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Delfin Tolentino, Jr.

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## The Indio As Other: Orientalism in *Tandang Basio Macunat*

Delfin Tolentino, Jr.



In what guise does colonialism appear in discourse, and in what manner does it operate in specific texts? How is the identity of the colonized reconstituted through figuration and rhetorical manipulation? How can the colonial motive be made to disclose itself? This article seeks to address these questions through a demonstration of the various ways by which narrative structure is exploited to camouflage sinister designs in colonial literature. The work in question is *Si Tandang Basio Macunat*, a nineteenth century protonovel in Tagalog written by a Spanish friar named Miguel Lucio y Bustamante.

Using conceptual frameworks drawn from recent critical theory, critics and scholars abroad have raised the same questions in their studies of Western representations of the colonized native in the "exotic" societies of the non-Western world. Specifically, they have brought to the fore the issues of race and imperialism as these are enunciated in various discursive practices. Only a few years ago, in an international conference on the sociology of literature, a poststructuralist critic had taken contemporary scholarship and criticism to task for failing to grapple with the problematic of colonial discourse. Specifically, he bewailed the failure of theory and criticism to push the boundaries of counter-texts "to that limit where the west must face a peculiarly displaced and decentered image of itself 'in double duty bound,' at once a civilizing mission and a violent subjugating force" (Bhabha 1986, 148).

It is precisely this decentered image of the West that Edward Said has sought to expose in *Orientalism*, one of the seminal works of contemporary critical theory. In this book, Said tries to dismantle the apparatus of power embodied in Western representations of "the

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Orient." Through a rigorous deconstruction of selected Western texts dealing variously with the ways of the eastern half of the world, Said demonstrates the formation and genealogy of a particular type of discourse which he calls Orientalism. This, he says, "can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1979, 3). Thus, in Orientalist texts, the Orient is cast not merely as a geographical terrain in the eastern hemisphere; it is reconstituted into an ideological construct, the silent and irrational other as defined and contained by the authority of the West.

As Said puts it, the division between the Occident and the Orient is "less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production" which he calls "imaginative geography" (Said 1986, 211). Although he has lavished his attention on historical accounts (chronicles, travelogues, memoirs, etc.) of life in the non-Western world, he has made it clear that the critique of Orientalism also offers a methodological approach to the analysis of literary works as colonial discourse. "For students of literature and criticism," Said states, "Orientalism offers a marvelous instance of the interrelations between society, history, and textuality; moreover, the cultural role played by the Orient in the West connects Orientalism with ideology, politics, and the logic of power." These, according to him, are "matters of relevance . . . to the literary community" (Said 1979, 24).

What Said has done in *Orientalism* is to demonstrate how certain texts, whether reportorial or literary, can be seen as the product of their own "ideological fiction." This article adopts a similar goal in its analysis of *Si Tandang Basio Macunat* and how this work functions as a discursive act of domination, i.e., as an Orientalist text, through its manipulation of rhetoric and narrative technique.

### **Tandang Basio and Its Covert Intentions**

Written by a Spanish priest of the Franciscan order and published in 1885 with imprimatur (the stamp of approval is significant, for this shows the work as part of the official discourse of the time), *Si Tandang Basio Macunat* is clearly the handiwork of a clever author.

Why should a Spanish priest weave a long prose narrative, with marked realistic dimensions, at a time when native writers were preoccupied with the composition of metrical romances, and the clergy itself was, expectedly, engrossed with literature of a devotional nature?

