7

Are all tyrannies the same? Rebellion against Spanish oppression as a re-enactment of resistance to totalitarianism in Marcos' Philippines

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When Bienvenido Lumbera, a playwright who was imprisoned during Marcos' times, was asked in an interview in 2006 about the never-ending issue of national identity in the Philippines, his answer brought back the topic of colonial resistance:[i]

> In the case of the Philippines, when we talk about national identity, I believe the artist must be aware of the history of his country; specifically the revolutionary history of the Philippines, about what those who fought against Spanish and American colonialism went through. [. . .] What we call the Filipino identity, therefore, is working to assert the freedom of the Filipino people.
>
> (Lumbera 2006)

On the one hand, being an intellectual close to Marxist criticism, Lumbera's statement is linked to Historical Materialism as it conceives history – Philippine history in this case – as a succession of struggles of the oppressed trying to overcome the status quo – first Spanish rule, then American rule, then Japanese rule and finally Philippine authoritarian rule – through confrontation, which will provide a framework to study the phenomenon to be exposed in this chapter: the re-enactment of one present oppression – Martial Law – in theater plays by identifying it to a past oppressor –

Spain – in order to legitimise the present struggle and avoid censorship. It will be done by examining firstly two representations of the Philippine Revolution and then two stagings of García Lorcas’ plays, all during Marcos’ times.

On the other hand, it naturally clashes with postcolonial criticism in its attempt to deconstruct the monolithic imagination of the postcolonial subject, as in this case one oppressor represents all oppressors and one ‘oppressed’ or pretended subaltern represents all of them (Spivak 1987: 197–198). However, as Lisandro Claudio states, it was post-war intellectuals and most especially a generation of Marxist historians who flourished during Marcos’ times, who “combined anti-colonialism with a renewed emphasis on the broader category of ‘the masses’” (Claudio 2013: 48), simplifying the problems of 20th-century Philippines into the narrative of one persisting problem: the struggle of the homogenised Philippine people (without class distinction) against likewise homogenised foreign powers.

The “struggle discourse” is deeply rooted in a country having such difficulty to define a national identity such as the Philippines, with no territorial continuity (it is composed of over 7,000 islands), and in which among the dozens of languages spoken in the archipelago, the majoritarian – Tagalog – was spoken only by around 25% of the population at the turn of 21st century.[ii] The fight against the invader has acquired, then, the status of a founding myth and a focus on *timelessness* in the construction of an uninterrupted tradition to justify an essence, which the Filipino individuals can identify with (Hall 1996: 614). In this case, even if the focus of the narrative is on José Rizal, it could also be traced back to Lapu Lapu defeating Magellan in history books and epics such as *De Mactan a Tirad* by Flavio Zaragoza Cano (1941) continuing to Padre José Burgos, Andrés Bonifacio, Emilio Aguinaldo and a long etcetera of “heroes” committing acts of revolt against foreign powers, whose lives and deaths are celebrated every last Monday of August (National Heroes Day), November 30 (Bonifacio Day) and December 30 (Rizal Day). Marcos used their mythical shadow to lay the foundation for his “New Society”. Paradoxically, the same heroes were also the inspiration of the resistance against Marcos.

Philippine theater scene in 20th century and the enactment of oppression

Since the end of the Spanish colonisation in 1898, theater has constituted an important way of raising social awareness in the Philippines. Spanish drama continued for a few years through the staging of costumbrist plays in official venues, but theater in Tagalog was soon developed and, as Epifanio San Juan stated, “in a language unknown to the Americans, succeeded in launching a series of attacks not only against the occupying power, but also against the capitalists” (San Juan 1974: 5). Therefore, with the use of the autochthonous language and the adoption of ex-colonial genres, as is the case of the *zarzuela* or *sarswela* plays, which reached their greatest success in the Philippines through the works of Severino de los Reyes, Filipinos found a space for self-expression and a vehicle for the construction of identity. According to Bienvenido Lumbera, the *zarzuelas* of de los Reyes succeeded in “keeping with the new self-image of the Filipino resulting from the struggle against the Spaniards and the Americans” (Lumbera and Nograles Lumbera 2005: 88). With *Walang Sugat* (*Not Wounded*, 1902), one of de los Reyes’ zarzuelas, begins the homogenisation of the struggles in the Philippine imaginary. The play depicts the period of revolution against Spain favouring the image of the Katipunan. However, it is released four years after Spain had left the Philippines, on the same year that the United States had won the war against the Philippines and taken possession of the country. The play was considered seditious by the American government even if it did not attack the Americans directly. The same happened to the writer and director Aurelio Tolentino, who was arrested in 1903 for his play *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas* (*Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*), an anti-imperialistic play which stages an allegory of the different foreign powers in the Philippines (Spain, China and America) and how stereotypes of Philippine individuals reacted to them.

