

Mary as Mother in the Flores de Mayo in Poblacion, Oslob

Patricia Marion Y. Lopez

University of the Philippines Diliman

ABSTRACT

The paper reflects on the meanings of the Flores de Mayo ritual as performed in a town on the southeastern coast of Cebu through the examination of Mary as a “semantically open” symbol. The essay illustrates how ideas about Mary are constructed through the discourse of the Church and are in turn, reinforced through a Church-instituted and regulated ritual. An analysis of selected elements of the ritual however, reveals that the symbol of Mary has the potential to hold “other” kinds of meanings that slip in between “official” and “unofficial” discourses, highlighting how Mary continues to be a negotiated field between church authorities and the popular faithful.

Keywords: Marian devotion, ritual, Cebu

INTRODUCTION

The enduring devotion to the Virgin Mary in Catholic parts of the Philippines since the beginning of Spanish colonization in the sixteenth century is partly attributed to the survival of pre-Christian belief systems despite the efforts of Spanish missionaries to stamp out all perceived “heathen” traces of the indigenous culture. The worship of beings believed to inhabit natural places like mountains, caves, and forests found new expression in Catholic imagery and ritual as noted by Mojares in his analysis of the discourses surrounding the miraculous Virgin of Guadalupe in Guadalupe, Cebu.

Christian images in the Philippines were “inserted” into a culture with a tradition of sacred iconography. Precolonial Filipinos had religious images of wood, stone, and other materials, called *likha* (invention), *larawan* (image), or *landing* (shadow). Sculpted animal figures or anthropomorphic representations, these were placed in makeshift shrines in fields, riverbanks, or caves, and to these images, propitiatory

rites (animal sacrifices, food offerings) were made. It is not difficult to conceive that the Guadalupe an image was absorbed into an older system of iconic practices ...

... The Virgin's "appearance" in Cebu could not have been disassociated from an existing complex of legends about an Earth goddess. A myth widely diffused in the Philippines, it tells of a female deity who inhabits a cave (mountain, forest) and is regarded as a supernatural provider who periodically appears and disappears, a goddess of fertility who once inhabited the mountains and has now vanished. (146)

The resulting syncretism of precolonial Southeast Asian, European, and Catholic myths and behaviors is the product of the tenuous relationship between church/colonial authorities and the colonized/popular faithful, and the processes of negotiation, appropriation and re-appropriation that have occurred. Throughout history, church leaders in the Philippines actively encouraged Marian devotion but also periodically enforced regulatory/corrective measures in the performance of rituals and in the interpretation of Mary's place in the Church whenever the popular laity took things "out of hand." This dynamic process of accommodation/toleration versus regulation/censure continues well into the present and illustrates how the symbol of Mary has always been a highly contested terrain. This is complicated by Mary's inescapable feminine identity as Mother of God or as Virgin Most Pure, also tied into the long history of patriarchy within the Church and in Spanish colonial Philippines.

This paper aims to add to the body of literature on Marian devotion in the Philippines by reflecting on the meanings of the Flores de Mayo in Poblacion, Oslob, a fourth class municipality in southeastern Cebu. The research situates the Flores de Mayo, as practiced in a town, within the broader history of negotiation described above. It seeks to provide insight into how meanings about Mary are constructed by examining a devotional ritual as a symbolic performance utilizing frames from interpretive anthropology.¹

A basic premise is that the symbol of Mary is polysemic and semantically "open" (see V. and E. Turner, Appendix A). The Flores de Mayo as a religious ritual constructs notions of who Mary is by reiterating her virtues, her relationship to Christ and to devotees. While the ritual represents the official discourse of the Church, it also articulates, when examined closely, differing discourses, which in turn reveal an unstable and dynamic field of meanings. Meanings are viewed as multiple (as opposed to singular), conflicting (as opposed to unified), and constantly in a state of

production (as opposed to stable and “natural”). The meaning of a “text” is not dictated by the “author” but is ultimately constructed by its “reader.”

The Church is perceived as the authority when it comes to matters of faith and doctrine, but the vast population of devotees contributes to the construction of meanings that render an object of devotion “sacred.” Mojares provides a useful description of the processes by which meanings are constructed and reconstructed, paying particular attention to the devotees’ creative agency in forming their own narratives.

In a semantic field in which motifs and details coalesced, displaced, or collapsed into each other, those who regulated the faith (priests, catechists) could select and heighten those elements they deemed relevant and useful, and delete or suppress those that were hostile and inconvenient. At the same time, of course, the faithful themselves could disentangle, combine or imagine elements of the image according to their own desire. We have to pay attention not only to the essentializing and codifying strategies of the dominant but the creativity of the faithful’s simplifying and meaning-making moves. (151)

THE FLORES DE MAYO AS A GENERALIZED DEVOTION



Figure 1. Photo of the Immaculate Conception church taken in December 2011.

The Flores is an adaptation of a European Marian devotion that gained popularity in the Philippines in the nineteenth century.² It is often confused with another popular May time tradition, the Santacruzán, which is held to commemorate St. Helen's finding of the True Cross.³ The Flores de Mayo is a monthlong devotion to Mary, consisting of the daily recitation of the rosary and special prayers, the singing of hymns, and the offering of flowers to the image of the Virgin. In Cebu, the Flores is held in practically every town and barangay with children or young girls as its main participants. The devotion normally culminates with a procession at the end of the month. The ritual is typically performed inside a church or chapel although it is believed that the devotion was intended originally to be practiced in homes. To ensure the proper performance of the ritual, devotees use a Flores de Mayo guidebook available in their locality, written in the vernacular. The guidebooks are usually written by priests and are officially approved by the Archdiocese of Cebu.

Apart from being a form of Marian veneration, the Flores was initially intended as a form of spiritual formation for the layperson through daily sacrifices, prayers, and meditations, packaged as spiritual offerings to Mary. It is said that the practice started in Rome as a means of counteracting infidelity and immorality among students in the Roman College of the Society of Jesus (Holweck n.p.). An example of an Italian guidebook published in 1733 in Rome is *Il mese di Maria o sia il mese di maggio consagrato a Maria: coll' esercizio di varj fiori di virti*, which roughly translates to "The month of Mary or the month of May consecrated to Mary: A collection of exercises of different flowers of virtue." Flowers are a metaphor of special sacrifices an individual devotee makes every day to offer to Mary. The carrying over of this practice to the Philippines is evident in the earliest known Tagalog Flores de Mayo guidebook in the Philippines, which uses the same metaphor and includes in its instructions for devotees a list of daily pious actions as offerings to Mary.⁴ The offering of these types of spiritual gifts to the Virgin is no longer evident in the current performances of the ritual in Cebu even though the tradition of offering of actual flowers persists.

In Poblacion, Oslob, *hermanas*,⁵ members of a group called the Children of Mary,⁶ ensure the proper performance of the Flores de Mayo every year. The *hermanas* come to church every day of May donned in white veils and dresses, with the Miraculous Medal fastened with a blue ribbon around their necks. The more senior *hermanas*⁷ usually lead the recitation of the rosary at the beginning of the ritual and read aloud the prayers and meditational passages in the guidebook while the younger girls assemble at the back of the church and prepare to carry decorated letters forming the words AVE MARIA to the front of the church. The *hermanas* also assist

the young children dressed as angels, who also accompany the girls to bring the decorated letters to the front of the church. Throughout the ritual, several Marian hymns are sung. At the end of the ritual, the hermanas, along with the other devotees who come to attend the Flores, place flowers in a basket placed in front of the altar as an offering to the Virgin.



Figure 2. Photo of hermanas and angels taken in May 2012.



Figure 3. Photo of procession in May 2012.

Following Victor and Edith Turner (n.p.) one can say that the Flores falls under the category of “generalized devotions” as it follows a Church-sanctioned and standard format with the aim of instilling pious behavior. As opposed to pilgrimages which are “liminal,” generalized devotions, often formalized in a sodality or fraternity, “... attempt to purify, and render more virtuous, life in a familiar, structured place, rather than to seek initiatory renovation through a journey to a far shrine—one where the Mother of God is believed to have appeared to a humble lay person ...” Generalized devotions, in contrast to liminal ones, tend to be more structured and institutionally regulated.

