

# Ligligan Parul: Pampanga's Giant Lanterns as Political and Cultural Thought

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## ABSTRACT

This ethnographic piece establishes a political-cultural vista of lantern makers and the thought processes going into the craft. It presents the premise that Pampanga's long history of the practice and selfless development of the Parul craft is reflective of Kapampangan ethnicity, history, and medium for political-cultural thought. It begins with an inquiry into how the giant lantern is expressive of the traits of the Kapampangan; language informs this study's interpretation of the Kapampangan-ness of the lantern. Secondly, it explores the prospect of the giant lantern displaying metaphors for political-cultural expression and storytelling.

The research is set on a Geertzian-flavored symbolic & interpretive anthropological framework where understanding another culture is perennially an activity of interpretation; this involves determining explications behind cultural acts through situating events in a particular cultural actor's motives, values, and intentions.

**Keywords:** *Giant-Lantern-Festival, San-Fernando, Political-Anthropology, Ligligan-Parul, Regional-Culture*

## INTRODUCTION

he City of San Fernando, Pampanga is recognized as the 'Christmas Capital of the Philippines' and as 'Asia's Christmas Capital.' Colloquially phonated and informally spelled as *Sampernandu*, it is the home of the Giant Lantern and its respective

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festival — the *Ligligan Parul* — and the birthplace of the *Parul Kapampangan*, a lantern in which its design is composed of four consistent parts and exclusive to Pampanga. The lantern is easy to love because of its lively vibe, which never fails to appeal to people of all ages. Reasons vary from the fascination of its technology, its whimsical colors, or the festive expression of Christmas that calls to the young at heart.

The giant lantern is a product of a colorful history. It is said that the first instances and events of the giant lantern were found in the Catholic folk festival called Lubenas. A procession done on land, hence the Kapampangan word 'Limbun,' it consists two rows of lanterns mounted on bamboo poles that accompany either the *andas* (shoulder-lugged carriage) or the *carroza* (wheeled carriage) bearing the patron saint's image;<sup>2</sup> at the back was the large lantern which represented their barangay. The lantern contest that is similar to the competition style today may have started around the time that lantern makers were using the car battery and generator as a power source. The barangays held the competition during their respective Lubenas, using their electric sources during the last two days. It is on Christmas Eve that the lantern processions from the competing barangays would come together in the town square, at the basketball court situated between the Assumpta Building and Liberty Building, for the Ligligan Parul.<sup>3</sup> At the time, the competition was about endurance, where competing lanterns were simultaneously lit and played until their bulbs exploded or expired; the lantern with the most number of remaining bulbs lit was the victor.

As time went on, the creation of the giant lantern along with its tradition and as a practiced art may no longer be considered confined to the seasonal territory of 'the longest Christmas.' In more recent observations and insights in terms of design trends, there are appeals to subjects that seem to appear visually distant from the more traditionally-rendered messages of love, hope, and peace in the standard stylings and religious icons of the holiday season. Initially, there have been lantern artists who have explored patriotic imagery and some who felt it necessary to consider the lantern as a tribute to calamities. The positive reception to these vivid metaphors eventually encouraged lantern artists to create more thoughtful designs bearing thematic messages. Such a departure into the more ecumenical and even secular is also

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<sup>2</sup> Tantingco, "8 Unique Kapampangan Folk Festivals," *Singsing* 3,2 (2007): 16.

<sup>3</sup> Robby Tantingco and Arwin Lingat, "The Lanterns of San Fernando and Angeles," *Singsing* 4,1 (2008): 98.

reinforced by two official sites promoting the Giant Lanterns of San Fernando, which have, in several instances, encouraged the public to receive the lantern as a symbol of hope, sympathy, and wishes of joy that can have its impact year-round.

These details considered, the lantern is recognized as a definitive part of Kapampangan culture because of its long history in the province, adaptations of the lantern to different materials in accordance with the times, and the continued heritage both in terms of the craft and performance. These inspire the revisiting and rumination of the other meanings that the giant lantern could have as well as the different instances they can be purposed aside from the spirit of the holiday season.

This article is double-tiered. On the local level, it discusses how the lantern is expressive of the traits of the Kapampangan. On the national level, the study advances that the lantern can be designed to display visual metaphors or political-cultural sentiments or statements; included in the portion is a brief discussion on how audio-visual works such as the lantern can be read. To set the context of this study, it is explained how folklife can inform political culture.

### **The Role of Folklife in Political Culture: Setting the Frame**

The usage of 'political-cultural thought' in this study is admittedly a demonstration of caution. It is customary to refer either only to 'political culture' and 'political thought' but never merged. Using 'political-cultural thought' is an act of respect as there are disciplines that have specific expectations and criteria in order for something to pass as a political thought and for an individual to pass as a political thinker. Political Cultural Thought, as employed here, invokes the importance of a 'ground-up' approach towards a composition of the political psychology of a nation or a subgroup, being inclusive of individuals from varied walks of life and profession, with respect to their framings of deep-seated, and long-held values.

### **Defining Political Culture**

At the very basic, political culture 'encompasses both... the politics of culture, and the culture of politics'.<sup>4</sup> The formula in this study includes Lucian

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<sup>4</sup> MJ Aronoff, "Political Culture," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral*

Pye's description that political culture is 'the composite of basic values, feelings, and knowledge' which are at the foundation of political process. Political culture comprises the beliefs, opinions, and emotions of the citizens toward their government.<sup>5</sup> Of particular focus, this study intends to show a variation of Participant Political Culture; this concept specifies that 'citizens understand and take part in

politics and voluntary associations'.<sup>6-7</sup> In terms of associations, spaces for the exercise of 'matters political' may also exist in nonconventional, seemingly nonpolitical spaces such as the 'home, neighborhood, commerce, work, worship, or any other gathering place'<sup>8</sup> just as long as there is a forum. Further, politics and governance are cultural constructs<sup>9</sup> where parameters of collective identity, values, and goals important to the collective are rendered through symbols and rhetorical strategies. Lastly, political culture 'functions as a conceptual umbrella for a wide and apparently heterogeneous range of political issue areas'; it includes 'national character, the impact of collective historical experience on national identity, and the emotional or normative dimensions of the relationship between the state and its citizenry'.<sup>10</sup>

## Defining The Role Of Folklife

Folklife focuses on customs, beliefs, stories, crafts, foods, rituals, as well as types of architectures, and these are considered interrelated units within particular groups.<sup>11</sup> Their respective lore shapes each of these components. What accounts for the charm that characterizes folklife is how its parts can convey the same story which Philippine history records, only that the accounts are told in a considerably more intimate manner by the folks themselves.<sup>12</sup>

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*Sciences.*, ed. Neil J.

Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), 11640

<sup>5</sup>Jurgen Winkler, "Political Culture," *Britannica Political Science*, May 04, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-culture>

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (California: Sage Publications, 1989), 18

<sup>7</sup> Michael G. Roskin, "Political Science," *Britannica Website* April 06, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-science>.

<sup>8</sup> Lynn Staeheli and Don Mitchell, "Spaces of public and private," In *Spaces of Democracy*, ed. Clive Barnett and Murray Low (London: Sage Ltd., 2004), 147.

