

Subverting Patriarchy and Colonialism: A Feminist Literary Analysis of Agency, Identity, And Resistance in Nick Joaquin's "The Summer Solstice"

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ABSTRACT

Using a feminist-postcolonial framework grounded in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity and bell hooks' feminist perspective, this study examined agency, identity, and resistance in Nick Joaquin's *The Summer Solstice*. A qualitative literary design employed repeated close reading, interpretive coding, thematic clustering, theoretical mapping, and statement-of-the-problem alignment. The novella served as the primary research corpus, while feminist, postcolonial, ritual, symbolic, and masculinity scholarship supported the interpretation. The findings showed that Lupeng's early identity was shaped by colonial Catholic discipline, bodily regulation, gendered shame, epistemic hierarchy, class authority, and naturalized masculine power. The Tadtarin ritual disrupted the Maria

Clara ideal through embodied excess, collective participation, indigenous knowledge, and the reclamation of the female body, although resistance remained partial and historically situated. Solar imagery and oppressive heat represented hierarchical patriarchal dominance, whereas lunar, earth, and ritual imagery expressed cyclical, relational, and communal forms of power. Don Paeng's characterization revealed masculinity as performative, vulnerable, emotionally restrictive, and dependent on maintaining authority. These themes culminated in a Feminist-Postcolonial Analytical Framework organized around the colonial-patriarchal context, gender construction, colonial ideology, ritual and embodied resistance, symbolic representation, masculinity and power dynamics, and intersectional power relations. The study concludes that identity and agency in the novella are continually reconfigured through negotiation, disruption, cultural memory, and embodied resistance rather than through complete emancipation. The framework offers a culturally grounded model for analyzing Philippine literary texts shaped by colonial and patriarchal histories.

Keywords: *feminist-postcolonial analysis, colonial ideology, Tadtarin ritual, gender identity, agency and resistance, Philippine literature*

INTRODUCTION

Philippine literature is a cultural arena in which gender, history, religion, and colonial power are repeatedly negotiated. Spanish Catholic rule and later colonial modernity shaped enduring ideals of femininity, social hierarchy, and cultural legitimacy. Among the most persistent is the Maria Clara ideal, which associates the Filipina with modesty, obedience, piety, domesticity, and self-sacrifice. Feminist-postcolonial criticism makes

visible how such ideals are historically produced rather than natural expressions of womanhood (Bhambra, 2020; Mohanty, 2023; Tadiar, 2022).

Nick Joaquin's *The Summer Solstice* stages these tensions through the collision of a colonial-patriarchal household and the Tadtarin, an indigenous female ritual. Don Paeng represents masculine authority and colonial rationality, whereas Doña Lupeng's encounter with the ritual unsettles the gendered discipline through which she understands herself. The novella's continued critical relevance lies in its representation of female transformation, cultural memory, ritual inversion, and unstable authority (Ang, 2023; Fermin, 2021; Sumatra et al., 2024).

A feminist reading alone can illuminate patriarchal regulation, but it may understate the colonial and epistemic conditions that shape gender. Conversely, a postcolonial reading may foreground cultural domination while treating women primarily as symbols of national or colonial conflict. Spivak's account of subalternity explains how women's voices and knowledge are mediated by dominant discourse, while hooks' critique of interconnected systems of domination clarifies how gender, class, religion, culture, and colonial history operate together (hooks, 2000, 2008; Spivak, 2023).

The study therefore analyzed *The Summer Solstice* through an integrated feminist-postcolonial lens. It examined how Catholic and colonial ideologies shape Lupeng's early identity, how the Tadtarin challenges the Maria Clara stereotype, how heat, earth, lunar, and ritual imagery represent power and agency, how Don Paeng reveals the constraints of patriarchal masculinity, and how these themes collectively support a culturally grounded analytical framework for Philippine literary criticism.

The inquiry contributes to literary scholarship and pedagogy by treating agency, identity, and resistance as historically situated and relational processes. Rather than reading Lupeng's transformation as a linear movement from submission to freedom, it investigates the ambivalence, reversals, and structural persistence that complicate postcolonial subject formation.

