

FROM THE SACRED TO THE PROFANE: THE *OBLATION* RITUALIZED

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ABSTRACT

The study approaches the historical construction of the narratives surrounding the statue titled Oblation, deemed as the symbol of the University of the Philippines (UP), from the theoretical perspective of Eric Hobsbawm's notion of "invented traditions," as well as Judith Butler's theory of performativity. The study looks at the genesis of this narrative as informed by the anti-colonial struggle of the late-19th and early 20th century, but amplified and "sacralised" through the symbolic power of the UP Presidency, particularly under Jorge C. Bocobo (1935-1939) under whose auspices the Oblation was erected on November 30, 1935. The study also foregrounds the key term "Sacrificial Body" as a determinant of the Oblation's narrational focus of itself as subject, and its function as idealized model or template to be "followed" by the UP community. The ambivalence of this narrative, however, is central to the production of contradicting discourses throughout its history, from the "sacred" Pre-War image akin to a secular Crucifixion upon which rituals supervised by a "priesthood" composed of the University's officials were enacted; to the Post-War secular (and thus "profane") image of the Oblation as that "representing academic freedom" from the viewpoint of its progressive student body and faculty. The common assertion of a sacrificial representation of anti-colonial struggle, however, is intuited by the study as exemplifying the epistemic problematics of postcolonial nationalism.

Keywords: *Philippine Studies, visual culture, oblation, invented traditions*

INTRODUCTION

Ever since its inauguration on November 30, 1935, the statue known as the *Oblation* has been irrevocably tied to the institutional identity and purpose of the University of the Philippines (UP), and has since served as the icon for its various campuses, as well as the central image of its recent 2008 Centennial celebrations. The *Oblation*, sculpted by National Artist Guillermo E. Tolentino, is in the image of a nearly-nude, muscular young man standing erect, head thrown back, and arms spread to the sides, in what has been commonly attributed as a symbol of heroic sacrifice for the sake of nationhood. This paper is a component of the much larger study on the *Oblation* as a masculine representation of Philippine visual culture practiced by the various UP community publics that acknowledge and/or interpellate the *Oblation* as a significant aspect of their felt and real material lives—that is to say, the students, alumni, administration, faculty, staff and other members of the academic community. This study contends that the narratives that have “produced” the *Oblation* from its inception in the mid-1930s all derive from the same epistemic intersection of the *Oblation*’s central metanarrative as a *sacrificial body* that “stands for/stands as” its publics of nationalistic Filipinos, but whose hazy epistemic origins and practisational permutations have since served to hybridize this understanding according to the interests and agencies of those who link their lived practices and beliefs of being “a nationalistic Filipino” to this statue. Often, this “felt imagination” of oneself as a sacrificing martyr for the sake of the nation (as espoused and enacted by as varied a membership of the UP community as Ferdinand E. Marcos and Jose Maria Sison) can be arguably traced back to the framework of late-19th Century folk Christian martyric sufferance as studied by Reynato Ileto in *Pasyon and Revolution*, wherein the struggle to liberate the nation from foreign colonial rule is equated with a Christ-like messianic (and problematically male) leader who shall sacrifice his life for the sake of his people’s redemption and arrival into a paradisiacal nation. Moreover, the ritualistic practices associated with the *payon*, which Ileto acknowledges as the colonial lowland Filipino’s most easily-available text to re-interpret his/her condition as oppressed natives vis-à-vis corrupt Spanish colonizers, is also recapitulated as the early 20th Century secular Filipino’s mode of “sacralizing” the central representations of anti-Colonial revolutionaries and victims as popular manifestations of national heroism, and thus serve as desirable models of civic emulation.

The dual nature of this civic manifestation (co-identifying with a colonial model of liberation through the knowledge system of Christ-like sacrifice, while at the same time disavowing the source of this episteme as foreign, displacing it with a “native” positionality), however, masks a problematic ambivalence of the colonial subject that Homi Bhabha has identified as an aspect in postcolonial discourse. This serves to open up the texts of anti-colonial liberation as either a reiteration of native resistance, or the “translation” or “transference” of native nationalism into modern and secular terms that is made possible only *through* the colonial experience.

