

# Ritual and Conflict in a Maytime Festival: Turning Pilgrims into Tourists

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**Abstract:** Antipolo City is considered the pilgrimage capital of the Philippines, with devotees coming to the shrine of the Virgin called Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage. This religious phenomenon takes place during the entire month of May, although it officially ends in July, after seven cycles of novena masses. The devotion to the Virgin of Antipolo began with its arrival in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the city took its identity from the presence of the statue, with its rituals adapted from the historical events that involved the people and the Virgin. The opening of the festival is characterized by the annual pilgrimage done on foot by her numerous devotees. On account of the millions of pilgrims that visit her shrine, the local government initiated a city festival to create other economic and commercial opportunities beyond the religious event. This civic celebration however struggles to sustain its own existence and would do well to recognize that it is the religious devotion to the Virgin of Antipolo that sustains the influx of people to the city and gives it identity.

**Keywords:** Maytime festival, Antipolo pilgrimage, Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, religious tourism

Antipolo City in the Philippines is located 20 kms east of the capital city of Manila, located on a plateau of the slopes of the longest mountain range of the Philippines, the Sierra Madre. The city is named after a tree, *tipolo* (English name, breadfruit; *Artocarpus communis*) which has an edible fruit and used to grow abundantly in the area and in other parts of the islands. The city has a total land area of 38,504 hectares comprising almost 30% of the entire land area of the province. With a census of 776,386 residents, it has the largest population in the province. It is mainly

a rural district (77% of the land area) as it is home to a watershed territory, but the agricultural area is quite small at 4.75% (Antipolo City 2013: 6).

Culturally, Antipolo prides itself as the pilgrimage capital of the country and as its first international shrine on account of the image of the Blessed Virgin venerated as Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage. This identity of the town is intimately linked to the statue of the Blessed Virgin found in the cathedral. Although the patroness of the town is the Immaculate Conception, whose feastday is celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, it is the image of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage that is found at the center of the high altar. It is this image that people seek when they come to Antipolo.

It is a national tradition that Catholics trek to the mountain city of Antipolo on the month of May to pray to the Virgin. The Virgin of Antipolo is traditionally implored for help related to travel: to obtain visas, to find employment abroad, for safety during travel, for thanksgiving for travel completed. However, pilgrims bring all manner of petitions to the Blessed Lady, ranging from family issues, work, health, relationships, studies and national examinations. The shrine attracts millions of pilgrims annually and there is a constant flow of devotees throughout the year (Antipolo Cathedral 2023).

## **The establishment of a colonial town**

Antipolo does not appear to be a town of significance prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Its emergence in history is on account of the image of the Blessed Virgin brought to the town. When the Spanish Franciscan missionaries first came to the area in 1578, they built a church in Boso-Boso, in the lower part of the foothills of the Sierra Madre mountain range. The Jesuits took over the mission in 1591, and they built a chapel in an area which they called Santa Cruz, not far from Antipolo. The former site may have been chosen as it was where an indigenous group called Aetas had established a permanent settlement (de la Costa 2014: 157). The missionary potential of the town of Santa Cruz appeared bigger than Antipolo. The small town of Antipolo on the hill was not a site of choice, since it had only some 100 households of about 2,400 to 3,000 inhabitants, where wild boar, deer and boa constrictors roamed.

However, Antipolo is reported to have increased considerably in population during 1595 and 1596, with the households soon numbering 700 excluding the migratory Aetas, who came over to the growing town. The increasing population together with the pleasant climate of a mountain settlement made the Jesuits decide to move to Antipolo. Soon after, they began reporting numerous conversions in the area and the burning of numerous wooden idols (de la Costa 2014: 154). The accounts of the conversion process and the number of converts in Antipolo

indicate that there had been a lively practice of the indigenous religion evidenced by the presence of numerous wooden images.

