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OROSIPON KAN BIKOLNON: INTERRUPTING THE NATION

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Abstract

If narration points to notions of fixity in terms of the position of the narrator and the subsequent structuring of events, *orosipon*, a Bikolnon word for “story,” suggests a refusal to fixity both in terms of the location of the narrator and the structure itself of the story: the story never stops being formed as it passes through multiple speakers. *Orosipon*, coming from the root word *osip* which approximates the verb “tell,” points to more than one person involved in an act of telling, which makes the act of telling proper to no one in particular: indeed, it is improper for any one to act as the sole teller. *Orosipon* suggests a multiplicity and fluidity that is prohibited by the homogenizing structuring of narration and community. *Orosipon* reminds us that any speaking necessarily entails a hearing, which is another instance of speaking as well. That is, *orosipon* points to the structural relationality of speaking which thus necessarily prohibits absolute control. This preliminary study follows the logic of *orosipon* in reading Valerio Zuñiga’s short story “An Sacong Aginaldo” published in the December 20, 1939 issue of the newspaper *An Parabareta*. Taking American colonialism and Tagalog nationalism as two stories in the process of being narrated during the period, the study reads the story as an instance of hearing-speaking, or of the insistence of the logic of *orosipon* itself.

Keywords

Bicol literature, Philippine vernacular literature

About the author

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*Orosipon*¹, an old Bikolnon word for “story,” was used by early twentieth century *Bikolnon*² publications to label most of the stories they published. It was used by *Almanaque o Kalendariong Bikol*,³ the regional almanac published by the region’s first printing house, Libreria Mariana. It was used as well as by *Sanghiran nin Bikol* (The Bicol Academy⁴), the publication of the Bikolnon writers’ organization of the same name. From the extant 1939 issues of the newspaper *An Parabareta* (literally, “the announcer of news”) all stories were also labeled as “*orosipon*” except for “Huring Panambitan” (“Last Words”⁵) by Juan Nicolas published on August 9, 1939, which was labeled as *halipot na novela* (“short novel”) occupying barely a page of the newspaper. The date of the publication of *Huring*

Panambitan suggests the reason for the sudden change of labeling: within the same month a new magazine was launched, the *Bikolnon*, published by Roces Publications, publisher of the influential Tagalog magazine *Liwayway*.

The Bikolnon writers welcomed the magazine *Bikolnon* with *An Parabareta*, even announcing its launching. The writers' enthusiastic welcome was immediately rewarded: barely five months after its launching, *Bikolnon* sponsored a regional competition for short story and poetry writing. The launching of the competition signaled the turn to academic literature by Bikol writers, who were previously more preoccupied with political, journalistic, and linguistic concerns. While older publications offered a few of their pages to stories, *Bikolnon* devoted many of its pages to short and long stories. In its announcement of the short story competition, *Bikolnon* names the Bikolnon story as "orosipon." Most of its published stories of various lengths were also labeled "orosipon." Other stories, however, were labeled differently. "Bitay na Paglaom" ("Dashed Hope"), for instance, written by Cirilo K. Labrador of Sorsogon, Sorsogon, was labeled as *katha*. The story appears to be a serialized story as the *Bikolnon* issue of July 20, 1940 provides the *gotos na kasaysayan kan mga enot na luas* ("summary of the events in the previous issues"). That "katha" was used to designate this longer story is contrary to the labeling of written works in the magazine's table of contents, which designates stories as "orosipon" and essays as "katha" such as Elias Ataviado's "Bakong aki ni Bonifacio" ("Not the Child of Bonifacio") and Augusto Presentacion Alvarez's "An Halaga Kan Pagbasa Nin Pahayagan" ("The Importance of Reading the Newspaper"). Instead of indecision, this play with the labeling indicates rather a moment of decision for the Bikolnon writers: what is our story? The indecision indicates a pause in the thinking of the Bikolnon writers and thus an act of control, of decision. This moment of naming of the Bikolnon story was of course corollary to the intellectualization of the production of stories, allowing intellectuals and writers to take the position of authority as producers and critics.

At the moment, however, we are less concerned with the Bikolnon writers' growing consciousness of a literary form that they were then attempting to label. We are more concerned with their growing consciousness of the word "orosipon" itself as the Bikolnon's word for "story."

Kellog and Scholes, studying the nature of the narrative, specify speaking as that which makes a tale, a tale: "For writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required" (4). It is, however, precisely this structure of a story predicated upon the notion of a speaker—or as Kellog and Scholes put it, a teller—that determines the social. For as Jacques Ranciere argues, not all speakers are sensed as such, making their

stories inaudible as well.⁶ Speaking's ontological non-relation translates into epistemic and material domination, authorizing the various forms of social domination. The notion of a speaker is predicated upon the sense of sight: the speaker who sees. The seer is the subject who is completely present to herself and in full control of herself. The self-presence of this subject enables her to see as well, and to speak of what she sees. The object seen, and spoken of by this self-presence, has thus been narrated/created. There is no relating in the speaking and seeing of this self-presence: the object seen and spoken of remains distanced and muted. Speaking thus erases multiplicity as such not just by dominating the arena of communication but by monopolizing it: the speaker has the sole rights to speaking. The epistemic control that results from this monopoly orders the social as well distributing and organizing spaces and bodies.

