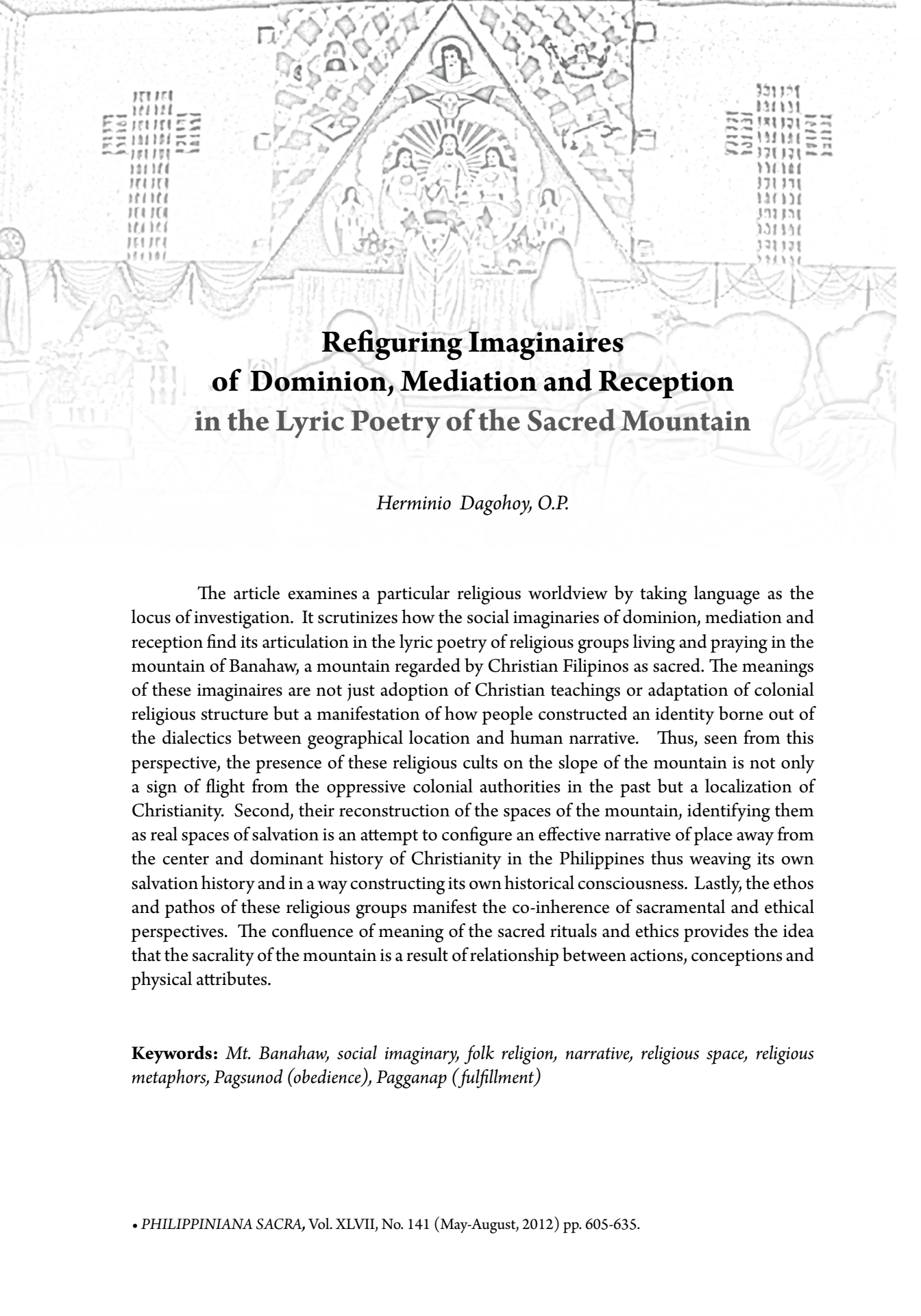




Refiguring Imaginaires of Dominion, Mediation and Reception in the Lyric Poetry of the Sacred Mountain

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The article examines a particular religious worldview by taking language as the locus of investigation. It scrutinizes how the social imaginaries of dominion, mediation and reception find its articulation in the lyric poetry of religious groups living and praying in the mountain of Banahaw, a mountain regarded by Christian Filipinos as sacred. The meanings of these imaginaires are not just adoption of Christian teachings or adaptation of colonial religious structure but a manifestation of how people constructed an identity borne out of the dialectics between geographical location and human narrative. Thus, seen from this perspective, the presence of these religious cults on the slope of the mountain is not only a sign of flight from the oppressive colonial authorities in the past but a localization of Christianity. Second, their reconstruction of the spaces of the mountain, identifying them as real spaces of salvation is an attempt to configure an effective narrative of place away from the center and dominant history of Christianity in the Philippines thus weaving its own salvation history and in a way constructing its own historical consciousness. Lastly, the ethos and pathos of these religious groups manifest the co-inherence of sacramental and ethical perspectives. The confluence of meaning of the sacred rituals and ethics provides the idea that the sacrality of the mountain is a result of relationship between actions, conceptions and physical attributes.

Keywords: *Mt. Banahaw, social imaginary, folk religion, narrative, religious space, religious metaphors, Pagsunod (obedience), Pagganap (fulfillment)*

The Notion of *Relihiyong Pambayan*

Relihiyong pambayan (folk/popular religion) refers to *Samahan* (association) commonly referred to as popular religions or folk or traditional religions. It is called popular because it is accepted or practiced by many. Furthermore, the term folk, when it is attributed to *relihiyong pambayan*, connote natural, primal, traditional manner or ways, which are retained and kept.¹ The term *bayan* (commune) adopted in this study is devoid of any politico-geographical meaning or graduated level of power or influence but of relation. The term *bayan* is closely related to *Kapatiran* since the term *Kapatiran* (lit. sibling) means brotherhood or fraternity. Everyone is part of *bayan*: parents, siblings, offspring, young and old, rich and poor alike. This relation is informal since the governance of *bayan* is simple.² Leadership is determined based on the condition or status of the inner self (*loob*) and not according to economic status, educational attainment or political power. The notion of *bayan* is analogous to folk religions' understanding of *Samahan*, which refers to their organic structure while *kapatiran* (fraternity) refers to the informal relation of the members. Such relation is never political but spiritual. Having only one God, all are related because of their faith.

The Filipino Folk Religion

Popular religious practices in the Philippines can be categorized into two. First, the beliefs and practices of individuals or group of individuals who are members of the Catholic Church but whose practices and beliefs deviate from the official teachings of the Church. The second constitutes the beliefs and practices of individuals or groups who are not members of the Catholic Church but whose practices and beliefs are appropriated from Catholicism. This group forms their own pious associations such as those religious communities found in the spiritual complex of Mount Banahaw. The first group remains entrenched in the enclosed

¹ This study will take folk religiosity as interchangeable term with traditional religion, popular religion and folk Catholicism. The term traditional religion refers to those religions that have remained to their original socio-cultural environment. The word traditional does not refer to something static or unchangeable but rather denotes this localized matrix. "Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions. Letter of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences in Asia, the Americas and Oceania, November 21, 1993" in *From Pagans to Partners The Change in Catholic Attitudes towards Traditional Religions*, ed. Leonardo Mercado (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2000), 102.

