

The Silence of *Nayanaya* in Cebuano Songs

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Abstract

The article is part of the chapter “Silence in *Nayanaya* vis-à-vis Silence in Zhuangzi” in the author’s dissertation entitled Phenomenology of *Nayanaya*: A Filipino Philosophy of Survival Interpreted in the Light of Silence in Zhuangzi.”¹ The meanings of *Nayanaya* and the different ways of doing *nayanaya* were extracted from the questionnaire accomplished by respondents from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Interview was also utilized. In its strictest significance, *nayanaya* is a whiling away of the time amidst a crashing limit-situation (to borrow Karl Jasper’s term), a taking time-out, a distancing, until one is able to face it, unbroken. *Nayanaya* is both an end and a means. As a means, the ways are many; singing or humming a song, being one of them. The pinnacle of

¹ <http://library.usc.edu.ph/Filipiniana/pdf/Philosophy/Velez,PHD.pdf>

nayanaya is *wu-wei*, that is, doing *nayanaya* by not doing *nayanaya*. As an end, while it aims at silence, *nayanaya* is actually a will to be happy and ultimately, a will to be.

Filipinos, with some exceptions, are known to be a “boisterous” people. They are highly sociable, whose unique sense of humor can lighten an otherwise heavy atmosphere. Their laughter rings loud and clear as a spontaneous response to jokes and, without being sadistic, they feel an innocent subdued amusement when something embarrassing occurs to themselves or to others. They can find something funny even in serious matters and so can take them lightly. These characteristics are portrayed in Filipino stories, movies, comics, cartoons, and songs.

Experiencing the Silence of *Nayanaya*

Filipinos are not always noisy, but when they are, their voices can fill a students’ canteen, crowded school corridors at dismissal time, marketplaces broiling with activity, beaches during their celebration of St. John the Baptist, and in many other instances where the spirit of fun and frolic reign free. It is no surprise that in a crowd, Filipinos go to the extent of shouting in their conversation to compete with all the noise. And yet not every crowd is noisy.

One very moving scene is the congregation inside a church. The same number of Filipinos who can cause hearing-in-a-crowd impossible can be so quiet that one can hear the muffled sigh of the person seated near him. The church is filled to overflowing and yet the silence is almost audible, except when it is time to sing or pray aloud. Even a murmur seems taboo by common consent—an occurrence not limited to churches. The same awe-inspiring silence-in-a-crowd is manifest in the annual fiesta of *Santo Niño de Cebu*, where noise is not only inside the Basilica, but also its plaza, the Pilgrims' Center, and the streets surrounding the Basilica that overflow with people. To each his own thoughts, feelings, petitions, and thanksgivings. And then in unison, they raise their voices at the right moment during the Holy Mass.

Is it possible that deep down, underneath a boisterous exterior, lies a silent current, which is strong and persistent? Is it possible that the noise of a Filipino signals a longing for silence? Answers to these questions are found when one probes deeper into the *nayanaya* experience.

Laughter is not all there is in the world of the Filipino. The threats to a peaceful existence that come from beyond the shores of the Philippines and from within its fold are capsulized in an individual's life, which is ruffled from time to time by problems that arise from within himself and from without. When the going gets tough, a Filipino dons a shield to protect him from his "world-gone-berserk." This shield is *nayanaya*.

Nayanaya has many layers of meaning. The first meaning tells that *nayanaya* is “that which a Filipino finds himself doing when he tries to postpone, for as long as possible, the tension that comes with fulfilling certain difficult responsibilities, or confronting an unwelcome situation.” Why does he postpone the onset of tension? Is it because he is afraid? Not ready for the task? Because the unwelcome situation is painful or embarrassing? One, two, or all of these are possible. So, what can a person do? He does the things he likes doing—not the one he dreads—until such time that evasion becomes impossible. Meanwhile, he is silencing his fear and his dread by discovering the courage and the confidence he thinks he does not have. In the meantime, he summons the nerve to face the inevitable.

