

Poststructuralist Reading of Popular Religiosity in the Devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo

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Abstract: *The article is a poststructuralist reading of the discourses on popular religiosity exemplified in the devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo. Popular religiosity is considered the religious expression of the 'ordinary' believers in the margins relation to the official hierarchical Church. Poststructuralist interpretation shows how power operates like a thread network where those in the periphery can own their faith: this is described as discourse, an expression of the devotees' faith and practices. Discourse can be either discursive or non-discursive. When it is discursive, it shows the structures, the faith expressions, organizations and observable elements. When it is non-discursive, it reveals the resistance, the underlying structures, undercurrent faith beliefs and practices, worldviews and hidden interactions. An examination of the models leads to uncover how the movements of popular religiosity from below find its way towards faith empowerment, life's meaning and even survival.*

Keywords: *Poststructuralism, Popular Religiosity, Power-Relations, Black Nazarene*

Preliminary Remarks about Popular Religiosity

Popular religiosity captures the Filipinos' self-expression of their Catholic faith. It has both tangible and experiential traits that allow the devotees to have control over their faith and the practices that go along with it. There are hidden transcripts in the observance of popular religiosity, which we can read from the poststructuralist dynamics of power-relations. While popular religiosity can merely be an individual piety based on affection to God, from the poststructuralist angle, what power does and how it affects faith expression is also considered. The devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo is one of the best expressions of popular religion because of the number of its devotees. In the 2018, the *traslacion* or the transferring of the Black Nazarene icon from the

Quirino Grandstand to the Quiapo Church had an estimate of four (4) million devotees participating in the twenty-two (22) hour procession.¹

The research describes popular religiosity in terms of what is believed (faith) and practiced as influenced by the economy of power (discussed by Michel Foucault) and as demonstrated by how culture ‘from below’ can have its own force. The method in data gathering consists of an ethnographic approach composed of key informant interviews, environmental scanning and cultural immersion, and library research.

Understanding Popular Religiosity

Segundo Galilea argues that popular religiosity is too varied and complex to fit precise and “scientific” limits. He suggests that instead of defining it, it would be better to agree on certain characteristics that allow for its approximate identification.² In this research, popular religiosity, popular religion, popular Catholicism and popular devotion are used interchangeably.

Undeniably, popular religiosity is characterized by economic, social and cultural marginality. Marginalization inevitably stands in relation to the official church that considers it deformed, deviant, and cut off from the official liturgy of the hierarchical Church. Michael Candelaria claims that marginalization happens because popular religiosity cannot be controlled by the clergy.³

Undeniably, popular religiosity is the religious expression of the dominated and oppressed sectors. Dominant groups have power to exert hegemonic control over society diffusing their value system and lifestyle. In the case of popular religiosity, the dominated sector expressed their religious piety without much reference to the dominant group. It is coming from within their interior lives and signifying their faith in God. Popular religiosity characterized the word “*popular*” which means poor or related to them: it originates from the people at a given time and drawn from the culture of a local

¹ Inquirer.net, “Traslacion 2018 attracts 4million Black Nazarene Devotees,” in <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/958747/traslacion-2018-attracts-4-million-black-nazarene-devotees-black-nazarene-pnp-quiapo-metro-feast-traslacion-devotees> accessed on March 3, 2018.

² Segundo Galilea, *The Challenge of Popular Religiosity* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1988), 15.

³ Michael R. Candelaria, *Popular Religion and Liberation: The Dilemma of Liberation Theology* (New York: University of New York Press, 1990), 13

Church. At least before these practices disseminated and become widespread.⁴

Drawn from what makes sense to the people, popular religiosity is both affective and sentimental. Galilea describes this as intuitive and concrete rather than ruled by reason or logic. The effect on the image of God is undeniable: God is not remote and abstract but is concretized by the rites, worship, sacred objects, images, places, candles, holy water and other symbols.⁵ This makes popular religiosity a 'basic religion' directed towards satisfying the elementary needs of the people such as: recovery from illness, protection against natural disorders and calamities, and promotion of fertility and all forms of life. Within Catholicism, this is also attributed to and strongly connected with the power of saints, Mary, or Christ Himself who can respond to the immediate needs of the believers.⁶

