

Rizal in the 21st Century

The Relevance of His Ideas and Texts

Cesar Adib Majul

Answers to questions as well as solutions to problems in Rizal's *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo* can best be found in his essay 'The Indolence of the Filipinos'. A key concept of Rizal is that of 'national sentiment'. Rizal believed that the lack of national sentiment was the cause of the numerous ills of Philippine colonial society. Rizal's criteria for identifying these problems, how to eliminate or prevent their recurrence in Philippine society, is still cogent for many more years to come.

WHEN SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES AND CLOSE FRIENDS suggested the above topic, I approached it with some apprehension. A major reason was that among the numerous essays on Rizal I have read my favorite one remains Professor Renato Constantino's 'Our Task to Make Rizal Obsolete' (1959). To him, the importance of Rizal's ideas consists in their valid applicability today as well as their inspirational value. While describing the negative characteristics of some persons and the social ills of his time, Rizal also indicated the ways for their regeneration. According to our esteemed professor, although Rizal aimed to describe the people and society of his time, the fact that we still see many of these non-too-agreeable characters and ills around indicates that he is still speaking of the present. All these, he writes, had given rise to various schools on Rizal, of which there are two extremes. One maintains that Rizal's ideas are still applicable not only today but for all times. The other pays lip service to the national hero, emphasizing some harmless or non-controversial aspects of his life and works, while claiming that the conditions he wrote about no longer exist. The first school fails to

CESAR ADIB MAJUL received his MA, PhD and Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*) from the University of the Philippines. This essay was a lecture delivered as part of the University of the Philippines Lecture Series on 8 February 1999 and is published with the permission of the UP-CIDS/Lupon ng Sentenaryo/UP Press.

view society in terms of a dynamic process and assumes that Filipinos will continue to exemplify those negative traits Rizal deplored and wished to reform. The latter school reveals that some ideas and truths of Rizal are 'unpalatable and dangerous even now'.

Professor Constantino demonstrates how Rizal was an incisive critic and commentator of his times. That his comments have cogency today reveals that the ills of Filipino society have changed little from the time

That Rizal's comments have cogency today reveals that the ills of Filipino society have changed little from the time he wrote.

he wrote—that the Filipinos today have learned little and have not progressed much from their colonial past. To prove his point, Professor Constantino presents a judicious choice of characters portrayed in Rizal's novels. There are the present day Pelaezes with their shady business deals; the Capitan Tinongs who are bribers of government officials and are noto-

rious influence peddlers; the Capitan Tiagos who fawn upon government officials and influential politicians; the Doña Victorinas who belittle native customs and the products of native energy while being dazzled by and emulating anything foreign, and the Basilio who, in spite of past humiliations and injustices from government officials, had become totally indifferent to political events coupled with a terrible fear of police retaliation while contenting themselves with a false sense of security. Thus, an acute problem in present day Filipino society is how to make such characters fade away and render Rizal's criticisms of them a purely historical matter. In brief, the task is to 'make Rizal obsolete' (Constantino 1959). But this does not imply that we must or will forget him. Our professor reflects and concludes: 'on the contrary, only when we have realized Rizal's dream can we really appreciate his greatness because only then will we realize the great value of his ideals.... A re-orientation of our ways and of our thoughts along nationalistic lines will fulfill the dream of Rizal and at the same time make them obsolete as goals because the dream will have become a reality' (Constantino 1959).

A main reason, among many others, why Rizal's literary works have generated various schools of thought has to do with the nature and aims of his analyses of social problems. The first is the descriptive aspect

dealing with facts both historical and contemporary. Here, Rizal deals with what he considered individual and social problems. The second is the prescriptive element where Rizal propounds or at least suggests solutions to problems expounded in the descriptive area. The third is the predictive aspect, which, in effect, is an analysis of what may not happen if and when the prescriptive element is followed or not. Yet it is to be noted that to predict an event is not necessarily to propound or favor it.

SOCIALLY DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

It is in the descriptive aspect where the delineation of character traits revealing a social malaise or laudable social values is to be found. Some of these traits are cultural or the result of social institutions. Many essays or comments on Rizal's novels even go as far as to identify some of Rizal's contemporaries as models for the novel's characters. But of greater importance than trying to identify such characters with living persons in the past is to view them as representations of cultural and social institutions. As such, the portrayal of characters merely represents a literary device to exemplify institutions. For example, the school teacher in *Noli me tangere* represents the educational problem in the colony; Sisa represents domestic and accompanying social ills; Cablesang Tales represents the chronic agrarian conflicts in the country, and so on. Rizal points out how many individual traits or idiosyncrasies are not innate but are fostered by social institutions or the result of historical events.

