

## Compare and Contrast of the Role of Different Themes towards Nation Building in the Selected Novels

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**Abstract:** Nation building has been one of the most significant issues recently and mainly in the countries with the experience of colonization. Hereafter, this paper aims to clarify that most of colonized countries pursue a kind of same aim for indicate their countries identities in the globe. The related novels will be Novel without Name authored by Guong Thu Huong, Ilustrado written by Miguel Sujuco and finally The Child of All Nations by Pramoedya Ananta Toer which are going to under analysis from different angles like Identity and characters.

**Keywords:** colonization, identity, nationalism, nation building

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### Introduction

Nation building has been one of the most significant issues recently and mainly in the countries with the experience of colonization. One of the best tools to express this issue is literature which has had a progressing route newly. In this ongoing paper I am to indicate the direct or indirect signs of nation building or nationalism as independent themes in the three East Asian novels from various countries. By this paper it will be clarified that most of colonized countries pursue a kind of same aim for indicate their countries identities in the globe. The related novels will be Novel without Name authored by Guong Thu Huong, Ilustrado written by Miguel Sujuco and finally The Child of All Nations by Pramoedya Ananta Toer which are going to under analysis from different angles like Identity and characters.

### Novel without Name

Novel without a Name by Duong Thu Huong reverberates powerfully on the theme futility of war and the devastation that war brings upon its people and its country. The novel portrays the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, whereby the American troops under the order of President Johnson who were sent there to defend the Vietnamese against the communist had already retreated to the U.S. and the war between the South of Vietnam and the North erupted. It also brings across the message of how corrupt their rulers were and the ideology that was being implemented to Vietnam. Duong Thu Huong being an ex-pro-communist herself was able to encapsulate that idea in her novel, bringing in the reality of communism which is better off accepted as just an ideology and not one that could be put into practise.

In this part I will attempt to explain how the characters were used by the author to show or present the theme to the nation. The characters I will touch on have been categorised as hopeful women in waiting, arrogant intellectuals or people in power, as well as disillusioned warriors.

The first group of characters that I will look at is the hopeful women who are waiting while the men in their lives go out to fight the enemy for the glory of the nation. It is common for men to sign up in the military and fight the enemy while the women wait in their homes for the men to come back glorious and victorious.

Although this notion seems acceptable and even romantic, the reality of it is the complete opposite. These women suffer from depression, anxiety, profound loneliness and rejection. The characters which are depicted to be waiting for different people and reasons; for some, their wait is full of uncertainties, while for others it's a wait for the eventual bad news of death of their loved ones to arrive. One such example is Luy's mother, 'An ugly, lonely, elephantine woman'. Luy was her only pride, her sole reason for living." (23). If or when Luy dies, his mother will commit suicide because there really isn't any point in living in isolation with no family members around. This is what the war has brought upon a poor old mother; she spends the rest of her living days waiting to hear from or about her son, if she hears news of his death, she'll have kill herself. The next characters that I would like to highlight are Comrade Vieng and Hoa. Vieng's job in the army was as an undertaker. Every day she buried dead soldiers and the nature of her responsibility required her to be strong both physically and emotionally. As a result, she was described looking hideous, "with her hulking, wrestler's body." (42). Her only feminine quality was perhaps the long black hair and her feminine gestures. This woman has lost what would be traditionally considered as typically female qualities due to the harshness that she is exposed to because of the war. When she begged Quan to sleep with her, one cannot but feel a deep sense of sympathy for her. The place where she is stationed to work is pretty much in the interiors, and the only human companionship that she has is probably with the dead bodies that she's supposed to bury. Human beings are social creatures and it's complicated for someone to live in such isolated situation. Vieng was lonely to the point of desperation; it wouldn't have been a problem to her if she were to get pregnant, at least that would present her with some sort of human company. The next group of characters that I would like to discuss is the people with power as well as influence in the society. The author has used a few such characters to highlight and criticize the folly of the Communist way of life and has shown the nation how it really isn't as rosy and hopeful as has been promised to them by the propagators of the ideology. For this purpose, I will look at the characters of the two intellectuals on the train as well as the regiment's political officer that Huu mentioned about. Under the Communist doctrine, every person is viewed as equals and one person should not have the notion of being more superior to the other. While all this sounds like a fantastic way to create a fair society, in practice, I think it's a feat that's next to impossible to accomplish because at the end of the day, all human beings fall into the trap of wanting to put his priorities before that of others. People also naturally crave for some power and the need to be 'in-charge' of others to create orderliness. The group of characters that was used by Duong Thu Huong to show the purpose of the theme to the nation is disillusioned warriors. Many young men enlist themselves to join the army year after year in order to fight the enemy, attain glorious victory and build a nation that would become an ideal society. However, the author has used a few characters to show that being in the war opens the eyes of these young idealistic warriors to the dark reality that the battles that they fight in doesn't really provide them with the sense of accomplishment or pride that they were hoping for. If anything, the futile war only made them heartless killing machine that have been programmed to behave in a certain manner. While some soldiers become used to and get absorbed in these ideals, there are other whose eyes are opened to the atrocities and mindless destruction that war brings about. For this purpose I would be touching on the characters of Quan and Kha. The other character that I would like to discuss is Quan. There are many incidents through which the author talks about the futility of war through Quan's eyes. The whole novel shows the journey that Quan went through in his ten year service with the military. When he met Comrade Vieng, after rejecting her, Quan thought about the reason and explained that after ten years he "had known both the glory and humiliation...I needed to meet her to finally see myself clearly. I had been

