

The Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta of General Santos City, Philippines in 2023: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

The Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta has been celebrated annually for 43 years in Barangay Bula, General Santos City, Philippines, attended by both local and non-resident devotees. Despite its significance, there is limited understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the devotees. This study aims to describe how people participate in the various Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta activities, and what meanings do they attached to it. Ninety-two (92) interviews and observations of Santo Niño devotees were conducted, involving locals and visitors. A Key Informant Interview (KII) guide and ethnomethodology were used to gather information about the meanings attached to their devotions and their lived experiences. The data were qualitatively analyzed to understand the meaning of people's experiences. Findings revealed that the fiesta served as a vital religious event for fisherfolks, reinforcing Filipino cultural values. Activities during the fiesta, including a procession, holy masses, a fluvial parade, and Sinulog, showed the participants' devotion. The prevalent themes include tradition, thanksgiving, miracle narratives, gathering, and faith. Researchers recommend further research on people's agency in their participation, the application and integration of more data collection tools, and the assertion of the relevance of Santo Niño in the lives of people in Barangay Bula.

Keywords: *Santo Niño de Bula, religious, devotion, meanings and devotion, Sinulog*

Introduction

Religion is a fundamental part of Filipino culture, with 86% of the population identifying as Roman Catholic (Li, 2021). Filipino religiosity is characterized by a unique blend of indigenous practices and Catholicism, resulting in a syncretic form of worship. The Catholic faith has played a significant role in the country's history, profoundly shaping the identity and spirituality of Filipinos (Inocian et al., 2020).

Filipino religiosity is also manifested in various devotional practices, such as the celebration of fiestas and the veneration of religious images or icons. These practices are deeply ingrained in the Filipino culture and are seen as a way of expressing gratitude and seeking blessings from God. Moreover, these practices also serve as a way of strengthening community ties and promoting social cohesion (Nuñez, 2019).

The Santo Niño Festival held every third Sunday of January in Cebu City, Philippines, honors Santo Niño. The name "Sinulog" is derived from the Cebuano word "sulog," meaning "water current," as dancers' movements resemble flowing water. The festival includes a grand procession, street parties, and colorful dances, climaxing in the Sinulog Grand Parade, featuring vibrant costumes and synchronized dances to drumbeats (SOXph, 2018). This event attracts millions of both local and international tourists, proving it as a significant cultural celebration in the Philippines.

On the other hand, the Santo Niño fiesta in Bula, General Santos, has its roots in the 1940s and was started by tuna fishing companies in Barangay Bula. The celebration takes place annually on January 15 and holds particular significance for the local fishing community, as it offers an opportunity to express gratitude to Santo Niño for their livelihoods and successes, which are intricately

connected to the sea. The celebration includes events such as the fluvial parade, inland procession, Holy Masses, street dance, and traditional Sinulog dancing, attracting an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 annually (Toledo, 2021).

Further, while both festivals are dedicated to Santo Niño, the Sinulog festival in Cebu is a grander and more commercialized event. In contrast, the Sinulog festival in Bula, General Santos, is a more community-oriented celebration that centers on the local fishing industry and the gratitude of its residents (Lay, 2023). However, there was limited to no research on this festival from the perspective of its devotees. Most of the documentations of the festival are in the form of grey literature by observers (Almendras, 2018; Catado, et al; Lay, 2023; Nuñez, 2019).

Thus, in 2023, this study was conducted to explore through scholarly research how people participate in the various Santo Nino de Bula Fiesta activities, and what meanings do they attached to it in Barangay Bula, General Santos City, Philippines.

Research Question

This study aims to explore the celebration of Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta 2023. It intends to understand attendees' and devotees' expressions of devotion and the meaning they attach to the Santo Niño Fiesta. More specifically, this study tries to answer the following question:

1. How people participate in the various Santo Nino de Bula Fiesta activities, and what meanings do they attached to it?

Methodology

The researchers used a qualitative research design to understand the subjective aspects of the Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta 2023, focusing on individual experiences, opinions, and cultural meanings. Qualitative research involves gathering and evaluating non-numerical data to understand better ideas, opinions, and experiences (Portus et al., 2018). For data collection, the researchers conducted a key informant interview (KII) to engage with individuals who offered informed perspectives. These interviews provided a deep dive into the cultural and symbolic significance of the festival. They also actively immersed themselves in the event through participant observation, allowing them to experience the festival firsthand. This hands-on approach provided a holistic understanding of participants' behaviors, rituals, and interactions. Utilizing ethnomethodology with photography, the researchers aimed to reveal the meanings attached

to events by studying individuals in their natural settings. The inclusion of visuals through photography added a unique dimension, potentially capturing moments that words alone might not convey.

Before conducting the study, the researchers obtained executive consent from the Vicar General of the Diocese of Marbel, Fr. Angel Buenavides and the parish priests of Santo Niño de Bula Parish Church. Subsequently, the practicum supervisor, Dr. Mario Aguja, approved for the protocol. A letter of permission from the barangay captain was also obtained to ensure the safety of the researchers and informants involved.

This study involved 92 conveniently selected informants, encompassing devotees of all ages, genders, and social statuses who attended the fiesta. The number of participants in each fiesta activity is as follows: the Sinulog activity had the most attendees, with 25 participants, followed by the Fluvial event, which had 14 attendees. The Procession and Community Fellowship each had 15 and 14 informants, respectively. The Holy Mass had 13 attendees, and the Business Sector segment had 11 informants. Throughout the research, the observers documented various events as they unfolding, capturing photos and analyzing the true meaning based on the narratives gathered.

In terms of data analysis, they meticulously examined the qualitative data from interviews, observations, and photographs. Thematic analyses were employed to find patterns and themes within the data. Thematic analysis was instrumental in systematically exploring patterns and themes within the data. Through a meticulous process of coding, grouping, and refining, they found key ideas and concepts that appeared from the participants' perspectives and behaviors during the Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta 2023.

This approach allowed for a flexible, yet in-depth interpretation of the cultural significance attached to the event. Simultaneously, content analysis played a crucial role in structuring and categorizing the vast data. Employing predefined criteria, the researchers systematically coded textual, visual, and, where applicable, quantitative elements within the dataset. This method enabled a more objective and structured examination of patterns and trends, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted aspects of the fiesta. By integrating thematic and content analysis, the researchers looked to reveal the complex meanings and interconnections within the qualitative data. This approach aimed to provide a nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of the Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta 2023, along with the diverse perspectives surrounding the event. By studying devotees in their natural settings, the

researchers looked to capture authentic behaviors and meanings as they unfolded during the fiesta.

