

Libad nang Apung Iru and Pamamaku king Krus

Performances of Ambivalence in
Kapampangan Cultural Spectacles

Sir Anril P. Tiatco



Two Catholic rituals in the Pampanga province of the Philippines present a concatenation of theatre, faith, and cultural spectacle: *libad* (water ritual and festival) in Apalit; and the *pamamaku king krus* (nailing on the cross) in Cutud. Although these performances are borrowed from the dogma of Catholicism, they present some ambivalences to the very Christian-Catholic religion on which the rituals are based. The actors, the audience, the spaces of the performances, and the texts are all manifestations of Catholic doctrines. At the outset, as the actors perform their

Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco is currently on leave as Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts at the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts in the University of the Philippines Diliman to pursue a PhD in Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore. His essays have appeared in Asian Theatre Journal and Philippine Humanities Review.

Catholic texts (most often enacted through *panata*, or religious and sacrificial acts of devotion), the performance of Catholicism in these rituals appears to be “obvious or known phenomena that do not require fresh and constantly renewed examination” (Cannell 2006:3). If we examine Christian (Catholic) doctrine and its physicality (performance), we find irregularities and paradoxes in the comparison. Fenella Cannell states:

[...E]ven where particular Christian churches have, at given times and places, adopted certain theological positions as orthodox and policed them as such, the unorthodox position remains hanging in the air, readable between the lines in Scripture, and implied as the logical opposite of what is most insisted upon authorities. Hence, the heretical is constantly reoccurring and being reinvented in new forms. (7)

Cannell suggests that the reoccurrences and/or the reinventions of heresies are manifestations of particular ambivalences towards the orthodox theological positions of the Catholic Church. These unorthodox positions then make Catholic tradition ambiguous.

This production of ambiguity can be traced from various webs of significations: the performers’ *panata* and the iconic figures or images in the performances (Apung Iru, or St. Peter in Apalit; and the wooden cross in Cutud). My arguments rely on the experiences and narratives of some members of the Catholic communities in these localities, which I have been visiting since 2004 when I began my research. In 2006, through the initiative of Dr. Floro Quibuyen of the Asian Center in the University of the Philippines Diliman, I was introduced to the members of the Catholic community in Apalit. This paved the way for me to look at the water ritual and festival in the context of cultural performance. I realized that the performers were ambivalent about the Catholic traditions that united the two communities. Although Catholicism and ambivalence to Catholicism are common in the performances of these rituals, the way ambivalence and Catholicism were physicalized are completely different (and/or may be analogous).

Performing the *Sinakulo* in Cutud; Performing the *Libad* in Apalit

The nailing-on-the-cross ritual in Cutud is the climax of a *sinakulo*,¹ a street passion play, titled *Via Crucis o Pasyon Y Muerte* (Way of the Cross or Passion and Death), written in 1955 by local playwright Ricardo Navarro and performed every Good Friday.² *Via Crucis o Pasyon y Muerte*

1. *Sinakulo* is “a Lenten play usually in verse, which narrates a long sequence of episodes from the Old and/or New Testaments, with special emphasis on the life, sufferings and resurrection of Jesus Christ [...] *Sinakulo* are presented on a proscenium-type stage of bamboo-and-wood or cement-and-steel; under light bulbs that cast an unyielding light instead of creating a mood and against painted cloth or paper backdrops, called *telon*” (Tiongson 2000:43). However, not all *sinakulo* are performed on a proscenium stage. Some are performed in streets, as are the *sinakulo* in Marinduque (Mandia 2002; Peterson 2007) and the *sinakulo* in Cutud (Tiatco 2006; Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008).
2. Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete (2008) explain that Good Friday, the Friday before Easter that commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is a very holy day in the Philippines. Catholics celebrate the redemption of mankind from sin as symbolically represented by the passion and death of Jesus. For this occasion, the Catholic Church conducts the veneration ritual as the Church’s official and legitimate ritual for this very day. See Rafael Semilla (1970) for comprehensive information on the rituals and other official devotional practices prescribed and officiated by the Catholic Church. For discussions on doctrines followed by the Catholic Church to legitimize the different practices, see the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (1997).

