

The identity of a filipino today essay sample

[Countries](#), [Philippines](#)



” The identity of a Filipino today is of a person asking what is his identity.” –
Nick Joaquin

When I bought this book a couple of months ago, I immediately skimmed the first two pages. I did think that this was a book about a female character with anatomical deformity and the book was about what caused the deformity and what should be done to correct it. I thought that this book would make me endlessly laugh.

Having formed that ridiculous image in my mind, I set this book aside. There were and there still are so many books by foreign authors that beckon on me. Also, just like most Filipinos, I always thought that foreign books were far better than local ones even those by our local literary greats.

On many counts, I was awfully wrong. First, this novel has nothing to do with the study of medicine, anthropology or anatomy. It is a novel that every Filipino should be proud of. It is a novel written by a Filipino about Filipinos and for the Filipinos. However, it does not preach. It does not self-deprecate. It does not promote self-interest nor does it encourage us Filipinos to hate ourselves and wish that we were of different nationalities. This novel is part of who we are as it shows a pivotal part in our nation’s history and how our race was formed or came into being by getting sustenance from two colonizers, akin to two navels: those of Mother Spain’s and Mother USA’s. The two countries that greatly influenced our nation’s psyche and will forever be part of who we are as an Asian race.

But I was right too. It made me endless laugh. But not for the thought of a person having two navels. I laughed endlessly albeit silently as I grieved

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about having to realize how much I've been missing while I prioritize foreign authors in my book choices. I also shamelessly laughed realizing how distorted asking myself who we are as a raceour culture is and we just couldn't do anything about it.

Nicomedes " Onching", today just " Nick" Joaquin (1917-2004) was awarded the National Artist for Literature trophy in 1976. This award is the highest national recognition given to Filipino artists who have made significant contributions to the development of Philippine arts and to the cultural heritages of the country. He was said to be the Greatest Filipino writer of the 20th century and third to Rizal and Recto as the greatest Filipino writer ever. He was #1 in Filipino writers list in English. Dr. Alejandro Roces compared him to William Faulkner. His Portrait of the Artist as Filipino is said to be the most important Filipino play in English. Before his death due to cardiac arrest in 2004, he was a friend and the biographer of the former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. After his death, this bookworm with a gift of total recall, expressed his wish of donating the 3, 000 books from his personal library to University of Santo Thomas. He did not marry.

Without providing too many spoilers, the story is about a Connie Escobar who claims to have two navels. She discloses this to a Filipino doctor, Pepe Monson who is one (the other being the priest Father Tony) of the two sons of a former rich Filipino businessman who is hiding in Hong Kong to avoid postwar trials of post war independence. Connie is in Hong Kong apparently to chase a band player Paco Texiera even if she is already married to Macho

Escobar. However, Connie says that she left the Philippines to run away from her husband because he is having an affair with her mother Senora de Vidal.

The novel's theme of pressure of the past upon the present is similar to G. G. Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* although Joaquin did not cover as many generations as Marquez did. In fact, Connie has only the relationship between her husband and mother as the immediate past that greatly affect her present. However, the symbolisms are clear. Connie suffers due to the strong influence of her mother when she was growing up (with the incident about the dolls as the image that got etched in my mind) and the indiscretions the mother did in having extra-marital affairs. All these while the supposedly the strong patriarch Don Manolo Vidal was busy protecting his business and his political turfs. Don Vidal can be likened to the Filipino businessmen who sided to whoever was in power during the Spanish and American occupations just to protect their interest while overlooking the interest of the many poor peasants (symbolized by Connie Escobar).

This is not an easy read though. Joaquin's narrative is confusing especially in the first 50 pages of the book due to mixed points of view and multiple flows of thoughts in just one paragraph. I worked for two years in Hong Kong and I thought it would have been more interesting if Joaquin took time to describe his milieu for imagery impact. He also did not resort to using local languages or phrases, e. g., Chinese nor in Filipino, to give authenticity to the spoken dialogues. Lastly, I did not notice any effort to give distinct and recognizable voices at least to the main characters. All the voices seem to be coming from the same person.

However, the plot is brilliant. My first time to read a local book with Hong Kong and Philippines as settings. Prior to this, I thought that the post-war (WWII) era has been that part of Philippine history that seems to be “untouched” by fictional writers. This was due to the fact that many literary works mainly focused on the time when the WWII was on-going. Joaquin’s use of his characters to symbolize the bigger scope – the Philippines as it is trying to rise from the ashes – is astounding and the impact is comparable to the intent that Dr. Jose Rizal probably had when he was writing his *Noli* and *Fili*.

I will be reading Joaquin’s *Cave and Shadows* and *Tropical Gothic* next to know more about the man.