Introduction

"But whom say ye that I am?"
Tracing Christ’s Cebuano ‘Figuring’

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, ‘Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?’ And they said, ‘Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremías, or one of the prophets.’ He saith unto them, ‘But whom say ye that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’

Matthew 16: 13-16

The focus of this study is a figure of Jesus Christ as a boy housed majestically in a glass-panelled shrine in Cebu City (Figure 1). The Santo Niño de Cebu is an object of devotion for millions of Filipinos, many of whom believe it to be more than four hundred years old. Numerous tales of its miraculous capacity for survival buttress the perception of the figure’s ‘longevity’. Whether it is through the account of the burning of an Augustinian monastery in 1602, or through the tale of the American bombardment of the Basilica Minore in 1944, the Santo Niño’s antiquity is premised upon its outlasting both its carers and the edifices that have housed it. It might seem unlikely that a small wooden statue had endured the harsh natural elements and the depredations of successive colonial regimes. Yet the Santo Niño is today accorded the same degree of reverence as a priceless national treasure or an irreplaceable historical artefact. A scientific dating of figure’s age -- a detail left out of virtually all accounts of its provenance -- seems peripheral to a study of its popular conceptions. For the Santo Niño stands as a tangible representation of Filipinos’ Christian identity, such that its
‘survival’ is itself a metaphor for how Catholics have fared amidst the many trials and tribulations in their tumultuous history.

Figure i: “The Miraculous Image of the Santo Niño de Cebu” Postcard

The project of ‘figuring’ Catholicism in Cebu is not so much one of appraising the sheer physicality of the statue itself, or of uncovering who the Christ Child really was. The aim of this thesis is to study the Santo Niño as symbol and representation: as a metonymy of the Cebuano engagement with Christianity, both as a legacy of Spanish colonialism and as an object of faith and devotion in the present. On one level, ‘figuring’ is manifested in Cebuano technologies of “figuring out”. It is an account of how they dealt with objects, events and people in the context of novel and challenging experiences. Oliver Wolters described this as a process of “making sense”, by which he

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meant "...the mental process of understanding new things in the light of existing knowledge by spotting similarities" (1999, 109). When I ask, in the second chapter, how Cebuanos 'figured' their early encounter with the Spanish, I am inquiring about those pragmatic strategies upon which the Santo Niño had become a veritable frame of reference -- a process that influenced Cebuano perceptions of the foreigner's attempts at commercial or missionary engagement. In another sense, 'figuring' is understood as the metaphorical and allegorical domestication of those challenging experiences. When I ask, in chapter one, how the Santo Niño 'figures' in the remembrance of the event of Cebuano conversion to Christianity, I argue that the tension of religious upheaval is negotiated through certain stories of the figure's 'double discovery'. Similarly, in chapter six, where I ask how the Santo Niño 'figures' in Filipino attempts to foster a civilizational or religious identity, I endeavour to explain how the icon contextualises Cebuano thought and action through the 'localised' rendition of its origins. The underlying rationale of this thesis is the heuristic oscillation between 'figuring' as a rationalizing capacity, and 'figuring' as the process in which ideas and actions are linked to the icon of Christ through various modes of imagery and narrative.

The excerpt from Matthew's gospel (16: 13-16) is instructive in this regard. It narrates how Jesus confronted his disciples about how they 'figured' his identity. When Christ asked "whom men say I the Son of man am", he was referring to the Pharisees, Sadducees and those others who vehemently disputed his divinity. Yet he was, evidently, impervious to the disparaging 'opinions of man', asking further whom ye (that is, his disciples and those who believe and follow him) say he is. Matthew's gospel underscores the notion that while Christ was well aware of the antagonistic criticisms of

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his personal integrity, what really mattered was how his flock understood and represented him in the practice of their faith. And just as Simon Peter's response affirmed his faith in Christ, so too are Cebuanos constantly expressing their sincere passion for and adoration of the Santo Niño, irrespective of those who contest its 'holiness' or dispel the sagacity of its miraculous 'longevity'.

