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Pamumuwesto of Mount Banahaw

RENE D. SOMERA

The people of Sta. Lucia in Dolores, Quezon believe a mystical story handed down to them by their forebears. A person's belief in this mystical tale rests on great faith, so the people contend. This spiritually symbolic legend has actually transformed the entire area¹ into a religious complex now known as "Santong Lugar," or the Holy Place.

When the Crucifixion took place, this mystical story begins, a strong earthquake shook the earth. So strong was it that Mount Calvary was divided into half ("nabaak ang bundok"). As an act of conversion, five archangels who were nonbelievers prior to Christ's death ("hindi binyagan") carried half of the mountain, so the story goes, and brought it to Mount Banahaw. This explains why some of the landmarks associated with Jesus Christ are now found in the Mount Banahaw area.

There is yet another version to this mystical tale. This other account says that after the Crucifixion, God the Father expressed displeasure at the world's continuing turmoil despite His Son's

As a member of the First Ateneo Summer Field School supervised by Dr. Prospero R. Covar, I am greatly indebted to discussions with the latter which eventually gave shape and direction to most of the ideas incorporated in this paper.

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1. This "entire" area actually includes the nearby barangay called Kinabuhayan, approximately an hour's hike from Sta. Lucia. As its name implies, Kinabuhayan is regarded as Christ's "place of resurrection," hence, mystical stories to this effect are common in the place. This article however focuses only on the Parang-side of Mount Banahaw.

For an integrative discussion of pamumuwesto in both Parang and Kinabuhayan communities, see Prospero R. Covar's "Prayer in Mount Banahaw Context," paper presented at the Philippine Province Seminar on Local Forms of Prayer, MPR, Ateneo de Manila University, 10 June 1985.

supreme sacrifice on the Cross. The Middle East remained a ravaged land, and hence, He decided on a "mystical transfer" of the Holy Land. According to this story, God the Father chose Mount Banahaw as the best site.² Consequently, the believers assert that Jesus Christ's Second Coming as foretold in the Bible will be a descent from heaven to this mountain. Thus, the people who have settled at the slope of Mount Banahaw live a fervent religious life in preparation for the prophesied *Armageddon*, which, they believe, will happen right in their midst.

Mystical though these accounts are, the whole Mount Banahaw area has now become an area of homage and worship, with visitors the whole year round coming from all over the country and beyond. Through the years, many people have come to regard the place as "Ang Bagong Herusalem" or the New Jerusalem, the "tierra santa de promission."³ In the entire Mount Banahaw religious area, there are more or less thirty local-based religious sects or groups, the largest of which is called *Suprema de la Iglesia del Ciudad Mistica de Dios* (Supreme Church of the Mystic City of God).⁴ By virtue of its history, this group holds the richest religious tradition in the area. It is in this context that the *Suprema de la Iglesia del Ciudad Mistica de Dios* (hereon referred to as *Mistica*) is considered the "gatekeeper of the Santong Lugar tradition."

Perhaps what serves as the binding spirit for all the different religious groups in the area is the mountain itself, considered sacrosanct by all. Though largely divergent in their systems of homage and belief, the various religious sects in the place all regard Mount Banahaw—"the holy mountain"—as the common denominator in their religious worship.⁵

2. This account was gradually pieced together from informal exchanges I had with Crisostomo Llamado, 40, and Aquilina Noche, 57, considered "unofficial leaders" of *Bayang Herusalem*, a spacious puwesto which serves as starting point as well as resting area of ordinary visitors to the area. Other details were provided by Arcadia Escueta, 52, sister-in-law of Aquilina, and other unidentified visitors of the place who willingly traded stories with me during my several visits.

3. Literally translated, "holy promised land," a caption on the illustrated map, *Holy Places Inside the National Park*, prominently displayed on the wall of the Bureau of Forest Development (BFD) office in Sta. Lucia.

