## IN THE MOUNTAIN'S WOMB

## MICHAEL MANUEL GONZALEZ

The study of the *kolorum*, the Tagalog term for those 'revitalist' (Wallace: 1956), 'nativist' (Linton: 1943), 'messianic' (Lanternani: 1974) and 'millenarian' phenomena (Burridge: 1969), requires not only an explanatory paradigm for "kolorum" activity, but also a theoretical stance in the handling of "subjective" data which hese activities invariably generate. Failure to come to terms with the symbolic milieu of these activities often betrays the observer's bias and reveals ambiguities at description:

Secret societies seem to achieve the most dramatic results in changing the pattern of living among members but on the whole. they only retard the process of socio-economic development . . . . (Cullen: 1973)

While Cullen concedes the presence of dynamic social relations within these societies, he inevitably assigns to them an image of stasis and fatalism. He does not explain how he has arrived at such a conclusion. We can only guess on the basis of similar experiences with these so-called secret societies that confusion arises from the 'subjective' statements that members of these societies are prone to make. When asked, for instance, to link their founder with other historical personalities, one of my informants responded: "They are all one." A decade and a half ago, in a different place, a similar query by an earlier researcher elicited a similar response: "It's all the same banana."2 (Sturtevant: 1976) In transcending both time and matter, the utterances lead the casual observer to mistake this sense of timelessness for a lack of "change".

Other writers have been less kind and less balanced in describing kolorum groups. Academics doing research on the sub-

<sup>1</sup> The term kolorum is derived from the phrase per omnia secula seculorum and often used to imply 'illegitimate' activities with jorative under tones. The term as used here implies a historical type characterized by a patriotic and anti-friar (Roman Catholic) stance. A more recent insight on the term is suggested by Patricia Araneta Gonzales's "Banahaw: Per Omnia Secula Seculorum", in *Diliman Review*, 28 (3) 1980: 52-54.

2 See "Appendix B" p. 276, Interview with Pedro Calosa (kolorum

leader in the 1930's).

My informant Mr. Amador Suarez is the tagapayo (adviser) of the Suprema dela Iglesia del Ciudad Mistica de Dios, Inc. located on the slopes of Mt. Banahaw, Dolores, Quezon Province.

ject are themselves often regarded as oddities, and were they to maintain an even sympathetic stance towards the kolorum. "guilt-by-association" is meted to them in haste. It appears that the problem arises not only in attempting to forward an explanation that is defensible, but also in reconsidering the very problem of "objectivity" as practised over several hundred years of western science and philosophy (Mushakoji: 1970). The latter, however, is beyond the scope of this paper, but its inclusion identifies the problematique confronted by non-western social scientists in general and questioned periodically by western scholars especially when this data cannot be entirely "objectified" (Turner: 1977). The problem becomes more complex for Philippine scholars since they have yet to establish a common ground for research.3 This indicates that so much shift has occurred in scholarly preferences even as the bibliography grows in length since Sturtevant's pioneering study of "popular uprisings". Equally diverse assumptions are suggested, as in the formers' stress/strain theory (1976); Jocano's (1973) adaptive reaction to the breakdown of modernization; Foronda's ephemeral cults (1961) and Covar's taxonomy of cultural traditions (1975). A more recent contribution to this growing bibliography is Ileto's persuasive study on the pasyon (the Philippine version of Christ's Passion) as the locus of peasant perceptions of change (1979). Unfortunately, however, this variety of approaches unearthed merely an edifice of data which taken together defies cohesiveness. The question remains: How do we bring an explanation to bear on such an "inchoate", subjective and even "odd" subject such as the "kolorum"?

