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Pamela Del Rosario Castrillo

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The Theater of Karl Gaspar: The Social Plays

Pamela del Rosario Castrillo



Mary Aquinas Lluch's thesis, "The Mindanao-Sulu Church in Dialogue: An Ecclesiology For Our Times," (1989, 131) refers to Karl Gaspar (also known as Melchor M. Morante) as "perhaps the most prolific and knowledgeable of Mindanao playwrights." Yet, apart from her brief description of two of Gaspar's more popular Cebuano plays, "Emmanuel Salvador: Ania Na!" [Emmanuel Salvador: He's Here!] (1975) and "Kolokabildo ni Tawo Duyog ni Kinabuhi ug Kamatayon" [Man's Conversation with Life and Death] (1977) and a misleading item in Arthur P. Casanova's *Kasaysayan at Pag-unlad ng Dulaang Pilipino* (1984, 346), very little is known of Karl Gaspar and his plays.

The aim of this article (and a succeeding one on the religious and Biblical plays of Gaspar) is to uncover what Mojares (1990, 52) calls the "historically submerged realities of national life" in the local world of Karl Gaspar's plays. It analyzes the plays and other stage works written in 1971-84 using the liberation framework of Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, and the theologians Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff.

The Gaspar dramatic canon (1971-84) is composed of 27 plays that fall into two categories: social and Biblical-religious. As might be expected, the 12 social plays are generally preoccupied with Philippine sociopolitical problems. Two plays are *sarswelas*: "Ang Ngot-ngot nga Kangit-ngit" [The Throes of Darkness] (1971) and "Buhi sa Kanunay" [Forever Alive] (1977).

Five are realistic studies of contemporary life: "Ang Kalayo sa Luha" [Flames in Tears] (1972), "Liwanan" [A New Vision of Life] (1978), "Usa Ka Adlaw sa Kinabuhi ni Manang Takya" [One Day in the Life of Manang Takya] (1979), "Pagpakabana! Pakigtambayayong!" [Involvement! Cooperation!] (1979) and "Kinabuhi ug Kamatayon sa Barrio Sudlonon" [Life and Death in Barrio Sudlonon] (1982).

Five are expressionistic. "Kuskos Balungos, Nganong Atong Nasud Nag-antos? Ambot sa Langaw, Pilay Idad sa Ok-ok" [Fuss, Fuss Why is Our Country Suffering? I Don't Know and I Don't Care] (1972) uses the Living Newspaper technique. "Lihok Katilingban!" [Move, Community!/Community Action!] and "Magbabaol: Dugokan sa Yuta'ng Katawhan" [The Farmer: Fertilizer of the Native Land] (1979) are Brechtian and analytical theater, respectively. "Konsumulo" [*konsumo*, to eat, consume; *mulo*, to complain] (1980) is a skeletal script for the celebration of Labor Day. "Bangon Akong Igsoon!" [Arise, My Brother!] (1978) tells the story of structural violence using the Brecht-Boal model.

The Social Plays of 1971–1973

The social plays of Gaspar focus on Philippine sociopolitical issues. The typical play of this cluster may be labelled *Zeitstück*, i.e., one that deals with current problems. Topical in nature, Gaspar's social plays of the early 1970s deal with land-related issues such as ejection, landgrabbing and landlessness as well as with institutional violence such as oppression and rural and urban poverty. The many faces of militarization and other repressions are tackled in the social plays of the late 1970s. The first set of social plays, written in 1971–73, is predominantly agit-prop owing to the prevailing sociopolitical climate.

The early 1970s in the Philippines were disquieting years. It was the time of the student-led First Quarter Storm mass demonstrations against political and military abuse of power as well as poverty and land deprivation by multinationals. Reinforcing poverty were continuing unemployment and a 10 percent drop in wages. In the countryside, it was caused by low agricultural productivity. Agrarian unrest was on the rise as a result of the displacement of small farmers and tenants from their lands. Bulldozers, physical threats and the military were used to force the farmers off their lands which were earmarked for huge plantations (Wurfel 1988, 174).

Gang wars erupted in Mindanao and more than 30,000 civilian refugees fled farms and villages to avoid armed attacks. Fraud and violence marred the 1971 local elections. In Manila, bombings were frequent—one of the more celebrated is that of Plaza Miranda's, which killed and maimed opposition members.

The early 1970s also saw the expansion of the revolutionary Catholic clergy's massive conscientization campaign. It aimed to awaken the Catholic masses to the socioeconomic realities around them, to analyze these realities in Christian and neo-Marxist terms and to spur the masses to solve their own problems (Wurfel 1988, 49). Progressive priests and nuns involved themselves in organizing trade unions and farmer groups. Their efforts and the mass movements were immobilized with the declaration of martial law in 1972.

The martial rule abolished Congress, free elections, free speech and free press. The military-backed regime made countless arrests that significantly cut the ranks of the revolutionary and religious opposition. But it did not stop the clamor for sociopolitical change.

The earliest extant Gaspar play is "Ang Ngot-ngot nga Kangit-ngit" [The Throes of Darkness] (Morante 1971), a *sarswela*. It tells of the death of a small farming community in Negros at the turn of the century. The first discordant note is struck at twilight in the postfiesta discussion of the farmers in a *sari-sari* store. Oroc, the leader of the *rondalla* has sold his land to a Don Benitez and has hurriedly left town, along with some ten farmers who have done the same. During the *pamamanhikan* of Roberto and his parents, we hear of Tasyo sporting a nasty head wound and a pronounced limp. Miguel shows up at the wedding party with a mangled hand and a bloodied head. Then an unconscious Jose lying in a pool of blood comes to and identifies the malefactors: "Gibogbog ako sa mga tawo ni Don Benitez" (p. 11) [I was beaten up by the men of Don Benitez]. In consequence, all these men sell their land and flee. The violence preceding the transactions attests to the unwillingness of the farmers to let go of their land.