In effect, Rizal's critique of some institutions of his time represents a veritable condemnation of an oppressive colonial administration controlled by an inept or corrupt bureaucracy that was further qualified by unwarranted clerical domination. True enough, Spanish colonial domination has long passed away and from the point of view of the Philippine Constitution there is now a separation of Church and State. But the point is whether the educational, economic and other social problems as Rizal viewed them still exist in one form or another in a subtle, and therefore more insidious, fashion. To repeat, Rizal aimed to point out what was wrong among individuals and institutions in the society of his time—wrongs still existing in some form or another these

days—and propounded solutions to eliminate them. This was his role as reformer. But in indicating such ways, he was, in effect, aiming to make obsolete the criticisms and condemnations he had previously made. From this perspective, he was making himself obsolete as a social critic. But in offering solutions to the individual and social malaise, his role was that of a moral and political philosopher. In this role, he takes his place among many of the world's moral and political philosophers with a message that may well be cogent for many more years, even if most or all of the evils he pointed out have ceased to be. At the very least, keeping in tandem with his solutions, a reversal to such a condemned past might well be prevented or thwarted.

If Rizal's major works are to be better understood, it is important to always bear in mind that he was a firm believer in the postulate that man was endowed by his Creator with innate moral and intellectual faculties or potentialities that were meant to be actualized in the individual and social spheres. To develop these faculties he also had innate rights that were God-given through Nature. These rights did not originate in government or any political institution. On the contrary, it was the duty of government to recognize and affirm such rights if it were to claim legitimacy to govern. Among these basic human rights were those of the recognition of individual worth—freedom of speech and association, and so on. They were so basic that their non-recognition or suppression implied the wicked stifling of the person's moral and intellectual faculties. It did not matter whether the individual was a

When Rizal demanded that a person be given his freedom, he did not necessarily mean political independence.

colonial subject or member of an independent state. Thus, when Rizal demanded that a person be given his freedom or be made free, he did not necessarily mean political independence since even within a colonial context he stressed the necessity that a person be free within

that system. And when he wrote that man was not created by God to be a slave, he was, in his own way saying that man was born free; but if he found himself unfree in society, it was due to the nature of certain social or political institutions.¹ In this detail, his thoughts ran parallel with those of Rousseau or were influenced by him. An illustration of

all the above in Rizal's writings might be fruitful. According to him, it is the duty of government to provide all the conditions or facilities for a person to develop his intellectual faculties by way of a very sound educational system. But if the government was for some reason or another unable to provide such opportunities, it ought, at the very least, not put any obstruction to such a natural propensity or development. Such obstacles represented a willful violation of an individual's human nature and innate rights.

At this point, a short digression on methodology may be introduced to better understand Rizal's two novels. First of all, the two novels must be viewed as one integral whole, such that it can be assumed that the conception of the first entailed the conception of the second. It is as if the space of time between 1887 and 1891, the two dates of the publication of the two novels, did not decisively alter the main plot of the second. There are many indications of this. However, one related to the theme of this paper will suffice. There is an incident in Chapter 62 of *Noli me tangere* where Elias reproves Crisostomo Ibarra: 'You are going to light the flames of war, since you have money and brains, and you will quickly find many to join you, for unfortunately there are plenty of malcontents. But in this struggle which you are going to undertake, those who will suffer most will be the defenseless and the innocent' (*Noli*, p. 475).² And this is precisely what Ibarra, now transformed into Simoun, did in *El filibusterismo*. And in the concluding chapter of *El filibusterismo*, Father Florentino sermonizes to the dying Simoun the import and consequences of such an action of war (*Fili*, p. 358).³

The second element in methodology is to determine which ideas voiced by the various characters in the novels represent Rizal's and those which do not. For example, of the different apparently conflicting views of Simoun, the most complex figure in *El filibusterismo*, one wonders which views are identical or parallel to Rizal's own ideas and those which he would have personally disowned or condemned. Moreover, there are certain views or questions offered by Simoun that seem intended more for the reader's reflections rather than for anything else. This is where the importance of Rizal's two major essays comes in. The first is 'The Philippines: A Century Hence' which was published serially in 1889-1890. The second is 'On the Indolence of the Filipinos' published in

1890. The first is a political essay indicating certain probabilities regarding the future of the Philippine colony. The latter is an incisive psychological and sociological analysis of the Filipinos and how they had been conditioned by their history, the conquest, and the introduction of foreign values and institutions. It is in this very essay where Rizal clearly delineates the conditions for the salvation or regeneration of the Filipino people, although he does so in an indirect manner. It is the major key to a better understanding of *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo*. It is no accident that the above two essays were written at a time between the publication of the two novels—a time when Rizal was already writing *El filibusterismo*. This explains the overlapping of ideas between both novels and both essays.

