

Sacred Camp: Transgendering Faith in a Philippine Festival

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By embodying the paradoxes found in three webs of signification – panaad (devotional promise), sacred camp and carnivalesque during the Ati-atihan festival – Augusto Diangson, an individual of the ‘third sex’, was able to claim membership in the Roman Catholic community of Kalibo, Aklan in the Central Philippines while also negotiating the Church’s institution of heterosexuality. The narratives of mischief and the gender ambiguity of the Santo Niño or the Holy Child Jesus, the centre of Ati-atihan’s religious veneration, further enabled Diangson to interact with Kalibo’s Roman Catholicism. Through an analysis of Diangson and his participation in the festival, this article exposes how ordinary individuals in extraordinary events localise their faith through cross-dressing and dance performance. Seen throughout the Philippines, these processes of mimicry and gender transformation transport individuals into zones of ambivalence and contradictions in which they are able to navigate through the homogenising discourse of their culture and the Church’s homogenising myth of Roman Catholicism.

Soft shafts of light barely shine through openings of Augusto Fuentes Diangson’s two-storey concrete house when he commands Persing, one of his household helpers and a few years younger than him, to start making breakfast. His seven friends, who have come all the way from Manila and Davao City, are about to wake up, and the ten musicians whom he annually hires from the adjacent province of Iloilo have been waiting downstairs for coffee and the usual ‘pan de sal’ (staple bread

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roll). For two consecutive days now, Tay Augus or Tay Gusto, as his close relatives and the local residents of Kalibo, Aklan call him, has been up at five in the morning. He is neither to hear an early Catholic Mass at the nearby Cathedral, as he regularly does, nor to attend to his orchids, which are the envy of his mahjong friends. Preparing for the 2000 Ati-atihan, a week-long street-dancing festival celebrated in the Central Philippines in honour of its unofficial patron saint, the Santo Niño or the Holy Child Jesus, has been the focus of his days.

Tay Augus walks around excitedly, and invites some early guests to have breakfast but hurries to the bedroom. Miniature statues of the Virgin Mary, the crucified Christ, and the ubiquitous Santo Niño emboss its yellow walls. The beautician, Benjie, has been waiting and is already sorting out brushes and make-up ready to transform Tay Augus' face similar to past years into a Caucasian-looking Folies Bergère chorus girl. Tay Augus, with a height of around 1.68 metres, sits down, lifts his chin and gazes past into the exposed, bleeding heart of the 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' nailed on his altar wall. He is ready to have himself transformed.

An hour later Ambo, another teenaged male servant of his, appears. He helps Tay Augus put on a skimpy bustier and thong. Ambo is tasked to put together a wide array of accoutrements and a set of feather boas and pink plumes that Tay Augus' nieces and nephews have sent from faraway Chicago and San Diego. This is to complete Tay Augus' mimicry of the Folies Bergère. By mid-morning, Tay Augus will have divested his 80-year old self and taken on a foreign self for the Santo Niño, and for the thousands of devotees who have come to worship and dance.

The above and following vignettes describe the transgending of *Tay Augus*, an *agi*, a man belonging to what he categorised in English as the 'third sex'.¹ They recall his participation at the 2000 Ati-atihan festival, an annual carnivalesque, street dancing-parade in Kalibo, Aklan on the island of Panay. Every second or third week of January both the local Roman Catholic Church and the municipal government organise this festival to honour the popular Santo Niño or the Holy Child Jesus. The vignettes are portraits as well of the festival life of *Tay Augus*, who, while not secretive about his homosexuality, decided to politely avoid spaces considered in Kalibo to be sites of the *bastos* (lewdness) and *linandi* (flirtatiousness). These sites are almost always associated with the beauty parlours, where lower-middle-class *agi* or the *bakla* hang out.²

1 *Tay* is an Akeanon language appellative used to refer to *Tatay*, which means 'father'. It is added before a person's name to indicate respect and a significant amount of age difference between the addresser and addressee. Upon the request of *Tay Augus* during my last interview with him in December 2001, his real name is kept. As regards the rest of the individuals interviewed for and quoted in this article, they likewise prefer their real names to pseudonyms.

2 To be called a *bakla* in Kalibo is derogatory, for its semantics is not as fluid as *agi*. For a Kalibonhon, the Akeanon word *agi*, although it could mean 'gay' or 'homosexual', as does *bakla*, can be an asexualised or a desexualised argot depending on who is speaking and the context in which it is used. The Tagalog *bakla* among Kalibonhons when spoken in the Akeanon language takes on a fixed signified, a negative connotation of male individuals whose sexual preference is towards the same sex, and who usually are uneducated and of lower-middle-class status. *Agi*, on the other hand, is a floating signifier, asymptomatic in its linguistic dynamics; it needs not readily refer to a non-normative sexual behaviour, or to being a member of the lower middle class. *Agi* also takes on the qualities of camp. A heterosexual individual when s/he acts playfully, affectedly, and excessively can be jokingly branded as an *agi*, as in the Akeanon banter, 'Oh no, there you are *agäng* (behaving like an *agi*) again.' In this instance, *agi*'s fluidity is additionally shown in its versatile nature of filling in different parts of speech: as a noun, an adjective, and an adverb, yet at times also a verb. All translations are mine.

When asked why this was so, he reasoned, 'I am a man of the third sex alright, but I have a name to protect, besides I have class and am educated unlike the other *agi* out there.'³ *Tay August* here is seen against the background of two opposing poles, on one side, of heteronormative masculinity, and on the other, of the *bakla* who are effeminated men working and/or taking up residence in beauty parlours. He did not fall into either of these worlds, and thus created a third category, an ambiguity that all the more captured the in-between, interstitial character of 'camp', and of the Santo Niño Himself.

As evidenced by the awards he received from the provincial government of Aklan for his many years of teaching physical education, Philippine folk dances, and ballet, *Tay August* was an outstanding member of his community.⁴ He was also known in Kalibo to have participated in the major rituals of the Roman Catholic Church, and hence was considered by parishioners and priests alike to be *Katoliko sarado*, 'completely Catholic'. His faith was so deeply grounded that his loyalty to the Church was unquestionable. In the eyes of the many Roman Catholics in Kalibo, *Tay August*'s faith was so exclusively Catholic that no amount of persuasion could have convinced him to change his religion to the growing faiths of Protestantism and Mormonism, or to the very foreign Buddhism and Islam.

Tay August carried a strong devotion to the Santo Niño until he lost his battle with colon cancer in 2002. He believed that it was the Santo Niño who saved him in the early 1980s from an appendicitis; it was a near-death experience. Aklan's former provincial governor, a close family relative, helped *Tay August* in getting the first flight out of Kalibo so he could be operated on at a government hospital in Manila. *Tay August* made a vow that if the Santo Niño were to give him a new lease on life, he would continue his *panaad*, a sacred devotion to the Holy Child Jesus he started in the early 1960s, and would dance for Him for the rest of his life. Given the popularity of the Santo Niño in the way Kalibo residents or Kalibonhons practise Roman Catholicism, and His centrality in their *Ati-atihan*, the Kalibo community participated in the fulfilment of *Tay August*'s *panaad*.

The Santo Niño, also known as the Boy King, is a patron of lost causes, and the most popular among Filipinos.⁵ Devotion to the Santo Niño is a national phenomenon in the Philippines, and it is said that 'if you are not a devotee of the Santo Niño, you are a rare

3 In December 2001, *Tay August* explained predominantly in Akeanon, *Third sex minatuod ako, pero may pangaeon ako nga dapat haeungan, may class ana ako ag edukado bukon it piras sa ibang agi una*. I suggest that his choice of the English term 'third sex' to describe his gender and sexuality was a way of separating himself from other *agi* and of marking the education and class membership he claimed.

4 In 1998, *Tay August* was awarded, 'Most Outstanding Aklanon', the highest possible recognition given by the provincial government of Aklan to its civic members.

5 For a discussion of the Santo Niño as Boy King, see Sally Ann Ness, *Body, movement, and culture: Kinesthetic and visual symbolism in a Philippine community* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 58–85. Upon the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan and his men in Cebu, Philippines in 1521, they presented the image of the Santo Niño to the wife of the chieftain, Rajah Humabon, during the baptism of many Cebuanos. Keeping the desire of converting more souls into the Christian faith, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, together with an Augustinian priest and a maritime team, returned to Cebu in 1565. Unlike Magellan who lost his battle against the Cebuanos and died in the hands of another local chieftain, Lapu-Lapu, de Legazpi succeeded in subduing the nearly 2000 hostile Cebuanos. In the battle remains, de Legazpi found the statue of the Santo Niño, proof that for nearly 40 years the Cebuanos had venerated the Holy Child Jesus unsupervised by Europeans. The relationship of Filipinos with the Santo Niño, therefore, runs deep in their colonial history. This initial contact, dramatised by the 'miraculous' survival of the image,

species in the Philippines . . . Everyone who has ever loved a child, who has ever loved a family, is devoted to the Santo Niño.⁶ The Santo Niño is perceived and narrated as a mischievous boy, who surreptitiously leaves His altar at night to play. Yet, devotees such as *Tay* August believe that the Santo Niño is powerful enough to fulfil wishes, such as to be healed from impotency or a debilitating disease. The Santo Niño also grants victory in a governmental election; makes it possible for His adherents to live permanently in countries such as the United States, Australia and Canada; or enables them to be overseas contract workers in Hong Kong, Singapore, the Middle East or the United Kingdom in order for them to send remittances back to their families in the province of Aklan. Moreover, since the Santo Niño is still a child, His gender for Kalibonhons remains ambiguous; therefore, participants during *Ati-atihan* can subvert and make fun of the gender norms the Roman Catholic Church has institutionalised. As a result, at this time of the year, John the Baptist, the official patron saint of Kalibo, is momentarily eclipsed. St John the Baptist, who baptised his cousin Jesus Christ to enable Him to save humankind from their iniquities, was also known to have condemned the incestuous marriage of Herod Antipas with his niece Herodias. A foil to the Santo Niño, St John the Baptist embodies and safeguards the very heteronormativity the devout *Tay* August tweaked, played with, and turned upside down by way of a transgendered performance. St John the Baptist cannot function as a central figure in the *Ati-atihan* festival, a carnivalesque event in which societal norms are temporarily broken.

