

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

---

## **Felipinas Caliban: Colonialism as Marriage of Spaniard and Filipina**

Alma Jill Dizon

*Philippine Studies* vol. 46, no. 1 (1998): 24–45

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>  
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Felipinas Caliban: Colonialism as Marriage of Spaniard and Filipina

*Alma Jill Dizon*



The female of the species is deadlier than the male.

– Rudyard Kipling

Each passing year takes us stylistically further from the writing of José Rizal. Translations of him tend to appear with translator's notes, explaining the need to make him less nineteenth-century, less verbose. We inhabit an active, post-Hemingway world of prose with less time and patience for the ample descriptions of the last century. While translators have not edited down the melodramatic action of the novels, an educated audience these days often considers such melodrama as best suited for television. Viewed as simplistic, the melodrama does not seem capable of conveying political complexities or of expressing a modern identity. For these reasons, many have reworked Rizal's material, finding endless possibilities in all media, and these new works, though they bear his titles and the names of his characters, are nevertheless separate entities with their own existence. Yet for those who study *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, the alterations and ellipses have a way of taking us back to the originals to reexamine the omitted such as a less attractive allegory of Philippine identity found in Doña Consolación or Doña Victorina.

Upon seeing the recent stage production of the musical version of the *Noli*,<sup>1</sup> one immediately notices the absence of Doña Consolación, described by Rizal as "la Musa de la Guardia Civil." The musical presents a streamlined story with a strong pacing. Bienvenido Lumbera's libretto and a multi-layered choreography display a greater craftsmanship than the original novel, controlling the numerous subplots that hinder an already meandering central story. In the musical, dance and song allude to subplots that a Philippine audience is

familiar with while most characters who have no direct connections to Ibarra disappear completely. In this manner, Sisa turns into a motif, screaming and whirling through scenes in which her character has no part. She expresses her story of lost sanity in her one song, but her missing children do not appear in the play since Basilio only meets Ibarra in the final moments of the novel. Despite its fame, the play also leaves out the scene in which Doña Consolación tortures the already mad Sisa. So for all their color and importance in the town, neither Doña Consolación nor her husband the *alférez* appear in the musical version since neither really has a scene with Ibarra.<sup>2</sup> Doña Victorina and Don Tiburcio, on the other hand, bask in an exuberantly comic glory that belies the abuse which the former heaps on her husband in the book. Diminutive, especially in comparison to his bewigged and voluminous wife, Don Tiburcio is already reduced to "una especie de perrito faldero" [a kind of lap dog] and prances about her with her parasol held aloft. Doña Victorina completely upstages her spouse with outrageous costumes, providing relief from the foreboding music that accompanies the other characters. Even though Doña Victorina and Ibarra hardly exchange words in the novel, her presence makes sense in that they do move in the same circles, and, of greater importance to the musical, she is an undeniably humorous figure.

Despite large-scale editing of the novelistic material, the musical version has its own integrity and within this its own manner of condemning the colonial situation. In a manner that evokes Artaud, the musical opens in darkness with a strange procession down both aisles. The entire cast, including serious as well as comic characters, descends upon the stage where they deposit large dolls one by one. A strange, serpent-like beast pops up to devour the dolls and the audience is left to wonder what this might signify. Not clearly Spanish or Philippine, the monster reminds us of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and so is a means of embodying a kind of evil that settles into the human psyche. The faceless and sexless dolls could be either children or ghosts. If we see them as children or even as the souls of the bearers themselves, then the serpent is a Moloch who requires the sacrifice of the future for a desperate, self-serving present. Nothing in the novel parallels this scene. The novel does, however, have its own means of conveying a lack of a future. There is the suffering of children in addition to a threat of evil from within, both of which indicate a moral conflagration at the point of intersection between Philippine and Spanish relations. It is oddly enough through

the often humorous depictions of Doña Victorina's and Doña Consolación's marriages that this colonial relationship finds a portrayal.

While they have intriguing details in common, Doña Victorina has tended to attract more critical attention than Doña Consolación over the years.<sup>3</sup> Critics have found an actual person, though greatly exaggerated, in the former, both as the prototype of the Filipina who would marry any Spaniard to improve her social standing as well as an actual individual.<sup>4</sup> Doña Consolación, however, has not found her model in reality. Critics see her more as an extreme caricature with "hyperbolic touches" or, if somewhat realistic as a campfollower, then not specific to the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> The greater interest in Doña Victorina also has to do with an admiration of her strength and of how her humor arises out of her sheer nerve. While Doña Consolación might torture natives, she still receives beatings from her husband whereas Doña Victorina focuses most of her energy on Don Tiburcio. As Nick Joaquin (1955, 266) explains:

Doña Victorina may ape the Westerner and wear preposterous costumes and false curls: but she's *not* slavish, she does *not* *cringe*—not before the genuine Europeans, not before the friars, not even before the captain-general. It's her poor devil of a Spanish husband who does the cringing—at her feet. She rules him with a terrible fist.

It is this subversive quality in Doña Victorina along with her comic potential that makes her more appealing. Yet her ability to terrorize her Spanish husband has not qualified her as an allegorical figure for the Philippines in the way that María Clara has been, which is misleading since Doña Victorina, as much as Doña Consolación, personifies another Philippine identity. In effect, as a sort of Shakespearean Caliban in opposition to the spiritual figures of the ingenues, Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación together present a vision of the corrupt union of colonialism. Rather than simply portraying case histories, these women are allegories, and, with their extreme behavior and abusive marriages, they alter the notion of the colonial experience as well as its lasting affect on colonized and colonizer.

