

Señor Santo Niño Devotees' Lived Experiences in a Fluvial Parade

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Abstract - *The study intended to divulge the Señor Santo Niño devotees' lived experiences in a fluvial parade as a component of the celebration of Cebu City's Sinulog Festival. This utilized a phenomenological studies design of the respondents' narratives on their lived experiences in the Sinulog Fluvial Parade. A bracketing process was adapted to separate the researcher's perspective from the respondents' lived experiences. Fluvial Parade espoused a significant celebration in the lives of the many devotees of Señor Santo Niño. Emotional bliss and peace of mind are evident in their faces as they welcomed Señor Santo Niño in his coming through his short voyage. They come to witness this event as a means of taking part in the celebration, expressing their gratitude to all the blessings, good health and many opportunities they have received, self-commitment and strong devotion to the child Jesus Christ. Fluvial parade showcased the Cebuano faith and tradition i.e. uniquely animistic and ritualistic Filipino. Señor Santo Niño symbolized as the giver of strength and the source of support among the devotees. As a whole, fluvial parade epitomized love, peace and unity, which heaved the Cebuanos to unconditional faith, as loyal devotees of the Holy Child Jesus. It is recommended that organizers of the annual fluvial parade will retain the best features of the celebration and will continue to find better ways to improve or disseminate information for wider participation and preservation of this unique Cebuano Christian heritage.*

Keywords: *Sinulog Festival, Señor Santo Nino, Fluvial Parade, Devotee, Cebu*

INTRODUCTION

Culture has always been part of human existence. It is a system of learned and shared practices wherein people interact with each other over the course of generations. The cultures in which we grow up directly influence how we view and distinguish ourselves from other people. Thus, our way of embracing our own ethnic, religious and cultural heritage promote a sense of belongingness and play a vital role in shaping our own identity. This identification gratifies the human needs and provides an avenue for the people to work closer together. Yet, it is very hard for us to just succumb to the value of cultural traditions because from the very start, cultural tradition has sprouted to give the entire humanity the freedom to express their own beliefs and ways of life.

People from different walks of life have their own way of practicing their culture. Each culture is

comprised of different customs and traditions that are unique and peculiar from the other. More often, it is characterized by elegant and refined festivities like cultural dances, religious processions and expensive celebrations. These celebrations emanate the people's thanksgiving towards one God. This is a manifestation of how the economic activities and religious participation are interwoven and interconnected with each other.

Cebu, dubbed as the "Queen City of the South", is known for its rich culture and tradition. From the succulent foods, beautiful places, and hospitable people, one would always say there is a lot to be proud of in Cebu. However, the most anticipated event in Cebu is the celebration of Sinulog festival in honor of Señor Santo Niño, the Holy Child Jesus. This is celebrated annual every third Sunday of January. Many people not just in the Philippines but also

outside the country want to witness this awe-inspiring and glamorous festival. Their sincere devotion and strong faith to the child Jesus is highlighted with many activities, like free interpretation, Sinulog-based and street dances that is participated by the different contingents all over the Philippines, and of course the fluvial parade which is one of the significant and mainstay event of the yearly celebration. Fluvial parade is accompanied with hundreds of devotees to show their zeal to the miraculous image of the Señor Santo Niño in His voyage along the waters of the Mactan channel. The colorful flotilla gives way to the sacred, aquatic and ceremonial procession. The heart-warming expressions and the delightful faces have shed more light to the celebration.

Fluvial parade symbolizes not just an ordinary event for the Roman Catholic but also a well-lived experience of the many people whose faith and devotion remained firm and strong all throughout their journey in serving and thanking for the blessings they have received. Their experiences are mere reflections on how they value culture, tradition, and religion. This study aims to get across the lived experiences of the devotees of Señor Santo Niño in the fluvial parade. It also intends to find out the significance of this celebration in the life of a true devoted Roman Catholic.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Festivals are a fun way to discover the culture of a group of people. It is one way of identifying the unique identity of a particular city. Visayas, one of the major islands of the Philippines has been a host of variety of festivals. Cebu as one of the cities in the region is known for hosting one of the grandest festivals in the country. The Sinulog Festival has been popular not just in the Philippines but also to the world. Cebu's Sinulog features different activities such Miss Cebu beauty pageant, the fluvial procession, the solemn procession, film-making and art contest are among others. Fluvial parade is a major highlight of the celebration.