Taking *nayanaya* in its first meaning as implying procrastination is misleading as *nayanaya* is different from the Cebuano term *unya-unya* (postponing the doing of something). Procrastination is only the unhappy concomitance of *nayanaya*. Neither does *nayanaya* have to do with the popular understanding of Filipino time as tardiness.

The second meaning, the “act of whiling away the time as one finds the courage and calm needed to be efficient and effective in his work” is actually similar to the first. However, this second meaning regards *nayanaya* in its positive aspect, “finding courage and calm,” whereas the first meaning focuses on the negative, the postponement of tension. One whiles away the time by listening to relaxing music, or

praying, or simply doing nothing. He hopes to find courage and calm in the serenity of the soul that music brings, or in the peace of mind that prayer gives, or in the silence that stillness offers.

The third meaning takes *nayanaya* as a form of escape from an unbearably stressful and hurtful situation. Escape routes differ depending on the cause of the pain. One way of escaping, for instance, is to leave the place that has become unbearable for incompatible people to stay together. If it cannot be done, one “transcends” the situation by ignoring the very existence of the stressful situation or imagining it as otherwise. Thus, by pretending, a wall of indifference is built around the sufferer, thereby silencing the stress and the hurt that have meanwhile stood in the way of happiness.

Below is a Cebuano song that suggests *nayanaya* by way of pretense to escape from problems, like financial inadequacy. Pretending includes laughing at difficulties, which is a refusal to be defeated by life’s “game,” and occasionally enjoying oneself in some entertainment.

Ayaw Pagpila²

...
Ang kinabuhi ning kalibotan
Lainlain ang pagkabutang
May kabos may adunahan
May malaksot, maanyag
ug ambungan.

Pretend

...
 Life in this world
 Varies in status
 Some are poor, others are rich
 Some are ugly, beautiful, and
 handsome.

² “Collection of Cebuano Songs,” University of San Carlos Cebuano Studies Center (Cebu City: USCCSC, n.d.), n.p.

(Koro)	(Chorus)
<i>Busa kalimti ang problema</i>	Hence forget the problem
<i>Ang kaguol inayanaya</i>	Amuse your worry away
<i>Ang kalisod mo ikatawa</i>	Laugh out your difficulty
<i>Paglingawlingaw ug panagsa</i>	Enjoy yourself once in a while
<i>Bisan kon way sulod ang bulsa</i>	Even with empty pocket
<i>Ang imong barog ayoha</i>	Straighten your bearing
<i>Pagpagumapò, pagpagumapà</i>	Beautify yourself
<i>Ayaw pagpaila.</i>	Pretend.

The song has a tint of “luck.” It tells that it is the way life is; it apportions opportunities unequally. In pretending, one puts up a good show that is directed to the person’s feeling self-confident in a world that has not endowed him with better chances.

The fourth meaning expresses *nayanaya* as a form of “taking time out to circumvent a regrettable impulsive action caused by violent feelings, or to avoid making wrong decisions.” This meaning takes *nayanaya* in the sense of “*binay-binay*” or “*daban-daban*” understood literally. But this is not *nayanaya* itself. *Nayanaya* is a process. As a process it involves *binay-binay*, and *daban-daban*, slow-down. The same is true when an Ilocano tells someone, who is jittery while waiting for a delayed jeepney, “*aguinnayad-ca man bassit.*” The advice is to relax, to calm down, *binay-binay*, *daban-daban* (slowly). However, even though *nayanaya* is understood as *binay-binay*, in this context, it still connotes silence—the hush of violent feelings and of a potentially dangerous action, as well as of uneasiness when in a hurry.

The fifth meaning includes important elements in the first four significations. *Nayanaya* is “a Filipino way of whiling the time away, to silence one’s emotions and thoughts to prevent an awfully debilitating reality from breaking him, while awaiting the time when he can accept said actuality, without losing his sanity.” The first four meanings constitute a general description of *nayanaya*, while the fifth can be regarded as its strict and real definition. The aforementioned illustration showing the phases of *nayanaya* is a phenomenology of *nayanaya* in its strict and real sense.

