# Women's Magazines in English from 1920 to 1972: Instruments of American Hegemony

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*Using Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this paper discusses how women's magazines in English, specifically those that were published from 1920 to 1972, served as tools for the subjugation and cooptation of Filipino women towards accepting American colonial rule, and consequently, the ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy. While these magazines did show, during the early years of American colonization, some potential for advancing the feminist cause, they, on the whole, affirmed the dominant patriarchal and capitalist beliefs, values, and way of life in their covers, editorial contents and advertisements.*

Since they first appeared in the Philippines in the 1920s, women's magazines in English have been avidly read by women of diverse ages and socio-economic and educational backgrounds, who apparently relish them not only for the information but also (perhaps more so) for the glamour, glitz and fantasy that they offer. For a minimal amount (P35 for newsprint magazines and P125 for the glossy ones) women can retreat every week or every month into a glittering world peopled by models, beauty queens, socialites and showbiz personalities. They can lose themselves in advertisements that feature the latest whitening, slimming or waxing product; articles revealing the beauty secrets of the current glamour icons; romantic stories set in exotic locations featuring eccentric playboys or the children of the royalty; and columns dishing out personal, professional or legal advice.

Over the years, the publication of women's magazines has become a thriving and highly competitive industry. Currently, there seems to be a proliferation of magazines catering to different groups of female readers: from magazines for preteens like ***Meg, Teen Trends, Seventeen, Candy, Chalk, Mod Jr.*** and ***Young Star;*** to those for yuppies like ***Mega, Preview, Metro*** and ***Cosmopolitan;*** to magazines for housewives and working mothers like ***Good Housekeeping*** and ***Metro Working Mom.***

Because women's magazines have become such ubiquitous media of entertainment, looking into the reasons for their sustained appeal throughout these years presents itself as a necessary and challenging area for academic inquiry. Further, given these publications' reliance on standard formulas for commercial success, it is important to understand what role these magazines play in women's socialization into their gender roles and in the formation of their self-images.

This paper seeks to contribute to these two strands of scholarly inquiry about women's magazines by conducting an analysis of Filipino women's magazines published during the period 1920 – 1972. In particular, this paper discusses 1) the origins of women's magazines in the second decade of American colonial rule, 2) their crucial role in the subjugation and cooptation of women in accepting American colonial rule and 3) the manner in which they have been used as vehicles for expressing both acquiescence and resistance to the dominant capitalist ideology. From a broader perspective, this paper attempts to demonstrate how popular culture, which includes women's magazines, colluded with the other ideological apparatuses (such as the family, the Church and the educational system) to mold the outlook and way of life of generations of Filipino women, in a manner so subtle that the Filipino women themselves have, wittingly or unwittingly, conspired in their own subjugation by giving their consent to the continued domination by the ruling capitalist ideology.

In its analysis of the role of women's magazines in American colonial rule, this study employs Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Gramsci uses the term hegemony to refer to "a condition in process in which a dominant class (in alliance with other classes or class factions) does not merely rule society but leads it through the exercise of moral and intellectual leadership" (Storey 1993: 124). According to Gramsci, for a ruling class to be able to dominate and to continue its domination over the subjugated group (the masses), it should be able to convince the latter that the existing social order is beneficial for them and that therefore, the leaders deserve to stay in power. Hegemony explains why, despite the presence of exploitation and oppression in society, there is "a high degree of consensus"

(Storey 1993: 124) among members of society.

Hegemony posits that consent and consensus are not just "imposed from above," nor do they "emanate from below." Rather, they are the product of a constant struggle between the dominant and subjugated groups. Because hegemony involves a constant struggle, it affords space for resistance and allows opposing views to be articulated and even to become part of the dominant ideology.

Gramsci also emphasizes that ideology is not merely a matter of ideas; it also has a material and institutional dimension that manifests in the concrete, practical aspects of daily life – from the daily activities, to the ways people relate to one another, to their modes of behavior and ways of viewing life. Ideology is so inextricably tied up with social practice that the people themselves hardly think of questioning the underlying assumptions of such social practices. They are so steeped in the dominant ideology and accept its unstated assumptions and beliefs as "common sense," because these appear to be true and unassailable or beyond questioning.

