

The *Giwang-Giwang* Devotion in Sta. Ursula Parish, Binangonan, Rizal: Understanding Religion from Below

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Abstract: This article investigates the celebration of *Giwang-Giwang* processional devotion during the Good Friday *Prusisyon ng Paglilibing* in Binangonan, Rizal, Philippines. Through ethnographic field work, it documents the twelve-hour procession, the ritual involving thousands of predominantly male devotees intensely swaying the *carroza* (carriage) of the *Santo Entierro* (dead Jesus). It utilizes participant-observation to position the ethnographer within the moving mass, treating the body as an epistemological tool to capture the sensory-saturated ritual. The study integrates the conceptual frameworks of Filipino (Enriquez, Mercado, Iletto) and Western scholars (Mauss, Durkheim, Turner, Bourdieu) to provide both grounded and theoretically elevated insights. Findings reveal that through shared physical suffering, the *mamamasan* (bearers) transcend ordinary consciousness to experience divine grace (*biyaya*) and channel male energy into communal cooperation and solidarity. This characterizes their expression of a somatized spirituality. Ultimately, this ritual serves as an anchor for Binangonan's local identity and collective memory.

Keywords: *Giwang-Giwang* • Somatic Catholicism • Solidarity • *Damay* • *Malasakit* • Embodiment • Folk Religion

Introduction

In contrast to official liturgical celebrations (such as the Sunday Mass), popular devotional practices (like the annual processions of saints or images of Jesus) consistently draw thousands of devotees from all walks of life. This disparity highlights a distinct form of widespread mass appeal that outpaces formal church gatherings¹ and

¹ See Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press,

the faithful continue to participate in these popular traditions despite repeated reminders from religious officials, like this one:

The faithful should be made conscious of the preeminence of the Liturgy over any other possible form of legitimate Christian prayer. While sacramental actions are *necessary* to life in Christ, the various forms of popular piety are properly *optional*. Such is clearly proven by the Church's precept which obliges attendance at Sunday Mass. No such obligation, however, has obtained with regard to pious exercises, notwithstanding their worthiness or their widespread diffusion. (*Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, §11)²

Elevating the official and obligatory liturgy over popular devotions creates an artificial binary in Christian thinking (or split in religious practice), dividing expressions of faith into the “essential” and the “optional.”³ This hierarchical division often stems from a patronizing attitude toward the laity's popular traditions. Although the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (§11) attempts to reconcile this tension by warning against “opposition or marginalization,” pastoral reality tells a different story. In practice, labeling popular piety as “optional” inevitably degrades it to

1995); see also Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), especially chapters 5 (The Materiality of Lived Religion) and 6 ((Lived Religious Emotions).

² *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, accessed June 16, 2026, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html

³ Cf. the collection of essays in Ellen Badone, ed., *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

something inferior—an indication of inherent systemic inequality that theoretical reassurances cannot resolve.

Nevertheless, the *Directory* recognizes the profound importance of popular devotions. It acknowledges their rich nature, showing how they express both popular piety and the collective mind and heart of the people.⁴ Furthermore, the *Directory* notes that these practices are uniquely “capable of moving the minds and imagination of the people who felt drawn toward them” (§24).⁵ Consequently, the document frames these optional practices as powerful tools that directly strike a chord with the faithful.

Since the dawn of Christianity, the faithful have embraced popular devotions as a vital way to experience and express their beliefs. Various cultural and local practices were gradually incorporated into mainstream liturgical celebrations, paving the way for a sanctioned form of syncretism. As the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* states, “the Church has never hesitated in incorporating into the liturgical rites forms drawn from individual, domestic and community piety” (§23)⁶. It explicitly stresses that “the optional nature of pious exercises should in no way be taken to imply an underestimation or even disrespect for such practices. The way forward in this area requires a correct and wise appreciation of the many riches of popular piety, of the potentiality of these same riches and of the commitment to the Christian life which they inspire” (§12).⁷

⁴ See Ambrose Mong, *Power of Popular Piety: A Critical Examination* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019).

