



THE PHILIPPINE JOURNAL OF FOLKLORE

BANWAAN

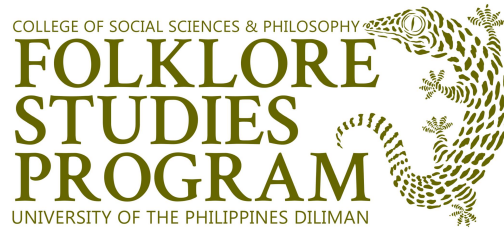
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BANWAAN

The Philippine Journal of Folklore

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JESUS FEDERICO C. HERNANDEZ

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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All correspondence regarding editorial matters, manuscripts, and contributions should be addressed to:

Jesus Federico C. Hernandez
Folklore Studies Program
College of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City
Email: folklore.upd@up.edu.ph

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Table of Contents

vii

Editor's Notes

1

The Folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity

MA. CRISANTA NELMIDA-FLORES

29

Vernacular Religiosity and "Grace" in

Bicol Christian Devotion

JAZMIN B. LLANA

49

Folk Devotion in the Waterscape of Pasig River:

The 1653 and 1748 Fluvial Processions of the

Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buenviaje

MARY JOSEFTI C. NITO

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building banwaan



When the Folklore Studies Program was established under the leadership of Dean Francisco Nemenzo, Jr. in 1980 at the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)—the precursor of the current College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (CSSP), College of Arts and Letters (CAL), and College of Science (CS)—one of its objectives was to promote the study of folklore through various projects and initiatives. The program was envisioned to serve as a hub that will provide space for scholars from here and abroad to come together, exchange ideas, and conduct research on themes relating to Philippine folklore.

But what is folklore? One of the challenges to folklore studies is determining its identity. In some universities, folklore and folkloristics deal with matters that may be categorized otherwise as subjects for investigation in cultural anthropology. Other universities focus mainly on oral literature, therefore classifying folklore with literary studies. Some universities consider folklore as a study of antiquity. More recent suggestions prefer folklife instead of folklore because the latter is regarded as inadequate and also archaic and colonial when applied to non-Indo-European cultures. While these various definitions and classifications may be viewed as a challenge in establishing the identity of Philippine folklore, the multiple interpretations or the lack of a canonical definition allow us to explore, locate, and contextualize what folklore and folklore studies mean to us. It allows us to define folklore on our terms and research and consider categories such as *kaalamang-bayan* and *dunong-bayan* as core organizing concepts of Philippine folklore. It provides us the opportunity to develop a theory of folklore based on Philippine voices and experiences.

Oftentimes folklore is regarded as quaint, unsophisticated, and peripheral. Reframing this view and the notional definition of folklore as a collection of traditions and beliefs of the rural to one that refers to accumulated meanings learned through common experiences, community-specific struggles and innovations will prove essential in our attempts to understand our identities and

place as a people. It will also allow us to see connections, not only with other communities in the archipelago, but also with the larger Southeast Asian and Austronesian communities.

As a field of study, what makes folkloristics different from related disciplinary fields is that it is always transdisciplinary. It can be literature with psychology, linguistic diachrony and phylogeny, or kinesiology and culture history. The possibilities for multidisciplinary investigations are numerous and the cross-disciplinary collaborations may prove beneficial to disciplines that have long been in isolation.

It is hoped therefore that the Folklore Studies Program can provide a space and facilitate these multi-disciplinary collaborations and exchanges through its various activities and projects. One of these projects is a journal of folklore. This journal is envisioned as a space for connections, explorations, and dialogues on themes that have been traditionally classified as folklore and topics that may not be considered folklore notionally but offers a reimagining and recontextualization of folkloristics in the Philippines.

We have decided to call the journal *Banwaan* because it reflects all the things that we imagine for this journal. *Banwa*, the root word of *banwaan*, is a ubiquitous and persistent term within the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family. The term and its cognates are found in various languages in the Philippines such as Itbayaten, Pangasinan, Kapampangan, Buhid, Cebuano, Subanen, to mention a few. It has cognates in languages that are genetically related to Philippine languages within the Malayo-Polynesian group such as Iban *menua*, Toba Batak *banua*, and even in the Oceanic languages such as Tongan *fonua*, Samoan *fanua*, and Maori *whenua*. The term was inherited, retained, and has a wide distribution within the language family. Diachronic linguists reconstruct the ancestral Proto-Malayo-Polynesian form as **banua*. However, the word has varied meanings. In some languages, it means a town, a village, a community, or a settlement. In others, it means a landing place or a port. The term also refers to the sky and the heavens, and even the underworld. The complexity of the semantics of the term points to a category of space that encompasses not only the land or the village itself but all spaces—physical and spiritual—needed to support the life of a community. It is no wonder that in some Oceanic languages, the cognates of *banwa* have gained an additional meaning, through metaphoric extension perhaps, of “placenta.”

Banwaan, a common form in languages like Bikol, has added what may be a locative suffix [-an] to the root. What may appear to be an unnecessary redundancy of adding an affix that expresses location (a place where x happens) to a root that is a location begs reconsideration of the already complex semantics of the term. It seems to indicate that *banwa* is not just a space that includes the physical and spiritual spaces as mentioned above but it is also something that is performed. *Banwa* then is a category best considered as a non-binary space where the support for the life of a community is performed. With this in mind, it is hoped that the journal will not only be a space for ideas but also a place where the community is built and performed; a space of folklore and folklife.

There are three articles in this inaugural issue. These were papers presented at the second *Pagdiriwang* International Conference hosted by the Folklore Studies Program in March 2021 on Christianity and Popular Devotions to commemorate the 500th year of the introduction of Christianity in the Philippines. The conference focused on the transformations and incorporation of Christianity and popular devotion in the cultural and social lives of local populations; a conversation about faith that has been localized and contextualized through intimate and collective acts of devotions.

Ma. Crisanta Nelmidia-Flores' article titled *The Folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity* adds her voice in the conversation that surrounds the idea of Folk Catholicism. Framing the current view using syncretism and inculturation, she interrogates the (possibly) unintended bifurcation between the folk (pagan) and western (Christian) in earlier studies as she problematizes the folk in Filipino Folk Catholicism.

The conversation continues in the article *Vernacular Religiosity and "Grace" in Bicol Christian Devotion*, written by Jazmin B. Llana. In the article, Llana investigates conversion and inculturation and the surfacing of vernacular religiosity and the laicization of grace as exemplified in the *dotoc* of Bicol, a devotion to the Holy Cross.

The third article in this issue, Mary Josefti C. Nito's *Folk Devotion in the Waterscape of the Pasig River: The 1653 and 1748 Fluvial Processions of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* analyzes the detailed descriptions of two fluvial processions of the Our Lady of Antipolo as documented by Pedro Murillo Velarde, S.J. The article shows the importance of the communal performance in these fluvial processions

EDITOR'S NOTES

along the Pasig River, a cultural-spiritual space, in the expression and articulation of popular devotion and inculturation in early Spanish colonial Philippines.

These articles are just the beginning of our *banwaan*. Starting in 2022, we plan to come out with two issues per year, one in June and another in December. After 41 years of existence and multiple attempts to establish a journal, the Folklore Studies Program finally launches its journal's inaugural issue.

Welcome to Banwaan.

JESUS FEDERICO C. HERNANDEZ

December 2021

The Folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity

Ma. Crisanta Nelmida-Flores

University of the Philippines Diliman

Folk Christianity is associated with pagan behavior of Filipino Catholics, such as in wiping a sacred image with bare hands or with a handkerchief and rubbing it on the body part that is afflicted with illness or disease. We equate Folk Catholicism with religious festivals where throngs of devotees exhibit such fervent devotion to the point of madness, like in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Carnival as Counter-Culture* or Victor Turner's *Liminality*, when devotees at a particular moment turn from the faithful to the fanatic. Fr. Jaime Bulatao (1966) identified this as Split-Level Christianity: the normative behavior of Christians inside a church and the unexpected behavior which he describes as an "occasional breakthrough of one's spontaneous self" (as cited in Drona, 2008, par. 2). Anthropologist F. Landa Jocano (1967/2019) distinguished two kinds of Catholicism: Rural Catholicism vs Urban Catholicism. Consequently, Fr. Leonardo Mercado (1994) pursued the study on the "Filipino Mind" to understand the Filipino psyche and behavior based on concepts and terms in the vernacular. Unwittingly, Bulatao, Jocano, and Mercado's studies resulted to a kind of dualism: a bifurcation between the *folk* (pagan) and the *western* (Christian). This paper problematizes the *Folk* in Filipino Folk Catholicism. Why are they viewed as pagans, heathens, and masses? This work intends to recuperate the definition of folk from a simplistic binary opposition or dualism using Cultural Exegesis framed by Syncretism and Inculturation. It shall also draw from the author's own reflective and reflexive practice as a Filipino Catholic faithful.

Keywords: *Split-Level Christianity, cultural exegesis, syncretism, inculturation, binary opposition*



Ma. Crisanta "Marot" Nelmida-Flores finished her undergraduate degree and graduate studies under the Philippine Studies Program at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She received the UP President's Award for Best Original Research in Filipino in 2004 on the Nuestra Señora de Manaoag and the Manag-anito Tradition. In 2017, she also received the UP Gawad Chancellor Award for Natatanging Pananaliksik in Filipino. *Email: mnflores@up.edu.ph*

During the onset of the Lenten Season in the year 2021, my attention was caught by a repost of a Lenten message on facebook by Catholics@Work from Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan Archdiocese who is a former President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). Archbishop Villegas called for “abstinence” from inappropriate clapping at Mass and said that, “The breaking of the Bread is a commemoration of the violent death that the Lord went through. Who claps while others are in pain?” He reminded the priests that applause should not be used to sustain their parishioners’ attention throughout the mass. The Archbishop urges everyone to “abstain from applause in Church. May this abstinence from clapping flow over into the other days of the year.” He instructed the faithful that, “The giving of appreciation such as clapping, must be done outside the Mass” (CBCP News, 2020).

But what interested me the most were the comments from netizens (internet citizens), particularly, a comment from an African Catholic. The netizen shared how African Catholics can clap, sing, and dance even during the liturgy of the mass for praise and adoration.

I wondered why can't Filipino Catholics, like the African Catholics, use songs and dances while clapping as forms of worship and praise? How is it that clapping in Church is inappropriate as stated by Archbishop Villegas? Does this “in Church” refer to the structure—the holy place of worship? Yet, he also stated that clapping must be done outside the mass. Is Archbishop Villegas permitting clapping after the mass “in Church” or outside the Church?

The question of how the faithful behave inside the Church and outside of it has been documented in previous studies, such as in the Master's thesis of Fr. Stephen Redillas (1999) when he observed the conflicting behavior of the devotees of Our Lady of Peñafrancia in Bicol. During the mass, the devotees were behaved and obedient to Church authorities but when the religious image of Our Lady was brought outside the Church for procession, the faithful became an uncontrolled crowd. The mood was transformed from a somber, solemn, holy mass to an exuberant and uninhibited display of devotion. This is exactly what happens during religious feasts when icons and holy images are brought outside the Church for procession. Other studies have documented the same observation during religious feasts: the Santo Niño de Cebu (Bautista, 2010); the Nuestra Señora de Manaoag in Pangasinan (Nelmidia-Flores, 2004); and, the ongoing study of the *Traslacion* (Transfer) of the Black Nazarene of Quiapo by Michael Charleston Chua.

This collision that also becomes a negotiation between the sacred and the secular is best exemplified in religious feasts or *fiesta/pista*. Sir Anril Tiatco (2016) calls the “performativity of pista” as an “entangled phenomenon” when “orthodox Catholicism is negotiated with everyday Catholicism” (p. 132).

During the Spanish era, religious feasts were commemorations of patron saints’ martyrdom. Like precolonial rituals, fiestas gathered the community together. But unlike precolonial rituals, the *fiesta* under colonial Spain was used through the policy of *reduccion* as an instrument to gather the Christianized *indios* to isolate the outlaws (*tulisanes* and *remontados*).

Indios in the Philippines referred to the general population of inhabitants who did not belong to the mestizo class (Spanish and Chinese). It is recorded for instance that the population of Chinese mestizos increased in 1810, with 121,621 in an indio population of 2,395,676 (Tan, 1994).

The policy of *reduccion* was adopted from Latin American colonies and applied in the Philippines. Because lowland settlement pattern was composed of dispersed small villages and there were limited number of priests, the policy was to establish a settlement which serves as the central village with a church and a convent. These settlements were called *cabeceras* or the central church village. Later on, this will evolve into a *población*. The policy of *reduccion* through the *cabecera* was effective in mass conversion, controlling the population against recalcitrant natives and as a source of labor (Doeppers, 1972).

