



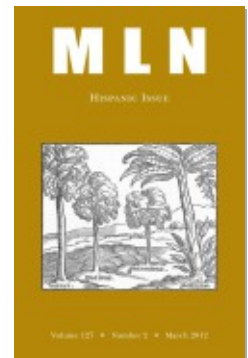
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¿En qué idioma escribe Ud.?: Spanish, Tagalog, and Identity in José Rizal's *Noli me tangere*



Juan E. de Castro

Introduction

“¿En qué idioma escribe Ud.?” (142) “In which language are you writing?”¹ This question, that Juan Crisóstomo Ibarra, the protagonist of José Rizal’s novel *Noli me tangere* (1887), addresses to the old scholar Don Anastasio, better known as Tasio, is more than just an expression of curiosity when he sees the latter writing, of all things, hieroglyphs. Tasio is, in Rizal’s novel, the one character who is presented primarily as an intellectual—the chapter in which this episode takes place is titled “En casa del filósofo” (“At the Philosopher’s House”). Yet he is also emotionally aligned with local values and with the future development of a Filipino nation, despite his pessimism regarding the social, political, and even cultural present. Tasio can be seen, therefore, as representing the anti-colonial Filipino scholar.² Ibarra’s question—¿En que idioma escribe Ud.?—raises the issue of the connotations and

¹In this, as in the cases of all texts in Spanish in the Works Cited list, the translation is mine.

²Caroline S. Hau notes: “The word *filipino* originally referred to creoles, that is, to Spaniards born in the Philippines. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the term was appropriated by members of the Propaganda Movement like Rizal . . . to include the so-called *indios* (‘natives’), and it subsequently assumed a ‘national’ denotation. It must be noted, however, that the denotation that Rizal assigns to the word ‘filipino’ in his novels shifts according to the context” (287 n2).

comparative advantages of using the imperial versus the vernacular tongue in anti-colonial and postcolonial contexts.

The importance of José Rizal and *Noli me tangere* in the history of the Philippines and of the imagining of its national identity grants additional relevance to these already important issues. After all, Rizal is not only a major Filipino novelist, but, after his execution in 1896, he became the central martyr in the archipelago's struggle for independence, even if his own attitude regarding independence was ambiguous.³ *Noli me tangere* is much more than a Filipino literary classic. It is a founding document of Filipino nationalism and an instrument central to its maintenance.⁴ While Rizal dealt with linguistic issues in some of his other writings, the centrality of *Noli me tangere* justifies, in my opinion, a concentrated study of implications for anti-colonial and postcolonial cultural production of the novel's discussions about language, in particular, in the chapter "En casa del filósofo."⁵

En el nuestro, en el tagalo

The main plot of *Noli me tangere* revolves around the romance between Ibarra and his childhood love María Clara. However, their planned

³John D. Blanco argues that Rizal's growing awareness of the numerous failures of the Latin American republics led him to evolve from a defense of *ilustrado* reformism to a skepticism regarding the possibility of reform or, for that matter, revolution: "Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Rizal was capable of both radicalizing the movement for colonial reforms based in Spain, led predominantly by Creoles and Spanish-Chinese mestizos and, toward the end of his life, of opposing the emergence of national revolution—a movement that he himself inspired" (101). Perhaps Rizal's ambiguity regarding independence is most clearly presented in his essay "Las Filipinas dentro de cien años," when after pointing out the impossibility of forcing its Asian colony to remain backward, he comes to the conclusion that "Las Filipinas, pues, ó [sic] continuarán siendo del dominio español, pero con más derecho y más libertades, ó se declararán independientes, después de ensangrentarse y ensangrentar á [sic] la Madre patria" (22). ("The Philippines, therefore, will continue under Spanish control, but with more rights and freedoms, or will declare their independence, after being bloodied and bloodying the Mother country"). It is obvious here that Rizal's preferred goal, as was the case with most *ilustrados*, was "not separation but recognition from the motherland" (Rafael 216). However, it is also clear that he countenanced the possibility of independence, even if, given the violence he associated with its achievement, as a less immediately desirable goal.

⁴The teaching of *Noli me tangere* and its follow-up *El filibusterismo* in high schools in The Philippines was mandated in 1956 by what has become known as "The Rizal Bill." On the contradictions present in the adoption of Rizal's novels as the central texts of Filipino nationalism, and some of the polemics surrounding the passing of the bill, see Caroline S. Hau 1–6.