Literature Review

Feminist and Postcolonial Readings of Joaquin

Critical studies of Joaquin often emphasize the encounter between colonial Catholic culture and suppressed or reconfigured indigenous traditions. Fermin (2021) situates Joaquin's work within competing Philippine humanisms, while Ang (2023) reads tropical heat and corporeality as central to the Gothic and ideological force of *The Summer Solstice*. These approaches demonstrate that atmosphere, body, and history are inseparable in the novella.

Postcolonial scholarship further shows that colonial power is maintained through cultural classification, religious authority, and hierarchies of knowledge (El Shakry, 2024; Mbembe, 2021). Ballestrin (2022) and John (2023) argue for feminist approaches that remain attentive to subaltern histories and situated differences. Such work supports an interpretation of Joaquin's text in which gender oppression and colonial discourse are mutually constitutive.

The study addresses a gap in approaches that isolate feminism, cultural history, or postcoloniality. Its integrated framework reads character, ritual, imagery, and masculinity as connected dimensions of literary meaning rather than as independent topics.

The Maria Clara Archetype and Colonial Femininity

The Maria Clara archetype became a durable model of the respectable Filipina: controlled, pious, passive, and self-sacrificing. Such femininity is sustained through social surveillance and the internalization of moral discipline. Contemporary gender scholarship explains how power becomes effective when subjects monitor their own bodies and emotions according to normative expectations (Ahmed, 2021; Gill & Francois-Cull, 2023).

In *The Summer Solstice*, Lupeng initially evaluates bodies, beliefs, and behavior through this disciplinary order. Her discomfort with embodied intensity, concern with propriety, and acceptance of masculine authority demonstrate that colonial femininity is reproduced psychologically as well as institutionally. The narrative nevertheless reveals cracks in this identity through curiosity, discomfort, and ambivalence.

The archetype is therefore not treated as a fixed character type but as an ideological structure. The study asks how the ritual destabilizes its assumptions and enables a more embodied, culturally situated conception of Filipina subjectivity.

Ritual, Embodiment, and Indigenous Resistance

Ritual can suspend ordinary structures, create communitas, and reorganize social meaning. Studies of liminality and anti-structure show that collective performance can temporarily reverse hierarchy and open alternative ways of relating (White & McSharry, 2021; Xygalatas, 2022). Menarche and other gendered rituals also demonstrate how bodily practice participates in the cultural making of identity (Perianes & Ndaferankhande, 2020).

The Tadtarin functions as a disruptive and transformative space in which women move, chant, laugh, and participate collectively. Embodiment becomes a language that exceeds colonial expectations of disciplined femininity. Ahmed's (2021) emphasis on orientation and affect helps explain how altered movement and bodily presence reshape a subject's relationship with social norms.

Yet ritual resistance is cyclical and context-bound. Its recurrence interrupts the dominant order without necessarily replacing it, making the ritual a site where liberation and structural persistence coexist.

Subalternity and Intersectional Feminism

Spivak's theory of subalternity focuses on the epistemic conditions that render marginalized subjects difficult to hear within dominant systems of representation (Spivak, 2023). Piu (2023) and Thapan (2022) emphasize that subalternity concerns not only material exclusion but also the social production of intelligibility and voice. In Joaquin's novella, colonial rationality initially defines indigenous ritual as disorder or superstition.

hooks (2000, 2008) argues that feminism must confront interlocking systems of domination rather than gender alone. This perspective makes class privilege, Catholic morality, colonial history, and masculine authority relevant to Lupeng's transformation. Mohanty (2023) similarly cautions against universalizing women's experiences without attention to historical and cultural specificity.

The integrated lens therefore interprets Lupeng neither as a universal woman nor as a fully recovered subaltern voice. Her agency develops through an unstable negotiation among inherited privilege, colonial conditioning, indigenous memory, and embodied participation.

Symbolism, Space, and Masculinity

Power in literary texts is frequently encoded through recurring images, spaces, and temporal patterns. Haugaard (2022) conceptualizes power as relational and contested, while Purcell (2022) emphasizes that space is produced through social relations. The opposition among household, procession, river, heat, moon, and earth in Joaquin's novella organizes competing systems of authority and meaning.

Masculinity studies likewise show that patriarchal authority must be performed and repeatedly validated. Messerschmidt (2018), Christofidou (2021), De Boise (2022), and Wedgwood et al. (2023) describe hegemonic masculinity as historically variable, relational, and vulnerable to disruption. Don Paeng's authority is therefore not simply possessed; it depends on composure, rationality, control, and recognition.

