

# Who defines “the Popular”? Post-colonial discourses on national identity and popular Christianity in the Philippines

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In memory of Pattana Kitiarsa, a good friend.

## INTRODUCTION

The social sciences are enmeshed with their own subject area in complex ways. Social-scientific discourses have an impact on the self-perception of tradition, authenticity and identity in the broader society. In the following sections, I shall trace various scholarly discourses on Filipino tradition, national identity, and popular Christianity. Such discourses result from varying expressions of Philippine nationalism. A general characteristic of nationalist discourses is their “propensity to ‘invent tradition’ [...], rewriting histories, revivifying long dead customs, and inventing new forms and traditions with apparently primordial origins” (Hogan 2006: 118). Hence, religion functions either as obstacle to or source of national identity. From the post-Second World War years until today, the intellectual attitude towards Christianity varied considerably: outright refusal of the oppressor’s religion by left-wing nationalists, reappraisal of a revolutionary “Passion Catholicism” by the “history from below” discourse, attempts of reconstructing pre-Christian animism, Austronesian cosmology and/or mystic-messianic nationalism as the true religion of “the” Filipino people, or post-nationalist appreciation of religious “creolisation” and “hybridity”. Such discourses are inseparable from the political development after independence and the postcolonial struggle over intellectual self-determination. Also inseparable

from discourses on the nation, tradition and the popular is the question “who speaks authoritatively, from what position, with what knowledge about the Filipino people”?

This chapter examines various attempts of Filipino intellectuals to contribute to the collective identity of their nation. As will be shown below, over a long period of time this ambition could be achieved only by selecting and defining certain essentials that make the desired collective “good to think”. Thus, the scholarly endeavour is aimed at compensating the loss of a supposed cultural authenticity of the past, destroyed by colonialism. In their neo-Marxian struggle for a classless society of “the people”, in their post-Rousseauistic attempts of reconstructing an “imagined community”, or in their recent esteem of cultural difference and “hybridity”, historians and socio-cultural anthropologists unavoidably take positions in the political arena.

At first, it seems useful to refer to concepts such as “the people” or “the popular” in the context of European nation building. The romantic idea of “the people” as the bearer of an authentic “spirit” or “essence” of a collective called nation had considerable effects on anti-colonial and post-colonial movements in the non-Western hemisphere. Furthermore, the romantic coinage of the terms “Volk” (folk) and “volkstümlich” or “populär” (popular) by the German philosopher Herder creates constant conceptual confusion in the academe.

### **“THE PEOPLE”, “THE POPULAR” AND “POPULAR RELIGION” – PRELIMINARY REMARKS**

During the 18th and 19th centuries, when the social sciences and humanities in Europe emerged, nationalism and imperialism were significant forces which profoundly shaped scholarly concepts and analytical categories in these disciplines. In particular, the political rivalry between the German-speaking countries and the French Empire spawned the well known pair of opposites “culture” and “civilisation”. French intellectuals lived in a centralised state and were deeply inspired by the rational principles of the philosophical Enlightenment. They reasoned about the ideal society as something universal. In fact, the French language, French fashions and the French arts were universally appreciated, at least in the transnational universe of the European nobility.

In contrast, German intellectuals were desperately seeking unity in a fragmented patchwork of independent principalities and autonomous cities. Inspired by romanticism, they considered culture as something peculiar, mainly based on language, oral lore, songs, myths, legends, local customs, natural environment

and sentiment. The bearer of culture was neither the nobleman nor the intellectual, but the peasant. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) was the most influential philosopher in this regard, and the contrast of culture vs. civilisation was reflected in the controversy Herder vs. Voltaire, summarised as follows by Eriksen and Nielsen (2001: 13):

“In 1764, the young Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) published his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte* (‘Yet another Philosophy of History’, 1993), which was a sharp attack on the French universalism championed [...] by Voltaire (1694–1778). Herder proclaimed the primacy of emotions and language, and defined society as a deep-seated, mythical community. He argued that every Volk (people) had its own values, customs, language and ‘spirit’ (Volksgeist). From this perspective, Voltaire’s universalism was nothing but provincialism in disguise. His universal civilisation was, in fact, nothing but French culture.”

The Herder-Voltaire controversy left its imprint on disciplines such as *Volkskunde* (European folklore studies) and *Völkerkunde* (cultural anthropology) and consequently, on debates about cultural relativism and universalism.<sup>1</sup> Far more important, however, was the political career of Herder’s concept of the Volk – the people – and his idea of the Volksgeist – national character or spirit of a people. Herder insisted that each people had a true genius or spirit. In order to preserve its purity, foreign influences had to be excluded. In the work of philosophers such as Fichte (1762–1814) and Schelling (1775–1854), Herder’s Volk became a term charged with emancipatory impulses and ambitions for nationalist movements in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. The exclusive and monolithic concept of Volk unfolded its dark side in the course of history. Ethnic nationalism merged with scientific racism. Bizarre, dangerous and sometimes

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1 Edward B. Tylor equated culture with civilization and opposed Herder’s Volk-concept. In contrast, Franz Boas was heavily influenced by Herder. For him, it is autonomous, bounded cultures that form humanity. Thus, via Boas, Herder’s ideas shaped culture-concepts of Alfred Kroeber and Ruth Benedict, and by it the US-American cultural anthropology as a whole (Eriksen/Nielsen 2001). In her brilliant study *In Search of Authenticity*, Regina Bendix (1997) shows how the academic discipline folklore studies or *Volkskunde* (in the US and Europe) developed out of intellectual movements that made the knowledge of folk cultures available amidst rapid modernisation. Thereby, bemoaning the “loss” and “estrangement” became a characteristic line of reasoning, and the term authenticity (and the search for it) was instrumentalised for the establishment of new nation states. Authenticity as a concept is highly flexible and always suitable for ideological use in different political contexts.

murderous ideologies took root subsequently: “racial hygiene”, “Völkisch Movement”, discourses on a master race such as “pan-Germanism”, “Aryan Race” or “Nordic Race” (cf. Poliakov 1974; Hutton 2005).<sup>2</sup>

Apart from these specific developments in the western world, nationalism, a concept deeply inspired by Romantic philosophy, made its career in the non-Western world. In times of postcolonial nation building, Herder’s ideas prompted other peoples, whether implicit or explicit, to define their “national” characteristics (Zialcita 2005: 4).

For the purpose of this chapter these references to Herder, his idea of Volk and the early history of European nationalism are necessary, because they make clear that the terms “the people” and “popular” have a peculiar political history and are evocative of their close relatives “folk” and “folk-like” in their specific European 19th century setting. The merging of ethnicity, national identity and the people generated a peculiar German vocabulary which is hard to translate. “Volksgeist” (genius/spirit of a people?), “volkstümlich” (folksy?), or the term “völkisch” are part of this vocabulary. On the other hand, the German word “populär” – popular – usually refers to consumerism and modern pop-culture. Cars, fashion, film or music become popular products due to marketing strategies of popularisation.<sup>3</sup> Here are the roots of certain misunderstandings in the use of the term “popular”, especially between German scholars and those who grew up in the Anglo-American social sciences tradition. But behind German and non-

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2 Herder cannot be made responsible for racism. He strongly denied the notion of the superiority of one culture. He advocated cultural relativism and belongs, therefore, to the ancestral line of socio-cultural anthropology. Nevertheless, Herder’s romantic idea of cultural authenticity and peculiarity, as well as his Volksgeist concept, became absorbed by scientific racism. Herder’s work, as Harry Liebersohn (2008: 29) remarks, “sometimes seems to take a hermeneutic approach, which tries to enter into the spirit of every time and place, and at other times reads as a xenophobic partitioning of culture into irreconcilable spheres of the organic and authentic versus the inorganic and inauthentic”.

3 A telling example which creates notorious confusion is the realm of German popular music. The term “Volksmusik” can be translated as folk music, but only in the context of history, folklore and ethnicity (comparable to the Irish Folk genre or the Portuguese Fado). “Populäre Volksmusik” in German TV shows or charts, however, refers to anything but popular folk music. Instead, the music showcased is a post-modern creation of feel-good pop-music with sentimental allusions to a non-urban pre-industrial idyllic world. The category “volkstümlicher Schlager” is only vaguely translatable as “popular hit”.

German traditions of conceptual allocations lies a general problem: what is the subject of our research?