The power of hegemony is particularly evident in culture, especially popular culture, because it is so pervasive and exerts direct influence on the consciousness of their "consumers." Along these lines, this study contends that magazines, which are part of popular culture, are not simply an innocuous entertainment form. Rather, they are being used by the ruling class – whether the foreign colonizers or the dominant native class in society – to win the consent or support of the subjugated classes so that they themselves collude wittingly or unwittingly in their own subjugation. More specifically, this study explicates how women's magazines functioned as hegemonic tools during, and after, the years of American colonial rule in the Philippines.

## Magazines in the American Regime: Sites for Negotiating Women's Rights

The American conquest of the Philippines, which was achieved through the signing of the Treaty of Paris between the US and Spain on December 10, 1898, did not only involve the physical occupation of the islands. It also included the launching of a massive and systematic campaign to erode resistance against,

and to condition the Filipinos to accept, the new colonial power.

After a brief military rule, the Americans established a civilian form of government and conducted a massive program of pacification to systematically indoctrinate and win the support of the Filipinos for American culture and way of life. The public school system was instituted and the English language was adopted as the medium of instruction. Consequently, there was an influx of American-authored books on history, literature, economics, politics, the arts and culture. The importation of Hollywood films, pop songs, musicals and other popular forms further propagated the American way of life among the Filipinos, who quickly learned to imitate and accept the culture of their new colonial masters. The dizzying array of American goods and products that flooded the local market completed the indoctrination efforts of the new colonizers.

Several women's magazines came out during this period. ***The Woman's Journal***, whose maiden issue came out in July 1920, was published by the Philippine Journal of Education Commission. A single issue cost P.35 centavos while a year's subscription was P3.00. In 1933, ***The Woman's Journal*** was cited, together with ***The Woman's Outlook***, by Jesus Valenzuela as " one of the two outstanding women's publications" (Valenzuela 1933: 174). ***The Woman's Journal*** was edited by four women: Paz Marquez Benitez, Trinidad Fernandez, Pura Escurdia de Buenaflor and Flora Amosanto de Ilagan. *(Women's Journal, April and July 1920, Vol, 1 No. 1 and 2* cited in Nabong 1977). In 1933, its editor was a lawyer, Miss Estela Romualdez, but the moving spirit behind it was Sofia de Veyra. It was later renamed ***Woman's Home Journal*** and tackled a variety of topics of general interest – the home, education, legislation, the arts and other miscellaneous topics (Valenzuela 1933).

Its July 1920 issue's editorial contents included "The Filipino Child's Concept of God" by Isidoro Panlasigui, "The Training of Future Parents" by Honorio Poblador, "Social Work in the US" by Anastacia Giron, "Presentation.... A Poem" by F.M. Maramag, "The Sequel" by an anonymous author, the conclusion of *Bachelor's Romance*, a serialized romantic novel and "Confidences" by Modesta N. Mapa. A separate section entitled

"Child Training and Care" had articles on "Baby's Colic," "More Stories for our Children," "School Dresses for the Junior," "Dainty Underwear" and "Baby's Wardrobe." It had a section on " Home Economics and Management," "Club Notes," a feature on the Settlement House of the Asociacion de Damas Filipinas, "A Few Notes on Marriage" by Tarcila Malabanan de Katigbak and "Women's and Children's Fashions" by Pura Escurdia. There was also a personality column entitled "Interesting People" which featured Librada Avelino and Anastacia Giron, "Odds and Ends" and "Young People's Page."

Its advertisements included well-known American products like Libby's Sweetened Condensed Milk, Chase and Sanborn Coffee, Community Silverware, Wear Ever Aluminum Cookware, American Hardware and Plumbing Company on Echague St., popular restaurants like Smile's Kitchen and Tom Dixie Kitchen, Inc. on Plaza Goiti, Philippine National Bank, Manila Dry Cleaning, Farol Dry Cleaning, Imprenta Fajardo, a printing press, G and V Motor Company, Rosario Commercial Co., sole agents for the Sanford Trucks and "Rumely" Oil Pull Tractors, and Los Filipinos Zapateria Emilio Corp. Ads of local products like Tangee Lipstick and Palmolive Soap. Noticeable, again, is the fact that the advertisements were addressed to women, since it was assumed that purchasing equipment for the home and chores like cooking and doing the laundry or even repairing appliances were women's tasks. The advertisements endorsed the capitalist ideology on which the American way of life is based. In effect the ads peddled fantasy because they promised to transform the women into the icon of that age – beautiful, ravishing, glamorous women who could carry out their domestic responsibilities even while they had civic and professional responsibilities in their careers.

