

THE KOMEDYA IN THE BICOL DOTOC: PRELUDE OR MAIN EVENT?

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Introduction

In this paper I am concerned with structures and relationships significant to understanding the *komedya* and the *dotoc* as performances of a community, having in mind specific practices in two communities: the *dotoc* of Baao, Camarines Sur and the *dotoc* and *komedya* of Bigaa, Legazpi City. At the beginning of my research, I was only familiar with the practice in Baao; my experience of the Bigaa practice was entirely new. For one, Bigaa practices both the *komedya*, which is absent in Baao, and the *dotoc*. This new experience led me to question all my previous conceptions. Is the *komedya* in the *dotoc*? Does it introduce or lead to the *dotoc*? Is it the *dotoc* itself? Is it a prelude or the main event? Is there any sense in pursuing this line of questioning that is really concerned with value related to the performed narratives?

The *dotoc* is a religious devotion to the Holy Cross. Every year in April and May, communities in the Bicol region of the Philippines perform the *dotoc* for nine days. The performance involves the singing of a text by women cantors called *paradotoc*, who as pilgrims, journey to the Holy Land to visit the Holy Cross. The text has various forms with

varying narratives and manner of performance. There are occurrences of the form in Camarines Sur such as in Baao, Nabua and Iriga, and in other provinces of the region. A variant of the *santacruz* described by Nicanor Tiongson (1975), the *dotoc* differs from the more popular May procession in many towns and cities featuring “local beauties” as the *reinas* (queens) in the *santacruz* entourage.

“Dotoc” in *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bicol* is actually the verb “nagdotoc” defined as “llegar, o acercarse a alguna parte” (Lisboa 1865, 128). Mintz and Britanico (1985, 279) provide a translation: *dotoc*, spelled “dutok,” means “advent, coming” and “magdutok,” “to come for something or for a specific purpose.” *Dotoc* then is an archaic Bicol word for pilgrimage. It is also the narrative contained in this cultural performance. This narrative of pilgrimage takes on many forms, as the *dotoc* varies from text to text. So far, there are seven texts that have been identified: *calle amargora*, *sanabua*, *panjardin*, *tres marias*, *sinanta-Elena*, *porlaseñal* and *corocobacho*. Four of these are extant (*sanabua*, *panjardin*, *porlaseñal* and *corocobacho*), but the text currently used in Santa Cruz, Baao and in Bigaa, Legazpi City is the *corocobacho dotoc* which is the focus of this essay.

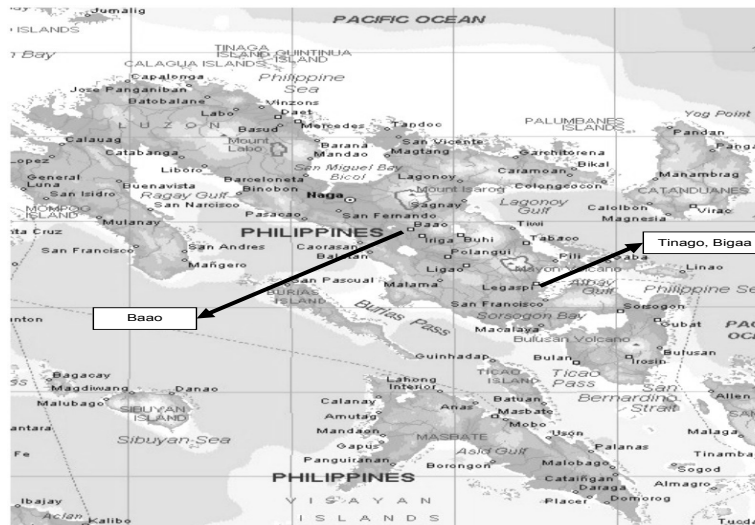


Figure 1. Map of the Bicol Region. Photo from <http://www.ati.da.gov.ph/bicol/sites/default/files/image/Bicol%20Map2.jpg>

The *corocobacho dotoc* text tells the story of a group of pilgrims who journey to the Holy Land to visit the Holy Cross. The pilgrims who journey at night come upon a *cobacho* (a caseta, Spanish for shed, or a small shelter from which the *corocobacho dotoc* got its name) with people inside. The pilgrims are dissuaded by those in the cobacho who have heard that the cross was stolen. But the pilgrims announce that the cross has already been recovered and they proceed to tell how everything happened.



Figure 2. The Cobacho. Photo by JB Llana



Figure 3. Dotoc performance in Santa Cruz, Baco on 2 May 2007. The pilgrims tell the story of Heraclius and the Persians at the cobacho. Photo by JB Llana

According to the tale, the cross was stolen and brought to Persia by its king, Cosrohas (Chosroes), who coveted Byzantine territory and stole the Holy Cross (Voragine 1993, 170). Herachio (i.e., Heraclius, Byzantine emperor of 610-641 A.D.) waged war against Persia and won. Cosrohas was killed by his own son Serwis who then ruled Persia. When Serwis surrendered to Herachio, he gave back the Holy Cross, which was then brought by the emperor to Constantinople and to the Holy Land. Trying to imitate Jesus, the emperor attempted to carry the cross up the hill of Calvary, but he initially failed. He only succeeded after heeding the advice of a patriarch to shed off his rich clothes, ornaments, and crown because Jesus himself had been a poor man.

