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Master of Arts in Communication

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*DARNA: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS  
ON THE MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF A FILIPINA SUPERHERO BODY  
IN FOUR DECADES OF SELECTED DARNA FILMS*

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**ON THE MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF A FILIPINA SUPERHERO BODY  
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by  
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**Total of 15 Directorial Projects since 2007**

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**Average of 6 Audio-Visual Presentations yearly**; including Program Launching and Finale

**Best TV Promotional Material 2007 – TV Promotions Category**

Kapisanan ng mga Broadcasters ng Pilipinas (KBP) Award for directing and creative editing of TV Special plug for the 2007 Presidential State of the Nation Address entitled “*Bangkang Papel*”.

**IABC Gold Quill Award of Excellence 2007** for the creative collaboration and launching of the campaign “*Boto Mo, iPatrol Mo*”.

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## **DEDICATION**

The following thesis, while an individual work, benefited from the insights and direction of several people.

First, I thank my thesis adviser, Prof. Shirley Evidente, for exemplifying the high quality scholarship to which I aspire. In addition, Professor Evidente provided timely and instructive comments and evaluation at every stage of my thesis process. Next I wish to thank the Thesis Committee for providing insights that guided and challenged my thinking, substantially improving the finished project.

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## ABSTRACT

Ramos, Rhea Emilia N. (2016). *Darna: A Feminist Textual Analysis on the Media Construction of a Filipino Superhero Body in Four Decades of Selected Darna Films*, Unpublished Masteral Thesis, University of the Philippines, College of Mass Communication.

This masteral thesis examines how the all-time super heroine *Darna* has been treated in film throughout time. Specifically, this study seeks to understand three things: (1) identify the image of the body of *Darna* on screen; (2) explain how *Darna* was created by Ravelo; and (3) present how the *Darna* filmmakers used the audience-characters within the narrative to illustrate *Darna* as a “socially and morally” acceptable pornographic identity. This thesis looks into the available *Darna* films in the UP CMC film archive and analyzes them using the shot-by-shot and feminist textual analyses. This thesis concludes that the media construction of the body of *Darna* as prescribed by Ravelo has been used by the capitalist system that commodifies women like a pin-up image. *Darna* is an alien super heroine that masquerades women empowerment. Visually, sexually and culturally. *Darna* represents misogyny conditioned by film to be applauded. In the process, the study is able to provide new avenues on how to view women as text in front of the camera.

This thesis recommends further study on critical discourses on violence against women; some may be through Galtung’s triangle of violence in looking into film as a cultural artefact.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

Women experience harassment in the form of catcalling, stalking, and unnecessary compliments. This may be an everyday scenario or a recurring incident that can happen to any woman in the society that we live in. The researcher is not an exception. She has also experienced this kind of harassment. This catapulted her to focus on this kind of topic for her film studies.

Many Filipinos are made to believe from childhood that catcalling is a form of compliment; however, this may not be the case. When a man calls attention to a woman with fuller breasts than others, or gets her attention by saying, “Miss with the big boobs,” it is thought as a compliment. Due to this thinking, some women opt for surgical operations to obtain the bosoms they assume men like. If one is noticed for having the body men admire, one has to be thankful. This idea is prevalent, and at times even supported by mainstream media.

In the Philippines, popular media becomes the source of the standard by which people gauge what is ideal and what is not (Fox, 1997). Allan Mazur in his work “US Trends in Feminine Beauty and Overadaptation” (1986) and John Berger in “Ways of Seeing” (1972) stated that mass media provides a representation of femininity as well as unrealistic standards of for bodies—particularly, the female body which is being used to feed society. As one of the most popular forms of media, film shows that there is a need for young and beautiful bodies. These serve as capital for achieving the proverbial “happily ever after”. Aside from this, films condition the audiences through repetition (Tolentino, 2000), making them believe that beyond the boundaries of media or that of

imagined worlds, the concepts and ideas they present are true, normal and acceptable (Macdonalds, 1995). Indeed, the media according to Fiske is so powerful that it has the capacity to control and influence the norms of a specific society (as cited by Allen, 1992).

This thesis looked into selected Darna films from the last four decades. Darna is a popular Filipino superheroine who, throughout time, has set the pattern for the ideal female in the context of Filipino society. From a simple woman, she turns into a heroine whenever she swallows a mystical white stone that came from outer space. This stone allows her to transform from an ordinary woman to a powerful one. Her superpowers include superhuman strength, intellect, speed, and flight. She is a lauded superheroine, especially when she fights villains. The popular superheroine Darna is one of the masterpieces created by the renowned Filipino graphic novelist Mars Ravelo.

The researcher first encountered Darna when she worked as a staff for its television series created by a media company in 2005. It was then that the researcher became interested in studying the different actresses who played Darna in the films. She tried to determine the specific patterns created by Darna for the ideal female body in Philippine society. This is the take-off of this study.

At the onset, the researcher had a positive image of the heroine because she represents a woman who, in the mind of the researcher, is in power and in control, and has the confidence to flaunt whatever asset she has while still managing to obtain the ‘respect’ of the people. The researcher perceived the actions of the heroine to be very masculine and violent as portrayed in the fighting scenes. It is also noteworthy that this heroine represents empowerment in the fight against social imbalances.

A super Filipina, Darna has been recognized, due to her characteristics, to have attained the admiration of society. She represents the dreams of many little girls and women to be accepted in by society. Women begin to subscribe to the need of the 'ideal' body which Darna romanticized in films (McDonalds, 1995). Women attempt to imitate the "ideal body" through dieting, body binding and strict exercising. This is also one of the reasons the researcher began to have a negative view of the heroine with regard to her body being set as a standard for society (Barktky, 1990).

It is obvious that there is a disparity between the experiences of ordinary women and of the actresses who portrayed Darna. While the latter experienced breakthroughs in their careers and became more bankable artists, gaining respect from the public and the industry, some women in society aimed to achieve the ideal body which has been romanticized by Darna's character.

In this study, the researcher presented data on how the character has been used to symbolize women as powerful members of society that fight against female oppression and the sexual conquest of men. This thesis also explored and analyzed the Darna films which have conditioned and pressured the female audience to accept female body norms and to subscribe to them as societal standards. This thesis also provides additional information regarding oppression of women in society.

## B. Objectives of the Study

Films, as discussed in the early part of this thesis, produce and reproduce accepted norms and value systems. There are useful insights into the investigation of the media construction of the Filipina body in Philippine society through the superheroine Darna



films from four decades. This thesis mainly answered how the film industry socially constructs the Filipina body through Darna.

This thesis also addressed the following objectives:

1. Identify the image of the body of *Darna* on screen;
2. Explain how *Darna* was created by Ravelo; and
3. Present how the Darna filmmakers used the audience-characters within the narrative to illustrate Darna as a “socially and morally” acceptable pornographic identity.

Through this set of objectives, the researcher uncovered the inspiration behind Darna’s creation by looking into the interview accounts of Marcial Ravelo from his granddaughter Julian Parian’s thesis, write-ups from fans and a documentary film dedicated to Marcial Ravelo. Using film as a propagator of ideology, the researcher explored issues that surround the Filipina body ascribed by society. To see the extent of stereotypes and power play society has imposed on women, the researcher also deemed it important to look at the female characters aside from Narda and Darna in the Darna films to get a glimpse of the experiences and stories of women during the time when the movie was released.

### C. Significance of the Study

In Filipino pop culture, the character Darna is one of the most popular fictional superheroines (Flores, 2005a). As a series, it has effectively crossed multi-generations, from pre-Martial Law in 1950-1971, Martial Law in 1972-1986 to post-Martial Law in 1986-1994. Until the present times, a remake of Darna stirs interest in the viewing public.

This thesis investigated and analyzed social construction in popular media such as the film Darna. More specifically, the available Darna films which hypothetically propagated society's norms as well as notions of acceptable behavior and femininity. The points of view of feminist theorists question the acceptability and propagation of these. In addition, this study offered analyses and illustrations of the norms and stereotypes of an ideal female body that particularly imposes certain ideals of femininity in Philippine society. The data and analysis in the study provided additional insights on how to make Filipinas and their stories more visible in society.

#### D. Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research focused mainly on full-length film adaptations of Darna. The four films for this thesis are chosen from within the span of four decades (from the 1960's-1990's). The four films were chosen from the following list of Darna films that have been released from 1951 to 1994:

- *Darna* (1951) by Royal Films which starred Rosa del Rosario, and which was reported to be missing since 2009;
- *Darna at ang Babaeng Lawin* (1952) by Royal Films which also starred Rosa del Rosario;
- *Si Darna at ang Impakta* (1963) by People's Pictures which starred Liza Moreno;
- *Isputnik Versus Darna* (1963) by Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions which also starred Liza Moreno;

- *Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod* (1965) by People's Pictures which starred Eva Montes;
- *Si Darna at ang Planetman* (1969) by VP Pictures which starred Gina Pareño;
- *Lipad, Darna, Lipad* (1973) by THP Films, Sine Pilipino which starred Vilma Santos, and which was reported missing as of 2009;
- *Darna and the Giants* (1973) by Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions which starred Vilma Santos;
- *Darna Versus Planet Woman* (1975) by Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions which starred Vilma Santos;
- *Bira! Darna Bira!* (1979) by MBM Productions which starred Rio Locsin;
- *Darna at Ding* (1980) by Viva Films which starred Vilma Santos;
- *Darna* (1991) by Viva Films which starred Nanette Medved;
- *Darna, Ang Pagbabalik* (1994) by Viva Films which starred Anjanette Abayari.

Thus, the four films for this thesis are:

- *Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod* (1965);
- *Bira! Darna Bira!* (1979);
- *Darna at Ding* (1980);
- *Darna: Ang Pagbabalik* (1994)

This study focused on the social construction of the Darna superheroine identity in films, its physical characterization, and its roles in Darna's society (i.e. her body).

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### A. Role, Images and Stereotypes

In an essay entitled “How to Make Women Visible in History (1998),” Dr. Rosalinda Ofreneo discussed how women were subjugated in our history as Filipinos through exclusion and apparent neglect of their version of stories. According to her, only a few privileged women managed to be included in history while the majority remained silent, poor and disempowered and are still waiting to be discovered and for their stories to be heard. Ofreneo pointed out that there is a need to look into the characters of minor women in every story as each can be articulated differently, which she emphasized in her objectives: “to name the unnamed, to surface the submerged, to give the voice to the silenced and to empower the disempowered” (Ofreneo, 1998).

In a paper entitled “The Unbearable Heaviness of my Being” (2002), University of the Philippines Professor Roselle Pineda articulated how her Barbie doll imposed a great burden and relief on her during puberty. Pineda discussed that she had an image of what she hoped to become in her pre-teen and teenage years, which gave her relief. Knowing that she would never attain Barbie’s beauty and body due to her natural physique burdened her. She experienced humiliation as her classmates, friends, and family joked at her expense, reinforcing the psychological and physical trauma which the Barbie doll caused her. Due to this realization and internalization of bodily shame, she was forced at a very young age to undergo an excessive and unhealthy diet. If her body was not at a certain state or weight, she would inflict slashes on her body as punishment for not keeping up. Pineda explained her experience of her Barbie doll by researching how its image construction came about. The research revealed that the inspiration of the

doll's image came from an adult sexual play toy from Germany called Bild Lily. Pineda's research also showed how Barbie dolls can cause sexual alienation on a young girl's body and mould her into a sexually arousing figure that attracts popular men. This idea would give a child a secure future just like Barbie who is paired with Ken and has popular friends, a car, and a doll house (Pineda, 2002). This concept was introduced in the early part of this thesis. This study utilized the concepts in history and body politics in unearthing the origins of the image construction that possibly inspired Ravelo's creation of Darna's body image. Additionally, the researcher utilized the information gathered from interviews with and write-ups about Darna's creator.

In one of the essays in the book *The Female Eunuch* (1971), Germaine Greer noted that the eternal feminine is an object of sexual fantasy, is adored by both men and women, and has a doll-like perfection that signifies impotence. This is because her erotic body is controlled by the male other. In the same book, media (film, advertising, in particular) is believed to continuously produce the image of the eternal feminine because of its marketability (Greer, 1971a). Comparing this to Darna, this thesis notes that Darna fights all evildoers that threaten society and emasculates the police system when she is half-naked. Darna, the eternal feminine in this study, transcends the sexual fantasy of men who would watch her fight for sexual pleasure.

Frames of femininity showcased by media not only label women with a commodity value, it also shows that it would never be attainable. In her book entitled *Representing Woman: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (1995), Myra Macdonald questioned and challenged the said frames of femininity. Macdonald discussed how the media continually defines the construction of femininity. This helps

society preserve and support the patriarchy, which allows men sexually control women, making the female body a spectacle (Macdonald, 1995a).

In her essay “The Liberative Role of Discourse in Articulating Women’s Issues and Concerns in Filipino Melodramatic Films from 1990 to 200” (2007), Arminda V. Santiago explained how women are represented in main stream cinema. In her study, Santiago raised eight images and issues of women. These images/issues are (1) the Filipino woman and family, motherhood and mothering, (2) the Filipino woman and marriage, (3) the Filipino woman and sexuality, (4) homosexuality and heterosexuality, (5) female friendship and women bonding, (6) female strength/female subservience, (7) class issues, and lastly (8) work issues. Movies with themes that have these issues “found space in our country” (Santiago, 2007).

Santiago’s essay in determining the roles and position of women in Philippine society from 1990 to 2000 was used in this thesis. In particular, the female strength or female subservience that Santiago mentioned as one of the roles and issues of women was looked into to show how the viewing public has developed a set of expectations for the way a Filipina should dress, speak and act. Additionally, the images of female bodies in available Darna films vis-à-vis their duties and responsibilities were analyzed to unpack the issues of the body of a Filipina and to unearth her version of the story. Santiago also mentioned that rapid technological advances during the 90s contributed to the shifting of the discourse regarding Filipino women in film.

Santiago also noted the effect of globalization and feminism on the said discourse when they emerged in Philippine society. This has also influenced the researcher’s interpretation of the women in the available Darna films since this is the time in which

the film was set. In the film adaptations of Darna from 1979 to 1991, changes in Narda's role and her position in society became more evident. From working within the confines of her home, helping her grandmother or aunt, she became a fashion model and a journalist or a working woman. Even before the 90s, in Western countries, Wonder Woman, specifically, influenced the construction of Darna as evidenced by her costume and super powers.

In his master's thesis "Images of the Mother in Lino Brocka films: 1970-1991", Jose Gutierrez III discussed the depiction of women, primarily, mothers. Gutierrez argued that as the auteur evolved, the images of the mother also shifted. According to Gutierrez, the films made by Lino Brocka from 1970-1982 were generally influenced by the studio system, popular literature and komiks, particularly the stereotyped mother. By 1984 to 1991, mother characters in Brocka's films were characterized to question their roles and to affirm themselves as persons. Again, the characterization in films during this time was heavily influenced by the trend wherein characters were questioning identities (Gutierrez, 2008). Gutierrez's thesis also presents the shifts of the auteur's perspective of the roles of the mothers in films through psychoanalysis and ideology as a research framework.

Concepts of psychology and psychoanalysis have also influenced the researcher's analysis of the images of women in films. Instead of focusing on mothers, the central idea for this thesis is the media construction of the bodies of women in the Darna films. The changes in the roles of mothers, from being silent sufferers to more proactive women, can also be likened to the way that Narda's role was changed and influenced by globalization as Gutierrez emphasized in his thesis. Although the researcher will not employ

psychoanalysis in this study, this research would maximize feminist standpoint theory to extract experiences of women as depicted in the film.

In the essay “Women in Filipino Religious-themed films” (2010), Erika Cabanawan studied four award-winning Filipino films that have women as the protagonist and which depict the hybrid religion of Catholicism and worship of a female deity (Cabanawan, 2010). In Cabanawan’s analysis, she articulated how the ideologies of the Catholic faith are deeply entrenched in Filipino consciousness, which can be seen through our history or even in films. In the films studied by Cabanawan, the ideologies of Catholicism are evident and interesting as exhibited by the women who were given extraordinary abilities and responsibilities through miraculous means. Examples of this are the babaylan or the priestess whom the people call upon for healing and wisdom.

Like Cabanawan, the researcher also looked into the ideologies of Catholicism, specifically the dogma with regard to good and evil, as this is supposed to be Darna’s primary motivation for punishing miscreants in society.

In her essay “Fish, Goddess, Superwoman, and Forest Nymph: Women of Fantasy Films” (2001), Rosario Cruz Lucero randomly sampled fantasy films focusing on women, particularly female leads characterized as invulnerable to the forces of evil and corruption. Lucero argued that in the cinematic tradition, women are characterized as either the ideal figure perched on her pedestal or the fallen woman and symbol or creator of social ills. She described the female characters of the fantasy films as powerful, knowledgeable and mystifying, but still falling within the confines of the patriarchal system. In the essay “From Victim to Vampire”, Yvette Tan argued that whether as a direct force or a source of knowledge, women and her link with the natural, the sacred,



and powerful are acknowledged in films. In “So what’s Funny? A Study on Female Comedians in Selected Comedy Films (E Anong Nakakatawa? Isang Pagsipat sa mga Komedyanteng Babae sa Ilang Pelikulang Komedi)” (2001), Glecya C. Atienza presented how women have been portrayed by top comediennes as nags, vampires, social climbers, nitwits or physically less-endowed beings. She also argued that women were reduced to being objects of ridicule and models of what not to be. Marra P. Lanot in “Bomba Forever: The Images of Women in Bomba Films” (2001) reiterated Atienza’s point. Lanot’s essay described *bomba* films where female leads are characterized as subject to violence and, more often than not, also responsible for her own dilemma.

The four essays mentioned would further assert that there is indeed a stereotype for women in film, such as in the case of Darna and Narda. The stereotypes of the images of the body of Filipino women presented in the essays mentioned above have helped the researcher in mapping out expectations of the roles that women were expected to play in Philippine society during the 90s. This reinforced the researcher’s argument on how cinema naturalized the position of Filipino women as the object of male fantasy (*pantasyang bayan*), and how being cast in films with such themes serves as a rite-of-passage for an actress to be deemed a sex symbol.

## B. Context of a Superhero

*The Concept of Superhero in Filipino Films* by Emil Flores tackled what constitutes a Filipino superhero. He discussed three particular Marcial Ravelo superheroes: (1) Darna, (2) Lastikman and (3) Captain Barbel. He then analyzed the concept of superheroes of Filipinos based on the template of the superhero that Richard

Reynolds illustrated in his analysis of the American Superhero (1992). Reynolds enumerated the following as the general characteristics of a superhero: (1) lost parents; (2) man-god; (3) devoted to justice; (4) extraordinary nature as compared to ordinary surroundings; (5) secret identity; (6) considerable patriotism and moral loyalty to state; (7) his story is mythical and use science and magic indiscriminately create a sense of wonder. Based on his analysis, Flores noted that Filipino superheroes matched the stereotypes he listed.