This study is founded upon a similar spirit of discerned inquiry into the convictions of Cebuano religiosity. It is concerned less with yet another recounting of the historical Christ Child than it is with what Cebuanos say and do, or accept and denounce, in His name. The 'figuring' of Catholicism as a scholarly project is not motivated by the desire to promote any particular Biblical view of Christ, or to make a statement about the veracity of Christian doctrine. It is, rather, an undertaking that ascertains how the "truth" about the Santo Niño is epistemologically contingent upon the historical interplay between Christian doctrine and who Cebuanos say Christ is. As such, 'figuring' Catholicism is a project that goes beyond conceiving of the Santo Niño as an old statue surrounded by a set of religious rituals. It is an attempt to trace the "constructedness" of our knowledge about figure; and is, thus, concerned more with the sociohistorical field in which it is revered, rather than with a positivistic or statistical record of its origins and age.
Power, Discourse and the Santo Niño as Symbol

THE ‘FIGURING’ OF CATHOLICISM finds reverberation in anthropology as much as it does in history. Clifford Geertz (1973) defined religious symbols as “tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs” (pp. 91-94). This study, similarly, conceives of symbol as the objectification of sentimental and psychological ideas, ‘compacted’, as they are, in religious iconography and statues. We shall see, particularly in the third chapter, how the Santo Niño ‘figures’ as the physical embodiment of Cebuano attitudes towards things beyond their immediate experience. Inscribed in the figure’s ‘miniatureness’ -- in the sheer compactness of its physique -- is an anthropomorphosis of religious sensibility; of Cebuano Catholicism manifested in the corporeal likeness of Christ.

Yet as much as symbols are constituted by human sensibility, they are also constitutive of how people perceive and act upon their world. Geertz defines symbols as “models” or templates from which are induced religious “moods and motivations” (p. 96) which, in turn, influence how humans negotiate the contradictions of their experiences. In this regard, as indeed Bourdieu argues, symbols are intertwined with people’s “dispositions” such that they are also the basis for ongoing processes of structuring experience (a dynamic Bourdieu calls “structuration”) (1977, 71). Chapters two and five describe how the Santo Niño framed events of momentous social and political upheaval, contextualising Cebuano actions in ways that domesticated the conflict between a crucial event in history and the Santo Niño’s ‘divine’ intervention upon it. The ‘doubleness’ of
Geertz formulation — that symbols are both models of and models for a peoples' reality — underlies the importance of symbol in the practice and propagation of religiosity, particularly where its adherents are challenged and in crisis.

In the examination of the Christian Philippines, however, this study seeks to expand upon the theoretical implications of Geertz’s ideas. Does the Santo Niño as a model of the social world simply reflect the affective sensibilities of the Catholic faithful? Conversely, will it, as a model for their world, order and regulate Cebuano perceptions of "reality" immediately and automatically? Geertz’s dialectic formulation suggests that symbols operate upon certain mental processes intrinsic and specific to the human animal. I am not convinced, however, that those processes are as inherently cognitive as he suggests. A major objective of this study, as such, is to elucidate the ways in which Filipinos are constantly recalcitrant to the capacity of symbols to represent and shape their experiences. This is to argue that there is often an incongruity between the Santo Niño’s "official" or "doctrinal" meanings, and how people actually conceive of it in everyday practice. That is, there is often a ‘lack of fit’ that reveals the agency of a group of people in interpreting icons in ways that sit awkwardly with the intentions that foregrounded its production. Historians such as Ileto (1979) and Rafael (1988) showed that religion in the Philippines is often characterized by slippages between intention and interpretation, thereby drawing attention to the creative (and reactive) strategies upon which Filipinos made use of Christian icons and doctrine. Following on from their work, I look beyond the anthropological notion of symbol, focusing also on discursive processes of resistance, intervention, suppression or naturalisation. In other words, the
focus is not merely on the Geertzian symbol as such, but on those historical relations of power upon which figures like the Santo Niño are produced and construed.

It is important at this stage to discuss how "power" corresponds to the scholarly project of 'figuring' Catholicism. Another anthropologist, Talal Asad, raises important issues in inquiring into the specific conditions under which religious symbols can produce religious dispositions. Reflecting specifically upon Geertz's views on religion, Asad problematises the exclusive primacy of symbols in determining the range and scope of human thought and agency: "It is not mere symbols that implant true Christian dispositions," he argues, "but power ranging all the way from laws and other sanctions... to the disciplinary activities of social institutions and of human bodies" (1993, 35, my emphasis). Asad's conception of power echoes that of Foucault (1979) who located the principle of power "...in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes, in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (p. 202). For both Asad and Foucault, power exists in "disindividualized" form; as a repressive and constitutive force exerted not just through symbols and actors, but in diversified institutional structures such as prisons, (colonial) governments, or indeed in the Church itself.