“Popular religion” as the equivalent to “folk religion” is used by socio-cultural anthropologists, religionists and scholars of folklore, and separates the supposed elite or orthodox version of a religion from its non-elite counterpart. “Popular religion”, however, can be something different in the context of cultural studies or sociology, as, for example, in the statement “Buddhism is a popular religion in Hollywood”. Such disparities in use and meaning of the term “popular” are closely related to the processes of modernisation, the emergence of complex societies, and the scholarly critique and deconstruction of essentialist notions of nation and ethnicity. The desire of contemporary anthropology “to challenge all essentialisms and question all generalizations” (Bunzl 2008: 57) is paralleled by a growing ethno-political drive “Back to Blood”, to paraphrase Tom Wolfe’s new book title (Wolfe 2012).<sup>4</sup>

What is meant by “the popular” also depends on the field that we study and the disciplinary tools we use. Thus, it makes a difference whether we talk about functionally differentiated capitalist societies, the middle class and Bourdieu’s taste and distinction (1984), or “world religions”, colonialism, and the analytical category of syncretism. In the latter case, the term syncretism itself is endlessly criticised but nevertheless remains “productively problematic” (Rutherford 2002: 196). Notorious problems are caused by doubtful juxtapositions such as elite–folk, giver–taker, great–little tradition and the implicit, and almost unavoidable, notion of “folk so-and-so” as something “impure” or “inauthentic”.

Adducing Buddhism as an example, Justin McDaniel argues convincingly that the common description of Thai Buddhism as “magic”, “folk”, “syncretistic blend”, or one variety among many “local Buddhisms” is misleading:

“Broadly judging Thai Buddhist practice, explanations, and expressions against their Indic origins is suspect and arbitrary. If we are going to use the term ‘local Buddhism(s)’ in contrast to early Indian Buddhism or a translocal Buddhist ideal, then we must ask, What form of Buddhism isn’t local?” (McDaniel 2011: 16)

When we talk about “popular religion” or “folk religion”, certainties that there is something such as “pure religion” are implied, explicitly or implicitly. Though emic statements such as “I am an adherent of Pop-Buddhism” or “we are folk-Catholic believers” are cryptic, if not absurd. And it is even more obscure to use

4 The desire to find reliable resources of identity and security in blood ties and ethnic belongings results in ethno-nationalist movements all over Europe and the former Soviet Union. The concept of Volk – “the people” – is revived in essentialist ways.

“non-popular religion” as the opposite of “popular religion”. Furthermore, the common assumption of the existence of a pure Christianity or true Buddhism before magic practices, local culture, colonial encounters and modernisation changed their pristine state is an intellectual elitist construct in itself, whether philosophical or theological.

In other words, heuristic categories are not innocent, and classification work never takes place on politically neutral ground. The concept of “syncretism” or “popular religion” claims to describe the encounter of religions and cultures in a neutral way, “but is itself a part of that encounter” (Baird 1971: 151).

### **PHILIPPINE CHRISTIANITY: “REACTIONARY IDEOLOGY” OR “SYNCRETISTIC BLEND”?**

Since Christianity, specifically Iberian Catholicism, is a foreign import to the Philippine archipelago, discourses on religion in the Philippines necessarily refer to indigenous tradition, colonialism, conversion and nationalism. They refer, in other words, to the enduring and troublesome quest for cultural identity, illustrated by the well-known description of Philippine history as “three hundred years in a Spanish convent followed by fifty years in Hollywood”. Labels such as “cultural schizophrenia”, “split-level Christianity”, “mongrel”, “bastard”, “half-breed” are used by the people to denote their own culture which is located in a vague and doubtful realm between East and West. Unlike in Latin America, where the term *Mestizo* is a positive attribution, in the Philippines an equivalent concept is lacking (cf. Zialcita 2005).

The primary authority on the pressing question of national identity is the academic discipline of history. Historical knowledge about the Filipino people, their pre-Spanish origins and traditions, as well as their anti-colonial struggle for freedom and national independence, are of great importance for the identity quest, at least for intellectuals and, increasingly, the growing middle class. In this nationalist paradigm, collective identity is intrinsically linked to the people’s struggle for liberation (Ileto 1998: 178). Subsequently, the discourse “about Filipino history and culture is shaped by two binaries; (1) colonial versus non-colonial/anticolonial, and (2) Asia versus West” (Zialcita 2005: 19).

After national independence in 1946, the historical (re)interpretation of the (failed) Philippine revolution of 1896–1898 was a passionately debated issue. Who were the moving forces behind true nationalism and historical progress? Members of the modernist educated elite, the lower-middle class or indigenous clerics? Marxist-Maoist guerrilla movements? What about “the people”? And

equally important was the question: "Was independence in 1946 really a culmination of the revolution of 1896? Was the revolution spearheaded by the Communist-led Huk movement legitimate?" (Ileto 2011: 496). The Philippine historian Teodoro Agoncillo (1912-1985) offered crystal-clear answers in his famous biography of the revolutionary Andrés Bonifacio (Agoncillo 1956). For Agoncillo, the revolution "was supposed to be the highest expression of nationalism, it was the 'masses' who served as the bearers of true nationalism and the engine of historical progress" (Curaming 2012: 603). Agoncillo and his comrade Renato Constantino (1919-1999) were the most prominent representatives of nationalist historiography. With the rise of Ferdinand Marcos' authoritarianism and the emergence of left leaning social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, an ideological divide became obvious. For the academic left, Agoncillo and Constantino were the voices of righteous nationalism, and their strictly class-based interpretation of Philippine history was shared by their fellow leftist thinkers.

Socio-economic and political factors seem to have played the most important role in the shaping of Philippine society and national consciousness. Religion in general, but particularly the Catholicism of the Spaniards, was considered a reactionary ideology, effectively used as an insidious instrument of (self-) subjugation, resulting in miseducation, "false consciousness", "(neo)colonial mentality".

Renato Constantino, for example, never dealt with religion per se, but was concerned with the resistance of the masses in relation to the political consciousness. His central question and criterion was "how class-conscious are the Philippine masses?".

"The people" is synonymous with "the masses", consisting of the working men and peasantry. "Popular religion" is something prone to "false consciousness", and "authentic popular culture" is equivalent to the "class-consciousness of the masses". It seems that Constantino's programme of consciousness building through writing and reading history (in the "correct" way), ideally supplemented by active participation in the liberation struggle, intended to replace other (wrong) ideologies.

"Revolts are shown to be increasingly complex and secular, in stages, as the economy develops. In an interesting variation of this by a militant church worker, religious unrest is pictured as developing in stages, from Hermano Pule's primitive cofradia movement to the highest stage in Aglipayanism" (Ileto 1986: 6).

For Constantino, history is progressing towards the ultimate fight of the masses for liberation and a classless society. The precondition, however, is the proper

political consciousness. The whole “history of the people’s movements through the centuries has been characterized by a groping for consciousness” (Constantino 1975: 404). History has to have a goal, and the nationalist historian’s job is to integrate “seemingly isolated facts and events into a coherent historical process so that a view of the totality of social reality may be achieved” (Constantino 1975: 404). There are objective laws of development, and the promise of liberation and the forward-movement of history are beyond dispute. Thus, history itself becomes a way of salvation, a substitute for religion.<sup>5</sup> The Weberian ideal of value neutrality in the social sciences and the sophisticated debates over methodological questions are irrelevant for that postcolonial commitment. The struggle for liberation does not allow neutrality, but demands staunch positioning.<sup>6</sup>

Starkly different is John Leddy Phelan’s historical description of the “Hispanization of the Philippines”, published in 1959. Whereas Agoncillo and Constantino developed distinctly nationalist perspectives on Filipino history, Phelan (1924-1976) represents “outsider” scholarship. The US historian Phelan, trained in Harvard and Berkeley, with a specialisation in Latin American history, never set foot on the Philippine archipelago. His sources were exclusively the Spanish chronicles and missionary accounts.

In Phelan’s narrative, the Spanish-Philippine encounter is interpreted as a meaningful historical event, a meeting of an advanced giver of civilisation and of

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5 Walter Benjamin, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), famously considered Historical Materialism as quasi-religious, despite Karl Marx’s claims to scientific objectivity (Benjamin 2009).

