

Masculinity and the ‘Holy Child’ of the *Birhen sa Balintawak*

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Abstract

The *Birhen sa Balintawak* is the first indigenous representation of the ‘Virgin-with-child’ in the Philippines. Associated with the revolutionary movement of the Katipunan and promoted by Gregorio Aglipay, a revolutionary priest and a founding figure of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, this representation of Mary is connected with the political and religious emancipation of the Philippines. This paper explores the construction of the masculinity of the child that accompanies its mother, arguing that its description and depiction both serve to uplift a particular kind of Filipino (revolutionary) masculinity by legitimizing it religiously and to interpret the Christian tradition in an equally indigenous as revolutionary sense. The paper draws on Aglipay’s 1926 *Novenario of the Motherland* as its central source.

Keywords

Mary – Jesus – Iglesia Filipina Independiente – Gregorio Aglipay – masculinity – Philippines – postcolonialism – Catholicism

1 Introduction

This paper explores the gendered representation of Jesus in the oldest indigenous Philippine ‘Mary with Child,’ the *‘Birhen sa Balintawak’* (‘Mother of Balintawak’) (1896/1920s), especially as it was presented to a broad audience by the ‘independent catholic’ bishop and former revolutionary fighter Gregorio



FIGURE 1

Contemporary use of a mural of the Birhen sa Balintawak, as present in the National Cathedral of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, Manila

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L. Aglipay (1860–1940), leader of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, in the mid-1920s (Gealogo 2010). Outlining a new way of systematically relating dimensions of religion to aspects of masculinity, the paper shows how gender, more precisely masculinity, religion, and nationalist politics are bound up in the child involved in this representation of Mary and Jesus. In doing so, it will be shown how religion and gender (masculinity) reciprocally influence each other and how the result is a subversive restatement of colonial religious repertoire (mimicry).

2 State of Research

Despite a growing number of pertinent studies, religious studies and masculinities studies, as a discipline that ‘emerged from Eve’s rib’ (‘De la costilla de Eva’—Parrini Roses 2002) are still frequently two ships passing in the night (cf. Krondorfer 2016 for a survey). Furthermore, in extant research, the trend is to research religion’s influence on masculinities rather than vice versa. The situation in biblical studies, as surveyed recently (Smit 2017, compare O’Brien 2014), can be said to be illustrative and representative, as far as religious studies and theology is concerned.

When it comes to masculinities studies, the discipline engaged in the critical analysis of masculinities/maleness as a multifaceted social phenomenon (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985; Connell 2005), the following may be noted.

As has been observed by a number of scholars, religion plays a marginal role in the field (Broomhall and van Gent 2016, 19; Schneider 2016, 27–29; Dinges 2005, 24), as it is evident from surveys of and introductions to the field (Connell 2005; Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005; Kimmel and Bridges 2011; Reeser 2010). When focusing on religion at all, scholarship tends to replicate a tendency present in Connell's work to focus on religious extremists while reducing religion to a function of broader political agendas (Connell 2000, 2005). With the return of religion as a key factor in contemporary politics as a whole and as a topic of scholarly analysis (Sharpe and Nickelson 2014), it is mandatory that this situation be changed. Signs of this taking place are there, for instance through the work of Krondorfer (Krondorfer 2009, 2016), and the appearance of a survey of masculinity in world religions in 2018 is also promising (Gerster and Kriggeler 2018). This paper seeks to make a modest contribution to forging precisely such a tighter connection between research on gender, particularly masculinities, and religion. Its particular approach will be outlined in the next section.

3 XY: Towards a More Integrated Analysis of Religion and Masculinities

In order to analyze religiously legitimized masculinities and their role in the shaping of religious traditions, an analytical framework is needed. Both with regard to masculinities and to religion this poses the question of definition, while there is also the need to circumvent essentialisms, as these are problematic with regard to either topic due to the extant plurality of forms of religion and masculinities. Therefore, an approach is chosen that is both self-consciously social-constructivist when it comes to analyzing religion and masculinities and that is also aware of the constructedness of any definition, acknowledging that any definition or description of a phenomenon in general also limits the range of phenomena that can be included in a particular category. What follows is, therefore, an attempt to combine, on a conceptual level, pertinent aspects of the analysis of both religious phenomena and of masculinities, to see whether their (reciprocal) relationship can be approached more systematically. First, (working) definitions of both are given, next, key dimensions of both are outlined, and finally, a proposal for relating them to each other is made.

Accordingly, following descriptions of masculinities and religion that have proven their heuristic and analytical value and as they have been proposed by leading scholars in the field, the two phenomena will be understood as follows.