### **Moral Degeneration and Crossed Genders**

It is telling that the family relationship most expressed in the rhetoric of colonialism is that of mother and child. As in the rhetoric of slavery, the maternal image masks a claim to permanent authority

as the colony, like the slave, never matures to the point of deserving freedom (Dizon 1994, 113). If a positive paradigm of marriage existed in the rhetoric of colonialism in the Philippines, it might match colonizer and indigenous wife in a binary opposition of male as governing intellect and female as emotional subordinate in order to portray a just and permanent colonial government. In Rizal's novels, the negative image of intermarriage uses gender to offer the reverse: a vision of colonial government as a chaotic and temporary arrangement.

With their strong wills, Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación participate in a gender-switching that leads to a questioning of assumptions even while it depends on traditional notions of feminine and masculine behavior. In this manner, the narrator tells us that Doña Consolación beats Sisa "su naturadeza [sic] no era la de una mujer," [her nature was not that of a woman] (219) using gender to express her violence and strength. Likewise, in describing how Don Tiburcio decides to marry Doña Victorina, the narrator explains that "es una vieja pretenciosa, imponente y varonil, pero el hambre es más varonil, más imponente y más pretenciosa todavía, y luego para eso ha nacido él dulce de genio" [she is a pretentious, imposing, mannish old woman, but hunger is even more mannish, imposing and pretentious, and, besides, he was born with a gentle disposition to face such things] (236). Within this pun of "el hambre" [hunger] rather than the expected "el hombre" [man], it is striking that behind the masculine article follows a feminine noun,<sup>6</sup> emphasizing the powerlessness of Don Tiburcio at the bottom of a female hierarchy of power no matter his status as Peninsular and male.

In contemplating the figure of Doña Consolación, the narrator sets up two distinct, Spanish reactions to her, one of them representing a colonial misreading and the other the actuality of the *alférez's* relations with her. Described as more male than female, Doña Consolación's violent nature upsets expectations of colonized and womanly behavior to the point where the narrator notes that if the Spanish writer Cañamaque had seen her "la habría tomado por un cacique del pueblo ó el *mankukúlam*, adornando despues su descubrimiento con comentarios en lengua de tienda, inventada por él para su uso particular" [he would have taken her for the warlord or shaman of the town, later adorning his discovery with commentaries in a pidgin that he invented for his own use] (215). Cañamaque does not actually speak of a *mankukúlam* in his books, and so a Propagandist narrator sets up a straw figure to voice a false, colonial

rhetoric. While there is some evidence showing that women held positions of leadership when the Spanish first arrived in the Philippines, the setting for Cañamaque is the late nineteenth century, and the warlord and shaman with whom he might have confused Doña Consolación are undeniably male. As a colonizer and would-be definer of Philippine life, he would have misread her gender, demeaning images of indigenous and noticeably masculine authority in a manner recalling the early explorers' claims that they were unable to tell the difference between native men and women. As in the description of a woman as masculine, a gender bending oxymoron arises here, but with a different purpose. Seeing an indigenous male as almost female helps to explain the inferiority of a people. The gender confusion is much like the age confusion of portraying the colonized as childlike and in need of a more mature culture's maternal guidance. The extent of this misreading, however, becomes clear with the attempts of Doña Consolación's husband to dominate her. When he tries to beat Spanish into her, she counterattacks, grabbing him by the fragile symbols of his manhood and supposed power: his beard and "otra parte del cuerpo" [another part of his body]. He lets go of her and asks her pardon this time, having to acknowledge that he has already reached a physical impasse with her.<sup>8</sup> The dynamics of the relationship effectively negates a colonial rhetoric that seeks to portray the rightness of Spanish domination.

Within a Propagandist concept, Doña Consolación's much touted masculinity also provides a means of examining moral responsibility to show that while colonialism is corrupting, the colonizer does not carry all the blame. Despite the influence of her husband's treatment of her character, the *alférez* cannot truly control her, and she ultimately surpasses him in abusive behavior. Forced to stay home where no one can see her, in her literally uncivilized state, she is compared to a trapped snake and then to a storm about to burst. Just before she vents her frustration on Sisa, the narrator observes that "Todo á su alrededor se plegaba, como las espigas al primer soplo del huracan; no encontraba resistencia, no hallaba ninguna punta ó eminencia para descargar su mal humor: soldados y criados se arrastraban á su lado" [Everything around her bent like plant stalks at the first gust of a hurricane; she encountered no resistance, found nowhere to aim her bad mood: soldiers and servants grovelled before her] (216). So even while he represents the military branch of the colonial government, the *alférez* actually becomes a peripheral figure to his monstrous wife and her antics. In fact, the

scenes from early in their marriage appear as an extended flashback in the chapter in which Doña Consolación tortures Sisa, so that they serve to explain who the wife is now as an individual. When he punishes her for torturing Sisa, he has to resort to deceit, pretending to leave so that she'll open the door and revealing that he has no real authority over her. Indeed, he finds himself superseded following the uprising concocted to ensnare Ibarra. It is Doña Consolación who whispers into his ear the idea of torturing Tarsilo in the well. And when Tarsilo dies, the now pensive *alférez* orders him untied while Doña Consolación burns the corpse's legs with her cigar to make sure that he is dead. She has quickly gone from unteachable student to advisor and will soon be on her own.

Although feminine in her exterior in contrast to Doña Consolación, Doña Victorina controls her husband in a manner that also raises questions regarding power under colonialism. As a woman who already lies about her age with rice powder and wigs, she immediately sets out to recreate her image as a Peninsular and *doctora* by adopting her husband's identity even though an investigation already made him quit his practice as a quack doctor. A less than admirable specimen, Don Tiburcio requires some remaking both physically and socially. Doña Victorina buys him false teeth which she takes away when angry with him—an ironic act considering that he married her to avoid starvation and one that emphasizes the powerlessness of the supposed man of the house. She ignores his fears that more complaints will lead to his arrest and has a self-contradicting plaque engraved in black marble proclaiming him “especialista en toda clase de enfermedades” [specialist in all types of illnesses]. The most striking aspect of the relationship and that which makes it tyrannical is Doña Victorina's obvious lack of reasoning. She rules by whim in a manner that subverts the supposedly superior and intellectual nature of the male and colonizer.

