DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

_______________________________
Manuel Victor J. SAPITULA
24 January 2013
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is said that an original piece of academic work stands on the shoulders of giants. I say that while it does, it also stands on the shoulders of all who made the work possible with their varying ways of expressing support and encouragement. This piece of academic work is a product of years of laborious thinking and the formation of enduring bonds within and outside the halls of academia. I wish to acknowledge these people, my friends and companions in this journey. This work is lovingly dedicated to you all...

First, to A/P Vineeta Sinha of the Department of Sociology in NUS, my supervisor, whose esteemed expertise, sound advice and support throughout two-and-a-half years of dissertation writing greatly aided in producing an academic piece of work that I can be truly proud of; also to Professor Michael Hill, who supervised me during the first two years of my Ph.D. candidature in NUS;

To my mentors and colleagues in the Department of Sociology at the University of the Philippines-Diliman, especially to Profs. Ester Dela Cruz, Clemen Aquino, Cynthia Rose Banzon-Bautista and Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M., who supported my aspirations to study overseas; to Profs. Joy Arguillas, Josephine Dionisio and Filomena Gutierrez for their friendly advice and encouragement;

To all the friends I met in the University of the Philippines-Diliman, especially to Benigno Balgos, Rizza Kaye Cases, Nicole Curato, Elma Laguna, Hannah Glimpse Nario and Arnie Trinidad, for their support and encouragement when I was writing this thesis; as well as to Yumi Baluyut, Chin Cabsaba, Glenda Caringal, Paola Infante and Aileen Te-Tan, all of whom wished me the best during our friendly chats over dinner each time I returned to Manila;

To all the Filipino friends I met in Singapore, especially to Bubbles Asor, Dina Delias, Enrique and Lizzie Leviste, Shelley Sibya, Joan Sydiongco, Vanessa Suquila, Giorjean Mutuc, Gene Navera, Julius Bautista, Rommel Curaming, Jayeel Cornelio, Cheryll Soriano, Liberty Chee, Glenda Lopez-Wui, Ireyah Basman, Miguel Lizada, Jan Wendell Batocabe, Lou Janssen Dangzalan, Michelle Aguas and Joseph Nathan Cruz, for making Singapore a “home away from home” with their wit, humor and brilliance during our numerous coffee breaks, parties and mall trips;
To all my Singaporean friends, especially to Quek Ri An, Allan Lee, Christopher Selvaraj, Caryn Tan and Suen Johan bin Mohd Zain, for making Singapore a place of fond remembrance with your cheerful company, sustained engagement and warm welcome; to my fellow NUS students Minhye Kim, Hu Shu, Kathryn Sweet, Fiona Seiger, Sarada Das and Tin T hananusak, who at various points have shared this Ph.D. journey with me;

To all the people who helped me during my fieldwork at the National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Baclaran, Parañaque City, especially to Fr. Victorino Cueto, C.Ss.R. (Shrine Rector); to Ms. Jasmin Jardeleza and all the staff at the shrine, for all the help and support they kindly extended during the data-gathering phase of my research and thereafter; to all the respondents in the Philippines and Singapore who kindly gave their time for the interviews;

To all the professors and friends I met during my stint in Harvard-Yenching Institute (HYI) as a Visiting Fellow, especially to Prof. Michael Herzfeld from the Department of Anthropology; to Visiting Scholar Prof. Jaeyoun Won (Yonsei University), and to co-Visiting Fellows Jia Wenjuan, Liu Yiran, Pan Lu, Rie Odajima, Ryoko Kosugi, Song Bin, Wei Bingbing and Yao Dadui; to Harvard graduate students Chan Wai Kit, Kheng Swee Lim, Ng Jia Hong Ray, Liu Tuo and Swati Agarwal, for their friendship.

To all the members of my family: to Tito and Josie, my father and mother; to Ate Mej Ann, Kuya Tibot, Ate Angie, Ate Machu, Kuya Troy and Ate Ances, my six siblings and their partners in life; and to Alexy, Cristina, Arianna, Roni, Joseph, Mia, Emily, Nina, T eetan and Nico, my nieces and nephews, for their cheerful laughter, unconditional support and love amidst all the stress of research and writing;

And most of all, to my heavenly Mother, who watched over me throughout this journey to make sure that I reach the end safely and triumphantly. I visited her shrine in 2008 to pray that I be given the opportunity to study overseas. She has graciously given this to me, plus a lot more during the last five years. I come to her once more and offer before her feet the fruits of these years of labor and toil.

Maraming maraming salamat sa inyong lahat!
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ABSTRACT

This study is a sociological account of modern popular religion using the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines as an exemplary case. The Perpetual Help Devotion is a relatively recent form of Marian piety that is centered in a purportedly miraculous ancient icon of the Virgin Mary. The Perpetual Help Devotion was introduced to the Philippines by the Redemptorist Missionaries in 1906. Since 1932, the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran district has been the center of devotional activity in Luzon. When the Perpetual Novena devotion was introduced here in 1948, the immense popularity of the prayers transformed the shrine into the center of devotional activity for Filipinos in the country and abroad.

This study argues that the preponderance of popular religious practices in the Philippines ought to be explained in the context of the country’s ongoing transition to modernity. This study disentangles the category of “popular religion” from the limitations of earlier conceptualizations and re-casts it within a multidimensional framework that consists of individual actors, discourses, institutions and practices. Furthermore, it engages in the process of rethinking “classical” articulations of modernity in sociological discourse in order to unpack different problématiques in modernity (Wagner 2012) that enable a nuanced articulation of the role and function of religion in modern societies. The task of this study is to demonstrate how popular religion has been configured into modernizing influences in the urban, institutional and individual domains.

This study is premised on viewing Marian piety as a conspicuous indicator of Catholicism’s status as a public religion (Casanova 1994) in the Philippines. This is especially salient in processes that exemplify the link between religion and urban modernity and the elite management of religious piety. In both instances religious
elites in the Perpetual Help shrine utilize various resources and establish relationships that will guarantee the continued preponderance of popular religious practices in public life. The devotees, however, are also endowed agents who respond to the regulation of religious practices and who craft their own notions of the devotional relationship with the divine figure. This devotional relationship with the divine figure is premised on the resources and exigencies of the self, the use of sacred space and material objects and the “commodification” of religious practices.

The conceptual synthesis of the Perpetual Help Devotion in this study argues that the configuration of popular religion in modern society is based on its effective engagement with a variety of social factors and forces. The interplay between various forms of stabilizing and expansive engagements creates conditions for popular religious practices to persist amidst change. In view of this reorientation of analytical inquiry, the category of “popular religion” is re-cast to reflect the dynamic character of the configuration process.
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CHAPTER 1
SETTING THE CONTEXT AND FOCUS
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1.1. Setting the context: the Perpetual Help Devotion as popular religion

This study is a sociological treatise on the devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help (henceforth Perpetual Help Devotion), a form of Catholic popular religion in the Philippines. The Perpetual Help Devotion refers to rituals and practices centered on a purportedly miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary. In the Philippines, these devotional practices have traditionally been under the tutelage of the Redemptorist Missionaries (or Redemptorists), a religious congregation for men in the Catholic Church. The Redemptorists brought the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help to the Philippines when pioneer missionaries arrived here in 1906.

The National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (henceforth Perpetual Help shrine) currently stands at Baclaran district (or simply Baclaran) in the southern part of Metro Manila, and since its inception 1932 it has significantly expanded in order to cater to increasing numbers of devotees. The Perpetual Help shrine is a fully functional Roman Catholic shrine where Masses and other religious services are regularly conducted. Because of the increasing popularity of the Perpetual Help icon, the number of devotees has significantly increased throughout the years. Novena devotions every Wednesday attract estimated crowds of 100,000 devotees weekly, from morning to night. Unofficial estimates place annual visitors to the shrine at five million (Deocareza 2006).

The popularity of the Perpetual Help Devotion has set the shrine apart from other places of worship in Metro Manila. Because of the continuous flow of devotees, the Redemptorists have decided to keep the shrine open for 24 hours; it is currently
known as “the church that never closes” (Hechanova 1998). Apart from the regular 
Sunday worship services, the Perpetual Help shrine is bustling with activity on 
Wednesdays. A typical Wednesday starts with a Mass at 5:30 a.m., continues with ten 
novena and Mass schedules throughout the day, and ends with the 7:00 p.m. novena 
schedule. This “Wednesday ritual cycle” is based on the continuous performance of 
prescribed novena devotions so that it becomes a regular feature of the devotees’ 
weekly schedule. Committed devotees make it a point to attend its novena services 
without fail. Those who are unable to do so attend novena devotions in regular parish 
churches, but attendance of novena devotions at the Perpetual Help shrine is generally 
preferred. Devotees who live far from the shrine visit during the first Wednesdays of 
the month, which explains the bigger turnout of devotees during these days. The 
annual feast day celebration every June 27 is the only day associated with the Perpetual Help Devotion that is independent from the “Wednesday ritual cycle”.

As the centerpiece of communal devotion, the Perpetual Novena schedules 
dominate any Wednesday of the year in the shrine. The officially-recognized 
Perpetual Novena, however, is not the only mode of devotion observable there. As a 
center of popular cult in the expansive Manila mega-urban region, the Perpetual Help 
shrine is also home to various devotional acts on the sidelines of the church, some 
existing comfortably with officially-approved prayers while some assuming a “life of 
its own”, independent of church-sanctioned rites. Whether or not there is an ongoing 
novena schedule, the Perpetual Help shrine is bustling with activity: everywhere, 
devotees place garlands of flowers before images of saints, light votive candles, walk 
on their knees, and murmur silent prayers while fingering rosary beads. Similarly, the 
entrances of the church building are teeming with vendors selling different items; with 
people sitting idly on stone benches; with street children playing, and with security
guards doing their regular patrols. Devotees often arrive in large numbers at the shrine office to offer monetary contributions, to seek assistance from staff or to meet with priests. In front of the office is a spacious parking lot, which on Wednesdays is also occupied by devotees attending novena schedules. At every corner and space within the church compound, there is a constant stream of people loitering, resting from their journey, conversing or eating with companions, or simply “killing time”.

The Perpetual Help Devotion is one of the latest additions in a long line of Catholic popular devotions that have become widespread in the Philippines and abroad (especially among overseas Filipinos). The devotion to the Santo Niño (Holy Child), the earliest form of Catholic popular religion in the country, is widespread outside its home base in Cebu province in central Philippines. The devotion to the reputed image of the Black Nazarene (venerated in Quiapo district in Manila) was started in 1606 by the Franciscans, while the devotion to Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia, the patroness of the Bicol region south of Manila, has been in existence since 1710. The Perpetual Help Devotion is one of the few forms of Catholic popular religion of recent origins to achieve such widespread success, thus making it an exemplary case of the liveliness of religious practice in the Philippines. It is with this conviction that I embarked upon an exhaustive and sustained research about the Perpetual Help Devotion, as I am fully cognizant of its important position in the task of clarifying how religion is understood within the lived realities of the Philippines and its transition to modernity.

In this study, I begin with the assumption that the location of the Perpetual Help Devotion within institutional Catholicism and its relatively recent origins in the Philippines enables an sociological investigation regarding the nature of popular religion in this country. Far from lacking “cultural uniqueness” vis-à-vis other

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forms of popular religion, the Perpetual Help Devotion enables the problematization of “differential logics” (Parker 1998) operating on the ground, which are not articulated in existing perspectives. These “differential logics” in turn provide novel ways in reconfiguring the simplistic dichotomy between forms of popular religious practice and its more “official” counterparts. In the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion, its relatively recent history specifically enables an articulation of a case example of this “differential logics” by situating it within shifting devotional trajectories, regulation of piety and urban transformations in the Philippines.

On a conceptual level, this study is located within emerging efforts to articulate a conceptual rethinking of the category of “popular religion”. This necessary rethinking is propelled by certain shifts in understanding the nature of popular religion in sociological literature during decades following the 1960's, both in Europe and North America and also Asia, Africa and Latin America. The expansion of the bases for conceptual inquiry and critique has certain implications in attempts to rethink popular religion, especially in the context of modern societies. I engage with these shifts by recasting the discussion of “popular religion” in ways that incorporate historical and societal transformations that altered how relationships between knowledge production, practices and institutions ought to be conceptualized in social scientific inquiry. With these conceptual trajectories laid out, I then locate popular religion in the context of the Philippines’ transition to modernity and emerging “societal self-understanding” (see Wagner 2012).

1.2. Popular religion in the Philippine socio-cultural motif

The aim of this present study is to examine how social and cultural experiences in the Philippine context may be conceptually located within a broad
range of “societal self-understandings” (see Wagner 2012). The timeliness of this task
proceeds from a conviction that the conceptual location of the Philippines is a
workable platform from which alternative discourses on the relevance of religion in
modern society may be formulated. This challenge calls for the need to craft concepts
that “are committed to raising original problems in social and historical studies”
(Alatas 2006: 82). In the case of popular religion in the Philippines, it makes sense to
situate attempts to understand “societal self-understandings” by highlighting certain
historical transformations when intense interactions among actors, institutions and
social forces take place.

1.2.1. Religion in the interaction of Austronesian and European cultures

The Philippine islands have in the past provided a gateway for the expansion
of Austronesian communities from their origins in Taiwan to much of maritime and
peninsular Southeast Asia (Bacus 2004; Bellwood 1985, 1995, 2004; Fox 1995). This
strategic location fostered enduring connections between local populations living in
the archipelago and the larger “Dunia Melayu,” that is, the larger Malay World upon
which the Philippine islands is an integral part (Salazar 1998). In the arena of religion,
belief in anitos (spirits/disembodied presence of ancestors) and a higher (but distant)
divine figure are common among dispersed Austronesian communities (Salazar
2000). The spirits of ancestors play a dominant role in the organization of daily life,
be it family life, rice cultivation and farming, the exercise of political authority, and
healing illness. Oliver Wolters (1992) remarks that, sparse documentary data
notwithstanding, various communities scattered throughout the archipelago were
centers of social and political life in their own right. He suggested using a maṇḍala-
based or ganization model to understand pre-Hispanic forms of Filipino political

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organization. The *mandala* model does not allude to a royal agent in the Chinese or European imperial sense, but instead refers to “centers of power” revolving around local chiefs and their alliances with neighbors.

The rise of Spanish colonial power served as the country's first *direct* contact point with highly bureaucratic and distinctly European forms of social and political structures. During the latter part of the sixteenth century, the Philippine and Indonesian archipelagos experienced massive transformation as Christianity and Islam exerted its influence over prevailing codes of conduct, dietary habits and marriage customs of the local population (Reid 1993). The expansionist ambitions of Spain during the latter part of the sixteenth century changed the course of Philippine history toward integration, albeit peripheral, into the world system with Europe as the purported center. The missionary religious orders laid the foundations of institutional Catholicism through an extensive network of parishes centered on Manila, the primatial ecclesiastical see in the country throughout the Spanish colonial period (Phelan 1959). This era saw the establishment of supra-local religious institutions, a trend that continued until the end of the Spanish colonial period.

Given the considerable grounding of pre-conquest culture within its Austronesian base, the advent of Christianity in the Philippines raises questions about disparate yet co-occurring syncretistic processes between a scriptural religion and Austronesian belief systems. The imposition of Christianity on the local population by and large was a process that was “neither unopposed nor completely successful” (Abinales and Amoroso 2005: 50). While Philippine society itself transformed as a result of colonialism, the local population influenced the shaping of religious influences in ways that enable a different type of Catholicism to take root (Phelan 1959). The adaptation of Christian beliefs and practices onto various the local
population's pre-conquest sacral economy enabled a different way of practicing Catholicism in the islands.

1.2.2. Religion, the colonial heritage and the transition to modernity

An assessment of available historical data suggests that the transformation of Philippine society during the earlier periods of colonial contact is premised on the “creative tension” between the need to establish an autochthonous Catholic Church that would replace pre-colonial belief systems; and the syncretistic adaptations of Christian practice with prevailing Austronesian beliefs and moral economy. The extensive missionary work of the Spanish religious orders opened links between local communities and European Catholicism, its politico-spiritual structures and sources of legitimation. In contrast, the subsequently transformation of Philippine society during events leading to the Revolution against Spain in 1896 and its aftermath stands against the backdrop of challenges to the colonial Catholic Church's legitimacy from the ilustrados, the nascent Filipino clergy and popular religious movements.

The ilustrados, the educated elite in nineteenth-century colonial Philippines, articulated liberal and republican ideas from the Spanish Enlightenment (Ilustracion) and criticized the friars in the colony for their control of ecclesiastical and secular administration (Mojares 2006). The Filipino clergy also became a seedbed for nationalistic tendencies as they demanded greater participation in ecclesiastical governance and refused being subjugated to Spanish friars in the administration of parishes (Schumacher 1981). Lastly, popular religious movements dissented from colonial authority and resulted in bloody confrontations with government troops before they were brutally suppressed (Ikehata 1990). Because of this increasingly complex situation, nineteenth-century Filipino Catholics had already maintained a
nuanced view of the colonial Catholic Church. While they remain attached to its rites and devotional heritage, a majority of the Filipinos sympathized with the cause of the Filipino clergy and grew suspicious, if not angry, at Spanish friars (Majul 1967). In the face of these challenges, the institutional Catholic Church suffered a steep decline of its prestige because of its close identification with the colonial interests of the Spanish government.

It can be argued from historical data that earlier missionary activity during the Spanish colonial period chose to rely on existing structures of local knowledge, notwithstanding the prevalence of certain forms of rhetoric of “Christianization” that insist on the superiority of the “Christian culture” in the assimilative process. In contrast, the socio-political conditions during the early twentieth-century Philippines were different: Catholicism had already established a strong presence and its ritual heritage had already sunk deeply into the fabric of Filipino lowland culture. The dilemma was not that certain aspects of Filipino culture remained “pagan”, but that they were unabashedly hostile to Catholicism. As a result, there was a move on the part of ecclesiastical elites away from active syncretization that characterized the first transformation toward aspirations for “purified” forms of popular piety. Catholic popular religion established after the Spanish colonial period were thus intended to become a “leaven” for the restoration of institutional Catholicism in the face of duress.

The major historical transformations outlined above are important in understanding the current state of modern popular religion in the Philippines in two ways. First, awareness of these shifts enables the creation of a taxonomy of Catholic popular religion, insofar as each historical juncture enabled the formation of certain types of popular religion. I particularly highlight the significant difference between
forms of Marian piety during the Spanish colonial period, which assumed the status of *local religions*; and forms of Marian piety after the Spanish colonial period, which tended to be translocal in character. The Perpetual Help Devotion resembles the latter type in this rudimentary sketch, especially that elite participation in crafting beliefs and practices in the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion were more “strategically planned” and implemented. Locating the Perpetual Help Devotion within this frame of reference also directs the inquiry to issues of urban modernity and the extent of global influences, as forms of popular religion in the second category are more urban in orientation.

Second, and more importantly, awareness of these transformations enables a closer look at how a specific form of popular religion leads to a broader theorization of a historically grounded type of “modernity discourse” in the Philippine context. The beginnings of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines in 1906, the construction of the Perpetual Help shrine under Redemptorist auspices within the environs of Manila 1932 and the inauguration of the Perpetual Novena devotion in 1948 serve as important markers that permit a sociological assessment of the interaction between popular religion and the modernizing conditions in twentieth-century Philippines. It is in this context that the Perpetual Help Devotion’s emergence can be maximized as an exemplary case of modern popular religion.

1.3. Conceptual direction: rethinking the category of “popular religion”

In the previous section I demonstrated how the Perpetual Help Devotion, as an exemplary case of popular religion, is situated within historical and social transformations in Philippine society. The plurality of socio-historical contexts entails certain implications for broader theoretical discourse on religion in the Philippines.
and elsewhere, especially that there is a perceivable increase of studies that assess how religious practices are embedded within broader social structures. In the context of this study, the shift of the inquiry from over-arching definitions to practice-oriented conceptions of popular religion bridges the gap between theoretical assessment and production and the nuances of lived experience of religious practitioners.

The direction of this reconceptualization is geared toward bridging the category of religion as a concept, on the one hand, and as a form of cultural practice, on the other hand. I contend that the formulation of theoretical questions is best informed by what religious practitioners actually do, in turn shedding light on the implications of certain claims being made in the name of “popular religion”. In this regard, individual actors and practices are important signposts in conceiving alternative trajectories of inquiry. This task, however, is linked to the adoption of a stance about the “modern condition”, insofar as this is the context in which popular religious practices are understood. The emphasis on discourses and institutions strongly resonates with the view that the modern condition offers challenges as well as resources for religious belief and practice. The point of sociological analysis is to determine how popular religious practices change as a result of the influence of discourses and institutions within particular contexts.

1.3.1. Adopting a multidimensional approach

In the context of this study, I propose an assessment of popular religion using four “theoretical signposts”: (1) individual actors, (2) practices, (3) discourses, and (4) institutions. In this frame of reference, individual actors and institutions are the contexts for configuring popular religion, while practices, values and discourses are the resources that are utilized to configure popular religion. This signposts arguably
offer a way out of unidimensional perspectives and the problematic dichotomization of popular religious practices and “institutional religions”. Long’s (1987) synthesis suggests that existing definitions of popular religion relied on established dichotomies: rural/urban, laity/clergy, esoteric/common, minority/majority, masses/intellectuals and non-elite/elite. From these dichotomies, scholars proceed to define popular religion as predominantly rural, lay, esoteric, minority, mass-based and non-elite in orientation, in contrast to institutionalized or official religions that are urban, clerical, common, majority-held, intellectually-articulated and elite-based in orientation. Subsequent research that followed this dichotomized conceptualization have received extensive scrutiny by an emerging scholars of religion. Bock (1966), for instance, explains that, while official religion incorporates folk elements by removing the latter’s transcendental references, folk beliefs nevertheless retain its ceremonial sacredness and thus are not fully absorbed into official religions.

In theoretical terms, the crux of this view's limitation rested on its tendency to regard “religion” as unitary, following Durkheim’s definition of religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices” (Durkheim 1912 [1995]: 44; emphasis in the original). This position is presupposed on the Western Christian “one true church” mentality that highlights the connection among logical propositions of belief (systematic theology), and between orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Stringer 2008). The distinction between official and lay religious practice, for instance, is based on how Christianity defined itself as a religio (as opposed to a superstition) in the Roman Empire in order to gain political and social legitimacy (Meister 2009). It betrays a bias favorable to Western Christianity that may not be useful in understanding contexts, in particular (1) Christian popular religion outside Europe; and (2) forms of popular religious practices in other religious traditions. When uncritically incorporated in
sociological analysis, this leads to the unfortunate tendency of pitting “popular” against “institutional” modes of religious practice, and by implication leads to the relegation of popular religion as a residual category.

Responding to the limitations of existing perspectives, the theoretical baseline of this study shifts the trajectory of inquiry from standard definitions to enabling conditions, from denotative to connotative meanings, and from unidimensionality to multidimensionality. Consistent with the treatment of popular religion as cultural practice, this study adopts a multidimensional framework that recasts the opposition between the “spiritual” from the “material”, and concurrently, the use of material objects in religious practice (materiality). The turn to material objects acknowledges the “commodification” of religion, insofar as religion is an enabler of certain forms of market economies and modes of exchange. There is an observed wariness in cognitivist accounts regarding the mixing religion and the “marketplace”, which leads to the dilution of the sacred onto purely secular and capitalist forms of market relations (see Kitiarsa 2008). I contend that this fear is largely misplaced, since the marketing of religious goods is an enduring dimension of religious practice itself. Economic exchanges involving offerings in temples, devotional objects, amulets and “potent” artifacts have engaged devotees into “economies of symbolic goods” (see Bourdieu 1998: 92 ff) that transcend the stringent money-based economy that characterizes modern capitalist societies. The point, then, is to understand how religious notions of exchange offer “possibilities of enchantment”, with the view that “[i]t is…problematic to assume at the outset that commodification of objects used in the religious domain necessarily represents a system of crass, economic exchange” (Sinha 2008: 184).
More importantly, this study unpacks how cultural dimensions of religion constitute beliefs, selves and institutional arrangements. My argument is that materiality and belief are not opposed to each other, but condition and presuppose each other. Appadurai (1986) explains how a “cultural biography” emerges as objects are grafted onto systems of valuation. King (2010) also makes an important link between materiality and belief by utilizing Bourdieu’s notion of habitus in explaining how “the things of religion…become incorporated, because it is through bodily practices – the way we hold objects, smell them and wear them – that we orientate our bodies toward things and places” (p. 6; emphasis in the original). Bautista and Reid's (2012) comparative focus on Southeast Asia contends that “religious materials”, which encompass conventionally religious artifacts to “things that may not immediately evoke religious ideas” (p. 6), enable an assessment of how materiality becomes a central dimension in the process of crafting the public presence of religion.

1.3.2. Popular religion as a form of cultural practice

In the previous section I engaged with the category of “popular religion” as a concept in sociological analysis and how the parameters can be extended to incorporate multidimensional perspectives. More than the task of rethinking the category of “popular religion”, the challenge also entails the ability to provide an assessment of the ways by which popular religion is successfully configured into individual life trajectories and social arrangements through the use of practices, values and discourses. “Successful configuration” here denotes those processes of adaptation that modify existing practices so that they continue exerting their relevance in public life. This would mean for agents (whether individual or institutional) the use of resources to ensure that religion is able to provide a stable platform for the production
of “plausibility structures” that legitimate the existing social order (see Berger and Luckmann 1967).

In this section I discuss how the theoretical signposts previously mentioned also resonate with emerging approaches in cultural analysis in sociology and anthropology. Manuel Marzal’s (2007) reiterates the cultural dimensions of Catholic popular religion and identifies eight “generating words” in accounting for popular religious practices: devotion, saint, miracle, blessing, punishment, promise, feast, and pilgrimage. In a similar vein, David Swearer’s (1995) study of Thai Buddhism notes that the popular tradition is hinged on inclusive syncretism that combines a sceptical demands in Buddhist scriptures with cultural expressions relevant to Thai society. C.J. Fuller’s (2004) interpretative approach to theistic Hinduism likewise notes the distance between the demands articulated in Hindu scriptures from everyday life. He accounts popular Hinduism's attempts to bridge these realities particularly in worship and devotionalist movements, pilgrimage, and ways of dealing with misfortune.

The turn to culture is complemented by the increasing attention to practices as the pivotal conceptual anchor through which popular religion ought to be understood. Synthesizing Latin American scholarship on the subject, Eloisa Martin (2008) recasts popular religion as practices of sacralization, arguing that the sacred exists as a "differential texture" performed in a wide range of contexts. Since these transcend religious systems and are morally ambiguous, “practices of sacralization” account for a wide variety of popular religious practices that lie outside traditional boundaries of what is commonly understood as “religious”. In North American sociology, Meredith McGuire (2008) turns to the category of “lived religion” as a corrective to the “post-Reformation 'Protestant' purism” that excludes from our pur view a large range of practices and beliefs that are, in fact, important parts of the lived religions of many.
individuals today” (p. 20). Like Martin, McGuire also argues that porous boundaries between the “sacred” and other dimensions of life underlie the heterogeneity and local orientation of religious practices, thus making them quite eclectic and diverse.

The emphasis on culture and practice provides useful frameworks that reorient the inquiry regarding the nature of popular religion. The turn to culture veers away from mentalist renditions of religion and resonates with Clifford Geertz’s (1973) symbolic anthropology that regards religion as a system of symbols. The cultural dimension of religion is most manifest in its capability “to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations” to be believers and makes them stable entities amenable to analysis (p. 90). The turn to practices likewise resonates with the emerging “practice turn in contemporary social theory” (see Schatzki, et al 2001). Proceeding from the notion that social systems have determinative power over human action, practice theorists explain the genesis and maintenance of these systems through practice (Ortner 1984). To say that popular religious practices are “continually produced and reproduced” means the abandonment of a historical conception that neglects changes in popular religious practices across time.

Situating the production and maintenance of popular religious practices within historical shifts also highlights the role of power. This is a development of Talal Asad’s (1983) observation that power is glaringly absent from Geertz’s symbolic anthropology. Asad pinpoints how the separation of meaning systems from their relationship with social-structural and psychological processes (see Geertz 1973: 125) leads to a stepping-off of power dynamics because it suggests that religious symbols can exist independently from power structures underlying their production. Resonating with Martin and McGuire’s abovementioned points, Asad insists that the “two-tiered” analysis of religious symbols should give way to an
analysis of how power relations create boundaries between the “strictly religious” and “non-religious” aspects of life (Asad 1983). In the same vein, scholars ought to abandon their “assumption of neutrality” and engage with the power dimension in labeling certain practices as “popular religion” (Mejido 2002). The label “popular” itself involves othering these practices with those that are deemed to be rational, dominant, orthodox and official. This turns the domain of popular religion to a site of contestation and a vehicle for social empowerment for oppressed peoples.

1.4. Unpacking “modern popular religion” in the Philippines

In the previous section I suggested the use of four (4) theoretical signposts in assessing the conceptual relevance of popular religion: (1) individual actors, (2) practices, (3) discourses, and (4) institutions. Besides the task of assessing popular religion, these signposts account also for the need to reorient the focus regarding the role popular religion plays in modern societies. In this section I identify ways by which popular religious practices may be grafted onto modern society, and in the process linking the Philippine experience to broader sociological conceptualizations about the nature of modern societies. In this section I unpack the role of religion in a society's transition to modernity by looking at the notion of “societal self-understandings” (Wagner 2012); and the processes involved in configuring popular religion into the exigencies of modern society.

1.4.1. Religion, modernity and “societal self-understandings”

Conceptualizing the nature of modernity is one of sociology’s central concerns: the founding figures extensively explained how changes enacted by scientific thinking, industrialism and the rise of individualism je ttison traditional social arrangements in Western Europe from the eighteenth century onward.
Contemporary sociological theories also confronted far-reaching changes in various societies that paved the way toward increasing individualism, urbanization and global integration. The outcomes resulting from contending with such forces, however, have differed from one society to another, creating significant impact in theoretical articulations of the nature of modern popular religion. A nuanced analysis of “modern popular religion” thus calls for a deeper consideration of conceptualizations of the vicissitudes of modern transitions in their specific socio-cultural experiences.

In this regard, I find it more theoretically and substantively relevant to speak of “modernity” as a platform through which various agents exert their influence in crafting life trajectories and public action. Wagner’s (2012) “novel comparative sociology” quite helpful in this task, especially his call to disentangle different problématiques in modernity to enable an understanding its context-specific trajectory in different societies (pp. 64 ff). The disentangling of different problématiques is premised on the historical context and pressing issues specific to each society forwarding different conceptions of the “modern”, and that no single formula for “modernity” can thus be expected in cultural and social analysis.

When framed this way, attention is given to transformations of popular religion as it confronts the changes associated with the changing character of modernity as it is experienced in different societies. In the face of modern transitions, there is an observable tendency for the gap between official and popular religion to widen further, as official religions adapted to the modern ethos of restraint and rationality while popular religious practices generally did not (Meister 2009). This tendency heightened the distinction between officially-recognized religious practices and those practiced by lay people, often outside the purview of religious authorities. This heightened difference itself a not come of modern transitions, i nsofar a s
popular religion is capable of achieving *autopoiesis* (self-distinction in Luhmann’s systems theory) as belief is detached from rigid institutional commitments (Pace 1987). In this condition, popular religion “contends with the religious subsystem for an *object*...which permits the subsystem itself to have its own primary function” (Pace 1987: 13) and thus becomes a new autonomous entity within the larger religious subsystem. The self-distinction process accounts for the continuing relevance of popular religion in modern societies; while it has assumed an institutionalized existence apart from officially recognized religious practices, it has been utilized by religious believers as an anchor point to orient their expectations, moral *habitus*, and life trajectories, among others.

The continuing relevance of popular religion in modern societies stands as a reference point in rethinking the wider theoretical relationship between religion and modernity. In this regard, sociologists from various persuasions outside Europe and North America begged to differ with the assumptions of the Eurocentric approach. The *secularization thesis*, the “theoretical twin-sibling” of modernization theory, espoused that the transition of societies into modernity tend to undermine the influence of religion and lead to the “demise of the supernatural” in public life (Berger 1970: 1). Scholars criticized this problematic linkage between “being modern” and being secular, as studies show that religion is actually experiencing a resurgence after a period of latency in some societies (Brown 1981; Bax 1985; Dubisch 1992; Carroll 1995; Gustafson 1982). The criticisms raised against modernization theory led to the forging of alternative understandings of religion as it unfolds in contexts that are identified as “modern”.

The most compelling criticism of the “modernization model” concerns its conflation of the “modern condition” with the historical experience of Europe (and...
eventually North America), which underlies its expectation that only one course of development (that of the Western model) ought to be followed to achieve the status of being a modern society. Scholars challenging this view question its deeply-held Eurocentric bias and its evolutionistic overtones. It must be argued that traditional societies are not to be deemed as always static, consistent and homogenous, and that new influences do not always jettison traditional beliefs (Gusfield 1967). Furthermore, the traditional-modern typology may be regarded as a set of constructed ideal types and not as an empirical description of societies or a set of generalizations about them” (Singer 1974: 383-384). Going even further, Latin American sociologists articulated a type of modernity “in a unique form…one which combines autochthonous and imported features in a particular form of dynamic” (Briceño-León and Sonntag 1997: 9). Various scholars assessed popular religious practices that emerged from adaptations of indigenous religious practices with colonial Catholicism, noting the interplay of local practices in shaping an imposed religious system (Szeminski 1995). This interplay between indigenous beliefs and Catholicism in Latin America occasioned a different “modernity paradigm”, where modernity is understood differently and where the secularization thesis is dismissed because of its inability to explain religious continuities (Blancarte 2000; Parker 1996, 1998).

1.4.2. Configuring popular religion in modern society

In the previous section I discussed the inability of Eurocentric modernization models in accounting for more nuanced ways of thinking about religious continuities, particularly in societies in Latin America and Asia. Similar to the case in Latin America and elsewhere, it was found that religious continuities in the midst of modern
transitions in the Philippines occasions an engagement with the ways by which religious practices are grafted onto articulations of “being modern”. Catholic lay group El Shaddai straddle between Catholic-inspired, economic and globalized forms of modernity that strongly appeals to a considerable cross-section of the Filipino population (Weigele 2006). This resonates with Pentecostal movements in Latin America, where Methodist tenets, indigenous influences and emerging market conditions “unite the modernizing thrust to the deep structure of spiritual ‘animation’” (Martin 2002: 5). In a similar manner, the current resurgence of shamanistic, Buddhist and Christian practices in Vietnam rests on a “re-enchantment narrative” that is predicated on the decentering of religion from state regulation, which enables it to penetrate the capillaries of modern social and market relations sweeping across the country (Taylor 2002: 50-51).

In line with these abovementioned examples, this study regards the Perpetual Help Devotion as a case of the configuring popular religious practices into personal, institutional and structural arrangements in ways that confirm its continued relevance. This is consistent with the call I made in the previous section that there is the need to disaggregate different problématiques in discussing modernity in order to generate broader trajectories of inquiry beyond the classical modernization thesis. This is particularly relevant in the case of the Philippines, where popular religious practices in its various forms and representing various interests have been integrated into the personal, social and cultural fabric throughout history. The Perpetual Help Devotion is one such case, but I argue that the disaggregation of individual, institutional and urban modes of religious practice highlights the dynamics of the configuring process that enables its continued relevance in contemporary conditions.
In this present study, the configuring process referred is first organized around *modern religious lives*. In studies of popular religion, this proceeds from the assumption that the “devotional self” is a variant of “modern selfhood” hinged on the *bricoleur*-type agency of individual devotees. Modern religious lives emphasize the centrality of the individual as distinct in making sense of relational fluctuations, urban transitions and global flows that characterize modern life. This turn to individual agency covers an important dimension in modern popular religion, insofar as it underlies the “modernity discourse” itself. In the case of Latin American and Philippine Pentecostalism, the freedom of access to spiritual gifts and biblical interpretation is an inherent part of its “modern” message and adds to its widespread appeal (*see* Martin 1991; Weigele 2006). In a similar manner, devotees performing popular religious practices employ resources from their life-trajectories to bypass or side-step channels established by ecclesiastical authorities in order to achieve “direct contact with the sacred” (Carroll 1989: 38).

This study also perceives the means by which religious organizations conceptualize and enact their own notions of “being modern”. The interplay of cultural and social factors involved in modern transitions impacts the life of institutions, insofar as they are faced with the challenge of adjusting to the exigencies of changing conditions. Chad Meister (2009) notes the importance of looking closely at popular religious practices, insofar as there is a perceived difference in the way it was evaluated by religious authorities. He observes that official religions generally adapted to modern ethos through a process of updating and relegation (if not total condemnation) of practices that were deemed as “superstitious”. This directly relates to popular religion, insofar as religious elites who enabled this process of...
“purification” at the level of official religion also forged attempts to reform popular religious practice to bring it closer to their own standards of orthodoxy (Long 1987).

Finally, this study also looks into a fuller analysis of the locatedness of modern popular religion in urban contexts, where it negotiates its position within the shifting and complex spaces of the city. The Perpetual Help shrine was constructed on the outskirts of Manila in 1932, but sprawling urbanization led to the incorporation of the outskirts into city life. The development of the shrine as urban space resonates with previous research on urban popular religiosity and its implications for the stability and well-being of the city (e.g. Brace, et al 2006; Kinney & Winter 2006; Kong 1992, 1993). This point is consistent with the claim that urban spaces are centers, and since modernity “is characterized by an unprecedented level of social mobilization/in incorporation into the centre” (Mouzelis 1999: 156), the configuration of popular religious practices in urban settings is an important dimension in assessing modernity itself.

1.5. Thesis organization

In view of the abovementioned discussion, this study regards popular religion as a set of localized cultural practices that enable individuals and institutions to infuse everyday life with a numinous and trans-empirical character. Popular religion is founded on a ‘differential logic’ based on a complex and often ambiguous relationality between the human condition and sacredness, thus transcends purely utilitarian modes of assessing intimacy and value. As meaningful practices, popular religion is configured onto individual life trajectories and existing institutional arrangements through a combination of creative and power-laden processes that becomes the basis for its continued relevance in modern society.
This study recognizes that the category of “popular religion” is an academic concept and remains as an *etic* category for devotees. It is, moreover, a *compound concept*, that is, consisting of two concepts that can stand independently of each other. While alternatives to the term “popular religion” have been forwarded in recent literature, I adopt the use of the term because of its conceptual flexibility, while at the same time guarding against reversions to unidimensional thinking. As a conceptual category, this study espouses a multidimensional framework that regards individual actors, institutions, values and discourses as “theoretical signposts” for assessing the relevance of popular religion in modern society. The organization of this present study is hinged on the need to account for the configuration of popular religion in modern society, using the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines as a case example. This study is divided into three parts: the first three chapters constitute the introduction; the next four chapters constitute the analytical chapters; and the lone final chapter offers synthesis and concluding remarks.

The purpose of the introductory chapters is to provide an orientation to the conceptual issues involved in the task of rethinking popular religion. This chapter (Chapter 1) presents the *problématique* of the study after identifying core issues and the broader theoretical contexts that inform them. Chapter 2 articulates the methodological and conceptual grounding of the study, laying out the process of entry into the formation of initial contacts with various stakeholders and respondents. The chapter also explains the formation of a definite conceptual framework and flow of analysis, insofar as these are grounded within the ethnographic research. Chapter 3 introduces the Perpetual Help shrine as the main field site, highlighting the historical and organizational development of the community. It
further provides a broad overview of the various components of the Perpetual Help Devotion and how they changed over time.

The four analytical chapters, which represent the four dimensions where popular religion is configured into shifting social conditions of modernity in the Philippine context, are arranged to present various dimensions that pertain to the divine figure, urban modernity, religious authority and individual devotees. In Chapter 4, I address the shifting appropriations of the Virgin Mary as a divine figure in Philippine Catholicism, highlighting different configurations of the sacred figure within social forces that shape various historical trajectories in the Philippines. Chapter 5 frames the Perpetual Help Devotion within the context of the urbanization of the Manila metropolis and the emerging translocal dimensions of popular religion as expressed in national and globalized imaginaries. In Chapter 6, I discuss the character of elite regulation of popular religion in the Perpetual Help shrine as a process of configuring popular religion at the institutional level. After this emphasis on religious authority, Chapter 7 focuses on the agential dimensions of popular religion and analyzes the Perpetual Help devotees’ life trajectories in the context of fluctuations of everyday lived realities, thus infusing the character of everyday life with religious significance.

The concluding chapter will provide a summary of the main arguments of the thesis and then address the problématiques articulated in the introductory chapters. It will highlight popular religion’s modes of engagement, after which an assessment of the category of “popular religion” and a conceptual synthesis of “modern popular religion” will be made.

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CHAPTER 2
CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1. Gaining entry and starting research

In the previous chapter, I began the task of engaging with the central themes for this study by locating ways by which the category of “popular religion” has been conceptualized in the social sciences. I proposed using *modernity* as an over-arching theoretical frame, while at the same time articulating a view of modernity that explains the role of religion not by “explaining it away”. The engagement with popular religion in this context requires unpacking how agents, discourses, institutions and practices are configured into transitions to modernity at the individual, institutional and structural levels and the implications of such processes of configuration on the character of modern popular religion itself.

This chapter turns the attention to the task of formulating nuanced conceptual and methodological starting points for the research. In this chapter, I outline the entire research process that commences with my subjective position with regard to certain issues involved in the practice of popular religion and concludes with the trajectories of sociological analysis that I adopted for this study. The important dimension of the research process that I intend to highlight is the emergence of substantive conceptual frames within the act of doing research itself, which demonstrates the open-ended yet rigorous feature of raising original research questions and trajectories of analysis. It is in this context that the interplay of the researcher’s background, ethnographic research and the analysis of various logics inform the task of theoretically assessing modern popular religion in the Philippine context.

My interest in the Perpetual Help Devotion began with my familiarity with the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and my own experiences of being a participant...
of religious activities in the Perpetual Help shrine since 2005. Raised in a “typical” Catholic family, I first encountered the icon prominently displayed in our home altar. I later learnt that a few of my immediate family members considered themselves as Perpetual Help devotees, and my siblings went to the Perpetual Help shrine during their university education to pray for favorable exam results. During my secondary education in a Catholic school, I became aware of certain prayers associated with the icon when I saw prayer books that included prayers addressed to the Virgin Mary under this title. This familiarity further increased when our official school prayer book included the novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, and prayer leaders led the student assembly in praying the novena every Wednesday.

My participation in the religious activities in the Perpetual Help shrine occurred later, when I attended my first novena devotion in September 2005 after being introduced by a female friend. I was quite surprised to find the entire church full of devotees, notwithstanding the fact that Wednesday is a regular working day. My first visit to the shrine introduced me to urban realities around the shrine compound as well: commercial activities along streets and sidewalks; heavy flow of traffic; and crowded streets. I continued participating in the devotional activities regularly until my departure for further studies in Singapore in 2008. I would say, however, that the experience of being a participant in the devotional activities in the shrine contributed to my interest in engaging in a sociological assessment of popular religion.

2.1.1. Developing theoretical and substantive reflexivity

In the process of thinking through the conceptual issues relevant for this study, my first task was to draw up a set of workable research questions and a framework to guide subsequent analysis. Constructing this conceptual model entailed previous
knowledge of religious practices on the ground, as well as relevant academic literature on the subject. In this regard my familiarity with Catholic thought and practices discussed in the previous section proved helpful in delineating the conceptual boundaries of the research and identifying relevant themes for analysis. I proposed using a conceptual model based on Max Weber’s notion of an “ideal type”, which consists of accentuations of selected characteristics in order to provide “conceptual anchors” by which situations on the ground are compared (Freund 1968). I intended to utilize this conceptual model as a sensitizing framework\(^1\) that allowed me to link practices on the ground with pertinent expertise knowledge and interrogate important facets of the Perpetual Help Devotion.

In the conceptual model, I proposed looking into (1) the link between popular and institutionalized forms of religious practice and the presence of syncretism in the shrine; (2) the devotees’ broader local moral worlds upon which relationships are defined; (3) the forms of reciprocity between the devotee and sacred figure; (4) the use of material objects (materiality); and (5) the creation of devotional spaces in the shrine. I felt that these dimensions represented important conceptual bases by which nuanced perspectives on popular religion may be articulated. When linked to the “theoretical signposts” I suggested in the previous chapter, these dimensions provided directions for inquiry, bases for framing observations and interviews in the field, and planning for the writing of results and data analysis.

I felt that in order to gain meaningful entry into the field of research, I needed to undergo a process of transitioning from being a devotee (participant) to a researcher.

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\(^1\) The idea of a “sensitizing framework” is adapted from Blumer’s (1954) notion of “sensitizing concepts”. Blumer (1954:7) explains that, whereas “definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look”. In the context of this study, the use of a sensitizing framework is helpful in determining trajectories of inquiry while acknowledging that these concepts are not prescriptive in nature.
and a sociologist (participant observer). This transition is important to make, and certain considerations are taken to mind concerning the researcher's subjectivity in relation to the topic of research; the various actors in the field (gatekeepers, church volunteers, de votees, ve ndors, l ocal gove rnment of ficials, a mong ot hers); a nd t he direction f or writing a nd analysis. I am qui te aware of t he cha llenges f aced by researchers with particular faith commitments in the course of the research process, as issues surrounding the choice of topic and the relationships with stakeholders in the field are linked to the researcher's self-interest and the implications of his/her visibility in that role in the field (see Wellman 1994). It is also related to how the researcher protects the integrity and rigor of the research process so that it adequately addresses broader theoretical and conceptual concerns. In this regard, I particularly value Max Weber's (1949) notion of “value-neutrality”,

> [an] intrinsically simple demand that the investigator and teacher should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts…and his own practical evaluations, i.e. his evaluation of these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Weber 1949: 11; emphasis in the original).

What Weber suggests is that the establishment of empirical facts is subject to its own internal criteria, and that giving in to the impulse of personal biases will diminish the rigor of the research process. This does not mean, however, that values should not be employed at all; Weber on the contrary argues that subjective dispositions of the researcher provide important contexts in problematizing the parameters of the research and the adoption of conceptual tools.

As a researcher, I am convinced that the call for “value-neutrality” has to be framed within issues of one's self-interest and visibility in the field and in the process of writing. The point of theoretical and substantive reflexivity is not to deny their existence, but to describe “how I managed both, or managed to use both to achieve
my ends” (Wellman 1994: 569). This conviction is consistent with my own perspective regarding the relationship between engaging in religious practices as a believer and observing religious practices as a researcher. This, in turn, flows from the purported relationship between religious knowledge (broadly defined as “theology”) and sociological knowledge. Situated in between these two bodies of knowledge are those generated from devotees’ articulations of their own experiences in research. The logic of sociological research I adopt for this study perceives these two bodies of knowledge as potential data, while the researcher generates his/her own data through participant observation and reflecting on his/her own subject position. I conceive the entire research process for this study as being “insight-driven”, where “empirical material...is subject of attempts to assess meanings and develop revealing insights” (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 258). Moreover, the intent to generate novel insights is achieved by the recognition (not the negation) of the researcher’s subject position, or “internal” religious knowledge, or more importantly the “external” sociological knowledge from existing academic literature.