Theater in the 20th century started therefore with the shadow of American censorship looming over it between 1902 and 1943. “Seditious” plays (Fernandez 2004) were banned and playwrights prosecuted, which led to a division of Philippine stage into official and alternative theatrical venues. It was in the last ones where social and nationalistic concerns would be expressed (Fernandez 2004). In the 1930s, the discussion about political independence moved from the theatrical to the political stage, and seditious theater no longer became necessary (Chua et al. 1996: 105). However, the airs of political upheaval revolving with cultural life in the West in the late 60s also reached the Philippines, bringing back the revolutionary trend of Philippine theater to stage social protest. According to the *Cultural Center of the Philippines Encyclopedia,*

> Short militant plays were staged in plazas, churchyards, factories and streets to awaken political awareness. During the First Quarter Storm of 1970, artists involved in the national democratic cultural revolution against the “culture of the status quo” staged such plays as the Kamanyang Players “*Pakikibaka* (Struggle), [. . .] Gingong Silahis” *Barikada* (Barricades) and *Tanging Paraan* (The Only Way).

(Chua et al. 1996: 105)

The revolutionary theater was driven mainly by students and young artists forming small amateur groups in schools and *barangays* (neighbourhoods) and rather than in formal venues, it was performed in public spaces both indoors and outdoors, reaching in this form a wider public of the *oppressed*.

Marcos' rule

The social turmoil of the 1960s in the Philippines responded to the first stage of Marcos' rule – the democratic one – in which the president's government was accused of corruption and blamed for allowing a new form of colonisation by the United States. On September 21, 1972, Ferdinand Marcos, who had been elected president of the Philippines in 1965 and whose re-election in 1969 was surrounded by controversy (Molina 1984: 723–724; McCallus 1989: 129), imposed Martial Law throughout the country and derogated the Constitution of 1935.

Martial Law initially achieved certain social approval according to McCallus (129) thanks to the propagandistic spread of cultural myths, which provided his regime with some political legitimacy.

First, there was the creation of three new foreign enemies to the country: Muslim secessionism, Communist Imperialism and *false Filipino*s, rich families who had sympathised with previous foreign rulers. Against these three enemies, Marcos would defend what was truly Filipino: traditional values, a strong leader and the heroes, ideas and images of the independence revolution of 1896 (McCallus 1989: 130). But if there was a true historical culprit to blame for all the problems of the

Philippine nation in Marcos' narrative, it was its Spanish colonial past (McCallus 1989: 132–134). This lead us to think that the imposition of Martial Law was a necessary means to create a new society which would accomplish the unfulfilled promises of the Philippine revolutionaries of 1896 (Ortuño Casanova 2015: 71).

Now, whilst the Marcos regime tried to make use of the Philippine heroes as a backup for their plan, their rebellion would have another reading for those opposed to the dictator. According to Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco in his introduction to *Entablado*, talking about Ferdinand Marcos,

> His administration was accused of engaging in a neocolonial relationship with the United States (Shalom 1981, Bonner 1987). James Paterson (1998) explains that political activists referred to him as the American boy or the puppet of the American government. Hence, nationalism and national identity were the favored themes in almost all aspects of sociocultural activities – including theater.
>
> (2015: 1)

Marcos' propaganda focused on the resistance to colonial power, taking as a paradigm the Spanish colonial rule and structuring his narrative around a repetition of this pattern of resistance against the foreign always referring to Spanish rule. However, his strategy backfired as he made alliances with the United States. Nixon saw in the Philippine president an ally against Communism in the Cold War, and a facilitator for the presence of American troops in South East Asia, as the Philippines is conveniently near Vietnam. This is contradictory because the United States was still another foreign coloniser, and albeit seemingly more benevolent than Spain, it had left around 250,000 Philippine people dead in the Philippine-American war (Sison 1971: 32) and small villages were burned to ground "because American officers believed that insurgents in these villages were widespread" (Quibuyen in Pineda Tiatco 2015: 123). As we said, Marcos' opponents used the same nationalistic narrative that he used in his propaganda, and made an example out of the Philippine heroes who fought against a foreign power – Spain. In this case, however, the "foreign power" was incarnated in Marcos himself: a dictator allied with the United States. According to Claudio, Marcos' New Society proposed an ethno-nationalistic discourse, whilst the National Democratic Revolution and most especially the Communist Party of the Philippines offered a nationalist anti-imperialist discourse attacking therefore North American Imperialism (2013: 53).

