

**SAYAW NG BATI: THE SYSTEM OF EASTER DANCE SPONSORSHIP IN ANGONO,
RIZAL, THE PHILIPPINES**

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Abstract

The brand of Catholicism that exists in the Philippines blends both Christian and folk traditions. During the precolonial period, sponsoring community rituals was obligatory for the *datu* (chieftain) and the local aristocracy, as these events consumed significant resources. The Christianization of the country through Spanish colonization transformed precolonial sponsorship traditions as new sponsorship practices emerged among the local elites, aligning them with the veneration of the *santo* (images of saints) and the *fiesta* (the feast of the town's patron saint). This article explores a distinct Catholic sponsorship system in the Southern Tagalog region called *sayaw ng bati* or *bati*, a dance ritual performed in Angono, Rizal, during Easter. Based on in-depth interviews conducted with three performers, the article provided an overview of *bati* as a sponsorship system, focusing on the process of becoming a performer and the corresponding

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motivations, the material and economic aspects of the practice, and the positioning of *bati* within the context of *panata* (devotional pledge).

Absztrakt

SAYAW NG BATI - A KÖSZÖNTÉS TÁNCA: A HÚSVÉTI TÁNCOS PATRÓNUSI RENDSZER A FÜLÖP-SZIGETEKI ANGONO VÁROSÁBAN

A Fülöp-szigeteken létező katolicizmus ötvözi a keresztény és a népi hagyományokat. A gyarmatosítás előtti időszakban a közösségi rituálék támogatása kötelezettséget jelentett a *datu* (törzsfőnök) és a helyi arisztokrácia számára, mivel ezek az események jelentős erőforrásokat igényeltek. Az ország spanyol gyarmatosítása során bekövetkezett keresztényesítés átalakította ezeket a patrónusi hagyományokat: új támogatási gyakorlatok alakultak ki a helyi elit körében, amelyek a *santo* (szentképek) tiszteletéhez és a *fiesta* (a település védőszentjének ünnepe) kultuszához kapcsolódtak. Jelen tanulmány egy sajátos katolikus patrónusi rendszert vizsgál a Dél-Tagalog régióban, amely *sayaw ng bati* vagy egyszerűen *bati* néven ismert. Ez egy táncos rituálé, amelyet a Fülöp-szigeteki Angono városában, Rizal tartományban, húsvétkor adnak elő. A három előadóval készített mélyinterjúk alapján a tanulmány áttekintést nyújt a *bati* mint patrónusi rendszer működéséről, különös tekintettel az előadóvá válás folyamatára és annak motivációira, a gyakorlat anyagi és gazdasági vonatkozásaira, valamint a *bati* vallásos *fogadalom*ként (*panata*) való értelmezésére.

Kulcsszavak: pagbati, sayaw ng bati, bati, katolikus vallásos tánc, népi vallásosság, patrónusi rendszer, húsvéti tánc, Angono, Rizal, Fülöp-szigetek

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Dance was part of the cultural fabric of precolonial Philippine society and functioned to strengthen solidarity among the community and protect their well-being. Together with songs and music, our ancestors used dancing in rituals to express their beliefs to a higher being. Outside of rituals, dances were performed to celebrate social occasions or for the conduct of agricultural activities such as planting crops, fishing, or hunting (Villaruz, 2020). Rituals in various communities were led by priestesses (also known as *babaylan*, *catalona*, *mombaki*, *dawak*, *mambunong*, *mangngallag*, or *ma-aram* depending on the ethnolinguistic group) who served as spiritual leaders and a medium of men to the spirit world (Center for Babaylan Studies, n.d.). In the animistic worldview of precolonial Filipinos, rituals intend to set a balance between man and nature. An imbalance between the two realms could cause a catastrophe and rituals were essential to troubleshoot this

imbalance. Dancing always accompanies these rituals because it is considered the “highest symbolic form” in precolonial society (Obusan, n.d.).

An important feature of these rituals is the sponsorship system that existed during the precolonial times. As our ancestors believed that *Bathala* – the supreme being who created the world – was far away, ornate houses of worship or temples did not exist. Instead, they showered this god and other supernatural beings with elaborate rituals performed everywhere (Reyes, 1985). Often, an altar is erected at the *datu*’s (chieftain) home where the rituals are conducted and joined by the *nagaanito*, the worshippers (Del Castillo, 2015). The rituals performed by the priestesses and the corresponding feasting that follows come with hefty costs, which are sponsored by the *datu* and the local aristocracy (Tamayo, 2022). The system of sponsorship that existed at the time also ensured

the expansion of the elite's social and political prestige in the community (Calma, 2009). With the arrival and colonization of the Spaniards in the 16th century, they introduced Christianity to the archipelago which was met with less resistance and embraced as part of the local culture. The success of Christianization in the Philippines is attributed to several factors: given the many semblances it had to the animistic beliefs of the natives, it did not cause immense psychological difficulty among the population; while the archaic beliefs of the natives reappeared in another form, it also depicts the resiliency, flexibility, and creativity of early Filipinos (Elesterio, 1989; Mercado, 1994).

