

Editors' Note

This issue of *AghamTao* contains four articles from the UGAT Annual Conference held at Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro in October 2009 with the theme 'The (Re)Making of Cities and their Consequences'. One article by Robert Panaguition explores a central sacred space and site of pilgrimage in Zamboanga City. The second article, a reflexive and reflective piece about doing fieldwork and discerning the undercurrents of present and historical labeling of people in the mountains of Panay by Mary Acel German, comes from an open session in the conference. There are two articles about Makati City, one on an urban art project by Tessa Maria Guazon, one outlining the historical development of the city up to the recent innovative governance initiatives by Eliseo Co.

Two articles dealing with BA Anthropology and its market in the Philippines (and more specifically in Mindanao) are from the National Social Science Congress VI that was held at the Philippine Social Science Center in the preceding year on the theme "The Paradox of Philippine Education". Maria Mangahas and Myfel Joseph Paluga in their separate articles look into the Bachelor's degree in Anthropology as commodity in the arena of market-driven education and as a stepping-stone to other things.

AghamTao had received Paul Mathews' new book *Asian Cam Models*, which explores the world of online sexwork by Filipinas (as well as transgenders), and a new sphere for fieldwork in Anthropology: 'netnography' or ethnography on the internet. It is reviewed for our journal by Aileen Paguntalan-Mijares.

The UGAT National Conference in October 2008 started with the observance of a minute of silence in memory of an old colleague who had just passed away. Alfredo Evangelista was a Filipino pioneer archaeologist, fieldworker and teacher. Jesus Peralta shares his memories of the man in the final article of this issue.

Many anthropologists have become interested in the non-physical aspects of pilgrimages or sacred journeys. For example, Colin Turnbull in his experiences of pilgrimage to Hindu shrines in India and to the forest among the Mbuti of Africa emphasizes the legitimacy of studying the Sacred and human aspirations in pilgrimage (1992:257-274). Peter Wood claims that pilgrimage to the shrine is also an experience of wonder, "of questions, not answers" (1992:133). Aside from the importance of symbols and meanings found in the experience of pilgrimage (Turner, Morinis 1992), complex interweaving of discourses is another element Glenn Bowman (1991:98-121) sees in his study on the Christian pilgrimage in Jerusalem. When Alan Morinis describes pilgrimage as "a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal" (1992:4) he does not limit the destination of the journey to the physical site. In fact "Hindu mystics and the Sufis [have] developed the concept of *inner pilgrimage* by which one visits sacred places within the microcosm of the mind and body" (Morinis 1992:2-3).

Pilgrimage can also be seen in terms of its function. James Steel Thayer (1992:169-186) finds that the primary function of hajj (Islamic pilgrimage) until the modern era was the diffusion or dissemination of Islam from its intellectual and spiritual capitals in North Africa and the Middle East back to West Africa. The hajj then became a vehicle for religious and cultural diffusion.

For others, pilgrimage is really about the pilgrim. For example, Andrea Dahlberg observes that there is recognition of a sacred value in the sick pilgrims encountered at the shrine of Lourdes in France (1991:39-40). In a more complex town, the identities of pilgrims can also be significant in understanding the sacred journey. Christopher McKeivitt (1991:77-95) reports in his research a distinction between resident devotees and pilgrims of the shrine of Padre Pio da Pietrelcina in the town called San Giovanni Rotonde, Italy. The distinction is that the pilgrim enters cosmological time and space for only a brief period of time, while the devotee attempts to live permanently in that realm. In the Philippines, Jaime T. Licauco's pilgrimage makes him say that Mount Banahaw in Dolores Quezon itself is a reflection of one self (1992). Not only does the pilgrim gain focus in the study of

however none of these studies has confirmed Turner's hypotheses (Morinis 1992:8). Morinis then highlights the individualistic characteristics of pilgrimage. He says, "In many cases, pilgrimage was found to be a highly individualistic practice in which a person sought to establish direct contact with his deity, in contrast to the group emphasized by Turner" (1992:8).

sacred journey but the deity as well. Richard L. Stirrat (1991:122-134) reveals in his examination of the Sinhala Catholic pilgrimage in Sri Lanka, particularly the Madhu and Talawila, that there is a decline in the popularity of shrines where place is stressed, and the rise of shrines focused on the person [deity].