6 The U.S.-American historian Glenn May criticised Constantino’s renowned “A Past Revisited” as pure propaganda, because it “violates virtually every canon of historical scholarship, and rather than teaching students to think critically, it merely offers them a new dogma to replace the old” (May 1987: 23). Even though he might be right from certain academic standards, May’s critique misses the point. In the context of postcolonial self-discovery, the committed native intellectual considers “value-neutrality” and the claimed “historical canon” itself as ideological in nature, basically a myth. In the “Post-Colonial Studies Reader”, the editors introduce the chapter on History by the following statement: “[T]he emergence of history in European thought is coterminous with the rise of modern colonialism, which in its radical othering and violent annexation of the non-European world, found in history a prominent, if not the prominent, instrument for the control of subject peoples. At base, the myth of a value free, ‘scientific’ view of the past, the myth of the beauty of order, the myth of the story of history as a simple representation of the continuity of events, authorised nothing less than the construction of world reality” (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin 1995: 355).



a backward receiver of civilisation. The reconquista tradition of suppressing paganism was supplemented by a humanist ideal of Renaissance inspiration.

“The ‘pax hispanica’ created conditions of ‘law and order’ [...], Spanish political institutions took deep root and Catholicism forged powerful new bonds of cultural unity. [...] And finally, Spain brought the Philippines into the orbit of Western civilization, from which they have not departed since the sixteenth century” (Phelan 1959: 161).

The career of the foreign religion brought by the Spaniards is mainly seen through the lenses of the missionary accounts. Problematic and highly positioned terms and concepts such as “magic”, “superstition”, “idolatry”, “paganism”, “ritual formalism” are never questioned.

“The Filipinos’ lack of a solid grasp of Catholic doctrine threatened to cause native Christianity to degenerate into outward ritual formalism. The line between veneration of the saints and idolatry was often crossed, and belief in miracles sometimes provoked a relapse into magic and superstition” (Phelan 1959: 78).

It is insinuated that the Filipino lack the ability to grasp the authentic doctrine of Christianity, whereas the Spanish missionaries are portrayed as the bearer of a true world religion and assiduous persecutors of paganism. Hence, juxtaposed are an authentic and consistent Christianity versus multifarious pagan practices. Phelan ascertains that the missionaries’ success was never complete. The danger of a relapse into magic and superstition has been a permanent threat (solely to the missionaries, of course).

Philippine Christianity is analyzed under the categories of “syncretism” and “folk Catholicism”, as Phelan put it: “preconquest beliefs and rituals, which survived the conquest eventually lost their pagan identity and blended into popular or folk Catholicism” (Phelan 1959: 80). It is worth noting that Phelan connects “identity” with pagan beliefs and rituals, and the new “blending” called “popular” or “folk Catholicism” is associated with the loss of identity and/or its substitution by an amalgam. Needless to say that such a statement is highly political in nature.

Phelan’s approach stands for a quite common perception. “Syncretism”, “popular religion” and, “folk Catholicism” are terms that are obviously unavoidable whenever someone tries to describe the confrontation of a “great tradition”,

Christianity in our case, with “little traditions”, pre-Spanish cosmologies and ritual practices – from the perspective of the “great tradition”.<sup>7</sup>

The early colonial period is seen by many historians, relying wholly on sources written by the colonisers, under the perspective of the “Christianisation” of a subject people and/or of the “Hispanization” of indigenous cultures and tradition (Rafael 1988: 4). The outcome is a mixture called “folk Catholicism”, a seemingly self-explanatory concept. Because of its simplifying potential, the processes and power relations behind it become invisible.

The reverse view, the “Filipinization” of Iberian Catholicism, would demand new sources, a different methodology, and consequently the deconstruction of the giver–taker/victimiser–victim dichotomy.

## **IN SEARCH OF THE FILIPINO PEOPLE: NATIONALIST DISCOURSES ON TRADITION AND IDENTITY**

In the 1960s and 1970s, nationalist discourses within the academe were growing and the critique of non-native scholars, especially US academics such as Phelan, was a matter of course. Nationalism, however, was (and still is) in no way a uniform movement in the Philippines, and the history of Philippine nationalism/s is yet to be written (Hogan 2006: 120). Samuel K. Tan distinguishes at least two types of nationalism: conservative/elitist nationalism, represented by political leaders, the economic elite and anti-communist intellectuals, and progressive nationalism, represented by left-wing activists and academics, such as Renato Constantino (Tan 2011: 87f.). Tan’s two type differentiation, although a bit rough, can be considered as ideal-typical.<sup>8</sup>

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7 A more recent example of a terminology that describes the results of the Spanish-indigenous encounters as mixture, blending, folk can be found in the introductory text on State and Society in the Philippines by Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso (2005: 51): “As acculturation to Christianity progressed, important continuities and underlying patterns persisted, as they did in Islamized areas. Converts adopted Christian teachings and rituals creatively, blending them with pre-Spanish norms and practices to create a ‘folk Catholicism’ unique to the Philippines”.

8 Trevor Hogan distinguishes between Spanish inflected histories in the 19th century and American inflected histories in the first half of the 20th century, romantic nationalist histories following independence after the Second World War, and revolutionary romantic histories in the Marcos years (Hogan 2006: 130). In an analysis of Philippine history textbooks, Rommel A. Curaming (2008: 142) identifies at least five streams of

In the 1970s, when Maoist guerilla and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) gained influence, leftist students revolted and bombs exploded in Manila, President Ferdinand E. Marcos (1917-1989) declared martial law. At roughly the same time he aspired to rewrite Filipino history in twenty-one ambitious volumes, titled *Tadhana: History of the Filipino People* (Marcos 1976).<sup>9</sup> The carefully selected group of ghostwriters consisted mostly of historians of the University of the Philippines. The intended framework of Marcos' historical revision was

“to show the evolution of the Filipino people from a glorious beginning in precolonial times, moving towards progress but passing through a period of colonial trial and travail, before finally achieving a triumphal blend of the old culture and the new elements of civilization” (Tan 1993: 86).

Special attention was directed towards the pre-Hispanic roots of Filipino heritage. The *Barangay*, the idealised pre-Spanish village community, was considered the nucleus of the Filipino nation whose blossoming was interrupted by the Spaniards. Finally, however, Filipino culture culminated in the birth of the New Society in 1972 under Marcos, who installed himself “as the successor to the series of fighters for freedom from the sixteenth-century Lapulapu onwards” (Ileto 1998: 167). The *Tadhana* [destiny] project has never been completed, but reveals perfectly a revisionist nationalist concept of history which points to a “golden past” from whence “a new nationalism could emerge to neutralise a growing radicalism” (Tan 2011: 89-90).

The nationalist ideology of Ferdinand Marcos was working in paradoxical ways. On the one hand, Marcos secured US-America's control over plantations, military bases, mines, businesses. As a result, his politics of “independence without decolonization” (McCoy 1981: 23) stirred an anti-colonial backlash. On

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nationalism: (1) mass or anticolonial nationalism; (2) colonial nationalism; (3) clericonationalism; (4) state nationalism; and (5) indigenous nationalism. Reynaldo Ileto characterises “nationalists” as an “all-embracing term for antiestablishment intellectuals and activists” at the University of the Philippines, Lyceum of Manila and a few other institutions. This movement of “decolonizing” the Filipino mentality started in the late 1950s and its members saw themselves as “carrying out ‘the second Propaganda movement’, a repetition of the consciousness-raising activities of Filipino reformists and nationalists in the late 1880s” (Ileto 1998: 180f.).

9 Rommel A. Curaming (2008) compares the Filipino *Tadhana* project with the simultaneous government-sponsored Indonesian history-writing project *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesia's National History; SNI).

the other hand, he “was able to surf on the wave of such a backlash and use nationalist rhetoric to justify his authoritarian rule, one clear example being the Tadhana project” (Curaming 2008: 130).

Ghostwriter of the first published Tadhana volume called “Encounter (1565-1663)” was Zeus Salazar (\* 1934), a historian at the University of the Philippines with a PhD from the Sorbonne, Paris (cf. Tan 1993). Deeply impressed by the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius (1873-1938), a follower of the doctrine of the Austrian-German “Kulturkreislehre” (theory of cultural circles) who provided key ideas for Leopold Senghor’s and Aimé Césaire’s conception of “Négritude”, Salazar founded the “Pantayong Pananaw” movement (cf. Guillermo 2003). The term translates as the “from-us-for-us perspective”, building upon “philosophies, methods and viewpoints distinctive to the Filipino historical experience” (Reyes 2008: 242). Starting in the 1970s, the “Pantayong Pananaw” movement formed a more or less coherent intellectual community in the 1980s and 1990s. The shared assumption was that there is a definite Filipino uniqueness. Knowledge about this uniqueness is, however, obscured by foreign influence, namely by the colonisation of knowledge production in the country. The ultimate goal is the construction of a uniquely and historically contextual Filipino voice. The key to revealing Filipinohood is the exploration of “the consciousness and social practices of the subaltern classes as marginalized bearers of the culture and history of Filipino society” (Reyes 2008: 249).