SOCIAL DEGENERATION

IN 'The Indolence of the Filipinos', Rizal admitted that the so-called 'indolence' of the Filipinos had become a chronic disease, but denied that it was a hereditary one. By means of a masterful historical account, he demonstrated how, before the Spanish conquest, the natives of the archipelago had commercial relations with neighboring Southeast Asian countries with a trade consisting of metals, textiles, spices, foodstuff, and so on. They had some well-developed native industries and manned large vessels to carry their products to far away places. Their warriors, too, had ventured as far as Sumatra. They had a culture of their own

The natives of the colony were deliberately isolated from their Malay neighbors by the colonizers, thus resulting in the decline of time-honored commercial links.

and a well-ordered value system which had not been necessarily substituted by a superior one. Without denying a universal inclination to avoid heavy labor while finding easier ways to produce things, Rizal wrote that the existence of a tropical climate normally inclined persons to seek a softer life. But these inclinations had become insidiously actualized during the colonial regime. Among the numerous reasons given are: the use of the natives to serve in the colonial wars and imperialistic designs of the Spanish empire, the depopulation of the towns due to the frequent Moro raids coupled with the inability

ous reasons given are: the use of the natives to serve in the colonial wars and imperialistic designs of the Spanish empire, the depopulation of the towns due to the frequent Moro raids coupled with the inability

of the people to defend themselves because they were not trusted to bear arms, and the heavy tribute and taxation which led to the gradual decline of local industries, agriculture and commerce. Furthermore, the natives of the colony were deliberately isolated from their Malay neighbors by the colonizers who were afraid that they would be contaminated with undesired foreign cultures, thus resulting in the gradual decline of time-honored commercial links. More than this, some of the best agricultural lands had fallen into the hands of the friar corporations.

To make a long story short, the native found himself exploited. And when he saw most of the fruits of his labor accruing to the benefit of his exploiters rather than his or that of his family, he asked himself why he had to work so hard. His initiative to work voluntarily ceased. As Rizal reflected: 'Man works for a purpose; take away that purpose from him and you will reduce him to inaction'.⁴ Here, Rizal was not merely criticizing what may have been a government's lack of encouragement to commerce and industry for the sake of the people or its indifference to the effects of natural disasters on the population. He was also arguing that a government could be essentially an exploitative agency when it favored certain classes as against the people in general. In more modern terms, he was against a government that was controlled by a special class in society.

In the same essay, Rizal shifts from the material or economic causes inducing indolence to the moral aspect. He bewailed the lack of moral encouragement in a colonial society. A native who had distinguished himself by some achievement was left unrecognized especially if such achievement surpassed that of a colonial. He was not allowed to appear better than the colonial masters. Thus was his value as a moral individual belittled. Moreover, the educational system was not really designed to encourage learning. It did not keep pace with the progressive trends in other countries. It was 'brutalizing, depressive and inhuman' since it was designed to remind the native of his inferior status and therefore deprive him of his self-esteem and innate dignity. To quote Rizal:

To deprive man of his dignity is not only to deprive him of his moral force. Every creature has its incentive, its source of power; man's is his self-respect; deprive him of it and he is a corpse... (Sobre la indolencia, p. 241)

Here, again, Rizal is asserting one of his fundamental premises: A person by the very fact of being human had certain rights based on his God-given moral and intellectual faculties or potentialities. Particular rights, human rights, were instrumentalities serving to actualize such potentialities. Rizal assumed that the impulse to progress and aspiration for a better and more progressive form of education were thus natural in man. That being the case, he aspired for an education hinged on 'liberty for the unfolding of his adventurous spirit' as well as good examples from its mentors. It was to be an education imbued with a modern outlook, that is, an openness to new and bold ideas coupled with an interest in and desire to master nature. To quote Rizal again:

To progress, it is essential that a revolutionary spirit should burn in his veins, because progress necessarily demands change, implies the defeat of the past by the present, the triumph of new ideas over the old and accepted ones. It will not be enough that you should appeal to his fancy (*fantasia*).... (Sobre la indolencia, p. 256)

A key word here is 'fancy'. It connotes a colonial mentality fostered by an educational system. Alas, too often to Rizal, the Filipino had by his fancy (*fantasia*) been unduly bewitched by anything that was foreign simply because it was foreign. And as long as 'his spirit is not free and his intelligence has not been dignified' the Filipino will be dazzled by certain lights that instead of enlightening him will mislead him like the will-of-the-wisp 'that misleads travelers at night...' (Sobre la indolencia, p. 256).

A second cause which, like the lack of a proper education, emanates from the people themselves but is 'more deadly and far-reaching' in bringing about the so-called indolence of the Filipinos, is the lack of what Rizal called *sentimiento nacional* or national sentiment. This is another key concept for a fuller understanding not only of a lot of Rizal's characters in his two novels but also of his idea of revolution and his actions in the political arena. For some reason or another, Rizal did not present a positive definition or categorical explanation of this concept in his essay, 'On the Indolence of the Filipinos'. He merely enumerated manifestations of its lack in order to demonstrate in what manner

this absence effected indolence among the Filipinos. Two manifestations of this lack can be summarized as follows: First, the person feels inferior regarding his native creative energy and the quality of the results of native labor. He is easily dazzled by the brilliant light of what is foreign simply because it is foreign. As such he is guided by and becomes a victim of this fancy (*fantasia*) and self-love (*amor propio*) or conceit. In brief, he is a victim of colonial mentality. Certainly, this mentality is closely related to the nature of a person's education or, rather, lack of a proper education. Second, the person fails or refuses to oppose any government measure that is injurious to the people. Furthermore, he lacks the initiative to contribute to the common good, although he may have personal accomplishments. Pertinent to this, Rizal wrote: 'A man in the Philippines is a mere individual, he is not a member of a nation' (*Sobre la indolencia*, p. 257). Here Rizal was bewailing the absence of a wider society which a person could be loyal to and be inspired to work for. He blamed the lack of freedom of association as an obstacle in bringing about such a wider community. In addition, he asked that no obstacle be placed before a person in reference to his right to develop his intellect.

