

Sa Awa ng Diyos: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Panata Among Filipina Black Nazarene Devotees in Low-Income Communities

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Panata, a prominent part of the Filipino culture, is a religious vow whereby devotees offer a sacrifice for thanksgiving, petition, or repentance in hopes of being rewarded by divine promise. This study focused on the experience of panata among female Black Nazarene devotees from low-income communities and sought to understand how they make sense of these experiences. Eleven participants from the Ladies of the Black Nazarene and Kababaihan ng Bukluran were interviewed. Three themes were identified using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), namely: feeling of loss and hopelessness, and experience of vulnerability as entry points to panata; self-transformation as a result of integrating panata into everyday life; and transition from panata as a personal vow to a social responsibility. The uniqueness of their experiences, brought about by the intersection of gender and socioeconomic status, was examined through the intersectionality theory. Panata is seen as a guiding principle for everyday life and a reflection of structural vulnerability. These devotional activities are also a way of life that can build cooperative communities, promote authentic moral behavior, and empower the structurally vulnerable.

Keywords: *panata*, Black Nazarene, women, low-income, intersectionality

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Panata, defined as a religious vow to act in accordance with ritual obligations, is a common practice among many Filipino Catholics in expressing their religious devotion (Bautista, 2017). By actively participating in church activities, devotees offer a sacrifice in thanksgiving, to request a petition, or ask for repentance in the hopes of being rewarded by God (Tiatco & Bonifacio-Ramolete, 2008). With a predominantly Christian population, the Philippines is among the most religious countries in Asia and is known for its array of religious festivals. Among these, the Feast of the Black Nazarene is said to be the most massive expression of Filipino Catholic faith and of panata (Calano, 2018).

The Feast of the Black Nazarene has been considered as highly popular due to the practice of *Traslacion*, the procession of the dark wooden sculpture of Jesus Christ, kneeling on one knee and clad in a maroon-colored robe while carrying a large wooden cross. Millions of devotees flock to the sacred image, which is believed to have special powers to grant miracles to its devotees (Deguma, Case, & Tandag, 2015). Even though the event causes hundreds of injuries each year, the number of devotees nevertheless keeps increasing. The ritual remains highly meaningful to the devotee despite the risks of danger (Avelino & Matienzo, 2015). As panata is an intimate vow between the self and God, the experience of participating in the Feast of the Black Nazarene remains unique for every devotee and is contextually grounded as a result of varying circumstances (McGuire, 2008). As Calano (2020) further explained, panata is (1) a personal vow that is interiorly inspired, (2) performed communally and publicly, and (3) contextually and materially embedded.

While panata remains a unique experience for every individual, expressions of religious devotion differ among social classes. According to a study conducted by Schieman (2010), individuals with low socioeconomic status tend to report higher levels of belief in divine control and religious participation. Correspondingly, the biggest percentage of Black Nazarene devotees belongs to the low socioeconomic group (Deguma et al., 2015). Their religious devotion is connected to their conviction that a person's true worth resides in their inner self and in their ability to live through suffering and pain, regardless of their outer worth (Ileto, 1979; Llana, 2014). Moreover,

devotees from lowland Christian communities are inspired to commit acts of self-sacrifice by the belief that they are sharing in the suffering of Christ (Peterson, 2017). This sacrifice is made possible through *damay* or compassion, which is an important concept in Filipino culture. Studies also show that women are more religious than men. In a study conducted by Mataragnon (1984), females across all social classes were more religious in terms of dedication to the Church and frequency of involvement in seasonal religious practices. Women were expected to be mediums between humans and the spiritual realm, being exemplars of religious devotion (Drum, 2001). In fact, a marked feature of low-income neighborhoods is that the local religious practices are led by women who are often married and elderly. However, even as women play prominent roles in local areas, religious power still remains in the hands of men from the time Christianity was introduced to the country (Drum, 2001). Up to this day, gender and socioeconomic status continue to be a source of marginalization even in religious institutions. It can be argued that female religious devotees from low-income communities can have unique experiences as a minority group. We propose that devoting themselves to panata may be an avenue for women to exercise their sense of agency beyond the social structure that restricts them.