As my academic interest in the Perpetual Help Devotion is partly informed by my religious background, there is the need to locate how this positionality in the field creates a conducive yet challenging context to conduct research. I can say that my Catholic background made me cognizant of the role of religious practices so that it does not assume an incidental but a central role in understanding nature of popular religion itself. In this regard, I was able to utilize previous faith commitments in establishing relevant subject matters for study, in generating data, and in establishing rapport with stakeholders in the field. In the course of fieldwork, I did not have difficulties identifying with my respondents who spoke about Catholic beliefs and practices. Respondents become positively disposed when I introduce myself as a
devotee, citing my studies in a foreign country as a reason for not being able to visit the shrine. In certain instances, that knowledge facilitated the disclosure of information that devotees would not have been comfortable in sharing had they been interviewed by someone who did not share their beliefs.2

One of the risks that I anticipated in this study is the dilemma of having to face “conversionist” tendencies from gatekeepers and respondents, that is, certain moves to make the researcher a committed believer to their religious ideals. I encountered such tendencies in previous research endeavors, but I was fortunate not to encounter them among Perpetual Help devotees. On the part of the priests and lay staff, I can say that they recognized my position as a researcher and took steps to respect that role. They demonstrated general openness to my research, and I have not experienced any attempt on their part to proselytize their beliefs. In fact, some of the priests expressed interest in a systematic sociological analysis of the thanksgiving letters that they have shared with me for this study.

Another risk I faced in the field is that of being identified with the institutional gatekeepers (priests and lay staff). In the course of the fieldwork, I found that this connection with the priests afforded some advantages but exposed me to certain challenges as well. There were instances when their approval actually aided the data gathering process. This was particularly true in the case of church volunteers, as they know the priests personally and referrals from them were positively regarded. As I ventured away from the shrine compound and interviewed devotees who were not

2 See Howell’s (2007) account of his interactions with evangelical Protestants in northern Philippines. His decision to make respondents aware of his faith commitments aided in establishing an atmosphere of trust. Conversely, it is also possible to conduct research with a religious community if the researcher does not share their beliefs. Blanes (2006), who identified himself as an atheist conducted research with evangelical Christians in Portugal. He notes that research is possible as long as the non-believer anthropologist can demonstrate respect for the beliefs and practices of respondents.
church volunteers, the impression I got was that the approval from priests was a neutral issue. I always mention that I obtained permission to conduct research; for most of the respondents, their response was positive or at least neutral. Some respondents did query about my personal religious beliefs; in these instances, I would reply that I am a devotee at the shrine. I would continue, however, that my devotional participation stopped during the course of my studies. I crafted this response so that I can assure respondents that I understand their practices because of my own subjective position as a devotee; I am, however, also conducting a research that is “independent” of the intentions and aims of the shrine administration.

The issue becomes slightly complex when I ventured outside the shrine compound and conducted research on the streets, among vendors and among local government officials. I still mention in passing that “I do research at the Baclaran church”, but I usually do not elaborate how I obtained permission to conduct research from the priests. Local government officials did not ask about my connections with the shrine, but they were interested to know if I am a student and what institution I am connected. When requested, I usually show my identification card from the National University of Singapore (NUS). There were instances in my interviews with Muslim leaders, however, when I was asked if I am connected with the priests. I reply that they gave permission for the research to proceed inside the shrine compound.

2.1.2. Engaging the field and archive: historical anthropology

In terms of the approach in making sense of the data, this study adopts the logic of historical anthropology, or sometimes referred to as ethnohistory. As a method, ethnohistory is mainly involved in the interplay of historical and ethnographic data in “reconstructing past societies and cultures, whether as
institutional parts or cultural wholes” (Carmack 1972: 238). Anthropologists adopting “the historical imagination” (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1992) found historical anthropology useful in providing alternatives to the overemphasis on ethnography in traditional anthropology. Ethnography need not be tied with face-to-face observations in limited space because the aim of anthropology is not writing “microsociologies” but understanding how everyday practices are “involved in the making of wider structures and social movements” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 32). The broader theoretical implication of this is far-reaching in anthropological research. Historical ethnography works to disrupt the “presentist” bias of ethnographic research that aids in the task of explaining the nature of processes of change and transformation in specific societies, organizations or institutions.

There is a strong inclination in historical anthropology to locate archives, but not only the state-owned and operated repositories of documents but more so local and particularistic archives from smaller communities (Schwerin 1976). These archives, most of which have not been subjected to categorizations from archivists and other forms of “mainstreaming”, provide intimate portrayals of local conditions and relationship patterns that anthropologists can use to characterize often neglected dimensions of social life. Furthermore, the archive, which has traditionally been the domain of historians, opens new possibilities with regard to the ways by which archival data facilitate the “production of a people, and the production of space and time” (Axel 2002, 3). This tension between a top-down approach to the creation of subjects and the active participation of agents in the process of making history results in the interface of two contexts of meaning-production that may either collaborate with each other or struggle against each other.
The theoretical highlight of historical ethnography is its nuanced regard for processes of change that explain the fragility of what constitutes “the present”. In this regard, while the focal aim is to explain the configuring of popular religious practices amidst changes inherent in modern conditions, historical and ethnographic data appeal to different dimensions and, by implication, provide different directions for inquiry and analysis. In this study, historical data from archives enabled me to problematize themes pertaining to institutional and urban transitions. These concerns navigated broader historical moments that conditioned contemporary expressions of religious expressions within Philippine Catholicism. The analytical chapters below are all concerned with this broader historical problematic: the periodization of the development of Marian piety (Chapter 4), urban transitions and its effects in Baclaran district (Chapter 5), the transformations of prevailing discourses of elite management of piety (Chapters 3 and 6), and “local moral worlds” (see Kleinman 1992) informing constructions of devotional selfhood (Chapter 7).

These broader historical trends, however, inform contemporary understandings and meaning-making processes of individual devotees and institutions. Ethnographic data from observations and interviews with devotees and other stakeholders provided nuanced perspectives regarding the configuration of relationships that sustain the performance of popular religious practices at the Perpetual Help shrine. While historical data provided the necessary context and grounding, ethnographic data teases out “contextualized self-interpretations” (see Glynos & Howarth 2007) and meanings that constitute cultural practices and discourses. Thus the devotees' personal testimonies and experiences pertaining to the management of piety, urban transitions, and the crafting of moral trajectories are amply illustrated throughout the four analytical chapters. These meanings are in turn unpacked vis-à-vis broader
institutional and structural dynamics that elucidate how popular religion is configured in modern conditions and the directions such configuration processes take. Thus the analysis of historical and ethnographic data both contribute to the generation of novel insights and thus relate directly to the conceptual aims of the study.

In the process of writing, I encountered that the use of historical and ethnographic data also presents challenges for “producing” contexts underlying situations of change. Instead of assuming what constitutes as “context”, historical ethnography enables the researcher to problematize how contexts are created and on what authority it rests. As Brian Keith Axel (2002) rightly notes, contexts that ground specific actions are generated and not just assumed to exist. He continues by saying that “[t]hus, the point is not to abandon the notion of context, but to generate a critical analysis of contextualization, from which we may illuminate disparate cultural forms of creativity, subversion, or collective identification” (Axel 2002: 22; emphasis added). Ethnographic data thus has a critical dimension that is useful in providing alternative explanations of social phenomena.

Historical ethnography also proved to be quite productive in explaining the extent of transformative processes on discourses and practices. This diachronic approach to change (see Carmack 1972) is relevant in counteracting the tendency to be overly focused either with “beginning states” and “end states” and neglecting what happens in between (Schwerin 1976). Historical anthropology also voids evolutionistic typifications of action that do not consider agency even in supposedly “structural transformations” (Krech 1991; Trigger 1986). In this regard it is important to highlight that historical anthropology is not only capable in characterizing processes of change, but also in generating original problems about how changes and transformations are characterized.
In the context of this study, the use of historical anthropology is particularly productive because it maximizes the potential for engaging at the multidimensional nature of popular religion. The broad range of historical data I was able to access because of the goodwill of institutional gatekeepers complemented the observations in the shrine compound and its environs. My exposure to rich sources for historical and ethnographic data had positive implications in the analysis, insofar as this allowed me to utilize data that pertain to different the nature and modes of inquiry. The use of historical and contemporary data from archives and observations enabled me to provide contextual histories of Perpetual Help shrine from its inception to the present; the devotional practices there at different periods of the shrine’s history; and the changing character ofelite regulation of piety. Historical anthropology was quite useful in the configuration of religious practices within modern ways of thinking and acting, which needs to be unpacked as a process rather than as an outcome. Explaining contemporary forms of social structures and relationships through events in the past enabled a characterization of dominant exercises of power within and outside the shrine. As will be explained in Chapter 5, the emphasis on the impact of large-scale social processes on neighborhoods resonates with the translocal character of the transformations within Baclaran district, the Manila metropolis and the nature of contemporary global flows characterizing the Filipino diaspora.

On the analysis of the devotees’ life trajectories, historical anthropology provided a set of heuristic tools by which personal documents may be located within broader historical trends. This resonates Glynos and Howarth’s (2007) argument that the logics of critical explanation need to transcend the “contextualized self-interpretations” of actors in order to render service to the analytical demands of concept-formation. There is a balance to be maintained here between maximizing the
distinctness of personal stories and the generalities of the social structures that bind them into a specific _milieu_. The point of analytical inquiry, then, is to engage archival materials, the testimonies of respondents, and the observations of their practices in crafting a _devotional life-trajectory_ that conditions the character of popular religion just as it is conditioned by forces impinging its performance of certain actions and implementation of certain choices.

### 2.2. Process of obtaining relevant data and locating respondents

I conducted fieldwork for a total of eight months, from October 2009 to May 2010. The main field site is the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran and its environs. In the course the fieldwork, however, I was able to go to Perpetual Help shrines in other Philippine cities; I had the chance to visit the Redemptorist Church in Davao City (Mindanao) in January 2010 and the Redemptorist Church in Cebu City (Visayas) in March 2010. These visits provided me with a means to compare different Perpetual Help shrines and to situate it within the context of a broader network of shrines and its importance as the _national_ shrine. Later I found out that even for Redemptorist priests, the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran is considered as a priority mission area in the Philippines. This further buttressed the timeliness of conducting research there.

I arrived in the Philippines on 22 September 2009 to commence the fieldwork. It was delayed for two weeks because of the massive flooding in Metro Manila and neighboring provinces caused by typhoon _Ondoy_ (international name Ketsana) on 26 September 2009. While the shrine itself was not affected, the neighboring districts were all swamped by flood waters and the shrine personnel initiated disaster relief operations to aid their return to normal life. I had to push back my research visits until the priests and lay staff were ready to accommodate my requests. I had access to the
field site with the approval of the Rector as I already knew him personally since 2008. Before I began the research, I presented my research proposal and asked for permission to conduct observations within shrine grounds and to have access to relevant documents. These requests were all granted, and the Rector assigned relevant personnel to assist me in accessing the documents from the shrine and Redemptorist Vice-Province archives. He also introduced me to key informants among the priests, as well as devotees who worked in various church organizations.

**2.2.1. Archived materials: devotional letters and Chronicles of the Baclaran Redemptorist community**

The first phase of data gathering focused on obtaining relevant documents about the shrine, its beginnings and the organizational life there. I was given access to a modest archive where various documents were kept. I was interested in finding old prayer books and devotional literature and obtained copies of six different prayer texts in Filipino and English. The staff personnel also provided me with 102 scanned pictures that captured key events in the development of the shrine compound. Most of these pictures referred to the mission endeavors of the priests in the area and the construction of the church building. Looking through the pictures, I learnt that the present church building is the third one built on that spot. Two smaller chapels were constructed in 1932 and 1949, but they were demolished to give way to the construction of a larger edifice as the number of devotees increased after 1948.

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3 I was able to access two archives in the course of the fieldwork. The shrine archives contained materials about the history of the church building; the names of Redemptorists assigned in the Baclaran community; and the evolution of the Perpetual Novena devotion, among others. The documentary collection of the Vice-Province archive, however, goes beyond the shrine and mostly referred to the history of the Redemptorist congregation in Manila and its environs; records of meetings of all Redemptorists in the Vice-Province; and correspondences with the Redemptorist central government in Rome.
Continuing the archival research, I accessed the archived copies of the devotional letters. Devotional letter-writing is an important feature of the Perpetual Help Devotion; it is one of the requirements listed in the novena booklet aside from attendance in the novena for nine consecutive Wednesdays, going to confession and receiving communion. The letters are classified as “Petition Letters” or “Thanksgiving Letters” and are dropped on letter boxes provided for this purpose. A petition letter is written while the devotee is within the nine-week novena cycle to ask for a favor, while a thanksgiving letter is written once the devotee feels that the request has been granted. Some devotees, especially those from overseas, can opt to mail the letters to the shrine. The Perpetual Help shrine receives around 4,000 such letters from devotees each week. These letters are gathered every Tuesday morning and brought to the community room of the convent, where priests and lay staff read them and tally “answered prayers” according to a predetermined set of categories. The statistics of tallied thanksgiving notes are then announced to the congregation during the novena prayers the following day. Around 20 thanksgiving letters from the weekly collection are kept and then read during novena devotions the next day (the name of the devotee is withheld). The shrine has kept a number of these thanksgiving letters, the oldest ones going back up to 1948 when the Perpetual Novena was inaugurated. In the course of the fieldwork, I was allowed to take the letters out of the archives, scan them and store electronic copies. I was eventually given working space in one of the offices in the shrine in order to save time and effort in bringing the thanksgiving letters for digital scanning. I found out that a considerable number of the letters were signed with the devotees’ own names. I made sure that I withhold using their name and also withheld using any information that might compromise the anonymity of the letter-writers.

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The Chronicles of the Baclaran community (or Chronicles, when cited in this study) is another significant archival material that I accessed in the course of the fieldwork. The Chronicles consist of four large-sized logbooks of hand-written accounts of various dimensions of the Redemptorists’ daily community life. The range of the four combined logbooks is from 1921 to 1996, with some intermittent disruptions of chronicling during the period of World War II and some years during the 1970’s. As a record of the daily affairs of the community, the Chronicles is a rich source of data about arrivals and departures from the community (new assignments and replacements); the priests’ dealings with individuals and institutions outside their community; the community’s views regarding social and political issues; and efforts to maintain the shrine and monastery. I was given permission to access the materials in from 20-25 October 2012.

I encountered the Chronicles for the first time when I read materials by other authors that cited specific entries there. When necessary, I first referred to entries in the Chronicles through these secondary materials. In due course, I inquired with the Rector about the existence of the Chronicles and if it was possible to have access to them. Permission was granted, but I can only access it while in the office and cannot bring them with me in another place. This did not pose a significant problem, since I was also given space in the office to look closely and work through the logbooks. Since the Chronicles contained substantial data, I prioritized data that pertained to three domains: (1) commentaries on social and religious issues of the day; (2) the relationship of the priests with their neighbors, with other ecclesiastical officials and with people in public service (government officials); and (3) the upkeep of the church building and the monastery. I took pictures of all the relevant pages and then transcribed the handwritten accounts to facilitate a closer reading. When citing from
the Chronicles in this study, I refer to the date a particular entry was written because there were no page numbers in some of the logbooks.

2.2.2. Thematic life history interviews

The interviews with key informants and respondents (devotees) formed the second phase of data gathering. I referred to interview devotees who had been visiting the shrine consistently for about a year at the time of the interview, so that they would have the basic knowledge of the devotional practices and the prayers. I was initially able to locate respondents through referrals by priests and lay staff. The limitation of this sampling range, however, is the type of devotees I encountered. Because of their association with institutional gatekeepers, these devotees tended to be volunteers in church organizations and thus were more “doctrinally conscious” Catholics. I am aware that the Perpetual Help Devotion attracts a wide variety of devotees. I tried, through various means and different contact persons, access to these “rank and file” devotees, that is, those who are unattached to any church organizations.

I interviewed respondents from a wide spectrum of age, social status, educational and professional backgrounds, as well as varying involvement in the shrine. The interviews I conducted with respondents were mostly done at the shrine office, where I was given a room to interview them. For the sake of the devotees’ convenience, however, I also conducted interviews in their homes, places of work or some other third place (in a mall). I conducted a total of 18 interviews with 14 female and 4 male devotees.4 Eleven respondents were Metro Manila residents, while the

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4 The disproportionate number of females was mostly the result of more referrals for female devotees as compared to male ones. Two of the male respondents were husbands of female devotees that I first interviewed. This disproportionate number of female devotees is also reflected in the devotional letters, of which around 70 percent were from female devotees.
remaining 7 respondents resided in provinces around Metro Manila (Bulacan, Cavite and Rizal provinces). Of the 18 respondents, 11 were not church volunteers at the shrine, while 6 were part-time volunteers. One respondent was a full-time staff at the shrine at the time of the interview.

The respondents were mostly educated, with 10 graduating from university and 3 who has some college education. One finished post-secondary vocational training, while another one had some high school education. One devotee reported finishing elementary schooling, while another one finished second grade in elementary school. There was an almost equal number of those who were educated in Catholic institutions (8 respondents) from non-sectarian or public institutions (9 respondents). The devotees were mostly small- or medium-scale entrepreneurs, with 8 of them engaged in their own business. Four respondents were employees and one was a service worker (house helper). Five respondents were retired, but 4 of them reported having consultancy or part-time jobs after their retirement.

I decided to limit my interviews to a reasonably sufficient number of exemplary cases to complement the close reading of the thanksgiving letters. I initially prepared an interview schedule that served as a guide during my interview with devotees. The preliminary interview schedule intended to ask some background information and questions about their devotional activities at the shrine (See Appendix 1). I also intended to ask specific questions about their religious background. Going deeper, I also included questions about their motivations for going to the shrine, and the importance it has on their everyday life. These questions were

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5 One did not disclose his educational background.
mostly based on my personal knowledge of the activities at the shrine, as well as my familiarity with the kinds of devotees who go there.

I had to make some minor modifications to the interview schedule when I began reading the thanksgiving letters. I found it productive to use the thanksgiving letters to fine-tune the existing interview schedule so that the themes and questions stayed within the bounds of the devotees’ “universe of meaning”. For instance, I initially wanted to avoid asking direct questions about personal religious convictions because I was mostly concerned with practices. As I read the letters, however, I found that devotees were quite open about their religious convictions, especially when they are confronted with people who held different beliefs. I found this openness quite interesting and incorporated questions about personal religious beliefs (especially those about their exercise of religious devotion). I had to exercise caution, however, so that it won’t appear that I am inducing them to criticize individuals who thought differently from them.

One of the significant things I encountered in fieldwork is the respondents’ discomfort with the term “deboto” (devotee). When I told them that I intended to conduct interviews with debotos (devotees), most of the respondents immediately clarify that they “are not really devotees”. Probing further, I learnt that respondents associate being a devotee with certain beliefs and actions that they themselves do not practice. These respondents, however, have been coming regularly every Wednesday without fail for the last five to ten years. This distancing from a certain view of a “deboto” convinced me that I should exercise caution in using this term as it may be something that is not usually claimed by devotees for themselves. For analytical purposes, I was alerted that this distancing from the label “devotee” (deboto) provides a clue in the task of assessing the nature of popular religion.
2.2.3. Participant observations in the shrine compound and its environs

Observations in the shrine started early in the fieldwork and occurred with the collection of archival materials. I engaged in extensive observation in the shrine from morning to evening during Wednesdays and three to six hours during other days. Since my main field site was in the church compound, I went to different places at particular times to observe what individuals did and what type of activities transpired at certain times of the day. My observations of several rites conducted inside the church were extensive. These rites consist of the Wednesday Novena, the Penitential Service every first week of the month, church liturgies during Holy Week and celebrations of the annual feast day every June 27. I took pictures in the interior space of the shrine, the candle chapel at its right side and the surrounding areas. I also had periodic interactions with devotees, vendors and security personnel in the course of these observations.

The interest in the urban dimensions of the Perpetual Help Devotion emerged in the later phases of fieldwork. The decision to incorporate the urban dimension into the existing analytical frame came with the insight that I learned from devotees that it was becoming more difficult to come to the shrine because of the “lack of order” outside the shrine compound. In talks with key informants, they also mentioned the “deteriorating conditions” of the streets and sidewalks, citing increasing crimes, miscoordination between law enforcement agencies and tolerance of illegal sidewalk vending. I felt that I needed official data from relevant government agencies to provide the context of the urban transformation of Baclaran area. I obtained data from two city halls, the reason being that the Perpetual Help shrine is located near the

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border separating Parañaque City from adjoining Pasay City. Official data from these offices provided socio-economic profiles, brief histories, land use maps, zonal (barangay) maps, and urban planning initiatives of the two cities.

I ventured outside the compound shrine during the last phase of the fieldwork and walked through the streets adjacent to the church compound. During these observations I resorted to making short conversations with vendors and pedestrians in the area. Unlike when I conducted observations inside the church compound, I was quite careful in taking pictures when I was outside the compound: except for special occasions like the annual procession during on 27 June 2010, I mostly desisted from taking photographs on the streets. My main consideration was to avoid being too conspicuous: taking photographs appeared visible enough to attract attention, and may lead to feelings of suspicion about “being watched” or “being documented”, especially on the part of street vendors.

By the time I finished the eight-month fieldwork period in the Philippines in June 2010, I scanned 937 letters of thanksgiving, took a total 476 pictures (mostly inside the church compound), interviewed 18 devotees and 3 key informants, conversed informally with devotees, priests, merchants and visitors in and around the shrine, and wrote copious field notes. I made short follow-up visits after this date, using this time to engage priests, lay staff and devotees to a conversation about emerging themes that I found as I looked at the data more closely. I also worked in the shrine convent’s library to obtain additional secondary sources.

When I returned to Singapore in June 2010, I continued conducting research on the Perpetual Help Devotion by frequenting the Church of St. Alphonsus (Novena Church) in Singapore among the Filipinos there. Having visited this church several times before fieldwork, I am quite aware that the Novena Church is one place where
Filipinos are known to congregate regularly. The Filipino community in Singapore organizes a Filipino Mass and novena devotion (patterned after the English novena usage in Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran) every second and fourth Sunday of the month. I established initial rapport with the organizers of the Filipino Mass and contacted respondents from among the devotees who attended the novena.

I also ventured to interview Filipinos who were then staying in Singapore. Coming from my eight-month fieldwork experience, I saw the feasibility of using the same interview schedule I used with respondents in the Philippines. However, I added questions pertaining to their devotional practices when they were still in their home country, and attempts to connect with the Perpetual Help Devotion at home. I came to know that not all Filipino devotees in Singapore were actually devotees at the Perpetual Help shrine, as some of them were from other provinces outside Metro Manila. The interview data also suggests that a significant number of devotees would go the Church of St. Alphonsus to “connect” with province-mates and friends. In total I interviewed five respondents (all women) in the course of one month. Four of them were then working as domestic helpers, while one was a graduate student on scholarship in a local university. Most of the interviews were held in the church, while one was conducted in the university.

2.3. Emergence of specific research questions and framework for analysis

In the previous section, I presented the nature of the fieldwork I commenced at the Perpetual Help shrine and the different types of data I was able to obtain from various sources. In the course of data gathering, some time was spent to periodically assess the progress I was making in the research. The intention behind this task is to enable a fruitful engagement between the data and the insights that earlier obtained
through a close reading of theory-related materials and other forms of secondary data. I accomplished this task by revisiting key aspects of the conceptual model and research design that I earlier proposed so that I can anticipate the next courses of action I needed to take with my remaining time on the field. I discuss below two pivotal moments in this rethinking process that reoriented the direction of the study to include several dimensions that I encountered in the field.

2.3.1. The need for an “ethnographic perspective”

In the first chapter, I explained the usefulness of conceptualizing popular religion as a form of cultural practice, that is, as centered on what people do. It is because of the importance of the practical dimension that I saw the importance of adopting an “ethnographic perspective”. In this study, I situate the ethnographic perspective on Clifford Geertz’s (1973) notion of “thick description” and the interpretive tradition of qualitative research in sociology, particularly grounded theory and methodology (see Glaser & Strauss 1967). I articulated in the previous section that the task of this study is to assess how meaning-making processes allows for a nuanced rethinking of the nature of popular religion in modern society. The task, therefore, is to see in devotees' narrative accounts alternative ways of conceiving religious practice using logics that are meaningful and consistent to actors themselves. When such an approach is taken, one can perceive, through the ethnographer's continuous engagement in the field, that generalizations made in the name of “popular religion” do not always apply on situations on the ground. The ethnographic insistence on particularity that an ethnographer generates from meaning-making processes on the ground thus offers alternative conceptualizations that go against “established (but largely problematic) wisdom” in social science. Lila Abu-Lughod
(1991: 149ff) considers such “ethnographies of the particular” as forms of “writing against culture”, unsettling established boundaries that preclude nuanced conceptualizations of the often fluctuating character of social formations.

This does not mean, however, that the particularistic preference of ethnography is not linked in any way to theory-building. Provided that the ethnographer articulates a perspective about what constitutes as “theory”, ethnographic work ought to be involved in the task of generating a useful set of concepts that relate to existing theories, if not the creation of new ones. Gabriel Abend's (2008) synthesis of the meanings of “theory” in sociology includes the hermeneutical task of providing an “original ‘interpretation,’ ‘reading,’ or ‘way of making sense’ of a certain slice of the empirical world” (p. 178). In certain cases this new understanding enables the crafting of a “Weltanschauung, that is, an overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world” (p. 179). Using these two meanings of theory in my own ethnographic research, I concur with Peter and Patricia Adler's (2008) point that the need for analytical depth can be combined with creativity and reflexivity in ethnographic research.

In the context of this study, I was particularly convinced of the importance of ethnography in the task of conceptualizing the nature of “everyday religion” or “lived religion” (McGuire 2008), that is, those beliefs and practices that lie outside or at the periphery of “official” church rites but were practiced by a sizeable number of ordinary believers (see Stringer 2008). In the course of the research, I found that this practice-oriented dimension is an enduring dimension that is found in all religious traditions. Literature on Catholicism, for instance, cite certain “exercises of piety” outside of official church rites and their emphasis with the domestic and mundane aspects of life (Thurston 1911). The notion of bhakti in Hinduism refers to the
devotee’s dedication to worship as expressed through the performance of ritual acts (Huyler 1999). In major variants of Buddhism, the performance of acts (especially directed to the sangha) is linked to merit-making. In these cases, the performance of rites is associated with requests for blessing of one’s standing in daily life, thus bridging reverence for divine figures with the practical necessities of life.

In more precise terms, the characterization of popular religion as practice links it to a specific logic. Bourdieu (1990: 86) posits that practice has “a logic which is not that of a logician”, highlighting the polysemy of human practice and its irreducibility to totalizing principles or inflexible rules. This perspective also resonates with De Certeau’s (1984) account of the tactical dimensions of everyday life. In employing tactics, action is planned not on the vantage point of rational calculation, but cunning wit and the exploitation of the weaknesses of supposedly organized fields of power. In the context of this study, I became convinced of ethnography's importance when I saw how it was utilized by anthropologists in their accounts of religious practices in the Philippines. Cannell’s (1999) ethnography of ritual practices to the Amang Hinulid in Calabanga (Camarines Sur, Bicol region), for instance, uncovered the structures of reciprocity between divine figures and devotees that challenged dismissive attitudes regarding the nature of lowland Christianity in the Philippines. Assuming an ethnographic perspective, this study intends to foster continual engagement with contemporary forms of popular religious practice by giving priority to what people do (practice) and how they make sense of what they do (beliefs).

The priority of the practical dimension led me to assess the usefulness of the sensitizing concepts that I earlier proposed in the conceptual model. Robert Faulkner (2009) observes that ethnographers working with sensitizing concepts will either engage in ethnographic coupling, that is, “the tight alignment and interweaving of in-

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depth fieldwork evidence with the sensitizing concept”; or decoupling, that is, recognizing the “gap between concept and measurement” (p. 80). As the usefulness of sensitizing concepts only becomes clearer in the process of data generation, the choice of what to “couple” or “de-couple” merges with the ethnographer's continuous engagement with data. With this in mind, I engaged in a process of rethinking with regard to the conceptual model that I provisionally adopted, as emerging realities enlightened as to what concepts were actually useful in framing trajectories of analysis. The focus on local moral worlds, mutual neediness and reciprocity, materiality and sacred space fill this category. However, I questioned the usefulness of syncretism as a plausible line of inquiry, as it was not a dominant feature of beliefs and practices associated with the Perpetual Help Devotion. I instead shifted my focus on logics of purification and gentrification, which, while sharing significant ground with syncretism, operated in a different “conditions of possibility” from it.

I also realized that there is a need to include the urban dimension into the existing framework. This insight surfaced after several months of exposure to the durée of daily life outside the shrine compound, when I interacted with street vendors, merchants in established stalls, security personnel and government officials at the barangay6 level. I was convinced of the importance of the urban dimension when I observed that Baclaran and its environs transformed significantly from being a dominantly Catholic space to an increasingly multi-religious space with the coming of Muslim migrants from Mindanao and the establishment of mosques in the area. With this increasing pluralization of space comes a number of issues that stakeholders on

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6 The barangay is the smallest political unit in the Philippines, established by virtue of Presidential Decree No. 557 by President Ferdinand Marcos in 1974.
the ground grapple with, thus adding validity for a more sustained attention given to urban conditions in the district.

2.3.2. Adopting “modernity” as a theoretical frame of reference

In the course of data analysis I found it necessary to utilize an over-arching framework to ground the entire research. This led me to frame popular religion in the context of the ongoing transition to modernity in the Philippine context. While I became convinced of the timeliness of using modernity, I had to synthesize my own assessment and commit to a definite notion of what constitutes as “modernity”. I agree with the criticisms leveled against both classical modernization theory and the “multiple modernities” approach (see Alexander 1994; Schmidt 2012; Wagner 2012) and proceed along the lines proposed by Peter Wagner (2012) in the need to “disaggregate modernity” to its cultural, economic and political dimensions. There is also the need to problematize discourses on modernity as different stakeholders on the ground propose a variety of ways of “being modern”.

In the context of this study, I disaggregated modernity by looking at three dimensions: (1) the agency of individual devotees (self and modernity); (2) the regulative control of institutional agents (religious institution and modernity); and (3) the diversifying conditions around the shrine and the “migration” of the Perpetual Help Devotion overseas (urban modernity and globalization). Discourses on selfhood in the social sciences eschewed the metaphysical dimensions of identity and emphasized the primacy of experience (Holstein & Gubrium 2000). James’ (1961) abandonment of ontological starting points has led to the notion of the “empirical self,” where bodily realities, mental representations and the material world impinge upon the individual's self-concept. George Herbert Mead (1934: 140) argues that the
self is “essentially a social structure” that “arises in social experience”. It is in this context that Rom Harré (1983) speaks of “identity projects” in which the self that one wants to become is actualized in the process of constructing one’s biography. In the context of this study, these insights suggest the usefulness of locating encounters between popular religion and an empirical notion of self by looking into the significance of popular religious practices in one’s “life trajectory”. A trajectory is “an ordered, temporally extended sequence of states or events” that are “not wholly present at a time, but are rather the kinds of things that unfold over time” (Jones 2008: 271). A life trajectory is then an ordered and meaningful arrangement of experiences borne out of the performance of certain practices. Practices supply the individual with resources to arrange7 one’s capabilities and talents.

The problematization of contemporary popular religion as “elite-sponsored” argues that the elite regulation of popular religion is itself a conspicuous manifestation of the transition to modernity. The assessment of regulatory mechanisms in modern Catholicism provides a venue for interrogating the nature of the self-posturing of religious interests within arrangements made possible by modernity. This insight resonates with Max Weber’s ideas about the nature of status groups and of power and domination in modern society. In Economy and Society (1978 [1956]), he discusses the relationship between elites and the rest of society. Among the three types of domination that Weber outlined, the rational-legal form typifies the temperaments of modern society, insofar as the civic and political institutions that characterize the modern state and its institutions are premised on the rule of law. In the context of religious organizations, elites take their role as the progenitors of norms.

7 My concept of arrangement resonates with Schatzki’s (2001: 43) formulation: “[a]n arrangement is a layout of entities in which they relate and take up places with respect to one another.” Social orders are arranged (a) spatially, (b) causally, (c) intentionally, and (d) prefigurationally; these four types of arrangements are not mutually exclusive and can co-occur in any form of social order.
and the mechanisms by which these norms are deployed in society. The regulation of
the piety is perceived as a profession in its own right in a broad range of religious
systems and traditions (see van der Veer 1988). Of particular importance here is the
elites’ aim to regulate the very identity of devotees. Identity regulation entails the use
of “discursive practices concerned with identity definition that condition processes of
identity formation and transformation” (Alvesson and Willmott 2002: 627).

The implication of urban transitions is mostly concerned with the location of
popular religious practices in urban space. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the rise of
modernity is connected to urban transitions insofar as modernity is a “mobilization
toward the center” (Mouzelis 1999: 156). In this context, processes that demonstrate
the expansion of metropolitan Manila especially in the decades following World War
II raises queries regarding the ways by which popular religious practices are
transformed by urbanization. Connected to this is the importance of the urban center
in enabling the encounter of various customs within and outside the nation’s defined
borders. One importance of proceeding from these urban processes is the possibility
of re-conceptualizing the tradition-modern dichotomy, which significantly bears upon
the task of rethinking the nature of popular religion and modernity itself.

2.4. Nature of data collected and the direction of analysis

I left the field in May 2010 with a significant amount of data in the form of
written documents and recorded observation that I made in the course of fieldwork.
The field notes culled from observations and casual discussions with devotees
provided useful contexts in understanding the nature of religious practices and were
sources of important emic or “observer-identified categories” (see Hammersley and
Atkinson 2007). Among the written documents, the thanksgiving letters is the most
numerous (937 s canned letters in total). This is because the number of letters the shrine receives has significantly increased as the Perpetual Novena devotions became more popular with devotees: the available data from letters tallied from 2004 to 2008 reveals that the Perpetual Help shrine has received an average of 3,350 individual petition letters and 460 thanksgiving prayer notes every week.8

A cursory reading of the devotional letters suggests that devotees come from very diverse social backgrounds. Applying the use of thematic analysis on these letters, most of which contain meticulous detailing of the devotees’ life trajectories, enables the generation of emic categories culled from the devotees’ usage of certain terminologies. Due to the large number of thanksgiving letters, I prioritized a smaller sample for closer analysis. The terms of the selection of which letters to analyze more thoroughly emerged with my deepening familiarity with the data. I printed all of the thanksgiving letters and read each of them twice. In due course, it became clearer that some letters had more narrative content and intent than others. I thus tended to favor letters that featured a discernible life trajectory as compared to those that merely itemized blessings. This is the reason why the length ranged from very short messages of thanksgiving to full-blown narrative detailing of one’s personal life.

As a body of documentary data, the thanksgiving letters also had their limitations. The first limitation is the letters’ uneven distribution: when I disaggregated the thanksgiving letters by date, I learnt that there were less than ten letters from 1970 to 1979. I also had to proceed with caution in using devotional

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8 “Prayer notes” (used for thanksgiving letters) is to be distinguished from “individual petition letters” (used for petition letters). I made this distinction after participating in the weekly reading of letters by priests and lay staff. As devotees usually include more than one reason for thanking the Virgin Mary, the priests and staff tally all these reasons for each of the letters they read, thus the use of ‘prayer notes’. Thus, in the case of thanksgiving letters, there may actually be two or three ‘prayer notes’ in just one letter. Individual tallying of the requests is not done in the case of petition letters; thus the tally refers to the actual count of individual petition letters.
letters from 1948 to 1969 because they were typewritten. Notations found on the upper margins indicate that these letters may have been originally hand-written and were later edited so they can be read during radio broadcasts. Another proof that they were already edited was that some of the letters had both English and Filipino (Tagalog) translations. The issue I found relevant here is the extent of the change in the “tone” of the letters because of the revisions made due to editing. My wariness with the typewritten letters was especially warranted because I had no means of checking the extent of the revisions made because all the priests assigned to the Baclaran community during this period are no longer alive. Another reason for being cautious are incidents (albeit few in number) of two or more letters coming from the same devotee. When I read through these letters from the same devotee, I discovered that the life trajectory expressed there were quite similar, notwithstanding minor differences as to how they narrated their experiences in each letter.

The interviews with devotees provided another important source of primary data for this study. During the interviews, I informed them about my intention to use a digital voice recorder, and all respondents have consented to have the interview recorded. The length of the interviews span from as short as twenty minutes to one hour. I tried to conduct the interviews under the best available conditions, but in some cases this proved to be challenging. Actual conditions may have affected the depth and quality of some of the interviews, especially if there was no choice but to conduct interviews in crowded or noisy areas.

I found the pragmatic use of the interplay of thematic analysis, narrative analysis and the logics approach in discourse analysis helpful in the data analysis. The challenge in data analysis is maximizing the use of data by employing certain techniques for generating themes and “empirically-derived categories. In this regard,
Gery Ryan and H. Russell Bernard (2003) identify different types of themes from the data: this study is interested in identifying indigenous typologies and repetitions in the accounts in addition to theory-related material. Janice Morse (2007) suggests a three-step path to develop concepts inductively: (1) building categories and themes; (2) naming the concept; and (3) creating definitions and identifying boundaries and attributes. Narrative analysis, which I used for longer thanksgiving letters, is interested in looking into certain uses of language to denote power and powerlessness and responsibility-taking or evading, as well as the “speech communities” where devotees identify themselves closely (Franzosi 1998). The logics approach in discourse analysis is hinged on Jason Glynos and David Howarth’s (2007) definition of logics as “a particular approach or ‘style of reasoning’…comprising the grammar of assumptions and concepts that informs a particular approach to the social world” (p. 8).

In this chapter, I articulated key conceptual and methodological issues that inform this study. In the next chapter, I introduce the Perpetual Help Devotion as a conspicuous form of Marian piety in the Philippines. In explaining the persistence of the Perpetual Help Devotion, I combine contemporary notions of religious devotion, materiality and regimes of bodily practices in the context of the discovery and “commodification” of the icon and the urban transitions that characterized the Manila metropolis during the last seventy years. In this historical and ethnographic introduction, I highlight the discursive and institutional dimensions of popular religion that serve as guideposts in the assessment of the shifting character of this particular form of popular religion.
CHAPTER 3
THE PERPETUAL HELP DEVOTION IN THE PHILIPPINES:
AN INTRODUCTION

3.1. Setting the context: the shrine, the community and its environs

In the previous chapter I highlighted key points in the conduct of research for this study. I paid particular attention to the need to combine available historical and contemporary data on the Perpetual Help Devotion in order to understand how present institutions and practices in the shrine are conditioned by important events in the past. This chapter identifies various dimensions of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines as exemplified in the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran with the aim of demonstrating this important linkage between past and present. I expound on four key dimensions of the Perpetual Help Devotion in this chapter: (1) the origins and appropriations of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help; (2) the history of the development of the shrine compound in Baclaran; (3) the evolution of Perpetual Help Devotion prayer texts and (4) the unfolding of the Perpetual Help Devotion as a particular form of “engaged devotionalism” in Philippine Catholicism. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, these four dimensions provide useful contexts in the task of demonstrating the process of configuring popular religion within institutional and urban modernity.

The National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is currently considered as one of the largest Catholic churches and one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations in the Philippines. Located in Barangay Baclaran, one of the sixteen barangays within the jurisdiction of Paranaque City government, the shrine
compound is located in the midst of a bustling commercial area and sits a network of
probably the busiest streets in the Manila metropolis: F.G. Cruz Road in the north,
Opena Street in the east, and Redemptorist Road in the west (Figure 1). These streets
are gateways to a still more extensive network of alleys selling all kinds of
merchandise. During the last decade, commercial activity around the Perpetual Help
shrine drastically increased as merchants went beyond established stalls and engaged
in selling along sidewalks. When the situation becomes very busy, these roads are
almost impassable to incoming and outgoing traffic.

The “busyness” of the streets around the shrine is perhaps a reflection of the
vibrant activity within the walls of the shrine compound itself. In my field
observations inside the shrine’s premises, I constantly saw devotees offering novena
prayers either by participating in regular sessions or on their own. I was
particularly intrigued by the sight of individuals walking on their knees. During one of
my observations in December 2009, I saw one well-dressed elderly woman fingering
her rosary beads and murmuring prayers as she walked on her knees. She looked
intently toward the icon at the topmost part of the church’s sanctuary. I was also
amazed to see in another instance an elderly woman walking on her knees
accompanied by a male child of about 7 years old who was also walking on his knees.
After completing their knee-walking along the entire stretch, devotees
immediately stand up and leave, but a greater number would kneel down along the
rails separating the main altar from the nave and spend a few minutes in prayer before
the icon.
Because of its status as an important and popular pilgrimage site, the Perpetual Help shrine has transformed into a significant landmark in Baclaran (See Plate 1). The Perpetual Help shrine dominates the landscape of the area: according to a land use survey map published in 1954, the parcel of land (which is a combination of two sub-plots of land) upon which the present church building stands has a total area of 29,993 m². The edifice, finished in modern Romanesque style in 1959, is one of the biggest churches in Metro Manila, which currently stands at 17.2 m (56.5 ft.) high on the nave and 12.5 m (41 ft.) high on the main aisle. The edifice has a length of 106.7 m (350 ft.), width of 36 m (118 ft.) and a total floor area of 5,069 m² (54,564 ft²) (National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help 2010). On the left side of the church building is the shrine office and convent (in one building), where churchgoers are seen giving their offerings for Mass requests. In front of the office is a life-sized image of St.
Therese of Lisieux atop a small pond; I observed how devotees after praying before the image would throw coins on the water in the same way that a well-wisher throws coins in a wishing well. In front of the image of St. Therese is a spacious parking lot, which on a typical Wednesday is filled with vehicles. On the uppermost left side of the church building is the Vinteres Hall where a modest religious souvenir shop is operated by volunteers (Figure 2).

3.2. The material basis of foundational narratives: problematizing the origins of the Perpetual Help icon

The practice of religious devotion in the Perpetual Help shrine involves a set of ritual acts centered on an icon of the Virgin Mary. When there are no novena sessions or other liturgical activities at the Perpetual Help shrine, devotees always make it a point to come closer toward the nave in order to secure a spot where they can pray. During my observations in the shrine on 31 March 2010, I walked around the church premises at 9:30 p.m. and I found the church still full of devotees. While there were those seated on pews, a greater number of individuals were queuing on the main aisle. Once they reach the sanctuary, devotees would proceed toward the spires that reach out toward the icon to touch it. As one of the Redemptorist priest told me, there is a belief among devotees that touching the metal spires is as good as touching the icon itself, which made them decide to open the altar rails to allow people to enter the sanctuary proper.9 In my observations, I have seen numerous devotees touching the spires while intently looking up to the icon, murmuring prayers as they do so.

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9 The icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is at the central apse of the sanctuary, located some fifteen feet above the ground. Devotees regard the touching of the metal spires as a substitute for touching the actual icon, as the spires are connected to it and therefore the ‘extension’ of its materiality.
After doing this, some devotees would find a comfortable spot in the nave, sit and spend the next ten or fifteen minute praying (See Plates 2 and 3).

Figure 1. Map of the Location of the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran District
(Source: Metro Manila Route Map, Scale: 1:30,000. Accu-map [2011], Madaluyong City, Philippines)
Legend: 1 – Church building; 2 – Candle Chapel; 3 – Monastery and Shrine Office; 4 – Office of the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Manila; 5 – Sarnelli Center for Street Children; 6 – Public Toilets; 7 – Statue of St. Therese of Lisieux; 8 – Vinteres Hall; 9 – Religious Articles Store; 10 – Medical and Dental Clinic; 11 – Parking Lot

Figure 2. Map of Shrine Compound, National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Baclaran, Parañaque City (Not drawn to scale)
Plate 2 (above). Devotees queue up late Wednesday evening to come closer to the icon at the church’s nave (Photo taken by researcher on 31 March 2010)

Plate 3 (below). At the back of the main altar, devotees hold the back side of the tabernacle, as well as the spires that were connected to the icon (Photo taken by researcher on 31 March 2010)
The story behind the original icon of what is now known as “Our Mother of Perpetual Help” goes back all the way to the fifteenth century. The original icon is painted on a 17×21 inches wooden canvas with a golden background (See Plate 4). Mary with the Child Jesus occupies the center part, while angels are flanked on each side, believed to be carrying the instruments related to the crucifixion of Christ. There is no certainty about the exact age of the icon, but artistic styles that characterize it suggest that it was painted at the end of the fifteenth century (Ferrero 2001). A wooden tablet detailing the icon’s history traces the icon’s beginnings in Crete and its eventual transfer to Rome. Although the original tablet has not survived, its contents were discovered in the Vatican’s Secret Archives in 1903; this discovery is important because it is the only extant description of the icon’s “foundational narrative” (Buckley 1948).

Plate 4. The icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help

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10 The winged creature on the left is the Archangel Michael, who holds a spear and a sponge attached to a stick, while the one on the right is Archangel Gabriel, who holds a cross. The cross borne by the Archangel Gabriel is indisputably an Orthodox one, as it has three horizontal beams (instead of one horizontal beam mostly used in Latin Catholicism).
Various studies confirm that the icon is a variation of a type of Marian iconography called the Virgin of the Passion of the Creto-Venetian school of iconography (Ferrero 2001), which, in turn, is part of a broader Hodegetria and Eleousa iconographic traditions in Orthodox iconography. Studies show that the Hodegetria motif depicts Mary’s grandeur, while the Eleousa (from the Greek eleos, meaning mercy or compassion) depicts Mary’s maternal relationship with her child (Drandaki 2002; Ferrero 2001). The Greek icon painter Andreas Ritzos, is said to be the purported author of the original icon that is now known as Our Mother of Perpetual Help, which has striking resemblances with at least six other icons in Italy and the Mediterranean region, all of which bear his signature (see Drandaki 2002; Ferrero 2001).

From its original location in Crete, the icon made its way to Rome through a merchant who stole the icon from Crete because of its reputedly miraculous powers. The icon was turned over to the care of the Augustinians, who were then custodians of St. Matthew’s Church in Via Merulana in the eastern part of Rome. The icon was housed in this church from 1499 until 1798, until the church’s destruction by Napoleon’s French army when they invaded Rome (Ferrero 2001). After the Augustinians fled St. Matthew’s Church in 1798, devotion to the icon almost ceased. The evacuating Augustinians brought the icon with them in the Church of St. Mary in Posterula (also owned by the Augustinians); according to sources, the icon was kept

11 According to the surviving copy of the wooden tablet, the merchant hid the image in his house until he fell gravely ill and died. Before dying, he passed the icon to one of his friends and pleaded that he entrust the icon to a church. His friend, however, delayed in heeding the deceased merchant’s request and kept the icon in his house. Their daughter eventually dreamt of a woman (believed to be the Virgin Mary) who requested her to convince her parents to surrender the icon to a church.
in a small chapel and received no public devotion for much of its stint there (Ferrerro 2001; Garcia-Paz, no date).

The rise of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help to international prominence is attributed to the efforts of the Redemptorists, who requested it to be housed in their newly-constructed Church of St. Alphonsus Liguori (See Plate 5). In 1855 the Redemptorists acquired a portion of the property along Via Merulana and built the generalate residence there, while they initiated the construction of a church later (Beco 2007; Garcia-Paz, no date). In 1865 Fr. Nicholas Mauron, C.Ss.R., then Superior General of the Redemptorists, requested Pope Pius IX that the icon be transferred to the Church of St. Alphonsus de Liguori. The Pope acceded to his request in a letter dated 11 December 1865, indicating that “it is our will that the image of Most Holy Mary, mentioned in this petition, return to stay between St. John’s and St. Mary Major’s” (cited in Garcia-Paz, no date). The Redemptorists received the original icon on 19 January 1866 and placed it at the main altar of their church (See Plate 6).