Doña Victorina goes a step further in reinventing her husband and the colonial paradigm when she alters his last name by adding a “de” to his surname on the marble plaque and calling cards. She does so to rewrite his past as well as their present standing, but the new “de” also publicly announces her control over the family unit, particularly with the unnecessary repetition of “de de Espadaña” that she affects to connote her married status. Don Tiburcio and the printer try to tell her that the repetition emphasizes the falseness of the addition, but Doña Victorina wins out as she believes that people might forget the “de” in her husband's name. For the reader,

there is no mistaking the first "de" for a declaration of her belonging to her husband since the repetition in writing demonstrates a reverse situation of him belonging to her. Ultimately, Doña Victorina's manipulation of her husband's name recalls Doña Consolación's attack on the physical signs of her husband's authority—a blow which ultimately extends to the colonizer. For even while Don Tiburcio does not wear the uniform of the colonizer, his name is only a syllable beyond that of his country, making it an ironic combination of *espada* (sword) and *España* (Spain). For all her ignorance of the colonizer's language and ways, she has effectively emasculated him.

The ability of both women to upset a traditional image of the balance of power both in marriage and colonialism also builds upon their husbands' intellectual and moral weakness. So even while the women speak Spanish badly, the question of bad Spanish extends rather ironically to the women's Peninsular husbands, neither of whom is in a position to teach the language of the supposedly powerful. The *alférez*, at the time a corporal, displays his ignorance in his early attempts to force his wife to pronounce the name of her country as "Felipinas," which he derives from "Felipe V." After various attempts, beginning with a comprehensible "Pilipinas,"<sup>9</sup> Doña Consolación finally arrives at "Felipenas" in careful obedience to the vowels of the king's name. Confused, the *alférez* seeks the help of a sergeant who once studied for the priesthood. After a long-winded explanation of the evolution of Spanish, the *alférez* only understands that he now has to beat "Filipinas" out of his wife. The narrator tells us that:

El cabo que veía los progresos lingüísticos de ella, calculaba con dolor que en diez años su hembra perdería por completo el uso de la palabra. En efecto, así sucedió. Cuando se casaron, ella entendía aun el tagalo y se hacía entender en español; ahora, en la época de nuestra narración, ya no hablaba ningún idioma: se había aficionado tanto al lenguaje de los gestos, y de estos escogía los más ruidosos y contundentes, que daba quince y falta al inventor del *Volapük* (218).<sup>10</sup>

Seeing her linguistic progress, the corporal calculated sorrowfully that his wife would completely lose the ability to speak after ten years. In essence, that is what happened. When they married, she still understood Tagalog and made herself understood in Spanish. At the time of our narration, she could no longer speak any language but had instead become proficient in the language of gestures, from which she picked loudest and bluntest. She would give fifteen gestures, and



her language still misses the inventor of *Volapük* (a predecessor of Esperanto).

Rather than augmenting his wife's knowledge, the *alférez* has only succeeded in initiating her devolution, a process that continues through the years of their marriage as a metaphor for the worsening colonial situation. Her now brutish state reminds one of Shakespeare's Caliban with a crucial difference here in that, unlike Prospero, the *alférez* does not control animalism but rather brings it to full bloom. In contrast to a spiritual Philippines as allegorized in María Clara or Juli, Doña Consolación is "Felipinas" or the corrupted colony, and the colonizer has neither the knowledge nor the capacity to govern.

Reminiscent of the *alférez*, Don Tiburcio also speaks badly in a manner that reveals the shortcomings of colonialism—in this instance highlighting the weakness of the well-meaning as opposed to the brutality of the ignorant. Like the *alférez*, Don Tiburcio is uneducated, but humbler than the other Spaniard. He takes a rather different tact in the early days of his marriage since he tells himself that even while his bride-to-be "habla muy mal el castellano, él tampoco lo habla bien, según dijo el jefe del Negociado al notificarle su cesantía" [speaks Spanish badly, he doesn't speak it well either according to the chief who told him that he was fired] (236). When his wife does make obvious mistakes, however, such as confusing "s" and "z" in her attempts to sound like a Peninsular, he cannot teach her otherwise even though we never hear any real errors in Don Tiburcio's grammar or pronunciation other than the staccato of an uncontrollable stutter. Just as Lucas' scar or Simoun's glasses indicate the corruption of these characters, Don Tiburcio's stutter makes his milquetoast personality evident. He is a man whose wife will ignore his correction of "¡A...a...al revés!" (329)

Despite the apparent opposition of Doña Victorina's ribbons and curls to Doña Consolación's whip, an unfeminine will puts them both beyond the control of their intellectually and morally weak husbands. Even as the use of gender-switching to describe the strength of the wives serves to undermine a notion of total power on the part of the colonizer, it also acts to problematize oversimplified oppositions that equate colonizer and tyrant, colonized and victim. For these women remain within the traditional opposition of male as reasoning and female as non-reasoning but here without the sensitivity that marks the ingenues. They become symbols of an anti-intellectual

force, of a tyranny and a brutality from within that literally outlive the more delicate and positive emblems of the country.

### Lost and Faked Identities

The portrayal of intermarriage in the novels functions as a means of picturing the negative opposite to a Propagandist project of creating identity. In this fashion, part of the colonial state's process of corrupting individuals is to induce the loss of identity associated with intermarriage. It is worth noting that this process does not differentiate between groups, affecting the colonizer as well as the colonized. A native self can become lost in the attempt to acquire status as a colonizer even while a Peninsular self disappears along with his scruples and honor. In other words, the loss of a clear sense of oneself has to do with a moral conscience as acting responsibly toward others, and so characters lose a true identity and ethics at the same time.