The most unwilling farmer is Salvador who raises the need for community organizing to save life and land. He is Freire's critical consciousness in the play—the spokesperson for a deepening awareness of sociopolitical realities and the people's capacity to transform these realities.

Mao gali kanang akong ginasulti maski kaniadto pa. Kinahanglan nga mag-tukod kita ug usa ka organisasyon dire sa baryo, aron dili kita mahimong biay-biayon lang sa mga tawo ni Don Benitez. Nagtuo gayud ako nga ang mga tawo ni Don Benitez mao ang mangtas nga gikahadlokang niining mga tawhana nga nibiya kanato sa baryo. Di man god kamo maminaw kanako. Kon duna na kitay organisasyon, mahimo na natong mahibal-an kon unsaon nato pag-panalipod sa atong kaugalingon kay magtinabangay na man kita (p. 10).

[I have been saying this for a long time. We need to organize ourselves so the henchmen of Don Benitez cannot oppress us. I believe that they are responsible for the departure of our friends in the barrio. You just won't believe me. If we have an organization, we will know how we can defend ourselves because we will be helping one another.]

This urgent call for solidarity, which is echoed in several later plays, is unheeded, to the detriment of Barrio Mahayahay (Cebuano for peaceful, restful). Salvador himself, who steadfastly refuses to sell his land, is hacked to death when he rushes to the defense of his daughter who is raped. What follows is a bitter and pessimistic ending: wife Petra wails her helplessness at Salvador's demise counterpointed by a choral singing of the development of the *sacada* problem in Negros.

Gaspar's concern about the monocrop system adopted by Negros, the Sugar Bowl of the Philippines, proves to be prophetic. In 1984, the world prices of sugar dipped to an unprecedented low and Negros suffered. Joel Abong, a pitifully thin child of Negros became a rallying symbol of all that was wrong with Negros agriculture.

The villain in this play is a rich landowner, Don Benitez, who is ably represented by three men with tough-sounding names, Max, Blas and Tony, who cow the farmers into submission with their strong-arm tactics. Constant references are made to their malevolent presence, but they appear in the flesh in Salvador's house only towards the end of the play.

An interesting image in "Ngot-ngot" that reverberates in Gaspar's other plays is the oppressor as demon, as in Salvador's "Ug kita makapangandam sa atong kaugalingon aron dili lang dayon kita papahawaon dire sa mga satanas sa yuta" (p. 10). [We can prepare ourselves so the demons on earth cannot eject us from our land.] A more frequent occurrence of this image is in the invective, "Yawa! (p. 14)," meaning "devil."

Another story of land dispute, and of landgrabbing is told in "Ang Kalayo sa Luha" [Flames in Tears] (Morante 1972a). Action is confined to the small living room of Emilio, who though obviously unwell, goes to work on his land. The goons of Don Montenegro claim that he holds the land title, attempt to rape Emilio's daughter, Lolita and threaten to set the PC (Philippine Constabulary) on them unless they leave the farm at once. Wife Yolanda and son Ismael vow to fight to the death to defend their land even as they mourn the death of Emilio who dies from consumption.

The demonic image of the oppressor is expressed in Lolita's scathing reference to the agents of doom: "Kon wala ka moabot, sigurong gilugos na ako niining mga demonyo" (p. 7). [If you had not arrived when you did, I could have been raped by these demons] and in Yolanda's adamant refusal to leave their land:

Bisan pa ang demonyo mismo ang magpapahawa kanamo, Mr. Fernández, dili namo biyaan kining among yuta ug kon kinahanglan man na mag-agas ang dugo, wala kami gikahadlukan (p. 13).

[Even if the devil himself tells us to go, Mr. Fernandez, we will not leave our land and we do not fear even bloodshed.]

The play's ending advocates violence for violence:

Kay kon kinahanglan nga among i-sugal ang among kinabuhi aron nga wala maka-ilog niining among yuta, amo kanang himoon (p. 13).

[If need be, we will put our lives on the line to stop anybody from taking our land.]

Apart from land and revolution, there are other sociopolitical issues. "Kuskos Balungos, Nganong Atong Nasud Nag-antos? Ambot sa Langaw, Pilay Idad sa Ok-ok" [Fuss, Fuss, Why is Our Country Suffering? I Don't Know and I Don't Care], a one-acter, popularizes national news headlines (Morante 1972b). A woman is stabbed by purse snatchers. Scavengers, prostitutes and a farmer are brought before a judge who decides against the scavengers (because they are poor and cheeky) and Juan de la Cruz (because Don Versoza wants him convicted) and for the women (because one of them is a congressman's paramour).

Inside a COMELEC polling center, votes are counted without regard for accuracy. A Senator Alcomendras (a pun on Almendras, a leading political figure in Mindanao) demands to see the election returns and threatens violence if thwarted. An election registrar seeks protection from an irate congressman whom she forbade from campaigning inside the polling center.

Villagers from Cotabato and Lanao del Norte flee for their lives as the war between the Blackshirts and *Ilagas* intensifies. A student activist harangues against the *isms* and leads the chanting of slogans and revolutionary songs while burying a dead comrade.

The demonic image is used in reference to a *hacendero* who sends a union organizer to jail on a theft charge, and to the judge who convicts him: "Usa ka ka satanas senyor huwes. Parehas ka lang ni Don Versoza. Parehas lang kamong tanan—mga satanas! Ginoo, nganong nasobrahan kadaghang yawa diri sa kalibutan?" (p. 5). [You are a demon, Sir Judge. You are like Don Versoza. You are all alike—demons! God, why are there so many devils in this world?] This image is fully developed in the morality play "Kapunongan sa mga Pangulo sa Kadautan sa Kalibutan (KPKK)," in which an assembly of devils personifies personal and structural evils.

