

the religious experience of hermano puli's *Cofradia* and the seeding of the 1896 philippine revolution

a kierkegaardian reading of reynaldo ileto's
pasyon and revolution

Rhochie Matienzo

University of Santo Tomas

Abstract

Before the celebrated EDSA people power revolutions in recent Philippine history, Apolinario "Hermano Puli" de la Cruz founded the *Cofradia de San José* as early as the 19th century which laid the seminal principles of the Filipino struggle for freedom and eventual democracy. The *Cofradia*, albeit berated by the Church and Spanish rulers, has become the emblem of the untiring search for authentic freedom against foreign rule and bourgeois leadership. This search for freedom is said to have been motivated by the rituals practiced by the *Katagalugan* (Southern Luzon Region) peasantry. These rituals, of which the most criticized is the *Pasyon Pilapil*, were informally documented through popular songs, poetry, and readings. Condemned as abominable and heretical, the suppression of the *Cofradia* and its rituals led to the brutal persecution of Hermano Puli and the massacre of hundreds of members of the *Cofradia* in 1841.

This study aims to reflect on Reynaldo Ileta's *Pasyon and Rebolusyon* from an existentialist perspective in order to philosophically explore the seminal thoughts that stimulated the late 19th-century Philippine uprisings against the colonial Spain. Ileta contends that the brotherhood's teachings followed a tripartite structure of *Dalit* (light); as it begins with the brightness (innocence at the Garden of Eden), followed by a darkness (Christ's passion and death), towards the luminous glory (of the Resurrection). This gradation, consciously and unconsciously, influenced the *Katipunan* that played a huge role in the Filipino struggle for independence at the turn of that century. It is a factor that has influenced the present day concern for empowerment especially for those people standing at the social margins.

Keywords

Hermano Puli, Pasyon, 1896 Philippine revolution, leap of faith, suffering



Introduction

This study aims to reflect anew Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* on top of the nowadays historical and literary investigations conducted upon it since its first publication in 1979. In particular, in an existentialist perspective in order to philosophically explore the seminal thoughts that stimulated *Katagalugan* uprisings and eventually, the nation against Spain during the late 19th century. In so doing, this reflection hopes to imbibe the present day experts in Filipino politics and the voting public as well, towards a nation of good governance focused on empowerment inclusive of the welfare of those people standing at the social margin. The paper is composed of two parts: first is the context of *Pasyon and Revolution* particularizing on the establishment of the *Cofradia de San Jose* by Hermano Puli and the second part is the Kierkegaardian reading of the *Cofradia* rituals.

I: Hermano Puli and the *Cofradia*

Pasyon and the Light of Freedom

Reynaldo Ileto's work *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* is an attempt to view Philippine "history from below."¹ In line of this, he uses the *Casaysayan nang Pasiong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin na Suicat Ipag-alab nang Puso nang Sinomang Babasa* (1814). This account of the passion and death of Christ is colloquially known to the peasants as the *Pasyong Pilapil* being written by an *indio* clergy Mariano Pilapil. The work is described as "highly imperfect . . . does not deserve attention from literary or theological standpoint . . . a work of ignoramus . . . and a 'bastardization' of De Belen's (educated) work."² Paradoxically, it is unique among other versions for it does not only focus on the passion, death, and resurrection but it includes and begins with the book of Genesis,³ to the narrative of Christ, and ends up with the

¹ Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979), 6-34.

² *Ibid.*, 15-17. Prior to *Pasyon Pilapil* was Gaspar Aquino de Belén's *Ang Mahal na Pasión ni Jesu Christong Panginoon Natin na Tola (The Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ Our Lord that is a Poem)* in 1703 and was approved a year later, whereas, the former remained unofficial. Ironically, *Pasyon Pilapil* became overwhelmingly popular to the peasantry of Southern Tagalog even reaching the plains of Central Luzon. This is evident to their memorized recitation and singing of the text not only during the Lenten season but throughout the year. Ileto holds, that the "authorship is irrelevant in the case of *Pasyon Pilapil* because it bears the stamp of popular consciousness" (*ibid.*, 18).

