

# Modern Asian Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/ASS>

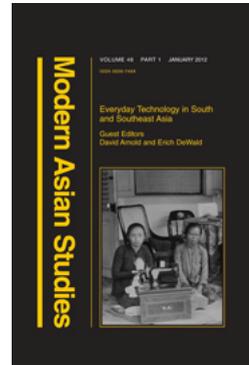
Additional services for *Modern Asian Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## Modernizing the Manileña: Technologies of conspicuous consumption for the well-to-do woman, *circa* 1880s–1930s

RAQUEL A. G. REYES

Modern Asian Studies / Volume 46 / Special Issue 01 / January 2012, pp 193 - 220  
DOI: 10.1017/S0026749X1100062X, Published online: 20 December 2011

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0026749X1100062X](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0026749X1100062X)

### How to cite this article:

RAQUEL A. G. REYES (2012). Modernizing the Manileña: Technologies of conspicuous consumption for the well-to-do woman, *circa* 1880s–1930s. *Modern Asian Studies*, 46, pp 193-220 doi:10.1017/S0026749X1100062X

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

# *Modernizing the Manileña: Technologies of conspicuous consumption for the well-to-do woman, circa 1880s–1930s*

RAQUEL A. G. REYES

*Department of History, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG; and the Royal Netherlands Institute for the Study of Southeast Asia and the Caribbean (KITLV), Reuvensplaats 2, 2311 BE Leiden.*

*Email: rr14@soas.ac.uk*

## **Abstract**

From the late nineteenth century onwards, a new range of European and American technologies, powered by electricity and gas, and intended for use on the body and in the home—especially appliances for the domestic kitchen—began to appear in Manila. Electro-mechanical vibratory devices and steam-powered massagers for the body; hair waving and curling machines; and a multitude of technologies for the domestic kitchen, from stoves and water heaters to a gamut of electric and gas gadgetry that included percolators, boilers, electric waffle-irons, grills, and refrigerators (or ice-boxes, their precursor) were targeted largely at the affluent female consumer with promises to improve her physical appearance and health or make her daily life more comfortable. Their introduction and impact in the Philippines can tell a number of compelling stories—the desirability of European or American bourgeois culture, how the trappings of Western lifestyles were imagined, the extent to which the use and purchase of certain technologies aimed at replicating or emulating those lifestyles, or, as this paper explores, the gendered technological infrastructure of the ‘good life’. In this story, modern technologies designed for domestic settings and for use on women’s bodies made manifest a myriad of desires and aspirations—prestige, status, cosmopolitanism, modernity, and urbanity. They also articulated a particular sensuousness and pleasure. Electro-vibratory devices, hair styling machines, and kitchen appliances could be experienced by all the senses and thus exerted a visceral appeal; their use proclaimed an enthusiasm for modern technology which, for the first time, emphasized the relevance of modern technology to women’s everyday lives by the transformative effects they promised.

## **Introduction**

From the late nineteenth century onwards, advertisements for a new range of European and American technologies, powered by electricity

and gas, began to appear in Manila's newspapers. Advertisements for technologies intended for use on the body and in the home, especially devices for the domestic kitchen, were targeted at the affluent female consumer with promises to improve her physical appearance and health or make her daily life more comfortable. The emergence in the late 1880s of establishments that specialized in therapeutic treatments for the body, for instance, advertised machines that delivered mild electric currents or warm jets of water to the face and body to treat nervous disorders, invigorate, rejuvenate, beautify, and relax. These treatments, aimed at wealthy Spanish-speaking local women, were promoted alongside other technologies and goods—photography, bicycles, sewing- and ice-making machines, the telegraph, imported comestibles, and other luxuries—that were rapidly changing the cultural landscape of the Spanish colonial city. At the turn of the century, after Spain relinquished rule of the Philippines to the United States, machines for the body and domestic appliances for kitchen use were aggressively marketed by newly established American companies not only to European and American residents in the colony but also to the burgeoning Tagalog middle class.

Advertisements have long presented social historians with a range of puzzles. How far do advertisements reflect actual behaviour, consumer values, and preoccupations? Do they create fantasies or fuel already present aspirations?<sup>1</sup> As will be evident in this paper, the social values and meanings that were attached to electric and gas powered kitchen appliances and technologies for the body in Manila owed a lot to Western advertising, particularly the language of American-style messages that appeared in the 1920s and which, to paraphrase Marchand, promised assimilation into a 'culture of high technology' and 'urbane sophistication'.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of Western technologies in Manila during the late nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century can tell a number of compelling stories—the desirability of European or American bourgeois culture, how the trappings of Western lifestyles were imagined, the extent to which the use and purchase of certain technologies aimed at replicating or emulating those lifestyles, or, as this paper will explore,

<sup>1</sup> Scholarship on the histories of advertising and global consumer culture is vast. See for instance Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 335.

the ‘technological infrastructure of the good life’.<sup>3</sup> In this story, modern technologies designed for domestic settings and for use on women’s bodies made manifest a myriad of desires and aspirations—prestige, status, cosmopolitanism, modernity, and urbanity. They also articulated a particular sensuousness and pleasure. Electro-vibratory devices, hair styling machines, and kitchen appliances could be experienced by all the senses and thus exerted a visceral appeal. Their use proclaimed an enthusiasm for modern technology which, for the first time, emphasized the relevance of modern technology for women’s everyday lives by the transformative effects they promised. Of course, they were far from economically necessary. Yet such technologies aimed to be incorporated into definitions of a woman’s personal identity and social self. Moreover, they had visual impact—whether it was the exhibition of modern kitchen appliances in the home, a fashionable hair-do, or looking radiant after vibratory treatment. Marketed to well-to-do women, these technologies impressed themselves on the everyday consciousness of a reading public and surely incited desire. For all these reasons, it seems, these technologies for women can be treated as technologies of conspicuous consumption *par excellence*.<sup>4</sup>

Although the term ‘technologies of conspicuous consumption’ has been adopted, the cluster of technologies that this paper surveys—electro-mechanical vibratory devices and steam-powered massagers

<sup>3</sup> This phrase emerged during the many stimulating discussions at the ‘Everyday Technology in Monsoon Asia, 1880–1960’ conference held on 19–20 March 2010, convened by David Arnold at the University of Warwick, and for which this paper was written. For their provocative comments, I thank David Arnold, Erich DeWald, Jean Gelman Taylor, Tim Harper, Suzanne Moon, and Sarah Teasley. An early version of this paper was written while I was a fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) where I benefited from conversations with Elizabeth Pilliod and Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann. Research for this paper was undertaken in Madrid’s newspaper archive, La Hemeroteca Municipal. I am grateful to Maria Isabel García Rubio, archivist at La Hemeroteca, for her help in locating material. I greatly appreciated the company and support of Peter Boomgaard and Florentino Rodao in Madrid; and thank also the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW).

<sup>4</sup> For classic formulations of ‘conspicuous consumption’, see Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973; first published 1899); Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (New York: Basic Books, 1979) especially Chapter 5; Alfred Gell, ‘Newcomers to the World of Goods: Consumption among the Muria Gonds’, in Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*, pp. 110–38; Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

for the body; hair waving and curling machines; and a multitude of technologies for the domestic kitchen, from stoves and water heaters to a gamut of electric and gas gadgetry that includes percolators, boilers, electric waffle-irons, grills, and refrigerators (or ice-boxes, their precursor)—appear to an extent to elude collective general categorization. Kitchen appliances, and those that supplied homes with heated water and electricity, appear to readily fall under the rubric of household technologies that industrialized homes, purportedly increased productivity, brought real changes to the daily life of the majority of middle class households, though not necessarily lessening the burden of household work on women.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, one would be hard pressed to think of the technologies for the body discussed here, with their origins outside the home (spas, beauty parlours, and so forth) and their association with fashions, pleasure, leisure time, and affluent lifestyles, in the same terms. Nor, it seems, would it be wholly appropriate to bracket vibrators and permanent hair waving machines under the sort of technological health care system elaborated upon by Cowan that shifted important health care work, such as the preparation of home remedies done by women within the home, to trained health specialists, particularly nurses and physicians, in institutions, especially hospitals, and to manufacturers of patent medicine.<sup>6</sup>