It is the determination of space, and the occupation of space established by speaking, which at the same secured speaking's place in the distribution of places. Movement itself is prohibited, Ranciere finds, in Plato's world. The establishment of Plato's world—the community of citizens where there is justice—is accomplished by the determination of time, which is to say, the determination of space. Plato achieves this through the figure of the artisan, which Ranciere finds as to have a double function in Plato's just community of citizens: the artisan is, on the surface, the member of the community who makes shoes and houses, but also and more importantly, the member who reminds everyone to be in their proper places in the community, at all times. That is, no one is to occupy two places at the same time. The regulation of time and space among the members of the community achieves the organization of the community, orders the community as such. For Plato, the order of the community is achieved and maintained by the solidity and fixity of space: members are determined by functions and their functions determine their proper place. The instance that the fixity of space, and with it the proper occupation of places of the members of the community, is poked even by just a movement of a member occupying two places at the same time, movement itself will ensue, revealing reason's locatedness.

This speaking has already been revealed to be nothing but a narrating of a narrator.⁷ That is, that which is spoken of is but a creation of this narrator, and that this narrator is always already circumscribed by her locatedness. It is to this violent reduction of being that Fanon issues a simple and direct answer: "The negro is not" (231). Fanon's speaking is a wrenching of the position of speaker, the establishment of a new language and thus of a new world.

Orosipon provides us with an alternative notion of being. Coming from the root *osip*, roughly meaning "to tell" as well, orosipon allows a different thinking of speaking as

such, and of stories. For orosipon⁸ is structurally multiple; a telling of more than one teller, a speaking of more than one speaker. It is also, in its very multiplicity, structurally fluid. That is, the orosipon never gets completed or solidified into a completely enclosed story. The complete one-ning, the communion that refuses difference as achieved by speaking, is structurally prohibited by orosipon.

In orosipon, we move from the immobility of non-relation that solidifies into essences to the movement of relating which prohibits solidification. The image of movement comes as a threat, as Ranciere had shown in his reading of Plato, and in no other way, as it challenges the very idea of what it is to be a human being, which cannot not be defined without the notion of language as speaking. We have seen, however, that “to be” is not really “to speak,” but “to hear-speak.” In other words, this movement is in the order of an encounter, of a relating. It is Mikhail Bakhtin who takes us furthest into the intensity of the movement of language. Bakhtin refuses to understand language either as langue or as parole but as that which incessantly moves between the language users—who are all at once speakers and understanders. For Bakhtin, then, there is no stillness at all at any time. There is never a “now” that is occupied by a presence. It is here that we understand (or come close to understand) what is at stake in writing or literature, which ultimately brings us to language as such. If we have been trapped for a long time in the thinking of the human being as that being who speaks, which is also to say that being with reason, the notion of a being who becomes in hearing-speaking, or in relating, takes us to the fluidity that structures language and the human being, who can no longer be properly called a human being. Language, writing, is the relating, that is also the hearing-speaking being.

Or more properly, as Marx reminds us, hearing-speaking beings, as language, does not appear in isolation. Language appears at the same time as a group of hearing-speaking beings acquire a certain consistency in their encountering as to effectuate a web of articulation in their hearing-speaking. We say at the same time, but for Marx, language is the property of the hearer-speaker beings, appearing as part of their property, and not as a separate entity. The hearing-speaking does not solidify into a speaking of a single speaker; it maintains the structure of a hearing-speaking, or of fluidity. It maintains the flow of fluidity, or in other words, its consistency.

It is this consistency of a relating which Jean Luc Nancy perhaps means when he argues that articulation actually takes place in a non-place, in a spac-ing. The emphasis remains on the movement, on the on-going-ness, the fluidity, of the taking which points as well to the multiplicity of the hearer-speakers. Nancy’s spac-ing is the consistency that is achieved by the articulation of hearer-speakers. Consistency provides another way of a

coming together that still recognizes difference in its coming together. Orosipon suggests this consistency of an articulation of a commonality that never achieves a complete communion.

Orosipon thus allows a different thinking of telling a story, one which denies the monopoly and thus dominance of a speaker. The story of a coming-together then is an orosipon—a story indeed, but one that is continuously told and changed by the continuous hearing-speaking of hearer-speakers.

Orosipon allows us to remember what is at stake in the thinking of what we have variously called “writing” or “literature,” which as Marx reminds us is the constitution of language and the language-users as such. While the notion of orosipon might seem to undermine anticolonial nationalist thinkers’ efforts towards a national unity that is strong enough to withstand the global and capitalist discourse, it only provides an alternative image of a coming-together in a self that remains fluid in its multiplicity. It is a unity that is not an immanence that totalizes, thereby erasing difference itself. The unity that is suggested by orosipon remains an orosipon, an articulation that has enough consistency to have achieved togetherness. Recognition of difference as such in a coming-together as suggested by orosipon does not break apart the orosipon into a total non-understanding. An orosipon maintains its multiplicity in its coming-together in a consistency, precisely in an orosipon.

Still paying attention to Marx, we remember that as it is the property of the human being to be related not only to other human beings but also to the conditions of production, and that this relationality structures the language as well, epistemic domination translates into the domination of the social goods. The dominance of Tagalog in the national imaginary functioned, or has been justified to function, to counter Hispanization and Americanization, but it also dominated over other ethno-linguistic groups in the archipelago.