This paper thus specifically attempts to frame the question: How is the connection made between the sacralizing narrative of the *passyon* (as translated into the nationalist realm of informing the discourse on “messianic” martyrs) and its transference into a sacralized embodiment of sacrificial passion that is the *Oblation*? In order for this question to be raised, key theoretical points that govern our understanding of the *Oblation* as a sacrificial body that represents the UP public should be briefly foregrounded. The study primarily reifies Judith Butler’s concept of “performativity” as an integral component in the construction of epistemic categories in which hitherto-imposed normatization of these words are invalidated through a deconstructive reading of its knowledge system as a constant reiteration, a “performative” that produces its own force (as well as its existence) through the reinforcement of re-citation.¹

Applied by Butler to critique gender identity formations as derived from hegemonic discourses regarding the normative interpellation of “gender,” performativity can in this case also be actively deployed to analyze modes of ritualization that institutions and their publics actively engage in as a form of what Eric Hobsbawn calls “invented traditions,” wherein such traditions are “...taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawn 1983, 1). By studying how particular rituals were “invented” to suit the political aesthetic priorities of the *Oblation*’s makers and publics, a more culturally nuanced critique is possible wherein “inventors” of state rituals are seen as allowing “access” to tradition by imposing binding social “contracts” to their publics—who now function as the tradition’s “participants.” This contract requires the “participant’s”

adherence to certain core values, institutional obligations, and rights of membership (and by implication, exclusion), which are then stabilized or “naturalized” through compulsory practice and repetition. Tradition’s emotional power and hieratic symbolism are also understood by Hobsbawm as a corollary—and necessary—by-product of the aspiration to unite disparate social forces into a singular entity which, in turn, advocates a felt universality and progression to the higher state of “nation” (versus “clan,” “tribe,” “fiefdom,” “province,” “kingdom,” or “colony”). Thus, by implication, invented traditions also destroy while they build, by privileging some traditions at the expense of others, justifying their violence as “necessary” in the mission of achieving and maintaining a stable society and their (unitary) nation-hood. Hobsbawm believes that this notion can help historians detect hidden problems within ritualizing nation-states by measuring the nature and intensity of traditions as “symptoms” and by analyzing how human subjects deal with the past, as well as “the historian’s own subject and craft” (Hobsbawm, 12). In this sense, the production of public monuments (e.g., the *Oblation*) becomes the concern of an organizing/maintaining state for its past, and the past’s value as a rallying point in current or future struggles and “sacrifices.”

It is through a catachrestic exchange of a culturally coded signifier for supreme sacrifice in the name of a faceless and numberless (hence sex/gender-less) public, however, that also makes a *theory of resistance* within the ritualizing traditions of the *Oblation* possible. In the light of the *Oblation*’s modernist/colonial receptive disjunction to the asymmetrical matrix of Filipino publics, “his” call for sacrifice “re-signifies” the politics of nation-building as not only originating from death, but also resulting in “redemption.” “His” upward-facing posture that totalizes “his”/our sufferance as an act of self-immolation dedicated to a higher power transacts the pain of “his”/our suffering with the promise of “our” liberation, and “his” redemption through the actions that “we” perform in response to that sacrificial gesture. That is, the discourse requires that we not only undergo a catharsis from suffering to death and finally into redemption. We must, as Jorge Bocobo asserts, also carry the burden of “proving ourselves worthy” of the very sacrifice that “he” made in the first place. In other words, the transactable value that “his” public must ensure as repayment for “his” sacrifice is subject to an equally sacred “oath” or “covenant” that is not lightly broken, a social contract “between men” in the name of the

sacrificed man. It is precisely the disjunct between the authorial narration of the call for sacrifice by the ritualizing state's hegemonic agents, and the (re)interpretation of this dialectic by a believer's "response" to the "call," that produces the dynamic between the "sacred" and the "profane" in the history of the *Oblation's* ritualization.

THE "SACRED SACRIFICIAL"

We can thus interpolate and isolate the "sacrality" by which the *Oblation* is persistently referred to, situated on "his" pedestal as a "sacred symbol" that is detached and unsullied by everyday, "merely mortal" events—analogue to a crucifix enshrined on a Catholic Church altar that, in pre-Vatican II days, was physically separated from the public of *parokyanos* via a railing or wrought iron gate to denote the inviolable division between "profane space" (the congregation) and "sacred space" (the altar and its officiating bureaucracy of priests and altar boys). In this case, the space of the first *Oblation* (which from 1935-1947 meant the UP Manila quadrangle defined by the threshold between Palma Hall and Rizal Hall; and between 1948-1958, the plaza in front of Quezon Hall in UP Diliman) was thought of as a sanctum that not only defined UP's institutional identity for the benefit of "outsiders," but was also treated as an "inviolable space" fit only for proper rituals that interpellated the UP public (the "congregation") with its sacred symbol (the *Oblation* as a "Crucifix") through the intermediary organization of UP's administration and faculty (the "priesthood and its acolytes").