Results and Discussions

This study has examined devotees' and attendees' meanings of the Santo Niño de Bula patronal fiesta in 2023. The dominant theme is devotion to the Santo Niño, expressed in religious practices such as participation in Holy Mass, procession of the Santo Niño, fluvial parade, and Sinulog dance. The fiesta also reinforced important Filipino values such as hospitality, gathering, family bonds, and economic activities.

How People Participate in the Various Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta Activities, and What Meanings Do They Attached to It

The Santo Niño de Bula 2023 fiesta highlights various expressions of tradition, thanksgiving, miracle narratives, family, and faith that stem from their devotion to the Santo Niño. On this note, tradition is seen as one of the factors explaining why the celebration of the fiesta has different manifestations. Thanksgiving, as one of the overarching themes, played a crucial role in elucidating the reasons behind individuals' participation in various activities during the fiesta. As shared by one participant, *“ginaapilan nako tanang aktibidad sa pista ni Santo Niño, isip pagpakita sa akong dakong pagpasalamat sa iyaha”* (I take part in all activities during the feast of Santo Niño as a way of expressing my deep gratitude to Him). This implies that his thankfulness forged his strong devotion to the Santo Niño. Additionally, miracle narratives explain why people endure long walks during processions, attend lengthy masses, prepare extravagant feasts, and engage in various preparations and expressions during the celebration. In line with this, one of the participants explained why she was devoting strongly to the Santo Niño: *“Sukad na ayo ako anak sa sakit, kay gikuyog namo sya atong pista usab diri. Taga tuig walay mintis jud mi naga adto ug apil diri sa pista.”* (Ever since my child was healed, when we brought him here, fail, every year, we always come and join in the festivities.). Finally, various manifestations and expressions throughout the entire fiesta are linked to the devotees' faith, regardless of the specific form in which that faith is expressed or showed. These themes are highlighted in the different events and activities held throughout the celebration, such as processions, home decorations, fluvial parades, masses, fellowship, and the Sinulog dance. These expressions of devotion to the Santo Niño were among the most prominent and observable features

of the festival.

Attending Holy Masses

The heart of the Santo Niño celebration lies in the Holy Mass, which mirrors the Eucharist. People's devotion to Santo Niño is expressed through these masses. Bula parish church held ten consecutive masses from 4:00 a.m. to 10:00 pm, with Diocese of Marbel priests present. Devotees, who carried figures of Mother Mary and Santo Niño, attended the event with proper security measures in place. The priests emphasized the importance of children in God's kingdom during their sermons. After the fluvial procession, a second mass in the church marked a sacred moment, and the crowd remained steady throughout.

The following are the sub-themes that surfaced from the researchers' progressive reading and re-reading of the narratives. Sub-themes that stand for the meanings associated with the holy mass are the assembly of the faithful, thanksgiving, and healing.

Holy Masses as Assembly of Faithful.

The holy mass, attended by devotees carrying statues of Santo Niño, is an assembly of the faithful during the feast in honor of the patron saint, Santo Niño. After the mass, there are blessings of the Niño, and people are eager to come to the center and have their Niño's blessed by the priest. People also shout "Pit Señor" when Niño leaves the church. Among the large crowd of devotees in the church is a mother and her family attending morning mass. They worshipped patiently. An annual family activity holds great sentiment. The devotee shared:

“Year after year, amo ginapa-basbasan kay lahi rajud ang value ani sa amoa” (We annually bless our image of Santo Niño as it holds excellent value for us). Devotees believe that blessing their Santo Niño reflects the Lord's blessings upon them, and dancing the Sinulog is their way of expressing faith and gratitude.

A female devotee reported that it was her first time attending the Santo Niño festival, and she purposely woke up early to attend the first mass of the day. She was baptized Roman Catholic, but her mother was the one who was a devotee to the Santo Niño, but sadly, she passed away the preceding year.

For her, celebrating the feast of Santo Niño is like reminiscing about the memories of her mother's devotion and faith. During the holy mass, devotees express their prayers of thanksgiving and willingness to sacrifice for Christ. Parallel to this, a study concluded that for Filipino Roman Catholics, the devotion to Santo Niño is a much-loved cultural and religious celebration (Toledo, 2021).

Figure 1

Holy Mass



Note. Actual Photo by Cartel, G., 2023, Holy mass conducted during The Feast of Sto. Niño de Bula

Applying the theory of religion in Durkheim, the mass, blessings, and the act of carrying statues of Santo Niño all serve as collective rituals that bring devotees together. Blessing the image of Santo Niño annually becomes a shared experience that reinforces the cultural and religious identity of the community. The shouting of "Pit Señor" and the dancing of the Sinulog further contribute to this collective enthusiasm, creating a powerful sense of unity among the participants.

Also, the testimonies of devotees, such as the family who blesses their image of Santo Niño annually, highlight the enduring tradition and the emotional significance of ritual. Blessing the Niño is not just a religious practice but a cultural activity that binds the community together. The female devotee attending the Santo Niño festival for the first time also exemplifies how the tradition transcends generations, connecting individuals to their cultural roots and family history.

Holy Masses as Thanksgiving. The Santo Niño festival was seen by many devotees as a religious practice with miraculous and healing elements. A devotee shared that, "*Sauna gipa suot nakog teacher si Santo Niño tapos karon LPT nako.*" (Before, I made Santo Niño wear the uniform of a teacher, and I became an LPT.) She explained that the desire to do so was part of their culture and had become a practice. Now they make him wear a navy costume, hoping that their younger brother will join the navy soon. In a similar tone, another devotee explicitly narrated that the reason her Santo Niño has varied sizes is

that they have different uses: one for the altar, one for her retail store, and one for her husband to protect him from travel. In symbolic interactionism, individuals create and interpret symbols as they interact with each other and their environment.

The act of making Santo Niño wear different costumes for specific purposes, such as a teacher's uniform or a navy costume, reflects the symbolic nature of these rituals. The devotees attribute meaning and significance to the attire of Santo Niño, believing that it can influence or bring about specific outcomes, such as academic success or a career in the navy. This practice highlights how symbols, in this case, the image of Santo Niño, are not fixed but are socially constructed and subject to interpretation within a particular cultural context.