The theme of struggle is evident in these social plays. The struggle against oppression is expounded using different genres. "Ngot-ngot" is a *sarswela*, whose story of landgrabbing develops amid two festivities, the barrio fiesta and a wedding party. Images of escalating violence are interspersed with romantic, comic scenes of rural life for much needed dramatic relief. The songs and dances and the love story, the obligatory elements of a *sarswela*, also lighten but do not offset the grimness of the play. "Ngot-ngot" advocates community organizing and building a farmer's organization to prevent takeover bids by big landowners and multinationals.

"Kalayo" is a visual invitation to get angry at the injustice being perpetrated against small farmers. It is a mirror held up to reality. "Kalayo" is realistic up to the point Ismael assumes the role of the joker and breaks the illusion by addressing the audience directly towards the end of the play:

Sa tibuok nasod karon, daghan ang panghitabo nga sama sa nahitabo sa among pamilya. Pipila ka gatos ka mga pamilya ang gi-ilugan sa ilang mga yuta sa mga tawo nga naa sa kagamhanan. Gitamak-tamakan lang ang ilang katungod diha sa ilang yuta nga maoy ilang kinabuhi (p. 13).

[The sad fate that has befallen our family is replicated throughout the country. Hundreds of families have been deprived of their lands by people in power. Their rights over the land that has provided both life and livelihood have been trampled upon.]

The fiery and defiant ending hews to the tradition of the agit-prop plays of the 1970s. "Kalayo" pushes for armed resistance.

Kalisod gayud king kabus, kay diha lang sa luha modangop. Apan wala lang mahibalo kining mga demonyo nga kusog magpas-an ug kasakit diha sa ilang gibiay-biay, nga diha sa luha dunay kalayo. Nga diha sa luha mag-agas ang dugo nga maoy magdala sa kainit sa pakig-bugno (p. 13).

[In great difficulty, the poor resort to tears. But the demons who inflict suffering on their victims do not know that these tears have flames. That from these tears flow the blood that bring on the fiery struggle.]

"Kuskos Balungos" is expressionistic: it uses the Brechtian "Living Newspaper" technique to tell its stories of struggle in episodes. Its title is as long and involved as the play is short and simple. It is light, even comic in parts, but it presents a world turned upside down by poverty and injustice, violence and death. The play attributes the sorry state of things to the indifference of the Filipino, his naive transitive consciousness and corruption in government. Like "Kalayo's" Ismael, the student activist sees salvation in "Makig-bugno! Makig-dait! Makig-sukol!" [Fight! Struggle! Rebel!]. One of its many performances was along a highway in Bansalan, Davao del Sur. It was well-attended by the townspeople ["Maraming nanood"] because news of the performance was announced all over town through a *recorida* [a loudspeaker mounted on a jeep] and because drama always draws crowds (Carrillo 1988). The social realism of "Kuskos Balungos" was also in stark contrast to the romantic dramas then prevalent.

The first group of Gaspar's social plays defines Gaspar's drama as partisan literature. It takes on the oppressed as its characters, performers and spectators, in order to impress on them the necessity of the struggle to acquire a critical consciousness for their liberation. Gaspar's plays were performed intrepidly by student and small community groups before, and cautiously during the martial law period in the countryside of Davao del Sur and Davao Oriental. The issues are often land-related, although a Brechtian-inspired piece, "Kuskos Balungos," catalogues the various evils associated with the present dispensation, like prison riots, massacres, election fraud and violence, graft and corruption.

Varied genres—*sarsuwela*, modified realism and Living Newspaper—present community organizing and armed resistance as solutions to social problems. The oft-repeated image is that of the oppressor as demon, which foreshadows Gaspar's use of more religious imagery and genres later.

The Social Plays of 1977–1980

The late 1970s leading up to the 1980s were years fraught with difficulties brought about by a near economic collapse. Moreover, these were still martial law years that tried the much-vaunted Filipino endurance sorely. Against the spread of organized unrest in the countryside, President Marcos used the police and military forces whose levels climbed from 35,000 in the 1960s to over 113,000 by 1976 (Wurfel 1988, 140). By the late 1970s in Mindanao, the Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF), "poorly armed, poorly trained part-time soldiers who were undisciplined" often helped large plantation owners to eject farmers without land titles, even those whose presence predated the plantation (Wurfel 1988, 140). Arrest, torture and detention were all too often the fate of those with anti-establishment views and actions. By 1977, there were some 70,000 political prisoners, more than 50 of whom were Catholic priests and several Protestant pastors as well as many nuns (Wurfel 1988, 124). Some of these were "union organizers, members of movements to boycott referenda and members of church-sponsored social action groups" (Wurfel 1988, 124–25).

Although secular, three of Gaspar's plays of this period still have religious undertones: "Lihok Katilingban!," "Liwanan," and "Bangon Akong Igsoon!" "Lihok Katilingban!" [Move, Community!/Community Action!] (Morante 1979a) is transition between the religious and social plays. It is labelled "usa ka drama liturhiya alang sa Alay Kapwa" [a liturgical drama for Alay Kapwa] and is envisioned as one of four things: a church presentation preceding a Mass; a liturgy in the barrios; a play launching Alay Kapwa in a parish or diocese; or a roving play in schools and parishes that will remind people of the Alay Kapwa program.

Like most of Gaspar's religious plays, "Lihok" is predominantly musical, i.e., church songs, some verbatim, others with newer lyrics, are used to underline ideas such as social responsibility and commitment to the oppressed. It features a narrator whose presence is felt throughout. For starters, he is Boal's joker who states the purpose of the play, "ang pagpukaw-tanlag aron kita mahigmata... LIHOK KATILINGBAN, kay naa diha ang kaanyag" (p. 3) [the awakening of consciousness so that we realize that in community action, there is light]. He appears at odd intervals to address the audience directly to describe events and to emphasize the theme of the play.

Juan de la Cruz, Filipino *Everyman*, is tried and sentenced to death because of his aspirations: his own parcel of land, his dreams of a comfortable life and the power to decide his family's fate. He is caged, tortured and crucified. Meanwhile, the people, led by Andres, move to set Juan free but find him dead. To console the disheartened group, Pilipinas, mother to Juan informs them:

Ayaw wad-a ang paglaum, bisan tuod sa mga kadag-um
Kay ang iyang kamatayon, ang mensahi gisugilon
Nga huptan ta ang kalig-on, sa atong panaghugpong
Walay angay'ng kahadlokan, kon magtigum ang tanan (p. 11).