(A) *Masculinities* studies emphasize that in the construction of masculinities many different aspects intersect. No single factor is determinative for the construction of a particular manifesting masculinity. Accordingly, Connell speaks of “the patterns of practice” by means of which the “masculine position” in a society is occupied (Connell 2000, 2005). Biological bodies do play a role, but they are always already “gendered,” inscribed with meaning in line with these patterns without determining them. For each segment of society the rules governing what “masculine” is vary—what may be masculine for one subgroup (e.g., circumcision) may have the exactly reverse significance for another. (B) With Meyer (and others), *religion* can be understood as “a medium of absence, that posits and sets out to bridge a gap between the here and now and something ‘beyond’” (Meyer 2015, 336). Thus, “‘religion’ refers to particular, authorised and transmitted sets of practices and ideas aimed at ‘going beyond the ordinary’, ‘surpassing’ or ‘transcending’ a limit, or gesturing towards ... ‘the rest-of-what-is’” (Meyer 2012, 23).

In both fields of research, also key dimensions of the phenomena at stake, i.e., of religion and masculinities, have been identified. (A) *Key dimensions of masculinities* are dimensions that very often play a role in the construction of masculinities, even if their interpretation and evaluation varies across such constructions. Based on my earlier survey of masculinities studies (Smit 2017), the following dimensions together can form a grid that can identify the most prominent aspects of masculinities, moving from concerns of the body to more social aspects: (1) Physical makeup (incl. biological ‘sex’ and health); (2) Sexuality; (3) Age; (4) Ethnicity; (5) Consumption of food, drink, stimulants; (6) Relation with (masculine and non-masculine) others; (7) Use of power/violence; (8) Intelligence/education (9) Job and job performance; (10) Social/political status (incl. pedigree and affluence); (11) Moral standing; (12) Physical location (cf. Connell 2000, 2005; Kimmel and Aronson 2004; Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005; Kimmel and Bridges 2011; Reeser 2010; Flood, Kegan Gardiner, Pease and Pringle 2013; Horlacher, Janssen and Schwanebeck 2016). (B) *Key dimensions of religion* identify central aspects of the media involved in the ‘mediation’ of the ‘beyond.’ They are manifold, yet can be captured under the following main headings: (a) the ethical and social; (b) the ritual (private and public); (c) the cognitive and intellectual; (d) the socio-political and institutional; (e) symbolic dimensions (e.g., art and symbols outside of ritual); (f) experiential dimensions (e.g., a sense of vocation, of salvation, etc.) (Hock 2014, 19–21; Stark and Glock, 1968; Verbit 1970; Smart 1996).

When taking this understanding of religion and of masculinities and the various dimensions involved in both, it is possible to relate the two to each other more systematically, by imagining a matrix with an x- and a y-axis, the first con-

taining dimensions of religion, the latter containing aspects of masculinities, on which all of these various aspects are plotted. This imagined matrix will be used to research the relationship between religion and masculinity in the Virgin of Balintawak and, in particular, her child.

4 The 'Virgin of Balintawak' and Her Child

When discussing the *Birhen sa Balintawak*, a good starting point is one of the more striking and—likely—widely used publications of Gregorio Aglipay (1860–1940), one of the founding fathers of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, a church emerging out of the Philippine-Spanish war (cf. Smit 2011): the *Novenario de la Patria* (1926), a booklet intended to aid the faithful in praying a *novena* (nine-day cycle of daily prayers). This publication contains both a specific kind of Mariology and a statement in devotional form of Aglipay's religious views; the origins of this kind of 'Mary-with-child' are older, however, going back to a(n alleged) dream that saved revolutionaries in the context of the Philippine-Spanish war of 1896–1898. The revolutionaries involved were so-called '*Katipuneros*', belonging to the armed group of the *Kataas-taasang, Kagalang-galangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan*—'Supreme and Venerable Association of the Children of the Nation' (usually: *Katipunan*); lower class fighters under the leadership of Andres Bonifacio (1863–1897; cf. Agoncillo 1996). As the reception of the *Birhen sa Balintawak* has been channeled, by and large, through Aglipay's *Novenario*, this work will be the vantage point for researching the character of this type of 'Mary-with-child.' The focus in doing so will be on the 'child.' This goes beyond extant research, which, as will be discussed below, when dealing with the *Birhen sa Balintawak* at all, gives the *Birhen* herself rather more attention than the 'child,' even though both are obviously of importance (cf. Smit 2020).

In order to do this, first the *Novenario de la Patria* and the tradition that it is based on will be introduced and placed in the broader context of the work of Aglipay and the emerging tradition of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, while also surveying earlier scholarship on Aglipay's work. Next, the place of Jesus in this work will be discussed, in order to finally draw conclusions as to the role of Jesus for this kind of representation of 'Mary with Child.'