It was therefore a gradual process of Christianization where the new images and practices were slowly made to replace the indigenous beliefs. The Jesuit historian Horacio de la Costa noted this subtle substitution saying that “in general, the fathers never destroyed or forbade a pagan usage without introducing a similar Christian usage to take its place. This was in line with the policy of making Christianity permeate the culture (...). It was perhaps not a fully conscious policy, but actual practice both at Antipolo and the other missions fairly consistently conformed to it” (de la Costa 2014: 155). For example, one renowned Jesuit missionary and founder of several churches in the area, Pedro Chirino, set to music the Christian prayers and catechesis using the melody of the indigenous chants called *awit*. This method captivated the people and women in particular were reported to have been very skillful in putting into song the homilies and other Christian teachings they heard in church.

Conversion was also facilitated by obtaining the assistance of the local chiefs. In the Jesuit towns of Antipolo and Taytay, they formed a confraternity of *principales* (the local elite) that acted as guardians of the new Christian faith and practices (Schumacher 1987: 80). The confraternity members who were “the most prominent, most Christian, and most trustworthy” town residents ensured that the local folk practices, particularly during times of illness and mourning, were stamped out, and prevented other abuses, superstitions, idolatries, intoxications, dirges, music, and wailings. These confraternities were immensely successful. In 1595, 500 adult baptisms were administered in Antipolo and in five years, more than 7,000 more people were brought over to the Catholic faith (de la Costa 2014: 154). The missionaries zealously taught the Catholic catechesis and stressed the sacrament of penance. They reported that in the Antipolo mission, many went to confession regularly every month, and some every two weeks or even weekly. By 1600 the Jesuits listed all 3,500 inhabitants as Christians; they had built a hospital, a boarding school for boys, and a seminary which all helped to achieve spiritual and temporal progress (de la Costa 2014: 184, 186). The vibrant indigenous faith was being transformed into a strong Christian devotion.

The town started to have greater spiritual significance after the arrival of a statue of the Blessed Virgin, sculpted in Mexico and brought to the Philippines by Governor General Don Juan Niño de Tabora in 1626 (Mercado 1980: 45). The pealing of church bells and sound of canons accompanied the religious procession that brought the image to the Jesuit church in Intramuros, Manila. The Jesuits decided to bring the statue to their hill mission and placed the image in the village chapel in Santa Cruz. However, the statue was soon discovered missing, and a long search led to her discovery on a tipolo tree. The statue was brought back to Santa Cruz,

only to be reported missing again and found on the same tree. The missionaries, along with the townspeople, believed that the Blessed Virgin was expressing her preference for that place and a church was then constructed on the site. For good measure, the tipolo tree was cut down and the wood made into her pedestal in the belief that it would keep her from leaving her altar again. Another icon, that of the Black Nazarene which was likewise carved in Mexico from mesquite wood, draws a similarly strong devotion among the Filipinos (Fortunado 2018: 1).



Fig. 1: The illustration depicts the *Nuestra Senora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*, known as the Virgin of Antipolo, atop a tipolo tree. This is the most popular Marian devotion in the Philippines.

Photo: [www.flickr.com/photos/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/) (retrieved 30.10.2023)

The icon is carved from the heart mesquite wood (*corazon de mesquite*) of the genus *Prosopis* which is native to Mexico. The mesquite wood becomes darker through the passage of time, and this black hue is one of the factors to which the devotion to the image is attributed, being dark-skinned like the local population.

There was no significant growth though in terms of the town population. The town was mountainous with limited resources. When the Americans recorded the number of residents three centuries later, in 1906, there were only 3,800 inhabitants. However, the parish was wealthy all on account of the pilgrims that came to visit

the shrine and pray to Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage. Thus the church was able to sustain itself through the sales of religious items such as rosaries, printed pictures of saints, and other goods (Foreman 1980: 184), rather than from tithing the parishioners. When the Americans took over the Philippines, they recognized that of all the Marian shrines in the country, the most popular by far was that of the Virgin of Antipolo, Our Lady of Good Voyage and Peace. An observer at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century remarked that the village really depended on the pilgrims for its existence which in the month of May ran into the thousands.

The reputation as the patroness of safe voyages began when the Spanish governor-general who brought the image to the country in 1626 attributed their safe crossing of the Pacific to her presence in the galleon. Six other return voyages to Mexico with her on board as patroness solidified her reputation for ensuring protection in travel and built the devotion to her as the patroness of Peace and Good Voyage.