In this study, Geertz's concept of symbol is brought to bear on relations of power in the Foucauldian sense. It focuses on the genealogies of 'regimes of truth' upon which Cebuano moods and motivations concerning the Santo Niño are defined and mediated. It is not enough, I argue, to look at the Santo Niño as a symbol driven exclusively by an essentially cognitive dynamic; as though autonomous from the discursive epistemes that Foucault describes. The chapters that follow are formulated upon the notion that the

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meanings of symbols are not automatically generated in a cultural ontology but, rather, can be traced to "conventional projects, occasional intentions, 'naturalized' events, and so on" (Asad 1993, 13). An examination of power in this sense invites us to elaborate on how "discourses" are formed and promulgated. What are the mechanisms by which 'disindividualised' forms of power are manifested and deployed in the devotion to the Santo Niño? How are the dominant (read: official) meanings of the Santo Niño passed on among Cebuanos across time and space, thereby forming the bases by which present religious dispositions are articulated and practiced?

A major theme of this study, particularly in the first and fourth chapters, is the operation of discursive formations that condition Cebuano religious sensibilities. "Discourse" typically refers to speeches and the performative act of articulating ideas. In invoking "discourse", however, I am referring to the systematic interconnection of a wide corpus of statements within an organized body of knowledge, so that a discussion of a "discourse of discovery" (chapter one) or a "discourse of syncretism" (chapter four) refers to an interrelated ensemble of thinking about the Santo Niño through time. "Discourse" is the site in which power is exerted upon knowledge, so that certain claims become naturalized as "truths". The validity of certain values about the Santo Niño may not be divinely sanctioned or inherent in its 'miraculous' grace, but often result from intentional technologies of promotion, inculcation or sanitisation. The vital point about discourse as it is used in this study is that it demonstrates how objects of (religious) knowledge are produced and foisted by institutions over individuals. This is a process which determines how the Santo Niño can be meaningfully talked and reasoned about, and influences how agendas are enacted through devotional practice in order to regulate

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the conduct of its participants. In this sense, discourse is at once a normative and performative aspect of religious experience. For it is as much in the ritualistic enactment of certain rites, and in the endorsement of particular modes of behaviour, that a certain institution's values are legitimized as 'preferable' or 'valid', if not 'natural' and 'self-evident'.

These chapters are concerned primarily with those discourses whose genealogy can be traced to Spanish colonialism as the original purveyor of "religious truth". It is not my intention, however, to argue that all knowledge about the Santo Niño is simply contingent upon a colonial legacy— an exercise that reifies the pervasiveness of discourse in the production and longevity of regimes of truth. The chapters that follow concern not merely the discussion of those 'dominant' discourses inspired by the convergence of missionization and imperialism, but also the ways in which Cebuanos sought to subvert their primacy in the crafting of their own 'counter-discourses'. In their use of folklore and cosmology (chapter two) or in the performance of 'folk religiosity' (chapter four), these attempts at subversion themselves are the conditions of possibility of new "regimes of truth". As such, the task here is not just to engage in a discursive comparison of texts and claims, but also to ask how competing discourses are constitutive of other regimes, paying specific attention to the motivations of the agents who use and deploy them.

This study, then, describes the Santo Niño beyond its purely phenomenological manifestations. It discusses 'iconography' as a set of relationships between objects and events, whereupon discursive power creates religious "truth" rather than simply being inherent in predetermined cognitive structures. This is a study about those intentional processes in which religious icons are co-opted in designating experiences as "religious",
“holy”, “divine” or “sacred”. What, for example, are the discursive conditions in which the Santo Niño is widely believed to be over four hundred years old? What are the regimes of truth that underpin the popular conviction in its ‘miraculous’ powers of survival? This work addresses such questions by being attentive to relations of power and discourses, thereby going beyond a scientific or statistical evaluation of the Santo Niño’s provenance, or a conventional ethnography of the practices of its devotees.

