Hagiographic Counterimaginary: The Case of *Pasyong Rizal*[1]

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Abstract: The influence of the Philippines' foremost patriot and martyr, Jose Rizal (1861-1896) finds peculiar expression in chiliastic, quasi-religious groups that worship him as a transhistorical, Christ-like figure. Some of these groups' doctrinal claims are included in Pasyong Rizal, a text drawing inspiration from the older Christian Pasyon, a narrative poem about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The paper argues that the reverence of a Christ-like Rizal as articulated in Pasyong Rizal, exemplifies what I refer to as hagiographic counterimaginary, a recontextualization and reappropriation of Christian theology brought about by colonial subjugation, and, corollarily, the mythopoeic renarrativization of the hero's persona. The paper concludes that projects delving into the cultural practices of chiliastic groups such as the Rizalistas and other marginalized collectives can constitute a branch of Subaltern Studies in the Philippines.

Keywords: Pasyon, Pasyong Rizal, Jose Rizal, Hagiographic Counterimaginary, Subaltern Studies, Chiliastic Groups, Millenarian Movements

Introduction: *Pasyong Rizal*

One of the lasting legacies of almost 400 years of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines is Roman Catholicism. By the end of the 19th century, religious practices had become so deeply ingrained in Philippine society and culture that even after the Revolution of 1896, the subsequent end of the Spanish colonial regime, and the cession of the country to the United States, these practices would continue to influence social mores. This persistent influence is demonstrable even in more contemporary times, with the continuing popularity of religious rituals during the so-called Holy Week, the culmination of the 40-day Lenten Season in many Christian churches. One particular ritual

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that has been around since the Spanish colonial era is the chanting of the *Pasyon,* a poetic narrative written in the vernacular and dealing with important events in the life, death, resurrection, and teachings of Christ.

On the surface, the *Pasyon* may be largely construed as nothing more than a Gospel-inspired narrative. To the subjugated natives, however, it was something that resonated with their own struggle against the excesses of colonialism. In Christ, they saw the embodied dialectic of sacrifice and redemption, suffering and liberation within the context of centuries-long cultural and historical subjection. Such is the overriding thesis of *Pasyon at Rebolusyon: Popular Movements in the Philippines 1840-1910* by Filipino scholar Reynaldo Ileto, a book first published in 1979 that employs, albeit implicitly, a Foucauldian approach to historiography problematizing the interplay between power and what is touted as historical knowledge. Unlike most historical writings that put a premium on supposedly important events and figures, Ileto uses an interpretivist, if conjectural, lens by analyzing the influence of a religious text on the *weltanschauung* of the Philippines' rural folk. It was an influence that would be further reified in the emergence of millenarian movements from the colonial period to the present, some of which, quite paradoxically, had avowed anti-colonial, anti-establishment, and/or egalitarian causes. But notwithstanding the role of these millenarian groups in history, they have often been left out, trivialized, or scorned. Reduced to historical sidelights, they have even been blamed by left-leaning scholars as a factor for the underdevelopment of socialist, or to be more accurate, Marxist praxis in the countryside in the early part of the 20th century (Nemenzo 1984).

In 2011, Eriberto B. Saños, a licensed forester, published a book he himself had written, entitled *Kasaysayan ng Pasyong Mahal ni Amang Dr. Jose Rizal – Ang Kristong Pilipino: Sukat Ipag-alab ng Puso at Gumising sa Damdaming Maka-Bathala, Maka-Kalikasan, Makabayan at Maka-tao ng Sinomang Babasa* (roughly translated as "Story of the Holy Passion of Father Dr. Jose Rizal – The Filipino Christ: Which Will Inflame the Heart and Arouse the Godly, Nature-Loving, and Patriotic Feelings of Whoever Will Read It"). The book is obviously in honor of the country's foremost hero, Jose Rizal (1861-1896), who was accused of being a subversive and executed upon the orders of the Spanish colonial government. Since his death, Rizal has been highly regarded as the Philippines' national hero, his life and writings studied by school children throughout the country, and his words often invoked to inspire the sense of patriotism and national pride that he epitomized.

According to his bionote, Saños was 46 years old and living with his family in Calamba, some 48 kilometers south of Manila and also the hometown of the martyr. He was a member of a group of Rizalistas (adherents of Rizal) called *Universal Rizalist Brotherhood Association Incorporated* (URBAI). In the introduction, Saños claims to have been born a Catholic and was a regular reader of the Christian Pasyon in his younger years, but he would later gravitate towards the Rizalistas of the mystical mountain called Banahaw, and has since been an active URBAI member.

The book in question has had two printings—one in 2011 and the other in 2015. Composed of 230 pages, the Pasyon is divided into two main parts, with appendices. The first part dwells on the life story of the hero, but it is in many respects different from most biographies. For one thing, it points to his otherworldly origins—like Christ, he was not human but divine, duly appointed by heavenly forces to fulfill a mission. Nonetheless, there are details one may have already encountered in other sources, such as those pertaining to his childhood, travels, writings, exile, imprisonment, and execution. The second part further underscores his supernatural qualities – his gift of prophecy, miracles, reincarnations, and, glorious reign as God's appointed ruler. The appendices include additional verses in honor of Rizal and a list of different Rizalista groups in the Philippines.