It is easy to identify many of the non-too-admirable characters in the *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo* who fall under each of the two or both manifestations of the lack of national sentiment. Best examples of the first are Capitan Tiago and Doña Victorina. Capitan Tiago was a person easily dazzled by foreign objects and bric-a-bracs, who tried to emulate and fawn over Spaniards in many ways, and was grossly superstitious regarding some foreign folk beliefs. Doña Victorina tried to out-hispanize the Spaniards, had an utter disdain for native culture elements, and looked down on other Filipinos as *indios* without considering herself as one of them. Examples of the second are Señor Pasta and Basilio in *El filibusterismo*. Señor Pasta was a man who, by dint of personal effort and much personal sacrifice, was able to attain the position of an influential lawyer. As he put it, with one hand serving chocolate to a friar and with his other hand holding a Latin grammar book he was studying, he was able to make something of himself. But the young Isagani reproached him as a person who had worked only for himself and had done nothing to contribute to the common good. Señor

Pasta, too, knew a great deal of what was wrong in society but his personal interests and safety prevented him from objecting to it in spite of his legal training. He was a supreme individualist of the selfish type and his personal accomplishments had no socially beneficial results. It was with such a model in mind that Rizal wrote to Padre Vicente Garcia, a Filipino priest: 'In the Philippines, there is individual progress but not a general one.'⁵

Then there is the character of Basilio. Despite having been a victim of injustice and the criminal acts of others, he was, with many sacrifices, able to achieve some academic distinctions. He had a difficult and humiliating life. But for a long time he would not lift a finger to rectify the injustice to his family or to object to the wrongs he saw endemic around him. He refused to risk what he had already achieved and remained content in a small nook of safety.

Certainly, the reader of 'The Indolence of the Filipinos' is tempted to ask Rizal more about the lack of national sentiment and its negative consequences. The last chapter of *El filibusterismo* grants this wish by further enumerating the ill effects of its absence. Through the words of Father Florentino, Rizal enumerates those ills that the Filipinos are responsible for. They can be conveniently classified as follows: (a) complacency in the face of tyranny; (b) the lack of disposition to struggle for their rights and to guarantee these rights by sacrifice and blood; (c) the feeling of private shame on what is recognized as unjust in society accompanied by the fear of voicing this feeling in public; (d) the wrapping of one's self in false pride or egoism; and (e) with a forced smile, lauding government iniquities (or corruption) while begging for a share in the spoils.⁶

Obviously all the above descriptions found in *El filibusterismo* are extensions or an intensification of what Rizal had earlier written in his essay on the indolence of the Filipinos. By a simple logical conversion, it is possible to define national sentiment in a positive manner as follows: A person with national sentiment is one who is preeminently appreciative of the results of native energy or labor or genius and is not easily dazzled by what is foreign simply because it is not the result of native effort. He is unafraid of tyranny, willing to work and struggle for his rights to the extent of defending them with his life. He is brave

to the point of publicly voicing his opposition to what he believes constitutes injurious acts to the community. He refuses to be bribed into silence or to share in the corrupt activities of his superiors or government officials. He dedicates himself to study and work with the general good in mind. Above all, he has emancipated himself from self-love (*amor proprio*) or purely personal or selfish interests so as to conceive of the good of a wider group—the community or nation.

RIZAL'S CONCEPT OF NATIONAL SENTIMENT

IN a very important sense, Rizal's concept of national sentiment has points of contact with Rousseau's concept of the general will. One school of thought, the liberal school, interprets Rousseau's general will as the will for the good of all. As a moral imperative it cannot err. It is a will that is in direct opposition to the individual or particular will which aims at personal or sectarian interests. Neither is the general will identical to the mere addition or aggregate of individual wills. Nor is it necessarily the will of the majority since the majority might only work for its partisan interests as against what may constitute the valid interests of a minority. In brief, the general will represents a moral effort aimed at the good of the whole community as against that of a special segment or class in society.

But there is a qualitative difference between Rousseau's general will and Rizal's national sentiment. Rousseau was a European acquainted with a long history of national states. He had lived in independent national states like France, England, and Switzerland. He was approaching his subject from an essentially moral point of view so as to arrive at the principle of the legitimacy of government. In Rizal's case, he was not living in what he conceived as a nation; a man in the Philippines is only an individual, not a member of a nation. The question to be raised here is: If there was no nation in the Philippines, then what did the term 'national' in 'national sentiment' mean? The answer will be dealt with later. For the present, what is needed is to

In Rizal's case, he was not living in what he conceived as a nation; a man in the Philippines is only an individual, not a member of a nation.

indicate one of the main stumbling blocks to the ability to generate a national sentiment or to exercise it.

