

A Popular-Theological Anthropology of *Bayani*: Liminal Unity of Overseas Filipino Workers in their Expression of Love as Sacrifice

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Abstract: The article conceptualizes a popular-theological anthropology of *bayani* (hero/patriot) in the context of Overseas Filipino Workers' (OFWs) sacrifices and difficulties abroad. It shows the parallelism between Filipino popular religiosity (e.g. *Hesus Nazareno* and *Santo Entierro*) based on the *pasyon* narrative and the Filipino labor migrant experiences of their vulnerabilities brought by practical paradoxes to give love to their left-behind families in the Philippines. Their expressions of love and sacrifice is akin to a *bayani* who also performs sacrifices and honorable deeds to promote the welfare of the community, both in the local and national sense. It also shows how the Messianic tradition which Jesus of Nazareth embodied is culturally expressed in the Filipino *bayani* tradition. In other words, OFWs, who are recognized as *mga bagong bayani* (new or modern-day heroes/patriots) through their love as sacrifice through various painful paradoxes, express the Messianic tradition embodied by Jesus of Nazareth.

Keywords: *bayani*, heroism, patriotism, popular religiosity, overseas Filipino workers, love as sacrifice

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Introduction

This paper argues that the Filipino concept of *bayani* (hero/patriot) provides a popular-theological anthropology in the context of Philippine labor migration, which was initiated through its government labor-export policy during the Marcos administration in 1974. Due to the significant contribution of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to the Philippine economy, the Aquino government in 1988 recognized them as *mga bagong bayani* (new or modern-day heroes/ patriots).¹ However, behind this recognition are the numerous sacrifices embraced and hardships encountered by OFWs to provide for their families. In this aspect, the gestures of love given by OFWs as breadwinners to their families create a situation that brings about vulnerabilities due to long-term physical separation and economic pressures.

Most discussions on international migration are focused on issues within the receiving countries while those of the predominantly sending countries, like the Philippines, are usually neglected. Aside from this, a theological anthropological reflection in the context of labor migration is inadequately discussed among scholars of religion. This study fills the lacunae in two ways: 1) by discussing the political cultural situation of the country of origin of migrants and 2) providing a theological reflection based on the migrant workers practice of love as sacrifice. The context of Filipino labor migration as seen in its history, politics, and culture informs how a theological anthropology would be

¹ Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., *Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood & Class Relations in a Globalized Age* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2014), 137-138; Jean Encinas-Franco, "Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as Heroes: Discursive Origins of the 'Bagong Bayani' in the Era of Export Labor," *Humanities Diliman* vol. 12 no. 2 (July-December 2015), 56-78.

formulated. In this way, the paper methodologically conceives a theological anthropology ‘from below’.

The first section deals with the historical-conceptual development of *bayani*. The second section analyzes how OFWs become vulnerable as they work for but away from their loved ones as seen in the practical paradoxes they encounter while deployed abroad. In the third section, the concept of *bayani* is used to conceive a theological anthropology by relating it to the Messianic tradition that Jesus of Nazareth embodied as expressed in various popular Filipino cultural and religious practices. Based on this contextualized theological anthropology, the study shows how Filipino migration experience can be theologically interpreted as a ritual akin to a procession in popular religious devotions. From here, the article explicates its pastoral implications for Filipino migrant communities. As seen here, we begin with *bayani’s* sociocultural context of OFWs and its practical dynamics as jumping point for further reflection. The article concludes by presenting the universal significance of *bayani* as heroism of migrants that transcends cultural contexts.

Historical-Cultural Conceptual Evolution of *Bayani*

The Filipino² word *bayani* is usually translated in English as ‘hero’ or ‘patriot’. This word is a cognate of the Filipino *bayan* which means ‘town’, ‘country’, ‘nation’ or ‘people’, showing that the concept of *bayani* has territorial connotations aside from its usual reference to a person of admirable qualities. To further clarify its meaning, the Spanish “*pueblo*”, which also refers to a ‘town’, ‘people’ and to greater extent ‘nation’, provides the nearest Western linguistic equivalent to the Filipino

² Filipino, which is derived mainly from Tagalog, is one of the two official languages, the other English, in the Philippines.

bayan since Philippines was a former Spanish colony.³ While the Filipino *bayan* refers both to the people and their territory where they belong, *bayani* is different from the Western notion of hero, ἥρως (*hērōs*) that focuses on the mythological individual who is “noted for feats of courage and nobility of purpose”.⁴ In contrast to an image of a heroic individual, a *bayani* works with a group to promote the welfare of the community. In this sense, even though *bayani* is often translated as ‘hero’ in contemporary times, it can be said that the *patriot*, which etymologically comes from the Latin *patria* or “home country” has a nearer equivalence in English than the commonly used translation of ‘hero’.⁵ As seen here, finding an exact translation of *bayani* due to different etymological nuances in the Western language poses some difficulties, requiring a review of its historical-conceptual development based on Filipino cultural beliefs and practices.

The Filipino historian Zeus A. Salazar mentions four key leadership personalities who embody the *bayani* tradition prior to the advent of Spanish colonization.⁶ These were the (1) *datu*, the chief leader of the *barangay*, a community of 30-40 families, (2) the *babaylan*, the priestesses that nurture the community, (3) the *panday* (blacksmiths), *manghahabi* (weavers) and *mamalayok* (potters), members who create tools and materials to sustain the community, and (4) the *bagani*, warriors who assist the *datu* in defending the *barangay*. As seen in

³ Etymologically, the Spanish *pueblo* is derived from the Latin *populus* which means ‘people’.

⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary 4th Edition* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2001), 399.

⁵ Teodoro A. Agoncillo translates *bayani* as “patriot” instead of ‘hero’. See Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People, Eight Edition* (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990), 153.

