

The Feminine Nation: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of the Iconographies of Marianne and Maria Clara in the French and Philippine Online Press

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Abstract

Using articles from online portals of French national dailies Le Figaro, Le Monde and Le Parisien and Philippine national dailies Philippine Star, Philippine Daily Inquirer and Manila Bulletin, this paper aims to discuss and analyze the nation and national identity by examining representations of women through the respective national iconographies of Marianne and Maria Clara, which embody postcolonial, patriarchal, republican and neocolonial ideologies in France and in the Philippines.

Analysis of the texts displayed how these representations of Marianne and Maria Clara are insufficient to portray the specificities of reality, in particular the realities of marginalized, impoverished and immigrant women.

Keywords: postcolonial feminism, hybridity, multiculturalism, neocolonialism, republicanism, imitation, Third World vs. First World, colonized vs. colonized

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Introduction

France, described at once “a classic nation-state” and “Europe’s leading immigrant society” (Walzer 1997) has aimed to establish a universal Frenchness to unite these two conflicting ideas and promulgate idea of a diverse yet united nation under a sole French national identity. Signifying what is truly and genuinely French, Marianne has taken the form of popular celebrities like Brigitte Bardot and Laetitia Casta, thereby concocting an image of a woman that radiates beauty and courage, vulnerability and intensity. Despite a pre-established imagery, representations of Marianne have changed and evolved to suit current situations and recent discussions within France’s sociopolitical spheres. Recently, representations of Marianne have begun to stray from the blond, bold and blue-eyed attributes of Bardot and Casta, in an attempt to encompass the visual realms of the usual and the everyday through adapting the images of women more commonly seen in most French societies today - that is to say, the immigrants, the political refugees and the natives of territories who are neither white, Christian nor Français de souche. As these attempts provide representations of the marginalized that do not seem to embody a dominant republican imagery of the French national identity, these images of women have stirred and incited feminist and postcolonial discussions from academics and civilians alike.

The Philippines, on the other hand, who has spent most of its long and significant history as a colony of three world powers, still struggle to establish a common identity among its patriots. As such, Maria Clara, the tragic heroine from national hero Dr. Jose Rizal’s infamous novel *Noli me Tangere*, was first introduced to Filipinos during the darkest hours of the Spanish colonial regime. Unlike Marianne who is meant to directly embody the totality of a common French national identity, the ideology behind Maria Clara relies on a more metaphorical and literary representation of the Motherland, the *Inang Bayan* (Retana as cited in Terranal, 1978), through an amalgamation of Rizal’s love for a woman and his passion for his nation. Maria Clara has also been a prominent icon of Philippine popular culture, which manifests through various cultural mediums such as fashion, dance, theatre etc. All these depictions of Maria Clara, as they seem, promulgate and promote her status as a timeless symbol of traditional Filipina beauty based on the values of modesty, purity and chastity. Her iconography entails an idealized femininity that reflects the nation from the traditions of its colonial era to the nuances of its modern, neocolonial period. Now, she appears in fashion magazines, in TV programs and in films and even in discussions in the dating scene as a modernized symbol, emancipated from the chains of her once-domestic existence.

As such, both Marianne and Maria Clara play significant roles in the emergence and development of national consciousness in each nation (Joaquin as cited in Terrenal, 1978; Agulhon, “Marianne: réflexions sur une histoire” 1992), but each icon represents contrasting national images. Marianne personifies a well-cultivated inspiring depiction of liberty and the glory of the French Republic (“Marianne, réflexions sur une histoire” 1992), whereas Maria Clara represents the tragic victim driven to lunacy, a symbol that at once condemned and romanticized the systematized and systematic oppression in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial regime – taking into account the ideologies that

surround the formation of an idealized national identity (Heuer, 2008) within altogether different yet similar contexts.

This paper will discuss the analysis of articles from different sections of French dailies *Le Figaro*, *Le Parisien* and *Le Monde* and Philippine national dailies *Philippine Star*, *Manila Bulletin* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, written by various journalists between the year 2000 and 2014, It examines how these virtual and perceptual representations of women are insufficient to exhibit the specificities of reality and the discussions that surround multiculturalism in France, neocolonialism in the Philippines and, more notably, the formation of identities in hybrid cultures entrenched within these phenomena.

