

**Foundational Fiction and National Identity in the Philippines:**

**Reflections on Race in José Rizal's *Noli Me Tángere***

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**ABSTRACT:** This work analyses the colonial racial discourses that are apparent in the novel *Noli Me Tángere* by Filipino revolutionary José Rizal. The essay proposes that the novel should be viewed through the same lens as that of a Latin American “foundational fiction,” as defined by Doris Sommer, as the repetition of various romantic tropes that plays with the power dynamic between the male enlightened revolutionary and the passive native female prize. In conjunction with Sommer’s theory, I apply Deleuze and Guattari’s three-point definition of minor literature, namely related to language, political intent, and audience, thereby drawing out the political language of the novel, as well as connecting this Philippine novel, originally written in Spanish, with other “Latin American” works. Through the application of contemporary theories of nationhood, this essay seeks to discuss questions of race in the late nineteenth-century Philippines by examining the mimetic nature of the novel to the life of Rizal. Additionally, through these comparative modes of analysis, the essay also proposes to challenge the boundaries of what it means to be a Hispanic novel in the context of Philippine literature in the twenty-first century.

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*“Deseando tu salud, que es la nuestra, y buscando el mejor tratamiento, haré contigo lo que con sus enfermos los antiguos: exponíanlos en las gradas del templo, para que cada persona que fuese a invocar a la divinidad les propusiese en remedio”*

-José Rizal

In Western academia, studies of Hispanic literature from the last decades of the nineteenth century tend to focus mainly on the independence of Latin American countries and the consolidation of these nations. However, there remains an intellectual gap with respect to the Philippines and how it could possibly fit within the hispanophone independence narrative, which is so representative of the entire century’s romantic ideals—the Philippines should also be viewed in the context of this foundational myth, while simultaneously being understood as a product of the same problems of colonization and national identity as Latin America. This gap is not merely an oversight. As John D. Blanco has stated in his comparison of José Martí with José Rizal “Latin America’s intellectuals have always maintained a respectful distance from the Philippines, for both obvious and less-obvious reasons” (95), while not all of academia has abandoned the Philippines and its authors, the studies that are done rarely establish a dialogue with other Hispanic literatures of the same era.<sup>1</sup>

José Rizal was a Filipino writer and activist widely considered one of the most important writers of his nation. Rizal wrote the majority of his works, such as *Noli Me Tángere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891), in Spanish, focusing on the same themes as his Latin American colleagues and employing the same romanticist aesthetics of the time. Why, then, is he not considered a more integral part of the Hispanic tradition in literary studies? Carmen Hsu affirms that, “[w]hile the influence of Asia on the early modern Spanish psyche was significant it has been largely overlooked. Scholars of Spanish literature and history [...] thus far mostly focused on America.” (349)

It could be noted that the emphasis in Hispanic studies on the Americas underscores a strong connection to the expression of Americanism.<sup>2</sup> As Doris Sommer has explained in her studies of nineteenth-century Latin-American romance novels, from the nineteenth century onwards, one begins to see the articulation of a new form of nationalism stemming from these “foundational fictions.”<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon may have been a reaction to the territorial as well as political expansion of North America, whose own academic discourse was trying to reconcile the same paradigms of self-determination and self-representation as Central and South America. To this effect, there exists a substantial literary corpus from the Philippines, which Hispanic scholars could benefit from, if only the literature of the former colony would be read in the same manner as its Latin-American counterparts.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the existing literature about *Noli Me Tángere*, by considering the novel both as a foundational fiction in the Philippines and an example of minor literature in the broader Hispanic tradition.<sup>4</sup> I will analyze the discourse on race and “*mestizaje*” in the novel, focusing on the conception of the Philippine nation and the limits of the act of mimesis<sup>5</sup> of the colonial subject, while exploring the fictionalization of the author-character. I will argue that Rizal employs the

novel and its characters as a launching ground to disseminate his performative discourse against the pedagogy of the Spaniards and to fight for a mixed nation.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Writer and the Revolutionary**

In certain regards, the life of Rizal largely mirrors that of the protagonist of the novel—an almost mythical *mestizo* man who studied at some of the most important centers of Europe in the nineteenth century. He was a doctor, philosopher, writer, revolutionary, and to this day Rizal is considered the “father” of the nation for many Filipinos. According to Austin Coates, “he was the man who single-[handedly] awakened the Philippine people to national and political consciousness” (XXV). In this respect, Rizal is to the Filipinos what Simón Bolívar is to Venezuela and José Martí to Cuba. It is precisely for this reason that Blanco writes that, “[N]o conception or discussion of national consciousness in the Philippines and Cuba is possible without somehow identifying their place in their respective countries, or citing the stirring words of their literary and political writings. Both shared a series of ghostly parallels” (93).