After the Heraclius tale is told, the people in the cobacho join the pilgrims. Upon reaching the Holy Land, they praise and adore the cross, adorn it with flowers, sing the *Vexilla Regis*, and offer their petitions in the Pasion. The dotoc ends with the singing of the Adios. The dotoc texts generally have four parts: the main body of the dotoc and three auxiliary parts—the *Vexilla Regis*, the Pasion, and the Adios or Paaram. These parts are not altogether present in all texts.

The *Vexilla Regis Prodeunt* (The Royal Banners Forward Go) is a Latin hymn (the only Latin part of the *corocobacho dotoc*) composed by the poet and bishop of Poitiers, Venantius Fortunatus (A.D. 530-609) to celebrate the receipt of a relic of the True Cross. The relic was sent by Emperor Justin II and his wife to Radegunde and the monastery of the Holy Cross at Poitiers that she (Radegunde) had founded. Sung for the first time on 19 November 569 (Rousseau 1967, 635) the *Vexilla Regis* was adopted by the church “as one of her great Passion hymns” (Raby 1966, 89) and became a favorite song of the crusaders (Kuhnmuensch 1929, 396).

How this celebrated hymn came to be part of the dotoc can only be inferred from its much-talked-about appeal and popularity. The early practitioners clearly adopted it from the church services

and it then became an integral part of the dotoc tradition. And though the church eventually stopped using it, the dotoc tradition ensured its survival.⁵

The *Pasion de Dotoc* is comprised of praises and adoration of the Holy Cross and petitions for graces in this life and in the hereafter. The Adios is the leave-taking, its concluding part consisting of two stanzas, a quatrain bidding farewell to the Holy Cross, preceded by a quintilla or five-line stanza that sums up all the petitions for mercy so that the paradotoc may “attain the glory of heaven now and forever” as the text explains.

Bigaa’s Enticement: “Come and See”

The dotoc of Bigaa (particularly in sitio *Tinago*) is the same *corocobacho dotoc* performed in Baao to this day. The performance is however so different that if one does not listen closely to the words or if one is not familiar with the cobacho text, one would say there is no relation at all between the two dotoc practices.

The sitio of Tinago in Barangay Bigaa, a coastal barangay, lies some twelve kilometers north of the city center of Legazpi, along the road to Tabaco and Tiwi. Tinago has 105 households built on opposite sides of one main street from the national highway to the seashore. Every year in May, usually starting from 16 or 17 May, the residents of Tinago hold the dotoc every other day. The ninth day, the *katapusan* and fiesta, falls on 31 May.

I went to watch the dotoc of Tinago for the first time on 17 May 2007. Arlene and Sam, my informants, live across a narrow stream separating Tinago from their side of Bigaa. Both have not had the chance to witness the dotoc performance in its entirety. Although I was told that the performance usually begins at 12:00 noon, I knew that the dotoc itself came later because a reenactment of Helena’s search for the cross is presented first before the actual dotoc performance itself.

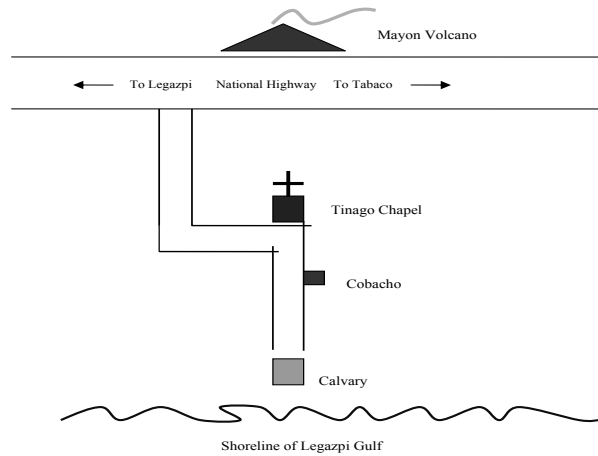


Figure 4. The Shoreline of Legazpi Gulf. Illustration by JB Llana.

One reaches the sitio through a road from the national highway. This road goes all the way to the shore, the pavement suddenly becoming sand and dust before turning to the left towards the chapel which is located on the corner of the second stretch of the road, marking one end of it. The other end has the *kalbaryo* (Calvary), the stage (and main performance venue) of the dotoc and the *komedyá*. The *kalbaryo* is a concrete square on concrete stilts rising some twenty feet from the ground accessible through a stairway in one corner of the square. The *kalbaryo* serves as the “mountain” on which the Holy Cross is found by Helena as well as the “Holy Land,” the destination of the pilgrims in the dotoc.