⁶ Zeus A. Salazar, *Kasaysayan ng Kapilipinuhan Bagong Balangkas* (Lunsod Quezon: Bagong Kasaysayan, 2004), 12-13.

these various personalities, a *bayani* is thus someone dedicated to the creation, organization, and sustenance of the community whether it is a *barangay* or a *bayan*.

The warrior figure of a *bayani* was later used by Spanish missionaries as their reference point for defining it as “a valiant man and of many forces, fights twenty men and can lift [something] that six people cannot”⁷ or a “valiant spirited” person who participates in “common work”.⁸ This interpretation of the *bayani* later continued as a predominant motif of anti-colonial leaders against the Spanish rule. During the Philippine Revolution of 1896, the revolutionaries used the word ‘*bayani*’ alongside with ‘GomBurZa’ and ‘Rizal’ as their passwords to verify whether a person is a member of the *Katipunan*.⁹ Toward the end of his life, Emilio Aguinaldo used the word *bayani* in his memoir to refer to those who died in the Revolution fighting for Philippine Independence.¹⁰

Although fighting and dying for one’s country is a predominant theme of *kabayanihan* (heroism/patriotism), we also must realize that *bayani* in

⁷ “*Hombre valiente y de muchas fuerzas, pues se tiene con veinte, y levanta lo que seis no pueden.*” See Francisco de San Antonio, OFM (1682-1744), *Vocabulario tagalo: Tagalog-Spanish Dictionary*. ed. Antoon Postma (Quezon City: Sources for Philippine Studies, 2000), 37.

⁸ P. Juan José de Noceda y P. Pedro de Sanlúcar, *Vocabulario de la lengua tagala* (Manila: Imprenta de Ramírez y Girauder, 1860), 44. There are two entries in this dictionary for *bayani*: 1) “*Valiente animoso. Mag[bayani] Hacerse, fingirse. Pag[bayani]han, Contra quien. Ipa[bayani] La causa*” and 2) “*Obra común. Mag[bayani] los que se juntan para ella. [Bayani]han, ser juntado para la obra. Pag[bayani]han, tal obra, o los que van a hacerla.*”

⁹ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1956), 49-53.

¹⁰ Emilio Aguinaldo, *Mga Gunita ng Himagsikan* (Manila: National Centennial Commission, 1998).

contemporary popular usage has been used to refer to Filipinos who did not necessarily fight in battles to defend the nation. The concept has also been used to refer to other patriotic individuals who contributed to nation building. Some of them even have dubious reputations. José Rizal did not fight in a battle against Spain while Emilio Aguinaldo was accused as responsible for the killing of Andrés Bonifacio and Antonio Luna, all of whom are considered *bayani*. Included to this popular usage of *bayani* are those who fought for their ideology such as the revolutionary left who died in battle against the government forces and the late dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos whose relatives and supporters sought his burial in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*. Regardless whether one believes that this or that person is a *bayani*, the concept is indeed very political in nature because it captures the imagination of the Filipinos on who can be considered a model for future generations to emulate.

Due to this problematic conceptualization of *bayani*, Teodoro Agoncillo suggested in 1965 some criteria that would help identify who can be considered as a hero.

1. The extent of a person's sacrifices for the welfare of the country.
2. Motive and methods employed in the attainment of the ideal (welfare of the country). In the attainment of the ideal, did the person concerned sacrifice purely and exclusively for the welfare of the country or was there any selfish or ulterior motive in making such sacrifices? Were the methods employed in the attainment of the ideal morally valid?
3. Moral character of the person concerned. Did he do anything immoral to attain his personal character? If there was any immorality, how far did it affect his work for society or the ideal?
4. The influence of the person concerned on his age and

or the succeeding age.¹¹

Based on these criteria, the National Heroes Committee under the Office of the President later on created a formal definition of a hero in 1993:

A hero [*bayani*] is an admirable leader towering over his peers, serving a noble cause with the sword or the pen, possessing exceptional talent, distinguished in valor and/or bold enterprise, exercising a determinative influence over the event; who in times of extreme stress and difficulties, project himself by his own fortitude, efforts, and sacrifices to be the beacon light that guides his oppressed countrymen to their rightful destiny, and in complete self-denial abandons his personal interests to place those of country above and before any other; and whose deeds and acts are proudly emulated by a grateful people, that after his death, render him singular tributes, honor him by public worship, and acknowledge his meritorious services to mankind by spontaneous national recognition.¹²

The *bayani* tradition has thus evolved throughout the centuries. It was first conceived as a warrior who fought for the *barangay* prior to the Spanish times, which later on applied to Filipino nationalists, who were not necessarily warriors but nonetheless fought for the creation of a national identity and community during the 19th century. During the 20th century, the word *bayani* has also been attributed to government leaders who served the country well, soldiers who fought during World War II and, in present times, individuals or organizations that have contributed to the Filipino

¹¹ Ambeth R. Ocampo, *101 Stories on the Philippine Revolution* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2009), 27-29.

¹² Ibid.

national welfare and pride. In this sense, the contemporary perspective on *bayani* has become more inclusive so long as it significantly contributes to nation building. This is the reason why Corazon Aquino's administration declared that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are 'new heroes' or *mga bagong bayani* due to their sacrifices abroad. Even though OFWs are physically separated from their families and communities in the Philippines, they are still able to contribute to the growth of the economy through remittances. However, the physical separation brought by labor migration shows the vulnerable side of both an OFW and their left-behind family.

OFWs' Expression of Love as Sacrifice in their Practice of Care

In 1974, Philippine President Ferdinand E. Marcos made labor-export policy through its legislation of the Labor Code as one of his flagship programs to develop the country by the sending of migrant workers abroad to acquire foreign capital through their remittances. Since then, millions of Filipinos journeyed abroad to secure their families a better life through the opportunities that would improve their social mobility. However, behind the faces of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are the faces of mothers and fathers who have left their families at home, facing loneliness, discrimination, violence, and at worse dangers of death.¹³ For this reason, their love and sacrifice for their family and their contribution through remittances that would provide indirect investment to the country led them to be called 'new heroes'.