The inability to conceive of a greater good that transcended the purely individual or personal interests was due to one's *amor propio* or self-love or false pride. Like many novelists of the late 19th century, Rizal used symbolism as a technique to convey some messages to the discerning reader. One of these is Maria Clara's locket which appears to be related to the pride or vanity which Rizal so much deplored as a trait among many Filipinos. It will be recalled that during the town fiesta of San Diego, Capitan Tiago gifted Maria Clara with a locket studded with diamonds and emeralds and containing a sliver of the boat of St Peter where Jesus Christ had ridden on the Sea of Galilee. It was a veritable act of ostentation and vanity. Not long after, without much thought or reflection, Maria gave it to a beggar afflicted with leprosy, causing one of her friends to remark that it was something the beggar could not eat and which other persons might refuse to touch for fear of contamination. In time, the leper gave it to Basilio who, as a medical student, came to treat him with beneficial medication. Instead of using the locket as a means to finance his medical studies and freeing himself from the humiliating handouts from Capitan Tiago, Basilio then gifted it to Juli, his girlfriend, who, for a very sentimental reason, would not use it to emancipate herself from domestic servitude or to help her father, Cablesang Tales, save their land from expropriation by a friar corporation. Simoun, whose love for Maria Clara (now cloistered in a nunnery) had not waned, offered Cablesang Tales a huge price for the locket. Cablesang Tales, instead of accepting the money to save his land and free his daughter from servitude, stole the pistol of Simoun and in its place substituted the locket which Simoun must have deposited in his smaller chest of valuables as hinted in *El filibusterismo*. It is this very treasure chest, unlike a larger one which Simoun also possessed, which Father Florentino personally carried to a precipice and threw into the sea, exclaiming that it had caused a lot of mischief.

A clue as to what the locket symbolizes is found in Chapter 11 of *El filibusterismo*, where the Spanish governor general, a Spanish official, some friars of different orders, the jeweler Simoun, and others were present in a gambling session in Los Baños. The group's conversation

drifted into the different forms of stakes that could be used in their gambling. Possible stakes or chips like Simoun's diamonds, government favors or concessions by the governor general, and so on were discussed as possibilities. When asked what he could bet or present as a stake, one of the friars protested that clerics like him did not possess the resources of persons like the governor general. It was then that Simoun retorted that the friars could offer *virtudes de boquilla*, that is, promises of virtues, or better still, empty or purely verbal promises. When asked what he could gain from purely verbal promises as well as other concessions from the governor general, Simoun irritatingly exclaimed: 'I'm tired of hearing virtues talked about and would like the whole of them, all there are in the world, tied up in a sack in order to throw them into the sea even though I had to use my diamonds as sinkers' (Fili, p. 92). And this is precisely what Father Florentino did when he threw into the sea the small treasure chest of Simoun which contained his diamonds and other precious jewels, as well as the cherished locket of Maria Clara. Did not Simoun's diamonds here serve as a ballast or a sinker for the locket?

Within the specific context of the gambling incident in Los Baños, what Rizal might have wanted to suggest was the existence of the hypocrisy or unfulfilled promises of high government or clerical officials. But in the wider context of how the locket passed from hand to hand, the element of *amor propio* or hurt pride is involved. To repeat, in his essay on the indolence of the Filipinos, Rizal bewailed this moral defect. And the *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo* are full of characters exemplifying this moral failure. It is the manifestation of the lack of national sentiment.

Rizal wanted to do away with all forms of vanity or self love (*amor propio*). In the last chapter of the *El filibusterismo*, when Father Florentino observed that Simoun had refused to hide in the face of the government's efforts to locate and arrest him, he recalled the saying of St John Chrysostom: 'Vanity of vanities and all is vanity'! The priest here was reflecting on one of the greatest flaws of Simoun's character—self-love or hurt pride. Might not this trait reflect a possible significance of Maria Clara's locket?

The idealistic and relatively naïve Ibarra of the *Noli me tangere* had been transformed into the sinister Simoun. Is it accidental or significant that, in the presence of the hunted and dejected Simoun, Father Florentino quotes a saint on the subject of vanity and that the name of this saint is no less than Juan Crisostomo, the very first names of Juan Crisostomo Ibarra? At this point, an admirable trait as well as consistency in Rizal's actions must be pointed out. In his dedication to the fatherland in *Noli me tangere* he wrote: '...I will raise part of the veil that covers the evil, sacrificing to truth everything, even self-love (*amor propio*) itself, since, as your son, I also suffer from your defects and weaknesses.'⁷ Here, our national hero exemplified fundamental elements of national sentiment: He showed consciousness of a fatherland and the existence of a people, bravery in exposing publicly what he believed were evils in colonial society, and the decision to do away with self-love or vanity and all that this implied. He dared to touch what many others had feared to touch. As he explained in a letter to his friend Felix Resurrecion Hidalgo, Rizal took the title *Noli me tangere* which signified 'touch me not' from the gospels. He had dared to do what others had feared to do. He tried to answer the calumnies heaped on the Filipinos, unveil what was really behind the promises of the government, express the hopes and aspirations of the people.

