

# LOCATING THE SACRED IN THE CITY: PILGRIMAGE AND SPIRITUALITY IN ZAMBOANGA CITY

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This article, while assuming the persistence of the sacred amidst materialism and secularism, wrestles with the view that city life is becoming increasingly secular. It aims to locate the sacred in the city by studying pilgrimage to Fort Pilar in Zamboanga City with focus on the built pilgrimage site and the religious objects therein as channels to the sacred. The Fort Pilar shrine is near the center of Zamboanga City. Its grounds comprise a religious space as well as a park. The Shrine has suffered from terrorism, and its being a location of prayer still denotes a religious mystery. At the same time, the shrine stands as an extension of ordinary city-life. The Shrine wall, altar, and saint statues in the shrine show that for the pilgrims the divine is in the religious images and objects. Hence, they touch them in communicating with the divine, as if touching the abundance of the divine power. The paper concludes that the divine is situated in the particularity of spaces and objects. Thus, Fort Pilar pilgrims manifest what I may call spatial spirituality in Zamboanga City.

## Locating Pilgrimage in Anthropology

Beginning from the seminal work of Victor Turner, pilgrimage as a spiritual reality has been receiving much anthropological attention. Turner dealt with pilgrimage as a drama (a rite of passage) and experience that stands as anti-structural counterpart to the structured society (Morinis 1992:8). Although pilgrimage was seen by Turner as *communitas* experience, which is the unstructured and relatively undifferentiated community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (Turner 1969:96), for others, it is rather an individual act (Morinis 1992:8).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morinis notes that Turner's theorizing has been put to test in various parts of the world (Morocco, Thailand, Nepal, North India, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Bengal),