⁵In particular, Rizal's *El filibusterismo* (1891), which continues Ibarra's story thirteen years later, has the creation of a Spanish-language academy for university students as one of its main plot-lines.

wedding is foiled by Father Dámaso, the Spanish priest who, unbeknownst to all, is her biological father, and by Father Salví, who acting independently, helps frame Ibarra as a *filibustero* (seditionist). The novel concludes with Ibarra turned into a fugitive from the law, while María Clara enters a nunnery and, apparently, goes insane. Despite the obviously *feuilletonesque* character of the novel's plot, it is filled with passages in which characters constantly and consistently discuss the political options open to Filipino society, from submission to reform, though, curiously and, perhaps, significantly, full independence is never mentioned. These political and cultural discussions are as important as any of the many secondary stories told throughout the novel and, perhaps, even the main romantic plot. The exchange between Ibarra and Tasio mentioned above is thus one of the many discussions about national issues presented in the novel.⁶

Tasio's reply to Ibarra's question, "En el nuestro, en el tagalo" ("In our language, in Tagalog"), provides a possible solution to the question of which language should be used by the would-be Filipino scholar.⁷ Tasio's answer presents Tagalog as "our language," that is as a link connecting the local population and, therefore, as one of the traits that make it possible to imagine this population as a nation rather than as a collection of individuals or discrete cultural communities.⁸ But even this answer is not unambiguous. Unlike Tasio, Rizal writes in Spanish and it is not stated whether the exchange between Ibarra and Tasio is in Spanish or Tagalog. The implicit claim of Tagalog as

⁶As we have seen, the relationship between Ibarra and Tasio, arguably, represent two alternative views of Filipino cultural identity. The novel also presents a similar opposition between Ibarra, who represents a mild political reformism, and Elías, the fugitive, who believes in armed struggle to force more radical reform, though, again, not independence. The heteroglossic and dialogic nature of *Noli me tangere* is exemplified by the fact that none of these options is explicitly favored. The conclusion of the novel—with Ibarra turned into a fugitive himself—may ultimately favor the more radical political and cultural options defended by Elías and Tasio. However, *El filibusterismo*, nominally the continuation of *Noli me tangere*, has been read as a criticism of both reformist and radical movements for autonomy and/or independence. In other words, the indeterminacy of the meaning of the text and, therefore, the relative hope for a positive national future that can still be read into *Noli me tangere* has been replaced in *El filibusterismo* by ruthless criticism.

⁷By claiming Tagalog as "our language," Tasio is excluding the other vernaculars spoken in the archipelago from the possible status of national language, even those that, like Cebuano, were and are spoken by millions of people.

⁸*Noli me tangere* is one of the examples from which Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* developed. According to Anderson, that novel implicitly presents the Philippines as an "imagined community" providing "a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community embracing, characters, author and readers, moving onward through calendrical times" (27).

a necessary trait of Filipino identity is ironically written in the language of colonization and is, therefore, undermined precisely at the moment it is made.⁹

Sílabas de platino

The issue of which language to use is a vexed one for the anti-colonial or, for that matter, the postcolonial scholar and writer. Should one use the colonizer's language or the local vernacular? This choice is fraught with consequences. Writing in the colonizer's language hints at an affirmation of belonging precisely to the culture which is, at least politically, rejected. The medium of communication can be seen as betraying the message. Subversion is expressed in the language of submission. Even the example of Shakespeare's Caliban—who is presented as transforming second language acquisition into anti-colonial activity—does not, despite the desire of many, avoid this contradiction. Being able to curse already implies a significant degree of assimilation. This point has been stressed, perhaps unwittingly, by the Mexican American essayist Richard Rodriguez in *Hunger for Memory*. Rodriguez's paean to assimilation begins with a reference to Shakespeare's character as a model and forerunner: "I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle" (1). As Frantz Fanon notes, "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 17). More dramatically, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o (on whom more later) "The bullet was the means of physical subjugation" while "Language was the means of spiritual subjugation" (9).

The implicit assimilation present in the use of the imperial language is also acknowledged in Fernández Retamar's *Calibán*, the *locus classicus* of left-wing Latin American appropriations of Shakespeare's play:

Mientras otros coloniales o excoloniales, en medio de metropolitanos, se ponen a hablar entre sí en sus lenguas, nosotros, los latinoamericanos y caribeños, seguimos con nuestros idiomas de colonizadores. Son las lenguas francas capaces de ir más allá de las fronteras que no logran atravesar las lenguas aborígenes ni los créoles. Ahora mismo, que estoy discutiendo con estos colonizadores, ¿de qué otra manera puedo hacerlo, sino en una de sus

⁹Ironically, Ibarra, in Rizal's second novel, *El filibusterismo*, expresses ideas similar to those presented by Father Dámaso in *Noli me tangere* (52–53).

lenguas, que es ya también nuestra lengua, y con tantos de sus instrumentos conceptuales, que también son ya nuestros instrumentos conceptuales? (15)

[While other colonials and ex-colonials speak among themselves in their own languages, we inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean continue using the languages of the colonizers. They are *linguas francas* capable of going beyond the borders that aboriginal languages and creoles cannot cross. Even now, when I am discussing with these colonizers, in what other manner can I do it except in their own language, which is now also our language, and with many of their conceptual instruments, which are now our conceptual instruments].