[Don't lose hope, even in times of darkness
because by his death, the message is told
We will have strength, in our organizing
there is no need to fear, if we band together.]

The people take heart, move as one to defend their rights and change the abject condition of their country, i.e., "ang katawhan nagkalisod, gidagmalan ug gigapos, nagdangoyngoy sa kapit-os" (p. 8) [the people suffer, are downtrodden and shackled, wailing in great difficulty] to one in which "katawhan [ang] tigmugna sa kasaysayan" (p. 12) [the people are the creators of history]. By some token, Juan is resurrected at their united front.

Clearly, Juan de la Cruz is a Christ figure who undergoes both a farcical trial and the brutality of the military, experiences which many Filipinos have gone through. Pilipinas is the grieving mother Mary who watches as her son is led to his death. Iyo Tasyo, who is patterned after Rizal's own wise man, is given the aura of God the Father:

Kon sa akong ngalan, kamo nagkapundok
Nahiusa sa paghigugma. Nagbabuhat kamo sa Akong gisugo
Ug ako kaninyo makig-uban. Ug ako kaninyo makig-uban (p. 11).

[If you gather in My Name
United in love, you are doing My Will.
And I am with you. And I am with you.]

The light-darkness motif is also present in "Lihok." Darkness is equated with the fear gripping the people, immobilizing them. It is also death, a powerful image that recurs throughout these social plays. Brightness is the enlightened consciousness, also the united people who channel their energies towards social change.

This play is Brechtian in its profusion of presentational devices such as slide and song, dance and poetry, shadow puppetry and masks. Without these devices, the audience is likely to identify emotionally with the characters at the expense of critical thought.

"Liwanan" (Morante 1978b), which is Mandaya for a new vision of life, alludes to the parable of the Prodigal Son and ranges Christianity against animism. The opening situation of "Liwanan" is one of crisis: the tribal leader or *Matikadong* of the Mandayas has not long to live. The *baylan* [medicine man] and the family members (save one) prepare for the healing ritual as they await the coming of Gorobio, the second son of the Matikadong who has reportedly lost himself in the pleasures of the city: "Nabuang na gayud sa kalingawan didto sa mga lungsod" (p. 1). He has been away for seven years punctuated only by annual visits to the tribe.

Gorobio enters with an unpopular suggestion: "Why don't you take Father to the *poblacion* doctor?" (p. 4). This triggers one of two arguments about tribal identity. *Bangkaylan*, the Matikadong's first born, and heir apparent to the leadership, stands by traditionalism, the cultural continuity of the Mandaya attitudes and institutions *sans* additives or changes. Gorobio believes in modernity and development:

Gorobio: Liwanan maoy yawi diin makasulod kitag kaugmaon mas malauman Olo. Liwanan ang atong kinahanglanon aron matubo kita ug mo-uswag. Apan wala kana magpasabot nga talikdan ta ang atong pagka-aron niini. Ato lamang gidawat ang panginahanglan nga sa kalibutan karon adunay mga paagi nga kon atong mahimo maoy mudugang na unya nga mas maayo ang dagan sa atong kinabuhi.

• **Bangkaylan:** Unsay kasigurohan niana Katog? Tan-awa ra ang nahitabo kanimo. Tungod sa imong bag-ong paagi, mitalikod ka niining paagi sa atong pagpanambal tungod kay ang imong nahibaloan didto sa ubos maoy imong pagtoo nga maka-ayo. Wala ka ba kulbai Katog nga sa imong pagtalikod kanila, gabaan ka na unya? Ug mahimo ka na nga morag kag bitin nga magkamang ug mobalik dinhi (p. 8).

[**Gorobio:** *Liwanan* is the key to a bright future, *Olo*. *Liwanan* is what we need so that we will grow and progress. But it does not mean that we are turning our back on what we are now. We merely accept [the necessity] that the modern world has ways that will later make our lives better.

Bangkaylan: Is there any certainty to this, *Katog*? Look at what has happened to you. Because of your modern ways, you have turned your

back on our way of healing, because what you have learned in the lowlands is what you believe to be effective. Aren't you afraid *Katog* that you will be cursed for turning your back on them [gods]? And you will crawl like a snake back to us.]

The issue is further complicated by the Matikadong's choice of successor: Gorobio, to Bangkaylan's palpable disappointment. Their last argument is interrupted by news of the Matikadong's summons, first of Bangkaylan and Gorobio together, and then of Gorobio alone. The next and last time we see Gorobio, he has discarded his city togs for the Mandaya tribal costume. He walks to a corner and weeps. Everyone rushes into the hut. There are sounds of weeping and then we see the *banig*-covered bundle atop the shoulders of the men. Gorobio intones an acceptance speech, wears the finery, and steps inside the hut of the Matikadong.

Gorobio's opinions, which hear vociferous protest from Bangkaylan, are to open up the tribal mindset to outside influence, not to resist but to cope with change, to move with the times, and live in a larger world. This play was presented to church workers in a seminar house in Davao City and to a Manobo tribe on a makeshift stage in Magpet, North Cotabato. It is one of two tribal plays of Gaspar. ("Bangon Akong Igsoon!" is the other.)

"Bangon Akong Igsoon!"

"Bangon Akong Igsoon!" ["Arise, My Brother!"] (Morante 1978a) is a musical morality play that has a beleaguered Muslim tribe standing for the whole of Philippine society, particularly during the martial law years.