Figure 1. (previous page) Kristo (Ruben Enaje) is captured by the Hudyo (L: Bert Francisco, R: Victor Aquino) after a long meditation (and contemplation) with his family. (Photo by Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco)

reenacts Jesus's walk, carrying the cross, to his death in Golgotha. In the Catholic Church, this is known as the Stations of the Cross, or the Way of the Cross. Usually, devotees stop and contemplate the passion, death, and crucifixion of Jesus at each of the 14 shrines (or the 14 stations).

In former times, the climax of this *sinakulo* was the tying of the actor performing the *Kristo* (Christ) on the cross. But in 1961, Artemio Añosa, then playing the *Kristo*, decided to be truly nailed on the cross as an act of ultimate devotion and sacrifice, as a *panata*. Nicolas Barker notes that Añosa's ritualistic and sacrificial act was the first actual crucifixion reenactment in the Philippines (1998:16).

Añosa was an *albularyo* (local doctor/faith healer). In an earlier essay (with Amihan Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008), I discuss that local doctors at that time were visiting Mount Banahaw in Quezon Province, which was considered the cradle and source of the *albularyo*'s power of healing. Añosa believed that his potency as a faith healer "depended on obtaining a mysterious stone from one of the caves in that mountain" (Navarro in Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008:63). He never found the stone, but it was this particular desire that made him push through with what Allan Navarro (2004), grandson of Ricardo Navarro, calls the "substantial" *panata* of being nailed on the cross.

Today, the performance begins at the house of the *Kristo* (Ruben Enaje presently performs the role; fig. 1). The *Kristo* meditates with his family while waiting for the *Hudyo* (actors performing the role of the Roman guards). At exactly 12 noon, he is captured by the *Hudyo* and is then brought to an artificial stage erected in the community's basketball court. There, he meets Pilato (Pilate) and the other high priests, Anas and Caipas (fig. 2). The priests accuse the *Kristo* of treason. Pilato, on the other hand is convinced that the priests' accusation on the *Kristo* is invalid. Being subjected to Cesar, the priests accuse Pilato of not asserting his position as the representative of the Roman Empire. After which Pilato washes his hands and proclaims the crucifixion of the *Kristo*. The *Hudyo* then bring the *Kristo* to the village's entrance and give him his cross. From the village entrance, the *Kristo* carries the cross to *purok 5* (zone 5) of the village where he is nailed and remains hanging on the cross for about five minutes (fig. 3). Along the way, the *Kristo* meets his mother Mary, along with Mary Magdalene and Veronica.



Figure 2. Left to right: Boy Padilla (as Pilato), Ruben Enaje (Kristo), Lem Navarro (as one of the Hudyo), and Allan Navarro (present director of the *sinakulo*). (Photo by Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco)



Figure 3. The *Kristo* is nailed on the cross as the climax of the village's *sinakulo* and ritual. (Photo by Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco)



Figure 4. Boy Alfonso, the president of KSP, protects the ivory image of Apung Iru from the sun with a sponsored umbrella from Beach Walk sandals, as the image is paraded on the waters of Calumpit River. (Photo by Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco)

The actual nailing is performed on the *burol*, an artificial hill made of *labar* (mudflows) locally known as *Kalbaryo* (Calvary). Cutud was one of the most devastated towns in Pampanga during the aftermath of Mount Pinatubo's eruption in 1991. I expounded in an earlier essay with Bonifacio-Ramolete (2008) that several locals were buried in the lahar when it devastated Central Luzon (specifically Pampanga) and the *Kalbaryo* was created in their memory. In 1996, despite the government's warning, evacuated members of the Cutud community rebuilt their village.

Two to three months after the nailing ritual, during the heat of summertime in the

Philippines, two towns away from Cutud, the Kapampangan Catholic community in Apalit celebrates the coming of the rainy season through the *libad* (fluvial) performance in veneration of the town's patron, Apung Iru (St. Peter) on 28 to 30 June (fig. 4).

