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The Leccio: Ethnicity and Indigeneity in the Ilokano's Observance of Semana Santa

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ABSTRACT

The *leccio* is a form of lamentation by Mary, the mother of Jesus based on the suffering and death by crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This lament is likened to the *dung-aw*, the Ilokano practice of mourning the dead, and usually practiced by older women. It is similar in form to the dung-aw but in delivery, the leccio is performed through a musical structure. Meanwhile, the dung-aw is an actual tearful lamentation, a sentiment uttered by the bereaved and it is a litany of grief, anguish and pain (Anima 1976). If the dung-aw provides the framework for the leccio and the former is regarded as a practice that is rooted in Ilokano culture, then the leccio is just as culturally rooted. Often compared to the *pasyon* of the Tagalogs, the leccio is, however, markedly different in some key aspects. The pasyon is scripture-based, while the leccio's scriptural leanings is optional and merely provides a context to a narrative that is based entirely on a mother's remembrances and pining for a child that she had raised, now deceased. The pasyon is the length of one book and is performed through the night in a *pabasa*, while the leccio is performed inside of 20 minutes. In terms of mood, the pasyon shifts from a breezy waltz tempo to a sprightly marching rhythm. The leccio, on the other hand, is consistently downcast and melancholic. The leccio and the pasyon are "grounded in local traditions" (Cordero-Fernando 2000), chants whose phrasing dates back to the datus (which) give Lent its unmistakeable, uncanny character. Described by Cordero-Fernando (2000) as "paraliturgy," the leccio is a local tradition which has a public character, but unlike the Mass, does not form part of the Church's official liturgy.

Keywords: Cultural Studies, ethnic, folk Catholicism, Ilokano, indigenous, oral tradition

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A HOLY WEEK RITE

Holy Week is always a much anticipated time for any person born and raised in Baguio City—like this author—but whose ascendants are from Ilocos Sur. It is, after all, "summer vacation" and is when the obligatory visit to one's relatives in the province takes place. This also means time once again to experience farm life—to reap ripened corn from their stalks, net some fish from the pen, and because it is the season, harvest the produce from a mango orchard.

These experiences are vivid and could be drawn from long-term memory. Because visits were fairly regular and timed during Holy Week, there is more that can be recalled of this Catholic tradition from the Ilocos setting because Holy Week was spent more often in Ilocos than in Baguio City or elsewhere.

Unless something truly special or earthshaking happens, the days leading to Good Friday were fairly ordinary. The only indicator that something was stirring is an occasional broadcast through the AM radio band of a piece of music that extends to about twenty minutes. It is slow, mournful, and repetitive for its two-chord progression. It is, for its purpose, a melancholic chant delivered in Ilokano.

Not yet a city a few decades ago, this music is always at the backdrop of the observance of Holy Week in Vigan municipality. Owing perhaps to the poor quality of sound emanating from battery-operated transistor radios and the even more apparent excuse of passive listening, nothing was ever understood from these songs; neither was its message established.

But curiosity took place one day and my grandmother did explain that before the advent of radio broadcasts, this practice called the *leccio* was an event of record in the community. Families, usually the affluent ones, hosted reading and singing sessions, as hosting chores extended to feeding the participants after.

It was also during this time that the lyrics of the song was listened to more closely as it delivered lines that state, for instance, "*Iti biag mo a kakaisuna, kenka o sabong, bunga daytoy darak*" (Your sole life, o flower, and fruit of my blood). With these lines, it is apparent that a persona speaks through the entire movement, and that the passages are replete with expressions that define that persona's particular attitude and perspective of a situation.

The term "persona" is used at the outset because while this paper will subsequently refer to Mary, the mother of Jesus as the persona, unlike the liturgical Mary, she is steeped in the cultural context, for instance, of Ilokano motherhood. This paper will also differentiate the leccio from the *pasyon* to provide a clear demarcation between both terms as much as the Tagalog word "pasyon" is now generally appropriated to describe the leccio. Finally, while the leccio is practiced under the premises of the Catholic faith, it will also argue that the practice is based on Ilokano customs and values that predates Spanish Christianity.

This paper's primary informant and source of data is Erlinda Rabanal-Valera of Barangay Cabittaogan, Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur. The data provided were four sets of full-length leccio written in her own hand and compiled in a notebook which was photocopied in its entirety. The data entries were labelled "Leccio I," "Leccio II," "Leccio III" and "Leccio IV." She no longer performs the leccio, but she admits she was a practitioner as early as when she was in the fourth grade (about ten years old). This paper's author, a native Ilokano speaker, provided a literal translation of the Ilokano passages selected for analyses, but the translations do not intend to capture the prosodic qualities of the leccio's Ilokano verses.

Rabanal-Valera is a board-certified religious educator, and she holds a bachelor's degree in English and Filipino. In addition, she is also a master's degree holder in School Leadership. She retired from teaching at age sixty but admits to being a volunteer teacher to this day. Unless specified, the following narration is based on data and information obtained from an interview with Rabanal-Valera at her residence in Cabittaogan on April 2, 2015.

While this study is primarily based on the texts obtained from the handwritten notes of Mrs. Valera, I also have a fair amount of familiarity with the leccio having heard this performed live over the radio on Holy Week through the years. I also heard a live performance of the leccio on April 1, 2015, at the Saint Paul Metropolitan Cathedral, Vigan City.

The Indigenous and Ethnic Ilokano

The term "indigenous" is often used to refer to a group of people either belonging to a society of "foraging bands" or "tribal cultivators" (Kottak 116). But Robbins (34) says, "today, virtually no human beings anywhere in the world live by hunting and gathering, although every society in existence is descended from such people. Hunters and gatherers are the common ancestors of us all."

This perspective, especially by Robbins, is particularly important in the idea of assigning the term "indigenous" to the Philippines' third largest ethnolinguistic group, the Ilokano (History n.d.). To describe the Ilokano as "indigenous" is particularly problematic if we go by a definition that the culture and history of indigenous peoples (i.e., foragers and tribals) are particularly distinct "from other populations that are often politically dominant" (Indigenous Peoples Literature, n.d.).

