

***Mga Milagro ng Birheng Maria (Miracles of the Virgin Mary):
Symbolism and Expression of Marian devotion in the Philippines***

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SUMMARY

This paper is about Catholicism in the Philippines, highlighting the events, and objects on the popular devotion to the *Birheng Maria* (Virgin Mary), that could give fresh look onto the process of formulating an alternative discourse on religious piety and identity formation. This study also calls for more scholarly attention on the historical and religious connection between Spain, Mexico, and the Philippines, focusing on the legacies of the Manila Galleon that through them we can better appreciate the Latin American dimension of Filipino Catholicism. In addition to the goods, the Manila Galleon facilitated the first transpacific people to people exchange and their ideas, customs, and most importantly the aspects of religious life. This study will examine the symbolism and expression of Filipinos' devotion to the miraculous image of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* (Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage) or popularly known as the Black Virgin Mary of Antipolo¹. What are the motivations of the devotees to the Black Virgin? How has the popular devotion to the Virgin Mary changed overtime? Observing a particular group of devotees and their practices could provide materials for the study of pilgrimage and procession. Then apply those features and analysis in order to formulate a method that is suitable for the study of popular piety in the Philippines. Although the origin of the devotion to the Black Virgin Mary of Antipolo is central to my arguments, the study will also take a broader consideration of the origins of Marianism in the Philippines. This analytical step is consistent with the hypothesis that a consideration of the cult of saints particularly to the Virgin Mary are crucial to the understanding of the historical, cultural, and religious connections between Mexico and the Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

Most contemporary studies on Asia-Europe relation and Southeast Asian-Latin American studies particularly Philippine-Mexican relation, have concentrated on economic expansion, political relationships, and security architecture. The knowledge that Filipinos

¹ A representation of the Immaculate Concepcion, the Virgin Mary of Antipolo is known as *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* a title given by Archbishop Poblete in 1653, it is also popularly known as the Black Virgin of Antipolo, the image originated in Mexico brought to the Philippines in 1626 by Governor Juan Niño de Tabora (Murillo Velarde 1749; Mercado 1980; Javellana 1991).

have about Mexico is based on popculture, in particular Spanish-Mexican *telenovelas*, which are hugely popular among a wide cross section of society. It is almost that the religio-historical connection between the Philippines and Mexico has become erased from the social memory, and only resurfaces in a very limited and superficial ways. Given that there is a very long historical tradition between the Philippines to Mexico, the first objective of this paper is to highlight the important role and legacies of the Manila Galleon that through them we can better appreciate Filipino Catholicism from the perspective in addition to the religious ideals originated from Spain. According to Fernando Zialcita², ‘there are themes in Filipino culture that cannot be understood with Asian or Anglo-American lenses only, Filipino scholars should try using Latin American lenses from time to time and although we have to craft our own lenses, if we use Latin American lenses, we will view the inter-mixing of races and cultures more positively’ (Zialcita 2008). The second objective of this paper is to examine the origin of the devotion to the Virgin Mary in the Philippines focusing on events, places, objects, people and their ideas. This study is both historical and ethnographic, using sources from the archives and materials collected during my fieldwork in the Philippines, Mexico, and Spain.

During my stay in Seville and while doing my archival research in *Archivo General Indias* (AGI), I would always stop by Plaza del Triunfo, a square adjacent to the grand *Catedral de Santa Maria de la Sede* (Seville Cathedral) and the Real Alcazar. The plaza with a Baroque-style statue of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child was constructed in 1757, baroque became popular style of arts and religious piety in southern part of Spain in the 1600s and was brought to South America and in the Philippines by missionaries. There is another Marian statue (see appendix 1) in the plaza that is dedicated to Mary, the Immaculate Conception³. According to local tradition, every year devotees all over Seville is celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 by offering flowers to the statue of the Virgin Mary.

Also in Seville opposite AGI is Real Alcazar, a government building housing the former *Casa de Contratacion* or House of Trade. Inside *Casa*’s old chapel, visitors can

² See Fernando Zialcita, “The Case for Latin American Studies: A Filipino Perspective,” a paper delivered in the First Philippine-Latin American Studies Conference co-organized by Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Manila (PLM) and University of the Philippines (UP), 15-16 December. Manila: University of the Philippines, 2008.

³ The doctrine attributed to Mary as the Immaculate Conception became a dogma only under Pope Pius IX with the Apostolic Letter *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December 1854. But for many centuries before *Ineffabilis Deus* the Immaculate Conception is already a topic of debate and discussion among theologians, pious members of Marian confraternities, and leading devotees of Mary. Spain assumed a great role in defending this doctrine, especially during the period of colonial rule in Spanish America and in the Philippines (Hall and Eckmann 2004; Jordan 2010).

view the painting of “The Virgin of the Seafarers”⁴, by the painter Alejo Fernandez. He was commissioned in 1531 and completed the project in 1536 (see appendix 2). In the painting a very huge image of Mary is depicted spreading her mantle over people, across the sea, uniting the lands, and protecting ships. The Virgin Mary and the other figures are representation of Spain’s Catholic ideals, illustrating the untold stories of early evangelization, baptism, and the early works of missionaries in spreading the knowledge of Christ. The painting was ‘evidently allegorical’⁵ of the activities of the House of Trade, according to Carla Philips, it represents not just the colonial exploration of Spain and the Spanish people but also all the peoples in Latin America brought under the protection or mantle of the Virgin Mary (Philips 2005). The painting’s historical value and religious symbolism are importance source not just of Spain’s colonial projects but also to the study of Marian devotion and popular Catholicism in general.