However, the physicality of the sacred journey cannot be taken for granted. A theoretician of the sociology of tourism, Erik Cohen, argues that pilgrimage is a journey and quest towards the Center which is "the point at which the charismatic divine power penetrated the chaos and created the phenomenal world; but this power itself is the indescribable, since categorically incomprehensible, unity behind the differentiations of the phenomenal world" (Cohen 1992:50). Ralph Johnstone also reports that "the mountain (summit of mount Kailas, [Himalayas, India] – a perfect pointed dome of brilliant white snow) possesses an indescribable power to dominate not just its surroundings but the sense of all who draw near" (1995). However, this focus on the physicality somehow does not exhaust the spatial dimension of pilgrimage. What appears to be unexplored in the study of pilgrimage is the pilgrimage site as a built-environment especially when located in the city where secularism dominates.

It is in this context that this article seeks to answer this overarching question: how and where can we locate the sacred in the built pilgrimage site, and in one located in a more or less secular city? Answering this question requires a privileged theoretical frame – in this case, the built environment.

The Built Environment

Pilgrimage is basically a physical travel towards a sacred physical site. Since the pilgrims of Fort Pilar shrine in Zamboanga City evidently interact with the objects and spaces in the Shrine, I methodically follow and converse with them by first acknowledging their interaction with the Shrine as a built environment. But what is a built environment?

According to Amos Rapoport, the built environment involves (or manifests) the organization of space, time, meaning, and communication, which can separately be studied to an extent, but their interrelation is indispensable (1994:465). He describes the built environment as the physical expression of the organization of space, which is fundamental and inescapable (1994:470, 475, 485). The built environment always implies spatial organization, which is "culturally classified and socially regulated" (1994:469). It emphasizes movement, which is found in the very act of organizing and use of space. Movement can facilitate organization without

necessarily upholding ownership over space (1994:487). Pilgrimage or any other ritual is a movement that utilizes space and thus organizes it. One interesting feature of a built environment is that it varies cross-culturally and historically, as humans have no 'species-specific environment' (Wuthnow et. al. 1984:23 citing Peter L. Berger). This paper then will discuss the organization of space in the Fort Pilar shrine in Zamboanga City while placing the other three (time, meaning and communication) at the background.

"Any consideration of built environment must take into account not only the 'hardware' but also people, their activities, wants, needs, values, life-styles and other aspects of culture" (Rapoport 1994:461), it speaks of roles, social groups, and networks and its characterization via individual personalizations as well as of wealth, status, and power (1994:476-7). The element of power is manifested in divine providence and the pilgrims' agency. However, wealth and status are factors leading to class categorization as well as gender differentiation and will not be dealt with in this study.

Within any built environment are specific kinds of *settings*. A setting is that which "comprises a milieu with an ongoing system of activities, where the milieu and the activities are linked by rules as to what is appropriate and expected in the setting" (Rapoport 1994:462), and in which the systematic use of space called spatial organization is based (1994:470). Settings comprise fixed, semi-fixed, and non-fixed feature elements. The *fixed features* are the elements of the built environment which are more permanent like buildings, steel fences, and the like. *Semi-fixed* elements are the movable objects within the built environment and less permanent than fixed ones. Examples of these are decorations. *Non-fixed elements* are the people themselves. Semi-fixed and non-fixed elements are used in establishing boundaries in the setting (1994:462). "The physical attributes of the setting are cues that act as mnemonics, reminding people about the situation and hence about appropriate behavior, making effective co-action possible (Rapoport 1990a)" (1994:462). The physical features of the built environment also reflect and influence human behavior and interaction (1994:472). This is why it can be said that the built environment, although secondary, is a reflection of human culture.

A clarification is needed at this point. Emphasis on the material component of built environment serves mainly as the springboard for cultural analysis (Rapoport 1994). The focus on the physical dimension of built environment necessarily brings the analysis to the settings involved in the cultural landscape, which implies the organization of space, communication,

time, and meaning. Inherent in the settings is the active relationship between objects and people, and among people themselves. All of these ultimately are traceable to how the cultural mind of the agent works, which indeed may be relative to how they organize or act. If Geertz points to symbols as a relatively fixed locus to study culture (Ortner 1994:374), Rapoport points to the built environment— “conceptual organization precedes building” (1994:461). Consequently, the different spatial organizations at all scales are the physical expressions of cognitive schemata. In effect, the world is divided into cognitive domains, which are labeled, and operate according to some rules (1994:483). As an expression of the cognitive schemata, spatial organization involves classification, control, and communication (1994:484). Thus, Rapoport says that, “it is usually cognized rather than actual spatial organization that influences behavior” (1994:484).