Reading symbolism and masculinity together reveals the broader human cost of patriarchy. The same system that grants men privilege restricts emotional openness, cultural receptivity, and the capacity to interpret forms of power that do not follow hierarchy.

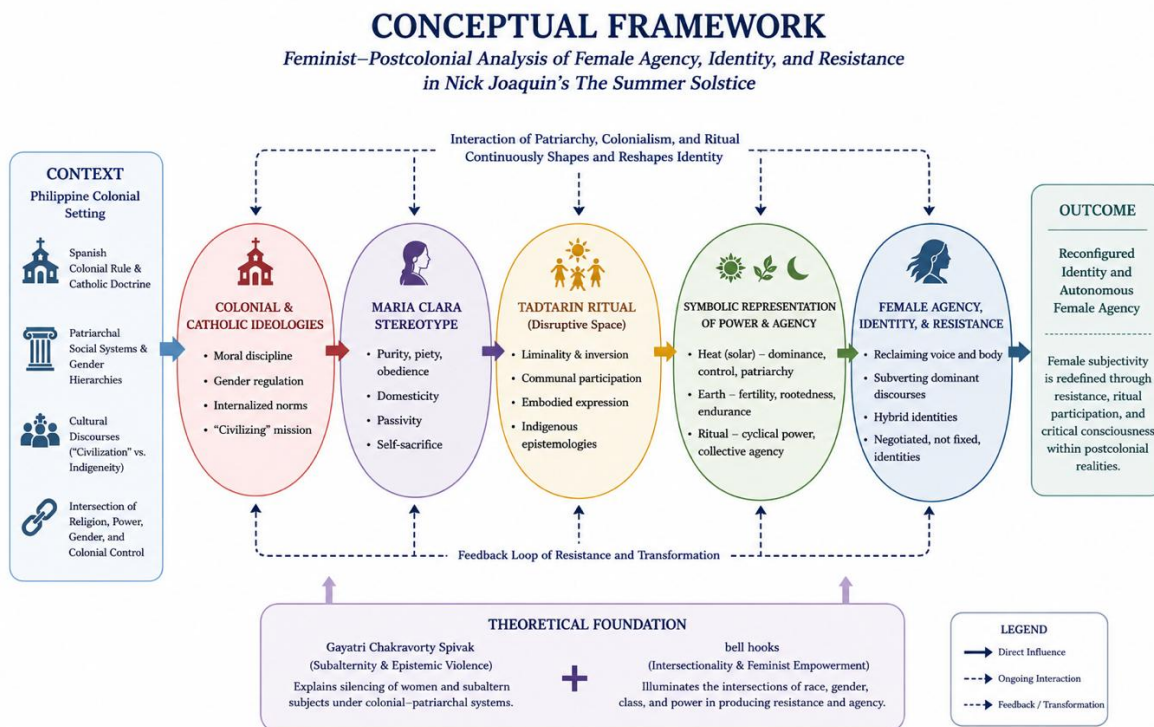


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the feminist-postcolonial analysis

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative literary design combining feminist literary analysis and postcolonial critique. This design supported contextual interpretation of gender, colonial ideology, ritual, symbolism, masculinity, agency, identity, and resistance rather than numerical measurement. Interpretations were developed inductively through sustained engagement with the text and remained grounded in textual evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Corpus and Text Selection

The primary corpus was Nick Joaquin's *The Summer Solstice*, originally published in *The Hudson Review* in 1955. The text was purposively selected because its characterization, ritual structure, symbolic imagery, colonial setting, and gender conflict directly addressed the research questions (Joaquin, 1955). Doña Lupeng, Don Paeng, and the women participating in the Tadtarin served as the principal analytical focal points.

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

Spivak's subalternity and epistemic violence provided the primary postcolonial lens, while hooks' feminist perspective clarified the interaction of gender, class, religion, culture, and colonial history. Complementary ideas from ritual studies, symbolic analysis, and masculinity studies were used where they illuminated recurring textual patterns. Theory functioned as an interpretive lens after close reading rather than as a predetermined set of categories imposed upon the novella.

