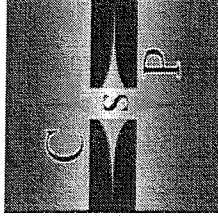


Transmission Image
Visual Translation and Cultural Agency

Edited by

Birgit Mersmann and Alexandra Schneider



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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Peter J. Bräunlein

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according to a "Silent Mail" principle: Only the first bust was fashioned after the living prototype. The artist herself sat for a traditional sculptor who usually produces ritual objects for his village. The first bust served as a model for the second sculpture, which was produced in another village, and the second one served as a model for the third one, which was produced in a village even more distant from the original place, and so on. Every woodcarver was asked to produce a perfect copy of the respective prototype. This experimental configuration was conceived in order to answer the following question: How would the busts change in correspondence with the growing distance from the initial position of the original and from the original itself? The results show how the portrait of a Western woman was transformed in its migration from place to place, and from picture to picture, to eventually become an African sculpture which shows absolutely no trace of its Western origin. The passing on of the image visualizes the assimilation of a hetero-image into the auto-cultural imaging system—a process which takes place on an inter- and intra-cultural level. Not only do Western and African image cultures collide—an iconoclash primarily inflamed by the unequal relationship of prestige between original and copy—but there is also a collision within African image culture itself between different local image traditions and practices. This double configuration not only shows the transmissive and transgressive impetus of images, but also the limits of their translatability. Images evolve in conjunction with cultural history and they are imbued with local influences. Although they are permanently migrating, they have a place which they refer back to by identifying or dissociating. Because of that, every change of place involves a change of perspective, be it inter- or intra-cultural. [BM]

PETER J. BRÄUNLEIN

IMAGE TRANSMISSIONS AS IMAGE ACTS:
CHRISTIAN IMAGES, EMOTIONS
AND RELIGIOUS CONVERSION
IN THE PHILIPPINES

Christianity is basically understood as *the* scriptural religion; a religion, which presents a book, the contents of which are made known by preaching and listening. The truth of Christianity—and of every other 'book religion' as well—can therefore only be found by deciphering the Holy Scriptures, so the religious experts insist. The scientific approach to religions was philological for a long time, imitating the theological endeavour of biblical exegesis.

Besides holy texts, most religions, however, also offer an extremely rich visual cosmos, consisting of architectural works, sculptures, statues and paintings of saints, prophets, teachers, demons, angels, mythical animals, monsters, gods and goddesses. Most religions have various forms of performative expression at their disposal, such as theatre, festivals, pageants, processions, commemorations, liturgical rites and rituals etc. Apart from external visible images, there is also the vast space of internal imagery. It may be a truism that religion expresses itself in texts, images and actions, but the scholarly treatment of religions has exclusively (and astonishingly) privileged the study of texts over a long period of time.

If we regard Christianity not exclusively as a text-based but also as an image-based religion, it is worth asking how the visual universe was perceived and transformed wherever it was transmitted to non-Western cultures by missionaries. The set of core images—a half naked baby representing God's incarnated son, a crucified male adult representing the odd idea of a sacrificed God—is anything but transparent or easily understandable, let alone cross-culturally acceptable.

The global spread of Christianity is usually measured by the countable success (or lack of success) in conversions to Christianity. In counting converts, however, we know nothing about the dynamics of how world-

views, the moral universe, social relations and concepts of supernatural beings changed.

In my paper I propose to consider the spread of Christianity as the spread of emotionally charged images of Christ's body. The history of religions in general was and has always been connected with the history of the human body, its senses and emotions. With this emphasis on image and body in the global history of Christianity, I would like to direct the analytical view to the fact that processes of becoming Christian (or Muslim and Buddhist alike) are mainly imagological and emotional. Growing up and learning to be religious has little to do with an ongoing scholarly dispute over enigmatic passages of holy texts. From early childhood on, becoming a believer means participating in rituals and dealing with powerful, sometimes overwhelming images. Via images, both external and internal, fierce or merciful other-worldly entities become "real" in a specific way, as do concepts such as paradise, hell, good, evil, beauty, violence, suffering, love, salvation, damnation, death and eternal life.

Religions have to be emotionally plausible, and in order to make the core messages of the textual canon plausible, they must be translated into powerful images. The intimate connection between pictorial text-interpretation, emotions and devotional practices is highly relevant for the history of Christianity in Western culture, but also in non-Western cultures.

In my paper, the Christianisation of the Philippines serves as an example by which the work of religious image-transmission can be studied in a specific cultural and historical context.

It was already during the period of first contact in the encounter between the new religion, Iberian Catholicism, and the indigenous religion of the inhabitants of a Southeast Asian island archipelago that a particular image of Christ played a key role. Interestingly, in the very moment of first encounter, it was not a suffering Christ, but Santo Niño, Christ the child as king, which became the famous object of religious negotiations.

Christ the Child King

When the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan landed and claimed the territory for Spain and King Charles in the year 1521, he soon befriended the local ruler Raja Kulambu of Limawasa Island. With the help of Kulambu, Magellan persuaded the ruler of the island of Cebu, Raja Humabon, and his wife to become Christians. On April 14, 1521 Magellan presented the image of Christ the Child, as well as an image of Mary and a

Cross to Humabon's wife in order to initiate her baptism. She was delighted and as Pigafetta wrote in his journal, "was overcome with contrition and asked for baptism amid her tears". After the Christian initiatory ritual, in which she was named Juana, "she asked to give her the little Child Jesus to keep in place of her idols, and she went away".¹ Two weeks later Magellan was killed in a battle and the Spaniards left the archipelago. For more than forty years, Juana's village and the Child-Christ, were not visited by the Spaniards.