Figure 5.
The Kalbaryo of
Tinago,
Bigaa. Photo by JB
Llana.

With four posts supporting a roofing of G.I. sheets that covers only a small area of the square, the kalbaryo looks like a high veranda with a protective railing of balusters. On the front side, a triangular wooden structure is set up on top of the lintel, making the structure look even taller and more imposing. A wooden raised dais under the covered space is built making two levels. The second level signifies “heaven” as indicated by the curtains. Bouquets of flowers and ribbons of coconut fronds decorate this raised square, the coconut fronds gently swaying with the breeze blowing from the side of the sea.

Beth Borja, daughter of the president of the sitio, has been organizing the annual performance. Arlene introduced me to her and later on to Beth’s mother. I asked for permission to take photographs and to use my video recorder. Both Beth and her mother said it was all right but when I met Nana Pilar, the *maestra* (trainer/director) of the performance, she forbade me to record a video. As the *maestra*, she is the “guardian” of the *libro* (i.e., the book or the text of the *komedya* and *dotoc*) that was given by her predecessors who also warned against making copies of the *libro* lest something “bad” happens to the community. Nana Pilar believes that she should heed the warning; anyone who wishes to witness the performances is welcome but they cannot have a copy of the text. At the same time, no one is allowed to take video recordings of the performances. I was told that some people have even offered to buy the *libro*, but they have been refused. The invitation is for the people to visit Tinago and watch the performance, which reminded me of the invitation Jesus extended to his disciples in John 1:39 to “come and see.”⁶

Nana Pilar’s “something bad might happen” is not just a figment of the imagination. Tinago is on the path of mudflows from nearby Mayon Volcano, right next to Padang, the area that was washed away to the sea by the raging flood of mud, boulders, and water from the slopes of the volcano during the onslaught of Typhoon Reming in November 2006. Nana Pilar thought she would not survive the terrifying ordeal. It was their belief in the Santo Cristo and their devotion to the Holy Cross

that saved them as they have been saved from natural disasters in the past. I asked Beth why they insist on staying in a dangerous area that is perpetually threatened by strong typhoons. She said they believe the community will be spared from any disaster; they have lived there for years and will continue to do so with much faith that their prayers and devotion will protect them from harm.

Beth does not share the same view with Nana Pilar when it comes to sharing the libro with other people. Beth even wants to have the Latin parts of the text translated into Bicol so that people will understand the words. She thinks that it is important to preserve but at the same time popularize their cultural traditions, especially among the younger generation. She also mentions that these traditions are part of their heritage as much as they are expressions of their undying faith in God and these traditions must be shared with the rest of the world.



Figure 7. Komedya performance on 17 May 2007 in Tinago, Bigaa . Photo by JB Llana

On the May 17th performance of the dotoc, the performers were not wearing costumes except for the basic crown of Helena and Constantine. A few hand props were added such as the soldiers' swords and three small crosses which represented those discovered in calvary. There was no brass band and the music was provided by a blind old man playing a guitar and a teenage boy playing a snare drum. Aside from myself, there were no outsiders in the audience.

The distinct sound of Nana Pilar's whistle alerted everyone to the opening of the performance. A few feet away from where we sat waiting in front of Beth's store, the few set pieces were positioned: three plastic chairs on which sat Helena, flanked by her son Constantine; two columns of plastic stools for the soldiers in Helena's court; and, in between them, a mat on which they could kneel. The "court" faced the kalbaryo and in the course of the performance moved from this position to several stations along the road to the kalbaryo. The royals, Helena and Constantine, were distinguishable from the rest of the characters by the crowns they wore, fashioned out of cardboard painted in gold and adorned with some shiny jewel-like accessories. Helena's scepter was also painted gold.

The whistle call turned out to be not just a signal to begin the performance but a cue for the musicians to play the music for the *marcha* (march) of the soldiers, the *damas* (damsels), and the entire court going from one stop in the pilgrimage to the next. The lines of the *personajes* (personages/characters) were sung without any accompaniment, each line softly dictated by the maestra who stayed on the side. This was not yet the dotoc, but the performance of a komedya.

Tiongson (1999, 1) describes the komedya as a form of theatre that originated from the Spanish colonial era. It is "a play in verse [that] has conventions of stylized verse delivery, marching for entrances and exits, choreographed fighting, and, very often, artifices to create magical effects on stage." It has been practiced for many areas in the Philippines and is called by many names. Tiongson (ibid.) further notes that in the

Tagalog region, “the komedya about the search for the Holy Cross by Elena and Constantino is called *arakyo, tibag, elena or kolokyo*.”