The term 'devotion' is from the Latin word *devotio* which refers to an internal attitude that entails consecration, surrender, and the readiness to be at the service of God. It consists of internal and external elements. Internal element refers to the basis of prayer and other external practices that emanates from it. Devotion empowers a person to have his or her private initiatives in the way he or she deals with God and the way he would express his own style of religious piety.⁷

Poststructuralist Economy of Power

When popular religiosity is viewed using a poststructuralist discourse, I recourse to Michel Foucault. Foucault argues that power is the ultimate principle of social reality; individuals are constituted by power-relations. He reformulates power from its negative conception to a technical and strategic one. Traditionally power appeared as transgression seen in its judicial mechanisms and laid down in laws, which limit, obstruct, refuse, prohibit and censor. Power also presupposes control by the sovereign whose role it is to forbid. Foucault takes a paradigm shift by looking at power

⁴ Candelaria, *Popular Religion*, 12-14.

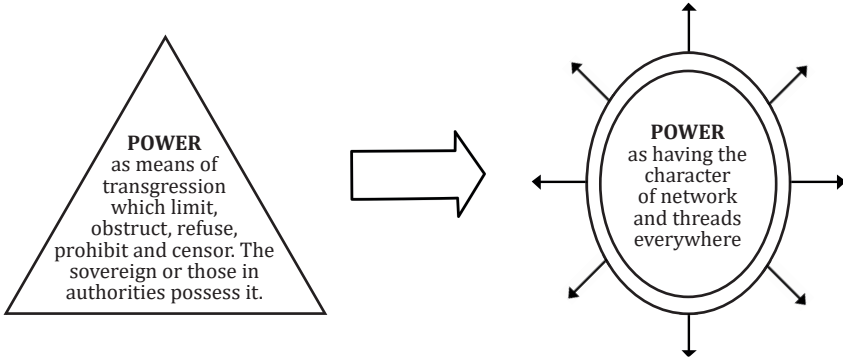
⁵ Galilea, *Popular Religiosity*, 19.

⁶ G.J.F. Bouritius, "Popular and Official Religion in Christianity: Three Cases in the 19th Century Europe", in *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies*. Edited by Pieter Hendrik Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburg (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1979) 136-137.

⁷ Bernard Raas, *Popular Devotions* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992), 13.

as operating through the construction of 'new' capacities and modes of activity. He demystifies the usual assumption of power as a possession, capacity or authority. The relations of power do not merely emanate from a sovereign or a state. It is not a commodity, which may be acquired or taken. The core idea of Foucault on power is its application, character of network and the manner it threads and extends everywhere⁸ as articulated in the diagram below:

Figure 1
Foucault's Paradigm Shift



Foucault begs the question, 'Who had power?' or 'What intentions or aims do power holders have?' to the processes by which subjects are constituted as effects of power.⁹ In line with Foucault's shift from the traditional conception of power, let us examine the faith and practices of popular devotion to the Black Nazarene using this framework.

By no means is Foucault's theory on power-relations perfect. His earlier works about power focused on *archaeology*, a term he used for the studies on the rules of formation and forms of practices. It was through this method that Foucault developed his dissertation, *The History of Madness* in 1961¹⁰ and his succeeding works: *The Birth of the Clinic* in 1963,¹¹ and *The Order of Things* in 1966.¹² The most systematized opus is *The Archaeology of Knowledge* which he

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, translated from French by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁹ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 74.

¹⁰ This was published as *Madness and Civilization: The History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Random House Inc., 1965).

¹¹ This was published as *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, translated by Alan Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1973).

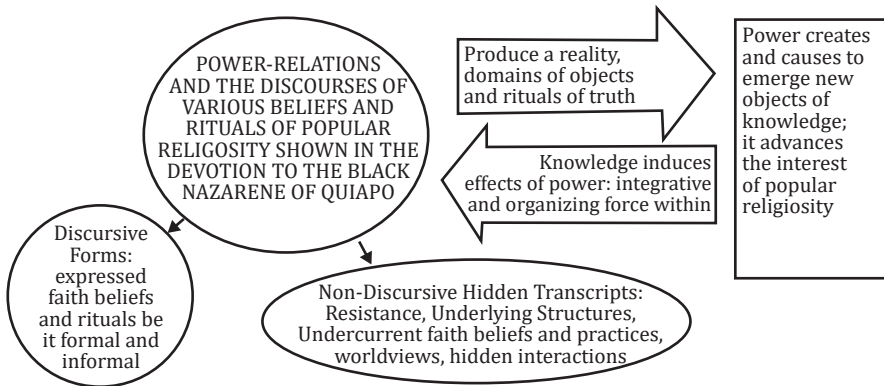
¹² Five years after this was published as *The Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences*, unidentified collective translation (New York: Pantheon, 1971).

