

Institute of Art, Design, and Technology, Dun Laoghaire.

Dept. of Design and Visual Arts

From Tapís to Terno, the Filipino Traditional Dress:
Fashioning the Filipino Female Body and Mind from
the 16th to 21st Century.

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Statement of Academic Integrity

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment for the BA (Hons) in Design for Stage and Screen. It is entirely the author's own work, except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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Abstract

The visualisation of the Filipino woman can be constructed by the values imposed onto the Filipino people from centuries of western colonisation. This thesis examines the transformation of the traditional female Filipino dress, which can be traced back to the cultural changes caused by the three colonial regimes that ruled the Philippines during the 16th-20th Century: Spain (1565 to 1898), the United States (1898 to 1946) and Japan (1942 to 1945). This thesis will be focusing on the Spanish and American colonial rule that had the most formative impact on the clothing, culture and mentality. Its influences undoubtedly continues to affect the image and mindset of Filipino women today; most evidently in the importance of keeping modest, a value that stems from the European and Christian ideals brought by the Spanish (Coo), and the efforts to achieve whiteness as “western colonisers taught the Filipino natives to embrace only the white culture” (Natividad 30), resulting in colourism and loss of identity. In order to understand the effects of colonisation on the traditional clothing of Filipino women, it is essential to examine the female traditional dress in both pre-colonial and postcolonial periods; study how cultural assimilation, cultural hybridism and colourism manipulated the mindset and sense of self of the Filipino people; and explore the consequential feelings of shame, guilt and nostalgia of being a Filipino woman today. Although I was born there, my relationship with the Philippines, its culture and clothing were limited. Having grown up in Ireland since I was three-years-old, I assimilated into Irish culture at an early age and, unfortunately, was not exposed to Filipino history or culture a lot. My life as a Filipino woman was surrounded by western influences and expectations like having to learn the English language and meet European beauty standards. This thesis gave me the opportunity to explore my heritage, learn the history of the Philippines and build my cultural identity as a Filipino. The aim of this thesis is to not only study the transformation of the traditional clothing for women of the Philippines but to reveal the already established, strong, female Filipino identity hidden under the dress of western ideals.

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Introduction

The transformation of traditional Filipino clothing can be traced back to the cultural changes caused by the three colonial regimes that ruled the Philippines during the 16th to 20th Century: Spain (1565 to 1898), the United States (1898 to 1946) and Japan (1942 to 1945). According to Coe, each colonisation altered aspects of Filipino history, culture and social life to be more multi-ethnic, multicultural and modern (4). These societal and cultural shifts were reflected in the way people dressed as traditional clothes were adapted to satisfy the new western ideals. However, the physical appearance and dress were not the only aspects that were affected. Colonial influences are incredibly rooted in Filipino history that the culture, beliefs and mindset among the Filipino people, specifically Filipino women, continue to conform to western standards today. This damages the relationship that Filipino women have with themselves and skews their cultural identity.

Although I was born there, my relationship with the Philippines, its culture and clothing were limited. Having grown up in Ireland since I was three-years-old, I assimilated into Irish culture at an early age and, unfortunately, was not exposed to Filipino history or culture a lot. My life as a Filipino woman was surrounded by western influences and expectations like having to learn the English language and meet European beauty standards. This thesis gave me the opportunity to explore my heritage, learn the history of the Philippines and build my cultural identity as a Filipino.

Learning about the people, culture and native clothing during the pre-colonial period of the Philippines was the first step in the writing process of this thesis. It was important to initially observe the simplicity of native Filipino life to be able to understand the future changes and consequences caused by colonisation. Firstly, I sourced artworks, articles, journals and books based on the Philippines during the pre- and post-colonial periods; general Filipino history; Filipino women; and native clothing. My focuses included themes and theories regarding colonisation; colonial mentality; culture and clothing; culture and women; colourism; discrimination based on skin colour; and cultural assimilation.

Books that I studied included: *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* by Joanne Entwistle and *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* by

William Henry Scott. These were useful resources when learning about pre-colonial clothing and how to examine the concept of clothing in conventional and unconventional ways. Scott's book writes about the Philippines during the 16th Century, providing great imagery on the cultures, lifestyles and clothing of different Filipino groups like the *Tagalogs* and the *Visayas*. *The Fashioned Body* by Entwistle was another helpful resource that looks at the concept of clothing, dress and fashion. It examines the concept of dress in different cultures, sub-cultures and histories while also delving into themes like identity, sexuality and ethnicity. It tackles these subjects in both broad and specific ways. This book introduced new ideas, ways of thinking and perspectives to me. I began to look at how a body is dressed in a new way.

Articles that I read were the following: *Clothing and the colonial culture of appearances in the nineteenth century Spanish Philippines, 1820-1896* by Stéphanie Marie R. Coo and *Colonial Mentality: A Review and Recommendation for Filipino American Psychology* by E. J. R David and Sumie Okazaki. These were significant resources in the early stages of my research. Coo's research paper provided a detailed review of the traditional clothing and image of Filipino women under the Spanish colonisation, discussing the clothing worn by different classes, different tribes in the Philippines and the non-believers and believers of Christianity. David and Okazaki's article expanded my limited knowledge on the effects that colonisation had on the Philippines and the Filipino people. Although my thesis is focused on the transformation of traditional female dress, I thought it was important to understand the political and cultural context that the clothing changes occurred in. It was beneficial to learn the impact that colonisation had on the country and how the effects were essentially passed down in the behaviour, mindset and pride that Filipinos today possess.

Authors Amina Mire, Anne McClintock and Francine Singson provided expert information on skin whitening products in the beauty industry. Their articles, *Skin-bleaching: Poison, beauty, power and the politics of the colour line* (Mire), *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (McClintock) and *Colonialism's Role in the Success of the Filipino Skin Whitening Industry* (Singson), addressed topics like white supremacy, commodity racism, internalised oppression and the health effects of using skin whitening products or skin-bleaching procedures. This information helped me when writing about the use of skin whitening products among Filipino women, as the authors explained why such beauty practices are so successful, and the damaging influence this branch of the beauty industry has "among the lower class" (Singson 2).

Although not many Irish libraries had books about Filipino history, finding enough relevant work online was enough help for my research. Another source was the available virtual tour provided on the website of The National Museum of Anthropology in Manila, where I was able to view their exhibitions. The Ayala Museum and The Rachel and Clare Tanner Collection displayed vintage materials, textiles and other items of pre-colonial clothing online with relevant descriptions. To be able to see and study the patterns, colours and history of these pieces was incredibly significant in developing my visual knowledge on how Filipino women were fashioned.

This thesis will focus on the influences and outcomes effects of the Spanish and American colonisations, examining how Filipino women were fashioned to fit the different customs, beliefs and western expectations that ultimately altered the traditional female dress. The outcomes of colonial rule such as internalised racism, colourism and the development of colonial mentality will also be discussed.

The first chapter will look at the history of the traditional female dress and mark the major milestones in its transformation over the course of each colonisation. The earliest native clothing worn by women, the *tapis*, a “wraparound skirt” (Coo 9) that was made from silk or linen, will be the first garment to be reviewed. It is important to consider the significance that this simple clothing had for Filipino women and their way of life leading up to the Spanish colonisation in the 16th Century as the *Filipiniana* will subsequently lose its original simplicity in later variations. For example, this tube skirt ultimately became a formal ensemble by the American occupation in the 19th Century. To fully delve into the history of the *Filipiniana* and the fashioning of the Filipino female body, it is essential to establish a timeline in this chapter to capture how colonial rule was connected to the changes in traditional clothing.

Colonisation, however, did not only affect the way Filipino women dressed. Roces explains that the transformation of traditional female clothing also transformed the image and perception that the western world originally had on Filipino women. She mentions that keeping traditional features in the dress “echoed this nostalgia for the ‘Filipina’ who was shy, timid, beautiful and obedient” (19) and a romantic figure that remained working in the countryside (20-21). However, the traditional dress today is recognised as a regal and dignified outfit (Roces 19)

which poses the question: When did the image of a Filipino woman change from meek to strong?

The second chapter will discuss the distinct changes in culture that altered the image of the Filipino woman such as the integration of the Spanish and English language, the introduction to Christianity and a new importance in eurocentrism. By examining how their image was made and reshaped to meet the cultural ideals of each colonial power, the influences that inspired the transformation of traditional female clothing can be further understood.

David and Okazaki explain that the aim of colonisation is to create a “race-based societal system... designed to benefit the coloniser and continually subjugate the colonised” (3). The result of such ruling is seen in the surviving European-inspired architecture, alterations to traditional Filipino clothing and the retention of American English; all of which contributed to the diminished cultural identity of the Filipino people. Western colonisation has also caused “psychological consequences” (David and Okazaki 3) and a “colonial mentality... among today’s Filipinos” (Quimpo 36).