Caliban has, therefore, partly assumed the culture of those he execrates. However, as Fernández Retamar intimates, the local scholar may feel a need to learn the imperial language as part of a process of appropriating “conceptual instruments” necessary for anti-colonial activity. For instance, in the Philippines, while Tagalog had possessed a writing system—*baybayin*—which the Spanish missionaries replaced with Roman alphabet (Vicente Rafael 222), and there was a significant literary tradition in the language, which included popular verse narratives, such as the *corrido*, as well as religious writings, there was no significant novelistic tradition.¹⁰ The novel—the genre Rizal adopted and adapted to Filipino society—thus had no major precedents in Tagalog.¹¹ Obviously, this lack of history and, therefore, of experienced readers of novels, would have made *Noli me tangere*, if it had been written in the local language, difficult to comprehend by those Tagalog speakers who were not previously familiar with Spanish language literature. But by being written in Spanish, Hispanophone readers, both Filipinos and Spaniards, were by necessity the implied readers of *Noli me tangere*. The case of Rizal and *Noli me tangere*, therefore, problematizes Fanon’s well-known comments in *The Wretched of the Earth* on the issue of national literature:

While at the beginning the native intellectual used to produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor, whether with the intention of charming him or of denouncing him through ethnic or subjectivist means, now the

¹⁰According to Mojares, in his *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel*, the *corrido* “formed the staple of secular printed entertainment” (61). Regarding the religious texts, which included many that were actually narratives—such as lives of saints—or incorporated narrative sections within more didactic contexts, for instance, in the “quintessential expression of the spirit of the [colonial] times, the book of context” (80).

¹¹Mojares who points out the existence of novelistic precedents in Tagalog and Spanish, in particular *Ninay* (1885) by Pedro Paterno, still accepts Rizal as “rightfully the father of the Filipino novel” (*Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* 137).

native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people. It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature. (240)

In this passage, Fanon seems to assume that there is both a clear separation between the oppressor and the writer's "people" as readerships and that these are both homogeneous groups. Rizal, on the contrary, sees his readership as necessarily constituted by allies and enemies that are both local and foreign. *Noli me tangere's* narrator's famous address to the reader, "¡oh tú que me lees, amigo o enemigo!" ("you who reads me, friend or enemy!") (8), exemplifies this difference. Instead of addressing exclusively either the "oppressor" or "his own people," the novel assumes the possibility of a varied readership who only share the ability to read in Spanish. Moreover, as the text clearly shows colonial Philippines is a space in which a heterogeneous population comprised of Filipino (in the sense of *criollo*), *indio* (indigenous), mestizo, Chinese, and *peninsulares* are not univocal representatives of specific political or ethical stances.¹² But not only is the population culturally and ethnically diverse. There was, as we will see, no real majority language in the archipelago. Nationality was for Rizal necessarily something to be constructed. Even the title of Rizal's novel, *Noli me tangere*, the words uttered by the just risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene, may indicate a belief in the inchoate nature of Philippine nationality.¹³

The relatively recent case of the Kenyan novelist James Ngugi, who after a celebrated English language career, reclaimed the name of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in the late 1970s, and abandoned English for Gikuyo, serves as a perfect example of the contradictions which an anti-colonial author faces when choosing a language in which to write. Nicholas Birns provides a lucid summary of the consequences of the Kenyan novelist's decision to adopt the vernacular:

This achieved the outcome of rejecting the language of the colonizer. It also liberated Ngugi from having to represent Africa to the West, which was a major contributor to the burden felt by both political and literary

¹²This awareness of a heterogeneous readership does not necessarily contradict the oft repeated assertion that Rizal attempted in *Noli me tangere* "rendering . . . a Philippine national community that was different and separate from Spain" or to "invent 'the Filipino'" (Hau 48, 49). To knowledge the existence of heterogeneous readers is not incompatible with the attempt to create, through address and representation, a coherent community out of the majority of these readers.

¹³The biblical passage from which the title is borrowed—John 20: 17—seems to present Jesus in some kind of in-between state or period. According to the King James Bible, "Jesus said unto her [Mary Magdalene], Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father."

liberation movements in this era, something which should not be underestimated. But it did not do much to enable Ngugi to communicate with Africans, the vast majority of whom did not speak Gikuyu. Even in Kenya itself, for instance, a member of the Luo people . . . may have felt more alienated by a Gikuyu text than an English one. At least English could serve as a neutral bridge between the two often-rivalrous groups. (228–29)

Anti-colonial principle clashed with the parallel need for communication within and without the oppressed community. Vicente Rafael has noted that, for the *ilustrados* (educated nationalist Filipino elite), Spanish played a similar role as “neutral bridge”:

We can think of Castilian . . . as a second language for translating the primary languages of the archipelago. It relayed sentiments and wishes not only across linguistic regions: For those who could use it, it had the power to convey messages up and down the colonial hierarchy, linking those on top with those below. . . Castilian played a function analogous to that of the telegraph, transmitting messages within and outside the colony. (219)

Given the fact that though Tagalog was spoken by a plurality of the population there were many other vernaculars, the propagation of Spanish was frequently seen in the nineteenth century as the necessary linguistic precondition for the establishment of a national literature and identity.

The Spanish colonies in the Americas were partial exceptions to this colonial/postcolonial linguistic quandary. As Fernández Retamar noted, in the quotation above, unlike “other colonials and ex-colonials” who “speak in their own languages,” Latin Americans had no choice but to use the imperial tongue. The thorough and willful destruction of indigenous cultures, at least in their more literary courtly expressions, and the geographic and cultural marginalization of their languages, with the well-known exception of Paraguay, led to the nearly complete hegemony of Spanish. This occurred not only among the *criollo* (Euro-American) cultured elites who would lead the struggle for independence, but even among large percentages of the populations.