Marianne: always a subject of debate

Every three years since the beginning of the 5th republic, the president has to choose a new model for Marianne. The new face of France will then appear on all possible cultural products in the country such as logos, busts, monuments or stamps. As such, the new Marianne should be able to embody universalism, mission civilisatrice, liberalism, secularism, and separation of private and public space – concepts and values inherent to the supposed Republican ideal that has been cultivated through the years.



Fig. 1 A photo that juxtaposes Kawena and Ciappa’s Marianne stamp and its model, Inna Shevchenko. “Timbre inspiré d’une Femen: des anti-mariage gay appellent au boycott ». *Le Parisien*. leparisien.fr, 15 Jul. 2013. Web. 21 Mar. 2015

In 2014, President François Hollande’s controversial choice of Marianne provides a suitable example of the opposite: Ukrainian sextremist, leader of radical feminist organization FEMEN and political refugee Inna Shevchenko. On the 14th of July 2014, François Hollande unveiled the new Marianne, a beautiful image of a woman with a graceful face, a fleshy mouth, huge, intense eyes and flawless hair,

sporting a Phrygian cap (Benjamin; “un visage gracieux, une bouche charnue des yeux immenses, des cheveux défaits, mais domestiqués par un bonnet phrygien.”)

The design was created by graphic artists Olivier Ciappa and David Kawena, who are known for promoting same-sex marriage through their art, and chosen by French high school students representing 30 French academies. Just hours after the stamp’s launch, the Parti Démocrate-Chrétien (“Christian Democratic Party”) and its president Christine Boutin appealed to boycott the stamp and demanded Hollande’s resignation. Entangled in a massive conflict of values and interests between the PDC, a conservatist political and social party in France, and FEMEN, a radical feminist organization in Paris famous for their sextremist events and their vocal support for same-sex or homosexual marriage, the two opposing sides have started a Twitter war which provoked a national online debate. Below is an exchange of posts on Twitter that highlights two opposing ideologies published in an article entitled “Timbre inspiré d’une Femen: des anti-mariages gay appellent au boycott” (“FEMEN-inspired Stamp: Anti-homosexual Marriage Groups Call for a Boycott” 2013):

La nouvelle Marianne est une FEMEN ! LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FEMEN !
(Femen_France)

(“The new Marianne is FEMEN! Liberty, Equality, FEMEN!”)

Maintenant tous les homophobes, extrémistes et fascistes vont devoir me lécher le cul lorsqu’ils voudront envoyer une lettre. (Shevchenko)

(“Now all homophobes, extremists and fascists must lick my ass in order to send a letter”)

APPEL AU BOYCOTT du timbre #Femen 1 outrage à la dignité de la femme, à la souveraineté de la #France, demande retrait du timbre de l’outrage (PCD)

(“CALL FOR BOYCOTT of the #Femen stamp! An outrage to the dignity of the woman and the sovereignty of #France, we demand the boycott of the outrageous stamp!”)

La nouvelle Marianne à l’image du gouvernement : christianophobe, haineuse et idéologue ! #ONLR #Femen #Résistance (Printemps Français)

(“The new Marianne is the image of the government: christianophobe, hateful and ideologist! #ONLR #Femen #Résistance”)

In these Tweets, the PDC and its supporters express their disdain towards Inna Shevchenko as Marianne highly due to the possibility that they consider this as an affront to essential Republican values of France today (Kovacs 2013, de Mallevoüe 2014) and a contemptuous insult to the dignity of women and the sovereignty of France as a nation. Almost in response to this, Femen_France’s tweet changed the motto of the Republic,

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" into "Liberty, Equality, Femen," as a proclamation of their victory. thus evoking the sense of national identity that comes with Marianne while at the same time promoting FEMEN's role in it. By associating the name and principles of FEMEN to the French Republic, the stamp inspired by Shevchenko sparked not only a controversy over an artistic choice, but a debate regarding the contested uniformity of French national identity through its representations in media.