Data Generation

Interpretive data were generated through repeated and reflective close readings. The units of analysis included characterization, dialogue, plot events, ritual descriptions, bodily movement, spatial relations, heat, solar, lunar, earth, and other recurring imagery. Significant passages were purposively selected for their relevance to the study's questions and their capacity to reveal patterns of ideological tension and cultural meaning.

Analytical Procedure and Theme Derivation

The procedure involved six connected stages: repeated reading; identification of significant textual signals; interpretive coding of recurring patterns; organization of related codes into thematic clusters; theoretical mapping; and alignment of each theme with the research questions. Codes related to shame, propriety, bodily restraint, and obedience were grouped under colonial femininity, whereas ritual movement, collective participation, leaves, hair, and embodied intensity were clustered under embodied resistance. Heat, sun, moon, earth, and ritual were mapped as competing symbolic systems of power.

The analysis maintained a traceable progression from textual evidence to code, theme, theoretical interpretation, and research-question response. Final themes were retained only when supported by recurring textual patterns and coherent theoretical explanation. Ohrvik's (2024) account of close reading supports this iterative movement between textual detail and broader interpretive claims.

Trustworthiness and Interpretive Validity

Credibility was strengthened through sustained engagement with the primary text, repeated checking of interpretations, and contextual reading of selected passages. Dependability and confirmability were supported through excerpt logs, coding notes, thematic-clustering records, theory-mapping notes, analytic memos, code-revision records, and an audit trail. Each interpretive claim was evaluated according to its textual basis, recurring motif, theoretical relevance, and alignment with the corresponding research question.

Ethical Consideration

The research involved no human participants. Ethical practice centered on reflexivity, academic integrity, accurate attribution, contextual fidelity, and responsible interpretation of indigenous cultural practice. The Tadtarin was treated as a literary and historically situated representation rather than romanticized, universalized, or detached from its cultural context. Interpretive claims were limited to what the primary text and cited scholarship supported.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Colonial and Catholic Ideologies in Lupeng's Early Identity

Table 1. *Themes explaining Lupeng's colonial-patriarchal subject formation*

Theme	Textual Pattern	Interpretation
Moral regulation and Catholic discipline	Shame, propriety, obedience, and bodily self-monitoring	Femininity is produced through internalized moral surveillance.
Colonial sensibilities and rejection of the body	Discomfort with odor, heat, trance, and bodily excess	Colonial civility privileges restraint and separates the respectable woman from embodied indigenous life.
Gendered shame and the male gaze	Concern with being observed and socially judged	Patriarchal visibility becomes self-surveillance.
Colonial hierarchies of knowledge and belief	Ritual is initially interpreted through rationalist and Catholic assumptions	Indigenous knowledge is rendered inferior or unintelligible.
Class authority and regulation of subordinate women	Elite domestic authority governs servants and women of lower status	Gendered power intersects with class privilege.

Naturalization of masculine authority	Don Paeng's control appears ordinary and legitimate	Patriarchal authority is normalized through household and social roles.
Emerging ambivalence and ideological tension	Curiosity, discomfort, and attraction disrupt certainty	Colonial identity is unstable and open to renegotiation.

Lupeng's early identity was shaped by interconnected systems of Catholic morality, colonial rationality, class, and patriarchal authority. The recurring language of shame, propriety, restraint, and public visibility shows that power operates through internalization rather than through direct command alone. She initially evaluates herself and other women according to the Maria Clara ideal, which associates virtue with bodily discipline and social obedience.

The analysis also revealed epistemic regulation. Indigenous ritual and bodily intensity are initially perceived through a colonial hierarchy that equates civility with rationality and restraint. This supports Spivak's (2023) argument that subaltern knowledge is marginalized by dominant systems of intelligibility and Bhambra's (2020) account of colonial modernity as an epistemic ordering process.

Lupeng's subject formation is nevertheless marked by ambivalence. Her discomfort coexists with curiosity, making her identity neither completely submissive nor already liberated. This instability becomes the narrative condition for later transformation and supports a non-linear account of postcolonial identity.

The Tadtarin Ritual and the Challenge to the Maria Clara Stereotype

Table 2. *Themes explaining ritual disruption and embodied female agency*

Theme	Central Finding
Maria Clara ideal as disciplined femininity	Purity, obedience, domesticity, passivity, and self-sacrifice define respectable womanhood.
Tadtarin as embodied excess and disruption	Dance, sound, movement, trance, and collective intensity reverse colonial restraint.
Transformation from resistance to participation	Lupeng moves from judgment and distance toward ritual involvement.
The body as a site of agency and expression	Posture, movement, laughter, hair, and visibility become forms of self-reclamation.
Limits of resistance and persistence of structure	The ritual is cyclical and liminal; empowerment coexists with enduring colonial-patriarchal institutions.

