

WOMEN'S ALLEGORIES IN ESTELITO B. JACOB'S *PINAGROK*

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Abstract

In the rich world of literature, poetry is a powerful way to express truth, reflecting human experiences, struggles, and victories. Literature is a powerful vessel through which societies reflect, reinforce, and challenge cultural norms. This study examines gender representation in Pinagrok by Estelito B. Jacob, analyzing how women's struggles, resilience, and societal roles are portrayed through allegorical poetry. The research aims to explore dominant themes in the text, including emotional distress, submissiveness, abuse, and bravery, to highlight the interplay between gender and power dynamics. Employing a qualitative research approach, this study utilizes thematic and feminist literary analysis to examine 43 selected poems. The analysis integrates sociological and legal frameworks, particularly Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women) and Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act), to contextualize the findings within broader gender discourse and educational policies. The results reveal 14 significant themes that illustrate the pervasive nature of patriarchal oppression, the internalization of gender roles, and the psychological and societal consequences of domestic violence. Findings indicate that Pinagrok not only mirrors real-life struggles faced by women but also serves as a medium for critiquing gender-based oppression. The study concludes that literature plays a vital role in gender awareness and advocacy, reinforcing the need for gender-sensitive materials in education. Recommendations include integrating feminist literary critique into curricula, expanding research on regional literature, and strengthening policies addressing gender inequality.

Keywords: Gender Representation, Feminist Literary Criticism, Philippine Literature

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, women have been regarded as the weaker sex and subordinate to men. This perception is deeply embedded in various aspects of life, where patriarchal systems continue to dominate, including the family, education, economy, employment, and politics (Connell, 2002). The historical marginalization of women has led to systematic discrimination that limits their opportunities for personal and professional growth. In many societies, traditional gender roles have reinforced stereotypes that confine women to domestic

responsibilities, often depriving them of leadership positions and decision-making roles (Lorber, 2010).

In response to these systemic inequalities, movements advocating for gender equality have emerged worldwide. Feminist activism has played a crucial role in challenging oppressive structures and pushing for policies that uphold women's rights. Laws and policies aimed at empowering women and combating gender-based violence have been established to ensure social justice and inclusivity. Article II, Section 14 of the Philippine Constitution underscores the state's recognition of women's critical role in nation-building and guarantees their fundamental equality before the law. This constitutional provision aligns with global efforts to promote gender equality as emphasized by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN Women, 2021).

Moreover, Republic Act No. 9710, known as the Magna Carta of Women, seeks to empower women by recognizing their rights and eliminating gender bias in education, employment, and other sectors. This law reinforces the significance of education and cultural awareness in dismantling deeply ingrained gender stereotypes (Esguerra, 2015). Despite these legal advancements, gender-based oppression and discrimination persist in many parts of the world, highlighting the need for continuous advocacy and systemic reforms.

Historically, challenges to traditional gender roles date back to the ancient and medieval periods, where unorganized movements laid the groundwork for future feminist struggles (Tong, 2009). The feminist movement began to gain momentum as early as the 16th century, evolving through various waves that addressed different aspects of gender inequality, from suffrage and legal rights to workplace discrimination and reproductive rights. However, despite significant progress, the struggle for gender equality remains an ongoing battle, necessitating continued efforts to break societal barriers and foster an inclusive and just society for all. Globally, nearly one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, often perpetrated by intimate partners.

In the Philippines, the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) revealed that 26% of ever-married women aged 15-49 have endured

physical, sexual, or emotional violence from their spouses or partners. These alarming statistics underscore the persistent challenge of gender-based violence and the ongoing struggle for gender equality. Addressing such a deeply rooted issue requires a comprehensive understanding and multifaceted approach. While immediate change is unattainable, consistent and collective efforts can lead to significant progress over time.

Recognizing the pivotal role of education in fostering societal change, the Philippine Department of Education has integrated the feminist critique of literary works into the Grade 10 curriculum. This initiative encourages students to analyze literature through a feminist lens, promoting awareness of women's experiences and societal roles. By engaging with women's allegories and narratives, students gain insight into the realities faced by both women and men, empowering them to identify and address gender issues. Such educational strategies aim to cultivate advocates for social change and champions of women's empowerment among the youth.

This study aims to analyze *Pinagrok*, a book by Estelito B. Jacob, a Bicolano writer, which portrays the struggles of a woman trapped in an abusive marriage. The central character is a wife who endures both physical and emotional abuse yet continues to forgive and love her husband despite the pain. Her suffering is observed by their child, whose resentment towards the father grows into a desire for revenge, as reflected in the lines: "*Si niya! Kun ika nay sarong pinagrok, panamita si Tatay kan saimong siram alagad dai nungka magtugot na dai madugi an saiyang halanuhan.*" This excerpt highlights the generational impact of domestic violence, emphasizing how the mother's passive endurance contrasts with the child's emotional turmoil.

