Women in the Diocese of Boac's Basic Ecclesial Communities: Pastoral Work and Organizing[1]

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Abstract: This article traces the role of pastoral workers/community organizers in the Basic Ecclesial Communities of the Diocese of Boac. It argues that the community organizing component, mostly handled by women lay pastoral workers, has become indispensable to BEC building. It acknowledges the role of women pastoral workers in community building inasmuch as community building has brought about shifts in the role of women in society.

Keywords: Basic Ecclesial Communities • Lay Leadership • Community Organizing • Women and Community • Second Plenary Council of the Philippines

Introduction

The BEC movement in the Philippines profited from the presence of lay leaders, mostly women, who have committed themselves to serve God through pastoral

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work in the churches. These present-day lay leaders have exhibited more religious inclinations and, in many cases, spiritual experiences that led them toward church/parish involvement. The local churches of the 1970s up to early 1980s have gained leaders through the political booms among the radicalized sectors who have dedicated their lives to the work of freedom and liberation from the Marcos dictatorship, US imperialism, feudal powers, and traditional politics.[2]

The current breed of BEC leaders in the sites form a different type of Church workers who are not necessarily immersed in socio-political issues, but are imbued with religious piety and inspiration that could lead them to involvement in critical issues in their communities (cf. BEC's protests against mining of limestone by Bacnotan in Samal, against human rights violation in Cotabato, or against logging in Bukidnon, or against illegal fishing in Cavite).[3]

It is instructive to consider how the BECs started in the late 60s or early 70s in Mindanao as Basic Christian Communities and subsequently organized according to the Basic Christian Community-Community Organizing (BCC-CO) methodology/approach.[4] A salient feature of the BCC-CO approach is its organizing component that

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[2] See, Kathleen M. Nadeau, *Liberation Theology in the Philippines: Faith in a Revolution* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), xiii-xviii; Warren Kinne, *The Splintered Staff: Structural Deadlock in the Mindanao Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1990; Karl M. Gaspar, "Of Faith and Keeping our Faith on the Ground: The Mindanao Church in Fidelity to the Liberating Wellsprings of the Gospel Message," in *Readings on Contemporary Mindanao Church Realities* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1994).

[3] See, the chapters on Samal, Cotabato, and Cavite Parishes in Dagmang, *Final Report*.

[4] See, Karl Gaspar, "Basic Ecclesial Communities in Mindanao: A Call to Continuing Missiological Relevance" *MST Review* 19/1 (2016): 37-66.

later took inspiration from the organizing principles of Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire. Alinsky, an American, operated on the ideas of organizing conflict groups or militants among the poor and making them into professional radicals.[5] Freire, a Brazilian popular educator, relied on radicalizing the poor through an education process called *conscientização* (conscientization).[6] Both of them, Alinsky and Freire, influenced the ways BCCs were organized especially during the martial law years (1972-1981).[7] The churches could not escape the climate of conflict and repression and be confronted by the so-called subversive activities from below. The BCCs of yesteryears were caught in this situation and have been more identified with the prophetic stance that somehow skews the expression of the triple role (*triplex munus*) of the Church as a worshipping, teaching, and serving community.

The BCC-CO approach was identified with the progressive church that created programs like education and health, economic enterprises, and cooperative development as entry points for organizing people to

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[5] See, Aaron Schutz and Mike Miller, eds., *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015).

[6] "Conscientização is often described as the process of becoming aware of social and political contradictions and then to act against the oppressive elements of our sociopolitical conditions. This entails developing a critical attitude to help us understand and analyze the human relationships through which we discover ourselves. Conscientização usually begins with the individual person becoming aware of her own social context, political context, economic context, gender, social class, sexuality, and race and how these play an important role in the shaping of her reality. The process of conscientização also entails becoming aware of our agency to choose and create our reality." Kim Diaz, "Paulo Freire," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; https://iep.utm.edu/freire/#SH5c (accessed 14 Dec 2021).