Flores' essay was used by the researcher to show that in superhero stories, such as the Darna films, the extraordinary nature of the superhero is contrasted with the ordinariness of her opposite, as well as her surroundings. Flores also used textual analysis of the Darna films, focusing on the story of the main character and comparing it to that of foreign counterparts such as Wonder Woman and Superman. Flores also questioned Darna's costume which, unlike a superhero's costume which serves as a symbol of power, did not serve its purpose and characterized it as "skimpy." In this particular study, the researcher focused on comparing the images of Darna's body in the different films, rather than comparing it to her foreign counterparts. This thesis also took Flores' view on how the Darna films have influenced the shaping of Filipino culture and creating a false consciousness of the body of a Filipino woman.

Two more theses talked about Darna comics. The thesis of Mars Ravelo's granddaughter, Julieta Parian, entitled "Mars Ravelo (1916-1988): Komiks Writers' Decade (An Analysis of the Life, Era and Perception of Writers on Komiks of His Influence)" (Mars Ravelo (1916-1988): Dekano ng mga Manunulat sa Komiks (Isang Pagsusuri sa Buhay, Panahon at Persepsyon ng mga Manunulat ng Komiks sa Kanyang

Impluwensya) and “Darna Comics: A History of its design from 1947-2003” by Gregorio Apolonio III. Parian’s thesis thoroughly discussed Mars Ravelo’s life and how his works influenced a lot of comic book and graphic artists through time. Ravelo was named as one of the people who popularized comics in the Philippines. He was characterized as a versatile comic writer who could write not only for the comedy genre but also heavy drama. According to Parian, Ravelo was a household name then and that up to now, his works still sell. He engineered his works to talk to people whose only escape from life’s troubles was through reading his works. Apolonio’s thesis, on the other hand, discussed images of Darna in printed comic books. How Darna evolved from being petite and drawn with gentle rounded slopes, to sexy and androgynous, and from dialogue-heavy to no dialogue. He also explained the importance of having a self-entitled series.

In Raffy Arcega’s essay entitled “Darna is not a Rip-Off of Wonder Woman: A Short Retrospective of an Often Misunderstood Character!” (2009), he defended Darna, claiming that she is uniquely Filipino, “Asia’s first superheroine,” as she was dubbed in Lawagan’s article (where he also noted that Liwayway published the concept of ‘Varga’ in the year 1939, ahead of DC’s Wonder Woman which was released in 1941). Arcega also explained that fans of Darna’s story influenced how she is redesigned in each generation, with fan-made stories that reimagined Darna with different powers and different costume designs. For example, in the 90’s, the concept of Darna sprang from fan stories, being able to deflect bullets with her bracelet and changed the helmet to tiara, for which she was accused as a rip-off of Wonder Woman. In the 1994 film “Darna, Ang Pagbabalik,” the character was given the Kryptonian-like power of heat vision, similar to what was said to be uniquely Superman’s power, which the Urian Anthology (1990-

1999) writer Justino Dormiendo criticized in his article “Darna, Ang pagbabalik: Pantasyang Pinoy, Realismong Hollywood.” He expressed how equally disappointed he was with this particular film due to the production failing to measure up to the promise of VIVA Films’ technological advancement and because the story obviously borrowed from foreign ideas, specifically from Hollywood superhero stories (1994). Arcega further argued that Darna’s costume is purely Filipino and is visually inspired by the “Philippine flag and bahag, a native clothing on the loin cloth” (Arcega, 2009a). Arcega added that Narda’s story of being a person of good heart who is rewarded with an amulet that transforms someone into an unbelievable celestial being (a warrior from Planet Marte), is unique to Filipino folklore. On another note, Lawagan (2010) also distinguished Darna from Wonder Woman by comparing their origin, transformation and powers:

Table 1. *Darna vs. Wonder Woman (Lawagan, 2010)*

<b>POINT OF COMPARISON</b>	<b>DARNA</b>	<b>WONDERWOMAN</b>
ORIGIN	Planet Marte (outside Earth)	Themyscira (on Earth)
TRANSFORMATION	From poor barrio lass (child in some versions and teenager in others), Narda swallows the white pebble and shouts the name Darna to transform	From first-class woman in the United States under the name of Diana Prince, she spins around to turn into Wonder Woman
POWER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flight</li> <li>• Super strength</li> <li>• Super speed</li> <li>• Impervious to all man-made weapons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of Hercules</li> <li>• Speed of Mercury</li> <li>• Cannot fly but has an invisible jet</li> <li>• Can be defeated using man-made weapons, but she can deflect bullets with the use of her wrist band</li> <li>• Has a magical lasso that can make anyone tell the truth</li> </ul>

“Darna through Six Decades” by Rommel Llanes (2009) discussed all the men and women who played the role in Darna film, television and ballet. Llanes noted some changes in Darna’s costume and the stories behind the making of each Darna in her respective time. He noted the two women who had difficulties in portraying Darna, particularly Rosa Del Rosario and Vilma Santos (whom he claimed as the sexiest Darna). According to him, Rosa Del Rosario almost had an accident in one of Darna’s literally death-defying flight scenes where she hung from a helicopter using cables. The shot was taken at night to hide the cables attached to her body. Next was Vilma Santos, who in her first Darna film was pressured by the producers to wear the two-piece Darna costume without the body stockings on the day of the press conference for the film. In the same article, Llanes narrated his interviews with Ravelo who revealed that two of his inspirations for Darna’s the powers were Superman and Captain Marvel’s transformation from a child to a superhuman character upon shouting a coded name. The inspiration for the Darna’s character is actually Ravelo’s mother, who was a single parent.

### C. Looking through the Body of a Woman

Sandra Bartky wrote two essays, “Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation” and “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”, in her book *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (1990) which focused on the relationship between female oppression and the female body. In the first essay, Bartky combined orthodox Marxism and social feminism to explain how the modes of femininity presented by the media (magazines, advertisements) and society sexually alienates a woman and her product—in this case, her body. Bartky further

explained that in feminine narcissism the woman also takes the place of the other, as both the objectifier and the objectified (Bartky, 1990a). This female vanity which is imposed on women by the capitalist world and people from the fashion and beauty industries, oppress women as they dictate what is beautiful, fashionable and “in” through mass media. Not only does this allow for insecurity regarding the face and body to arise, it also benefits those who dictate such norms and who lure them into buying their products (Bartky, 1990b).

In “Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation”, women’s persecution is done through the mind and body (Bartky, 1990b). According to her, women experience two levels of alienation: firstly, fragmentation of the human, wherein women lose their ‘being’ and are only seen as sexual bodily beings; and secondly, the prohibition of the exercise of typically human functions, wherein women lose control of how their bodies are used by this “capitalist patriarchy”(Bartky, 1990c). This repression of women in her consciousness is further discussed in Bartky’s next essay, “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”.

Bartky compared the subjugation of women to a prison called the panopticon, which was designed by Jeremy Bentham, and analyzed it with Michel Foucault’s power relation. She argued that a woman internalizes the gaze of the other, forever inspecting all her visible flaws. She then begins policing and disciplining herself to be able to fit into the prescribed femininity imposed on her face and body. Women’s daily subscriptions to rituals and disciplines are as simple as dieting or putting on cosmetics to be able to conceal her deficient body (Bartky, 1990d).

For this thesis, the researcher employed how Bartky articulated her case regarding the beautiful, feminine body of women and alienating notions of femininity. Discipline and punishment are already embedded in women's consciousness. These arguments were used by the researcher in her framework to study women in the available Darna films and their repetition of images, especially themes such as femininity, carried out, distorted and manipulated constructions of the Filipina face and body.

Emmanuel Reyes, in his essay entitled "Black and White in Color: The Lure of the 'Komiks' Movie" (1989), noted that while women are the focus of most melodramatic comics, they are also given the greatest burden in life. For this thesis, while Darna is the central figure in her eponymous stories, she also carried the burden of poverty, being orphaned, being the breadwinner in the family (while in her alter-ego Narda) and the burden of saving the world from evil (as Darna). In the same article, Reyes discussed how film has a propensity to make the audience empathize with the characters and their reality. Reyes also asserted that films based on komiks have their fan base, which effectively results in box office hits (Reyes, 1989a). This thesis used Reyes' view that the comic genre in film has been characterized to show society's spectacularized misogynistic ideology (Reyes, 1989b).

John Berger, in his book *Ways of Seeing* (1972), noted that more often than not, the media assumes that the audience is male and that the spectacle, the one being looked at, is female. In any medium, such as painting or film, women only serve as objects which give satisfaction to the male other. In this particular study, it is assumed that Darna, as a woman, appears for the satisfaction of the male audience.

In her essay “Visual and Narrative Cinema” (1975), Mulvey used concepts from Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to argue that the cinematic apparatus of classical Hollywood cinema inevitably put the spectator in a masculine position of the subject, with the figure of the woman onscreen as the object of desire and the male gaze (Hill and Gibson, 2000a). Mulvey's central idea is that the spectator (i.e. the audience) is male and derives visual pleasure from a dominant and controlling perspective.

According to her, women in film were coded with to-be-looked-at-ness with the camera positioned to her and the male viewer being the bearer of the look. Mulvey suggests that there are two modes of the male gaze in this present era. These are: voyeuristic (i.e. seeing a woman as an image “to be looked at”) and fetishistic (seeing a woman as a substitute for "the lack," the underlying psychoanalytic fear of castration). As audiences consume filmic diegesis without being watched by the characters, they become onlookers of their lives. Therefore they become part of the film as the voyeurs of the characters onscreen, suturing the divide between fantasy and reality. (Hill and Gibson, 2000b)

On a related note, Filipino blogger Ernee Lawagan, in his article “Darna: The Filipino Superheroine” (2010), notes how after Rosa del Rosario’s Darna movie in 1951, Darna became the object of sexual fantasy of male Filipino aficionados. He further discussed how all actresses who played the character exuded the aura of sexiness beyond the heroic character. For this thesis, the researcher articulated how the actresses who played Darna were chosen based on their sexual appeal to the masses and how one’s portrayal of the character in the film is only a fragmented version of them.



Aside from the above mentioned sources, the researcher also looked into studies that focused on Darna, albeit not her body. The next paragraphs discuss some of these.

*Darna and Intellectual Property Rights* by Cherish Brillon tackled how the law protected the branding of Darna, its story, logos, narrative, characters' consistency and almost everything about Darna that was sold and franchised. Brillon also authored a journal article entitled "Ding, ang Bato! The Rise of Superhero(ines) and Violence on Local Television" which critiqued violence on local television. She argued that due to the rise of superhero stories, violence on local TV increased. She thoroughly discussed heroines in primetime TV that fight just like men action heroes and the implications of using violence to save the day. In connection with the previous reviewed journal article, Brillon published a thesis entitled *Manufacturing a GMA Telefantasya: A Political Economy Case Study of Darna (2007)* which showed how Darna saturated the market in the form of merchandise.

### III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

#### A. Theoretical Framework

##### 1. *The Hegemony Theory of Gramsci*

Klienmans says that in his Theory of Hegemony, Italian Marxist theorist and politician Antonio Gramsci asserts that the dominant or ruling class in a society uses manipulation tactics to stay in power and extends it over their territory by making sure that their ideas are propagated as the norm and common sense in the culture of a society (as cited in Hill and Gibson, 2000c). Through different forms of media, like advertisements and film, the ruling class manipulates society by imposing that one body type is more acceptable than the other, and one may consume the products and commodities that are sold to achieve this ideal body. The ruling class also takes advantage of the patriarchal society through their appeals with commodities denoting how women validate heterosexual manhood (Kacen, 2000; cited McCracken, 1993) wherein men objectify the female body. As Professor Estrada-Claudio notes, the marketing of the female body has always been a major area of capitalist enterprise (Estrada-Claudio, 2002).

For this thesis, the researcher used Gramsci's Hegemony Theory by asserting that the dominant actors in society, such as the capitalist men, define and dictate what body and beauty type is ideal and acceptable. This thesis argues how film uses highly sexualized images of women to sell their product, which, in this case, is Darna's body. The researcher also used the theory to argue that the culture influenced by the ruling class normalizes the concept of women as commodity, valued for their physical looks, and not for what they think (Ifezue, 2010).

Althusser, who drew from Marxist thinking influenced by Mao Tse Tung and Gramsci, as well as Jacques Lacan, posits concepts that stressed how people are socially positioned in power relationships which are internalized unconsciously. Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) was employed in this thesis. ISA is an instrument by which an ideology is propagated through persuasion and interpellation, the process of subject-positioning in which society gives specific roles to individuals (Hayward, 2006). Althusser believed that the rich, who belong to the ruling class, dictate the identity and the subject positioning of those who do not belong to the ruling class. The ruling class takes advantage of this by interpellating individuals into constructed roles within a particular society. They can also do this in the media through the ISA. In addition, Althusser argued that the representation of the subject happens when the individuals unconsciously accept the identity and position given to them by the ruling class (Rosen, 1986).

This thesis used Althusser's ISA Theory to explain the process by which notions of the ideal body of a woman are propagated using the media through popular stories like Darna. In particular, the researcher showed how film techniques influenced the viewing public's perception of women's bodies, which in turn, also dictate the actions and attitudes of female viewers. Using the said paradigm, this thesis looked at the notion of the standard or the desirable body that is set by the male viewer, which influences how women see themselves in films; how this is experienced by women; and how they are absorbed by the concept of the ideal body advocated by Darna in the films.

## 2. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory*

The Feminist Standpoint Theory is a post-modern feminist theory derived from the master-slave dialectic of philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, which was subsequently echoed in Marx's exegesis of class relations in capitalism and was later on developed in Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, where Lukács notes the development of the idea from the standpoint of the proletariat (Mojab, 2015, Cockburn). The theory states that in order to access a better view of reality, the perspective of the subjugated or the slave rather than the dominant or the master must be taken into account (Harding, 2002). For social feminists, this means that it is important to begin with the proper standpoint—the oppressed or in this thesis, the women. This is important to recognize false consciousness, where representations of reality are often distorted and mystified by the androcentric ideologies and structures of society where an acceptable version of socially constructed reality is obtained. Alison Jaggar (1983) explained that feminists unearthing unique, collective and social experiences of women through political and scientific struggle give a distinct interpretation of reality. She also said that by explaining both the standpoints of the oppressed and the ruling class gives impartial historical alternative accounts of the truth (Jaggar, 1983a).

This thesis used this theory to take into account the story of women who are considered the oppressed and subjugated class and gender. The researcher also considered how women have a distorted view of ideal beauty and body types, which are highly influenced by the media.

### 3. *The Concept and Theory of Alienation*

Two theories used to argue the issue of Body Politics were used as a framework for this study: the feminist concept of Alienation derived from Marx's Theory of Alienation and the concept of Panopticism by Foucault.

In Marx's Theory of Alienation, he explained how capitalist production has a devastating effect on human beings, particularly on the physical and mental states as well as on social processes. According to Allen Wood's (1972) suggested definition of alienation from Karl Marx, alienation is an illusion of one's self and condition. Under capitalism, alienation has four (4) basic processes: (1) Workers are alienated from their product, (2) workers are alienated from themselves, (3) workers are alienated from other human beings, and (4) workers are alienated from nature (Tong, 2009a). According to Sandra Bartky (1990e), there are two core features of alienation: (1) fragmentation of human person, which occurs when workers lose control of the products of their own labour; and (2) prohibition on the exercise of the typically human function (Bartky, 1990 e). The feminist view of alienation was derived from this theory of Marx, which stemmed from the condition of wage workers in capitalist society (Jaggar, 1983b).

Just like the workers in the examples of Marx, women are unable to experience and enjoy their own lives or even exercise their full potential because they rely heavily on how other people perceive them (Foreman: 1977 as cited by Tong, 2009). Like Foreman, Jaggar argued that, under capitalism, the contradicting demands over women about everything (work, sex, play) and by everyone (family, friends) become the source of both her becoming and her collapse as a woman (Tong, 2009 b).

For Jaggar, there are three (3) ways a woman undergoes in the process of alienation. Firstly, the concept of alienation is based on her “product”—the body, where people evaluate it in fragments or by parts (her breasts and butt) and not as a whole. This is for men’s enjoyment, making her powerless over how her body is alienated from her own sexuality (Jaggar, 1983c; Tong, 2009c) and transforming her into an object that is expected to attract and sexually stimulate men for economic survival or to sell her sexuality in the marriage market (Jaggar, 1983c). Secondly, women are also alienated from themselves as they are trained to look at the body as something beautiful to be gazed at (Bartky, 1990f). By seeing the standards provided by the media, a woman becomes discontented with her body, thinking it deficient and in need of constant improvement. Women then begin to devise ways to improve themselves, forcedly going through diet regimens, exercise and other feminine rituals (Bartky, 1990g) to obtain the ideal body. It is also to cater and align to the standards provided by society, mostly by the ruling gender—men (Tong, 2009c). Lastly, a woman is alienated from other women, as she and other women are competing against each other for men’s attention and reward of economic security through marriage. With imposed femininity, women are alienated by experiences of other women through the creation of an atmosphere of individualism. (Jaggar, 1983d; Tong, 2009c). This thesis used this framework to argue that beauty and ideal body of Darna in the films are instrumental in the alienation of the female audience.

#### *4. The Prison Design Model*

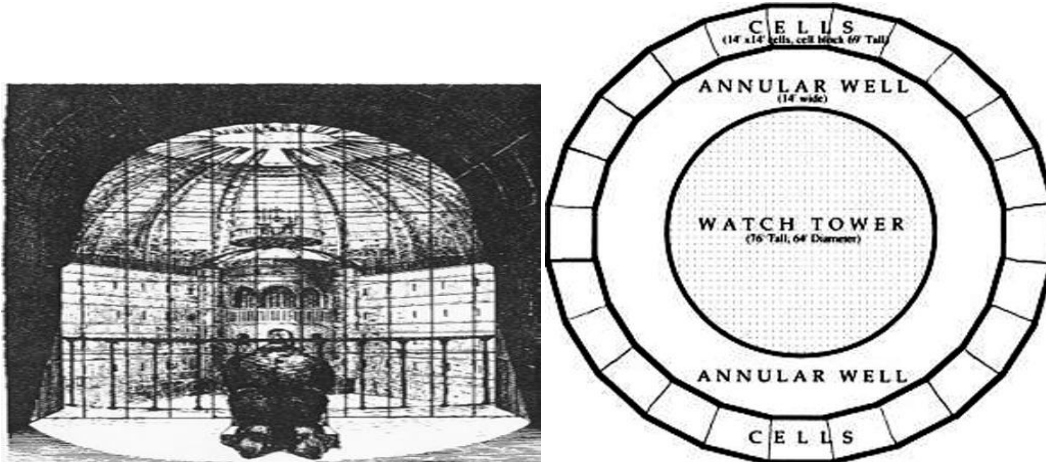
Lastly, this thesis used the framework of prison design by Jeremy Bentham as a model or paradigm for modern strategies in the internalization of discipline and authority.

This is derived from the concept of Panopticism which is a concept by Michel Foucault, a famous theorist of modern uses of power. Bentham's prison design (1843) as cited by Foucault is described as:

at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected.