⁵ See *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, §24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, §12.

Consequently, contemporary popular devotions must be assessed in light of the *Directory's* valuation.⁸

The *Directory* thus insists that the liturgical renewal mandated by the Second Vatican Council must inspire a correct evaluation and revitalization of pious exercises and popular devotions. It holds that popular piety should be infused with four key characteristics:

- A Biblical Spirit: Christian prayer must always connect, directly or indirectly, to Sacred Scripture.
- A Liturgical Spirit: Devotions should prepare the faithful for, or echo, the mysteries celebrated in liturgical actions.
- An Ecumenical Spirit: Practices should respect the traditions of other Christians without being unnecessarily restricted by them.
- An Anthropological Spirit: Devotions must preserve culturally meaningful symbols while avoiding outdated expressions, striving instead to dialogue with contemporary sensibilities. (§12).

These expectations serve as formal standards—yardsticks against which devotions are measured. However, the apparent lack of these prescribed “spirits” does not mean the devotion itself is insincere or erroneous. Rather, popular devotions are spontaneous expressions that reveal the devotees’ state of mind and heart which does not show strict conformity to doctrines. Ultimately, expecting conscious/rational (head-level) adherence to formal theology overlooks how heartfelt devotions truly reflect personal character or communitarian memories and inner dispositions.⁹

⁸ See Kevin Maicom, “Examining Filipino Popular Piety in the light of Vatican II’s *Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*,” *Ecclesial Futures* 5, no. 2 (2024): 39-54.

⁹ Pope Francis, referring to popular piety as “popular spirituality” or “the people’s mysticism”, affirms: “It is truly ‘a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly’. Nor is it devoid of content; rather it discovers and expresses that content more by way of symbols

Utilizing an ethnographic approach and integrating the conceptual frameworks of Filipino (Enriquez, Mercado, Iletto) and Western scholars (Mauss, Durkheim, Turner, Bourdieu), this research provides an in-depth documentation and interpretation of the *Giwang-Giwang* religious practice at the Santa Ursula Parish in Bina-ngonan, Rizal. It explores how individual and communal faith is externalized through embodied participation in religious rituals. By immersing themselves in these sacred spaces, the researchers gathered firsthand data via participant observation and direct interaction with devotees. This methodology investigates how faith is manifested through *panata*¹⁰ (sacred vows) and acts of self-sacrifice, allowing the devotional practice to reveal itself organically. Consequently, the study yields nu-

than by discursive reasoning, and in the act of faith greater accent is placed on *credere in Deum* than on *credere Deum*.” *Evangelii gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World,” §124; https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#The_evangelizing_power_of_popular_pietty.

See also Stephen Bevans, “Pope Francis’s Missiology of Attraction,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 43, no. 1 (2019): 20-28; Mong, *Power of Popular Piety*. Chapter 3 on Pinoy Piety.

¹⁰ “*Panata* ay isang pangako sa pagitan ng namamanata at ng pinamamanataan. Isa itong pangako na ibinibigay ng isang tao sa kanyang santo kapalit ng pagsasakatuparan ng kanyang hiling.” Cecilia S. Dela Paz, “Ang Problematisasyon ng Poon at Panata: Ang Relasyon ng Sining at Paniniwala sa Lipunang Pilipino,” G.E. Professorial Chair Lecture, Philippines: University of the Philippines, February 27, 2001, p. 22, cited in Rhodalyn C. Wani, *Ang Santo Giwang-Giwang: Paghubog sa Kamalayang Pilipino*, Tesis. University of the Philippines, 2006, p.42.

See also Wilson Espiritu, “Rethinking the Panata to the Nazareno of Quiapo,” *Journal of Global Catholicism* 7, no. 2 (2023): 8-29; Karl Gaspar, *The Masses are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2010).

anced insights that may challenge standard institutional definitions of the “anthropological spirit” pillar. To capture this sensory-saturated reality, the researchers embedded themselves directly within the crushing weight of the *mamamasan*, utilizing their own bodies as epistemological tools to understand the physical vulnerability and pressure points experienced by the devotees.¹¹ Navigating the ethical and physical reflexes of participating in such an intense ritual allows the ethnographer to analyze how the *mamamasan* collectively translate exhaustion into ecstasy, and physical pain into an experience of divine grace.