published in 1969.¹³

Foucault argues that “power is situated among a cacophony of social practices and situations.”¹⁴ For him, power is directly tied into the economy of discourse itself. Discourse is one of the key concepts which he treated in *Archaeology of Knowledge*. In a discourse, power is referred to as the authoritative way of describing, composed of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions could be defined.¹⁵ Discourses promotes a specific kind of power-relations where the “neutral” person or professional is favored using his discourse - such as a lawyer, psychiatrist, professor and doctor: discourses highlight the fact that every categorization and description regulates what it describes.¹⁶

It is through discourses that popular religiosity using the devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo is examined.

Figure 2
Conceptual Framework in the Analysis of Popular Religiosity



We are using Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish* as touchstones in examining the discourses of popular religiosity. Power depends on the economy of discourse--when someone asserts a statement, it becomes “power” or someone else takes the statement as “true.” Power is productive for it traverses, forms knowledge and continuously creates discourses. Power circulates and is never monopolized by one center. It is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization.

¹³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

¹⁴ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 135-141.

¹⁵ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 31-39.

¹⁶ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 31-39.

Expressed Faith Beliefs and Rituals to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo

The widespread and growing devotion to the Black Nazarene of Quiapo is attributed to three factors: 1) Miracles and Healing, 2) The identification of the Filipinos with the Sufferings of Jesus Christ and 3) The *Panata*, Commitment, or Promise.¹⁷ It is a common narrative and popular agreement among devotees that countless miracles and healings take place in Quiapo and provide a living testimony on how the Black Nazarene performed wonders. Poor families can relate to the pains and difficulties of Jesus carrying the cross. Worth noting is the growing number of youth (so-called millennials) joining the devotion because the annual *panata* of their parents and the continuing the promise because of favors given by the Black Nazarene.

The article published by the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene described the common practices observed (discursive forms) by the devotees. It says:

Quiapo church has been a witness to several practices of Popular Piety. They have become part of the Devotion to the Black Nazarene. Among them are the following: The Pahalik (kissing of the statues), Pasindi (lighting of multi-coloured candles outside the church), Padasal (prayers from the Mandarals or the Priests), Pabihis (the changing of the garments of the Black Nazarene), Pabendision (sprinkling of Holy Water after mass or the kissing of the hands of the priests), Pahawak (touching of the statues or the garments of the Black Nazarene), Pamisa (Mass Offerings), Pagnonobena (Novena prayers or masses), Pagpasan (Carrying of the wood of the carroza or the rope attached to it), Pagyayapak (walking barefoot during processions), Paglalakad ng Paluhod (processing to the altar on bended knees)¹⁸

The non-discursive and hidden transcripts refer to the resistance, the underlying structures, and the undercurrent faith

¹⁷ Manila Reviews, "Devotion to the Black Nazarene, A Pastoral Understanding (Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene Website, 2018)," in <http://www.quiapochurch.com/devotion-to-the-black-nazarene-a-pastoral-understanding/>. Accessed on March 18, 2018.

¹⁸ Minor Basilica, "Devotion to the Black Nazarene".

beliefs, practices, worldviews and hidden interactions. In popular religiosity, this is subtle and one needs to look at the world behind the practice. To uncover the resistance and underlying structures within the ambit of power-relations, the lesser or none at all reference they have with the official hierarchical Church, the most likely they disregard the official teachings, dogmas and authorities.

Results of participatory research shows that hidden transcripts are mostly products of their non-engagement with the official authority and a reaction from the Church pronouncements. These are attributed to the need for survival--be it for healing or daily sustenance. A number of the devotees resorted to involve in superstitious beliefs such as using the *sampaguita* flowers they offered to the Nazarene and mix it with water for use in taking a bath. The belief is that it heals their sickness or give them extra strength.

The given practices cited above are part of the discourses on how devotees express their faith to the Black Nazarene. They are analyzed based on poststructuralist dynamics on power-relations within the ambit of the discursive and non-discursive forms.

Frijhoff reveals models on the power-relations between the Catholic Church and its practices of popular religion: these are constitutive institutional, semi-institutional, para-institutional and anti-institutional.¹⁹ These processes of interactions can facilitate in analyzing the discursive forms and non-discursive hidden transcripts embedded in the devotion.

