

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Kapampangan Flagellants – Kristos

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ABSTRACT

In the province of Pampanga, Philippines, Holy Week is one of the highlighted seasons of the year. Seemingly, during this time, there are a number of flagellants (called ‘Kristos’) who want to be crucified as a form of penitence and supplication. However, after a thorough search of published literature, the researchers found a dearth in the body of knowledge focusing on the experiences of these flagellants. Therefore, this interpretative phenomenological study sought to unearth and interpret the lived experiences of Kapampangan Kristos. Five (5) Kristos voluntarily participated in the individual face-to-face interview using semi-structured questions. Findings revealed that there are three (3) superordinate themes namely: prosaic family life, spiritual drift, and looking back-moving forward reflection. Recommendation for future research undertakings to consider in-depth psychological analysis on the lived experiences of Kristos.

Keywords: Kapampangan, Kristos, lived experiences, Pamagdarama, phenomenology

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INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the passage “It is finished” coming from the Gospel of John (*New American Bible Revised Edition*, 2011, John 19:30) is one of the so called “Seven Last Words” of Jesus Christ while he was crucified on the cross. These words of Christ expressed that “he was able to accomplish the very role of saving humanity from the

bondage of sin and death in accordance with the Scriptures. The sacrifice of Christ is unique because it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, no. 614). Every Lenten season especially during Holy Week, the Catholic Church commemorates the Lord’s passion, death, and resurrection to remind the faithful that Jesus Christ already performed the salvific role to atone the world from sin.

However, in the Philippines, every Holy Week especially in the province of Pampanga, some Kapampangan penitents locally called *magdarame* (self-flagellants) are performing flagellations so as to imitate Christ in his sufferings also known as *Pamagdarame* (self-flagellation). These unusual practices of Kapampangan penitents include carrying of crosses (*mamusan krus*); bleeding and whipping their backs (*mamalaspas*); crawling on hot pavement and dirty roads (*magsalibatbat*); and nailing on the cross (*kristos*) (Marasigan, 2015; Sarmiento et al., 2017; Tiatco & Bonifacio-Ramolete, 2008).

Since the 1980’s, foreign and local scholars have started exploring the phenomenon on flagellation and crucifixion in the Philippines because they were drawn by the prevalence of the practice. Consequently, these rituals and practices performed by well-known individuals in the community become part of costly commitments to one’s religion, just like the Catholic faith, thereby perpetuating them across generations (Atran & Henrich, 2010).

Local scholars from the Philippines tried to engage in the crucifixion and flagellation practices to unveil their significant meaning. Zialcita (1986) reiterated that crucifixions and flagellations had multiple meanings which were not just exclusively religious in character. Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete (2008) highlighted the practice of nailing on the cross in the theatrical perspective by dealing with other factors that led to the staging of the ritual. In another article, Tiatco (2010) gave emphasis on the concept of *panata* as an axiom of performances which included the ritual practice of flagellation and crucifixion. Meanwhile, Francisco (2011) pointed out the embodiment of the crucifixion which led to a close and intimate way of being with Christ. Cornelio (2014) used ethnography in dealing with experiences of everyday authenticity for those who engaged in the crucifixion ritual. Lastly, Sarmiento et al. (2017) looked into the forms, reasons and preparations of the Kapampangan flagellants. On the onset, spirituality has been highlighted in the study since the majority of the participants mentioned that they prepared themselves spiritually by praying and living in solitude before they did the act.

Moreover, some foreign scholars did research on the phenomenon of flagellations and crucifixion rituals. Barker (1998) conducted a longitudinal study on the passion rituals in the Philippines and he had observed that there was a lot of media channels who portrayed these rituals. Schneider (2009) examined the experience of enduring pain because there was a

manifestation of trance like state among those who were being crucified. Houser and Zamponi (2011) discussed how pain became a very significant element of cultural manifestations of religious faith especially in the ritual practice of crucifixion and flagellation in the Cutud, San Fernando. Meanwhile, Bräunlein (2009) paid attention to women who were being crucified in *Kapitangan* in the province of Bulacan. These women were members of a faith-healing movement which drew more people to believe in their healing power. From the socio-anthropological point of view, Bräunlein (2012) did a hermeneutical interpretation of those who performed the passion rituals. In another study, Bautista and Bräunlein (2014), presented an ethnographic study of engaging in the passion rituals but not focused on the Kristos or flagellants rather on the act of witnessing by the participant observer researchers. Bautista (2017) explained that the act of nailing was a form of entrusted agency between the Kristo and the ritual associates who facilitated the crucifixion possible. Lastly, another article of Bautista (2018) explored the clerical and public attitudes towards passion rituals in the Philippines.

