

Passion for Philippine Social Transformation in the Novel *Ilustrado* of Miguel Syjuco

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Abstract - *The study aimed to analyze the Passion for Philippine Social Transformation in the Novel Ilustrado of Miguel Syjuco. In view of the prevailing social problems encountered in the Philippines such as social injustices, corruption, and the like, and the need for transformation or change of its societal structures, the researcher's interest being a literature teacher is aroused or stimulated. The qualitative approach was used in this descriptive study of the novel of socio-political nature in order to project a social transformation through critical investigation on the values projected in it. Hence, the study used analytical approach, psychological approach, philosophical or moral/ethical approach, and sociological approach in analyzing its content. Results showed that social transformation in making wise preferences, having smooth family relationship, and decreasing social injustices apparently were the social transformations depicted in the novel. The author's rejection to join politics and desiring to expose social ills were the major incidents in his life that showed his passion for social change. The structures of the society that needed to be changed were moral values of the leaders, personal interests, Filipinos culture, and the motives of the politicians to maintain their hold in power. The use of symbolism as the predominant literary device gave the readers clearer picture of the condition of the society and understanding of the author's passion for Philippine social transformation. The moral ethical values of courage in saving other's lives from devastation, honesty to self and to the country, devotion to Filipino writings and writers, faith in God, and forgiveness reflected in the story were made alive and real in the readers.*

Keywords: *Philippines, Society, Transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Social problems, also called social issues, such as corruption, poverty, and human rights abuses affect every society, great and small. They tend to refer to the problems that affect people living together in a society. It is an aspect of society which people are concerned and would like to change.

Philippine contemporary society according to Bicomong's study is brought about by the influence of foreign issues full of immorality and forgotten Filipino values which hinder the growth of the society [1]. The country faces lots of social problems that need transformation. This transformation according to Pascual must begin from personal conversion. He further explains that the love for the Philippines alone will not change or transform Philippine society. Only God's love flowing through each soul will convert the country. One cannot regenerate Philippine society for the better unless one has changed oneself for the better. Individual transformation back to Christ is the

solitary way one will be able to change Philippine society [2].

Transformation surpasses reformation. Reformation denotes improving one's life. But transformation involves a change of heart, a new way of thinking and a new perspective on life. Transformation of society requires the conversion of the societal structure: cultural, social, economic, and political. These structures are made by people to express and uphold the values that they love most: what they believe, how they work, how they want to be directed, their standards and hopes. These structures change as the values of the society alter. Values, thus, define the justness or unjustness of the Philippine social structures [3].

In addition, Buenaflor [4] clearly and strongly emphasizes the importance of fighting for the moral principle as a Filipino leader for the country's transformation. He upholds the significant role of a righteous and just leader for the nation's attaining of

true freedom. He also believes that every citizen should also submit to the leader's authority and fulfill his/her responsibility to maintain peace and order in the society.

In view of the prevailing social problems encountered in the Philippines such as social injustices, corruption, and the like, and the need for transformation or change of its societal structures, the researcher's interest being a literature teacher is aroused or stimulated. The researcher believes that through literature, one can mirror or reflect the true situation of the society. It is one of the most effective ways of telling the truth where one can have profound understanding of the society and compel a strong desire to change it. As part of the Philippine society, the researcher's awareness of the country's social, political, cultural, moral, and economic conditions widens due to the rampant national problems the government and its people are experiencing and suffering until now.

Ilustrado was only a manuscript when it was first written in 2008. Miguel Syjuco experienced several hardships of rejection and revision before his book was published. Through the help of his editor, Eric Chinski, and his copyeditors, designers, and translators, his manuscript became a book. It obtained the Grand Prize for the Novel in English at the 2008 Palanca Awards before it was published. In November 2008, he gained the Man Asian Literary Prize for writing *Ilustrado*. In 2010, it acquired the QWF Paragraphe Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction, Quebec's highest literary award, and became New York Times Distinguished Book. It was also a qualifier for the 2010 Grand Prize du Livre de Montreal, one of the exceptional English-language books in the world. In late 2010, *Ilustrado* was published in Spanish, Swedish, and Dutch translation. In 2011, *Ilustrado* became one of the top three best-selling books in the world and was published in different international languages like French, Italian, Japanese, and German through the help of Peter Straus, Melanie Jackson, Laurence, and Stephen [5].