The Historical Rizal: A Brief Note

Widely recognized as the Philippines' "national hero," Jose Rizal was born in 1861 in Laguna, a province near Manila, the country's capital. By then, Spain had colonized the country for more than three hundred years, wielding enormous political, economic, and cultural power over the natives whom their European colonizers had pejoratively called "indios." While Spanish colonialism had its lasting legacies, such as imposing a sort of political unity on what had been scattered villages in pre-colonial times, the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized was not forged on equal terms. The natives resented their domination by European colonizers, compounded by abuses committed not just by colonial state agents but also by church officials and their lackeys. In this regard, Philippine colonial history would be an incomplete narrative without citing the pockets of resistance waged by the natives against their colonial masters.

Rizal came from a relatively privileged background. Educated in some of the finest institutions in the Philippines and later in Europe, he

was a multi-faceted genius who fought for the natives' greater recognition in the colonial system. Growing up, he experienced what were perceived injustices first-hand: His mother was imprisoned by colonial officials and made to walk several miles over trumped-up charges (Guerrero 1974); his brother's mentor, native priest Fr. Jose Burgos, was executed for his alleged involvement in an aborted mutiny (Schumacher 2006); his family was dragged into a legal tussle over the land claimed by an influential religious order (San Juan 2011). These and other events in the young Rizal's life emboldened him to work for reforms in favor of his compatriots and criticize the excesses of the Spanish colonial regime. He wrote two novels in Spanish, *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) and *El Filibusterismo* (The Filibuster), to expose social injustices under colonialism, and while overseas, worked with other educated, middle-class natives to establish reform-oriented organizations and produce propaganda materials critical of the colonial establishment. In consequence, he was tried and banished to a province far from his hometown where he stayed for several years. While he did not expressly call for the use of arms, a fledgling revolutionary movement acknowledged him as a guiding spirit. Rizal was implicated in the 1896 revolution, the culmination of the natives' struggle against centuries of colonial oppression, for which he was tried and eventually executed. He died a martyr's death in December of that year. His death did not dampen revolutionary fervor, but instead motivated the natives to carry on their valiant struggle until, finally, in 1898, the Philippines declared itself independent of Spain (Quibuyen 1997).

The Pasyon as Hagiographic Counterimaginary

I would consider the *Pasyong Rizal*, which draws inspiration from its urtext, the Christian Pasyon, as a project which blurs the convoluted dichotomy between historical truth and fantasy – indeed between fact and fiction—and which I would call *hagiographic counterimaginary*. The first word in the term pertains to a lengthy, centuries-old tradition within the Catholic Church (Roman, Orthodox, Coptic, etc.)—that of writing about the lives of saints which, in the olden days, was meant to propagate the faith. Hagiography developed from stories of martyrdom of early Christians who were executed primarily because of their faith. In the third and fourth centuries, with Christianity gaining adherents notwithstanding constant opposition, the early Christians celebrated their martyrs' stories of sacrifice to encourage solidarity and spread their beliefs. According to Head (1999), "By unintentionally

giving the impetus for the cult of martyrs, the imperial persecutors unwittingly provided one of the chief means through which Christian communities created a sense of both identity and historical consciousness" (2). As I will try to show later, the Pasyon as a hagiographic narrative about the Philippines' most well-known hero serves the same purpose as his other biographies – that of uniting Filipinos and creating a sense of historical identity.

The other term, *counterimaginary*, references the subversive character of hagiographic texts exemplified by the *Pasyong Rizal*, in which case such accounts may hardly correspond to actual events. These texts may be ostensibly embellished versions of the biographies of historic, semi-historic, at times even fictional figures to whom holiness is imputed. I am reminded of Michel de Certeau's (1984) observations regarding the role of narratives as a way for people, especially those in the peripheries of existing cultural, political, and economic setups, to weave their way out of "functionalist reality" (xviii)). What is suggested here is a kind of counter-history vis-à-vis the conventions of historiography that privilege "big" persons and events by virtue of their provenance. This is because knowledge—including historical knowledge—is indissociably bound up with the issue of power. That is, there is knowledge that gets legitimated and promoted, and in the process, other knowledges that do not fit discursive templates are deemed unseemly, threatening, inaesthetic, and illegitimate, and in the words of Foucault, consequently subjugated.

The counterimaginary hews closely to Foucault's notion of counter-memory that complicates memory as something that is inexorably crisscrossed by conflict. In his ground-breaking work, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (2002) interrogated the constructed neutrality, scientificity, and generalizability of what is passed down as knowledge. Counter-memory constitutes an attempt by which the metanarratives of institutional/institutionalized knowledge and memory are necessarily transgressed. In such a case, "truth" is not just critically examined, or "remorselessly interrogated" as Nietzsche would have it; it is blasted open, revealing its gaps, limitations, and fissures, as well as the role of enabling institutions and epistemic formations. In his analysis of Nietzsche's genealogy of history, Foucault cited at least three uses of the "historical sense": parodic, one that opposes history as mere "reminiscence or recognition"; dissociative, one that opposes history as "continuity" or "tradition"; and sacrificial, one that opposes history as "knowledge." Such demurrals, according to Foucault, constitute "counter-memory—

a transformation of history into a totally different form of time" (Foucault 1996, 160).