Among the highlights of the *pamagdarame* in the province of Pampanga especially in the community of Cutud, City of San Fernando and of Pampang, Angeles City is the crucifixion of *Kristos* every Good Friday. This undertaking makes the province well known not just locally but even internationally which draws tourists coming from various places.

Kristos-flagellants who are nailed on the cross and portraying the role of Jesus Christ during *Senakulo* (Passion plays). A *kristo* is the lead actor performing the role of Jesus and other devotees in the whole community regard him as the ultimate portrayal of sacrifice and faith (Tiatco & Bonifacio-Ramolete, 2008). During the performance of crucifixion, a flagellant may undergo the internalization of being like Christ to perform the character of Jesus depicted in the passion play. Thus, flagellants could potentially have a “redemptive effect on the viewer in the form of a ‘second Christ’” (Kreuder, 2008, p. 181). Peterson (2007) also affirmed this observation regarding the performance of being a *Kristo*. He explained that the Philippines was famous around the world for the number of devout Christians who flagellated and the offering of their bodies for literal crucifixion.

Brewer (2004, p. 71) pointed out that the practice of flagellation “was preached as the only way to salvation.” She further explained that flagellation had survived as a mainstream religious practice in southern France, Italy, Spain and the Philippines. She observed that in the early seventeenth century the practice of *disiplina* or flagellation in the Philippines, were common among Spanish men during Lent, “leapt across the cultural divide to be adopted by indigenous men” (Brewer, 2004, p. 71).

Performing as *Kristo* is adhered towards a ritual. As mentioned by O’Murchu (2015, p. 563), “spirituality tends to distinguish ritual from liturgy or sacrament, claiming that the former prevailed for thousands

of years long before formal religion ever evolved.” Furthermore, he claimed that all people are endowed with the capacity for ritual making, and need to exercise this endowment for their spiritual growth and development. Though these claims are exclusive to the official liturgy of the Church, performing as *Kristo*, flagellants may take it as a form of ritual to profess spirituality.

On the other hand, Moriones Festival in Marinduque, Philippines has a passion play depicting Christ as well. Peterson (2007) interviewed Allen Madrigal, a native of Marinduque but worked in Manila, who performed as an actor portraying the character of Christ. Madrigal mentioned that his sacrifices to portray the character of Christ in the passion play was a sacrifice. The play was done so that others realized how Jesus experienced self-sacrifice to redeem the humankind from the state of sin.

In Filipino spirituality, being a *Kristo* is a manifestation of the *damay* concept. Beltran (1987, p. 247) explained *damay* as the subjective relationship of the Filipino to events implies the “understanding of being-in-relation” to general life events. *Damay* is not a merely passive experience but is closely related to the Filipino trait of *malasakit* which is the concern for the other. Beltran (1987, p. 247) further elaborated that “*malasakit* is the concern for another that proves itself in action, no matter what price one has to pay or what pain one must suffer.” Hence, it can be said that to accept the truth of Jesus meant sharing his fate, even to the point of death. Beltran (1987) explained that

corporal mortification was foreign to the Filipinos previously but it became prevalent when it was introduced by the Spaniards during their more than three-hundred-year colonization of the Philippine Islands from 1565 to 1898 and it became prevalent when it was taken up by popular piety especially when it was connected to one’s *damay*, sympathy with or suffering with Jesus.

Moreover, flagellation can also be considered as a form of bodily expression of faith. De Mesa and Cacho (2012a) claimed that many Filipinos expressed their love for God through bodily gestures like walking on one’s knees, walking bare foot during a procession amongst various other actions. Such bodily gestures for Filipinos give much importance to body language such as embrace, hug, holding hand. Other gestures are common expressions of affection in their relationships. Indeed, the body expresses deeper meanings when words limit human’s capacity to communicate because what persons may deny in words, the body may truthfully manifest.