The double reading of the lives of these big names in Philippine history also provided a useful tool to outwit censorship during the days of Martial Law (1972–1981) and even after its "nominal lifting", until the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr. in 1983 (Chua et al. 1996: 106).

Theater and censorship in Marcos' times

John Lent talks of "nine major mechanisms of control" which were used in Marcos' regime by the Office of Civil Defense and Relations for censoring information and opinions which might be against the regime's interest. Among these, three concerned theater: "the stipulation of taboo subjects that critics dared not broach; the review and censoring by a board of all films and tapes meant for the theater and televisions" (it would include theater scripts), and "the busting of media and theater guilds" (Lent 2015: 851). This put an end to direct protest in media and stages. However, censorship promoted an "evolution of expressions of protest in dramatic form; and the development of playwrights, actors, and stage artists whose commitment and imagination were expressed and often enhanced in the ‘creative poverty’ of protest theater” (Chua et al. 1996: 106). Whilst between 1972 and 1983 there was hardly any criticism of the regime in the media, the proliferation of semi-professional groups linked to churches, neighbourhoods, schools and universities, and other community collectives “registered their protests in dramatic idiom” (Fernández 1987: 111). This proliferation of protest amateur groups, which was actually a continuation of the Philippine tradition of staging discontent since the early 20th century, was led by the “re-foundation” of the Philippine Educational Theatre Association, PETA, which from the beginning preferred to tackle social issues such as “agrarian unrest and electoral corruption” in their repertoire (Samson et al. 2008: 71–72) and which in 1977, despite the social commitment of the team, started sourcing institutional funds that led the company to have the most fruitful years of its existence from 1977 until the first half of 1980s (109).

The institution would develop what was called the “aesthetics of poverty”, committed to the awareness of performing in a poor country at times of depravation, using certain colours and forms in staging which reflected the reality of a third world country, as well as indigenous inexpensive materials which contributed to identify and envision a national culture (Fajardo 2010: 181–182). It was a well-thought concept of aesthetics with a clear ideological message in a strongly politicised and influential theater team.

At the time, and together with the “aesthetics of poverty”, PETA would also give birth to the People’s Theater, a movement after the declaration of Martial Law, which would mobilise population in social and political endeavours by staging subversive plays of their own as well as adaptations during and after Martial Law.

Other theater groups which had a relevant role in social protest were the University of the Philippines Repertory Company, also strongly politicised, the Kolambugan Theater of Lanao, or Tanghalan Silangan, a proletarian group founded in 1981 (Samson et al. 2008: 106).

Rizal as *bayani*

When Doreen Fernandez enumerates the resources that playwrights had to develop for producing works reflecting social concerns without being accused of being subversive, she starts by the use of historical material "letting it speak about past events, while suggesting to fertile minds in the audience possible analogies or parallels in the present or even in the future" (Fernandez 1983: 12). Several Filipino revolutionary heroes, often martyrs, were resurrected for those plays. In the case of José Rizal, even when he did not fight directly in the upheaval against Spain, his books criticising the Spanish establishment in the Philippines and his tragic death executed by the Spanish army contributed to his creation as being the most symbolic *bayani*.[iii]

A considerable amount of literature has been devoted to the construction of José Rizal as an icon of Philippine society, a keystone for its national identity, and the political interests that this construction implies (Valenzuela 2014). Rizal's unfair assassination and the Filipino collective identification with it might constitute what Dominick Lacapra called "traumatropism", a "founding trauma as myth of origins", but also repeated and "transfigured into the sublime or the sacred" in a way that "the traumatized may be seen as martyrs or saints" (Lacapra 2014: xiv). The sublimation of Rizal and his identification with Christ as a martyr sacrificing his life for the good of his countrymen reached the point where a church venerating this victim of Spanish colonial regime was founded.[iv] The consecration of Rizal's life is transferred to his work, making any story about him relevant, serving as a lesson for any situation. It may explain the many works reenacting his life and even the idea to identify him with the protagonist of his novels, Crisóstomo Ibarra.