Badly spoken Spanish represents how both of the women wish to join a class of Spanish speakers. Apart from the comic possibilities, this attempt reveals the opposite of the Propagandist work of nation-building through imagining community in that these characters deny their native backgrounds and try to separate themselves from indigenous life. In their understanding of social categories, the only possibilities are *indio* and Peninsular which they see as defined through a series of oppositions, such as weak/strong, provincial/cultured, dark/light, Tagalog/Spanish, and so on. Thus they attempt to remake themselves as Spaniards by marrying Peninsulars and then adopting the defining characteristics—in particular, an incomprehensible pidgin and a feigned inability to speak Tagalog well in the manner of the Peninsulars.

The linguistic move toward the Peninsular class, however, does not represent a desire to join a community as much as it does a desire to disassociate oneself from the colonized. After all, Doña Consolación's goal is to become *orofoea*—her pronunciation of "europea"—a goal which she believes she has reached when she sees that Sisa cannot understand her mangled Tagalog. With her equally mangled Spanish, her status of *orofoea* doesn't signal a newly acquired membership in the class of Spanish-speakers but rather alienation from a disenfranchised class. Doña Victorina's emphatic usage of the word "categoría" as a compliment and goal similarly reveals a wish to move into a powerful class. The language that she manipulates

haphazardly doesn't permit her to understand when a friend of her husband's calls her "*el único espíritu fuerte en este aburrido país*" [the only strong spirit in this boring country] in Chapter XLII, "*Los Esposos de Espadaña*." After Don Tiburcio stammers "*el e...espíritu más fuerte que conozco es el amoníaco*" [the st...strongest spirit that I know of is ammonia] (238), she proceeds to tell everyone that a respected personage has called her ammonia. She doesn't grasp metaphors, seeing only surfaces, and so while Doña Victorina may think of herself as having joined a social class, she does not truly belong to a linguistic community with its wordplay. Rather, Doña Victorina, like Doña Consolación, has learned that a colonial notion of power is the ability to abuse and take advantage of a subservient, native population without fear of retribution, and this is precisely what both do in their own ways.

In unlearning Tagalog, Doña Consolación loses the capacity to communicate with other natives and so becomes alienated from her social reality. Here, loss of language ties in with an intentional forgetting of the moral self. So while Doña Consolación greets her husband's blows with her own from the beginning, the violence that she absorbs there quickly translates into abuse of those natives who fall into her hands. Since to be *orofoa* signifies that she has attained a position of power over a native from whom she differentiates herself, she tortures indios in order both to express and actualize her new identity. In other words, the expression and actualization of *orofoa* are simultaneous and interdependent as she literally speaks and acts to create herself. Her attempts to reinvent herself have little to do with social interaction. Thus as she gyrates to make Sisa dance, Doña Consolación's alienation appears through her own apparent deafness to the slow music of a religious procession outside. Like her attempts at communication which have nothing to do with her milieu, her movements follow "*otro compás, otra música, la que resonaba en su interior*" (219).

The theme of lost identity and abuse coming out of the colonial experience also arises in the matter of Doña Victorina's marriage, extending in this case to the colonizer. In this manner, the colonial experience turns into a danger for the colonizer as well as the colonized when the capricious nature of customs designed to maintain an appearance of prestige aid in the loss of values and with them a moral identity. Don Tiburcio starts out as a well-meaning man who quickly loses all sense of self in trying to survive in the colony. Completely harmless, he is the sort of man who "*se hubiera hecho*

misionero en los antiguos tiempos" [would have become a missionary in the old days] (236) but this moral identity quickly evaporates in the late colonial situation. Placed in nineteenth-century Ultramar, he finds himself unable to make a living after losing his job as a customs official. Colonial attitudes ostensibly cause the beginning of his moral decline since the need to keep up an appearance of Spanish prestige rules out physical labor even though he is willing to work. This pride of the colonizer, however, cannot feed him, and when his countrymen tire of caring for him, they convince him to pass himself off as a doctor to the natives. Between hunger and his friends' encouragement, he gradually loses his scruples, charging modestly at first while he still listens to his conscience. He charges more as he becomes accustomed to his new position with the result that people think him a good doctor. Unfortunately for him, he comes under the scrutiny of the Protomedicato de Manila, but a Spanish community rallies to save him, saying that he only wishes to make enough to return home and that the natives should be smarter. Notably, these speakers ask the head doctor to be a buen *español*, which he does and shuts his eyes to the matter. In this manner, the metamorphosis of someone who was a good man in Spain into a good Spaniard in Ultramar comes at the cost of a work ethic and responsibility to others outside the ruling class.

What the colonial situation begins, Doña Victorina—a product of colonial society—finishes off. Having sold his scruples to feed himself, Don Tiburcio falls easily into Doña Victorina's hands. Love and morals come together as Don Tiburcio's gradual relinquishing of scruples parallels a decline in romantic ideals from courtly love to a still hopeful realism until it reaches a dismal present in his marriage choice. While still in Spain, he starts out with a dream of a vague "divinidad" before realistically hoping only for "una buena mujer, hacendosa, trabajadora." As he leaves for the Philippines, his pragmatic outlook at home gives way to flights of fancy as the narrator tells us that "el realismo cedió el puesto á una arrogante mestiza, á una hermosa india," and so his daydreams brim over with riches. After the loss of his job, his hopes dwindle to a widow until with his marriage to Doña Victorina, he tells himself "¡Aquello era un sueño y en el mundo no se vive soñando!" (236) Thus the loss of the ideal of romantic love is strongly attached to the loss of a moral vision. In settling for Doña Victorina and physical survival, Don Tiburcio enters a gilded prison at the cost of his dreams of the future.<sup>10</sup>

The *alférez*' difficulty with Felipinas versus Filipinas hints at a basic problem of names and language. The name of the colony is not pronounceable in the *lingua franca*, and yet neither does it obey clear rules of Spanish pronunciation. The colony is amorphous both to itself and to its would-be definer, the naming colonizer. This situation allows for a negative as well as a positive reaction, and so the opposite of the Propagandist project comes into view through the figures of Doña Consolación and Doña Victorina as allegories of a colony without a clear sense of itself. For like colonials such as Don Tiburcio, they can better their status not through work but through assumed identities that command respect. Corrupting by nature, the colonial state simultaneously encourages the falsification of identities, the relinquishing of ideals, and an absence of community.