The Place

The *Giwang-Giwang* of Binangonan, Rizal, is an intense Good Friday procession featuring a grueling twelve-hour *traslación* (process of transfer) of the *Santo Entierro* (statue of the dead Jesus) to and from the Santa Ursula Parish. Driven by intense devotion, barefoot participants aggressively rock and sway the *carroza* (carriage) as it moves through the streets. The arduous journey begins as the statue leaves the church to symbolize Jesus’s path to the tomb, culminating hours later in its return to signify his final resting place.

Binangonan¹² is a first-class urban municipality reliant on the fishing and farming industries. It is nestled between the Sierra Madre mountains and Laguna de Bai, comprising 40 barangays (23 mainland and 17 island). Its

¹¹ Documentation may be accessed here: Midielee M. Ditablan, *The Giwang-Giwang Devotion in Sta. Ursula Parish, Binangonan, Rizal: Understanding the Devotion through Ethnographic Study, Historical Analysis and Theological Evaluation*. Unpublished Thesis. Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 2025.

¹² Binangonan, Municipality of. 2021. “Socio-Economic Profile: Land Use and Demographic Shifts,” *Official Portal of the Municipality of Binangonan, Rizal*, [binangonan-socio-economic-profile.pdf](#)

formal history began as an independent parish in 1621 under the Franciscan missionaries, later becoming an established town in 1737 and a municipality in 1900. Its most significant landmark is the Santa Ursula Parish, which has stood for over 400 years.

The Franciscans established the Church of St. Ursula in Binangonan initially as a stone structure supported by the local community. The parish underwent several administrative shifts between Franciscan, Jesuit, and Augustinian control before becoming independent in the 18th century, with the church remaining a center for traditional religious practices, including the feast of St. Ursula.

According to the Sisante-Silvestre Family, current owner of the *Santo Entierro* image, the first owner was a lady named Maria Tabangongo.¹³ But there are no details on her whereabouts or her descendants. The only thing certain was that all the images in Sta. Ursula Parish were all owned by the Church, and then they were distributed to different Catholic families who lived near the Church.

Religious images in Binangonan, including the *Giwang-Giwang* image (the *Santo Entierro* [the “*Amba*”¹⁴]), are historically linked to land ownership and managed during Sta. Ursula Parish processions by the *Encargados de Binangonan*, a group of image owners under the Parish’s Ministry of Evangelization. The *Seguidores*, an offshoot organization, ensure the smooth navigation of these images through streets during events such as Good Friday procession/*traslación*.

Two weeks before Holy Week (Domingo de Lazaro), the image of the *Santo Entierro* is moved from Sta.

¹³ Wani, *Ang Santo Giwang-Giwang*, 10.

¹⁴ *Santo Entierro* or *Santo Sepulcro* is the image of the dead Jesus as displayed in most Catholic Churches. In Binangonan, Rizal, it is called the *Amba*.

Ursula Parish to the Sisante-Silvestre family home in Sitio Dalig, Barangay Batingan which is two km. away. It has been the tradition in the parish that after a year in the church, the image is brought back to the owner's house, where it is cleaned and the clothes changed. The water used in "bathing" and the strands of hair would be distributed to the devotees. During its 14-day stay, the family hosts prayer vigils and prepares the image—cleaning and vesting it—for Good Friday. Devotees visit to pray, touch the image, or whisper their burdens to the "dead Jesus," believing he has the power to take their suffering with him in death.