Setting aside the plays which remake his life or writings, such as *Noli me tangere* (adaptation by Rodolfo Medel Jr and Jess R. Aiko and direction by Luisa M. Reyes in 1969 for PETA), *El filibusterismo* (adapted by Felipe Padilla de Leon into an opera in 1970), or *Kanser* (another adaptation of *Noli me tangere* by Jomar Flores staged in 1980), this section is going to focus on two plays which show the National Hero in real and imaginary situations having to once again face the possibility of joining a rebellion against the Spanish colonial establishment: *Indio*, staged by PETA in 1969, and *Bayani*, a pop/rock opera based on imaginary situations lived by Rizal, written by Bienvenido Lumbera in 1977 and finally staged in 1984.[v]

Néstor Torre's *Indio* (*One Swallow Night*) focuses on Rizal's exile in Dapitan (Mindanao) between 1892 and 1896, during the Spanish colonial rule, with Josephine Bracken, the woman who would become his wife the night before his execution. The play identifies the character of José Rizal with Jesus Christ, in a sublimation of both assassinations. The focus is on his private life, and Josephine Bracken, as a new Maria Magdalena, even has to explain to the Dapitan people why she is not married to Rizal: "He is brilliant, much older than I, and the most eligible man in this town, if not in the whole country. While I am a pale, young Irish girl whose hands are chapped from work and wear" (Torre 1969: 25–26). A physical idealisation of the hero is being imposed together with a pinch of racial (and racist) pride, by comparing the *Indio* to the despised white girl. In this case, she is the “other”. As soon as the subalterns are given the voice and become aware of their importance as a force, driving resistance against the traditionally Western elite, but using the local bourgeoisie – in this case Jose Rizal – to be their voice in society and lead their fight. This is verbalised by the character of Aseniero, representing the Filipino people and advancing the high destiny of Rizal: “he loves us more than he loves you. You’re nothing but his woman. We’re . . . We’re the future!” (26). That future, which refers to “the masses”, includes all Filipinos – as opposed to Bracken, a foreigner. This idea coming from the play, contributes to the concept of a homogeneous Philippine mass. However, the class to which Aseniero belongs was not the same as Rizal’s; that is why he and his family trusted him to lead their fight. They are the subaltern, the ones who do not have a real voice. In the play, the voice they were looking for to represent them was that of the left-wing intellectuals, who spoke through the character of Rizal, who had himself a Westernised perspective, as he was educated in Europe, wrote in Spanish and had European Romantic ideas of freedom and nationalism. Is this a case of use of the hegemonic language to express or pretend to be the voice of those who do not have one to gain a seat in the power structures, as Gayari Spivak warns? (1987: 197–198). It may well be.

Rizal in this play keeps the reasonable attitude of reform, education and intentions of peaceful change which was what made him a popular choice for the American government under the Taft administration, which chose him among other more revolutionary heroes as National Hero for the people to identify with (Iya 2012: 110). The message criticising the ruling power is there, for that public ready to listen to it. Rizal's message is so universal that can stand out without its context, becoming an incitement to rebellion against any system which deprives its citizens of freedom:

> I thought I could play their game by following the rules they'd set down. But now they've changed the rules and I'm caught in my own traps. [. . .] Rebels can't be beggars, because then they've got no choice. And what else is being a rebel all about if not a matter of choosing.
>
> (Torre 1969: 33)

The character is left victimised and with no choice but to break the rules despite what he says. This would provide the character with a moral authority that should be transferred to the rebellious public. However, the call is still for peaceful revolution: Rizal does not join the armed revolt and actually despises it. In his final discourse, after refusing to join Bonifacio's war, he gets as Messianic and as Biblical as it could get:

> We must win our freedom by deserving it, loving the just, the good, to the extent of dying for it; when a people reach such heights, God gives them the weapons they need, the idols and the tyrants fall like a house of cards, and the dawn of freedom breaks.
>
> (Torre 1969: 51)

The religious tone of the discourse connects with a trend of protest theater which would foreground the liberation message inherent to Christianism: liberation from evil and liberation from sin. Being difficult to blame a script with a religious topic of subversion, in 1979 PETA retakes the traditional Christmas subgenre of *Panunuluyan* (short plays performing the search of Mary and Joseph for an inn in Christmas Eve), relocating it to Manila's shanty towns, where the protagonist couple end up supporting the oppressed masses of Manila and have their child there (Fernandez 1987: 111). Also the University of the Philippines used the resource of providing a religious play with a social message: they staged in 1977, 1980 and 1984 the play *Pagsambang Bayan* (*The People's Worship*), written by Bonifacio Ilagan, which "Refashioned the Catholic Mass into a people's rite of liberation" (Fernandez 1987: 111), while depicting Marcos' abuses with projections and mimes (Chua et al. 1996: 106).