***The Woman's Outlook*** first saw print in October 1929. This official publication of the National Federation of Women's Clubs of the Philippines was published monthly, except for May and June when it was summer vacation time, by the Philippine Journal of Education Commission, Inc. and sold for P.35 centavos. Its editor was Paz Marquez Benitez, a well-known teacher from

an elite family and a fictionist among the first generation of women writers in English.

The contents of ***The Woman's Outlook*** followed what would become the classic formula for successful women's magazines in the Philippines – women's fashion, household and cooking hints, feature articles on children's stories and poems for children, news tidbits and gossip, club notes and romantic fiction (Nabong 1977).

These magazines played a major role in marketing American products as they carried pages and pages of advertisements promoting such US goods as Libby's Food Products, Heinz Mayonnaise, Campbell Soups, Chase and Sanborn Coffee, Del Monte Peaches, Ovaltine, Colgate Dental Cream, Kolynos, Scott's Emulsion, Lux Toilet Soap, Lysol, Tangee Cosmetics, Cashmere Bouquet, Mennen Talcum Powder, Murine Eyes, DMC Thread and YCO Floor Wax. By their repetitive appearance in the magazines, these ads endorsed the products as necessary and desirable for those who wanted to embrace the more modern way of life. Thus the magazines, to a great extent, served to reinforce the capitalist ideology of the American colonizers.

The covers and contents of the women's magazines tended to uphold the traditional or conservative representations of women. The covers usually featured pretty mestizas wearing ternos or *dalagitas* (female adolescents) with baskets of fruits on their heads or being serenaded by young men. The articles mostly emphasized propriety and correctness in behavior, as well as in manner of speaking. A premium was placed on "correct grammar" and "etiquette and social conduct," particularly in relating to the opposite sex. While women were encouraged to pursue higher education and venture into professional fields, they were always exhorted never to neglect their responsibilities to the family and the home, which were to be given priority in case of conflict between the demands of public life and the home. "Social clinics" or advice columns admonished women to observe traditional views on premarital sex, marriage and fidelity. There was no compromising on virginity – if one lost it, one had no choice but to marry the man who took it away. Wives whose husbands strayed had no choice but to endure and stick it out with their families for the sake of family honor. Thus did the magazines serve to reproduce

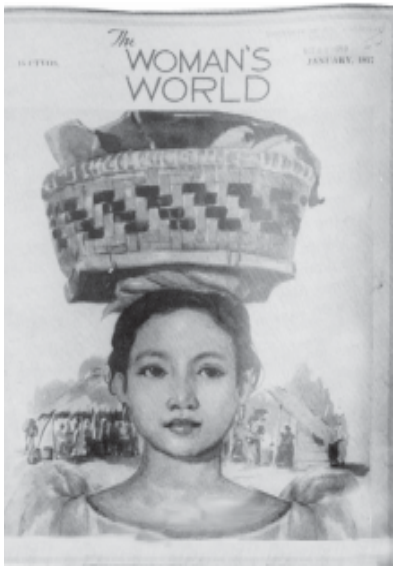
the kind of values, beliefs and way of thinking that would reinforce patriarchy.

Further, the magazines tended to naturalize and uphold the capitalist ideology by hiding the contradictions between upholding woman's role as the "queen of the home" and encouraging alternative roles for women in the public sphere and in careers in the predominantly male dominated fields; between the traditional past and its conservative ideals of modesty and subservience, and the present with its pressure to accept the modern ways brought in by the influx of publications that propagated the "liberated" American lifestyle and values.

