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# Religious Performing Arts in Quiapo District: Continuity, Transformation, and Cultural Memory from the Colonial Period to the Contemporary Era

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## Abstract

*This study examines the religious performing arts of Quiapo District, Manila, as evolving cultural expressions shaped by colonial history, urban transformation, multicultural exchange, musical traditions, and contemporary media practices. Using a qualitative descriptive-historical approach informed by performance studies, cultural memory theory, ethnomusicology, urban heritage studies, and scholarship on Filipino popular religiosity, the paper analyzes ritual performance, liturgical music, devotional theater, processional traditions, sacred soundscapes, and Islamic devotional practices from the Spanish colonial period to the present. Drawing from archival documents, church records, interdisciplinary scholarships, and field observations, the study argues that Quiapo functions as a performative sacred space where religion, commerce, politics, music, and urban life intersect. The paper explores how Quiapo developed into one of Manila's major religious and artistic centers through the convergence of church-sponsored music, zarzuela, processional bands, sacred chants, theatrical traditions, and multicultural ritual practices. Particular attention is given to the Pabasa ng Pasyon, Senakulo, the Traslación of the Jesus Nazareno, church choirs, brass band traditions, and Islamic devotional recitations associated with the Golden Mosque.*

*Findings reveal that Quiapo's religious performing arts serve as living repositories of cultural memory and communal identity. These traditions preserve continuity with the colonial past while adapting to postwar urbanization, commercialization, globalization, and digital media technologies. The study contributes to scholarship in performance studies, Philippine cultural history, religious studies, ethnomusicology, urban anthropology, and heritage studies by foregrounding the relationship between performance, devotion, music, and urban sacred space.*

**Keywords:** *Quiapo, religious performing arts, Filipino religiosity, performance studies, urban sacred space, cultural memory, devotional music, Traslación, ethnomusicology, heritage studies*

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## Introduction

Religious performance occupies a central place in Philippine cultural life, particularly in urban environments where ritual practice intersects with commerce, migration, politics, and everyday social interaction. Among the many religious districts in the Philippines, Quiapo in Manila stands out as one of the most historically layered and culturally dynamic spaces in the country. Frequently described as the “heart of Manila” and the “crossroads of the nation,” Quiapo embodies centuries of colonial encounter, artistic production, multicultural exchange, and vernacular religiosity (Zialcita, 2006).

Historically, Quiapo evolved from a swampy settlement associated with the *kiyapo* plant (*Pistia stratiotes*) into one of Manila’s most important commercial, artistic, and religious districts. As Ma. Patricia Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) explains, Quiapo became “a vibrantly pulsating center of everything—commerce, worship, politics, folklore, popular culture, music” (p. 2). The district’s centrality enabled it to emerge as a fertile environment for the development of religious performing traditions shaped by Catholicism, theater culture, sacred music, and multicultural urban life.

The district is internationally recognized for the Feast of the Jesus Nazareno, especially the annual *Traslación* procession that draws millions of barefoot devotees into the streets surrounding the Minor Basilica and National Shrine of Jesus Nazareno. Yet Quiapo’s performative culture extends beyond the *Traslación* alone. The district also sustains traditions of liturgical music, processional brass bands, *Pabasa ng Pasyon*, *Senakulo* performances, devotional chanting, Islamic recitation, public ritual theater, sacred processions, and ceremonial music associated with fiestas and feast days.

These practices reveal that religious performance in Quiapo is not merely representational but deeply embodied and communal. Rituals transform churches, plazas, streets, bridges, markets, and homes into sacred performative spaces where faith, identity, and historical memory are collectively enacted. As Victor Turner (1982) argues, ritual performances create liminal spaces where ordinary social structures are suspended, and participants experience *communitas* through collective participation.

The performative culture of Quiapo also reflects the district’s remarkable musical history. From the nineteenth century onward, Quiapo became one of Manila’s principal centers for opera, zarzuela, sacred music, theater, and musical education. Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) notes that Quiapo was once home to “a rousing network of composers, singers, band and orchestra players, music teachers, impresarios, instrument makers and repairers, music merchants, conductors, pianists, music publishers, opera costume designers, and even opera make-up artists” (p. 2). Religious music and secular musical culture developed side by side, often overlapping within churches, theaters, schools, and private residences.

