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### Writing the Nation

*Transculturation and nationalism in Hispano-Filipino literature from the early twentieth century*

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## Chapter 1

### Writing a New Orient: Filipino Transcultural Orientalism in the Work of Jesús Balmori

*Mindanao, princesa mora vestida de plata y cubierta de perlas, reclinada en una vinta de labrados remos, de velas de encendidos colorines, banderas y alas de su ornato exótico.*<sup>30</sup>

(Balmori 1945: 39)

[Moorish princess, dressed in silver and covered in pearls, reclined on a sailing boat with engraved oars, with burning colors, flags and wings of her exotic ornaments.]

#### Introduction

Since Edward Said wrote *Orientalism* in 1978 his concept of orientalism - explaining how Western knowledge about the East has been produced as an academic and popular discourse - continues to be discussed. New ideas have been added by Said himself as well as by other critics in various disciplines,<sup>31</sup> helping to expand his theory towards new contexts. Araceli Tinajero's *Orientalismo en el Modernismo Hispánico* (2004) draws on Said's theory of orientalism in order to examine the vision and relationship with the Orient that prevails among Latin American modernist writers, specifically focusing on travel writers. With her study, Tinajero has revealed another route of cultural approximation between two (assumed) peripheral contexts: the Far East and Latin America. More specifically, she argues that the type of orientalism expressed in the travel diaries of modernist authors such as Juan José Tablada (Mexico, 1871-1945) and Enrique Gómez Carrillo (Guatemala, 1873-1927) seeks to establish a cultural exchange, a dialogue between two peripheries, instead of a monologue that reinforces binary oppositions of self and other, West and East. Orientalist modernist writing from Latin American authors in the early twentieth century, according to Tinajero, responds to a desire for *experiencing* the Orient, factually, by travelling there, rather than *imagining* it.

However, even if the establishment of cultural hierarchies that Said attacks in his *Orientalism* is arguably less prominent or even overturned in the representations of Chinese and Japanese culture in the Mexican and Guatemalan texts that Tinajero explores, both forms

<sup>30</sup> Mindanao is the largest island in the South Philippines, as well as the name of this region. It has the largest Muslim population of the Philippines and was an important Sultanate in the pre-Hispanic period.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Linda Nochlin "The Imaginary Orient" (2005), in which she analyses orientalism in French painting from the nineteenth century, Behad and Gartlan's edited collection *Photography's Orientalism New Essays on Colonial Representation* (2013) or Varisco's *Reading Orientalism: Said and Unsaid* (2007).

of orientalism (that produced between a centre and a periphery, and that between two peripheries) continue to mark a difference between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Tablada and Carrillo’s travel accounts, for example, are framed by an ethnographic curiosity that is problematic when taken as a form of knowledge production, as much as it includes the voice of ‘the other’ as an informant rather than as a muted object. To challenge (if this is possible at all) the perpetual othering that is part of doing orientalism (or any of the *-isms* that exist in area studies: *occidentalism*, *hispanism*, *filipinism* or even *mediterraneanism* (Varisco, 2007)), in this chapter I will explore the idea of orientalism as it emerges in various ways in the poetry of Hispano-Filipino author Jesús Balmori (1886-1946).

Balmori’s poetry is considered an example of Filipino modernism that clearly shows Hispanic modernist aesthetics in terms of its themes and style. Balmori was very familiar with the work of Rubén Darío (1867-1916), the Nicaraguan poet to whom the invention of literary modernism in Spanish has been attributed.<sup>32</sup> Among other characteristics, modernist Hispanic literature features abundant oriental motifs and represents ‘the orient’ as a trope that provides a stimulus for the poetic imagination. This literary rhetoric travelled from France to Latin America, Spain and the Philippines. Given the geopolitical circumstances of the Philippines as a Hispanized culture located in Asia, the modernist orientalism found in its literature is shaped in two ways: as a form of self-representation and as the idealization of other locations in the Far East, specifically Japan. This demonstrates a significant change of perspective in terms of what and who is being orientalised, and by whom.

In this chapter, my aim is to identify and analyze the various types of orientalism articulated in Balmori’s poetry, focusing on three poems contained in the collections *Rimas Malayas* (1904) [Malayan Rhymes] and *Mi casa de Nipa* (1941) [My house of Nipa]. My argument is that these poems engage with the two models of orientalism conceptualized respectively by Said and Tinajero: as a hegemonic discourse promoting assimilation to Spanish colonization and Western modernity, and as an expression of literary modernism that

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<sup>32</sup> Darío’s poem “La Sonatina,” included in *Prosas Profanas* (1895), is one of the best examples of modernism. According to O’Brian in *Manifesto of Modernism* (1982):

“Sonatina” contains all the chromatic, sensual, opulent, and exotic elements that, once coalesced, gave form to the Modernist movement in Spain in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The fundamental purpose of Modernism is an appeal to the senses, a reaction to the false sensibility and prosaic and rhetorical style of the Realists and Naturalists. [...] The theme of the princess, a literary motif dating from the Middle Ages, serves as the focal point of the poem and provides a point of departure for Darío’s “poetic trip,” in which opulence and sensuality are combined with the exotic and the rare around the princess’s silent world of sadness. As the poem develops it is graphically enriched by the addition of other devices popular with the Modernist poets, such as color, imagery, synesthesia, erudition, and musicality. (134)

Notably, Balmori wrote a short play entitled *La Princesa está Triste* (1919) that takes the second verse from Darío’s “Sonatina” as a departure point.

re-inscribes the poet's assimilation of Hispanic and French aesthetics. Crucially, in some of his poems Balmori also moves beyond these models by giving voice to what I call *Filipino transcultural orientalism*. This form of orientalism articulates Filipino identity as both orientalised and orientalising, with authors variously attaching to and detaching from the various cultures that have historically constituted it, as well as the forms of representing the orient specific to these cultures and their literary expressions.

The first poem by Balmori that I will analyse in this chapter, titled "Blasón" [Code of Arms], assigns the cultures of the pre-colonial Philippines to an orientalised realm that is seen as having been "improved" by colonialism. As such, the poem can be read as an example of Said's conceptualization of orientalism as a hegemonic discourse, promoting assimilation to Spanish colonization and Western modernity. In contrast, the second Balmori poem I look at, "Rima Malaya" [Mayan Ryme], shows how Filipino modernist oriental writing effects a transculturation of Hispanic and French aesthetics. Lastly, I discuss the poem "La Gueisha" [the Geisha] as an illustration of how Filipino transcultural orientalism can distance itself from foreign aesthetics and orientalising discourses to create a new version of the Orient and of Filipino identity.

### **Orientalism as a Hegemonic Discourse**

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) seeks to "understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). It reveals the process through which the Western world forged an image of the East - mostly the Middle East - as inferior, with the aim of domination. Said explains how the image of the *other* was constructed based on a discursive system of binary oppositions such as Orient/Occident, Catholic/Muslim, science/religion, progress/underdevelopment, knowledge/labor and law/superstition.<sup>33</sup> These oppositions defined both the East and the West, and supported western power. Said's idea of cultural dominance through orientalism is supported by Antonio Gramsci's theory of power as hegemonic. Gramsci's main claim is that a hegemonic relation of dominance is supported by both force and what he calls 'consent,' an individual agreement to power that prevails in non-totalitarian regimes (2009: 210-16). In the

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<sup>33</sup> Said conceptualises discourse in a Foucauldian manner as a way of thinking expressed and recognised through the use of a specific language (vocabulary, expressions, and even style) that discloses the field of knowledge it refers to (see Foucault 1972).

case of orientalism, this translates into the acceptance of the West as unquestionably superior and advanced - as something to look up to and forward to - both in the West and outside it.

Said identifies orientalism in the fields of history, literature, art and politics, disclosing the elements that helped construct the image of the East as exotic, mythical, barbaric and anchored in the past.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the West is perceived as progressive, powerful and desirable. By elucidating orientalism as a form of discourse Said insists on the complexity of the phenomenon and offers a way to acknowledge its viral-like spread, affecting academia as well as popular culture. Providing an historical overview of how accounts of the Orient came into being, Said draws on examples of the earliest colonial and imperial enterprises carried out by the West, which go back to the eighteenth-century Napoleonic invasion of Egypt. The relationship between orientalism and colonialism is evident, as Ania Loomba points out: “Orientalism [...] was an ideological accompaniment of colonial ‘power’” (42), in which the making of the *other* is essential for the establishment of a colonial system that forged the roles of the colonizer and the colonized, parallel to those of West and East.