When something deeply emotional becomes overwhelming to the point of almost squashing him, two things are possible: he either breaks down or breaks through. To avoid the first and attain the second, he goes *nayanaya*. Depending on his personality, character, and values, he either goes drinking (“*pa beer-beer lang*”), eats a lot, listens to soothing music, watches ball games on TV, talks with a friend, or a combination of any of these. He uses these activities to dodge a maddening emotion or a dangerously self-destructive thought. What he does involves *binay-binay* and *daban-daban*, slowing-down. This time, these terms mean “take it easy,” or “don’t let your feelings get the better of you.” But these words are not said directly to a Filipino who is immersed in his emotions, for one cannot tell yet how badly hurt he is. The unuttered message gets across more eloquently. “You say it best when you say nothing at all,” says a famous song from the 90s. In some instances, a gentle squeeze on the shoulders is enough

to bring home the message. These terms mean “taking time-out,” living life one day at a time, allowing the heavy feelings to dissipate slowly until they cease to be meaningful. This is why *nayanaya* is a process. It is a doing, or a non-doing, and a waiting for a staggering blow to become absurd. It is an indirect way of silencing disturbing emotions and thoughts while the worst lasts.

In light of the above, it can be said that while the common element in all five meanings is “whiling away the time in the midst of an unpleasant situation,” overarching this commonality is the yearning for silence, proximately and, ultimately, happiness.

***Nayanaya* in Cebuano Songs**

These unpleasant situations we are eager to escape from may involve issues within oneself or our relationship with others. The roads we take to “while away the time” are beautifully captured in treasured/popular Cebuano songs. One road a Filipino takes to try to cope with problematic human relations, conflicting priorities, work pressure, or exasperation from work is to get away from it all for a while, be far from the “maddening crowd,” as it were, and go on a “nature-walk”—a stroll at the beach, or an idle moment in a scenic plaza, or a walk up a hill.

The healing power of a stroll at the beach is eloquently expressed in the following song:

Sa Daplin Sa Baybayon³

*Kon aduna kay kasakit
 Dalikyat lamang sa baybayon
 Kay didto lunlon mga budyaka
 Ang buyoboy sa hangin
 Kanimoy ray mohadla
 Ug ako kang pabilakon
 Pahiran sa luba.*

By the Beach (At the Shore)

If there is something
 that hurts you
 Just get out for a while
 to the beach
 For there only gaiety reigns
 The breeze alone will
 make you laugh
 When I make you cry
 Your tear will be wiped away.

The song says: if there is something that pains you, take time out to go to the beach, for out there, only gaiety is present. However, it is not advisable to go to the beach without a companion when one is feeling depressed and gloomy and has an unsteady will to live—at a time like this, the sea can be very inviting.

Another song tips its hat to life away from the city, where happiness is:

Laylay sa Payag⁴

*Ang awit sa mga bukidnon
 Nga sa payag paglaylayan
 Ug kalalim nga pamati-on
 Ay, inday kamalipayon
 Ang awit sa magbabaol.*

Lullaby At The Nipa Hut

The song of the
 mountain people
 Sung at the hut
 How nice to hear
 How happy is the girl
 At the song of the farmer.

³ *Bisaya* (Cebu City: University of San Carlos Cebuano Studies Center, 1962), n.p.

⁴ USCCSC, "Collection of Cebuano Songs," n.p.

*Ang katabum niining tanaman
 Ug kasadya sa kalanggaman
 Maoy bansalan, maoy langitnon
 Awit sa mga bukidnon
 Sa payag pagalaylayon.*

(Koro)

*Bisan ang payag layo sa lungsod
 Apan ang tanum daghang tinuod
 Ug kalipay sa magbabaol
 Awit sa mga bukidnon
 Sa payag pagalaylayon . . .*

The beauty of this plant
 And the gaiety of the
 heavenly birds

The song of the
 mountain people
 At the hut is sung.

(Chorus)

Even though the hut is
 far from the town
 But many of the plants are real
 And the happiness
 of the farmer
 The song of the
 mountain people
 At the hut is sung . . .