The counterimaginary may also be a sort of transgression as explicated by Foucault. It is not necessarily a mere negation, but an affirmation of division. It is a division "only insofar as division is not understood to mean a cutting gesture or the establishment of a separation or the measuring of a distance, only retaining that in it which may designate the existence of difference" (Foucault 1996, 36). In other words, the counterimaginary does not represent a new creation but simply a re-creation, not a new enactment but a re-enactment—the re-fashioning of what already exists specifically to transgress the conventions that legitimate the status quo and to promote empowering and egalitarian possibilities.

This study concentrated only on the hero's putatively divine attributes as stated in *Pasyong Rizal.* Several details in the Pasyon are staples in popular biographies of the martyr, but what I am more interested in is the discourse surrounding Rizal as the spirit incarnate, the demigod, and the Filipino messiah—details that may not be found in most biographical accounts but are accepted as doctrinal "truths" among groups that venerate the man. These truths exemplify the notion of the counterimaginary I cited earlier which suggests that, one, social beings are capable of imagining society in different ways depending on their corresponding subject positionalities; and secondly, these truths may consist in alternative, dissident logics, articulations, and narratives vis-à-vis dominant discursive formations surrounding the hero.

One may also surmise that the (re)narrativization of Rizal and its seeming similarity to the Christ's own story illustrates what Hayles (1990) called the "reconfiguration of spaces" (275). In this regard, Rizal-centric theology as articulated in the Pasyon, which forms part of the belief system of certain millenarian groups should not easily be dismissed as a distortion, but rather a recontextualization of Christian dogma. One may also be reminded of Derrida's opinion on "negative theology" which seems to be the theological application of his celebrated concept of *differance*, and which, as he himself hastened to point out, is not the same as atheism—that is, the outright rejection of God's existence. According to him, negative theology is the assertion of God's otherness, unknowability and indeterminacy because of which it has God has to be experienced and expressed as plural: "The voice multiplies itself, dividing within itself: it says one thing and its contrary, God that is without being or God that (is) beyond being" (Derrida 1995 as cited in Shakespeare 2009, 112).

Specifically, this essay seeks to answer the following questions: How is Rizal depicted as a saintly, even Christ-like, figure in the Pasyon? What details in the text constitute the counterimaginary surrounding him? How does this re/configuration of Rizal instantiate postcolonial subversion? In what follows, I try to answer the aforesaid questions according to four interrelated themes I purposely culled from the Pasyon: the depiction of Rizal as "overman"; the parallelism between him and Christ; his "reincarnations" and his role in the designation of the Philippines as the "New Jerusalem"; and the radical recasting of his life story.

Rizal as Overman

A common thread that runs through the many accounts about Rizal is the emphasis on his physical and intellectual prowess. But unlike these accounts, the Pasyon does not simply attribute Rizal's extraordinary qualities to his genes, upbringing or educational training; rather, the narrative claims that the hero had such qualities because of his divine nature. Even as a young boy, Rizal was already demonstrating uncanny physical and intellectual skills that expectedly left spectators bemused, including members of his own family—solitary journeys to a far-away island, communicating with animals, composing poetry at a young age. He, too, had a gift of prophecy, having foreseen, for instance, his own martyrdom and eventual glorification through the erection of monuments in his honor (Pasyon 175):

> *Ating mga kababayan*
> *Magtatayo nang matibay*
> *Bantayog kong karamihan*
> *Sa mga dako at lugar*
> *Sa akin ay karangalan.*
> Translation:
> My compatriots
> Shall erect
> Enduring monuments to me
> In different corners and places
> To pay homage.

His writings, particularly, *Filipinas duentro de cien anos* (The Philippines a century hence) and at least one letter to his bosom friend, the European Ferdinand Blumentritt, likewise presaged the

progress of telecommunication, the development of a national language, the emergence of the United States and Japan as global superpowers that would annex the Philippines, and the decline of Spain as a colonial power. His ability to predict the future puts Rizal in the same league as the prophets of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures who, according to Agamben (1995 as cited in Delahaye 2006), possessed an "unmediated relation to the *ruah Yahweh* (the breath of Yahweh), who receives a word from God that does not properly belong to him" (86).

In Philippine spiritual culture, prophecy and other spiritual endowments are realized through the use of amulets as sources of power. Taking varied forms and shapes, the amulet—or *anting-anting* in the vernacular—has played a significant role in Philippine history, as celebrated historical figures allegedly believed in its potency to repel their enemies in battle. In the case of Rizal, his mystical tools as indicated in the Pasyon include a "mahiwagang sambalilo" (mysterious hat) to render himself invisible; a "mahiwagang ilawan" (mysterious lamp) that shone excessively bright; and a "mahiwagang baston" (mysterious cane) to ward off enemies (Pasyon 195). These apocryphal claims, irrational by certain standards, illustrate nonetheless the deployment of folk mythology to enrich the Pasyon's apotheotic treatment of the hero.