Additionally, Jocano (2001) also had an observation regarding the concept of *damay*. Jocano had observed that *damay* reflected three components such as *dama* (feeling), *kahulugan* (meaning attached to events) and *habag* (sympathy for people in need). In connection with being a *Kristo*, the performer may take *damay* as one of the reasons in doing *panata*. Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolet (2008, p. 59) cited *panata* as “a popular expression of faith and piety (a religious vow whereby the devotee promises to do a sacrifice for his faith).”

It can be observed that existing local and foreign literatures on *pamagdarame* and the practice of crucifixion in the Philippines are more focused on the spiritual, anthropological, and sociological dimensions of the ritual practice especially those who are subjecting themselves in crucifixion rituals. Though these literatures provide in-depth analysis in understanding the practice, the psychological dimension of *pamagdarame* is not that well explored. There is only one study (Schneider, 2009) which dealt with flagellation and crucifixion on the psychological point of view.

Hence, this research is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing discussions on flagellation and crucifixion rituals by revisiting the lived experiences of Kapampangan *Kristos*.

METHODS

Research Design

The researchers employed an interpretative phenomenological method. This design is appropriate for the study since the researchers aim to explore and interpret the lived experiences of Kapampangan

flagellants regarding their spirituality and religious beliefs, and practices.

Participants

The participants of this study were five (5) men who are called “Kristos.” These men are usually taking part in the re-enactment of the crucifixion every good Friday in Pampanga, particularly in the villages of *Cutud*, City of San Fernando and *Pampang*, Angeles City in the Philippines. The researchers used purposive sampling technique which included a set of criteria in the selection of participants. The demographic profile of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Data Collection

The participants of this study were contacted to inquire their interest in participation. They were also briefed about the nature of the research of the study. All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder with the permission of the participants. Both the researchers and the informants used the *Kapampangan* language - their mother-tongue language - in the conduct of interview. Then, the researchers transcribed

Table 1
Demographic profile of the participants

Participant	Age	Civil status	Occupation	Educational attainment	# of children	# of years of doing Panata
1	55	Married	Sign painter	HS undergraduate	4	29
2	60	Married	Construction worker	Elementary graduate	4	25
3	52	Married	Three-wheeler driver	Elementary graduate	12	18
4	50	Married	Three-wheeler driver	Elementary graduate	4	20
5	44	Married	Laborer	HS undergraduate	4	16
Mean (SD)	52. 20 (5.93)					21.6 (5.32)

the interview data to English, which was their second language. To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, the researchers listened to the recorded interviews while reading the transcriptions and removed all discrepancies.

Participants of this study were asked to answer a short demographic questionnaire for descriptive purposes only. After answering the questionnaire, a one-on-one interview followed. The interview was both structured and unstructured so that the researcher could ask questions along the way to make sure the participants would understand what they were saying. The researchers asked the participants the fundamental question of: “How do you describe your experience as Kristos?”

Data Analysis

The researchers used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), described by Smith et al. (2009), in order to analyse interview data. This analysis involved the following steps: (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, (6) looking for pattern across cases. Finally, in the discussion section the researchers engaged in dialogue with the existing literature by looking at how existing studies clarified the present findings.

To ensure the validity of the interpretations, the researchers employed internal auditors who were well versed with qualitative research, including IPA. These auditors were coming from the field of psychology, sociology, and theology.

They read the complete report and gave their comments on how the write-up can be improved and whether the interpretative analysis remained true to the lived experiences of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The technical and ethical approval of this research came from the Ethics Review Board of a private university in the Philippines. After getting the approval, the researchers personally approached the participants and established rapport with them. Then, the researchers explained the nature of the study to the participants. Furthermore, the participants’ rights (in terms of research undertakings) were explicitly explained. A process consent (counterpart of the informed consent for qualitative research) was secured from each participant. Lastly, all gathered information were kept with confidentiality and used for research purposes only.

