literary study, Carayan Vol 1. No.1 Dec 2015

The Marginal in the Filipino Woman: A Feminist Reading of Autobiographical Narratives

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In the classrooms where literary theory is studied, we are told that there was a time when feminist studies dominated the academic scene. There was a proliferation of feminist literary criticism, and heretofore obscured works by women were exhumed and meticulously studied for their feminine (therefore resistant) content. I must contend, however, that there is still much to learn and discover about the situation of women, especially Filipino women. Although contemporary Filipino women, especially in the metropolitan centers, manifest a measure of independence from the patriarchal rule (a patriarchal rule that seems to have become diluted in the wake of these feminist activities), there are still evidences of the marginality and diminishment of women, mostly in the urban areas of this country, and in the privacy of domestic spaces.

The main interest of this study is to determine the marginality of women, not just as it is manifested in public and private domains, but as it is constituted within the psyche of women. It is a reading of eight autobiographical narratives of women with a view of studying what I would term the "feminization" of the mind. How and where do we locate the marginality of Filipino women? This study is linked to the notion of subjectivity and identity as mediated not just by gender, but by other cultural categories such as race, age, nationality and ethnicity. A woman's marginality is overdetermined because she is multiply positioned. It is therefore necessary to link the literature mentioned to other social sciences. This paper will demonstrate the interrelationships between literature and linguistics, psychoanalysis, and politics. The discipline of linguistics will be appropriated because this reading will give a special focus on the language of the narratives. This discussion will also be linked to the discipline of psychology because it will use the psychoanalytic notions of Jacques Lacan which were appropriated by Julia Kristeva in her description of *semanalysis.* The feminist bent of this study also necessitates a political perspective, or an analysis of power relations.

This paper will attempt to locate the "negativities" and "refusals" pertaining to the marginal in woman as revealed in the autobiographical narratives of Filipino women writers. The framework will largely be drawn from Julia Kristeva's concept of semanalysis, which locates in language the processes of the semiotic (connected to Lacan's pre-oedipal state) and the symbolic (the system of signs).

According to Jacques Lacan, the Symbolic order into which we are born shapes us and determines our gender identities and our place in our society. Our entry into the world of symbols (or language) separates us from our "ambient childhood world". This separation, experienced as a

loss or a yearning that will never be fulfilled, gives rise to the Imaginary. The Imaginary or the narcissistic part of the mind, defines the ego which is "a delusory construct" forever desiring objects that can only be substitutes for the Real. The Real is the realm of the primordial sense of unity with the mother, the drives, the instincts, and the unconscious processes that shape our ego selves. Psychoanalysis focuses on the dynamic interrelations between the conscious and the unconscious (Lacan, *Literary Theory* 441).

Kristeva proposes an analysis of the signifying process or *semanalysis,* which presupposes a split "speaking subject" divided between unconscious and conscious motivations. She posits two types of signifying processes corresponding to these two heterogeneous levels: the *semiotic* process which corresponds to Lacan's primordial, pre-Oedipal unconscious and relates to the *chora,* that "invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible"; and the *symbolic* process which corresponds to language and the realm of the conscious, referring to the "establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, symbolic law" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 4-6). The semiotic mode of signification energizes the symbolic mode (Macafee 18). One cannot exist without the other.

The signifying process may be analyzed through two features of the text: a phenotext, or the language of communication, and the genotext, which is not linguistic per se, but which can be detected by means of certain aspects of language (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 6-7). Following Kristeva's view of the intertextuality of the text (which she draws from Mikhail Bakhtin) as "a narrative texture woven together with strands borrowed from other verbal practices", Toril Moi proposes that texts be taken as "whole utterances," in which can be read "its ideological, political and psychoanalytical articulations, its relations with society, with the psyche and with other texts" (Moi 155).

Toril Moi describes semanalysis as an attempt to "locate the negativity and refusal pertaining to the marginal in 'woman', in order to undermine the phallocentric order that defines woman as marginal in the first place." (Moi 162). This is the locus of this paper: to map the "negativity" and to locate the "refusals" of the Filipina "speaking subject" in the narratives.

The term "negativity" points to the marginal position to which the woman is relegated by the symbolic order. In *About Chinese Woman*, Kristeva traces the development of the patriarchal monotheism of Judaism which reduced woman as the "silent other" of the symbolic order. In *Powers of Horror,* Kristeva claims that the way in which an individual excludes the mother as a way of forming identity is the same way in which societies are formed. According to Toril Moi, "We have to accept our position as already inserted into an order that precedes us and from which there is no escape. There is no other *space* from which we can speak at all, it will have to be within the framework of symbolic language". She links the semiotic *chora* to the mother and the symbolic order to the Law of the Father. A woman is trapped in the in-between or the margins. If she identifies with

the mother, she is excluded from the symbolic (patriarchal) order, but if she identifies with the father, she becomes a perpetuator of the same order which marginalizes her (Moi 169).