If the basis is numbers alone, the Ilokano are indeed a dominant ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines and because of this, the term "indigenous" as previously defined, may no longer apply to them as a people. But a fact sheet from the United Nations (n.d.) Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues maintains that "an official definition of 'indigenous' has not been adopted by any UN-system body." The fact sheet (ibid) goes on to elaborate that "the most fruitful approach is to identify, rather than define indigenous peoples."

With "self-identification" as a "fundamental criterion" according to the UN, the permanent forum (United Nations n.d.) came up with a seven-point "system" for a "modern understanding" of the term "indigenous." For this purpose, and following Robbins' (34) attribution to a society's common ancestry of hunter-gatherers, we will argue that the Ilokano is indigenous because, according to the UN (n.d.), they draw on a "historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies." And furthermore, we will also argue in terms of another point mentioned by the UN which is, that the Ilokano possesses a "distinct language, culture and beliefs" (ibid).

Distinct language, culture, and beliefs are indicators of ethnicity. "Markers of an ethnic group may include a collective name, belief in common descent, a sense of solidarity, and an association with a specific territory, which the group may or may not hold" (see Kottak 52). Certainly there are individuals (this author included) who "are born members of a certain group and remain so all their lives" (Kottak 52). This birth status is ascribed and drawn from membership in an ethnic society, in this case, the Ilokano.

The Ilokano is often mentioned in scholarly works especially if these are about the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera collectively known as the Igorot. Among a number of reasons, a historical account of the Spanish contact with the Igorot almost always begins in the Ilocos region. The historian William Henry Scott (9) writes,

> The Igorots had their first contact with the Spaniards as a result of the fame of their gold mines. Adelantado Miguel de Legazpi heard about the rich mines of the Ilocos only a few months after he planted the Spanish flag on Philippine soil in February 1565, and within six months of his capture of Manila in 1571, his grandson, Juan de Salcedo, was preparing an expedition to explore the west coastal region of northern Luzon which was the emporium for that Igorot gold.

Indeed, the Ilocos region is invariably linked with the "Gran Cordillera Central" as Scott (2) puts it, because where the land and sea meets is a coast inhabited by the Ilokano. Consider Abra's (a province in the Cordillera) intersection with the Ilocos. Scott (1) says "The Abra takes its name from the Spanish word for opening, or gap, and originally referred to the Abra de Vigan, that dramatic natural gateway the stream has cut through the Malaya range of the Ilocos coast to reach the South China Sea."

Since its initial contact with the Spanish, the Cordillera has held a particular fascination among groups of people not least of whom are those engaged in scholarly works (anthropologists, sociologists and historians). This is because as a society, the people of the Cordillera are possessed with attributes that are a part of the UN's (n.d.) criteria for "identifying" indigenous peoples and these are a "distinct social, economic, or political systems."

Present-day research in fact points to "Cordillera indigenous political institutions" (Prill-Brett 1-5) such as the "tongtong (council)" by the Ibaloy, the Bontok "pechen (peace pact)," and the Kalinga "bodong" (peace pact institution). These systems have been studied extensively because the rest of us "need to gain more knowledge on Cordillera culture, about which there have been a lot of generalizations, misconceptions, or false information" (Prill-Brett xv).

This preponderance of concern for Cordillera scholarship is, without question, attention richly deserved. If outputs on Ilokano studies were at a rate less than Cordillera studies outputs, it is not because the former has taken on lesser currency and relevance in scholarship than its Cordillera counterparts. It only means that the assignment of a seemingly eternal historical value on the Cordillera has made the Cordillera shine brighter than any of its neighbors, and scholars have since been drawn to it like moths to a flame.

As a result, works written about the Cordillera revolve around this historical theme described no less by Scott (2) in these terms:

> But historically they (the people of the Cordillera) have one thing in common, whatever they are called—their ancestors resisted assimilation into the Spanish Empire for three centuries. At the time of the American invasion, they were still living in a pre-literate society, and since they therefore kept no written records, it is not possible today to write a history of the Igorot people.

If one route to "assimilation into the Spanish Empire" is conversion to Catholicism, the so-called Ilokano pagans "(from) Agoo, Bauang, Balaoan, Tagudin, Candon, Narvacan, Vigan, Bantay, Batac, Laoag, Bacarra, and Dingras" (Scott 19) have effectively assimilated into Christianity because "all had missionary priests by 1600" (Scott 19).

A survey of literature made for this paper was done in part to determine how much of the authors' deliberations tackled matters about the *leccio*—if ever. Isabelo de los Reyes, celebrated by Scott (266) in his writings as a "provinciano and a nationalist," did not write anything specific on the leccio in his *book El Folk-Lore Filipino* even if he wrote about Lent and mourning in its chapters. Neither did contemporary scholars Anima, Jocano, nor Hufana for that matter. But the lack of, or shortfall in, the specifics on the leccio in their writings does not mean that the leccio could not be written into the larger embodiment of their works. Scholars such as Azurin (1995) and Pertierra (1997) wrote about broader Ilokano cultural representations but do not mention the leccio. But just as the leccio is a part of a larger occasion called *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), the writings of Azurin and Pertierra do support the arguments made here in several aspects even if, as mentioned, they wrote about a broad Ilokano cultural representation.

Pertierra's (114) study of an Ilocos town called Zamora mentions practices by the inhabitants which can be described as indigenous. He writes,

> In Zamora, agricultural rites still lie largely within the indigenous system. The opening of the irrigation canals in June is preceded by a pig sacrifice (paayos), with the meat distributed among the members of the particular irrigation society (dapat). In September, a white chicken is offered to the spirits guarding the rice fields (apuy). These rituals are practiced by otherwise conventional Christians.

In this instance, Pertierra writes about rituals that pertain to agriculture, but he does elaborate that rituals, too, are a "conflation of expressive, performative and instrumental action" (195). Local culture does not always elicit national attention, but are nonetheless "an integral part of social structure, (and) contains temporal expectation leading to the stability and coherence of social life" (194). He proceeds, "the objectification of meaning in ritual, song, dance and other aspects of village life are not just representations of social life but expressions of a common habitus" (194).