Visibility is a trap (Foucault, 1995b)

Figure 1. *Harou Romain, Project for Prison, (Bentham, J. 1843)*



Left: Image of *The Panopticon*, source: DP. (2016). *The Panopticon*. Retrieved September 25, 2016, from <<http://www.utilitarianism.com/panopticon.html>>

Right: Image of *The Cartography of Power* source: Lambert, L. (2012, June 24). #FOUCAULT /// Episode 4: *The Cartography of Power*. Retrieved September 25, 2016, from <<http://thefunambulist.net/2012/06/24/foucault-episode-4-the-cartography-of-power/>>

Elliott, as cited by Marshal, defined Panopticism as societies where individuals are increasingly caught in systems of power wherein visibility is a key means of social control (2012). In essence, when norms in society become internalized, people act as though watched at all times, whether by surveillance cameras, government or law enforcement officials and or by other agents who are themselves under forms of surveillance as well. When expectations of how one is to act in public translate into the private sphere, these expectations are no longer applicable and are considered a panoptic society (Foucault, 1977).

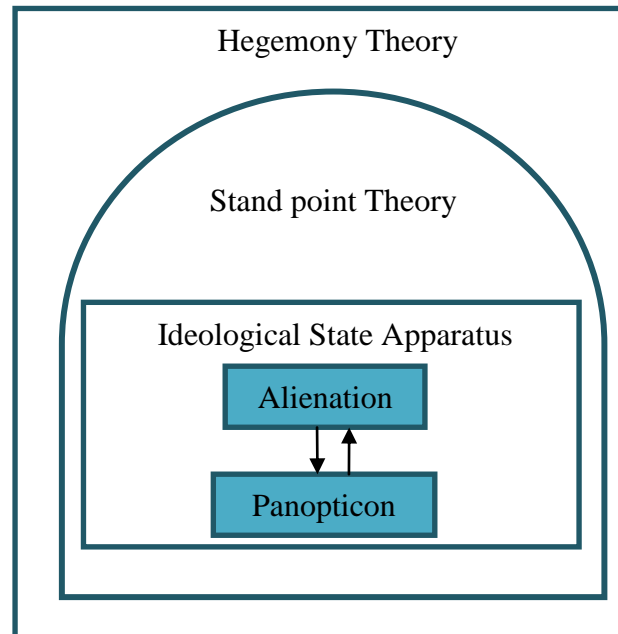
Feminists used panopticism to study how women are made to be docile bodies through the internalization of self-surveillance. Sandra Bartky (1990h) noted in her study on the phenomenology of the oppression of women, that the Panopticon in feminism is an internalized and eternal self-surveillance of the subject (i.e. women) who is committed and obedient to the standards of the patriarchal system. According to her, Panopticon



exists inside the consciousness of the subject and trains a woman to gaze upon herself through the serious eyes of the other, to relentlessly police herself and to please the men in the patriarchy (Bartky, 1990). She also examined the existing women's physical discipline imposed upon themselves, such as adopting a diet plan and gym programs. This effort is so much that their own bodies become their enemies as they punish themselves for gaining weight, even developing eating disorders such as bulimia or anorexia (which are all psychologically motivated). These practices are to attain a body type that fits the social construction of femininity. Bartky further explored how society puts a burden on women. Society dictates that women should hide physical (facial or bodily) flaws, and highlight their acceptable features through the use of make-up and other products. Women are then deemed to be prisoners of society's standards when it comes to the concept of beauty and body types. Society and the media argue that all available beauty products are within reach, not taking into consideration a person's status in life. Using poverty as a reason for not complying is considered a poor excuse, and is then used as a way to shame the woman. With the media's daily bombardment and the repetition of images in the construction of ideal and acceptable femininity, every woman is made to appear as a failure so that the beauty products endorsed by the ruling class will always sell (Bartky, 1990h).

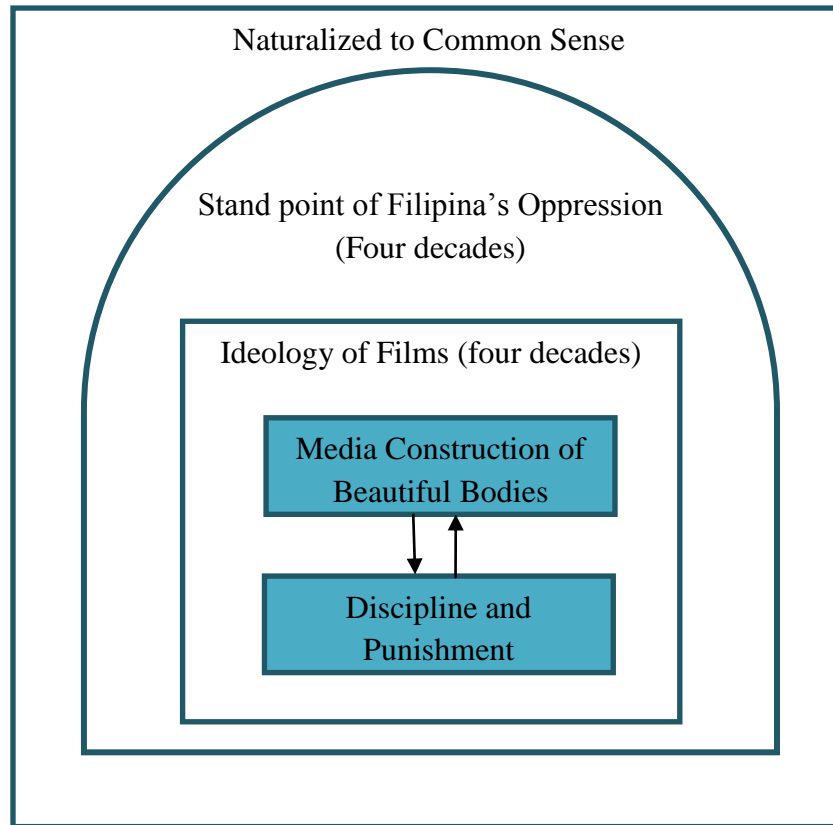
## B. Theoretical Framework

Illustration 1: Integrated Theories of Hegemony, Stand Point Theory, ISA, Alienation and Panopticism (Ramos, R. 2016)



This diagram is the integrated design of the researcher's theories and frameworks in investigating the media construction of a Filipina Superheroine body across four decades of selected Darna films.

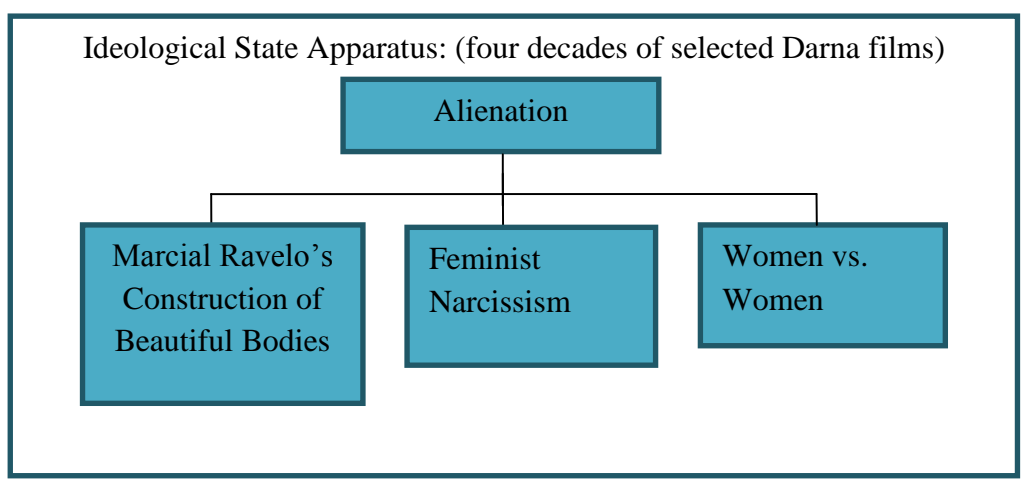
## C. Conceptual Framework

Illustration 2. *Culture* (Ramos, R. 2016)

Through the culture of capitalism and patriarchy, the beauty and fitness industry naturalizes the commodification of the faces and bodies of women to guarantee the saleability of the products of businesses of the few elite.

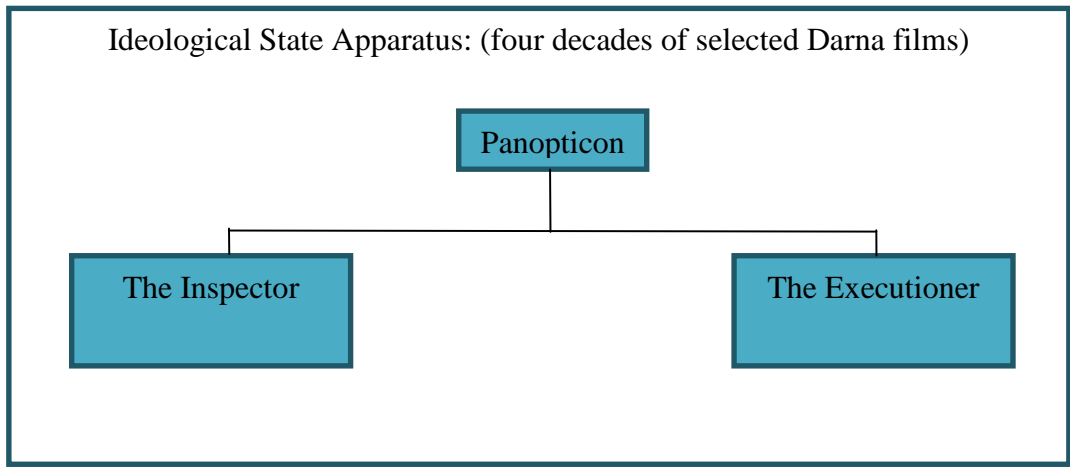
D. Operational Framework

Illustration 3. *Body Politics: Alienation* (Ramos, R. 2016)



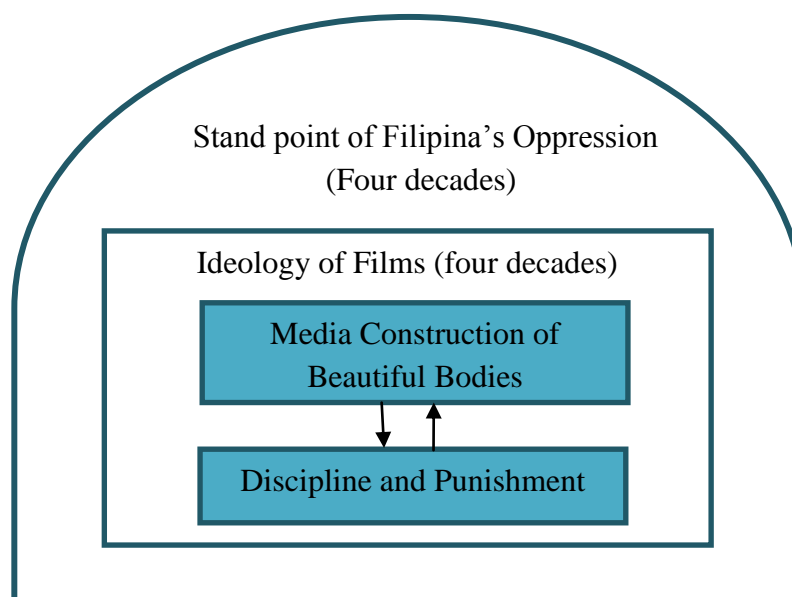
The Darna films from the four decades (1965-1994) were analyzed as an Ideological Apparatus to propagate the concept of Alienation by studying Marcial Ravelo's construct of beautiful bodies, Feminist Narcissism and Women pitted against Women.

Illustration 4. *Panopticon* (Ramos, R. 2016)



By looking through Darna films through 1965-1994 as an Ideological Apparatus to propagate the concept of Panopticism according to Bartky is studying Darna as both the Inspector and executioner of a beautiful face and body.

Illustration 5. *Bird Cage* (Ramos, R. 2016)



Looking through the standpoint of women and the researcher's experiences, which were revealed at the last section of this study in the Post Script, propelled this research as the standpoint of the subjugated in films of Darna through 1965-1994. Films as an Ideological Apparatus to propagate the concepts of alienation and panopticism that make the beautiful face and body an unattainable are like cages, limiting women based on their sexual function and biology.

#### E. Operational Definition

- Alienation – Patriarchal and capitalist coerced manipulation over the image of women and their products—bodies of women. (Jaggar, 1983; Tong, 2009)

- Ideology – An Althusserian concept of belief system that unconsciously and socially “positions people into power relations” (Gibson and Hill, 2000d)
- Feminist Narcissism – Indulgence to become “feminine” (Bartky, 1990)
- Inspector – The perpetual surveyor, the one who is invisible (Foucault, 1975)
- Executioner – The one who administers punishment to an individual for any disobedience to the existing system (Foucault, 1975)
- Panopticon – A form of psychological prison wherein an individual employs unconsciously/consciously unending self-surveillance, to cater to the patriarchal society’s standards. (Bartky, 1990)
- Oppression – The act of trapping and controlling a subject inside a restrictive system that suppresses the person’s being, like a bird trapped in a bird cage. (Frye, as cited by Minas 2000)
- Hegemony – Gramsci’s concept of culture being manipulated by the ruling class through the process of normalizing the thoughts, values and culture of the dominant or ruling class (Fiske as cited by Allen 1992b; Gibson and Hill, 2000c)
- Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)- An Althusserian concept; an instrument used by the social institutions such as the media, schools and family and is used by the dominant class to produce and reproduce subjects according to what is socially acceptable to patriarchy (Fiske,as cited by Allen 1992b; Gibson and Hill, 2000d)
- Common Sense – Efforts of the dominant class to ‘naturalize’ meanings in society for their own benefit. (Fiske as cited by Allen 1992b)

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilized the method of Dr. Thelma Kintanar in Feminist Textual Analysis. Guerrero (2002) said that the analysis mentioned is a process which includes (1) reading, (2) interpreting and (3) criticizing the text. To identify the image of the body Darna onscreen, the researcher applied the lenses of feminism to critically read the images and text of the films.

In June 2015, the researcher's panel on the triangulation of semiotics, ideology and psychoanalysis of the Darna films approved the researcher's thesis and suggested that she should take a course on feminism to have a deeper sense regarding women's plight against oppression that may be read in the films being studied. The researcher secured copies of the 1965 film *Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod*, the 1979 *Bira, Darna! Bira!*, the 1980 *Darna at Ding* and the 1994 *Darna, Ang Pagbabalik* from the UP CMC, ABS-CBN Film archive, Video 48, Cineaste, and film enthusiasts.

The researcher was encouraged by her adviser to enrol in Dr. Ofreneo's class who was cited in her research. Dr. Ofreneo encouraged her to interview Prof. Roselle Pineda and Dr. Baldo-Cubelo to further understand the concepts of identities and feminism. The concepts presented by Pineda about the historiography of Barbie greatly influenced the researcher's idea of Darna. Pineda's processes regarding the Barbie as standard of the concept of beauty was used as a lens to look into the norms propagated by the films analysed.

Ofreneo suggested that the researcher take into account feminist perspectives of Bartky and Jagaar in her reading and interpretation of Darna's identity in the selected films. The researcher used the ideas of Bartky and Jagaar on the analyses of the body,

embodiment, alienation and feminist Marxism which helped her to deconstruct the Darna's identity onscreen presented to the people and which made society subscribe to the idea that it is normalized and is a standard of femininity in the Philippines. This made the researcher use the alienation concept and the Panopticon.

The researcher was also interested and in search of possible influences for the construction of the female superheroine. The researcher then had decided to look into Marcial Ravelo and his life history to draw the line of her inquiry. The researcher encountered Ravelo's granddaughter's masteral thesis which gave hope to the researcher in answering her queries on the hegemonic influences behind the construction of Darna. The researcher was also able to look for online accounts of some fans who wrote online blogs for the possible influences of Ravelo.

The researcher's idea of Darna as a standard of beauty was also analysed. The superheroine was thereby used to present a socially and morally acceptable pornographic identity. The researcher, with the guidance of her adviser, found that Darna was used by the capitalists to gain profit, making it the "gaze" of patriarchal society.

Films analysed used recurring segmented images highlighting portions of the female body to visually entice society to subscribe to and consume the products of capitalists. The researcher applied the concept of alienation wherein the female body alienates any woman once they see Darna's unattainable body. The researcher utilized a shot-by-shot analysis of Valasek to further analyze the notion of the images presented in the films which normalize the idea and which make women follow the concept of beauty prescribed by society. Hence, this makes men fantasize about the imagined body and also use the concept of the beautiful body in their realm of the male gaze. In Valasek's shot-



by-shot analysis, he analysed the shots through edited sequences of the films and included camera angles and editing, as if re-imagining the storyboard of the film. This research focused more on the recurring images, but still subscribing to his style of choosing a specific shot to problematize, and comparing and contrasting the shots to other shots. The discussion on the mis-en-scene and cinematography was discussed separately in the section about Darna's identity through her costume. To document the recurring images, the researcher screen-grabbed these using VLC Media Player. She then composited the repeating images by year and by theme with Microsoft Power Point to strengthen the argument that, indeed, these images surfaced constantly from 1965 to 1994 before exporting the composited copy as one whole image. To document the dialogues, the researcher took time to transcribe the films to be able to extract dialogues that would help her articulate further.

The researcher used the ideas presented and submitted her masteral thesis in November 2016 and has been approved by the panel. One of the members of the panel suggested she include the concept of post-war ideas regarding the construction of the Filipino superheroine which was included in the final revision of the research. The time in which Ravelo created Darna was during World War II, hence, he was greatly influenced by American constructs.

This masteral thesis spanned three years of reviewing related literature and looking for patterns in the Darna films propagated as media construct, the notions as well as norms in society, including as the concept of the female body.