² Salazar, Zeus, "Wika ng Himagsikan, Lengguahe ng Rebolusyon" in *Bagong Kasaysayan. Mga Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*. Lathalain Blg. 8, (Quezon City: BAKAS, 1999), p.44. Additional discussion can be found in "Ang Kartilya ni Emilio Jacinto at ang Diwa Pilipino sa Agos ng Kasaysayan" in *Bagong Kasaysayan. Mga Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*. Lathalain Blg. 6 (Quezon City: BAKAS, 1999), 18ff.

religious space albeit the performative difference of their religious expressions from the theological foundational assumptions and liturgical norms set by the Catholic Church. The second group moved away from the center and sought an alternative space.³

The Religious Complex of Banahaw

The mountain of Banahaw in Dolores, Quezon is a haven for people in search of spirituality. It is a home to almost a hundred religious groups professing a confluence of Christian faith and native religion. Its numerous caves and cavernous openings become cathedrals and shrines, believed to be abode no longer of earthly but divine spirits. Its waterfalls and springs refresh the body but also believed to invigorate the soul. In Banahaw, natural markings acquired supernatural identities. The belief that the mountain is sacred and possesses magical charm antedates the colonial history of the Philippines. For many Filipinos, climbing the sacred mountain is also considered as a rite of manhood, a fulfillment of a vow, and among the young, a youthful adventure. Its sacrality draws the interest of healers looking for medicinal herbs and plants, of scientists researching for endemic species of flora and fauna, or the simply curious who are looking for psychic phenomenon or unusual sight. While the task of developing indigenous methods and approaches in anthropology, psychology, history, social science and even art studies motivates the academe to undertake its own ritual of discovery.

Banahaw is located 100 kilometers southeast of Manila. It is an inactive volcano. It has three historical eruptions, the last recorded eruption happened in 1730. The spiritual sites of Banahaw are Sta. Lucia, Kinabuhayan, Duruwangan and Ilalim. Sacred sites, which are more popular and accessible to devotees, are located in Barangays Sta. Lucia and Kinabuhayan. Most religious communities or *Samahan* can be found in barangays Sta. Lucia and Kinabuhayan. From a handful of sects, it has grown in number, contributing further to the popularity of Banahaw as a spiritual and mystic place. Mobility is enhanced because of good roads leading to these barangays, making socio-economic activities dynamic. Economic progress is also evident by the concrete and painted houses dotting the once unpaved road due mainly to financial remittances of some residents working overseas. Despite of the

³ Francisco, Jose Mario. "Mapping Religious and Civil Spaces in Traditional and Charismatic Christianities in the Philippines", *Philippine Studies* 58,1-2 (2010): 193. Ileta noted that after the Spanish authorities prosecuted Apolinario dela Cruz, many members of the Cofradia went to the mountain of Banahaw and continued their religious practice and rituals. See Ileta, Reynaldo, *Pasyon and Revolution. Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*. (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press. Quezon City, 1979), 56-62.

intrusion of modernity, life remains laid back; agriculture is still the main source of income. Some have small convenient stores catering to pilgrims and visitors. From the town of Dolores, motorbikes and jeepneys can access these barangays.

Qualities of Banahaw religiosity

The relation between the members of the *Samahan* (association), with the environment and with cosmic divinities is expressed through symbols and rituals. These rituals express their creedal beliefs and at the same time preserved their codal or ethical duties.⁴ Members of the *Samahan* are obliged to regularly join the specified religious rituals. The performance of rituals is an act of remembering, an anamnesis. It ensures the continuity of their myth, which is more an expression of affection rather than supplication.⁵ The ritualistic life of the groups is an obvious influence of Catholicism whereas its affective dimension is more expressive of indigenous values.

Second, these religious sects give importance to the value of personal and communitarian identity. On the level of the personal, they encourage the cleansing of the inner self (*loob*) so that anyone can lead the *Samahan*. On the communitarian level, the temporal structure of a *Samahan* is constituted in order to discern communally the divine will particularly when the group is confronting or confronted by conflicts and problems. The communal/consensual discernment of the spirit provides strength and courage to the members as they pursue the chosen course of actions and a reliable source of inspiration as they traverse the path of spiritual and moral renewal.

Third, these religious sects are remnants of revolutions.⁶ The residual manifestation of revolutionary undertaking is expressed in their religious rituals with its extravagant display of nationalistic symbolisms, in the murals inside their places

⁴ Florentino Hornedo remarked that religious action among traditional societies could be classified in two categories: the re-enactment of the myth and enactment of ethical duty. The first is creedal expression and the second constitute codal and cultic expression. Hornedo, Florentino, "Notes on Filipino Religious Symbolic Action" in *Colloquia Manilana*, Volume 5 (1997), 35.

⁵ Hornedo noted that in these societies, the sense of the cyclic recurrence of time is dominant; and in the cyclicity represented by the annual cycle, commemoration is inherent. And remembering is a fundamental feature of thought and behavior. This is the basis of cyclical liturgies in which events *in illo tempore* are re-enacted annually. Failure to remember the annual cycle is regarded as a failure of love and affection, and therefore of devotion and faith. And this is held true in both the level of the personal and on the institutional and cosmic. Hornedo, Florentino. "Notes on Filipino Religious Symbolic Action". *Colloquia Manilana*, Volume 5 (1997):35-46.

⁶ When Sinilbado de Mas dissipated the members of the Cofradia de San Jose, the members of the kapatiran fled to the dense forests of Mount Banahaw where they were not pursued by the government. Ilto provided a detailed account of the history of the association in his *Pasyon and Revolution*, 57ff.

of worship and in the very structure of their organization. However, their unending quest for the sacred among the profane and in their insatiable desire to transform society so that the material world may conform to the divine provenance resonate the spiritual motivation of their forebears. For these groups, revolutionary activities are not politically motivated but an aspiration to a new possibility of existence.⁷

The convergence of the sense of the sacred and revolutionary ideals is evident in linguistic symbolism. The language of popular religion reveals its capacity to constitute a society, which is different from the colonial type—a type of society, governed by beliefs and convictions unique to its culture. In other words, a consciousness that constantly seeks to define the world in its own terms.⁸

The competence of popular religion as a recourse of a subjugated and oppressed nation to reclaim the power to govern itself can be revealed when language is considered as a symbolic locus. Each culture has its own life form. To understand the language of a particular culture means to comprehend its forms of life. It expresses the dynamic role of language as a foundation of culture. As a repository of culture, language contains the collective consciousness of the people. The development of its vocabulary and the expansion of its register points to a historical and cultural interaction. This does not mean passive acceptance or absence of conflict, for a culture that has a long colonial history; a tensed relation between the dominant and the subjugated; between foreign ideas and native understanding, expectedly produces its lexicon from this tensive situation. The synthetic understanding of meaning produced from this dialectical condition produces meaningful actions, i.e., behaviors and practices that are amalgam of seemingly conflicting polarities.

This synthetic understanding is the given of interpretation. “A meditation on symbols starts from the fullness of language and of meaning already there; it begins from within language which has already taken place and in which everything in a certain sense has already been said; it wants to be thought, not presuppositionless, but in and with all its presuppositions. Its first problem is not how to get started but from the midst of speech, to recollect itself.”⁹ Since meaning is already there, the elucidation of its presuppositions is the task of hermeneutics. One always

⁷ Other religious groups identified by Ileto having the same historical roots with the revolutions are Lapiang Malaya of Valentin delos Santos; Confradia de San Jose of Apolinario dela Cruz; Colorum Society of Sebastian Caneo; Watawat ng Lahi of Arsenio de Guzman; Gabinista of Felipe Salvador. Tres Persona Solo Dios of Agapito Illustrisimo and Ciudad Mistica de Dios of Amador Suarez may be included in the list. See also Covar, “Liham ng Isang Pilipinong Antropolohista sa Kanyang Kaibigang Kristiyano” in *Larangan. Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture* (Manila: Sampaguita Press, 1998), 83.

⁸ Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 31.

⁹ Ricoeur, Paul. “The Hermeneutics of Symbols” in *The Conflict of Interpretation: Essays in Hermeneutics*, edited by Don Ihde, (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 287.

philosophizes from somewhere.¹⁰ This involves not only the particular religious tradition of the thinker, but also the gamut of cultural references that includes social, economic and political conditions¹¹.

