‘Figuring’ Catholicism: The Santo Niño and Religious Discourse in Cebu

Julius J. Bautista

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University

December 2003
ANY VISITOR WHO INQUIRES about Cebu City’s most important historic site would most likely be led to Fort San Pedro. Initially constructed in the sixteenth century, the first Spanish fort to be established in the Philippines is a triangular-shaped bastion of citadels and towers, now nestled among landscaped lawns and gardens. What remains of its fortified stone walls -- twenty feet high and eighteen feet thick -- contribute to a lingering echo of militancy about the compound, which has at various times served as barracks for colonial and Filipino soldiers alike. After having been placed under the administration of the National Museum, some effort has been made to underscore the Fort’s historical and religious heritage. At its entrance, a replica of the Christ Child, the Santo Niño de Cebu is placed within the stone just above the seal of the Spanish King, while maps of Cebu drawn since 1521 are commonly displayed in commemoration of “The Founding of Cebu.” Wandering around the compound, it is not hard for one to get the impression that the city had indeed come into being when the Fort was built – an intriguing incidence of anachronism considering that Cebu had in fact existed many centuries before the first stone was laid.
In the near vicinity of the Fort, meanwhile, is another very popular and sacred tourist attraction. Within a white kiosk is enclosed a black cross of tindalo wood standing about three meters in height (Figure 1.1). In 1834, Gov. Miguel Creus had the structure built in commemoration of Ferdinand Magellan’s 1521 arrival in Cebu. Legend has it that through the centuries, Cebuanos would pick at this cross in attempting to acquire the miraculous properties it was believed to contain. It is now popularly said (with varying degrees of seriousness, to be sure) that the black structure houses “the remnants” of the original cross to protect it from being chipped away.

![Figure 1.1 “Magellan’s Cross”](image)

The mural on the ceiling is an allegorical depiction of the arrival of Magellan’s expedition in Cebu in 1521. It depicts the first event of baptism and Cebuano conversion to Christianity upon which the Santo Niño was presented as a gift to Cebuanos.

*J. Bautista, Cebu City, April 2001*

Symbolic of the advent of Christianity in the Philippines, Magellan’s Cross and Fort San Pedro are representative of the impressions most Cebuanos choose to project to
visitors of the City. There is a sense in which the value of such "lieux de memoire" (Nora, 1984) lie in the impact of the decrepit – in old structures that enable the observer to make a mental and visual connection between the city and the events that had foregrounded its establishment. This is a process that is familiar not just in Cebu but also in other places in the Philippines. The promotion of a religious icon such as the Cross, combined with the ancient maps and dedications within an old Fort suggest a value for the antiquated as a source of symbolic capital. Inasmuch as the congruence of militancy and religiosity had once characterised the Iberian campaigns in New Worlds (symbolized effectively by the Santo Niño’s image over the Royal Insignia), the Fort and the Cross are representative of Cebu’s ‘authentic’, if not tangible, claim as the “spiritual capital” of the Philippine nation. But they also suggest something that is closer to the heart of this paper: that religiosity in Cebu is inexorably linked with a prevailing discourse that has at its core a reverence for moments of arrival and discovery.

It is important to understand that like Magellan’s Cross and Fort San Pedro, the popular conception of the origins of Christianity is likewise conceived within specific discursive configurations. This paper discusses how the popular image of the Santo Niño is bound allegorically and metaphorically to the two events that are thought to be the foundational moments in Philippine history: the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in 1521, and that of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in 1565. In both these moments, the image of the Santo Niño is depicted as having been the decisive factor in facilitating the productive interaction between conqueror and conquered – relationships that were otherwise liable to succumb to the numerous factors that threatened to undermine the expedition’s success, as we shall later see.
The Philippine archipelago is here described as “twice discovered” by virtue of the significance Cebuanos place upon two events of Spanish arrival. In both the formal and casual remembrance of their city’s historical legacy, Cebuanos invariably invoke the momentous events of Magellan and Legazpi’s arrival, citing the religious ceremonies of baptism or “first mass” that gave them poignancy. Indeed, the significance of those moments can be located in Spanish and Cebuano interpretations of one little figure -- one which still stands enshrined in the city today. This essay describes how the history Cebuanos remember is a pervasive retelling of a particular allegory in which the Santo Niño ‘figures’ as the most decisive actor. The question asked here is this: how does the ‘figuring’ of the Santo Niño provide the conditions of possibility for which both the Cebuano and the Spaniard came to perceive their encounter as specifically divine? How is ‘discovery’ construed as both a geographical act of mapping and naming, and a spiritual one of conversion and baptism? The sections that follow will examine the allegorical underpinnings of ‘discovery’ and the divine and holy events of ‘finding’ that foreground and define it. It is in so doing that we may be able to understand how Forts and Crosses in Cebu have become imbued with a ‘sacred’ force that re-inscribes its significance in Cebuano history.
The Epic Voyage of Discovery: Ferdinand Magellan, 1521

ONE WOULD BE HARD PRESSED to find a textual description of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines that does not base itself on Antonio Pigafetta’s Primo Vaggio Intorno al Mondo (First Voyage Around the World). As a member of Magellan’s crew, Pigafetta provided not only a traveller’s account of the expedition but also a detailed ethnography of the peoples they encountered. Even outside the Philippine context, Primo Vaggio is widely regarded as the pre-eminent text of ‘discovery’, referred to by historians and literary writers from Shakespeare to Gabriel Garcia Marquez. (Cf. Mojares 2002). In the Philippines, Pigafetta’s text is unquestionably the most popular account of the Spanish arrival in the Philippines, and also of ancient Filipino religious customs and beliefs.

In many ways, Primo Vaggio is a veritable hagiography of Ferdinand Magellan: a man who had been an experienced campaigner for the Portuguese in their conquest of Malacca in 1511-12. After several unsuccessful petitions to the Portuguese court for further expeditions, he defected to Spain with proposals of a Westward route to the Indies.

1 The text used in this essay is from Jocano (1975) as translated in Blair and Robertson, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 103-211. While the original diary itself is lost, there are four manuscript versions of it: one in Italian (archived in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan) and three in French (two archived in the Bibliotèque Nationale in Paris and the third in the Beinecke Rare and Manuscript Library of Yale University). Primo Vaggio first appeared in English in Richard Eden’s Decades of the New World (1555). It has since appeared in numerous forms and publications. (Cf. Mojares 2002 and Wionczek, 2000) The transcription found in Jocano, however, (i.e. the Blair and Robertson) is the most commonly used in the Philippines and it is only for this reason that I use it here, remaining sensitive to the debate regarding the process of its translation from the Spanish.
(Figure 1.2). Correspondingly, the establishment of a trading route that would destabilise the Portuguese monopoly of the spice trade framed the commercial interests of the Spanish Cortes. Magellan was thus granted funds and equipment for a voyage to the Spice Islands which began in September 1519 with five ships and a manifest of around two hundred sixty-five.

