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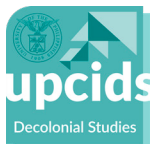


UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
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Decolonizing Religion: Wishful Thinking or a Real Possibility?

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Decolonizing Religion: Wishful Thinking or a Real Possibility?¹

Brian U. Doce² and Nassef Manabilang Adiong³

Introduction

Religion has been an integral part of human history. Regardless of the category (e.g., organized, folk, etc.), the belief in the intangible, the supernatural, or the divine is central in every human civilization. While modern-day secular ideology aims to replace the role of religion in public life, religious actors have managed to find new, innovative ways to maintain their role and importance in the contemporary era.

Religion also played an important role in one of the most tragic episodes in human history: colonialism. The explicit and implicit roles of Christianity, whether Catholicism and Protestantism, in validating and legitimizing Western imperialism are historical realities that need to be accepted and addressed. On the other hand, it is also important to acknowledge that religious actors also played an important part in various decolonization and liberation movements in the non-Western world. This ambivalence in various global issues poses two important

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- 1 This discussion paper is a product of two roundtable discussions organized by the Decolonial Studies Program of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies last April and May 2019.
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questions for the UP CIDS Decolonial Studies Program. First, *how should we address and rectify the colonial logic currently persisting in modern-day scholarship in religious studies?* Second, *how can religious actors in the contemporary period address their historical and current participation in the persistence of coloniality, as manifested in terms of doctrine and rituals?*

To answer these questions, this paper draws inspiration from the two roundtable discussions (RTDs) that were organized by the Decolonial Studies Program (DSP) of the University of the Philippines' Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS). These discussions were held in Ang Bahay ng Alumni, University of the Philippines Diliman in April and May 2019. Attended by several foreign and Filipino senior scholars and early career researchers (ECRs) hailing from reputable universities in the Philippines, the United States, and Europe, the two RTDs were enriched by interdisciplinary perspectives from participants' think pieces. Their contributions drew inspiration from the following fields, namely, anthropology, history, international relations, interreligious studies, Islamic studies, political science, sociology, and theology.

Religion as Damocles: Religion and Colonial History

A character from Greek mythology, Damocles, characterizes this paper's discussion about the role of religion in decoloniality. In the parable, the god, Dionysus, allows Damocles to experience the life of a king. However, while Damocles is being lavished with royal privilege, Dionysus hangs above him a sword suspended only by a strand of horsehair. This condition inflicts perpetual anxiety and threat on Damocles because he will never know when the sword will drop and kill him (Andrews 2018).

While religion has been successful in surviving the effects of secularism on modern public life, the story of Damocles personifies the current status of religion, particularly on the institution's position on the conversations regarding decoloniality. Like the suspended sword in Cicero's (a Roman orator and politician) parable, religion's links with colonialism perpetually threatens its credibility and authority.

In this regard, it is important to clarify that religion's participation in coloniality did not end when colonial masters left their colonies after World War II. Unfortunately, while former colonies were permitted to obtain sovereignty and statehood, coloniality has continued to exist through power relations, ideology, institutions, and other practices. Echoing the position of Maldonado-Torres (2016), Rosa Cordillera Castillo, in her think piece, reminded the persistence of "coloniality's logic, metaphysics, ontology and matrix of power even if a country has already gained independence."

Religion is no stranger to such a phenomenon. The scholarship regarding the role of Western Christianity, both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, in colonial history is already well-established. For instance, friar missionaries were always present in the Spanish and Portuguese expeditions; evangelization was used as a tool to pacify and subdue the resistance of non-European natives. While religious propagation was not the priority of other Western colonizers such as the British and the Dutch, Protestant missionaries took advantage of the British and Dutch expeditions to reach new lands to propagate the Gospel.