The image is one of the many images that are included in the processions, especially on Holy Wednesday and Good Friday. The *Encargados de Binangonan* led and organized the processions in Sta. Ursula Parish which is under the guidance of the Ministry of Evangelization. This organization is composed of the owners of the images that are included in the processions. Its aim is to ensure the smooth flow of the procession of the images, which to this day consists of sixty-one images. Helping them is the organization called the *Seguidores*, which is an offshoot of the *Encargados*. They are responsible for the traffic flow of the procession, especially on Good Friday. The route would usually go to small streets, and the devotees will be gathered in one corner. They ensure that the images can maneuver and traverse the streets.¹⁵

¹⁵ From Jonathan Neil Tayco's (field researcher) transcript of interviews. Binangonan, Rizal, April 2025.

On Good Friday afternoon, a more recent tradition sees female devotees carry the image back to the church. This ensures women have a chance to bear the icon before men take over the heavy *baras* for the 5:00 PM funeral procession (*Prusisyon ng Paglilibing*). It will commence right after the Veneration of the Cross liturgy and the kissing of the Cross. The *Santo Entierro* is included in the *Ikalawang Yugto* (second part) which is followed by the images

An Extra-Ordinary Event

Every Good Friday, the lakeshore municipality of Binangonan, Rizal, transforms into a theater of popular piety. While traditional Philippine Catholic liturgies observe Christ's death with relative solemnity and silence, Binangonan erupts into the *Giwang-Giwang*—a dynamic, twelve-hour ritual procession. At its center is the *Santo Entierro*, a life-sized, antique wooden image of the dead Jesus interred in a heavy glass-and-wood *carroza* (carriage). Upon emerging from the parish church, the carriage is instantly engulfed by thousands of *mamamasan* (bearers)—a dense, surging sea of predominantly male devotees. Rather than following orderly, linear procession, the crowd energetically sways, pulls, swerves, and counter-pushes the heavy structure through narrow, sloping streets. This collective, unpredictable rocking motion—the *giwang*—creates a vibrant sensory landscape thick with the scent of melting wax, sweat, and hot asphalt, driven forward by the deafening, synchronized roar of a crowd navigating precarious turns.

of the *Mater Dolorosa*, St. John, *Maria Cleofe* and *Maria Jacobe*. The first group for the *Unang Yugto* (first part) is composed of persons or situations that became part of the life of Jesus in his mission and public ministry. The procession is over even before the image of *Santo Entierro* is moved out of the patio of the Church. At around 3:00 am on Black Saturday, the image was brought back into the Church, and the Funeral Rite was performed. The image stayed inside the Church until dawn and was brought back by the devotees to the house of *Camarero*/the owner (Silvestre-Sisante Family). This is based on the Christian belief that Christ resurrected at the break of dawn. The image is finally returned to the parish on Easter Monday. See the detailed description of the ritual in Midielee Ditanlan, *The Giwang-Giwang Devotion in Sta. Ursula Parish, Binangonan, Rizal: Understanding the Devotion through Ethnographic Study, Historical Analysis and Theological Evaluation*. Unpublished Thesis, Maryhill School of Theology, 2025.

To the uninitiated outsider or the orthodox institutional church, the *Giwang-Giwang* is frequently mischaracterized as a chaotic frenzy, a manifestation of collective hysteria, or an expression of “blind fanaticism” that borders on the sacrilegious. This paper considers such assessments as disconnected from reality and reductionist by reframing the devotion through a grounded anthropological lens. It argues that the *Giwang-Giwang* is not an anarchic challenge to order, but a highly sophisticated, structured, and rational system of somatic knowledge, localized humanity, and cosmic negotiation. Beneath the apparent chaos lies an intricate matrix of indigenous values, kinesthetic coordination, and embodied spirituality. The ritual functions as a profound cultural expression wherein the marginalized ordinary body becomes the site of spiritual articulation, converting physicality into a distinctive vocabulary of devotion that confounds institutional religious orthodoxy while anchoring Binangonan’s local identity.

The twelve-hour *Giwang-Giwang* procession creates a distinct temporal and spatial rupture in Binangonan’s ordinary reality. Viewed through the structural framework of Victor Turner, this ritual operates as a classic liminal phase.¹⁶ Good Friday serves as a threshold between the darkness of death and the brightness of resurrection. Within this suspended, in-between time, devotees embrace a “dead God,” offering intense bodily sacrifice in exchange for shared deliverance and glory. This spiritual drama unfolds across Binangonan’s public spaces, transforming them into arenas where human misery, communal ecstasy, and divine pathos intersect.