A pious act practiced by many Spanish navigators is acknowledging the Virgin Mary as *capitana*, Christopher Columbus prayed and asked the blessing of Mary before departing Spain, his flagship *La Gallega* (The Galician) was also called *Marigalante* (Gallant Mary) but he ordered it to be called *Santa Maria de la Imaculada Concepcion* (Holy Mary of the Immaculate Conception) it is the largest of the three ships that sailed for the Americas (Hall and Eckmann 2004). According to Hall, following the Roman Catholic calendar, the expedition of Columbus first landed in America on 11 October 1492, eve of the feast of the *Virgen de Pilar*⁶ and the entire crew was ordered to sing and pray the *Salve Regina* (Hall and Eckmann 2004). In Spain, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela⁷ were known for being great devotees of the *Inmaculada* (Mary, the Immaculate Conception) petitioning the pope for indulgences be granted to all the confraternities as

⁴ Also known as the ‘Virgin of Navigators’, the painting also depicts four saints who are popular in Spain and the Americas, namely: St. John the Evangelist, one of the four gospel writers. St. James the Great, brother of St. John, is one of the apostles and patron saint of Spain, he is known as Santiago that according to tradition his body had miraculously arrived after martyrdom by King Herod in the town of Santiago de Compostela, the third most important pilgrimage site of the Catholic Church after Jerusalem and Rome. The third saint in the painting is St. Sebastian, a former palace guard of the Emperor Diocletian but was arrested when he was discovered to be a Christian, he was shot by arrow and because of his defense of other Christians, he is venerated as one of the Holy Helpers, particularly in the northern Basque country in Spain. The last saint is St. Elmo is a figure beloved among seafaring populations in Spain, Portugal, and elsewhere in Europe, and enjoying particular devotion in Seville. According to tradition many sailors prayed to him as their protector during storms at seas, he attributed to a strange lights known as San Elmo’s fire—lights generated by certain conditions during storms.

⁵ See Phillips. “Visualizing Imperium: The Virgin of the Seafarers and Spain’s Self-Image in the Early Sixteenth Century”. *Renaissance Quarterly* 58 (2005): 834.

⁶ According to Catholic tradition, Zaragoza in Spain is the oldest Marian Shrine in the world and every October 12, a festival in honour of *Nuestra Señora del Pilar* is celebrated in whole of Spain, is one of the biggest Marian festivals in the world, having been recognized by Pope Clement XII. According to legend the Apostle James while praying together with a group of followers on the banks of the Ebro River, Mary appeared and asked that they construct a chapel for her at that site (Hall 2004:24).

⁷ King Ferdinand was at the point of death, but recovered on the vespers of the Immaculate Conception attributing his recovery to the *Virgen de Pilar*, he ordered a necklace of precious jewels to be made to adorn the statue while Queen Isabela indicated in her will that three Marian chapels in honour of the Immaculate Conception to be founded in Guadalupe, Toledo, and Seville and providing the funds for the solemnly celebration each year in those chapels (Martinez Puche 2005; Guzman 2011).

well as for those who heard mass in honour of Mary, the Immaculate Conception (Martinez Puche 2005; Guzman 2011).

In Mexico, the dominant symbol of Marian devotion is the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe⁸. After Spain and Portugal or even France, Mexico can pride itself, according to Ruben Vargas Ugarte, the glorious title of being ‘a Marian country, a Marian land’ (Ugarte 1956; Taylor 2005). The Guadalupe phenomenon has inspired many scholars and some even tried to furbish the historical records to document how the devotion began and how it developed over time. Historians have found little evidence to change or substitute the classic version of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe’s apparition and miracle narratives.⁹ As the story relates, the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego (now a saint), a Nahuatl convert on the hill of Tepeyac in December 1531, Mary wanted a shrine to be erected on that very spot she appeared. Juan Diego was unable to secure the approval of local bishop, but the Virgin helped him by performing a miracle and painting of herself on Juan Diego’s cape (thilma) as physical proof of her apparition (see appendix 3). From the 1690s to the 1750s, the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe spread throughout Mexico and Latin America and became the patroness of Cebu in the Philippines (Poole 2006; Bautista 2010).

In Antipolo, a city east of Manila, a series of bas-reliefs originally placed in the old church¹⁰, showing the Black Virgin Mary’s miracles and other supernatural events dating back to 1639. The sculptures depicts the discovery of the Virgin in the forests or her floating in the air or standing on a throne above an artillery ship, other sculptures showing the Virgin standing above the cloud surrounded by angels or beneath her are galleons¹¹ tossed by the stormy seas (Mercado 1980; Javellana 1991:115).

Mexico City or *Ciudad de Mexico* is the capital of colonial New Spain where the viceroy and other colonial officers enacted laws and enforced justice in the whole viceroyalty (MacLeod 1982). And for 250 years goods and people are transported from Manila to Acapulco then to Mexico City, connecting Spain to Latin American and Asia.

⁸ See Ruben Vargas Ugarte’s survey of the devotion to the Virgin Mary in Latin America, *Historia del culto de Maria en Ibero-America y de sus imagenes y santuarios mas celebrados*, 2 vols. Madrid, 1956, 2: 163. See also William B. Taylor, “Two Shrines of the Cristo Renovado: Religion and Peasant Politics in Late Colonial Mexico,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 110, No. 4 (October 2005), pp. 945-974.

⁹ See Stafford Poole. *The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico* 2006:1–25.