Portia L. Reyes, comparing the Filipino “Pantayong Pananaw” movement with the Indian Subaltern Studies project, emphasises that both intellectual schools “introduce a ‘historical difference’ or a history-writing that subverts the European variant” and seek “to destabilize the inherent Eurocentrism of the social sciences” (Reyes 2008: 254).

Methodologically, the “royal road” to the decolonisation of knowledge is the use of the national language, Filipino, and linguistic analysis for historical interpretation. In terms of content, the distant Austronesian past serves as a central source of Filipinohood. Culture, language and authentic collective identity are inseparable from such a perspective. The success of Iberian Catholicism can be easily explained as the superficial disguise of an Austronesian cosmology. For example, the stunning career of Sto. Niño, the Christ Child, as a national icon is due to its characteristic “as the representation (likha) of an anito (divinity) connected with the sun, the sea and agriculture” (Salazar 1998a: 61, cited in Abinales/Amoroso 2005: 49).

Although the attempt to subvert European variants of history writing is all too understandable, the proposed solution to the post-colonial identity-dilemma is reminiscent of the very European and romantic idea of a “Volkscharakter” –

people's character – in the strict sense of Herder. It is (Austronesian) language, pre-colonial culture, and territory which contain the essence of Filipinohood. In fact, the guiding idea behind such academic attempts at a reinvention of national identity has its roots in the 19th century, and in Europe.

National hero José Rizal (1861-1896) studied in Europe and stayed for a while in Germany. With his friend and mentor Ferdinand Blumentritt (1853-1913), a scholar from Austria, he exchanged ideas about nationalism in connection with the German term "Vaterland" (fatherland). Correspondingly, he adopted the periodisation of golden age-darkness/decline-glorious future for his own historical approach and desire for national unity. Rizal, actually a mestizo de sanglay, a person of mixed Chinese and indigenous ancestry, adopted Blumentritt's idea of a pan-Malay race as the authentic root of the Filipino people and considered himself as a "Tagalog Malay" (cf. Salazar 1998b; Reid 2009: 98f.).<sup>10</sup>

In his "Pantayong Pananaw" vision, Zeus A. Salazar builds on the European ideas in the spirit of Herder, the Humboldt brothers and Blumentritt. The "Pantayong Pananaw" movement, which began as a critique not only of colonialism but also of left-leaning nationalist historiographies, is apparently an offspring of Marcos's revisionist "Ideology for Filipinos" (Marcos 1980), designed to answer the problem of national unity (Tan 2011: 95; Diokno 1997).<sup>11</sup>

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10 In the 1930s, Wenceslao Vinzons (1910-1942), a student of law at the University of the Philippines founded the "Malay Association", supported by Manila based students from Malaya, Indonesia and Polynesia. They promoted not only the study of the history, civilizations and culture of the Malay race but also a confederation of free Malayan Republics in Southeast Asia. Vinzons was executed by the Japanese in 1942, but his ideas remained important in the post-war Philippines (cf. Salazar 1998a: 126-128; Reid 2009: 99f.).

11 Curaming (2008: 128) remarks that in the Philippines "there was nothing comparable to the Sumpah Pemuda or Pancasila, two important markers of Indonesian unity and nationalism. Marcos's (...) was perhaps the first attempt to propose what amounted to a Filipino ideology, but due to his unpopularity it was dismissed as nothing but a self-serving ploy."

Besides the Pantayong Pananaw movement, other attempts at indigenizing the social sciences are notable: Sikolohiyang Pilipino, initiated by Virgilio Gaspar Enriquez in the mid-1970s, and Pilipinolohiya or Filipinolohiya, a nationalist version of Philippine Studies (incl. political science, anthropology, folklore, linguistics, sociology). Also in the mid-1970s Leonardo N. Mercado published his meta-linguistic reconstruction of a coherent Filipino worldview as "Elements of Filipino Philosophy" (1974). Cf. Aquino

The second type of nationalism which became consolidated in the martial law years was

“the radical agitation and movement involving more or less a large portion of the ‘the masses’, workers and peasants. [...] It was in the milieu of this mass movement [...] where the ideologically sophisticated socialist and Marxist elements found complementary roles” (Tan 2011: 90).

Renato Constantino and his acclaimed “The Philippines. A Past Revisited” (1975) held a prominent position in this intellectual movement. The National Democratic Front (NDF), a coalition of social movements and leftist political parties, derived its conception of history from Amado Guerrero’s “Philippine Society and Revolution” (1971). The dialectical progression of history in the Hegelian sense was assumed, and the masses were considered the real “makers of history” in the Marxian and Maoist sense. Required was solidarity with the masses and a determined fight against authoritarian rule and US (or any other Western) imperialism.

Despite grave ideological differences between the liberal and radical variants of the nationalist reconstruction of the authentic Filipino people, both sides shared basic assumptions, as Reynaldo Ileto summarises:

“they present an image of pre-Hispanic feudal order bastardized by colonialism and a native culture contaminated by Christianity”, and “the same construct of Fall-Darkness-Recovery (or Triumph), where there is a necessary development from a point in the past to the present and everything in between is either taken up in the march forward, or simply suppressed” (Ileto 1986: 6).

A further, even more important point must be highlighted here. The assumption that there is such a thing as “the” Filipino people is fundamentally ahistorical in nature, as well as the conception of “the masses” as being self-evidently homogeneous and uniform. Glenn Anthony May, in his review of scholarly studies on the Philippine revolution and the Philippine-American war, underlines the fact that local histories show “beyond a shadow of doubt [...] that there were important social, economic, and ethnic differences between the various provinces in the Philippines” (May 1987: 181). The Muslim-Christian, and Upland-Lowland divide within the country, 180 indigenous ethnic groups and 171 living

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2004; Mendoza 2002: 51-85; Pe-Pua/Protacio-Marcelino 2000; Salazar 1998b; Bennagen 1990.

languages show anything but cultural homogeneity.<sup>12</sup> In need of explanation is the fact that despite the continuous search for the authentic Filipino, socio-cultural knowledge about cultural minorities is widely ignored (Zialcita 2005: 24).<sup>13</sup> The mandatory use of Filipino in the academe as a means of liberation is in itself a doubtful attempt by an intellectual Manila-based elite that is ignorant of the political importance of Taglish (Tagalog-English fusion) and the vernacular languages in the Visayan region and Mindanao. Thus, the national language does not represent the nation. It serves as the *lingua franca* of the mass media, but only in conjunction with English and Taglish.<sup>14</sup>

Cultural and ethnic differences and the variety of local traditions contradict essentialism. Essentialism as a concept can only be saved in the form of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1987), though this strategy is meanwhile itself under heavy critique by proponents of postcolonial theory (Mendoza 2002: 31-33; Lee 2011).

The Filipino historian Reynaldo Ileto cautions against homogenisation and romanticisations.<sup>15</sup> History, he argues, should not celebrate

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12 The ethnic groups and languages are listed in the relevant Wikipedia websites: "Ethnic groups in the Philippines". In: Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic\_groups\_in\_the\_Philippines); "Philippines". In: Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines). Last access 9th February 2013.

13 "I have gone through many academic papers that tend to fantasize when alluding to indigenous, non-Hispanized culture because they ignore these accounts and ethnographies. As a result they fail to realize how strong and persistent indigenous ways are even in the lowlands, and that these modify the foreign", Zialcita (2005: 24) comments.

14 Vicente Rafael (2000: 170) states: "Seized on by the new social movements of the 1960s—consisting of left-wing student, worker, and women's organizations—Tagalog as Pilipino or Filipino has been a popular medium for mass mobilization at political rallies in and around Manila. Outside the Tagalog-speaking regions in such cities as Cebu or Iloilo, however, English and the local vernacular continued to be the languages of political movements".

Filipino sociologist and anthropologist Fernando Zialcita prefers to use the vernacular because it forces him "to rethink abstract concepts in a clear, concrete way. [...] But the reality, however, is that in both the Visayas and Mindanao, the colleagues I wish to reach complain when the discourse is completely in Filipino" (Zialcita 2005: 26).

15 Nationalism as ideology and political project produces basic contradictions whenever it is measured against the ambitions of social scientists to document the richness of culture and religion and the contingencies of history. Accordingly, "Pantayong Pananaw", an amalgam of an essentialist political ideology and historical scholarship,

“some epic resistance to colonialism. It should give equal status to interruptions, repetitions and reversals, uncovering the subjugations, confrontation, power struggles and resistances at the level of the local and specific, which our dominant histories tend to conceal. [...] We tend to identify nationalism with identity, unity, destiny. We would be better nationalists, I think, with a national history that welcomes difference, disorder, and uncertainty” (Ileto 1986: 16).