defeated from the beginning...I had never really committed myself to war.” (49) Quan had become repulsed by war and he was also disgusted by what it brought about to the land and the people. While passing through the Pregnant Cow Gorge, every man was supposed to carry one injured or dead. It was that incident that made Quan realise that what they were doing was just shooting and killing the people that they have no personal animosity towards. In some occasions, the soldiers have even ended up killing the people who belong to the same side as them. All these errors had to be covered up, rendering them feeling like killing machines. They were declared victors but their victory was at the expense to the death of most of the members of the troop. How can one consider this victory to have any meaning at all? Based on the examples above, we can see that soldiers at war pretty soon realise the pointlessness of war that they are engaged in. The author has also very cleverly used the first person narrative style to highlight themes in this novel to show the nation the reality behind the age long battle that human beings have against each other.

### **Ilustrado**

National identity is the person's identity and sense of belonging to one state or to one nation, a feeling one shares with a group of people, regardless of one's citizenship status. The national identity of most citizens of one state or one nation tends to strengthen when the country or the nation is threatened militarily. The sense of belonging to the nation is essential as an external threat becomes clearer when individuals seek to unite with fellow countrymen to protect themselves and fight against the common threat. In the novel one of the concerns of Syjuco is his country and gradually his own lost identity. He does his best to aware people of the oncoming influences of not having a united identity for whole part of the country. He wants to find the country's identity and then to be proud of it. However, he shows that most of the people has been used to be in this wilderness and finds to a difficult job to inform them. As he utters in the novel: Sadie: “mom, Miguel grew up in the Philippines.”

Raquel: “Ah, I'm sorry. I keep forgetting. You don't have a Filipino accent anymore! Good for you. (195) By these sentences we can understand that they like to call themselves American or to adopt an identity other than themselves. Furthermore, On the other hand he shows some contraries in some part of them novel that suggest the ambiguity of the identity in this novel: “Around that time the Philippines was listed by western government as a terrorist hotspot, though many Filipinos scoffed.”(p.54)..... “New York is beautiful, Granma...I wish you were here.”(51) However, from the beginning of the story we can find a positive and optimistic point of view of the writer about his own motherland. From the first pages the authors hopes for great changes to happen in the country that will be in the profit of the people. To put simply he is into introduce and/or regain his country's lost identity and wants to aware people to amend or totally create a new identity which its original owners are the people of the Philippines not the other states. “My biography of Crispin will be in indictment of my country, of time, of our forgetful, self –centered humanity.” (32) Crispin was obsessed with our oral traditions and doubly infatuated with translating Filipino humor into English. He called jokes “our true shared history,” “our sweetly bitter commentary.” (35) He believes this is the one of the writers' and literate people's duty to make the identity and introduce it to the word through their works. As it is crystal clear from most of the prestigious authors' works in world, it is possible to shake a country or even the world by words produced though novels, poems and other genres. Ilustrado presents the Philippines from within and without, using its two characters that have left the country but are still closely tied to it - through family, culture, and history - to shine a light on some of the darker nooks and crannies, and a corrupted