The transfer of the icon to the Church of St. Alphonsus brought about the spread of the Perpetual Help Devotion outside Rome. Authenticated copies of the original icon were sent to various churches in Europe, and eventually in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Australia. Records in the Redemptorist generalate show that there were 30,263 authenticated copies of the icon as of 1988, from just 422 copies in 1876 (Garcia-Paz, no date). Most of the authenticated copies were introduced by

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12 An authenticated copy of the icon is usually hand-painted on flat wood using weather-resistant paints, and artists exercise great caution in making an accurate rendition of the original icon. The replica is then touched to the original icon. A certification from the Superior General of the Redemptorists is mounted at the back, indicating the process of authenticating the icon and the unique identification number that corresponds with the records in the Redemptorist archives in Rome.
Redemptorists who brought the icon in their respective mission territories. Pilgrims also aided the spread of the devotion, as visitors in the Church of St. Alphonsus Liguori brought copies of the icon back into their respective communities.

Through my observations of the practices at the Perpetual Help shrine, it became quite clear to me that devotees regard the icon as an extremely special object. I found thanksgiving letters dated as far back as the 1950’s which stated that devotees would be very happy being assigned to a job where they are not prevented from going to the shrine every Wednesday. In one of my interviews, a devotee revealed that she considers being close to her icon an incentive for doing volunteer work as a nun

When I inquired further, she replied, “It’s very significant for me that I can just come near her, and I can touch (makakahaplos) [the icon] anytime I want to”. It is

Plate 5 (left). The Church of Saint Alphonsus Liguori in Via Merulana, Rome (Photo taken by researcher on 9 June 2012)

Plate 6 (right). The main altar of the Church of St. Alphonsus Liguori. The original icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is at the center of the altar above the tabernacle (Photo taken by researcher on 9 June 2012)
interesting that this devotee, like numerous others, refer to the Perpetual Help icon as “her”, that is, as a person. Devotees going to the sanctuary to touch the spires leading to the icon also mention that they desire to “get [even] closer to her”. Devotees also narrate in their letters how the icon “spoke to them” while they were praying in the shrine, or through dreams and visions in the course of doing the novena devotions.

The Perpetual Help icon at the shrine is a demonstration of the dynamics involved in the coexistence of "extrinsically-attributed" and "intrinsically-attributed" sacredness in objects (see Kong 1991). The ecclesiastical hierarchy is the vanguard of the former, assuring that sacredness is “transferred” to the replica through proper rites of blessing and physical contact with the original icon. The latter, tied to the potency of a religious object or a manifestation of the sacred (Kong 1991), resonates strongly with the experiences of devotees in the shrine. Devotees' notions of the icon's specialness rests upon the conflation of its material existence as a thing and the person that it represents (see Kopytoff 1986). This conflation breaks down the purported distance between the contingencies of the icon's materiality and the personality of the divine figure, thus making the icon not just a representation, but an extension of the divine figure's presence.

3.3. From a backwater chapel to National Shrine

I went to the Perpetual Help shrine to continue my field observations and interviews on 6 January 2010. I had already been warned by Fr. Rector a week before that there will be more than the usual number of people visiting the shrine because the first Wednesday of the year is a special occasion for devotees. Although the first Wednesday of the year is like any other in terms of the activities in the shrine, devotees have set it aside as a special day because it is the “first of firsts” and a
special time to ask for blessings for the coming year. I was told that devotees from as far as Baguio City (207 kilometers north of Manila) and from Legazpi and Naga cities in the Bicol region (240 kilometers and 382 kilometers southeast of Manila, respectively) come to the shrine at this time. Considering the distance and the length of time one needs to travel from these places to Metro Manila, these devotees make many sacrifices to visit the shrine on this day. When I arrived at the shrine at 11:45 a.m., Fr. Rector’s warnings proved to be true: there were indeed many devotees in the shrine compound, significantly more numerous as compared to any other Wednesday since I had started doing fieldwork in October 2009. Later during the day I was granted access to the church’s upper gallery and loft, where I saw the assembled crowd waiting for the start of the 1:45 p.m. novena; the numbers of attendees are astounding, considering that was midday timing on a supposedly ordinary weekday (See Plates 7 and 8).
The immense throng of devotees coming to the Perpetual Help shrine, on the one hand, and the rapid pace of urbanization of the areas surrounding the church compound, tend to mask its humble beginnings and the backwater origins of the district where it is currently located. Situated beside Manila Bay, Baclaran district’s beginnings as a fishing village is even reflected in its name: “Baclaran” is derived from the word “baclad”, “a rattan fence placed by fishermen around the fish siblings in order to protect them until they are readied for sale in the market” (Parañaque City Planning and Development Coordinator’s Office 2009: 12). The choice of this site did not come from the Redemptorists but from the then Archbishop of Manila, Michael O’Doherty. In 1932, O’Doherty arranged for the donation “for perpetual use” of three hectares of land for the Redemptorists to conduct mission work. Prior to this, the Redemptorists were assigned to the parish church of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios (Our Lady of Remedies) in Malate, Manila. They held this assignment until 1929. The donation of the land was O’Doherty’s response to pleas from Redemptorists that they
be given an opportunity to exercise mission work outside the confines of parish administration. The Redemptorists accepted the offer and Fr. Grogan was promptly sent from Australia to supervise the construction of the church and monastery (Maguire 2005).

*Plates 9 and 10.* Two views of the first monastery and church in Baclaran; Plate 9 was taken from the sea (dated 1938-1939), while Plate 10 was taken from Redemptorist Road at the left side of the property (dated 1933). (Photos courtesy of the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Manila)
The newly-constructed wooden chapel was opened for public use on February 1932, when O’Doherty consecrated the altar and placed it under the patronage of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. The church and monastery were placed under the patronage of St. Therese of Lisieux, probably because of the personal preference of Fr. Grogan (Hechanova 1998; Maguire 2005; see Plates 9 and 10). The Redemptorists conducted mission work in Baclaran among the fisher folk, in neighboring villages around Baclaran and provinces surrounding Manila. Throughout this period, the shrine did not yet function as a pilgrimage site. While there are no records showing the number of devotees who visited the shrine regularly, its location contributed to its low-key position. Compared to other forms of Marian piety in Manila and surrounding towns, the Perpetual Help Devotion is quite recent, as most of the Marian devotions have been in existence since the Spanish colonial period and thus were already quite established.

The introduction of the Perpetual Novena devotion in 1948 was the single most significant development in the transformation of the shrine from a local chapel to a pilgrimage site of national proportions. The first Perpetual Novena session commenced on 6:00 p.m. of 23 June, and in due course other time slots were added to cater to growing demand from an increasing number of devotees. In due course the overflow of devotees attending the novena cannot be remedied by adding new schedules and thus led to the expansion of the chapel. The second church building was finished in 1949: it increased the space inside the church to accommodate 600 worshipers more than its former capacity (Maguire 2005).
This church building, however, still failed to provide enough space for still increasing numbers of devotees. Visual and documentary evidence during this period suggest that crowds often spilled outside the church and created difficulties during intense heat or strong downpours (See Plate 11). Hence, another expansion of the church building was commenced in 1952. Unlike the first two structures made of wood, the renovated (third) church building was made of concrete to serve as a more permanent structure. As the edifice would be almost double the size of the old church, the entire old church sat within the scaffolds of the new church building at the peak of construction works. The entire project took seven years to complete, and the finished church was consecrated by Archbishop Rufino Santos of Manila on 1 December 1958.

The Perpetual Help Devotion received additional boost in 1952, when Manila ecclesiastical officials declared the Our Mother of Perpetual Help as the titular patroness of the church (Hechanova 1998). As mentioned previously, the titular patron of the chapel consecrated in 1932 was St. Therese of Lisieux, in deference to Fr. Grogan’s personal preferences. A sc...
common practice in Catholicism, ecclesiastical authorities have taken exception of the increasing popularity of the Perpetual Help Devotion and thought it best to proceed with the change. Nine months before the consecration of the new church in 1958, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) also elevated the Perpetual Help shrine to the status of a *National Shrine*, thus recognizing its importance as a place of pilgrimage for Catholics throughout the country.

The construction of the third church building has thus far served the needs of devotees and pilgrims due its larger size. The seating capacity of the current church building is pegged at 2,000 persons with an additional 9,000 standing room capacity (National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help 2010; see Figure 3). Since the consecration of the third church building, significant changes have occurred outside the shrine compound. The area around the Perpetual Help shrine became a cove ted spot for merchants because of the increasing number of devotees every Wednesday. From the period of the 1960’s to early 1990’s, the landscape of Baclaran significantly changed from a semi-rural fishing village to a highly-urbanized district. Business ventures included family-owned businesses of residents who moved into the area, as well as those from merchant associations (especially for clothing) and medium-scale single proprietorships. Another factor contributing to the change is land reclamation, a portion of which lies directly in front of the Perpetual Help shrine. This reclaimed land is currently managed by Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) and earmarked for future development.

The integration of Baclaran district into urban space was steady and incremental. Documentary evidence during the 1950’s reveals that public transport (buses and public utility jeeps [PUJs]) already plied the roads near the shrine. Some of the devotees writing from the 1950’s narrate that their first encounter with the
Perpetual Help Devotion was when they saw large crowds around the church while on board a bus or PUJ. One male devotee, writing a thanksgiving letter in 1951, alludes to this:

…one day, while I was travelling in a bus which was coming from Cavite City, it was caught in the traffic in the vicinity of Bacalaran Church. The crowd of people pushed me along the pathway to the Church until I found myself inside the Church’s patio. I entered the Church and while inside, I heard those beautiful hymns that forced me to forget my loneliness. Then I found out that the people were making a novena in honor of you.

(Letter dated January 3, 1951; written entirely in English)

Those who have the means also drove cars to the shrine. These cars competed with devotees in securing a space in the limited parking lot at the left side of the church.

The changing urban landscape took a new turn in the 1990’s with the start of street vending along roads around the shrine. According to key informants, street peddling started in the area as early as the 1980’s, but records from the Chronicles already alluded to the existence of street vendors as early as the 1960’s. The increase of street vendors in the area was motivated by the same drive to capitalize on devotees coming to the shrine, which increased to as many as 100,000 during regular Wednesdays and 120,000 during the first Wednesdays of the month (Hechanova 1998). The Redemptorists have appealed mostly to city- and national-level agencies like the Paranaque City government and the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) to enforce anti-vending regulations, citing the devotees’ safety concerns. As the increasing number of street vendors becomes a major concern, the management of streets fluctuates as different agencies attempt to exercise jurisdiction to enforce rules.
Figure 3. Floor Plan of Present Church Building (not drawn to scale)
Another recent development involving urban transformations concerns the entrance of Moro settlers from Mindanao to the area for trade-related activities. Mostly coming from the Lanao provinces and Maguindanao, these settlers were attracted by opportunities for trade with a potentially large market and have been making a living by selling wares along the sidewalks of Baclaran, while some have ventured into owning stalls in established commercial buildings in the area. Baclaran district, along with other areas in Metro Manila, have thus become home for Muslim secondary communities (see Watanabe 2007), where issues of religious and cultural pluralism impinge themselves on a predominantly Christian and Tagalog-speaking area.

3.4. The trajectory of a devotional tradition: prayer texts and their contexts

The Perpetual Novena is the most organized devotional activity known to devotees and is the centerpiece activity at the shrine during Wednesdays. There are presently ten novena schedules from 5:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (two schedules are for Mass only, without the recitation of the novena); of these ten slots, four sessions follow the novena-Mass format (5:30 a.m., 10:45 a.m., 1:45 p.m. and 4:45 p.m.) while the remaining seven follow the novena-Benediction format (9:00 a.m., 10 a.m., 3:00 p.m., 4:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.).¹³ Six of the novena schedules are in English while the remaining four are in Tagalog. The Perpetual Help shrine is at the peak of its flurry of activity during these novena sessions, and devotees increase significantly toward the afternoon and early evening.

¹³ A novena session is a novena-Mass if the recitation is incorporated within the celebration of Mass; it is a novena-Benediction if the recitation of the novena is concluded with a Benediction service, where the priest exposes consecrated altar bread (Host) to bless the people.
Aside from the recitation of novena prayers, the novena booklet itself is a cherished religious object for Perpetual Help devotees. The novena booklet is one of the most coveted religious articles by devotees after the Perpetual Help icon itself. Devotees in the shrine are always seen carrying their little novena booklet, despite the fact that a significant number of them already know the prayers by heart and television screens flash the prayers in all novena schedules every Wednesday. In my observations, I often saw devotees holding their novenas while praying their rosary beads, while walking on their knees, while lighting votive candles, or while just resting on their desired spot in the shrine. In my observations at the religious articles store at the left side of the church's main sanctuary, I often saw devotees purchasing novena booklets (some in bulk of 10 or more copies), after which they have it blessed.

Like the replica icon of the Mother of Perpetual Help at the shrine's sanctuary, the novena booklet is also a conduit of the presence of the divine figure, albeit in its more “portable” form. In this regard, the novena booklet belongs to the same category of devotional objects like rosary beads, pendants bearing the divine figure's picture, or handkerchiefs bearing popular prayers to God or the saints. The Perpetual Help novena booklet is designed to fit one’s purse or wallet, thus making it convenient for devotees to carry around wherever they go. Devotees have, in fact, reported that they carry the novena booklet wherever they go so that they can look at it or hold it during periods of anxiety, difficulty or perceived danger. Also, the fact that devotees have their novena booklets blessed by a priest signifies that they regard it as a conduit of divine power. When outside the shrine, devotees actually regard the novena booklet as the most immediate material representation of the Virgin Mary’s presence.

The novena booklet, however, is not only a material, but more so a linguistic representation of the Perpetual Help devotion. Like any prayer text, a novena is
important because it is a receptacle of the beliefs and value systems of its progenitors. While the Redemptorists have no direct hand in the selling of novena booklets (another organization is directly involved in it), they guarantee that the prayers are theologically sound. They also make efforts to assure that the prayers reflect actual struggles and difficulties experienced by devotees as closely as possible. Other than being a guide to praying the novena, however, the priests actually do not perceive any other use for the novena booklets. But as illustrations above show, devotees appropriate the use of novena booklets to their own ways of practicing the devotion, usually privileging the materiality of the booklet over its linguistic significance. The priests, for their part, generally agree to bless novena booklets as a religious object, noting that they are “aids to prayer” in the same way that rosary beads or other devotional paraphernalia are used by devotees.

3.4.1. Prayer texts prior to the 1948 Perpetual Novena

Documentary evidence shows that a version of novena prayers in honor of “Our Mother of Perpetual Help” began circulating as early as 1926. The novena is titled *Maikling Pagsisiyam sa Mahal na Virgen sa Tawag na I na ng Laging Saklolo* (Short Novena to the Blessed Virgin under the Title of Mother of Perpetual Help), with an *imprimi potest* granted by Fr. O’Callaghan, C.Ss.R. and *imprimatur* given by Fr. Jose Bustamante (See Plate 12). A close reading of the text suggests that its style corresponded with usual novenas then already existing: there is a prayer to be said every day, to be followed by a short reflection and a specific prayer for each day of
the novena. The novena booklet also contained a narration of the origins of the icon, as well as a recommended “exercise” (*pagsasanay*)\(^{14}\) for each day.

Another novena booklet titled *Novena in Honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour*, written in English, was published in 1936 (See Plate 13). A close reading of the text reveals that the 1936 novena text had notable differences if compared to its 1926 counterpart. The immediately noticeable difference is that, even though both novenas were to be recited for nine days, the 1936 edition had instructions in the form of “General Remarks” on how to perform the novena properly. Also, the prayers said for each day in the 1936 novena text is fixed (the 1926 novena had a fixed prayer for everyday as well as a variable prayer for each day); what varies each day in the case of the 1936 novena are the reflections, which are quite long and “theologically dense”.

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\(^{14}\) An exercise (*pagsasanay*) is a set of recommended actions or dispositions that the devotee ought to fulfill, so that the novena devotion not just involves the recitation of prayers, but also the performance of pious works.
By “theologically dense”, I mean that the reflections contain more citations from the Bible, vignettes from the lives of saints, pious sayings and the Catholic catechism.

3.4.2. The inauguration of the Perpetual Novena devotion in 1948

The significant turn that led to the expansion of the Perpetual Help Devotion was the introduction of the Perpetual Novena prayer format, which, as mentioned above, was adopted in the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran in 1948 (See Plate 14). Historical sources agree that its origins were quite recent: this form of devotion started in the United States, particularly in St. Alphonsus Church in St. Louis, Missouri (Hechanova 1998). The Perpetual Novena devotion is an offshoot of their monthly practice of reading letters of petition and thanksgiving that the priests there initiated in 1916 (Garcia-Paz, no date). They moved from a monthly to a weekly reading of the letters in 1922 in order to accommodate the increasing number of devotees; they also expanded the devotional exercises by adding prayers and songs. In 1928, the name “Perpetual Novena” for this new form of devotion was suggested: a Perpetual Novena was to be performed for nine consecutive days (hence novena), but the nine-day cycle is also to be repeated continuously (hence perpetual). The diffusion of the Perpetual Novena devotion relied on the extensive network of Redemptorists in different parts of the world. The reception of the devotion by lay people varied from place to place. While the Perpetual Novena flourished in the countries like India, the Philippines and Singapore, it did not take off significantly in Australia and declined in the United States (see Kelly and Kelly 1998 for history of Perpetual Help Devotion in the United States).
The text of what is commonly known as the “1948 Perpetual Novena” in the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran, contrary to expectations, was not an immediately fixed text and assumed its final form only after months of experimentation. A “core format” of the novena text was established around three months after it was begun, which in turn became the basis of the 1950, 1951 and 1953 editions of the novena booklet (Gornez 2003). The Perpetual Novena text published in English in 1951 begins with a hymn addressed to the Virgin Mary, and then the reading of letters of Petition and Favours (Thanksgiving). Another hymn is then sung, and the three major prayers – for temporal needs, for spiritual needs, and for the home – are recited, followed by a litany. After this, another hymn is sung, and then the Benediction of the
Sacrament follows. Devotees recite the Act of Consecration every first Wednesday of the month; otherwise, the novena ends with another hymn to the Virgin Mary and a blessing for the sick.

A close reading of the 1948 Perpetual Novena reveals that it reflects typical Catholic spiritual temperament of the day. As a “borrowed text”, the 1948 Perpetual Novena was similar to other formats then used in the United States (Hechanova 1998; Gornez 2003). Its theological orientation reflected general theological currents of that era, particularly its “privilege-oriented and ‘high’ Mariology” (Gornez 2003). The theme of the prayers, akin to other devotional exercises, focuses on aspirations for personal sanctification. The litany addressed to the Virgin Mary in the novena text is dotted with such references. There are petitions regarding the worthy reception of the sacraments; a voiding proximate occasions of sin, perseverance in prayer life; forgiveness of one’s enemies; and non-deferral of one’s conversion. The litany includes invocations about hating sin, “the only evil”, with all one’s strength, overcoming bad habits, and ten invocations at the last part about facing one’s death and judgment by God.

While the association between the Perpetual Help Devotion and Wednesday is already institutionalized in the Philippines, it must be noted that there is nothing special about the choice of Wednesday (Hechanova 1998). A cursory look at novena schedules shows that the Perpetual Novena devotions were held in different days in other Redemptorist churches in the country. It was initially held every Monday in Iloilo and every Sunday in Cebu. Because of the success of the Perpetual Novena in Baclaran, however, these communities synchronized their novena sessions to achieve greater uniformity throughout the country. Catholic parishes in and around Manila likewise held novena sessions on Wednesdays. Two years after the inauguration of the
Perpetual Novena in Baclaran, the prayers were already recited in parishes in Quezon City, Quiapo and Sampaloc in Manila, Taguig, and Marilao, Obando and Barasoain in Bulacan province (entry dated 1-7 April 1950; cited in Gornez 2003).

3.4.3. The revision of the Perpetual Novena text in 1973

The official text of the Perpetual Novena remained the same for twenty-five years, after which a new format was introduced in 1973. The revision of the Perpetual Novena flowed from the conviction on the part of the Redemptorists that the prayers needed to adapt to the changed conditions in the Catholic Church (on the global scale) and in Philippine society (on the national scale). The revision of the Perpetual Novena text took two years to complete, with the Joint Novena Commission of Cebu and Manila Vice-Provinces meeting for the first time on 9 January 1971 and the version of the Perpetual Novena being available on 18 June 1973 (Gornez 2003; Hechanova 1998). In broad strokes, the 1973 Perpetual Novena text shares certain features from the preceding 1948 version, although shifts in emphases have changed the general tone of the prayers. The 1973 Perpetual Novena in this regard is therefore not an entirely new version, since it shares a number of aspects with its predecessors. As one Redemptorist priest who participated in the Joint Committee noted in an interview, the 1973 revised version was a “compromise text”, reflecting the commission members’ adherence to a broad spectrum of theological currents. On the first day of the use of the revised text on 27 June 1973, around 100,000 copies of the novena booklet were immediately sold (The CSsR in the Philippines, 2006).

A closer reading of the 1973 Perpetual Novena reveals that social justice and peace dimensions are given more attention, perhaps as a corrective to the perceived overemphasis on personal needs in the 1948 Perpetual Novena text (Gornez 2003;
Documents from the Redemptorist archives and external theological assessments of the revised novena report that the inclusion of the communitarian and social justice dimensions was explicitly intended by the Joint Committee. One finds in the novena prayers references to the need to be aware of broader social concerns. Consider this portion of the novena prayer:

While praying for our own intentions and for the intentions of all here present at this Novena, we earnestly ask you, our Mother, to help us comfort the sick and the dying, give hope to the poor and unemployed, heal the broken-hearted, lighten the burden of the oppressed, teach justice to their oppressors, and bring back to God all those who have offended him.

In the litany of “Petitions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help”, explicit references are made regarding the dignity of the human being, the need to pray for others’ needs as well as one’s own, loving concern for others and openness to service in the community.

The revision of the novena text in 1973, as one Redemptorist priest indicated, was implemented carefully because of fears that the new novena text might not be as popular as the one then in use (Fr. David Clancy, personal communication, 2010). Their fears proved to be unfounded when the new text was widely accepted by devotees, who continued to participate in the novena sessions (See Plate 15). A number of Redemptorists were concerned that the emphasis on social justice, which is the distinctive feature of the new version, has yet to receive the attention that it deserves. This thinking was manifest in the meetings of the Manila Vice-Provincial Chapter in 1987, one year after the famous “People Power Revolution” that toppled the Marcos dictatorship. Referring to the use of religious symbols during the protest, some of the members noted that the “domesticating symbols” of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Child “did not express where the people were at that moment”, and the use
of these icons betrayed a “utilitarian use” of religious symbols and “a gap between political involvement and faith activity” (C.Ss.R. Vice-Province of Manila, 1986).

These observations on the part of the Redemptorists initiated moves to keep the Perpetual Novena relevant to emerging social realities. Much discussion about the possibility of revising the 1973 novena text have been underway and initial plans made headway in 2011 with decision to implement minor changes. Among the reasons for the proposed updating is the need to reflect gender sensitivity, ecological awareness and migrants’ concerns in the prayers. As mentioned by a member of the Vice-Provincial Chapter during the deliberations, the revisions “need not be too radical”, while another member emphasized that the essential thing is to “update” the novena text while maintaining its general structure and content (C.Ss.R. Vice-Province of Manila 2011: 72).

Plate 15. A regular Wednesday novena devotion using the revised Perpetual Novena text in the new [third] church structure (Circa 1980s; photo courtesy of the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Manila)
3.5. Piety and “social conscience”: social involvement in the Perpetual Help shrine

During my fieldwork one Wednesday in March 2010, I saw a banner that contained an open letter from the Rector. Addressed to all the devotees, the message explains that the Perpetual Help Devotion does not only entail asking favors for one’s personal needs, but also reaching out to assist others. The message continues by encouraging devotees to cultivate a greater “sense of mission” to those in need. This sense of mission, the message continues, assures that the performance of the novena devotion in the shrine does not become self-centered but other-centered. The “open letter” announcement remained posted for one month, and after it was taken down, the theme of being “perpetual helps” to those in need became a regular feature in the Rector’s contributions to The ICON Magazine, the shrine’s official organ. This “sense of mission” that the Rector referred to is the most contemporary articulation of “socially engaged” form of devotionalism that also distinguishes the Perpetual Help Devotion from a number of devotional practices in Philippine Catholicism.

3.5.1. A legacy of “engaged devotionalism”

Probing this emerging sense of mission further, I learnt that this theme was a recent one due to constant emphasis in the ICON magazine, the official newsletter of the Perpetual Help shrine. The Rector’s message was complemented by testimonials from devotees who espouse the same kind of thinking about the link between performance of the devotion and the assumption of certain social responsibilities. In my talks with the Rector himself, he insisted on the need on the part of the shrine personnel to promote his message of “deboto-misyonero” (devotee-missionary) among the regular churchgoers in the shrine. Continuing, Fr. Rector explained that deboto-misyonero concept is a novel way of promoting heightened social awareness
on the part of devotees, so that their devotional exercises in the Perpetual Help shrine becomes a means to effect a transformation of social relations for the better, thus adding, if not displacing, the emphasis on receiving personal favors.

In my interaction with devotees and their thanksgiving letters, I realized that this message about the social orientation of the Perpetual Help Devotion is practiced differently by devotees. Consider this insight given by one devotee:

The oath-taking for students who passed [the Board Exams] is on March 17-18, 2008. I am very happy because I made my parents and my siblings very happy, especially my sister who paid for my education. With your help, Mama Mary, I can help my family now. I asked you that God may use me as an instrument for good when I qualify as a nurse, and that I may be humble at all times after I receive what I asked for.

(Letter dated 27 February 2008; translated from Tagalog original)

In this particular instance, the devotee refers to the networks of familial obligations and responsibilities first, and then mentions the broader dimensions outside the family (being an “instrument for good” in a broad sense). Another devotee, this time an employee whom I interviewed in the Perpetual Help shrine, conceives a different trajectory in referring to “social responsibility”. She narrated her view thus:

Because I work here for the Redemptorists, I do not ask only for my own needs. Sometimes I also pray for the needs of all (pangkalahatan)…we also have to ask for these things. For example, with what’s happening now in society and with the environment, you cannot ask only for your help except through God’s intervention…especially now that there is a drought (tagtuyot). What can you do about it? You just have to pray…not really for yourself only…I think about the rice fields, the fishes that will be affected because the waters dry up…You will just have to pray that it rains soon. It’s not only about us being inconvenienced by it, but more so with what happens if it doesn’t rain. What will we eat? How about the animals? What about our forests?

(From a female devotee, interviewed 3 March 2010)

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15 At the time of the interview, there is an impending El Niño in some areas in the Philippines and the rains are quite scarce for farmlands to sustain agricultural production.
Perhaps because of her closeness to the priests, she imbibed the officially-articulated perspective about achieving the prescribed manner of social involvement. Her sharing alludes to an abstract conception of social involvement, where devotees go beyond their own needs as well as the needs of others in her immediate circle, but considers non-immediate realities as well.

The Perpetual Help shrine’s emphasis on “engaged devotionalism” sets it apart from other places of pilgrimage in the country. This integration of the practice of popular religion and ethical responsibilities is intimately linked to the missionary praxis of the Redemptorists, especially during the last fifty years and in the social mission apostolate of Perpetual Help shrine. The call for increased lay participation emerged in grassroots mission work during the late 1960’s, as new realities and theological emphases on the role of lay people in the church (Maguire 2005). Increased lay collaboration in mission work was a welcome but contentious pastoral direction, and the transition was not easy. By the 1980’s, however, lay people became more fully integrated into the various ministries in the shrine (Maguire 2005). The Baclaran Church Team (BCT) was established in 1983 with the intent of promoting the shrine, “being a National Shrine…remains a significant evangelizing force for the local and national levels” (Vice-Province of Manila, no date). The BCT consists of a group of lay people whose role is to take a “prominent evangelizing position” and a “significant evangelizing force for the local and national levels” (S.U.A. Findings and Evaluation Apostolate, no date).

The disposition toward social activism during the 1970’s placed the Perpetual Help shrine in the opposition to martial law by President Ferdinand Marcos. During the latter period of martial law, the shrine became one of the places of refuge for those who opposed the Marcos regime. The family of the late Senator Benigno Aquino went
to the Perpetual Help shrine to pray after his assassination in Manila International Airport (MIA) in 1983. On February 1986, a group of election technicians who walked out from Batasang Pambansa (Parliament House) to protest massive electoral cheating sought refuge in the Perpetual Help shrine (Hechanova 1998). A few days after the walk-out, the then Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin read the CBCP’s historic pastoral letter announcing the bishops’ withdrawal of support for Marcos during the 6:00 p.m. Mass at the Perpetual Help shrine (Hechanova 1998).

In time, there was an emerging consensus on the part of the Redemptorists that lay people are not merely sentinels of an imposed value system but should aspire to become “true believers” of that value system. This view is articulated in the Vice-Province of Manila’s entry in the 2008 Conspectus Generalis¹⁶, where an integral link between the congregation’s sense of mission and the administration of the shrine is made: “the extraordinary vice-provincial council sees the shrine as a genuine mission addressing the vast challenges to the enormous number of people who come regularly to the shrines” (p. 412). As explained by the Conspectus Generalis, the Perpetual Help shrine is at the forefront of mission because of its extensive reach, and it does not merely provide a means for practicing religious devotion, but aspires to become a catalyst of change.

3.5.2. Crafting a faith-based development discourse

The emergence of the social development apostolate at the Perpetual Help shrine reflects the change of orientation toward “holistic evangelization” that concerns itself not with the spiritual but also the socio-economic and political realities of life.

¹⁶ The Conspectus Generalis (full name is Conspectus Generalis Congregatio Sanctissimi Redemptoris) is a compilation of reports from Redemptorist provinces and vice-provinces throughout the world. It contains information regarding the number of confreres in a particular region, the state of the works undertaken by them, and some challenges and means of addressing these challenges.
The social development apostolate involved two forms of activity: (1) socially-oriented programs within the shrine; and (2) development outreach in neighboring communities around the shrine. In the 1990’s, a number of social services programs were introduced in response to calls for the integration of popular religiosity with social awareness. The medical and dental clinic was established on June 1994. It aimed to bring assistance to those who go to the shrine, as well as to residents where the Baclaran Church Team conducted mission work (Maguire 2005). The apostolate to street children started on September 1995 with the inauguration of the Sarnelli Center for Street Children, a residential facility for abandoned youth aged 8 to 16 years old. The St. Gerard Family Life Center, founded in the same year, functioned as a counseling facility for women experiencing marital and pregnancy problems (Maguire 2005).

The development of social services and urban mission compose the shrine’s social apostolate. These are expressions of the Redemptorist congregation’s sense of mission as articulated in the 2009 Conspectus Generalis. The document explained that the Vice-Province of Manila “does not speak of shrine apostolate but shrine mission” (p. 411) insofar as “the shrine offers the Congregation a unique opportunity for evangelization of the abandoned poor, ministry to young people, the celebration of reconciliation and promotion of peace as well as dialogues with Islam” (General Visitation Letter of Joseph W. Tobin; cited in Gubernii Generalis C.Ss.R. 2009). The provision of social service programs alongside the promotion of religious devotion projects the ideal link between faith and action that the Redemptorists

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17 The center was named after Bl. Genaro Maria Sarnelli, an Italian Redemptorist priest who spent a significant part of his ministry among the sick, prostituted women and abandoned children. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1996.
wanted to implement at the shrine. In one of my conversations with the Rector, he mentioned that the shrine’s social mission apostolate is a reminder to devotees that the Perpetual Help Devotion does not only concern one’s personal needs. As already mentioned in the open letter addressed to devotees, he reiterated that “it is good for people to realize that just as Mary has been their Perpetual Help, so they should also be ‘perpetual helps’ to people who are in need”. At present, a significant portion of the costs of maintaining the programs come from weekly contributions, as well as from donations dropped in boxes and those given directly to staff in the shrine office.

3.6. Concluding synthesis: situating the Perpetual Help devotion analytically

As can be seen from the chronology of events, the beginnings of devotion to the Perpetual Help icon was attributed to the institutional apparatuses of the Redemptorist congregation. The “latching” of the Perpetual Help Devotion with the institutional resources of the congregation enabled the reconfiguration of the icon into the Redemptorists’ history and “institutional spirituality”. As the discussion in the previous section of this chapter demonstrates, while the Perpetual Help icon’s increasing reputation after 1866 was the result of the Redemptorists’ intensive propagation, the reconstruction of the icon’s history before 1866 was also the result of the Redemptorists’ efforts to re-narrate its ancient origins. By this act of reconstruction, the Redemptorists claimed their place geographically within the city of Rome, as well as politically within the nineteenth-century Catholic Church, which had several powerful religious orders (Eriksen 2005). This links the Perpetual Help icon and the congregation’s institutional identity and missionary praxis of the Redemptorists: in claiming custodianship of the Perpetual Help icon, the Redemptorists have herediated its transformation into a devotional object of global
proportions and that consolidated their own “spiritual capital” within Catholicism itself.

In the local scene, the discussion of the historical development of the Perpetual Help prayer texts; the evolution of the shrine compound; and the shifts in crafting a form of “engaged devotionalism” all demonstrate the successful adaptation of the Perpetual Help Devotion to the exigencies of religious, social and political life in the Philippines. In this matter, the Perpetual Help Devotion stands apart from documented cases of the decline of Catholic popular piety or church-oriented religious practice because of their inability to adapt to broad-level changes in institutional and social arrangements (e.g. Ahern 1987; Bax 1985; Kelly and Kelly 1998; Sharp 1999). In the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion, the Redemptorists were able to expand the reach of the devotion’s significance in ways that resonated with structural changes in postwar Philippine society. The Perpetual Novena has thus retained its “public devotion centered on private ends” motif, although the price of its maintenance entail constant watchfulness as social realities and motives continually shift and create new reasons for further adaptation.

In the case of the Philippines, the narrative of custodianship of the Perpetual Help icon was beneficial to the interests of institutional Catholicism in general. By monitoring the conduct of the devotion the Redemptorists succeeded in presenting the Perpetual Help Devotion as an available apparatus in regaining the religious allegiance of Filipinos, especially the middle classes. Particularly successful was the introduction of the Perpetual Novena, which represents “a public devotion centered on private ends”, or “privatized Catholicism” (Eriksen 2005: 316; Ribeiro de Oliveira 1994: 519). The public character of the Perpetual Help Devotion is a domain controlled by ritual experts who exercised surveillance so that prevailing discourses...
will not fall outside the acceptable range of dogmatically acceptable expressions. The Perpetual Novena nevertheless engaged the insecurities of postwar reconstruction, linking these deeply-felt insecurities to issues of faith and practice of religious duties. While addressed individual desires of devotees, the Perpetual Novena functioned as an arbiter of trust between devotees and the prevalent social order.

Having presented a broad overview of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran, the next chapter provides a historical synthesis of Marian piety in the Philippines. The discussion in the next chapter exhibits that the modes of adjusting and incorporating to structural changes is not unique to the Perpetual Help Devotion but is apparent in a wide range of forms of Marian piety in the Philippines. This positioning of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the context of dominant religious institutions’ involvement with Marian piety provides a platform in assessing how religious beliefs and practices are crafted in order to maintain their relevance in public life. Using the Perpetual Help Devotion as a case example and linking it to a broader discussion of Marian piety thus enables an assessment of key dimensions that link religion and modernity.
PART TWO:  
ANALYTICAL CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 4: The Trajectory of Marian Piety in the Philippines:  
A Socio-Historical Synthesis

CHAPTER 5: The Perpetual Help Devotion and the Exigencies of  
Urban Modernity

CHAPTER 6: The Perpetual Help Shrine and the Rationalization of  
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Constructions of Self and Identity

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CHAPTER 4
THE TRAJECTORY OF MARIAN PIETY IN THE PHILIPPINES:
A SOCIO-HISTORICAL SYNTHESIS

4.1. The Perpetual Help Devotion as a form of Marian piety

In the previous chapter I provided a comprehensive background of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines by looking at its four key aspects: the icon, prayer texts, the shrine building and a legacy of faith-based social involvement. The combination of these four aspects defines the cultural and social trajectory that explains the popularity of the Perpetual Help Devotion as a form of popular religion in the Philippines. I was convinced of this popularity when I observed one of the novena schedules during the first Wednesday of 2010. I attended the 1:45 novena-Mass session in the choir loft, where I was able to see activities in and outside the church from a “bird’s eye view”. The whole church (including aisles) was filled with devotees even before the start of the novena (See Plate 16). After the homily, the crowds already spilled outside the church’s steps, and by the time the service was over the crowds reached the parking lot at the church’s left side.

From a historical perspective, the popularity of the Perpetual Help Devotion is striking not only in the Perpetual Help shrine in Balaran but throughout the Philippines as well. No other Marian shrine in the country is able to draw crowds on a weekly basis in the same way that the Perpetual Help shrine does. Moreover, the devotion is already a regular feature of Catholic parishes in the country, where the novena is also recited every Wednesday. This serves as an indicator of the ways by which devotees and religious institutions in the Philippines craft the relevance of Marian piety in their everyday lives. This is consistent with the argument I articulated in Chapter 1 that the Perpetual Help Devotion is an important reference point through
which assessments of popular religion in the Philippines may be made, as these practices are similarly found in Marian shrines all over the country.

![Image](Perpetual_Help_shrine.jpg)

**Plates 16.** The crowds inside the Perpetual Help shrine before the 1:45 novena-Mass session started (Photo taken by researcher on 6 January 2010)

The devotion to the Virgin Mary within Catholicism is an important point of departure in social science research because it strongly resonates with the “feminine principle” that is found in most of religious traditions. Katharine Weigele (2007: 125) observes that “[s]he [Mary] is a controversial figure…and even a site of struggle over gender relations and roles”. Outside the Philippines, scholarly works compare and contrast Marian piety in Catholicism with the cult of female goddesses, particularly in pre-Christian Europe and Asia Minor (Benko 2004; Borgeaud 2004). Studies of contemporary Marian piety likewise pay close attention to the formation of cultural identities in countries like Italy and Spain (Breuner 1992; Christian 1981) in Europe; and Haiti (Rey 1996), Mexico (Wolf 1958; Kurutz 1982) and Nicaragua (Linkogle 1998). The figure of Mary goes at the heart of the role of the feminine principle in Philippine religiosity as well, acting as a platform to assess the shifting contexts of
institutional Catholicism itself. Belief in feminine (usually benevolent) mythical beings like *diwatas* and other nature spirits is widespread among pre-Hispanic local communities in the Philippines (Scott 1994).

Comparing among religious traditions, the figure of the Virgin Mary is analogous to a number of female divine figures and deities. William Harman (1989), for instance, outlines the interplay between sacred marriage and goddess worship in Hinduism. Whereas the goddess *Minākṣi* is joined in sacred marriage to Śiva and both are worshipped as a divine couple in Madurai, *Minākṣi* enjoys a distinct cult as a sister of the god Viṣṇu and the presiding deity for the city. The figure of Kuan-yin (or Guanyin) as a female *bodhisattva* remains an important feature of Buddhist popular piety within and outside China, where she is referred to as the “Goddess of Mercy” (Yü 2001).

Drawing from the theoretical groundwork in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter provides a historical synthesis of the development of Marian piety in the Philippines. The general problematic I address here concerns the processes accompanying the creation of culturally-relevant forms of Marian piety at various points in Philippine history. This synthesis is relevant because, while data pertaining to the origins of various forms of Marian piety are available, the latter do not give ample attention as to how Marian piety are grafted into the social fabric of local communities. In the first section of this chapter, I present various processes linking Marian piety and the conversion of the local population to Catholicism during the early phases of Spanish colonialism. Here I use William Christian’s (1981) concept of “local religion” to explain the nature of the syncretism between indigenous cultures with Iberian Catholicism, a process that showcases local and translocal dimensions of religious practice during this period. The second section locates changes in Marian piety within
the shifting socio-cultural landscapes of the nineteenth century, insofar as these enabled new forms of engagement with Spanish colonial authority that culminated in the Revolution against Spain in 1896. This section establishes the roots of the “crisis of legitimacy” in institutional Catholicism, which altered its course in public life in the Philippines thereafter. The last section delves into key events during post-Spanish assimilation to American culture and post-World War II reconstruction, where notions of a specific form of elite-sponsored “Catholic culture” as expressed in Marian piety impinged upon the quest for Filipino national identity.

4.2. Marian piety as local religion in Spanish Philippines

The customs of the islands’ inhabitants prior to Spanish colonization may be described as non-centralized and diverse. Pre-Hispanic Filipino social organization tended to evolve around small communities with extensive contacts through trade, political alliances or wars (Scott 1994; Wolters 1992). The religious practices of the early Filipinos consisted of the worship of anitos (ancestral spirits) or diwatas (nature spirits), although belief in a supreme deity called Bathala by Tagalogs and Laon by Visayans is reported to have been widespread. During worship ceremonies, rites presided by native shamans (babaylan among Tagalogs and catalonan among Visayans) featured ceremonies at various stages of the agricultural cycle, rites of passage, and the curing of illness (Scott 1994). There is also evidence that it was unusual for early Filipinos to worship in temples, as the invocation of anitos or diwatas was predominantly home-based (Hislop 1971).

4.2.1. Marian piety to the spread of Christianity in the Philippines

The advent of Spanish colonial power in the Philippines in 1565 inaugurated the conversion of the local population to Catholicism alongside the rise of Spanish
colonial power. The colonization of the Philippines is to be perceived in the context of Spain’s aim to demonstrate the expansive reach of its naval power; concomitant to this colonial expansionist moves, however, King Philip II felt that it was his responsibility to propagate the interests of Catholicism in new territories. After Ferdinand Magellan’s “accidental discovery” of the Philippines in 1521, King Philip II insisted on the necessity of deploying naval expeditions to incorporate the archipelago into the Spanish empire. Miguel Lopez de Legazpi and his fleet succeeded in gaining a foothold by establishing a Spanish settlement in Cebu in 1565 and in Manila in 1574. The Spanish *conquistadores* employed a “relatively peaceful” strategy in occupying the Philippines, in contrast to the bloody conquests that took place in Latin America fifty years earlier (Reid 1993).

Legazpi’s naval expedition to the Philippines included several Augustinian missionaries; actual mission work, however, only commenced when they received instruction from King Phillip II regarding the occupation of the islands. Spanish colonial officials in Manila requested additional missionaries to staff the budding Catholic mission. In response to his request, Pope Gregory XIII approved the nomination of Fr. Domingo de Salazar, O.P. as first bishop and issued a decree in 1579 creating the diocese of Manila (Gutierrez 2000). Other religious orders in due course sent their own missionaries: the Franciscans arrived in 1578, followed by the Jesuits in 1581; the Dominicans commenced mission work in 1587 and then the Augustinian Recollects in 1606 (Phelan 1959). In order to avoid “jurisdictional overlaps” and undue competition, the heads of the five religious orders agreed to divide the archipelago into distinct areas. The Augustinians assumed responsibility over Spanish settlements in Cebu and Manila and their environs; while the Franciscans went to the Bicol provinces southeast of Luzon. The Dominicans went to
the northern part of Luzon, conducting their missionary work in Bataan, Cagayan and Ilocos provinces, while the Augustinian Recollects went southwest from Manila and initiated missionary activities in Marinduque, Mindoro, Romblon and Palawan (Sitoy 1985). The Jesuits worked in areas surrounding Manila, in the eastern parts of the Visayas and in northern Mindanao.

4.2.2. The strong identification of Philippine Catholicism with Marian piety

The implications of Catholic missionary activity among the local population were profound. Imbued with the strong Marian temper of Iberian Catholicism, Spanish missionaries extolled Marian piety, as evidenced by the practice of naming churches after Mary and her different titles. The first church in Manila was dedicated to La Purisima Inmaculada Concepcion (Immaculate Conception of Mary), and in 1576 this church was designated as the cathedral of the newly-created diocese of Manila (de Salazar 1581; cited in Blair and Robertson 1903-1904). Gregory XIII eventually placed the Manila cathedral under the patronage of the Inmaculada Concepcion (Immaculate Conception) in 1595 when the diocese of Manila was elevated to an archdiocese (Santos 1983). The same was true for churches built on towns around Manila: the parish church of Pasig was first dedicated to Nuestra Señora de la Visitacion (Our Lady of the Visitation), after which it was rededicated to the Inmaculada Concepcion. The parish church in Malate was dedicated to Nuestra Señora de los Remedios (Our Lady of Remedies) in 1588, while the parish church in Binondo (Chinatown) was named after Nuestra Señora de la Purificacion (Our Lady of Puriﬁcation) in 1614. When the Dominicans initiated mission work in Bataan, Manaoag (Pangasinan) and Piat (Cagayan) in northern Luzon, they entrusted these towns to the patronage of Nuestra Señora del Santísimo Rosario (Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary).
This naming of churches in honor of Mary as supplemented by the encouragement of the cult of sacred images, which was another missionary strategy that greatly aided Catholic mission work. The friars utilized Marian images to lure locals away from their worship of local divinities, commissioning local craftsmen to carve images to be sent to their mission stations. In one account, Fr. Diego Aduarte, O.P. narrates how an image of the *Nuestra Señora del Santísimo Rosario* in their convent church in Manila had earned a high reputation among city residents (cited in Blair and Robertson 1903). The image of the *Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia* (Our Lady of Peñafrancia) was brought to Bicol in 1712 and housed in a chapel, from which its fame spread throughout the Bicol provinces (Barcelona and Estepa 2004). In the absence of local craftsmen, the missionaries requested shipments of images from Mexico despite the prohibitive cost of renting a space in galleons plying the Manila-Acapulco route. The oldest Marian images in Luzon includes the *Nuestra Señora del Santísimo Rosario* of Orani in Bataan in 1581 and of Manaoag in Pangasinan in 1608; the *Nuestra Señora del Buen Succeso* (Our Lady of Good Happenings) in Parañaque in 1610; and the *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* (Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage) in Antipolo in 1632 (Santos 1983).

Despite the slow and uneven pace of the local population’s adoption of Christian beliefs and practices during the first century of the Spanish colonial period, Catholicism made headway especially in areas within the reach of Spanish missionaries. Colorful church rituals and the promotion of Marian images as “miraculous” were often deployed to entice the local population to live in towns (see Phelan 1959). Fr. Pedro Chirino, S.J. recounts how “not just one individual but whole towns started coming over to us [in Antipolo]” in order to live more closely to the reputed image of the *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* (Our Lady of Peace and
Good Voyage) (cited in Blair and Robertson 1903). In the town of Mabitac in Laguna province, the locals transferred their residences around an *ermita* (chapel) built by the Franciscans near the foot of Mt. Makiling to house a renowned Marian image. Any attempt to remove the image from the chapel since then proved futile as the townspeople vehemently protested (Santos 1983).

As conversion to Christianity became a conspicuous feature in colonial settlements throughout the country, lowland religious cultures served as “encounter-points” between pre-Hispanic religious beliefs and Catholicism. The missionaries mention the tendency of local populations to continue practicing indigenous religious practices even after their conversion. A small number of missionaries took an uncompromising stance toward this perceived “idolatry”. A significant number of missionaries, however, assumed a moderate approach that approved, tolerated or condemned certain practices on a case-to-case basis. In the latter approach, there was recognition of the need to respect legitimate cultural heterogeneity. This resonated with the dispositions of the Bourbon monarchy to operate on the notion of an *oikonomia*, where various cultural traditions account for different *naciones* within the ambit of one imperial power (Blanco 2009). One can also take the view that the moderate approach was expedient for missionaries and colonial administrators, especially since the small numbers in the colony prevented an overly strict implementation of colonial policy.