4. It was officially registered as a religious group with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in 1952.

5. My informants, in an attempt to explain the sacredness of the mountain and their religious activities associated with it, referred me to the *Holy Bible*, Matthew 5: 14, which reads: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill can not be hidden." The very same lines, in Tagalog translation, appear on a big poster board, "Ang Labin-dalawang Aral ni Kristo," at the front of the Ciudad Mistica de Dios church.

Regardless of affiliation, one of the common expressions of religious worship in the area is the practice of visiting and praying before shrines known as *puwestos*. As a Spanish-derived Tagalog term for *place*, a "puwesto" (*lunan* in traditional Tagalog), in the parlance of Mount Banahaw religious groups, refers to a natural formation (e.g., spring, cave, rock, river, etc.) now regarded as a holy shrine. Being a sacred place, a *puwesto*, as perceived by the people, is hallowed by religious or Biblical association. The practice of visiting these *puwestos*, according to a desired or specified sequence, is called *pamumuwesto*, a term which inherently carries a religious meaning in itself, since as practiced by Mount Banahaw folk, this is considered an integral part of the doctrinal teachings of their faith.

Puwestos found in Mount Banahaw are many and varied. On the Parang-side of Mount Banahaw alone, there are over fifty of them.⁶ As natural formations, they can be roughly classified into four types: (1) *bato* (rock); (2) *bukal* (spring); (3) *kuweba* (cave), and (4) *taluktok* (peak) *puwestos*. Admittedly however, this taxonomy is limited and preliminary (Appendix).⁷

The mystical stories surrounding Mount Banahaw find empirical basis in early historical records and documents. As early as 1870, a report submitted by the alcalde mayor of Tayabas, Emilio Martin, addressed to the Spanish governor-general, gives us the first description of a religious "cult" on the slopes of Mount Banahaw. The report mentions "baths where the pilgrims were baptized, seven trees successively marked 'first heaven' to 'seventh heaven' and a huge rock with a flat top upon which lighted candles were left to burn." In conclusion, the report laden with obvious Spanish bias, says: "Those which the inhabitants call temples, hermitages and holy places are represented only by rocks, trees and streams."⁸ Yet, the French explorer Marche, writing in 1887, pointed out that to the inhabitants of the place, Mount Banahaw

6. The Kinabuhayan-side likewise is a complex of *puwestos*, from *Pinaggapusan* at the foot of the mountain to the *Ilalim*, its crater.

7. My co-fieldworkers and I are indebted to Mrs. Gloria Samiano and her family who served as excellent hosts for the duration of the Field School. Most importantly, *Ate Glo* as she is fondly called, was largely responsible and instrumental in our gradual integration with the Mistica community, of which she is a respected member and priestess.

8. Quoted in Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1979), p. 86.

was indeed a "holy land," where mystical stories explained a lot of seemingly unfathomable mysteries.⁹

Pilgrimages to this holy land did not escape Marche's attention and he included these in his account. He mentions that a pilgrim's gathering, with participants, coming from different areas of the archipelago, had been raided by the *guardia civil* at the request of the parish priest of Dolores town, the place where the pilgrimage usually began.¹⁰ On the other hand, Reynaldo Iletto textually analyzed a literary piece called *awit* to explain the significance of such a pilgrimage from the native's own perspective. According to his own analysis, the pilgrimage involved several days experience on Mount Banahaw "with much climbing, crawling through narrow caves and intense prayer in the heat of the sun." As Iletto concludes, pilgrims went there to experience hardship and exhaustion and to go through a "bloody and difficult ascent to Calvary," in desire for a common experience of *damay* with Christ's *pasyon*.¹¹

THE PUWESTO CONCEPT

A puwesto, in the civil government sense, is "rented space" in the market place, for which a license is to be secured from the authorities. Here, an endower-recipient relationship is clearly apparent. The transference of meaning from "stall" to "shrine" retains these same categories. For in the context of the Mount Banahaw usage of the term "puwesto," God is the endower while the *mananalangin* becomes the recipient. The word now acquires a "religious" meaning; one does not "rent" a puwesto from God, it is a holy endowment, "impregnated with sacredness."¹² Mount Banahaw's terrain as mountain logically points to the existence of puwestos or natural formations in the area. However, mystical stories associated with the place, and openly believed by the people, add more to this claim. It is not mere geography but according to a "divine plan" that the puwestos evolved, as the old