<sup>9</sup> Aronoff, "Political Culture"

<sup>10</sup> Lowell Dittmer, "Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis," *World Politics* 29, No. 4 (1977): 552.

<sup>11</sup> IPL American Folklife Resources, 2015, <http://www.ipl.org/div/pf/entry/48474>.

<sup>12</sup> Mellie Leandicho Lopez, *Handbook of Philippine Folklore*, (Quezon City: UP Press, 2006), xxi.



Being lore that is 'communicated,' this makes folklife relatable to political thought in the sense that politics can exist beside it.

As Murray Edelman has written, politics is much like religion, love, and the arts, in the fashion that it is a subject matter which men cannot abstain from nor abandon; '...not in their behaviour, nor in their talk, nor in their writing of history'<sup>13</sup> Under the framings of folklife- flavored political culture, anyone can have a political thought as these are expressed ideas about the conditions of the times which concern a specific population. Further from Edelman, what all countries and cultures have in common is how its peoples dwell on lore about the state: what it is and does and should be.'<sup>14</sup> Ruminations on the political from the viewpoint of folklife, being from the ground up, permits a more appropriate theoretical contrast to the usual activity of locating politics in the public sphere. This viewpoint can be described using an adaption of Jean Cohen's<sup>15</sup> and Jean Elshtain's<sup>16</sup> description of the concept of the private sphere. Both write that it is a space of negative freedoms and by that, free from interference and conducive for the construct of political ideas and the nurturing of autonomous citizens.

It is ruminated that lantern artists and their guilds fit this description as these bodies provide these spaces as outlined since their practices have lore of their own.

### Geertz's Symbolic & Interpretive Anthropology

The foundations of the study were set using a Geertzian symbolic & interpretive anthropology which contends that the approach to culture is predicated on the intellection that understanding another culture is a continuous activity of interpretation, this act of inspection which involves positioning a cultural act into the specific and local contexts in which the act is meaningful. The Geertzian brand of analysis is an 'actor-centered

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<sup>13</sup> Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Cohen, "Rethinking privacy: the abortion controversy," in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, ed. J. Weintraub and K. Kuman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Jean Elshtain, "The Displacement of Politics," "in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, ed. J. Weintraub and K. Kuman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

perspective'<sup>17</sup> which recognizes that people, skilled with language and living in history, are not without intentions, hopes, and moods; likewise in passions and judgment shaping what they do, and the reasons behind it. To truly understand their socio-cultural life in terms of forces, mechanisms, and drives alone, considered 'objectivized variables set in systems of closed causality'<sup>18</sup> barely suffices. The concept of 'layers of meaning' likewise develops the content of this discourse. For Geertz, the concept accomplishes more nuanced work --- any ethnography is considered by its nature as 'thick description' wherein an account is stratiform with levels of cultural value and significance. Also, to view culture as context, a full description would become a means of taking account not only of an act but of the culture that informs it.<sup>19</sup>

## INTRODUCING THE LANTERN ARTISTS<sup>20</sup>

This study gains both its content, color, and vibrancy from the wisdom of several lantern makers whose insights shared in the interview are, in turn, shaped by their life experiences.

Teddy Aguilar is a 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Lantern Maker residing in Purok 10 Barangay Santa Lucia. He was the former apprentice of Arnel Flores. Aguilar earned the honor of Giant Lantern Festival Grand Slam for Barangay Dolores in competition years 2016 and 2017.

Arnel Flores is also a 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Lantern Maker from Purok 10. His practice spans more than three decades, and he has apprenticed for four years.

Edwin David Jr. is of Barangay San Nicholas; he has been practicing for 13 years.

Arvin Bondoc Quiwa is a 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Lantern Maker; he is the son of Ernesto Quiwa and also resides in Purok 10. He is known for contemplative and political lanterns and is the designer of the ASEAN lanterns.

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<sup>17</sup> Jon McGee, *Anthropological Theory an Introductory History* (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 483.

<sup>18</sup> Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 127.

<sup>19</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 14 & 20

<sup>20</sup> The data for this segment is derived from a spreadsheet-style directory authored by the City Tourism and Information Office of San Fernando.

Ernesto Quiwa is one of the oldest lantern makers. He is of the 4<sup>th</sup> Generation and the grandson of Francisco Estanislao.

Roland Quiambao is of Barangay Del Pilar; he is a lantern artist of 31 years. He is a composer and an advocate of Kapampangan culture, being awarded Most Outstanding Fernandino in 2004 and Most Outstanding Kapampangan in the category of Arts & Culture in 2005.

Efren Tiodin is of Barangay San Nicholas and has been in the lantern-making industry for 34 years. He is credited for replacing hairpins with remodeled bicycle brakes as the contact point in rotors. Tiodin trained under the tutelage of Mario Datu.

For the purpose of brevity throughout this article, each lantern artist will be referred to by their first initial and surname after the first instance their names are mentioned.

## THE PARUL AS KAPAMPANGAN & THE KAPAMPANGAN-NESS IN THE PARUL

What gives the lanterns of Pampanga their distinction from the others is its design formula made up of four consistent components regardless of the size of the lantern; all the lantern artists agree with this. Arnel Flores weighs in on the matter—

The way the Kapampangan lantern is made, it cannot be altered. First, it has to do with the 'tambur,' the center of it, then the next part called the 'palimbun,' then 'siku-siku,' then 'puntetas'... other people don't know this detail. Even if someone from San Fernando made a lantern in another place, they won't be able to deny that the lantern is Kapampangan-made.<sup>21</sup>

The components are explained in detail as follows --- First, there is the *Tambur*, which is a corruption of the word 'tambul' or 'drum'; it forms the center of the lantern. There are right-angle designs that attribute the star shape to the lantern, which are called *Siku-Siku*. The word bears

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<sup>21</sup> Arnel Flores, interview by author, Santa Lucia, San Fernando Pampanga, Philippines, October 10, 2017.

exemplification to the inuulit morphology, with the repetition of the word 'siku' meaning 'elbow,' fitting of the repetition of the angles. There is the *Palimbun*, which is a series of circular shapes on the outer rim. It symbolizes the procession, the act of going around town and its religious connotations.<sup>22-23</sup> Last is the outer layer that surrounds the lantern. Given the name *Puntetas*, it is from the word 'punta' which means 'edges.' This fourth section reflects the Kapampangan's fondness and attention to detail.<sup>24</sup>

It may be said that if a Kapampangan were to be rendered into a creative symbol, it would be the Christmas lantern. What furthers the Kapampangan-ness of the lantern is how the aesthetic is permeated by Kapampangan attitudes.

