, *Spirits Rising*, Catherine Ceniza Choy asserts: “Although U.S. colonial rule brought more educational opportunities for Filipino women under the guise of liberation, in *Spirits Rising*, Ramona Diaz claims that this supposedly new freedom meant little more than a costume change for Filipino women.”<sup>20</sup> By calling the Western dream of freedom a mere “costume change” for Filipinas, Choy provides a connection to how this image of María Clara and her impact on Filipinas coincides with oppression. This relationship can be seen in Imelda Marcos’ modernization of the María Clara gown during the martial law era, and as well as this dress’ appearance when the second Filipina to be elected president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, wore an elaborate version during her 2008 State of the Union Address as an attempt to portray her allegiance to the nation, and avoid critique of her environmental and human rights failures.<sup>21</sup> As education is understood by the general public as the means to liberate oneself and escape from poverty, the system of education in the Philippines has been structured to resemble the West, become a space in which Filipinas are socialized, and produce women such as Imelda Marcos and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo who serve the nation rather than critically engage with it. Filipinas outside of Manila, in the provinces, migrate to the capital for better opportunities, and suffer more from the impacts and limitations of colonialism, and are in the same situation

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<sup>20</sup> Choy, Catherine Ceniza. "Towards Trans-Pacific Social Justice: Women and Protest in Filipino American History." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 3, 293-307. 303.

<sup>21</sup> Avendaño, Christine. "Modernized Maria Clara Gown for Arroyo - INQUIRER.net, Philippine News for Filipinos." *Inquirer: Philippine News for Filipinos*. July 28, 2008. Accessed April 20, 2015.

as these political and social icons, but due to socio-economic class, are the victims of the docility, not the perpetrators of it.

The women in the novels by Casper, Hagedorn, and Apostol are in conversation with the long history of colonial femininity cemented by María Clara. This colonial femininity has resulted in the exploitation of Filipinas, with the feminine docility that María Clara embodies used to structure the gender roles Filipinas are regulated to: the desirable virgin, the sex worker, and the overseas contract worker. By complicating the understanding of Filipina femininity and placing Filipina activism and defiance as the focal characteristic in place of docility, the writers themselves are attempting to subvert a long tradition of coercion and silence pressed on them by the patriarchal literature celebrated by the government. Since *Noli Me Tangere* is accepted as the norm, and even the starting point for the understanding of nationhood and womanhood, then these novels and their fictional women are critical to re-evaluating this lineage in Philippine literature. Despite the limited accessibility of *Awaiting Trespass*, *Dogeaters*, and *Gun Dealer's Daughter*, a century-long gap since *Noli Me Tangere*, they serve as alternatives to Rizal and María Clara.

## II: Telly, the Favored Niece

In the final years of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship, Ty-Casper wrote and published *Awaiting Trespass*, a novel written with the intent to harshly critique the government and their abuse of human rights during Martial Law. The novel weaves a narrative around the protagonist, Telly, the favorite niece of Don Severino Gil who had passed away under mysterious circumstances, later revealed as beaten to death by thugs of the Marcos administration. Telly has returned to her home town for his funeral and the novel circles around her interactions with her family members, her once-childhood crush turned priest, Sevi, and her own internal daydreaming, and poetry writing. By critiquing the government, Ty-Casper thus criticizes the way women have been socialized as part of nationalist project. Moving amongst Telly and her family members, Ty-Casper opens up spaces for critique by having Telly speak and act against the virginal ideal which previous women characters were created to serve.

Like Rizal, Ty-Casper wrote *Awaiting Trespass* as an outsider to the government. Whereas Rizal writes *Noli Me Tangere* dedicated to the "Motherland, "with the

dedication itself written while he was in exile in Europe, Ty-Casper is writing as a political outcast of the nation-state under the Marcos dictatorship.<sup>22</sup> Ty-Casper writes:

*Awaiting Trespass* is a *pasión*—traditionally, a lengthy, chanted chronicle of agonies—set in the Philippines, 1981. The agonies in the novel are those of a nation and of a family, the result of usurpations that have turned Filipinos into exiles in their own country. . . . It is a book of revelations about what tyranny forces people to become; and what, by resisting, they can insist on being.<sup>23</sup>

Ty-Casper's dedication parallels the dedication that Rizal wrote almost a century earlier.

Like Rizal, Ty-Casper is unapologetically critiquing the systems of power that have held the nation at an arrested development, and like her literary forefather, her book resulted in a notoriety that prevented *Awaiting Trespass* from being printed in the Philippines. Yet the parallel ends when gender enters the comparison; due to the patriarchal leanings of a Western influenced society, Rizal is often given a lot of credit for instigating the Philippine Revolution and his revolutionary radical separatism from Spain is celebrated as patriotic and nationalist. Whereas Rizal is the "Father of the Nation," there is very little scholarship on Ty-Casper. Despite the similarity to Rizal and his literary projects, Ty-Casper was forced to leave the Philippines because she openly criticized the Philippine government rather than an invading force.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Rizal, who is revered by

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<sup>22</sup> Rizal, Introduction.