For Julia Kristeva, marginality is not a matter of *essence* but of *position*. Even if the political reality (the fact that women are defined and oppressed by the patriarchy) necessitates a campaign in the name of women, Toril Moi reiterates the importance of recognizing that in this struggle, a woman cannot *be*. She "can only exist negatively, as it were, through her refusal of that which is given." 'Woman', for Kristeva, is "that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies." Kristeva sees her proposed definition as entirely relational and strategic. (Moi 162).

The term "refusal" refers to the woman's refusing to adopt the masculine model of femininity. Semanalysis has the potential of subverting established beliefs in authority and order, for its aim is to remove the "mysterious" and "incomprehensible", to be a critique of meaning (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 6). In *Women's Time,* Kristeva writes: "No longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded of us (to maintain, arrange, and perpetuate this symbolic contract), how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition, and then as we want to transform it?" Kristeva proposes that women must not refuse to enter the symbolic order, but "to break the code, to shatter language, to find specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract" (Kristeva 13-35).

Toril Moi emphasizes that Kristeva does *not* associate the semiotic with the feminine. The semiotic is linked to the pre-Oedipal mother, *a figure that encompasses both masculinity and femininity* (my italics). The little girl (or boy) must make a choice: to identify with the semiotic (pre-Oedipal) mother or to identify with the symbolic Law of the Father. Femininity comes about as a result of these options (Moi 164).

This reading will be based on the following assumptions: 1) There is no essential definition of 'woman', and therefore no such thing as *feminine* writing. 2) Femininity is engendered by the woman's relative *position* within the various facets of the patriarchal order. 3) The text, as mediated through the language used by the split "speaking subject" is, by virtue of its being a product of all these determinations, intertextual. 4) My reading will be based on the notion of semanalysis and its twin processes of the semiotic and the symbolic.

This paper will attempt to undertake two tasks: 1) to reveal the "negativity" or marginal position of women by locating the processes of the symbolic order, and 2) to analyze the semiotic processes, or the various ways through which the speaking subjects of these narratives have expressed their "refusals" of the prevailing order. What will also be shown in this study is how, within the space of marginality, the very seed of transformation can be located.

The following autobiographical narratives that will be read come from the collection entitled *Pinay,* edited by Dr. Cristina Pantajo-Hidalgo: Excerpt from *Liberty* by *Yay Marking, Notes on Growing*

Up Protestant in a Catholic Country by *Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas, Motel Weather* by *Gilda Cordero-Fernand, The Loneliest Christmases* by *Rina Jimenez-David,* Excerpt from *A War Diary* by *Pacita Pestano Jacinto, These Peaceful Days* by *Estrella Alfon (1917-1980), Games* by *Kerima Polotan* Excerpt from "*The Law Above All*" by *Katrina Legarda.* There are a number of narratives in the *Pinay* book but the choice of these narratives had to be determined by their manifest semiotic content. The contexts of the speaking subjects were also considered so that a wider variety of social institutions could be represented - such as the family, the church, and the government. Also considered were the different roles which these women sought to fulfil - as daughters, mothers, or grandmothers.

In this reading, I shall appropriate linguistic processes by singling out certain phrases and gaps in the narrative (*symbolic*) through which the emotions, feelings, and repressed desires (*semiotic*) will show. These psychological perspectives will be linked to political considerations. The *semiotic* feelings will, in turn be connected to the "power" relations within the family or community that are revealed in the narrative - power relations mediated through the subject's age, class, and gender position(s). Through this process, the interpellation of women as marginal will show through, as well as the ways in which these women writers manifest their refusal of these interpellations. Perhaps the revelation of how they are constructed by the patriarchal, social, and economic systems is in itself the negation, or the created space for resistance.

In the first four paragraphs of an excerpt from *Liberty* by *Yay Marking*, the narrator (speaking subject) locates her mother as being "halfway nowhere." Her mother has run away to the US and could not return because of the family's economic situation in the Philippines and because of her own economic and racial position in the US. She lived a difficult life, and "by reason of her race, was more conspicuous in that foreign land…" where she never really changed, and where her temperament remained "essentially Philippine."

This seemingly sympathetic picture of the mother, although it also serves to outline the speaking subject's position, is belied by the rest of the narrative, which describes in detail four occasions in which the narrator rebels against the "unquestioning compliance" expected by the mother: "The slightest hesitation was defiance, defiance was revolution."

In the first narrated incident, she is told by her mother not to associate with a certain older girl and she disobeys. She comes home one day to find the washtub on newspapers ("to keep the blood from staining the linoleum") in the middle of the kitchen and her stepfather wielding a knife.