Since the 20th century, fiestas have become pageants and spectacles to boost local tourism. Structured and institutionalized through negotiations between the Church and State, the more ostentatious and exotic the tapestry of the *pista*, the more the electrifying effect on the community. Some religious feasts and observances even border on the uncanny and bizarre.

This unorthodox performance of Catholic Christian rituals and ceremonies is always associated with the folk. There seems to be a divide between the folk and the traditional/conservative Catholic Christian in the way they manifest their devotion and piety. Conveniently, any aberrant behavior of a Catholic faithful is understood as part of Folk Christianity.

In this paper, my interest is to problematize the *folk* in Folk Catholicism. Who are the folk in Filipino Folk Catholicism? Why is there a pejorative reference to them as pagans and heathens?

The word “pagan” in the Bible refers to those who worshipped idols and practiced polytheism and animism. They were the exact opposite of the Chosen People of God, from Abraham to the Israelites who only worshipped one God. In Exodus 20:3, Yahweh commanded the descendants of Abraham not to worship any other gods. In Genesis 32:22-32, Jacob was called Israel. His descendants, the Israelites, were committed to keep the covenant and observe the law which is to worship one God. Pagans were considered outsiders and heathens by the Israelites. Today, pagans and heathens are those who do not belong to a widely held religion such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

How come religious rituals and practices which appear absurd and ridiculous are disparagingly referred to as folk? There are two main objectives of this paper: to understand the folk using cultural exegesis framed by syncretism and inculturation; and, to recuperate the definition of folk from a simplistic binary opposition where the folk is defined as native/pagan vs western/orthodox Christian.

Cultural Exegesis

The dismissive attitude towards the folk in Folk Christianity associated with an aberrant and irrational behavior is an indication of a lack of understanding of the cultural texts that ordinary Filipinos or the *common tao* produce to make meaning of the world around them. Cultural exegesis is a helpful methodology in understanding the reception and appropriation by the folk of Catholic dogma, beliefs, and traditions.

Cultural exegesis provides a framework in understanding “The art and science of interpreting culture: the sets of rules, guidelines, or principles for interpreting cultural texts and trends” (Vanhooser et al., 2007, as cited in Conner, 2019, p. 93). Filipino Professor of Theology Jose M. De Mesa (1987) is one of the pioneer educators who grounded his methodology in cultural exegesis. For him, cultural exegesis “intends to make explicit the meaning a culture holds” (as cited in Ramos,

2015, p. 698). As a hermeneutical act, cultural exegesis is informed by the past—ancient religious traditions and practices of a people before the advent of Christianity.

To denigrate the folk in their manifestation of their reception of Judeo-Christian religion as irrational, absurd, and insane betrays the lack of understanding and ignorance of our ancient belief system, traditions, and customs. Cultural exegesis as a methodology should however be framed by Syncretism and Inculturation.

Syncretism

From the Greek word *synkretismos* meaning “to combine,” syncretism was first made evident under the rule of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE. With his empire reaching Mesopotamia and Persia, the Greek language and culture spread: the Hellenistic culture. In Jesus’ time, Greek was the *lingua franca*. It is believed that Jesus spoke not only Aramaic and Hebrew but even Greek since it was the *lingua franca*.

Saul, who would become St. Paul, spoke Greek, Aramaic and perhaps, even Latin since he was highly educated as a Pharisee. St. Paul’s facility in Greek brought the new faith successfully to the Greek-speaking regions of Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Athens, etc.

Synkretismos, however, will not only refer to the mixture of languages but of people and their culture given the movements and migrations of people along the Mediterranean Sea. St. Paul would be known for his evangelization to the Gentiles against the consternation of some Jews who were disciples of Jesus, including St. Peter. The Gentiles converted into the new faith had different cultures and practices from the Jews that initially was the cause of antagonisms between them. It was in Antioch where “Christians” was first used to name the new followers of Christ. From the outset, Christianity was borne out of the different local cultures of Gentiles, particularly where St. Paul’s footsteps had trod.

Religious syncretism is a highly contested academic terrain. For some theologians, the content of Christian message has been compromised due to

religious syncretism. They believe that while Christianity would have not survived without syncretism, the incorporation of new belief systems and customs has diluted the meaning of the Sacred Scriptures. It is pointed out that “Christian religious practice showed an enormous appetite for absorbing materials from other religious traditions, and this indicated success in penetrating the wider society. It however posed a threat of uncritical syncretism” (Sanneh, 1989, pp. 42-43, as cited in Nyuyki & Niekerk, 2016, p. 385).

Nyuyki and Niekerk (2016) critiqued inculturation which leads to uncritical syncretism. The authors define syncretism as an “indiscriminate and uncritical incorporation of religious and/or cultural practices into Christianity in order to make it relevant to the receiving cultural context” (p. 399). The terms “indiscriminate” and “uncritical” here already suggest that the authors are suspicious of local cultures’ incorporation into Christianity as something that will pollute and corrupt the religion.

To understand the folk in Folk Christianity, the study of religious syncretism is inevitable. The encounter between two religious belief systems and cultures will never result to homogenization or the creation of a new whole. The encounter is a process which cannot be simplified as mere borrowings or influences which deny the inherent power of religious cultures. Other related studies on syncretism focus on reception and appropriation of foreign religion by native cultures. In this case, it is the folks’ reception and appropriation of the Judeo-Christian religion. Reception and appropriation presuppose that the receiving culture has already an understanding and acceptance of the foreign religious belief system and culture. This understanding and acceptance are coursed through inculturation.

Inculturation

The Roman Catholic Church has convened two Vatican Councils. The First Vatican Council convoked by Pope Pius IX from 1869-70 addressed the contemporary issues and influences during that period such as rationalism, liberalism and materialism, and the decision to declare the infallibility of the Pope (Vatican, 2018). It has been described as the Council of the Counter-Reformation. The Second Vatican Council was convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962. When he passed away in 1963, Pope Paul VI succeeded him and saw its completion in

1965 (Carbone, 1997). The Council called for the modernization of the Church, encapsulated in the Italian theme of *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date), because of world events such as World Wars I and II, communism, and totalitarianism. The Second Vatican Council is also known as the *Aggiornamento* Council.

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium Et Spes* (Joy and Hope) and the Decree *Ad Gentes* (To the Nations) of the Second Vatican Council recognized diverse cultures and conditions of human life and committed to the continuous promotion of culture (*de culturae progressu rite promovendo*) in their missionary work.

Inculturation has been a primary concern from Synods since 1979. It was defined as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures” (Final Report voted by the Fathers, 1985, as cited in International Theological Commission, 1989). In the history of salvation, inculturation has expanded and extended the covenant between God and Israel to the Gentiles and to all of creation. The ultimate mission of the Church is *Lumen Gentium* or to bring the “Light to the Nations,” the Word made Flesh—Jesus Christ—to all cultures.

Filipino scholars who did studies on inculturation related it to the process of indigenization which is considered the most effective way of bringing Jesus Christ and expressing the Gospel in their own language and culture. It is stated that expressing Christianity in indigenous ways is “Folk Christianity” (Ramos, 2015). Thus, inculturation in Folk Christianity can be simply understood in terms of indigenization, vernacularization, and localization of Sacred Scriptures, the Liturgy, and Christian teachings.

Folk Catholicism and Popular Religion

Folk Catholicism is under Folk Christianity and is associated with popular religion. For Belgian priest and theologian Antoine Vergote (1982), “The term ‘folk Catholicism’ is thus broader than the French term ‘religion populaire’ which has a more sociological signification... it is the Catholicism that is tightly bound to the cultural traditions of the people and that is adhered to by the majority of the people, thus giving it the distinguishing character of so-called popular religion” (p. 6).

Vergote (1982) explains that the word “folk” is sociological because it signifies “a group of people that is used in contrast to the cultural and/or economically dominant group” (pp. 5-6). Folk Catholicism has been derided by other faith communities under the Catholic Church, particularly those who belong to the middle and upper educated classes, since it is constituted by masses who are superstitious and unlearned. This “rational disdain,” according to Vergote, comes usually from charismatic groups and Basic Christian Communities (BCCs). Interestingly, the latter is critical to both folk religion and charismatic groups and “distrust folk Catholicism.” Moreover, BCCs “are inclined to consider folk religion as an ‘opium *of* the people’ in the Marxist sense of the expression, and the charismatic movement as ‘opium *for* the people’ which is a neo-Marxist judgment” (Vergote, 1982, p. 8).

Folk Catholicism clashes with other faith communities under the Catholic Church because it is viewed not only as a “popular religion” but also as “habit religion” where customs and traditions of the past are mindlessly performed perfunctorily, thus corrupting Catholicism as a universal religion. Another term associated with habit religion is “natural religiosity.” It is assumed that humans are naturally religious from the beginning of human life when they could not understand and control the world around them so they look for gods to protect them. Natural religiosity in Folk Catholicism is commonly understood as the persistence of pagan practices evident in Judeo-Christianity.

From an anthropological perspective, habit religion and natural religiosity in Folk Catholicism reveal the importance of rituals. Religious rituals are more than a mechanical, perfunctory, or superficial routine of performative acts. Victor Turner’s *The Ritual Process* (1969) is a germinal work in anthropology on rituals. Turner saw the interrelation of religion, rituals, and symbols. For him, rituals possess meaningful symbols that are informative of a community’s social and religious values. Rituals can be authoritative and even transformative. Turner’s *liminality* (which he derived from Arnold van Gennep’s *The Rites of Passage*, 1909) while it may sound ambiguous to many up to now, is better understood with his *communitas*. Turner’s field study of the Ndembu of Zambia gave him the opportunity to develop his conceptualizations of liminality and *communitas*. Turner (1969) observed that in a “liminal period,” society becomes “unstructured or rudimentarily structured” (i.e. *communitas*) where “the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be

low.... The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness ... In liminality, the underling comes uppermost ... the supreme political authority is portrayed as a slave” (pp. 96-97, 102).

This state of limbo in liminality, like a world upended in a given moment which radiates power to the common ordinary folk, is akin to Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Carnavalesque* (1968). While Turner studied the Ndembu of Zambia, Bakhtin had the satirist Francois Rabelais’ novels as his field of study. Like Turner’s liminal period, Bakhtin’s carnivalesque is also a moment of chaos, of disruption and disorder. Bakhtin’s concept of carnival laughter is interpreted as “a subversive attack on the perverted concept of folk culture.” The laughter by renaissance folk culture in the carnival is a “spectacular feast of inversion and parody of high culture”; a subversion of order, authority and hierarchy. It is a “... world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted” (Lachmann, et al., 1988, p. 118).

From Turner’s ritualesque to Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, this moment of disruption and disorder is precisely the power sui generis of the folk. Folk Catholicism’s carnivals and spectacles, such as in religious feasts (the pista) which may appear irrational and insane to the “educated” and “initiated” Catholic Christian, are the locus of the folks’ subversion and defiance against order and hierarchy in an institutionalized religion. But contestations are also negotiated so that Folk Catholicism continues to animate the manifestation of faith and increase the number of the faithful under the Catholic fold.

Folk Catholicism in the Philippines

Considered as the country with the biggest Catholic population in Asia, the Philippines has many religious feasts, rituals, and ceremonies that amaze and shock foreign tourists and observers. Religious festive celebrations and dolorous commemorations are usually spectacular and attract local and international audiences. But preceding these spectacles is a solemn holy mass officiated inside a Church where parishioners and the faithful remain decorous and restrained. The radical shift of behavior of the faithful from the holy mass inside the church (decorous and restrained) to the procession outside of the church (uninhibited and wild) is rather baffling.

Split-Level Christianity

One of the first, if not the first, to observe that Filipino Catholics exhibit conflicted behavior once in the church and outside of it is Fr. Jaime Bulatao who wrote about Split-Level Christianity in 1966. Bulatao started his essay with a funny story about a Mother Superior who was gifted a parrot which could recite a prayer automatically when its legs are pulled. When the Mother Superior pulls its right leg, the parrot recites the “Our Father.” When its left leg is pulled, the parrot immediately prays the “Hail Mary.” One of the young nuns was curious what the parrot would recite when both of its legs are pulled which was what she did. The angry parrot cried an expletive, “Putres, madadapa ako!” (“Damn, you’ll make me fall!”) (Bulatao, 1966, as cited in Drona, 2008, par. 1).

This funny parrot story was used by Bulatao (1966) as an analogy to how Filipino Catholics actually behave. His observation is that Filipino Catholics recite prayers and manifest their “special behavior in the presence of society, authority figures” like a learned reflex or automatism (as cited in Drona, 2008, par. 2). But this learned and conditioned behavior which Bulatao attributes to formal schooling and influences cracks when confronted with an unexpected turn of events. He calls this an “occasional breakthrough of one’s spontaneous self” (as cited in Drona, 2008, par. 2).