These representations or ensemble of symbolic discourses that shape and affect the behavior of individuals in a community or society is what is known as social imaginaries.¹² Social imaginaries are deep-seated modes of understanding that serve as parameters within which people imagine their communal existence. The social imaginary explains how the members of a particular community fit together, how things go on between them, the expectations they have of each other, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie those expectations. Structured by social dynamics that produce them while at the same time also structuring those forces, social imaginaries are products of history that 'generate individual and collective practices in accordance with the schemes generated by history'.¹³

Ideology and utopia are two facets of the social imaginary. Ideology is the symbolic confirmation of the past and utopia is a symbolic opening towards the future. The dialectical relation between ideology and utopia enables any imaginative to prevent its totalizing tendency or reducing it into an illusory dream. In other words, to totalize ideology is to create false consciousness and dismantle the capacity of social imaginary to be creative. It is the function of utopia to prevent such fixation with the past. Utopia challenges the what-is-already-there and points to an elsewhere and what-is-not-yet. It introduces novelty and offers imaginative alternatives to the present conceptions or understanding.

In the case of religious groups living in Banahaw, these social imaginaries or conceptual frame are derived from their lived experiences, aesthetic symbolisms and narratives about their founders expressed metaphorically in their lyric poetry. Their

¹⁰ Ricoeur, Paul. "Reply to David Stewart" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Southern Illinois: Carus Publishing Company, 1996), 443. Ricoeur added that even philosophy is not without its presuppositions.

¹¹ Ricoeur, *Reply to David Stewart*, 443. This is similar to Ricoeur's idea of pre-figuration. In this theory of narrative, he asserted that the first instance of reading, the reader possesses a pre-understanding of the character of the story. This pre-understanding includes the reader's expectation of how a particular character will behave or his reaction to a particular situation or event in the story. See Simms, Karl. *Paul Ricoeur*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 84.

¹² Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur. The Owl of Minerva*. (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 57,75-78,87-88.

¹³ Steger, Manfred. *Globalization and Social Imaginaries: The Changing Ideological Landscape of the Twenty-First Century*. *Journal of Critical Globalization Studies*, Issue 1(2009): 12-13. Steger added: All social imaginaries consist of a series of interrelated and mutually dependent narratives, visual prototypes, metaphors and conceptual framings. Endowed with specific properties, social imaginaries acquire additional solidity through the social construction of space and the repetitive performance of their assigned qualities and characteristics. Thus feigning permanence, social imaginaries are nonetheless temporary constellations subject to constant change.

understanding of the Christian God and the history of salvation find its foundation on the social imaginaries of dominion, mediation and reception. These imaginaires represent a hierarchically ordered epistemic frame. Dominion refers to the Divine power, transcendent in nature and exacts obedience and compliance with its mandate. Mediation is the realm of the governed entrusted with a mission of transmitting and making the will of the Divine immanent and the imaginaire of Reception is the sphere of people belonging to a particular religious group who followed the Divine mandate by performative actions.

By seeing Banahaw religiosity through these social imaginaries, one may arrive at the understanding that the complexity of religious expressions found in Sacred Mountain is a narrative of movement. It is a movement away from the center and institutional trappings of organized and mainstream religious space. Being outside of the parameters of dominant confession, these groups created a particular religious belief system that extols the transcendent aspect of God learned from religious missionary preaching and harmonized it with the immanent dimension of faith by living in a community animated by Filipino values. This configuration is integral to Banahaw religious spirituality and identity. It is actually, its ontological moorings.

Second, it is political since the manner by which its narratives are constructed presuppose an exclusion of other narratives. The religious symbolisms of Banahaw graphically debar representations analogous with European culture and reminiscent of the colonial system. Thus, its pantheon of saints include only Filipino heroes like Rizal since they believe that these heroes died selflessly just like Christ. The emergence of *babaylans* (women-priests) leading the rituals of the groups is a strand of spirituality that subverts the highly clericalized nature of the Catholic Church. The importance and significant role accorded to the ordained male in Catholic rites no longer exists in Banahaw rituals. This practice can be considered as “heterological space”. It is a place where a kind of segregated refuge, a circumscribed space for the practice of meaning that represented a rupture with the public, clericalized space of the Church.¹⁴

Lastly, this movement or narrative departure from the mundane and profane to a place of mystical experience is a kind of utopian vision. The vision of New Jerusalem refers to a future horizon of value, some surplus meaning that transcends the limits of ideology, something that unfolds a horizon of possibilities.¹⁵ They live their lives not as a form of escape but an engagement to that apocalyptic event by

¹⁴ Sheldrake, Philip. *Spaces for the Sacred. Place, Memory and Identity* (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 125.

¹⁵ Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur. The Owl of Minerva* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 85.

trying to live a transformed human existence. This calls to actively participate in observing proper relations with the environment and with others. The hospitality and gracious welcome they accorded to their visitors without discrimination represents their understanding of Banahaw as metaphorically reconciled space. The familial structure reflected and replicated in the hierarchy of positions or levels of authorities is dispositive for forgiveness and reconciliation. Ask when will this New Jerusalem come and in unison, they will exclaim, 'soon', but their longing reminds them that they have not reached that altered place yet and so, are still dis-placed.

The relation of these imaginaires of dominion, mediation and reception is not only dialectically constituted but also historically constructed. They find their synchronicity in the notions of *Pagsunod* (Obedience) and *Pagganap* (Dutiful fulfillment).¹⁶ These two vectors intersecting with each other provides the nexus of how space is conceived and reconstructed by these religious groups which also provides a cogent explanation of the active participation of its members and their ardent commitment to their religious beliefs that Banahaw is the New Jerusalem.

The Imaginaire of Dominion

The understanding of the imaginaire of Dominion is expressed in the *Samahans'* concept of *Pagsunod* (Obedience). *Pagsunod* points to the convergence of two familiar sources of power: a transcendent God who exercises dominion and power and an immanent God effectively experienced as compassionate, loving and benevolent *Bathala*.¹⁷ The first is obviously inherited from the transcendent and totally Othered God of the early missionaries and second is a product of a native understanding of the divine presence.

***Pagsunod*: Confluence of the two notions of Power**

The concept of *Pagsunod* (Obedience) is a principle of dutiful observance of precepts and rules. The members of the Samahan follow a figure of authority; a spirit, the *Santong Boses* (Holy Voice) or a person chosen by the spirit.

According to the history of Ciudad Mistica de Dios¹⁸, it was the *Santong Boses* (Holy Voice) that revealed to Maria Bernarda Balitaan, its founder, what she is

¹⁶ *Pagsunod* and *Pagganap* are two common terms used by believers living in Banahaw in describing the dynamics of their religious life. These two concepts are also found in the ethnography of Dr. Guillermo Pesigan. *Dulang Buhay ng Bundok ng Banahaw. Karanasan ng Ciudad Mistica de Dios* (Manila: Raintree Trading and Publishing, Inc., 1992), 33.

¹⁷ An indigenous name for God or the Divine.

¹⁸ For history of the Ciudad Mistica de Dios see Pesigan, *Dulang Buhay ng Bundok ng Banahaw. Karanasan ng Ciudad Mistica de Dios*.

and who she is. This same spirit brought her to the Light and introduced her to the Highest Light. It made her realized that she was the Woman begotten from the mind of God and from the Word, the Wisdom of God. The same spirit revealed to her the content of a secret book (*Aklat na Lihim*), the place of sinners and place of the souls awaiting justice. The Voice told her mission in the world—that she is the *Mahal na Ina* (God-the-Mother), the second emissary of God since she will complete the unfinished work of redemption of Jesus, the God-made-Man. Just as through Eve, the first woman, sin enters the world, Maria Bernarda Balitaan, God-the- Mother, will completely redeem the world from sin.¹⁹

The members of the Tres Persona Solo Dios²⁰ also follow the *Santong Boses*. They believe that the Voice revealed itself to Julio Illustrisimo when he was living in San Isidro, Calawan, Laguna. As stated in the document *Mga Dakilang Kasaysayan ng Amang Illustrisimo* (The Great History of Father Illustrisimo), it was the *Santong Boses* that ordered the old Illustrisimo to open the mountain (referring to Mount Banahaw). The Voice taught him the word CUATRO and asked him to contemplate on it.²¹ He realized that it was the four evangelists talking to him. This is the first time that Jose, the son of Julio and Susana, knew the meaning of CUATRO PILARES.²²

The members of the DEO²³ believe that the voice of God-the-Father-and-Mother dictated the message to Nanay Nena, their founder.²⁴ Since this compendium of messages is believed to be of divine origin, its serves as the source of their codal practices. Even the name of the *Samahan* (association) is divinely inspired. According to their account, when a group of men gathered to discern the name appropriate for the group, they suddenly heard a man's voice whispering the name DEO. They tried to know who said it but nobody among those present admitted saying anything of that sort. Thus, the group believed that the voice came from God who wanted their group to be named DEO.²⁵

¹⁹ *Dulang Buhay ng Bundok Banahaw. Karanasan ng Ciudad Mistica de Dios*, 34.