Syjuco come to be known world-wide for being one of the most intellectual novels that attempt to mirror the Philippines and Filipinos into different levels and dimensions of life. It focuses on themes such as insurgency, responsibility, social transformation, valor, weakness, remorse, faith, expatriation, and patriotism. *Ilustrado* achieves the Palanca Outstanding Award, the Philippines'

uppermost literary honor. Its title alone, an insinuation to the upper-class intelligentsia during the Spanish period, is a reference to examine Salvador/Syjuco. Miguel Syjuco, the author of the novel, wins the 2008 Man Asian Literary Prize. He is an educated, reform-minded, but most notably, upper-class.

The author's skills as a literary writer and social critic are internationally known and manifested in his use of different literary techniques and postmodernism style which inspired the researcher.

The novel's exposition of the ills of society and clamor for change can be easily understood because of its richness of thoughts and wisdom that motivated the researcher to explore more for its meaningful implications to life through an in depth analysis.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study attempts to analyze the *Passion for Philippine Social Transformation in the Novel Ilustrado of Miguel Syjuco*. Explicitly, the study aimed to determine the forms of social transformation depicted in the novel of Miguel Syjuco; to identify specific incidents in the life of the author that show passion for social change; to determine how the following facets of Philippine social transformation are pursued in the novel: moral ascendancy, economic security, cultural identity; and political stability; to determine the literary devices does the writer use to bring out passion for Philippine social transformation; and to determine the moral ethical values that are awakened among readers of contemporary society.

METHODS

The study used the descriptive method of research that described the nature of a situation and explored the causes of social problems with emphasis on the social transformation of the contents of the selected novel. Hence, the study was analytical in nature and ultimately required critical examination or investigation of the values projected in it.

The study used content analysis in trying to project the values in the selected fiction. The analyses present specific incidents in the life of the author that shows his passion for social transformation as treated in the selected novel.

The analytical, psychological, philosophical or moral, and sociological approaches in literary criticism bore concrete meaning along with the

framework of social transformation analysis in studying the selected fiction.

Analytical Approach. Since the study's aim was to analyze the selected fiction, the researcher used the analytical approach in an attempt to get to the nature of Miguel Syjuco's work as an object in itself through the detailed analysis of its parts and their organization. In particular this approach was utilized in order that the author's thoughts and attitudes towards Filipino values, beliefs and practices could be evaluated. In this regard the thematic connection of each story was assessed.

Psychological Approach. This approach was based from the idea that actuation, desires, and feelings of a person could influence others emotions and actions. This was a major approach used in studying the values projected in the novel of Syjuco in understanding the problems of human affairs. The source of help in solving personal and social problems was in knowledge of the principles of psychology. The study also described and analyzed the reader's personal responses to a text.

Philosophical or Moral/Ethical Approach. This approach eventually helped the researcher took note of the ideas in it and held that the grander objective of literature was to instill goodness and to examine philosophical concerns. The researcher recognized that literature could move readers, and the meaning of the literary piece was significant. The moral critical approach examined literary writings contrary to the standard ethical and public measures; humane, social influence, acceptance, impartiality, social fairness and sympathy. This method conformed to the humanistic and domestic component of literature and evaluated the impact and influence of it in a strict moral context. It aimed to support the readers perceive, comprehend, and value the influential ways in which literatures invited them into detailed means of emotion, intellect, and evaluation which consequently brought long-lasting impact on readers' emotional and rational transformation [6].