## Timeline:

2014	<p>1<sup>st</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The researcher and her adviser agreed on a topic to research</li> </ul> <p>2<sup>nd</sup>- 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The researcher researched and started writing her thesis proposal, with the guidance and approval of her adviser.</li> </ul>
2015	<p>1<sup>st</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporating adviser's comments.</li> <li>- Revise.</li> <li>- Discussed who the researcher's panelists who would help enhance the research would be.</li> </ul> <p>Mid 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personally approached her critic, Professor Ed Lejano to consider her research for their approval. Laid down her plans regarding this study including her projected timeline for proposal defense. He agreed to be part of the journey of this study.</li> <li>- Commented</li> <li>- Revised</li> <li>- Personally approached her panel member, Professor Julienne Baldo-Cubelo to consider her research.</li> </ul> <p>End of 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good to defend</li> </ul> <p>Summer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposal defense</li> <li>- Panel's comment: the study yields more to feminist research. Change the triangulation of semiotics, ideology and psychoanalysis to a feminist textual analysis problematizing more on bodies of women and embodiment.</li> <li>- Panel strongly suggests that the researcher take a class in Women's Department specifically WD 210- Feminist Theories and Movements</li> </ul> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Took the WD 210 class taught by Dr. Ofreneo</li> <li>- Had a one-on-one meeting with Dr. Ofreneo for guidance regarding her study.</li> <li>- Prof. Roselle Pineda and Dr. Baldo-Cubelo to understand further the concepts of identities and feminism.</li> <li>- Interview.</li> <li>- Watched and transcribed the Darna films at hand.</li> <li>- Revised thesis according to the panel's comment</li> </ul> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Watched and transcribed remaining Darna films.</li> <li>- Write thesis.</li> </ul>
2016	<p>1<sup>st</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporated adviser's comments and suggestions</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Research</li><li>- Revise</li></ul>
	<p>2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Incorporated adviser's comments and suggestions</li><li>- Research</li><li>- Revise</li><li>- Change of critic, as per advice of his critic due to his schedule discrepancy.</li><li>- Critic change to Professor Melissa Dela Merced, her expertise in Visual communication enhanced the study's articulation</li></ul>
	<p>Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Incorporated new critic's comments</li><li>- Revise</li><li>- Asked for the approval of critic</li><li>- Thesis Defense</li><li>- Incorporate Panel's comments and suggestions</li></ul>

## Budget

## A. Proposal:

Particulars	Amount
Transportation	20,000
Photocopy	10,000
Print/ Book Binding	10,000
Internet	10,000
Communication	20,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Php 70,000</b>

## B. Proper:

Particulars	Amount
Transportation	60,000
Photocopy	10,000
Print	20,000
Internet	10,000
Book Binding	10,000
Video Edit	10,000
Burn	10,000
Miscellaneous	20,000
Communication	50,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Php 200,000</b>

## V. DATA AND ANALYSIS

### A. Images of Darna in Film

#### 1. *Darna: Her Life, Power, Strength and Role*

Darna's responsibility is to uphold goodness here on earth as ordered by the white stone. As mentioned, she was chosen by the stone due to her pure heart. Day and night, she flies over cities to stop evil, specifically in Manila (See Fig. 2-5). She works with people in towns, police (see Fig. 2) and even priests (see Fig. 2). Darna's ability to fly can be said as a panoptic vision that easily helps track commotions and her opponents or any deviants in society (see Fig. 6).

Also Darna in the 1980 film was made superior to any woman as it was highlighted in one of the dialogues: "Si Darna, mas maganda, mas matalino at mas mapanganib" (Darna is more beautiful, more intelligent and more dangerous.) This is the kind of ideology that one must embody back then as portrayed by media; a kind of beauty that is unattainable and only offered to the chosen one. Darna has a docile body (Bartky, 1990) trained to be perfect for society's needs—visually, sexually and culturally.

Darna's number primary source of encouragement and ally is her brother Ding. He is considered her sidekick aside from being a sibling. In the 1979 and 1980 films, Ding was the caretaker of the white stone and it was necessary for him to be with her sister most of the time. He also kept her sister's secret identity as humanity's savior hidden. Whenever Narda is in danger, Ding, being the caretaker of the stone, tosses it to her to transform into Darna.

In the 1979 film *Bira, Darna! Bira!*, Ding compared his sister to the character Superman found in comic books. He innocently equates Superman as Darna's male

counterpart. This can also be read as Superman being the strong, Western man, and Darna as the mystical Eastern woman. Ding's statement confirms the claims of Ravelo and his family that one of the inspirations of Darna is Superman.

Ding:

Ate alam mo, kung ako si Superman, tutulungan ko siya. E ikaw ba ate, kung katulad ka ni Darna, ung nasa komiks, tutulungan mo ba siya?

Ding:

[If I were Superman, I would help him. How about you, *ate* (older sister); if you were Darna, the one in the comics, would you help him?]

Darna is also tasked to care for Ding wherever she goes. She carries him around whether her mission is dangerous or not. Ding is always by her side (see Fig. 6). Child caring is expected of her even when Darna is working. Although there are moments wherein Ding is left alone to protect himself and he is equipped with his street smarts to outwit his challenger. Whenever there is a need for help, Darna is sure to rescue her beloved brother.

Figure 1. *Concept of Darna 1965: Strength and Power (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1965 Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod: Fights the Ape man, Flies above the police, City Priest points to Darna where the Babaeng Tuod wreak havoc, Flies above the city*

Figure 2. *Concept of Darna 1979: Strength and Power* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: 1979 Bira Darna! Bira: Darna flies from the province to the city with Ding on her back top shot, Darna flies with Ding on her back mid shot, Darna kicks gangsters who wantsto kill her, Darna kicks the kidnapper of Pepping*



Figure 3. *Concept of Darna 1980, Strength and Power (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1980 Darna at Ding: Darna flies with Ding on her back; Darna punches escaped prisoner; Darna flies while holding Ding on the side; Darna breaks the bones of the fugitive*

Figure 4. *Concept of Darna 1994, Strength and Power (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1994 Darna ang Pagbabalik: Darna saves the kidnapped child; Darna flies with the child to escape the explosion; Darna fights Valentine daughter of Valentina; Darna fights with the son of Valentina who transformed into a python*

Figure 6. *Concept of Darna Panoptic Vision (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1965 Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod; 1979 Bira Darna! Bira; 1980 Darna at Ding; 1994 Darna at ang Pagbabalik*

## 2. *Darna's Identity through the Costume*

Darna's costumes change through time. In the 1965 adaptation, the color of the costume cannot be determined. Darna wears a headpiece with a winged emblem in the middle. Her brassiere was designed to have two large stars that cover the cups of the bra. Darna wears leg shorts with a belt and a long loin cloth in the middle. Darna's large bracelet and high-cut boots completes her costume (see Fig. 7)

In 1979, Darna's costume used a red and gold color scheme. Her headpiece is red with wings, with a golden insignia and an encircled star in the middle. She was the only one who wore a choker. Her brassiere had two smaller stars. She wore a red low-cut bikini with a white-silver belt and a short, golden loincloth in the middle (a few inches above the knee). She had white-silver bangles and red high-cut boots (see Fig. 7)

In the 1980 film, Darna's costume drastically changed. The color scheme was comprised of a shiny red, white and blue with gold as highlights to the overall costume. She wore a red headpiece with a wing-like crest in the middle. Her brassier was red with low-cut cups that each had a golden star in the middle. Darna was back in her leg shorts, only this time it was in blue, with a white long loincloth in the middle. She wore white-golden bangles and white-gold boots (see Fig. 8).

In the 1994 film, the color scheme of Darna's costume went back to red and gold. Instead of a headpiece, she wore a crown-like headband with an emblem with small wings. Her brassiere was red and had huge golden stars that cover the cups. Darna had a golden belt with a star like design in the middle from which a long, red loincloth dangled. She wore a golden bracelet and a red boot that completed her costume (see Fig. 8).

According to Mclachlan and Hudson, the colors of the costume tell the persona of the character. In particular, the color red signifies passion while yellow represents energy (2016). Comic fans hypothesized that Darna's costume, through its combination of red and yellow, may visually be interpreted as dancing fire when she moves. It can be said that it is an image of fire that may be used either for good or evil. In a study made by Bortoli and Maroto regarding global meanings of colors, they said that for the Philippines yellow meant rebirth or resurrection and red signified the sun (2001).

In Darna's costumes, (see Fig. 7-8) the red and golden yellow colors signify boldness and passion, a metaphor for the energy given to her by the white stone. As discussed, based on Mclachlan and Hudson's color theory, it can be said that Darna is like the sun—the centre of attraction and a central component of society. As stated by Bortoli and Maroto, Darna is a rebirth, a new creation better than Narda, whose role in society is to become the source of light, like that of a sun. It is also an indication of matriarchy in the Philippines where the center of society is a strong and wise woman. This is also in line with what Dr. Castro of the University of the Philippines Department of Anthropology said as cited in Brillon's thesis (2007): that the country, although colonized, never really veered away from being matrifocal. Darna has the persona of a mother—a mother who protects her family, which may be linked to the concept of motherland.

In the 1980 film *Darna at Ding*, she wore a different combination of colors: red, white and blue. Arcega argued in his blog (2009) that Darna's costume is a commemoration of the Philippine flag with the two stars on her bra are inspired by the stars of the flag and her color scheme by the flag. According to Legarda (2013) in his

matrix of the history of the Philippine flag, its colors are derived from the flag of America. However, Legarda noted that the design was conceived by Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo.

According to Rina Ravelo, in Parian's thesis (1991), Darna's popularity in the komiks gave an opportunity for Marcial Ravelo to sell the rights of Darna's character as a separate product franchise and story popularized in komiks. This opened an opportunity to re-imagine Darna in a different milieu suitable to its audience, but still approved by Marcial Ravelo and eventually by his family.

According to the study, the 1965 *Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod* film was based on the popular comic story, while the succeeding Darna films, the 1979 *Bira, Darna! Bira!*, the 1980 *Darna at Ding*, 1994 *Darna, Ang Pagbabalik* bought the Darna character, re-told Darna's story and made drastic changes of the color scheme. This can be attributed to the social unrest of the Filipinos caused by Martial Law which was felt by the majority, indicating a symbolic outcry for a saviour. In 1986, coincidentally, a woman together with the Filipino nation ousted the dictator and ended his regime.

Arcega (2009) also explored the strip of cloth dangling from Darna's belt. This cloth resembles that worn by our katutubos. According to his study, the Igorots, or people from the mountain (Maentz, 2013), are known to wear the bahag. They have six different tribes namely, Ibaloi, Ifugao, Bontoc, Itneg, Kalinga, and Kankanaey (*The IGOROT People*, 2012). The bahag is clothing meant for men (Scott, 2012). The Igorots are known to be fiercest fighters, for they eat their fallen foe. They even call themselves head hunters. Like Darna who is above the city, Igorots live above the cityscape, with their

homes found on the mountain of Cordillera. Darna, like the Igorot warriors, have the skills to kill, destroy and protect.

Figure 5. *Image of the concept of Darna 1965 and 1979 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1965 Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod played by Eva Montes long shot; 1965 Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod played by Eva Montes mid shot; 1979 Bira Darna! Bira! played by Rio Locsin mid shot; 1979 Bira Darna! Bira! played by Rio Locsin long shot*

Figure 6. *Image of the Concept of Darna 1980 and 1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1980 Darna at Ding played by Vilma Santos long shot; 1980 Darna at Ding played by Vilma Santos mid shot; 1994 Darna ang Pagbabalik played by Anjanette Abayari mid shot; 1994 Darna ang Pagbabalik played by Anjanette Abayari worm shot*



### 3. Darna vs. Men and Other Mystical Creatures

Fighting scenes are the most anticipated part of each Darna film examined. Most of the time, Darna fights criminals and those men and women who try to destabilize society, including kidnapers (see Fig 10), illegal miners (see Fig. 12), escaped prisoners (see Fig. 11), and men hired by drug lord syndicates (see Fig. 13). Darna also has the ability to take down supernatural evils (see Fig.9, 11, 12, 14) responsible for creating fear in human beings. Her abilities range from super strength, power punches and kicks, super speed, extraordinary hearing powers, ability to outwit her opponents, to flight, and in the 1994 film, the ability to deflect bullets and to shoot laser beams through her eyes.

Darna's enemies were commonly depicted as groups of men comprised of gangsters, illegal miners and loggers, hired killers and escaped prisoners. In contrast, Darna defeats the men who are armed with guns as a lone superheroine. The frames shown (see Fig. 9-12) depicted Darna as a being more powerful than any other and as an excess of a woman better than men (Greer, 1970). In the 1994 film *Darna ang Pagbabalik*, capitalism was tackled through the destruction of nature. The Philippines is rich with raw materials which Northern countries lacked (Pineda-Ofreneo, Narciso-Apuan and Estrada-Claudio, 1997). Illegal businesses exploit nature without thinking about the depletion of natural resources and creating environmental imbalances which may result in disaster and displacement of people. These businesses do not care, because they will not bear the brunt of the consequences of their actions.

Darna's two- and three-color schemes, illuminated by the key light in the foreground, separate Darna from the men who wore dull or monochromatic colors. The

picture was at eye-level, middle shot or mid-high angled full shots to make her appear bigger and more powerful than the men (see Fig. 9-12).

Darna also faced female villains in the films. Walker (1993) as cited by Foster in her blog (2005) discussed the archetypical snakes as the great mother goddess—the bearer of wisdom—which was seen in the Darna film in 1994 with Valentina and her children, Dr. Adan (also known as Valentine when she transforms into a snake-haired woman) and Max (also known as Magnum, one of the most wanted men of the police). They possess powers nearly equal to Darna's, but use their abilities for evil. This kind of character was put into shame in the film by highlighting their ideals which do not coincide with the ideals of society. This proves that women can also be evil in film as exemplified by Dr. Adan (1994), Dr. Fontisberg (1980) who studied in Germany (a first world country) to study science and advanced technology, and Lei Ming who inherited the art of black magic from her Chinese ancestors and who came from another first world country, China. They are similar to Darna; equally beautiful and powerful, but with corrupt ideologies.

Dr. Fontisberg's character is a representation of World War II German Nazis, and is imagined as a lunatic, who creates zombified (Marangheg) creatures obedient to her, regardless of how illogical and inhumane her orders are. Narda even verbalized her contempt of Dr. Fontisberg's insanity, which the doctor took as commendation coming from a silly peasant girl like Narda.

NARDA:

Isa kang baliw, doktora!

[You're a lunatic, Doctor!]

DOCTORA FONTISBERG:

Iyan ang sabi nila. (halakhak)

[That's what they say! (evil laugh)]

Dr. Fontisberg represents women who are learned. She studied in Germany, a representation of the great European nations. Her German schooling signifies a power structure wherein the all-knowing and powerful are the people from the North which has better education and better technology compared to a developing country like the Philippines. Darna shames Dr. Fontisberg in public by challenging the doctor's view by telling the defeated doctor that science can never win against what was ordained.

In the 1980 film *Darna at Ding*, Lei Ming was angered by her husband, who was not shown if he is Chinese or Filipino, for killing all of their children upon discovering that she has the knowledge of black magic from China. Lei Ming harmed Ding by piercing her handmade cursed doll with needles. Lei Ming wanted revenge by kidnapping all their children and slowly killing them to become her disciples. In a scene, Darna considered black magic as a more potent form of witchcraft compared to the Filipino version of kulam, and said, "Hindi Tiyang, mas matindi pa sa kulam, black magic" (No Auntie. This is worse is greater than kulam, the usual Filipino sorcery, it's black magic). This comparison indicates a power play between knowledge and sorcery where China is greater than the Philippines.

Lei Ming also represents Sinophobia and, historically, Filipino-Chinese experiences in the Philippines, in particular, Binondo. During the Japanese war, Japan antagonized and demonized the Chinese. These notions of Chinese enmity resulted in massacres and even genocide in different places across the Philippines. In Binondo, the

place known for its Chinese artisans was awarded to a Catholic-Chinese individual, which ended in a mutiny for Wong Chee-Beng (as cited in Ang & Ang, 2013-2014).

Cinematography helped the viewers focus on Darna's physical powers during her battles. Shots taken of Darna fighting a villain, or engaged in a face-to-face battle, are framed in a way that the villain wears a darker shade, with low lighting at the back and juxtaposed to high key lighting. This focuses the scene on Darna in the foreground. The colors of her costume together with her accessories diffuse the light for a soft glowing effect on Darna's image (see Fig 14-15). The backgrounds frequently showed dark or deep forests and abysses of a building rooftop which signifies chaos or tension in a battle. In cases wherein the villains are framed individually, their style of clothing speaks about their identity. Dr. Fontisberg comfortably wears a stylish business man's clothing, depicting her class, belonging to a world constructed by men. Lei Ming wore a silk dress typically worn by Chinese women and an excessive headdress that can be seen as a crown, showing her class and perhaps her position as an expert of black magic in Binondo. Valentina and Valentine's use of green colors and Dr. Adan's glowing yellow headdress and jacket create a link to nature. Dr. Adan's excess exhibits aggressiveness, and her attempts to seek attention from her mother Valentina and her devotees. Magnum wears monochromatic business attire, showing that he is a "typical", laidback businessman who he needs a push from her sister or mother to perform a job.

In every diageitic fight scene (see Fig. 16-19), the recurring frames encourage female empowerment. Darna is a mystified wise woman possessing a beauty and the ability to rescue humanity, and at the same time exudes danger and sensuality. McDonalds' (1995) concept of Darna diageitically masked the female experience and

encourages the viewers to see her as a spectacle (1995). The film analyzed the concept of the spectacular, which enables the ideologies of films to influence reality by creating societal norms, especially those relating to women and their perception of themselves.

Figure 7. *Darna's Opponents in 1965 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left Darna 1965. : Darna fights the Ape man, Darna kicks the Ape man, Darna carries Lucy as she flies her to talk to God, Darna lifts the tree trunk lady*

Figure 8. *Darna's Opponents in 1979* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left Darna 1979: Darna kicks the gangster/ kidnapper; Darna jumps; Darna punches a man hired by a drug lord syndicate; Darna threatens her enemy*

Figure 9. *Darna's Opponents in 1980 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left Darna 1980: Darna fights with Istariray; Darna fights the escaped prisoners; Darna fights with her evil self; Darna confronts Lei Ming*



Figure 10. *Darna's Opponents in 1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left Darna 1994: Darna escapes the bodega blast; Darna confronts the evil miner, Darna fights with Valentine, Darna on top of the upside down helicopter used by Magnum to escape*

Figure 11. *Male Antagonists* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: 1965 Darna chased by goons; 1979 Darna, Drug lord and his hired goons; 1980 Darna fights escaped prisoners; 1994 Darna confronts illegal miners*

Figure 12. *Mystical Women Antagonist 1965-1980 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1965 Darna fights the ape man; 1965 Darna fights Babaeng Tuod; Dr. Fontisberg in 1980 Darna; Darna fights evil Darna in 1980 film; Lei Ming in 1980 film*

Figure 13. *Mystical Women Antagonist 1980-1994* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Dana versus Istariray in 1980 film; Darna versus Valentine in 1994; Valentina in Darna 1994; Darna versus Magnum who has returned to his original form, a huge snake, in 1994; Darna, Dr. Adan and Magnum in 1994 film*

Figure 14. *Concept of Darna fights and flight scenes 1965 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Narda transformed into Darna, flight and fight scenes*

Figure 15. Concept of Darna fights and flight scenes 1979 (Ramos, R. 2016)