The third chapter will discuss issues like colourism, racism, cultural assimilation, cultural hybridism and other outcomes that stemmed from colonisation. An analysis of these socio-cultural problems will reveal how the Filipino woman’s mindset was affected by the European values imposed onto them.

Although conducting research for this thesis was a valuable effort, it unveiled a culture that was taken, destroyed and replaced under colonisation. The more history that was uncovered about the *Filipinana* showed the consequences of colonial control. However, tracking the transformation of this important female garment and analysing how it was built under the pressure of power and broken back down to a genuine piece of Filipino culture today, reveals how the female Filipino identity always prevails.

Chapter One: The Transformation of Traditional Clothing under Spanish Influence (16th to 19th Century)

To effectively examine how the Filipino female body was fashioned during the 16th to 19th Century, it is important to establish the history of the *Filipiniana*, the traditional dress of Filipino women, and track its transformation in the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods of the Philippines. The Spanish colonisation (16th to 19th Century) and American colonisation (19th to 20th Century) brought cultural, political and religious influences that altered the traditional dress in distinct ways to meet the social ideals of each respective rule. This chapter will uncover how the original female garment, the tube skirt called a *tapis* shown in Fig. 1, becomes the formal ensemble called a *terno* shown in Fig. 2.



Fig. 1. *A Pintado (Visayan) couple.* Circa 1590, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Indiana.
Boxer Codex.



Fig. 2. Amorsolo, Fernando. *Portrait of Susana Bernardo Ramos*. 1959, National Museum of Fine Arts, Manila.

By studying the society, culture and way of life of native Filipinos during the pre-colonial period of the Philippines, the traditional customs and original symbols of clothing can commence the timeline of transformation of the *Filipiniana*.

Hislop reveals that before the first colonisation, native Filipinos were already encountering people from different countries due to trading routes. Some religious rituals and beliefs practised by native Filipinos were influenced by Chinese and Muslim culture. Hislop writes that “Filipinos [that] worshipped the spirits of their ancestors might tend to Chinese influence... [as] Chinese influence is seen mainly in the instruments used in worship, such as Chinese jars and gongs” (145) (see Fig. 18). Another example is how native Filipinos practised *Anitism*, a religious belief of ancestral spirits and souls, long before Christianity (see Fig. 19)

The influence of the Muslim and Chinese culture is prominent among the Tausūg people, an ethnic group found in the southern regions of the Philippines. According to an online article by

Vesti Conversations, the *pis syabit* is a textile traditionally woven in silk that is “believed to have been adapted from Chinese textile techniques” (Vesti, “Vestriovia: Pis Syabit”). Today, the material showcases the colour green more as it is the sacred colour of the Islam religion, the main religion in Muslim culture.

As mentioned above, these cultural and religious influences were introduced by trading routes. This poses the question whether the violence and oppression brought by colonial rule were necessary to change the customs of the Philippines as the integration of Muslim and Chinese culture during the pre-colonial period of the Philippines are continuously being retained today (see Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). This chapter will reveal how the transformation of traditional Filipino clothing is rooted in religion and ruthless rule.



Fig. 3. *Muslim woman by pis syabit tapestries.* 2022, The Smart Local Philippines, <https://thesmartlocal.ph>



Fig. 4. Pis syabit *used as clothing*. 2022, The Smart Local Philippines, <https://thesmartlocal.ph>

1.1 Pre-Colonial Filipino Society and Structure

According to Scott, there were three class systems in pre-colonial Philippines (127). The lowest social class was called the *oripun*, who were perceived as servants or slaves which was a status received through “birth right, acquired debt or capture” (Mateo 31). The middle class was called the *timawa* which means “freemen”. They were the offspring of “*datu*’s commoner wives or slaves concubines” (Mateo 31) who considered themselves free due to their “progenitor granting them freedom” (Scott 131). The *timawa* fought with their masters in battle and earned tattoos (see Fig. 9) which were viewed highly and represented their social standing or bravery in war.



Fig. 5. *A Pintado Couple.* Circa 1590, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Indiana. *Boxer Codex.*



Fig. 6. *Native Visayan Slaves.* Circa 1590, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Indiana. *Boxer Codex.*



Fig. 7. *Tagalog royal couple in red, the distinctive colour of their class.* Circa 1590, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Indiana. *Boxer Codex.*



Fig. 8. *A pre-colonial couple belonging to the datu or nobility. Circa 1590, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Indiana. Boxer Codex.*

The head of the community was called the *datu* who had political and social power over the community. The *datu* “governed over people, settled their disputes, protected them from enemies and led them in battle” (Scott 130). The duties and responsibilities of a *datu* were rewarded with “labours and tributes from his people” (Scott 130) such as “harvesting his fields and building his house” (Scott 130) and gifts like crops. These honours and rewards reveal the significance and high social status that *datu*s held in the community.



Fig. 9. *Warrior from Cagayon Valley.* Circa 1590, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Indiana.
Boxer Codex.

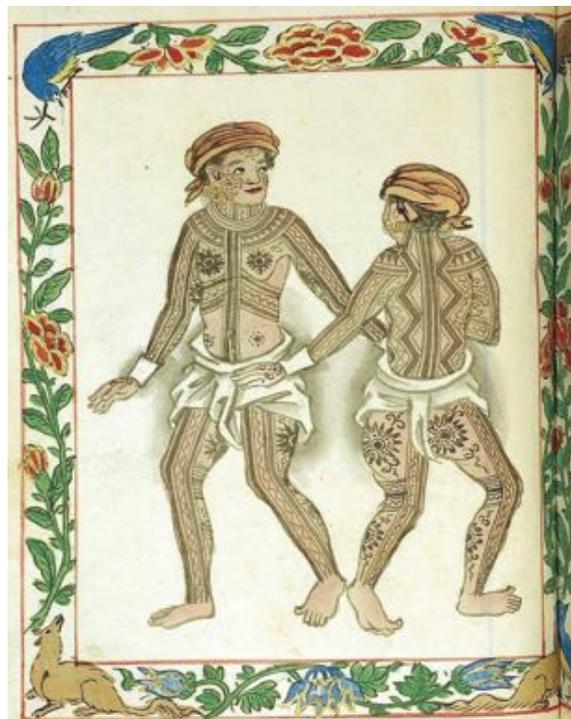


Fig. 10. *Pintados (Visayans) from Bohol, showing their patok or tattoos.* Circa 1590, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Indiana. *Boxer Codex.*

A high social status was also shown in how someone dresses and their physical appearance. While most clothing of the higher class were similar to other social classes, such as the silhouettes of the female *tapis* or male g-string, the difference in classes were found in the textiles, material and embellishment of clothes and accessories. This can be seen by comparing Fig. 5 and Fig. 7 with Fig. 8. The clothing of *datus* were made from more elegant Chinese silks, that were obtained through trade, and fabric manipulation such as the dyeing of material and embroidery showed the wealth of high class people (see Fig. 7 and 8). For example, Labarador writes that Muslim Maranao people from the region of Mindanao dyed fabric green to represent “stability and secure social status [and] red for strength and bravery” (39). According to The Rachel and Clare Tanner Collection, the colour “yellow [was] a symbol of royalty or high class” (“Malong a Landap (Tubular Garment)”) among the same community.

The tubular garment or skirt called *malong a landap* in Fig. 11 is made of a thin silk material called *sutra* that is traditionally worn by the Sultan or elite men and women of the Marano people of Southern Philippines since the 1500s. This colourway of yellow and magenta symbolises royalty or high class and is inspired by Indian textiles (The Rachel and Clare Tanner Collection). The *malong a landap* involves three parts in the garment: the *lakban* which is the wide silk tapestry bands sewed vertically on the sides of the garment, the *langkit* which are silk tapestry bands sewed vertically and horizontally the garment for patterning purposes, and finally the *tobrian* which is a narrower piece that runs down the centre of the malong.



Fig. 11. and Fig. 12. Silk or “Sutra” Malong (Tubular garment). The Rachel and Clare Tanner Collection. 2023, Sentro Rizal, London.



Fig. 13. Gold ear ornaments discovered in Butuan. Circa 10th-13th Century, Ayala Museum, Manila.

Fig. 14. Necklace with beads shaped like augur shells (susos). Northeastern Mindanao. Circa 10-13th Century Ayala Museum, Manila.

Jewellery such as necklaces, cuffs, collars and earrings were made from a variety of local and readily available materials such as bamboo, vegetable fibres and seeds. They were also made with gold, pearl and ivory which were obtained through trade (see Fig. 13 and Fig. 14). In pre-colonial Philippines, external or foreign trades came from Chinese, Indian and Indonesian

traders who “sought interior or forest products like beeswax, medicinal plants and honey” (Matteo 24).