Spanish missionaries initially introduced theatrical performances, processions, and liturgical music as evangelization tools for non-literate colonial populations (Ileto, 1979). Over time, however, these imported forms merged with indigenous oral traditions, vernacular aesthetics, and local performative sensibilities, resulting in

uniquely Filipino religious expressions. During the American colonial and postwar periods, these traditions further absorbed influences from vaudeville, cinema, jazz, brass bands, radio, and mass media.

Today, Quiapo remains a vibrant urban sacred environment where Catholic and Islamic devotional practices coexist amid intense commercialization, migration, and technological transformation. Rituals continue to occupy physical and digital spaces through livestreamed Masses, amplified devotional chants, online novenas, and social media documentation.

This study therefore seeks to examine the historical development and contemporary transformation of religious performing arts in Quiapo District from the colonial period to the present. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How did religious performing arts develop in Quiapo from the colonial period to the contemporary era?
2. What socio-cultural functions do these performances serve within the Quiapo community?
3. How do music, ritual, and theatrical traditions contribute to the preservation of cultural memory and Filipino identity?
4. In what ways have urbanization, commercialization, and digital technology reshaped these practices?
5. How does Quiapo's multicultural soundscape contribute to its identity as a performative sacred space?

By addressing these questions, the paper contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship in performance studies, ethnomusicology, heritage studies, urban anthropology, Philippine cultural history, and religious studies.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study is grounded in performance theory, cultural memory studies, ethnomusicology, urban heritage studies, and scholarship on Filipino popular religiosity.

The primary theoretical foundation comes from Richard Schechner's (2013) concept of performance as "restored behavior." Schechner argues that performances consist of repeated, culturally encoded actions continually reenacted and reinterpreted across historical periods. Religious performances in Quiapo—including the *Pabasa*, *Senakulo*, processional music, brass band traditions, devotional chants, and the *Traslación*—may therefore be understood as living repertoires that preserve historical memory while adapting to changing social conditions.

Victor Turner's (1982) concepts of liminality and *communitas* are likewise central to the analysis. Turner argues that ritual suspends everyday hierarchies and creates powerful experiences of collective participation. Quiapo's major devotional events, especially the *Traslación* of the Jesus Nazareno, generate forms of *communitas*

in which social distinctions are symbolically dissolved through shared bodily sacrifice, movement, prayer, and devotion.

The study also engages William O. Beeman's (2002) understanding of performance as an active social process through which communities negotiate identity, memory, and meaning. Religious rituals in Quiapo are therefore interpreted not as static symbolic representations but as dynamic social performances embedded in historical and urban realities.

The analysis is further informed by ethnomusicological perspectives on sacred soundscapes. Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) describes Quiapo's musical environment as "a dizzying musical assault so powerful on the senses" consisting of "church bells, Malaysian videoke pop hits, the hymn to the Black Nazarene, the muezzin's periodic call to prayer, the streetvendor's cries, the rush of non-stop traffic, [and] the blare of horns" (p. 2). This layered urban soundscape constitutes a form of performative spatial experience in which sacred and secular sounds coexist.

The study additionally draws from scholarship on Filipino popular religiosity. Cornelio (2014) emphasizes that Filipino religious expression frequently emerges outside formal doctrinal structures and is deeply embedded in everyday social life. Similarly, Cannell (1999) and Bankoff (2003) argue that Philippine Catholicism developed through hybrid interactions between colonial religious systems and vernacular communal practices.

Cultural memory theory also frames the discussion. Ritual performances are interpreted as repositories of collective memory through which communities preserve historical narratives, devotional values, and shared identities across generations. Through repetitive ritual enactment, communities maintain continuity with the past while continually reinterpreting symbolic meanings in response to historical change.

Finally, the study engages Smith's (2006) concept of heritage as a dynamic cultural process rather than a static artifact. Quiapo's religious performances are forms of intangible cultural heritage shaped by preservation, tourism, commercialization, urban redevelopment, and digital media.