The electric vibratory and massage apparatuses referred to in this paper are to be distinguished from vibrating dildos—vertical projectiles designed for vaginal or anal insertion—that have been explicitly marketed as sexual aids since the 1960s. Discussed here are electromechanical devices that imparted rhythmic pulses and exerted pressure with the use of a flat applicator or rubber ‘vibratodes’ placed on surface areas of the body—the advertisements suggested use on the face, scalp, gums, even fingernails; ‘violet ray’ devices that delivered pulsation massage using glass or rubber applicators; and electrodes, commonly used in electrotherapy, that passed a mild electric current to skin tissues causing the user to experience a mild tingling sensation to the face or breasts upon which the electrodes were recommended to be attached.<sup>7</sup> Such technologies were developed for home use and

<sup>5</sup> See the classic study on household technologies by Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

<sup>7</sup> These distinctions are made and elaborated upon by Rachel P. Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: ‘Hysteria’, the Vibrator, and Women’s Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore:

marketed as home appliances by the first two decades of the twentieth century. Maines has noted that the vibrator was in the top five of the first home appliances to be electrified following the sewing-machine (1889), the fan, the tea-kettle, and the toaster (1899).<sup>8</sup> Prior to the twentieth century, users had to travel to spas or doctor's clinics that offered mechanized therapeutic treatments. Thus, the use of such technologies was long restricted to an affluent clientele. Spas involved high costs, often entailing expenditure for travel to the spa, accommodation and meals, fees for the use of particular machines, and for specialist attention. Even when they became suitable for domestic use and were sold as portable hand-held kits, they remained relatively expensive and therefore exclusive.

Similarly, machines that styled hair into the deep undulating permanent waves that were in vogue during the 1920s and 1930s were only available in beauty parlours and hairdressing shops. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that kits for home permanent waving were produced.<sup>9</sup> Known as the 'Marcel Wave' after Marcel Grateau, the Frenchman who created the style in the early 1870s, the procedure was time-consuming, originally taking 12 hours; involved the application of chemicals and heating electric curlers to the correct temperature before placing them in the hair; and was expensive. Although the 'cold wave' procedure developed in the 1930s cut the cost and amount of time it required, which further popularized the hairstyle, a visit to the beauty parlour still required both time and money.

A summary of the commonalities these technologies shared would include, first, their gender identification. They were marketed to women and quickly became associated with female-identified consumer culture. Second, slowly but surely, all the technologies discussed here found their way into homes. By the first two decades of the twentieth century kitchen appliances and vibrating devices had been developed for domestic use and were designed to be aesthetically pleasing, elegant-looking, compact, and simple to use. Frequently, what had been large, heavy, unwieldy apparatuses located in sites outside the home and necessitating special training in their use,

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). Much of my discussion on vibrators in this paper has drawn upon Maines' pioneering work.

<sup>8</sup> Maines, *Technology of Orgasm*, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Trasko, *Daring Do's: History of Extraordinary Hair* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001); Richard Corson, *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years* (London: Peter Owen, 2000).

became miniaturized, sold as hand-held kits, and simplified in their application. And third, the acquisition or use of such technologies was associated with cosmopolitan and modern lifestyles.

The introduction and impact of Western domestic technologies for use in everyday life is a subject that has not been addressed in relation to the Philippines.<sup>10</sup> In the spirit of exploring this wholly new terrain, what follows is an attempt to understand how certain technologies—electric and gas appliances for the home and the body—entered colonial Manila and what effect they had on the lives of women. This paper will discuss the emerging culture of consumption and range across the new technological innovations and imports that were making late nineteenth century Manila a brighter city (from electric lighting), better connected with the outside world with the use of new communication technologies (such as the telephone), and filled with new gustatory experiences for those with refined palates and deep pockets—those who could afford to shop in the city’s upmarket bazaars and La Estrella del Norte, the newly established department store at Escolta, Manila’s premier shopping street. Amid the constellation of technologies and new tastes, treatments known as *teràpico-funcional*, using electro-therapeutic machines that aimed to relieve physical disorders, made their first appearance.

With the advent of American colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century, the market was soon flooded with new technological goods that forged an image of the style-conscious, modern woman and the concept of a hygienic home kitchen. This paper will speculate on the extent of a ‘trickle-down’ effect and will explore how advertising, combined with the new field of domestic science taught in public schools, and the spread of the English language, helped to bring American imports to the attention of Filipinos and educate them with regard to their value and social importance. Kitchen appliances and

<sup>10</sup> With the exception of Indonesia, research on other areas of Southeast Asia is also scanty. For pioneering work on Indonesia see, especially, Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Peter Boomgaard, ‘Technologies of a Trading Empire: Dutch Introduction of Water- and Windmills in Early Modern Asia, 1650s–1800’, *History and Technology*, 24 (1), 2008, pp. 43–60; Suzanne Moon, *Technology and Ethical Idealism: A History of Development in the Netherlands East Indies* (Leiden: CNWS, 2007). On the links between the spread of modernity; consumer culture, including everyday technologies such as telephones and bicycles; and the indigenous middle class as ‘cultural citizens’ in the Dutch East Indies, see Henk Schulte Nordholt, ‘Modernity and Cultural Citizenship in the Netherlands Indies: An Illustrated Hypothesis’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 42 (3), 2011, pp. 435–57.

technologies for the female body were viewed as innovations whose use marked a woman out as ‘modern’. But there was also a sense that the Americanization of Filipino tastes, a process that was linked to these technologies, was being thought of as unacceptable, at least by the 1920s.

### Brighter lights, bigger city: city-life in late nineteenth-century Manila

Electricity in 1880 was still a novelty. Anacleto del Rosario and Felix Roxas, two elite schoolboys, made people gasp at their experiments with electricity and fascinated them with a contraption they had assembled—an electric lamp—that disturbingly crackled and flashed, before finally emitting a continuous white glow.<sup>11</sup> John Foreman, an Englishman who visited the Philippines in the late 1890s, noticed a few electric lamps had been placed to illuminate the quays, and gaslights had also begun to be used for home lighting.<sup>12</sup> In 1892, La Electricista, Manila’s first electric light company, was established to provide improved street lighting and supply up-scale businesses and the more affluent residences that could afford to switch to electricity. The use of firewood and charcoal continued, however. Poor households remained dependent on biomass fuels, and the manner in which households prepared most foods—grilling and roasting meats outdoors to ensure smoke and ash stayed outside—remained unchanged.<sup>13</sup>

The vogue for electric lighting in homes was reflected in shops from the late 1880s. Bazar de Velasco in Binondo, for instance, sold a ‘great variety of electricity’, and crystal lamps fitted with up to 12 lights.<sup>14</sup> Shops that sold a range of imported industrial machinery from sugar, rope, and rice-milling machines, to steam and electric powered boats—‘*botes de vapour y electricidad*’—also offered electric lighting installation services to public and private establishments.<sup>15</sup> Electricity also ushered in new and faster ways to communicate. Manila’s first

<sup>11</sup> Felix Roxas, *The World of Felix Roxas: Anecdotes and Reminiscences of a Manila Newspaper Columnist, 1926–1936*, trans. Angel Estrada and Vicente del Carmen (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1970), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> John Foreman, *The Philippines* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1980), p. 346.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Doepfers, ‘Lighting a Fire: Home Fuel in Manila, 1850–1945’, *Philippine Studies*, 55 (4), 2007, pp. 435.

<sup>14</sup> Advertisement for ‘Bazar de Velasco’, *El Comercio*, 11 February 1889.

<sup>15</sup> Advertisement for ‘Julius C. Neville y C.’, *El Comercio*, 22 September 1888.

telecommunications office was established in 1885.<sup>16</sup> From 1888, advertisements began to appear for domestic telephone equipment—‘*nuevos teléfonos domésticos*’—that could readily be bought and substituted for the use of electric bells.<sup>17</sup> The introduction of electric telephony, like the telegraph before it, revolutionized communication.<sup>18</sup>

Manila’s population was expanding. A sense of Manila’s changing demography, and ethnic and gender composition at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth is given by the 1903 census. Manila’s population in 1887 stood at 176,777. By 1903, even after the devastation wrought by the Philippine revolution against Spain in 1896 and the war of resistance against the United States in 1899–1902, the number of Manila’s inhabitants had risen to 219,928.<sup>19</sup> Of this total population, 185,351 were natives (classified as the ‘brown’ race); 21,083 were Chinese; almost 8,000 were white; 4,564 were of mixed race; 4,300 were American; and just over 2,000 were Spanish. Of the city’s inhabitants, 86 per cent were natives, and nearly 60 per cent of the total population were males.<sup>20</sup>

Economic historians have attributed the rapid social, spatial, technological, and demographic changes that occurred in Manila during the late nineteenth century to the country’s booming export economy. The profits that were made from export agricultural commodities, principally sugar, coffee, hemp or abaca, and tobacco, enabled the Philippines to buy increasingly large amounts of imported goods and machinery.<sup>21</sup> European countries, specifically Spain, Germany, Holland, and France, but also Britain, were among the most

<sup>16</sup> Vicente L. Rafael, ‘The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in Contemporary Philippines’, *Public Culture*, 15 (3), 2003, p. 400.