These accessories held great significance and symbolism. For example, an Ilongot man in Northern Luzon will wear a specific earring to indicate that he was a headhunter (see Fig. 9). According to Rosaldo, red hornbill earrings represented masculinity and symbolised strong capabilities as a headhunter (310) (see Fig. 15 and Fig. 16). Charm bracelets, armlets and leglets held medicinal value and were used to deter bad spirits in the Negrition communities (see Fig. 17). People with high power and positions wore “gold, porcelain and bronze” (Scott 169) jewellery (see Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).



Fig. 15. Man's Ear Ornaments (Batling). Circa 19th-20th Century, The Met, New York.



Fig. 16. Peknar, Wakedeng. *Original drawing of red hornbill earrings.* 1986.



Fig. 17. *Kunseras*, Charm Bracelet. Unknown date. National Museum of Anthropology, Manila.

1.2 Filipino Religious Beliefs Then and Now, How Christianity Changed Culture

In the pre-colonial period of the Philippines, native Filipinos believed in many gods and nature spirits to help them navigate through “unsafe and unpredictable” (Mateo 36) environments. Scott writes that they worshipped a Supreme God called *Laon* and lesser gods called *diwatas*. Nature spirits, however, were viewed as the personification of animals, natural elements and inanimate objects with each representing a different type of help. For example, “the new moon suggested prosperity and fertility... stars and constellations connected with the agricultural cycle were invoked for good crops” (Scott 77).

How native Filipinos worshipped gods were considered unconventional by the Spanish. According to early Spanish missionaries, native Filipinos were seen worshipping “without temples or organised priesthood and used no scriptures” (Hislop 147). This perspective indicates that “replac[ing]” the religious rule was possibly easy for the Spanish (Hislop 147). Instead of temples, native Filipinos worshipped in their homes with altars and ritual objects (see Fig. 18 and Fig. 19).



Fig. 18. *Butingan* .Stoneware jar used as vessel for making rice wine, believed by the Pala'wan to be as the drinks of the deities and spirits during rituals. Unknown date. Palawan.
The National Museum of The Philippines.

Fig. 19. *Bulu*, Granary Deity of the Ifugao, believed to provide wealth to the owners if treated with respect. Unknown date. National Museum of Anthropology, Manila.

Scott writes that in addition to the observations made by early Spanish missionaries, explorer Ferdinand Magellan found that native Filipinos “did not worship anything but raised their face and clasped hands to heaven, and called their God *abba*” (79). The word *abba* had two different meanings: (1) the Visayan expression for wonder or admiration (Scott 79) and (2) the Malay-Arabic word for “father”. The use of the Malay language shows the influence that Austronesian-speaking people had on the Philippines which Gaillard and Mallari writes about in the following:

The Austronesian speakers are associated with the spread of Neolithic culture in the Philippine archipelago. [The] Neolithic cultural stage in the Philippines usually includes the development of agriculture, polished stone tools, pottery making and Austronesian languages. (6)

It is evident that the Philippines had encountered and developed relationships with other countries long before the arrival of the Spanish. The different cultural customs and religious practices brought by the Muslims, the Chinese and Austronesian-speaking people had positive impacts in agriculture and trade (Matteo 26). The transformation of traditional Filipino female

clothing comes from this multicultural history established by trade routes and later, changed by colonisation.

1.3 From Tapís to Terno, The Transformation of Filipino Traditional Dress

The traditional clothing of Filipino women originated as a “wraparound skirt” (Scott 31) called the *tapís* (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 20). Evidence of this dress dates to the 10th and 16th Century where it was made of silk or linen and was commonly worn in different regions of the Philippines. The *tapís* was known by different names in these places. For example, the Maranaw people in Mindanao called this skirt a *malong* which was not only wrapped around the waist, but the chest as well and secured with a knot. In the Visayas, it was called a *patadyong* and was longer than the usual *tapís* but styled similarly.



Fig. 20. An 18th Century Kapampangan woman using a *tapís* as a bottom. The Newberry Library, Chicago.



Fig. 21. *Malong, silk and dyes.* Tubular skirt made of dyed silk. Maranao. Circa 15th-16th Century. The National Museum of Anthropology, Manila.

Along with the *tapis*, “a *baro* or collarless blouse, *talukbong* shawl, *lambong* or ankle length tunic” (Scott 29) was worn on top for public or formal occasions. The native daily attire worn by women and men was simple. Men wore a loincloth or g-string to showcase their tattoos (see Fig. 6, Fig. 9 and Fig. 10) and women wore a *tapis* (see Fig. 20). Eicher and Sumberg describe pre-colonial clothing to be “slow-changing” (12) as it was only until the Spanish colonisation in the 15th Century that the traditional dress started to evolve.

The *tapis* and *baro* became the female traditional dress known as the *baro’t saya* (see Fig. 22) and this attire was how the Spanish colonists identified Filipino women. Additionally, the name itself reflects the reality of the Spanish colonisation as the name of the dress is the combination of both the Tagalog and Spanish languages; the word *baro* meaning “blouse” in Tagalog and the word *saya* meaning “skirt” in Spanish.

In the 18th Century, traditional female clothing transformed under the new prominence and practice of modesty. The *baro't saya* became more conservative to comply with the Christian ideals brought by the Spanish rule. These changes are evident when comparing Fig. 23 and Fig. 24 with the original dress in Fig. 22. The *pañuelo* meaning “neck scarf” in Spanish was added to cover the chest more (see Fig. 23). The skirt also reached the floor and had two layers to cover any exposed skin (see Fig. 24)



Fig. 22. (L) Amorsolo, Fernando. *Young Woman with a Pot*. 1947.

Fig. 23. (R) Amorsolo, Fernando. *Portrait of a Lady in Maria Clara Dress* *Portrait of Doña Leonila Mercado Yatco-Yapinchay*. 1955.



Fig. 24. (L) Luan, Juan. *La Bulaqueña*. 1895, National Museum of Fine Arts, Manila.

Fig. 25. (R) Amorsolo, Fernando. *Portrait of Susana Bernardo Ramos*. 1959, National Museum of Fine Arts, Manila.

Filipino female fashion not only distinguished different classes but it helped a woman construct a cultural identity in society. Coo writes how “these luxurious textiles, from dainty handkerchiefs (see Fig. 24) to exquisite *pañuelos*, all attest to a period in Philippine history when clothes reveal - or conceal - status, affiliations and values” (1). Assimilation was asserted with language, modesty reshaped societal reputation and the new western perspective changed the image of Filipino people, particularly Filipino women, completely. Coo writes the following:

While the colonisers may not have encouraged the imitation of their dressing habits, they may not have discouraged them either. Many of the *indios* and *mestizos* aimed not only to match but at times, even to surpass the appearance of their social superiors. (47)

For example, the more sophisticated version of the traditional female dress is called the *traje de mestiza* which means “dress of the mixed race” in Spanish, but is more popularly known as the Maria Clara gown (see Fig. 24). Its name derives from a character in Jose Rizal’s novel *Noli Me Tángere*. Maria Clara is the *mestiza* or “mixed racial or ethnic ancestry” protagonist who Rizal describes as the ideal image of a Filipino woman. Romero et al. also writes that

“Maria Clara is the image of the Philippines with her virtues and inconsistencies, a symbol made more human by characteristics of the typical 19th century Filipino” (97).

The future variation of the Maria Clara gown became the *traje de mestiza*, which featured the *camisa, pañuelo* but had a stiff *serpentina* skirt, which was “a skirt that was narrowed at the top but was generously wide at the bottom” (Moya) (see Fig. 29). This later evolved into the *terno* (see Fig. 25). The dress developed into an iconic, sleek and sophisticated silhouette, bearing butterfly sleeves that Filipino people recognise today as the traditional dress of a Filipino woman. The word *terno* means “suit” in Spanish and reflects the original matching two-piece blouse and skirt before refining into the one-piece dress.

Chapter Two:

Changes in Culture, Society and Lifestyle under American Influence (19th to 20th Century)

When the Americans defeated the Spanish in May 1898, it marked the beginning of a new colonial rule in the Philippines. The American military brought forward a force of “tutelary benevolence” (Go 94) that created weariness among the Filipino people. Information regarding the new rulers and their intentions were limited (Go 93). While the Spanish conquest was “characterised by conflict and bloodshed” (Newson 24), the American approach for control was “a matter of coercion and conquest... [by instilling] the American Spirit” (Go 94). However, Filipino leaders already understood the concepts of “independence, rights, liberty and self-government” (Go 95) which were gained under the influence of Spanish Catholicism and French politics. With this knowledge, Filipinos began campaigning for independence from the Americans in 1902 and were successful.