In a preface addressed to his Tagalog readers in the 1860s, Father Miguel Lucio declares: "Ang pagcatha co nitong salitang ito, i, naging parang isang calibangan co sa aquing sariling buhay; ngunit, t, mayroon din acong hinahangad dito sa aquing salita, t calibangan." ("My writing this story was something of a personal diversion; but I also have a purpose in both my writing and diversion.") This is not a complicated revelation of motive and design: narrative practice is presented as simultaneously an act of leisure and a pursuit of some serious goal. What makes it a curious expression of intent is the explicit refusal, as embodied in the next statement, to reveal the transcendent goal of the narrative enterprise: "Ang aquing hinahangad, ay hindi co sasabihin sa mga bumabasa, o naquiquinig nang pagbasa nitong aquing isinulat, cundi sasabihin ko lamang, na ang cahalimbawa nitong quinatha cong salita, ay isang dayap." ("I will not reveal my purpose to the reader or to the listeners to a reading of my story, but I will only say that this story I have created is like a lemon.") Metaphor is employed here to fill the gap created by the author's refusal to make an unequivocal statement of purpose, but he explains: "Anoman ang laqui nang dayap, at maguing ano ang caniyang ganda at caquinisan nang balat, ay cundi ninyo pigain, ay wala cayong macacuhang catas doon cundi amoy lamang at sucat." ("No matter how large the lemon may be, and no matter how beautiful and smooth its skin, if you do not squeeze it, you cannot get any juice at all, but only its smell.") This is both a warning and an admonition—the reader is warned not to dwell on the surface of the narrative, and enjoined to extract an essence that is supposed to reside in the text.

Obviously, Fr. Miguel Lucio is calling attention to the didactic purpose of his narrative, but the didactic dimension of his tale is not on the same level as the easily accessible moral universe of the parable. Polemics are involved here, as implied in the author's instruction on how to read the book:

Ang totoong bilin co sa manga iniibig cong tagalog, ay houag baga basahin nila itong salitang ito, na palactao-lactao, na parang inuugali nilang basahin ang manga libro, at cung magcacaganyan, marahil magcacamali sila, palibhasa, i, ang laman nitong salita, i, parang isang

usap; caya cailangang paquingan ang magcabilang parte, at pagtimbang-timbangan ang canilang mga catouiran, nang macuha ang catotohanan.

(My sincere request to my dear Tagalogs is that they should not read this work skipping portions as they are wont to do when reading books, for if that happens, they may be mistaken, because the content of this story is like a conversation; and it is necessary to listen to both sides and weigh carefully their arguments in order to grasp the truth.)

Three significant points are raised in this passage. First, it contends that *Tandang Basio* is not like other books (*mga libro*, which presumably refers to printed editions of the vernacular romances called *awit* and *korido*, the popular reading fare among the natives in nineteenth century Philippines)—a distinction that must be drawn to stress the authority of the whole narrative, whose parts are supposed to exhibit a plenitude of meaning. Second, it characterizes the text as *isang usap*, dialogue—an intimation of its argumentative character. Third, it demands objective assessment of the disputations so that truth can reveal itself. The implicit assertion here, of course, is that truth is immanent in the text, but this truth can disclose itself only with the full complicity of the reader.

What in the text warrants this mystifying expression of authorial purpose? The bulk of the narrative in *Tandang Basio* consists of an inner tale, a long chronicle of the travails of an affluent Tagalog family in the town of Tanay in the year of 1830. The misfortunes of this family appear undeserved: pious and prosperous, with a fine sense of charity and enterprise, Cabesang Dales and his family enjoyed not only a measure of prosperity but also an untarnished reputation as befits a family that leads an exemplary life. Cabesang Dales and his family displayed a fine combination of virtue and wealth; they were also beholden to Government, to Church, and to God. Thus they represented, from the point of view of the existing dispensation, the ideal family in native society. Unfortunately, Cabesang Dales and his wife Maria were not entirely bereft of ambition and pride. Guided by the belief that the felicitous outcome of education is social and economic mobility, they decided to send their only son Proper to school in Manila: through the acquisition of knowledge that only an exclusive education could bring, Proper should be able to escape the tyranny of bondage to the soil, the condition perpetually assigned to the unlearned peasant of the countryside.