RESULTS

To meet the objective of the study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted. The following superordinate themes and subthemes were explored and uncovered as presented in Table 2. These themes were derived from the participants’ lived experiences as interpreted in various facets such as sociological, theological, philosophical, and even psychological perspectives.

Prosaic Family Life

The first superordinate theme that emerged from the interviews conducted with the

Table 2
 Themes on the lived experiences of Kristos

Superordinate themes	Subthemes
Prosaic family life	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal and Social affairs <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic and family affairs
Spiritual drift	<input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal <input type="checkbox"/> Intrapersonal <input type="checkbox"/> Transpersonal
Looking back-moving forward	<input type="checkbox"/> Giving-up and letting go <input type="checkbox"/> Being hopeful

flagellant-Kristos is “Prosaic Family Life” which includes the day-to-day activities of the participants as persons and as family men. It also explains the social life of the *Kristos* when they are not engaged in the *pamagdarama*.

Personal and Social Affairs. This subtheme describes the personal and social affairs of the Kristos especially during the ordinary days. They do the ordinary activities like working to earn a living and to provide the needs of their families. Most of them are engaged in blue collar job such as working as three-wheeler drivers, farmers, construction workers and helpers. It can be said that their life revolves around work and interaction with others. As mentioned by Participant 1 (Personal communication, January 26, 2017) that “Kanita pung bayu ku papaku ing obra ku agyang makananu kasakit agyang makananu la pa kakatas ding building ukyatan kula ban mikaobra. Sign painter ku. Magobra ku, ing bie balamu linabas ya mu kilub ning patingapun” [Before I engaged in the crucifixion rite, my work even if it was difficult and the buildings were high, I became a sign painter. I work and my life seems to pass for a day].

Part of the *Kristo's* life is to experience social activities. Ordinarily, from time to time, they engaged in recreational activities such as occasional drinking and dancing. These activities are means to relieve themselves from stress and anxieties of life. Moreover, they do this not to be intoxicated but as means for *pakikisama* (getting along with others) being active members of the community. Participant 2 (Personal communication, January 26, 2017) said that “Minsan mimumun ku naman. Makiabe ku keng terakan” [I sometimes drink beer. I also join in dance parties].

Domestic and Family Affairs. In the Philippines, the family gives the basic sense of belonging, stability and security. This means that Filipinos try to consider their families in any anything that they do for their welfare. Consequently, all the participants are family men who are fathers to their children and husbands to their wives. It can be said the family plays a significant role in their practice of being a *Kristo*. All of them offer their painful sacrifice of being a *Kristo* for their families. As an observation, they tend to give their entire life for the family because they want their family to

remain intact despite of the many daily conflicts and difficulties of life. Participant 3 (Personal communication, January 28, 2017) mentioned that his children are well because he offered his sacrifice for them as he cited that “Okay noman pu deng anak ku. Eno man pu magkasakit uling yang pagpanata kung talaga” [My children are okay. They are not getting sick because I offer them during my sacrifice].

Another aspect of domestic and family affair is the role of the *Kristos* in instilling discipline especially to their children. In return, the family members of the *Kristos* would always support the cause of their father’s *panata* by being good in their behaviors and attitude to become role models to others in their community. Participant 2 (Personal communication, January 26, 2017) articulated that “Ing asawa ku pu neng minsan emu aiwasan, itang mipamakibat kayu lalu na kareng anak mi kanita ating suwail. Syempre pilit kung palako kareng anak ku ing sugal” [My wife and I sometimes argue because of my stubborn children. I also ask my children to refrain from engaging in gambling].

Spiritual Drift

The second superordinate theme is spiritual drift. It is the spiritual movement of the flagellant-*Kristos* from the ordinary life gradually shifting to their preparation of engaging in the spiritual and religious practices (penance and sacrifices) as part of the commitment and dedication to their promise or “*panata*” during Holy Week.