¹⁶ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93-97.

Crowd Regulation

To the casual observer standing on the sidewalks or watching from the windows of houses along the route, the rhythmic swaying, the sudden collective shoves (*salya*), and the erratic trajectory of the carriage appear to be a breakdown of order. However, an ethnographic description of the procession reveals a highly complex, non-institutional, and democratic governing system operating within the heart of the chaos.¹⁷ The choreography of the *Giwang-Giwang* is regulated by an intricate network of local marshals, rope-holders, and seasoned *mamamasan* who employ a specialized system of verbal, auditory, and sensory cues.

The movement of the massive wooden carriage through the narrow, sloped, and sharp corners of Binangonan's interior barangays requires precise coordination. High-pitched whistles, rhythmic hand clapping, and specific commands shouted over the roar of the crowd—such as “1.. 2.. 3.. *Tulak!*” (Push!) or “*Salya sa kanan!*” (Surge to the right!)—act as the governing pulse of the collective body. The ropes extending from the front of the *carroza* are not merely instruments of towing; they serve to generate pulses through the network, transmitting tension and directional intent from the front ranks to the rear of the procession. This localized governance completely bypasses the official, hierarchical authority of the parish priesthood. The ultimate expression of this community-led governance occurs at 4:25 am on Black Saturday. Arriving at the gates of the Santa Ursula Church, the exhausted *mamamasan* halt the swaying, completely quiet the crowd, and collectively

¹⁷ See Thomas J. Csordas, “Somatic Modes of Attention,” *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (1993): 135–138; Thomas J. Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5–47.

sing the “*Ama Namin*” (Our Father) before handing the *Santo Entierro* back to the institutional church. This demonstration shows that what appears to external authorities as dangerous chaos is actually a highly sophisticated, self-regulating choreography of local communal devotion.

The Cultural Matrix of *Panata*, *Damay*, and *Utang na Loob*

To properly analyze the motivations driving the *mamamasan* of Binangonan, one must look at *Giwang-Giwang* as one rooted in an interlocking social-cultural matrix of *panata* (sacred vow), *damay* (empathetic sharing of suffering),¹⁸ and *utang na loob* (a deep, non-quantifiable debt of gratitude).¹⁹ Within this indigenous psychological framework, a *panata* is never an individualistic act of self-flagellation; rather, it is a practice imbued with profound sense of relationality.

The devotee enters into a lifetime contract of *utang na loob* with the *Santo Entierro*, typically triggered by a divine intervention in a moment of acute crisis—such as the miraculous recovery of a dying child, or the sudden acquisition of a stable livelihood. The physical exhaustion endured during the procession is the tangible means used to service this debt. Furthermore, the ritual is an intense expression of *damay*. By throwing their bodies into the suffocating mass, the *mamamasan* actively participate in the grief and physical brokenness of the dead Jesus. They are not merely observing a historical tragedy; they are

¹⁸ See Reynaldo Clemenña Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

¹⁹ See Virgilio G. Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1992), 19-24.

collectively comforting and sharing the burden of a deceased family member, translating an abstract theological concept into a deeply personal, relational obligation.

Popular Somatic Religiosity

The *Giwang-Giwang* devotion is a local, embodied ritual practice rather than an expression of head-level doctrines. While doctrines remain relevant, it is most important to deliver an understanding about how local practitioners embody and practice their own traditions through what may be called a popular somatic religiosity.

The intense physical maneuvers of the procession—the side-to-side *giwang* (swaying), collective *salya* (shoving), and bracing against the *carroza* (carriage)—are not planned rituals driven by catechesis or abstract concepts. Instead, they embody a flow of native sentiment and energy. They represent an indigenous, physical language of relating to the divine, culturally transmitted through socialization and imitation rather than through formal instruction or academic training.