The semiotic rises through the symbolic as the narrator spells out her inner thoughts and feelings: "There was a tone to my mother's voice, a quality of cheer, that hurt me to the heart." And later, when the stepfather places the blunt edge of the knife against her neck:

> I knew by the pressure of the knife how much my stepfather wanted to slice away. I hated him and he hated me more than either of us loved my mother. Both of us had cause and through the years would give more cause…he made a little sawing motion and, because nothing gave and nothing stung, I knew it was

> the back of the blade, not the edge. Had our positions been reversed, the edges would also have been reversed. (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 21)

We can read beneath this phenotext not just the hatred and the fear resulting from years of conflict and the clash of wills, but also the power play between mother and daughter, stepfather and stepdaughter. The situation reaches a stalemate. The mother tells her to rise, go out and play. The narrator describes this as her "victory" and her "vengeance", clearly aware of the "subtleties" of their truce. These subtleties are not explained. We can surmise, however, that this is a manifestation of the semiotic instinct to be free clashing with the symbolic order that seeks to overpower. This dialectic will inform her growing up years. She is aware of it for she writes: "But for my mother it was not an ending. It was a beginning that was to concern me for the rest of my life."

After the bathtub showdown, her mother decides that she should go back to the Philippines: "Go back. Be me…be a teacher… or a nurse… or you can find your relatives." To which the narrator always said no. She had made her first "stand" at the age of five. She decided to lie down on the pavement, provoking her mother to thrash her with an umbrella, and drawing the unwanted attentions of the "tall white people" and a police man. At ten, she is slapped again and again by her mother for saying "I won't" after being ordered to clean up. A neighbor's Dad defends her mother, saying: "You're just a wild colt, needin' to be halter broke." This was said while he applied iodine to her cut lip, "with blood all over her face and a front tooth loose."

The final scene is that of the mother standing over the daughter with the edge of a hatchet pressed down hard on the top of her head. We are not told the specific circumstances which led to this point. The narrator obviously lived through it to write this:

> I lowered my eyelids. She lowered the hatchet. But her instinct told her that the *inside* of the human head is the true frontier, remote, free, hardest to conquer, that dropped eyelids are not defeat but fair warning. It set her to thinking… (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 24).

This text lies in an intersection of discourses and the power relations that inhere in each: race (positioning the subject as the daughter of her Filipino mother in a foreign place inhabited by "tall white people"), age (as revealed in the clash of wills between mother and daughter), gender (with the mother urging the daughter, but not the son, to "go back" and the negative reactions of the two male presences in the narrative).

It seems clear that the mother in this narrative identifies with the symbolic Law of the Father, and is literally supported by the stepfather and the neighbor's Dad, whereas the "speaking subject" identifies herself with the semiotic unconscious, that place of hatred, vengeance, and anger which the external order continually tries to tamp down. The first part of the narrative which seeks to "explain" the mother (or the order) contradicts with the

succeeding violent images of a child being traumatized with fear – in the hands of her own mother.

Told not in the linear sequence, but in circular fashion, the contradiction in the meanings within the narrative itself only underlines the split within the speaking subject, and the struggle which this particular girl had to experience as she unceasingly refuses to be formed, shaped and interpellated by the social order in which she finds herself. In listening to her semiotic instincts which come out as desires to have friends of her own, to have independence, and to have freedom, she is persecuted and punished by the symbolic order which seeks to keep her in her place – with knife, hatchet, and umbrella. Toril Moi quotes Kristeva: "It is there, in the analysis of her difficult relation to her mother and to her own difference from everybody else, men and women, that a woman encounters the enigma of the 'feminine.' (Moi 168)

Notes on Growing Up Protestant in a Catholic Country by *Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas* is a very short narrative about a Protestant girl watching a Catholic procession. The speaking subject begins with these words: "*We* were looked upon…" indicating her otherness by virtue of her religion, showing awareness of her interpellation by those who looked upon *them* with *grudging* respect and *dismissively* spoke of *them* as being "*overquick* in admitting wrongdoing, *allowing* themselves to be *imposed* upon, and for an *unforgiving cheerlessness* when running into the kept woman of the bank manager." *They* were *spiritually arrogant,* making up their own prayers and refusing to "negotiate absolution with a *few* Hail Mary's at the confessional."

She further says that they had to reckon with their *cold* God each day, without intercession from (and she italicizes) *their* canon of friendly saints. The words which I have italicized in the phenotext reveals a genotext of self-derision, but a derision and marginalization revealed from a unique position of being on the inside of the mind of the interpellators and how they look at and think of people like *her.*

We do not have to wait long for her own refusal of this specular diminishment. The reference to a *few* Hail Mary's and to *their* canon of *friendly* saints indicates her own use of the "look" which the prevailing order levels on her. She proceeds to describe the processions of her childhood as "religion-as-theater", juxtaposing the sacred with the secular and prioritizing the latter discourse as she writes about the "lines of women *muttering* under their *rusty* black mantillas, *clacking* their glass beads" (suggesting mindless chanting, the "glass beads" bringing to mind the plasticity or pretentiousness of habitual acts rather than the sacredness of ritual). She juxtaposes the word *drab* in describing the clothing of the Legion of Mary with "the cord knotted *proudly* around the waist in the *self-abnegatory* manner of St Francis." These contrasting hyperboles produce a tone that mirrors the derision with which she reveals her own interpellation in the first two paragraphs.