¹⁰ Father Juan de Salazar arrived in the Philippines 22 June 1605. He was rector of the Antipolo residence for nine years. He built the churches of Antipolo, Taytay, and Silang (Murillo Velarde 1749; Javellana 1991:23). Built in 1954 over the rubble of the first stone church destroyed in the war, the current shrine is open and circular, its rests on a cornerstone from the cave in Covadonga, Asturias in northern Spain, which is also a great shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Mercado 1980:123).

¹¹ The galleons probably is the *San Francisco Javier* in which the Virgin Mary travelled from 1651 to 1653 and when it ended its many voyages with the return of the galleon *San Jose* in the year 1662. The ships or galleons are visual depictions of the title “Nuestra Señora del Buen Viaje” which Archbishop Poblete gave the Virgin in 1653 (Javellana 1991:115).

The Philippines was more like a colony of Mexico than that of Spain directly administered in Mexico City (Mercene 2007).

Mexico City was the seat of the archbishop where Manila was just a mission territory before establishing it as a suffragan diocese of Mexico on 6 February 1579 by Pope Gregory XIII, eventually becoming independent and was raised by Pope Clement VIII to an archdiocese in 14 August 1595 (Blair and Robertson 1909; RCAM 2011). In Mexico with its numerous churches and monasteries, religious piety, and customs, are reflections of Spain's artistic and Catholic ideals, creating in a way a reinvented transcendental physical space whose influence radiated far beyond Mexico to the rest of Spain's colonial territories including the Philippines. Members of the Catholic hierarchy assigned in the colonies and high-ranking missionaries sometimes acting as government officers, enjoyed direct access to both the trade networks and Spanish ships travelling the Atlantic and Pacific. And because of the unique position of the trading centres of Manila, Acapulco, Veracruz, and Seville, they capitalized on these especially reinforcing the evangelization projects that through these direct access and constant connections between Europe, Latin America, and Asia, the missionaries was able to maintained their mission territories (Schurz 1939; Phelan 1959).

Through this investigation of the Manila Galleon, this paper also examines how the missionaries were able to access Asia and the apparatus they used in expanding their missionary activities beyond South America. And by examining the movements of those missionaries and other pious people and their religious ideas within the framework of the religio-historical connections between the Philippines and Mexico, a comparative study of Catholicism is very useful to the understanding of the Latin American dimension of the Filipino popular piety and how it changed overtime. After discussing Filipino Catholicism in the context of the Manila Galleon, I will continue the discussion focusing on (1) the Virgin Mary's images either miraculously instructed or commissioned by an authority, this paper argues that these images and performing the devotion to Mary is a way of communicating ideas, historical connections, and religious beliefs; and (2) apparition and miracle stories are part of the complexity attributed to Mary and to Marian devotion.

MANILA GALLEON AND THE RELIGIO-HISTORICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PHILIPPINES AND MEXICO

The colonial enterprise of Spain in Mexico and in the Philippines brought fundamental changes to economic, social, cultural, and religious life of the Filipinos (MacLeod 1982; Newson 2009). Scholarly studies of the early colonial period have focused on the initial

conquest of the Philippines and the setting up of administration. While this dimension is important, the religious aspect of the colonial project of Spain like the role of the missionaries in the Manila Galleon trade, and the other aspects of the religious life of the Filipinos has not received much attention.

Manila in 1571 became the furthest outpost of the Spanish empire, an achievement of the earliest goals of Spanish exploration and the quest for Asian commodities¹². Trade between local communities of East and Southeast Asia existed as early as the tenth century (Schurz 1939; Caoilo 1988). In order to gain control of these trade routes, the Spanish imposed their institutions, both civil and religious, according to Caoilo, the Spanish rule of the Philippines is not only bureaucratic but theocratic as well. And with these institutions, Spain was able to impose projects to resettle the populations or *reducciones*, as well as *repartimiento*, or force labor (Schurz 1939; Phelan 1959; Caoilo 1988; Rafael 1988). For 250 years, the Manila Galleon¹³ successfully became a trade, commerce, and evangelization apparatus connecting the Philippines and Mexico, transporting people and their ideas, carrying Spanish-Mexican silver coins that were exchanged for return cargos from Manila¹⁴ (Schurz 1939; Phelan 1959; MacLeod 1982). Asian merchandise and other valuable commodities from different parts of Latin America was then carried through Mexico City to the port of Veracruz to be loaded on the *Flota de Indias* (West Indies Fleet) sailing to Seville, Spain, and for centuries these exchanging of goods and people resulted to a hybrid cultural phenomena between the Philippines, Mexico, and Spain (Schurz 1959; Mercene 2007).

This paper focuses not just on commercial goods but also religious cargos that where given less emphasis by scholars yet very important to the study of Latin American dimension of the Filipino Catholicism. Example are wood and ivory figures, manufactured in the Philippines for export to Spain and the Spanish America while Mexican *retablo* designs and carved images adorned many churches in the Philippines (Guevarra 2011; Legarda 1999; Phelan 1959). On 20 September 1638, *Nuestra de la*

¹² According to Flynn and Giraldez, Manila in 1571 was founded as a Spanish entrepot and the year which global trade was born (Flynn 2002). Ellsworth Boyd wrote that the galleons were the largest ships afloat in the colonial history of Spain, sailing long and risky routes, carrying 'silk money' or Spanish-Mexican gold and silver that bought lavish exports from the Philippines, China, Japan, India, Burma (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand) like spices, porcelain, pearls, jade as well as art treasures, furniture, and carved ivory statues (Boyd 2012).