The current study explores the experiences of panata among female Black Nazarene devotees from low-income communities. Given the context presented earlier, the research takes into account the intersection of gender and socioeconomic status in their religious experiences as devotees.

We review the literature in the next two sections. First, religious devotion is defined within the Philippine context, specifically in relation to the Feast of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo. Second, studies on religiosity among women in low-income communities are tackled.

Religious Devotion in the Philippines

In this section, we discuss religious devotion in relation to the following elements within the Philippine context: (1) ritual obligations accompanying the panata especially to the Black Nazarene of Quiapo, (2) *Bahala na* mentality in the performance of panata, and (3) an

agentive and relational view of panata.

Ritual obligations. Bautista (2017) defined panata as a vow or pledge to act in accordance with ritual obligations. The motivation for making the panata is always associated with petitions for health, success, happiness, and the like. Filipinos believe that participation in church practices show that they are remorseful for their sins and this, in turn, will enable them to heal any ailment and solve any problem (Jocano, 1966; Tuason, 2008). Devotees may also perform panata with the belief that it will shorten one's time in purgatory or pay the debt of gratitude to God (Deguma et al., 2015; Matienzo, 2016). Calano (2020) also described panata as a response to a petition, a type of sacrifice or penance, and an act of gratitude.

For Black Nazarene devotees, there are two rituals. First, the wiping ritual is when the devotees wait in line to wipe the glass-covered case of the Santo Entierro or the Black Nazarene. Second, the kissing ritual is where one devotee anoints the statue with perfume before kissing and murmuring prayers (Kahambing, 2019). This devotion to the Black Nazarene points to what the image represents: Jesus Christ. Since spirituality is a person's way of understanding and experiencing the divine (Capiro & Reyes, 2019), the annual Traslacion is meant to be a journey with Jesus, carrying one's crosses alongside him (Kahambing, 2019). As time passes, majority of the devotees see panata as a lifelong engagement and continue to hold onto their solemn promise, regardless of whether their petitions were granted or not (Deguma et al., 2015).

Bahala na mentality. During the Traslacion, people appear unfazed by the risk of getting injured in the crowd in order to practice their panata (Bautista, 2017). When the devotees were asked whether the death of their fellow devotees affected their decision to continue their panata, many replied, "Bahala na!" (Avelino & Matienzo, 2015, p. 90). They believe that as long as they express their faith to the Black Nazarene, what may happen along the way does not matter (Menguito & Calleja, 2010). The ritual affirms Abraham's double movement of faith in the book of Genesis: resignation of everything and receiving everything (Avelino & Matienzo, 2015). Moreover, it attests to the religiosity of Filipinos and their patient endurance for God (Kahambing, 2019). There are three significant elements of this

mentality. First is the certitude of uncertainty where the devotee freely and willfully accepts all possibilities, even injuries, and places absolute trust in the object of faith. Second, the act of believing is filled with personal meaningfulness that even in the face of danger in performing the ritual, it remains worth doing to the believer, a feeling only a fellow devotee can understand. Lastly, the devotee is fueled by passion, an inward strength to serve for as long as he or she is able that becomes their expression of faith in God. In sum, participating in the *Traslacion* is “a religious experience characterized by a personal trust towards the uncertain that comes from one’s inward and passionate religiosity” (Avelino & Matienzo, 2015, p. 95).

Religious agency. As defined by Bautista (2017), religious agency is “predicated upon a porosity of interior states, one that involves the outward channeling of inner personhood towards an intersubjective relationship with a trusted inter-subject” (p. 160). In *panata*, religious agency is an experience of affect that goes beyond the parameters of the human body and can be shared with another person going through the same experience. Among lowland Christian communities in the Philippines, the concept of *damay* or compassion is an integral part of the motivation for self-sacrifice and identifying with the suffering Christ (Peterson, 2017). The act of sacrifice stemming from *damay* is a manifestation of the devotee’s response to his or her inner core—to communicate and identify with God (Tiatco & Bonifacio-Ramolete, 2008). Hence, *panata* is a private vow that is performed with the rest of the community and integrates the person’s *loob* (interior) with the *labas* (exterior) through performance (Calano, 2020; Peterson, 2017). This tradition liberates the hearts of devotees and *panata* is a symbol of the concreteness of their devotion, a notable trait of religious Filipinos (Abdullah et al., 2013).