Bulatao (1966) describes Split-Level Christianity as the “coexistence within the same person of two or more thought-and-behavior systems which are inconsistent with each other” (as cited in Drona, 2008, par. 5). He explains that at one level, the Filipino Catholic “professes allegiance to ideas and ways of behaving which are mainly borrowed from the Christian West” and at another level, “his ‘own’ ways of living and believing which were handed down from his ancestors” (as cited in Drona, 2008, par. 6). From this description, Bulatao infers that the normative behavior of Catholic Christians is influenced by Western Christianity while the “spontaneous,” irreverent behavior is primitive and primordial.

Bulatao (1966) mentions many other stories about devout Filipino Catholics who in their unguarded moments show unbecoming behavior. He narrated how a group of alumni from a Catholic high school celebrated their reunion in the company of two priests but after the pleasant, wholesome event, ended up in a nightclub in the company of prostitutes. There was also this young lady who

conforms to the strict dress code enforced by a local church but reads pornographic literature at bedtime. Another typical story shared by Bulatao was a Manila policeman who regularly went to mass but who also regularly collects *tong* or protection money from the small stores.

This Split-Level Christianity during the 1960s which reveals a “hidden” or “unconscious” behavior of Filipino Catholics contrary to Catholic values was readily identified as Folk Christianity. Interest in this “split personality” of Filipinos grew, from studies on what creates this “split” to studies on how Filipinos behave and think.

Urban Catholicism vs Rural Catholicism

A year after Bulatao (1966) released his essay “The Split-Level Christianity,” anthropologist F. Landa Jocano published his academic paper entitled “Filipino Catholicism: A Case Study in Religious Change” (1967/2019). The intention was to look into religious practices and behavior of Filipinos from the urban and the rural areas, respectively. The findings seem to answer the question why there is a “split personality” among Filipino Catholics. Jocano proffered two kinds of Catholicism—an urban Catholicism and a rural Catholicism.

He presented his description and analysis of “folk religion” focusing mainly on Roman Catholicism. He made clear that his study on folk religion is grounded on anthropological research rather than from a religious point of view. Using historical sources, Jocano pointed to the *cabecera-visita* settlements as the reason for the two kinds of Catholicism. The church was located in the cabecera which would later become the *pueblo*. Since subsistence farmers hesitated to leave their fields to go to the distant cabecera to attend mass, the Spanish missionaries were the ones who visited the small settlements or the *barrio*. They built a chapel or *ermita* to bring the word of God to them. This colonial arrangement bred two variant forms of Catholicism—the cabecera (pueblo/urban) and the visita (barrio/rural) (Jocano, 1967/2019).

In his study, doctrines and rites of the Judeo-Christian religion would be interpreted and practiced differently in the cabecera and in the visita. Infrequent visits of Spanish missionaries to the visita gave the rural farmers more freedom to express and articulate Catholic concepts in the context of their everyday life

compared to the urban population. According to Jocano (1967/2019), urban dwellers are more into the “content” of the new religion while the farmers are more into the “form of worship” through their rituals and lore.

Interestingly, in the entire paper, Jocano (1967/2019) refers to Filipinos living in the *visitas*/barrios as rural Filipinos or rural *folks*. His reference to Filipinos in the *cabecera*/población is urban Filipinos or urban Catholics but not *urban folks*. The folk in Jocano’s Filipino Catholicism directs us to the old *visita* population—the rural farmer Filipinos who are less educated, less indoctrinated, and less privileged vis-à-vis the urban educated Catholic Filipino.

The Filipino Mind

In 1974, Fr. Leonardo Mercado wrote his first book—*Elements of Filipino Philosophy*. The basic concepts in this book were used in his next book, *Applied Filipino Philosophy*, in 1977. Twenty years after his first publication, Mercado authored a monumental work on Filipino philosophy based on the study of culture—*The Filipino Mind* (1994). This book sought to understand the Filipino psyche and *weltanschauung* (worldview) given the multiethnic, multilingual Philippine society.

To deeply understand the Filipino psyche and identity, Mercado (1994) used concepts and terms in the vernacular. Curiously, his introductory statements about urban and rural Filipinos seem to enrich what have had been proffered by Jocano (1967/2019) in his “Filipino Catholicism.” Mercado (1994) writes, “If there is a continuum in the social context of the **urban and rural Filipino**, there is also a continuum in their world view. This continuum may range from the thoroughly **western to the precolonial ...**” (p.13; emphasis mine).

The book emphasized the need to examine ourselves in our own terms. The concepts of *loob*, *kalag*, *kagandahan*, *lusot*, and the social values of *pakikipag-kapwa*, *pakikisama*, *utang na loob* in Tagalog, as well as *ginhawa* (Cebuano) over *hininga* (Tagalog) and *nakem* (Ilokano) over *damdamin* (Tagalog), best express and articulate Filipino-ness or the ethnocultural identity of Filipinos. Mercado (1994) also included Eastern philosophical models in his analysis of the Filipino’s concept of the soul and spirit to point out that the double-soul belief (a person has two souls) among certain ethnic groups in the Philippines is more Eastern or Asian rather than Western (a person has only one soul).

The “Filipino Mind” for Mercado (1994) is “not the philosophy of any individual philosopher as in Western tradition” (p. 155) in a pluralist Philippine society. It is that of the people, which he relates to *diwa* or *volksgeist* or the folk’s worldview. He intertextualizes his use of *volksgeist* to Emerita Quito’s (1984) “Filipino Volksgeist in Vernacular Literature.”

Volksgeist is attributed to three German thinkers: Herder (1744-1803), Hegel (1770-1831), and Savigny (1779-1861). Herder’s *volksgeist* points to a people with distinct ethnicity, language, culture, and context which is his direct criticism against Voltaire’s French universalism (Finkielkraut & Friedlander, 1996). Hegel, following Herder, reveals that an individual has a “spirit” as well as that of a certain group of “people.” Taking all the separate “spirits” or essences of diverse nations, a uniform “world-spirit” arises through a dialectical process (Avineri, 1962). Savigny’s *volksgeist* views laws not as a deliberate legislation but an expression of the “spirit of the people,” a common will that is predicated upon the people’s history and traditions (Rai, 2011).

In Deutsch, *volk* means the people (or an ethnic group), where the English word “folk” is derived. But the German *volk* and the English *folk* are not similar because of their different historical contexts, especially of the emergent German nationalism after 1800 (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

Volk in 1800’s Germany would acquire the meaning of nation and in Hitler’s time, *volk* is the German people—the superior race, and that the mission of the state is to serve the *volk*. In the United States, *folk* refers simply to the common people who belong to the working class or the *hoi polloi* (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). This usage of *folk* was brought to the Philippines through American colonialism and it persisted in the minds of the learned and educated Filipinos. But instead of referring to the working class or the *hoi polloi*, it referred to what Jocano (1967/2019) had been pinpointing all along—i.e. the rural folk who are uneducated and unsophisticated.

Thus, Mercado’s (1994) use of *volksgeist* or the folk’s worldview which encapsulates all his explications about the philosophical concepts in the vernacular language actually ascribes these to the common people—the rural, the uneducated, the masses.

Problem of Dualism and Dichotomies

It may not be the intention of Bulatao (1966), Landa Jocano (1967/2019), and Mercado (1994), but their studies resulted to a kind of dualism: a bifurcation between the folk and western.

Bulatao's (1966) Split-Level Christianity has unwittingly defined the behavior as bipolar, a kind of disorder that seemed to undermine the folk; their behavior which he describes as an "occasional breakthrough of one's spontaneous self" (as cited in Drona, 2008, par. 2).

Today, this Split-Level Christianity appears as a simplistic view of people's behavior given the *cultural paradigm* that has framed many studies on society, religion, and philosophy which gave birth to new perspectives such as hermeneutics, cultural exegesis, syncretism, inculturation, symbols, and meaning-making, etc.

But Bulatao's (1966) observation is one of the first articulations of an awareness that there is a conflicted behavior among Filipino Catholics. This challenged many theologians and researchers to direct their studies toward the understanding of Filipino Catholicism and the Filipino mind.

Jocano (1967/2019), treading the same path, made the split more apparent when he dichotomized Filipino Catholicism between Urban Catholicism and Rural Catholicism. He assigned the word folk to Rural Catholics but maintained the designation of Urban Catholics. This juxtaposition of rural vs urban becomes ambiguous when Jocano distinguishes the two in terms of rituals and Catholic belief.

As he simply put, rural folks are more into rituals while the urban Catholics are into content. This observation however cannot substantiate the numerous urban festivals and rituals that reverberate with prehispanic practices scorned as paganistic and profane such as the Sto. Niño Festivals, the Obando Fertility Dance, the Marian Festivals, and the *Traslacion* of the Black Nazarene of Quiapo, which are not in his list of "pan-regional religious observance" (Jocano, 1967/2019, p. 97).

Mercado (1994), interested in the Filipino psyche than behavior, laid down another dichotomy between western-educated Filipinos and indigenous Filipinos

who have their own *volksgeist*. Mercado calls for the study of indigenous categories of thought against Western philosophical thought taught in schools. Deciphering concepts in the vernacular, he found out that several ethnic groups in the country share the same *weltenschaung* which he relates more to Eastern philosophical models rather than Western models. Dichotomizing indigenous/Eastern vs Western thought purports to a people divided in terms of their education and socioeconomic class, not very much unlike Jocano's (1967/2019) rural folk vs urban Catholics.

With the foregoing discussion, educated urban Filipinos are viewed as those who are more initiated into Western thought while the uneducated rural folk are those who retain their indigenous worldview or *volksgeist*. This results to a dichotomy between the educated urban Filipinos vis-à-vis uneducated rural folks. As mentioned earlier, it may not be the intention of Bulatao (1966), Jocano (1967/2019), and Mercado (1994) to create dichotomies but their studies directed them to a configuration of folk identity defined in terms of binary opposites.

The problem with dualism and dichotomies is that meanings are restricted wherein one is defined in relation to the other. In the study of hermeneutics, dichotomies hinder the interpretation of texts and only allows an understanding predetermined by the relationship between opposing thoughts. Dualisms and dichotomies spring from the theory of binary opposition in Structuralism propounded by literary critic Jonathan Culler; rendering meaning as immutable or fixed. Subscribing to binary opposition, the tendency is to essentialize, homogenize, and hegemonize meanings.

The folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity has been bedeviled by its location in binary opposition through sets of dichotomies. How is the folk defined, described, and referred to in these sets of dichotomies?

Sets of Dichotomies

The folk is referenced in a binary opposition as follows:

- pagan/heathen/gentile vs Christian/believer/disciple
- indigenous/native/primeval vs western/mainstream/modern
- rural/uneducated/masses vs urban/educated/elite

- naïve/uninitiated/ignorant vs experienced/cultivated/learned
- fanatical/peculiar/exotic vs orthodox/common/normal

These sets of dichotomies conjure images that are unfavorable to the folk from the point of view of civilization, rationalism, and urbanity.

Images

More powerful than words are images representing the folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity. Here are two images of the folk in popular religious observances in the Philippines.

From the point of view of the urban and educated elite, these images reify the folk as pagan, heathen masses who are uneducated and uninitiated into the authentic Catholic doctrines and Sacred Scriptures. They are anachronistic—being indigenous, native, and primeval; a group of people who are naïve, ignorant, and uncouth. Their behavior is irrational, peculiar, unorthodox. Their ritual performances are intense, insane, and profane. They are easily dismissed as fanatical and even lunatic.

Cultural Exegesis, Syncretism, & Inculturation in Filipino Folk Christianity

A careful and impartial perspective grounded on exegesis will shed light on who are the folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity. This brings us to the existence of a prehispanic belief system which was not entirely obliterated by Spanish and American colonization. This ancient belief system is rooted in our Austronesian past which is called by anthropologist Prospero Covar and historian Zeus Salazar as *Anitismo* (not Animism as some scholars wrote). From the term *anito* or spirit, our ancestors believed in the spirit world. According to Covar (1998), the anitos dwell in nature: mountains, hills, forests, caves, etc. These anitos or spirits are nature's caretakers. Intermediaries between the spirit-world and mortals are the *babaylan* (Visayan), *catalonan* (Tagalog), *mandadawak* (Kalinga), *maaram* (Kinaray-a), and *manag-anito* (Pangasinan). According to Salazar (1999), the *babaylan* were experts in religion, literature, psychology, medicine, and even science. In spite of the conscious efforts of the Spanish missionaries to demonize



FIG. 1. *Traslacion of the Black Nazarene of Quiapo. Traslacion is a yearly reenactment of the “transferral” of the image from its original shrine in Intramuros to Quiapo Church. (Estrella, 2020)*



FIG. 2. *Mandarames in Pampanga (The Penitents during Lenten Season). (Mhegs McV, 2010)*

Anitismo, its belief and practices persist to this day. This explains why even among city dwellers who need the help of a babaylan, they can always find one in every barangay—diviner, herbalist, *manghibilot* or bone-setter, native midwife, *albularyo*, etc.