¹³ In his article "Track of the Manila Galleons," according to Eugene Lyon, the floating trade links between Spain, Mexico, and Manila is one of the most determined yet perilous commercial ventures but a profitable enterprise in the colonial history of Spain. For less than three hundred years it was the most significant and important pathway for commerce and cultural interchange between Europe and Asia (Lyon 1990).

¹⁴ Each year the galleons left Manila in the late summer for a five to six month journey. By law, the ships were required to depart by July 10 in order to avoid the monsoon season of the early fall, but decisions about the departure were contingent on both practical and commercial needs and rarely followed the letter of the law. The eastward journey to Acapulco followed the northerly winds, a much longer route than the southern one that followed the equator (Schurz 1939:194).

Concepcion, a galleon-bound to Acapulco loaded of Asian goods sunk off the coast of Saipan, her treasures spilling into the sea eventually scattered along the coastline helping pinpointing the wreck that was discovered by William Mathers¹⁵. *Galleon Concepcion* was one of the richest galleons and was salvaged in the late 1980s by Pacific Sea Recovery Group and William Mathers, the team recovered about 1,300 pieces of gold jewelry and ornament (Mathers 1993) and some of the most interesting items are of religious value¹⁶: (1) a statue of *Virgen de Guadalupe* with face and hands made of ivory; (2) a statue of Shepherd Boy Jesus also made of ivory; and (3) a diamond imbedded solid gold cross. Aside from religious designs and figurines, another important commodity of the Manila Galleon trade is wax, often used for the lighting of houses and religious activities in Mexico and in the Philippines. By the late 1600s wax became a very important commodity, according to Alcina because of the expensive price of wax the Jesuits asked their parishioners to contribute and with so much excess of supplies in the Philippines, the Jesuits began shipping wax to Mexico as part of their allotted annual shipment, a suitable income in running the different missions (Alcina 1660:520-21; 1668:485-87; Javellana 1991:112).

As a passenger ships the composition of people aboard the galleons varied according to the direction, ships sailing from Acapulco transported merchants, missionary priests, colonial bureaucrats together with their families, and soldiers or reinforcement troops, many of them creoles and mestizos from Mexico. Ships sailing from Manila towards Mexico, the galleons brought returning clergy, missionaries, and officials, as well as traders from different parts of Asia (Lugar 1990). In July 1605, fourteen missionaries of the Order of Augustinian Recollects (*Recoletos*) boarded the ship in Cadiz, Spain sailing to Mexico, aboard the galleon *Espiritu Santo* from the port of Acapulco they cross the Pacific Ocean, only thirteen missionaries reached the Philippines in 1606, they landed first in Cebu on May 12 and reached the shores of Manila in May 31 of the same year, the *Recoletos* brought with them a dark image of Jesus Christ from Mexico that became known as the Black Christ Nazarene of Quiapo (Romanillos 2001). The procession of the Black Christ Nazarene is currently the biggest and longest in the Philippines. One of the biggest group of passengers were missionaries not just male but also female religious and one of them is Mother Jeronima Asuncion, the founder of the Royal Monastery of Poor Clares (*Santa Clara*) in Manila, together with her fellow nuns they left Acapulco on 21

¹⁵ See William M. Mathers, "Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion," *National Geographic*, (September 1990) 178, No. 3.

¹⁶ For complete list of the cargo see William Mathers, *Treasure of the Concepcion (La Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion)*, APN Publications (HK) Ltd., Hong Kong, 1993.

April 1621, boarding the galleon *San Andres* to sail for the Philippines (Ruano 1999). Mother Asuncion's group is the very first contemplative order to be founded in Asia (Ruano 1999). While in 1610, a young girl named Catarina de San Juan¹⁷ from South Asia was seized and taken to Manila and then to the city of Puebla in Mexico, because of her exemplary Christian life, officially not beatified, she became a figure of popular veneration in Mexico (Seijas 2014). According to Tatiana Seijas, Catarina's experience makes visible the religious formation of that time as well as the transpacific slave trade. Catarina's first leg of a forced journey from South Asia is Manila, where she stayed for a while before travelling to Acapulco aboard the Manila Galleon in 1619, after staying in Mexico City for a short period of time, she then travelled to Puebla where she lived the rest of her life (Seijas 2014).

BAROQUE CATHOLICISM AND THE BLACK VIRGIN MARY IN SPAIN AND MEXICO

The Council of Trent¹⁸ convened from 1545 to 1563, and with respect to the Virgin Mary, the council fathers had a total of twenty-five sessions in 1563 with asserting that the veneration of Mary and the other saints was a legitimate part of Catholic faith (Tanner 1990). Furthermore, the council members agreed that it was proper to display images of Mary and the saints for veneration in churches however, they warned devotees of abuses on the practices¹⁹. Although baroque Catholicism did not consist of a stable or codified set of practices, it was primarily a religion of outward gesture and ritual observance (Tanner 1990). For Tanner, much of the devotional practice of baroque Catholicism was exterior, and Catholics engaging in baroque devotions often demonstrated interior states with outward expressions. Baroque Catholic practices, according to Brian Larkin, focused on 'outward gesture and ritual observance,' the goal is to inspire through emotion, the

¹⁷ The accounts of Catarina's voyage from South Asia to Manila also demonstrated the reach of the Portuguese India's commercial system and its connection to Manila (Souza 1986). This study would like to recommend a further investigation on Catarina's life in Manila.