## **PEOPLE’S POWER REVOLUTION: A POPULAR AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT?**

Ileto delivered this statement in 1985, the year before the “People’s Power Revolution” ousted Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda. Societal disorder and uncertainty increased during the Marcos years as well as harassment and pressure by the government. After the assassination of opposition senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino in August 1983, demonstrations started in Manila. After manipulated elections in February 1986, they culminated in a mass rally of two million people. This rather unexpected “revolt of the (bourgeois) masses” was supported by the Catholic church in equally unexpected ways.

At first glance, the EDSA revolt<sup>16</sup> was a popular uprising, and through this outstanding historical moment ideas of the people and “the popular” were reconceptualised in the public arena. The Filipino people became tangible in its entirety by this act of open resistance: the collective of “the Filipino people” versus the corrupt individual Marcos. Unsurprisingly, “the crowds on EDSA seemed to readily interpret or locate their experience within a familiar discourse of revolution and mass action” (Ileto 1998: 177).

The historian Mario V. Bolasco doubts this version and argues that the “miracle of the EDSA” was a revolt by the middle class elite of the capital, guided by the voice of the institutional church, Cardinal Sin, through Radio

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is criticised for its methodological, epistemological and theoretical shortcomings. For a discussion of the critical objections, see Guillermo 2003 and Reyes 2008. Guillermo’s book-length “Critical Appraisal of Pantayong Pananaw” (2009) might be a helpful contribution in this regard. The publication, unfortunately, is inaccessible outside the Philippines.

16 The acronym EDSA stands for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, a major north to south arterial road of Metro Manila. In February 1986, the highway was the site of huge demonstrations that toppled president Ferdinand Marcos.



Veritas. For Bolasco, the question then “is not whether or not traditional religion can be mobilized for politics but rather how come the institutional Church took the lead and how come the discourse of protest took that particular form at that particular juncture in Philippine history” (Bolasco 1994: 147, 148).<sup>17</sup> Thinking along similar lines, Julius Bautista shows that it was the images of the Virgin Mary and the Santo Niño which contextualised mass political actions, and it was the ability of the “Philippine Catholic Church [...] to exert its authoritative jurisdiction over icons in general, by projecting ‘People Power’ as both a religious and political phenomenon” (Bautista 2006: 295). The Catholic church declared itself as the legitimate representative of Filipino “popular religion”. Eventually, the revolt was interpreted by many as a specific Catholic revolt, with marching and singing nuns in the front line, fought with rosaries and shielded by Mother Mary’s wondrous interventions.<sup>18</sup> The EDSA shrine with the sculpture of Saint Mary, Queen of Peace, condenses such a statement symbolically.<sup>19</sup> The EDSA rebellion made clear that the Christian religion can be an effective social and political force in the struggle for liberation and freedom. It was exactly this capacity of Christianity that nationalist intellectuals in both camps had denied vehemently. For them, Christianity, the colonisers’ effective instrument of thought control, is what made the masses submissive.

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17 “EDSA religiosity was consistent with middle class practice and whatever creativity there was, it was within the parameters of that practice”, and “[...] the organization of middle class daily life was the éminence grise that made possible the effectivity of the Church’s prescience” (Bolasco 1994: 156).

In 1986 Fr. Ruben J. Villote wrote in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*: “In the liberation story of February 1986 the millions who composed people power at EDSA and Channel 4 were actually the small and dominant elite sector of our society, while the vast ‘unchurched’ majority (88%) were left behind and marginalized” (Villote cited in Bolasco 1994: 155). Esperanza E. Abellana characterised “People Power” by the term “elite populism” (1987). Though slightly hesitant, Reynaldo Iletto points in the same direction in his comments on the “Unfinished Revolution” and the EDSA revolt of 1986 (cf. Iletto 1998: 197).

18 For details of the Catholic “Miracle of EDSA discourse”, see the biography of Cardinal Sin by Felix B. Bautista 1987. On the Protestants’ claim to have been an active force in the EDSA revolt, see Schwenk 1986.

19 Built in 1989, the EDSA shrine is a small church located at the intersection of Ortigas Avenue and Epifanio de los Santos Avenue in Manila. It commemorates the People’s Power Revolution of 1986. The statue of Saint Mary, represented as Mother/Queen/Lady of Peace, is holding a dove and an olive branch as symbols of peace.

## PASYON AND REVOLUTION: POPULARISED CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

In 1979, prior to the EDSA events, Reynaldo C. Ileto published his “Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910”, a trail-blazing monograph which opened up a fresh perspective on Philippine Christianity and the meaning of “popular” as related to that religion (Ileto 1979). The main thesis is that it was the ritual reading of the Pasyon that provided the “grammar of dissent” for the revolutionaries (Azurin 1988). Since the 18th century, poetical translations of the Christian passion story into the local languages, as well as staged passion plays, had become increasingly popular, especially in the island of Luzon and the provinces near Manila, the colonial power centre. The content of the Pasyon is obviously “Western”, namely the story of Christ’s death. However, the social context of its reception, its form and aesthetics are related to epic narratives and Southeast Asian theatre practices. Thus, the Pasyon replaced these traditional epics. The ritual singing of the Pasyon during Holy week still continues today.<sup>20</sup>

Without doubt, the Pasyon is the best-known Filipino text, at least in Central Luzon (Tiongson 1976). Through the vernacularisation of the biblical passion story, Iberian Catholicism became the Philippines’ popular religion, labelled today as “Calvary Catholicism”. This transformation included textual translation, ritual singing and dramatisation. For a whole week, 24-hour recitations, stage dramas and street plays, rites of self-mortification such as self-flagellation and crucifixion were (and are) powerful expressions of Filipino Christianity. Thus, the indigenised version of Christianity was “popularised”, so to say, by means of performance (cf. Bräunlein 2010: 212-240).

The vernacular passion narratives effectively transmitted indigenous cultural values and, during the period of nation-building in the 19th and early 20th centuries, offered resources for anti-colonial insurrections, at least in some parts of the country, and at least by some charismatic leaders. Those self-appointed Kristos identified themselves with the suffering Christ and interpreted their suppression in the light of the Pasyon. The text of the Pasyon, as Ileto expressively underlines, is able to generate multiple meanings in relation to audience and context. It may effectively function as a colonial tool, at one time, or, under certain circum-

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20 Ricardo Trimillos points out a close analogy between the singing of the Pasyon and the Javanese wayang kulit puppet theatre. In discerning such a connection, he reveals an indigenous model of theatre performances in the Philippines which is only masked by the Christian content (cf. Trimillos 1992).

stances, as a language for liberation (Ileto 1979: 15-17; 1982: 94). Thus, the socio-cultural history of the Pasyon and its various encoded messages serve as a perfect example of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding-model that differentiates between a hegemonic, professional and negotiated code. Before a message "can have an 'effect' (however defined), or satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be perceived as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully de-coded" (Hall 1973: 3).

With his "Pasyon and Revolution", Ileto recalled a centuries-long tradition of anti-colonial resistance that basically consisted of religiously motivated revolts.<sup>21</sup> Almost all of the hundreds of local revolts against the Spaniards were led by a charismatic religious person, male or female. David Sturtevant, in his "Popular Uprisings in the Philippines" (1976), distinguishes between the "Little Tradition" of peasant unrest and the "Great Tradition" of elite-led movements for independence. In Sturtevant's view, the peasant-based, religious-oriented revolts were antinationalist and irrational. For Ileto, this is a crooked interpretation, because Sturtevant's effort

"to classify each peasant movement according to its proportionate ingredients of the religious or secular, rational or irrational, progressive or retrogressive, nationalist or anarchist, [...] explains away whatever creative impulses lie in them rather than properly bringing these to light" (Ileto 1979: 7).

Ileto's critique reveals his own ambitions and new perspectives. By writing "history from below", he wants to show that Catholic religion, especially its master narrative, was creatively appropriated and transformed by the non-articulate. Ileto's primary sources were texts in Tagalog, for example the *Casaysayan nang Pasiong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin – Account of the Sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, or the *Pasyon Pilapil*, published in 1814, and probably the most common text to be used in the ritual reading, called *pabasa*. Ileto applies a new interpretive strategy by close readings of such vernacular texts, implicitly advocating a literary approach to history and culture (See 2009: 12). By decoding the unfamiliar worldview behind the peasant unrest, he discloses various dynamics of popular Christianity, especially its revolutionary potential in the realm of politics. Furthermore, the people, usually portrayed as the passive and submissive subject of colonialism, appears as active, resistive and creative. Although native epic traditions declined in the 16th and 17th centuries, Filipinos nevertheless

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21 For a historical overview of messianic uprisings all over Southeast Asia, see Ileto 1992.