### 4.2.3. Marian piety in the Philippines as “local religion”

As mentioned in the previous section, the veneration of images of Christ, Mary and the saints tended to replace the pre-conquest practice of worshipping *larawans* (animist images). This predisposition toward iconic representations of...
divine power enabled the local population to identify with Christian images as replacements for their pre-conquest deities, as these were absorbed into their existing indigenous sacral iconography (Mojares 2002). This “insertion” of Christian iconography within existing templates of local religion is more apparent in accounts of “discoveries” of religious images. The Santo Niño (Holy Child), for instance, was “discovered” in 1565 by the crew of Legazpi’s fleet, as they obtained knowledge that the locals continued worshipping the image even after Magellan’s departure (Mojares 2002; Bautista 2010). There are similar “discovery stories” for Marian images: a member of Legazpi’s fleet, for instance, discovered the image of Nuestra Señora de Guía (Our Lady of Guidance) being worshipped by the Tagalogs near Manila as a diwata. The image of the Nuestra Señora de Caysasay (Our Lady of Caysasay, named after the town where it was found) is reported to have been fished out of Pansipit River in Batangas province in 1603, while the image of the Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria (Our Lady of Candles) was reportedly fished out of Iloilo River in 1587 (Barcelona and Estepa 2004).

This “seamless narrative of discovery” of religious images partly explains the continued existence of pre-colonial practices alongside Catholic prayers and rites. In the town of Pakil in Laguna province, devotees of the Nuestra Señora de los Sete Dolores (Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows) continue to perform the Turumba dance during the town’s patronal feast every September 15. The dance began in pre-colonial times as a “pagan” ritual that was continued even after the local population converted to Christianity (Santos 1983). The same may be said of the fertility dance in Obando in Bulacan province, where childless couples pray for the intercession of the Nuestra Señora de Salambao (Our Lady of Fishermen), San Pascual Baylon (a Spanish saint canonized in 1690) and Santa Clara (foundress of the Order of the Poor Clares) to
obtain a child. The ritualized dance is considered as a remnant of pre-colonial fertility rituals that were carried over to Catholicism.

The accounts mentioned above allude that the Marian dimension that was both elite-sponsored and popularly acclaimed was a strong dimension of Catholicism in the Philippines. Insofar as Marian piety in earlier phases of colonization was sufficiently localized, they assumed roles in advocating social cohesion and served as foundational elements in the establishment of pueblos. This is apparent in a number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novenarios that mixed official foundation narratives of towns, historical vignettes, pious legends and miraculous stories (Mojares 2002: 140). These foundational narratives become an important benchmark of communal identity so that acceptance of the Marian piety becomes an indicator of social belonging, and rejection of the same is construed as a challenge to communal identity and thus repelled. The devotional activities of lowland Christian populations, therefore, were not merely tools of “forced Christianization”, but repositories of indigenous traditions that were reconfigured with Christian elements.

The abovementioned historical observations may be synthesized into two analytical trajectories that betray the location of the Philippines within a broader constellation of cultural relationships and expectations. The first is the status of Marian piety in the Philippines during this period as “local religions” (see Christian 1981). There is sufficient data to show that at the friars, secular officials and townspeople are basically “of one mind” in the celebration of their fiestas, the recitation of their localized prayers and the veneration of their localized Marian images. The hierarchy, then, between “elite” and “lay” forms of religious is quite superfluous because these localized devotions influence the cultural trajectory of local communities regardless of the elite-lay distinction (see Christian 1981).

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These localized Marian piety in the Philippines are likewise strongly linked to the translocal “Ibero-Mediterranean polity” that characterized the religious temper of Spanish colonial expansionism. This means that, just as various localities incorporated Marian piety within their respective domains in the Philippines, townships in Mexico, Cuba, Peru and in the hinterlands of Spain also boasted their own Marian images, pious associations, patronal feasts and localized devotional expressions (see Stevens-Arroyo 1998). Consistent with this religious polity, prevalent missionary strategies in the Philippines during this period rested on the mutual reinforcement of localization of Marian piety and the internationalization of its influence within a wider territorial expanse (see Stevens-Arroyo 1998). The figure of the Virgin Mary became a focal point of Catholic devotionalism in this polity, where theological orthodoxy, inclination for the miraculous and strong affect blended to form the post-Reformation Baroque mentalité that gave local religion its parochial and global character (Stevens-Arroyo 1998). This represents a distinctly “Marian path to global Christianity” where localized forms of Marian piety in the hinterlands and urban regions in Spain and its colonies reveal the expansive reach of Baroque-style Catholicism as a form of “globalized” Christianity.

This local character of colonial Marian piety in Spanish Philippines thus needs to be framed within the prevailing “Ibero-Mediterranean polity” that characterized the religious temper of Iberian colonialism in general. Spanish colonial ambitions, based on the propagation of Christianity alongside the creation of various naciones within the empire (see Blanco 2009), established a panoply of religious practices that are distinctly local yet unabashedly Iberian in character. At best, the “global” character of Iberian Catholicism rests on its ability to provide a set of material and non-material heritage – cultural artifacts, calendrical cycles and
practices, among others -- to the colonies, which are always reconfigured and adapted to local realities. True to its character as local religions, the impressive array of Marian piety in its colonies are engaged in a creative tension between its elite-sponsored and mass-based character. The local population's reception of Marian piety in their respective territories thus enabled them to craft “narratives of belonging” that did not alienate them from their communities. This mode of “global Christianity” based on Iberian and Baroque forms of Catholicism was thus characterized by its openness to cultural specificity that encouraged “localized participation” on the part of colonial subjects.

4.3. Marian piety and the post-1896 Revolution crisis of Philippine Catholicism

The shifts in social and political configurations in the latter period of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines enacted certain changes that had significant impact on colonial administration in the islands. The British invasion of Manila (1762-1764) broke the uncalled hegemony of the Spanish empire in the Philippines and created trade opportunities with other Europeans (Corpuz 1989). After regaining Manila from British control, policy shifts initiated by the reformist tendencies of the Bourbon monarchy further changed the country’s status from a missionary and naval outpost in Asia to a “real”, albeit peripheral, actor in the emerging world economy. The transitions that marked this era placed the colonial Catholic Church within a new configuration of social forces and relationships that signaled the birth pangs of a new dispensation, profoundly affecting the institutional regulation of local religious practices in the colonies.
4.3.1. The colonial Catholic Church and the crisis of legitimacy in eighteenth-century Philippines

The Spanish monarchy passed from the hands of the Hapsburg to the Bourbon dynasty with the death of Charles II in 1701 and accession of Philip V to the throne. From the beginning, the spirit of reform inspired much of Bourbon policies; in the sphere of religion, Charles III commissioned his officials to reform Spanish Catholicism with the aim of “purifying” it of supposed “extravagances”. There were attempts to suppress local piety that were deemed “superstitious” despite the resistance of the common people who practiced them (Lynch 1989). An account of the Bourbon policy on religion in Spain illustrates the breadth of the changes that the Bourbon monarchy desired:

[translated into action this involved a campaign to suppress eucharistic plays, liturgical dances, flagellation, and a number of pilgrimages. The bureaucracy conducted an inquiry into the cofradías, or religious associations, their income and expenditure, and closed many of them on the grounds that they were mere social clubs. Public prayers for rain were prohibited because they might disturb the grain market…Permission was obtained from the pope to reduce the number of feast days. Many of these ‘reforms’ were simply the rhetoric of rationalization and an attempt to enroll the church in the modernizing programme; they also betrayed an unmistakable tendency to tell people what was good for them (Lynch 1989: 278).]

This reform policy not only affected religious life in Spain. Civil and ecclesiastical officials in the colonies were later enjoined to enact these same changes in their respective territorial dominions. Colonial authorities in Peru foiled a conspiracy by rebel forces to take over the town of Cuzco during the height of Corpus Christi celebrations in 1804, thus provoking moves to “reform” popular religion there (Cahill 1996). Ecclesiastical authorities in the Philippines started to frown upon dalits (prayers) and Pasyon texts (lyrical verses that narrate Christ’s passion) as carriers of mistaken, if not heretical, ideas about Catholic doctrine. They subsequently legislated
the promulgation of “official versions” that were deemed “safe” for devotional use (Blanco 2009).

As ecclesiastical policies started to closely monitor the devotional life of the local population, power struggles between the Filipino clergy and the Spanish friars created rifts within colonial Church administration. This widening rift was eventually exploited by the ilustrados, who severely resented the friars whom they thought were the perpetuators of obscurantism in the country. Marcelo Del Pilar wrote in 1889 that “[t]he friars in the Philippines have now come to be a symbol of obstruction to progress”. Jose Rizal exposed inherent contradictions between popular religion as it is practiced in the Philippines and sound Christianity and rational thought. He observes that

it is not the idea but the symbol that they [the Filipinos] venerate and worship; it is not the Mother of God but a statue or a painting that at one time represented a being pious and tender above all; now it has become a true existence (Rizal 1964: no page).

Rizal then faults the friars for preventing the Filipinos’ attainment of genuine spirituality, for they had everything to gain if the people remained in their present state of ignorance.

On a different front, another breed of religious sentiment was seething in the Tagalog countryside. Exemplified by Apolinario dela Cruz (or Hermano Pule, as he was commonly known to his followers), locally-acclaimed religious leaders among the peasantry combined conventional Catholicism, militant organizing and millenarian expectations for freedom from colonialism in developing a new way of engaging Spanish colonial authority. Hermano Pule founded the Cofradia de San Jose (Confraternity of St. Joseph, henceforth the Cofradia) in Lucban, Tayabas (at present Quezon province) in 1833. The Cofradia’s policy of not admitting Spaniards aroused
government suspicion, and in 1841 it was suppressed with the execution of Hermano Pule and several members on the slopes of Mt. Banahaw (Ikehata 1991). The case of the *Cofradia* is important because it exemplified a new method of engaging with colonial authority. Unlike previous uprisings instigated by *babaylans* (animist priestesses) in earlier periods, these nineteenth-century revolts did not merely advocate a return to animist worship but freedom from the yoke of colonialism altogether (Mojares 2006).

The *Cofradia* and similar groups represented a form of popular religion that was independent from the structures of institutional Catholicism, and their ideological base is constituted of folk beliefs that once sustained Christian missionary activity. This time, however, these beliefs assumed a life of their own and became the basis of resistance to colonial power (Blanco 2009; Ileto 1983). This arrangement allowed the local population to re-appropriate conventional Marian symbols within their own cultural notions, despite attempts by Spanish missionaries to “domesticate” her according to their own categories of passivity (see Brewer 2001).

In a similar vein, the nationalist *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (Philippine Independent Church, henceforth the IFI) significantly retained traditional Marian piety. Founded in Tondo, Manila in 1902 by Fr. Gregorio Aglipay, the IFI spread throughout Luzon and Visayas so that in 1903 roughly 25 percent of Christians in the Philippines were IFI members (Deats 1967; Schumacher 1979). In areas where IFI priests replaced Catholic priests, they promoted the same religious devotions that were already popular with the local population. In the town of Botolan, Zambales (northwest of Manila), the IFI for instance took over the management of local devotion to *Ina Poonbato* (Our Lady of the Rock), a form of Marian piety that has been popular among Christianized *Aetas* (aboriginal peoples). Fr. Gregorio Aglipay
himself wrote a *novenario* for *Virgen s a Balintawak* (Virgin in Balintawak),\(^{18}\) and while it functioned for many as a novena in honor of the Virgin Mary, he explained that the Virgin in Balintawak is the *Inang Bayan*, the Motherland (Ileto 1983).

As can be seen from the course of events, the Catholic Church’s privileged status in colonial society became increasingly challenged toward the end of Spanish colonialism. The end of the *Patronato Real* system simultaneously with Spanish colonial rule in 1898 effectively concluded the Catholic Church’s privileged position in public life. In 1902, Pope Leo XIII promulgated *Quae m ari s inico*, in which he gave specific instructions about the renewal of Catholicism in the Philippines. The Pope instructed the opening of more Catholic schools and seminaries, sought to reorganize parish life in urban centers and the countryside, warned priests and lay Catholics against schism and pleaded for unity in the Church (Salamanca 1968).

Although praising the *Patronato Real* and the efforts of the Spanish friars, Leo XIII in the apostolic constitution encouraged Filipino Catholics to move on and adapt to the exigencies of the new social order. The tone of the apostolic constitution “explicitly sanctioned the revolution in the Philippines, or at least the end of Spanish rule in the Philippines (and the establishment of American colonial rule)” (Smit 2011: 135). These instructions likewise signaled the beginning of Rome's direct administration of the internal affairs of the Philippine Catholic Church, a situation desired by Vatican ecclesiastics who earlier also crafted a policy for the reorganization of the Catholic Church in India (Smit 2011). The Vatican's subsequent intervention in negotiating with the American insular government eventually reversed

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\(^{18}\) *Balintawak*, a *barangay* currently in Quezon City in Metro Manila, is the purported site of the beginning of the 1896 Revolution against Spain.
the tide in favor of institutional damage control for the Catholic Church there after the setbacks it experienced during the Philippine Revolution in 1896 (Aguilos 1999).

4.3.2. The reform of the Philippine Catholic Church during the American colonial period

The publication of *Quae m ari s inico* spelled an especially significant development in Philippine church history because it was during this time that institutional Catholicism itself had emerged from a series of ideological struggles in Western Europe. The Enlightenment (specifically its cultural manifestations in France) and its socio-political expressions like liberalism and secular republicanism undermined the status of traditional Christianity in ways that put the Catholic Church on the defensive position. Losing its political domains (the Papal States) in 1870 and its influence in emerging secular democracies, the nineteenth-century Catholic Church sought to establish a spiritual hegemony that paved the way for the centralization of ecclesiastical power at the hands of Vatican officials directly under the Pope (McSweeney 1980).

The new non-Spanish religious orders, along with the emerging generation of Filipino secular clergy, were also at the helm of these efforts toward a “Catholic Restoration”. There were a total of seven such new religious orders which from 1905-1915 alone, while new ones continually came in throughout the American colonial period. The new religious orders adopted more flexible missionary strategies as compared to their Spanish friar counterparts and encouraged existing forms of Marian piety while introducing new ones as well. It was particularly the Jesuits who “proved

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19 The 7 religious orders that arrived between 1905 to 1915 are: Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer – CSoR (1905); Mill Hill Missionaries – MHM (1906); Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – CICM (1907); Missionaries of the Sacred Heart – MSC (1908); Society of the Divine Word – SVD (1908); Brotherhood of the Christian Schools – FSC (1911); and the oblates of St. Joseph – OSJ (1915) (Schumacher 1979).
to be the greatest factor in the Church's transition from a Hispanized culture to one which was becoming heavily influenced by American mores, customs and language” (Aguilos 1999: 209).

The importation of new forms of Marian piety by these new religious orders melded comfortably with existing devotional practices in the country, although local Marian piety during the Spanish colonial period differed significantly from its post-Spanish counterparts in a number of ways. First, as part of the Catholic Church’s campaign to impose spiritual hegemony over its laity, nineteenth-century Marian piety is unambiguously orthodox in orientation and regulated by the Church’s clerical elite. Nineteenth-century Marian piety has served the cause of fostering a unified front against a secularist society and displayed a strong translocal character. In contrast to expressions of local religion in Mexico, Peru, and the Philippines during the Hapsburg monarchy, nineteenth-century Marian piety articulated doctrinal stances that assured its link with the Catholic Church as a global entity. As the regulation of these forms of Marian piety lies at the domain of clerical authority, there are limits to the extent that such devotions can be localized.

Twentieth-century Filipino Catholics accepted these new forms of Marian piety into their communities despite the perceived differences noted above. For Catholic ecclesiastical leaders, there was still the issue of how to deal with local forms of Marian piety. They realized that a comprehensive approach to reform was important for these local forms of piety as the introduction of “universalized” ones. The issue was how to align these local forms of Marian piety with the orientations of post-Spanish Catholicism in the Philippines. Ecclesiastical officials found a solution in the practice of canonical coronation, where official recognition of historically significant Marian images is given by the Pope (Buono 1997). These canonically-
crowned Marian images became a source of honor for residents of these towns, as they took pride in the recognition given by the Pope to their locally-acclaimed patron. A total of thirty-three canonical coronations have already taken place in the Philippines. The earliest one was performed in 1907 with the canonical coronation of *Nuestra Señora del Santíssimo Rosario de La Naval* (Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary of La Naval) in Manila, while the last one was performed in 2012 with the canonical coronation of *Nuestra Señora del Pilar* (Our Lady of the Pilar) in the province of Cavite. In total, canonically crowned Marian images are found in ten places in Metro Manila, nineteen locations in Luzon (excluding Metro Manila), three in the Visayas, and one in Mindanao.

This brief historical overview has presented the prevailing *mentalité* that characterized two different moments in the engagement between Christianity and local cultures in the Philippines. The effective use of ritual substitutes to bridge the chasm between Christianity and local belief systems strongly suggests that syncretism was common during the earlier phase of missionary activity. Furthermore, the process of syncretization leaned toward local structures rather than toward Western (Christian) cultural forms (Mojares 2006; Blanco 2009). This means that the patterns of elite regulation of religion in the Philippines engaged in creative syntheses of pre-Hispanic beliefs and practices with its Christian counterparts in order to craft an accessible form of Christian practice for the local population. This adaptation of local frameworks of knowledge with Christian expectations is particularistic in nature, owing to the Hapsburg monarchy’s openness to local traditions (Stevens-Arroyo 1998).

Quite different from this is the form of elite management that took root after the Spanish colonial period, when the Catholic Church in the Philippines assumed
direct relations with Vatican bureaucracy. This came amidst the growing influence of the IFI (commonly known as Aglipayans) and Protestant Christianity in the country, both of which were perceived as threats by Catholic ecclesiastical officials. The Aglipayans claimed almost a fourth of Filipino Christians during the first five years of the establishment of the nationalist church (De Achutegui & Bernard 1960). The Protestants were quite eager to “Christianize” the Filipinos, partly because some of them seriously doubted if Catholics are really Christians. This belief was shared by almost all pioneer Protestant missionaries in the Philippines, who lambasted the ignorance of the masses regarding Biblical teachings, their “worship of idols” (images of saints in Catholic churches), and their practice of “pagan rituals” and superstition (Clymer 1980).

As ecclesiastical elites in nineteenth-century Europe saw the promotion of popular piety as a bulwark against a perceived “atheistic” secularist wave (see McSweeney 1980), Catholic ecclesiastical officials likewise utilized Marian piety as a tool to combat the challenges of an emerging religious pluralism in the country. This meant that local Marian piety that flourished during the Spanish colonial period had to be “recast” within the new social order with the intention of serving new institutional goals. Bishop Jorge Barlin (1972 [1910]) of Nueva Caceres (in the Bicol region, southeast of Manila), for instance remarked that the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary, being well-established in his diocese, will “in the future [be] the surest and the most efficacious defense of the Faith and Religion against all the attacks of heretics and schismatics” (p. 293). The new religious orders also prioritized the defense of Marian piety in their mission work in rural towns, alongside the restoration of parish life and the “regularization of invalid marriages” performed by Aglipayan priests or Protestant missionaries (Boland 1982; Dela Goza & Cavanna 1985).
What is particularly interesting in this case is that the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary is its later involvement in Catholic apologetics against Aglipayans and Protestants, which demonstrates its transformation as one of the Catholic church's defense strategies during this period. The same may be said of the deployment of Marian piety in the restoration of parish renewal efforts against competitor religious groups that already laid claim to people's allegiance. In both these exemplary cases, the transformation of Marian piety becomes a significant feature of institutional self-introspection and change, as it assumes a definitive role in post-Spanish restoration efforts in the country.

4.4. Marian piety and the postwar quest for Filipino national identity

The changes resulting from American colonial policy in the Philippines were already apparent a decade after the cession of the Philippines to the United States in 1898. Majority of the social institutions in the Philippines during this period had already adapted to American-style lifestyle and values. Instruction in the English language displaced Spanish as the lingua franca of elites, coinciding with economic expansion that increasingly relied on English as a medium of communication. American firms started investing in various parts of the country, overtaking British, French and Spanish investments during this period. The Philippines in due course was absorbed into the American way of life, which left a significant impact on Filipino social identity even after independence from the United States in 1946.

4.4.1. Marian piety and the conflation of Catholic and Filipino national identity in the 1950's

As the institution that represented the old Spanish order, the Catholic Church initially found it difficult to adjust to American-style political system in the
Philippines. After initial setbacks, the Catholic Church hierarchy accommodated itself to American colonial rule. The bishops utilized political opportunities offered by democracy in mobilizing support for political candidates that were sympathetic to Catholic interests. After the liberation of Manila in 1945, the bishops formed the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO), which initially intended to provide aid to those affected by the atrocities of World War II. It eventually became the mouthpiece of the bishops when they intend to speak collectively on social and religious issues. The CWO transformed itself as the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in 1968 and henceforth represented the “official” Catholic Church in the Philippines (Santos 1997).

Discerning the vibrancy of Marian piety in their respective dioceses, the bishops were aware of the influence of these devotional forms in uniting Catholics throughout the country under one institutional front. In certain instances they used Marian piety to reinforce Catholic values as the moral foundation of Philippine society, a facet of rampart-building efforts of the “Catholic culture” that intends to counteract the liberal and Protestant tendencies brought about by American colonialism. In the previous section I discussed some examples of how Catholic ecclesiastical authorities deployed Marian piety in the task of redefining the institutional church's role in post-revolutionary social order. In this section I further illustrate this point in the case of the National Marian Congress of 1954, which spelled certain implications in understanding the dynamics that led to the conflation of Filipino and Catholic identities in the Philippine public sphere.

The strategy to conflating notions of Filipino nationalism and national identity with the country’s Catholic heritage assured that the character of public life in the Philippines will remain congenial to the interests of institutional Catholicism. The
National Marian Congress of 1954 was a manifestation of the use of Marian piety in the conspicuous display of the nation’s “Catholic identity”. This grand event held in Luneta Park in Manila was attended by the Papal Nuncio to the Philippines, bishops and priests from various ecclesiastical provinces throughout the country, government officials at different levels of the bureaucracy led by no less than President Ramon Magsaysay himself. Towards the end of the Congress, Pope Pius XII, through a radio message, urged Filipinos to be faithful to their Catholic heritage, reminding them of the role of the Philippines as a “Christian nation” in the Far East.

The National Marian Congress of 1954 is a significant event in Philippine history because it was a conspicuous display of the ecclesiastically-sponsored link between institutional Catholicism and Filipino national identity. Despite the supposedly secular character of Philippine politics, the Marian Congress of 1954 sought to uphold Catholicism’s self-allocated role as the arbiter of moral truth and a significant player in the crafting Filipino national identity. Marian piety thus assumed a prominent role in this conflation of Catholicism and Filipino identity by acting as a link that binds historic Spanish Catholicism and the present configuration of ecclesiastical power in a seamless narrative of historical development.

The Marian Congress of 1954 is also significant because it became the platform for completing the transition from the logic of polycentric to translocal production of religious meaning. As I explained in the previous section, Marian piety during the Spanish colonial period assumed the character of local religions, but it had to give way to universalized forms of Marian piety introduced during the American colonial period. In this context, the Marian Congress of 1954 was an attempt to incorporate Marian piety into the center of Philippine ecclesiastical life, thus making it more amenable to institutional control and regulation. There are strong indications
that the transition from local to universalized expressions of Marian piety was consistent with “rampart-building” that characterized post-Hispanic Catholicism and worked to unify discrete tendencies into a “singularist” frame of reference. In this emerging “singularist” frame, the Philippine bishops are at the helm of regulating the “proper” exercise of religious piety and defining the boundaries of acceptable religious practice. The character of post-Hispanic Marian piety in the Philippines thus reveals the ongoing institutional differentiation between religion and the rest of public life, and the separation between lay and specialist accounts of religious practice (see Bourdieu 1987). Religious specialists, operating within the confines of institutional opportunities and constraints, aim to alter lay religion to conform to standardized conceptions of the sacred.

4.4.2. Marian piety and the pastoral custodianship of democracy in the 1970’s

The decade of the 1970’s was pivotal for Philippine politics with the imposition of martial law by then President Ferdinand Marcos in 1972. The relationship between Marcos and the Catholic church hierarchy experienced a fall-out when a number of church personnel were labeled as “Communist instigators” and subjected to intimidation and warrantless arrests. Several priests were either detained or deported (if they are foreigners) because they were “instigating civil unrest” (Youngblood 1978). The assassination of Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. on 21 August 1983 further aggravated the weakening legitimacy of martial law.

The Philippine bishops’ embattled position vis-à-vis the Marcos regime’s heavy-handed treatment of church personnel enabled the crafting of a novel articulation of the Catholic Church’s role in public life. Drawing from principles of social justice and inviolable defense of human rights, the bishops saw themselves as
the custodians of Philippine democracy as it was attacked by the “immoral” imposition of martial law. This is an important development in Philippine Catholic religious discourse because it spelled a method by which the church as an institution can engage in public life (see Casanova 1994). Again recognizing the immense influence of Marian piety, the bishops articulated their critique of the ills of Philippine society by calling for another Marian Year in 1985. The CBCP’s Pastoral Exhortation on the Marian Year, 1985 mentions that

1985 seems to promise perhaps even more privation, more widespread unemployment, increased inflation, greater hardships, with no end of the tunnel in sight. For so many who are suffering from difficulties and uncertainties, burdened by injustice and crushed by violations of human rights, the foreseeable future seems to bring little prospect of relief.

Such bleak conditions, however, provide an opportunity for the Filipino people to invoke Mary’s intercession and stressed the need for “conversion, life-offering, reparation”. In addition, the bishops explained that the Marian Year will also give the church the opportunity to deepen attempts to renew Marian piety in accordance with Vatican II Council’s teaching.

The situation became tense in 1986 as “cracks” in the authority structure of martial law opened venues for dissent that reached nationwide proportions. The CBCP, in a strongly-worded Post-Election Statement on 13 February 1986 expressed its collective withdrawal of support for the Marcos regime and called for non-violent resistance that led to the “People Power Revolt” in February 1986. Occurring only two months after the conclusion of the 1985 Marian Year, the demonstrations along the streets of major thoroughfare EDSA saw the conspicuous use of Marian

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20 EDSA is an acronym for “Epifanio delos Santos Avenue”, a major thoroughfare in Metro Manila. This was the site of demonstrations against martial law in 1986. This is the reason why the “People Power Revolt” is also widely known as “EDSA Revolution” in the Philippines.
iconography and piety in public space. Available documentary and visual data show that the “People Power Revolt” was dominated by religious symbolism, and a sizeable number of demonstrators believed that the Virgin Mary and the Santo Niño were “leading the procession” against armed tanks (Bulatao 1992: 284). The demonstrations thus became an overtly religious form of protest in the people’s ostentatious use of Catholic devotional symbols like religious icons, rosaries, and flowers. “The use of the Santo Niño and Marian images… demonstrates that People Power was as much an experience and expression of religiosity, as it was an event of social and political upheaval” (Bautista 2010b: 167). Because of the overtly religious nature of the demonstrations in EDSA, the transition to democracy assumed religious significance as the ecclesiastical elites interpreted this as the triumph of the Virgin Mary’s intercession. The then Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin inaugurated the Shrine of Mary, Queen of Peace (Our Lady of EDSA) in 1989 to commemorate Mary’s intercession in the success of the “People Power Revolt” in 1986. At present, the Shrine of Mary, Queen of Peace is a fully functional Catholic chapel that commemorates the “People Power Revolt” every 25th of February each year.

The participation of church figures like Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin and the visibility of Catholic religious icons in the “People Power Revolt” worked in favor of increasing the Catholic Church’s moral ascendancy. Using this increased clout in public life, Catholic ecclesiastical officials worked to reestablish its strong ties with the new government under President Corazon Aquino. The post-martial law government appeared to be favorably disposed toward the Catholic Church, as some cabinet secretaries and key government appointments were given to individuals who are closely identified with church interests. The allusion to religious values was once again utilized in calls for the resignation of then President Joseph Estrada in 2001 on
accounts of betrayal of public trust. People Power II (commonly referred to as EDSA Dos) was also held at the grounds facing Our Lady of EDSA shrine and widely participated by Catholic groups. In both instances the CBCP assumed the role of a social critic and mobilizer of political action; in both instances they also resorted to a vibrant practice of Marian piety in supporting political mobilization to safeguard purportedly democratic traditions and values.

There is a negative side to all these, because in exchange for its increasing presence even in matters pertaining to the state, the Catholic church hierarchy garnered criticism for its “politicking”, that is, unduly influencing the exercise of public governance to benefit ecclesiastical interests. In certain cases, bishops had to contend with the secular character of Philippine politics especially when state policies clash with established Catholic ideals.

4.4.3. Marian piety and opposition to “the tides of secularism” in the 1990’s

One of the instances that saw the bitter dispute between the Catholic church hierarchy and the government is in the issue of population control and reproductive health. As a matter of established doctrine, the Catholic Church is against all forms of artificial contraception, as articulated in the 1967 encyclical Humanae vitae of Pope Paul VI banning all forms of artificial methods of birth control. The Philippine bishops have generally toed this line and have asked themselves to block any attempts to legalize widespread access and distribution of artificial birth control. President Marcos successfully thwarted the bishops’ lobbying against artificial contraception during the period of martial law, the “war with contraceptives” again raged on after the restoration of democracy in 1986. The Department of Health in 1992 moved to make artificial means of birth control more accessible with the
endorsement of then President Fidel Ramos. Attempts have been initiated in the Philippine Congress since then to enact a national policy on population control and reproductive health: House Bill (HB) 8110 in 1999, during the incumbency of President Joseph Estrada; HB 4110 in 2002, HB 3773 in 2005, HB 5043 in 2008 during the incumbency of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo; and HB 4244 during the incumbency of President Benigno Aquino, Jr.

The Catholic Church, acting on its self-allocated role as the arbiter of moral truth in Philippine society, perceived these proposed legislation as attempts to adopt secularist values at the expense of established Christian principles. In the face of the looming passage of the reproductive health bill, the Catholic church hierarchy has thus not hesitated to invoke Marian symbols to avert an impending “crisis of morality”. When the CBCP issued Love is Life: A Pastoral Letter on the Population Control Activities of the Philippine Government and Planned Parenthood Associations in 1990, the bishops invoked “the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Life” in their condemnation of abortion and artificial family planning methods. The invocation of “Mother of Life” betrays the bishops’ stance that any attempt to introduce a “contraceptive mentality” among the population works against life and should be opposed. Giving into pressures from Catholic bishops, the proposed legislation did not flourish under the administrations of Ramos, Estrada and Macapagal-Arroyo. It was ratified by both chambers of Congress in the current administration of Benigno S. Aquino III, who took office in 2010.

In the course of the debates, the bishops invoked the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which was declared as the “patron of the unborn child” and “patron of
the Pro-Life Movement” in the United States. What is interesting in this move is that the choice of Our Lady of Guadalupe alludes to the eventual legalization of abortion, even though all the proposed legislations on reproductive health in Congress specifically outlaw abortion. In 2010, the CBCP approved the elevation of the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Makati City in Metro Manila to the rank of a national shrine. This event is hailed by pro-life organizations as a milestone in the campaign against the “anti-life” and “anti-family” reproductive health bills then pending in Congress. Since 2010, the Archdiocese of Manila also directed all Catholic parishes to pray the Oratio Imperata for the Respect of All Human Life in 2010, again with a clear invocation of the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Once again, the bishops and members of pro-life groups called on congressmen to junk the Reproductive Health (RH) bill in 2012, pointing out that the date of the congressional vote on the measure (12 December) is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The RH bill was approved for second reading by a slim majority (113 voted in favor, 104 voted against, and 3 abstained), and was eventually signed into law by President Aquino on 21 December 2012.

4.5. Concluding synthesis: Marian piety and the changing character of Philippine society

In this chapter I provided a broad historical synthesis of processes by which Marian piety became a focal cultural identifier and source of individual and institutional identities. I highlighted various agents in the production of discourses and practices throughout four centuries of thriving Marian piety. The historical synthesis

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21 An article posted in the website of Priests for Life explained the relationship between the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the present-day struggle against abortions. The article mains that the present-day “altar” where human beings are sacrificed are abortion clinics, and thus the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe is important to end legally-sanctioned abortion in the United States and elsewhere.
provided in this chapter demonstrates that Marian piety had been appropriated by different agents with different aims throughout history. During the Spanish colonial period, the friars controlled syncretistic adaptations in order to assure its alignment with orthodox Catholic doctrine. They never had the monopoly of regulating prayers and devotional practices, however, as “charismatic leaders” like Apolinario Dela Cruz utilized the Catholic and Marian heritage of previous centuries in crafting expressions of religious identity that differed from conventional Catholicism. In the wake of a crisis of legitimacy, institutional agents in post-Hispanic Catholicism acted to reassert the place of the church in Philippine public life. One of the means they employed was the flourishing Marian piety in various local communities, which they recast to fir the exigencies of new political and social arrangements.

As I discussed extensively in this chapter, religious elites have periodically utilized Marian piety in asserting the public character of Catholicism in the Philippines. Marian piety in the period after the transition from Spanish to American colonial rule has been appropriated in various ways. It was deployed by ecclesiastical elites to foster “Catholic Restoration”; the aspiration for a “Catholic nation”; the restoration of democracy; and the fight for the protection of human life against perceived ideological threats. During the 1954 Marian Congress, ecclesiastical elites deployed the figure of Mary as a marker of one’s Filipino and Catholic identity, uncritically conflating the Catholic and nationalist heritage to produce acceptable modes of social identity that rested on Catholic values. During the 1986 “People Power Revolt”, his deployment of Marian symbolism was again utilized in articulating the Filipino people’s quest for freedom. As with the previous case, this conflation eliminated real differences among the “Filipino people” and uncritically subjected nationalist aspirations under a prevailing religious discourse. This tendency
is again deployed in the responding to calls for the enactment of a reproductive health policy, where ecclesiastical officials resort to Marian piety in campaigning against what they regard as “the culture of death”.

As seen above, Marian piety acted as a legitimizing agent for elite-sponsored discourses and practices. This is not uncontested, as contending interests also make use of Marian piety to justify alternative claims. This explains why Marian piety in the Philippines articulated a plurality of voices and interests. Various claims for legitimacy produce different, sometimes even conflicting, forms of Marian piety throughout the country’s history of involvement with Christianity. In particular, it was shown how postwar articulations of Marian piety supported institutional Catholicism’s claims as the arbiter of moral truth and its status as a public religion in the Philippines (Casanova 1994). From this two generalizations may be made. First, the character of Catholicism as a public religion gives it a privileged status, which can be utilized to articulate alternative visions of society. In the case of the Philippines, the involvement of the Catholic Church during martial law exemplified this engagement with political authority that provided a viable alternative to a situation that is widely regarded as problematic. Second, the public character of Catholicism is likewise discernible in the identification of Catholic interests with national interests, which leads to the conflation of Filipino identity with its Catholic roots. When taken to its extreme, this tendency results to the misrecognition of differences and “explains away” the secular character of Philippine public life. This is especially true when ecclesiastical elites propose Catholic principles as the only acceptable standard in crafting public policy, thus alienating non-Catholics from policy discussions that will inevitably affect their own interests as well.

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CHAPTER 5
THE PERPETUAL HELP DEVOTION AND THE EXIGENCIES
OF URBAN MODERNITY

5.1. Setting the context: the story of two religious processions

In the previous chapter, I provided a historical synthesis of Marian piety in the Philippines in order to provide a framework through which an assessment of contemporary devotional practices may be made. I demonstrated how practices introduced by Spanish friars “latched onto” pre-existing belief systems and structures of early Filipino communities and resulted to a distinct combination of Western and indigenous influences that compose Philippine Christianity. In this chapter I investigate this process of “latching” in contemporary popular religion by tracing how changes in the surroundings of the shrine have altered the patterning of experiences of the sacred by institutional agents, of devotees and other stakeholders in the area. In accomplishing this task I consider three specific dimensions: territorialization, diversification, and de-territorialization. Hervieu-Leger (2002: 99) emphasized the necessity of looking into “territorial modalities of the communization of religion” (emphasis in the original), which refers to the ways by which religious communities form relationships with the conditions where it takes root. I focus on these “territorial modalities” and emphasize how the Perpetual Help shrine rooted itself within the rural conditions of pre-war Baclaran and how the shrine both induced and was incorporated into urbanizing processes in the years following 1948.

I continue the discussion by looking into various processes of diversification. The primary focus in this section is to highlight the tensions associated with the increase of social actors and institutions in Baclaran during the last two decades. I emphasize the religious dimension so far as Baclaran has seen the increasing
presence of Muslims who migrated from Mindanao. The relationships between state, religious and commercial actors in this case present opportunities to unpack the ways by which pluralism is negotiated in the Manila metropolis. The notion of pluralism is a significant point of departure because urban spaces are potential sites of various forms of polarization (Sassen 1991). The last section shifts focus from territoriality to notions of movement and social imaginaries and their implications in the way the Perpetual Help Devotion is understood not only within the confines of the shrine compound but also in its broader global context.

Following this line of inquiry, this chapter provides a conceptualization of religious practices in contemporary Philippine society by looking at the spatial dimensions of popular religion. This spatial dimension especially examines urban processes in the Manila metropolis. The Perpetual Help shrine’s appeal among devotees especially after 1948 (the year of the inauguration of the Perpetual Novena devotion) occasions a deeper assessment of dynamics associated with shrines as geographical and material representations of the sacred. For the most part during the year, devotional activities are performed within the confines of shrines. It is significant for the purposes of this study to note that religious devotion has contributed in processes that led to the transformations of the shrine’s surroundings.

Within Metro Manila, the National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Baclaran and the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo district in Manila are two shrines that exemplify this trend. The latter is famous for its annual procession of the image of the Black Nazarene every January 9. The Black Nazarene procession has been a regular feature in Philippine dailies every year because of the huge turnout of devotees, as well as the record of casualties. In 2010, for instance, casualties reached 2 deaths and 400 injuries (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 1.10.2010).
When I arrived at the Black Nazarene shrine on 9 January 2010 for fieldwork, I saw that a portion of Quezon Boulevard, the main thoroughfare at the church’s right side, was already closed to traffic. Carrozas (decorated floats) carrying different images of the Black Nazarene move smoothly: some of these are owned by individual devotees or local chapters of the Hijos de Nazareno (Sons of the Nazarene), a lay-based association spreading the devotion to the Black Nazarene (See Plate 17).

At about 4:00 p.m., the number of devotees noticeably increased, as banners of different Hijos de Nazareno local chapters preceded the procession, indicating that the procession of the replica image from the church was about to arrive. The replica image is borne by a large float with a thick rope in front that devotees use to steer the direction of the procession. The float can accommodate as much as ten people, but I saw countless numbers of devotees constantly trying to climb the float to touch the image (See Plate 18). As the replica image neared the spot where I stood, the current
of human movement became quite strong and one can really be steered away by the crowds. The number of bystanders significantly diminished after the image passed through the street; I surmised that those who waited along the sidewalks eventually joined the procession.

![Plate 18. The replica image of the Black Nazarene as it passed through Carlos Palanca Sr. Street in Manila. Devotees are seen struggling to climb the *carroza* in order to touch the image, mostly in fulfillment of a vow (Photo taken by the researcher on 9 January 2010).](image)

Six months later, I witnessed another procession, this time for the feast day of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Baclaran on June 27. In the spirit of a Filipino *fiesta*, bands were playing loud music on the shrine’s driveway and parking lot, and dance troupes featuring colorful attire were merrily dancing with the beat of the music. The increase in the number of devotees became quite noticeable at 4:00 p.m., and by the time the 6:00 feast-day Mass ended, the crowds already spilled outside the church. An announcement was made for devotees to proceed to the driveway for the start of the procession. The devotees heeded the announcement, and in a short while candles were distributed as adorned *carrozas* of different saints left the shrine grounds.
As the procession progressed, volunteers carrying megaphones led in the recitation of the rosary. The *carroza* bearing the image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, well-lit and adorned with roses and jasmine flowers, stood amidst the throng of devotees (See Plate 19). The devotees walked through nearby streets and alleys as their candle light filled the commercial area as merchants looked on (See Plate 20). On its way back to the shrine, the procession also passed through a strip of night clubs, which by that time were starting to take in customers. As the procession passed through, the bright red lights from the night clubs were switched off, and a few ladies from the night clubs went out to witness the procession.

*Plate 19.* The *carroza* carrying the image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help as it was being carried outside the church compound (Photo taken by researcher on 27 June 2010)
Using these two contemporary vignettes of religious practice in different parts of the Manila metropolis, I intend to demonstrate how the interaction between “modern” and “urban” processes provides a conceptual gateway that enables a nuanced assessment of the configuration of religion into the cultural conditions of modernity. Historical studies cite the influence of religion in crafting urban forms (see Jameson 1997; Lilley 2004a, 2004b). Jameson (1997) argues that the Greek polis alluded to the public character of religion as well as its separation from other dimensions of urban life. Comparing ancient Athens in Greece and Bhaktapur in India, he pinpoints the association between politics and religion in the desire to construct temples near civic places, but also highlights the rarity of ritual practices with regard to the moving of the images of gods in streets (processions). Such intermittencies in the Greek case derive from the desire to protect powers associated with sacred images; to a lesser extent it is also meant to “keep the sacred in place”.

Plate 20. Procession during the feast day of Our Mother of Perpetual Help on 27 June 2010. The procession had just left the church and devotees were traversing Redemptorist Road on the church compound’s left side (Photo taken by researcher on 27 June 2010).
In the “modern city”, this distinction between places of worship and its surrounding space is carried to its logical extreme with the near-complete separation of the sacred from the secular, and religious buildings as “officially sacred” edifices are distinguished from the secular space that surrounds it (see Tuan 1978; Kong 2001).

5.2. Popular religion and urban modernity: incorporating the Perpetual Help shrine “into the center”

The logic governing the “incorporation toward the center” (see Mouzelis 1999) refers to processes by which practices at the periphery are transformed by being taken into the scope of urban life. This entails a closer look at the urbanization of Manila and its environs, a historical path that started with the imprinting of colonial urban forms in Manila since 1571 (Reed 1978). The privileging of Manila during the Spanish colonial period initiated the rural-urban rift that affected the economic, cultural and social relationship between the poblaciones (towns) and the ciudad (city): by the mid-eighteenth century, the economically privileged sector of affluent Spaniards, Chinese mestizos, Filipinos and Europeans mostly lived in Manila (Camagay 1987). When the Americans came to Manila in 1898, they worked to imprint Manila with distinct American influences. Their proposed groundwork insisted on the need to develop Manila’s vast terrain outside Intramuros, which coincided with the promulgation of Act. No. 1869 in 1908 that divided Manila into two districts, the first (north) district covering Tondo, Binondo, San Nicolas and Intramuros; and the second (south) district including Ermita, Malate, Paco, Pandacan, Santa Ana, Quiapo, Sampaloc, San Miguel and Santa Cruz (Torres 2010).

A nuanced discussion of processes that incorporated Baclaran into urban life necessitates revisiting this rural-urban rift. This rift is important because the social
imaginary underlying the foundation of the Perpetual Help shrine itself is steeped in
the urban-rural divide that defined the Philippine landscape. Situated 10 kilometers
south of Manila, Baclaran was then a predominantly fishing village outside Manila
and its adjacent towns. In this regard, the differences between Manila’s urban milieu
and Baclaran’s backwater surroundings demonstrate the rural-urban divide that
dominated the Philippine geographical landscape during this period.

5.2.1. The Perpetual Help shrine and Baclaran’s rural beginnings

The Redemptorists accepted the pastoral care of the church of Nuestra Señora
de los Remedios (Our Lady of Remedies) in Malate district (Manila) in 1913, but they
constantly felt a certain discomfort as there was a prevalent view among them that
parish administration was against the spirit of the Redemptorist rule (Baily 1976).
This belief found strong resonance with the historical development of the
congregation itself. Founded in Naples (presently in southern Italy), the Redemptorist
congregation was established with the intent of providing accessible sacramental
ministries to people who lived far from urban areas (Orlandi 1996). The founder
Alphonsus Liguori developed a strong inclination for mission work in rural villages in
order to fill the lack of clerical manpower in far-flung areas, an inclination that was
eventually incorporated into Redemptorist institutional identity. This explains why,
throughout much of their history, the Redemptorists insisted on the precedence of rural
over urban forms of ministry. This explains their reticence of the pioneer
Redemptorists in the Philippines regarding their pastoral assignment in Malate
district, which they deemed “too urban”. Instead of an urban parish, a mission base far
removed from the exigencies of urban life was preferred by the majority of the
pioneer missionaries.
The first Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran, inaugurated in 1932, fits the ideal preconception of a rural mission church that the pioneer Redemptorists favored. Built with wooden frames and rather small, the shrine and monastery suited the predominantly fishing village landscape that Baclaran exemplified. The Redemptorists conducted mission work among the fisher folk in the area, learning Tagalog so that they become proficient in giving sermons in that language (Maguire 2005). From 1932 to the end of World War II leading to 1948 (the year when the Perpetual Novena devotion was inaugurated in the shrine), the Perpetual Help shrine took root within this fledgling fishing community. Records from the Chronicles show that most of the attendees of the Perpetual Help shrine’s activities during this time were the local fisher folk. In an entry dated 24 December 1947, the Chronicles mention that

\[w\]e had the usual midnight Mass here in Baclaran. The church was crowded out by 10:30 PM mostly by the barrio folk, so that quite a number who came in cars were forced to go elsewhere. The church has grown too small for the congregation that attends it.

While there is acknowledgement of the increasing number of devotees attending the religious services in the shrine, it can be seen that the scope of the shrine’s influence has remained within the barrio folk, the residents of the district.

On the part of the Perpetual Help shrine’s administrators, the territorialization process entails the prospect of facing the challenges that came with life in a rural district, which mostly centered on coping with natural disasters and integrating with the local community. The Perpetual Help shrine was exposed to the hazards of typhoons, as the property is situated near the shores of Manila Bay. The priests identified closely with the recurring predicament of the resident fisher folk who had to brave storm urges from the sea. There are, in fact, several references in the
Chronicles pertaining to the reeling effects of storm surges. A typhoon on 16 October 1934, for instance, caused some wooden boards and iron sheets to be blown off from the church and caused slight damage to altar linens and vestments in the sacristy. On 20 July 1947, the Chronicles reported that high tides (this time without any storm waves) were “eating into” the monastery’s backyard.

The more persistent feature of the territorialization process, however, involves the task of integrating with the life of the local community. The decision of the Redemptorists to transfer to Baclaran exposed them to a number of issues pertaining to rural life, among which concerns property ownership arising from tenancy. The Chronicles record a series of events in 1936 regarding legal challenges posed to the rightful ownership of the land where the shrine and monastery stood. In an entry dated 13 August 1936, the Chronicles mention that majority of the residents were threatened with eviction as they refused to pay the increasingly prohibitive rates imposed by the Philippine Bank, the entity that then managed the entire “Baclaran Estate”. The matter progressed into a violent confrontation between the tenants and the police:

Today a gang of wreckers escorted by Constabulary arrived at Baclaran Hacienda to evict 6 tenants, but the angry people massed across the road 2000 strong, threatening violence if the eviction was proceeded with, whereupon the wreckers and constabulary by order of [President] Quezon withdrew (entry dated 16 September 1936).