The Santo Niño statue, the beloved new idol, which found its place among its indigenous relatives in the Raja's home, was the product of Flemish artisans: a wooden statue of an upright standing child, 30 cm tall, dressed in precious clothes, shrouded in a velvet coat, a plumed hat (a Flemish red velvet bonnet) on its head, in its left hand a globe with a little cross on top, the right hand raised in blessing. This image of the Jesus-Child with its imperial insignia, was, so the hagiographic tradition goes, a recent invention, authorised by a vision of Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), one of the most eminent mystics of the Counter-Reformation era. Thus, the vision of the Jesus-Child as king reflected perfectly the ambitions of the Spanish crown in the age of European expansion.² It is therefore not surprising that the devotion to the Holy Infant image successfully developed in the process of 'refashioning Catholicism'³ in Spain, and from there across Europe and beyond.⁴

¹ Tenazas (1965), pp. 21 f.

² In his book on 'The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770', Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia (1998) shows that the voices of female mystics became publicly more and more audible due to their visionary capabilities. Teresa of Avila has developed a lively interest in the colonial and missionary endeavors of the Spanish crown. She felt the burning desire to bring God's message to the heathens from a young age. Conquering the world was therefore a persistent venture with both politico-military and missionary-visionary aspects.

³ Bireley (1999).

⁴ It was due to the efforts of the Carmelite order, to which Teresa of Avila belonged, that devotion to the Holy Child spread all over Europe and finally beyond. Since this piece was brought from Spain to Bohemia, Santo Niño de Praga, the miraculous child of Prague, became the center of European, and finally worldwide Santo Niño-devotion, starting in the first half of the seventeenth century. The Sto. Niño of Cebu began its career over a century earlier. Later, the Infant of Prague also arrived in the Philippines together with the Carmelite order. The Carmelites and also the Redemptorist Fathers fostered the devotion of this image there. Until today, however, the two images were and will always be distinguishable. Cf. Nemeč (1959); Tenazas (1965).

At the end of April, 1565, forty-four years after the violent death of Magellan, another Spanish expedition entered Cebu harbour upon the suggestion of the Viceroy of Mexico, King Philip II. The Cebuanos, however, were hostile and the head of the expedition, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, and his men skirmished with them. The village was set on fire and practically all houses were burnt. The day after the skirmish, a soldier named Juan Camus, found the image of Santo Niño unburnt. According to the sources, as historian Rosa Tenazas shows, the image was found in a box, covered with a white cloth.

"The tip of its nose was somewhat rubbed off, and some of the original paint was coming off its face. Otherwise, the image was perfectly preserved. But as regards its original garments, it seems that only its red velvet bonnet (red Flemish hat) was intact. We may surmise that the image's clothes were apportioned among devotees as relics, for when found, the Santo Niño was dressed in the native style and material. Hanging about its neck was a necklace of peculiar make with a small cross attached. Aside from the clothes, only the cross which is generally on top of the globe that the Infant holds in his left hand was missing."⁵

The Spanish settlement, which was built later, was named 'City of the Holy Name of Jesus' (Villa del Santissimo Nombre de Jesus) in remembrance of the unharmed image of the Infant Jesus, who became the patron saint of the village. The Spaniards constructed the monastery of the Holy Name of Jesus and the Holy Child was entrusted to the Augustinian Fathers.⁶ Legazpi ordered the transfer of the Santo Niño to the very first church on this island. In a grand procession, the figure was transferred from a temporary chapel made of bamboo to the new church. Chronicler Juan de Medina wrote in his history of the Augustinian order (1630):

"The whole fleet took part in it and carried the ornaments that they could. The Most Holy Child was carried in this procession to our house, and placed on an altar as decently adorned as was possible in that early period. The first mass of those islands was celebrated there, with more spirit and devotion than music and splendour. At its conclusion, all took a vow to celebrate annually the feast of the finding of the relic [...]. A confraternity of the Most Holy Name of Jesus was then established with the same rules as that of St. Augustine in the city of Mexico."⁷

⁵ Tenazas (1965), pp. 27 ff.

⁶ Noone (1986), p. 322.

⁷ Medina [1630] (1893), quoted in Tenazas (1965), p. 29.

During the seventeenth century the church was reduced to ashes twice, but each time the miraculous child was rescued from the ruins.

The career of little Señor Santo Niño as a dominant Christ image of the Philippines is astonishing. From north to south, the Holy Child can be found in thousands of variants, placed not only in churches and chapels, but also on small altars in restaurants, stores, offices and private homes. Only Christ the Victim, with whom we will deal later, has nearly the same visual presence in this country. (Fig. 2)

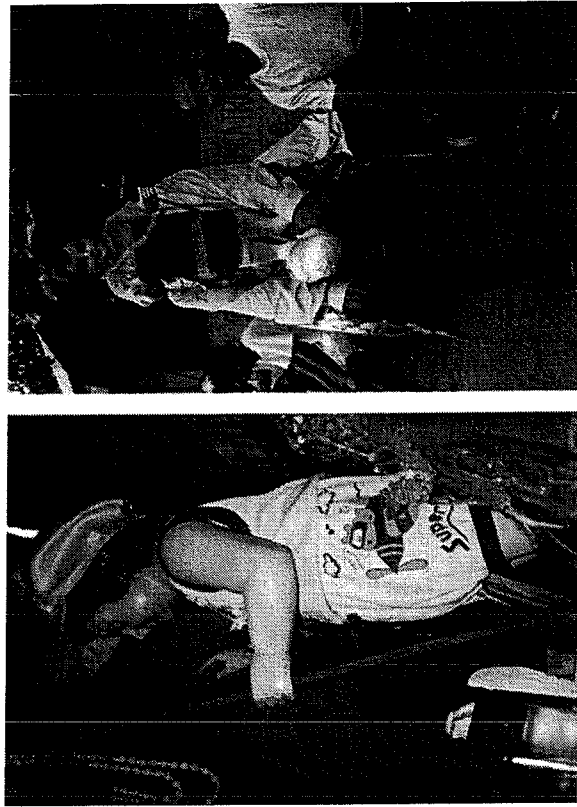


Fig. 2: Local variants of Sto. Niño images. Left: A Niño on a house altar. Right: A street vendor with a Sto. Niño statue for sale. Malolos, province of Bulacan. Photos by the author, 1996.