Long years after the Spaniards landed on the island of Mactan. It has been a tradition of the Cebuanos to celebrate Sinulog which is known as the "Mother of all Festivals" in the country. A re-enactment of the coming of the foreigners to the Mactan shores is held annually. This celebration is popularly known as "Fluvial Parade". Imperial states that the Sto. Nino Fluvial Parade is a significant and

mainstay event in the celebration of Sinulog [1]. There are hundreds of devotees who brave enough to cross the turbulent waters of Mactan Channel during bad weather, just to show their devotion to the miraculous child Jesus.

According to Cordilla, it has been a tradition of the image of the Holy child Jesus to visit His parents before His grand day [2]. The icon's voyage starts to leave from the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño and is paraded to His foster father, Señor San Jose, in St. Joseph Parish in Mandaue City. Señor Santo Niño stays with His father for a day and night. After His overnight stay with His father, He voyages His way to His mother (Nuestra Señora de la Virgen de Regla) in Our Lady of Rule in Opon, Lapu-lapu City in the Island of Mactan. The ceremonies in Cebu begin with the early fluvial procession, re-enacting the arrival of the Spaniards in the shores of Cebu. Hundred devotees are expected to witness the annual fluvial parade. Santos even adds that not only foreign tourists but also local tourists want to witness the re-enactment of the first mass and the baptism of Rajah Humabon and Queen Juana, when the Santo Niño was given to them by Magellan in 1951 [3]. The image of the Santo Niño has been considered as the oldest Christian relic in the Philippines.

The parade in the waters of the Mactan Channel is not only distinct in Cebu. To de Jesus, "it has also been practiced in places all over the country like the famous fluvial parades in Bocaue, Bulacan, in honor of the feast of the Holy Cross, in Naga City, Camarines Sur, in honor of the feast of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, and in Angono, Rizal in honor of the feast of San Clemente [4]. This is evident that Filipinos give significance on the culture and traditions acquired during its early years in the hands of its conquerors and have been change over time. This notion is supported by Pierson that even though Philippine tradition has been highly influenced by foreigners, but still the Filipinos has created its identity [5], which is unique from the rest, i.e. the recognition of the fertility and abundance of water in lakes, rivers and channels that provided Filipinos' dependency in terms of food, agriculture, business and transportation. This is an animistic psyche that continues to be handed down that man and nature are inseparable, and it is the Filipinos' indulgence to take care of nature as a precious in the country's growing civilization.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study intended to divulge the Señor Santo Niño devotees' lived experiences in a fluvial parade as a component of the celebration of Cebu City's Sinulog Festival. Specifically, this study delved to answer the following objectives: (1) explain the reasons of the devotees' fluvial parade participation, (2) describe the devotees' feelings upon witnessing the fluvial parade, (3) extrapolate the significance of the fluvial parade for the devotees in terms of: belief, obligation, and tradition, (4) analyze the symbolism of the fluvial parade according to the devotees' viewpoint, and (5) identify the foremost intention of the fluvial parade as a part of the Sinulog Festival celebration.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research Design

This utilized a phenomenological studies design of the respondents' narratives on their lived experiences in the Sinulog Fluvial Parade. A bracketing process was adapted to separate the researcher's perspective from the respondents' lived experiences. Narratives as posited by Connelly &

Clandinin (cited by Moen) are stories of experience shaped through interview discussions in a meaningful dialogue [6].

Research Tools

Data can be in the form of field notes; journal records; interview transcripts; one's own and other's observations; storytelling. Purposive sampling served as sampling procedure where identified respondents based on predetermined criteria. The researchers interviewed five (5) elderly aged from 60 years old and above; who have witnessed the fluvial parade of not less than 2 years; either who are able to join the parade in water or in land. An interview guide was used to elicit responses from knowledgeable respondents. Observations were also conducted to record the respondents' gestures, manner of speaking, eye contact and other relevant body movements which were relevant in data collection.