²⁰ For history of Samahan ng Tres Persona Solo Dios, see Marasigan, *A Banahaw Guru. Symbolic Deeds of Agapito Illustrisimo* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1985).

²¹ The phrase in the original Tagalog document is “basagin ang salita” which literally means “to break the word”.

²² Marasigan, “Dakilang Kasaysayan ng Amang Illustrisimo” in *A Banahaw Guru. Symbolic Deeds of Agapito*, 28-29.

²³ For history of DEO, see Pama, Hermel. *Diskurso tungkol sa Damdamin, Salita at Gawa ng Kapatirang DEO sa Bundok Banahaw* (MA thesis, University of the Philippines Archives, 1999). Literally, the word DEO means God.

²⁴ This message is a compendium of admonitions, prayers and songs, believed to be given by God to Nanay Nena on several occasions.

²⁵ See Pama. *Diskurso tungkol sa Damdamin, Salita at Gawa ng Kapatirang DEO sa Bundok Banahaw*.

Attributes of the *Santong Boses*

The *Santong Boses* is the source from which these religious groups constitute their spiritual life and the principle of their governance. It is an extrinsic principle, a directive force. In a song of *Tres Persona Solo Dios*, it states:

Santong Espirito halinat'dalawin
Ang mga hinirang ay iyong aliwin
Sa saklolo mo po kami'y pasaganain
At sa gracia naman ay gayon din.
Tagapagtanggol ka, aliw at tahimik
Biyaya ng Dios, laganap sa dikit
Sa sinta ay apo'y, buhay ka pong batis
Na sadyang pandilag ng masayang langit

Come Holy Spirit
Console your chosen ones
Come with your aid
And with your abundant grace.
Advocate, joy and peace
Gift of God, full of beauty.
You're fire of love and fount of life
splendid anointed of heaven above.

Sa mga ligaya doo'y kumikinang
Nilagda ng Amang makapangyarihan
Ikaw po ang luno, ikaw rin ang ilaw
Na sa aming dila ay uma-alalay.

Splendor of happiness
Ordained by Almighty Father.
You're our aid and our light
Who guides our tongues aright.

Ilaw mo'y itanglaw sa sintidos naming
At ang aming puso ay papaglingasin
Sa kabagsikan mo laging pagsiglahin
Ang panghihilambot ng katawang sutil.

Your light imparts on every sense
And let our hearts enflamed
And with Your unfailing might
Refresh our bodies weary and tired.

Iyong pailagin ang lilong kaaway
Parating tahimik sa ami'y ibigay
Maging parang puno, kami'y pangunahan
Lahat ng sakuna upang maiwasan.

Drive away our perilous foes
And Your abiding peace bestow
Be our leader and our guide
So all adversities can step beside.

At sa iyo amay siyang kilalanin
Ibantog sa anak sadyang ginigiliw
Ikaw espiritu ang siyang sambahin
Sampalatayanan walang hinto't tigil.

Father, we acknowledge you
Gracious Son, we praise you
And to the Spirit, we adore
Whom we worship ever more.

Buong lualhati ihandog sa ama
At sa anak naman humadlang sa sala
Ikaw espiritu, aliw at ginhawa
Ng pusong may lumbay sa nagawang sala.

Hail and glory to the Father
And to the Son who conquered sin
To the Spirit, joy and solace of
hearts saddened by repeated sins.

Ihandog sa ama buong lualhati
At sa anak nama'y kapantay kauri
Tunay na magwagi mabuhay na muli
Santong espiritu sa ami'y mamalagi.

Hail and glory to the Father
And to the Son, same and One
True victor we truly praise
Holy Spirit, abide with us.

This song is an adaptation of a popular song of the Catholic Church addressed to the Holy Spirit. But the group's translation of the song gives more emphasis to the qualities of the Spirit as: *nagpapasagana sa pamamagitan ng saklolo at grasya* (profuse with mercy and grace); *tagapagtanggol* (advocate); *taga-aliw* (consoler); *batis ng buhay* (fount of life); *lunas* (cure), *umaalalay* (guide); *tanglaw* (light); *nagpapasigla sa naghihilambot na katawan* (refreshes the body); *tagapagtanggol sa lilong kaaway* (defender from perilous enemies). These dominant themes express an existence of a loving relation between God and man. Such themes are also present in a song of the DEO written in July 2, 1973.

Kayo ang mga tupa	You are the sheep
Alaga nang Poon	You are Lord's flock,
Maging gabi at araw	Day and night
Laging tinatanaw	He watches you
Kaya ang aking samo	And so I plead
Ay maging maamo	Be always meek
Ang lahat ay lumapit	Come to Him
Kay Kristong Pastol ninyo.	To Christ, your shepherd.

Mga matang malamlam	With dimly eyes
Sa inyo'y nangungusap	He pleads to you
Huwag kayong lumayo	Don't go too far
At nang huwag maligaw	Lest you go astray.
Pastol ninyo'y magiliw	Your shepherd is loving
At sa inyo'y matiyaga	And ever patient,
Kaya ang aking samo	And so I beseech
Ay maging maamo.	Be always meek.

Here we have a God that keeps watch (*tumatanaw*); tender (*may mga matang malamlam*); affectionate (*magiliw*) and patient (*matiyaga*). The song portrays God as a good and loving shepherd. It has no tinge of authority but a patient and caring God.

The Nature of *Santong Boses*

The *Santong Boses* is the *Amang Bathala*.²⁶ In the song of Tres Persona Solo Dios, *Bathala* is the *Infinito Dios*, the progenitor of the Holy Trinity. The *Bathala* has no beginning and the most holy as depicted in Tres Persona Solo Dios hymn addressed to the Father:

²⁶ The native Filipinos' term for the highest spiritual being. The word means Almighty Father.

Amang kabanal-banalan
Nunong walang pinagmulan
Harinawang kami po'y tulungan
Sa kapayapaan ng aming bayan.

Oh Holiest Father
Forefather unbegotten
Help, we beseech you
For peace in our land.

Amang Bathala
Tunay sa amiy nagmamahal
Harinawang sa amiy pakamtan
Ang kapayapaan ng aming bayan.

Almighty God
Who loves us truly
Grant, we beseech you
Peace in our land.

God is also expressed as unbegotten in one of the hymns of *Samahang Kolorum* (Kolorum Society), *Sa Kueba ng Dios Ama* (In the Cave of God the Father):

Amin pong iginagalang
Ang pagka Dios mo pong mahal
Pinupuring walang hanggang
Ng tao sa sangtinakpan.

We give honor
To you our loving God
All of creation
Praise you unceasingly.

Lahat kami'y nanunuyo
Gaya't nagmamakaamo
Ikaw ang pinipintuho
Dating Panginoon't puno.

We seek your favor
And thus we plead
We honor you
Our Lord and guide.