Despite this praise given to OFWs by succeeding

¹³ Anne-Marie Hilsdon, "What the Papers Say: Representing Violence against Overseas Contract Workers," *Violence Against Women*, vol. 9 no. 6 (2003): 698-722.

administrations, the political left has criticized this government policy. This was especially the case in 1995 when Flor Contemplacion, an OFW domestic helper in Singapore, was tried, found guilty, and executed despite the questionable accusation that she murdered the child of her employer. Seeing this risk and lack of protection among OFWs, the Philippine government legislated Republic Act 8042 – *Omnibus Rules and Regulations Implementing the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995* to avoid the Contemplacion scenario happening again to other OFWs. The law explicitly states that the Philippine government does not promote labor-export policy as the path to development.¹⁴ However, on the ground level, millions of Filipinos continue to venture abroad to uplift their lives.

As of September 2018, the Philippine Statistics Authority has recorded 2.3 million OFWs.¹⁵ This is out of the Philippine population of 108 million estimated by Commission on Population and Development in 2019.¹⁶ According to a 2017 survey of Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), most OFWs are women working in domestic or professional care services as their primary source of income.¹⁷ OFWs are often employed in the ‘reproductive labor sector’, “the labor needed to sustain

¹⁴ *Republic Act 8042 - Omnibus Rules and Regulations Implementing the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995*, Rule 1, Section 1, paragraph c.

¹⁵ Philippine Statistics Authority, *Total Number of OFWs Estimated 2.3 Million (Results from the 2018 Survey on Overseas Filipinos)* 30 April 2019 <https://psa.gov.ph/content/total-number-ofws-estimated-23-million-results-2018-survey-overseas-filipinos> [accessed 18 December 2019]

¹⁶ Republic of the Philippines Commission on Population and Development <http://popcom.gov.ph/> [accessed 18 December 2019].

¹⁷ Philippine Statistics Authority, *2017 Survey on Overseas Filipinos* (Results from the 2017 Survey on Overseas Filipinos), 18 May 2018, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/2017-survey-overseas-filipinos-results-2017-survey-overseas-filipinos> [accessed 27 December 2019].

the productive labor force” such as domestic workers or professional healthcare providers so that they can take care of their families back home by sending remittances that can be used for consumption which improves their social mobility.¹⁸ Their remittances constitute \$33.8 billion of the Philippine GDP in 2018 according to a World Bank report of 2019, the fourth country to receive the highest remittances after India, China and Mexico.¹⁹

In this regard, two aspects on expressions of love are derivable from the OFW’s practice of care: 1) their practice of care in relation to their left-behind families as love as sacrifice, and 2) their practice of care for the families abroad as love that demands for justice.

Paul Ricoeur sees the two-fold dimension of love based on the “logic of superabundance” and the “logic of equivalence”.²⁰ The first shows the incommensurability of love and sacrifice, which in the case of OFWs care for one’s own relatives. The second aspect shows finite or the demand for a just treatment, commensurate compen-

¹⁸ Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work, Second Edition* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015 [2001]), 29. Cf. Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett, “Gender, Social Reproduction and Women’s Self Organization: Considering the U.S. Welfare State,” *Gender and Society* vol. 5 no. 3 (1991): 311–333; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: The Historical Continuities of Women’s Paid and Unpaid Reproductive Labor,” *Signs* vol. 18 no. 1 (1992): 1–44.

¹⁹ World Bank, *Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook* (KNOMAD and World Bank Group, 2019), <https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Migrationanddevelopmentbrief31.pdf> [accessed 27 December 2019]

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, “Love and Justice,” in *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion*, ed. W.G. Jeanrond and J.L. Rilke (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 187-202. Cf. Eline Van Stichel, “Love and Justice’s Dialectical Relationship: Ricoeur’s Contribution on the Relationship between Care and Justice within Care Ethics,” *Medical Health Care and Philosophy* 17 (2014), 504.

sation, and benefits in exchange for the care services OFWs render in foreign land. In this sense, the former treats care as an end, the latter sees care as a means to achieve the former. The tension between the two aspects of love in the practice of care is especially seen among OFWs who work in the reproductive labor and health care sector.

Commodification and Simulacralization of Care: Paradoxical Tensions in Love as Sacrifice – The Logic of Superabundance

The commodification and simulacralization of care are seen in the correlation between the top occupations of OFWs in relation to the use of remittances by their left-behind families. According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) report, the top-ten occupational categories of OFWs in 2016 are the following: 1) household service workers, 2) manufacturing laborers, 3) nursing professionals, 4) waiters, 5) cleaners and helpers in offices, 6) home-based personal care workers, 7) civil engineering laborers, 8) welders and flame cutters, 9) plumbers and pipe fitters, and 10) building construction laborers.²¹ So far, household service workers, caregivers professional health providers and those involved in construction-related work have consistently been in top-ten occupational categories as source of overseas employment since 2005.²² In terms of their quotidian living, the use of OFW Remittances by their families can be seen in the frequent consumption of

²¹ Philippine Overseas Employment Agency, *Overseas Employment Statistics Deployed Overseas Filipino Workers 2016 vs 2015*, <http://www.poea.gov.ph/ofwstat/compendium/2015-2016%200ES%201.pdf> [accessed 27 December 2019].