![Map of Magellan's Voyage](map.png)

*Figure 1.2: Route of the First Circumnavigation of the Earth, 1519-1522*

The Spanish Court's sanction for the expedition was made under the prescriptions of Alexander VI's Papal Bull of Tordesillas in 1494. In seeking to settle Spanish-Portuguese conflicts, the treaty effectively carved the world up into two spheres of influence. This kind of division -- what lay West was within the Spanish jurisdiction, and what lay East, Portuguese -- revealed the prevailing ignorance about the exact extent of the Pacific and what lay beyond the realms of familiarity. Tordesillas, however, did not
grant temporal jurisdiction *per se* but a religious one in allowing each nation the right to send missionaries to the lands which lay on its allocation. Though the lands encountered would ostensibly be occupied either through their inhabitants’ consent or through war, the treaty did much to encourage the incorporation (or at times, the conflation) of agendas of trade and missionization in the Orient.²

When Magellan set out on his expedition, his priorities were far from ‘discovering’ the Spice Islands or in proselytizing along the way. His main objective was to prove the existence of a strait across the American continent. This he achieved in 1520 upon navigating around Tierra del Fuego in Argentina via a strait now named after him. As such, the “discovery” and Christianisation of the Philippine archipelago a year later was not the specific objective of the voyage. Rather, it was an incidental (indeed, almost accidental) outcome of what was primarily a Spanish commercial enterprise and one that sought to lay the inroads for the eventual missionization of China and Japan.³

While Magellan’s goals were indeed ambitious, he may well have underestimated the toll that a trans-Pacific crossing would take on an expedition already decimated by mutiny, hostile encounters and natural disasters. By the time his fleet had achieved the feat -- arriving in the eastern Visayas three years after it had set out -- it was one literally falling apart at the seams with a hungry, diseased and demoralized crew. Much of the earlier sections of Pigafetta’s account depict a mission in dire and desperate need of replenishment and recuperation.

---

³ Magellan’s instructions are specific and very much commercial. See “Instrucciones que dio el Rey a Magallanes y a Falero para al viaje al descubrimiento de las islas de Maluco” in the Coleccion de las Viages. Scott (1994) argues that these commercial instructions were to be adhered to precisely, even if it meant engaging in cordial relations to any Muslims encountered. (p. 43)
In such a state, it was imperative for Magellan and his crew to establish friendly relations with natives of the Philippine archipelago. It is significant, then, that the first Spanish landing in the archipelago was indeed marked by an act of hospitality (in stark contrast to their experience in the Pacific islands where they were subjected to petty theft and looting). In the eastern Visayas, they were greeted by natives from Samar who, according to Pigafetta, “exhibited great pleasure at seeing us” (Primo Vaggio p. 46). Naming the archipelago “Islas de San Lazaro” (as it was sighted during the Saint’s feast), a mass was held the following day to commemorate their salvation. In Samar, the expedition found mental and physical recuperation in the friendliness of the natives, imbuing the journey to the Spice Islands with renewed strength and enthusiasm.

The event of arrival in the area is itself posited as an unlikely and pioneering event in its own right, and it is in the context of chivalry, courage and magnanimity that Christianity is shown to have arrived in Cebu. In contemporary recollections of this event, there is a great deal of underestimation of how the friendly encounter at Samar conditioned subsequent impressions of the arrival, particularly in terms of Magellan’s later acts of Christianisation. But the events at Samar did much to fuel the belief that the vassals of Christianity arrived in the Philippines in a spirit of conviviality, not of forced conquest. This is the scenario that reverberates in Philippine conceptions of the ‘discovery’ and ‘conversion’ to Christianity. As we shall see, the event is largely remembered as it was depicted in Pigafetta’s account: a solemn blessing that Cebuanos readily accepted without much opposition or, for that matter, full appreciation.
Discovery as Christening

The founding action of Christian imperialism is a christening. Such a christening entails the cancellation of the native name – the erasure of the alien, perhaps demonic, identity – and hence a kind of making new. It is at once an exorcism, an appropriation, and a gift. (Greenblatt 1991, 83).

The expedition proceeded to Cebu (Zubu or Sugbo) on April 17, 1521 after having been led there by one of the local chieftains. There, they were greeted by an emissary to Rajah Humabon, ruler of Cebu, who communicated through an interpreter that the Spanish were required to pay the regulatory port duties. This Magellan refused on the grounds that he was the “captain of the greatest King and prince in the world” and would not pay tribute to a lesser king. If Humabon “wished peace, he would have peace but if war instead, war.” Conflict was averted when Humabon agreed to dispense with the tribute upon the advice of a Muslim trader who recognised the Spaniards as the white men “who have conquered Calicut, Malacca and all India Magiore [sic.]” (Primo Vaggio p. 55) It would be unwise, he was advised, to oppose these foreigners who only ten years before had subdued the prominent Sri Vijayan port.

Humabon’s recantation, while probably interpreted by the Spaniards as a capitulation to their inherent jurisdiction, attests to Cebu’s connectivity to the political and commercial matrix within the region. There is much textual and archaeological evidence to the effect that Cebu had extensive commercial transactions with neighboring polities, servicing a network spanning south from Timor to Canton in the north, and west to the coast of the Malay peninsula (see Hutterer 1973 and Fenner 1985). In this instance it seems likely that Humabon himself exhibited a type of pragmatism characteristic of the Southeast Asian leaders characterized by Wolters (1999) and Reid (1988, 1993): as men
of prowess who placed primacy on commerce and opportunistic forecast in interacting with new arrivals. Mojares (2002) points out that the Spanish encountered in Cebu “a people who were not wholly surprised by the appearance of white men and were wise to the rites of diplomacy and trade.” (p. 24). Like the Europeans, who came for commodities and the prospect of exchange, the Cebuano court of Humabon too was aligned towards enhancing the prospect of favourable trading relations.

Inasmuch as commerce was the prime motivation of the Spanish expedition, it is not entirely clear why Magellan chose to forgo an immediate departure for the Moluccas as formally instructed. Instead, the expedition dallied for over a month in Cebu where members of the crew immersed themselves in Cebuano life. Ever vigilant for the presence of Moors in the region, the Visayas that Magellan encountered was somewhat of an anomaly in an archipelago dominated by Moro settlements in Mindanao and to a lesser extent Luzon. Pigafetta had asked Rajah Kulumbo specifically if they were Muslim and the latter’s reply was that they had no god in particular but worship “abba.” (Scott 1994, 79). The animistic religious practice of Cebuanos is described by Pigafetta, who by this time was interacting quite freely with the locals. He observed that “These people are heathens, and go naked and painted [tattooed].” (Primo Vaggio, 53) Indeed, this was a nakedness that exceeded their physical state of undress which, like so many other instances in the engagement with the New World, was conceived to be a nakedness of a spiritual nature as well. Though Cebuano flesh was painted to signify their animistic belief, it suggested not a religious system in its own right but a lack of culture and religion that made them suitable objects of missionisation and eventual conversion.
It was in this context that Magellan would invite natives to his ship, himself waxing eloquent about the Christian faith. That it was the Captain himself who did so indicated the blurring of his imperialistic mandate and missionary aspiration. In the several events of Magellan’s proselytism, Cebuanos are portrayed by Pigafetta in their physical and spiritual naïveté -- dumbfounded and awed by the eloquence of the Captain’s words. As Pigafetta describes:

The Captain told them that if they became Christians, he would leave a suit of armor, for so had his king commanded him... and that if they became Christians, the devil would no longer appear to them except in the last moment of their death. They said that they could not answer the beautiful words of the captain’s, but that they placed themselves in his hands, and that he should treat them as his most faithful servants. (Primo Vaggio p. 58)

Christian conversion is here depicted as explicitly associated not only with spiritual but material benefit, having as Royal decree the provision of armory as an accompanying gift. If the Spaniards thought of their arrival in the Philippines as their saving grace, it was perhaps even more so for the Cebuano who would be able to reap the dual rewards of conversion. Yet the acceptance of Christianity among Cebuanos is here depicted as entirely motivated by the inherent truth and beauty of Captain’s word, driving natives into an almost mesmerized acceptance and unconditional submission.