<sup>17</sup> Advertisement for ‘*Nuevos teléfonos domésticos*’, *El Comercio*, 6 July 1888.

<sup>18</sup> The Philippine patriot, novelist, and polyglot, José Rizal, imagines eavesdropping on a conversation between an Augustinian friar in Madrid and the provincial father in Manila with hilarious results. See Rizal, ‘Por Telefono’ in *Prosa por Jose Rizal*, Vol. 3, *Book 2 (1880–1894)* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1995), pp. 85–90. See also Rafael, ‘Cell Phone’, p. 400.

<sup>19</sup> Notable explanations for population growth in late nineteenth-century Philippines have been put forward in particular by Norman Owen, ‘The Paradox of Nineteenth-Century Population Growth in Southeast Asia: Evidence from Java and the Philippines’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 18 (1), 1987, pp. 45–57.

<sup>20</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Philippine Islands 1903* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), Vol. II, p. 438.

<sup>21</sup> The late nineteenth and early twentieth century Philippine export economy in relation to global trade and local changes has been well studied, especially in relation to the abaca, tobacco, and sugar industries. See for example: Norman Owen, *Prosperity without Progress* (Berkeley: Center for South and South East Asia Studies and University of California Press, 1984); Benito J. Legarda, Jr., *After the Galleons: Foreign*

important sources of imports in the Philippines.<sup>22</sup> A cursory perusal of a few Spanish trade newspapers of the time shows the availability in the colony of a wide and diverse choice of European luxuries—Parisian perfumes and colognes, Viennese beers and furniture, cheeses from Holland, medicines and shoes from England. Equally striking was the prevalence of small mechanical goods on sale—Swiss-made watches, Singer sewing-machines, the ‘*maquinillas para hacer hielo*’ (small ice-making machines), and bicycles. In 1896, for instance, members of the secret revolutionary organization, the Katipunan, peddled away on bicycles to recruit supporters outside Manila.<sup>23</sup> Exiled in remote Dapitan in the same year, the Filipino patriot José Rizal asked his sisters to send him a bicycle, stipulating that it should be inexpensive, ‘sturdy’ rather than ‘deluxe’, and able to ride over sand and bad roads.<sup>24</sup>

If ‘imports’ are thought of in a broader sense, rather than confined to goods, the appearance of new sorts of services offered by foreigners gained importance. There was a proliferation of photography studios run by Europeans, which became exceedingly popular with the Filipino bourgeoisie and the middle class.<sup>25</sup> European-style ‘*boticas y droguerías*’ (pharmacies and drugstores) presented fierce competition to the city’s Chinese-owned *boticas*, introducing new patented medicines and remedies into the colony.<sup>26</sup> The most famous, the English-owned *Botica Inglesa*, sold cameras and photographic equipment as well as medicines, soaps, and perfumes. The shopping lists Rizal mailed to

*Trade, Economic Change and Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth-Century Philippines* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002); Daniel Doepfers, *Manila 1900–1914: Social Change in a Late Colonial Metropolis* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1984); Alfred W. McCoy and Ed. C. de Jesus (eds), *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformations* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1982); Jonathan Fast and Jim Richardson, *Roots of Dependency: Political and Economic Revolution in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Philippines* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> O. D. Corpuz, *An Economic History of the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1997), p. 185.

<sup>23</sup> O. D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation* (Quezon City: AKLAHI Foundation, 1989), Vol. II, pp. 243–55.

<sup>24</sup> José Rizal, Dapitan, to Trinidad Rizal, 15 January 1896, in *Letters between Rizal and Family Members, 1876–1896* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> For a provocative and highly original treatment of wartime photography and photographic portraiture among the Filipino bourgeoisie, see Vicente L. Rafael, ‘The Undead: Notes on Photography in the Philippines, 1898–1920s’, in Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 76–102.

<sup>26</sup> Raquel A. G. Reyes, ‘The Persecution of the Boticas de China in 19<sup>th</sup> century Manila’, forthcoming.

his sisters from Dapitan included a box of ‘Pear’s Fine Soap’ from the Botica Inglesa, and a remedy for flatulence, with a preference for the American brand ‘Dr Jayne’s Carminative Balsam’.<sup>27</sup>

The demand for European technological and consumer goods in the late nineteenth century was predictably confined to the upper echelons of Spanish-speaking society. The wealth they had made from export agriculture permitted provincial native elites to furnish their homes, entertain guests, dress in high European style, and even send their sons to Europe to complete their education and obtain doctorates.<sup>28</sup> Foreign visitors invited to dine in the homes of the affluent took note of their host’s ability to speak excellent Spanish, in addition to Tagalog and other local languages, indicating their extensive connections, their urbanity and education—elements that together made upper class Filipinos indistinguishable and quintessentially Hispanic in orientation.<sup>29</sup> Spanish-language papers were quick to pick up on the latest shopping fads and trends. The satirical *Manila Alegre* sharply caricatured the consumption habits of elite *Manileños* and highlighted the *Manileña* woman’s penchant for having her portrait taken, and her taste for elegant clothing, footwear, and department store jewels.<sup>30</sup> The achievement of modern looks, indeed, a healthy aspect, involved more than these goods. Increasingly, it appeared to require not only the medicated creams and lotions that were arriving in Manila *boticas* from Europe and America but also the use of the newest electrical technologies on the body. One important area of female consumer culture was the purchase of treatments to improve the physical appearance of their body or relieve physical disorders.

### **Drainage, irrigation, and electrical stimulation: Technologies for the bodies of nervous women**

Throughout the nineteenth century, fashionable spa resorts all over Europe offered a range of mechanized treatments for a

<sup>27</sup> Rizal to Trinidad, 15 January 1896.

<sup>28</sup> Raquel A. G. Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism: Sexuality and the Philippine Propaganda Movement, 1882–1892* (Singapore and Seattle: NUS Press and University of Washington Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Elite society in the rural environs of Manila—Batangas, Laguna, Cavite, and Pampanga—is a case in point. See in particular John Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>30</sup> ‘Anuncios de Moda’, *Manila Alegre*, 16 April 1887.

variety of female disorders: hysteria, chlorosis or 'green sickness' (a condition recognized by a multitude of vague symptoms that included nausea, lassitude, sexual excitation, frustration or nymphomania), and neurasthenia.<sup>31</sup> By the early twentieth century electro-mechanical vibrators and massagers, instruments marketed to American consumers initially by the brand name 'Vibratile', could be purchased from American mail order catalogues in hand-held, portable, battery, and steam-powered models designed for convenient home use and self-treatment.<sup>32</sup>

In Spain, the use of electricity in medicine began in earnest during the mid-nineteenth century with the pioneering work on electrotherapeutics undertaken by the Spanish neurologist Eduardo Bertrán Rubio (1838–1909). With the publication of Rubio's treatise on the application of medical electricity in 1871, hydro- and electrotherapies became available a year later through the founding of el Grande Establecimiento Terápico Funcional in Barcelona. Institutes and hospital clinics in Madrid specializing in electro-, balneo-, and mechanotherapy soon followed suit throughout the 1880s.<sup>33</sup> These developments were felt, to a limited extent, in Spain's Southeast Asian colony.