¹⁸ Council of Trent reinforced the establishment of local churches in Spanish America and in order to formalize the Tridentine policies, dioceses convened local councils: Lima (1551–1552; 1567–68; 1581–83), Mexico (1555; 1565; 1585), Ecuador (1570; 1594; 1596) (Bulman & Parrella 2006:44). Across the Pacific Ocean, Manila was suffragan diocese to the Archdiocese of Mexico until 1595, when it was elevated to an archdiocese. However, Manila did not hold its own council therefore the acts of the 1585 Third Council of Mexico was implemented over the following centuries in the Philippines (Fernandez 1979:95). The Vatican's *Propaganda Fide* intended to focus on the Americas but later became the congregation for worldwide missions of the Catholic Church, John Paul II in 1998, changed it to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Bulman and Parrella 2006).

¹⁹ According to Tanner, one of the most interesting results of the council was great men and women emerged as, for instance, reformers of ancient religious communities, founders of new ones, and inventors of the Baroque Catholicism—which means what is very appealing to all the senses and bringing the believer closer to God. Catholic missionary activities became superabundant and formidable, especially beyond old Europe particularly in Spanish America (Tanner 1990). For further discussion on the Council of Trent, see Norman Tanner ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990.

senses and many of its rituals were physical, using the body as a link to Jesus Christ and reenacting his sufferings (Larkin 2010:4-7). Baroque Catholics outwardly venerating the images of saints and of the Virgin Mary, making pilgrimages to shrines, lavishing gifts of wax and precious items, touching and kissing the images, and parading them through villages and cities in times of crisis or celebration. Over the years the Virgin Mary took many forms in Spain, Mexico, and in the Philippines. Devotees calling her by different titles and names like: *Pilar*, *Montserrat*, *Guadalupe*, *Remedios*, *Dolores*, *Antipolo*, *Peñafracia*, *Piat*, etc., some of these names are associated with a particular place and were tied to specific doctrine, devotions, or particular attributes of the Virgin Mary, such as Our Lady of the Rosary, the Virgin of Remedies (*Remedios*), the Virgin of Sorrows (*Dolores*), the Immaculate Conception²⁰, and were distinguished by special iconographies (Hall 2004). Other representations are tied by legends of appearances or apparitions and miracles creating networks of pilgrims, connecting villages, towns, and cities, stimulating devotion and economic activity.

In Spain overlooking the Pyrenees is Torreciudad a shrine dedicated to the Black Virgin Mary, located in Huesca northern Spain. The history of the devotion to Virgin of Torreciudad (see appendix 4) dates back to the eleventh century, there is a legend that Mary appeared to some woodcutters from a small village near Torreciudad, and told them that she wished to be venerated at that spot (Gonzalez 1994). The image is of Romanesque style, a type of *Sedes Sapientiae*, one of the medieval titles of the Virgin. It is also one of the images of Mary, with dark or black skin, popular in northern Spain in the medieval period or earlier. The Romanesque-style Virgin Mary is either free standing upright figures or seated figures on a throne.

In Latin America, in particular the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, drawing millions of pilgrims than any other Marian shrines in Latin American (Hall 2004:12). Guadalupe carries complex layers of symbols and meaning (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 2007:79):

As an icon born on the soil of the Americas that bears characteristics of two cultures, the appropriation and use of the images of Mary in various unexpected forms as an example of cultural transformations and hybridity. And the ways in which the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been reinvented in cultural forms such as street murals,

²⁰ The representation of the Virgin Mary, Immaculate Conception, though its proclamation as a Catholic dogma would not take place until 1854, was strongly supported by the Spanish theologians and powerful political figures from the late thirteenth century including in Mexico and in the Philippines (Hall 2004). Associated with the Woman of the Apocalypse, she was picture standing on the moon, either full or crescent, clothed with the sun, sometimes crushing the serpent of evil beneath her feet, usually pictured alone without the Christ Child. She is shown floating visibly above the ground, an indication of the association with the Assumption (Hall 2004:8).

tattoos, t-shirts and by artists who have ‘liberated’ Guadalupe from her static pose, she is transformed into a truly active woman who works, walks, and dances, (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 2007:1; 79; 154).

With my aim of examining how the image of the Black Virgin Mary adapted and used by a particular community particularly in Antipolo, Oleszkiewicz-Peralba’s work is very useful especially on how cultures use and adapt a religious symbol, although focusing on the use of this symbol in the modern world, it also examines the wider issues of its use in different cultures, in exchanging of ideas between cultures and the subversion of traditional religious imagery (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 2007). This process could be the same on the reinvention of symbols and signs that combines the notion of Catholicism, which is a unique form of Filipino ideas and practices (Rafael 1988).

THE BLACK VIRGIN MARY OF ANTIPOLLO AND POPULAR CATHOLICISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

A good number of studies on the devotion to the Virgin Mary in the Philippines raises interesting questions that are neglected or rarely explored that this paper would provide further examination, I would like to begin with a question: Do any images of Mary in the Philippines assume a critical role in the Filipino Catholic history as does that of Mexico’s Black Virgin Mary of Guadalupe in Latin American Catholicism? Highly debatable but *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* or the Black Virgin Mary of Antipolo (see appendix 5) could be the best candidate. The Black Virgin of Antipolo is historically connected to Mexico via the Manila Galleon, her representation as the Immaculate Conception is similar to that with Virgin Mary of Guadalupe. Both have similarities but different in some aspects especially on ‘appearance’, ‘disappearance’, ‘(re)discovery’ and miracle narratives, which is according to De la Cruz are allegories which are parts of the complexity of many Marian apparition narratives (De la Cruz 2015:27). Images like the Virgins of Antipolo and Guadalupe connects what De la Cruz means the importance of appearance of physical objects and resemblance to published apparition stories and miracle narratives during the expanding period of the print culture in the Philippines and Mexico (De la Cruz 2015).