It is the ritualizing aspect of this discourse that confirms the spiritual and *pasyon*-like homology of the *Oblation* as a sanctified—therefore "inviolable"—statue, positioned like an atrial cross traditionally found in cathedral squares and plazas, and retaining the conflated function of these crosses as signs of sanctified public space. The *Oblation's* original erection within the UP Padre Faura Quadrangle also identifies the specific representation of a martyred hero as the university's "saint," which is analogous to the various sacred statues erected at a church plaza during the early 20th Century, such as the *Kristong Hari*. Public ceremonies sanctifying these sacred outdoor sculptures (that also stood on plinths) were common in the lowland Philippines during the turn of the century, climaxing in the devotion of the *Kristong Hari* as well as the *Santo Rosario*, *Birben*

ng *Lourdes* and *Immaculada Concepcion* during the 1937 Philippine International Eucharistic Congress.²

In the case of the *Oblation*, the presence of a living heroine, Gregoria de Jesus-Nakpil, the remarried widow of Andres Bonifacio, served as the sacred link to the memory of martyrdom during the *Oblation*'s unveiling at UP Padre Faura on National Heroes Day, November 30, 1935,³ being one of the guests of honor who unveiled the statue's dedication plaque.⁴ President Jorge Bocobo's acceptance speech congratulated Guillermo Tolentino, the *Oblation*'s sculptor, for a job well done, and highlighted the key iconographic values of the statue and its pedestal as appropriate metaphors for the public reproduction of a religious passion for national sacrifice. Bocobo also charges his "congregation" with their duty to re-memorize and re-pay this represented sacrifice:

...On this solid and immovable base rests the spirit of sacrifice of our national heroes. There the heroic figure opens his arms and exposes himself to every manner of danger and suffering—without fear, without thought for himself and with his face towards the distant heights, the summits of abnegation and of patriotic duty...it is well, therefore, that our students and faculty members go about their daily tasks, should see in their midst this monument which stands as a perpetual rebuke to every unworthy design and act, and is at the same time a continual encomium for every worthwhile and wholesome ambition and resolve. When a student is discouraged in his studies but beholds this monument to heroism, he shall, I am sure, take heart. When selfishness begins to loom in the vision of our students for their life plans, the sight of this remembrance of the sacrifices of our heroes will dispel selfishness from the horizon of the mind...I wish to thank the initiators of the idea for having added not only to the artistic beauty of the campus, but also to the moral assets of the institution. For certainly such a monument as this which embodies Rizal's ideals and high vision, Bonifacio's indomitable fighting spirit, Luna's military talent, the political philosophy of Mabini, and the supreme patriotism of all the unknown compatriots who have died in a thousand battlefields, I say a monument of such high symbolism is of great spiritual value on this campus where we strive especially to cultivate the spirit of patriotism (Bocobo-Olivar, 164).

Note the narrative construction that interlinks "sacrifice," "seeing," and "moral values." They are situated in such a manner as to privilege not only the *Oblation* as a central symbol of sacrificial passion that results in patriotic duty; it is also crucial that one *envisions* this

“symbology” to produce the requisite psychic reflection and social action. The *Oblation* thus serves as a representation of what Michel Foucault would consider as a “panoptic gaze,” a discursive narrative that subjects and renders all who gaze at “him” to “his will.”

It is the performance of this “duty” that we will briefly note in the period of ritualistic passion during the tenure of Bocobo as UP President. Between 1934 and 1939, Bocobo celebrated National Heroes Day (a holiday that Bocobo himself was primarily responsible for institutionalizing starting in 1927 as then-acting UP President) using the combined student and faculty bodies of UP as his “congregation” to “re-enact” the sites of sacrifice. The 1934 celebrations of National Heroes’ Day during Bocobo’s first year as UP President were poignantly *Pasyon*-like in its ritualistic observance of sorrowful commemoration. The celebrations were also vintage Bocobo in its national martyrdom discourse which the UP students and faculty had already been interpellated:

...National Heroes Day celebration consisted of a pilgrimage to the Luneta Rizal Monument via Fort Santiago, site of Rizal’s prison cell. Five thousand students and faculty members went bareheaded and on foot. A short program was held at the foot of the monument, including a convocation and a closing prayer. In simple but impressive ceremonies, the U.P. also placed and dedicated a marker on the exact spot where Dr. Jose Rizal was shot. Coeds representing all colleges of the university unveiled the marker (381-382, emphases mine).