³ Thus, it is also coined *Pasyong Henesis* by the locals.

book of Revelation. Ileta identifies these phases to the varying degrees of *Dalit* or “divine light” as central symbolism in their rituals.⁴ This may be viewed in a tripartite framework:

Innocence →	Christ →	Salvation
paradise / light	passion and death / darkness	glory / light

The most significant contribution of Ileta’s *Opus* is the juxtaposition of this framework with the Filipino struggle for *Kalayaan* (freedom). He contends that::

. . . the *Pasyon Pilapil* is an image of universal history, the beginning and end of time, rather than a simple gospel story. In its narration of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection, and of the day of Judgment, it provides powerful image of transition from one state to another, e.g., darkness to light . . . these images nurtured an undercurrent millennial beliefs which, in times of economic and political crisis, enables the peasantry to take action under the leadership of individuals or groups promising deliverance from oppression. One of these groups . . . heralded the country’s passage from the dark, miserable, dishonorable age of Spanish rule to a glowing era of freedom (*kalayaan*).⁵

Ileta contends that the popular symbolic approach to spirituality transcends and reflects the history of the Filipino people in three phases: as it begins with the innocence of the pre-colonial period, to the darkness experienced under a foreign rule, towards the shining glory of the democratic era. Thus, the framework:

Pre-Hispanic society →	Spanish American occupation →	Independence
Innocence (paradise / light)	Christ (passion and death / darkness)	Salvation (glory /light)

⁴ Ileta, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 43-47. In his early years, Hermano Puli was said to have his own religious experience *via* rays of light at the corridors of the *Huspicio de San Jose* as a helper.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

Lakaran as Suffering and the Revolution

Lakaran, the Tagalog translation for "journey on foot," refers to Hermano Puli's manner of preaching. Inspired by the Christ's "journey on foot" on the way to Mt. Calvary, the ascent is dangerous and excruciatingly exhaustive. In the case of Hermano Puli, this pertains to the suffering brought about by the dehydrating miles of walking under the tropical sun and the perils with it from the attacks by the Moros and Englishmen during those times.⁶ Such choice involves no turning back as one is lead to his own crucifixion.⁷

Ileto's thesis theorizes that the *Cofradia's* popular rituals became a significant framework that inspired the abled men and women to take arms and combat the centuries-old Spanish government in the country. Half a century after Hermano Puli's death in 1841, a peasant-turned-militant Andres Bonifacio founded the *Kataas-taasang, Kagalang-galang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (KKK). One of the rituals they embraced is the *Cofradia* practice of "journey on foot" which Katipuneros interpreted as *lakaran-unto-death*:

. . . her sons pursue struggle, not ceasing until *kalayaan* is found. As long as the struggle is perceived as a sacred mission -- a people's *Pasyon* -- the path toward *kalayaan* is narrow and straight, and there is no turning back until the end is reached. In view of this, it no longer appears irrational that Katipunan units mostly armed only with bladed weapons and sticks fought the Spaniards with determination. A Spanish observer notes that the Katipuneros seemed to be 'hallucinated unto death.'⁸

This seemingly "hallucinated attacks" is an existential consequence of one's purity of *loob* in their desire to see the light of *kalayaan*. Advancing in perspective, Ileto see *lakaran* as the *Pasyon's* symbolic approach to the eventuality of a national revolution.⁹

Anting-anting and the Bolontad na Loob

The alleged "irrationality" attached to *KKK* stems from Bonifacio's reading of the *Cofradia's* "frenzy" rituals and prayers. Witnesses to the initiation rites describe:

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ According to Ileto, Hermano Puli's *lakaran* as an evangelization approach provides symbolic approaches: 1. Self-denial as an expression of purification of individual *loob*, 2. Gospel proclamation understandable and near to the hearts of the natives; and 3. as a method of struggle against colonialism (ibid., 71).

⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁹ Ibid., 130-133.