“continued to maintain a coherent image of the world and their place in it through their familiarity with the *pasyon*, an epic that appears to be alien in content, but upon closer examination in a historical context, reveals the vitality of the Filipino mind” (Ileto 1979: 16).

Ileto’s study was a great leap forward for the study of popular religion in the Philippines. Popular Christianity was no longer a “wrong ideology”, something “inauthentic”, a “syncretistic amalgam” or an “irrational force”, but a valid moral resource for political action and a coherent, though complex, worldview of the people. The Philippine people as docile disciples, Christianity as an unproblematic gift of colonial rule – such a view was no longer convenient, and the line between “Great” and “Little Tradition” was no longer as clear cut as it was hitherto. The vernacular *Pasyon* texts were produced by a native literate elite, Gramscian “organic intellectuals” so to speak, and the encoded indigenous values, subversive messages, and emotional images were understood not only by illiterate peasants but also used by intellectuals, although within a different framework of ethos and pathos.

Finally, Ileto’s “history from below” approach provided an elaborate and explicit local history of religion. The above-cited programme of “uncovering the subjugations, confrontation, power struggles and resistances at the level of the local and specific” (Ileto 1986: 16) has notable methodological consequences. This focus on local situations and on the peculiar historical events strives against tendencies of homogenisation of culture, religion and identity. The lasting value in Ileto’s book,

“and something that imbues his approach with credibility and poignancy is this very reminder that the world of humans is complex to the point where we may be actors on the same stage, but we are seldom in the same play. And yet, in the end, a finale involving all actors is assumed necessary” (Ooi 2009: 52).

Published in 1979, Ileto’s work had a tremendous influence on Filipino intellectuals who were struggling against dictatorial suppression. His book about peasant resistance during the revolutionary period in Philippine history served perfectly as an allegory for the present time. Ileto could show that in this crucial period the relation between Catholicism and anti-colonial resistance was not contradictory but complementary. A new window of self-perception was opened: religion, especially the Catholicism of the Philippine peasants, was discovered as a source of cultural identity. Christian images, symbols and semantics, motifs of

suffering and sacrifice, martyrdom and salvation were recognised as a potential for unrest and liberation. They served as catalysers for a peculiar alchemy which made “the multiethnic imperial identity transform into a passionately felt new community” (Reid 2009: 26), at least potentially.

Religion henceforth became part of the nationalist discourse. It was not only the peasants of the 19th century, moved by the Pasyon, who believed in sacrifice for a worthy cause. It was also José Rizal who became identified with the suffering Christ. Both figures “at once pathetic and prophetic” were mobilised “to explain the events that began with the assassination of Ninoy Aquino in 1983 and ended with the People Power Revolt in 1986” (Rafael 2000: 211).<sup>22</sup>

Ileto’s plea to take popular religion seriously stimulated further academic research. Alfred W. McCoy (1982) examined peasant revolts in the Western Visayan part of the country. He discerned animism as the dominant spiritual force and the core of what McCoy calls “peasant ideology”. Characteristic of that local cosmology are the omnipresence of spirits with greater or lesser powers, and the Babaylan, a male or female trance-medium and ritual expert who constitutes its charismatic centre. Important features of this peasant religion are protective amulets, a spiritually endowed leadership, and a conception of political and natural powers in magical terms.<sup>23</sup> “Folk catholicism” as an analytical category has to be reconsidered:

“The term ‘folk Catholicism’ has been used to describe the existing syncretism, but it is not an altogether accurate description if by ‘folk Catholicism’ one means the survival of pagan influences in a rural Catholic faith. In the Western Visayas, the reverse is true — a few Catholic practices such as Latin invocations, saints’ images, and medallions have been incorporated into a pagan religion that remains the dominant religious experience of the region’s peasantry” (McCoy 1982: 164).

22 “Ninoy and Rizal,” Vicente Rafael (2000: 211f.) resumes, “seemed to merge into a single narrative frame that harked back to the themes of the Pasyon: of innocent lives forced to undergo humiliation at the hands of alien forces; of unjustified deaths both shocking and public; of massive responses of pity and prayer that would, in mobilizing alternative communities of resistance, finally drive away the forces of oppression and pave the way for some kind of liberation. In place of the class-based militancy of the National Democratic Front and Communist Party of the Philippines, this particular narrative drew on cross-class religiosity, positing a sacred hierarchy within which all other hierarchies would be subsumed and reordered”.

23 In the region of the Central Visayas, the image of Sto. Niño, the Christ Child, has provided an enduring material and emotional source of power for the popular imagination since the 16th century (cf. Bautista 2010a, Bräunlein 2009).

McCoy's comparison of modern peasant revolts in Mindanao, the Visayas, and the Tagalog region unveils "a spectrum of conceptual development ranging from an animist based millennialism to folk Christian aspirations inspired by a positive model of a utopian state" (McCoy 1982: 180f.). Alfred McCoy not only links historical research into peasant rebellions with the reconstruction of an animist peasant religion, but also places that religion in a wider pan-Asian horizon. He identifies the mythical motif of the Naga serpent which connects Philippine animism to the "Indianization" process of Southeast Asia during the 2nd to 15th centuries.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1980s, Reynaldo Ileto and Alfred McCoy complemented the scholarly perspective on popular religion in the Philippines. Both linked popular anti-colonial uprisings with religion, indigenous cosmologies with "world religions" (Christianity or Hinduism), and both impressively demonstrated the value of an approach which privileges the local history of religion. Most notably, both scholars emphasised that familiar and catchy dichotomies such as coloniser–victim, giver–taker, authentic–inauthentic are too simple.

### **MT. BANAHAW MESSIANISM AS PECULIAR FILIPINO SPIRITUALITY?**

Although McCoy demonstrated the persistence of animism, or what he called peasant ideology, as a basic stratum of Philippine religion, nationalist scholars did not cherish McCoy's approach and findings, but rather ignored them. From their perspective, the implication that Filipino traditions and culture are somehow "borrowed", coming from elsewhere, has to be countered.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, Ileto's study was passionately debated within the Filipino academe, because he, as a Filipino historian, shed new light on agents and agency of the Filipino revolution and the question of nationalism and its legitimate representatives.

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24 McCoy draws here on the "farther India" thesis of the French scholar George Coedès (1886-1969), who linked the proliferation of formal Hindu courts, including palaces and monuments, with the wider penetration of the region by Indian scripts, vocabulary, ritual elements, cosmology and demonology (Coedès 1968).

25 In the aftermath of the EDSA events, social anthropologist John P. McAndrew made reference to McCoy's findings on Southeast Asian animism, considering "the indigenous religious tradition as an embryonic expression of Philippine counter-consciousness" (McAndrew 1987: 61).

Animism, nevertheless, was ennobled as the primordial religion of the Filipinos by the anthropologist Prospero Covar, distinguished proponent of Pili-pinolohiya – Filipinology (cf. Covar 1991, 1998). Starting in the 1960s, he studied messianic communities, particularly the Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi – The Church of the Banner of the Race – in the province of Laguna, Luzon (Covar 1961, 1975, 1998). This messianic movement was established around 1940 and its members revered Dr. Jose Rizal as a new Christ. Besides the Bible, Rizal's *El Filibusterismo* and *Noli Me Tangere* are considered Holy Scriptures. The adherents merge traditional beliefs, Catholic and Protestant Christianity, and a rigorous nationalism. Through his fieldwork, Covar became interested in various similar religious communities, all situated on the slopes of Mt. Banahaw, an active volcano in the province of Quezon. More than 100 sites, such as rivers, rocks, anthills, caves and peaks are recognised as sacred. The whole area is famous for its powerful *anting-anting* – amulets – which attract healers of various kinds. All the worshippers share the conviction that these sacred sites were once mystically, i.e. by means of the four archangels, transferred from ancient Palestine to Banahaw. Furthermore, many devotees state that Christianity existed on the Philippines long before the Spaniards arrived, and its original form has been preserved at Mt. Banahaw. Many of the Banahaw millenarians aspire to absolute self-reliance. According to Covar, the eclectic cosmology of the Iglesia Watawat and other religio-nationalist groups is based on animism, the belief in "nature spirits", the role of Dr. Rizal as a messiah, and Christianity, with a re-framed doctrine of the Holy Trinity, consisting of Jehovah, Jesus, and Jose. The veneration and manipulation of spirits is a crucial part of this belief system.