In addition, the varied sizes of Santo Niño for various uses, such as the altar, a retail store, or protection during travel, exemplify the symbolic versatility of the image. Each size and use carry its own meaning and purpose within the devotee's life. This practice reflects how individuals, through symbolic interaction, attribute diverse meanings to objects based on their individual experiences, needs, and aspirations.

After each mass, the Santo Niño blessing led to candle lighting, the Sinulog dance, and noticeable healing rituals at the gym. The candlelight Sinulog dance, and healing rituals after each mass also serve as symbolic acts within the Santo Niño festival. Lighting candles can symbolize prayer, devotion, or seeking blessings, while the Sinulog dance is a form of expression

that reinforces cultural identity and collective celebration. The healing rituals show a belief in the miraculous and transformative powers of Santo Niño, emphasizing the symbolic link between the image and the devotees' well-being. As noted by a study, festivals in towns and cities are expressions of gratitude for their patron saint, reflecting their religious and cultural heritage. The Holy Mass serves as a symbol of thanksgiving, associating blessings with hope and expectation (Inocian et al., 2020).

Holy Masses as Healing. During the Sinulog Festival in Bula, General Santos City, Philippines, researchers saw that some attendees came to the holy masses seeking protection from Santo Niño. As researchers conversed with one of the attendees, she shared, "*Mag protect sa akoa at sa akoang pamilya si Santo Niño maong ga saulog mi*" (Santo Niño will protect me and my family; that's why we celebrate). Santo Niño was the one who whispered in her ears, telling her to be strong and not be clouded with fear. Since that time, her daughter has gotten sick and has been confined to the hospital. From that day on, she left all her doubts and fears to the Santo Niño.

A devotee also said, "I believe that if you are sick and dance here, your illness will be cured." She then added, "I am very thankful because he gave me everything I asked," after sharing that when she was pregnant with her first baby, it was a delicate pregnancy, but she asked Niño to protect her and make her pregnancy go well. Moreover, the baby came out well. The attendees' belief in Santo Niño as a protector and healer reflects a form of religious coping where individuals turn to their faith and religious practices to deal with life's challenges, uncertainties, and adversities.

The Sinulog Festival, as described from an outsider's perspective, reveals how this religious celebration serves as a unifying force within the community. The statement, "*Kami gadayo gyud mi kung asa nay piyesta kay saamoa dili man kaayo ani ka dako, amoa gyud ning debosyon og pasalamat saiya*" (We really make it a point to attend the festival wherever it is because it's not that big in our place, but our devotion and gratitude to him are genuine), emphasizes the communal aspect of religious practices. The act of gathering for the festival becomes a family tradition, reinforcing a sense of shared identity, devotion, and gratitude.

The observation of a huge crowd both inside and outside the church during the Sinulog festival underscores the collective nature of religious experiences. This aligns with the sociological understanding of religion as a social institution that fosters a sense of community and

shared values. The power of faith and prayer is not just an individual Endeavor but a collective expression, with thousands coming together in worship and celebration (Durkheim, 1947).

Participating in Procession

The Santo Niño de Bula procession, celebrated on January 14th each year, is a diverse expression of devotion to Santo Niño. The procession of Santo Niño de Bula made the floats of the Santo Niño with the figure of the patron the highlight of the night. It is done during the night after the mass. Following the 6:05 pm mass, the patron figure is carried from the church to the float, blessed by the parish priest, and the procession begins at 6:20 pm, attracting participants from various backgrounds.

Joined the procession, people walked with figures of Santo Niño in several ways, including costumes, candles, and family groups. Some used tricycles and cars with figures of Santo Niño on top. The route covered several streets, passing Santo Niño altars with different themes from households. The procession revealed devotees' strong expressions of devotion, encompassing themes like prayer, tradition, sacrifice, creative expression, and respect for the elderly. Notably, processions have traditionally been an integral part of religious life. They are often among the most visible of religious activities in public spaces and, to that extent, have the greatest opportunity for contact with secular activities and religious practices of other faiths (Kong, 2005).

Procession as Prayer and Thanksgiving.

The procession served as a means for devotees to convey their prayers and gratitude while carrying their Santo Niño replicas throughout the lengthy parade route. Notably, an elderly grandmother, unable to walk alone, was supported by her grandson throughout the procession, showing their devotion. The grandmother said: "*Pasalamat jud sa tanan grasya nga nadawat ug bale mao nasad ni siya ang paraan nako para magpasalamat sa tanang grasya nga akong nadawat*" (It is a form of thanksgiving to all the blessings that I received). Moreover, a devotee who displayed the Santo Niño outside their house along the procession route said, "*pagpasalamat sa mga grasyang among nadawat gikan kay Santo Niño*" (It is our way of thanksgiving to all the blessings that we received from Santo Niño). They were offering their prayers and thanksgiving in every step they made during the procession.

The participation of devotees in the Santo Niño procession, as a means of expressing gratitude and offering thanksgiving, aligns with Emile Durkheim's theory of religion and rituals.

According to Durkheim, rituals serve as mechanisms for reinforcing social solidarity and expressing collective sentiments within a community [8]. The procession, where individuals carry Santo Niño replicas and walk together along the parade route, embodies the concept of collective effervescence, a shared emotional experience that fosters unity among participants. The act of expressing gratitude through this communal ritual contributes to the overall social integration of the community, reflecting Durkheim's idea that religious practices play a crucial role in binding individuals together within a shared cultural and social framework. This implies that the act itself is a powerful symbol shown to gather the community on a journey of pilgrimage (Durkheim, 1947).

Procession as a Tradition. The enduring participation of devotees in the Santo Niño procession, viewed as a tradition, aligns with Émile Durkheim's theory of ritual and tradition. Durkheim argued that rituals play a crucial role in reinforcing social bonds and creating a sense of belonging within a community (Durkheim, 1947). The participant's statement, "*Taga tuig namo ni ginabuhat namo ni walay absent*" (We do this every year without fail), reflects the regularity of the ritual, contributing to social integration. Additionally, the procession's role in transmitting the tradition across generations resonates with Durkheim's idea that rituals perpetuate cultural values from one generation to the next [8]. In essence, the Santo Niño procession serves as a collective and enduring practice that fosters social cohesion and cultural continuity within the

community of devotees. Also, according to the study, the celebration of Santo Niño is deeply rooted in the faith of the Filipino devotees, which is why it is hard for them to let this tradition go unattended (Martin, 2021).