Sometime in the 1880s, an Establecimiento Terápico Funcional—what might be known as Manila's first spa—opened its doors to fashionable Manila society. Very little is known about this establishment and the entrepreneurs behind such a business, but its presence was announced in numerous advertisements that first appeared in early 1889 within the pages of the Spanish newspaper, *El Comercio*.<sup>34</sup> The building was situated in the Calzada del Iris, an upmarket location not far from Malacañang, the Governor-general's palace. The number of attending medical staff is unclear and the establishment did not seem to have any connections with Manila's hospitals, though it appeared to employ several physicians. There was a senior physician, the *médico director*, with whom a patient consulted and whose presence could be requested at certain treatments. A patient

<sup>31</sup> Maines, *Technology of Orgasm*, pp. 32–47.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> I. Raposo Vidal, 'La Fisioterapia en España durante los siglos XIX y XX hasta la integración en escuelas universitarias de Fisioterapia', *Fisioterapia*, 23 (4), 2001, pp. 206–17.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the series of advertisements dated from 22 February 1889 to 6 May 1899.

would be assigned a physician who had the authority to prescribe, without prior consultation with the *médico director*, the number of sessions and treatment that only involved inhalation, baths, showers, and sprays. This physician could accompany the patient during treatment. Facilities seemed to have been state of the art: on offer was use of the electric powered carbolic steam apparatus pioneered by the renowned French surgeon and advocate of massage treatments, Just Lucas-Championnière (1843–1913); an ophthalmology *gabinete*; an ‘iron chamber’ for steam baths; a dark chamber (*cámara oscura*) for examining the eyes using an ophthalmoscope; bath chambers; and recovery rooms (the *enfermería*), which offered serviced and furnished places for rest and repose (see Figure 1).

Potential customers were spoilt for choice by the variety of treatments available in Manila’s *Terápico Funcional*. Hydrotherapeutic treatments ran the gamut of fashionable water cures that were all the rage in late nineteenth century Europe: steam baths; baths of hot and cold mineral waters (sulfurous, iodinated, or with chloride); hot and cold bath chambers for whole body immersion with a choice of heady, aromatic atmospheres—eucalyptus, hydrofluoric acid, carbolic acid, arsenicals, and *mercuriales*; showers that could be locally applied to the chest, spinal column or kidneys; emollient, astringent, antiseptic, and mineral water sprays for specific regions of the body, or for small delicate areas such as the throat and nasal cavities; electric applications; and inhalations of compressed or oxygenated ‘air’.<sup>35</sup>

As it is today, the cost of luxurious pampering was prohibitively high. A first consultation was two Mexican silver dollars (known as pesos).<sup>36</sup> The priciest treatments, costing a small fortune of five pesos, were for the steam and mineral baths, and ophthalmoscopic examinations. Electrical stimulation and use of the Championnière steam apparatus were bargains at only one peso. A room in the *enfermería* cost five pesos daily without ‘apparatus’.<sup>37</sup> That the delights of the *Terápico Funcional* lay out of reach of most of Manila’s inhabitants is best illustrated by comparing wage earnings and prices. Salaries of middle class workers at the lower end of the scale, such as clerks and skilled

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> The Mexican silver peso was the unit of currency until the end of the Spanish era and circulated with coins of silver, copper, and paper of fractional amounts. See Corpuz, *An Economic History of the Philippines*, p. 225.

<sup>37</sup> Advertisement for ‘Establecimiento *Terápico Funcional*’, *El Comercio*, 28 February 1889.

36. Binondo. en reducido precio. h

**IARMOL**

OREDA  
Real Casa  
olita 24.  
edo 14. mjs

r mayor  
gue. 7. h

**EROS**

do

de recibir  
Roensch. il

**LAN**  
calle de Du-  
letras A y C  
En el n.º 7  
llaves. h

do algu-  
y pequeños) de  
sento año 1889  
AND DIREC-  
listas de resi-  
ertos desde Pe-  
e se hallan las  
tra China y los  
set como otros  
am, Corea etc.  
y Reglamentos  
rentos puertos,  
nes de los puer-  
ora, Filipinas,  
Borneo; Esta-  
chos, etc. etc.—  
s  
imprensa á \$5  
s. la pequeña,  
rtas y comp.  
n.º 24. h

ales

renta el ejem-  
sobre teno-  
mbres de Pi-  
elo de los Re-  
h

**AS**

**ESTABLECIMIENTO TERÁPICO-FUNCIONAL**

Calzada del Iris C.  
—Tarifa de honorarios.—

Primera consulta y recono-  
cimiento . . . . . \$ 2  
Consultas sucesivas . . . . . „ 1  
Inhalaciones de azoe . . . . . „ 1  
de aire comprimido . . . . . „ 1  
de aire sobrexigénado  
especiales, según pres-  
cripcion facultativa; em-  
olientes, astringentes; es-  
citantes, antiépépticas, al-  
terantes, calmantes y de  
aguas minerales natura-  
les ó aromáticas etc. . . . . „ 1  
Pulverizaciones emolientes,  
astringentes, antiépticas,  
calmantes, y de aguas mi-  
nerales; á la garganta, fo-  
sas nasales, etc.; frias y  
calientes . . . . . „ 1  
Atmósferas artificiales con  
los aparatos de vapor de  
Collin y de Champigniere  
ó en la cámara especial de  
Garcin para la inmersión  
total del cuerpo en atmós-  
feras de eucalipto; esen-  
cia de trementina, ácido  
fénico, ácido fluorhídrico  
etc. . . . . „ 1  
Aplicaciones eléctricas . . . . . „ 1  
Baños de ducha generales  
ó parciales á la columna  
vertebral, riñones, pecho  
etc. frios y calientes . . . . . „ 1  
Baños de vapor en cámara  
de hierro. . . . . „ 5  
Baños minerales frios y cal-  
ientes de todas clases; sul-  
furosos, clorurados, yoda-  
dos, etc. . . . . „ 5  
Gabinete Oftalmológico. La  
primera consulta con re-  
conocimiento. . . . . „ 2  
Reconocimiento oftalmos-  
cópico en la cámara os-  
cura. . . . . „ 5  
Consultas sucesivas . . . . . „ 1  
Operaciones, honorarios con-  
vencionales.  
Enfermería. Habitaciones amue-  
bladas con manutención de los  
enfermos que lo deseen, cinco

3.a, 4.a y 5.a, en la calle Nueva  
núm. 24, ó sea Dasmariñas núm. 1  
(Binondo).  
8 J. Chochiong.  
Peinadora á domicilio  
Honorarios convencionales.  
Barbosa 25.

**Util al comercio.**  
Tarifas de telegramas, reciente-  
mente reformadas.  
Nuevos Aranceles consulares.  
Presupuestos de Filipinas.  
Se venden en esta imprenta.

**A los Sres. médicos.**  
En esta imprenta se venden es-  
tados de los médicos llevar y  
rendir á los Sres. Médicos por la  
Inspeccion general de Sanidad, con  
arreglo á los modelos publicados  
en la "Gaceta". h

**CARIDAD.**  
Un pobre español peninsular  
que se encuentra enfermo en  
este hospital de San Juan de  
Dios, con hidropesia y sin poder  
mover piés y manos, solicita de  
las personas caritativas le favo-  
rezcan con algun donativo para  
poderse trasladar á la Peninsula,  
pues segun opinion de los facul-  
tativos dicha enfermedad solo  
puede curarse con el cambio de  
clima. En la Peninsula tiene  
tambien esposa ó hijos de me-  
nor edad los que no cuentan con  
recurso alguno: por lo que el  
que suscribe suplica á las perso-  
nas caritativas que tengan á bien  
ayudarle con el donativo que  
crean conveniente.  
2 Andrés Mateo.  
Sela españoles, n. 9.  
La Administracion de la Ocea-  
nia y la madre Superiora de di-  
cho establecimiento son encarga-  
das de recibir los donativos.

