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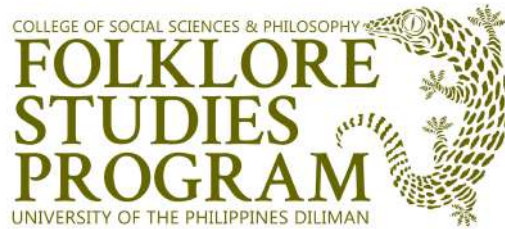
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*Vol. 03, No. 02 (2023)*





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**SOLEDAD NATALIA M. DALISAY, PhD**

*Issue Editor*

**FOLKLORE STUDIES PROGRAM**

College of Social Sciences and Philosophy

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**Banwaan: The Philippine Journal of Folklore** is the peer-reviewed online journal of the Folklore Studies Program of the UP College of Social Sciences and Philosophy. The journal aims to provide a space for scholars working on folklore to exchange ideas, methodologies, and research findings. Recognizing the multidisciplinary nature of folkloristics, the journal welcomes articles from various disciplines.

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# Table of Contents

vii

*Editor's Notes*

1

*Tárag yé king dápu!*  
*Hybrid na pagkakaintindi sa ayún sa*  
Indung Kapampáangan  
JC GAILLARD

23

*Stars of Portent: Comets and Disasters*  
*in the Philippine Past, 1566–1910*  
EMMANUEL JAYSON V. BOLATA

57

*Raining in Quezon and Laguna:*  
*Revisiting Shared Folklore through*  
*the 1953 Historical Data Papers*  
RYAN ALVIN M. PAWILEN

77

*The Curse of the Tablas Strait:*  
*An Interrogation of Maritime Accidents*  
*from 1902-2008*  
KARL FRIEDRIK K. POBLADOR

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## *the folklore of disasters*



Folklore is a rich repository of local wisdom passed down through the generations of community members either orally, through written records or other means such as art forms. While the entertainment function may be present, valuable lifesaving lessons may be culled from the experiences of the past as encoded in folklore. People have dealt with hazards in the environment in ways that they find meaningful as a community. People have engaged with hazards in a manner that has proven to be effective in many encounters with hazards in the past. People explain the occurrence of a hazard through folktales. One of the more prominent cautionary tales in disaster risk reduction, is the legend of the seven rollers and the *laboon* of the Moken in Thailand which reportedly helped save lives from the great Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004 (Arunotai, 2004). Similarly, the legend of the *smong* among the Simeulueans had also saved people living in coastal communities in Aceh (Syafwina, 2014). Proverbs and folk songs are also repositories of local wisdom such as the proverb used to predict the weather among agricultural communities in Vietnam. The proverb speaks of a corona around the moon which portends of drought whereas a halo may indicate rain soon (Ngoc Huy and Shaw, 2008). Observing erratic animal behavior has been reported to portend the coming of a devastating typhoon (Dalisy and Tatel, 2011) in certain areas in the Bicol region. Hence, being mindful of references to hazards in folklore may help in predicting their occurrence and may potentially stem damages from devastating hazards (Dalisy, 2014). This issue of *Banwaan* is devoted to giving readers a glimpse of how valuable folklore can be to hazard mitigation and disaster risk reduction efforts. This issue of *Banwaan* is devoted to folklore of hazards and its use as harbinger or deterrent to disasters. The articles in this issue show that local explanations and responses to hazards exist and that understanding these could potentially contribute to more contextualized disaster risk reduction programs. Equally important, the articles also show that folklore, just like any other aspect of culture is not monolithic. Change and convergence with other paradigms are possible.

The article of Reidan Pawilen on **“Raining in Quezon and Laguna: Revisiting shared intangible heritage with the 1953 historical data papers”** examines similar folklore on rain, storm and typhoons in the two provinces using 1953 historical data of the Philippines. Pawilen argues for the recognition of the value of folklore studies in writing local and cultural history of the Philippines, particularly in the context of interrogating how people understood and responded to meteorological hazards in the past.

Emmanuel Jason Bolata in his article on **“Stars of Portent: Comets and Disasters in the Philippine Past, 1680 - 1910”** delved into the narrative communicated by the paintings of Estaban Villanueva y Pichay on the Basi Revolt of 1807. Prominent in these paintings was the Great Comet of 1807. Bolata contends that celestial bodies, in the early 19th century Philippines, were interpreted to be portents of “...famine, misery...pestilence, wars, fall of kings, collapse of empires...” Thus, the paintings gave the message to the native Filipinos that rebellion at the time would most likely lead to devastating results. Similar narratives are evident in the literature. Celestial bodies as harbingers or signs of an impending disaster are part of the folklore of other areas in the Philippines like Albay and in other countries like Vietnam (Dalisy, 2014). Bolata, likewise, argues for the universality of celestial bodies as portents of disasters reflecting the collective experiences and knowledge of previous generations that serve as guides for the succeeding generations in navigating through potentially devastating hazards. In the end, Bolata poses the counter narrative of hope saying that a comet may not only herald doom but may also act as a “...comet of hope”.

Karl Poblador engages folklore in explaining the seemingly high number of maritime accidents in what is popularly known as the Romblon Triangle in his article **“The Curse of the Tablas Strait: An Interrogation of Maritime Accidents from 1902-2008”**. While the folk explanation seems to be more the more readily accepted explanation of the sinkings in the Tablas Strait which is part of the mythical Romblon Triangle, Poblador encourages a revisiting of the official narratives of the sinkings in the attempt to provide an alternative to the more dominant folk elucidations of the sinkings in the area.

JC Gaillard, in his article **“Tárak ye king dapu! Hybrid na pagkakaintindi sa ayun sa Indung Kapampangan”** challenges what he contends is the dominant western perspective of hazards as extraordinary life events that require

extraordinary solutions. Gaillard uses the Indung kapampangan in putting forth the point of view that hazards such as the ayun or the lindol (seismic events) are viewed by locals with a hybrid perspective, putting together precolonial paradigms and the colonial perspective and the current global context in shaping the kapampangan views of the ayun in relation to danger. Gaillard contends further that the hybrid perspective can be taken as resistance to the colonial and possibly also, the neo colonial paradigms in disaster studies.

Soledad Natalia M. Dalisay  
*January 2025*

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# Tárag yé king dápu! Hybrid na pagkakaintindi sa ayún sa Indung Kapampángan

JC Gaillard

*Waipapa Taumata Rau  
(The University of Auckland)*

Ang artikulong ito ay tungkol sa seismolohiyang Kapampángan o ang pagkakaintindi ng mga Kapampángan sa *ayún* (lindol) at sa kaniyang epekto sa *Indung* Kapampángan. Hamon ito sa kasalukuyang namamayaning talastasan tungkol sa lindol bilang *extra-ordinary* na dahilan ng kalamidad at hadlang sa pag-unlad ng buhay ng tao. Ang ganitong punto de bista ay pamana ng Kanluran na hindi tugma sa tunay na pananaw sa mundo ng mga taumbayang Kapampángan. Sa katotohanan, ang kasalukuyang pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* sa *Indung* Kapampángan ay *hybrid*. Ang ibig sabihin nito ay meron pa ring katutubong paniniwala na nakaantabay sa iba't ibang pamanang banyaga galing sa precolonial na relasyon sa Asya, kolonyalismo at kasalukuyang globalisadong talastasan. Ang artikulong ito ay tumututok sa kahalagaan ng *dápu* (buwaya) sa pagkakaintindi ng Kapampángan sa *ayún* at *ngánib* (panganib) at kung paano ang mga ito ay nabago sa kasaysayan. Pangwakas, ang kasalukuyang *hybrid*ity sa pagkakaintindi sa *dápu*, *ayún* at *ngánib* ay itinuturing na isang uri ng *resistance* sa proyektong kolonyal.

Mga susing salita: *kalamidad, lindol, buwaya, panganib, hybridity, Indung Kapampángan*



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Si *JC Gaillard* ay Ahorangi / Propesor ng Heograpiya sa Waipapa Taumata Rau / Unibersidad ng Auckland, Nueva Zelanda at International Research Fellow sa University of the Philippines Resilience Institute. Dati rin siyang membro ng faculty ng Departamento ng Heograpiya ng Unibersidad ng Pilipinas sa Diliman. Tungkol sa mga kalamidad ang kanyang pagsasaliksik at pagtuturo. Marami rin siyang proyekto kasama ang mga Non-Government Organisations at lokal na pamahalaan sa buong Pilipinas.  
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## Panimula

Noong 22 ng Abril ng 2019 nagkaroon ng malakas na lindol (6.1 na *magnitude*) sa *labuad* Kapampáangan<sup>1</sup>. Sampu ang mga namatay at malaki ang naging pinsala sa imprastraktura. Dahil dito ang buong lalawigan ng Pampanga ay idineklara na nasa *state of calamity*. Samakatwid, ang pangyayaring ito ay itunuturing bilang isa sa mga pinaka o kung hindi ang pinaka grabing kalamidad ng mga huling dalawang dekada sa *labuad* Kapampáangan. Ayon sa mga lokal at internasyonal na komentarista nangyari ito dahil sa *nature's fury* at sa *deadly earthquake* (CBS News, 2019; Orejas, 2022). Mabilis at madali ang paghahanap ng may kasalanan, at ito ay dahil sa kalikasan.

Sa kasalukuyang panulat, hinahamon natin ang ganitong pagkakaintindi sa lindol, o *ayún* sa *amánung* Kapampáangan<sup>2</sup>, bilang *extra-ordinary* (i.e. hindi nangyayari sa araw-araw na buhay) o pambihirang natural na pangyayari na kung saan tinatamaan ang abilidad ng taumbayan na umunlad sa buhay. Ito ay isang pamana ng Kanluran na hindi sumasalamin sa tunay na pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* ng mga Kapampáangan (Gaillard, 2021). Ang kasalukuyang panulat ay sinusuri din ang *hybridity* ng tunay na pananaw sa *ayún* at sa mundo sa *Indung* Kapampáangan<sup>3</sup>. Ibig sabihin nito na ang mga katutubong paniniwala o mito na may tutok sa buwaya, o *dápu* sa *amánung* Kapampáangan, ay kaantabay sa umiiral na pamanang kolonyal at kasalukuyang globalisadong talastasan tungkol sa kalamidad.

Ang tutok ng artikulong ito ay ang mitolohikal na karakter ng *dápu* bilang matapat na pamana ng lokal at oral na tradisyon na nangingibabaw sa kasalukuyang katutubong karunungan Kapampáangan o Kapampáangan *folklore* sa wikang Ingles. Ayon kay Garcia (2016: 179) tungkol sa buong Pilipinas '*despite the last four hundred years of Western hegemonic influence and rule, (...) life in these islands had not really been subjected to the same empirical description and rationalization that life in the West has been, since at least the period of the Enlightenment*'. Nagmula rin sa kanluraning pamana ang karamihan sa mga nakasulat tungkol sa *Indung* Kapampáangan (halimbawa kay Beyer, 1918; Forman, 1971; Larkin, 1993). Kaya

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<sup>1</sup> Lugar ng mga katutubong marunong mag-Kapampangan

<sup>2</sup> Wikang Kapampangan

<sup>3</sup> Ang literal na kahulugan ay inang Kapampangan pero ginagamit ito bilang malawak na konsepto para sa kamalatang pangmundong Kapampangan.

na namis-interpretata ang mga Kapampáangan bilang masunurin na tagasuporta ng kolonyal na pamumuno ng mga Espanyol. Sa talastasang ito walang kapasidad, o *agency* sa wikang Ingles, ang mga Kapampáangan.

Mahalaga rin sa argumento ng artikulong ito ang pagbabago ng talastasan tungkol sa *ayún* sa kasaysayan. Samakatwid, hindi nakasentro sa mismong karanasan ng lindol ng taumbayan ang ating argumento. Kaugnay ang ating argumento sa *postcolonial* na pag-aaral dahil hinahamon natin ang unibersal na kabuluhan ng Kanluraning pananaw sa mundo na nagmula sa *Enlightenment*. Ang diskurso ay lampas din sa simpleng representasyon ng kapaligiran at kalamidad kaugnay sa punto de bista ng binary sa pagitan ng, sa isang banda, kalikasan/panganib at, sa kabilang banda, lipunan/bulnerabilidad. Ang tunay na pokus ng argumento ng artikulong ito ay ang *ambivalence* ng kasalukuyang pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* at *resistance* sa kanluraning talastasan. Hindi ibig sabihin ito na iminumungkahi natin itapon ang konsepto ng kalamidad bilang paglikha ng Kanluran (Gaillard, 2021). Ayon kay Butler (1995: 51) pwede pa rin natin gamitin ang mga ganitong hehemonikong konsepto kaya lang kailangan din natin '*to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power*'.

Magsisimula ang artikulong ito sa isang maikling paliwanag tungkol sa mga kasalukuyang nakapamayaning talastasan sa kalamidad at ang kanilang pinagmulan. Ang ikalawang bahagi ng artikulo ay isang pagsusuri ng katutubong karunungan Kapampáangan, lalo na ng sismolohiang Kapampáangan o katutubong pananaw ng Kapampáangan sa *ayún* at ang tungkulin ng *dápu*. Ang mga susunod na bahagi ay tungkol sa pagbabago ng talastasan tungkol sa *ayún* at *dápu* at kung paano ang dalawang ito ay naging panganib ayon sa punto de bista ng mga kolonyalistang Espanyol. Ang mga panghuling bahagi ng artikulo ay nakatutok sa kasalukuyang pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* at ang *ambivalence* at *hybridity* bilang *resistance* sa proyektong kolonyal at normatibong Kanluraning talastasan tungkol sa kalamidad. Ang ganitong *ambivalence* at *hybridity* ay malinaw na nagpapatagal sa presensiya ng *dápu* sa pananaw ng Kapampáangan sa *ayún*.

### **Kasalukuyang pagkakaintindi sa lindol at kalamidad**

Kumon sa pananaliksik tungkol sa kalamidad ang talastasan na ginamit ng medya noong lumindol sa Pampanga noong 2019. Sa ganitong talastasan ang lindol ay *nature's fury* na may malupit na pinsala para sa lipunan. Ito ay

sumasalamin sa hehemonikong pananaw sa kalamidad na nagmula sa proyekto ng modernidad noong ika-labing walong siglo sa Europa. Ang layunin ng proyektong ito ay palayain ang mga taumbayan mula sa mga panganib ng kalikasan upang umunlad sila. Kahit iba't iba ang mga kasalukuyang balangkas tungkol sa kalamidad, pinagbabatayan pa rin ang ganitong ontolohikal na paniniwala: ang kalamidad ay nasa pagitan ng kalikasan at lipunan, o sa wika ng pag-aaral tungkol sa kalamidad, sa pagitan ng panganib (halimbawa isang lindol) at bulnerabilidad (ang posibilidad na may pinsala) (Gaillard, 2021).

Pinipigilan ng ganitong ontolohikal na paniniwala ang mga kasalukuyang balangkas kung saan ang dahilan ng kalamidad ay ang panganib/kalikasan o ang bulnerabilidad/lipunan. Samakatwid, ang kanilang diperensiya ay parang paglipat-lipat lamang ng *pendulum* sa loob ng isang binary na pananaw sa mundo na nagmula sa Europa. Kaya ang lahat ng kasalukuyang balangkas upang maintindihan ang karanasan ng taumbayan sa harap ng natural na pangyayari katulad ng lindol ay nagpapatuloy sa hehemoniya ng Kanluraning kaalaman at talastasan. Sinasalamin nila ang dialektikal na paghahanap ng *reason* ni Hegel (Gaillard, 2021). Isang paghahanap ng maliwanag at unibersal na katotohanan tungkol sa lindol, pinsala at pagdurusa. Ito ay ang imperyal na katotohanan ng Kanluran ayon kay Eboussi-Boulaga (1977).

Nagmula sa ganitong hehemonya ng mga Kanluraning balangkas tungkol sa kalamidad ang mga normatibo at pare-parehong polisiya at gawi o aksyon para sa kasalukuyang tinatawag na *disaster risk reduction and management*. Itong mga polisiya at aksyon ay sentido kumon sa buong mundo dahil sa normatibo at unibersal na balangkas katulad ng *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015). Samakatwid, pagpapalawak sa proyektong imperyalista ng Kanluran ang mga ganitong balangkas, polisiya at aksyon ayon kay Bankoff (2001, 2009). Kahit napalitan na ang mga ibang teknokratikong polisiya at aksyon batay sa agham, teknolohiya at estratehiyang militar at kahit sa kasalukuyan may mas progresibong *community-based* o *participatory* na proseso, ang lahat ng ito ay katulad pa rin ng paglipat ng *pendulum* sa pag-aaral tungkol sa kalamidad. Batay pa rin silang lahat sa pananaw sa mundo na nagmula sa Kanluran at sa proyekto ng modernidad upang palayain ang mga taumbayan mula sa lindol at ibang banta ng kalikasan.

Ang ganitong pagkakaintindi sa lindol bilang banta o panganib ng kalikasan na maaaring makahadlang sa pag-unlad ng taumbayan ay malinaw noong 22 ng Abril ng 2019 sa Pampanga. Ang deklarasyon ng buong lalawigan ng Pampanga bilang



nasa ilalim ng *state of calamity* ay isang maliwanag na ebidensiya ng ganitong pananaw. Ayon sa batas (RA10121) ang *state of calamity* ay ‘*a condition involving mass casualty and/or major damages to property, disruption of means of livelihoods, roads and normal way of life of people in the affected areas as a result of the occurrence of natural or human-induced hazard*’ (Republic of the Philippines, 2010).

Hindi tugma ang ganitong pananaw sa kalikasan at natural na pangyayari katulad ng lindol sa katutubong pananaw sa *ayún* ng Kapampáangan. Hindi rin ito tugma sa kanilang kasalukuyang hybrid na pagkakaintindi sa mundo. Ang argumento ng artikulong ito ay tungkol sa *hybridity* ng pananaw sa kalamidad kung saan may pamanang katutubo, o seismolohiyang Kapampáangan, na nakalakip sa pamana ng Kanluran na *reinterpreted* sa konteksto ng *Indung* Kapampáangan.

### Seismolohiyang Kapampáangan

Sa mitolohiyang at katutubong karunungan Kapampáangan, at pati rin para sa mga Tagalog at iba pang lipunan sa Luzon (de Plascencia, 1903; de los Reyes, 1909; Nocheseda, 2002; Barretto-Tesoro, 2020; Saluria, 2023; Ubaldo, 2023; Reyes, 2024), ang *ayún* ay kaugnay sa buwaya o *dápu* sa *amánung* Kapampáangan. Ang *dápu* ay dinadala ang daigdig sa likod niya. May parang karayom, o *sikuan* sa *amánung* Kapampáangan, upang ikabit ang daigdig sa likod ng *dápu*. Kapag galit na ang *dápu* gumagalaw siya at matatanggal ang *sikuan* kaya lumilindol. Samakatwid, ang ating pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* ay hindi pwede ihiwalay sa mitolohikal na karakter ng *dápu* at ang kanyang metaporikal na tungkulin sa pananaw sa paggalaw ng daigdig. Dahil dito ang mga mito ay salamin sa pananaw sa mundo ng taumbayan at ekspresyon ng kanilang katotohanan. Ang mga mito ay ‘*infuse meaning into existence, sustain life, and give it flavour*’ (Garcia, 2016: 26). Ayon kay Garcia (2016: 22) ulit ‘*the truth of myth comes from its metaphorical nature, which serves to indicate profound insights and truths about the human condition. Myths are to be taken as literally false, but metaphorically true, therefore*’.

Sa mitolohiyang at katutubong karunungan Kapampáangan, ang *dápu* na dinadala ang daigdig sa likod niya ay hindi kahit anong buwaya. Ang *dápu* ito ay iginagalang ng mga Kapampáangan. Ito ay ang *Indung Tibuan* o ang ninunong ina (Pangilinan, 2022). Bago ang kolonisasyon, ang *dápu* ay *núnú*. Sa *Vocabulario de la Lengua Pampanga* na inilathala nong 1732, ang salin ni Bergaño para sa salitang Espanyol na *tarabuelo* ay *dápu* at *núnú*. Sa mitolohiyang at katutubong karunungan Kapampáangan, kasama silang *dápu* at *Batala* bilang tagalikha sa

mundo. Si Batala ay isang asul na ibon at ang ninunong ama (Mallari, 2004; Pangilinan, 2022). Si Batala ay nag-alala sa langit at sa mga proseso sa atmospera. Samantala, ang *dápu* ay lumikha sa bundok at ilog (Larawan 1). Samakatwid, ang *dápu* ang may kontrol sa mga *ayún*.



Larawan 1. Kapampangan mythology, obra ni Don Reich de Dios, mixed media sa plywood, 2017

Pangkaraniwan ang buwaya, bilang reinkarnasyon ng *Indung Tibuan*, sa mga ilog ng *labuad* Kapampáangan noong hindi pa dumating ang mga kolonyalistang Espanyol. Samakatuwid, mahalaga noon ang *dápu* sa buhay ng mga Kapampáangan. Marami ang mga ebidensiya nito sa mga unang sinulat ng mga Espanyol, pati sa wikang Kapampáangan at sa mga pangalan ng mga lugar. Halimbawa, sa *Vocabulario* ni Bergaño (1732), lampas dalawampu ang mga nakalista na salita na kaugnay sa *dápu* at sa kanyang ugali, katawan at kapaligiran. Ganon din sa mga librong gramatika ng mga Espanyol noong ika-labing pito at ika-labing walong siglo: marami ang mga halimbawa ng pangungusap na may reperensiya sa *dápu* (Bergaño, 1729; Coronel, 1621; de Benavente, 1699). Meron din lugar at ilog na

may pangalan na nagmula sa *dápu*, katulad ng *Babang* (baba rin sa wikang Filipino) *Dápu* sa Mabalacat, *Tete* (tulay) *Dápu* sa Apalit at *Tacasan* (takasan din sa wikang Filipino) *Dápu* sa Candaba (Mallari, 2004; Tuazon, nd).