From their idols and deities, the natives quickly recognized the potency of Christian saints and martyrs and turned to them for supplications. If not fleeing to the mountains and branded as witches or joining the uprisings staged by some *datus*, the role of the converted priestesses who were once the spiritual leaders of various communities was reduced to assisting the parish priest during mass or conducting preparations for the processions (Salazar, 1996; Limos, 2019). The natives also had an alternative to their priestesses through the person of the Virgin Mary, who was promoted as the “mediator and intercessor with the divine” (Reyes, 2015). The sponsorship system that existed during the precolonial period also experienced a transition. As the Spaniards restructured the social hierarchy, they changed the status of the *datus* including their families, their descendants, and the *maharlikas* (local aristocracy) to the so-called *principales*. From this class emerged the privileged individuals who ascertained the only government positions available to the natives: *cabeza de barangay* (village lieutenant), *gobernadorcillo* (town executive), and *juez* (judge). Most *principales* were also powerful lords who owned vast landholdings (Padua, 1994).

In the newly formed *pueblos* (towns), the *principales*' close affinity with the clergy can be

observed in their large dwellings often placed near the parish church alongside the main square, town hall complex, and abodes of Spanish settlers (Santiago, 2005). Given the wealth of the *principales*, their prestige extends into the religious affairs of the *pueblo*. The way they sponsored the rituals and feasting in the precolonial context was sustained through their patronage of many church-related affairs. Most *principales* donated lands to the religious orders (Padua, 1994). If not land, they extended their help to the parish by donating money or shouldering certain expenses. In return, the religious orders made sure to further the status of the *principales* by introducing two forms of sponsorship system in the church: they were elevated to become *camareras* (custodians) of processional images or they assumed the position of *hermano mayor* (sponsor) during the *fiesta* (feast day) of the town's patron saint.

Despite the sponsorship systems' material, economic, and hierarchical nature, they preserve elements of Philippine indigenous values. Interpersonalism is at the core of these sponsorship systems. For a *camarero* and *hermano mayor*, there is fulfillment when they share something with other people because the values of *pakikipagkapwa* (fellowship) and *pakikisama* (belongingness) are central elements in Filipino spirituality and religiosity (Macaranas, 2021; Tamayo, 2022). The two sponsorship systems also underscore the practice of *panata* or devotional pledge. When the supplicant requests or receives something from a higher being, he enacts a *panata* due to *utang na loob*, a feeling of indebtedness (Macaranas, 2021). In the studies regarding the *camareros* and *hermanos mayores*, the majority – if not all practitioners – continue to practice *santo* and *fiesta* sponsorship mainly because of their answered prayers and current intentions that they continue to pray for (Tamayo, 2020; Tamayo, 2022). Parallel to other devotions that ordinary Filipino Catholics practice, being a *camarero* or *hermano mayor* can also be transferred or

inherited by family members. This ‘transferability’ is a facet of *panata* unique to Filipino religiosity (Zialcita, 1986, as cited in Espiritu, 2023). Jayeel Cornelio’s (2014) concept of everyday authenticity also applies to the contemporary sponsorship traditions in the Catholic Church. Sponsorship, as an act of doing religion, inherently showcases “the self”; however, it also considers the well-being of others, including family and the broader community, aside from one’s spirituality and piety. These practices mirror authentic expressions of faith.

In this article, I explore another sponsorship system, the *sayaw ng bati* (dance of greeting), an Easter dance ritual performed during Holy Week in Angono, Rizal. It is commonly known as *bati*, a relatively new sponsorship tradition compared to *pagsasanto* and *hermano mayor* practices. The earlier sponsorship systems also exhibit a pan-regional orientation, whereas *bati* is primarily practiced in the Southern Tagalog region of the country. Rosalie Matilac (2018) defines the *bati* in the Encyclopedia of Philippine Art: “a flag dance performed in Angono, Rizal as part of the religious rituals before and during the *salubong* which is the dramatized meeting of the Virgin Mary and the resurrected Christ on Easter Sunday.” Available sources on *bati* focus on its historical origins and choreography. The article “Philippine Dance in the Spanish Period” by Basilio Esteban Villaruz (n.d.) highlights “*bate*” as an example of a Christianized dance. Conversely, Bryan Levina Viray’s (2019) article examines the ‘dancerly attitude’ of the performers and concludes that Marian veneration shapes the choreography of *bati*. Meanwhile, Jose Antonio Lorenzo Tamayo’s (2023) recent study explores the precolonial and Spanish colonial contexts in the Philippines and argues that the concept of transculturation played a part in the creation of *bati*.