Pertierra (207) explains that the decline of traditional Ilokano performances, whether Lenten readings (such as the leccio) or the *komedya* (a traditional Ilokano drama), is occasioned by the advent of

> *(S)arsuelas*, a more modern theatre form and recently by the advent of television and Tagalog movies. The slow development of the action, the archaic language and other pre-modern elements of the *komedya*, in particular its anachronistic plots and pre-psychologically portrayed characters, make it unsuitable for a modern audience.

Azurin (1995) examined religious rites performed in Pakil, Laguna, called Turumba; the fertility dance in Obando, Bulacan; the Sinulog in Cebu; and the Sanghiyang meditative fire-dancing in Alfonso, Cavite. Azurin describes these rites as dance-prayers and argues that these acts are a "wedlock of the prehistoric and colonial ways of communal worship" (81). Writing in Filipino in this chapter of his book which I paraphrase, Azurin (81) argues that the act of ritual dancing is as old as our proto-human ancestors. He contends that the symbolic swaying of bodies as well as singing is held as a prelude to mating, hunting or as part of ceremonies attending troops going to war. The dance embodies biological, psychological, and sacred aspirations that makes us distinctly human.

Dance movements and songs are patterned after nature. The imitation of the animals' mating patterns and the sounds that they emit are the basis for human society's formulations of songs, language and prayers, according to Azurin (82). As humans formed societies and cultures, songs and dances have become integral components of harvest and thanksgiving, and celebrations found in cultures old and new, Azurin and forms of worship. The practice of Turumba, with all its awkward movements and steps is, according to Azurin, drawn from the impulse of the ancient ways and thus the self succumbs to the traditional framework of piety even if the movements are awkward (82).

Azurin's description of a Filipino *pista* is worth noting. He said that contrary to Mexican philosopher Octavio Paz's nihilist view that feasts are representations of death, this condition is not found in the Filipino pista. The leccio is recalled in this instance because, as I argue that it sprung from the indigenous practice of the *dung-aw*, death is at the core of both leccio and dung-aw. Azurin (88) asserts however, that in the Filipino belief system, even wakes and burials emphasize the continuity of life and the kinship between the living and the dead. He writes that the rite of burial is a sort of *despedida* (literally, a going-away party) hosted by the kin of the deceased, with an admonition that the deceased communes with kin that had gone ahead to the great beyond. This is reminiscent of the patterns attending both the recitations of the leccio and the dung-aw.

It can be argued that in the absence of a direct reference to the leccio and/or dung-aw by these scholars, my assertions might be deemed overreaching. But for sure, we cannot stand by the other definition of nihilism that says traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). It is precisely out of a belief that the subject of this study did not spring out of nowhere that this study proceeds.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

It is from this premise that this research seeks to answer the question: Was the Ilokano's assimilation to Christianity (Catholicism) absolute that all vestiges of indigeneity and ethnicity have been effectively wiped-out? Or, were there instances when the Ilokano were able to navigate through the systematic purging of their indigenous beliefs and were able to retain them by assigning "Christian" qualities to these traditions and thus, masking its "indigenous" origins?

This paper argues that the leccio is such a vehicle used to navigate through the strong currents of Christian conversion that threatens to overpower indigenous traditions. We assert that the leccio is the same as the Ilokano's indigenous practice of mourning the dead (called the *dung-aw*) albeit being deployed as a Christian (Catholic) practice. Consider this description of the dung-aw written by a blogger identified only as "I am called DENCIONG" in 2012:

> The *dung-aw* expresses the lyric mode of death, the thought of which it congeals one's blood with chill anticipation thrusts one into the blank depth of sorrow. It is the song of grief, sorrow, lamentation and praise

> for the dead. The *dung-aw* is charged with deep emotion and is stamped with feeling of sympathy and love which arise directly from sharp personal sorrow which the singer of the *dung-aw* may have felt while creating it extemporaneously.

By this, we can also create a description or definition of the leccio simply by replacing the word "dung-aw" in the preceding definition with "leccio" and still arrive at an accurate description of the latter. On this basis, it can be said that the dung-aw and the leccio are not mutually exclusive. The task now is to explain the intersection of Christianity and indigeneity in this situation where an apparent Christian tradition (that is the leccio) has evolved from its pure indigenous form, the dung-aw.

Kottak (52) says "in a complex society [. . .] people constantly negotiate their social identities." He calls this "situational negotiation of social identity" and explains that "sometimes, taking a status or joining a group requires a conversion experience, acquiring a new and overwhelming primary identity, such as becoming a born-again Christian" (Kottak, 52). As a result of this major status shift, the Ilokano has effectively assimilated into the Christian ways of attending masses and praying the rosary, among others. But Kottak (52) also says ethnicity could also be fluid and flexible, adding that statuses can also be contextual. If a person can be both "black and Hispanic," an Ilokano can certainly be Christian and indigenous at the same time.

The leccio and the dung-aw are both lyrical expressions of death with differing modes of deployment. The leccio is deployed as Christian lore, while the dung-aw is folklore. But as far as these practices' sources of knowledge are concerned, such knowledge still comes from the same indigenous cultural roots—only that the leccio is disguised as Christian practice. Burke (25) describes this apparent "paradox" of tradition: "in the first place, apparent innovation may mask the persistence of tradition. The persistence of religious attitudes in a secularized form has been noted in many cultures, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu and Muslim."

If the Catholic Church has allowed the practice of the leccio to persist throughout the generations despite its indigenous underpinnings, Burke (52) says,

> Historians of missions used to concentrate on the 'conversion' of individuals, groups and peoples from one religion to another. Today, aware of the persistence of tradition, they place more emphasis on the conscious or unconscious mixture or synthesis of the beliefs and values of the two religions involved.

The peculiar local color of the *leccio* might also be an attempt by missionaries to "negotiate" the context of Christianity in a way as to be understood in the community and thus overcome the recalcitrant (and even belligerent) attitude of the locals toward conversion to Christianity. Burke (120) explains, "missionaries [. . .] tried to present their message in such a way that it would seem to be in harmony with the local culture. In other words, they believed Christianity to be translatable, and attempted to find local equivalents for ideas such as 'saviour,' 'trinity,' 'mother of God' and so on."