The purpose of these “ceremonies,” according to Bonifacio S. Salamanca, was to provide “important elements of the socialization process...[to] further enhance nationalist feelings, (especially) if they revolve around symbols of national identification, like heroes” (Salamanca 1985, 216). But Bocobo’s more nuanced language justifying these events as not only fostering nationalism, but more importantly, edifying these “performances” as a felt internalization of the virtues of martyric sacrifice makes a clearer, more “spiritual” connection between the episteme of nationalism as an affective solidarity with the Filipino dead of the turn-of-the-century revolution and wars, and (Bocobo’s/UP’s) current, pragmatic purpose of building a nation sanctified by martyric sacrifice:

...to foster reverence for our heroes because they are the concrete examples of what our country’s ideals are. Respect for them, for their

*memory, for their deeds, and for what they typify, constitutes a great uplifting power for the young people, and a firm unifying force for the whole country. Great nations are invariably those that have an abiding respect for their heroes. **Respect** for heroes unites the living and the dead and makes for the continued growth and progress of the race* (Bocobo-Olivar 1975, 319-320, emphases mine).

By contrast, the 1936 National Heroes Day celebrations seemed like a typical “University Day,” featuring a flag ceremony at the UP campus, a military parade, first aid demonstration by coeds, and a “sham Battle of Burnham Green, complete with gas masks.” The 1937-39 celebrations, on the other hand, hewed closer to the “pilgrimage” aspect of ritual re-memorization to the sites of passionate heroic sacrifice. The 1937 celebrations consisted of “a pilgrimage to Calamba, Laguna, birthplace of Jose Rizal. On this occasion, President Bocobo stressed the need for making the birthplace of the country’s foremost hero a national shrine, adding that the idea of the pilgrimage was to call attention to the sad neglect of the historical spot.... Another pilgrimage, this time to the Barasoain Church, marked the 1938 celebration. Four thousand students participated in the pilgrimage during which occasion the U.P. placed a historical marker to commemorate the site of the Malolos Congress. This marker was unveiled by Miss Maria Paterno, niece of Pedro Paterno, president of the Congress” (383).

The year 1939 was particularly significant for ritualizing the *Oblation*, for as Celia Bocobo-Olivar relates:

...President Bocobo initiated a ceremony of allegorical significance by the graduating class of the UP before the Oblation monument. It was featured by responsive readings from excerpts from Rizal’s El Filibusterismo and Mabini’s ‘Decalogue,’ and a symbolical dedication and recitation of the patriotic pledge by the graduating class. Other numbers included the singing of the ‘Philippine Triumphant’ and ‘Aking Bayan’ and the declamation of Guerrero’s poem, ‘Patria’ by Alberto Cacio. Leading the entire graduating class in the responsive reading of Rizal’s challenge to (the) youth and Mabini’s moral invocations was Ahmed Garcia. Felix Makasiar, as the ‘Spirit of Ibarra,’ handed a lighted torch to one of the seniors, enjoining the new graduates to spread enlightenment to their countrymen. With this torch, the torches held by other seniors were lighted, and the latter lighted the torches of the rest of the class. It

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was impressive to see the entire class in cap and gown holding lighted torches. Macario Evangelista, as the 'Spirit of the Revolution,' gave a sword to a representative of the class, asking the seniors to defend their country as their fathers did in 1896 while Luz Balmaceda as 'Mother Philippines,' passed the Filipino flag to another member of the class, telling the graduates to consecrate their lives to the people. The graduating class was represented by Benjamin Roa, Ernesto Santos, and Ramon Fernandez. The graduating class (then) recited the following patriotic pledge:

"I hereby renew my love of the Philippines, my country. This I do out of full-hearted gratitude to those who dared and died to make the Philippines lift up her head in rightful pride. Further, I hereby resolve to consecrate my life, my noblest thoughts, and my utmost endeavors to the freedom, the strength, the prosperity, and the happiness of my beloved country and people" (384-385).

Bonifacio Salamanca's evaluation of these rituals indicated its primary pedagogical function, and its brief tenure: "It was typically Bocobian, a bit ostentatious but not frivolous and, in a way, Bocobo's redemption of a forecast by an obviously ardent admirer...that his rise to the presidency of the university is most fortunate for the youth of the land in whose welfare...he has always been interested...Unfortunately for Bocobo, it was to be the first and last such ceremony during his presidency. Shortly thereafter, Quezon appointed him Secretary of Public Instruction..." (Salamanca, 217).

