

# Rizal nationalism



As we studied Jose Rizal's life and his written works, we were able to have a better understanding of the nationalism of Rizal and were also able to correct the myths regarding the real convictions of Rizal. In tracing the circumstances and events that developed the personality and way of thinking of Rizal, we need to look back at how he lived his life. Rizal belonged to a family that managed to be well-off because his father was able to earn through the business of sugarcanes, which was very profitable during those times.

As his family had the means, Rizal was able to receive education from the Jesuits and Dominicans in the country, and even from one of Spain's educational institution. With that, Rizal was considered an ilustrado, or one of those from wealthy native families who were sent abroad to receive education. Indeed, after being educated by Spanish priests in the country, Rizal was further nurtured within the bosom of Spain. Rizal can be seen to have greatly valued acquiring education and manifesting it. He was an excellent student in almost every aspect of learning and he even mastered several other foreign languages aside from the Spanish language.

Having lived in an environment wherein he was mostly with the affluent and elite people, where he experienced ease of living and where he was able to make use of his talent in science and writing, Rizal has developed that concept in his mind that his surroundings should always be in order and in peace. Rizal, along with his fellow ilustrados, was among those early people who requested reforms from the Spanish government which included representation of natives in the Cortes, filipinization in the churches, and equal rights for natives.

The ilustrados like Rizal initiated this action because they wanted to be treated in equality with the Spaniards because they have a higher status in the society because of their wealth and they have also benefited from the education from Spain and abroad. But their reform movement was not successful as Spain did not comply with their pleas in adherence to unwritten rule that the colonial master will not allow himself to be in equal terms with his colonial subject. But the natives who were oppressed and abused continued to rebel against the colonizers.

Thus, when the conflicts of the country due to resistance against the Spaniards began to further heat up and the upheaval of the natives was threatening to break out, Rizal was caught in a dilemma of whether to favor reform, which seeks assimilation and merely freedom from Spain, or revolution, which seeks whole independence and breaking away from the clutches of Spain. This predicament of Rizal is reflected upon his two novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. In *Noli Me Tangere*, Rizal was represented by both Elias and Ibarra.

In the chapter *The “Voice of the Hunted”*, Elias was insisting for radical reforms in the armed forces, administrative justice system and the priesthood while Ibarra didn't agree with the reforms Elias wanted and believed in the power of the authorities and the need for necessary evil. In the chapter *“Elias' Story”*, again Elias was emphasizing the need for resistance and armed struggle to liberate the people, while Ibarra disagreed and said that the people will be liberated if they deserve it and the way to be so is through education so he was advocating for building a schoolhouse.

But in the chapter “Chase on the Lake”, Elias suddenly had a change of heart when he switched to believing in reforms while Ibarra also changed and because of the hardships he experienced, he then rooted for having a revolution as he decided to become a filibuster as part of his personal vengeance. This trend of indecisiveness continued in the novel *El Filibusterismo*, where Rizal was reflected in the characters of Simoun, Basilio and Padre Florentino.

In the chapter “Simoun”, Simoun, who was Ibarra in disguise, was again being adamant for a revolution, while Basilio was being like Ibarra initially in the *Noli* when he proclaimed in his belief in education as a tool for equality and freedom. And in the conclusion of the *Fili*, Rizal has implied his resolution when in the story, he killed Simoun, the promoter of revolution, and made Padre Florentino, an advocate of peace, prevail.

And in real life, Rizal reiterated his stand regarding this issue in his December 15 Manifesto when he declared that he was against the revolution and he favored the reform programs especially that regarding education. The portrayals of Rizal in the different characters of his novel depicted how his mind struggled on whether to fight for revolution or reform. His mind was open as he saw the plight of his fellowmen who suffered under the oppressive hands of Spain. And with this he allowed himself to be a realist as he understood why there is a need for revolution.

But his initial concept of thinking dominated his mind, as he believed in an orderly and peaceful environment wherein he didn't want to see blood shed nor people hurt. This side of Rizal being an idealist was stronger than his

small portion of being a realist which is why he wanted to have freedom through peaceful means. In addition to being an idealist who didn't want to see the ugly face of the society, Rizal also was expressing gratitude to Spain which is why he didn't want to fight against it. Since Spain was also like a mother country to him, it justifies why Rizal, as a child of Spain, didn't want to stab his own mother.

But Rizal also loved his own nation such that he didn't want either to get hurt in the process of making circumstances favorable for both and so his appeal was for reforms and education. However, his plea for education and other reforms was impossible during those times and those were not what the people currently needs. What would liberate the people is the massive movement of the natives united against the oppressors. Rizal wanted what he believed was for the welfare and benefit of his fellowmen and the Spaniards, and such desire for peaceful coexistence with the Spaniards is not totally a bad thing.

But Rizal failed to see what majority of the natives is experiencing and what these people truly need. He wanted freedom but he didn't want to be separated from Spain, while what the people deserve and aspire for is independence from the colonizers. The idealism embedded in his mind made him dream of the almost impossible, and had that ideal concept prevail in his mind until the very end. True enough, Rizal has inspired his fellowmen to fight as he became an icon and a victim of the cruelty of Spain, although, it was just a matter of untold truths and misunderstandings.

Yet, the natives were still able to push themselves towards independence through their unified strength and efforts, and Rizal may have caused some influence for these people to have their sense of nationalism fired up although his was different. And the result of independence was very sweet for the Filipinos who fought and died for it, and it's such a regret that Rizal wasn't able to see that the revolution that he was against at was what made his people liberated.