The fluvial parade takes place in Ouano Wharf and passes through Mactan Channel until it reaches Pier 1 in Cebu City. The galleon is docked in port of Cebu and the Image of the Holy Child is paraded on His way to Basilica Minore del Santo Niño.

Research Environment

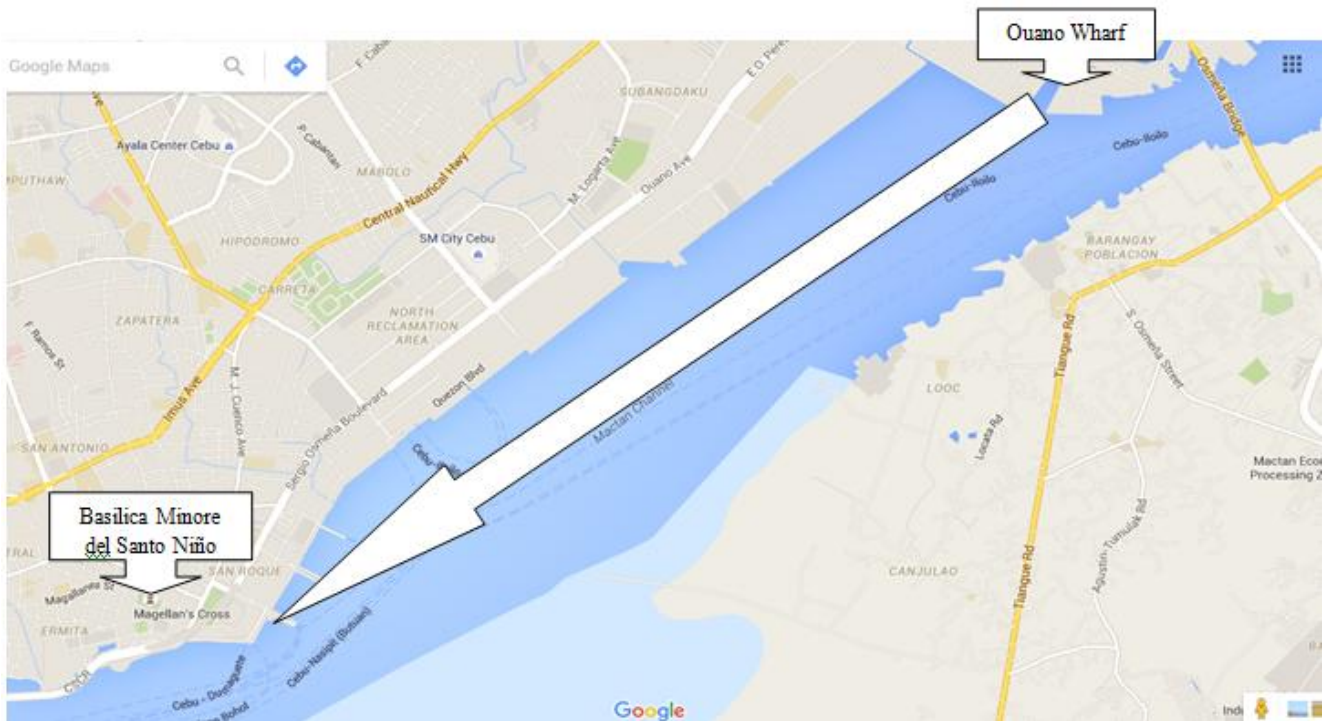


Photo from: <https://www.google.com/maps/@10.2958502,123.9042311,13z>

The port of Cebu is the second largest in the country and is located along Mactan Channel. On the other hand, Mactan Channel is a strait that connects main island of Cebu and the smaller Mactan Island. The body of water is located within Metro Cebu separating Lapu-Lapu City on Mactan Island from Mandaue City and Cebu City in mainland Cebu. It is one of the three channels that connect the Cebu Strait to the Camotes Sea - the other two being Olango Channel and Hilutangan Channel. It is the main passageway for ships navigating between Cebu and Bohol. The channel has been used since the Spanish Colonial Period. It was organized a Channel in Cebu on March 1, 1958. The channel was first spanned by the Mactan-Mandaue Bridge in 1971 and then by the Marcelo Fernan Bridge in 1999.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Fluvial Parade and the Devotees' Driving Force