Sinasambang walang humpay
Nitong sanglibutang bayan
Pagkat walang pinagmulan
Ikaw Amang walang hanggan.

You are worship unceasingly
by the entire universe
Because you are unbegotten
You, eternal Father.

The acknowledgement of God's eternity is an obvious influence of Catholicism. It is redolent of the victorious undertaking of missionary preachers like Blancas de San Jose, Herrera, etc.²⁷ This understanding of eternity is not only metaphysical but ethical. It follows the long accepted Adamic myth, which leads to a moral or ethical vision of the world. According to this myth, God is both lawgiver and judge who rewards and punishes.²⁸ The need to follow the Sacred Voice appears to be an antithesis to the disobedience of Adam. However, in the process of appropriation, the transcendent God in the poem of Blancas de San Jose, Herrera and others becomes immanent in the poems/songs of the *Samahan*. While it is true that the Voice of God exacts submission, the notion of obedience is no longer

²⁷ Blancas de San Jose, OP and Pedro Herrera are religious missionaries sent to the Philippine Islands in the early 16th century. Both are poets and had translated numerous religious articles and prayer books in Tagalog. See Lumbea, Bienvenido. *Tagalog Poetry. 1570-1898. Tradition and Influences in its Development*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1986.

²⁸ Houston, Sam. "Possibility and Identity. Ricoeur and Frei on the Resurrection" in *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* (Volume 4, Issue 2): 20.

framed within the theology of just retribution but reinterpreted as a loving response to a deity. Members of the *Samahan* obey the Sacred Voice not so much of fear of punishment but as an action performed in illo tempore with eschatological value. Their actions may exteriorly manifest passivity but actually interiorly active since they are performed in the light of a futural event. This spirituality highlights the belief of the *Samahan* that gives emphasis and value to the interplay of external submission manifested in ritualistic behavior and the internal disposition that requires purity of the self and openness to the Divine will.

The *Samahan* not only lower down God from its transcendent position but also harmonized the Christian notion of the Trinitarian God according to the traditional structure of a family. Hence, in the *retablo* (altar) of aboriginal beliefs, the *Infinito Dios*, begets the three persons: *Dios Ama* (God the Father), *Dios Anak* (God the Son) and *Dios Ina* (God the Mother) This is known as the *Sagrada Familia* (Holy Family).²⁹ For the native mind, it is more epistemically coherent to begin from one unitary principle than to posit a plurality of persons and claim that they are one and the same. The threeness of person found in the Catholic Trinitarian doctrine is explained by way of a familial structure.³⁰ Few lines of the hymn sung during evening prayer of Filipino Spiritual Catholic Church³¹ evoke a familiar scene in a traditional Filipino family where children say their night prayers and greet their parents' goodnight.

Paalam na Deo; ang panginoon
O aking puso at kaluluwa
Ang lahat ay saloobin
Nagpupuri sa iyong ngalan.

Goodnight, Deo, my Lord!
My heart and my soul
All that is in me
Your name be the glory.

Purihin ang panginoon
O aking puso at kaluluwa
Huwag mong kalilimutan
Ang lumikha ng langit at kalupaan.

Glory to you, O Lord!
My heart and my soul
Forget not the One
who created the heaven and the earth.

Purihin ang panginoon

Glory to you, O Lord!

²⁹ This notion of *Sagrada Familia* (Holy Family) is different from the Catholic understanding of the Holy Family that refers to the human origin or progenitors of Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. For the apocryphal story on the origin of *Santisima Trinidad* and *Sagrada Familia*, the two common acceptations of the Holy Trinity, see Pambid, Nenita. "Anting-anting: Animism and Catholicism in Philippine Bronze Amulets" in *SSEASR Journal* (2009): 118-119.

³⁰ Covar, Prospero. "Retablo ng Paniniwala" in *Larangan. Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture* (Manila: Sampaguita Press, Inc, 1998), 45-49. The *Infinito Dios* is the progenitor of the Three Persons, hence, in the altar of *Tres Persona Solo Dios*, the image of the *Infinito Dios* would be seen hovering above the Three Persons.

³¹ Filipino Spiritual Catholic Church is one of the religious sects in the Banahaw religious complex. The church could be easily identified since the statue of Jose Rizal marks the entrance of the church.

Na sumusunod sa ngalan mo
Elohim et vel Israel
Kami po ay patnubayan.

Makapangyarihan Ama
Ay siyang nagtanggol sa amin
Sa kapangyarihan at mula ngayo't
Magpakailanman
Ikaw ay susundin, hindi iiwanan.

Paalam na, Santong Ina sa kalangitan
Naway manaog sa sangkatauhan
At Inang haraya ng katamis-tamisan
Tanglaw sa kalupaan.

Paalam na mahal na Ina naming
Ligaya mong kapiling
Paalam na Ina, laging nakapiling
Paalam na sa'yo at Diyos ang iniibig.

Those who follow your name
Elohim et vel Israel
Be our guide.

Almighty Father
Who protects us ever
through Your might
We will obey and remain
Now and forever.

Goodnight, Holy Mother in Heaven
May you descend upon us
O Gracious Mother, ever sweet
Light of our the land.

Goodnight, our dear Mother
whose presence gives us joy
Goodnight Mother, who abides
Goodnight and to the God we love.

The Tres Persona Solo Dios has a similar hymn address to Trinitarian God.
However, the hymn gives more importance to *Dios Ina*.

Ina ng kaliwanagan
Tunay sa amiy nagmamahal
Harinawang sa amiy pakamtan
Ang kapayapaan ng aming bayan.

Ina sa karagatan
Tunay sa amiy nagmamahal
Harinawang iyo na pong buksan
Ang pinto, ina, iyong kaharian.

Ina sa kabayanan
Tunay sa amiy nagmamahal
Harinawang sa amiy pakamtan
Ang kabuhayan ng aming bayan.

Ina sa kabundokan
Tunay sa amiy nagmamahal
Harinawang sa amiy pakamtan
Ang buhay, Ina, walang katapusan.

Inang kasanta-santahan
Tunay sa amiy nagmamahal
Harinawang kami po'y tulungan
Sa kapayapaan na aming bayan.

Mother of Light
who truly loves us
Grant to us, we pray
Peace in our land.

Mother of the Seas
Who truly loves us
Grant to us, Mother, we implore
The door of your kingdom.

Mother of the Plain
Who truly loves us
Grant to us, we implore
Resources of our land.

Mother of the Mountains
Who truly loves us
Grant to us, Mother, we implore
Everlasting life.

Mother most holy
Who truly loves us
Grant us your help to attain
Peace in our land.

Inang Pilipinas
Tunay sa amiý nagmamahal
Harinawang iyo na pong buksan
Ang bandera Ina ng kapayapaan.

Mother Philippines
Who truly loves us
Grant that you may waive
O Mother, the flag of peace.

The localization of divine presence in multifarious ways indicates the degree of involvement the deity exercises over the ordinary activities of the suppliant.³² This intimacy further points not only to the matriarchal bent of Filipino religious consciousness but also an affirmation that the Holy Voice could interfere even to the mundane details of ordinary life just like the message given to the members of Ciudad Mistica de Dios instructing them to construct an arc in front of their *kapamiento*³³ and the present project of rebuilding their Church in Kinabuhayan, in the case of Tres Persona Solo Dios.

The Imaginaire of Mediation

The concept of *Pagsunod* necessitates purity of heart and openness to the will of God from the person chosen to be the medium or mediator. The condition of the inner self becomes the source of his authority and credibility to lead the *Samahan* and the determinant in case of spirit possession. Since the *Samahan* believes that God communicates through spirit possession, the deity only chooses those whose inner selves are capable of transmitting the divine command with authority and integrity.

