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978-0-521-64622-2 - Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines

Fenella Cannell

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## POWER AND INTIMACY IN THE CHRISTIAN PHILIPPINES

What kind of reciprocity exists between unequal partners? How can a 'culture' which makes no attempt to defend unchanging traditions be understood as such? In the Christian Philippines, inequalities – global and local – are negotiated through idioms of persuasion, reluctance and pity. Fenella Cannell's study suggests that these are the idioms of a culture which does not need to represent itself as immutable. Her account of Philippine spirit-mediumship, Catholicism, transvestite beauty contests, and marriage in Bicol calls for a reassessment of our understanding of Southeast Asian modernity. Combining a strong theoretical interest in the anthropology of religion with a broader comparative attention to recent developments in Southeast Asian studies, she offers a powerful alternative to existing interpretations of the relationship between culture and tradition in the region and beyond. This book addresses not only Southeast Asianists, but all those with an interest in the anthropology of religion and post-colonial cultures.

FENELLA CANNELL is lecturer in Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science

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*For Jeanne Frances I. Illo, and all the other Bicolanos who helped me,  
especially the people of Calabanga, Camarines Sur. Dios mabalos po sa  
saindo gabos.*

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## Glossary

abaca	Manila hemp
abay	bystander (spirit)
agaw-buhay	death-struggle
agom	spouse
agta	ethnic minority ‘pygmy’ population in Bicol
alok	invite
ama	father
Amang Hinulid (Ama)	the ‘dead Christ’
amateuran	amateur contest
ambag	contribution to wedding costs by groom’s side
amerikana	men’s formal Western suit
Amerikano/a	American/white person
an mga pobre (pl.)	the poor
anayo	soul-loss
anitos	spirits/ancestors
ano	what
anting (Bicol/Tag.)	amulet
aray!	exclamation of pain
areglado	sorted out (of disputes)
arindo	mortgaging of land
artista	a star
aso	smoke
asog (archaic)	effeminate priest
aswang	viscera-eating ‘witch’
atado	heap (of goods measured for sale)
ataman	person or animal cared for by humans/adoptee
atang	offering cast on the sea or river

Ate (Tag.)	Older Sister
babaylanes (Visayan)	traditional healers
baduy	vulgar
bahon	orator of courtship rituals
bakla	transvestite man
bakya (Bicol/Tag.)	wooden clog
balak	intermediary/go-between
balao	small salt shrimp
balayi	in-laws (parents of newlyweds)
balos	pay back
baloslos	mythical creature with reversible face
bansag	nickname
barangay	'village'; smallest administrative unit
bawi	to swap, or to give something back
bayaw	brother-in-law (spouse's brother/sibling's husband)
bilas	spouse's siblings' spouses (either sex)
binucot (Visayan, archaic)	enclosed elite woman
birthdayhan	Filipino birthday party
bisa	kiss the hand of senior kin
boot	inner feelings
buhay	life
bukid	mountains, rural areas
contravida	villainess
daghan	breast/heart
dai	no/not
daog	defeated
dapit	to accompany a funeral procession
datu (historical, except Mindanao)	local Filipino leader/aristocrat
disponir	borrow money
diwata	high supernaturals
drama	film melodrama
duende	dwarves
dulok	approach
emsee	master of ceremonies
endono	wedding gifts from parents of newlyweds
engkanto	magic being/spirit
entregar	trousseau
espiritu	soul
gadan	dead/a dead person
gi'til	vain



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guapo	handsome
gusi	form of sharecropping
gusto	like/wish
habay	belt
hadi	king
halo-halo	sweet snack with crushed ice
hanapbuhay	a living
harana	serenade
harong	house
harong-harong	sort-of-house/hut
hawak	body
herak	pity/compassion
higda	lying down
hilot	traditional massage
hipag	sister-in-law (spouse's sister/sibling's wife)
hito	catfish
hulit	little sermon
ibos	type of sticky-rice cake
igwa	there is/there are
ilustrado	elite of Spanish period
Inay	Mother
incenso	type of incense
Itay	Father
Jueteng	lottery
kadikloman	darkness/domain of the dead
kagawad	councillor
kalag	dead soul
kamangyan	type of incense
kami	we (exclusive)
kampusanto	cemetery
kapwa	fellow-humans
katabang	(domestic) helper
kaya	able to cope/match
keme (bakla slang)	nonsense
komedyang	folk drama
kulam (Bicol/Tag.)	sorcery
kulkul	carrying a child over one's shoulder
kumpliaño	birthday
kuripot	stingy
kursinada	'fancy' (romantically)
Kuya (Tag.)	Older Brother
laban	struggle/martial arts movie

laki	mythical being, half-horse
lang	only
laog	inside
laway	saliva; heal with saliva
librito	'little book' (of spells)
lote	form of sharecropping
lugod	might as well/ faute de mieux
lumay	love-potion
luwas	outside
ma-arte	artful
maboot	good, accommodating
madaldal	talkative
madi	co-godmother
mag-adal	study
mag-agi	pass (a house or person)
mag-arog	imitate/make something like something else
mag-atubang	be (sit) opposite/facing
magbantay	keep guard/perform brideservice
mag-blowout	host an extravagant meal
magbulong	heal
maghagad	beg
maghale	leave/remove
maghugot	commit suicide
mag-iba	accompany
mag-intindi	understand
magkakan	eat
magpangisi	comedy
magpoon	begin
magpresentar	propose marriage formally
magribay tasa	'exchange of cups'
magtugang	group of siblings/be siblings
magtungod	deal in rice wholesale
magurang	parents/old people
maimon	selfish
maisog	fierce
makahibi	likely to make one weep
makiulay	discuss, negotiate
makulog	painful
maligno	evil spirit
malungsi	deathly pale
Mamay	Uncle
mamundo	sad