It was the third Sunday of January, the last day of the 2000 *Ati-atihan*, when I visited *Tay* August to participate in and document his festival participation. According to an informal survey conducted by the Kalibo municipal government, 250,000 guests from far and near – even from outside the Philippines – arrived that day at this festival of festivals, the mother of all the Santo Niño festivals in the Visayas, and the most religious, ‘authentic’, and carnivalesque of all the Philippine festivals which venerate the Santo Niño.⁷ It was to quadruple Kalibo’s population of approximately 65,000, and would fill the streets to the seams with dancing devout bodies. That Sunday was bound to be the most

propels the popularity of the Santo Niño in the practice of Philippine Roman Catholicism, especially in the Visayan Islands. For an account of the early development of Christianity in the Philippines, see Barbara Watson Andaya and Yoneo Ishii, ‘Religious developments in Southeast Asia, c. 1500–1800’, in *The Cambridge history of Southeast Asia*, vol. I, part 2, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 185–90.

6 Abe Florendo (ed.), *Santo Niño: The Holy Child devotion in the Philippines* (Manila: Congregation del Santísimo Nombre del Niño Jesus, 2001), inside back cover.

7 Cebu’s *Sinulog*, Iloilo’s *Dinagyang*, Capiz’s *Halaran*, and Bacolod’s *Maskara* are believed to have followed the *Ati-atihan*’s popularity. Based on stories I heard growing up in Kalibo, and interviews with Kalibonhons from years 1999–2001, these Western Visayan festivals have all been borne of *Ati-atihan* and are its poor and thus inauthentic copycats. These were the same kind of narrative accounts Sally Ann Ness heard when she conducted ethnographic research in Cebu in 1984–85 (*Body, movement, and culture*, pp. 24, 185, 194, 196–97). In the *Ati-atihan* recently celebrated by the Aklanon community in La Mirada, California in February 2006, banners announcing *Ati-atihan* as the ‘Mother of Philippine Festivals’ were hung in the ballroom where the festivity was celebrated. Rosalyn Fernandez Cabison, President of the Aklanon Association of Los Angeles, announced that in June 2006, in commemoration of Philippine Independence, an *Ati-atihan* contingent will lead a parade in downtown Los Angeles ahead of such groups as *Sinulog*, *Dinagyang*, and Davao’s *Kadayawan*. She said that for the organisers of this trans-Pacific Philippine Independence Day Celebration *Ati-atihan* gave birth to these other religious festivals, and thus merits the honour of heading the parade.

attended of the week-long gathering, understood by faithful participants such as *Tay August*, the Kalibo community and the devotees within and beyond the Philippines as the festival which not only honours the Santo Niño, but also respectfully acknowledges the ancestors of the Filipinos: the *ati* or the dark-skinned Negritos.⁸ Such gesturing towards a past that was pure and untouched by modernity and colonialism is articulated in the repetition of ‘*ati*’ and the attachment of the verbal affix ‘-han’ in the name, ‘Ati-atihan’, which gives it the gloss, ‘to mimic the *ati*’. Most Ati-atihan participants apply soot on their faces and extremities to appear like the putative first inhabitants of the Philippines. But *Tay August* would take pains to whiten himself to distance himself from the ‘others’. Later on that day, in his whiteness, he would dance in stark contrast to the darkened rest. This was the kind of difference which he felt would please the Santo Niño even more.

Instead of devoting his mornings to hearing a six o’clock Catholic mass, *Tay August* broke that ritual and woke up early to prepare instead for the most important day of the Ati-atihan. For two days, he and his visiting friends from out of town, who similar to him were also *agi*, had been dancing in the streets of Kalibo as Folies Bergère chorus girls. The musicians *Tay August* imported from the neighbouring Iloilo province had enthusiastically followed behind them. But this day was the ‘very day of Ati-atihan’, referred by Kalibonhons as the *kaadlawan it Ati-atihan*. That Sunday, festival participants and Santo Niño devotees alike were to street-dance the route set by the Mayor’s Office in close consultation with the Bishop’s Office of Kalibo. *Tay August* made sure to dress very elaborately to show his *panaad* to the community, especially to the Santo Niño.

According to local accounts, the Santo Niño is a naughty boy, who secretly steps down at night to gallivant around Kalibo’s deserted streets to tease and play harmless tricks on the residents. Knowing that the Santo Niño was waiting to have fun that day in exchange for the countless danced petitions to Him, *Tay August* launched for the first time his Folies Bergère chorus girl costume made of baby pink feathers and studded with purple rhinestones. He put to rest last year’s emerald green brassiere and spandex thong, both shouting with gold sequins. The world premiere of his pink costume, as scanty as last year’s, would give *Tay August* a dramatic Sunday entrance that would catch the eye of the playful Santo Niño.

Tay August mobilised and commanded his own resources and those of his community to carry out his *panaad*, which, since his appendectomy in the early 1980s, had largely defined his Ati-atihan participation. He had pooled together his own savings from his pension as a retired schoolteacher and a former member of the Philippine Constabulary that helped the American soldiers fight the Japanese during World War II; the sales from his inherited land in the nearby town of Bulwang; and the remitted dollars

8 Due to the tourism development that began in the province of Aklan in the early 1960s, archival and oral historical research shows that Ati-atihan took on carnivalesque elements from much more popular carnival celebrations of Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans. This was to turn Ati-atihan, which prior to the 1960s was a local festivity attended only by residents of Kalibo and a few guests, into a national, even global phenomenon in which foreign and Filipino tourists would flock to the streets of Kalibo. My use of ‘carnivalesque’ is informed by Michael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); and, Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, intro. Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

specifically earmarked by his US-citizen nephews and nieces for his festival participation. One hundred thousand pesos (roughly \$2,000; the average annual salary of a school teacher in Kalibo) was more than enough to cover food, costumes, festival banners, salaries of helpers and professional fees for the musicians and the make-up artist. The public display of his *panaad* turned his transgenering into a communal affair, the embodiment of his own faith in the Santo Niño and that of his family and his Ati-atihan and Kalibo Catholic community as a whole.

Tay August would take at least two hours to prepare. Aside from the heavy make-up and the complicated vesting of the different parts of his new costume, a fake bouffant had to be secured on his thinning grey hair to serve as a solid base for his half-metre head-dress. Surprisingly all the hustle and bustle did not take a heavy toll on him. When I asked him about his boundless energy, he laughingly credited it as *halin kay Santo Niño*, a gift from the Santo Niño. At around ten in the morning he was already ‘around and about’, fully transformed into a Folies Bergère chorus girl. His younger friends were still in the process of divesting their ‘old’ selves to take on ‘new’ selves for the mischievous Santo Niño and His popular festival.

Ethnography of the particular and notes on agency

Tay August’s transgendered performance as a feminine, white-skinned dancer during this religious, yet at the same time carnivalesque, festival was an act of cross-dressing, which the Diocese of Kalibo came to consider a necessary element in the Ati-atihan celebration. It was his class, his political affiliations, and his relationships with both the Church and the Santo Niño – an article of faith consistent with his loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church – that principally paved the way for his transgendering as a Folies Bergère chorus girl to become one of Ati-atihan’s strongest exploding signifiers. As the Bishop of Kalibo at that time, Monsignor Gabriel Reyes, explained in an interview in 2000, ‘There will be no Ati-atihan if *Tay* August does not come out; he has already become an institution.’