Marami rin sa mga naunang sinulat ng mga kolonyalistang Espanyol ang mga ebidensiya ng kahalagaan ng *dápu* sa *Indung Kapampangan* at ng buwaya sa mga kalapit na lugar ng mga Tagalog kung saan meron rin ganitong paniniwala (de Bobadilla, 1640; de los Reyes, 1909). Halimbawa, ayon kay de San Nicolas noong 1664 (1905: 138), ang mga taumbayan *‘adored not less the sun, the moon, the rainbow, birds, and animals—but especially the cayman or crocodile; a blue bird closely resembling the thrush; the crow; rocks placed on the shores of the sea, and those that they see in the sea, such as sunken rocks and shoals’*. Sinabi rin ni de Bodilla nong 1640 (1905: 284) na ang mga tao *‘had a great veneration for the crocodile. [When] they saw it in the water, they called it nono, or “grandfather.” They offered to it prayers regularly, with great devotion, and offerings of what they carried in their boats’*.

May ganitong pagpapabanal sa *dápu* sa mismong kabahayan kung saan ang mga taumbayan ay nag-ipon ng *‘a great number of the teeth of the crocodile or wild boar, strung on a cord’ for ceremonial purposes’* ayon kay de Jesus in 1663 (1905: 204). Ayon kay de Loarca noong 1582 (1903: 149), ang ganitong mga pagdiriwang ay *‘casting lots with the teeth of a crocodile or of a wild boar. During the ceremony they invoke their gods and their ancestors, and inquire of them as to the result of their wars and their journeys’*. May impluwensiya rin sa paglilibing ang larawan ng *dápu* bilang *Indung Tibuan* (Beyer, 1947). Halimbawa, sinabi ni Tenazas (1973: 23) na *‘the motifs most frequently encountered in boat-coffins in the Philippines are the lizard and crocodile’*. Marami ring mga kuwintas na ngipin ng buwaya na nakita ng mga arkeologo sa mga naunang libingan sa Pilipinas (Kress, 2004).

Ayon sa ganitong mga salaysay ang *dápu* ay hindi panganib. Hindi rin panganib ang kaugnay na *ayún*. Ang *dápu* noon ay *Indung Tibuan*<sup>4</sup>. Siya ang nagbibigay ng proteksyon at siya rin ang tagapangalaga. Kaya walang patungkol sa mga naunang sinulat ng mga Espanyol na may humabol o pumatay sa buwaya. Siya ay laging minahal, pinakain at iginalang. Halimbawa, sa mapa ng Minalin noong 1619 na makikita sa simbahan ng Santa Monica may *dápu* sa pinakagitna ng komunidad. Ang *dápung* ito ay hindi nagbabanta sa taumbayan (Larawan 2). Marami rin ang mga inukit na larawan ng buwaya sa nasabing simbahan. Kaya hindi panganib noon ang *dápu* at wala rin siyang kasalanan sa kahirapan ng mga tao noong lumindol. Noon, limitado rin naman ang pinsala ng *ayún* dahil wala pang imprastraktura na maaring bumagsak at pumatay sa mga tao.

<sup>4</sup> Ninunong ina



Larawan 2. Mapa ng komunidad ng Minalin noong 1619 sa pader ng tsimbahan ng Santa Monica, Pampanga

Samakatwid, walang ontolohikal na priksyon sa pagitan ng taumbayan at *ayún* katulad ng tinuro ng dialektikal na balangkas ng Kanluran tungkol sa kalamidad kung saan may panganib at bulnerabilidad. Ang *dápu* noon ay mitolohikal at tunay na karakter sa araw araw na buhay ng mga naunang Kapampáangan. Dahil sa *dápu* may liminal na espasyong ontolohikal at walang dibisyon sa pagitan ng lindol at lipunan sa simolohiyang Kapampáangan. Nahawalay at naging panganib ang *ayún* at *dápu* sa buhay at hanapbuhay ng mga taumbayan dahil lang sa epekto ng koloniyalisasyong Espanyol.

### ***Ngánib, ayún at dápu***

Ang pagbabago ng pagtingin sa *ayún* at *dápu* ay nangyari mula sa ika-labing pintong siglo dahil sa mga kolonyalistang Espanyol. Sa talastasang kolonyal nahawalay ang dalawa at naging banta sa lipunan. Sila ay naging *ngánib*, sa *amánung sísuán*, o *panganib*, sa wikang Filipino, na kailangang labanan.

Nakaranas kaagad ng *ayún* ang mga koloniyalistang Espanyol pagkdating nila sa Luzon. Marami ang kanilang naging mga salaysay tungkol sa malalakas na lindol nong 1599, 1600, 1619, 1645 at 1658 (e.g. Fayol, 1647, 1906; de Santa Cruz, 1676, 1906). Pamilyar sa mga lindol ang mga conquistadores dahil sa kanilang karanasan sa Espanya at sa Amerika Latina. Sa kanilang punto de bista ang *ayún* ay panganib dahil sa pinsala sa imprastruktura at sa pagkamatay ng mga tao. Halimbawa, *‘the first earthquake of June 21, 1599, does much damage to buildings, and it is followed by other disastrous earthquakes in 1600’* (de Uriarte, 1728, 1907: 35). Noong ika-labing pitong siglo, lumaki ang pinsala habang dumami ang mga imprastruktura, lalu na ang mga imprastrukturang pang relihiyon. Ayon kay Aduarte (1640, 1905: 104) pagkatapos ng lindol sa Maynila noong 30 ng nobyembre ng 1619: *‘the stone buildings suffered the greatest damage. Our church and convent in the city were totally overthrown, the very foundations giving way in places, because of the sinking of the earth. It was no small comfort to be able to find the most holy sacrament in this most pitiful ruin, with the consecrated loaves unbroken and unharmed’*. Sinabi rin ni de San Agustin (1698, 1905: 193) tungkol sa mga ayún noong ika-labing pitong siglo: *‘the many and horrifying earthquakes from which the city of Manila has suffered from its beginning until the present, have resulted in almost its destruction and depopulation—especially in those of 1645 and 1658, as we shall see later. But in the midst of these ruins, the houses which suffered most always preserved the principal walls, some even the first floor, and others more—although these were stripped of their covering, and, as it were, the skulls and shapeless skeleton which indicate the robust symmetry of that building’s corpse’*.

Mula sa ika-labing pitong siglo ang naging dahilan ng *ayún* ay hindi na ang *dápu* at ang kanyang paggalaw. Para sa mga Espanyol ang dahilan ng lindol ay naging kombinasyon ng pisikal, ayon sa agham ng panahong ito (Hooke, 1705), at reliyosong salik. Sinulat ni Diaz noong 1718 (1906: 263) na *‘it may be proved that a cause of these tremblings and earthquakes is the air which is shut in within the caverns of the globe, drawn into them through the crevices and openings which the heat causes in the soil, which afterward are closed by the rains; a great volume of air being thus gathered, it becomes rarefied, and, increasing in quantity or volume, it seeks an outlet, directing its force toward its center and causing so terrible a commotion. But the safe and useful way of maintaining ourselves faithful in the fulfilment of our obligations is to regard these earthquakes as tokens of the wrath of God against our transgressions’*.

Samantala, ang *dápu* ay naging panganib din sa punto de bista ng mga Espanyol. Sa mga naisulat ng mga Espanyol ang debosyon sa *dápu* ay ebidensiya ng paganismo

ng mga taumbayan. Gayumpaman mula noong ika-labing pitong siglo ito ay namis-interpretá bilang pang laban o pang-iwas sa pinsala. Sinabi ni de Morga noong 1609 (1904: 131) sa kanyang sikat na salaysay tungkol sa pananakop ng Pilipinas na *‘they [ang mga taumbayan] generally worship and adore the crocodiles when they see them, by kneeling down and clasping their hands, because of the harm that they receive from those reptiles; they believe that by so doing the crocodiles will become appeased and leave them’*. Noong panahong ito ang buwaya ay naging *horrible* (de Morga, 1609, 1904: 235), *fierce* (Anonymous, 1649, 1906: 300), *ferocious* (Anonymous, 1610, 1904: 73), *voracious* (Chirino, 1604, 1904a: 133), *fond of human flesh* (Vaez, 1601, 1904: 205), *bloodthirsty and cruel* (de Morga, 1609, 1904: 93) at *who cause great havoc* (Chirino, 1604, 1904b: 216) o *great loss* (de Padro, 1629, 1905: 298) sa mga salaysay ng mga Espanyol tungkol sa nangyari sa kanilang mga kababayan o sa mga lokal na taumbayan. Ang susunod na salaysay ni paring Pedro Chirino in 1604 (1904b: 213) ay sinasalamín sa pagbabago ng pagtingin sa buwaya:

*‘There was another crocodile, smaller than this one, which inflicted loss on the household of a reputable Spaniard of Manila; and this man came therefore to our house to entreat that Ours would provide him with a father who would make his Indians Christians. The affair occurred thus: This Spaniard was in his encomienda, where his house stood on the shore of a river much infested by these beasts. While he was dining one day, a youth, one of those who waited on the table, went to the river to wash some plates; but he did not finish his task, for a crocodile suddenly sprang upon him and swallowed him. The people [in the house] saw this tragic event, and the good man left the table, grieved that the youth should perish without baptism, and desirous to see if there might be some means of giving him the sacrament before he should die in the belly of the crocodile. He soon decoyed the animal by means of a little dog, a food of which these beasts are very fond; and, having captured the crocodile and landed it on the shore, he cut it open and found the boy within, whole but dead. This man, who measured the beast (which was not a large one) told us that it was fifteen [Spanish] feet in length, but that the capacity of its stomach was extraordinary: for within it were found, besides the corpse of the boy, a great number of eggs of various animals, and fifteen human heads. Grieved by this sad event, he had come to entreat that instruction might be supplied in his villages; but this could not be done, as there was no one to give it’.*

Samakatwid, ang *dápu* ay naging isa sa mga dalawang *ngánib* para sa mga taumbayan sa *Vocabulario* ni Bergaño (1732: 163): ‘*ngánib: peligro de enemigos ó caimanes*’. Naging maliwanag ang paghahati sa pagitan ng panganib at lipunan ayon sa bagong balangkas tungkol sa kalikasan na nagmula sa Europa nong ika-labing walong siglo. Kung walang ginawa ang mga taumbayan laban sa sinasabing banta ng *dápu* ito ay ebidensiya ng kanilang katamaran o kahinahan ayon kay de Medina 1630 (1905: 246): ‘*the same thing happens in regard to the crocodiles. Although the people see that the crocodiles seize them daily, they proceed with the same abandon; notwithstanding that, with but little toil, they could remedy this, by catching them or by making some enclosed bathing places in the rivers. But they neglect to do this, either through laziness, or in order not to toil for another’s gain*’. Ang *dápu* ay naging perpektong sangkalan dahil siya ay salamin sa katutubong paganismo at ang naging tagasagip ay ang mga kolonyalistang Espanyol at ang kanilang relihiyong kristiano (van der Ploeg et al., 2011). Kaya, ang susunod na salaysay ay naging pangkaraniwan na kwento mula sa baybay ng ilog Pampanga ayon kay Garcia (2004: 55): ‘*one day, an unbaptized isik (Chinese merchant) was rowing his bangka during stormy weather. While negotiating the river, he encountered a large, starving dápu downstream. He panicked, but just then remembered he had tinape nang Apung Kulas stashed in his pocket, given to him earlier by a friar. He threw the biscuit at the crocodile, shouting, ‘Sanikulasi, sanikulasi, magi ka sa’ng batu balani!’ The dápu instantly turned into stone and the isik was saved. From the river he ran back to the friar and asked to be baptized*’ (ayon din kay Hall, 1898). Malinaw na ang kuwentong ito ay nagmula sa sinulat ni Rizal (1891) sa *El Filibusterismo*. Inilarawan din ni Rizal ang kriminalisasyon ng *dápu* sa kanyang sikat na eskultura La Venganza Dela Madre na ginawa sa Dapitan noong 1894 (Larawan 3).

Samakatwid, ang kasalukuyang oposisyon ng kalikasan at lipunan, o panganib at bulnerabilidad, na nangibabaw noong lumindol sa Pampanga noong 2019, ay nalikha ng mga Espanyol nong ika-labing pitong at ika-labing walong siglo. Ang resulta nito ay ang ontolohikal na paghahati sa pagitan ng *ayún* at *dápu* at ang kanilang magkahiwalay na dulot na panganib.



Larawan 3. La Venganza Dela Madre, likha ni Jose Rizal, terra cotta, 1894

### ***Ayún, dápu at hybridity sa pagkakaintindi sa kalamidad***

Dahil sa paghuhuli sa mga *dápu* noong panahon ng mga Espanyol nawala ang mga ito sa Ilog Pampanga at ibang katabing sapa. Gayumpaman, ang mitolohikal na karakter ng *dápu* ay hindi namatay at mahalaga pa rin ito sa pagkakaintindi ng mga Kapampáangan sa *ayún*. Samakatwid, hanggang ngayon minamahal at inaalagaan pa rin ang *dápu* kahit *ambivalent* at *hybrid* ang kanilang pananaw sa *ayún* at sa mundo. Ang ganitong *hybrid* na pananaw sa mundo ay nagmula rin sa pamanang kolonyal at kasalukuyang impluensiya ng mga normatibong polisiya para sa tinatawag na *disaster risk reduction and management*.

Isa sa mga pinakaebidensiya ng kasalukuyang *hybridity* sa pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* ay nakikita sa reinterpretasyon ng mga paniniwalang Kristyano sa konteksto ng katutubong karunungan Kapampáangan at ng mitolohikal na karakter ng *dápu*. Halimbawa, marami ang mga salaysay tungkol sa lindol sa mga papel ng mga estudyante ni H. Otley Beyer (1918) at sa mga *Historical Data Papers* na sinulat ng mga guro ng lalawigan ng Pampanga at Tarlac noong dekada '50. Sa mga ito ang *ayún* ay nagmula kay Hesukristo, San Policarpo, isang halimaw, o higenteng tao na humahawak at naglalaro sa daigdig. Malinaw ito sa susunod na alamat mula sa Apalit: *'there is an old belief that a mighty man under the earth is holding the world*



*with his right hand. At times, this man shakes his hand holding the world, that makes it move this way or that, causing the world to quiver into an earthquake. Another idea is that a great monster lives under the sea. When he gets restless, rather angry, he makes such a movement that causes the water to surge with fury and this makes the earthquake'* (Punsalan et al., 1953: 53). Sa alamat na ito at sa iba pang kwento mula sa Pampanga at Tarlac ang *dápu* ay pinalitan na ng alin man sa mga ito: isang makapangyarihang tao, San Policarpo o Hesukristo. Gayumpaman, ang paniniwala na ang dahilan ng *ayún* ay ang galit ng isang karakter sa ilalim ng lupa o daigdig ay nananaig pa rin.

Samakatuwid, ikinunsidera pa rin ng mga taumbayan ang *dápu* pero *ambivalent* at *subversive* ang kanilang pagpapahiwatig upang maiwasan ang pagpipigil ng mga kolonyalistang Espanyol. Ang ganitong subersibong pag-aalala sa *dápu* ay maliwanag sa mga *libad*<sup>6</sup> na ginaganap kada taon sa ilog Pampanga at ibang malapit na sapa sa mga bayan ng San Luis, Apalit, Macabebe, Masantol, Guagua at Sasmuan (Tomen, 2008; Pineda Tiatco, 2016). Sa ganitong mga *libad* ang ninunong ina o *Indung Tibuan* ay hindi na maaaring ipagdiwang bilang *dápu* na naging panganib sa lipunan. Kaya ito ay naging *Apung Irú* (ang ninunong ilog) na ginaya, o *mimicked* sa wikang Ingles, bilang isang pangkaraniwang santong Kristyano katulad ni San Pedro sa Apalit. Kapag araw ng *libad*, ang estatwa ni *Apung Irú* ay isinasakay sa isang pagoda na umaagos sa ilog, Naniniwala pa rin ang mga taumbayan na kinaladkad ang pagoda ng isang hindi nakikitang puwersa sa ilalim ng tubig: ito ay ang *dápu*. Sumusunod sa pagoda ang mga taumbayan upang magtapon ng pagkain sa ilog bilang *áin*<sup>7</sup> sa *dápu*. Ang harap ng kanilang sinasakyang bangka ay minsan may hugis ng buwaya. Umaasa sila sa isang magandang tanda para sa darating na taon.

Hanggang ngayon ang ganitong pagmamahal at pag-aalaga sa *dápu* ay upang maiwasan ang *ayún* kahit hindi na ito maliwanag sa unang tingin. Halimbawa, pangkaraniwan pa rin sa kasalukuyan ang paghahain at paglilibing ng manok o baboy bago magtayo ng anumang imprastruktura. Ang ganitong *áin* ng pagkain ay upang mabawasan ang sakit na mararanasan ng *dápu* sa pagtatayo ng bagong imprastruktura o, ayon kay Nocheseda (2002: 67), '*for restoring any disturbed balance or harmony between man and the spirits in nature*'. Ang *áin* ay tinitiyak ang katibayan ng gusali o imprastruktura. Halimbawa, meron isang sabi-sabi sa lungsod ng Angeles na ang *áin* bago ang muling pagtatayo ng tulay sa ilog Abacan

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<sup>6</sup> Prusisyon sa ilog

<sup>7</sup> Handog o pasubo ayon kay Nocheseda (2002)

pagkatapos ng mga lahar ng bulkang Pinatubo ay isang sanggol na inilibing sa ilalim ng mga haligi ng tulay. Ayon sa katutubong karunungan, ito raw ang kinailangan upang payapain ang *dápu* pagkatapos ng pagtayo ng ganitong kalaking imprastruktura. Malinaw dito na *makilabas*, o magpasintabi sa Wikang Filipino, pa rin ang mga taumbayan kapag manghimasok sila sa teritoryo ng *dápu*. Ito ay upang maiwasan ang *ayún*.

Kapag galit pa rin ang *dápu* at nagkaroon ng *ayún* sumisigaw ang mga matatandang tao: *‘mámayun, mámayun! Ing Sikuan, ing Sikuan, kákaló ya! Itárak yé, itárak yé king gabun! Mámayun, mámayun! Géló ré ing Sikuan! Tárak yé, tárak yé king dápu!’*<sup>8</sup> (Pangilinan, 2022). Pagkatapos, kukuha sila ng isang tungkod at ihahampas nila sa lupa sa pag-asang ibalik ang *sikuan* sa likod ng *dápu*. Ito ay upang matahimikan siya at matigil ang *ayún*. Ang ganitong paghahampas sa lupa ng isang tungkod ay tinawag na *guluk* sa diksyonaryo ni Forman (1971). Sinabi rin ni Forman (1971) na ito ay isang *preventive measure*.

Kung ganito ka-*hybrid* ang pananaw sa kalikasan at ganito ka-*mimicked* at *reinterpreted* ang impluwensiyang kolonyal sa konteksto ng katutubong karunungan at sismolohiang Kapampáangan ibig sabihin na kailangan din natin muling bisitahin kung paano natin maintindihan ang kasalukuyang epekto ng mga natural na pangyayari katulad ng *ayún*. Ayon sa nangyari noong Abril ng 2019 ang epekto ng *ayún* ay nakakapinsala. Ito ang tinatawag na *disaster* sa wikang Ingles o *kalamidad* sa Espanyol, o *sakuna* – isang salita na nagmula sa wikang Sanskrit kung saan ito ay isang *bird of omen* (i.e. शकुन) (Benfey, 1866; Mani, 1975). Ibig sabihin nito na kailangan ng *ambivalent* na pautang na salita mula sa mga banyagang wika upang pangalanan ang epekto ng *ayún*. Ibig din sabihin nito na walang katutubong salita na maaaring gamitin upang maintindihan ang pinsala at kahirapan na nagmula sa Kanluraning proyekto ng modernidad at sa ahendang kolonyal ng mga Espanyol. Samantala, nabigo rin ang mga pagsusubok ng mga Amerikano at Espanyo na isalin ang tinatawag na *disaster* sa wikang Ingles sa katutubong salita na *tagku* o *katagkuan*, ayon sa *Vocabulario* ni Bergaño (1732) at diksyonaryo ni Parker (1905). Nawala ang mga salitang ito sa kasalukuyang *amánung sísuán*.

Samakatwid, malabo, o *opaque* sa wikang Ingles, ang kasalukuyang *ambivalent* at *hybrid* na pagkakaintindi ng Kapampáangan sa *ayún*. Ayon kay Glissant (1997,

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Lumilindol, lumilindol! Ang síkuan, ang síkuan, gumagalaw siya! Itusok niyo ito, itusok niyo ito sa lupa! Lumilindol, lumilindol! Ginalaw nila ang síkuan! Itusok niyo ito, itusok niyo ito sa dapu!’

2009) ang *opacity* ay likas sa *co-existence* o magkakasamang umiiral na iba't ibang pamana sa ating kasalukuyang pananaw sa mundo, lalo na sa mga lugar na may pamanang kolonyal katulad ng Pilipinas. Gayumpaman, hindi ibig sabihin ang itong *ambivalence*, *opacity* at *hybridity* sa pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* ay isang pasibong pagsumite ng mga Kapampáangan sa kolonyal na kapangyarihan at sa kasalukuyang normatibong balangkas para sa tinatawag na *disaster risk reduction*.

### **Pamanang kolonyal, *hybridity* at *resistance* sa pagkakaintindi sa *ayún***

Ang kasalukuyang *hybrid*, *ambivalent* at *opaque* na pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* sa *Indung Kapampáangan* ay hamon sa normatibong talastasan at balangkas tungkol sa kalamidad na nagmula sa Kanluran. Ang interpretasyon ng taumbayan sa *ayún* at ang kanyang epekto ay sumasalamín sa pamanang kolonyal at impluwensiya ng kasalukuyang globalisadong talastasan tungkol sa kalamidad katulad ng salaysay ng *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*. Gayumpaman, hindi natin pwedeng pabayaang ang pamanang katutubo o seismolohiyang Kapampáangan. Hanggang ngayon mahalaga pa rin ito sa pagkakaintindi ng taumbayan sa *ayún*.