Modern-day babaylan are known in their English terms as folkhealers or faithhealers. Most prominent among them were Alex Orbito and Antonio Agpaoa whose patients/clientele were mostly foreigners. Alex Orbito, the builder of the Pyramid of Asia near Manaog Shrine, was the spiritual adviser of then President Fidel V. Ramos. His claim to fame was his prediction that Ramos would become the next President. As Ramos' spiritual adviser and with his "faithhealing" operations abroad, Orbito also served as the President's ambassador of goodwill by reciting speeches before an assembly of captive audiences in every country he visited (Licauco, 1999).

Anitismo is still evident in contemporary Catholic religious practices both in the rural/barrio and in urban/pueblo. The belief in the spirit-world and the rituals and practices to appease the spirits when natural calamities struck or ravaged the crops or when illnesses afflicted the village folk have been integrated into the Catholic rituals and ceremonies. The process of religious syncretism in the Philippines cannot be overstated. Catholic religious feasts, rituals, and ceremonies are the most evident forms where anitismo surfaces and where the folk are viewed as fanatic instead of as faithful.

Bautista (2010), in his study of "The Syncretic Santo Niño" of Cebu, has put it aptly, "the processes by which symbolizes a distinctive type of Filipino Catholicism that synthesizes the modern and the ancient, the official and the sensational, the pagan and the enlightened" (as cited in Concepcion, 2014, p. 578).

Even Jocano (1967/2019), who dichotomized the rural and urban, noted that Filipinos wherever they are, invoke the saints for protection, healing, rain, work, etc., because in precolonial times, the ancient religion also had deities that interceded for the natives. It is said that humans recognize a Supreme Being and his lowliness in the greater cosmic scheme of things. Studies have shown that the success of Catholic proselytization is based on the native religion's belief system and rituals which are not dissimilar from Catholicism. The belief in *Kabunian* or *Bathala* does not run counter to the worship of a Supreme Being in Judeo-



FIG. 3. *Manag-anito in Pangasinan.*

Christianity. Deities (*diwata* and *anito*) have found their counterpart in saints and martyrs. The *agimat* or the *anting-anting* are just replaced by religious scapulars and medals. The *poon* is transformed into a Catholic religious icon such as the *Santo Bangkay*. The natives' prehispanic river rituals find resurgence in fluvial processions, especially of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Syncretism allowed the ancient, native religion to not only to be integrated into Catholic Christianity but to animate it as well. However, the success of religious conversion in the Philippines could not be solely attributed to syncretism. Social actors such as the *ladino* poets (meaning "latinized" or the first natives who learned Latin) were instrumental in the facilitation of Latin prayers to the native tongue. Inculturation, even before the Second Vatican Council, had already taken root during the Spanish colonial era.

The *ladino* poets were the first translators of the Bible and the Ten Commandments. They were taught Latin so they could fulfill their duty as translators. They served as the first *sacristan* or church servants who were confined inside the *convento* to concentrate on their work.

Christ's passion on the cross is recounted through the *pasyon*, an epic narrative in verse. There are three notable *pasyon* texts: *pasyong De Belen*, *pasyong Pilapil* and *pasyong De la Merced*. Of the three, it is *Pasyong Pilapil* which was the most popular. Allegedly written by a secular priest Padre Pilapil, the *pasyon* had captured the imagination of the folk because it incorporated prehispanic mythical characters and superstitious beliefs. As a reaction to this "nativistic" text, *pasyong Candaba* was written to expunge the nativistic, pagan elements in the *pasyong Pilapil*. The result was an antiseptic and uninspiring *pasyon* that was hardly read nor chanted. The folk reception of the *pasyong Pilapil* attests to the power of the native population as a receiving culture, to accept what is closest to their worldview and to reject what does not intersect in their lived reality. In fact, the *pasyon* provided revolutionary power to the natives as was powerfully theorized in the pioneering work of Reynaldo Ileto (1979)—*Pasyon and Revolution*.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65), through its *Ad Gentes* decree, reiterated the mission of the church to form strong Christian communities all over the world through inculturation. Synods from 1979 continue to emphasize the theme of inculturation of faith in the light of the Scripture. Today, Eucharistic masses are celebrated in the vernacular. The bible, novenas, hagiographies, prayers, and religious instructions are translated into different Philippine languages.

Inculturation has been synonymous to indigenization and vernacularization. But the identity of the folk as the ignorant native remains in these problematic categories. Indigenization and vernacularization are also caught up in dichotomies—indigenization for the indigenous and vernacularization for those uneducated masses who cannot relate to the English language. The lingering question is still left unanswered: Are the masses the only ones constitutive of the folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity?

Folks as Elites

As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the ladino poets instrumentalized inculturation through translation of biblical texts and prayers. They were the first native elites of the *Islas Filipinas* under Spain for they were taught how to read and write in Latin.

The *hermano* (brother) and *hermana* (sister) who were lay leaders since Spanish times were privileged church servants. Today, they are chosen by church officials

to spearhead certain activities of the church, including the exoticized and outrageous religious festivals and processions.

The religious images which are displayed during fiestas and processions are owned by elite families. In De La Paz's (2012) study of the statue of the *Mahal na Senyor ng Lucban, Quezon*, she interviewed the elite Rañola clan who are the caretakers of the *poon* (sacred image). The *poon* was originally owned by a Chinese mestizo, Don Juan, who bequeathed it to his nine children along with an endowment of two hectares of land to oversee the icon's maintenance and Holy Week rituals. The Rañola clan is a blood relative of Don Juan.

There are politicians, celebrities, and personalities who join religious feasts and processions that are directly associated with the folk and fanaticism. Former Vice-President Noli De Castro is a well-known devotee of the Black Nazarene of Quiapo. Many say that his attendance in the maddening yearly Traslacion may have given him the votes from the masses. Incumbent Vice-President Leni Robredo is always visible during the popular feast of the Our Lady of Peñafrancia in Bicol, her home province. Famous broadcaster and EDSA personality in the 1980s, June Keithley was a known Marian devotee whose documentaries chronicled miraculous stories and life of visionaries. Popular TV actor Coco Martin, among other stars such as Christopher de Leon, Angeline Quinto, and Melai Cantiveros are spotted during Traslacion.

How can these educated politicians, broadcaster, urban and cosmopolitan TV stars be considered part of the folk defined and described in pejorative terms—paganistic, fanatic, lunatic, and heathen? Thus, this brings me to my own folk experience.

Folk and Faith

In 1995, my first baby was born very premature at 28 weeks of development (normal is 37-42). Her weight was just 1.1 kg and she was smaller than a 1 liter bottle of Coke. Inside the ICU incubator, she developed hydrocephalus with an accompanying porencephalic cyst. She contracted meningitis and the deadlier ventriculitis, not once but twice. She underwent 16 brain surgeries.

The doctors had conflicting approaches that even led to an almost fisticuff in our presence, the parents. Desperate, I explored all kinds of healing—from the folk



FIG. 4. *ex-VP De Castro in Traslacion 2015.* (Umbao, 2015)

manag-anito (healer), pranic healing, to healing priests and “prayovers.” My most memorable experience was when a *manag-anito* from my home province of Pangasinan came to Manila the first time and instructed me to go to 14 churches and pray the 14 Stations of the Cross. Since she was illiterate, she just drew the churches where I should go. Her scribbles were more symbolic than actual drawing.

Unbelievably, the symbols were clear enough to point to particular churches such as the “hanging Christ” in the UP Parish of the Holy Sacrifice and the Marian Icon in the Lourdes Church in old La Loma, not to mention the others. She was not privy to the history of my husband nor mine, yet she was able to direct us to the important landmarks of our lives separately and jointly: as parishioners of the UP Parish and my husband’s high school Alma Mater, Lourdes School beside the Lourdes Church.

I finished my spiritual journey ending in the Our Lady of Manaoag Shrine. When I returned to Manila, my baby survived her most difficult surgery and we

returned home. But it was not the end of my spiritual journey for I would be afflicted with breast cancer in 2018. The manag-anito, *Manang* Mary, passed away many years ago. There may be no more manag-anito during my ordeal but the faith of a folk who believes in the miracles performed by Jesus, his apostles and saints, is the one that sustained and restored me—body and spirit; a folk who knows her lowliness and sinfulness before a merciful God. It is not erudition nor knowledge that made me choose Catholic Christian values over the earthly and mundane. Paradoxically, my education challenges my faith and leads me to doubt and ambivalence. Choosing good over evil or knowing right from wrong is not a gift from books but a gift of discernment for those who have the desire to live a life in the way a good God wants us to.

Folk and faith are not mutually exclusive. There is an inherent goodness in humans whose lowliness in the greater cosmic scheme of things makes him realize his precarious existence and thus look up to the heavens. The folk cannot be defined in terms of class, ethnicity, nor education but by his own faith.

Conclusion

Recuperating the definition of *folk* from a simplistic binary opposition or dualism, the meaning of folk transcends class, socioeconomic, geographic, and ethnic categories. Raymond Williams, in his “Culture is Ordinary” (1958), demolishes the idea of “masses” as ignorant contrasted to the Leavisite “high culture tradition.” Williams’ grandfather was a farm laborer and his father worked as a railway porter. He argues against the generalized view by the bourgeoisie that masses were ignorant and incapable of culture and sophisticated thinking. He wrote, “working people are excluded from English culture is nonsense” (Williams, 1958, as cited in Highmore, 2002, p. 95). Williams asserts that there are no masses but only ways of “seeing” people as “masses” (Highmore, 2002, pp. 94-96). There is really a great danger when we look at the folk in Filipino Catholicism as masses who are ignorant, fanatical, and profane. This “seeing” is essentialist, homogenizing, and hegemonizing.

St. Paul, though very educated as a Pharisee, preached the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was in fact ridiculed as a folk believer in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a preacher to the Gentiles. Saint Peter and the Apostles were uneducated masses

yet they became Evangelists imbued with Wisdom and *Parisea* (boldness and courage) through the Holy Spirit.

I have lived in an urban area all my life. My mother was a devout Catholic and my father was a Catholic convert from Protestantism. I grew up joining community prayers and processions. I have witnessed inexplicable and supernatural phenomena where the manag-anito was always summoned to intervene. I am awed at stories of healing and other miracles from people I know and even those from documentaries. I have been reciting the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help since I was in Grade 5. I recite novenas to different saints with a special devotion to the Holy Spirit. Every time I visit pilgrim churches and mingle with people from all walks of life, I find comfort and solace that my faith is celebrated with the faithful regardless of class, ethnicity, or social standing. In the midst of all of them, I am folk. There are Filipino intellectual elites in the academe who may have participated in a religious feast or have become a devotee of a popular devotion, one way or another. Anyone can be folk and be faithful.

Saint John Paul II, in the context of a new era, exhorted the Church to commit itself into a New Evangelization given the challenges of communism, dissolution of family, and moral decadence. Nyuyki & Niekerk (2016) question uncritical syncretism and offer critical contextualization as a methodology instead. But can we really distill pagan practices from folk Christianity or weed out the ancient and exotic from the authentic and official?

Perhaps, whatever religiocultural formation that arises from syncretism and inculturation (which is certainly of academic interest), the most important concern is if the essence of Christianity has been implanted to grow in the lives of the faithful. The mission remains univocal and clear which is the main point of evangelization: **to spread the Truth in the Gospel of Christ = his life, death, and resurrection.**

In a post-truth world, where truth can be non-existent or can have multiple meanings, it is in the **faith of the folk** such as Mary Magdalene, the first witness, that the truth of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection is preserved and preached.

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Vernacular Religiosity and "Grace" in Bicol Christian Devotion

Jazmin B. Llana

De La Salle University

Faith in God is *pagsa-Dios* to the Bicolanos and expressions of this faith have persisted and endured in cultural practices of communities of believers, a testimony to how Christianity as colonial inheritance has been claimed and appropriated. The observance of the quincentenary of Christianity in the Philippines is a good time to once again ask how this has happened, to revisit some of the explanations by major Philippine scholars and rethink them in dialogue with other ideas, and perhaps find out how going back can help us go forward, especially in light of the current difficult times. Writing mainly on the *dotoc* of Bicol, a devotion to the Holy Cross, I discuss the Christian conversion vis-à-vis the emergence of vernacular religiosity as an experience of and response to “grace”—Christian grace (*grasya nin Dios*)—but also as a kind of “laicized grace” similar to Alain Badiou’s Pauline story in the book *Saint Paul* (2003), one that is kept with fidelity across/despite time and its many vicissitudes.