The Tadtarin served as the central counter-discursive space of the novella. It disrupted the Maria Clara ideal by foregrounding embodied expression, communal participation, indigenous spirituality, and alternative cultural knowledge. Lupeng's transformation occurs first through movement and sensory participation rather than through an abstract declaration, making the body a medium of knowledge and resistance.

The ritual also converts individual awakening into collective agency. The women's shared movement and symbolic inversion create a temporary anti-structure in which colonial gender hierarchy is suspended. This finding is consistent with work on ritual *communitas* and liminality (White & McSharry, 2021; Xygalatas, 2022) and with Ahmed's (2021) understanding of the body as a site where orientation and social possibility are reshaped.

Resistance remains partial. Lupeng does not simply leave behind her colonial identity, and the annual ritual interrupts rather than permanently replaces the social order. The resulting identity is hybrid and negotiated, illustrating why feminist-postcolonial agency must be interpreted as historically contingent rather than absolute.

Symbolic Representations of Power and Agency

Table 3. *Symbolic systems of dominance, transformation, and resistance*

Theme	Interpretation
Solar imagery and dominant power	Sunlight signifies hierarchy, visibility, masculine authority, and the apparent permanence of colonial order.
Heat as saturation and regulation	Oppressive heat organizes space and time, producing pressure, exhaustion, and ideological stagnation.
Lunar and earth imagery as relational power	Moon, earth, vegetation, and fertility signify cyclical renewal, rootedness, and embodied cultural memory.
Ritual as anti-structure and collective agency	The Tadtarin temporarily reverses hierarchy and produces a shared female subjectivity.
Oscillation and instability of power	Solar and lunar systems coexist; authority is continually negotiated rather than finally resolved.

Joaquin's imagery constructs two competing but interacting systems of power. Solar imagery and prolonged heat reflect hierarchical, controlling, and masculine authority. Lunar, earth, plant, and ritual imagery express cyclicity, fertility, relationality, and communal power. The opposition is not a simple replacement of male power by female power; it reveals the instability and relational character of authority.

The symbolic landscape therefore participates in the ideological conflict. Space, time, and atmosphere are not decorative backgrounds but structures that organize who can move, speak, see, and define reality. This interpretation corresponds with Haugaard's (2022) view of power as dynamic and Purcell's (2022) understanding of space as socially produced.

Patriarchal Masculinity and Its Constraints

Table 4. *Themes explaining Don Paeng's performed and vulnerable masculinity*

Theme	Central Finding
Masculinity as performed authority and social expectation	Authority requires continual displays of rationality, composure, protection, and control.
Masculine identity as vulnerable to symbolic disruption	Ritual inversion exposes dependence on recognition and stable hierarchy.
Patriarchy as emotional and cognitive restriction	Emotional restraint and certainty limit empathy, vulnerability, and openness to other knowledge systems.
Ritual as exposure of masculine vulnerability	Don Paeng's inability to understand Lupeng's transformation reveals the fragility of hegemonic authority.

Don Paeng demonstrates that patriarchy constrains women and men unequally but interconnectedly. His social privilege depends on repeated performances of authority, rationality, emotional restraint, and control. When the Tadtarin reorganizes symbolic power, his masculinity becomes vulnerable because it cannot rely on its usual recognition.