The property where the shrine stood was initially unaffected by this controversy, and the tenants expressed their intent to spare the priests of any harm (Chronicles, entry dated 1 September 1936). But the shrine was not exempted from threats of expropriation; in an entry dated 20 September 1936, the Chronicles reported a lengthy account of this impending threat:

Very Rev. Fr. Superior received today from […] the Presidente of Paranaque Municipality a copy of the claim to be lodged against the Redemptorist Fathers in the Court of First Instance by the municipality.
re: the piece of land occupied by the Redemptorist Fathers. It is claimed that the BACLARAN Hacienda was acquired illegally by the Church in 1632, and that therefore the Archbishop of Manila could not solidly give to the Redemptorist Fathers the perpetual use of the part of the hacienda. Thus it is claimed, the Redemptorists have no legal right to occupy the land on which their church and monastery stands.

While this issue eventually died down, this episode demonstrates the precarious nature of land ownership that was replicated in various rural areas throughout the Philippines at this time. Situated within the vagaries of rural life, the priests confronted these problems that brought them into close contact with the local people. This also succinctly represents the “rural imaginary” that the religious elites in the Perpetual Help shrine held in order to make sense of their location within the matrix of supposedly “non-urban” social and cultural sensibilities.

This close identification with the local community was mitigated by the need to protect the shrine and monastery from unfavorable external elements through the construction of walls; and the “translocal” ties that defined their engagements outside the shrine. The first concern is relatively straightforward: the walls acted as a rampart against storm surges especially during the storm months (July to October each year). There were attempts, however, to build walls on all four corners of the property, which relate not to the need for protection against natural disasters but to the need for enclosure. The enclosure is deemed necessary because of the monastery had to be a relatively private space for prayer and reflection. This privacy is greatly valued by priests, and in one entry in the Chronicles dated 19 April 1937, there is mention of a construction of a side wall that is “intended to give us [i.e. the priests] some little privacy on that side of the ground”. This wall shields off the monastery from the adjacent road, where daily commercial activities are done. Again, in 1941 before the start of the war, another bulk of construction efforts to build a new wall as
commenced but stopped due to shortage of funds. Resuming activities in the shrine after World War II, the priests expressed feelings of unease because of the continuous disruption of monastic silence. The entry dated 17 July 1946 laments that

[g]one is the former neatness, seclusion and frugal comfort of Baclaran. A road across the bottom of the property along the seashore makes the grounds a public thoroughfare besides sending clouds of dust into the house. Only two side concrete fences remain; consequently people parade around the house all hours of the day and night. Monastic silence is continually shattered (emphasis added).

As the space around the shrine underwent further transformation, the priests eventually had the entire compounded walled in with high concrete walls.

The urgency to construct a wall also betrays the need to secure the property from petty theft and other unwanted activities, which had been a long-standing problem at the Perpetual Help shrine. The first recorded theft was in September 1937; as a response the community paid for the construction of iron bars at the monastery’s veranda to provide “additional security against prowlers at night” (Chronicles, entry dated September 1937). Subsequent thefts took place in the church building, with burglars targeting collection boxes and church vestments. The priests were also concerned with encroachments on the property by unsuspecting personalities. In January 1947 the Chronicles report a local resident (probably a businessman) accusing the Redemptorists of collaborating with the Japanese soldiers in an effort to incite ill-feelings against them. In March of the same year, some “local thugs” (as they were referred to in the Chronicles) destroyed the fence at the property’s eastern portion and threatened to cut down trees in front of the church (entry dated 28 April 1947).

It can be surmised that, while the shrine blended with the rural conditions surrounding it, it was also reticent to completely identify with these conditions and worked to define its separate institutional identity. Part of this “duality of territorial
signification” is because the Perpetual Help shrine is grafted into networks of translocal ties with the broader institutional Catholic Church in the Philippines (the Archdiocese of Manila) and the Redemptorist congregation abroad (particularly in Australia). The translocal ties of the Perpetual Help shrine is further strengthened with the identification of pioneer missionaries with their countries of origin outside the Philippines, a connection that facilitated the inauguration of the Perpetual Novena in Baclaran in 1948.

5.2.2. Pilgrimage-based economy and the exigencies of urban transition

The introduction of the Perpetual Novena devotion in June 1948 precipitated changes within and outside the shrine. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the origins of the Perpetual Novena is traceable to the Redemptorist communities in the United States; it reached the Philippines through the description provided by American soldiers stationed here who gave an account of their memories of how it was done back home (Hechanova 1998). From Iloilo, the Perpetual Novena was introduced in Baclaran and was introduced to the Tagalog-speaking regions in 1948. From its humble origins in a predominantly fishing village, the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran served as the center of devotional activity for Luzon and eventually for the entire country. What is interesting in this case is the role of the religious elites in initiating the pilgrimage-based economy through their crafting of the Perpetual Novena devotion. The rise of the Perpetual Help Devotion to national prominence in the Philippines was the result of the propagation of the Perpetual Novena. By introducing the Perpetual Novena in 1948, religious elites unwittingly poised the shrine as a translocal place of worship that attracted devotees beyond its immediate geographical borders.
The response to this “positioning” was immediate and gathered increasing momentum throughout the decades following 1948. From the estimated 70 devotees during the first Perpetual Novena session at 6:00 p.m. on 23 June 1948, the numbers exponentially increased to an estimated 2,000 devotees attending the same novena schedule one year later (Chronicles entry dated 15 June 1949). By September 1949, there were eight Perpetual Novena sessions, with the 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. sessions being the most attended. Because of the growing numbers of devotees, religious elites initiated renovations of the church building to accommodate them. An expanded church was opened for use in 1949, which was inaugurated by the transfer of the altar from the western to the eastern end of the church building on 28 January 1949. Another expansion was inaugurated in 1958 with the consecration of the new church building in December of that year.

One of the conspicuous indicators of the translocal nature of the Perpetual Novena is the number of attendees using cars, which gives an idea of the devotees’ residential location as well as their class standing (See Plate 21). The first mention of cars in the Chronicles is on 28 July 1948, roughly one month after the inauguration of the Perpetual Novena: an estimated 40 cars were seen in the compound that day. One week later (4 August 1948) it increased to 60 cars; two weeks later (25 August 1948) it further increased to 90 cars. In 15 June 1949, one year after the inauguration of the Perpetual Novena, the estimated numbers jumped to an astounding 260 cars for all the novena sessions. The Chronicles in an entry dated 7 September 1949 recalls that “[t]he traffic problems on the nearby roads is constituting a headache for 10 policemen”; ne arly two years later the situation has remained unchanged as “[t]he traffic on Wednesday novena seems to be worrying local authorities” (entry dated 10 March 1951).

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All of these changes are indicative of the transition of Baclaran from a predominantly rural to a highly urbanized area. Consistent with changes happening since 1948, this transition was conspicuously manifested with the inauguration of a “pilgrimage-based economy” in the district. However, it is expedient to unpack the nature of pilgrimage itself and how this applies to the realities in the Perpetual Help shrine. Richard Barber (1993: 1) defines pilgrimage as “[a] journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding”. What is particularly important with pilgrimages is movement, which has become the fundamental concept in understanding the nature of contemporary pilgrimages (Collins-Kreiner 2010; Hyndman-Rizk 2012). In the context of the Perpetual Help devotion, it is only feasible to talk of medium- or large-scale pilgrimage after 1948.

Plate 21. Parking lot at the shrine’s left side filled with cars and devotees. (Undated photo; courtesy of the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Manila)
The thanksgiving letters also provide information about the devotees’ place of residence. A survey of thanksgiving letters in the period from 1948 to 1960 indicates that Manila residents account for 49 percent of devotees; next are residents from towns in Rizal province (where Baclaran is located) comprising 28 percent; devotees from other provinces comprise 15 percent and those from overseas 7 percent. It may be surmised that devotees coming from Manila and surrounding provinces at some point visited the shrine as pilgrims, while those from overseas were devotees in the shrine who eventually migrated overseas. There are references in thanksgiving letters regarding the devotees’ sense of attachment to the shrine. Consider this account from a male devotee from Sta. Cruz, Manila:

Not long ago I received an order from my office superior stating my transfer of assignment in Legazpi City (Albay). I pray, loving Mother, that I be spared from this assignment in the province so that I can continue my novena devotions every Wednesday in Baclaran…This is the reason why I prefer staying in Manila for now.

(Letter dated 10 January 1953; translated from Tagalog original)

As this letter and other relevant data show, devotees needed to travel to come to the shrine, and these travels are construed as pilgrimages. There is indication that devotees were willing to travel the distance on a regular basis to reach the shrine and participate in the novena sessions.

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Letters received from cities and municipalities in Rizal province come from devotees residing in Makati, Malabon, Mandaluyong, Parañaque, Pasay City and Quezon City.

Letters received from the provinces came from Albay (Polangui and Tabaco), Bulacan (Polo), Cavite (Naic), Laguna (San Pablo City), Quezon (Naic) and Zambales (Palaing), all in Luzon. One letter each from Capiz (Roxas City) and Iloilo (Cabatuan) in the Visayas was also received during this period.

Letters from abroad included those from the United States (Alaska, California and Pennsylvania), Scotland (Edinburgh), and South Korea (Seoul).

There was also one letter that indicated “Philippine Air Force” as its address, which comprises the remaining 1 percent of the tally.
One consequence of the increase of devotees from other territories is the transformation of the economic landscape of Baclaran after 1948. Currently classified as a *Commercial 3 Zone*, Baclaran has the most number of small- and medium-sized commercial establishments in Parañaque City. As of 2009, there are fifty-three (53) such establishments in an area that is only 1.37% of the total land area for the city. As of 2008, Baclaran is also the densest barangay in terms of population, with an estimated 422.60 persons per hectare as compared to the city average of 68.7 persons per hectare (Parañaque City Planning and Development Coordinator’s Office 2009). This economic boom is the result of transformations that began after World War II, when fishing activities along the shores of Manila Bay significantly decreased (Jacinto et al 2007). In April 1940, the Chronicles still mention a sizeable number of fisher folk along the shores of Manila Bay:

> We have had some trouble with the local fishing people who put their boats on our property, claiming that the strip of 33 meters depth inside the fence does not belong to us but to the government. The particular piece in question was given to the government some years ago, but at present efforts are being made to get back the title for such in exchange for a strip on the right side of our property for the new road.

This is the last reference regarding fishing activities along the bay, and subsequent years saw its steep decline and the eventual rise of urban development in Baclaran. There is mention of a casino in the neighborhood in 1947, one of the first references of business establishment outside the shrine compound. In 1959 to 1960, business establishments like a night club and eateries, the latter at the opposite side of the street near the compound’s west side (where the monastery is located), were all so established.

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[23] The category *Commercial 3 Zone* is given to areas that have a high concentration of malls or other commercial buildings, while *Commercial 1 Zone* is given to the city's central business district and *Commercial 2* is given to areas that have mixed commercial and industrial ventures.
The presence of street vendors has had a long history in the development of Baclaran. The network of makeshift stalls is one indicator, albeit unfavorably regarded by religious elites, of the burgeoning pilgrimage-based economy that characterizes the shrine’s environs. The first reference about vendors in the Chronicles is an entry dated 28 September 1949:

During the week past – a sub-division of Quiapo market has been growing up a long Redemptorist [Road] in front of the gate. Someone has counted more than 30 stalls. Many people have expressed disgust at the nuisance – but nothing much can be done about it.

Although not explicitly stated, the emergence of the informal economy is viewed negatively here. The mention of “Quiapo market” suggests that the Perpetual Help shrine was beginning to experience the same problems encountered by religious authorities at the Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo district in Manila. The Redemptorists disapproved of street vending because stalls are considered as road obstructions that make traveling inconvenient for devotees. Street vending eventually became complicated because of concomitant issues of property ownership and paying rent. Redemptorist Road, where most of the vendors pitched their stalls, is a private alley that belongs to the shrine. The priests desisted from asking the vendors to leave and also from asking for rental payments for the use of the road, until a group of vendors themselves asked to be charged rent. The Chronicles in an entry dated 18 July 1955 explained the situation:

This morning a delegation of vendors came to see the Superior bringing with them a petition signed by 150 vendors. The petition: that we will accept rent from them! It appears that households on either side of the road have been charging vendors up to 30 pesos a Wednesday – payable in advance – for the right to put their stands on the road. As the households have no claim whatever on the road it was quite a profitable revenue – for them. The vendors finally rebelled. They acknowledge us as the true road-owners and ask us to from each vendor a rent of 1½ pesos a square metre. Offer accepted.

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In an entry dated 21 October 1955, it was further explained that the arrangement with vendors “afforded an excellent opportunity to get our property back and control it”.

The emergence of the pilgrimage-based economy is significant because economic activities outside the shrine had significant impact on the character of the Perpetual Help Devotion itself. These impacts are manifested in the forging of stronger links between devotional activity and materiality, thus alluding to processes related to *religious commodification*. In this regard Pattana Kitiarsa (2008: 1) explains that “‘commodification of the sacred’ does not lead to a critical decline of religiosity…Rather, it characterizes the variable ways that relationships between religion and the market are configured” (emphasis in the original). The Perpetual Help Devotion’s success is attributed to its recognition of material needs, a dimension that people can relate to especially in post-World War II Philippines (see fuller discussion in Chapter 3). This has affected the urban streetscapes in the district of Baclaran, which demonstrates in spatial terms the melding of the sacred and the material in devotional practice. These various manifestations of “religious commodification” are not unique to the Perpetual Help shrine but is found in various shrines and cuts across various religious traditions (see Askew 2008; King 2010; Sinha 2011; Wilson 2008).

In this section, I unpacked various processes pertaining to the Perpetual Help shrine’s place-making within the shifting contours of urban transitions. The district experienced changes brought about by the pilgrimage-based economy. In this regard the shrine may be considered as a driver of growth in the district and a progenitor of change, as the pilgrimage-based economy is buttressed by the eventual urban sprawl that emanated from the capital city. In the next section, I discuss with the exigencies of urban diversification in Baclaran, shifting the line of inquiry from the Perpetual Help shrine *per se* to its interaction with an increasing number of actors.
especially relevant in the religious domain with the presence of Muslims and the construction of mosques in the area.

5.3. At the throes of diversification: “hierarchized conviviality” in Baclaran

During my first days of fieldwork at the Perpetual Help shrine in October 2009, I chanced upon something that I did not expect: a prayer call from a nearby mosque. I was sifting through the devotional letters taken from the archives one afternoon when I heard a muezzin at the nearby Masjid Sulayman across Roxas Boulevard chanting the introductory lines of the Muslim call for prayer. I may have not heard it before this particular incident as the muezzin’s call to prayer is nearly muted by the sound of bus horns and therefore not audible at all inside the church building. At 3:00 p.m., I heard the muezzin intone “Allahu akbar” twice before proceeding with the rest of the chant. Back then, I thought that hearing a Muslim prayer call while inside the compound of a popular Catholic shine was an experience that demonstrated the diversity that characterizes the present-day Baclaran.

In this section, I shift the course of inquiry from “place-making”, which I highlighted above, to urban diversification. This is an important aspect to unpack insofar as Baclaran through the years has diversified not only economically with the burgeoning of business ventures, but also in terms of the religious dimension with the entrance of Muslim migrants. The religious dimension of the diversification process turns the focus toward the formation of lines of communication among agents and the conditions that underlie the formation of such ties. In this section I trace the in-bound migration of Muslims and its concomitant effects in Baclaran, after which I introduce the notion of “hierarchized conviviality” to account for the emergence of ties between
Christians and Muslims, and among merchants, shrine authorities, devotees and law-enforcement agencies.

5.3.1. In-bound migration and the internal diversification in Baclaran

The arrival of Muslim settlers from Mindanao to urban neighborhoods in Luzon has significantly altered the character of urban life in these places, as it has changed Baclaran during the last decades. Since 1958, the landmark religious building in Baclaran is the Perpetual Help shrine, but the arrival of significant number of Moro migrants during the 1990s paved the way for the construction of four mosques within 500 meters from the shrine. The earliest to be built in the area, the Masjid Abdullah, was built in 1978; the next one to be built is Masjid Rajah Sulayman in 1995 (Watanabe 2008). Masjid Al-Nur in Brgy. 79 of Pasay City came next in 1998, while Masjid Al-Wasat, located a few meters away from Baclaran Barangay Hall at the Perpetual Help shrine’s northern part, was completed in 2009 (Ustad Samanuddin, personal communication, 2011).

The Masjid Rajah Sulayman, the mosque referred to at the beginning of this section, sits in the middle of a sprawling urban poor community of mostly Maranao Muslims and Balik-Islam (reverts to Islam) in the Pasay City Reclamation Area (Watanabe 2008). Built in 1992, its existence in that area has been challenged by the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA), the government agency that administers the property. Government authorities urged the relocation of informal settlers in order to commence the development of the property. Some residents who pitched their homes around the mosque filed petitions in the Pasay City Regional Trial Court (RTC) in 2007 to cease the demolition of the mosque, but their petition was turned down. The Court of Appeals (CA) reversed the decision of the RTC and granted a 60-day

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temporary restraining order (TRO) preventing the dismantling of the settlers’ homes. After this period, the authorities were again emboldened to act on the RTC’s decision and a demolition of the informal structures surrounding the mosque took place on 11 November 2009. After the demolition of their houses (the mosque was not touched at all), the residents promptly rebuilt them and still refused to leave the premises (ABS-CBN News, 18.11.2009). The case of the Masjid Rajah Sulayman is at present still pending in the Philippine Supreme Court.

What is interesting with regard to the religious dimension of the issue is the formation of religious-based alliances supporting the residents’ plight, which interestingly gathered more support outside Balaran than within it. The Muslim leaders’ concerns in Balaran district were focused on the upkeep of their mosques and on attending to their internal problems. A volunteer worker in Masjid Al-Wasat shared his community’s desire to spread the teachings of Islam to residents in the neighborhood through proselytism and information-sharing with non-Muslims. The imam in Masjid Al-Nur expressed his desire to help as much as he can in addressing the Muslims’ domestic problems in the district. Both leaders acknowledged the existence of the Perpetual Help shrine, but they recount that they have not talked to any of its priests or staff members. The Redemptorists, too, were concerned with the orderly flow of devotees in the shrine and the upkeep of the premises. They are aware of the existence of the mosques around the shrine, but they have not engaged with any of the Muslim religious or community leaders. The priests were inspired by what they heard about Quiapo district in Manila, where religious authorities of both the Basilica of the Black Nazarene and Masjid Al-Dahab (popularly known as the Golden Mosque) have cooperated on a range of issues affecting the local community there. They expressed interest in emulating the same level of cooperation in Balaran, but
they have not made any progress regarding that plan, as they do not know imams or Muslim leaders in the area.

The issue of the impending demolition of Masjid Rajah Sulayman has attracted the attention of the local media and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) outside the district. In various interviews with local media, residents were recalled invoking the possibility of a jihad (holy war) if the mosque is demolished, especially that the planned demolition date last 2009 coincided with Ramadan (Manila Bulletin, 14.08.2009). Then imam Abdul Fatah Sarip of the Rajah Sulayman mosque remarked that “Muslim brothers and sisters would gladly offer their lives during Ramadan if it is the only way to save their place of worship from utter destruction” (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 27.08.2009). Likewise, community leader Abdelmanan Tanandato raised the specter of religious discrimination against Muslims in an interview with the Agence France-Presse (AFP):

if this is a church, the government would not demolish it; because this is a mosque, the government will try to change the surroundings, because they don’t want to see that the mosque has been erected in between two big churches (cited in AFP, 10.01.2009).

Despite the specter of Christian-Muslim misunderstanding, a number of Catholic clerics expressed their sympathy for the disenfranchised Muslims in Baclaran. Muslim residents threatened with eviction have in the past sought the help of Catholic Church officials to voice their concerns to government authorities. Tanandato handed a letter for President Arroyo to Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo of Manila in June 2007 to seek for his mediation with then President Macapagal-Arroyo regarding their pleas. Fr. Robert Reyes, who is known for his activist stance on social injustice, joined the Muslim residents in their Ramadan observance last September 2009 as an expression of support. In an interview with local media, Fr. Reyes urged government authorities
to “let [the mosque] stay together with our churches so that it may be seen as a symbol of Muslim and Christian understanding in our country” (Philippine Star, 21.09.2009).

Like the presence of mosques, the change in the socio-economic configurations resulting from the increased presence of Muslim settlers has implications for the management of Baclaran’s streetscapes. Muslim leaders in the area explained to me that Baclaran is an attractive area for trade because of the large number of potential customers traversing the area (Ustad Samanuddin, personal communication, 2011). In due course, some Muslim settlers invested in established stalls (puwesto) and matched medium- and large-scale business enterprises owned by other merchants in the area. A considerable number, however, remained as street vendors due to lack of sufficient capital.

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, the issue of street vending has been a feature of the emerging pilgrimage-based economy in Baclaran after 1948. The shrine administration during that time was able to exert control over the property through the acceptance of rent from vendors, who, as the Chronicles records, freely recognized their jurisdiction over the property under question. The situation during the 1990’s onward, however, has significantly changed. Becoming a full-fledged commercial area, the Redemptorists are now less able to exert their jurisdiction over those spaces that they used to control. The increasing number of Muslim migrants also necessitated a nuanced response because religious issues are also involved. Besides their interest in reaching out, the Redemptorist community in Baclaran also willfully avoids any kind of misunderstanding with Muslims so as to prevent the rise of any religious-based conflicts. This explains the strategy adopted by the Redemptorist community in dealing with the issue of street vending: a voiding any mention of sectarian-based categories, they insist on stronger enforcement for the
realization of a “win-win” solution for all parties concerned (The ICON magazine 2011).

In August 2011, the Redemptorist community in Baclaran initiated a signature campaign to pressure government authorities to take steps to restore order around the shrine. In the July-September 2011 issue of The ICON magazine (official newsletter of the shrine), the Shrine Rector wrote:

We are fighting for two things: first, the right, as articulated in the 1986 (sic) Constitution that Filipinos should be able to freely practice their religion without any constraint. We believe that the chaotic situation in Baclaran hinders the freedom of worship which every faithful should enjoy.

Second, it is common knowledge that some local politicians, government officials and their cohorts profit from such a situation. What is at stake here is not only millions but hundreds of missions [of pesos] every year. Kotong is the game and Wang-wang24 is their name, while the pockets of a few are stuffed [with money] (some portions of the text translated from Tagalog original).

What is interesting in this message is the framing of the issue about the maintenance peace and order in the district. The emphasis is placed on the right to practice one’s religion as articulated in the Philippine Constitution itself. There is also the criticism of corruption as a hindrance to attempts at establishing a baseline agreement regarding the clean-up of streets around the shrine. These two emphases is an acceptance of the complexity of the situation resulting from the diversification of the district itself.

5.3.2. The exigencies of hierarchized conviviality

A close reading of the incidents mentioned above demonstrates that the diversification of Baclaran has resulted to a specific mode of conviviality, that is, of people of different backgrounds living together in one common space but also

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24 Kotong and wang-wang are colloquial Tagalog terms for bribery and preferential treatment for public service officials, respectively.
creating quite interesting tensions. As mentioned in the previous section, the Redemptorists have established relationships with the local community in Baclaran since 1932. As Baclaran district gained a reputation for its flea markets selling a wide range of affordable merchandise (Hechanova 1998), devotees frequenting the shrine and merchants have sustained interactions on streets and commercial stalls. Merchants also formed their informal or formal networks, and law enforcement agencies have interacted with both merchants and the general public. There is thus a sizeable network of interactions among various agents in Baclaran to date; what is significant is to identify and assess the character of these modalities of conviviality, especially religious-based conviviality.

The events mentioned above suggest that religious conviviality in Baclaran has not yet reached a viable level of interdependence and cooperation among different sectors and stakeholders. Aldo Ruben Amegir’s (1998) alludes to the “us and them” dynamics in assessing the formation of mutual prejudice and distrust, while Norbert Elias (1994) adopts a more specific “established and outsiders” framework to account for the maintenance of neighborhood hierarchies. The established settlers have the advantage of longevity of residence in a place and strong internal ties amongst themselves, often at the expense of the members’ individuality (Elias 1994). The strong internal ties are institutionalized by a stringent normative structure that defines identifiable outsiders as “anomic” and thus disagreeable. Based on differences of class or racial backgrounds, the stigmatization process allows the established group to declare qualitative superiority over outsiders and thus guarantees the non-integration of the two groups.

Using this framework, the Baclaran district case resonates with the general situation in Metro Manila, where Muslim settlers from Mindanao often find...
themselves relegated to the periphery of urban life and are often victims of unpolished legal formulations that cost them their livelihood and residence. The lack of a comprehensive urban planning policy in Metro Manila with regard to employment and housing has contributed significantly to the already existing inequalities between traditional residents and migrants; the middle- and upper-classes and the urban poor; and between Christians and Muslims. In this situation, exoticized views of Muslims desists individuals from choosing a place of residence near Muslim-dominated neighborhoods: In a survey done among Metro Manila residents in 2005, more than half (57 percent) were willing to pay higher rent to be further away from an identifiable Muslim community (Human Development Network 2005). This prevents substantive interaction between Christians and Muslims in various local communities in the metropolis, and while it may be said that the two groups lived side-by-side, they are not really living together.

The confluence of class and religious factors in Baclaran district illustrates the persistence of hierarchized conviviality, a mode of urban social stratification resulting from processes of “othering” identities and groups that do not conform to standards imposed by traditional elites. The patterns underlying interactions among various agents here have led to a general questioning of stereotypes as instrumental economic interactions are still enveloped within a climate of mutual suspicion. The case of Baclaran is a particular illustration of hierarchized conviviality in the context of an established pilgrimage-related economy related to a Catholic shrine. In this regard it is not difficult to perceive what justifies the feelings of Muslim settlers in Baclaran as “second class citizens” and objects of systematic discrimination (Ustad Samanuddin, personal communication, 2010). As Muslim merchants in Baclaran are relatively new to the area’s commercial environment, a large portion of their
population has remained at the periphery of commercial life and has thus resorted to street vending (Watanabe 2008). In my observations of the street life in Baclaran at different points of the day, I see a considerable number of Muslim men and women\(^{25}\) selling wares along the sidewalks using tarpaulin sheets as improvised mats. In several instances, I saw vendors along Redemptorist Road (at the west side of the church compound) running frantically with their tarpaulin mats, creating a flurry of hurried movements. When I asked what was happening, one lady vendor with a tudung (Muslim veil) told me, “May pulis!” (The police are there!). While the police does not always confiscate their wares when they pass by the area, their mere presence creates panic among street vendors who dread the confiscation of their merchandise. These instances show the insecurities involved in street vending that Muslim settlers in Baclaran experience on a daily basis.

The diversification of economic activities in Baclaran indicate an emerging order of hierarchical relationships among merchants, where street vendors (a significant number of whom are Muslim migrants) are at the lowest rung, the least legally protected, and the least likely to be integrated into the commercial life of the district. In my talks with barangay authorities in Baclaran, it appears that street vendors often resort to barangay-level intervention and mediation in cases of dispute, as barangay officials have access to the recognized Muslim leaders in the area. They are not as confident in approaching city- or metropolitan-level authorities, however, as these were responsible in their eviction from their sidewalk puwesto (spot where they sell) and the confiscation of their merchandise. In like manner, Muslim residents around Masjid Sulayman fit the category of maralitang tagalungsod (urban poor); as

\(^{25}\) Some Muslim men in Baclaran wear their traditional clothing and ťāqīyah (round headgear), while Muslim women wear their tudung (a veil covering the hair and ears).
shown in the previous discussion, the fight for their right to decent housing and livelihood resonates with other urban poor’s demands in other parts of the metropolis.

Thus it can be seen that the diversification process has not led to significant transformations of mercantile structures and relationships, and the non-integration of street vendors is a clear instance of hierarchized conviviality. Diana Eck (2007) argues that various groups are able to participate in the ordering of social life without shedding their distinctive identities. To this, I must add that the level of participation should rise beyond the need to protect one’s community from external forces which are deemed unsympathetic or hostile. Especially in the case of the residents around Masjid Sulayman, the engagement with broader social processes is still at the level of “defensive protectionism”, as the threat of the mosque’s demolition puts them in an attitude of distrust vis-à-vis social forces outside their community. The same can be said of sidewalk vendors, whose efforts toward self-organizing are still mainly against the backdrop of impending demolition of their stalls and confiscation of their wares.

5.4. Popular religion and mobilities: the Perpetual Help shrine as an urban ethnoscape

In the previous section I discussed dimensions linked to the territorialization and diversification processes in the Perpetual Help shrine. I argued that the popularity of the Perpetual Help Devotion is based on how religious elites crafted an institutional identity within the local community before 1948. After the introduction of the Perpetual Novena, the focus shifted toward changes brought about by the pilgrimage-based economy. The entrance of Muslim migrants from Mindanao in the 1990’s brought an additional class, ethnic and religious dimensions to the diversification process occurring in Baclaran. These processes notwithstanding, there is a need to
focus attention to dimensions outside the perimeters of the shrine in order to assess its translocal and global character.

This emphasis on “social imaginaries” as associated with sacred spaces is consistent with emerging scholarship on religious mobility in pilgrimage studies. In the context of this study, “social imaginaries” consist of agents’ signification of their connections with places, people and experiences associated with the conduct of the devotion. Noga Collins-Kreiner (2010) observes that in studies of religious mobility from looking at sites and the “external” and “general” features of pilgrimages toward “inner experience” and subjectivity of pilgrims visiting shrines. This is necessary because the movement of pilgrims and their experiences at the sacred site entails changes in mental states that intensify over time. Nelia Hyndman-Rizk (2012: xvi) adds that a pilgrimage privileges a “distinctively spiritual conceptualisation of mobility, which emphasises inner transformation over physical mobility”.

Given this emphasis on the subjectivity of the pilgrimage experience, the aim of inquiry is thus less directed on the relevance of spaces than the relevance of meaning-making among agents. This is consistent with devotees’ accounts of how they make sense of their actual movement toward the shrine as part of the devotional experience itself. Thanksgiving letters mention that visits to the shrine are suffused with motivation, for instance to give thanks, to request for more favors, or in some instance to unload grievances. There is general belief among devotees that the inconveniences of traveling “prepares” an individual for devotional exercises. One devotee I interviewed, a lawyer in her late twenties, was more explicit in saying that the difficulties encountered in visiting the shrine is “part of the sacrifice” that teach devotees the “value” of their requests.

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I became more convinced in the value assessing the social imaginaries of devotees when I interviewed two of them in Singapore during my fieldwork in St. Alphonsus Church (Novena Church) in 2010. Besides the regular Perpetual Novena schedules facilitated every Saturday by Singaporean Redemptorists, the Filipino community in Singapore has maintained a Perpetual Novena schedule (according to the usage in the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran) and Filipino Mass every second and fourth Sundays of the month. When I asked the first respondent about her devotional life before coming to Singapore, she had fond memories of visiting the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran. She recalls that

[a]ctually, before I went here [in Singapore], the day before my flight, I went to Baclaran. I passed by Baclaran to ask for Mama Mary’s guidance, and I made a promise that if I reach here safely, I will visit [the shrine] again…That was February 5, 1990…(laughs) Yes, I know the date because that was when I also made my first confession. When I reached here [in Singapore] I did not remember asking her [Virgin Mary] for anything because during my first month I did not experience any difficulty with my employer. So I did not ask anything from the Lord and did everything on my own, saying to myself that I do not need [to ask for help]. But I found out that I need to ask for help, that I do not have to do things on my own.

(Female devotee, interviewed 8 May 2011; translated from Tagalog)

She continued that she would make it a point to visit the Perpetual Help shrine when she comes home to the Philippines. Another devotee, who I interviewed two weeks later, had a different story. When I asked her if she had been a Perpetual Help devotee in the Philippines, she replied in the negative. She recounts that

For me, there is no need to go to Baclaran, isn’t it? For me, requesting something from [the Virgin Mary] and faith can be [applied] anywhere you are. As long as it is from the heart and your prayer is sincere before [her, she] will hear it wherever you are. But of course, when here’s an opportunity you will also go to her house (bahay). This is what I think. If there is time, I also go to the church.

[Interviewer: Do you go to Baclaran?]
Not that much, because the fares are expensive from Los Bños [Laguna province] to Manila. And I cannot travel alone, because we are a family, right? That’s costly already. Maybe occasional visits okay, but I cannot afford to go there every week (laughs).

(Female devotee, interviewed 22 May 2011; translated from Tagalog)

The second respondent, it appears, does not have any attachment with the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran, although she is as devoted as the first respondent in coming to the Novena Church regularly. What can be gleaned from their contrast of their experience is that the practice of religious devotion is as much tied to imaginaries as to places. While the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran represents a mode of practicing popular religion in the Philippines, the “social imaginaries” of devotees go beyond the geographical boundaries of the shrine.

In this section, I explore the Perpetual Help Devotion within the translocal networks that inform the religious elites’ and devotees’ social context. The transition toward translocality entails a move from Danièle Hervieu-Leger’s (2002) emphasis on territorialization to religious symbolization of space. What is important in this shift is the attention to how the “religious imagination” understands places (Hervieu-Leger 2002: 100). This is consistent with Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) notion of ethnoscapes, which supersedes the emphasis on bounded neighborhoods in anthropological analysis. An ethnoscope is defined less by boundaries than by movements and imaginaries of agents in increasingly de-territorialized conditions of global modernity. This entails certain implications for conceptualizing practices because in a situation where “culture areas” become less defined by spatial boundaries, even intimate spaces like home is re-imagined (Razak 2007).
5.4.1. Dimensions of translocal meaning-production

The shift toward social imaginaries is premised on the analytical reorientation of the inquiry from a bounded to a “nodal” notion of popular religious practice. The thanksgiving letters provide an opportunity to conceive meaning-making processes in popular religion as “expressed imaginaries”. This resonates with Coleman and Eade’s (2004) notion that religious mobility entails various forms of motion: aside from embodied forms, there are also imagined and metaphorical forms to consider (p. 3). The sacred, while experienced bodily and spatially, also includes “cognitive” dimensions of experience.

What is particularly important in this regard is that the cognitive relevance of meaning-production roots the agents into the subjective experience of popular religion without restricting their actual movement. The letters are replete with instances of these wanting to establish ties with the shrine across borders. True to the notion of an “imagined community” (Anderson 2003), the devotees’ “sense of connectedness” alludes to the importance of looking at mental significations that enable this connection to flourish not withstanding their distance from the shrine. One devotee about to leave Metro Manila permanently illustrated this quite well:

We are about to leave Metro Manila to live in the province. I am quite sad that I will be far from Baclaran, especially that I have been coming here for the novena since my college days. But I know that you will never leave me alone. I hope that my prayers still reach you even if I do not pray in your home (tahanan). I promise that when there is time, I will visit this home (tahanan) that provided many miracles for me.

(Letter dated June 13, 2007; translated from the Tagalog original)

Devotees I have interviewed also expressed that, although they may be able to find time to visit the shrine because of the demands of work or family, their regard for the shrine as a privileged site for expressing their faith remains.
In particular, there is a noticeable tendency for meaning-production in the Perpetual Help shrine to be mediated by national imaginaries, which, while expressed differently, is shared by ecclesiastical elites and devotees alike. This is one of the implications of the incorporation of Baclaran into urban space, which I extensively discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The configuration of the shrine into urban life occurred toward the end of a long process that started in 1948. The formation of national imaginaries after 1948 occurred at two levels, one that took root among religious elites and another one that was manifested among devotees. Elite-sponsored national imaginary consists in the increasing prominence of the Perpetual Help shrine in ecclesiastical and political affairs. It is in this regard that ecclesiastical officials took notice of the success of the Perpetual Help Devotion and extolled it as a “model” Catholic devotion in the Philippines. Monsignor Vagnozzi, Apostolic Delegate of the Philippines, commented in 1951 that “the Baclaran novena is the biggest thing of its kind in the world today” (Chronicles entry dated 23 February 1951; emphasis added). This purported exceptional character of the Perpetual Help Devotion was recognized by the Philippine bishops when they declared the Perpetual Help shrine as a National Shrine in 1958 (Hechanova 1998).

Apart from ecclesiastical recognition, the Perpetual Help Devotion’s fame also brought it closer to personalities in Philippine politics. The earliest account of this is in 1949, when Fernando Lopez of the Philippine Senate and his wife renewed their marriage vows here. The Chronicles continues that “[two or three other senators were also present and quite a crowd of ‘big shots’]” (entry dated 27 May 1949). By 1954, the Perpetual Novena became quite popular that the Redemptorists were invited to Malacañang Palace (official residence of the Philippine president) to conduct novena sessions there in the presence of President Ramon Magsaysay and his family.
This invitation is hardly surprising since President Magsaysay already encountered the Perpetual Help Devotion when he was still the Secretary of National Defense. In an entry dated 6 March 1951, the Chronicles records a visit by Secretary Magsaysay’s representative in order to request prayers against the spread of communism:

Today a Colonel of the Philippine Army came as representative of Ramon Magsaysay, Secretary of National Defense, to ask that prayers be said at each session of novena tomorrow, and over the air at 6 and 7pm against communism. There is a big move to instruct the people against communism as the war of bullets against them that has been going on for so long is not producing the hopes for results. It was decided by the Fathers at home to pray and seek prayers to avoid civil war without mentioning communism or the Huks directly, as many of our missions are given in areas where Huks are strong, and any direct attack on them may cause unnecessary trouble.

The shrine’s increasing popularity thus enabled it to forge links with the centers of religious and political power. The national imaginary of the religious elites after 1948 was based on the breadth of the Perpetual Help devotion’s influence, which transcended the confines of the shrine’s geographical boundaries. The success of the Perpetual Novena placed the shrine at the center of enduring alliances with the wider Catholic Church and the state.

This emerging national imaginary is also apparent in the devotees’ letters, which are indications of the devotion’s reach outside the confines of Baclaran. What is evident in this regard is the increase of letters from outside Manila and its environs not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of the locations from where the letters came from. In the period from 1960 to 1969, thanksgiving letters were received from Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga, Pangasinan, Rizal and Quezon provinces in Luzon and Cotabato and Sulu provinces in Mindanao (probably from devotees

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26 The Huks (full name HUKBALAHAP, or Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon [Army of the People against the Japanese]) is an armed resistance group formed during the Japanese occupation. After the Liberation in 1946, they were frustrated with the slow pace of reforms and waged an armed resistance against the government instead.
originally from Luzon but eventually transferred to these provinces). In several instances, devotees narrate the exigencies of post-war living and the material insecurities of everyday life. Consider this account provided by a woman devotee, which is indicative of a number of letters from this period:

My husband has been transferring from one employment to another since we got married. On September 1961, he resigned from his job and from that time on up to September 19, 1963 he had no steady income. We had to live with our relatives in order to live and it was quite a shame because aside from ourselves we have three children. We came here in Manila in 1961. My husband then started looking for a steady job but to no avail. We were really desperate because everywhere my husband applied there was no vacancy. . . . Last June I started making novenas in your honor and made promises to thee. Things have changed for the better and now my husband is employed with a permanent position.

(Letter dated 14 October 1963; cited verbatim from English original)

As can be seen from his and similar narrative accounts, threats of material deprivation and insecurities of urban transitions characteristic of this period are expressed in devotional letters. As these concerns are expressed by a number of devotees throughout the country, they serve as platforms through which individual experience relate to structural conditions that define social and cultural experiences at the national level in the Philippines.

Based on the abovementioned instances, there is a discernible difference of emphasis that characterizes the national imaginary of ecclesiastical elites and devotees. Through links with government authorities, ecclesiastical elites craft the Perpetual Help Devotion as a translocal form of devotion that relates to the problems facing Philippine society. Devotees, for their part, situate their struggles within broader social forces shaping the shifts in Philippine society, using their exercise of the devotion in making sense of their struggles and finding ways to cope with the insecurities that such transitions bring. Through the practice of letter-writing,
Perpetual Help devotees engage in crafting imagined and metaphorical articulations of experiencing the shrine.

5.4.2. Locating global religious imaginaries

Quite similar to the abovementioned distinction between elite- and mass-based national imaginaries at the Perpetual Help shrine, there is also a similar dichotomy at the global level. In the previous section I defined “social imaginaries” as the signification of places, relationships and experiences; in the same vein, “global imaginaries” entails the same signification process, but beyond community or national modalities. More specifically, “global imaginaries” are by its nature translocal in character and transnational in scope. The global links of the Perpetual Help Devotion are based, first and foremost, on the linkages of Redemptorist communities and the authenticated icons of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Redemptorist shrines throughout the world. The mass-based links are conditioned by the movement of devotees overseas, which account for 10 percent of Filipinos according to data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). This out-bound migration of Filipinos has implications for the Perpetual Help Devotion in the context of the formation of globalized social imaginaries.

The Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran is the biggest of its kind in the Asia-Pacific region and its Perpetual Novena devotion is recognized as successful case of elite-sponsored popular religion. As discussed in Chapter 3, the diffusion of the Perpetual Novena devotion to the Philippines occurred through broad networks of Redemptorist communities the United States and other places. As one Redemptorist priest mentioned, the success of the Perpetual Novena devotion in the Philippines was surprising for those who did not see the same
growth of the devotion in Australia (Fr. David Clancy [personal communication] 2011). Furthermore, the success of the Perpetual Novena became an inspiration in the region after it became popular in the Philippines. Radio broadcasts from the shrine in Baclaran, for instance, aided the Redemptorists in Singapore when they were starting the Perpetual Novena devotion in St. Alphonsus Church. They listened to these radio broadcasts in order to obtain ideas in adapting the novena prayers to the needs of Singaporeans (The C.Ss.R. Vice-Province of Ipoh 2010).

The mass-based links of the global imaginaries is tied to the movement of devotees overseas to work temporarily or reside there permanently. Peggy Levitt (2007) argues that the emphasis on the nation-state is increasingly becoming problematic in accounting for the emerging “religious global citizenship” of transnational migrants because religious experiences are not restricted by geographical boundaries. Migrants will thus continue participating in religious practices inspired in their countries of origin as they adjust to the new conditions in their respective receiving countries. I argue here that various strategies of maintaining religious practices are hinged on crafting global imaginaries that result from the complex interplay of stable institutions and shifting religious identities.

The shrine has received thanksgiving letters from Filipino migrants since the earliest days of the Perpetual Novena. A cursory look at the letters reveals that migrant devotees typify general migration trends of overseas Filipinos from 1950’s onwards. For instance, professionally-oriented workers tended to aspire for the United States until the 1970’s, after which was a shift to low-skilled and service-sector workers who tended to aspire for countries in Europe (United Kingdom), East Asia (Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan), Middle East (Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) and Southeast Asia (Malaysia and Singapore).
Furthermore, the feminization of labor migration is also apparent in the devotional letters, as there are increasing numbers of women who report the need to go overseas to look for jobs.

On the part of the migrant devotees, letter-writing serves to revitalize and sustain their links with “home”. The dominant narrative in the devotees’ letters is the opposition between the conditions abroad, which is characterized by competitiveness and difficulty; and the conditions at home, which is characterized by contentment and the absence of hardship. A closer reading of the letters reveals that devotees intend to establish a relationship with the shrine in order to cope with feelings of loneliness in a foreign place. Consider this account from a woman devotee working in Libya:

When I am depressed and homesick especially here in a foreign country, away from my family, you always lighten up my heart and mind and keep my soul refreshed for the good of my family. You are always with me, my dearest Mother.

(Letter dated 7 July 1986; quoted from English with minor editing)

As this and several others illustrate, the Perpetual Help Devotion enabled the devotees to craft an image of home, which consists of the enduring bonds with family and significant others. But it can also happen that it is the situation at home that causes stress on the part of the migrant-devotee: in this case, the devotees use their letters to establish an intelligible posture by which they can make sense of the confusion. Usually highly emotional and deeply personal, such expressions of confusion are rooted in the same image of home as blissful and serene. One male devotee working in Saudi Arabia exemplified this trend:

My Mother, I wish to be enlightened if ever I have lacked in looking after my wife to warrant all these…I have not been neglectful of my duties as a husband and father of our children…I hope, Mother, that you will help me in solving this problem. I give you the power to
decide what should be done. Help my wife in making a decision and give her the right frame of mind for the sake of the future of our children.

(Letter dated 1 June 1985; translated from Tagalog original)

In these instances, devotees maintain their religious practice not by being physically present in the shrine but by letter-writing, through which they engage the divine figure and forge links with significant others. The notion of home in these cases is deeply bounded to their ties with their families and significant others in the Philippines. In this typology of global imaginary, the writing of devotional letters acts as a vehicle for reinforcing these ties aside from being an indicator of a deterritorialized mode of religious participation.

The abovementioned instances of the formation of global imaginaries allow for a nuanced reconfigurations of locality, which is an important dimension in assessing the evolution of the Perpetual Help Devotion from its inception to the present. The transition of Baclaran from a bounded rural neighborhood to an urban ethnoscape necessitates a shift toward an assessment of locality “as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial” (Appadurai 1996: 178). As I copiously documented in this section, the expanding reach of the Perpetual Help Devotion beyond the geographical confines of the shrine compound has enabled new forms of power and new modalities of belonging. The reach of social imaginaries transcends physical boundaries because the task of meaning-making is not tied to places per se but to cognitive and affective representation of experience, most of which occur outside the confines of sacred spaces. Thus the “locality” of popular religious practices are re-casted within interactions of spatiality and memory in order to account for the translocal (both national and global) dimensions of religious practice and the flows resulting from them.
5.5. Concluding synthesis: popular religion and urban transformations

In this chapter, I demonstrated the link between the historical development of the Perpetual Help Devotion and urban transformations within Baclaran. Changes in the condition of the neighborhood were conditioned by both internal and external factors. The internal conditions allude to the changes resulting from heightened religious practice at the Perpetual Help shrine since 1948 with the introduction of the Perpetual Novena devotion. This transformation can be interpreted as the emergence of the “pilgrimage-based economy”. Occurring simultaneously with this is the urbanization of cities and municipalities surrounding the city of Manila and the eventual creation of a political unit that merged these cities and municipalities into the Metropolitan Manila Area (MMA). These conditions external to Baclaran also significantly changed the landscape of the area and placed the Perpetual Help Devotion within the ambit of the “center” – conceived in geographical, ecclesiastical and political terms.

This chapter contributes to the task of rethinking the category of “popular religion” based on historical and ethnographic sources, and of the role of the urban dimension in the formation of a public religion. As argued in Chapter 4, Casanova’s (1994) landmark concept “public religion” identifies ways by which religion enters the public sphere to protect freedoms and rights of citizens; to question the “absolute lawful autonomy of the secular spheres”; and “to protect traditional life-world from administrative or juridical state penetration” (pp. 57-58). The Perpetual Help shrine, as seen in Chapter 3, increasingly assumed a normative (sometimes even militant) stance vis-à-vis emerging social issues; in this way it may be properly regarded as a “public religion”. The missing dimension in this increasing involvement in national and global affairs, however, is an account of the urban dimensions that impinge upon
popular religious practices. This is important to consider because the urban dimension serves as the strongest link between popular religion and modernity. In the context of the Perpetual Help Devotion, I discussed the transition toward this level of engagement with translocal realities by situating it within the dynamics of urban processes, particularly the “incorporation toward the center” and formation of “globalized imaginaries”. These urban processes serve as the conceptual base upon which a sociological assessment of modern popular religion may be made.