Keywords: *Christian conversion, performance of devotion, performance of pilgrimage, laicized grace, dotoc*



Jazmin Llana is a professor of drama, theater, and performance studies at the Department of Literature, De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines. She is the Vice President of Performance Studies International and an Associate Editor of Performance Research, Routledge Journal of the Performing Arts. At DLSU, she has served as Chair of the Literature Department and Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Recent publications include essays on politics and performance in *Theatre Research International*, *Performance Research* and a chapter in the book *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance*. Email: jazmin.llana@dlsu.edu.ph

The Bicol *Dotoc*

The *dotoc* is *pagsa-Dios*. This is the answer one gets to the question about what the *dotoc* is or why people observe the tradition. *Pagsa-Dios* can be variously translated as: for God (Dios); an act of faith or belief in God; a religious practice. Elsewhere, I have written about the *dotoc* as “religious longing” that enables the devotee to commune directly with the *Ama* or *Dios* (Llana, 2011, p. 94). As devotional practice, it is a homage to the Holy Cross. Communities of devotees in the Bicol region perform the *dotoc* for nine days every year, in April and May. It is performed by women cantors called *paradotoc* who sing a text while playing the role of pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land to visit the Holy Cross.

In the *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bicol*, *dotoc* is a verb: “*nagdotoc*” is defined as “*llegar, o acercarse a alguna parte*” (Lisboa, 1865 [1628], p. 128). The Bicol-English dictionary by Mintz and Britanico (1985) provides a translation: *dotoc*, spelled “*dutok*,” is “advent, coming” and “*magdutok*” means “to come for something or for a specific purpose” (p. 279). I have inferred from these sources that the term “*dotoc*” is an archaic Bikol word for pilgrimage, which is “the narrative contained in the *dotoc* as cultural performance” (Llana, 2009, 2016, 2020).

The *dotoc* is performed in several places in Bicol, but my research covered principally the *dotoc* in Baao, Nabua, and Canaman in Camarines Sur and Bigaa, Legazpi City. In Baao, its current form is called the *corocobacho* or *cobacho dotoc*, the text of which can be traced to an 1895 print, authored by an unidentified priest (the University of the Philippines Library has a copy of this early publication). The *cobacho dotoc* is called such because of the use of a “*cobacho*,” a shelter for travelers, where the pilgrims of the *dotoc* meet another group and between them tell the tale of the theft of the Holy Cross by the Persians and its recovery and return to the Holy Land by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. The same text is used in Nabua and in Bigaa. The use of the *cobacho dotoc* began sometime in the 1930s. The *paradotoc* in Baao speak of texts older than the *cobacho dotoc*, but these texts are not used anymore. In Canaman, the *dotoc* still has many texts, one for each day of the novena. In all these texts is a common narrative thread also present in the *cobacho dotoc*: pilgrims go on a journey to the Holy Land to look for or visit the Cross and they find it, sing songs of praise, worship and adoration, and submit petitions for salvation from “hunger, war, and pestilence” in this life (*hambre, guerra, y peste* in the *cobacho dotoc*: line 4, quatrain II of the Pasion part) and from

eternal damnation in the hereafter (*Dotoc sa Mahal na Santa Cruz*, 1895). In this essay, I will elaborate only on the cobacho dotoc narrative.

In the cobacho dotoc, the protagonists are the pilgrims who are ordinary people from Spain (*bale sa España*), while the story of the great Heraclius is only told, not enacted. The pilgrims (*peregrinos*) set out for the journey in May, when flowers are in bloom, and travel on foot at night to escape the scorching heat of day. They come upon a cobacho by the roadside and wonder if the people there were also Christians and decide to stop by and ask them. The people in the cobacho say they were Christians also and ask the pilgrims where they were headed. The pilgrims answer that they were traveling to the Holy Land to visit the Holy Cross and pay homage, but the cobacho people heard that the Cross had been stolen. The pilgrims reply that the Cross was indeed stolen but had already been returned. The people in the cobacho say they want to hear what happened and invite the pilgrims to be seated. By turns, as they are organized in four rows, the pilgrims sit down on benches facing the cobacho. They then proceed to tell the story of how the Cross was stolen by the Persian king *Cosrohas* (Chosroes), how the emperor *Herakyo/Heraclio* (Heraclius) waged war and defeated the Persians, how *Serwis* (Syrois) the son of Coshoras surrendered all to Heraclio including the Holy Cross, and how Heraclio returned the Cross to the Holy Land. After this, the people in the cobacho thank the pilgrims and decide to join them on the journey to visit the Cross, to the great delight of the pilgrims. They get flowers and prepare *media luna* (tiny paper half-moon flags) as offerings to the Cross. They travel together and eventually reach the place where the Cross is located—in the scenography this is the chapel, which represents “the Holy Land.” There they sing the *Vexilla Regis Prodeunt*, a 6th century hymn in praise of the Cross, the *Pasion de Dotoc* which are composed of petitions to the Cross, and a final *Adios* or farewell.

The dotoc is sung throughout, with choruses and parts sung by four rows of singers—*uno, dos, tres, quatro*—in succession, one quatrain after another, accompanied by guitars. In the Baa practice, it is sometimes accompanied, although less frequent, by an electric organ, a saxophone, a clarinet, a cornet, or a bass, or all these together. The music was composed by a local musician—Marcial Briones—in the 1940s, but improved or improvised (*pigparapakaray*) and ornamented over time by generations of paradotoc. The language is “Standard” Bicol, commonly referred to as “Naga Bicol,” which is the language of the Bicol Catholic church.

In Nabua, however, I saw another form of the dotoc in barangay Baras, which enacts the story of the search and finding of the Cross by Helena and Constantine, the better known story in many parts of the Philippines that is the basis of many Santacruzian traditions. The form is *komedya*, with actors playing the parts of the characters, but the practice is called dotoc and also sung. In Bigaa, the same Helena narrative is performed as komedya (and called komedya), with a cobacho dotoc preceding it. The cobacho dotoc is thus common in the Baao and Bigaa practices, while the search and finding of the Cross by Helena, performed as komedya, is common in Bigaa and Baras. The performances differ in many aspects like the number of performers, the music and melodies, the scenography or “sets” used, and the costumes and hand properties, which are all marked by active local improvisations.

In my work on the dotoc and on the category of “popular devotion” within which it can be seen as a form or expression, I use the methodology of radical ethnography in performance research, first elucidated by Dwight Conquergood (2002). It is a methodology of co-performance where I, the researcher, can only account for what I encountered in the research process and do not seek to represent what only the devotees and practitioners can fully speak about. I can only hope and strive for the ethnography, the writing-up of this experience, to be faithful to this encounter. In this essay, I strive for the account to be faithful to the dotoc event, to what was said by those who practice it, which, at the same time, is a shaping or construction of the event for themselves and for others. I say this as someone who sang the dotoc myself, in Santa Cruz, Baao, where I grew up, and so I had an organic relation to the practice. I was and continue to call myself a paradotoc, like my grandmother and mother before me. The dotoc was something we did as part of our life in the community but did not need to explain to ourselves, until it became, for me, a subject of research. I had to negotiate the insider-outsider identity when I started looking at it as a researcher, thinking that I needed to be “objective” and that objectivity can only be achieved with distance from the researched. With radical ethnography, however, this negotiation is rendered unnecessary and even ill-conceived, because this methodology interrogates the very idea of an “objective” research. Its ambition is for the research as embodied performative practice to enable insider voices, otherwise muted, to sound loud and prominent in the ethnography. This is a radical departure from the view of research as a practice of experts who consider culture as a text to be interpreted, the “world-as-text model of ethnography” propounded by Clifford Geertz that Conquergood debunks

(Conquergood, 2002, p. 149). The methodological challenge for radical ethnography in fact, as I have used it for my own work based on Conquergood, is not how to be distanced and objective but how to co-perform and be one with the other. This is the challenge of *anduyog*, the Bicolano practice of what in Tagalog is called *bayanihan*, which I have adopted as my own ethic of practice. Anduyog calls for being one with the other, the *kapwa*. And as I have conceived it, an important part of this methodology is how to be proper (or “polite”) such that I pay attention to the way the dotoc appears, to how it is shown, and what people say they are doing. It is also a practice of performative historiography that constitutes the past in “a critically, creatively and politically affective afterwardness that enables some form of moving forwards” (Kear, 2013, p. 217) in the “politics of the present” (p. 8). For this essay, I am thinking especially of the pandemic currently gripping the country in 2021, in the here and now of the Philippines under the regime of Rodrigo Duterte, and what the commemoration of the 500 years of Christianity means for us within this weave of time and circumstance. This methodology commits to the act of historicizing as recognition of the incessant march of time, but strives to intervene, to stop time, or bend it towards a different direction.

The discussion that follows is in many ways an illustration of this methodology, as I attempt to articulate how “popular devotion,” in the specific instance of the dotoc, is a practice of “pagsa-Dios” and how Christianity as colonial inheritance has been claimed and appropriated in a thoroughly vernacular way, in what I call an experience of “grace,” drawing from Alain Badiou’s notion of “laicized” grace.

Christian Bicolanos

Scholars who have written on the Christian conversion say that the people resisted the colonial imposition—among them are Reynaldo Iletto (1979), Vicente Rafael (1993), and Filomeno Aguilar (1998), who take subaltern perspectives and interpret conversion as a process of native appropriation and translation that served emancipatory purposes. But the dotoc and other Christian devotions are a testament that the belief was embraced, prospered, and endured. Something must have happened that made the people keep their fidelity.

Can Rafael’s account be taken as a possible explanation for the Bicol conversion? For Rafael (1993), the conversion was a translation, with the natives

using their own notions of exchange when they “contracted” the new faith and thereby transformed it, “[resulting] in the ineluctable separation between the original message of Christianity ... and its rhetorical formulation in the vernacular” (p. 21). For confirmation, Rafael used linguistic analysis of colonial texts such as catechisms and *confessionarios* (confession manuals). But translation in Rafael’s conception is not only linguistic translation, it is a process that he calls a domestication of the foreign in the vernacular, which can be understood not as passive assimilation but as an act of active containment (see Rafael, 2006).

However, the British scholar Fenella Cannell says that there is something else that needs attention, especially when we start asking about not just the conversion as such but what came after that: the lived religion of the Bicolanos and its continuity to the present. Her book, *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (1999), came out of field work in Calabanga, Camarines Sur and has had a lasting influence in my thinking of the dotoc devotional practice.

Cannell shows that belief in and transactions with the world of the *tawong lipod* (the Bicol term for spiritual companion, the Visayan *dungan* that Aguilar [1998] speaks of) still exist side by side with Catholicism and that contemporary Bicolanos are still “superstitious” and taken by magic or belief in spells, charms, or the *anting-anting*. Why this is so is explored in her ethnography of indigenous healing and spirit possession and the devotion to the *Amang Hinulid* in Calabanga, Camarines Sur. The ethnography reveals much about contemporary vernacular religiosity in Bicol and the way that relations with the sacred are informed by and interlinked with power relations evident in everyday sociality, such as the transactions between husband and wife in forced marriages or the place of the *bakla* (transvestite men) in society. Cannell (1999) shares most of Rafael’s assumptions, such as the existence of a stratified social system—W.H. Scott’s division of precolonial society into *datu* (aristocrats), freemen, and commoners (Scott, 1985a, 1985b) in which rank and status are “mutable” depending on how one fares in the economy of social exchange—that is, the datu may lose his leadership status or the slave may become free or even ascend to datuship. The mutability is due to the relational/reciprocal character of power whereby the parties in a relationship, in the exchange, mutually affect each other: the datu’s power is as much dependent on the loyalty of followers as the followers’ welfare is dependent on the care of the datu. Moreover, and this is basic to Rafael’s analysis that Cannell also takes for her own, it is one’s obligation to enter the relations of exchange—it is only by entering into relations of exchange that one cultivates the *loob* or inner self.

However, Cannell points out in another work, the essay “Reading as Gift and Writing as Theft,” that the question of conversion is even more complicated than what Rafael takes up: it was not just translation from one language (Spanish) to another (Tagalog), because there were many more: Bicol, for instance, and its many variants in the region, not to mention Bisaya, Iloko, Ilonggo, and so on in other regions (2006, p. 139). Texts were translated not only into Tagalog, but also into these other languages, or the Tagalog text was further translated into Bicol. An example that is particularly relevant is the Bicol (Lenten) *Pasion* thought to have been translated from the Tagalog *Casaysayan* by Tranquilino Hernandez at the instigation of Archbishop Francisco Gainza (Javellana, 1988). The translator states that the Bicol translation “clarifies” for Bicolanos what was otherwise not clear to them when they only had the Tagalog *Casaysayan*, suggesting that Tagalog as a totally different language was in fact poorly or not fully understood by the Bicolans: “one can imagine a phase in which [the *Casaysayan*] constituted yet another layer of the polylingual, half-understood, half-recognized religious texts with which Bicolanos were surrounded” (Javellana, 1988, p. 143). This Bicol version of the *Casaysayan*, the Lenten *Pasion*, eventually migrated into many other texts such as the texts of the dotoc.