This play is composed of two disparate parts: one illustrates social analysis by Mannheim and class stratification by Gramsci (Scenes 1 and 2) and the other is the story of a small Muslim tribe who is ruled by a power-mad Datu (Scenes 3-7). A narrator introduces and ends the play. He also links the two parts and butts in whenever necessary. In Scene 1, he states the purpose of the play:

Kahintang bulikaton, atong tuki-tukion kay diha atong masabtan, usa diay hinungdan nganong nagkagoliyang, larawan sa katilingban ang nasud tang pinangga, karon wa nay kasadya (p. 2).

[We will investigate the situation so that we will understand the cause of the troubles in the community which mirrors the country we so love now is bereft of joy.]

The *dramatis personae* then enter as in expressionistic plays, like "mechanized robots," and take their positions. The names of the characters (in Part 1) are very Filipino in that they are abbreviations. The dominant class is DC, and AC means auxiliary class. OC is the oppressed class and OI means organic intellectuals. Scene 2 then illustrates the Gramsci schema. The DC is said to own practically everything. The OC/AC make special mention of the New Society's armed groups: PA (Philippine Army), Navy, AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines), PC (Philippine Constabulary), SOWESCOM (South Western Command) and their armalites and safehouses (p. 3). The OI then tell the OC/AC to the tune of "Pobreng Alindahaw:"

Among mga kaigso-onan, kon maghiusa 'tong mapokan!
Paminaw mo kanamong OI-Ahay!
Makigbisog aron di ta malanay! (p. 3)

[Our brothers, if we unite, we will overcome!
Listen to us, OI-Ahay!
Struggle on so we won't be defeated.]

Part 2 begins with Scene 3 where Datu Daysay satirizes President Marcos. He imposes a 4-AM-to-4-PM curfew and new working hours as well as confiscates the sun for his exclusive use. He holds referenda to legitimize the martial rule and unhesitatingly uses military might through torture and execution against the opposition. A repressive arrest and seizure order (ASO) is put in place to divest people of their liberty (at times, even of life) on mere suspicion of subversion. Mock trials make a travesty of justice.

The OC naturally do not take to these. In Scenes 4 and 6, they debate among themselves. Some think they should just suffer in silence. Others plan to change the configuration of their world through community organizing and concerted action.

Kiram: Paminaw o igsoon, kanato ang paglaum, kon kita maghiusa sa atong gitingoha wala silay mahimo, kay daghan ta kaayo angay kitang mag-CO, pag-angkon sa atong damgo (p. 6).

[**Kiram:** Listen, my brother, hope is ours if we unite they cannot do anything about our goal, because we're too many for them we should CO to fulfil our dream.]

Scene 5 heightens social contradictions by showing the DC—Datu Daysay and the royal court in all their splendor, stuffing themselves

with food. Datu Daysay falls asleep and dreams he is beheaded by those he abuses so easily. He panics and has innocent people picked up and killed.

In Scene 6, the OC besiege the palace and capture the capricious King. He is tried for his many crimes against humanity in Scene 7. An old woman who symbolizes the Motherland decides that the riches of the DC be distributed equitably, that the cronies of the King be divested of their ill-gotten wealth and that the sun be returned to the people. A celebration ensues. Everybody sings the Philippine National Anthem at the end and then exits as they entered, like robots.

This play is as didactic as didactic plays go. It uses the tools of social analysis to make understandable the workings of society and more importantly, to push for cooperation and involvement among the oppressed. Such an agenda may make a play stultifying. But not "Bangon Akong Igsoon!" It injects humor and uses songs at every opportunity. Pidgin English is spoken by the King and the Ministro who reads the decree on the curfew and the curtailment of the people's right to sunlight.

The price of opposing the regime is spoofed. In Scene 3, the people's approval of the decree is supposedly sought. Marcos' referendum that attempted to legitimize martial rule is alluded to.

Ministro: Dunay reklamo? [Any objections?]

Datu: Silence means aprub. But for the record, let's have a referendum. Yes or no, is your answer. Those who vote for No, know what they will get. Guardia! [Action ug pusil ang mga guardia.] Good. You know the consequences of No. Those who vote for Yis, raise your nose. . . . Good, very good. Thank you very much for your support. Now clap your hands 1—2—3—[(Mag-clapping sab ang mga tawo] (p. 5).

Songs are integral to this play. Popular tunes are dressed with new and appropriate lyrics. For instance, "May Bangag sa Ilawom sa Dagat," the Cebuano version of "May Pulis sa Ilalim ng Tulay" is used to say "We must retrieve the sun that the crazy datu has stolen" (p. 5). A poignant protest song by Sis. Nars Fernandez (which is well known all over Mindanao Sulu), "Ngano?" [Why?] is inserted to tell of the injustices and of the power residing in a united front. "Pilipinas Kong Mahal" and "Ang Bayan Ko" are hummed as background music. Moreover, the play has a soloist who sings the speaking parts of mime artists in certain scenes, e.g., the lines of Inang Nasudnon [Motherland] in the trial of Datu Daysay.

The play's rhythm is set and maintained by Mindanao's *agong* and *kulintang* (gongs). They provide accompaniment to the rhyming dialogue, indicate breaks and set the mood.

"Bangon" was staged twice, in Davao and in Pagadian City by the MSPC staff. Its first performance was at a NASSA convention of nuns, priests, bishops and laypeople (Gaspar 1985).

"Seditious" Drama Revisited

In "Buhi sa Kanunay" [Forever Alive] (Morante 1977a), Gaspar exchanges his normal lens for a wide-angle lens and takes for a subject the oppression of the Philippines by Spanish colonial masters. He focuses on the love story of Felipe and Luzviminda, symbolic of the Filipino's love for his Motherland. This relationship is threatened by Spain, here represented by Marcelo. Luzviminda loves Felipe and has already accepted his engagement ring, but he does not find favor with Doña Josefa because his father is suspected of being a Katipunan sympathizer. Felipe is also, alas, only an *indio*. Marcelo is much more to Doña Josefa's liking because he is Spanish, rich and powerful.