### ***Mayabang, Masigla, Masaya***

The Kapampangan is joyful, hence the preference to use many lively and complementing colors while the Kapampangan sense of extravagance and showiness is translated to size;<sup>25</sup> *sigla* may refer to 'mirth' and 'joy,' but it can be generally applied to 'loudness'<sup>26</sup> For A. Flores, joy is also something shared both by the people and the lantern:

Joy should be wide-spread, not meant to be kept by one's own. The same goes with grace --- if it isn't shared, it'll vanish; what will become of one then? Which is also why I teach lantern craft. I won't be here forever; when I die, what will become of lantern craft then? Lantern craft is a legacy.<sup>27</sup>

This said, it is also reminiscent of the gallant tendencies of gentlemen and the generous or bountiful feast table,<sup>28</sup> perhaps an extension of the sharing and giving tendencies<sup>29</sup> possibly associated with *Caba*, but along a generalized

<sup>22</sup> Roland Quiambao, interview by author, Del Pilar, Pampanga, Philippines, May 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Flores, interview

<sup>24</sup> Quiambao, interview

<sup>25</sup> Quiambao, interview

<sup>26</sup> Fray Diego Bergano, *Vocabulario en la Lengua Pampanga* (Angeles City: Holy Angel Center for Kapampangan Studies, 2007)

<sup>27</sup> Flores, interview

<sup>28</sup> Alice Guillermo, "The Superstars of San Fernando," in *Pasko Essays on the Filipino Christmas* ed. Cid Reyes and Ige Ramos (Quezon City: Larawan Books, 1993)

<sup>29</sup> Arvin Quiwa, interview by author, Santa Lucia, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines,

definition involving ‘food taken on a platter or basket’<sup>30</sup>. Paired with discriminating taste (a far from perfect translation of ‘e basta-basta’) in which the Kapampangan will not settle for anything less (generally so) and the competitive spirit they have, this created the annual Giant Lantern Festival.<sup>31-32</sup> The enlargening of the lanterns is also a translation of another Kapampangan trait --- *paratut* (roughly translatable as ‘boastful pride’). According to Roland Quiambao, the Kapampangan enjoys challenges:

The Kapampangan like to out-do each other and even themselves; when they are pressured by competition, this is a chance for them to bring out their best. This is what makes us Kapampangans haughty.<sup>33</sup>

*Mayabang* is the top adjective used to describe Kapampangans, and it is considered an embarrassment only for Kapampangans who are unfamiliar with the reasons why. The Kapampangan’s framing of ‘mayabang’ or ‘yabang’ differs from that of the Tagalog, in that the latter speaks of the incompatibility of such a trait with the accepted and taught national values of ‘hiya’ or shame which is on occasions conceptually interchanged with demonstrations of humility. The Kapampangan is haughty because they believe they can own up to what they commit to and say. As a people who know how to mock things and people, and joke about them, they fear being mocked and jested themselves and so they would see to it that whatever they do, they go about it with diligence, an emphasis on process and detail that doesn’t believe in shortcuts (Pangilinan: 2018).<sup>34</sup>

### ***Kasampatan, Magpamulala***

The giant lantern is uniquely Kapampangan, being only made in San Fernando by Fernandinos.<sup>35</sup>

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January 21, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>31</sup> Quiambao, interview

<sup>32</sup> Quiwa, interview

<sup>33</sup> Quiambao, interview.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Raymon Pangilinan, interview by the author, Angeles City, Pampanga, Philippines, November 04, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Teddy Aguilar, interview by the author, Dolores, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, January 17, 2018. Flores, interview. Quiwa, interview. Efren Tiodin, interview by the author, Del Pilar, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, January 09, 2018.

*Kasampatan* or 'the beauty of a thing at its peak' or 'perfect beauty'<sup>36</sup> is reflected in the lantern such that the Kapampangan has a preference for high standards and perfection. They are most happy in dedicating time, effort, and resources in order to create a thing of beauty. The framing of beauty in the instance of the lantern is on the one end defined by the visual aesthetic and, on the other, is the dedication to process and tradition. From A. Flores:

Some want to try making the lanterns computerized. From what we know, the computerized one promises plenty of shape combinations for designs. But to compare, the traditional rotor is still superior to the computerized because of its practically limitless character. This is how we boast of the tradition. No matter what changes are proposed, if there is claimed to be a third way to get the craft done, it still wouldn't beat the original.

The Mayor of Santiago, Isabela has been impressed by this. I made one for him. I showed him the version made with computer, then I showed him the traditional one; he still preferred the traditional one. He says it truly is one of a kind. It's also because the lantern operators are dancing, they move to the beat.<sup>37</sup>

The creative disposition embodied in the giant lantern was born in a time long before television and the internet existed to provide graphical or conceptual references for inspiration. But what is most remarkable is the demonstration of ingenuity characterizing the complex fashion and simplicity of materials the lantern is constructed. Components of the lantern are made from steel sheets, wood, steel, plastic, and board. The preferred diligence to the original make shows respect for the past, a fondness for antiquity and the manual<sup>38</sup> in a time where everything is now 'smart.' The rotors do more than bring life to the lantern as the cylinders become the canvas for vast imaginations that speak in the parlance of shapes and colors. No doubt, the act

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<sup>36</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

<sup>37</sup> Flores, interview,

<sup>38</sup> Quiwa, interview.



of scoring the rotors to create the points of contact is a demonstration of genuine patience in reverence for process, the incentive being both dedication to the craft and the want to be marvelled. Quoting Arvin Bondoc Quiwa—

Being Kapampangan means not wanting to settle for less; we don't believe in saying the words 'this is close enough,' that just as long as the lantern is lit, we are happy. We want the people to be stunned.<sup>39</sup>

*Magmulala* is 'to become astonished' and 'be bewildered';<sup>40</sup> it is the perennial objective for lantern artists to trigger such reaction from the audience.

### *Santungan, Aslag*

Behind the effervescence projected by both the lantern and its festival lies a melancholic memory that drove the spirit of the Parul Kapampangan into deeper significances. R. Quiambao (2015) sees the lantern as a fervent symbol of Kapampangan resilience, an insight inspired during the events of 1991 in the aftermath of the lahar from the Mt. Pinatubo eruption:

It showed resiliency because when there weren't any raw materials available, they looked for other possible means; they used plastic. You make using what's available, from bamboo to wire, to steel. That's being resourceful. When the calamity struck, we were able to rise from the tragedy. I used the Parul as the metaphor for resilience in my speech when I won the award for Most Outstanding Kapampangan. I said: Those lanterns became the refuge and source of courage of the Kapampangans for them to come back to their homes; the lantern served as the bright light so the people would remember who they are as Kapampangans; it was the light that guided them home and encouraged them to restart their lives.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Quiwa, interview.

<sup>40</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

<sup>41</sup> Quiambao, interview.

These twin ideas of 'light' and 'hope' in the shape of the 'star' have been explored in the works of scholars such as Anne Therese Mabanta-Fabian who write that the star was originally seen in the context of being a symbolic component in the Nativity Scene, where it functioned as the bright, guiding light for those who searched for the new-born Messiah. Margins for the interpretation of the star had eventually accommodated definitions inspired by spiritual ornamentation and decoration.<sup>42</sup> The star became one of the first shapes of the lantern in the likeness of a five-pointed circular motif. Fabian explains that both 'function' and 'representation' are at play, where the star-shaped lantern becomes the form for a 'universal light-giving character ensconced in an earthly form'<sup>43</sup> The spiritual aspect comes into play during religious performances.