The Filipino society and culture changed to reflect this new-found freedom. Corpuz discusses how the Philippines possessed an “estranged” (12) relationship with the Spanish government under the Spanish rule due to the conflicting interests which didn’t serve the Filipino people. This contrasts with the “close and reciprocal involvement” (12) between the Filipino people and the government under the American colonisation. Corpuz states that the “Filipino society in the American period became what we now call modern” (12) while the Spanish rule was “almost feudalistic” (11).

This new modernity or modernisation can be visually tracked in the transformation of the traditional dress of Filipino women. The depictions of the Filipino traditional dress, as seen in Fig. 26, 27 and 28 show its evolution being under Spanish influence, then the American colonial rule and thereafter. The garment shown in Fig. 26 depicts a two-piece ensemble which can be dated back to the *traje de mestiza* or further back to the *baro’t saya*. The dark coloured skirt and light, floaty blouse with puffy sleeves shows evidence of this (see Fig. 22). The stamp shown in Fig. 26 was released in 1943, a few years before the Philippines gained independence. It displays an earlier and more traditional version of the dress which poses the question: did the simplicity of the past still represent the Filipino woman? Or was it to capture nostalgia? These representations of Filipino women during this time will be discussed further in this chapter.

The garments depicted in Fig. 27 and Fig. 28 illustrate what seems to be the *terno* dress according to the narrow silhouette, monochromatic colourway and suggested one-piece attire with notable butterfly sleeves. These two stamps were released in 1935 and 1946 respectively, the year that the American colonial rule ended. The significance of the *terno* represented on these stamps suggest the modernity and forward-moving mentality that Filipino people had.

It is important to inspect how the country's independence changed the ways in which Filipino women presented themselves. Did they break away from the reins of colonisation or hold onto the customs conditioned under colonial rule? This chapter will delve deeper into the cultural and political symbolism in traditional Filipino female clothing during the country's shift towards independence.



Fig. 26. (Top L) 1943, Independence Declaration, perforated

Fig. 27. (Top R) 1935 Philippines Council

Fig. 28. (Bottom Row) 1946, Independence

2.1 Dress in Politics, Women in Politics

From 1902 to 1946, the American colonisation pushed the Philippines through great political and cultural growth. It was a highly influential period that transformed the traditional clothing of Filipino women once again. Like how traditional clothing changed under the Spanish colonisation to reflect the adoption of Spanish traditions and beliefs such as modesty from Christianity, the traditional dress of Filipino women started to show more American customs. Roces mentions that the *terno* (see Fig. 25) was “influenced by American evening gowns” (24) as seen in Fig. 31.

One American custom that influenced change was the learning of the English language with the arrival of 600 English teachers onboard the *U.S.S Thomas* who “inadvertently brought with them a new mode of dress” (Gonzales). This new mode of dress associated with the Gibson Girls (see Fig. 32) inspired the *serpentina* style skirts which were fitted at the waist and flared out towards the hemline in a dramatic way, sometimes leaving a small train. Customs like modesty from the Spanish colonial rule shifted slightly during this time as we saw the removal of the *pañuelo* with the *terno* dress, leaving the nape and part of the chest exposed. Although it is important to examine the external transformation of the *Filipiniana* during this time, it is equally essential to look at how the self-perception that Filipino women formed under highly influential rulers and changed when the Philippines found independence.



Fig. 29. (L) Lady in serpentina skirt, early 1910s, hand-tinted postcard photo.

Collection of Louie Acosta

Fig. 30. (R) Pacita de los Reyes in a Ramon Valera pañuelo-less terno, circa 1947.

Lopez Museum and Library Collection



Fig. 31. (L) Blush Pink Evening Gown, circa early 1900s

Fig. 32. (R) Danish-born actress Camille Clifford, one of the 'Gibson Girls'. Unknown date.

The perception of Filipino women during the pre- and post-colonisation colonial periods can be considered to be one of compliance. Their behaviour and mindset were expected to comply with colonial rules, assume gender roles and be established early in education. Coo states that

during the Spanish colonisation, social and cultural education for girls were “prioritised over reading and writing” (131) as society only saw value in the women who were conservative, outgoing and homely (see Fig. 22).

Coo further explains that young girls were exposed to this learning at a young age. She writes that “cultural education began at home, continued under the influence of nuns in convent schools and reinforced through interaction with friends” (131). Young girls were taught “hygiene, domestic economy and the application of adornment appropriate to their gender” (133) instead of subjects like agriculture, which was taught to the boys. This image can be seen in Fig. 22 which shows a young girl holding a pot; a prop that could symbolise cooking, gardening or housework. Furthermore, young girls were taught how to sew and hand embroidery at an early age which brought pride to their family as the “image of a sewing woman immersed in needlework formed part of the idealised image of a compliant and talented colonial woman” (Coo 133). Coo provides a clear picture of what a Filipino woman was expected to be during the Spanish colonisation, which was conservative, homely and dutiful; traits that are also attached to what a *baro't saya*, *traje de metzisa* and *Maria Clara* dresses (see Fig. 23, Fig. 24 and Fig. 25) were imagined to be.

Around the 1930s under the American colonisation, wearing traditional Filipino dress became less common amongst women. The *terno* (see Fig. 25) was mostly worn as formalwear during special occasions or exclusively by women in the political field who attended political events.

The traditional male garment, the *barong tagalog*, was also worn less. Early illustrations from the 1820s depict the *barong tagalog* as “almost knee length, striped with bright colours and very sheer in texture” (Sorilla IV). This version was called the *barong mahaba* (see Fig. 33) and it evolved into the *barong tagalog* which was shorter, monochromatic in colour but still sheer in texture. The *baro cerrada* was worn later and had “a closed-neck collar and made from opaque material” (Sorilla IV).

The traditional Filipino clothing for men shared the same lightweight, sheer material that female blouses had. These garments were often made of *pina* cloth as shown in Fig. 35. Similar to the wear of traditional female dress, the *barong tagalog* was used as everyday attire before, then only worn in special occasions and eventually being replaced by the *americana* during the American colonisation which were more western-styled suits (see Fig. 34).



Fig. 33. Asuncion, Justiniano. *Mestizos Sangley y Chino*. 19th century watercolour.



Fig. 34. *From Camisa to Americana*, circa late 1920s. Alex Castro Collection.

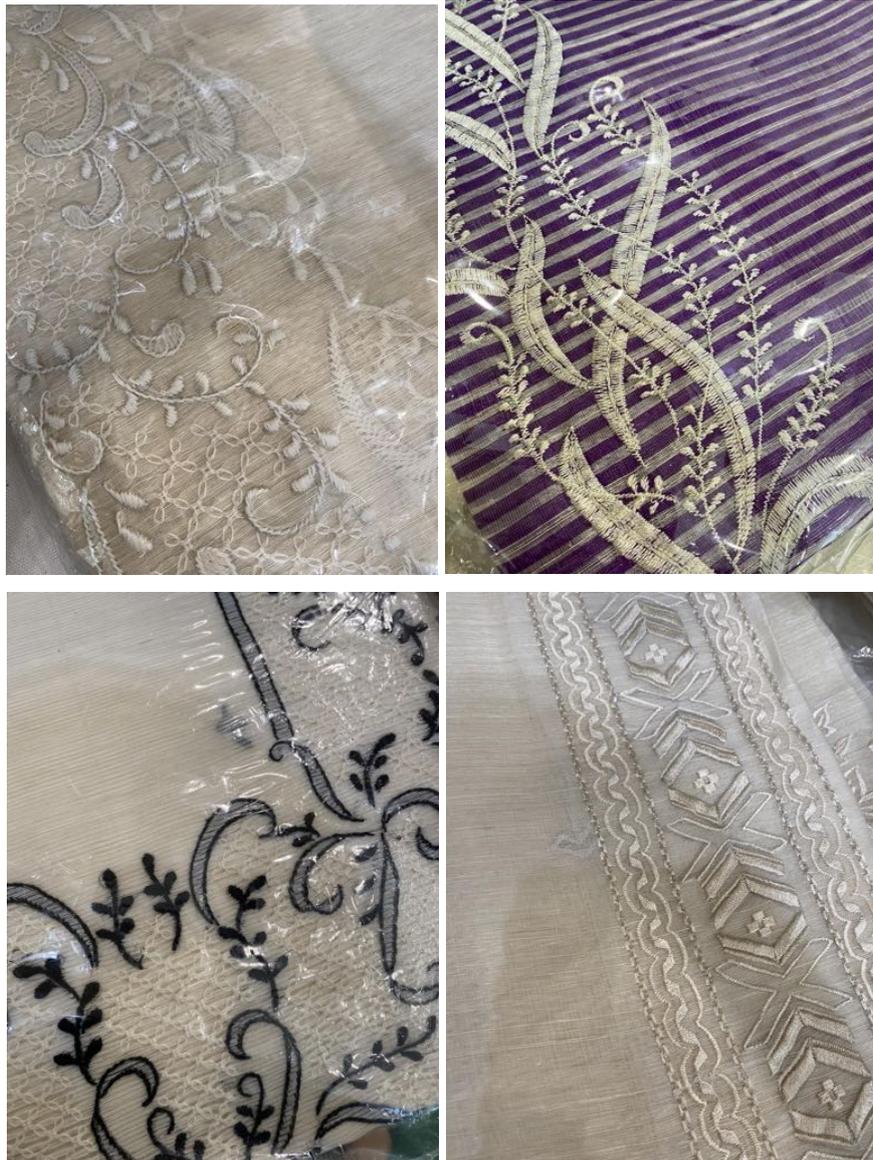


Fig. 35. Geodisico I., Tricia. *Samples of piña cloth used to make barong tagalogs today.* 16 January 2024.