system. Both characters are almost chameleon-like in the multiple guises they appear in: the title Syjuco chooses for his Salvador-biography is appropriate, since Salvador did live many very different lives. Similarly, Syjuco, too, takes on a variety of roles in a variety of circles, ranging from typical college student to expatriate black sheep. Though useful in addressing so many different facets of Filipino life, in the Philippines and abroad, it's also one of the book's weaknesses, these two main characters anything but fixed, and too often too readily adapted to meet yet another purpose. The novel weaves the complex human experiences of its characters into key historical events such as the People Power revolution in the Philippines in 1986, which, after mass street protests, saw the end to the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Although touching down often in Manila, Ilustrado's characters and their experiences are forged in a global world, with storylines also unfolding in New York City and Vancouver. Diaspora meditations are strongly present and long narrative passages that take place in airports and on airplanes point to the global experience of Filipino culture, stemming from a nation that today has one of the highest rates of emigration in the world. Syjuco's descriptions are precisely detailed and support the novel's strongly humanistic tone, delivering important meditations on contemporary global history. "America imported and imposed its brand of democracy on the Philippines," says Syjuco, "putting into power first people who were sympathetic to Western policies, writing a system of political dynasties and patronage into the nation. I think that it is important to understand the problems in the Philippines today as linked to this history, while [Filipino history] can give us ideas as to what the situation will be 100 years from now in Iraq or Afghanistan, where again the Americans imposed 'democracy.'"

### **Child of All Nations**

The link between the spirit of nationalism and education has long been established since the 18th century, with Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) being one of the main advocates of the association between the two elements. Intrigued by the idea of the spirit of nationalism, its development in a country or society, and citizenship, he proposed that patriotism is a sentiment that can not only be moulded, but also generated in a person. Rousseau considered this a part of the many tasks a capable government should perform, citing that "The task of governments was to carve the mould...in which the children of nations should be shaped" (235); and this, he argued, can be achieved through proper means: the education institutions. Instead of focusing on the development of the people's intellect, education should be used to develop their character, and thus, their sense of nationalism.

In this second book of Pramoedya's Buru tetralogy, Indonesia is still under the brutal rule of the Dutch, but with the provision of Western education to certain groups of the natives, there begins a desire to free Indonesia from the clutches of their colonial masters. This association between Western education and the brewing spirit of nationalism is well documented in many of the characters in *Child of All Nations*, most notably Minke, Kommer, and Jean Marais. It would not be too farfetched to claim that without Western education, Minke and his comrades would not have been able to discard the sense of respect and admiration that they hold for their colonisers – a consequence of extended exposure to the Dutch's self-propaganda of their eminence. Indeed, the fight for Indonesia's independence would have been a slow and sluggish, perhaps even a failed one.

However, before delving into how Western education was able to sow the seed of nationalism in the characters in the book, it is only prudent to first examine the education system that was offered in Indonesia

during the Dutch colonialism era.

The benefits and impact of Western education on the nationalistic spirit of the characters in the book are colossal, but perhaps the biggest effect lies in the acquisition of Western languages. By acquiring these languages (particularly English, Dutch and French), a whole world of new knowledge and beneficial ideologies is opened to the learner. Not only are they free to explore and read from books, they are also able to speak to foreigners to learn of new things.

Without knowledge of Western languages, Minke would not have been able to correspond with the de la Croix family (a family of three: Miriam and Sarah, and their father, Herbert) who are constantly urging him towards developing a nationalistic spirit. In her letters to Minke, Miriam de la Croix tries very hard to persuade him to relinquish his blind trust and pride towards the Dutch government: "I write this with a heavy heart...The north [the colonisers' country] contains no magic. But it is true that you must keep your eyes to the north always in vigilance" (55). She urges him to strike a balance between taking pride in his cultural heritage and revolutionising "the warped attitude of the people of Java and the Indies towards the world" (103) with the necessary Western knowledge to give birth to a new race of more advanced and knowledgeable natives (100-4).

As mentioned earlier, language, too, allowed Minke and his comrades access to books that contain much of the valuable teachings, ideologies, and latest news. Without Western knowledge, they would not have been introduced to the French Revolution and the beliefs that served as the driving force of the Revolution.