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. For a more exhaustive discussion, see Iletto's book, Ibid. p. 89 and specifically Chapter 2, "Light and Brotherhood," pp. 37-91, where he traces the beginnings of Apolinario de la Cruz's *Cofradia de San Jose* and how the Mount Banahaw tradition eventually began as an offshoot of this movement.

12. I am indebted to Edilberto Alegre, Asian Center, UP, for his discussions with me regarding *puwesto* semantics.

folks would glibly explain.

The histories ascribed to each puwesto are different and interpretative, depending on who is giving the account. Some of them are identified with particular sects based in the area; others have been known since a long time ago, while a few others have just been recently discovered and named.¹³ The Mistica members point to their late spiritual leader-adviser, Monsignor Amador Suarez, as mostly responsible for the name-giving. Hence, *Balon ni San Isidro* as a name for a bukal puwesto came from him, they say.¹⁴ They recount an old account about a bird known as *Ibon de Custodio* as having guided "Mamay" (as Mon. Suarez was fondly called) and his companions, into the dense thickets of Mount Banahaw while following the bird's flight. This was during the early fifties, the time of the *Santong Boses* (Holy Voice). It is said that this bird appeared and reappeared, after the Santong Boses had given instructions to Mon. Suarez to go to the mountain for prayer and reflection.¹⁵ In effect, the *Ibon de Custodio*, as the story is now told and retold to children, was actually believed to be God in a *balatkayo* or disguise. Hence, to the Mistica flock who deeply treasure this account, it was God himself who showed their *Obispo Misionero* the way to the puwestos. Their leader, with spiritual guidance from above, merely named them.

To the Mount Banahaw mananalangin, the puwesto as natural formation, is a manifestation of God's immense *kapangyarihan* or power. For example, no ordinary mortal could create or carve such a perfect, grandiose cave as *Kuweba ng Dios Ama*. (These are the exact words of an informant.)¹⁶ In the heart of the mountain

13. The former are called the traditional puwestos while the latter are referred to as "puwestong bago." These are arbitrary categories, however, since a rigid classification as this is bound to create a stir among the religious groups identified with particular shrines, a phenomenon which is probably related to the ownership of "poons" in the Catholic sense.

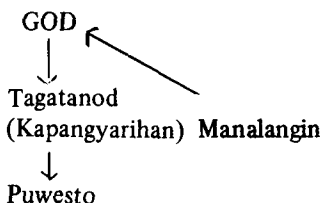
14. For this section of the article, the following informants provided varied details and insights: Bonifacia Suarez, 33; Dionisio Samiano, 50; Teodosia Pisara, 50; Cirilo Romero, 48; Ligaya Umali, 19; Bayani Mendoza, 26; Elpidia Dalisay-Suarez, 65; Marcelina Asican, 40; and Floro Bueno, 35 – all members of the Mistica religious sect. Among these informants, Mrs. Elpidia Suarez provided the fullest account, being the widow of the late Mons. Amador Suarez, who used to be the *Obispo Misionero* of the Mistica church.

15. There are likewise mystical stories associated with this same account, as narrated by informant Bonifacia Suarez, 33, daughter of the late Mons. Suarez. These stories alone could be the subject of another article.