The humor with which she speaks of the "the priest in vestments almost as *inappropriately bright* as the statue's own, but with a *filthy sweat-stained* collar " contrasts with the serious tone in which she once again "looks" at herself through the eyes of the symbolic order so aptly represented

by the priest: "I'd look into his stern eyes and cringe back against *Yaya's* smelly skirt, knowing he had only to look into my face to see me for what I was, a *heretic* child." This single last line which includes her *Yaya* tells us that she belongs to the middle class. The *Yaya* belongs to the *other* side because she makes the sign of the cross as the priest passes by. She is referred to only as the one with the *smelly* skirt, the marginalized marginalizing others in turn.

"The line of *muttering* women went on and on…more disturbing than the secretive murmuring which I was barred from understanding by my parents' conversion." This sentence allows us to see how the discourse of religion enters into the family system, and how, within the close confines of the home, a little girl could be marginalized. The last sentence contains an image of the "*painted* martyr *levitating triumphantly* above", the denotative word *painted* placed next to the lofty words *levitating triumphantly* prepare us for the last descriptive words of this visitation: "fearful and amazing as that of a djinn touching down in a desert in Arabia only to disappear again in a whirl of sand."

In this narrative, the "speaking subject" finds herself within the intersecting symbolic orders of religion and society (including class and age). She stands apart, it seems, from her Yaya, her family, and the rest of her community. The last sentence perhaps speaks of both her confusion and desire. Her allusions to the distant Arabian deserts (suggesting at the same time, the Muslim religion) gives us a glimpse of her own lienation and her desire perhaps that the semiotic stirrings giving rise to all these words would "disappear in a whirl of sand." Her social standing places her in the center, but her religion and age positions her in the margins. She stands at the margins of the family system to which she belongs. Her semiotic "refusal" of this position is revealed within the same symbolic order, in her disruptive use of language to describe the rituals of the most powerful ideological tool of all – religion.

The plot of *Motel Weather* by *Gilda Cordero-Fernando* is simple. Two people fall in love, get married secretly, and secretly have sex in motels until the time they are able to reveal their relationship to their parents who give them an expensive wedding, and they should have lived happily ever after – only they didn't. I added this last phrase to indicate that this narrative disrupts the discourse of romance, marriage and the happily ever after.

It begins with four paragraphs describing in graphic detail the sexual activities of the two secret lovers ("his hands caress my breasts and move down between my thighs"). This certainly is among the "ruptures" in the order which Kristeva speaks about, of women producing "specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract." The period which this text recalls was 1952, a time when the "parents' unrelenting strictness allowed young people little private conversation and no dates":

> Virginity was the code of the day. Nice girls didn't "cross the line." Instead, we confessed to some poor celibate priest all that steamy necking and pecking that went on in the car without consummation. (It drove my boyfriend nuts.) (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 144)

The speaking subject breaks this sexual/social order on two levels – by getting married and having sex secretly, and writing about it, making the "secret" public. The humor with which she juxtaposes the *celibate* priest and *steamy* necking is also evident in her narration of her first wedding: "Too risky to step out of the house dressed like Snow White." This humor takes on a sense of foreboding as she uses hyperbole and repitition in describing her future husband "already at the altar, this man I was destined to live with for the rest of my life, my assurance and riches, my pleasure, my rest and my tranquillity, my sweetness, my possession and my treasure (or so I thought)." The last phenotext in parentheses renders to this part of the utterance a sarcastic tone which will later on be explained in staccato manner as the speaking subject chances upon a forgotten journal and reads about: "The anger. The quarrels. The bending of wills. The betrayals and accusations" (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 145).

These short phrases, ending in periods to produce the appearance of short sentences, not only breaks the rules of grammar; they also reveal a semiotic that ruptures the order of marriage. The subject remains within this system, speaking of this "package deal" in which only much later, "did the bugs crawl out", a marriage not made in heaven, but "in the barbecue pit." Even in her narration, she vacillates between maintaining the symbolic order: "and life had been abundant and rich in so many other ways!" ; and scarcely containing the semiotic discontent that shows through as she ends the narrative with their anniversary in which he says, "Here's to our marriage. I wouldn't wish it on anyone!" and to which she responds, "Here's mud in your eye."

At some point in this narrative, the speaking subject confesses of her secret union a few months after the (wedding) celebration, hoping to "*break* her (mother's) heart":

> Let her *stew* over the motel business and *agonize* over the thought of my coming home every day *pretending* to be a dutiful, virginal daughter." And then in parentheses: "(It is a *perversity* only *colegialas* are capable of) (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 144).