Constitutive Institutional. This is a power-relation between the official church and popular religiosity wherein the faith beliefs and practices of the devotion strictly followed the interest and dogmas of the Church. Popular religion's discourse in its faith beliefs and practices were under the control of the clergy and should gain approval from the authority.

Key informant interviews and random talks with devotees, along with participant observation and cultural immersion, revealed that this type of power-relations is highly characterized by how basic dogmas of the Church are preserved. This includes the belief in God the Father as Creator, Jesus Christ as Savior, and the Holy Spirit as

¹⁹ M. Frijhoff, "Official and Popular Religion in Christianity: The Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Times (13th-18th Centuries)", in *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies*, edited by Pieter Hendrik Vrijhof and Jacques Waarddenburg (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1979).

Sanctifier. For its rituals and practices, constitutive institutional puts premium to sacraments and the official liturgy of the Church, penance and abstinence and the procession of the Black Nazarene that followed the prescription designed by the Church authorities. There are personal intentions incorporated in the celebration of the Eucharist. The essential trait points to the magisterium, Catholic dogma and doctrine that people followed with their practice of popular piety. The clerical-institutional outlook and formality in the practice of popular religion dominates this model.

To further advance its control, the official Church acknowledged and validated religious organizations formed around the devotion to the Black Nazarene of Quiapo. They served as official arms of the Church authorities. Examples are those mandated organizations formed by the church such as the Special Ministers of the Eucharist, Ministers of the Word, Knights of the Altar and the Biblical Parish Apostolate. Their main function is to serve as extension to the church authorities in the propagation of dogma and of the official Catholic teachings.

Semi-Institutional. In this type of power-relations, popular religiosity functions as a sub-culture within the church. Authorities are aware of the on-going sub-cultures deviating from their beliefs and practices. For example, devotees interchange the concepts of the Holy Trinity, and see God as healer and giver of well-being if certain sacrifices should be done. They believed that sacrifices are offered to atone sins and petitions be granted. This is semi-institutional since the clergy has minor influences in their discourses. The church officials tries to guide these practices which include the following forms: novena prayers, lighting of candles, embracing, touching or wiping statue of the Black Nazarene, praying while walking on their knees, excessive enthusiasm in pulling the ropes of the *andas* or carriage of the Black Nazarene statue, and the waving of towels and handkerchiefs.

Each devotee has his or her own *panata* or promise which they should not miss: else they believe a cursed is given to them. Many stories relate to healing and well-being. They pull the rope of the *andas* for example because they can share the blessings from the Black Nazarene. During the *traslacion* every 9th of January, devotees believe that heaven its graces and blessings: participation means consecration. The novena is incorporated in the Mass, but many

devotees still pray the novena even if the Eucharist is going on: this is also true for individual prayers and intentions where people do their own thing while the official liturgies are performed.

During the *traslacion*, the *mamamasan* (or those carrying the wood of the *andas* or the rope attached to it) believe that their petitions are granted: they come in the form of healing, or answers to immediate needs for survival (such as employment or simply better life). Those who cannot carry the wood or rope participate by waving their handkerchiefs, ask the *mamamasan* to wipe the icon with their handkerchiefs or light a candle and pray the Black Nazarene statue in front of them.

These discourses are not prescribed by the Church but neither are they prohibited: the church respects these manifestations of faith in the devotion. What the official church authorities did was to regulate them and organize people to take care that no chaos or stampede happens.

The organizations that are not under the full control of the official Church such as the *Santo Sepulcro Society*, *Hijos de Nazareno* and other mandated organizations like the Legion of Mary and the Block Rosary Federation formed a sub-culture of their own. They cooperated on the dictates of the Church officials, but they have activities that do not always need approval from the local Church officials.

Para-Institutional. In this model of power-relations, the official church is ill-informed and has no awareness of beliefs and practices that take place in popular religiosity. The official Church authorities loses control of mechanisms and become ignorant. The authorities also developed an apathetic attitude to them. They do not care their presence as long as the public order and “good” morals are not endangered.