16. This, in the words of Eduardo Arceo, 18, our *pator* when we climbed Mount Banahaw ourselves, May 20-21, 1985. It was in this cave, *Kuweba ng Dios Ama*, we spent

itself, where one has full concentration, one communes with Nature spirits amidst natural formations, like springs, caves, rocks, that God alone, in His absolute power, controls. For the rock *is*: it always remains itself, it does not change; yet to pray before it is a conscious, overt recognition of the sacrality of God's kapangyarihan which created it.¹⁷

Furthermore, it is believed that a *tagatanod* or guardian resides in the puwesto, a "banal na espiritu," who oversees men in the forest and guides them safely through it. This resident Nature spirit also wields kapangyarihan and many, in certain opportune occasions, manifest it through certain means. It is however mostly in safe guidance in the forest that the tagatanod's kapangyarihan is made apparent.¹⁸ The following diagram schematically illustrates the relationship among God, the puwesto, tagatanod and the mananalangin himself:



In essence, the mananalangin, although he is before a puwesto, recites his *dasal* (prayer) directly to God; this is his main prayer. Yet, he also says a thanksgiving prayer or sings a *dalit* (hymn) addressed to the kapangyarihan in the puwesto, to the "banal na espiritu" whom he knows lurks nearby.¹⁹ Perhaps this will be better understood when the puwesto is seen along with other puwestos, not as a concept nor as a singular, isolated entity, but as an integral part of a complex routine of ritual actions and elements meaningfully organized in the whole pamumuwesto practice itself. For ardor as he prays and chants before a *single*

the night. (The local term "pator" to mean a *guide* seems, a corrupted variant of *pastor*, a leader or a minister.)

17. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), pp. 155-56.

18. Mistica *pators* Marcelina Asican, 40, and Floro Bueno, 35, after initial reluctance, shared the information that they do possess a "lihim na dasal" (secret prayer) which, to my understanding, corresponds to an "anting-anting" or amulet. According to them, they silently recite this as a direct address to a puwesto's *tagatanod* everytime they are given charge of a group of non-Mistica mamumuwesto visitors; this is for a safe guidance through the forest.

19. Ibid.

puwesto cannot quite accurately reflect the full meaning ascribed to that physical referent. Only the complex dynamics of the pamumuwesto ritual best serve to empirically illustrate that meaning.

MISTICA PUWESTO-TREK

It has now become a traditional practice among the members of the Mistica religious group to observe *collective pamumuwesto*²⁰ during the month's last day, continuing up to the very first day of the succeeding month. A day or so prior to this appointed time, Mistica members from other barangays, mostly from nearby Batangas and Cavite, come to Sta. Lucia to participate in the ritual. This group (including local members), usually numbering fifty or more, assemble at Central, the Suprema's compound, where an intensive prayer activity is held, serving as a psychological and spiritual preparation for the two-day retreat to the mountain.²¹

In order to understand the Mistica collective pamumuwesto ritual as "religion in action, the cutting edge of the tool,"²² it is necessary to probe into the organic routine of the ritual itself.

The following is the organic form of the ideal pamumuwesto routine organized by a Mistica pamumuwesto group:

1. Assembly of mamumuwesto group at Central
2. Prayer before altar in Suprema's house where MBB or Maria Bernarda Balitaan's picture, the sect's foundress, is hung
3. Prayer before main altar in church
4. Prayer in plaza before big wooden cross (church's left side)
5. Prayer before "Pinto ng Kalbaryo" (church's right side)

20. It must be clarified here that pamumuwesto can likewise be observed by a single individual or before a single puwesto, but with an entirely different set of rituals.

21. The bulk of the details in this section of the paper was gathered from three priestesses of the Mistica sect: Helen Hernandez, 43, Gloria Samiano, 44, and Teodosia Pisara, 50. The latter, a high priestess, is considered next in command to Suprema Isabel Suarez, the highest official in the Mistica church hierarchy. As a point of information, women play a very important role in Mistica religious life. They, not men, perform church rites and all other religious functions in the community. A passage inscribed on a mural inside the church, as a Mistica member explained, serves as the basis for this practice. The passage reads: "Hanggang kailan magpaparito't parito ka, o ikaw na tumatalikod na anak na babae ng Sion? Sapagka't ang paparoon ay lumikha ng bagong bagay sa lupa. Ang babae ang siyang mananaig sa lalaki."