This isolated paragraph reveals layers of discourses: the first is that of the mother-daughter relation of which Kristeva speaks about (referred to earlier) as part of the *feminine* enigma. Once more, the mother in this narrative seems to identify with the order against which the daughter rebels. This dis-identification from the mother places the daughter within the symbolic order, yet it marginalizes her at the same time. The semiotic desire-frustration shows through in her use of the emotion-laden words *break, stew,* and *agonize.* The term *colegiala* categorizes her as belonging to the middle class, the word *only* seems to indicate her prioritization of that class to which she belongs, yet juxtaposed with the word *perversity,* she succeeds in doing the opposite, once again choosing to marginalize herself from the symbolic order into which she is born.

Revealed in this narrative is the marginal position held and rebelled against by a middle class daughter and wife. The contradictory actions of refusal against and maintenance of the status quo only emphasizes her marginal experience.

The writer's ambiguous feelings towards the institution of marriage found in the previous narrative can also be detected in *The Loneliest Christmases* by *Rina Jimenez-David.* It is a recollection of Christmases spent in marriage. It begins with anticipation: "I couldn't wait to get married." But rather than rhapsodizing over her love for her future husband in the next two paragraphs, the speaking subject elucidates instead her eagerness to escape a communal existence where "everyone was constantly looking over my shoulder, inquiring about my health, poking into my things…"

Her semiotic longing for separation and independence shows through in these words:

> I daydreamed about the incredible luxury of having a closet of my own, with no sisters constantly borrowing my clothes and eventually appropriating some choice items. I imagined blissful days of adult freedom – free to eat in bed while watching tv, free to cry without having to hide in the bathroom, free to do all the things I wanted to do with my husband-to-be – without hearing my mother's voice echoing sternly in my mind (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 148).

This is immediately followed by one simple sentence: "So I got married." Right after this are the words: "But marriage, as every former bride realizes as soon as she becomes a 'mere' housewife, fell far short of my fantasy." She soon realizes this: "I still couldn't eat in bed while watching tv, since someone beside me raised a ruckus whenever crumbs fell on his side of the bed. Welcome to reality."

Words are sparingly used to frame the disillusionment and the frustration. This only emphasizes the semiotic energy behind the expression. There is much that is left unsaid, but so much more is revealed. Notice the words that are used to refer to the lifetime partner as well as the other words that contextualize every reference to him: "*someone* beside me raised a *ruckus*", "the *hubby* laid down what was to be the *iron law* throughout our marriage", "the *hubby dragged* me home", "*hubby snored* beside me". He is not referred to as "my love" or "my darling" at all and the words associated with him are all negatively connotated: ruckus, iron law, drag, and snored. From the aforementioned words, he strikes the reader as fastidious, demanding, and insensitive. He isn't even named, thus, the speaking subject succeeds to objectify this "someone" beside her. This perhaps is her response, her refusal of her own objectification as the appendage, the wife who must follow the law laid down by the husband: On Christmas Eve, they must be back in their own home by midnight.

> There was still a lot of celebration left in me when finally the hubby dragged me home…While the hubby snored beside me, I sat up in bed, eaten up with homesickness…Tears welled in my eyes. Only then did the full import of what I had done hit me. By getting married, I had irrevocably distanced myself from the family I grew up in. (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 149).

Closely following this monologue laced heavily with regret, she says: "But I had also cleaved to another man, another family. There would be moments like this, when, however lonely, my place would have to be beside him."

In a society where getting married is the norm, and romantic love is idealized, the subject speaks about a sadness that is often kept hidden by married women. For this speaking subject who had hoped for independence from family and a space to be free, it is the sadness of not finding her own space after all, a sadness from realizing that within the social order she occupies, there can be no open space for a woman just to *be.*

In war-torn Philippines of 1943, a married woman who is pregnant finds her own space in her writing. The text of this narrative comes from those writings. The first sentence of this excerpt from *A War Diary* by *Pacita Pestano Jacinto* immediately places us within the semiotic space: "Every significant day is remembered with pain. War changes everything for everyone…"

The narrative allows us a glimpse into the concrete effects of the Japanese occupation on the everyday lives of Filipinos. The writer details the restrictions made for the celebration of *All Soul's Day,* along with the political and economic exploitation of the Japanese that belies their talk of independence (which her house boy calls "Japanese Greed"). Included in this litany of misfortunes is the flood that victimized many and almost killed a little girl. Her recollection is made more vivid by descriptions of her domestic domain: "My house looks like a pigsty. Mud tracks on my floor are an inch thick, my window sills are dripping wet, my furniture sticky and damp…" The shifts between the public and private spaces, between the domestic and the greater economic, social, and political conditions, along with stories of individual Filipinos reveal not only the prevalent symbolic order of that time; it also brings to light the internal movements that were happening within the writer.