The action of the komedya consists of the pilgrimage to find the cross of Jesus undertaken by Helena when she was already 80 years old. Helena is the protagonist who leads the important mission and commands the damas and the soldiers. Constantine hardly has a line in the entire performance and serves more like a living prop. He gets to speak an extended line only during the *diskurso* (speeches) of the personajes at the concluding part of the performance. Tension and conflict are provided by the refusal of a *gurang* (old man) to reveal what he knows about the location of the cross. Helena directs her soldiers to “soften him” up by forcing him into a well (or a hollow space in the ground) where he will be starved for three days. The *gurang* eventually gives in, leads the entourage to the *kalbaryo*, and points to the location of the cross. The soldiers and damas climb the steps to the *kalbaryo* and “dig” on the raised square, as Helena, Constantine, and the people in the audience watch them. They find three crosses, one bigger than the other two. They also find three nails and a crown of thorns, but they are confused as to which of the three crosses found was Christ’s. God takes pity on them and sends an angel who tells them to have a sick person kiss all crosses because whichever heals the sick person is the “True Cross.” The Bishop consulted by the people advises them to test the crosses on a dead person; the cross that is able to rouse the dead to life is the “True Cross.” The “dead” lying on a small wooden bed across the road is “risen” when the last of the three crosses is laid on it.

The discovery of the True Cross segues into its triumphant proclamation made by means of a procession from the *kalbaryo* back to where the “pilgrimage” started. The procession then moves to the national highway towards the border of Padang, turns back towards the other interior streets of Bigaa all the way to the Bigaa Parish Church, back again to Tinago, and ends at the Tinago chapel.

As I watched on that day of May 2007, the small “True Cross” replica was placed on a light wooden dais (*andas* in the local language)

carried on the shoulders by four adolescent boys. Flowers and the *media luna* (half moon) and *bandera* (flag) in the dotoc were decorated on the dais. During the procession, the *Vexilla Regis* was sung mainly by the *cantoras* (cantors), who in Santa Cruz, Baa0 are called *paradotoc*. In Tinago, these *paradotoc* were young girls aged between fourteen and eighteen. The hymn they sang was the same *Vexilla Regis* in Latin lyrics that is also sung in Baa0 and Nabua in Camarines Sur but with a totally different melody. The verses of this Latin hymn were sung over and over until the end of the procession, briefly interrupted at the Bigaa Church, where the procession entourage prayed several Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory Bes in the local language. These same prayers and the Adios were recited at the chapel in Tinago, at the end of the procession.

By the time the komedya, procession, and prayers were over, dusk had fallen, so there was a short break while the participants took their meals courtesy of the sponsors of the day. We were hardly finished with our snacks when the *cantoras* once again congregated at the starting place—the same area where the komedya began. A small shed made of bamboo splits with a roofing of nipa stood on one side of the road near the area. It was the *cobacho* used in the dotoc action. Without any *décor*, the place looked like any resting area, with built-in seats of bamboo on three sides. A small bamboo table occupied the center space and on it were placed potted plants. The *décor* used in the procession—flowers, paper flags, and paper half moons—were placed in the pots.

Nana Pilar who was no longer needed to dictate the lines of the dotoc was conspicuously absent during this time. The young girls had copies of the *orihinal* (the dotoc script) with them. In practice, it was only the komedya script that is kept a secret while the dotoc script may be reproduced.

It was a dark night; only the interior of the *cobacho* was lit and there were no street lights. Taking photos was difficult. It was nevertheless a very enlightening night for me, because I witnessed an entirely new practice of the dotoc. Here in Tinago, the *paradotoc* were

young girls who, in the May 31st performance (the day of the fiesta itself), wore white dresses. They sang as though they had seriously rehearsed for the performance; gestures (*la mano*, in Spanish, meaning “the hand”) accompanied every line of the song. Six girls performed—two for each of the stanzas in each set of the sung text, alternating—four as the pilgrims who begin the journey and two at the *cobacho* who later join the pilgrimage to the “Holy Land.”⁸



Figure 8. Dotoc in Tinago, Bigaa (17 May 2007). The pilgrims tell the story of Heraclius at the *cobacho*. Photo by JB Llana.

Similar to the text in the Baao practice, the longest section of the dotoc in Tinago is the retelling (singing) of Heraclius’s story at the *cobacho*. Unlike in Baao though, the audience in Tinago was regaled not only by the singing but also by the gesturing of the *paradotoc*. Two girls were seated on each of the three built-in seats of the *cobacho*, around the center table bearing the *samno* (the décor with which they would adore and praise the cross). As their turn to sing came, each pair stood up to sing and do the *lamano*. Their voices were clear and full-throated, their gestures confident. When the tale had been told, all six girls got up and went out of the *cobacho* and onto the street, resuming the journey.

The girls of Tinago ran to the next station to sing and perform until they reached the *Tierra Santa* (Holy Land)—the kalbaryo of the komedyá. Accompanied by a young boy, the blind guitarist walked as fast as he could to keep up with the pace of the girls. The drummer followed closely, joined by some young boys who held portable gas-fueled lamps (*petromax*) to light the way. Up on the kalbaryo, the cantoras, together with the angel of God who helped Helena in her search for the “True Cross” and the personajes of the komedyá, sang the concluding part, including the *pasion de dotoc*. They were all positioned in a tableau on the dais, the “heaven” level.