Filipino men with political power wore more westernised clothing such as suits, commonly called the *americana* (see Fig. 34, right image), instead of the *barong tagalog* (see Fig. 34, left image) during official events in the early 1900’s. Roces writes that the suit was seen to represent power and modernity, aspects associated with the “powerful coloniser” (13). Meanwhile, Filipino women who continued to wear the traditional *terno* were viewed in two ways: wearing the “attire of the colonised subject” (Roces 13) from “[the Philippines’s] meek and emasculated past” (Roces 13), or the “bearer and wearer of the national ‘tradition’” (Roces 12), the latter having the more positive connotation. This was in contrast to when Filipino men

began wearing the *barong tagalog* after the country gained independence which was seen as a “symbol of their proud, nationalist identity” (Roces 20).

It is clear that certain traditional clothing carried different respect amongst the Filipino people. The varying views regarding what was worn by Filipino women reveal the unfair expectations, inequality and complex consequences of colonial rule. Anything traditional was associated with weakness, nostalgia and a longing for familiarity.

2.2 Paintings, Political Events and How Women are Perceived

While negative connotations continued to be associated with the female traditional dress, women in politics used them as tools to make statements, create change or establish power (Roces 12). As seen in Fig. 36, the ternos worn by the women have varied colours and patterns but maintain the classic silhouette of a fitted long gown with exaggerated starched butterfly sleeves.

Filipino fashion designer and National Artist, Ramon Valera, was credited for “unifying the components of the *baro't saya* into a single dress” (Vinta Gallery). Valera was successful in maintaining the significant features of the original traditional dress while moving the garment forward with its shape and structure. These changes provoked the nostalgia of a romanticised image of the Filipino woman.



Fig. 36. The First Lady tendered a dinner at the Palace. Unknown date.

Painter and National Artist, Fernando Amorsolo, captures the romanticised essence of Filipino women and their rural life before the Spanish colonial rule well. His paintings depict an idyllic way of life in the countryside and the women are dressed in traditional Filipino clothing as seen in Fig. 37 and Fig. 38. During the 1920's and 1930's, the nostalgic nature of the paintings created a sense of familiarity and comfort to the changes brought by the American colonisation. Roces writes how “women became the bearers and wearers of national tradition” (12) which can be seen in the paintings below.



Fig. 37. Amorsolo, Fernando. *Under the Mango Tree*. 1939, National Museum of Fine Arts, Manila.



Fig. 38. Amorsolo, Fernando. *Dalagang Bukid*. 1929, National Museum of Fine Arts, Manila.

Both paintings are set outdoors in a peaceful and pastoral landscape where both men and women are wearing traditional Filipino dress: the *tapis* with the floaty, puffed-sleeved blouse on the women and the lightweight shirts with rolled up sleeves on the men. Bathed in golden

light, they are seen working in “pre-industrial pastoral labour” (Lisa 32) and appear to be positive. The atmosphere is warm, peaceful and joyful. The paintings depict pre-colonial life to be simple and slow.

It is clear that Amorsolo paints the women in an idealised way as they are depicted to be hard-working, lively and kind (see Fig. 38). He paints them in a bright light that illuminates their beauty and the liveliness of their surroundings, creating a romanticised image of pre-colonial times. Amorsolo captures the beauty of Filipino women by painting them in a positive light, suggesting a rejection to westernised beauty standards. He has once stated:

[A] rounded face, not of the oval type often presented to us in newspapers and magazine illustrations... the ideal Filipina beauty should not necessarily be white complexioned, nor of the dark brown colour of the typical Malayan, but of the clear skin or flesh coloured type which we often witness when we meet a blushing girl. (Amorsolo)

As mentioned before, while the associations with the national dress were negative, women in politics used the image of the *terno* in an impactful way when attending public events. San Pablo Burns writes how “the *terno* took central stage in women’s struggles to enact the most popular form of democracy - voting” (205) as well as advocating for equal treatment in the workplace and political space. The strategy behind this was to appeal to the nostalgia of “traditional Filipino womanhood” (Roces 5) as during this time, the Philippines was navigating a new modernity in its independence and the traditional Filipino woman was a nostalgic and romanticised image.

Notable political figures that actively used and popularised the wear of the *terno* and *barong tagalog* were former President Ferdinand Marcos and former First Lady Imelda Marcos, during their years of “nation remaking” (San Pablo Burns 205) in the 1970s. Ferdinand Marcos was the President of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986 and he credited his wife, Imelda Marcos, for helping him gain the support and votes of the Filipino. Imelda became a public figure during his campaign and presidency as her “glamour” (Ray) created great appeal and she was able to carry out cultural initiatives and projects in Manila like establishing the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

San Pablo Burns writes that popularising the wear of traditional clothing was imperative in creating the new image of the “modern Filipino” (205) during the country’s new-found independence. Imelda Marcos was known for donning the *terno* in all public and political occasions, earning the nickname “the iron butterfly” (Vinta Gallery) or “steel butterfly” (San Pablo Burns 205) in reference to her *terno* sleeves and powerful status (see Fig. 39). During the 1988 racketeering case, writer Richard Lacayo reported to *TIME Magazine* that Imelda Marcos “[was sweeping] into U.S. district court in nothing less bewitching than a floor-length turquoise gown, a silk-and-chiffon *terno* that is traditional Philippine wear” (Lacayo 1988). This quote is evidence to how iconic the *terno* became as Imelda wore it to every event and occasion, especially abroad when representing the Philippines. The image of Imelda wearing the traditional *terno* dress during this time of change became an iconic symbol of power and “a specific kind of Filipina modernity, countering Americans’ misrecognition of Filipina elites’ privilege” (Clutario ch. 5).

This new modernity in the Philippines brought more women to Manila for school and work. A social scene developed that demanded “a participation in a system of accessing feminine appearance and comportment” (Clutario ch. 5), meaning, taking part in beauty and style regimens was necessary to “to appear powerful [in society]” (Clutario ch. 5). Due to the “racial and classed misrepresentations of privileged status” (ch. 5) that elite Filipinos experienced by “Manila Americans” (ch.5) in the 1920s, there was a desire to invest in designer *ternos*. Similar to women in politics using the *terno* to make statements, Filipino women in elite social standing used the *terno* to “make claims to an exclusive and cosmopolitan modern womanhood” (Clutario ch. 5) that was developing in Manila. It is clear that the wearing of the *terno* was a vessel of power and change, once again creating a distinction between women of the working class and those in elite groups.

Many people during the Marcos presidency viewed the first lady’s clothing choices as intentional ways of portraying herself as a pro-nationalist; similar to how the suffragists used clothing as a form of communicating their message of equality. Roces argues that Imelda’s wearing of the *terno* was important in establishing her husband’s authoritarian rule and gaining her own position of power through him.



Fig. 39. President Ronald Reagan Nancy Reagan Imelda Marcos and Ferdinand Marcos in Cross Hall During a State Dinner for President Ferdinand Marcos of The Philippines. 1982.

White House Photographic Collection

After the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986, what followed was a decline of the *terno* dress due to its association with the corruption of the Marcos presidency. Roces writes “by the 1980s, the *terno* was a metonymy for Imelda Marcos rather than a metaphor for the nation” (12). Despite her efforts to portray herself as the nation representative and using the traditional dress as an expression of Filipino pride, audiences at the time just saw the controversial regime which the *terno* dress now represented.