The Holy Child devotion in the Philippines was officially propagated for good reasons. The history of the Child-Christ represents the triumphalist history of Christianity in the Philippines:

"[T]he first baptism of the whole archipelago, the first Christian procession and festival in the Philippines, the first Christian church erected in the

archipelago, and the first Spanish settlement established in the archipelago, all these originated in the name of the Santo Niño."⁸

The 400th anniversary of the finding of the Holy Child in the year 1965 was celebrated as the fourth centennial of the Christianisation of the only predominantly Christian country in Asia. The image was transported from Cebu City to the capital, Manila, by Philippine Airlines. Right in the centre of the Philippine nation, the image served the purpose of reconfirming Philippine Christian identity.

Most obvious is the use of the representative capacities of Santo Niño in church policies. Does this, however, explain the enormous attraction of the image among the common Filipino people? What do they perceive when looking at the Holy Child? Are they moved with pride for belonging to the Catholic Church? Do they consider the infant with the globe as the victor over heathendom? It may be, but probably not.

A closer look at the devotional practices is revealing. The condition of the image at the moment of its rediscovery in the year 1565 gives us some hints. The rubbed nose and the peeled-off paint on the infant's face hint at the practice of touching parts of religious images, which is very common all over the Philippines even today. By rubbing the saint's head, foot or hand first and then one's own related body parts, healing power is transferred and, more importantly, a sensual, intimate contact to the image is established. The Flemish Santo Niño was, without doubt, highly appreciated due to its resemblance to the traditional idols, called *tao-tao* (manikin), *bata bata* (great-grandparent), or *larawan* (image, mould, model). Such idols, as William Henry Scott in his reconstruction of sixteenth-century Philippine culture and society states, were kept in homes and served as guardians of family welfare and as the first recourse in case of sickness and trouble.⁹ The affective devotion to the Santo Niño was even more intensified by the simple fact that it was a little child. Going into rapture by rubbing or even pinching babies is very common and culturally permitted in the Philippines. The unknown, and therefore "exotic", naturalistic mode of the cute *tao-tao* of the foreigners increased the delight and the appreciation of the Niño.¹⁰

⁸ Ness (1992), p. 63.

⁹ Scott (1994), p. 86.

¹⁰ When I brought my two-year-old blond-haired, pale skinned son to the Philippines, the observable reactions to him by ordinary Filipino people were all too often stereotypical. In moments of inattentiveness on the part of myself or his mother, all available soft parts of his body were squeezed and rubbed, accompanied

Besides this private treatment of the Santo Niño as a member and guardian of the family, the Niño was celebrated in public by means of parades and processions, which originated in Cebu and became known as *simulog*. Anthropologist Sally Ann Ness who studied its kinaesthetic and visual symbolism detected three forms of the *simulog*: a healing ritual, a dance drama and a cultural exhibition dance. All the forms are visual, bodily expressions of Santo Niño veneration, which convey statements about local and national identity, past and present, commercial and spiritual power, society and the individual. Santo Niño, manipulated by parade dancers, becomes a vessel for different meanings and concepts: it is an object of public religious devotion, a tourist attraction and thereby a financial gain for the commercial community. The procession transmits a spirit of cooperation and 'Cebuano-ness'. It facilitates physical experiences of sacrifice and prayer, and it displays and influences general concepts such as "beauty, formality, sincerity, gratitude, and mercifulness".¹¹

Starting with the first encounter, the foreign Santo Niño was treated as an orphaned deity. The survival of the image in the indigenous setting, free of missionary control for over 44 years, favoured the unique potential of the image to be appropriated and translated into local contexts for diverse spiritual needs and purposes. New origin myths emerged. One of the most popular narrates how the image arrived in Cebu as a piece of firewood in a fisherman's net. During the night, by the hut of the fisherman, the burnt wood was transformed into the figure of a little child.¹² In such a myth, which exists in several variants, and in so many other legends about the miraculous Niño, his Spanish origin is nearly made invisible.

Sally Ann Ness emphasises the "high degree of fluency in the translation of the Niño back and forth between foreign and local cultural terms, as well as the remarkably permanent residential status in the provincial city of Cebu"; a process in which the "Niño image emerged as an ideal symbol of Cebuano regional ethnic identity and, on certain occasions, as a symbol of Philippine national identity."¹³ During the struggle for national independence, the members of the Katipunan

by yells of exaltation. Oftentimes they called him Niño, and it was especially the colour of his skin and the nose, which caused admiration and enthusiasm.

¹¹ Ness (1992), p. 130.

¹² Tenazas (1965), pp. 56 ff. When the image was found in Cebu, it was ebony black; the myth explains the mahogany colour. For further examples of the rich Santo Niño folklore see Tenazas (1965), pp. 54-77; Eugenio, ed. (1996), pp. 74-87.

¹³ Ness (1992), p. 78.

revolutionary movement used "Long live the Katipunan! Viva Santo Niño!" as their rallying cry to counter the "Viva España!" of the Spanish troops.

The attractiveness of the image of Santo Niño in the Philippines rests on its potential as an iconic messenger of God Almighty, but also on its capacities for emotional transformation. In the image, conflicting hierarchies and power relations are dissolved, at least for a moment.

While its royal bearing and adornment clearly conveyed messages about the hierarchies and power structures that it was frequently employed to reinforce in the society at large, the image nevertheless also represented the hope and the destiny of meek and vulnerable social figures to belong as well, during a moment of miraculous reflection, to the highest ranks of the Philippine omnipotent.¹⁴

The dwarf-like nature of the image, its smallness, was and is its weapon, not its weakness, as Ness comments:

"Its minuscule scale effected a magnification of the space around it, creating an almost tangible aura of greatness in its chapel. It was at once a tiny and an immense presence, and it was its very tininess that intensified its immensity. To approach the Santo Niño was to confirm and grasp enormity in a profoundly intimate way."¹⁵

The Christian conversion of the archipelago was, as Ness stresses, "largely a result of (...) 'saint-centered' religious activities".¹⁶ The encounter of local spirits with the saints of Iberian Catholicism resulted in an amalgamation, but could also produce a "clash of spirits", as Filomeno Aguilar phrased it.¹⁷

We must emphasise that the transmission of the new religion was a process of image transmission. The history of the global spread of Christianity is not only the history of ideas and doctrines; it is also closely connected with the history of image transfer, visual communication and the media. This holds true especially for the era of Iberian expansion. Counter-Reformation Catholicism is characterised by its valorisation of visual media and the visual imagination in general. In his 'global history

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 59 f. Ness refers in a footnote (p. 247) to Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Savage Mind*, in which he "notes the capacity of miniatures to condense and simplify the quality of the objects they represent, and to facilitate the comprehension of a complex object in so doing."