The orosipon of the Bikolnon, the particular focus of this short essay, relocates speaking in Bikol. Recalling here, however, the continuous movement of the orosipon, the relocation of speaking is not a movement that stops in the new location but a sensing of other locations, other speakers in the continuous orosipon of the Philippine nation. That is, the study recognizes that the narrative of the Philippine nation-state, in conjunction with the narrative of capital, are but two strands, two locations, of speaking in the continuous and differently located simultaneous speakings of the orosipon of the Filipino nation. In the early twentieth century Bikolnon publications, Bikolnons hear-speak the orosipon of the

Filipino nation and take the position of hearer-speakers as well, thereby taking up space in the national imaginary.

AN OROSIPON KAN BIKOLNON: DETERMINING THE BIKOLNON

In its December 20, 1939 issue, the Bikolnon magazine *An Parabareta (El Noticiero)* published Valerio Zuñiga's "An Sacong Aginaldo," labeling it as *pamascong orosipon* ("Christmas story"). Ziuñiga's orosipon is significant for Bikolnon writing in several ways. Let us take a look at the orosipon's opening.

23 nin Disyembre, Antebispera o ika duwa na sabang aldaw can ka-aldawan nin pagsubang sa kinaban nin Dios-aki. An kaagahon malipot asin an panahon malomlom ta natititinik. An aldaw garo nasosopog magpahiling can saiyan liwanag, ta an sapot na mahipot nin alopoop natatahoban an saiyang saldang; alagad, can naghihigñodto na, garong napanale sanang hinapoy idtong mahibog na alopoop, tominonong an pagtitinik asin an nagñising pandoc nin si aldaw luminowas sa iyong nagpaliwanag asin nagpaogma caidtong caaldawon.

It was the 23rd of December, *antebispera* or two days before the day when the Child-God was born. The morning was cold and gloomy because of the light drizzle. The sun seemed to be ashamed to show its light since the thick clouds cover its rays. However, at around noon, the thick clouds suddenly disappeared, the drizzle stopped and the smiling face of the sun appeared which shone and made the day happy.

The choice to open and set the orosipon with nature, particularly the sun, is not new to Bikolnon writing in itself; stories⁹ by Nicolasa Ponte de Perfecto published in *Kalendariong Bikol* in the same decade used nature as well to characterize not only the stories but Bikolnon as a geographical and cultural location as against the nation's metropole, Manila. What differentiates Zuñiga's orosipon, for one, is its unhurried and detailed characterization of the sun, and two, its temporal specificity (December 23) from which previously published orosipons shied away.

As Benedict Anderson has shown, the precision of the calendrical-clock time of narration works wonderfully as a homogenizing machine; mentioning December 23 as the

specific day when the orosipon happens immediately takes the readers into that single day. Zuñiga's choice of the day is especially effective as Bikolnons, like other Filipinos, have been Christianized enough to know exactly what happens two days before Christmas. The orosipon's opening, thus, immediately swallows its readers to its time, effectively wrapping them into a community of readers.

While Ponte de Perfecto's orosipons published in *An Kalendaryong Bikol* make use of nature to start and ground the story (Barbaza), Zuñiga's orosipon is markedly more specific. The description of the morning sun as initially shamefully hiding behind the clouds because of the light drizzle works to pull its readers to its orosipon as well. It is a familiar enough sight to Bikolnons for it to be overlooked in its very everydayness image. Like the smile that the sun lets out around noon in the orosipon when the drizzle finally stops, the readers might very well smile as well in recognition of the sun's characterization. The recognition of what in fact is an everyday reality in Bikol (as well as in most parts of the archipelago) works then as a recognition of Bikol as a self: yes, that is Bikol, our land. This narrative technique called by formalists as defamiliarization seems to be the first time such specificity in description was used.

The precision of time in which the readers are gulped into one synchronized and thus homogenized time is also the horizontalization of space. The determination of time into a simultaneity is the determination of space: the distribution and occupation of a smooth uninterrupted space. Readers sucked into the homogenized time are also thereby sucked into the occupation of the horizontalized space. The horizontalization of space works to trace the contours of the geographical body of Bikol, thereby solidifying the entity defined: narrating thus the Bikolnon body.

The first sentence, however, immediately betrays as well the instability from which the orosipon itself issues. After specifying the day on which it happens, *23 nin Disyembre* (December 23), the narrator follows it up with "antebispera o ika duwa na sabang aldaw can kaaldawan nin pagsubang sa kinaban nin Dios-aki" ("antebispera or two days before the day itself of the birth of the Son of God"). The narrator stops and recognizes the foreignness of the occasion itself, the foreignness announced by the Castilian word *antebispera*, by translating it to the Bikolnon language with the translation signaled by the "or." The hump in the reading, and in the imagining of the readers as occasioned by the "or," throws the narration from its smooth flow into a movement away from the narration's now—Bikolnon, as a presence. The foreign, marking the discontinuity in the narration, however, will be immediately lodged within the stability of the familiar self of Bikolnon nature. Thus, the solidified self cushions, absorbs the undesirable effects of the foreign.

Here, the foreign is already comfortably absorbed such that the self is imaged as unmoved (unaffected) by the not-self. The self then appears to have been sufficiently solidified.

The community of readers as a self that turns out to be multiple as announced by the “or” indicates the need to address at least two groups of readers: one readily understanding the Castilian *antibispera*, and the other group who may not readily understand this word, thus the subsequent translation into the Bikolnon word for it. Indeed, the pages of the *An Parabareta* do not hide the multiple self indexed by at least three languages: Bikolnon, Spanish, and English. The multiple self will be further revealed to be in fact more than three, as the different varieties of the Bikolnon language is addressed by some of its writers. This multiplicity, however, will later be perceived as undesirable by some of the Bikolnon writers, and will be attempted to be controlled. The instability engendered by this multiplicity was addressed precisely by the writers of the *An Parabareta* and of the other publications. Its writers, including its very own publisher Estaquio Diño, engaged in a series of essays debating on the properties of the Bikolnon language.