Meanwhile, even after decolonization, other religious traditions, aside from Western Christianity, have been observed to exhibit colonial tendencies and aspirations. During the two RTDs in 2019, two papers provided examples of how other religious traditions were socialized and imbued with colonial tendencies, particularly on the use of violence to erase certain groups, and on the emphasis on the standardization of doctrine and practices. The first paper, written by Alexander Horstmann, used the case of the Buddhist-majority population in Myanmar. For Horstmann, the entanglement of such a majority population into the state enabled the formulation of a nationalist and racial ideology. This ideology excludes and marginalizes other minority groups such as the Muslim and Christian ethnic tribes based in specific regions and provinces.

The second paper written by Nassef Adiong talked about the Salafiyah movement in Saudi Arabia and its crusade to purify the practice of Islam outside the Arab world. He particularly emphasized the element of diffusion through the emergence of different *dawah*

(missionary) movements, especially in Southeast Asia. Millions of non-Arab Muslims study in Saudi Arabia and are inspired to teach the Salafi ideology of Islam when they return to their respective homelands. While Adiong does not explicitly compare Salafi missionary activity to other colonial projects, central to his criticism of the movement is its resemblance to the Christian colonial missionary model, particularly during the Age of Exploration. During this period, Christian Europe served as the center and source of missionary activities to evangelize the natives living in the continents of the Americas, Africa, and various parts of Asia. In addition, based on Adiong's account of Salafism, the Salafi crusade against alien influences in the practice of Islam worldwide mirrors the Christian colonial missionaries' rejection of indigenous knowledge and beliefs outside the European world as un-Christian and demonic.

From these exhortations, the two RTDs established that religion must face the reality of its role in the colonial past and its continuing impact in reproducing and legitimizing the persistence of colonial logic in various parts of the world. If religions aim to cement their relevance in the modern world, religious institutions need to face the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads: their association with previous and present coloniality.

Decolonizing Religion: Issues and Challenges

When talking about decolonizing religion, it is important to point out where the decolonization process should start. The submitted think pieces of each RTD participant forwarded various strategies to decolonize religion, both in its study and practice. However, an outline of the reasons behind the difficult and painstaking process of doing so is necessary prior to laying out the suggestions raised during the RTDs.

The first reason is the conventional assumption that all religions share the same structural template that the wider public has accepted. Assuming that all religions have hierarchical organizational structures similar to Western Christianity has been a hindrance to liberating the study of religion from the practice of Western social sciences, which standardize categories or impose nomenclatures in understanding specific social phenomena. For instance, for Müller and Steiner

(2018), Islam should not be compared to Western Christianity, which has figures of central authority (e.g. the Pope for Roman Catholics, the archbishop of Canterbury for Anglicans) because Islam does not have the equivalent of a pope or a Vatican that, among other things, decides on doctrine. Such caution against generalization also applies to other religions.

The second reason pertains to the doctrine of “unity of life,” especially among the world’s major organized religions. The emphasis on the unity of life presents the porous borders between what is considered the sacred and the profane, i.e., the demarcation between the religious and the secular. Decolonization efforts will surely touch and oppose certain traditional beliefs, values, and doctrines since one of the aims of decolonization is the liberation from certain structures that continually contributes towards oppression. Examples include traditional teachings on gender relations and the unfortunate history of Christianization of Asia and Africa.

Third, we are adopting the language frequently used to describe the “ambivalent” role of religion in several global issues, especially in war and conflict.⁴ Religion seems to be a two-faced force. It can be a potent force in peacekeeping, but it is also one of the causes of conflict (Sandal 2011). In the case of decolonization, history proves that religious actors have been entangled and continuously involved in anticolonial movements. For instance, the early attempts to resist Spanish colonization in the Philippines started from the efforts of three Filipino priests who advocated for reforms in racial policies so that Filipinos could become members of Catholic religious orders. During that time, Filipinos were only allowed to be secular, diocesan priests (Manila Bulletin 2022).

At present, Philippine social movements advocating land reform and opposition to neoliberalism and imperialism include faith-based organizations and individuals inspired by a theology of liberation (Holden and Nadeau 2010). However, despite such progress in recent decades, some religious groups involved in these movements are still

4 See Appleby’s (2000), *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*.

constrained by certain religious interpretations of doctrines that are considered nonnegotiables. For instance, while the Catholic Bishops' Conference in the Philippines (CBCP) is known to fight for some progressive social causes such as the rights of workers, environmental protection, and the opposition to authoritarianism, the institution draws a line towards some policy advocacies that contradict Catholic teachings. These are considered "authoritative" since they have been promulgated in papal documents such as the use of artificial contraception, marriage dissolution, same-sex marriage, and abortion.