Things come to a head when news of the *guardia civil's* shooting of Kabesang Pedro, Felipe's father, breaks out. In his grief and anger, Felipe breaks up with Minda (renounces his hopeless love for her) and then joins the outlawed Katipunan. He is advised to downplay the revenge bit and instead fight for the liberation of the Filipinos.

In a scene reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Minda consults Padre Guillermo about her dilemma. She loves Felipe but her mother insists on her marrying Marcelo. "Trust in God," the priest says, "you cannot be married against your will."

In the penultimate scene, Felipe suddenly appears and invites Minda to go to the boondocks with him. Her heartfelt "Yes" is overheard by her mother who predictably tells Marcelo about it. The secret marriage of Minda and Felipe is rudely interrupted by the *guardia civil* led by Marcelo. Marcelo rapes Minda inside the church. The guards arrest Felipe, torture him and take him to Bagumbayan to be shot. Minda rushes to Felipe and they die in each other's arms. The rape of Luzviminda is symbolic of the pillage, abuse and exploitation of these foreign devils of our shores. It gets the audience thinking that these colonial masters may have different nationalities, but are doing the same thing.

"Buhi" is a remake of the revolutionary play of the 1900s. Its despairing ending is akin to Juan Abad's *Tanikalang Ginto*. Death is an inescapable image and a sense of equilibrium is never attained. Yet hope springs eternal. Horfilla (1990) says there is still hope, a reason to hope, notwithstanding the utter bleakness of it all.

Expected to provide lightness to the proceedings are 17 songs, which unfortunately are not extant. The typescript only refers to them by numbers, as in "Manganta sila sa Song 5. Choreography needed" (p. 4). These songs affirm the play's claim to being a *sarsuwela*. Traditionally, a *sarsuwela* does not have a narrator, but "Buhi" does. Juan de la Cruz, however, also acts as a friend to Felipe who likes Maria Fe, Luzviminda's younger sister.

"Buhi" is one of the plays which boast of lavish production values such as a large cast, elaborate sets, choirs, choreographed numbers, stage lights and a sound system, costume and makeup. It is unlike the low-cost and self-reliant productions which abided by the aesthetics of poverty.

"Magbabaol: Dugokan sa Yuta'ng Katawhan" [The Farmer: Fertilizer of the Native Land] (Morante 1979b) is analytical theater that employs music. It asks, "Why is a farmer-tenant poor?" and proceeds to answer it in a variety of ways. In the first trial scene, Gaspar presents the reasons given by the landlord, government technician, schoolteacher, and parish priest: indolence, lack of ambition and savings, unscientific farming techniques, no college degree, too many mouths to feed, and God's holy will are cited as the causes of poverty. Then the play debunks these pat reasons in a discussion group led by Iyo Joaquin and in the next trial scene which traces the farmer-tenant's poverty to the age-old problem of land ownership. To further its claim to analytical theater, Gaspar has a code-switching farmer-organizer give a short and haphazard lecture on structural analysis which confuses the farmers (and the audience).

Melvin: Actually, dunay mga assumptions ang Structural Analysis ...Society is made up of systems...economic, political, cultural systems ...[which are] interconnected. Puedeng mag-haomay o homology o mag-bangi o torsion. Duhay determinant...ug duna say dominant (p. 8).

This play uses presentational devices such as a soloist who functions as a narrator cum Greek chorus, and song and slide projection that enlarge on the farmers' hardships and overwhelming need for community organizing.

A disembodied voice does the opposite: it pronounces a farmers' union as illegal, and the members as subversives. It strikes fear in the hearts of the farmers but they still meet and plan their moves to better their condition. The booming voice, which is featured again in "Konsumulo," retaliates by sending bursts of gunfire that cut down the number of farmers but not their fiery commitment to solidarity and a better future. "Magbabaol" was written on Easter Sunday 1979.

A Labor Day Play

"Konsumulo" (Morante 1980) is a portmanteau word from Cebuano *konsumo* (to eat, consume) and *mulo* (to complain). It is also a skeletal script written for the celebration of workers' rights.

Peopled by labor leaders and their wives, capitalists and laborers/factory workers, "Konsumulo" discusses the ramifications of the 1980 oil price hike. The price hike ensures the skyrocketing of the prices of basic commodities but not the increase of minimum wages. It will affect the poor in ways the rich will not even notice.

The labor leaders exhort everybody to act because if they allow this oppression to go on in the way of all price increases, it will happen again and again, with them none the wiser (or richer). They sing,

Managhugpong tang tanan aron ta mabulahan
Panaghiusa ta mao ang kadangpan
Sa atong pakigbisog, molambong kaisog
Duyog igsoon ko aron ta modaug! (p. 3)

[Let's band together so we are blessed
Solidarity is our only recourse
In our struggle, strength blossoms
Join, my brother, so we will succeed]

They consider talking to the manager about their grievances. They enact an imaginary scene at the office of Sir Monsanto, clearly a rehearsal for revolutionary action. They see that three persons are powerless. They talk about other possible scenarios until they decide on a strike pressing for their demand for higher wages.

A disembodied but powerful voice first heard in "Magbabaol" warns them against going on a strike. They desist but not for long. They organize themselves and absorb a lecture by a labor leader on prices and wages and then move to strike. The booming voice returns,

but it wavers in the face of a strong opposition. Firm in their convictions, the workers finally silence the voice and rejoice at their victory.

The play begins and ends with a song "Katawhan, katawhan lamang." It employs other songs to tell of the workers' misery and of the need for a union. Among the other auditory/aural effects that are used are the siren which stresses the time-governed life of workers, and the voice which represents the unseen capitalist, or the inner fears of the workers. A lecture is also employed to bring issues to the fore. The play is structured in such a way that actors are given room to invent dialogue on the spur of the moment; they create lines within the course of a performance on the basis of a scenario or plot. It is in the tradition of *commedia dell'arte* and Boal's theater.