Without necessarily contradicting Rapoport’s view, I still find it difficult to do away with the influence of the physical spaces and objects on human behavior and cognition. Even the cognized space, which influences human behavior, may even come from the person’s response to the encounter of the physical object or space. It seems that the source of cognition is the experience of the physical world. Some studies would mention the shrine, statue saints, the mountain (Johnstone 1995, Robson 1995, Powell 1995, Licauco 1992, Francisco, 1992) to attest to the power of the sacred in affecting them – in affecting their senses and cognition. Even the most abstract configuration cannot escape physical representation. I am not pointing to the physical as ultimately the ground and source of all cognition. However, what I intend to say is that we cannot explain away the physicality in the human cognition as a source and effect. After all, cognition emanates from the biological brain, which receives impulses from the experience of the world. It is by this point that this study deals with the Fort Pilar pilgrimage and spirituality.

Locating the Pilgrimage Site in the City

Where is Fort Pilar shrine in Zamboanga City? At the southeastern part of Zamboanga City lies what is considered the most miraculous space by Zamboangueños. This sacred space is officially called Santuario de la Virgen del Pilar but is known by many Zamboangueños simply as “Fort Pilar,” a name indicative of its attachment to the eastern wall of one of the oldest structures in the Philippines - Fort Pilar. Fronting the Shrine are two Muslim barangays: Sta. Barbara and Mariki. At its rear is a newly

inaugurated (July 10, 2009) coastal park called Paseo del Mar². There are other parks in the city but the juxtaposition of the Fort Pilar shrine and Paseo del Mar would pull more people toward this location than it ever did before. At present these two city spots offer both the sacred and profane in one adjacent location near the center of the city.

Before the Paseo del Mar was opened for the public, the Fort Pilar shrine would pull people towards it like no other park in Zamboanga City does. For many pilgrims and tourists, Fort Pilar is a park that is conducive for family recreation aside from its being a place of prayer and reverence. Aside from the park's repute for being very miraculous and protector of the City, it's being only walking distance from the business center of the City makes it often part of people's journey to the town. The spot is within a 5-minute ride from shopping or doing business in the center of the town.

The Shrine is surrounded by candle vendors and fronting it are stores selling different religious objects, foods, and refreshments. The Shrine has an office where pilgrims can access information about thanksgiving mass and other activities. The office clerk takes instructions from the Shrine's administrator who is usually a diocesan priest. The administrator has command over the changes of the physical as well as institutional aspects of the Shrine. He supervises the two groups helping in the activities of the Shrine: the La Liga³ which basically serves in the mass activities, and the Corte de Honor⁴ which helps with the physical maintenance of the Shrine. As another administrator takes over and introduces changes, these groups

² Paseo del Mar has been open to the public even before its inauguration on July 10, 2009. In English Paseo del Mar means "the way to the sea." True to its name, it is a park along the coastal line at the back of Fort Pilar facing Basilan Island to the south.

³ Its formal name is La Liga de Nuestra Señora Virgen del Pilar. It was founded in January of 1989 by Mrs. Gigi Miguel, a Zamboangueña, with its main purpose – to intensify prayers for peace. At present, La Liga serves the Fort Pilar shrine by seeing to the lector commentator, daily Rosary, and lay ministers, among others.

⁴ Formally it was called La Corte de Honor de la Virgen del Pilar. It was the first Fort Pilar shrine organization formed to cater to the services and improvement needed by the said Shrine in 1928. In its inception, it was composed of twelve members representing the twelve stars on the Shrine Image's arch. The organization has to maintain the twelve members and in cases of death or incapacity of any of its members, the organization has to recruit a relative of the outgoing member. Across time, the organization has contributed much to the physical arrangement of the Shrine. At present however, the organization does not seem to have good solidarity and as an organization has become quite inactive due to a diminishing membership.

may experience adjustment or assertion. They attain some cultural and social capital as they develop themselves to better serve their purpose in the Shrine.

With its history of being a space for bomb explosions and its being located near the very center of the City, the Shrine was eventually enclosed by steel fence, with three gates. Even though the Shrine is enclosed, it is open to anybody, may s/he be a pilgrim or tourist. It being prone for any terrorist it is guarded by some police officers. The sense of security people feel allows many to pay homage or visit this sacred site with ease and confidence. Some would even want to stay a little longer as kids run and enjoy the atmosphere. It would not be a surprise to see professional photographers in the Shrine.