In his study of the connections and similarities between these three intellectuals, Blanco broadens the discourse on nationalism and demonstrates the influence that Simón Bolívar had in the writings of both Martí and Rizal. As such, he notes that, “with the thought of Simón Bolívar [...] both Rizal and Martí saw themselves as the problematic inheritors of an unfinished project that began with the Latin American wars of independence in 1810” (“Bastards” 94). I agree with Blanco’s recognition that the works of Rizal function as a “foundational fiction” (“Frontier” 263). That is, these very same romance narratives have informed and built the base from which one could imagine and construct a Philippine national identity. As Sommer has stated regarding the romance of Latin America, “histories during the foundational period tend to be more projective than retrospective, more erotic than data driven. Their genre is romance, which is itself a marriage of historical allegory and sentimentality” (Sommer 84).

There is no other romance novel more celebrated in the Philippine context than *Noli Me Tángere*. Originally published in Berlin, it is the first installment of two polemic novels that openly denounced the frailocracy.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the novel sparked the flames of revolution in the colony, leading eventually to Rizal’s execution (Ikehata 180). The plot of the novel centers on the *mestizo*<sup>8</sup> Filipino protagonist, Crisóstomo Ibarra, who returns to his native land after six years of studies in Europe to learn more about the death of his father. Upon returning, Ibarra plans to marry María Clara, a childhood friend who is also a *mestiza*, and construct a primary school. However, in typical romance fashion, these plans encounter difficulty when the local priest Father Dámaso conspires against Ibarra, causing a series of conflicts that ends with the protagonist going into exile. As one finds out later in the novel, Father Dámaso is both the illegitimate father of María Clara and the friar who was responsible for unearthing Ibarra’s father’s grave. Thus, the friar’s main motivation for causing Ibarra such problems becomes clear. He wants to stop Ibarra, a racially mixed man, from marrying his daughter.

As Ikehata notes, “while the novel was written in the form of a tale of the tragic love of the principal characters, Crisóstomo Ibarra and María Clara, what Rizal is really depicting is the cancer of Philippine society that no one before him had dared to portray” (180). Undoubtedly, as Sommer argues, the employment of this romance narrative

assumes the form of “an analogy, commonplace in political philosophy, between the nation and the family and, by extension, between ideal history and (domestic) romance” (84). Thus, the relationship between Crisóstomo Ibarra and María Clara can be seen as the desire of the nation to unite itself, that is to say, the union of the synecdochal man/people, with the stereotypical female protagonist as representative of the motherland. Just as the nation depends on obstacles to find unity and symbolic cohesion, so too does a romance fiction, where the trials and failures of the individual constitute the collectivity of the people. *Noli* serves as a direct criticism of the colonial state by referencing other classical nation-building texts, and by emphasizing race as an expression of a socially accepted hegemony. To this end, *Noli* exemplifies the foundational fiction that the Philippines needed to conceptualize itself as a “temporal national-space,” from which the nation could begin to define itself.<sup>9</sup> Bhabha addressed this discrepancy when he stated, “[h]istorians transfixed on the event and origins of the nation never ask, and political theorists possessed of the ‘modern’ totalities of the nation [...] never pose, the essential question of the representation of the nation as a temporal process” (204). In this respect, one must ask how it would be possible to conceptualize the perceptions of race and identity in contemporary life in the Philippines without properly analyzing the literary constituents of this national identity from its inception?