The Epic and the Episodic

THERE ARE SEVERAL MONOGRAPHS devoted specifically to the examination of the Santo Niño. “Scholarly investigations on Philippine religion and iconography, particularly by Americans and Europeans in the 1920s and 1930s, predominantly made use of surveys to account for the customary laws they observed in Philippine religions. Laura Benedict’s work on Bagobo religion (1916) and R.F. Barton’s on the Ifugao and Kalinga (1919, 1946, 1949) were among the more popular. Also prominent were the “Chicago school” led by Fred Eggan and H. Otley Beyer towards the latter half of the century. Some major works conducted on the politics, social organisation and cultural life of the Visayas region include Cullinane (1993) and Dumont (1992). More specifically related to religion are the works of Cannell (1999), Ness (1992) and W.H. Scott (1994).

The works of Tenazas (1965) and Florendo (2001), if only for the breadth and depth of their inquiries, stand out as the most popular among an assortment of essays, coffee table books and commemorative albums about the figure. Though varied in scope...
and in focus, a prevalent characteristic of these works is the ‘epic’ and lineal rendition of the Santo Niño’s history. Having emerged “from the Fires of the Golden (European) Age”, the figure is conventionally depicted as being brought to different corners of the globe by the emissaries of the Christian faith. Upon this act, the figure is shown to have been seamlessly implanted into various local cultures, framing the universal acceptability of the Christian doctrine it symbolises. Its European lineage notwithstanding (it is usually identified as of Belgian or Czech origin) this conventional history of the Santo Niño posits the Philippines as the homeground in the figure’s literal and symbolic journey. From the Santo Niño’s arrival in Cebu, to its numerous feats of ‘survival’, to the adoption of its devotion across the rest of the archipelago, a more or less predictable narrativity recounts the nation’s progression from the “paganistic” and “profane” (the Dark Age), to the “spiritual” and “sacred” (the onset of a kind of Filipino Enlightenment).

In this sense, a wide array of Santo Niño literature can be situated within a tendency in post-war Philippine historiography to examine religious change within the template of the causal and the ‘linear’. As Ileto (1997) has observed:

The operations by which some events are highlighted while others are suppressed, the division into arbitrary historical periods, the establishment of chains of cause and effect, the evolutionary ordering of phenomena such as from primitive to advanced, religious to secular – all these are obscured in textbooks and teaching methods. The student is made to learn the facts as they are strung out in some linear fashion, not the relationship of histories to power groups, the silences of the past, or the history of the linear scheme itself (p. 99).

In elucidating his prescriptions for a “nonlinear emplotment of Philippine history”, Ileto demonstrates how some eminent Filipino historians have forsaken an attentiveness to the construction of knowledge in favour of fostering the “epic” of Filipino religious history.
There is a sense in which the various works on the Santo Niño are particularly susceptible to an historiographical lineality, given that the figure is conceived of as a kind of trans-temporal, heroic ‘survival’ of the Filipino past.

It is upon a dissatisfaction with such modes of *metahistory* that this study has been conceived. This is a project that displaces the primacy of the Epic by engaging in the “thick description” of the various events of Cebuanos’ engagement with the Santo Niño.¹ It proceeds upon the anthropological notion that sees constructions of cultural reality as *compressed* and *expandable*. In practice, this means engaging in the analysis of synchronic clusters of historical minutiae — historical events, episodes, or anecdotes — which, when ‘unpacked’, reveal the complex social fields within which they operate. I am not proposing an analysis of the elements of myth or narrative in a Levi-Straussian sense. Rather, this is an act of interpreting those discourses that determine how a historical event is conceived, and how they compel its recollection in the present. The first chapter, for example, examines the “event” of mass baptism during which the Santo Niño was first “bequeathed” unto Cebuanos in 1521. The analysis of this episode enables us to gain insight into the specific constructedness of the connection between ‘discovery’ and ‘salvation’ — continuities that pervade even modern understandings of ‘baptism’ and ‘conversion’. “Figured”, as these concepts are, in the image of the Santo Niño, the question we ask by focusing on *the event* is what imbues the conception of the “first baptism” with an aura of ‘salvation’ or ‘sense of destiny’? It is not upon the emplotment

¹ Again, “thick description” is a legacy of Clifford Geertz (1973). Geertz has found some relevance in the field of literary studies. It is the effect of the *compression* of such events that enabled literary historians like Auerbach, for example, to expand a tiny passage into a sprawling text, mining the ‘deep play’ of its messages. Greenblatt borrows from the vocabulary of optics in describing Geertz’s interpretive strategy as “foveation” (as in skills in foveation) — the ability to keep a tiny object (here, a snippet, anecdote, or a ‘textualised’ piece of behaviour) within a high-resolution area of perception (Greenblatt 1997, 18).