Time, however, interrupts the smoothing of the plane of the Bikolnon body. The interruption of space comes in the form of absence. The first interruption mars the assembly of the Bikolnon writers where Diño took part as a lecturer: Casimiro Perfecto, publisher of *the An Kalendariong Bikol*, could not make it to the assembly as he was busy with his tasks as a member of the Instituto de Lengua Nacional. Diño, publisher of the *An Parabareta*, appears to be regarded as a reliable authority among Bikolnon writers as he was invited to speak at the conference of Bikol writers which was held in the same year when Zuñiga’s “An Sacong Aginaldo” was published. The assembly of Bikolists was organized by another publication, the *Bikol Pioneer Herald*. Diño was asked to talk about the orosipon of the Bikolnon and titles his lecture accordingly as “An Orosipon sa Bikol.” The first part of the lecture was published in *An Parabareta* in its November 1, 1939 issue.¹⁰ We recall here that the magazine *Bikolnon* was launched in August of the same year. Diño’s lecture thus coincides with *Bikolnon*’s launching of the orosipon writing contest, and the subsequent academization of the writing of orosipon. The conference itself must have been the same assembly held in October 28-29 announced by *An Parabareta* in its October 23, 1939 issue. Diño starts his lecture by immediately confessing his lack of authority on the topic and proceeds to invite his fellow writers to fill in whatever his lecture lacks. This lack, of course, is precisely the lack which the assembly has gathered to fill: the fullness of the Bikolnon presence, the proper identification not only of orosipon, but specifically that of the Bikolnon self.

The modesty with which Diño decides to open his lecture might have also been a gesture towards the convention of starting an *agi-agi* or *plosa* (metrical romance) with the humble recognition of the limits of one's talents, but the main body of the lecture itself attests to the lecturer's confession: the body of the Bikolnon and her orosipon are still to be defined. Diño chooses to trace the Bikolnon orosipon from its beginnings but finds himself not with an originary beginning of the Bikolnon and her orosipon, but with the Bikolnon's not-self, its Spanish colonizers: "An pagugid sa Orosipon sa Bikol, mahihimong poonan niyató sa kapanahunan nin mga kastilá na an dating pagsurat nin mga pilipino sinangléan kan abakada o alpabetong latina" (2). ("We might as well begin the tracing of the Bikolnon orosipon from the Spanish period when the Filipinos' old system of writing was replaced with the alphabet or the Latin alphabet"). The lecture discloses the self of Bikolnon as blurred not only by Hispanization but by Tagalog as well, with Diño crossing to literary works written in Tagalog and going back to what is Bikolnon. As such, not only was the self of Bikolnon undefined, but its orosipon as well. It was, however, precisely the goal of the conference and the lecture itself to define what was properly Bikolnon. The conference was for Bicol vernacular writers to discuss the different aspects of the development of the Bicol dialect, considered one of the richest dialects in the Philippines" (6). Another announcement claims that the assembly was the first of its kind to be held in Bicol. It must have been the first academic assembly of Bikolnon writers and intellectuals, but the first organization of Bikolnon writers and intellectuals was the *Sanghiran nin Bikol* founded in 1927. A letter written to the editor in *An Parabareta* by Reyna Purita of Villareal, Gubat-Sorsogon, published in August 20, 1939, recalls the pioneering efforts of the writers and organizers of the *Sanghiran nin Bikol*, and calls on writers to take up once again the worthy cause of the *Sanghiran* writers. Purita lauds Diño in his August 2 column Takiux¹² which declares the paper's agreeing to the editor of *Pioneer Bicol Herald*, Leon Sa. Aureus, published in July 29, 1939, which calls on Bikolnon writers to organize and work on the sanghiran of the Bikolnon language.

The letter suggests three things. First, the efforts of the *Sanghiran* Bikolists, based mainly in Nueva Caceres (now Naga City), reached a wider audience with Purita, the letter writer residing in the southernmost tip of Bikol, Sorsogon. Secondly, the *Sanghiran* work was serious enough for Purita to have remembered it, more than a decade later. However, the letter also suggests that the efforts did not last long enough. Thus, the need for another conference on Bikolnon language and literature.

Diño's lecture in the conference illustrates the Bikolnon writers' growing consciousness of the institutionalization of literature. Zuñiga's orosipon published barely a

week after the conference further suggests the increasing conceptual intrusion of academic literature in the orosipon of the Bikolnon. The labeling of most of the published stories before the launching of the magazine *Bikolnon* as “orosipon” could be suggestive of the conceptual distance that the Bikolnons still hold vis-a-vis the conceptual colonization of academic literature. However, Zuñiga’s writing of the orosipon “An Sacong Aginaldo” itself was a move to recognize the other, the colonial categories of literature, as much as it was a move to define and establish the properties of the Bikolnon. That is, the writing of the orosipon was a move to bridge the perceived gap between a proper way of writing and what was still the perceived way of writing printed short narrative prose in Bikol. This move to establish the self as the same as that of the other is a move to establish the equality between the self and the other, the movement of the articulation of Bikolnonness anchored on the proper as established by the image of the other. This writing of the Bikolnon self, however, is a writing that will be structurally determined by orosipon, by the restless *orosiponic* character of writing, of language as such, pulling and pushing the writing into different directions.