Religiosity Among Women in Low-Income Communities

This section looks into the past and present of women’s involvement in religion, such as what religious engagement means for them and the limitations placed in their religious activities. In an earlier study, Lynch and Makil (1968) concluded that women are expected to become mediums between humans and the spiritual realm. Female

religiosity seems less normative, more devotional, and experiential in nature, while male religiosity tends to be more normative or doctrinal. When the Spanish friars arrived in the Philippines, they particularly pursued overthrowing the female religious leadership. Despite this, women remained active in public spaces such as religion and the economy during the Spanish colonial rule. For example, women who are often senior and married led the local practices in low-income neighborhoods. However, formal power was in the hands of men, particularly in political and religious discourse (Drum, 2001).

This patriarchal structure impeded women's agency (Sanchez, 2016). Filipino women were restricted and confined under this new system and all women who opposed religious authority were demonized. Although men and women both exercise power in a religious setting, there are specific gendered expressions of power. For example, male leadership is defined by their aggressiveness and their ability to influence through military prowess. Women, on the other hand, exert power through beauty and religiosity. Despite this, women still find a way to appropriate religious power and find ways to act within the structure (Israel-Sobritchea, 1996). For instance, priests objected to the common practice of women carrying the Marian statue in procession on holy days, but women still continued to do so. Although the male leaders were unable to stop them, they emphasized that the women involved should at least be clothed in a seemly fashion (Fernandez, 1979). This highlights the stereotype set for women to be prim, proper, and exemplars of good behavior while subjected to male religious power, which still applies today.

However, religious devotion such as participating in processions and other forms of panata are perceived to be expressive of the collective agency where the devotee, along with the religious community, addresses their problems by offering them to God (Leone, 2014). Given that low-income members of society, even more so the women, are at a disadvantage in exercising power within the religious setting, panata can be conceived as an avenue for women to exercise agency beyond the patriarchal structure of the Church. Such agency can further influence their everyday lives. As Iletto (1979) explained in his research, one's devotion is connected to their conviction that a person's true worth resides in their inner self. The ability to go through

suffering and pain as a form of devotion shows that one's inner worth is strong and meaningful, regardless of their outer worth (Drum, 2001).

The Current Study

Studies show that people from low socioeconomic status are more religious. Their acts of self-sacrifice are motivated by their compassion or dismay when they link their own suffering with the suffering of Christ (Ileto, 1979; Peterson, 2017). Identifying with the Black Nazarene is one of the ways they communicate and identify with God. Moreover, women across all social classes are more religious because of their expected social role as a medium between humans and the spiritual realm and as an exemplar for the church (Lynch & Makil, 1968). However, there remains a dearth of studies that examine the religious experiences of women from low socioeconomic status. This research sought to address the gap in literature by exploring the meaning-making behind the practice of Filipino popular devotion by female devotees from low-income communities. The study also examined the personal meanings that female devotees attach to panata as experienced from within their specific gender and social class. Indeed, as Calano (2020) argued, the phenomenon of panata is both personal and communal, as well as contextually and materially grounded in the society where the person is situated. Interpretative phenomenological analysis and intersectionality theory were used in this study as approaches to understanding religious devotion among female devotees from low-income communities.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an approach in qualitative psychological research that explores how people make sense of their lived experiences. This approach requires the researcher to collect reflective, first-person accounts from research participants (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Coyle, 2008). Within this approach, participants were asked to describe and articulate their personal understanding of panata. This method has three theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, idiography, and double

hermeneutics. Specifically, IPA makes use of Heidegger's assertions, considering the phenomenological inquiry as an interpretative process (Shinebourne, 2011). Meaning is derived through scrutinizing female devotees' lived experiences and asking the participants to narrate the phenomenon as they experienced and interpreted it (Helminiak, 2008). The idiographic approach is committed to a detailed analysis of particular cases, which contain unique experiences of a particular person in a specific context (Shinebourne, 2011; Syed, 2010). Double hermeneutics recognizes the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of participants as the participants also try to make sense of their own experiences (Shinebourne, 2011). The researchers examined the answers of the participants and drew logical inferences about the relationship of their idiosyncratic understandings to their staunch participation on devotional activities. The value of IPA comes from its inductive and interpretative analysis, coupled with the researchers' skills in conceptualizing themes that ground the analytic procedure in a close examination of what the participant has said (Smith & Osborn, 2015). In the present study, this approach was used to determine the meaning that the female devotees hold about their experiences of panata, in light of their gender and their socioeconomic status.