Mode of Communication of the *Santong Boses*

Pagsapi or *paglalangkap* (spirit possession) is the manner by which the Santong Boses communicates its authority to the members of the *Samahan*. Hence, the members of the Ciudad Mistica de Dios believe and follow the authority of Nanay Sabel since Maria Bernarda Balitaan (considered to be the Dios Ina) communicates to her through *paglalangkap* (spirit possession). The *Santong Boses* communicates to the members of the Tres Persona Solo Dios through communal discernment. A communal discernment is a prayerful activity where the members sought the guiding presence of the spirit, the same voice that talked to Amang Illustrisimo.

³² This is also rooted from the ancient belief of the indwelling of the souls of the dead ancestors in the anitos. The native Filipinos believe that the souls of the ancestors dwelling in the different anitos have to be appeased to avoid misfortunes. This is also the basis of spirit possession. The natives believe that the soul is immortal and can communicate with the living through spirit possession.

³³ *Kapamiento* refers to the formation house of women aspiring to become priestess.

The phenomenon of *sapi/paglalangkap/sanib* is based on the fundamental belief of the native Filipinos.³⁴ Spirit possession is only possible when the medium is ready, it should possess the necessary conditions for its reception. First, the person should be pure of heart (*malinis ang kalooban*). Thus, the founder of the Ciudad Mistica, Amador Suarez and Suprema Isabel Suarez can communicate with the spirits since both of them are believed to be pure of heart.³⁵ Second, the person is open to the will of God (*bukas ang kalooban*)³⁶. These two attributes were the same requirements of the Katipunan³⁷ from among its members. The *Katipunan* believed that these two conditions are the ultimate basis or standard of behavior that will guarantee their success. These are the values, which many of them had written by their blood, the same values that gathered them and prodded them to give up their lives, honor and dignity for the country.³⁸

Dialectical understanding of the two notions of Power

The notion of *Pagsunod* therefore is an idiom of power relation. It determines a form of relation between the creator and creatures; between creature and other created realities. It acknowledges the dominion of a divine power that exacts from the subject the duty to relate with the deity as inferiors.³⁹ It is reminiscent of the *Dios-na-Makapangyarihan* (Almighty-powerful-God) of Blancas de San Jose and Herrera that creates a religious paradigm of external submission and supplication. The access to the Holy is indirect thus highlights the necessity for a mediator/intercessor. The vertical relation implicit in this concept of *Pagsunod* is mimetically reproduced in the leader-follower relation. The authority or power of the leader resides on his ability to communicate directly with the divine and to other spirits under the phenomenon

³⁴ Pambid, Nenita. *Semiotika ng Anting-anting* (MA Thesis. University of the Philippines Archives, 1989), 117. Covar posited that the phenomenon of spirit possession is not something shocking. The belief of the possibility of the soul to leave the body and another body occupying it is within the dynamics of the native understanding of the relation between the body and the soul. The phenomenon of *sapi* demonstrates this. The spirit that possesses the body could be a good or bad spirit. The *babaylan* or *catalonan* is believed to possess the power to release the spirit possessing the body through rituals of *patawas*, pouring of hot water over the body, insertion of a feather of chicken between fingers, etc. These rituals aim to recall the original spirit (*dating kaluluwa*) of the person. See Covar, "Kaalamang Bayang Dalumat ng Pagkataong Pilipino" in *Larangan*, 9-14.

³⁵ Pesigan, *Dulang Buhay*, 25, 31.

³⁶ Pambid, *Semiotika ng Anting-anting*, 85.

³⁷ The Katipunan was the revolutionary movement against the Spanish authorities. Its founder was Andres Bonifacio. Ileta theorized that many members of the Katipunan were members of *cofradias* or religious organizations that because of the non-recognition they received from the Spanish religious authorities and persecutions they inflicted upon them, joined the Katipunan.

³⁸ Talisayon, Serafin, "Ang Uliirang Pamumuno sa mga Pilipino" in *Roots of Filipino Spirituality*, ed. Teresita Obusan. (Quezon City: Mamamathala, 1998), 269.

³⁹ Hornedo, *Notes on Filipino Religious Symbolic Action*, 39.

of spirit possession. Having the sole right to access the realm of the spirit, the leader then can demand obedience to his/her followers. The failure of the members to follow and fulfill their duties is considered as an act of transgressions that derails the preparation for the coming of God.

However, this dutiful obedience as comprehended by the members of the Samahan does not only spring from the perceived dominion or sovereign power of a transcendent God. The *Santong Boses* is both seen as Lord and friend. This immanent understanding of God is framed according to the natural structure of family relations. God is regarded as Father and Mother. Hence, God is obeyed with reverential fear but also with love and devotion as children obey and love their parents. Similarly, the leader, despite of his/her privileged position is expected to behave in the same way—as someone who possesses *magandang kalooban* (pure of heart) and *bukas na kalooban* (open to God's will). Operating within the concept of the traditional and non-political notion of *bayan* (commune), the leader, though acting as mediator/intercessor, is considered as a brother/sister and a friend. Thus, the characteristic of mediator in the context of colonial structure as indifferent to the plight and conditions of others no longer functions in the folkloric understanding of religious structure among the *Samahan* in Banahaw.

The fusion of the transcendent and immanent nature of God in *Pagsunod* makes *Pagsunod* the principle of unity of the *Samahan*. It becomes the solid foundation of their oneness, togetherness and actions while they await the fulfillment of the Promise. In the context of Banahaw spirituality, it refers to the promise of making Banahaw the New Jerusalem.

Pagsunod also serves as basis of their interconnectedness. It is unthinkable for a member of a *Samahan* to live an independent and isolated life. Life is harmony. This harmony is manifested in the interdependence between man and his environment and among the members of the group. Thus, obedience is not simply hierarchical positioning of the powerful over the powerless but as a means to achieve unity and peace.

The Imaginaire of Reception

The imaginaire of Reception operates under the notion of *Pagganap* (fulfillment of duty). Immediately, the term connotes otherness. The horizontal articulation of *Pagsunod* is *Pagganap* and its beneficiary is always the neighbor. *Pagganap* is *Pagsunod* in action. *Pagganap* pertains to the loving response of a subject completing a celestial command and awaiting the fulfillment of the divine promise.

Pagganap: The fulfillment of Mediative Action

The concept of *Pagganap* (fulfillment of duty) is the concretization of the creedal belief in the ordinary activities of life.⁴⁰ It also refers to the behavioral pattern of action sanctioned by their creedal beliefs,⁴¹ which is believed to bring about the Promise of freedom and happiness. Some religious sects like the Ciudad Mistica de Dios and Tres Persona Solo Dios believed that the re-enactment of sacred events in the life of Jesus and the performance of sacramental rites similar to Catholic practices is a dispositive condition for the reception of the Promise, that is, to be numbered among the elect.

Pagganap is evident in the regularity of complying with religious rituals and activities⁴² such as *Panalanging walang patid* (regular prayer)⁴³, *kulasyon* (fasting), and *pamumuwesto* (pilgrimage).⁴⁴ Prayers in Ciudad Mistica de Dios are recited according to an established pattern and at designated hour. Special prayers are recited for significant and important occasions. Saturday is reserved for the weekly lecture or *lectio* of the Suprema and *pamumuwesto* (pilgrimage to the sacred sites) is conducted every month. The DEO has its forty days of fasting (this is a must for the initiates) and regular attendance to the *lambat* (net), a regular prayer meeting. Part of the rhythmic life of the Tres Persona Solo Dios, on the other hand, is the celebration of the Mass every 7th, 17th and 27th day of the month.

Ating salubungin
Ang masayang pagsapit
Ng Ina ng Pilipinas
Hiwaga ng dikit.

Let us welcome
with joy the advent
of the Mother of the Philippines.
The unfathomable beauty!

Kaya ngayoy nakaluhod kaming lahat
Sa dilag moy tumatawag
Naway manatili sa amin ngayong lahat,
Ang pagpapala mo at habag,
Kaya't ngayoy nagpupuri kaming lahat,
Sa pagdating ng Inang Pilipinas.