## **The Maytime Festival**

May has been associated with numerous Philippine festivals due to the agricultural foundation of the economy. The rice harvests were traditionally done in March and April thus May became a month of celebrations. The Virgin of Antipolo alone has the distinction of having an entire month specifically identified for pilgrimage. However, due to the numerous number of people coming to pay a visit to the Virgin, pilgrimage season is now extended until July, celebrating novena masses for seven cycles or a total of 63 days.

The image remains as one of the most popular Marian images in the country, widely held to be miraculous and efficacious. Most Filipinos traveling abroad or hoping to travel abroad petition her help for their safe journeys or the processing of their travel documents especially the applications for either a passport or a visa. At present, the pilgrimage is undertaken not only to visit the shrine and hear mass in her honor, but also to bring their cars and other vehicles to be blessed. From January to October 2018, the City Tourism office estimated that the number of vehicles brought to the shrine for blessing averaged 4,000 a month (Bacani, 2018). But the Virgin of Antipolo is believed to be so powerful that almost any petition is brought to her shrine. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mother of the Philippine national hero Jose Rizal vowed to take her son to visit the Virgin of Antipolo after his difficult birth in 1861 (Zaide 1984: 12). The promise was fulfilled seven years later, when the young boy was taken by his father from their town in Laguna across the lake to go up the mountain of Antipolo. It was a riverine journey, as he later recalled in his memoirs: "How sweet the emotions I felt as we passed the banks of the Pasig (...) and made stops at Cainta, Taytay, Antipolo (...)" (Bantug 1982: 18).

Upon reaching Antipolo, they prayed before the image of the Virgin in fulfilment of his mother's vow.

There are two religious feasts where pilgrims have traditionally trekked to Antipolo on foot, during the Holy Week, particularly on Maundy Thursday evening, and at the beginning of May. (Antipolo Cathedral 2023) The May pilgrimages bring in more people who come as families, communities or parishes. There are daily masses in the shrine every hour beginning at six in the morning until 12 noon, then another mass in the late afternoon, making a total of seven masses a day. After it became an international shrine, ten masses are now celebrated on regular days and twelve on Sundays. This number is indicative of the number of pilgrims who visit the shrine. In comparison, another popular Marian shrine, Our Lady of the Rosary of Manaoag in Pangasinan province 199 kms north of Manila, has five daily masses and eight on Sundays (Philmass 2023).

The pilgrimage season begins on the first of May, which is the feast day honoring Mary's spouse St. Joseph as worker. On the eve of May 1<sup>st</sup>, the image is brought down to the Minor Basilica in Quiapo, Manila, in the morning of April 30, leaving the cathedral at 6:30 AM. Her arrival in the Shrine of the Black Nazarene is celebrated by a mass at 8:00 AM where she stays the entire day. At the end of the last mass for the day, 6:00 PM, the Virgin is then brought back to Antipolo followed by devotees who proceed on foot, reaching the cathedral anytime from 2:00 to 4:00 in the morning of May 1. The trek is done by thousands of pilgrims who can converge with the main procession from any point. There are families with young school-age children, teen-aged groups, members of religious organizations; they may come alone or with large numbers taking only water with them; some walk barefoot. These pilgrims come to fulfill promises or to continue family tradition; for petitions or for thanksgiving. What is common to all is the element of sacrifice in doing the penitential walk, to cleanse them of their sins and nourish their devotion (De Guzman 2012). The pilgrimage, involving hardship and suffering, becomes a form of spiritual retreat in the tradition of the great Catholic saints. It is this aspect of penance that the people put into the living tradition which sustains the devotion. It builds upon the spiritual wealth that becomes its legacy to the pilgrim, the stories of faith that nurture the customs and make belief visible.





Fig. 2: Pilgrims in 2017, taking over the highway leading to Antipolo in the annual penitential walk that begins on the eve of May 1. Their starting point is usually the Basilica of the Black Nazarene, situated at a distance of 24 kms from Antipolo.