Whilst in 1969 a discourse from Rizal's mouth encouraged Filipinos to trust God to free them from undesirable leaders, in 1984, after having suffered almost ten years of Martial Law, and still three more under Marcos' rule, the discourse behind the reenactment of Rizal's ideas changed substantially as proposed by Bienvenido Lumbera.

According to Lumbera, the initial idea for the Pop opera *Bayani* came from Jim Paredes, the music composer, in 1976 (Lumbera 2003: 96). Due to different delays and obstacles, the play was performed only in 1984 for four days, when Lumbera was teaching in Japan (Rush 1993). As Lumbera himself recalls in conversation, the play received good reviews although it was watched by a very limited amount of public, despite the appearance of popular jazz and pop stars in the show (Fernández 1987: 108). However, Jim Paredes intended to extend the performance for more days, but the actors refused, as they had not been paid. The staging was provocative and glittery, with a live band with its members dressed up in a punk fashion performing on one side of the stage. Colourful modern costumes and punk-rock music with historical characters: a risky bet to tell how the past was relevant in that present.

The play is designed indeed to be provocative at various levels, one of them being the transformation of Rizal's story, something difficult to touch in the Philippines where it becomes a founding myth for cultural identity, and something near to the status of being sacred. They wanted to create something recognisable for a Philippine public, but at the same time not let them get into the comfort of the predictable story of Rizal's heroism (Lumbera 2003: 96). To achieve this, they created a tension, a debate, between two freedom heroes – Rizal and Bonifacio – a confrontation that had already been suggested in *Indio*, which in *Bayani* is taken to its last consequences by placing both characters on stage face to face, one representing peaceful discontent and self-sacrifice for ideals, the other one pushing for armed fight and using the name of Rizal to achieve his objectives. The antagonism leads to the public to question, acquiring major relevance at the time of the play's release, right after Benigno Aquino Jr.'s assassination: "Ano ba ang bayani at sino ang tunay na bayani?" (What is a hero and who can be a true hero?) (Lumbera 2003: 99). The final words explaining the tension were suggested by the producer, Leo Rialp. He wanted to end the play in a provocative way to awaken the audience, due to the national circumstances at the moment of the representation: the deep economic crisis and the rallies demanding justice for the assassination of Benigno Aquino (99). The question is not about Rizal, it is not about how to defeat Spanish rule, it is an appeal to the public, to enquire about how to defeat a criminal political leader.

The encounter between Bonifacio and Rizal, which never took place in reality, might have surprised the audience as a deliberate departure from official history, but it is set in a context of imaginary situations and metafiction. According to Lumbera, the resource of metafiction, materialised in his play in the presence of the author-compositor as a character to link the story to the time of representation was borrowed from "protest" plays, without indicating which ones (Lumbera 2003: 97). However, in another interview he said that the two playwrights who had influenced his plays had been Lorca and Brecht (Guerrero 2013). We can trace, therefore, a line from the author-compositor who is tired of always doing the same and wants to transcend (Lumbera 2015) to Lorca's "director" in *El público.* Both *Awtor-kompositor* in *Bayani* and director in *El público* establish connections between past and present, between the characters and the public, and break the boundaries of the stage in order to demand a reaction from the audience: in *El público* the action is to liberate the "theater under the sand"; in *Bayani* it is to decipher the present relevance of the play for the *Public* and encourage action. This is actually said in the first song sung by the *Awtor-Kompositor* called "Gusto kong balikan ang ating nagdaan" ("I would like to look into the past"):

Gusto kong balikan ang ating nagdaan –
hindi mga pangyayari, kundi ang kahulugan,
Ano'ng sinasabi sa kasalukuyan.
Dalawang bayani, dalawang pananaw,
magkaibang tugon sa tawag ng bayang
ang minimithi paglaya at dangal.
[I would like to look into our past
not just events, but into its meaning.
What does it say nowadays?