"These spirits possess power, knowledge, or amulets about various things. These are bestowed on select people. Mountains, caves, swamps, rivers, waterfalls, plants, animals, even humans have their very own powers. The power may be obtained through the cultivation of a clean heart, conscience, and spirit and through the meticulous adherence to ritual, such as fervent praying" (Covar 1980: 77; Aquino 2004: 115).

For Covar, such a mystical messianism represents a peculiar Filipino spirituality, characterised by cleansing of the *kalooban* (inner self) and *pagpapakatao* (aspiring for humaneness).

Teresita Obusan, who, in the footsteps of Covar, researched a "Filipino folk religion" at Banahaw, stresses a reversed concept of folk Christianity: "Filipino traditional religion shaped the Christian elements incorporated into its system, and not vice versa, as is generally taught" (Obusan 1991: 90; Wendt 1997: 122). For scholars determined to decolonise knowledge and uncover indigenous and

authentic Filipino religion, the mystical nationalism of the Banahaw religiosity provides an ideal field of inquiry.<sup>26</sup>

Only recently the Banahaw mountain massif, for 150 years a known habitat for communities usually categorised as “alternative sects”, became a popular pilgrimage site. The majority of the tens of thousands of pilgrims belong to the urban middle class of Manila. They combine mountaineering with visiting sacred sites, the discovery of the “powers of nature” with New Age spirituality. Since the late 1980s, Banahaw has satisfied the spiritual desires of people, frustrated by politics and stressed out by the pressures of urban living and neo-liberal working conditions. Sporty nature lovers, mountain climbers, ecological activists, feminists, New Agers, traditional and post-modern healers, even Catholic theologians feel equally attracted. Moving forces behind such an enthusiasm are the need for extraordinary experiences, i.e. encounters with powerful spirits in magic locations, but also the certainty that Banahaw offers something authentic and spiritual, Filipino uniqueness. Not least, pilgrimage to Mt. Banahaw is the search for true Filipino roots (Wendt 1997: 120). The Banahaw “boom” parallels the late advent of religious alternatives in the Philippines, consisting “of eclectic forms of religion and religiosity from born-again to new age, from beliefs in reincarnation to gleeful fantasies about aliens from outer space” (Rafael 2000: 191).

### **ANTI-ESSENTIALIST AND POST-NATIONALIST APPROACHES: “LOCALISING” AND “TRANSLATING” CHRISTIANITY**

Without doubt, Spanish colonialism was not a peaceful enterprise. Colonial order was forcefully implemented and violence was part of it. However, a growing sensibility for the local situation and scholarly acknowledgment of a “nonlinear emplotment of Philippine history” (Ileto 1997) have opened up new windows on encounters, mutual perception and interaction in the colonial setting beyond “either-or” dichotomies. The transformations caused by colonialism and Christianity have been analysed through the lenses of new key concepts such as

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26 Vitaliano R. Gorospe, S.J., a Filipino Catholic theologian and university professor, discovered the “power mountain” (cf. Gorospe 1992). Floro C. Quibuyen (1991) offers a feminist, “counter-hegemonic discourse” of the Banahaw Church “Ciudad Mistica de Dios”. After her fieldwork at Banahaw, Smita Lahiri published on “Filipino Nationalism through Mt. Banahaw” (2005).



“localization” and “translation”. It was the eminent historian Oliver W. Wolters who coined the concept “localization” as an analytical tool. Deliberately and strategically, Wolters avoids characterising the foreign-indigenous encounters in Southeast Asia under the headings of “syncretism”, “assimilation”, “adaption”. It is more convincing, he argues, to analyse the advent of various “world religions” such as Islam, Hinduism or Christianity in mainland or insular Southeast Asia as “local statements”. Such a view is more unbiased than the commonly accepted and all too convenient label “syncretism”.

“The term ‘localization’ has the merit of calling our attention to something else outside the foreign materials. One way of conceptualizing ‘something else’ is as a local statement, of cultural interest but not necessarily in written form, into which foreign elements have retreated” (Wolters 1999[1982]: 57).

Installing the local as the angle of historical perception is neither banal nor negligible. By directing our attention to the notion of “something else” in the study of “local” religions and cosmologies, Wolters gives proof of its analytical potentiality.

“I hasten to add that only the awareness of a ‘something else’ prevents the notion of ‘localization’ from being trivial. These ‘local statements,’ generated from interactions between foreign fragments and indigenous preoccupations, comprised a range of experiences: for example, relationships between local spirits and the ‘Hindu’ pantheon and how religious and political relationships overlapped in Khmer elitist society; the dispersal of foreign materials in Khmer and Malay society; the value of royal gifts in Malay society; the blending of tantric and indigenous notions of sanctity in Borneo; how Visnu in Balinese society came to represent new men from the periphery of ancestor groups; the Tagalog localization of Christ’s Passion; how Angkor Wat, with its profusion of Hindu materials, represented the privilege of living in Suryavarman II’s generation; a Vietnamese local statement that called attention to the novelty of the Vietnamese dynastic institution” (Wolters 1999[1982]: 174).

The passion Catholicism in the Philippines, at least in Central-Luzon, can be regarded as a local statement, as an interaction between the foreign religion and local culture. Deceptive and misleading dualisms, such as “great” and “little” tradition, “folk” and “world” religion, are avoided.

The historian Vicente L. Rafael fully sympathises with Wolter’s approach on “localization” and himself adds a further equally promising analytical dimension, namely “translation”. Here, translation is meant both as a linguistic tech-

nique and a cultural operation. As in Iletto's "Pasyon and Revolution", general topics in Rafael's influential "Contracting Colonialism" (1988) are religion, resistance and cultural identity. Unlike Iletto, however, he concentrates on the missionaries' attempts to convert Manila's populace to Christianity, and the responses of the converted. The procedure of translating Spanish sermons into Tagalog during the early period of Spanish rule is one central focus. Due to the encoded notions of authority and exchange, catechetical texts were conceived as a means of domination by the Spaniards. Through translation, power relationships were deliberately introduced into Tagalog culture. Rafael shows the dialectics of such power implementation by considering the Tagalog responses to this process. Rafael scrutinises untranslatable native concepts of exchange, reciprocal indebtedness (*utang na loob*) and shame (*hiya*). Christianity was phrased in the idiom of *hiya* and *utang na loob*, and so "the natives 'converted', that is, availed themselves of the sacraments as a way of entering into a debt transaction with the Spaniards and their God" (Rafael 1988: 127). Confession became a key procedure for that process.

"Confessional discourse, as with the sudden turn to the other sacraments, tended to be motivated [...] by the fear of *hiya* and the desire to establish *utang na loob* ties with those at the top of the colonial hierarchy. What emerged was confession without 'sin', conversion in a state of distraction [...]. Converting conversion and confusing confession, the Tagalogs submitted while at the same time hollowing out the Spanish call to submission" (Rafael 1988: 134 f.).

For the Spaniards translation was aimed at the reduction of native language and culture to objects accessible to imperial interventions. For the Tagalogs,

"translation was a process less of internalizing colonial-Christian conventions than of evading their totalizing grip by repeatedly marking the differences between their language and interests and those of the Spaniards" (Rafael 1988: 211).

Rafael unravels the complex web of submission and resistance by depicting the colonised not as mere passive recipients, but as interactive subjects with distinct intentions and the ability to form power relations and interests in the colonial setting. Finally, "there was no conversion at all because of the conflicting sign-systems constituting the Spanish and Tagalog languages, which rendered impossible the translation of concepts from one into the other. The converts used the missionaries for their own ends", as Iletto summarises Rafael's argument (1986: 8). Thus, Rafael's work corroborates Anthony Reid's thesis of a so called "ver-

nacularizing” process which took place in the long 18th century all over Southeast Asia.<sup>27</sup> By reconsidering the act of translating and the binary opposition between “original” and “translation”, Rafael highlights activities of power negotiation and persuasion politics in the colonial setting. The colonial encounter between the Tagalogs and the Spaniards is interpreted as a dialectical one. Hybridity is celebrated as a creative and proliferous state, and not as a deplorable or imperfect condition.<sup>28</sup>

### **UNIVERSAL CHRISTIANITY AND LOCAL CHRISTIANITIES: CHALLENGES FOR THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY**

The innovative strength of both Iletto’s and Rafael’s work is reflected in the larger cultural analysis they offer. Notions of “cultural syncretism” and “historical synthesis” are no longer relevant. More important are cultural processes in local contexts, an actor-oriented approach and the paradigm of a power-religion correlation. Thus, “popular religion” is a matter of constant negotiation which can be meaningfully analysed only in its historical and local context.