While the choreography and historical underpinnings of *bati* in Angono are well

documented, the sponsorship system behind it is an uncharted territory that begs further exploration and analysis. Through interviews with three performers, the present article aims to describe the process of becoming a dancer in *bati* and elaborate on the Easter dance as a sponsorship system, focusing on its material and economic aspects. It also examines the performers’ motivations and explores whether the practice can be identified with *panata* (devotional pledge).

Angono, the ‘Art Capital’ fusing art and religion

Angono is known informally among Filipinos as the ‘Art Capital’ of the Philippines. The town produced renowned artists such as Carlos “Botong” Francisco, the National Artist for Visual Arts, Lucio San Pedro, the National Artist for Music, and painters such as Jose Blanco and Nemesio Miranda. More than anything, Angono is home to a thriving art scene that blends folk and fine arts, both of which are reflected in the people’s practice of the Catholic faith. It is interesting to note that the town has artwork for various religious celebrations and holds elaborate *fiestas* or commemorations relating to Christmas, New Year, Epiphany, Holy Week, and the feasts of *San Isidro* (St. Isidore) and *San Clemente* (St. Clement) that feature intricate and vibrant structures as well as decorations (Manalo, 2004). Understanding the fusion of art and religion in Angono requires a closer look at its history. The story starts at the Angono Petroglyphs – considered the oldest artwork in the Philippines – featuring 127 human and animal figures etched on a rock wall since the late Neolithic period (before 2000 BC), which were associated with healing and sympathetic magic. The early Tagalogs who settled in the area considered it a sacred ground where their deities dwelt (Angeles, 2021). The natives’ relationship with the lake also cultivated their pre-colonial beliefs. Aside from

being a source of livelihood, the natives believed in the presence of *sirenas* (mermaids) who supposedly protected the place. With Christianity arriving in town, the missionaries replaced the *sirenas* with a Christian saint through *San Clemente* who had a close association with water. The way the natives venerated *San Clemente* paralleled how they worshipped the *sirenas* of the old: a fluvial procession called *pagoda* was conducted, which for the missionaries was symbolic of Emperor Trajan's order to drown the saint to the Crimean seas (Tiamson-Rubin, 1992, as cited in Asilum, 2018). Between 1751 and 1766, Angono was elevated to a *pueblo* under the jurisdiction of the Province of Laguna and the Distrito delas Montes de San Mateo, later known as Politico Militar del Distrito de Morong. When the Spaniards left and the Americans became the next colonizer, Angono experienced various reorganizations including its incorporation with Taytay in October 1903 and fusing it with Binangonan in November 1903. In 1939, the town gained independence through the declaration of President Manuel L. Quezon, comprising five *barrios*: Bagong Bayan, Poblacion, San Isidro, San Roque, and San Vicente. By 1975, the Province of Rizal was reorganized during the term of President Ferdinand Marcos. Angono and thirteen other towns remained under the Province of Rizal while fifteen others were created as independent cities and fused into Metro Manila (MPDC, 2016, as cited in Asilum, 2018).

Despite the changing political climate and the ravages of the Second World War, Angono retained its centuries-old traditions highlighting the intersection of art and religion. The use of bamboo is particularly prominent during religious festivities. Adding a festive flair during the feast of *San Clemente* are the *endramadas*, which are rows of bamboo installations along the processional route decorated with colorful motifs of shrimp, fish, and an assortment of garlands and buntings (Tiamson-Rubin, 1992, as cited in Asilum, 2018; Manalo,

2004). During the mass in the Epiphany, resident Simeon Tolentino devised a pulley that brings three *estrellas* (stars) to the altar fashioned out of bamboo and paper lanterns (Manalo, 2004). A *Galilea*, a platform where dancers of the *bati* perform on Easter Sunday, also features bamboo poles that support an enormous bird and a heart made of papier-mâché. This heart blooms gently and reveals a child dressed like an angel. Moreover, Angono is most famous for its folk art called *bigantes* or giant figures that appear in various festivities. Giant figures resembling male and female characters are attractions during the feast of *San Clemente*, *bigante* carabaos are paraded to honor *San Isidro*, and *bigante* lanterns also appear as part of the local Christmas tradition (Asilum, 2018). Beyond the entertaining façade that the *bigantes* portray, its origins depict the resistance that locals imposed against the *hacienderos* (powerful landed families) during the Spanish colonial period. Except for one festivity, the *hacienderos* prohibited the common folk from joining other festivities in town; as a result, the locals protested by mocking powerful landlords through the *bigantes* which resembled the latter showing commands and one hand on the waist (Angeles, 2021).