5 Earlier Research on the Novenario

The *Novenario* has been addressed by several scholars in the (recent) past; here the most prominent views, those of Iletto, Gealogo, Furusawa, and De la Cruz will be given attention (Iletto 1997; Gealogo 2010; Furusawa 2014; De la Cruz 2015; Sapitula 2013, 110–111, only mentions the *Birhen* in passing). Surprisingly, earlier research on the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* has paid little attention to the *Birhen*, even the (biased and polemical, yet very well documented) multivolume work of De Achutegui and Bernad does not discuss it (De Achutegui and Bernad 1961–1972).

One of the first studies to highlight the *Birhen Balintawak* is Iletto's *Pasyon and Revolution* of 1979 (Iletto 1997). Iletto focuses on the narrative undergirding it, i.e. the account of the *Katipunero's* dream at Balintawak. In particular Iletto's observation that, while in earlier poetry Spain was portrayed as the mother or the mother country, it is here for one of the first times that the *Philippines* fulfill this role is of high significance for understanding the *Birhen*. In terms of national self-imagination and self-representation this shift constitutes a watershed. In this context, Iletto also notes the complete integration of national and religious ideals in the tradition of the *Birhen sa Balintawak*, which is equally key to understanding this tradition. No detailed attention is given to the child (cf. however Iletto 1997, 106).

More recently, Gealogo has made a significant contribution (Gealogo 2010). He notes from the start the oddity that the *Novenario* has been neglected in Aglipayan studies, despite its significance at the time.¹ Outlining the contents and functioning of the work, he also notes that the

[t]he image of the *Virgen sa Balintawak* became one of the most popular figures of Aglipayan iconography and religious portraiture that was prominently displayed in a number of prewar, pre-concordat Aglipayan churches across the archipelago.²

GEALOGO 2010, 150–151

When it comes to analyzing the imagery itself, he highlights the “indigenized physical features and local peasant costumes of both the Virgin and the child,

1 Gealogo, ‘Time,’ 150; he does not substantiate this claim, however likely it is.

2 The concordat that he refers to is the influential 1961 concordat between the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* and the Episcopal Church (USA); it would cause the relegation most of Aglipay's theological work to the category of ‘historical documents’ with no lasting theological significance for the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*.

and the call to freedom with which it became associated.” (Gealogo 2010, 151) By thus varying on themes from the broader catholic tradition, “with the Virgen sa Balintawak, Aglipayan religiosity, class orientation, and nationalism became incorporated into one iconic representation.” (Gealogo 2010, 151) As a whole, however, the *Novenario* goes beyond nationalism alone. As Gealogo rightly sees, it serves to articulate a package of Aglipayan “rational, nationalist, scientific, and secular outlooks and perspectives.” (Gealogo 2010, 165) When it comes to the child, apart from the figure of the *Birhen* as such, Gealogo notes a number of elements, beginning with a quotation from the *Novenario*, where the child is identified as follows: the *Birhen* is described as leading a pretty child by the hand, dressed like a farmer with short red pants and holding a shiny *bolo* (dagger/machete) shouting “*Kalayaan! Kalayaan!*” (“Freedom! Freedom!”—Gealogo 2010, 150)³ In a further quotation from Aglipay’s work “the voice of the people” is stressed, and it may well be that this is the voice of the child (Gealogo 2010, 150). When analyzing this, Gealogo notes the similarities and differences with more standard representations of the Virgin-with-child, notably also with the iconography of the ‘Holy Child’:

[W]hat contributed to the uniqueness of the religious image was the indigenized physical features and local peasant costumes of both the Virgin and the child, and the call to freedom with which it became associated. The balintawak as a peasant costume of both the mother and the child, and the prominent bolo in the hand of the child that took the place of the usual globe (as in the Santo Niño) and the story of the child shouting Kalayaan, not only indigenized the universal Catholic image of the Virgin with the child, but also appropriated the revolutionary call to arms of the Katipunan and oriented the icon toward a more militant and revolutionary. Balintawak was both the location of the virgin apparition and the type of peasant attire worn by the virgin and the child. By locating the revolutionary apparition of the virgin and the child in Balintawak, with the two dressed in balintawak peasant outfit, the Virgen sa Balintawak was being projected with its revolutionary orientation and peasant origin.

GEALOGO 2010, 151

Gealogo expands this analysis by noting that in some editions of the *Novenario*, the text of a blessing of the *Birhen* is included, which states that

3 In other and later representations of the *Birhen sa Balintawak* the text varies.—The term was also the name of the *Katipunero* newspaper, which was, in turn, being printed at the place where the *Katipuneros* were going when one of them received the dream at Balintawak.

The Katipunero child represents the people, eager for their liberty, and their spokesmen, prophets and evangelists are the great Filipino teachers Rizal, Mabini, Bonifacio and our other countrymen whose modern sapient teachings will form the best national Gospel.