In this ritual and festival, the performers—the devotees, the *kamarera* or *kamerero* (the caretaker, Dr. Ederlinda Bahdenhop at the time of fieldwork and later replaced by Toto Gonzales when Dr. Bahdenhop died in 2008), the Knights of St. Peter (KSP), and the Catholic Church (as represented by the parish priest of St. Peter's Cathedral)—engage in impassioned “dancing, chanting, *limbon* (ground procession), *libad* (fluvial procession), and water exchanges” (Tiatco 2008:93). The performance begins at the shrine of Apung Iru in Capalangan with a “turnover” ceremony where the *kamarera* and the KSP (headed by Boy Alfonso during the time of fieldwork) sign a contract-like agreement signifying that “the *kamarera* is transferring the authority of the image to KSP for three days” (96).

However, prior to this turnover ceremony, beginning at 4:00 A.M. (or earlier), interesting performative activities occur within the shrine. Devotees line up, not only to view the elegance of their patron saint, but also to literally feel the power of being near him. A huge banquet is served by the *kamarera* to signify what Apung Iru has provided. A priest conducts a Eucharistic celebration inside a chapel near the shrine. Immediately afterwards, Boy Alfonso presides over the saying of the rosary inside the shrine.

Immediately after signing the agreement, Apung Iru moves out of the shrine and parades through the streets of Capalangan towards the Calumpit River bank. As the image moves through the streets, people begin their impassioned dance and water exchanges, with a brass band accompanying their merrymaking. As the image passes by, devotees sprinkle (or throw) water at everyone using pails, water hoses, glasses, plastic containers, or anything that holds water. Since the devotees believe that Apung Iru has blessed the water, everyone is eager to share the blessedness of the water. At the same time, devotees believe that the sprinkling of water is a performative act of petition to Apung Iru asking for protection against various water disasters, especially floods since the celebration coincides with what the community believes to be the beginning of the rainy season. Devotees also continuously shout “Viva Apung Iru!” as they wave stalks of plants or branches of shrubs.

Arriving at the river, the image is transferred to a small pagoda signifying the start of the libad (fig. 5). As the image passes by the devotees gathered on both sides of the river, they spray and throw and splash water euphorically. The devotees never run out of water since the river is a never-ending source for the ecstatic water exchanges. As I observed, devotees (specifically the Apaliteños) happily plunge into the river even though it is polluted.³ This does not stop people from enjoying the river for, as locals claim, it is Apung Iru's water.

After about two hours, the image crosses Calumpit River. Equally ecstatic devotees in a hundred or so smaller pagodas welcome Apung Iru to the Pampanga River (fig. 6). Apung Iru is then transferred to a bigger pagoda provided by the fiesta committee of St. Peter's Cathedral (fig. 7). The libad continues for about five hours more. During the procession, devotees continue plunging into the water, dancing in the pagodas, chanting and singing songs, and exchanging water. In addition, devotees throw food towards Apung Iru's pagoda and at each other.

When Apung Iru reaches the bank of *sitio* (zone) Paralaya, the image is paraded on land (*limbon*). Leading the procession is Rev. Fr. Larry Sarmiento, the parish priest of St. Peter's Cathedral at the time of my fieldwork. After another three-hour procession, Apung Iru is transferred to the cathedral, its dwelling for the next two days.

On the 30th, people once again parade Apung Iru around the grounds and move it into the waters for the libad so that it can be brought back to its shrine in Capalangan. The same merrymaking is performed along the river back to Capalangan.

Panata: Axiom of the Performances

When I asked them why they engage in the rituals, my informants for the two rituals replied, "Kasi *panata* na namin iyon!" ("Because it's our religious pledge, that's why!"). Most literature on the study of Philippine rituals claim that the panata is at the core of ritual performances (Baciera 1977; Zialcita 1986; Alcantara 1987; De Mesa 1994; Barker 1998; Cannell 1999; Llana 2002; Bonilla 2001; Gonzales 2001 and 2008; Mandia 2002; Tolentino 2003; Tiatco 2006; Alcedo 2007; Peterson 2007; Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008; Tiatco 2008). Panata is often invoked as the direct communication of the devotee with the Almighty. Panata is "a religious vow whereby the devotee promises to do a sacrifice for his faith in hopes of being rewarded by divine response to his prayers" (see Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008:59), oftentimes associated with the Catholic doctrine.