The Fort Pilar shrine may be seen as a field of “structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions base on types and amounts of capital” (Swartz 1997:123, citing Bourdieu). But as a field of pilgrimage in the city where pilgrims basically communicate with the divine, the Fort Pilar shrine is beyond being a field “of power struggles among holders of different forms of power, a gaming space in which those agents and institutions possessing enough specific capital to be able to occupy the dominant positions within the respective fields confront each other using strategies aimed at preserving or transforming these relations of power” (Pilario 2005:170 citing Bourdieu). This shrine in a city will be seen more as a built-environment that constitutes different settings: the stores outside and inside of the Shrine, the altar, the trapezoidal house, the Blessed Sacrament, the Shrine’s benches, the Shrine’s office as well as the candle site.

In the Shrine Grounds

As any built-environment, the Fort Pilar shrine has undergone modifications. Nanay Presing, an old devotee, recalls: “*cuando 1947, este abierto Shrine ma arena y piedragal. Tiene maga shembra na areredor como maga bogambilla, pandangera, y adelpa como ta tranka cun el Shrine dol semi-circle*” (As early as 1947 the open Shrine area was sandy with pebbles. Surrounding it are plants like bougainvillea, pandangera, and adelpa [Oleander] in a semicircle form). These plants serve as markers rather than boundaries because they are low enough to restrict people from entering and do not divide the spacious area in front of the Shrine. They serve as markers of people’s intention for the Shrine’s beautification.

There was a time when the Shrine’s ground was applied with asphalt pavement for its order and comfortable use because its dusty ground would disturb many people. Nanay Presing and Ate Mel (a devotee and now

watching over a store in front of the Shrine) recalls that somewhere in the second half of 1950s, the near ground of the Shrine was cemented with benches built on it. At this time, the Shrine's ground is widened with the cemented pathways and plants all over on the parts with soil. Today, the Shrine's ground is cemented with washout pebbles at some pathways and with bricks in other parts.

The Shrine administrator in the middle of June 2005 removed the santan plants all over the isles in between cemented passages in the Shrine's ground and transferred them to around the foot of trees planted in different locations near the Shrine's fence. At the foot of every tree is a circular cemented wall, about a foot above the ground, with about six-inch width where many visitors sit. When it was filled with santan plants, no one could sit on them comfortably because the flowers could hit their back. So, towards the end of August 2005, these santan plants were again removed and replaced with plants that bear small yellow flowers (they call these plants *mani-mani*). This makes the circular cemented wall usable for sitting again. After removing the santan plants from the Shrine's ground, Dwarf Cypress Trees were planted along the isles. There are already four pairs of bigger cypress trees along the center path towards the altar and two pairs in each side of the center path present today in the Shrine's ground. All this contributes to the Shrine's beauty at present, as the then Shrine administrator intends to create an accommodating ambiance to the pilgrims. Perhaps implicit in the intention is that the Shrine is located near the center of the City.

The beautiful surrounding of the Shrine ground is often cited as the reason why people go to Fort Pilar shrine. When I asked some of my friends, many of them said that they go there to relax and enjoy the Shrine's ambiance. Most of these people choose the locations near the fence because very few go and pray there. The Shrine then becomes a park where most of the spaces are busy and crowded. As a park, the Shrine becomes a meeting place of city goers and this is very visible during Sundays. Most of these people are youngsters, who would leave the Shrine just before the mass starts in the late afternoon. As remarked by some photographers in the Shrine, many of these youngsters are thought to be maids and helpers of families and establishments in Zamboanga City who offer them a Sunday-off.

Some make the Shrine a dating place. Some go inside the Shrine for picture-taking or just to have their pictures taken by the photographers. I once met a young lady who worked in a house here in Zamboanga City. She went to the Shrine at around 7:00 AM not for any other purpose but to have her picture taken. Some just meet their friends or lovers, without even praying or lighting candles in the Shrine. That is why Daisy, a married

professional and pilgrim of the Fort Pilar shrine, says that, “it is supposed to be a place for prayer, but eventually used as a park.” Perhaps it is because of its accessibility and being an open space for anybody.

With a little orientation of the Fort Pilar shrine, one may already foresee the activities of the people therein as they interact with one another especially on Sundays. Many discuss their doings like being in the park or in a dating place. Others look for the photographers, while others claim their pictures. Others are silent as they wait for their peers, while others are noisy as they play with their children. And in the corners of the Shrine’s ground, one may notice romantic interactions. Yet, the intense prayer of pilgrims on benches or those with their knees on the ground accounts for a spiritual interaction with the Divine. The Shrine’s ground then is used both as a religious space and a park, although dating has been discouraged by some older devotees and servers of the Shrine so that it is now slowly decreasing.