Interpersonal. It describes the way the *Kristos* deal with others especially those who do not understand the spiritual undertakings they experience. *Kristos* recognize the irreplaceable sacrificial status of Christ, yet undertake part of the sacrifice for their loved ones. Consequently, these *Kristos* are self-professed Catholics, yet they feel discriminated by the local church as the ritual of flagellation, including the role of being a *Kristo*, is rejected as part of the official worship and liturgy. Participant 2 (Personal communication, January 26, 2017) explained that

Eku neman pu gagayahan i Kristo uling tutuparan ke mu itang pengaku kaya, agyang ditak mu pu king delanan na adama ku anti mo pu itang keng gamat pepapaku ya, aku man delanan ku. Inya pu yang adama ku na masakit pung talaga ing papaku. Inya eku naman pu atukyan ing babawal da kekami [I do not replicate Christ because I only fulfill my promise to him that even just a little of what he went through I could also experience it such as the crucifixion of his hands. I myself also experienced that. I already felt the pain of being crucified. I could not follow them for what they refrained us to do].

Intrapersonal. This subtheme describes the spiritual drift of the flagellants as they make time to pray and discern in preparation for their crucifixion. This experience reveals the personal rituals being done by *Kristos*

specifically their prayer and solitude. They move away from people in order to enter into the depth of their being. The practice of prayer and solitude are not only being done during the Holy Week by *Kristos* but every day of their lives. Seemingly, they do not often go to church but they have more personal time to pray every day so as to strengthen their relationship to God. Participant 1 (Personal communication, January 26, 2017) clarified that “Pero mostly pu agyang Maleldo atin mu rin time keng pisamban. Pero halus keraklan keng tahimik a lugal ka rin ku mangadi. E madalas sisimba pero ing pamangadi ald-aldo” [I attend masses. But mostly even if it is Holy Week, I have time for the Church. Oftentimes, I go to a quiet place to pray. I do not often go to mass but I pray every day].

Transpersonal. This subtheme highlights the experience of *Kristos* having spiritual communion with God. Through their *pamagdarame*, they are able to reach a certain peak of their spirituality and religiosity that makes them experience fulfillment within the realm of their being. They claim that they enter the transcendental state of consciousness especially when they are crucified on the cross. They feel a sense fulfillment because they were able to perform their promise to God in offering themselves as *Kristos* in enacting the passion and death of Christ. This is the experience of Participant 5 (Personal communication, January 28, 2017) who stated that

*Patse makapaku naku king krus
kasi ing panlalawe ku karing tau*

*malati na lamu. Balamu ing kakung
espiritu panandalian mako at ing
espiritu ning keng babo (Diyos)
yang lungub kaku. Kung lalawen
mu la deng gamat areni potang atiu
naka king krus, balamu ala man.
Mayan ku pakiramdam [When I am
already crucified on the cross, I look
at people as just small. Seemingly
my spirit leaves me and the spirit
of God enters my being. When you
look at my hands at the cross, it
seems nothing happens. I feel light].*

Looking Back – Moving Forward

The third superordinate theme is looking back – moving forward. It is the experience of the flagellant-*Kristos* to move forward in clinging to their promise of engaging in crucifixion as much as they can up to the point of relinquishing this promise to those who are willing to continue the *panata*. It is a concept giving and receiving in relation to the *panata* that they ought to perpetuate the practice of *pamagdarame*.

Giving-up and Letting Go. It is the willingness of the *Kristos* to surrender everything to God as they fulfil their *panata*. Giving up means a total surrender and reliance upon the providence of God that they will never be forgotten. Letting go means leaving ones comfort to embrace the pain and suffering of their *pamagdarame* in response to the call of self-sacrifice. They give-up and let go of things as way of showing their gratitude to God. Participant 4 (Personal communication, January 27,

2017) claimed that “Potang lulub ku king simbahan, mangadi ku sabyan ku, sopan yu ku pu O Dios ko papaku naku na naman pu” [When I enter the church, I pray and I say to Him, help me O God, I will be crucified again].

Participant 2 (Personal communication, January 26, 2017) articulated that he attempted to stop the crucifixion of himself, but a voice from within called him to continue the crucifixion. He said

Hanggap agyu ku pa. Kasi pu sibuknan kuna sinabi kun a kaya (Ginu) angga naku ngeni oneng pung potang datang na ing Maleldo balamu atin mamaus na sisitsit kanaku na papaku ku pa. Anya kinai ku namu pu na hanggat mabie ku nung agyu ku pa papaku ku pa [As much as I can. Before I already tried to say to God that I would already stop but every time Holy Week was fast approaching, seemingly a voice would tell me that I should be crucified. That is why I say to myself that as long as I am alive. I will let myself be crucified].