### **A Political Novel in Disguise**

Aside from the romantic plot, by having written the novel in Spanish instead of his native tongue, Rizal produced what Deleuze and Guattari, in their extrapolations of Kafka, define as a minor literature. The three points of their essay is as follows: first, a minor literature is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language (1777). The use of this language is marked by the impossibility of not using it, both as a form of protest and an expression of nationalism. The second point is that, unlike other literatures, minor literature is completely different: because it exists in a narrow space, where individual matters are immediately plugged in the political (1778). The third point is that everything has a collective value, thus everything the solitary writer says already constitutes a communal action (1778). With this framework, a novel like *Noli*, written by a colonial subject, with the purpose of propagating the *voz* of lettered Filipinos, is by definition a minor literature, but at the same time a foundational text in that it projects an imagined community.<sup>10</sup> Bhabha states, “the minority does not simply confront the pedagogical [...] it interrogates its object [...] insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidarity” (223). Thus, *Noli*'s duality, as both a foundational romance in the Philippines and at the same time a minor literature for its political content, signifies to the reader that Rizal, both writer and colonial subject, understood that the only viable way to claim a national identity under the parameters of the colonial system was through fiction.

In order to discuss this novel and the Philippines more deeply, it is worth examining the relationship these Pacific islands had with their metropolis in Europe since the very beginning. Unlike the territories in Latin America, where the majority of early encounters resulted in bloody and violent conquests, the colonization of the Philippines was organized much more strategically by the crown. The process of

colonizing the Philippines began with the Legazpi expedition in 1565, when the Spaniards had already held control of vast American territories for several decades (Phelan 8). Phelan states, “[i]n his written instructions for the Adelantado Legazpi, who commanded the expedition, Philip II envisaged a bloodless pacification of the archipelago” (8). It was at this moment when the legacy of the frailocracy began with a motto of conquering through religion in place of the sword although this did not imply that the clergy was not accompanied by armed forces (Phelan 9). It is important to clarify that, although the conquest was not completely peaceful (quite the contrary), the *barangays* system in the islands precluded many uprisings by the natives that were comparable in scale to those in Latin America.<sup>11</sup> The inherent contradictions of this pacified conquest resonated three hundred years later in Rizal’s politics, especially in his negative attitude toward armed revolt. In agreement with Setsuho Ikehata, Eugenio Matibag affirms that, “a Philippine revolution, in Rizal’s view would be unsuccessful and yet inevitable” (250), which is why he was reluctant to participate when he wrote this first novel. Perhaps Rizal was perceptive of the *barangays* mentality that permeated in the island culture all the way through the nineteenth century, or perhaps it was because of his own *ilustrado*<sup>12</sup> status that Rizal fought against the ideas of an armed revolution.

Such a counter revolutionary stance is especially noted in the Philippine Revolution in 1896, in which “Rizal’s work inspired but which he was in fact opposed to, knowing it to be premature and inadequately organized” (Coates xxvii). Here, the similarities between the author Rizal and the character Ibarra stand out, as this pacified revolution is also represented in the novel through Ibarra’s plan for the construction of the school in the town of San Diego. The construction of this school represents an initiative to develop the colony and Ibarra is the ideal colonial subject—one who promotes education in place of violent uprising. Rizal, speaking through Ibarra, sees a true modern [Western] scientific education, as opposed to a religious one, as the only viable method of sustaining the people’s intellect. For both writer and character, the construction of an institution of knowledge on native lands was not acquiescence to pacified conquest, but an intellectual protest that symbolized the consolidation of a national consciousness. In the case of Rizal and other *ilustrados*, these ideas were conceived in European centers such as Madrid, Paris and Berlin. Vicente Rafael explains, “they [the *ilustrados*] saw the friars as forces of reaction [...] for the friars regarded Filipinos as inferiors to Spaniards, liberalism and learning as threats to the power of the church, and the *ilustrados* themselves as subversives” (595). For the friars, this subversive education was the vocalization of any perceived form of challenge. Thus, in the first dinner scene where Ibarra recently arrives from Europe and is asked for his opinion of the Europeans, the friars are agitated as he responds. Ibarra states:

¡Notables! Lo más notable es el lamentable atraso de los europeos y su orgullo inconmensurable. Sienten un soberano desprecio por los otros pueblos [...] son tan ignorantes como ellos y aún mas desgraciados. La naturaleza y los hombres los oprimen al mismo tiempo. Ya quisieran gozar de la libertad y la abundancia de los países semisalvajes. (Rizal 38)

Clearly this harsh critique of the Europeans and their colonial projects points out shared deficiencies between both parties, equalizing the conquerors and the conquered.