²² See Philippine Overseas Employment Agency, *Compendium of OFW Statistics* from years 2005-2016 <http://www.poea.gov.ph/ofwstat/ofwstat.html> [accessed 27 December 2019].

the following based on Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 4th quarter of 2016 *Consumer Expectation Survey*: 1) Food and other household needs, 2) Education, 3) Medical Expenses, 4) Debt Payments, 5) Savings, 6) Purchase of Appliances/ Consumer Durables, 7) Purchase/Rent of House, 8) Investments, 9) Purchase of Car/Motor Vehicles, and 10) Others.²³

The correlation between the top-ten occupational categories that use the practice, logic and discourse of care for employment and the top consumer items bought by their left-behind families shows that the things consumed are, in practice, the goods or services produced by their OFW relatives abroad. OFWs take care of foreign households to acquire goods that would help them take care of their own household in the Philippines. For instance, the household care, restaurant, medical or construction services rendered by these top occupations of OFWs are equivalent to the products their families back home consume (i.e. food and household needs, medical expenses, purchase/rent of house). Of course, one should not infer that an OFW waiter's family in the Philippines only use remittances for food consumption or a medical professional's left-behind family consume only medical expenses. One must see the correlation from a national scale. In other words, OFWs are often employed to take care of households abroad in order to take care of their own household. This paradoxical phenomenon can be thus conceptualized as 'commodification of care' where the practice of care is already a cultural capital used as an instrument of exchange through labor to acquire income and consumption items to improve one's social mobility in one's home country.

It must be noted that the practice of care through the

²³ Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, *Consumer Expectation Survey Fourth Quarter 2016*, http://www.bsp.gov.ph/downloads/Publications/2016/CES_4qtr2016.pdf [accessed 27 December 2019].

sending of material benefits amidst the physical separation between OFWs and their families as an expression of love brought by migration has negative consequences. Despite the material rewards that they receive by working abroad, numerous empirical studies have shown the negative effects of physical absence on the part of the left-behind children of OFWs.²⁴ Generally, these researches discovered that left-behind children are often physically and emotionally distressed due to the experience of various negative affectivities such as sadness, loneliness, anxiety, and anger that bring about poor school performance particularly in the case of elementary students. As Parreñas observes, “[T]he paradox that Filipinas face is that to provide for their children’s long-term welfare, they have to leave them behind, often not seeing them for years at a time.”²⁵

In this regard, aside from the commodification of care among OFWs, the consumer goods that they acquire for their left-behind families as an expression of their love becomes however a poor representation to compensate for the physical care that they could not provide due to their absence. For Jean Baudrillard, this representation is called a simulacrum or an Ersatz of a particular reality

²⁴ Graziano Battistella and Ma. Cecilia G. Conaco, “The Impact of Labour Migration on the Children Left Behind: A Study on Elementary School Children in the Philippines,” *Sojourn* 13, no. 2 (1998): 220-241; Maruja M. B. Asis, “Living in Migration,” *Asian Population Studies*, 2, no. 1 (2006): 45-67; Marie Joy B. Arguillas and Lindy Williams, “The Impact of Parents’ Overseas Employment on Educational Outcomes of Filipino Children,” *International Migration Review* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 300–319; Chantal Smeekens, Margaret S. Stroebe, Georgios Abakoumkin, “The Impact of Migratory Separation from Parents on the Health of Adolescents in the Philippines,” *Social Science & Medicine* 75 (2012): 2250-2257.

²⁵ Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, “Human Sacrifices: What happens when Women migrate and leave Families behind? The Case of the Philippines raises Some Troubling Questions,” *The Women’s Review of Books* vol. 19, no. 5 (Feb. 2002): 16.

that has become the reality in itself.²⁶ Following this idea of Baudrillard, the paradoxical phenomenon where the use of consumer goods for taking care of the family as substitute has become a simulacra or the situation when representations have become expressions of ‘real’ physical care in themselves can be thus conceptualized as the ‘simulacralization of care’.

Based on this analysis, the sacrificial nature of love has problems due to the double paradoxes encountered by OFWs in relation to the practice of care to their children. While they have sacrificed physical presence to uplift their social standing, its absence however cannot be substituted by any simulacrum to compensate it. In this sense, no amount of consumable goods is enough to compensate for their physical absence. Although OFWs do not directly intend to produce this unfortunate situation as the consequence, this could be felt as an unjust expression of love. In other words, the love and care expressed by OFW parents which also bring about physical absence felt negatively by left-behind children operate through the logic of superabundance.

Asymmetry of Compensation and Social Trust: Paradoxical Tensions in Love as demand for Justice – The Logic of Equivalence

In connection to the commodification of care, OFW-foreign employer’s family relationship is the locus where the practice of care is differently employed as means to an end. However, what makes the relationship different is the expected just treatment and compensation given by the family employer to the OFW domestic worker. As migrant workers, OFWs have to be justly compensated so

²⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981]), 1.

that they can survive in the foreign land amidst the higher cost of living while at the same time acquire sufficient savings from their income that they can use to send home as remittances. This balancing act in budgeting is difficult because of the underlying nature and usual sociopolitical and economic circumstances of domestic work abroad.

Concerning its nature, the reproductive labor sector is often treated inferior compared to other blue collared or white collared occupations since it is regarded as an ‘unskilled’ form of work.²⁷ Cleaning, cooking, and baby-sitting are considered quotidian activities that most people can learn. However, since working outside usually requires 40-hours a week, families employ a domestic helper who can assist in taking care of their households. Despite its importance, it is paradoxical to see that while domestic workers are the most trusted to do such duties, they are the ones who usually receive the lowest salary and benefits among the occupations abroad.²⁸ In this case, while OFWs are demanded to love wholeheartedly the foreign children that they are caring for, foreign employers are expected to pay them just compensation for their work. Although the contractual nature of the OFW-family employer is manifested as a *quid pro quo*, it must be reminded that giving love through care operates through, following Ricoeur, the ‘logic of superabundance’ unlike giving a worker’s wage that works via the ‘logic of equivalence’. In this sense, this paradoxical tension in the

²⁷ Cameron McDonald, *Shadow Mothers, Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) cited in Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 210.