Beyond the literary analysis, this study is grounded in legal and educational frameworks that support research on gender representation in literature. It aligns with Republic Act No. 73566, which established the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) to promote research on Philippine arts and literature that reflect cultural and societal realities, including gender issues. By examining how *Pinagrok* presents domestic violence and gender roles,

the study contributes to the discourse on how literature portrays women's experiences and resilience within the context of Filipino culture.

Furthermore, this research is also linked to Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which advocates for the integration of gender-sensitive materials in the curriculum. By analyzing the gender representations in *Pinagrok*, this study supports the inclusion of literature that raises awareness about social issues, particularly those affecting women, in educational discussions. This aligns with the broader objective of fostering critical thinking among students regarding cultural norms and gender dynamics in Philippine literature.

Thus, this study does not only focus on literary analysis but also seeks to highlight the societal implications of gender portrayals in literature. It aims to contribute to the growing body of research that examines how Filipino literature reflects the realities of gender roles, family dynamics, and the effects of domestic violence across generations.

The novelty of this study lies in its multidisciplinary approach to analyzing *Pinagrok* by Estelito B. Jacob. Unlike previous literary analyses that focus solely on thematic and stylistic aspects, this research integrates legal, educational, and sociocultural frameworks to examine gender representation and domestic violence in Philippine literature. First, this study uniquely connects literature to existing legal frameworks, such as the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) and Republic Act No. 10533, which emphasize gender sensitivity in education. By doing so, it highlights the role of literature as a tool for advocacy and policy reinforcement, positioning literary works as a means to promote awareness and legal consciousness regarding women's rights. This perspective is relatively underexplored in Philippine literary studies, making the research a significant contribution to gender-focused legal and literary discourse. Second, this study explores the intergenerational impact of domestic violence through a feminist lens, analyzing how gender roles and family dynamics are perpetuated across generations. By examining the perspective of the child in *Pinagrok*, the research offers a fresh insight into the psychological and emotional effects of domestic

violence beyond the immediate victim, shedding light on the long-term societal consequences of gender-based violence. Third, the study aligns with the Department of Education's initiative to integrate feminist critiques into the curriculum, reinforcing the need for gender-sensitive literary materials in Philippine education. It provides an educational framework for utilizing literature to foster critical thinking among students about gender roles and societal norms, which has not been extensively explored in previous research on Bicolano literature.

Finally, this research contributes to the broader discourse on Philippine regional literature by bringing attention to *Pinagrok*, a work that reflects the unique cultural, social, and gender dynamics within the Bicolano context. By analyzing how regional literature portrays women's experiences and resilience, the study expands the scope of feminist literary criticism beyond mainstream Philippine literature.

The purpose of this study is to examine the representation of women's allegories in Estelito B. Jacob's *Pinagrok*. By analyzing the poetic elements, symbolism, and underlying messages in the text, the research seeks to uncover how women's experiences, struggles, and identities are portrayed through allegorical expressions. Specifically, the study aims to identify the dominant themes present in *Pinagrok*, shedding light on recurring motifs that reflect cultural, historical, and gender-related perspectives. Furthermore, it seeks to determine the personal dilemmas and societal conflicts embedded within the poetry, highlighting the tensions between individual experiences and broader social structures. By doing so, the research intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of gender representation in literature, emphasizing the ways in which poetry serves as a medium for expressing the complexities of women's lives, their resilience, and their struggles within patriarchal and socio-political contexts.

2. METHOD

This study employed qualitative research methods, specifically thematic analysis, to examine the 43 selected poems in Estelito B. Jacob's Pinagrok (Mga Piling Rawitdawit). The focus was on understanding the underlying meanings, dominant themes, and representations of personal dilemmas and societal conflicts experienced by women as depicted in Jacob's works.

To achieve a comprehensive analysis, this study utilized a combination of causal and sociological content analysis alongside a feminist literary approach. Content analysis was used to systematically categorize poetic devices, symbols, themes, and figurative language, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and motifs related to gender and societal structures (Krippendorff, 2018). The causal analysis helped determine the underlying causes and social conditions reflected in the poetry, while the sociological content analysis provided insights into how these literary elements mirror real-life gender roles and struggles (Bengtsson, 2016).