Marianne and the myth of a universal Frenchness

According to an article by Ciappa himself entitled "Le nouveau timbre Marianne: autopsie d'une fausse polémique," (The new Marianne stamp: autopsy of a false scandal") he revealed that presenting a universal Marianne was exactly his objective when he designed the stamp. Ciappa claims that Shevchenko is not the only inspiration he chose; rather, the design is a mixture of several female icons such as actress Marion Cotillard, politicians Christiane Taubira and Roselyne Bachelot, and employs a mélange of several artistic styles like Renaissance art, comics, Japanese manga and Walt Disney's animation aesthetic (see fig. 1). Ciappa combines all these models and styles to create a "universal" Marianne - a Marianne to whom everyone can project their own imagined character (Vertaldi 2013, Ciappa 2014). Thus, Ciappa claims that a controversy regarding his choice of model is useless because of his design's massive reach and universal appeal:

"Demandez aux personnes autour de vous à qui leur fait penser cette Marianne. Les uns évoqueront la vierge Marie, certains Falbala dans Astérix, d'autres une princesse Disney, d'autres encore une héroïne de manga. Aucune réponse ne sera la même, mais chacune sera vraie. Et c'est tant mieux."

("Ask people around you what they think of when they see this Marianne. Some will say the Virgin Mary, some Falbala in Asterix, others may see a Disney princess, others a manga heroine. No answer will be the same, but each will be "true." And that's good." [Author's translation])

Ciappa's Marianne, who he claims can evoke different truths about the same representation, is uniform and diverse at the same time. In choosing to portray a specific woman through signs, symbols and figures closest to French culture and identity such as Panacea and the Virgin Mary, a woman who embodies all women rendered in different artistic styles, Ciappa may have tried to achieve a universal representation through a mixture of cultures and perspectives amidst a grand, all-encompassing celebration of Frenchness.

However, critics and opponents of FEMEN remained persistent as they regurgitate issues regarding the validity of Shevchenko's origins and French identity. In an article by Solene Cordier (2014) entitled "La naturalisation imaginaire de la Femen Inna Shevchenko" ("The Imaginary Naturalization of FEMEN Inna Shevchenko"), critics challenged the new Marianne's national roots. Evidently, the fact that Shevchenko was not completely naturalized yet during the time presented itself as an opportunity to call for a boycott under the grounds of the unjustified alignment between France's national

icon and a mere political refugee. According to the article, the debate sparked after, of course, another Tweet from Shevchenko, followed by Femen_France:

After a long struggle I got my passport! Very proud it's written French Republic. Have a nice day, fascists! (Shevchenko)

Marianne a récupéré ses papiers ! Bonne indigestion les fachos ! femeninna @LaManifPourTous (Femen_France)

(“Marianne has recovered her papers! Good indigestion fascists! @femeninna @LaManifPourTous”)

These Tweets highlight an important part of being "French" and being a citizen of a nation - the possession of a passport or any official document recognized by the government. Shevchenko considers obtaining the papers as a triumph, based on her celebratory tone. Femen_France also used the name "Marianne" to refer to Shevchenko. Combining the images of Marianne, the French national symbol, and the "triumph" of acquiring documents to prove her French nationality, this fiasco has created a sardonically ironic scene: here comes a Marianne who needed to prove her own Frenchness.

Moreover, conservatist groups in France such as the PDC have continuously gone against FEMEN's radical sextremist advocacy. According to their website, FEMEN declares sextremism as its own brand of feminism: "Our god is a woman! Our mission is protest! Our weapons are breasts! And so FEMEN was born and sextremism was set off. " In an article entitled "Les Femen, meilleurs ennemis du féminisme" ("FEMEN, worst enemy of feminism") which features an interview with Lydia Guirous (2014), an expert on French feminism, the specialist talks about her contempt for FEMEN's "terrorist acts" (de Mallevouë 2014) that betray and undermine the feminist cause ("trahissent et nuisent à la cause féministe"). Guirous further claims that FEMEN trivializes its own advocacies owing to their hypersexualized tactics, obviously pertaining to the infamous group's bare-chested street protests. Guirous considers FEMEN's sextremist advocacies as a regression of feminist struggles since the 1970s ("régression des combats féministes depuis les années 1970") as they encourage the objectification and sexualization of the female body. More importantly, she believes that FEMEN does not take into consideration the political environment in France at all and therefore does not contribute to the evolution of French feminism:

Malheureusement les Femen n'ont pas intégré cette évolution et n'ont pas compris que la situation des Françaises n'est pas celle des Ukrainiennes, des Tunisiennes ou des Indiennes. Nous ne sommes pas au même niveau d'évolution de nos droits.