Joan Torres-Pou’s book *Asia en la España del siglo XIX* (2013) [Asia in Nineteenth-Century Spain] is one of the few works that focus on cultural exchanges between Spain and Asia in a century that, in Spanish studies, has traditionally been considered a time of closure and isolation, leading to and affected by the loss of the last colonies. Importantly for this study, Torres-Pou analyses the Spanish colonial discourse about the Philippines and the representation of the Orient by Spaniards in diplomatic reports, letters, journal articles, examples of travel writing and also literature, including a travel novel by Juan Valera (1824-1905) called *Morsamor* (1899). Torres-Pou’s research confirms the existence of an orientalist colonial discourse in accounts by Spanish intellectuals that justified Spanish imperialism based on a notion of racial inequality. Thus, Sinibaldo de Mas (1809-1869), who was the ambassador of Spain in Beijing in 1844 and consul general in Hong Kong in 1848, wrote a report entitled “Informe sobre el Estado de las Islas Filipinas” (1842) [Report on the State of the Philippine Islands] in which, in addition to presenting a scientific classification of what he had observed in the Philippines (populations, topography, agriculture, language, climate, flora and fauna), he repeatedly attempts to prove his conviction of “pertenecer a una raza

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<sup>34</sup> Nochlin’s “The Imaginary Orient” (2005) illustrates how Orientalist French painting, such as that of Jean-Léon Gérôme, who painted *The Snake Charmer* (ca. 1870), which was on the cover of early editions of Said’s book, fed the imagination of the orient as atemporal, untouched and unpolluted by producing images that seem objective and realist but in fact contain meaningful absences, such as that of the white man (colonisers, travellers, even tourists), of art itself, of ordinary activities and, crucially, of history.

superior” [belonging to a superior race] (Torres-Pou 2013: 15). These testimonies from within Spanish colonialism are symptomatic of the colonial institutionalisation of power over the Orient that Said denounces in *Orientalism*, and that was transmitted, as in the case of French and English imperialism, through the channels of intellectual and political writing.

Said’s study identifies a generation of French and British pilgrim writers such as Chateaubriand (1768-1849), Edward William Lane (1801-1876), who translated the *1001 Nights* into English, and Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935), better known as Lawrence of Arabia, as orientalists. However, he explains that their way of doing orientalism was different from Napoleon’s, as they were driven by a philological and aesthetic aim rather than a political and colonial one:

French pilgrims did not seek a scientific so much as an exotic yet attractive reality. This is obviously true of the literary pilgrims, beginning with Chateaubriand, who found in the Orient a locale sympathetic to their private myths, obsessions, and requirements. Here we notice how all the pilgrims, but especially the French ones, exploit the Orient in their work so as in some urgent way to justify their existential vocation. (Said 170)

With this new wave of orientalists, the Orient became for European writers a source of inspiration that propelled their imagination and justified their “vocation,” leading to the creation of an orientalist discourse that was uncontested by reality and constricted by the limitations of the western cultural lens of travel writing and literary inspiration. The creation of a twentieth-century orientalist literary discourse is thus conceived by Said as a consequence of artistic creation - not empirical but imagined.

In the Spanish-speaking world, orientalist travel writing originated with the generation of modernist Latin American writers Tinajero studies, which will be discussed in the next section. What needs to be addressed at this point is the relationship between travel writing and orientalism, which has at least two aspects: first, travel writing is at the origin of orientalist discourse because the voyage generates a series of contact zones that open *the imperial eye* - to borrow Mary Louise Pratt’s metaphor; and, second, travel responds to an desire to experience, directly, the otherwise abstract entity called the Orient.

Pratt, in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1997), finds illustrative examples of Said’s orientalist discourse in the travel accounts of British colonisers in Africa and Alexander Humboldt in Latin America. According to her, the landscape descriptions that western travellers, ethnographers or anthropologists offer in the nineteenth century have three recurrent characteristics: the landscape is aestheticised (presented as exotic, mysterious and seductive), a notable density of meaning is created through an extreme use of adjectives

denoting “material and semantic substance,” and “a relation of mastery between the seer and the seen” is constructed that positions both the writer and the reader as “the monarch of all I survey” (Pratt 1997: 204-5). The absolutism of the monarch’s view and the language that is used to describe the landscape form the basis of how it is captured, becoming the primary source, the archive or the discourse that nurtures subsequent rewritings and representations of that very nature (and culture) by others, whether they are natives or foreign. In this way, Pratt succinctly demonstrates how a particular orientalist discourse is created and becomes entrenched.<sup>35</sup>

Pratt also develops an understanding of transculturation based on how the colonised engage with such received orientalist knowledge. In this context, she highlights the stylistic characteristics of how a writer constructs his/her text. This can be connected to the way modernist poetry traveled from France, Nicaragua and Spain to the Philippines, and how it was transformed by each ‘local’ writer that appropriated it through the process of transculturation, which, as explained in the introduction to this study, implies leaving things behind (*deculturation*), adopting new things (*acculturation*) and producing new meaning (*neoculturation*). This is not simply an intertextual phenomenon but also a sociopolitical one “scripted into a network of heterogeneous cultural representations generated by the forces of both authority and aesthetics” (Behad 1994: 136), which, in the case of Filipino writers, served as a form of self- and national affirmation, as my analysis of Balmori’s poems will show.

In addition to the hegemony of orientalist modernism having undergone a process of transculturation in the various locations that engaged with it, the growing awareness of the omnipresence of an orientalist discourse in Western academia, art and popular culture has prompted calls for the empowerment of the oriental subject, which has produced a counter-discourse leading to a self-redefinition. Nowadays, a call for a remapping of cultural epistemology as response to the lingering of orientalism as a hegemonic discourse has given voice to scholars that have been conditioned to see their academic research, itself essentially a Western tradition (see Appadurai 2000), through the prisms of orientalism. Thinking about

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<sup>35</sup> Said explains the scientific discursive process as follows: “There is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality is determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers’ experiences. A book on how to handle a fierce lion might then cause a series of books to be produced on such subjects as the fierceness of lions, the origins of fierceness, and so forth. Similarly, as the focus of the text centers more narrowly on the subject - no longer lions but their fierceness - we might expect that the ways by which it is recommended that a lion’s fierceness be handled will increase its fierceness, force it to be fierce since that is what it is, and that is what in essence we know, or can *only* know about it” (94, emphasis in text).

orientalism from the East, or from other peripheries, raises questions about the terms in which people in these locations see, explain, create and imagine the West and themselves, and, consequently, about the role of orientalism as a hegemonic discourse.

Chen Xiaomei (2002) perceives the imposed dominance of western thought as a prompt to carry out an exercise of introspection:

As a result of constantly revising and manipulating imposed Western theories and practices, the Chinese Orient has produced a new discourse, marked by a peculiar combination of the Western construction of China and the Chinese construction of the West, with both of these components interacting and interpenetrating each other. (2)

As Chen claims, the sociopolitical circumstances of specific spatio-temporal locations in which actors produce their cultural texts are essential elements in the production of a counter-hegemonic knowledge that does not necessarily position itself against the dominant discourse, but engages with it.

Iris Zavala (1992) notes that, for Latin American authors, orientalist writing “sought to construct the Orient as other while establishing national identities. Rather than a discourse of power to create, incorporate, or control Oriental spaces, Latin Americans sought to affirm their own identities through discourses against power, created through creolized visions and polyphonic hybridized strategies” (Zavala 84, qtd. in Shulman 2013). In the context of the Philippines, Megan C. Thomas (2012) points to the potential of the orientalist European research in linguistics, philology, folklore and ethnology young Filipinos from the 1880s and 1890s engaged with when producing their own work, and how it was sometimes “put to anti-colonial ends” (3). This confirms that orientalism can also be appropriated to serve as a form of national affirmation.

To summarize, three aspects are important when looking at orientalism as a hegemonic discourse. The first is that it is created, supported and expanded through the use of a specific vocabulary that supports a powerful ideology by which the orientalist and the orientaled are put in a hierarchical relationship that ends up being reproduced by both parties. Second, it is used to justify colonial enterprises, which are translated into a project of civilising the uncivilised, of bringing progress to backward places and of improving the living conditions of the ‘other.’ Third, and highly relevant for the study of Hispano-Filipino literature, travel writing, through the centuries, has contributed to the emergence and maintenance of an orientalist creative aesthetic. Orientalist modern literature positions the orient as exotic, pure and anchored in the past (traditional), a view that is often internalised

by the orientalised as well. However, this (auto)orientalisation can also generate a form of self-affirmation and resistance against (colonial) power.

### **Latin American (Peripheral) Orientalism**

There are many studies that focus on how the Orient and Orientals are represented in Latin American literature, but only a few use the term ‘peripheral’ to refer to the type of orientalism put forward in these works.<sup>36</sup> Most importantly, Tinajero’s *Orientalismo en el Modernismo Hispánico* (2005) defines Latin American modernist writing as a type of peripheral orientalism because it emerges from what is considered, from a European perspective, a periphery. She explains that the relationship established between Mexico and Guatemala and Japan and China is one in which two peripheries are connected and put into dialogue. While this definition of peripheral orientalism refers to the geopolitical location from which orientalism is made, I want to go one step further and ask what type of orientalism the periphery (Latin America) produces and how it differs from the European orientalism described in Said’s work.