22. A.F.C. Wallace, 1966, 102

6. Trek to the puwestos (Barefoot)
7. Prayer before specific puwesto (Repeated several times before different shrines)
8. Thanksgiving prayer at the last puwesto where itinerary ends.
9. Trek back to church (Barefoot)
10. Thanksgiving prayer in plaza before big wooden cross
11. Thanksgiving prayer before main altar in church
12. Dispersal

It is readily apparent that prayer or *panalangin* serves as unifying strain of the entire structure. The Mistica mananalangin explain that prayers are generally said throughout the entire ritual to seek guidance and protection in the course of pamumuwesto. Hymns, addressed to both the puwesto's tagatanod and to God, are prayers that reflect a sense of thanksgiving, as well as praise.

It is important to clarify here that variations, as also ramifications, occur in this organizational structure. This, as is often the case, depends on the namumuwesto group's composition. Among the Mistica members however, this is the *ideal*, standard routine, yet, on certain occasions, the whole process may not be fully completed within the specified two-day period. Sometimes, it could be of an extended duration, especially when the puwesto, like *Santos Durungawan*, the peak of Mount Banahaw, can only be reached after a day's hike. In such cases, this could mean even a full week's encampment on the mountain. Yet, a two-year cycle of pamumuwesto covering all the puwestos in Parang and adjacent Kinabuhayan is *the* ideal practice. This is usually arranged through a serialized pattern or on a staggered basis.

Tradition, it seems, is solely responsible for the linearity apparent in the routine as observed by the Mistica mananalangin. It is, to be more exact, "the living legacy of Mamay" ("turo ni Mamay").²³ In effect, this organized structure and routine, now comprising the ritual process as a whole, gained intensified "formalization" upon Mon. Suarez's death in 1982, although it had since been practiced since the late fifties. Truly, the practice could be considered a perpetuation of a meaningful tradition bequeathed by a cherished and respected spiritual adviser.

Furthermore, this tradition extends to the *sequencing* of the routine itself. In the performance of this ritual, *structure* and

23. Marcelina Asican, 40, our *Husgado* pator, confirmed this information.

sequence are equally important. Both contribute to the general meaning and essence attributed to the whole pamumuwesto practice. As prescribed by Mons. Suarez when he was still alive and now perpetuated by the Mistica flock, the pamumuwesto itinerary follows a sequence or chronology, substantively in conjunction with the former's teachings about the symbolic significance of the whole ritual process in Mistica religious life.

In other words, this sequence is dictated by the basic Mistica concept of the pamumuwesto event itself. To the Mistica flock, this is a *sacrificial journey*, a tracking of Jesus Christ ("pamamakas kay Kristo") in the course of His own trials amongst men.²⁴ Unlike the "Via Crucis" however, the puwesto-trek, although it basically employs the journey or pilgrimage motif like the former, does not involve a specified, specific number of "stations." Moreover, it is not mere empathy or pakikiramay per se in Christ's pasyon, as Ileta would lead us to believe, but more exactly a ritual process of being Christ-like in spirit through acts of *sakripisyo* or sacrifice. In this perspective, sakripisyo acquires an *endemic* meaning, i.e., one must go through the pamumuwesto ritual process in Mount Banahaw itself in order to personally experience it. This whole pamamakas is a conscious reaching out of man to God; this, through a tortuous uphill climb symbolic of Christ's own pag-sakripisyo on earth.

In the course of the entire routine, the individual puwesto thus stands as a "station" for prayer, reflection and concentration. It is not a mere landmark nor a stopover point in the course of the journey; it serves as a concrete reminder of God's kapangyarihan, a "sacred space" and thus, before this manifestation of the world's sacrality, the namumuwesto mananalangin can take stock of himself in relation to God in an atmosphere of serenity and quietude. Every puwesto is thus a station of purification leading