<sup>23</sup> Ty-Casper, Linda. *Awaiting Trespass: A Pasión*. New York: Readers International, 1985. Introduction.

<sup>24</sup> Florentino, Alberto. "Linda Ty-Casper: Philippines Writer" Philippine American Literary House. Accessed April 15, 2015. <<http://www.palhbooks.com/Linda.htm>>

the nation, Ty-Casper and her work has been rejected by the masses, not included in the canon, and ultimately, despite her activist work as a writer and organizer, she and her novels are practically anonymous on the global stage. This rejection stems from her positionality; that she, a woman, had the audacity to critique a fellow countryman and his politics, the President of the Philippines, and that she, like her character Telly, refused the passive docility that María Clara promotes.

While hosting a writing workshop at the University of the Philippines, reports document that when a young student asked how to write around the Marcos regime, she responded: “You don’t have to write ideology; just write honestly about what the regime is doing to the people; that can be more powerful than any ideological writing!”<sup>25</sup>

*Awaiting Trespass* not only reflects what Ty-Casper told the student, but also does so boldly. The martial law era reflects the control imposed on the country during U.S. Imperialism, as subversive conversations happen in secret, often within the home. In the days leading up to the funeral of her uncle, Telly passes by conversations of family members and locals who debate on the country’s history and current political climate. In one passing conversation, the mourners speak of Telly’s grandfather and memories of American soldiers during the Philippine-American War (1899-1902): “From the

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<sup>25</sup> Arcellana, Francisco. "Awaiting Trespass (A Pasion) by Linda Ty-Casper, Review." *Philippine Studies* 34, no. 4 (1986): 545-47. Accessed April 13, 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42632976>>. 545.

beginning [Aurelio Gil] insisted on opening every window wide, a change from the times before the Americans came. When parents hesitated, he humored them. ‘Let the sun come in. The germ is the American devil. However, all it needs is the sun, not prayers.’”<sup>26</sup> Prior to this conversation, another aunt laments about a boy who was killed by Marcos’ secret police, for being an activist, a clear violation of Martial Law. By writing conversations such as these into the narrative, Ty-Casper not only documents the history with the United States but also connects the U.S. with Marcos government by paralleling these two stories on censorship. The connections between the martial law and the U.S. are made explicit in the story of the grandfather. By telling the story about the silence and the violence of the Marcos government, Ty-Casper documents and criticizes the current state of the nation. In essence, by having a relationship with the United States, the Marcos regime has placed their citizens in the dark, that they have been infected by a “germ,” America.

Ty-Casper illustrates the agonies imposed on the people of the Philippines by the two governments in a statement by an outspoken aunt. Telly bares witness to this conversation, a back and forth between the family and the aunt who openly critiques the U.S. and the Marcos presidency and how they work together to exploit the citizens of the Philippines:

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<sup>26</sup> Ty-Casper 10

‘But we hold life cheaply here. Pesticides, herbicides, and tainted milk—anything unsafe in the world finds its way to the Philippines. That nuclear plant Westinghouse is building cannot pass safety inspection in the United States. Do you realize where the power lines are going? To the American bases, to the export processing zones where foreign industries, which do not pay taxes or come under laws, can exploit Filipino workers. They take their profits home, too.’<sup>27</sup>

Given that Telly hears these conversations in passing, they could be misread as “tsismis,” or women’s gossip, rather than a critical documentation of the “agonises” that Ty-Casper mentioned in her dedication.

The mantel of María Clara is taken on by Telly’s three aunts, Maria Paz, Maria Esperanza, and Maria Caridad, the living sisters of Telly’s dead mother and recently passed uncle, and also the gatekeepers in the novel of the past and its traditions. Whereas Telly moves throughout the house as liberally as she flows in and out of reality and her daydreams, the three sisters monitor the guests and try to guide Telly throughout the whole funeral, often under the guise of finding out if she will marry again. Telly, who is motherless like María Clara but a divorcee and so do not have the coveted virginity that María Clara symbolizes, stands as the total rejection of this docile femininity. Even though she does not bluntly make statements like some of the other women at the house, her daydreams are a manifestation of the anxiety of being in her homeland and her rejection of marriage is ultimately read as a rejection of femininity. Many of Telly’s

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<sup>27</sup> Ty-Casper 37

internal, poetic, daydream sequences are similar to the following: “The bending of the light, the slow turning of the record seem as much a wail of sorrow as the stand of drying flowers, the light bulbs’ dusty brilliance. She feels it is herself being waked and wonders how many hours of her life she has lived foolishly, senselessly circling, repeating and repeating the things she never intended to do.”<sup>28</sup> Whereas it is the other women in the story making the bold statements against the Marcos regime and the chaos of martial law, Telly internalizes all of the “agonies” that are going around her and then poetically reflects on them. Telly’s poetic reflections are reflective of Chatterjee’s argument that literature can be used as a source of history from those speaking from “unbound serialities.” Telly ruminates on wasting time on redundancy, “senselessly circling, repeating and repeating,” and rejects the necessity to be repetitive, whether it is repeating traditional gender roles or history repeating itself with the Philippine’s government replication of the atrocities under both Spanish and American rule.<sup>29</sup> Even though she is not as outspoken as the aunt who is a government official, Telly’s internal reflection and disengagement with her immediate reality reflects that she is actively rejecting the docility of being an object like María Clara.