(“Unfortunately FEMEN has not integrated this development and does not understand that the situation of the French is not the same as that of the Ukrainian, Tunisian or Indian. We are not on the same level of evolution of our rights.”)

The blatant use of the terms "terrorist acts" and "Western society," which establishes a distinction between those who are members of Western society and the "terrorists" who threaten those members. Also, the use of the words "modernizing" and "regression" to refer to culture, society and development of feminism indicates a linear perspective of development, dividing cultures, societies and the world feminisms between two parties: the modern or progressive and the traditional and regressive. In fact, Guirous has made this very clear: by stating that the French sociopolitical climate is different from situations of the Ukrainian, Tunisian and Indian, it displaces FEMEN's activism and purports to a sociopolitical sphere and context that is distinctly French. This statement, of course, presents its own complications, considering the continuous influx of immigrants in France from all parts of the world. All these indications further support the claim that Marianne's iconography cannot possibly represent a universal Frenchness for she rests within a multitude of paradoxes: uniformity and diversity, multicultural and republican, belonging and Otherness.

As an example, one can consider the 14 women of the exposition "Mariannes d'aujourd'hui," or quite literally "Mariannes of Today" - a display that features 14 portraits of Mariannes from various races, different physical attributes, and who came from various professions and social environments (see Fig. 2), all draped over the frontispiece of the Assemblée Nationale. The exhibit is the final stage of the "Marche des femmes des quartiers contre les ghettos et pour l'égalité," promoted by Ni Putes ni Soumises, a movement that condemns insecurity, discrimination and violation of human rights of marginalized women. 14 women from "disadvantaged neighborhoods" in France don the Phrygian cap and tricolor flag to embody the values of a Republic that promotes the liberation and protection of women against the temptations of national disunity. ("toutes les tentations de disunion nationale")



Fig. 2 One of the 14 portraits of women in the exposition “ Mariannes d’aujourd’hui ». “ Assemblée Nationale - Marche Des Femmes Des Quartiers ». Assemblée Nationale. Assemblée Nationale. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

An article entitled “Être représentée en Marianne est une vraie fierté” (“Representing Marianne is a real pride”) by Stéphane Sellami (2003) features an interview with Samira Cadasse, one of the 14 faces of the exposition. According to her, being part of the exhibit is a real pride for her as a woman, especially despite her and Marianne’s physical differences:

Même si je m’appelle Samira et que j’ai les cheveux frisés, je me considère comme une Marianne d’aujourd’hui. Avant d’être black, blanche ou beur, nous sommes des citoyennes à part entier de ce pays et dignes représentantes.

(“Although my name is Samira and I have curly hair, I consider myself as a Marianne of today. Before being black, white or Arab, we are citizens of the country and we are worthy representatives.” [Author’s translation])

In Cadasse’s comment, she asserts that women are “French” and are “citizens” before being black, white or Arab. As a declaration of her otherness, she highlighted her foreign-sounding name, Almira, and her curly hair. Her comment not only affirms the fact that she perceives herself as “othered” but also reinforces the notion of universal Frenchness through Marianne. By imitating Marianne, wearing her dress in three colors, donning on the Phrygian cap and exposing her image on the frontispiece of the Assemblée Nationale, Cadasse declares that she belongs to a French community that acknowledges her despite their “differences.”

However, in light dominant Republican ideology, which envisages a common and pure universal Frenchness, and the ongoing discrimination against immigrants in France,

critics have further questioned how the movement only succeeds to cultivate mainstream and Front national stereotypes of beur, or Arab, existence in France (Weber-Fève 2010). Furthermore, the use of the word "aujourd'hui," which means "today," in "Mariannes d'aujourd'hui" point to the recurring concepts of modernization and the dichotomy between the First World and the Third World, the West and East, the Occident and the Orient. By assimilating into France and embracing French identity through imitations of Marianne, these women from the suburbs have become "modern" or "new" – they have become, indeed, women of today. By donning on the symbolic Phrygian cap and painting their souls in three colors, these 14 women try to imitate important French iconography through their costumes and succeed in displaying their otherness as sameness (Weber-Fève 2010). And this imitation, this semblance of uniformity, feeds the imagined notion of a universal French identity.