Performance of Devotion

As it happened, when our ancestors embraced Christianity, they did so with full devotion in the way they knew how and developed and passed on to later generations a fidelity to the religion that can be seen in the *panatal/panuga* (promise or vow) and in the many forms of faith expressions associated with calendrical rituals and devotional practices. It is a fidelity that can only be described as tenacious, even fierce.

The dotoc is a lighter example, because it is quiet, muted, even melodious and lilting, but also uneventful in the sense of being almost ordinary or quotidian, whereas other devotions are more spectacular, more visceral in their impact—like the Nazareno of Quiapo or the Peñafrancia of Naga. In the dotoc, one does not experience the intensity and thickness of the atmosphere present in the Peñafrancia and Nazareno processions. But the dotoc is as much a practice of pilgrimage as is the Peñafrancia devotion and one in which, as in the Peñafrancia, there is something else at work—beneath the ritual or the trappings of tradition, there is

a genuine truth event that effects the subjectivation of the devotee. This is why I have moved beyond the more well-known explanations of the conversion and popular devotion, even as I continue to draw from and be inspired by the ideas of Iletto, Rafael, Aguilar, and Cannell. I continue to explore deeper ground in the effort to stay faithful to what I encountered: the dotoc on my pulses. Of course, as the performance researcher Geraldine Harris (2008) suggests, “deeper” may actually be all on the level of appearance.

Let me elaborate on this point which I feel is an important aspect of the methodology of radical ethnography in performance research. Writing on a production by Quarantine and Company Fierce, Harris (2008) says that “[*it*] seemed rude, as in *impolite*, to Susan and Darren (the performers whose names are used in the title of the show)” for her to analyze the performance using her “usual” categories of race, sexuality, gender, age, and class, or in relation to the politics of identity (p. 4, emphasis added). Instead, she ends up writing about her self-reflexive experience of the performance and included a running counterpoint of “corrections” by Quarantine about her observations on the details of the performance. Writing about “the appearance of authenticity,” she concludes that the show’s apparent authenticity comes “paradoxically” from its “focus on surface, ‘show’ or appearances (the spectacle itself [!]) rather than what is ‘behind’ them ...” (p. 14).

It may well be that I have nothing else to go by but the appearances of the dotoc as I encountered them, and the challenge is how to stay faithful to those encounters. Only by such faithfulness can such appearances reveal something else: the truth that flashes rare and quick amidst and through appearance, challenging us to seize and hold it—as Saint Paul did when he saw the truth of Christ’s resurrection on the journey to Damascus—and, I would argue, as the dotoc practitioners have done all these years (why I refer to Paul will be seen in the later pages).

The dotoc is a performance in the sense of being ritual and also in the sense of being repeated, “restored behavior” as Schechner (1988) would say, both involving the elements of play and display. It is a nine-day prayer (*novenario*) which means it is performed every night for nine days and repeated in April and May every year. It is a pilgrimage to the Holy Cross but not a “real” one; it is a performance of pilgrimage. The pilgrims of the dotoc only imagine the pilgrimage, “act out” the journey, the performance turning intention into reality—as *if* they do become

pilgrims *hale sa España* (from Spain), as the text says, looking for the Cross and finding it in the Holy Land (see Llana, 2011, p. 93).

This performance of pilgrimage is a creative act, an imaginative transaction by agentic subjects. As Michael Taussig (1987) puts it, the centrality of the devotees in this creative act marks their embodied fidelity as a community of persons who imagines the sacred and in so doing, keeps the sacred alive. The divine being sought in the pilgrimage is made present by the act of seeking, and the act of seeking becomes an act of giving, so that as givers they may in turn receive in the dynamic play of reciprocity with the divine. In the terms of Marcel Mauss (2005 [1954]), such giving obliges the receiver to give back and places the giver on an even ground. The devotee is neither victim nor helpless supplicant in relations with the divine, even as individual subjective positions may be one of deep humility and desperate need. This giving is akin to Cixous' (1994) idea of feminine giving, because it is a giving that does not or cannot command a return. Though a return is prayed for, one can only believe in and hope for the love and goodness of the divine—and this comes as grace. One may say that pilgrimage and its performance in the Bicol experience thus become a seizing and sharing of grace. And this giving, this sharing, is done not from excess but from lack. Many devotees are poor and they save and scrape in order to participate in the devotions, although many attest that they “miraculously” have an excess (say, of fish-catch) that allows them to have a feast on the table and to buy the dresses or accessories for the performances.

The people were “struck by grace.” It can be the Christian concept of grace, inferring from how the dotoc practitioners talk about pagsa-Dios, how they profess their Christian faith. However, it can also be Badiou's (2001) idea of “laicized grace” that does not depend on any “divine transcendence,” but one that involves only human individuals grasping at a “chance of truth” (p. 123)—persisting in a truth whose predications or outer appearances have changed because of the experience of colonialism, but remaining what it is, a potent force in their lives. This is the unsaid, perhaps unsayable, explanation manifested only in the performance of devotion.

Vernacular Religiosity

Why is there a continuing discrepancy between popular faith observances and prescriptions of the official church? The plausible explanation is that what the native Bicolanos held on to with a fierce faith upon “conversion” was not really Christianity in its European or Spanish form, but one that was shaped according to the native understanding, that is, a thoroughly “vernacular religion,” and this is how we can understand the concept of appropriation.

I use the term as it is defined by Leonard Primiano (1995) who says, “Vernacular religion is ... religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it” (p. 44). In my view, this is religion considered as speech, behavior, performance, specific situated practice. Primiano suggests that all religion is vernacular religion because it is interpretive; it is also ultimately “personal” and “private.” Working in the field of folklore and folklife studies and their intersections with religion, Primiano posits the concept of vernacular religion both as theory and method, offering it as an alternative to approaches that presuppose a split between “official” religion and “folk” religion. Primiano rejects such approaches saying they only perpetuate the relegation of the folk to the margins and reifies religion as an institution, making it stand for the “community of believers” whose individual belief and practice are inevitably found wanting. The concept of “folk religion” has had great currency among scholars of religion, notably in the work of Don Yoder (1974, reprinted 1990) in the Western academy, as well as among Philippine scholars: Lynch (2004); Gerona (2005); MacDonald (2004); Gorospe (1986, 1994); Reyes (1985); and Mulder (1992a, 1992b). Mulder terms it as localization or the Filipinization of Christianity.

I find Primiano’s concept useful in thinking out the problematic of Bicol religiosity as expressed in the dotoc (and other devotions) without resorting to predicative claims of identity—the reason I hesitate to use terms like “the Filipinization” of Christianity. The view that every religious practice is vernacular suggests that it is a multiple singular and thus contains a potential universal address.

Wendy James and Douglas Johnson (1988) see the Christian religion as a way to apprehend truths and that this way is in fact multiple: “for outside the authorizing institutions of the Churches and the texts of theological debate there is no Christianity except in the life of vernacular society and culture” and that

“without such a ‘native’ appropriation, there cannot be a living religion” (p. 3). Saint Paul, they say, “legitimized ‘vernacular Christianity’ [through both the style and message of his preaching]—[even as] he also embodied the tensions between the universal and the local which together have helped to spread the Christian way” (p. 3). But can the vernacular in fact have a universal address? James and Johnson (1988) rightly raise what seems like opposing positions between the universal and vernacular Christianity. “There is a point at which the proclamation of universal faith and its necessary practical demonstration must take precedence over and alter local cultural idioms” (p. 4). They go on to enumerate some of the ways that they think this happened, for instance, the way that the Jewish heritage (and laws from the Old Testament) was adopted by the Graeco-Roman world and imposed on and would have “profound social implications” for those outside the Jewish world. Moreover, “the early Christian apologists were aggressive in their claims to exclusive truth” (p. 4) and the later Christians (Europeans) brought the religion by conquest to other populations in “the rest of the world and the rest of the world must choose to submit or resist” (p. 5). In the Philippine experience this has meant the erasure of the precolonial religion in its outer appearances. All these we understand to be true. However, going back to Paul, it was not him who decided the adoption of the Jewish laws. It can be said that Paul, in fact, asserted the vernacular: the universality of the faith could be true only if it was vernacular—if the uncircumcised would be recognized as Christian as much as the circumcised. While the fidelity to the faith may be considered Pauline, the acts of colonizing populations as we know them in history cannot rightly be called so and can be thought precisely as opposite and inimical to the Pauline idea. I therefore see no contradiction between asserting the vernacular and professing the universal, for as Badiou (2006) says, the universal is always local or can only be known as or appear in a local site. This is not to say it is particular, because the particular is known by means of its predicates, but that it is singular, subtracted from all predications (p. 146). It seems to me that this is perfectly in agreement with the assertion by James and Johnson that “there never was a Church” but always churches in the plural, even during the early days of Christianity in Asia Minor, where it flourished before it reached Europe. Of course, it is possible that James and Johnson are in fact talking about predications, particularities, “particular social situations” (p. 2), but this may be just a matter of semantics or perspective, because any particular situation is itself a singularity and a multiple—that is, each of the churches is a multiple singular being as Christian and as Greek, Armenian, Assyrian, and so on. The same may be said of the Philippine church, or the Bicol church. Predicates define a world, but

it is important to see that a singular truth must be “subtracted from identitarian predicates ... although obviously it proceeds via those predicates” (Badiou, 2006, p. 147).

The Work of Grace

For Alain Badiou (2003), Saint Paul preached the “Christian discourse” that the Christian message is for all, whether Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, and it was this and similar actions that questioned and rejected the Law (upheld by the “Jewish discourse”) that marks him as the great militant of grace that he was. As Badiou (2003) elaborates, “what Paul calls grace ... occurs without being couched in any predicate ... is translegal, and happens to everyone without an assignable reason” (pp. 76-77). But it can only be thought or apprehended within the situation of its occurrence, that is, vernacularly. For the Bicolanos, when this universal Christian message was addressed to them, they responded in the only way they knew how, that is, vernacularly.

Badiou (2001) likens how truths come to be apprehended to the Christian idea of grace and admits to the possibility of something that exceeds human understanding, such as the divine: “If every grace is a divine gift, we cannot absolutely avoid the idea of an ultimate, divine calculation, even if that calculation exceeds our understanding” (p. 122). However, Badiou’s (2001) grace is “laicized grace,” and therefore different from the religious conception of the term.

Fundamentally, what I call laicized grace describes the fact that, in so far as we are given a chance of truth, a chance of being a little bit more than living individuals, pursuing our ordinary interests, this chance is always given to us through an event. This eventual giving, based absolutely on chance, and beyond any principle of the management or calculation of existence—why not call it grace? Simply, it is a grace that requires no all powerful, no divine transcendence. (p. 123)

It is instructive for my reflections on the dotoc that Badiou uses Saint Paul as an illustration, a classic case of the experience of Christian grace. In Saint Paul one sees Badiou’s (2003) notion of “a fidelity to a fidelity” (p. 47)—the truth-process being itself a fidelity. The “becoming of a truth” and indeed the process of

subjectivation exceeds one's understanding, and that a truth always only becomes after the fact of one's having been struck by it through "a pure event"—that in the case of Paul was Christ's resurrection. It is not planned or pre-conceived. Once seized by such a truth, one is capable of remaining faithful to it, of being a "militant" of the cause one believes in.

In *Saint Paul*, Badiou (2003) presents Paul as a militant par excellence. He is Badiou's illustration of all that he says in his philosophical writings: of being, of truth, and the subject. It is in reading *Saint Paul* that I understood why Badiou insists that truth is for all, that as universal singularity it is addressed to all and can be accessed by anyone, be he/she Greek or Jew, Christian or Gentile, slave or citizen, and that predication limits and excludes and thus shatters or negates universality. Paul thus provides me with a model to think of the dotoc as fidelity and ground my political take on it in the situations within which I encountered it. The connections are uncannily strong: Paul was always outside the "law" or authority—he was never part of the anointed group, the twelve apostles and their immediate circle of friends who formed the core of the early Christian church; the dotoc has also largely been a secular undertaking, outside the church's initiative or program, and it is of the folk. Paul was focused on only one thing: the event of Christ's resurrection and he believed in its singular truth outside of what can be considered its history—Jesus' life and works. As Badiou (2003) puts it, Paul's was "a discourse without proof, without miracles, without convincing signs" (p. 53). The dotoc is pagsa-Dios, an act of faith—everything else is mere detail subordinated to this one truth professed by the Christian Bicolanos. Beyond these immediate striking links between Paul and the dotoc, other ideas in Badiou's (2003) writing on Saint Paul resonate powerfully or present further challenges to thinking about the dotoc and the Bicolanos' lived experience and practice of Catholicism: Paul's texts as "interventions" (p. 31); Paul's "militant discourse of weakness" (p. 53); the "antidialectic of death and resurrection" where death is not negated by resurrection but is its affirmative ground (p. 73); the opposition of law and grace and grace as *kharisma* or gift (pp. 75-85); the linking of love and faith and love as "universal power" (pp. 86-92); and hope as the "subjectivity of a victorious fidelity" (p. 95).