My concentrating on *Tay* August is an answer to the call of Lila Abu-Lughod to ‘write against’ the homogenising discourse of culture.⁹ The Self, she maintains, is very much determined by the enduring qualities of one’s culture, but is also constructed by the shifts and turns of that culture. It is the unique relationship of the individual to the political, economic and cultural changes – those more challenging to pin down than a generalised understanding of ‘culture’ – that forms his or her own individuality. Incorporating and making central the notions of difference and cultural construction support the assertion that culture is not at all and will never be a complete whole. Abu-Lughod writes in this regard:

Anthropologists commonly generalize about communities by saying that they are characterized by certain institutions, rules, or ways of doing things. For example, we can and often do say things like ‘The Bongo-Bongo are polygynous.’ Yet one could refuse to generalize in this way, instead asking how a particular set of individuals – for instance, a man and his

9 Lila Abu-Lughod, ‘Writing against culture’, in *Recapturing anthropology: Working in the present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991), pp. 137–62.

three wives in a Bedouin community in Egypt whom I have known for a decade – live the ‘institution’ that we call polygyny. Stressing the particularity of this marriage and building a picture of it through the participants’ discussions, recollections, disagreements, and actions would make several theoretical points.¹⁰

Ethnographies of the particular emphasise difference and represent the people in the field as individuals who, like the ethnographers momentarily living with them, are also affected by their personal lot in life. This is the kind of subject positioning scholars should strive for, in that it demonstrates the myriad ways of being human from the participant’s point of view and not from the generalisations of a community’s culture. As a dance ethnographer, I relate my subject position, which is multi-pronged and is both personal and academic, to my being a long time Ati-atihan practitioner, an Aklanon born and raised in Kalibo, and a Santo Niño adherent myself. The many selves I assume form that subject position, a ‘multiplex identity’ shared by Kalibonhons like *Tay August*.¹¹

The institution of family, which the Philippine Roman Catholic Church feels the need to define at all times as central to Filipino culture, runs parallel with Abu-Lughod’s all-encompassing ‘institution’ of polygyny. The highly influential Jaime Cardinal Sin, who died on 21 June 2005 and was the head of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines for 18 years by virtue of his being Archbishop of Manila, reminded Filipinos in January 2003 that families should remain hetero-normative if they are to ‘align’ with the ‘vision of God’. A quote from one of the Philippines’ national dailies taken from the same address he gave at the Fourth World Meeting of Families in Manila reads: ‘The family should be the “focal point of evangelization,” amid incidents of divorce and same sex unions which do not conform to God’s “vision”.’¹² *Tay August* reflected – in his weaving together of what I will later describe as webs of signification – an ambivalence to the heterosexual normativity of Philippine culture as homogenised by Cardinal Sin.¹³

A year earlier Cardinal Sin, a Filipino-Chinese and an Aklanon whose roots are in the port town of New Washington, 9 kilometres southeast of where *Tay August* lived for most of his life, decided to change his homily at the sixteenth anniversary of the original People Power Movement. He did not revisit the 1986 revolution, where he played a crucial role in ousting Ferdinand Marcos from the presidency due to human rights abuses and corruption, and in catapulting Corazon Aquino to power. Instead, Cardinal Sin heavily criticised a bill filed in Congress that would give equal rights to gays and lesbians. He said, ‘My goodness, what is happening to our country? Instead of talking

10 Abu-Lughod, ‘Writing against culture’, p. 153.

11 ‘Multiplex identity’ is a concept taken from Kirin Narayan, ‘How native is a ‘native’ anthropologist?’, *American Anthropologist*, 95, 3 (Sept. 1993): 671–86.

12 *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 Jan. 2003, http://www.inq7.net/globalnation/sec_new/2003/jan/22-03.htm.

13 The phrase ‘webs of signification’ is highly influenced by the famous line, ‘that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun’, from Clifford Geertz, following Max Weber, in *The interpretation of culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5. My decision to replace ‘significance’ with ‘signification’ is spurred by the need to foreground the active production of the multiplicity of signs spawned by the affective space of Ati-atihan, and to specifically illustrate how *Tay August* and his transgendered performance wove together signs in the unnatural process of signification.

about how to solve the problems of poverty, they are talking about the marriage of two male people.¹⁴

Manila Auxiliary Bishop Socrates Villegas, in support of Cardinal Sin's stand on homosexuality, said in an interview after the Mass that homosexuality as manifested in same-sex marriage goes 'against Filipino sensibilities'. Bishop Villegas added, 'It is unnatural. It is against our Filipino culture. It is against our Christian faith.' Indeed this was a remark that was essentialising, comprehensive in its reach in the way Cardinal Sin similarly resisted heterogeneity in Filipino culture. The admonishment the bill received from the country's two very powerful Roman Catholic leaders, especially from Cardinal Sin, who held a position inferior in power and mandate only to that of the Pope, and by the time of his retirement in 2003 held dominion over close to 68 million Catholic Filipinos, 85 per cent of the country's total population, became a most compelling reason why the bill did not go beyond the House of Representatives.¹⁵

Why did a Santo Niño devotee and a devout Catholic, but a self-confessed *agi*, annually embody a foreign female self at a festival, which was supposed to be Catholic in register and supportive of the homogenous character of Filipino culture? How did he negotiate his faith by working within the bounds of the Church-mandated hetero-normative behaviour, in a town where 98 per cent of the population professes a Roman Catholic faith and therefore supports the maintenance of 'family values'?¹⁶ One could encode the transgendered performance of *Tay Augustus*, who would volunteer to help the Kalibo Catholic Church organise religious events in rare times when the Cardinal paid his ancestral home a visit, in webs of signification. These are *panaad*, a sacred promise in a form of an embodied prayer, sacred camp and carnivalesque. Taken together they confirmed for *Tay Augustus* the homogeneity of Filipino culture, so adamantly professed by the nation's Roman Catholic leaders. However, they successfully challenged the values and ideas of those same Roman Catholic Church leaders, while also swaying the local church leaders of Kalibo to consider *Tay Augustus*' transvestism as emblematic of the Ati-atihan festival. These webs of signification explain how an individual navigated through, with difference and theatrical drama, his hometown's institutions of Roman Catholicism and heterosexuality. His transgendered mimicry should be considered a personification of the local and individual practice of Roman Catholicism in Kalibo, which, similar to the demographics of the rest of the Lowland Philippines, overwhelmingly adheres to the Roman Catholic faith.¹⁷ It is in the ambivalence of one's performance, and in the paradox of difference and uniformity – in *Tay Augustus*' fulfilment of his Catholic *panaad* to the Santo Niño through his annual transgendering of the Folies Bergère chorus girl, and

14 For a fuller discussion of the 2002 homily in which this quote and the following quotes from Bishop Villegas were taken, see *Newsflash*, <http://www.newsflash.org/2002/02/hl/hl015291.htm>, Feb. 2002.

15 David Steinberg, *The Philippines: A singular and plural place* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994) p. 93; *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, http://www.inq7.net/brk/2003/sep/15/brkpol_11-1.htm, 15 Sept. 2003.

16 Out of the 478,092 residents of Aklan, 420,651 practise Roman Catholicism; *The 2004 Catholic directory of the Philippines: Containing status of the Catholic directory of the Philippines as of January 2004* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2004).

17 Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85–92; Samuel Weber, 'The sideshow, or: Remarks on a canny movement', *Modern Language Notes*, 88, 6 (1973): 1102–33.

therefore through his public performance of his third sex – that an individual's agency is located.¹⁸

The premises found in the webs of signification are realised by way of a kind of 'double sense', an assumption of two bodies, which *Tay August* lived out by using his pedestrian, local body to become a foreign, female body.¹⁹ The two bodies – one as a mimic of the *Folies Bergère* chorus girls and the other as his quotidian self – mobilised his transgenderism and revealed the double in *Tay August*' corporeality. This very doubleness made it unproblematic for an admiring public and the local Church leadership to regard him as a loyal parishioner, rather than dismiss him as a sacrilegious backslider, remiss in his obligations to the Church.

Like Cardinal Sin, *Tay August* was born and raised in the Aklanon culture, and was of Filipino-Chinese descent; they also shared a similar defining personal history, such as the Japanese occupation (1942–44) and the Marcos period (1966–86).²⁰ Cardinal Sin, a well-known *bon vivant* among Roman Catholic priests and his close friends, was in fact the godson of *Tay August*' mother. During the younger days of the Cardinal, he would visit *Tay August*' ancestral home in Kalibo to pay respect to his godmother, *para magbisa*, to touch with his forehead the back of his godmother's right hand. When Cardinal Sin became a priest and received his appointment from the Vatican to be Manila's Cardinal, *Tay August* would show the same kind of respect by doing the exact gesture of *bisa* whenever Cardinal Sin visited Aklan.

Why did they see homosexuality in a different light? There is a Filipino 'culture' that exists in the minds of the people and dictates the way they should live their lives in relation to societal norms. Since it is one of the strongest and highly respected gatekeepers of Filipino values, the Roman Catholic Church carefully monitors generalised notions of culture. Articulating, interpreting, and prescribing them to parishioners allows national religious leaders such as Cardinal Sin and Bishop Villegas to remain in positions of power.

As soon as one closely examines, however, the vicissitudes of an individual's life and the local practice of Roman Catholicism, one realises that there is plenty of mediation and accommodation in expressing one's Roman Catholic faith. In these processes, one understands how an individual like *Tay August* can sway past the homogenising forces of his culture, exemplified by the institution of having a hetero-normative family, while at the same time confirming their power over individuals like him. I consciously limit my comments to the Kalibo community alone. I thus not only foreground the particularities of the local; I also interrogate the ways in which an individual lives this localness through

18 Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting colonialism: Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Rafael, *The promise of the foreign: Nationalism and the technics of translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

19 Susan Sontag, 'Notes on camp', *Partisan Review*, 31, 4 (Fall 1964): 520; Moe Meyer, ed., *The politics and poetics of camp* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

20 Both Cardinal Sin and *Tay August* belonged to upper-middle-class families. When I was growing up my late paternal grandparents, Rustico and Leonaria Alcedo, who hailed from Dumaguít, another port town a few miles southeast of New Washington, would tell stories about the Cardinal. His parents owned the biggest retail store in that part of the province, and during the Japanese Occupation their ancestral home was razed to the ground. It was also during this time, my grandparents narrated, when they and most probably the Cardinal's family as well evacuated (*nag-ibakwit sa taëon*) to Aklan's hinterlands.

acquiescence and negotiation. Moved by the double bodies of *Tay August* and the multiplicity of meanings they generate, I suggest that one can better grasp the culture's fabric of sameness if one takes the time to notice its threads of difference.