Procession as a Form of Sacrifice. Joining the procession is a sign of sacrifice for the devotees who joined. As the researchers saw, there were old ones who still joined the procession despite their age. Also, some people were tired, but their eagerness to finish the procession was dominating. According to the interviewee, "*Nagapil mi ug tranlasyon kay bali sakripisyo ni namo*" (We are joining the translation because it is our sacrifice). The devotees believed that the procession was only a little sacrifice compared to what the patron had given them since they were young. They were ready to shed sweat and tears as this *panata* of theirs has an attached prayer and thanksgiving for the patron. After the long walk, they gained new hope and ease, knowing that one day their prayers would be heard. According to a participant in a similar study, he was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer in 2015. But despite his ailing condition, he joined the procession as a way of sacrificing to the Santo Niño. He believed that this sacrifice could heal him anytime soon (Catado, et al., 2016).

Procession as a Creative Expression of Devotion. During the fiesta, people highlighted their creativity in designing their homes along the procession route. Each household's unique presentation of the Santo Niño image, using feather designs, balloons, and colorful lighting, serves as a

Figure 2

Santo Niño Procession



Note. Actual Photo by Cartel, G., 2023, the Sto. Niño de Bula carried by accentuated float accompanied by hundreds of devotees

symbolic expression of their happiness. The interviewed devotees conveyed that putting figurines outside their homes is a way of highlighting their joy, "*Sa among pagbutang sa gawas sa among balay sa Santos ug pag decorate niini among ginapakita ang among kalipay.*" (Putting our figurines outside our houses is our way of expressing our happiness). Additionally, the elaborate designs, as mentioned by a mother, are a display of talent and an effort to contribute to the festivity, "*Gina butangan namo ug nindot na design ang among gibuhat na murag altar diri sa gawas kay ginapakita sad namo unsa among talent sa pag design ug para makuha namo ang pagka fiesta. Ingun ani man jud basta naay okasyon, ginapangandaman para nindot sa mata*" (We used creative designs on our altars outside our house to show our talent in designing and to join the festivity. It is a regular thing on every occasion to exert efforts in making it pleasing to our eyes). This practice aligns with the symbolic interactionist idea that individuals engage in activities based on shared meanings and symbolic expressions (Catado, et al., 2016). This practice during the Santo Niño de Bula shows the creativity of people and their way of celebrating the fiesta (Domingo, 2018).

Procession as Family Gathering. The prioritization of family gatherings over strict adherence to the older people's wishes during the procession reflects the principles of symbolic interactionism in sociology. Individuals, particularly youths, join the event not solely based on a profound understanding of its religious significance but as an opportunity for family bonding. Phrases like "*Uban-uban kay mama kay gusto nako mag suroy*" (Just joining my mom since I want to stroll around) and "*Lakaw lakaw ra. Naa man diri si mama gud ug uban man mi sa akong mga ig'agaw*" (Just going for a walk. Mom is here, and I'm with my relatives). This narrative exemplifies how personal meanings are attached to the activity, emphasizing the role of shared experiences in fostering family connections. Despite diverse understandings of the procession's meaning, the event serves as a common ground for family members to come together and bond, aligning with the principles of symbolic interactionism (Domingo, 2018).

Participating in the Fluvial Parade

The Fluvial Procession of Santo Niño de Bula celebrates faith, strong devotion, and thanksgiving, known locally as "a prayer for the sea." Fishers offer their gratitude for blessings from the sea and seek bountiful catches. All fishing boats, big and small, owned by fish magnates and

small entrepreneurs of Barangay Bula, joined the fluvial parade. Devotees, including the elderly and colorful figurines, gather early in the morning, dancing joyfully as the procession starts. Alongside seeking guidance and protection from Santo Niño, law enforcement agencies and volunteers ensure security. The Philippine Coast Guard leads the procession, featuring many fishing vessels and boats, symbolizing the sea's importance to the people of Bula as a source of their livelihood, making Christ an integral part of their lives.

Decorations and floral arrangements on the amphibian and FB San Felipe 98 create a festive atmosphere. The flowers in the fluvial procession symbolize devotees' gratitude for blessings, especially from fishing magnates who sponsored the event, signifying prosperity and wealth. The procession is also a time for repentance and seeking healing, a highly sought-after blessing from Santo Niño. Many devotees believe that wiping linens and cloth on the replica during the procession is a way to seek healing from their illnesses.

Fluvial Parade as Celebration of Prosperity and Thanksgiving. Devotees celebrate the Fluvial Procession of Santo Niño de Bula as a joyous expression of gratitude for the prosperity and blessings bestowed by their patron. According to one devotee, the feast is a way "*para magpasalamat sa iyaha, sa iyang bungga na blessings ug iyang kamaayo na amoang nadawat*" (to express gratitude for the abundance of blessings and goodness received). The event is a continuous expression of thanks, with devotees believing that Santo Niño blesses them. For those engaged in the fishing industry, who rely on the sea for their livelihood, the procession holds particular significance. They view Santo Niño as the source of abundant fish catches, taking part to seek ongoing protection and guidance for their work at sea. Despite the challenges, a devotee emphasized, "*bisag unsa ka ngitngit ug ka dako ang balod sa dagat, naa ang Santo Niño kauban namo*" (regardless of how big the waves were, we were accompanied by Santo Niño). The celebration is a collective expression of gratitude for fish catches and the patron's protection at sea. This tradition mirrors the observation that fiestas express gratitude to patron saints for abundant resources and nature, symbolizing thanksgiving. Santo Niño de Bula's celebration holds deep meaning for devotees, allowing them to express gratitude for blessings and protection (Domingo, 2018).

Rituals express and reinforce collective values within a society, which is clear in the devotees' celebration of the feast and participation

Figure 3

Fluvial Parade



Note. Actual Photo by Cartel, G., 2023, of a woman devotee praying intently on the patron saint of Sto. Niño de Bula

in the parade. By collectively expressing gratitude for blessings and goodness, the community reinforces shared values related to dependence on Santo Niño for prosperity. Additionally, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, Herbert Blumer advocates, the Fluvial Procession serves as a symbolic expression of shared meaning among devotees (Tiangco, 2020). The communal celebration becomes a shared symbolic act of gratitude, enhancing social integration and reinforcing a collective understanding of the significance of Santo Niño in their lives.

Fluvial Parade as Form of Atonement.

Observations during the Santo Niño de Bula feast reveal diverse ways of commemorating the patron saint. Many devotees view the procession as a sacrificial act, enduring both the intense heat and lengthy walks throughout the fluvial procession. The act of carrying the Santo Niño is seen as a symbol of repentance and a means to seek forgiveness for transgressions, despite the physical discomforts and hardships faced along the way. According to a devotee, the weight and challenge of carrying the Santo Niño are insignificant compared to the profound significance of repenting for their sins, saying, "We never minded the heaviness and difficulty of carrying the Santo Niño because it was a way for us to repent of our sins."