While doing research on "folk religious sects" in the summer of 1976 (despite the protests of our research director), we trekkled with our pastor (guides) to the summit of symbolic Mount Banahaw (2,177 m.)<sup>4</sup> In the context of the religious communities on Banahaw, the act of climbing the mountain is an act of sacrifice, an act that is reenacted during the Lenten season by thousands of devotees. The pasyon-like ritual involves the visitation in rosary-like fashion of puestos (shrine stations) starting from the foothills to the mountain summit. The pilgrims' motives centered on the panata (vows). By comparison our motive appeared banal to witness the pilgrims' ordeal

<sup>3</sup> Reviewing the literature available so far. Sylvia Thrupp (1962) laments the lack of any basis for comparative studies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The research was conducted by the now defunct Philippine Center for Advanced Studies in 1975-76 under Dr. P. Covar. The latter felt the mountain was beyond our jurisdiction, we argued otherwise, pointing out that this was the apex of the pilgrims' ritual. For three days of heat, fog and cold drizzle we negotiated the peak, then its crater and back.

although intuitively, we felt that climbing the mountain would lead us to a better perspective on ritual behavior. But for a while the metaphor of the mountain was lost when physical survival became our major concern. The fact was, we were, as non-believers, not even expected to manage the half-way mark to the peak. Our climb and our return unscathed added a new dimension to our relationship with the sect members. It was a shock of recognition to them as it was for us. Having bared our *loob* (inner self), so to speak, we found that they were now more willing to bare theirs. The revelation is better expressed by an earlier pilgrim who wrote (Aranas: 1927):

Ang nasa loob ko'y itong kahirapan ay ang hahalili itong katuwaan, kaya ko sinapit ang ganitong bagay nang makilala ko ang kaliwanagan. This suffering within will be replaced by this joy why I came unto this lot is for me to recognize the light.<sup>6</sup>

Literally, the term *makilala* means to recognize but in the nuance of Tagalog it can refer to a deeper and more face-to-face relationship with the object of knowing. In terms of our metaphor of sacrifice, the mountain climb, we had moved closer to the "light" or *kaliwanagan*. Being a *magbubundok*—one who has climbed the mountain—bestows a certain status so that curious lowlanders seeking a similar experience have sometimes been referred to us, "Ayan, itanong mo sa kanila." (There, ask them.) With this came the tacit acknowledgement of our "membership" the symbolic community. This leads us to an essential feature of the study of the *kolorum* and similar activities: to see the light requires sacrifice, for sacrifice is in fact the key concept of every ritual endeavor. In more secular terms, the light is that "intuitive grasp" arrived at by prolonged exposure to the milieu being investigated.

The metaphor of sacrifice is well ensconced in folk literary tradition. Heroic self-sacrifice for the good of the parent or the kingdom is an oft repeated theme. In the narrative poem *Ibong Adarna*, the hero prince commits self-laceration—squeez-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> As in literary studies, the shock of seeing the familiar in a way that is totally new.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Simeon Aranas describes in verse the experience of *pagpinitensya* (sacrifice) of the *magbubundok*. Ileto (1980) in his study quotes Aranas extensively. He however translates the last line as: "in order to be in *limanaa*."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Better known as participant observation. Within the limits of research ethics, we found this method inadequate in homogenous situations, i.e., native researcher to native informant. Short for membership, the reciprocal ties established go beyond the traditional participant observer status.

ing a lemon into a self-inflicted wound—in order to remain conscious and thus avoid the bird's mesmerizing song. By staying awake, the prince can dodge the bird's potent droppings that could turn him into stone. One can derive a variety of symbols from such a vivid combination of sacral and banal imagery. That the folk symbolists (raconteurs and writers) have raided the awit and corrido and other similar genres is evident in vernacular bibliography. This providence unfortunately is seldom mined, except by folklorists and students of comparative literature.

Tagalog literature is noted for its characteristic angst which has been present even during its proto-Christian stage (Medina: 1976).

And the quality of emotion that dominated folklore—poetry and prose, and then the derivative ritualistic theatre—defined the primary virtue: an agency that is a celebration of the Tagalog predilection for suffering.

This notion of struggle does not escape even from what should otherwise be innocuous oyayi or lullaby (Medina: 1976):

Matulog ka na bunso ang ina mo ay malayo at hindi ka masundo Daa'y may putik at balaho Sleep now, child sleep your mother is far away there is mud and puddle on the the road.