In direct contrast to the fighting stance of "Kalayo" is "Pagpakabana! Pakigtambayayong!" [Involvement! Cooperation!] (Morante 1979c). It is set in a *sari-sari* store in San Salvador, Timawa, a small farming community besieged by three rats. The first is the black rat, thousands of which have destroyed their crops, their hopes for a bountiful harvest and their will to plant anew. The other two are rats in the guise of humans. One is Mr. Claveria, the usurer, who charges close to 200 percent interest on loans without collateral, and has the nasty habit of appropriating the livestock and land titles of farmers who fail to pay on time. The third rat is the indifferent farmer to whom everything is futile. Kardo's twisted logic makes him say

Ug unsa man guy inyong adto-on sa inyong uma. Mag-usik lang kamog panahon. Mananum tuod mo karon, apan unya'g mamunga na nang inyong mais, hutdon ug kaon sa ilaga. Unsa may mahabilin, mubo sab ug presyo. Purdoy gihapon. Maayo pang magsigue na lang niining hubog (p. 2).

[And why are you going to your farm? You're just wasting time. You plant today, and when your corn grows, the rats beat you to it. Whatever is left is priced very low. You're still poor. Better for you to drink to stupor.]

and turn to the bottle notwithstanding his long list of debts at the *sari-sari* store.

Kardo is countered by Jaime, another farmer who believes it is not the end of the world; he sees salvation in involvement and cooperation, in a farmers' organization that will help uplift the community. He attempts to sell this idea to Kardo but Kardo refuses to acknowledge the value of cooperation.

The third rat's hopelessness is the lifeblood of the first two rats. Until the indifferent farmer joins hands with the other farmers, the black rat and Mr. Claveria will continue to plague the community. Predictably, the devil in this play is Mr. Claveria whom Jaime curses to his face: "Pagkawala gayud nimoy konsensiya, Mr. Claveria. Kon mahimo lang siguro nimong hakopon lakip na ang mga kalag niining naka-utang kanimo, imo sigurong himoon no? Haskang hakoga nimong yawaa ka!" (p. 5) [You don't have a conscience, Mr. Claveria. If you could appropriate the souls of the people who are indebted to you, you would, wouldn't you? You're a selfish devil!].

A realistic drama of inaction, "Pagpakabana!" chronicles the lethargy some farmers are afflicted with, and ends as it begins, in a petty argument between *sari-sari* store owner, Iya Ana and drunkard Kardo.

The next social play, "Kinabuhi ug Kamatayon sa Barrio Sudlonon" [Life and Death in Barrio Sudlonon] (Morante 1982) is a realistic one-act play that opens and closes with death scenes. Iyo Tiburcio succumbs to tuberculosis in the first scene, depriving Goryo, Miguel and Lando of a father, and Barrio Sudlonon of a staunch spokesman for peasants' rights. In the wake (scene 2), talk revolves around the need to strengthen the farmers' union Iyo Tibur helped form. The farmers request Miguel to be one of the leaders of the union, buoyed as they were by his active support in the past. But Miguel, overcome by grief at his father's death, refuses.

Scene 3 centers on the other side of the sociopolitical fence, on the supporters of the move to eject the peasants from the land to make way for a multinational rubber corporation. Barrio Kapitan Jose and CHDF Captain Tomas are later joined by PC Sgt. Lucio and Don Alejandro's minion, Mr. dela Peña whose shortness of breath attests to the remoteness and inaccessibility of Barrio Sudlonon (Cebuano for interior).

They gleefully note that the name will have to be changed (preferably to Barrio Imelda) along with other things when the rubber corporation constructs feeder roads in the name of progress. However, they express apprehension over the expected resistance of the farmer-tenants (identified by Tomas and easily tagged as subversives). They console themselves with a plan to gatecrash the union meeting and quell the resistance with a show of arms.

The last scene (scene 4) is the community meeting itself which starts off with a song led by the peasant organizer Berting and short lecture on TB by health worker Tessie. Both of them are looked upon with suspicion by the military and paramilitary units because they

attempt to conscientize. Tessie injects analysis into her spiel as she traces the prevalence of TB in Sudlonon: "TB is a lung disease caused by malnutrition and fatigue. Farmers are hungry and exhausted because they cannot afford to eat better meals and they have to work hard to earn a few pesos. They are poor because they don't own their land" (n.p.). The farmers are still digesting this information when Miguel, erstwhile reluctant leader, enters and joins them as they thresh out their problem of landlessness.

A probable ejection in view of the impending entry of the rubber plantation compounds their problem. Then they didn't own the land they tilled, soon they might have no land to till.

Miguel speaks for a united front—the best defense against the mighty MNC just as the gatecrashers enter with Don Alejandro's compensatory package. Every farmer-tenant will be paid P3,000 and given a month to pack up and leave. Those who refuse will have their houses bulldozed. Those who are interested in working in the plantation will be screened for good (read "meek and submissive") behavior. The farmers refuse the offer, chanting "We are not leaving our land!" They are momentarily silenced by a gunshot and a heated exchange between Miguel and Sgt. Lucio who brings his gun down on Miguel's head. Chaos ensues. A gunshot fells Lando, 17. The gatecrashers run out.

Miguel makes two long speeches, one addressed to Iyo Tibur, begging forgiveness for Lando's untimely death, and the other to Lando—bidding him rest and promising to derive strength from his death to struggle on. A ringing "We will fight to the death if that is what it takes to keep our land!" sounds at the end of the play.

Although both are realistic studies, "Kinabuhi" stands in direct contrast to "Pagpakabana!" where indifference and utter lack of understanding prevail. In this play, there are attempts at resistance, at overcoming the culture of silence. In theme and technique, "Kinabuhi" is similar to Gaspar's first social plays. The pattern for these later social plays is set in the earlier "Ngot-ngot" and "Kalayo." A small community of farmers or farmer-tenants who are living on the edge of poverty is threatened with landlessness. The villain also known as oppressor/demon is always a rich landowner whose name is always preceded by the honorific *Don*, but who remains unseen. However, he is most ably represented by a goon squad and his interests fully protected by military or paramilitary units, which most naturally bode violence for the hapless farmers. Community organizing is the oft-suggested panacea for their ills, and a call to action

is always sounded by the enlightened. Responses vary: inaction that leads to much weeping and gnashing of teeth, or a fighting stance that looks forward to either a bright future or anarchy. Death images are liberally sprinkled throughout the social cluster and violence is a requisite of these deaths.