Photo: <https://bluecrystal248.wordpress.com/2017/04/13/> (retrieved 30.10.2023).

The logistics for the penitential walk is a major undertaking not only of the city but the entire province. To ensure safety and order in the streets as thousands make the annual trek, the Police Provincial Office arranges for police officers to be present along the 15-km length of main route in Ortigas Avenue (Bautista 2017). Alongside them, the police units of Antipolo are likewise deployed within the city limits and outside the cathedral, together with the non-military and civic volunteers sent from different villages and community organizations in the city.

Bringing the image to the shrine in Quiapo recalls the time during the Second World War when the statue was brought there for shelter. Antipolo was among the hardest hit by American bombing runs in the battle for liberation against the Japanese that began in 1945. The Japanese began to retreat from Manila, bringing the battles to the surrounding provinces. In February 1945, due to the escalating bombings in Antipolo, the people sought to flee the town taking the image of the Virgin with them to Sitio Colaique, a secluded hill some four kilometers at the outskirts of the city. The church in Antipolo was destroyed by American bombs and the Virgin was then brought to Quiapo church, where the image of the Black Nazarene was enshrined. This is a life-sized image of Christ bearing the cross that was brought over from Mexico in 1606; it was carved from the same kind of

dark-colored wood as the Antipolo image. The image of the Mother taking refuge with her Son captivated the imagination of the family-oriented Filipinos and from here arose the tradition that was initiated during the episcopacy of Msgr. Gabriel V. Reyes (Saquido 2018).

From a religious perspective however, the liturgical season of the pilgrimage begins on the first Tuesday of May, not on the first of May. The first Tuesday of May tradition also came as a result of the war. After the image was restored in Antipolo, the townspeople brought her to the highest point of the town on May 1 and a mass was celebrated in her honor in thanksgiving to the Virgin for having spared their lives. The hill they chose overlooked the entire town of Antipolo which was symbolic of her protection of the whole area. The place is now called *Pinagmisahan* hill (the hill of the mass) or White Cross, in reference to its marker. May 1 in 1945 was a Tuesday and to commemorate that thanksgiving on the first of May after the war, the liturgical feast officially begins on the first Tuesday with a procession and a mass at the site. After seven cycles of a nine-day novena to the Virgin, the pilgrimage season officially closes on the second Tuesday of July (Saquido 2018). After each nine-day cycle, the image of the Virgin is brought out in a procession. Outside of the pilgrimage season, there is a regular First Saturday of the month procession.

There are no organized religious events other than the masses at the Antipolo cathedral, though pilgrims previously proceeded to the waterfalls called *Hinulugang Taktak* after the visit to the shrine. Now a protected national park, the picturesque 12-meter height falls serves as a picnic ground for pilgrims. However, the old residents of the town recall that the people used to dip in its waters for healing rather than recreational bathing. The oral testimony of local residents indicate that the main altar of the church where the image of the Virgin is found was positioned on top of a spring, whose waters ran down to where the street named *Calle de la Virgen* is now located and merged with the waters at the Hinulugang Taktak falls. In the past, parents would bring their sick children to dip in the stream so that they might be cured of their ailments.

The number of pilgrims going to Antipolo is truly remarkable, and it has been that way from its establishment as a shrine. During the 2018 pilgrimage season, the city police department estimated four million visitors to have come to visit the shrine (Saquido 2018). The devotion has translated into various acts of gratitude to the Virgin for numerous favors. There is now a collection of 500 dresses for the image donated by devotees, along with crowns and scepters, such that the Church no longer accepts donations of clothing for the image and asked the people to put them in charities instead (Group Birhen Maria ng Pilipinas 2010). There is also a collection of donations, called the *Patronato de Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buenviaje Fund*, that supports a scholarship program for elementary and high school students.



These *Paaral ng Birhen* (Scholars of the Virgin) are selected from indigent communities and provided with their school fees, school uniforms and school supplies.