Walang katulad ang *hybridity* ng pagkakaintindi ng Kapampáangan sa *ayún* dahil sa walang kaparis na kombinasyon o *métissage*, sa oras at espasyo, ng iba't ibang pamana na *co-existing* o magkakasamang umiiral. Hindi rin naisanib o *fused* ang mga pamanang ito. Ayon kay Glissant (1997, 2020) ito ang tinatawag na *creolisation*. Ayon sa kanya ito '*is not a fusion, it requires each component to persist, even while it is already changing. Integration is a centralist and autocratic dream. Diversity is at play in the place, runs across different times, breaks and unites voices (languages). A country that creolizes is not a country that becomes uniform*' (Glissant, 2020: 130). Dinagdag niya na '*creolization is the putting into contact of several cultures or at least several elements of distinct cultures, in a particular place in the world, resulting in something new, completely unpredictable in relation to the sum or the simple synthesis of these elements*' (Glissant, 2020: 22).

Mahalaga na kasabay at hindi nakaanib ang mga pamanang kolonyal at katutubo sa kasalukuyang pagkakaintindi sa *ayún*. Dahil hindi ito nagmula sa pasibong pagpapasukong isang pananaw sa mundo sa iba katulad ng inaasahan ng Kanluraning proyektong kolonyal kung saan ay isang katotohanan lang sa pagkakaintindi sa lindol at sa pagbubuo ng *disaster risk reduction and management*. Ayon kay Garcia (2016: 71), '*no knowledge is ever absolute. After the initial encounter, the ensuing mimicry of colonial norms by the natives, and the hybridity that this mimicry*

*produces, render impure and inauthentic the colonial presence – its identities, edicts, and discourses’.*

Ang *hybridity* ay isang proseso ng *resistance* o taktikal na *subversion* sa kapangyarihang kolonyal at sa pagpapataw ng mga Kanluraning konsepto at gawi. Ginamit ito ng mga opresadong tao upang umangkop at ibagsak na pahilim ang mga *asymmetrical* na relasyon ng kapangyarihan sa mga kolonyalista (Rafael 1988; Young 1993; Bhabha 1994; Prakash, 1999; Garcia, 2016). Malinaw ang ganitong *subversion* sa *Indung Kapampáangan*. Hanggang ngayon, ang mga taumbayan ay minamahal at inaalaga pa rin na palihim ang *dápu* upang maiwasan ang *ayún*. Dahil naging panganib at kriminal ang buwaya nong panahon ng mga kolonyalistang Espanyol ang mga gawing ito ay ginaya sa mga kunwaring gawaing Kristiyano katulad ng nakita natin sa mga *libad*. Ayon kay Nocheseda (2002: 99), *‘the new faith did not conquer the Filipinos, rather they have conquered the new faith and made it their own’*. Ito ang proseso ng *mimicking*.

Ang *subversive* na katangian ng mga *ambivalent* at *hybrid* na gawaing ito ay paraan para sa mga kolonisadong taumbayan upang angkinin ang kanilang kapasidad, o *agency* sa wikang Ingles. Mahalaga ito dahil nawalan ng ganitong kapasidad ang mga Kapampáangan sa mga namayaning talastasan sa kasaysayan at agham tao. Sa mga talastasang ito, ang mga Kapampáangan daw ay laging masunuring sakop o tauhan. Sila raw ay laging tapat, tinanggap at sinuportahan ang patakarang kolonyal ng mga Espanyol at ang kanilang mga Kristiyanong tradisyon at pagpapahalaga (Tomen, 2008: 93). Halimbawa, nagtaka si Larkin (1993: 30), *‘why did the Pampangans remain so loyal to the colonial government (...)?’* Ang ganitong maling akala tungkol sa pagtugon ng mga Kapampáangan sa kolonyalismo at ng kanyang epekto sa mga kasalukuyang gawi at pananaw sa mundo, halimbawa sa *ayún*, ay isang malaking problema. Sa huli, sinusuportahan ng ganitong talastasan ang hehemonya ng mga Kanluraning talastasan katulad ng mga normatibong at namamayaning salaysay tungkol sa kalamidad.

Ang ganitong maling akala at hindi tumpak na pagkakaintindi sa *hybridity* ay posibleng nagmula sa hindi marahas na paglaban sa kolonyalismo sa *labuad* Kapampáangan. Ayon kay Bhabha (1985: 153), *‘resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the “content” of another culture, as a difference once perceived’*. Sinabi rin ni Bhabha (1985; 1994) na nanggaling ito sa epistemolohikal na imposibilidad ng proyektong kolonyal ng Kanluran na makamit ang kanyang layunin. Kasama rito ang inasahan na may nag-iisang katotohanan lamang tungkol sa tinatawag na kalamidad sa

buong mundo. Ang proyektong kolonyal ay hindi kailanman magtatagumpay dahil batay ito sa isang hierarkikal na punto de bista tungkol sa iba't ibang kalinangan na kung saan ang Kanluran at ang kanyang agham lang ay tama. *'One cannot expect those who are inferior and dominated to fully absorb and mimic Western culture or it would undermine the whole ethos underneath the said imperialist project'* (Gaillard, 2023: 5). Idinagdag pa ni Bhabha (1985: 153) na ang *hybridity* at *resistance* ay *'the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power-hierarchy, normalization, marginalization, and so forth'*.

Sa *labuad* Kapampáangan at sa ibang lugar sa Pilipinas, ang mga natural na pangyayari katulad ng *ayún* ay *interpreted* o, sa halip, *reinterpreted* sa magkasamang punto de bista ng katutubong karunungan o sismolohiang Kapampáangan at mitolohikal na karakter (ang *dápu*), impluwensiyang precolonial (sa kanilang epekto bilang *sakuna*), pamanang kolonyal (bilang *panganib*) at kasalukuyang globalisadong pwersa (dahil sa mga normatibong balangkas para sa polisiya at aksyon). Ibig sabihin ito na kailangan natin lumayo sa mga normatibong talastasan ng Kanluran upang maintindihan ang tunay at walang katulad na karanasan ng mga taumbayan kapag nasa harap sila ng ganitong pangyayari. Ang pagpapatuloy ng kahulugan ng *dápu* sa pananaw ng mga Kapampáangan sa mundo ay sinasalamín sa posibilidad *'to be modern and still accept the value of mythology. While it is true that science has made it impossible to believe literally in myths (...) it has not invalidated the existential truths, and the human wisdoms, that these stories continue to offer us. What's more, science has not remotely succeeded in explaining away the desire – which is to say the necessity – to believe in powerful and inspiring fictions, like myths. Despite science, myths remain important and useful in that they render perceptible the forms of the psyche, and illuminate the inner life'* (Garcia, 2016: 27).

Sa kasalukuyan, kung tatanggapin natin ang *co-existence* ng iba't ibang pamana at ang patuloy na kaugnayan ng mga mito, ibig sabihin na kailangan natin ng mga balangkas na sasakop sa mga espasyal at temporal na *fluidity* ng kasalukuyang pagkakaintindi sa *ayún*. Ang pagsasama ng lahat ng mga pamanang ito ay isang kapuluan ng ugnayan ng mga kalinangan. Ayon kay Glissant (1997, 2020; 2009) ito ay ang pinakabatayan ng kasalukuyang *creolisation* o *hybridity*. Ang pagkakaintindi sa *ayún* at ibang natural na pangyayari sa bawat pulo ng kapuluan ay magkakaiba, magkakaugnay at laging nagbabago kaya hindi *relativist* o *essentialist* ang ating argumento. Samakatwid, kailangan natin muling bisitahin ang

kasalukuyang hehemonikong at normatibong pananaw sa kalamidad sa pagitan ng kalikasan/panganib at lipunan/bulnerabilidad katulad ng mga salaysay tungkol sa *ayún* sa Pampanga nong Abril ng 2019.

Sa wakas, ang artikulong ito ay isang tawag para sa isang pagbabago mula sa unibersal na obyektibidad ng agham patungo sa pananalig o pagtitiwala na meron ibang *hybrid* na pananaw sa mundo katulad na pagkakaintindi ng mga Kapampángan sa *ayún*. Ang mga ibang pamanang ito ay tunay at may katwiran din. Samakatwid, ang layunin ng ating argumento ay *'bringing out the truth, one's own truth, in the human condition a truth first and foremost believable by one's self, without mystification'* (Eboussi-Boulaga 1977: 155).

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# ***Stars of Portent: Comets and Disasters in the Philippine Past, 1566–1910***

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This paper shows how the perceived relationship between comets and disasters developed and deepened among the Philippine communities through time. Lexicographic data show how indigenous Filipinos thought about comets and their passing, while ethnographic and historical accounts provide a glimpse to the knowledge processes which put into reason these cometary perceptions and predictions. Ancestral tradition, historical experience, and generations of observations can be cited as causes that established and strengthened this mentality. The arrival of Spaniards in the sixteenth century, nevertheless, made these perceptions more durable and tenacious. As shown in select historical accounts, Spanish priests and soldiers possessed the popular lore of the comet-fearing West. Gradual permeation of modern science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries combatted these “primitive superstitions” and “popular apprehensions” through an army of scientists, scholars, and schoolbook writers. However, comet astrology persisted among the Filipinos, as seen in print and folklore. The historical period covered is from 1566, when a comet was sighted in Cebu, to 1910, the year when the Halley’s Comet graced the Philippine sky. These comet apparitions marked not only the astronomical events but also the complementing and conflicting discourses they caused.

Keywords: *comet, disasters, ethnoastronomy, astrology, Philippine astronomy*



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### Introduction: The Great Comet of Basi Revolt

If one follows the eyes of the man on horseback, the hat-wearing *alcalde mayor*, Don Juan Ibañes, they point to a streak of light, ball-headed, dropping into a pale blue skyscape. Some of the men, then subjected to the governor's rounds, are also eyeing this eerie ball of light. Two frames after, their enemies, the insurgents from the north, march rightward as the same yellowish flash falls into a hilly horizon covered with coconut trees. In another frame, a local militia composed of foot soldiers and cavalymen is being sent to repel the rebel attack. This time, the ominous light takes the form of palm leaves. It won't be long for the two forces to face each other. As the Bantaoy River gushes between them, the troops at the lower bank fire their rifles mercilessly. Armed only with bows and arrows, the insurgents become sitting ducks: heaps of bleeding bodies are lining their side of the bank, while heads, of dead rebels perhaps, are partly submerged in the water. Up in the sky, the palm-shaped light, now with sharper points, passes through, showing half of its rugged body till the tail, opposite to puffs of cumulus clouds, if not gun smoke, hovering over a group of fleeing rebels.

These scenes were part of the 1807 Basi Revolt in Ilocos, retold through a series of paintings made by an Ilocano mestizo painter, Esteban Villanueva y Pichay. Painted in 1821, when the painter was only in his early twenties, the stories on which the series was based were probably collected from eyewitness accounts. Four out of the fourteen paintings show the portentous light—in the form of a falling ball or a passing branch of palm leaves—and this is no other than C/1807 R1 or the Great Comet of 1807 (Cano, Ingel, Robis, & Tauro, 2020; for the stories of the revolt, see De los Reyes, 1889, pp. 232-234; De los Reyes, 1890, pp. 218-229).

Apart from being a visual retelling, the placement of comet in these frames might also hinted folk perception of astronomical phenomena. How the Ilocanos interpreted the passing of comet in 1807 can be surmised from *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889) by the Ilocano folklorist and journalist, Isabelo de los Reyes.

Respecto á los cometas, podemos copiar, podemos copiar literalmente lo que un autor había escrito, refiriéndose á la astronomía china. Según los chinos, como los ilocanos, “los cometas son precursores de hambre y miseria y pronostican casi siempre pestes, guerras, caidas de reyes, derrumbamiento de imperios” (De los Reyes, 1889, p. 43).

[With respect to comets, we can copy, we can literally copy what an author had written, referring to Chinese astronomy. According to the Chinese, like the Ilocanos, “the comets are precursors to famine and misery and almost always foretell pestilence, wars, fall of the kings, collapse of empires.”]

The belief that comets portend famine (*hambre*), misery (*misería*), pestilence (*pestes*), wars (*guerras*), fall of the kings (*caidas de reyes*), and collapse of empires (*derrumbamiento de imperios*) fuses meaningfully into the overall depiction of the revolt. A writer described in 1938 the religiosity among Ilocanos: “Although the people of Ilocos region, as Christians, know the heavenly bodies are creations of God, as they are themselves, they nevertheless accord the various celestial bodies with certain divine qualities, and never speak about them except in reverential tones” (Pascual, 1938, p. 292). Nearly century later, as Halley’s Comet graced the Philippine sky in 1910, the same reading was ascribed by the Ilocanos, for “there simultaneously broke out a smallpox epidemic in Laoag, and this was followed by a famine.” But the mishaps to expect doesn’t end there. The writer continued, “What the people considered, however, as the real though belated calamity foreboded by this comet, was the World War” (Pascual, 1938, p. 292).



Fig. 1. Vigilancia del Sr. Alcalde Mayor sobre las Rondas by Esteban Villanueva y Pichay, Painting I of The Basi Revolt Paintings (1821). Photo taken by the author at the Old Carcel, National Museum of the Philippines (NMP) Ilocos Regional Museum Complex, Vigan, Ilocos Sur, 04 April 2024.



Fig. 2. Los Ilocanos Insurgentes del Norte dirigen al Sur by Esteban Villanueva y Pichay, Painting III of The Basi Revolt Paintings (1821). Photo taken by the author at the Old Carcel, National Museum of the Philippines (NMP) Ilocos Regional Museum Complex, Vigan, Ilocos Sur, 04 April 2024.



Fig. 3. Tropa de Vigan enviada a rechazar los ataques del enemigo en Bantaoay by Esteban Villanueva y Pichay, Painting V of The Basi Revolt Paintings (1821). Photo taken by the author at the Old Carcel, National Museum of the Philippines (NMP) Ilocos Regional Museum Complex, Vigan, Ilocos Sur, 04 April 2024.



Fig. 4. Sangrienta lucha estallada en Bantaoay by Esteban Villanueva y Pichay, Painting IX of The Basi Revolt Paintings (1821). Photo taken by the author at the Old Carcel, National Museum of the Philippines (NMP) Ilocos Regional Museum Complex, Vigan, Ilocos Sur, 04 April 2024.

These comet perceptions go beyond the confines of Ilocos and the Philippines. As shown in some popular science books, such as Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan's *Comet* (1985), it appears that the idea of comets being “stars of portent” is universal as it is ancient. As early as fifteenth century BCE, the ancient Chinese had been documenting comets in relation to calamities. In varying degrees and extent, similar perceptions have also existed among the Masai of East Africa, the Zulu of South Africa, the Eghap of Nigeria, the Djaga and the Luba of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), the Babylonians of Mesopotamia, the Incas and the Aztecs of the Americas, the Greeks and Romans, the Arabs, Syrians, Persians, Turks, Egyptians, and Central Asians of the Islamic World, and the Europeans of the medieval Christian West and even of the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods (Sagan & Druyan, 1985, pp. 14-33; Thomas, 1971, pp. 90, 298-299; Verdet, 1992, pp. 77-86; Saliba, 1992; Rohr, 2022; Schmidl, 2022).

Such “universality,” nonetheless, needs to be examined in their own specific contexts. We may look, for instance, at how extensive and deep among the Philippine communities this perceived relationship between comets and disasters is. In his *Balatik: Etnoastronomiya: Kalangitan sa Kabihasnang Pilipino* (2010, p. 223),



ethnoastronomy historian Dante L. Ambrosio calls for this kind of studies—how Filipinos knew and understood “comet and meteor, lightning and thunder, wind and rainbow.”

Establishing the “durability” (Paluga & Ragrario, 2023), if not the rather pejorative “tenacity” (Peirce, 1877), of these epistemic-cultural perceptions, interpretation, and understanding needs interdisciplinary approaches to historical sources, to be coupled with well-informed epistemological framework. Thus, the present study can be considered as a preliminary attempt to delve into this topic. Questions such as “when and how did this Filipino perception on comets and disasters start?” can be answered, for the meantime, by some facts and conjectures we have at hand.

We may assume that these “perceptions,” “interpretations,” “imagination,” and “understanding”—or, if one would assert incommensurability, “knowledge” or “science”—hailed back to the precolonial times.<sup>1</sup> This can be surmised in the Austronesian words we used for comets or meteors, and the perceptions and beliefs which the precolonial and/or indigenous Filipinos associate with them. A seventeenth century Jesuit missionary in Visayas once said that the natives learned their astronomical knowledge “either from tradition of their ancestors or from the experience that time passed on to them” (Alcina, 1668/2005, p. 55). In addition, a nineteenth century ilustrado scholar argued that Philippine local knowledge is based on “empirical methods” and “rooted in daily experience and generations of observations.” Although these practices “often stem from chance occurrences or superstitions,” they “nevertheless are based on tangible observations and phenomena” (T.H. Pardo de Tavera, 2000, as cited in Planta, 2023, pp. 82-83). In the case of ominous comets, these foundations of knowledge production—ancestral tradition, historical experience, and generations of observations—might have validated the reasoning called *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after it, therefore on account of it) (Zwack, 1910), which confuses correlation for causation. This is apparent, for example, in an account of Bukidnon folk, saying, “[People] even predict that war will also come because during the previous war a comet also appeared first” (Demetrio, 1991, p. 345). Despite being “unscientific,” the

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<sup>1</sup> My use of “perception” here is nearly synonymous with “interpretation,” “imagination,” “reading,” or “understanding.” I am inclined to use this term more frequently than others because I think it would be the nearest term to describe the social phenomenon. I find in this term a kind of “unity” of both the act of seeing comets and the act of decoding what the comets signify.

principles of epistemic “incommensurability”<sup>2</sup> would remind us that these perceptions or interpretations need to be situated in their proper epistemological and social contexts.

Furthermore, these local knowledge, perceptions, or beliefs were not solely “pre-Spanish.” As to be shown later, some Spaniards were also “superstitious,” thereby revealing a curious mix of exact astronomical description and enduring medievalist interpretation.<sup>3</sup> It was only by the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries that these “primitive superstitions” and “popular apprehensions” (Zwack, 1910) were combatted by modern science, through an army of scholars, schoolbook writers, and scientists. Nonetheless, the Filipino perception of comets as stars of portent persists till this day.

The period covered is from 1566 to 1910, which I believe is a good timeframe for examining how the perceived relationship between comets and disasters were established and strengthened, how it was challenged by new scientific paradigm, and how it was sustained despite these challenges. It starts with the sighting of a comet in Cebu in November 1566, which the Spanish soldiers took as a sign of war and bloodshed (“Resume,” 1559-1568/1903, p. 152). The study ends with 1910, the year of Halley’s Comet’s passing, which turned into a scene of epistemic battle between prevailing astrological interpretation and modern scientific explanation. Within this timeframe, I will show how Spanish astrological perceptions strengthened the indigenous mentality on comets and disasters, and how modern astronomy attempted to correct these “beliefs,” much to its dismay, due to these beliefs’ durability or tenacity. To contextualize this period, I go beyond the either ends of the timeline. On one end, I provided the Austronesian, pre-Spanish foundation through lexicographic data and ethnographic accounts to inform us of the Filipino concept and understanding of comets before the European encounter. On the other, postwar Filipino folk beliefs and customs are provided which argue for the durability and tenacity of these concepts and perceptions.

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<sup>2</sup> Keith Windschuttle (1996, pp. 207-208) summarized Thomas S. Kuhn’s concept of *incommensurability*: “Different [scientific] paradigms operate with different concepts, sometimes changing the meaning of old terms, and they have different standards of acceptable evidence, as well as different means of theorizing about their subject matter... there is no common measure for the merits of competing theories, nor any common agreement about what constitutes either a scientific problem or a satisfactory scientific explanation.”

<sup>3</sup> “Exact” here pertains to the involvement of precise quantitative measurements, techniques, and other approaches in observation or experiment, as used in the term “exact sciences.”

## Philippine Words for Comet

In some Philippine words, meteors and comets are rarely distinguishable from one another. Although the Proto-Philippine (PPh) protoform *\*bulalakaw*<sub>2</sub> means ‘shooting star, meteor, spirit of the shooting star’ (Blust & Trussel, 2020), some reflexes also pertain to ‘comet,’ such as the Bicol and Tagalog *bulalakaw* (Lisboa, 1754, p. 142; De los Santos, 1794, p. 295; Noceda & Sanlucar, 1832, p. 80),<sup>4</sup> and Bahasa Sug (Tausug) *bulakaw* (Hassan, Halud, Ashley, & Ashley 1975, p. 101).<sup>5</sup> The Batad Ifugao *bullāyaw*, however, is not ‘meteor,’ but rather ‘a fireball with a tail; a comet.’ Shooting stars in Batad Ifugao are called *dubduhnug* (Newell & Poligon, 2013).

Aside from PPh *\*bulalakaw*<sub>2</sub>, some reflexes from other protoforms of astronomical words have a semantic expansion which includes ‘comet’. Synonymous to *kometa* and *taing-bituin*, the Tagalog *buntala* pertains to ‘planet; comet’ (Santos 1978, p. 205; cf. Ambrosio, 2010, p. 171). This is probably derived from Tagalog *tála?* ‘bright star, planet,’ from the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) *\*talaq*, ‘the morning (evening) star: Venus’ (Blust & Trussel, 2020). Cognates of *tála?* include the Ifugao *tallo* ‘bright morning or evening star; the planet Venus’ and the Mansaka *bonta-tara?* ‘morning star.’ Hailing from Proto-Austronesian (PAN) *\*bituqen* (Blust & Trussel, 2020), the Kapampangan *batwin* is also synonymous to ‘comet,’ at least in Father Diego Bergaño’s Kapampangan dictionary (1732, p. 22; 1860, p. 294).

Another Kapampangan word for ‘comet’ is *taclan* (Bergaño, 1732, p. 22; 1860, p. 294). Is this related to *tacla* ‘excrement’ (Bergaño, 1860, p. 233)? If so, comets in Kapampangan would either be ‘star shits’ or ‘shitty stars.’ Such scatological reference is also apparent in *taing-bituin* ‘comet’ (lit. ‘star shit’) in Tagalog-based Pilipino (Santos, 1978, p. 205), and the *\*taqe lanj* ‘cloud’ (lit. ‘feces of sky’) in Vanuatu languages, the Central Maewo *tae-lanji* and the Mafea *tai-lanji* (Blust & Trussel, 2020).