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of history into a deterministic chain of causality that this question can be addressed. It is, I argue, in being cognizant of the discursive density of events (to its “thicknes”) that the genealogical study of the Santo Niño’s contemporary meanings can be engaged.

This attentiveness to the hermeneutic richness of the episode is a prevalent characteristic of Vicente Rafael’s more recent work (2000). For him, the usefulness of an “episodic history” “...lies in its ability to attend to the play of contradictions and the moments of non-heroic hesitation, thereby dwelling on the tenuous, we might say, ironic constitution of Philippine history” (p. 4). Epic history’s alignment towards tropes of progress and development hampers our understanding of instances of silence or recalcitrance that do not easily fit into larger metanarrative structures. For Rafael, it is by drawing out the ironic relationship between the historical epic and moments of passive resistance or creative sedition that one is able to truly appreciate the richness the archives have to offer.2 In the same vein, this study transcends metahistory’s inhibitive structures by setting one historical episode against another in order to flesh out the ironies manifested therein. Hence, the ‘heroic’ event of the Santo Niño’s ‘dual discovery’ in the sixteenth century (chapter one) stands in ironic disparity to the 2003 event of its ‘demotion’ as Patron Saint (chapter four). Similarly, the tales of the Santo Niño’s ‘survival’ stand in stark and ironic contrast to the event of a hundred of its replicas being dumped in a Cebuano garbage heap in 2003 (chapter five). This study concurs with Rafael’s conviction that “Irony forestalls and interrupts the establishment of a single, overarching narrative about the nation.” (ibid. p. 4). For it is upon allowing for the

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2 Inspired by De Mann, Rafael construes the use of irony not as a retreat to sheer relativism but is “a way of arriving at a more objective view of the world where facts themselves are messy and unstable, subject to ongoing interpretations and contests, stubbornly resistant and at odds with any single political will or cultural articulation.” (2000, 230).
emergence of irony in our work that history can be fostered as a dialogical praxis: as a dialogue within the past (wherein each historical episode is characterized by a conflict of voices, all of which needs to be made heard), and a dialogue with the past (where synchronic events are juxtaposed with each other to account for both continuity or change).

This use of synchronic historical ‘events’ has not been without criticism. Rafael’s ‘episodic history’ has been interpreted as promoting a haphazard voluntarism of interpretation which opens up a kind of authorial arbitrariness. For in the choosing of which episodes are to be mined for their interpretive and ironic significance, is not the author himself in danger of imposing his own sense of value upon historical categories? It is not immediately clear whether an episodic history offers a “method” beyond what Hunt has described as “individual virtuosity in which history is simply a storehouse of interesting anecdotes available to an exceptionally talented writer.” (1991, 97)

Furthermore, while Rafael’s approach might imply that episodes are chosen randomly and that others would be just as likely to furnish us with insight, some episodes seem far more condensed than others (that is, some texts seem “thicker” than others) as Greenblatt has suggested (1997, 17). How does one decide which ‘episodes’ are to be singled out for “thick description”, considering that the act of choosing is itself subject to various authorial strategies and agendas? Among the plethora of episodes in history, are the ones chosen for analysis contingent solely upon the author’s prerogative? As Dirlik (2001) suggests, it seems that there is a need for episodic history to be combined with careful consideration of how the historian deals with issues of the interpretive significance and value of each event.

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This 'episodic history', I argue, is an anchored project that should clearly specify the linkages between the synchronic events chosen for analysis. To be sure, episodes are associated with one another in their sharing a common ideological field of articulation and it is the task of the historian to describe them. In addition, I argue, the episodes chosen should all be associated with a tangible and/or metaphorical object around which events and discourses circulate. This object does not posit a causal and chronological relationship between events, but determines which events are relevant for synchronic, "thick" evaluation. In this study, therefore, the Santo Niño is not merely the topic of discussion, but also the heuristic template by which episodes and discourses are unpacked and examined. In chapter four, the analysis of the 'discourse of syncretism' is anchored in the event of the Santo Niño's controversial 'demotion' from patron sainthood. The contribution of the episodic is in its furnishing insights about 'syncretism' that would otherwise been impossible if not seen in the context of the Santo Niño's contentious relegation. A focus on the event of this 'demotion' reveals a syncretism characterized by a politics of institutional regulation over the definition of the Santo Niño's "sainthood" or "divinity". Again, the irony of the event of 'demotion' (juxtaposed as it is within a long period of the Santo Niño's dominance) imbues interpretation with a depth absent from a deterministic 'epic' history. While an 'interpretive virtuosity' is indeed required in order to draw out the insights inherent in events, episodes in an episodic history's framework are not arbitrarily or randomly chosen.