As shown by subsequent events, the decision of Cabesang Dales and his wife did not lead to emancipation, only to the unexpected

absurdity of their own damnation. In Manila, their son Proper was gradually introduced to metropolitan ways and values. In the heady atmosphere of the capital, and largely through the influence of his schoolmates, Proper developed into a true disciple of Bacchus: he lost all interest in his studies and began to dedicate himself to the profligate life. In the pursuit of pleasure, he wasted all his money and promptly ran into debts; in desperation he was compelled to commit various misdeeds. His progressive degradation led to his imprisonment and to the erosion of his family's fortune and prestige. Pinning their hopes on the possibility of Proper's redemption, Cabesang Dales and his wife did not hesitate to use all their resources to get their son out of jail so he could be rehabilitated in the more clement milieu of their rural world. Their efforts were in vain. Proper remained committed to the degenerate life, and his parents ultimately found themselves divested of all that had secured for them a privileged position in colonial society. The tale's litany of misfortunes came to an end in the kind of peace that only death could bring.

#### A Defense of the Colonial Order

Why should Miguel Lucio y Bustamante take interest in this almost naturalistic tale of damnation which is relieved by not a single note of joyful possibilities? Why should a Franciscan priest bother to engage in this kind of fictive narration?

The "message" of *Tandang Basio* has already been explicated by Resil Mojares in his generic study of the Filipino novel, where he discusses the marked colonial perspective of the narrative. He asserts that *Tandang Basio* is "essentially a defense of a colonial structure founded on, among others, ideas of racial superiority and monastic power." Mojares relates the book to earlier colonial narratives, pointing out that its appearance in the second half of the nineteenth century coincides with a developing process of secularization in native society and the emergence of intellectual unorthodoxy among the educated elite. As summarized by W.E. Retana (and quoted by Mojares) in his entry on Miguel Lucio y Bustamante in the *Aparato bibliografico*, the narrative contains a cluster of obnoxious anti-native arguments, namely that "the indio should not go out of the place of his birth; that knowledge for him is dangerous; that he has no better companion than the carabao and no truer counselor than the friars"

(Mojares 1983, 94–98). *Tandang Basio* must therefore be seen as a counter-text to the emergent discourse of the rising *ilustrado* class, a discourse which the protonovel sought to exclude and forbid by consigning it to what Uta Schaub has called “the silent underground of the official discourses” (Schaub 1989, 307).

Mojares presents a close textual reading of the dialogue and the diegesis of the narrative to unfold its semantic content. My intention here is to show the duplicity of the text by revealing what it seeks to conceal through feigned objectivity. *Tandang Basio* maintains an explicit referential mode of expression and tries to create the impression of completeness but, metaphorically speaking, there are cracks in the text, and it is to these crevices that we must pay attention because these represent the space where the significant silences of the text reside. In other words, we have to show how the text can be made to reveal its hidden identity by identifying what it refuses to say.

In the preface, as we have already noted, the author refuses to reveal his intention, allegedly so that the reader may participate in the process of discovering what is contained in the text. His gentle advice to the reader to “listen to both sides, to weigh the logic of their respective arguments” implies that his work does not present an explicit proposition, that what we have here is an impartial narrative account. And yet he speaks of a “truth” that is resident in the text. What is this “truth” and where does it slumber?

The major strategy employed by the text to hide the novel’s discourse is embodied in the narrative framework. Earlier, we have pointed out that the bulk of the narrative consists of the story of Proper’s degradation and the misfortunes encountered by his family as a result of his misdeeds. This story is actually framed by a larger story which narrates the various transactions that take place between the narrator, who is a Spanish priest, and Gervacio Macunat or Tandang Basio, a wise old man in the town of Tanay. The priest-narrator has acquired the habit of visiting Tandang Basio because he has developed some fondness for the old man whom he describes as a man of talent, intelligence, and pleasant disposition. It is during one of these visits that Tandang Basio presents to the narrator an old manuscript written by his late father, Antonio Macunat, whom Basio acknowledges as the singular influence in his life. It is in this manuscript that we find the story of Proper.

What prompts the resurrection of the manuscript is the remark, made by the narrator in an earlier visit, that Basio, given his sagac-

ity, could easily have obtained a municipal post and earned a comfortable life if only he had studied in Manila and learned the Castilian tongue—a remark that drew the old man's ire. To explain his anger, Basio narrates the story of his life and later reads aloud the manuscript left by his father, in an effort to rationalize his view that learning the tongue of the colonial master—and higher learning itself—is not meant for the lowly Indio.