Also, banking on the original religious connotation of the star, this was the motivation for the organizers to push through with the lantern festival when it was almost temporarily canceled for 1991. The motion to call off the festivity was grounded on an entertained need for solemnity, a demonstration of sympathy for victims of Pinatubo. Efren Tiodin (2018) recalls the scenario:

The city of San Fernando 'broke down' from the effects of the lahar; that was during Dr. Aquino's time. But there was one Giant Lantern maker back then, Roland Quiambao, because he was a good acquaintance of Dr. Aquino, [He told them] 'if we (stop) the festival, we'll only lose hope even more; we need to show that we have hope, that we can rise and recover.' From the standard 18 feet lantern, we made 12 feet ones. It's just so the tradition would continue for that year.<sup>44</sup>

*Santungan* is the Kapampangan word for 'shelter' and 'refuge'<sup>45</sup> while *Aslag* refers to 'light'<sup>46</sup> In its usage here, aslag pertains to optimism and hope; this is a

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<sup>42</sup> Anne Therese Mabanta-Fabian, "Exhibiting the Giant Lanterns of Pampanga," 2007. (Conference Proceeding).

<sup>43</sup> Anne Therese Mabanta-Fabian, "Exhibiting the Giant Lanterns of Pampanga," 2007. (Conference Proceeding).

<sup>44</sup> Tiodin, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

<sup>46</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

thematic that would become recurrent in both succeeding lantern festivals and in the general interpretation of lanterns on their own.

***Katapangan, Dinay, Pamangara***

But the most remarkable of all is how the lantern stands as a consistent symbol of bravery. For A. Quiwa, this is defined by both design and inherent in its operation—

On the giant lantern, the symbol of bravery is constant. Red is for bravery, right? Same with brightness. And if you look at the lantern, the method of operation is dangerous because of its open wires; but one could see the operators dancing.

When a foreigner goes to see it, they'd say—

'Hey! That's dangerous! Aren't you going to get electrocuted?!'

They don't want to come any closer as they can see the open wire. But then one sees the strut and sway of operators accompanying the rhythmic turning of the rotor; they enjoy what they are doing. That's bravery, is it not? They don't fear death!<sup>47</sup>

A. Quiwa also recounts a definitive moment in the festival of 2016 that exemplified what the greatest instance of bravery demonstrated so far is—

But the time it rained, that's when they experienced fear. It was the festival of 2016. Some prayers were said, and the rain stopped within minutes. The lanterns and rotors were wet and the teams were reluctant to proceed.

'But our rotors are wet!'

They exclaimed.

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<sup>47</sup> Quiwa, interview.

But then Ching called with the go-signal.

‘We’re ready...!’

She said.

‘We won’t start them because we’ll die!’

We replied.

But we went ahead.

The lanterns were to be lit for the visitors. The lantern makers and their operators would risk their lives. We want to ask that the members of the lantern making teams be given insurance. This idea came from what we experienced. Just because the visitors were there, we had to go on with the show, risking our lives in the process. We wore gloves but it didn't change the fact that the lanterns were still wet. Del Pilar refused to go on, neither did Calulut, Sindalan’s was a bit wet.

I told everyone ‘Let’s switch them on.’ But they didn’t want to. It was probably out of shame that the show went on. Our groups were talking backstage ---

‘Let’s turn them on...!’ I said.

‘We can’t, we might die...!’

So fretted Del Pilar.

‘Wear gloves and step on the wood footing. We can’t stop, we have guests; they’re all from different countries.’<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Quiwa, interview

*Dinay* refers to ‘shame, bashfulness, embarrassment.’ Even the brazen-faced Kapampangan knows the feeling;<sup>49</sup> in this instance, it stems from *Aco*, which involves ‘owning some act; taken as one’s responsibility’<sup>50</sup> Being mindful of the guests is anchored to the convention of hospitality. The Kapampangan is said to always be ready to accept visitors because of the ingrained sense of preparedness and order typically practiced in the house and home on a regular basis. It eventually extended to public spaces and events with a local and homey feel, the Giant Lantern Festival being fitting, given its intimate intertwine with Kapampangan as a whole.

While it is a story of how a group of men flirted with danger, it also spoke of *Pamangara* or the ‘act of trusting someone’<sup>51</sup> Teddy Aguilar stresses that for the lantern artist and their guild,<sup>52</sup> *Ara*, being ‘trust’ and/or ‘confidence’<sup>53</sup> is a habit that one must exercise with their fellow workers. It’s a display of respect that the guild has faith in their leader and the wisdom of decisions made.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Bayanihan, Damay***

For a time, the lantern making process involved a wider circle of workers, individuals who came together for the love of tradition and the art. It didn’t matter what background each was from; they each had something to bring to the team. A. Quiwa shares an anecdote:

It’s said that back when the festival was in its infancy, they had a ‘bayanihan’ approach towards lantern creation; no one was being paid. It had to do with everyone making lanterns as well. Like the commercial type. My grandfather told us that when my aunt’s group were working on it, the Barangay Captain would bring rice cakes which he bought from Cutud. And then some few would cook *Tidtad* and they would bring it. Then they would make the lantern and free of charge. It’s fun. But you can’t

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<sup>49</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>50</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>51</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>52</sup> Aguilar, interview

<sup>53</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>54</sup> Aguilar, interview

get volunteers nowadays --- all the heroes are gone!<sup>55</sup>

Although the differences between the times are understandable --- the lanterns created via the initiated efforts of the community were the sort that had 300 bulbs, and so it was feasible; the lanterns of the present day have 10 000.

The collectiveness which colors the process of lantern creation in the past reflects another definition of *Damay* which in its neutral verb *dumame* refers to the ‘sharing or participating in a work, and also the work participated in (take part in the task, and the part contributed to the task)<sup>56</sup> *Damay*, in its more widespread usage, is usually recognized more for associations with shared suffering as in the ‘*Darame*’ and ‘*Pamandaramé*’, of Flagellation rituals during Maleldo (Holy Week) in Pampanga.<sup>57</sup> But to read on in Bergano’s description, he writes that good things/favors can be shared.<sup>58</sup> Its usage here, ‘*damayan*’ is proposed over the usage of ‘*bayanihan*’. While the latter is popularly accepted and even used among the lantern makers, *Damay* and *Damayan* presents a more Kapampangan flavor.

### ***Sapni, Dagul, Dangal***

The giant lantern and its respective festival have popularly been interpreted as a visual representation of pride. However, behind the garish and largeness of the event is a story of brotherhood, of what is more a merry rivalry than anything else. A. Quiwa tells this as follows:

It’s a friendly competition, because behind the lanterns we just kid and joke there. You’ll also see that if one team is lacking an operator, a member from another would come to their aid and operate that opponent team’s lantern. They are rivals still. Yes, that’s how things just are; Roland (Quiambao) knows that. Of course one of the lantern makers is my sibling, when I’m the one in need of an operator, one member from his team would sub.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Quiwa, interview

<sup>56</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>57</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>58</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*

<sup>59</sup> Quiwa, interview.