²⁸ Gemma Tulud Cruz. *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 17-20. Cf. Manolo Abella and Lin Lean Lim, “Movement of People in Asia: Internal, Inter-regional and International Migration,” in Christian Conference of Asia, *Uprooted People in Asia* (Hong Kong CCA, 1995): 18-19.

practice of care abroad can thus be considered an ‘asymmetry of compensation’.

In terms of sociopolitical circumstances, OFWs were mostly working in professional occupations in the Philippines. Most of them speak English and come from the educated middle class of Philippine society. However, some OFWs have difficulty accessing professional work abroad due to foreign government policies such as labor restrictions, language requirement, and non-equivalence of educational qualifications. Due to such difficulties, some OFWs, even though possessing professional credentials, become domestic helpers abroad because of better monetary compensation than their professional work in the Philippines. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas describes this migration phenomenon as “contradictory class mobility”.²⁹ In this regard, it is paradoxical to see that OFWs are not given equal opportunity to higher salary occupations due to the host country’s government restrictions despite the fact that they have professional skills and well ‘trusted’ to take care of the household and the children of its citizens. For these reasons, OFWs, even if they are professional workers abroad, are stereotyped to do domestic work. This is aside from the problem of treating migrants as scapegoats whenever there is an economic crisis based on the accusation that they are stealing their job opportunities. Due to the accusation that they do not contribute to the welfare of the society, OFWs face the challenge of acquiring citizenship to increase their social mobility in a developed host country, which could be used to look for better sources of income that will better the lives of their families in the Philippines. While migrant workers are trusted (instrumentalized) by host governments to take care of the household micro economy, they are not trusted

²⁹ Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 117-158.

to become part of the national macro economy despite their professional skills. In this sense, this paradoxical tension between migrant workers and the restrictive policies of a host nation can be called the 'asymmetry of social trust'.

Liminal Unity: A Paradoxical Consequence of Love expressed as Care and Sacrifice

We just presented the four practical paradoxical tensions in the care practices of OFWs as an expression of love for their own left-behind families and to the foreign families whom they are employed. While the former relationship sees love as an end by performing the sacrifice of physical absence through work abroad, the latter relationship uses love as a means to sustain the former which demands just compensation. In the first aspect of love, it was revealed that OFWs encounter two paradoxical tensions: the commodification and simulacralization of care. In terms of their relationship with their employers, it was discovered that the paradoxical tensions also exist in the form of asymmetry of compensation and social trust. As a means to an end, these asymmetrical relationships aggravate the practice of care of OFWs already brought by commodification and simulacralization of care, making their situation more complicated to achieve their goal to maintain the unity of their families.

These paradoxes show the underlying tensions in the practice of care of OFWs, which is an expression of love. Despite these problems, the effect of love as sacrifice and love that demands justice is unity; the maintenance of the unity of their own household amidst the challenges of marginalizing poverty and socio-political and economic integration in a foreign society amidst the loneliness, frustrations and dangers that they might experience. In

this sense, love as sacrifice and love that demands justice are not contradictory relationships but rather seen as parallel railroads that lead to the same direction. As Servais-Théodore Pinckaers mentions, “Human love is built on sacrifice. [...] There is no real charity without detachment and self-renunciation. As love deepens through trial, so its capacity for sacrifice grows stronger. This is the realism, the power of love”.³⁰

While everyone will experience pain and suffering in life due to the sacrifices they made so that they can be united with what they love, not all forms of pain and suffering can be considered just. This is especially the case when these experiences are results of repressive practices that restrict the capability of the person to attain what is good. In this connection, the unjust pain and suffering brought by poverty that OFW families experience in the Philippines become an obstacle to attain love as unity. As Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle states in an interview about the family situation of OFWs during the 2014-2015 Synod of Families, “Couples separate not because they're mad at each other. [...] They separate because they love their family and they bear the pain of separation just to find jobs elsewhere”.³¹ In this regard, the four paradoxes mentioned have resulted in an (un)intended double effect which can be conceptualized as ‘liminal unity’ of OFWs with their families and the host society. Liminality here refers to the simultaneity of

³⁰ Servais-Théodore Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington D.C.: The Catholic of University of America Press, 1995 [1985]), 30. Cf. Bernard V. Brady, “Love and Recent Developments in Moral Theology,” *Journal of Moral Theology* vol 1. no. 2 (2012): 147-176.

³¹ Simone Orendain, “Poverty among Synod’s Major Concerns, Philippine Cardinal Says,” *Catholic News Service*, 30 October 2014, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/poverty-was-among-synods-major-concerns-philippine-cardinal-says> [accessed 28 December 2019].

being present and absent in a particular place, a condition of in-betweenness. The consequences of 'liminal unity' shows the paradoxical threshold experience of OFWs: they are financially united (intended effect of love as sacrifice) but physically separated (the unintended effect of love as sacrifice) as a family while micro-economically integrated (intended effect) but socio-economically and politically marginalized in their host country (the unintended effect of love as demand for justice). These practical paradoxes thus show their vulnerability because of the tensions that prevent them to love through the maintenance of their unity as a family and their integration in a foreign land.

A Theological Anthropology of *Bayani* via Filipino Popular Religiosity

Given that OFWs sacrifice their physical presence as an act of love for their family in the Philippines so that they could find employment abroad to sustain them results in their liminal unity as a condition of their vulnerability, this essay proceeds to the theological anthropology of *bayani*. To theologize the Filipino tradition of *bayani* necessitates an investigation into the cultural understanding of the Filipinos about Jesus of Nazareth as the messiah through popular devotions or folk religiosity. Thus, beyond a semantic analysis of *bayani*, Filipino cultural practices serve as good points to extract its theological anthropological dimension.