Filipino folklorists agree that folklore takes on a rather "serious view of life" characterized by a general feeling of "sorrow" (Eugenio: 1976) which upon the consolidation with the Christian tradition developed into "epic" proportions. Until the 19th century, Spanish colonization engendered the acculturation of Biblical and medieval European myths through the folk theatre—the moro-moro (Christian vs moor play) and senakulo (Passion play) (Tiongson: 1975). An acculturated Christ emerged and took on the feature of a Filipino culture hero. We take clues from the biography of Jesus as interpreted by the writers of the pasyon: Gaspar Aquino de Belen, Aniceto de la Merced, and Mariano Pilapil (Lumbera: 1968). In his analysis of the pasyon, Father Francisco, S.J., found four images of Christ represented in these versions. One image is that of Christ as a model for man; second, that of Christ as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Marcelo P. Garcia, ed. (1957). Awit (chants) and corridos (narratives) were popular literary fare during the Spanish period. They are distinguished by metre, but their thematic content is similar.

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The Adarna bird was a popular symbol of Hispanic origin. (Romual-dez: 1938 as cited by E. San Juan: 1971) A cult that calls its foundress Inang Adarna, may be found in Bongabong, Nueva Ecija.

God yet humble and obedient to his parents and the church; third, that of Christ as a model of suffering and calm; and lastly, that of the unity of Christ in man (Francisco, 1977:190-197). Historically, the colonial regime found appropriate use for the first three images. Ultimately, what caught the imagination of the population was the possibility of social protest using the image of Christ as "the exemplary insurgent." A detailed investigation of the pasyon will also reveal sociological data that hewed closely to what we have come to know as the "traditional culture"—the family ethos, the value of motherhood, the strength of friendship; and, to contextualize the spatial setting of the pasyon, a tropical, albeit symbolic mirrorimage of Jerusalem is created. This process Ileto calls "recasting". I would prefer to place this process within the context of acculturation to encompass a wider sociological area (La Barre: 1971:20-22).11 In either case, the folk character of the pasyon, the presence of "doctrinal mistakes" which agitated the friar-clergy no end, brings it closer to reality and, therefore, better mirrors the folk consciousness of its audience.

In his analysis of peasant and religious leadership behavior between 1840-1910, Ileto provides evidence that the peasants perceived reality in terms of the pasyon or that the leaders were able to communicate through the facility of the pasyon symbols like pagtitis (forbearance), loob (inner self), liwanag (light) and katubusan (redemption) among others. So embedded were these symbols that time and again even in modern times the radical worker or peasant writers need only resurrect these images for relevant political action (Kerkvliet: 1977; Reyes: 1978). Only in this diachronic sequence can we appreciate Ileto's historical observation (1979: 19):

During the Spanish and American colonial era, these images nurtured an undercurrent of millineal beliefs which, in times of economic and political crisis, enabled the peasantry to take action under the leadership of individuals or groups promising deliverance from oppression.

11 To La Barre: Acculturation is not the cause of crisis cults; it is only one very common area for human ambivalence about culture...and for cultural "identity crisis—but always of individuals and groups of individuals." p. 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The term, a very apt one, was coined by E. San Juan Jr. (1971:32). <sup>10</sup> For example, to concretize this reality, Mount Banahaw, to its devotees, is pasyon-land with its River of Jordan, Gethsemane, and Calvary. The area is popularly called Banal na Lugar (Holy Land) and Bagong Herusalem (New Jerusalem).

<sup>12</sup> Direct appropriation of these images may be seen in Aurelio Tolentinos' play Bagong Cristo (New Christ) 1907, depicting the conflict between labor and capital. See Delfin Tolentino (1976:6-8). Contemporary activists have likewise found the utility of "recasting" Marx in Biblical terms when working in more "traditional" communities.