Among the extant orosipons, Zuñiga’s “An Sacong Aginaldo” is the first orosipon whose formal characteristics (as the more detailed description of the sun discussed above) approximate that of the western realist short story. What immediately distinguishes it from previously published orosipon is its length. Its length required its readers to turn the pages of *An Paraberata* six times. In the same year, *An Parabareta* published two orosipons in Bikolnon both written by Juan Nicolas, another orosipon in Bikolnon written by Aniceto Gonzales, and two orosipons in English both written by Johnny Belgica. Four of these orosipons are short enough to fit a single page of *An Parabareta*. “Ang Tulong Magtorogang” by Gonzales is the longest, occupying two pages of the publication. However, Gonzales’s orosipon is not properly fiction as a retelling of a folk tale. Among the extant copies of the *An Kalendaryong Bikol*, there are four orosipons by Nicolasa Ponte de Perfecto which were published in 1938 and 1939. These four orosipons are narratives that, like Zuñiga’s, fall under the category of fiction. Perfecto’s orosipons, however, only occupy one and half pages of the almanac’s pages. Zuñiga’s “An Sacong Aginaldo” thus comes across as something foreign in Bikolnon writing.

If the first paragraph of Zuñiga’s orosipon cushions the effect of the presence of the not-self in the comforting solidity of the self as discussed above, the second paragraph of the orosipon gives way to the confusion of receiving the foreign. In the first paragraph, the presentation of the self succeeds in enveloping the not-foreign as to make it already part of itself. The second paragraph takes on the foreign in its foreignness.

In the first paragraph the foreignness of the occasion, the *antebispera* was translated into Bikolnon, signaling its foreignness. The image of the Christmas tree in the second paragraph as not being part of the Bikolnon self is announced loudly in having the words themselves rendered untranslated and in the upper case amidst all the words in Bikolnon, which are in the lower case. More than the visuality of the word, however, Christmas tree intrudes as a presence as the narrator proceeds to describe the confusion that the invasion of this not-self engenders:

Sa harong in Ninay, kanigoan an riboc, ta an saiyang tolong saraday pang aki, si Bading, si Oro asin si Liling nagpapasuruhuay con anong palong pong o cahoy an marhay na saindang gibohon na "CHRISTMAS TREE." Si Bading na iyo an matua sa gabos, na gñogñotil na an "agoho," iyo an marhay, ta taranos an mga sagña minsan saraday an mga dahon. Si Oro na iyo an ika-duwa, nakikipasuhay man na an "miyapi", na palongpong iyo an maninigó ta dakol an mga sagña asin maramoong an dahon. Si Liling na iyo an gñohod, nagñigñdit man ma an "hagol," iyo an marhay, ta haralabá an mga sagña asin rawong rawong an mga dahon. Garo an mag-iiriwal si tolo, asin haralangkaw na an saindang pagtaram na iyong nakasadol sa saindang iná na dolokon kan saindang tolo, sa pagugid con ano ano an saindang pinag-iiriwalan.

In Ninay's house, her three children, Bading, Oro, and Liling, are noisily arguing over which kind of tree would they use to make their "CHRISTMAS TREE." Bading, the eldest of the three, insists that "*Agoho* is the best tree since its body is straight and the leaves are small." Oro, the second child, argues that *miyapi* is the best tree to use since it has a lot branches and the leaves are many. Liling, who is the youngest, protests that *hagol* is the best tree since its branches are thick. They are already close to fighting with their voices already shrieking when their mother speaks and asks them what is it they are arguing about.

From pulling its readers into the community and land of the Bikolnons in the first paragraph, the narrator then zooms in on a specific house, that of Ninay's. From the warmth that the sun finally decides to bestow, the narrator brings its readers to the heat of an argument—that of Ninay's three children. Here we have narration and its homogenizing

powers stopped loudly (*riboc* literally means “noise” in Bikolnon, although figuratively used to mean argument) in its very tracks by orosipon.

The narration brings with it the narrating powers of Christmas tree, intruding as it were the warmth of the Bikolnon land. We know very well that the image of the Christmas Tree goes beyond its religious function. As it homogenizes the religious belief and the rituals that come with it, capital enters as well, translating the tree into a need and eventually becoming a commodity. Yet, we see orosipon, language as such, stopping the narration. The children ask: which of our trees here makes the best Christmas tree? The eldest argues for *agoho* since the branches are straight and the leaves are small, the second child argues, on his part, for *miyapi* since there are many branches and leaves, and lastly, the youngest, Liling, argues that *hagol* will make the best Christmas tree, since the branches are thick. Ninay, the mother, wrenches the meaning from the tree and establishes it on the basis of practicality: the best tree is the tree nearest to our house.

Between the image of the Christmas Tree and its presencing there lies language as such and the materiality of its production. The arrival of the Christmas Tree as the real of the image is delayed by the undecidability, or as Derrida puts it, in the iterability that structures representation as such. The undecidability that occurs in the transfer has to do with the materiality of the geologic condition of the peninsula as well—the trees that are produced by the Bikolnon land on which the children base their question. With the mother stilling the movement of meaning with practicality, the children proceed with the preparation of the tree, making all sorts of decorations by hand. It is not just the children who are busy with the Christmas preparations; the mother, too, is busy preparing her children’s clothes to be worn in the traditional midnight mass. The narration thus proceeds.