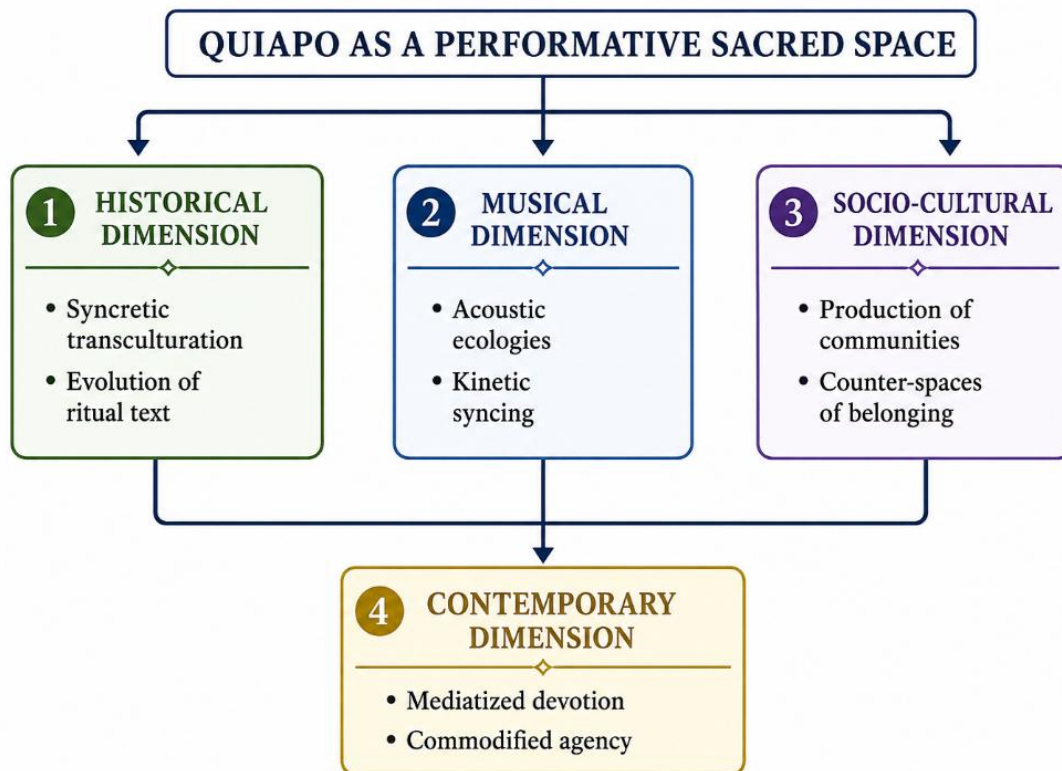
### **Conceptual Framework: The Performative Sacred Space of Quiapo**

Conceptually, this study views Quiapo as a "performative sacred space" where religion, music, theater, commerce, migration, politics, and historical memory intersect through embodied ritual action. Religious performances are analyzed through four interconnected dimensions: Conceptually, this study views Quiapo as a "performative sacred space" where religion, music, theater, commerce, migration, politics, and historical memory intersect through embodied ritual action. Religious performances are analyzed through four interconnected dimensions:

- **Historical Dimension** – the colonial and postcolonial evolution of ritual and musical traditions;
- **Musical Dimension** – the role of sacred soundscapes, processional music, and devotional singing in ritual life;

- **Socio-cultural Dimension** – the role of performance in communal solidarity, identity formation, and urban belonging;
- **Contemporary Dimension** – the adaptation of devotional practices to globalization, commercialization, and digital media.

The overarching conceptual design of this study is illustrated in the diagram below, which traces how the spatial, auditory, material, and social realities of Quiapo converge into an active, performative arena:



### 1. The Historical Dimension: Colonial and Postcolonial Evolution

The colonial and postcolonial evolution of ritual and musical traditions; The core premise of this study is that sacredness in Quiapo is not merely inherited through institutional decree but is actively and continuously performed into existence. By treating Quiapo as a "performative sacred space," we shift the analytical focus from *what religion means* to *what religion does* through the body, sound, and space.

Through embodied ritual action—the physical navigation of the streets, the straining of vocal cords, the waving of towels, and the navigation of crowds—devotees negotiate the complex intersections of faith, survival, and identity.

This dimension traces how ritual and musical practices in Quiapo are neither fixed nor timeless; they are historical layers of negotiation, resistance, and adaptation.

- **Syncretic Layering and Transculturation:** The introduction of the Black Nazarene (*Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno*) by the Augustinian Recollects in 1606 was a tool of Spanish Catholic conversion. However, the Filipino response was not passive reception but *transculturation*. Pre-colonial indigenous concepts of *bisa* (spiritual potency inherent in physical objects) merged with Catholic icon

adoration. The historical evolution is marked by this tension: institutional efforts by the Church to maintain "doctrinal purity" versus the masses' insistence on a tactile, folk-driven relationship with the divine.