At this juncture, it may be remarked that the title of his first novel when related to the sad and tragic fate of Maria Clara makes her symbolize something that none ought to or could touch. In the last few paragraphs of *Noli me tangere*, it is narrated how a colonial government official appeared at the nunnery where Maria Clara was cloistered to make some inquiries about her. He saw a beautiful nun who, with tears and tales of horror, begged the official's protection against the 'outrages of hypocrisy'. The official ignored the request and was assured by the abbess that this beautiful nun was mad. He left things as they were since he might have thought that the nunnery was itself precisely a place for the insane. Nevertheless, when the Spanish governor general came to know about the matter, he thought otherwise and wished to protect the nun. But this time no one was allowed to pursue an inquiry since the abbess would not permit a visit to the nunnery—'forbidding it in the name or religion and the Holy Statutes' (*Noli*, p. 498). In brief, Maria

Clara was not to be touched. She had become clerical property and, in effect, symbolized some aspects of clerical dominance in the colony. In touching this aspect, Rizal hurt certain vested interests in the colony. For this, he had to pay with his life.

The figure in *El filibusterismo* who best exemplified the absence of national sentiment, at least in one facet of his complex personality, is Simoun. His vindictiveness was very personally motivated and many of his actions stemmed from self-love or hurt personal pride. He resorted to any means to achieve personal aims: bribery, corruption, coercion, and so on. He was devoid of moral consideration for others and manipulated others for his own personal aims. Thus, according to Father Florentino, it was God Himself who frustrated Simoun's plans—principally, the two attempts at revolution. The priest said to Simoun: 'He has frustrated our plans one by one, the best conceived, first by the death of Maria Clara, then by a lack of preparation, then in some mysterious way' (Fili, p. 357).

The first attempt at revolution failed or was aborted due to Simoun's inaction upon hearing of Maria Clara's death. The attempt at revolution contained a very personal purpose—the rescue of Maria Clara from the nunnery, which involved the hurt pride of the vindictive Simoun. The second attempt at revolution failed due to faulty coordination and because of the lack of a well-defined cause or ideology. The revolutionists eventually dispersed into different bands, each pursuing group interests. Some had become bandits sacking convents and the houses of the rich. According to Father Florentino, Simoun had fostered rebellious movements based on individual frustrations 'without sowing an idea'. Certainly, no national sentiment was involved in Simoun's two attempts at revolution. But if Rizal made national sentiment the motivating factor in such attempts, would he have made Simoun's efforts successful? From this speculation, one may interpret *Noli me tangere* as exposing the various ills of a colonial society and *El filibusterismo* as showing what was wrong or incomplete in the technique of ameliorating or solving them.

Nevertheless, it is through another facet of the personality of Simoun that national sentiment can be best expressed. This is revealed in a lengthy dialogue, almost a debate, between Simoun and Basilio in

a forest in Chapter 7 of *El filibusterismo*. From the vantage of literary technique and political discourse, many of the views of Simoun here which do not normally tally with his destructive tendencies are meant more to raise questions for the reader rather than to instruct Basilio as part of the novel's plot. Many of Simoun's views in his moralization and exhortation to Basilio are closely parallel—if not actually identical—to Rizal's expressed views and activities. Simoun was recommending that instead of thinking in terms of the language of others and entirely adopting a foreign culture which would kill one's original creative abilities and subordinate one's thoughts to those of aliens, it was imperative to develop and cultivate one's own—that is, the native language.

Preservation of one's language was not only preserving one's identity but constituted a form of freedom from the intrusion of unwanted ideas. One ought to develop one's culture to avoid being a poor imitation of the culture of others which can only lead to being belittled and despised. What must be built are 'the foundations of the Philippine Fatherland' (Fili, p. 62). And instead of begging to be a province of Spain, 'aspire to be a nation' (Fili, p. 63). Furthermore: 'Instead of subordinate thoughts, think independently, to the end that neither by right, nor custom, nor language, the Spaniard can be considered the master here, nor even be looked upon as part of the country, but ever as an invader, a foreigner, and sooner or later you will have

your liberty' (Fili, p. 63). Aside from pointing out the evil aspects of cultural imperialism, Rizal here is once again indicating that a main principle of national sentiment is found in the confidence and appreciation of native creative energies and the sheer avoidance of wishing to be a mere copy of others.