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<sup>4</sup> *Bulalacao*. pp. Cometa de estos que parecen estrellas, y van cornendo hasta desbacerse (Lisboa, 1754, p. 142); *Bulalacao*. pp. Cometa, exhalación encendida. *Nagbubulalacao cagab, y, ang langit*, anoche hubo exhalación. Tambien por metáf. llaman á los cohetes *Bulalacao* (Noceda & Sanlucar, 1832, p. 80); Cometa. Bulalacáo. (pp) como la pasada. *daquilang bulalacao. grande* (De los Santos, 1794, p. 295).

<sup>5</sup> *Bulakaw* n. meteor, comet. *Nakakita’ aku bulakaw kabii*. I saw a meteor last night. fig. adj. *bulakawan* hysterical esp. when angry. *Hi Abdul bulakawan bang iyaamahan*. Abdul becomes hysterical when he’s angry. cf. *bungis* (Hassan, Halud, Ashley, & Ashley, 1975, p. 101).

In Tagalog, another term for comet is *bituing may sombol* (Ambrosio, 2010, p. 3) or simply *sombol*. *Sombol* refers to a pennant used in boats and ships (*gallardete de navío*), if not a kind of plumage (*plumaje*) (Noceda & Sanlucar, 1832, p. 375).<sup>6</sup> Another Tagalog word for ‘comet’ is *solong mangayaw*, which appeared in Domingo de los Santos’ 1794 dictionary as *solongmangayao* (p. 295).<sup>7</sup> This can be considered as a compound word of *solo* and *mangayao*. The Tagalog *solo* (also *suló?*, *sulô*, or *solô*) ‘a lighted torch, a light to be carried about or stuck in a holder’ or simply ‘torch’ hailed from PMP *\*suluq* ‘torch, probably of dried palm frond’ (Blust & Trussel, 2020; Santos, 1978, p. 2328; Noceda & Sanlucar, 1832, p. 374). Being a ‘torch,’ a comet also resembles a fireball. *Mangayaw* is a warfare term with varying meanings, from headhunting to sea raiding.<sup>8</sup> In his *A Visit to the Philippine Islands*, British official and writer Sir John Bowring (1859, p. 227) listed *solonmañgayao* ‘comet; exhalation’ as an example of “Tagal polysyllabic words.”

<sup>6</sup> Cometa: Maysombol pc: duo dic: may, sombol. l. q tiene plumaje, bitoing may sombol, estrella con complaje, por que les parece plumaje aquella cola que tiene (San Buenaventura, 1613); Bitoin, pp. Estrella, Bitoing may sombol, Cometas, Cielo estrellado Langit napinaninictan nang manga bitoin (*Vocabulario tagalo español*, n.d., spread no. 57); *Sombol*. pc. Gallardete de navío. Mag, ponerlo. Y, él. An, donde. *Bitoing mey sombol*, cometa (Noceda & Sanlucar, 1832, p. 375); Cometa. Sombol. (pc) Naquita co ang Sombol. Vi la cometa (De los Santos, 1794, p. 295).

<sup>7</sup> Cometa. Solongmañgayao (pc) que pasa ligeramente. Hindi mo naquita yaong solonmañgayao? no viste aquella cometa (De los Santos, 1794, p. 295).

<sup>8</sup> Blust and Trussel (2020) identified PMP *\*kayaw* ‘headhunting’ as the protoform reflected in Isneg *káyaw* ‘headhunting,’ Casiguran Dumagat *ñayo* ‘raider; a killing raid; to attack a house or village for the purpose of killing,’ and Manobo (Western Bukidnon) *kayew* ‘be in readiness to fight.’ Related to this is the PMP *\*ma-ñayaw* ‘go headhunting,’ as seen in Isneg *mañayaw* ‘go headhunting,’ Ifugaw *ñáyo*, *ñáyaw* ‘headhunting raid, revenge expedition,’ Ifugaw (Batad) *ñāyaw* ‘for a group of men ... to go on a headhunting raid (a raiding party traditionally consisted of about five to ten men, usually from a single clan),’ *ñ-um-āyaw* ‘waylay an enemy ... for the purpose of taking a head in revenge,’ Manobo (Western Bukidnon) *meñayaw* ‘a raider,’ Tboli *ñayaw* ‘(of people) to raid at night, to kill and take things,’ and the PWMP *\*pa-ñayaw* ‘headhunting expedition,’ as seen in Maranao *pañayaw* ‘engage in piracy,’ *pañayaw-an* ‘place where slaves are captured,’ Manobo (Western Bukidnon) *peñayaw* ‘raid a house or village in order to kill someone,’ and Tiruray *feñayaw* ‘invade, attack another tribe or country.’ Blust and Trussel explained that, “It is unclear whether a separate base *\*ñayaw* is also justified for PMP. This form is reconstructed for PAn, since the only Formosan language that has a related form is Puyuma, in which the base is *ñayaw*. Cognates such as Ifugaw *ñáyo*, *ñáyaw* and Tboli *ñayaw* may be affixed forms of *káyaw*, or reflexes of a doublet that began with a velar nasal.” William Henry Scott similarly inferred that *kayaw* is probably the root of *mangayaw*, as in the case of the Ilocano *kinayawan*, ‘captive.’ The Spanish lexicographers, however, “extracted *ayaw*,

In Ilocano, comets are called *bituén á nagdúlaó* and *bandus*. *Bandus* refers to ‘plumage, insignia of victory.’<sup>9</sup> A contemporary Ilocano dictionary, however, would place *bandos* under meteor, and *kometa* under comet (Agcaoili, 2011, pp. 178, 519).

In Maguindanaon, comets are called *bituun bericor* or *bituun berasap* (Juanmartí 1892, p. 28), like the Malay bintang *běrekor* and bintang *běrasap*. *Bericor* roots from the Malay *ėkor* ‘tail’ or Old Javanese *ikū*, *ikuh* ‘tail,’ ultimately from PAn \**ikuR* ‘tail.’ *Berasap* is from the Malay *asap* ‘visible vapor; steam; smoke’ or Old Javanese *asep* ‘incense,’ from the Proto-Western Malayo-Polynesian (PWMP) \**asep* ‘incense, ritual smoke’ (Wilkinson, 1901; Blust & Trussel, 2020).

Tagalog, Bikol, Cebuano, Ilocano, and other languages simply borrowed the Spanish *cometa* through words like *kometa* or *kumita* (Wolff, 1972; Mintz & Britanico, 1985; Agcaoili, 2011, pp. 178, 519). Ambrosio (2010) often used *kometa* instead of the archaic Tagalog *bituing may sombol*.

From these, we may identify two ways of naming and defining a comet. First, comets are stars with an added feature, as seen in Tagalog *bituing may sombol*, Ilokano *bituen a nagdulao*, and Maguindanaon *bituun bericor* and *bituun berasap*. Second, there are word equivalents that have other meanings, such as *bulalakaw* and *bulakaw* ‘meteor,’ *buntala* ‘planet,’ *batwin* ‘star,’ *bandus* ‘plumage,’ *sombol* ‘pennant,’ and *solong mangayaw* ‘a headhunting/raiding torch’. These word relations form semantic domains that are indicative of community concepts and practices. For instance, *mangayaw* as ‘sea raiding’ can be related to *sombol*, a pennant or plumage one places in ships, especially those used for raiding. A dress plumage called *tongol* is displayed at a Visayan warship’s stern, and *tongol*, along with other words like *luba*, *pogot*, and *sumbali*, also means ‘to behead’ which the Visayans used the same manner the Isnegs, Ifugaos, and Tagalogs used *kayaw*, *ayaw*,

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*ngayaw*, and *agaw*, and it meant a raid to bring back slaves or heads.” Scott further emphasized that “there is no record of Visayan headhunting—that is, warfare for the specific purpose of taking heads—but heads were cut off in the course of battle or murder” (Scott, 1994, p. 154). Confined within Spanish sources, Felice Noelle Rodriguez’s article on warfare terms pointed to *ayao* (Rodriguez, 1999, pp. 147-151).

<sup>9</sup> *Bandus*. P.C. *Mai; nai*, Plumaje: insignia de victoria: *á pacabalbál-linguían*. Llanan asi al cometa con cola (Carro, 1849, p. 48); *Bituén*. P.C. Estrellas en general: planeta cometa – *á nagdúlaó*: Estrella errante *umalis á – nagbinnúguis laeng á immalis ti* – dejó rastro (Carro, 1849, p. 59).

or *ngayaw* ‘headhunting’ (Scott, 1994, p. 154; Rodriguez, 1999, pp. 147-151; Blust & Trussel, 2020).

The cometary image of ‘pennant’ and ‘plumage’ also appears among the ancient Chinese. For instance, the statesman and poet Qu Yuan (340-278 BCE) used “cloud banner” and “kingfisher-blue flag” to describe these “small arbiters of human destiny,” which “are in reality allusions to the numerous Chinese names for comets” (Sagan & Druyan, 1985, p. 17). In other languages, this ‘pennant’ or ‘plumage’ is seen as tail, hair, dust, smoke, and pipe. Probably derived from Malay, we found in the Maguindanaon *bituun bericor* comets being referred to as ‘stars with tail.’ They are called ‘hair stars’ by the Tshi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). The Chinese treat them as ‘broom stars,’ with such a meaning punned in a royal advice by a certain Yen Tsu in 516 BCE: “A comet is like a broom: It signals the sweeping away of evil.” The Tonga describe them as ‘stars of dust,’ while the Aztecs call them ‘smoking stars,’ much like the Maguindanaon *bituun berasap* and the Malay *bintang berasap*. For the Bantu Kavirondo in Western Kenya, there is only one comet, Awori, “the feared one, with his pipe” (Sagan & Druyan, 1985, pp. 14, 16). In other instances, it was said that “a comet appears because the devil is lighting his pipe and is throwing away the still burning match” (Verdet, 1992, p. 79). With these, Sagan and Druyan (1985, p. 14) spoke of the following as they pondered upon comet-naming: “Comets were a kind of psychological projective test—something wholly unfamiliar that you must describe in ordinary language.” The word comet itself came from the Ancient Greek ἀστὴρ κομήτης *astēr komētēs* ‘longhaired star,’ likening its tail to κόμη *kómē* ‘hair.’

### Pre-Spanish and Spanish Astrological Perceptions

“Everywhere on Earth, with only a few exceptions, comets were harbingers of unwanted change, ill fortune, evil. It was common knowledge,” said Sagan and Druyan (1985, p. 15). They supported this generalization by comparing comet perceptions. “In their myths, the tribal peoples of Africa may have preserved something of our original perceptions of comets. To the Masai of East Africa, a comet meant famine; to the Zulu of South Africa, war; to the Eghap of Nigeria, pestilence; to the Djaga of Zaire, specifically smallpox; and to their neighbors, the Luba, the death of a leader” (Sagan & Druyan, 1985, p. 15). By saying that a heavenly phenomenon has physical, social, or “worldly” effects, such event (and the reading of it) can be considered “astrological.” As posed by historian Keith Thomas

(1971, p. 284-285), “For if astronomy is the study of the movements of the heavenly bodies, then astrology is the study of effects of those movements.”

Just like the communities in the other parts of the world, early Filipinos also believed in the astrological effects of comet. This can be partly explained by the relationship of astrology to animism. Assessing PPh *\*bulalákaw*, Blust and Trussel (2020) noted, “Although most of the known evidence from Mindanao identifies the *\*bulalakaw* with the spirits of lakes and rivers, the older association appears to have been with the spirits of meteors or shooting stars.”<sup>10</sup> In the Subanen folk tradition, Bulalakaw is a giant serpent placed by God, Apo Gumulang, at the meeting point of heaven and earth. Bulalakaw encircles the world, and between its head and tail is the passageway of sun and moon (Tiemeyer, 2003, pp. 377-379). In her study on the Higaunon, anthropologist Oona Paredes stated that *bulalakaw*, the spirit, should not be “confused with the Tagalog *bulalakaw*, which is a shooting star” (2016, p. 332). The Higaunon *bulalakaw* is a spirit that “lives in bodies of fresh water (not brackish or saltwater) and is responsible for aquatic life and the overall health of the river or stream— but it can also make people ill and cause destructive floods” (Paredes, 2016, p. 332). Nonetheless, since *bulalakaw* pertains to comets too, this animist perception can be extended to comets. Thus, among the Tagalogs and Cebuanos who perceived *bulalákaw* and *bulákaw* as the Santelmo (St. Elmo’s fire) or the *unglu*’s fireball vehicle,<sup>11</sup> comets might also be seen as such (Blust & Trussel, 2020).<sup>12</sup> Hailing from PPh *\*bulalákaw*, the Batad Ifugao *bullayaw* ‘a

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<sup>10</sup> Blust and Trussel (2020) further added, “The puzzling Ifugaw reference to the whiteness of a wealthy young man and the Cebuano reference to whiteness of the skin caused by contact with a spirit fireball suggests another feature of the belief which cannot be completely teased out of the available glosses.” How these “words and things” parallel with or figure into the “clash of spirits” between native and foreign worldviews can be a subject of future studies. Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr. (1998, pp. 32-38) explored the relationship of spirits, whiteness, and colonial negotiations in the figure of *engkanto* (enchanted beings).

<sup>11</sup> Contrary to Blust and Trussel (2020) who referred to *unglu* as ‘witch,’ the Jesuit Father Alcina wrote, “About this *unglu*, they say that it is not a witch nor a *diwata* nor even only a soul or specter but something resembling a black man, who in stature, is taller by one and a half times of an ordinary person... They relate about them that these carry off small boys and girls and even adult women into the distant mountains” (Alcina, 1668/2005, p. 371; for the whole chapter, see Chapter 18, “Concerning witches, *unglos* and other such in their antiquity; whether such still exist now,” pp. 356-375).

<sup>12</sup> *Bulalakaw* also became a favorite symbol for some Tagalog writers in early twentieth century. Ismael Amado titled his 1909 novel, *Bulalakaw ng Pag-asa*. A fortnightly Tagalog magazine (*rebistang Tagalog*) in 1925 is also titled *Bulalakaw*. In its flag, one finds stars and the planet

fireball with a tail; a comet' indicates a more direct connection between comets and the fireball spirit or creature. A cultural note on a Batad Ifugao dictionary stated that the *bullāyaw* “eats and drinks the blood of a person at night who is not protected by a fire” (Newell & Poligon, 2013).

In the sixteenth century *Boxer Codex*, the anonymous chronicler provided a glimpse of ancient Tagalog astrology by reporting how the Tagalogs would read a comet's passing, a ring of light round the moon, and a lunar eclipse.

Quando había algún cometa decían que significaba que se había de despoblar un pueblo grande, o que había de morir algún principal. Cuando en la luna veían algún cerco decían que significaba muerte de algún principal. Cuando se elipsaba la luna, si estaba algún indio para ir a alguna parte fuera del pueblo, aunque le importase mucho, dejaba de ir por más de un mes, y muchas veces dejaba la ida del todo.

[When some comet appears (in the sky) they say that this means that some large town will become depopulated, or that some chief will die. When a ring appears around the moon they say this portends the death of some chief. When a lunar eclipse occurs and if some indio is about to go outside his town for another destination— no matter how important – he will desist from doing so for more than a month and oftentimes not go at all (*Boxer Codex*, 2016, pp. 104-105).]

These astrological interpretations from native Filipinos may draw parallelism with those of the Europeans. In *Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas* (1668) by the Jesuit missionary Francisco Ignacio Alcina, there are traces of “astrological dogma imposed to ethnographic observation” (cf. Thomas, 1971, p. 285). Speaking about the Bisayan natives' vices, habits, and emotions, Father Alcina pointed not only to the natives' bodies and environmental conditions as the causes of vices, but also to the “influence of the stars” (*influjos de los astros*).

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Saturn. One playful statement which serves as a space filler reads, “Magpadala kayo ng bulalakaw sa inyong bahay” (Send a *bulalakaw* to your home), referring either to a copy of magazine or a meteor/comet (*Bulalakaw*, 1925, p. 16). Interestingly, in its issue for 15 October 1925, one also finds an advertisement for a shoemaker's shop named “Ang Cometa” (*Bulalakaw*, 1925, p. 11).



Aunque la voluntad del hombre es causa principal de sus vicios en cuanto pecados, y de los muchos actos se engendran los hábitos viciosos, con todo parece, que las calidades del cuerpo, temple de las tierras o influjos de los astros, se comunica no poco a los ánimos inclinados, cuando no obligando (que a lo malo solo el hombre se determina de suyo, nada le obliga) a algunos vicios más que otros.

[Although the human will is the main cause of one's vices whenever these are sins, and vicious habits are developed from repeated acts, yet it seems that the dispositions of the body, the climatic conditions of the land and the influence of the stars have a considerable influence upon the spirit. One is not compelled toward some vices more than others (Alcina, 1668/2005, pp. 398-399).]

Hispanic astrological reading applies not only to stars, but also to comets. On 20 November 1566, a “very large comet” (*un cometa muy grande*) was seen in Cebu, and it was a subject of the reports written by Spanish soldiers. The perceptions were varied. In one account, some soldiers treated this as “an omen of war and bloodshed” (“Resume,” 1559-1568/1903, p. 152). Other soldiers, however, saw this interpretation as superstitious, an “amusing” if not “crazy” take.

The latter was recorded in Father Gaspar de San Agustín's *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas* (1698). Martín de Goyti, the master-of-camp (*maestre de campo*), upon “seeing the nonsense they were reporting about the comet” (*viendo los dislates que decían hacienda juicio del cometa*), told the story of a Portuguese captain named Antonio López Sequeyra. Earlier, this Portuguese captain led one of the rowboats near the Mindanao coast. The encounter with Captain Sequeyra was described by the Spanish governor, Miguel López de Legazpi, as a “comedic farce that is unworthy of Christian captains and just nations” (*el cual tuvo menos comedimiento con él del que se requería entre Capitanes cristianos y naciones tan juntas*) while Goyti himself, relating the story to Simón de Melo, a Spanish captain, called Sequeyra “crazy” (*un loco*). Later, Goyti told the following to the Cebu soldiers who saw the comet:

Pues ya V.mds. han dicho su parecer, justo será que oigan el mío; aunque el juicio no es de mi cabeza sino del Capitán Antonio López Sequeyra, que explica en esta cometa los grandes daños y males que han de sobrevenir a todo

este Campo por habernos atrevido a poblar en estas islas sin consentimiento del Serenísimo Rey de Portugal...

[Your graces have given your opinion, it is but right that you should hear mine. Even if this does not come from me, but from Captain Antonio López Sequeyra, who explained that this comet presages great harm and evil to befall all this camp for having dared populate these islands without the consent of the Most Serene King of Portugal... (San Agustín, 1998, pp. 460-463).]

Having said this, Goyti read Sequeyra's letter, "laughing out loud and to the great amusement of everybody who heard the reply and what transpired" (*con grande risa y pasatiempo de todos, habiendo oído también la respuesta y lo que había pasado*) (San Agustín, 1998, pp. 462-463). Although this "superstitious" belief was from a Portuguese, not a Spaniard, it reflected the popular lore in Europe (see Sagan & Druyan, 1985, pp. 26 – 33; Verdet, 1992, pp. 78-86; Rohr, 2022).

Another comet story was told by the same Augustinian friar, as he spoke about some events in 1597. This time, the new governor and captain-general, Francisco Tello de Guzmán, was recently welcomed in Manila. A ship bound for Mexico had a bad trip, and this misfortune was attributed by the author to a comet. The story might have hinted Father San Agustín's own inclination to astrology.

Pues habiendo despachado la nao San Felipe a la Nueva España a cargo del General D. Matías de Landecho — en cuya compañía se embarcaron los Padres Fr. Diego de Guevara y Fr. Juan Tamayo— salió de Cavite a doce de julio y padeció tales tormentas y temporales contrarios que estuvieron próximos a perderse. El tiempo fue notable y calamitoso, porque en 22 de julio se vio un espantoso cometa cuya cauda tiraba al septentrión, indicio de los sucesos que por aquella plaga amenazaban. En cuatro de septiembre hubo un terremoto que fue muy grande en el Japón, donde cayeron muchos edificios, y el mar causó tan gran tormenta que desarboló la nao San Felipe, y corriéndola tan horrorosa que, sin árboles, velas ni timón arribó al Japón en 18 de octubre, a la isla de Thoza, en Xicoke.

[The ship *San Felipe* was dispatched to New Spain under the command of General Matías de Landecho, accompanied by Fr. Diego de Guevara and Fr. Juan Tamayo. It left Cavite on July 12 and suffered such tremendous storms that it was close to perishing. The weather was calamitous and on July 22, a frightening comet was seen whose tail tapered to the north. This was an indication of the disaster to come. On September 4, a very strong earthquake occurred in Japan where many buildings were leveled. It caused such turbulence in the ocean that it split the mast of the *San Felipe*. It swept the boat along so horribly without a mast, sails or rudder that it was shipwrecked in Japan on October 18 off the island of Thoza in Xicoke (San Agustin, 1998, pp. 1034-1035).]

Priestly prognostications also appeared in Father Diego Aduarte's *Historia de la Provincia del Sancto Rosario de la Orden de Predicadores* (1640). Here we can read the story of Father Bernardo de Sancta Catalina, who had foreseen, among others, the demise of Governor General Juan de Silva. One omen which occurred to him pertains to the struggles of Dominican missionaries in Japan in 1616.

The persecution in Japon was revealed to him before it occurred. Being asked how he knew of the threatening danger, he said that he inferred it from certain stars in the sky, which resembled a comet threatening Japon. His companion when he had looked was unable to see any comet, or anything like one (Aduarte, 1640/1905, p. 64).