Public spaces in Angono have become a platform for locals to express their faith and communal spirit. Religious expressions and art intersect in public. In the processions, paintings of several Angono masters abound like the oval oil paintings on metal plates which were mostly the work of 19th-century painter Juan Senson, the *birang* (cloth) held by the image of Veronica during Holy Week featuring the face of Christ painted by Carlos "Botong" Francisco, or the Senson painting of the crucifixion adorning the backdrop of the Dead Christ, the *Santo Entierro* (Manalo, 2004). In the streets, locals witness the *bati* performances, the *sagalas* (maidens) in their beautiful costumes during the *Santacruzán* (Holy Cross procession), or the vibrant handiworks adorning the streets during

fiestas. The lakeshore provides an avenue to witness the intricate bamboo installation in the *pagoda* of *San Clemente*. Public spaces allow outsiders to witness the locals' pious expressions of faith, made tangible through the art forms they produce. As Ino Manalo (2004) notes, art forms in public spaces are deconstructed after religious festivities and reconstructed annually without fail. It serves as a reminder of how art becomes a tangible expression of the people's devotion. More than anything, the process of deconstruction and reconstruction strengthens the spirit of renewal enacted by one's *panata* and the Filipino values of *pakikipagkapwa* and *samahan* (group solidarity) – the foundation for preserving these artistic and religious traditions in Angono.

Sayaw ng bati as an Easter ritual dance

The *bati* is a unique Easter dance ritual performed in many towns in the Southern Tagalog region. In Parañaque City, once part of the Province of Rizal, young girls and boys perform the '*bati-bati*'. The town of Ibaan in Batangas has the '*bati de bandera*' performed by three dancers composed of two males and a female. Despite the differing terms, a common element among these *bati* variations is the *bandera* (flag). The exact birthplace of *bati* is still a lingering question, given that several towns claim ownership of the original choreography. In Angono, Rizal, which is the location of this study, the choreography of the *bati* was formulated by Tandang Apang Gil in the late 19th century while Tandang Juan Petiza provided the music (Matilac, 2018; Viray, 2019). In 1870, the first recorded *kapitana*, Dominga Reyes, performed the *bati*. Since *bati* is sacred to the locals, the choreography is only taught among chosen performers (Matilac, 2018). There are two dancers in Angono's *bati*: the *kapitana* and the *tenyenta*. In the past, the *tenyenta* only served as an attendant to the *kapitana* until it was decided in 1972 to allow

the former to perform. Both dancers are selected by lottery on the evening of Easter Sunday. Eight *konsehalas* are chosen as well by sortition; although they simply sit on the stage during *bati*, a possible *kapitana* and *tenyenta* is selected among them in case something untoward happens to the incumbent dancers (M.E.T. De Leon, personal communication, October 7, 2024).

The *bati* is characterized by a distinct movement called *bali* or *kiling* or "the steep and sinuous bending of the torso from the waist on either side towards the back, rotating the whole body in an engaging swirl" (Matilac, 2018). Viray (2019) adds that the dancers embody the virtues of the Virgin Mary as emphasized in the *dicho*: "*babaeng matimtiman* (decorous woman), *maganda* (beautiful), *matapat* (honest), *marunong* (wise), and *malinis* (clean)." The *bandera* is the most important element in *bati*. It is approximately 1 x 1.5 feet long and contains an insignia bearing the 'Alleluia' for the *kapitana* and the 'Auspice Maria' for the *tenyenta* (Matilac, 2018; A.M.G. Diestro, personal communication, October 16, 2024). The *bandera* accentuates the ritual dance as it sways gracefully during the performances. It alludes to the cross with a banner that the image of the resurrected Christ holds, which symbolizes the joy of the resurrection and Christ's sacrifice in redeeming mankind from sin (Eke, 2020). Given the *bandera* is considered a sacred object, the dancers take good care of it as the locals believe that misfortunes happen to the community when it falls to the ground (Matilac, 2018).