Yet unbeknownst to Ibarra, it is a critique that he would never have been able to articulate had it not been for his very own European education. In this respect, education serves as one of the few outlets through which an *indio*<sup>13</sup> could project his antagonism. However, as in many cases, the repercussion for such critiques is suppression by the pedagogical racial discourse. This is evident in the way the Franciscan friar responds to Ibarra's opinion, "la culpa no la tenéis vosotros, sino quien os consiente que vayáis a Europa a pervertiros y a aprender disparates. No son vuestros cerebros los mas a propósito para comprender la cultura europea" (38). In this exchange, it is clear that the friar's racial retort is intended to discredit Ibarra's observations, proposing the status of race over reason. In this regard, the fact that Rizal and his colleagues have traveled to Europe, taken advantage of the "perverse" education, and used it afterward for their discretion was in many ways the most peaceful and effective form of challenge to the *frailocracy*.

### **On Race and Education**

The trope of education as the key to peacefully overcoming the "deficiencies" of race persisted deeply throughout the novel. Very early in the text, Ibarra has a flashback to a conversation with an old priest who gave him some insightful advice, which would inform his whole childhood: "...no olvides que si el saber es patrimonio de la humanidad [...] en los países que vas a visitar puedes aumentar considerablemente el caudal de tus conocimientos y adquirir la ilustración conveniente para ser útil a tu país. Los europeos vienen aquí en busca de oro, id vosotros a Europa, a buscar el oro de la ciencia" (Rizal 65). By comparison, this priest was one of the better understanding representatives of the clergy, but his advice was typical in that it implied the superiority of the Western episteme over that of the East. Therefore, in carrying out the construction of this school, Ibarra is implicitly realizing both the national project of self-determination and the colonial project of imposing a foreign form of thought. This preference for, and importation of Western knowledge brings about the paradoxical dilemma of colonial *eurocentrism*. It must be said that while Ibarra's intentions were good, in practice he became the extension and disseminator of European ideology, which he obviously prefers over indigenous knowledge. On the other hand, from a meta-textual perspective, this very same ideology could be perceived in the ways in which Rizal has chosen to exercise his subjectivity. With disregard to the issues of pragmatism, by employing a Spanish-language Castilian romance novel as the tool of protest over armed conflict, Rizal implicated a future in which no resolution could be found without a syncretic culture and people. Romances are predicated on the conjoining of two entities, and so too does Rizal project this concept onto the Philippine nation.

The problem with *eurocentrism*, especially for men such as Rizal and characters such as Ibarra, is the limits of the mimetic act of colonial subjects. As displayed in the novel, it is not a question of the subject's capacity to educate oneself or to behave like one's colonizers because no amount of imitation can change the subject's race. Notions of value and truth are inextricably tied to the irrationality of race. In this sense, the colonial subject's aspiration to the ideals of the hegemonic State, well-intended or not, could never fully be realized—hispanization<sup>14</sup> in itself has a limit.

Another manner of articulating this *eurocentrism*, in terms preference for a cultural center, would be to question the collective Asian gaze towards the West in the nineteenth century as opposed to China to define itself. This referential shift, in the colonial context, is especially aided by ideological dissemination of the church. In the scene of *El sermón*, Father Dámaso gives a long speech about the importance of religious texts and the life of saints, while implicitly demonizing the Chinese. He states, “[t]odos debíais saber de memoria las santas escrituras, la vida de los santos, y así no tendría yo que predicaros, pecadores; debíais saber cosas tan importantes necesarias como el Padrenuestro [...] que no respetan a los ministros de Dios ¡Como los chinos!” (Rizal 140). This direct critique toward the Chinese, which comes from the mouth of a European, not only disguises itself as didactic religious discourse drawing on the images of good Christians and sinners, but also configures the opposing binaries of Western versus Eastern institutions into the binary of good vs. evil.