This is what war does: "Pregnant women have suddenly stopped having whims and caprices…Women have learned to become less demanding, less selfish, more conscious of how precious even merely living can be." These are the words of the speaking subject. Of these words I must ask as a reader, where does the assumption that women are demanding and selfish come from? This paragraph begins with these words: "Oscar (the husband) says, women in my condition should not be allowed in the streets." Don't the women know what is good and what is not good for them that they should be told what to do and what *not* to do?

She does not verbalize it, but perhaps the speaking subject's desire to write, despite all odds, reveals a desire for her own space amidst a social order that interpellates women as weak, selfish, demanding, and unable to decide for themselves. Of her writing, she says: "I am writing at noon. I have made it a practice not to use my typewriter at night, when it is too quiet, when every sound is held longer by the stillness." It is not only the war the writer has to contend with: "Oscar has asked me not to keep with my diary any longer. He claims that I take it too seriously, that I have begun to put *too much feeling* into it, that I expend energy *for no reason* (my italics)."

He says further: "I have never asked you to give it up before because I felt that you need something to amuse yourself with, but when you take it as if troubles of eighteen million Filipinos were all your own, it is no longer amusing. It becomes a drag." (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 111)

Talk about silencing the woman! But the woman's *jouissance*, especially one who is at the brink of motherhood, cannot be stifled. She writes: "I can still laugh. I still find pleasure in my green plants. I still keep the house alive with flowers. I have told him that I write these days only that I might be able to look back at them when normal times return." The speaking subject keeps on writing.

Julia Kristeva posits that women's roles as mothers may be the key to social change. She speaks of the *jouissance* that is articulated within the idea and act of reproduction. (Moi 167) *These Peaceful Days* by *Estrella Alfon* is a narrative that celebrates motherhood. Strangely, we find in the interstices of this joyful narration the "abjection" of motherhood that Kristeva speaks about.

The word pregnancy, birth, or motherhood is not mentioned at all. We only know that the speaking subject is going to be a mother from association with other words. The pregnancy or giving birth is only referred to as "the lovely dream" or "a deep wish." The feelings revealed in the phenotext are "joy" and "ecstasy." In the middle of this narrative is a recollection of people whom "she grew to love as one with my flesh, and one with my heart" during her stay at the sanatorium – an extension of the mother love she is experiencing. She speaks of a friend named Sylvia and how she could say to her, *unabashedly,* "I am lovely, lovelier than I have ever been in all my life. And I am happy, happier than I have ever been."

Yet there are slips amidst all this *jouissance*, in words like "subtle terror" and "fear" as well as being "embarrassed" by the scrutiny of her mother's eyes: "I would perhaps beg her not to look at me too closely." There is an instance when "irrelevantly", she wishes her husband would "dry his hair thoroughly." She writes about her husband's father who is "silent, withdrawing into a seeming solitude that we dared trespass only with our good evenings, and our good nights." And then there is her father, who told *her mother* to tell *her* that "it would be happiness enough to have his daughter alive, rather than that she should die bearing his grandchildren." She thinks about her husband and wonders if, the rest of their lives, he would love her again "the way he loves me now."

Surrounding the *jouissance* of motherhood is a symbolic order that rests on the abjection of the maternal function in order to exist. Closely related to sexuality, motherhood in this narrative carries with it a sense of shame, born of being located within an order that seeks to abject it. The speaking subject is reluctant to share her joy with her own mother and husband, perceived perhaps as part of the social order that expresses its own fears of motherhood as closely associated with death – physical death (the father's fear of her own death) and psychological death (her own fear of the permanence of her husband's love). Finally, in the last paragraph, she writes: "Let their children die, not mine." Strong words from a would-be mother after she is told by the older women to pray, if her child cannot be good, that the child should die.

Even if it is only hinted at within the symbolic order, motherhood is at the center of this narrative. The subtle repressive language that is used by the systems of family and society is responded to with semiotic fear, almost terror, but the semiotic *jouissance* also shows through, culminating in the violently protective words that could only come from the maternal instinct: "Let their children die, not mine." The maternal instinct is beyond the symbolic order that categorizes between good and bad, and beyond the power struggles that govern the division between genders: "How can a child be bad whom I prayed for, how can the child be ugly whose life begun with my hopes and dreams?"

The freedom that comes from nurturing another human being brings out the semiotic *jouissance* in a grandmother. *Games* by *Kerima Polotan* takes us into the uninhibited world of a child's imagination, into that pre-Oedipal space that does not know the lines demarcating the real from the fantastic.