Furthermore, a feminist literary criticism approach (Showalter, 1985; Moi, 2002) was employed to examine how the poems represent women's voices, struggles, and identities within the cultural and historical contexts of Jacob's work. This method enabled the classification of poems based on their feminist themes, identifying allegorical representations of women's oppression, resilience, and resistance. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, ensuring a structured approach in coding and interpreting the data. By integrating these methods, this study provided a well-rounded and in-depth exploration of the allegorical representations of women in Pinagrok, contributing to a broader understanding of gender narratives in Philippine poetry.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION [Capital Letter, Times New Roman, 12, Bold]

The analysis of the selected poetry reveals 14 significant themes, primarily focusing on the lived experiences of women as manifested through various poetic devices, including symbolism, imagery, direct expression, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and repetition. These themes encompass emotional distress,

submissiveness, sexual objectification, sacrifice, prostitution, sexual abuse, discrimination, incest, poverty, infidelity, physical abuse, bravery, and unrequited love. The thematic exploration of these poems offers profound insight into the struggles and resilience of women in a patriarchal society.

One of the most striking themes is emotional distress, which permeates multiple poems such as "Mea Culpa," "Komunyon," and "Sagrada Familia." Emotional distress in women arises from various factors, including familial conflicts, financial struggles, and personal relationships. Research suggests that emotional distress in women is often linked to societal expectations that mandate endurance and silence in the face of suffering (Gilligan, 1993). This aligns with the depiction in "Init kan Sirang asin Tagubtob kan Daghan," where the protagonist remains silent despite her emotional turmoil, symbolizing the societal pressure to suppress pain.

Another recurring theme is women's submissiveness to men, as highlighted in "Tabagan" and "Pinagrok." The portrayal of women willing to submit to men's desires aligns with feminist critiques of patriarchal structures that condition women to prioritize male authority and acceptance (Beauvoir, 1949). The phenomenon of female submission in literature often reflects real-world dynamics where women internalize their subordination due to sociocultural conditioning (Butler, 1990). The poem "Pinagrok" exemplifies this as a wife forgives her abusive husband, reinforcing the normalization of gendered power imbalances.

Sexual objectification is another prevalent theme, found in "Maisog an Halas kun Gadan an Kristo" and "Kun Kita Sanang Duwa." Objectification theory posits that women are often perceived as mere objects for male pleasure, reducing their agency and individuality (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In "Purisaw," a young girl is objectified by a male family member, illustrating how deeply entrenched and systemic sexual objectification is. This aligns with feminist theories that critique the male gaze, which commodifies women's bodies and reinforces gender inequality (Mulvey, 1975).

The theme of sacrifice, particularly maternal sacrifice, is evident in “Kan Namundag Ka” and “An Siring na mga Istorya.” The selflessness of mothers is often romanticized in literature and society, reinforcing gender norms that position women as caregivers and nurturers (Chodorow, 1978). The poems illustrate how women endure hardship for their children, resonating with studies on maternal labor and the expectation that mothers prioritize their families over personal well-being (Hays, 1996).

Prostitution, as explored in “Keanna” and “Sarong Hapon II,” highlights the economic vulnerabilities that force women into sex work. Studies indicate that poverty and lack of economic opportunities significantly contribute to women engaging in prostitution (Farley, 2004). The poetry reflects a nuanced reality where women, despite moral and societal condemnation, engage in sex work as a means of survival, challenging simplistic moral judgments about prostitution (Kempadoo, 1999).

Sexual abuse and incest, prominent in “Askad asin Lugad” and “Pagmata,” underscore the disturbing reality of violence against women within their own families. Research has shown that familial sexual abuse remains one of the most underreported crimes due to fear, stigma, and power dynamics (Russell, 1986). The poems depict young girls subjected to abuse by male relatives, reinforcing the findings that family structures often facilitate rather than prevent sexual violence against women (Herman, 1992).

Discrimination is another dominant theme, particularly in “Sa Hapot Mo Kun Magayon Ka” and “Dora a la Bona.” Gender discrimination extends across various facets, including appearance, social status, and professional opportunities (Ridgeway, 2011). The poetry illustrates how women face discrimination based on beauty standards and societal expectations, echoing feminist critiques of how patriarchy enforces rigid norms that disadvantage women (Frye, 1983).

Poverty, as depicted in “An Harong Mi” and “Superman Returns,” highlights the socio-economic hardships disproportionately affecting women.

Feminist economics argues that women are more likely to be in poverty due to gender wage gaps, unpaid labor, and systemic barriers to economic independence (Folbre, 1994). The poetry reflects this reality, showing women enduring adverse conditions to support their families, sometimes at the cost of their dignity and well-being.