In Angono, *bati* is performed multiple times during Holy Week: on *Viernes de Dolores* (Friday before Holy Week) during *Harap sa Banda* (Facing the Band); on Palm Sunday the *Unang Panaog* (First Descent) at the residence or within the area of the *kapitana*; on Holy Tuesday the *Ikalawang Panaog* (Second Descent) at the residence or within the area of the *tenyenta*; on Holy Wednesday the *Ikatlong Panaog* (Third Descent) at Poblacion Ibaba; and

two performances on Easter Sunday consisting of *Salubong* early in the morning and *Bunutan* (Lottery) after the last mass in the evening (A.M.G. Diestro, personal communication, October 16, 2024). The performances before Easter Sunday serve as rehearsals that eventually culminate during *Salubong*. In each performance, both dancers wear different attire following the style of the *terno*, a Filipiñana attire accentuated with butterfly sleeves.

Out of the five performances during Holy Week, the one in *Salubong* on the dawn of Easter Sunday is the most significant. Two processions are conducted simultaneously during that time. Starting from the church, the parish priest accompanies the image of the resurrected Christ with the *kapitana* and *tenyenta*. Meanwhile, the image of *Birhen ng Pagbati* (Virgin Mary) comes from *Poblacion Itaas* (Upper Town) and is accompanied by the *andas* (shoulder-borne float) bearing *Santa Maria Jacobe* (St. Mary of Clopas), *Santa Maria Salome* (St. Mary Salome), *Santa Maria Magdalena* (St. Mary Magdalene), and *San Juan Evangelista* (St. John the Evangelist). Both processions end and meet at a designated location where a *Galilea* is erected particularly for the main event (Viray, 2019). Resembling a stage supported by four bamboo poles, it is decorated with palm leaves, flowers, flaglets, colorful buntings, giant papier-mâché doves, and an enormous flower bud. In the past, *bati* was performed in a different location until it was transferred to Bloomingdale Subdivision, given that the owners sold the previous space where the *Galilea* once stood. The lack of space in the vicinity of the parish church explains why the ritual dance is performed elsewhere (M.E.T. De Leon, personal communication, October 7, 2024).

The *tenyenta* begins performing *bati*, which signifies the greeting of *Santinakpan* (the creation) to *Dakilang Mananakop* (the Risen Christ) to the rhythm of *Gavotte* (a march) often the version by National Artist for Music Lucio San Pedro and rendered by the local band (Tiamson-Rubin, 1999;

Matilac, 2018). The musical scoring for the *tenyenta* and *kapitana* may change annually as its selection is also done by sortition (L.C. De Leon, personal communication, February 2, 2025). Compared with the *kapitana*, the *tenyenta's* movement is slow and somber, depicting the sorrowful moments encountered in the previous days of Holy Week. After this, the *kapitana* recites a 20-minute poem called *dicho*, a composition of 31 stanzas proclaiming both the sorrows and triumphs of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of Christ (Matilac, 2018). As the *kapitana* reaches the line *nabuksan na* (it is revealed) toward the end of the *dicho*, spectators hold their breath as the giant doves race to peck the flower bud, which then gently opens to reveal a child dressed as an angel (Viray, 2019; Tiamson-Rubin, 1999).

While the angel descends slowly singing the Regina Coeli and showering the Virgin Mary with confetti, the doves target a bag that showers the same material to the *kapitana*, an allegory of heaven's blessing to the people (Tiamson-Rubin, 1999; L.C. De Leon, personal communication, February 8, 2025). The way the confetti falls to the ground is also shrouded in folk beliefs. If it falls gently, bountiful harvest is expected; if too sudden, calamities may ensue (M.E.T. De Leon, personal communication, October 7, 2024). Upon reaching the image, the angel reaches the *lambong* (black veil) and uncovers the face of the Virgin Mary to signify the end of mourning (Viray, 2019). Meanwhile, the *kapitana* recites the remaining parts of the *dicho*. The people then shout "*Viva Resurreccion!*" (Hail the Resurrected Christ!) after the *dicho* and the *kapitana* finally performs her *bati*. In contrast to the *tenyenta's bati*, the *kapitana's* dance has a tempo reflecting the joyous occasion – lively and fast – and the music heralds the triumph of the resurrection. The *andas* bearing the saints also join the merriment as those carrying them below gently sway the floats; from afar, the saints appear to be dancing (Tiamson-Rubin, 1999). Finally, the dance ritual concludes

when the *kapitana* kneels, spreads her arms sideways, and affectionately holds the *bandera* with her right hand (Viray, 2019). After the *kapitana*'s performance, the parish priest gives his blessing and then a procession commences going back to the church. The liturgy is completed in the church which ends by nine in the morning (L.C. De Leon, personal communication, February 8, 2025).