Behind Maria Clara

It is no question that Maria Clara leaves an impressionable image. She is not merely a character in a novel, but a timeless symbol in Filipino culture that embodies the values significant to an entire community's ideal. Behind her status as a pop culture icon is an established portrait of an ideal woman, not just of Rizal's, but of every Filipino.

This ideal goes out to several other textual representations of Maria Clara. In the article "Meet the modern Maria Clara" by Nicola Sebastian (2012), the author identifies several types of Filipino women in comparison to the stars of movies and American popular culture like Zooey Deschanel, Kristen Stewart and Rihanna. Sebastian uses these icons to evoke the situation of women in "a not-too-distant past where Filipino girls were expected to behave, think and even laugh properly" vis-à-vis the situation of women today, in a modernized, liberal society wherein choices, identities and preferences are respected. By juxtaposing the traditional image of Maria Clara as the coy, blushing maiden behind the fan with modern images of women who are not afraid to show skin, who take on a wider array of roles in the society and who can express themselves as weird and funny, Sebastian's stance establishes a dichotomy between the repressed, controlled traditional woman of the past and her better, freer, happier modern version.

This distinction is a common theme among a number of articles. In "Maria Clara Who?" by Tamara Benitez (2002), she also cited examples from American pop culture such as Madonna, Britney Spears and Ally McBeal to represent subversive behavior, and evoked images of the modern woman through her rather uncharacteristic choice of too revealing clothes and her attitudes to sex:

Who has the young Filipina become? Britney Spears? Ally McBeal? Worst, Madonna? See her as she bids farewell to her patadyong and payneta, and trades them off for those oh-too-revealing midriffs and micro-mini skirts!

In this excerpt, Benitez uses clothing as evidence to prove the modernization of young Filipino women, by leaving traditional national outfits behind to adapt styles and looks of American icons like Madonna, Britney Spears and Ally McBeal. Furthermore, by making

a reference to the patadyong and payneta, garments that are parts of the traditional Filipina costume, the text strengthens the link between national identity and behavior of women and associates the changes in styles and looks of modern women to Maria Clara's idealized national iconography.

However, in an article entitled "Will the real Maria Clara please stand up?" the writer Lexi Schulze (2007) maintained that Maria Clara's classic traditional image has always been prone to influence and change through her sexuality. In fact, as this article discusses the dating scene and relationships in Philippine society, Schulze wrote that the ability to be more subversive, more deviant and more sexually liberated has always existed in the consciousness of the Filipino woman. To illustrate this point, she created a supposed equation to specify the perfect blend of traditional and modern. The example below shows a basic classification of women according to their sexual attitudes, using a creative writing style that mimics a mathematical equation:

$$V \text{ (Virgin)} + S \text{ (Slut)} = (M) \text{ aria } (C) \text{ lara} = MC$$

According to this equation, Maria Clara, unlike the images of a conservative woman continuously reinforced in various forms of media, is a mixture of virgin and whore. The perfect Maria Clara was never totally conservative. Her coyness is intentional; her innocence merely heightens her desirability and her sexual charm. In invoking the image of Maria Clara to embody the careful and traditional woman but simultaneously subvert this image by disproving Maria Clara's lack of playfulness and sexual aggressiveness, the text addresses a familiar dual perspective:

...There is a beautifully nasty duality to Maria Clara's being. Like two sides of a coin, the whole would not be worth 10 pesos (...) if both sides didn't exist. There is certainly a brand of coyness to her, not exposing everything at once to get the imagination going.

In this excerpt, Schulze identifies two faces of Maria Clara, or in this case, the ideal Filipino woman in the dating scene. On one side is the Maria Clara already known for innocence and prudence; on the other, is the hidden trickster, deviously aware of her sexuality and her subtle and irresistible allure. The idealized Filipino woman of today is both these Maria Clara's - a woman who is innocent but intelligent, attractive but prudent, attentive to her sexuality but reserved enough to deserve a marriage proposal.