Tay August's *de facto* claimed space to perform his difference and veneration to the Santo Niño. He embodied power to dialogue with the overarching institutions of the Roman Catholic Church. Through his dance, which mimicked the foreignness of the Folies Bergère chorus girls, *Tay August* displayed the ability of an individual to perform one's difference through the ambiguity of his third sex; in these strategies his agency resided. Being ambivalent, and in a state of constant paradox – neither fish nor fowl, at once mimicking the Folies Bergère chorus girls for his *panaad*, and publicly being an *agi* of strong Catholic faith – makes one slip out from the culture's essentialising clutches; in this particular case, it is from the Church's firmly valued institutions of family and heterosexuality.

Panaad: Dramatic offering

To begin the transformation of Tay August into a Folies Bergère chorus girl, Benjie divides Tay August's face into sections, and works on one section at a time. After wetting a sponge and rubbing it on a light coloured pressed powder, Benjie applies 'Kukuryo', an imported foundation from Japan, on Tay August's entire face, down to his neck, and further to the upper part of his chest that will not be covered by his new brassiere. Similar to previous years and the last two days of Tay August's street performance, Benjie sets the cosmetic base. He deepens the foundation between Tay August's eyes and temples; stretching taut with a sponge that section of his face to conceal the many wrinkles there. The cosmetic product gives Tay August's face a matte finish and a thick layer of make-up, which will withstand the street dancing he will do that day. Above all, its evenness whitens his dusky complexion.

Afterwards Benjie dips the tip of a slim brush, first in the bowl of water, then on a mound of black eyebrow enhancer to pick up colour. He unhesitatingly gives Tay August's eyebrows a shape, clearly defining them. Benjie then goes to work on the eyes. He forms a concave of dark brown shadow on the eyelid's upper portion, carefully making sure that the inward curve left a small circle at the bottom. To make Tay August's nose narrower, more aquiline than it already is, he lines both sides of the nose ridge with the same off-white make-up. Finishing the eye section, Benjie gently pulls down Tay August's lower eyelid to saturate it with black eyeliner. The tiniest of brushes is used. Benjie wets it a little to capture the black make-up stored in one of the cosmetic cases.

To contour Tay August's left eye, Benjie moves the brush from the furthest corner near the temple, to the corner close to the nose ridge, and reverses the movement for the right eye. Cautiously, he confines those left to right movements on the thin skin where the hair edging the eyelid and the conjunctiva meet. Tay August struggles from the forced dilation; his eyes turn red, and he sheds tears almost instantaneously from the artificial contact. Before his eyes are awash with tears, Benjie quickly extends the eyeliner to the corners of the eyes, securing for Tay August a feminine 'cat's eye look'. Tay August does not stop Benjie from continuing on despite the discomfort.

After Benjie puts on a light blush on Tay August's cheekbones, and distributes specks of silver glitter on the face, he prepares to glue on the pair of false eyelashes. Benjie removes one of the leaves from the star apple stalk Ambo brought in earlier. Droplets of milky sap ooze out from it, and Benjie expertly lines them on the edge of one of the false eyelashes. He at once fits

it over Tay August's right upper lid, and repeats the same process for the other lid. The sap bonds in seconds the false eyelashes to Tay August's own lashes, thus extending the natural lashes and erasing his obvious epicanthic fold. Tay August flutters his eyelashes, now new, longer, and much heavier.

Once again Benjie sweeps a pinkish blush across the hollows of Tay August's cheeks. His broad strokes reach all the way to the temples. Using a rounded U-tip brush, Benjie dabs dark lipstick on Tay August's lips, setting them and finally completing the make-up process. Tay August presses his lips together to even out the freshly applied lipstick. By way of that final gesture, Tay August corporeally declares his make-up done, and indicates he is now ready to be dressed.

The above description begins to flesh out the first web of signification that is *panaad*, a sacred vow an individual has promised to keep throughout one's lifetime. By 2000, Tay August had imitated the image of the Folies Bergère chorus girls for close to 40 years. His dedication to the Santo Niño image, seen by the annual transgenering, made his mimicry in his eyes a *panaad*, and as he believed in the eyes of others, of the Kalibo Roman Catholic Church, and of the Santo Niño as well. Tay August demonstrated what it meant to publicly display one's faith in the Santo Niño through the annual physical labour and at times pain he had to go through. Among the Roman Catholics of Kalibo, for any *panaad* to be legitimately viewed as such, the elements of suffering and transformation should be experienced through one's own body and be rendered visible every year. Tay August's *panaad* had both these corporeal and temporal elements, essential factors which made residents of Kalibo, like their Bishop in 2000, Monsignor Reyes, consider such transgenering an expression of genuine religious faith. These two elements, which put in motion Tay August's *panaad*, propelled the local Roman Catholic Church to include him as a defining feature of its Santo Niño festival. Tay August literally changed the face of the festival and through his *panaad* opened some more the door for transvestism to be part of the Ati-atihan celebration.²¹

One can begin to discern the elements of transformation and temporality in Tay August's *panaad* from observing Benjie's hands in recreating section by section what seemed to be an already familiar image. By not once hesitating in putting on make-up, not even in the delicate part of marking the eyelids with black eyeliner, it was visibly clear that this was not the first time he was hired to transform Tay August's face. Benjie had been doing Tay August's make-up for the past five years, not at his nearby beauty parlour, but always at Tay August's house, a service requiring extra remuneration which Tay August and his family did not mind paying. On the third Sunday of January 2000 Tay August had once more feminised himself through the play of light and dark shadows. His transformed, foreign look recalled yet another imported image from the past and a distant place.

Tay August's face and entire body, which was minimally covered by a shimmering bustier and a thong, were a conglomeration of historical and popular images – emanating first from nineteenth-century Bohemian Paris, transported then to the various elsewheres of the Ice Follies skating world, imported next to Manila's Araneta Coliseum via

21 In spite of the fact that there were other festival participants who transgendered themselves, to my knowledge and according to the Kalibonhons I interviewed for this project, it was only Tay August who had received the kind of institutional support from the Roman Catholic Church of Kalibo.

Ice Capades productions, and brought finally by *Tay* August to the local streets of Kalibo.²² Although it cost *Tay* August discomfort and trouble to achieve such an overly female look, transgenering himself was necessary to have a dramatic presence in the Ati-atihan. It was also critical in illustrating how sincere he was in keeping the *panaad* he had made 20 years earlier, and for the Ati-atihan and Kalibo Catholic community which had given his *panaad* confirmation.

Tay August therefore decided to continue with the make-up process even after he had shed tears from such an unnatural act as having his eyes contoured with black eyeliner. In comparison to the many blessings he had received from the Santo Niño and to the unspeakable sacrifice Jesus Christ had gone through for the sins of mankind, the amount of bodily sacrifice he put into his transgenering, *Tay* August explained, was negligible. The holy statues, more than a dozen of them placed on several wooden platforms tiered on his bedroom wall, were constant reminders of those stories of magnanimity. *Tay* August was thanking them, particularly the Santo Niño. As any devout Catholic in Kalibo understands, he was also redeeming himself from his sins. And maybe if he danced hard enough and deadened all the discomfort caused by his act of mimicry, he could also ask forgiveness for the transgressions of his neighbours.

Outside Ati-atihan, *Tay* August was also known to have had another *panaad* during *Semana Santa*, or Holy Week, when he would process his family's life-size image of Mary Magdalene around the streets of Kalibo (see Figure 1). However, his *panaad* was more dramatic during Ati-atihan when his transgendered and later on his dancing body, which he turned into a whitened body, became the very vessel of his *panaad*. He himself had to corporeally transform into a feminised 'woman', a Caucasian Other. Such exaggerated transgenering was a *panaad* that gave him necessary pain and joy. For *Tay* August these two elements caused the Santo Niño to beam down upon his *panaad* with great delight and amusement. *Tay* August found satisfaction in that pain, a paradox which ran throughout his transgendered performance in thanking the Santo Niño for giving him a healthy body to street dance year after year in His honour.

Tay August's transformation into a Folies Bergère chorus girl reminded festival participants in the Ati-atihan 2000 of the full extent to which an individual would go in order to fulfil a *panaad*. His gender transformation corporealised the *panaad* of a devotee grateful to the Santo Niño for saving his life and, akin to Mary Magdalene, of a sinner in search and in need of forgiveness. As a Roman Catholic, *Tay* August believed that he was doubly a sinner: as a human being with an original sin, which he inherited from Adam and Eve, and as an *agi*, who found himself outside the Church's heterosexual fold. *Tay* August moved away from the practise of procreation and therefore became an 'unnatural' member of the Church. I read the *panaad* he observed throughout the year as devout acts

22 One of the earliest productions staged by and in the Araneta Coliseum was the Ice Capades extravaganza performed by visiting Ice Follies dancers, who came to Manila in the early 1960s. *Tay* August was sent by his parents to Manila in the late 1930s to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education, but decided to stay to train in ballet and teach physical education at public high schools. He regularly watched these imported productions and recalled how he would save all his earnings as a teacher and ballet dancer for season tickets to Araneta's Ice Capades. In the 1960s *Tay* August would take a leave from his work in Manila to go home to Kalibo, where he used such influences in the development of his street dance performance for the Ati-atihan festival.



Figure 1 *Tay Augustus in front of the carriage of Mary Magdalene (caro ni Santa Maria Magdalena) during the 2001 Semana Santa in Kalibo, Aklan.*
(Photo by Patrick Alcedo)

of faith of an individual fervently coming to terms with a sin he was born with by virtue of being a Roman Catholic, and of another sin committed by his sexual orientation. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, sin severs one's relationship with the Lord, and it is by doing acts of penance that an individual is once again welcomed to His fold. *Tay Augustus* and the members of Kalibo's Catholic Church fulfilled these acts of penance through their local *panaad* practices.