From 20 November 1680 to 14 February 1681, another comet was seen in Philippine sky. Father Casimiro Díaz, an Augustinian priest, provided mathematical descriptions of the astronomical phenomenon culled from the observations and measurements of two Jesuit mathematicians, Fathers José Zaragoza and Eusebius Kino (Díaz, 1890/1906, pp. 195 – 197). Despite these seemingly “scientific” account, Father Díaz described the comet as “frightful,” and said that “this comet was visible throughout the world, giving rise to much discussion over its effects, which in truth were generally very evil” (1890/1906, p. 197). To quote in length:

The frightful comet [was] so large that it extended, like a very wide belt, from one side of the horizon to the other, with but little difference [in its breadth], causing in the darkness of the night nearly as much light as the moon in her quadrature. The course of this comet was, like those of the planets, a rapid one from east to west, so that every day it disappeared and was hidden. The other movement was a retrograde one, so that it moved from west to east three or four degrees, and sometimes more than five, each day, at times less. This movement lasted from November 20 until February 14, 1681, in which time it passed through the signs of Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Aquarius, Pisces, and Aries—passing the equator from the south, from the handle of Libra and Ophiuchus [Serpentario]. It crossed the ecliptic and southern solstice, and through the constellation Antinous to the tail of the Dolphin, to the tail of the Little Horse [i.e., Equellus], and the breast of Pegasus, and thence to the head of Andromeda; and it passed over the equator at  $310^\circ$  from the point of Aries. Its magnitude was frightful, for its circumference and head [i.e., of the coma and nucleus] was two thousand one hundred and four leguas; and its magnitude was equal to that of Mercury, which is nineteen times larger than the earth. Its tail reached, on January 8, an extent of seventy-five degrees, which at its distance made 1,437,919 leguas. It was a celestial comet, and not elemental; and according to its parallax it was in the celestial quarter distant from us 1,150 semidiameters or halves of the line which we regard as crossing the center—which, according to the measurement of Father José Zaragoza, a distinguished mathematician of the Society of Jesus, are 1,153,000 leguas, which was its apogee. Its movement was 7,458 times as swift as the velocity of a cannon-ball weighing twelve libras, which, according to those who are curious, travels in each minute, or sixtieth part of an hour, two-thirds of a legua. This comet was visible throughout the world, giving rise to much discussion over its effects, which in truth were generally very evil. On the second of January it passed the parallel of our zenith. These observations were made by Father Eusebius Kino, a German, of the Society of Jesus—a mathematician of the university of Ingolstadt, a missionary in California—while he was in Mejico; and he printed them, with a dedication to our Lady of Guadalupe (Díaz, 1890/1906, pp. 195 – 197).

Aside from 1566, 1597, 1680-1681, and 1807, comet apparitions were also observed in the Philippines in the years 1618 (“Relation of the events,” 1619/1904, pp. 224, 227), 1734 (Selga, 1922), and 1882 (Ocampo, 2020). Until the late nineteenth century, as historian Kerby C. Alvarez (2013, p. 152) once argued, religious reading of natural phenomena prevailed, and natural disasters were perceived “as manifestation of God’s malevolence.” Comets were treated as omens of calamity and misfortune even by the educated class. For instance, in 1882, when a comet was seen in Calamba, Laguna, Maria Mercado wrote to her brother José in Spain: “Tatay is asking if you have not seen there a comet like the one we used to see during the cholera epidemic at four o’clock in the morning” (*Ipinatatanong sa iyo ni Tatay tung uala ca rao naquitang cometa dian na pares ng aming naquiquita dine buhat ng mag ca Cólera, na cun aming maquita ay cun a las cuatro ng umaga*) (Cartas, 1961, pp. 58-59; Rizal, 2011, pp. 53-54). After a month, José replied rather nonchalantly: “Tell Tatay I saw the comet with the long tail one night when Sanciango, Paterno, and I were returning from the house of Don Pablo. The tail was long and it was visible from one to six o’clock in the morning” (*Dí a tatay que ví el cometa de larga cola, una noche en que Sangsianco, Paterno y yo veníamos de la casa de D. Pablo. La cola es larga, y cuando aparece es desde la una hasta las seis de la mañana*) (Cartas, 1961, p. 77; Rizal, 2011, pp. 69-70). Historian Ambeth R. Ocampo (2020) described 1882 as “a year that was remembered for typhoons, floods, earthquakes, and a cholera epidemic that left hundreds dead and thousands in fear and mourning.”

Going back to our introductory story, the astrological interpretation of Villanueva’s comet portrayal would run smoothly with the fact that the Basi Revolt itself is a site of folkloric reading and retelling. Given that the paintings were commissioned, both the natural and supernatural are assumed to take the side of the Spaniards and their native allies. Divine intervention was not only embodied by the Great Comet, but also enacted by the Mother of God herself. It was told that the Vigan Ilocanos prayed to the Virgen de la Caridad for protection from the insurgents. The Virgin, in turn, disguised herself as a woman carrying a jar, and upon meeting the rebels coming from north, offered them a drink. The rebels refused and proceeded to the Bantaoy River. It led to the drowning of some rebels as the woman poured water out of her jar. Due to her “act of charity,” the Vigan troops was able to pounce on their vulnerable enemies (De los Reyes, 1889, pp. 232-234). These stories of heavenly powers, a comet in the sky and the Christian Virgin on earth, construct a cosmological view that fuses native and foreign mentalities.

## Combatting “Primitive Superstitions” and “Popular Apprehensions”

Later, astrological perceptions and prognoses encountered an antithesis: modern astronomical science. Nineteenth century became the stage wherein the gradual assault against these comet interpretations occurred. In 1863, a royal decree led to the reforms on education (Grifol y Aliaga, 1894). During this time, suggested textbooks for primary schools already contained scientific information about comets. In these books, astronomy (*geografía astronómica*) is under the geography subject. A regular import, Ricardo Díaz de Rueda’s *La escuela de instruccion primaria* (1845) rectifies the “belief” (*creencia*) on comet apparitions.

P. La aparicion de los cometas es signo de guerras ó de algun otro género de calamidades?

R. No, porque ninguna conexion tienen con ellas. La creencia contraria es una de las muchas preocupaciones que se transmiten de unos en otros por la ignorancia y por una ciega credulidad (Díaz de Rueda, 1845, p. 245).

[Q. Is the apparition of comets a sign of wars or some other kind of calamities?

A. No, because there is no connection between them. The contrary belief is one of the many concerns that are transmitted from one to another by ignorance and blind credulity.]

In addition, a geography book published in Manila also included a scientific description and illustrations of comets (Noval, 1896, pp. 7, 22-23). This book, *Lecciones de geografía universal y particular de España y Filipinas* (1896), was authored by Father José Noval y Gutiérrez, a Dominican professor at Santo Tomás, and published by the Imprenta del Colegio de Santo Tomás.

Development in the content of schoolbooks can be coupled with the establishment of scientific institutions such as the Escuela Náutica de Manila (est. 1820) and the Observatorio Meteorológico de Manila (est. 1865). It won’t be long before the rise of the Filipino *ilustrados* (lit. ‘enlightened ones’) in the late nineteenth century, who constituted the intelligentsia. Some of these members of the educated class would be involved in the propaganda movement, which pushed forth political and social reforms for the Philippine colony. As local heirs of the

Renaissance and the Enlightenment, these ilustrado propagandists “corrected” these medievalist superstitions propagated or tolerated by the Spanish friars. They belong to what Sagan and Druyan (1985, p. 26) called “a new breed of scholars who were predisposed to hold the Church responsible for superstition and ignorance.”

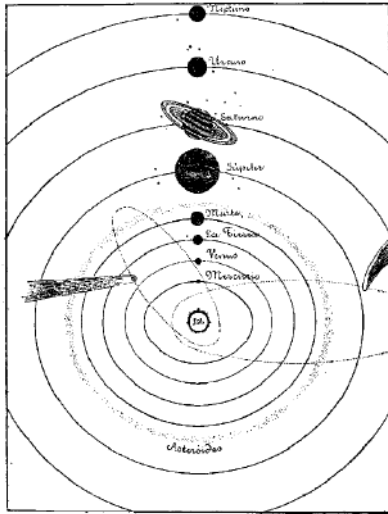


Fig. 2.<sup>a</sup>—Sistema planetario.

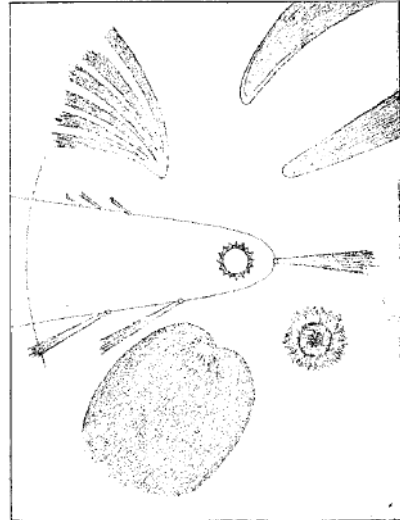


Fig. 6.<sup>a</sup>—Cometas de varias formas.

Fig. 5. The heliocentric planetary system, which shows a comet (left), and the comets’ forms and track around the sun (Noval, 1896, pp. 7, 23, accessed through Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, Biblioteca Nacional de España).

Isabelo de los Reyes, the Ilocano ilustrado mentioned earlier, used folklore and fiction to criticize the “medievally superstitious” Spaniards, especially the friars. It was implied in *El Diablo en Filipinas segun rezan las crónicas* (1887), a fictional dialogue that quoted friar accounts, and his very own folklore collection, *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889), that the priests themselves were “superstitious” and “out of time” (Benedict Anderson in De los Reyes, 2014, p. 9; Thomas, 2016, p. 130; Testa – De Ocampo, 2022). A more direct attack was posed by Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera, who, on one occasion, “seized the moment to tackle the pervasive *legado del ignorantismo* (legacy of ignorantism) perpetuated by Spanish friars” (Planta, 2023, p. 68). Historian Ma. Mercedes G. Planta (2023, p. 69) underlined how Pardo de Tavera “likened to a spreading *lepra de la superstición* (leprosy of superstition)” this frailocratic legacy of ignorantism, and how the natives, who were subjected to religious education, suffered in mind and heart.

[L]a persistencia de antiguas supersticiones son una demostración del fracaso de la educación religiosa. Tendrían por excusa los misioneros culpa la rudeza invencible del filipino, que podríamos admitir por cortesía y para evitar discusiones. Pero lo grave no es que ellos no pudieron quitar algo de la supuesta cabezadura del indio, sino el tremendo caudal de supersticiones que durante más de tres siglos, esos misioneros han hecho penetraren esa misma cabeza con tan grave perjuicio para su mentalidad y su moralidad.

[The persistence of these old superstitions are proofs of the failure of religious education. Missionaries will perhaps attribute this to the supposed stubbornness of the Filipinos, a notion we shall concede to for politeness and to avoid contention. However, what matters is not their inability to eradicate these superstitions due to the perceived obstinacy of the Indio, but rather the extensive propagation of superstition over more than three centuries and how these missionaries inculcated these in his mind to the detriment of his mentality and his morality (Pardo de Tavera, 1920, in Planta, 2023, pp. 69-70).]

The American arrival in the Philippines further augmented these attacks. In the early twentieth century, “primitive superstitions” and “popular apprehensions” on astronomical phenomena were vigorously combatted by American institutions of education and science. As cholera was explained through germ theory and the volcanic eruptions through geophysical sciences, comets were described as celestial bodies “composed of matter... [and] follow the universal law of gravitation and other physical laws,” rather than as a “sign of God’s wrath” (Zwack, 1910, pp. 7-8).

In May 1910, Halley’s Comet graced the Philippine sky. Months before, the Executive Bureau found it necessary to explain through science the upcoming arrival of the “celestial visitor.” The task fell into the hands of the Jesuits of the Manila Observatory, then the central office of the Philippine Weather Bureau. Reverend Father George M. Zwack, the bureau secretary, hurriedly wrote the pamphlet, *The Return of Halley’s Comet and Popular Apprehensions*. Father Zwack is a German Jesuit from Buffalo, New York who went to the Philippines in 1902 (Hennessy, 1960, p. 108). Based on the transmittal letter by the bureau director, Father José Algué, S.J., to the Interior Secretary dated February 4, it appears that the pamphlet was published sometime after.



Father Zwack promised to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” emphasizing science over “ignorance or superstition, or... both combined” (1910, p. 7). He described his treatise that “it is a plain and honest exposition of the groundlessness of fear in regard to comets in general, and particularly as concerns the present return of Halley’s comet” (Zwack, 1910, p. 5). With a dash of wit, Father Zwack emphasized the distinction between causation and correlation in interpreting astronomical phenomena.

[C]omets are by no means warnings of impending calamities, but very natural phenomena. Great disasters have doubtlessly followed the appearances of comets; but the reasoning “*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*” (*after it, therefore on account of it*) is exceedingly illogical. The comet had as little to do with them as your or my sneezing on December 27, 1908 had to do with the Calabrian earthquake of the following day (Zwack, 1910, p. 9).

The bureau scientists called for its enthusiastic distribution. Father Algué asserted that, “I am convinced that the purpose of its author may be obtained if the pamphlet is given the widest circulation possible” (Algué, “Letter of Transmittal,” in Zwack, 1910, p. 3). Although we don’t know yet if the pamphlet was indeed wide-reaching (cf. Alvarez, 2017, pp. 166-167), the events of 1910 imply how ineffective this science propaganda was. It turns out that the locals read the passing of Halley’s comet as a sign of times, signaling a general unrest in Central and Southern Luzon. Historian Reynaldo C. Ileto wrote,

Contributing significantly to the state of excitement and expectation among the masses in 1910 was the rumor that the appearance of Halley’s comet [*sic*] meant war, and that this war might possibly be the prelude to independence. The “general belief of the ignorant popular masses,” adds the constabulary report, was that “it was this Halley comet which announced the birth of the Son of God to the Wise Men, and that today it announces to the Filipino people the proximity of the day of their independence.” The comet was a clear sign (*tanda*) which various politicians and peasant leaders pointed to in order to further convince the people that 1910 was the year to rise in arms (Ileto, 1979, p. 239).

Father Zwack's English pamphlet can be partnered with a Tagalog geography textbook which appeared in print three years later. Authored by Manila-based Tagalog writer Mamerto Paglinawan, *Bulatlupang Tagalog* (1913), also titled *Heograpiang Tagalog*, contains lessons in astronomical, physical, and political geography using the traditional question-answer format. We find in this "geography book in vernacular" a better attempt to confront the folk beliefs and customs on comets. Paglinawan debunked such "old beliefs" (*matatandang paniwalà*), calling them utter lies (*walà nang kasinungalingang gaya ng mga paniwalang itó*).

T. ¿Nakasasamâ kayâ ó nakabubuti ang paglitáw ng kometa sa Lupà?

S. Ang paglitáw ng kometa sa Lupà ay hindi nakasasamâ ni nakabubuti, sa makatuwid bagá'y waláng sukat ipanganíb. Dapat matalastás, na ang mga kometang lalòng kilalá ay may sariling landasing tinutuntón sa pagtakbó na siyáng iniikitan niyâ sa panápanahón, na gaya ng halimbawâ ng kometa Halley na bago málakad ang kanyáng paligid ay tumátagal muna ng 76 na taón. Ang mga kometa ay hindi nawawalâ kailán man sa kabilugan ng langit, at kung kayâ lamang hindî natin nakikita sa arawaraw ó sa gabígabí ay sapagká't nálalayò silá sa Lupà.

T. ¿Anó ang dapat másabi ukol sa matatandang paniwalà?

S. Sangayon sa matatandang paniwalà, ang paglitáw raw ng kometa ay siyáng dahilán ó babalâ ng mga digmâan, salot ó mga pagkakasakit, gutom at ibá pang sakunâ na mangyayari sa mga tao. Walâ nang kasinungalingang gaya ng mga paniniwalang itó, palibhasà'y ang mga bagong tuklás ng karunungan ay táhasang nagsasabi na ang mga kometa ay waláng kinálaman ukol sa Lupà (Paglinawan, 1913, pp. 17-18).

[Q. Is the appearance of comet on earth bad or good?

A. The appearance of comet on earth is neither bad nor good, in short, it does not do any harm. It should be understood that the well-known comets have their own track to follow which it encircles from time to time, like the Halley's Comet which takes 76 years before it completes its orbit. Comets do not disappear forever in the sphere of heaven, and it is only because they are away from earth that we cannot see them every day or night.

Q. What should be said about old beliefs?

A. According to old beliefs, the appearance of the comet is said to be the reason or a warning for war, pestilence or epidemics, famine and other disasters that would happen to people. No lie is comparable to these beliefs, especially because new scientific discoveries have stated straightforwardly that comets have nothing to do with earth.]

### Persistence of Perceptions

Despite the improvement in science research, education, and communication, comet beliefs persisted among the Filipinos. In 1921, another Tagalog writer, Rosendo Ignacio, published his book *Aklat ng Karunungan ó Mga Lihim ng Kalikasan: Sinipi sa mga “Libro de Ciencias”* (1921). A compendium of esoteric and practical knowledge, four chapters of Ignacio’s book dealt with astronomy and astrology. In one of these chapters, “On Presaging Events through Comet Rays” (*Kasaysayan ng panghuhula sa mangyayari sa pamamagitan ng sikat ng kometa*), Ignacio wrote, “It should be known that through the comets’ shape and form and the colors shown through their radiance, one may identify the power they possess and the events they would bring, and their types” (*Dapat n̄ngang mabatid, na sa hugis at anyong tinataglay n̄ng m̄ga kometa, at sá m̄ga kulay na ipinakikita sa pagsikat, ay nakikilala ang kanilang taglay na lakas at ibinubun̄gang pangyayari, at kung anong uring tinataglay*) (Ignacio, 1921, pp. 34-35). Such part exhibits a well-defined comet typology. Indicated below are the forms and colors of comet and the corresponding celestial bodies and meanings.

In the *Encyclopedia of Philippine Folk Beliefs and Customs*, edited by Jesuit Father Francisco Demetrio (1991, pp. 345-346), twelve entries concerning comets are placed under a sole motif, “Comets Appearing Presage Calamities.” Like those from other sources, these calamities include war, hunger, famine, drought, sickness, epidemic, plague, and pestilence. Dated 1946 – 1972, the entries can be compared with Ignacio’s comet typology. As said earlier, the tail’s form may hint at the type of disaster to expect (Ignacio, 1921, pp. 34-35; Verdet, 1992, p. 79). Two entries spoke of comets with “long tails,” “tail like a saber,” and “tail like a broom.”

Table 1. The meaning of comet's color and form in Rosendo Ignacio's *Aklat ng Karunungan* (1921, pp. 34 – 37)

Comet's color and form	Corresponding celestial body	Meaning
<i>Maitim at mamerdemerde</i> (Dark and greenish)	<i>Saturno</i> (Saturn)	Death, pestilence, extreme cold, icing of dews, darkening winds, disasters, tornado, earthquake, rising tides, hunger, and lack of food
<i>Mamutimuti at bahagyang madilaw... malaki at mabilog, at nahahawig sa mukha ng tao</i> (Whitish and slightly yellowish, big and round, face-like)	<i>Hupiter</i> (Jupiter)	Death of a king or great individuals
<i>Mapula at nagbabaga, at ang buntot ay mahaba</i> (Reddish and flaming, with long tail)	<i>Marte</i> (Mars)	Great famine, wars, earthquakes, water scarcity, and fall of cities and kingdoms in the West
<i>Maputing maputing kulay, kakilakilabot ang anyo</i> (Too white, terrifying form)	<i>Araw</i> (Sun)	Change of states, scarcity of fruits, death of kings and wealthy and powerful men
<i>Ginintuan... malaking nahahawig sa buwan, na may lampik, at may mga tilamsik na nanaiwan sa likuran</i> (Golden, moon-like, with sparks left at its end part)	<i>Venus</i> (Venus)	Harm for the powerful and new religions
<i>Iba't ibang kulay, ó kulay bughaw langit, na maliit ang katawan at mahaba ang buntot</i> (Different colors, or sky blue, with small body and long tail)	<i>Mercurio</i> (Mercury)	Death of some princes, revolt of the people, hunger, war, famine, thunder and lightning
<i>Kulay pilak na malinaw na malinaw, napakaliwanag, na halos natatangi sa kaliwanagan nã ibang mga bituin</i> (Silver, very clear and bright, almost unique in its own glow compared to other stars)	<i>Buwan</i> (Moon)	Prosperity in life, especially if Hupiter would be seen at the signs of Cancer or Piscis

Comets with long tails are a bad omen. Like a broom which sweeps dirt, these will sweep people's property, either with an epidemic or some other calamity. Cagayan de Oro City, 1966, old people: by Alejandro L. Custodes (m) (Demetrio 1991, p. 345).

If a comet appears with its tail like a saber, war will come. If it is formed like a broom plagues and other pestilence will occur. (Kon mosubang daw ang kometa kag ang ikog korte espada, may guerra nga palaabuton; kon silhig gani pameste, kag kon ano pa nga salot.) Davao City, 1967, old people: by Erlinda Jermia (f) (Demetrio 1991, pp. 345-346).

Broom-like tails remind us of the Chinese 'broom star,' as well as its role to "sweep away evil." Meanwhile, Filipinos seeing tails as *korte espada* ('saber-shaped') finds affinity with Europeans and West Asians who, starting the first century, watched the skies for "hanging swords" that signify civil troubles, wars, assassinations, and destruction of cities (Sagan & Druyan, 1985, p. 25).

Where the tail points are also read, as seen in the two entries below. Suggesting a good omen, the second entry is an exception, like the !Kung of Namibia who were "alone in their optimism" (Sagan & Druyan, 1985, p. 15; cf. good omen in Ignacio, 1921, pp. 36 – 37; Verdet, 1992, p. 82).

I heard one barrio folk who had seen a comet say that if the tail pointed downward to the earth, there would be war and famine. Quezon City, 1966, old people: by Reynaldo Reyes (m) (Demetrio, 1991, p. 346).

When a comet's tail points downward, bad things may happen. If it points upward, good things may happen. Malaybalay, Bukidnon, 1967, Ofelia Gamao (f): by Estrellita B. Halina (f); Maramag, Bukidnon, 1967, Anunciacion Cadiz (f): by Corazon Cadiz (f); Pangantucan, Bukidnon, 1967, Avelino Ruferzo (m): by Salvador Don (m) (Demetrio, 1991, p. 345).