### **Momentary Self-recognition**

Due to the acerbic humor surrounding them, Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación are not melodramatic characters apart from the scene in which the latter tortures Sisa. They do, however, experience brief moments of self-recognition that reach out toward a kind of limited peripety that only the reader witnesses. As in the melodrama, such moments uncover a greater truth that can occasionally intrude upon the false world of the colonial state, but the corruption of a society turned upside down is so strong that revelation sparks a violent disavowal rather than a public confession and recognition of goodness.

True to the melodramatic tradition behind the novels, Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación exhibit their spiritual conditions in their bodies and their dress. Their outward appearance and manners are in stark contrast to what they believe themselves to be, and so this unfounded vanity speaks of a lack of awareness, of an unquestioning faith in their invented identities as Spaniards. Yet the ugliness of their physical beings and their situations causes their real selves to emerge both to the reader and eventually to their own eyes.

The excessive make-up and curls that Doña Victorina uses may imply a losing battle against the effects of her age, but she allows no one to question her persona. The narrator describes her husband as thirty-five and old but still younger looking than she even though she claims to be only thirty-two, adding tongue in cheek, "*El por qué de esto es facil de comprender, pero peligroso de decir*" [It is

easy to understand why but dangerous to say so] (234). For Doña Victorina, appearance connotes power and prestige, and so she zealously defends her dress against anyone who might disagree. A disinterest in spiritual matters goes hand in hand with her philosophy, so that she doesn't seek the help of saints to become pregnant. In contrast to Capitán Tiago who relies heavily on icons and priests, Doña Victorina is in essence her own icon, treating herself lavishly in hopes of reaching her own ends. Her confidence in her success is, however, as superficial as her idea of becoming Spanish. As the narrator reports, despite her poor Spanish, she knows some proverbs and repeats two in particular to herself, "Más vale tarde que nunca" and "No hay felicidad completa en la tierra" [Nothing is perfect in life] (233).

At first glance, Doña Consolación is the opposite, showing no interest in her physical appearance. However, her only virtue of not looking into a mirror is as much a lack of interior self-examination as a denial of her exterior. In not examining herself in a mirror, Doña Consolación can avoid seeing how filthy and badly dressed she is, unlike her notion of looking better than María Clara. In not seeing her own rags, she can also avoid recognizing her actual social status and the inner degradation that it connotes. While Doña Victorina has some awareness of having failed to reach her goals, Doña Consolación's denial is such that self-recognition requires prompting from without. Sisa's singing awakens a memory of a language and particularly a self long-repudiated by Doña Consolación just as it does in the soldiers. The *kundiman*, a song from Sisa's youth that she remembers even in her insanity, has the ability to bring back past identities to those whom the colonial situation has altered. In reminding Doña Consolación of who she was, however, the song's story of a wilted flower also reminds her of the irrevocable decline that has brought her to her present state, producing an unbearable self-recognition. She screams out in Tagalog for Sisa to stop singing, thus giving a glimpse of the self she has hidden to both the native guard and her captive, and suddenly bringing herself into their linguistic community. To recover her sense of status and conceal her native identity, Doña Consolación then dances and whips Sisa to make her join in. As external, the provocation of Sisa's song is also public, and even as it reminds Doña Consolación of her lost self, it simultaneously lays bare her indigenusness to the guard. Instead of recognizing Sisa's innocence, Doña Consolación seeks to cover up her humiliation with further abuse. So even though the description of

the following torture has many melodramatic elements, it is actually unfaithful to the tradition.

In contrast to melodramatic peripety with its emphasis on identifying goodness, recognition for Doña Consolación and Doña Victorina is limited to the self, and thus it makes sense that their public confrontation should offer the clearest revelation and with it a violent reaction. The women may pretend to be opposites, but, despite their apparent differences, they belong to the same pattern of forgetting language and pasts in favor of the colonizer's privileges. Their confrontation therefore moves abruptly from insults based on dress to ones based on each other's husband. A European husband is not enough to establish superiority since each woman has one, so in trying to prove the other's inferiority, each comments on the shortcomings of the other's spouse. Of particular interest, the attacks next focus on pasts that the women have sought to hide. Doña Victorina asks Doña Consolación if she would like to do her laundry, striking a wound at last. Doña Consolación counters with the announcement that everyone knows that someone, meaning Don Tiburcio, had to be on the verge of starvation to take the leftovers and marry a woman whom no one wanted. The women have quickly stripped each other of pretensions, and only the intervention of P. Salví staves off a fight.

Although momentarily deflated, Doña Consolación's and Doña Victorina's assumed identities refuse to collapse as the women stubbornly bolster their untenable positions. This brief entrance of awareness recalls melodramatic peripety, and yet the women's rejection of the obvious aids in sustaining the sham of the colonial situation. As allegories of a degraded colony, the two women are incapable of change. Unlike the male representation of possible governance in the figures of the ilustrados, the female allegories cannot change their "minds." As pure heart or heartlessness, the multiple proto-national allegories each present a different aspect of the colony. Doña Consolación and Doña Victorina cannot change because they cannot turn into María Clara or Juli who exist simultaneously as more attractive symbols of an endangered identity. Rather than letting Doña Consolación and Doña Victorina pass on to a greater consciousness, the Propagandist discourse will instead relegate them to the background to focus more on the death of ingenues in the *Fili*. Nevertheless, Doña Consolación and Doña Victorina live on in the back of the reader's mind as undesirable allegories.