In one ethnographic missionary account of Pedro Chirino S.J. in Luzon, he mentions that when a *datu* dies, he is embalmed with perfumes and dressed with the best clothing.³² Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J. in his mission-

³² Pedro Chirino, *Relación de las islas Filipinas/The Philippines in 1600*, trans. Ramon Echevarria (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1969[1604]), 88-89, 326-331.

ary work in Visayas observes that when a *datu* dies the whole community should have a period of bereavement through silence.

The *datu* or his son or relative who was succeeding the [deceased] *datu*, commands everyone in general that they would do *lalao*, and they would declare: “The *datu* orders, as a sign of grief, nobody, while the interdict is not raised, may laugh, nor speak loudly; that nobody, not even the women, may comb [their hair], nor arrange it; that no one may cover their heads, that the roosters may not crow nor may the dogs bark nor the children cry, nor there should be any other kind of noise; that nobody may bathe, nor change vestments; nor wear gold or adornments, until the *datu* orders otherwise.”³³

Based on the writings of Spanish missionaries, it can be observed that these rituals accorded to a *datu* are also the religious practices done in popular devotions to Jesus of Nazareth who is considered as the Messiah during Good Friday. During Good Friday services in the church, the cross for veneration is also perfumed while people are told to refrain from doing unnecessary activities (i.e. playing, creating noise, taking a bath after 3pm). These reverential practices to a *datu*, who is a *bayani*, have been thus conferred to Jesus Christ as part of the Filipino culture. In this regard, performing taboo activities during the period of grieving of a dead leader is punishable and thus considered morally unacceptable, or in religious terms, sinful. As Francisco Nakpil Zialcita keenly observes, “The cult of the dead leader persists in the

³³ Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J., *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands: Evangelization and Culture at the Contact Period Part 1, Book 3, Vol.*, trans. Cantius J. Kobak, O.F.M. and Lucio Gutierrez, O.P. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2005[1668]), 310-311.

taboos surrounding Good Friday” suggesting that “perhaps the converts must have accepted the new taboos because they saw Christ as the new *datu*.”³⁴

Seeing Jesus Christ as a *bayani* through the Filipino cultural practices conferred to the dead is one way of recognizing resemblance. However, another way of viewing it is to see that a *bayani* can also be equated to the messianic role of Jesus of Nazareth. In one remark of Apolinario Mabini about the execution of José Rizal, he mentions in his book *La Revolución filipina* how Filipinos interpreted his death as someone akin to the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

When he was alive, his enemies mockingly and ironically called him the Filipino Messiah. Now, after his death, they rightfully and dutifully have to give him this title, proving his victory and recognizing his supremacy. The documents reflect the essence of his life, for the present and future generations to properly judge him and learn from their teachings. Father Florentino in “El Filibusterismo”, if we remember it right, was searching for the youth of impeccable character for sacrifice. Rizal was the first to offer himself. The Filipino Messiah of Bagongbayan is worthy of being a disciple of the Messiah of the Jews in Golgotha.³⁵

It must be reminded that the messianic role of Jesus of Nazareth carries a political overtone during the biblical times. A messiah is the ‘anointed one’ of God, in the person of a king or a priest or a prophet, who cares for the welfare of the People of the Covenant by ensuring

³⁴ Fernando Nakpil Zialcita, *Authentic though not Exotic: Essays on Filipino Identity* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2005), 211-236.

³⁵ Apolinario Mabini, *The Philippine Revolution with Other Documents of the Period volume II* (Manila: The National Historical Institute, 2001 [1931]), 271.

that there is social justice, compassion, and mercy in Israel. As what the prophet Micah preached, one should “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8 NRSV).

Benigno Beltran’s study *Christology of the Inarticulate*, strengthens the link between the compassion accorded by the ordinary people to charismatic individuals who suffered in the struggle to attain the well-being of the community. According to him, the most popular image of Jesus Christ for Filipinos is the *Nuestro Padre Hesus Nazareno*, otherwise known as the *Black Nazarene*, which is followed by the *Santo Niño* and the Crucified Christ.³⁶ The reason behind the popularity of the images of suffering Christ is their strong identification with the impoverished condition of the Filipino masses that induces them to perform sacrifices for their family. In this regard, although not in the top-three list, is the popularity of the *Santo Entierro* which also symbolizes the passion and death of Jesus. However, beyond this identification with hardship is the hope that the experience of well-being will come afterwards just like the resurrection of Christ. In contrast, the popularity of the *Santo Niño*, the child Jesus, culturally represents the fondness of Filipinos to their children because of the joy they generate that foster strong family ties despite the trials in life. As seen here, these popular Filipino devotions exude ambivalent meanings that represent both the human condition of sin and grace in the everyday life of a Christian.

The heuristic analogy between *bayani* and the messianic role of Jesus of Nazareth becomes more evident when one compares the funeral procession of Benigno Aquino Sr. after his assassination during the

³⁶ Benigno P. Beltran, *The Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus Christ* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1987), 116-124.