Sinulog Festival is celebrated every year to showcase the distinct and unique culture of the *Cebuanos*. Aside from the various dance categories, the celebration is well-highlighted with the fluvial parade participated with thousands of devotees from all over the Philippines and from other people abroad. Many people not just teenagers but also middle-aged and the elderly consider this event worth celebrating. Thus, they have different reasons that urge and motivate them to come in this particular religious activity. Two respondents disclosed:

"We felt the sense of commitment and because I believe in the stories since I was a child until today and for the miracles that I have witnessed." (Naa lang gyud mi gibati, nakontento kay gihatag man sa panahon nga makaari jud mi nga way kakulian ug nakontento gyud na sa akung kinabuhi. ug tungud sa mga storya-storya nga akong na dungug ug sa mga milagro nga akung nasaksi) R-1

"I express gratitude for a sound body and good health despite getting older." (Para sa ako kaayohan sa lawas, piskay kanunay ang lawas bisan tigulang na.) R-5

According to Emmons, gratitude involves two stages [7]. The first one is the acknowledgment of goodness in one's life in which we affirm all the

things we have taken together which gratifies our human needs. Second, gratitude is recognizing that the source(s) of this goodness lie at least partially outside the self. These maybe an object, a person, or someone whom we are grateful and thankful for helping us solve our problems and providing opportunities in life. This is supported by McCullough et al. that those people who are grateful are those who are more open-minded, easy to communicate and less neurotic [8]. This entails that they have an optimistic side in them wherein they accept views and opinions from other people. Algoe et al. [9] posit the idea that gratitude helps in strengthening the relationship and in maintaining the formation of such relationship; as well as relationship connection and satisfaction in Algoe, Gable, & Maisel [10]. Moreover, Lyubomirsky expresses that gratitude is a kind of meta-strategy for achieving happiness. It is an appreciation, looking at the brighter side and thanking God for everything He has provided [11]. This is agreed by Fabrega that gratitude means being thankful, counting your blessings, recognizing simple pleasures, and acknowledging all the things received [12].

It has been a commitment to their family to join the fluvial parade because of their strong belief that Señor Santo Niño made miracles. Moreover, it is also one way of giving thanks to the Lord for giving them many blessings and good health. A respondent also exclaimed:

"I just want to take part in this celebration here in Cebu since we don't have this kind of festivity in Davao." (Gusto lang pud kong makipaglambigit sa situation nga celebration dinhi sa Cebu. Since nga sa amo sa Davao man gud wa man miy ing-ani nga klaseng celebration.) R-2

The way fluvial parade is celebrated is very much different since only few in the Philippines are practicing it. This entails that *Cebuanos* are creative enough to come up with this idea that other people do not have. Another respondent expressed:

"I am a devotee of Señor Santo Niño." (Kuan man deboto man gyud kong Señor Santo Niño.) R-4

More than anything else, people who witness the fluvial parade is characterized mainly of their strong devotion Señor Santo Niño. Being a devotee not just required them to attend but also enlightened them to

offer their entire day to glorify and praise the Lord Jesus Christ. Strong devotion is characterized by an undying belief to God. In this case, a person who fears God and has a strong devotion will never do anything which is unethical, unprincipled and immoral in Karwa [13]. It is when a person indulges his self in following and serving God to the fullest extent.

