

**THE FUNCTION OF FOLK-RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND BELIEFS
RELATED TO THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE PEOPLE OF BARRIO
PUERTO BELLO, MUNICIPALITY OF MERIDA,
PROVINCE OF LEYTE**

**A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of the Graduate School
Silliman University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Anthropology**

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The Thesis hereto attached, entitled THE FUNCTION OF FOLK-RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND BELIEFS RELATED TO THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE PEOPLE OF BARRIO PUERTO BELLO, MUNICIPALITY OF MERIDA, PROVINCE OF LEYTE prepared and submitted by Miss Ma. Milagros R. Teleron in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology, is hereby presented.

Accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology.


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THESIS ABSTRACT

This study has attempted to find out which folk animistic rituals and beliefs are still prevalent in an already largely acculturated Catholic community such as Puerto Bello, Merida, Leyte. This was carried out with a two-fold objective: (1) to examine how functional these folk-religious rituals are to the family in its life-cycle; and thereby (2) to venture some interpretation of the coexistence of animism and the Roman Catholic beliefs and practices in this community.

During three months of field research, the writer conducted her investigation through interview of families and special respondents, and participant-observation.

The main sampling consisted of 50 older parents or grandparents and 50 younger parents from a universe of 320 households. Each couple was represented in the interviewing by either the husband or the wife. For a generation whether or not traditional practices are being maintained. Ten tambalans (folk doctors) and hilot-mananabangs (folk masseuse-midwives) served as key informants on folk practices, and the priest and the hacienda manager who is a lay leader were resource persons for some religious aspects of the study.

There are many folk-animistic practices prevalent in the life-cycle events of the people in the area. No significant difference has been found between the older parents and younger parents as regards their attitudes towards traditional practices (e.g. lihi or prohibition and initiatory rites, and the use of the orasyon or Latin prayer-formulas for cure of illnesses). There is instead mutual agreement between them, in favor of those practices. Moreover, eighty-eight per cent of the high school students affirmed that lihi is necessary; and seventy-one per cent of the same group believe in the orasyon. Another finding is that the proportion between technical and non-technical personnel involved in assisting the birth of children for the entire municipality of Merida does not yet offset the use of traditional methods of panabang (assisting deliveries), much less the dissemination of lihi practice.

Folk beliefs also exist side by side with Roman Catholic practices as they function to enhance family values in Puerto Bello. Most salient among these values are traditionalism, closeness in the family and kinship circle, and benefactor-dependent relationship. However, the family, with its traditional values, is being challenged by urbanizing influences on the social, economic, and political levels. On the matter of religion, especially since Vatican II, some of these folk practices are subject to reform geared towards

the emphasis of authentic, not syncretistic, religious functions. The organizational structure of this largely hacienda-owned community may yet facilitate the introduction of needed change in the religious structure and functions related to the family in Puerto Bello.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"From his cradle to his grave, man is the slave of ancient usage."¹ In other words, tradition or the "folkways" of a people, according to Sumner, take on the character of social forces. Yet social science studies show that men are never conscious of "historical action"² such that the old ways of life need contain the assumption of some quiet coercion of both society and the individual to conform to, respect and revere tradition.

Among other cultural items, and in view of such assumption, folk rituals and beliefs have become stereotyped. They become modified over time by the introduction, say, of a new religion and acquire the semblance of a religious nature, in form, meaning, use, or function.

In the Philippines, this is illustrated by the persistence of folk animistic practices that seem to play as important a part as authentically Roman Catholic practices. There is, for instance, a folk rite at

¹William Sumner, Folkways (New York: New American Library, 1959), p. 20, citing the Journal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain, XX, p. 140.

²Ibid., p. 23. Sumner refers to the origin of primitive custom when he mentions "historical action."

childbirth as well as a religious rite which celebrates the birth of a child. Here, the problem of ambiguity arises as to the functional significance of the two different rites to society, for, indeed, folk rites, particularly those bordering on superstition, animism or magic, on the one hand, and religious rites on the other have often been found by anthropologists to be empirically associated with each other. How to separate the pristine form from the acculturated one after four centuries of Christianity will certainly involve methods of rigor. It is difficult then to try to define what modern religion does to society independently of what folk rituals and beliefs do.

The average Filipino family is still being haunted, consciously or unconsciously, by the vagueness of a thought-and-behaviour system under the pressure of the church after Vatican II. Considering that "the family is a dominating influence in Philippine society," and that the "social conduct of the Filipino is very much determined by the shared values of the family as such,"³

³Mina Ramirez, "A Phenomenology of the Filipino Family," The Eleventh Annual Baguio Religious Acculturation Conference (1967), reprinted from Saint Louis Quarterly, VI, Nos. 3-4 (September-December, 1968), p. 348.
Family values in Puerto Belle are mentioned in Chapter II.

it is worthwhile examining some of the facets of its manifest behavior. The duplication, not necessarily dichotomy, of Filipino Roman Catholic conduct with traditional behavior is salient. It is along this line that this paper is developed.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. This study does not treat of religious acculturation per se, or the process by which Roman Catholicism was indigenized in a Philippine barrio. It attempts to examine instead some traditional pre-Christian rituals and beliefs, and to relate these to the rituals and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines. It seeks to answer the following questions:

What is the relationship between religion and family life in the barrio of Puerto Bello?

How are their folk practices functional in the life cycle of the people of this place?

How are Roman Catholic ritual practices functional in the life cycle of these people?

What related changes are there in the local Roman Catholic rituals since Vatican II? How have these affected the family?

How closely do the younger families follow

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