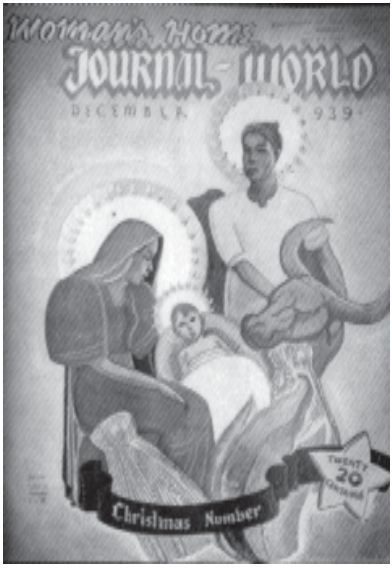
But to a certain extent, it could be said that these magazines have contributed to the advancement of women's rights in the country by carrying articles on women's struggle for suffrage and equal rights in the West. These articles created a consciousness among the Filipino women, especially those from the upper and middle class, about the need to campaign for women's rights. Through ***Woman's World***, for instance, the Philippine Association of University Women worked for the passage of laws which would champion women's rights, such as the Paraphernal Property Law which allowed women to mortgage their paraphernal property without their husbands' consent, the Tirona Bill (in the Senate) and the Ricohermoso-Fortich Bill (in the House of Representatives) which required a woman's written consent before her husband could dispose of conjugal real estate property. The magazine also recommended freedom for the wife to engage in business although she still required the prior consent of her husband if she wished to use their conjugal property (Mendez 1993).

The ***Woman's Home Journal-World***, for its part, proposed the granting of scholarships to non-Christian college girls, the appointment of women to high positions in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, and the revision or repeal of laws discriminatory to women (Mendez 1993).

The women's magazines, too, served as a venue for the "battle over the representations of women" by publishing articles that featured women's concerns beyond the domestic sphere – i.e., articles that focused on civic concerns and events, successful women in the professions, legal and business advice – even as




T***he Woman's World***, January 1937 issue (Reprinted from the ***Philippine Journalism Review***, June 2002)




***Woman's Home Journal-World***, December 1939 issue (Reprinted from the ***Philippine Journalism Review***, June 2002)


***Woman's World***, October 1937 issue (Courtesy of the National Library)


***Woman's Home Journal-World***, December 1941 issue (Courtesy of the National Library)

they still adhered to the formula of fashion, gardening, recipes, child care and advice to the lovelorn.

Fe Mangahas, a feminist historian, emphasizes that although women's magazines in the American period were published by women who belonged predominantly to the upper middle and elite social class, it is wrong to dismiss these magazines as vehicles of the bourgeoisie, for the gains they achieved for Filipino women marked a turning point in their struggle for liberation from oppression, within a society that was itself struggling for its own liberation from the stranglehold of its American colonial masters (Azarcon-de la Cruz 1987).

## The Postwar Years: Deepening the Colonial Consciousness of the Filipina

In the immediate postwar years, the Philippines' war-torn economy had to be rebuilt. By then, the US had firmly established its stranglehold over the Philippines, having secured for the Americans, through the Bell Trade Act and the Parity Amendment to the Constitution, equal rights with the Filipinos to exploit the country's natural resources. Further, through the Military Bases Agreement, the Americans were able to maintain authority over Clark Air Base and the Subic Naval Base and 20 other installations all over the country (Aguilar 1987). Being a US colony brought the Philippines under the control of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), which have virtually intervened in and dictated not only the economic but also the political policies of the country. (The US took the lead in setting up the IMF and WB in 1945; as such, it was in a position to dominate and control these two financial institutions.) Thus, in the postwar years, it was still necessary for the Americans to continue producing consent among the Filipinos, including the women who constituted 50 percent of the population, even as the Philippines was granted independence from the US on July 4, 1946.

The postwar years saw the proliferation of newspapers. Some of them were revivals of prewar newspapers like the ***Bulletin***, the ***Philippine Herald*** and the ***Manila Times***, while others were newly established like the ***Manila Chronicle*** and the ***Evening News***. In time, these newspapers started to come out

with Sunday supplements, which were mostly directed at the women. As John Lent (1969: 34) put it, "magazines blossomed like sampaguita during the next decade."