As mentioned above, there were bombs planted and exploded within and outside of the Shrine. My friend’s mother who has been selling candles in the Shrine for decades tells the story:

“El primer bomba ya rebenta alli adentro del Shrine na pies del grande crus donde ta resa maga gente antes sila sindi di ila candela. Y pone cun aquel bomba junto na maga shembra na mismo pies del crus. Ya sucede aquel serca fin del mes del Agosto 1995. El segundo bomba ya rebenta adentro Shrine serca na este gate. Ya susede aquel Agosto tambien pero nusabe yo cosa año. El tersero rebentada amo aquel ya sucede del Octubre 20, 2002 maga alas ocho del noche del Domingo. Por causa cun aquel, ya muri gayot el un Marins. Makalastima gayot cun aquel cay hinde aquel di aqui canaton y amo pa gayot quel el premer sindida di suyu del candela aqui na Shrine antes le de muri. Ya causa gayot aquel muchu maga irida. Ya tene pa gayot dos bomba shembrao pero ya puede incuntra: unu adentro del Shrine amaraw na un flashlight; el otro apuera serca na gate aquel na medyo. Tiene pa gayot unu bomba ya incuntra na pies del crus donde ta sindi candela del Octubre 12, 2004. Fiesta Pilar aquel tiempo”.

(The first bomb, which exploded inside at the foot of the big cross, where pilgrims pray before lighting candles, was planted together with the flowers at the foot of the cross. It happened towards the end of August in 1995. The second bomb that exploded inside the Shrine near the left wing gate happened also in August but I don’t

know what year. The third bomb explosion in October 20, 2002 around 8 pm (Sunday) caused the death of a marine corps officer [they call it Marins] who is not from the city and made his first candle lighting inside the Shrine before he died of the explosion. It also caused many wounded people. There were two other unexploded bombs found during this time: one is inside the Shrine attached to a flashlight; the other was outside near the center gate. Another bomb was found at the foot of the big cross in the burning candle site on October 12, 2004. It was Fiesta Pilar then.)

Surprisingly, this is not a new phenomenon because even during the occupation of the Japanese in Zamboanga City a similar incident occurred. When the Japanese learned the devotion to the La Virgen del Pilar, they opened the roads and gave permission to do pilgrimage in the Fort Pilar. "In spite of the fear and of many restrictions, many took advantage of this permission to continue their devotion at the Shrine" (Salvador 1942:7). Their spirituality is there in the Fort Pilar shrine. Perhaps, the threat is overpowered by the need of healing and of spirituality that is anchored on that same space. They cannot do away with the location of the Shrine. Even Tintin, a critical pilgrim, says that, "the place [Shrine] is a pacifier."

Amazingly, these negative events do not prevent the pilgrims and devotees from continuing their expression of spirituality in the same Shrine. The same volume of people is observed even until the present. In spite of the threat, the pilgrims still visit the same space because what they need is anchored on the same built-environment. Mamang Choleng, a retired employee and pilgrim, confidently declares: "*ta queda libyano el miyo pensamiento adentro pilar*" (I experience peace of mind inside the Shrine).

As the built-environment in the Shrine changes, pilgrims' interactions with it also change. But the correlation is not determined by an *a priori* principle. The negative incidents in the Shrine ground do not alter the pilgrimage and devotion. In other words, changes in the pilgrims' interaction with the Shrine and the objects therein are not automatic outcomes of the changes in the built-environment. The changes are still rooted in the mystery of human practice.

Moreover, the Shrine ground does not really stand apart from Zamboanga society as may have been implied by Morinis in his study of pilgrimages (1992:24). As the Shrine is located within the center of the city, it stands rather as part of society. It becomes the people's leisure place, if not their meeting ground. In it are different social mechanics and roles as there are cleaners, administrator, vendors, and buyers within. Perhaps, Fort Pilar shrine is more of an extension of than outside of Zamboanga society. It is

attached to the very life of the city as symbolically as it is attached to the northeast wall of the Fort Pilar which embodies a history of Zamboanga society's beginning.