Given these nuances, the forthcoming section below outlines some of the proposals of the RTD participants regarding the question of how to liberate religion, both in its study and practice, from being entrapped in the continuation of colonialism in the contemporary era.

Decolonizing Religion: Some Steps Forward

We categorize the arguments and proposals of the participants into three strategies. First, most approve of the idea that the decolonization of religion must commence with the study of religion. This process must encompass issues on ontology (the study of being) and epistemology (the study of how we come to know anything), methodologies, and other ways of doing scholarship on religion. Second, a significant number of participants also agree that decolonization may also occur with the revisitation or revision of certain doctrines that contribute to the survival of colonial logic among faith-based institutions. We refer to the outcome of these doctrinal revisitations and reformulations as "public theology," adopting Sandal's (2012, 67) definition: "the systematic ways people relate their faith to public issues under the guidance of religious authorities." Lastly, several participants presented the idea that rituals, devotions, and other ways of living the faith may also serve as a bottom-up strategy to advocate decolonization.

Rethinking Religious Scholarship

In his think piece, Paul Hedges (2018) categorizes the roots of religious scholarship into the following fields, namely, religious studies (RS), theological studies (TS), and interreligious studies (IRS).

These categorizations provide a good starting point to the conversation regarding the decolonization of religious scholarship.

For Hedges (2018), RS refers to that body of inquiry about religion that is nonconfessional in nature. As a secular pursuit, RS approaches the question of religion and even (other fields), from a multidisciplinary angle. On the other hand, TS differs from RS because it is confessional in nature and is usually housed in religious-educational institutions, especially those affiliated with Western Christianity such as Catholicism and Protestantism. Lastly, IRS refers to the recent category of inquiry regarding the interconnectedness of religious traditions. IRS is defined through an interdisciplinary angle and the presence of scholar-activists directly immersed in the encounter between religious traditions in multicultural and diverse societies.

However, regardless of the focus of inquiry and the approach to understanding religion, the capabilities of these fields to decolonize are constrained by the environmental setting these disciplines are housed in: the academe itself. Per Hedges, the study of religion in academia is shaped by the following factors: (1) the concentration of scholars housed within Western elite educational institutions, (2) the dominance of works written by dead, old, white men (DWOM) as the canon of references for students, and (3) the lack of attention regarding the contributions of religious thinkers from the West and Asia.

To resolve these issues, Hedges forwards the following assumptions: One is to challenge the established canon of references for religious studies. He emphasizes the need to understand religion beyond the lens of traditional thinkers, especially those belonging to Western Christianity, or those that are part of its educational institutions. Another is promoting inclusivity within the field itself. This can be achieved by allocating increased attention to religion scholars who are women and who hail from Africa and other Global South countries aside from Asia. In addition, he also argues that elite academic institutions and organizations need to step down from their comfortable locations and start engaging Global South religion scholars through outreach and immersion in their locations. It is essential to reduce barriers that impede scholars' participation in the current conversations. Lastly, he notes that decolonization is not only the task

of academia. Religion scholars need to engage and rally the support of other stakeholders such as government and funding agencies.

Rosa Cordillera Castillo's think piece, meanwhile, complements Hedges' position by focusing on the conduct of research on religion. However, Castillo differs from Hedges since she focuses on aspects of reflexivity and positionality of the scholar. She proposes a four-point initiative. Her first point refers to the principle of reciprocity. How do the works of a religion scholar positively contribute to the religious communities selected as sites of the study? Does the scholar enable the members of these religious communities to become part of the conversation?