The significant contribution of Rafael's episodic history, then, is thus: it enables this study to take into account both the discursive circumstances that underpin the perception of the Santo Niño (circumstances that have 'produced' it and for which, in
time, it has come to stand) and its autonomy as a formal, ritualized religious symbol. This thesis is concerned with preserving the icon’s inherent analytical value as a Christian icon (on what it is in and of itself) while being sensitive to the way(s) in which it serves as a manifestation of the constituting discourses that lie outside it. In this sense, I agree with Maurice Bloch that it is “in the rapprochement between anthropology and history that the really exciting things seem to be happening.” (1987, 6 Cf. Ortner 1989, 16). Similarly, Greg Dening (1980, 1988) and the “Melbourne School” of historians have been pioneers in this intersubjective convergence between history and anthropology. While this work is decidedly historical in breadth, looking at the ways in which the Santo Niño is embedded in reflections and recollections of the Cebuano past, it is also anthropological in its concern with the role of religious symbol as models of and models for Cebuano beliefs.

An Historical “Situatedness”

“AN HISTORICAL SITUATION,” writes Stephen Greenblatt, “is never simply that of the moment: it is the expression of long-term trajectories, material necessities, social structures, enduring, largely unconscious patterns of will and constraint, not necessarily identical with the culture’s own understanding of itself or others” (1993: x).

This work traces over four hundred years in the history of the Santo Niño, moving strategically back and fourth across time and event, and reflecting upon Cebu and the surrounding islands of the Visayas. (Figure ii) As Greenblatt suggests, the general aim is to depict the Santo Niño’s “historical situation” by locating cross-temporal and cross-
cultural patterns of recalcitrance and appropriation, pragmatic acts that subvert dominant discourses, and a series of tumultuous events that frustrate the emplotment of the figure’s Epic history. As such, the episodes that frame each chapter are not meant to be taken as autonomous wholes. They are not intended to assume an uncontested place in a pre-given chronology. They function, rather, to challenge the deterministic causality of progress and development – something that can be approached by juxtaposing ‘events’ of the Santo Niño’s figuring, taking heed of the sometimes ironic relationship between them. The chapters that follow, each concerned with divergent topics, are united by the Santo Niño as both a topic of research and as a heuristic anchor.

The location of this exercise in ‘figuring’ Catholicism is primarily Cebu: an island with a land area of 508,844 ha. located at the central part of the Philippine archipelago. The province has a population of 2.2 million people (2003 Census), over 85 per cent of whom are Roman Catholic. The Capital of the province is Cebu City, a metropolis populated by 632,000 people. Although many of the observations made in the city find parallels in the outlying regions of Cebu province, ethnographic research was conducted mainly in the urban setting of Metro Cebu where fieldwork was undertaken for a period of eleven months.
Figure ii: The Philippine Archipelago (left) Central Visayas Region (centre) and Cebu City (right)

The first chapter focuses on two periods of Spanish arrivals in Cebu — 1521 and 1565 — as they are remembered through popular history, the landscape and religious iconography. It is not so much a “background history” to the Santo Niño as much as it is an elucidation of the underpinnings of a discourse of ‘discovery’, describing its allegorical and metaphorical links to the figure today. It will trace the lineage of the discourse of discovery in the ways in which Cebuanos became emplotted into European conceptions of ‘paganism’, and how their “exoticism” was domesticated into the discursive universe of Spanish missionaries and colonial administrators. As will be seen, this was not always a straightforward process in light of Cebuanos own actions of hostility and recalcitrance to Spanish designs.