Before answering these questions, it is useful to clarify why most orientalist works from Latin America concern the Far East rather than the Middle East, which is the focus of the hegemonic orientalism explored by Said. There is an historical explanation for this. The relationship between Latin America and the Middle East was mediated through Spanish orientalism, which, as a result of “721 years of Islamic occupation, which left its mark in the language, culture, infrastructure, and political institutions of the Iberian Peninsula and colonial Spanish America” (Camayd-Freixas 2), has othered the ‘moors’ under a different discourse than that of orientalism. The old battles between ‘Christian and Moors’<sup>37</sup> have determined how the Hispanic world perceives Middle Eastern and North African countries, extending to today’s racist discourses on migration from these areas to Spain.

From their own periphery, Latin American orientalists such as Darío, Tablada and Gómez Carrillo found in the Far East, *el lejano oriente*, an appealing space which they could

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<sup>36</sup> One of the most complete recent works on Orientalism in Latin American literature is the volume edited by Erik Caymad-Freixas entitled *Orientalism and Identity in Latin America: Fashioning the Self and Other from the (Post) Colonial Margin* (2013), from which I discuss Zoila Clark’s and Ivan A. Schulman’s work in this chapter. Another interesting work is Torres-Rodríguez’s “Orientalising Mexico: *Estudios indostánicos* and the Place of India in José Vasconcelos’ *Raza Cosmica*” (2015), which connects with Caymad-Freixas’s discussion of the construction of a cultural link between Asia (mostly China and Japan) and Latin America by Latin American intellectuals, including Octavio Paz.

<sup>37</sup> The most famous Spanish literary text concerning the battles between Christians and Moors is the epic poem *El Cantar del Mio Cid* (ca. 1200), which narrates the battles of the Christian knight Cid Campeador. A study by Svetlana V. Tyutina (2013: 178-197) argues that this text is the “founding paradigm of Hispanic Orientalism.”

use to resist the self-proclaimed superiority of Western man - an orient with which Latin America did not share a history of conflict but with which they could forge a connection through the foundational myth that Amerindians<sup>38</sup> had come from the East (Camayd-Freixas 1). Peripheral orientalism as practiced by Latin American modernist writers is therefore first defined by the distance of both Latin America and the Far East from the European centre, and second by a desire to connect with an 'other' perceived as equal (and, for some, the same).<sup>39</sup> This removes the sense of cultural superiority that characterises the orientalism from the centre described by Said. Latin American modernist travel writers declared themselves different from the French and English modernists in writing in a "spirit of veneration and respect for the Orient" (Gómez Carrillo). In my analysis of Balmori's poems, I will show how the idea of a cultural hierarchy does not completely disappear but is reversed through a sublime idealisation of the Orient (specifically Japan).

As noted, Tinajero, in response to Said, elucidates a new paradigm for understanding Latin American modern orientalism. Her critique of Said's orientalism is mainly directed at its Eurocentrism. She argues that his theory is insufficient to describe Hispanic orientalism for two main reasons. First, she points to a geographical displacement, a shift between centres and peripheries that occurred in Hispanic literary modernism, a literary tradition in the Spanish language that emerged in Latin America, enabling a dialogue between two so-called 'peripheries': Latin America and countries from the Middle and Far East. Second, she identifies a temporal junction in the twentieth century that opened up a dialogue between postcolonial subjects leading to a new perception of what studying the orient means and how it should be carried out. This junction is the emergence of modernity, specifically literary modernism. One of the characteristics of modernist literature - in the French tradition that coined the term - is the stylistic exercise of escapism provoked by a sense of dissatisfaction with the modern world.

It is necessary to clarify at this point that Said's work explains orientalism mainly as a discourse of power that can be traced in various sources, literary and non-literary. Tinajero, on her part, views orientalism in the Latin American context as a modernist literary style that

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<sup>38</sup> The term *indio* accidentally connects the two peripheries through a colonial misunderstanding. Columbus, thinking that he had arrived in India, used the word to refer to the American natives and by (colonial) extension the word *indio* was used to refer to all people colonised by the Spanish empire, including those of the Philippines. Throughout this study, the word *indio* will appear in various texts, usually referring in reductionist terms to the natives of the Philippines.

<sup>39</sup> A foundational essay that addresses the idea of peoples being part of one and only interconnected race, and therefore often used to argue against racism, is Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos's *La Raza Cosmica* (1925).

derived from the appropriation of French writing by key authors such as Théophile Gautier, Pierre Loti and Alphonse de Lamartine by an emerging bourgeoisie in the South American capitals of Santiago and Buenos Aires:

Aquí surgió una nueva burguesía adinerada y elitista, que hizo gala de derroche: copió modelos de París, llámense éstos palacios, salones, lujo, carruajes o moda. Poco a poco fueron copiando estructuras aristocráticas, arquitectónicas o grandes decorados, de moda entonces en París, produciéndose un trasplante de la cultura francesa al Sur del trópico. (Llopesa 1996: 176)

[Here [in South America], a new rich and elitist bourgeoisie emerged that boasted of wasteful spending: copied Parisian models, in the form of palaces, ballrooms, luxury, carriages or fashion. Little by little they began to copy aristocratic structures, architecture and furnishings that were fashionable in Paris at the time, transferring French culture to the South of the tropics.]

Ricardo Llopesa (1996) uses the word “trasplante” [transplant] to talk about the phenomenon of bringing French orientalist culture to “a tropical south” via a bourgeois lifestyle in which the oriental motifs are, in fact, oriental precious metals and stones such as gold, silver, ivory, diamonds and emeralds, translated into a literary aesthetic (178).

Octavio Paz has argued that in Latin American modernism escapism (as a feature of orientalism) constituted an attempt to enter the European modernity that was believed to be temporally ahead. This accords with the longstanding perception of Latin America as a backwards territory situated in an *off-modern* time, always trying to catch up with Europe. Pratt (2002) explains the consequences of this perceived temporal lag between modernity and the periphery in the following terms:

It has been common to assume that “progress” in the periphery has the same meaning as “progress” in the center. The center’s normative interests are served by this equation, but in the periphery, it becomes apparent that “progress” in such senses as “bettering the human condition” or “moving towards greater plenitude” is not the same at all as in the sense of “catching up” or “reproducing what has already happened elsewhere”. The latter teleology, as many critics point out, imposes a permanent identity crisis. (34)

The “permanent identity crisis” that Pratt refers to here has been thoroughly discussed in postcolonial literary studies. It pervades postcolonial literature in the form of a persistent questioning of belonging, nationhood, roots and ethnicity, while also producing new meanings that speak of specific processes of transculturation in the various peripheries.

Pratt usefully comments on the variety of terms that Latin American scholars have come up with to designate the crisis of living an *off-modernity*. Octavio Paz talks about “pseudomodernidad,” José Guillermo Nugent of “contramodernidad” and the Argentinean

scholar Nestor García Canclini, in *Hybrid Cultures* (1995), argues that subjects are “entering and leaving modernity.” Canclini’s dynamic metaphor takes us back to Paz’s idea of entering European modernity with the option of also staying outside it. In this light, it is possible to think of orientalism made in the periphery as encompassing the hegemonic European orientalist mindset, but with a twist. This twist, indicated by the prefixes *pseudo-* or *contra-*, invokes a difference and a resistance that it is dismissed, however, by the negative, Europe-centred prefix *off-*.

The idea that Hispanic modernism imitated French writing - of poets such as Baudelaire (1821-1867), Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Valéry (1871-1945) - as a way to enter European modernity calls for a questioning of the meaning of ‘imitation’ through the framework of postcolonial theory. Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘mimicry’, expressed in his seminal “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” (1994), expands the idea of colonial mimicry from plain imitation to an act of resistance - resonating with the abovementioned prefixes attached to peripheral modernities. Bhabha borrows the term from biology, but for him mimicry is not just a strategy of survival through camouflage; rather, it is an act of mockery, irony and resemblance, which menaces that which is being mimicked by an uncanny version of itself. The power of colonial mimicry lies in how it reveals both desire and ideology in an ambivalent way. First, from the perspective of the coloniser, who attempts to force his image of himself onto the other yet cannot allow that other to become exactly the same. In his most cited sentence, Bhabha expresses this idea of colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed recognizable other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite” (122). Second, from the point of view of the colonised, mimicry ‘writes back’ to the colony, revealing the very ideology projected onto it and its own desire to be transformed by it.

Following Bhabha, when Hispanic poetry is accused of *afrancesamiento* (frenchification), it reveals precisely that it is *not French* but only *French-like*. Latin American modernist writers are not simply reproducing French models, but undermining the (colonising) canon and its power by producing a new literature that questions the ‘original.’ Hispanic modernism is thus an example of transculturation that can be understood through the lens of mimicry’s double articulation: it is modern (assuming this term to refer to the canonical, colonising French literary movement) but it is also *contra-modern*, *pseudo-modern*. Yet, from a nationalist perspective, Filipino poetry that assimilates French, Spanish or Nicaraguan modernist aesthetics is often perceived to stand against Filipino nationalism.