GEALOGO 2010, 152

In his analysis, Gealogo therefore notes that the “holy child assumed a Katipunero identity, with bolo and the cry to Kalayaan further strengthening its revolutionary roots.” In this manner, “[t]he Virgen sa Balintawak with a child beside it became the symbolic representation of the inang bayan (motherland) and bayan (people)—and no longer confined to catholic imagery of the Virgin and the Holy Child.” (Gealogo 2010, 152)

Furusawa’s paper, published shortly after Gealogo’s study, provides a relatively general (but apt) description of the *Birhen sa Balintawak*; its greatest contribution is to position it among other representations of Mary in the Philippines, as the first indigenous one. She notes that such indigenous ‘Mary’s’ only appeared from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, despite Marian devotion since the 16th century, postulating that “This late development is probably because of the fact that the Filipinos’ awareness of their cultural identity and Filipino cultural value gained ground only after they strove for independence at the end of the 19th century.” (Furusawa 2014, 95) Furthermore, she notes that the indigenized (or ‘localized’) versions of Mary “are associated with the freedom and protection of the Filipino people, from the current conditions of suppression and social difficulties.” (Furusawa 2014, 95) This applies to the *Birhen* in particular. She does not provide an in-depth analysis of the child.

A final pertinent study is De la Cruz’ *Mother Figured* (De la Cruz 2015). In her analysis, she draws attention to the manner in which various ‘translations’ take place in the image of the *Birhen sa Balintawak*, i.e., “of the quasi-divine figure of the Virgin Mary and of the globally circulating concept of the nation, into Filipino.” (De la Cruz 2015, 60) Accordingly, the dream underlying the account of the *Birhen* is for De la Cruz another instance of imaging the Filipino nation (De la Cruz 2015, 74). She further positions Aglipay’s use of this account in the *Novenario* in the context of the developing theology of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, which she understands to be one that moved from differing from ‘Rome’, mainly by refusing allegiance to the Pope, to introducing “secular, rational ideas that would rub acutely against orthodox Catholicism’s grain.” (De la Cruz 2015, 75, cf. Schumacher 1981 and Mojares 2006 for an outline of the intellectual climate). In this and her further discussion, the child as such does not receive separate attention.

Having thus surveyed recent scholarly considerations of the *Birhen sa Balintawak*, the *Novenario* can be contextualized further historically.

6 The *Novenario* in Its Historical Context

The historical setting of the *Novenario de la Patria* consists of two 'layers': the layer of the events of 1896 reported in the introductory materials of the work and the setting of the publication of the work itself, both part of the broader context of Marian devotion in the Philippines and—increasingly—'global' catholicism. Here, the latter two will be discussed; what 'really happened' in 1896 is of secondary importance for analyzing the *Novenario*.⁴

The broader historical context of both the original dream and the development of the tradition concerning the 'Mother of Balintawak' out of which the *Novenario* emerged is, of course, provided by the Philippine Revolution (1896–1898) and the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris, in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the USA (1898). After the last Filipino forces had surrendered in the ensuing Philippine-American war, Filipinos, led by Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr., (cf. Hermann 2016) and acting in the context of a meeting of the labor union *Unión Obrera Democrática* (3 August 1902), proclaimed an independent Philippine church, the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (cf. Smit 2011; Hermann 2014). Gregorio Aglipay, a Filipino priest and highly regarded revolutionary, was named *Obispo maximo*, "supreme bishop", of the new church. In this role, he will issue the *Novenario* 23 years later.

The publication history of the *Novenario* is somewhat complex, as it appears that the Tagalog translation was printed prior to the Spanish original (Aglipay 1926a; the Tagalog version notes that it is a translation from Spanish by Juan Evangelista, cf. Aglipay 1925); in addition, also an English version appeared in 1926 (Aglipay 1926b). All editions have been published by Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr.⁵ The latter was 'parish bishop' of the church of Maria Clara in Manila, a heroine and representation of the Philippines in the revolutionary martyr José Rizal's *Noli me tangere* (cf. Terrenal 1979; Peracullo 2017). (In the novel, the

4 The functioning of the story about the dream is also not dependent on its authenticity (whether in terms of being an accurate rapport of an historical event or in terms of being a 'real', supernatural message from Mary), therefore a term like 'foundational narrative' is appropriate, while terms like 'fable' and 'legend', when suggesting the inauthenticity of it all, ought to be used with restraint (all terms appear in De la Cruz 205, 74). Iletto (1997, 106), considers the option that the story is entirely 'apocryphal.'

5 One of the (many) sons of Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr., he would, from 1946–1970, be *Obispo Maximo* of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*.