On the other hand, her second point criticizes the traditional, hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the informants. Religion scholars need to immerse and understand the origins of the positions, narratives, and views of their informants. In addition, she highlights the importance of serious engagement with indigenous epistemologies. It is important to understand the factors shaping the responses of informants through a bottom-up approach instead of drawing insights solely from a top-down interpretation of responses from a preexisting or ahistorical theoretical approach. Lastly, recognizing the lack of uniformity and diversity of religions globally, she asserts the increasing importance of provincializing academic traditions instead of searching for a unifying grand theory.

If Hedges and Castillo explore possibilities of decolonizing the study of religion through institutional reforms and the reevaluation of a researcher's position, the other think pieces particularly point to specific areas of religion research and case studies in the Philippines, and how they provide avenues for decolonization.

For Arvin Eballo, it is possible to understand the Filipino precolonial religious worldview and how it blended with Catholicism by researching on extant Spanish-era catechism books written in the Old Tagalog language. His proposal has the following merits. First, revisiting the language and style of Old Tagalog catechism books will enable religion scholars to develop a benchmark by learning how the Spanish friars and missionaries approached the religious literacy of

Filipinos and how the former adapted to such preexisting knowledge about the supernatural or the divine in order to propagate the Catholic faith. Second, while Eballo's proposal focuses only on the Tagalog language, such an initiative will jumpstart other inquiries on catechism books and other religious instruction tools written in other languages in the Philippines used beyond the island of Luzon.

Meanwhile, if Eballo's decolonization proposal centers on recovering the precolonial religious worldview of Filipinos through an analysis of historical written documents, Jayeel Cornelio's think piece looks at the contemporary religious demography of the Philippines. Cornelio shares the caution raised by Filipino Jesuit priest, Jose Mario Francisco, in calling the Philippines a Catholic nation (Esmaquel 2014).

Anchored on the extremely visible presence of the Catholic-majority population in the country and the significant influence of the Catholic clergy in Philippine politics, the perspective that the Filipino nation equates to a Catholic nation has been the dominant framing of analysis in social science research for decades. In contrast, contemporary statistics challenge this widespread assumption. The credibility and political influence of the Catholic Church are increasingly contested by its own members. Furthermore, new religious movements of Christian, non-Christian, and syncretic orientations have emerged, and certain sections of the political elite have opposed the Catholic hierarchy (Tiglao 2023). In addition, reports about the recently increasing numbers of Filipinos converting to Islam (called *balik-Islam*) also support Cornelio's proposal to decolonize the study of religion in the Philippines by providing more visibility to religious minorities (Morados and Malayang 2023).

Cornelio's position in acknowledging the presence and visibility of religious minorities as a way to decolonize provides some utility beyond research on religion in the Philippines. For instance, other states in the Southeast Asian region share with the Philippines the same demographic make-up, where the dynamics between the majority and minority religions exist. Cornelio's call for religious diversification also applies to how some academics and media personnel treat Thailand

and Myanmar as Buddhist nations, and Malaysia and Indonesia as sweepingly Muslim countries.

Along with Cornelio's call for religious diversification, Ariel Lopez's think piece laments the colonial grip on the underdevelopment of Islamic studies in the Philippines, especially in terms of Islamic history. He blames this situation on several reasons. First, it is important to deconstruct our pre-existing views about the status and history of religion in the country, particularly the assumption that Islam was the Filipinos' precolonial religion and that conversion to Christianity was only a recent phenomenon.

Such thinking enables complacency and discourages the initiative to map out the development in religious demography in the Philippines especially during the pre-colonial times where other religious practices, such as animism, existed. Such a tendency to view the whole precolonial Philippines as Islamic also perpetuates the colonial view that the country is a Catholic nation and a vanguard of the faith in Southeast Asia. In reality, Philippine religious history would look differently if we account for the presence and interactions of different religious beliefs during the precolonial era.