The generalized character of the Flores in Cebu can be seen in the interventions of the archdiocese in the performance of the devotion to ensure its compliance with Church teachings, reinforced through the publication of guidebooks. In recent years, church authorities prescribed the celebration of the mass within the ritual of the Flores to stress the primacy of the liturgical rites of the Church over Marian devotion. The establishment of this new ritual structure necessitated a revised guidebook, *Ang Han-ay sa Flores de Mayo*, originally published by the archdiocese in 2007, which includes the celebration of the mass within the other elements of the ritual. The new guide is also a more modern, comprehensive, and easier to follow version of the older guide, *Bulan sa Mayo: Hinikay ug pinupo sa daghanang basahon nga nagadayeg kang Maria Santisima* (Month of May: Prepared and picked from the many readings that give praise to Holy Mary), originally printed in 1915.⁸ Alongside the inclusion of the mass was the altering of some of the texts used in the devotion to shift the orientation of the ritual from Marian to Christ-centric. The content of the new guidebook also stresses the centrality of biblical passages in the interpretation of Mary’s identity and role in the Church. An observation of the Flores in selected parishes in Cebu reveals that most communities with the resources to hold a mass every day have complied with this mandate even though the older guidebook (*Bulan sa Mayo*) continues to be more popular.⁹

BULAN SA MAYO

Rosary Songs are usually sung in between mysteries.

*This is typically ended with the singing of the *Salve Regina* (Hail Holy Queen) and the *Letania* (Litany).

ANG HANAY SA FLORES DE MAYO (with the Mass)

Rosary Songs are usually sung in between mysteries.

*This is typically ended with the singing/recitation of the *Salve Regina* (Hail Holy Queen) and the *Letania* (Litany).

Act of Contrition Memorare	Ang Pag-ampo Ang Paghalad sa pulong nga 'AVE' Ang Pagdala sa pulong nga 'M-A-R-I-A'(Presenting of the letters <i>AVE MARIA</i> to the altar)
Pagpalandong... (Meditation) Ejemplo Pag-ampo	Ang Pamalandong (Meditation) Ang Santos nga Misa (Holy Mass) Ang Pag-ampo sa Katilingban (Community Prayer)
* The presenting of the letters <i>AVE MARIA</i> to the altar is done after.	
Paghalad sa mga Bulak kang Maria Santisima (Offering of flowers to Holy Mary)	Ang Paghalad sa mga Bulak (Offering of Flowers) Ang Panamilit (Farewell) Ang Pag-ampo: Regina Caeli/Angelus Mga Awit alang kang Maria (Songs for Mary)

MARY AS DOMINANT RITUAL SYMBOL



Figure 4. Photo of Virgin taken in May 2011.

Mary as a complex of signifieds, using Victor Turner's frame, is a "dominant ritual symbol" with "semantic polarity" (cited in V. and E. Turner, Appendix A). The meanings signified by dominant symbols fall within a spectrum between the "ideological" or "normative" pole and the "sensory" or "orectic" pole. The normative pole refers to "ideas, values, legal principles, norms of social structure, theological doctrines, and the like...," while the sensory pole represents "objects, activities, relationships, and ideas which, in the relevant culture, may be expected to arouse emotion and desire, feeling and willing ..." (V. and E. Turner). While the divide between "sensorial" and "normative" may be unwieldy, it is useful in viewing the doctrines and teachings of the Church versus the interpretations of the popular laity as oppositions between a tendency towards a generalized and orthodox interpretation and a contextual, particularized interpretation on the other.

A consistent element in the older and newer guidebook is the following prayer to Mary. This prayer (referred to as the *pag-ampo*¹⁰) is usually accompanied by the procession of AVE MARIA letters from the back to the front of the church.

Putli uyamut nga Birhen Maria, hinigugma namong Inahan, nakaila kami kanimo; kay ikaw man ang among makagagahom nga Mananabang, ayaw kawanga ang among mga pag-ampo, sukad karon nagasaad na kami sa pagdebosyon kanimo ug pagsunod sa imong mga Birtudes. Hatagi kami sa imong Santos nga grasya aron makaila kami sa among mga sala, mabiyaan ang mga dautang pamatasan, ug mag-alagad na kami sa imong mahigugmaong Anak. Ug aron amo kining madangat, halaran ka karon namo niining mga pagpanghupaw sa among kasingkasing nga among ipahinungod sa imong matam-is nga ngalan, MARIA.

Maaghop uyamot nga Inahan sa Dios ug Inahan man usab namo, hinumdumi nga kaming mga alaut nga kaliwat ni Adan, imong gipanganak sa tiilan sa Krus.

Anak nga pinalangga sa Dios nga Amahan, pangayo-a ang Diosnon niyang kaluoy ug hatagi ang among mga mata sa mga mapait nga luha aron among madangat ang pasaylo sa among mga sala...

Dios te salve...

Rayna sa langit ng yuta, panaplipdi kami sa tanang mga katalagman sa kalibutan ug luwasa kaming nagsaulog kanimo sa gahom sa among mabangis nga kaaway..

Dios te salve...

Ikaw nga putli nga esposa sa Dios Espiritu Santo, idangat kami sa imong Diosnong Esposo sa usa ka mainit nga gugma ug sa mga grasya nga kinahanglanon sa kaayohan sa among mga kalag...

Dios te salve...

Alagad na pinalabi sa Dios, hatagi kaming mga makakasala sa imong Langitnong panabang ug tabangi kaming nagadayeg kanimo sa among makalilisang nga oras sa pagtinga...

Dios te salve...(Ang Han-ay sa Flores de Mayo 9-11)

[Pure Virgin Mary, our beloved Mother, we know you; that is why we take refuge in you because you are our almighty Helper, do not let our prayers be in vain, from today, we promise devotion to you and to follow your virtues. Give us your holy grace in order for us to recognize our sins, we will leave our evil ways and we will serve your loving Son. And in order for us to attain this, we now offer you these sighs of our hearts which we will offer to your sweet Name.

Merciful Mother of God and our Mother, as well, remember that we, wretched descendants of Adam, were borne by you to the foot of the cross...

Hail Mary ...

Daughter, who is loved by God the Father, ask for his Godly mercy and give our eyes bitter tears in order for us to attain forgiveness for our sins...

Hail Mary ...

Queen of heaven and earth, protect us from all calamities on earth, and save us who are celebrating you from the power of our merciless enemy...

Hail Mary ...

You, pure Wife of God the Holy Spirit, obtain for us from your Godly Husband warm love and grace which are necessary for the sake of our souls...

Hail Mary ...

Special servant of God, grant unto us sinners your heavenly aid and help us who praise you in the most terrible hour of our death...

Hail Mary ...^{11]}

It is in this section where the Church's construction of Mary's identity is most clearly articulated in the Flores de Mayo. Each prayer begins with a title of Mary, calling on a specific role or identity before asking for a request. These multiple personas, while nothing strange to the average Catholic, may be read as almost contradictory—as if one always had to be neutralized by the other. Mary embodies the various roles of femininity: as the *Merciful Mother of God* who is at the same time the *Daughter, who is Loved by God the Father* and the *Pure Wife of God the Holy Spirit*. She is also one that represents power—*Queen of Heaven and Earth*, and yet she is made lowly and humble, as a *Special Servant of God*. Reiterating Mary's multiple titles reinforces her special, feminine place in the Catholic world, but always through her multidimensional relationship to Christ/God. This, I believe, is what the Church has always sought to remind devotees through the Flores de Mayo—that Mary is not by herself powerful. Rather, she is a vessel from which God's power flows.



Figure 5. Photo of medallion worn by a hermana taken in May 2011.

Mary as the Most Pure Virgin is also reiterated in the Flores. The Miraculous Medal worn by the hermanas contains the short prayer “Oh, Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have no recourse but thee.” This same prayer, shortened to the Spanish hymn “Ave Maria purisima sin pecado concebida,” is sung several times as the letters AVE are brought to the front of the church. The image of Mary as pure and chaste (due to being conceived without sin) is often conflated with her body being untainted by sex. This is meaningful when examined within the history of colonization and the role of Marian devotion in constructing ideals of femininity in Philippine society.