But if a Filipino cannot reside in the *barrio*, or in the mountain, at least going up there from time to time brings about the easing of his crushed ego. Communing with nature in solitude, the fresh air, cool breeze, and the silence outside and inside him can soothe his high-strung nerves, relax his anxiety, and reenergize his weary spirit. All these are possible if nature is still there, available for man.

If human beings let nature be—allow plants to maintain the greenness of the earth, trees to flourish in the mountains and hills, vegetables and fruits be pesticide-free, and waters to retain their pristine quality—then, the air too is fresh and man can roam the earth, that is, walk around, safe from pollutants. The stillness of the forest, accented by the

chirping of birds can lift a man's spirit from feeling "down and out." Beautiful flowers and landscapes with sweet scented greenery can make an artistic Filipino forget his worries, including his financial problems, at least for a while. With his balance restored, he can confront his problems once again with more sobriety and a clear mind.

Sa Kabukiran⁵

*Sa kabukiran layo ang kasakit
Ang kalanggaman abay nanag-awit*

...

*Maoy nag-indig mga paghadla
Mga parayeg ay mga hudyaka
Ang hinoyuboy naglanuylanoy
Sa kadahunan ug kabulakan
Sa kadahunan ug kabulakan
Oh, kinabuhi lunlon kalipay
Gawas hamili way ikagmahay.*

Oh, kinabuhi

Lunlon kalipay

*Sa kabukiran layo ang kasakit
Ang kalanggaman abay nanag-awit*

...

In The Mountain

In the mountain hurt is far
The birds are singing

...

Competing are frolics
Caresses and gaiety
The breeze is blowing softly
On the leaves and flowers
On the leaves and flowers
Oh, life pure happiness
Free, dignified nothing to regret

Oh, life.

Only happiness

In the mountain far from
sorrow

The birds are singing

...

It is not only in the mountain nor at the seaside that nature offers a sanctuary for the weary. When one has eyes for the world around, he finds that nature's healing presence

⁵ *Lamdag* (Cebu City: University of San Carlos Cebuano Studies Center, 1949), 22.

is actually within his reach. The songs that follow are eloquent proofs of this:

Bulan⁶

*Bulan, pagkatabum mo
Ang nagasud-ong kanimo
Daw way kaguol
King dughan kong subo
Imong gihadla sa dan-ag arong
malingaw
Pagka-anindot sa imong silaw
Sama ka sa maanyag nga bulak
Akong gimahal
Apan wala na ang akong pinalangga
Busa bulan, gisud-ong ko ikaw.*

Moon

Moon, how beautiful you are
The one who gazes at you
Seems to have no worry
This sad heart of mine
You amuse with your beam
How pretty is your glow
You are like the lovely flower
That I love
But my beloved is
no longer here
That's why moon,
I'm gazing at you.

This is *nayanaya*: running to Mother Nature when something goes wrong in one's life, when problems become too magnified to be within one's control.

The need to preserve a useful tree, so that its usefulness does not destroy it, is expressed in the following Cebuano song:

Ang Kahoy⁷

*May usa ka dakong kahoy
Nagtubo daplin sa dalan
Daghan ang mga bungaboy*

The Tree

There is a big tree
That grows by the roadside
It has many fruits

⁶ USCCSC, "Collection of Cebuano Songs," n.p.

⁷ USCCSC, *Bisaya (Oktubre 2, 1974)*, 54.

<i>Ug labong ang kadahonan . . .</i>	And its leaves are plenteous (plentiful) . . .
<i>Kadako ug kapuslanan Sa nagtubo nga kaboy Kay landong kapasilongan Ug maka-on ang bungahoy . . .</i>	How useful it is This growing tree For its shade shelters And the fruits are edible . . .
<i>Kaayo nga panaminan Sa kabintang sa kaboy Nga nahimong dalangpan Sa baklay may kaluoy . . .</i>	How good it is to reflect The state of the tree That has become a sanctuary For travelers it has pity . . .
<i>Nga maoy bubing timaan Sa atong panagdait Niini nga kalibotan Sa kalipayg kasakit. . . .</i>	Which is a living symbol Of our camaraderie In this world In happiness and in pain