Sociological Approach. This approach equated man within a given social situation which tended to highlight the conflict between the two classes. Through the sociological approach, the researcher analyzed how the social milieu affected the character of the novel. The researcher took into consideration the economic facet of the society and other environmental factors that affected the characters and the plot of the story. It stressed social relevance, social

commitment, contemporaneity, and deemed communication with the reader.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The forms of social transformation depicted in the novel of Miguel Syjuco are his *preferences in life* where Miguel chooses to live away from his politician family and pursues his passion to be a writer. He also prefers to save the lives of the drowning children than his safety. Another decision in life the characters choose to do is to find their lost family members who made them realize the importance of a *family relationship* which completes their lives. In addition, the *administrative governance* in the Philippines is faulty because of the immoral conduct of the country's president; the public officials are dishonest in declaring one's assets or wealth to the people; and profit-taking of the governors is pervasive not for the utmost good of the masses, but for their own benefit. Moreover, Miguel's mind is also opened to the depriving condition of the poor and marginalized sector in the country which does not have even television to watch at home and have not been to the sea for many years because of insufficient money to go down the mountain. Human rights abuses and cruelty are also experienced by the characters in the story where Crispin's live-in partner is kidnapped battered, and killed for her opposition the foreigners' involvement in the country's affair. Another one is the prevailing social imbalance between the rich and the poor. These are the social problems the Miguel desires to expose and solve to attain *social justice*.

2. The specific incidents in the life of the author showing passion for social change are *his rejection of joining the politics*. His grandfather wants him to enter politics like him, but Miguel refuses to be one of them. He stands on his principle and preserves himself from the corrupt system of politics in the country. He strongly disagrees with the offer of his grandparents of a position in the government. He believes that it is hard to keep one's integrity and purity when in politics. When a person knows how to stand firm with his principles and fight for his ideologies, then that person is really serious of his cause. And Miguel has these qualities by deciding not to join politics and forsaking his prominent status only to become a writer. This is one of the incidents that show his passion for social change.

Another incident in his life is *his abandonment of affluent lifestyle*. The author belongs to the upper class or elites of the society. They live in Forbes Park and in many parts of the country. They also owned lots of properties. All the riches and glory in this world are possessed by Miguel but still he is dissatisfied and unhappy; that is why he abandons his affluent lifestyle. However, there are things in life money cannot buy. They are peace of mind, contentment, and joy that can only be attained by following his heart's desire to be a writer. Indeed richness in this world could not give all the person's needs in life. Love, peace of mind, contentment, joy and the like are things that cannot be bought by money. And these are the reasons why a rich and influential person like Miguel Syjuco leaves his comfort zone. He leaves all his possessions and pleasures in life just to reach his dream to be a writer and contributes for the nation's welfare.

His life as an exile and independent needs patient, endurance and determination to overcome homesickness, hardship, and loneliness which are also experienced by Filipino expatriates. He leaves the Philippines to freely write his manuscript that will enlighten the minds of the readers, specially his countrymen. Miguel strongly believes in the efficacy of literature. Through it, he can make changes if he wants as the author of the story. He shows the potentiality or competence of him as a writer to change the systems of the society. That is what Miguel believes in and strives to do: to reflect the condition of the society and change it for the betterment. He exposes the illegal transactions of the elites of the society. He unveils their socio-political deeds that bring them to a higher social status which are usually levels of theft or robbery. For him, the country's wealth should be properly and fairly distributed to all the Filipino people. And as an *Ilustrado* like Jose Rizal he wants to bring home new ideas or enlightenment. He campaigns the reformation of the economic, political, and educational conditions of the Philippines. He leaves Philippines to freely write his manuscript, *The Bridge Ablaze*, the counterpart of his novel *Ilustrado*. These writings expose the illnesses of the society that will enlighten all his readers.

Moreover, *his addressing of social issues and desiring for social change* are written in his book *Ilustrado*. It tells about the physical abuses and violation of human rights rampant in the country. It

has a very ornate style of speech or writing and lots of exaggerated and complicated descriptions to picture the severity of the abuses and cruelty his people experienced under a dictatorial government especially during the time of colonization and in Martial law period. The author portrays the country's social realities to awaken the authorities and readers' mind. He mirrors the country's condition by revealing its true condition. He believes that his writings can stir the nationalistic spirit of the people and moves them for a change. Syjuco deems literature as a means to guide the people to a moral or acceptable decision. He regards it as the best way to develop social order needed to transform the society. Miguel unveils the evils of society with Rizal in mind. He believes that courage and love for country should be the motive of a writer in revealing the truth to the people. He deems best the value of commitment or devotion to writings about Philippine freedom or democracy which he gets from the country's hero, Rizal.