In this chapter, it is not only clear that the Spaniards regard the Asian race as inferior, but also that the Church plays a fundamental role in propagating and enforcing this view. This racial ideology, which is heavily dependent upon caste divisions and economic power, can also be found in Rizal’s other writings. In the essay “Cómo se gobiernan las Filipinas,” Rizal states, “[l]os extranjeros, entre los cuales ponemos en primera línea a los chinos, se ríen de todo lo que pasa y aprovechan las faltas y defectos de gobernados y gobernantes para utilizarlos. Son los mas felices...” (11). To speak of the Chinese as an other, a separate race that also takes advantage of the colonial situation in the Philippines, in a negative tone, is to further alienate the Chinese from his own cultural sphere. How should the reader come to terms with this distinction when both the Spaniards and the Chinese take part in the exploitation of the islands? For Rizal, European exploitation is indeed preferable.

### **Mimetic Limitations and the Science of Race**

The question of preference and the hopelessness that comes from in the impossibility of the subject to carry out the mimetic act becomes more evident when one sees how Rizal was raised. Coates states, “[a]t the time of his birth, European power and influences in Asia had been growing and spreading for more than three hundred years [...] [t]he real capitals of East Asia were London, Paris, Amsterdam, and Madrid” (xxv-xxvi). In this context one is inclined to ask how an Asian subject would perceive him or herself in seeing their world and cultured discredited? On one hand, one would imagine it to be similar to how the civilizations of the Americas may have felt upon seeing their homeland exploited with the arrival of the Europeans. But on the other hand, it is also quite dissimilar due to the long history of trade that Asia had with Europe even before 1492.

Luis Duno Gottberg has stated that, during the end of the nineteenth century, positivist thought and social Darwinism had pushed scientific racism, trying to justify the subjugation and extermination of what Europeans considered biologically inferior races (22). This “science” as Marguerite Fisher noted, propagated through publications such as “*Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*” (1853-55) by Count Arthur de Gobineau in Paris, *Hereditary Genius* (1869) and *English Men of Science* (1874) by Sir Francis Galton in England, and *Ancient Society* (1877) by Lewis Morgan in North America, consolidated and promoted the superiority of the European race in the name of science (259). For

Europeans that took roles in the colonizing enterprises, such as those subscribing to the “White man’s burden” ideology, this phenomenon became the definitive proof they had been waiting for since the fifteenth century. However, for native intellectuals such as Rizal, these publications served as the motivating obstacles he needed to overcome in order to project his own counter discourse by imagining an affluent *mestizo* Philippine nation.

### **Symbols of the Colonial State**

In Blanco’s analysis of a study done by Phelan, he summarizes the thesis with three terms: Hispanization, Christianization and Philippinization,<sup>15</sup> stating how this process has always been partial (“Frontier” 12). When one considers *Noli*, in this light, it becomes more clear that the construction of the school demonstrates the effectiveness of the ideological apparatus in reproducing itself, through the three above-mentioned processes, which are: cultural conversion, religious conversion, and self-realization with the new identity. As Bhabha suggested in his explanation of this process, the national project depends directly on the interpolation of the people (145). For Ibarra, this nationhood is achieved via hispanization, at least on the intellectual level, and what better way to interpolate citizens into this system than institutionalized education? Despite his good intentions, Ibarra is still acting under the same mentality of cultural productivity shared by many other leaders of the nineteenth century. As in the case of Latin America, where Sommer states that the nations needed “civilizers, founding fathers, [and] not fighters,” so too does the Philippines need developers of the mind (86). Unfortunately, as the novel unfolds, all of Ibarra’s plans are dashed. If the only way to develop and save his homeland from Spanish tyranny is through education, what does it mean when the plans are ruined in the narrative?

To continue with Sommer’s idea about the nation’s formation, it is important for the narrative that the national project is destined to fail, which in this case is exemplified by the marriage of the colonial subjects (86). In the novel, during the school’s construction scene in the novel, a derrick falls and kills a native. In this rather obvious metaphor, the edifice and its materials represent the physical hand of the hispanizing institution, which kills the native. This apparatus of the state was capable of taking indigenous life (livelihood) even without having been completed. During the scene, the mayor states, “¡El muerto no es sacerdote ni español! ¡Hay que festejar su salvación de usted! ¡El muerto no es más que un indio! ¡Qué siga la fiesta!” (Rizal *Noli* 150).