'hyperfeminine' [i.e.: dependent, weak, passive and beautiful] Maria Clara ends her days locked up in a convent and manifestly insane. Thus, she quite adequately represents the Philippines under colonial rule.) The church of Maria Clara is also home to the oldest statue representing the *Birhen sa Balintawak* and must have been the center of devotion to her in the 1920s and 1930s; the statue was probably placed there in 1924 (Furusawa 2014, 92). In order to avoid having to produce a new English translation in the references made here, De los Reyes, Jr.'s translation is used here. If anything, De los Reyes, Jr.'s translation also indicates how the text itself was understood in its historical context.

A rather different part of the *Novenario's* context consists of the broader field of Marian apparitions in the Philippines and beyond. (cf. Zimdars-Swartz 1991; Di Stefano and Solans 2016). As noted, the *Birhen* is the first indigenous representation of Mary. The differences with other 'Spanish colonial' representations of Mary are obvious: rather than encouraging a piety focused on the beyond, the *Birhen* exhorts to a piety focused on agency and action in the sublunar (compare and contrast the 'Conquistadora' type of Mary—cf. Remensnyder 2014). Also, the *Birhen* is depicted with Jesus, rather than as an independent figure, as in some Spanish representations, and it is in imitation of the 'holy child' in particular that the devotee is exhorted to act, i.e. as freedom fighters—at least, this is the interpretation in the text of the *Novenario*. With regard to this political aspect, also among indigenous representations of Mary, the *Birhen sa Balintawak* remains the only one that is so directly linked to political events. As such, however, the 'Mother of Balintawak' fits well into the context of the (global) 'age of Mary' (ca. 1830–1950s), in which a proliferation of Marian appearances (and the two Marian dogma's of the Roman Catholic Church of 1854 and 1950) all played a part in negotiating modernity and the political circumstances of the people involved, i.e. "within the processes of the construction of national and political identities." (Di Stefano and Solans 2016, 1) More specifically, one may speak of the "creation of territorial identities around Marian devotion." (Di Stefano and Solans 2016, 1) The *Birhen sa Balintawak* fits into such a pattern very well. As a 'Filipina Mary', she both highlights Philippine identity and its value and she claims the catholic tradition for the Philippines (all the while interpreting it in a very modern[istic] and nationalistic manner). Yet, rather than being related, as is often the case with Marian apparitions (Di Stefano and Solans 2016, 10–15; Krebs 2017), to reactionary or conservative politics, she is aligned with very modern and liberal convictions. The combination of being Filipina nationalist *and* European in terms of heritage, catholic *and* liberal theologically (and ethically), ensures that the 'Mother of Balintawak' stands out among the various representations of Mary available in the Philip-

pinos and elsewhere (as surveyed in Di Stefano and Solans 2016), certainly in the era between 1896 (date of the narrated appearance) and 1926 (publication of the *Novenario*). In fact, as will be argued, the whole representation of mother and child is a cultural hybrid, engaged in subversive mimicry. Also, the form and content of the *Novenario* fit this mold. On the one hand, the choice for the form of the *novena/Novenario* in order to popularize the views of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (as they had been published before in works such as the *Biblia Filipina* and the *Oficio Divino*, on which cf. Gealogo 2010; Smit 2011, 245–246) is a very traditional one, given that it was one of the most widely circulated and influential kinds of religious literature of catholic life in the Philippines (Mojares 2006, 332; Gealogo 2010, 148). On the other hand, its contents are a complete transformation of what one might expect to find in such a work.

7 The *Katipunero* Child in the *Novenario*

When considering the *Novenario* and its *niño* (child), it should be stressed first that the work and its use are located right in the center of popular devotion: *Novenas* and *Novenarios* abounded. By connecting with this devotional life and transforming it, by introducing a new kind of mother and child and a new set of texts, a very appealing medium for the communication of ‘Aglipayan’ theology is created. Although the *Novenario* contains multiple statements on Jesus and his teaching, here the focus will be on explicit references to the child in relation to the *Birhen sa Balintawak*, as Aglipay distinguishes between Jesus in general and the particular appearance of Jesus/the child *Katipunero* as well in his discussion of both. The focus of the present article remains on the *Novenario* itself, without being able to tracing its reception history. Therefore, what is argued here concerning the construction of masculinity and religion and the legitimization of certain kinds of Filipino identity pertains only to what seem to be the rhetorical, ideological and theological intentions of the *Novenario*, without being able to assess its impact.

A first description of the ‘Mother and child’ occurs in the preface to the *Novenario*, which is signed by Aglipay.⁶ He starts by quoting the periodical *La Vanguardia*,⁷ in which the journalist Aurelio Tolentino is introduced as a

6 The text is included as prefatory material in the English edition, but as following on the novena in the Spanish version (cf. De la Cruz, *Mother*, 78).