Borrowing from Max Scheler, panata may be understood as "an experience of sacrifice, done individually, yet performed for the good of others as well" (in Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete 2008:73). By way of sacrifice, the devotee usually performs extraordinary acts like being nailed on the cross in Cutud, and frolicking in filthy water in Apalit. Most of the time, these acts are considered eccentric and absurd by outsiders, but for the devotees, these acts are "the best way to get closer to God" (59). Overall, these performative and sacrificial acts give the performers "necessary pain and joy" (Alcedo 2007:118). Local theologian and Catholic priest Pablo David discussed that in Catholic doctrine this is best explained as the "theology of redemptive suffering" or the "theology of the redemptive cross" (2005). Usually, the sacrificial act is enacted for the good of the devotee himself or herself, for a loved one (i.e., usually a sick loved one), or for the community.

A panata may appear as a product of Catholicism. However, the particular devotional acts performed in these two cultural spectacles seemingly contradict the theological teachings of the Catholic Church. For instance, the nailing on the cross in Cutud is a devotion that the Catholic Church does not promote. Specifically, the nailing ritual coincides with Good Friday, one of the

3. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in the Philippines has attested to the pollution in the river (Tiatco 2008).



Figure 5. Members of the KSP prepare for the transference of Apung Iru in the pagoda before the libad begins. (Photo by Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco)

most important liturgical dates of the Catholic tradition. Incidentally, the nailing ritual traces its origin from the medieval European Catholic ritual of self-flagellation. Historically, self-flagellation has been disowned by the Church. In its original intention, self-flagellation was a way to atone or pay penance, which is the intention behind the enactment in the ritual in Cutud. Nowadays, however, the Catholic Church maintains that the sacrament of Reconciliation is the proper and only medium of performing penance. The sacrament of Reconciliation according to Vatican II exposes that:

those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for offenses committed against Him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, example, prayer, labors for their conversion. (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines 1997:511)

But for the devotees, performing and attending the ritual is more effective than confessing their sins to priests (Tiatco 2006).

Nonetheless, atonement is not the only reason why Catholics in Cutud continue this devotional performance. Ruben Enaje (2004), Mario Castro (2005), and Chito Sangalang (2004) narrate that the devotion is an act of thanksgiving and a petition for a better life.

Ruben Enaje's participation in the ritual is a devotional act of thanksgiving for his "second life" after miraculously surviving a fall from a three-story building where he used to work as a painter. Chito Sangalang, performing Kristo prior to Enaje, vowed to be nailed on the cross after his mother survived tuberculosis. Mario Castro was Kristo in the 1970s; he vowed to be nailed on the cross when his first-born child miraculously revived after the doctor in a local hospital declared him dead.



Figure 6. Devotees in smaller pagodas welcome Apung Iru in the waters of Pampanga River. (Photo by Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco)

In Apalit, panata is linked to the waters of Rio Grande de Pampanga (Pampanga River). The Church has for a long time been ambivalent about the frolicking in the river. Church authorities not only use the pollution in the river to challenge the validity of the ritual/festival, but also add to their list of reasons why *not* to take the plunge the recorded incidents of drowning since it started in the late 19th century. Still, the pollution and the drownings have not intimidated the community. Ederlinda Bahdenhop (2006) even testifies that the drownings are in fact tests of the Apaliteños’s faith in Apung Iru. The drownings and the pollution are “necessary pain and joy” deepening their relationship to their patron.

Cannell (1999) discusses analogies to the panata in Apalit, and implicitly, to that of Cutud. In her view, the panata of most of Calabanga’s Catholics is manifested in the *pagparigo ki Ama* (bathing of the Father) and the funeral of Amang Hinulid. Cannell observes that the expression of faith for residents in the Bicol region is a deep devotion to the “dead Christ,” a wooden sculpture believed to have miraculous powers. Cannell suggests that the devotion is more iconic than an interest in the economy of salvation and not focused on the transcendent idea of God. This opposes the teaching of the Church that asserts that the sculptured images of the saints are representations of divinity and are not divinity themselves. However, the panata in *pagparigo ki Ama* and Amang Hinulid’s funeral appear to be otherwise, Cannell suggests. Most of the time, the Catholic Church categorizes these performative acts as fanaticism, if not totally against doctrine.