This "undercurrent of millinealism" continues to this day despite the competing forms of potentially symbolic media, such as cinema and television. Beyond the prophetic statement of Keesing that the Philippines is "messianic potential" there remains the problem of seeking out these continuities. Turner (1977) believes that socio-cultural systems orient themselves to "root paradigms". He defines this (in terms strikingly similar to Ileto's excerpt above) as representing (1977: 74):

conciously recognized (though only on occasions of raised consciousness) cultural models of an allusive, metaphorical kind, cognitively delimited, emotionally loaded, and ethically impelled, so as to give form to social action in publicly critical circumstances.

Narratives of exemplary religious and political personalities which climax in actions of self-sacrifice for social goals become the basis for such "root paradigm". A "genealogy of folk heroes" and mythic characters from Christ, Hari sa Bukid, Bernardo Carpio, Leon Kilat to Rizal may very well fit the narrative.<sup>14</sup> No wonder, as casual observers would put it, that Filipinos have a soft spot for the underdog and the martyr.

The pasyon as a cultural model represents explicit social action raised to the level of sacrifice, redemption and resurrection: Jesus is separated from his parents and his apostles, arrested, pilloried and convicted by the higher priests, crucified then entombed only to disappear three days later, and finally resurrected to redeem all mankind. Philippine folklore is replete with examples of this process. In the sleeping hero myth (Mojares: 1974), the hero withdraws from the kingdom; he is imprisoned or killed by his enemies; but he does not die or is not really "dead"; he is instead prophesied to return and redeem his people. Each time a hero's death captures the symbolic imagination, the myth of the eternal return is invariably invoked. In this milieu the heroes of Ileto's study did not "die". It is noteworthy that in some Rizalista cults, the founder's death or a revered person's demise is not termed namatay (has died) but is instead referred to as "umalis" (has left). In the same manner, Jose Rizal did not "die".

Unlike Christ, the exegesis of Rizal can stand on real historical grounds, a fact that even makes the study of Rizalista cults more perplexing. <sup>15</sup> Not only was the man a prolific writer who made known his sentiments, he is also the un-ending source

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> The term comes from Felix Keesing as cited by Sturtevant (1976: 260)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Adapted from a lecture of Ileto with a similar title delivered at the Ateneo University, 1977.

of journalistic attention. Yet Rizal when placed among his peers was no different from the others in that they all sought intellectual and cultural liberation from a repressive Spanish colonial regime. In fact, his exemplary life was accented by the "dramatic publicity" of his death. Rizal's execution in the hands of the oppressive regime, given the assumption that the pasyon and similar genre established the perception of real historical events among the people, could not but evoke an expression similar to the Christian metaphor.

That Rizal himself cultivated this metaphor of sacrifice is beyond mere speculation. Although others will contest this as sheer coincidence, we need only review the manner of his incarceration and execution to show the contrary. A Rizal biographer describes this aptly (Coates: 1968:293):

...never for an instance was there the slightest failing of his supreme composure. And with it, then and until the end, went a quiet strain of humour. Shortly after his return [when they arrested him enroute to Cuba] he designed and sent to the family a little sketch of the Agony in the Garden beneath which he wrote the words, "This is but the First Station."

The inner calm of Rizal as he was led to his Golgotha on December 30, astounded the attending military doctors. As the soldiers raised their rifles, Rizal declared: "Consummatum est." When he fell he made an effort to hit the ground with his face towards the sky and thus dignify his death. Within the norms of the pasyon, the steadfastness of Rizal in the face of death projected a steadfast loob. Organizing a motific index of the myths which have grown around the hero illustrates this correlation with the life of Christ: 16

<sup>15</sup> Jose Protacio Rizal was born on June 19, 1861 to Francisco Mercado and Teodora Alonso, in Calamba, Laguna. Rizal (from ricial, green of renewal) was assumed as a secondary surname to Mercado (marketplace) and has remained such due to Jose's popularity. A genius nurtured by self-discipline, Rizal earned degrees in Medicine and Philosophy (1885), wrote two novels Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo. His writings and political leadership led the Spaniards to brand him as dangerous to the regime. He was arrested, exiled (1892-96) and later executed on December 30, 1896 after a mock trial. He left behind voluminous tracts on politics, culture and literature. Successive regimes, American, Japanese and various others served up Rizal as a model. No plaza is without his statue, and students are required by law to study his life and works.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> These themes are culled from Alfonso Santos's collection of Rizal tales (1973-1974). Other themes are derived from folklore gathered in the field. This schema, however, is preliminary. A more systematic and extensive collection of Rizal myths must be conducted.