24. According to Gloria Samiano, 44, this phrase was the "exact words" of her father, the late Mons. Amador Suarez, when he began to preach about the symbolic significance of the pamumuwesto ritual to the Mistica flock. In a slightly modified vein, this is also how a sixty-two-year-old man, Servillano Manguiera, a chance informant at the *Santos Kalbaryo* puwesto, described his own *parata* or vow of going up to the puwesto every year. He claimed he had been doing this "Station of the Cross" since 1925. Obviously, he regarded his own vow of pamumuwesto from a Catholic standpoint. On the other hand, the Nuestra Señora del Carmen religious sect, through its leader Patricia Jordan Castro, regards the pamumuwesto practice as "pagrorosaryo" (literally, praying the rosary). It is however unclear how, figuratively, the whole rosary chain is completed through the pamumuwesto ritual, as this was not adequately explained by the above informant.

to a suppliant's eventual symbolic communion with God through sakripisyo.

Praying in the puwesto, to the Mistica flock, adheres to a pattern that includes the following sequence:

1. Tresagiong Tagalog
2. Rosario ng Rosa Mistica
3. Santong Linay
4. Siyam na Koro
5. Rosario ng Luwalhati
6. Tresagio sa Sabado
7. Oficio Farvo
8. Oficio Divino
9. Miserere
10. Pasasalamat (One Largo)
11. Cantada (Dalit)²⁵

How does the Mistica namumuwesto group achieve this lofty, spiritual objective of symbolic union with God? The following table shows this by putting into column form the whole ritual's complex dynamics as broken down into: a) puwesto/sequence; b) type of puwesto; c) ritual action/element; and d) symbolic meanings ascribed to specific actions performed in the course of the ritual process (See Table on pp. 446-47).

To synthesize, the whole pamumuwesto routine, (see Table of the Mistica mananalangin) is a journey of symbolic oneness with God. As a spiritual-psychological preparation, one must be free of "impurities" and hence, bathing rituals in various puwestos (Table, Column 3) constitute a meaningful symbolic action towards this noble aim. From the "knocking" in Santong Pepe to the "cleansing" in Sta. Lucia (Table, column 1.1, 1.2), the mananalangin confirms his relationship with the tagatanod in each puwesto, by a dalit or dasal, sung or recited in exchange for a psychological assurance of safe guidance in the course of pamamakas, the sacrificial journey. In the mini-waterfall Sta. Lucia, for example, a hymn is usually sung while bathing under it. Stanzas 5 to 9 of this dalit ("Sta. Lucia") provide us an idea of this relationship between the mananalangin and the puwesto's resident "kapangyarihan":

25. Interview with Ligaya Umali, 19, *namumuno* or prayer leader in one pamumuwesto session, 19 May 1985.

Table THE PAMUMUWESTO RITUAL-SEQUENCE

PUWESTO/SEQUENCE	TYPE OF PUWESTO
1. Santong Pepe	Rock
2. Sta. Lucia Complex	Rock (Guardian of place)
San Miguel	Rock
Piedra Mental	Subterranean Spring
Tubig ng Sta. Lucia	Subterranean Spring
Buhok ng Birhen	(Both are flowing as mini-waterfall)
3. Hilamusan	Subterranean Spring (Water droplets from a bamboo trough)
4. Balon ni San Isidro	Ground-Surface Spring
5. Balon ni Santong Jacob	Subterranean Spring (Approximately 20-ft-deep well lodged in cave structure)
6. Prisintahan	Twin-caves inside a pit structure
San Pedro	about 7-ft deep
San Pablo	
7. Inang Santisima	Cave
8. Matandang Kiling	Cave
9. Ina ng Awa	Cave
10. Husgado	Cave with labyrinthine passageway about 20-ft in length from entrance to exit points
11. Pinagkulasyunan	Rock
12. Santos Kalbaryo	Hilltop, where 3 crosses are strategically planted in simulation of the actual crucifixion scene

RITUAL ACTION/ELEMENT

SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

Dasal

Door-shaped rock signifying entrance's point of spiritual journey;
Symbolic knocking

Dalit/Daṣal

3 Inom mula sa Palad

Bathing

“Baptism”