Marcos dictatorship in 1983 and Corazon Aquino's death during Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's unpopular administration in 2009 vis-à-vis the *traslación* of the *Hesus Nazareno* on feast days. During the *traslación*, the Black Nazarene is processed around the Quiapo district of Manila which usually takes the whole day to return to the Minor Basilica. Millions of devotees participate in the *traslación* wearing maroon clothing while performing various symbolic practices such as pulling the rope of its carriage, climbing on other devotees' shoulders, or throwing their towels at the lay organizers who will use these to wipe the statue and give these towels back to their owners who will cherish these as sacred materials being loaded with the 'touch and power of God'. As seen here, these actions of the devotees suggest their willingness to have a proximate and personal touch as expressions of compassion to Christ as represented by the Black Nazarene. In these events, the presence of the crowd who empathizes with the dead, both the *bayani* and the *Hesus Nazareno*, is reminiscent of the people's affection for their leader who has served, suffered and sacrificed his life for their welfare amidst the hardships and oppressive condition that they experienced in life. Using the *pasyon* as framework to understand such cultural phenomenon, Reynaldo C. Ileto rhetorically asks, "Could the popular slogan *Ninoy di ka nag-iisa* (Ninoy, you are not alone) be another form of *damay* for the suffering Christ?"³⁷ Based on this premises, the concept of *bayani* as a heuristic device becomes its theopolitical anthropology in the Philippine context when used to understand the messianic tradition in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

These funeral rituals accorded to a *bayani* and the

³⁷ Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), 173.

Hesus Nazareno can be regarded as a “rite of passage” to use Arnold Van Gennep’s anthropological concept, which later on was more elaborated by Victor Turner to understand the sociopolitical dynamics of rituals in communal life.³⁸ In his theory, he explains that a ritual has three phases: 1) the pre-liminal state, 2) liminal, and 3) post-liminal. During the pre-liminal state, those participating in the ritual undergo a separation from their usual routine of ordinary life as a metaphorical ‘death’ of the old self or identity.

This segregation from ordinary life leads to the liminal stage where participants are caught in the threshold moment of the ritual. To be in the threshold refers to the participants’ “neither here nor there” situation. Moreover, this phase of the ritual creates an experience of *communitas*, or when a community of participants that ‘subverts’ the previous hierarchical structure of day-to-day living by equalize everyone’s status. The experience of *communitas* in the liminal phase of the ritual therefore creates a common affinity among the participants by giving special recognition to the lowly while neglecting, if not debasing, the powerful. Participants experience a tension in the liminal phase brought by the alternating experience of *communitas* and structure. The liminal stage strengthens, rejuvenates, and empowers the participants who undergo a ritual because it allows them to challenge the hierarchical, domineering and oppressive structures. Toward the end of the ritual, the post-liminal phase, ritual participants break through the alternating *communitas*-structure experience. They are able to re-integrate to the usual routines of ordinary life with the new energizing

³⁸ Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 95.

experience. The end of the ritual is thus a start of new beginning on the part of the ritual participants to confront the hardships of daily reality with renewed courage and strength.

Based on these historical-conceptual and cultural analyses of practices, a *bayani* is thus a symbolic epitome of someone who has faced the challenging task of leading the Filipino community. The struggle of the *bayani* is however never an isolated one. People support them not merely because of his or her charismatic authority but also because they share the same ideals as their leader. In this sense, individuals become a *bayani* when people acknowledge their ideals, words and deeds amidst the challenges the Filipino national community has been facing.

When applied in the context of Filipino labor migration, Christ's passion, death and resurrection provide a theological symbolism of the struggles and triumphs of OFWs who are recognized as *mga bagong bayani* as seen in their liminal condition. The pre-liminal state begins when an OFW departs from the Philippines after recognizing the need to find better work opportunities in foreign land. After this state, OFWs enter the liminal phase once they arrive in their new workplace, taking the risk of being separated for long time in the hope that they would uplift their family back home. Analogously, the *traslación* of the *Hesus Nazareno* and the life of an OFW depicts Christ's *via dolorosa* to Golgotha. However, beyond the experience of suffering, OFWs attempt to subvert the previous oppressive structural condition of poverty and lack in the Philippines amidst the difficulties encountered in foreign land. This tension creates the challenge on the part of the OFW because of the constant threat that they might not achieve their goals abroad when they return home. In its positive aspect, the post-liminal phase happens when the

OFW returns home to his family, bringing the success of their hard work. On the part of the ‘left-behind’ children, they recognize and reciprocate the sacrifice made by their parents through their success in studies and behaving well even in the latter’s absence. In Christological terms, the post-liminal state of success in one’s adventure abroad is a resurrection event on the part of the OFW families. As seen here, the Filipino *bayani* tradition as embodied by OFWs is reminiscent of the messianic tradition that Jesus of Nazareth embodied as popularly expressed in the *traslación* of the Black Nazarene based on Christ’s passion narrative.

Pastoral Implications for Filipino Migrant Community Practice

The life of a Filipino migrant is a “rite of passage” that leads to a liberating experience amidst the challenges of daily life to find work, seek socioeconomic and political integration in the country of destination, and in most cases, provide financial support for their family in the Philippines. Migration abroad transforms the life of a Filipino as an irrevocable experience of recognizing the stark differences of life abroad and in the Philippines. Once a Filipino travel abroad, the experience is already imprinted as a lifetime memory. As Filomeno V. Aguilar observes, “The stages of labor migration, starting from desiring to work overseas through to the period of overseas employment until the return to the homeland, can be viewed as a ritual journey that eventuates in the marked transformation of the sojourner’s person.”³⁹ While it is optimistic that a Filipino would return to one’s homeland after many years of work or residency abroad,

³⁹ Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., *Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood & Class Relations in a Globalized Age* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2014), 129.

which is considered the post-liminal or re-aggregation phase, what makes the migrant condition peculiar is his or her open-ended option whether to return to the Philippines or not.

The first pastoral implication of looking at Filipino migrants as *bayani* is regardless of their decision to stay indefinitely by intending to acquire a foreign citizenship or not, they will always be in a liminal condition. On one hand, a Filipino migrant who has no foreign citizenship papers is still left in a 'neither here nor there' condition. On the other hand, in case a Filipino acquires foreign citizenship, his or her situation is still caught 'in-between' because his or her migrant history cannot be erased. In either case, whether one intends to get a foreign citizenship or not, Filipinos abroad will always carry with them their migrant background. Given this case that the life of a Filipino migrant is like participating in the liminal phase of a ritual, it can thus be equated that the narratives expressed in the rituals accorded to a *bayani* and *Hesus Nazareno* are applicable to what Filipino migrants are experiencing. Filipino migrants, regardless of their status in life, are *bayani* in their own right because of the sacrifices and struggles they face abroad.