The memory of this particular event may have faded quickly, but the practisanal discourse was still operant as the *Oblation* "moved base" to UP Diliman in February 1949. The asserted symbol of sacrificial passion that the *Oblation* re-presents for the subsequent decades would be elevated into a virtual dogma, especially during the ritual-conscious period of UP President Carlos P. Romulo, when the by-then accepted practice (among protesters, anyway) of dressing up the *Oblation* with black cloth would be construed and decried as "acts of sacrilege and desecration." Moreover, the underlying sanctity of the *Oblation*'s significance continues in the present via the mysterious and mystical practices of a small group of "cult-like" advocates who are known to routinely offer "prayers and offerings" to the bronze *Oblation* in front of Quezon Hall.⁵

THE “PROFANELY SECULAR”

On February 11, 1949, the *Oblation* was moved from UP Manila to UP Diliman in a slow, raucous convoy that symbolized the official “transfer” of the University to its newest campus, in time for UP’s quadragesimal anniversary, and after a period of controversy in which the budget allocation for the transfer was “held hostage” by political interests in Congress. This transfer continued the pre-War “reverence” of the statue as a “sacred image,” as the statue’s movement was demanded as a condition for the student body’s acquiescence of the University’s movement to the then-isolated precincts of Diliman. Tolentino, who orchestrated the engineering feat of detaching the statue from its old base, putting it in a cradle on the flatbed truck, and moving it to its new site in what is now Oblation Plaza, wrapped the *Oblation* in a tight canvas cover, which can be seen as an artist’s simple precaution, but also as an extension of the spiritual investment of sacrality, since such a practice of “covering” statues when they are moved, or else presented in non-idealized circumstances, are also the norm in Roman Catholicism.

In December 1957, however, the culture of sacral “reverence” for the *Oblation* collided with the developing secular ideology of treating the *Oblation* as a representation of the University’s student community during the peaceful student protests led by the University Student Council (USC), which at this time was excoriating the UP Board of Regents (BOR) for failing to appoint a permanent President since the untimely removal of Dr. Vidal Tan in 1955.⁶ The protests peaked between December 16-17, 1957, when the USC, led by Chairman Fernando A. Laguna and Vice-Chairman Homobono Adaza, conducted a series of unauthorized student motorcades and demonstrations in Quezon City and the vicinity of Malacañang Palace, that climaxed a three-day “student’s strike” in UP Diliman, in which the student body walked out of their classes and converged at the BOR’s offices at Quezon Hall to vent their anger at the “President-less” situation. It was at this protest that the *Oblation* was first draped with a black cloth, and whose hands were hung with placards, as a symbol of student *protest*. This unprecedented student action, which *The Philippine Collegian* called “the first of its kind in the history of the University,” was unsettling enough for the University Council to declare an early Christmas

break. The action eventually resulted in a January 2, 1958 “dialogue” between the UP Executive Committee with the USC to discourage future “student strikes,” the appointment of Vicente Sinco as UP President a few days later, and the March 30, 1958 prosecution of Laguna and Adaza as “ringleaders” of the student strike.⁷ This initial student action, although tame by later standards, also irrevocably transformed the representational iconography of the *Oblation* in the eyes of its most valued public, the UP student body, who now saw this statue not as an image of “reverence for heroic sacrifices of the past,” but now as an equally validated image for “student activism against oppression and injustice in the present.” In short, the epistemology of the *Oblation* changed from a “sacred sacrificial” to a “secular”—and thus “profane”—image.

This flipping of the *Oblation*’s iconography can be seen in the subsequent major case involving the draping of the statue by student protesters, in which the *Oblation*’s status as a sacred representation—in the eyes of the UP administration, which still “sees” the statue based on Bocobo’s sacerdotal legacy—is subjected to an act of “desecration.” This is to be found in the student protests of December 1967, and the administrative “reply” to this protest on September 1968. As the *Philippine Collegian* reports in its September 4, 1968 headline story:

Three students face one-month suspensions from their classes, as penalties for ‘debasing the University Oblation,’ during a demonstration on academic freedom held last year before the Administration Building...The three students...Sixto Carlos, Jr.; Ellec Cortes and Monico Atienza, all political science students of the College of Arts and Sciences...are given an alternative. They can make public apologies at the next university convocation and escape the penalty suspensions...The decision was handed down by the Executive Committee of the University Council, which found the students guilty upon recommendation of the Special Investigating Committee which was formed to study their case. The decision was signed by Dr. Francisco Nemenzo Sr., dean of the College of Arts and Sciences...The three students have been accused of having ‘climbed the statue of the University Oblation during the height of the demonstration and in the presence of hundred of spectators and demonstrators...with the purpose of humiliating university officials, willfully and intentionally tied jackets and sweaters around the waist of the Oblation so that it would look like a skirt to the viewers below...the demonstration was held last December 15, 1967 by students and faculty members to

protest the alleged 'harrassment (sic) and persecution of liberal and progressive members in front of both the Palma and Quezon Halls...The original complainant who filed the case against the accused was Major Ponce V. Cabinian, chief security officer of the University. He charged the students with 'desecrating the University Oblation.'