I have argued that there is benefit in locating the Perpetual Help shrine as a type of urban space, as the evolution of the shrine and its environs call for nuanced accountings of urban modernity that allow religion to take a constitutive role in the formation of social forms and imaginaries (see Hancock and Srinivas 2008). This dialectic is also pointed out by Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce (2003) in her assertion that “[r]eligion plays an important role in the process of modernization and social change in contemporary societies” (p. 1). I also argued in the previous sections that the trajectory of changes in the shrine and its environs has ventured toward what may be conventionally regarded as toward being “modern”. This means, in specific terms already mentioned in Chapter 1, that processes pertaining to the urban transition of the shrine entailed the “incorporation toward the center” of communities and practices that used to be at the periphery (see Mouzelis 1999).

In situating the development of modern popular religion within the context of urban realities, I emphasized the processes of territorialization and deterritorialization of religious practice. This mode of analysis rests on the Perpetual Help shrine’s capacity to craft sacred space within the shifting contexts of its secular surroundings. In this the role of religious elites is especially important. Various references to their efforts in securing a space that is conducive for religious devotion are made here,
which highlight their institutional identity as a resource for crafting a form of elite-sponsored popul ar religion. I have also highlighted that the notion of “social imaginaries” is as important to modern popular religion as place-making. In this regard, the devotees’ agency in crafting notions of home also explains the persistence of the Perpetual Help Devotion.
CHAPTER 6
THE PERPETUAL HELP SHRINE AND THE RATIONALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS PIETY

6.1. Setting the context: managing piety, regulating blessings

In one instance during my fieldwork, I was doing my usual rounds of observation when I chanced upon a crowd forming at the upper left side of the church. The 11:00 a.m. novena schedule had just ended and devotees started congregating at the informal “Blessing Area” outside the sanctuary’s left side to wait for the priest who will bless religious articles. The priest arrived shortly and the commentator began the ritual by announcing some instructions. She reminded the devotees that the ritual about to take place is similar to *paggamano* (placing the hand of an elderly person on one’s forehead as a sign of seeking their blessing); she also reminded the devotees that having religious articles blessed does not transform them into *anting-antings* (amulets) that bring good luck or protection from harm.

After the announcement, the priest began the ritual. It was a straightforward ritual with readings from scripture, a prayer for blessing and sprinkling with holy water. As the priest reached the part where holy water was to be sprinkled on the religious articles, the devotees became frantic raising their rosaries, images and prayer books, while those who had none simply raised their hands (See Plate 22). The devotees made sure that the droplets of holy water landed on their religious articles—the more holy water, the better! The priest had difficulty moving through the crowds because devotees continually pressed into the crowds, hoping to be sprinkled with more holy water. Those who received a generous sprinkling went away contented; some even joked about “becoming holier” because of it.
The rite of blessing is one of the regular activities during a busy Wednesday at the Perpetual Help shrine: in every instance one observes the same religious images, medals and rosaries and prayer books, frantic adulation over holy water. Every time, too, there is the straightforward and restrained blessing ritual and the cautions against superstition. This earnest desire on the part of the priests to propose a doctrinally acceptable notion of blessing is significant, as well as how such notions are received by lay devotees. It demonstrates, among other things, their intent to manage not only the mundane aspects of the shrine but also the conduct of religious piety by devotees, their expectations and motivations for doing so, and their “success” in this endeavor.

In the previous chapter I focused on the larger urban context of modern popular religion in the Philippines by engaging with apparent historical and contemporary trends in the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran. I argued that the “place-making” dimension of religious practices is apparent in processes of territorialization, diversification and deterritorialization that involved the religious
elites and the devotees. This chapter continues that line of inquiry by unpacking the nature of religious authority and the regulation of piety by ecclesiastical elites. In focusing on the processes of managing devotional practices, this chapter forwards the notion of “elite-sponsored” popular religion. Elite-sponsored popular religion resonates with previously articulated concepts like “devotional exercises” or “popular piety” in official Catholic documents (Empeneur 2002); clerico-popular strains of piety within institutional Catholicism (Williams 1989); privatized Catholicism of the masses (Ribeiro de Oliveira 1994); or simply Catholic popular religiosity (Marzal 2007).

My aim to conceptually articulate the notion of “elite-sponsored” popular religion is premised on the need to account for the regulation of lay religious practices by institutional agents who are considered as “ritual experts”. The immediate task is the need to distinguish between elites “from outside” who regulate religious acts in the public sphere as non-participants; and elites “from within” who manage religious beliefs and practices as believers in the same religious system that they regulate. One example of the former would be state agents; in secular societies, state agents regulate expressions of religious belief and practice to contain their perceived negative effects on the secular character of public life (see Beckford 2004; Hill 2004; Oddie 1995). Conversely, elites who regulate religious practices “from within” consist of experts who seek to maximize the perceived benefits of religious practice. Religious elites may be further distinguished between virtuosos and the hierocracy, with the former banking on charisma and personal sanctification (e.g. monks) and the latter banking on their lawful exercise of authority (e.g. clergy) (Weber 1978 [1956]). While tensions persist between the virtuosos and the hierocracy, studies have shown that the
integration of virtuoso religion is attainable and can also become an instrument for controlling lay religious practice (Sharot 2001).

The dynamics of managing religious piety by elites “from within” occasions an assessment of “institutional” religion versus its “popular” counterpart, the former referring to discourses and practices upheld by clerical establishment. The means and processes by which ecclesiastical elites redefine the practices and beliefs of lay devotees is first of all an issue of religious legitimacy: “what is at stake is the monopoly of the legitimate exercise of the power to modify, in a deep and lasting fashion, the practice and world-view of lay people, by imposing on and inculcating in them a particular religious habitus” (Bourdieu 1987: 126; emphasis in the original).

This created the bifurcation between “institutional” and “popular” religions, which, as Peter Vrijhof (1979) explain, is based on the level of institutionalization and division of labor, and the presence of an endorsing authoritative body. However, I concur with Steven Vertovec’s (1994) assertion that these are poles of a continuum that coexist and mutually influence each other on the ground, rather than being discrete and mutually exclusive categories. In his study of diasporic Hinduism in the Caribbean, he enumerates six (6) forms of Hinduism that coexist among migrant Indians there, with “official” Hinduism just being one among many options. In the context of this study, the emphasis on the historicity of clerical authority allows the inquiry to pay attention to the mechanisms that elite regulation employ to maintain its relevance, avoiding the tendency of assuming the exercise of authority rather than explaining it.

Inventuring an explanation of the exercise of religious authority in the Perpetual Help shrine, this chapter focuses on three dimensions by which an assessment of “elite-sponsored” popular religion may be made: (a) text, (b) identities, and (c) practices. I begin the analytical inquiry by discussing the textual dimension of
elite regulation, which amply considers discourse-formation processes associated with
the written word, foremost of which is the actual text of the novena prayers. Next, I
investigate processes pertaining to identity-formation and maintenance, which denotes
devotees’ self-concept especially in reference to the performance of their perceived
religious duties. In this section I refer to the ecclesiastical elites’ formative role in
fostering certain types of identities, deploying them to committed devotees and the
mass of lay devotees. Lastly, I focus on a comprehensive assessment of practices,
which mainly refers to various methods by which ecclesiastical elites have managed
acts of piety in the shrine.

6.2. Crafting discourses of relevance: the regulation of Perpetual Help prayer
texts

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the central feature of the Perpetual Help Devotion
is the icon of the Virgin Mary in Rome, of which the icon in the Perpetual Help shrine
is an authentic replica. It was also mentioned that the use of a prescribed prayer
(novena) text was a relatively new addition to already existing forms of devotional
activity. This development may be conceived as indicative of the growing acceptance
of the novena as a typical form of devotional activity within institutional Catholicism
itself. A novena is a repared prayer text published either for private or public
devotional activity directed to a particular sacred person and is predominantly
“petitionary” in tone (Meagher 2003). It is usually dedicated to a saint, and the prayers are spread over nine days to allude to the same number of days between
Christ’s ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Mostlly used for private
devotion, a novena differs significantly from prayer books for general liturgical use,
with the latter having the status of “official prayers” and thus subjected to more
rigorous processes of production. Like of ficial liturgical books, the production of
novena texts are usually placed under the tutelage of religious elites and approved for public use by higher ecclesiastical authorities. In this regard, both are said to be outcomes of a complex process of the production of ritual by duly constituted religious authorities acting as experts, and the content of novena texts would mostly reflect the intentions of these experts.

The task of analyzing different versions of Perpetual Help novena text requires the identification of pivotal shifts in the prevailing discourse of the prayers. Prayer texts are important in this regard because they are written expressions of the value systems that their progenitors espouse. Prevalent discourses in novena texts function as the conceptual ground upon which prayers may be understood. It is in this context that Stevens-Arroyo (1998) refers to prayer texts as forms of material theology. As they are used by devotees, prayer texts are encounter points between theological statements and the lives of ordinary people. Prayer texts are also articulations of specific religiously-crafted logics, highlights how beliefs and practices are adopted (possibilities) and challenged (limitations) in practice (see Glynos and Howarth 2007). The analysis of logics contained in prayer texts thus enables access to the broader structural dimensions that condition the religious elites’ framing of specific interests.

6.2.1. The formation of Perpetual Help prayer texts

There are four existing novena texts that served as pivotal points in assessing the course of development of the Perpetual Help novena. A more extensive discussion of the four novena texts is available in Chapter 3; it suffices to mention some of their general features here. The earliest novena text, titled Maikling Pagsisiyam sa Mahal na Virgen sa Tawag na Ina ng Laging Saklolo (A Short Novena to the Blessed Virgin under the Title of Mother of Perpetual Help) and published in 1926, was designed
mainly for individual (private) devotional use. The novena includes a general prayer to be said on all nine days, to be followed by a short reflection and prayer particular to each day of the novena. Another novena text, this time in English, was published in 1936, with the title *Novena in Honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Succour*. Like its previous counterpart, the 1936 novena was to be recited individually for nine consecutive days. The 1936 novena text begins with “The Story of the Miraculous Picture” and the “General Remarks,” which serves as an instruction guide on how to perform the novena. The novena format begins with a meditation that varies for each day of the novena, to be followed by a set of fixed prayers.

The introduction of the Perpetual Novena format in 1948 was a pivotal point around which an assessment of the transformations of the Perpetual Help Devotion may be made. Available records in the Chronicles narrate how the number of devotees significantly increased with the introduction of the Perpetual Novena, notwithstanding weather disturbances that made travel difficult. It may be said that the Perpetual Novena was instrumental in catapulting the Perpetual Help Devotion to national prominence (Hechanova 1998). One of the possible reasons for the popularity of the Perpetual Novena is because it departs from then conventional novena texts. While conventional novena texts were suited mainly for individual recitation, the Perpetual Novena is communally recited. Another significant difference is the strong emphasis given to everyday-life concerns that individuals encounter: protection against natural disasters, healing from sickness, perseverance in the face of persecution, sorrow and affliction, and safety in times of war (See Appendix I for full text of the 1948 novena). Even previous Perpetual Help novena texts did not place high premium these
everyday-life needs; as spiritual graces or pious exhortations to virtue are emphasized, material concerns are mentioned vaguely and only in passing.

The 1948 Perpetual Novena continued as the official version in use in the Perpetual Help shrine until the 1973, after which it was extensively revised (See Appendix II for full text of the 1973 novena). When the Joint Committee first met in 1971, they envisioned that the new text would be as close as possible to the format of the Mass. The 1973 revised novena text begins with a prayer for asking forgiveness then proceeds with the reading of thanksgiving letters and homily; afterwards the novena prayer, prayer for the home and the litany of petitions are recited. The thanksgiving prayer and prayer for the sick conclude the novena prayers. The flexibility of the prayers allows it to be integrated with either the Rite of Benediction of the Sacrament or the celebration of Mass. In the Perpetual Help shrine, there are six schedules for the novena-Benediction format and four schedules for the novena-Mass format; in other parishes where the Perpetual Help novena is recited every Wednesday, the Benediction or Mass is usually omitted.

6.2.2. Prayer texts as receptacles of elite-sponsored religious piety

Having provided a general overview of the prayer texts, I now examine the specific contents of the texts in terms of their “tone”, which represents the dominant orientation of the prayers. A closer reading of the 1926 novena text reveals that it still demonstrates features that were akin to prayer formats during the latter portion of the Spanish colonial period. Although written in Tagalog, the 1926 novena text is steeped in the culture of Hispanic Catholicism as it was the novena version closest to the post-Hispanic milieu. As explained in Chapter 4, Hispanic Catholicism and its broader Ibero-Mediterranean polity (see Stevens-Arroyo 1998) is characterized by its
This form of devotionalism persisted in the Philippines even after the Spanish colonial period, although it was gradually replaced by devotional tracts composed by non-Spanish religious orders.

The 1926 novena text does not feature any author, but it is quite common for priests during this period to compose whole novenas in honor of a saint. There is strong reason to surmise that a Redemptorist missionary, albeit unnamed, composed the prayers of the 1926 novena text. The format of the novena features one paragraph of meditations for each day, which consists of exhortations to greater devotion to the icon, leading a life of piety, and warnings against committing sin. It ends with a prayer that varies for each day. The 1926 novena text tends to emphasize the icon’s miraculous nature, as exemplified by the use of Tagalog words **mapaghimala** (miraculous) and **kababalaghan** (mystery) in reference to the icon. The use of highly evocative Tagalog words in the text also betrays its strong affective dimension, which is also found in the majority of Spanish-authored novena texts in the Philippines before the 1896 Revolution. Consider this passage from the meditation for the second day of the 1926 novena text:

Tumiñgala ka kristiano, at pagmasdan mo ang *Ina ņg Laging Saklolo.*
Tingnan mo't ang mga nañgiñginig na kamay ni Jesus ay kumakapit sa kamay ņg kaniyang mahal na Ina. Ano kaya ang nangyari? Iniharap sa Kaniya ņg da lawang angel a ng m ga ka sangkapan ņg ka niyang haharaping pa ghihirap a t na ng m amalas i to ņg mahal na S angol a y siya'y nasindak at hinanap Niya ang pagaampon at tulong sa kaniyang mahal na Ina. At dito sa ginawa niyang ito'y ibig niyang ipahayag sa iyo n a t ulad s a Kaniya'y nararapat m ong ha napin t witwina a ng pagaampon ni Maria sa gitna ņg mga kahirapan sa buhay na ito.

*Look up, o Christian, and see the Mother of Perpetual Succour. See the trembling hands of Jesus clasps her mother’s hand firmly. What happened? The two angels showed him the instruments of his Passion, and seeing it, the Child was terrified and he sought the assistance and help of his beloved mother. And in what he did he wants to tell you*
that, like him, you should seek always the assistance of Mary in the midst of the sufferings of this life.

The use of exhortatory and sentimental references addressed to devotees to encourage them to continue their novena devotion in this case is quite similar to other existing novena texts during this period. I juxtaposed this aforementioned quote with three novena texts published before 1896: (1) *Historia at Novena nang Mahal na Virgen Nuestra Sra. De Guadalupe* (History and Novena of the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe); (2) *Novena sa Maloualhating Ama ‘t Doctor at Ilao ng Santa Iglesia na si San Agustin* (Novena to Saint Augustine, the Illustrious Father, Doctor and Light of the Holy Church) published in 1887; and (3) *Novena ng Pagdalangin sa Ating Panginoong Dios ay sa amang Banal na Csaloua sa Purgatorio at sa T’aong Buhay na Nalagac sa Casalanang Daquila* (Novena Prayer to Our Lord God for the Holy Souls in Purgatory and for Persons Living in the State of Mortal Sin), published in 1895. Although the three pre-1896 novena texts did not have separate meditations in their respective formats, the language of evocation and profuse use of exhortations are similarly featured in these texts, an indication that this type of piety was the standard of that era in Philippine Catholicism.

The 1936 novena text, in contrast, had a more “catechetical tone” as compared to its 1926 counterpart. The 1936 novena text, for instance, devotes sixteen pages to meditations for the nine novena days, and just two pages to the actual novena prayers. The meditations for the 1936 novena text are also discernible for their theological “denseness”. Like the cited passage in the 1926 novena text, a gain consider this meditation on the second day of the novena:

A mother's authority over her son is so great, that, even though he be a powerful monarch and possess absolute sway over his subjects, such a mother could never become subject to her son. True it is, that Jesus Christ, who is now in heaven, seated at the right hand of God the

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Father, has sovereign dominion over all creatures, Mary not excepted. Still it is like wise true, that the re w as a t ime, when that same Jesus Christ, living on his ear th, c ondescended to submit in a ll t hings to Mary's a uthority. W e may t herefore r ight ly c onclude t hat although Mary c annot, s trictly s peaking, impose any commands on her Divine Son in heaven, still her petitions forever remain the petition of a mother and must t herefore e xercise ove r t he w ill of her S on on a m other's influence, powerful enough to obtain whatsoever she may ask. Hence St. Bonaventure says: "Mary possesses this singular privilege that she may be said to be all-powerful with her Divine Son. And whence is this? Simply because Mary's petitions are a mother's petitions. It is then certain that Mary is not wanting in the power to assist us and save us. Neither is she wanting in good will, because she is more anxiously concerned about our everlasting welfare than we ourselves. Since therefore, this is really the case, how can a true servant of Mary ever fail to have unbounded confidence in Mary's Perpetual Succour?

Using these two meditations as indicative of the whole novena text, the change in both the content and tone from the 1926 to the 1936 novena text is already quite perceptible. The 1936 novena text quoted from the Bible a total of nine times and quoted from saints' writings six times. Regarding miracles, the 1936 novena text, in contrast to its 1926 counterpart, only had one reference to the miraculous nature of the icon: the texts mainly referred to "extraordinary favours" (p. 8) rather than miracles. The 1936 novena text likewise devoted eight pages to the explanation of the icon's history, although no reference is made at all to its "miraculous" origins. What received greater emphasis was the visions of the Virgin Mary to seers and her instructions about where the image should be kept and how it should be venerated. In total, there is a discernible move in the 1936 text to instruct the devotee about standard Catholic doctrine, and its expressions of beliefs are precise and supported by relevant theological data.

Among the saints, St. Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorist congregation, figures quite prominently, especially his teaching on the privileges of Mary. Other saints include St. Jerome, St. Felix Damien, St. Antonius and St. Bonaventure. St. Brigid (Bridget) of Sweden is the only female saint quoted in the 1936 novena text.
The communal dimension of the Perpetual Novena in 1948 broke tradition with the two previous novena texts, which spelled certain changes in the way the novena text is organized. The general format of nine days of prayer and the use of meditational texts were both discontinued and a standard pattern combining supplications to the Virgin Mary, songs, a litany and official church rites (Benediction of the Sacrament and blessings) was crafted. There is also the inclusion of petitions for material needs and explicit references to the need for bodily healing and general stability in everyday life. In the context of its timing, the emphasis on material security struck at the heart of the anxieties of a significant number of individuals because the inauguration of the Perpetual Novena occurred only three years after the end of World War II.

One important feature to discern in the novena texts is how the divine figure is regarded and how devotees establish a relationship with the same. This is important because such prevalent discourses condition the tone of the prayers and supplications directed to the divine figure. In the context of the Perpetual Help prayer texts, this refers to the “Mariological” dimension of the novena prayers. A closer reading of both the 1926 and 1936 novena texts reveals that both exemplified a “privileged and high Mariology,” that is, an exalted view of Mary’s attributes and her distinctness from the rest of humanity (see Gornez 2003). The terminologies used in the two novena texts to refer to the Virgin Mary are listed in the table below:
Because of the "high Mariology" that characterizes these two novena texts, the prayers are phrased to evoke Mary's sense of apartness from her devotees and for the latter to assume a humble status before her. In the 1926 novena there is an exhortation for devotees to "look up...and be hold the Mother of Perpetual Help" (tumingala ka, Kristiano, at pagmasdan mo ang Ina ng Laging Saklolo, p. 10). There is also a supplicatory invocation "O Mother of Perpetual Help, I kneel humbly at your feet" (Oh! Ina ng Laging Saklolo! Nagpapatirapa ako sa iyong paanan, p. 21; emphasis added). The 1936 novena text is dotted with a number of self-deprecatory phrases: man is called a "miserable sinner" and "miserably fallen" (p. 14), "poor unfortunate sinner" (p. 19 and 20); and "poor mortals" (p. 24).

Although the 1948 Perpetual Novena departed from the two previous novena texts in terms of its emphasis on the material dimensions of everyday life, the Mariological dimension that informs the novena prayers and songs has remained the same as compared to the 1926 and 1936 novena versions. The prayers in the 1948 Perpetual Novena explicitly mention the "singular" nature of Mary's divine privileges, which means that she is exalted and therefore distinct from all human beings. The 1948 Perpetual Novena refers to Mary as the "dispenser of all the graces"
as “Queen of our Home” (p. 5); and “Most holy” and “sovereign Lady” (pp. 12-13) which resonates with the majority of prayer texts during this period.

The revision of the Perpetual Novena text in 1973 saw immense changes in the tone of the prayers. In terms of its Mariological character, the 1973 Perpetual Novena significantly departed from the “privilege-oriented and ‘high’ Mariology” (Gornez 2003) that characterized all the previous versions of the novena text. This departure is attributed to the changes in the theological direction of institutional Catholicism itself in the 1970’s. The 1973 Perpetual Novena was thus a product of theological currents inspired by a more restrained view of Mary’s role in public worship during Vatican II Council in 1962-1965. While she is still referred to as “Immaculate Virgin Mary” and “Queen of our homes” in a few instances in the 1973 novena text, most common references to her are “Dearest Mother”, “Dear Mother of Perpetual Help” and “our model”, which strongly resonates with her humanity and womanhood and tends to temper references to her exalted status. In various instances in the text, she is perceived as a “perfect model” because of her own experiences of pain and disappointments in life. A portion of the Novena Prayer, for instance, mentions that

[while you were on earth, dear Mother, you willingly shared in the sufferings of your Son. Strengthened by your faith and confidence in the fatherly love of God, you accepted the mysterious designs of his Will. We, too, have our crosses and trials; sometimes they almost crush us to the ground. Dearest Mother, share with us your abundant faith and confidence in God. Make us aware that God never ceases to love us; that he answers all our prayers in the way that is best for us.]

This and other references to Mary’s closeness to human experience sets a different “tone” and makes the 1973 Perpetual Novena different from preceding novena texts, where Mary’s solidarity with suffering becomes the axis through which the entire Mariological character of the novena text is based. Instead of extolling her privileged
status, the 1973 novena attempts to make her human side more accessible to devotees.

6.2.3. Prayer texts and the shifting contours of crafting relevance

What these novena texts demonstrate are not so much the content of the prayers as the shifts in foundational discourses upon which the prayers may be assessed. In the case of the changes from 1926 to the 1936 novena texts, the Redemptorists used means that were already familiar with the lay devotees; ten years later, they were ready to deploy the novena as a tool to assist in the task of doing mission work. The transition toward an explicit doctrine or orientation in the prayers reflects the climate of “rampart-building” within Philippine Catholicism, in which ecclesiastical elites establish a Catholic culture. This shift also means that Catholic popular religion had to be “checked” for its perceived excesses in order to fit into the sensibilities of post-Hispanic Filipinos who were getting accustomed to American ways (Schumacher 1990).

There is also the need to refer back to the Catholic Church’s role in postwar reconstruction to unpack the “conditions of possibility” informing the production of the 1948 Perpetual Novena text. Because of the steady adjustment of ecclesiastical elites to the post-Hispanic social order, the Catholic Church transitioned from being a defensive to being a pro-active institution within Philippine society (Fabros 1988). The 1930’s saw steady rejuvenation of cooperation between ecclesiastical elites and secular authorities, paving the way for increased visibility of Catholics in local and national politics (Shirley 2004). Religious orders like the Jesuits took an active role in promoting social justice and the rights of the working class, which led to the establishment of Catholic labor unions (Fabros 1988). The increasing
openness to change with the times became the Catholic Church’s leverage in winning
over subsequent generations of Filipinos to committed religious practice. It was from
the ranks of the middle classes that the church obtained its strongest supporters. The
middle classes were important in the “Catholic Restoration” efforts because, unlike
self-professed liberals, much of the middle classes were not hostile toward religion.
The aspirations of the middle classes to economic prosperity in fact predisposed them
to religious practice if it suited their interests. Middle-class Catholics, once they
committed to regular religious practice, became a steady source of financial and
logistical support for the church’s activities.

This also meant that, in the face of this new set of values, the conflation of
Catholicism and Hispanized culture became increasingly untenable. The growing
popularity of the Perpetual Help Devotion is a manifestation of the Catholic Church’s
successful adaptation and resilience in Philippine public life. The 1948 Perpetual
Novena is far from a Hispanized novena format, both in terms of style and content. The emergence of a different variant of Catholic piety in Philippine Catholicism is an indication that the process of institutional adaptation to the new social order has been successful. The emphasis of the 1948 Perpetual Novena on material security, which was downplayed in earlier novena texts, proved that the management of piety shifted toward the domain of the personal. This turn to the self represents the enlargement of the domain of elite regulation of religion by involving itself into the regulation of individual subjectivities.

With regard to the transition from the 1948 and the 1973 novena texts, the
changes seem quite drastic at first glance. Even a number of ecclesiastical
commentators alluded to the extensive adjustments in the content, format and style of
the revised text (e.g. Hechanova 1998; Kelly 1973). The changes were conditioned in

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part by ideological shifts within contemporary Catholicism itself. The commencement of Vatican II Council in 1962-1965 in Rome provided new frameworks that shifted the parameters of the church’s involvement in modern society. The council devoted its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum concilium) to the reform of the church’s liturgy and by implication included the reform of “popular devotions”.

Article 16 of the Sacrosanctum concilium reads:

> Popular devotions of the Christian people are highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See…But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them (emphasis added).

This provision addressed the growing distance between official liturgy and forms of “popular devotions”, as concerns were raised that the active participation in popular devotions does not carry over to their attendance in official liturgies (Hechanova 1998). From a historical vantage point, this provision is reflective of the attempts of institutional Catholicism to subject popular religious practices to scrutiny and regulation and later to deploy them as tools for encouraging church participation.

Seeing the novelty of revising the entire Perpetual Novena text, concerns were raised that changing the text of the prayers diminish its appeal to devotees who were already accustomed to the style of the prayers. The Redemptorists were initially divided about the extent and manner of the revisions. While some members in the community felt that the general format should be retained, others felt that the changes should be more far-reaching. What resulted was a “compromise text”, wherein certain features of the 1948 novena version were retained as additions were introduced to reflect contemporary trends. A close reading of the 1973 novena text proves this interface of old and new influences. The format of the revised novena text, the
communitarian emphasis of the prayers and the emphasis on Mary’s humanity and her solidarity with suffering were new additions. The communitarian approach is clearly reflected in a passage from the Novena Prayer below:

Dearest Mother, as we worry about our own problems, let us not forget the needs of others. You always loved others so much; help us to do the same. While praying for our own intentions and for the intentions of all here present at this Novena, we earnestly ask you, our Mother, to help us comfort the sick and the dying, give hope to the poor and the unemployed, heal the broken-hearted, lighten the burden of the oppressed, teach justice to their oppressors, and bring back to God all those who have offended Him.

In this passage, emphasis on responsiveness to the needs of others, doing good works, confronting oppression and teaching justice are explicitly mentioned. These are, however, juxtaposed to the task of converting sinners. Themes like the conversion of sinners, concern with one’s death and avoiding purgatory are dominant themes from the 1948 novena prayers that found their way into the revised novena text.

The juxtaposition of individual needs and social awareness; praying for personal intentions and following God’s will; and salvation of the soul in the next life and involvement with the present world, all indicative of the compromise between two orientations, are featured strongly in the 1973 novena text. A close reading of the petitions in the 1973 novena text reveals that these are clustered around four themes. Of the twenty-five petitions, those pertaining to “mission” have a total of two petitions; those concerning “sacraments and church life” consist of seven petitions; those aligned with “personal morality and sanctification” garnered eight petitions; and those regarding “social conscience and morality” had eight petitions. Petitions that pertain to church life and personal morality and sanctification are legacies of previous novena texts (1926, 1936 and 1948 versions), which provide the 1973 version of the Perpetual Novena a connection with the past. Those that pertain to mission and social
morality from a selective interpretation of contemporary theological trends, which endow the 1973 novena text with a link to contemporary realities. While there is a tendency for the 1973 novena text to be theologically disjointed because of the interface of older and recent influences, the synthesis of these influences expanded the appeal of the prayers.

In a more diffused form, calls for social awareness and greater respect for human dignity seep through devotees’ devotional discourses. During periods of upheaval and social change, a number of devotees expressed gratitude that the country was able to surpass a period of trial. One devotee, writing a few months after the famous EDSA Revolution in 1986, prayed for the end of the conflict between then President Corazon Aquino and the deposed President Ferdinand Marcos, adding that the “rightful president” be given chance to lead the country (unsigned Thanksgiving Letter dated 22 June 1986). A nother devotee was more explicit in thanking Mary’s help during the People Power revolt:

I would like to reiterate my heart-felt thanksgiving for all the help you have given me and to my family, and, of course, to the Filipino people (sambayanang Pilipino) for the help you gave during the recent revolution.

(Letter dated June 6, 1986; translated from the Tagalog original)

In a number of instances, devotees emphasized the social dimensions of their devotional practice by “being a better person” and extend kindness to those around them. Consider this narration from a female devotee who went back after working overseas:

I am an OFW [Overseas Filipino Worker] for 18 years in the Middle East, working as a master cutter and fashion designer. I went home last 2003 because I was a victim of betrayal. In the course of my stay here, I wasn’t able to forget what my colleagues did to me, but through my novena prayers every Wednesday to you, Mama Mary, I eventually surrendered to you and to the Lord Jesus all my ill feelings for those who put me in danger. During the last week of this year,
I surrendered and settled (nakipagbati) with them, and it was then that I felt that you never abandoned me in all my prayers and requests.

(Letter dated March 24, 2007; translated from the Tagalog original)

In these instances, devotees highlight the positive impact of the novena prayers on their ability to make correct moral choices. In a more diffused form, this resonates with the broader calls for social involvement and participation.

6.3. Producing the “appropriate” devotee: crafting logics of identity regulation

In the previous section I demonstrated how religious elites craft the relevance of popular religious practices through the adoption of certain discourses and then taking efforts to disseminate these discourses to condition devotional motivations and actions. In this section I discuss the mechanisms in the elite regulation of popular religion and its concomitant regulation of identity claims. The increasing complexity of devotional life in the Perpetual Help shrine throughout the years necessitated certain regulative mechanisms that aim to maintain order and decorum. There is a form of regulation that concerns the “internal space” of the individual devotee’s understandings of his/her relationship with the divine figure.

6.3.1. The formation of devotional discourses

The task of identity regulation flows from the idea that the Perpetual Help shrine is a place for “integral evangelization”, that is, for the integration of one’s faith commitments in everyday life. In this regard, the Baclaran Church Team (BCT), a corps of committed lay volunteers established in 1983, was established at the Perpetual Help shrine because “being a National Shrine…remains a significant evangelizing force for the local and national levels” (Vice-Province of Manila, no
date). In the course of refining the shrine’s missionary orientation, the Mission-Vision Statement was adopted. It reads:

Ever attentive to the cry of the most abandoned, we, the community of professed and lay co-workers of the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Manila, unite with the poor, deprived, oppressed, and marginalized in their struggle towards a just and humane society through explicit, prophetic and liberating proclamation of the gospel.

This view is articulated in a more nuanced way in the Vice-Province of Manila’s entry in the 2008 *Conspectus Generalis*\(^{28}\), where a link between mission work and the administration of the shrine is made. “[T]he extraordinary vice-provincial council sees the shrine as a genuine mission addressing the vast challenges to the enormous number of people who come regularly to the shrines” (p. 412).

As a fundamental articulation of institutional goals, this Vision-Mission serves an important function in identity regulation. Organizational mission statements “can be seen to have a…communal sense to them and, in ritualistic terms, do seem intent on binding the various organisational stakeholders through establishing a sense of community” (Hamilton 2005: 174). Mission statements are properly regarded as epideictic\(^{29}\) statements and are thus linked to values that tie members of a particular community together (Hamilton 2005).

In this regard, the aims of the Perpetual Help shrine is thus not limited to providing a space to practice religious devotion, but assumes a more active role as a

\(^{28}\) The *Conspectus Generalis* (full name is *Conspectus Generalis Congregatio Sanctissimi Redemptoris*) is a compilation of reports from all Redemptorist provinces and vice-provinces throughout the world. It contains information regarding the number of confreres in a particular region, the state of the ministries and apostolate works undertaken by them, and some challenges and means of addressing these challenges.

\(^{29}\) Aristotle distinguishes three forms of speech: deliberative, judicial and epideictic in his book *Rhetoric* (Book I). An *epideictic* speech is ceremonial in function and is intended for rhetorical display. According to Lockwood (1996), the epideictic is mostly attuned to the “now” as compared to the other two forms of speech, which opens it to a “kind of reflexive or metadiscursive paradox” because of its singularity and focus on the present” (p. 70).
catalyst of change. The shrine’s “to make the social services and community building mission a clear actualization of Marian devotion and liturgical-sacramental ministry of the shrine” (National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help website, 2012). The Perpetual Help shrine’s social mission component represents a shift regarding the role of the lay people in realizing the Redemptorists’ missionary vocation. The call for increased lay participation emerged during the late 1960’s as emerging realities shook the foundations of traditional emphases on “Salvation, Sin, Hell, Confession, Prayer, Mass and the Blessed Virgin” (Maguire 2005: 42). These traditional themes for conducting mission work attracted criticism because of its over-emphasis on spiritual matters at the perceived expense of rootedness in everyday experience (The C.Ss.R. in the Philippines, 2006).

6.3.2. Two-tiered identity regulation of volunteers and regular devotees

Insofar as lay volunteers in the shrine are themselves devotees, they share certain attitudes, beliefs and practices with the rest of the devotees who come to the shrine. A distinction may thus be made with regard to identity claims of committed lay devotees. These identity claims are hinged on key principles of Redemptorist praxis in mission work and rooted in the belief that layperson’s participation in mission work entails a change of identity claims so that they are cognizant that their work is a sharing in the congregation’s missionary thrust. The lay volunteers’ membership in ministries thus necessitates additional “formation activities” that cater to the demands of their commitment. The aim of these activities is to effect change not only on what one does, but on who one is. The emphasis is thus on qualitative changes in attitudes and values. These activities are important for identity regulation because, as Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott (2002) point out, it is not merely
presence of regulative discourses that constitute successful identity regulation, but the 
linkages made between the discourses and the maintenance of identity claims. These 
formation activities seek to change not only what the lay volunteers do, but their 
motivation for doing what they do. This is reflected in the goals of Perpetual Help 
Devotion, which is concerned with the “transformation of lay volunteers’ motivation 
from devotional and religious to one that is integral and missionary” (National Shrine 

The distinction made between committed lay volunteers and the mass of 
devotees result in differing expectations and methods of regulation. The lay 
volunteers in the shrine embody the ideal integration of Marian piety and engagement 
with the “signs of the times”. The formation activities for committed lay volunteers 
thus assume a significant cognitive dimension. During such sessions they are 
constantly invited to reflect upon the ideals of their life through retreats, recollections 
and sharing sessions. The purpose of such formation sessions is to reinforce the 
missionary dimension of their devotional practice because it supports the idealized 
notions of the relationship between Marian piety and everyday life that religious elites 
esteem as the norm.

The successful linkage of institutional discourses with identity claims 
produces a class of devotees who imbied Redemptorist ideals as their personal 
normative standards. These ideals produce qualitative changes in the devotees’ 
outlook about their own devotional practice, its relevance and its broader social 
implications. The ICON Magazine is replete with accounts of devotees who share this 
type of ideals. It recounts instances of devotees who propose a type of Marian 
devotion that corresponds to the standards espoused by religious elites. One devotee 
expressed the missionary dimension of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the April-May-
June 2010 magazine issue: “like Mary our family will be missionaries whose lives and love will hopefully lead others to her and her Son...This is the core of our Marian devotion” (The ICON 2010: 22). Committed devotees I interviewed also expressed their views about the implications of religious devotion beyond individual needs. One woman devotee explained:

Maybe because I work here with the Redemptorists, it [i.e. devotional life] is not for my personal needs alone. Sometimes, the broader issues – in the community, family, among friends, the nation, and even the whole world – you also need to think of these things. You cannot really ask anyone but God’s help in these matters, right? Especially during droughts,30 for instance, what can you do? You can only pray about it. You do not only pray for yourself...that is why I am praying hard that the rains will come. It’s really praying for things that not only I can benefit, but also my family, my friends…

(Female devotee, 3 March 2010; translated from Tagalog original)

The respondent’s stress on the missionary dimension of the Perpetual Help Devotion betrays an identity claim that goes against widely-held notions that popular religion is merely concerned with individual needs. This is a notion that the Catholic Church in general and the Redemptorists in particular are trying hard to change. These testimonials, considered as “success stories”, insinuate the viability of elite-sponsored alternatives that integrate individual-emotional satisfaction and social-moral responsibilities in devotional practice.

The regulation of popular religion, however, goes beyond the corps of committed lay volunteers in the shrine. The ultimate aim of elite regulation is the wider diffusion of officially-recognized normative standards to the mass of devotees. One of the shrine’s goals is that “a sustained and consistent evangelization program especially for church goers is in place” (National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual

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30 During the time of the interview in March 2010, some areas in the Philippines were experiencing severe summer heat, making it difficult for agricultural activities to continue.
Help website, 2012). This means that the shrine should offer opportunities for the formation of all devotees, but because their number precludes any possibility of holding small-group sessions like the ones given to lay volunteers, all communicative apparatuses in the shrine (preaching, sacramental administration, public announcements and distribution of reading materials) are utilized to promote a “mission-oriented and socially-conscious” religious devotion. Less intensive and more generalized, identity regulation is aimed at effecting change so that devotees may craft a religious lifestyle in their particular contexts. Consider the homily given by the priest for the Perpetual Help feast day (June 27) in 2009:

What is the meaning of true devotion for us today? It is simple: devotion to Our Blessed Mother does not only occur during Wednesdays but on each day that we find someone in need. It does not stop in church but continues on to where we are needed.

(Translated from Tagalog original)

The message of this homily resonates with the purported goal of “true devotion”, which is the integration of one’s personal faith and one’s actions. The Rector has been keen in using the term “debo-misyonero/a” (devotee-missionary) to characterize the devotees, and “debo(misyon)” (a Tagalog neologism that combines devotion and mission in one word) to characterize the Perpetual Help Devotion itself. He further explains that, “[m]ost importantly, our being devotee-missionary means that we ourselves become the shrines in our everyday life” (The ICON 2010: 3; translated from Tagalog and emphasis in the original). In my interactions with the Rector, he often emphasized the importance of this ideal. The Perpetual Help Devotion, he explains, must lead to devotees’ to become more aware that they are “perpetual helps” to those in need.

There are limits that temper the general success of elite regulation in both “tiers” of devotional commitment. Regarding committed lay devotees, there is first the
need to locate their adaptation and adoption of the “ideal” Perpetual Help devotion vis-à-vis their level of commitment in the shrine. In my observations in the shrine and interviews with committed lay devotees, I found that lay devotees had varying levels of involvement and volunteer work in the shrine. I found some devotees who go there every day, on some days just to attend religious service, and on other days to do volunteer work. These lay devotees tended to have deeper familiarity with facets of Redemptorist mission work and mission, and would know all the priests assigned at the shrine. Other volunteers, however, are only present during Wednesdays, and their volunteer work is confined within the parameters of the novena devotions. These devotees, while expressing their attachment to the shrine and their adherence to the ideals proposed by the principles of Redemptorist mission work, tended to speak of their volunteer work in relation with their other commitments outside the shrine. There is, thus, a general observation that the level of commitment among volunteers is a factor that influences the depth of the “internalization” of elite-sponsored values and principles.

On the part of the mass of devotees, the limitations of elite regulation is more pervasive and in certain cases more difficult to overcome. The crux of the limitation is whether new articulations of “ideal” Marian devotion will supplant perceived “incomplete” or “superstitious” understandings of devotional practices or will just coexist with the latter. Bulatao’s (1966) widely cited concept of “split-level Christianity” alludes to this tendency to efface “dissonances” between seemingly contradicting thought- and value-systems. Commentators of Philippine culture have also noted this reticence to integrate contrasting belief systems, which is traceable to the legacy of Austro-Asian eclecticism in matters of religious beliefs and practices (Mulder 1997, 2000). My conversations with devotees confirmed this tendency.
toward eclecticism: while they easily adopt and articulate notions of “devotee-missionary” mentioned above, they also maintain conventional notions of popular religious practice (e.g. bargaining with the divine figure, blessings viewed as “successful bargaining”, and performing devotional acts that are frowned upon by priests). The limitation here is then a case of the “half-way success” of elite-sponsored discourses on the nature of religious devotion. In this phenomenon, the values and principles are accepted, but integrated with personally-relevant notions of popular religious practices, even those that do not sit well with ecclesiastical regulation.

6.4. Bureaucratization and acts of piety: rationalizing religious practices

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the range of acts of piety that devotees perform within its premises is one feature of the Perpetual Help shrine that other places in Metro Manila generally do not share. This preponderance is attributed to the presence of the authenticated icon. In this regard, the Perpetual Help shrine is quite different, for while Catholic churches in the metropolis have their own religious icons, the Perpetual Help shrine has an icon that possesses “intrinsically-attributed sacredness” as evidenced by its reputation for miracles among devotees (see Kong 1991). This “intrinsically-attributed sacredness” flows from the devotees’ esteem and veneration because of the icon’s actual capacity to effect purportedly miraculous interventions. There are several references in the letters about devotees’ claims that the icon is miraculous, insofar as it was attributed with the power to turn an almost hopeless situation around. The icon is, moreover, considered as an important conduit of divine presence: devotees attest in their letters that Mary can “speak” and communicate her message to devotees through dreams, a “bright light” seen from the altar, or similar
phenomena. This is the reason why the Perpetual Help icon in Baclaran has particularly attracted an extensive devotional cult.

In view of the preponderance of strong devotional current, the management of the shrine involves the regulation of devotional activities done there. Managing devotional acts entails providing the techniques by which devotees are made aware of the motivation behind their practice and assuring that these are aligned with certain principles and articulations of belief. This also resonates with the task of analytically engaging the social nature of religious identities, as well as bodily and mental dimensions of learning (Bourdieu 2000; Herzfeld 2004; Schatzski 2001).

6.4.1. An elite-sponsored typology of popular religious practices

Owing to the need to keep order and decorum, the regulation of acts of piety serves to control the use of space, especially because the shrine receives a large number of devotees every week. The link between the regulation of devotional actions and the goals of devotional practice as articulated by “official” agents in the shrine is the significant dimension that needs to be unpacked conceptually. As acts of piety are expressions of one’s status as a devotee, the regulation of these acts are necessary in assessing how devotees have internalized the values proposed by ecclesiastical elites.

I argue here that the key principle of this regulative dimension is restraint, which in turn is based on the link between religious practice and broader theological/sacramental frames of reference. Frank Lynch (1984) in this regard proposed the distinction among popular religious practices that are “recommended”, “tolerated”, or “discouraged”. While he did not articulate the standards upon which the taxonomy is based, I suggest that the elitesponsored theological/sacramental principles may serve as the standard. The taxonomy he proposes may thus be regarded

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as an internal classificatory system within Catholicism in its task of assessing popular religion.

One example of a “recommended” devotional activity in the Perpetual Help shrine is the lighting of votive candles (See Plate 23). There is a separate chapel for this purpose, and votive candles are supplied by the shrine management from donations. During a typical Wednesday, large crowds would usually form inside the candle chapel, as devotees struggle to find their way to light their votive candles and spend a few minutes in prayer. Inside the candle chapel are also images of saints, a large crucifix and a mural of the Perpetual Help icon at the center, all of which are objects of extensive veneration by devotees.

If lighting votive candles is one example of “approved” devotional acts, the wiping of images is an example of a “tolerated” practice. At the shrine’s main entrance, images of the crucified Christ and the *Santo Niño* (Holy Child) have been objects of extensive devotional attention (See Plate 24). The crucified Christ in particular had to be repainted several times in a year because constant touching by devotees erodes the paint. The most venerated image is the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help at the central apse. As one of the most venerated Marian icons in the Philippines, the Perpetual Help icon stands out because, unlike other Marian images that can be touched by devotees, the icon is quite inaccessible because it is mounted ten meters from ground level. In a demonstration of leniency, the Redemptorists allowed devotees to approach the altar area so that devotees may touch the metal spires that connect to the icon’s casing. According to devotees I interviewed, touching

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*In some Marian shrines in the Philippines, provisions are made for devotees to touch the image. A walkway is constructed that leads to a window-like opening situated at the image’s back side. Devotees can then continue queuing to touch the image even when church services are ongoing. Such provision is not available in the Perpetual Help shrine, as the icon is not mounted against the sanctuary’s wall.*

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the metal spires is as good as touching the icon itself, and the opportunity to be able to “touch the icon” is a vailed by a s ignificant nu mber of de votees e very W ednesday,
especially dur ing m idday and l ate evening w hen t here are no s cheduled no ve na devotees.

Plate 23. Devotees lighting votive candles at the candle chapel. The mural of the Perpetual Help icon is also the object of extensive veneration by devotees (Photo taken by researcher on 17 February 2010)

Plate 24. A devotee knocking at the glass case of the image of the Santo Niño (Holy Child) at the church’s main entrance (Photo taken by researcher on 2 January 2009)
Devotional acts toward images are “tolerated” because ecclesiastical elites are less certain of the devotees’ motivation for wiping or kissing religious icons. Even from a doctrinal point of view, there is a thin line that separates devotion to religious icons and “idolatry”, which is never tolerated. The key indicator for a “correct way” to practice devotion to religious images is restraint, that is, the ability to mediate between the need to express as well as control strong emotions. The assumption here is that too much display of emotion toward a religious icon increases the likelihood that the devotee holds a “misplaced” view with regard to the function of religious images in the conduct of worship. Thus, devotional acts involving religious icons are evaluated on a case-to-case basis, and what is ultimately important is the presence of ecclesiastical elites who oversee the performance of devotional practices.

The practice of walking on one’s knees (and other acts that involve pain) are examples of acts of piety that are “discouraged”. The Perpetual Help shrine in the past has been notable for the number of people seen walking on their knees. Devotees would utilize the center aisle for this purpose and would walk from the main entrance all the way up to the altar area (See Plate 25). The reason for this disapproving stance, it seems, is that the practice is perceived as a misguided attempt to make bargains with the divine figure. Devotees’ testimonials sometimes make this link between walking on one’s knees with supplication when in extreme need. One devotee wrote something to this effect:

My Mother, I have request from you: may I be one of the successful CPA’s (Certified Public Accountant) for this year. I regret not having the time to go to your church frequently, but I promise you that I will visit you in your shrine when I have time to spare…if I pass the CPA exams, I promise you that I will do the novena for nine consecutive Wednesdays; I will also walk on my knees from the front door of your shrine all the way up to the altar. My Mother, I hope that my name will be included in the roster of successful exam-takers.

(Letter dated February 18, 1964; translated from Tagalog original)
Banking on the notion that pain provides additional leverage to secure favors, the practice is deemed by ecclesiastical elites to be supported by an erroneous conception of how divine power works. A priest I interviewed mentioned that during the 1970’s, confrontations between devotees and volunteer ushers would ensue because some devotees insist on walking on their knees even during Mass or novena sessions. The Redemptorists insisted on discouraging this practice, and while there are still a certain number of individuals who walk on their knees, anecdotal evidence shows that the number has considerably declined. The devotees have also used the side aisles for this purpose because volunteer ushers discourage devotees from walking on their knees at the central aisle. According to the ushers I interviewed, this is done to prevent crowding and obstructions to free movement in the church building.