The vendors outside the church make a living selling religious items but most of them sell the food items most associated with Antipolo: *suman* and *kasuy* (sticky rice snack and cashew nuts). Mangoes are also sold, but it is a seasonal fruit that is in season from March to June and thus most abundant during the summer month of May. The *suman* that Antipolo is famous for is evidence of the market power of the shrine. This was originally sourced in Cainta, a town at the foothills of Antipolo which grew rice and where making rice delicacies became a cottage industry (Malasig 2018). In the 1940s they turned to Antipolo, where a large market existed in the form of the pilgrims. Thus the vendors came up to sell their *suman* outside the church. Eventually, either through marriage, migration or adaptation, *suman* came to be made in Antipolo town itself, where it has distinguished its product for being more deeply yellow-colored than those originally made in Cainta (Bacani 2018). This is due to adding turmeric to the water where the *suman* is cooked, thus turning the coconut leaves into a deeper shade of yellow. There are two main areas where these products are sold, the first being right outside the church and the other in a “souvenir center”, a one-storey structure built by the city government to contain the numerous vendors. Women meet the pilgrims coming out of the church yard and lead them to favored food stalls, where *suman*, *kasuy*, and other food delicacies are sold. These elderly women themselves are not vendors, but earn commissions from the stall owners for the buyers that they bring. The vendors are registered with the City Hall through one association, thus it is hard to know for certain how many vendors there are. The trade does well even outside the pilgrimage season, where thousands of products are cooked daily. In a day, a vendor usually cooks around four or five vats containing 500 pieces of *suman* per vat, making between 2,000 to 2,500 pieces of *suman* each day (Bacani 2018). On Sundays and during the Holy Week and Maytime festival, they make even more. The cost of the *suman* is six pesos per piece, but it is usually sold in a bundle of ten pieces for 100 pesos. The vendors pass on the trade to their children and some stalls are now owned by second- and third-generation vendors. The income from this commerce is significant. During May, *suman* alone can gross a vendor some US\$880 on a single Sunday. Outside of the pilgrimage season, they earn half of that amount on Sundays. A second-generation vendor says they make their profit for the year during the month of May; the rest of the months brings their bonus income (Mariñas 2022). Vendors are able to put their children through college from their earnings.

This is an ongoing phenomenon. When the town prepares for the Maytime crush of pilgrims, temporary stalls and tents are put up that sell agricultural harvests and also serve food.

Antipolo, as an ecclesiastical district, was carved out from the Archdiocese of Manila in 1983 and became a separate diocese. This administrative independence indicated that the number of its Catholic population, the priests, and religious establishments (churches, chapels, schools) was sufficiently large to justify its creation as a distinct ecclesiastical territory (Knight 2018).

The recognition of Antipolo's religious significance is indicated by the canonical coronation of the miraculous image of the Virgin of Antipolo. The decree, signifying official recognition of popular veneration of an image, was granted by Pope Pius XII in 1924. It is true that it was the fourth Marian image to be thus crowned officially, the first being the image of the Most Holy Rosary of La Naval de Manila in 1907. However, the coronation of the Virgin of Antipolo was done in the Luneta, a public park of 58 hectares where the remains of the Philippines' national hero is located. This was the only Marian image to be officially bestowed its crown in a place that had a foremost public and national character. It is likewise notable that despite the La Naval being canonically crowned 17 years ahead of the Virgin of Antipolo, the churches holding these images were declared national shrines on the same year, 1954, thus making equal the recognition of the special part they have in religious observances. (Pintakasi 2021) Thus the primacy and the drawing power of the image of the Virgin of Antipolo has been confirmed through the years.

### **The City creates a festival**

In contrast to the religious preeminence of Antipolo over other sites, the political development of the town was not as notable. Antipolo became a city only in 1998. This meant that only at this late date could the income and population of Antipolo qualify for cityhood with a locally generated income of at least US\$881,000 based on 1991 prices and a population of over 150,000. However, Antipolo still remains only a "component city" which means that despite its relative political autonomy, it does not yet meet the population and income requirement of a highly urbanized city and remains under the jurisdiction of the province (SEPO 2013). It still lacks revenue and the pilgrims that converge at the shrine are a ready market to tap.