The somewhat delayed and disjointed reaction of the UP administration to impose sanctions on these offenders, nine months after the filing of the charge sheet of UP's chief of security, provided sufficient grist for the *Collegian's* writers to harp on when the decision finally came. Three articles in the same issue, all critical of the judgment, are noteworthy. Perhaps the most perceptive article came from then-*Collegian* columnist Franklin M. Drilon who wrote:

...Probably realizing that the term 'desecration' is appropriate only for acts of irreverence to holy objects...and no amount of argument will convince even the feeble-minded that the oblation is a holy object...Dean Nemenzo convicted the defendants of 'debasing the Oblation.' When it became apparent that the charge cannot find support in the University Code, a new pronouncement came-the three students are guilty of staging a skit, a play or a farce without the proper university permit. In other words, they were charged with one offense, convicted of another, and adjudged guilty of a third...we cannot resist the conviction that the decision by any standard is an injustice created against the three students...It serves as a grim warning to all of us that the Administration cannot tolerate dissent in the University. If the Oblation symbolizes freedom of inquiry, dissent, search for truth and student militancy, then it might as well be permanently draped with a black robe...(2, emphasis mine)

There are two striking points that Drilon makes in this commentary: that the student body "fails to recognize" the "sacred status" of the *Oblation*; and that the *Oblation* is instead presumed to "symbolize freedom of inquiry, dissent, search for truth and student militancy." The first may have arisen as a result of the inability (or perhaps refusal) of UP administrations to continue the sacralizing rituals of the *Oblation* during subsequent terms (that of Bienvenido Gonzales, Vidal Tan, Vicente Sinco, and Carlos P. Romulo) leading up to this event. This neglect/inability/refusal to "sacralize" the *Oblation* had instead "secularized" the statue's significance in the minds of UP students. Perhaps the continuation of the sacralizing rituals by UP

would have proven sufficient epistemic deterrent to prevent the draping, clothing or otherwise “desecration” or “defacement” that the statue has allegedly “suffered” in the hands of the students during the Sixties.

The second point of Drilon’s article is more intriguing, since it specifically disavows the heroic narrative postulated by Bocobo, and reinforced in the *Oblation Plaza* itself through the emplacement of commemorative markers quoting Rizal’s *El Filibusterismo* during the 1958 bronze *Oblation’s* dedication. Drilon’s point instead advocates what may now be considered as a “classic statement” with regards to the *Oblation’s* contemporary meaning to the student body, i.e., the *Oblation* as a representation of the UP student’s ideals of academic freedom and assertive militancy.

The other article by Greg de Guzman is a more detailed blow-by-blow account of the events from the protest and “clothing” incident of December 5, 1967, to the criticism following the decision of early September 1968. De Guzman pointedly refers to the complainant’s assertion of both his ignorance as to “which precise provision of the University Code or of the Rules and Regulations of the UCCSOA or the Revised Penal Code was supposedly violated by the students;” and to the complainant’s alleged decision to file the case “only after he was instructed to do so by the Secretary of the University,” Ms. Iluminada Panlilio, who had also appointed the panelists of the Special Investigating Committee. De Guzman asserts that all these indicated a conspiracy to silence student protests ordered by Romulo (and ultimately by President Marcos), but promulgated by Panlilio in order to shield her boss—or rather, bosses (5, 8).

The third article, the published manifesto of the “Partisans for Nationalist Student-Power” (presumably one of the organizers of the December 5, 1967 demonstration) condemns the actions of the administration, and notes, once more, that “there is no such thing as ‘desecration’ which may be properly termed as a violation under existing University rules”...and that “since there [are] no existing rules...which can possibly cover the complaint of ‘desecration’...the direct punishment being meted out...constitutes an usurpation of powers properly belonging to the University Council.” The manifesto then leads to the organization’s motherhood statement on the matter of “desecration:”

It is a peculiarity in this University that the Administration hypocritically preaches against the 'desecration' of symbolic figures while having enough gall to throw the human and political rights of the faculty and the students into the garbage can. Indeed there is enough gall to be so pious and moralistic about such 'conventions and symbolisms' of our society 'which everyone should revere and respect if he so desires to maintain his good standing...in his community' while the same Administration powers allow the pallid prostitution of the University for foreign purposes... (5, emphasis mine)

CONCLUSION

In hindsight, what all the student commentators of the event missed was that the “desecration” charge, though correctly not written into the University rules, was nonetheless inculcated as a “moral force” from the Bocobo years⁸ via an administrative re-imagination (or, following Hobsbawm’s notion, an “invented tradition”) of the *Oblation* as a “sacred figure” due to its edifying and commemorative purpose in honor of the martyrs of nationalist revolution *specifically* from 1896-1906. This edifying iconography and martyric symbolism of the “sacred *Oblation*” before the War was then “imagined” for his Sixties-era community as a visual form/force by the complainant. The complainant’s “sermon” of the requisite (moral) value system that students should enact on the *Oblation* was then directed to an epistemically uncomprehending/unyielding student body of the late-Sixties, which were “ignorant” of the earlier religious/mystical-nationalist narrative.