[7] Martial law was lifted on January 17, 1981, but Marcos retained all of his powers as dictator up to his ouster in 1986.

avoid getting into trouble with the Marcos dictatorship. Even if the BCCs were organized along liturgical work, employing Bible studies and other creative forms of worship, during the martial law years, it became a means for Christian witnessing through socio-political work.

When many Mindanao Bishops distanced themselves from the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) for its politically charged community-organizing approach, dioceses could not avoid stressing on the more familiar liturgical practices for BEC-building.[8] Although some parishes may try to blend the socio-economic aspects of BEC organizing with the liturgical, their programs and projects reflect anemic integration due to lack of competent leaders and pastoral workers. Besides, the weight of the traditional past is just too much to balance with the more recent emphasis on community-building and total human development.

Today, we have BECs which are not necessarily radicalized or conscientized and organized around socio-political issues despite some BECs rallying against logging and mining (cf. cases of Pagadian, Bukidnon, and Marinduque). The previous organizing sites like the chapel or the *barangay* kiosk have become part of the organizing approaches of today's BECs whose members may no longer be attuned to the more conflictual origins or radicalism legacy of the BCCs during the martial law years. Many BECs of today thrive on the more liturgical direction[9] rather than on the approach that fully integrates total human development à la Pope Paul VI in *Populorum progressio*: "The development We speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man." (no. 14)

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[8] See, Gaspar, "Basic Ecclesial Communities In Mindanao."

[9] See, the chapters on Cavite, POLA, Cebu City and Iloilo City Parishes in Dagmang, *Final Report.*

The same Pope clarifies: "When we speak of development, we should mean social progress as well as economic growth." (no. 34). Although difficult and complicated, the integration of socio-economic programs with pre-established piety-imbued liturgical practices through the BEC spaces is indeed a commendable approach. Nevertheless, the task of integrating socio-economic endeavors in BEC-building may require the committed engagement of full-time pastoral workers.

Diocese of Boac's Basic Ecclesial Community Organizing

The Community Organizers

Sr. Mila Velasco (+2007), a member of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, was the first coordinator and supervisor of the BCC-CO Program implemented by the Diocese of Boac's Social Action Commission (SAC). The CO component replaced the former KRISKA (Kristiyanong Kapitbahayan; a neighborhood model) approach of the diocese. The target groups of SAC were the farmers, fishers, and women. Under Sr. Velasco's supervision were the seven (7) full-time community organizers deployed to various parishes: Villaluz Villaruel, Ernesta Paglinawan, George Sapunto, Adora Ricaplaza, Celedonia Rocha, Bernadita Lintot, and Lydia Mauzar. They were the pioneers in community organizing and became indispensable to the expansion of the BEC program which today accounts for more than 30,000 BEC individual members in the whole Boac diocese. As of 2017, there were about 30,000 individual members being served by 6 full-time pastoral workers, 45 part-time BEC Parish Workers, 485 community organizing volunteers.

Today, part-time BEC parish workers and community organizing volunteers join the full-timers in their community work. Volunteer community organizers were recruited from the local parishes for their services; they did not receive the compensation given to full-time community workers. As COs on the level of the parish, they gave strength and presence to the coordinating and consolidating work done by the full-time paid COs. It is to the local COs' active involvement that the increase and maintenance of parish-level BEC awareness and belongingness may be credited. They have successfully gathered people and organized them into BEC members who regularly meet around bible sharing or prayer meeting sessions in various venues—from chapels to town halls or BEC members' homes.

The previously-existing neighborhood belongingness (a cultural trait especially strong in rural communities) made the BEC organizing less-difficult. People were not alien to the values of *damayan/pagkakaisa* (solidarity) and *malasakit/pagtutulungan* (mutual-help).[10] In many areas, it was a matter of formally gathering them together for Church activities. As time went on, however, the neighborhood/KRISKA approach proved to be inadequate to face the issues of ecological devastation (brought about by the operations of Marcopper Mining Corporation and Consolidated Mining), land-grabbing, unemployment/underemployment and widespread poverty. It was because of the urgency felt in the face of such social issues that the CO approach became the diocese's twin component for its BEC program.