- From Latin Liturgy to Vernacular Performance: The historical trajectory shifts dramatically in the postcolonial era, particularly after the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in the 1960s. The transition from Latin to Tagalog democratized ritual participation. Musical traditions evolved from Western, clergy-led liturgical chants to localized *pasyon* chanting (*pabasa*) and vernacular hymns.
- The Ritual as Historical Text: In a postcolonial context, the annual *Traslacion* (the procession commemorating the transfer of the image to Quiapo) mirrors the historical anxieties and resilience of the Filipino people. It has evolved from a modest parish procession into a massive national spectacle, reflecting the growing socio-economic pressures of post-WWII urbanization in Manila.

## 2. The Musical Dimension: Sacred Soundscapes and Devotional Sonicity

Sound is not just an accompaniment to the ritual; it is the primary medium through which the sacred space is claimed, demarcated, and felt.

- The Acoustic Ecology of Quiapo: Quiapo represents a highly contested soundscape. On any given day, the auditory environment is a chaotic mix of the sacred and the profane: the booming voice of a priest over the Basilica's loudspeakers, the collective murmuring of the rosary, the clanging of church bells, the shouting of vendors selling herbal abortions or anting-anting (amulets), and the roar of jeepney engines. The ritual performance acts as a sonic intervention that temporarily reorganizes this chaos into a coherent, sacred order.
- Processional Music and Kinetic Syncing: During the *Traslacion*, brass bands play a critical structural role. The music they play—often repetitive, rhythmic, and high-energy—is not meant for passive listening. It functions as a kinetic driver. The rhythm synchronizes the steps, breathing, and physical exertion of thousands of barefoot devotees (*mamamasan*). The music establishes a shared bodily pulse, transforming a chaotic mob into a singular, flowing entity.
- Devotional Singing as Affective Labor: Singing the *Himno del Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno* or chanting the *pasyon* during Holy Week is a form of embodied "affective labor." The straining of voices, the repetition of melodies to the point of exhaustion, and the collective vocalization of grief and gratitude create an intense emotional resonance. Sound here becomes a visceral bridge between the internal interiority of the devotee's *loob* (inner self) and the external collective space.

### 3. The Socio-Cultural Dimension: Solidarity, Identity, and Urban Belonging

This dimension looks at how performative rituals act as a crucial survival mechanism and a site of identity-making for marginalized urban populations.

- **The Production of Communitas:** Drawing from Victor Turner's anthropological theory, the physical intensity of Quiapo's rituals—specifically the Traslacion—creates a state of communitas. In the heat, sweat, and danger of the procession, rigid societal hierarchies (class, education, employment) dissolve. The wealthy businessman and the informal settler become equals, stripped of status, united by the shared title of deboto (devotee).
- **Navigating Urban Displacement and Marginalization:** Quiapo is a destination hub for domestic migrants fleeing rural poverty. For these individuals, the performative ritual serves as a site of "urban belonging." In a metropolis like Manila that often marginalizes, displaces, and silences the poor, the ritual gives them visibility and ownership of the city's streets. By claiming the public square through ritual action, they assert their right to the city.
- **Embodied Solidarity and Masculinity:** The physical act of pulling the rope (lubid) of the Nazarene's carriage is heavily associated with a distinct form of working-class, performative masculinity. It is a display of physical strength, endurance, and brotherhood (panata or sacred vow). The solidarity formed in these high-stakes, physically dangerous moments fosters localized support networks that extend far beyond the church doors into everyday survival in the slums.

### 4. The Contemporary Dimension: Globalization, Commercialization, and Mediatization

This dimension examines how traditional devotion dialogues with modern forces, proving that globalization does not dilute religion, but rather transforms its medium.

- **Digital Devotion and E-Religiosity:** The digitization of faith has redefined what "embodied" ritual action means. Through Facebook Live, YouTube streams of masses, and TikTok documentation of the Traslacion, the sacred space of Quiapo has been deterritorialized. For millions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) worldwide, participating in "e-devotion" allows them to maintain ties to their homeland and faith. The "performative space" is no longer just physical asphalt; it is a hybrid space of physical bodies in Manila and digital screens across the globe.