Contrary to popular impression, the lantern makers take on competition is far from cut-throat; if anything, it is reflective of ‘*Sapni*’ in which its root ‘Sap’ refers to ‘a companion who helps’<sup>60</sup> and in *Sapni* ‘is like that of a camaraderie of partners, companions, friends...’<sup>61</sup> A. Quiwa adds:

We’ve been together for so long. We are relatives and we know each other. We don’t have knowledge of each other’s gimmicks for lantern, it is only revealed during the competition. The lantern maker of Calulut is my brother. Same with Del Rosario. I represent Sindalan. The lantern maker for Dolores is my cousin who used to work for me, and he is a friend. Then the one behind San Juan is my cousin. The lantern maker of Telabastagan is my uncle. I have a cousin who makes lanterns for San Jose. The only one I’m not related to is the lantern maker of Del Pilar [Roland Quiambao]; but he is a good friend of mine, he and I handle the street lanterns of San Fernando.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, it is this sense of smallness that is placing the giant lantern practice along the lines of becoming an endangered art. The majority of the artists both have roots and are based in Purok 10 of Santa Lucia — this challenges the conventional notion of barangay pride, given the inter-barangay nature of the competition; in other words, there are Lucians who are representing other barangays. There have also been many an occasion that a lantern artist would create two lanterns for different barangays. This raises the question of whether or not there is a sense of misplaced pride on both the artists and the people of each barangay. The pride of winning goes to the lantern artist who made the best design. The Kapampangan word for Pride is available in two related entries—‘Magmaragul’ with its root ‘Dagul,’ which pertains to ‘magnitude and greatness’<sup>63</sup> is the act of boasting; this also presents a second way of looking at the enlarging of the lantern. There is also ‘Dangal’ which means ‘honor’<sup>64</sup> and this more significantly applies to the prize and title of winning places in the festival.

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<sup>60</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

<sup>61</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

<sup>62</sup> Quiwa, interview.

<sup>63</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

<sup>64</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario*.

## LANTERNS AS POLITICAL EXPRESSION

The mechanism of the lantern operates along with a synesthetic formula. Stories can be told beginning with the song that is played, in which the lights have been sequenced to synchronize to.

Interpreting the lantern involves looking into two components: the gimmick (the changing designs on the face of the lantern) and the playlist (the series of song excerpts the lantern will synchronize to). However, it is generally true for all the lanterns, a common objective of each is to express the identity or personality of each barangay in its design and the lights' movements. As there are no specific rules with regards to both song selection and the visuals of the design, the lantern artist is free to go with any motif preferred as long as it still nods to the aims of delivering the messages and spirit of the Christmas season.

### Some Preliminary Notes on Close Reading of the Lantern

As an art form, the giant lantern is designed to communicate with people.<sup>65-</sup>  
<sup>66</sup> Similar to other visual arts in the general sense, attention is first placed on how the form can convey itself, context aside. This does not mean that context is less important, given its function for full understanding and appreciation of a work. This emphasis on the form has to do with the mechanism as art 'does not communicate unless the form of the work has some meaning by itself'<sup>67</sup>

The process of extracting meaning begins with the ability to recognize that there is a sign in the first place; this is to say that signs have 'structure'<sup>68</sup> In the case of lantern gimmick creation, the basic definition of signs (their function of being 'the smallest unit of meaning' that 'can be used to communicate')<sup>69</sup> could be applied to refer to the motif which could either encompass the overall theme uniting the gimmicks or individually classifying per gimmick, per turn of display for organizational purposes granting that there is more than one message being expressed on the lantern. Symbols are incorporated in the

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<sup>65</sup> Quiwa, interview.

<sup>66</sup> Quiambao, interview.

<sup>67</sup> Evelyn Payne, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, (USA: University Press of America, 1985), 135.

<sup>68</sup> Marcel Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings: A Basic Textbook in Semiotics and Communication* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2004), 14.

<sup>69</sup> Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings*, 31.

design, its meanings 'all established by social convention or through the channel of historical tradition.<sup>70</sup>

In the process of deciphering and reading, there are three elements: subjects, symbols on the iconographic level, and form-qualities.<sup>71</sup> Each conveys a message, but in order to obtain the messages rendered in each code in a particular event, the reader has to possess some understanding of the manner of how each code operates, as in a system. Visual communication bears similarity to linguistic communication in the sense that artworks have parts that can be likened to utterances, to speech, and a cultural style found in a language.<sup>72</sup> In the case of Gimmicks, these can be formed through a consolidation of tiled imagery to compose a unified display.

Giant Lanterns also have visual-kinesthetic aspects in their displays, which include synthesis and patterns; categorizing these make them closer to relatable analysis. Classifying subject or content can be in terms of what is 'recognizable' or in accordance with the primary subject matter.<sup>73</sup> Subject or content can be representational in their forms.

The challenge that surrounds attempts of reading into a work is the occasional oversight that the visual realities in the artist's perspective may be substantially off in many respects from that of the examiner.<sup>74</sup> This is a consideration that lantern artists are wary of; they are to avoid this by using established symbols or icons with familiar references to reinforce the design. This usually materializes in the form of pairing an image(s) with an associated tune or sound byte.

At the same time, working with icons can be somewhat problematic. As a category of meaning, it is a form in which those sharing a culture have familiarity with while those outside the culture have to be informed so as to relate.<sup>75</sup> Theoretical symbolism is defined as 'the meaning as interpreted in accordance with some theoretical formulation as to the nature of things.'<sup>76</sup> In the process of examining icons, there is the need to identify symbols that have universal, basic meanings and those which are more culture-specific.

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<sup>70</sup> Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 138.

<sup>72</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 138.

<sup>73</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 140-141.

<sup>74</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 143.

<sup>75</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 149.

Metaphors may also be sought; these are devices in which one thing is rendered to resemble another in some manner, typically by way of an analogy.<sup>77</sup> Given their commonplace usages in everyday speech, metaphors tend to be overlooked. Metaphors, under the class of the formal qualities of visual art, are likewise not always apparent but are interesting additions for inclusion.

Separate from the content, the formal qualities of a work pertain to the style in the narrow sense. As the understructure, it includes the spatial composition, distribution, and alignment of the elements used, degree of symmetry, colors utilized, the nature of the lines, and similar details.<sup>78</sup> Color is a definitive component of the giant lantern. While at the denotative level these are interpreted as 'gradations of hue on the light spectrum'<sup>79</sup> the naming of the hues cannot be entirely separate from personal and cultural considerations and would be of interest in determining how these colors are used to express emotional qualities.<sup>80</sup>

In the case of the lantern in which its images are not static, the aspect of performance is woven in with the visual-kinesthetic, metaphors, and the details of the gimmick sequence (order of appearance and exit) in the formal qualities.

### Political Messages And Motifs On Lanterns

Blatantly political designs had, for a time, been an aspect of street decors, commissions requested by LGUs and custom pieces for institutions. According to A. Flores these types usually place logos of choice and names of mayors at the core of the design.<sup>81</sup> One of the popular examples is the Drug Watch lantern. R. Quiambao, on the other hand, recalls lanterns that incorporated the town/city motto. For Quezon City, who was under Sonny Belmonte at the time, the motto was 'Kapayapaan Para Sa Bayan,' with the significant component of the detail being the letters 'SB.' He also mentions San Mateo

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<sup>77</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 152.