Being Hopeful. *Kristos* also mentioned that their hope would be individuals who can continue the tradition. They claim that they will never stop doing their *panata* unless someone continues their practice. They see the value of *pamagdarame* because they experience hope in the midst of suffering, allowing them to endure the process. Participant 1 (Personal communication, January 26, 2017) said that “Kung sakali pu

nung mika kapalit ku mu pu. Nung atin nang manalili kanaku pwedi naku rin tuknang” [Actually, if there is only someone willing to replace me. I am willing to stop already].

DISCUSSIONS

The main superordinate themes of Kapampangan flagellant-*Kristos* such as prosaic family life, spiritual drift and looking back-moving forward describe the participants’ lived experiences of ordinary individuals as the roles of skilled workers and responsible family men.

These superordinate themes represent a cycle of spiritual journey of certain events such as family concerns and personal experiences. These events captivated the *Kristos* to enter a phase of spiritual drift that would remind them to look back and move forward as a sense of gratitude to God as a process of living and winning in a constant struggle of life. The experience of *Kristos* is a manifestation of *kagandahang loob ng Dios* (goodness of God) that made them realize God’s *pagpapadama* (revelation) (De Mesa & Cacho, 2012a). This is the reason why they enter into *panata*. Flagellants engage in spiritual preparations before they perform in *pamagdarame* (Sarmiento et al., 2017).

However, their promise or *panata* bring them to a gradual spiritual drift especially during Holy Week to undertake part of the sufferings of Christ. *Kristos* enter into the concept of *damay* (Jocano, 2001) as they engage into *pamagdarame*. Namely, they have *dama* as signifying Christ’s sacrifice, *kahulugan* in what they do and *habag* for

their loved ones especially those to whom they dedicate their sacrifice. It is their personal conviction to continue their *panata*.

These *Kristos* know that being crucified on the cross is a fulfilment of their *panata* since God answered their prayers (i.e. healing of loved ones). The experiences of *Kristos* conform to the concept of *damay* (Beltran, 1987) which is being in relation to others leading to *malasakit*.

As compared to other forms of flagellation, being a *Kristo* would entail a longer engagement as shown by the findings. Only few flagellants engaged in crucifixion (Sarmiento et al., 2017). These flagellants may probably consider crucifixion as part of the process of ritual making which leads them to spiritual growth (O’Murchu, 2015).

The sacrifices of *Kristos* in professing their *panata* or vow highlights “a showing of a doing” (Schechter, 1988, p. 105 as cited in Bautista, 2017). For the *Kristos*, this is their way of expressing their desire to express their spirituality. In the Filipino context, spirituality is anchored with the concept of *pangangatawan* as discipleship (De Mesa & Cacho, 2012b). *Pangangatawan* as discipleship means that “those who follow Jesus represents in their bodies or personhood his spirit today” (De Mesa & Cacho, 2012b, p. 80). *Kristos* express their embodied selves through crucifixion to signify their desire to follow Jesus as his disciples even though other may take it differently.

Consequently, the CBCP Vice President and former Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of San Fernando, Pampanga,

made a counterargument on the practice of flagellation and crucifixion (Sebastian, 2015b). He said that Catholics should focus more on carrying out the faith concretely by doing corporal works of mercy instead of doing “ritualistic penitential acts” every Holy Week. The bishop argued that they were reintroducing the corporal works of mercy which could be found in the Gospel of Matthew (*New American Bible Revised Edition*, 2011, Matthew 25:35-40) instead of doing “mortification of the flesh” like what the crucifixion and flagellation.

Another member of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) who is the Auxiliary Bishop of Manila and Chairman of National Secretariat for Social Action, reminded the Catholic faithful that “the Church frowns upon folk practices like flagellation, as well as the staged crucifixions in Pampanga and Bulacan on Good Friday each year” (Sebastian, 2015a, para. 2). He also pointed that flagellation and crucifixion “should not be used especially as a way to boost tourism, trivializing and commodifying Lent in the process” (Sebastian, 2015a, para. 3). He stressed that the Lenten season was all about contrition, conversion, and charity.