The observance of the Santo Niño de Bula feast, particularly the symbolic act of carrying the patron saint during the fluvial procession, can be

understood through symbolic interactionism. Devotees view this act as a symbol of repentance, emphasizing shared meanings and creating a sense of communal identity. In the context of symbolic interactionism, the physical challenges of the procession become secondary to the profound symbolic significance attached to seeking forgiveness for transgressions. During the patronal celebration, devotees seek forgiveness and honor their patron saint through acts of tribute and penance (Catado, et al., 2016). This period allows devotees to ask for pardon, cleanse their souls, and show repentance through sacrifice, hoping for forgiveness and spiritual renewal through devotion.

Fluvial Parade as Inter-generational Gathering.

The Fluvial Procession of Santo Niño de Bula is a celebration that brings together devotees of various age groups, often accompanied by their families and led by an elder, reflecting the intergenerational nature of the feast. During the procession, an elderly devotee was seen with her grandson, who traveled with heavy bags and a jacket just to see the fluvial parade. Another interviewee noted an elderly individual from Bula member celebrating the feast with her family, expressing gratitude for their lives. It is not limited to adults or those who are physically capable; instead, it attracts people of different ages, each with their reasons for taking part. Despite diverse motivations, the common goal is to thank Santo Niño as their patron. Thus, the fluvial procession is

not only for adults but also for those who can. The event is inclusive of all age groups within the community, each taking part for several reasons, yet united by a common goal: to express their gratitude to the Santo Niño, their patron. On the same trajectory of intergenerational activity, a study investigated the viability and advantages of employing intergenerational group reminiscence to empower older adults and enhance children's beliefs of aging. The study suggests that intergenerational reminiscence has educational benefits for young students, offering a personal perspective on historical facts and allowing them to explore the past through the eyes of those who experienced it. Furthermore, intergenerational reminiscence can enhance community cohesion among children and encourage the rediscovery of local folk traditions (Gaggioli, et al., 2014). Similarly, the investigation of intergenerational group reminiscence in this study highlights the potential of these activities to connect older adults and young students. Such interactions provide educational benefits, foster a sense of community, and help preserve local traditions. These examples highlight the enduring power of communal celebrations and intergenerational connections in enriching the cultural fabric of a community.

Fluvial Parade as Belief on Flowers on Amphibian. Devotees believed that Santo Niño blessed the flowers from the amphibian sea vessel, and they sought ways to get them. These flowers were seen as sources of money, blessings, luck, and prosperity, as said by the vendors, "*magsilbing pampaswerte man gud ni siya maong naga-kuha jud mi ani kada pista sa Niño.*" This implies that "it serves as luck, that is why we aim to get every fiesta of the Santo Niño." She also added that "Blessings man gud ni siya unya palayaon namo ni ug taguon kay inig muabot napud isa ka tuig, magkuha napud mi ani inig musaulog mi sa pista sa Santo Niño". It means that "this is a blessing, and we let it wither and keep it and by the next year, we will get another flower if we join the fiesta." The flower picking during the fiesta has become a tradition to people because the devotees believe in every sacrifice, they make for Santo Niño will have a return of more blessings from the patron. According to the participants of a similar study, the flower symbolizes health and blessings. That is why they are doing flower drops and collecting flowers, as it serves as their devotion to the Santo Niño (Catado, et al., 2016).

Dancing at Sinulog Festival

One of the main activities of the Santo Niño de Bula Festival is the Sinulog, a unique and entertaining dance mimicking the flow of water.

The Sinulog began at 1 p.m. in the Sto. Niño de Bula Parish Pastoral Center continued until midnight, attracting a steady flow of devotees. Participants of all ages danced in unison, moving like a water current. After attending mass, devotees gathered at the parish gym for the Sinulog dance, some holding Santo Niño figures, others dressing their babies just like the patron. The repetitive music filled the air, and people joyfully danced to express their devotion. Unlike other Sinulog, this one in Bula wasn't a competition, so there were no costumes, drums, or lyres, just repeated song playing. Different sub-themes appeared, reflecting happiness, gathering, thanksgiving, prayer, communal action, satisfaction, and tradition, each with unique expressions and values.

Sinulog Festival as Celebration. Feasts, particularly the Sinulog, radiate a palpable sense of joy. The Sinulog dance venue buzzes with people of all ages, including devotees, visitors, and vendors. Despite the scorching heat in the parish gym, individuals engage in various activities—some pray with closed eyes, while others energetically dance. A devotee expressed, "*Maka lingaw maong ga sayaw ko*" (it is fun, that's why I'm dancing). Over the course of the Sinulog dance, a female devotee in her 30s shared, "*Ang kaning sayaw kay kalipay namo ni among gina batyag na gina alay kay Santo Niño tungod wala mi niya gipasagdan*" (we dance to express the happiness we feel, which we offer to Santo Niño for not forsaking us). When a family was asked about their smiles despite the heat and fatigue, they simply replied, "*Lingaw kaayo ang Sinulog*" (Sinulog is very enjoyable).

The vibrant atmosphere and joy experienced during events such as the Sinulog, especially in the context of dancing, can be supported by Émile Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence. According to Durkheim, collective rituals and celebrations create a heightened emotional state among participants, fostering social integration and reinforcing community bonds (Durkheim, 1912). In the Sinulog context, the shared experience of dancing reflects this collective effervescence, as devotees express their joy collectively, reinforcing their sense of unity and shared devotion to Santo Niño. The dance becomes a symbolic manifestation of communal celebration, gratitude, and shared emotions within the religious and cultural context of the Sinulog festival.

The vibrant atmosphere and joy experienced during the Sinulog feast reflect not only faith and devotion but also the participants' emotions, particularly their happiness associated with significant life events. It is noteworthy that Filipinos express gratitude for the simple blessings

that God provides (Domingo, 2018).