. . . neophytes whisper 'ancient prayers' and prostrate 'themselves on the dusty pavement of the church,' asking for divine light, supernatural grace, in order that at the precise moment they may be strengthened in their new state of being.¹⁰

The "new state of being" pertains to the individual *loob*'s "potentialities of courage, goodness, and heroism."¹¹ This "potensiya," or faculty, is the "intangible, mysterious and divine energy which animates the universe" that comes from the union of individual *loob* to a higher force outside itself which enables the self to control itself and one's surroundings "manifested in every aspect of the natural world, in stones, trees, clouds, and fire."¹² The rituals are dangerous which can only enacted via *bolontad na loob* out of one's inward willingness amidst uncertainties for the sake of achieving his/her "new state of being."¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹¹ Ibid., 52. Just as Hermano Puli declared armed struggle in Tayabas, Laguna and Batangas provinces in 1841, religious leader Felipe Salvador (Apo Ipe) of the brotherhood *Santa Iglesia* from Bulacan, raised up arms in support of the *Katipunan*, believed that in "maintaining the *loob* in a state of full control and serenity so that in the battle of the *Santa Iglesia*, (a) soldier would make up for in courage what he lacked in arms" (ibid., 273; see also, 50). Before an attack, Salvador also claims that "with divine protection, they would be immune to the weapons of the Spanish army and would, therefore, be able to take possession of the weapons in the camps with which they could assure themselves of the triumph." Salvador along with his 300 men with only 100 rifles defeated the less than 3,000 well-armed *cazadores* in San Luis, Pampanga in 1902 (ibid., 264).

¹² Ibid., 30.

¹³ Ileta cites an example of this willingness quoting a letter of Hermano Puli on March 1841: "the *fondadores* have never 'squeezed anybody's neck' (*pinisa sa liig*) or threatened anyone with a dagger to join their union; it was all done out of 'willingness (*bolontad*) of *loob* and nothing was accomplished with the whip" (ibid., 68). The choice proceeds from external impulses to the interiority of the self where one has the control of the self to endure "extreme asceticism, meditation, sexual abstinence, ritual purification and various types of sacrifices in order to 'focus' or 'concentrate' in oneself some of the energy suffusing the universe" (ibid., 31). This is most evident during the season of Lent, particularly Holy Week, where members are intimately connected *via* the rituals to invigorate their "anting-anting." The rituals include purification of *loob* by self-flagellation, fasting, abstinence, meditative prayer and the singing of the *Pasyon*. Ileta further explains, "For the power that is concentrated in an amulet to be absorbed by its wearer, the latter's *loob* must be properly cultivated through ascetic practices, prayer, controlled bodily movements and other self-discipline. For an amulet to take effect, the *loob* of its possessor must have undergone renewal and purification . . . historical circumstances have given unique shape to Filipino beliefs and practices. This is where Holy Week and the *Pasyon* enter the picture" (ibid., 32).

These rituals and the use of *anting-anting* if viewed in a different angle suggests that a *Cofradia* believer is fully active, free, and conscious of the consequences of his/her practice of faith. The rituals and the possible "religious experiences" therein, are not to be regarded as plain irrational for each member sees light not shown to those exposed to formal education and modern living. What is beyond is a hidden brightness that nimbly shines as indigenous mystic traditions. Theirs is the subjective belief that as one gets closer to the *Dalit*, the more radiant and efficacious an individual becomes.

II: Kierkegaard and the *Pasyon*

"Christendom" and the "Offensive Truth"

While Hermano Puli was indoctrinating the *Cofradia* in the early 19th century, Søren Kierkegaard in Denmark was raging an attack against the local Danish Church. His main target is the systematic objectification of faith by its clergy he coined as "Christendom" which he describes as "a Christian nation composed of units that honestly admit that they are not Christians . . . bewailed of an effort of what the *New Testament* understands by Christianity."¹⁴ By "understanding," he pertains to the experience of suffering by the individual in the name faith just as the first Christian in the early years; an experience he finds dead among the modern Danish people.¹⁵ This faith is the belief in an "offensive" truth about God and the actions of the believer in defense of it before the others.¹⁶

¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Attack Upon Christendom*, trans., Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), 31.

¹⁵ This battle cry of Kierkegaard is seen across his works. In the *Attack Upon Christendom*, he asserts that "suffering (is the) truth," explaining that, "in this mediocre, miserable, sinful, evil, ungodly world the truth must suffer, Christianity is the suffering truth" (ibid., 268). Likewise, in *Sickness Unto Death*, he concludes that Christendom is the "profanation and prostitution of Christianity" (Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, eds., trans., Howard Hong and Edna Hong [New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980], 102). In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he traces this degradation from the "assumption that we are all Christians" by default without hardships (Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 44, 512; see also, *Practice in Christianity*, 181).

