

At the Site of the Void: Performance and Pilgrimage in the Bicol *Dotoc*

In Bicol, Philippines, the *mayong-mayo* ('people who have nothing at all') perform an enduring act of hope: the performance of pilgrimage in the tradition of the *Dotoc sa Mahal na Santa Cruz*—performances of the ancient Christian stories of the finding of the cross by Helena and by Heraclius. How might one think of such fidelity? The dotoc is an act of seeking that reveals the subject at the site of the void—the 'presence of absence within the empty tomb' of the resurrection that has become the sign of a primal religious desire (Kubiak 1991) and the repeated motif in the dotoc pilgrimage. But the sharp incongruities in the way it appears, the multiple ways that the communities in the different sites perform their stories, sing the texts, dress up the characters, or *not* make an effort at all to put up a show, challenge understanding. The images jar and clash as one struggles to make sense of its logics as postcolonial performance. Conquergood's methodology that goes back to the event, the act of saying itself and the sayer, provides a way forward. Performance as concept, practice and epistemology, recast using the Bicolano notion and practice of *anduyog*, opens up the inquiry towards the dotoc participants' fidelity and why it matters. Co-performance is itself fidelity to the event, consistent with Badiou's notion of militant commitment and the idea of the 'inexistent' coming to be when a truth event unfolds—a way to think about the dotoc performances beyond their appearance, but ever close to what has been experienced.

Cited work:

Kubiak, Anthony. 1991. *Stages of terror: Terrorism, ideology, and coercion as theatre history*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

About the Author

Jazmin Badong Llana has recently earned her PhD at the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, Aberystwyth University in the United Kingdom, where she was a Ford Foundation International Fellow from 2006 to 2009. (Supervisors: Richard Gough and Adrian Kear; Examiners: Alan Read [external] and Sabine Sorgel [internal].) Her areas of research are cultural performance, postcoloniality, ethnography, and Alain Badiou's theory of the event and the ethic of truths. She is currently the director of the Aquinas University Center for Culture and the Arts in Legazpi City, Philippines. Jazmin received the Helsinki Prize 2008 of the International Federation for Theatre Research (FIRT/IFTR) and has been granted this year's Dwight Conquergood Award by Performance Studies international (PSi).