Lay participation usually means a corollary and extension of clerical leadership. It refers to the presence

[10] See, Ferdinand D. Dagmang, "*Malasakit* (Compassion) and *Damay* (Empathetic Assistance): An Indigenous World-Embedded Compensation and Resistance at the Margins," *Unitas* 81/2 (December 2008): 307-336.

of active and involved lay faithful in the clergy-initiated parish programs or projects. In other words, the lay people are customarily engaged or recruited by the priests-leaders to partake of their pastoral responsibilities. In this sense, lay participation cannot be possible without the rational management by the clergy who, through their leadership, becomes responsible for a centripetal form of parish management. This paints a picture of lay involvement that extends the functions of clergy leadership. This depicts lay participation as coming from the margins of the Church center—suggesting that lay people and their services are adjuncts to the clergy's central authority.

The presence of full-time COs and volunteer COs, religious celebrations, barangay-level faith activities may still bear the mark of clerical management, but because of the autonomous aspects of lay initiative, autonomous neighborly belongingness, and the logic of cultural practice (away from the parish center's super-vision) lay participation may no longer be regarded simply as a mere portion and asset of clerical leadership.

COs are regarded as delegates from a central diocesan BEC thrust. Yet, as fellow Boakeños (that is, from Boac or fellow residents of Boac), they are also linked to the communities that they serve. In that capacity, their perspectives and dispositions cannot be separated from the Boakeño habits of neighborly belongingness and the logical course of the Boakeño cultural beliefs, rituals, organizations, and practices—that is, the shared Boakeño culture inexorably directing the course of everyday life of the common people. In a sense, COs, possessed by their own sense of commitment, straddle the Church center's vision-mission and the world of the common people. They may be regarded as the bridges that provide vital links between the Diocesan center and the lifeworld of Boakeños. Parishes without pastoral

workers/community organizers are deprived of their special mediating roles—organic leaders that bridge between institutions and communities by being embedded in both.[11]

In a survey done by Maquimot,[12] a community worker of Boac, respondents from various parishes ranked the degree of importance of various personnel responsible for the implementation of BCC-CO program, organization of BCC units in different areas, planning, implementation and evaluation of various programs and activities related to BCC building. The Director of SAC (Fr. Senen Malapad) received the most number of votes from the people for his central role in BEC-building; the BEC program coordinator (Adora R. Sapunto) took the second place; the third place went to Bishop Rafael Lim; the fourth was given to the second Director of SAC (Fr. Allan Malapad), and; the fifth place went to the vicarial coordinator (Ernesta M. Paglinawan). Out of the 50 personnel to be ranked, only 6 names came from the rank of the clergy. The rest, lay workers which include a few members of religious congregations (3 nuns + 2 religious brothers), earned the nod of the respondents.

This perception of the respondents about the high degree of importance given to the role of SAC Directors and Bishop Rafael Lim does not take away the unmatched indispensability of pastoral workers/ community organizers in BEC-building. In fact, the Bishop and SAC Directors depend so much on their

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[11] In the sense that these leaders emerge from a certain group and exercise the function of perpetuating the (positive cultural) hegemony of such a group, they are called "organic intellectuals". See, Antonio Gramsci, *Notes from Prison*, in *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 301-322, 425.

[12] Gil Maquimot, *Basic Christian Communities in the Diocese of Boac,* Unpublished Master's Thesis (Marinduque State College, Boac, Marinduque, 2005), p. 64.

"bridges." Without them, community organizing could not have been successfully implemented down to the level of the parish, chapel, neighborhood, and the family. The Bishop and the SAC directors may be regarded as the 'generals' of an army; the pastoral workers/coordinators, however, are the 'vanguards' who struggle at the forefront and who take *direct* responsibility in bringing the BEC message of hope to the people.