¹⁶ Ness (1992), p. 74.

¹⁷ Aguilar (1998).

of Christianity', David Chidester points to the fact that when Ignatius of Loyola declared his militant mission to the world, he "also introduced a reformation of the imagination" by inventing techniques of visualisation and working with mental imagery, emotions and the internal senses.¹⁸

The Spanish missionaries coming to the Philippines were, of course, fully aware of the power of images and they tried to control their interpretation and related devotional practices. In the case of Santo Niño, control did not work well, if at all. The indigenous take over was favoured by the fact that there is no authoritative scriptural reference to Christ as a boy of four or five years of age. From a biblical perspective, Sally Ann Ness mentions, "the Santo Niño was something of a blank slate" and was therefore "uniquely suited to being made over in such a local fashion, regardless of what ideological purposes might be served in so doing and for whom."¹⁹

Christ the Tragic Victim

The process of the translation of the Niño into the local culture occurred without reference to textual authority. It was, instead, authorised by indigenous myth and legends. The image of Christ the tragic victim, another equally important religious image in the Philippines, was adopted in a different way. While Santo Niño was a 'blank slate' icon, the image of Christ the victim arrived with a detailed narration of suffering, torture, sacrifice and murder. Since the High Middle Ages, when Christ's fleshly body became the central image promoted by theological and devotional emphasis, religious sentiment in the West has been generated, modelled and channelled through depictions of Christ's suffering. The biblical text is translated into pictures, and consequently into emotional reaction.²⁰

¹⁸ Chidester (2001), p. 355.

¹⁹ Ness (1992), p. 75.

²⁰ It was Christ the resurrected king and not the suffering human being Jesus who was the central image during the first one thousand years of the history of Western Christianity. In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, however, a spiritual change took place. The political, oftentimes heated and bloody struggle of the church for complete independence from secular control was accompanied by a thorough moral reform of the clergy. Since that period, the story of Christ's torture and killing has become the master narrative of that religion, and the instrument of his execution, the cross, represents the core of Christianity. The fascination with the wounded body and the murder of the founder of Christian religion is intimately connected with the cultural history of the West. McGinn et al. eds. (1987); Constable (1998); Beckwith (1993); Nirenberg (1997), pp. 16–25.

In the context of non-European cultures, the image of Christ the Victim had to remain enigmatic without knowledge of the biblical passion story. The understanding of the textual narration, however, depended upon its translation into the vernacular.

The first translation of the story of Christ into Tagalog, the language spoken in Manila and the neighbouring provinces of central Luzon, was the *Doctrina Christiana* in 1593, followed by *vocabularios* and *devocionarios* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the beginning of the eighteenth century another religious text genre appeared, the *Pasyon*. The first ascertainable *Pasyon*, published in 1703, was written by the Filipino Gaspar Aquino de Belen, who worked as a printer in the Jesuit *Imprenta de la Compañía*. Belen's *Pasyon* is a 980-verse poem, which narrates the passion and death of Jesus, supplemented by the author's own exhortations to Christian virtue.²¹ The *Tagalog Pasyon* by Belen served as the model for further passion poems that have appeared in diverse languages of the archipelago like Iloko, Pangasinan, Kampampangan, Ibanag, Samareño, Bikol, Hiligaynon, and Cebuano. In 1814 the Tagalog narrative called *Pasyon Henesis* or *Pasyong Pilapil* was published. It was influenced by Belen's *Pasyon*, but widened the frame of reference. The *Pasyon* poem is not a translation of the biblical story in a philological sense, but rather a peculiar interpretation, which expands the spatial and temporal frames of a reworked passion story. The *Pasyon Henesis*, which became the most popular and influential up to the present, covers the following sequences: "(a) from Creation to the Deluge, (b) from Mary's conception to the Annunciation, (c) from the infancy of Jesus to his Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, (d) Mary's Death and Assumption, and (e) Empress Helena's discovery of Christ's Cross, and the Last Judgement."²² The narration is interrupted by *aral*, short didactic comments, which explain the moral value of a particular episode. The biblical story is therefore contextualised in the life-world of the ordinary people by the *aral*.

In the nineteenth century the *Pasyon* became the most widespread text form in the Philippines.²³ The tremendous popularity of the *Pasyon* was a result of the ritual chanting of the text, called *pabasa*. The chant is usually done *a capella* in a *bisita*, a small chapel, in homes, on street corners or in a temporary shelter. The *pabasa* is held during Holy Week, oftentimes as a

²¹ For the history of the textual tradition of the Filipino *Pasyon* see Javellana (1988) and Lumbera (1968).

²² Francisco (1993), p. 86.

²³ Tiongson (1976).

non-stop event, starting on Palm Sunday and ending on Holy Saturday night. The chanters are divided into two factions responding to one another antiphonically. After a couple of hours the tired chanters are replaced by others waiting on the margins. The *pabasa* is a fiesta-like social event. Food is distributed for all singers, listeners and guests, even to strangers who just drop by. The *pabasa* rite became popular during the nineteenth century along with the *sinakulo*. The *sinakulo* is a kind of passion play based on the *Pasyon* text and possibly evolved from the *pabasa*. Parts of the passion story are played by lay-actors in colourful costumes in the streets. Some *sinakulo* have been played as fully developed passion dramas on stage for seven nights during Holy Week, other *sinakulo* were arranged as *via crucis* processions through the parish, where, at certain stations, episodes from the *Pasyon* were chanted and acted out.