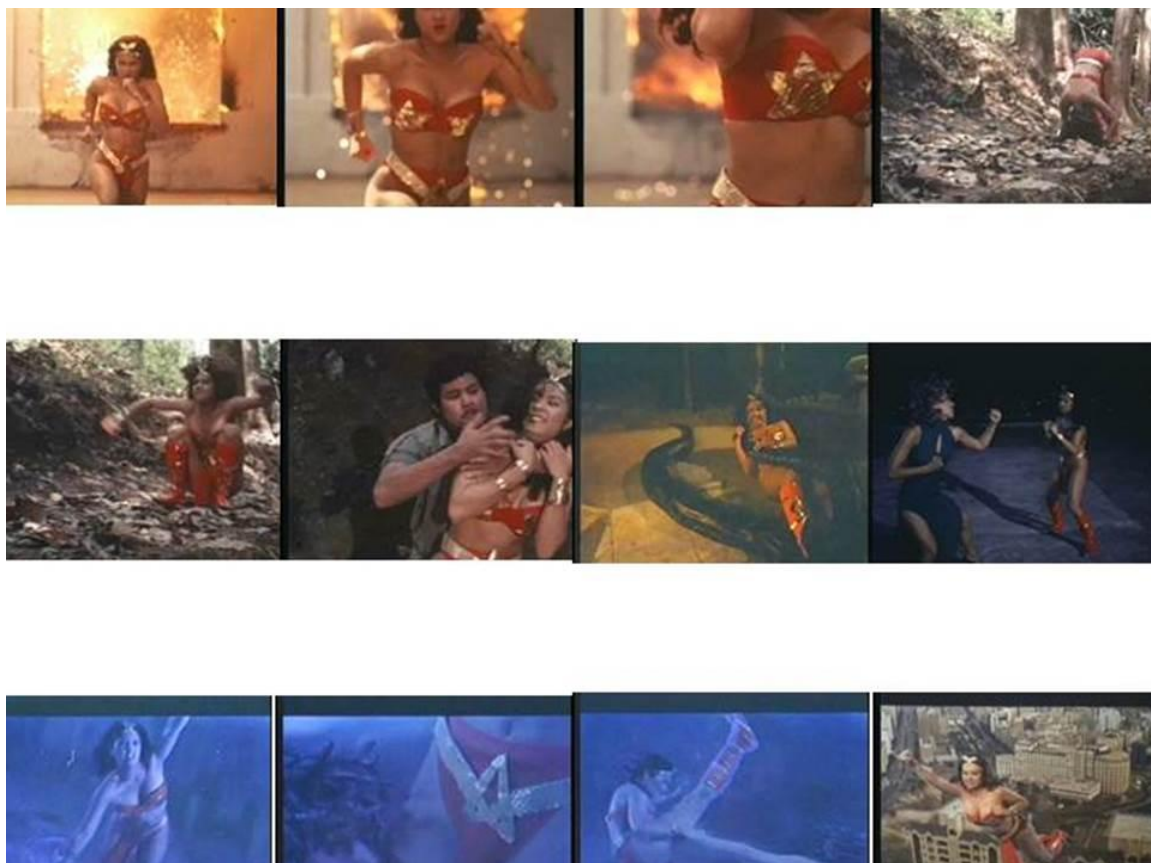
*Clockwise from top-left: Narda transformed into Darna with Ding; flight scene with Ding; Darna fight scenes*

Figure 16. *Concept of Darna fights and flight scenes 1980 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top-left: Darna's flight scenes with Ding; Darna fights Istariray; Darna fight and flight scenes*

Figure 17. *Concept of Darna fights and flight scenes 1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna runs away from the bodega blasts scenes; Darna fight and flight scenes*



## B. The Creation of Darna

### 1. *Marcial Ravelo*

One of the popular forms of media that has greatly influenced how women view themselves is comics. It emerged here in the Philippines in 1885 through Jose Rizal's creation "The Monkey and the Tortoise" (Lent, 2009). It became one of the industries during World War II (1939-1945). American soldiers based in the Philippines imported comics for entertainment. Later on around the 50s (which was recognized as the Golden Age of Komiks), Filipinos developed comics for different genres (e.g. melodrama, horror, comedy). Between the years 1950 and 1970, Marcial "Mars" Ravelo's name came into the picture and he was unofficially given the title "King of Philippine Comics" (Parian, 1991a).

After successfully authoring several cartoon-strips, including the famous Rita Kasinghot which was published by the Bulaklak Magazine in 1947, Ravelo pursued his passion to become a serious novelist. He wrote his first classic novel *Roberta* in the 1950s which was published by Tagalog Klasiks Publishing House and made into a hit movie by Sampaguita Pictures. Its box office success made Ravelo the most sought-after comic novelist at the time.

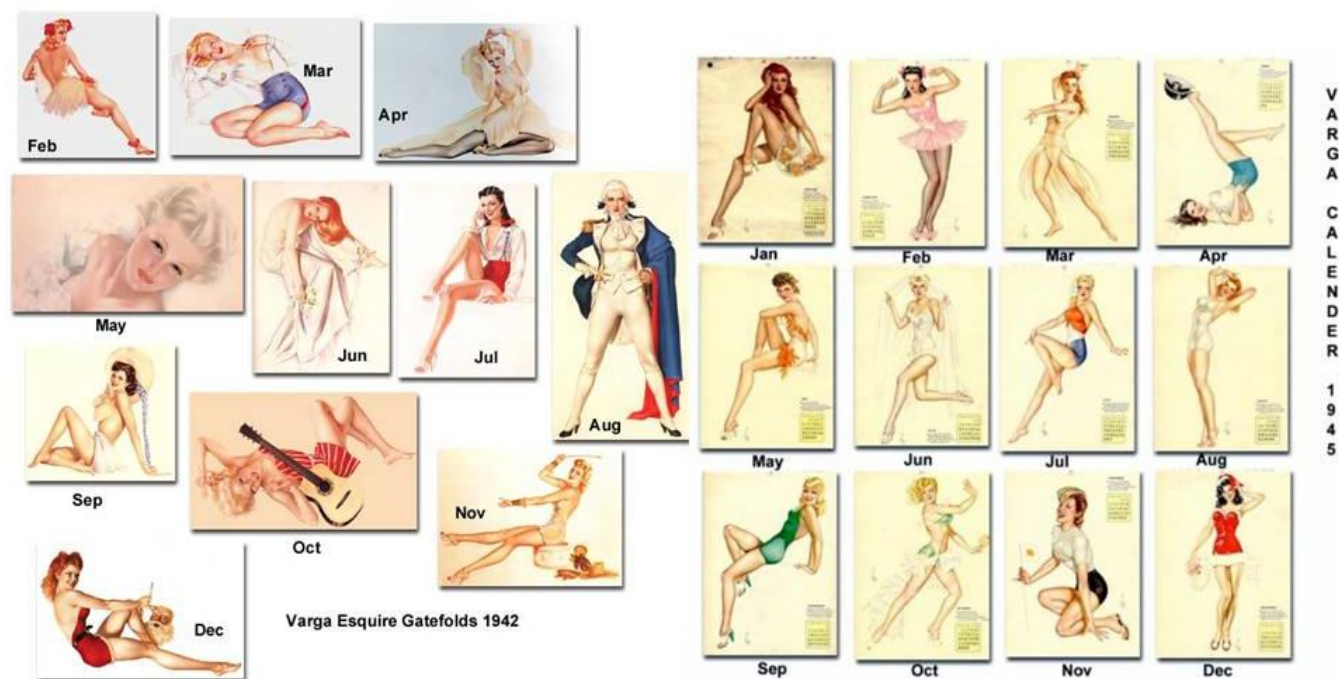
The longest enduring comic series that Ravelo authored is the Darna series. In 1939, before the outbreak of the Second World War, Ravelo originally published the series under the name "Varga" under Bulaklak Komiks Publishing House. Unfortunately, due to a rift between him and the management of the said publishing house, Ravelo transferred to Pilipino Komiks Publishing House where he later on changed the name of

the heroine from Varga to Darna while retaining Narda as the name of her ordinary counterpart (Arcega, 2009; Lawagan, 2010).

Marcial Ravelo had a hard life, which helped him write familiar Filipino stories that touched the hearts of his readers. His father left him and his mother at the age of two. During the Japanese occupation, he worked as a messenger in a Japanese shirt factory. He had access privilege to libraries and taught himself accounting, sales and drawing (Parian, 1991b). During World War II (1939-1945), it can be assumed that the American soldiers brought with them Varga Esquire calendars and paintings of women for inspiration (see Fig. 20). This assumption was also stated in passing in Apolonio's thesis but was not explored. These images may have proliferated during this era, especially in the adult world of men, and eventually inspired Ravelo. As a tribute to Varga Esquire's pin-up images of women, he christened his first komiks character Varga before renaming her, Darna. However, Llanes and Kieth Sicat affirmed on their blogs and the latter's video documentaries, that the inspiration behind Darna was Ravelo's mother. Rina, Ravelo's daughter, added in the interview with Brillon that aside from his mother, another inspiration behind the creation of Darna is Superman, a well-known western superhero (Brillon, 2007b).

In 1952, Ravelo garnered the name 'hit maker' for successfully entering five films in the yearly Big 10 or Box Office Hits. Famous names in the film industry such as Mr. Cirio Santiago, Atty. Espiridon Laxa and Ms. Marichu Maceda, according to Brillon, enjoyed the benefit of investing in Ravelo's masterpiece (Brillon, 2007). Because of the prestige, Ravelo had the privilege to make his voice heard in film adaptations of his stories and especially in choosing actors. (Parian, 1991b). For Ms. Vilma Santos, being

one of the favorites to play Darna, the role boosted her career. Santos added that Darna is the game changer that completes an actress' career, which was also affirmed by GMA7 (Brillon, 2007). After Revalo's death, his family took over all intellectual property rights Marcial Ravelo enjoyed to ensure the consistency of the story and the character's image (Brillon, 2007).

Figure 18. *Varga Esquire Calendar*

*Clockwise from top left: Varga Esquire Calendar (1942), Varga Esquire Calendar (1945)*

Source: Herausgeber (Ed.). (n.d.). *americanad: Varga 1945\_2*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from [http://americanad.free.fr/pin%20up/Liste\\_pinup/45Varga\\_2/Varga45\\_2.html](http://americanad.free.fr/pin%20up/Liste_pinup/45Varga_2/Varga45_2.html), on-the-step.com. (n.d.). *Varga girls 1943 Esquire Varga Calendar*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/172755335681231852/>, *The Varga Esquire Years*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <https://www.google.com.ph/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pinupgallery.com%2FvargasID%2Fesquiregatefold%2Fidg42.jpg&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pinupgallery.com%2FvargasID%2Fesquireyears.htm&docid=uhHOCHCChMX9M&tbnid=LIquCyiU4iJJNM%3A&w=761&h=761&bih=6>, Tiron, K. (2006). *Manifestacia Spasimo Bobovac*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from [http://www.sb.kraljevasutjeska.com:http://www.sb.kraljevasutjeska.com/foto/themes/rainy\\_day/images/\\_nose%20art%20flight%20jackets](http://www.sb.kraljevasutjeska.com:http://www.sb.kraljevasutjeska.com/foto/themes/rainy_day/images/_nose%20art%20flight%20jackets)

## 2. *Darna, an American Construct*

According to Parian's study (1991) Tony Velasquez' style of drawing inspired Ravelo to create his own characters. Velasquez was one of the people before Ravelo who popularized Tagalog komiks. According to Roxas and Arevalo (1985a), he was given the title "Father of Tagalog Komiks". At 16, Velasquez began working as a photoengraver at Banaag Press in 1926. Later on, as Don Ramon Roces placed the photoengraving department under his company Liwayway Magazine, he became one of the artists. Together with Romualdo Ramos, Velazquez popularized komik strips such as Kenkoy and Ponyang Halobaybay. Ramos wrote the jokes while Velasquez illustrated them, giving life to these stories. The Ramos-Velazquez duo became a hit but was short-lived due to the unexpected death of Ramos (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985b).

Before the war, Velazquez' style of drawing was mature and the first to explore cartoon advertising, creating characters that suit a certain product. As an example, there is "Tikboy" for the Tiki-Tiki brand, and Manuel Zamora and "Isko" for Esco Shoes. After World War II in 1945, Velasquez continued to pen Kenkoy and Ponyang Halobaybay as a freelancer at Liwayway Magazine (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985c).

Ravelo's inspiration from Velazquez' artwork helped him imagine and illustrate Varga's character at Bulaklak Publishing House. The Varga and Ponyang characters both have soft, rounded strokes as seen in (see Fig. 22) the small waist and long legs and huge bra cup, indicating that the female already has a developed body. The character's body occupy the center space of the frame panels, leaving less space for other minor characters and dialogues, and signifying that the character is the center of the story. In each frame, her impeccably small waist and full breasts must be seen to represent femininity. The

characters were also pictured smiling, inviting the reader and tell them not to be intimidated by her presence, as well as by her story.

When Ravelo transferred to Pilipino Komiks, he worked with Nestor Redondo as his artist. Together they created the world of Darna, with Ravelo as the writer and Redondo as the illustrator (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985d). Nestor Redondo's drawing style were all inspired by Western action and adventure comics imported by his father. Among them were Superman, Tarzan and Captain America, all of which helped him pen Darna's adventures (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985d).

Redondo reimagined Darna, changing her characterization and imagery into a more visually pleasurable and highly sexualized one. Darna did not just invite his readers to read her story, she encouraged voyeurism, allowing her avid supporters to come closer and inspect her, especially the delicate lines of her body. The depth and detail of imagery adds characterization, feel, and motion in each panel, illuminating a more fetishized woman, espousing a more mature role. He also specialized on fantasies of barely naked or naked bodies of women, with most of his female characters drawn in this fashion. This mixed style of fantasy and realism visually resembles the images of the pin-up women of Varga Esquire magazines. Redondo is worth mentioning because he marked the shift from the soft, rounded imagined girl of the character Varga to the delicate, socially and morally acceptable pornographic identity that later on translated to film (see Fig. 23). Even the other imagined female drawings of Rendondo, the illumination of the fetishized, fantasized and highly sexualized bodies were seen in the komik panels.

According to Rina Ravelo (Parian, 1991), Darna's extraordinary powers were inspired by the writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster's Superman (see Fig. 24). While

her ability to transform was drawn from Captain Marvel, which was illustrated by Jack Kirby and written by Bill Parker and C.C. Beck for Fawcett Publications, where the child Billy Batson would say the name “Shazaaam” and would turn into the super hero Captain Marvel (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985e). There was a time in the history of comics when the publisher of Superman, DC Comics, sued Fawcett Publications for copyright infringement. A few years after Fawcett exited the industry, in February 1973, DC Comics, re-introduced the character Captain Marvel in their series (see Fig. 29) (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985e; Daniels, 1995a).

Darna was born during a time of war where there was a need for people to hope for a savior. Darna became a huge icon of the post-war period. During this time, the American Westernized (white, tall) concept of hero influenced the construction of the Filipino heroine, specifically Darna. Her stories had the American influence that proliferated and became dominant in the komiks (see Fig. 25-29). Ravelo incorporated the American construction of local superhero stories, which is the superhero ideology, into his own ideas of the local superhero. The idea has been Filipinized, with Darna becoming the passive counterpart of Western stories and being mystified when translated into the context of the Philippines.

The name Narda was also inspired by an American comic called Mandrake the Magician by Lee Falk and Phil Davis in 1934 (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985f). She is the beautiful wife of a Magician whose powers include hypnosis, shape-shifting, invisibility, telekinesis, and teleportation (see Fig. 30). She is unafraid to be with Mandrake and Lothar, an African bodyguard. To be able to experience Mandrake’s crime-fighting adventures, she goes as far as abandoning being a princess (Cereno, 2015).

Figure 19. *Ravelo and Velazquez Style of Drawing (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: 1947 Varga Character design by Marcial Ravelo (Apollonio, 2005a); 1940 Ponyang Halobaybay Character design by Tony Velasquez (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985g)*

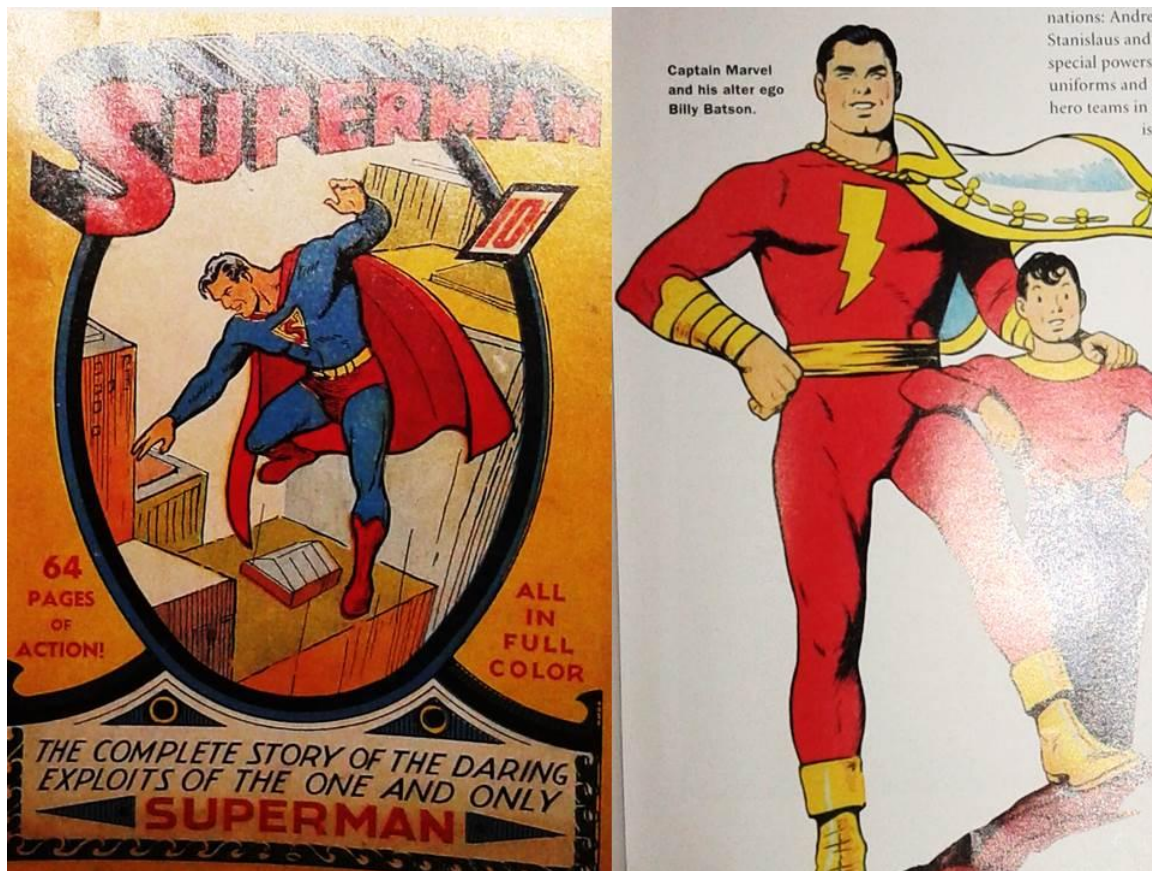


Figure 20. *Nestor Redondo's Imagined Women*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna, Onageruz, Woodsprite, Tygra (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985h)*

Figure 21. *Comparison of Superman and Captain Marvel*



Clockwise from top left: *Superman* (Daniels, 1995b); *Captain Marvel* (Daniels, 1995c)

Figure 22. *Possible Influence of Superman's Strength on 1965 Darna Film*



*Clockwise from top left: Action Comics #1 June 1938 (Daniels, 1995d); Darna in Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod from 1965*

Figure 23. *Possible Influence of Superman's Strength in 1979 Darna Film*



*From left: Superman vs. wife beater (Daniels, 1995e); Darna in Bira, Darna! Bira!*

Figure 24. *Possible Influence of Superman's Enemy on 1980 Darna Film*



*From left: Action Comics #199 December 1954 (Daniels, 1995f); Darna in Darna at Ding 1980*