In inquiring into how the Santo Niño came to be accepted in a world that was at times antagonistic to its European purveyors, the second chapter interprets how Cebuanos made sense of the colonial relationship. It will posit a sixteenth century Cebuano world
of *kalag* (spirits) and *ginhawa* (soul) as the framework in which the Spanish arrival, including that of the Santo Niño, was conceived. In the philological analysis of Cebuano concepts of *buot* (will, fortitude) and *gahum* (power), this chapter will argue that the colonial encounter was metaphorically perceived through native ideas of sickness and infirmity. While the Santo Niño had become that which had supplied the mutual 'healing' of the colonial affliction, this process was understood by Cebuanos in different, sometimes contradictory, ways to their colonizers. This chapter will describe such moments of Cebuano resistance to and co-option of Christian iconographies — a somewhat ironic situation which characterized the ways in which Filipinos "contracted" colonial dominance up to the final days of the Spanish regime. (Rafael 1988).

The third chapter focuses on a more tangible 'figuring' of the Santo Niño in focusing an analytical gaze onto the statue enshrined in Cebu City's Basilica Minore today. A depiction of different devotional organizations accorded to the figure will be made in the context of a theoretical discussion of Christian iconography in the Philippines, conditioned as they are by successive American and Japanese colonial regimes. In enacting a literal and metaphorical distinction between the Santo Niño "inside" and "outside" the Basilica, this chapter will examine both the organized forms of Santo Niño devotion as well as those spontaneous and 'on the ground'. How are the figure's devotees distinguished according to the descriptive and semantic categories imposed by the Church authority? The chapter will examine how the various modes of worshipping the Santo Niño bring distinctions of class and ethnicity into stark and often contesting distinction.

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While the third chapter lay the groundwork for an understanding of the complex interplay between ‘folk’ and ‘official’ Catholicism, the fourth is a discussion of the Santo Niño as a harmonizing, ‘syncretic’ deity. It inquires into processes by which the figure symbolizes a distinctive type of Filipino Catholicism which synthesizes the ‘modern’ and the ‘ancient’, the ‘official’ and the ‘sensational’, the ‘pagan’ and the ‘enlightened’. It will argue against the conception of the Philippine Catholic Church as a monolithic entity that is largely ‘intolerant’ of folk religious practices. Insofar as the official stand of the Catholic Church in the Philippines is one of ‘contextualisation’ and ‘accommodation’, the chapter will point out some ways in which it positions itself as the sole source of tolerating unorthodox means of worship, thereby preserving their semantic and discursive powers of authenticating and legitimizing Filipino religious belief.

The subject of the fifth chapter is the history of use (or ‘misuse’) of religious iconography, focusing on the Santo Niño and, to a lesser extent, the Our Lady of EDSA in Manila. Through the semantically ‘open’ appropriation of their meanings, these religious icons have become utilised by Filipinos as symbols of protest against the State and, indeed, against the Church institution as well. The question here is how these icons are brought to bear on revolutionary causes and agendas, in ways that have outstripped the spiritual and theological functions for which they were intended. What are the ways in which religious iconographies contextualise and ‘figure’ mass action in the Philippines? What are the semantic and discursive processes by which revolutions are designated and conceived of as “holy” while others are not?

The final chapter asks where the Santo Niño ‘figures’ in Filipino attempts to foster an identity in opposition to their colonizers. In engaging in literary and

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historiographical acts of ‘soul searching’, Filipinos constructed and ‘revived’ a glorious past autonomous from and recalcitrant to the colonial-prescribed renderings of their racial and ethnic origins. An associated project in this regard was the discursive ‘localisation’ of the Santo Niño through works of scholarship that sought to deny its foreign affiliations while supplanting to it a distinctly “Filipino” or Asian origin. In this sense, the task of this chapter is to trace how Cebuano devotion to the Santo Niño became allegorically and metaphorically associated with Cebu’s own claims to political legitimacy. But it will also elucidate the friction that exists within the project of fostering a Filipino nation as a collectivity united in an over-arching metahistory.

This study is an endeavour to delineate the value of religious symbol as a means of ‘accessing’ the historical and ethnographic reality of Cebuano life. Through the discussion and ‘unpacking’ of the episodes that frame the Santo Niño, these chapters seek to promote an attentiveness to the ways in which discourses of power shape religious experience in Cebu, or otherwise, to how Cebuano actors express their agency in being recalcitrant to them. I will have succeeded in this objective if, through the chapters that follow, this study manages to bring out whom Cebuanos say Christ is, while making the reader aware of the sheer beauty of the glass-enshrined icon, and appreciative of its interpretive richness as well.