From these select details, we can say that the precise documentation of comet apparitions would lead to the proper decoding of the comet's message. Interestingly, these multiple ways of reading point towards a kind of astrological "pluralism" (cf. "medical pluralism" in Newson, 2008). It was "pluralist" in the sense that even though these astrological interpretations generally agree in saying

that comets signify disasters, they hailed from a variety of sources. Thus, in the twentieth century, the pre-Spanish and Spanish foundations of comet astrology were further supported and expanded through the medium of print. Although we are yet to investigate the “knowledge transfer” (see Rohr, 2022, p. 152) that led to Ignacio’s compendium, his sources were probably European astrological texts from the Renaissance period, if not the Middle Ages, and these texts probably had deeper roots in the Islamic or Hellenic astrological cultures, or even the ancient Mesopotamian ones (cf. Schmidl, 2022, pp. 254-255). Thus, by the postwar period, when Father Demetrio and his team collected entries of Filipino folk beliefs and customs, it would be difficult to know if the sources of these perceptions were indigenous, Spanish, a mix of both, or from other foreign sources. Further, these perceptions also had similarities with how Europeans, West Asians, Africans and the Chinese interpret comet apparitions.

Far removed from the strictures of modern observatories and laboratories, local production of knowledge through ancestral tradition, historical experience, and generations of observations (Alcina, 1668/2005, p. 55; Pardo de Tavera, as cited in Planta, 2023, pp. 82-83) partly causes the perpetuity of these perceptions. Furthermore, one entry stated that “[people] even predict that war will also come because during the previous war a comet also appeared first” (Demetrio, 1991, p. 345). With this, astrological principles were “validated” by historical experiences of the community. It can be sustained by the collective memory of disasters which the people went through. Although the relationship of these astronomical and worldly events is merely correlational, we may further think how this reflects the epistemological processes of communities who treated these perceptions or interpretations as fact and truth.

## **Conclusion**

The perception on comets as harbingers of calamities and ill fate existed in different parts of the world, including the Philippines. This paper attempts to show how these perceptions, interpretations, or understanding developed and deepened through time. Lexicographic data show how Filipinos thought about comets and their passing, while ethnographic and historical accounts provide a glimpse to the knowledge processes which put into reason these comet “beliefs” or “superstitions.” Ancestral tradition, historical experience, and generations of observations can be cited as causes that established and strengthened the astrological mentality. Rooting from the precolonial times, this perceived relationship between comets

and disasters was made more durable and tenacious by the superstitious Spaniards, who possessed and propagated the “popular imagination” of pre-modern, comet-fearing West. Gradual permeation of modern science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries combatted this “legacy of ignorantism.” However, as seen in the proliferation of astrological books and oral folklore, the perception persisted among the Filipinos despite the advent of scientific modernity.

I’ll end with an anecdote. Dante L. Ambrosio, the pioneer historian of Philippine ethnoastronomy, opens his book with a comet sighting.

Oktubre 1965 nang una akong makakita ng kometa. Nag-aaral ako noon sa Philippine Science High School at nakatira sa dormitoryo nito sa UP Village, Quezon City. Kaunti pa ang mga bahay rito, at may mga burol pa. Isang madaling-araw, umakyat kami ng aking mga kadormitoryo sa isang burol para tingnan ang Kometa Ikeya-Seki, isa sa pinakamaliwanag na kometa ng siglo 20. Kapwa pagkamangha at pagkabahala ang naramdaman ko. Namangha ako sa angkin nitong kariktan ngunit nabahala naman sa tila panghihimasok nito sa karaniwang larawan ng langit. Noon tumindi ang pagnanais kong tuklasin pa ang ibang “lihim” ng langit. Noon ako nagsimulang maging stargazer at amateur astronomer (Ambrosio, 2010, p. 1).

[I first saw a comet in October 1965. I was then studying at Philippine Science High School and residing in its dormitory in UP Village, Quezon City. The houses here were only few, and there were still hills. One early morning, my dormmates and I climbed up a hill to watch the Comet Ikeya-Seki, one of the brightest comets in the twentieth century. I was both fascinated and worried. I was fascinated by its own beauty, but I became worried about its seeming intrusion into the plain image of the sky. At that time, my desire to discover more of heaven’s “secrets” intensified. It was then that I began to become a stargazer and an amateur astronomer.]

Ambrosio remembered this apparition as one of the events that ushered his interest in astronomy, and this, too, foretold one of the fascinating turns in Philippine historiography. Thus, it seems, for Ambrosio and for us, that this Comet Ikeya-Seki is not a star of portent that brings disasters and doom, but a *bulalakaw ng pag-asa*, a comet of hope.

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# ***Raining in Quezon and Laguna: Revisiting Shared Folklore through the 1953 Historical Data Papers***

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Rain and typhoons are common environmental experiences for local communities in the Philippines, a tropical country located in the typhoon belt. Building on the idea that shared natural hazards and environmental phenomena can lead to identical cultural expressions and practices, this paper undertook an exploratory cultural-historical study of similar folklore between the neighboring provinces of Laguna and Quezon. The study focused on beliefs, practices, and proverbs about rain, typhoons, and related concepts as recorded in the 1953 Historical Data Papers of the Philippines. The results were categorized into 'Causes and Human Intervention,' 'Rain Predictors,' and 'Rain in the Mental Landscape.' Aside from reflecting the interactions between humans, the environment, and spiritual factors, this type of folklore also reveals that the environment, particularly rain, exists both as an external natural entity and as an internal moral idea. Consequently, folklore about nature should therefore be considered a significant historical source, particularly in representing and understanding the everyday lives of the masses. Furthermore, this underscores the importance of the 1953 Historical Data Papers of the Philippines, which recorded and preserved local knowledge in the aftermath of World War II. Despite its limitations, the HDP can still yield valuable data for cultural history and folklore studies, as demonstrated in this paper.

Keywords: *rain, folklore, Historical Data Papers, Laguna, Quezon*



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This paper was initially conceptualized as a study of past local knowledge regarding weather predictions. However, the 1953 Historical Data Papers, or Historical Data (Philippines) as they were titled in the Techno-Aklatan of the National Library of the Philippines Digital Collection, presented the possibility of focusing on rain and related concepts such as typhoons, storms, and floods as one of the often recorded memories of natural events in various localities. As the title, inspired by the song ‘Raining in Manila’ of the Filipino band Lola Amour, implies, this paper examined historically shared folkways between the provinces of Laguna and Quezon through their Historical Data Papers.

In her book ‘Rain: A Natural and Cultural History,’ Cynthia Barnett (2015) showed that ‘rain,’ ‘raining,’ and related concepts are not just natural events but also symbolic as we associate meanings, stories, memories, and even experiences with them. Since rain, storms, and floods brought by typhoons are part of the natural cycle, how people react to them from the physical to the cultural level also reflects the relationship between human beings and their environment. Greg Bankoff (2016) discussed that hazards of natural phenomena and disasters also get shared among various communities leading to similar memories, social adaptations, and cultural expressions. Conversely, examining rain-related folklore therefore reflects shared experiences of local communities as they relate to similar natural landscape through symbolic means.

Given the author’s academic background, this paper was also considered an endeavor in cultural history, one of the closest branches of history to include folklore as part of historical research and view it as mentioned above. One of the interests of cultural history is the shared meanings and everyday life of the masses in the past which includes folklore (Calaresu et al., 2016; Nauright & Wiggins, 2010; Mandler, 2004). It is considered the branch of history that tackles unpopular topics compared to politics, war, and economics, and is known for ‘disciplinary “border raiding”’ with its use of approaches and methods from other social sciences as well as the use of unconventional sources such as oral traditions (Mojares, 2017, p. 1; Calaresu et al., 2016, p 1). Combining folklore and history to study past human-environment relations also coincides with one of the subfields of climate historiography which is the ‘cultural constructions and perceptions of climates’ (Carey 2012, p. 234).

Specifically, the paper aimed for the following objectives.

First, the exploration of past folklore associated with rain shared between the neighboring provinces of Quezon and Laguna. Second, the comparison and categorization of said shared folklore to reflect possible perceptions of the human and nature relationship by these provinces in the past. Lastly, a reconsideration of the Historical Data Papers as a source for cultural history and folklore studies.

One of the earliest works on Laguna folklore came from Luceta Ratcliff, who was a teacher in Pagsanjan, Laguna, in 1908. In 1949, she published an enumeration of local folktales submitted by her pupils in the *Journal of American Folklore*. Interestingly though, there are very few published folklore studies for Laguna and Quezon. Many folklore articles focus on folktales, myths, and legends. Contemporary folklore research on the other hand often employs anthropological methods such as surveys and fieldwork, while some use secondary sources like commercially published collections of folktales. Rios (2022) argues that the continued transmission of environmental folklore might reflect knowledge dating back to ancient Philippine societies. If this is the case for contemporary folklore studied through interviews, it is likely even more true for past folklore examined through archival sources.

Therefore, this paper's major contributions include uncovering or revisiting old local folklore from the provinces of Laguna and Quezon. The paper goes beyond folk stories to focus on proverbs, environmental knowledge, and folk practices, providing a summary, comparison, and categorization of shared folklore. Utilizing a cultural history approach, it focuses on past folklore using the Historical Data Papers as a primary source. Additionally, the paper highlights rain and its related concepts to represent human-environment interaction.

Folklore related to the environment or weather, often called weather lore, reflects the community's sensitivity to their surroundings (Galacgac and Balisacan 2001). It enables them to observe closely and process their experiences with the natural setting into local knowledge (Galacgac and Balisacan 2001; Rios 2022). Studies on environmental folklore or weather lore highlight its economic significance. For instance, fishermen and sailors in Tawi-Tawi, farmers in Ilocos Norte, and Cebu continue to utilize their local environmental and weather knowledge in their economic endeavors (Galacgac and Balisacan 2001; Rios 2022; Tahiluddin, Ullang Jr., Jali, Ajik, Ebbah, & Jamil 2023). This local knowledge supplements modern forecasting technology, especially for area-specific weather predictions (Galacgac and Balisacan 2001).

It's also notable that folklore about the environment often involves the supernatural or spiritual realm wherein intangible factors also explain natural phenomena (Rios 2022; Sajulga and Canayong 2024). Many Filipino folklore promote coexistence, balance, and harmony with nature, while some view humans as 'stewards' of the environment, indicating a possible influence of Christianity on folk perspectives (Plaza-Galigao 2014; Sajulga and Canayong 2024, p.5778).

Building on these ideas and the research results, this paper views folklore as a way for people to gain some sense of control over their environment. While this might seem contrary to the ideas of coexistence and balance, this sense of control is often seen as necessary, especially to mitigate disasters or improve socio-economic conditions. In their efforts to influence the environment, there remains an awe towards nature and other possible grander controlling powers.

Additionally, folklore regarding rain and typhoons was examined as sources of moral and life lessons. The interrelationship observed in the environment could also be applied to social relationships. Thus, the paper argues that folklore about rain, floods, and typhoons not only looks outward to the natural landscape but also inward to the mental or moral landscape.

Whether studying contemporary folklore about the environment and weather or revisiting old ones through a historical lens, their significance for the community remains evident. As Demetrio (1978, p. 36, 37) stated, to 'rediscover' them is not necessarily to believe in them or uncover scientific or historical truths, but to understand the community's experience at a certain period. It is about 'the truth of experience, of the real, of life, the holy, the sacred' (Demetrio 1978, p. 37).

## Methodology

In an effort to replenish lost archives during World War II in the Philippines, Former President Elpidio Quirino signed Executive Order 486 series of 1951, starting a nationwide effort to record historical events and folkways of municipalities and barrios (now barangays). This led to the compilation of the Historical Data Papers (HDP) in 1953. They can now be accessed online through the *Techno-Aklatan Digital Collections of the National Library of the Philippines*.

In 1973, Robert Bruce Cruikshank reviewed the HDP and noted that it is best utilized on topics that are its contemporaries or probably experienced by its writers and informants such as the American colonial period, World War II, and



immediate post-war. Aside from these historical periods, another treasure within the HDP is the recorded folkways around the period of its compilation (Cruikshank 1973). The discussions of Mojares (1981) and Churchill (2012) on the development of Philippine historiography already showed how historical research in the late 1950s onward has become more welcoming to oral history and traditions, literary works, and other unconventional sources in the attempt to be more representative of Filipino experiences, especially the masses. They also included the HDP as a significant source reflecting the shift to more local narratives (Mojares 1981; Churchill 2012).

Nevertheless, there are very few historical research publications that highlighted the HDP as one of their main source in favor of more official colonial documents as well as some negative perceptions of the memories reported in the HDP among scholars. However, recent works on death practices in Ilocos Sur and Norte (Pawilen 2019), migration and settlement narratives with Geographic Information System in the same provinces (Pawilen and Arellano 2022), toponyms in Marinduque (Santiago and Bolata 2022), and memorializing the history of Ermita (Cataquian 2024) reflects the value of the HDP in both local and cultural history.

Being arguably underutilized until recently, the HDP therefore finds home in said fields where history and folklore studies intersect with their interest in the shared symbols and meanings of localities with a temporal angle being the 'past.' It is also argued that using the HDP in such a manner aids in the writing of a local history that is grounded in the understanding of the mindset and experience of the Filipino people by using folklore as a result and reflection of this psyche.

A similar but far more notable work would be *Pasyon and Revolution* by Reynaldo Ileto in the 1970s. While this paper is written in a foreign language, the approach is also arguably aligned with the goals of *Pantayong Pananaw* for example in using the codes and expressions of local communities such as local epics to further represent shared consciousness and provide meaningful or relatable stories of the past (Salazar, 2000, p. 56).

By folklore, the paper generally alluded to 'verbal lore' and traditional knowledge (Madden, 2019, p. 12; McNeill, 2013). To gather, present, and analyze the data, results from the HDP were classified and presented through the following subsections.

First is 'Causes and Human Intervention' or the lore reflecting the people's explanation of the natural phenomena including explanations with religious or

mythological themes. This section also includes human intervention showing how people attempted to influence their natural environment despite its perceived supernatural causes. Rain is viewed as an integral part of the landscape or place (Pillat, 2016). At the same time, it provides “medium and condition of interaction” among people, between people and other aspects of the environment, and between people and their beliefs (Ingold, 2015, as cited in Pillat, 2016, p. 4). Inspired by the idea of structure and agency from Anthony Giddens, people are viewed as both the influenced as well as the influencers of their environment. In the following subsections, this interaction can be further observed in how individuals attempt to further control their environment by predicting when it will rain, as well as ingraining their knowledge of the environment with their values.

The second section therefore is entitled ‘Rain Predictors’ or the lore about the signs that rain and storms will occur. This section reflects the awareness of the people of their surroundings as portrayed in the traditional knowledge used by the communities.

The last subsection is ‘Rain in the Mental Landscape’ which includes sayings or proverbs using rain as symbolism to teach community values and wisdom.

The flow of the discussions therefore argues that rain and perhaps other natural features of the environment exist outside the person in the physical geographic space as well as within the person in a more personal and symbolic form. Even going back to the *Annales*, Bloch (1949, as cited in Villasenor, 2017) claimed that the landscape as a unit of analysis existed in his consciousness. Rain affects the life of the localities, and the localities also affect how rain is perceived.

The geographical choice of Laguna and Quezon was mainly due to the author’s affiliation with an institution located in Region IV-A. While some entries were recorded at the municipality level, the paper preferred to examine those from the barrio/barangay level HDP. Most of the data on folkways can be found in the barrio reports but this is also to highlight how folklore was shared even at the smallest geopolitical unit.

To gather data on folklore, the author accessed the HDP report of each barrio (barangay) of the different municipalities in the provinces of Laguna and Quezon. If the reports followed the prescribed format, it is easy to identify the folklore by looking at Part II, also entitled ‘Folkways’ in some of the papers, then Section II also entitled ‘Myths, Legends, Beliefs, Interpretations, and Superstitions.’ The term ‘barrio’ was still used during the 1950s, but it will be used interchangeably with the term barangay in this paper.

Only the entries that had the words 'rain,' 'storm,' 'typhoon,' 'floods,' or their Filipino terms were included in the list. From the initial data, the classifications for the subsections were created and then the entries were further sorted and revised to fit the classifications. Thus, memories of disaster in the community, predictors of sunny weather or droughts, toponym-related entries, and folktales were not yet included.

Lore with similar entries such as the same object as the cause of rains or comparable interpretations of predictors were clustered and the author logged how many barrios from Laguna and Quezon mentioned them. The paper also noted how many entries were shared by Laguna and Quezon, and only the shared entries were featured and further examined in this study. Sample lore distinct for each province based on the HDP was only included for further discussion purposes. For each subsection in the discussion of the results, the author opted to provide summary tables of the folklore and the barrios that shared them for easier reference.

Some of the challenges in doing the research include incomplete historical data reports, missing or destroyed pages, unclear scans, and inaccessible pages due to updating of the website. In case of unclear portions of the entry, the author tried as best as he could to copy what he thought was correct or sensible letters. Some reports also generalized that they have similar practices and beliefs to other barrios while others wrote 'none.'

The paper is therefore mostly limited to what was remembered and recorded by the writers of the HDP in 1953. But even with the said limitation of the HDP, it was still able to provide a glimpse of shared folklore between the provinces during the same period. Perhaps it would also be helpful to note that some of the places mentioned in the paper could have changed due to geopolitical development.

## Results

Under the section 'Causes and Human Intervention,' six barrios from Laguna and 15 barrios from Quezon shared four similar folk beliefs and practices. In terms of local knowledge to predict rain, at least 12 similar folklores were shared between 18 barrios of Laguna and 32 barrios of Quezon. Lastly, seven barrios of Laguna and 25 barrios of Quezon shared five similar proverbs.

During the revisions for this article however, the Techno-Aklatan page containing the digitized copies of the Historical Data Papers was under renovation, rendering some pages of the reports missing. The author hopes these will be restored to facilitate validation and replication of the study through online access. Otherwise, researchers will have to sift through the physical archives.

### *Causes and Human Intervention*

Both provinces have folklore associating rain with certain saints, often depicting humans appeasing the saints to bring rain, which is also arguably considered a form of human intervention. One specific supernatural cause shared by seven barrios—one from Laguna and six from Quezon—is the belief that storms, thunder, and lightning signify God's anger towards the people.

Despite this perception, people rely on rain for their crops and have developed various ways to influence nature and supernatural forces to make it rain. Common practices include bathing a cat, celebrating the Santacruzán in May, and conducting the Moro-moro during fiestas.

People also perform a novena, a nine-day prayer and procession for San Isidro. Several reports from Quezon mention additional terms, such as "Hibiliyuhan" for the procession, "Suverena" for the specific novena or prayer, and "Subli" for the final day of the procession, when some barrios hold festivities. Some communities also perform these rituals on nine consecutive Fridays instead of successive days.

The following is a list of sample entries from the Historical Data Papers followed by a table summarizing the similar folklore regarding rain among Laguna and Quezon barrios. The samples copied as much as possible the exact way that the folklore were recorded in the HDP. Note however that each barrio may have variations of the belief or practice.

1. *Sickness, earthquakes, thunder, and lightning, and storms are believed to be God's punishment for our negligence of worshipping Him. (Ibabang Palina, Lilio, Laguna).*

2. *Kung ang pusa ay paliguan nagkakaroon ng ulan. (East Malicboy, Pagbilao, Quezon).*

3. *Children celebrate "Santa Cruzán" to ask for rain from Heaven. (Santa Cruz, Bay)*

4. During the month of August there is the ‘Hibilyuhan.’ That is for nine successive Fridays the people of Camagong hold a procession around the entire barrio taking with the image of the patron St. San Isidro. The people pray and sing as they go begging the Almighty for rain. A certain family is assigned to prepare dinner and another a merienda. The preparation of food is done by turns.(Camagong, Alabat, Quezon)

In Santo Domingo, Luisiana, Laguna, it was mentioned that the procession included a song performed by the participants with the following lyrics:

*“Sang Isidro’y kaawaan kaming alipin  
 mong tunay”  
 “Isidro, iyong ibibik  
 kaming ampon mo’t tangkilik.”*

Table 1. List of Shared Folklore Related to Supernatural Causes of Rain and Human Intervention at the Barrio Level

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF FOLKLORE	LAGUNA		QUEZON	
	MUNICIPALITY	BARRIO	MUNICIPALITY	BARRIO
Rain as God’s Wrath	Lilio	Ibabang Palina	Atimonan	Mangalayan
				San Isidro
			Candelaria	Mangilag
			Catanauan	Bolo
			Lucena	Mayao Silangan
Bathing a Cat	Lumban	Pagsanjan	Candelaria	Mangilag
		Pinagsanjan	Catanauan	Bolo
		Victoria	Bitin	Padre Burgos
	Pagbilao			East Malicboy
	Quezon			Guinhawa
	Unisan			Maputat
	Santacruzán	Bay	Santa Cruz	Candelaria
Novena/9-day Prayer for San Isidro	Luisiana	Santo Domingo	Alabat	Camagong
				Buenavista
			Catanauan	Gatasan
			Mauban	Tubog
			Unisan	Maputat
				Pagagausan

Municipality is included here to help provide a clearer picture of the folklore's geopolitical settings. The references provide the links for each HDP report. Note that the list of shared beliefs are based on the barrio reports. There were similar beliefs or other shared beliefs at the municipal level but were not part of this study.

In typical days, when human intervention through religious means were not necessary, knowledge of the environment took the form of local knowledge on predicting when rains and typhoons will occur.

### *Rain Predictors*

In the shared folklore entries from the HDP, it appears that people in both provinces observed animal behavior, including birds and insects, to predict rain or storms.

Frogs, in particular, were associated with rain. The croaking of frogs, especially during a fine, sunny day or at night, indicated that rain or a storm was imminent. An entry from Matan-ag, Atimonan, specified that the croaking of two to three frogs at midday on a sunny day foretells rain in two to three days. During a storm, however, hearing frogs croak meant that the storm was nearing its end.

Entries from both provinces also noted that if a cat cleans or rubs its face, it will rain.

Any unusual behavior of other animals, birds, and insects was perceived to be a predictor of the changing weather. For example, the sneezing of a carabao, the bleating of a deer especially at night, or the restlessness of carabaos, cows, and horses could be signs of a pending storm. The same can be said when a kingfisher (salaksak) chirps loudly or when swifts or swallows (laying-layang) fly low and close to the ground or surface of the lake and the sea. The hooting of the owl near the cemetery during days of fair weather also signifies rain, and if it occurs near a brook, a storm will come in two to three days.