Cleansing of both body and soul in preparation for journey of the spirit;
Ritual of purification

Hilamos sa Mukha

Dasal

Further washing away of sins in a symbolic sense

3 Buhos sa Ulo

Dasal

Spiritual cleansing through water

Suot sa Balon

Dasal

Bathing

Purification through water after going down to a deep well lodged in a cave structure

Burning of written name
on a piece of paper
with lighted candle;
Dasal

Presentation of one's self to God through personal appearance;
Spiritual readiness now achieved and hence, journey “officially” starts

Dasal

Bathing

Prayers addressed to mother of God, imploring guidance from her;
Further spiritual cleansing through water

Dasal

Spiritual guidance further invoked

Dasal

Merciful grace invoked for journey's success; Mary's blessings asked

Leaving of slippers,
watch, etc. at cave's
opening; Suot sa Ku-
weba; Dasal in both
entrance & exit points

Final judgment on spiritual readiness determined by a successful negotiation of cave's labyrinthine passageway

Dasal

Regarded as Jesus' fasting place (“ayunuhan”); Passing through this place emphasizes spiritual emptiness

Dasal ng Pasasalamat
Dalit

The spiritual journey ends on top of a hill where man communes with God in his supreme sacrifice on the Cross
Spiritualism once again reached

Ngayon kami'y nagpupuri
 Lahat ninyong mga kinasi
 Sa batis mo pong yari
 Ng biyaya mo pong kasi

Katawan ko po'y iyong hugasan
 Dumit libag kasalanan
 Sakit namin ay lunasan
 Upang kami'y makapaghintay

Santa Lucia ang tawag
 Sa batis mo pong marilag
 Kami ngayo'y nagagalak
 Sa biyaya mo pong wagas

At kung kami'y umaawit
 Sa mahal mo pong pag-ibig
 Kami ngayo'y nagnana is
 Lingap ng iyong tangkilik

Ang bendicion po'y igawad
 Sa inyong mga palad
 Santa Luci ang marilag
 Ina't luwalhati ng lahat ²⁶

We praise you today
 And all those whom you love
 Here in the stream
 Of your loving grace

Cleanse my body
 Of dirt and sin
 Cure our ills
 So we can stand waiting

Santa Lucia, it is called
 Your lovely stream
 Now we rejoice
 In your unending blessings

And so we sing
 Unto your love
 And we desire
 Guidance from your care

Bless us
 With your hands
 Lovely Santa Lucia
 Mother and glory of all

The *dasal* or *dalit* recited or sung in the name of the *tagatanod* who takes care of the *puwesto* thus "prepares" the supplicant to proceed, one *puwesto* at a time, one after another, until he reaches the peak of *Santos Kalbaryo* (Table, column 1.2) where a "renewed spiritualism," borne out of *pagsasakripisyo*, engulfs his whole being. Here at the peak, he is provided a retrospective view of the complex of *puwestos* below — a vivid reminder of his painful, albeit fulfilling, ascent.²⁷ At *Santos Kalbaryo*, he is now symbolically one with God. Essentially, this is the whole ritual's *raison d'être*. The specific reasons — viz. contrition or penance, exhortation for grace, favor or blessing, petition or affirmation,

26. These stanzas were copied from *Aklat ng Dalit*, a Mistica hymn book, owned by informant Bonifacia Suarez.

27. After *Santos Kalbaryo*, *pamumuwesto* is continued on the Kinabuhayan-side of Mt. Banahaw, where a complex of *puwestos* forms a similar sequence but ends not at the peak of the mountain but at its crater below. The first-time visitor to the area who is interested in going through this complex of shrines in Kinabuhayan can gather useful information from a thin booklet, "Paglalakbay sa Banahaw" (Pilgrim's Guidelines in Tagalog and English) edited by V. Marasigan, S.J. of Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. Fr. Marasigan has a recent book, *A Banahaw Guru*.

fulfillment of *panata* or vow — are individual-oriented rather than group-based.