The full-time pastoral worker was the indispensable link between the Center and the periphery; but most important, hers were the indispensable efforts that coordinated the BEC members and inspired them to join each community gathering. Notices or word-of-mouth announcements do not have the same effect as that of the pastoral worker's powerful presence in pulling BEC members out of their everyday routine spaces or immediate concerns.

What is most important is not merely the organizing component provided by pastoral workers. The formation toward a more expanded expression of faith through socio-civic programs/projects is indispensable in BEC formation. This has been proven by Boac's CO approach to BEC development. It may be the case that when BEC programs are linked with what preoccupies households on a daily basis, these households pay a "different" attention to their religion—one that does not only cater to pietistic rituals but also to communitarian BEC living-out the call, through creative activities, to become God's co-creators of people in communities. The experience of Boac Diocese in its efforts at integrating more socio-civic expressions in religion is again instructive for all. Boac's Social Action Commission fosters and promotes socio-political programs that provide more reasons for a wider participation in the BEC.

The presence of paid pastoral workers/community

organizers in Boac diocese has proven to be one of the major keys to the success of BEC in the area—something that could not be said of the BECs without paid pastoral workers.

Popular Religiosity

The religiosity of the people and their friendly/neighborly attitude to the Church is another factor why lay participation could be expected. The influence and reputation of the local Church as dispenser of divine blessings and goodwill is also a taken-for-granted reality. Boakeños are quite a religious people and many of their local practices have become integral part of the symbols, rituals, and feasts of the local Church.

For example, the Annual Moriones Festival is held in Boac and surrounding areas of Marinduque Island during the Lenten season. This celebration is considered as one of the most colorful festivities in Marinduque and in the whole of the Philippines. The festivities reflect the buoyant aspect and cooperative character of Boac's society and culture. The Moriones Festival is one great drama of people's encounter with Jesus and their unconventional ritual-response to the crucifixion event and the mystery of sin and death. Another feast, the Kangga Festival, is celebrated annually to coincide with San Isidro Labrador's feast day, May 15 in Mogpog. *Kangga* is a sled, usually made of bamboo and drawn by a carabao (a Philippine buffalo); it is used by farmers to transport products or tools. The festival features the carroza of San Isidro Labrador and a parade of decorated *kangga* pulled by carabaos and filled with harvests while residents, who walk barefoot in farming attire, carry assorted tools and *bilao* (a native tray woven from bamboo materials) filled with fresh vegetables and fruits.

These local celebrations represent some of the public aspects of the people's faith expressions. These would show their autonomous appropriation of some elements of Christianity and would give a deeper significance to the fact of lay participation.

Neighborly belongingness

The autonomous neighborly belongingness lived and experienced by the people of every neighborhood is vital in terms of the communitarian quality it brings to the BEC program. Being an internal component of the people's lifeworld, neighborly belongingness becomes part of the package of lay participation as lay members bring themselves into the whole BEC program.

Except for the Immaculate Concepcion Parish in Boac poblacion/town center, where BECs are a mere 3 units (in Maquimot's data), indices of community and belongingness are high in most areas of Marinduque even though the indices of income, housing, health, employment, education, and environment are low. Thus, implicit to the notion of lay participation is its communitarian spirit grounded in a broad and solid socio-cultural base. In that, every step taken, every contribution given, or every decision made by members of the BEC is marked by the harmony, tonality, melody, rhythm, and texture of neighborly belongingness that constitutes Marinduque's island-agrarian culture. In this sense, lay participation *must be brought back to its implicit lifeline in popular culture* than just credit its fruition to the rational administration of the Diocesan center. The center may have provided the leadership impetus for ecclesial-organizational work, but Marinduque island-agrarian society and culture have always been there for a more strategic harnessing. Boac's diocesan thrust of BCC-CO has precisely provided that

harness toward a more ecclesial orientation and direction of neighborly belongingness.

