

FIESTA, PATRON SAINT, AND THE CONCEPT OF *GAHUM*: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE FOLK NOTION OF POWER AMONG CEBUANO MIGRANT FISHERFOLK

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The time of fiesta to most of the people in the lowland Catholic Philippines is a time of sheer pleasure, reunion, and temporary release from their daily routines and obligations.¹ Particularly for people who have migrated from their homeland, the fiesta is an opportunity to maintain links with the places they left and stir within themselves a sense of identity and belongingness.

This paper focuses on the devotion of a Visayan migrant fisherfolk to the patron saints of their places of origin, and discusses the nature of the people's relationship and interaction with these saints. In particular it examines a notion of power which characterizes their devotion to the saints.

The patron saints are referred to locally as *gamhanon*, or *makagahum*, and the power which people attribute to their saints is termed *gahum*. The purpose of this paper is to unpack the concept of *gahum*, and notions related to it, and to focus on some of the practices of the devotees during the fiesta celebrations, using their narrations and case studies. While the data deal mainly with the people's devotion to the saints, the study neither intends to discuss squarely all aspects of folk Catholicism among the devotees nor examine the uniqueness or idiosyncrasy of Filipino Christianity. Rather, the present study is intended to be a preliminary discussion on the Visayan notion of power that permeates various aspects of their social relationships.

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