José Martí, Rizal’s close contemporary, despite being a much more unambiguous anti-colonial activist, did not consider the possibility of promoting existing indigenous languages, beyond purely pragmatic uses, as exemplified in his (unfortunately unfounded) claim that “los gobernadores en la república de indios aprenden indio” [“the governors in the republics of Indians learn Indian”] (37). He is an example of how even the most radical American independence leaders saw Spanish as the only possible means for the expression of nationality. Martí, in his programmatic anti-colonial manifesto “Nuestra América” does not

question the hegemony of the Spanish language even as he proposes the creation of a decolonized and decolonizing educational system:

La universidad europea ha de ceder a la universidad americana. La historia de América, de los incas acá, ha de enseñarse al dedillo, aunque no se enseñe la de los arcontes de Grecia. Nuestra Grecia es preferible a la Grecia que no es nuestra. Nos es más necesaria. (34)

The European University must yield to the American University. The history of America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught in detail, even if the history of the Greek archons is not taught. Our Greece should be preferred over the Greece that is not ours. It is more necessary.¹⁴

As the quotation makes clear, Martí proposes the decolonization of education and of culture. One can also assume that educational methods would also be adjusted to the American context. After all, Martí imagines that “el libro importado ha sido vencido por el hombre natural” [“the imported book has been defeated by the natural man”] and “los hombres naturales han vencido a los letrados artificiales” [“natural men have defeated artificial men of letters”] (33). However, in no moment in “Nuestra América” does Martí propose that the language in which education is imparted and liberation is achieved be other than Spanish.¹⁵

¹⁴The comparison between Rizal and Martí has become commonplace in writings about the former, but, perhaps significantly, not in those on the latter. Recently John D. Blanco has analyzed “the common engagement of Rizal and Martí with the thought of Simón Bolívar . . . both Rizal and Martí saw themselves as the problematic inheritors of an unfinished project that began with the Latin American wars of independence in 1810” (94). Blanco ultimately sees Rizal as “condemning [revolution] as the mystification of a long term problem,” while he implicitly celebrates Martí for “demonstrating the ‘failure’ of the liberal political and aesthetic project as a necessary part of the project itself,” which I take as incorporating and acknowledging this failure in order to radicalize the struggle for more egalitarian and just societies (110).

¹⁵Towards the end of “Nuestra América,” Martí describes the positive changes he sees taking place: “Surgen los estadistas naturales del estudio directo de la Naturaleza. Leen para aplicar, pero no para copiar. Los economistas estudian la dificultad en sus orígenes. Los oradores empiezan a ser sobrios. Los dramaturgos traen los caracteres nativos a la escena. Las academias discuten temas viables. La poesía se corta la melena zorrillesca y cuelga del árbol glorioso el chaleco colorado. La prosa, centelleante y cernida, va cargada de idea. Los gobernadores, en las repúblicas de indios, aprenden indio” (37) [“There appear natural statesmen out of the direct study of nature. They read to apply, but not to copy. Economist study difficulties at their roots. Orators become more circumspect. Playwrights bring native characters to the stage. Academies discuss feasible topics. Poetry cuts its *zorrillesque* long hair, and hangs on the glorious tree the red vest. Prose, brilliant and purified, is charged with ideas. The governors, in the Indian republics, learn Indian”]. Needless to say, these positive changes only took place in Martí’s poetic imagination. However, this passage rather than proposing

Even in the Andean region, where late into the twentieth century there was a significant population, perhaps even a majority, who spoke indigenous vernaculars, Spanish, as the language of the urban elites, was still the national language. As Antonio Cornejo Polar notes, the region's literature was situated "en el conflictivo cruce de dos culturas" ["the conflictive contact of two cultures"], that is, indigenous and Hispanic, and, therefore, marked, at its best, by a "tránsito entre la oralidad y la escritura" ("transit between orality and writing") in which the former is heavily impacted by the local vernaculars ("Literatura peruana: totalidad contradictoria" 8). However, the literature produced was still in Spanish. Only a few, such as the later José María Arguedas, would question the hegemonic role of Spanish.¹⁶

It is, therefore, not surprising that Pablo Neruda, in his Marxist anti-colonial poetic "people's history" of Latin America, *Canto general*, concludes the section that retells the story of the conquest with a poem titled "A pesar de la ira" ("Despite the Anger"). Neruda lists science, technology, and the Spanish language, described as "sílabas de platino" ("syllables of platinum"), as parts of a positive, perhaps, necessary, "luz" ["light"] that "se derramó sobre la tierra" ["spilled over the land"] with colonization (79). As Neruda states: "La luz vino a pesar de los puñales" ("Light arrived despite the knives") (80). The Spanish language and Western reason were, for the great poet, the silver lining to the bloody clouds of the conquest.