In the Archdiocese of San Fernando, the ecclesial territory where the village of Cutud, City of San Fernando belongs, a circular letter of the Archbishop Emeritus sometime in the 1990s was issued to regulate the singing of the *pasyon* (passion narrative) on Holy Wednesday which was usually being done until Good Friday. The Archbishop Emeritus asked the people that they should

focus themselves with the celebration of the paschal triduum from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday rather than engaging with other non-liturgical activities such as the flagellations and crucifixions. However, most of the flagellants and *Kristos* did not stop doing their vow even if the singing of the passion narrative was regulated up to this day. This is a clear manifestation that there is a nuance in terms of the Catholic Church hierarchy's pronouncements and that of the people's practice. Rituals, like crucifixion in relation to pain, bring people to think that these "are embedded in often conflicting system of meaning-making between folk and official Catholicism" (Bautista, 2011, p. 156).

Despite the opposition of the institutional Church on the practice of crucifixion, *Kristos* remain steadfast with their conviction that what they do is an authentic expression of faith. The institutional Church should also find ways and means on how they could reach out to these people. There should be a more accommodating and tolerating attitude and actions on the passion rituals (Bautista, 2018). Sensitivity comes with the understanding of inculturation that passion rituals like crucifixion showcase the interconnection of local customs and traditions into a positive engagement with these expressions of faith (Bautista, 2018).

It is also observable that most of the *Kristos* do not experience a sense of belongingness with the Church. Though it may not be accepted as an official form of devotion in the church, everyone is encouraged to give the utmost respect to

one's expression of faith. As articulated by De Mesa and Cacho (2012a, p. 113) that

We should be careful in judging one another as if there is only one correct way of expressing our love for God. If Filipino religiosity keep faith alive and truly felt, who are we to claim that its expressions are to be considered superstitious and immature?

On the part of the Philippine government, the Department of Health (DOH) reminded the flagellants during Holy Week against the risk of being affected by tetanus caused by flagellation and crucifixion (CNN Philippines Staff, 2017). Even though flagellants want to express their religious devotion, it may even lead them to harmful effects of tetanus such as muscle spasm and lockjaw. Flagellants are reminded to maintain cleanliness by washing their wounds with soap and water.

Most of the participants also mentioned the "seasonal concern" of the government and Church to them. They felt that the government and Church would only look after them during the Holy Week but afterwards there would be no engagements during the days outside Holy Week. It is a considerable issue as these people desire attention and care from the government and Church. The government and Church currently lack sufficient long-term programs and activities that will make the flagellants feel that they truly belong. For the Church, a program to engage them in the parish and community affairs such as prayer

meetings, livelihood activities, catechetical and formation activities will be welcoming experiences to the flagellants. On the one hand, the government can look into their livelihood and not just to become objects of tourism promotion especially during the Holy Week.

Furthermore, the community in *Cutud* and *Pampang* are also engaged in the crucifixion rite where they support and approve the event of crucifixion in their place. The community respects the devotion of the flagellants especially the *Kristos*. People in the community take part in different roles such as in the preparation of the place of crucifixion, materials to be used and co-actor in the theatrical Passion play. But most importantly, the mere presence of the people during the crucifixion is a strong expression of support and approval. As explained by Bautista (2017) that during the crucifixion of *Kristos*, there may have been an anthropological turn to effect as the *Kristos* benefit from the said practice as well as the community.

In addition, their *panata* (vow) reflects their daily positive disposition towards the self, others and God. *Kristos* are being reminded by their *panata* to be adept with themselves especially with their motivations of engaging in the crucifixion rite. Their painful sacrifice of being crucified on the cross reflects their desire to offer such for others especially to their families and friends. Lastly, *Kristos*' crucifixion is a time to engage in offering their sacrificial pain as a form of devotion as they commune with God.