Sinulog Festival as Family. Sinulog served as a gathering for devotees, especially those separated by distance. Many people danced with their families, highlighting the importance of togetherness during the celebration. A family wearing the same shirts said *“Daghan kayo mi diri sa karon, kuyog akong mga igsuon na anak ni papa, akong mga apo, pagumangkon, apo sa tuhod ug mga ka ig-agawan. Permite jud mi naga tapok para aning kapistahan ni Santo Niño”* (We are here right now together with my siblings, my grandchildren, my nephew, great-grandchildren, and my cousins. We always went here together yearly for the feast of Santo Niño). Coming from her words, it is indeed a glimpse of reunion to their family, this fiesta became their reason to be intact yearly. A female devotee said, *“Kuyog nako akong buong pamilya, akong bana, anak pati usab mga pagumangkon”* (I am with my family, my husband, my child and even my nephew). As the devotee's dance in the rhythm of the Sinulog song, they show togetherness, particularly a dance for family. Similarly, a study highlighted the importance of recognizing that family rituals can create a more positive environment and better outcomes for young people. Therefore, it is essential to find ways for families to regularly engage in these rituals (Tiangco, 2020).

Sinulog Festival as Thanksgiving and Prayer. As the devotees believe that the Holy Child delivered a miracle and answered their

prayers, the whole gym where the Sinulog happened was full of people who eminently offered their prayers and thanksgiving. With their eyes closed, faithful thanksgiving and prayer were uttered while dancing the Sinulog. A woman in her 50s expressed the meaning of dancing the Sinulog. The faithful attendee said, *“Pasasalamat nako ni kay Santo Niño sa tanan blessings na iyang gi hatag ug sa akong nadawat”* (This is my thanksgiving to Santo Niño for the blessings that he gave, and I received).

During the festival, many devotees expressed their gratitude for the blessings their families received throughout the year. According to a study, thanksgiving is a form of prayer offered when one's requested blessings have already been granted (Domingo, 2018). These testimonies of miracles and stories of prayer and devotion reinforced their faith in Santo Niño as their patron saint. Researchers also met these narratives. During the Sinulog, the team noticed a child dressed as Santo Niño being danced by her mother, the mother said, *“Magabayan sad ni Santo Niño iyang pagdako og maging maayong bata sama niya,”* (So that he will be guided by Santo Niño as he grows up and becomes a good child like him). Devotees dance and perform dance steps carrying their thanksgiving and prayer to the Santo Niño. The depictions of Sinulog rites span from the natives' struggle between good and evil, the recovery from a feared illness, and thanksgiving for an abundant crop or catch in fishing. Additionally, informants stress that developing new concepts is acceptable if they preserve the worship aspect (Tiangco, 2020).

Figure 4

Stories in every step



Note. Actual Photo by Cartel, G., of the hundreds of devotees dancing to Sinulog Beat carrying their own image of Sto. Niño de Bula

Sinulog Festival as Communal Action.

The devotees dance synchronously with common steps as the Sinulog song is repetitively played. With the song's lyrics "Sinulog (ha), isyagit og kusog (ha) (Pit señor, pit señor) tanan magsaulog (ha)," they dance following the majority's actions. A Middle-aged woman have said that "Nag sayaw ko kay mao man ang ginabuhay sa uban, murag ga sundog nalang bitaw kay mao man ako makita na ginabuhay nila" (I'm dancing because it is what others are doing, I just go with the flow because it is done by many). Furthermore, there are instances where people join the crowd and dance together. There is also a case wherein children dance because their parents taught them to dance without teaching the children the context of the reasons for doing so. An eight-year-old kid said, "Gasayaw ko kay wala lang, gitudluan ra ko sa akong mama." (I'm dancing for no reason at all; it is just because my mom taught me). These narratives highlight those social interactions during the Sinulog influenced people to imitate actions, particularly the dance. In the Bula Parish Sinulog, devotees could dance as they pleased, without instructors or guides. Many chose to dance coordinated with others' movements.

Practicing Communal Hospitality

The people of Barangay Bula in the Philippines, like many Filipinos, are known for their warm hospitality, which extends to festivals like Sinulog. Their hospitality goes beyond providing food and shelter; it creates a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that makes visitors feel valued and appreciated. For example, the certain

Suarez family gladly received guests into their home and said, "Dili pani mao among handa gang ba, ga adjust paman gud mi sa pandemic uy. Dati gabuhi jud mig baboy sa isa ka tuig tapos sa gabii palang gaihaw na," (This is not the usual banquet that we had before since we are still adjusting from the pandemic. We used to domesticate a pig for a year and, then it was slaughtered at night before the day of the festival), after we asked them about their preparations. She added that offering food to others is a form of sharing all the goodness God has given them. In addition to this, a group of people sitting outside of their house while drinking and laughing said, "Pila ra may pakaon sa mga bisita pero ang grasya sa Ginoo na iyang gi hatag sa tibuok tuig kay labaw pa. Kulang ra kaayo ning pag pakaon tawon namo kesa sa hatag sa Ginoo" (There are only a few things to serve food for the guests but the grace of the Lord that he has given throughout the year is more. Sharing food with others is not enough compared to what God has provided). The festival is an avenue for the residents of Bula to show the goodness of God and share the blessings they have received that were showered upon them through the form of being hospitable to guests and visitors. In this context, a study shows that communal hospitality, known as *pakikisama* or *camaraderie*, is an essential element for both society and the country. It will empower the citizenry and develop from simple socialization towards something of greater value for the survival and development of humanity (Almendras, 2018).

Communal Hospitality through Generosity. During the Sinulog festival, the people

Figure 5
Hospitality



Note. Actual Photo by Cartel, G., 2023 of a local devotee escorting a fellow towards their home for banquet

of Barangay Bula showed remarkable generosity by welcoming strangers into their homes, sharing blessings, and offering meals. This practice exemplified the deep-rooted culture of generosity, promoting a powerful sense of community and togetherness. Their clear generosity speaks to the community's selflessness and kindness.

Upon invitation and asking if it was okay to enter their house, the man said, “*Gi prepara man namo ni para ipakaon*” (We prepared it for the people to eat). The parish distributed food, and individuals prepared and shared meals with attendees, highlighting the community's generosity. This aligns with Domingo’s analysis, emphasizing that locals' hospitality, including offering meals and accommodations, is a significant draw for the festival and contributes to its continued popularity as a tourist attraction (Tiangco, 2020).