### The Invisible Author

The construction of the narratives shows the priest-narrator twice removed from the story of Proper in this text within a text. Is this merely a narrative technique, a purely aesthetic contraction? The point of this analysis is to show that far from being an innocent narrative device, the story-within-a-story structure of *Tandang Basio* serves to reinforce the projected image of a neutral author and to buttress the "will to truth" which is made to appear as the driving force in the construction of the text.

This privileging of an exterior feature of the text and its implication on narrative authority is an analytical device that relates to the method of "strategic location" as defined by Said in *Orientalism* where he uses the term to describe the position of the author in relation to the material that he is writing about. This location, Said explains, "includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the [Other], and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf" (Said 1979, 20).

In *Tandang Basio Macunat* the narrator, through the structure of the plot, is allowed to keep himself distant from what is narrated in two-thirds of the text. He has no direct connection to the story of Proper, and gains access to the tale only through the mediation of a text, the manuscript of Antonio Macunat, as this is read aloud by Basio. The narrator is also emphatic in saying that the manuscript is reproduced verbatim in his narrative ("isinalin . . . na ualang culang at ualang labis"). The question that must be raised is this: could he have adopted another narrative strategy? A clear option would be to present the tale of Proper in itself, without being framed by another narrative. But the author did not choose this option: it would impli-

cate him in the construction of the narrative artifice, expose his presence in the text, and identify him with the voice of authority whose perspective informs the material of the narrative. Instead, the author chose to distance himself through his narrative artifice, assumedly in the hope that in so doing he could succeed in creating the impression that in the telling of the tale not once did he intervene; its moral judgment was not his.

This strategy is connected to the implicit message of the preface about the impartiality of the narrative and the neutrality of its narrator. By implying the objectivity of the narrative, the author subtly props up his claim about the 'facticity,' 'honesty,' 'accuracy,' and 'truth' of his discourse-virtues that have to be invoked because the dominant views expressed by the polemics of the narrative are views that can easily be undermined if they are seen with the stamp of his ideology.

What are these views and how are they presented in the text? These views represent the colonialist perception of the Indio as an inferior being incapable of emancipating himself from his status as subjugated creature, and these views are articulated in the novel not by the Spanish narrator but by the two most positively characterized Indios in the story: Tandang Basio, the wise old man of the narrative, and Antonio Macunat who, though long dead, still makes his presence felt through his pervasive influence on his son. It may be added that the same views are presented in the story of Proper itself, by the virtuous Felicitas, Proper's sister, who registered the strongest objection to Proper's studies in Manila and who, at the conclusion of the tale, is shown being given funerary honors as if she were a martyr destined for beatification.

In his pioneering studies which include *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Mask*, the Negro psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon provides an analysis of the Western representation of the colonized native and the native's apprehension of himself as these are encoded in cultural practices. In these works, Fanon claims that the psyche of the subjugated native is a text that can be read and dissected to reveal the most profound dislocation wrought by Western power. *Tandang Basio* dramatizes how the colonized Indio's self-perception is distorted by definitions imposed by the colonizer. What emerges out of this is a false image of the Indio who is misled into thinking of himself in terms of what he lacks, and what he lacks is precisely what he sees in his colonial master.

Fanon's reference to the colored man's dualistic self-perception and the sense of otherness that surfaces in his confrontations with the white man establishes the important connection of his diagnosis of the maladies induced by Western power to the category of the Other as this is employed in the works of the French thinker Michel Foucault. Foucault has pursued the various incarnations of the Other as a category of exclusion which cannot be separated from the exercise of power: the Other is that which is defined as different, abnormal; to be so defined is to be contained and controlled by the defining Subject. As articulated by Foucault himself in his Preface to *The Order of Things*, the Other is "that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness) . . ." (Foucault 1973, xxiv).