The Fluvial Parade and Devotees' Feelings toward the Celebration

The fluvial parade has been part of the *Cebuano* tradition. Every year, many people not just *Cebuanos* but also foreign people and tourists come to witness this one of a kind celebration which pays tribute to Señor Santo Niño. Such celebration is deemed not complete without the image of Señor Santo Niño in their hands, dancing through the beat, and shouting “*Viva Pit Señor*”. Many devotees joining the fluvial parade are very much prepared and would not miss the chance to see the colorful boats, yachts, and ships and of course to express their gratitude to the Lord for the blessings they have received. From there, you can see the mixed emotions portrayed in their faces. In fact, the happiness they have felt, the peace of mind and the shedding of tears because of joy are indications that the child Jesus Christ has helped them during the time of trials and difficulties. One respondent expressed:

“I cannot control myself to shed tears because every time I join Sinulog I can recall my parents and the time we spent together.” (Di jud malikayan, nga mutulo ako luha kay naka recall man ko sa akung parents niya karun kay wala na sila, makahilak jud ko kay mag-usa man me basta na aning selebrasyona) R-1

These emotional attachments are also one way to show to the Lord that they are thankful for everything they have received and achieved in life. To Bogle, happiness is based on our mind which translates outer conditions and lies within the reach of our capacities [14]. It is something that depicts our experiences, feelings and emotions. To Sasson, happiness is a feeling of inner peace and satisfaction [15]. For some instance, we experience this with the absence of fear and worries within our thoughts. This happens when we love to do such thing and want to achieve certain goals that are significant to us thus giving us a positive outlook in life. On the other hand, it may seem a strange response when we see people breaking

out with tears because of joy he feels in his heart (Duffin) [16]. It is said that these people are restoring “emotional equilibrium” in which they respond to an overwhelming positive emotion with a negative one and are believed to recover better. Moreover, peace of mind is a state of mental and spiritual silence (Sasson) [17]. True inner peace is experienced not only during those times when we are okay but also during the times when we wanted to contemplate with our problems and issues with ourselves. It is also a time when we are calm and capable of handling things efficiently.

Fluvial Parade and Its Significance to the Devotees

The Fluvial parade has been a part of the celebration of the Catholic faith among Cebuanos. It has been a tradition passed from one generation to another. Rockwell defines tradition as an act in which it serves as a compass for all human relationships and personal interactions and qualitative experiences of life [18]. Sonnenberg also stresses that traditions represent a critical piece of our culture. It helps form the structure and foundation of our families and the society we live in [19]. The annual parade has contributed a significant value among the devotees towards the Holy Child Jesus. The reason why devotees still witness this event is to show their strong devotion and thanksgiving for all the blessing received from Señor Santo Niño. The respondents shared:

“Santo Niño’s journey in the fluvial parade resembles our willpower to continue fulfilling our endeavors in life. He is also the source of strength as we deal with the trials and circumstances in life.” (Siya ang naghatag ug kahimsug sa atung lawas nga bisan sa kadaghan trabaho padayon gihapun ta. Siya akung sandiganan sa akung problema ug isip pasalamat sa mga kanendut ug mga kabati nga akung nadawat sa kinabuhi). (R- 1-5)

Truly the Holy Child Jesus is the source of strength among devotees. He resembles hope on whatever obstacles and struggle His believers encounter. For the devotees, joining the fluvial parade is only one way of giving back all the good things He has provided. This is supported by Beckett that the principle of reciprocity demands that we return a gift for a gift [20]. A belief that is innate among Filipinos that it is

necessary to return and give back all the favors received.

The Fluvial Parade and Its Symbolism

We have different interpretations as to what is really fluvial parade and what does it symbolize for. We view and perceive this event based on our experiences from our very own faith and tradition. For many Roman Catholics who are practicing this kind of tradition, fluvial parade symbolizes three main values of *love, peace and unity*. It is a driving force that makes the people united under this one activity despite of the weather conditions and overcrowdedness. It also represents a pure and sincere love towards the family, neighbors and to the Almighty God. Moreover, fluvial parade stands for peace among the people and its community. According to Anderson that virtues bind together by love in perfect unity. He also adds that we are to love one another which create a perfect bond of unity [21]. This zealous endeavor depicts the strong filial tie that has always been the foundation and core value of the Christian faith. With the majority being Christians, the Filipinos specifically Cebuanos are very family-oriented people as seen by their actions and participation in the Sinulog Fluvial Procession, which is primarily driven by their affection for their loved ones. Upon the conduct of this study, it is observed that majority of the viewers of the fluvial procession are families who together attended the undertaking as a form of gathering to celebrate and dedicate their unyielding bond to Señor Santo Niño. Four of the respondents were able to come up with the same contemplation:

“On Unity, the Cebuanos are united. Not just Cebuanos but the Catholic faith who believes in Señor Santo Niño. He is really powerful, miraculous Jesus Christ.” (Kanang nagkahiusa ang mga Cebuano. Dili lang mismo sa mga partikular sa mga Cebuano tanang mga Sugbuanong Katolikanhong pagtuo nga nituo nga si Señor Santo Niño usa gyud na siya kagamhanang Hisu Kristo) R-2 & 4. For the family, for peace (Para sa pamilya, para sa kalinaw) KI-3 & 5.