Sinakulo existed as early as the eighteenth century, but there is no certainty as to when and how the *sinakulo* first appeared exactly. However, the proximity of the dramatizations of Christ's life with the chanting of the *Pasyon* is evident. Most often, staging the *sinakulo* is combined with the chanting of the *Pasyon*.²⁴

The aesthetics, the performative means and the social context of the staging of the *pabasa* and the *sinakulo* all reveal elements of indigenous Southeast Asian theatre forms. The analogy between the singing of the *Pasyon* and the Javanese *wayang kulit* puppet theatre is obvious, as Ricardo Trimillos has ascertained. Thus, a Southeast Asian model of theatre performance can be detected, which is, in the Philippine context, only masked by the Christian content.²⁵

The *Pasyon* together with the *sinakulo* replaced the traditional epics. In the pre-Hispanic Philippines, a variety of oral literature was known. Epics, poetic narrations of ancestors, of warriors or of beautiful women were widespread, but disappeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁶ Like the traditional epics, the *pabasa* and the *sinakulo* offer a coherent interpretation of man's destiny in history and the cosmos. And they tell the story of the exemplary life of God's son.

The vernacular *Pasyon*, needed for the performance of the *pabasa*, is conveniently available in very cheap booklets, sold at church entrances throughout the country. The copies not only contain the textual narrative but also an opulent pictorial narrative. The black and white illustrations are of Western origin. It is the pictorial language of popular religious prints of

²⁴ Javellana (1988), p. 6.

²⁵ Trimillos (1992).

²⁶ Scott (1994), pp. 96–103.

nineteenth century Europe and abundantly reproduced in the Philippines in the *Pasyon* booklets. (Fig. 3)

Thus, the master narrative of Christendom was vernacularised and popularised by the *Pasyon* poem, and, simultaneously, a certain pictorial interpretation of the passion story was transmitted. Since naturalistic or portrait-like depictions of human and non-human beings were totally unknown in the pre-Hispanic Philippines, this new visual approach to reality was imported together with the new religion.



Fig. 3: Jesus Falls the First Time. European 19th century woodprint of the *Pasyon* Mahal booklet published by Sto. Niño Catholic House.

In colonial times the colourful statues of Christ and the saints, which were shown in churches and pompous processions, later supplemented by popular prints for home use, conveyed concepts of the "nature" of the supernatural realm of the Christian religion and its representatives, but also of beauty or suffering. The new form of visual perception and representation was an overwhelming success. In thousands of churches, chapels and home altars all over the Philippines, the saints remain European or at least Mediterranean in their physical appearance to this day. Pale skin, long noses and large eyes are highly appreciated, even worshipped, in this Asian country. Race, beauty and power, be it political or spiritual, are intimately connected. It is 'imitation', which serves as a means of empowerment for the powerless. Imitating Christ, so the missionaries taught, is an act of piety, at least to a certain degree. Imitation

in the religious context was a means of obtaining power in a basically unequal, nevertheless reciprocal system of a patron-client relationship. In the context of modernity imitation sometimes becomes mimicry. As Fenella Cannell lucidly shows, beauty contests in the post-colonial context are mimetic rituals representing the power and beauty of an imagined America, the second coloniser of the Philippines, in order to participate in its power and beauty. The desire for nearness to the powerful, be it Christ or America, is realised by imitation with the expectation of being rewarded with power.²⁷

The pictorial programme and aesthetics of Hispanic Counter-Reformation Catholicism shaped not only the sense of beauty and power, but also bodily experiences through acts of imitation.

Costumes and behaviour of the actors in the *sinakulo* plays were directly informed by the visual programme of Hispanic Catholicism. As a further consequence of these image transmissions, the real enactment of Christ's passion, the *penitensiya*, evolved besides *pabasa* and *sinakulo*.

Persons who vowed to carry a cross for hours in the blazing heat are usually dressed as the *Nazareno* with a maroon tunic, golden cincture, wig, crown of thorns and rays of light made of bronze.²⁸ Like Santo Niño, the *Nazareno* belongs to the Hispanic image-import of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Every bystander knows, however, that the penitents, despite the costumes they wear, are not actors in a passion play. Their intention is neither entertainment nor catechetical instruction, but a matter of personal concern rarely motivated by sin and repentance, but, instead, by sickness and familiar obligations.²⁹

The custom of *pasang cruz*, carrying the cross as the result of a vow is very widespread, but even more widespread is the vow to flagellate. Flagellation was introduced by the Spaniards as a monastic exercise, *disciplina*, usually practised privately behind closed doors or in the church's gloom on every Friday throughout the year. The indigenous Philippine male population enthusiastically accepted flagellation, and they performed this bloody practice in public. Thirty years after the arrival of the Spaniards, self-flagellation was already a mass phenomenon in parts of the archipelago, which caused the church to forbid the practice. The prohibition, however, turned out to be ineffective. Up to the present, ritual

²⁷ Cannell (1999). Gender politics and the aesthetics of beauty and power is also the topic of Mark Johnson's study on transvestite performances in the Southern Philippines. Cf. Johnson (1997).

²⁸ Javellana (1994), p. 7.

²⁹ Cf. Zialcita (1986).

self-flagellation has had an uninterrupted tradition for more than 350 years. (Fig. 4)

However, the combination of *pabasa*—chanting of the *Pasyon*, *sinakulo*—performing episodes of the passion drama on stage or in the streets, and *penitensiya*—rites of self-mortification such as carrying the cross and self-flagellation, evolved during the nineteenth century.