If the leccio then became a means by which the introduced concept of Christianity was localized and "indigenized," then the theory that only the Cordillera peoples have historically resisted assimilation to the "Spanish Empire" might actually be debunked. In the leccio, the Ilokano might have carried out its own cultural "resistance" against what might be regarded as the hegemony of the West.

From the perspective of cultural materialism "all power is fragile, subject to undermining by dissident elements within a society, and they believed that literature inadvertently displays the fissures in power, the moments of subversion where the precariousness of power is most palpable" (Rivkin and Ryan 506).

In the leccio, the Ilokano was able to undermine the ultimate Christian authority, the Bible, "a historical text that illuminates a pattern" (Rivkin and Ryan 506), by creating another text based on the dung-aw. By this intervention, the Ilokano did not merely "reflect" upon their own culture and tradition, but rather the leccio created an "effect" upon the cultural situation that they currently find themselves in.

This "effect" is not only in the leccio's literary manifestation but also in terms of how the local voice prevails over the voice of the clergy in the church hierarchy. These are "ways in which power is maintained by unofficial means" according to Rivkin and Ryan (506) in characterizing the work of New Historicists.

That the leccio and for that matter the dung-aw are cultural practices considered endangered means that all the more attention should be given to these cultural forms in order to provide an "anti-essentialist" historical view of the Ilokano. A counter-narrative is important because the Ilokano has been regarded by popular historical accounts as one of the Philippine ethnolinguistic groups that have assimilated into the "Spanish Empire." Rivkin and Ryan (507) explain, "The metaphor of their missing stories is another way to mark the place of alternative discourses,

alternative histories, of all the historical work yet to be done in the ever-expanding process of writing the past."

A MOTHER'S GRIEF: THE LECCIO AS DUNG-AW

The leccio is a form of lamentation by Mary, the mother of Jesus based on the suffering and death by crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That lament is likened to the dung-aw, the Ilokano practice of mourning the dead. By observation, this is a practice commonly undertaken by older women. Among others, the dung-aw recalls instances in the life of the deceased as well as the circumstances that led to his or her passing. In verse 20 of Leccio I, the persona speaks of the death of a child on the cross,

Quet ita anacco ta sica manen
Dungngo ti sumina ditoy arpadco
Ay awanen, Apo, ti murmurayco, nga
Sabong a nabanglo
Ta indaca metten pinadso iti
Nangato a bantay Calvario
Anya aya unay anacco ti basolmo
Nga castoy man ti malac-ammo
Nga rigat nga napalalo nga pakatayan
Toy Inam, anacco

[And now that you, the child that I love
Would leave my side, no longer will I
Wake up to the scent of fragrant flowers
For they have condemned you to die
At Mount Calvary. What could you
Have done that is so wrong to deserve
This great suffering? This is the death
Of your Mother, my child.]

The traditional liturgical account of Jesus's final hours on the cross is recalled in the practice of the recitation of the seven last words on Good Friday. The Catholic faith is aware that Jesus' third word pertains to his mother and John the Apostle who was with Mary. Here, according to biblical scholars, is proof that there is a mother and son bond between Mary and Jesus and the proof is in the latter's words "Mother

behold your son," and "Son, behold your mother." Bishop (254) explains that the words were uttered because

> (N)ow that he, the only child, was dying, there would be no one to watch over Mary and to take care of her in her declining years. Their many kin would not see Mary in want, but Jesus did not wish his mother to be shunted from relative to relative, no matter how kindly disposed they might be.

But this is hardly comforting for Mary, as Bishop (255) further states, "All too well, Jesus knew that words like these, far from decreasing her grief, would add to it and bring all her sorrow to poignant life. It was better to say it all in a few important words." That Mary was in tears all throughout her son's ordeal, Bishop (254) states this in no uncertain terms: "(Mary and John) stood only a foot below his eyes, and what they saw caused Mary to sob and lower her head."

If there are four versions of the leccio that were provided for this paper, there could easily be many more versions written in the past that might still be in use today, or it could also be possible that new ones are being written at present (Rabanal-Valera). It has been said that some leccio materials were written by *maestros* who were also directors of theatre groups that staged *sarzuelas*, a type of stage play where singing and dancing are also incorporated. The dialogue is usually humorous and there is a touch of romance in the plot. Usually, they were handwritten and conveniently compiled in notebooks for leccio performers and were put away for easy storage after the Holy Week (Rabanal-Valera).

While some leccio texts were based on the life of Jesus Christ, writers need not (nor were they expected to) be schooled in the Gospels. The leccio's content varies and may not be bible-based. More than a biblical account, the dominant theme of the leccio is a mother's grief over the death of a child.

The leccio consists of about 22 or more verses, with a verse comprising some ten lines. The song is introduced by a root chord on the guitar followed by a seventh in the next chord to guide the pitch of the singers—a duet—doing first and second voices. The guitarist is usually the third person in the group although it could be dispensed with if either of the two singers could play the guitar.

As mentioned, the instrument does more to initiate and provide a transition to the verses rather than a musical accompaniment as the lines are delivered a capella. A skilled guitarist may proceed with a few adlibs between lines but it is usually the

vocal harmony that sets the tone of and dominates the performance. Perhaps the use of the repetitive expression "ahh" after the delivery of each line is onomatopoeic in the sense that it mimics the sound that a person makes when crying. The content of the material may vary, but the work usually ends in two ways: either a hope that the persona may one day join the deceased in heaven ("*Ta intayto met la agtitipon dita arpad ti Dios Apo*"), or with another's pleading for the mother to end her mourning and to be strong instead because Jesus' death is God's will.

Isunan, Apo, isardengmo daguita adu
Nga sangsangitmo
O Apomi a Virgen Maria, agliwliwaka
Paturdem ta nakemmo
An-anoem cadi, Apo, ta iso't
Inkeddeng ti langit a nangato.

[Hush now, my Lady,
Dry your copious tears, take comfort
Virgin Mary, our Lady, and be brave,
For this is fated and ordained from
The heavens above.]

Today, the leccio may be performed by either men or women, but older recollections have it that the practitioners were commonly men. The reason for this might be debatable but Rabanal-Valera (2015) says categorically that it has nothing to do with gender dominance, only that accordingly, it was the men who knew how to play the guitar.