**MARITIMO**  
**DE GENATO Y COMP.**  
Debidamente autorizados y por  
cuenta de quien corresponda, ven-  
deremos en pública almoneda su  
reserva el vapor español REMU-  
tal como se encuentra sumergido  
entre las islas de Biliran y Maripi-  
asi como tambien el cargamento y  
caudales que se hallan á bordo del  
mismo.  
Tambien venderemos dos botes

**C. He**

**Violines**  
y to la clase de accesor  
den en el Almacén de M  
Cecilia", Real, 13.

**D. ENRIQUE HORE**  
Coronel del Regimiento  
Artillería.

Autorizado por la S  
para adquirir veinte  
destino á las Batorias  
se anuncia al público  
compra abierta en e  
San Diego todos los d  
dos de 8 á 12 de la ma  
do reunir el ganado q  
te las condiciones sigu  
Edad . . . . . 2 4  
Alzada . . . . . 6 c

Conformidad . . . . . las  
ser  
tr

Precio . . . . . el c  
Manila 21 de febrer

**NEGOCIO S**  
Traspaso de la  
**Fonda de**  
Por tenerse que a  
mo á la Peninsula,  
este establecimiento  
la persona que quis  
este negocio en las c  
ventajas. Para pro  
das á su dueño en  
blecimiento.  
Toilo, Plaza de  
Fonda.  
16

**Teatro de**  
Compañía de O  
Funcion extraordin  
misgo 3 de marzo  
noch  
Beneficio del Sr. Gi  
trocinado por la S  
mir de DE  
PROG  
La ópera en tres a  
**Lucrecia**  
REPAI

Figure 1. Advertisement for Manila's Establecimiento Terápico Funcional. Source: *El Comercio*, 28 February 1889.

workers in the tobacco and printing industries, ranged from between 15 and 20 pesos to 25 pesos a month; male and female house servants received five and ten pesos a month respectively; and women who

worked as seamstresses and did laundry earned around five pesos a month.<sup>38</sup>

The advertisements placed in *El Comercio* tell little of the well-heeled clientele who crossed the doorways of the Terápico Funcional. Neither can the gender composition of users be ascertained—the advertisements were not overtly directed at men or women and contained little in the way of eye-catching detail or drawings. Many of the ailments and complaints treated at the establishment afflicted both men and women—illnesses of the heart, chronic pain, catarrh, and other kinds of congestion, phthisis (known today as tuberculosis), conditions of the throat and chest, scrofulous, and rickets, for example, all of which could be treated, the advertisements claimed, with inhalations of compressed or oxygenated air or hydrofluoric acid. But it is reasonable to infer that some of the treatments offered were intended to treat the ‘disorders’ that related to women. The warm water douche, for instance, had been commended for hysteria at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris by 1890; in England ‘congestion’ in the pelvic region was reportedly cured using localized irrigation in conjunction with electrotherapy.<sup>39</sup> In a number of advertisements for Manila’s Terápico Funcional, electrical machines and apparatus were recommended for nervous conditions and weakness; similarly, water treatments—spraying, the hot and cold baths, and showers—explicitly addressed ‘nervous illnesses’ (*enfermedades nerviosas*), ‘mental conditions’ (*afecciones mentales*), and ‘feebleness’ (*debilidad*).<sup>40</sup> Application of these therapies must have involved the use of the same sorts of mechanical apparatus and procedures followed in European spas, such as the projection or pumping of water, and the mechanized stimulation of the vulva using hydriatic massage.

Since the high cost of these treatments excluded all but the truly wealthy, it is likely that few Filipinos had an opportunity to use the rejuvenating facilities on offer at the Terápico Funcional. This did not mean, however, that knowledge of the treatments and their efficacy was completely unheard of. Filipino physicians, returning to

<sup>38</sup> Gilda Cordero-Fernando, ‘The Low Cost of Living’ in Gilda Cordero-Fernando and Nik Ricio *Turn of the Century* (Quezon City: GCF Books, 1978), pp. 88–108; Jim Richardson, ‘Notes on the Katipunan in Manila, 1892–96’, *Studies on the Katipunan*, February 2007, <<http://kasaysayan-kkk.info/studies.kkk.mla.htm>>, [accessed 9 October 2011].

<sup>39</sup> Maines, *Technology of Orgasm*, pp. 74–85.

<sup>40</sup> See advertisements for ‘Terápico Funcional’, *El Comercio*, 22 February 1889; 11 March 1889; and 18 March 1889.

the Philippines in the 1890s after completing their medical training in Paris and Madrid, established their own practices specializing in the lucrative field of obstetrics and gynaecology. Men such as Felipe Zamora (1854–1919), Ariston Bautista Lin (1863–1928), and Galicano Apacible (1863–1928) were at the vanguard of medical care for parturient women and the treatment of women's illnesses.<sup>41</sup> Elite Filipino women, often acting on the recommendation of their male relatives who were, as in the case of Rizal, personal friends with the physicians, sought out their expertise and consulted them regarding a range of female bodily complaints. Zamora, for instance, was called upon to treat Saturnina Hidalgo, Rizal's elder sister, whose uterus had become, according to Zamora's diagnosis, 'swollen, out of place and dirty'. Zamora advised her to purchase vaginal syringes presumably to administer the medicine he had prescribed.<sup>42</sup> Paciano, Rizal's elder brother, who regularly corresponded with Rizal in Europe and liked to keep abreast of modern innovations, discussed with Rizal whether their younger sister Narcisa, suffering from '*la locura*' (madness), would benefit from a course in hydrotherapy.<sup>43</sup>

While it is not known whether patients were advised by their doctors to visit the *Terápico Funcional*, Filipino physicians, it is certain, were introducing the treatment methods they had learned in Europe and employed some of the associated technologies—at the very least, the use of vaginal syringes, pumps, and douches—to address uterine disorders. At the turn of the twentieth century, mechanized therapies for afflictions concerning the female body underwent a radical change in terms of how they were marketed and to whom. European and American chemists in Manila began to stock American-made electromechanical vibrators, signalling an effort to sell 'vibratory therapy' as beneficial to a woman's health, and also to help her achieve a look that was modern and part of a modern lifestyle. Electromechanical devices for women were things any woman could—and—should use. Under new American marketing strategies, this fresh message sought to bring vibrators to a general public, joining other new electric and gas appliances that purported to transform a woman's physical appearance and the home kitchen.

<sup>41</sup> Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism*, p. 233.

<sup>42</sup> Saturnina Hidalgo to José Rizal, Manila, 2 June 1890, in *Letters between Rizal and Family Members*.

<sup>43</sup> Paciano Rizal to José Rizal, Calamba, 27 May 1890, *Ibid*.

# PHILIPPINE MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXV

January, 1938

No. 1 (357)



1904—1938

*Caricoo Reyes Corbin*

**THIRTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION**

*Thirty Centavos the Copy*

*Three Pesos the Year*

Figure 2. The Filipina 'modern girl'. Source: Cover, *Philippine Magazine*, January 1938.

### The modern look

The revolutionary change that was said to have occurred in Filipino women dating from the arrival of the Americans in the Philippines was nicely depicted on the front cover of the January 1938 anniversary edition of the *Philippine Magazine* (see Figure 2). Captioned by the dates 1904–1938, the cover shows a drawing of two women and a dog in what is imagined to be a random scene in a city street. The differences between the women—in their styles of dress, hair, stance, and stride—sought to represent the progress made by Filipino women over three-and-a-half decades. The woman shown slightly in the foreground embodies the change: she is a striking image of youth, vitality, confidence, and style. She wears Western clothing that provocatively reveals her bare arms, legs, and a graceful neck. She wears the latest fashions: high-heeled, ankle-strap shoes, a belted dress that emphasizes her svelte figure, and a clutch bag that gives her the sort of panache that came from studious attention to current styles. Her hair, ‘bobbed’ short and waved, is of the latest style that could only have been produced by knowledgeable hairstylists with machines that waved the hair just so. She is seen striding out, dynamic and busy looking. She gazes ahead, with a hint of disdain, a hint of eagerness. She is a product of modernity and a picture of cosmopolitan femininity. With her little turned up nose, ‘bee-stung’ lips, and upward tilt of the head, she is the iconic ‘modern girl’ that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, trim, polished, and glamorous, whose sisters could be found all around the world.<sup>44</sup>

Many stare; even the dog cocks an ear. The woman shown slightly in the background and seen from behind looks over her shoulder with a backward glance that appears shocked; her pursed lips and raised eyebrow indicating either disapproval or amazement or both. She is of the past. Her stance gives the impression that she will remain in the past. She appears static, stiff, and almost immobile. Her hair is piled into the chignon of old; her clothing is the Hispanic *baro't saya* of a bygone era that weighs her down with long, heavy skirts in outdated stripes, and the *camisa* and *pañuelo* blouse made from local cloth that was starched to rigidity. She is literally and figuratively in a backward

<sup>44</sup> The phenomenon of the ‘modern girl’ has been closely examined in different cultures, with the exception of Southeast Asia, by Alys Eve Weinbaum et al. (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008).

position. Implicitly, she is the woman who would continue to speak Spanish, the outdated language of yesterday, and belong to a country that appeared to no longer exist.