This is an important critique that I will address in more detail in the next section when discussing how Balmori's poetry was received.

Pascale Casanova provides yet another understanding of Hispanic modernism as an example of transculturation through the framework of the World Republic of Letters, explained in the introduction of this study. As noted there, the relationship between centres and peripheries in Casanova's model is dynamic, so that sometimes peripheral literary movements can enter and even set the tone for the centre. Thus, *modernism* was an important avant-garde movement in global Spanish letters that came not from Spain but from Nicaragua through the work of Rubén Darío. According to Casanova, Hispanic modernism can 'enter' the centre of the World Republic of Letters (which, for her, is Paris) by means of an "expropriation of cultural capital":

It is in these terms that I would analyse the advent of modernismo in the Spanish-speaking countries at the end of the 19th century. How to explain the fact that this movement, which turned the entire tradition of Hispanic poetry on its head, could have been dictated by a poet from Nicaragua, on the far reaches of the Spanish colonial empire? Rubén Darío, captivated from boyhood by the literary legend of Paris, stayed in the city in the late 1880s and, logically enough, was enthused by the French symbolist poetry that was just making its mark. He then carried out an astonishing operation, which can only be called an *expropriation of literary capital*: he imported, into Spanish poetry itself, the very procedures, themes, vocabulary and forms looted by the French symbolists. This expropriation was asserted quite explicitly, and the deliberate Frenchification of Spanish poetry, down to the phonemes and syntactic forms, designated 'mental Gallicism'. *The diversion of this capital towards inextricably literary and political ends was not, then, carried out in the passive mode of 'reception', and still less of 'influence', as traditional literary analysis would have it. On the contrary, this capture was the active form and instrument of a complex struggle.* To combat both the political-linguistic dominance of Spain over its colonial empire and the sclerosis that was paralyzing Spanish-language poetry, Darío openly asserted the literary domination exercised by Paris at that time. (Casanova 2005: 88, emphasis added)

Darío's importation of "the very procedures, themes, vocabulary and forms" of French symbolism is heralded by Casanova as an act not of passive "reception" or "influence," but of overt anti-colonial resistance through expropriation. This struggle transculturally surpasses Frenchification by subverting Spain's political, linguistic and cultural domination in Latin America. Significantly, Casanova's argument implies a triangular move rather than a bilateral relation between coloniser and colonised: the strategic use of one centre (France) against another (Spain) in the interests of the periphery (Nicaragua).

Both Bhabha's colonial mimicry and Casanova's expropriation of literary capital help to redefine the idea of imitation by the postcolonial or the peripheral as a process of transculturation that empowers rather than subjugates. Tinajero complements this dynamic further by reflecting explicitly on how orientalising for Latin American writers constituted a plural method of engaging with Latin America, Europe and the Orient:

Para el modernista [latinoamericano] el acto de *orientalizar* no significaba encontrar una respuesta opuesta a los conceptos éticos, morales o estéticos de la sociedad europea. Tampoco se trataba de dar una respuesta al orientalismo europeo finisecular ni mucho menos de imitar a ciegas su producción literaria. Esto lo enfatizó Aníbal González al proponer que los modernistas sabían exactamente lo que hacían cuando en un mismo texto combinaban referencias al Lejano Oriente con aquéllas de las culturas indígenas y al mismo tiempo citaban autores europeos (54). En ese sentido los miembros del movimiento “dialogan” con orientalistas europeos, pero eso no quiere decir que la razón por la cual los primeros se aproximan al Oriente esté basada en ofrecer exclusivamente antagonismos a la visión europea sobre esa parte del mundo. (Tinajero 19, emphasis in text)

[For the [Latin American] modernist the act of *orientalising* did not mean finding an opposite answer to the ethical, moral and aesthetic principles of European society. Neither did it aim at responding to the European orientalism of the fin-de-siècle or at blindly imitating its literary production. This was emphasised by Aníbal Gonzalez's suggestion that modernists knew exactly what they were doing when, in the same text, they combined references to the Far East with ones to indigenous cultures, while at the same time citing European authors. This does not mean, however, that the reason why the members of the movement engaged in a dialogue with the European orientalist was based on an attempt to exclusively antagonise the European vision of that part of the world.]

As this quote suggests, Latin American modernist orientalist knew of European orientalism but did not approach the Orient solely to refute this European discourse. Instead, they incorporated both the European and 'their own' view of the Orient in the form of a transcultural style based on pastiche, cultural exchange and historical recognition.

Tinajero moves from the early Latin American orientalist modernists to a later group of writers that viewed the European orientalist literary imagination (mostly French and English) as fake and pretentious, and followed their impulse to know 'the Orient' beyond its imagination. Juan José Tablada and Enrique Gómez Carrillo travelled to Egypt, Japan and China. Tablada kept a diary during his trips to Japan in the 1900s. In the following excerpt, he comments on the way he perceives texts from the French tradition:

Concluyo de leer por segunda vez la *Madame Chrysanthème* de Loti y a la vez que me encanta los prestigios del delicioso escritor me exaspera la frivolidad de sus juicios, la perfecta incomprensión del verdadero tipo japonés. (qtd. in Tinajero 10)

[I have finished reading Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* for the second time and as much as I love the praise of the delightful writer, the frivolity of his judgments, the perfect incomprehension of the true Japanese exasperates me.]

Tablada is enchanted with Loti's s delightful writing while at the same time critical of him for remaining superficial, frivolous and uncomprehending of the "true Japanese."

The following fragment, published in the Mexican newspaper *La Patria* in 1900, illustrates the mentality and role of these Latin American travel writers as peripheral orientalists:

José Juan Tablada parte mañana para el Japón. El poeta realiza su sueño de toda una juventud... ¡Ve, artista! ¡Ve, escogido!... Estudia y fructifica, y que tu labor acrisolada en la palpación de la más sugestiva de las artes plásticas, porque es soberanamente original, sea simiente fecunda en nuestra tierra... Cuando contemples arrobado flotar en un mar de oro el témpano de nieve del Fusiyama , sueña en el lejano y augusto Citlaltépetl. (qtd. in Tinajero 32)

[Tomorrow, José Juan Tablada will depart for Japan. The poet will accomplish his youthful dream... Go artist! Go, you chosen one! Study and be fruitful, and may your noble work on the most suggestive of plastic arts, because it is profoundly original, be fertile in our land... When, enchanted, you behold a snowflake from Fusiyama floating on a golden sea, dream of the distant and peaceful Citlaltépetl]

The comparison made here between a Japanese and a Mexican volcano establishes a new route from the Far West to the Far East that will serve as fertile soil for a new form of cultural expression. But the directionality of this new form of cultural expression is clear from the newspaper fragment: it is not so much about *them* (the Japanese) as it is about what *we* (Mexicans) can learn from them.

Gómez Carrillo's commentaries on his trip to Asia, published as *De Marsella a Tokyo: Sensaciones de Egipto, la India, la China y el Japón* (1906), illustrate how a neutral location such as the ocean can become the contact zone for cultural exchanges between two travellers.<sup>40</sup> The author was travelling by boat to Egypt when he encountered a Chinese man whom he describes as "no vulgar, un mercader, un banquero, no, ni siquiera un diplomático, sino un sabio chino, un chino doctoral" [not vulgar, not a banker, not even a diplomat, but a wise Chinese man, a doctoral Chinese!] (qtd. in Tinajero 39). This Chinese man spoke various European languages, including Spanish, and was writing a book demonstrating that America had not been 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus but by a Chinese admiral. Interested by this new version of history, Gómez Carrillo continues conversing with him and

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<sup>40</sup> In Chapter 3 of this study I explore, in relation to the work of Paz Mendoza, how travel writing produces a new space for cultural encounters in which orientalist Asian stereotypes are challenged when travellers from different parts of the world engage in conversation and try to explain themselves to each other.

eventually informs his interlocutor that he has discovered that the Chinese and the Mexican calendars are identical, and that the same is the case with most of the religious and philosophical beliefs in ancient China and pre-Columbian Mexico:

la transmigración de las almas, las atribuciones de las divinidades domésticas, los amuletos, la creencia en que el dragón devora al sol en sus eclipses, las reglas monásticas, que son idénticas en la China antigua y en el antiguo Méjico. (qtd. in Tinajero 40)

[The transmigration of souls, the attributions of domestic divinities, the use of amulets, the belief that the dragon eats the sun in its eclipses, monastic rules, they are all identical in ancient China and ancient Mexico]

Once in Egypt, Gómez Carrillo talks to an Egyptian judge and writes the following:

[El Viejo Egipto] no estaba muerto. Los musulmanes y los ingleses han podido dominarlo pero no transformarlo. Un soplo nacional fuerte, bastaría para hacer desaparecer los turbantes y los cascos coloniales. (qtd. in Tinajero 41)<sup>41</sup>

[[The old Egypt] was not dead. The Muslims and the English may have been able to dominate it, but not transform it. A strong gust of nationalism would be enough to make all the turbans and colonial helmets disappear.]