Cultural Praxis

Hence, the logic of cultural practice must be remembered and recognized as an inevitable component of what could transpire and result from every lay involvement in the BEC. If Boac culture contributes to community and to the increase in inclusive solidarity, then there is every reason to recognize and promote its importance. But if Boac culture brings more negative components into the BEC program, then steps must be taken to check its direction. The ambivalent logic of culture may manifest in the way solidarity is either understood as a broad practice of mutual help among neighbors or as a narrow practice of exclusive solidarity of clan members or relatives. It is in this context that the Christological principles, built into PCP II's vision of the Church of the Poor,[13] should work to purify a culture that necessarily forms every BEC.

With the gains of community organizing shown by the progress of the vibrant Marinduque Social Action Multi-Purpose Cooperative (MASAMCO; a merger of *Pederasyon ng Marinduqueñong Magsasaka at Mangingisda* [PEMARSAKADA; a farmers and fishers group] and *Mga Kababaihang Kapit-Bisig Tungo Sa Katarungan* [MAGKABALIKATAN; a women's group]), lay participation has reached an incomparable level in any BEC-inspired activity in Marinduque. As of

[13] *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 47ff.; Ferdinand D. Dagmang, "From Vatican II to PCP II to BEC Too: Progressive Localization of a New State of Mind to a New State of Affairs." *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal, Vol. II,* ed. Shaji George Kochuthara, 308-326 (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2015), 312ff.

December 2012, MASAMCO has 2,026 members (plus 500 associate members) with assets of PhP 6,387,597.78. It has brought socio-economic benefits to its members, like loan assistance, scholarship, senior citizens' support, *damayan* program, technical education, and savings deposits services.

The Mobilization of Women for Pastoral Work

The home, neighborhood, and farms are the primary spaces that provide the platform and backdrop/stage for Boac everyday life as well as for the shaping of identities, roles, and the directions of people's hopes or goals—this agricultural embeddedness points to the kind of emplacement that Boac women cannot avoid, notwithstanding the presence of the Boac poblacion which provides a different kind of space for less rural lifestyles. Nevertheless, life in the island of Boac is predominantly farming and fishing in character.

Boac women thus are exposed to typical domestic, neighborhood, and farm experiences as they are raised to become daughters, potential wives, and mothers of fishers and farmers. The everyday life of girls who have rarely gone beyond secondary schooling has predictably led to the pathways of farming or fishing life of fathers or siblings. When they get married, they usually trace the footsteps of their mothers or grandmothers. Boac women stand on island-provincial spaces and are soaked in age-old socio-cultural traditions. However, some of the more adventurous or ambitious types may follow directions away from farming or fishing and toward opportunities that deviate from the usual choices of their more conventional cohorts. But they do not represent the majority.

Majority of Boac women (44.5% complete primary schooling; 33% enter secondary level; 8% complete

college), because of lack of resources, would follow the ways of their mothers or grandmothers, navigate the confines of their modest homes/huts and neighborhood, tend to the needs of farmer/fisher fathers and husbands, give birth to children, nurture them and hope for a household that will keep them in their old age, until they get sick, bid goodbye to the world, and laid to rest in the local cemetery.

At home, women would have mastered the language and practice of care, nurture, and home economics. They would have the opportunity to extend these home routines toward public water wells, rivers for washing and bathing, market places or backyard gardens. This means that going out in public would invariably lead women back to their paramount domestic space. In the neighborhood spaces, many (especially those unemployed) would learn the ways of coming together in the immediate public even as they would also supervise toddlers scampering around front yards or watch boys negotiating with their playmates or be mindful of little girls bonding with fellow girls; ladies or mothers would converse with fellow women on topics about or beyond the kitchen, laundry room/water wells, and bedroom, until the domestic space call them back to fulfill roles and face other home routines again. The neighborhood spaces (unfenced front yards or alleys without physical boundaries or clear public markers) have become places of interactions and belongingness that also inevitably lead women back to home spaces at proper times (after laundry, before meals preparation). Home movements, processes, and interactions somehow dictate the nature of movements and interactions that are negotiated in public. Thus, domestic concerns exert the powerful centripetal direction of many women in Boac; centrifugal movements even depend on or yield to the more dominant pull of the domestic center. Even as public spaces are