This somatized custom is passed down generationally and culturally through informal learning and cultural formation. Young boys watch from the sidewalks, internalizing the posture, footwork, and breathing rhythms of their elders, ensuring that the physical language of the *panata* (sacred vow) is structurally replicated year after year despite the absence of a written script.²⁰ *Giwang-Giwang's* physical display forms a distinct religious *habitus*—a system of durable, transposable dispositions²¹ that embeds the town's historical memory into the

²⁰ See Frederico Dinis, “Performativity of the Memory of Religious Places through Sound and Image,” *Religions* 14 (2023): 1137. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091137>

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72–78.

muscles, sinews, and reflexes of its young men. They soon will learn from a veteran *mamamasan* (carriage bearer) who does not consciously deliberate on ‘the how’ of *Giwang*; his body has internalized the features of the local streets, the compliant pulling ropes, and the shifting center of gravity of the *carroza*.²²

The *Giwang-Giwang* procession cannot be understood through visual documentation alone; one must get into its immersive, multi-sensory environment that overwhelms the human senses. As the *carroza* of the *Santo Entierro* crawls through the dense interior streets of the municipality, the landscape is dominated by a heavy, suffocating wall of sound. The deafening, rhythmic shouts of “*Sulong!*” (Advance!) and “*Salya!*” clash with the scraping metallic screech of the carriage wheels grinding against concrete, punctuated by the onlookers’ recitation of the rosary from their doorsteps.

The air is equally stifling, saturated with a thick mixture of burning paraffin wax, toxic exhaust fumes from the slow-moving convoy, and the smell of human sweat evaporating under the summer heat. In the moving mass, individual bodily boundaries somewhat dissolve. The *mamamasan* faces a continuous contact of bare flesh against bare flesh, wet skin sliding over wood, and feet negotiating asphalt roads. Fresh air becomes sparse as the heat radiating from thousands of packed bodies creates an environment of dense air. In this ritual, the mundane awareness is gone and one plunges into a state of intense event that somehow dissolves an individual’s perspective into a shared one.

Within the framework of institutional Catholic orthodoxy, spiritual transformation is typically pursued through quiet contemplation, sacramental confession, and the silent internalization of scripture. The *Giwang-*

²² Cf. Marcel Mauss, “Les Techniques du corps,” *Journal de Psychologie Normale et Pathologique*, vol. 32, no. 3-4 (1935): 274.

Giwang scarcely pays attention to this institutional model by positioning struggle and physical pain as the primary vehicle for crossing the human world toward the divine. The *mamamasan* do not enter into a discourse with cognitive-truths about Jesus' passion; rather, their suffering bodies become the means by which that passion is understood and expressed via a communal drama of supplication.

The backbreaking weight of the wooden beam pressing into the shoulder, the palm blisters torn open by hemp rope, and the suffocating pressure of the crowd are not viewed by devotees as negative consequences. Instead, this physical suffering is actively sought after as a form of somatic participation in the Passion of Christ. Here, the individual and collective bodies are not passive vessels of misfortune; rather, the state of extreme exhaustion—where devotees hover on the brink of fainting—marks the ritual's peak. At this intersection of pain and endurance, ordinary human survival is transcended. Physical suffering, transformed from a desperate plea into a tangible conduit for *biyaya* (divine grace), allows the devotee's personal agony to align with and touch the redemptive suffering of Jesus.

The intense somatic devotion highlights a deep ideological divide between the institutional Catholic Church and the practitioners of folk Catholicism.²³ The official, orthodox position of the clergy may match a

²³ See also Ferdinand D. Dagmang, "Babaylanism Reconsidered," *Diliman Review* 42, no. 1 (1994): 64-72, where we find the following: "Our way of celebrating the liturgy is so often foreign to the mentality of our folks that when they are inside the churches to hear mass they still need the more material and sensuous rosaries and scapulars. When the deity is presented as a healing spirit in the person of the *babaylan* the liturgy becomes a dramatic, i.e., sensual encounter with the sacred. We need to retrieve this kind of sensuality in our religion not just to make our liturgical celebrations more alive but really to be able to reach and touch the minds, hearts and flesh of our folks."

classic Western framework: the statue of the *Santo Entierro* is viewed as a piece of art—a representation or a visual aid meant to direct the mind toward a historical Jesus who resides safely in heaven. For the institution, treating the wood and glass as actively powerful in themselves slips into the dangerous territory of idolatry or fetishism.