Compañera del imperio

Underlying Ibarra's question to Tasio, and Rizal's implicit questioning of the relation between language and Filipino identity, is the fact that the diffusion of Spanish in the Philippines differed substantially from other Spanish possessions. If in the Americas, Spain followed the dictum proposed by Antonio de Nebrija—the first grammarian

bilingualism or bicultural hybridity as a necessary component of the vaguely defined "repúblicas de indios"—Peru? Bolivia? Ecuador? Guatemala?—defends a nativistic art which incorporates foreign topics and a pragmatic use of indigenous languages as a means for the state to communicate with the indigenous populations. In no moment is the use of indigenous languages as artistic or national language proposed.

¹⁶Perhaps the canonical text questioning the exclusive role of Spanish is José María Arguedas's emotive speech "No soy un aculturado" ("I Am Not an Acculturated Man"), where the great *indigenista* writes, "Yo soy un peruano que orgullosamente, como un demonio feliz, habla en cristiano y en indio, en español y en quechua" ["I am a Peruvian who proudly, like a happy demon, speaks in Christian and in Indian, in Spanish and in Quechua"] (257).

of Spanish and of any modern European vernacular—that “la lengua fue compañera del imperio” (“language was the companion of Empire”)—in the Philippines the dissemination of Spanish took a permanent back seat to the catechization of the archipelago’s indigenous population. Even military action itself was, to a degree, replaced by religious propagation, and the state by the Catholic Church. As Rafael notes: “the success of the Spanish missionaries in converting the majority of lowland natives to Catholicism rested less on coercion—it could not, given the small number of Spanish military forces in the islands—as it did on translation . . . evangelization relied on the task of translation. God’s word was delivered to the natives in their own tongue” (222). The Philippines was the one Spanish attempt to apply the ideas of Las Casas regarding the role of the Catholic Church in Imperial expansion.¹⁷ Ironically, given the philanthropic intention of Las Casas, throughout *Noli me tangere*, the ideological backwardness and authoritarianism of the Church is, perhaps even more than the country’s actual political control under Spain, the main source of injustice and abuse in colonial Philippines. The villainous roles played by Father Dámaso and Father Salví represent in the narrative the negative view of clerical dominance expressed throughout the novel. The limited spread of Spanish throughout the archipelago originated in this prioritization of catechization over state functions. The expansion of Catholicism could be achieved more rapidly in the local languages. Moreover, in addition to their authority as religious figures, as Spaniards, and as speakers of the two hierarchically privileged languages, Spanish and Latin, the clergy, as the sole structural polyglots in a multi-lingual society, functioned as translators between different indigenous populations and between these and the state. As Rafael argues, “The rhetoric of conversion and the practice of translation allowed for the naturalization, as it were, of hierarchy, linguistic as well as social” (224).

Moreover, there was no absolute majority language. According to Rafael, Spanish was spoken by only 1.6 % of the population in 1903,

¹⁷According to Fidel Villaroel, the conquest of The Philippines followed the parameters proposed by Las Casas and Victoria as adopted by the Spanish crown. In fact, Miguel López de Legazpi, the *adelantado* who accomplished the conquest of the archipelago followed faithfully the *leyes nuevas* of 1542: “Besides, Legazpi brought with him specific instructions and norms on how to conduct the explorations and conquests, which neither Hernán Cortés nor Francisco Pizarro had had in Mexico and Peru. Gone were the days of arriving in new lands and taking possession of them in the name of the kings of Castile and Leon. Legazpi was bound to follow to the letter the norms of *requerimiento* or the formalities established by law for dealing with newly discovered peoples” (98).

5 years after the U.S. takeover of the country.¹⁸ Even Tagalog, “our language” as Rizal through Tasio calls it, was, as Benedict Anderson notes, “spoken by perhaps two million in the multilingual Philippine archipelago” (*Spectre of Comparisons* 232), approximately a third of the country’s population at the time.¹⁹

Prendas prestadas

Ironically, the explicit defense of Tagalog is entrusted in *Noli me tangere* to the villainous Father Dámaso. The cleric opposed teaching Spanish although “el Gobierno lo ordenaba” [“the government ordered it”] (99). Facing down a school teacher who attempted to teach the language to his Filipino students, Dámaso states: “No me uses prendas prestadas; conténtate con hablar tu idioma y no me eches a perder el español, que no es para vosotros” [“Don’t use borrowed clothes. Be content to speak your own language and don’t ruin the Spanish language, which is not for you”] (99). Although Dámaso seems to believe that Filipinos are intrinsically unable to master the Spanish language—a statement rendered ironic by Rizal’s masterful Castilian prose—and implicitly presents Spanish as superior to Tagalog, the fact is that like Tasio, he also sees language as imbricated with identity. For them, Tagalog is the natural means of communication for Filipinos, just like Spanish is for Spaniards, even if Tasio’s statement is free of racial undertones.²⁰

The schoolteacher and Ibarra, to whom the former is confiding his exchange with Dámaso, both Filipino, see Spanish as a means to access a Western modernity that includes but is not exclusive to Spanish culture. In the characteristic nineteenth century liberal reformist dream they present education as the solution to all social problems, including those that originate in the colonial structure of the Philippines. Ibarra’s dream is to build a modern school in his town of San Diego which would follow German educational innovations, which are, in fact, also alluded as a model by the school teacher (153, 98).²¹ But

¹⁸Rafael is, however, interpreting the American census since it placed Spanish speakers at “under 10%” (220). Rafael proposes that only those with superior education, that is, 1.6 % be considered to be Spanish speakers.