Second, Lopez observes an imbalance of works about Christianity and Islamic histories in the Philippines. Thus, he encourages the utilization of existing colonial archives in Europe to reconstruct our understanding of colonial history. This is particularly true since in those collections, one can find various publications on the histories of Catholic missionary efforts, Catholic educational institutions, and religious biographies of Catholic clergy (see Bernad 1972; Sitoy 1985; de la Rosa 2014). Recently, non-Catholic Christian groups have also joined the trend. For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Philippines documented family histories of its members and even Filipino Christians belonging to other denominations (BusinessMirror 2019). Meanwhile, works on Islamic histories in the Philippines are catching up. After the publication of Cesar Majul's (1973) canonical *Muslims in the Philippines* as the go-to reference, several institutions and research groups have since contributed more works on Islamic history in the Philippines such as the Ateneo de Manila University Press, Ateneo de Davao University Press, University

of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Developments (Islamic Studies Program), the *Islam in Southeast Asia* book series of Springer Publications, and *Islam in the Philippines* book series of the International Islamic University of Malaysia Press and Palgrave Macmillan.

Third, Lopez calls for a greater historical perspective on the study of Islam in the Philippines, especially in recognition of recent developments in the field. Such is an interesting point in light of the limited availability of writings about the evolution of Islamic institutions in the Philippines, including, for instance, the government agency tasked to handle affairs and interests of thousands of Muslim Filipinos, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF). It is quite surprising to note that, throughout its almost five decades of existence, there are no available authoritative references on the history of the NCMF, ranging from the time when it was referred to as the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA) in the late 1970s and in its recent transformation into a Commission by virtue of Republic Act No. 9997, which was passed in 2010.

The think pieces of Cornelio and Eballo are united by a common goal: *to decolonize the study of religion in each country, it is necessary to acknowledge the visibility of religious minority groups and foreground their respective histories into the mainstream.* These actions provide interesting opportunities in studying religion in the Global South. For instance, in Southeast Asia, mainstreaming the history of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Oriental folk religions in Christian- and Muslim-majority countries begs the question, “How do the encounters between majority and minority religious groups shape the development of doctrine, which have the potential to address social ills brought by or linked to colonialism?” To answer this question, the think pieces discussed in the next section provided some suggestions.

Rethinking Public Theology

The following think pieces approach the question of decolonizing religion by focusing on the formulation of doctrine and theology. In this section, we adopt Sandal’s (2012) concept of “public theology,” which refers to the interpretations of religions towards public issues as

shaped by the contemporary historical, economic, social, and political contexts where such religious groups are currently situated.

Hadje Sadjé's think piece tackles the benefits of decolonizing Christian theology. In his paper, he uses the case of Filipino Pentecostal theology, where he problematizes its current characteristics that resemble the colonial understanding and practice of religion. Among these attributes are individualism, materialism, and fatalism. Colonial Christian theology is *individualistic* because of its emphasis on the self and one's personal relationship with God as the primary basis of salvation. Such a tendency sidelines the Christian responsibility to other people and to society as a whole.

Meanwhile, colonial theology is *materialistic* because of its emphasis on the pursuit of individual success in career and finances. This is popularly known in modern parlance as the "prosperity gospel." Rooted in the classic Protestant ethic essay of Max Weber ([1905] 2012), the prosperity gospel emphasizes that belief in Jesus will result success in business and one's career. Popularized by Christian preachers in the United States, the idea has already diffused throughout the non-Western world; thousands of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia were observed to convert to Christianity because of the message of the prosperity gospel (The Economist 2018). The Philippines is also not a stranger to the phenomenon (Medina and Cornelio 2021).

Lastly, the *fatalist* feature of colonial theology pertains to the emphasis on enduring suffering on earth in exchange for heavenly rewards in the afterlife. While such teaching is shared among various religious groups, the fatalist emphasis neglects the importance of what liberation theologians refer to as the "here and now," which, per religious belief, also factors in and shapes the potential destination of a believer (Dupertuis 1991).

If Sadjé's paper normatively discusses the importance of decolonizing theology, Jonathan Chow's think piece specifically outlines how a religious group's articulation of a doctrine can potentially be used to perpetuate coloniality or promote decoloniality. By invoking the constructivist literature in international relations theory, Chow argues that religions can advocate not only for decolonization but for

the total eradication of colonial logic by banking on a group's moral authority.