Gómez Carrillo chooses to incorporate the voices of Asian and Middle Eastern people, especially the well-educated, in his travelogue and sees these voices as subverting the master narratives of colonialism. Identification occurs through a perceived shared history with another peripheral oriental.

Julia A. Kushigian, a specialist in Hispanic orientalism whose work precedes and inspired Tinajero's, explains in *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition: In Dialogue with Borges, Paz and Sarduy* (1991) that Latin American orientalist literature prompts an "opening, dialectics and identification with the orient," seen as a "complementary cultural source" (106). Gómez Carrillo's text demonstrates this cultural identification: understanding Mexican pre-Columbian cosmology facilitates comprehending the teleology behind the Chinese horoscope, Mexico and China share cultural and religious artifacts, and Latin America and Egypt can survive their specific histories of colonisation in similar if not identical ways.<sup>42</sup> While Tinajero presents Gómez Carrillo as an example of someone writing

<sup>41</sup> One of the arguments put forward by the Indian scholar Partha Chatterjee (1993) on postcolonial nationalism is that colonial administrations may have dominated the 'material realm,' but never fully penetrated the 'spiritual realm'; this sentiment is echoed in the judge's insistence that "the old Egypt" has survived.

<sup>42</sup> Ania Loomba (1998) stresses that the term "post-colonial" carries different meanings in different places and refers to different temporalities. She further argues that the term "post-colonial" not only fails to reunite, as an umbrella term, the temporal and spatial disjunctures of decolonisation, but also obfuscates important inequalities within the same community:

on the basis of experience (i.e. actually travelling to Japan), Zoila Clark argues that a “negotiation between intentions and expectations, on the one hand, and experience, on the other” takes place, leading to a text that leans towards the first and “fits into his (and the audience’s) expectations of the Japanese,” particularly in its idealised portrayal of Japanese women (114).

As my examples illustrate, peripheral orientalism dismisses the cultural hegemony that Said’s identifies in European orientalism as a colonial discourse. Even if the relationship with the orient expressed by Latin American modernist writers, as examples of peripheral orientalists, continues to be one based on a search for identity and self-definition through the other, this oriental other is perceived not as an inferior but as a cultural counterpart. At the same time, it has become clear that each instance of peripheral orientalism should be looked at carefully to decide whether it merely replicates European orientalism (as a hegemonic discourse) or whether it uses orientalism in a different way. The fact that orientalism is coming from the orient does not automatically make it subversive.

In the next section, I return to the initial questions I posed concerning the type of orientalism that is produced in the Philippines and who it orientalises by looking at Balmori’s poetry. I will argue that his poems show very clearly that peripheral orientalism can stay very close to orientalism as a hegemonic discourse, but can also move further away from it, towards what I will call transcultural orientalism, in which the *other* is located within the *self*. Consequently, transcultural orientalist texts simultaneously articulate orientalised and orientalising perspectives.

### **Filipino Transcultural Orientalism in Balmori’s Poetry**

Jesús Balmori was born in 1886 in Ermita, Manila, which was the centre of Hispanic life during the colonial period. He studied at the Municipal Ateneo and obtained his bachelor diploma in 1900 from San Juan de Letrán College. He worked as a lawyer for a while but dedicated most of his working life to journalism and writing, at a time when Spanish was at its peak as the medium of the Filipino press. Balmori was one of the most active contributors to Spanish newspapers such as *La Vanguardia*, *El Debate* and *Voz de Manila*, as well as the weekly *Revista Filipina*, in which most of the Spanish literary production of the Philippines - poems, stories, essays and novels - was published. Under the pseudonym “Batikuling”

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The term [post-colonialism] is not only inadequate to the task of defining contemporary realities in the once-colonized countries, and vague in terms of indicating a specific period of history, but may also cloud the internal social and racial differences of many societies. (13)

Balmori published numerous pieces of satirical poetry criticising the government and fast-changing Manilean society. Many of the columns he wrote were compiled in a book entitled *El libro de mis Vidas Manileñas*, published in 1928, which Donoso describes as a “truly delicious book about the socio-political life of his time” (2012: XVI).

Besides his work as a journalist, Balmori was also known as a much-lauded poet; he was a competitor and admirer of Manuel Bernabé (1890-1960), another key author in Hispanic Philippine literature. Together, they wrote *Balagtasán*, a type of poetry duel for which they won the Zóbel Prize in 1926. Balmori’s early novels, *Bancarrota de almas* (1910) [Bankrupt souls] and *Se deshojó la flor* (1915) [Leafless flower], criticize the influence of American culture on Filipino society, specifically women. His last novel, *Los Pájaros de fuego, Novela Filipina de la Guerra* [Birds of Fire, A Filipino War Novel], written in 1945, is considered his best work in prose. I will analyze this novel in Chapter 4. Here, to delineate the characteristics of Filipino transcultural orientalism, I focus on three of Balmori’s poems: “Rima Malaya” [Malayan Rhyme], from a collection of poetry Balmori wrote when he was 17 years old entitled *Rimas Malayas* [Malayan Rhymes] (1904), and “Blasón” [Code of arms] and “La Gueisha” [The Geisha], both from *Mi casa de Nipa* [My house of Nipa], published in 1941.

My analysis of “Blasón” [Blazon of Arms] will show how, in this poem, Filipino identity is attached to historical, racial and religious elements in a way that reiterates an orientalist colonial discourse:

“Blasón”

*Soy un bardo indohispano. En mi pecho cristiano  
mi corazón es vaso donde mezclada está  
la sangre de Legazpi, el capitán hispano,  
con la sangre tagala de la hija del Rajah*

*Con el talón hundido en olas y en espumas  
esperé sobre el mar el galeón español  
y España, al encontrarme, besó las áureas plumas  
que en mi frente temblaban como rayos de sol.*

*Era hermosa, era buena, era plena de amores;  
puse a sus pies mis lanzas, mis espigas, mis flores;  
le di mi corazón salvaje y oriental;*

*Y desde entonces va en mi pecho desnudo  
sirviéndome de férreo y de glorioso escudo  
con su idioma divino y su sangre inmortal.*

[I am an Indo-Hispanic poet. In my Christian chest / My heart is a vase in which the blood of Legazpi, the Hispanic captain/mixes with the Tagalog blood of the daughter of the Rahá / With my heel sunken in the foam of the waves, / I awaited on the sea the Spanish galleon / And Spain, when she found me, kissed the golden feathers / That trembled on my forehead like rays of sun / She was beautiful, she was good, she was loving / I laid my spears, my thorns and my flowers at her feet / I gave her my wild oriental heart / Since then I carry her on my naked chest / Serving me as a glorious iron shield / With its divine language and immortal blood.]

“Blason” mobilises several identity attachments. The narrator describes himself as an Indo-Hispanic poet,<sup>43</sup> a mix between the Spanish coloniser Legazpi (the leader of the first Spaniards to arrive in Manila) and the Tagalog daughter of a ‘Rajah.’<sup>44</sup> The poem includes Filipino cultural and racial heritage by recognising elements of pre-Hispanic cultures (Islamic and Tagalog), but privileges the Hispanic elements, as indicated by the contrast between the reference to a named historical Spaniard (Legazpi) and the one to the nameless Tagala, daughter of an unidentified Muslim king (“rajah”). A feminised Spain described as “Hermosa,” “buena” and “plena de amores” [beautiful, good and loving] arrives to the coast of the Philippines, where an expectant ‘native’ surrenders to her, putting down his weapons (spears, thorns) and, most remarkably, giving her his “salvaje corazón oriental” [wild oriental heart]. The wild heart may refer to a heart wild with love or to the literal wildness of the ‘native,’ thus orientalisising him through a colonial discourse that justified its ‘mission’ as one of civilizing the ‘wild.’<sup>45</sup> Either way, the voluntary act of surrendering the narrator’s weapons and heart to Spain dismisses the violence of the first colonial encounter and suggests that the speaker’s attachment to Spanish colonialism is a positive one. This suggestion is reinforced by the reference to the way the narrator now carries Spain and its “divine language” and “immortal blood” like a shield.

The retelling of Filipino history proposed in this poem contrasts greatly with how official history relates the arrival of early colonisers from Spain: Ferdinand Magellans (1480-1521) in Cebu and Manuel Lopez de Legazpi (1503-1572) in Manila. Having survived the majority of men that participated in the first expedition to circumnavigate the globe under the command of Sebastian El Cano, Magellan arrived on the island of Cebu in 1521. Shortly

<sup>43</sup> Filipinos identify themselves as belonging to the Malay peoples, which also populated Indonesia and Malasia; they often use the short form ‘indo.’

<sup>44</sup> In the pre-Hispanic Philippines, most of the chieftains were called Rajah, the Arab term for ‘king.’ Islam was the most widespread religion and its terminology was used for many elements of government. See Isaac Donoso’s “El islam en las letras Filipinas” (2007).