What is said above tells of the times when instead of the quiet that Nature has to offer, the noise of the world elicits the silencing of the nuisance inside the self. But aside from taking recourse to the seemingly useless noise for diversion, troubled souls turn to worldly diversions: watching a wholesome television show, or seeing a movie, or going shopping—even if it is only window shopping. Their mind, directed to other things, is diverted from the disturbing problem. There are times when recreation is in the form of keeping oneself busy by gardening, cooking, eating, drinking, or playing games. Besides reading light materials, one may go out swimming, hiking, singing, or dancing with friends or his family. With the exceptions of gardening that keeps a man close to nature in these activities, one does not seek

silence through the stillness of nature, hoping to find it elsewhere in a respite of enjoyable activities.

To achieve this end, the possibility of doing the wrong things and going to the wrong places with the wrong company cannot be discounted. Those who are so led astray realize, sometimes too late, that silence cannot be found where they seek it, and with the “friends” they keep.

Being surrounded by the company of the right people or friends does more good than harm. A walk with a friend, dining with him, confiding secrets that bear telling, sharing problems too big for one to solve, and even simply chattering the time away are all *nayanaya*. At times, a sense of humor or a good laugh helps to defy a cruel world. It is cathartic, leaving man quiet and feeling better as a result.

Even simply walking in silent company already does great wonders to a bewildered person. However, even though speech is silent in the realm beyond conceptualization, so also a talk with a friend who is instrumental in understanding and finding a solution to a problem is useful in easing the disturbance of the mind, giving him the power to be alone, without being overwhelmed by his problem. In the silent hours of his day, he can then reflect on the meaning of his existence, and slowly move on to solve his dilemma, step by step.

Doing Nothing

Humans are not strangers to the realm of contradiction. For instance, financial problems are situations that call for *nayanaya*. And yet one of the things that facilitates worldly success in *nayanaya* is the recognition that “nothing” is, at times, a blessing (that nothingness is also useful). The lack of money (having no money) can lead to the discovery of true friends, aside from teaching children the value of frugality (*tipid*), hard work, time, and study, in preparation for living more fully. For at times, having nothing and doing nothing is for the best.

There are hardships that a Filipino can hurdle by simply being silent. Listening to soothing music (like classical ones), playing a musical instrument, or singing softly are audible, reticent ways of *nayanaya*. These survival maneuvers defy the world’s way of breaking a man’s sanity: being bathed in nature’s beauty, sitting idly around, or simply doing nothing when one is fuming in anger or in intense depression, and not overreacting to life’s trials and “jokes.” Take for instance someone who works in haste on a group activity. The more he hurries, the less he accomplishes and an Ilokano advises, “*in-in-naya-dem man bassil?*” (slow down a bit). Here, one is asked to slow down and not to overact, asking him to silence his nerves. Moreover, doing nothing at the height of one’s emotion is useful, since no regrets follow. Soon the individual will emerge from it whole, not broken. It will dawn on him that some of his problems are of his own

making, caused by his excessive attachments and inattention to those that he considers useless. He will learn that it is by maintaining his balance and living in moderation that life ceases to be a constant struggle and a constant fear of constant change. Doing nothing can thus be regarded as doing *nayanaya*, by not acting and not-knowing which is a kind of knowing.

Why can doing nothing be regarded as doing *nayanaya* without doing *nayanaya*? The usual way of doing *nayanaya* is “performance,” occupying oneself with nerve-easing “moves.” Besides this, a person can do *nayanaya* the silent way, such as the ways mentioned above. They are also *nayanaya*, even though there is nothing that is done. In other words, doing nothing is doing *nayanaya*, which is simultaneously not doing *nayanaya* because the person refrains from over-reacting (*wu-wei*) to a nerve-wracking condition. Doing nothing, as in letting oneself be wafted away by a serene melody, or in being vivified in God’s presence, are silent ways of *nayanaya*, although one does not actively take part in the process.