It must likewise be emphasized that in the entire ritual process, a *community* is at work. The namumuwesto members pray and sing together as one, united in purpose and spirit. A two-day retreat (perhaps more) in the mountain necessitates communal living, too. Thus, each one has a specific role to perform. The women generally take care of cooking while the men carry the things necessary for the journey, among other functions. In this sense, the pamumuwesto ritual integrates, and achieves, both religious and social ends simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

The general manner in which specific ritual actions in the whole routine itself are performed serves to reflect the impact of this practice upon the Mistica members' religious way of life. Within the framework of the Mistica belief system, the *sakripisyo* complex, is the basic foundation underlying the ritual's performance.²⁸

Sakripisyo or sacrifice, a tribute which proceeds from a mananangin's recognition of his own selflessness, stands as the supreme act of offering addressed to God. To the namumuwesto mananangin, for example, walking barefoot on the way to the puwestos is sakripisyo in its real sense. For one must clamber up sharp-edged boulders, or walk through thorny paths or crawl through dark caves or wells. Yet, to the Mistica flock, the element of risk, in fact, forms substantial part of this act of sacrifice. Fear must be conquered and driven away. In its stead, unflinching faith and trust in God's guidance should reign in the heart, and nothing more.

Crawling through the *Husgado* cave-puwesto, for example, would seem risky and dangerous to any outsider (Table, Column 1.10). As the name implies, this is a "place of judgment." One must successfully negotiate the narrow, maze-like passageway of the cave, approximately twenty feet in length (Table, Column 2), in order to be declared spiritually ready to continue the

28. More than anything else, the *sakripisyo* concept as tribute to God, is perhaps best given empirical basis in the "pagsusuplina," a flagellation ritual held every Tuesday and Friday evening at the church plaza of the Mistica church in Parang, Dolores, Quezon.

perilous journey to the peak. A popular belief among the Mistica folks is that the cave's width expands or narrows as necessary or applicable, based on a person's religious and moral integrity. To the sinful, it is a difficult crawl from entrance to exit points; yet, to the virtuous, it is believed, the journey is never a problem at all. Once the exit point is reached successfully, one is considered "nahusgahan na" (adjudged to be fit) and hence, the journey continues, after this experience of risk. Indeed, danger, fatigue and exhaustion — all these constitute an integral part of the trials one must go through in the course of sacrifice, as offering to God.

To the Mistica mananalangin, the entire pamumuwesto ritual as *pamamakas* or tracking of Jesus Christ's sakripisyo brings him to a psychological-spiritual plane that makes him feel "closest to God" (napakalapit sa Diyos). Such a feeling of proximity has, of course, a transcendent quality. In the corporeal world, the mananalangin's closeness to God always remains concrete and tangible. Why? The puwestos in his physical environment, remain a sacrosanct reminder to him. The journey motif, in the final analysis, serves as a folk expression of his natural, unique manner of homage to God.

APPENDIX

Preliminary Taxonomic Listing of Puwestos in Parang, Dolores, Quezon

A. *Bato* Puwestos (Rock)

Piedra Mental
Kamalig ng Asin
Kamalig ng Yaman
San Miguel
Pinagkulasyunan
Koronang Bato
Tore ng Babel

B. *Bukal* Puwestos (Spring)

***Ground-Surface**

Balon ni San Isidro

Lihim na Tubig

***Subterranean**

Non-flowing

Balon ni Santong Jacob

Flowing

Tubig ng Sta. Lucia

Buhok ng Birhen

Tubig ng Santisima

Tubig ng Buhay

Sta. Ines

Tubig ng Ina ng Awa

Hilamusan

San Bernardo

C. *Kuweba* Puwestos (Cave)

Prisintahan

San Pedro

San Pablo

Ina ng Awa

Husgado

Sta. Clara

Kuweba ng Dios Ama

D. *Taluktok* Puwestos (Peak)

Santos Kalbaryo

Santos Durungawan

Unang Dungaw

Pangalawang Dungaw

Pangatlong Dungaw