Integrating Intersectionality Framework With IPA

Drawing from the argument that panata is both personal and communal, as well as contextually and materially grounded in the society where the person is situated (Calano, 2020), this research also looked at the significance of adopting intersectionality theory to better understand how the intersection of gender and social class shaped the lived experience of panata among female devotees. Norris and Inglehart (2011) forwarded the existential security hypothesis which states that religion is a coping mechanism for structurally vulnerable people. For example, unemployed people have a tendency to be more religious. However, for poor women specifically, there is an experience of the comingling of two disadvantages (Cole, 2009; Veenstra, 2011). Women were marginalized at the start of Spanish colonization when Spanish friars established that men should hold the power in

church, and women were expected to merely follow their orders. This is despite women also being commonly the leaders of low-income communities who served as good examples to others. Therefore, women in impoverished situations may have a unique experience of being belittled based on their gender yet are given enough power to be an exemplar and influence in their local community (Dravitzki, 2015).

The present study explored Filipina devotees' unique experiences of panata within the intersectionality of gender and socioeconomic status. Such structural conditions are assumed to cross over into the experiential dimension, where subjective meanings may manifest as effects of the aforementioned structural disadvantages. The study sought to answer the question: "What are the subjective experiences of religious devotion, such as panata, among Filipina devotees from low-income communities?" More specific research questions include the following:

1. How do the Filipina devotees make sense of religious devotion, specifically their lived experiences of panata, in relation to their lives as women within low-income communities?
2. How do accounts of religious devotion among Filipina devotees demonstrate the intersection of gender and social class in religion?

METHOD

The present study used qualitative methods to examine the lived experiences of panata among Filipina devotees within low-income communities. In the succeeding sections, we discuss information regarding the participants as well as the procedures for data collection and analysis, which were guided by theoretical and methodological underpinnings related to IPA and intersectionality framework.

Participants

A characteristic of IPA is its commitment to a detailed account of the cases included, thus favoring a small sample size (Smith & Osborn, 2007). In this study, there were 11 participants engaged based on the following criteria: (1) at least 30 years old; (2) a member of a religious

organization for female Black Nazarene devotees for at least five years; and (3) belongs to a low-income group. Eight participants were from the Ladies of the Black Nazarene, an all-female organization that serves as ushers in Quiapo church in Manila, while three were from Kababaihan ng Bukluran, formerly a basic ecclesial community but presently serves the Quiapo church as well.

All the participants resided in small single-family homes along the narrow streets of Quiapo. Ten of the participants were married and six of the interviewees were either retired or unemployed. Two of the participants chose to be housewives, taking care of the children while their husband works. Others still make a living by selling food on the streets despite their old age to support their children, grandchildren, or even siblings and in-laws. While most of their children already have their own families, some of the devotees still live with their children and attend to their needs.

Recruitment procedure. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. The researchers sent letters to leaders of religious organizations that are linked to devotional practices to request for help in recruiting potential participants. Once they consented, the researchers set a face-to-face appointment to discuss the details of the study.

Ethical safeguards. The study underwent an ethics review and obtained clearance from the university's research ethics committee. The head of the organization served as the mediator between the researchers and the participants. Potential participants were screened based on the inclusion criteria. Moreover, the participants were thoroughly informed about the nature of the study and the entire procedure, including ethical safeguards highlighting how the data and their identities will remain confidential. Thus, pseudonyms were used. Those who consented were asked to suggest a convenient date, time, and place for the interview.

Data Collection Instruments

Before the interview proper, the participants were asked to signify their agreement to participate in the study by signing the informed consent form. A semi-structured interview guide was used for the

data gathering process. The interview revolved around discussions of thoughts, feelings, and meaning-making. The main interview questions were: (1) What are your experiences of panata? (2) What meanings do you attach to your experience of devotion?; and (3) How do you relate your devotion to everyday life? Interview questions were carefully selected in order to guarantee relevance and understanding.