Encouraged by their acquiescence, Magellan had hundreds of Cebuanos baptised including Rajah Humabon and his wife, who are likewise depicted as having accepted the Christian faith sincerely and wholeheartedly. During the baptism of Humabon’s wife, she was presented with a wooden image of the Santo Niño in commemoration; a gift she readily accepted as Pigafetta narrates:
After dinner the priest together with some of the others went ashore to baptize the queen, who came with forty women. We conducted her to the platform, and she was made to sit down upon a cushion, and the other women near her, until the priest should be ready. She was shown an image of Our Lady, a very beautiful wooden Child Jesus, and a cross. Thereupon, she was overcome with contrition and asked for baptism amid her tears... She asked us to give her the little Child Jesus to keep in place of her idols, and then she went away. (Primo Vaggio 62-63)

The sheer ceremoniality of the event is portrayed to be too much for the Queen herself, who, like her subjects, had become passionately won over by the whole experience. Her tears – indicative of her utter emotional release and surrender – framed the inherent and universal appeal of the Christian iconography presented to her, with the Santo Niño being particularly appealing. From the Spanish perspective, it seems the figure was a gift in both a literal and figurative sense. On the one hand, the Santo Niño was to be henceforth displayed as a visual reminder of the new Cebuano commitment to the Christian God. On the other, it was a symbolic representation of the elevation of erstwhile pagans into the realms of those worthy of divine mercy and salvation.

That Humabon’s wife was made to choose between a crucifix, the image of Mary and the Santo Niño is also significant. Interviews conducted in Cebu indicates that her choice of the latter is widely interpreted as significant of the importance Filipinos place on family and in particular, “the Filipino love for Children.” In this sense, the Santo Niño was a ‘figuring’ of the God to whom they were promising their devotion – a tangible signifier of goodwill between two people brought together by miraculous circumstances. Inasmuch as the baptism was a symbolic cleansing of their damnation, the figure of the Santo Niño was a cross-cultural conduit of sorts, bridging the gap engendered by Cebuano exoticism and Spanish noblesse oblige. It was during this baptism that the Santo Niño first became a kind of intercessor between the colonizer and
colonised; a role it would fulfill for most of the Spanish presence in the Philippines. The ‘mass baptism’ in 1521 is commemorated in Cebu as the exact moment during which Cebuanos became aware of the true meaning of the Christian faith, symbolized so effectively by the figure of the Santo Niño and the tearfully passionate way in which it was received (Figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3:** The Santo Niño is presented to the “Queen of Cebu” during her baptism

Apart from this, the baptism was a ‘christening’ in the true sense of the word. Humabon and his entourage, like the rest of the islands over which he had dominion, would henceforth be known by the Christian names they were bequeathed. Humabon himself would be known as Don Carlos after the Spanish king; a designation that would ‘promote’ him to vassal of the Spanish crown. It was premised upon a promise made by
Magellan that conversion went hand in hand with political and military sovereignty over the archipelago. This does not mean that the possibility of a purely spiritual element in the Cebuano acquiescence to baptism and conversion should be dismissed entirely. It is important to recognize, however, that Humabon’s baptism was not just a religious ascension but a political one that would see him reaping the rewards of a Spanish-supported claim to neighboring islands. In light of these rewards, it may not be foolish to interpret Cebuano conversion (within a four week period to a God they did not know and a king they had not seen) as a small ‘price’ to pay for the establishment of a Spanish-Cebuano military coalition. This is certainly a scenario that is played out in contemporary remembrances of the event, particularly during the annual commemorations of the “discovery of the Philippines” (Cañizares 1960).

Magellan had sought to uphold an Imperial dominion in the islands with Humabon himself as the locally designated custodian. A few weeks after the baptism, Magellan focused on the containment of Rajah Lapulapu, Humabon’s rival in nearby Mactan island, who had been expressing recalcitrance to Spanish demands to yield to Humabon’s authority. It was a strong conviction in European military and spiritual superiority that embroiled Magellan in a horrendously lopsided battle against the painted warriors of Mactan. On the morning of April 27 – a day “especially holy to him” -- Magellan himself landed a group of a mere sixty soldiers into battle in spite of his knowledge of the overwhelming odds against which they were pitted.

The battle of Mactan during which Magellan met his death, is remembered in the Philippines as a truly defining moment in history. Yet as Mojares (2002) observes, the battle of Mactan was quite literally a performance, having as actors a Spanish crew eager
to demonstrate a divinely inspired military superiority, and as an audience, Cebuanos, who were asked to participate but only as spectators in what was meant to be a one-sided demonstration. Damrosch’s observations on the Conquistadores in South America may have likewise held true for Magellan in Mactan: “Warfare is seen as an artistic act,” he observes, “and the warrior becomes a poet” (Cf. Greenblatt 1993, xiii). Victory at Mactan would not only be a military success, but also an affirmation of Magellan’s eloquent proselytism. But when Magellan lost his life in this battle, he was not only denied the promised material rewards completing the first trans-Pacific voyage. His defeat at Mactan had nullified European claims to superiority, triggering a chain of events that led to the massacre of the remaining crew and their harried evacuation from Cebu.

Despite the disintegration of Cebuano-Spanish relations, Magellan’s place in Philippine history is secure. He had become the geographical “discoverer” of the Philippines, landing by chance in the archipelago as an ‘accident of history’. Despite the tragic circumstances that eventually befall him, he is credited as having implanted the seeds of Christianity through a noble act of baptism. In having first mapped, charted and fixed the location of the archipelago, Magellan (and indeed, Pigafetta) is seen to have put Cebu on the geographical map as a significant place in Philippine and world history. And in his act of ‘converting’ Cebuanos, he had also placed them on the spiritual map, effecting a “Christianisation” in a double sense of naming and blessing.

A dilapidated and famished crew ventured onward from Cebu and eventually reached the Moluccas. Led by their new leader, Sebastian del Cano, the crew loaded their vessels with spices and managed to arrive back in Spain in April 1522. The expedition had completed the world’s first circumnavigation, but at considerable cost.
Having lost four out of five ships, it had also left behind several of its crew in Cebu, as well as Magellan’s corpse in Mactan. Incidentally, they also left the image of the Santo Niño – an occurrence that would prove significant forty-four years later, as the archipelago would be discovered for a second time.

II

The Second ‘Discovery’: Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, 1565

The introduction of Christianity in Cebu is marked by stories of religious images lost and found. (Mojares 2000, 7)

AS NEWS OF THE MAGELLAN EXPEDITION reached Spain, the Spanish Cortes sent several expeditions to the Philippines. Between 1525 and 1542, Loaisa had set out from Spain while Saavedra and Villalobos did so from Mexico. (De la Costa SJ 1965, 18 and Documentos de Ultramar II, pp. 161-163) All of these expeditions reached the islands and ventured directly into the Moluccas, but only a fleet led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi made landfall in Cebu in April 28, 1565. While Magellan’s was a commercial mission that had taken on a proselytizing nature after experiencing great hardship in the Pacific, Legazpi’s was mandated not only to expand the commercial interests of the Spanish Cortes, but to investigate the circumstances that befell his predecessor and continue on with the Christianising mission he had set in motion.