Figure 6. Photo of hermanas taken on 27 May 2012.

Carolyn Brewer, in *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*, provides an account of role of Mary in the process of conversion and in the reshaping of gender relations, eventually leading to the denigration of the status of women in early colonial Philippines. Brewer asserts “women and feminized men had to lose their privileged status in the spiritual sphere, and it was necessary to reconstruct the Filipina into the ‘good’ woman of Hispano-Catholicism by curtailing her freedom of association and sexual expression” (xv-xvi). According to Brewer, Mary was fashioned as the “ideal woman” in order for Catholicism to effectively take root and for the virtue of virginity to become

acceptable. Since the portrayal of Mary as meek, humble, and subservient to a male God would not have been attractive to women who had occupied a position of leadership in spiritual matters, Mary's identity as the powerful mother of God had to be highlighted to appeal to the sensibilities of precolonial society. However, Mary's special role and power had to be qualified as only emanating from God's grace and as rooted in her being pure from sin and sex.¹²

Despite this complex construction of Mary's identity (particularly in the pag-ampo), it is Mary as Mother that resonates the most in the more expressive elements of the ritual. The songs performed as the flowers are offered to Mary (Paghalad sa Bulak section) refer specifically to Mary as "Inahan," despite her many other roles articulated pag-ampo above. In both songs below, Mary is described or addressed as Mother by children in most need of her mercy and aid.

Mangadto Kita**Let's Go¹³**

Chorus:

Chorus:

Mangadto kitang tanan
Sa mga bulak magdala
Ihalad ta kang Maria
Kay maoy atong Inahan

Let's all go
Bringing flowers
Let us offer to Mary
Because she is our Mother

Solo:

Solo:

Ikaw man ang babayeng putli
Maanyag pa kay sa bulan
Maghapa kami sa tiilan
Kanimong Inahang hamili

You are the chosen woman
More beautiful than the moon
We prostrate ourselves at your feet
O Blessed Mother

Ikaw labi pang masiga
Kay sa adlaw sa kaudtohoon
Ang kalag mong bililhon
Sa gugmang nagakasiga

You are brighter
than the sun at noon
Your precious soul
Shines with love

Maghugyaw Kita

Chorus:

Maghugyaw kita ug magkanta
Magsa-ulog kang Maria
Claveles ug azucena
Atong ihalad kaniya

Solo:

Ngari kamo binunyagan
Ngari kamo kang Maria
Ngari kay atong halaran

Sa rosas ug azucena
Ania na kami ania
Oh Inahan nga nalolotan
Tan-awa kami tan-awa
Dinhi sa imong atubangan

The farewell song at the end of the Flores likewise reiterates Mary as a powerful Mother.

Adios Rayna sa Langit

Adios Rayna sa Langit
Bitoon nga masiga
Adios, Inahan dalaygon
Adios, adios, adios

Let Us Rejoice¹⁴

Chorus:

Let us rejoice and sing
Celebrate Mary
Carnations¹⁵ and tuberose¹⁶
Let us offer unto her

Solo:

Come ye baptized
Come ye to Mary
Come for we shall offer

Gardenia and tuberose
We have come, we are here
Oh tender Mother
Cast your eyes on us
Who have come before you

Goodbye Queen of Heaven¹⁷

Goodbye Queen of Heaven
Bright star
Goodbye,
praise worthy Mother
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye

That Mary is addressed in the songs as a beautiful, protective, and maternal being is not counter to the teachings of the Church. It is, in fact, an idea nurtured by church leaders themselves and which may have well survived until the present especially during moments of crisis.

The grid layout and the church-municipal hall complex in Poblacion is typical of Hispanic towns throughout the area. A few kilometers from the town center still stand the ruins of the watchtowers and the old fort in Daanglungsod, evidence of

the area's long history of slave raids from the south during most of the Spanish colonial years. It was only in the nineteenth century under the leadership of Augustinian priest Julian Bermejo that a successful defense strategy (including the installation of watch towers along the coastline) was put in place. It was also after the quelling of the slavers when the stone church of Oslob, dedicated to the Lady of the Immaculate Conception, was built.

There is an old miracle myth involving Mary, a version of which was narrated to me in 2011 by Samuel Luna, a resident of Poblacion. I had asked him about a grotto with the image of the Virgin of Lourdes a few meters away from the old Spanish settlement in Oslob (Daanlungsod). The grotto is now in the place called Nigad, which is named after an old tree growing right above a fresh water spring still flowing out to the sea. According to Luna, this spot is believed to be the site of a miracle. Legend has it that a when fleet of slavers were on their way to raid the town, a lady in white stood there and mysteriously caused the enemy to flee. This story is reminiscent of the pre-Christian belief in a protective, female deity, but it also represents how Catholicism has appropriated this legend to reinforce devotion to the Virgin. The use of the image of the Virgin of Lourdes ties the narrative of the Marian apparitions in Lourdes, France, to the local mythology and the healing properties of the miraculous waters of the spring where Mary appeared.

A recent calamity to befall the town happened in 2008 when the convent and the church were gutted by a fire, which destroyed valuable artifacts and historical records. Surprisingly, the wooden relief image of the Virgin above the tabernacle was spared from the fire, prompting many to call the event a miracle. Based on a photo shown to me by a local, Cresencia Oyapoc, the dome of the church's ceiling had folded over the tabernacle shielding the image of the Virgin from severe damage. Oyapoc also showed me photos of the fire while it was going on and explained that some claim they saw an image of the Virgin in the fire itself.² After the unfortunate event, the image of the Virgin was brought to eighteen parishes in Metro Cebu to generate funds for the rebuilding of the church (Benitez 177).

Crisis may also be on a more personal scale brought on by poverty, sickness, or death in the family. A local fisherman once narrated his hardships to Luna and his wife Ikon one afternoon. Because the fishing boat of the company he worked for was not operational and was taking several days to fix, he had no means to feed his family. Samuel's wife, after listening to his problems, suggested going to the Flores that afternoon to ask for a favor from the Virgin. It is not difficult to imagine similar cases in the town where sources of livelihood remain scarce.¹⁸



Figure 7: Photo of tabernacle after the 2008 fire courtesy of Cresencia Oyapoc.

The construction of Mary's identity as maternal protector is also clearly expressed in the town's festival held every December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Not unlike other towns in Cebu, Oslob's fiesta has transformed into a spectacle-driven and tourist-oriented festival complete with colorful street dances and a Miss Oslob beauty pageant. In 2011, the following was the theme song of the "Toslob Festival"¹⁹ and was used for the street dance competition featuring performances representing each of the 21 barangays in the municipality.

Toslob sa Oslob²⁰

I
Sa yanong kasaysayan,
 bilihong sinugdanan
Oslob kaniadto duawonon sa tanan
Mga langyaw nagsusi
Sa kaanindot sila nadani

Molupyong nagtuslob-tuslob
 sa kanhi
Mga katsila ilang gi-abiabi
Pangutanang wala mahisabti
Sa ngalang Oslob, nabunyagan kini

Dipping in Oslob²¹

I
In a humble story of a great beginning
Oslob of old was sought by all
Travelers, who came to see
Were entranced by its beauty

Natives were dipping something
The Spaniards were warmly welcomed
Questions misunderstood
And the place christened Oslob

Chorus:

Toslob, toslob sa Oslob
 Magsadya ta dinhi sa Oslob
 Toslob, toslob sa Oslob
 Mabulokong kapistahan gisaulog

Talagsaong tradisyon
 Matahum nga talan-awon
 Kulturang ikapasigarbo
 Bahandi sa lalawigan sa Sugbo

II

Mga panaad nga kalamboan
 Sa katawhan kini gi-atiman
 Sa mga nanglabay'ng katuigan
 Gi-ugmad ug gipanalipdan

Oslob kon imong masusi
 Hulagway kini sa kauswagan
 ug kakugi
 Mga dumuduong buhong
 sa pag-abiabi
 Sadya nga kapistahan kini ipalabi

(repeat chorus)

Bridge:

Birhen de la Immaculada
 Concepcion
 Pagadaygon ka ug pagasimbahon
 Nagauban Ka namo sa kanunay
 Salamat sa imong pagsapnay
 Sa pag-giya ug pag-gabay

Chorus:

Dipping, dipping in Oslob
 Let us make merry here in Oslob
 Dipping, dipping in Oslob
 Celebrate this blessed festivity

A rare tradition
 Beautiful vistas
 A culture to be proud of
 A treasure of the province of Cebu

II

Promises of prosperity
 Seen by the people
 Through the passing years
 Cultivated and protected

In Oslob if you look closely
 you will see
 The face of progress and hard work
 Wanderers we welcome you
 Indulge in our joyful festivities

(repeat chorus)

Bridge:

Virgin of the Immaculate Conception
 We praise and worship you
 You are with us always
 Thank you for supporting us
 For your guidance and support

The performances provide the visual and aural form of the Toslob myth and generate spectacle primarily through the manipulation of elaborate props by a large group of dancers. The format is appropriated from the Sinulog Festival, a popular tourist event held in honor of the Sto. Niño de Cebu in Cebu City every January. In the Sinulog dances, which reenact the bringing of the image of the Sto. Niño to Cebu, the highlight is the dance sequence of Queen Juana holding the Sto. Niño.²² In the Oslob version, the image of the Virgin Mary replaces the Sto. Niño as the central

figure of the performance. In 2011, the image of Mary was literally processed for the bridge of the song, showing how the symbol of Mary has been appropriated as a central figure of the town's recently exoticized cultural identity. These performances reinforce her role as a powerful patroness whose presence has been there since the beginning of the town's (mythicized) history.



Figure 8. The image of the Lady of Immaculate Conception in one of the dances for the Toslob Festival in 2011.

That Mary has a kind of power that she uses for the protection of her devotees is hardly blasphemous, and yet, I believe, it has the potential to disrupt the official discourses of the Church or the set of normative meanings that “correctly” define Mary’s identity. A close analysis of the interventions done by the archdiocese in “containing” the signifieds that the symbol of Mary can hold for her devotees reveals that the discourses surrounding Mary and the (generalized) devotional practices that religious leaders promote do not necessarily remain unified, consistent, or stable.

THE PALANDONG AND EJEMPLO

The newer guidebook (*Han-ay sa Flores*) contains passages to ponder on for each day of the month called *pamalandong*. The passage is read aloud by the prayer leader right before the mass is held. Each *pamalandong* has a theme based on the many titles and attributes of Mary based on specific biblical passages. The meditation

typically extols Mary's virtues based on a particular excerpt from the bible in the first paragraph and follows with a prayer for Mary's help and intercession. Below is the pamalandong for the first day of May in the Han-ay sa Flores.

May 1

Santa Maria, Putli nga Asawa ni San Jose (Luke 2:4-5)

Ang atong Mahal nga Inahan mao ang putli nga asawa ni San Jose. Si San Jose usa ka tawo nga ligdong ug matinud-anon sa trabaho. Si San Jose wala gayud mibatong ug kalagut niya diha sa pagsumbong ni Maria sa mga kaparian. Diha sa damgo, nahibaw-an ni San Jose, nga ang gisabak ni Maria, mao ang Anak sa Dios, nga gihinganlan og Emmanuel. Giubanan ni San Jose si Santa Maria ug gipatubo niy si Kristo hangtod kini mipahulay sa dayon.

Santa Maria, ang putli nga asawa ni San Jose! Ikaw ang buhing sumbanan kon unsaon namo pagpuyo diha sa Kristohanang banay. Ikaw, Balaang Jose, gitudlo-an mo kami unsaon pagpuyo og kinabuhing yano apan puno sa kaligdong. Ikw, Bulahang Maria, gitdulo-an mo kami unsaon pagpuyo og kinabuhi nga masinugtanon sa kabubut-on sa Dios. Atubangan sa trono sa Dios, ipangaliya mo kami dinhi sa kalibutan.

Santa Maria, Putli nga Asawa ni San Jose... I-ampo mo kami (12).

May 1

Holy Mary, Pure Wife of St. Joseph (Luke 2:4-5)

Our Beloved Mother is the pure wife of Saint Joseph. Saint Joseph was a man who was upright and honest in his work. Saint Joseph never nursed any anger at Mary's testimony to the priests. In a dream, Saint Joseph came to know that the child Mary was carrying was the Son of God, named Emmanuel. Saint Joseph lived with Holy Mary and raised Christ, until he passed into eternal rest.

Holy Mary, the pure wife of Saint Joseph! You are the living model by which we live in Christ's family. You, Holy Joseph, you taught us how to live a life that is humble yet filled with righteousness. You, Blessed Mary, you taught us how to live a life accepting of the works of God. In front of the throne of God, intercede for us who are here on earth.

Holy Mary, Pure Wife of St. Joseph, pray for us.²³

As in the new version, the older guidebook (Bulan sa Mayo) also has a meditative passage for each day of May. Unlike the new version, which is addressed to Mary, the *pagpalandong*²⁴ is directed to the devotees and does not have specific references to the bible. The style of writing is reminiscent of old-style sermons replete with praises of Mary's virtues and stern warnings to devotees of the dangers of forsaking devotion to the Virgin.

Pagpalandong mahatungud sa kapuslanan sa paghalad kang Maria sa Bulan sa Mayo

Pakadaku, kristianos, sa imong kinahanglan sa mga panabang ni Maria aron ikaw maluwas! Kon ikaw wala makasala, pagkabulahan nimo! Apan sa taliwala sa dili maisip nga mga katalagman sa kalibutan takus nimo kahadlokang mawala kanimo ang grasya sa Dios, kon dili ikaw magtawag sa panabang ni Mariang Santisima. Kon ikaw makasasala, labi na nga magakinahanglan ka sa mga panabang ni Maria aron luwason ikaw niya sa mga kamut sa yawa. Tungud niining debosyon sa Bulan ng Mayo molaum ka nga madangat gayud nimo ang iyang panabang ugang imong salbasyon. Ikatungina ba kaha sa usa ka maaghup nga Inahan ang pagtabang sa usa niya ka anak nga nagapasidungog kaniya? Palandunga, kristianos, sa mahinay ug magtinguha ikaw sa pagsugod kutub karon sa pagalagad kang Maria, paghalad kaniya sa adlawang tanan sa pagpangadye sa Santos nga Rosaryo ug sa ubang mga debosyon mga nakapahimuot kanya. Amen (7-8).

[Meditation regarding the usefulness of offering to Mary in the Month of May

How great, Christians, is your need of Mary's help in order for you to be saved! If you have not sinned, how blessed you are! But between the unthinkable calamities on Earth, it is fit that you fear that the grace of God disappear from you, if you do not summon the help of Holy Mary. If you are a sinner, the more you need the help of Mary to save you from the hands of the devil. Due to this devotion to the Month of May, hope that you will truly receive her help and your salvation. Will a merciful Mother deny help to her child who is giving honor to her? Meditate, Christians, slowly and aim to start until today to serve Mary, offering to her at all times the prayer of the Holy Rosary and other devotions that please her. Amen.^{25]}

After each palandong is the *ejemplo*, an anecdote illustrating the theme of the day.