The stress on Rizal's ingenuity and psychic ascendancy recalls those efforts to countervail prevailing assumptions during the Spanish regime about the native's putative inferiority to the Spaniard. And because colonialism is also partly a discursive process, discursive tools – by way of narratives, for instance—have to be deployed to portray the native as somebody capable of asserting themselves against the *othering* gaze of colonialism. But it is also worth noting that stories about their protagonists' otherworldly feats by virtue of their physical and spiritual powers have been propagated in the country for centuries, initially as oral history predating the advent of the colonizers. It is not just confined to the realm of what has traditionally been considered fiction: In Philippine cultural history, strength of character has been associated less with wealth or educational attainment than with one's soul stuff, and prevalence of this belief dating to precolonial times is borne out by varied indigenous terms referring to the soul or life force in the country's different languages – *dungan* in Hiligaynon, *ikararua* in Ibanag, and *gimokud* in Bagobo to cite a few. It is this strength of character that enables one to persuade or even dominate others, and, in more contemporary times, it still

serves as an important criterion for being entrusted a leadership position, say, during elections.

The details presented above underscore the depiction of Rizal as no average man but, to use a Nietzschean concept rather loosely, an overman—one who has transcended humanity and overcome its immanent limitations. However, Rizal also serves as a metonym: The aggrandized portrayal is also meant to picture native Filipinos as being capable of fending off the colonizer's orientalist gaze that for a long time had consigned them to a position of inferiority. One is reminded of Rizal's own accolades for his compatriots, the artists Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, who had won grand prizes at the 1884 Madrid Art Exposition: "(C)reative genius does not manifest itself solely within the borders of a specific country: it sprouts everywhere; it is like light and air; it belongs to everyone: it is cosmopolitan like space, life and God" (Rizal 1884). In truth and in the way he is represented, Rizal epitomized that genius and the power to rise above oneself.

Drawing Parallels: Christ and Rizal

As a supernatural figure, Rizal is likened to Jesus Christ, the figurehead of the Christian faith, on the basis of their shared, "divine" purpose. In this regard, Rizal is detached from the image nurtured by conventional historiography—that is, he transcends human history and this puts him in the same league as the universally proclaimed "Son of God" and "Messiah." The Pasyon, for instance, reveals that Rizal did not have a human birth but descended to earth to fulfill the mission of redeeming the country from the clutches of Spanish colonialism. His descent to earth—the fulfillment of a prophecy—was celebrated by the angels and divinities in Heaven, among them the three Marias – Makiling, Sinukuan, and Arayat—who became his spiritual companions and the guiding spirits of Mounts Banahaw, Arayat, and Makiling, sacred mountains that have been associated with devotion to the hero (Pasyon 37) :

Katumbas na kabundukan
Titipuning muli naman
Ibabalik na mahusay
Doon sa Kaban ng Tipan
Na siyang pinanggalingan.
Translation:
The corresponding mountains

Shall be gathered together
And returned well
To the Ark of the Covenant
Whence they came.

Like Christ, Rizal would use his miraculous powers to heal the impaired and resurrect the dead while criticizing the agents of colonialism as modern-day Caiaphases. Interestingly, some of the miracles attributed to Rizal in the Pasyon even have the names of people who benefitted from his extrahuman powers, such as one Carlos Burgadrin, a student in Heidelberg where Rizal was staying at the time. Burgadrin had died under mysterious circumstances and the family decided to hold his wake at the university, but when he was about to be buried, Rizal interrupted (Pasyon 192):

Sigaw ng Bayani'y "Hintay"
Sansala ni Doktor Rizal
"Wag ninyong ililibing iyan
Pagkat siya'y hindi patay
Siya'y natutulog lamang.
Translation:
The Hero shouted, "Wait!"
Doctor Rizal exclaimed,
"Don't bury him
Because he is not dead.
He is only sleeping."

The moment, of course, recalls the Biblical passage of Christ's resurrection of Lazarus (Book of John 11:1-44) in which Christ used the word "sleep" as a euphemism for death.

The Pasyon also details some of the allegations about the hero's own immortality, which have formed part of the belief system of many Rizalista movements. A persistent and popular belief is that a banana plant, rather the hero's actual body, was buried by his family. It is also claimed that at about the same time that Rizal was being executed in Bagumbayan, he was seen in at least two other places—in Paco, Manila and in his hometown of Calamba, Laguna. Upon hearing news about the execution, a servant working in an eatery in Calamba supposedly reacted (Pasyon 186):

Ay paano mamamatay

Si Doktor Gat Jose Rizal
Ngayo'y kaaalis lamang
Naririto sa restoran
Akin pang pinagsilbihan!
Translation:
How could he have died?
Doctor Gat Jose Rizal
Just left
He was here in the restaurant
And I even served him!

Another intriguing story is about a German painter's fortuitous encounter with the immortal Calambeño. The painter, married to a native of Calamba, had been on the lookout for a model for a painting. His search ended on a vast field at the foot of Makiling where he saw a mysterious-looking fellow exuding a quiet and impeccable mien--*lalaking marangal…/At tunay na larawan pa/Pilipinong hanap niya!* (Translation: an honorable gentleman…/ And the perfect picture/ of the Filipino he was looking for) (Pasyon 197). Before long, the German artist started illustrating the mysterious gentleman without knowing who his subject was. He realized later on that his subject was no less than Rizal who was believed to have died 25 years before. In analyzing these stories, one may be reminded of Derrida's concept of mid-mourning which posits that "historical losses are neither… 'properly' mourned nor melancholically entombed… but constantly re-examined and re-interpreted" (Craps 2010, 467). In other words, Rizal's life, like that of Christ, never ended; rather, his death as a historical loss was reinterpreted by believers into a mythopoeic transcendence of his own humanity that should, therefore, be celebrated and iterated.