The Shrine Wall

On the shrine wall are images of devotion and reverence that also underwent metamorphosis, although there had been not much change in the basic icons. Except for the number of carved angels, the transformation has a lot to do with the sizes, positions, and colors of the images. A little above the center of the northeast wall of the Fort Pilar lies the image of La Virgen del Pilar. During the Spanish occupation, it was placed as a frontispiece on top of the Fort's main entrance at the center of the northeast wall. Later, this entrance was sealed and eventually it became the wall of the Shrine. Although there is not enough on record that would explain how the Shrine came to be, there are stories and legends about it. The closing of the main entrance to the Fort Pilar is said to be a result of a miraculous protection of those in procession (with the image of La Virgen del Pilar) when attack from the outside alarmed them. Consequently, the image was left outside and later found on top, where it stands in today's Fort Pilar shrine (Salvador, S.J. 1942:5-6). Above the image of La Virgen del Pilar is a gold-colored crown. The first crown (smaller than the present one) which was placed at its coronation on October 12, 1960 was removed after a few days of placement because of its value and fear of theft. Above the crown is an arch with twelve stars. The arch is anchored on the edge of the northeast wall of Fort Pilar. All of these are fixed elements as they endure the changes of time since they were built.

Below the image of the La Virgen del Pilar are four angels (they were six before as evidenced by some old pictures) set against the sky and clouds carved on that same wall. Below the angels is Saint James along a riverbank looking upward. This stone-carved image is already a product of modifications. Comparing different pictures of the Shrine will show that the image has become smaller than the previous one to give way to the modification of its lower portion where the crucifix is housed. In some older pictures of the wall, the colors differentiating the images are bolder and sharper. Now, the colors are disappearing. The entire image commemorates La Virgen del Pilar's apparition in Saint James presence in Zaragoza, Spain long time ago. Ate Mel, a candle vendor outside fronting the Shrine has the story:

*"Cuando nu hay pa ese maga benches, ya hase sila escalera
imfrente alyi na Shrine para puede sila alcanza cun el La Virgen*

ariba si sila quere agara o adora. Dispues, yan ulan ese por cuanto dias, seguro maga un mes. Amo ya discompone cun el escalera el mga seminario y padre aquel tiempo. Ya pidi tambien sila perdon cun el La Virgen. Dispues, ya descansa lang el ulan.”

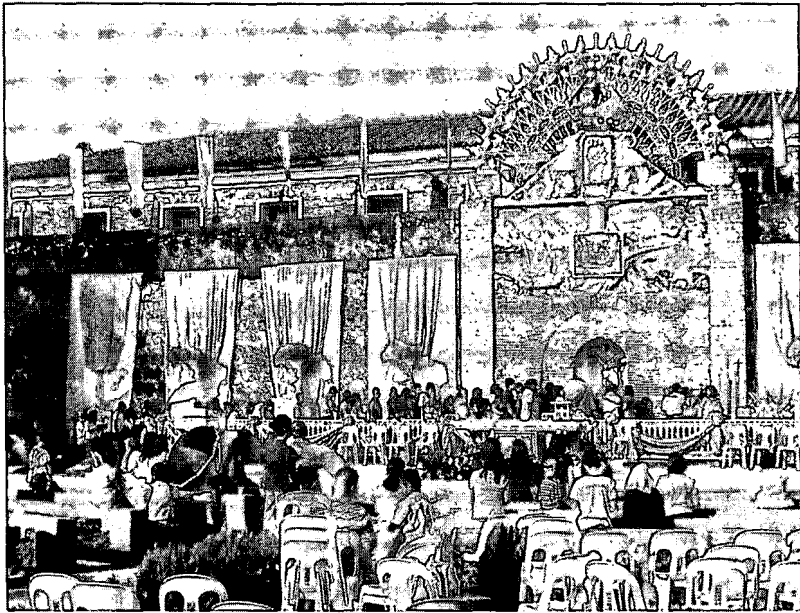
(A ladder to reach up the La Virgen’s image was built during the time when there were no benches yet in front of the Fort Pilar’s northeast wall. This was built so that people can climb up for veneration and touch the image. Rain came continually for about a month, which prompted the priests and seminarians to pray for forgiveness and remove the ladder. Then the rain stopped eventually).

However, some say that the rain does not imply any disapproval from La Virgen del Pilar. Thus, in an interview with Mommy Angelin in 2006 (she died recently), she says that, “*si no quere el La Virgen, mismo el escalera ay hinde na porsigue*” (if La Virgen does not want it, the ladder itself will not be made).

Like the building of the Shrine wall, the building of a ladder to reach up the image of La Virgen is an indication of the devotees’ improvisation over space to have attachment to the La Virgen del Pilar. Nanay Presing, a volunteer and devotee of Fort Pilar shrine, says that Zamboanguenos in Guadalupe River, Cebu, and somewhere in Davao, have built shrines in honor of the La Virgen del Pilar since they were already far from Zamboanga. There is also a quite similar case in Sta. Cruz, Manila although not built by the people from Zamboanga.