All of these were performed repeatedly for nine days and nights, culminating on the May 31st fiesta with the performance of sacada, a parade, with a brass band whose members fetch all the personajes, from the lowest in rank (i.e., the soldados or soldiers) to those of the highest (i.e., Emperatriz Elena). This was the spectacular beginning of the fiesta performance that everyone in Tinago and those in the entire Bigaa, the neighboring barrios, and even Legazpi City looked forward to. At high noon, under the scorching sun, the costumed personajes paraded back and forth on the Tinago street until all other personajes were gathered. The lower-ranked *pregonero*, soldados and damas, and of course the musicians, had to withstand the heat and dust. Perhaps such unforgiving condition explains the ubiquitous sunglasses worn by the participants who were all in “medieval” costumes.⁹

Nanay Choleng, Arlene’s mother was just fifteen when she played the role of Emperatriz Elena, twice. Her grandfather, then the *teniente del barrio* (i.e., village head), made her ride a *dahong* in the sacada. It was a carriage or parade float shaped like a boat with sails grand enough for a queen and her damas. Her grandfather then required the Constantino to ride a real horse as this was called for by the story of the quest for the “True Cross.” The community had a common reading of the story—Emperatriz Elena went on a boat to Jerusalem in search of the cross while Constantino and his men were on horses. On the sacada were a band of twelve musicians and the rest of the personajes who accompanied the Emperatriz.

The sacada I saw in May 2007 was less grand but no less colourful and captivating to my outsider's gaze. What I saw was a village that showed all evidences of economic strife and wearing like a badge the wreckage of the last deadly typhoon, and yet bursting with life and vigour. The residents, mostly fishermen, were garbed for this *katapusan* of the dotoc and the komedya in shiny silks, coiffures and make up. The Gurang wore a long white robe and a beard and wig of long braided white abaca fiber. The performers' shiny shoes got dirtied by the dust on the street, the high heeled sandals of the ladies sinking into the sand on the unpaved areas. I struggled to contain my emotions as I watched the soldados salute the higher ranked personaje as they were fetched for the sacada. I recalled Nanay Choleng's story that in the month of May, the fisher folk somehow get more produce from the sea and save up enough money for the fiesta; the families vie for the public's attention and praise as they spend on the rental of costumes or on having them especially made for their sons or daughters who play roles in the komedya or sing in the dotoc. Nana Pilar told me that she has been sickly and weak, but in May she finds the strength to gather the personajes, train and rehearse them, and manage the afternoon performances.

The dotoc and komedya are therefore also performances of thanksgiving and celebration. In the procession following the komedya, the lavishness of the celebration could be seen in the colourful paper lanterns—shaped as individual letters spelling S-A-N-T-A-C-R-U-Z. The dinner, after the procession, was a feast of *lechon*, *sotanghon*, *egado*, *pochero*, *caldereta*, and *estofado* complemented by a variety of *kakanin* and sweets such as *ibos*, *suman*, *latik*, *leche flan*, *buko salad*. Joy and gratefulness for another year could be felt in the warmth and hospitality of the hosts who received friends, family, and strangers into their homes.

The dotoc performance during that day was the same one I saw on the 17th of May, except that the cantoras wore pristine white satin dresses and shoes instead of *tsinelas* (slippers). The cobacho was fully arrayed with fern bouquets. The music, provided by the same band of *musikeros* that played for the entire event, from the sacada to the dotoc, was a full complement of trombones, saxophones, and drums. And

though the street was still unlit, the event was graced by a full moon that night, lighting the performance in a silvery haze.

The highlight of the entire event was the concluding diskurso (speeches) of the personajes after the *pasion de dotoc*. Speeches were avidly listened to by the enthusiastic audience, their applause erupting after each speech, in rhythm with the explosions of the *kwitis* and other firecrackers that glowed in the moonlit sky. Beth, who emceed the diskurso, gave an explanatory speech on why they have continued practicing the santacruzán. In what perhaps could be regarded as a summary of the collective meaning of the event for the people of Tinago, Beth emphasized in her speech what she had already explained to me: the dotoc is a demonstration of their abiding faith in God who keeps them safe from all dangers, most especially the deadly natural calamities that frequent the area. She added that they were offering the performance as a way of expressing their gratitude. They wanted to share their joy with all who believe in the miraculous Santo Cristo. Finally, she pointed out that the tradition keeps them cohesive as a community.

After her speech, Beth introduced the performers, who in turn gave their speech as personajes in the komedya, to a happy cheering crowd. The diskurso was capped by what Beth called the “viva,” recited by all the personajes. I was not able to understand everything but the gist of it could be gleaned from the damas’ lines inviting everyone gathered to proclaim “viva!” (long live!) in honor of the Holy Cross and those who praise and honor Him. The children in the audience as well as the grown-ups all shouted “viva! viva!” in response.