Parenthetically, the stories about Rizal's own resurrection—or non-death—began to spread shortly after his execution in Bagumbayan. Public historian Ambeth Ocampo (2020) cited the following excerpt from *Cuerpo de Vigilancia* (the Security Corps of the Spanish colonial government) on the rumor that the hero was still alive:

> After the execution of the prisoner, when the body was collected and locked in the closed carriage that transported it to the Cemetery, a faint, pink cloud settled on the carriage, surrounded it and followed it on its entire journey to [Paco Cemetery]. Stopping at the door of the cemetery, the carriage was met by servants who took out the stretchers where the

> corpse lay but it was not there. In its place a beautiful white rooster was seen that, in the presence of the authorities and to the great surprise of all, took flight, surrounded by the faint cloud, toward the province of Cavite, where it was joined with the soul of Father [Jose] Burgos who, [since his execution by garrote in] 1872 has watched over this province, instilling courage and daring in its inhabitants.

That the claim about Rizal's immortality merited an official statement suggests that not a few natives must have given credence to the rumor which threatened the Spanish colonial government. The same document asserts, "Such fake news, Honorable Sir, proves once again the great ascendancy that the name of the prisoner Rizal exercised over the indigenous people, the masses who believe, by superstition and idolatry, that Rizal is an extraordinary being with supernatural powers" (Ocampo 2020).

Arguably, the best honorific of Rizal that captures the analogy is "Kristong Kayumanggi"—the "Brown Christ" that salvaged the country from centuries of colonialism, and, Christ-like, is expected to return to complete his redemptive mission. As stated in the Pasyon (181):

> *Kapwa ang kanilang Bayan*
> *Noo'y napailaliman*
> *Ng madlang kaalipinan*
> *Judea ni Kristong mahal*
> *Pilipinas ni Gat Rizal.*
> Translation:
> Their respective countries
> Were then subject
> To oppression
> Christ's Judea
> And Gat Rizal's Philippines.

Perhaps sacrilegious by certain standards, the analogy, however, is not meant to be a burlesque appropriation of the Christian motif. I would argue that, from the optics of postcolonialism, the deification of Rizal was not meant to supplant Christ; rather, it represented the reconfiguration of Christian doctrines to accommodate elements of the natives' culture. The parallelism suggests a sort of mythic transculturation in which Christ was reimagined in accordance with socio-cultural contexts, thus resulting in the reportrayal of a hero

whose attributes paralleled Christ's own. In such and many other respects, colonialism is opened up and made vulnerable, subjected to a process that ineluctably undermines its supposed integrity and creates possibilities for insurgency and resistance. In other words, the parallelism cannot simply be reduced to a mindless, vapid mimicry but, to borrow a term popularized by Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizomatic reimagining. To quote them further, one sees that in the dynamics of colonialism:

> something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming…. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 10)

It should be noted that belief in Rizal's immortality has survived through the decades and has spread to other parts of the country. Far from the country's capital, a group called *Supreme Council of Datus-Alimaong,* for example, professes faith in the hero and boldly proclaims on its website (http://www.alimaong-scoda.org/?page_id=981) that "Rizal is alive." Citing a somewhat obscure book *Rizal's Miracle,* the group believes that on the day of his scheduled execution, the hero was actually in Calamba and, therefore, eluded the capital punishment imposed upon him. The account further states that after a few days, Rizal ended up in Cebu where, under an assumed name, he became a teacher in San Carlos College. Later, he settled in Dapitan, the town in Mindanao where he had spent meaningful years as an exile. It is not known why, as alleged, the hero wound up in Cebu and, subsequently, Dapitan, but because the latter served as site of his four-year banishment, it could hold symbolic significance ("Rizal is alive"). For one thing, he became productive during his exile so as not to be overwhelmed by the despair that attends being away from home and loved ones. The town became a living laboratory for his varied interests, especially farming and teaching. Moreover, it was in Dapitan where he first met Josephine

Bracken who would be his fiancé. A return to the town, whether actualized or otherwise, may well be emblematic of a desire on the part of Rizal to relive the happiness of those times. The following lines from the Pasyon may well encapsulate his contribution to—and consequently, his lasting affinity for— his place of exile (147):

Tantong lubhang karamihan
Pinakain, tinulungan
Ginamot at dinamayan,
Halos buong pamayanan…
Translation:
It is known that many
Were fed, aided
Treated, and consoled—
Almost the whole community…