In the forty-four year gap between the two Spanish expeditions to Cebu, Cebuanos are believed to have continued with the animist practice that had, evidently, only been replaced with Christianity on a superficial level. Consequently, the
reappearance of Legazpi’s ships was viewed with apprehension by Cebuanos who had become increasingly wary following brutal raids by the Portuguese in nearby Bohol island in 1562 (Scott 1994, 47). Significantly, Legazpi’s crew did had not met with the same hospitable arrival that Magellan encountered in 1521. A brief period of negotiation with local chiefs deteriorated, prompting the Spaniards to bombard the settlement. The port city was set ablaze by Cebuanos as they evacuated themselves and things of value to the highlands.

Circumstances of violence and hostility mark the beginning of a physically and mentally demoralizing first few weeks for the Spanish, who also had to contend with diminishing supplies and provisions. Legazpi’s difficulties were compounded by the fact that the legitimacy of the expedition did not receive the full support of accompanying clergy themselves. 4 If Magellan’s expedition had arrived in the archipelago after difficult circumstances in the Pacific, Legazpi’s mission likewise underwent hardships. And just as Magellan found recuperation and encouragement in Samar, an event commemorated accordingly in the naming of San Lazaro and in the First Mass, thus it seemed that the second expedition was to find what would be perceived as divine salvation in the ruins of the settlement they themselves had set ablaze.

In the many contemporary depictions of the event, there is one exception to the otherwise hostile relationship between Cebuano and Spaniard in 1565. After Magellan

---

4 Catholic priests aboard the expedition were not convinced of the merits of the missionization in the archipelago, preferring instead that their efforts be focused on New Guinea. An anonymous report contained in a letter to the King from Mexico dated 28 May 1560 indicates that “the friars in the fleet felt very badly about [the expedition to the Philippines], saying that they had been deceived and had they known or suspected this while ashore, they would not have come for they believed the reasons that Fr. Urdaneta had given in Mexico... the friars refused to participate in [the decision to settle in Cebu] saying that they would not give an opinion on settlements in these islands”. Paragraph quoted from Fr. Fermín de Urcilla y Arroita Arregui “Urdaneta y la Conquista de Filipinas Estudio Historico” San Sebastian: 1907, pp 195-229. Cf. See Felix (1992, 9)
had left, the Santo Niño figure given as a gift to Humabon’s wife is believed to have survived and endured in the island. The Santo Niño figure bequeathed onto Cebuanos was apparently taken into the hearts and minds of the natives, offering a somewhat ‘miraculous’ contrast to the vanquishment of Magellan and the massacre of many of his crew. Without any specific Cebuano documentary evidence to this effect, it is difficult to know for sure why or how the figure was kept after Magellan’s death. Yet few (if any) in Cebu today to contest that this was so as a 1985 official description of the “Origin of the Holy Image” expresses:

In those unaccounted years, the Image became part of Cebuano life. And this is probably why, when asked about the Image... the natives refused to relate it to the gift of Magellan... Thus the unaccounted 44 years of stay of the Image in the hands of the natives is part of Philippine history. (1985, 9, 11)

So entrenched, apparently, was this image in the lives of sixteenth century animist Cebuanos that there is a ‘refusal’ to acknowledge its foreign affiliations. Moreover, the presence of the Santo Niño had somehow given spiritual and historical significance to that forty-four period of Spanish absence -- years that would otherwise been “unaccounted” for as though caught up in an historical vacuum.

That the figure of the Santo Niño had withstood the 1521 disintegration of Cebuano-Spanish relations is a prominent theme in Legazpi’s memoirs. His accounts most likely conditioned contemporary Cebuano beliefs in the figure’s ‘miraculous’ survival. Like Pigafetta’s text, Legazpi’s relations affords us important insights into the ways in which the Spanish ‘second coming’ is remembered and commemorated. Of particular significance is a passage in which Legazpi recalls how, while inspecting the settlement on April 28, 1565, a crewmember, Juan Camus, uncovered an image he
recognized to be the Christ Child placed in a pine box. Recognizing this as the same image that Magellan had earlier presented to Hamabon’s wife, this ‘second discovery’ confirmed that the seed of Christianity had literally been implanted in Cebu amidst native icons and idols (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 “Finding of the Santo Niño of [sic.] the Legazpi Men”
Sugbo sa Karaang Panahon: A Painting Exhibit by Manuel Páinares, Cebu City January 1997

Spanish soldiers are overjoyed to find the image of the Santo Niño in a Cebuano hut. It is depicted as having ‘survived’ alongside native idols, signifying that it had been taken into Cebuano sensibilities despite Magellan’s death forty years before.

The official account of the expedition, penned by chronicler Riquiel, frames the importance of the Santo Niño’s second discovery:

The soldiers were quartered in the houses remaining after the fire. There was found a marvelous thing, namely, a child Jesus like those of Flanders... Meanwhile, as was right, the general had his prize, and when he saw it, he fell upon his knees, receiving it with great devotion. He took it in his hands and kissed its feet; and raising his eyes to heaven, he said ‘Lord, thou art powerful to punish the offenses, committed in this island against thy majesty, and to found herein thy house, and holy Church, where thy most glorious name shall be praised and magnified... And he ordered that this sacred image be placed with all reverence in the first church that should be founded, and that the church be called Nombre de Jesus. It gave great happiness and inspiration to all to see such an auspicious beginning, for of a truth it seemed a work of God to have preserved so
completely this image among infidels for such a long time; and an auspicious augury in the part where the settlement was made. (Cf. Blair and Robinson, Volume 2 pp. 120-121)\(^5\)

The Santo Niño itself became considered that divine omen that legitimised the Spanish campaign in Cebu in the face of many physical and emotional impediments. This "auspicious augury", as Riquel describes, functioned to address prevailing doubts even among Legazpi’s crew and furnished the expedition with a renewed sense of purpose. Moreover, in the finding of the figure was the religious justification for the perseverance of the Spanish empire in a relatively barren and violent land as Legazpi, in his letter to the King seeking for provisions, would further acknowledge:

I beg his majesty to send us some aid... because it is worth knowing, and so that your excellency may understand that God, our Lord, has waited in this same place, and that he will be served, and that pending the beginning of the extension of his holy faith and most glorious name, he has accomplished most miraculous things in this western region, your excellency should know that on the day we entered this village one of the soldiers went into a large and well-built house of an Indian, where he found an image of the child Jesus...I pray that the holy name of this image which we have found here, to help us and to grant us victory, in order that these lost people who are ignorant of the precious and rich treasure which was in their possession, may come to a knowledge of him. (Cf. Blair and Robertson, Volume II, pp. 215-216)

Spanish sources are generally silent about Cebuano reactions to the rediscovery of the icon. Twentieth century Filipino accounts of the second discovery, most likely drawing upon the Pigafetta and Riquel sources, characterize Cebuano natives as again dumfounded, this time at the mere sight of the Spanish with the figure. In these accounts, the Santo Niño is accorded a kind of power of conciliation that had eased a colonial