Performance and the “Elsewhere” of Faith

Cannell also diverges from Rafael on a key idea in suggesting that the attraction of conversion to the Bicolanos lay somewhere else, not in the promise of Paradise. A point that she repeats several times in the ethnography and in subsequent papers is “the complex and ambivalent tone of Bicol culture” (1999, p. 138), that the Bicolanos are “uninterested” in constructing a clear picture of who they are or what their culture is or what they believe in, which of course makes it difficult for people like her (and me) to write about them (us). Nevertheless, a striking observation that Cannell seems certain about is that the Bicolanos (at least those with whom she lived) are also “relatively uninterested in the classic Christian ‘economy of salvation’” that figures greatly in Rafael’s theory. “The relationship of exchange into which they insert [the words in the Pasion and other religious texts] is not the one intended by the church” (Cannell, 2006, p. 144). While some of the details she enumerates to support this view may be uniquely true to the Calabanga folk and may be true only to a limited degree or not at all for other groups of Bicolanos, I find that they can also be said of the ordinary folk in the dotoc sites covered by my own research—notably, that “ordinary Bicolanos are not especially priest-centred, nor are they deeply invested in a morality within the economy of salvation, which is centred on sin, repentance, and justice in the next life” (Cannell, 2006, p. 145). The novenario and dotoc performances run smoothly and largely without the involvement of priests, although they say mass on the day of the fiesta that marks the end of the nine-day cycles and ordinary folk are quite pleased to be at the receiving end of the priest’s attention if and when it is given. Yearning for salvation is said in the prayers and found in the dotoc verses, but that is just what it is: text. The interiority of the desire is something else that is never discussed by or among the dotoc singers or their *kabarangay* (fellows). Instead, practitioners are preoccupied about present worries and frequently talk about them—like how the devotion to the Holy Cross saves them from the danger of volcanic eruptions or typhoons and flooding and puts food on their tables. For the paradotoc, therefore, conversion and fidelity would not be about a (sinful) past that must be ransomed or about a future (the afterlife) that must be ensured, but about the here and now that needs to be faced with faith and fortitude.

What was/is going on then? What is the “elsewhere” that Cannell points towards as a possible, truer, account of the enduring Christian faith of the Bicolanos, long after the colonizers have gone? “What, then, does it mean for

present-day Bicolanos to insist that what they are doing, during Lenten vigils, is ‘reading’ the Pasion?” (Cannell, 2006, p. 143). This essay proposes that a close look at the performance of devotion will provide an answer.

Cannell’s (2006) supposition aligns with the notion of a laicized grace in saying that contemporary vernacular religiosity in Bicol and relations with the sacred are informed by and interlinked with power relations evident in everyday sociality, undergirded by the mutability of rank and status, depending on how one fares in the economy of social exchange. And how else to say this but in terms of performance?

Bicolano Pasion singers are perfectly capable of explaining many of the episodes given in the text they “read,” as well as of rhetorically quoting a number of passages from it, and they themselves emphasize their skill in producing the words clearly, a statement that would no doubt have gladdened the heart of the local priest. Yet at the same time, they stress the “matching,” “harmony,” and “pairing” of their two voices, concepts that refer to ideas of balance, testing, and blending in Bicol rhetorical techniques in quite different contexts (such as formal riddling contests and courtship ritual). The extent to which Bicolano people literally “read” in our sense when they perform the Pasion is, therefore, debatable. Actual performances often depart to some extent from what is printed on the page, and my observation over many readings is that singers rely on memory as much as on the text, despite the length of the piece. Semi-memorized, the reproduction of the Pasion occupies a space between the exclusively oral and the exclusively literate. (pp. 143-144)

Cannell’s (2006) answer takes the form of a description of the way that the Pasion is “read”—essentially how it is performed, since the reading is a chanting in two voices.

The technology of performance ... goes far beyond what we mean by *reading*. In singing pairs, one person always leads, while the second harmonizes and ornaments the line. The way in which this is organized musically actually cuts across the structure of what is printed on the page. Thus while the *Pasion* is arranged in stanzas of five

lines throughout, the musical ornamentation occurs principally at the ends of the first, second, and fifth lines and runs together the others in rhythms determined by the chant more than by the meter of the printed line. To know where to ornament, as well as to learn the wide repertoire of possible musical variations appropriate for particular points in the text, requires complex knowledge and experience, none of which can be read from the book itself. The performance of the *Pasion* by singing pairs in some respects actually seems to replicate a common pattern in the Bicol religious performances generally. (p. 144, emphasis in original)

She goes on to describe the way that the dotoc in Canaman, for instance, is performed, with the *maestra* (the director, who Cannell identifies as a “prompter”) reading the lines “slightly ahead of the moment when the group of performers need to sing it ... [or] start reading while the singers are still completing the line before, producing a slightly syncopated effect in the performance.” She ends this description with the insight that “Bicolano reading has this quality of interruption, of something extra being interjected. The line is not produced on a direct path from eye to mouth” (2006, p. 144). She may well be describing the dotoc performance, though the dotoc is sang rather than chanted. The difference between singing and chanting can be seen in the melodic quality of the piece, evident even to untrained ears—the difference, for instance, between the dotoc singing of the *Pasion* specifically in its current form of the cobacho dotoc and the chanting of the Lenten *Pasion*. I am not sufficiently equipped to describe this in specialist terms, but it suffices to say that the melodic structure of the cobacho dotoc is already predominantly Western, while that of the Lenten *Pasion* is not. I have said elsewhere that the *Pasion* chanting may be traceable to the *soraque* intoned by the female shaman called *balyana* in the *atang* rituals that the ancient Bicolos offered to the god Gugurang in thanksgiving for a good harvest (Castaño, 1895).

It may very well be that, with the Christian conversion, the Bicolanos had found another material with which they can hone their rhetorical and performance skills, another way to show or present themselves (my point about play and display) and thus push their standing a further notch up the scale of exchange and balance of power—even as they enjoy their performances, with their costumes, movement, stylized delivery, or the highly “ornamented” singing, out of which their fidelity of faith surges.

The in-existent appears, the invisible becomes visible: the “native,” who cannot be conformed to the law imposed by the colonizer: of modesty, of piety, that is supposed to be demonstrated in behavior and appearance; and the vernacular that is the product of situated transactions governed by the idioms of reciprocal exchange. The subjugated and converted are revealed as active subjects who act on/ in a situation and transform it and themselves to be the militants of the truth that they are capable of being. Through the *dotoc* and other devotions, God appears and the devotee appears, and they commune *without mediation*: without priests, shamans or other intermediaries. (Llana, 2011, p. 94, emphasis in original)

The Philippine church has long incorporated in its evangelization program what is called “inculturation,” identified as “the effort to express and live the faith in terms and ways more attuned to the symbols and traditions of a people” (Claver, 2006, p. 3), which became official policy after the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines held in Manila in 1991. In the words of a 2000 pastoral letter of the CBCP, “True inculturation ... is really the building up of an authentically local Church for its own time” (Quevedo, 2000). However, while there is a move to inculturate Christianity, there are notions of “authentic” and “inauthentic” inculturation, which means the church continues to be bound by an idea of a “pure” faith versus vernacular expressions that need to be “purified.” This is perhaps only to be expected since we are talking about an institutional program, what Badiou might typify as law. But faith works well beyond any law, and this is how I propose we understand what devotion is and how it works—like grace. As Badiou (2003) puts it, the Christian is not so much a transgressor of law as he/she is bound by a different law: that of love.

This might be Christian love, but then again it might be something else for which we have forgotten the words, after 500 years of Christianity. What matters is that the faithful devotees have persisted not as objects of conversion but as subjects and agents who chose to be Christian and have fashioned their own expressions of that decision. How significant is this for us as a nation and people in 2021, looking back to the arrival of Christianity even as we face the worst of disasters in our contemporary history: living in a pandemic period and under a tyrannical regime? The question compels a critical and decisive action: to persist in that agency, to muster our creative energies to not just survive but live, and, in

radical love—Christian or not, perhaps, more rightly, “Filipino”—to choose to resist subjugation and end tyranny.

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Folk Devotion in the Waterscape of the Pasig River: The 1653 and 1748 Fluvial Processions of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje

Mary Josefti C. Nito

University of Asia and the Pacific

The *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* or Our Lady of Antipolo is one of the most prolific Marian sites or devotions in the Philippines. The image of Our Lady of Antipolo also served as the patroness of some galleon ships during the 17th and 18th century. The return of the image to its shrine in Antipolo would be occasions for a fluvial procession along the Pasig River. This paper analyzes the 1653 and 1748 fluvial processions of the *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* along the Pasig River as documented by Pedro Murillo Velarde S.J., which were reprinted in 1887 as the *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*. The detailed descriptions from this account captures the waterscape of the Pasig River during the procession, which Velarde compares to a theater because of the great number of people in attendance. The account also details the performance of folk devotion particularly from the Tagalog towns participating in the procession. By focusing on the Pasig River, this study brings to the fore the value of the river as a cultural-religious space unifying the Tagalog towns that complete its waterscape. Lastly, the conclusions of this study highlight the communal experience of the procession and the role of popular devotions in the articulation of folk culture and identity especially during early modern colonial Philippines.

Keywords: *Our Lady of Antipolo, Pasig river, fluvial processions, folk devotion, waterscape*



Mary Josefti C. Nito finished her MA in Humanities from the University of Asia and the Pacific and is currently pursuing her PhD in History at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Her dissertation is about Marian devotions in Luzon in the 17th and 18th century. She is currently a board member of the Philippine Studies Association, Inc. and an instructor on Philippine History in the University of Asia and the Pacific. *Email:* mcnito@up.edu.ph

The devotion to *Inang Maria* is one of the most popular traditions in the Philippines. The cult or devotion to her has produced countless rituals such as novenas, processions, and pilgrimages accepted as part of Filipino heritage and culture. For some communities, the devotion to Inang Maria served as a catalyst to the process of their own place-making, the forging of their community identity, and the narration of their local histories. In this paper, the author looks at the fluvial processions of the *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* of Antipolo in 1653 and 1748 emphasizing the native participation and the manifestation of the folk devotion to Inang Maria. This article is part of a bigger study exploring the introduction and the deepening of the devotion to Inang Maria in the Philippines during the 17th and 18th century (Nito, 2020).

Deirdre de la Cruz's book entitled *Mother Figured: Marian Apparitions and the Making of a Filipino Universal* talks about the centrality of the devotion to the Virgin Mary in Filipino Catholicism. She cites the studies on the *babaylan* and the framework of conversion-as-translation as possible explanations for the depth of the devotion to the Virgin. She asserts that the high status attributed to the *babaylan* or even the *catalonan* bore the "... closest structural resemblance ..." to the Virgin Mary (de la Cruz, 2015, p. 27). In this book, she looks at some of the 19th century apparitions of the Virgin Mary as recorded in prayer books and accounts written by the clergy. Majority of the book tackles the 20th century Marian miracles, apparitions, and popular devotions as mediated by different forms of media such as hagiographies, sermons, prayer books (*devocionarios*), exempla, popular romances, and spiritual manuals (de la Cruz, 2015).

According to Rene Javellana S.J., the introduction of the devotion to Inang Maria was vigorously fostered by the different religious orders who came to evangelize in the Philippines. Each religious order would however be differentiated by their own preferred title for the Inang Maria or Nuestra Señora. "The Dominicans propagated the Nuestra Señora del Rosario. The Franciscans and the Jesuits preferred the Inmaculada or the Immaculate Conception. The Augustinians and the Augustinian Recollects pushed for the Nuestra Señora de la Correa or Our Lady of the Belt. These titles were associated with the devotional life of each religious order" (Javellana, 2010, p. 25). The images were either locally made or brought to the Philippines via the galleon ships from Mexico.

One of these images brought by the galleon is the image of the *Nuestra Señora de la Purisima Concepcion*, also known as the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje,

and colloquially known as the Our Lady of Antipolo. According to Barcelona and Estepa (2004), the devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje or Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage is one of the oldest Marian devotions in the country, close to four centuries already, beginning with the arrival of the image on 18 June 1626. A detailed discussion on the history of the Our Lady of Antipolo can be found in Michael Delos Reyes' (2016) book entitled *Morena Graciosa: The Devotion to the Virgin of Antipolo through the Centuries*. Citing mainly the *Historia* (1887) of Fr. Murillo Velarde S.J., Delos Reyes narrates that the image was brought to the country by Don Juan Niño de Tabora, who first saw the image in Acapulco, Mexico. Don Juan Niño de Tabora was then traveling to the Philippines to serve as its governor-general. When he died in 1632, he bequeathed the image to the Jesuits to be enshrined in their mission station in Antipolo. In addition to the book of Delos Reyes, Monina Mercado's (1980) work entitled *Antipolo, a Shrine to Our Lady* also narrates the history of the image of the Our Lady of Antipolo, especially its connection with the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade. The first voyage of the image aboard the galleons as its protectress was in 1641, the year after Governor-General Corcuera ordered that it be brought down from Antipolo after hearing about its desecration by the Sangleyes fleeing Manila in 1640 (Mercado, 1980). The table below lists down the journeys of the image of the Our Lady of Antipolo with the galleons based on the works of Delos Reyes and Mercado.