The discourse of the traditional woman vis-à-vis the modern woman is also a recurring theme in fashion, particularly among designers who work with the maria clara gown. Several articles tackle designers from here and abroad who have jumped on the modern Maria Clara bandwagon through their contemporary recreations of the iconic gown. The titles of these articles are indications of this argument:

"The rise of the modern Filipiniana"

"Young designers redefine the 'maria clara'"

"Masters and Millennials: maria clara reborn in face-off"

Usage of the words "modern," "redefined" and "rebirth" implies the presence of change, or at least attempts to change, revise or remodel a pre-established image. More importantly, usage of the terms "master" and "millennia" indicates a tension between the generations of artists who come from different eras. Claiming that this tension stems from varying ideologies of two generations, a "face-off" becomes the marketed theme of the fashion show, which banks on opposing styles of older artists who believe in traditional elegance and younger designers as the voice of the contemporary, willing to even out the playing field through their "juvenile, light and sexy" redefinitions (Moral 2014).

These articles covering representations of Maria Clara in the world of fashion once again affirm a familiar duality between the traditional woman and the modern woman as well as demonstrate how Maria Clara's modern representations are deeply rooted in culture and Philippine society through American neo-colonial influences. More recently, however, neo-colonial influence and its manifestations are at the center of debates in the Philippines due to a controversy regarding the proposed and recently approved Act for Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health, more popularly known as the Reproductive Health Bill or RH bill.

Maria Clara as a neocolonial force

In the previous parts, articles discussed the manifestations of a dichotomy between the traditional and the modern as far as Maria Clara is concerned, associating the image of a modern woman to a transformative, progressive sexual liberation. Recently these oppositions are directly addressed in an ongoing issue on former president Benigno Aquino III's approval of the Republic Act 10354 or the Reproductive Health Bill of 2012. The RH Bill is a law which mandates the access of the poor and disadvantaged communities to ample education and information regarding the reproductive organ. The RH bill includes the promotion of various family planning methods, particularly the distribution of provisions and adequate and effective products such as condoms, contraceptives, pills and injectables that do not violate abortion laws in the Philippines. Targeted individuals are those from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially the youth and people with disabilities. The bill claims to promote gender equality through its support for the interests, sex lives, choices, and health of women, as well as to help reduce an alarmingly increasing number of cases of teen pregnancy in the country, causing poverty through overpopulation.

As expected, the bill is confronted by the opposition of conservative associations and organizations, especially, of course, the Catholic Church. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines or CBCP, the supreme body of Catholic authority in the Philippines, declined an invitation to debate with legislators regarding the aforementioned bill. The CBCP opposes the law because of its tendency to associate the artificial methods of family planning to abortion, which is prohibited in the Philippines according to legal and religious laws. More importantly, conservative Catholic organizations believe that access to methods that prevent pregnancy may encourage

perverse and provocative behavior, especially amongst couples who are not married yet (Montenegro 2010). These events have caused a division between those who oppose the bill, pro-life, and those who support its implementation, pro-choice.

In "Maria Clara learns the ABCs of reproductive health," Maria Clara's image was used to draw attention and promote the principles of the RH bill. During a tourism event celebrating the 65th anniversary of the Battle of Manila, Manila tour guide Carlos Celdran and sex columnist Ana Santos organized a group of women who wore a Maria Clara costume while distributing condoms. The organizers believed Maria Clara was apt not only to the event's historical theme and aesthetic, but also fit to promote an important sexual advocacy. The gimmick was called "The ABC's of Reproductive Health," wherein A stands for "Abstinence," B for "Be Faithful" and C for "Consistent and Correct use of Condoms." For Celdran and Santos, Maria Clara is the perfect model to represent the promotion, as her status as the epitome of purity, innocence and Filipina beauty makes her an appropriate and ironic symbol of sex education. The gimmick largely depended on the shock value by capitalizing on Maria Clara's sexuality, or lack thereof, to promote reproductive health. Just the mental image of a subversive Maria Clara distributing condoms, a product associated to perverse sexual behavior, created a fascinating twist to the cultural event while at the same time expressed the organizers' support for the RH Bill.