7 I have not been able to verify the appearance of this account in *La Vanguardia*—no date of publication is provided; given Tolentino’s death in 1915 and the establishment of the newspaper in 1910, it must have been between those years.



FIGURE 2
A contemporary statue
of the Birhen sa Bal-
intawak and her child
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spokesperson for the story about a dream that occurred to a(n unidentified) *Katipunero* (Aglipay 1926b, 1). The description of the dream is an etiology of the *Birhen sa Balintawak* and therefore of key importance and worth quoting in full:

A beautiful Mother dressed in the style of the farmers of Balintawak leading a pretty child by the hand, dressed like a farmer with short red pants and holding a shiny bolo, crying 'Liberty, liberty!' the beautiful woman approached the one dreaming and said to him 'Be careful.' When the dreamer woke, he told his comrades what he had dreamed, saying that the mother and child had the face of Europeans, though dressed like Filipinos.

AGLIPAY 1926b, 1

Subsequently, the *Katipuneros* changed their plans, remaining in Balintawak, thereby escaping a raid. The piece notes that it is because of the dream that the first *Katipuneros* wore red trousers (as the *Niño* in the dream wore the same).⁸ In a comment on the dream, Aglipay states:

The Mother of Balintawak ... reminds you constantly of your sacred and inescapable duty to make every effort possible to obtain our longed-for Independence; and she is the sacred image of our Country. The voice of the people will constantly resound from our pulpits, reminding you of the great teachings of Rizal, Mabini, Bonifacio and other Filipinos, and these teachings of our greatest compatriots will form the special seal of our National Church.

AGLIPAY 1926b, 1

Later on in the *Novenario*, Aglipay writes:

[T]he Virgin of Balintawak is the symbol of our nation, and the Katipunan child that she bears is the Filipino nation, the rising generation, the youth that longed for independence, and the two figures are constant reminders to you of our inescapable duty to follow the sacrifices of those who suffered to obtain it.

AGLIPAY 1926b, 42

Following this account of the presentation of 'mother and child' in the *Novenario*, a few observations with regard to the child and masculinity can be made on the basis of this text, using the x/y approach outlined above.

To begin with, neither mother nor child are identified explicitly, yet it is clear from the context, certainly of the *Novenario* as a whole, that they are in a certain way versions of Mary and Jesus. Therefore, whatever kind of masculinity is involved in this male child, it is divinely sanctioned. The connection between masculinity and religion is quite explicit, therefore.

Second, when it comes to aspects of masculinity having to do with one's physical 'make up', a few observations can be made. To begin with, Jesus certainly appears to be in good shape: as a healthy male child, he is even referred to as a 'pretty child' by Aglipay, which is of some significance for understand-

8 If this claim can be substantiated on the basis of other sources, the choice for red pants would be an interesting instance of consciously 'performing' the role of the *niño* at the service of the country and as an expression of one's relationship with the *Birhen*/motherland; it could also simply be an etiology on the part of Tolentino without much historical basis, of course.

ing what sort of masculinity is being presented here—the beauty of the child is, doubtlessly, also tied up with the value (and beauty) of the Filipino people. With regard to the child, questions of sexuality do not play an explicit role. Yet, age is of significance. On the one hand, the boy's youthfulness is iconographical tradition, as it has links with the material, symbolic, ritual and intellectual aspects of the imagery used, on the other hand it is also commented upon explicitly by Aglipay. He identifies the child as a representative of the 'rising generation' in the *Novenario*:

The mother of Balintawak symbolizes our Country, and the Katipunan child expresses the Filipino people, the **rising generation** [emphasis in *original*, pbs] which longs for independence, and both figures constantly remind us of the tremendous sacrifices of the liberators of our Country and of our sacred and inescapable duty to follow them, also making all possible sacrifices on our own part to achieve our independence. To this end, the immortal teachings of Rizal and other Filipinos on our duties to God and people will live and constantly resound in this temple. So, brethren, come and help us in this noble task of patriotic liberation and the liberation of conscience as well, instead of enlarging the ranks of the enemies of our Country and our liberty and adding to their already vast treasures.

AGLIPAY 1926b, 21

Thus, its age characterizes the child not so much as 'not an adult yet,' but rather as someone who represents the future.