Figure 25. *Superman's Possible influence on an explosion scene in a 1994 film*



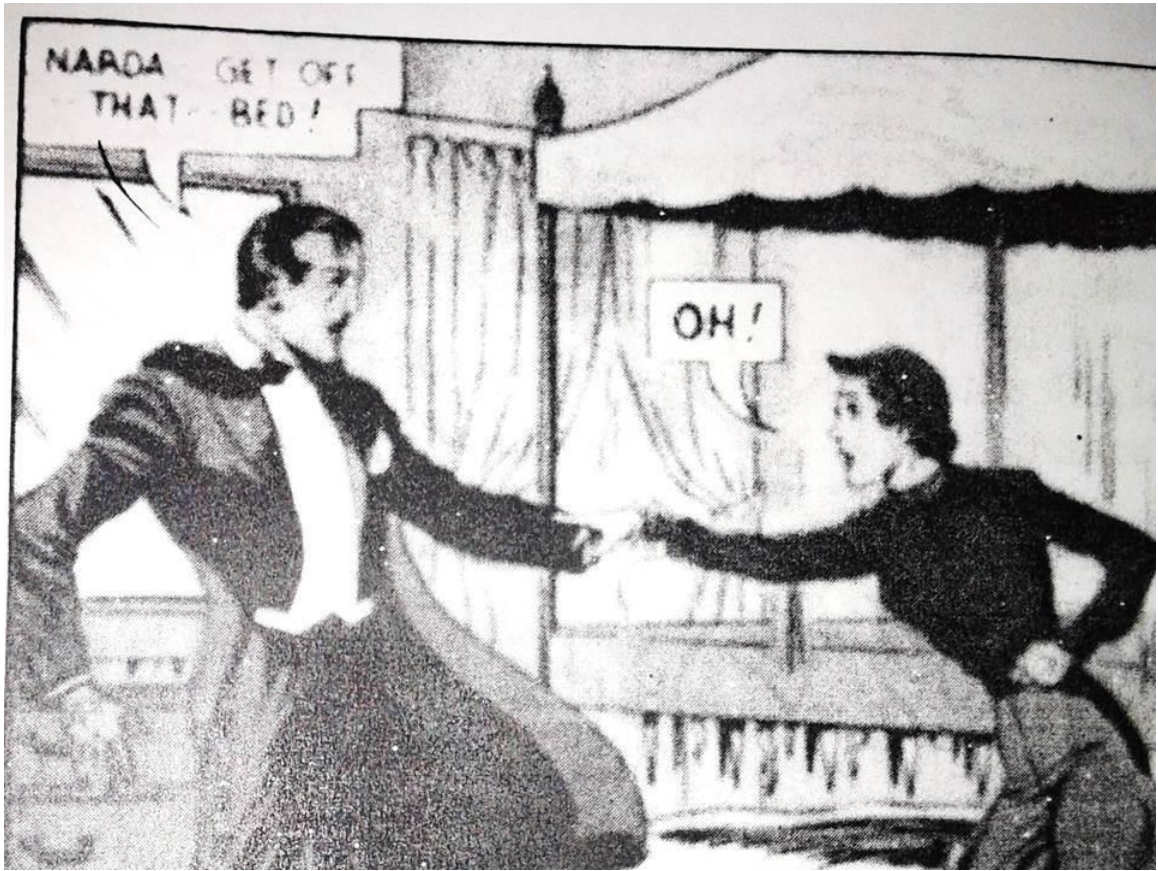
*From left: Superman #5 Summer, 1940 (Daniels, 1995g); Darna in Darna Ang Pagbabalik*

Figure 26. Captain Marvel's possible influence on transformation 1965



*Clockwise from top left: Shazam #1 February 1973(Daniels, 1995h); Darna in Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod from 1965*

Figure 27. Narda Inspiration



*Mandrake the Magician (Roxas & Arevalo, 1985i)*



### 3. *Darna Through the Decades: Actresses from 1965-1994*

The bodies of actresses who portrayed Darna from 1965 to 1994 exude sex appeal and yet remain a sexless women (see Fig. 21). The type of the body depends on Ravelo and his family's decision, which was confirmed by Parian (1991) and Brillon (2007) in their studies. In the 1965 film, Darna was portrayed as a tall, fair-skinned and big-boned woman (see Fig. 7). In the 1979 and 1980 films, she was a fair-skinned, petite, young woman with soft curves (see Fig. 7-8), and in the 1994 adaptation (see Fig. 8), a voluptuous, brown-skinned woman with an Amazonian built. Some actresses who portrayed this imagined body are not pure Filipinos. Rosa Del Rosario, was half-Filipino and half-Mestiza (Pareja, 2014); Gina Pareno was half-Filipino and half-German (Flamencoguy26, n.d.); and Nannette Medved was half-Russian and half-Chinese (Gonzales, n.d).

According to Rolando Tolentino (2000), the concept of a beautiful Filipina shifted from mestiza to morena when the censorship during the martial law was lifted. Film had to find a way to go around the rules of censorship while still romanticizing women. Scenic bodies of water like waterfalls and lakes are juxtaposed to women who are brown-skinned and without undergarments. They are shown to wear white camisoles which, when wet, cling to and show off their bodies.

The image of the highly sexualized pin-up women (see Fig. 21) is not far from the images of actresses chosen to play Darna. The actresses wearing Darna's costume was one of the methods to attain popularity (Parian, 1991c). Flores (2005) characterized the costume as "skimpy" in his essay, saying that it created a false consciousness of the body of a Filipino woman. This costume made women desire for a visually pleasurable body

and motivated them to work hard to achieve that body. According to the GMA7 primer of Darna (2005), Darna represents being a champion to the people, having traits that embody the Filipino dream of becoming a success story (Brillon, 2007). According to Zafra (2005) as cited by Brillon, this success story of ensuring the families' financial security has been part of Filipino diaspora (2007). Darna's traits are comparable to an Adranikan warrior with intense sexuality but are also in accordance to the fetish of patriarchy (Tolentino, 2000) which is primarily for the consumption of men (Tasker, 1993). The representations of the pin-up image of Darna was an excuse for voyeurism and scopophilic tendencies of the heteronormative heterosexual male gaze of the camera, which were seen as admirable in mainstream cinema.

Darna's body is like that of Barbie's, which conditions women, especially the young ones, to view their bodies as sexual commodities being prepared for married life (Pineda, 2002). Darna is to be idolized by men but she herself should not be in an intimate relationship. Women believed that they had to be like Darna who possesses ideal physical characteristics in order to get a partner. This has also been an issue for actresses who portrayed Darna because they also subscribed to the beauty standards set by the character's body that comes with the role. This proposed stereotypical body put immense pressure particularly on women. Harrison's study (2007) showed that dissatisfaction with one's body image lowered the self-esteem of young girls aged 13.

Figure 28: *Comparison of Varga Esquire Calendar Image of Women and Concept of Darna (Ramos, R. 2016)*



Clockwise from top left: *Varga Esquire inspiration for flight; Eva Montes scene in Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod (1965); Rio Locsin scene in Bria! Darna bira! (1979); Anjanette Abayari in one of the scenes in Darna ang Pagbabalik (1994); Varga Esquire inspiration for strength; Varga Esquire inspiration for kick*

Source: Herausgeber (Ed.). (n.d.). americanad: Varga 1945\_2. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from [http://americanad.free.fr/pin%20up/Liste\\_pinup/45Varga\\_2/Varga45\\_2.html](http://americanad.free.fr/pin%20up/Liste_pinup/45Varga_2/Varga45_2.html),  
on-the-step.com. (n.d.). Varga girls 1943 Esquire Varga Calendar. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/172755335681231852> >/,  
The Varga Esquire Years. (n.d.). Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <https://www.google.com.ph/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pinupgallery.com%2FvargasID%2Fesquiregatef%2Fold%2Ffidg42.jpg&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pinupgallery.com%2FvargasID%2Fesquireyears.htm&docid=u%2FhHOCHCChMX9M&tbnid=LIquCyiU4iJJNM%3A&w=761&h=761&bih=6>,  
Tiron, K. (2006). Manifestacia Spasimo Bobovac. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from [http://www.sb.kraljevasutjeska.com/foto/themes/rainy\\_day/images/\\_\\_\\_nose%20art%20flight%20jackets](http://www.sb.kraljevasutjeska.com/foto/themes/rainy_day/images/___nose%20art%20flight%20jackets)

#### 4. *Darna As A Source Of Empowerment*

According to Firestone and Reed as cited by Pineda-Ofreneo, Narciso-Apuan and Estrada-Claudio in 1997, society equates women to the roles assigned to them, which are, in turn, based on their biology. Women are seen as sexual conquests, functions and objects, and are often tasked with bearing children and taking care of the family. In the films analyzed, the frames show that Darna is Ding's protector as well as caretaker. The image has been reused through the decades. Figure 31 shows recurring frames, and through the lens of feminism, these empower and laud women for their altruism and shows that they can be equal to men in strength. According to Reyes (1989), popular culture often depicts women as all-enduring and all-suffering individuals in the path to success, especially in the genres of drama and melodrama. This idea helps women be empowered in the society that they live in. These are observed in close-up shots of the actresses where Darna is shown to smile as if tolerating the pain thrown at her.

Ding is repeatedly shown behind Darna (see Fig. 31). This means that women can also be the protectors of men. Being in a patriarchal society where men are strong, Darna from a feminist perspective promotes that we look at women not as weak beings but as strong as any man in society.

As the town's heroine, Darna's efforts are honored and applauded. Darna has earned the trust of their people as an ever-reliable savior. (See Fig. 32). In the 1979 and 1980 films, men like Falcon (an undercover agent in the 1979 film) and Henry (a media personnel in the 1980 film) congratulated her for her good work.

In a dialogue in the 1965 film *Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod*, the town's priest recognizes the presence of Darna and honors her before the crowd.

Pari:

Narito si Darna, upang tayo ay tulungan sa ating suliranin.

[Priest:]

[Darna is here to help us with our predicament.]

In a dialogue in the 1980 film *Darna at Ding*, a famous disk jockey in the story announced the presence of Darna to his listeners and praised her. This dialogue confirms the celebrification of the character Darna as a concept in mainstream media.

Dambuhalang DJ:

At alam ninyo mga kaibigan, dahil sa ginawang pagsaklolo ni Darna, maraming buhay ang nailigtas sa tiyak na kamatayan. Ang sampu sa labing isang takas na bilanggo ay muling naibalik sa mga alagad ng batas. Don't forget ladies and gentlemen, ang public service na ito ay una ninyong narinig dito sa Dambuhalang DJ. At hindi lamang iyan, narito ang ating pinaka-iscoop, ang bisita natin sa araw na ito mga kaibigan. Ang champion ng mga champion. Everybody's idol, si Darna!

[Enormous DJ:]

[Friends, because of the Darna's heroic efforts, lives were saved from sure death. Ten out of the eleven escaped prisoners are back in police custody. Don't forget ladies and gentlemen, this public service was first heard through Dambuhalang DJ. Not only that, for our latest scoop, our visitor for today; the champion of champions. Everybody's idol, Darna!]

In a dialogue of the 1994 film, as the crowd rejoices over Darna's victory, she is then put in the position of savior—not just a hero but a warrior of the “Lord” who comes to rescue those in need.

Babae 2:

Darna, salamat. Salamat Darna!

Lady 2:

[Darna, thank you. Thank you Darna!]

Babae 1:

Hay! Thank you Lord. Thank you!

Lady 1:

[O! Thank you Lord. Thank you!]

Affirming this concept of celebrifying Darna, not only in the realm of man, but also in the spiritual realm, is her dialogue in the 1965 film *Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod* where Darna, through Panopticon, became the mediator between man and God.

Darna:

Nagdiwang ang sangakalangitan sa kanyang pagbabalik.

Darna:

[The heavens rejoiced because of her repentance.]

She is no longer seen as a threat to society especially by strong and influential men, but has rather been acknowledged as an ally of the good. Society and influential men like policemen, priests and media personalities trust in her ability to save the world. Townspeople celebrate each of Darna's triumphs against her adversaries. All her efforts

to save and inspire society are applauded, honored, as well as publicized across radio, newspapers, and television.

Through diageisis, the film systematically sutures the divide between reality and fantasy. This process creates a world wherein the viewers are invited to participate in celebrating Darna's victories, and by interpolating the experience through repetition as something real and normal, the story itself becomes real. The actresses who played the role are then catapulted to stardom. This stardom assures capitalists of having a marketable actress, which, according to Brillon's thesis (2007), perpetuated the fetishized body franchise, which is Darna. The Darna brand encouraged Filipino citizens to further commodify Darna's body by buying products such as shirts, mugs, bags with the emblem of the franchise. Recreating the suture experience of film seamlessly dissolves the divide between fantasy and reality.

A sense of individualism is also being propagated by the films. Marcial Ravelo's experience of 'brotherhood' (tayo-tayo mentality) from his elite and biased colleagues (Matienzo, 1979) drove Ravelo to create stories that focused on individualism. Fighting battles alone would accumulate more victories because being alone gives focus and brings decisive strategies to defeat the evil of the world. This lessens room for any weakness. Most of the time, Ding is with Darna while she is working (carrying him on her back as she flies and looks for her enemies); Ding was taught to defend himself while his sister fought her own battles.

*Table 2. The Character Antagonists and Their Fate (Ramos, R. 2016)*

YEAR	CHARACTER	SCENE
1965	APE MAN	Fought Darna, died,
	TREE TRUNK LADY	Fought Darna, died
1979	GOONS (group of men)	Fought Darna, some injured, some died.
	KIDNAPPERS (group of men)	Fought Darna, died
	GOONS (drug syndicate, group of men)	Fought Darna, died
	MAD KILLER	Fought the undercover police woman, Veronica. Died.
1980	ISTARIRAY	Fought Darna. Defeated. Died.
	WITCH	Fought Ding, then fought Darna. Died.
	MARANGHIG (zombie, [group of women and men])	Fought Darna, some cured from the bacteria, some died.
	DR. FONTISBERG	Fought Darna, defeated. Repented and forced to administer the cure to all zombies she created.
	ESCAPED CONVICTS (group of men)	Fought Darna. Defeated. Died. Encountered Darna. Surrendered to Darna with the promise of Darna to help him find justice.
	EVIL DARNA	Fought Darna. Defeated. Vanished.
	LEI MING	Fought Darna. Defeated. Died. Vanished.
1994	GOONS (corrupt miners, group of men)	Fought Darna. Defeated. Some died. The leader and some that surrendered to Darna and the police.
	VALENTINA	Fought Darna. Ding throws the magical white stone on her mouth. Exploded. Died.
	MAX/MAGNUM	Fought Darna. Died
	DR. ADAN/VALENTINE	Fought Darna. Escapes.



It is interesting how after building up Darna and defending her as a distinctively Filipino story, Lawagan ended his essay affirming that Darna is an object of Filipino male fantasy, awakening the manhood of each man watching her and stirring fantasies, not limited to having Darna as a girlfriend (Lawagan, 2010). This is in line with the concept of the eternal feminine stereotype from the book *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer (1971) in which she defines the eternal feminine as an image of sexual fantasy, adored by all genders (Greer, 1971b). Comparable to Darna, her fight scenes are a montage of visually stimulating frames with an overlay of a sexualized and fetishized body of a woman.

Figure 29. Close up of Darna's flight scenes with Ding 1979-1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Bira Darna! Bira! from 1979; Darna at Ding from 1980; Darna at ang Pagbabalik from 1994*

Figure 30. *Darna: Society's Celebrated Hero* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod from 1965 - Townspeople, including the police, point to Darna to rescue the person assaulted by the Apeman; Bira Darna! Bira from 1979 – Falcon, a top undercover agent, thanks Darna for helping him catch the gangsters; Darna at Ding from 1980 – Henry, a media personnel thanks Darna for solving his investigation; Darna ang Pagbabalik from 1994 - people applauded Darna for saving the lady banker from Magnum*

## C. Fetishized Body

### 1. *Darna and Her Body as a Standard of society*

The visually pleasurable bodies presented by the actresses who portrayed Darna conditioned Filipinos' expectations from a woman's body, which mystifies with its curves and turns into a spectacle (see Fig.33-34). These concepts are embedded in Darna films which normalized society and its standard of beauty. The Filipina body for this matter is sexually alienating as seen in the fragmented body parts represented as a sexual function and a sexual body (Bartky, 1990h).

In the films, aside from exhibiting Darna's strength, her body is emphasized in each conflict. As stated by Lucero (2001), the dreams and fears of the patriarchal ideologies are preserved in every fantasy film through the construct of a female character. From every camera angle and in every camera shot her body is showed to be perfect. Fragmented shots give focus to her body parts, like underarms, cleavage, buttocks, arms and legs. This only proves that the female body is being commodified but, at the same time, this same body emasculates men by showing that a soft, fair and feminine body can be as powerful as a man's.

Body parts are shown in each action sequence to showcase not only Darna's ideal body, but also to portray power of each part. Her tight buttocks, long legs and strong arms show how powerful her kicks and punches are. Whether she is lying down or standing, it is certain that she can reach her opponent with maximum impact (see Fig. 36, 38). Her underarms are fair and hairless and do not show any discoloration of skin or sweat which creates bodily odour (see Fig. 36) especially during strenuous physical activities, like fighting or flying while carrying heavy bodies or objects.

The camera angle and her costume help highlight the curves of the body of the actress. The scopophilic heterosexual male gaze fetishizes (Mulvey 1975) further the curves of Darna's body every time she is seen on the screen. Every movement of her body is for the pleasure of the voyeurs. Camera movements and montages are romanticized through the male gaze's tendency for voyeurism. This technique was repeatedly used in each of the films studied, creating a lasting impression in the minds of the viewers. This, in effect, will help people subscribe to the notion that such an ideal body is necessary and perpetuates the belief that Darna's body is the norm in society (see Fig. 35-38).

Bartky combined orthodox Marxism and social feminism to explain how modes of femininity given by the media (magazines, advertisements) and society sexually alienate women and their product—in this case, their bodies. Bartky further explained that in feminine narcissism, the woman also takes the place of the other as “both the objectifier and the objectified” (1990f). This “female vanity” imposed on women as femininity is oppressive, especially when capitalists and the beauty industry try to benefit off of it. Dictating what is beautiful, fashionable and “in” through media images allows insecurity with women's faces and bodies to seep in. Companies are then able to lure them into buying their products (Bartky, 1990b). In this feminine narcissism, women are persecuted through both the mind and body. According to Bartky, women experience two levels of alienation of her image. “Women are seen as only sexual bodily beings and second, women have no control of how these bodies are to be used by this capitalist patriarchy” (Bartky, 1990c). Darna is a sexual body documented by the camera and presented to the viewers, yet her bodily function is to uphold justice by eradicating all

evil through physical fights and submitting to the law of the land. Darna's body is the property of the white stone. Her body is offered to society for the purpose of championing the good. She must never love lest it distract her from her mission. Emotions such as love are equated to lust, which can easily manipulate her. She is portrayed as very sexual and yet she is required to be asexual.

Darna is forbidden from engaging in a relationship with anyone because feelings of love distract her from her mission. To prevent this, certain emotions must be rid by physically leaving and forgetting the lover for another mission or death.

