

“Communitas” in Liminal Spaces: Exploring Christian Spirituality from the Experience of the Displaced

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Abstract

Displacement, as a sociological, political, economic and cultural phenomena, is a very real experience especially among those who are living in inner cities” or the communities of informal settlers and the indigenous peoples (*lumads*) who are ravaged by insurgency, militarization and other forms of human-made and natural calamities. In recent years, particularly in Mindanao, there have been waves of displacement among indigenous peoples. Thousands of *bakwits* are forced to leave their ancestral lands and seek temporary shelters in evacuation centers and informal settlements. By employing a hermeneutical analysis, this paper offers a descriptive interpretation of the narratives of the displaced from the optic of liminality as a socio-cultural category. As displaced persons, the *bakwits* and the informal settlers are always in an in-between state of uncertainty, contradiction and ambiguity. Inherent to this condition is the reality of living in liminal spaces which is characterized by fluidity and the intersection of spheres and boundaries. It is also in this “spaces of encounter” that they form and experience *communitas*. From this analysis, this paper tries to map out some key elements of a Christian spirituality that is grounded on the experience of the displaced and relevant in today’s reality marked by a pandemic and an on-going political and economic marginalization.

Introduction

Displacement has been a common feature of the everyday experience of today’s people. As Edward Said says: Our age, with its modern warfare, imperialism and quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers... is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, and mass immigration.

In context of the Philippines, this culture is precipitated by various factors such as urban migration, war, and natural and human-made calamities. Such experience is very real especially among the *lumad* communities or indigenous peoples who are ravaged by insurgency, militarization, and other forms of human rights violations. In recent years, there have been waves of displacement and evaluation among the indigenous peoples who, in their defense of their ancestral lands, have been labelled as insurgents and sympathizers of the New People’s Army

(NPA). Thousands of “*bakwits*” have been forced to leave their ancestral lands and seek temporary shelter among concerned civil and religious groups. The United Nations Refugee Agency records that in 2019, in Mindanao alone, “total of 387,722 persons have been forced to flee their homes of which a majority of these have been repeatedly displaced due to armed conflict and generalized forms of violence including human rights violations.” Reflecting on the condition of the displaced based on the real-life narratives of the bakwits, this paper is a humble contribution to the on-going efforts of developing a relevant missionary spirituality for the Church to exercise her mission in a world largely characterized by displacement, migration, and homelessness.