---

\(^5\) Another account can be found in Testimonio de como se hallo en la isla de Zibu el Niño Jesus published as an appendix to Invencion el Santo Niño de Jesus (Cf. Villanueva y Billar 1968 and personal communication with the Author, Madrid 2001).
encounter defined as much by dichotomies of race and religion as it was by imperialism and sovereignty. Bulatao and Joaquin’s accounts are among many that attest to the significance of the event of the Santo Nino’s rediscovery. The popularity with which they are received in the contemporary Philippines is perhaps testament to the widespread perception of the ‘divine’ history of the Philippine past – that the coming into being of the archipelago was itself premised upon a divinely sanctioned will. Some eminent opinions are voiced by the following:

The Child didn’t simply come and abruptly cut us off from our past. It shared our past with us and served as the link between the past and our present, by becoming, from 1521 to 1565, the last and greatest of our pagan gods. (Joaquin 1988, 69)

...there was no doubt about the popularity of the Niño among the islanders, and when Legazpi had a shrine built for it and they saw the white men kneel in prayer before it, the natives were favorably impressed. The pagan homage paid to a Christian symbol which the natives considered their own gave the Augustinian Father Andres de Urdaneta and his small band of missionaries something to start with in their heroic work of planting the seeds of Christianity in the Philippines. (Bulatao 1965, 36; Cf. Ness 1992, 72)

Both accounts acknowledge that during the forty-four year interlude, the Santo Niño had been accorded a certain degree of reverence. There is a sense that while Cebuanos had maintained a “pagan homage” for the Santo Niño, their veneration of it was one that was misguided and decidedly illicit. The rediscovery of the Santo Niño, as such, had given Urdaneta and his accompanying Augustinian clergy a clearly defined mandate. Inasmuch as the Santo Niño’s survival in Cebu was a matter “auspicious augury”, the Spanish felt a responsibility to guide Cebuanos along the “right” and “proper” path towards the Faith. The Augustinians were thus tasked to pursue the “heroic work” of missionisation, and the
Santo Niño was to be the guiding force by which this would be achieved, as a painting by Rojo depicts: (Figure 1.5).

![Painting of Santo Niño and Missionaries](image)

**Figure 1.5: “The First Augustinians in the Philippines (1565)”**
*Painting by Niceforo Rojo, Vientos de Acapulco*

Augustinian Missionaries take inspiration from the re-discovery of the Santo Niño in engaging in their missionary work in Cebu. Cebuanos, meanwhile, sit awestruck and receptive to the Augustinians’ divine mandate.
(Cf. Florendo 2001)

The settlement was renamed “Nombre de Jesús” after the Santo Niño and Legazpi had a chapel built on the site of the second discovery, again exerting both a physical and semantic re-inscription of Cebuano territory. In Limasawa four decades earlier, Magellan had a cross erected as a symbol of the European arrival and the acquiescence of the islanders to Christianity. He assured the natives that these structures would garner friendly treatment from future European missions to the islands. In a similar vein of *noblesse oblige*, Legazpi’s building of the church was an act that ‘sacralized’ Cebu,
relegating it to the protection of the Iberian Empire and the higher powers to which it was
devoted. The “Congregacion del Santisimo Nombre Jesus” was established, following
the pattern of the brotherhood of St. Augustine’s in Mexico. Legazpi installed himself as
its first hermano mayor [major patron], and the majority of the crew as members.
Placing the Santo Niño in the principal altar of the chapel, Cebuanos and Spaniards alike
are said to have “vowed to observe, sanctify and celebrate solemnly as a feast day each
year, the day on which it had been found.” (Tenazas 1965: 81, and Bautista 2000: 17)

To this day, indeed, Legazpi is remembered among the Catholic faithful in Cebu
as having consummated the ‘second discovery’ of the Philippines by founding a
settlement that was literally more concrete than what Magellan had established. In
building the first churches and in instituting the order of the Augustinians in the
Philippines, his arrival served to provide consummation to the sanctity of Magellan’s act
of baptism, effecting an erasure of the brief interlude between them. Indeed, there was a
point in which the relationship between Cebuano and Spaniard was at the brink of
catastrophe. The violence and hostility that marked Legazpi’s landing contrasted sharply
with the almost romantic arrival of Magellan in Samar. Yet there are more critical
aspects to Legazpi’s expedition that prevented it from being associated with the ‘failed’
expeditions that preceded it. Over four centuries after 1565, Cebuanos remember and
commemorate Legazpi’s voyage for a ‘discovery’ of a spiritual kind, one characterized
and legitimized by an image lost and found.
III

Dinhi ning pulo
ta gisaad gigasa.
Pinadala sa Dios
O pinanggang hata.
Karon ug Kaniadtto.
Banwag ka’s kalag,
Among gabayan.
Siga ning dughan

One day to these Islands
As gift and in pledge
God sent You to us
O beloved Child
And always you have been
The light of our souls
The guide of our people
The flame in our hearts

Ang sakayan nila
Midunggo dinhi
Aron magmando
Ni-ining yuta namo.
Apan nagbuot ka
Tipon kanila
Aron ka maghari
Imong pinili

The ship You were sailing
Arrived at our shores
To conquer this land
The pearl of the seas;
But you had decided
To stay in this soil
To conquer our people
And give us a name.

THE WORDS ABOVE (Cf. Ness 1992, 77-78,) are part of the lyrics to the “Señor Santo Niño Hymn”, which is sung either in English or in Bisaya at every novena service at the Basilica Minore. The English rendition of the hymn does not constitute an entirely accurate translation of the Bisaya, particularly towards the end of the second stanza. Yet both versions are indicative of the ways in which the Santo Niño ‘figured’ the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines, and the significance Cebuanos ascribe to the figure’s intervention upon that process. In both versions, the Santo Niño is depicted as a mediator between the Cebuano and the Spaniard, keeping in check the anticipated excesses of the latter who came to conquer (“magmando”). Inasmuch as the Santo Niño was a “gift” from God, the two events of Spanish arrival became construed as defining moments in the country’s physical and spiritual identity. As such, the Santo Niño is depicted in the hymn not merely as a figure indelibly linked with the notion of discovery/salvation, but
as a manifestation of the very trajectory of the archipelago’s history. As national artist Nick Joaquin argues:

Look: the Santo Niño arrives in our land; and then the Santo Niño survives in our land at a time when it should have perished. What are we being told? The survival of this ikon [sic.] at the beginning of our history – how can we not read it now but as an indication of what the design of our history will be? (1983, 115)

For Joaquin, as in the hymn, the circumstances of the archipelago’s discovery were portent of a kind of divine purpose embodied in the image of the Santo Niño. For indeed, Cebu was not discovered merely upon the Spanish arrival, but upon the will of the Santo Niño to designate its Chosen Ones [“nagbuot ka...imong pinili.”]. This was an act of bequeathal and magnanimity that had not only guided Cebuanos towards a virtuous path, but had also emplotted the semantic existence of Cebu by acting, as the hymn’s last sentence indicates, to “give us a name”.