The earnings of the town, and later the city, from the pilgrimage season consist of the business permits and parking fees that the local government charges. Vendors coming from other areas in the Philippines would set up stalls in the municipal plaza (square) as makeshift outdoor restaurants and to hawk their products. Residents within a block of the church would earn extra income by offering parking space within their premises. When the place became a city, it became more imperative for the local government to increase its revenues and develop the place as something more than a religious site.

After cityhood in 1988, the local government started initiating changes that would not only improve the local revenue but also showcase local culture and products outside of the religious festival. It was also a way of stamping the Antipolo identity on the festival and gain political capital. The small political units known as *barangays* were organized to sell their products which were mostly agricultural items. In 2000, the national government held a tourism campaign and challenged the various cities and provinces to initiate their own festivals that would attract tourists to their areas. This became the impetus for Antipolo to stage its own festival. Together with the Department of Education officials, the term SUMAKAH was adopted by the city in 2002 to showcase Antipolo's culture outside of the religious festival. From all the other suggestions, SUMAKAH was selected as it stood for Antipolo's main products, Suman, MAngga, KAsuy, and Hamaka (the rice delicacy suman, the mango, the cashew nut, and the hammock). The major festival was a street dancing competition which was intended to draw the pilgrims to discover Antipolo culture beyond the religious tradition "to familiarize the tourists with all the fine facets of the city" (Student Irregular 2016).



Fig. 3: Students participating in the 2017 SUMAKAH Festival dance while holding images of the Virgin of Antipolo, although the church is not part of this civic celebration that begins on May 1. The dome of the cathedral is seen in the background.

Photo: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/> (retrieved 30.10.2023).

The name Sumakah however lasted only for ten years, after which political change and tourism priorities prompted a reexamination of the festival tag. The city festival however has become part of the Maytime celebration in Antipolo, taking advantage of the large number of pilgrims visiting the Virgin in her mountain shrine.

The city gives a big subsidy to the participants of the civic celebrations in order to mount a grand street parade. Ninety thousand pesos (approximately US\$ 1,700 at current rates) is given to each participating group for their costumes and meals during rehearsals. There are about twenty school- and community-based groups that participate, making the total subsidy a little less than two million pesos (approximately US\$34,000). Substantial cash prizes of 100 thousand pesos, 75 thousand, 50 thousand, 30 thousand and 20 thousand (US\$ 1,886; \$ 1,415; \$ 943; \$ 566; and \$ 377) are given to the top five prizes. The same cash amounts are given to winners in the drum and lyre competition among school bands, in both a junior and senior divisions. All these expenses are devoted to making the visiting guests feel the vibrant events of the city and increase tourist arrivals.

The secular and commercial aspect of the festivity has caused some friction between the church and the city administrators. It has mainly to do with the noise generated by the activities and programs in the public square just outside the church courtyard during mass. Priests apologize to the pilgrims during their homilies for the noise coming from the civic celebrations outside. A coordinating committee involving both church and city representatives is tasked to coordinate the activities and schedules in order to maintain the religious aspect of the Maytime devotion.

### **The national and the city rituals**

On March 25, 2023, the Antipolo cathedral was elevated into an international shrine, making it the first church in the Philippines to be accorded this recognition by the Vatican. (Ramirez 2023) With this distinction, even more pilgrims are expected to flock to Antipolo to pray to the Blessed Virgin, further boosting the economic and political recognition of Antipolo as a place of unique importance.

May is associated with Mary and among her shrines, Antipolo takes primacy. The pilgrims who flock to her on this month come from all over the country and other parts of the globe. After its declaration as an international shrine, regular daily masses even outside of the pilgrimage months were increased to nine, with Sundays having 14 masses (Philmass 2023). Even outside of the pilgrimage season, easily 90 per cent of the people who attend mass are pilgrims coming from places other than Antipolo itself (Saquido 2018). The Antipolo residents on Sundays prefer to attend mass in their own parishes rather than at the shrine, due to the huge crowds in church, leaving them little space to fit inside the huge cathedral.