- 1. Rizal's mysterious death
  - i. born on a mysterious night in the presence of a lady in white
  - ii. baby is found by the door swaddled in clothes marked JOVE REX AL
  - iii. Rizal is a curious name
- 2. Rizal's travels abroad
  - i. separation from loved ones and family
  - ii. known to be polyglot and learned
  - iii. studies medicine and becomes a famous healer
- 3. Rizal hounded by his enemies
  - i. returns to the Philippines despite dangers
  - ii. has powers to avert harm that may come to him
- 4. Rizal does not die at Luneta
  - i. Spaniards shoot a look-alike
  - ii. Rizal is having tea in another part of town
  - iii. Spaniards bury a banana trunk
- 5. Rizal is alive and will redeem the Filipinos
  - i. in various human manifestations, e.g., Tatang de los Santos<sup>17</sup>
  - waiting and manufacturing products in the bowls of Mt. Makiling, Laguna
  - iii. will return and lead the army of God

The mythification of Rizal probably began even before his execution. Since he lived a life calculated to perfection with such a characteristic semblance to the *pasyon* Christ—the "exemplary insurgent"—Rizal knew this image would outlive his mortal death and guarantee his "resurrection" (Coates: 1968, 309).

One could very well interpret the existence of Rizalista cults as the cognitive proof of Rizal's "resurrection". At the level of Rizalista ritual, 18 this reality is permeated with the hero's symbols: the two novels, Noli and Fili, as the biblical fount; ritual mass performed by priestesses incorporate the "Last Farewell" poem; and spirit-mediums trance about as Rizal, spouting authority and advice. The ritual variations bring on an indeterminate "shock of recognition" that attest to the creativity of the "Rizalist mind":

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup>Valentin de los Santos, leader of the Lapiang Malaya (Freedom Party) who figured in a tragic "uprising" in the summer of 1967 in urban Manila.

<sup>18</sup> Ritual is meant here as those activities which translates a belief system into observable terms.

...Ang Kristo ng Katagalugan ay si Dr. Jose Rizal. Ang Panginoon ng lahat dito sa Sanglibutan. Hari ng mga Hari, Panginoon ng mga Panginoon. Sapagka't siya ang pinagkalooban ng banal na Tipan ng Espiritu Santong Bathalang Maykapangyarihan. Sapagka't siya ay inilagak lamang sa mag-asawang Teodora Alonso at siya rin ang Espiritu ng Panginoon kung kaya gayon na lamang ang Pagibig sa mga anak ng Bayan. Kaya't sa ikapitong buhay ay hindi na mamamatay at itinitindig ang kanyang kapangyarihan at maniningil sa mga sukaban na hindi lumingon sa lupang tinubuan at iyan din ang Inang pinanggalingan ng gatas na malapot na ikinabubuhay.

... Rizal is the Christ of the Tagalog region. The Lord of the whole universe. King of Kings, Lord of Lords. Because the Almightly Bathala gave unto him the Holy Writ of the Holy Spirit. Because of his love for children of the country, the Holy Spirit decreed that Teodora Alonso should conceive him. Thus in the seventh life he will no longer die and he shall bring about his power and shall exact the payment for the greed of those who ignore the motherland who is also the mother from whom comes our very life.