In a seemingly similar devotional practice in Manila, the feast day of the Black Nazarene produces what the Bishop of the Archdiocese of Manila, Cardinal Rosales, characterizes as an act of fanaticism. Irked by the mob during his homily in the 402nd year of the Black Nazarene, Cardinal Rosales stated:

Actually, these are the fanatics. That's exactly the devotion we want to purify. Sometimes, the strong emotion of people takes over reason. The emotions take over the holiness of the event, the emotions take over the devotion. The emotions, the fanaticism, they should not be there and that is exactly what we are trying to tell the people. We still have a long way to go. (in Macarain 2009)

In a similar stance, Rev. Fr. Homer Policarpio (2004), the parish priest of Santa Lucia in Cutud during the time of fieldwork, stated that the devotion to the cross and the ritualistic act of being nailed on it are acts of fanaticism. At the same time, Fr. Policarpio claimed that these are not in any way promoted by the Church.

Catholics in Apalit consider Apung Iru a member of their community responsible for several heroic deeds. Other people believe that Apung Iru leaves his shrine every now and then to visit a household as a way of inviting every Apaliteños to celebrate the town's fiesta. In Cutud, the efficacy of the cross is responsible for the different performances of thanksgiving, petitions, and atonement. Catholics dedicate themselves to the cross. Ruben Enaje keeps a shrine for the cross and the nails in his house. It is a sacred site that he and his family look to in times of prayer.

Apung Iru and the Cross

Actors in the Performances

Despite the performers' ambivalence toward the Catholic tradition, they consider their performance incomplete without the participation of the community's symbolic representations of their Catholic faith. Both in Cutud and in Apalit, iconic images of the "divine" are not mere artificial figures (of wood in Cutud and of ivory in Apalit) but are believed to be divine. Cannell (2006) suggests that these images contradict the very notion of the transcendent being as the Catholic doctrine teaches. In Apalit, Apung Iru is believed to be a playful old man who once in a while invites members of the Catholic community to actively participate in the three-day ritual and festival from Capalangan to the Cathedral in the town proper. In Cutud, the cross is the actual source of strength. As the Way of the Cross proceeds, the slow pace of the march contributes to the somber atmosphere, almost as if a real person was in danger of dying, illustrating how the communities venerate not the abstract idea of divinity but a very present divine.

Beyond just venerating these figures as real and divine, the communities have actually constructed narratives supporting their claims of divinity. In Apalit, people believe that if they believe in Apung Iru, their petitions will be granted—the whole town will be protected from danger. The community's narratives make Apung Iru more than just an image; he is a power. Local historian Vicente Catacutan (2006) reports that in WWII when Japanese soldiers left Apalit, Apaliteños associated their departure with Apung Iru. Both Catacutan and Bahdenhop (2006) verify that when the Americans arrived after the Japanese left, the Cathedral's bells were rung in honor of Apung Iru's victory. Sergio David, a member of the KSP (2006), Rev. Fr. Larry Sarmiento (2006), and Connie Hizon, a devotee (2006), all testify that when two factories emitting chemicals that were killing the fish in Pampanga River were closed, Apaliteños cried "Viva Apung Iru!"

In Cutud, devotees believe that the cross is the source of redemption. Carrying the cross is a mark of atonement and guarantees the bearer that his petition will be granted. More so, to be nailed on the cross is a complete surrender to the redemptive power of the cross. Some devotees narrate that before they actually decided to participate in the ritual, they dreamed of the cross. Ruben Enaje dreamed that the cross was coming towards him. He claims that the cross did not disappear from his dreams until he finally accepted the role of Kristo (2004). In a sense, the cross was literally inviting him to perform the most prestigious and difficult role of the *sinakulo*. Mario Castro witnessed an apparition of the Santo (Saint) Niño, the young Jesus holding a cross on his left hand. According to Castro, the Niño did not utter a word but offered him the very cross the Niño was holding. For him, this was a sign that the Almighty was inviting him to accept the role

he declined when Rolando Navarro, the director, first offered it (2004).