The significance of events of discovery for many Cebuanos today is premised upon the notion that the island was literally and figuratively placed ‘on the map’ upon the Spanish arrivals. There are twenty-three paintings in Primo Vaggio, most of which depict only the coastal inhabitants of the islands with whom trade seemed possible (and in accordance with the strict directives of the expedition)⁶ (Figure 1.6). Subsequent to Primo Vaggio, nonetheless, the archipelago began to appear in European maps from 1522. A 1522 chart attributed to Pedro Reinal shows “Islas S. Lazaro” while a planisphere attributed to Diego Ribeiro in 1535 shows the southern part of the islands, including Cebu, Negros and Mindanao. After the islands were renamed “Filipinas”, a

---

⁶ See Zaide (1990, 99) for a list of Pigafetta’s maps.
map of 1554 by Ramusio includes individual islands under the same name. (Cf. Mojares 1991)

Figure 1.6 “Insyla Mathan” [Mactan] in Cebu
Engraving from Hulsius’ *Travel Book*, 1626
(Cf. Mojares, 1991)

Mary Louise Pratt (1992) suggests that “Navigational mapping exerted the power of naming.”(p 33). Pratt describes a process of both physical and semantic violence in which the act of renaming geography formed the basis upon which the eventual conquering of New Worlds was to be enacted. The accuracy of early visual descriptions of the Philippines, in this sense, is less significant than the actual fact of its having been located, fixed and given designation. For it was in the naming of the islands after Christian feast days that the religious and geographical designs of the Iberian Empire became contextualised and came together. In the Spanish Christening of the archipelago as ‘Islas de San Lazaro’, ‘Nombre de Jesus’ and ‘Filipina’, the native name ‘Sugbo’ – a
designation that still carries a certain allegorical and sentimental value among many Cebuanos -- had effectively become superceded in Spanish maps and documents. From the point of naming and mapping, the islands were open to be reoccupied again and again, if not physically, then sentimentally as an object of the European imagination. Indeed it is the archipelago’s very spiritual and geographic indeterminacy, reflected as it was by maps that stirred European desire and provided the rationale for its eventual occupation and possession.

As with the mapping and naming of the landscape, so too were Cebuanos semantically transported into the constellation of a European universe. Accounts of natives by explorers returning from Africa and the New World brought into the European imagination a creature whose kinship to Christian Europe was highly problematic. Yet through the eyes of Spanish Imperial desire, Asia came to be conceived according to its potential for spiritual progress rather than the ‘backwardness’ of its inhabitants. The image of the East, constituted through existing descriptions of Cathay, Cipango and Indian civilizations, ‘figured’ as fertile ground for Christian converts. Spiritually, the rumour of Christian sects in the area brought the prospect of alliances against Moors and Saracens into the realms of possibility. Positive action towards the spread of Christianity in Asia accelerated upon the arrival of the first Jesuit in Asia, Francis Xavier in 1542, whence occurred mass conversions particularly outside Portuguese fortresses in eastern Indonesia.

From the Spanish perspective then, the discovery of the Philippines was contextualised by prevailing conceptions of the East’s similitude and potential. In depictions that framed Asia’s economic and cultural achievement (particularly China and
Japan), the East became imagined not just as an economic but a spiritual frontier. While the Philippines was not believed to possess the same level of sophistication and advancement as its neighbours to the north, the perceived presence of the devil in the archipelago served to confirm and justify the missionary cause. The rationale for the colonisation of the Philippines hinged not only upon the economic advantages it presented but upon their similitude with the European pagan of antiquity— a ‘discovery’ that constituted their eligibility for Christian conversion.

An engraving by de Murga (1698) is illustrative of how the archipelago ‘figured’ in the congruence between the religious and imperialistic designs of the Spanish Court (Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7: “Conquista de Las Islas Filipinas” [Conquest of the Philippine Islands]

De Murga’s engraving depicts the strategic and spiritual potential of the Philippine archipelago as a rationale for its conquest. (Cf. Florendo 2001)
The engraving shows several rays of light emanating from the sun onto maps of China, Siam and the Philippine archipelago. Inscribed in most of the rays are Latin words depicting the grace of God and legitimising the Iberian mission of evangelisation in the East. A single ray emanating onto a map of the Philippine archipelago however, is refracted off a heart held in the hand of a Spanish Missionary. Unlike the others, this ray has no Latin inscriptions on it: a bareness that suggests the archipelago’s readiness to be filled with the graces purveyed by the missionaries and conquistadors who foreground the picture.

As depicted in the “Señor Santo Niño Hymn”, so too was the engagement with the inhabitants of Cebu perceived by the Spanish in the context of a divine will and sanctioned initiative. For such perceptions of spiritual ‘openness’, coupled with the economic prospects in the East (on which the Portuguese had a firm grip), legitimised the urgent necessity of sending missions to Asia. The rationale for voyages of discovery was not only foregrounded by imperialistic and commercial designs, but was fuelled by the European ambition of converting heathens, effecting in them both a spiritual and semantic transformation. It is this dual rationale that framed the discourse of discovery as it is perceived by many in Cebu today. What remains to be examined is how this discourse was premised upon European perceptions of Cebuano potential for conversion. How did Cebuano exoticism and the occasional, yet dramatic brutality that characterised it, become domesticated and interpreted within a mode of classification that placed primacy on salvation and conversion? How does the act of mapping and naming translate into, as the hymn suggests, a designation of Cebuanos as the “chosen ones”? 
From Paganism to Salvation: The Domestication of Cebuano Exoticism

All peoples and their customs were manipulated in more or less the same way for scholarly and polemical purposes. Almost without effort, the New Worlds were co-opted into a style of thinking as if they had been part of the argument from the beginning (Ryan 1981, 530).

A sixteenth century engraving by De Bry depicts the battle of Mactan that led to Magellan’s death (Figure 1.8). Here Bisayans are depicted as warriors who are distinguished from the armor-clad European only by their nakedness. Like many other descriptions of the inhabitants of the New World, Bisayan nakedness suggested an organic relationship with the surrounding natural environment. Despite their being engaged in battle, there is a pristineness about Cebuano physical form that framed not only their exoticism but implied a sense of rawness of body and mind. While this owes a little to the fact that engravers may not have always directly observed natives of the New World, their depictions drew from travel accounts such as that of Pigafetta in creating the image of the naked exotic. And what they imagined and projected were images of primordial objects of a salvation which Magellan, in his magnanimity, was willing to bestow.
In De Bry’s depiction, Bisayan bodily form is similar to the European in frame, stature and muscular composition. Apart from the absence of clothing, little else in the engraving distinguished Visayans from Europeans. If this is seen in the context of the battle of Mactan, where European protective armory failed to validate their physical superiority, naked Visayan warriors begin take on a sense of similitude with the European. Other works showing combat between exotics and Europeans (for example, Frenchman Andre Thevet’s *Cosmographie Universalle*, 1595) likewise depict a uniformity of bodily form. Indeed it was in the nakedness of the savage body – its likeness to the European body revealed in its undress -- that their aptness for salvation was premised. As Velasco’s 1574 *Descripción Universal de las Indias* describes, Cebuano natives were viable targets for conversion inasmuch as it is upon their very corporeality that “they appear as though they possess the potential for conversion to the
Christian religion,” [“parece que serán fáciles de convertir á la religión Cristiana.”] (p. 297) The body was the space on which Cebuano custom was inscribed and, hence, it was also along lines of embodied subjugation that the Imperialist effort was to be directed. As such, observes Mojares (1997), “European colonizers (whether by conscious or unconscious design) proceeded to ‘colonize’ the body. Whether under the guidance of Islam, Christianity, or plain Eurocentrism, the colonizers proceeded to eradicate long hair, tattooing, elongated earlobes, teeth filing, and “nakedness” (p. 20).