To be sure, the writing of the orosipon is an articulation of the Bikolnon. The orosipon is published by the publication *An Parabareta*, whose banner head proclaims “Parasorog sa capacanan nin magna Bicolnon” (“Defender of the welfare of the Bikolnon”). The pages of the *An Parabareta* trace the contours of the geographical self of the Bikolnon as the readers partake of various writings about different events happening all over the peninsula and even the two island provinces of the political region of Bicol. Fiesta in Libon is reported as well as the preparation for a grand celebration for the town fiesta in Virac. An old woman got hit by a car and died as a consequence. A new hospital inaugurated in Legazpi where a meeting of communists was also held with the lone female member attending. A meeting of Bikolists in Naga City for the *sanghiran* of the Bikolnon language. The towns where the events are reported to have happened serve as points that spread out horizontally on the smooth plane of the geographic body of the peninsula of Bicol. The

publication, with its news articles, traces the limits defining the geographic inside of the Bikolnon as a separate self with its specific geographic body.

Zuñiga's orosipon treats space smoothly, almost uninterrupted. The movement of the characters from one place to another, one house to another, or from the house to forest does not make time appear. That is, there is no interval—a dog barking in the corner while a character walks, or the sound of people chatting when a character passes by a neighborhood store. Space is interrupted when time enters the orosipon. Time comes in the form of a letter announcing an absence. Rosa's husband, Carlos, works in a mining camp in Aroroy, in the island of Masbate, southwest of Sorsogon, the tip of the peninsula of Bicol. Absence wedges itself in space by its very absence. The narrator explains Didoy's absence:

ta huli sa kadaihon nin paghanap buhay, poon can sinda kasalon, na paduman sa dudulagnan o mina nin bulawan sa Baliti, baryo nin Aroroy, sa paghanap nin pangamlang o trabaho.

since the day of their wedding Didoy had not been able to find a job, he went to the mining village of Baliti, in the town of Aroroy, to look for one.

Thus Didoy's presence in the orosipon, like Perfecto's in the conference, is his absence. Although the island is still part of the political unit of the region, certain factors prevent Carlos from coming home as frequently as he would have wanted. In fact, he has been away from home for nine months. He sends home his 1.50-peso daily salary from work at one of the canteens at the mining camp, like what present-day Filipinos working overseas do with their salaries. Didoy, however, works not just within the Philippine archipelago but within the geo-political unit of the Bicol region. We might guess that the reason for Didoy's not being able to come home is the state of the system of transportation within the region. Yet, when Rosa hears the whistle of the ship, it is familiar enough for her to immediately recognize it as belonging to a specific ship:

An macosog na pito nin motor "Perla del Oriente," pagpondo sa dorongan na halé sa Aroroy, iyong napacobacoba can daghan asin naca paogma can pusó ni Rosa, ta idtong pito nagpapaisi saiya na ominabot na an saiyang namomótan na agom. (8)

Rosa's heart thumped wildly when she heard the loud whistle of "Perla del Oriente's" engine as it docked from its trip from Aroroy. It announced the arrival of her beloved husband. (8)

The specific information that the ship sailed from the port of Aroroy and not from any other port could very well be the insertion of the narrator's voice within Rosa's thoughts, informing the readers that what Rosa heard was really the whistle of the Perla del Oriente. Yet, Rosa immediately picks up her child, tightly embraces him, and whispers to him, "Nonoy, anion na si papa mo" ("Nonoy, your papa has arrived"), and with her child in her arms she goes over to the window and asks her Tiyang Ninay (Aunt Ninay): "Tiya, nadagnog mo an pito can motor Perla?" ("Tiya, did you hear the whistle of Perla's engine?") Ninay's response to Rosa suggests that the ship from Aroroy docks frequently enough for them to recognize its whistle or know the time of its arrival: "Garong nalomatignan co, alagad, na pasibayaan co, ta may pig-gigibo ako" ("I think so, but I was doing something so I really did not notice it.") If not for Ninay's preoccupation with the preparations for Christmas Eve, the whistle announcing the docking of the ship would also have been audible for Ninay.

Still, the orosipon remains silent on Didoy's inability to come home earlier and more frequently. This silence is buried, and thus is made more pronounced, in the happy preparations for Christmas Eve. The orosipon details the picking of the tree, the making of decorations, the cooking of the *noche buena*, and the preparation of the clothes to be worn for the traditional midnight mass. The orosipon, in other words, presents all these exotically. But what of the silence on Didoy's job in the mining camp?

The *An Parabareta* itself, however, was not silent about the mining in Aroroy, Masbate. An article by Ramon A. Alejo with the title "The Mining Camp: One-Man Government" supplies the readers with the information unsupplied in the orosipon:

The typical mining camp in Baguio, Paracale, and Aroroy Mining District is a complete city in itself. Like the International Settlement of Shanghai and ... in China, it has an independent government run by one man and he is known as the General Superintendent or Resident Manager. Like Louis XII, The Tyrant of France: he can say: I AM THE STATE.

This absolute power that is allegedly held by the Resident Manager of the mining camp allows him to run the camp like military camp:

The premises are fenced with barbed wire. At the gate are guards, stationed to prevent outsiders from entering the premises of the company. Mine workers are inspected at the gate when leaving the property and stripped of their clothes. (6)

It is not clear whether Alejo was also a Bikolnon since his articles discuss the general situation in three mining camps, or whether he writes in the Bikolnon language. The presence, however, of his articles on the pages of the *An Parabareta* suggests the need for the article to be published. His article further details the kind of surveillance that the mining camps maintain to ensure the continuity of production without the interruption of protests from the laborers.