These particular variances to the Catholic doctrine of divinity are probably rooted in precolonial Filipino religious practices enacting faith and adoration. Annotators and chroniclers of the Spanish monarchy during the early days of inquisition⁴ reported that the precolonial Filipinos had a deep reverence towards their sacred figures. To the colonial Catholics, the figures were “idols,” but to the Filipinos they were sacred presences inhabiting the territory. Felipe L. Jocano notes that, “Plasencia reported the existence of a ritual complex involving the adoration of the idols and the celebration of feasts” (2001:183). In addition, “drums and gongs were used during the ritual performances. The entire community came together to worship in the chief’s house, which was erroneously labeled by the chroniclers as a temple. The form of worship was known as *magaanito*” (183). Thus, the introduction of Catholicism with its saints and other religious icons blended with an existing religion.

Jema Pamintuan believes that the Apalit community venerated crocodiles prior to the coming of Catholicism. Using as reference her keyword analysis of language in precolonial performance texts, such as epics chanted by the bard who accompanied ritual dances and festivals in part of the Philippines and Southeast Asia, and comparing it with Fray Diego Bergaño’s recorded accounts in his *Vocabulario de la lengua Pampanga en Romance* (Vocabulary of the Pampangan Language), she concludes that the ritual/festival may have its roots in a precolonial crocodile veneration:

narratives on pre-colonial beliefs of its natives, therefore, not surprisingly, may come from legends that are tied-up with the river/rivers in Pampanga. Stories on the beginnings of the *Apung Iru Fluvial Festival* were in fact given light in Fray Bergaño’s book, one of which was how the native priests (*katulunan*) during the pre-colonial period gave festive offerings to crocodiles which were believed to be the guardian deities of the Kapampangan River. (2006:2–3)



Figure 7. Boy Alfonso supervises the transference of Apung Iru to a larger pagoda. (Photo by Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco)

4. When Ferdinand Magellan discovered the Philippines in 1521, Charles V (r. 1516–1556) was the King of Spain. When Magellan was killed by Lapu-Lapu, some Spaniards (including Antonio Pigafetta, who was Magellan’s chronicler) returned to Spain. Pigafetta reported to the king what he witnessed during his short stay on the island of Mactan. Thereafter, the kings who followed the reign of Charles V (Philip II [1556–1598], Philip III [1598–1621], Philip IV [1621–1665], Charles II [1665–1700]) sent chroniclers and annotators (e.g., Antonio de Morga, Juan de Plasencia, Wenceslao Retana, Alfred Marche, etc.) to take notes on the archipelago and its inhabitants. When most of the archipelago was Christianized, religious orders, specifically the Jesuits and the Franciscans, sent their chroniclers and annotators (Fray Pedro Chirino, Fray Francisco Collin, Francisco Combes, etc.), who reported Catholic indoctrinations and resistances to their superiors (Phelan 1959; Blair and Robertson 1973; Agoncillo 1990; Fernández 1996; Jocano 2001).

Negotiating Catholicism in Performance

Ambivalences Surfacing

The different panata in the two rituals show how the communities negotiate with Catholicism. These negotiations are examples of Lila Abu-Lughod's "writing against culture [...] against the homogenizing discourse of [Catholic] culture" (in Alcedo 2007:112). Catholic tradition has several doctrines that have been internalized by its followers. The externalizations and physicalizations of these doctrines vary depending on how the performers interpret Catholicism. And these interpretations are continuous and ongoing contestations of the community with their local lore or narratives (Tiatco 2008). In Apalit, the ritual/festival is a contestation of Apung Iru's heroism against the Catholic narrative of St. Peter. These negotiations involve all the actors in the ritual/festival: the kamarera, the KSP, the parish priest, the devotees, and even Apung Iru.