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<sup>28</sup> Ty-Casper 65-66

<sup>29</sup> Ty-Casper 29-30

This rejection and disembodiment of María Clara is seen during moments of interaction between Telly and her old childhood friend, Sevi, who has returned as a priest. Whereas María Clara is constantly diverting her gaze throughout *Noli Me Tangere*, Telly dares to look at Sevi, even if it is from across the room while he is performing mass:

Telly thinks she knows what Sevi was struggling to say. We are much alike, she thinks.... Telly lowers her gaze from the chandelier. It is as if she is hearing the other half of her thoughts although she cannot recall a word that is being said in prayer.... She blinds herself with fantasy and dream; failing that, with anger. How does [Sevi] harden himself against externally exciting things? Are we both merely afraid, strong-willed in fear? Is there a purpose in willfulness beyond merely opposing?<sup>30</sup>

In this scene, not only does Telly direct her gaze at Sevi, but also she returns her reflections and daydreaming to the purpose of opposition, asking the question “Is there a purpose in willfulness beyond mere opposing?” Telly’s looking at Sevi challenges both gender and social norms. As a priest, Sevi has a vocation in which he cannot look at Telly the same way, and as a woman in her 40s, Telly defies the traditional image of a young virgin as a central Filipina character. Not only is Telly not the young virgin that María Clara is, but her gaze is filled with both desire and defiance.

Telly’s rejects the historical and western concepts of virginity imposed on transpacific Filipinas, and turns away from María Clara. Rather than engaging with the

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<sup>30</sup> Ty-Casper 55-56

other women and partaking in popular forms of feminine socializing, as her aunts, Telly's internal poetry and observations challenges the authority of everything around her.

Telly's observations question both the Marcos regime and the utilization of María Clara's virginhood by this regime to create a cloak of silence. Like Ty-Casper, Telly shows how creative writing, such as poetry, can challenge authoritarian regimes.

Ultimately, Ty-Casper intervenes in the performance of femininity and also gestures towards the ways in which the Marcos regime exploited Filipinas' sexuality and bodies.

### **III: Lolita Luna and Daisy Consuelo Avila, the *Bomba* and the Beauty Queen**

On February 25, 1986, two inaugurations occurred and a revolution ended. Early in the morning, Corazon “Cory” Aquino was sworn in as the President of the Philippine. The bible she swore on was held by the mother of the late Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, a vocal critic and the biggest political opponent of President Ferdinand Marcos, who was assassinated by Marcos’ cronies immediately after returning home from a self-imposed exile in the United States. This assassination sparked uproar and culminated three years later in the People Power Revolution, a two-day, nonviolent revolution that was instigated when Benigno Aquino’s widow, Corazon, won the snap elections. The People Power Revolution ended on February 25, 1986, on the same day that Aquino was sworn in the newly elected president and after Marcos held a symbolic and public inauguration on the balcony of Malacanang Palace, with Imelda by side, before they fled to Hawaii that same afternoon.

Hagedorn fictionalizes the historical events leading up to the assassination of Ninoy Aquino in her first novel, *Dogeaters*. Published in 1990, *Dogeaters* is an attempt to document the early 80s by providing a fictionalized myriad of cultural, political, and social characteristics that are similar, if not the same, to the socio-political conditions during the 1980s. Hagedorn uses the nostalgia of 1980s Manila via images of the martial law, Hollywood, and revolutionary civil unrest as an entry point for looking into the past in order to critique the present and allow for fiction and reality to coincide with one

another.<sup>31</sup> The novel is a kaleidoscope of different perspectives that cross gender, class, and sexuality, in an attempt to document and negotiate the material reality of the early 80s. Two women appear throughout the text whose position and narrative should be interrogated for their interruption of traditional Filipina femininity: the buxom movie star, Lolita Luna, and the beauty queen turned guerrilla fighter, Daisy Consuelo Avila. Like María Clara and Imelda Marcos, these two Filipinas are portrayed as pop cultural emblems of beauty and sexuality, but they are also combating the mantle of docility that was imposed upon them by Filipino men.

Lolita Luna is a sex symbol film star whose Hollywood pseudonym, “Lolita,” in reference to Nabokov’s novel, *Lolita*, evokes the same youthful naivety as María Clara as well as the youthful sexuality of the 12-year-old Dolores Haze from Nabokov’s novel. Throughout the novel, her movie roles become progressively more scandalous and her affair with a prominent general becomes common knowledge amongst fellow socialites and politicians. Lolita Luna’s first appearance is when she appears on screen in a *bomba*<sup>32</sup> movie being watched by Romeo Rosales and Trinidad Gamboa on their date. It is the third time Romeo Rosales has seen this film, and he is looking forward to the climactic scene in which Lolita Luna is not only rescued from her suicide but is also practically naked: “If you looked closely enough, you could catch a glimpse of Lolita Luna’s erect nipples pressing against the clinging, wet, white nightgown she happened to

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<sup>31</sup> Hau, Caroline S. *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980*. Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila UP, 2000. 116.