Two heroes, two different perspectives

the answer to the call for people

aspiring to freedom and dignity]

(Lumbera 2003: 100)

Interestingly, years later, metafiction would be profusely used in Spanish new *Memoria* fiction on the civil war (i.e. Cercas' *Soldiers of Salamis*), as a way of recognising the past relevant to be the present, foregrounding memory as a present retrieve of the past and its consequences. The projection of the punishment and lack of freedom of the author (see footnote 1) enters in a parallelism with Rizal and performs with him on the same stage. The play becomes then a game of mirrors or rather a matryoshka in which three characters who have challenged the status quo at different moments work together to translate the idea of the necessity of the fight and its cyclical character to the public, evidencing again the Marxist-Leninist Nationalistic view that Lumbera would also defend in his critical essays, but this time on stage, in a popular production with pop stars and "plot elements [. . .] drawn from Rizal's biography, classroom material in the Philippines from elementary school onward and therefore familiar to all Filipinos" (Fernandez 1987: 108). In this way, the interaction with the public breaking the fourth wall becomes more powerful.

Lorca in the Philippines

The staging of the Philippine fight against the Spaniards is not the only reference used to provide a precedent to the actual struggle being fought. Censorship did not limit the production of foreign plays which did not criticise the government directly. Assuming that foreign authors would tackle foreign issues, Bertolt Brecht and other Western playwrights became popular in the Philippine stages. Bringing García Lorca to the stage would give the chance to once again adopt a Western voice – as was Rizal's in the plays that we referred to earlier – to criticise a very familiar oppression in the Philippines: the Spanish one. In this case, the oppression depicted is against the Spanish themselves. Coincidentally, Lorca was himself killed by Spanish soldiers, and his pieces have been interpreted as subversive.

La casa de Bernarda Alba is the first representation of Lorca in Tagalog that we have news of,**[vi]** and this took place in 1967, during the first term of Marcos' presidency. It was translated and directed by Rolando Tinio for Barangay Theater Guild in 1967, with Daisy Hontiveros Avellana (National Artist of the Philippines) performing the role of Bernarda. The politics of the work match perfectly with the interests and turmoil of the theater scene of the late 1960s in the Philippines, when Ferdinand Marcos was already the President. As Manuel Antonio Arango states:

> *La casa de Bernarda Alba* muestra la represión social, económica y psicológica encarnada en este caso en el personaje central de Bernarda Alba, representante de la ideología dominante. Ella es rica a "fuerza de dinero y sinsabores" (Acto III) y desprecia las clases desfavorecidas: "Los pobres son como animales; parece como si estuvieran hechos de otras sustancias"
>
> (Arango 1995: 213)

> [*La casa de Bernarda Alba* displays social, economical and psychological repression, which are incarnated in this case in Bernarda Alba, the central character, who represents the dominant ideology. She is rich "by dint of pain and money" (Act III) and despises the

> disadvantaged: “The poor are like animals. It’s as if they’re made of some other substance”.]
>
> (Act I)

The play shows through Adela’s dissent the legitimacy of the fight against the oppression imposed by Bernarda and consequently, against the status quo. This rebellion, which initially has to do with Spanish society and the feminine condition, goes beyond its own boundaries in time and space when the popularity of Lorca and his work makes it a universal chant against any oppression. It is such as it is read in Mario Camus’ 1987 cinematic version, in which Isolina Ballesteros highlights “el tono alegórico de la casa y la figura de la madre como anticipaciones simbólicas de España bajo el régimen autoritario de la dictadura” [The allegoric tone of the house and the figure of the mother as symbolic anticipation of Spain under the dictatorship authoritarian regime] (Ballesteros 2001: 162). Despite the timing – a text by Lorca challenging a Francoist regime that he did not get to experience, having been killed at the beginning of the civil war – the subversive message of *Bernarda Alba* trespasses space and introduces a revolutionary ideal rooted in European Romanticism to Asia. Paradoxically, it originates in the same sources that fed the Philippine revolution against the Spanish colony.[vii]

According to director and academic Anton Juan, the first representation of *Yerma* in the Philippines was directed by Behn Cervantes for the Sigma Delta Sorority of The University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman at some point between 1969 and 1971 (Juan 2015). Behn Cervantes himself recalls how theater became subversive in UP even before the Martial Law, highlighting a World Theater Festival held in Manila in 1972, when two of the plays he directed were forbidden: *Barikada* and *The Short Short Life of Citizen Juan* (Cervantes 2011, 2013). However, unfortunately, the *Yerma* performance cited by Anton Juan could not be traced, but only that of a representation of *Bernarda Alba* by Sigma Delta Sorority in the same year mentioned by Cervantes himself in a 2013 article for promotion of the University of the Philippines (2013). In any case, after the implementation of Martial Law, we find no trace of representations of Lorca until its "nominal abolition" in 1981, when, after the caution exhibited by Philippine Theater in the worst years of the Marcos regime, protest theater returned to the forefront.