Notions and rumours of similitude of the Cebuano body, not its exoticism, was the operating principle that framed Spanish desires in the East. It is important to note, however, that this process of recognition had its limits and endured under specific conditions. Far from a recognition of the inherent parity of the European and the Bisayan, the suggestion of likeness in De Bry and Velasco’s depictions suggested the latent possibility of the latter ascending higher along the ranks of spiritual civility. Far from admitting the collapse of European claims to superiority in Mactan, it implied that in the barbarous, naked Visayan was a being in dire need of their moral and spiritual enlightenment.

To be sure, Pigafetta demonstrated the exoticism of Cebuanos in citing their numerous strange practices -- from betel nut chewing to strange mortuary practices. But this exoticism was tempered by actions and narrations that blunted the force of their difference, neutralising its impact through references to their likeness to the European. As such, in the names that both Magellan and Pigafetta bequeathed onto baptized Cebuanos were inscribed the ambition to reaffirm them as mirror-images of the European Christian. Pigafetta narrates:
The captain general told the king that he was clad all in white to demonstrate his sincere love toward them. They replied that they could not respond to his sweet words. The captain led the king by the hand to the platform while speaking these good words in order to baptize him. He told the king that he would call him Don Carlo, after his sovereign the emperor; the prince, Don Fernando, after the emperor’s brother; the king of Mazaua, Johanni; a chief, Fernando; after our chief, that is to say, the captain; the Moor, Christopher, now one name, and now another (Primo Vaggio, 62).

The act of baptism, thus, was not just an anointing of pagans into Christianity. To the Spaniards at least, it was a cancellation of the native name so that the Cebuano court became a semantic replication of the Iberian. The baptism itself manifested a kind of ‘wiping the slate clean’ as Cebuanos underwent a process of re-designation one after the other. Alongside the mapping of Cebuano geography, the promotion of Christian symbols such as the Santo Niño could be seen as attempts at fostering a sense of cultural and religious uniformity that domesticated Cebuano exoticism. It is as though the success of continued relations between the Cebuano and the Spaniard became premised on the extent to which the exotic was transported into a European discursive universe. In this sense, similarity, not difference, operated as the main perceptual principle in the experience of conversion.

This process of semantically domesticating the exotic had its own precedents. Fostering similitude was possible inasmuch as the notion of ‘paganism’ had already existed in Europe as a template for comprehending the ‘naked savage’. Literature that described the rustic pagan of European antiquity provided a tradition from which missionaries could draw upon in attempting to understand the Cebuano Pigafetta described. Indeed, the inhabitants of the East were being emplotted into the discourse of European paganism. As a 1965 observation by De Valle shows:
And if any one wonder at some fashions and customs of the Indies and will scorn them as fooles or abhore them as a devilish and inhumane people, let him remember that the same things, yea worse, have been seen among the Greeks and the Romans, who commanded the whole world... for the Prince of Darkness being the head of all infidellites, it is no new thing to find among Infidells curellities, filthiness, and follies fit for such a master (pp. 55-56; Cf. Ryan, 530, spelling in the original).

In this sense, the definition of ‘paganism’ extended beyond a religious ontology, to an inclusive category of Otherness that inscribed its universal applicability. This meant that as a category it was applicable in contexts across time and space, including in Cebu where both parties were looking for ways to ‘negotiate’ the barbarous event of Magellan’s death. And regardless of their nakedness; regardless of the superficial differences in material culture, the unbaptized Cebuano was conceived within a specific category: as a heathen/pagan object of salvation. As such, it became clear that establishing a commonality between the ancient pagan in Europe and the exotic heathen in Cebu was a vital step towards the fulfillment of the missionary noblesse oblige.

The discourse of discovery is defined not in terms of the disorientation of the encounter between exotic Cebuanos and Spanish. Rather, it came about in moments of discovering their ultimate, fundamental and allegorical resemblances. This was, however, a familiarity that had its limitations. For the Cebuano was not ascribed a temporal equality with the European missionary or explorer. Instead, he was located as a contemporary of peoples already assimilated into European consciousness: the European rustic, the pagan of antiquity. Their similitude contained within it a denial of their contemporaneity, as though there were remnants of an age and time long past. As Ryan (1981) observes:
Surely the difference between [the Indian] and an ancient Egyptian was clear to everyone. ...but it was not nearly so important as the things – gods, superstitions, rituals, artifacts – that they had in common. Establishing that commonality was the first step towards their assimilation. There is an almost childlike joy running through these lists of conformities, as if the real discovery were not the exoticism of the Other, but his ultimate similarity with peoples already assimilated in the European consciousness” (p. 529, my italics).

Even the sheer barbarity of having killed Magellan did not preclude Cebuanos from being slotted into the discourse of European paganism. For indeed, the Cebuano will to violence and barbarity was inexorably linked to the far-reaching agency of Satan. Along with demonstrating their savagery came the demand that they be subjected to the leveling, ‘civilizing’ power of Europe and Christianity. Their savagery was to be domesticated, ironically, through the recognition of the devil’s malevolence which, like the universal validity of Christianity, was recognizable even in Cebu. In the gruesome idols Legazpi found displacing the Santo Niño figure from Cebuano houses, was indication that the process of Christianisation Magellan had begun was overrun by the devil. In the animist rituals that Cebuanos had continued to practice after Magellan’s death, furthermore, was confirmation that Satan had worked to subvert the progress achieved in the Cebuano baptism forty years before. Cebu offered validation for the notion that humans everywhere suffered the same religious affliction – an affliction for which European missionaries possessed the only effective and valid ‘cure’.

We find that what was remarkable for Europeans in their encounter with Cebuanos was the observance of those conformities which suggested their potential for conversion. Magellan’s actions and Pigafetta’s narration demonstrated a kind of ‘double movement’ that would give shape and conviction to the Spanish campaign in the
Philippines. Along with celebrating their ‘likeness’ came the suggestion that Cebuanos were a people with whom Europeans could interact and transact. They are seen to be “like the Europeans” in living “in accordance with justice”, especially in the presence of social hierarchy, ceremonials, commerce and agriculture, and their adeptness at dealing with strangers. Their weighing scales, implements, musical instruments and infrastructure were “like ours” and the women were “very beautiful, almost as white as our girls and as large” (Primo Vaggio 59, 60). Cebuanos were perceived, in this respect, as the Noble Savage of the Renaissance, their proximity to nature associating them with the Children of Eden (inasmuch as ‘Eden’ signified a realm which, while primordial, was part of an allegory of the Creation and Fall). In baptism, Cebuanos effectively became included into the Biblical tale, indicating that the discovery of Cebu was not merely a physical act of sighting, but an allegorical one of inclusion as well.