After the finale at the kalbaryo, I walked back with Arlene to Beth’s house and went for another round of snacks. Many of the young people proceeded to the dance party organized by the youth of Tinago at the sitio’s basketball court. The full moon shone benignly on our heads, on the roofs of houses, and on the sandy street still full of people at half past nine in the evening. It had been a good night, a good day indeed, as Beth said. I left with a prayer on my lips.

Conclusion

My questions about the Bigaa practice came out of my previous conceptions about the dotoc of Baao. The issue is one of postcoloniality: the dotoc is a postcolonial performance that centers the community as protagonist, with the Heraclius tale being just a story told, not enacted, in the dotoc. How do I argue this considering that the Bigaa practice contains both the Helena and the Heraclius stories, with Helena's search for the cross enacted in full theatrical regalia and the dotoc appearing more like an interlude or intermission piece, rather than the main event? Here, too, the tale of the quest for the True Cross is more complete while in the Baao performances only one part of it, Heraclius's tale,¹⁰ is told.

Helena's tale is also the same as the one performed in the *lagaylay* of Canaman and in the *toqui* of Santa Elena and Santa Cruz in Catanduanes. My limited field work timetable did not allow travel to all these areas, but two M.A. theses— one on the *lagaylay* by Elsa Mampo (1980) and the other on the *toqui* by Pablo de Leon Jr. (1999)—provided me with rich data on the performances—Later field work in Santa Elena, Nabua confirmed this view.

What was performed in the Bigaa practice may perhaps be the same narrative of triumph in the dotoc practice in Baao, Camarines Sur. This assertion may also be made about other santacruzán performances: they enact the triumph of the cross and the triumph of the pilgrims in finding the cross of Jesus and in staging the dotoc and komedya every year despite economic hardships. In the case of the Bigaa folk, the triumph of performance or the triumph of the cross is achieved despite (and perhaps because of) the threats to their life and safety. What is performed is the liminal condition of the community, always in-between states of safety and states of disaster, a state of being that is always uncertain, always on the edge—an in-betweenness that is never a movement to a center, but always an awareness of being in the margins, of being poor and vulnerable, even as the desire to escape this state remains constant. In performing liminality,¹¹ the community triumphs over it and renews itself.



Figure 8. Komedya performance in Bigaa on 31 May 2007. Photo by JB Llana

It is perhaps pointless to pursue the question of whether the Bigaa komedya is a prelude or a main event. As Wendt (1998, 7) has observed, fiesta traditions (like the dotoc and komedya) are very much Filipino creations and not simply received practices from the colonizers. These traditions have given us “opportunities to incorporate, and thereby preserve, [our] own traditions.” The unconscious act of appropriation in both the dotoc and the komedya can be seen in the use of language, versification, music, and other performance elements which are all products of endless improvisations (Llana 1999, 2006).

Vicente Rafael’s work on translation and conversion, especially his concept of “fishing” and “haunting,” in early Tagalog society (1995) is also instructive on this matter. The Helena and Heraclius tales and Vexilla hymn as received texts seem to fulfill more of an artifactual function that defies understanding. The paradotoc have “fished” out—and continue to do so—those parts of the text that do speak about the people’s experiences. They are “haunted” by memories that persist because they cease to be memories and indeed go in and out of the

realm of the physically real, like the repeated calamities or the perpetual threat of disease, poverty, and political crisis.

However, let us not forget the element of display, of show, and of presentation of self that Erving Goffman (1959) identifies as “performance.” The Bigaa folk revel in their performance practice; they save up money for it, prepare a feast, and pride themselves in being able to do so. The performance thus celebrates triumph and is a show of the living, grateful, and celebrating people in this land and sea that pulsate with life, energy and color. It is a celebration and display of identity, faith, hope, and thanksgiving.

I continue to seek answers to many nagging questions, bearing in mind that I might never really find satisfactory answers. But the exercise is not futile. Dwight Conquergood’s description (2003, 407) of the dialogical ethnographer¹² comes to mind: he is one who seeks to “bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another.” As Carlson (2000, 25) observes of Conquergood’s dialogical methodology, ethnography is “an open-ended performance, resisting conclusions and seeking to keep interrogation open.”

Postscript

The foregoing, written for the Komedy Conference in February 2008, was an early output from my study; I continued my inquiry on the dotoc performances, including some more visits to my field sites. I found that indeed the dotoc is performed as komedy—such as in Baras, Nabua where the practice is called “dotoc” even if the performance is a komedy. Many other details presented challenges to thinking, such as the many discrepant appearances of the practice. The way that the dotoc appears changes from one instance to another, marked by the peculiar vernacular improvisations of each place and of the individuals who perform the texts, sing the songs, re-enact the stories of the finding of the cross. What is striking about these

vernacular expressions is that they do not neatly cohere. One can see them as empty forms, shallow rituals, plain words uttered by people dressed in fancy costumes. In some instances, there is even no attempt at having any kind of show even if the performers are dressed in their shiny satin dresses. One finds oneself asking what the point of it all is. In the same conference where this paper was presented, Resil Mojares (2008) spoke about the “exoticism” of the komedya which I discuss in this paper as the “artifactual” quality of the dotoc.