Rizal's Reincarnations and the Philippines as the New Jerusalem

It has been established that both Christ and Rizal share the gift of immortality. Discussed in the preceding section are stories claiming that Rizal has remained alive, suggesting at least two things: first, that he was able to escape his execution; and second, that he rose from the dead. Unlike the Christ of official Christianity, however, who is believed to have resurrected and not reincarnated, Rizal is alleged to have had several reincarnations that the Pasyon calls *poderes* (literally, powers). Here one may find another instance of how elements of the precolonial, pre-Christian belief system, in particular the belief in reincarnation or at least the power of spirits to take over living bodies (Scott 1994), have complexified the Rizalian discourse. To name a few, Rizal's reincarnations include the eremite Apo Asyong; Apo Arsenio de Guzman, one of the early figures in movement called Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi (literally, Church of the Banner of the Race), a well-known chiliastic group living at the foot of Banahaw; Valentin de los Santos, figurehead of Lapiang Malaya (Freedom Party); Salvador Manalo, founder of the group Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) based in Bauan, Batangas; Ruben Eccleo, philanthropist of Surigao on the island of Mindanao; Amado Suarez, founder of Del Ciudad Mistika (Mystical City); and Apo Iro of Intramuros, whose exemplary piety inspired devotees to liken him to St. Peter (see Pasyon 198-202).

While the groups cited above emerged in different parts of the Philippines, they are bonded by their common faith in Rizal and in the

Philippines as the New Jerusalem, as discussed below. Like other chiliastic movements, some of these collectives, such as the Universal Rizalist Brotherhood Association (URBAI), anticipate a Day of Judgment during which the Philippines will arise unscathed to assume a new role in the new cosmic order. Consider the following lines describing the events leading to the apocalypse (Pasyon 203):

> *Pagkagutom, kahirapan*
> *Kaguluhan at digmaan*
> *Kalamidad na daratal*
> *Sa hangin at katubigan*
> *Apoy sa kalupaan*
> Translation:
> Famine, misery
> Conflict and war
> The calamity to come
> In the air and in the waters
> Will set the earth ablaze.

Gloom and destruction will embrace the whole world partly because of humanity's irresponsibility and selfishness, because of which it has to be reclaimed by Divine Power (Pasyon 203):

> *… At walang ginawang tunay*
> *Na ingatan, alagaan*
> *Ating Inang Kalikasan.*
>
> *Ito ay parusang tunay*
> *Ng Bathalang Walang Hanggan…*
>
> Translation:
> … And nothing has really been done
> To take care
> Of Mother Nature.
>
> This is retribution
> By the Eternal God…

The selection of the Philippines as the New Jerusalem with Rizal at the helm of its Spiritual Government is no mere coincidence. The description points to the country as a site of natural and spiritual

beauty and abundance for which it was appointed as the dwelling place of the Sun (*Amang Haring Araw*) and the Moon (*Inang Reynang Buwan*) (Pasyon 209):

> *Sadyang mabibiglang tunay*
> *Sa pariralang tinuran*
> *Pilipinas, ating bayan*
> *Ang Selda at ang Tahanan*
> *Amang Araw, Reynang Buwan.*
> Translation:
> One would be surprised
> At the claim
> The Philippines, our country,
> Is the Seat and Home
> Of the Sun King and the Queen Moon.

The passage, of course, references the mythical significance of these two givers of life and light revered in many animistic and polytheistic cultures including that of pre-colonial Philippines. The description of the country as a mystical abode is on account of its fabled natural attributes (Pasyon 211):*"masaganang likas-yaman"* (abundant natural resources), "*luntiang kapaligiran*" (verdant surroundings), "*matatamis, masasarap/ Bungang-kahoy na laganap*" (exquisite fruits), "*malalawak na dagat´* (vast seas), *"malinis na katubigan*" (clean waters). The natural wealth with which the country is endowed did not get unnoticed by western colonial officials. Writing more than a century ago, American David Barrows, who was among those instrumental for the establishment of an Americanized public education system, expressed the following observations: "(T)he Philippines possess (sic) certain advantages (over other countries) which, in the course of some years, may tell strongly in her favor. There are greater natural resources, a richer soil, and more tillable ground" (Barrows 1995).

But the country's terrene beauty is just part of the equation. The appointment of the Philippines as the new seat of spirituality in the world is also attributable to its people who, like Rizal himself, have a reputation for their intelligence, hardiness, and resilience. According to the Pasyon, the local term *Pilipino*, pertaining to the citizens of the country, is a fusion of two words from the vernacular, *pili* (chosen) and *pino* (fine), which further suggests the superiority of Filipinos as a people deserving of God's design for a spiritual government. Like the

ancient Israelites of Biblical lore, the Filipinos as a people, bereft of sovereignty and independence under colonial regimes, their basic freedoms circumscribed by intruders for centuries, have a rightful place in the Divine Plan (Pasyon 212):

Sila itong mamumuhay
Mabubuting mamamayan
Pagsisimulang mainam
Pagtataguyod na tunay
Ng Gobyernong Spiritual.
Translation:
It is they who will live
The benevolent people
Will be the foundation
For building an authentic
Spiritual Government.

As Jove Rex Al, Christ's counterpart in this part of the world, as well as the *other* King of Peace and King of the Universe, Rizal has an important role to play in the consummation of his country's appointment as the New Jerusalem. He has served as a rallying symbol for uniting the country free from external interference while also championing the rights of the abject and the weak. Here, we see the Philippines, through Rizal, paving the path for what has come to be known as the "soteriological" moment in the mythical narrative, promising "a radical transformation of history—perhaps, but not necessarily an irrevocable one—and thus invites to ritual enactment (or reenactment) of the sacred and essential in the name of a utopia of love, justice, or transcendent union" (Sheehan 1981, 70).