As an example, he uses the case of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, which lobbies for the promotion and institutionalization of transnational human rights. To operationalize how decoloniality can be achieved through articulatory strategies of a religious group, Chow approached transnational human rights principles as global "norms," simply defined as sets of ideas that prescribe or determine the boundaries of approved behavior and actions of actors.

In addition, he introduced the concept of norm-thickening. Religions employ norm-thickening, which entails (1) explaining foreign norms in ways that are intelligible to and understandable by local audiences, and (2) rallying authoritative institutions in support of a specific norm aiming for the acceptance of a local audience. Specifically, religious groups can become allies of decoloniality in three ways, namely: (1) if religious groups endorse decolonial ideas as compatible with their religious teaching, (2) if religious groups explain the compatibility between its doctrine and decoloniality, and (3) if religious groups institutionalize its commitment to support the assertion about the compatibility of decolonial ideas and religious teaching.

However, Chow cautions about the potential overoptimism regarding a religious group's capability towards the institutionalization of ideas foreign to a local audience, especially the logic and the principles related to decoloniality. As mentioned, the capability of religious groups to support decolonial initiatives is dependent on their moral authority.

However, various religious institutions are continuously losing influence and support due to continuing scandals involving religious leadership. Such scandals are not only limited to a certain religious organization (Williams 2021), like, for instance, the Roman Catholic Church, which Chow used as the case for his think piece. Religion's battle against secularism is continuing, and scandals involving its leadership threaten the moral credibility of a faith as a potential ally for the decolonial cause.

Meanwhile, if Chow uses the issue of transnational human rights as a space where religion can contribute towards decoloniality, Julius Bautista's think piece focuses on democratization, using the contributions of the Catholic Church in the Philippines and Timor-Leste. These two Southeast Asian states have a Catholic-majority population. Bautista refers to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council as a force that empowered the clergy of two states to view politics as an extension of their religious mandate. He specifically identifies that post-Vatican II Catholicism's emphasis on listening to the "signs of the times" empowered the Filipino and Timorese clergy to engage in the struggle towards the democratization of their respective countries. In addition, Bautista clarifies that the power of the Catholic Church in these two countries does not only reside with its persuasive capability in articulating public theological interpretations regarding the moral responsibility to support democratization. The network of the Church in these countries, composed of religious and lay individuals and organizations, is important, especially in terms of the mobilization and diffusion of the clergy's message.

In this regard, we believe that Bautista's premise about the importance of warm bodies in the contribution of religious groups towards the decolonial cause opens the discussion on how a religion's followers can exercise their part towards decoloniality. In relation, the next section discusses the role of religious practice and rituals.

Rethinking Practice and Rituals

In the past, studies on religion and politics, especially in the Philippines," frequently treated religious groups as mere interest groups whose interests are shaped by religious doctrine (Doce 2018). Very little emphasis had been given on the role of religious actions and rituals in achieving specific causes until Wilson (2012) shattered the dichotomous treatment between religious ritual and political action. For Wilson (2014), religious rituals are also political if they are viewed under the context where they are performed. In fact, in her analysis, Wilson even extended the definition of ritual even to charitable and philanthropic actions of faith-based organizations. This extension of the definition of ritual from mere devotion to charitable advocacies intersects with two think pieces also discussed in the RTD.

From a devotional angle, Doce explores the case of the disputed 1948 Lipa apparition to demonstrate the ways in which local churches resist the decisions of the Vatican leadership. Doce commences his discussion by asserting that, while the Roman Catholic Church claims its “oneness,” such unity is not always observable, especially with the continuing decentralization and autonomy granted to local churches (in terms of dioceses) after the Second Vatican Council. Despite the explicit presence of rules that some doctrinal and ritual matters can only be approved by the Vatican, the implementation of rulings is not always smooth and harmonious.