The orosipon's image of Didoy, the mining camp worker, however, does not reconcile with Alejo's description. Didoy does not come home tired, angry and yelling at his wife. Instead, like the image of present-day Filipino overseas worker, Didoy happily comes home with all the presents to compensate for his absence. Stashed safely away from the orosipon is the hardship of living and working at the mining camp.

Another absence brings more exotic things. Ninay's own husband, Carlos, arrives that day as well "hale sa Juban sa pagpahagot, asin may dara na daraculang pipatos can saiyang binacalan" ("from Juban, from abaca harvesting and was carrying big bags of things he bought") (15). While the orosipon mentions *pagpahagot*, referring to abaca stripping, it remains silent as to the specific reason for his absence. Does he own an abaca farm? Is he a *parahagot*? The orosipon instead enumerates again the things that Carlos brings home:

Pagbucaha ni Ninay can sindang pinatos na dara can saiyang agom, na hiling niya an magna vestido asin sapatos para sa magna aki, igwa man nin tagasarong kilong nuseses, abalyanas, castanyas, asin tagsarong dosena na mansanas asin peras asin duwang kilong pasas, duwang kilong ubas, dacol na naranhitas asin lansones.

Ninay unwrapped the presents brought by her husband and saw the clothes and shoes for her children. There were also a kilo of one dozen each of apples and pears, two kilos of raisins, two kilos of grapes, and a lot of oranges and *lanzones*.

Except for the *naranhitas* (Philippine orange) and *lanzones* (a Philippine fruit grown in Laguna and in Davao), the rest of the fruits are imported. Constantino writes that “in 1899, the Philippines purchased only 9% of its total imports from the United States; by 1933 the proportion had risen to 64%” (307). Indeed, among the first laws enacted concerning the Philippine colony were those which would allow the free flow of American products into the Philippine market. The series of Tariff Acts enacted from 1901 protected American businesses by eliminating competition and lowering the tariff rates on some of the American products. The Treaty of Paris allowed Spanish products to be imported for ten years but the US Congress immediately passed the Payne-Aldrich Act, which finally allowed unlimited quantities of American goods to enter the Philippine soil tax-free.

Although the narrator does not specify the town where the story happens, there are two indications pointing to a coastal town in Sorsogon, the southernmost most tip of the peninsula. The townspeople can hear the whistle of a docking ship and Ninay’s husband, Carlos, comes home from Juban, a town in Sorsogon. In Sorsogon, Bikolnon historian Luis Dery writes that the commercialization of hemp (*bandala* in the Bikolnon language) significantly changed the lives of the Sorsogaños. Hemp has long been part of the lives of the people of Bikol with its fiber providing the people various uses in their housing, fishing, and clothing. Its importance to pre-colonial Bikolnons is strongly suggested by archeological findings of “fibrous-like materials with the dead” (Dery 106). Certainly, the Spanish colonial authorities discovered the *bandala*’s importance early on and subsequently made it part of the colonial tribute exacted from the peninsula’s inhabitants. A decree was established as early as December 10, 1646 mandating the cultivation of the abaca plant by all the natives. By 1661, Dery finds the abaca plant already an expensive commodity with its price pegged at four reales per *chinanta* (equivalent of 6.326 kilograms) of abaca. The Spanish colonial authorities made use of the abaca to make the ropes and riggings for their galleons. Eventually a Royal Rope-Making Factory was established in the Bicol region to supply the Spanish galleons with all their roping and rigging needs. The Spanish, however, limited themselves to using the abaca in their ships. It was the English and especially the American traders from the early nineteenth century who linked Bicol to the global economy by transforming abaca into an export commodity. The integration of the region’s economy, especially the abaca-producing provinces of Albay and Camarines Sur, to the international fiber market by the latter half of the nineteenth century was such that “the economic cycles of the industrial West are clearly reflected in the local crop prices, wage rates, government revenues (including cockfight admissions), and even the rate of marriage” (Owen 96).

There are no articles in the *An Parabareta* that reveal the otherwise unknown living and working conditions in abaca farms. There are, however, news articles announcing changes in government policies on abaca trading, approval of the quality of abaca by inspectors. Abaca as Dery writes has long been integral to the Bikolnon life. The silence in Zuñiga's orosipon and in the pages of the *An Parabareta* then must be the silence of the already known, the commonly sensed.

Carlos's absence, however, like Didoy's absence, results to an empty space which must be filled. Both Didoy and Carlos fill the empty space with foreign, exotic food and goods. These foreign, exotic things are welcomed into the very intimate spaces of their houses. The foreignness is made more pronounced as the narrator tells of the neighbors who are enticed to come up to the house of Carlos and Ninay by the beautiful voices of the children singing Christmas carols, and are amazed at the beauty of the Christmas Tree, its decorations and the children's toys. All of which, the narrator reveals, the neighbors have not seen before. The giddy happiness felt by everyone with the presence of all the amazingly beautiful exotic goods makes the absences of the men of the families justified. The children are the happiest as they are all given what they have been desiring the most: automated toys, all grimly hinting at the impending war that will reach the archipelago in a year:

Si Bading sarong tren na may guyod na duwang bagon na macadalagan ta
igwa nin cuerdas; ki Oro sarong aeroplanong bomber na pagcuerdase na
layog asin naghahagobohob asin ki Liling sarong corocanyon na automatico
na pagcuerdas man sonodsonod an potoc. (16)

A train for Bading which has two wheels and can run. A bomber airplane for
Oro which is also automatic. And an automatic canyon for Liling. (16)

Zuñiga's orosipon does appear to be a clearing and taking up of space. Like the specifications on the Bikolnon language and its orthography, which the Bikolnon writers debated on in the pages of the *Sanghiran nin Bikol* and the *An Parabareta*, the orosipon takes up space by giving the Bikolnon a body. The orosipon makes the Bikolnon visible: the Bikol geographic body in the details of the setting, the Bikolnon in Rosa and Didoy, Carlos and Ninay and the three children.