However, debates on morality and sexual perversions are not the only concerns about the RH Bill. According to Dr. Bernardo Villegas, a columnist for the Philippine Daily Inquirer famous for his pro-life arguments, moral consequences and affronts to sacred religious affairs are not the only flaws of the act. In an editorial, he argued that the Bill is merely a command from the Obama administration, a deceitful ploy of the United States' ulterior motives disguised as a helpful law promoting poverty alleviation ("No need for an RH Bill, now or ever," "No to RH Bill" inquirer.net). Villegas makes a reference to accusations and speculations that these so-called reproductive health provisions are waste products from pharmaceutical establishments in the United States. In this sense, Villegas's arguments highlighted neo-colonial discourses present in the proposition, approval and implementation of the RH Bill.

As such, controversies surrounding the representations of Maria Clara and its influence on women not only strengthens a dichotomized perspective on the subject of modernity, but also proceeds to embody neo-colonialist forces of the United States in political, cultural, social and economic domains. And yet the notion that Maria Clara is simply a neo-colonial icon that can transform a traditional woman into a modern individual is a concept with defects. Her iconography, rather, is based on appropriation and attempts to imitate and align itself to Western models.

Conclusion

Representations of both Marianne and Maria Clara use imitation to signify and embody women immigrants and modernized women, respectively. The FEMEN stamp, "Mariannes d'aujourd'hui" and publicity events are attempts of providing women from

the ghetto or a Ukrainian political refugee with voices and representations under a common universal French identity through an imitation of Marianne. On the other hand, the modernization of Maria Clara which extends to several mediums such as the gown's new look, the imagined sexual emancipation brought about by the RH Bill and the appropriation of American icons manifests through the image of a Maria Clara that mimics the modern woman of the West.

Imitation exists in both cases, but it is remarkable that, considering the aforementioned representations, the object of imitation is different. The underprivileged in France mimic Marianne as a testament to their imaginary inclusion to the common French identity, but representations of Maria Clara imitate westernized icons as proof of her modernization. The manner is parallel but the directions are opposing: France veers towards the exterior for the purpose of promulgating a concept of France as a world power, the Philippines veer towards the interior, while welcoming and receiving neocolonial elements to become more "modern."

Though Maria Clara and Marianne are parallel in some ways, their roles are different. While Marianne attempts to include immigrant women but limits the participation of women in the virtual and symbolic space, Maria Clara tries to imitate Western identities through a notion of gradual modernization, transformative, dichotomized and consequently bourgeois. Universal Frenchness and neocolonial imitation are merely insufficient representations of disadvantaged communities and identities.

Appendix

Below is a list of online articles considered for the purpose of the analysis:

French newspaper	Title	Date of Publication	Author	Section
Le Figaro	“ Pour plus de Marianne dans les Mairies”	28 March 2014	Juliana Bruno	Société
	“ Marianne à l’“université”	19 August 2011	Sidonie Sigrist	Société
	“ Marée rouge”	19 March 2012	Emeline Le Naour	Société
	“ Le Front national lance le collectif Marianne pour conquérir les étudiants”	04 March 2014	Emmanuel Galiero	Étudiant - Actualités
	“ Brigitte Bardot Bardot...”	19 September 2009	Henry-Jean Servat	Culture - Rencontre
	“ La Marianne mahoraise fait Scandale”	15 March 2012	Gaëlle Rolin, Brenna Daldorph	Société
	“ Le nouveau timbre Marianne accusé dès reception”	16 July 2013	Aurélia Vertaldi	Culture
	“ La nouvelle Marianne des timbres postaux est une Femen”	15 July 2013	Stéphane Kovacs	Société
	“ Timbre Femen : Marianne pour tous ou Marianne pour quelques-uns?”	06 March 2014	Farah Hamelin	Société - Vox
	“ Vague de mobilisation pour le retrait du timbre “Femen”	07 February 2014	Delphine de Mallevoüe	Société
	“ Ces bustes de Marianne inspirés de stars”	15 July 2013	-	Actualité - Photos
	“ La Marianne dénudée de Quimper délogée du Hall de la Mairie”	24 July 2014	Marc de Boni	Insolites
	“ Les Femen, meilleures ennemies du feminism”	24 April 2014	Lydia Guirous	Société - Vox
“ Timbres: l’imprimerie des	22 July	Benjamin Jérôme	Société	