Data Collection Procedures

The 11 participants who met the inclusion criteria and gave their consent took part in the following data collection procedures. For the Ladies of the Black Nazarene, the interviews were conducted at the back of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene, where their organization meets. For the Kababaihan ng Bukluran, the participants were interviewed outside their home in Quiapo. At the beginning, each participant was reoriented on the nature of the study. She was then asked to read and sign the informed consent, and to state her consent for audio recording. Printed copies provided were in English and Filipino for the convenience of the participant. Finally, the participant was informed that she could refuse to answer or stop the interview at any point should she feel uncomfortable with proceeding. The interview proper was conducted in Filipino, the language most comfortable to all participants. The average interview lasted for around 45 minutes. Throughout the interview, the researchers procured written notes apart from the data being audio recorded.

Data Analysis Procedures

Preparations for data analysis. After the interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions included all data and events from the recorded interviews, including gestures and pauses made by the participants, and were supplemented with the researchers' notes. The transcripts were reviewed to ensure completeness and rechecked for technical errors. Pseudonyms were used, and all data was stored in a password-protected laptop that can only be accessed by the researchers.

Data analysis. The researchers did a thorough reading of data,

taking note of keywords (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Systematic reading followed, with the initial notes written in a column next to the transcript, as suggested by Willig (2001). The initial notes were then refined into themes and subthemes. In the final reading, the themes for each interview were clustered according to their relatedness with each other. They were arranged in such a way that the master table contained a summary of clusters and themes, integrating all of the themes found in each participant's data (Iqbal, Radulescu, Bains, & Aleem, 2019). Throughout the analysis, both IPA and intersectionality theory served as frameworks for meaning-making, thus contextualizing the themes within the intersection of gender and social class. The succeeding results section presents the findings from the study. Quotes from the interviews were translated to English.

Checks for Reliability and Validity

After transcribing, the researchers checked for technical errors and compared their transcripts. They also requested for participant feedback so as to ensure the meaningfulness of the results from the perspective of the participants. The participant feedback process affirmed most of the findings presented in the results section. During data analysis, the researchers diligently kept a comprehensive log of their analytical processes, including the analysis plan, initial interpretations, and steps undertaken to reach the final themes.

RESULTS

The researchers extracted three main themes from all the interviews: (1) feelings of loss and hopelessness and experience of vulnerability as entry points to panata; (2) self-transformation as a result of integrating panata into everyday life; and (3) transition from panata as a personal vow to a social responsibility. The three themes can be seen as representing the different stages of a devotee's experience and understanding of her devotion.

Feelings of Loss and Hopelessness, and Experiences of Vulnerability as Entry Points to Devotion

The first theme focuses on the initial stage of devotion. The participants recounted the time when they started their devotion, which for majority of the participants was during a period of struggle in their respective households. They were burdened with family issues and financial constraints. This induced feelings of grief and hopelessness as they dealt with both working and taking care of the family. These negative feelings led them to seek comfort in religious beliefs, and as such opened doors to a life of devotion. This key theme branches out to two subthemes: turning to the divine during situations beyond human capacity and panata as a calling, not a personal choice.

Turning to the divine during situations beyond human capacity. At the time they started their devotion, the participants spoke about struggling with a problem perceived to be of great magnitude and beyond their control. For example, Faye felt great distress when the doctors told her that her son needed to undergo an operation in another country to survive. With her other son's drug addiction and her separation from her husband, she felt that her situation was impossible. In describing her experience, Faye recounted, "It was as if heaven and earth fell on me and I couldn't be saved." Her faith in the Black Nazarene was her last resort and, according to her, solved all her problems. Her son recovered, she eventually remarried, and during the time of the interview, she continued to serve in Quiapo church every Friday and Sunday.

Religious devotion was seen as a solution for what may be impossible for humans. According to the devotees' belief, since humans have limitations, there are situations where only the divine can have power over. Feelings such as anxiety, hopelessness, and depression prompted the participants to turn to the Black Nazarene to fill in for their shortcomings. Coming from a low socioeconomic status and dealing with the duties of both a mother and a housewife, they may also have had nowhere else to turn to for psychological help or financial assistance.