Shortly after it, on October 1, 1982, Juan choreographed a version of *Yerma* performed by Ballet Philippines, one of the resident companies of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, a foundation created paradoxically by Imelda Marcos in 1969. On this first version of *Yerma* by Juan – he would direct another version in 1998 for the centenary of the birth of the author – the performance in Tanghalang Nicanor Abelardo of the CCP showcases music composed by Francisco Feliciano. *Yerma*'s plot about accomplishing one's desires would easily justify the more subversive message: the continuous orders for remaining locked in the house would provoke, as in *Bernarda Alba*, a claustrophobia easily related to a demand for freedom which is actually verbalised several times in the text, as it happens in Act III Scene I ("yo pienso que tengo sed y no tengo libertad" [I know I'm thirsty and that I'm not free]). The implicit message of the text is enhanced by the not so implicit provocative aesthetics of the scenery. Juan, as he says, "put many fat breasted creatures on the stage rolling on a Cultural Center that was used to seeing Imelda's TRUE, GOOD, AND BEAUTIFUL" (Juan 2015). Those creatures would be a reason for disrupting Imelda's utopia, bringing to the Philippine leaders a metaphor of the grotesqueness and “ugliness” of the country they were creating, to be faced in their own ivory tower. When Juan is asked whether he considers the production of *Yerma* a subversive spectacle in the 80s, he answers yes, for “its lyrical manifestations of the lonely and the oppressed, the marginalized”, which in that context aimed “to speak of being free and to kill the LAW, the FATHER” (Juan 2015). According to him it “was a strong statement to make in a context of fear and agreement with the Law” (Juan 2015). The end of *Yerma*, surprising and Nietzschean as it is, brings the tragedy and the call for subversion to its climax. It is not only killing the father, but also the assassination of a god who controls and watches Yerma’s life and destiny.

Performing Lorca’s dramas during Marcos’ rule would have unavoidably brought the shadow of the poet and his death. By 1982, Lorca constituted a figure full of political significance, symbolising the struggle of a generation under Francoism, after having been killed at the beginning of the civil war. His plays were re-read under new terms agreeing with the biography and sublimation of the death of their author – and here we can go back to Lacapra’s “traumatropism” as Lorca’s trauma became the symbolic recipient or a nation’s trauma and was as idealised as Rizal’s was. However after 1981, they did not face any major problems with censorship in the country. Anton Juan states that the only problems brought up by censors had to do with moral and not with politics: they cut the moment in which, in Juan’s production, *Yerma* tears her dress to show her breasts (2015). When asked about the possible reasons for having avoided political censorship, he affirms: “ignoramuses do not understand, military fascists are quite literal really, so for them it’s just another crime of passion” (Juan 2015).

In 1983 a new production of *Yerma* was prepared to be staged on August 20th, on the anniversary of the murder of García Lorca. But destiny wanted to make the date even more meaningful, as the day after the premier in the Rajah Sulayman theater, Benigno Aquino Jr., the main opponent of the Marcos regime, was killed when disembarking the plane which brought him back from exile. There is no commentary on the play either in the newspapers consulted or in the dossier of the play kept in PETA's headquarters, only a note the day before the staging, informing of its date and venue.

Conclusion

What does this insistence on the cyclical re-enactment of oppression as colonial oppression imply? Lisandro Claudio, in a 2013 article, bravely criticises some influential Philippine historians for transforming "the way Philippine history and the history of the 'masses'/Filipinos has been written" (48). He explains how during Martial Law, Philippine intellectuals formed a leftist cluster that identified anti-colonial nationalism as a part of proletarian struggle (49). This point of view overviewed differences in the enemy and in the Filipinos themselves, identifying them all as "the oppressed" despite their social class. Duke Bagulaya would insist in this idea, going back to Garcellano's criticism of Philippine historiography by saying that "most of our historians, contemporary and past, have always been mystifying history" (Bagulaya 2006: 11).