During *Ati-atihan* *Tay Augustus* became a kind of Mary Magdalene. As he would explain, 'We are all sinners, and the Lord knows how to forgive if we submit ourselves to Him.' Even if he did not explicitly express it, his *panaad*, which for him gave joy to the Santo Niño, was his way of negotiating his sexual difference with the Lord Jesus Christ through the young, mischievous Santo Niño. This is a type of gender that is clearly outside the moral rubric of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, as demonstrated by *Tay Augustus*, being an *agi* could be inside the Lord's grace if one professes faith as deeply as Mary Magdalene and becomes consistent with one's *panaad*. The *panaad*, the local practice of Roman Catholicism in Kalibo, and the original sin he shared with the rest of the Roman Catholic world, made it possible for *Tay Augustus* to street-dance as an *agi* during the *Ati-atihan* festival.

Sacred camp: Dressing-up for the Santo Niño

Tay Augustus stands up and after a quick search finds his wig lying on a tiny dresser. Facing the cabinet mirror, close to fading photos of the Virgin Mary and the crucified Christ, he stretches the wig's elastic sides, and fits it all the way to the nape of his neck. Benjie combs Tay Augustus' front bangs, brushes the side away from his made-up face, and then smoothens the hairs that are out of place. Once again, an immaculate bouffant has been created. Tay

Augus gives himself a quick smile in the tiny mirror that ends in tiny crows' feet forming between his temple and his eyes. He sits down on his bed, ready for the next part of the dressing-up process.

Ambo takes over. He begins by getting the panty hose Tay Augus has worn the past two days. To fit it on Tay Augus' right foot, he sits on the hardwood floor. Patiently, he slowly pulls up the translucent pair of stockings. He is careful not to pull it with his nails or else it will ruin the stretchable material. When Ambo successfully fits the stockings up both knees, Tay Augus stands up and pulls it all the way up his waist. He then moves over to the piano bench, and from a yellow plastic bag hands the purple bustier he will premier that day to Ambo. Although it is as fully studded with beads and sequins as last year's green bustier, the new purple bustier has its own unique character. Its breast cups do not have the usual curvy, circular look; they follow the kind of rugged edge one finds from a seashell. The breast cups themselves are filled with much glitter, as they are covered with hundreds of diamond-looking beads atop violet sequins. It is easy for Ambo to help Tay Augus put on the new purple bustier. Street dancing for the last two days under the sun in last year's green bustier has left round white marks around his breasts and vertical lines on his shoulder top. That sun burnt outline on his torso guides Ambo as he fits the purple bustier on Tay Augus, who does not grimace with pain in spite of the contact on his sun-burnt skin.

Tay Augus then takes his thong out from the yellow bag. The thong is the same colour as the bustier, made of spandex material and elaborated with strings of beads; it has formed into a knotted ball. Ambo spreads it first and disentangles its beads before fitting it to Tay Augus. When Ambo has connected the hooks to hug the sides of Tay Augus' waist, the strings of beads cascading from the thong's lower section repeat the breast cups' wavy appearance. Ambo proceeds by retrieving Tay Augus' tutu from the wooden closet in front of the wall crowding with holy images. The tutu is made of neon pink boas and imported ostrich feathers his niece bought for him as 'eukas' (gifts) when she returned from Chicago the year before. It is not a ballerina's tutu made of tulle; it is not stiff and does not flare out to the sides. Instead it is as limp and droopy as the feathers of a peacock when it does not want to attract its opposite sex. Ambo takes out a safety pin to attach the two sides of the soft feathers.

With Ambo still at his side, Tay Augus crowns himself with an almost metre high headdress of neon pink feather plumes. Affixed to a bejewelled tiara, the plumes arise from it like fountains of pink lights caught in a swirling motion. Once the unwieldy headdress steadies, Ambo sticks three of the same kind of imported plumes on his lower back to represent tails. They fan out as if those of a peacock at the height of its sexual invitation.

Tay Augus steps forward a little and slips into his pink high-heeled sandals with fake purple rhinestones fastened on their outer covering. The rubber sandals are of a lighter shade of pink in comparison to the bright pink plumes and ostrich feather boas. The plumes projecting from his headdress and lower back, and the high-heeled sandals make Tay Augus appear much taller. His presence requires space and invites more attention. All of a sudden, this wisp of a man is transformed into a statuesque, larger-than-life Folies Bergère chorus girl.

From a medicine cabinet, Tay Augus locates the perfume his nieces from the US gave him, and sprays it generously behind his earlobes and brand new cleavage. Tay Augus is to capture the Ati-atihan crowd, which is now growing in the street in front of his house. The local residents of Kalibo especially await his entrance. Similar to last year and the years before that, they are there to cheer for Tay Augus. At around nine o'clock, at the time when High Mass will have started at the plaza, they will join his group. Tay Augus and his family



Figure 2 Tay August in the middle of his dance of *cha-cha-cha*, and leading his group in Ati-atihan 2000. (Photo courtesy of Eli Africa.)

annually organise this group around his coming out simultaneously as a faithful Santo Niño devotee, and as a flamboyantly transformed Roman Catholic Folies Bergère chorus girl.

The above vignette portrays through the vesting of the different parts of costume on Tay August's body the second web of signification, which could be called 'sacred camp' (see Figure 2). Following Jonathan Z. Smith, the 'sacred' is commonly understood to be something that belongs to a special dimension.²³ Religious persons believe it to be imbued with power to transform people's lives. The sacred, Smith argues, however, only comes into being because of the concentrated attention a community gives to it. It is the community's effort that places the sacred at the core of its ritual practices, brings on it sacrality, and, as a result, makes it possess a transcendent quality. Effectively evoked by Susan Sontag, 'camp' is an exaggerated play on form, a special kind of ludic behaviour, replete with innocence and unintentionality; it is enacted with tender feelings but always with pathetic and theatrical seriousness.²⁴ Combining these two words, the latter referring to something secular and the former religious, captures the paradox in Tay August's Ati-atihan participation. For Tay August, and some members of the Kalibo Catholic community, his transgending, a profane act in the eyes of the Manila-mandated Roman Catholic Church, was a serious expression of devotion to the playful Santo Niño. Tay August believed that the only way for him to be sacred was to annually invest energy on using his body as an instrument in becoming a 'woman'. To speak therefore of sacred camp, as it was performed by Tay August, is to consider the sum of these paradoxes, and to pay attention to both words as discrete yet related entities.

23 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 55.

24 Sontag, 'Notes on camp'.

Through his *panaad* to the Santo Niño, *Tay Augus* together with his community underscored the sacred in his street dancing; neither the Holy Child nor the Roman Catholic Church bestowed sacrality on his performance. Together with the *panaad* during the *Semana Santa*, and the strong bond he had with Kalibo's Catholic Church, it was his Ati-atihan *panaad* which made things sacred. *Tay Augus* energised the omniscience of the Santo Niño and constantly demonstrated that he had to submit to this Supreme Being whom he believed had control over his life. As Smith has observed, nothing is innately sacred, 'things are only sacred in relation These are not substantive categories, but rather situational or relational categories. The ordinary (which remains to the observer's eye, wholly ordinary) becomes significant, becomes sacred, simply by *being there*. It becomes sacred by having our attention directed to it in a special way.'²⁵ In the observer's eye, the people who only see *Tay Augus* inside the Ati-atihan carnival context, his performance may be viewed as that of the 'ordinary', one that belonged solely to the festival domain and not the world of the gods and the deities. But for those who knew him well outside the Ati-atihan festival, and were constant witnesses and even partners to his *panaad*, his transgenering was a sacred act of faith. In the end it was *Tay Augus*' devotion to the Santo Niño that convinced the local Church to take his transgenering as a religious offering.

In the words of *Tay Augus*, 'it's because it's a religious promise and prayer, and not an act of flirtation'. Framing his being a 'woman' as an act of prayer negated the profane, as in flirtation, in his performance. *Tay Augus* actively weeded out the elements, which for him were not for the Santo Niño, and only retained those which would delight Him: the doubleness and ambivalence of the performance. It was the choices *Tay Augus* made and the way he harnessed his energy for the Santo Niño that gave religious weight to his transgenering, a gender bending which would otherwise be considered sacrilegious outside the *panaad* context. This sense of the sacred was what finally held together *Tay Augus*' transgenering performance as an expression of his Catholic faith in a mode characterised by Sontag's camp.

Tay Augus openly admitted he was an *agi*. Yet, he also claimed that, 'I am not like the other *agi*, since what I am doing is for the Santo Niño.' His sacred devotion to the Santo Niño was what set his performance apart from the other *agi* who also dressed up as 'women', and who street danced not to stage femininity but to be flirtatious with men. *Tay Augus* took the Holy Child Jesus as a protector of his transgenering, his own couturier if you will, who gave him permission to annually vest the set of bustier and thong in order for him to be more feminine than the 'original' chorus girls he saw in Manila in the 1960s. In the sacred lay the possibility of being in the same space and time with the Santo Niño, and with the common public who were devotees as well. Contextualising his transgenering in that special realm was to suffuse his dressing-up with sacred meanings, and to make his body imitate corporealities, which, even if they were of and from the quotidian, were sensitive to the ways of the sacred. *Tay Augus*, who in relation to his other *panaad*, equating his transgenering through and through with an act of religious faith, was ultimately the person responsible for making his *panaad* the pivot upon which the sacred in his transgenering turned.