By my experience and recollection, gender dominance was never an issue in the performance of the leccio specifically the question of whether in performing the rite, men are preferred over women. However, in terms of the writing or composing the material, Mrs. Valera's mention of the maestro is a key concept in an attempt to provide a tentative explanation to the role of men and women in the performance of the leccio. I hasten to add, however, that this issue certainly deserves further inquiry.

For instance, a line of inquiry would be to provide a timeline as to when the writing and composing of the leccio began. If it could be established that the leccio is being composed and performed at a time when the Catholic church asserted dominance in the Ilokano society, then "the church, like the state, is ideologically committed to the principles of male domination," according to Susan Harding (Reiter 294). But it

is also true that as far as the dung-aw is concerned, the ritual is customarily performed by older women. It can be imagined that the diversity of utterances in a dung-aw vary, insofar as their memory of the deceased are concerned and how the mourner recites these in a dung-aw. But we have to underline the fact that the persona in the leccio is female and if the writer is male (and subsequently the performer), these men must assume the mindset and character of a female. In this instance, Pertierra's (209) words are again recalled in his description of the Ilokano *komedya* insofar as role reversals (or switchings) are concerned: "gender differences are muted and women in the *komedya* are often in the center of battles as active participants."

The earlier versions of the leccio may have been written by Ilokano men because church patriarchy have privileged men in terms of education and literacy. As a result, the training and education obtained by men who do not necessarily belong to the *principales* or the elite, would have contributed to the flourishing and diversity of texts on the leccio. Despite the fact that the leccio writes about one specific subject, the words diversify and inflate, and partake of cultured ways of seeing that points to a fundamental attribute of literary writing: imaginative.

Ultimately, what appears to be male dominance in the writing of the leccio may not have mattered as the Ilokano man and woman tap into their indigeneity and indigenous worldviews. Paula Webster (Reiter 146) explains, "Women in pre-class societies were neither oppressed nor exploited. The expression of authority and power did not reflect gender differences."

Isabelo de Los Reyes (233) mentions that in the Ilocos provinces, there are lamentations and hymns that are sung in low tones. He does not specifically mention the dung-aw. Instead he presents an example in the following lines:

Ay anakko bunga!
Bilbilinenka, ama!
Ta no makitam ni Kal-la
Pakomustaamto koma.

[My child, my seed!
I ask of you, by my father
That if you see Kal-la
Send her my regards.]

The pattern—especially in the recurring use of the word "bunga" (literally fruit or seed)—is similar to the leccio which is now stipulated as patterned after the dung-aw. In verse 2 of Leccio I, the lines are thus stated,

Ta idi, anacco, ta rebbengna coma
nga aginanaac, o, bunga
Ta maicasiam a bulan idin Ama,
Nga toy tianko nabukelka

[It was then, my child, as it is only right
That I deserved some rest, my seed,
Because – by my father – it was the
Ninth month then, of you being
Formed in my womb.]

For sure, the use of the term "bunga," and for that matter "anacco" (my child), is specific to the mourning accorded to a child. Anima (82-83) cites the following example of a dung-aw:

O! Anacco a nasayacsac
Liwliwac quen ragragsac;
A napancan dita andas
Sumublica pay coma caniac
(Apay) ngamin aya anacco a
Panaoannac!

[My sprightly child, my comfort,
My happiness, you have gone
To that bier, but you should return
To me. Why did you have to leave me?]

It is apparent that the loss of a child results in profound grief, and, in these literatures presents a more vivid account of a mother's affections for her child. Verse 3, Leccio II further elaborates on the reasons why Anima's example is stated as such:

Malaguipco amin daguitoy anacco
Ta sica ngamin bunga ti macagapu
Ta no salaysayek nga isao, diac
Masbaalan toy ladingitco.

Ata rigat, tuoc ti linak-amco, nanipud
Caaddam ditoy saclotko.
Puyat, bisin, lam-ec ken tudo ti
Agsasamusam a linac-amco
Gapu laeng, anacco, ti ayatco a
Mailisica cadaguiti naranggas unay a tao.

[These I remember because of you, my child.
Because when I speak of you, I could not
Contain my grief. I have endured hardships
And suffering since you were a child on my lap –
Sleepless nights, hunger, storms and all –
Just so I could keep you from the harmful
Designs of cruel people.]

If the foregoing examples are an indication, delos Reyes's and Anima's examples illustrate that the leccio is, form-wise, patterned after the dung-aw. It might be similar in form but differs in delivery. The leccio is delivered through a musical structure while the *dung-aw*, according to Anima (82), is a mere tearful lamentation. It is a sentiment uttered by the bereaved and it is a litany of grief, anguish and pain (Anima 82).

Jocano (178) is much more specific. The lamentation, he says, is characterized by wailing in a dramatic and formal manner. "Everyday relatives wail over the dead and recount his good deeds." He writes further that the dung-aw usually provides relatives with the opportunity to give vent to their grief over the dead and somehow to remind the listeners, who are moved to tears, that life is short and therefore should be lived well.

If the dung-aw provides the framework for the leccio and the former is regarded as a practice that is rooted in Ilokano culture, then it stands to reason that the leccio is just as culturally rooted. But the objects of the material - that of Mary and Jesus – suggest an outside influence and therefore bring into attention the traditions that govern the practice: is it ethnic, indigenous or Christian?

THE INDIGENOUS, ETHNIC, AND CHRISTIAN INTERSECTIONS

In the passages that comprise Leccio I, the details clearly speak of a reference to the nativity. "*Quet idi anacco ta incam nagtengan / ti ili nga Bethlehem nga*

nacayanacam. /Ado ken sabsabali nga balbalay / ti incam nangibagaan / Ti paggianan nga pagdagusan / ngem awan mayat nga incam sangbayan" (When we arrived in the town of Bethlehem where you were born, my child, we asked many homes if they could take us in. But there was no one to take us and shelter us in). This is the biblical "no room in the inn" which is one of the most well-known accounts in the gospels. Rabanal-Valera's (2015) analysis says that even if the writer is not a scholar of the Bible, a writer can compose a leccio based on common biblical passages and anecdotes.