As such, just as how the French managed to rouse their spirit of nationalism through the effort of the philosophes of their country who campaigned strongly for social and political reforms, it is the duty of Minke and the writers of his nation to learn from the West and to revolutionise their people through what they have learnt. This, in turn, would help to promote nationalism in them. The French Revolution, too, could serve as the end goal that the people of Indonesia should strive to achieve. If the French commoners were capable of breaking away from their oppressors, then so could the Indonesians. Throughout the novel, it is towards this idealistic state of liberty, equality, fraternity (the underlying ideologies behind French Revolution) that Minke is striving towards, and he does achieve it to a certain degree: "...You are truly a child of the French Revolution" (179).

In this sense, Western education has made it possible and encouraged Minke to practise critical thinking, a trait often associated with the West, in his views of the world. This way, he finds himself building a strong sense of admiration and awe at the ability of an Eastern country that appears to be as great as that of a Western country. Thus, like the French Revolution, Japan's success becomes a motivation for Minke's growing nationalistic spirit; Japan has shown that Eastern countries are not inferior to Western powers, and thus, inferiority is not an excuse for the East to submit to the West.

In fact, it was also Ter Haar, an outsider, who had to open Minke's eyes to the injustice that was being done by Dutch colonisers to his own people in their own land because the news were not printed in the local papers. Ter Haar exposes Minke to the scandal of the royal family in Holland who were accused of having "taken from the peasants of Java the amount of 951 million guilders" (255); the truth of Soerabaiaasch Nieuws as a sugar paper (252-3); as well as the attempt by the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies to please the crown prince of the Russian czar when he came to Batavia by offering him hunting trips and a bupati's daughter for entertainment, merely because Russia was unhappy with the decision to grant the Japanese equal status with the Europeans (256-7).

It is Ter Haar's goal to direct Minke away from the Western idealisms by showing him the wickedness of the West, but to the end, Minke comes to realisation that it is only through Western education that he will be able to fight the colonisers: "...No, Ter Haar the Coaxer, I still need Europe as a teacher, including you yourself. Only through your own strength can we confront you, Europe" (276).

Aside from the motivating news of upheavals mentioned above, Western education also brought in revolutionary writings, one of them being those of the famed Multatuli. Multatuli is the pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker, said to be one of Netherlands' greatest writers who strove to expose the Dutch exploitations of the Javanese natives. His book, *Max Havelaar* (1860), was touted to be one of his best written tomes, and it is the title of this book that Minke takes on as his penname in the *Buru tetralogy's* first book, *The Earth of All Mankind*. Anyone who claims to fight for Indonesia would have read Multatuli's book, and it later became one of the motivating factors for the natives to fight for their independence. Thus, this Western tome becomes the earliest eye-opener to the Dutch's wickedness, and also the yardstick for Minke, Kommer, and their other comrades in their bid to free Indonesia.

### **Conclusion**

In order to conclude this study, I would like quickly recap the points that have been raised earlier. The author has used the characters and their experiences in order to show the nation the brutality of war and the destruction and death that it has caused to people over the years. In my opinion, Duong Thu Huong's writing style is highly effective in projecting the futility of war. There have been many scenes from the novel that showed it to be brutal and gory. I think these are the very aspects of this novel that has made it a successful one. The civil war that the Vietnamese people fought for many years was indeed the source of much misery rather than joy in the lives of the people.

*Ilustrado* is, of course, a work meant to free Filipino writing from the limitations -- to batter down the self-set walls, or at least try. By presenting so much, Syjuco suggests some of the possibilities for moving ahead and beyond - but the presentation also has the feel of just throwing a lot out there, in almost hit and miss manner (just like the examples of Salvador's writing show the most varied approaches, from true popular pulp to a Palanca Award-winning story taking off "from the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet") -- making for a different kind of uncertainty. (Syjuco certainly seems to recognize this, to: his alter-ego in the novel is someone who is still in the process of finding himself, constantly expressing uncertainty about his actions). An often appealing but ultimately too far-flung and -reaching pastiche, *Ilustrado* is an interesting portrait of a class and nation, though generally it is more satisfying in its parts than its whole.

In the latter novel, even though it was the West who colonised the natives, it was also the West who provided the natives with means to fight for their independence. Indeed, without the materials provided by the Western education, Minke, as the protagonist of the book, would have continued to worship the Dutch colonialists without knowing the reality of the situation. The nationalistic spirit, too, would have been less successfully roused within the characters in *Child of All Nations*.

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