The Lipa apparition has created a widespread conflict among Filipino Catholics. On one side are the clergy, religious, and laity who have insisted on complying with Rome’s decision regarding the apparition’s lack of supernatural origin. On the other side are factions who overtly and covertly resist the Vatican’s ruling. One of the interesting parts of this episode of internal fragmentation was the anticolonial rhetoric employed by Filipino religious leaders themselves. They have questioned the authority of the European investigators and their Filipino allies sent by Rome to investigate the alleged apparition. The conflict still has not been resolved. In an interview with the *Varsitarian*, the student newspaper of the University of Santo Tomas, former Lipa Archbishop Ramon Arguelles insisted, “It is because we are not Italians. We are not Europeans. But they are deciding in Rome here anything about in the Philippines” (Santos 2016).

While doctrinal controversies are common among religious groups, debates regarding rituals and devotion also occupy a certain space on the Roman Catholic Church’s operations globally. For instance, Catholicism was also faced with the so-called Rites Controversy in China, which lasted from the 17th to the 18th centuries. During that time, Jesuit missionaries pleaded with Rome to allow the inclusion of Confucian elements in the Holy Mass in order to attract more Chinese towards the Catholic faith (Liu 2020). The Holy See in Rome turned down the proposal but managed to pacify the opposition and resistance. This event occurred when the Catholic Church was not yet open to the ideas of decentralization and inculturation. This was the period known for the (re)consolidation of Papal supremacy throughout the Catholic

world, a period defined by centralization. However, the Lipa apparition case, which is still ongoing, takes place in the modern era, where Catholicism is, or should now be, receptive to ideas of providing more autonomy to local bishops and churches.

This begs the question, “Up to what extent can the Lipa resistance sustain itself?” As of this writing, the situation is getting more complicated. Recently, a devotee of the Lipa apparition accused a Filipino Dominican priest of violating a civil rights provision, specifically the crime of “offending religious feelings.” The said priest has been echoing and affirming Rome’s 1951 decision against the apparition. As a result, the said Dominican priest was imprisoned for two days; he applied for bail, and now awaits the forthcoming arraignment in the coming months (Tupas 2023). Such an incident inflicted further fragmentation within the Catholic Church in the Philippines, especially between the hierarchy, laypersons, and groups following Rome’s orders, and those individuals and groups insisting on the authenticity of the Lipa apparition.

In addition, the Lipa resistance also casts light on the elephant in the room, “How can religions become instruments of decoloniality given that they need to maintain orthodoxy, which in some cases perpetuates coloniality?”

In lieu of this question, it is necessary to revisit Cornelio’s think piece, which not only calls for religious diversification in the study of religion in the Philippines but also tackles the practice of religion by contemporary Filipino youth. If Doce looks at the disconnect between Rome and the Philippines, Cornelio looks at the generational angle, drawing from his ongoing research on the religiosity of youth. According to Cornelio, contemporary Filipino youth emphasize the importance of authentically living the ideals of the Catholic faith, instead of clinging to doctrinal orthodoxy and amplifying it. As history suggests, religious and doctrinal conflicts played a role in the competition of European empires to conquer lands outside their continent. Such preference towards living the universal moral values common among religions, instead of lingering within the space of religious and doctrinal debates, is a strategy to complement the call for decoloniality.

The previous sections discuss the necessary reforms for religious scholarship, theology, and practice; however, these suggestions focus on the responsibility of individual institutions, such as religious groups themselves and the academe. Yet these institutions are not operating within a vacuum. As Sandal (2012) notes, religious theology is influenced by its historical, economic, social, and political contexts. The same applies to the academe; Cordillera's think piece asserts that educational institutions are entrapped within colonial logic. To address this issue, the next section discusses the importance of looking at how coloniality persists among religious groups through their established power relations with other social actors.

Rethinking Power Relations

The think pieces discussed in this section look at the internal power relations within a religious group and the power relations between and among religious groups, state actors, and other social groups in specific countries.

Warlito Borja's think piece tackles the internal power relations within Roman Catholicism. Specifically, he problematizes the existence of class relations within the Catholic Church, which features the presence of a clerical class. For him, the presence of the clergy created uneven class relations between the priesthood and the laity, who have become overdependent on the former. Such overdependence results in (1) a theology devoid of knowledge of the everyday experiences of the laity, (2) the aggravation of the sexual and other abuse scandals of the Church, and (3) a clergy-centric interpretation of socioeconomic and political issues. As a solution, he forwards the proposal of de-clericalization—the abolition of the priesthood.