In para-institutional faith beliefs can be in the form of superstitions mostly related to Blessed Trinity, belief that incantations done in Latin language can give power to amulets, pendants and pictures for protection or become *anting-anting* (a special power similar to a super hero). They believe that sacrifices and flagellation are means of obtaining grace. They invoke the Black Nazarene, the Blessed Trinity and Mary to add power to their amulets. Mary for them is equal with Christ which is not taught by the Catholic Church. The saints have powers too almost the same level as with God. The

Catholic Church teaching about Mary and saints is “Catholic Church clearly proclaims that God alone is to be worshipped, that is, He alone is to be given the highest form of honor, adoration, or in Latin “*latria*.” This is proclaimed in the liturgy at Mass as well as stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.”²⁰

*Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men . . . flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it.”*⁵¹³ *“No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source.”*²¹

But this is not the case of the para-institutional practice. Mary’s status is elevated almost like that of God.

For their rituals and practices, the incantations give power to amulets, pendants for anting-anting, prayer peddling, flagellation, wearing of devotional habit and superstitious rituals like sampaguita garland after being offered to Nazarene were brought home soaked in water and used for healing.

Popular religiosity uses tangible objects to demonstrate their concrete bond with the icon like wearing the same color (maroon/purple) and having the face of Christ printed on their shirts. But there are hidden transcripts apparent here since at the back of the shirts are names of politicians who donated the items. This is a subtle way of promoting one’s name where popular religion serves as their ideological tool.

The discourse of prayer peddling or prayer for sale is another

²⁰ Defending the Bride, “Proof that Catholics clearly teach to worship only God and not to worship Mary,” in <http://www.defendingthebride.com/ma3/only18.html>. Accessed on March 20, 2018.

²¹ Paragraph #970, Catechism of the Catholic Church (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994), 275.

reality which is away from the control of the Church but allowed by authorities since it does no harm. Devotees still resort to the peddlers in a desperate move to get their intentions.

Flagellation is a usual scene in a number of places in the country during Holy Week. But for the devotion to the Black Nazarene only few individuals did that since the carrying of the icon and walking barefoot is considered by many a form of sacrifice already.

A prominent organization to represent para-institutional is the Christ the King Spiritual Government established by Lauro Gonzales. His group is seen in front of the Quiapo Church where he declared himself as the personification of Jesus and the begotten Son. He wore a white habit, and showed gestures that he thought have semblance with God the Son. The official Church simply ignored his group and considered them deviant.

Anti-Institutional. In this model, there is an inversion of faith beliefs and practices. Its adherents have beliefs and practices that are not in conformity with Christian doctrine such as occult beliefs in witchcraft, fortune telling and magic. They use the divine Trinity for sorcery and have the heresy of imitating Christ through excessive harm of the body. In para-institutional, the flagellation is milder. In anti-institutional it goes to the point of crucifixion or unreasonable fasting.

Fortune telling practice is a business within the vicinity of the Church. They utilize tarot or playing cards to predict one's destiny. The hidden transcript in popular religiosity argues for basic religion needing assurance for survival. It is ambivalent why there are devotees who tolerate it; for some they did it for curiosity's sake without considering the adverse effect to their faith.

Witchcraft or sorcery comes in the form of *gayuma* (love potion), *barang* or *kulam*. It is not easy to find them since this is not a popular practice and is condemned by many. But there are a few people who still do that, which can be categorized as anti-institutional since it is anti-life and against the teachings of love and sacrifice. Nevertheless, those who are engaged with it look at the Black Nazarene as their protection against all forms of threats be it a *manananggal* (flying half human being), *tiyanak* (monster child), *dwende* (dwarfs) and any other beast. They buy amulets to ensure safety from all forms of danger.

Sorcery and all forms of witchcraft are condemned by the official

Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church declares:

*All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.*²²

Power “from Below” in Popular Religiosity

The discourses in the devotion to the Black Nazarene of Quiapo, be it discursive and non-discursive forms produce integrative and organizing forces. Integrative force means that it can provide an internal order to life which is translated into the performance of rituals that can address practical needs. The devotion makes sense because it offers meaning to the life of a devotee. It gives the conviction and assurance that there is a greater reality beyond the situation of anxiety, chaos, disease, uncertainties and even death.

Their use of symbols connects their practices to the Nazarene which is their source of power. This power is a discourse shown in the spontaneous expression of what they believed and puts value to everything they do to the Black Nazarene. The official Church cannot contain and has no control with these discourses

For instance, in the *traslacion* an observer can see how dangerous it is to hold the rope of the *andas*. And yet, devotees demonstrate *malasakit* or sensitivity by allowing others to express their faith by taking turns in carrying the image and the rope. This is where the organizing force comes in. People from various walks of life join the practices of the devotion: it is like a magnet where they perform together the rituals.