The formalism can be deceptive yet a quick reference to the Apostle's Creed will show the careful deletion of the last few lines to avoid a conflict of ideas. In this prayer of the *Inang* Mahiwaga cult, the audal image is remarkably similar to the Creed when recited in a mumbling, prayerful manner. Examples of these abound in Rizalista literature. 19

But Rizalism is not all ritual. It is a way of knowing, of percieving reality (the historical and the common sense) in categories determined by the cultural model offered in the pasyon. In one interview, an informant advised me: "Don't you know . . . that to know Rizal you should know Christ first? Hindi mo ba alam-kilalanin mo muna ang pagkatao ni Kristo, bago mo makikilala ang pagkatao ni Rizal?"20 Knowing can also come literally, by way of revelation.21

We listened intently, eyes glued to the drawings of a mysterious woman described in Apocalypse 12-14. He flips his drawing and proceeds to explain: the woman gives birth to a boy who is Rizal, but the dragon which is no other than Spain, kills the boy. But God redeems him and the dragon is killed by St. Michael in the person of Andres Bonifacio....

<sup>19</sup> Foronda (1961) was able to collect valuable documents, which are sprinkled with these "gems" of creativity. A psychoanalysis of this mate-

rial should reveal very novel insights.

20 Interview with Mrs. Zenaida Martinez, 'nanay' (mother) to a group called Sagrada Familia in Tanay, Rizal.

21 Paliwanag (giving light) by Mr. Eustaquio Niofe during a ganap (religious event) at Ronggot, Calamba, Laguna.

Now, the speaker asks: Has Rizal "returned"? Not yet, I said. He asks his companion who nods affirmatively. Observe, he says, the one-peso coin where our hero is facing left. But look at the two-peso bill. We now have two faces, one facing left the other facing right. Now in this new coin [New Society issue] has not Rizal revealed his face in full, bounded by a hexagon crowned by stars?

This process of thinking and knowing seems typical and a continuous interpolation of the symbolic, from the "materyal" and the "espiritwal". Folk wisdom is also used to drive home the banal (sacred):<sup>22</sup>

A Rizalista of possibly middle age, was explaining his concept of geography to a curious crowd gathered at the Luneta in the aftermath of the Rizal Day celebrations. Shifting from the descriptive to the rhetorical, he queried his audience: "Why is Rizal's face in the one-peso coin facing left?" The audience, taken a back giggled uneasily. Sensing he has caught the crowd's attention, he blurted out the explanation (paliwanag) which to me, given the context of the situation (a patriotic day of celebration) sounded profound: "Because...Rizal's countrymen were lefthanded." (Literally, kaliwete. But in Tagalog metaphor it can mean unfaithfulness and treachery...)

Taken out of its milieu, these examples cannot be explained adequately. Tracing the continuities of metaphor, inchoate and ambiguous descriptions gain an understanding and become meaningful. By seeking out a "root paradigm" (the pasyon in this case) a better grasp of the subject is possible, giving coherence to data that otherwise would appear nonsensical and and subjective. Instead, ambiguities are reduced and other variables explained in the light of other theories. Hence we can see that folk religious cults have a dynamic logic of their own. Following our own prescription, we have to seek elsewhere for an explanation of Cullen's conclusion that secret societies retard socio-economic development. To put it in another way, is the belief system of the "secret societies" the culprit or is it something else?

To change social relations requires a great deal of personal and social sacrifice which invariably has its effects on economic production. My own experience with these groups indicates that land ownership (some are technically squatters) and market forces (which exploit their cheap labor), rather than the belief system of the cults are more likely to retard socio-economic development. The gospel value of "poverty" lies more in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Or the political, if you prefer. Profundity is marked by a deep repertoire of metaphors like: "How many mothers does a person have?" Inang-suso (biological mother), inang-bayan (motherland) and inang-wika (mother tongue).

a given economic reality than in a symbolic one. On the other hand, material improvement is not prescribed either so long as it is pursued without greed. Folk religions of this nature do idealize economic life, but to claim that it rationalizes such behavior might be too hasty a conclusion. We can invoke a statement of a Rizalista who was questioned about his owning a sari-sari store: "Pakitang tao lamang iyan. (That's merely for show.)"

We will always encounter a process of indeterminate interpretation with this subject. But we can, through metaphor, have an expanded yet coherent milieu, a kind of symbolic world within the mountain's womb. This demands a new method of comprehending the familiar in ways understandable to us and to our anthropological community. We enter the mountain's womb that our inner selves (loob) may match, as we emerge, those whom we seek to understand.

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