Panata as a calling, not a personal choice. Some participants believed that they did not choose to enter a life of devotion, but that

God called them into it. According to Bea, Claire, and Diane, their devotion began because they were chosen by the Black Nazarene. For example, Diane was going through a period of intense grief over the death of her child. Her neighbor suggested that she turn to the Black Nazarene, and she took this as a sign from God for her to become a devotee. In Diane's words, "I became a devotee because I have a lot of problems and because of this, it was like I was also called by the Nazarene."

At first, the devotees recalled these experiences with sorrow because of the problems they had to endure, but as they began to talk about their devotion, their tone changed into eagerness and delight, eventually seeing it as a way in which they were being drawn to the Black Nazarene who became their savior. Compared to the first subtheme where the devotee's initiative to become closer to God is highlighted, this subtheme focuses on the perceived action from the side of the divine. Instead of seeing their devotion as a commitment they chose to fulfill, the devotees believe that God played an active role in orchestrating their life experiences to eventually lead up to the moment when they joined the devotion.

Self-transformation as a Result of Integrating Panata Into Everyday Life

After consistently experiencing the rewards that came with a life of devotion, the participants came to believe that they were being blessed by the Black Nazarene. As such, they have come to see panata as part of their daily routine in constantly working to achieve a favorable life and in turn, become exemplars for the church. The feelings of ease that the devotees experienced in performing acts of panata translated into a feeling of ease in life, and they went about their lives with this feeling of contentment. In this theme, panata can be viewed in three distinct ways: a sacrifice in exchange of securing good outcomes, a source of contentment and reassurance, and a means to self-improvement. These subthemes help in understanding how panata became embedded in the everyday lives of the participants, how this integration has contributed to their transformation as persons, and how participants made sense of the transformation process as resulting from their practice of panata.

Panata as sacrifice and exchange. In this subtheme, panata is seen as an experience of hardship to receive a desired outcome. Some of the sacrifices mentioned by the devotees include waking up early in the morning, reducing the time for work in order to serve the church, and willingly participating in the Traslacion despite the risk of getting injured. The devotees believed that the time they did not spend on earning money and taking care of their family was offset by even better outcomes that were a result of allotting time to their panata.

At this stage, the devotees understand panata as an exchange. As Isabel mentioned in her interview, “one cannot expect prayers to be answered without experiencing hardship first.” Therefore, they believe that continuously putting effort into their devotional activities will somehow guarantee themselves a good life.

Panata as a source of reassurance and contentment. The devotees also highlighted their feelings of reassurance as they participated in devotional activities. As a result of having panata completely integrated into their everyday lives, the participants have learned to associate the effects of their devotion not only with favorable things but also with less desirable experiences. They believe that undesirable encounters would lead to positive outcomes in the end, or that good events are deferred according to God’s plan. Conversely, when they receive a blessing such as a job opportunity or unsolicited financial help, they also understand this as a favor from God. For example, Erica claimed, “I receive strength to tackle my daily challenges from the Black Nazarene who is always by my side.” When she experiences hardship, she pours her heart out to the Black Nazarene and this helps to calm her.

Consequently, the devotees’ belief keeps them unceasingly content no matter the state they are in. Interpreting the events in their life as all part of God’s plan, they are able to feel confident and satisfied with their reality. This helps them deal with their daily challenges as a female devotee belonging to a low-income community.

Panata as a means to self-improvement. In this subtheme, there is focus on the devotees’ process of development into a person of good moral character. Deep into their life of panata, the participants have become more concerned about the authenticity of their devotion. They recognize their faults and try to improve themselves so that

they may deserve the graces they receive. This self-improvement is characterized by hard work, moving outside their comfort zone, and resistance against temptation. For example, Isabel recognized changes in her personality such as being “more open to helping others and serving the community.” Compared to the other subthemes, this theme highlights the devotees’ initiative for self-transformation into what they believe is a better devotee and a person worthy of blessings. In a way, this process fulfills the social expectation of women becoming exemplars of the church.