However, in recent years, we have seen a revival of the *terno* dress as Filipino designers promoted are promoting the traditional dress as a “symbol of Philippine national style and identity” (Angeline). Lifestyle and entertainment editor, Tessa Mauricio, called the year 2003 as the “year of the *terno*” (Mauricio, 2004) with fashion shows, such as the “Timeless *Terno*” and design competitions pushing the return of the cultural garment, as well as innovating the dress as they focused on the technical designs, patterns and shapes of the *terno*. Technical designs such as the material of the dress changed from replacing the light and delicate, usually handwoven *piña* fabric with heavier and more opaque fabrics like “various types silk and

cottons blends” (Vergara). Patterns and designs on the *terno* featured a variety of motifs, fabric manipulations and embellishments such as embroidery and beadwork, which took inspiration from Filipino art and national symbols (see Fig. 40). The shape of the *terno* evolved into a more fitted silhouette, taking on the shape inspired by American evening gowns, with the sleeves also developing from the delicate looking, exaggerated bell sleeves, as seen in Fig. 41 (left image), to the more structured and starched butterfly sleeve, as seen in Fig. 41 (right image), that a has an elegance to it.



Fig. 40. (L) Dennis Lustico, Detail of terno top for Dr. Aivee Teo and (R) Dennis Lustico, Tapis and blouse with terno sleeves, made of crinoline and embellished with beadwork inspired by Pintados



Fig. 41. (L) Filipino women and girls in Bacoor, Cavite Province, 1898 from Arnaldo Dumindin and (R) Terno dresses from *Fashionable Filipinas : An Evolution of the Philippine National Dress in Photographs 1860-1960*. 2015.

Over the years, designers have participated in working with the *terno* dress and pushed it forward by looking at the traditional garment in different shapes, silhouettes and materials. Due to this revival and celebration of the *terno* dress, the status of the *terno* dress has changed as what was once seen as negative during the American colonial period and the mixed reaction following the Marcos regime, has now evolved into a garment that represents a history of growth, strength, remembrance and a fight for independence; that ultimately represents the Filipino people, their pride and strength.

Chapter Three:
Effects of Colonisation on Filipino Women in the Modern World
From the 2000's to Present Day

Racism, colourism and colonial mentality are some socio-cultural issues that resulted from colonisation in the Philippines. Not only are these consequences reflected in the visual and tangible transformation of traditional clothing, but in the changed mindset and self-perception of the Filipino people, specifically, Filipino women. David and Okasaki consider the Filipino identity to be ruined by the Spanish and American colonisations, stating that the Filipino people now have a “devalued self-worth” (3) due to their “historical oppression” (2).

This thesis has tracked a timeline of the transformation of traditional Filipino clothing and investigated some societal, cultural and external issues that resulted from colonial rule. This chapter will build from this foundation and discuss the psychological and intrinsic effects that colonisation had on Filipino women from the 2000s to the present day, through colonial mentality and beauty skincare, with the aim of promoting a more positive image of Filipino women.

3.1 Colonial Mentality

David and Okasaki describe colonisation to be “designed to benefit the coloniser and continually subjugate the colonised” (3). The use of the word *continually* is important to note as the context of their article addresses the colonial consequences that Filipino-Americans face today. This poses the question: how did the significance of colonisation survive long after the Philippines gained independence? The legacy left behind by colonisation can be credited to the different justifications for the practice that allowed racial oppression to occur and ultimately, created a colonial mentality and inferiority complex within the colonised people (David and Okasaki 5-9) (Decana 9). For example, one opinion of colonisation is described by Edward Said as follows:

The practice of changing the unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society... [resulted into] a widely varied group of little Europes scattered throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas, each reflecting the circumstances, its pioneers and its vanguard settlers. (Said 78)

The quote above illustrates how colonisation was viewed as establishing new societies and communities throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas, to resemble Europe; by enforcing the beliefs, the culture and the traditions of its settlers. Said’s justification shows an obvious power dynamic between the colonists and the colonised people, deeming the colonised country to be useless before the arrival of western settlers despite already being established lands. To form a complex of inferiority within colonised groups was “need[ed] for colonial territories... [in order to] raise Europe or a European race to dominion over non-European portions of mankind” (Said 232).

However, other authors such as Tempels in 1969, presented a different perspective on the practice. Instead of seeing colonisation as an aggressive act of asserting western beliefs and ways of life, Tempels saw it as an act of charity. He writes that colonists had the intention of “progressing... civilization through improvements in housing, in hygiene and scholastic instructions” (171-2). Although these developments would have been beneficial, it still creates a sense of “colonial debt” (David and Okasaki 10) and a “self righteous” (Serequeberhan 91) justification that supports western ideals.

Serequeberhan writes how this attitude “grounded the ‘normality’ of Europe’s process of inventing globally ‘administered’ replicas of itself” (91) which can be seen in the surviving Spanish-inspired architecture in the Philippines and Filipino families bearing Spanish surnames.

Similarly, David and Okasaki state how the acceptance of the oppression created the mindset “to become as much as the dominant group as possible” (10). They further write how this mentality manifests into a type of behaviour, belief and self-perception that mirrors their modern western rulers (8-11).

For Filipino women, this psychological grip is seen in their traditional clothing, beauty standards and self-image. Although “colonists are no longer physically present” (Decana 8), it is clear that an inferiority complex and colonial mentality continues to exist in the environment, self-perception and identity of the Filipino people.

3.2 Skin Hierarchy

The consequences of having a colonial mentality and inferiority complex are evident in the depiction of Filipino women throughout history in different media and art forms such as in paintings and advertisements. It is important to examine examples that were produced during and post-colonisation to see the shift in how Filipino women were perceived. It can also give an insight into how they were viewed by society and influenced under western rule. David and Okasaki write how the colonial effects today are experienced quietly with internalised oppression and feelings of shame, or openly by “becom[ing] as much like the coloniser as possible” (4) such as by learning their language, adopting their religion and mirroring their manners. Both behaviours, however, support and contribute back into having a colonial mentality and inferiority complex; a mental cycle that continues to foster today due to the generational familiarity and fear of colonisation.

Another consequence of the colonial system that was created in the Philippines is the racism, specifically the discrimination based on skin colour, towards the colonised group. There was a significant difference in the treatment given to darker- and lighter-skinned Filipinos; for example, darker-skinned Filipinos or native Filipinos led an underprivileged lifestyle that was different to their lighter-skinned counterparts, which impacted their socioeconomic status and therefore, their healthcare. Flores, Tonato, Dela Cruz and Ulep performed a study that revealed that while “20%-30% of the population has access [to a hospital], 70-80 million poor Filipinos do not” (Flores et al., 2021). Coo also writes about this racism in the following statement:

Every Spaniard regarded himself superior and privileged in the colony and every Indio a second-class citizen... it did not help that white was the aristocratic skin colour [and Indio girls] fortunate enough to be born almost white and blonde were considered as beautiful in the colony. (45)

Darker-skinned Filipinos were viewed to have “low income and [an] inferior social status” (Singson 2) while those with lighter-skin were seen to have “improved lifestyles” (Singson 2). This was because lighter-skin was associated with superiority, power and wealth. The discrimination and connotations attached to having darker or lighter skin supported a harmful mentality that divided the Filipino people. As Coo states, it was considered “fortunate” (45) to

be born with European features and lighter skin; a damaging idea to push onto an ethnic group that can be considered to have the complete opposite facial features and colours.

This mentality, however, can unfortunately still be seen today in beauty products, advertisements and the encouragement from the media to undergo surgery to have more Eurocentric features (Natividad 3). These societal expectations have led to the popular and common use of skin bleaching and harmful skin whitening products among the lower class and darker-skinned people in order to reach a higher status. Roger Lee Mendoza (227) writes that the side effects to such products and procedures are damaging and detrimental to a person's long-term health but despite this, skin whitening products continue to be used. His statement reveals how image and status have become highly prioritised and pursued over health as a "long-term social and economic investment" (223). The growth and success of the beauty and skin whitening industries in the Philippines are rooted in "the damaged psychological state of the native people" (Singson 2) and the continual "internalised oppression, colonial mentality and an ingrained preference for white skin" (Singson 2), both established and encouraged during colonisation.

Global white supremacy is also a factor that heavily contributes to the growth and success of the beauty and skin whitening industries. According to McClintok and Mire, commodity racism is used in advertising and media to promote "imperial progress into mass-produced commodity spectacles" (Puri 533). This is evident in multiple global advertisements depicting and promoting the "ideal image of femininity" (Natividad 64) which tend to exclude darker-skinned women. Singson writes how commodity racism excludes "those who are not white" (7) because of the history of colonisation and exploitation of native groups. By removing the culture of native people, western ideals and whiteness are what are left in the forefront.