The Marian images of Antipolo and Guadalupe are considered Black Madonnas²¹ or Black Virgin Mary, that according to some devotees, the blackness what makes them

²¹ In her study of the Black Virgin Mary from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century in Europe, Monique Scheer presented the complex and yet cogent example of how the people’s perception and the aesthetic experience of the faithful are determined by culture in understanding their devotion but also suggesting to be more careful in ascertaining the ontological status of blackness of the image because it is most likely futile and tells us nothing of how the devotees become aware of the colour and they interpreted it (Scheer 2002: 1-38).

so popular and so close to people. The darkness or blackness according to Iwaniszewski, is more than a colour, it gives the image ‘an aura of respectability’ and is ‘associated with a sense of holiness’ (Iwaniszewski 1997). In Antipolo when did the devotees become aware of the blackness of the Virgin Mary? Does the colour created a stronger presence and increase the number of followers as the image’s colour even grew darker over time?

Antipolo was previously part of the province of Rizal and currently a component city, east of Manila, comprising sixteen barangays with a population of 776,386 (PSA Census 2015).²² Pope John Paul II in 1983 announced the creation of the Diocese of Antipolo, comprising the whole province of Rizal and Marikina City (CBCP 1983). Antipolo’s history was first recorded in the works of Franciscan missionaries in 1578. The original church was built by the Jesuits²³ between 1630-1633 and was damaged during the earthquakes of 1645, 1824 and 1883 (Javellana 1991). The humble little apparition church that was built on the site of the Virgin Mary’s apparition that has grown into a popular pilgrimage site and presently known as the Shrine of *Nuestra Señora dela Paz y Buenviaje* (Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage), and in January 1954 was decreed by the Vatican and the Philippine Catholic hierarchy a national shrine (CBCP 1954). Although the statute of the Virgin Mary in Antipolo is popularly known as the Black Virgin is also a Marian image representing the Immaculate Conception, numerous titles are also attributed to her namely: Virgin of Acapulco, Virgin of Manila and Virgin of the Galleon. The image is made of dark mahogany called *Corazon de mesquite*, a kind of wood found only in Mexico that grows darker with the passing of time.

A Galician-born Spanish Juan Niño de Tabora²⁴, commissioned an unknown wood carver in Mexico to carve the image, he then brought the image to Manila in 29 June 1626 aboard the galleon *El Almirante* when he was posted as governor-general of the Philippines (Mercado 1980; Murillo Velarde 1749). Governor Tabora is not only known as a great navigator but a pious Catholic and a member of the Order of

²² See 2015 Census of Population: Region IV-A (CALABARZON), *Total Population by Province, City, Municipality and Barangay*, Philippine Statistics Authority, available at: <<https://psa.gov.ph>>.

²³ In 1581 the first group of Jesuits arrived in the Philippines and in 1595, two galleons landed in Manila and among its passengers was largest groups of Jesuits from Mexico. The galleon also carries two important dispatches from Spain: one a letter from the Jesuits, Superior General Acquaviva indicating the elevation of the Philippine mission to a vice-province dependent on Mexico; the other letter is for the colonial government, a decreed apportioning the Philippine into mission districts and stipulating that different religious orders be assigned to each (Javellana 1991:1; 51).

²⁴ Governor Tabora was born and raised in Galicia is a province north of Spain and it is famous for the Church of Santiago de Compostela, the burial site of apostle St. James, and the third most important pilgrimage sites in the Catholic Church after Jerusalem and Rome. Another little known religious site in Galicia is Muxia with its very interesting religious traditions is located west of the Atlantic coast of Galicia. In Muxia the Our Lady of the Boat (*Nosa Señora da Barca*) sanctuary is located and believed to have been a sacred place for a local cult since pre-Christian times. Legend has it that Muxia was the landing place of the stone boat that carried the Virgin Mary when she arrived in Galicia to help St. James convert the locals.

Calatrava²⁵, an order taking a vow defending the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Before the statue was turned over to the care of the Jesuits in 1632 after the death of Governor Tabora on 22 July of the same year. The Virgin Mary's image became known as the patroness of the Manila Galleon, honouring her as the protector of the galleons and the people aboard from the harsh conditions while crossing the Pacific. The Virgin of Antipolo crossed the Pacific Ocean, and returned, eight times aboard the galleons of Manila-Acapulco: in 1641, 1643, 1645-46 on the *San Luis*; 1648-1649 on the *Encarnacion*; in 1650 on the *San Diego*; in 1851-1853 on the *San Javier*; in 1859-1662 on the *San Jose* and in 1746-1748 on the *Nuestra Señora del Pilar* (Murillo Velarde 1749; Mercado 1980).

SYMBOLISM AND EXPRESSION OF POPULAR DEVOTION TO THE BLACK VIRGIN MARY OF ANTIPOLLO

In Antipolo the traditional month of May pilgrimage season lasts for days for pilgrims and devotees to attend or to complete the 'novena'. The dominating theme in the 1930s and 40s in Antipolo is "Tayo na sa Antipolo" (Let's go to Antipolo) which originated from a song composed by German San Jose in the 1929 which made Antipolo not just a popular pilgrimage site but also a holiday place. This paper focused more on how the devotion changed overtime, particularly on the 'shifting' to a more 'penitent' form of devotion than the festive theme of "Tayo Na Sa Antipolo".