It will be recalled that, in Chapter 50 of *Noli me tangere*, it was Elias who initially requested Ibarra to 'spread the idea of what is called a fatherland' (Noli, p. 392). While Rizal already had a concept of the Philippines as his fatherland, characters in his novels still talked of build-

A main principle of national sentiment is found in the appreciation of native creative energies and the sheer avoidance of wishing to be a mere copy of others.

ing the foundations of the fatherland. There is no inconsistency here. Rizal had a concept of a fatherland and this to him was the Philippines. What he desired was that its consciousness become more universalized among all the natives of the archipelago in a manner that would rise in tandem with a high degree of social or community awareness. He was aiming at a form of social solidarity along ethnic or national lines. But this was not enough. The society had to be organized in terms of novel institutions to reify this solidarity. In brief, Rizal's aim, in his novels and articles as well as in his later actions, was to form a national community. This was more than patriotism in the sense of merely loving the place of one's birth. Rizal was trying to seek another identity instead of that of an *indio*.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A NATIONAL COMMUNITY

IN 1889, between the publication of *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo*, Rizal reprinted Morga's *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas* (originally published in 1609) with his learned annotations. As he claimed here, his aim was to awake among Filipinos 'a consciousness of the past'. In this manner, with an awareness of a common past and ancient culture, the people would feel like a historical people and belie the charge of their detractors that, before colonial conquest, they were savages doomed to eternal perdition. Once they have cast away the feeling of inferiority fostered upon them by their conquerors and developed common aspirations, the people would progressively increase their community feeling and solidarity—thus evincing an element of national sentiment. But Rizal's wish for the Filipinos to know something of their 'nationality in its last days' was not meant to revert to an old nativistic culture that had been bypassed by modern progress and technology. It was simply to remind people of a common ancestry and past achievements and not to impress upon them that they were once upon a time a nation in the modern sense. For this, according to his complaint, had yet to exist in the islands.

But Rizal was not merely content to have the national community as a concept that could be reified by harking to a precolonial past or by the mere exercise of many wills. He decided to go into the arena of action by organizing the *Liga Filipina*. This organization aimed to stimu-

late education, agriculture and commerce. It was to serve as an agency for mutual protection and necessity. More importantly, it was also to serve as a defense against all violence and injustice. One of its moral prescriptions was that its members ought not to subject themselves to any form of humiliation nor treat each other with arrogance. If successful, the *Liga Filipina* would make obsolete the problems enunciated in *El filibusterismo*, like the educational one represented by the schoolmaster, the economic one represented by Cablesang Tales, the domestic and social ones epitomized by the tragic Sisa, and so on. Defense against violence and injustice and, presumably, the bravery that went with it, coupled with willingness to risk one's life, all revealed the inspiration of national sentiment elements. When the *Liga Filipina* aimed to unite the archipelago 'into one compact, vigorous and homogenous body', it was, in effect, aiming to create a parallel community with a higher good to which the member could sublimate his personal interests since he was not humiliated or exploited in it. National sentiment in this community will constitute a will for the good of the whole people. Thus struggle against injustice will be on behalf of the community and not for the satisfaction of individual vindictiveness or sectarian interests. Due to the structure of its administrative set-up as well as its 'cell' system as provided for in its very last provision which was intended to guarantee its perpetuation, a goal of the *Liga Filipina* was to eventually include all natives of the archipelago. That the term *filipina* was used to qualify the organization implied that the country called Filipinas belonged not to Spaniards but to the native born, and that the native

When Rizal made Simoun's two attempts at revolution fail, it did not necessarily imply that he was against revolution.

born was the Filipino. As a member of the *Liga Filipina*, the *indio* had been transformed into a *Filipino*.

At this juncture, the problem of revolution enters. When Rizal made Simoun's two attempts at revolution fail, it did not necessarily imply that he was

against revolution. It could only mean that he was prescribing the conditions for its justification. Or, to put it in another form, he was laying the conditions under which it could be judged successful. Indeed, Rizal was not against the use of force if circumstances validated it. In the

words of a high Spanish official in *El filibusterismo*: 'When a people is denied light, home, liberty, and justice—things that are essential to life, and therefore man's patrimony—that people has the right to treat him who despoils it as we would the robber who intercepts us on the highway' (Fili, p. 304).

Based on Father Florentino's peroration, it appears that one reason for Simoun's failures in launching revolutions was that they were personally motivated rather than based on an 'idea' or ideology. But if a revolution were launched on behalf of a national community where national sentiment reigned, would it be justified? Rizal's answer would have to be a resounding yes. If a movement were launched to do away with a particular tyranny where human rights were denied but would succeed only to bring another form of oppression, then nothing had been accomplished in terms of the recognition of the individual worth and rights. But a widespread national sentiment would be a guarantee that no future tyranny would be substituted for the previous one. Now, should a national community imbued with national sentiment emerge in the archipelago, it might not even be necessary, hopefully, to launch a revolution to make it free. Hopefully, too, the colonial power would let it go, for 'when the fruit of the womb reaches maturity, woe unto the mother who would stifle it!' (Fili, p. 304). At any rate, if this does not come to be, then, from a pragmatic point of view, a revolution motivated by a definite ideology and supported by a solid community would have greater chances for success.

In his essay 'The Philippines: a Century Hence', Rizal predicted the likely possibility that the Philippines would eventually secure political independence and defend its liberty at the price of 'much blood and sacrifice'.⁸ It is not gainsaying that Rizal anticipated eventual political independence for the Philippines, and he gave some reasons for this in *Noli me tangere* as well as many more in the above essay. This makes it clearer why he ardently wished that national sentiment would pervade in such an independent state. He never equated human liberty with political independence. Here, we find Rizal at his best as a moral and political philosopher.