Among the magazines that came out during the postwar years were ***Woman's World***, which was acquired by World Publishing Company in 1958; ***Woman's Home Journal*** and the ***Weekly Women's Magazine***, both published by Ramon Roces; ***Home***, which was published by the ***Manila Chronicle;*** and ***Home Fashion*** (Gloria 1973). These magazines were consciously patterned after popular American magazines like ***Cosmopolitan***, ***Good Housekeeping***, ***Redbook***, ***Ladies Home Journal***, ***True Confessions*** and ***Romances***.

***Weekly Women's Magazine***, which came with the ***Sunday Times***, became the most popular magazine in the 1950s. It practically dominated the local magazine industry from the early 50s to 1972. It was originally started by Doña Isabel "Bebeng" Roces, the sister of Don Chino Roces, whose family attained phenomenal financial success in the magazine industry during the postwar years. Its first editor was Telly Albert Zulueta. The magazine became very popular because it was relatively inexpensive, costing only 1/3 the price of American magazines like ***Cosmopolitan***, ***Good Housekeeping*** and ***Ladies' Home Journal***. Indicative of its popularity in the postwar years was the steady increase in its circulation.

Unlike American magazines which came out monthly, the ***Weekly Women's Magazine*** was published weekly and its contents were designed to last the whole week. The magazine hewed closely to the traditional time tested formula that had accounted for the success of women's magazines in the US – a lot of light fare emphasizing fashion, beauty tips, profiles on successful women, advice columns on relationships, serialized romantic columns and features on Hollywood. But its editors, like Telly Albert Zulueta and Luisa Linsangan, introduced innovations into the formula. Over a period of five years, Telly Albert Zulueta nurtured the WWM from a four-page supplement into a 64-page magazine. Among her major innovations was the introduction of novels or plays of Filipino authors such as NVM Gonzalez and Nick Joaquin. The magazine also had pull out patterns, sections featuring cooking demonstrations by women who had gained a

reputation for their culinary skills, "Advice to the Lovelorn," a column on stamps known as "Stamp Corner" which carried Armando Malay's byline, historical Filipino comic pages written by Paula Carolina Malay and illustrated by Zeny Laygo, a column entitled "Good Old Days" by Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil (who was better known as "Chitang") and a section on how the government works, which followed up cases still pending in various government agencies (Logarta 1995). Zulueta's efforts show an attempt to give the magazine a more Filipino orientation and relevance, even as the magazine as a whole remained very American.

Luisa Linsangan took over from Zulueta and became editor of the ***Weekly Women's Magazine*** until the Martial Law years. She is credited with having catapulted the magazine to the top of the magazine industry and making it a phenomenal success. According to Nelly Samson, one of the young Filipinas who joined the staff of the WWM, Linsangan had very definite ideas on what the magazine should be like – its look, its cover girls, its editorial contents and even its advertisements. Cover girls had to be mestizas. Settings for photo shoots had to be the lush gardens of mansions, where the model would either sit on top of a fence made of cement columns or stand against a fence, with the rustic scenery in the background. Alternatively, the setting could be the interior of a home, where the models would be puttering around and holding potted plants. Linsangan wanted the magazine to have a snob appeal and enable the women readers to enjoy their retreat into the world of glamour and fantasy for the relatively cheap price of P.35 centavos.

Like their American counterparts, Filipino women's magazines heavily depended on advertisements as their chief source of revenues, since income from subscriptions did not suffice. These advertisements, to a large extent, created a world of fantasy because they sent the message that consumption of the products that they endorsed would enable the Filipinos to experience, albeit vicariously, the American way of life and consequently, to attain the American dream. Filipino women were bombarded with advertisements that propagated the American lifestyle, as well as American notions of beauty, glamor and femininity to aspire for. These advertisements created a need for all sorts of cosmetics for whitening and smoothening the face, the

latest French perfumes, and later, even breast augmentation. A lot of these ads might have been irrelevant to the needs of the Filipina, but these were what preoccupied her attention and filled her consciousness. And the products they endorsed were the things she hankered for, making her part of the growing mass of consumers for the capitalist goods for women.