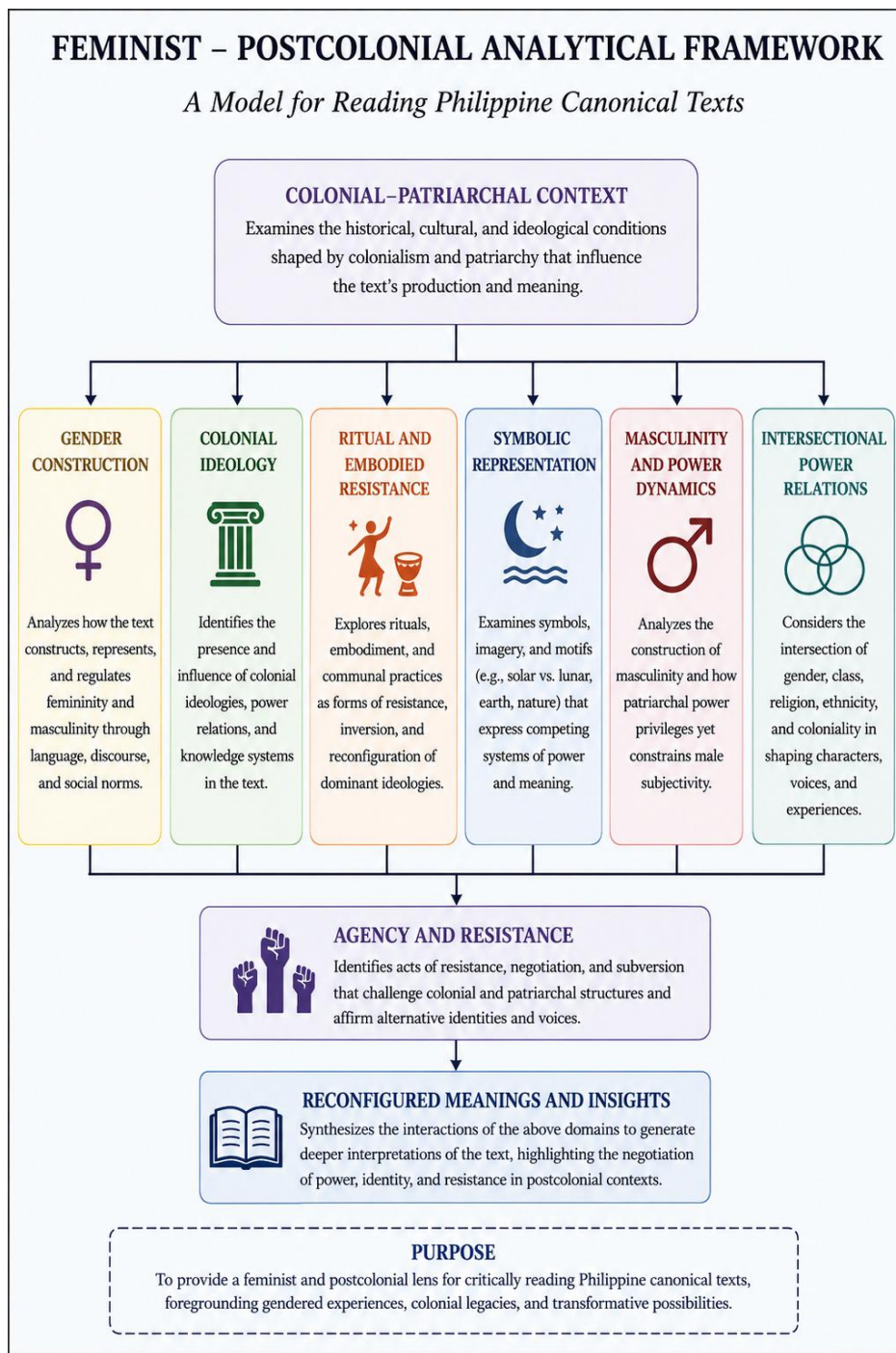
The analysis extends beyond identifying male dominance. Hegemonic masculinity narrows Don Paeng's emotional and cognitive range, making alternative knowledge appear as disorder and female autonomy as a threat. This interpretation is consistent with relational accounts of masculinity as socially produced and vulnerable to historical change (Christofidou, 2021; De Boise, 2022; Messerschmidt, 2018; Wedgwood et al., 2023).

Feminist-Postcolonial Analytical Framework

The integrated findings produced a Feminist-Postcolonial Analytical Framework for reading Philippine canonical texts. The model begins with the colonial-patriarchal context and organizes six mutually constitutive analytical domains. These domains converge in agency and resistance and culminate in reconfigured meanings and insights.

The colonial-patriarchal context represents the historical and ideological conditions through which religion, morality, domestic life, class, and cultural authority shape literary meaning. From this context emerge gender construction, colonial ideology, ritual and embodied resistance, symbolic representation, masculinity and power dynamics, and intersectional power relations. These dimensions are analytically distinct but operate together in producing subjectivity and conflict.