3. The facets of Philippine social transformation pursued in the novel:

3.1 moral ascendancy

Moral authority of the president deteriorates when he is linked to another woman. His integrity as a leader and as a role model of the country are affected by his immoral conduct. However, he regains public's trust through the help of the church. Likewise, Miguel's moral ascendancy is also affected by his sexual relationship with his live-in partner, Madison. Their emptiness of hearts are not satisfied by their youthful lusts, so they decide to separate from each other and freed themselves. After doing that decision, both of them find freedom and peace of mind.

Being far from his family, and living independently abroad, he is easily influenced by his friends to use prohibited drugs like cocaine and marijuana. Motivated also of his dream to become a well-known writer in the world, he continuously used illegal drugs to write and finish his stories fast. It is only because of therapeutic sessions, counseling and medical intervention done by his doctor, Dr. Goldman, Miguel realizes that what he is doing will lead him to failure in life. So he decides to stay away from his friends and return to his family. Miguel realizes his decadent acts and decides to restore his moral control.

3.2 economic security

The increasing number of Filipino Overseas Workers proves the prevailing poverty problem in the Philippines. Many Filipino families send their family members abroad and sacrifice each other's presence only to survive physically and materially in the country. Through their remittances, financial status of the country is alleviated.

Poverty is another major development problem in the Philippines. Crispin understands the situation of the underprivileged people; that is why he volunteers himself to treat freely the poor children downtown and let them watch and swim in the sea which their family cannot afford because of the cost of transportation.

In the Philippines, elites own big corporations, establishments, and stocks in the *Mercado*. Miguel points out the powerful and influential elites who control Philippine economy. He is very skillful in presenting the names of the manipulators of the country's financial system like *Lisa Lupas*, *Ret-Ret Romualdez*, *Cherry-pie Changco*, *Pogi-boy Prieto*, and *Heart Aquino*. He believes that they are untouchables because of their great contributions to the Philippines' economy; that is why he is motivated to accept communism ideals of equality.

Graft and bribery in the Philippines have infiltrated every stage of government, from the Bureau of Customs down to the traffic police officers who pull over motorists to insist bribes. Miguel being a principled man courageously questions the soldier's authority of asking penalty for traffic violations. He fearlessly warns the soldier of reporting his illegal acts though the soldier is armed and he is not.

Philippine economic security is also endangered and aggravated because of terrorism. President Estregan aims to extend his tenure of office that is why he plans a destabilizing plot to his country by instigating the bombings and riots in different places in order to declare Martial law. People indignantly express their resentments and dissatisfactions to the president's greed for power. Filipinos aspire for a new president, for new systems, and for a new government whose motive is to serve the public and not his personal interest. That is why they form parliaments to the streets and mutually agree to oust the president by revolution. These realities are all witnessed by the characters in the story.

3.3 cultural identity

Filipinos welcome the foreigners' supremacy and have developed *colonial mentality*. This is evident in

the outward appearance and Taglish conversation of the Filipinos witnessed by Miguel in the airport. His family has also acquired this mentality by Americanizing all the family members. On the other hand, Crispin proves his love of country by writing books and articles about Philippines.

Another Filipino cultural identity that needs to transform is the value of *debt of gratitude* in politics. Positions in the government are granted by to show gratefulness of the debtor to his giver. In the novel, Miguel's grandfather is convincing him to join the politics. His grandfather accuses him for being ungrateful. Miguel justifies his reason by explaining the true meaning of love, and that is expecting nothing in return. His love to country supersedes his affection to his family.

Traffic in Manila is also Philippines' distinctiveness. It affects the country's economy because it slows down transportation. He sees its negative effect to the country's economy and promotion to investors because it slows down transportation. Nonetheless, Miguel finds the virtues of acceptance and patience as the honest and best thing to have as a writer. He becomes sincere and straight to his country by appreciating the Philippines' social reality.