- The Paradox of Sacred Commerce: Quiapo is the epicenter of what scholars call the "religious marketplace." The boundaries between the sacred basilica and the commercial market outside are completely porous. The commodification of the ritual is evident in the sale of replica statues, devotional towels, oils, and digitized prayer tracts. Instead of viewing commercialism as a corruption of faith, this study views it as an extension of performance. Purchasing and utilizing these material goods is a form of domesticating the sacred space, allowing devotees to take a piece of Quiapo's *bisa* (potency) back to their own homes.
- The Mediatization and Securitization of Spectacle: In recent years, state intervention, mass media coverage, and heavy securitization (signal jammers, drone monitoring, police barricades) have transformed the aesthetics of the performance. The state attempts to discipline and sanitize the chaotic procession into a neat, photogenic public spectacle for television and tourism. This creates an ongoing, contemporary tension between the raw, unpredictable performance of popular piety and the institutional, regulated performance enforced by Church and State authorities.

### **Interconnection**

Ultimately, these four dimensions do not exist in silos. For example, a contemporary TikTok video (Dim. 4) of a historical hymn (Dim. 1) sung with intense musical fervor (Dim. 2) by a marginalized migrant worker seeking socio-cultural belonging (Dim. 3) demonstrates exactly how these dimensions intersect to form the performative sacred space that is Quiapo.

This study conceptualizes Quiapo as a "performative sacred space," shifting the analytical lens from religion as a fixed doctrinal system to religion as a dynamic, bodily practice that is continually performed into existence. Rather than viewing space as an empty, static container where activities occur, this framework treats Quiapo as a socially and textually produced landscape structured through embodied ritual action (Calano, 2015).

The intersections of faith, survival, identity, and politics within this space are analyzed through four deeply integrated dimensions.

For rural migrants navigating structural poverty, participating in these intense somatic practices serves as an assertion of "urban belonging" (Calano, 2015). By physically claiming the streets of Manila through ritual performance, marginalized sectors construct an alternative counter-space where their presence is visible, sovereign, and validated through shared suffering.

#### **4. The Contemporary Dimension: Globalization, Commercialization, and Mediatization**

The contemporary dimension evaluates how traditional popular piety dialogues with modern global forces, demonstrating that modernization transforms rather than dilutes religious practices. Through mediatization, the boundaries of Quiapo's performative space have expanded beyond its physical streets. Livestreamed liturgies, digital prayer request boards, and social media documentation deterritorialize the parish space, allowing Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) worldwide to engage in remote "e-devotion" and preserve their ties to home.

Simultaneously, this dimension interrogates the porous borders between the sacred basilica and the "religious marketplace" surrounding it (Calano, 2015). Rather than interpreting the commerce of Quiapo—such as the sale of amulets (*anting-anting*), herbal remedies, and devotional merchandise—as a dilution of faith, this framework views commerce as an extension of ritual performance. The purchase of these objects allows devotees to domesticate the sacred potency (*bisa*) of the icon and carry it back to their homes (Bautista, 2021). Finally, this dimension addresses the ongoing structural tensions between the raw, unpredictable expressions of popular devotion and the institutional efforts of Church and State authorities to sanitize, secure, and regulate the spectacle for media consumption.

#### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-historical research design integrating archival research, literature review, interpretive textual analysis, and field observation.

#### **Archival Research**

Primary and secondary historical materials were examined to trace the development of religious performing arts in Quiapo across historical periods. These included church records, colonial chronicles, historical essays, musical documentation, newspapers, photographs, devotional literature, and studies on Philippine theater and sacred music.

Special attention was given to the work of Brillantes-Silvestre (2008), whose extensive historical account of Quiapo's musical culture provided valuable insights into the district's sacred soundscape, theater history, and artistic infrastructure.

#### **Literature Review**

The study engaged interdisciplinary scholarship from performance studies, ethnomusicology, religious studies, urban anthropology, Philippine history, and heritage studies. Scholarship on Filipino popular religion, ritual performance, sacred music, and urban cultural memory was reviewed to contextualize Quiapo's religious traditions.

### **Field Observation**

Field observations were conducted during selected religious activities in Quiapo, including Holy Week Pabasa sessions, processional rituals, devotional music performances, Friday devotions to the Black Nazarene, and observations related to the Feast of the Jesus Nazareno. Attention was given to soundscapes, audience participation, ritual movement, spatial organization, amplified music systems, processional choreography, and digital media technologies.