The system of sponsorship in *sayaw ng bati*

To explore and document the system of sponsorship existing in *sayaw ng bati*, I interviewed three respondents from Angono, Rizal in October 2024. They assumed the position of *kapitana* and *tenyenta* in the past. Two *kapitanas* were interviewed for this study: Ma. Elena De Leon, 65 years old and a retired employee, became a *kapitana* in 1982 when she was 19 years old, and Denise Bautista, 20 years old and a university student, performed in 2023. Another respondent is Gianina Diestro, 30 years old and working in a multinational bank. She performed as *tenyenta* together with Bautista in 2023. From childhood, all respondents have a strong sense of their local traditions as they witnessed early on the practices aligned with Holy Week, especially the performance of *bati* in Angono. Their families also contribute to this strong sense of heritage, given that their families are either active in church or directly involved in certain components of *bati*. Diestro's father, for example, was a conductor for the Angono National Symphonic Band who made several compositions for the *kapitana* and *tenyenta*. On the one hand, Bautista's aunt who was a *kapitana* before is active in church and encouraged her to become a *kapitana* one day.

De Leon and Bautista admit that they could see themselves performing *bati* from an early age. De Leon's motivation stemmed from her deep devotion to the Virgin Mary and early exposure to the activities of the *kapitanas* and *tenyentas*. She

expresses, "*May call kay Mama Mary. Kasama na ako sa pag-aalay ng bulaklak at the age of six years old. Nakakasama ko na ang mga kapitana at tenyenta*" (I have a calling from Mama Mary. I'm already offering flowers by the age of six. I'm already with the *kapitanas* and *tenyentas*). Aside from personal volition, Bautista's desire to dance is further motivated by his father who encouraged her to participate in the sortition in due time. In contrast, Diestro did not imagine herself performing *bati*. Her father was also hesitant since people tended to criticize those who performed. Diestro explains, "*Syempre, sa kanya naman kung gusto ko, okay lang naman. Very protective lang sya nung kabataan ko. Nung nagdadalaga ako secretly siguro gusto na din nya kasi iba nga rin naman na maging part ka ng tradisyon*" (Of course, it's fine with him if I want to join. He was just very protective when I was younger. When I was in my teenage years, maybe he wanted it for me secretly since it's also meaningful if you become part of tradition).

Aside from personal devotion and encouragement from family members, the respondents emphasize that external factors (e.g., the desire for fame) did not influence their decision to take part in *bati*. Bautista and Diestro admit that they are inherently reserved. However, becoming a *kapitana* and *tenyenta* provided them with a platform to improve their confidence. Bautista also notes that she has become more proactive in church activities and the *Samahan* (organization of *kapitanas* and *tenyentas*).

Diestro adds that the overall experience is a form of personal development. She asserts, "*Marami kang matututunan na skills aside sa sayaw. Sense of belongingness at nagkaroon ka ng impact sa community. Part ka na ng history, tradisyon kung бага*" (You will learn many skills aside from the dance. It is the sense of belongingness and having an impact on the community. You become part of history and tradition). De Leon, on the one hand, states that she received many blessings after performing *bati*.

In return, she remains committed to her obligation to serve the parish, which continues to this day.

I asked the respondents their definitions of *panata* and how it related to *bati*. For De Leon, it should be coming from one's heart. Although a serious obligation, she was certain that nothing could go wrong because she had been chosen by the Virgin Mary to become a *kapitana*. Bautista shares that *panata* is a matter of showing respect and time in one's devotion. "*Pagbibigay ng energy na maging deboto na walang hinibinging kapalit. Once maniwala ka kay Mama Mary, maraming blessings na matatanggap. I felt nagstrengthen ang faith ko since naging kapitana ako*" (It is about giving one's energy as a devotee without asking anything in return. Once you believe in Mama Mary, you will receive many blessings. I felt my faith has strengthened since I assumed the role of *kapitana*), she elaborates. Diestro emphasizes that *panata* is a "lifelong commitment" that could be related to Christ and the Virgin Mary. It is something she can offer as a "manifestation" of her faith and a way to praise the Lord and honor the Virgin Mary. Meanwhile, all respondents agree that *bati* can be classified as *panata*. It is something that everyone thinks and anticipates every year including their immediate families. Even if they are not directly involved, they make it a point to witness the Easter ritual without fail.