Transition from Panata as a Personal Vow to a Social Responsibility

After the devotees felt a deep, personal connection to the Black Nazarene, they then developed a commitment to the Nazarene and a drive to serve others. This stage encompasses the times when the devotees continued to serve even without a petition in mind, only asking for good health to continue serving. With their long-time engagement in panata, there is a shift from an individualistic to a macro-level interpretation of panata that focuses on helping the community.

In this stage, the consistency of the devotion becomes more essential as the women put more weight on their perceived intimate relationship with the Black Nazarene. At the same time, their identity as women in low-income communities is exemplified as they become active members in their local neighborhood, following their gendered expression of power. This theme is divided into two subthemes: panata as an expression of desired commitment to the church and panata as a duty to serve the community.

Panata as an expression of desired commitment to the church. The devotees express great joy in their devotional activities and described the Quiapo church as their source of happiness. At this stage, the initial problem that had brought them to join the devotion was solved. With no other reason but wanting to keep helping out in the church, the devotees put time and effort in these services gladly and unconditionally. Claire even said, “I spend more time in church than at home.”

This feeling of great enjoyment when they are in church also

evolves into a lifelong commitment — serving until they die — that the devotees personally want to fulfill. Most of the devotees speak highly of their duties such that they wish they can live longer in order to serve longer. At this stage, their commitment to the Black Nazarene has intensified and is now rooted in consistent and selfless service.

Panata as a duty to serve the community. Similarly, the participants now saw panata as their service to the community and functions as a medium to carry out their social responsibility. This is much like the role of women as mediums between humans and the spiritual realm. With negative feelings from their past problems diminished, their focus shifted to the needs of others. For example, Kat prays for the safety of her fellow devotees during the celebration for the Black Nazarene and assists them during the Traslacion.

In this stage, after having received graces from God, they seek to bring others the same good fortune by continuing their service in the organization and extending help to the community. For Isabel, her involvement in the organization changed her from “being closed off to driven to help others.”

DISCUSSION

In this study, panata serves as a guiding principle for what the devotees think, feel, and do in all areas of their lives. It becomes a framework for understanding what happens in their lives and directing their response. Women look to their spirituality as ultimately enveloping and directing their lives; as a continuous cycle of change through which they were constantly mediating their way (Drum, 2001). Their religious devotion also developed into a reference point for their emotional disposition in life. The feelings of ease from performing their panata have encompassed their life and become a guiding force. Moreover, it becomes a paradigm that orients their lives towards commitment to serving the community as their panata demands to be lived out in all their actions. This resonates with Baring’s (2018) findings on religion and how it contributes to one’s interior dispositions, social commitment, and overall well-being.

Furthermore, panata becomes a reflection of the power dynamics that the devotees experience from the intersection of their gender

and socioeconomic status. Their panata began during a troubling experience specific to their role in the household, which induced feelings of hopelessness. As mothers and housewives, the female devotees were burdened with both taking care of their family and finding the means to support them financially as well. Their religious devotion was seen as a solution and pathway to address the problems they were dealing with at that time. Their experience of panata framed their hardships as sacrifices that will lead to positive outcomes and their lifelong commitment to their devotion is believed to guarantee them a good life for as long as they serve. This coincides with earlier findings that religion is a psychocultural resource of meaning in later life as the devotees find the significance in their hardships as their path to a closer relationship with God (Manuti, Scardigno, & Mininni, 2016). Moreover, their deep immersion in their panata has allowed them to transition to new ways of thinking and to feelings of hope, strength, and peace. This finding exemplifies the results from the study by Baring, Lee, Sta. Maria, & Liu (2016) that religion promotes mental health and other positive developmental outcomes. In turn, this transformation has allowed them to commit to their social responsibility to help and serve others in their respective communities.

Calano (2020) defined panata as a religious sacrifice or penance. The results affirm this as the devotees indeed participate in devotional activities with an intention in mind, such as giving thanks for good business or praying for the recovery of a loved one. The results also resonate with the findings that most Filipinos offer their everyday lives to a greater power and exhibit *bahala na* mentality (Ibones, Oliverio, Ondo, Tagpuno, & Inocian, 2016; Avelino & Matienzo, 2015). Believing that the positive outcomes they obtain are brought about by their panata, the participants develop confidence in God being a reliable provider and appreciation in His plan as the explanation for both answered and unanswered prayers.