People also believe that rainy or stormy days are upcoming when insects such as fireflies and cockroaches fly into houses or black ants crawl out of their homes and climb up into houses to rebuild their nests.

The sky and celestial bodies are also parts of the shared physical landscape of the provinces, and they also have shared interpretations when looking up the heavens.

In both provinces, the position of the endpoints of the new moon or more accurately the crescent moon forecasts when it will rain in the locality. However, perhaps due to the difference in geographical locations, the interpretations seem to be inverted. In an entry in Laguna HDP, days will generally be rainy if the moon is in the 'salok' or 'batangan' position wherein the endpoints point upward. The same if the moon points towards the side of the mountain or in certain areas, Mt. Banahaw.

In Quezon however, the belief is that when the endpoints of the moon point towards the mountain or face upwards, it means sunny days ahead, while endpoints of the moon pointing downwards or towards the sea mean rainy or stormy days are coming. The author still considered these as shared folklore because of the very similar and specific use of the crescent moon's endpoints despite the reversal in interpretation.

Similarly, observing the color of the sunset can help predict rain. In Quezon, despite numerous reports, there were inconsistencies. Nonetheless, sunset observations remain useful. In Laguna, a red or crimson sunset indicates rainy days ahead. Some barrios in Quezon share this belief, associating reddish or dark clouds in the west with impending rain or typhoons. However, other entries suggest that a yellowish or golden sunset predicts rain, while a red one signifies sunny days.

The appearance of one or more rainbows, even half or 'incomplete' ones, is also considered a predictor. Changes in wind direction could either signal an incoming storm or indicate that an ongoing storm will soon end.

Additionally, several barrios from both provinces observe other environmental aspects to predict rain. However, the only consistent belief across barrios is that when mountains, like Mt. Makiling in Laguna, are covered in clouds or mist, rain or typhoons are expected in the following days.

Like the previous section, the following list provides sample entries exactly as they were recorded in the HDP followed by a summary of the shared folklore.

1. *Pag ang palaka raw ay humuni kung taginit ay uulan kinabukasan. Pag ang ulan ay nagsimula sa araw ng Sabado ay Sabado rin ang tigil. (Panukulan, Polillo, Quezon)*

2. *The barrio folks believed that when ever the carabaos, horses, or cows ran wild francing to and fro, the weather would be bad. (Baao, Mauban, Quezon)*

3. *When the weather is good and the swallows fly with their wings touching the surface of the water, it will rain. (Santo Domingo, Luisiana, Laguna)*

4. *The emerging of the worms from the ground and the coming up of ants in the house are believed to be signs of rain coming soon, while the appearance of rainbow, a sign of heavy rainfall. (Cabuyew, Lilio, Laguna)*

5. *If the moon is what they call ‘salok’ ‘batangan’ the ends of the half moon point upward, it foretells continuous rain the year round. (Santa Cruz, Bay, Laguna)*

6. *When the West gives a red hue at sunset it is a sign of a heavy rain. A pinkish hue scattered all over the sky is a sign of sunny days. (Himbubulo, Guinayangan, Quezon)*

7. *Isang biglang unos at sinundan ng malakas na hangin ay hudyat na titigil na ang bagyo. (East Malicboy, Pagbilao, Quezon)*

8. *When the barrio folks see that the top of Mt. Makiling is covered with dark clouds, it is a sure sign that they would have rain, (Real, Calamba, Laguna)*

Again, each barrio may have a variation of the recorded practices or beliefs.

Some of these beliefs were listed on the municipal level but were not counted because of the geographical focus of the paper.

Table 2. List of Shared Folklore Related to Rain Prediction at the Barrio Level

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF FOLKLORE	LAGUNA		QUEZON		
	MUNICIPALITY	BARRIO	MUNICIPALITY	BARRIO	
Frogs	Pakil	Balian	Atimonan	Buhangin	
				Habingan	
				Matan-ag	
				San Rafael	
		Dambo	Padre Burgos	Walay	
				Pagbilao	Pinagbayanan
					Talipan
Polillo	Panukulan				
Sampaloc	Agpasan				
Cat washing its face	Alaminos	San Miguel	Alabat	Villa Jesus East and West (one report)	
				Catanauan	Madulao
			Polillo		San Pablo
				Libo	



Restlessness of carabaos, cows, horses, and deer	Alaminos	San Miguel	Mauban	Baao	
	Bay	Santa Cruz			
	Binan	Platero		Mauban	Liwayway
San Vicente			Guinayangan	Dancalan	
Chirping of Kingfisher/ Salaksak	Luisiana	San Rafael	Sampaloc	Agpasan	
	Lilio	Silangang Bukal		Bitukaw	
Low-Flying Swift/ Swallow/ Layang-layang	Luisiana	Santo Domingo	Calauag	Maulawin	
			Pagbilao	Polo North	
			Unisan	Maputat	
Hooting of Owls	Longos	Mabitac	Agdangan	Calutan	
			Atimonan	Malinao Ilaya	
			Guinayangan	Dancalan	
			Sampaloc	Ibabang Owain	
Ants crawling up houses	Cabuyao	Pulo	Atimonan	Buhangin	
	Lilio	Cabuyew	Mauban	San Rafael	
			Unisan	Maputat	
Position of the Crescent Moon	Bay	Santa Cruz	Atimonan	Plaridel	
	Lilio	Oples	Padre Burgos	Walay	
	Lumban	San Antonio	Pagbilao	Pinagbayanan	East Malicboy
			Sampaloc	Bayongon	Bitukaw
				Unisan	Ibabang Kabulihan
			Sunset	Nagcartan	Tuy
Atimonan	Talaba				
Guinayangan	Dancalan				
Guinayangan	Himbubulo				
Quezon	Montana				
Sampaloc	Bayongon				
Rainbow	Lilio	Bayate	Guinayangan	Himbubulo	
	Lilio	Cabuyew			
Change of Wind Direction during a Storm	Nagcartan	Tuy	Guinayangan	Himbubulo	
			Pagbilao	East Malicboy	
Clouds/Mist on Mountains	Calamba	Makiling	Atimonan	Matan-ag	
		Real			

As mentioned in the introductory parts, this interaction with the environment did not end in attempting to explain, influence, or predict the rain. Rain, or the idea of it, also existed in the mindset of the people in the form of symbols for values or nuggets of community wisdom.

*Rain in the Mental Landscape*

Laguna and Quezon shared most of the proverbs using rain, typhoons, storms, or floods as symbolism as reported in their respective HDPs. The following are the specific sayings shared by these barrios. The list was arranged from the most to the least mentioned shared proverb.

1. *Kapag hangin ang itinanim, bagyo ang aanihin./ Ang magtanim ng hangin, bagyo ang aanihin./ He who plants the wind reaps the storm.*
2. *Walang batong sakdal tigas na sa patak ng ulan ay di maaagnas./ Ang ikinabubutas ng batong dapi ay dahil sa pinatak-patak ng ulang tigati./ Constant raindrops wear away stones.*
3. *Ang ulang tikatik ay siyang malakas magpapatik./ Ang ulang tikatik (atik-atik), madaling magpapatik./ Sa pinatak-patak ng ulang tikatik, tigang man ang lupa’y pilit magpapatik.*
4. *Kung may tag-araw ay may tag-ulan./ Pag may tag-ulan ay may tag-araw.*
5. *Walang isang taong bagyo./ Walang bagyo ni lindol na tumagatal ng isang taon.*

Table 3. List of Proverbs with Rain as Symbolism at the Barrio Level

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF FOLKLORE	LAGUNA		QUEZON	
	MUNICIPALITY	BARRIO	MUNICIPALITY	BARRIO
'Hangin ang itinanim...'	Bay	Tranca	Atimonan	Plaridel San Isidro

(Cont'd) 'Hangin ang itinanim...'	Majayjay	Banilad	Buenavista	Cabong
			Catanauan	Pakabit
			Guinayangan	Aloners
			Mauban	Lual
				San Miguel
			Padre Burgos	Cabuyao
				Danlagan
				Hinguiwin
San Isidro				
Pagbitao	East Malicboy			
	Pinagbayanan			
	Polo North			
	Talipan			
Quezon	Montana			
'Bato'	Lumban	Biñan	Atimonan	Lakip
			Burdeos	Calutcot
			Mauban	San Miguel
			Pagbitao	Bantigue
				Talipan
Sampaloc	Ibabang Owain			
'Ulang tikatik/atik-atik'	Lumban	Biñan	Mauban	Abo-abo
				Santo Niño
			Padre Burgos	Kinagunan
			Pagbitao	East Malicboy
			Sampaloc	Ibabang Owain
Tiaong	Lagalag			
'Tag-ulan at Tag-araw'	Los Baños	San Antonio	Sampaloc	Ibabang Owain
	Lumban	Sampaloc		
	Nagcarlan	Laguna		
'Taon'	Lumban	Maytalang	Mauban	Balibago

These were just the ones listed and shared on the barrio level.

### *Analysis and Discussion*

The study presented shared folklore associated with rain between the provinces of Quezon and Laguna. As neighboring provinces, these similar beliefs and practices are not only attributed to cultural transmission but also to natural hazards, such as

typhoons that affect both provinces. The recorded folklore from the 1950s reflects attempts to explain these natural phenomena, influence their causes, predict their occurrence, and integrate them into the mindset and morals of social interaction.

Linking natural forces, like weather and rain, to causes beyond the physical realm, such as deities, reflects the local people's recognition of the strength of these phenomena. The notion that storms and lightning were manifestations of divine wrath instilled both fear and respect. However, this does not indicate a fatalistic surrender or powerlessness. They still had the choice and ability to change their ways and appease the saints. Their actions demonstrated efforts to influence both nature and the supernatural, despite being affected by their environment.

Using folklore to predict rain can be seen as an attempt to control the environment or at least mitigate the effects of natural hazards on well-being. The rich data on shared weather predictors in the HDP reflects the sensitivity, keen observation, and in-depth knowledge of past communities about their environment.

These rain predictors are arguably scientific to some extent. The recorded folklore in the HDP during the 1950s wasn't invented out of thin air but passed down through generations. This indicates that these lores underwent processes of environmental observation, assumption creation, and testing for the highest success rates. Just as present-day localities continue to use weather lore alongside modern technology, the folklore of the 1950s complemented the technology available at the time. Despite the existence of the Manila Observatory, the Weather Bureau, and science in education long before the HDP recordings, it shows that these technologies weren't always accessible, and folklore remained a persistent aspect of culture, regardless of other knowledge sources' claims to accuracy.

It's noteworthy how some folklore contemplates the minutest details of everyday life, such as the behavior of ants or the effects of continuous drops of rain on a rock.

Such attention to detail was useful in embedding rain in communal knowledge, such as shared proverbs or sayings. The cycles of rain and weather were connected to the cycle of life, offering both caution and hope when facing uncertainties. Like small drops of rain shaping a rock, the importance of persistence and consistent effort, no matter how small, to change one's situation was emphasized.

Rain existed not just outside the person, caused by mystical forces and predicted by people, but also within one's mindset, through moral teachings and

life lessons shared by the community. Rain, and arguably other environmental folklore, were not just local knowledge about nature but also sources of wisdom and inspiration for everyday life.

This paper was limited to three classifications of folklore shared between the provinces of Quezon and Laguna as reported in the Historical Data Papers (HDP) in 1953. There is still much to explore regarding rain and weather or environment-related folklore. Firstly, this can be expanded to a regional or even national level of analysis. Secondly, the paper only focused on rain, typhoons, storms, and floods. The HDP still contains entries about communal memories of typhoons which could be a source for creating an environmental history of disasters in the Philippines. Additionally, there are folktales that might include rain, and other weather-related folklore, such as those concerning sunny days and droughts. However, the HDP records the existence of these folkways but not their formulation or evolution, which is a limitation researchers must consider.

In a recent discussion which also involved the author, the process of validation similar to today's cultural mapping project was raised about 1953 HDP. The executive order did not provide guidelines on external or community validation, unlike current cultural mapping practices. It only required that the respondents be the oldest or most knowledgeable about the topic in the community and that the report be reviewed and approved by various committees. However, this criticism overlooks the urgent national rebuilding context of the order, the quantitative and financial limitations of the government and researchers, and the lack of theoretical guidelines at the time compared to the UN frameworks, cultural mapping guidelines, and laws we have today. One might even argue that the HDP was ahead of its time regarding its goals and format.

Another challenge in using the HDP is accessing its digital version in the digital collections of the National Library of the Philippines. Accessibility is limited by the capacity of technology. As previously mentioned, the HDP page was under renovation during this paper's revision, causing some pages to be missing. Hopefully, the updated page will include these missing pages to enable off-site validation of the results.

Nevertheless, we now have strategies to validate and update the records through pedagogy and the ongoing cultural mapping of local communities. Like the communities in Tawi-Tawi, Ilocos Norte, and Cebu, the folklore about rain and typhoons in Laguna and Quezon might have survived to the present as long as the

communities perceived their function and applicability. Their continued existence could validate those recorded in the HDP, or variations could be used for a longitudinal study.

The results and discussion highlight the immense value of the Historical Data Papers (HDP) when given proper attention. While sources like chronicles, diaries, and commentaries also face issues of validity and accuracy, this does not prevent researchers from analyzing them and extracting valuable information. We subject any written sources to external and internal criticism. The challenge lies not with the HDP but with the researcher—how they examine the data, further analyze what is useful, and reconsider what is questionable.

Folklore about rain, typhoons, and weather reflects human-environment relationships. A cultural historical study on this topic showcases human-environment interactions during a specific period in history. The study demonstrated that such folklore illustrates not only the external natural environment but also the internal mental landscape of the people of Laguna and Quezon around the 1950s. A comparison of common lore between two adjacent localities also reflects similar environment, mutual natural hazards, and possibly identical cultural tendencies.

Further reflecting on Pantayong Pananaw, Zeus Salazar, Reynaldo Ilete, and other researchers' efforts to decolonize historical research and represent the Filipino masses' mindset, the recorded folklore in the HDP regarding weather and environment should therefore be considered valuable sources for both history and folklore studies.

### **Further Recommendations**

Studying folklore from a certain period in the past is not about appraising it as historical or scientific fact, but acknowledging it as part of past events, societies, and people. If cultural history aims to represent common people, refocus historical narratives on everyday life, and understand shared symbols and meanings within their temporal context, then folklore should be considered a significant source.

However, using folklore does not have to be limited to conducting interviews; archival materials, such as the Historical Data Papers, are available for period-specific studies and can be accessed online. Nonetheless, caution is needed regarding its limitations, both as a source and as part of the open-access digital technology.

Moreover, with current laws on cultural mapping and the trending topic of heritage, folklore should be seen as an important aspect of a community's intangible cultural heritage, worth revisiting. As part of a similar endeavor post-World War II to record the folkways of local community survivors, the HDP might serve as a preliminary source for those conducting cultural mapping. Conversely, cultural mapping and current heritage approaches may help update the HDPs for each locality.

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# ***The Curse of the Tablas Strait: An Interrogation of Maritime Accidents from 1902-2008***

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When the M.T. *Princess Empress* sank off the northeast coast of Mindoro in the early morning of February 28, 2023, she became yet another addition to the list of vessels that have met their fate along the treacherous Tablas Strait. The unusually large number of disasters that have taken place in that vicinity, including one of the worst maritime tragedies in history, has created a contemporary narrative about the existence of the so-called "Romblon Triangle," which has become the watery grave of thousands of souls since the beginning of the twentieth century. While the death toll from the sinkings and collisions that have taken place in that area is irrefutable, there are logical explanations that could dispel the myth about the Tablas Strait being cursed. Hence, this article revisits official accounts of tragic events that took place in that waterway to provide analysis that could dispel the myth about the Tablas Strait being cursed. Regardless, no amount of fact-based historical accounts or even scientific analysis may be enough to dispel the mysteries and lore about this waterway, which is among the most heavily traversed in the archipelago.

Keywords: *interisland shipping, maritime disasters, Tablas Strait, Dona Paz, Romblon Triangle*

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## Introduction

As an archipelagic nation, interisland shipping is a primary mode for transporting goods and passengers across the Philippines. However, despite its cruciality to the country's development, the domestic shipping industry has been plagued by inefficiencies in route management, high prices, and poor service (Jusi, et al., 2020). The mere mention of interisland shipping in the Philippines may bring about memories of the numerous maritime disasters that have taken place in recent years. Aside from the sinking of the recent M.T. *Princess Empress* off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro in 2023, which created an oil spill that spread as far as Antique, the image of the capsized M.V. *Princess of the Stars* off the coast of Sibuyan Island, Romblon (see Figure 1) on her voyage from Manila to Cebu at the height of Typhoon Frank on 21 June 2008, is probably still etched in the consciousness of many Filipinos today as she capsized off the coast of Sibuyan Island resulting in 227 deaths and 592 missing.



Figure 1. The Capsized Princess of the Stars

To older generations, however, it is probably the collision involving the M.V. *Doña Paz* and the M.V. *Vector* on 20 December 1987, which is listed as the deadliest civilian maritime disaster in history (Ray, n.d.), has embedded a negative

impression about the Philippine maritime industry on a global scale. Additionally, that tragic event also reinforced the lore surrounding the Tablas Strait curse. These incidents involving the *Princess of the Stars* and the *Doña Paz* took place in what has recently been referred to as the "Romblon Triangle." As seen in Figure 2, it is an imaginary area bound by Sibale Island as its tip, with the Tablas Strait and Sibuyan Sea as its base (Evora, 2014). The discovery on 2 March 2015 of the 73,000-ton *Musashi*, which was one of the largest battleships ever built, may have added further credence to that site.<sup>1</sup> While that English language term seems to be construct

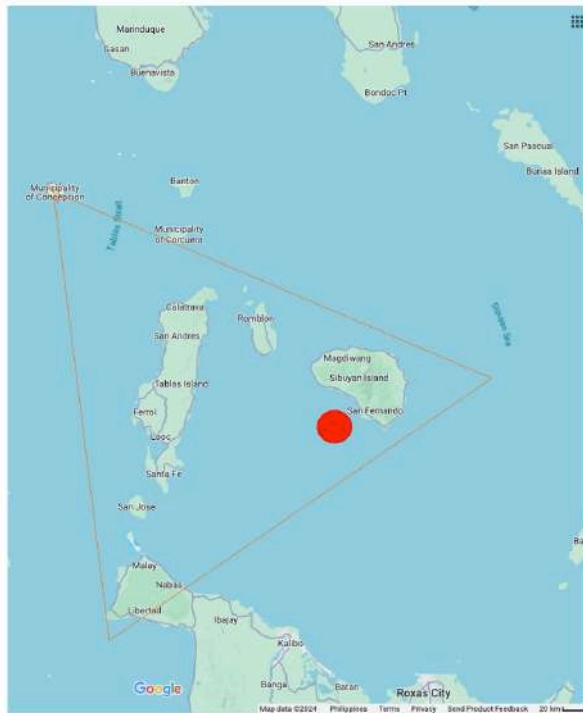


Figure 2. A Map of the "Romblon Triangle" Showing the Site of the Capsized *Princess of the Stars*. Note: The map was plotted based on the description in Evora, R. (2014, February 3). *The curse of the Romblon Triangle*. *Manila Standard Today*, B6. The vicinity where the *Princess of the Stars* capsized was taken from MV *Princess of the Stars*. (2024, August 4). In *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV\\_Princess\\_of\\_the\\_Stars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV_Princess_of_the_Stars)

<sup>1</sup> The *Musashi* was discovered by a team led by the late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen at approximately 3,280 feet beneath the Sibuyan Sea. More than half of its 2,399-man crew perished when it was sunk by Allied forces in what was possibly the largest naval battle in history, the Battle of Leyte Gulf (Romey, 2018).

patterned from the "Bermuda Triangle," it reinforces the narrative about the curse that seems to have befallen many ships that have sailed around this region and has become embedded among the many superstitions that are part of the indigenous folklore of Romblon.

In a chapter of a book about the province published by the Provincial Government of Romblon, local resident Francis Prado (2018) wrote about the "Golden Ship" which journeyed from Calatong<sup>2</sup> to various ports around the country. Aside from being made of gold, it was also filled with splendid-looking passengers in a constant state of jubilation. According to noted anthropologist, Alicia P. Magos, similar tales about "Barko nga Bulawan" also exist in the provinces of Panay Island (Santiago 2023, p. 338). Hence, despite Romblon's insularity, the proliferation of this narrative around the region may have provided a quick explanation for incomprehensible events that took place in the waters surrounding the island. In that regard, This was the same "ghost ship" that was supposedly cited by the captain of the *Don Juan* minutes before she collided with the oil tanker *Tacloban* in 1980. Her captain supposedly tried to avoid the mysterious vessel but crashed into the tanker instead (Evora, 2014).

Given how much folk narratives accompanied actual events, a historical interrogation of maritime tragedies that have been taking place since the American colonial era could provide a more factual interpretation of the lore surrounding the curse of the Tablas Strait. These stories generated a similar hype among the public due to the extensive media coverage of the era. Hence, by showing how similar circumstances were also prevalent in the past, a more convincing explanation as to why maritime accidents have been a frequent historical occurrence could be established. Hopefully, by demonstrating that conditions behind the disasters along the Tablas Strait have been going on for over a century, a greater sense of urgency to rectify what has turned out to be a deadly historical pattern could be realized, and perhaps even change the perception about the interisland shipping industry in general.

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Mt. Calatong, located on the southeastern tip of Tablas Island, is still believed to be enchanted and inhabited by supernatural beings who should not be disturbed (Tablas island, Romblon PH, 2019).