¹⁹According to the 1887 census, the population of the archipelago was 6,462,875 (Mojares, *Brains of the Nation* 511).

²⁰It is, however, a sign of Rizal’s heteroglossic irony, that, as we have seen, in *El filibusterismo*, Ibarra repeats as nationalistic dogma the same racist arguments made by Dámaso in *Noli me tangere*.

²¹Although Ibarra represents throughout the novel a Hispanic version of Filipino identity, the linkage between language and nationality is of Germanic provenance,

as we know, this reformist solution will fail by the end of the novel when Ibarra is forced to become a fugitive. However, in *Noli me tangere*, Ibarra and perhaps even Rizal at the time see Spanish as also composed of “syllables of platinum” for, as is the case of Neruda’s poem, the language is presented as the gateway to modernity.

Escribo para otras edades

As mentioned above, Ibarra’s question—¿En qué idioma escribe Ud.?—originated in his surprise at seeing Tasio writing hieroglyphs in his house. Tasio clearly states the reason for his use of hieroglyphs: “¡Para que no me puedan leer ahora!” [So they cannot read me now!] (142). This puzzled Ibarra, who couldn’t understand why anyone would write without meaning to be read by a contemporary public. Tasio’s response merits quoting:

Porque no escribo para esta generación, escribo para otras edades. Si ésta me pudiese leer, quemaría mis libros, el trabajo de toda mi vida; en cambio, la generación que descifre estos caracteres será una generación instruida y dirá: ‘¡No todos dormían en la noche de nuestros abuelos!’ (142)

[Because I do not write for this generation, I write for other times. If this one could read them, they would burn my books, the labor of my whole life. Instead, the generation that deciphers these characters will be a learned generation and will conclude: ‘Not all slept during our grandparents’ night!’].

And, as we have seen, though transcribed in hieroglyphs, the language in which he writes to the future is Tagalog.

This passage makes clear several assumptions underlying Tasio’s intellectual activity. The first is that it is directly based on his profound pessimism about the present of the Philippines. Undeniably, this opinion is directly related to the colonial condition of the archipelago. However, it is notable that Tasio does not merely fear the reaction of the authorities, but also of his “generation,” that is, his Filipino contemporaries. As previously mentioned, the Spanish authorities and, in fact, Spain itself are not presented in the worst of lights in *Noli me tangere*. Instead, it is the local Catholic Church that is seen as the primary obstacle to the progress that Ibarra is attempting to bring to San

originating in Herder’s thought. Ibarra is presented in the novel as having spent time in Germany: “estos dos últimos años estaba en el Norte de Europa: en Alemania y en la Polonia rusa” [“these last two years I spent in Northern Europe: in Germany and Russian Poland] (22).

Diego and, implicitly, the Philippines. Moreover, throughout the novel, what could be anachronistically called Filipino civil society is, despite a handful of exceptions, consistently aligned with the dicta of the clergy. This explains why Tasio's writing is hidden underneath hieroglyphs so that for all, except himself, the philosopher is incomprehensible.

However, the fact that he writes at all implies a wager on a different future. There is in Tasio's statement and actions an implicit belief in political and cultural progress. He writes for a future characterized by rationality, education, and, therefore, modernity, rather than by ignorance and religion. (The fact that they would be able to decipher the hieroglyphs emphasizes the learned nature of the future generation). Furthermore, by resorting to the trope of the family, it will be one in which Filipino identity will be clearly established. Not only will they see in Tasio, the anti-colonial scholar, but also a grandparent. It is a future in which, as we have seen Tagalog, not Spanish, is "our language." The future of the Philippines is one in which the nation has been fully constituted through linguistic, cultural, and social unity; and in which modernity has been fully embraced.

But, as we know, *Noli me tangere* is written in Spanish. Therefore, "our language" is not reflected in the actual text read, except in the occasional words and phrases in Tagalog. Even if there are many more speakers of Tagalog than Spanish, the latter is in the late nineteenth century the language of communication among *ilustrados* within and without the archipelago. Therefore, the activist José Rizal writes for the present and uses Spanish as the only possible means to influence public opinion in a multilingual society, such as that of the Philippines; while the philosopher Tasio writes for a future Philippines in which Tagalog has become the language of nationality.

Mis huéspedes de la China y del Japón

Writing about *El filibusterismo*, Rizal's 1891 follow-up to *Noli me tangere*, Adam Lifshey notes the presence of "an imaginary and typecast but powerful Orient" throughout that novel (1443). The reference to hieroglyphs in *Noli me tangere* could be seen as representing a similar Orientalizing strategy. However, hieroglyphs, despite their obvious links with a Saidian "stereotyped Orient associated . . . with the Middle East" (Lifshey 1443), do not serve, in my opinion, to distance the Philippines from Asia, or to reproduce an image of the latter as the "Other" of the archipelago which, as a Spanish possession, would then be identified with the West, despite its geographical location.