According to Rondilla in *Shades of Difference*, what Filipino women were expected to have and the beauty standards that were advertised towards them were "extremely pale skin, straight jet-black hair and large, double-lidded, almond shaped eyes" (64) to resemble white Eurocentric features (63). In the Philippines, these beauty standards are greatly encouraged by celebrity culture as many Filipino actors, singers and models tend to be lighter-skinned, such as Toni Gonzaga and Nadine Lustre who both appear in the *Pond's White Beauty Cream* advertisement (see Fig. 44). This damaging advertisement will be further discussed in this chapter.



Fig. 42. Nadine Lustre featured in the Pond's White Beauty Cream, Most Beautiful Faces campaign, 2016.

Hunter references professors of history, Choy and Rafael, to have stated “movie stars and popular singers in the Philippines are often *mestizos*, [which means] half white, or extremely light-skinned with round eyes” (Hunter 240). Some of these celebrities are seen on TV advertisements praising and promoting skin whitening products and lighter skin towards women.

Two examples that will be examined are the following TV advertisements: *Palmolive Naturals White + Papaya Soap*, released in 2013, and *Pond's White Beauty Cream*, released in 2016. The Palmolive Naturals advertisement features Anne Curtis, a well-known and well-loved Filipino celebrity, expressing her excitement for having “smoother, whiter” (0:25 seconds) skin because of the soap product containing papaya extracts (see Fig. 43). The atmosphere of the advertisement is lively, joyful and fun; creating positive connotations for the skin-whitening product. Anne Curtis being half-Filipino and half-Australian makes her a *metiza* and she also has lighter skin. When starring in this advertisement, she is praising the whitening papaya soap and convincing the audience that this product is needed to achieve fairer skin, and therefore, achieve beauty and joy. These actions reinforce the idea that lighter-skin and Eurocentric ideals are the beauty standard.



Fig. 43. Stills of Anne Curtis from the Palmolive Naturals White + Papaya Soap Commercial, 2013

Pond’s campaign in 2016 for the *Pond’s White Beauty Cream* is aimed to uplift and support women of all ages and backgrounds with their slogan being “Most Beautiful Faces”. Their advertisement features a group of female celebrities who share the secret to their “rosy white glow” (0:20 seconds). Similar to the Palmolive Naturals advertisement, the atmosphere is comforting and invites the audience into a space where they can be vulnerable and honest. This creates a positive association with the product and encourages the practice of skin-whitening. The women share the secret skincare product to their beauty and confidence to be the promoted product *Pond’s White Beauty Cream*. However, the irony of promotion is that the secret to such beauty and confidence is the extremity of altering your skin colour, when, truthfully, it is to embrace your natural skin colour and beauty



Fig. 44. Stills of Nadine Lustre and Toni Gonzaga from the Pond’s White Beauty Cream, Most Beautiful Faces Campaign, 2016.



Fig. 45. Pond's White Beauty Cream Product



Fig. 46. Palmolive Naturals White + Papaya Soap Product

In Fig. 45 and Fig. 46, the use of the word *white* on the products is simple yet effective. It carries the connotations and positive associations that were addressed above to have enough importance to inspire the desire to be lighter-skinned.

In both advertisements, it is hinted that success and happiness are only achievable for women if they have lighter skin. This is conveyed in the song that Curtis sings in the *Palmolive Naturals* advertisement. The description of Pond's advertisement encourages women to use its product to be part of the Philippines' "most beautiful faces" but only shows a series of women with lighter complexions throughout the video. Darker-skinned women are not shown. It is clear that darker-skinned women are not being represented in the media in the way that light-skinned women are portrayed which is more beautiful, desirable and praised.

The desire to be white and the encouragement to have Eurocentric features are deeply embedded in the Filipino beauty culture. The promotions to have white skin and the reminders of its importance are exposed to Filipino women daily by advertisements, celebrity endorsements and products on pharmacy shelves. The two advertisements addressed above were released in the past decade and reveal that a strong skin hierarchy, colourism and desire to achieve whiteness still exists in the Filipino beauty culture today; but fortunately, in the past decade, darker-skinned Filipino women, or women with *morena* (brown) skin have been stepping up and speaking out against harmful advertisements and societal beauty standards.

A recent advertisement was the GlutaMAX skin-whitening cream commercial in 2019, which talked about the treatment Filipino people receive based on their skin colour. They conducted a poll and revealed that “3 in 5 Filipinos believe that people with fairer skin receive better treatment from others” and showed two Filipino women, one with a lighter complexion and the other with a darker complexion looking upset. Their conversation is as follows:



Fig. 47. GlutaMAX, Skin-whitening cream advertisement, 2019

Unfair, di ba? (*Unfair, isn't it?*)

Wag magalit, mag – GlutaMAX! (*Don't get angry, get GlutaMAX!*)

- With their tagline: Your fair advantage.

In essence, this commercial was claiming that to be treated fairly, one should brighten their skin.

GlutaMAX later took down their advert from their Facebook page and issued a statement that has since also been deleted. In response to the harmful colourism of this advert, Filipino women with *morena* skin have spoken up and criticised the advertisement as well as left encouraging

messages on social media, embracing *morena* skin and reminding each other that one is not inferior to another due to their skin colour.



Fig. 48. A post from Bianca Gonzales on X responding to the GlutaMAX advertisement, posted April 13th, 2019. The Tagalog translates to:

There's no problem at all to those who want to have fair or white skin. The problem is when whitening brands make us look pitiful because we have tan skin. Because, we are not pitiful, we are beautiful for having tan skin.

...It need not be a "battle" of brown skin versus white skin.

From then, I've found projects, blogposts and articles created by Filipino people from 2018 to 2022, talking about colourism based on their experiences and those of others. One example is an ongoing project by photographer Juro Ongkiko that started back in February 15th 2017. The project is called *Moreno Morena Photography Project*, and documents tan and dark-skinned people through photography and personal stories on Instagram. Ongkiko shares that his vision is to "depict dark skin in the best light without the usual heavy-handed messaging that you would find in similar inclusivity campaigns" (see Fig. 49 and 50)

Through his work, Ongkiko is representing *morena* people, both Filipino and non-Filipino, in a positive and celebratory way that is lacking in Filipino media.



Fig. 49 and 50. Screenshots of nine photo grids from the *Moreno Morena* Instagram page

3.3 Decolonisation

Natividad writes that due to the western ideals, culture, beliefs and importance of whiteness that were imposed in the Philippines during colonisation, the Filipino people now have a skewed cultural identity today (164). This is clear in the enduring Eurocentrism, colourism and colonial mentality that Filipino women still possess; all of which continue to be projected in modern-day advertisements shown in the Philippines and the everyday reminders of their colonised past such as surviving Spanish-inspired architecture and Filipino families having Spanish surnames. Because of these lasting colonial aspects in daily life, breaking the pattern of colonial mentality and inferiority complex can be considered to be complicated.

Decena's 2004 study regarding how colonial consequences affect the current generation of Filipino-Americans reveal that the trauma experienced by the older generations who lived under colonial rule are still experienced and passed down. David and Okazaki also observe that the colonial consequences found in Filipino-Americans have resulted in a cultural identity crisis and a "confusion of what authentic Filipino culture is" (8) thus leading to "the perception of inferiority toward any Filipino" (8) or feelings of "embarrassment, shame or resentment for one's culture" (9). These can be seen in Filipino families that reside abroad where parts of their Filipino culture and heritage are hidden to avoid ridicule or mistreatment in social situations. David and Okazaki refer to different authors who have shared their experiences of having a colonial mentality. For example, Linda A. Revilla (101) was written to share the following:

Throughout my days at elementary school I had an acute fear that someone would discover that I was Filipino... It embarrassed me that I should be a part of a race so disregarded and dehumanised by society. (David and Okasaki 9)

It is clear from Revilla's experience that such emotions and fear can begin at an early age. Similarly in David and Okasaki's research, interviewees as young as 17-years-old shared that "[their] ambition as a kid was to be like an American" (9) as it was taught in the school that Americans were their "saviours" (9) and "brought us democracy" (9). This mindset places Americans in a superior position against the Filipino-Americans. These experiences, emotions and fears can lead the minority group to separate or even remove themselves from their native culture as a form of survival and a better living experience.

From these two experiences, assimilation into cultures different from one's own native culture can cause polarising reactions. For example, learning a second language, adopting new traditions and integrating into the community can be seen as positive and commendable. However, there becomes a fine line between being commendable and being a "sell out" (David and Okasaki 9) which is where feelings of shame and guilt can resurface. As mentioned before, the feeling of so much shame can create a separation from Filipino culture and lead to the act of conforming to another culture. This can cause strong reactions and even ridicule from other Filipino people. From the perspective of the person who assimilated, conforming into the new culture can be the result of a lack of belonging, however, from the outside perspective, this can feel like a rejection of one's native culture. Scholar Sara Ahmed describes the shame as:

... an impulse to 'take cover' and 'to cover oneself'. But the desire to take cover and to be covered presupposes the failure of cover; in shame, one desires cover precisely because one has already been exposed to others. (Ahmed, 104)

It is clear that there are two different sides to shame which can be applied to cultural assimilation as some people choose to assimilate and others do not. The reasons for assimilation can vary. For example, it can occur as a form of survival, integration or connection. The reasons to not assimilate can also differ. It can be as simple as wanting to maintain their connection to their heritage.