The ethical concept which inspired my methodology was the “co-performative ethnography” derived from Dwight Conquergood. I re-named it as *anduyog*—a Bicol word which means “being in total unity with the other” (in other Philippine contexts, this is called *bayanihan*). Upon further reading critical theory, I found that I had to rethink many of the ideas contained in my early papers such as the concept of “community,” which for the theorist Jean Luc-Nancy (1991) is “inoperative”; or the idea of “identity” which for Stuart Hall (1996, 1-2) must always be negotiated or constructed, given the fact that identity always operates “under erasure” in the interval between reversal and emergence. I pursued the postcolonial thread of inquiry but encountered concepts that deny agency to the weak subaltern (e.g. Spivak 1998 and 1990) and draw the postcolonial critic towards a cosmopolitan position that veers towards a denial of the political (see San Juan 1999 and Hallward 2001 for critiques of postcolonial theory; and Gilbert and Lo 2007 on “cosmopolitics”).

I never had doubts that my project was political from the beginning, but I was nonetheless disturbed because I knew that the dotoc participants I write about would never think of the dotoc in that way. The dotoc is a colonial legacy. This they acknowledge and are not bothered at all by its provenance. Instead, they proudly say that the practice goes back to the days of their ancestors, who inherited it from the Spanish. I knew I had to pay attention to such articulations. I wanted to be faithful to how I encountered the dotoc practitioners and their performances, to answer the call of fidelity as they have done, with their faith and commitment to continue the practice. Alain Badiou

(1992, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008) and his theory of the event, the ethic of truths, grace, and fidelity provided me with the tools to think and write the dotoc in a co-performative way, while Michel de Certeau's "practice of everyday life" (1984) provided the means to think about how these articulations are made in relation to the everyday concerns of the dotoc practitioners. I also continue to read works on how and why performance practices like the dotoc thrive (e.g. Aguilar 1998; Cannell 1999; and Rafael 1995, 2000, and 2006). All these, however, are the subject of a different paper altogether.

Notes

- 1 Realubit (1972, 193) writes that in Catanduanes, it is called *umao*; in Albay its form is that of the *panjardin*, locally called *kinorubong*, and in Camarines Norte, it is called *dalit*.
- 2 I have chosen to use the term "dotoc" as it is spelled in the scripts (*orihinal*) retrieved from the field work and in the 1895 *Dotoc sa Mahal na Santa Cruz*. The same is true for most other words that use the Tagalog orthography—they are spelled as they appear or are used in the communities. There is therefore no preferred orthography, nor does this paper advocate the use of a specific one. For consistency in spelling, I use "c" instead of "k" in *Bicol*, but "k" in *komedya* in deference to the development of the form as explained in Fernandez 1996.
- 3 In many *orihinal*, Heraclius is "Herachio," an error due perhaps to careless copying from one *orihinal* to another. The many years of wrong transmission have fixed the name which is now pronounced as "Herakyo." In Heraclius (1976, 1047), Serwis is Kawadh who acceded to the Persian throne after Chosroes was defeated by Heraclius. Kawadh is not mentioned to be a son of Chosroes; neither is it said that Kawadh killed Chosroes, but it was he who agreed to restore the occupied territory and the Holy Cross to the Byzantine Empire. New material on Heraclius points out that it is not Kawadh or Kavad-Seroi, son of Khusro II (Chosroes), but

the Persian commander Shahrvaraz who eventually located the fragments of the True Cross and arranged for them to be sent to Heraclius. Heraclius promise to help Shahrvaraz assume power in Persia if he returns the True Cross that he took during the violent sacking of Jerusalem in 614 (Regan 2003, 132).

- 4 In Voragine (1993, 170), Serwis is Syrois, the eldest son of Chosroes who made a pact with Heraclius when he learned that his father, fallen ill with dysentery, wanted his other son Medasas to inherit the crown. Then Syrois pursued his father, put him in chains, fed him “with the bread of afflictions and the water of distress,” and eventually killed him with arrows. He freed all the Christian prisoners and the patriarch Zachary and sent them, together with the wood of the Cross, to Heraclius.
- 5 Recent searches in google.com gave me a slew of sites on Gregorian chant and plainsong, and, interestingly, music that hails Satan, using Dante’s parody in Canto 34 of Inferno: “*Vexilla Regis prodeunt inferni*” (the standards of the infernal king advance).
- 6 John 1:39 of the Catholic Bible reads: “He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon” (The New American Bible 1987). John Gill explains that here Jesus invites his disciples “to go along with him directly, and see with their own eyes, where he dwelt, and there and then converse with him, and at any other time; to which they had a hearty welcome...they accepted of the invitation, and went along with him immediately, and saw, and took notice of the place where he had lodgings, that they might know it, and find it another time...” (Gill 1999).
- 7 Arlene and Sam and their children were also from Bigaa, although not from Tinago.
- 8 As I watched I was busy comparing this practice with that of Baao and I have to admit that I felt envious because in Baao this would be a dream-come-true for the older

paradotoc. They have long wanted the dotoc be performed once again by teenage girls, properly trained and rehearsed.