In the second half of the twentieth century another ritual element of the Holy Week celebration was invented: ritual crucifixion. Ritual crucifixions are confined to a few places, mainly in the region near the capital of Manila. As media events, however, crucifixions are *known* all over the archipelago. (Fig. 5)

The first Philippine crucifixion took place in 1961. It was a faith healer, Arsenio Añosa, who was nailed to a cross in the town of San Fernando. His crucifixion was performed annually between 1961 and 1976. Prior to his first crucifixion, Añosa was a flagellant and by crucifixion he intended to get closer to Christ, closer than flagellation permitted. The anthropologist Nicholas Barker, who conducted fieldwork in San Fernando, understands Añosa's decision to be crucified in the context of a specific revival of religious self-flagellation, which was evident from the 1960s onwards. The revival of self-flagellation, starting in the early 1960s and reaching its peak in the late 1970s, was itself clearly fostered by the Philippine press (by sensational front-page headlines, news reports and photographs).³⁰ In the village of Kapitangan, situated in the rice growing flatlands of the province of Bulacan, the first crucifixion took place on Good Friday in 1977. Lucy Reyes, then a 16-year-old girl, was nailed to a cross, which was erected on a temporary stage made of wood and bamboo. Before crucifixion, Lucy had often been very sick. Her sickness was accompanied by states of unconsciousness and later by states of trance. It was Santo Niño, whom she met regularly during her trances, and it was the Holy Child, who ordered her being nailed to the cross. In return she was awarded healing power. Her crucifixion was repeated in 13 consecutive years. Since that time, Lucy has been copied by other individuals, mostly by women, who underwent crucifixion as part of their

³⁰ Nicholas Barker conducted anthropological fieldwork in San Fernando in 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990 and 1991. He met Añosa personally and was able to interview him before he died in 1993. See Barker (n.d.).



Fig. 4: A Philippine 'Kristo' carrying the cross due to his vow. Good Friday 1995, Kapitangan, province of Bulacan (Philippines). Courtesy of Buboy Dionisio.

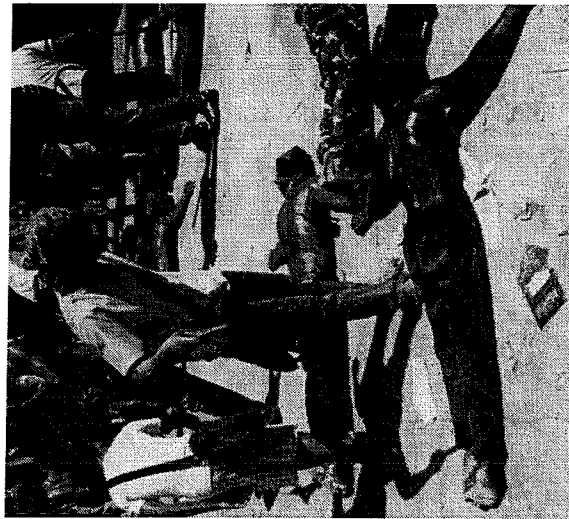


Fig. 5: Flagellants in the church yard of Kapitangan, province of Bulacan (Philippines). Semana santa, 1997. Photo by author.

career as healers.³¹ Both Lucy and Añosa, as well as all the other persons nailed to a cross, use the ritual of the ultimate reenactment of Christ's death in order to be as near to Jesus as possible and in order to show this in public. Thus, crucifixion can be conceived as a performance, which is ultimately aimed at the creation of presence—the presence of Jesus' death in the churchyard of Kapitangan. The occurrence of this temporal and spatial shift is the central and most important moment of that performative event. The authenticity of the realisation of Christ's death in a Philippine village depends not only on the actor on stage, but equally on the eyewitnesses and their emotional participation. (Fig. 6)



Fig. 6: Lucy Reyes, nailed to the cross in the church yard of Kapitangan, province of Bulacan (Philippines), 1985. Courtesy of Lucy Reyes.

Returning the Gaze—'Provincialising Europe'

The conquest of the extra-European world was not only a military endeavour but also a hermeneutic and meaning-making event, both on the colonial frontier and at home. Imperial aspirations stimulated imaginative engagement. The "making of" and the techniques of "othering" are well

³¹ In the years 1996, 1997 and 1998 I carried out fieldwork in Kapitangan as part of a research project on 'Philippine Passion Rituals' at the Science of Religion Department of the University of Bremen/Germany. The ethnographic findings on Philippine crucifixion and flagellation, as well as a historical study on practices of self-mortification in Western Christianity, are elaborated in my post-doctoral thesis. See Bräunlein (2003).

studied in the fields of literature, history and cultural anthropology. Discernable are strategies of spatial and temporal distancing as well as the greed of incorporating "the other". Since Edward Said published his *Orientalism* in 1978, many scholars brilliantly analysed the power of knowledge, imagination and representation in the dynamics of cross-cultural encounters.³²

Despite the fruitful and enlightening results of such scholarly work, it is the gaze of 'imperial eyes',³³ which is primarily being scrutinised in this discourse. We are well informed about colonial desires and the powerful work of imagination and its effects on the construction of cultural differences.³⁴ And we know, with the help of Lacan and Žižek, that hegemonic ideologies must have recourse to fantasies about the others.³⁵ However, modes of perception of the colonised and their potential to renegotiate power-relations by literal and visual discourses are lesser known. The assertion of a world, divided into the powerful West and a victimised rest, endlessly narrated and reconfirmed by (neo-)conservative and (post)Marxist historians and social scientists alike, came under critique by indigenous scholars of the former colonies. Persistent dichotomies—'active-reactive', 'centre-periphery', 'developed-undeveloped'—are questioned. Neither the injustice of the world system nor the devastating effects of colonialism are denied. Desired, however, is a turn in scientific perspective. Dipesh Chakrabarty, criticising the 'asymmetric ignorance' of the West and the Euro-centricity of history writing, proposes the anti-hegemonic strategy of 'provincialising Europe' by returning the gaze.³⁶

³² Besides Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), I will only mention here a few of the more seminal works: Todorov (1982), Fabian (1983), Greenblatt (1991), Lestringant (1994), Mignolo (1995).

³³ Cf. Pratt (1992).

³⁴ Young (1995).

³⁵ See for example Žižek (1997).

³⁶ "Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history, historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate [...] The everyday paradox of third-world social science is that we find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of 'us' eminently useful in understanding our societies. What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant? Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?" Chakrabarty quoted in Loomba (1998), p. 255.