However, for the local community, the material statue does not merely *represent* the divine; it *is* an active site of divine presence. The wood, the paint, and the glass are experienced as animated, responsive, and radiating a localized divine field. The divine is located precisely within the material object itself. When the crowd sways the carriage, they are not engaging in an abstract performance; they are physically wrestling with, balancing, and drawing close to an active, material node of power that possesses the agency to heal, protect, or punish based on how it is handled by the community.²⁴

Once the procession concludes, the devotees' white towels that wiped the statue are believed to have absorbed the *power* of the *Santo Entierro*. Such items undergo a permanent transformation in the devotees' social and material life. Shifting from ordinary, mundane household items used to wipe sweat, they are re-contextualized as highly valued religious objects—objects imbued with divine power. The life cycle of these cloths extends far beyond the duration of Good Friday. Devotees take these saturated items back to their homes, where they are carefully preserved in altars, glove compartments of vehicles, or carried directly on the body.

In times of domestic crisis, such as a child suffering from a sudden illness, a family member embarking on a dangerous journey, or a financial emergency, the towel is brought out. It is placed directly on the afflicted part of

²⁴ Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1975), 102–106.

the body or gripped tightly during prayer. The sweat of the *mamamasan* trapped within the fibers of the cloth, combined with the transferred essence of the dead Jesus, creates a physical talisman. This object bridges the gap between the historic, communal ritual on the streets of Binangonan and the private, daily struggles of working-class survival.

Solidarity: *Damay at Malasakit*

The *Prusisyon ng Paglilibing* (Procession of the Lord's Burial) in Binangonan, Rizal, operates as a massive temporal and spatial rupture, culminating in what is arguably the longest Good Friday procession in the Philippines. Beginning around 5:00 p.m. on Good Friday, the ritual spills across the boundaries of Holy Saturday, crawling through the town proper for nearly twelve hours before its dawn return to the historic Santa Ursula Church.²⁵ One must look again to Turner's conceptualization of the liminal phase—a dangerous, threshold state where ordinary rules suspend because the cosmic order is inverted by a “Dead God.”

In Binangonan, this metaphysical suspension is mapped directly onto the physical, narrow topographies of the *poblacion* (town proper) and coastal barangays. As the massive wooden and glass *carroza* crosses the threshold of the church gates, the asphalt street transforms from a public thoroughfare into a sacred arena. Within this space, rigid social hierarchies of Rizal—such as economic wealth, political lineage, and formal education—are blurred. The prominent politician or business owner and the marginalized tricycle driver or

²⁵ NCCA declares Sta. Ursula Church in Binangonan, Rizal a National Cultural Treasure, accessed May 18, 2025, <https://ncca.gov.ph/2025/03/06/ncca-declares-sta-ursula-church-national-cultural-treasure/>

fisherman are stripped of their secular status markers. Clad in identical, sweat-soaked civilian clothes, barefoot, and gasping for fresh air, they are reduced to a uniform state of equal vulnerability. The street ceases to be a conduit for commercial traffic and becomes an egalitarian plain where the structural boundaries of the secular world do not dictate.

Within this arena, the mass of the *mamamasan* transitions into what Turner terms *spontaneous communitas*—a profound, unmediated communal bond that emerges when individuals are stripped of their social personas and thrown into shared existential trial.²⁶ When the heavy *carroza* begins to sway forcefully, the crowd does not turn into an anarchic free-for-all struggle for individual survival; instead, it behaves as a single, coordinated assembly. This phenomenon can be understood as a state where a community comes together and collectively shares the same purpose and participates in the same action, creating a surge of collective energy that transcends individual limitations.²⁷

Inside the *giwang* (swaying/swerving) mass, this energy manifests as a deep form of dynamic solidarity. Devotees are locked in such close physical proximity that the distinction between the self and the other is irrelevant, embodying the core Filipino indigenous value of *damay* and *malasakit* (care and sympathy)—the moral recognition of the other's presence and needs. A veteran *mamamasan* does not need visual cues to understand the state of the crowd; he feels the shifting weight, the accelerating pulse, and the failing muscular strength of the complete stranger pressed against his ribs. When a

²⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 126-130.