Infidelity, as shown in “Sa Gurang na Karpentero” and “An Harong Mi,” reflects the relational struggles faced by both men and women. Studies on infidelity suggest that gendered double standards often lead to the stigmatization of women's extramarital affairs while men's are more socially tolerated (Treas & Giesen, 2000). These poems highlight how infidelity disrupts families, reinforcing the complexities of romantic and marital relationships.

Physical abuse, highlighted in “Bayonet” and “Pinagrok,” aligns with extensive research on gender-based violence. The normalization of domestic violence in literature mirrors real-world attitudes that often justify or excuse male aggression (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The poetry exposes the harsh realities of women enduring physical harm, reinforcing the urgent need for cultural and legal reforms to address gender violence.

Bravery, as seen in “Sa Tato ni Osang” and “Ki Irina Ratushinskaya,” provides a counterpoint to the victimization theme. The poems celebrate women's courage in the face of adversity, resonating with feminist narratives that emphasize resilience and resistance against oppression (Hooks, 2000). The depiction of bravery challenges the notion that women are merely passive victims, instead showcasing their agency and strength.

Lastly, domestic violence, explored in “Pagmata” and “An Harong Mi,” presents a grim reality where women face multiple forms of abuse within their own homes. Studies indicate that domestic violence is one of the most pervasive human rights violations, often exacerbated by legal and social structures that fail to protect victims (Johnson, 2008). The poetry provides a stark commentary on

this issue, shedding light on the cyclical nature of abuse and the societal complicity in its perpetuation.

The selected poetry serves as a poignant reflection of women's struggles in a patriarchal society. By employing various poetic devices, these works effectively highlight themes of emotional distress, abuse, discrimination, and resilience. The findings align with feminist theories that critique gendered power dynamics and advocate for women's empowerment. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to amplify women's voices and challenge oppressive societal norms.

The analysis of the selected poems reveals profound personal dilemmas and societal conflicts experienced by women, reflecting the complex interplay between individual struggles and external societal forces. The personal dilemmas ranging from indecisiveness and confusion to insecurity and grief, underscore the psychological burden faced by women due to cultural, economic, and institutional pressures. Simultaneously, societal conflicts, including infidelity, intolerance, sexual violence, and economic instability, illustrate the systemic barriers that reinforce women's subjugation. These findings align with existing literature on gender oppression, psychological distress, and sociocultural constraints on women's autonomy.

Personal Dilemmas and Psychological Impact

The manifestation of indecisiveness in poems such as "Dusol," "Sidok," "Tabagan," and "Sa Gurang na Karpentero" highlights the struggle women face in making autonomous decisions regarding relationships and personal aspirations. Theories of decision-making, such as Janis and Mann's (1977) Conflict Model of Decision Making, suggest that individuals experiencing high stress and perceived risks tend to adopt avoidant decision-making strategies. This aligns with the indecisiveness depicted in the poems, where women rely on external validation rather than internal agency.

Confusion, evident in “An Harong Mi,” “Keanna,” “Mantang Naisasabi Pa,” and “Subi,” suggests a deeper cognitive dissonance that women experience due to conflicting moral and social expectations. Leon Festinger’s (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains that when individuals hold contradictory beliefs or face incompatible social expectations, they experience psychological distress. The confusion portrayed in these poems is a direct result of societal double standards that create irreconcilable expectations for women, particularly in the context of marriage, family, and sexuality.

The experience of rejection, as seen in “Piripit na Dila” and “Imang,” reinforces the theme of women’s disposability in patriarchal societies. Studies on interpersonal rejection (Baumeister & Tice, 1990) indicate that rejection elicits feelings of worthlessness and emotional pain comparable to physical injury. The rejection suffered by the female personas in these poems reflects their marginalization within intimate relationships, emphasizing the emotional cost of gendered power imbalances.

Helplessness, vulnerability, and grief, as depicted in “Bayonet,” “Kaykay nin Tarom,” “Superman Returns,” and “Ki Irina Ratushinskaya,” correspond with Seligman’s (1975) Learned Helplessness Theory, which posits that individuals who repeatedly experience uncontrollable negative events develop a sense of powerlessness. The women in these poems face insurmountable adversities, such as sexual violence, poverty, and wrongful imprisonment, highlighting how structural violence systematically disempowers women.