“Sobre la indolencia de los Filipinos”, which Rizal wrote for the magazine *La solidaridad* in 1890 and is, perhaps, the defining example of his work, contests the injustices of the state (Fisher 262). In this essay, which has many similarities to “Nuestra América” by Martí, Rizal retells the history of the Philippines in causative terms to explain the decadent state of his homeland. This indolence, Rizal argues, is the result of a long history of colonial rule rather than predetermined characteristics of race—contrary to what the literature of the time suggested.

In going to the first scene in the novel where all the guests are situated in the house of captain Tiago, a rich native living in Manila, one sees how the ambiguity of race is articulated from the very beginning. A young, blonde Spaniard who recently arrived in the islands and has yet to understand the colony remarks, “creo que estamos en casa de



un indio, estas señoritas...” upon seeing the young native girls in a high class setting (Rizal *Noli* 26). Because he is new, he is excused for his insolence and is given an explanation, “[b]ah ¡No sea usted tan aprensivo! Santiago no se considera como indio, y además no está presente” (Rizal *Noli* 26). This rather unspecified explanation as to how Tiago could “pass” his native status to obtain the title of “honorary European” outlines the complexity of the racial hierarchy. It could be understood that because of his wealth and influence, Tiago is considered hispanized enough to no longer be trapped under the indigenous classification.

The stratification of the *other* was not limited to the Philippines, if one were to take a panoramic view of other European colonies through Asia. Although Rizal was writing specifically about his homeland, his message was applicable to all of Asia. It is because of this that Fisher considers him as the Asian apostle of the Enlightenment, for it is the first time that “[t]he postulates of Western liberalism and the European Enlightenment were expressed [...] by an Asian, as a creed for an Asian nation.” From this perspective, Rizal becomes the embodiment of neocolonialist ideals (264). Additionally, unlike the works of his Latin American counterparts where the plot revolves around the failed relations between a Spaniard and an indigenous subject, Rizal’s foundational text revolves around the trials of two *mestizo* subjects.

As expected in most romances, this narrative was never destined to succeed without some form of difficulty as Terrenal points out in the novel, “María Clara stood for the Phillipines.” (2) So to apply Sommer’s theory that is used for Latin American Romances, the marriage to María Clara is symbolic to the unification of the nation. Sommer states: “She is the object of desire. Whether she becomes rhetorically synonymous with the land, as she often does, or with the ‘naturally’ submissive and loving races and classes the hero will elevate through his affection, woman is that which he must possess in order to achieve harmony and legitimacy” (85). In this sense, Sommer affirms that the role of the female protagonist is to personify the land, without which it is impossible to unify the nation. But as I have indicated previously, differently from other novels, this narrative asks who the benefactor of this impossible romance is supposed to be because both characters are *mestizos*.

### **A Father’s Dilemma and a Fear of Pigment**

Toward the end of the novel, the reader learns why Father Dámaso has such resentment towards Ibarra’s family. In a conversation with María Clara, he reveals his rationale, stating, “¿Cómo podía permitir que te casases con un mestizo para verte esposa infeliz y madre desgraciada?” (Rizal *Noli* 253). Clearly, from the perspective of Dámaso, his hostility toward Ibarra for being a *mestizo* is justified as long as it is in defense of his daughter’s happiness. Yet his rationale is inherently flawed, because his daughter is also the product of a taboo relationship. Therefore, in order to elevate her status, he thinks María Clara must marry a Spaniard; she must marry whiteness. As Duno Gottberg mentioned in his study of mestizaje in Cuba, “la mezcla racial tendía a ‘mejorar’ o ‘empeorar’ la prole, dentro de un continuo que se aproxima o aleja de lo blanco y con ello de la civilización” (22). Thus, just as the colonial subject is not meant to have autonomy in choosing his fate, the character of María Clara was never destined to be united with another *mestizo*.