Agency and resistance arise from the interaction of these domains rather than from a single heroic act. The framework interprets resistance as negotiation, cultural reclamation, symbolic inversion, and embodied



participation. Its final component, reconfigured meanings and insights, recognizes that postcolonial identity and authority remain fluid, historically situated, and open to repeated reinterpretation.

Figure 2. *Proposed Feminist-Postcolonial Analytical Framework*

Table 5. *Domains and interpretive function of the proposed framework*

Framework Domain	Interpretive Function
Colonial-patriarchal context	Establishes the historical, religious, cultural, and ideological conditions shaping the text.
Gender construction	Examines how femininity and masculinity are produced and regulated through discourse and social norms.
Colonial ideology	Identifies epistemic hierarchy, cultural classification, and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge.
Ritual and embodied resistance	Explores communal practice, inversion, movement, and the body as forms of resistance.
Symbolic representation	Interprets imagery and motifs as competing systems of authority, identity, and meaning.
Masculinity and power dynamics	Analyzes patriarchal privilege together with the regulation and vulnerability of male subjectivity.
Intersectional power relations	Considers the simultaneous operation of gender, class, religion, culture, ethnicity, and coloniality.
Agency and resistance	Identifies acts of negotiation, cultural reclamation, symbolic inversion, and subversion.
Reconfigured meanings and insights	Synthesizes the domains to interpret identity and power as fluid, relational, and historically situated.

The framework's contribution lies in integrating feminist criticism, postcolonial theory, ritual studies, symbolic analysis, and masculinity studies. Sposato and Rumens (2021) similarly demonstrate the value of postcolonial feminism for examining gendered authority within historically structured institutions. The model is not a fixed checklist; its domains are designed to interact so that the analysis can trace how domination and resistance are reproduced, contested, and reconfigured.

Applied to *The Summer Solstice*, the framework explains why Lupeng's transformation cannot be understood through gender alone. Her agency emerges through the interaction of colonial discipline, class position, indigenous ritual, bodily movement, symbolic reorientation, and collective female experience. The model may be tested and refined through future analyses of Philippine texts that represent colonial memory, gender ideology, indigenous spirituality, ritual, and postcolonial identity.

CONCLUSION

The Summer Solstice functions as a feminist-postcolonial critique of the colonial and patriarchal systems that shape identity, knowledge, and authority. Lupeng's early femininity is produced through Catholic moral discipline, bodily restraint, gendered shame, class hierarchy, and the naturalization of masculine authority. Her ambivalence reveals that such subject formation is powerful but never completely stable.

The Tadtarin challenges the Maria Clara ideal by foregrounding embodied participation, indigenous spirituality, collective female experience, and alternative systems of meaning. Lupeng's transformation reclaims the body as a site of agency, but the ritual's cyclical and liminal character prevent the narrative from presenting emancipation as complete. Identity remains hybrid, contextual, and continually negotiated.

Solar and heat imagery express colonial-patriarchal dominance, whereas lunar, earth, and ritual imagery signify cyclical, relational, and communal forms of power. Don Paeng's destabilization further demonstrates that patriarchal masculinity is performative and fragile, granting privilege while restricting emotional and cognitive

possibility. The proposed Feminist-Postcolonial Analytical Framework synthesizes these findings into a culturally grounded model for interpreting agency, identity, and resistance in Philippine literature.

Recommendations

Literary scholars may apply and refine the proposed framework in analyses of Philippine canonical and contemporary texts concerned with colonial memory, gender ideology, ritual, indigenous knowledge, embodiment, symbolism, and resistance. Comparative studies may test its applicability across authors, regions, genres, and historical periods.

Literature and language educators may integrate feminist-postcolonial close reading into classroom instruction to develop students' critical understanding of gender, colonial history, cultural identity, and systems of knowledge. The framework may guide activities that connect textual evidence, thematic interpretation, historical context, and theoretical reflection.

Future studies may combine feminist, postcolonial, anthropological, religious, historical, and masculinity perspectives; investigate indirect forms of agency such as silence, movement, collective action, and symbolic inversion; and examine how readers from different communities interpret the Tadtarin and related cultural representations. The proposed framework should be treated as an analytical model requiring further application and validation rather than as a final or universal account of Philippine literature.

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