However, it is equally clear that, to Rizal, the existence of a national sentiment and of a national community is not an ultimate end in

itself. It is simply a tool to achieve certain human ends in the historical development of a people. This is revealed in the dialogue between Simoun and Basilio in the forest (Fili, pp. 64-65). Basilio, defending the role of and need for science in society, anticipated the eventual emergence of a scientific world culture that would transcend and eliminate differences of race, national states, colonizers and colonized, and oppressors and oppressed. In that state, too, patriotism would be considered a form of fanaticism or mental disease, if not an actual danger to world order. Simoun readily agreed with Basilio but commented that in the historical stage they lived in, when tyranny and oppression were the rule, patriotism was a crime not only to the oppressors but also a virtue of the oppressed because it signified love of justice and liberty and the affirmation of the innate dignity of the individual. Obviously, this dialogue was meant more for the perusal of the reader since both Simoun and Basilio in their character roles in *El filibusterismo* were unable to transcend personal interests. But Rizal's message was that the anticipated so-called world culture was centuries away and could never be realized unless there was the complete elimination of the oppressor and the oppressed, and the colonizer and the colonized. A world or universal order assumed this absence. To him, the Filipinos had an immediate problem: How to eliminate the lack of liberty and those institutions that stifled the actualization of man's innate impulse toward moral and intellectual progress. In brief, what was essential for the moment was to develop national sentiment and the national community. This was the response to the given actual historical situation. Take one thing at a time and let the far future decide how to transform national sentiment to international sentiment.

More than a century has passed since Rizal lived and wrote his works and we now face a new millennium. The world scientific culture or order seems as far off as ever just as Simoun thought of it. We still witness conflicts between national states, ethnic rivalries, religious conflicts, subtle oppressions between states, as well as internal struggles between social classes within each country. And a great deal of these inner conflicts is intimately related with the foreign policies of stronger and wealthier states.

The following questions can be asked: How much of the national sentiment, as Rizal defined it, can be found today in Philippine society? How pervasive is it and in what segments of society is it best found? Or to put it in another way: To what extent has our country approximated Rizal's model of a national community? For, indeed, Rizal believed that an independent state was not necessarily identical to the national community he had in mind. A national community is something in the making. In accordance with Rizal's criteria, it can move forward in a dynamic fashion or take a few backward steps. Answers to the above questions can partially be found in the existence, disappearance, or reappearance of those characters Rizal wanted to do away with or make obsolete. Herein is the cogency of his criteria.

Rizal believed that an independent state was not necessarily identical to the national community he had in mind. A national community is something in the making.

As long as there is exploitation and poverty in society, a lack of bravery in the struggle for the recognition and protection of human rights, selfish support for power-hungry or corrupt officials in order to partake of the crumbs from their tables, and an urgent need to bring about the best of the people's creative energy, Rizal's message for the people he so loved and others in a similar historical situation remains true in the next millenium.

NOTES

1. Many of Rizal's ideas here are found scattered in his 'A las compatriotas jovenes de Malolos', written in 1889 and found in Jose Rizal, *Escritos Politicos e Historicos, Tomo VII*. Comision Nacional del Centenario de Jose Rizal, Manila 1961, pp. 66-75.

2. References to Rizal's *Noli me tangere* are based on Charles Derbyshire's English translation, *The Social Cancer* (1957).

3. References to Rizal's *El filibusterismo* are based on Charles Derbyshire's English translation, *The Reign of Greed*, 2nd ed., rev. (1957).

4. References to Rizal's 'Sobre la indolencia de los Filipinos' are taken from Jose Rizal, *Escritos Politicos e Historicos, Tomo VII*.

5. Found in De Rizal al P. Vicente Garcia, *Epistolario Rizalino, Tomo III*, p. 137.

6. These ideas are found scattered in *The Reign of Greed*, pp. 360-361.
7. My translation.
8. In Filipinas Dentro de Cien Años, *Escritos Politicos e Historicos*, p. 163.

REFERENCES

- Constantino, R. 1959. Our Task: To Make Rizal Obsolete. *This Week*. 14 June.
- Rizal J. De Rizal al P. Vicente Garcia. *Epistolario Rizalino, Tomo III*.
- Rizal, J. 1961. A las compatriotas jovenes de Malolos. *Escritos Politicos e Historicos, Tomo VII*. Manila: Comision Nacional del Centenario de Jose Rizal.
- Rizal, J. 1958. *The Reign of Greed*. CE Derbyshire (trans). Manila: Philippine Education Co.
- Rizal, J. Sobre la indolencia de los Filipinos. *Escritos Politicos e Historicos, Tomo VII*. Manila: Comision Nacional del Centenario de Jose Rizal, 1961.
- Rizal, J. 1957. *The Social Cancer*. CE Derbyshire (trans). Manila: Philippine Education Co.