Attachment to the believed miraculous, in this case, is not purely through a mental or abstract connection, but through building images. In their devotion, the pilgrims of Fort Pilar shrine have been clearly showing the significance of images and objects. The following constitute the myriad images and objects which pilgrims interact with as they show their devotion to the divine: the statues of saints along the pillars of the Shrine’s fence; the cross near the candle site; the four saint figures inside the trapezoidal house at the left wing gate of the Shrine; the crucifix on the Shrine’s altar; the Blessed Sacrament; and the confession room among others. Jojo, a professional and a devotee of Fort Pilar shrine, says: “When I pray the ‘Our Father’, I face the crucifix. When I pray the ‘Hail Mary’, I face the image on top.” “The architecture and physical arrangement of the shrine are both a practical arena for pilgrims’ actions and a representation of the symbols, deities, and ideals that are the central focus of pilgrimage and practice”

(Morinis 1992:25). These images become the center of the pilgrims focus and sight. The Shrine wall attracts many pilgrims, or more specifically, many eyes. One of which is Jojo. He continues: "I could hardly pray if I could not see her image." Another is an old and ordinary lay Nong Boy who claims that, "*no puede yo concentra si hinde yo ta puede mira cun Maria* (I cannot concentrate when I cannot see Mary). *Si ta mira iyo cun el imahen, Libyano y ta sinti yo cuntento na mi pobresa*" (looking at her image makes me fell light and contented with my being poor). The Shrine wall is perhaps the physicality (not only a representation) of what these pilgrims consider divine. In looking at the Shrine wall, they see the La Virgen del Pilar. This point is elaborated more in a location where pilgrims can not only see the sacred but are also able to touch it.



Fort Pilar, Zamboanga City

The Altar

Below the carved image on the northeast wall of Fort Pilar is the altar (reachable by ordinary adults). The previous altar of the Shrine, in the later part of the 1960s, housed a little crucifix attached to the Fort's northeast wall.

At present, the crucifix is housed in the interior hollow in the lower center of the same wall. At the foot of the crucifix are fixed stones. There were semi-fixed flowers around the crucifix before. These flowers would be changed or removed from time to time as they become messy. At present, the people maintaining the physical aspect of the Shrine no longer allow people to put flowers on the altar to maintain cleanliness and order. Near the outer edge of the marble desk is a relic believed to have a special connection to the La Virgen's apparition in Zaragoza, Spain. The relic is submerged in the marble plane of the desk-altar and visible from the outside because of its glass-cover surface. Today, one will notice much moisture inside the glass, which brings wonder to many pilgrims. This relic becomes the object of the pilgrims' touch or kiss.

The altar is where people pray and touch religious objects. Devotees are usually quiet as they wait and move on toward the altar, but this does not imply emptiness of prayer and spirituality. Many pilgrims pray as they line up here. Upon reaching the altar, touching objects and their bodies is the usual scenario. Yet, this is the highlight here. Many of the pilgrims pass by the Shrine's altar to pray and to touch the crucifix including the stones at its foot. Then they would touch their face or any part of their body using the same hand that made the earlier touching. Usually, they would make the sign of the cross after touching the crucifix and the stones using the same hand. Some do this twice or thrice at a time. There are pilgrims who cannot touch the crucifix because they cannot reach it, so that they touch instead the stones at the foot of it. Parents or the adult ones sometimes guide their children on what to do at this location. Some adults would even do the touching of the crucifix and stones and the signing of the cross on their children or to the small ones. At times they would use their handkerchief or towels in rubbing them against the crucifix and stones. Some would carry their child on top of the altar to do the touching while stepping on the concrete desk near the relic, which many pilgrims would kiss.

The Shrine's altar, in a sense, becomes a micro-model of Fort Pilar pilgrimage. It is a location of pilgrims' travel where prayer is rendered through the medium of sacred objects. Moreover, pilgrims converge at this location, as a way of getting closer to the believed power it possesses. Getting closer to the powerful is not enough. Pilgrims touch these objects as their way of connecting to the Divine. Touching the crucifix and the stones is like touching the powerful Jesus Christ. In the same fashion, kissing the marble desk or the relic is like caressing the Divine. Here lies one important characteristic of the Fort Pilar spirituality – touch. A certain pilgrim once said: "I just pass by there [at the altar] to touch." But why do pilgrims touch?

This implies that the Divine is also there in the object, and in a built-environment like the saint statues in the trapezoidal house in the Shrine.