All these ways of *nayanaya* have silence for their end and, ultimately, happiness. *Nayanaya* is not silencing the problem, or the crisis, or anything that tends to throw man off-balance, for the problem comes when it does, whether or not it is desired. Rather, as already mentioned, it is the stilling of the heart and mind, amidst all these problems, Understood not in the sense of numbing, since *nayanaya* is

not an opium, but in the sense of putting oneself above the problematic situation. One overcomes depression, difficulty, problem, or crisis when one understands why they are there, despite being unable to explain it themselves, and when a Filipino is concerned, realizes that the Lord can explain reasons for events that human reason cannot comprehend. Thus, as far as one is concerned, “*Dunay Diyos nga nagtan-aw. Siya ray nasayud niining tanan. Alam ni Apteng. Lumalabay lang ang mga hitabo. Molurang ra ang bagyo sa iyang kinabuhi* (God is watching. He knows best. These are but fleeting events. The storm in his life will soon wane).” One is, as it were, at the center of the circle of events in the “lived-world,” the indifferent bystander, and the unmoved spectator of a moving world, although at the same time one still cares—as illustrated by the following song:

Sama Sa Usa Ka Damgo ⁸

...
*Ang Musika mobupay
 sa mga kasakit mo
 Bisan si kinsa pa man
 ang hingtungdan
 Busa pamati-a kining akong
 hamubong awit.*

(Koro)

Bisan ang ulan may pagtu-ang

Like A Dream

...
 Music will heal
 your hurt
 Whoever is concerned
 So listen to this
 my little song.

(Chorus)

Even the rain will stop

⁸ USCCSC, “Collection of Cebuano Songs,” n.p.

May kangitngit ug may kabayag
Ang unos may paglurang
May gabii ug may adlaw . . .

There is darkness and
 there is light
 The hail will wane
 There is night and there is day . . .

Moreover, when one's *nayanaya* is talking with the Lord, one is actually speaking with the Great Silence, who sees everything from the viewpoint of eternity. It cannot be denied that when a person beholds everything through the wisdom of God, one is above mundane events. A mystic knowledge experienced by the sage may not yet be attained. Nevertheless, when one says, "*Ibangad ko na lang sa langit ang tanan* (I surrender everything to God)," since God knows best, it is like seeing things through the "eyes of God." Belief in God, although he is far, is analogous to viewing life from His vantage point through a mystic knowledge of God. Believing in God is finding Him, and finding Him is finding happiness, although it may not yet be lasting.

Hence, *nayanaya*, whether as a means or an end, is an experience of silence. As a means, silence is utilized, not only by a total keeping still, but also by playing musical instruments, watching a good movie, contemplating a promising dawn, or by listening—listening to music, or to a friend. Even positive auto-suggestion is keeping quiet without really being quiet, for one is telling oneself to silence his fears and anxiety. As an end, silence is attained through the conquest of one's troubles. It is attained, however, because one is predisposed to receiving the silence that

comes from Him. It is imperative, therefore, that humans, particularly Filipinos, let go of all obstructions inside and outside themselves to let Him take over. Inwardly, there is now silence (peace and harmony), although outwardly, one is still “noisy.” In the absence of inner blocks, one expresses oneself spontaneously in dealing with the world, people, and God. Happy laughter resounds loud and clear—a spontaneous manifestation of interior silence and joy. Thus, the silence that *nayanaya* elicits is meta-silence. It is a silence that is no-silence.

Summary

The Cebuano term *nayanaya* finds no direct translation in the English language. This article serves as a rich exposition of *nayanaya* as an experience of silence. It is a way of dealing with a crisis by confronting it indirectly. It is underhandedly defeating an enemy with your adversary left none-the-wiser. Thus it is a whiling away of the time, dodging the “storm’s” ferocious blows through diversive moves called “*lingaw-lingaw*,” (that is, amusing oneself), in the many ways of *nayanaya*, until the “wind’s wrath” dissipates and one is able to walk again in confidence and joy—even in the presence of the once painful reality. Although *nayanaya* does not always destroy this reality, it does make humans superior to it, for in the process it has silenced the turmoil within.