<sup>32</sup> Tagalog word that translates to “scandalously naked.”

be wearing when she plunged into the Agno River to kill herself.”<sup>33</sup> Romeo is captivated by her image and when he later has sex with Trinidad, he imagines Lolita instead. The reader is introduced to a character’s public and later, private, appearances which are situated at the intersection of sex and death; her most sensual scene is when she tries to kill herself, and it is sexual enough for Romeo Rosales to remember it during sex. Like María Clara, who gives up her life and goes into a convent, Lolita Luna plays is expected to give up her life and yet be sexually available and vulnerable while doing so.

María Clara’s docility and the intersection of her sexuality (virginity) and death have been incorporated into the capitalist economy of the Philippines. In the end of *Noli Me Tangere*, Rizal infers that while at the convent, María Clara is not safe from sexual assault. Since María Clara’s virginity was culturally and economically cultivated during the Marcos Era, then the violence she experiences in *Noli Me Tangere* is also an expected characteristic of Filipina womanhood. In *Women’s Movements and the Filipina*, Mina Roces historicizes the sex work industry in the Philippines and how it flourished during Marcos’ dictatorship, continuing to integrate into the national economy during the last half of the 20th century and well into the new millennia:

... The income [sex workers] sent formed part of the PHP110 billion pesos (US\$12.8 billion) total all money sent home by OCWs [overseas contract workers] (including domestic helpers, and so on) in 2003. In the 1970s, during the authoritarian regime of President Ferdinand Marcos international tourism was promoted heavily, making it the forerunner of the Philippine economy as Manila developed a reputation as an ‘international sex city’ or as the ‘sex capital of Asia.’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hagedorn, Jessica Tarahata. *Dogeaters*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Roces 55

According to Roces, the Marcos Administration enforced policies on tourism that helped support the sex tourism industry in the Philippines, and thus exploited Filipinas, children, and baklas<sup>35</sup> to foreigners as a source of income for the nation. During the Marcos Administration, Manila was cleaned up, cultural centers, museums, and hotels were built. By pumping money into tourist projects and by receiving money from the U.S. government by allowing the U.S. to establish and renew their contract to maintain military bases in Olongapo and Angeles City, the Marcos Administration created an environment that made many women vulnerable to and yet reliant on the sex tourist industry. The industry's growth even garnered attention from both overseas press and religious organizations. In an 1989 article published with *Asian Week*, a Bay Area newspaper, Rev. Nellie Mercado, an official from the National Council of Churches in the Philippines states: "Women are usually included in a packaged deal in tourist arrangements."<sup>36</sup>The impact of the labor and tourism policies was long felt after the Marcos dictatorship collapsed, as was evident during a 1995 presidential visit to Australia, when then President Ramos admonishes the Australian government and public, stating to journalists: "Inform your people that the Philippines is not a destination for sex tours and pedophiles."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> A Tagalog term that can either refer to queer men who possess feminine traits or dress as women, and a colloquial but inaccurate term for transwomen.

<sup>36</sup> Churches Denounce Prostitution As Promotion For Tourism In Asia. (1983, Aug 18). *Asian Week*(1983-1989).  
<<http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/371372307?accountid=7118/>>.

<sup>37</sup> Australia Tells Philippines to Combat Child Prostitution. (1995, Aug 20). *The Filipino Express*.  
<http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/212460061?accountid=7118/>.

Lolita Luna is commodified by means of her profession and through her hypersexualization in her films and reputation. Aside from her appearance in films in the novel, she often appears besides Nicasio Ledesma, the military general with whom, she has an affair throughout the story. In the first sex scene in the novel, she appears yet again at the intersection between violence and sex:

Lolita Luna is on her knees. She is trembling, trying hard not to scream. It is always more exciting when she restrains herself. Nicasio Ledesma stands over her. He holds her head up by her mane of unruly hair. He loves her hair—its weight and coarse texture alive in his hands. He dreams of making love to her hair, but doesn't risk offending her by confessing his dreams. You could never tell with Lolita. She would act as if everything was a joke; she would boast of being game for anything. Then, without warning, she'd turn on you. Act just like a prim schoolgirl from a convent run by nuns. Act just like his wife. The General gazes at her hardened young face, the face he worships. She is still beautiful, her body still firm and voluptuous in spite of years of abuse. His favorite image of her: flushed like a flower in bloom, coming toward him where he waits in the dark shadows of her bedroom.<sup>38</sup>

Lolita Luna is simultaneously a sex object, a schoolgirl, and a wife. Her youthful description reflects María Clara and her own lustrous hair and childlike persona; “flushed like a flower” recalls the orientalist image of the “lotus flower.” The body's vulnerability and the capacity for abuse is emphasized in this scene. Lolita Luna doesn't cry out, but rather withholds both pain and pleasure, accepting the intersection of abuse and sex with the same obedience and docility that María Clara has. Lolita Luna's sex-kitten persona and image follows her throughout the novel, and despite being in opposition to María Clara, her character is reflective of the ways in which women's bodies in the Philippines were commodified to become a part of the national economy.