"Usa Ka Adlaw sa Kinabuhi ni Manang Takya"

"Usa ka Adlaw sa Kinabuhi ni Manang Takya" ["One Day in the Life of Manang Takya"] (Morante 1979d) has an impoverished washerwoman, Manang Takya, for a central character. Six A.M. finds her washing clothes and caring for an ailing husband, Simo. Student activist, Boy, enters. He is picking up Takya's daughter Ligaya (who is never really happy about anything) for school, but he finds time to do two other things: he mouths slogans but fails to get a rise out of Takya (who cautions him against inviting Ligaya to their organization's demonstrations), and he buys vinegar and Medicol (acetaminophen/paracetamol) at Takya's behest for Iyo Simo's rising temperature/fever.

At 7:30 A.M., Takya goes to the community *poso* for water. She averts a near fistfight between two righteous gossips, Petra and Pining, and two weary prostitutes, Brenda and Marilyn, whom Takya services. An hour later, Takya delivers the freshly laundered clothes to Doña Margarita, CWL member who explodes at the sight of creases in her *terno*. She then refuses to pay Takya for her services until Takya returns with a well-ironed *terno*. Takya, who needed the money for Simo's medicine, crushes the *terno* in frustration.

The scene shifts to the two prostitutes. Marilyn has just made known her disapproval of Brenda's lover, Sonny, when he comes barging in. Marilyn and Sonny exchange curses as she exits. Sonny then asks for money from Brenda who gently tells him she can only give him P20 (instead of the P200 he is demanding). Sonny crudely tells her that she ought to pay him for the pleasures he gives her. Brenda is wounded as she imagines him in love with her too. Sonny makes a beeline for Brenda's handbag which she holds on to for dear life. But he gets it all the same and runs off with it as Marilyn rushes in too late. They are crying on each other's shoulder as Manang Takya enters with their laundry and words of comfort. In direct contrast to Doña Margarita who begrudges Takya her due, Marilyn pays her and adds a little more for Simo's medicine. This scene ends with Brenda's imperious command to Marilyn for a bottle of Tanduay.

High noon at Takya's shack finds Simo unconscious. Neighbors help take Simo to the government hospital, Our Lady of Sorrows. Takya's plea for emergency treatment falls on the indifferent ears of a nurse and a doctor who refuse to take them seriously.

A possible savior arrives, Doña Margarita, but she too refuses to intercede in Takya's behalf. Simo dies. As the scene changes into a wake for Simo with people coming in to express their condolences, they sing "Haskang lisura kining kabus ta" [It is very difficult to be poor]. The last image is that of Takya crying out in helplessness, "Simo!"

"Usa sa Adlaw sa Kinabuhi ni Manang Takya" takes place in the slums. Takya cares desperately for Simo who nonetheless coughs his life away. It features an upper class woman and prostitutes. Doña Margarita's selfishness knows no bounds. The prostitutes are of the type common to Philippine literature—prostitutes with golden hearts. Brenda and Marilyn treat Takya decently and voluntarily give her a little extra for Simo's recovery. Nothing else in this play comes close to this pocket of kindness, so there is more than enough room for anger and angry words. Characters swear "Yawaa ka!" [You devil!] and "Ay letcheng yawa! (p. 6)," "Sa impierno ta magdumog (p. 6)," "Go to hell!" (p. 7).

There is so much anger and despair going around that it is hard to believe that humor is also an important element of the play. Humor stems from two founts: the code-switching (Tagalog to Visayan, and vice versa) of Takya, Brenda and Marilyn; and the sexual innuendoes and witty dialogue of the prostitutes.

While all the characters are individuals, they are also Brechtian types, representatives of social classes. Thus the conflict is not only between individuals but also between social classes, as the Marxists have it. "Usa ka Adlaw" reflects the class divisions and the power structure within Filipino society. Each aspect of structural analysis is made clear through Takya's relationship with the other characters—the upper class woman she works for (economic system), who is a member of the elite Catholic Women's League (religious system), her husband who is sick (health system), her daughter who is a student (educational system), and her friends who are prostitutes (social system).

Conclusion

Most of Gaspar's plays, like "Usa ka Adlaw," are one-act plays. Brevity allows these plays to be a part of a conscientization session.

The methodology followed by Gaspar's theater groups involves the following phases (Morante 1977b):

- I A member of the cast gives an introduction to the audience. The introduction includes the purpose behind community theater for conscientization.
- II Play presentation itself.
- III The spectators are divided into small groups. Each group is given a guide question related to the play.
- IV The chairpersons of these small groups report their results to the whole group. A member of the cast then collates the results and shares social analysis.

Gaspar's second group of social plays still observes the tradition of sincere exploitation of drama for political purposes. In realistic and Brechtian modes, he extols the virtues of community organizing and the development of a critical consciousness for liberation. He uses images of death and violence and the booming disembodied voice to protest against militarization that suppresses the oppressed. The lecture scene is often used, underlining the didactic thrust of these plays. The trial scene, first seen in Gaspar's religious plays, puts focus once again on the idea of justice (and injustice). This social group is more analytical and more sophisticated in its use of presentational devices such as slide and song, masks and shadows and mime. Unlike the first group of social and religious plays, many of these plays have been performed on proscenium stages with provisions for lights and costume and makeup. These later social plays were, for the most part, popularized because of the wide-ranging CD network. This network was put into place by a series of CD training workshops which produced little theater groups, mostly parish-based all over Mindanao-Sulu. These groups performed their own workshop improvisations and the circulated copies of scripts by Mindanao playwrights such as Gaspar.

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