25 Smith, 'The bare facts of ritual', p. 55. Emphasis in the original.

Performative double sense

Tay Augustus' mimicry worked in two directions. Borrowing Sontag's instructive term, it was this 'double sense', which in this case refers to his everyday, female body, which made *Tay Augustus'* performance campy as well. He wanted to become a woman, while turning his male, brown body after the image of the white bodies imported from different corners of the figure skating world to perform in such centres of culture as Quezon City and Manila. *Tay Augustus* was already 80 years old, when I became witness to and participant in this performance in question. Nonetheless, the amount of foundation and make-up, and the way he wanted his costume tightened to hug his body pointed to his desire to remain youthful and white. At that moment he denied the rust of time, which left wrinkles on his face and sag on his body, corporeal marks no amount of make up and costume could cover. In spite of the make-over of *Tay Augustus*, the effort he exerted to become feminine and young, the public, the local Kalibonhons and visitors from out of town, either identified him as *Tay Augustus* in his usual Ati-atihan attire, or as an old man masquerading as a nubile 'woman'.

Tay Augustus understood the necessity of going back to his quotidian self after the festival, and of performing only within the festival's immediacy and carnival frame. His transgenering was not to bleed over to the everyday, or else it would elicit pathos, place him in the land of absurdity, and turn itself into a tragedy which would bring shame to him and his family. While his theatrical performance delighted the public, and in the mind of *Tay Augustus* and others, the Santo Niño as well, it also gave them a sense of *tristesse*. In *Tay Augustus'* case, the public could read his performance as campy, as Janus-faced, with his other face intensely focused on becoming a 'woman' for a few days, and the other left with no choice but to accept the inevitability of going back to his old self. They were either torn between relishing or feeling pity for his transgenering's artificiality, an embodied doubleness, which pushed his performance and *panaad* from the onset. *Tay Augustus* was distantly exotic and yet utterly familiar, a festival veteran rife with passion in both praising the Santo Niño and staging the 'unnatural' act of annually mimicking Folies Bergère chorus girls.

What made *Tay Augustus'* performance additionally campy was not only this double sense, but also the innocence strewn across his performance. *Tay Augustus* never talked about his performance as being campy, a silence and naiveté that made his street dancing truly as one. As Sontag wrote, 'To talk about camp is to betray it.' Hence the reading and utterance of camp should be left in the eyes and mouth of the public and not of *Tay Augustus*. Although 'camp' is a Western idea that evokes all sorts of signifiers, its playful and excessive quality is found in the Akeanon word, *agi*.²⁶

26 Sontag, 'Notes on camp'. In order to arrive to some kind of understanding of 'camp' in the world of Akeanon language, another word which could bring out a 'campy' feeling or taste is *baduy* (male) or *baday* (female), meaning unfashionable or out of date. Although *baduy* or *baday* has the quality of excess and absence of self-election (actors not intending to be tacky), its negative connotations make it 'camp's' partial equivalent. 'Camp's' playful quality always places it in a neutral, innocent mode. Indeed 'camp' is non-Akeanon, an outsider's concept used in my reading of *Tay Augustus'* transgenering. However, 'camp's' playful and tender sentiments and affects do exist, still in multiple forms in both the Akeanon language and *Tay Augustus'* performance. If I had said to *Tay Augustus* for instance that his performance was campy, most probably he would not have understood it, as it was a concept foreign to him. Such epistemological distance, however, does not mean that camp did not exist in *Tay Augustus'* transgenering and streetdancing.

Tay Augus reminisced gleefully how, when he first came out in his overly feminised attire, the public literally went berserk: 'They all ran up to me in such a frenzied fashion for a photo shoot. I was completely taken by surprise. I could no longer move.' He could not forget the white guy, a *kano*, an 'American', *Tay* Augus surmised, who followed him around town taking photos from different angles: 'I would see him every year from then on, maybe he was also "gay".'²⁷ *Tay* Augus further narrated in Akeanon, 'But he never even once introduced himself though. Maybe he was the one responsible for having my photos printed in international travel brochures.'

Tay Augus was unaware that it was the campiness of his image which caught the attention of the international media and brought joy to the public. When I was growing up in Kalibo, my mother would bring my siblings and me to the plaza to participate in the Ati-atihan, and *Tay* Augus' promenade and street dance in his 'new', 'foreign' self would always climax that experience for us. In 2000, after having been educated in Manila and the United States, but still a Santo Niño devotee, I read his performance as campy and sacred at once. For the Kalibo Catholic Church, specifically for the priests who knew *Tay* Augus and were aware of his deep loyalty to the Santo Niño, his transgendered performance was simply read as a sacred devotion. The complexity and multilayeredness of the performance engendered several readings, and one of them is what I offer: sacred camp.

Tay Augus, however, thought the festival participants were attracted to his being markedly different – his transgendering, the comic relief and the carnivalesque atmosphere he provided. Innocence here manifested itself in several ways: his attraction to the Folies Bergère chorus girls was spurred by their foreignness and professionalism, and not by the possibility of camp; and his transgendering was not staged to be campy but to negotiate his being an *agi* and ultimately to reinforce his *panaad*. Given that his gender transformation was committed in the name of his *panaad*, he made sure that he would be more beautiful than the original ice dancers, more sparkling in speckles on the face and costume. He unintentionally corporealised a campy image due to his commitment to his *panaad*, exaggerating every opportunity to be an overly graceful 'woman'. Even the sweet scent of his imported perfume set him apart from the stench and musk of others'

27 Although *Tay* Augus recounted this incident in Akeanon, he deliberately used the English word 'gay'. The lexical insertion of the word 'gay' demonstrates that such a terminology and its accompanying concept (of a gay individual desiring another gay man) is for *Tay* Augus exclusively applied to American, Caucasian foreigners and not to locals like himself, who self-identified as *agi*. My understanding of *agi* here, and as supported by my ethnographic research and local experience is markedly different from the Tagalog word *bakla*; Fenella Cannel, 'The power of appearances: Beauty, mimicry and transformation', in *Discrepant histories: Translocal essays on Filipino culture*, ed. Vicente L. Rafael (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1995), pp. 223–58, Cannel 'Beauty and the idea of "America" in *Power and intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 203–26; Neil Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: The last 30 years* (Diliman: University of the Philippines Press, 1996); Mark Johnson, *Beauty and power: Transgendering and cultural transformation in the Southern Philippines* (New York: Berg, 1997); Martin F. Manalansan IV, 'Speaking of AIDS: Language and the Filipino "gay" experience in America', in *Discrepant histories*, ed. Vicente L. Rafael, pp. 193–222; Manalansan, *Global divas, Filipino gay men in the diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Michael L. Tan, 'From *bakla* to gay: Shifting gender identities and sexual behaviors in the Philippines', in *Conceiving sexuality: Approaches to sex research in a postmodern world*, ed. Richard G. Parker and John H. Gagnon (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 85–96.

sweating, dancing bodies. To the ongoing music he threw his aging body, an obvious physical limitation not shared by the nubile, visiting ice dancers. He swished his tutu-covered hips, and grooved his foundation-layered torso, unmindful of the tropical country's funereal humidity and heat. As a professional performer, *Tay Augus* danced from the beginning to the end of the parade, which he referred to as *prusisyon* (procession) and not *parada* (parade), a lexical choice indicative of his understanding of Ati-atihan participation as a religious procession of *panaad*, similar to the *Semana Santa*, and not exactly synonymous to a secular parade.

The public would be enraptured by his costume, campiness and demonstration of Santo Niño devotion, a sensibility made distinctly peculiar by the excessive image he was projecting and his indefatigable movements. Through the laughter, professionalism, and the outlandish femininity he worked hard to produce, *Tay Augus* believed that the Holy Child would find it in His mischievous Self to be forgiving of his being an *agi*, and once again accepting of his dance of thanks. The public, especially those who were Santo Niño devotees themselves, was aware of that mischief. *Tay Augus*, who knew about the public's awareness, was certain that his becoming this kind of 'woman', a delightfully strange being, who desired youthfulness, titillated the Santo Niño. The seriousness and yet innocent play of his sacred devotion, which he staged year after year, qualified his transgending to belong to the world of camp. By inputting the sacred in his performance, *Tay Augus*, quoting Sontag, made a 'good taste of a bad taste'. The 'good' here paradigmatically substituted by what was sacred, serious in his devotion, and innocent in his act of playful mimicry; and the 'bad' by a sexual profane act whose ultimate goal is to *linandi*, to flirt, and not to praise the Santo Niño.

The Santo Niño image

The very image of the Santo Niño mirrors many of *Tay Augus*' campy qualities. As understood in the Kalibo and other Filipino communities, the Santo Niño Himself is campy, in that He embodies Sontag's 'double sense' (see Figure 3).²⁸ Sally Ann Ness in her ethnography of Cebu's *Sinulog*, a Visayan festival, which pivots as well around the Santo Niño's sacrality, describes the Santo Niño as a 'Boy-King'.²⁹ This description of the Santo Niño is consistent with religious stories one hears most often from priests, parishioners

28 There are numerous icons of and devotional practices around the Santo Niño in the Philippines, a plurality which engenders cultural and religious meanings specific to their locales. For instance, in Cebu, devotion to the Santo Niño is manifested in the dance of *sinulog*, which in itself is heterogeneous, and is performed either as a ritual of a candle seller, a street-dancing parade, or a dance-drama, re-enacting a battle between Christians and Muslims. In Ibaday, west of Aklan, devotees venerate the Santo Niño with the same kind of dance-drama called *sayaw*, but their street parade is made unique by their carrying bamboo poles strapped with agricultural and sea products (such as chicken, crabs and fish) as offerings to the Holy Child. In Tacloban, in Eastern Visayas, a fluvial parade is annually organised to honour the Santo Niño, who the Warays believe helped them in keeping at bay the cholera epidemic of June 1889. In Pakil, Laguna, on the island of Luzon, Tagalog children gently throw petals to the Santo Niño, who is lying on a manger, to ask Him to ward off diseases. Moreover, the Santo Niño statue may appear as dark-skinned as the Negritos, and is dressed up by His owners and communities according to their profession or occupation and by communities to their local history. Thus there are Santo Niños who look like a Conquistador, a policeman, a medical doctor, a farmer or a fisherman; Florendo, ed., *Santo Niño*.