On this basis, the writer could take his or her liberties and overdramatize biblical references to include imaginary scenarios that are not found in biblical passages. For instance, verse 7, Leccio I, would point to the meeting of the so-called Three Kings (Wise Men or Magi) in the story of the Nativity (Matthew 2: 1-12) and claim this in the *leccio* as a mere chance encounter. "*Quet dagiti tallo nga Ari nga cona, / awan met ti nagtutulaganda. /Ngem iti dalan nagsasaracda, a gapu/ daydi bituen a sursurutenda*" (Now the so-called Three Kings, they did not agree among themselves at first, but they met during their journey because of the star that they were following)

This situation suggests that liturgical accuracy takes a backseat to favor a more personal rendering of a mother's lament over the death of the child. That some leccio compositions contain biblical references only serves to strengthen the point of the divinity of the decedent child. Consider, for instance, a reference to the young Jesus in Luke's account (Luke 2: 41-52) when he went missing for three days during the Festival of the Passover to which he questioned why his parents were searching for him when in fact Jesus says he had to be in his Father's house:

> *Tallo nga aldaw anacco, nga*
> *Nagawanca ditoy imatangco*
> *Quet ni amam anacco, lagawna tay*
> *Napalalo*
> *No sadino ita nga disso, ti*
> *Panuntunanmi kenka, anacco*
> *Nga calalaok, casinsinnungbatmo*
> *Dagiti mamasirib nga mamaestro*
>
> [You went missing for three days, my child,
> And your father was beside himself wondering
> Where to look for you. But we soon saw that
> You were in the company of wise men whom
> You were having discussions with.]

This aspect of the gospels is underscored because Christian tradition has it that this is the last time that Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, was directly mentioned in the scriptures. During Jesus's ministry as an adult, Joseph was never again mentioned and from here Mary was represented in Christian teachings as a widow. But in the leccio, the fate of Joseph is explicit and just as mourned.

Quet idi anacco ta incan manursuro
Cadaguiti riniwriw a tattao
Ragsacco coman a napalalo
Ta napatan-ay can nga anacco.
Ngem napursing a narungrungdo
Ti ragsac daytoy puso
Gapu ti ipupusay ni Joseph
Nga nadungngo
Asinonto cad pay ti cabadangco nga
Manaranay kenca anacco

[Soon my child, you were preaching
To the multitude and I would have been
Happy that you are honored as such.
But the joy of my heart was short-lived
Because Joseph, who was quite loving,
Has died. With whom will I now share
The burden of caring for you, my child?]

The gospels do not mention Joseph's death, or if indeed he died prior to Jesus's adult ministry but this trope is again elaborated in verse 2 of Leccio II which states, "*Gasatco ngata ti agsagaba, ta pimmusay / ni Joseph, nandungngo nga asawa*" (It is my fate to suffer because Joseph, my loving husband, has died). Again, in verse 7 of Leccio IV: "*Ngem ladingitko ti kimmaro gapu't ipupusay/ni Joseph a nadungngo*" (But my grief has multiplied because Joseph, who was quite loving, has died). Joseph was again mentioned as Leccio II ended in verse 18,"*Ala, anacco ti maudi nga idawdawatko / kenka nga ilalailo/Inton masarakam ni Joseph a nadungngo/ isaritamto kad met anacco / Nga kayatko metten ti umay dita ayanyo*" (And now my child, my final pleading: If you would be so kind as to tell Joseph, who was quite loving, that I also wish to be with the both you in the afterlife).

Joseph is always described as "*nadungngo*" or a loving father. Jocano (99) explains that in the Ilokano system of kinship and family ties, the father is always the recognized head of the family and the source of ultimate authority. Although, he

proceeds, the father does not exercise rigid authority over the members of his family. He shares his authority with his wife, especially in making decisions for their children.

This situation of shared parenting is articulated in a scene described in verse 8, Leccio II where the child Jesus is supposedly asleep in the cradle and it is his mother's turn to rest.

Sublatannacto ni Amam, o bunga
Nga mangtultulod, mangduaya kenka
Tapno saan nga agpatingga, nga
Sumbrek ti puyopoy ta duyanmo, bunga
Agkinkinnita cam ken ni Amam, gapu
Ti singpetmo nga incam maimatangan
Ta ipagpagapu met ngata ti Dios piman,
Nga mayataday ti kinapanglaw

[Your father will take my place, my seed,
And will rock you gently, and sing you lullabies.
With your father's help, the breeze that lulls
You to sleep as he rocks your cradle will
Not cease. He and I will look at each other
As we admire your kind face.
We are impoverished, but you are God's
Way of assuaging this.]

Jocano (98) states further that the (Ilokano) father is responsible for providing the children with the basic needs in the best way he can. On the other hand, the mother helps support the family, takes care of the children and does the household tasks. The value of a father and the pain of his sudden loss are illustrated in the poem *Panangusig ti Dung-aw* (Hufana 112) where the English translation reads in part,

What but Father's care clung fast
To our weal no less than twenty
Of his thirty years. Two changes of diapers
We two children had moulted off –
I and my younger sibling, both of us petted
To inherit what passed for true.
Food vanished as soon as it was served us.
But why all the weeping?

There are two key words in the preceding example of the leccio that points to distinctive Ilokano cultural markers. First is the use of the word *mangtultulod,* and the other is *mangduaya*. Mangtultulod pertains to the act of rocking a suspended cradle described by Jocano (1982, 146) as a rattan hammock called *indayon*. He explains further that in the absence of rattan, "they use an improvised one made of a strong blanket slung by cords at each end."

Mangduaya is simply to sing a lullaby (Hufana 12). The leccio itself speaks of an Ilokano mother's concept of child-rearing—a tendency to spoil their children by giving everything they ask for (Jocano 146) and to disregard their own interests for the sake of the child. If this is the manner in which Mary raised his son Jesus, then Mary might as well be Ilokano.