Furthermore, texting habit helps people a lot, but misuse of it results to vehicular accidents, neglect of duties, waste of time, and behavior problems of teenagers. A maid of the Filipino-Chinese couple in the novel is charged of negligence of duty because of texting that results to their son's death. This they do to inform and warn the public of the dangers of texting while working. They want to prove that it is a big crime and great mistake to disregard one's responsibility especially one's life only because of pleasure or personal gratification. These are the cultural identities Filipinos need to develop and change.

3.4 political stability

Political stability leads the nation to a successful and progressive government. One reason of political instability in the country is the administrator's *greed for power*. Political instability characterizes President Estregan's administration. His government is reported doing destabilization plot to secure his country's hold of power. Consequently, media men in the novel are questioning the socio-political problems prevailing in the country. They are making the administration

responsible and careful to their duties and transactions because they will always scrutinize and expose to the public their deeds whether good or bad. In addition, *political dynasty* also happened in the Philippines where the children of the popular political candidates are appointed or elected in a public office as what Miguel's family is doing. In order not to lose the power and the influence, Miguel's grandmother is placed in the position of governorship after the term of his grandfather because no one from their children wants to take over the said position. Miguel refuses to receive this offer for he knows that corruption pervades in the Philippine politics. Not only that a political dynasty reigned in the government but also different *compromises*. Siding to different presidents or to whoever occupies the position for the reason of support and financial help from the allied politicians shows the compromise attitude of the public officials. Miguel criticizes his grandfather's compromising attitude toward his political career a destruction of their family reputation. Miguel takes the courage of revealing the secrets of his family by unfolding it to the public. For him, their good and clean name will be tainted with flaws and corruptions when his grandfather will continue doing it. In addition, disputes among public officials of the country also happened in the story. The political leaders in the novel clash each other's beliefs and fight physically with one another in front of the masses. They are acting as though they are uneducated. They do not show good examples for the people to follow as public servants. Because of these, the people decide to form parliaments on the street and protest the autocratic form of the government.

4. One of the literary devices the author used to bring out his passion for Philippine social transformation is through the use of *figure of speech* that touches the emotion and create picture in the mind of the readers. He utilizes *paradox* to carry his readers into the serious point between self-pursuit and self-destruction. Miguel puts himself in danger in attempting the rescue the siblings from drowning in the flood. On the other hand, Miguel, the intertwined character of Crispin, is alive and pursue his writing career for the salvation of many; while Crispin died exposing the ills of the society. *Metaphor* is also used by the author in comparing the politicians and the traitors of the society to the fruit "balimbing" due to its many sides. This is used by the author in

comparing the politicians and traitors of the society to the fruit *balimbing* due to its many sides, or faces. *Simile* is employed to show the condition of the Philippines under several colonizers which was being compared to a river through snow that becomes stagnant or frozen but still will continuously flow or progress. *Pun* is also used to give multiple meanings on current social issues by pop culture jokes or idiomatic constructions. Miguel reveals the different sexual acts or expressions of the Filipino people such as doing oral sex, use of condoms and prostitutes through jokes. *Foreshadowing* is also used to anticipate a particular series of events that will happen to the character's life where Crispin's death is foretold to happen because of his boldness in exposing the country's social ills. His foreshadowing of his fatality really happened before his homecoming when his dead body is mysteriously found floating on a Hudson River.

The author also employs *symbolism* to reveal the truth and portrays common sceneries in Philippine politics. He uses names, persons, organizations, objects, and events to bring out his passion for social change like the name *President Estregan*. He represents all the presidents the country has ever had. *Ilustrado* portrays *Bansamoroas* symbolism of Muslim representatives in the government who opposed the administration and the declaration of martial law. The *Club Coup d' Etat* is a very disorder and chaotic organization that symbolizes the disordered milieu occurring in a destabilized country with a corrupt and dictatorial form of government.

Satire is also effectively used by Miguel to expose the Philippines' chaotic political conditions by telling ridiculous stories about Boy Bastos' family. This he does to awaken the mind of the Filipino people of what is really happening to the government and indicating the seriousness of the matter.