## An Overview of Maritime Disasters Along the Tablas Strait

With the use of primary sources, a list of tragic maritime accidents that took place along the Tablas Strait as well as sites located in the vicinity of the so-called Romblon Triangle was constructed in Table 1 below. Starting with the recorded wreck of an American customs steamer in 1902, the conditions surrounding the disasters that took place until 2008 will be examined to explain what makes traversing the Tablas Strait so dangerous. Noticeably, traversing the Tablas Strait during a typhoon was a typical condition during which sinkings took place. Early twentieth-century steamers (which were actually built in the nineteenth century) such as the *Barongan* (185 tons) and *Negros* (280 tons) were of low tonnage and were more unstable in stormy weather. On the other hand, the *Quantico* was one of the biggest coastwise steamers in the Philippines at the time, weighing in at 2,676 tons (Bennet, 2011, p. 28). It just so happened that the Christmas Day typhoon of 1918 (which came to be known as the Quantico Typhoon) through which she sailed straight into had actually had its signals lowered, only to curve back with a stronger force in its tail that even the Pennsylvania-built steamer didn't have a chance (Coronas, 1919). Among the twenty-one who perished in that tragedy were firemen and engineers, several Americans, a district court judge, and a passenger whose dog also jumped overboard and stayed with his master's hunched body after the latter fell off the ship ("Recount Fight With Storm", 1919).

Table 1. Maritime Accidents Along the Tablas Strait, 1902-2008

Vessel Name	Operator	Date	Cause	Dead + Missing
<i>USS Shearwater</i>	US Customs	1902-07-14	typhoon	19
<i>Barongan</i>	Tabacalera	1905-09-25	typhoon	0
<i>Quantico</i>	Robert Dollar Co.	1912-12-25	typhoon	21
<i>Negros</i>	Yangco Steamship Co.	1927-05-28	typhoon	81
<i>Nuria of Manila</i>		1939-07-04	broken propeller	
<i>Mindoro*</i>	Compania Maritima	1967-11-02	typhoon	unknown
<i>Don Juan</i>	Negros Navigation	1980-04-22	collission	178
<i>Tacloban City</i>	PNOC			
<i>Doña Paz</i>	Sulpicio Lines	1987-12-20	collission	4000+?
<i>Vector</i>	Vector Shipping			
<i>Jem II</i>	Alfredo Martinez	1989-01-02	overloading	61
<i>Princess of the Stars</i>	Sulpicio Lines	2008-06-21	typhoon	819

\*accident took place in the Sibuyan Sea

While the sinking of smaller vessels during the early twentieth century at the height of a typhoon might have been explainable, it is harder to comprehend how such incidents could continue to occur in the twenty-first century. One reason for that is that the Tablas Strait is a passage where currents from the South China Sea converge with waters from the western Pacific which flows through the Sibuyan Sea. This convergence makes predicting local currents very challenging (Weiqing et. al., 2009), thereby making voyages along that waterway dangerous even under normal conditions. Notwithstanding the nature of these currents and the disasters that took place due to extreme weather conditions, one reason why these maritime accidents had taken such a huge toll on lives is a practice in the industry that had been going on for decades - overcrowding.

It is not unusual for vessels of all sizes in the Philippines to be loaded with passengers beyond their capacity, especially during peak travel periods around the Christmas and school holidays. The M.B. *Jem II*, for example, was mostly carrying students returning to school from their Christmas holidays on its voyage from Romblon to Caticlan, Aklan, on January 3, 1989. That might have actually been an accident waiting to happen because she was merely a 14.9-ton wooden motorboat allowed to carry thirty-one passengers. She had a passenger load of 174 on the day she sank (Evangelista and Santos, 1989).

A similar case of overcrowding took place in the sinking of the *Negros* on 28 May 1927, on its voyage from Aklan to Manila (with a stop in Romblon). However, the conditions in which the tragedy occurred were exacerbated by misjudgment on the part of her captain. He received a typhoon warning by telegraph and his Chief Officer tried to dissuade him from departing. The captain persisted and only realized his mistake two hours later when he realized that it was too late for him to return to port. He shot himself in his cabin while the ship was sinking (The *Negros* Disaster, 1927). As for the rest of his crew, they completely disregarded the passengers and tried to save themselves as best they could. Making the matter worse was the fact that a lot of the cargo belonged to the officers themselves (The Official Story, 1927).

Fifty passengers and twenty crew who survived the ordeal landed in the barrio of Bondoc, Southern Tayabas after about 45 hours on fragile rafts. The exact number of passengers who boarded in Capiz and Romblon was unknown due to a “sifting of some facts.” One thing that was certainly reflected on the manifest was that the officers and crew packed the decks with personal consignments of bananas and marble dust, plus an unspecified amount of firewood consigned to the

manager's daughter (The Official Story, 1927). Two weeks after the *Negros* sunk, an authentic list had yet been furnished by the agents of the ports from which passengers embarked. An incomplete list was merely based on the recollection of survivors and served as the only basis for a list which showed that there about 120 passengers were aboard (The Negros Disaster, 1927). This type of anomaly would be a similar factor in the case of the M.V. *Mindoro* which would also sink during a typhoon forty years later.

The *Mindoro* was a former U.S. Army Freight and Supply (FS) ship operated by the largest shipping operator in the Philippines at the time, Compañía Marítima. After setting sail from Manila North Harbor on 2 November 1967, bound for New Washington, Aklan, she encountered typhoon 'Welming' on the Sibuyan Sea off Aklan at about 5:00 in the morning of November 4. According to testimonies from among her 136 survivors, there were about 200 passengers on the second deck of the vessel, thereby forcing others to squeeze onto the third deck or first deck. Some passengers were not included in the manifest because they only purchased their tickets upon boarding. Based on a certified true copy of the Special Permit issued by the Bureau of Customs, the *Mindoro* was limited to only 193 passengers (*Heirs of A. Delos Santos, et al. v. C. A. and C. Marítima*, 1990).

An anomalous passenger list was also a factor in the collision between the M.V. *Don Juan* operated by Negros Navigation and the M.T. *Tacloban* of the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC). The disaster took place at about 10:30 in the evening on the former's voyage from Manila to Bacolod. She sank within ten to fifteen minutes. According to the Certificate of Inspection issued by the Philippine Coast Guard Commander at Iloilo City, the *Don Juan* was only allowed to carry 810 passengers and 54 crew. However, there were 1,004 onboard the vessel when she sank. (*Negros Navigation v. C.A., et al.*, 1997).

While the overcrowding of the *Don Juan* in itself is an unacceptable act of negligence, a more disturbing revelation was exposed after an ensuing investigation revealed that the *Don Juan's* captain and other crew members were playing mahjong on the vessel. Negros Navigation assumed full responsibility for all claims arising out of the collision after reaching an agreement with PNOC in 1986. Nonetheless, they still tried to appeal this verdict until the case was finally closed in 1997 after the Supreme Court concluded "that Capt. Santisteban and Negros Navigation are properly held liable for gross negligence . . . leading to the death of hundreds of passengers" (*Negros Navigation v. C.A.*, 1997).



A far greater casualty count resulted from another collision involving a vessel operated by a major liner company and an oil tanker when the 2,215-ton M.V. *Doña Paz* of Sulpicio Lines collided with the 629-ton tanker *Vector* on the former's voyage from Tacloban to Manila on the evening of 20 December 1987. As in the case of *Don Juan*, there were also anomalies regarding her actual passenger count. The manifest of the *Doña Paz* listed 1,493 passengers and a 53-member crew and had a declared capacity of 1,518 passengers and 60 crew members (Gabieta, 2012). However, those figures may be well below the actual number of passengers on board because the names of as many as 1,000 children may not have been included on the manifest, as well as those of the passengers who only purchased tickets after boarding (Chua-Eoan, 1988). The highest unverified estimate placed the total deaths at 4,386 people, making it the deadliest peacetime maritime disaster in history (Ballesteros, 2016).

Another factor surrounding the collisions involving both the *Don Juan* and the *Doña Paz* was that they took place late in the evening. In the case of the *Doña Paz*, the collision also took place at around 10:00 p.m. The 8,800 bbl. of petroleum products carried by the *Vector* immediately ignited and created a sea of flames that engulfed both ships, after which dozens of passengers leaped into the water, diving deep to avoid getting burned. Passengers who crowded the decks in beds that were occupied by up to four people were anticipating the Christmas holidays, many of whom were children who screamed for their parents as the burning vessels disappeared within four hours of the collision (Chua-Eoan, 1988). Only twenty-six people survived that horrific event when they were rescued by the *Don Claudio* of Negros Navigation (Mariano, 1987).

As in the case of the *Don Juan*, there was also a disturbing account of negligence on the part of the captain of the *Doña Paz*. Based on the Coast Guard's initial inquiry, some of her officers were watching T.V. or drinking beer when the collision took place. Moreover, an apprentice officer was left on the bridge alone as it made its way through the treacherous Tablas Strait off Mindoro (AP, 1987). While that narrative remains embedded in the popular consciousness, the Supreme Court had determined that it was the *Vector* who was entirely at fault in that collision, as shown in the following statement

"All evidence points to the fact that it was MT *Vector's* negligent officers and crew which caused it to ram into MV *Doña Paz*. More so, MT *Vector* was

found to be carrying expired coastwise license and permits and was not properly manned. As the records would also disclose, there is a defect in the ignition system of the vessel, and it was not convincingly shown whether the necessitated repairs were in fact undertaken before the said ship had set to sea. In short, MT *Vector* was unseaworthy at the time of the mishap. That the said vessel was allowed to set sail when it was, to everyone in the group's knowledge, not fit to do so translates into rashness and imprudence" (*Vector v. Macasa, et al., 2008*).

In the two tragedies involving the *Don Juan* and the *Doña Paz*, human agency was a major factor that led to the loss of lives which could have been avoided. There is, however, another factor at play that makes navigating the Tablas Strait more treacherous. By looking at the image from an online ship tracking site in Figure 3, the Tablas Strait seems to be a point where vessels to and from Manila are forced into a bottleneck where they encounter vessels from the opposite direction. To prevent collisions at sea, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has had regulations set in place since 1972 (COLREG, 2019). In the Philippines, however, this convention was only ratified in 2013 (MARINA, 2022). Had these guidelines been implemented much earlier, there still wouldn't have been any certainty that the captain of the *Don Juan* would have decided to stay on the bridge instead of play mahjong when his ship collided with an oil tanker in 1980, or that the *Doña Paz* would not have exceeded its legal passenger capacity.

The aftermath of these tragic maritime disasters always ends up exposing what is probably the biggest curse that besets travelers within Philippine waters - the inability of the government to improve the state of domestic shipping in the country. In the aftermath of the 1927 sinking of the *Negros*, for example, Acting Governor-General Eugene Allen Gilmore created an advisory committee on interisland shipping to recommend tighter safety regulations and to prevent monopolies by allowing more competitors to operate in the market. Among the politicians who got involved in the deliberations that followed were Sen. Juan Sumulong, Speaker Manuel Roxas, and Ramon Fernandez. Yet what followed was a bill that merely gave the freedom for existing operators to stay in business (Poblador, 2022). Fast forward to the *Doña Paz* tragedy. One thing that has been forgotten in history is that less than a year after her sinking, another vessel owned by the same operator, Sulpicio Lines, the 2,855-ton *Doña Marilyn*, sank near Maripipi island, located between Masbate and Biliran when she ran into engine

trouble as she encountered rough seas at the height of typhoon Ruby on October 24, 1988 (Echeminada, 1988). Ten days after the sinking, it was established that at least 63 people died, and 191 were still missing ("Sulpicio banned", 1988).



Figure 3. Typical Traffic Along the Tablas Strait

Despite the seemingly criminal negligence involving Sulpicio Lines and its role in the tragedies involving the *Doña Paz* and *Doña Marilyn* which took place less than a year apart, they were still allowed to operate and eventually became responsible for the second-worst sinking in the country's history involving the *Princess of the Stars* in which 819 lives were lost on 21 June 2008. While a typhoon was also a factor in that disaster, human error was a bigger factor at play. According to the report prepared by the Board of Marine Inquiry (BMI), "The immediate cause of the capsizing of MV *Princess of the Stars* was the failure of the Master to exercise extraordinary diligence and good seamanship thereby committing an error of judgment . . ." (The Maritime Executive, 2019). The BMI report was referring to the captain's miscalculation of the risk of continuing with the trip to Cebu

despite the stormy weather. According to former officials from the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA), however, the *Princess of the Stars* could have easily hurdled the storm, and in all likelihood, the improper stowage of cargo was what led her to the capsizes (G. Cabañez and B. Adil, personal interview, April 2, 2019).

Despite the different factors discussed so far to explain the maritime disasters that took place along the Tablas Strait, and in the case of the *Mindoro* and *Princess of the Stars*, the adjacent Sibuyan Sea, the lack of an acceptable explanation for these tragedies paved the way for an indigenous narrative about a curse along the Tablas Strait. Additionally, the unverified count of over 4,000 casualties in the *Doña Paz* tragedy by the Supreme Court (*Caltex, et al. v. Singzon, et al.*, 2016) adds an element of infallibility to the folk narrative, thereby enhancing its embeddedness into the national consciousness. However, experts and insiders within the shipping industry do not believe in the existence of the so-called Romblon Triangle. In fact, they have always refuted the staggering number of casualties from that incident. Hence, this article also includes a brief discussion that would consider the possibility that the casualty count of the *Doña Paz* might have been inflated. While it may do little to dispel the myth of the Romblon Triangle, it will still offer a better understanding of Philippine maritime culture in the modern era.

### **A Re-Analysis of the *Doña Paz* Casualty Count**

Although the figure 4,000 deaths in the *Doña Paz* disaster is etched in practically all written accounts about that tragedy including records of the Supreme Court (*Caltex v. Sulpicio Lines*, 1999), industry experts and insiders have never believed that figure to be accurate. Survivors of the tragedy overheard some of the crew mention that there were more than 3,000 people on board the *Doña Paz* when she departed from Catbalogan (Chua-Eoan, 1988). That was already about double its declared capacity, which in itself is already an extremely high figure but still within the norm of overcrowding which regularly took place during peak travel periods such as the Christmas season. What made the casualty figure balloon to over 4,000 was the claim made by Northern Samar Representative Raul Daza just over a week after the deadly collision took place, that a list of over 2,000 missing passengers was produced by their relatives and friends and compiled by local media outlets (Hitosis, 2023). There are two compelling reasons why the veracity of these additional claims should be re-examined: 1) an analysis of the General

Arrangement Plan of the *Doña Paz* based on her net register tonnage (NRT)<sup>3</sup> would reveal that it was physically impossible to fit over 4,000 passengers in her available space, and 2) a socio-geographical analysis of transportation services out of northern Samar may cast doubt on the rationality of boarding the crowded *Doña Paz* in Catbalogan to travel to Manila.

When the passenger cargo vessel *Himeyuri Maru* was launched in 1963 in the Onomichi Zosen shipyard in Japan, her gross register tonnage was 2,602 GRT<sup>4</sup> (Dona Paz, 2016). She was purchased by Sulpicio Lines in 1975 and named the *Don Sulpicio*, and renamed the *Doña Paz* in 1981. Having undergone refitting in the Philippines to accommodate more passengers, local databases indicate that her tonnage went down to 2,324 GRT (Wrecksite, 2016). Obviously, it would have been impossible for her tonnage to decrease if retrofitting was done to add more revenue-generating space. (According to industry insiders, tonnage is usually undervalued in order for the operator to minimize port duties). Hence, to calculate the volume of space that could have been occupied by revenue passengers in the *Doña Paz*, industry experts from the Philippine Ship Spotters Society / PSSS (personal communication, November 21, 2023) used the exaggerated figure of 2,000 Net Register Tons (NRT).

According to the Steamship Manual (2010), the capacity available for cargo and passengers could be measured in cubic feet by the net register tonnage by 100, i.e. 1 net ton = 100 cubic feet (or 2.83 cubic meters). Thus, the available passenger space in the *Doña Paz* could be calculated as follows:

$$2,000 \text{ NRT} \times 100 = 200,000 \text{ cubic feet} = 5,663 \text{ cubic meters}$$

$$5,663 - 1,770 \text{ (the two cargo holds of the Doña Paz)} = 3,893 \text{ cubic meters} \\ \text{of usable passenger space}$$

$$3,893 \text{ cubic meters} / 4,386 \text{ (highest passenger estimate)} = 0.88 \text{ cubic meters} \\ \text{passenger}$$

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<sup>3</sup> Net Register Tonnage (NRT) was a measure of the capacity available for the carriage of cargo and passengers. Deductions from GRT included: Master and crew accommodation, safety and storage spaces, water ballast tanks, allowance for propelling machinery. is a measure in tons of the inside of a ship for carrying goods, which does not include space used for fuel, the engine, etc. (Cambridge University Press, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> Gross Register Tonnage (GRT) was a measure of the total internal capacity of the ship consisting of: under-deck volume excluding double-bottoms, volume of tween deck spaces, volume of superstructures, volume of deck-houses etc. Exemptions included: navigational spaces, galleys, stairways, light and air spaces. (Steamship Manual, 2010).

It was assumed in the above calculation that passengers were allowed to occupy the passageways, the roof, the restaurant, and even the crew quarters. The claims from survivors that three to four passengers were occupying a single bunk were also considered true, but they definitely did not occupy her cargo holds due to the heat and lack of ventilation in those spaces. Thus, the allotted space of 0.88 cubic meters per passenger will be taken into account. As a point of reference, that is just about the size of a casket, meaning the 4,386 passengers that were claimed to have boarded the *Doña Paz* would fill up all available space from floor to ceiling, not just the passageways and bunks. Assuming that her maximum passenger carriage of 1,583 was reached, PSSS estimates that an additional that about 600 passengers could have been accommodated in the available bunks, about 360 on the passageways of her three main decks, plus additional passengers in the economy class restaurant. No matter how creative you are in stretching that number, fitting over 4,000 passengers into the *Doña Paz* seems unimaginable. And if you were to ask any industry expert what the excess passenger ceiling would have been on a vessel such as the *Doña Paz*, the typical reply would have been "3,000 tops" (PSSS, personal communication, November 21, 2023).

Since even the figure of 3,000 persons was already obscenely high, there wouldn't have been any point in bloating it any further. However, as with all events in the past that become part of recorded history, human agency plays a significant role. During the 12th Philippine Congress, Samar was divided into three districts: Northern Samar, Eastern Samar, and Samar, which had two legislative districts. Catbalogan was part of the 2nd District of Samar, and its port was where the *Doña Paz* made a stop on 20 December 1987 to pick up an additional 908 passengers. From there, she departed for Manila with the declared headcount of 1,583 passengers and 58 crew. It could be easily surmised that passengers who boarded at that port were residents of the city itself, or of the residents of neighboring municipalities for whom it was the most practical port of disembarkation for a voyage to Manila, and that might have included residents of Eastern Samar as well. On the other hand, the fastest, most practical, and least expensive way for residents of Northern Samar to travel to Manila would have been to take land transportation to the Port of Allen, and take one of the big double-decker motorboats across the San Bernardino Strait to Matnog, Sorsogon, where buses to Manila with a daily schedule would be waiting for passengers. This was obviously the best way to travel to Manila, as opposed to backtracking, let's say, from Catarman (the capital of Northern Samar) on a journey of over 100 kilometers that could take up to three hours to board a slow-moving ship from Catbalogan that leaves once a week, and

would have been already packed after it left Tacloban.

Despite this logic, it was the representative from Northern Samar (not the districts that were adjacent to Catbalogan) who put forward a list of about 2,000 names to add to the casualty count of the unfortunate tragedy. From there, the matter of compensating the relatives of the victims turned into a legal conundrum in which a group called Bulig-Bulig Kita cooperated with the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) in seeking compensation for the relatives of the victims. A P30,000 settlement from Sulpicio Lines was rejected in 1991, but a class action suit made it all the way to the Supreme Court of Louisiana where the main office of Caltex was located (Ballesteros, 2016). On March 6, 2017, heirs of the victims of the *Doña Paz* tragedy each received claims amounting to over P200,000 (Recuerdo, 2017).

### Conclusion

Based on a socio-geographic analysis of the mode of travel from North Samar to Manila and the net register tonnage of the *Doña Paz*, there may actually be a basis to cast some doubt on her casualty count estimate from the 1987 tragedy. Nonetheless, regardless of whether or not the number of deaths from the *Doña Paz* tragedy was inflated, the lowest possible casualty count based on its "suspicious" manifest listing 1,493 passengers and 53 crew members will still make it one of the most tragic maritime disasters of all time. The other disasters that took place along the Tablas Strait and the Sibuyan Sea throughout the twentieth century may have had lower casualty figures, but they are by no means less significant as they all form part of a longer history that reinforces the lore surrounding that waterway, and for that matter, the more current reference to a Romblon Triangle.

A historical inquiry into the maritime disasters that took place in that vicinity has provided more informed explanations behind them. Based on the accident history in Table 1, most sinkings took place during typhoons, with at least six vessels sunk with the loss of human lives since 1902. Moreover, better judgment on the part of the ship's captains, or in the case of the *Princess of the Stars*, the officer in charge of loading cargo, could have prevented the loss of lives altogether. However, despite those explanations based on historical accounts, folk narratives about the inherent danger of traversing the Tablas Strait will continue to persist as long as the disturbing pattern of events that have taken place in the past continues to this day. Indeed, according to MARINA, 782 maritime accidents were recorded from 2018 to 2022 (PortCalls, 2023).

Although both the natural and human factors surrounding the curse along the Tablas Strait continue to persist, fortunately, one historical pattern that seems to have taken a break is the incidence of heavy casualties in maritime accidents. Thanks to the introduction of budget air travel and roll-on/roll-off (ROPAX) passenger service, the public now has the option of taking faster and safer modalities to travel across the archipelago. Unfortunately, maritime accidents continue to be reported in other parts of the country at around the time of this writing. Aside from the oil spill caused by the sinking of the M.T. *Princess Empress* in February 2023, other more recent incidents are 1) the tilting of the M.V. *Maria Helena* in Banton during the month of July, and the capsizing of the M.B. *King Sto. Niño 7* in the municipality of Corcuera in August (Ombay, 2023). Notably, both of these incidents took place in the province of Romblon right inside the Romblon Triangle. Apparently, the curse continues to persist until this day, and as long as the state of interisland shipping remains the same, the safety of human lives as well as our marine environment will continue to be at risk of being a victim of this curse.

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sa ayún sa Indung Kapampáangan  
*JC Gaillard*

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in the Philippine Past, 1566 - 1910  
*Emmanuel Jayson V. Bolata*

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