Usa ka bantugang datong ulitawo nga, tungud sa iyang pag-osik sa iyang katigayonan nga iyang gigamit sa bisyos midangat sa pagkapobre ug sa pagpakilimos. Tungod sa iyang ka ulaw sa iyang tagilungsod, mibiya sa iyang lungsod, ug milangyaw sa laing dapit nga walay nakaila kaniya. Usa niana ka adlaw nga siya nagasuroysuroy, hisugatan sa diwatahan nga kanhi binatonan sa iyang amahan ug namulong kaniya sa pag-ingon: maglipay ka kay dad-on ta ikaw sa usa ka halangdong tawo nga magahatag kanimo sa ngatanan nga imong kinahanglan. Dihadiha gidala kining ulitawo niadtong diwatahan sa usa ka lasang diin niyang nakita ang usa ka yawa nga gipamulongan niadtong diwatahan. Ginoo, kining ulitawo nga karon pobre ug makalolooy uyamut, buot unta mobalik sa iyang pagkadato ug pagkabahandianon. Dayon mitubag ang yawa. O! Mahimo ko kanang imong gipaninguha; apan kinahanglan nga biyaan mo ang Dios. Bisan dakung kahadlok nga gibati sa ulitawo, apan daug sa iyang kahaylo sa sapi, mitubay siya sa pagbiya sa Dios. Dili pa igo kana, mipadayon ang yawa; kinahanglan usab kang Maria Santisima. Niini giabut ang ulitawo sa dakung kalisang ug mitubag nga nagahilak. O! Kana dili ko gayud mahimo. Ako dili gayud magabiya sa kong hinigugmang Inahan nga maoy akong gilauman; apat pa hinoon ng magapakilimos ako sa tibuok kong kinabuhi nga dili ko gayud talikdan si Maria Santisima. Dihadiha milakaw siya ug gibiyaan kadtong malditong lasang ug mipauli sa iyang balay. Sa paghilabay niya sa usa ka Simbahan, misulod ug miluhod sa atubangan sa larawan ni Maria ug nagahilak ug naga-ampo sa Mahal nga Birhen nga idangat unta siya sa iyang hinigugmang Anak sa pasaylo sa iyang mga sala. Busa si Maria Santisima nga ginganlan sa atong Santa Iglesya “Inahan sa kalooy” sa tapus mamati sa mapaubsanon nga pag-ampo, niadtong makasasala nga midangop sa iyang gahum, nagaampo kang Jesus aron iyang pasayloon kadtong makasasala ug si Jesus mitubag sa iyang hinigugmang Inahan sa pag-ingon! Inahan ko, kining dautang tawo mibiya na kanako. Apan kay si Maria wala man gayud mohonong sa pagpangamuyo kang Jesus tungud niadtong makasasala, si Jesus mitubag Inahan ko, sayud ikaw nga ako wala pa gayud magatungina kanimo sa bisan unsang pangayoon nimo. Busa ako magapasaylo karon nianang makasasala tungud sa imong paghangyo kanako. Magkugi usab kita pagdebosyon kang Maria aron atong madangat ang iyang panabang. Higugmaon ta si Maria ug ato karong halaran niining maapubsanong. (8-10)

[A renowned wealthy young man who due to his squandering of his wealth which he used in vices came to poverty and was begging for alms. Because he was ashamed to face the townspeople, he left his town and migrated to another place where nobody knew him. One day, while he was taking a stroll, he met an animist²⁶ who was formerly a servant of his father and spoke to him saying: rejoice for I will bring you to a noble man who will give you everything you need. The young man was immediately brought by the animist to a forest where he saw a devil to whom the animist spoke. My Lord, this young man who is now rather poor and destitute wishes to go back to being rich and wealthy. Then the devil answered. Oh! I can give you what you yearn for; but you must forsake God. Although the young man felt great fear, he was overcome by his embarrassment towards the animist and his temptation to money and carried on forsaking God. That is not enough, the devil continued; you must also forsake your devotion to Holy Mary. With this, the young man felt great alarm and replied while weeping. *Oh! That I can never do. I will never forsake my beloved Mother on whom lies my hope. I would rather beg for alms my entire life; I will never turn my back to Holy Mary.* He immediately went on his way, left the evil forest and went home. He passed by a Church, went in and knelt in front of the image of Mary weeping and prayed to the Beloved Mary that he may attain forgiveness from her beloved Son for his sins. Therefore Holy Mary who was named by our Holy Church as “Mother of mercy” after hearing the humble prayer of the sinner who took refuge under her power, prayed to Jesus in order for him to forgive the sinner and Jesus answered his beloved Mother by saying: Mother, this evil man has already forsaken me. But because Mary did not stop beseeching Jesus because of the sinner, Jesus answered: Mother, you know that I have never denied you anything you ask for. That is why I will now forgive that sinner because you have asked me to. Let us also strive in giving devotion to Mary in order for us to attain her help.²⁷]

The ejemplo genre, also known as *exempla*, was a popular form of prescriptionist literature in the Spanish colonial period.²⁸ Exempla were stories missionaries drew from in their constructions of sermons meant for the popular laity (Javellana 239). They were preached in the vernacular and included, “animal fables and tales of Oriental origin, myths, historical events, episodes in the life of the saints, and anecdotes from the preacher’s experience” (Javellana 239).²⁹ Though it is not clear

where all the ejemplos in the *Bulan sa Mayo* were drawn from, a number were evidently taken from or inspired by the *Glories of Mary*, a book written by St. Alphonsus Liguori in the eighteenth century.³⁰

The altering of the pamalandong and the omission of the ejemplo in the new guidebook is compensated by the celebration of the Catholic mass, which includes the reading of biblical passages and the priest's homily. The replacement of the ejemplo and pagpalandong section with liturgical texts and the priest's reflection is a clear indication that the former are no longer forms which the Church considers appropriate for the spiritual guidance of the laity. While the ejemplo and pamalandong passages are all about forsaking sin (not necessarily against the doctrines of the Church), their imaginative and emotionally driven characteristics, generate meanings that potentially expand beyond what is orthodox.

Javellana's analysis of the sermons of Fray Francisco Blancas for Tagalog-speaking missions in Bataan in the early seventeenth century provides insight into how and why texts like the pamalandong and the ejemplo as both literary devices and instruments of moral reform were constructed. Javellana notes that in seventeenth century Philippines, sermons were meant to uproot "perceived idolatry and customs adjudged as contrary to the Christian ideal" (240).³¹ Moreover, to make the sermons more effective, missionary priests like Fr. Blancas had to intimately understand their audiences and their way of life, and adjust their sermons accordingly. To induce moral reform, the preacher had to rely not on dry theological arguments, but on vivid imagery, exaggerated exhortations that appealed to the emotions, and on a successful weaving of Catholic myths with local experiences. To be truly successful, sermons had to capture and transform the imagination of the Tagalog converts.

He expected the Tagalogs whom he often calls *tawo* to share the lot of fallen humanity. He supposed that they were not easily moved to moral reform; hence his exhortations are often exaggerated. These were rhetorical devices to emphasize the urgent need to strive for the Christian ideal. He had a fine sense of what was precept and what was counsel. While painting virginity as an ideal, a state that bound one with the all-powerful, he knew that asking Tagalog couples to be faithful and true was asking a lot. (252)

If, indeed, Blancas was able to affect the Tagalog convert through his homilies, it was due to his ability to relate to the Tagalog world and to paint an alluring image of Christian life as culled from the bible. He did

this by bridging the biblical and Tagalog experiences masterfully, through the use of analogies and metaphors. He brought the Gospel to life through metaphorical/narrative theology rather than through logical/discursive thought. (252)

Crucial to this transformation was the metamorphosis of the Tagalog's imagined universe. The transformation occurred by placing Tagalog experiences within a new continuum and proposing a world peopled by idealized biblical figures which stood authoritatively outside both the Tagalog and the Spanish (Castilian) world. The figures were symbols of the Christian ideal. The narrative, a literary form known to the Tagalog through their myths, legends, and epics, was the main literary device for stimulating the imagination. (253)

Following Javellana's argument, prescriptionist texts (such as those found in devotions like the Flores de Mayo) are not only generalized articulations of Catholic ideals, but could be indicative of local systems of meaning making. If we take this argument further, a devotional ritual's "meaningfulness" to a particular community rests on the capacity of its ritual symbols to accommodate both the "normative/generalized" and the "orlectic/individualized" discourses. Moreover, generalized devotions like the Flores, while patterned after devotions done in Europe, had to be tweaked according to the sensibilities of its devotees.

In the ejemplo above, the portrayal of Mary as a loving, merciful, and powerful mother is contrasted with a more distant, stricter, image of God. The primacy of the relationship between the young man and Mary is revealed in his emotional outburst when asked by the devil to forsake Mary, as expressed through the words, "*Oh! That I can never do. I will never forsake my beloved Mother on whom lies my hope. I would rather beg for alms my entire life; I will never turn my back to Holy Mary.*" The focus on Mary's maternal qualities and powerful role in a person's salvation downplays Christ's tender and merciful aspects, which are by contrast, imaged clearly in the gospel. In general, there are no biblical references in the ejemplos or any emphasis on the life of Christ, which the Church today considers central to the understanding of Christian values and virtues. Instead, the story focuses on how an ordinary person's devotion to Mary has saved them from sin and evil. More so, the story has a sense of melodrama and strong emotional content. In fact, it is the feelings of guilt, fear, and remorse, which ultimately leads to a sinner's salvation.