*Plate 25. A devotee walking on her knees at the church’s central aisle (Photo taken by devotee on 27 December 2009)*
6.4.2. Religious authority and the reorientation of personal motivations

In all the instances mentioned above, the interesting point to consider is not the devotional practices themselves, but how they relate to principles that are invoked to legitimize them. Since the beginning of the third century C.E., Christianity has increasingly sought to maintain its institutional integrity through orthodoxy (right belief), which extended to the standardization of ecclesiastical politico-legal power in European Catholicism (Barshack 2005). This resulted to the conflation of the desire for doctrinal “correctness” with the desire for uniformity of religious practice, which culminated during the sixteenth century with the reforms enacted by the Council of Trent. In this regard, doctrine provides the unifying principle for devotional practices, and attempts to rationalize popular religion are made by referring to the doctrinal principles. In the Philippine context, the same trend toward lessening pluriformity was enforced by colonial state agents in the eighteenth century who policed the conduct of festivals, while ecclesiastical prelates regulated the use of prayer texts.

In the Perpetual Help shrine, ecclesiastical elites use similar means of regulating lay piety, citing traditional and contemporary theological principles in encouraging or discouraging certain practices. Owing to its link with the symbolism of light (which is particularly important in Christianity), lighting votive candles is generally perceived as a “theologically sound” form of devotional practice. This is one of the reasons why lighting candles is widespread in Catholicism. Regular parish churches and chapels would allocate spaces for lighting candles, usually in front of religious icons or statues. Moreover, the practice is also restrained and has a prayerful/meditative character, a feature that is favorable to the proclivities of ecclesiastical elites.
The discouragement of walking on one’s knees and similar acts of piety that involve pain proceeds from the wariness on the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to displays of religious fervor that involve self-inflicted punishment. In the Perpetual Help shrine, some of the priests, lay volunteers and devotees I interviewed expressed their ambivalence regarding devotees who walk on their knees and similar practices that involve pain. According to one devotee, she does not walk on her knees because she does not see any reason to do so; her participation in the novena sessions are enough. Another devotee replied that she does not need to walk on her knees to be assured that God hears her prayers. In one occasion, a priest expressed his surprise at how devotees can be so patient with the pain involved in walking one one’s knees.

There are several reasons that explain ecclesiastical elites’ ambivalence for walking on one’s knees and similar practices that involve pain. The first springs from the belief that walking on one’s knees is inconsistent with a “healthy and liberating” Marian devotion. From the perspective of ecclesiastical elites, such practice has remained within the pi etistic and individualistic mode of popular religion that the Redemptorists and lay collaborators are trying hard to change. The second is the abovementioned observation that involvement with pain as a leverage for obtaining divine favor does not sit well with certain Catholic theological principles. In a statement made in 2008, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) asserted that rituals involving bodily harm are “superstitious” and “not an authentic expression of faith” (Philippine Star, 18.03.2008). The third is the sense of wariness on the part of ecclesiastical elites regarding devotional practices that seek “direct contacts with the sacred” (see Carroll 1989). Practices that involve pain would fall into this category, especially when notions of “sacrifice” are linked to aspirations for potency. As Reynaldo Ileto (1979) points out, the connection between sacrifice and
potency is firmly established among adherents of Tagalog-based popular movements. Similar observations also indicate the absence of a strong discourse on guilt and emphasis on the primacy of blessings and well-being in Filipino social psyche (Mulder 2000).

It is interesting to note that attempts to regulate devotional acts entail the acceptance that certain practices are already widespread among lay devotees. This is significant in the case of “discouraged” religious practices as devotees are perceived to proceed from stances that are at variance with the expectations of ecclesiastical elites. In the case of walking on one’s knees, devotees continued the practice and have cited various reasons for doing so in their letters or during interviews. One devotee I interviewed mentioned that she has been walking on her knees since she started going to the Perpetual Help shrine in 1984. This practice goes with her usual attendance in novena sessions and is done when she is in dire need that requires an “urgent response” from the Virgin Mary. When I asked her about the personal significance of walking on one’s knees, she replies,

I am not really sure, but I just feel that she [the Virgin Mary] can hear me better when I am in pain, that is what I feel…She may take pity on me because she sees that I am doing some sacrifice. But I know that even without sacrifice she will still help me; it’s just that I really want to do it.

(Female respondent; interviewed on 21 April 2010)

In some of the letters, the same ideas are expressed: the practice is seen by many devotees as an expression of desperation (when one requests something really urgent) or of thanksgiving (when one feels that the request is already granted). One woman devotee who asked to be spared from operation expressed this idea clearly:

According to the results of the biopsy, my uterus needs to be removed because of hyperplasia. I suddenly felt a pang of nervousness and I immediately thought of doing the novena to the Mother of Perpetual

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Help every Wednesday and walk on my knees as far as my body can take it. I know that I will never be left alone by our Mother.

(Letter dated March 4, 1987; translated from Tagalog original)

In these cases, walking on one’s knees is regarded as a legitimate act despite the ecclesiastical elites’ disapproval of the practice. Devotees have no problem in trying to “change the mind” of the divine figure through acts that bear direct consequences on bodily comfort (such as walking on one’s knees). Devotional practices being portrayed as “kusang l oob” (doing something out of impulse or without much self-deliberation) demonstrate the affinity between interiority (kalooban) and action (Miranda 1989; Alejo 1990). The point is not that the act of walking on one’s knees per se is used as a bargaining tool; it is, rather, that the act of walking on one’s knees is an identifiable indicator of sincerity, which is the bargaining tool with the divine figure. This line of thinking is reminiscent of local notions of the interplay of hierarchical and egalitarian patterns in social relationships that Fenella Cannell (1999) observed among Bicolanos. She argues that Filipino ideas about “social circulation, hierarchy and the sources of power” flow from an ambiguous “economy of salvation” that is premised on fostering closeness while at the same time acknowledging superior authority (p. 234). In this context, the practice of walking on one’s knees and the “pity” it triggers are justified by a flexible and agency-centered relationship between the divine figure and devotees. I gather from devotees’ testimonies that expressions of belief in the efficacy of walking on one’s knees are premised not on the pain itself but on its transformative potential, that is, its capacity to transform individuals and their life trajectories. As the case with Pentecostal groups like the El Shaddai (see Weigele 2007), the important matter for Perpetual Help devotees is the redefinition of suffering, which leads to the “reinvent[ing of] their own pasts and futures” (p. 96).
There is thus a covert but real clash of interpretations of the same practice here. The declining numbers who engage in this practice may be taken as an indicator of the success of ecclesiastical management in curbing this practice. The persistence of the practice, however, is a proof that the standard for evaluating the usefulness is still the devotees’ tactical evaluation of “what works” and not the reasons proposed by ecclesiastical elites. The task is then to reorient the devotees’ motivation so that their performance of such acts is not based on “self-centered”, “merely subjective” or much worse, erroneous intentions. The persistence of the “utilitarian use of religious symbols” among devotees has been a cause of concern among the Redemptorists, as it represents “a gap between political involvement and faith activity” (C.Ss.R. Vice-Province of Manila 1986: no page). This perplexity is also expressed by priests and lay volunteers who complain that the social justice dimension of the novena devotion seeps too slowly among devotees: social justice related thanksgiving letters account for a meager 0.05 percent of the total number of thanksgiving letters from 2004 to 2008, the lowest-ranked item in the list of answered favors. These situations notwithstanding, ecclesiastical elites still rely on the need to continually engage lay devotees to rethink their religious practices.

The purported strategy to obtain this outcome is to recognize that these practices are widespread, but aiming for the “containment” of possibly erroneous interpretations and self-centered motivations underlying them. This containment of popular religious practices operates through supervision rather than repression of these practices. I argue that the logic of containment in this case is an institutional response to a real limitation in the task of managing popular religion. Containment is the viable option when repression is not possible, mostly because of the practice is too widespread to be eradicated. In using this adaptive strategy, religious elites either
envision a complete eradication of a perceived “anomalous” practice through a gradual process of lessening its intensity and numerical pervasiveness; or the introduction of a “ritual substitute” to replace an existing practice altogether. The point is to give due regard to what devotees need: while religious elites cannot accept these needs in toto, its continual assessment assures the relevance of elite-sponsored practices. While the logic of containment aims to craft relevance by a continual assessment of what devotees need, it presents certain limitations as to what is strategically feasible or possible. Contrary to expectations, the religious elites are thus not “free” to do anything as they please with popular religious practices.

6.5. Concluding synthesis: managing piety and crafting relevance in public life

In this chapter, I discussed the nature “elite-sponsored” popular religion to argue for the regulation of religious practices in contemporary popular religion. I began by identifying the need to problematize institutional discourse by clerical elites as a constitutive yet contentious dimension in modern popular religion, resonating with Weber’s notion of rationalization and the demagification of rites by religious elites (Sharot 2001; Thomas 1971). The impetus to rationalize religion became the main motivation for clerical authority to stamp out “superstitious” elements, employing the logic of mediated efficiency in instituting reforms and eradicating the partial and immediate character of popular religion (see Bourdieu 1987). The Perpetual Help Devotion in this regard may be regarded as an exemplary case of a rationalized form of popular religion that is subsumed within the broader dimensions of the Catholic theological and sacramental system.

In terms of devotional discourse, religious authority effectively controls popular religion by providing normative evaluations of what is done in its name. This

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is particularly relevant to institutional Catholicism, which increased its surveillance of popular religious practices to curb “superstition” and the “instrumentalization” of religion for personal gains. Charles Macdonald (2004) explains that the Catholic system’s contribution to Philippine folk religion is a clearly definable moral system, something that the latter did not have before the advent of Spanish colonial power. Catholic discourse on popular religion in the Philippines has mainly reiterated the “official position” that harmonizes popular piety with prevailing sacramental and ethical systems. Jaime Bulatao’s (1966) exposition of “split-level Christianity” alludes to the integration of supposedly conflicting systems of belief that enables a Filipino Christian to profess belief in the saints, on the one hand, and engkantos (nature spirits that need to be appeased), on the other hand. This “problem of inconsistency” may be remedied by the adoption a theologically consistent (albeit abstract) position that he refers to as incarnational (as opposed to split-level). In a similar vein, Frank Lynch (1984) ascribes to “official Catholicism” a normative dimension that is used to evaluate religious practices as tolerated, disapproved, or condemned. Religious practices that are “non-official” are outside the church’s sacramental heritage, and therefore assessed on the basis of their closeness or departures from Catholic orthodoxy as upheld by recognized ecclesiastical authorities.

The management of piety, however, is ultimately an attempt to regulate of what people actually do and how they make sense of them. This immediately ties elite regulation of piety with questions of identity-formation and maintenance, which I discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. In the next chapter I locate devotional identities in the context of Claude Levi-Strauss’ (1966) notion of bricolage and its concern with “what works”, betraying a tendency toward the tactical dimensions of coping with the flux of everyday life (see De Certeau 1984). As
demonstrated in this chapter, ecclesiastical elites often assert the need to refashion popular religion that employs the logic of subsumption, which locates the immediacy, particularity and spontaneity of popular religion within the broader, more predictable and rigorously codified structures of official modes of belief. In this process of incorporation, popular religious practices assume significance in the broader orders of the ecclesiastical institution, but they cease to exist in themselves and are effectively removed from the exigencies of their lived environment. In this case, popular religion becomes a translocal entity assuming a subordinate and peripheral role within that system. This is a power-laden process within modern religious institutions and must not be taken as natural (Bourdieu 1987; Mejido 2002).

The discussions in this chapter allude to a historical synthesis of elite regulation of popular religion that likewise provides the groundwork for understanding elite interests in Philippine society. Like other groups in society, elites also make sense of the opportunities and challenges posed by historical circumstances in order to advance their interests. In the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines, the preponderance of ecclesiastical elites who act as endogenous agents of regulation is important because their location within the objective relations of power in institutional Catholicism has influenced their motivation to maximize the relevance of religious practice in public life. What can be perceived, therefore, is a case of relevance-making, where ecclesiastical elites craft uses of religious practice in order to assert the merits of “having a religion” to confront the exigencies and fluctuations in modern life.

A close reading of elite-sponsored popular religion suggests that it resonates with Erich Goode and Nachman Ben Yehuda’s (1994) notion of “elite-engineered moral panics”. My agreement with their formulation lies in the role of the elites in
initiating a wide variety of responses to specific phenomena. I adopted the term “elite-sponsored” instead because popular religious practices can be regulated but not totally engineered by elites, insofar as the support of devotees constitutes an important dimension for its persistence. As the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion demonstrates, this process of incorporating practices and individuals into the ambit of ecclesiastical discipline influences the formation of regulative discourses. The ultimate goal of this process is thus not only the successful management of popular religion by elite forces but the extension of what constitutes the “elite” itself, which now includes groups and individuals who toe the line of the clerical elite’s position. This is exemplified in the existence of committed lay volunteers at the shrine, who assume a status that is qualitatively different from the rest of the devotees.

As explained above, the elite sponsorship of popular religion is premised upon the logic of subsumption that locates popular religious practices within the standards of orthodoxy and officially-sanctioned rites. A crucial issue to consider is the extent of elite regulation’s influence in transforming popular religious practices and in what direction this transformation takes place. Historical and ethnographic data from the Philippines suggest that the shift from a predominantly affective popular religion during the Spanish colonial period to a doctrinally-robust and tempered one during the American colonial period and thereafter alludes to a process of rationalization. Elite regulation, however, also entails the formation of cooperative bonds amongst committed devotees. The limitations of current scholarship, which tends to take a narrow view of the elite (that is, confined to clerics like priests and other ritual experts), prevents a nuanced understanding of elite regulation. This thinking is cogent in the distinction between officially-sanctioned rites as “religion as preached,” and popular religious practice by lay people as “religion as practiced” (Johnson 2006).
While this perspective distinguishes two modes of living religiously, it has failed to account for the crisscrossing between elite and lay forms of religious practice. Charles Stewart (1989) discusses how the supernatural has become a marker of distinction among classes, and how “[t]he apparatus of gemony inculcates a sense of participation and belonging among subordinate classes and is reinforced by the impression that there is social mobility” (p. 85). On the part of ecclesiastical elites, collaboration with lay devotees serves as a gauge of success, as well as an indicator of the extension of their regulative role.

The character of successful elite regulation is therefore premised on the capacity of ecclesiastical elites to make strategic accommodations, while at the same time maintaining internal institutional coherence. There is a delicate balance to be maintained here, and local ecclesiastical elites are at the helm of keeping this balance. While the church is a “hierocratic organization” that allocated for itself the right to enforce decrees through the distribution or withholding of religious benefits (Weber 1978: 54), practices on the ground have claims to legitimacy that ecclesiastical elites cannot ignore. The regulative mechanisms enforced by ecclesiastical elites do not completely “colonize” religious practices because they have always remained pluriform and polyvalent. Regulative mechanisms thus resort to various logics of incorporation just as they provide boundary-maintaining mechanisms to distinguish properly Catholic forms of popular religion from other alternatives. The success of elite regulation of popular religion depends on this creative balancing act.
CHAPTER 7
THE PERPETUAL HELP DEVOTION AND THE DEVOTEES’ CONSTRUCTIONS OF SELF AND IDENTITY

Mama Mary, I wrote to you to offer my heart-felt thanks. I am one of those who took the Board Exams last November 2004, but I was not lucky enough to pass it. Mama Mary, I admit that, after knowing that I did not pass the exam, I felt a weakening of my faith in God. Many questions plagued my mind, and I asked all of these to God even though I know very well that no one has the right to question Him. It has been like that for some days, but I was finally enlightened because I always pray to God. After realizing that my thoughts were a big mistake, I immediately asked forgiveness from God...Even if I did not pass [the Board Exams], I believe that everything that happens in life has a reason. Even if God did not accede to my birthday request to pass the Board Exam, I believe that he has a greater gift for me. I believe, too, that He has a better plan for me in this world; all I need to do is to wait.

- From a male devotee’s letter (translated from Tagalog original)
December 8, 2004

7.1. Setting the context: devotional selves and thanksgiving letters

Ever since the Perpetual Novena devotion was initiated in the Perpetual Help shrine in 1948, writing letters has been an important dimension of devotional practice there. The number of letters the shrine receives weekly is another indicator of the Perpetual Help Devotion’s appeal both at home and abroad. To provide a general picture, the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran received nearly one million letters in a span of four years, from April 2004 to December 2008, 80 percent of which are petition letters, while the remaining 20 percent are thanksgiving letters. The shrine encourages devotees to write these letters; in this it stands quite apart even from other Perpetual Help shrines in other places in the Philippines.32

32 Not all Perpetual Help shrines in the Philippines recommend writing letters of petition and thanksgiving. For instance, the Perpetual Help shrine in Cebu City (in Visayas, central Philippines) provides a pre-coded tally sheet where devotees may tick boxes that correspond to their intended petition or thanksgiving. The practice of writing personal notes at the back of the tally sheets is generally not expected.
Taking of f from t his extensive resource o f personal stories, t his c hapter investigates the f ormation of not ions of “everyday l ife” and relates t hese t o the crafting of alternative lifestyles among devotees. This line of inquiry responds to the dea rth of s cholarly accounts on t he role of t he self i n t he m aintenance of popular religious practices. S holars of popular religion in Europe and North America have in the pa st e mphasized a ccounting f or t he r eception (or non-reception) of doctrinal pronouncements by lay faithful (e.g. Adams 2008; Johnson 2006), as well as the rise and decline of certain forms of popular religion, particularly in Catholicism (e.g. Bax 1985; D ubisch 1990; K elly and Kelly 1998; R ey 2004; V ellenga 2007). W hat i s common in these works i s their focus on pr ocesses that condition the acceptance or rejection of institutional regulation of popular religion. T hese studies however tended to emphasize communal religious practices and do not deal with the experiences of ordinary people. M oreover, w ith notable e xceptions (e.g. D ubisch 1990; K elly and Kelly 1998; R ey 2004), m ost of t hese s tudies a re c oncerned with r ural p opulations and pr actices, w here t he f orce of gr oup nor ms a nd c onvention o v er i ndividual subjectivities is much more pervasive.

In the context of this study, I argue that the emphasis on selfhood and identity is a w orkable pl atform from which s tatements about t he n ature of t he r elationship between religion and modernity may be made. O wing to the nature of the life stories from devotional letters, this inquiry is premised on devotees’ capability to reflexively monitor their life trajectories and perform certain identities in their everyday practices (see Giddens 1984). D evotional l e tters a r e i mportant i n this r egard because the y occasion an engagement with personal narratives as s ources of s ociological i nsight. T he r ecognition gi ven t o l ife hi story r esearch i n s ociology p roceeds f rom t he increasing importance of individual s tories as accounts o f s ocial p rocesses (e.g. ~213~
Moreover, the letter is the most direct expression of an individual’s perspective among different types of life documents. Letter-writing especially from the eighteenth century onward has become “an emblem of the private” and thus intimately linked to notions of individuality and self-scrutiny (Steedman 1999: 117-8).

The implication of this particular insight leads to the clarification of the conceptual location of the “devotee”. The “devotee” is an important category to investigate because it provides an entry point for assessing the nature of modern religious lives. Devotees’ location within the complexities of urban life places them within the constellation of relationships and resources that are considered “modern”, and their response is a “modern” response. The attention to selfhood and identity thus enables a nuanced discussion of notions of agency, active negotiation, appropriation and liminality. While the management of piety by institutional agents is an important dimension of the practice of religious devotion, attention to notions of selfhood and identity provide compelling insights that aid in the task of assessing the nature of modern popular religion.

7.2. Bond-formation and moral identity: the liminal basis of popular religion

During one of my field observations in the Perpetual Help shrine in April 2010, I met Emily (not her real name) through a referral made by one of the devotees I had recently interviewed. Probably in her early fifties (I did not ask for her age), Emily had finished a bachelor’s degree in nursing and was eventually employed as a full-time nurse in one of the hospitals in Metro Manila. She was married but separated from her husband and had not remarried. I met Emily for the first time at the Perpetual Help shrine and scheduled an interview at her workplace during the afternoon of 15
April 2010. On the appointed day, Emily began the interview by relating her religiously plural family background: while she grew up Catholic and had a cousin who was a Catholic priest in a nearby province, one of her sisters converted to born-again Christianity and some of her extended family used to be members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* (INC), an indigenous Christian church in the Philippines. Emily appeared really pleased when she talked about her cousin who was a priest. “I am really happy…because someone will bless us. He is our *dilihensya* from heaven”.

In the course of the interview, Emily shared interesting points about her life as a devotee. “I dream about Our Mother of Perpetual Help when I miss attending Mass [on Wednesdays],” Emily told me once. When I asked of the reasons why she is a devotee, she replied that it was not because she experienced something “miraculous”. “It’s just that [I feel that] all my prayers are heard by her…even if I say the same things over and over again, she never gets tired to help me,” Emily explained. While she goes to the shrine every Wednesday, she would also come during “less busy” days like Tuesday or Thursday as well because she appreciated the solitude. “When you ask for something, it is better if you are just alone when talking to her [Virgin Mary]. I think that God can hear my prayers better if I pray by myself,” she claimed. Lastly, she recounted that there were times when she did not finish the novena prayers. At some point, she would stop participating and would pray in her own words. “I prefer that because I can really talk to her [Virgin Mary],” she explained.

Emily’s story serves as a platform that allows for an appreciation of the relational dimensions of selfhood that condition the devotional relationship with the divine figure. In this context, the counterpart of the elite-inspired rationalization in Chapter 6 is the meaning-making processes done by devotees. These meaning-making processes are premised on different standards and follow their own logics and “ways

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of proceeding”. As explained below, the relational self is conditioned by *liminality* that influences the formation of moral choices and responses to the hierarchical nature of the devotional relationship.

### 7.2.1. The relational self and the vagaries of liminality

The concept of liminality utilized in this section is based on Turner’s (1969) discussion of a double-process that exposes the limits of completely rationalizing social practice. This condition of liminality “elude[s] or slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (Turner 1969: 95). In the context of selfhood and identity, this liminality is apparent in the “non-distinction between the self and other” (see Sta. Maria and Largoza 2008). The non-distinction between the self and other is a constitutive dimension of Filipino social identity that culturally-sensitive psychologists in the Philippines discussed in recent literature (De Guia 2005; Enriquez 1986, 1992; Salazar 1982). While European and North American notions of the self are based on an individualistic reckoning of experience and has influenced Philippine cultural psychology to a certain extent, such notions may not be a useful starting point in understanding Filipino notions of self, where “no normal self-experience appears to be relational” (Mulder 1997: 125). Dominant Filipino notions of self (*sarili*) do not exclude the other (*kapwa* in Tagalog) but engages in a dialogical encounter where “meaning is not located ‘within the individual’ but ‘in between’ the self and the other” (Sta. Maria and Largoza 2008: 58).

This relational dimension is apparent in the link between bond-formation with the divine figure and notions of authenticity and closeness. On closer analysis, the “subjectifying” of the divine figure counter-balances elite-sponsored rationalizations of devotional practice that “sanitizes” the divine from the “thick” textures of human
experience. This also echoes Karen Cerulo and Andrea Barra’s (2008: 377-78) claim that divine figures become social actors when a believer commences a prayerful relationship. Thus it is not surprising that mere recitation of prayers will not bring about its desired effects because it is not the formulaic nature of the prayers but the devotee’s sense of closeness with the divine figure that determines its efficacy. Consider the insight provided by one woman devotee:

There came a time when I cried before your “miraculous picture” at our family altar at home; I asked you, O Mother of Perpetual Help and our dear Lord Jesus, why my requests were not heard. I began asking if there was something wrong with the way I said my prayers, and I requested you to teach me the right way to pray. But I was mistaken because as long as the prayer of petition to Our Mother of Perpetual Help and our dear Lord Jesus comes from the heart (taos sa puso), the request will be answered.

(Undated letter [probably 2000’s], translated from Tagalog)

The devotee perceived this sense of closeness as authenticity, expressed in the expectation that prayers should “come from the heart” (taos sa puso). In a number of narrative accounts, this aspiration for authenticity is expressed by going beyond ritual prescriptions and emotionally investing oneself in the devotional practice. There is indication here that authenticity is not merely in the performance of ritual obligations but an experience of one’s loób (Tagalog for “inside”; here meaning the internal emotional condition of an individual). The loób is the seat of an individual’s internal balance that defines the meaning and purpose of one’s relationship with one’s kapwa (near others). In Filipino cultural experience, authenticity is a condition where there is resonance between the internal sentiments of one’s loób and the external performance of ritual acts (see Salazar 1982; De Guia 2005). Insofar as the devotional entails the performance of certain ritual acts, devotees regard rituals as resources relating with the divine figure. The devotional relationship has to transcend ritual prescriptions and reach the level of one’s affect for it to be regarded as authentic.
The devotees also expressed the importance of the shrine as a privileged location for experiencing the presence of the divine figure. Numerous devotees highlight the necessity of visiting the shrine because praying there “feels different” as compared to praying in other sacred places. Several studies support this observation that shrines are “special places of hierophany” that make them unique spaces (Bax 1985; Dubisch 1990; Jansen and Kuhl 2008; King 2010). Among Perpetual Help devotees, there is consistent reference to the shrine as the Virgin Mary’s tahanan (home). The difference between performing devotional acts in the Perpetual Help shrine and in other places is explained in terms of the intensity of the Virgin Mary’s presence and the quality of that presence in the shrine. By intensity, devotees allude to the presence of a spiritual presence that leads to positive feelings; by quality, they claim that he kind of this spiritual presence is unique to the shrine and not experienced elsewhere.

By emphasizing authenticity and invoking images of tahanan (home), the goal of the Perpetual Help Devotion is to foster an intentional relationship with the Virgin Mary. Intentional relationship means that their connection with the divine figure is not defined by impersonal forces like nature, the “life cycle”, or environment, or by group identifications like membership in a specific class, ethnic group or nationality but by personal choice. This intentionality is premised on devotees’ capacity to “activate” the relationship, which means that the divine figure must be consciously invoked in order for the experience to be judged as “authentic”. Intentionality is important to the devotional relationship because it presupposes the co-presence of the divine figure and devotee within the same interactional plane. The potency of the divine figure is therefore recognized as real, and there is not hing frivolous about approaching the divine figure to bargain with them. In this sort of relationship the divine figure is
expected to operate on standards of reciprocity that devotees can comprehend. The “potency” of the divine figures is dependent on a set of obligations and can therefore be “tamed” by devotees.33

At this point, I introduce the argument that the relationality of the self and the co-presence in the same interactional plane lead to the liminalization of the devotional relationship. By liminalization, I refer to mutually-reinforcing process of “sacralizing the human” and “humanizing the sacred”, which creates intersections between the sacred and “mundane” that are not collapsible into either of the dimensions exclusively. Rather than strict separation between the sacred and mundane dimensions, it is more productive to speak of processes that transform these supposedly “mundane” modalities of relationship tools of dealing with the divine figure. In Chapter 2, I discussed that the use of religious objects orients the individual habitus (in Bourdieu’s sense of the term) toward the sacred. In this creative use of objects, ordinary materials assume special significance as conduits of divine presence.

In this case, the standards of human reciprocity and relationship that is transformed as conduits of divine presence, alleging to the same creative use of available resources to bring about a certain mode of relating with the divine. This process of the liminalization of relationality, when projected inward into one’s selfhood, becomes a “space of empowerment” as divine potency becomes an accessible dimension in crafting one’s life trajectory.

33 A similar case documented by Cannell (1999) in Calabanga, Camarines Sur (Bicol region, southeast of Manila) explains that devotees of Amang Hinulid (an image of the Dead Christ) clearly perceive the difference between Christian and nature-based spiritual entities. Like their nature-based counterparts, Christian spiritual entities like Christ, Virgin Mary or saints make demands on their devotees, but the latter enable them to carry out the demands. In this regard, Christian divine figures are perceived to be more powerful and reasonable in their dealings with human beings.
7.2.2. The devotional relationship and the formation of moral selves

The logic of moral identity formation also proceeds along the same principles of liminalization outlined previously: the projection of liminality inward leads to self-empowerment because the “sacred” becomes accessible to devotees, while its outward projection leads to the framing of moral choices in the context of local moral worlds, those contexts of belief and behavior where human experiences are constructed (Kleinman 1992). One thus observes in devotees’ accounts that the formation of moral identities is based less on codified moral standards than on “self-reflexive” assessment of commitments with oneself and others.

This emphasis on reflexivity is further warranted by a notable decrease of the influence of a “Catholic-oriented moral culture” in devotional accounts. This religio-cultural logic revolves around certain imperatives extolling time-honored Catholic sacramental practices (especially confession and communion); a church-sanctioned marriage; necessity of Catholic religious associations; and Catholic school education. One feature of the “Catholic-oriented moral culture” is a relatively straightforward system of rewards and punishments. One can thus expect that adherence to its normative standards leads to temporal and supernatural rewards and non-adherence leads to supposed punishment through divine action. One woman devotee alluded to this in narrating her experience of obtaining a church-sanctioned marriage ceremony:

For over forty-three years ago, my husband and I had been married by a Protestant minister. We lived as husband and wife from that time. Due to my early becoming an orphan of mother (sic) I was left unguided to my religious duties. A life full of afflictions, tribulations and miseries (sic). At last, my continuous attending masses and other religious activities, the thought came to my mind that all the unhappiness were due to the lack of receiving the sacrament of Matrimony.

(Letter dated 22 September 1951; written in English, quoted verbatim)
A close reading of devotional letters shows that this religio-cultural logic was prevalent in the decades before the 1970’s and declined henceforth. Emerging social realities during that time significantly altered the configuration among agents in institutional Catholicism, the Philippine state and local government officials such that definable boundaries became difficult to maintain.

This changing configuration of social forces carries implications for the construction of the devotees’ construction of moral bases in everyday life. The thanksgiving letters allude to a slow but constant change from reliance on a codified moral system to the internalization of a context-based understanding of moral principles. This is apparent in the devotees’ notions of “giving back”, that is, in their perceived obligation to “repay” the divine figure. Consider the contrast between two exemplary cases of letters from two devotees:

I took up the Pre-Bar Review for four months with very inadequate facilities, such as books, and with no money. The environment in which I lived was not conducive to a good review…In spite of all these, I took the Bar Examinations…I computed my grades and it reached only an average of 68%…there was only one hope for my success in said examinations – to pray that you extend to the Examiners your spiritual blessings for…their pity upon me and their patience in reading my poor handwriting…Every Wednesday, we went to Baclaran and joined the Novena prayers. Rain and storm did not hinder us from going to Baclaran…Last January 7th at 12:30 p.m., I found my name as one of the successful Bar candidates of 1953… I am now a lawyer and will soon practice my profession, if God permits it… I will try my very best to perform my duties as a lawyer religiously. Please help me, my Mother, please give me courage and strength.

(Letter dated January 23, 1951; written in English, quoted verbatim)

Compare this with the thanksgiving letter from another devotee writing in 2006:

Even when we were not yet married, we always went here [at the shrine] every Wednesday to pray the novena, either to thank you or to ask for favors. This last 20th of April, you answered our most urgent request: my husband finally finished his studies in the field of Medicine. Thanks to you, Lord, and also to you, dear Mother, because my husband’s four years of hardship and long sleepless nights during...
review days finally paid off, putting him where he is now. As both of us grew up with paucity of material possessions and therefore sensitive to the poverty of people around us, especially the street children we see around the shrine, we promise to offer our help others by using our education to attend to the plight of street children. My husband is planning to specialize in being a Pediatrician so that, insofar as we are able, we can provide free services and give back (maibalik) all the graces that we have at present.

(Undated letter written in 2006; translated from Tagalog original)

These two devotees spoke of the same concerns about their need to pass examinations. Notice that there is explicit reference to the performance of defined religious activities as a way of “paying back” in the 1951 letter. This reference to the religious dimension is at best implicit in the case of the 2006 letter, where the devotee intended to “give back” in thanksgiving for the favor received by helping others. As both these letters are exemplary cases representing two periods in the history of the Perpetual Help Devotion, one can surmise a general shift in the character of the way devotees intend to replay their obligations to the divine figure.

The decline of the “Catholic-oriented moral culture” is also apparent in the emergence of voices from marginalized groups and from devotees in “alternative lifestyles”. There was also an observable increase in devotees who defended relationships that were looked down by their family, friends or by societal standards. For purposes of illustration, I focus on devotional letters with explicit reference to homosexual relationships because it is a significant departure from the “Catholic-inspired moral culture”. Because of the sway of the “Catholic culture” that frowned upon homosexuality, no references to such occurrences were found in devotional letters prior to the 1970’s. After this period, a small number of devotees broke the

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After a cursory reading of the devotional letters, I include in this category of ‘disputed relationships’ the following: (a) philandering husbands; (b) those coming from a previous marriage; (c) those involved in drugs or other illegal activities; (d) those without a stable job; and (e) those from a different religion as the devotee (i.e. non-Catholics). It is interesting that a majority of these incidents were reported by female devotees.
impasse and related their homosexual relationships. One male devotee who chose to
give up his relationship with another man narrated his experience:

He is the most ideal partner in life if you may want me to say that. I
enjoy every minute of his company. But it seems you are against with
\textit{(sic)} my relation to him. You have given these tests. I would rather see
him enjoying his life with his legitimate partner than have me see him...little by little taken by leukemia. It will be very hard to accept he
is dying of leukemia...I will sacrifice his company and other comfort if
that is the only exchange. If that is right to \textit{(sic)} your eyes. I just don’t
want him to die. I’ll fight for \textit{(sic)} all the coming temptations and cease
this relationship with him. But I hope you will also open the doors for
me. I want a normal clean life...to have a wife and kids...and make
him as a friend which should only be the case. I promise to do that for
you and your SON.

\begin{quote}
And with the result you have given me, it is a miracle, no less.
Unimaginably negative...You have given me this sign and this
time...it is my part...I’ll do what I promise...
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
(Letter dated July 23, 1986; written in English, quoted verbatim)
\end{flushright}

Another letter, this time written by a woman devotee working overseas, narrates her
intimate relationship with another woman in the Philippines:

\begin{quote}
I have a mistake, so I’m asking for forgiveness. I do hope you
understand me. Dearest Mother of Perpetual Help for the past 6 months
that I was still there [in the Philippines], I’ve been in love to the same
girl. Mother, is it my fault to be in love with the same sex? I really love
that girl, Mother, so please forgive me. She is the reason why I’m
sacrificing to work here in (name of country), in order to support her,
to prove that I can also do the responsibility of a man to a woman. I’m
a college graduate but I’m sure my salary will not be enough for us if I
just work in our country. So, I tried to ask help from you, I’ve asked
you before to allow me that I can go abroad, and so I’m thanking you
very, very much because you gave me your blessings.

Thank you very much, I hope you’ll continue to bless us with my love
which \textit{(sic)} now planning to follow me here in (name of country). I
promise you I’ll be good always.
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
(Letter dated March 1987; written in English, quoted verbatim)
\end{flushright}

These two excerpts reflect the liminality of the devotional relationship. In both
instances, there is recognition of the conventional disapproval for homosexual
relations: the male devotee tacitly accepts it and the female devotee is apologetic.
about violating it. The twist occurs when they evaluate their self-worth in relation to their partner, in which case the configuration of moral judgments change significantly. This is consistent with the observation that certain dimensions in life do not fall neatly within defined moral systems, especially those that concern the individual’s motivations, long-term projects or deeply-held personal values (Bransen 2000). These alternatives of oneself (as opposed to alternatives for oneself) include choices that carry implications on the individual’s identity claim. In the cases featured here, romantic relationships are the devotees’ deeply-held personal projects and are premised on an alternative set of values. Despite the disapproval of homosexual relationships, pursuing these partnerships still defined the devotees’ life trajectory through which they “realise a harmony between oneself and the surrounding social and natural world” (Bransen 2000: 393). While the woman devotee chose to continue with the relationship and the male devotee chose to end it, both are premised on the same need to resolve dissonance and achieve personal integration. Acting on a certain alternative of oneself thus resolves an acute feeling of indecision, although the outcome does not follow neatly-articulated moral principles.

7.2.3. Affirmation and questioning of hierarchical relationships

It is interesting to note that devotees demonstrate a wide range of emotional responses to the Virgin Mary’s purported action (or inaction). There are occasions where the emotional responses do not typify standard reverential dispositions that are expected when one is in the presence of a divine figure. A considerable number of devotees, for instance, are fond of referring to the Virgin Mary as “Mama Mary”, “Mother” or simply “Ma” (a colloquial expression for one’s mother). Numerous devotees were often uninhibited in expressing thoughts about “contentious” topics.
like the ir objects of affection; di slike f or certain i ndividuals; a nd t he harshness o f everyday life. In certain instances devotees were quite honest about their doubts about the effectiveness of divine action. Some devotees went to the extent of expressing feelings of being abandoned (pinabayaan), losing trust (nawalan ng tiwala), or wanting to sulk (tampo) at perceived divine indifference. The ambiguity of the devotional relationship in these instances has counter-intuitively opened spaces for devotees to engage frankly with the divine figure, while at the same time adhering to prevalent cultural scripts pertaining to mutual respect and reciprocity.

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the implications when liminality is projected outward is the reinterpretation of everyday experience to enable a “trans-utilitarian” assessment of seemingly perfunctory chores. Here is becomes possible to unpack the disproportionate number of material-related blessings in the devotional letters. Based on the data from April 2004 to December 2008, the thanksgiving for material-related blessings\(^{35}\) account for nearly 77 percent of the total number of thanksgiving notes received during that period. Lay volunteers who worked in the Perpetual Help shrine notice this increase in material-related petitions and expressed wariness at the increasing trend toward “materialism”. A close reading of the letters connotes that the strict demarcation between the material and spiritual does not make much sense to devotees. Consider the thanksgiving letter from one devotee who suffered bankruptcy in their small-scale business:

> After 10 years of working abroad, we agreed to have a little business… Mama Mary, we thanked you so much, after ten long years, we were able to save money to buy a house and car for our business…I was very thankful that our lives with our little kids ran

\(^{35}\) Based on the pre-set tabulation sheet currently in use at the Perpetual Help shrine, “material-related blessings” are those that are related to (a) health and recovery from sickness; (b) deliverance from all dangers; (c) financial help; (d) education and success in studies; (e) board exams; (f) travel abroad; (g) local and overseas employment; (h) legal favors; and (i) temporal favors.

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smoothly…We went into construction business. At first, it went good even without investing [much] capital…I initially thought, this is it, we have the break [we need]…We tried a partnership with a big company to secure good contracts, but that was the start of our problems…IS IT WRONG TO ASPIRE FOR ADDITIONAL INCOME? We went bankrupt and had court cases filed against us by our suppliers, until we sunk in debt. We tried to start anew…but we fell all the more and until now we haven’t recovered. I know that you sent all these tests to us. Everything is meant for a reason. And I accepted all of these willingly.

(Letter dated October 12, 2005; translated from Tagalog original)

The devotee defends her implicit belief that it is not wrong to aspire for material wealth, especially if others benefit from it. This notion is shared by numerous devotees, which indicates that the spiritual dimension of life does not negate aspirations for material security. Especially in the context of personal relationships, devotees regard the acquisition of material and other “temporal” benefits as a necessary dimension of everyday life and do not contradict the pursuit of a proper “spiritual life”.

The relationship between aspirations for material security and devotional practice invites a rethinking of conventional notions usually articulated in religious circles about the relationship between material security and devotional practice. There are adequate references in devotees’ accounts that success, material security and stability of income are not regarded negatively; in most cases these are even sought out by devotees. This is a implication of the connection between popular religious practices and “social imaginaries of class”, which I will discuss more substantively in the next section. Consistent with the trans-utilitarian dimension of

36 There is an old but still relevant debate in Christian circles regarding the role of material prosperity in religious practice. Advocates of the “Prosperity Gospel” especially among evangelical Christians allude to material prosperity as a sign of divine favor, akin to Weber’s (1930) discussion of the emphasis on material success among Puritans. Advocates of the “Theology of Suffering”, however, disdain material security as a form of temptation and will instead emphasize on the need for renunciation of wealth.
devotional practice, there is also an observable tendency for material blessings to be relativized and eventually subordinated to moral and ethical dimensions of relationships, be it with the family, close associates or the divine figure. As the devotional accounts themselves illustrate, this process of relativizing material security vis-à-vis moral considerations is premised on the usability of material goods beyond the needs of the individual devotee. Material benefits are thus regarded as “social cement” that binds the individual devotee into “webs of responsibility” with others.

I argued in this section that the relational dimension of the devotional relationship is premised on the capability of the devotee to enact a sense of closeness with the divine figure. Furthermore, the devotional relationship presupposes intentionality, that is, the capacity of both sides to enact a specific mode of relationship. This relationship affects an individual’s conception of oneself in relation to the divine figure. Without this dialogical dimension, popular religious practices are reduced to meaningless habits that do not carry implications for self-concept and personal identity. This has certain implications in the treatment of material goods, moral identity formation and the construction of personal ties in ways that would make sense to the devotees.

7.3. Piety as lifestyle: Perpetual Help Devotion and aspirations for well-being

In this section, I discuss the important connections between popular religion and notions of well-being. Well-being is a broad concept and is associated with objective measures as well as with the subjective interpretations of actors. In objective terms, well-being is a central dimension of development and is measured in terms of economic indicators and access to resources and other “publicly perceived necessities” (Gadrey and Jany-Catrice 2006; Searle 2008: 35; Bok 2010). Subjective
well-being (SWB), in contrast, is the “personal” dimension of well-being and quite related to feelings of happiness, positive affect and absence of stress (Campbell 1981; Diener, et al. 1999; Ferriss 2002). Sociological perspectives have significantly broadened existing notions of well-being by its emphasis for environmental and social factors influencing the individual’s perception of his/her psychological state (Searle 2008).

Studies also show that religion is positively correlated to well-being in general (Ellison 1991; Gartner, Larson and Allen 1991; McIntosh, Silver and Wortman 1993; Pollner 1989). This link is not true in all situations, and it is important to determine what groups of people and under what conditions does the link make sense (Inglehart 2010; Snoep 2008). Popular religious practices broadly defined have been to aid general feelings of well-being because it enables its practitioners to cope with change (Haynes 2011).

7.3.1. “Blessing” and “the good life” as key devotional notions

As a number of cases illustrate, popular religion is strongly linked with notions of well-being owing to its emphasis on security in everyday life. In the case of Perpetual Help devotees, consistent reference is made to the notion of biyaya (blessing) as a fundamental category that conditions well-being. Among available empirically-derived categories, the concept of biyaya relates most closely with the relational dimension of popular religion as it exemplifies the intersection between the devotee’s relationship with the divine figure and his/her individual aspirations. Based on the devotees’ accounts, aspirations for blessing as a strong motivation for enacting a devotional relationship, insofar as blessings are attributed to supra-natural action on the part of the divine figure, and that “being blessed” is the outcome of
one’s fidelity to the devotional relationship. In devotional letters, expressions about “being blessed” are equated with, for instance, “not being abandoned” (hindi pinabayaan) or being “extremely favored” (malakas ako sa ‘yo) by the Virgin Mary.

Interestingly, there are certain categories of well-being used by devotees that allude to their social class position. The most conspicuous among these categories is the notions of buti (good). In this regard, numerous devotees consistently refer to hopes of a mabuting buhay (good life), as one devotee expressed in her letter:

With your help, loving Mother of Perpetual Help, we can live by selling food stuffs outside our house; with your help, what we earn is just right (sumasapat naman) for us to continue living.

(Letter dated August 6, 1986; translated from Tagalog original)

As found in other accounts, the notion of sapat (having just enough) also forms an important aspect of mabuting buhay. Regardless of the favors they ask, devotees from a wide range of backgrounds believe that what they ask for is reasonable, that is, the requests are “not too much”. This flows from the conviction that the divine figure will not heed a “superfluous” request, that is, asking something when there is no pressing and real need. Other devotees also referred to having swerte (good luck) in one’s daily affairs. In most instances, devotees regard swerte as part of a larger distributive cycle. For instance, there is implicit belief that one can hope for swerte (good luck) when one has suffered enough difficulties and setbacks. One devotee who asked the Virgin Mary that she win the jackpot prize for the state lottery alluded to this:

I hope, Blessed Mother, that you give me swerte (good luck) in life. Do not be surprised if I attach my lottery ticket with this letter. I pray that you help me so that this number will hit the jackpot [in the next lottery draw]. I do not desire to be rich without working hard for the money (hindi pinagdaanan sa hirap). I want to win the jackpot, even with just a few tickets, because I need money to help my parents and siblings. I currently work as a house helper (katulong sa bahay), but I am afraid my body cannot take all the work anymore because I am sick.

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As these devotional accounts show, both notions of *sapat* and *swerte* allude to the avoidance of two extremes. On one hand is destitution: devotees lacking in even the most basic necessities in life do not experience a good life (*mabuting buhay*) because they have too little. On the other hand is conspicuous wealth: devotees having too much material comfort and possession sessions do not experience a good life (*mabuting buhay*) too because their conspicuous wealth is a sign of attachment that prevents their proper use. On the basis of this framing of *mabuting buhay* (good life), well-being is thus an experience that is “somewhat in the middle”, that is, in having only what is necessary.

### 7.3.2. Devotion from the vantage point of strength and weakness

A distinction needs to be made between two opposing standpoints from which devotees enter into an intentional relationship with the Virgin Mary: the perspectives of strength and weakness. A devotional relationship from the vantage point of strength is when devotees enjoy the fruits of *manghawang buhay* (a good life), where resources are enough and potentially stressful situations are managed properly and defused of its disruptive effects. One devotee exemplified this in one of the thanksgiving letters:

> Our faith on (*sic*) you is concrete, so we feel that every step we make is guided by you and when difficulties come across our path we don’t hesitate to ask for your kind intercession. Everything we do is referred to you, dearest Mother, so we feel secure under your care. So everything goes on smoothly, and oftentimes the things I ask you is (*sic*) granted.

(Letter dated July 22, 1954; written in English, quoted verbatim)

Another female devotee’s thanksgiving letter echoes the same sentiment:

> I wrote this letter to thank you for all the wonderful graces and blessings I’ve been receiving from you. Of all the millions asking for

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help from you, you still remember me and my prayers. All my prayers and wishes had come through (sic) and I know that I deserved it and that I never had failed you of what you expect from me.

(Letter dated September 1, 1986; written in English, quoted verbatim)

As can be gleaned from these accounts, devotees expressed general confidence about how things work in their favor. The second devotee even went further by saying that she “deserved” being heard because she “never had failed” any expectations a devotee. These confident expressions of one’s worth are generally expressed by devotees whose life trajectory is “in good order”, so that their experience of everyday life is characterized by lack of anguish, confusion or discord.

Conversely, a devotional relationship from the vantage point of weakness characterizes a situation wherein devotees bear the brunt of problems, tensions or systematic exclusion from opportunity structures. These perceived “irregularities” result to devotees expressing lack of meaning, feelings of doubt, or feelings of being “betrayed” or “left alone”. Consider this account from a female devotee who suffered unemployment:

You have tested us so many times, and the most severe one was when I and my husband both lost our jobs. Because of this, I admit that my faith weakened. I started asking “Why?” I did not attend Mass as a sign of my ill-feelings (sama ng l ООo00б) toward you. My life seemed so heavy, especially during those times when I don’t know where to find money to spend for basic necessities. It hurts a lot when I cannot provide for the even the simple requests of our only child. I lost my peace of mind, until the time came when I learned to accept everything. Like a child coming back to her mother’s embrace, [I asked for your forgiveness].