The crucifixion practice in Pampang needs to be understood as well from the psychological perspective though it can be observed that the superordinate themes on prosaic family life, spiritual drift, and looking back-moving forward are affirming the previous literature findings. The psychological dimension of *pamagdarame* derived from themes that emerged from the *Kristos* presents three possible views for the phenomenological analysis that involves pain, optimal experience, and human existentialism.

The first view on the psychological dimension underscores the reality of pain being experienced by flagellants. The superordinate themes from the IPA are grounded on the psychological attachment of the *Kristos* with the sacred because they had experienced a strong sense of awe through pain for glorious consummation. *Kristos* can turn their negative affective state over one's control, intensity, and duration of pain "into an equally potent but positive affective state" (Schneider, 2009, p. 288). With each addition of pain by being nailed on the cross, the participants believe they have to be tied and nailed for them to be free. This phenomenon illustrates the concept of sadomasochism which involves an unbalanced relationship established through the infliction of pain. The vital component of this concept is not merely the presence of pain but rather the knowledge that someone has complete control over the other. Like drunkenness and other forms of vices, participants' deep longing for habitual pain especially being crucified, is a

way to forget themselves and focus on their relationship with the Divine. This can be another angle of understanding why *Kristos* continue the crucifixion practice which even the Church cannot stop. Pain is an essential dimension of existence, especially for Filipinos. *Kristos* also experience pain in ordinary and extra-ordinary life situations and these experiences turn out as positive. In the Filipino psyche, they will never allow pain to dampen their attitude towards life and eventually find pleasure.

Meanwhile, the second view on the psychological dimension is focused on the optimal experience of flagellants especially *Kristos*. In Burger (2015), optimal experience makes people being caught in a natural, almost effortless movement or flow of being so involved in what they do. Whenever *Kristos* are nailed on the cross, they also encounter optimal experience because they are being taken over by the activity. There are eight components of optimal experience to wit;

- 1) Activity is challenging and requires skill,
- 2) One's attention is being absorbed by the activity,
- 3) the activity has clear goals,
- 4) There is clear feedback,
- 5) One can concentrate on the task at hand,
- 6) One achieves a sense of personal control,
- 7) One losses self-consciousness, and
- 8) One losses a sense of time (Burger, 2015, p. 293).

This optimal experience of *Kristos* explains the reality of spiritual drift that they

encounter every time they are nailed on the cross. Most of the components of optimal experience, if not all, can be observed during the crucifixion rites. At the end of the optimal experience of *Kristos* being nailed on the cross, they feel a sense of happiness and pleasure because they were able to perform once more their *panata* or promise.

Finally, the third view on the psychological dimension of *Kristos* is geared towards the humanistic existentialist approach. As cited in Feist et al. (2018), human existentialist theorists Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May describe the humanistic-existential perspective when people strive to have meaningful lives, aiming for psychological well-being and growth. The three major themes on prosaic family, spiritual drift, and looking back-moving forward illustrate the existential reality of *Kristos*. They find meaning and purpose in their practice of being crucified. Their existentialist personalities are highlighted by their ordinary life and even during the performance of crucifixion. These experiences bring about the desire of *Kristos* to continue what they do and have the yearning to pass it on to the next generation especially among their kin. In that manner, the practice of crucifixion is perpetuated and the sense of fulfilment of *Kristos* is achieved.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the lived experiences of the flagellant-*Kristos* revolve around three superordinate themes such as *prosaic family life* (personal and social

affairs, domestic and family affairs), *spiritual drift* (intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal) and *looking-back –moving forward* (giving up and letting go, being hopeful). Prosaic family life highlights the familial and social involvement of *Kristos* when they are not performing the crucifixion ritual. Spiritual drift illustrates the process of transition that *Kristos* experience from ordinary life to spiritual preparation as an essential element of the crucifixion ritual for the fulfilment of their *panata*. And, looking back – moving forward provides the avenue for *Kristos* to continue their *panata* and to relinquish their desire to find persons who will perpetuate the crucifixion ritual as a sign of commitment.

Meanwhile, the study is limited only to a very few *Kristos* who indulge in these practices. Their experiences became the bases of the researchers for interpretation. Future research undertakings can also focus on the psychological perspective of the passion rituals especially the experiences of *Kristos* since there were only few studies available.

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