<sup>45</sup> The idea of colonisation as a moral mission was rapidly adopted among religious orders, for which it became missionary work.

after, he was killed in the battle of Mactan against the Malayan chief Lapu-Lapu, who had refused to be converted to Christianity. Later expeditions arrived to Manila, where Rajah Sulayman (1558-1575) ruled. Suleyman resisted subjugation to Legazpi and waged a war against the Spanish. In the Philippines, both Lapu-Lapu and Sulayman are iconic figures of resistance against the Spanish.

The description of the first colonial encounter in Balmori's poem dismisses its violence, praising instead what it has produced: a new-born Filipino<sup>46</sup> who has inherited Spanish "immortal blood" and the "divine language" that allows him to write this poem. The opening line of "Blasón" recognises the hybrid identity of the Filipino poet as Indo-Hispanic but what follows sees the Indo part as surrendered to Spain and glorifies only the Spanish part of his heritage. The indigenous man is reduced to the recipient of an 'oriental heart' that is willingly offered to the coloniser. Thus, this poem stands as an example of peripheral orientalism that sees the colonised repeat the colonial discourse.<sup>47</sup>

The second poem I want to analyse is "Rima Malaya," contained in one of Balmori's earliest poetry collections entitled *Rimas Malayas* (1904). Donoso (2012) describes the collection as a key text in Filipino modernism. I will read Balmori's appropriation of European and Hispanic modernism as an example of transcultural orientalism. "Rima Malaya" describes a romantic scene; the male speaker of the poem tells how he secretly enters the chamber of his beloved and persuades her to run away with him:

"Rima Malaya" (1904)

*Era la noche tropical de oriente  
Alumbrada por una luna soñolienta  
Brillaban fugaces mil relámpagos  
Y el trueno retumbaba con violencia  
Mudo el jardín, las aves dormitaban  
En sus nidos de plumas y hojas  
Y las auras calladas susurraban  
Girando entre los lirios y las rosas  
Con pie dudoso y vacilantes manos  
Trepé la verja de dorados hilos  
El céfiro traíame en sus alas  
El trémulo rumor de sus suspiros.*

<sup>46</sup> It was only after colonisation that the word 'Filipino,' after the Spanish King Felipe, was used to refer to the indigenous peoples of the islands.

<sup>47</sup> One explanation for the glorification of Spain and Spanish in this poem could be that, at the time it was written, in 1941, over forty years had passed since the US became the new coloniser. Most Hispano-Filipino writers resisted the Americanisation of the Philippines as another form of colonialism and attached themselves to their Hispanic heritage, especially the language, as a form of resistance (Donoso 2012).

[It was the tropical night of the orient / Illuminated by a somnolent moon / A thousand fleeting lightning bolts were shining in the sky / thunder resounded violently / Mute was the garden, the birds were asleep / In their nests of leaves and feathers / And quietly the wind whispered / Twirling around the lilies and the roses. / With doubtful foot, hesitant hands / I climbed the fence of golden threads / The zephyr brought me in his wings / The tremulous murmur of her sighs.]

The opening stanza locates the action of this poem in an abstract oriental space referred to as “la noche tropical de oriente” [the tropical night of the orient]. Although it is possible to infer that the narrator is referring to the Philippines from the poem’s title, it is not until its last stanzas (11 and 12) that local Filipino elements appear:

*Es decir, sí, me iré pero contigo  
Allá al bosque oriental de verdes ramas  
Donde las mayas rimen nuestro idilio  
Donde te aguarda un lecho de sampagas.  
[...]  
¡ Oh! vente, Vente Carmencita mía,  
Si no sabes amar, yo allí á tus plantas  
Cantándote el vals de los Kundimans  
Coronaré tu frente de champakas.*

[I mean, yes, I will go but with you / Back to the oriental forest of green branches / Where the *mayas* rhyme our idyll / Where a bed of *sampagas* awaits you. [...]  
Oh! Come, come with me my beloved Carmencita, / If you do not know how to love, I'll be there at your feet / Singing the waltz of the *Kundimans* / I will crown your forehead with *champakas*.]

In the eleventh stanza, the narrator suggests running away to an ‘oriental forest’ populated by “*mayas*,” a general term for small birds such as sparrows used in the Philippines, where the lovers may rest on a bed of “*sampagas*,” the national flower of the Philippines, and the narrator will entertain his lover by singing the vals of the *Kundiman*, a traditional Filipino love song, and crowning her with “*champakas*,” a type of magnolia from South East Asia. Significantly, the tropical forest to which the lovers want to run away is identifiably in the Philippines, whereas the image of the garden that opens the poem is constructed with non-indigenous elements and metaphors: lilies and roses, feathered “*aves*” (the generic name for birds, fowl) and Zephyr, the God of the West wind in Greek mythology.

The central part of the poem describes how the narrator/lover climbs up to a balcony from which he walks towards the room of his beloved. The poem does not identify her home as a palace, a castle, a tower or a Nipa house, but the narrator does explain that to get to the room where his “white” beloved (holding a Spanish name *Carmencita*) was peacefully

sleeping he had to cross one thousand rooms, surrounded by the quietness of sleep, darkness and shadows:

*Llegué al balcón; saltando para adentro  
Crucé indeciso mil salas en penumbras,  
Todo sueño alrededor y calma,  
Todo tinieblas, sombras y mis sombras.  
Era su lecho, dormía recostada  
medio vestida aún, blanca y hermosa,  
Agitaban su seno los ensueños  
Y sonreía su entreabierto boca.*

[I reached the balcony, jumping inside / I crossed undecided a thousand rooms in the shadows / All around me was asleep and quiet / All darkness, shadows and my own shadows. / It was her bed, she slept lying down / Half-dressed still, white and beautiful / Her chest was being shaken by her dreams / And she smiled with her mouth half-open]

This section of the poem invokes elements of the western romantic tradition, such as the garden, the white, princess-like character in her secluded bedroom and the gothic-like description of the dark dwelling. The landscape and characters are richly described using humanising qualifiers that make nature seem very much alive: fleeting thunder, doubtful feet, hesitant hands, a trembling murmur, the golden threads of the fence, a divine perfume, a virginal smell, gigantic butterflies, cruel madness. The combination of themes (lovers eloping), settings (the garden versus the tropical forest), characters (a white princess-like figure, flowers, songs and humanised nature) and the dense, lyrical use of the Spanish language make this poem, I want to argue, an example of transcultural orientalism, where the indigenous elements are not subsumed to the European ones, as in “Blasón,” but presented at the same level: they are all part of an idealised fantasy world. More importantly, the indigenous forest is preferred over the western garden, as it is where the lovers flee to. The poem ends with a distinctly transcultural image: the “white” princess and the presumably indigenous narrator united in the forest. She, the foreigner/coloniser is brought into the world of the indigenous/colonised. In contrast with “Blasón,” in which the Indo-Hispanic poet/narrator begins by bringing up his transcultural heritage only to dissolve it into the glorification of Spain, “Rima Malaya” shows the two cultures coming together while remaining distinct. This emphasises dynamic cultural interaction - potentially leading to neoculturation - over cultural erasure (deculturation) and cultural appropriation (acculturation).

The practice of modernism in the Philippines was criticised, as it was in Latin America, by contemporary critics who considered the dwelling on romantic words an

imitation of foreign (French) poetry and therefore an anti-nationalist gesture. For some, this type of baroque poetry betrayed the local in favor of the foreign, demonstrating assimilationist colonial practices. W. E. Retana, one of the few Spanish literary critics who wrote about the Philippines in the early twentieth century, points out that the abuse of lilies and violets by some Filipino poets was regrettable since these flowers are not native to the Philippines: “it is as if the Filipinos find the Flora of their country unworthy” (Retana qtd. in Donoso 6). Retana’s critique does not, however, apply to this poem, where the indigenous Filipino landscape is chosen over the western garden, but also transculturated through the coming together of the lovers in it. Moreover, Balmori’s literary *indigenismo*, displayed in the incorporation of vernacular Malay words (*sampaguitas*, *champakas*, *mayas*, *kundiman*) into a Spanish poem, produces a very specific transcultural Filipino identity. In “Blason”, it is the native who becomes Spanish; here, it is the princess-like figure that is, to an extent, indigenised by the narrator.