<sup>78</sup> Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 152.

<sup>79</sup> Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings*, 69.

<sup>80</sup> Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings*, 74.

<sup>81</sup> Flores, interview.

lanterns, marked by the letters 'PD' which stood for 'Pasko na Dito sa Paing Diaz'.<sup>82</sup>

Given these accepted applications, it is asked what of more pressing issues? Can the lantern become a canvas for more intricate political expression? And why lanterns to begin with?

A. Quiwa raises that part of the popularity of the lantern lies in its being televised. The lantern artists would put their feelings and thoughts into the lantern so that it would speak to the people. He mentions previous examples of his works—

If I'm the one talking, no one's going to listen to me, right? Who am I anyways? But if it's a lantern giving the message, they would watch it because it's a lantern, it's like it permeates into their heart. 'Wow, the lantern is shouting for peace in Marawi...!' An effect like that... which is why we like putting messages on the lantern designs. Before this last festival I also had one of the designs for my lantern reference Duterte 'My God I hate Drugs'. That's what I do. We deliberately put references so we could give messages to the people. It's also to make an impact with the judges and audiences and to elicit a reaction from the people; it encourages thinking, the rousing of consciousness.<sup>83</sup>

The lantern has the potential to be utilized as a medium because of its existing framing. It is informal and its associations with Christmas, events, histories, and both personal, as well as collective memories, are what permit their immediate tendency to open hearts and minds and make new mental associations. In action, feasibility occurs in the play of symbols and sounds, which in their combinations would motivate a close reading on the part of audiences.

The conductivity of the lantern as a canvas for political imagery lies in the common details shared; an apparent one would be a play of symbols and metaphors which convey the lore of the state and the people within it. In

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<sup>82</sup> Quiambao, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Quiwa, interview.

Murray N. Edelman's *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, there is a line that reads, 'Man creates political symbols and they sustain and develop him or warp him'<sup>84</sup> This responsibility that people have for the symbolic dimensions that politics has, calls for attention. He maintains that people cannot know themselves until they know 'what they do and what surrounds and nurtures them'<sup>85</sup> The essence of politics and surmises regarding it are founded on the recognition that peoples' lives are shared, as long as there are elements of commonalities such as residence within the same state territories <sup>86</sup> and similarities in predicaments. Political thoughts, on the other hand, are both reactions to and products of interesting times.<sup>87</sup> The lantern inspires rumination on the part of the audience and the latter, in turn, would be motivated to discuss their ideas on the symbols and concepts portrayed in performance.

At the same time, the prospects of using the lantern for expression is not without its risks. Quoting A. Quiwa:

Sometimes it can be tricky to add political tones to a lantern. One can't go about it in a style that points to certain people and/or the hot-button topics they're associated with, because of the prospects of getting into trouble from it.<sup>88</sup>

The defining aspect of risk in using the lantern as a medium is its sheer opposite of anonymity. The lantern itself is designed to be obvious and is attention-calling by nature. To make a politically-expressive lantern requires semiotic care. A. Quiwa suggests that opinions can be voiced as long as they are peaceful and diplomatic, that one's design can tell a tale as long as it reflects the realities transpiring in the country in a storytelling fashion free from a position. E. Tiodin states that a true lantern artist is capable of expressing their thoughts on the lantern in a design that everyone can understand—unlike a painting where there are either descriptions or someone there to explain the art, a lantern lacks that feature.<sup>89</sup> This reiterates the

<sup>84</sup> Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 1.

<sup>85</sup> Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 1.

<sup>86</sup> Ellen Grigsby, *Analyzing Politics 4e An Introduction to Political Science* (Mexico: Cengage Learning, 2008), 6.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Curtis, *The Great Political Theories Vol. I*, (New York: Avon Books, 1981).

<sup>88</sup> Quiwa, interview.

<sup>89</sup> Tiodin, interview.



possibilities of being misunderstood. For E. Tiodin, clarity of message relies on the choreography of the design and songs of choice.<sup>90</sup>

This reflective reading into the lantern reminds us to revert to the original framings of 'politics' and the 'political.' Its juxtaposition with all-things-good as embodied in the Christmas season and representation in the lantern is valid if considering the oft-overlooked premise of 'politics as virtue.' This more favorable flavor banks on Aristotle and his *Nichomachean Ethics*, proposing that 'the true student of politics is thought to have studied virtue above all things'<sup>91</sup> and the subject of 'true student' is taken in its more liberal application in its tandem to the reference of man having a political nature. The connect between man and the political is evident in the root word 'polis' in which the focus is on the people comprising it and the relations within it;<sup>92-93</sup> this does away with party politics, partisan tactics, and narrow personal interests<sup>94</sup> --- the nouns and verbs which typically attribute the popular sloven flavor to the political. Politics as virtue is identified with moral goodness, and it lies in the conduct of the individual with the others, their exercise of moral maturity in terms of respect for others, and sense of responsibility. Successful democracies have 'reflective citizens.' These are individuals 'who possess the skills and dispositions associated with critical thinking and use them appropriately within the context of democracy'<sup>95</sup> Rational competence does translate to competence for political decision making, the act of 'weighing options, taking alternative views into consideration, and gathering information to make informed and reasoned decisions.'<sup>96</sup> Also included here is how the individual would engage others in discourse so as to refine ideas. Citizens have the responsibility to say what they must in a fashion that savors of temperance, level-headedness, and justice. This is just as citizens have responsibility for what they say. These acts, in turn, influence the shared responsibility of building the state. A lantern artist, on the other hand, would always be

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<sup>90</sup> Tiodin, interview.

<sup>91</sup> Eirini Pasoula, "Moral, Social, and Civic Education in Greece" in *Education for Citizenship* ed. Denis Lawton, Jo Cairns, and Roy Gardner, (London: Continuum, 2000), 31.

<sup>92</sup> Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 158.

<sup>93</sup> Alaisder MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (London: Duckworth, 1981), 156-159

<sup>94</sup> Pasoula, "Moral, Social, and Civic Education in Greece," 32.

<sup>95</sup> Laura Elizabeth Pinto & John Portelli, "The Role and Impact of Critical Thinking in Democratic Education: Challenges and Possibilities" in *Education for Citizenship* ed. J. Socoban, L. Groarke, R.H. Johnson & E Ellet (London: Althouse Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Pinto & Portelli, "The Role and Impact of Critical Thinking in Democratic Education," 2

responsible for their art. They spread joy, goodness, and diplomacy. As it is the duty of the lantern artist to be bringers of light, they will never bring 'shade.'

## **A HISTORY OF POLITICALLY-THEMED LANTERN DESIGNS**

A common opinion shared among the artists is that Lanterns tell stories in the moods and lyrics of the songs they dance to with the pairing of color combination and shape, provided that the lantern maker is skilled in interpretation.