The modern Filipino 'girl' that advertising campaigns and magazine editors in Manila liked to depict possessed a Westernized aesthetic—wide-eyed, with an elongated body. To achieve the modern look required fashionable clothing and accessories but also, more emphatically, the consumption of a host of the latest imported cosmetics, creams, and soaps. Advertising copy extolled the benefits of beautiful skin, lips, dazzling teeth, firm mouth, and glossy hair that could be obtained from imported 'beauty aids for busy women' which held the promise of a flawless, odourless physical existence. The 'Modern Girl's beauty and youthfulness,' Weinbaum et al. wryly observe, was 'linked to scientific hygiene.'<sup>45</sup> In an article published in 1928 in the *Philippine Education Magazine* entitled 'The Road to Beauty', women were advised to follow a routine of morning exercises, bathing, and a modest breakfast.<sup>46</sup> Writing on women's health in the tropics, Mrs Samuel Gaches, chief nurse at the Philippine General Hospital, extolled the virtues of regular vaginal douching using scalding hot water 'for cleanliness, to check haemorrhage, arrest inflammation, and to relieve pain. The douche should be as hot as can be tolerated from 110f to 115f.'<sup>47</sup>

Sensible advice, however, did not have quite the same impact as beauty treatments, which offered the most decisive transformation, especially to those who utilized mechanized vibrating electric devices or electric hair irons. The 1920s witnessed a boom in local beauty parlours.<sup>48</sup> These were often establishments that conveniently offered hairdressing, facial, and body treatments. At this time, mechanized treatments and electrotherapeutic devices came into their own and entered the mainstream. The 1920s style of fashioning the hair into the 'Marcel Wave' distinguished by undulating 'finger' waves in bobbed hair, a style that became popular around the world, necessitated the use of heated electric irons.<sup>49</sup> The *Rizal Province Directory* contained

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 31

<sup>46</sup> 'The Road to Beauty', *Philippine Education Magazine*, June 1928, p. 39.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs Samuel Gaches, *Good Cooking and Health in the Tropics* (Manila: American Guardian Association, 1922), p. 333.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *Rosenstock's Manila City Directory 1923* (Manila: Yangco, Rosenstock & Co., n.d.).

<sup>49</sup> 'The Art of Marcel Waving', <<http://www.1920-30.com/publications/hairstyles/marcel-wave.html>>, [accessed 9 October 2011].

numerous advertisements for beauty parlours whose services were advertised in Tagalog with English words, illustrating the emergence of the new lingua franca, a linguistic hybrid that came to be known as ‘Taglish’.<sup>50</sup> Rosa’s Beauty Parlor, for example, curled hair day and night and offered: ‘flat wave, round wave, finger wave, *at* [and] ringlets’ and sold assorted hairdressing products to keep waves in place: ‘*kagaya ng* [just like] *Frederick’s liquid, hair trane at Brilliantine*’.<sup>51</sup> Mrs T. M. Nicol’s Hair Dressing Parlor in Ermita specialized in the latest ‘permanent hair waving’, but also seemed to be a successor to the earlier Terápico Funcional. The parlour offered ‘Turkish Baths’, which included steam rooms, vapour boxes, mineral baths, body massaging by hand, use of the electric vibrator, and ‘violet rays’.<sup>52</sup> The latter was particularly novel and Mrs Nicol, advertising in 1923, seemed to be ahead of the game. The violet ray devices and equipment that combined the emission of violet rays and electromechanical vibration only became available in the US, Canada, and Britain in 1932. The machines, fitted with glass and rubber applicators, provided women with ‘pulsation massage’ or ‘suction massage’ on ‘the delicate parts of the face and body’.<sup>53</sup>

A new section that appeared in the *American Chamber of Commerce Journal* entitled ‘In and Out of the Shops’ detailed the latest vogue in more upmarket luxurious beauty treatments. Aimed at the American woman who felt she was wilting in the tropical climate of the Philippines, the treatments addressed the ‘queer faded drawn look about the mouth and eyes’ that seemed to afflict the complexions of American women. Electric massage machines and ice to stimulate the face were thought to be particularly effective:

The patient holds the electrodes, one in each hand. The operator then massages the face and throat. A current is set up between the two and a delightfully tingly sensation seems to ooze from the tips of the operators fingers where ever they touch the patient’s face. This treatment brings the blood to the surface and relieves the sluggishness of the skin.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See also Vicente L. Rafael, ‘Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca’, in Rafael, *White Love*, pp. 162–89.

<sup>51</sup> Advertisement for Rosa’s Beauty Parlor, in Isayas R. Salonga, *Rizal Province Directory* (Manila: The Author, 1934), Vol. 1, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Advertisement for ‘Mrs. T. M Nicol’s Hair Dressing Parlor’, *Rosenstock’s Manila City Directory* 1923 (Manila: Yangco, Rosenstock and Co., no date), p. iv.

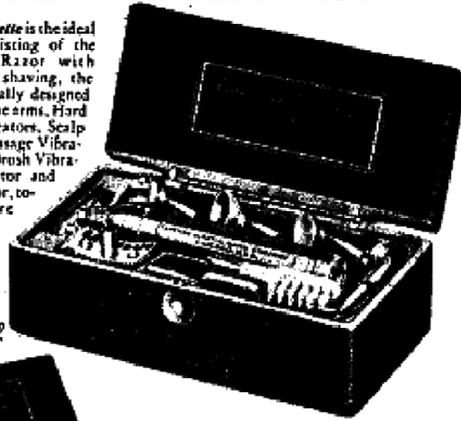
<sup>53</sup> Maines, *Technology of Orgasm*, p. 104.

<sup>54</sup> ‘In and Out of the Shops’, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, September 1930, p. 19.

**The CAMERON *Electro-Matonette***  
**AND THE *Electro-Maton* RAZOR**

*The Electro-Matonette is the ideal combination, consisting of the Electro-Maton Razor with Straight Head for shaving, the Curved Head specially designed for shaving under the arms, Hard and Soft Face Vibrators, Scalp Vibrator, Gum Massage Vibrator, Bristle Tooth Brush Vibrator, Cuticle Vibrator and Finger-Nail Vibrator, together with Five Razor Blades and Connecting Cord in a bakelite box, with removable bakelite tray-stand;*

*Price ₱45.00*



*THE CAMERON *Electro-Matonette* FOR MILADY*



*The Electro-Maton Razor outfit consists of the Razor with Straight Head, Five Razor Blades, and Connecting Cord in a bakelite box with removable metal tray-stand;*

*Price ₱22.00*

*The Cameron Electro-Maton Razor has taken the pull out of the daily shave and has put a smile on every user's face.*

***All Metal Parts of the Electro-Maton are Solid DIRIGOLD***

***Philippine American Drug Company***  
 95 ESCOLTA  
***BOTICA BOIE***

Figure 3. Advertisement for the 'Cameron Electro-Matonette'. Source: *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, November 1931.

Electric vibrating devices for home use had been advertised in the US since the turn of the century through to the 1930s. It is unclear when advertisements for home vibrators first made an appearance in Manila, but by the 1920s and 1930s, their presence in print advertisements had become relatively common. A popular kit seemed to have been the Cameron Electro-Matonette and the Electro-Maton Razor (see Figure 3). The kits were sold by the Philippine American Drug Company and could be bought in upmarket Escolta, at the German-run chemist Botica Boie. The Electro-Matonette, with a price tag of 45 Filipino pesos (or 22.50 US dollars), was a Bakelite box filled with vibrating and massaging equipment. The razor came with straight and curved heads for shaving underarm hair; 'hard and soft face vibrators'; 'scalp vibrator'; 'gum massager vibrator'; 'bristle tooth brush vibrator'; and 'cuticle vibrator and finger-nail vibrator'. The second set, for 22 pesos, only contained the razor with assorted heads. Both boxes

came with a connecting electrical cord and both, according to their endorsers, took the 'pull out of the daily shave and put a smile on every user's face'. This might seem as if they were for men's use, but the sets were for women, or as the advertisement stated, for 'milady'.<sup>55</sup>

If electrovibrating devices and electric hot irons in beauty parlours and for use at home offered women consumers ways to look modern and Western, the purchase of appliances for the home, especially for the kitchen, brought American bourgeois living into Filipino homes. One of the most powerful advertising campaigns, which generated high sales, was for electric- and gas-powered kitchen appliances. The expanded availability of electricity and gas must have contributed to their popularity. Since 1900 the US colonial government had been taking measures to enlarge the provision of electricity to urban spaces, public, and private establishments.<sup>56</sup> In 1903, the government granted a franchise to the newly formed Manila Electric Railroad and Light Company (MERALCO) to build, maintain, and supply an electric light, heat and power system in Manila and the surrounding suburbs.<sup>57</sup> The Manila Gas Corporation, owned mainly by a company based in Chicago, piped gas into city homes.<sup>58</sup> Sustained and intensive advertising campaigns, conducted by both these companies over three decades, promoted gas and electricity as modern fuels, even encouraged the belief that they were 'part of the reward civilization had brought', 'within the reach of the humblest citizen today... the cheapest good thing in existence', and convenient and time-saving—'you just touch a button'.<sup>59</sup>

Frequently, these messages were explicitly directed at women. Electricity was a 'liberating service' that entered the home: 'strong, reliable, willing, it responds to a snap of the fingers, and relieves woman of household tasks that have burdened her for centuries'.<sup>60</sup> Advertisements for kitchen appliances promoted the same ideas.