Translation and Conversion

An outstanding contribution to such a strategy is offered by the Filipino scholar Vicente Rafael in his work *Contracting Colonialism*.³⁷ Rafael examines the missionary attempts to convert Manila's Tagalog to Christianity by translating Spanish sermons into Tagalog. Encoded in the religious texts were Spanish notions of authority and exchange, and through the translation, new power relationships were introduced into Tagalog culture. The traditional *datu* system was relocated "into a divinely ordained system of patron-client relationship, and [...] the *datu*'s position finally found a stable source of authority by being linked to a centralized spiritual-cum-political realm."³⁸

By considering the Tagalog responses to this process, Rafael elucidates that colonial power was not solely implemented in a one-way direction. The cultural pattern of Tagalog reciprocity, along with cultural concepts such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *hiya* (shame) and as a different concept of power and exchange, contains a mechanism for both resisting Spanish hierarchies and participating in the process of conversion. For the Spaniards, translation was aimed at the reduction of native language and culture to accessible objects of imperial intervention. For the Tagalogs, "translation was a process less than internalizing colonial-Christian conventions than of evading their totalizing grip by repeatedly marking the differences between their language and interests and those of the Spaniards."³⁹ Rafael unravels the complex web of submission and resistance and he does so by depicting the colonised not as mere passive recipients, but as interactive subjects with distinct intentions and the ability to form power relations and interests in the colonial setting. By looking at the translation or vernacularisation of conversion, Rafael is able to discern "alternative native responses to the dominant and dominating interpretation of the past."⁴⁰

It was the passion story's imaginative and emotional repertoire, which lends itself to a multitude of such "alternative native responses". During

³⁷ Rafael (1993) [1988].

³⁸ Aguilar (1998), p. 56. In the pre-Hispanic Philippines a three-class social structure was widespread. The *datu* belonged to the ruling class and were heads of local communities, supported by followers (*timawa* or *maharlika*). The third class consisted of slaves (*alipin*), bondsmen or indebted persons. See Scott (1994), pp. 219 ff.

³⁹ Rafael (1993), p. 211.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the nineteenth century, the widely familiar, popular version of the passion story, "the non-official readings of the Christian master text"⁴¹ provided "peasants with a framework for comprehending their circumstances, a language for expressing hopes of liberation from oppression, and a rationale for acting to restructure their world."⁴² The Passion, conceived as a means of domination by the Spaniards, became the "grammar of dissent" for the revolutionaries, as Reynaldo Ileto famously demonstrated in his book *Pasyon and Revolution*.⁴³

At the beginning of the twentieth first century, the passion story continues to provide spiritual power and discourses of cultural identity, as do the *Semana Santa* rites such as self-crucifixion and self-flagellation show.

Translating Images—Transmitting Religion

Vicente Rafael links socio-cultural and religious processes of localisation and vernacularisation in Filipino history. Applying such an analytical view to studying local history enables us, so he writes, "to consider the history of a native society in terms other than those set by the reified and reifying categories of 'Christianization' and 'Hispanization'."⁴⁴

Henceforth, the term 'translation' denotes far more than a philological skill. Neither "the word, nor the text, but the culture becomes the operational 'unit' of translation", as André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett

⁴¹ Ileto (1992), p. 212.

⁴² Machado (1981), p. 36.

⁴³ Ileto considers his study as 'history from below', analysing a variety of folk sources, such as poetry, songs and prayers and documents, which reflect the standpoints of the participants of religious movements. Published in 1979, Ileto's work had tremendous influence on young Philippine nationalist intellectuals. Ileto's 'Passion and Revolution' is a book about peasant resistance during the revolutionary period in Philippine history and it serves perfectly as an allegory for the present. Cf. Ileto (1979).

⁴⁴ Rafael (1993), p. 15. Rafael's work is deeply impressed by O.W. Wolters' historical findings on "cultural commonalities and practices in the region which predated the transmission of Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and Western influences and persisted well into the colonial and postcolonial periods." Wolters describes the history of early Southeast Asia as a series of local histories. "Change within these subregions can then be understood in terms of the vernacularization, as it were, of foreign influences in local contexts. This notion of local history as entailing a history of vernacularization resonates with the problem of translation [...]." Rafael (1993), p. 15, cf. O.W. Wolters (1982).

characterised the 'cultural turn' in translation studies, which was undoubtedly stimulated by Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism*.⁴⁵ Here I would like to suggest that the concept of cultural translation, which Rafael sees as "the root metaphor for the exchange between the Spanish and the native",⁴⁶ ought to be used as an analytical tool for image transmissions and religious conversions in general.

In the examples of *simulog*, *pabasa*, *sinakulo*, *penitensiya* and ritual crucifixion I directed attention to processes of image transmission, which shape religious orientation and identity on a collective as well as on an individual level. Impressive images of Christ, the cute Child and the suffering *Nazareno*, are translated, interpreted and thereby locally re-created.

In order to contextualise acts of image translation, it seems useful to distinguish between iconic images and narrative images. The latter invite and allow viewers to create a story, both mentally and/or by mimetic action. Finding the plot of the story, however, is not an arbitrary act. Narrative images are closely connected to textual authority and to performative genres such as staged drama or religious processions. Christ the tragic victim serves as a proto-type of a narrative image, whereas Christ the Child can be considered an iconic image, which allows a greater variety of interpretation and symbolic appropriation.

A further distinction may also be of help for the study of image transmission. If we take into consideration that there are three dimensions by which power is culturally negotiated and implemented, namely the practical, the symbolic and the ideological dimension, we are able to discern sublime, underlying interests, motives and effects of image transmissions.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lefevere and Bassnett (1990), p. 8. For the academic field of post-colonial 'translation studies' see also Niranjana (1992), Robinson (1998), Bassnett and Trivedi eds. (1999).

⁴⁶ Francisco (1993), p. 82.

⁴⁷ The distinction of a practical, symbolic and ideological dimension is inspired by Max Weber's concept of authority. It is needless to say that the three dimensions interact and are thus not fully separable.