*Table 3. The Men in Darna's and Narda's Life (Ramos, R. 2016)*

YEAR	CHARACTER	SCENE
1979	ARCHIE	Died saving Narda from the goons that wanted to kill her.
	JIMMY	Discovered that Darna and Narda are the same person. Darna left Manila for the province with her family.
1980	HENRY	Discovered that Darna and Narda are the same person. Darna explained to him that she must prioritize her mission over any romantic relationship.
1994	MAX	Distracts Darna from her mission. He had a chance to kiss her and to kidnap her. He died fighting Darna.
	POL	Narda explained to Pol that she cannot go with him to the province because she still has a mission in Manila.

Femininity is also an important factor to consider in Darna's fights. She is a vigorous warrior who fights well because of the power of the stone. Although fighting is

considered a manly and violent activity, Darna's body, with most of it exposed especially in fight and flight scenes, is seen as soft and smooth (see Fig. 39-42).

Darna films from across four decades prove that women are subconsciously trained through time to gaze at their bodies through the eyes of a heteronormative heterosexual male other (Greer, 1971b). The woman is both the inspector and executioner of beauty and body disciplines. She applied panoptic rituals, carefully scrutinizing every area of her beauty and body to be perfect for him, her audience (Bartky, 1990d). She is to be admired and to be looked at (Berger, 1972b). She is an idol with doll-like features that need constant maintenance and upgrades that would keep her interesting, like through make-up, waxing, clothing and jewellery (Greer, 1971b). To enable the function of the panoptic discipline, smothering the female narcissism is necessary.

Table 4. *Beauty Rituals* (Ramos, R. 2016)

YEAR	CHARACTER	SCENE
1965	LUCY AND ANGHELITA	Their clothing and fashion style at home, school and even as they sleep.
	LUCY	Lucy after her dance performance retouches her make-up.
1979	NARDA	How she describes herself to Ding.
		Her makeover after being discovered by her talent manager Fanny.
		How Narda presents herself during and after she becomes the top fashion model in the Philippines
	VERONICA	How she presents herself during her undercover stints.
		Retouches her makeup after her sexy dance performance.
1980	TIYA BIYANANG	Discussing to her niece and nephew her strategy to get a man.
	NARDA	How she tries to blend in Binondo.
	LEI MING	Describes herself during a fight with Darna.
	DARNA	Described herself during a fight with Lei Ming.
1994	MOTHER IN A VAN	Discussed how she got her husband through jewelleries, expensive clothing and beautification rituals.
	Dr. Adan/Valentine and Valentina	Her style of clothing.

Remarkably, the komiks genre in film uses women as the central figures of its narratives (Reyes, 1989c). In this particular case, Darna is the champion warrior of her eponymous stories. John Berger (1972) explained that the media assumes images are viewed by the male audience and the one being looked at as a spectacle is the female. Therefore, in paintings or in any medium, like film, Darna, although the central figure of the story, remains a woman who appears for the satisfaction of the male other (Berger, 1972b). Historically, Darna, after hailing her as the first Asian superheroine, and one of



the most popular komiks story ever told, champion of “goodness” in society, is perceived only as a fragmented body part, her body as the object of male fantasy (Lawagan, 2010) embedded in the media, “normalizing” criteria for beautiful Filipinas and bodies.

Moreover, if Darna, who is the supposed privileged woman and the lead in her own stories, would eventually be categorized in a stereotype of a sexual body, pleasing the male surveyor, what then of the other female characters who are seen as antagonists and others still who are hidden? How about their experiences and versions of the story?

Figure 31. A. *Sexy Images of Actresses who Portrayed Darna in Full length Films* (Ramos, R. 2016)



Clockwise from top left: Rosa Del Rosario, Liza Moreno, Eva Montes, Rio Locsin, Gina Pareno

Source: 48 Video. (2013, February 1). *ROSA DEL ROSARIO: "RETURN OF THE ROSE" (1982)*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, <<http://video48.blogspot.com/2013/02/rosa-del-rosario-return-of-rose-1982.html>>,

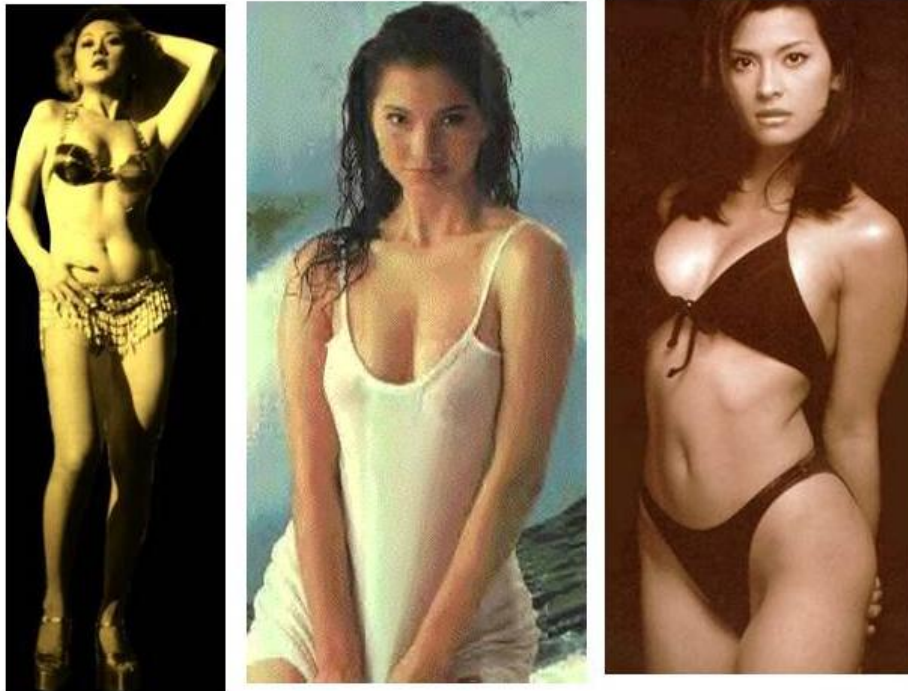
48, Video. (2014, August 13). *THE SIXTIES # 174: RONALD REMY, LIZA MORENO, PAUL EDWARDS, SYLVIA LAWRENCE IN LAMBERTO V. AVELLANA'S "BUS TO BATAAN" (1961)*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <<http://video48.blogspot.com/2014/08/the-sixties-174-ronald-remy-liza-moreno.html>>,

48, Video. (2015, June 1). *THE SIXTIES # 936: DOLPHY (IN THE TITLE ROLE), EVA MONTES, MARY ANN MURPHY, RICO ROMAN, SUZANNE MACHELLE, PONGA, PROSPERO LUNA, RODOLFO (BOY) GARCIA IN "ALYAS DON JUAN (AGENT 1-2-3)" (1966)*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <<http://www.ebookxp.org/video48.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-sixties-936-dolphy-in-title-role.html?b=4>>

Drosa, J. (2009, September 10). *Pelikula, Atbp.: Gina Pareno*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <<http://pelikulaatbp.blogspot.com/2009/09/gina-pareno.html>>,

Drosa, J. (2010, December 22). *Pelikula, Atbp: TWO ARTICLES ON RIO LOCSIN*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <<http://pelikulaatbp.blogspot.com/2010/12/two-articles-on-rio-locsins.html>>

Figure 32. *B. Sexy Images of Actresses who Portrayed Darna in Full-length Films (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Vilma Santos, Nanette Medved, Anjanette Abayari*

Source: Servinio, A. E. (2013, May 9). *Pinoy Rebyu. Pinoy Films Through Pinoy Lenses: 50 Greatest Pinoy Films Of All Time Part 3 (30-21)*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <<https://pinoyrebyu.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/greatest-pinoy-films-poll-part-3/>>, Enrico. (2011, April 12). *Re: Katuwaan lang. Mga Artistang Pedeng Isabak Sa Miss Universe: Nanette Medved - pasadong pasado maging Miss Universe noong early 90's*. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <<http://missosology.info/forum/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=79258&start=0#p1614622>>, ocmanila@asia.com. (2000). *Ms. Anjanette Abayari - Babe of the Week - Tripod*. Retrieved August 31, 2016, from <[http://ocmanila.tripod.com/botw/archives/anjanette\\_abayari.htm](http://ocmanila.tripod.com/botw/archives/anjanette_abayari.htm)>

Figure 33. *Fragmented Bodies-Cleavage* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Eva Montes, Rio Locsin, Vilma Santos, Anjanette Abayari*

Figure 34. *Fragmented Bodies-Underarms* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Eva Montes, Rio Locsin, Vilma Santos, Anjanette Abayari*

Figure 35. *Fragmented Bodies-Buttocks* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Eva Montes, Rio Locsin, Vilma Santos, Anjanette Abayari*

Figure 36. *Fragmented Bodies-Legs* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Eva Montes, Rio Locsin, Vilma Santos, Anjanette Abayari*

Figure 37. *Soft and Smooth Skin of Darna 1965* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod: Darna fights criminal; Darna flies top shot; Darna fights Babaeng Tuod; Darna flies frontal shot*



Figure 38. *Soft and Smooth Skin of Darna 1979* (Ramos, R. 2016)



Clockwise from top left: Bira Darna! Bira!: Darna kicks the kidnapper; Darna crawls to surprise her enemy; Darna waves at Falcon; Darna kicks the gangster that wants to execute her

Figure 39. *Soft and Smooth Skin of Darna 1980* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left Darna at Ding: Darna fights Istariray; Darna punches the escaped criminal; Darna twists to look for her enemies; Darna destroys the rope that binds her feet*

Figure 40. *Soft and Smooth Skin of Darna 1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna ang Pagbabalik: Darna rolls towards her adversaries; Darna flies over the city; Darna's close up of her breasts in a fight scene with Valentine; Valentine tries to bite Darna's leg*

## 2. *The Mystical Stone as Metaphor for Beauty Pills*

In every Darna film there would always be a mystical stone with an anonymous male voice commanding the typical woman what to do. As soon as she swallows the stone, it then transforms her into a new supernatural woman; it may be said that it is a better version of the typical woman like Narda. In the 1979 film *Bira, Darna! Bira* and the 1980 film *Darna at Ding*, it is important to note that the voice of the stone was given considerable airtime to indicate its command and control over Narda's body. The latter possesses more knowledge about the chosen keeper of immense power of the mystical white stone.

Dialogue of the 1979 mystical white stone:

BOSES GALING SA PUTING BATO:

Ang batong iyan ay may taglay na kapangyarihan. Isubo lamang at isigaw ang katangang, "Darna." Iluwa mo lamang para magbalik ka sa dati mong anyo.

ANONYMOUS MALEVOICE:

[That stone possesses magical powers. Swallow it and then shout "Darna." You need only take it out of your mouth to return to your old self.]

Dialogue of the 1980 mystical white stone:

BOSES GALING SA PUTING BATO:

Narda! Narda! Ikaw ang napili ni Sanlibutan, upang gumana ng isang katungkulan! Na siyang makakapagligtas sa buong Sangsinakop. Pananatilihin mo ang kabutihan. At susugpuin ang mga galamay ng kasamaan. Damputin mo ang bato, at isubo mo. Kapag sinabi mo ang pangalang nakaukit sa bato,

mapapasaiyo ang katauhan at kapangyarihan ng kalasag ng katarungan. Kunin mo na ang bato, Darna.

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE:

[Narda! Narda! The universe has chosen you to be its protector. Keep the peace, and destroy all that is evil. Take the stone and put it in your mouth. If you shout the name etched on the stone, the powers of the shield of justice shall be yours.

Take the stone, Darna.]

In a scene in the 1994 film *Darna, Ang Pagbabalik*, the white mystical stone was stolen by Dr. Valentine, and was given to Valentina to restore her beauty and youth. As soon as Ding took the stone from her possession, she then turned into a worm-like creature. These two scenes support the argument that the white stone can be a metaphor for a beauty pill, which when consumed would transform a woman to the best version of herself (see Fig. 43). This belief of a potent beauty pill is commodified by the beauty industry and is subliminally promoted in stories in popular culture. Without availing of this beauty potion, one may have to face looking like slime in the future (see Fig. 44).

Diet regimens (e.g. food and gym) have also been popularized and propagated, commodifying the notions of a beautiful body in Darna films. The passive body is trained to look and become strong, and, at the same time, pleasing to the prying eyes of both the capitalists and the patriarchy (Bartky, 1990i). Specialized diet programs and exercises for toning a particular part of a body (e.g. abs, buttocks, legs, arms), fragmentizing the body of a woman to perfect each curve—these programs are available but only to those can afford it, perpetuating a specific standard for bodies which only the economically stable few are able to achieve.

Femininity teases us with the impossibility of achieving the ideal body (McDonald, 1995c). A woman is expected to work hard physically, mentally and economically, to achieve the ideal body and, in effect, achieve the approval of society. The natural body is seen as a defective one that needs constant improvement (Bartky, 1990i). Women of today are now working and have the capacity to choose and afford this kind of luxury. The ceiling of the commodification of a woman's body is higher, for she is now part of the paying market (McDonald, 1995d). Ideologies of beautiful bodies are embedded in the representation of a beautiful woman in mainstream films such as *Darna*, to ensure that there is a need for beauty industries.

Knowledge of what is beautiful secures the continued marketability of various beauty and fashion products and services such as those offered in salons, cosmetics, clothes, gym membership, and diet regimens especially those sold in larger establishments like malls. Malls are a one-stop shop for these commodities and guarantee income to the fashion and beauty businesses because capitalism has created insecurity within women. This insecurity can only be expunged by patriarchy, by the affirmation or admiration expressed through sexual glances, whistling, and sexual compliments given by men. This created insecurity can only be fixed by capitalism, which makes people, particularly women, think that it was their choice to buy a certain product or service, when in fact, the purchase was orchestrated by the capitalist market. Through marketing, capitalism simultaneously gives an illusion of choice, a certain sense of empowerment, and limits her and her freedom to choose, to a sexually fragmented body part and femininity. This in general alienates the Filipina from her own identity, body and beauty.

The beautiful face and body is altered and manipulated to a highly sexualized face and body to conform to norms acceptable to both capitalism and patriarchy.

The methods to achieve the ideal body, which results from taking drugs or doing exercises, conditions a typical Filipina to modify her body (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Anjanette Abayari was probably pressured into drugs to attain and maintain a certain body type during the 90s (Vanzi, 1999). Rosa Del Rosario nearly had an accident in one of the literally death-defying flying scenes of Darna, where she was hung from a helicopter using cables. For her first Darna film, Vilma Santos was forced by the producers to wear the two-piece Darna costume without the body stockings on the day of the film's press conference (Llanes, 2009b).

It is important to show in every image (see Fig. 17-20) that her triumph can be well-attributed to the transformed self and body that Darna possesses, a patriarchal conspiracy that is evident in each fantasy film (McDonald, 1995e). Another conspiracy is that Darna is an alien, neither a woman nor a man, for she is not human. Therefore she can be seen as asexual, denying humanistic urges or sexuality and emotions, which as Lucero stated, contributes to a focused mind-set towards victory (2001b). Darna's representation of a beautiful face and body alienates Filipinas from their own natural faces and bodies.

The natural body of a Filipina is also being attacked because it needs constant policing from society and from her. She should always be on guard because she is the connoisseur that resides in her consciousness (Bartky, 1990), just like Darna. Even in her fight scenes, where she appeared most rugged, she should always look perfect and be conscious that she is being looked at. Her face and body should keep up with the

closeness of the shots of the camera where every detail of probable imperfection counts. Darna's body is trained to be a perfect, eternally young and beautiful body (see Fig. 39-42).

According to Baldo-Cubuelo, popular concepts of feminism are co-opted to be commodified by the capitalist market. The Darna films across four decades are instruments of co-opting women empowerment (2015). Darna broadcasts individualism, because of the personal experiences of Ravelo, but according to Pineda-Ofreneo, Narciso-Apuan and Estrada-Claudio, feminism is a continuous struggle against oppression, exclusion and exploitation, wherein everybody is encouraged to participate, whether in policy-making, rallies, organizations and education (1997b). One of the strengths of feminism is the conscious effort of everyone in the plight for empowerment; no one can do it alone, the need for the inclusive and continuous support of society is recognized for the movement to be successful.

Masking empowerment through commodification of the bodies of women sensationalized by pop culture through the image of the most popular superheroine in the Philippines. Now that most women are economically empowered, women have the capacity to "choose" what needs alteration. This choice is a manipulation of the beauty and fitness industry making sure that there is enough insecurity with the bodies of a Filipinas, to generate a demand for their products. This smothers the female narcissism through repetition of images in the films through four decades and trains the women to see their natural bodies as deficient and in need of constant enhancement. Because these beautification and fitness products are everywhere and affordable, non-conformance with the norm is ashamed.



The beautiful and perfect body of Darna is the focus of this data and it is interesting to look at how deviance applies to the concept of the perfect body type in the Darna films analyzed (1965-1994). A feeling of neurosis towards old age and being fat is observed. Old and fat bodies are made fun of, shouted at, almost murdered and turned into a worm-like creature, a punishment for their deviance.

Table 5. *Deviant Bodies* (Ramos, R. 2016)

YEAR	CHARACTER	SCENE
1965	ARURAY	Tries to seduce Apiong by imitating Lucy's dance. Apiong rejects her.
1979	LOLA	Narda and Ding make fun of their Lola's forgetfulness (mali-mali).
	VENDOR OF THE PACHOCHAY STORE	A woman belittles his character by shouting at him and tells him how insignificant he is. Narda and Ding make fun of the fat of the vendor.
1980	DAMBUHALANG DJ	Ding makes fun of the DJ.
1994	VALENTINA	Turned into a worm-like creature, because of her old age.
	KIDNAPPED VICTIM	Thrown by Magnum from a helicopter.

In these Darna films, having emotions is a woman's weakness. Crying is associated with hysteria, a mental illness that needs to be cured. This gives men the license to shout and grab women who cry a lot. The following items in Table 6 are the scenes in films analyzed for the treatment of women.

Table 6. *Otherring Other Women (Ramos, R. 2016)*

YEAR	CHARACTER	SCENE
1965	MARTHA	Grabbed by Gaspar, and accused of having a mental illness because she cries a lot and says illogical things. First because of her (paglililihi), next because she could not easily move on from the death of her first daughter.
	ARURAY	Accused of being a gossip by Apiong, giving him license to grab her hair and drag her out of the room
	ANGHELITA	Ross didn't approve of Anghelita ignoring him (tampo). To get her attention he throws his books to her side and then sits beside her.
1980	TIYA DORING	Her emotional breakdown because of her being ignored and forgotten, was made fun of by Ding, Narda and Doring's husband, Tiyo Inngo.
1994	NARDA	Her loss of self made her cry and dance a lot, giving license to Pol to shout at and grab her whenever he disapproved of her actions. Narda described Pol's action as sweet.
	LOLA MARITA	Her state of desperation made her cry and feel afraid and cling blindly to anything that promises a good life. Pol sees the action of her auntie unsatisfying and shouts at her.
	KIDNAP VICTIM	Cries and shouts because of fear. Magnum, throws her off the helicopter.