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<sup>38</sup> Hagedorn 95.

In conjunction with Lolita Luna, Daisy Avila is another pop cultural icon Hagedorn conjures up to represent Filipinas in the fictional mid-century Philippines. Daisy is first introduced soon after the reader finds out that Lolita Luna is having an affair with the General, in the chapter, “Sleeping Beauty:” “Before her twentieth birthday, before she marries a foreigner in haste and just as hastily leaves him, before she is given the name Mutya by her guerrilla lover in the mountains, Daisy Consuelo Avila is crowned the most beautiful woman in the Philippines....”<sup>39</sup> Daisy, the daughter of Senator Avila, a fictional version of Benigno Aquino, the assassinated opponent of Marcos and of colonialism, wins the national beauty pageant, which is endorsed by the government and by the First Lady, Imelda Marcos.<sup>40</sup> Whereas Lolita Luna tries to escape but fails as she returns to the arms of the General and whereas María Clara becomes a part of the nation state as the face of the nation, Daisy Avila speaks back fiercely in an interview segment on a popular talk show:

The moment Cora asks her first questions, Daisy seizes the opportunity to publicly denounce the beauty pageant as a farce, a giant step backward for all women. She quotes her father and her mother, she goes on and on, she never gives the horrified Cora a chance to respond. She accuses the First Lady of furthering the cause of female delusions in the Philippines. The segment is immediately blacked out by waiting censors.<sup>41</sup>

Daisy takes her politics onto public television, a radical action considering that the fictional Philippines in which Hagedorn places her characters in are living under martial law. Daisy pushes against the bonds of silence as dictated by traditional femininity and martial law. In *Immigrant Acts*, an influential text in both comparative literature,

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<sup>39</sup> Hagedorn 100.

<sup>40</sup> Hagedorn 101.

<sup>41</sup> Hagedorn 109.

migration studies, and Asian American studies, Lisa Lowe focuses on Daisy's character and how she is articulated by Hagedorn in the novel's fictional gossip magazines, stating:

This construction of 'Daisy' reveals the decisively reactionary dimensions of gossip, historically a key purveyor of the control and regulations of women's bodies, sexualities, and agency. As a *woman*, Daisy is figured as a carrier of community, and the gossip about her is concerned with the containment of her sexuality and with her transgressive movements across 'private' and 'public' domains as she changes from pious daughter to revolutionary.<sup>42</sup>

The construction of Daisy's character and her trajectory in the text serve as another emblem of the historical and gendered realities of the time. The actual reality of martial law and the suppression of human rights during Marcos' regime is exemplified when the live feed is cut, and then seen when a rock group that is inspired by Daisy and her politics pens a song after her and is subsequently thrown in jail:

Daisy becomes a sensation, almost as popular as her father. The rock band Juan Tamad records a song dedicated to her, "Femme Fatale." Banned on the radio, the song surfaces on a bootleg label, Generik. It is an instant underground hit. Condemned as NPA sympathizers, band members are rounded up by plainclothesmen from the President's Special Squadron Urban Warfare Unit. They are detained at Camp Dilidili, a brand new complex of buildings with all the best in modern conveniences: hot and cold running water, toilets that flush, and clean, windowless cells for solitary confinement.<sup>43</sup>

Daisy becomes a pop cultural icon because of her defiance. Unlike María Clara, who is depicted as shy and devoted, Daisy exemplifies the characteristics of "Filipino" identity that Rizal's novel advocates but simultaneously conflicts with María Clara; her actions instigate protests, her voice challenges censorship, and she rejects the glamor of being a beauty queen. When Daisy leaves Manila to become a guerilla fighter, but then is captured by the military, the First Lady, Imelda Marcos, does not comment or gossip on

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<sup>42</sup> Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. 119.

<sup>43</sup> Hagedorn 109-110.

Daisy's whereabouts with a reporter. It is later revealed that she was pardoned and returned to the mountains as nameless guerilla fighter.

Daisy's evolution into a guerrilla rebel is not a new narrative in Philippines' history and is emblematic of Hagedorn's act of mixing of fiction and reality to intervene with mainstream history. The Philippines has a long history of women who fought both Spanish colonialism and US imperialism, and like the Filipinas who revolted in these eras, Filipinas who organized and revolted during the Marcos regime were minimized in the history. Daisy's transition from iconic Filipina femininity to guerrilla fighter is reflective of a strong tradition of Filipina activism and parallels activists such as Salud Algabe.