The phenomenon would not remain limited to historians: Lumbera, Juan, Cervantes, Almario, San Juan . . . they were all well-respected literary critics and creators, who contributed through their plays, which would reach the general public more easily than articles by academic writers, to form this Marxist-Leninist narrative of Philippine history as a continuous struggle between the local masses (oppressed Filipinos) and the colonial oppressors, in a unifying fashion for both sides, and converting the anti-Marcos movement in a Nationalistic anti-imperialist fight, against a foreign force. Theater is, in this sense, an active agent that appears in a given context of crisis, which determines its content, and attempts to transform this context. To this point, public opinion is crucial, and plays on Rizal would definitely contribute to shape it.

What about Lorca? The similitude and identification with Rizal's topic actually pushes the limits of the struggle (against Spanish oppression) beyond Philippine boundaries, and stresses the fact that the Philippine historical narrative is being constructed upon a Western world view, by using Lorca, Rizal and Brecht: three individuals educated in Europe.

If the phenomenon of re-enacting Rizal's life and death started as a way of avoiding censorship during the US occupation of the Philippines, the repetition of the process during Marcos' era would have an added political agenda to create a narrative of Philippine history as a continued resistance against outside enemies, justifying "localized acts of oppression" (Claudio 2013: 46) which would exempt Philippine oppressors. EDSA revolution is commemorated every February with hardly any mention to the victims of Marcos' regime. Imelda Marcos, Marcos' wife and *partner in crime*, is nowadays a member of the Philippine House of Representatives: the lack of liability has led to a political tolerance in the archipelago, and even to a widespread narrative of acceptance of Marcos' rule as a beneficial era for the Philippines.

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[i] Lumbera founded the activist writers’ organisation PAKSA in 1971 and went underground to publish an anti-Marcos government magazine of prose and poetry called *Ulos* during Martial Law. He was finally arrested in 1974 and sent to the Ipil Rehabilitation Center for almost a year, being released in December 1974 (Rush 1993).

[ii] 21,500,000 native speakers in the Philippines according the 2000 census, followed closely by Cebuano with 15,800,000 native speakers (source: ethnologue.com www.ethnologue.com/country/PH/languages).

[iii] *Bayani*, a Tagalog word meaning literally “hero”, is a composition of the word *Bayan*, “hometown”, linking the idea of belonging to a place and hero semantically.

[iv] For more on Rizal Christification in Philippine popular culture, see Palmo Iya (2012).

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[v] Among the many other plays reenacting Spanish oppression to depict Marcos' regime, Doreen Fernandez highlights Bonifacio Ilagan's *Katipunan: Mga Anak ng Bayan* (1978) and *Langit Ma'y Magdilim* (1979); Isagani R. Cruz's *Josephine* (1978) telling the story of Josephine Bracken and her trip to Dapitan; Fernando Josef's *Ang Tao . . . Hayop o Tao* (1975), and Lito Tiongson's *Ang Walang Kamatayang Buhay ni Juan de la Cruz Alyas . . .* (1976). As Fernández states, "All suggested parallelism with the present, and invited questions and solutions" (Fernández 1996, 2015). On the other hand, after Marcos' rule we find *Tiempos muertos* by Nikki Luna (1987), which was settled in a Spanish encomienda symbolising "resistance to the co-optative cultural forms that the Marcos New Society had attempted to disseminate through its Tourism Ministry" (Chua and Lucero 2014: 78).

[vi] The group *Community Players* performed a production in English of *The House of Bernarda Alba* in 1949 (Patajo-Legasto 2008: 179). There must have been some other version in the early 1960s by the Sigma Delta Sorority from UP, according to an article by Behn Cervantes (2013). Years later there were other versions: PETA theater produced it in 1990 and Miguel Castro directed another version using Tinio's translation for the Gantimpala Theatre Foundation in 2005 [https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2479&dat=20050711&id=VFg1AAAAIBAJ&sjid=kCUMAAAAIBAJ&pg=1271,19212658&hl=es].

[vii] Some postcolonial theorists such as Franz Fanon and Edward Said in *Power and Imperialism* have approached similar phenomena and, also from the Philippine Studies perspective, the leftist historian Renato Constantino tries to explain the

contradiction between revolting against Western powers and later turning to Western values to forge a national identity (Constantino 1978: 25–26).