The hero, more than a century after his "execution," serves as an hauntological site and spectral authority still impacting a country that is greatly beholden to his patriotism. However, the "ghost" of Rizal is "not simply an abstract alterity, but the other who calls to us, places demands on us, without ever becoming immediately visible or knowable" (Shakespeare 2009, 132). Faith in Rizal as practiced by chiliastic groups and as expressed in the Pasyon is not based on an absolute abstraction; rather, it undergoes performative and critical iteration, and, in the process, gets imagined because faith *per se* cannot "rearticulate itself" and cannot "exist without this law of iteration displacing and disrupting the origin since before the beginning" (Shakespeare 2009, 122). Faith, in other words, is

“embedded in practices” whose “gods” are “invoked by rituals rather than by conscious belief” (Chakrabarty 2000, 78).

Moreover, counterhistorical accounts exemplified by “alternative” narratives about Rizal have a somewhat empowering, liberative quality. For Deleuze and Guattari (1994), producing multiple, subjectified interpretations is imperative to resist the maneuverings of a despot-god that would insist on a controlled, unidiscursive interpretation:

> There is no longer a center of signifiance connected to expanding circles or an expanding spiral, but a point of subjectification constituting the point of departure of the line. There is no longer a signifier-signified relation, but a subject of enunciation issuing from the point of subjectification and a subject of the statement in a determinable relation to the first subject. There is no longer sign-to-sign circularity, but a linear proceeding into which the sign is swept via subjects. (127)

That Rizal has been blasted open and, in a manner of speaking, yanked away from official depictions by the state or by the mainstream historians under its aegis, is a welcome indication of his enduring influence on disparate elements and segments of Philippine society. Rizal, simply put, should not be viewed as a mere “fact” of history, but as text requiring relentless weaving, unweaving, and reweaving, thus involving a pedagogy whose approach should necessarily be based on dialogic inclusion and processuality.

Rewriting Rizal’s Life Story

As a counterimaginary, the Pasyon gives interesting details that flagrantly go against traditional biographies of the hero. If most accounts, for instance, mention Francisco Mercado and Teodora Alonzo as his biological parents, the Pasyon narrative claims that the hero was not of this world (again recalling the Christ motif) and was a foundling adopted by the couple. Later, he would be given an interesting name capturing his exceptional and preternatural character—Jose Rizal, a variation of *Jove Rex Al* which means “Bathalang Ama, Haring Kataas-taasan, Diyos na Walang Kapantay” (God the Father, Supreme King, God Almighty; Pasyon 42). Still on his

adoption, it is said that the couple who were to be his foster parents received the infant from the three deities—Makiling, Sinukuan, and Arayat—who promptly informed them of the child's mission for his country and for humanity in general (Pasyon 46).

Not long after, the couple would encounter more mysterious events. On the day of Rizal's baptism, an old, bearded hermit (who turned out to be St. Ignatius) appeared inside the church and, to everyone's consternation, carried the infant. The foster parents, perhaps realizing the holiness of the uninvited visitor, asked him to serve as a godparent. When the attending priest asked the name of the infant to be baptized, the child Rizal himself spoke and uttered his complete mystical name, *Jove Rex Al*, which importance has been explained earlier (Pasyon 50). This extraordinary moment recalls Lam-ang, hero of an old Philippine epic, who, according to the story, could already talk from the moment he was born and even told his mother what name he preferred. These and the other supernatural circumstances surrounding the birth, life, and death of the hero may well suggest that the *Pasyong Rizal* can be considered to be within the country's rich epic tradition. It should also be noted that according to cultural scholar Resil Mojares' *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* (1983), the popularity of the pasyon and other religious narratives (especially hagiographies) can partly be ascribed to the natives' epic tradition which had started long before the advent of the colonizers.

Unfortunately, the once-popular epic, together with other fascinating elements of pre-colonial culture, became a target of aggressive Catholicization in the islands courtesy of overzealous foreign missionaries wanting to consign them all to oblivion. As stated by Reiley (2013), "To the extent that other types of epics were perceived by the Spanish as being (sac)religious in nature, as opposed to merely entertaining, say, their practitioners too were ostracized, and their creations expurgated" (41). But these "heathen" practices and beliefs were not easily drowned out by the inrush of western culture but transuded through the cracks of colonial order, thus resulting in a hybridized or syncretized variant of Christianity.

The different, even conflicting, knowledge formations about Rizal flesh out what Giroux (2005) called the "politics of location" that challenges the attribution of stability to dominant truth claims and recognizes "the situated nature of knowledge, the partiality of all knowledge claims, the indeterminacy of history, and the shifting, multiple, and often contradictory nature of identity" (p. 18). Moreover, such a politics concedes "that the relationship between knowledge and power on the one hand and the self and others on the

other is as much an issue of ethics and politics as it is one of epistemology" (Giroux 2005, 18). The politics of location posits that social memories, accepted by and within a particular community, even when seemingly convoluted and antithetical to what is accepted as common sense or to the legitimate discourse of "national" history, cannot be readily dispensed with as an unreliable source of historical knowledge. The production of meaning, after all, is invariably contingent on the subject positionality—i.e., the cultural and experiential repertoire—of whoever produces the meaning. One can deduce from such a standpoint that subordinate groups—including millenarian groups that have been sidestepped by unsympathetic academics including "nationalist" historians and "progressive" scholars—are capable of producing their own creative and oppositional consciousness even without intervention from outside. As it is, Pasyong Rizal—as well as the theology of chiliastic groups on which the narrative is largely grounded—constitutes a counterimaginary that is *ipso facto* oppositional, insurgent, and even utopic.