Communal Hospitality through Welcoming. The people of Bula are renowned for their warm and welcoming nature. This practice of hospitality and generosity reflect the cultural values of Bula, emphasizing relationships and unity. Whether offering accommodation or sharing food, they embody the spirit of making visitors feel at home. A group of friends shared, “*Gi invite me sa among mga barkada na taga diri*” (We were invited by our friends from here), when asked what brought them there.) In addition to this, strangers who roamed the street to experience the celebration had been invited by the residents to come inside their homes. According to a guest “*Ga lakaw lakaw ra jud ko pero manghagad man sila*” (I am just walking around but they invite me) and “*Maulaw ko musulod sa ilang balay pero grabe*

man ilang ngisi para pasudlon ko” (I became shy to enter their house, yet they are smiling to invite me inside). The devotees gave off a very welcoming attitude and atmosphere towards strangers and guests by opening their doors and displaying smiles to invite and celebrate the feast with them.

Engaging in Economic Opportunities

The Santo Niño fiesta in Bula gave economic opportunities to entrepreneurs, drawing people from various places to engage in income-generating activities.

Economic activities thrive during the Santo Niño de Bula's Sinulog festival, with vendors from both inside and outside Bula selling assorted items related to the patron, like candles, flowers, and Santo Niño clothing. Many vendors, regardless of their level of devotion, take part in this bustling street event to earn income. A flower vendor shared, “*dili man mi taga-Bula pero kada tuig mi naga tinda bisag wa pa tung pandemic.*” (We are not residents of Bula, but we come every year to sell flowers even before the pandemic.) Another vendor also added, “*nag-adto mi diria sa Bula kay gusto namo mamaligya ug mga memorabilia sa Santo Niño.*” (We came to Bula just to sell memorabilia of Santo Niño.) The festival served as an opportunity to survive daily living and generate income opportunity for the vendors as there were big crowds, which is beneficial to marketing their products. In the Sinulog period, there is an increase of 20% on the income of the business owners resulting in a positive impact on the economic stability of the city. This affects the city and other nearby places as the food to feed the crowd and

Figure 6

Busy Night



Note. Actual Photo by Cartel, 2023, of the devotees crossing alleys of vendors selling Sto. Niño de Bula memorabilia

other goods comes from the rural areas and nearby places. Overall, the Sinulog festivities can improve the city's economic growth (Almendras, 2018).

Celebrating the Fellowship of Family and Friends

The Santo Niño de Bula Festival offered a reunion opportunity for devotees after a two-year pandemic break. People from diverse backgrounds came together for several reasons, uniting for family, tradition, and bonding.

Fellowship through Reunion. Reuniting is a cherished Filipino tradition during unique events. The Santo Niño de Bula Festival serves as a time for individuals to gather with loved ones, friends, and colleagues, strengthening bonds as part of the celebration. As a member of a family told the team that *“Kanang pag tapok namo diri, kay ga tapok man gud mi basta piyesta kay karun lang pud mag kita kita sa amoang mga pamilya na nag dayo pa diri sa Bula para maki-pyesta”* (When we gather here, it's because we usually come together during festivities. It's only now that we get to see our families who came all the way to Bula to join the celebration), which is similar to a mother who joyfully greeted the team, *“Kani sila akoang mga pinsan og ig agaw, basta pyesta mao pud ng time mag kita-kita mi kay mag uli man gyud na sila diri”* (These are my cousins and relatives; during celebrations, that's also the time we meet because they really come back here) thus, the celebration is a way for them to see each other after some time. Added, another family shared that during the festival, their members outside Bula are

always invited to join them through all means necessary, for it has been their family tradition. *“Sa tinuod lang, basta nay piyesta amoa gyud na permi gina pangitaan og pama-agi maka byahe lang sila diri inig kay mao ma nang amoang ginahimo gyud sa pamilya”* (To be honest, whenever there's a festival, they always find a way to travel here just to join us because that's really what our family always does).

Meanwhile, workmates or friends of locals reunited and flocked in the area for no reason other than fellowship and bonding. *“Mga ka-workmates nako ni sila, akoang gi invite kay para maka tapok tapok nasad mi, pero mas bibo mi sauna na pyesta tung wala pay pandemic”* (They are my co-workers; I invited them so we could gather again, but we used to be livelier during festivals before the pandemic). Similar words coming from a person who works somewhere in Brgy. Calumpang: *“Mga ka-trabaho nako ni sila diha sa (Brgy.) Calumpang, wala may duty, unya mga laagan mani sila, pero permi gyud ko ga invite dati pa saila basta piyesta”* (They are my colleagues in (Barangay) Calumpang. When there's no duty, they are wanderers, but I always invite them, even way back, whenever there's a festival). Also, after asking, Sir, kamusta inyong celebration sa pyesta? (Sir, how was your celebration during the festival?) They replied, *“Ok lang sir, lingaw man kay gi invite mi samong barkada na taga diri para mag kita-kita og enjoy kay lingaw man daw pyesta diri.”* (It's okay, sir. It was fun because we are invited by our friends from here to meet and enjoy, as the festival here is said to be enjoyable.) They told the team that the gathering was all because

Figure 7

Reunion



Note. Actual Photo by Cartel, G., 2023, of family members catching up on a family gathering

they were invited by their friend who happened to live in Bula, they told the team that the gathering was all because they were invited by their friend who happen to live in Bula, and that they were all excited for the fun that the festival was going to give them.

On the perspectives of outsiders, *"Ge dayo pa jud namo ba gikan Davao kay lahi raman jud ilahang sinulog diri ug naa sad akoa uban na pamilya diri, gusto sad naku sila makauban"* (We really came from Davao because their Sinulog here is different, and I also have my family here. I also want them to be with us) such urge to reunite with her family in Bula was made possible because of the celebration of Santo Niño de Bula festival. This is also all true to young ones who wanted to reunite and experience the fun in the festival: *"Gusto lang nako maeksperyens ang lingaw sa pyesta kauban akoang mga amigo, kay na postponed man ni 3 years kay nag pandemic"* (I just want to experience the fun of the festival with my friends because it got postponed for 3 years due to the pandemic).

The Santo Niño de Bula festival is a reunion for families, friends, and workmates after a 3-year pause due to the pandemic. The festival highlights the joy of reuniting with loved ones without restrictions. Filipinos look up to the Holy Family as a way of inspiration in keeping the family ties stronger. This can be seen on special occasions like the Sinulog Festival, which involves the coming home of some family members from a prolonged stay away from home. This can be concluded that the family reunion is one of the underlying themes of the Sinulog festival (Cabilao, 2014).

Fellowship through Bonding. Bond reflects the Filipino spirit of community, inclusivity, and hospitality. People of similar faith take part together in rituals, and strangers are welcomed into homes for meals, highlighting the warm and fun-loving nature of Filipinos.