Through participant observation, it is understood how ordinary devotees handle the movement and dynamics of the *traslacion* and other faith expressions of the devotion to the Black Nazarene. This is the discourse of ordinary devotees who participated in the activity

²² Catechism of the Catholic Church #2116, 569.

guided by the official Church. For example, those who join the *traslacion* are all barefooted in order to pull the rope easier and not hurt other participants. In most cases, devotees transfer the rope of the icon to let it move in a coordinated fashion from one group to another. While waiting for their turn, the group stay together under their banners, which state the name of their organization, the place or chapter where they came from and the image and maroon/purple identified to the Black Nazarene.

Most devotees wear maroon/purple t-shirts and bring a face towel when they participate in the *traslacion*. If they want to go and touch the image while the *traslacion* is on-going, they are allowed to step on the bodies of those carrying the image and be thrown back to the throng of devotees who catch him or her afterwards. Most *mamamasan* are men, but there are women who dared to touch the icon, and they are facilitated by the *mamamasan*.

For those who cannot join the grueling activity, they wait in the street for the icon to pass them where they wave their white handkerchief or face towel. In most instances, they throw it to the *mamamasan* or the ones carrying the image. They also join the cheers to the Black Nazarene chanting “*Viva Poong Nazareno, Viva.*”

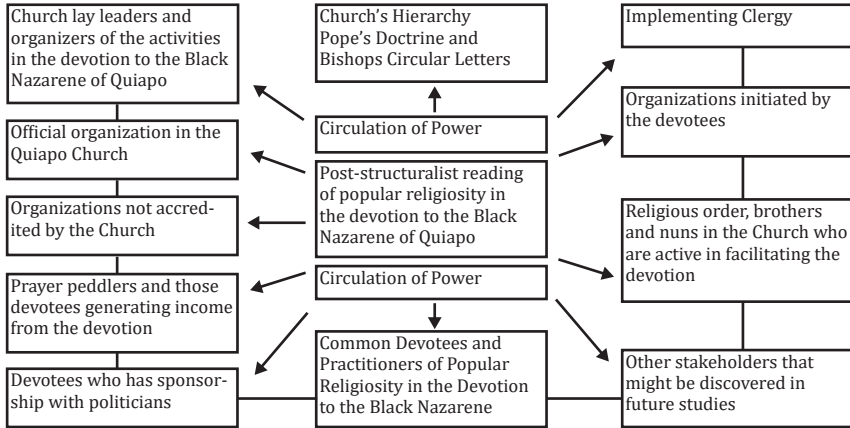
The church place stop-stations where they can pray. In most cases, devotees are more into touching the Black Nazarene icon and pulling its rope.

The power of the people from below is manifested in the spontaneous faith expressions performed together in an orderly manner and guided by their sensitivity not to hurt others. It may appear disorderly and chaotic, but a further analysis shows that the *andas* (the carriage of the image) cannot move and the *traslacion* will not progress if devotees cannot agree in pulling the rope together in a synchronized manner. What is certain is that the official Church adjusted to fit in the need of the devotees: the movement from below dictate the tempo. This is the powerful discourse of popular religiosity that even those who are in authority have to bend and modify.

Power further circulates in the different participants of the devotion to the Black Nazarene. The usual pyramidal scheme is deconstructed by a net-like organization. This is the point raised in the poststructuralist reading, popular religiosity in the devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo has in its discourses as source of

power that disperses and has the character of network and threads everywhere. This is summarized by the following diagram:

Figure 3
Circulation of Power among Various Stakeholders on the
Devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo



Conclusion

The poststructuralist reading of popular religiosity in the devotion to the Black Nazarene of Quiapo reveals the power-relations between the official Church and the devotees. Power in the discourses show how faith to the Black Nazarene is expressed and practiced. In this case, power moves around like a net organization, and it is not fully under the control of the mainstream Church authority. The undercurrent or those ordinary devotees have their voices heard, and those in the official Church tried to adjust and fit in to their needs on what is going on below to find themselves relevant. There are a number of participants in the dynamics of power where each advances their interests, motives and faith expressions. But it is the strength of their discourses which has integrative and organizing force that sustains the movements and life of the devotion.

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