Borja's proposal is indeed radical. It is rooted from the discontentment regarding the spirit of *aggiornamento* (reforms) expected from the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) of Roman Catholicism. While Vatican II clarified the equality of vocations between priests, consecrated religious, and lay persons, the hierarchical structure and organization of the Catholic religion still exist. Specifically, *Presbyterum Ordinis* (Paul VI 1965) affirmed that

all Catholics share the priesthood of Christ through the virtue of baptism. However, there was a demarcation between the ministerial and sacramental priesthood of the clergy and that of the laity. The persistence of such differences continuously shapes the hierarchical class relations within Roman Catholicism. Such a view, which Borja also shares, regards this organization of social relations as a vestige of the colonial past.

In contrast, if Borja focuses on the power relations perpetuating coloniality in a religion's internal organization, Blanco's think piece spotlights the relationship through which colonialism was legitimized and validated: the relationship between Western Christianity and the European nation-states. For Blanco, religion must be disentangled from its association with the state to achieve its full liberation from its being an accomplice of coloniality. Through this, the State will no longer use religion to achieve its narrow goals rooted in creating social divisions. As a result, the higher ideals of religion such as belongingness, inclusivity, and the erasure of physical and social borders shall be finally achieved.

Blanco's dichotomous treatment of state-religion relations, especially in the context of Western Christianity, and the need to divorce the two, are further extended through Horstman's analysis of the Theravada Buddhist majority in Myanmar. As established in the previous sections, the participation of religions in the colonialism of the past and present is not only confined to Western Christianity, since other religions were unfortunately socialized to colonial logic and practices brought by the West. For Horstmann, the government of Myanmar is using the Theravada Buddhist majority to mobilize hatred, discrimination, and everyday violence against ethnic and religious minorities. The entanglement of religion and the state in Myanmar reinforces a nationalist, racist ideology aimed to exclude minorities, such as Muslims and Christians, from the imaginary of Myanmar's nationhood.

Conclusion

Despite the raging tide of secularism over the last decades, religions still manage to maintain their contemporary relevance and importance

in modern society. However, while successful, religions will never truly assert their moral authority and credibility if they will not acknowledge and engage their participation in historical and present-day coloniality. Based on the submitted think pieces for the Decolonizing Religion roundtable discussions of UP CIDS' Decolonial Studies Program, religion may be tapped as a potential ally for decolonization. This may be done through rethinking our conventional paradigm in doing religious scholarship, theology, rituals and practices, and religion's social relations with other actors and institutions.

However, while the discussed think pieces seem to comprehensively cover the decolonial issue of religion, the roundtable discussions—despite the interdisciplinary orientations of participants—failed to cover the role of economic transformations in shaping a religious group's capability to decolonize itself and contribute to the wider scope of decolonial advocacy. While aspects of globalization and neoliberalism were discussed specifically by Borja and Sadje, respectively, the two RTDs did not account for the role of capitalist transformations in both society and economy in the emergence of competing religious factions and coalitions that support decoloniality on the one hand, call for the restoration of colonial elements in religious theology and practice on the other.

To conclude this paper, it is recommended that future discussions also include the increasing "colonial nostalgia" among religious groups. For instance, within Catholicism, there are calls for the restoration of the centuries-old Tridentine Latin Mass and for the rejection of the inculturation of local practices in various forms of worship and devotion. Other examples are non-Arab versions of Islam (e.g. Southeast Asia, China and Central Asia), which have been observed to have increasingly abandoned indigenous, local elements due to puritanical influences from abroad. Thus, liberating religions from the colonial grip is not the sole task of religions themselves. This process requires a collective effort to dismantle current relations shaped by external socioeconomic forces, since religions are also operating within a broader set of social and power relations shaping their behavior, activities, and tendencies.

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