The findings of this study are aligned with Peterson's (2017) argument that members of lower social classes link their own sacrifice with the suffering of Christ and this drives them to perform acts of self-sacrifice. The results exemplified that people from lower classes celebrate in their ability to live through suffering and pain as a concrete way of showing their devotion and exhibiting their inner worth.

Abdullah et al. (2013) mentioned that religious devotion liberates the hearts of the devotees. In this particular study, the female devotees also saw their devotion as liberation from the hardships and challenges brought about by the intersection of their gender and socioeconomic status. The devotees also focus on the consistency of their devotion to the Black Nazarene that eventually turns into an intimate relationship, giving emphasis to their passion to serve as long as they live. This supports the finding from Lynch and Makil (1968) that women are viewed as being closer to God and as a medium for humans and the spiritual world.

In addition, it was also observed that panata is a way of life. In integrating panata into their everyday lives, the participants developed true concern for their community and continued to serve outside of their duties. This is consistent with the findings from the study of Tiatco and Bonifacio-Ramolete (2008) as well as the study of Magpantay et al. (2014) that religious participation enables a stronger sense of self and a more productive way of life that encourages volunteerism in the community. The female devotees are able to establish their role in society as well as build a strong character that extends to their everyday lives in spite of their structural disadvantages. Although panata may be a form of liberation from the distress in their personal life, their absolute devotion to the Black Nazarene is what the church expects from women in low-income communities. During the last stage, the devotees can be seen as fulfilling their role as exemplars for the church and leaders of local communities, promoting church participation, and selfless community service.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study provided an in-depth description of the lived experiences of panata among Filipina devotees of the Black Nazarene from low-income communities. The specific focus on this particular group and experience engendered some limitations. Thus, the researchers recommend expanding the scope of inquiry by examining other experiences of devotion. The differences in petitions can play a factor in the meaning-making processes. The difference in the experience of panata of different generations can also be considered. Future studies

may look for younger devotees and compare their understanding of panata with the older generation.

Further research can be done on religious devotion as a form of community intervention that is expansive and wide-ranging. The aspect of self-transformation in religious devotion can also be examined in relation to building resilience and empowering disadvantaged groups in society. Future research can also focus on identifying factors that influence the person's initiative for self-transformation, which can be useful for individual and family interventions, and subsequently towards playing an agentic role in structural change.

Implications for Practice

Findings of the study may have some relevance to those working with communities as common religious beliefs and practice can function as a way of binding people together into cooperative communities (Graham & Haidt, 2010). Participants in this study experienced a death in the family, family feuds, and financial struggles yet they found solace in their devotion. In living out their panata, devotees become resilient and propelled to carry out acts of social responsibility. With agreement on views and cultivation of moral character, they can work together in serving their community. In this way, devotion can be helpful for coming up with community and family interventions while increasing volunteerism and unity within the group (Magpantay et al., 2014).

Those in the practice of counseling or clinical psychology may also apply specific implications from this study as panata steers devotees into a fulfilling life and promotes taking initiative for self-help. Religious coping is widespread among patients with psychiatric disorders, facilitating emotional adjustment, and maintaining optimism (Hefti, 2011). Psychological interventions that contain religious elements are effective in reducing levels of emotional distress as the religious aspect consists of a set of values and living standards that people utilize in stressful situations (Levin, 2010; Khan, Mughal, & Khan, 2013).

Conclusion

In summary, panata is the undertaking of ritualistic, religious

activities, particularly arduous and time-consuming ones that are offered by the devotee as sacrifices for God, in the belief that accomplishing such activities will allow the devotee to reap physical, spiritual, and emotional benefits.

Such undertaking becomes a valid, even desirable, option primarily for the female devotees who face various hardships in their day-to-day lives, such as poverty and marginalization in a patriarchal society. For these women, panata becomes their source of reassurance and hope, as mothers and housewives who take care of their families amid financial struggles. The practice of panata provided an avenue to exercise their agency beyond their role as mother and housewife.

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We dedicate this study to women who are experiencing poverty. May this study empower you to rise in every occasion.

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