Retana, however, insists on highlighting the foreign aspects instead of the local ones in Hispano-Filipino works. In the following acerbic quote, he explicitly attacks the superficial and “excessive modernism” of the young Balmori:

Á Jesús Balmori, uno de los poetas más jóvenes, le incluyo entre los que más llegarían á valer; pero el ataque de *modernismo fulminante* que padece no sé si le dejará seguir viviendo. Balmori no ha salido de su patria, y, sin embargo, vive mentalmente en París, en el París misterioso, trágicamente bohemio, del Barrio Latino... Balmori quiere a toda costa ser un parisino enfermo, y enfermo se ha puesto, por pura espiritualidad, porque no concibe ser poeta si no es muriéndose de tristeza, de tristeza parisina. [...] He cargado la mano de la censura en Balmori, porque Balmori tiene el alma de poeta, vale, y se está tirando a matar á consecuencia de haberse creado a sí mismo un ambiente falso y antifilipino; y la crítica justa debe pedirle cuentas de tan sensible aberración. En Balmori luchan en espíritu, que es el de un buen patriota, y el cerebro, que es el de un parisense de doublé: y como pone su voluntad al servicio del cerebro, resulta que muchas de sus composiciones son... un verdadero dolor. (qtd. in Donoso 17-18)

[To Jesús Balmori, one of the youngest poets who I would add to my list of most promising; however, the attack of fulminant modernism that he suffers from may not let him live long. Balmori has never left his country, but mentally he lives in Paris, in the mysterious, tragically bohemian Paris of the Quartier Latin... Balmori wants, above all things, to be a sick Parisian and thus he has become sick by virtue of pure spirituality, because he cannot conceive the idea of being a poet without dying of sadness, of Parisian sadness. [...] I have censured Balmori because he has the soul of a poet, and yet, he is throwing all his talent away as a consequence of having created himself in a false environment, one that is anti-Filipino, and a fair critique must demand payment for such a profound aberration. In Balmori fight the spirit of a good patriot and the brain of a doubled Parisian; since he puts his will at the service of his brain, many of his compositions are... a true pain.]

Retana's (unfair) critique derives from his conviction that literature in the Filipino Hispanic tradition should be conceived of not only as an aesthetic practice but also as a political tool to be used in the imagination of a new independent nation. Modernist writing in Spanish in the Philippines should move, according to Retana, towards the configuration of *filipinidad*: the idealisation of the Philippines based on a discourse that served political and national assertion as well as cultural expression.

In my reading, Balmori's poetry does not fully subsume the "spirit of a good patriot" to the "brain of a doubled Parisian," but rather creates its own form of *filipinidad* by combining the two and having them inflect each other in a process of transculturation. The cultural syncretism of indigenous and foreign motifs, and of literary styles (Hispanic and French modernism), exemplifies what I call Filipino orientalist transculturation. I thus contend that Filipino modernism produces a form of peripheral orientalism that is both aesthetic *and* political; the exoticisation of the Philippines responds *not only* to an attitude of literary escapism *but also* to a desire of national affirmation. Balmori, like Darío, is "expropriating cultural capital," as Casanova (2005) puts it, to create something new. If Darío's modernism was a form of resistance against both European modernism and the Spanish lack of a comparable literary form by a Central American author, Balmori's transcultural orientalism can be considered as the Filipino expropriation of European and Latin American literary modernism in the service of an emergent nationalism.

Donoso explains his views on the nationalist function of Filipino modernist literature in Spanish as follows:

En el caso de Filipinas, la estética del modernismo será el vehículo fundamental en la creación de una estética propia que contenga in ideario político basado en la idea de nación. El creador modernista filipino, no necesitaba la evasión a paraísos exóticos y orientales, es decir, *no necesitaba crear un Orientalismo desde Oriente*. El Modernismo, en el Archipiélago, idealiza un imaginario filipino y lo convierte en un elemento de afirmación nacional en el proceso de construcción del propio nacionalismo. (Donoso, XVIII, emphasis added)

[In the case of the Philippines, modernist aesthetics will be the fundamental vehicle for the creation of a particular aesthetic containing a political ideal based on the idea of the nation. The modern Filipino creator did not need to escape to exotic oriental paradises, that is, *he did not need to create an Orientalism from the Orient*. Modernism, in the archipelago, idealises a Filipino imagination and transforms it into an element of national affirmation in the process of constructing its own nationalism]

While, like Donoso, I understand Filipino modernism as having its own modernist aesthetics, I do not agree with his negation of the necessity for an "Orientalism from the Orient" as a form of imaginative escapism. Even if Balmori, who lived in the Philippines, does not have to

‘imagine’ the Philippines as a realm to escape to, he still represents Filipino nature and culture as exotic when referring to “a bed of *sampagas*” and the “tropical night of the orient.” In addition, there is Balmori’s undeniable orientalisation of the self, revealed in the profound attachment to a colonial discourse displayed in “Blason.” I would argue, then, that Balmori’s poetry shows that there was, at this time, indeed a need for an “Orientalism from the Orient,” but that this orientalism is not necessarily a straight imitation of European orientalism; in certain cases, as in “Rima Malaya,” it appears as a transcultural orientalism that, like the modernism hailed by Donoso, acts as a national affirmation and forms the basis for a new Filipino nationalism.

The last poem by Balmori I will discuss in this section shows another aspect of transcultural orientalism by abandoning self-orientalisation and drawing on Japanese and European elements to make visible the Orient as a dramatised representation rather than as objectively described. Balmori, like some of the Latin American and European travellers mentioned earlier in this chapter (Loti, Tablada, Gómez Carrillo), found in Japan a source of inspiration for modernist exoticism, yet their motivations are different. As noted earlier, in contrast to the writings about Japan produced by French authors, which were designed to stimulate the imagination, Tablada and Gómez Carrillo were driven by a desire to ‘truly’ understand the Japanese (and other orientals), although, as Clark notes, they were also heavily influenced by their preconceived images of them and had to negotiate between their expectations and experiences. Balmori’s position with regards to the orientalisation of Japan is different again. On the one hand, as a writer, he also uses idealised stereotypes (national symbols such as golden temples, geishas, cherry blossoms) to develop a positive image of Japan; on the other hand, like many Filipinos in the period leading up to WWII, he admires the perceived strength and consistency of the Japanese sense of nationhood, which he feels is lacking in the Philippines.<sup>48</sup>

I will briefly discuss a fragment from Balmori’s novel *Los Pájaros de fuego* (1945), to be analysed in more detail in Chapter 4, to show how the admiration for Japan on the part of the Hispano-Filipino elite (which the novel ends up portraying as naïve through its account of the Japanese invasion of Manila in 1943) is expressed and how it contrasts with the transcultural orientalism I will identify in the last poem I will look at, “La Gueisha.” The main character of the novel, Don Lino Robles, professes a blind admiration for Japan (and Japanese women) based on a trip he took to the country. At one point, he talks to his brother

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<sup>48</sup> I will elaborate on Balmori’s attitude towards Japan and his views concerning Filipino nationalism in Chapter 4.

Ramón, who is skeptical of the ‘superiority’ of Japan that his brother defends. Don Lino tells Ramón about his beloved Haruko San, a woman he met in Japan after the death of his first wife but had to leave in Kyoto when he returned to the Philippines:

—¡No! Se quedó en su casa de papel, como una muñeca perdida entre los cedros y los criptomeros de Kyoto. Es de allá. Se llama Haruko San. Bella como un templo de oro, suave como la seda y los pétalos de las flores del cerezo. Me hizo feliz con su amor tímido y reverente. Esas mujeres saben amar. Si alguna vez necesitas a tu lado una mujer amante, ¡búscate una japonesa!

[...] De tarde en tarde, recibo cartas de ella. Aún me sigue siendo fiel, me quiere, no me olvida. El día en que la dejé cayó ante mí llorando silenciosamente, abrazada a mis rodillas, besándome los pies. ¡Pobre Haruko San! ¡Pobre "musmé" dulce y enamorada! La dejé varios miles de "yens" y la promesa de volver muy pronto... (*Los Pájaros de fuego* 126)

[No! She stayed in her paper house, like a doll lost among the cedars and the Japanese ciders of Kyoto. She is from there. Her name is Haruko San. Beautiful like a golden temple, soft as silk and the petals of the flowers of the cherry blossoms. She made me happy with her timid and reverential love. Those women know how to love. If you ever need a loving woman by your side, look for a Japanese!

[...] Every so often I receive letters from her. She is still faithful to me, she loves me and does not forget me. The day that I left her she fell on me, crying quietly around my knees, kissing my feet. Poor Haruko San! Poor “musme” sweet and loving! I left her various thousands of “yens” and the promise of returning soon...]

In this passage, the beauty of the Japanese woman is compared to that of a golden temple, to the softness to a doll and to the petals of cherry blossoms. All these comparisons evoke, in an idealising manner, national symbols and archetypes of Japanese culture. However, the reference to the money that Don Lino gave Haruko San, combined with the promise of returning, may be read as a critique (in material terms) of such idealisation. The implication is that she will only remain faithful as long as the money lasts and if his return does not take too long. Three chapters later, Don Lino receives a letter in which Haruko San explains that she has married someone else and is about to give birth. At this point in the novel begins the collapse of the idealised image of Japan, which will be completed by the savage attack of the Japanese troops on Manila in 1943.