During the 1930s, Salud Algabe, who was an educated Filipina left her middle-class family to lead peasant revolts in the mountains, and was eventually captured, detained, and persecuted by the Philippine government. Ma. Luisa T. Camagay traces out both Algabe's history as well as the tradition of Filipina activism in *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements*, arguing: "The Philippine nationalist movement contained a few notable women, but colonialism made it difficult for many women to become involved in such public political activities. Efforts were made by the Spanish... and particularly the Catholic Church, to reduce Filipino women to a position of subordination in relation to men."<sup>44</sup> There was Corazon Aquino, but her presidency fits in the fantasy of Western democracy; anti-establishment and communist Filipinas were left out of the

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<sup>44</sup> Camagay, Ma. Luisa T. "Salud Algabe: A Forgotten Member of the Philippine Sakdal." *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements*. Ed. Susan Blackburn. S.I.: Nus, 2013. 127.

history so that Rizal's colonial-influenced fantasy of the sacrificial grieving and devoted wife could be seated at Malacanang Palace. Women activists and revolutionary leaders who did not fit the mold as dictated by Western influenced patriarchy and the Catholic Church, as both the fictional María Clara and the real life Corazon Aquino do, are then regulated to be forgotten by both mainstream fiction and history. Hagedorn's Daisy and Salud Algabre are not part of the narrative of Filipina leaders and yet they pushed more against the status quo than their better-known counterparts.

Whereas Lolita Luna is a sex kitten who conjures a violent and economic reality that Filipinas face and the ways in which Filipinas try to survive and thrive in their limited conditions, Daisy serves as the volatile "femme fatale," whose femininity does not serve the male gaze. Yet, regardless of the ways in which they act in order to survive and fight their conditions, they are unified in pain and violence; whereas Lolita Luna participates in a BDSM relationship with the General in order to claim a safe space from martial law, Daisy is gang raped by Philippine government officials and repeatedly by the General himself when she is captured from the mountains.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of these two Filipina's consensual and nonconsensual relationship with the General, they are symbolic of the ways in which Filipina bodies are violently commodified and restrained by military regimes. Both women are dangerous as they are written as representative of real life women who push against the normative reality of Hagedorn's home country. Like their real counterparts, they also live in spaces of vulnerability at the hands of the Philippine government, and thus serve as overt criticism of the ways in which the Philippine

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<sup>45</sup> Hagedorn 216

government/nationalism, like Spanish Colonialism and US Imperialism before them, has silenced and abused Filipinas.

#### IV: Soli and Sol, the Student Activists

As the country reached the decades of the mid 20th century and the impact of western modernity influenced education, the dichotomy of female representation becomes set: the barrio girl is pastoral, traditional, and innocent, the coed is western, urban, and immoral. Denise Cruz also details in *Transpacific Femininities* this modernity-influenced dichotomy of femininity:

The coed soon was in the eye of this storm, as she began to signify dangerous influences and their repercussions... the suffrage movement intersected with multiple complex, contradictory attempts to manage Filipina sexuality. Demands were made for formal investigations of female coeds' supposedly immoral behavior in the dormitories of the University of the Philippines, and calls went up for the containment of lower-class women's sexual transgressions through the creation of a new red light district...<sup>46</sup>

Cruz argues that the pastoral provinces represent virginity and national dignity, and the western urban spaces, specifically Manila and the villages that turned into cities due to the presence of military bases, allow immorality to flourish. Cruz points out how the space of the urban, specifically the university, allowed female sexuality to be policed, and how the enrollment of women into the University of Manila coincided with the creation of the red light district, as women of a certain class were seen as sexual deviant. This structuring of the urban as both a place of education and sexual immorality cements the

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<sup>46</sup> Cruz 70

relationship between emergence of educated Filipinas and to the construction of regulated prostitution.

The red light district also exists beyond Manila, as in Olongapo where Clark Air Force base's presence urbanizes the town through the commodification of pleasure. As Filipinas are indoctrinated by the Western educational system, which parallels the Philippine government's relationship with the United States, the coed thus becomes equated with the sex worker. Denise Cruz also argues in *Transpacific Femininities* that as the hypersexual coed emerges from the lower class, the upper class ironically turns to the space of the province for a "dignified" image of femininity. Cruz writes that:

In response to the coed's threatening presence and to mounting preoccupations over the sully of Filipina morality, elite Filipinos turned to María Clara, extracted her idealized traits, and transferred them to the barrio girl and the Malay woman, who were ostensibly immune from the inimical dangers of urban and colonial spaces and the corruption of the West engendered by imperialism.<sup>47</sup>

Although Filipinas from varying backgrounds were able to obtain education and career opportunities through labor-focused initiatives during Marcos' regime, the space of the campus parallels the space of the red light district, as they are both locations that Filipinas from the lower class occupy. A metropolitan education is no longer exclusive to the upper class and Filipinas from varying socioeconomic backgrounds can migrate to an urban space, like Manila, with ideas of a "better life." María Clara's pastoral innocence

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

is juxtaposed with the emergence of the metropolis and the cosmopolitan Filipina, who is vulnerable to immorality, resulting in María Clara's image being evoked more as the foil to immoral, urban Filipinas.

