

LESSON 6

Mga Talang Pangkultura Maynila Manila

Have you been to Manila? Have you ever wondered what life was like in Manila in the 19th century?

Apparently, it all depended on one's race, class, and gender. We have two vastly different accounts from Doreen Fernandez's article "The Merriment Mix" (1978), and Maria Luisa Camagay's book, *Working Women in the 19th Century* (UP Press and University Center for Women's Studies, 1995).

Fernandez's source Sinibaldo de Mas narrated that for Spaniards and **mestizos** (Filipinos of mixed race), the lifestyle was one of "indolence and ease" (69). The day usually started at around ten o'clock for breakfast although some people got up earlier to have coffee or tea. Lunch, served from two o'clock to three o'clock, was followed by a nap. At five o'clock in the afternoon, people then ventured out.

Drawing from the 1846 accounts of J. Mallat, Fernandez narrated of women who dressed up in gowns made from "embroidered **nipis**, **piña** (from the pineapple fiber) or **sinamay**, or silk or cotton, fixed their hair tortoise-shell combs, and carried fans (or conveniently had a system of attaching these fans to their clothes). She gives us details of the **paseo** or promenade (71)":

At this hour, all paths led to the Luneta, to the esplanade by the old sea wall, called the Calzada, for at this time the sea breezes set in. Here, in the coolness of early twilight, as the Governor's military band played a serenata, all Manila came to see and be seen. The Calzada was to Manila "what Hyde Park is to London, the Champs Elysees to Paris, and the Meidan to Calcutta," wrote Bowring. To it came sometimes as many as two hundred carriages and hundreds of people in leisurely promenade. The paseo was one of the few occasions in which foreigners, mestizos, and native Filipinos mixed and blended. Vehicles and manner of dress distinguished them, however.

Then, at six o'clock, the Angelus bell rang without fail, and still according to Fernandez's essay, people stopped for prayer. This was then followed by greetings of "**Buenas Noche**" or "**Magandang gabi po**," and children then kissed their parents' or grandparents' hands. This practice of the Angelus continued throughout the 20th century as I remember visiting relatives' homes where the Angelus prayer was practiced at six o'clock without fail.

In the evenings, people then entertained themselves either through the **teatro** (theater), having **hapunan** (dinner), a reception or **baile**, a **tertulia**, or a stroll down Escolta street. Those who went to the theater were treated either to a **zarzuela** (play

with songs) or a **comedia** (plays on princes and princesses set during the Middle ages; featuring love amidst the war between Christians and Muslims).

Life was different, however, for the majority of the Filipinos, or **Indios** as they were then called in the 19th century (the term “Filipino” was reserved only at that time for Spaniards born in the Philippines). The majority of them were peasants or peasant workers, but one might ask: did women work outside the home? According to the Maria Luisa Camagay’s research, some women did find employment as **costureras** or dressmakers, **bordadoras** or embroiderers, **cigareras** or cigar factory workers, **maestras** or teachers, **criadas** or domestic workers and even as prostituted women (called pejorative names such as **indocumentada**, **mujer publica**, or **damas de noche**). While these professions may seem “gendered professions,” it is good to know that the majority of Filipino women in the 19th century did not lead a life of indolence.