Although, Jean-François Champollion was for Edward Said the prototype of the orientalist, the reference to hieroglyphs serves a very “non-orientalist” purpose in *Noli me tangere*: that of marking Tagalog as Asian linguistically (despite the actual location of Egypt in Africa).²² When asked by Ibarra, “Y ¿sirven los signos jeroglíficos? [And, are the hieroglyphs useful?], Tasio responds: “Si no fuera por la dificultad del dibujo que exige tiempo y paciencia, casi le diría que sirven mejor que el alfabeto latino. El antiguo egipcio tenía nuestras vocales” [“If it weren’t for the difficult in drawing them, which requires time and patience, I would almost say that they are more useful than the Latin alphabet. Ancient Egyptian had our vowels”] (142). Hieroglyphs, the characteristic cultural product of Egypt, the Oriental space par excellence, is presented as being structurally compatible with Tagalog, “our language,” the prospective agglutinating trait of Filipino identity. Tagalog, strangely enough through the connection with Egypt, is presented in the novel as an Asian language.

But the Philippines is not only Asian in its language. Tasio notes that writing hieroglyphs keeps him busy when his “huéspedes de la China y del Japón se marchan” [“guests from China and Japan leave”]. The guests in question are swallows. Tasio’s explanation of how he discovered the provenance of the songbirds is, again, significant:

Hace algunos años . . . les ataba al pie un papelito con el nombre de Filipinas en inglés, suponiendo que no debían ir muy lejos, y porque el inglés se habla en casi todas estas regiones. Durante años mi papelito no obtuvo contestación, hasta que últimamente lo hice escribir en chino, y he aquí que el noviembre siguiente vuelven otros papelitos que hice descifrar: el uno estaba escrito en chino y era un saludo desde las orillas del Hoang-ho, y el otro . . . debe ser japonés. (143)

[Some years ago . . . I tied to their feet slips of paper with the name of the Philippines written in English; assuming they did not fly far, and because English is spoken throughout these regions. During years, my papers did not receive replies, until recently I had their names written in Chinese; and then the following November I received messages which I had deciphered. One was in Chinese and was a greeting from the shores of the Hoang-ho, and the other . . . seems to be in Japanese]

²²Hieroglyphs play an implicit though important role in Said’s *Orientalism*. As mentioned Champollion, the decipherer of this Egyptian writing system, was, in particular in French culture, the prototype of the Orientalist. As Said notes: “The modern Orientalist was, in his view, a hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished. His research reconstructed the Orient’s lost languages, mores, even mentalities, as Champollion reconstructed Egyptian hieroglyphs out of the Rosetta Stone” (121).

If Tagalog is presented by Tasio as implicitly Asian, given its affinity with Ancient Egyptian, the ur-Oriental space of antiquity, the Philippines in this passage is shown as actually belonging to the geographical and cultural space of Asia. Therefore, it is not Spanish, the language which was used by the *ilustrados* to access Western culture (as mediated by Spain), nor English, already presented as the nominal world lingua franca—"se habla en casi todas estas regiones"—which actually serves as a means for communication with the surrounding countries. (It is also significant that Ibarra omits French, the language of diplomacy and the international elites, and in which Rizal was fluent).²³

However, the implicit privileging of Chinese and, therefore, China, may contradict Rizal's actual opinions about the country and its culture. In his *Las Filipinas dentro de cien años* [*The Philippines in a Hundred Years*] (1889–90), an early example of futurology, Rizal argued that in the late twentieth century "La China se considerará bastante feliz si consigue mantenerse unida y no se desmembra, ó se la reparten las potencias europeas que colonizan en el Continente asiático" ["China will consider itself quite happy if it stays united and does not fall apart, or it will be carved by the European powers that colonize the Asian continent"] (47–48). If the links between Tagalog and ancient Egyptian serve to stress the non-Western nature of the future language and culture of the Philippines, Tasio's need to use Chinese in order to receive replies to his messages, serves to remind the reader of the actual geographical location of the archipelago. Tasio's writings—in hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms—stress the Asianness of the Philippines against the Spanish version of Filipino identity proposed by Ibarra who, in fact, is identified as an "*español filipino*" [Spanish Filipino] (155). Despite the fractured state of China in the late nineteenth century, and in Rizal's imagined future, and the low or at least foreign status assigned to the Chinese immigrants and their descendants residing in the Philippines, perhaps even, by Rizal, Chinese is implicitly presented as the language for international communication in contemporary Asia.²⁴

²³In fact, Rizal considered, at one time, writing in French rather than in Spanish or Tagalog (as he tried in his incomplete third novel). According to Mojares: "He was not completely happy with his choice of language [for *Noli me tangere*]. In fact, he had written . . . that if *Noli me tangere* proved a failure, he would thenceforth write his works in French, as in this language he would have a more progressive, wider public" (*Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* 140).