Now that we all kneel
Before your majesty, we call
May your blessing and mercy
Abide in us all
As we gather to praise Your visit
O Mother of the Philippines.

⁴⁰ Pesigan, *Dulang Buhay*, 11.

⁴¹ Hornedo opined that religious action among traditional societies can be classified in two topical categories: re-enactment of myth and enactment of ethical duty. The first is creedal and the second constitutes codal and cultic expression. The enactment of myth is meant to renew the sacred effect of the original sacred event or the renewal of the moment of grace. Hornedo, *Notes on Filipino Religious Symbolic Action*, 35.

⁴² Pesigan and Marasigan provide a detailed discussion on the religious rituals and practices of Ciudad Mistica de Dios and Tres Persona Solo Dios.

⁴³ Panalanging Walang Patid is patterned after the Catholic's Liturgy of the Hours.

⁴⁴ Pamumuwesto is similar to Catholic's practice of Way of the Cross.

Gumawa, bumuo at magbata Itatag sa Silangang Asya Lupalop ng mga ginhawa.	Act, unite and persevere Establish a land of consolation In the East of Asia.
Gising mga kababayan Atin ngayong pagsikapan Lagutin ang tali sa kamay Itinali ng mga dayuhan.	Wake up, my fellowmen Let us earnestly strive to Sever the knot that binds our hands Bound by the strangers.
Saan man dumating sa pakikibaka Pilit sasapitin ang buong Victoria Viva si Bernardang, kalakasa'y sakdal Viva ang bandila, vivang walang humpay.	Where ever this fight leads us on Victory be ours and will spur us on Praise, Bernarda, all powerful. Praise the flag, Praise forever more.

The Himno Nacional⁴⁵ of Ciudad Mistica De Dios and Tres Persona Solo Dios has four elements: first, the recognition of the role of *Inang Pilipinas* (Motherland), second, the description of the situation of the suppliant; third, the imploration of mercy and presence of the Ina; and lastly, the operation needed to achieve freedom.

In the hymn cited above, the subjection and the accompanying duty to honor, establish and liberate the people from oppressive powers are conditions for the *Inang Pilipinas* (Mother of the Philippines) to remain and extend her mercy and blessing. Because of these, the structure of productive position is created—between a supernatural being that possesses mercy and grace and the position of recipients who are constantly in need.⁴⁶ It marks also the manner of approach to the supernatural being and the means of making this relation effective. The external rituals of propitiatory offerings and liturgical services regularly performed in their designated temples and *puestos* (holy sites) are dialectically related to the internal requirements of purity of the inner self and openness to the spirit. These ideas are also present in the structure of a hymn of DEO written on July 19, 1974.

Halina mga anak, ako'y matibay na sakdalan
Pagpapalain ko kayo, kapag ako ay inibig
Sa mga kasalanan, ang pangako ko'y pakinggan
Kapag nagsisi at nagtika, kapatawara'y makakamtan

⁴⁵ This is the only common hymn of Ciudad Mistica de Dios and Tres Persona Solo Dios. The Misticas sing this hymn before the regular lecture of the Suprema whereas the Tres Persona sings the hymn as part of the opening ritual of the mass and at the end of the liturgical service. However, the last stanza is specific to Ciudad Mistica de Dios.

⁴⁶ Hornedo noted that the enactment of ethical duty of traditional societies show itself as acknowledgement of dominion; acknowledgement of indebtedness or gratitude; profession of faith and affection. Since the subject has no power over the deity, he needs to profess his poverty before the divine majesty by supplication and manifest reverential fear by keeping taboos and fulfillment of vows. Hornedo, *Notes on Filipino Religious Symbolic Action*, 39.

Sa puso ko'y inuukit mga larawang nagbalik
Upang aking makasama sa buhay na walang hanggan.

Come, my children, I am a just judge.
Love me and be blessed
To listen to all your sins, I solemnly promise.
Confess and be contrite and pardon will be yours
For those who are pardoned are engraved in my heart
And will be with me in everlasting life.

Certainly, the love of God is unconditional. Gifts are sure to come but not yet. Here contrition is a condition to restore once again the image of man distorted by sin.

Pagganap (fulfillment of duty) implies the belief that life is a totality. Though these rituals are obviously influenced by Catholic tradition and practices, they are not just exterior compliance. For the members of these religious groups, life is never dichotomized. Rituals encompass the whole system of signification and this law of harmony is strengthened by repetitive performance of rituals. These rituals form the *kalooban* (inner self), making them dispose to receive the millenarian promise of redemption.

While *Pagganap* entails a vertical relation between the divine that exercise dominion and the subject that professes poverty by supplication and reverential fear, the horizontal dimension of *Pagganap* is manifested in *pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity). The operationalization of *pakikipagkapwa* is *pagdamay* (empathy/participation). It is the manifestation of indebtedness and gratitude. The folk understanding of duty to return the blessings received is through gift giving. Since the act of giving gift is not a reciprocal obligation, the act becomes a matter of goodwill.⁴⁷ The feeling of joy induces the act to offer gift to the divine and share the blessings he receives by giving gifts to others. In the life of these religious sects, helping a member to plough his field, sharing some harvests from the farm, volunteerism or welcoming a stranger could be an act of *Pagganap*. Hence, through the notion of *Pagganap*, the members of the *Samahan* anticipate the promise of redemption. The notion of New Jerusalem in the first place, is not a physical and geographical territory, but a condition of moral transformation. There is no transparent manifestation of such anticipated reality other than obedience, fulfillment and participation. These daily activities are not just meant to address the present needs, but for the members of the *Samahan*, suffuse with eschatological value.

⁴⁷ Hornedo, *Notes on Filipino Religious Symbolic Action*, 39.

Banahaw as a Configured Place

The concept of place refers not only to geographical location but also to a dialectical relation between environment and human narrative.⁴⁸ It is a locus where events are remembered and it evokes significant and meaningful thoughts born out of shared experience and common narrative. Though place is a construct, “the physical or material aspect of a place is an active partner in constituting its meaning. There is interplay between the physical and material geography and the geographies of the mind and spirit”.⁴⁹

The rich vegetation coupled with the narrative of revelations attributed to God made the geographical relocation of religious space from the dominant and institutional Catholic religious domain to a liminal and secluded space possible.⁵⁰ This movement away from the center and enclosed religious site of Catholicism provides these religious sects a space to form and nurture their own beliefs and practices. The physical contour of the mountain is marked out according to the events in the life of Jesus Christ. Caves, stones and bodies of water serve as shrines and places of worship. The mountain is now configured and re-imagined as *Bagong Herusalem* (New Jerusalem). As manifested in their religious language, the formed religious belief extolls the transcendent aspect of God learned from missionary preaching and at the same time enshrines the native love for the family and the immanent dimension of faith by living in a community animated by Filipino values such *Pagsunod* (obedience), *Pagganap* (fulfillment of duty) and *Pagdamay* (empathy/participation). The use of nationalistic symbolisms such as the color and shape of Philippine flag and images of Philippine heroes in their shrines and altars is integral to the Banahaw religious spirituality. Rituals performed by *babaylans* (priestesses) further amplified the nationalistic and native slant, reminiscent of pre-colonial religious role accorded to women. This configuration is integral to Banahaw religious spirituality and identity. It is in fact, its ontological mooring. This makes Banahaw spirituality different from other folk religious practices elsewhere in the Philippines.

Place is also political since the manner by which place is constructed presupposes the exclusion of other narratives. The system of spatialization is historically conditioned. It is not merely physical arrangements but also spatial patterns of social action and routine and historical conceptions of the world.⁵¹ The

⁴⁸ Sheldrake, Philip. *Spaces for the Sacred. Place, Memory and Identity* (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 1.

⁴⁹ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 15.

⁵⁰ Francisco, Jose Mario, “Mapping Religious and Civil Spaces in Traditional and Charismatic Christianities in the Philippines” in *Philippine Studies* 58, Nos 1-2 (2010): 85-221.