A more recent tradition is the pilgrims' procession to the hill called *Pinagmisahan* (where the mass was celebrated) and every Good Friday and at the eve of the first day of May is the *Alay Lakad* (Penitential Walk)²⁶ where millions of silent pilgrims walking barefoot to the shrine. The procession of the Black Virgin dates back to more than 400 years. Before there were only two processions: one to begin the pilgrimage season and the other to end it (Mercado 1980). Currently, there are nineteen processions: seven within the pilgrimage season, twelve throughout the year on each first Sunday of the month. The first procession of the pilgrimage season goes from the shrine to a hill outside the town to

²⁵ The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was approved only in 8 December 1854 but very popular in the late 1400s under the Spanish royal patronage particularly members of military orders, and in 1652 Philip IV issued the vows of the Order of Calatrava. See *Definiciones de la Orden y Cavalleria de Calatrava*. Valladolid, 1600; Also see Zapater, *Cister militante*. Zaragoza, 1662; and Dubois, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Morimond avec les principaux ordres militaires d'Espagne et de Portugal*. Paris, 1851. Moeller, C. (1908). Military Order of Calatrava. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Accessed 13 August 2016 available at: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03149d.htm>>.

²⁶ On another account narrated by Marcela Bautista, more than five hundred devotees and members of the religious journeyed by foot through the mountains of Rizal province to escape the Japanese during the occupation; miraculously, there were no deaths or any catastrophes in their exodus. A mysterious lady appeared before the fleeing devotees and told them to go the other way. If they had continued with their original path, they would have fallen into the hands of Japanese soldiers. The image was then kept in Quiapo throughout the Japanese occupation. In 1945, the image was returned to Antipolo. This story became the basis of the annual *Alay Lakad*, devotees (now millions) making pilgrimage from Quiapo Church to Antipolo Church barefoot (Interview 2014 and 2015).

commemorate a favour granted by the Virgin to the people of Antipolo when she stopped an epidemic (Mercado 1980; Reed 1999). The other procession within the pilgrimage season begin each of the seven novenas, a time of prayer stretching from May to July making the Antipolo pilgrimage season the longest in the Philippines.

The miracles of the Black Virgin Mary of Antipolo²⁷ were not limited to her numerous transpacific voyage. The statue supposedly fell into the hands of the Chinese, according to Murillo Velarde, during their uprising in 1639 and they tried to destroy the statue yet somehow only the scratch marks on the Virgin's face remained as proof of that incident as she stands tall and proud to this day (Murillo Velarde 1749; Mercado 1980; Reed 1999). The miracles are not included officially in the records of the church. According to some devotees they had not thought to document the Virgin's favours, and to be subjected to scrutiny, in order to get the seal/approval of authenticity from the hierarchy. They just talk about their *panata* (vows/promise) and favours they are asking to the Virgin. Millions of pilgrims returning again and again to Antipolo are the living testimony of the Black Virgin's intercession, a miracle in itself according to one of the devotees I interviewed.

The care of the statue of the Black Virgin is entrusted to a head *camarera*. A *camerara* is a lady in waiting, like in a royal court and she has an office and assistants taking care of hundred details in the pilgrimage season. Marcela Bautista²⁸ or Nana Sela has been taking care of the image since 1963. Her predecessor, Rosario Ocampo Medina, was appointed by the church but for one reason or another Nana Sela was never given the official church appointment. Yet the church and everyone in the diocese of Antipolo acknowledge her as the Virgin's official caretaker. As the *camarera*, Nana Sela is the closest person to the Black Virgin. She intuitively knows the Black Virgin's mood and bases her decisions on this intuition on matters ranging from choice of dress to the possibility of an impromptu procession. Nana Sela started as an assistant, a job she took over from her mother. "My mother became a devotee of the Black Virgin after she was miraculously healed by the Virgin," Nana Sela says. "My mother was a sickly woman who suffered from many ailments and the Virgin cured her. In gratitude, my mother showed her devotion and thanks by assisting the *camarera* in dressing the Virgin." Nana

²⁷ In Padre Murillo's missionary account of the Black Virgin's miracle, the story is about a little boy who became very ill. The boy was only three years old and he was their only child. He burned with fever and tossed with pain and when he reached out for the picture of the Black Virgin, which his father held while praying, his parents thought he was in delirium. Nonetheless, they let him hold the picture until he fell asleep. The next morning the child recovered (Murillo Velarde 1749; Mercado 1980).

²⁸ I received the sad news from the diocese of Antipolo, Marcela Bautista died last 29 March 2016. I interviewed Nana Sela in 2014 and 2015 during my fieldwork in the Philippines. Nana Sela was born on 31 January 1934. She is responsible in dressing up the Black Virgin of Antipolo, selecting from a vast collection of dresses and mantillas, and a treasure chest of gold jewelry inlaid with gems, all donated by people whose lives the Black Virgin had touched and whose prayers were answered.

Sela is a very strict guardian, she does not permit anybody else in the Black Virgin's chamber when the image clothing is changed, not even the priests. "There was one time when a priest asked if he could watch the *pagbibihis* or changing of wardrobe," Nana Sela says with a wry smile. "*Padre*, if your mother was getting dressed, would you watch her?" The priest then immediately left the room." Nana Sela's protectiveness of the image perhaps is a reflection of the filial piety of Filipinos given to their parents, especially mothers. Nana Sela said that "*Birheng Maria* (Virgin Mary) may be made of wood²⁹, but the Black Virgin is like a mother to me and I will protect her privacy as any child would protect the privacy of her mother."