²⁴Although Rizal had Chinese ancestry, in both *Noli me tangere* and, especially, in *El filibusterismo* the few Chinese characters are not only presented as caricatures, but as being outside the (proto) national community. For instance, in *El filibusterismo*, the main Chinese character, "Chino Quiroga," a merchant who despite being described as

Ironically, given that English is today with Tagalog one of the two majority and official languages of the Philippines, the former language is discarded as a possible language of communication and, perhaps, nationality. Nevertheless, Rizal actually incorporates into *Noli me tangere* the pressure of English on local languages—"el inglés se habla en casi todas estas regiones." Prefiguring the reality of many contemporary Filipinos, Tasio, who writes in Tagalog by means of hieroglyphs, is also a writer of English texts, even if these are only the brief messages he ties to swallows. However, Tasio, who first considered English to be the possible language of insertion into the world, ultimately discovers that, for the Philippines, Chinese is to be the international language. In the novel, the Asianness of the future Philippines is affirmed within and without the archipelago.

Conclusion

As we have seen, *Noli me tangere* raises questions still central to anti-colonial and postcolonial cultural production. For instance, *Noli me tangere* can be seen as exemplifying, with some modifications, the notion of heterogeneity proposed by Cornejo Polar for the *indigenista* literature of the Andes. According to the Peruvian critic, *indigenista* literature was characterized by heterogeneity, that is, by disjunction in the relationship among text, referent, and system of consumption.²⁵ (As we have seen, this disjunction originates in the simultaneous presence of indigenous and Hispanic cultures and societies). This disjunction creates for Cornejo Polar a "zone of ambiguity and conflict" in the text ("El indigenismo y las literaturas heterogéneas" 12). The tensions in *Noli me tangere* regarding the status of Spanish and Tagalog, dramatized in "En casa del filósofo," but already present in the act of writing *Noli me tangere* itself, are characteristic of heterogeneity as understood

circulating among the Filipino elite, is presented in a stereotyped manner. Moreover, he "aspiraba á crear un Consulado para su nación" ["aspired to establish a consulate for his nation"] (120). As Hau notes "The 'Chinese' became the marker for the alien who stands outside the nationalist imagination" (142).

²⁵"Caracteriza a las literaturas heterogéneas . . . la duplicidad o pluralidad de los signos socio-culturales de su proceso productivo: se trata, en síntesis, de un proceso que tiene por lo menos un elemento que no coincide con la filiación de los otros y crea necesariamente una zona de ambigüedad y conflicto" ["Heterogeneous literatures are characterized . . . by the duplicity or plurality of the socio-cultural signs of their productive process: in synthesis, we are dealing with a process that has at least one element that does not coincide with the filiation of the others and necessarily creates a zone of ambiguity and conflict"] ("El indigenismo y las literaturas heterogéneas" 12).

by Cornejo Polar. A world (mostly) lived in Tagalog is presented in Spanish. However, unlike *indigenista* literature in which, as a norm, the indigenous world described differs radically linguistically and culturally from the *criollo* world of the writer and readers, the disjunction between the productive and consumptive process and the referent is not as clear cut. After all, even if Rizal is writing in Spanish, he is not a Spanish writer nor one intrinsically separate in location and culture from the world and society fictionalized in his novels.

But, if *Noli me tangere* repeats traits characteristic of (some) Latin American literary production, it also foreshadows the dilemmas faced by contemporary African and Asian writers. As we saw in the case of Ngugi, the tensions experienced by Rizal as a Filipino writer—regarding the relationship with, respectively, local and international cultures, languages, and even markets—is still felt by many writers. (In the Philippines, Spanish, though entrenched in Spain and Latin America, has been replaced by English as the international language, as perhaps Rizal foresaw; while Tagalog has risen to become the Filipino national language).²⁶ If the anti-colonial struggle has waned as nominal independence has been achieved by most of the former possessions, the cultural, linguistic, and even economic pressures felt by postcolonial vernaculars has increased. As Christian Mair notes: “Languages are today disappearing at a faster pace than ever before in human history. What happens is linguistic genocide on a massive scale, with formal education and media as the main concrete culprits but with the world’s political, economic and military structures as the more basic causal factors” (33). Paradoxically, globalization and the spread of Anglo-American culture throughout the world have made the questions discussed in *Noli me tangere* retain their relevance. The case can be made that *Noli me tangere* is not only one of the last Hispanic anti-colonial texts, but one of the first prefiguring contemporary postcolonial questions of identity.

Noli me tangere proposes no answer to the questions it raises. Rigorously dialogic and heteroglossic, the conversation between Ibarra and Tasio, that is, between a Hispanic and Western culture and identity,

²⁶Rizal’s suspicions regarding a possible American imperial role in the Philippines, which would, in fact, become reality in 1898, is expressed in his *Las Filipinas dentro de cien años*, when after discounting the possibility of the archipelago coming under German, French or even Chinese control, he notes: “Acaso la gran República Americana, cuyos intereses se encuentran en el Pacífico y que no tiene participación de los despojos del África, piense un día en posesiones ultramarinas” [“Perhaps the great American Republic, whose interests reside in the Pacific and which has not participation in the partition of Africa, one day will wish overseas possessions”] (48).

on the one hand, and a Tagalog and Asian one, on the other, is never solved. The tensions that haunt *Noli me tangere* regarding the respective advantages of imperial languages and vernaculars are still alive in the literatures not only of the Philippines but throughout the global south.

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