Transferability is a unique aspect of *panata* in the Philippines. Many practices aligned with *panata* can be passed on from father to son or from one generation to the next. I am eager to explore if transferability is possible in *bati* as the selection of dancers undergoes a rigorous process. This includes applying through an online form shared by the parish's Facebook page, a pre-screening interview, and a discussion where the duties and obligations of a *kapitana*, a *tenyenta*, and a pool of *konsehalas* are elaborated on together with the applicants' parents. Regardless of socioeconomic status, any female between the ages of 18 and 30

can apply as long as they are Catholics, residents of Angono, and not married or in a relationship. De Leon shares that the age requirement in the new booklet will be changed from 21 to 30. According to De Leon, the age restriction is enacted for these reasons: based on previous experience, it was challenging to teach those younger than 18 and, considering the schedule of the dancers, they need to practice every day for two hours from January till the week before the first performance (*Harap sa Banda*). The prospective dancers should also be single to prevent pregnancy during their tenure, as this would be a delicate situation. If a dancer becomes pregnant, her performance will be revoked, and she will be replaced by a *konsehala*. These considerations and the sortition that follows on the evening of Easter Sunday may hinder transferability in the context of *bati*.

Exemplifying the complexity of the selection process, Diestro joined the sortition four times. She was a *konsehala* in the first three sortitions and only assumed the role of *tenyenta* during the fourth sortition. De Leon and Bautista, on the one hand, became a *kapitana* immediately after joining one sortition. Except for Bautista, the other respondents have other relatives who were a *tenyenta* or *kapitana* in the past. The two respondents reveal that a family can have several *tenyentas* or *kapitanas*. Diestro notes that a family in Angono has dancers in *bati* for three generations. This is supported by De Leon who says, "*Anghel ako ng kapitana ko. Yung anak nya naging kapitana. Yung apo nya naging kapitana...Merong situation na sa isang pamilya meron*" (I'm an angel of my *kapitana*. Her daughter became a *kapitana*. Her granddaughter became a *kapitana*...This situation is possible for a certain family). Moreover, the interviews disclose several *panamanata* practices involved in *bati*. Those teaching the choreography and the *dicho* (Estelita Gil; Josefina Reyes), the composers, the sponsors of gowns, and even the individuals who erect the *Galilea* annually made

their obligations a lifelong commitment. “*Panata din sya in a sense na pati yung mga nagtuturo talagang ginagawa na nilang lifelong commitment na every Holy Week magtuturo ng bati, ng dicho. Naka-embed na sa bubay nila*” (It is a *panata* in a sense that even the teachers make it a lifelong commitment that every Holy Week they will teach *bati*’s choreography and the *dicho*. It is already embedded in their lives), Diestro adds.

A clear misconception in *bati* is aligned with the obligations of the chosen dancers. Prospective applicants in the contemporary period think that their obligation is solely the dancing component during Holy Week. However, to be selected during the sortition means that they also need to engage in several church activities including the daily floral offering to the Virgin Mary in May, the processions where the image of *Birhen ng Pagbati* joins, and on Christmas time where they need to help in preparing the giant *parols* (Christmas lanterns). Even after their tenure as *tenyenta* and *kapitana*, they are expected to join the *Samahan* when their presence is needed in church. De Leon shares that attendance at these functions is challenging, but the *Samahan* continuously encourages their members to allot time and serve the church. She shares, “*Itong way back 13, 14, 15, 16, awa ng Diyos napapunta na naming sa simbahan. Napush naming sila na maglingkod sa simbahan. Sinasabihan namin na nakakahiya sa mga matatanda. Kayo naman ang pumalit*” (Through God’s providence, we were able to encourage the dancers from batch 13, 14, 15, 16 to go to church. We were able to push them to serve the church. We told them that it was embarrassing for the senior members. They have to replace them).

Aside from the tedious physical preparations and obligations that dancers undergo before their performances, the most complex aspect of *bati* is the corresponding expenses. Each performance entails a different set of gowns. They also share expenses for the materials to be used in building the *Galilea* and meals for people involved in the

construction. Most importantly, the dancers are expected to feed the band after each performance. They are also required to open house and provide a meal to anybody who wishes to come to their residence on Easter Sunday. Traditionally, the *kapitana* sponsors the *umagahan* (breakfast) and the *tenyenta* prepares the *merienda* (snacks) in the afternoon. Regarding the costs, Bautista estimates that her family spent at least half a million pesos (USD9,259) during her tenure while Diestro shouldered around PHP200,000 (USD3,703). Bautista shares that her immediate family and some relatives paid the expenses. Since Diestro is already in the workforce, she shouldered the expenditure and her mother also contributed. Both respondents affirm that the bulk of the expenses go to food and the commissioning of gowns from local designers. Despite the hefty costs, certain expenses are sponsored by the parish church, the *Samahan*, and the local government. The parish church and the *Samahan* pay for the band, whereas the local government extends help in logistical concerns and provides LCD screens during the *Salubong*. There are also local designers who sponsor the gowns of the *tenyenta* and *kapitana*. In more ways than one, the sponsorship system inherent in *bati* mirrors the spirit of *bayaniban* (community cooperation) in Angono.