⁵¹ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 21.

physical displacement of religious sects from the civil and ecclesiastical centers and the re-location of Christian symbolisms make Banahaw a geography of struggle and resistance. Marasigan narrated how the founder of Tres Persona Solo Dios, Julio Ilustrisimo, had suffered from repressions and injustices committed by civil authorities and religious functionaries.⁵² The founder of Ciudad Mistica de Dios, Maria Bernarda Balitaan had similar fate. The religious language itself, the rituals performed and social structures of their organizations subvert the dominant religious institutions considered by Banahaw believers as synonymous with European culture and colonizers whose values and experiences are different from their own.

The emergence of the *babaylans* through the priestesses and women ministers is a strand of spirituality that also subverts the clerical nature of Catholic Church. Wearing priestly garbs and performing rituals similar to Catholic rites and practices by priestesses emphasize the ability of women to exercise the spiritual ministry in the Catholic Church ordinarily and regularly reserved to clerics and ordained male. In fact, the predominant role of women in the ritualistic life of Banahaw is actually a re-emergence of an intrinsic quality of Filipino primal religion. Furthermore, their visionary experiences concretely expressed in *pagsanib* (spirit possession) accentuate the lay and women religious leaders capacity to access the sacred. This mediatorial role, which was once used to justify the importance and significance of priests in a highly structured colonial system, is now occupied and dispensed by female or even unordained man.

Banahaw as Refigured Place

Seen from the perspective of spirituality, the movement of religious groups in Banahaw can be considered a withdrawal, a spiritual journey towards interiority that requires a physical transfer from the center towards a frontier territory. Their journey was not a form of escape but a voluntary withdrawal to experience physical deprivation and submission to a spiritual guide, the *Santong Boses* (Holy Voice). The precarious condition waiting for them in the mountain resonates a similar scene of withdrawal of mystics or monks' entrance to the monasteries that symbolizes the spiritual entrance into a new life in Christ. The physical withdrawal of Ilustrisimo of Tres Persona Solo Dios and Maria Bernarda Balitaan of Ciudad Mistica de Dios, involved a topographical displacement that indicates that the attainment of holiness is also expressed as a movement in space.⁵³

⁵² Marasigan, *A Banahaw Guru*, p. 20.

⁵³ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p. 93, 131. He noted that this spatial movement from the center towards the margin underscores the prophetic nature of ascetism and monasticism. It could not be simply regarded as *fuga mundi* but a way of transcending the well defined and enclosed boundaries.

This narrative of departure from the mundane and profane to a place of mystical experience is a kind of utopia. A utopian is an imaginary place that expresses a deep human longing. It refers to some future horizon of value: some surplus meaning that transcends the limits of ideology; something that unfolds a horizon of possibilities.⁵⁴ It is this quality that allows utopias to capture our attention and sympathy, that is, whether they offer practical possibilities or not. Utopias point to a different kind of place that explores the dialectical relation between the possible and the impossible, a place of what has no place, or no longer has a place—the absolute, the divine or the possible.⁵⁵

The image of Banahaw as a newfound place, the New Jerusalem where the elect shall be gathered is a utopian vision. The time of the final reckoning shall be known by the appearance of a huge and golden church at the summit of the mountain. The transformation of Banahaw to a New Jerusalem demands a passing from the present world to a new world. The present material world is confused and unmindful to the call of the Spirit. It does not mean treating the ordinary insignificant; the faithful of Banahaw believes that the material and spiritual dimensions of life is never dichotomized. While, it is well pronounced in their hymns and rituals the primacy of the spiritual realm, the material life must conform to the transcendent. Thus, the ethos of life demanded from the members of these religious sects anticipate that apocalyptic event by trying to live a transformed human existence.

To achieve this moral transformation, members of religious sects perform and dutifully observe *Pagganap* (fulfillment of duty). This is not simply a form of exterior compliance, but an embodiment of duty. This understanding of ‘indwelling’ calls for participation to effectively live in a place. ‘Out of place’ is a fitting expression for a person who does not participate. Ricoeur stressed that the formation of personal identity cannot be divorced from narrative identity. Such narrative identity includes the stories of others. One cannot possess a story entirely about oneself. To admit a pure and solipsistic narrative is to disconnect one’s life to the social world where he really belongs. Moreover, for people of Banahaw, to participate is to observe the proper relation with others and with the environment. Everyone is related and things are interconnected. The hospitality and gracious welcome accorded to visitors by these religious sects, their peaceful coexistence, and their involvement with various civil activities and initiatives projects the image that Banahaw is a “metaphorically reconciled space.”⁵⁶ There should be no room for violence as peace is a universal theme in almost all of their hymns, no contention or rejection of others as expressed

Contemplation then for the mystic is the only recourse to expand and transgress the normal bounds.

⁵⁴ Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, 85.

⁵⁵ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 94.

⁵⁶ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the sacred*, 110.

in their prayers and structure of society. The familial structure of their faith replicated in the hierarchy of positions or levels of authorities in their material life is dispositive for forgiveness and reconciliation. They live in the present, to a physical and material world but with a vision of a world that is not yet here. Their idea of Banahaw as New Jerusalem is a sign of future belonging. “So much things to do” expressed by Nanay Sabel. These expressions are not so much untruths as exercises of faith.⁵⁷

Disfiguring Banahaw: Deviating from the Path

The spirituality of Banahaw is inseparable from the different *puestos* (holy sites) a pilgrim has to meander and faithfully follow. One cannot sufficiently claim that he is a Banahaw pilgrim without passing through its caves and experience traversing the localized biblical path. To follow the path of the *puestos* is to retrace the *daan-ni-Kristo* (Way of Christ). To trace it correctly is the right *pamamaraan* (way). No one is allowed to shortcut as one traces the events in the life of Christ that begin in the ritual washing at the falls of Sta. Lucia and culminates in the *Durungawan* in Kinabuhayan. In other words, *pamumuesto* is a metaphor of righteousness.⁵⁸ If sanctity is identified as dutiful obedience, the right *kaparaanan* (right way); *paglabag* (disobedience), on the other hand, constitutes transgressions. Members who committed moral transgressions are coaxed to retrace the right path. *Pagpunya* (fraternal correction) becomes a form of moral persuasion. *Pagsusuplina* (sacrifice/doing penance) is *pagbabalik-loob* (repentance) which in turn restores *dangal* (dignity). Sin derails the fulfillment of the promise. One would understand how most members of the different *Samahan* frown on those who are *lumalabag sa utos* (disobeying the rules) that includes observing silence while trekking the mountain or polluting the mountain by leaving tons of garbage and pilfering the trees for commercial purposes. Thus, in Banahaw the confluence of meaning of the sacred rituals and ethics provides the idea that the sacrality of the mountain is a result of relationship between actions, conceptions and physical attributes.

Modernity is taking its toll on the sacred place. Members of the *Samahan* are living a precarious condition of negotiating the demands of tradition and alluring invitation of modern and contemporary lifestyle. Its enigma and guarded seclusion is gradually buttressed by commercialization and advent of modern technology. The

⁵⁷ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the sacred*, 141.

⁵⁸ Durungawan is a pilgrim site in Banahaw. There is an open gape in the cave that appears like a window and one can see from there the verdant scene of Banahaw. The demarcation of space to determine sacrality is even more pronounced as the members of the *Samahan* identified Mt. Cristobal as the evil mountain. If Mt. Banahaw is sacred, the mountain adjacent to it is not. It is the locale of many misfortunes, of haunted and haunting spirits.

academe and the media, perhaps, can be blamed partly in this unholy intrusion. Ultimately, the continuity of Banahaw tradition depends on how the members and the different *Samahan* come to terms with the dialectics of sedimentation and innovation. What makes it survive rests on how the members and pilgrims of Banahaw continuously weave narratives of its sacrality to allay the sanctimonious desire of those enamored of its physical beauty and untapped resources.■

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