The first words already sets the loving tone of the whole narrative: "There is a little girl in the house around whom my life revolves and heaven help me if she doesn't lead me a merry chase." Every little thing this "dearest thing alive on two feet" does is noted by the writer: "She salutes the cake vendor, kisses the hand of the maid (whose clogs she borrows), sweeps the floor with a fly swat, and talks to the fishes in the aquarium…"

The bed is turned into a stove where she (the little girl) cooks soup, bakes a cake, and finding out that it is "not done", calls for A-1 gas without bothering to dial the phone which she lifts from the bed. She asks for money to pay for it, and their roles in the game get mixed up, but as the writer says: "We can each be several characters at the same time."

In the role playing, the little girl becomes the husband and here, the categories set up by the social order begin to show through. When the little girl pretends to be the husband, she gets to drink the beer:

> She is laughing now. Tossing her head and guzzling her beer. She will not let me do that with my drink, because coffee is for sober people and must be drunk with circumspection. She will not let me have any ice, either, because ice is for beer (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 177).

Into this innocent paradise, amidst laughter and make-believe, we are given a glimpse of what the child must have seen and now imitates: "Drink up, she urges, while she leans back, crosses her legs, and then suddenly tosses her empty glass (or bottle) against the wall. She likes the sound of breaking glass and slaps her thigh, laughing."

The narrative continues with the little girl coolly navigating her car as a lion darts across their path and jumps out the window. It ends with the little girl planting a kiss on a red horse's wet nose before she takes her evening bath.

The delight this narrative brings to the reader stems from its being a reminder of that consciousness which must be repressed and kept hidden if one must survive in this symbolic world. The speaking subject in this narrative allows herself to be drawn into the imaginative world of the child she loves, finding her own childlike consciousness, and writing about it with delight. This narrative may serve as proof of Kristeva's concept of love as an agency which gives subjects the permission to act.

In the excerpt from "*The Law Above All*" by *Katrina Legarda*, the speaking subject is a lawyer who chooses to leave her job at a law firm to assist women who are victims of abuse. Coming from a woman of her economic and social position (she studied in Britain, belonged to a prestigious law firm), this is a conscious choice to align herself with the semiotic, which is a movement away from the symbolic orders to which she belongs. Her narrative is written during the time she is defending an eleven-year-old girl who had been raped by Romeo Jalosjos.

Disrupting the cohesiveness of the narrative voice, she uses the second person "you" when she speaks of her journey from being a lawyer who deals objectively with her faceless clients - to one who worries about the clients' private life or state of mind, one who spends sleepless nights dreaming of "children screaming as they were torn away from their helpless (read: poor) mothers." The use of the second person "you" in this context suggests a closing of the distance between the reader and herself.

Shifting back to the first person "I," she speaks of the "surprising feelings emanating" from her. Her choice to leave behind the symbolic orders into which she was born is energized by these semiotic "feelings," even though she "did not know how or where to start." She left a marriage "which was not making (me) grow, was not supportive of my strong desire to help people, and was a manifestation of everything my grandmother said was wrong in male-female relationships." She does this following an experience of grief over the sudden deaths of her sister and mother. We can see the strength of the semiotic at play here – intense grief at the death of loved ones, at the same time choosing to lose a husband, a social position, and a job.

A television interview launches her new career path and she is "inundated with calls from women begging for help to rid them of abusive, controlling, or even inconvenient husbands." She speaks, not just of fighting abusive patriarchal systems within the family, but of fighting an American educational system. She speaks of "still fighting, in midlife", but also of "choosing her battles." Here is a woman who has aligned herself with the "maternal function" – that which protects and looks after the needs of her "children." Kristeva notes that when a woman fulfils her maternal function, she is not "sexed." This harks back to the pre-Oedipal semiotic *chora,* which lies beyond the power relations inherent in the binaries of the female and male gender.

This speaking subject claims that she is hot-tempered, but also shy. She was, along with her sisters, brought up on the notion that they only had to work hard to get ahead. She says that she had no self-confidence in terms of physical attraction, intelligence, or even brilliance. Their interpellation, therefore, was not based on the essentialist patriarchal idea of the "good, pretty and intelligent" (at

least within the family system). This must have been facilitated by the fact that they "practically grew up without a male figure", her parents having separated early. She goes on to say that "it is not fair to make female children think that men are better than they are" adding that in fact, "Adam was stupid – he followed what Eve told him." For her to make this statement shows that she is aware of how the symbolic order to which she belongs perpetuates ideas opposite to hers.