Criticisms are unavoidable especially when the tradition is closely associated with the practice of the gentry. Based on the interviews, it is interesting that the *bati* is not criticized for accommodating certain socioeconomic brackets, given that the practice is open to anybody who wishes to participate. The criticisms, however, mostly refer to the physical appearance of the dancers and the way the choreography is executed. Bautista notes certain comments she heard through the years: “*Dapat maganda ang kapitana o tenyenta. Yung criticisms na narinig ko katulad na medyo chubby nabunot. Dapat payat lang ang nabubunot. Kaya napepressure din ang iba*” (The *kapitana* or *tenyenta* should be beautiful. Some

criticisms refer to the weight of the performer. They say slimmer performers should be chosen. This is the reason why others are somehow pressured). As for the choreography, some individuals train the *tenyenta* and *kapitana* in secret, deviating from certain stylistic forms in the choreography. While most spectators do not give importance to *bati*'s execution on stage, these deviations are easily recognized by the incumbent choreographer and the older folks in Angono.

Conclusion

The ritual dance *sayaw ng bati* performed during Easter in Angono, Rizal can be differentiated from other sponsorship traditions (i.e., *santo sponsorship*, *hermano mayor*). While these sponsorship systems gained transformation by opening the practice to other socioeconomic brackets, the sponsorship system in *bati* contains a complex set of processes, especially in selecting the performers and the obligations they need to fulfill. The dancers' pious expressions of faith, the practice's connection with *Flores de Mayo*, and the processions where the dancers accompany the image of *Birhen ng Pagbati* resonate with *bati*'s strong association with the devotion to the Virgin Mary. In addition, elements in the *dicho* describing the values of the Virgin Mary are reinforced in the selection of the *tenyenta* and *kapitana*. As such, *bati* is a gendered practice closely linked to the female gender. Its annual repetition coincides with the idea of gender performativity highlighting not only the role of the female gender in this ritual dance but also the idealized virtues that women should project from the point of view of religion. Borrowing the idea of feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1988), *bati* can be classified as a social performance with "temporal and collective dimensions" and is publicly demonstrated to frame the female gender in the existing social codes.

Moreover, the present study uncovers layers of practices related to the conduct of *panata*. Aside

from the dancers who view the practice as a form of *panata*, they also affirm that the people directly involved in the tradition (e.g., choreographers, composers, *Galilea* builders) who committed themselves for a lifetime to sustain the practice consider their obligations a form of a devotional pledge.

Further, the transferability of the practice within the family is feasible. Although restrictive on the dancers' part due to the aspect of sortition, it is not entirely impossible as some families produced a *tenyenta* or a *kapitana* per generation. Anthropologist Maurice Bloch (1986) argues that ritual is governed by an ideology that aims to sustain social hierarchy and social continuity. In *bati*, the *tenyenta* and *kapitana* embody an idealized Marian devotion in the community. This, together with related *pamamanata* practices, serves as a mechanism for sustaining social order and demonstrating the influence of the Catholic Church even in the contemporary period.

Transferability is also echoed in how the *bati* is passed down to succeeding generations. This study reveals that *bati* is an ongoing and internalized cultural practice that enriches people's identity and reinforces solidarity. Such a notion reminds of Cornelio's (2014) concept of everyday authenticity where people's faith is not merely confined to the formality of religion; they express it through diverse, personal, and meaningful ways. More so, the concept of *habitus* by sociologist

Pierre Bourdieu frames the discussion on the transferability of the practice in Angono. For Bourdieu, *habitus* are embodied dispositions influenced by the community's social structures and historical conditions. These are durable, can surpass the tests of time, and generate practices, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings (Bourdieu, as cited in Maton, 2008). *Habitus* is deeply ingrained in the locals' consciousness and reflected through an ongoing transmission of the practice: the continued participation of former dancers, the mentorship of

future *tenyentas* and *kapitanas*, and acts of sponsorship reflecting the spirit of *bayanihan*.

Finally, the locals' financial investment to sustain *bati* is remarkable. Despite the hefty costs that the annual event incurs, it reflects the profound cultural significance that the locals attach to their Easter tradition. This illustrates what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1972) calls "deep play" wherein the amount of financial investment becomes irrelevant for as long as people attach significant meaning to a practice. In this case, *bati* is a powerful expression of faith that combines Marian symbolism, elaborate choreography, and material components.

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