### **The Santa Lucia Lantern in the Festival of 1986**

Created by Ernesto Quiwa, he recalls this lantern that he had conceptualized. Such a design was a reaction to the times:

In 1986 there was the EDSA revolution. I made a lantern then, I made a symbol of reconciliation in the design. My lantern, once the lights are all on, you can see joined hands encircling the entirety of the lantern. I told the people who interviewed me – ‘That lantern,’ I said ‘shows that the Filipinos are in a state of unity, love and compassion.’ When the lantern’s design opens, it also shows the image of Virgin Fatima.<sup>97</sup>

### **Giant Lantern Festival 2016 & The Foundations of the Exploratory**

Among the younger generations of lantern artists, the first deliberate politically-themed giant lantern was in the form of the Sindalan entry by A. Quiwa which ended with both a textual and audial reference to President Rodrigo R. Duterte and his war on drugs. It is possible that this was the lantern to set the trend of more conceptually critical lantern designs in the succeeding year.

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<sup>97</sup> Ernesto Quiwa, interview by the author, Santa Lucia, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, October 10, 2017



**Image 01.** Sindalan Lantern Design from the Festival of 2016.  
*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*

### Storytelling in the Giant Lantern Festival of 2017: Marawi, Peace, Well-wishes, and Salutes to the AFP

Despite the coincidental uniformity of the theme among several lanterns, the uniqueness was manifest in the design schemes.

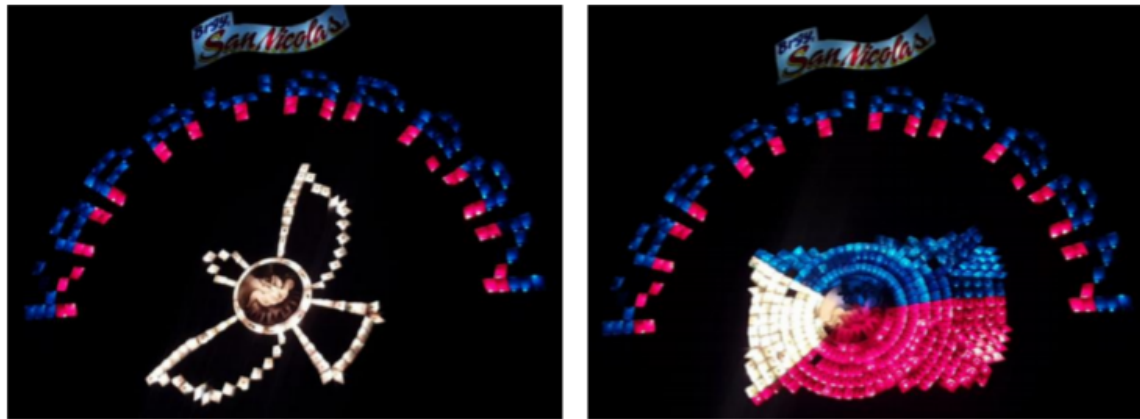


**Image 02.** Calulut lantern tribute to Marawi and AFP in the Festival of 2017.  
*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*



**Image 03.** Patriotism and unity shown in Santa Lucia lantern in the Festival of 2017.  
*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*

Calulut for instance made their tribute in the juxtaposition of text and shapes in the 'Hope for Marawi' and 'Salute AFP'. The message of patriotism and unity shown in flag motif were common for San Nicholas and Santa Lucia.



**Image 04.** San Nicholas Lantern from the Festival of 2017.  
*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*

San Nicholas gains its originality through its recurring theme of an infant Jesus at the core of the design; this year it is positioned at the heart of the Philippine flag. Edwin David Jr. was the one who conceptualized that year's particular design for San Nicholas. Edwin David, Jr. reflects on his thought process:

Our faith in God was our inspiration. This is why we have the design show Baby Jesus, Peace, and Flag as its parts. This gimmick we thought up, we wanted it to be fitting of the events that transpired in the country for that year. For the conflict in Marawi, the Jesus at the center symbolizes a connection with the world.<sup>98</sup>

While at an initial reading, one may think of the concepts as incompatible—with Marawi being more of an Islamic nation—David was referring to his lantern design as an illustration of support and prayers from the Catholic community.

Two lanterns stood out the most with the originality of their motifs. Dolores championed with a meditative piece revolving around the concepts of trust, freedom, and unending love & hope. Sindalan's lantern was catching as a rendering reminiscent of a music video in which its playlist and series of ethnic-themed imagery tell the tale of war, loss, hope, and rising again.

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<sup>98</sup> Edwin David, Jr., interview by the author, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, January 05, 2018.

## Love & Hope Never End: Teddy Aguilar's Commentary on His Winning Dolores Lantern

The Dolores lantern was designed by Teddy Aguilar. It has two gimmicks in which its success was grounded on. The first play is a progressive display of the design in the sequence of the parts of the lantern from the middle-out. Its movement, playing to the excerpt of Mariah Carey's *All I Want for Christmas is You* (1994) followed by Pinkfong's *Baby Shark* (2017) is a perfect analogy to a Windows Media Player visualization. While the kaleidoscopic, joyful persona of the lantern and its obvious references to Christmas are displayed here, its true intention is to assist in providing the sharp contrast delivered in the second play, which in terms of both the music and imagery transition is paced and contemplative.



**Image 05.** Winning Dolores lantern in the Festival of 2017.  
*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*

The first stanza of Madonna's *Like a Prayer* [1989] sets the tone for a figure appearing by part, starting with the crown followed by the top part of the head; a flash of light --- a set of petal-like semblances forming the shape of a cross adorns the figure's core, presumed to be where the center or the heart is, while the rest of the parts of the figure is completed. The word 'Trust,' in thick and large, capital letters is spelled at the bottom, following a basic tri-colored band lining the lantern's puntetas. Aguilar was asked about this particular combination. He answers that the figure has no fixed identity and remains open to each audience member's interpretation.<sup>99</sup> His motivation is for a personalized reading of the lantern, the priority being that people should

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<sup>99</sup> Aguilar, interview.



relate to his design how they see fit to make it more special.<sup>100</sup> Asked about what he thought of about 'Trust,' he defined it from the point of view of his working with his guild—"Trust among your companions, fellow workers".<sup>103</sup> But he does not expand on this portion further.

The figure then cascades out a sweep of native pattern just before the chorus plays. The native pattern then pulses in time with the beat, a continuation to match the first play. It reverts to the loud and joyful notes with an electronic track. Again, this is to set up the next play, which is, once more, another contemplative gimmick.

The succeeding play is introduced with the first stanza of the Whitney Houston & Mariah Carey duet *When You Believe* [1998]. It displays a spread of an eagle in Philippine flag colors followed by the word 'Freedom' in the same font styling as 'Trust.' There is then the sweep of the eagle design from the bottom once more, replacing the torso and tail with the figure from earlier but with the eagle wings; the eagle wings change color in a scrolling fashion from blue to red to white, along with the smoothing of the words 'Love and Hope Never End' in the same font style as the previous two words. This alternates with the Freedom imagery. In the process of the transitions between the two plays, both the figure and the eagle have the petal-like cross at their cores. Aguilar explains the context wherein he believes an intertwine between the latter two word-based plays. He defines Freedom as 'being filled with love and no hate'<sup>101</sup> Still on the same subject of the petal-cross aesthetic, he also adds the role of faith in the development of the nation where prayers play a role alongside fulfilling one's duties whatever industry they are a part of.<sup>102</sup>

### Ode to Marawi: Arvin Quiwa's Commentary on the Sindalan Lantern

Arvin Bondoc Quiwa has long been a proponent of lantern artistry as mode of political expression and storytelling. He had created a piece with a focus on the war in Marawi which is the predominant story of the State for that year. Unlike other lantern artists, he utilizes an entire song for the first half of the play, Esang De Torres' *Arwit Sa Marawi* (2017).