¹⁶ The "offense" is a result of a disturbance that alarms the religious routine conveniently conceived by human reason. Here, the inauthenticity of faith lies at the level of reason since whatever mysteriously conceived is contrary to a trouble-free religiosity of the "many." In Christendom, the individual's passion for appropriating the paradox of existence becomes diminished. No one bothers anymore to approach the absurdity of Christ's Incarnation. In a similar context, Kierkegaard's Johannes de Silentio asks in *Fear and Trembling*,

Hermano Puli's act to pull arms against Spain is precisely this context, since for Kierkegaard, Christian faith is a frightful but resilient and a humble yet defiant kind of experience towards the attainment of truth free from modernity's engulfing intellectualization. Kierkegaard explains:

[To] be a Christian is . . . about crucifying the flesh, hating oneself, about suffering for the doctrine, weeping and wailing while the world rejoices, about the most heart-rending sufferings due to hating father, mother, wife, one's own child, about being what the Scripture says . . . that He is a worm and no man. Hence, not to be offended at the fact that what in the highest, the divine understanding . . . is humanly speaking, so frightful. This is what it is to be a Christian. . . . Indeed, if such exactions had occurred to any human power, man would at once have revolted in defiance.¹⁷

Such divine understanding that is "offensive,"¹⁸ humanly speaking, is Kierkegaard's justification of Hermano Puli's call to struggle against the friar's intellectual approach to faith. If Kierkegaard is against the conception of faith as a matter of citizenship formulated by Christendom, Hermano Puli is revolting *contra* the blind obedience proliferated by the colonizer's impassioned sermons and truth about "dogma." For the Dane, the highest threat towards authentic religiosity is the reification of faith that fosters depersonalization, hypocrisy, and irresponsibility. A faith of this kind is devoid of personal devotion, self-will, and acceptance of risk; the very elements evident in the religious experiences of the Hermano Puli's *Cofradia*.

"There were countless generations who knew the story of Abraham by heart, word for word, but how many did it render sleepless?" (*Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, 28).

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*. trans., Walter Lowrie (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 168.

¹⁸ In a signed book *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard writes: "But although by taking away the possibility of offense men have gotten the whole world Christianized, the curious thing always occurs--the world is offended by the real Christian. Here comes the offense, the possibility of which is, after all, inseparable from Christianity. Only the confusion is more distressing than ever, for at one time the world was offended by Christianity--that was the intention; but now the world imagines that it is Christian, that it has made Christianity its own without detecting anything of the possibility of offense--and then it is offended by the real Christian." (Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* trans., eds., Howard Hong and Edna Hong [New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995], 176; see also, 193-194). For Kierkegaard, thus, being a Christian "is repugnant to the natural man, an offense to him, against which with wild passion and defiance he must revolt" (Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*, 150).

“Vacillation of *Loob*,” “Sunday Christianity” Versus the True Follower

The *Cofradia* struggle for authentic practice of faith is illustrated in Kierkegaard's distinction between an “admirer,” or those whose faith is devoid of sacrifice and play safe by following obligations to the Church, versus, the “follower,” whose lives are at stake in the name of faith.¹⁹ If the former's faith is naive and weak, then the latter's is decisive and defiant.

In the *Pasyon*, this Kierkegaardian dichotomy is seen in Ileta's usage of the phrase “vacillation of *loob*” depicting the “admirers” as exhibited among the ranks of the revolutionary government headed by the *ilustrados*.²⁰ Ileta enumerates such instances: first, General Emilio Aguinaldo's *mahinang loob* depicted in the truce of Biak-na-bato in December 14, 1897, where Aguinaldo and the Spanish authorities at a residence in San Miguel, Bulacan, agreed to end revolutionary activities by the surrendering rebel arms and a self-exile to Hong Kong with a huge sum of wealth.²¹ Another account was the amnesty rewarded by the Governor-General Primo de Rivera in April to May 17, 1897, to the officials Daniel Tirona (Minister of War), Jose del Rosario (Interior Minister) and General Julian Cailles.²² This inauthenticity of one's *loob*, persisted even in the post-revolutionary period, as the *Pasyon* warns all against those “who continue to behave outwardly . . . and runs counter to what their '*loob*' is.”²³ The *Pasyon* is referring to the “*ilustrado*”-politicians described as “the three false kings who . . . treat the country's illness with poison” identified by Ileta as Manuel Quezon, Sergio Osmeña, and Manuel Roxas.²⁴

The “follower” in the Kierkegaardian sense epitomizes the *Cofradia* brotherhood whose rituals are considered incantations of madness and abominable hallucinations. Yet,

¹⁹ In the *Provocations*, Kierkegaard writes: “The difference between an admirer and a follower still remains, no matter where you are. The admirer never makes any true sacrifices. He always plays it safe. Though in words, phrases, songs, he is inexhaustible about how highly he prizes Christ, he renounces nothing, gives up nothing, will not reconstruct his life, will not be what he admires, and will not let his life express what it is he supposedly admires” (Kierkegaard, *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*, 88).