Moreover, the tentative and interrupted project in foregrounding this religious/mystical-nationalist narrative through performed (and thus necessarily repetitious) rituals had removed the impository force of this obligation, and in the empty epistemic space of official “priestly” neglect, the “sacred” had turned into the “profane.” In the search for answers to the *secular, non-sectarian, and materialist* insistence of legal statutes aimed towards the defense and fulfillment of a student-centered ideal of “academic freedom,” the moral law of “sacred commemoration” that overrides this public’s discourse of “freedom and militancy” with the contra-discourse of “reverence and responsibility” is thus simply “unimaginable” and unacceptable. The notion that the student body is obliged to “revere” and defer to the *Oblation*’s sacrality is weighed

down by the accusation that this notion is irrelevant to the socio-political conditions of the Philippines during the late Sixties. The notion also implies a reactionary, patriarchal, anti-youth authoritarianism that student radicalism in UP had been countering since the mid-Sixties. This primary conflict between the semiotic “readings” of the *Oblation* between “originators” of the “sacred” discourse,” and the instigators of counter-discourse continues to reproduce itself in the present contentious interpretations of University policies and “symbols” like the *Oblation* between the administration, faculty, non-teaching staff, alumni, and student body.

What these symbolic contentions reveal is the manner by which epistemic modernity has played out in the realm of the state university, itself a microcosm of the disruptive nature of modernity’s imposition and reconfiguration in the Philippines from modernity’s turn-of-the century introduction via American imperialism, to the contemporary period of neocolonial relations and nationalist aspirations. Both the “production” and promulgation of the *Oblation* as a sacred symbol of national heroism, as well as the profanely secular interjection of the *Oblation*’s supposedly symbolic defiance of the youth against foreign oppression and authoritarian injustice, are seen by this study as equal and twin-faceted results of the arrival of modern ideas and concepts of nationalism, secularism, and universalism in the Philippines. This “doubled” nature of Philippine modernity is part of what Homi Bhabha would argue as integral to the formation of the “postcolonial subject,” which is seen as both “split” (between their identities as “native” versus “colonial”) and “doubled”, and thus results in a plurality of identities, and the deconstruction of the modern subject—the national citizen—as heterogenous and polyglottal.

The *Oblation*, originating from a “native” anti-colonial mode of resistance, is thus now “clothed” with the authoritative (*because* administrative) aura of a sacred—thus universally inviolate—sacrificial to the realization of nationhood. Eventually, that hermetic historicist status is questioned by a self-aware student body which ennoble their own contributions to a “true realization” of such a sacrifice-for-nationhood by their activist resistance to the perceived “errors” of that very authority which composed this narrative. It is in the space between and among the “doubled-and-switching codes” of an asserted sacrality *and* profanity, authority *and* resistance, that the nature of the *Oblation*’s sacrifice, as well as the subject whom “he” represents, can perhaps be significantly interpellated.

NOTES

¹This ability to conflate different concepts together also helps us in formulating a general relationship between epistemological categories, not only among simplified “key words” and their more complex modalities, but also to interlink this “practice of naming” with their practitioners, the writers, academics, artists, and publics who jointly have a stake in the validity (and “performativity”) of the term. Again, it is important to emphasize the ability of reiteration (the “performative”) in stabilizing this self-generated “structure.” Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus is thus necessary to understand the productive system of (re)naming terms based on often-contending agential interests in a field of knowledge-production.

²Although centrally connected to the Philippine International Eucharistic Congress of 1937, which was the Catholic Church’s first attempt at 20th Century reforms in the Philippines as a consequence of the near-disastrous losses of the anti-Spanish revolution and the influx of American Protestant missionaries, and a growing trend in Rome that would eventually climax with the Vatican II Council, the erection of such statues in the church plaza areas was well on its way by the late-19th Century, as a consequence of the increasing role that public statuary played in the Philippine Colonial space during the last years of Spanish rule.