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DISCUSSION

The latest development regarding Marian apparitions in the Philippines was the decree³⁰ issued by the Vatican's Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith or CDF stating the definitive character of the 1951 declaration that the apparition of the Virgin Mary (under the title Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate) in Lipa in the province Batangas, south of Manila that occurred on 15 September 1948 has "no supernatural origin." The CDF's decree reverses the 2015 declaration made by the archbishop of Lipa Ramon Arguelles that the phenomenon is "worthy of belief." Speaking to the media Arguelles indicated that he would continue supporting the devotion to the Virgin Mary of Lipa. And if Arguelles successfully reverse the CDF's decision on the Lipa apparition and together with already established popularity of the devotion to Mary in Lipa, the Philippines could play an active role in propagating the fifth Catholic dogma to the Virgin Mary under the title Mary: Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate. The dogmas Mary, the Mediatrix and Mary, the Immaculate Conception, are images representing Mary as the Woman of the Apocalypse and alone without the Christ Child, are alternative forms of the Romanesque and Baroque representation of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child. The Baroque images are still very popular in parts of southern Spain particularly in the Andalusia, while the Romanesque Black Virgins (see appendix 6) of northern Spain and southern

²⁹ The reasons, according to Kathleen Coyle, for the continuous growth of the devotion and cult of the Virgin Mary, rested on her symbolic power (Coyle 2010: 135). Symbols are "complex of gestures, sounds, images and words that evoke, invite, and persuade participation in that to which they refer" (Coyle 2010:119). Like other religious symbols, the Marian symbols have accumulated layer upon layer of meaning that holding on the loyalty of millions of devotees over a long period of time. The Litany of Loreto reminds us that the figure of Mary is far too complex, too rich for such simplification. Some of her "thousand faces" inspire our imaginations—cause of our joy, gate of heaven, the Ark of the Covenant, etc (Coyle 2010:120).

³⁰ See CDF Decree "Presumed Apparitions of the BVM at the Carmelite Convent in Lipa, Philippines PROT. N. 226/1949" issued by Cardinal Prefect Gerhard Muller, 11 December 2015. Cardinal Muller stated that CDF confirms the definitive nature of the 11 April 1951 decree by which the phenomena of Lipa were declared to lack supernatural origin. Furthermore, CDF stated its instruction that all groups and commissions studying the question of the alleged supernatural phenomenon in the Carmel of Lipa be immediately disbanded.

France are undergoing robust popularity because of the newly established *Ruta Mariana* (Marian Route) initiative of Marian devotees in Spain and France.

To say that Catholic faith in the Philippines and Mexico have survived chiefly because of the people's attachment to their religious devotions particularly to the Virgin Mary is an exaggeration. But Filipinos and Mexicans could have abandoned their devotion to the Black Virgin of Antipolo and to *Virgen de Guadalupe* at the height of the revolution against Spain. When the American Protestant educators, controlled the educational system in the country, Filipinos could have turned away from Catholic schools. In Mexico the images of Mary permeates religious art, and meaning, figures of Guadalupe can be found almost in everything on clothes, jewelry, and in places like bars, restaurants, hotels, parks, and even on public transportations.

According to Taylor, comparing Mexico to other Spanish Latin American colonies (including the Philippines), Mexican cultural manifestations maybe superficial and dramatic, differences occurred because Mexico's uniqueness is apparent but its connections obvious (Taylor 1985:115). Although the difficulty at first in trying to study the religious connections between the Philippines and Mexico is that on the surface it seems so familiar, that many scholars having initial expectations that the historical development in these countries will be the same and most probably analogous to Spain. I would like to conclude that, this paper would like to offer new possibilities and new dimension of popular Catholicism in the Philippines by exploring the interplay of studying religious devotions and the importance of Hispanic and Mexican religious connection and influences to the understanding of the Latin American dimension of Filipino's devotion to the Virgin Mary and Filipino Catholicism in general.

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INTERVIEWS

Interviews in Antipolo: (1) Marcela Bautista, May 2014; (2) Marcela Bautista and selected devotees, March & May 2015.

Interviews in Manila: Selected devotees in Quiapo and Antipolo, January 2013; January & May 2014; January, April, May 2015.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Photo of the statue of Mary, the Immaculate Conception. Location: Plaza del Triunfo, Seville, Spain. Photo courtesy of Mark Iñigo M. Tallara



Appendix 2: 1536 Painting of the Virgin of Seafarers (Virgin of Navigators) by Alejo Fernandez. Location: Real Alcazar, Seville, Spain. Photo courtesy of Mark Iñigo M. Tallara



Appendix 3: 1531 Painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Location: Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico. Photo courtesy of Mark Iñigo M. Tallara



Appendix 4: Photo of the Romanesque statue Black Virgin Mary of Torrecuidad. Location: Huesca, northern Spain. Photo courtesy of Mark Iñigo M. Tallara



Appendix 5: (1) Photo of the 1626 statue Black Virgin Mary of Antipolo. Location: National Shrine of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage. Photo courtesy of Mark Iñigo M. Tallara



(2) 1863 Painting of Virgen de Antipolo by Justiniano Asuncion.
Photo courtesy of Mark Iñigo M. Tallara

Appendix 6: Photo of Romanesque statues of the Black Virgin Mary. (1) Pamplona (2) Monserrat; both in northern Spain. Photo courtesy of Mark Iñigo M. Tallara

(1) Pamplona



(2) Monserrat