- 9 After witnessing the sacada again in 2008, I had to rethink why the personajes used dark sunglasses during the sacada, because on this second time that I saw it, the rain was pouring and it had gone dark even at mid-day—there was no reason to use the glasses as protection from the bright glare of high noon. Perhaps the glasses were part of the costume as it was learned from earlier generations of participants in the komedya? Perhaps I am the only who think it strange for them to be wearing the glasses with the “medieval” dresses?
- 10 As it turns out, the Bicolano performs both the Helena tale and the Heraclius tale not only in Bigaa but also in Santa Elena, Nabua, in Santa Elena, Iriga, and, as I suspect, in many other Santa Elena barrios in the region; the *komedya* played in Bigaa is likewise performed, albeit in countless modified ways.
- 11 Liminality or the state of being “betwixt and between” has been much talked about in performance studies, made popular by Victor Turner and further problematized by Richard Schechner. Turner turned to theatre and performance in his search for explanations of ritual, but got his ideas on liminality from the work of Arnold van Gennep who wrote that rituals provide human beings with sacred connections that mitigate the effects of turbulent times.
- 12 I am borrowing the term and its definition from Aquinas University in Legazpi, Philippines, my home university, that has adopted *anduyog* as its principle of action both for its internal operations as an institution and for its engagements with the external community. Not that Aquinas has exclusive right to the term; others use the term as a name for their organization or program (e.g., the Anduyog Federation at the Mt. Isarog National Park in Camarines Sur and the Anduyog Fund of the Naga City Government). At any rate, I had a hand in bringing to birth its use in the institution in 1999.

- 13 Conquergood (2003, 403-407) distinguishes dialogical performance from four other moral stances to the other: “the custodian’s rip-off” that is characterized by self interest and plunder; “the enthusiast’s infatuation” that trivializes the other while holding oneself from any moral engagement; “the curator’s exhibitionism” that exoticizes and sensationalizes in order to astonish, full of “sentimentality and romantic notions about the ‘Noble Savage’ but actually dehumanizes the other”; and “the skeptic’s cop-out” that is “the most reprehensible” because “it forecloses dialogue...shuts down the very idea of entering into conversation with the other before the attempt, however problematic, begins.”

Glossary

Andas	Litter on which religious icons/images are placed and carried in processions
Banwaan	Town; the town or people of the town
Batalla	Battle; the scenes of stylized fighting in the komedya
Cantora/s	Singer/s; the dotoc performers in all the sites are called cantoras, although the performers in Baao are more commonly called <i>paradotoc</i>
Cobacho	The hut or shelter used in the <i>corocobacho/cobacho dotoc</i> where the pilgrims meet fellow devotees of the Holy Cross to whom they relate the story of the captivity of the Cross by the Persians and its recovery by Emperor Heraclius
Corocobacho/ Cobacho	The dotoc type used to this day which carries the narrative of the loss of the Cross and its recovery by means of a siege led by the Emperor Heraclius against the Persians
Dicho	Stylized verse delivery in the komedya

Gurang	Old Man; the character in the komedya of Bigaa who defies Elena and is punished for his disobedience
Kalbaryo	Calvary; the set piece of the komedya and dotoc in Tinago, Bigaa
Katapusan	The last day of the nine-day cycle; also, the fiesta
Kwitis	A type of firecracker usually used in celebrations like the dotoc
Lagaylay	The specific performance practice in Canaman in honour of the Holy Cross
Lamano	Hand gestures used by the performers in Tinago, Bigaa
Maestra	Teacher; the trainer/director in Bigaa
Marcha	March; entrances and exits in the komedya performance are made with stylized walking or marches
Musikero	Musician
Novenario	The cycle of nine-day prayers in honour of a patron saint
Orihinal	The script
Panuga/ Promesa	Sacred vow; <i>panata</i> in Tagalog
Paradotoc	The actor-singer or cantors in the dotoc of Baao
Pasion	The part of the dotoc in which the Cross is praised and adored or in which the suffering of Jesus on the Cross is told and Christians are exhorted to repent and repay Christ's sacrifice with goodness; also refers to the chanting of a text, the <i>Pasion Bicol</i> , that recount's the story of salvation during Lent
Personajes	The characters in the komedya
Sacada	The opening parade of the fiesta performance of the komedya and dotoc in Tinago, Bigaa

Samno	Adornment or decoration; the dotoc praises and adoration are expressed through the offering of adornments
Sitio	A zone or neighbourhood cluster in a big barrio

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