The second pastoral implication of the *bayani* tradition is that it provides an overarching concept to understand Filipino cultural, both secular and religious, practices that would preserve Filipino migrant identity abroad. While these practices are clear visual representations of being a Filipino, what makes these cultural traditions identifiable is the narrative that reminds Filipinos of their homeland. This contention is especially the case among the Church activities 'exported' abroad such as Santa Cruzan, *Simbang Gabi* during Christmas season, *Salubong* on Easter vigil, and the devotion to the *Hesus Nazareno* or Our Mother of

Perpetual Help. These Filipino religious traditions are celebrated alongside other forms of festivities such as beauty and singing contests, and celebration of Philippine Independence Day abroad. In this sense, these practices are expressions of liminality since it makes Filipino migrants feel at home while not being in their homeland.

On this basis, the third pastoral implication of *bayani* as a theological anthropological model for Filipino migrant communities is the character formation of Filipino leaders both in the Philippines and abroad. As leaders, they can influence Filipino migrant communities in the creation of a public opinion that would contribute to nation building not only in the Philippines but also abroad. In this sense, what makes migrant leaders as a *bayani* is their special role in organizing Filipino communities outside of Philippine territory. Thus, Filipino identity as seen in their ‘exported’ cultural practices is no longer limited to one’s attachment to Philippine territorial space.

Universal Significance of *Bayani*: Labor Migrants as Heroes in Late Modernity

We just analyzed Filipino migration culture through the lens of Filipino popular religiosity to do a theological anthropology ‘from below’. Through this method, we were able to come up with a theological anthropology of *bayani* in the context of labor migration. Filipino migrant identity is thus located in a liminal situation akin to what a *bayani* undergoes, resulting in their paradoxical condition that they are neither present here nor there but at the same time ‘partially’ present in both places.

In conclusion, beyond treating migrant identity based on a particular cultural narrative is the imperative to extract its universal anthropological significance. As

Étienne Balibar argues, “Is there, properly speaking, a mode of constitution of individual and collective identity that is specifically national? We must, I think study this question at the deepest level: not at the level of the mere discourses of the community (mythical, historical or literary grand narratives), nor even the level of collective symbols or representations, but the level of the *production of individuality* itself.”⁴⁰ Thus, the study of identity politics, which in this case migrant identity, should not be limited to a particular national or cultural identity.

In response to Balibar, the Filipino *bayani* tradition in the context of labor migration demonstrates three universal aspects of being human: 1) all human beings move from one place to another, 2) all human beings work to sustain themselves as members of a social unit, and 3) everyone has to face and overcome challenges, hence making them vulnerable, in life to improve their well-being. These three anthropological dimensions of being human one way or another reconfigure the way people socially relate. The commodification and creation of asymmetrical forms of social relationships demonstrate the fragility of labor migrants of all nationalities in the globalized capitalist economy. The intensification of migration issues as a contemporary human phenomenon is due to the technological advancements in late modernity. In this connection, to make the tradition of *bayani* embodied by labor migrants universally relevant, these three factors should be viewed from the lens of modernity as expressed through the globalization of capital and labor.

In this aspect, the universal significance of the Filipino labor migrants as *bayani* is to treat all labor migrants as ‘heroes’ in its broadest sense. Following the

⁴⁰ Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, Trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson and Christ Turner (London: Verso, 2002), 66.

ideas of Van Gennep and Turner, Joseph Campbell theorizes that all heroic exploits undergo three stages—departure, initiation and return—which he calls “monomyth”.⁴¹ Monomyth sees that each individual is a ‘hero’ or a protagonist who has a personal story to narrate through the quest they have to accomplish. Using Campbell’s theory, labor migrants exhibit various forms of ‘heroism’ or ‘patriotism’ not merely because of their contribution to their families and economy of their home country but also because of the noble struggles they perform while seeking for opportunity in foreign land. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari predicted, “The man of capitalism is not Robinson but Ulysses, the cunning plebeian, some average man or other living in the big towns, Autochthonous Proletarians or foreign Migrants who throw themselves into infinite movement revolution. Not one but two cries traverse capitalism and head for the same disappointment: Immigrants of all countries, unite-workers of all countries”.⁴² Thus, the globalization of capital and labor struggles in late modernity provide the grounding for extracting the universal significance of *bayani* that all labor migrants as new ‘heroes’ or ‘patriots’.

Campbell’s monomyth provides a universalizing framework for both labor migrants and Jesus from the perspective of heroism. Both begin their new phase of life through their adventure abroad in the case of OFWs, or the ministry to preach the Kingdom of God in the case of Jesus. Likewise, the second phase of the monomyth where the liminal stage happens is their initiation through trials in life. Both OFWs and Jesus had to

⁴¹ Joseph Campbell *A Hero of a Thousand Faces* (New York: Meridien Books, 1956).

⁴² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 [1991]), 98.

undergo suffering as part of the process. The third phase, which is the post-liminal stage, shows the successful return of the OFWs to their family in the Philippines after all the years of struggle working abroad. Although their sacrifices are particularly directed only to their family, the personage of a migrant worker who struggles abroad to secure their household transcends particular cultures and is thus universal. In the case of Jesus, his resurrection both as an historic and transcendent event shows how the 'hero' overcomes death in the cross. The universal relevance of this theological anthropology of *bayani* is thus seen in act of love as sacrifice committed by these personages amidst their struggle in their liminal condition.

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