### The Colonial Dead End: Childlessness and Separation

Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación not only outlast the positive and more fragile representations of Philippine identity, they also outlive their marriages. As abusive relationships, the marriages that allegorize the colonial experience have none of the harmony necessary for maintaining a long-lasting union. The lack of children in these marriages points toward their eventual demise as well as the absence of an imaginable future for the colonial relationship between Spain and the Philippines. For images of children are central to the melodramatic imagery that saturates the *Noli* and their absence here underscores the inhumanity of the wives who cannot become mothers. This childlessness simultaneously indicates a Peninsular inability to cleave to the land with the husbands ultimately leaving as they opt to escape an unviable situation.

Children in the *Noli* serve not only as a bridge to the future but also as a means of measuring a character's sense of social responsibility or, conversely, inhumanity. Introduced as children, Basilio and the as yet unnamed Juli grow up among the protagonists of the *Fili*. When Sisa and Elías die, the pyre that Basilio makes with the help of Ibarra marks the passing away of the present of the first novel to the later time frame of the sequel. More importantly, children also serve to express social problems such as education and the backwardness of religious tenets in the colony. Thus the school teacher tells Ibarra that Basilio stopped attending school after becoming a sacristan due to the sacristán mayor's threats. This situation is ironic since, as we know, Sisa worked to make her sons sacristans, so that they would receive an education. The sacristán mayor's lack of responsibility toward the boys degenerates into depravity when he beats Crispin to death. The suffering of a child here acts as a gauge of inhuman conditions as it does in the school master's account of how the priest and parents made him beat his students. The suffering of the young also appears as a background motif as in the description, near the start of Chapter XVI "Sisa," of a widow who cannot feed her children because of the high cost of indulgences for souls in Purgatory. In a similar vein, when arguing against damnation and inherited sin, Tasio falls back on images of infanticide, exclaiming,

Si eso fuera cierto, ahogue V. á su hijo que allí duerme; si tal creencia no fuese una blasfemia contra ese Dios que debe ser el Supremo Bien, entonces el Molok fenicio que se alimentaba con sacrificios humanos



y sangre inocente, y en cuyas entrañas se quemaban á los niños arrancados del seno de sus madres, ese dios sanguinario, esa divinidad horrible sería al lado de él una débil doncella, una amiga, la madre de la Humanidad! (69)

[If this were true, drown your child who sleeps there; if such a belief were not a blasphemy against this God who should be the Supreme Good, then the Phoenician god Moloch—who fed on human sacrifices and innocent blood, in whose belly they burned babies torn from their mothers—this bloody and horrible god would seem like a weak girl, a friend, the mother of Humanity in comparison.]

The juxtaposition of the idol with the mothers on whose children it feeds quickly turns into the oxymoronic vision of Moloch as maternal. As in the frantic command to drown one's own child to avoid his damnation, the confusion of saving and ending a child's life works to express an unimaginable evil behind the corrupt colonial state.

The childlessness of Doña Consolación's and Doña Victorina's marriages stands out in sharp contrast to the multiple references to children throughout the *Noli*, indicating their unsympathetic natures. Most basically, their lack of children supports information already given about their personalities and physical condition. Doña Victorina is much older than she pretends, and so her inability to conceive reveals what she tries to mask with powder. When she declares herself pregnant only to wait until no heir is apparent, one can assume that she mistook menopause for pregnancy. Since her vanity led to a late marriage after rejecting native suitors, Doña Victorina's age and consequent childlessness reinforce an image of her as too egocentric for maternity. Body and temperament also play a role in Doña Consolación's situation. With her masculine face and thin, flat thighs, Doña Consolación's visible features imply a similar lack of female characteristics in her reproductive system. Her build announces a violent nature even as her childlessness illustrates an essential lack of maternal capacity. In this way, barrenness acts as yet another physical marker for both of these characters.

Following the melodramatic tradition that distinguishes many characters in the *Noli* and the *Fili*, these women's physical signs go hand in hand with their moral conditions. Thus Doña Victorina's lack of and desire for children tie into her created identity and her desire for influence. The desired heir represents a means of leaving the colony and of further separating Doña Victorina from all that is native. For just as she sees people as divided into only two opposing

categories of indio and Spaniard, she views the world as only consisting of the Philippines and Spain. In a sense, her false pregnancy is part and parcel of her delusions of grandeur but, interestingly, is the only detail she gives up as she cannot control her body the way she does those around her. Moreover, Doña Victorina's lack of interest in the young and a future without them translates into ignoring other possibilities. Thus, Linares, Don Tiburcio's nephew and the godson of P. Dámaso's brother-in-law, who comes to the colony to manage her estates when she believes herself pregnant, never turns into a son. A lawyer, he is simply another tool that she can manipulate by threatening to reveal his past—a history never quite revealed to the reader, but, given Don Tiburcio's medical practice, is probably a complete fabrication. In the Epilogue, we learn that Linares dies due to disease and Doña Victorina's ill treatment of him as a further display of her lack of motherly interest. Although with greater humor, a similar moment of self-centeredness arises in the *Fili* when she encourages Isagani's courtship of her niece Paulita Gómez. Isagani worries at first that Doña Victorina might prefer the mestizo Juanito Peláez for her niece, but, as it turns out, the old woman wants Juanito for herself as soon as her husband dies.