The origin of this text may have been the following example from St. Alphonsus Liguori's *Glories of Mary*, originally written in Italian.

It is related by Belluacensis and Cesarius that a noble youth having lost by vices the wealth left him by his father, became so poor that he was obliged to beg. He quitted his native land, that might live with less shame in a distant country where he was unknown. On this journey he met one day an old servant of his father, who, seeing him so cast down by the poverty he was suffering, told him to cheer up, for he would take him to a prince who was so liberal that he would provide him with everything he needed. Now this wretch was an impious sorcerer. One day he took the youth with him to a wood on the borders of a moor, where he began to address some invisible person. The youth asked to whom he was speaking. "To the devil," he answered; and seeing the youth terrified, bade him not to fear. Continuing to speak with the devil, he said: "This youth, oh my master, is reduced to extreme necessity, and wishes to be restored to his former condition." "If he will obey me," said the enemy, "I will make him richer than before; but in the first place, he must renounce God." At this the youth shuddered but urged on by that cursed magician, he yielded, and renounced God. "but this is not sufficient," said the demon; "he must also renounce Mary; for it is to her that we attribute our greatest losses. Oh, how many souls she has snatched from us, and led back to God and saved!" *"Oh, this I will not do," exclaimed the youth; "deny Mary! why she is my only hope. I would rather be a beggar all my life."* With these words he left the place. On his way he happened to pass a church dedicated to Mary. The unhappy youth entered it, and kneeling before her altar, began to weep and implore the most holy Virgin that she would obtain the pardon of his sins. Mary immediately began to intercede with the Son for that miserable being. Jesus at first said: "But that ungrateful youth, my mother, has denied me." But seeing that his mother still continued to entreat him, he at last said: "Oh my mother, I have never refused thee anything; he shall be pardoned, since thou dost ask it." The citizen who had purchased the inheritance of that prodigal was secretly present at this scene, and beholding the mercy of Mary towards that sinner, he gave him his only daughter in marriage, and made him heir of all his possessions. Thus that youth recovered, through the intercession of Mary, the favor of God and even his temporal possessions. (182-84)

While the essence of the story is the same, this version is noticeably longer than the Cebuano one, perhaps because the writer of the Cebuano version wanted a

shorter story with a more focused message. The last part of the story, where the young man marries and regains his inheritance, is omitted in the Cebuano version, accentuating the importance of spiritual salvation over earthly redemption. The line of the devil “Oh, how many souls she has snatched from us, and led back to God and saved!” which is not found in the Cebuano version could have been seen as superfluous. On the other hand, the line of the protagonist, “I will never turn my back to Holy Mary,” could have been added to emphasize the intensity of his devotion to Mary.

As translated to the vernacular, the Cebuano version, while shorter, adds local flavor to the narrative. Particular details that set the story in a specific point in time (“related by Belluacensis and Cesarius”) and place (“to a wood on the borders of a moor”) that are found in the original, are no longer seen in the Cebuano version. The use of the word “diwatahan” in the Cebuano version as a translation for “sorcerer” or “magician” is also significant. The term “diwatahan” (translated by Mojares as “animist”), evokes older belief systems and practices which had existed in the islands. Compared to the Liguori version where the young man is just described as having left “the place” after speaking to the devil, in the Cebuano version, the diwatahan’s abode (the forest) is described as evil (*malditong lasang*). The evil space is countered by the church, which becomes the protagonist’s space of sanctity and refuge. We could read this spatial dichotomy as a legacy of the efforts of missionaries to transform the church into the center of worship and spiritual activity in the Poblacion, alongside the demonization of the practice of seeking help from the spirits who resided in nature.

A popular legend in Cebu that could represent the pervasiveness of the belief in benevolent beings (framed as evil in the ejemplo) is the one of Maria Cacao, an elusive, female *engkantada*. According to a version of this legend from Argao, a town not very far from Oslob, Maria Cacao was a beautiful fairy who lived in a cave on the mountain of Lantoy (Kintanar-Alburo, *Cebuano Folktales* 39-43). In the variations of this story, there are recurring motifs. One is the presence of a kindhearted being (an *engkantada*, or an *agta* [giant]) who lives in a cave or in a tree, somewhere isolated from townfolk. This being is believed to be a lender of things (in the form of plates, silverware, kitchen utensils, wedding dresses, or jewelry) which the townfolk would ask for weddings, baptisms and other events. However, because of an abuse of trust, the kind hearted being stops lending the townfolk these objects and no longer appears to the people (Kintanar-Alburo, “A Study of Two Cebuano Legends” 46-47).

Stories in Cebu about frightening mythical creatures including the *sigbin* (a kangaroo-

like animal which eats human liver), *agta* or *kapri* (a hairy giant who smokes cigars), *tambaluslus* (a being in human form with very wide lips), *mangtas* (a fierce beast), *kikik/wakwak* (a bird which eats unborn babies), and the *unglu/manananggal* (a creature which can detach its upper half when it flies) are still well-known. Despite their fearful natures, there are ways to avoid, counter, or sometimes control these creatures. Stories told by the older generation in Oslob for example, claim that a family may own and control their own sigbin and become very successful or wealthy from it (Gonzalez 2013). Thus, the sigbin, associated with the world of myth and nature, could be analogous to the world of the diwatahan in the forest.

The vulnerability of people to unseen creatures of the mythical realm is paralleled in the world of the ejemplo where demons abound and are always ready to inflict harm on people. Those who are vulnerable are those who commit sin or who stray from Mary. Even those who speak against Mary are made vulnerable to the powers of evil. In a world where one is constantly in danger and where spiritual evil manifests in the physical realm, it is devotion to the powerful Virgin Mary who is feared by the enemy, which is the only recourse.

The following ejemplo from the Bulan sa Mayo also illustrates this. Unlike the previous example, this one includes details which clearly set the story in a different time (life of St. Domingo de Guzman) and a foreign place (Carcassone). Like the previous ejemplo, this one includes lines from the demons themselves, as if something one could act out in a play.

Mabasa nato sa kinabuhi ni Santo Domingo de Guzman nga sa pagwali niya didto sa Carcasona, gitagbo siya sa usa ka herejes nga, tungud sa iyang pagtamay sa debosyon sa Mahal nga Birhen Maria, gisauban sa yawa. Gisugo ni Santo Domingo ang mga yawa nga misulod sa lawas niadtong herejes sa ngalan sa Dios aron nila ipahayag kon matuod ba ang ngatanang giwali sa Santo mahatungud sa pagdebosyon kang Maria ug silang tanan nga mga yawa naghiusa sa pagtubag. Mga kristianos nga namati karon patalinghugi ninyo ang tanang giwali ug gitudlo nianang tawhana nga among kaaway mahatungod sa pagdebosyon kang Maria. Ang tanan matuod nga gayud. Walay bisan mausa nga makondenar niadtong nagkanunay sa pagdebosyon kang Maria, kay ang Birhen magahatag sa mga makasasala sa mapait nga luha aron makadangat siya sa paghinulsul sa mga sala ug dihadihanamulong ang mga yawa nga sila walay gahum sa mga debotos ni maria. Nan, kinsa kanatong mga kristianos ang dili maninguha sa pagdebosyon kang Maria? Kinsa ang dili molaum

sa iyang gahum? Modangop kita kang Maria aron luwason kita niya sa gahum sa atong mga kaaway nga sa kanunay nagatukmod kanato sa pagpakasala, aron ato kining madangat sa dakung kainit sa atong kasingkasing pangadyeon nato kining mosunod nga pag-ampo ... (19-20)

[We can read in the biography of St. Domingo de Guzman in his sermons in Carcassonne, that he met up with a heretic, who in his defiance of the devotions of the Beloved Virgin Mary, was possessed by demons. Sto. Domingo ordered the demons who had entered the body of the heretic to reveal in the name of God if everything he had preached about the devotion to Mary was true, and the demons answered in unison "Christians who are present, heed all the preachings and teachings of this person who is our foe, regarding the devotion to Mary. All of this is indeed true. None of those who have a constant devotion to Mary will be condemned because the Virgin bestows unto the sinners her bitter tears so that she may obtain the repentance for their sins." And then and there, the demons stated that they have no power over the devotees of Mary. So who among us Christians should not strive in devotion to Mary? So who among us should not place our hopes in her power? We seek refuge in Mary that she may save us from the power of our enemies that constantly force us toward sin, that we may obtain this fire in our hearts. We now recite the following prayers ...³²]

The following story reiterates the necessity of the participation of an ordinary person in a religious association devoted to Mary as part of his/her salvation. If we situate this story in the first half of the twentieth century in Oslob,³³ a person's membership in a sodality or confraternity is not just as a public expression of love for Mary, but an essential step in saving oneself from harm and evil.