The annual penitential walk that opens the Maytime pilgrimage season is undertaken mainly by non-residents of Antipolo. They are indeed pilgrims, some returning in keeping with a promise to the Blessed Virgin and others to continue family devotions began by their parents and grandparents. This homage by her devotees gives Antipolo its primary identity as the “pilgrimage capital”. Residents who belong to other parishes in the Antipolo diocese have taken to making the pilgrimage themselves in keeping with the tradition although the nearby parishes are amused when their trek is also referred to by the pilgrimage label “ahunan” or ascent, since they live in the mountain city themselves. Indeed, the pilgrimage as a religious ritual is undertaken for the purpose of traveling to a holy site “in order to encounter God where He has revealed Himself” and strengthen their faith.

The ritual involving the image of the Virgin that does contribute to the local identity and sense of community among the city residents is another event entirely outside of the pilgrimage. It is the reenactment of the evacuation of the townspeople to safety at the close of World War II, when in February 1945 they brought the image to a hill outside the town in order that it would not be destroyed during the battle for liberation. A reenactment of this evacuation is done annually on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, beginning with an early morning procession from the Antipolo cathedral to Sitio Colaique, where a mass is then celebrated. The city government provides for a light breakfast for the people who attend the *paglilikas* (evacuation) commemoration, numbering anywhere from 600 to a thousand. Church and local officials collaborate closely to ensure the order and safety involving the police, Office of Public Safety and Security, City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office, City Health Office as well as the government-run San Jose National High School Dance Troupe, the Antipolo City Band, and the private Catholic school Our Lady of Peace School Drum and Lyre band. The city government provides a marching band, deploys policemen to look after the participants, and assigns fire trucks, ambulances and medical teams to the site. This is the local ritual; the May festival is a national event.

This local commemoration does not attract any significant number of pilgrims; it is usually the local residents who participate. Hence, the city does not prepare a separate festivity at this time and instead participates in the procession and mass celebrated by the church.

## Conclusion

Antipolo is always associated with the Virgin and its drawing power comes from the presence of the miraculous image. Secular festivals such as parades and musical contests will not be able to draw the same numbers to the city. The long tradition



of pilgrimage to Antipolo is a religious ritual and draws its strength from the sustained devotion of the people.

The identity of the city is undeniably and irretrievably linked to the image of the Virgin of Antipolo. It would be a mistake for the local government to ignore and much less deny this formidable historical and cultural connection. The connection is so strong that upon its institution as a city, the seal of the local government was drawn with the image of the Virgin in the middle of the logo. The other picture elements in the seal all have religious significance and connection to the Virgin: the Antipolo cathedral, the Boso-boso church which was the first Catholic establishment in the area, and the Hinulugang Taktak falls whose healing spring waters are found at the foot of the shrine (City of Antipolo 2023). The seal of the diocese of Antipolo has the Virgin in the center too, although the illustrations have more historical references. These are the leaves of the tipolo tree, from which the city is named, and the galleon ship, which brought the holy image to the Philippines. At the top is a dove, representing the Holy Spirit according to Catholic tradition (Diocese of Antipolo 2023).

Instead of veering away from the religious character of the festival, the city would be better served to recognize the deeply-rooted tradition and devotion to the Virgin. Such historical references to her image have to be incorporated and built into the festival because, in the words of a resident, “Antipolo would not be Antipolo without the Virgin”. Recognizing its intimate connection to the place and identity of the city would give the created festivals its anchor in history. The created festivals of the local government, no matter its color and gaiety, would not be able to draw the same huge crowds as the image. The festival and therefore the revenues from it can only be sustained if this historical ties are maintained.

The May-time festival is not a local ritual and does not actually engage the community nor contribute to the community identity. It is the character of the Antipolo pilgrimage to be a national undertaking with no need for the local population to participate in the events. The government festival only capitalizes on the religious motivation for the visit to offer other economic and commercial opportunities. Even without these government-initiated marketing and tourist-oriented activities, the Antipolo festival will remain and continue. Government needs to partner with the church in order to strengthen the popular devotion and maintain the tradition for the pilgrim-tourists to continue coming to the city.

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