29 Ness, *Body, movement, and culture*, pp. 58–85.



Figure 3 The image of the Santo Niño, processed around the town of Kalibo during the Ati-atihan festival of 2001. (Photo courtesy of Patrick Alcedo.)

and old ladies, who are tasked to clean and decorate His altar every morning with flowers. The Santo Niño is a mischievous boy, who at night secretly steps down from the altar to play. In the morning, the ladies sometimes find *amorsiko* grass, sticking to His robes – proof that He once again had been out in the field. They lightly scold Him and beg Him not to go out again, out of fear that He might not find His way back home to the Cathedral.

Yet, the Santo Niño is also a King endowed with the power to answer a myriad of petitions, such as the one asked by a couple who had been childless for a number of years. A husband and his barren wife danced for three days straight in the Ati-atihan, and a year later were blessed with a child. In honour of the Santo Niño, they named their child Niño, and from then on would bring the little boy to Kalibo for the Ati-atihan. When Niño became a toddler, he was placed on top of his father's shoulders and paraded around town as if he was their family's Santo Niño. This is a ritual that children in Kalibo publicly perform with their own fathers during Ati-atihan. As a King, the Santo Niño punishes parishioners who are not remorseful for their sins, and not observant of their religious obligations as Roman Catholics. Their prayers are not heard and they live a dry and bare

life. Father Alex Meñez, the priest in charge of my catechism class, would punctuate his Sunday lessons with these kinds of stories and understandings. After class, my grade school classmates and I would genuflect before the Santo Niño's altar with mixed feelings; on the one hand, with delight that He is a young child like us, yet on the other hand, with trepidation that He is powerful enough to chastise us for our misdemeanours.

Father Meñez later explained that the Santo Niño 'is innocent, since he is still a child'. Thus, Father Meñez reasoned, the Santo Niño is unaware of his sexuality. Given His age and the psychosexual stage He is in, the Santo Niño is asexual, and is therefore able to traverse all at once the worlds of femininity and masculinity. He is only a toddler, and to embody both gender behaviours is expected and considered not only to be innocuous but playful too. In fact, Father Meñez enjoined, if you look at His features, garments and paraphernalia, double gendering is evident. The Santo Niño has bloomers for his underwear and always wears a red robe, flowing as if caught in mid air, studded with precious and semi-precious stones, outlining His tiny body – vestments, which for Father Meñez are signs of femininity. His gold sceptre and crown, and kneecap red boots, however, point to His masculine side. The soft smile, tender facial features, and the long, curly hair, which the old ladies lovingly brush and set prior to an important occasion, make the Santo Niño all the more a transitional figure torn between being a boy and a girl.³⁰

Furthermore, the Santo Niño is fond of being dressed up, rather excessively and in different guises at that. One of the rituals during Ati-atihan is either the repair of His old clothes, or giving Him an entirely new set of clothes. Assisted usually by that select group of female parishioners mentioned earlier, the Kalibo Catholic Church every Ati-atihan makes certain the Santo Niño is 'presentable' to the public. After removing dirt and soot from the face of the Santo Niño, His red robe is dusted off; if it looks faded and old a new one will be vested on Him. The ladies will complete and even augment the stones on His robes; will whiten and adorn with white lace His undergarments; and will deeply polish His crown, the globe on His left hand, and the sceptre on the right hand until they glisten. The Santo Niño will be paraded amidst His devotees in this beautified, immaculately sparkling state, and in His double gendered Self.

Tay August in his transgendered self all at once embodied both the sacred and the camp. He was a Catholic of solid faith in the Santo Niño, a local devotee who promised 20 years ago that as long as he could street dance he would continually maintain sensibility toward the foreign image of the Folies Bergère chorus girls. He performed this transgendered self at a time when Kalibo's Roman Catholic Church annually reminds its parishioners to strengthen their devotion to the Santo Niño. It was also a time when the local church allowed them to enter into transgenderism, a gender transformation which otherwise would be deemed transgressive outside the carnivalesque context of Ati-atihan, and, most probably, would even be condemned by the Roman Catholic Church of Manila. By placing in the foreground a unique kind of femaleness in honour of the Santo Niño, and re-creating this femaleness year after year within the first web

30 For an analogous reading of religious figures traversing the boundaries of the feminine and the masculine through vesting of garments, see Marjorie Garber, *Vested interests: Cross-dressing and cultural anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 210–33.

signification of *panaad*, *Tay* Augustus vested in an image which was in the realm of the sacred camp. He dressed up in excess and deadened the discomfort that came with his performance – the excessive trouble needed to become a foreign female other.

Tay Augustus gathered his resources from both the local (such as the services of Benjie and Ambo, and the skills of the seamstress who patiently beaded his costume) and the global (the US dollars and feather boas from his relatives in Chicago and San Diego) to take on an overly ‘female’ persona. In his transforming into a chorus girl, *Tay* Augustus chose to publicly out himself as an *agi* at the *Ati-atihan*, where it is the norm for festival participants to extraordinarily dress themselves up to earn religious merit from the Santo Niño. Vesting on a sacred and ludic self was *Tay* Augustus’ strategic response to fulfilling that religious expectation, but in a manner that was in keeping with his being an *agi*. His exaggerated femininity was of paramount importance to him, as he believed that dressing-up his *panaad* with such fey sensibility brought a tender smile to, and blessings from, the Santo Niño.

As illustrated by *Tay* Augustus’ dressing-up process, sacred camp follows coinciding designs. While it was coloured by his sense of gratitude and loyalty to the Santo Niño, it was also adorned by his transgenering and propensity towards the camp. Similar to the make-up process described earlier and to the actual street dancing he did later, *Tay* Augustus’ appearance publicly presented a ‘third sex’ capable of deep religious faith. Even though the practice of ‘third sex’ is pre-colonial, a carry over of an old pattern of gender and sexuality, which is shared by the rest of the Philippines and Southeast Asian countries, *Tay* Augustus’ brand of ‘third sex’ as vested by sacred camp garbed him into a category entirely of his own making.³¹ Both ‘third sex’ and sacred camp enabled him to transform into a transgendered man, who mischievously and yet seriously straddled homosexual camp and Roman Catholic religiosity.

It was the combination of the sacred and the profane, the ambivalence of these designs that set in motion *Tay* Augustus’ religious faith and transgenering in the religious and carnivalesque world of the *Ati-atihan* (see Figure 4). In the end, transgenering into a chorus girl in the name of the Santo Niño was his act of restitution for his inability to create his own family, to be part of the Roman Catholic Church’s call for procreation. It was an exuberant *panaad*, which could only be fulfilled by his being sacred and playfully campy about it at the same time: an excessive, joyful, though at times painful embodiment of faith. The transgenering of faith of *Tay* Augustus and the sacrifices and fun which came with it earned him forgiveness for being an *agi*, and by virtue of his being Roman

31 For discussion of the ‘third sex’ as a continuation of an older pattern in Philippine culture, and as it was encountered during the Spanish colonization in the early part of the sixteenth century, see Carolyn Brewer, ‘Baylan, asog, transvestism, and sodomy: Gender, sexuality and the sacred in early colonial Philippines’, <http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue2/carolyn2.html>. For examining the ‘third sex’ against the grain of other Southeast Asian communities, see among others Leonard Y. Andaya, ‘The *bissu*: Study of a third gender in Indonesia’, in *Other pasts: Women, gender and history in early modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Barbara Watson Andaya (Honolulu: Center for Southeast Asian Studies University of Hawai’i at Manoa, 2000), pp. 27–46; Richard Totman, *The third sex: Kathoey – Thailand’s ladyboys* (Chiang Mai: Silkwood Books, 2003); and Megan Sinnott, *Toms and dees: Transgender identity and female same-sex relationships in Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004). My reading of the *agi* as an alternative gender is inspired by Walter L. Williams, *The spirit and the flesh: Sexual diversity in American Indian culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986); my understanding of gender as performance is informed by Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).



Figure 4 *Tay August* inside Kalibo's St. John the Baptist Cathedral, showing his respect to the Santo Niño, whose statue crowns the altar, at the end of the Ati-atihan 2000 (Photo courtesy of Patrick Alcedo.)

Catholic for the original sin passed on to him by Adam and Eve, who God forever banished from Paradise after eating the forbidden fruit. As demonstrated by his *panaad* and innocent corporealisation of camp, *Tay August* believed that his annual transgending ultimately resulted in pleasing the mischievous and yet powerful Holy Child, the Santo Niño.

Conclusion

Father Meñez, the Cathecist teacher mentioned earlier, recalled in a 2005 interview in Los Angeles, California that one of his most poignant memories of Ati-atihan is hinged on *Tay August*'s participation in the early 1980s.