<sup>55</sup> Advertisements for 'The Cameron Electro-Matonette and the Electro-Maton Razor, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, November 1931, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> *Report of the Military Governor of the Philippine Islands on Civil Affairs, 1900* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), pp. 296–300.

<sup>57</sup> *The Far Eastern Review*, December 1906, pp. 217–18.

<sup>58</sup> Doeppers, 'Lighting a Fire', p. 434.

<sup>59</sup> Advertisement for 'Back to the Oil Lamp', Manila Electric Railroad and Light Company, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, February 1927, p. 1; advertisement for 'Light your Home with Electricity', The Westinghouse Home Light Plant, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, March 1929, p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, August 1925, p. 31; December 1926, p. 21; and March 1929, p. 20.

Electric water heaters, percolators, toasters, waffle-irons, and grills 'all help to make life more comfortable'; they made manifest a mother's care—'use hot water for baby's bath and clothes'; they were easy to use, even the expensive and impractical gas refrigerator had 'no moving parts... to annoy',<sup>61</sup> and affordable, monthly payment plans were available for gas water heaters and stoves.<sup>62</sup> When advertisements appealed to men, women were still thought of as the primary users. Messages stressed the product's durability and a man's thoughtfulness: electric kitchen appliances made lasting gifts that were bought by a mindful husband 'to remind the recipient that you remembered her'; or were meant to encourage wives to cook their husband's favourite food: 'YOU like waffles; tell the Mrs about these and ask her to order one.'<sup>63</sup>

Powerfully persuasive, these advertising campaigns targeted magazines with a female readership. Advertising expenditure for the *Ladies Home Journal* was the second highest in 1921.<sup>64</sup> This foreign magazine, available in Manila newsstands, had the second largest circulation, and the *Woman's Home Companion*, the fifth largest. It was argued that these periodicals were mainly read by the 'English-speaking young Filipino'.<sup>65</sup> Advertising messages also found resonance in the new field of domestic science. Since the early 1920s, school curricula included a highly influential domestic science component whose teachers worked hard to inculcate the value of sanitation and hygiene in food preparation and healthy living in the tropics. Manuals sought to change Filipino eating habits, which were deemed to be nutritionally deficient, dirty, and literally worm-ridden, and to raise

<sup>61</sup> Ice was difficult to obtain and therefore a luxury. The sale of mechanical refrigerators was a particular problem in the Philippines. For a background on ice consumption and the American trade in ice overseas, see the excellent Susanne Freidberg, *Fresh: A Perishable History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Doeppers, 'Lighting a Fire', note, p. 442.

<sup>63</sup> Advertisement for 'Electric appliances', Manila Electric Company, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, November 1931, p. 8; advertisement for 'Give Gifts that Last', Manila Electric Company, *Philippine Magazine*, December 1929, p. 457; advertisement for 'Use Hot Water for Baby's Bath and Clothes', Manila Gas Corporation, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, February 1931, p. 18; advertisement for 'Tell the Mrs about these Waffle-irons', Manila Gas Corporation, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, May 1931, p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> 'US Advertising Shows Big Growth', *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, January 1921, p. 50.

<sup>65</sup> 'What the School-Going Philippines Reads', *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, November 1926, p. 8.

the standard of public health to a level 'compatible to a progressive people.'<sup>66</sup> This thinking resonated with America's own prevailing obsession with germs, and the conflation of hygiene and cleanliness with modernity.<sup>67</sup> A modern kitchen was one in which stoves and kitchen utensils operated without the soot and smoke that came from fires and, importantly, could be scrubbed clean unlike the old-style *kalan* (firewood-using stove), and earthenware *palayok* pot whose scorched, cracked presence was banished to the outdoor cooking area, where food had always been prepared, but was now fast becoming a space referred to as the 'dirty kitchen'.<sup>68</sup>

However, it was unlikely that the mistress of a household that could afford American kitchen appliances would herself toil in the kitchen preparing the family's meals. That task was left to servants who lived with the family and often endured a master-servant relationship that was fraught with tension and suspicion.<sup>69</sup> Data for the late nineteenth century show elite Filipino and Spanish households hiring, at a minimum, a domestic servant, a laundry woman, and a cook. Rizal's family, for instance, employed a 46-year-old male Chinese cook. In the 1902 census, the household cook was revealed to be the eighth largest occupation in the country. From the late nineteenth century on, and in Filipino, European or bourgeois American households, cooks were expected to prepare daily, varied meals on a budget.<sup>70</sup> Rafael's observation that domestic order in American homes relied on the

<sup>66</sup> Philippine Health Service Circular, 15 February 1923, in Philippine Health Service, *Report for the Fiscal Year from January 1 to December 31, 1923* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1924), p. 594. See also Gaches, *Good Cooking and Health*; Alice M. Fuller, *Housekeeping: A Textbook for Girls in the Public and Intermediate Schools of the Philippines* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1917).

<sup>67</sup> See the pioneering study by Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998); and, in terms of military culture, Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race and Hygiene* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Doreen Fernandez, *Palayok: Philippine Food through Time, on Site, in the Pot* (Makati: Bookmark, 2000); idem, *Tikim: Essays on Philippine Food and Culture* (Manila: Anvil, 1997). For an insightful study of the reconceptualization of the Japanese domestic spaces through commodities, see Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space in Bourgeois Culture, 1880–1980* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003). I thank Sarah Teasley for this reference.

<sup>69</sup> Greg Bankoff, 'Servant-Master Conflicts in Manila in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Philippine Studies*, 40 (3), 1992, pp. 285.

<sup>70</sup> Felice Prudente Sta. Maria, *The Governor-General's Kitchen: Philippine Culinary Vignettes and Period Recipes, 1521–1935* (Manila: Anvil, 2006), p. 73.

labour of servants might very well be applied more generally.<sup>71</sup> The ubiquity of servants in households, and a family's dependence on their labour, indicates that the appeal of modern appliances lay not in their labour-saving qualities, but in their symbolic dimensions.

Gas and electrical kitchen appliances were touted as emblems of modernity and affluence, synonymous with an American lifestyle and epitomizing American-ness. The grand opening of the showroom of the Manila Electric Railroad and Light Company and shops for electric appliances in Manila underlined how America and a modern, affluent lifestyle were thought of as one and the same:

New York has come to Manila. . . Personally [the stores] made me so homesick I had to go inside. . . the spaciousness, the uncluttered orderliness, the simplicity, the arrangement of the fixtures and furnishings, so different from that found in most stores in the orient, bespoke modernness [sic] down to the smallest detail. Manila is indeed progressing.<sup>72</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, Manila consumer culture revolved around the pursuit of a modern look that informed the most quotidian and intimate aspects of a woman's life—the clothes she wore, how she styled their hair, how she washed and kept her body and face looking healthy, how food was prepared, in what part of the house, and using what kinds of equipment. Modernity, the image of an affluent lifestyle, and the American identity that knit these elements together coalesced in technological objects whose use and possession promised to change a woman forever.

### **Technology and the Americanization of everyday life**

A major economic consequence of American state-building in the early years of US colonization was the massive increase of American imports. In 1910, less than ten years after Roosevelt had officially declared the Philippine-American war over, it was calculated that US imports in just one year, 1909, had risen by 129 per cent, with an increase of total imports amounting to almost 20,000,000 US-Filipino pesos.<sup>73</sup> The combined efforts of nationwide public school education

<sup>71</sup> Rafael, *White Love*, p. 69.