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<sup>100</sup> Aguilar, interview.

<sup>101</sup> Aguilar, interview.

<sup>102</sup> Aguilar, interview.





**Image 06.** Ethnic-themed aesthetic seen in Sindalan lantern tribute to Marawi in the Festival of 2017.

*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*

A. Quiwa confirms that there are design and music combinations that do nod to an ethnic aesthetic.<sup>103</sup> He specifically references his combined use of triangles and squares as well as the shapes similar to the Magdalo sign. There is the usage of spin and blooming motifs for transitions and words derived from lyrics juxtaposed with native design reminiscent of textile patterns for instances that the words could not be rendered into symbol. In the gimmicks, there were three concepts: Love, Hope, and Kapayapaan (Peace).



**Image 07.** More gimmicks from the Sindalan lantern. Its approach is the usage of fragments of lyrics along with patterned symbols for visual renders.

*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*

Among the three, 'Kapayapaan' (Peace) stood out as the more visually and audibly-catching play as the symbol of unity—people holding hands—resembled figures made from bamboo. The imagery is displayed while the first

<sup>103</sup> Quiwa, interview

stanza of Tropical Depression's *Kapayapaan* (1994) played through the speakers. A. Quiwa defines the requisites for there to be a state of peace in a country or community:

Maybe, if there is respect for one another regardless of their religion, culture, personality, and attitudes. Respect for one brings respect in return. This would prevent conflicts.<sup>104</sup>

On a similar note, he frames 'Love' in anchoring to the state of peace where if there isn't any chaos or conflict, then there is love among the countrymen.

Last but not least, he weighs in on an interpretation of 'Hope' and its intertwine with 'Faith':

Of course, for 'Hope,' hope lies in the want for the community or country to prosper. Faith would require believing that one's intentions and actions would lead them to their goal to succeed. The role of religion, since they don't teach one to do bad, right? It's there to be followed. Doesn't matter if you're Muslim, Christian, Buddhist... religion wouldn't teach its followers to do bad. Pursue the good as it is the driving force for the development of a people.<sup>105</sup>

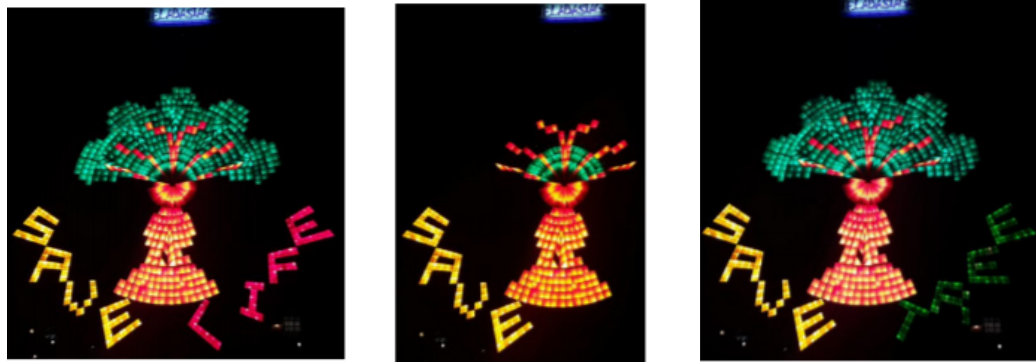
### **Advocacy as a Pursuable Theme: 2017 Lantern Entry By Telabastagan**

The Telabastagan lantern designed by Arnel Flores is classifiable as under the theme of Hope. As a lantern that exemplifies expression of advocacy, it plays on the concept of hope in trees as givers of life. It reflects one of the local issues of that year that involved the projected clearing of trees as part of a road-widening strategy.

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<sup>104</sup> Quiwa, interview

<sup>105</sup> Quiwa, interview



**Image 08.** Gimmicks from the Telebastagan lantern in the Festival of 2017.  
The designs exemplify the subject of environmental advocacy.  
*Screenshot extracted from video taken by the researcher*

## Reservations Towards the Political

Lantern artists A. Flores and E. Tiodin commonly share the opinion that the lantern is utilized because of its popularity with the people. For A. Flores, it is a possible medium just as long as the design to be affixed is not for a malicious or exploitative purpose, given the associations of the lantern as being of Christ. He gives Valentines as an example of a compatible theme. He also opines that lanterns should not be stripped of their Christmas connotations as that would be akin to disrespect.<sup>106</sup> E. Tiodin disagrees with the concept of politically-themed lanterns altogether, fearing that the subject matter of Christmas spirit would vanish in the process. He maintains that the lantern should concentrate on illustrating the ties the symbol has with Christmas being the birth of Christ and the associated imageries of the star.<sup>107</sup>

## SOME LAST RUMINATIONS

The thoughts of the lantern makers play a valuable role in the reframing of what Christmas lanterns can stand for. Getting the chance to speak with them can be as simple as sending them a message to their social media. The important point to make is that connecting with the creators completes the cycle—of both the creative process and in rumination in the sense that there is a reaction triggered and the artists could reconnect with the people.

<sup>106</sup> Flores, interview.

<sup>107</sup> Tiodin, interview.

The political nature of the symbolisms in the lantern would remain even if these would not be so visually-obvious; it has to do with the message awaiting discovery and the process going into it. Once more, reflective thinking is a trait of active citizens; by ruminating on potential meanings and bringing them to the fore, they encourage exchanges. These exchanges, in turn, would make the lantern design recognizable as potentially political.

In the process of gathering materials for the study, it has been observed that Anne Therese Mabanta-Fabian's<sup>108</sup> lament on the lack of substantial scholarly materials covering a deep reading into the spirit of the Parul Sampernandu and its gigantic variant is still confirmed. Any exploration similar in nature encourages a 'from scratch' approach, primarily involving long visits to the crafters' workshops and chronicling oral histories. In a consultation with Joel Mallari of Holy Angel University and KATATAGAN, he likewise mentions that if to inspect the other dimensions of lantern culture other than its cultural history of 'being Kapampangan' in terms of its origins, there has only been a focus on the economic dimensions among researches conducted.<sup>109</sup> There has also been the observed tendency for the absence of a distinction between the small and giant lantern in some discourses via the catch-all of 'lantern industry.' A ubiquitous topic is the historical analysis of the giant lantern heritage. It is only unfortunate that these come in the form of unpublished researches, and chances of coming across such material greatly rely on a 'who-knows-who-wrote-what' system.

The pained process of seeking literature and studies aside, it was an honor to have had the opportunity to sit down with these wonderful people and listen to their wisdom.

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<sup>108</sup> Mabanta-Fabian, "Ang Parol San Fernando, Pampanga," 2007. (Unpublished Course Paper)

<sup>109</sup> Joel Mallari, personal communication

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