The American lifestyle and standards were reiterated in the magazines' contents. Front page covers always featured the ingénues or daughters of Manila's upper crust like Conchitina Sevilla, Josie Padilla, Bambi Lammoglia and Larcy Villar; or matrons like Chona Kasten and Chito Vasquez; or actresses like Amalia Fuentes, Barbara Perez and Susan Roces. The cover girls were always fair-complexioned, slim, with pinched waists and attired in clothes that dutifully followed the fashion trends and styles in the fashion capitals of the world, especially those in France, London and the US. Inside the pages of the magazines, the beauty regimen of these popular socialites or models were described.

The emphasis on fantasy was just as evident in the editorial contents of the magazines. There was a preponderance of articles on Hollywood in the postwar years, featuring popular actresses like Joan Crawford, Olivia de Havilland, Deborah Kerr, Mitzi Gaynor, Cyd Charisse, Kim Novak, Debra Paget and Marilyn Monroe. In the 70s, the American actresses featured included Audrey Hepburn, Judy Garland, Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Fonda, Barbara Streisand, Sandra Dee and Liza Minelli. There were also gossip columns about Hollywood and the fabulous parties thrown by blonde, blue-eyed actors and actresses who lived extravagant lives in Beverly Hills or New York. And there were articles on the British royalty like Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. All these were avidly devoured by women readers from the middle and lower classes, who could only gain access to such a glamorous, exciting world through the fantastic stories dished out by the weekly magazines. Such stories afforded a weekly escape from the drudgery of daily household chores like cooking, washing laundry, taking care of babies and wiping snot off their noses and other mundane tasks that women were expected to perform even while constantly striving to maintain their svelte girlish figures and be as glamorous and sweet-smelling as the beauty icons of the West.

Apart from the articles on celebrities, the women's

magazines also had features about fashion, physical improvement, home management tips and gardening, recipes, profiles of successful career women, Philippine history, stamp collecting, romantic and sexual relationships with men, and serialized romantic novels mostly authored by American writers or Filipinos with American pseudonyms. Lita Logarta, one of the writers of women's magazines, recalls being made to rewrite drafts of romantic novels submitted by Filipinos to make them sound American. She also had to use an American byline, "Annelle Nicholas." The practice of using American bylines created the impression that the serialized romantic novels were syndicated stories and, as such, were supposed to be more appealing to the readers.

The fashion pages featured the latest trends and dominant silhouettes that were in vogue in the European fashion capitals, such as Dior's "New Look," the A-Line, the H-line and the "Trapeze Look." Filipino women dutifully followed these trends, in order to be fashionable. Even hairdos like the short, curly hair cut close to the face popular in the 50s, the chignon a la Audrey Hepburn, the page boy, the pouf and the teased hair were aped by the Filipinas.

The postwar women's magazines did not tackle political subject matter, although they featured women who had careers in the professions like law. Nor did they touch on problems affecting women like rape, wife beating and discrimination. Instead, women's magazines in the postwar years were powerful entertainment forms that reinforced the capitalist system by propagating and reinforcing the capitalist ideology through their covers, advertisements and editorial content. Western ideas of femininity were marketed even as a local veneer was injected to make the Filipina readers, predominantly from the middle class, identify with the magazines. American hegemony was reaffirmed by featuring advertisements and articles that reproduced Filipinas in the image and likeness of the American woman.

The magazines capitalized on fantasy, which filled their every page, from the covers showing models with innocent looks, to advertisements with exotic and glamorous settings, columns on the lives of Hollywood actors and actresses and the *crème de la crème* of Philippine society and the serialized romantic novels. The escapist tendencies of these magazines were evident as well in the

minimal attention given to social problems or issues of the time, such as the Cold War, the witch-hunting of the McCarthy years, the Korean War in the 1950s, the social unrest among the peasants and the corruption in government.

In conclusion, the postwar weekly magazines created generations of women who were cast in the American colonial mode. The magazines played a hegemonic role in society because they influenced Filipino women toward uncritically accepting the Western way of life – i.e., the American patterns of behavior, standards of conduct, etiquette and manners and tastes – as the ideal one, even if this way of life was very alien and far removed from what was traditionally Filipino. Because they were steeped so much in this kind of American colonial culture, Filipino women tended to uncritically accept the assumptions of the capitalist ideology that dominated the magazines from cover to cover, to the extent that they themselves colluded, wittingly or unwittingly, in their continued subjugation by the Americans.

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