<sup>72</sup> 'Meralco's Regular New York Place', *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, October 1930, p. 42.

<sup>73</sup> As detailed by O. D. Corpuz, during the US occupation of the Philippines, the unit of currency was changed from the Mexican silver dollar to the US-Filipino peso with

through instruction in English and advertising campaigns helped, in no small measure, to open the hearts and minds of ordinary Filipinos to American goods. As the first few hundred American schoolteachers disembarked the refitted battleship USS Thomas in the summer of 1901, and fanned out across the archipelago, with the same zeal as religious missionaries, to educate Filipinos for citizenship, advertising campaigns sought to persuade Filipinos of the desirability of American manufactures and foodstuffs and the modern American lifestyle they symbolised.<sup>74</sup> Domestic science courses taught in public schools introduced new apparatus for the kitchen, and tutored Filipinos in kitchen sanitation and refrigeration. Manuals written in Tagalog advised on 'modern table manners', hygiene in food preparation, and the use of assorted tableware, including knives and forks.<sup>75</sup> Such advice often went hand-in-hand with advertisements for American foods and kitchen appliances.

In contrast to previous European merchandizing strategies, American advertising methods strove to reach as many people as possible. Advice to American businesses on how to successfully market products in the colony emphasized understanding Filipino habits, customs, and the country's climate; and bombarding private residences (through direct house-to-house leafleting) and the public domain (from newspapers to billboards and streetcars) with posters, handbills, pamphlets, and slides (shown in cinemas). Advertising messages, it was advised, should be written in simple English, with translations in Philippine languages, and heavily illustrated with drawings.<sup>76</sup>

As we have seen, new technologies, fuels (especially electricity), and European luxury food imports were introduced to Manila in the last decades of Spanish rule and became part of the fabric of city life. By the first decade of American rule, greater numbers of urban Filipinos had become familiar with a host of new

US dollar gold as the standard of value. Corpuz, *An Economic History of the Philippines*, p. 226.

<sup>74</sup> For a critical examination of the discourse of 'regeneration' espoused by the first American schoolteachers to arrive in the Philippines, who came to be known as the 'Thomasites', see Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), especially pp. 169–70.

<sup>75</sup> See, for instance, Rosendo Ignacio, *Aklat ng Pagluluto* (Manila: J. Martinez, 1919) in Sta. Maria, *The Governor-General's Kitchen*, p. 266.

<sup>76</sup> F. H. Herier, 'Proved Advertising Methods in the Philippine Islands', *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, September 1921, p. 14.

small foreign technologies—cylinder record players, moving pictures, lantern slides, telephones, and typewriters.<sup>77</sup> American advertising campaigns employed aggressive tactics that capitalized on a pre-existing familiarity with foreign goods, and exploited existing social conditions. ‘Salmon and milk are quite well-known to the Filipino,’ observed publicity men, but previously unheard of comestibles such as breakfast foods and canned goods required ‘considerable educational literature to introduce them’.<sup>78</sup> To take other examples, the country’s high infant mortality was viewed as a good opportunity to sell canned sweetened condensed milk, a product promoted as a healthful food for babies. Advertising men linked the special social circumstances to the product’s success. Most effective was the use of ‘drawings showing Filipino babies, doctors and mothers and testimonials from doctors and mothers in the Islands. . .’<sup>79</sup>

Although the acceptance of American domestic technological goods was, inevitably, most visible on the bodies and in the homes and culinary practices of bourgeois Filipino women, the burgeoning suburban Filipino middle class was purchasing a range of domestic technologies by the 1920s, investing in gas water heaters, and oil or gas cooking stoves for their homes.<sup>80</sup> Recalling in her memoirs the comfortable Manila middle class upbringing she enjoyed as a child, Celia Mariano proudly detailed the family’s ownership of a car, an ice-box, and a *Victrola* gramophone upon which her father would play opera and classical music records.<sup>81</sup>

A growing taste for American foodstuffs, particularly canned fruit and meats, leavened cakes made with wheat flour instead of rice, food and drinks that required chilling or to be kept cold, spurred the sale of electric and gas cooking ranges, pressure cookers, ice-boxes and refrigerators, goods that were directly targeted at women consumers. American cuisine was celebrated in local newspapers and housekeeping manuals that printed ideal menus for ‘summer dinners’ featuring iced beverages, jellies, and cakes. The Instituto de Mujeres, a college for women in Manila, served tinned evaporated milk with

<sup>77</sup> Larkin, *Pampangans*, p. 229.

<sup>78</sup> F. H. Herier, ‘Proved Advertising Methods in the Philippine Islands’, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, September 1921, p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Doeppers, ‘Lighting a Fire’, p. 434.

<sup>81</sup> Celia Mariano Pomeroy, ‘Autobiographical Notes’, unpublished manuscript, *circa* 2003. Thanks are due to Jim Richardson for providing me with this source.

coffee and chocolate.<sup>82</sup> Less affluent women could still modernize their kitchen in accordance with American ideals by buying cheaper alternatives to electric and gas appliances. Advertisements for the popular ‘smokeless Mayon stove’, a Filipino-designed stove that still used firewood and coconut husks but directed smoke away through an attached flue, endeavoured to convince husbands to buy the stove for their wives: ‘Treat your wife. . . it’ll mean so much less drudgery in the kitchen. . .’.<sup>83</sup>

Even attempts by nationalist Filipino women to wean Filipinos away from imported American food did not reject imported kitchen appliances and domestic technologies. Maria Y. Orosa (1893–1945), a Filipina educated in the US who returned to the Philippines to work as a chemist and food technologist at the Bureau of Science, struggled hard to undermine the desirability of imported fruit and canned goods and return local food to popularity. Famously, her recipes for fruit preserves substituted imported fruit, such as peaches and grapes, for locally grown fruit and she modified the *palayok* to function like an oven to bake cookies made with rice bran, *darak*, rather than wheat flour in the fight against beriberi among the poor.<sup>84</sup> But, without irony, the arsenal of equipment she advised Filipino women to use in preserving food included gas or electric steam ovens and steam pressure cookers.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

From the 1880s to the first decades of the twentieth century, technological goods for the home and for the body were associated with the country’s ruling elites, be they Spanish, American or Filipino. Growing prosperity by the late 1920s, however, enabled the newly emerged Filipino middle class to acquire or, at least, have access to imported technologies. Domestic science classes in public schools, the

<sup>82</sup> Sta. Maria, *Governor-General’s Kitchen*, p. 274.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Mayon Stoves for Domestic Science Instruction’, *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, July 1930, and advertisement in Sta. Maria, *Governor-General’s Kitchen*, p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> The oven became known as the ‘Orosa Palayok Oven’. See Helen Orosa del Rosario, *Maria Y. Orosa: Her Life and Work* (Manila: R. P. Garcia Publishing, 1970), p. 190. On addressing the problem of beriberi in monsoon Asia, see David Arnold, ‘Tropical Governance: Managing Health in Monsoon Asia, 1908–1938’, Asia Research Institute Working Paper, series no. 116, <[http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps09\\_116.pdf](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps09_116.pdf)>, [accessed 11 October 2011].

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

spread of the English language, and aggressive advertising campaigns combined to bring the message to Filipino women that American technological goods were part of an American identity that was thoroughly advanced, egalitarian, and economical. In reality, beauty parlours were visited only by women who could afford the treatments. Electric and gas kitchen appliances did not end dependence on the labour of servants by the upper and middle classes, nor did they stop the use of firewood stoves and clay pots, the *kalan* and *palayok*. However, there were no signs that the appeal of these technologies would wane. The promises they held, the possibilities they offered brought a perceptual and experiential understanding of the good life. Further, the technologies discussed here—from vibrators to waffle-irons—belonged to the category of new worldly goods whose possession denoted not mere materialism, affluence or vanity. Rather, luxury technological goods came to embody certain moral qualities that an individual could assert—a fine discerning taste regarding material things, even the demonstration of such moral virtues as healthful living, cleanliness, and physical good looks, and a cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>86</sup> In other words, technologies of conspicuous consumption claim an important history in Manila's consumer culture—they played a part in new ways of thinking about a woman's body, the spatial organization of the home, how it felt to be modern and, even, what it meant to have good taste and a knowledge of the world.

<sup>86</sup> My thinking here is indebted to Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 14–16. Also, personal conversation with Harold J. Cook, 26 August 2011.