The inability to reproduce is also revealing of Doña Consolación's spiritual condition. No specific reason appears for Doña Consolación's lack of progeny other than the telling exclamation of her husband "¡Maldita sea tu descendencia, marrana!" [Goddamn your children, slut!] (221) when she whips him in the face. Neither she nor her husband express a desire for children, which is hardly surprising given her lack of femininity and consequent lack of maternal instinct. As Tasio tells Ibarra when speaking of Doña Consolación's plans to have Elías arrested, "La mujer, para poder ser buena, necesita haber sido siquiera una vez ó doncella ó madre" [To be good, a woman must have been at one time either a virgin or a mother] (136). Like the sacristán mayor, this character's villainy appears against the gauge of a child, but with the difference here of an absent rather than a murdered child. The barrenness of her body reveals a basic lack of human feeling in her psyche. It is telling that the final description of her in the epilogue describes her as a drunk who frightens girls, old women, and children. For her targets are what she might have been, who she could have become, and, of particular importance here, the Propagandist instrument for measuring moral responsibility. Likewise, the scene of Sisa's torture offers a tantalizing dichotomy of the woman who could not be good, due to her childlessness and the

woman who wished only to be a good mother. Sisa has gone insane because colonialism denies her being, her sense of self as a mother, through the loss of her sons and her own arrest. Doña Consolación's beating of Sisa thus functions as a denial of goodness as embodied in feminine behavior and maternal feeling. Unable to conceive, Doña Consolación is as much a moral dead end as she is a biological one.

Alongside these questions of maternity arise ones concerning paternity and the inheritance of colonialism. Even while the women probably cannot conceive, their Peninsular husbands should not escape scrutiny as incapable of putting down lasting roots in the colony. Impotence already exists as a precedence in the *Noli* through the case of Capitán Tiago whose much prayed-for María Clara turns out to be the daughter of P. Dámaso. In the case of Don Tiburcio, impotence takes on an added aspect of denying the possibility of a Spanish future in the colony through immigration, intermarriage, and the creation of a mestizo class. Given Don Tiburcio's poor health and the description of how his experience in the marriage bed ages him by about ten years, a lack of off-spring is as much in keeping with his weak personality as it is with Doña Victorina's age. While the *alférez* is undeniably stronger than Don Tiburcio, his childlessness nevertheless reinforces an image of colonial sterility, of the inability to bring about the true joining of the interests of colonized and colonizer.

Behind this vision of barren relations between Peninsular and india rests a pattern of failed mestizaje. While the presence of mestizo characters in the novels show a past history of interracial relations, successful reproduction comes to a distinct end. Ibarra appears as the great-grandson of a Peninsular, but this mixed blood connotes a kind of original sin rather than a positive inheritance. His Spanish ancestor hung himself on the land that would become the family estate, and his grandfather made enemies whose descendants plot against Ibarra. For María Clara, a fair complexion and nearly blonde hair hint at an illegitimacy that her mother's letters confirm, bringing her under P. Salví's control. The other mestizo is notably Juanito Peláez in the *Fili*, and though he lives and marries, his hunchback and mediocrity suggest a general decline.

In the end, a lack of offspring facilitates the eventual separation of Peninsular husband and native wife, dissolving the unviable metaphor of marriage as colonialism. The question remains, however, of what the Philippines will then be like, since the abandoned wife remains as an allegory of the country. Considering that the hopes of a Spanish future in Ultramar pass away in the *Noli* with Linares'

entombment in Paco Cemetery, it is hardly suprising that advancement for the *alférez* means a return to Spain without his wife who is left to rampage alone. The Epilogue of the *Noli* still presents Don Tiburcio and Doña Victorina as married, but he spends most days at home, dentureless, while she literally holds the reins as she has decided to drive her own coach for the sake of fashion. With her worsening eyes, she has many accidents as if to put into further doubt the notion of her governance. By the start of the *Fili*, Don Tiburcio has already run away, and he only appears toward the end of the novel as he flees yet again.

While the Spanish husbands' retreat indicates the inevitable dissolution of the colonial state, it does not offer a paradigm of how that state will end. The manner of separation for the couples depends on the unattractiveness of an allegory of the colony, and so, rather than indicating that independence is unavoidable even without revolution, the husbands' lack of authority and the extreme behavior of the women problematize a goal of freedom. The humorous descriptions of their marriages uses absurdity to reveal the weaknesses of the colonial state, demonstrating the impotence of those who are supposedly in power and challenging their right to govern. Even though the melodrama influences character description, satire dominates here as a two-edged sword that both makes tyrants appear assailable while raising the question of why they have not yet fallen. Are the *ilustrado* heroes too naïve or too weak? Is an ingenue too frail an allegory? These good characters remain on the fringes. Ultimately, Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación represent indigenous tyrants all too ready to take the place of the foreign ones. Thus a Propagandist attempt to clarify its own project of imagining community identity arises through juxtaposition with the egocentric outlooks and falsified identities of Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación. In refusing to admit their indigenous pasts even as they attempt to solidify their status through exploiting others, these characters act as a warning against an anarchy made possible through the absence of a moral consciousness.

## Conclusion

It is certainly intriguing that the end of the marriage between colonizer and colonized should occur at the close of the *Noli* and before the start of the *Fili*. That Doña Consolación does not appear

in the sequel has a certain logical basis in plot as the setting is the city or Doña Victorina's territory. The *Fili* also has a greater emphasis on the colonial machine with scenes showing the Captain General and the friars instead of native oppressors. On a thematic level, Doña Consolación's absence makes sense in that, with Sisa's death, she can no longer participate in the bad woman/good mother dichotomy presented in the torture scene. Doña Consolación's absence in the *Fili* has the additional effect of taking Doña Victorina out of the pattern that announced their joint allegorical status, reducing the latter to an individual. In their place, an emerging pattern of ingenues who die or disappear takes the spotlight. And although seemingly hopeless, these sacrifices open up possibilities for patriotism on a more spiritual plain.