(Undated letter [probably 2000’s]; translated for Tagalog original)

Sounding as a complaint addressed to the divine figure, devotees acting from the vantage point of weakness expressed powerlessness in acting to actively work to solve problems or to prevent the negative effects of anticipated hassles, or both. The idea of “being tested”, which this devotee articulates, appears in ten of the letters. In bot
vantage points (i.e. strength and weakness), there is clear indication that the divine figure is involved in the “test”, either directly (the divine figure sends the “test”) or indirectly (the divine figure allows the “test” to affect the devotee). The main difference, however, is that the “tests” are portrayed as unbearable and “too harsh” for devotees who are coming from the vantage point of weakness. This is not the case for those who come from the vantage point of strength, as they often express confidence in the divine figure, as well as themselves, in overcoming particular difficulties. As shown by the testimonial of the devotee above, it is thus not the nature or degree of tensions and problems, but the inability of the individual to prevent it from causing undue damage that conditions this feeling of weakness.

7.3.3. “Social imaginaries of class” and propriety

With the empirical groundwork already established, certain links can then be made among notions of the good life (*mabuting buhay*), strength and weakness and individual aspirations. The first concerns the link between notions of well-being and one’s position within broader structures. The concept of “social imaginaries of class”37, which links these notions of well-being and one’s position within economic and social fields, characterize devotees’ notions of ideal or acceptable lifestyles. While there are expected variations among these idealizations, what unifies them is their location in between extreme poverty and overabundance. This is exemplified by notions of “*sapat*” (having just enough) already discussed above. Concomitant to aspirations for material security, however, are aspirations for certain values. These

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37 The concept of “social imaginaries of class” I use here differs from the actual class positions of devotees, of which there are clear indicators and which can be empirically measured. Going beyond these objective indicators, the concept of “social imaginaries of class” has certain elective affinities with the notion of ‘subjective well-being’ (SWB) where well-being is interpreted in interpersonal terms by devotees.
value aspirations gravitate toward a broadly defined “middle-class oriented” ethos of propriety and respectability and a “tactics-based approach” to the resolution of struggles and challenges in everyday life (see De Certeau’s [1984] notion of tactics as opposed to strategies).

With regard to the link between individual devotees’ aspirations and popular religion, the capacity of popular religious practices to act as a platform where certain aspirations may be articulated need highlighting. The conceptual location of the Perpetual Help devotees’ social aspirations between two perceived extremes differentiates it from rationalized forms of religiosity like Puritan Christianity, where aspirations for wealth is ultimately linked to the search for psychological security of being assured of divine favor (Weber 2004 [1930]). It is also different from popular religious movements that Vittorio Lanternari (1963) attributes to religious expressions of world-rejection that inevitably result to uprisings and revolts. Situated between these two variants, the Perpetual Help Devotion is best understood as a “gentrifying” form of popular religion insofar as it is a workable platform for devotees to articulate a tempered set of economic and social aspirations.

A link also needs to be made between “social imaginaries of class” and the devotees’ sense of empowerment, which involves popular religion in the process of crafting certain notions of respectability and propriety. I mentioned that the pursuit of material gains per se is not regarded by devotees as incompatible with the development of a relationship with the divine figure. Conceptualizing this further, it seems that the liminal conditions informing popular religion creates flexibility (not

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38 Elie Halévy, a scholar of British history, argues that there is a strong link binding religious practice and social mobility. The Halévy thesis explains the role of Methodism as a ‘channel of social mobility’ (Hill 1973) that enabled the working classes in Britain to transition to bourgeoisie lifestyle and values. It is this dimension of the Halévy thesis that brings it closer to notions of ‘gentrification’, in the sense that the latter refers to aspirations for (middle-class) respectability.
constriction) for devotees to actively engage in the creation of “social imaginaries of class”. This transpires when devotees re-appropriate biyaya (blessing) and grasya (grace) so that notions of abundance become reference points in pursuing not only material prosperity but also subjective well-being. This is an important insight because it exhibits how popular religion becomes a resource in fashioning aspirations for economic sufficiency and respectability.

Utilized as a resource, religious notions of prosperity impel the creation of workable options for upward mobility – this is the first modality of the relationship between popular religion and well-being. Devotees acting from the vantage point of strength are regarded as fully empowered individuals; in these cases, positive emotional states afforded by the experience of mabuting buhay (good life) are based on the efficacy of the devotional relationship in enacting change in one’s life conditions. As can be seen in these instances, mabuting buhay and perceived upward mobility are always mediated by the devotional relationship. Conversely, devotees acting from the vantage point of weakness experience a real loss of agency. The elusiveness of mabuting buhay thus leads to the questioning of the efficacy of the devotional relationship because devotees cannot perceive its tangible effects. Even in these cases of heightened difficulty, note that aspirations to well-being remain as idealized goals. The more fundamental issue, however, is that popular religion does not prove helpful in making one’s life conditions better even though it was used as a resource to achieve this goal. Thus, whether the use of popular religion in crafting trajectories of upward mobility proves successful or not, these aspirations for well-being are regarded as religious experiences by devotees and are not pursued for its own sake.
The second modality of the relationship concerns the appropriation of notions of “the good life” into the dialogical nature of the self. Devotees acting from the vantage point of strength find the alignments between their individual and social aspirations unproblematic. Anthony Giddens (1979) mentions the normative (and not only the positional) nature of social roles: in this regard, expressions of thanksgiving are coupled with imperatives to fulfill certain obligations. Devotees thus recognize that the reason for receiving blessings (nabiyayaan) is for them to gain their rightful place in their constellation of relationships. In this regard there is again a connection between notions of blessings and the agency of devotees: blessings, even material and “temporal” ones, enable strong and enduring social ties.

Conversely, devotees acting from the vantage point of weakness reveal that misalignments of personal capabilities with social expectations result to considerable anguish and “social suffering” (see Bourdieu 2000; Shibutani 1967). Acutely-felt tensions pose threats to the devotional relationship because unstated expectations run the risk of being stoned. Devotees who bear the brunt of personal problems indicate their confusion because the devotional relationship does not proceed a long rules of reciprocity that they believed it rested upon. Referred to as “the defeat of agency”, such experiences empty the self of motivational force because the removal of “a project or person around which one’s plans and networks of intentions have been centered” (Calhoun 2008: 197). Such experiences challenge the devotee’s sense of control by “depleting the self” of resources to cope with problems. Aspirations of well-being in both instances are thus always located within the relationship with the divine figure and other human co-actors. In this regard personal relationships become important in aspirations for well-being and are therefore invested with varying levels of religious signification.

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7.4. Concluding synthesis: the devotional self and the ethic of obedience

I have thus far demonstrated how the practice of popular religion is based on a dialogical nature of the self and the liminal dimensions of the devotional relationship. These connote certain implications in terms of how devotees regard material goods, how they form moral choices, and how they affirm interpersonal ties. Premised on the same notions of the dialogical nature of the self and the liminal dimensions of the devotional relationship, I extend the analysis by explaining how devotees construct certain responses to ecclesiastical elites’ attempts to manage religious practices. The previous chapter noted that the management of religious piety is grounded in the notion of rationalization which, akin to Michel de Certeau’s (1984) “scriptural economy” and involves “[u]sing tools to make a body conform to its definition in social discourse” (De Certeau 1984: 145). This does not mean that the practice of popular religion fully conforms to standards proposed by ecclesiastical elites, a finding that was already discussed in the previous chapter. Responses to religious regulation are hinged on the capability of devotees to reinterpret ecclesiastical regulation and thus arrive at alternative conceptualizations of their own practices of piety in relation to their own life-trajectories.

This chapter discussed processes associated with the refashioning of elite-sponsored discourses by devotees in order to make sense of actual dilemmas. The interface of officially-recognized ecclesiastical discourse and devotees’ blessing-oriented worldview thus results in the recasting of regulative discourses and practices. This is consistent with observations made about Southeast Asian religious cultures that do not dwell on a “sinful past” but rather focuses on the future, particularly with “ensur[ing] a peaceful and blessed life” (Mulder 1997: 18). In the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion, this reinterpretation bears a strong individual/personal slant,
thus resulting to what Pedro de Aís Ribeiro de Oliveira (1994) refers to as "privatized Catholicism of the masses". "Privatized" in this context does not mean that the re is lack of reference to an external social order but suggests that the interpretive act occurs at the level of individual needs so that the legitimacy of structural arrangements is not significantly questioned or challenged.

A close reading of devotees' accounts reveals that elite regulation of religious practices is perceived as an important dimension in religious practice. It is, however, not taken as an immutable guide. In order to understand how devotees respond to the regulation of their religious practice, devotees’ crafting of a certain logic around which their beliefs and practices are organized need scrutiny. It is worth recalling at this point Claude Levi-Strauss’ (1966) notion of *bricolage*, which I quote in *The Savage Mind*:

> The 'bricoleur' is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. The set of the 'bricoleur's' means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project (which would presuppose besides, that, as in the case of the engineer, there were, at least in theory, as many sets of tools and materials or 'instrumental sets', as there are different kinds of projects). It is to be defined only by its potential use or, putting this another way and in the language of the 'bricoleur' himself, because the elements are collected or retained on the principle that 'they may always come in handy' (pp. 17-18).

This notion of popular religious practices as *bricolage* creates implications on devotees’ responses to ecclesiastical regulation. A close reading of devotional accounts shows that the framing of moral action resorts to the interplay of various
factors, especially institutionally-informed moral vocabularies (see Lowe 2010), notions of personal well-being (akin to Michel Foucault’s “care of the self”) and webs of social relationships with near others (malalapit na tao). It is in this regard that devotional practices transcend unidimensional notions of practice because it is grounded in paying simultaneous attention to varying systems of evaluating everyday experience.

This “et hic of self-care”, it must be emphasized, bears the imprint of the relationships that define the individual’s self-concept. Michel Foucault (1986) points out that caring for oneself need not be understood as withdrawing from social life by “going inward”: on the contrary, “[t]he care of the self – or the attention one devotes to the care that others should take of themselves – appears then as an intensification of social relations” (p. 53). On the cultural plane, this strongly resonates with Filipino notions of self that are rooted in awareness of shared identity with one’s kapwa (close or near others), thus a fundamental dimension to understanding Filipino identity itself (Enriquez 1986). This shared notion of selfhood is quite visible in the articulation of positive or negative affect in relation to the conditions of family or near others outside the family.

What can be deduced here is that the logic supporting devotees’ religious practices does not resort to exclusive systems of knowledge, even those that are crafted by duly-constituted authority. This logic of “coterminous believing” (see Seband 1981) justifies the interface between legitimate authority and other forms of regulation. What is useful is utilized and what is not immediately useful is not altogether rejected but “kept at bay” until such a time when it is deemed expedient to make use of them. The bricolage notion thrives on the mutual interpenetration of various dimensions that inform the process of forming choices in one’s everyday life.
In the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion, the interface between popular religion and everyday life is premised on the capacity to “tinker with” available options, rendering an “ethic of obedience” that is not confined to conformity with abstract principles. This complexity must not give the impression of a “splintered” self because the individual as bricoleur exercises practical mastery of everyday life and refuses to yield to the totalizing influences of any system. Institutional religious systems are therefore modified not in relationship to other systems but in terms of their efficacy to produce intended outcomes.
PART THREE: SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 8: Popular Religion and Modernity: An Assessment and Synthesis
CHAPTER 8:
POPULAR RELIGION AND MODERNITY: 
AN ASSESSMENT AND SYNTHESIS

8.1. Rethinking “popular religion”: conceptual starting points

In the course of this study, I unpacked various features of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines in the light of the Philippines’ own experience of modern transitions. I began this inquiry by arguing for the need to rethink the category “popular religion” in the social sciences by adopting a multidimensional theoretical perspective, supported with appropriate empirical material. The framework I proposed aimed to look at agents, discourses, practices and institutions involved in crafting forms of popular religion. I also highlighted the need to situate the conceptual parameters of popular religion within certain articulations of modernity (see Gustafson 1967; Singer 1974; Wagner 2012). This entailed the analysis of various methods by which popular religious practices are configured into modern institutions, processes and ways of thinking. This, I have argued, can be achieved by analyzing three modalities: modern religious lives, the religious institution, and urban arrangements.

In this context, the dimension of popular religious practice that remains to be explored but was not highlighted in this study is the domestic domain. The shrine and the home are two most conspicuous locations of popular religious practices, and the space of the home provides a counter-balance to the overarching presence of the shrine in devotional accounts (see King 2010). The importance of the home as a devotional center counter-posed to the shrine occurred later during my fieldwork, as I started interviewing respondents in their homes. A fuller account of devotional practices at home can be the subject of future studies, where it will be interesting to
assess how various dimensions of popular religious practices are embedded into processes of identity-formation, commodification and relevance-making at the level of “private spaces”. Future research on the Perpetual Help Devotion may wish to scrutinize and engage this sphere to assess how devotees carry out religious practice outside the gaze of religious authority, given that the home is considered personal space where various influences from “the outside” are creatively combined.

In the process of accomplishing this study, I dealt with a number of conceptual trajectories. This study has trail-blazed a sociological assessment of the persistence of popular religion in the Philippines by using urbanization, religious authority and selfhood as conceptual platforms. I highlighted in the introductory chapters the interplay of theoretical and methodological positions that elucidate relevant trajectories of inquiry regarding the relationship between religion and modern society. I employed a relevant research methodology that combined the use of ethnographic and historical data in assessing the nature of the shifts experienced by various agents involved in the Perpetual Help Devotion. The materials used in this study were mostly obtained through an appreciation of the “textures” of devotional practice and its regulation as articulated in devotional letters and the Chronicles of the community, respectively. I maximized the use of devotional letters by generating empirically-derived categories from them, and then allowing these to chart the course of data analysis.

In the course of the chapters, I demonstrated how popular religious practices from one urban shrine in Metro Manila have broader implications in reorienting the debates about the nature of religion in modern society. The experience of Perpetual Help devotees, as expressed through interviews, letters and other documents has allowed sociological analysis to demonstrate how religious practices assume its
relevance in interpersonal, institutional and structural domains of life. The focus on sustained demonstration through ethnographic data has enabled me to relate prevailing discourses to the situation on the ground, and to eventually take a critical stance as to how these have proved helpful or unhelpful in understanding the nature of modern popular religion. I can say that the insights gained from the study of the Perpetual Help Devotion in the Philippines resonate with broader calls for “provincializing Europe” (and North America) through alternative conceptualizations that challenge the links made between “being modern” and “being secular”. As demonstrated by individual life trajectories of devotees and institutional religious agents in this study, there is a conspicuous absence of clear-cut boundaries between the “sacred” and other dimensions of life. As Eloisa Martin (2008) rightly explains, the sacred exists as a flexible and morally ambiguous “texture” that has significant transformative potential. It is this coexistence of rational (and by implication, modern) forms of exchange, on the one hand, and ambiguities in the experience of the sacred, on the other hand, that is pivotal in understanding the Philippine religious experience on its own terms. This creative interplay of ambiguity and definiteness has enabled various agents to utilize resources afforded by contemporary conditions to craft notions of selfhood, practice and institution that is modern while at the same time religious in character.

One of the significant achievements of the framework I proposed in this study is the re-casting of the relational foundations of popular religion. This line of inquiry addresses various engagements that popular religion has sustained in order to configure itself into modern social arrangements. In this regard, even historically “distant” past events have shaped the cultural trajectories of prayer texts, ritual acts and devotional selves in contemporary Marian piety in the Philippines. It was also
enlightening to witness the interaction between religion and materiality as expressed in the mercantilist expansion of Baclaran district throughout the years. Further studies may be made in other Perpetual Help shrines throughout the country to enable a fuller comparative assessment. I anticipate that the findings will highlight processes of “territorializing” devotional acts in ways that make sense to local communities where the shrines are based. The shrines in various parts of the country in turn provide platforms for assessing transnational links, mobilities and flows in the same way that the Perpetual Help shrine in Baclaran has enabled the emergence of new forms of religious practice.

The implications of the relational dimension of popular religion places the Perpetual Help Devotion vis-à-vis a polyphony of popular religious practices in other social and cultural contexts. The focus of the inquiry as well as the methods for generating data I employed in this study reframes the ways in which sociological assessments of popular religious practices are made. This has implications as to how the Philippine experience may be understood in the light of cross-cultural research and inquiry. The multidimensional focus of the study calls for a nuanced understanding of the unevenness of popular religion as it is configured in different cultural expectations and experiences. Rather than being seen as a liability, the variety of cultural and historical trajectories underlying popular religious practices across various contexts opens vistas for comparative research that are sensitive to specific situations on the ground, while at the same time aspiring toward an engagement with broader conceptual parameters that condition scholarly understandings of modern popular religion.
8.2. **Stabilizing and expansive modes of engagement**

The case of the Perpetual Help Devotion’s widespread popularity and success as a form of popular religion are premised on its strong and sustained engagement with various agents, conditions and institutions. This can be further distinguished between **stabilizing** and **expansive** modes of engagement. The former provides a definable ground for popular religious practice through two related processes. The first is the process of compartmentalization, which distinguishes religious practice from other forms of practices; and the second is boundary-maintenance, which argues for the uniqueness of popular religious practice vis-à-vis other forms of practices. As I demonstrated in the thesis, stabilizing modes of engagement are important for the maintenance of popular religion because they ensure that devotional practices achieve a certain degree of consistency across time. Without the aid of these processes, the “sedimentation” of social encounters through time (see Berger and Luckmann 1967) will not emerge and religious practices will remain vulnerable to the continuing flux of social forces. The “drive for constancy” that these processes offer enables popular religious practices to transcend the exigencies of “fleeting encounters” and thus assume a verifiable **historical** existence.

In this study, the stabilizing mode of engagement is relevant in the processes associated with territorialization and diversification; the religious elites’ crafting of the relevance of religious practices; and the devotees’ enactment of an “ethic of obedience” to religious authority. These processes are “stabilizing” not because they do not feature a dynamic orientation, but because they are premised on the need for “a defining enclosure” for religious practices. In the thesis, I have demonstrated that processes associated with territorialization and diversification function to root popular religious practices to the exigencies of its physical location. I also highlighted that the
religious elites’ crafting of relevance work against the backdrop of the performance of religious identities, adherence to beliefs and use of material religion. Lastly, I also explained how the “ethic of obedience” is hinged on the qualified acceptance of the legitimacy of religious authority.

The success of the Perpetual Help Devotion is also due to its dynamism in confronting the limitations of the “stabilizing” modes of engagement. These emerge from the contradictions of social life itself: while order is based on stability, persistence is based on the capacity to adapt to change. It is in this context that there is also reference to another set of engagement mechanisms which I call “expansive modes of engagement”, which are premised on notions of mobility and fluctuation of social relationships. Because it is not dependent on the historical, motivational and physical locatedness of actors, this mode is capable of engaging with the ambiguities of religious practice. There is thus emphasis on the importance of tactical “crisscrossing” and “crossovers” between related but distinguishable courses of belief and action. The point is to allow the “integration by prioritization” of these influences in the course of the performance of the practices themselves.

I have further alluded to the Perpetual Help Devotion’s “expansive” mode of engagement by discussing processes pertaining to territorialization, strategic accommodation and notions of 

liminality and bricolage. The first of these detaches the analysis from the physical structures toward translocal “imaginaries” that transcend spaces. The second recognizes the limits of the exercise of religious authority and alludes to the need to work within the devotees’ range of expectations, with the aim of modifying or eradicating certain ways of practicing devotional piety. The third acknowledges the implications of inherent ambiguities of selfhood and identity formation in the formation of a devotional relationship with the divine figure,
and the final process works on the notion of “tinkering” with various resources in order to craft meaningful religious practices. In these processes, the aim of engagement is not meant to address the “steadiness” of devotional practices, but their potential for creative refashioning. This is an important counter-balance to the “drive toward fixity”, recognizing that stability is at best a fragile structure in the midst of constant change.

Taken together, these two modes are engaged in a constant mutual enabling and constraining so that it can maximize the opportunities and resources offered by actors, institutions and contexts. The analytical inquiry launched by this study has certain implications for assessing alternative trajectories in conceptualizing the nature of popular religion, a discussion to which I turn now.

8.3. Assessing the category of “popular religion”

The study began with the proposition that it is necessary to rethink the category of “popular religion” and assess the parameters by which this process of rethinking may be initiated. I claimed that there is a dearth of perspectives that enable this conceptual rethinking because of the limitations posed by the uncritical acceptance of the “institutional” vs. “popular” religion dichotomy in academic literature on the subject. This is further compounded by the bias of earlier sociological discourses toward Christian notions of what counts as “religion”. The approach I proposed in this study emphasized the conceptualization of popular religious practices as “nodes of engagement” with broader social processes. The question that remains unanswered at this point is the implications of this emphasis toward the re-articulation of the category of “popular religion” in modern society. In this section, I direct the
inquiry toward that course and from there identify some reference points in assessing popular religion.

I noted in the first chapter that a number of scholars have avoided the use of the term “popular religion” because of its inherent weaknesses and its identification with limiting articulations of religious practices. In this regard, terminologies like “local religion”, “common religion” (Towler and Chamberlain 1974), “implicit religion” (Bailey 2009) and “vernacular religion” (Primiano 1995) have been forwarded in the literature. As far as the implications of this study are concerned, I do not see the need to abandon the category of “popular religion” and replace it. Rather, I would suggest two major reorientations that will instead aid in expanding its conceptual parameters. The first is the de-linking of popular religion and “folk religion”, a dichotomy premised on discrete boundaries between rural and urban forms of social organization. This tendency was strong in social science literature during the 1960’s and 1970’s. In this study, I have demonstrated that the urban context is a fertile ground for the persistence of popular religious practices; in fact, the role of urban centers as conduits of transnational flows makes it a relevant platform for assessing the nature of popular religion.

The more significant conceptual shift I propose is to reorient the focus from the “popular” to the “religious” dimensions of popular religion. This hinges on the nature of popular religion as a compound concept (Martin 2008), which gave scholars in the past the freedom to emphasize one of the two concepts. In this regard I agree with Eloisa Martin (2008) that it is more theoretically productive to inquire what is done in the name of “popular religion” than who is doing it. Earlier studies tended to emphasize the bases of the persistence of popular religion by alluding to class, ethnic or gender dimensions. The contribution of these previous studies is the central role
that the power dimension played in elucidating important conceptual themes. The limitation of this focus is the failure to account for the role of religion in crafting individual life trajectories because the individual dimensions of popular religion were subsumed under broader categories of reference.

I regard this study as a continuation of previous studies of this variant. There is a need to push the conceptual boundaries to provide a more nuanced understanding of popular religion. Here I have proposed two important analytical considerations towards this end: the focus on cultural practices and the emphasis on agency. In this regard, the icon, prayer texts, sacred spaces and bodily practices that I discussed are properly regarded as tools used differently by various devotees in crafting specific identities, social imaginaries and life trajectories. There is no one privileged way of making use of these resources in the formation of habituses (in Bourdieu’s sense of the term), even in the context of larger units like class and gender. Because of the dynamism of individual life trajectories, sociological inquiry needs to assess meaning-production and consumption processes in this category of analysis.

This study is therefore premised on the claim that there is still relevance in using “popular religion” as a conceptual category in the social sciences. I argue that the concept’s flexible character enables a fuller treatment of the production and maintenance of beliefs, values, practices and institutions that define the devotees’ engagement with the commonness of everyday life as well as the specialness of certain events. This study has provided specific modes of inquiry that expanded the parameters of theoretical engagement. The emphasis on the practical dimensions of popular religion particularly anticipates the accounting of the tactical nature of practice itself (see De Certeau 1984) that provides popular religious practices its
longevity. In the next section I discuss the implications of appropriating “popular religion” as “modern popular religion”.

8.4. A synthesis of “modern popular religion”

The category of “modern popular religion” is a response to the need to update “popular religion” so that it reflects the exigencies and possibilities of religious practice in modern societies. In Cristian Parker’s (1998) assessment of this term in the Latin American context, he enjoins sociology to abandon its “bias for erudition” and consider seemingly “primitive religious expressions” as an inherent dimension of modern societies. The use of the term “modern popular religion” in this study is thus the outcome of the de-linking of “popular religion” from “folk religion” I argued for earlier. I share Cristian Parker’s emphasis on the need to problematize popular religious practices in relation to modernizing and globalizing trends that affect the local landscape. This insight accounts for the emphasis on explaining processes of territorialization, crafting relevance and “ethic of obedience”, among others, in the context of modernizing forces at the individual, institutional and urban levels. The disentangling of different problématiques allows a nuanced treatment of various approaches to “being modern” and “being religious” in the context of devotional life trajectories.

The discussions in the thesis allude to possibilities of enmeshing religious beliefs, values and practices, on the one hand, with urban, institutional and individual forms of modernity, on the other hand. As explained in Chapter 1, the configuration of popular religious practices into modern ways of thinking questions the assumptions of the secularization thesis that the increase of modern values leads to the decline of religious practice. As this study demonstrates, the context that is referred to as
“modern” is not a threat but a platform for individual and institutional agents to craft modes of religious practice. In saying this, I contend that there is nothing in modern conditions that is inherently against religion, although there are dimensions that pose challenges to religious practice. In the historical synthesis I provided in Chapter 4, institutional Catholicism’s “crisis of legitimacy” during the latter part of the nineteenth century is premised on growing hostilities between ecclesiastical power and secular articulations of nationalist ideals. The masses, however, continued with their devotions and have engaged in a reinterpretation of beliefs and practices to make sense of the changes brought about by revolutionary stirrings and new colonial dispensations.

In the case of the Perpetual Help Devotion, the successful crafting of relevance that supports its widespread popularity is an indication of a successful configuration of popular religious beliefs into modern life. The religious elites accomplished this configuration through strategic accommodation, while devotees engaged in it through bricolage. As demonstrated in the discussions, these different methods of configuring popular religion have produced differences between religious elites and devotees. I would argue that this dialectical tension is beneficial for maintaining popular religious practices because they serve as platforms for continual engagement. The prospect of further interaction, even tense ones, sustains popular religion by creating more liminal and empowering spaces between stabilizing and expansive modalities of engagement.
GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN TERMS

A. Filipino Terms

Anting-anting  amulet
Barangay  comparable to districts, it is smallest political unit in the Philippines
Biyaya  blessing, grace
Diligensya  to collect a favor from someone (usually monetary)
Kababalaghan  mystery
Kapwa  close or near others
Larawan  visual representation (picture) of a person
Mabuting buhay  good life
Mapaghimala  miraculous
Nawalan ng tiwala  lose hope
Pagmamano  kissing the hand or placing the hand on the forehead, a common gesture of respect for elders
Pedicab  bicycle attached to a cart
Pinabayaan  left alone
Puwesto  post; position
Sapat  just enough
Swerte  good luck
Tahanan  home
Tampo  a non-confrontational but emotionally-charged response given by someone who is hurt by a close friend or loved one. It consists in the withdrawal of the usual exuberance that characterizes close relationships.
### B. Spanish Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carroza</td>
<td>cart or float bearing the image of a saint in processions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novenario</td>
<td>novena prayer book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pueblo</td>
<td>town</td>
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A. Published Sources


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B. Unpublished and Limited Circulation Sources


City Planning & Development Coordinator’s Office (Parañaque City). 2 009 Socio- Economic Profile, Parañaque City. Unpublished document.


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Novena nang P agdalañgin s a A ting P aëginoong D iós ay on s a manga B anal na Caloloua s a P urgatorioat s a T auong B uhay na N alagac s a Casalanang D aquila. 1885. Manila: Imp. De los Amigos de Pais.


C. Internet Sources


APPENDIX I:
THEMES/QUESTIONS FOR LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW (SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM FORM)

Personal Background
*Can you tell me something about yourself?*
(age, sex, residence, family background, occupation, educational background)

Religious Socialization
*Did you have/join religious activities during your childhood??*
(family religious activities, school, neighborhood/community activities, religious clubs/groups, personal religious acts)

Background to Devotee’s PH Devotion
*How did you know about the PH devotion?*
(who, when, how introduced devotion, significant experiences, activities related to the devotion)

Respondent’s devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Beliefs and attitudes
*Why do you practice the PH devotion?*
(reasons, beliefs, motives, ‘setbacks’ and frustrations, knowledge of ‘doctrine’, other religious practices and beliefs, attitudes about other aspects)

Value judgments
*What do you think is the importance of the PH devotion in your life?*
(assessments, moral choices, ‘benefits and costs’, concept of ‘vow’ or ‘promise, PH devotion and other spheres of life)
APPENDIX I:

PERPETUAL HELP NOVENA TEXT
(1948 VERSION)

Immaculate Mother
We come at thy call,
And low at thy altar
Before thee we fall.
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.

In grief and temptation
In joy and in pain,
We'll seek thee our Mother
Nor seek thee in vain.
Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria

Reading of Petitions and Favors

Mother Dearest, Mother Fairest (sung)

Mother Dearest, Mother Fairest
Help of all who call on thee,
Virgin purest, brightest, rarest,
Help us, help, we cry to thee.
Mary, help us, help, we pray;
Mary, help us, help, we pray;
Help us in all care and sorrow,
Mary, help us, help, we pray.

Novena Prayers

I. Prayer in Our Temporal Needs
O Mother of Perpetual Help, with the greatest confidence I come before thy sacred picture, in order to invoke Thine aid. Thou hast seen the wounds which Jesus has been pleased to receive for our sake; Thou hast seen the Blood of thy Son flowing for our salvation: thou knowest how much thy Son desires to apply to us the fruit of His Redemption. * Behold, I cast myself at thy feet, and pray thee to obtain for my soul this grace I stand so much in need of. O Mary, most loving of all mothers, obtain for me from the Heart of Jesus, the source of every good, this grace (Here mention it). O Mother of Perpetual Help, thou desirest our salvation far more than we ourselves; thy Son has given thee to us for Our Mother; thou hast chosen to be called Mother of Perpetual Help. I trust not in my merits, but in Thy motherly love. Mother of Perpetual Help, for the love thou bearest to Jesus, thy Son and my Redeemer, for the love of thy great servant Alphonsus, for the love of my soul, obtain for me the grace I ask from thee. Amen.

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II. Prayer in Our Spiritual Need
O Mother of Perpetual Help, thou art the dispenser of all the graces which God bestows upon us wretched creatures, and for this end has He made thee so powerful, so rich, so kind, in order that thou mayest assist us in our miseries. Thou art the advocate of the most miserable and abandoned criminals, who have recourse to thee. Help me, then, who recommend myself to thee. I place my eternal salvation in thy hands, to thee I consign my soul. Number me amongst thy more special servants; take me under thy protection, and I am satisfied. Yes, if thou helpest me, I fear nothing, neither my sins, since thou wilt obtain for me the pardon of them; nor the devils, for thou art more powerful than all Hell; nor even Jesus, my very Judge, because by one prayer of thine He will be appeased. My only fear is that through my own negligence I should cease to recommend myself to thee and should thus be lost. Obtain for me, my Lady, the pardon of my sins the love of Jesus, final perseverance, and the grace of ever having recourse to thee, O Mother of Perpetual Help.

III. Prayer for the Home
Holy Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, we salute thee as the chosen Queen of Our Home. We beseech thee, by thy tender, motherly love, to preserve its inmates from destructive fire and earthquakes, from thieves, accidents and calamities, and above all, from a sudden and unprovided death. O Mother of Perpetual Help, be ever the Queen of Our Home. Amen.

Petitions to our Mother of Perpetual Help

Priest: Lord, have mercy on us.
People: Christ, have mercy on us.
Priest: Christ, hear us.
People: Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us.
God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.
God the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us.
Holy Trinity, One God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, pray for us.
Holy Virgin, conceived without sin, pray for us.
Our Mother of Perpetual Help, pray for us.

We sinners call to thee, *O Mother ever help us.
That we may love God with our whole heart,*
That we may be conformable in all things to thy Divine Son, Jesus,*
That we may have a tender and heart-felt devotion to thee, most holy Virgin,*
That we may hate sin, the only evil, with all our strength,*
That we may frequently remember our last end,*
That we may often and worthily receive the most holy sacraments,*
That we may avoid with all our strength the proximate occasions of sin,*
That we may not neglect prayer a single day of our lives,*

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That we may have recourse to prayer in moments of temptation, *
That we may generously forgive our enemies and wish well to all men, *
That we may not defer our conversion from day to day, *
That we may labour zealously to overcome our bad habits, *
In all concerns of soul and body, *
In sickness and in pain, *
In persecution and in trial, *
In sorrow and affliction of all kinds, *
In time of war and infectious diseases, *
In struggles against temptation, *
In danger of sinning, *
In struggles for the holy virtue of purity, *
In assaults of the devils, *
When we have reached the end of our earthly course, *
When lying on our death bed the thought of our approaching end shall fill us with fear and horror, *
When in the hour of final separation from all, the devil shall try to drive us to despair, *
When the priest of the Lord shall give us the last absolution and blessing, *
When our relatives and friends shall surround our bed weeping and praying for us, *
When our eyes grow dim and our heart cease to beat, *
When we breathe forth our souls into the hands of our Creator, *
When our poor souls appear before our Divine Judge, *
When the terrible judgment is about to be passed, *
When suffering in the flames of purgatory and longing for the vision of God, *

Ant. Holy Mary, assist the miserable, help the fainthearted, cheer those that weep, pray for the people, be the advocate of the clergy, intercede for all devout women; let all feel thine aid who implore thy perpetual help.

Priest: Thou hast been made for us, O Lady, a refuge.
People: A helper in need and tribulation.

Let us pray. O Almighty and merciful God, Who has given us to venerate the Picture of Thy most Blessed Mother, under the special title of Perpetual Help; graciously grant, that amidst all the changes of our journey through life, we may be so defended by the continual protection of the same Immaculate ever Virgin Mary, that we may deserve to obtain the rewards of Thy eternal Redemption Who livest and reignest with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, world without end. Amen.

Mother Dear, Oh, Pray for Me (sung)

Mother dear, oh, pray for me
Whilst far from heaven and thee,
I wander in a fragile bark,
O'er life's tempestuous sea,
O Virgin Mother, from thy throne
So bright in bliss above,

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Protect thy child and cheer my path.
With thy sweet smile of love.

Chorus
Mother dear, oh, pray for me,
And never cease thy care,
’Till in heaven eternally
Thy love and bliss I share.

Benediction

Tantum Ergo (sung)
Tantum ergo Sacramentum
Veneremur cernui:
Et antiquum documentum
Novo cedat ritui;
Praestet fides supplementum
Sensuum defectui.
Genitori, Genitoque
Laus et jubilatio:
Salus, honor, virtus quoque
Sit et benedictio;
Procedenti ab utroque
Compar sit audatio.
Amen.

Priest: Panem de coelo praestitisti eis, (Alleluia).
People: Omne delectamentum in se habentem. (Alleluia).

The Divine Praises

Blessed be God.
Blessed be His holy Name.
Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.
Blessed be the Name of Jesus
Blessed be His most Sacred Heart.
Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.
Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception.
Blessed be her glorious Assumption.
Blessed be the Name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.
Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.
Blessed be God, in His angels and in His saints.

O Sacrament, Most Holy, O Sacrament divine.
All praise and all thanksgiving,
Be every moment Thine.
Act of Consecration (First Wednesday of the Month)

Most Holy Virgin Mary, who to inspire me with the fullest confidence hast been willing to take the sweet name of Mother of Perpetual Help I, (State your name), acknowledge that my sins render me unworthy to be admitted among the number of thy privileged children. Nevertheless, desirous of enjoying thy merciful favor, I cast myself at thy feet, and humbly prostrate before thee, I consecrate to thee my understanding, that I may always think of the love which thou deservest. I consecrate to thee my tongue, that I may always make use of it to proclaim thy sublime prerogatives. I consecrate to thee my heart, in order that after God I may love thee above all things. O my sovereign Lady, deign to receive me among the number of thy favoured children, take me under thy protection; help me in all my spiritual and temporal wants, but especially at the hour of my death. O Mother of Perpetual Help, I know that thou lovest me more than I can love myself, therefore I entrust all my interest to thy care, dispose of me and all that belongs to me, according to thy good pleasure. O my Mother bless me and by thy powerful intercession support my weakness so that having been faithful in serving thee during life I may love thee praise thee and thank thee eternally in the next. Amen.

Mother of Christ (sung)

I. Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ.
What shall I ask of thee,
I do not sigh for the wealth of earth
For the joys that fade and flee.
But Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ,
This do I long to see,
The bliss untold which thine arms enfold,
The Treasure upon thy knee.

II. Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ,
He was all in all to thee,
In Bethlehem's cave, in Nazareth's home,
In the hamlets of Galilee.
So Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ
He will not say nay to thee,
When He lifts His face, to thy sweet embrace,
Speak to Him Mother of me.

III. Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ,
I toss on a stormy sea,
Oh, lift thy Child as a Beacon-light
To the Port where I fain would be,
And, Mother of Christ. Mother of Christ,
This do I ask of thee
When the voyage is o'er, oh stand on the shore,
And show Him at last to me.
**Blessing of the Sick**

O God, the one only help for human infirmity, show forth upon Thy sick servants the power of Thine aid, that by the assistance of Thy loving kindness, they may be found worthy to be restored in health unto Thy Holy Church. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

 Almighty and eternal God, the everlasting help of those who believe, hear us for Thy sick servants, for whom we implore the aid of Thy tender mercy that by being restored to bodily health, they may give thanks to Thee in Thy Church. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

They shall lay their hands upon the sick and they shall recover. May Jesus, the Son of Mary, the Lord and Saviour of the world, through the merits and intercession of His Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and all His Saints show you favor and mercy. Amen.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you to defend you; within you, to preserve you; before you, to lead you; after you, to guard you; above you, to bless you; Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth world without end. Amen.

Through the intercession of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, descend upon you, and remain with you always. Amen.

**Notices**

1. After the devotions follows the blessing of religious articles.
2. Confessions are heard before and after the devotions.
3. The surest way of obtaining a favourable answer to your petition is to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion on Novena Day.
APPENDIX III:
PERPETUAL HELP NOVENA TEXT
(1973 VERSION)

Opening Hymn: Immaculate Mother

Immaculate Mother
To you do we plead
To ask God our Father
For help in our need.
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.

We pray for our country
The land of our birth
We pray for all nations,
That peace on earth.
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.

Opening Prayer

Priest: Brothers and sisters, as children of our Blessed Mother, we are gathered before her miraculous picture to honor her and to pray for our needs. Unworthy children that we are, let us first of all ask God’s mercy and pardon.

All: Merciful Father you sent your Divine Son to redeem us by his death and resurrection and to give us new life. By this you make us your children to love one another in Christ. How many times in the past we have forgotten this sublime dignity. We have sinned against our brothers and sisters; we have offended you. Merciful Father, forgive us. Repenting sincerely of our sins we ask your mercy; may we always live as your truly devoted children.

Reading of Petitions and Thanksgiving

Sermonette

Mary Immaculate, Star of the Morning (sung)

Mary Immaculate,
Star of the morning.
Chosen before the creation began,
Destined to bring through the light of your dawning,
Conquest of Satan and rescue to man.

Refrain: Bend from your throne at the voice of our crying.
Look to this earth, where your footsteps have trod.
Stretch out your arms to us, living and dying.
Mary Immaculate, Mother of God.
We sinner honor your sinless perfection
Fallen and weak, for God’s mercy we plead
Grant us the shield of your mighty protection.
Measure your aid by the depth of our need.
(Repeat Refrain)

Novena Prayer
Dear Mother of Perpetual Help from the cross Jesus gave you to us for our Mother. You are the kindness, the most loving of all mothers. Look tenderly on us your children as we now ask you to help us in all our needs especially this one… (Pause to recall your petitions)

While you were on earth, dear Mother you willingly shared in the sufferings of your Son. Strengthened by your faith and confidence in the fatherly love of God you accepted the mysterious designs of His Will. We too have our crosses and trials. Sometimes they almost crush us to the ground. Dearest Mother, share with us your abundant faith and confidence in God. Make us aware that God never ceases to love us; that He answers all our prayers in the way that is best for us. Strengthen our hearts to carry the cross in the footsteps of your Divine Son. Help us to realize that he who shares the cross of Christ will certainly share His resurrection. Dearest Mother, as we worry about our own problems let us not forget the needs of others. You always love others so much; help us to do the same. While praying for our own intentions and for all the intentions of all here present at this Novena we earnestly ask you, our Mother, to help us comfort the sick and the dying give hope to the poor and unemployed, heal the broken-hearted lighten the burden of the oppressed, teach justice to their oppressors and bring back to God all those who have offended Him. Dearest Mother, help us to avoid sin which separates us from our heavenly Father and from one another. Full of trust in you, we place ourselves under the mantle of your maternal protection and confidently hope for your powerful help. Amen.

Prayer for the Home
Mother of Perpetual Help, we choose you as Queen of our homes. We ask you to bless all our families with your tender motherly love. May the Sacrament of Marriage bind husbands and wives so closely together that they will always be faithful to each other and love one another as Christ love His Church. We ask you to bless all parents, may they love and cherish their children whom God has entrusted to them. May they always give them the example of a truly Christian life. Help them to bring up their children in the love and fear of God. Bless all children that they may love, honor, and obey their fathers and mothers. To your loving care we especially entrust the youth of today. Give us all a sense of responsibility that we may do our part in making our home, a haven of peace like your own home at Nazareth. We take you as our model. Help us to grow daily in genuine love of God and neighbor so that justice and peace may happily reign in the entire family of mankind. Amen.

Petitions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help
Holy Mary R. Pray for us.
Holy Virgin conceived without sin R. Pray for us.
Our Mother of Perpetual Help R. Pray for us.
We sinners call to you * R. Loving Mother, help us.

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That we may be filled with the Holy Spirit and become courageous witnesses of Christ’s love for men. *
That we may be more and more like our Divine Lord, as you were. *
That we may be meek and humble of heart like your son, Jesus. *
That we may fear losing God’s friendship forever by unrepented sin. *
That we may seek Christ’s mercy and forgiveness constantly in the sacrament of Penance. *
That we may be aware of God speaking to us in the events of daily life. *
That we may pray daily with love and trust, especially in moments of temptation. *
That we may realize the value of worshipping God together in the Eucharist. *
That we may grow in the love of Christ and neighbor by frequent Communion. *
That we may reverence our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. *
That we may strive to be true Christian by our loving concern for others. *
That we may proclaim the dignity of work by doing our own work conscientiously. *
That we may forgive from our heart those who have wronged us. *
That we may see the evil of seeking our own interest at the expense of others. *
That we may work for the just distribution of this world's goods. *
That we may share our talents with others for the good of the community. *
That we may accept our responsibility in the community in the spirit of genuine service. *
To pray that the Holy Spirit may guide and strengthen Pope (Benedict XVI), the Bishops, and the clergy. *
That we may be blessed with an increase of priestly and religious vocations. *
That we may bring the knowledge of Christ to those who do not know Him. *
That we may be aware of our dependence on God in the midst of human achievements. *
That we may be ready at death to enter the home of our heavenly Father. *
That we may die at peace with Christ and our fellowmen. *
That we may comforted at the death of our dear ones by our hope in the risen Lord. *
To pray that our departed brothers and sisters quickly share in your Son’s resurrection. *

(Let us pray in silence for our own intentions)

All: Holy Mary, help us in our needs pray for all the people of God; may all experience your perpetual help.

Priest: Lord, you gave us Mary to be our mother ever ready to help us; grant us the grace to have recourse to her in all our needs.

All: Amen.

Consecration to Our Mother of Perpetual Help (First Wednesdays)

Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church you are also our Mother of Perpetual Help. With hearts full of love for you we consecrate ourselves to your Immaculate Heart so that we may be your devoted children. Obtain for us true sorrow for our sins and fidelity to the promises of our Baptism. We consecrate our minds and hearts to you that we always do the Will of our heavenly Father. We consecrate our lives to you that we may love God better and live not for ourselves but for Christ, your Son and that we may see Him and serve Him in others. By this humble act of consecration dear Mother of Perpetual Help we pledge to model our lives on you, the perfect Christian. So that, consecrated to you in life and in death we may belong to your Divine Son for all eternity. Amen.

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Mother of Christ (sung)

Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ, What shall I ask of thee?
I do not sigh for the wealth of earth. For the joys that fade and flee.
But, Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ, This do I long to see.
The bliss untold which your arms enfold. The treasure upon your knee.

Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ, I toss on a stormy sea.
Oh, lift your Child as a beacon light to the port where I fain would be
And, Mother of Christ, Mother of Christ This do I ask of thee
When the voyage is over O stand on the shore and show Him at last to me.

(During Benediction) O Saving Victim

O Saving Victim opening wide
The gate of heaven to men below!
Our foes press on from every side,
Your aid supply, Your strength bestow.

To your great name be endless praise.
Immortal God-head, one in three;
Oh, grant us endless length of days
In our true native land with thee. Amen.

Thanksgiving Prayer

All: Lord Jesus Christ, truly present in the Most Blessed Eucharist we adore You. It has please the Father that in you all his fullness should dwell. And that through You He should reconcile all things to Himself. Grant us the grace to be truly grateful for all that our Father has done for us. Grant that we may be truly sorry for our sins and do penance for them. Through you, we thank the Eternal Father for the gift of life. He has created all the wonderful things of this world for us. May we learn to use them well so that through them we may grow in love for Him. Above all, we thank our Father for sending You to us as the greatest expression of His love to save us and all creation by Your death and resurrection. We thank you Lord, for giving us your own Mother, to be our Mother of Perpetual Help. May the countless favors we have received through her intercession, and especially through the Novena inspire us to greater confidence in God’s loving mercy and her perpetual help. Grant us that we may always do the holy Will of God and persevere in His love. To the most Holy Trinity Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be honor, glory and thanksgiving forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer for the Sick

All: Lord Jesus Christ, you bore our sufferings and carried our sorrows in order to show us clearly the value of human weakness and patience; graciously hear our prayers for the sick. Grant that those who are weighed down with pain and other affliction of illness, may realize that they are among the chosen ones whom you call Blessed. Help them to understand that they are united with You in your sufferings. For the salvation of the world. Amen.
(During Benediction) Let us Raise our Voice
Let us raise our voice to proclaim our faith
Christ the Lord for us has died.
Dying, He destroyed our death,
Rising, He restored our life.
O Lord Jesus, we await Your last return in glory.
When we eat the bread and we drink the cup
in the blessed Eucharist,
We meet You, our Risen Savior
giving life to us anew.
Through life’s journey, be with us,
to strengthen us forever.
Amen.
V: You have given them bread from heaven (Alleluia)
R: The source of all happiness (Alleluia)

Priest: Let us pray. Lord God, by the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Your only Son, You accomplish the work of man’s redemption. Full of trust, we proclaim the paschal mystery in the sacramental signs of the Eucharist. Help us to see ever growing in us the fruits of Your saving work through Christ Our Lord.
All: Amen.

(During Benediction) The Divine Praises
Blessed be God. Blessed be His Holy Name.
Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.
Blessed be the Name of Jesus.
Blessed be His Most Sacred Heart.
Blessed be His Most Precious Blood.
Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.
Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.
Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.
Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.
Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste Spouse.
Blessed be God in his angels and in his saints.

(During Benediction) O Sacrament Most Holy
O Sacrament Most Holy,
O Sacrament Divine,
All praise and all thanksgiving,
Be every moment thine,
Be every moment thine.

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Final Hymn: Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace.
The Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God
Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.