When it comes to ethnicity, it is immediately obvious that this is a key aspect of this representation of Jesus. As an indigenous representation of Jesus (yet with a European face, at least in the account of the dream), here religion and masculinity influence each other reciprocally. An indigenous male is elevated to the plane of the sacred, and such aspects of the sacred as the symbolic, the intellectual and the ritual are shaped by their association precisely with the indigenous masculine.⁹ Spanish (colonial) ethnicity is no longer normative, neither in religion nor as far as gender is concerned. With regard to the latter, the shift in iconography is even bigger than one would think,

9 To this should be added that 'indigenous' means something like 'mainstream Filipino' here, i.e. someone who is a descendant both of those inhabiting the Filipino lowlands prior to islands' colonization and of the colonizers—Jesus is not, for instance, depicted as a member of one of the inland tribes, such as the Igorot or the Lumad, which are today often referred to as the indigenous people of the Philippines.

when considering the manner in which mother/child motherland/people constellations functioned in Spanish colonial discourse. In brief, for a long time, the 'mother' of the Philippines was seen to be Spain, a country that was in turn associated with the figure of the Virgin (often represented as a Spanish queen). When (the abusive) 'mother Spain' is replaced by a representation of the Philippines *qua Birhen*, this is an important shift (cf. Iletto 1997, 103–105). Spain has simply been written out of the 'genealogy' of the Philippines, which is, as a country, no longer a child in need of and dependent on an (abusive) parent, but is rather a(n adult) parent itself, with a child who is the 'rising generation.' With that the parent-child relationship with all loyalties that belong to it has become a different one: Mary/*Birhen* appears to have brought forth the Filipino people, or at least is suggested to be supportive of them, or her child's/children's struggle. The Filipino people's obligation is to the mother(land), not to Spain as 'motherland' of the Philippines and the Filipinos alike anymore.

Accordingly, a next issue to consider consists of Jesus' relationships to others. Both in the visual and in the textual representation of the *Birhen sa Balintawak*, three relations of the holy, Filipino boy stand out in particular. These are: (a) his relation to the *Birhen*/the motherland; (b) to the *Katipunero* revolutionaries; (c) to the colonial powers. Here, the first will be considered, as the two others return when discussing social status and the use of power/violence respectively. For the identity of this 'Holy Child'/Filipino people the relationship with the *Birhen*/motherland is constitutive. Both mother and child play two roles simultaneously. This also shapes the masculine identity of the child: as the one born of the *Birhen* he depends on her, given that she leads him by the hand, yet as a child of the Philippines he is also committed to working (and fighting) for its motherland. Thus, not just ethnicity shapes what both masculinity and religion amount to here, but also national identity—the two are not identical—to be a (Filipino) man along the lines of this kind of representation of divine(ly sanctioned) masculinity, means to be a nationalistic man, while religion and nationalism coincide in such a manner that true religion appears to be nationalistic in content and nationalism is religiously legitimized.

Next, when it comes to the use of violence, the child's *bolo*, which features emphatically in both the visual and the textual representation of the *Birhen sa Balintawak*, is a clear indication that it is not a very peaceful kind of masculinity that is involved here; rather, it is a revolutionary and militant kind. At the same time, the *bolo* is an improvised weapon, given that its main purpose is not so much fighting as it is cutting, it is a kind of machete—as such it is also indicative of incidental violence, in which improvised weapons are being used, and it is also typical 'lower class' weaponry. Either way, here religion legit-

imizes a violent kind of masculinity. This means a significant transformation of 'Holy Child' iconography as well as themes from traditional Christology, in which Jesus usually features as a non-violent figure. The violence is quite clearly directed against the colonial overlords of the Philippines (Spain in 1896; the USA in the 1920s), which also positions the masculine child further in terms of his relationships with others.

While questions of intelligence do not play a role in this case, issues of education, job, and social status do play a very important role. That is to say: the child is depicted as a lower class figure. At least the following elements contribute to this. For instance, the child is dressed as a farmer, which occurs both in its visual and textual representations. Furthermore, he has a bolo with him as a weapon. More specifically, a bolo is a farmer's tool turned into a weapon, which, therefore, reinforces the impression that this is a lower class child, one of the colonized, not one of the colonizers (as a 'Spanish' or 'American' Jesus would be, for instance as a typical 'Holy Child'). The kind of masculinity that this child embodies and that is religiously legitimized here is, accordingly, one that is lower class and marginal. At the same time, this positions religion socio-politically: if Jesus is this kind of man, then the force of religious support is with this kind of men, validating and empowering them. This, consequently, also shapes the ethical orientation of the Christian tradition, all the while making use of (transformed) aspects of the symbolic and ritual repertoire of this tradition itself. As the child is also quite emphatically associated with the *Katipuneros*, lower class freedom fighters under the leadership of Andres Bonifacio, this social positioning of the child is further strengthened. Jesus/the child is a little model *Katipunero*, which indicates precisely what sort of masculinity he stands for. Yet, this also draws the *Katipuneros* into the sphere of religion (it was not an emphatically religious movement as such), while simultaneously indicating what the role of religion in the battle for freedom ought to be.