Usa ka olitawo nga sakop sa usa ka Cofradia sa Mahal nga Birhen, matud ni San Alfonso sa Glorias de Maria, nga mibiya sa pagka kofrade ug nagpuyo sa usa ka kinabuhi nga kalibutanon. Sa usa ka gabii gitunghaan sa yawa sa makalilisang uyamut nga dagway ug kadtong karaan nga kofrade nagatawag sa Mahal nga Birhen ug ang yawa namulong sa pag-ingon: kawang lamang ang imong pagtawag niadtong imo karong gibiyaan; kay aron ako ikaw nga olipon tungud sa imong mga sala. Ang olitawo giabut sa dakung kakulba, mingluhod sa atubangan sa usa ka larawan sa Mahal nga Birhen ug nangadye sa pangadyeon niadtong Cofradia nga

iyang gibiyaan; Birhen nga Santos ug putli uyamut, tabangi ako niining dakung kadaut nga midangat karon kanako. Dihadiha mitungha usab ang Mahal nga Birhen ug sa pagkakita sa yawa, nawala dayon ug namulong kadtong mahigugmaong Inahan sa makasasala nga olitawo; dili unta ikaw takus sa akong panabang, tungud sa imong pagbiya kanako: apan nalooy pa ako kanimo aron biyaan nimo kanang imong mahugaw nga kinabuhi ug mobalik ikaw sa pagpasakop sa akong Cofradia. Sa sunod nga dalaw nikompisal ug mibalik sa pagpasakop sa Cofradia sa Mahal nga Birhen nga iyang gibiyaan hangtud sa iyang kamatayon nga mahimayaon. (82)

[There was a young man who was a member of the confraternity of the Beloved Virgin, according to St. Alfonse of the Glory of Mary, who left the confraternity and lived a worldly existence. One night, the devil came to him with a most hideous visage and the former lay brother invoked the Beloved Virgin and the devil spoke these words "It is futile to call upon that which you have forsaken because now you are my slave due to the sins you have committed and the youth was stricken by a most profound terror. He fell to his knees before an image of the Beloved Virgin and recited the prayers of the confraternity that he had forsaken, "Holy Virgin Most Chaste, aid me in this terrible evil that has befallen me." Then and there appeared the Beloved Virgin and when she cast her gaze upon the devil, he vanished immediately and the Loving Mother spoke unto the erring youth, "You should not be deserving of my aid because you have forsaken me but I show you your mercy that you may forsake your filthy existence and return to service in my confraternity. The next day, he took confession and returned to service in the confraternity of the Beloved Virgin that he had previously forsaken and remained so until his glorious death.³⁴]

The dire consequences of forsaking Mary so vividly portrayed in these stories could be, as Javellana notes, ways of capturing the imagination, evoking emotions of fear and guilt in order to instil piety. What is reiterated in these texts is an image of a Mother Mary that is at once powerful, feared by all enemies, and merciful to repentant sinners. If read narrowly, the emphasis on Mary's salvific power potentially overshadows the central role of Christ in salvation, and displaces the biblical narratives in the spiritual life of devotees. The removal of these stories in the newer guidebook and the mandating of the celebration of the mass are thus means of countering this potential by ensuring the correct interpretation of Mary's identity.

CONCLUSION

There are significantly less people who attend the Flores in the town compared to the early to mid-twentieth century. The younger generations are not as interested in joining a religious devotion that is increasingly perceived as antiquated. The aesthetic qualities of the ritual, particularly its musical performances, have also noticeably declined. In contrast to the first half of the twentieth century, Oslob had a wider repertoire of church music, a more competent choir and church musicians.³⁵ Compared to the spectacle and pomp of the Toslob festival performances, the Flores is markedly simple and quiet.

Despite the increased secularization of everyday life in the town, there continue to be individuals who perform the tradition faithfully every year. Many of them are elderly women, but there are also several from the younger generation who willingly attend to the ritual. Many go regardless of the changes that have been made to the ritual and its texts. Due to the fact that the ritual is performed the same way every day, every year, it is also not surprising that most of the participants do not pay full attention to the prayers when they are read aloud. In fact, many of the hermanas are too preoccupied with their duties or are usually chatting with each other at the back of the church when the ritual unfolds.

Interviews of the hermanas reveal that the desire to participate in the Flores does not come from a place of fear and guilt. Neither is the motivation from the more known *panata* or personal vow/promise a devotee makes to a saint in exchange for a favor. When asked why they do it, many of the respondents seemed to have a difficult time articulating a reason, as if the ritual is performed “just because.” One replied that she did it to ask a favor from Mary, and a couple replied that it was for their spiritual salvation. Most of the responses were “Because it makes me happy,” “Because I’ve been doing this as a little girl,” “To serve,” and “To give thanks.” A number of girls joined because their mothers told them to or because their friends or siblings were also hermanas. These answers seem to show that the Flores de Mayo is performed because it is enjoyable, because it satisfies a sense of “what is good” and “what is ought to be.” It could be the product of “habitus” (following Pierre Bourdieu),³⁶ shaped throughout one’s life in the town, and reinforced by family and friends.

The performative aspect of the Flores de Mayo ritual, where women figure prominently, must also be taken into account. A reason for the association of women with the Flores could be the fact that the ritual was intended to be practiced in homes, the space to which women became mostly confined in nineteenth century

colonial Philippines. This is supported by the fact that the first performances of devotion in Cebu started in the homes of prominent and pious women in town of San Nicolas in 1894 (Kintanar-Alburo, *Sumad* 77). The connection of women to the Flores may also have to do with the role of Mary as Virgin in shaping ideas of ideal femininity in a nineteenth century patriarchal and Catholic world.³⁷ The hermanas' emulation of Mary's virtues and appearance, through their pious devotion signified by the donning of the white dress,³⁸ the veil, and the Miraculous Medal, could be interpreted as a set of "restored behaviors" (Schechner ch. 2),³⁹ affirming the ideal, virtuous, pious, and chaste woman in colonial society (in contrast to her foil, the evil temptress/whore). At the same time, this same performance could have also been a means of acquiring and reinforcing a kind moral authority in society, a power stemming from the powerful Mother.⁴⁰

To conclude, I hope to have illustrated here that Mary as a dominant symbol of the Flores de Mayo ritual represents meanings that are mostly orthodox. But despite its generalized character, Mary's symbol continues to be polysemic, with the potential to hold "other" kinds of signifieds, which may complement or disrupt what is considered "proper" or "correct." The instability of the field of meanings occasionally necessitates the Church to enforce/create rules to assert its role as the regulator of the faith. However, it is the very openness of Mary's symbol that renders the Flores de Mayo more "meaningful" to her devotees, who in the end, negotiate and perform what they think, feel, and believe.

ENDNOTES

¹ For a more extensive analysis of the Flores as a symbolic performance (including a history of Marian devotion in the town of Oslob and other aspects of the ritual performance) on which this paper is based, refer to Lopez, Patricia Marion. "Expressions of Devotion: The Flores de Mayo in Poblacion, Oslob." MA thesis. University of the Philippines, 2013. Print. The research was partly funded through a grant from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Development, University of the Philippines Diliman.