²⁰ The Spanish term for the “enlightened ones” referring to the educated native Filipinos comprising the middle class of the late 19th century who eventually led the first revolutionary government. They are the leaders whom the *Pasyon* identified with Judas Iscariot whose *loob* are indecisive in times of trials. (Ileta, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 9, 182).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

²² *Ibid.*, 182.

²³ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁴ They served as the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Philippine presidents after Aguinaldo (Quezon, 1935-1944, Osmeña, 1944-1946, Roxas, 1946-1948). *Ibid.*, 248, 250-251.

for Kierkegaard such is the case if described "humanly speaking" but a form of "true worship of God . . . doing God's will, which was never to man's taste."²⁵ This is what Kierkegaard insists in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* when he describes Christians as "fools" before the religious authorities. He writes:

In those early days a Christian was a fool in the eyes of the world. . . . One is now a Christian as a matter of course . . . it is always foolish to exert oneself with infinite passion. . . . Before, a Christian was a fool in the eyes of the world; now that everyone is a Christian he becomes a fool all the same, in the eyes of the Christians.²⁶

The *Cofradia's* cult, is precisely, this foolishness resulting in one's perseverance and zealousness before an arduous task of *imitatio Christi*. A true Christian possesses the strength to endure isolation, humiliation, mockery, and persecution by the society. What makes them persevere in such a practice faith, is for Kierkegaard, the inward passion that proceeds from the "joy" of exaltation by way of suffering. Here, an individual is filled with the jubilation of seeing the path of liberation towards the attainment of truth. The passageway is hidden to many but clearly visible to the individual enlightened by the joy of becoming "witness to the truth"²⁷ This is the context of Hermano Puli's *Lakaran* ritual aimed to break the individual free from the lethargic traditions of "Christendom." Faith in this context is a *subjective, inward* and *passionate* choice to walk the pathos Christ took on his way to Mt. Calvary. A truth that is constantly offensive, yet worthy of searching and dying for.

The opposite of which is the "Sunday Christianity," which for Kierkegaard, is an experience of Christendom resulting in a passionless spirituality. Viewed in the Kierkegaardian premises, Hermano Puli is revolting against this very system and relives the spirit of the early Christians of the *New Testament* whose practice of faith is defined by "suffering in the state of fear and trembling."²⁸ Likewise, the *Cofradia* serves as true followers and witnesses to the teachings of Christ, i.e., the path of *offensive suffering* relishing the persecutions of fellow men.

Kierkegaard seemingly predicted the *Cofradia's* fate when he says: "What Christianity wants is the following of Christ. What man does not want is suffering, least of all the kind of suffering which is properly the Christian spirit, suffering at the hands of men."²⁹ On November 2, 1841, Hermano Puli at the age of 27, was executed *via* a firing

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*, 219.

²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 181-182.

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 60-61.

²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 88.

²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*, 34-35.

squad in Sariaya, Quezon after the townfolks he thought his refuge surrendered him to authorities. His remains were mutilated and hanged in the strategic locations of his hometown in Lucban-Tayabas. The day before that, hundreds of *Cofradia* members including women, elderly and children were brutally massacred. After a couple of centuries, Hermano Puli and the *Cofradia* secular spirituality are slowly gaining the honor that is due. Kierkegaard virtually sees Hermano Puli's legacy saying: ". . . every moment is to see the sword hanging over the beloved's head, and yet not to find rest in the pain of resignation but to find joy by virtue of the absurd."³⁰

The Absurdity of *Loob* and the Pathos of *Kalayaan*

In a recent essay, "Translation as Argument: The Nontranslation of *Loob* in Ileta's *Pasyon* and Revolution," Ramon Guillermo contends that Ileta intentionally avoids translation of the term *loob* in order to recoil from the fixed definitions and to put emphasis on the actual relating of the self in the concreteness of reality. He remarks:

Ileta's nontranslation of the Tagalog concept of *loob* is integral to the argument and rhetorical persuasiveness of his seminal work, *Pasyon and Revolution*. The meaning of *loob* that readers gather is a deeply religious and mystical one. However, the idiom of *loob* has multifarious and varied usages, and in the vast majority of cases *loob* is a prosaic term . . . demonstrates that reambiguating Ileta's translations could lead to different interpretations."³¹

This is illustrated in the "Problemata III" of Kierkegaard's renowned *Fear and Trembling* where he reveals the secret of Abraham's silence during the sacrifice of Isaac. Even its pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio, who is a man of reason and non-belief, fell silent (hence, the name "de Silentio") justifying such insane ordeal: the killing of one's own son.³² Abraham has clearly found something exclusively significant in that instant which, however, appears absurd to the observer. Thus, his special kind of silence. This is what Ileta (and Guillermo's point) is confronting with on the nontranslatability of the word *loob* since the idea of *loob* is more than an idea but a personal experience. Ileta in another essay made this point by a warning the local

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, 50.

³¹ Ramon Guillermo. "Translation as Argument: The Nontranslation of *Loob* in Ileta's *Pasyon and Revolution*," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 62, no. 1 (2014): 3-28; 3. The term "Tagalog" represents a group of people who speak the "Tagalog" language and living in the southern region of the Luzon Island of the archipelago. Most of the people, then, were peasants and the first natives to raise arms and rebelled against the colonial Spain.

³² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, 119.

historians not to succumb into the theoretical description of the human person. Ileta writes:

The definitions of such words (they certainly defy translation) are constantly subject to subtle plays of meaning - a dreadful situation for historians . . . meanings cannot be fixed in some transcendental plane that the archaeology of words like *loob* and the like must be undertaken.³³

This justifies Hermano Puli's notion of *loob* in search for *Dalit* (divine light). The movement is an inward search for meaning *via* the absurd where only the one who actually experiences shall be able to discover. As absurdly as it can be, the *Pasyon* taught ordinary men and women living under the colonizer's rule to search for *kalayaan* in the face of systematic persecution by the authorities. More so, the use of *anting-anting* as the ultimate protection against the advanced armaments of the Spaniards, is in one hand, "abominable," "heretic," "mad" and "absurd," while on the other hand, the most meaningful meaning unveiled to the individual, i.e., the true sense of *kalayaan*.

The Revolution of the *Pasyon* "Leap"³⁴

The absurd ways of the *Cofradia* is rooted in an existential paradox. The *Pasyon* Christ is the paradoxical image of a "divine yet human, humble yet strong, victim yet victor, poor yet wealthy Tagalog Christ."³⁵ People understand this paradox in the person of a peasant leader Hermano Puli. The Tagalog Christ is unpopular to the *illustrados* due to its berated origins in contrast with the Christ illustrated in the sermons of the friars. Thus, the choice to believe in Hermano Puli, is itself, an act of "leap of faith." Ileta himself puts it:

Apolinario's descent . . . is a sense, a mirror of certain possibilities of existence to which ordinary individual could respond. (This) leadership implies leading others

³³ Ileta, Reynaldo C. "Critical Issues in 'Understanding Philippine Revolutionary Mentality,'" *Philippine Studies* 30 (1982): 92-119; 108.

³⁴ The phrase "leap of faith" identified with the philosophy of Kierkegaard is taken from the *Fear and Trembling's* original "faith by virtue of the absurd." The term "absurd" is peculiar in this usage as it connotes a *subjective, inward, and passionate* approach to faith. These elements are the means to find meaning amidst uncertainties in life. (e.g., Abraham's obedience to God despite insane command). Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 48-49.

³⁵ Ileta, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 63.

to view their own lives and to decide whether they should make that 'leap of faith'.³⁶

Ileto's interesting use of the Kierkegaardian "leap of faith" refers to the individual's decision to accept a life of conversion; "done out of the 'willingness' (*bolontad*) of *loob*" despite overnight vigils, days of continuous singing, miles-stretched *Lakaran*, prolonged fasting, etc.³⁷ Thus, to live with the *Cofradia* necessitates one to take a "leap" into a life that embraces all possibilities; even death for the sake of one's belief. Kierkegaard substantiates Ileto's point in a footnote in *Fear and Trembling* where the term "leap" appeared only twice in the whole of the Kierkegaardian *opus*. Similarly with Hermano Puli, Kierkegaard believes that only by way of passion, true faith is realized in the face of death.