Le Parisien	Marianne”	2013		
	“ Timbre inspiré d'une Femen : des anti-mariage gay appellent au Boycott”	15 July 2013		Société
	“ Le nouveau timbre Marianne en partie inspiré d'une Femen”	14 July 2013		Culture
	“ Etre représentée en Marianne est une vraie fierté”	12 July 2003	Stéphane Sellami	Actualité - Vivre Mieux
	“ Le FN lance Marianne, "collectif étudiant" pour la "méritocratie"”	08 March 2014		Actualité - Politique
	Ils veulent faire souffler l'esprit de Marianne”	23 March 2011		Actualité
Le Monde	“ Marianne enceinte, une pub Polémique”	18 February 2010	Elise Barthet	Société
	“ Le FN crée un collectif étudiant pour s'implanter sur les Campus”	09 March 2014	Nathalie Brafman	Politique
	“ La naturalisation imaginaire de la Femen Inna Shevchenko”	09 January 2014	Solène Cordier	Société
	“Le nouveau timbre Marianne:	19 July 2014	Olivier Ciappa	Idées

	autopsie d'une fausse polémique “	2013	(artiste et créateur du timbre)	
	“ Le radicalisme des Femen irrite l’Eglise et embarrasse le mouvement féministe “	21 February 2014	Gaëlle Dupont et Stéphanie Le Bars	Société

Philippine newspaper	Title	Date of publication	Author	Section
	“ Meet the modern Maria Clara “	9 June 2012	Nicola Sebastian M.	Lifestyle
	“ Maria Clara Who? “	11 May 2002	Tamara Benitez	Lifestyle
	“ Will the real Maria Clara please stand up? “	13 October 2007	Lexi Schulze	Lifestyle

Philippine Star	“ Maria Clara learns the ABCs of reproductive health “	07 June 2010	-	Lifestyle
	“ Maria Clara “	04 May 2009	écrivain anonyme	Dr. Love (conseil d’amour)
	“ The rise of modern Filipiniana “	29 June 2012	Geolette Esguerra	Lifestyle
	“ The pros and pluses of real women “	21 July 2010	-	Lifestyle
	“ 100 years of women's rights “	9 March 2011	-	Opinion
	“ All about women “	16 March 2005	Rosalinda L. Orosa	Opinion
	“ Gemma Cruz as inveterate Rizalian “	5 March 2014	Bibsy M. Carballo	Entertainment
	“ Benildanze performs Love, Death, and Mompou “	9 November 2006	-	Lifestyle
“ Divine reinvention “	9 November 2012	-	Entertainment	
Philippine Daily Inquirer	“ Young designers redefine the „maria clara“ “	19 September 2014	Alex Y. Vergara	Lifestyle
	“ Lanuza’s intriguing narrative of „The Interrogation of Maria Clara“ “	05 July 2013	Jack Teotico	Lifestyle
	“ Maria Clara as Mary Magdalene? A fresh look at „Noli“ ”	24 June 2012	Ino Manalo	Lifestyle
	“ Maria Clara, Sisa “	10 June 2010	Michael Tan	Opinion
	“ Today’s Filipino woman stronger than yesteryears “ “	19 April 2011	Tita Engracia	Opinion - Letters to the Editor
	“ „The weaker sex“ “	16 March 2014	Conchita C. Razon	Lifestyle
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“ Masters and Millennials: The „maria clara“ reborn in „Face-Off“ “	7 December 2014	Cheche V. Moral	Lifestyle	
“ The renaissance of the terno “	25 May 2014	-	Others	

	“ Maria Clara (1) “	10 March 2014	Gemma Cruz- Araneta	Opinion
	“ Maria Clara (2) “	12 March 2014	Gemma Cruz-	Opinion

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	“ Framing Andy Warhol “	08 September 2014	Hannah Jo Uy	Lifestyle
	“ Nostalgia “	21 July 2014	-	Lifestyle
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	“ Proud Pinay “	04 April 2014	Jane Kingsu Cheng	Lifestyle

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