There is a phenotext fragment in this narrative which manifests a semiotic rupture within the patriarchal Catholic symbolic order. I reproduce it here so as to capture the humour with which it is told:

> Cardinal Sin told me I should not be advising women to leave their abusive husbands. I said, you know, Cardinal Sin, you are surrounded by fifty nuns who serve you hand and foot, you have no idea how the ordinary family lives in this country. He was stunned. He said maybe I need a little more wisdom. (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 206)

These statements contain disruptions on several levels: the symbolic order of religion, as represented in this country by the Catholic church; and the symbolic order of sexual politics. It is no secret that the Church is viewed as the upholder of patriarchy. For this subject to speak out, right there in the presence of the "head patriarch" himself, within the material confines of the symbolic order, speaks of a semiotic energy that has succeeded in breaking through the bonds of the ruling symbolic order. She gives the Cardinal a picture of his own patriarchal practices (fifty nuns serving him hand and foot), and as often happens, after being temporarily stunned by the reality of its own power (even if said in hyperbole – or maybe not!) the symbolic order will seek to restore its position: "You need more wisdom." "You" refers to the subject, who is once more interpellated as having no wisdom, hence her need for it. She is interpellated as subordinate to the one who tells her she needs it, the one who knows better, the one who presumably has more wisdom than she does.

And yet, she has the last word, for this is her narrative:

> I have not heard Cardinal Sin say anything in behalf of the child in the Jalosjos case. Nor have I heard any priest tell his congregation not to sell their children. And yet priests tell women not to practice birth control, they should breed children, the children are the future of the Philippines. For sex? (Hidalgo, *Pinay* 206)

She also has much to say about the constitution of patriarchal men in Filipino households: "I think mothers here are disenabling their sons…They have no sense of responsibility, of initiative, even of awareness that a home requires certain things. And they certainly have no sense of commitment to a relationship. They see their sisters being brought up to believe they must never leave their husbands, they must serve, be faithful to him. Men are not taught they are supposed to be faithful too. And yet women put up with all this."

On top of her openly questioning the prevailing patriarchal order, she says: "I will never marry again," breaking from the symbolic order of marriage. She ends her narrative by saying "I

don't go to mass," breaking from the Catholic symbolic order. She ends her narrative by saying: "I say the purpose of our existence is to learn God's experience in life." Perhaps she is speaking of a connection with the formless and the unnamed.

Conclusion

This study has shown how, by linking literature with linguistics, psychoanalysis, and politics, the marginality of Filipino women can be mapped. By emphasizing specific words and phrases, the semiotic content of the narratives was brought to the surface. The examination of the semiotic processes was made possible through psychoanalysis, which is a major psychological approach. Finally, these linguistic and psychological perspectives were linked to political considerations, specifically the power relations between the speaking subject and the symbolic order.

In these narratives, we find a patriarchal symbolic order that seeks to maintain the status quo: daughters should be obedient and chaste, wives should love and serve their husbands, citizens should uphold the law (as the law upholds those in power), and the members of the religious order should follow their leaders without question. The marginality of the women speaking subjects in this selection of autobiographical narratives have been mapped according to the particular position (often overdetermined) in which they find themselves, or choose to be. These women speaking subjects have, each in their own way, sought to "refuse" the "negativity" to which they have been reduced by the prevailing order.

There is the daughter who literally placed her life and safety on the line, trying to escape the "molds" which she is literally forced to conform to. Caught between a chair and a hatchet, she discovers a space inside her head in which she can be free. There is the little girl whose religious beliefs and practices marginalize her from the prevailing Catholic religious order, alienating her from her own family and the Filipino community in which she finds herself. She refuses her interpellation by claiming her own perspectives, transforming the hegemonic symbolic order in her head with words.

There is the woman who began her narrative with the sexual act, considered taboo at that time. Although she remains within the social order which interpellates her as an obedient and chaste daughter, and then as a loving wife, she somehow manages to refuse both roles – while staying within that social order. By objectifying the force that tries to keep her in her place, a disillusioned wife is somehow able to bring out into the open the feelings kept hidden by those who must stay within the institution of marriage.

Then there is the would-be mother whose *jouissance* could not be stamped out by the subtle abjection of a fearful patriarchal order, and a grandmother who enters the pre-Oedipal world of her grandchild, thus finding her own joy. In the same way, a would-be mother is able to create her own space within the pages of her diary, amidst war and a patriarchal order that has found its way into her own home. Finally, there is the woman lawyer who chose to bring her maternal function into the public arena, breaking through the symbolic order of the law, religion, family, and society.

Awareness of the semiotic and symbolic processes of semanalysis throws light onto the fact that the marginality of women is not based on their *essence* but on their *position*. In analyzing the positions in which women find themselves, notions of a universalizing "womanhood" are done away with. The eight women speaking subjects in this paper come from different generations, and are interpellated by various discourses. Their differences from each other are marked, even if they share the same gender and the same race, and are located within the same patriarchal order. As has been shown, the patriarchal hegemony is also heterogeneous in its manifestations, producing different subjects, whose responses are as varied as there are individuals.

The purpose of this narrative has been to reveal, through semanalysis which is a linguistic, psychological and political approach, the "negativity" and "refusal" pertaining to the marginal in the Filipino woman. These eight "speaking subjects" show how, within their multiple marginal positions in the narratives, they have variously refused the "negativity" to which the Filipina women are continuously reduced to sexually, economically, politically, and socially.

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