There are two important elements in the Catholic notion of celebration and performance in Apalit: food and water. Previous priests in Apalit have criticized the community's extravagant food consumption during the ritual/festival. Vincente Catacutan recalls that one priest reminded the Apaliteños of the economic crisis that the community (and the country) was experiencing. But the people responded: "It is the banquet that Apung Iru himself prepared" (see Bahdenhop 2006; and Catacutan 2006). Fr. Larry Sarmiento acquiesced to the traditional way of celebrating. Also, as previously mentioned, the pollution of the river and the incidents of drowning from past celebrations were used by a former priest to persuade the people to end the water performances. The Apaliteños are actually well aware of the pollution of the river and the danger of drowning. Most do not allow their children to bathe in the river. But when the performance begins, the divinities present at the ritual/festival transform this dirty space into something sacred.

In Cutud, although the Catholic Church strongly opposes the ritual nailing to the cross, the community is not persuaded to discontinue it. Their devotion to the ritual is strengthened by the different crises that the community has encountered and overcome—the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991, the threat of rich landlords to dislodge the residents of zones 3 and 4, national elections, typhoons, etc. In the nailing ritual, the community integrates folk theatre and Catholic doctrine. As mentioned earlier, the performance is on Good Friday, a very holy day for Catholics who use the day for reflection and meditation. The Church also recommends its congregations to undertake some sacrifice as an observance of this very holy day. In response to this call, the performers unequivocally consider the nailing on the cross to be the ultimate form of sacrifice. Other sacrificial practices observed in the performance are walking with Kristo to the burol, joining the ritual of *pamagdarame* (flagellation), and memorizing the long lines of the play recited by the major actors. The performance is the community's instrument for reflection and meditation as it mimics the passion and death of Jesus. The performers observe moments of silence, and they abstain from red meat (pork and beef) prior to the performance as required by the Church for Holy Week, or even all of Lent. However, after the performance, the participants hold a banquet to celebrate Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. The villagers prepare sumptuous meals as if Good Friday were the town's fiesta. The Church criticizes this festivity reminding people of the required abstinence on Good Friday. The response among residents is that there is a reason to celebrate since Jesus redeemed mankind by dying on the cross.

Concluding Reflection

Catholicism as Performance of the Particular(s)

The Philippines is predominantly a Catholic country. Catholic doctrines not only saturate the religious psyche of Filipinos, but the narratives of these doctrines are extended to almost all aspects of social, cultural, economic, and political life:

Since it is one of the strongest and highly respected gatekeepers of Filipino values, the Roman Catholic Church carefully monitors generalized notions of culture. Articulating,

interpreting, and prescribing them to parishioners allows national religious leaders such as Cardinal Sin and Bishop Villegas to remain in positions of power. (Alcedo 2007:115).

Despite the hegemony of Catholicism, Filipinos have particular ways of performing their ambivalent reactions to the Church. In practice, Filipino Catholicism is not a passively embodied dogmatic tradition. Members of the Catholic community also perform their “power to dialogue with the overarching institutions of the Roman Catholic Church” (116). This persists particularly in the ritual performances/cultural spectacles of the Catholic communities of Apalit and Cutud.

These spectacles, whose origins are precolonial, are also Catholic even as they demonstrate how today’s Filipino Catholics contest the Roman Catholicism imposed by colonizers from Spain and the United States. Filipino communities continue to enact their own ritual narratives, supplementing and opposing the narratives dictated by the Vatican and more specifically by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines. However, I am not suggesting that Catholicism corrupted the so-called “native” religions of Apalit and Cutud. My point is that although Pampanga is predominantly a Catholic province, the process of Christianization in the region (and even in the entire country) does not involve “simply the imposition of Western culture onto local traditions but, rather, highly variable processes of local reinterpretation and contestation” (Whitehouse 2006:295). It is in this context that the Apalit and Cutud communities “have made Christianity part of their culture” (296). But the development (and appropriation) of Catholicism in these two towns never proceeded in an orderly or harmonious fashion. Ruptures and irregularities are continuously experienced in culture-making and this is no less true among the Catholics in Apalit and Cutud who continuously make Catholicism part of their cultures, without causing the collapse of their “indigenous” religions.

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