The researchers handedly experienced individuals, compelling them to come inside their homes and eat with them. As they said it, *"Nangaon namo? Hala pangaon sa mo diri sa sulod...daghan pa kaayog pagkaon diri"* (Did you eat? Come and eat here inside... there's a lot of food here) and *"Ma'am sulod sa mo ma'am kay basi ginapanggutom namo ba, ali sulod sa mo"* (Ma'am, please come inside, ma'am, in case you are hungry. Come inside). These two are just some of the many invitations cast out by locals to newcomers.

From the vantage point of outsiders, *"Ana man gud among friend na taga diri na lingaw daw ang piyesta og gi invite ra pud"* (Our friend who is from here said that the festival is fun, so she invited

us), similarly to a group of youths, who identified themselves as non-Catholics, said, *"Dili man mi katoliko, te (referring to her friends), karun lang sad mi ka try ani kay lingaw man ana among barkada na taga diri (all laughing)"* (We're not Catholic (referring to her friends), we're just trying this now because it seems fun according to our friends from here (all laughing). And she also added, *"Sabay sabay lang gud kay amigo man."* (We're just going together because we're friends). The festival may be a religious celebration, but for the people or devotees who shared the fun and bonded with their friends from different religious affiliations, it is their way of strengthening their relationship.

Applying the principle of symbolic interactionism, this festival serves as a metaphorical space where people of similar faith unite in shared rituals, and even those from different religious backgrounds come together, transcending differences for shared enjoyment and celebration. Moreover, the hospitality and invitations extended by locals to researchers align with the sociological theory of social exchange. The locals' offering of meals and invitations into their homes stands for a form of reciprocity, a fundamental aspect of social exchange theory (Homans, 1958). By inviting newcomers and researchers to partake in their celebrations, the locals are setting up social bonds, strengthening community ties, and fostering a sense of belonging.

The experiences of non-Catholic youths taking part in the festivities highlight the festival's role in building social cohesion and strengthening relationships across religious lines. This interfaith bonding, as seen in the festivities, aligns with sociological perspectives on multiculturalism and social integration, emphasizing the ability of shared celebrations to bridge diverse communities (Pierson, 2000).

Fellowship as Family Tradition. The celebration of the festival is deeply intertwined with family tradition, serving as a unifying force that brings generations together. The tradition of gathering for shared beliefs and practices is handed down from older to younger generations. As one family member expressed, *"Sauna pa man gud Sir, mahimo ra gyud na magtapok mi og mag sabay manimba kay amoang mga katiguwangan sauna, sila man gud tung isa sa nag salubong kay Niño."* (Back then, Sir, it was a widespread practice for us to gather and attend mass together because our elders used to do that, as they were the ones who started the welcome for the Santo Niño.) This highlights the continuity of family practices, especially in attending holy mass, tracing back to their great-grandfather's involvement in the

Salubong rite for Santo Niño at the Bula parish church. Another family, found outside the church, emphasized the enduring nature of their tradition, saying, "*Dugay naman gud namo ni na tradition sa pamilya na mag tapok og mantiid sa piyesta kay gikan pa ni saamong mga ginikanan sauna, labi na kay mama.*" (We have indeed been seeing this tradition in our family for a long time, gathering and watching the festival because it has been passed down from our parents, especially from our mother.) This underscores the festival's role in not only uniting families but also fostering a sense of community, as many individuals from the community echoed that it has been a longstanding family tradition that gathers them for the celebration.

Conclusion

The research goal is to describe how people participate in the various Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta activities and what meanings they attach to them. The data presented shows that the Santo Niño de Bula is celebrated through a variety of religious practices. Based on the analysis of observation data, the spiritual practices observed during the fiesta included the Holy Mass, the procession of the Santo Niño, a fluvial parade, and the Sinulog. It is important to note that attendees and devotees followed a specific flow, striving to take part in all the religious activities. The most vivid flow of events observed was that, after the Mass conducted during the fiesta, attendees moved to the parish gymnasium where the Sinulog was taking place.

This study also implies that people devotedly take part in the fiesta's activities, attaching meanings to their engagement. Significantly, the dominant theme is devotion to the Santo Niño, expressed in religious practices such as participation in Holy Mass, the procession of the Santo Niño, a fluvial parade, and the Sinulog dance. The fiesta also reinforces important Filipino values such as hospitality, gathering, family bonds, and economic activities. Holy Mass is seen as the assembly of the faithful for thanksgiving and to ask for healing and protection from the patron. The procession is considered a form of sacrifice. During the inland procession, people show strong faith and devotion to the Santo Niño by walking for three hours and saying prayers to express their gratitude. The procession is a tradition in Bula allows people to show their devotion and creativity by decorating carriages. Additionally, the fluvial parade holds great significance for the local fishers and fishing magnates in Bula. The decorations and musical arrangements create a festive atmosphere for the event. The Fluvial parade played a key role in the

celebration. It was seen as a prayer offered by the fishing industry in Sarangani Bay, where they celebrate the abundance of their fish catch and give thanks for their prosperity. Moreover, Sinulog is an expression of joy, an avenue for families to gather for prayer and thanksgiving, and dance to the beat of the music. This implication of the study aligns with the Symbolic Interactionism theory, which posits that individuals actively construct and interpret the meaning of their social world through symbolic communication and interaction. In the context of the festivities, the significance associated with the Santo Niño shows that participants are not just taking part in religious activities; they are also infusing their involvement with personal and collective meanings.

Recommendations

Researchers claim that this study helps create a fact-based understanding of a unique and shared celebration. But by grasping both the etic and emic view of a religious-cultural event, researchers acknowledge the following recommendations:

Exploration of people's agency for their participation suggests further enhancement and expansion of the study that delves deeply into the narratives on other customary practices as the paper is pivoted alone at the observed major events. Data on the healing ritual, for example, were not as comprehensive. This only shows that the celebration is multi-faceted.

For future research, the authors recommend incorporating other data collection tools, such as analyzing social media posts and using video recording devices, to enhance the depth of data analysis and discussion. Other than that, it would likely bridge the presentation to various social media platforms.

Recommendation for the parish church to continue to preach the relevance of Santo Niño in the lives of the people of Barangay Bula for cultural heritage and development and strengthening of devotion, especially for the youth and younger generation. More so, its 50th Anniversary is fast approaching, and historical and collective accounts are ideally needed to recall and give light on the shared memory and traditions of the devotees.

Account for the live experiences and meanings attached by the organizers and parish officials in organizing Santo Niño de Bula Fiesta.

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