Image Acts and Possession Cults

The activity of translation and re-interpretation of images can lead to what I propose to call, 'image acts'.⁴⁸ Elderly ladies dancing with Santo Niño replicas in the *simulog* parades, self-flagellating youths, a man wearing a tunic, a wig and carrying a heavy cross, or a Lucy, who is literally nailed to the cross, all of them are performing image acts. And by their ritualised activities moral values, sentiments and a certain interpretation of the world are communicated. Images acted out, so I propose, can be analysed as communicative events, which release inherent political, cultural, emotional and religious energies.⁴⁹

The term image act is inspired by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann,⁵⁰ who in his studies of ancient Egyptian image communication drew on John L. Austin's speech act theory and to Irving Goffman's frame analysis, and borrowed from anthropologist Liza Bakewell, who also suggested the application of Austin's speech act theory to images.⁵¹

Religious images, communicated in the public sphere through dramatised and bodily action, are emotionally moving. Images set in motion and the emotions of actors and spectators are interwoven. Drama, theatre, ritual action—all kinds of performative expression—have the potential of concrete immediacy and are predestined to impress forcefully. Religion is heavily dependent on concrete immediacy, or put in another way, on impression management. Most religions are based on a set of rather 'hard-to-believe' historical events, 'hard-to-follow' rules, and odd explanations of the inconsistencies of this and the next world. Religions, therefore, rely on ritualisation and visualisation in order to make abstract

⁴⁸ The concept of 'image acts' and its possible application to the study of religions is elaborated in my paper on 'Bildakte'. Cf. Bräunlein (2004).

⁴⁹ Inspiring for such an approach are, for example, Elkins (2004), and Wulf and Zirkas eds. (2005).

⁵⁰ Cf. Assmann (1990). According to Assmann, speech acts are only one specific case of diverse social and communicative acts. *Ikonomisches Handeln*—iconic action—can be considered a further one. Failure or success of iconic communication, as well as the related production of meaning, depend on the situative contexts, cultural institutions and worldview.

⁵¹ Cf. Bakewell (1998). Liza Bakewell refers, among other examples, to the destruction of Lenin images in post-socialist Russia, and to the public burning of Uncle Sam puppets in Iran as forms of image acts in the political arena. Recently the German art historian Horst Bredekamp also referred to 'Bildakte' (image acts) by reassembling images (photos, monuments) and historical key events. Cf. Bredekamp (2004).

statements of religious truths plausible and to keep the charismatic authority of founding events and figures alive. It was Clifford Geertz, who stated in his famous work on the *Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, that it is visible, ritualised performance, a "metaphysical theatre" in that case, whose purpose it is "to present an ontology and, by presenting it, to make it happen—make it actual."⁵²

Religious images are media by and through which religious views of the world are materialised and communicated. The effectiveness of these religious media lies in their characteristic faculty of being *Unwahrscheinlichkeitsverstärker* (re-enforcers of improbability), as Niklas Luhmann coined it in his media-theory.⁵³ Image acts function as *Unwahrscheinlichkeitsverstärker*.

Finally, I want to refer to Fritz Kramer's *The Red Fez*.⁵⁴ In this impressive study, Kramer elaborates a theory of mimesis derived from Erich Auerbach and stimulated by Godfrey Lienhardt's concept of *passiones*. African images of Europe and Europeans—in sculpture, masquerades, as a feather, car, or as the red fez—are representations of the powerful other. Possession is characterised as the state of being overwhelmed by external experiences and images. Such extraordinary, powerful and impressive images are interpreted by the natives as external agents, with the capacity of possessing human bodies. During this state of possession, the embodied being is acknowledged as an other within the self. The concept of agency and the individual is different from the Western idea of agency and the self. Thus, possession is not an internal psychic process (of dissociation or hallucination etc.), but the visit of an external being. By possession rituals the overwhelming other is visualised

⁵² Geertz (1980), pp. 102–104.

⁵³ Luhmann, generally, characterizes mass-media as *Unwahrscheinlichkeitsverstärker*. Human beings landing on the moon is a highly improbable event. Camera-transmitted pictures made this event not only probable but real, and, additionally, created a new myth of the provable civilisatory progress. Passenger airplanes crashing into the New York twin-towers and reducing them to ashes is a highly improbable scenario, but 24-hour of non-stop TV-images made the unbelievable real. Communication with God, saints, demons or other transcendent beings is highly improbable, but becomes feasible through religious media. It is hard to believe that a criminal, sentenced to death by crucifixion, is the son of God, but through Christian liturgy and by penitents, such a strange story is not only permanently memorized but also emotionally accepted. Cf. Luhmann (1996); Luhmann (1997), especially Chapter 2, Kommunikationsmedien, §§ I-IV, pp. 190–249. See also the inspiring media history by Hörisch (2004), pp. 67 ff.

⁵⁴ Kramer (1993).

bodily, interpreted and assimilated. Mimesis, Kramer argues, is an alternative form of knowledge to Western rationalism. The African possession cult, the "spectacle of the other", therefore, is an indigenous form of ethnography, which deepens the understanding of human and non-human beings. Images, imagination, emotion and embodiment are at play, offering redemptive assumptions of otherness.

Fritz Kramer's insights are helpful, for instance, in understanding Filipino flagellants and persons nailed to crosses. Christian images—especially under the historical condition of colonialism—can be considered images of the overwhelming other. Imitating Christ in a literal way can be considered a form of possession cult, which aims at the assimilation of the irritating other and, equally, at participating in its presumed power. In fact, the majority of faith healers in the contemporary Philippines are regularly possessed by Santo Niño, the *Nazareno* or any other Christian Saint, and with their help they gain the power to heal. Obviously, the contemporary faith healers, one hundred percent pure Catholics, as they would insist, are the descendants of the pre-Hispanic shamanic healers, of whom we know thanks to Spanish chroniclers.⁵⁵

Under the conditions of colonialism, processes of image transmission, as I have tried to show, are closely connected with the restructuring and negotiating of power relations, colliding worldviews, religious conversion and assimilation. The concrete immediacy of images in motion has transforming effects on actors and the audience. Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, among others, tell us, that reality is never a simple "given", but always a construct. Perception, understood as an intentional activity, is inseparable from the creation and representation of reality. By studying image transmission from a religio-historical and trans-cultural perspective, we can learn more, so I hope, about our own fundamental perceptive and creative processes as well as those of the others.

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⁵⁵ The traditional priests were called *baylan*, shamans subject to spirit possession. Cf. Scott, (1994), p. 168.

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