The romanticization of María Clara's dignified pastoral femininity is seen in Apostol's novel, *Gun Dealer's Daughter*. Apostol, who was born in Manila, attended University of the Philippines, and resides in New York, centers this coming-of-age novel on her protagonist, Soledad (Sol), the daughter of two prominent fixtures in Philippine high society and politics.<sup>48</sup> Sol's character is set up to parallel her college classmate, Solidaridad (Soli), a political activist of middle-class origins who participates in union fights and peasant rebellions. The narrative, which jumps between the 1980s and the 2000s, focuses on Sol's interactions with a college activist group she desperately wishes to be apart of when she moves into the university dormitories. Sol's desire to become like Soli, who is the leader of the group, culminates in her falling in love with Soli's boyfriend, Jed, a son of high society Filipino family who is rebelling against his father.

The novel follows Sol as she desperately tries to become part of the activists' inner circle and also socialize with her parents' political and military friends, as her parents provide the weapons for the Marcos government. Sol's desperation to become an activist allows her to be manipulated by Jed in his own plot to assassinate a U.S. military

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<sup>48</sup> "Gina Apostol." *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. August 16, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2015.

colonel, a family friend of Sol's parents, as he uses her to gain access to both the colonel's schedule and to military weaponry. The interchangeability of Sol's name with Soli results in Soli being mistaken as the assassin and murdered in the mountains by the Philippine government. Despite coming from the province, and thus more akin to the origins of the María Clara trope, Soli is not given the same portrayal of María Clara's innocent pastoral virginity due to her interests in Communism. Despite coming from the same island as Imelda Marcos, Soli diverges from the high brow notions of femininity that Sol is given, whose mother, in this fictional Philippines, is a peer of Imelda Marcos. Sol, on the other hand, like Imelda Marcos, conforms to the high society's appropriation of María Clara and romanticized country life, to the point that her life mirrors her fictional foremother, María Clara. These two characters embody the virgin-whore dichotomy instigated by the idyllic femininity of María Clara, the barrio girl and the coed, and show that the metropolitan space of Manila, by ways of the urban college setting, depict how classed femininity impacts Filipina activism and who can and who cannot claim innocence.

The college campus in *Gun Dealer's Daughter* becomes the microcosm of these urban interactions and movements. In the dormitories, Sol and Soli become interchangeable despite their vastly different backgrounds: "Sol and Soli. Soli and Sol. In

the dorm, we were twinned in people's eyes. Solidaridad Soledad. Soledad Soliman. Our chiasmic names were some cosmic joke, or perhaps a sloppy choice in a careless novel. People could not get us right.”<sup>49</sup> The use of the doppelganger in this dichotomy of femininity is an overt ploy on Apostol's part to underscore how the dichotomy is not structurally fixed: that Filipinas can be read as either/or not just by society, but by institutions that decide their fates. Unlike Hagedorn's Daisy Avila who is pardoned by the government and released back into the mountains, Soli, perhaps due to class, does not survive the violence of nation-state. The interchangeability in the eyes of their peers eventually culminates in Soli's murder by Marcos militia, as government officials mistook Sol for Soli in a Jed's plot to assassinate a U.S. colonel. Not only does the interchangeability between these two characters result in Soli's murder and burial in an unmarked grave and Sol's confinement in a home abroad due to insanity, but also show that the tropes of the barrio girl and the coed are neither fixed nor liberating, which is reminiscent of María Clara's doomed ending.

At the end of the novel, Apostol flash forwards to the present day, as indicated by a reference to the recently elected U.S. President Obama appearing on the news. Soli's memory and body is long forgotten except by Sol's internal haunting, critically alluding to the ways in which women's bodies are used and forgotten but also how the nation-state

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<sup>49</sup> Apostol 124.

has restricted the minds of Filipinas. Sol is depicted as unable to retain memories beyond the 80s and her caretakers, despite being in her 30s, treat Sol like a child. As the two girls live and die in the shadow of María Clara and Rizal, Apostol shows that the nation has yet to empower or liberate Filipinas.

Although neither Sol nor Soli take on occupations that resemble the tropes of the transpacific caregiver and the military town sex worker when they leave college and Manila, Soli's murder by the Philippine military and Sol's confinement in a house in New York are actions still rooted in restriction and domestication. This contrasts with Sol's fellow conspirator, Jed, who was able to leave the Philippines and retain his wealth and status abroad. The revolutionary spirit embodied by Rizal and evoked by politicians, even Marcos himself during his fourth state of the nation address in 1969, is only reserved for men, as Marcos himself states "In the 1890s Rizal saw the rise of 'new men' and a 'new social order' within a century. In 1968, the New Filipino and the New Filipinism came into being."<sup>50</sup> Marcos, like the politicians before him, and even Rizal himself, saw the true spirit of the Filipino to be that of a revolutionary, and yet Filipinas themselves are domesticated, like María Clara. By rejecting the opportunity to become educated and thus domesticated by the western structured university, a fictional version

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<sup>50</sup> "Ferdinand E. Marcos, Fourth State of the Nation Address." Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. 27 Jan. 1969. Web. 12 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.gov.ph/1969/01/27/ferdinand-e-marcos-fourth-state-of-the-nation-address-january-27-1969/>>

of University of the Philippines, Sol and Soli depict how their dedication to a communist and activist cause goes beyond class, social status, but also how their womanhood makes them vulnerable to the psychological and physical violence of the nation-state.