TABLE 1. Galleon Ships and the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje

Name of the Galleon Ship	Year of Travel
San Luis	1641, 1643, and 1647
Encarnacion	1648
San Francisco Javier	1651
San Diego	1653
San Jose	1659
Nuestra Señora del Pilar	1746 and 1748

In 1653, on the journey back to Manila on board the galleon ship San Diego, the image was given the title *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*. The conferring of the title to the image of the Our Lady of Antipolo was an act of gratitude from the prestigious travelers onboard the San Diego—the incoming Governor-General Manrique de Lara and the Archbishop Miguel de Poblete. The passengers of the galleon ship believed that the Our Lady of Antipolo saved them during the dangerous crossing of the San Bernardino Strait. In addition to the conferring of the special title *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* or Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, Governor-General Manrique de Lara also promised that the image will be finally going home to its mountain shrine in Antipolo (Delos Reyes, 2016). The return of the image to Antipolo included a grand fluvial procession along the Pasig River. The fluvial processions in 1653 and again in 1748 are the focus of this paper.

The theoretical considerations of this paper are influenced by the concept of waterscape and the intricate relationship between water and society as discussed in the study of Timothy Karpouzoglou and Sumit Vij (2017) entitled “Waterscape: A perspective for understanding the contested geography of water.” Waterscape essentially looks at the intimate relationship between water and society. As a concept it includes “... the way water travels in time and space and is shaped by culture and geography” (Karpouzoglou & Vij, 2017, p. 2). An example of this is Swyngedouw's study on the water history of Spain wherein waterscape is the foreground perspective for understanding how water and society is deeply intertwined. “For Swyngedouw, the Spanish waterscape reflects the intricate ways in which nature and society are ‘fused together in a way that renders them inseparable,’ producing water as a ‘restless hybrid.’ Studies that focus on waterscapes are therefore sensitive toward the dynamic processes through which water as *socionature* is continuously reworked, including its various flows and uses” (Karpouzoglou & Vij, 2017, p. 2). Waterscape as a perspective values fluidity and openness to different types of analyses. Consequently, works using waterscape has been pioneered primarily by social scientists, human geographers, anthropologists, and environmental historians associated with political ecology. Although there are other perspectives to use in studying the relationship of water and society, in this paper waterscape is the most appropriate because “the strength of the waterscape is that it brings into focus the geographical situatedness of these relations and provides ample scope for detailed empirical observation, using rich ethnographies and detailed case studies” (Karpouzoglou & Vij, 2017, p. 1).

This paper focuses on the 1653 and 1748 fluvial procession of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje along the Pasig River as narrated by Pedro Murillo Velarde. This Jesuit priest is best remembered today as the cartographer of the 1734 Velarde Map commissioned by Governor-General Valdes Tamon in 1734 (Arcilla, 1996). Velarde arrived in the Philippines in 1723 and served as the first professor of Canon and Civil Law in the Jesuit College in Manila. Then he was assigned as the rector of Antipolo from 1747 to 1748. He wrote about the history of the Jesuits in the Philippines in a book entitled the *Historia de la Provincia de Philipinas de la Compania de Jesus* published in Manila in 1749 (Arcilla, 1993). Some chapters of this work are dedicated to the documentation of the local devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje of Antipolo. The chapters focusing on the devotion were later published separately as the *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* (1887). These writings of Velarde can be considered as the main primary sources on the history of the devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. The *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* is not yet translated into English; the translations of some paragraphs from this source used in the succeeding paragraphs were done by the researcher.

The rich description of the procession provided by the account of Velarde (1887) enables us to draw out detailed analysis and observations regarding the fluvial procession along the Pasig River going up to Antipolo. During the fluvial procession of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje, he describes the waterscape of the Pasig River and likens it to a great theater attended by many. In the original Spanish he says “*todo el espacio como un teatro de mayor concurrencia*” (p. 31). It would seem that the comparison to a theater was spot on because of the grandness of the procession, both in terms of quantity of people who participated in it and the level of performativity involved in how the native population in particular manifested their devotion towards the Our Lady of Antipolo.

The route and stops of the processions emphasized the control of the Jesuits. According to Velarde (1887), “On the 18th (February) they embarked on a boat until San Pedro Macati, and the whole space was like a theater attended by many. On the 19th in the morning from Macati to Cainta, and in the afternoon to Taytay” (p. 29). Even if the different towns along the Pasig River prepared altars along the route, the procession only stopped in the towns administered by the Jesuits — San Pedro Macati, Cainta, and Taytay. Even if special attention was given to the towns administered by the Jesuits, the procession nevertheless attracted

participation from the towns surrounding the river and those that are connected to the river: “The towns of the river were joined by those in the Laguna de Bay and all the other surrounding towns” (Velarde, 1887, p. 32).

The river, according to Velarde (1887), looked like a floating city. In his descriptions, he says that it was so full of *sampans* and boats of different shapes and sizes accompanying the image of Our Lady of Antipolo in its procession along the river. The sampan carrying the image and the rector of Antipolo was richly decorated. There were so many flags, streamers, and pennants of different colors that seemed to be floating through the expanse of the river, fluttering in the air. He adds, “in the river so many boats of different shapes and sizes were piled up, that it was a wonder that no misfortunes or run-over were experienced crossing the bridge” (Velarde, 1887, p. 29). It should be noted that the type of boat that carries the image of Our Lady of Antipolo as mentioned by Velarde was the local sampan. The sampan is a flat-bottomed wooden boat commonly used by traders in Southeast Asia as a fishing boat, for transportation of goods, and even permanent habitation for riverine and coastal communities (Hornell, 1934).

Looking closely at the descriptions of the processions in 1653 and in 1748, one noticeable difference was that in the 1653 narrative, the sangleyes were not mentioned as participants, while in 1748 they were included among the devotees. According to Velarde (1887) in Chapter 7 of the *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*: “The participation on the river was so great that it was marvelous to see in addition to the sampan, which the Virgin was accompanied by the Governor, a Spanish boat also came. Surrounding the Virgin are various boats from the natives, the Chinese, and those from the other nations in richly decorated boats with flags ... ” (p. 29).

The devotion in the river overflowed to the banks of Pasig. Taking in the whole scenario, Velarde says it was a “a huge, open church without doors.” Velarde (1887) narrates that in the 1653 procession:

The banks of the river would not be left behind in adoring the sacred image as it passes through. The banks of this mighty river were filled with altars, flags, and flowers. There were also colorful and grand altars and the ministers of the towns who waited on the banks, decorated it with layers of gold, cross and candles, waiting to welcome

the Virgin. They were accompanied by many people holding lighted candles to worship the Sovereign Lady. The many and beautiful villas of the Spaniards along the banks of the river were also filled with decorations and lights which were enhanced with sweet musical concerts to celebrate their Queen. The bells, drums, bugles, muskets and fireworks resounded everywhere, announcing this common and universal rejoicing. (p.16)

There were so many devotees waiting along the banks of the river that it seemed to be a continuous anthill and that if they were not able to show their devotion in celebrating the Señora in their town, they accompanied her by running along the banks in pursuit.

Notable among these Tagalog towns surrounding the Pasig River is the *pueblo* of Pasig. This town was specially mentioned by Velarde as excelling in their refinement and devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. He mentions in the 1748 procession which he personally witnessed that “Pasig, one of the most populated pueblos in these islands, took great care in the celebration with such finesse. The flags and streamers were their own, some of these were decorated with images, lights, and jewelry. The two altars they set up is accompanied by sweet instruments and chords” (Velarde, 1887, p. 31).

Quiapo and San Pedro Macati were also specially mentioned. Both towns supposedly excelled in offering up dances to the Our Lady of Antipolo during the procession and in the celebration in Antipolo. In the 1748 procession, “Various dancers and singers came from other towns. Quiapo's gracefully dressed singers performed a Tagalog verse which is part singing and part reciting. It was a great enjoyment participated by many and presented as a special gift to the sovereign Virgin. Almost all the people of San Pedro Macati attended the celebration, with two dances from the children of the said town which was received with satisfaction of those around, ...” (Velarde, 1887, p. 32). Besides the aforementioned towns, Velarde also mentioned the following pueblos as participants in the procession and the festivities in Antipolo: Taytay, Cainta, Mariquina, San Mateo, Pasig, Moron (Morong), Baras, Angono, and then some from the provinces of Pampanga, Bulacan, Cavite, La Laguna, Tayabas, and Batangas.

The narratives of Pedro Murillo Velarde showed the reception and devotion to the Our Lady of Antipolo by the different members of the colonial society. He mentions in his account the participation of the Spanish population, especially the ones outside of Manila, in the procession. However, the focus of the narrations is the overwhelming devotion of the native population and their affection for the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. The towns mentioned in the account attest that the devotion to the Our Lady of Antipolo was a shared Tagalog devotion. Even though it was known as the Our Lady of Antipolo, the fervor for the image went beyond the town of Antipolo. The different towns from Manila to Macati and then Cainta and Taytay were not just connected by the river but also by the devotion to the image of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. The image and the shared devotion became a means in widening the sense of community of the natives beyond their own town or pueblo.

While the devotion connected them to *others* beyond their own pueblo, their participation in the procession and the festivities were also opportunities to showcase their local identity which sets them apart from the other towns. For example, the towns of Pasig, Quiapo, and San Pedro Macati were singled out in the account for their performances during the procession and festivities. The various dances and the singing in the procession attest that, in the performance of the devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje, they were also articulating their folk identity and adapting their own local art form into the practice of religion.

The fervor for the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje evident in the account of the processions begs the question—why do the native population identify with the Virgin of Antipolo and the fluvial procession along the Pasig River? To answer the first part of the question, writers have attributed the identification of the masses with the Our Lady of Antipolo to her color. The image which stands more or less 41 inches is made of dark wood, earning her the title *Morena Graciosa* or the Gracious Brown Virgin. According to earlier studies, her color made it easier for the natives and the masses to accept her as their Inang Maria (Mercado, 1980; Brainard, 2012; Delos Reyes, 2016).

Refocusing our attention to the Pasig River, in this narrative of the procession we see the devotion and the affirmation of that devotion happening not in the plaza or in the church within the plaza but in the river. The whole waterscape of the Pasig River, which includes not just the river with all the boats but also the participation

from the banks, widens the space by which the devotion is practiced. The water element in the narrative of the fluvial procession breaks the typical centeredness of faith in the town plaza where the church is located. The river, which is often found in the periphery of the town as created by the colonial state, now becomes the center of the narrative and is even considered as a sacred space. With all the altars along the banks of the Pasig River, Velarde (1887) describes the waterscape like a church without walls.

The fluvial procession of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje along the Pasig River highlights the centrality of the river to our culture and way of life. In this practice, it is evident that the Pasig River was not just used as a thoroughfare of goods and people, it was not just a space for economic activities, but also a religious space. In bringing to prominence this narrative of the fluvial procession, we see how much the Pasig River and its banks became an important context in the performance of the folk devotion to Inang Maria. Although we do not have any record of the fluvial procession being done in the 19th century, it is interesting to note that in the drama *Junto al Pasig* written by the young Jose Rizal (1880), there is a line in the fifth scene that says: “*Ya la Virgen de Antipolo/ Las aguas, surca del río; Saludala en canto pío.*” Or in English “Here comes the Virgin of Antipolo / The waters of river furrowing for her/ Greet her with a pious song.”

The procession of the Virgin of Antipolo along the Pasig River is now a forgotten practice. Now that the river is being threatened with the construction of an expressway above it, the narratives that highlight its centrality to our Tagalog culture is even more necessary. To revive the Pasig River, it is important to also recognize it as a cultural-religious space and that it was once a part of our devotional landscape.

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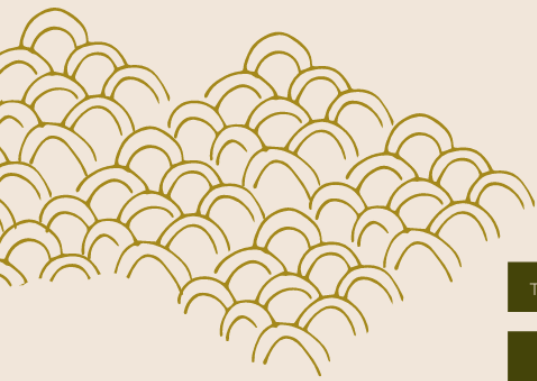
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