Johanning posits that Christians believe that peace is in God [22]. They seek peace in God. And they believe that living in peace is more than keeping in peace. This is true to Catholics, faith in the Holy Child

Jesus give them peace. They are not only praying for themselves but also for the common good. They believe that Señor Santo Niño would always guide them and protect them from the dangers of life. As a whole, fluvial parade play a vital role in the lives of the devotees.

Fluvial Parade and Its Main Purpose

Pertaining to their views of celebrating the fluvial parade, one of the respondents traces back to history that the Señor Santo Niño was introduced by the Spaniards to the Cebuanos adopting the Catholic faith such which eventually grows and continues to prosper over the centuries.

“To showcase the Cebuano faith that was introduced by the Spaniards which we adopted and eventually grew.” (Naas a pagtuo sa mga Cebuano. Parte man gyud ni sa kanhi-ay nga gihatag man gyud ni siya sa Espanya, Kinatsila nga nasunod nato nila ang sitwasyon sa ilang pagtuo mao nang nilambo.) R-2

To Antonio [23], *“Sinulog is not only a celebration of a feast but it is also a time for thanksgiving. It is the wonderful time of the year when harmony and forgiveness rule in the hearts and minds of every Cebuano and the whole Filipino nation in general. It is when wrecked fences are mended and clenched fists are being opened.”* His statement signified that the Sinulog Festival is the perfect time for all catholic believers to assert their faith to the child Jesus. Sinulog is when people extend their heartfelt gratitude for all the blessings they receive as well as for the strength and tenacity in their daily living. As affirmed by the respondents of this study, their witnessing of the fluvial parade is to show their appreciation especially for being bestowed with good health, sound body, prosperous career and answered prayers.

Additionally, other respondents claim that the fluvial parade has already been part of our tradition and that it is said to be miraculous thus uplifting the zeal and fervor of the people. Also, another informant claims that their participation of the fluvial parade is driven by their sense that they are invited by God to “go forth” in faith.

“We are really urged to attend. It seems like God wanted us to come and told us to “Go ahead.” (Gusto gyud namu makatambong gyud

mi, mura bag agdahon gyud mi sa Ginoo nga lakaw namu). KI-5

Villongco adds “...the Sinulog still holds a sublime purpose of unifying a people with their God, being a regal manifestation of a people's spiritual ardor that is traced back to more than five hundred years of history” [24]. Bonded by a common goal, Cebuanos and all believers unite as they gazed upon Señor Santo Niño in his voyage with all their hearts and fervor to give thanks and praise to the Holy Child who has always been in the lives of every Cebuano.

CONCLUSION

Fluvial Parade espoused a significant celebration in the lives of the many devotees of Señor Santo Niño. Emotional bliss and peace of mind are evident in their faces as they welcomed Señor Santo Niño in his coming through his short voyage. They come to witness this event as a means of taking part in the celebration, expressing their gratitude to all the blessings, good health and many opportunities they have received, self-commitment and strong devotion to the child Jesus Christ. Fluvial parade showcased the Cebuano faith and tradition i.e. uniquely animistic and ritualistic Filipino. Señor Santo Niño symbolized as the giver of strength and the source of support among the devotees. As a whole, fluvial parade epitomized love, peace and unity, which heaved the Cebuanos to unconditional faith, as loyal devotees of the Holy Child Jesus.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that organizers of the annual fluvial parade will retain the best features of the celebration and will continue to find better ways to improve or disseminate information for wider participation and preservation of this unique Cebuano Christian heritage.

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