external to homes, domestic concerns intersect through women who move and interact along spaces that inexorably lead back to baby care, kitchen, laundry, and bedroom. Pathways and spaces of Boac are highways for women's predominantly domestic roles.

The daily domestic routines of many Boac women, however, are rather simple and do not preoccupy the whole waking hours of women. As women are freed from the domestic chores, some of them respond to the call of BEC organizing—using their "free" or "idle" times for community time. Those who are pre-occupied with employment would be pulled toward the job market where time is measured and where paid work is earmarked for production or service; those who cannot avoid regular farm work and domestic calls would fail to break the cycle of domesticity. The interconnected BEC time-space has provided a breather and vitality/fresh life to Boac women's drives and capacities.

The BEC-spaces which provided new spaces for Boac women have become sites not only for planning about BECs and livelihood programs; these have become venues for exchange of narratives and opinion that have formative roots in their experiences as women of their homes and neighborhood. Deliberation and discussion, action and interaction, are now experiences of broader and more expansive public activities that widened their previously narrow perspectives—from their home chores toward the broader arena of ecclesial-political practices. Perspectives that have been narrowed down by particular domestic concerns are now widened and expanded by the broadening effects of the BEC activities and the emerging culture of ecclesial community. Hence, women's social integration has reached more spaces which were previously closed because these were far or distinct from their domestic/domesticating roles. The new spaces that the BEC has unveiled for women have further

contributed to the re-shaping of their common/ customary/conventional consciousness (*karaniwang kamalayan*) as women of the home, neighborhood, ecclesia, and the wider Boac civil society.

From their domestic and neighborhood spaces to the ecclesial public, women bring themselves to learn new things with their dispositions providing the platform for apprehending and appropriating whatever is intelligible and significant to their lives. The BEC-space, where religious goods, products, laws, and codes also rule sovereign through the clergy, has become a space and a pathway that does not necessarily force women back to domestic roles and routines.

Is Numerosity (of women) an indication of Feminization of BEC?

Women are embraced by a familiar religion and encouraged to participate in BEC-time/community time while they bring along their gender and neighborly habitus. Women's chronotope[14]—"time-space"—within

[14] Mikhael Bakhtin defines chronotope: "We will give the name chronotope (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture.'

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.

the BEC narrative are time-spaces of participation and gendered cultural expressions. From their used-to-be "free time", women have found spaces that afforded communitarian experiences and promised hopes beyond their traditional emplacement. The BEC-women chronotope has opened windows, doors, and pathways that do not just lead to domesticating farms or rivers or coastlines.

Women, usually localized in the kitchens, laundry rooms, rivers, bedroom, have been extending their presence in terrains in view of non-domestic obligations. In the BEC, they learn to make themselves present in community spaces. In turn, BEC could not but be shaped or infected by the process of diffusion of the feminine-domestic brand of attentiveness, responsiveness, and care when women respond to the call of the BECs. Women would bring their "different" view of their world; their more relational ways of dealing with fellows; their intuitive approach to issues; their caring ways of solving problems or conflicts, or; their home-manner of doing community.

Does this mean BEC in Boac is feminized? Is numerosity in BEC an indication of its feminization? Would women's numbers, scents, and voices engender the feminization of the Church of the Poor? Do they overwhelm BEC's spaces and processes?

The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic." "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel," *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258.

What does this BEC activity mean for the women?