## ***Nomenclatura: aproximaciones a los estudios hispánicos 4 (2015)***

The fear of mixing and the fear of a colored man's sexuality in relation to light-skinned women are prevalent in the Western imaginary and literature. Frantz Fanon has tried to come to terms with this irrationality in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). In the chapter "The Man of Color and the White Woman," Fanon underlines the psychological processes that take place when a dark-skinned man is united with a white woman. He quotes another work in saying:

Out of the blackest part of my soul [...] surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white [...] who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love [...] her love takes me onto the novel road that leads to total realization... I marry white culture, white beauty [...] when my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine. (45)

While the situation may be similar, can one really say that Ibarra also suffers the same inferiority complex with María Clara? Is he not already assimilated into Europeaness by his education, customs and wealth, or was María his last step towards total hispanization? For father Dámaso, this seems to be the case; even when both are *mestizo*, her partial whiteness is still somehow perceived as more valuable.

The mentality that "everyone climbs up towards whiteness and light and is engulfed by a single, monolithic notion of what it means to be human," was not only appropriate to the friar, it was righteously defensible (Sardar xix). In Chapter 34 one sees a glimpse of how this systematic racism is internalized by the father in his argument. Dámaso states, "[s]i los educabas les preparabas un triste porvenir; se harían enemigos de la religión y los verías ahorcados, expatriados; si los dejabas en la ignorancia, los verías tiranizados y degradados" (253). As evident in this scene, Dámaso's apparent concern is not only for his daughter's happiness but also for the possible grandchildren who would be illegitimate citizens. Citizenship to the Spanish crown is thus not only a legal matter, but also one of cultural and social inclusion. It is precisely this type of marriage that would determine the existence of a new class of citizens where the sons of both nations would enjoy Spanish power. Sommer concludes that, "part of the romance's national project, perhaps the main part, is to produce legitimate citizens" (86). Therefore, by impeding this marriage, Dámaso is consciously making the decision to impede this new class of citizen, which would, in turn, secure both Spanish influence and his own prestige within the system.

### **Imagining a New State**

The parallels between author and protagonist also arise in the manner that Rizal and his *ilustrado* friends confront racial ideology. Quintin Terrenal states,<sup>16</sup> "[t]his ideology projects the need of subjecting the *indio* to the process of becoming hispanized first, in order to be able to transform him thereby into a Filipino" (his emphasis 4) What this suggests is that the new nation and its subjects must in some way make use of the resources made available by the current state in order to imagine itself as a separate entity. Fuchs also asserts that, "[the mimetic act] involves deliberate representations of sameness," whereby the subjects voluntarily partake in cultural interpolation (3). With

this understanding, both Rizal and Ibarra become prime examples of mimetic actors who accomplish this imitation well. However, for Ibarra, this mimesis is severely challenged and denied when the promise of marriage is no longer a reality.

This entire process of assimilation and rejection ultimately represents Spain's denial of a Filipino identity. True to the tenants of foundational fictions, the fact that the couple does not manage to marry signals the grim future of the nation that all true nationalists must avoid in real life. Furthermore, the denial of a *mestizo* union with the expectancy of *mestizo* children is a clear message of the state in regards to the birth of an affluent class within the colony. Rizal knew that this was one of the main issues that plagued his homeland because, unlike Latin America, the Philippines never had a substantial *criolla* class that could successfully rebel against Spanish rule (Anderson 4-5).

The ending to the novel summarizes many of the issues that continued to plague the colony. By having Ibarra exiled, not only does Rizal allude to his own future situation, but he also makes a statement about how the *frailocracy* condemns intellectuals who reside within his homeland. Furthermore, by having María Clara (symbol of the homeland) sent to the convent (marriage with God), Rizal forever inscribes her role as saint like figure in the Philippines.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, by reading *Noli Me Tángere* as a foundational fiction, one sees how Rizal has constructed and projected a narrative of the Filipino nation through the romance drama of Ibarra and María Clara. With the character Ibarra, Rizal is able to achieve his goal of expressing anti-revolutionary ideals. Similarly, to romances in Latin America, this narrative defines itself through a central conflict that revolves around the family. Race becomes the leitmotif through the novel and is positioned as the determining factor of the various conflicts that ensue. As much in the novel as in real life, race ultimately determines both socioeconomic advantages and self-identity. Thus to impede the marriage of two *mestizo* characters, which signifies the rise of a new class, Rizal points out the hopelessness and corruption that are rampant in the colony. It is because of this political nature of the piece that it is necessary to analyze the novel as a minor literature as well as a foundational work. It is foundational in the sense that it projects the Filipino identity in terms of hispanization and filipinization, while minor in that it exemplified all three of aspects that Deleuze and Guattari outlined: Hispanization, Christianization and Philipinization. The notions of race and the *mestizo* are further complicated when one considers that the same Western institutions that both Rizal and Ibarra hold so dearly due to their eurocentrism are also responsible for promoting their inherent "inferiority" because of their race. In the novel, this issue is addressed through the construction of the school, which will reproduce the same systems of thought, and where the building itself becomes the instrument that kills a native. Further, just like the novelist Rizal in real life, Ibarra confronts the complexities of mimesis and its limitations in terms of race. This tragic "flaw" of the hero causes both Ibarra's exile and Rizal's determination to contest the ideological parameters imposed on his people. Even though in the second novel Ibarra returns as a revolutionary, the tone of *Noli's* conclusion leaves readers with a sense of condemnation.