In an interesting manner, also physical location plays a role in case of the *Birhen* and her child. In fact, two locations matter: Balintawak and the hiding place of the *Katipuneros* there and the churches in which the statue of the *Birhen* with her child found a place, in particular the Maria Clara Church in Manila, where the first statue was placed. The *Novenario* is also linked to this latter church. The first location is not religious at all, but rather politically connotated, which also contributes to the characterization of the 'Mother of Balintawak' and her child. The second is, of course, religious, yet also political, given that, as was already noted, 'Maria Clara,' is the fictional (and tragic) heroine of national hero José Rizal's famous *Noli me tangere* (1887). She is the polar opposite of the self-assured *Birhen*: a delicate and defenseless woman driven

insane by the colonial condition. Both places position the male child squarely in the political conditions of the Philippines, further characterizing both his kind of masculinity, i.e., a political, liberative one. This also aligns the religious with the political. This, to be sure, also speaks to the virtuousness of the child, which is not just given as such, but also focused in a particular manner, thereby also pushing religious morality in a specific direction.

More generally, it can be remarked that the combinations made in this particular representation of the 'Holy Child' lead to a number of noticeable ambiguities. To begin with, the role that Christianity plays in relation to the colonial struggles of the Philippines is interesting. Christianity is, on the one hand, colonial import, yet, on the other hand, here it also serves as a source of nationalist inspiration in an indigenized form. The child and his virgin mother are neither purely indigenous nor purely foreign, but indigenized. The hybridity inherent in something that has been indigenized also means that it cannot be reduced to other categories and remains somewhat 'outside of the box' (following Bhabha 1994), which is certainly the case with this 'Holy Child' (with his European face and Filipino dress). Mimicry is another a category that can be used to describe what the *Birhen* and her *Katipunero niño* amount to (as mimicry can be an effect of hybridity, cf. Bhabha 1994). Given that mimicry involves the embrace of cultural patterns of the colonizer by the colonized in a manner that at the same time begins to subvert this pattern, it helps to see how the 'Mother of Balintawak' and her child both continue and subvert colonial patterns of Marian devotion. The dream of the *Birhen* and its ensuing reception, up until and including the devotional form of the *novena*, perpetuate such patterns, yet with a twist that steers them a markedly anti-colonial direction.

8 Conclusions

Conclusions can be drawn on the levels of method and content. Both can remain relatively brief, given that the substance of the results of the analysis undertaken in this paper has been presented above already.

First, therefore, with regard to the experiment in method, it seems that employing a systematic combination of dimensions of religion and masculinities has at least the advantage that one is forced to consider a large number of possible connections between religion and masculinity when considering a case. Of the different elements in the (imagined) matrix, which systematically related dimensions of religion and aspects of masculinities to each other, many appeared to be relevant to consider when examining the relationship between

religion and masculinity in the *Birhen sa Balintawak* and her child. For instance, the fact that the *niño* is 'Filipino' (and not European) both indigenizes Jesus and uplifts 'indigenous masculinities' due to the sanctification that these receive in this way. Furthermore, the (incidental) violence that the *Birhen's* child is associated with (it carries an improvised weapon in the shape of a *bolo*) constitutes both an interpretation of who Jesus is in a Filipino context (an armed revolutionary) and what the status of (male) armed revolutionaries is, namely, they are men like Jesus. In a similar manner, the child's emphatic presentation as a member of the lower or farming classes, both indicates who Jesus is and what it means for one's masculinity to be a member of this class (i.e.: to be of the same class as Jesus!).

Second, in the representation of Mary and Jesus as the *Birhen sa Balintawak* and her 'Holy Child,' a type of gendering takes place in which religious tradition and gender stand in a reciprocal relationship to each other; each contributes to the construction of the other. The child, represented as a Filipino, lower class boy, carrying a weapon and appearing in close relationship to his mother, who doubles as the country of the Philippines, while he doubles as the people of the Philippines, leads to the uplifting and legitimizing of a (violent) revolutionary indigenous masculinity—people embodying this are accorded the same status as Jesus. At the same time, this form of masculinity provides an interpretation of the meaning of 'true Christian religion': it is the kind of religious tradition that legitimizes such a kind of masculinity. Thus, the *Birhen sa Balintawak* and her 'Holy Child' also determine what Christianity can be, at least in the eyes of those adhering to the devotion to this type of 'Virgin-with-child,' such as the *Katipuneros* and the priest-turned-guerrillero-turned-nationalistic-bishop Gregorio Aglipay. In analysing these aspects, the role of gender, especially masculinity, in (post)colonial Filipino religious identity has been highlighted with regard to the *Birhen's* child, which was lacking in extant research, while it has also been shown how religious traditions and gender, especially masculinity, stand in a reciprocal relationship to each other.

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