Figure 41. The Mystical White Stone (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Narda and Ding are curious about the mystical stone (1979); White Mystical Stone (1980); Narda picks up the stone (1980); Narda looks at the stone on her hand (1980); Narda consumes the white mystical stone (1994)*

Figure 42. *Oldness as depicted in Darna ang Pagbabalik 1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna ang Pagbabalik: Ding takes the mystical white stone from the mouth of the golden snake statue; Valentina woke up angry; Valentina turns into an old woman; Valentina turns into a worm-like creature*

### 3. *Transformation from Narda: Darna as a Figure of Hope for Every Woman*

A lot of people dream to have an instant change in their lives. That is why people go crazy when media promises a new show, often reality shows to discover new talents. In Darna's case, actresses covet Darna's position, especially young women who are trying to make a break in show business. This idea of getting a break in their careers is signified by the white stone. Women desire the stone that will choose the one deserving of its power. In films, Flores (2005) says to become a superheroine, an ordinary image of a woman and daily life must be represented.

In the four films analyzed, Narda was a poor young woman (see Fig. 45). In the 1965 film, Narda does not have any stone to swallow to transform into Darna. The image (see Fig. 45) shows Narda shouting to transform into Darna. This depiction gives women an idea to use their voice to become superior or powerful. In 1979, Narda (see Fig. 46-47) was actually portrayed as a poor woman who has been recognized by a talent manager. This gave her an opportunity to be appreciated by people by becoming a model. The transformation of her life fuels the hope of her viewers, dreaming that an ordinary woman may get a chance to be successful and famous, becoming eyecandy to men.

The ordinary Narda is juxtaposed by the powerful Darna. Narda, like her counterpart heroine, was tasked to take care of Ding—an image of the ordinary woman in society whose main duty is to give love to and care for family members. In the 1980 film, Narda's duty most of the time was at home. This is a reflection of women during the 1980s in the Philippines where women were mostly charged to do household chores (see Fig. 49-50). Like Darna, Narda should stay clear of falling in love or to have any intimate relationship with a man. This is actually a reminder to young women in the Philippine

setting. Women are being reminded to avoid relationships at an early age because they have a more important responsibility as young women. An ordinary woman, such as Narda, attracting men because of her kind heart and beauty is also often depicted in the films (see Fig. 48-50).

Narda was appreciated by people around her, not because of her dedication to her loved ones, but because of what they can get from her. Both in the 1979 and 1994 films, men were enticed by her beauty (see Fig. 51-52). Men fantasized about her body. In the films from 1979 to 1994, some men seriously tried to pursue the young Narda. They were captivated by her beauty. In return, Narda gave them her attention by serving them drinks, allowing them to touch her to the point of kissing her (see Fig. 47,48, 50), except in 1980 Narda. (see Fig. 49)

Appreciation of Narda comes with a price. It is more of what that person can get from Narda. Suitors ( Jimmy, Archie in 1979; Henry, 1980; Max and Pol in 1995), pursued her because she seemed like wife material. She knows how to care for the home and to satisfy him, with her attention, the openness of her emotions, her ambitions. She also knows how make the man feel great about himself through encouragement, praises and allowing the man touch her, to a point of giving into a kiss.

In the 1994 film, a strange transformation happened to Narda because she lost her white stone. She was enraged with herself and lost her self-control, becoming a lunatic. Men in the slums of Manila would tease her to dance and sing more while they drank their alcohol (see Fig. 48,50). As Narda's family enters a filthy, congested Manila, men begin to take interest in her. The half-naked men playing basketball eye Narda, though well-covered by her simple dress, lasciviously.

MGA BINATA: (background noise)

O, ayan takbo. O ayan shoot! O ayan, tira, tira! O ayan anong score? Shoot!

LALAKE: (pabulong)

Pare, ang ganda nun!

MGA BINATA: (background noise)

O ayan, tira, tira!

LOLA MARITA:

Dito ka!

BOYS:

[Run, shoot! Come on, go, go! What's the score? Shoot!]

MAN: (whispers)

[Man, she's beautiful!]

BOYS:

[Come on let us play!]

LOLA MARITA:

[Stay here!]

They took advantage of Narda's situation as if they were at a bar hitting on her. This could happen to any woman in our society. This is a form of sexual harassment and the film was actually it. Including this in the film can make the viewers think that this is just a normal scenario and can be repeated by any man. However, Narda's transformation to Darna rejects this culture of harassment because Darna would fight any man who would sexualize her. As they play basketball, they communicate using words with double

meanings such as 'tira' (come let us play), referring to either their basketball game or Narda, whom they see as a potential sexual conquest. Their grandmother, Marita, takes on the role of Narda's protector. Ding tries to find their relative Pol who may be able to help them and hopes that Pol will accept them into his home. This scene shows how both Marita and Ding have been influenced by society and how they have become accustomed to men's "common" perception of women. Marita is aware of the sexual undertones of the men's words and the looks they give Narda. When Narda unknowingly encourages further advances, Marita immediately stops her. Ding, on the other hand, sees a girl who also lives in the slums of Manila. Ding, who has also been conditioned by society to have a particular perception of how a beautiful girl looks like, stares and winks at the girl, signalling his attraction to her. The girl plays coy, flips her hair and looks in the other direction. As young as they are, Ding and the girl know how to read these signals, the underlying meanings of which have been ingrained in them, such that they are able to communicate with each other without physically speaking. This interaction illustrates that the acquisition of certain notions or perceptions of what is beautiful and the responses to such beauty starts at a young age, regardless of whether one resides in rural or urban areas.

Repetition of the images of women in Darna films during the four decades set the sexually beautiful face and body of a woman as something normal to all women. The appreciation of men, shown through sexual comeupons like whistling and touching, should be taken as flattery by women and reward them with their attention.



Table 7: Compliments from Men (Ramos, R. 2016)

YEAR	CHARACTER	SCENE
1965	LUCY	Tries to seduce Ross by wearing skimpy clothes that accentuate her body, by dancing and touching her body as she does, and by touching Ross.
		Entertains men by dancing, kissing and teasing them by slightly taking off her clothes and allowing her audience to touch her legs.
	ANGHELITA	Her accepts Ross's attention by allowing him to touch her hand.
	ARURAY	Touches Apiong as she imitates Lucy's dance.
1979	DARNA	Palos' way of allowing Darna to know that he appreciates her presence, beauty and body is by touching her, and caressing her shoulders as he thanks her.
	NARDA	Giggles, as she flaunts her almost naked body as she dances in her fashion shows.
		Entertains Archie, by smiling enthusiastically as they converse, going out for dates, and giggling each time he compliments her.
		Entertains Jimmy by obeying all his commands, aside from him being her boss. Allows him to kiss her. Serves him food whenever he visits her at the house he bought for her.
	MODELS	Entertains their audience with their smiles as they dance, twist and turn.
	VERONICA	Poses as an undercover stripper. Entertains her audience by dancing sexily, wearing only her undergarments.
		Kidnapped by the mad killer. She obeys his command to dance only for him wearing his dead lover's ballet clothes. To show his appreciation of her body and beauty, he attempts to rape her.

1980	GIRLFRIEND OF HENRY	Whenever she sees him, she enthusiastically offers her body to him. She obeys him and patiently waits for him.
	NARDA	Entertains Henry by allowing him to be alone with her, as they share updates from his investigation.
1994	NARDA	With her loss of self, she entertains men who make sexual advances to her with her giggles and dancing and jumping. Later, when she finds the magical white stone, she entertains Pol, by allowing him to hold her body, and each time Pol thinks she needs protection. She bites her lips and smiles whenever she talks to Pol. She entertains Max, by allowing him to spend time with her and to touch her body as he brings her to places where they can talk and be alone.
	DARNA	Seduced corrupt mining goons with her fight stunts (running, jumping, kicking, rolling)
		She is emotionally distracted by Max; she allows him to kiss her.
	PIA	Responds to Ding's flirtations (winking), though she flips her hair and looks the other way.

Figure 43. *The Characterization of Narda 1965 (Ramos,R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna at ang Babaeng Tuod: A young Narda shouts 'Darna' to transform into Amazonian warrior Darna.*

Figure 46. A. *The Characterization of Narda 1979* (Ramos, R. 2016)



*Clockwise from left: Bira Darna! Bira!:* a poor Narda in Manila wearing an oversized hand me down shirt mimicking the mannequin she saw at the store; a wealthy Narda during her evening fashion show by the pool

Figure 44. B. *The Characterization of Narda 1979* (Ramos,R. 2016)



*Clockwise from top left: Bira Darna! Bira: Narda was discovered by Fanny, a salon owner and gives her a makeover to be able to market her as a model; Narda at a swimsuit pictorial; Narda serves food to her guests; Narda entertains Jimmy*

Figure 45. *The Characterization of Narda 1994 (Ramos,R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna ang Pagbabalik: Narda during their exodus to Manila loses her mind after losing the mystical white stone; Narda at Manila giggling; Narda's realization that she still has a mission, in Manila; Narda in her right state of mind talking to Max*

Figure 46. *The Character Roles of Narda 1980 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna at Ding; Narda at the province helps her aunt with the household chores; Narda at Binondo, Manila reads the newspaper as her aunt prepares the food; Narda entertains Henry; Narda cares for the sick Ding*

Figure 47. *The Character Roles of Narda 1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna ang Pagbabalik: Narda cares for the lahar victims; Narda sets the table for dinner as her family watches TV; Narda entertains Max; Narda cares for Ding*



Figure 48. *Appreciating Narda 1979 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Bira, Darna! Bira!: Gansgsters watch Narda while at a fashion show; Lola amazed at how beautiful Narda looks on the catwalk; Narda modeling the latest swimwear; Ding taught by Jimmy to look at his sister's beauty as she walks down the runway; Jimmy tantalized by Narda's body sporting the latest swimwear*

Figure 49. *Appreciating Narda 1994 (Ramos, R. 2016)*



*Clockwise from top left: Darna ang Pagbabalik: An old man drinks gin as he looks at Narda; Men singing as Narda mindlessly dances and sings; Man gleefully sings a tune to see Narda sways her body; Boy examines Narda who is new to the slum area*

## VI. CONCLUSION

According to the data gathered and analyzed, the concept of beauty is propagated through mass media, specifically through films. In our society, during the peak of the Darna films, the body and face of the actresses who played the character Darna influenced the standard of society. Women believed they needed to have the same physique as Darna. The actresses who portrayed the character gradually shifted from the mestiza to a morena-looking Darna. This was because of Gloria Diaz who won at the Miss Universe pageant before the declaration of Martial Law which Roland Tolentino also expounded on in his research. She then became the standard of Filipina beauty. However, the pin-up image of foreign-looking Filipinas still influenced our concept of beauty because of the pervading neocolonial mentality in our society.

Darna's identity can be analyzed through her costume. It represented through the decades how an empowered woman can be more powerful than a man. She wore a loin cloth reminiscent of the cloth worn by male Igorot warriors, which could be read as women being appreciated as they are given a cultural symbol that equates to men. The colors Vilma Santos' costume in 1980 also harks to the Philippine flag which stands for the concept of "Inang Bayan". This impacts women in our society because Darna is not an ordinary member of society and plays a symbolic role, helping women establish an awareness of their roles in society. This also subverts our stereotypes of women. Through the films, Filipinos are informed to be socially aware and, in this case, be aware that women deserve to be recognized.

Darna fought groups of men and, at times, women who possess supernatural powers like her but who have evil intentions. The villains she faced in the films were all

conquered for the sake of peace and order in society. Darna's drive to uphold righteousness highly suggests that she is a source of empowerment for every woman that helps transform the way society thinks with regard to women's strength and is an agent of preserving society. She is a hope to every Filipina because the mystical stone allowed an ordinary woman named Narda to transform into a beautiful and powerful being. It is a metaphor for the hope for all women, especially the young girls to become a better version of themselves, physically, as they experience changes in their bodies and receive society's admiration and trust like how Darna. This hope comes with one's recognition that their body is deficient and needs constant policing to be improved. Her body is considered defective, surrendered to the capitalist market which has the power and capacity to transform the body into eye candy. This hope embodied by Darna is a conspiracy to make insecure women and to ensure that capitalists would always have a willing and paying market for their beauty and fitness products and services. The mystical stone also symbolizes youth. Possession of the stone will allow them become eternally youthful, which may perhaps be a key to an advantageous marriage, much like pills and other beauty products that capitalists produce in society. In a way, the elite controlling the standards of beauty promises the people, especially adult women, that consuming their products will give them a great advantage in selecting a partner.

In studying the selected Darna films across four decades using the theories and methodologies detailed in this thesis, the research found information on Marcial Ravelo's inspiration for Darna. He was inspired by the following: his mother who greatly influenced him in his career; pin-up women of the Varga Esquire magazine; and, superman. His imagination of a superheroine eventually trended as the standard body

type of society. Ravelo and his family chose the actresses who played one of the most coveted roles in Philippine cinema. Ravelo designed Darna with super strength, exceptional beauty, and power as well as the panoptic vision that surveys society. Ravelo conceptualized this character to be above any human being and should stand for our cultural concept of beauty. Women are associated to the meanings and roles this character stands for—visually, sexually and culturally. Darna, a symbol of Filipinas, is an American construct inspired by Superman, Captain Marvel, Varga Esquire Magazines and Ravelo's mother. She is not inspired by Wonder Woman.

The political-economic study of Darna by Brillon proves that indeed Darna is a commodity in which patriarchy is heavily invested. The study of Parian is instrumental in explaining why Darna changed through time. Ravelo wanted to capitalize on Darna and managed to separately sell his character Darna to film production outfits to be re-imagined in films. This is why her costume, story, and powers varied and why in the 90s some of Wonder Woman's powers were incorporated into the character. This earned Darna accusations of being a Filipino version of Wonder Woman.

The gaze in Darna films is consistently a heteronormative, heterosexual male gaze. From Marcial Ravelo, Nestor Redondo's drawing style marked the shift to a mature Darna, imagining her as a socially and morally acceptable pornographic identity. Tony Velazquez, Ravelo's mentor in drawing, and Redondo got their style in drawing from foreigners, particularly American artists.

The researcher realized through a shot-by-shot analysis that the films constructed a recurring image of a Filipina, one that can be considered a morally and socially acceptable and pornographic body masquerading empowerment and the being of a

woman. It is the body used by the capitalist system to make profit. It communicates a subliminal message to the viewers, especially women. It may be perceived as this and one may be opposed to it because the capitalists' main purpose is to earn. Women should instead use the concepts of mass media as a source of empowerment, like how the Darna films repeatedly used striking images that highlight Darna's unique characteristics, promoting and giving hope to every woman. The representation however burdens Filipino women because their bodies are pressured to become like Darna's. This was seen in the repetition and reproduction of these ideologies in the four decades of Darna films that created hegemonic notions of manipulated, highly sexualized and unattainable standards of beauty. This standard is made to seem as though it is essential to being Filipina. Some Filipinas underwent beautification procedures and rituals promoted by mass media, in order to fit the normalized concept of the body. Only those who can afford to sacrifice time, energy and money will have this ideal body.

Darna alienates women, causing them to feel they do not fit the concept of a woman in society. This is intensified by the capitalist system which commodifies the female body so women would agree to the norms which they impose. Bodies are of central interest to women who, in turn, subscribe to normalized standards in society. In this case, Darna films imposed particular notions of the female body on its audience. There is a problematic fat/thin binary by which women are often classified in addition to women's issues with aging. These issues resulted in women shaming themselves and others and obsessing over altering their bodies, to the point of death.

The media's construction of Darna produced standards of and shaped the concept of beauty for Filipinas. These constructions are both beneficial for capitalists (beauty and

fitness industry) and the patriarchal society. Women, in effect, are being commodified by the capitalists for profit. Men are gazing at and fantasizing about women as they consume the female body through the images produced by the media. The female body through which notions regarding Darna are immortalized affects the behaviour of women as well as men in our society. These people subscribed to and accepted the norms imposed by mass media.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

After finishing this study, there are certain areas in Darna films which the researcher found worth studying.

The researcher believes (as of the production of this thesis) there are three more full-length films existing wherein a woman portrayed Darna and which are not included in this study. The researcher suggests an analysis of these films using the researcher's suggested framework and methodology. These are *Darna and the Giants* (1973) by Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions and starring Vilma Santos; *Darna Versus Planet Woman* (1975) by Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions and starring Vilma Santos; and *Darna* (1991) by Viva Films which starred Nanette Medved.

There are four Darna films that used an actor to portray the Darna superheroine character. The researcher saw it appealing to recommend a study of these films focusing on LGBT themes and using Judith Butler's Performativity Theory where one may investigate how Darna's character in the films are portrayed and performed by men. These films are *Double Trobol* (1974), *Chiquito, Darna Kuno* (1979) *Dolphy, Bira, Darna! Bira!* (1979) and the character *Eng- Eng and Darna at Ding* (1980).

Another interesting study linked to Darna films as propagators of ideology is hermeneutics focusing on Christian theology and semiotics. Darna's judgement and punishment depends on the good and evil to which Catholicism subscribes. Biblical characters, stories and passages are used and spoken by the characters in the film.

A further way to contribute to the study of Darna in connection to violence is through the critical discourse of Galtung's triangle of violence (1969), wherein film, as a cultural artefact, triangulates with structural violence (indirect), and personal violence



(direct), creating a culture of discrimination and racism in society. Characters pitted against Darna were repeated and reproduced through decades, creating specific negative media notions of what is evil, eventually normalizing discrimination towards a group of people in Philippine society at a given time. For example, sinophobia and smart-shaming women.

## VIII. POST SCRIPT

It was 2:30 in the afternoon when Rhea got off her work as creative editor in one of the biggest media companies in the metro. Tired after a day's worth of work, she still has to meet a friend for a video editing job, one of her side jobs for extra income. Rhea and her friend decided to meet at the latter's office to discuss the details. Since their meeting place was near her workplace, she decided to walk to save money. She was wearing a rugged attire at the time— a pair of simple conservative jeans and a t-shirt.

While on her way, a white car slowed down beside Rhea. The driver lowered his window shield and hollered at her, “Miss, miss na maputi!”(Miss, miss with the fair skin!). She was scared and hurriedly walked towards her destination, telling herself that maybe the guy was not really hitting on her. But then, in her peripheral vision, she saw the car kept following her and then the voice of the man from the car goes “Miss, miss, mamaya ha...” (Miss, miss, later...). She just thought that the man must have mistaken her as one of the prostitutes frequent in the area. She walked faster, and approached a nearby office supply establishment with a security guard and decided to go inside. Fortunately, as she entered the store, the white car vanished. She almost fainted. She could not believe what just happened. She despised her body, thinking that it may be the reason for the unsolicited sexual advances and harassment. Perhaps, the curve of her body emphasized by the sweat from all her walking, aroused the man in the white car, who, unable to keep it to himself, felt the need to tell her this. Yes, perhaps, she was not asking for it.

This made the researcher interested to do a feminist reading of the films as it highly influence the people through visual repetition of concepts. The scenario made the

researcher realize that her idea of subscribing to the norms regarding the female body ascribed by society through films put her in a situation for which she never asked.

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