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manambitan	ritual wailing
Manay	Older Sister
Mang (Tag.)	Old Man
Manoy	Older Brother
manugang	parents-in-law/children-in-law
marhay	good, very
masakit	difficult
masiram	delicious
masuba	jokey
matibay/on	(very) clever
may	there is/are
mayaman	wealthy
maybahay (Tag.)	householder/housewife
mayo	there is/are not
misteriohan	prayers, e.g. for death anniversaries
naibanan	'accompanied' (by spirits)
naigo	reprimanded/served right (by spirits)
Nana	Aunty
napikon	hurt/tricked
nawili	fascinated
negocio	business
nguog	coconut
Ninang	Godmother
Nini/Ni	Little Girl
Ninong	Godfather
nipa	type of palm
Nono/Nonoy/Noy	Little Boy
om'om	nightmare
orasion	spell/prayer
oripon	oppressive
pabasa	reading
padangat	darling/favourite
padi	co-godfather
pagkamoot	love
pagkatawo	consciousness
paglaog	entry
pagtapat	riddling contest
palad	palm/fate
palagayon	black spirit-rice
palihion	death observances
pamaghat	herbal infusion
pangontra	protective spell
pantomina	wedding dance

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paraanitos	healer with anitos
parabulong	healer
paradaog	'defeater'
paralibot	circulating
parigos	bathe
parong	smell
pasalubong (Bicol/Tag.)	greeting gifts
pasayan	shrimp
Pasion	Bicol Passion text
pasma	humoral illness
Pasyon (Tag.)	Tagalog Passion text
patianak	abortion-causing spirit
pilosopo	sceptic
pilya	feisty
pinsan	cousin
Pistang Kalag	All Souls' Day
po	respect particle used in address
poblacion	town centre
pogi (slang)	handsome
promesa	religious vow
pula	dumb
puyo	mudfish
remontados	outlaws
restos	secondary tomb
ribay	exchange, swap
rigaton	deal in fish
sabi	say
sadiri	self
sakop	dominion
salabat	ginger tea
salapi	50 centavo coin
sampot	spirit-companion
sana	just/only
sanib (Tag.)	spirit-companion
santiguar	form of divination
santo/a	M/F saint
saro	spirit-companion
sentencia	judge
sentimiento	sentimental
sikat	famous
silahis (Tag.)	double-blade/ man with dual sexuality
sinda	they

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sundang	farmer's knife
sungkohan	final meal in courtship ritual
supog	shame/embarrassment
suwerte	luck
swardspeak	bakla slang
talusog	mudfish
tandan	wage
tanggal	passion-play
tawad	discount/forgiveness
tawo na dai ta nahihiling/tawo	people we don't see/people
tentasion	temptation
togot	allowed
tontonan	Easter ceremony blessing children
tood	used to/accustomed to
tribo	clan
tugang	sibling
tulod	spirit meal
tunay	true/real
turog	sleeping
turubigan	hopscotch
tuytoy	canopy extending a house
ugali	customs/ways
ugat	body vessels
urulay	discussion/talk
usog	illness caused through 'influence'; a form of mystical 'contagion'
utang	debt
utang na loob (Tag.)	'debt of the inside'
vetsin	monosodium glutamate

## Note on language and names

The Philippines is rich in languages, and the Bicol language is itself rich in dialects, including mutually incomprehensible dialects. The people with whom I lived speak standard Camarines Sur Bicol, and it is their dialect which is quoted here, and which for the sake of brevity is referred to as ‘Bicol’ throughout. Some words in Tagalog (the language of the national capital region of Metro Manila) are also quoted, and are marked by the abbreviation ‘Tag.’ Other Philippine languages are referred to by their full name in the text.

The Bicol language, like other Filipino languages, makes plurals by inserting a plural marker (in this case, **mga**) before the noun; hence **harong** (a house) becomes **mga harong** (houses). For the sake of ease of reading in English, the plurals used here (except of course in passages of Bicol quotation) are ‘false plurals’; I have either added a final -s to Bicol words (as in **saros** from **saro**, a spirit-companion), or omitted pluralisation altogether (as in **amateuran** for singing contests) if the Bicol ending already suggests a possible plural to the English ear (on the model of sheep/sheep). I hope these bits of DIY ‘Biclish’ will not offend Bicolano and Filipino readers too greatly.

Spelling in Bicol and other Filipino languages was not fully standardised during the Spanish period, and writers in local languages may still adopt a number of variant spellings. Contemporary Philippine spellings in many local languages, however, now tend to be modernised according to the pattern of the constructed official national language, Pilipino. The reader may therefore notice a number of different spellings of cognate words, according to the period and source. My Bicol spellings generally follow M.W. Mintz and J. del Rosario Britanico’s *Bikol–English dictionary* (*diksionario ng bikol–ingles*), except in quotations from, for example, the

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**Bicol Pasion**, in which more old-fashioned spelling is used, especially -c for -k. However, I prefer 'Bicol' to the modernised 'Bikol', and have used this spelling throughout.

**Names**

Some pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of my informants.