²⁷ Cf. the concept of collective effervescence in Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1912), 214–218.

devotee is on the verge of fainting from the suffocating heat, those around him do not let him fall to be trampled on the road. Instead, through an unspoken, intuitive bodily solidarity, the surrounding men automatically shift their own center of gravity, absorbing his dead weight and passing the devotee's body over their shoulders to the safer space of the crowd.²⁸

***Lakas and Tindi*—Humanizing and Sanctifying Male Energy**

The *Giwang-Giwang* procession operates as a highly gendered arena, serving as a primary site for the construction and public performance of working-class masculinity in Rizal. The subculture of the *mamamasan* heavily values and showcases specific physical traits: *lakas* (raw, explosive muscular power), *tindi* (grit and resilience under pressure), and *tibay* (endurance against physical trauma). The environment of the street procession allows young men to put these traits on display before the eyes of their peers and the wider community watching from the sidewalks.

To gain entry into the inner circle closest to the wooden shafts of the *carroza* is to achieve a prestigious position within the local peer group (*barkada*). This space requires an aggressive display of physicality—dealing with fellow devotees' bodies, gripping the ropes with bleeding hands, and enduring the impact of the *salya* (surges). In this context, the ritual also acts as a rite of passage where adolescent males can prove their transition into manhood by demonstrating their capacity to handle pain, struggle through physical hazards, and command space within an environment intensified by communal participation.

²⁸ Cf. Virgilio G. Enriquez, *Pagbabagong-Dangal: Indigenous Psychology & Cultural Empowerment*. (Quezon City: PSSC, 1994), 45.

However, a critical ethnographic reading reveals that the *Giwang-Giwang* does not simply reinforce scripts of male dominance; instead, it performs a radical subversion by humanizing and sanctifying that very male energy. In everyday secular life, the physical power (*lakas*) and aggressive tendencies of young, marginalized men are often viewed by society as disruptive, dangerous, or prone to criminality and public disorder. Within the sacred space of the Good Friday procession, this narrative is turned around.

The aggressive shoving, the straining muscles, and the fierce competitiveness are divested of their destructive potential and transformed into tools of religious caregiving and mutual-dependence. The *mamamasan* use their collective strength to protect, balance, and gently guide the fragile, broken body of the dead Jesus through the town. In doing so, the masculine body is made completely vulnerable; men openly weep, gasp for air, and collapse into the arms of other men in states of surrender. The *Giwang-Giwang* provides a rare, culturally sanctioned outlet where working-class men can express deep emotional tenderness, grief, and submission to a communal drive, utilizing their physical strength not to dominate, but to offer profound cooperation.

Conclusion

The *Giwang-Giwang* of Binangonan, Rizal, stands as an example of cultural adaptation and survival. Through the choreography of the swaying *carroza*, the community has taken a colonial instrument of submission—the image of a defeated, dead Jesus—and transformed it into an active theater of local human-divine exchange, solidarity, and resilience. Over the years, the unique, forceful swaying motion has been officially embraced as

a proud marker of Binangonan's identity, setting its Holy Week practices apart from those of neighboring towns.

By analyzing the event through a grounded Anthropological lens, this paper demonstrates that the ritual is far from an act of fanaticism or mere superstition. Instead, it is a highly structured, profoundly rational system of bodily knowledge. Within the sweat-soaked core of the *mamamasan* crowd, the everyday structures of the world dissolve, allowing working-class men to act out their own religion of survival, expressing and communicating an indigenous worldview in the modern world.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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