Before the start of the Sunday procession, before dusk would set in, people in Kalibo – those, who were the *minatuod*, 'real' residents [the ones who have always lived around the plaza; most of them neighbours of *Tay August*] – would gather in front of the Cathedral. Older ladies, who like *Tay August* were regular churchgoers, and some priests would always look for him. Where's August; is he here now? If he was not yet around, the bells would not be rung, thus the procession would not start. Every time he would arrive in his usual Folies Bergère attire, with his whole retinue trailing behind him, these Catholic ladies together with the priests would heave a sigh of relief, and clap admiringly realising how much he once again spent dressing-up himself. Thank God, he's here now! They would wave their hands to the belfry, commanding the boys up there to now ring the bells. The procession would then start moving forward, with the drums and the xylophones climbing to a steady crescendo.

Born and raised in Kalibo, and therefore one of those 'real' residents, Father Meñez said that what made Kalibo's Roman Catholic community support *Tay August*'

transgendering was the courage and enduring sacrality his transgendered body put into action. In a way, Father Meñez noticed that each time *Tay August* became a chorus girl to fulfil his *panaad*, he was saying to the public, 'I am all of you.' In every family in Kalibo, there is always a son who is an *agi*, or a daughter who is a *tomboy* (lesbian). But families have to be silent about these family members, since they could cause embarrassment and shame when the 'unnaturalness' of their sexuality is publicly known.

Father Meñez was aware that unlike those families *Tay August*' family had always been supportive of his 'outing' during the Ati-atihan, with his nieces and nephews sending him pieces of his costume from the United States, and his immediate relatives in Kalibo financially contributing to the hiring of the band and food preparation. Every piece of glitter, feather boas and stroke of make-up on *Tay August*' body represented an *agi* or a *tomboy* in that circle around the plaza where he spent most of his ordinary and extraordinary life. And every mischief in his dressing-up process and later on his street dancing resonated back to the stories shared inside and outside the Cathedral about how naughty Santo Niño is, and how pleased He becomes when devotees do a 'cartwheel' of themselves. Because of *Tay August*' transgendering and of what his transgendered body synecdochically signified, other families did not feel the need to go public with their 'unnaturalness'. In so many ways, this is the reason why *Tay August*' transgendering was considered by Kalibonhons to be an exemplary *panaad*. As Father Meñez starkly put it, 'During Ati-atihan, *Tay August* flaunted his sexual orientation. Kalibo accepted him, and the Church did not say anything against him, because what he did was truly an expression of faith.'

Where *Tay August* annually changed the colours of his costume, for instance, from predominantly green in 1999 to a saturated pink in 2000, he dressed up consistently following the iconographic image of a Folies Bergère chorus girl. It was his loyalty to this imported image that made Kalibonhons recognise him still as *Tay August*, and exclaim, 'Thank God, he's here now! The Santo Niño will once again be pleased.' Moreover, it was his vesting of the same iconographic image which transformed his transgendering into a *panaad*, with his street performance annually mobilising synonymous religious meanings. Because of the *panaad* in his transgendering, an act of faith recognised as such by those older ladies and priests, *Tay August* became a religious figure who carried the sins of others, a mimicry of Christ's martyrdom. The presence of his transgendered and, in my own reading, sacred campy Self constantly elicited exclamations thanking both God and the Santo Niño, who for Kalibo Catholics are two persons but of one God.

While *Tay August* was repenting for his own sins and his community's, he was also asking forgiveness for the 'unnaturalness' of the sons and daughters of the Kalibo community. It was a sin he shared with his neighbours; he decided as well not to procreate in a way a 'normal' human being should, a hetero-normative value as the Roman Catholic Church declares it in its theological doctrines: 'I am an *agi* all right, but I have a sacred promise.' From the point of view of *Tay August*, of the women who heard countless masses with him, and of the priests who conducted those masses for them, it was his *panaad* that made the Santo Niño look at his appeal for clemency with most favour. *Tay August*' extreme mimicry of chorus girls caused him bodily discomfort and cost his family its financial resources. It was an 'unnatural' act that the carnivalesque element in the Ati-atihan made 'natural', that allowed him to out his own homosexuality, and that enabled him to street dance his and his neighbours' non-normative sexuality and gender.

Its campiness brought admiration and laughter to the public, but above all, as *Tay August* believed, a smile of mischief and forgiveness to the Santo Niño's tender if not feminine face.

Tay August's family made sure that his Ati-atihan *panaad* and performance would define his person even after his death in 2002, and would be the most lasting memory of the Kalibo community about him. When he passed away, his family decided to have an upbeat version of the song 'Happy Days Are Here Again' played during the burial procession. This was also to fulfil the promise they made to *Tay August* that his death should not be mourned but rather celebrated. Since it was a wish of a dying person, his relatives clearly understood that it had to be granted. The family was able to hire the most coveted Army Band of the Western Visayas. During that time the Regional Commander of the entire island of Panay was the cousin of the wife of *Tay August*'s brother. Until the very end, *Tay August* embodied the concept of sacred camp, and by way of his authority and family influence allowed the public to embody that paradox at a time of the year when it was supposed to be non-carnival.

A happy refrain was made to partner a most sorrowful event. This unseemly combination produced campy bodies, ambivalent in expressing at once pain or joy. For the first time outside the Ati-atihan context, the carnival moved into the quotidian. *Tay August* removed it from Ati-atihan's festival frame to mark his final exit as a person, who because of his *panaad* to the Santo Niño and sexual orientation constantly had to move between the private and the public, the procession and the parade, the ritual and the carnival, and the sacred and the camp. For the last time, *Tay August* animated the mischief that the Santo Niño demonstrates in His oral hagiography. Since these narrative accounts are unwritten, unlike the biblical stories re-enacted during the *Semana Santa*, Kalibo Catholics are given the freedom to create them. Kalibonhons keep them alive whenever they share and hear stories about the harmless pranks their Santo Niño has committed, and whenever they themselves perform acts of mischief. *Tay August*'s extraordinary burial procession and Ati-atihan participation are now part of that organic hagiography. Those sacred yet campy performances will accompany Kalibo Catholics and Ati-atihan participants in their walk down 'memory lane' when they remember and decide to mimic *Tay August*'s everyday and festival lives.

When *Tay August*'s body reached the cemetery, and before it was entombed, the Army Band stopped playing to give way to a group of military officers in their honorary fusillade. Several shots pierced through the air in recognition of his being a veteran who helped the Americans fight the Japanese during World War II. People present that day, and who paid their last tribute by going to his wake, remembered how *Tay August* carried a soft smile, as if he was pleased with how he had lived his life on earth. The late Remedios Cesar, daughter of *Tay August*'s older sister, described her uncle's life as, 'good for he had accomplished all the things he wanted'. Before he passed away, *Tay August*'s wish for the longest time had been granted: his application for a US tourist visa was approved. A few months before he died Remedios accompanied him to Chicago, where he visited the shop where his family had bought pieces of his costumes for years. *Tay August* was barely able to contain his joy, and decided to buy a set of black feather boas, and a dozen black ostrich feathers for the next year's headdress and tails. He said he had never had black as a motif in Ati-atihan, and he was going to surprise the public with that unlikely choice. A few weeks later, Rosalyn Depositar, sister of the late Remedios Cesar, accompanied *Tay August* to Las Vegas, so he could see the 'real' Folies Bergère chorus girls.

For the people who really knew *Tay* Augustus, the tolling of the church bells, the bands, the firing of the guns and the procession, were a salute to one of Santo Niño's greatest Ati-atihan street dancers, who created for Kalibo an alternative world, where its residents and festival participants could navigate their difference through mischief and the staging of 'unnatural' acts. *Tay* Augustus was but a strand in the multi-stranded world of Kalibo society. Yet what rings past the particulars of his life was his demonstration of how diverse individuals become in their need to be resilient, and how different they could be in spite of their being considered and wanting to be members of powerful institutions like the Roman Catholic Church.

The people around him that day, who after the reverberating gunshots were covered once again with the lilting tune of 'Happy Days Are Here Again', remained in *Tay* Augustus' debt for illustrating how it is important to corporealise contradictory premises in order to constantly interact with and negotiate Roman Catholicism and Filipino's institution of heterosexuality. *Tay* Augustus wove the webs of signification of *panaad*, sacred camp and carnivalesque into one unforgettable fabric. He vested on and danced away with this fabric with such grace and mischief, giving way to a world where bodies could exist in other forms. For dancing the paradox of the sacred and the camp with such faith inside and outside the carnival context, and for having always prayed to the Santo Niño with a contrite heart, Father Meñez said, he is 'certain the Santo Niño was smiling at *Tay* Augustus at the entrance to Heaven'.

Tay Augustus will serve as a steady and graceful partner when Kalibonhons and the Ati-atihan participants decide to transgender their own Catholic faith and to dialogue performatively with their culture's homogeneity. They will have to ensure the sacredness of their *panaad* by transforming themselves through their own dramatic statements of corporeality, make-up, fabric, sequins, feathers and music. Like the remarkable *Tay* Augustus of Kalibo, they can empower themselves once a year through sacred camp – the re-ritualisation of the non-quotidian and therefore the sublime. The Ati-atihan festival and their memory of *Tay* Augustus teach observers how not to be hemmed in to society's polarisation of the masculine and feminine, to momentarily turn off the old tapes of cultural conformity, and to modify and layer the choreography of their everyday lives, so they as Roman Catholics can perform extraordinarily and dance out their individual faith and identity.