³After Independence, the Philippine Congress enacted the law declaring August 28 as National Heroes Day, and renamed the holiday on November 30 as Bonifacio Day.

⁴Another guest of honor was then newly-elected Commonwealth President Manuel L. Quezon, whose own role in the *Oblation*’s formation, as well as his keynote address during the *Oblation*’s inaugural, is just as significant. As the premier *kuya* of a triumvirate of early-20th Century nationalists associated with both Philippine nationalism as well as the birth of UP (which includes Jorge Bocobo and Rafael Palma), Manuel Quezon oversaw the transformation of UP from an American-imposed colonial instrument of imperial tutelage to an institution that “resisted imperialist ambitions” (for as long as they adhered to Quezon’s own political interests). By so doing, Quezon inadvertently sowed the seeds of student radicalism on the UP campus, especially during his fight against Palma during the Hare-Hawes Cutting Act controversy of 1934.

⁵Proof of this activity often comes in serendipitous moments. During my initial reconnoitering of the *Oblation* Plaza to photograph the statue on the late evening of September 19, 2006, accompanied by a friend

with his newly-bought digital camera, I had come across one such offering for the first time. It was a mound of white rice, cooked, roughly shaped into a circular mound roughly thirty centimeters across by two centimeters high. It was apparently larger earlier on, as a tracing of the “offered” rice extended in a larger oval about sixty centimeters across, staining the gray-black gravel wash of the plaza pavement with a dull ecru. What I reached that night was apparently the remains of an offering given just before sunset, which has been reduced due to the local fauna (birds) feasting on it. A second opportunity arose on the late afternoon of August 22, 2007, when I was informed via text message by Dr. Norma A. Respicio that a “kind of ceremony” was going on at the *Oblation* plaza, involving two men dressed in office *barongs* “praying” across each other in a ritualized manner, with the abovementioned offering of rice in between them. When I reached the site a few minutes later, the “performers” were gone, leaving only the mound of rice in the same spot where I saw the 2006 offering. Birds (particularly a boisterous flock of *maya* which are adept at scavenging) were flying in and eating out to feed on the rice heap. I later asked the security guard stationed at the ground floor of Quezon Hall if they knew these persons who were “offering rice at the *Oblation*,” and he claimed it was one of the people who worked within the building. Pressing him for a clearer answer, he simply said that the person had been “feeding the birds with the rice.” Although I left my calling card with him along with the explicit request that he give this to the person so that I could talk with him about his “offering,” there were no responses. I have interpreted the lack of response as a sign of evasion to authority among those who undertook this “bird-feeding” habit. The position of the mound of rice, directly in front of and to the center of the Diamond Jubilee marker at the rear side of the *Oblation*, a position where visiting luminaries could normally lay wreaths during important ceremonial occasions, argued against a simplistic explanation of bird feeding. The spot is too “ceremonial” and spatially strategic to be a simple bird feeding station, and indicates a far more ritualistic function: a *pag-aalay* in the native “folk” tradition of giving offerings to the sacred departed, which along with cooked rice would usually include lit candles, glassfuls of liquor—and prayers. Whoever performed this ritual had an intelligent grasp of the *Oblation*’s sacral status, the “folk” traditions of elemental offering,⁸ and of their own role as followers of a sacralizing tradition extending, as Iletto would argue, into the folk Christian realm of Apolinario de la Cruz, Andres Bonifacio, and Felipe Salvador.

⁸This removal, and subsequent extended vacancy of the position of President of UP, was allegedly due to the political allegiance of University President tied to the current party in power. Vidal Tan was the Liberal

Party's nominee in 1951, which saw the earlier removal of Bienvenido Gonzales—a Nacionalista Party-appointed President. It was the Nacionalista Party which defeated the Liberals in the 1955 Presidential election, and the otherwise upbeat term of President Ramon Magsaysay was marred by this one inexplicable inability to promptly appoint an “NP-acceptable” UP President after his occupation of Malacañang. However, one would have to bear in mind that the term of the UP President was already fixed at seven years, the years covering 1955-1957 supposedly being part of Tan's term.

⁷Laguan was suspended for nine months as a student, and dropped as USC Chairperson, while Adaza was permanently dropped from the University. It took the defense of then-Senator and future Vice-President Emmanuel Pelaez to bring this “miscarriage of justice” to public attention.

⁸Let us also remember that one of the members of the Board of Regents most responsible for the elevation of Jorge Bocobo to the UP Presidency in 1934 was Carlos P. Romulo. Romulo nominated Bocobo during the official BOR meeting called to elect Rafael Palma's successor. See Salamanca, in Alfonso 1985, 206; also see Bocobo-Olivar 1975, 325-327.

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