Ket no incanto, anacco, macariing
Dagdagusencanto, anacco nga ubbaen
Ilil-lili canto anacco nga sapuyoten
Ditoy barukongco incanto manen duayaen
Ta ti pannaturogmo inca tuloyen
Ut-ot tactackiagco diacto samiren
Kunkunac gamin anacco nga innacto
Sagrapen, ti bunga ti ado a dagensen
Ata rebbeng tay maysa nga ina nga inna
Taripatuen, tay ubing bassit unay inna
Dungdunguen

When you are awaken, my child,
I would, at once, carry you in my arms
And rock you gently as I sing a lullaby
So you can be further lulled to sleep.
The pain in my arms do not matter.
I will suffer the hardships
For it is only right that a mother
Should care for the child that she loves.

But who was Mary? "The handmaid of the Lord," Mary says of herself in the scriptures (Luke 1:38) and "highly favored" by God (Luke 1:28) but there was no mention in the Bible as to whether Mary had engaged in a trade or livelihood. Not so with the leccio. Verse 9 of Leccio III describes Jesus as "*putot ti agab-abel ken / carpentero*" (sired by a weaver and carpenter). This matter was expounded further as Jesus

traversed the route to Calvary and there, Mary says, "*inda inuksob daydi caoesmo nga inabelco*" (they stripped you of your clothes that I have woven).

"The highly favored ... handmaid of the Lord" already says much about Mary's role as God's chosen one. However, it is not out of whim that *leccio* composers imagine Mary as an Ilokano weaver. Jocano (61) writes,

> There is a legend in Ilocos Norte which states that the expertise of the women in spinning cotton into long, fine threads and weaving cloth with beautiful designs was taught to them by a goddess who was an expert weaver of fine clothes in heaven. She supposedly came to earth and married a native from Paoay, hundreds of years ago.

That the Mary in the leccio was a weaver suggests that she is a woman of exceptional skill because according to Jocano, "it usually takes two years to learn the art and master the whole process." Imagining that she is from Ilocos Sur and not from Paoay where the original Ilokano weavers were from, she must have been one of "only few women from other places ... to have learned to weave skillfully" (Jocano 61). If so, the Mary of the leccio fulfills the liturgical Mary's role as the "chosen one" because as a weaver, her skill is considered exceptional.

Ramon Villegas writes that traditionally, a proper (Ilokano) lady must know how to weave on a loom (Manalo 117-18).

> Today, the craft of weaving survives only in Paoay, Pinili and Sarrat in Ilocos Norte, and Bantay, Candon, Caoayan, Santa, Santiago, Tagudin and Vigan in Ilocos Sur. Other centers of the craft in the region are Abra and Bangar, La Union. Wholesalers from other provinces come to weavers' homes or the public markets in these towns to buy their handmade products.

But while tradition has it that weaving is undertaken for the most practical reasons and purposes as with blankets or clothing, the weaving patterns and designs are established not only for aesthetic reasons but relates to the people's most intrinsic beliefs as well. Villegas (Manalo 117-18) says that the *binakul* fabric's squares and rectangles arranged in a grid in such ways as to produce an illusion of circuitous images is "thought to drive away evil spirits because of the dizzying effect." He adds, "it was believed such designs came to the weaver when she was in a trance or in a dream. These designs protected the owner from bad spirits" (Manalo 118).

Villegas (Manalo 121) affirms that the women of Paoay are highly skilled weavers. "What was once a chore limited to the production of fabrics for clothing for the immediate family is now a successful business activity providing surplus income." In Vigan, the weaving center is in a barangay called Camanggaan which is also known for its mangoes, hence its name according to Villegas (Manalo 123). With a population count of less than a thousand, the village weaving industry is augmented by farming. Villegas says the most sought after woven products from Camanggaan are pillow cases, bags, blankets, and curtains.

The leccio is thus replete with passages suggesting that Mary had woven Jesus's clothes as a child as mentioned in verse 14, Leccio III: "*nasikkarudco daydi inucsobda nga caoesmo … ta tinibbik ken inabelko idi ubingka pay nga agsososo*" (I stumbled upon the clothes that they stripped from you … because they were clothes that I have made and woven since you were a nursing child), and even when he was already an adult in verse 6, Leccio IV: "*Idi anacco ta bumilegcan nga / tumulong ken bumadang / Nangabelac ti tonicam ket tumengmo't innac nagrukodan*" (When you were old enough to help and assist, I wove you a tunic and measured its length from your knees).

THE LECCIO AND PASYON COMPARED

But how does it happen that the leccio is often regarded as the Ilokano's counterpart of the pasyon of the Tagalogs? To be sure, there are similarities as there are differences and it is the latter that prevails in the comparison even if leccio practitioners themselves—to include Rabanal-Valera—concede that it can be likened to the pasyon.

The similarities are in the use of scriptural passages. The leccio, however, regards this as optional and only insofar as it provides sufficient material to characterize the interface between the subjects of the work. Otherwise, it may skip the scriptures entirely and work instead on an imagined scenario as with Leccio II which speaks entirely of a mother's remembrances and pining for a child that she had raised. In the passages she remembers her instinct to protect the child from harm, her hopes for the future: "*Ta bareng cunac masupapacanto ti nam-ay iti aldaw a masakbayan*" (That hopefully you would be blessed with a comfortable life in the future), as well as expectations that the child would be her steward in her old age : "*No ipalubos ti Dios a dumackelka addanto mangibin caniac no pigsac tay agbaba*" (God-willing, you will grow to be my support when I am already weak).

The pasyon, while a distinctively Filipino tradition, appears to draw a basis on the scriptures and this is mandatory. It begins with a recitation of the Biblical creation up to the judgement day. No wonder that the *pabasa*, or the reading of the pasyon, is an all-nighter with a very thick volume as reference, compared to the leccio's 20 minutes duration. In terms of music, the pasyon shifts from a breezy waltz tempo to a sprightly marching rhythm. The leccio, on the other hand, is consistently downcast and melancholic because it is reflective of the persona's grieving point of view.

Thus, in terms of voice, it is clear that it is Mary the mother of Jesus that speaks in the leccio, with the exception of the end verse when the voice shifts from Mary to the listener. In the *pasyon* the speaker is anonymous all throughout. In terms of structure, the pasyon is a recitation of scriptural passages with a lesson or *aral* in between (see also Ileto in Cordero-Fernando 7-15). On the other hand, the leccio is not flagrantly didactic because it concerns itself with "feelings" particularly of a mother's grief at the loss of her child.