### The Indio as the Inferior Other

As Said has shown in *Orientalism*, colonial discourse has reduced the subjugated native into this inferior Other, a defined Object that must be contained. Father Miguel Lucio's narrative is directed toward this form of reduction, as can be seen in Basio's most indicative pronouncements. Let us isolate some of these. Explaining his belief that the Indio should never bother to learn the Castilian language, Basio tells the narrator: "Ang castila [ay] castila, at ang indio ay indio . . . ang ongo, i, sootan man ninyo nang baro at salaoual, ay ongo rin at hindi tauo." ("The Spaniard is a Spaniard, and the Indio is Indio . . . the monkey, even if dressed in shirt and trousers, remains a monkey and does not become human.") Later, quoting the words of his father, he says: "Ang mga tagalog, ang mga indio бага . . . na humihiualay caya sa calabao, ay ang cadalasa, i, naguiguig masama at palamarang tauo sa Dios at sa Hari." ("The Tagalogs, the so-called Indios . . . who are separated from the carabao, usually become bad people, and traitors to God and the king.") And during their last meeting, Basio once more articulates his argument:

hangan macacayanan co, ay pagbabaualan co't hindi co, po, pahihintulutan ang aquing manga anac, at ibang manga camag-anac at caquilala, na mag-aral sila nang uicang castila, o iba cayang carunungan di bagay at ucol sa canilang calagayan at pagcaindio. Ang caucaan co, po, i, para nang naririnig cong madalas sa aquing ama. Ang Hari, ay

mangasiua sa caniyang pinaghaharian; ang anloagui, ay maghasa nang maghasa nang caniyang mga pait at catam; ang ama, t, ina, ay mag-alila sa canilang manga anac; at ang manga indio, ay mag-alaga nang canilang manga calabao.

(as long as I can, I forbid and will not allow my children, and other relatives and acquaintances to study the Spanish language, or any other knowledge which is not proper and pertinent to their status and their being Indio. My maxim is like what I often heard from my father. The king rules his kingdom; the carpenter keeps sharpening his chisel and his plane; and the father and mother take care of their children; and the Indios take care of their carabaos.)

Basio's pronouncements express a static world-view: in the universe, everything is fixed; man's nature and destiny have been set and cannot be changed; everything has its own place in the great chain of being, which cannot be altered. These represent the consciousness of the colonized Indio; at the same time, encapsulated in these statements are the projections of the colonized, his image of himself as mirrored in the Other.

These statements are invested with authority through characterization. The narrator characterizes Basio in the expository mode at the start of the narrative, describing him as the embodiment of virtue. Basio, in turn, characterizes Antonio Macunat as the paragon of prudence and wisdom in his narration of the story of his life and his family background. Investing these characters with the most positive attributes is a clever device: the two characters are made credible, and their pronouncements are made to ring with the voice of authority.

And so for the Tagalog reader of the nineteenth century, the argument of the text is made to appear acceptable through this narrative contraption. The Indio is made to appear as defining himself when in fact he is defined by his colonial master through a discourse that seeks to perpetuate his status as Object and reinforce the image of his difference. *Tandang Basio*, like other Orientalist texts, exhibits "the process of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" (Bhabha 1986, 149); in other words, it buttresses the politics of subjection and domination by configuring the Indio as a silent and irrational Other.

The principles governing discourse, according to Foucault, are masked, repressed, or relegated to an invisible space where they are obstructed from damaging the presumed unity and integrity of what

are actually decentered texts; what is allowed to surface is the "will to truth," or the order of words as analogous to what is true. And yet, as Foucault contends, an analysis or excavation of this layer would reveal that the division between what is true and false is a "historically constituted division" which involves systems of exclusion. The foundations of what is allowed and what is prohibited, what can be spoken and what must remain unspeakable, are institutional, and their persistence can be guaranteed only by "institutional support and distribution" (Foucault 1982, 216–19).

It is this significant connection of discourse to systems of exclusion and, consequently, the exercise of power that *Tandang Basio Macunat* ultimately conceals. As part and parcel of the discourse of Spanish colonialism, this narrative conceals its own fabrication; hence, the active intervention of the reader must be summoned, so that the space where the contradictions in discourse are silenced and rendered invisible can be explored and contained, in other words, so that the status of discourse as discourse can be disclosed.

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