Conclusion: Counterimaginaries and Subaltern Studies

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Nietzsche and Foucault respectively called attention to the dissolution of the self. In their writings, the two philosophers insisted on the decentering of the subject—i.e., the self is no longer to be celebrated as rational, stable, and determinate. I reference the said idea from the two thinkers because the Pasyon seems to do just that: the decentering of Rizal. Here, the celebrated figure is no longer the same popular, albeit inaccessible, Rizal that is lionized in history books, pamphlets, movies, literature, and educational programs. Part of his old, familiar image is dissolved, but with the dissolution comes his creative reinvention—perhaps even a perversion by certain standards—in the hands of those who have chosen to compose their own narratives about the hero as an "irretrievable other" (Dean 1992, 120). In this regard, the myriad reconstructions of Rizal constitute ways by which people—or at least those who in one way or another have derived inspiration from the hero—reconstruct themselves: The state, the church, the industries, the activists, the artists, the workers, the peasants all have their different versions of Rizal according to competing ideological credos. Come to think of it, Rizal's image in traditional history books is fissured by still unresolved claims, such as those pertaining to his attitude to a nascent revolution of which, as alleged by both colonizers and

revolutionaries, he was the figurehead. Whether he was for revolution or not is still very much disputed in academic circles more than a century since his death.

In this regard, subaltern groups that do not fit conventional academic frameworks should not readily be brushed off as a bizarre sidelight of Philippine colonial and postcolonial history. They are not just the "backward," superstitious; and amulet-wielding rural folk; they also include street dwellers, out-of-school youth, criminals, prostitutes, and other ostracized segments of society, that would easily fall under a deprecatory term popularized by Marx and Engels (2008)—the *lumpenproletariat* (49) If we are to make history more inclusionary and, ultimately, recreate culture into one that is more accommodating of diversity, then such groups that have fallen between the cracks should be given academic attention.

One is reminded of Ranjit Guha's critique of Eric Hobsbawm when the latter described Indian peasants of the colonial era as "prepolitical" (Chakrabarty 2000, 11). Expounding Guha's criticism, Chakrabarty (2000) argued that the consciousness of the peasants was not "a 'backward' consciousness—a mentality left over from the past, a consciousness baffled by modern political and economic institutions and yet resistant to them" (13). To describe peasants as pre-political is nothing short of another orientalizing categorization of social and cultural elements that did not fit the European hegemonic framework. This brings me to the next point: I believe that it is time to undertake projects that may constitute the interdisciplinary area that has come to be known as Subaltern Studies which have made headway in other postcolonial societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This is not to downplay the tradition of Marxism and other critical philosophies that have contributed in no small measure to varied ways of critically understanding and problematizing Philippine society. A Philippine strand of Subaltern Studies—i.e., Philippine Subaltern Studies—can more adequately capture the voices and narratives from the margins without necessarily subjecting them to the mechanistic and scientistic gaze of an exclusively class-based analysis. Again, in the words of Chakrabarty (2000), the tendency on the part of the traditional historian or the self-proclaimed progressive intellectual to speak of and for the subaltern is anchored on the "transition"—i.e., teleological—narrative that frowns upon chiliastic groups like the Rizalistas as pre- or non-modern collectives.

While the Pasyong Rizal is by and large the work of just one man, it has become acknowledged as an important text and cultural practice of a community, and thus illustrates the appreciation of historiography

as a complex field requiring more nuanced approaches that take stock of multiplicity and heterogeneity. Again, to quote Chakrabarty (2000):

> I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenships in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity…. This is a history that will attempt the impossible: to look toward its own death by tracing that which resists and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous." (45-46)

The study of Rizal should not be limited to unidimensional, romanticized or idealized portrayals of the hero as can be seen in biographies that are written according to the conventions of historical writing. Such a study should be based on a wide range of texts and representations, including those that come from traditionally ignored groups, which should not be evaluated, however, according to deep-seated dichotomization of categories – e.g., good versus evil, rational versus irrational, historically accurate versus fictive or conjectural accounts. Rather, they should be appreciated on the basis of how narratives about Rizal or about any other personality for that matter have incited critical, creative, and even competing discourses. Instructive are the words of Barbara Christian (1990) regarding minority discourse (which the Pasyon may very well exemplify): "…the literature of a people who are not in power has always been in danger of extinction or cooptation, not because we do not theorize, but because what we can imagine, far less who we can reach, is contantly limited by societal structures" (48). Rizal's integration into the realm of myth and symbol through his hagiographic renarrativization is what provides the hero his continuous significance—an emblem of the struggle against colonialism and its vestiges, and, in more contemporary times, against social issues that have beset a country constantly in need of a messiah.

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