In the generations following the publication of the novels, new versions have arisen due to political changes that make certain characters more attractive and others less relevant. Each version offers a new figuring of allegories, eliminating those that do not fit the new criteria. After all, the statue of Madre Filipinas near the monument that commemorates the site of Rizal's execution could only come into existence as a viable allegory with the exit of Madre España as voiced in the colonial exclamation which preceded "Hija Filipinas." In the 1951 film *Sisa*, a post-Commonwealth revision empowers the nationalist mother figure, allowing her to take revenge despite her insanity as Sisa herself stabs the sacristán mayor. In a sense, this movie observes melodramatic peripety more closely, providing an end that Rizal's novels cannot and do not offer as pre-nationalist works since Basilio fails to revenge his mother and brother. While the creative possibilities of rewriting Rizal has its own merits, it should nevertheless call attention to different manners of resolving the problem of excess. A concentration on the main plot or on a particular subplot may tighten a story, but it should also lead to remembering what later authors have left out, such as native culpability in the forgetting of nativeness. In contrast to a Propagandist project of identifying the Philippines, allegories exist in the *Noli* for a colony that has lost its soul.

### Notes

1. Directed by Nonon Padilla with music by Ryan Cayabyab, the musical ran from 10 February through 5 March 1995 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

2. Guerrero refers to the *alférez* as the Commanding Officer, which is what he is as the highest ranking officer in the town. Lieutenant, however, is a more precise translation.

3. A notable exception to this rule and one from which my analysis derives in great part is Vicente Rafael's article (1984, 110-40), Language, identity, and gender in Rizal's *Noli*. E. San Juan, Jr. has a section on this character in his article in *Himalay* with the intriguing but unexplained title of "Doña Consolación: In Quest of a First Lady" and "Toward Rizal" (Melendrez-Cruz 1991, 546, 522-58).

4. The endnotes of the Centennial edition recognize in Doña Victorina the figure of a Doña Agustina Medel who, despite her marriage to a Spaniard named Coca, tried to help the Calamba tenants in their lawsuit (6, note 44).

5. Pura Santillan-Castreñe (1960, 44) reasons that Rizal "might have copied his fiction character from life, tingeing the terrible cruelties that he saw committed by his model with the seething hatred which found indignant expression through his pen." The Centennial edition endnotes do not point at any particular person as the inspiration for Doña Consolación, instead viewing her as the archetypal campfollower. It states clearly that "Es un tipo sin educación y sin cultura y de costumbres y moralidad relajadas que por desgracia existe en todas partes" (Apéndices 33, note 11). That the Centennial edition does not come up with a name as the basis for Doña Consolación is indicative of how extreme her character has appeared since the editors took great care in identifying as many individuals as possible. For the purpose of this discussion, it should be noted that her situation is a particular metaphor that does not extend to all native wives of the colonial military. Thus near the end of the *Noli*, the narrator mentions the new *alférez*' wife, saying "no es la Medusa, es una joven: *alférez* y desgraciado no son sinónimos" [it isn't the Medusa, it's a young woman: lieutenant and unlucky are not synonymous] (347).

6. In Spanish, singular feminine nouns beginning in a stressed /a/ require the masculine articles "un" and "el."

7. Cañamaque (1882, 2), a one-time official in the Philippines, published several travelogues to introduce the colony in the metropole. They are filled with comic anecdotes attesting to the indolence and incomprehensible behavior of the natives, sprinkled with Tagalog and Chavacano phrases that he defines for the Spanish reader: While his criticism of the clergy did earn a ban on *Recuerdos de Filipinas*, he claims to respect the early missionaries. His views on the friars do not, however, gain him an ally in Rizal who exhibits a distrust of the Spaniard's work. As an outsider, Cañamaque cannot write a true costumbrismo, and he is suspect as an anthropologist since Rizal accuses him of inventing phrases not actually in usage in the community he claims to describe. It is not surprising then to find an introduction that Cañamaque wrote for *Memorias sobre Filipinas y Joló* in which he invokes the banning of minority languages in Spain to advocate the use of Spanish in Ultramar. Spanish would be essential, he writes, to overcome "el ingénito espíritu de inerte resistencia y aun de hostilidad" [the natural spirit of inert resistance and even hostility] toward European civilization. His political views, though Liberal, are in sharp contrast to a Propagandist desire for equal rights through the ability to use the language of government.

8. As part of a feminist revisionist project, Lilia Q. Santiago considers Doña Consolación in a more positive light as having "tamed the *alférez* and the guardia civil." According to Santiago, Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación are carnivalesque characters that both express and challenge the absurdity of the colonial experience (Flores 1993, 44).

9. Doña Consolación's linguistic troubles derive from a proper pronunciation of Tagalog. Like most Philippine languages, Tagalog has no labial-dental sounds such as /f/ and /v/ while vowels such as /i/ and /e/ tend to open up and become interchangeable.

10. A reverse situation comes into focus in the *Fili* when Isagani steals the lamp with the bomb hidden in it. Even though he loses Paulita to Juanito Peláez, he nevertheless holds onto a simultaneously romantic and moral vision from which he derives his sense of identity.

### References

- Cañamaque, Francisco de. 1882. Prólogo by Patricio de la Escosura. *Memorias sobre Filipinas y Joló*. Madrid: Librería de los Señores Simón y Osler.
- Dizon, Alma J. 1994. Mothers, morals, and power in the autobiography of Juan Francisco Manzano. *Revista de estudios hispanos*. University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras.
- Flores, Patrick D. 1993. Of women in Philippine popular cinema, or why Lea Salonga is sorry for not being perfect. *Diliman Review* 41:3-4, 41-48.
- Joaquin, Nick. 1955. The novels of Rizal: An appreciation. *Kathá I*: 262-72.
- Melendrez-Cruz, Patricia, et al., ed. 1991. *Himalay: Kalipunan ng mga pag-aaral kay José Rizal*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines.
- Rafael, Vicente. 1984. Language, identity, and gender in Rizal's *Noli*. *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 18 (Winter):110-40.
- Santillan-Castrence, Pura. 1960. *The women characters in Rizal's novels*. Manila: Regal Publishing Co.