The appearance of the self, however, as in any self-ing, comes in its recognition of the not-self. In publications such as *Sanghiran nin Bikol* and the *An Parabareta*, writers like

Estaquio Diño, Herrera, Guray, Casimiro Perfecto, and Luis Dimarumba argued in print as to the specifications and categories of the Bikolnon language by placing it side by side with the English and Castilian languages. In making the geo-body of Bikol and the Bikolnon people visible, Zuñiga's orosipon differentiates the Bikolnon from the not-Bikolnon. In other words, the Bikolnon appears at the moment that the not-Bikolnon appears for the Bikolnon.

The appearance, however, is not the clear and transparent eruption of a presence which thereby takes position in space. The debate on the Bikolnon language bares the multiplicity of speakers and thus the fluidity of the Bikolnon. Zuñiga's orosipon presents the community as being grounded in absence. The absences in the orosipon filled up, as they were, by the material foreign things were not exactly absences, an emptiness that stands still in its very emptiness. The empty space created by the absence, on the contrary, points to a movement: the encroachment of another spatial order. The absences, compensated in the narratives with exotic goods and food, point to another speaker, speaking from a different location, and of a different order already summed up by Marx around one and a half centuries ago: "Capital by nature drives beyond every spatial barrier" (524). Capital reaches Ninay's home with Didoy and Carlos, going away to make a living and going back home on Christmas eve (Carlos) and on Christmas day (Didoy), giving everyone their Christmas presents bought by their very absence from their homes.

The spectacularity of the foreign goods which fill in the space vacated by the absence obscures the presence of this differently located speaker. Thus the absences in the Bikolnon narratives are not absences as such that translate into spatial emptiness, breaking apart the orosipon of the Bikolnon. The absences are engendered by the movements of insertions by the epistemic and spatial configurations of American capital and the Philippine nation-state. The presences of these orosipons take up space in the orosipon of the Bikolnon engendering gaps and movement in the orosipon of the Bikolnon.

Still, the orosipon ends with the ultimate gift: Rosa's child born in the absence of Didoy. Apparently Rosa is already heavy with child when Didoy leaves for Aroroy. The child, Rosa's surprise Christmas gift to her husband, is born a few months after he left. As the child takes his presence in the orosipon, the orosipon of the Bikolnon begins to maintain consistency in the orosipons of its writers. As the Bikolnon orosipons take more and more space, however, the statist and capitalist discourses hem in the orosipon of the Bikolnon.

Any speaking, however, is always already a hearing, as these Bikolnon writings indicate. The speaking of these Bikolnon writings is a hearing of the nation's narration. If

speaking is an ordering of spaces and the distribution of the social goods among the bodies, orosipon is an interruption of this ordering. As these Bikolnon writings show, however, an interruption as another speaking is also always already interrupted in its interruption.

Thus the Bikolnon orosipon interrupts the national orosipon. Orosipon, however, is the uninterrupted interruption: Bakhtin's incessant movement of the word. A word, which if we stay close to Bakhtin, we understand to be more of a word-ing: a becoming rather than a being.

NOTES

- ¹ I thank my anonymous reader/s for the valuable suggestions and helpful comments.
- ² Based on the extant materials.
- ³ Sometimes spelled as *Kalendariog Bikol*, *Almanake okon Kalendaryong Bikol*, or *Kalendariong Bikolnon*.
- ⁴ The banner head of the publication itself translated *Sanghiran nin Bikol* as *Academiang Bicol*.
- ⁵ Translation by Maria Lilia F. Realubit, page 243, in *The Bikols of the Philippines*.
- ⁶ My reading of the notion of speaking is primarily from the work of Ranciere. His most sustained discussion of this is in *Disagreement: Politics and History*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1999.
- ⁷ See for example Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.
- ⁸ Osip itself illustrates language's iterability in the various ways the word and its derivatives are used. Osipon could also mean gossip (osip-osip), rumor, or casual conversation. In the late 1990s, while osipon [usipon] was still being used as story in the town of Bacacay, Albay, according to people I interviewed there, osip [usip] was already then being used to mean "to squeal" in Naga City, revealing a verticalized view of the social order (the presence of an authority to which the person will "osip" something against somebody). This *orosiponic* journey of the word osip merits perhaps another paper to explore what the change illustrates in the formation of the social. I thank my anonymous reader's suggestion to discuss the other meanings of the word.
- ⁹ *An Maimon* (1938), *An Binayaan* (1938), *An Ina Kan Parahabon* (1939) and *Parabibingka* (1939).
- ¹⁰ It was supposed to be continued in the following issue but the last part of the lecture was never published, at least in the remaining 1939 issues which are the only extant copies of the newspaper.
- ¹¹ From his first name Estaquio.

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