## **Conclusion: Activist Writing and Transpacific Pop Culture**

Fiction allows Filipinas to discuss the ways in which the impacts of colonialism have been subsumed into the national consciousness through laws that regulated “unfeminine” characteristics and produced in them modes of domestication and through societal norms that perpetuate idealized femininity. Like Rizal, who used fiction to critique the Spanish regime, Filipina novelists employ fiction to discuss many issues at once, such as how Manila is symbolically the space in which national and transpacific notions of womanhood are both articulated and contested.

With a long history of colonialism, and an ongoing narrative of US imperialism and political corruption, novels by Filipina writers like Ty-Casper, Hagedorn, and Apostol speak to these realities in ways that Rizal and María Clara never did. Because the latter have been memorialized by the same government that has commodified Filipinas’ bodies for the nation’s economy, transpacific Filipinas must turn to a different set of literature to ground their identity and activism. Although Lowe only speaks specifically of Hagedorn’s first novel, her analysis can be applied to the other two texts: “In the displacement of the authority of official historical representation, *Dogeaters* rehistoricizes differently the material conditions of colonialism, neocolonialism, and

continuing civil war.”<sup>51</sup> Left out of historical documentation and national memory, and with an emphasis on the “continuing civil war,” Filipinas must reimagine themselves and their voices through creative fiction. The historical archive is structured so that Filipinas, especially those who do not serve the nation’s dominant narrative by being sexual deviants and communist activists, are invisible. This invisibility is reflective of a long tradition of docility imposed onto the women of the Philippines, whether it is to rationalize their right not to vote or to regulate their sexual and emotional labor as the basis for the national and transnational economy.

Because the nation roots its national identity in a piece of fiction, then to unroot the systemic oppressions that came with *Noli Me Tangere*, more counternarratives must be produced. Filipinas who spend their energy either on creative writing or doing a close, scholarly reading of that writing participate in the same tradition that helped build the Philippines and simultaneously partake in undoing what the government has done over the decades to create a resemblance of the United States’ capitalistic democracy. In a collection of essays on Philippine post-colonial literature, Caroline Hau states her reason for focusing on the fictional world created in *Dog eaters*:

In choosing to work on the text as a *fictional* site of the worlding and thereby not sufficiently addressing the question of the relationship between discourse and the material conditions... in which it is inscribed, I stand accused of privileging

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<sup>51</sup> Lowe 120.

discourse as the primary site of struggle over other modes of ideological struggle, thereby putting in my two cents' worth towards legitimating (politically) academic work... If anything, this very text confirms precisely the limits within which meanings are constructed and negotiated in our particular social formation.<sup>52</sup>

Fictional realities allow the marginalized to enter a space in which meaning is twisted and questioned. In doing so, the lived realities are also seen as texts that must also be interrogated and negotiated with. Whereas the government's intent is that Rizal's novels and writings informed the lived experiences of Filipino/as within and beyond the borders of the nation to become ideal citizens, Filipina writers and their novels are impacting the lives of young diasporic Filipinas and forcing them to confront their internalized colonialism and their relationship to their homeland.

Hagedorn's writing has reached some degree of popularity, and her acclaim and recognition by both scholars and publishing houses has opened the doors for younger writers like Apostol to publish work. Yet, this permeation goes beyond writers and scholars. The success of *Dogeaters* made way for Hagedorn's second novel, *Gangsters of Love*. Although this novel did not receive the same accolades as *Dogeaters*, a young Filipina rapper from the Bay Area, which is noted for its dense first-and second-generation Filipino American population, has been producing songs under the name of the *Gangsters of Love*'s protagonist, Rocky Rivera. Although it is only within the last year that she has gained online notoriety, online communities of young women of color bloggers have been circulating her tracks on women of color empowerment. One of her earlier tracks, "Heart," is a shout out to women of color who have been ignored in Civil

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<sup>52</sup> Hau 125-6.

Rights movements, such as Dolores Huerta, Angela Davis, and Gabriela Silang.<sup>53</sup> The latter was a Filipina insurgent also known as “*la generala*,” who led a revolt against the Spanish, a century before Rizal ever made a draft of *Noli Me Tangere*. In 1984, a group of leftist Filipina militant activists came together to form GABRIELA, which is now one of the most vocal and critical transpacific activist groups against the Philippine government.<sup>54</sup> Salaud Algabre, Gabriela Silang, the activist group, GABRIELA, Filipina activist-writers, and Filipina American rappers are just a few examples a history beyond Rizal and the other revolutionaries and warriors in the pantheon. Ty-Casper, Hagedorn, and Apostol are not alone in this re-visiting. By not accepting the narrative that the revolution began and ended with Rizal and by not conforming to the standards represented through María Clara, Filipina writers, activists, scholars, and the average diasporic youth are proclaiming that the struggle to decolonize has not ended.

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<sup>53</sup> "Heart." YouTube video, 3:01. Posted by "KerMa83," upload March 21, 2010.  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evrJJkUHZ4Y/>>.

<sup>54</sup> "About- GABRIELA Philippines." About- GABRIELA Philippines. Accessed April 29, 2015.  
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