Furthermore, the presence of guilt, distrust, and insecurity in poems like “Mantang Nagduduyan,” “Kun Kita Sanang Duwa,” and “Sa Hapot Mo kun Magayon Ka” reflects the internalization of societal norms that hold women to unrealistic standards of morality and appearance. Research on gender socialization (Bem, 1981) suggests that women are conditioned to internalize blame for relational failures and physical insecurities, reinforcing low self-worth and dependency.

Societal Conflicts and Structural Oppression

The societal conflicts identified in the poems reflect external forces that shape women's lived experiences. Infidelity, as depicted in "An Harong Mi," underscores the normalization of men's extramarital affairs while stigmatizing women who challenge marital norms. This finding resonates with Giddens' (1992) discussion of traditional versus modern relationships, where traditional gender roles continue to privilege male dominance in romantic and familial relationships.

Cooperative stress, intolerance, and exclusion highlighted in "An Siring na mga Istorya," "Frida," and "Cleopatra" demonstrate how women navigate social hierarchies that often exclude them from decision-making processes. Feminist scholars such as Butler (1990) argue that gender performativity is enforced through societal expectations, leading to exclusionary practices that limit women's agency.

Sexual violence, a prominent theme in "Bayonet," "Purisaw," and "Sarong Hapon I," aligns with studies on rape culture, which emphasize how patriarchal societies normalize and perpetuate sexual violence (Buchwald et al., 1993). These poems expose the vulnerability of women to sexual exploitation, reflecting systemic failures in protecting them from gender-based violence.

Economic status and stability, as depicted in "Kaykay nin Tarom" and "Sagrada Familia," are critical determinants of women's autonomy. According to Sen (1999), economic freedom is a fundamental aspect of human capability, yet women often remain economically dependent due to structural barriers. The poems highlight how economic instability forces women into precarious situations, such as sex work or reliance on unfaithful partners.

Injustice and presumptuousness, seen in "Ki Irina Ratushinskaya" and "Pagmata," illustrate the legal and social biases that disadvantage women. Scholars like Fraser (1997) argue that gender justice requires both economic

redistribution and cultural recognition, yet these poems depict women facing compounded injustices due to gendered expectations.

Lastly, labeling and social stigma, evident in “Sa Saro Sanang Tataramon” and “Dora a la Bona,” align with Goffman’s (1963) theory of stigma, which describes how marginalized individuals are socially marked, leading to their exclusion and discrimination. The female personas in these poems experience labeling that reduces their social worth, reinforcing their subjugation.

The findings from these poems provide a compelling narrative of the interplay between personal dilemmas and societal conflicts that shape women’s experiences. The psychological distress observed in the personal dilemmas aligns with established theories on decision-making, cognitive dissonance, and learned helplessness, while the societal conflicts reflect structural inequalities and systemic oppression discussed in feminist and sociological literature. Addressing these issues requires both personal empowerment and structural change to dismantle the cultural and institutional barriers that perpetuate women’s subordination.

4. CONCLUSION

The study provides an in-depth exploration of gender representation in Estelito B. Jacob’s Pinagrok, analyzing how women’s struggles and resilience are portrayed through allegorical poetry. Using qualitative methods, particularly thematic and feminist literary analysis, the research identifies 14 recurring themes, including emotional distress, submissiveness, sexual objectification, abuse, and bravery. The findings highlight how literature serves as both a reflection of and a commentary on gender roles and systemic oppression.

One of the study’s key contributions is its multidisciplinary approach, integrating legal, educational, and sociocultural frameworks. By linking the literary analysis to laws like the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) and Republic Act No. 10533, the research underscores the importance of literature in raising awareness about gender issues. Additionally, the study reveals the

intergenerational impact of domestic violence, showing how trauma and patriarchal conditioning shape both victims and observers.

From a psychological perspective, the research aligns with theories of decision-making, cognitive dissonance, and learned helplessness, illustrating how societal norms condition women to endure suffering. Simultaneously, it addresses structural oppression, examining issues like economic instability, discrimination, and sexual violence through a feminist lens.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the power of literature as a tool for advocacy and education, reinforcing the need for gender-sensitive literary materials in academic curricula. It provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between personal dilemmas and societal conflicts, contributing to the broader discourse on gender equality and cultural transformation.

Recommendation

Future studies should explore the representation of women in other regional literary works to provide a broader understanding of how gender narratives evolve across cultures. Comparative research on different Philippine literary traditions can deepen insights into the sociocultural factors influencing gender portrayals. Writers and educators should work together to produce and promote literary works that advocate for gender equality. Literature can be a powerful tool for challenging stereotypes, encouraging discussions on gender issues, and inspiring social change.

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