Inspired by Rafael’s work and other studies of Christian conversion, Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper offer a new view of colonialism, Christianisation and indigenous response as a dialectical process, generating innovative results that fall into a thought-provoking “neither-nor” category.

“In the Philippines as much as in Africa, people heard what Christian missionaries had to say but scrambled the message — sometimes finding in the mission community something valuable and meaningful to them, sometimes using their mission education to gain secular advantage, sometimes insisting that their conversion should entitle them to run the religious organizations themselves, and sometimes dismantling both doctrine and organization to build a religious edifice or even a revolutionary movement that was wholly new, neither the Christianity of Europe nor a recognizable variant of local religious practices” (Stoler/Cooper 1997: 8).

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27 See the chapter Religion in Early Modern Southeast Asia: Synthesizing Global and Local by Anthony Reid in this volume.

28 Vicente Rafael took part in the “translational turn” of the late 1980s and shaped that turn in a very substantial way (cf. Robinson 1998). On the translational turn in general, see Bachmann-Medick (2009).

Such a perspective on vernacular Christianities in the Philippines or elsewhere comes along with recent attempts at finding new analytical concepts and categories that replace pejorative terms like “syncretism” or “folk” and the contradictory concept of “popular” culture/religion. Examples of such new analytical concepts are notions of “multiple syncretisms”, “configurations”, James Clifford’s “inventive syncretism” or, inspired by Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, religious “creolization” and “hybridity” (cf. Bräunlein 2012: 403-405). It is high time to abolish “Manichaeic dichotomies” such as coloniser–colonised or giver–taker (Stoler/Cooper 1997: 7). However, the reconfiguration of a foreign culture and religion as a hybrid bricolage of Western and indigenous elements, presupposes the question “hybrid of what?”. Thus the danger of a paradoxical reinforcement of binary equations is lurking (Bräunlein 2012: 403f.).

In former times, and in the tradition of Robert Redfield’s “little/great” division, anthropologists studied the local and the popular as opposed to the elite or orthodox tradition. Anthropologists modestly accepted their role as experts for the cultural-specific approach, and subscribed to cultural relativism with good reason. The job of reasoning about the essence of Buddhism, Islam or Christianity was left to religionists and theologians who, by the way, were not really concerned how religions are lived. The growing interest in the anthropological and sociological study of “Global Christianity” has changed such a division of labour.<sup>29</sup> The ambitious ongoing project of an “anthropology of Christianity” adds an elaborate theoretical level of reflection here (cf. Robbins 2003; Cannell 2006). The problem of defining its subject is central to this anthropological endeavour. The value of studying local Christianities is indisputable, yet the Christian theological claim to universality, without any regard for the spatial confines of culture, is equally indisputable. Labels such as Filipino Catholicism or non-European Christianity seem to be contradictory against the background of such a self-conception, which is shared by theologians as well as laypeople. Hence, the anthropology of Christianity, as Simon Coleman suggests, has to respond to the need to represent social realities as “authentically different” or as “different and therefore authentic” (Coleman 2007: 20).

The well-known Philippine scholar Fernando N. Zialcita recommends cross-cultural comparison and analyses as antidotes against essentialism. After investigating Islam in Central Java, the Philippine Maranao and Christianity among the

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29 Although the Christian religion has always been global from the year one, the specific coinage “Global Christianity” has been under more intense debate for a decade. This can be explained by the continuing growth of Pentecostal churches and charismatic versions of Christianity worldwide (cf. Jenkins 2002).

Germanic people, he concludes with a programmatic assessment: "We Are All Mestizos" (Zialcita 2005: 211-238).

Jon Bialecki meets the challenge of the paradoxical nature of Christianity, being local and universal at the same time, by proposing a Deleuzian-derived assemblage theory. He promotes the view of Christianity as a virtual object, "to have a sense for the range and complexity of actualized elements from it, so that we can grasp how these actualized elements themselves can be folded into larger assemblages" (Bialecki 2012: 313).<sup>30</sup>

Through socio-anthropological concepts such as "configurations" or "assemblage", but also through historical approaches such as "histoire croisée" (cf. Bräunlein 2012), the global and local dimensions of Western and non-Western Christianity can be researched in a non-dichotomous constellation. Finally, the imminent danger of reifying religion, whether in terms of its claim to be a "world religion" or in terms of its rites and practices as local manifestations, is recognised and averted.

## CLOSING REMARKS

My paper started in 18th century Europe, in order to recall the simple fact that disciplines such as socio-cultural anthropology, folklore studies, or history were formed in those turbulent times when European nations were nascent. Key terms such as the people, nation and tradition, as well as concepts of the popular and the elite became both political and academic terms. Herder's ideas of Volk and Volksgeist were contested in the political struggle for national unity, and consequently for national identity.

The European notion of nation made its global career together with the notion of identity, whether individual or collective, as something essentially homogeneous, although individualistic, "spirited" and therefore authentic. In the post-colonial struggles for self-determination, nation and identity were only thinkable along these lines. The internal complexity of cultures and histories, languages and ethnicities had to be surmounted by that powerful imaginary of collective oneness. Among the indigenous elite the fear prevailed that their identity and

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30 This, Bialecki comments, "is something that has been already occurring in the anthropology of Christianity, perhaps most explicitly in Simon Coleman's thinking through Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity as a 'part culture... worldviews meant for export but often in tension with the values of any given host society'" (Bialecki 2012: 313, citing Coleman 2006: 3).

culture would be bastardised, somehow carrying the stigma of being illegitimate, as compared to the seemingly holistic nature of the colonialist national character.

A consistent and integrative narrative of the Filipino nation was the pressing political requirement of the day, especially in the years after independence. Philippine academics, particularly historians and social scientists, offered intellectual instruments for the society as a whole. By means of such tools, the Filipino people were empowered to differentiate between “us” and “them”. Filipino uniqueness could be disclosed only by defining its other, whether the English language, wrong consciousness, the coloniser’s religion or misinterpreted history and culture. Scholarly projects such as Pantayong Pananaw, Pilipinolohiya, Sikolohiyang Pilipino, or the nationalist class-based reconstruction of history drew lines between colonial-anti-colonial, and Asia and the Filipino people. Discourses on popular religion and tradition have always been part of this project. But Catholicism was fraught with problems. The colonisers’ “gift” was intended to reinforce submission, but, idiosyncratically interpreted by the people, it turned into the main source of national identity, and occasionally inspired uprisings. The scholarly evaluation of Christianity happened after the so-called EDSA revolt which ended the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. “People’s Power” was interpreted by its participants as a basically Catholic upheaval and this event was reminiscent of a centuries-long religiously motivated anti-colonial resistance. Thus Christianity was seen as being authentically Filipino, in the public arena as well as in the academe, and research on Philippine indigenous religions was intensified.

Due to the post-colonial and translation turn in the social sciences, Philippine Christianity was analysed increasingly against the background of localised, reciprocal processes. As a result of efforts to scrutinise post-colonial identity, the terms “folk”, “popular” or “syncretistic Catholicism” lost their self-explanatory and simplifying quality. At least in the scholarly discourse, the recognition prevailed that identity is psychologically and culturally formed. Culture, in turn, is always complex and heterogeneous. Purity of culture or primordial identity are ideological and idealised constructs. Thus, the search for authentic origins, the definition of what is considered the Filipino people and the popular, is always governed by ambiguous “politics of epistemologies”, as Ann Laura Stoler (1997) lucidly showed a while ago.

Today, “folk Catholicism” or “popular Christianity” is not banned from the academic vocabulary, but sensitive scholars know that these terms need always further explanation. Julius Bautista, for example, who contributed an article on “Filipino Roman Catholicism” to the catalogue of the prestigious Asian Civilisa-

tions Museum of Singapore, explains the term folk Catholicism to a wider audience in an exemplary manner:

“While ‘folk Catholicism’ may be seen as a pejorative term, it remains a fact that many Filipinos do not see their faith as diminished or corrupted. Rather, theirs is a faith that is integrated into the very fabric of life — such as in praying to both animist spirits and patron saints in harvest time, for example — without a sense of duality or theological friction” (Bautista 2010b: 33).

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