During the 18th century Industrial Revolution migrations in England, factories located hundreds of miles away beckoned thousands of women from the farms of their fathers and husbands to try their luck in the cash-promising jobs in textile, food, and furniture manufacturing; some have even entered the mines. Some of them had their children in tow that also formed part of the industry's labor pool. Their native skills in household or farm chores were enough qualification for them to be enlisted by industries. The unpredictability of job offerings and the strange/spartan urban life that awaited them in their factory lodgings did not deter women from pushing their wager for a brighter future. The hope written on their faces for the prospect of a more prosperous future pulled them away from their native grounds and familiar neighborhood. They had to literally uproot themselves away from their homes and neighborhood, bringing with them the culture of their ancestors and neighborhood.

Boac women have heard the call of the BECs, but this is neither a call to enter the factories or offices nor miles away from their homes and neighborhood. We have women, whose roles are clearly cut for them by culture, and called to enter into the BEC spaces and processes which are not generated by farming or fishing but by a discourse which again does not come from farmers or fishers.

Women in the BEC gradually see themselves occupying some new public space and time to engage with familiar and not-so-familiar activities like discussion, comparing problems, offering solutions, fellowship beyond neighbors, and conversations *without* their husbands (who may give them the gaze). But then women express themselves through these new things in this new

state of affairs—drawing out something from themselves and drawing them outside the confines of their domestic spaces and roles. Their words matter now, not only what they produce in the kitchen, water wells, or bedroom but also in the public forum where the exchange of ideas is robust—giving them opportunities to explore and realize some aspects of their personalities, like acquiring a voice, expressing different voice, and acting on that voice.

In today's BECs of Boac, women find themselves in public spaces and scenarios still filled with the old. As they bring with them their neighborly belongingness, they are not entirely deprived of the traditional religious beliefs and rituals that they learned from their elders. The regular sessions for Bible sharing and prayer meetings are not entirely strange to them since these are still part of the religious seasons that followed the Church calendar. The more organized prayer scenarios celebrated outside church venues still form part of the ordinary religious culture that informed their growing up years; the religious practices that became closer and nearer to homes (and more detached from the church center) are still the kinds of faith expressions that promised salvation, formed upright behavior, and reinforced trust in God. At the parish center, the vestments of priests, the rituals of masses, and the way the other sacraments are celebrated are neither strange nor novel. They are part of their parish worlds that Vatican II has opened up for their grandparents in the late 1960s and had become common in their generation. The domestic chores, problems, and family life challenges may not have prepared them for the unfamiliar tasks they encounter in organized BEC activities, but the familiar religious-symbolic world was something that did not intimidate them.

Conclusion

The Boac BECs opened up new challenges and possibilities for lay members, especially women who would constitute majority of the BEC membership. The BECs in fact provided newer pathways and spaces that served to extend and broaden their limited and confined spaces of experience. In their BEC involvement and among fellow BEC members, their participation in the ecclesial activities, their sense of solidarity as they tackle common problems (like financial difficulties), situations of crisis (disease and death), and community concerns (pollution, landlessness) gave them more opportunities to discover and embody the different aspects of their personhood and mission.

The decentralization of parish programs and services has also led to the opening of the parish center to popular or communitarian involvement. The movement of liturgy and parish services into the people's zones has not only developed BECs at the chapel level, but also raised BEC people's awareness about their vital role in the parish center that has welcomed them. The people's movement toward the center has created a dynamic centripetal lay involvement. It is not so much the center that has drawn people toward itself, but the people having been drawn by their desire to become further involved in broadened spaces that allow and welcome their presence. Thus, even if the old rituals still characterize the BEC liturgies, there is a new grassroots-based organization that draws broader forms of participation. This, hopefully, will eventually lead to newer forms of ecclesial life and identities.

Some may regard lay participation in running the affairs of the parish as already revolutionary. But one that is fully revolutionary is to rally behind a God who liberates people from the enticements and traps of the

cultures of consumption, exclusive alliances, domination, money-making, and distinction-seeking.

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