The Saint Statues in the Shrine

There are four saint figures inside a trapezoidal house located at the left wing of the Shrine (perspective: facing the Shrine): two La Virgen del Pilar statues, one Sto. Niño, and the Our Lady of Guadalupe in frame. Pilgrims usually walk in through this passage-house, sometimes in a slow moving line, while stopping at every saint to talk, to pray usually in silence, and touch the glass covering the saint, then to their own faces or bodies after. Some would even kiss the glass covering. One or two steps leftward is another saint to whom pilgrims usually do the same. Many pray, ask for special favor, for thanksgiving, for guidance, and all sort of expressions to the saints. They are done through touch. Many would extend their arms against the mirror, while either closing their eyes or focus on the saint. Most of the pilgrims do this silently, but radiation of intense prayer can be felt especially when their hands touch the glass as if wanting to touch the very saint statue. In this case, no covering would ever create a gap between the pilgrims and the saint. What they say may not be heard by other people, but it is in their extended arm and facial expressions that in deed there is intense spiritual communication happening.

The wiping of a handkerchief over the mirror of the saint's cage and using the same handkerchief to wipe their bodies is another silent gesture full of messages. The mirror covering does not block the pilgrims' touch to the divine. Instead, it becomes a channel to the divine. In an interview, Jojo, a pilgrim and lay minister, agrees that prayer through touch would cleanse and heal his body. More than this is the sense that this is a way of being connected to the Divine, to the Powerful, and to the Miraculous. Touching his body after touching the crucifix and stones at the altar or the saints encased in glass is like transferring the miraculous and powerful element into his body so that illness will disappear. In one of my observations atop the Fort Pilar, I saw a pilgrim getting a white stone from the foot of the big cross near the candle pond before reciting the prayer found in two tablets in the same foot of the cross. He removed some soil from the stone and quickly put it in his right front pocket. Then, he began the prayer with his candles on hand. Many pilgrims pick up even petals from flowers anywhere in the Shrine. Fr. Alejo says: "it seems that the mediation we have in the contact with the Divine is not Dogma, it's not doctrine, and it's not true statements, but a kind of an experience that is bodily" (Alejo 2004:38).

Conclusion

Having grottos or altars in the privacy of their own home is common among the religious people of Zamboanga City. Yet, they put much importance to the altar found in the Fort Pilar shrine – a public built environment in the heart of the City. This paper shows that there is a special significance in going to the Shrine's altar or to the four saints in the trapezoidal house because of the many miracles and healing stories pilgrims hear, believe, and experience there. This location is a location of divine power. Yet, this power does not just float in the air so that everyone on earth may have it anywhere and anytime. Zamboangueno pilgrims travel to the Shrine and touch the religious objects on altar and the saints in the trapezoidal house. This implies that it is in physically being there at the Shrine altar or on the Shrine ground or with the saint statues that one accesses the power they share.

This further implies that the powerful or the miraculous is situated in the particularity of spaces and objects even at the heart of a seemingly secular city. The power is in the objects so that pilgrims have to touch or possess them to have and possess the power they have. In the same way, pilgrims have to go to the Fort Pilar shrine to attain the miracles they wish because it is the location where the Powerful resides. One has to physically light candles there, or else, one has less confidence of receiving the grace. For many pilgrims, going to this built environment means going to a site of miracles. Entering into the Shrine means tapping a fountain of divine power that one may not be able to find in other locations because, as legend has it, it is in this location that the Lady of the Pillar miraculously appeared in the past and still touches lives of the people up to the present even amidst the secularity of its location.

There is contradiction between what is said and what is done. Some students speak of God as everywhere and therefore they can pray anywhere, but nevertheless put much significance in doing this in this particular built-environment the Fort Pilar shrine, where miracles happened in the past, and believe that the same place has the same effect in the present. Yet, this is not mere belief because pilgrims continue to visit the Shrine and pray there as they experience (aside from believing) the everyday miracles of the La Virgen del Pilar in their everyday lives in the City. To tap the miraculous power, one has to bodily touch it. It is embodied in space, location, object, or image, not in a very far mountain but within the heart of the seemingly secular City. This popular religiosity is indeed a spirituality of the body (Alejo 2004:38-41) facilitated through touch and reachable by anyone who

believes. Even though located in the heart of the city where materialism and secularism seem to rule the urban life, pilgrims continue to find the sacred in the spaces and objects believed as channels to the Divine. Indeed, the sacred is also there in the materiality of everyday city-life. It is by this point that I would like to propose that both the pilgrimage to Fort Pilar shrine in Zamboanga City and the spirituality in the Zamboangueno pilgrims' bodily practice is spatially-oriented.

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