It is from this inclusion of Cebu into the sacrosanct discourse of salvation that the events of Spanish arrivals derive its contemporary significance in Cebu. Among many Filipinos, it is this allegorical emplotment into the Story of Christianity that discovery is seen as a meaningful event. To this extent, the Philippines is set apart from other places in Asia as having been recipients of divine blessing through European missionization. It was upon this process that Filipinos ‘figured’ Catholicism, about which Joaquin, again, is the most articulate:

In the whole Orient, only here did the Church display its old genius for using and transforming the material it found... And the Church could not do otherwise, because there was one ahead of it to show them the way. Again, it was merely following the lead of its Lord. For the Child was here before the missionaries, the Child was here before the Church. The Child was willing to join our pagan idols, if only to defeat and demolish them. The Child was willing to live a pagan among us, and to become a rain god before us, and to bless our heathen ceremonies. But
all the time it was preparing us for the Faith. When Legazpi and Urdaneta arrived, they found it so much easier to convert us because we had, unknowingly, been tempered for conversion by the Child (1988, 68 –69).

In Joaquin’s words, the Santo Niño is more than just a metaphor for the arrival of Christianity in the archipelago. Its discovery was the final installment in the long process that was initiated long before the Spanish arrival. The Santo Niño’s continued presence in Cebu had exceeded both Spanish and Cebuano expectations, acting upon its own will (buot) so that both parties may be “shown the way”. Furthermore, the Santo Niño had relieved the friction of the colonial encounter by intervening in areas of possible conflict. In this vein, the missionary noblesse oblige was made easier by a people who had “unknowingly been tempered for conversion by the Child.” Its “defeat and demolition” of Cebuano idols had functioned to domesticate Cebuano exoticism, laying the foundations for Spanish missionaries to Christen them into mirror-images of the European Christian.

At no other time was the strong link between the interpretation of similitude -- the discourse of discovery -- and the Santo Niño’s intervention more prominently apparent than in the Fourth Centennial of the Christianization of the Philippines in 1965. Invited religious dignitaries from Rome and other parts of the world gathered in Cebu to commemorate “the discovery of our islands” and “our conversion to the Christian Faith”. In the occasion, the Catholic hierarchy of the Philippines through a Joint Pastoral Letter decreed to “grant the privilege of Canonical Coronation to the image of Santo Niño de Cebu, this image that was so closely connected with the first missionary endeavors of the Augustinians in the islands” (Cf. Villanueva 1965, 25). The official illustration of the
Fourth Centennial shows most effectively how the Santo Niño is regarded as intrinsic to the country’s geographical and spiritual “discovery” (Figure 1.9).

Standing majestically atop the archipelago, the Santo Niño rests its scepter upon the island of Cebu effectively designating its primacy in relation to all other places in the country. The allegorical depictions that surround the figure -- the raising of Magellan’s Cross, the baptism of Cebuanos, the conjuncture of Spain’s imperialistic and missionary mandate -- are effectively shown to be premised upon the Child Christ’s divine intervention. It is as though it was the Santo Niño itself who had ‘discovered’ the archipelago, and the variously hostile and harmonious transactions between Cebuanos
and Spaniards were all part of an epic Story of Christian salvation. In this story, the Santo Niño is depicted as exercising an autonomous will of its own (or as the hymn depicts, “nagbuot ka”) so that the dual discovery of the Philippine archipelago is remembered as an allegorically and semantically ‘figured’ experience.

CENTURIES BEFORE THE ARRIVAL of Europeans, Southeast Asians had been exchanging their spices for Eurasian cloth among other things. Its political systems and religious ideas were taken from India while wares, technology and migrants flowed into the region from China. For over a millennium, adventurers and pilgrims negotiated the considerable sea voyage which separated the region, making pilgrimage to the holy places of India and Sri Lanka. “Europeans,” cites Reid (1993), “were initially just one more strand in the already complex fabric of Asian maritime trade.” (p. 155)

Yet it is not unreasonable (or yet unfashionable) to suggest that many in the Philippines believe their history began on precise date. March 16, 1521 is widely remembered as the day when Magellan fist “discovered” the Philippines, having with him the Santo Niño as the recognised symbol of the nation’s Christian heritage. The connection between a religious finding of the Santo Niño and the eventual establishment of the Philippine nation is conceived, as we have seen, in an almost fairy-tale like continuity. The story of discovery is characterized, as Greenblatt has remarked, by the literal and symbolic “gift” of the Santo Niño -- a testament to Filipinos having been granted the privilege of ascending into a morally legitimate and spiritual existence. It is likewise, as Mojares points out, “marked by stories of images lost and found” whereupon
the Santo Niño’s ‘second coming’ had served to sanctify the beginnings of the missionary effort in the island.

The popular version of Philippine history is one that posits Cebu as the setting of two events which have literally charted the shape of the globe. But it is not merely the event *per se* that is significant, but the Filipino involvement in a figurative, nation-shaping discourse of discovery. For “discovery” in this context means something beyond a simple sighting of an island or of a religious figure. It signifies, moreover, a people’s “situatedness” within the universe of an existing tradition of Christian thought and practice. While it is often said that the Renaissance “discovered man”, the colonial experience of the Iberian Empire demonstrates that what was discovered was the *European himself* light of his engagement with the ‘exotic’. Towards the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Europeans found ways to negotiate the exoticism of the *Indio* by emplotting him into a Chain of Being along which all human beings existed in various stages of maturity and enlightenment. Yet this was not merely an act of self-assurance so that Europeans could legitimately claim its place at the top of the historico-evolutionary ladder. This was a strategy of containing those aspects of Cebuano life that escaped categorisation, rendering a kind of domestication of the exotic through an already understood notion of ‘paganism’.

Only in March 2002, a petition was brought to Philippine Congress proposing that March 16 be declared a national holiday in homage of the Philippine ‘discovery’. (Dequiros, 20 March 2002) That this occurred as recently as it has (indeed, this is not the first time) suggests that the discourse of ‘discovery’ still maintains significant currency within a broad spectrum of Filipino society. In the context of the rampant post-colonial
historicism of the early 1970s, it is remarkable that such a notion had survived more than a century after the end of Spanish colonialism and through a comprehensive American colonial regime. But the point of this chapter has not been to suggest a failure of the educational system, or to argue that Filipinos have no appreciation for a ‘proper’ historical education. The emphasis here has been to discuss how the history of the Santo Niño that Filipinos know is etched in a particular trope. Despite the fact that most history texts cite a long tradition of Philippine interaction with the rest of Southeast Asia, there remains a sense among many Filipinos that their identity had been given legitimacy in being named, mapped and sanctified by Spanish explorers. This is to say that the event of Magellan’s ‘discovery’ of the Philippines, and of Legazpi’s “second discovery” meant something more than just the beginning of the Spanish campaign in the Philippines. It is in the context of discovery and re-discovery, in the process of baptism and naming, in the act of losing and finding, that the recounting of the history of the Santo Niño is meaningfully conceived and articulated.

One should not, however, underestimate the counter-discourses among Cebuanos, then and now. There remains a need to probe into Cebuano motivations and understandings of the colonial encounter, accounts muted or restrained by the dominant discourses of discovery and legitimisation. It is by inquiring into the slippages in interpretations, looking through what Scott (1985) has called “the parchment curtain” of history, that we ourselves may unearth the Cebuano “discovery” of the exotic European. It is to such an inquiry that this study shall now turn.