The desire for one to fit in and avoid isolation in new countries but not wanting to lose connection with their native culture is challenging. Along with that, the shame caused by prejudice, ridicule and discrimination is difficult to overcome as it is deeply rooted in white supremacy, racism, colourism and Eurocentrism. All of which are a result of colonisation. By unlearning Eurocentrism and instead, learning to decolonise one's mentality can improve one's relationship with their native culture. Assimilating into new communities and societies can be an easier and more positive experience that promotes better connections with oneself and others. Associate Professor Leny Mendoza Strobel explains that decolonisation is the "process of reconnecting with the past to understand the present... and strengthens the cultural connection to the Filipino indigenous culture as a source of grounding" (63). Strobel lists the stages of decolonisation to involve the following:

recognising feelings of internalised oppression, shame, confusion, anger; questioning the reality constructed by colonial narrative; and taking leadership roles to ensure the forward moving towards visibility and empowerment. Strobel 67

Learning to decolonise the mind requires time, effort and an understanding that one's values, beliefs and culture is not unvalued or unworthy due to colonisation and Eurocentrism. This can be seen as internalised racism, a form of colonial mentality which is the result of colonisation that is "the internalisation of the dominant group's attitudes, beliefs and values while devaluing one's own" (130) as explained by Associate Professor of Psychology Suzette L. Speight. Speight further expresses that because the dominant group has power and authority over the target group, it suggests that "the dominant group can define and name reality, determining what is 'normal', 'real', and 'correct'" (130), thus it "ignores, misrepresents and or eradicates the target group's culture, language and history" (130). This is evident in the instilling of the English language, religious beliefs and standards of beauty and status on Filipino people and women.

By recognising the issues created by colonisation and taking the steps to actively unlearn them and adopt a better mentality will enhance one's relationship with Filipino traditions and culture. Furthermore, understanding that one's culture, history and traditions aren't less than others because of colonisation can be the motivator to embrace one's heritage and celebrate our beauty, clothing and values. This is demonstrated in the modern day through occasions such as Miss Universe pageants. The talent, passion and pride are illuminated in the traditional Filipino dresses we dress our contestants in, such as Pia Wurtzbach from the 2015 Miss Universe competition and Michelle Marquez Dee, the most recent Filipino contestant from the 2023 Miss Universe competition. Dee was born in Makati, Metro Manila but spent part of her childhood in Utah, United States. She is the daughter to Filipino businessman and former actor, Derek Dee and former beauty queen, Melanie Marquez, who won Miss International in 1979.

These garments are a positive representation of Filipino culture as they display Filipino creativity and history. Dee's sheer and black evening gown is bold and striking, paying homage to traditional indigenous Filipino tattoo culture and the famous *mambabotok* (traditional Kalinga tattooist) Apo Whang-Od.



Fig. 51. Vivas, Hector. *Michelle Marquez Dee, Miss Universe 2023*. November 18, 2023 in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Fig. 52. Nepomuceno, Artu. *Apo Whang-Od on Vogue Philippines, 2023*

Dee’s dress is a long-sleeved floor length gown that features a heavily beaded bodice whose geometrical lines and patterns form the face of a viper. These bold black lines are meant to symbolise the tattoo patterns found on indigenous tattoo designs. The skirt of the dress is representative of the simple wrap skirt or *tapís* from the pre-colonial period of the Philippines, which further portrays the passion, dedication and pride of Filipino to this piece (see Fig. 51).

This garment is significant as, in the words of Dee on Instagram, it pays “tribute to a legendary Filipina who has become an icon, preserving the rich cultural heritage of indigenous tattoo art”. With the photos of Apo Whang-Od and Michelle Dee side by side (see Fig. 51 and Fig. 52), the attention to detail and research are clear. It is a remarkable observation, individually or together, as they both represent a cultural revival and a celebration of Filipino history and heritage. It becomes an educational moment for new spectators of Filipino culture to learn about indigenous traditions; and a reminiscent moment for Filipino people, both native living in the country and immigrants living abroad, as they can take pride in the history and traditions that were once hidden.

Conclusion

Studying the transformation of the traditional female dress of Filipino women allowed me to learn about the history, culture and identity of the Filipino people. Having this thesis as a platform to delve deep into the rich and colourful history of the Philippines gave me an insight into the native way of living and clothing, developing a deeper appreciation for Filipino culture and the perseverance of Filipino people when the country experienced colonisation. Despite the challenges created by colonial control and the changing then replacing of Filipino culture with western and Eurocentric ideals, the Filipino woman's identity remained strong as it evolved to survive such rule.

Exploring the Filipino societal structures, trade routes and traditional customs during the pre-colonial period in Chapter One was crucial in establishing a historical background of the Philippines that the reader might not know. Since many aspects of Filipino culture are the direct result of colonisation of over 300 years, it was important to delve into the history, culture and traditions of native Filipino people to gain cultural knowledge so a timeline to chart the transformation of traditional Filipino female clothing could be formed. The first chapter looked at the beginning of traditional Filipino female dress and how new ideas, religious beliefs and values altered it over time. As appearance helps form an identity, by looking at the various changes in clothing, like the silhouette shape or textile, we can track important influences and moments of history that contributed to these alterations.

The evolution of the Filipino traditional dress and the independence of the Filipino people were major historical, cultural and political events that were imperative to include in Chapter Two. As it was a time of great change and independence, it introduced new shifts in attitudes, beliefs and values. The tenacity of Filipino people was revealed while also unveiling the changing perceptions of Filipino women. Chapter Two examined and compared the different views of women by looking back to the pre-colonial period of the Philippines to the years under Spanish colonisation, discussing how it changed from being conservative and obedient to strong and passionate. As mentioned before, appearance helps form an identity and clothing has a strong influence on it. During a time when the traditional female dress was associated with being weak, Filipino women wore them as a way to provoke change and establish power amongst themselves.

Researching the impact of colonisation beyond the changes in Filipino clothing and culture helped deepen my knowledge of the influences that shaped the identity and self-perception of Filipino women. It is clear how big of an impact Spanish and American customs, cultures and values had on Filipino society and culture up until today, as seen with products promoting skin whitening and European beauty standards. The western expectations that Filipino women are pressured to achieve over the years have created modern issues of colonial mentality, skin hierarchy, colourism and internalised racism. These harmful ways of thinking can manipulate Filipino women to conjure negative feelings towards their own country, culture and themselves. For this reason, by learning to decolonise and unlearn Eurocentric beauty standards can the natural features and complexions of Filipino women be embraced.

Having grown up in Ireland, my relationship with the Philippines was limited as I was not exposed to Filipino history, culture and traits very much in my youth. After some thought, I learned that this is the result of my assimilation into Irish culture and learning the English language from an early age. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I was not very connected to my culture, though, I did not have or develop any feelings of shame towards the country and have neutral views regarding the Philippines. As I am now in my adult years, I am making more of an effort to learn my background, embrace the Filipino culture and share it with others.

When I began this research project on the transformation of the traditional dress of the Philippines, my knowledge of native clothing was minimal; having only worn the *terno* once in my life. However, since starting this thesis, my knowledge of the dress and the history behind it has grown significantly and my appreciation for it has grown stronger. Upon reflection, I would have given myself more time to research the political history behind the Marcos presidency, Imelda Marcos and their impact on Filipino society. Researching what I could about Imelda and the Marcos presidency for Chapter Two was eye-opening to me. If I had given myself more time, I would have written more about her and her impact. That being said, my focus for this thesis is the transformation of traditional Filipino clothing under the influences of western colonisation so my interests had stuck to the topics of fashion rather than politics.

By conducting this research project, I hope to provide a different perspective on the traditional dress of Filipino women, exposing the harsh realities and outcomes that colonisation had on

the Philippines and encouraging the steps to unlearn the idea that western culture is above others. I realised how important it is to learn about the background behind such beautiful pieces and how they survived so we can still wear them today; as everything we know and wear will become history too. Despite the attempts to reshape the traditional attire of the Philippines and the idea of what a Filipino woman is meant to be in western eyes, the dress continues to be won back by the modern Filipino woman today who is strong, proud and authentic to themselves. Overall, this thesis allowed me to celebrate my Filipino heritage, traditions and culture – in all its pain and beauty.

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