The twenty-ninth poem in Balmori’s collection *Mi Casa de Nipa* (1941) presents another example of transcultural orientalism, this time by appropriating the figure of the Geisha:

## “La Gueisha”

*Es de noche, es un salón, y son las once.  
 Suena un gong como un violón de viejo bronce.  
 Se descorre la cortina de oro y grana,  
 Y en la escena que simula un nuevo Oriente  
 Se adelanta quedamente, lentamente,  
 La muñeca de esmaltada porcelana.*

*Se dijera un gran aroma de resedas  
 Toda envuelta entre sus oros y sus sedas  
 Bajo un ritmo musical que sube y sube.  
 ¿Es un ave? ¿Es una flor? No es flor ni es ave,  
 Es la Gueisha langorosa, dulce y suave,  
 Como el paso tembloroso de una nube*

*Va a bailar. Es una danza misteriosa.  
 Es un vuelo, es el capullo de una rosa  
 Que a la luz de los faroles se hace flor.  
 No se pueden ver sus pies bajo sus galas  
 Solo mueve sus dos manos blancas alas,  
 Blancos remos de un ensueño bogador.*

*Bajo el triunfo de la música que rima  
 Todo el baile es una grave pantomima.  
 Y la Gueisha soberana y tornasol.  
 A los sonos de las flautas, sonriente.  
 Se levanta en espirales de serpiente.  
 O se dobla como un loto bajo el sol.*

[...]

[The night has fallen, inside the room, the clock strikes eleven / The sound the gong is heard resonating like a double bass old bronze / The gold and red curtain are drawn / And on the scene that simulates a new Orient / Comes forward quietly and slowly/ The doll of varnished porcelain.

She smells like the great aroma of mignonettes / All wrapped in gold and silk / The music rises in crescendo/ Is it a bird? It is a flower? It is not a flower, not a bird, / It is the geisha, languid, sweet, soft, / Like the flickering walk of a cloud.

She is going to dance. It is a mysterious dance. / She can fly, she is like the rosebud / That blooms when illuminated by some lantern / Her feet cannot be seen under her clothes / She only moves her hands like white wings / like the white paddles of a sailing dream.

Under the triumph of rhyming music, / The whole dance is a serious pantomime / And the Geisha, sovereign sunflower / Smiling at the sounds of flutes / Rises like spirals of a snake / Or bends her body like a lotus in the sun.]

The poem talks about an evening performance in a theatre. The main character of the “pantomime” is a Geisha, who, through a dance, tells the audience about her (fatal) love story. The Geisha’s fiancé - her *prometido* - has departed in search of “fame” and “fortune” while she, like Penelope, waits for his return. However, when he does not return, the Geisha

sees no other ending to her sorrow than to die. The poem concludes with the vanishing of the flute music, the sound of the gong and the gold and red curtains being closed again.

In the opening stanza, we are told by the narrator that the stage “simula un nuevo oriente” [simulates a new orient]. The drama, therefore, does not take place in Japan, in the Philippines or in Spain, but in a simulated or staged orient in which the Geisha performs (or is performed) accompanied by music. The Geisha is compared in her movements to a porcelain doll, a snake and a lotus. In the third stanza, it is announced that she is going to dance “una danza misteriosa” [a mysterious dance] in which she twists like a (dangerous) snake or bends with the flexibility of a lotus in the sun. The narrator then asks the reader to interpret her movements in order to find out what her story is:

*¿Qué nos dice en sus solemnes movimientos?  
¿Qué nos cuentan sus menudos pasos lentos?  
¿Qué oriental historia es esta de la danza,  
Que al abrir la media luna de sus ojos  
Se dijera traspasada en los abrojos  
Como pobre mariposa su esperanza?*

*¿Es tristeza? ¿Es alegría lo que siente?  
¿Qué misterio perfumado del Oriente,  
¿Qué divino mago rito religioso  
Desenvuelve como en ondas de un aroma  
Esta flor, esta mujer, esta paloma,  
Con el ritmo de su cuerpo cadensioso?*

[...]

(*Mi Casa de Nipa*, 127-8)

[What does she tell us in her solemn movements? / What do her slow steps tell us? / What oriental story is there in this dance? / When she opened the crescent moon of her eyes / her hope was pierced in the thistles/ like a little butterfly/  
Is it sadness? Is joy what she feels? / What scented mystery of the East / What divine magician, religious rite / Develops in fragrant waves / This flower, this woman, this dove, / With the rhythm of her steady body?]

Only the music will tell you what her story is, “el tan-tan os lo dirá,” says the first verse of the seventh stanza. The rhetorical questions written in the present tense suggest that the narrator knows the story and is retelling it to the reader while also asking the reader to interpret it. The poem explicitly includes the reader by using the first-person pronoun “nos”: “¿Qué nos dice en sus solemnes movimientos?” [what is *she telling us* in her solemn movements?] (my emphasis). It continues: “¿Qué oriental historia es esta de la danza? [...] ¿Es tristeza? ¿Es alegría lo que siente? [...] ¿Qué misterio perfumado del Oriente?” [What

oriental story is behind the dance? Is it sadness? Is it happiness what she feels? What fragrant mystery of the Orient?]. In referring to her as a mystery of the Orient, the narrator reveals his own doubts about interpreting her movements and also evokes a familiar orientalist motif, that of the Asian as inscrutable and mysterious. The mystery, however, is in the end not very enigmatic, as the Geisha is the protagonist of an archetypal narrative (not specific to the Orient) of waiting in vain for the return of one's great love. In this way, the reader of the poem is prompted to reflect on his or her own investment in orientalist motifs.

The elements that Balmori juxtaposes in this simulated orient are oriental and occidental - the gong, the porcelain doll, the snake, the lotus, the Geisha and the mysterious dance versus the double bass, the rose and the Penelope-like story. At the same time, the framing narrative of the poem's speaker viewing the performance brings to the fore the artificiality of the oriental pantomime and reveals the ability of the author to braid together the cultural elements that constitute the "new orient" into a scene that does not aspire to be authentically Japanese but only playfully so.

Here, unlike in the other two poems, Balmori's transcultural orientalism does not refer to the history of colonisation affecting the Filipino self. Instead, the poet looks to *another orient* as a source of inspiration, while also thematising orientalism and playing with the expectations it fosters in the reader. In the end, "La Gueisha" does not orientalise Japan in a hegemonic way, as "Blason" does with the Philippines, or show aspects of the Philippines (sampagas, mayas, Kundiman songs) and the West (the white princes and the castle) coming together as a way of achieving national affirmation, as happened in "Rima Malaya." Instead, "La Gueisha" is an example of a transcultural orientalism that works through playfully combining elements from Japanese and Western culture in order to critique orientalism itself as an artificial mode of stereotyping and othering.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have conceptualised orientalism as a hegemonic discourse (on the basis of Said's work), as an expropriated modernist literary style emerging from the peripheries (using Tinajero) and, in Balmori's poetry, as a transcultural mode capable of critiquing colonialism and orientalism itself. Balmori's poems incorporate the 'native' and 'the foreign' (whether Spanish, Malay, Muslim or Japanese), and engage with the received ideologies of East and West in order to imagine a new Philippines. In this, they go beyond Donoso's exclusively nationalist vision, which, he argues, does not require an "Orientalism from the Orient." Elements of orientalism are indeed perceptible in Balmori's exoticisation of local

nature and their idealisation of the Spanish colonial influence. Yet this does not mean that Balmori merely reiterates orientalism as a hegemonic (European) discourse. As my analysis of the poems has shown, orientalising the Philippines or Japan from within Asia can lead to a new vision of the orient. Through a process of transculturation, the oriental (real or imagined) Filipino landscape becomes a trope of national and historical affirmation. Seeing the island of Mindanao as a “Moorish princess,” as the opening quote of this chapter does, is both a symptom of poetic exoticisation derived from the influences of French and Hispanic literary modernism, and a way of making visible the historical Muslim influence on the Philippines that marks it as a transcultural realm rather than a timeless oriental fantasy world.

The work of Balmori, I contend, weaves a complex network of significations. Cultural objects and symbols that belong to the East and the West, and that together constitute his received cultural capital, are mixed, re-interpreted and conveyed from different perspectives to affirm the transculturation of Hispano-Filipino culture. Unlike the Latin American peripheral orientalist described by Tinajero, who attempted to ‘truly’ understand another Orient through travel writing, Balmori’s approach to Japanese culture does not respond to a necessity of knowing or a desire to establish an intercultural dialogue, but constitutes an act of expropriating its figures (specifically the geisha) for his own literary experimentation, which ultimately aims to articulate a new transcultural Filipino national identity. While in his poetry the various cultural attachments that constitute Filipino transculturation tend to be depicted as harmoniously entangled, as in “Rima Malaya,” Balmori’s novel *Los Pájaros de fuego* (1945), which will be further discussed in Chapter 4, highlights the dangers of looking to other cultures for models of national becoming.

The work of Adelina Gurrea, which I will analyse in the next chapter, also relies on a form of transcultural orientalism, but instead of orientalising the Philippines (in various ways) from the Philippines, as Balmori does, she looks at the Philippines, where she grew up, from Spain, where she lived most of her life. Gurrea’s work, in bringing together orientalism with the notions of memory and nostalgia, offers another perspective on the lingering and competing influences of American and Spanish colonialism, as well as an account of experiences of transculturation - specifically the dynamic interaction of indigenous and Catholic beliefs - in the rural Philippines.