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It is no coincidence that *Noli* was both minor and foundational because it represented the emergent minority discourse necessary to incite nationalist sentiments. By analyzing *Noli* through the lens of a foundational romance, when most studies of this kind focus on Latin America, one is able to pull this novel more or less toward the same grounds of study as those of other Hispanic novels of the nineteenth century. This inclusion not only complements the existing literature but also proves the applicability of Sommer's thesis. Moreover, the inclusion of this novel into the Hispanic canon would come at a time when the discourse on transpacific relations is reshaping how these literary productions obscure the lines between, what has been traditionally considered Western literature. Observing the development of race in *El Filibusterismo* (1891), Rizal's sequel to *Noli me Tángere*, vis-à-vis the author's own ideological development will be the focus of future research. This upcoming study will complement my previous work on race in *Noli* through a dialectic relationship with Blanco's scholarship, as well as others scholars who have devoted considerable effort to make sure Rizal's works are known.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Blanco is one of the few critics who have made the connection between José Rizal and other Latin-American writers in his studies. See "Bastards of the Unfinished Revolution," p. 92-114.
- <sup>2</sup> Americanism here refers to the newfound subjectivity that Americans experienced at the turn of century, affirming their distinctiveness from their European counterparts.
- <sup>3</sup> See Sommer in chapter 5 of *Nation and Narration*.
- <sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari define a minor literature as a political work written in a major language that expresses the collective voice of the people. See "What is a Minor Literature?" p. 1777-1782.
- <sup>5</sup> This refers to the performative act of the colonial subject, which threatens the distinction between the conqueror and the conquered. See the introduction of *Mimesis and Empire* by Barbara Fuchs, p. 1-12.
- <sup>6</sup> Bhabha explains that the construction of the nation derives from the liminal space between the pedagogic discourse of the state and the performative act of the people. See p. 209-213.
- <sup>7</sup> This term refers to the colonial bureaucratic system in the Philippines in which major functions of the state are controlled by the church. See Coates, p. 18-29.

<sup>8</sup> Mestizo in the context of the Philippines refers to both Sino-Filipino and Filipino-Spanish mixes. See Phelan, p. 254.

<sup>9</sup> In chapter 8 of *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha describes the articulation of the nation as a temporal process, where different nation-time and spaces collide.

<sup>10</sup> See “Imagined Communities” by Benedict Anderson in *Nationalism* pg. 89-96.

<sup>11</sup> In chapter 1 of *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, Phelan explains that when the Spaniards arrived, they encountered various barangays, or small indigenous groups with rivalries against each other. It is because of these preexisting divisions that there wasn’t any large-scale resistance.

<sup>12</sup> This term refers to a group of polyglot nationalist Filipinos of an emergent class educated in Europe. See Rafael, p. 594.

<sup>13</sup> Under the colonial system of the Philippines any native subject that was not European including mestizos were considered an *indio*. See Phelan, chapter 8, and Phelan, p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> See Phelan, chapter 9.

<sup>15</sup> In *Frontier Constitutions* Blanco makes a summary of Phelan’s thesis, which argues how these three processes constitute colonial politics of the Philippines. See p. 10-14.

<sup>16</sup> This study was based on ideas established previously by Phelan.