² Exactly when the Flores de Mayo tradition started in the Philippines is not known although the earliest documented booklets written for the Flores de Mayo were published in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is believed that the first Flores de Mayo booklet in Tagalog was translated by Mariano Sevilla (1839-1923), a Filipino priest and religious writer.

³ It is not uncommon for the two to be held concurrently especially on the last day of May as is done in Poblacion, Oslob.

- ⁴ Based on the 1912 version of Mariano Sevilla's *Flores de Maria o Mariquit na Bulacac na sa Pagninilaynilay sa Boong Buan nang Mayo ay Inihahandog nang manga Devoto cay Maria Santisima*, originally published in Manila in 1867.
- ⁵ The word "hermana" technically refers to a girl who has undergone the *pagsad-ong* in the previous year. The *pagsad-ong* is a ceremony usually officiated by the parish priest during which he places the blue ribbon with the medallion or "sad-ong" on a devotee. The girls who were newly "sworn in" have the obligation of assisting with the Flores in May the following year. Once the month is over, they become *diputadas*. In practice however, *diputadas* continue to assist in the Flores every year and continue to be referred to as *hermanas*.
- ⁶ "Children of Mary" is a general name for a sodality or confraternity dedicated to Mary. There was a revival of the Children of Mary movement in the nineteenth century to promote devotion to the Miraculous Medal, a design revealed by the Virgin to St. Catherine Laboure in 1830 ("Children of Mary" 1995). In Poblacion, Oslob, the name of the group used to be *Hijas de Maria*, indicating that the tradition was traditionally exclusive to women.
- ⁷ Rosita Rendon, the prayer-leader I was able to interview from 2011 to 2012, is in her 60s. Hippolita Lozano, the other prayer-leader I interviewed, was in her 80s. She passed away in 2013.
- ⁸ The guidebook was reprinted several times. Its copyright is dated 1937. The imprimatur on the second page, however, dates the publication to July 9, 1915.
- ⁹ Based on observations of the Flores in the Poblacions of Carcar, Santander, Boljoon, and Cebu City in 2012. It is different in the smaller chapels of the barangays where a priest or lay ministers are not always available.
- ¹⁰ The term "pag-ampo" is Cebuano for prayer. In this paper, however, it refers to this particular prayer in the Flores.
- ¹¹ Translation by Lyndielou Egnar.
- ¹² According to Reid, in sixteenth to seventeenth century SEA societies, while women were not exactly viewed as equal in stature to men, they enjoyed relative autonomy, which extended to a stronger position in sexual relations (146). Women were free to divorce their husbands if they were dissatisfied in their marriage. Evidence that men wore various types of penis ornaments as a means of satisfying women better during intercourse shows that women's sexual preferences were respected rather than vilified (146-58).
- ¹³ Translated by Edmund Gonzalez and Piedad Gonzalez.
- ¹⁴ Translated by Edmund Gonzalez, Piedad Gonzalez, and the author.
- ¹⁵ The word "clavel" is Spanish for "*Dianthus caryophyllus*" or is more commonly known as "carnation."

- ¹⁶ “Azucena” is a Spanish word which translates to “lily,” which is a general category of flowers derived from the order Liliales. “Lily” when translated to Cebuano, however, is “liryu,” which is not the same as “azucena.” Wolff’s dictionary defines the word “asusinas” (Cebuano spelling) as “bulbous ornamental plant with spikes of fragrant white flowers, borne in pairs: *Polianthes tuberosa*.” Thus, a more accurate translation for “azucena” in English is “tuberose.” See “Azucena.” *Philippine Medicinal Plants*. www.stuartxchange.com. Web. 6 Jan 2015.
- ¹⁷ Translation by the author.
- ¹⁸ In fact there is a video on YouTube of the fire which shows an outline of the Virgin on top of the roof of the church (jingaranjuez 2008).
- ¹⁹ The word “toslob” which means “to dip” is drawn from the legend surrounding the origin of the name of the town. The story is about two Spaniards who had come to the area and had asked a couple of locals what the place was called. The locals, who were at the time dipping bananas into salt or vinegar, misunderstood the question and answered “toslob-toslob,” which meant “dipping” or “dunking.” Myth has it that this was the origin of the name Oslob.
- ²⁰ Music and lyrics by Gani Villarojo.
- ²¹ Translation by Edmund Gonzalez.
- ²² In the past few years, this part was always danced by former Governor of Cebu, Gwendolyn Garcia.
- ²³ Translation by Edmund Gonzalez.
- ²⁴ In the new version it is called “pamalandong.” In the older version each section begins with “pagpalandong.”
- ²⁵ Translation done by Lyndielou Egnar.
- ²⁶ “Diwatahan” is translated as “animist” in Mojares, “Stalking the Virgin,”157.
- ²⁷ Translation by Lyndielou Egnar; emphasis by the author.
- ²⁸ Other prescriptionist texts include *vidas* (stories of saints’ lives), as well as novenas, prayerbooks, conduct books, and meditation books (Lucero 182).
- ²⁹ Javellana also adds that many of the ad populum sermons would be compiled and published and used widely as books of private devotion in the seventeenth century. This could explain the origin of the exempla texts found in the novenas and guidebooks for devotional practices used until the early twentieth century.
- ³⁰ Alphonsus Maria de Liguori is an Italian Catholic saint born in 1696. He studied law before becoming a priest and wrote several works on theology and morality. He was declared “Doctor of the Church” by Pope Pius IX. The Glories of Mary is a scholastic treatise on Mary’s virtues, written to counter the criticisms of Marian devotion at the time.

- ³¹ This included the need for Tagalog converts to take to heart the virtues of virginity and chastity in order to secure their salvation.
- ³² Translated by Edmund Gonzalez.
- ³³ This was roughly the time when the devotion was at its peak.
- ³⁴ Translation by Edmund Gonzalez.
- ³⁵ This is based on oral histories acquired from older generation choir singers and musicians in the town and a music collection obtained from the town's former church organist, Bernardo Luna.
- ³⁶ *Habitus* is defined as "the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world. These unconscious schemata are acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings, via the internalization of external constraints and possibilities ... It implies also that these systems of dispositions are malleable, since they inscribe into the body the evolving influence of the social milieu, but within the limits set by primary (or earlier) experiences, since it is habitus itself which at every moment filters such influence" (Wacquant 6).
- ³⁷ Teresa Wright highlights the role of rulebooks for women which were published the nineteenth century in reinforcing patriarchal behaviors and attitudes among women, particularly the need for propriety, and the importance of doing one's duty. In the analysis two popular Cebuano works (*Avisos muy utiles para las casadas* and *Lagda*) were discussed. In *Lagda*, excerpts from Alphonsus Liguori's work are cited (25 to 37).
- ³⁸ Traditionally, only unmarried women wear the white dress. In Poblacion, there is a tradition of single women (*dalaga*) holding the responsibility of managing the Flores de Mayo every year.
- ³⁹ Schechner describes restored behaviors as "... living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behavior can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (personal, social, political, technological, etc.) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. The original "truth" or "source" of the behavior may not be known, or may be lost, ignored, or contradicted—even while that truth or source is being honored. How the strips of behavior were made, found, or developed may be unknown or concealed; elaborated, distorted by myth and tradition" (ch. 2).
- ⁴⁰ Cecilia De La Paz has a similar point in her dissertation on the Dead Christ in Lucban, Quezon, where she notes how the group of women or "manang" (believed to be derived from the word "hermana") who are responsible for dressing and cleaning the image of the Dead Christ acquire a special kind of authority and power due to their intimate proximity to the sacred image.

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Patricia Marion Y. Lopez <pmylopez@gmail.com> is an Assistant Professor from the Department of Art Studies, College of Arts and Letters in the University of the Philippines Diliman. She holds an MA in Art Studies, major in Art History from the same University, which she obtained in 2013. Her thesis, *Expressions of Devotion: The Flores de Mayo in Poblacion, Oslob*, is a lengthier analysis of the Flores as a devotional ritual utilizing the frames of performance studies and interpretive anthropology. Her research interests include devotional rituals and church music in Cebu.