This is the continual leap in existence. . . . What our generation lacks is not reflection but passion . . . our age is actually too tenacious of life to die, for dying is one of the most remarkable leaps . . . *ein seliger Sprung in die Ewigkeit* [a blessed leap into eternity].³⁸

Conclusion

Kierkegaard's call to a passionate spirituality is concretely visible in the *Cofradia*'s influence to the *Katipunan*. The movement took inspirations from the rituals as a source of strength to revolt against the centuries-old Hispanic colonialism. Hermano Puli once said: "true brotherhood exists only when the individual *loob* is 'converted', and this can only be revealed with the imminence of death."³⁹ For Kierkegaard, this is the joy amidst death brought about by "faith by virtue of the absurd." A reality each *Katipunero* endures in their everyday revolt.

It might be presumptuous on the part of this paper to believe, but a close reading of Ileto's account of the *Pasyon*, reveals a leap of faith made by the courageous men and women of the *Cofradia*, whose beliefs are never blind but pure and decisive, as they find Christ in the personality of Hermano Puli. This is offensive to the educated *illustrados* and Church authorities of the 18th and 19th century and even to the experts of today as Ileto continues to invite everyone to write the "unfinished history" of revolution. Following this paradoxicality of thought, the uneducated poor has become the beacon of light identified with the ideals of the Filipino revolution against the foreign rule.

³⁶ Ibid., 65-67. Italics added.

³⁷ Ibid., 68.

³⁸ *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, 42. Italics in the original.

³⁹ Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 302.

This paper further concludes that there is at least, if not most, a grain of truth found in the faith of those belonging to the social margins. At present, the faith of the remaining popular cult scattered along the mountain ranges of Banahaw and the Sierra Madre, including those in plains of Laguna, Rizal, and Quezon provinces, continue to *leap* over the modern logic, science and the catechism of the mainstream religion. They may be on par to what the opulent few conceive as *the* religion, but one cannot simply discard that if revolutionaries did not venture into the "unchristian," "abominable" and "absurd" rituals of the *Katipunán*, our founding fathers would never have the inspiration and become the catalyst of struggle for democracy, freedom, independence, and sovereignty we are enjoying at present. Indeed, the *Cofradía* ways are absurd but their faith is certainly meaningful.

References

- Blanchette, Olivia. "The Silencing of Philosophy." Edited by Robert L. Perkins. *International Kierkegaard Commentary Vol. 6 - Fear and Trembling and Repetition* (Mercer University Press), 1993: 29-64.
- Guillermo, Ramon. "Translation as Argument: The Nontranslation of *Loob* in Ileta's *Pasyon* and Revolution." *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 2014: 3-28.
- Ileta, Reynaldo C. "Critical Issues in "Understanding Philippine Revolutionary Mentality." *Philippine Studies* 30, no. 1 (1982): 120-124.
- . *Pasyon and Revolution*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1979.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*. Edited by Alastair Hannay. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- . *Kierkegaard's Attack Upon Christendom*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- . *Practice in Christianity*. Edited by Howard Hong, & Edna Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1991.
- . *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*. Edited by Charles E. Moore. Farmington, Pennsylvania: Plough Publishing House, 2007.
- . *The Sickness Unto Death*. Edited by Howard Hong, & Edna Hong. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

—. *Works of Love*. Edited by Howard Hong, & Edna Hong. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Perkins, Robert L. "Abraham's Silence Aesthetically Considered." *International Kierkegaard Commentary* (Mercer University Press) 6 (1993): 155-179.

Pilapil, Mariano. *Casaysayan nang pasiong mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon natin, sucat ipag-alab nang puso nang sino mang babasa*. Manila: P. Sayo, 1939.

Podmore, Simon D. "The Sacrifice of Silence: Fear and Trembling and the Secret of Faith." *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 2012: 70-90.

Rafael, Vicente L. "'Becoming Rey Ileto: Language, History, and Autobiography.'" *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 2014: 115-132.