In terms of authorship, there is no specific claim to original authorship in a *leccio* composition while the pasyon has recorded authors such "Ignacio Luna & Sons" in 1949. Cordero-Fernando (vii) says, however, that *the pasyon* dates as far back as 1704. Filipino authors such as Gaspar Aquino de Belen were composers of the more popular *pasyon* versions based on a "seventeenth century Spanish *pasion* as a model" (Cordero-Fernando vii). Meanwhile, the leccio is described merely as "*kadaanan*" (old) by Imelda C. Rivero writing for *Tawid News Magasin* dated April 6, 2015.

Reynaldo Ileto's Cordero-Fernando (vii) description of the pasyon as "grounded in local traditions" is key in the understanding of this practice as well as that of the leccio which, by now has been established as based on a specific local tradition, the dung-aw. "Cordero-Fernando (vii) says," chants whose phrasing dates back to the days of the *datus* give Lent its unmistakable, uncanny character.

While the leccio, for instance, is Christian in orientation, Cordero-Fernando (vii) describes this as "paraliturgy." She proceeds, "these are rituals ... which have a public character, but unlike the Mass, do not form part of the Church's official liturgy." What's important, according to her, is that "they have been concocted to make Christian teachings easier to grasp." In the end, these "non-official, popular liturgy (was) developed by the laity itself, sometimes with the priests' approval."

SITUATIONAL NEGOTIATION: THE ILOKANO AS CHRISTIAN AND INDIGENOUS

Accounts have it that the ministry in Vigan was established by the Augustinian friars as early as 1575. The ministry's jurisdiction extended up to the territories of San Vicente, Cauayan, Tuley, Santa Catalina and Santo Domingo (Laoag City Local Government). "What worked the miracle of overhauling the sense of values of the Ilocano, his circumscribed attitude toward his fellowmen, his moral goals in life, his beliefs, convictions and attitudes ... was his conversion to Christianity" (Laoag City Local Government).

This might be so, but some customs and beliefs considered to be "indigenous" seem to have held sway within the larger community. De Los Reyes (235) condescendingly states, "There are many customs and superstitions in the Ilocano provinces which are believed only by the peasants and the ignorant people. The principales or the elite and the educated people in the town seldom, if ever, follow them." Yet these peasants and ignorant people held the knowledge that enabled "unique innovations made by Filipinos" on Christian practices. The innovative elements were "pre-Christian survivals," that were sustained throughout the centuries (Cordero-Fernando vii).

Because Christianity was introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish colonial powers, it is easy for a casual observer to assume that the leccio is Spanish-influenced and therefore must draw its origins from Europe. Regalado Trota Jose (Manalo 49) says, "I came to realize that much of this attribution to Spanish origin as well as the very quest for a Spanish pedigree were symptomatic of a culture that found it difficult to 'own' certain of its achievements."

This tendency at colonial mentality, he continues, is drawn from the mindset that "something out there was always better than what we could do" (Manalo 49). Today, Filipino "folks" still grapple with the concepts of "enculturation, culture change, or even adaptation." Trota Jose (Manalo 49) explains this further:

> The conscious/unconscious refusal to consider these aspects has resulted in a sort of blindness where the full beauty of ones culture cannot be enjoyed. It has resulted in an amnesia where things of the past lose their significance.

Harrison (11) writes that even epic poetry such as "The Song of Roland" has its origins in "short folk songs called cantilenes." The development of the epic to what it is today is attributed to "epic fermentation," he adds. Drawing from the work of

the nineteenth century medievalist Gaston Paris, Harrison (11) says "The Song of Roland" was "the product of a new sense of national identity emergent among the French people at the time of the First Crusade."

The issue here, however, is the assertion that the basis of the leccio is the Ilokano cultural practice called the dung-aw. In the dung-aw, there are no specific texts because every performance is based on the speaker's state of mind and emotion, according to Panganiban et al. (66). But if there is a common ground between the leccio and the French medieval epic, it is, that they are based on fairly stable references: the leccio is based on the circumstances of Christ's crucifixion while "The Song of Roland" rests on the historical fact of the Massacre at Roncesvals.

If, as Harrison (11) states, the epic had reached its present form through fermentation, is there a possibility that the leccio might attain a level of familiarity in terms of form, such that it might be regarded, in a sense, as fermented? As observed during Holy Week at present, there are not many practitioners of the leccio as compared to a generation ago. But the few holdouts are seen with worn copies of the leccio which they say have been handed to them by previous, older practitioners. Fermentation, thus, might be possible through the initiative and intervention of current practitioners, scholars, archivists and cultural advocates. In the process, these few remaining manuscripts might be compiled, preserved, transcribed, translated and reproduced (inasmuch as its performance is recorded) for the continuing production of knowledge.

How then would we characterize leccio as a local practice? Is it indigenous or ethnic? The definition of "indigenous," which is "having originated in and being produced, growing, living, or occurring naturally in a particular region or environment" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* 614) and "ethnic" which is defined as "of or relating to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* 427) creates a conundrum because the Christian interface of the *leccio* certainly did not occur "naturally" in the Ilocos region yet at the same time the dung-aw, yet unnamed by de los Reyes when he wrote his book *El Folk-Lore Filipino* had been practiced by the "peasants and the ignorant people" before the advent of Christianity.

Yet the amalgamation of both Christian and indigenous practices invariably results in a tradition that is uniquely Filipino and therefore warrants the description "ethnic." Cordero-Fernando (vii) explains, "In the case of our religion, the pagan elements intertwined with the Catholic give it an original Filipino character and make the pious shudder."

To resolve this issue for now, we borrow from Jocano (v) who states that, "the term ethnic is used here heuristically to refer to a culture-bearing population which occupies a continuous territory, shares the same basic values and historical tradition, speaks a common language, and has membership identity and is identified by others as constituting a social group."

It may not be optimal or perfect, but to describe the leccio, heuristically, as indigenous and ethnically Ilokano is sufficient for our immediate goals.

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