Another literary device is the use of wide variety of materials called *bricolage*. It widens the image of the novel by utilizing popular lifestyle and refines its essentiality by delineating its persona and showing its truths with understanding from erudite examination of the past. *The variety of materials used by the author are: passages from narratives and short tales, well-read social and political compositions, written dialogs, verses, epistles, and the universal and unidentified school jests and rudetales that all of us acquire through text messages, and E-mail messages.* Miguel skillfully uses variety of materials or resources

and put them into one story. His rich writing of *Ilustrado* is the result of his education received not only in the Philippines universities but also from international schools of literature where he received different criticisms and revisions from his mentors which resulted to a more refined and quality product of literary work.

However, *cliffhanger* is used to end the narrative unsettled and bring the reader back to a future episode for the resolution. This is a post-modern style of ending uncertainly and in quite a few incongruous means. There are numerous acts where Miguel decides to take unusual trails with blurred outcome which are printed in elevated text. This explains Miguel's findings of social and life's reality which is uncertain and unpredictable.

5. *Courage in saving other's lives from devastation* is one of the moral ethical values awakened among the readers of contemporary society. The characters in the novel have the courage to sacrifice their selves for the sake of others which is a moral response of reverence. Having courage of self-sacrifice is the very culmination of the moral life. It diverts the focus away from one's selves. The Filipinos need to make stand for what is right and proper and be courageous enough to face the truth and hear criticisms or reactions against principles in life. In addition, *honesty to one's self and to the country* arouses the Filipino readers. One must confess his/her weaknesses and failures in order to understand the society. This could be attained when one is humble enough to confess or admit his/her mistakes or failures. Moreover, *devotion to Filipino writings* is also one of the moral ethical values Miguel wants to be revived among readers. They are important because by this Filipinos can preserve the nation's rich culture and beauty. They are also able to address people's grievances and protest through their writings. And more importantly, social transformations could start and happen just by the power of writings. Furthermore, *faith in God* is another good and just value the author desires the society to possess. Without faith, life is barely tolerable, everything becomes valueless, and activities lose their point. And because morality is created by God according to the divine command theory, then morality rests on the will of God, Who determines by His choice what is right. An experience of being touched and changed by God is known as transformative spirituality which

creates a just, humane and compassionate society. Lastly, *forgiveness* is being highlighted as one of the moral ethical values Syjuco deems morally and ethically proper for the Filipino people. Miguel wants the society full of hatred, anger and bitterness realize the importance of forgiveness, for he knows that only by unloading all the burdens from one's heart will one be set free. He believes that his passion for social transformation could be best achieved when all his bad things in life will be abandoned and surrendered.

CONCLUSIONS

Social transformation in making wise preferences, having smooth family relationship, and decreasing social injustices apparently are the social transformations depicted in the novel.

The author's rejection to join politics and desire to expose social ills are the major incidents in his life that show his passion for social change.

The structures of the society that need to be changed are the moral values of the leaders, personal interests, Filipino culture, and the motives of the politicians to maintain their hold in power.

The use of symbolism as the predominant literary device gives the readers clearer picture of the condition of the society and understanding of the author's passion for Philippine social transformation.

The moral ethical values of courage in saving other's lives from devastation, honesty to self and to the country, devotion to Filipino writings and writers, faith in God, and forgiveness reflected in the story are made alive and real in the readers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers of literature must present several book reviews of award-winning contemporary Filipino novels to the students to encourage them read and analyze those writings in the light of Philippine society.

Students of literature need to be given more exposure to international Filipino writings to gain deeper knowledge and more profound idea in the improvement of Philippine literature.

Further study about the subject or other related topics may be done to be able to gain more knowledge and information about the structure of Philippine society.

Teachers should let the students read this novel as part of their home reading and class requirement for them to understand the author's craft and literary

techniques, and develop their sense of appreciation and realization.

Morality and ethics need to be given more emphasis in the teaching of literature to enhance positive behavior.

This study only works on with the writer's passion or intense desire for social change through a fiction. Further research about the present-day or current Philippine social problems and transformations happened in the real world should be done to make this more realistic and productive.

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