### **Interpretive Analysis**

The study utilized interpretive textual analysis informed by performance theory and cultural studies. Rituals and performances were analyzed not solely as devotional acts but as socio-cultural processes embedded within historical, political, musical, and urban contexts.

The scope of the study focuses primarily on Catholic and Islamic devotional performances associated with Quiapo's religious life. Purely secular entertainment practices were discussed only insofar as they intersected with religious culture and urban performance traditions.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Colonial Foundations of Religious Performance in Quiapo**

Quiapo's historical development is inseparable from Spanish colonial evangelization and urban formation. Originally a fishing settlement and marshland area, Quiapo gradually became a major religious and commercial district through missionary activity and colonial urban expansion (Andrade, 2006).

Spanish missionaries introduced liturgical dramas, sacred music, processions, devotional chants, and theatrical performances as pedagogical tools for evangelization. Since many colonial subjects were non-literate, religious instruction relied heavily on spectacle, music, embodied participation, and oral performance.

Among the earliest forms of religious performance documented in Quiapo were church-sponsored musical activities and dramatic presentations. Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) cites the eighteenth-century Jesuit chronicler Pedro Murillo-Velarde, who

described the “exquisitely garbed tiples” of Quiapo performing a Tagalog *colloquio* “with much grace and skill” during a religious celebration in Antipolo (p. 3). This account demonstrates that Quiapo already possessed a thriving culture of liturgical and theatrical performance during the colonial period.

The *Pabasa ng Pasyon* became one of the most enduring devotional traditions introduced during Spanish colonization. Performed during Holy Week, the *Pabasa* involves the chanting of Christ’s passion narrative in poetic vernacular form. The repetitive melodic recitation transforms homes, chapels, and community spaces into environments of collective devotion and oral performance.

Similarly, the *Senakulo* localized European passion plays through Filipino language, gestures, costumes, and performance aesthetics. Tiongson (1999) explains that these dramatizations merged Catholic narratives with indigenous storytelling traditions, creating hybrid theatrical forms unique to the Philippine colonial experience.

Religious processions likewise became central to colonial ritual culture. Streets and plazas were transformed into performative spaces where sacred images, church music, and embodied devotion intersected. These rituals reinforced Catholic ideology while simultaneously enabling local communities to indigenize imported religious forms.

### **Quiapo as a Musical and Theatrical Center**

By the nineteenth century, Quiapo had emerged as one of Manila’s principal centers for music and theater. The district became home to theaters, opera houses, zarzuela companies, music schools, orchestras, instrument shops, and musical societies.

Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) notes that Quiapo evolved into “a rousing network of composers, singers, band and orchestra players, music teachers, impresarios, instrument makers and repairers, music merchants, conductors, pianists, music publishers, opera costume designers, and even opera make-up artists” (p. 2). This thriving artistic infrastructure profoundly shaped the development of religious performance traditions.

Theaters such as the Teatro Zorilla, Teatro Calderon, Teatro Filipino, and Teatro de Variedades became venues for opera, zarzuela, and religious drama. Productions like *Walang Sugat* and *Dalagang Bukid* reflected the blending of religious themes, nationalist sentiment, and popular theatrical entertainment.

Quiapo also nurtured some of the country’s most important musicians and composers, including Julio Nakpil, Francisco Santiago, Antonio Molina, Nicanor

Abelardo, Ladislao Bonus, and Leon Ignacio. Many of these musicians were deeply involved in church music, processional traditions, and devotional performances.

Religious and secular musical cultures frequently overlapped. Choir members performed in opera companies, while composers wrote both liturgical and theatrical works. Churches, theaters, and private homes functioned as interconnected spaces of musical production.

The district's musical culture extended into domestic life. Elite Quiapo families hosted tertulias, chamber music performances, and salon concerts in private residences. Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) describes how homes belonging to the Legarda, Nakpil, and Tuazon families became important venues for music-making, reinforcing the intimate relationship between urban domestic culture and artistic production.

### **Processional Music and Sacred Soundscapes**

Music has historically played a central role in Quiapo's religious performing traditions. Church bells, brass bands, choirs, chants, hymns, and processional marches transformed the district into a sacred sonic environment.

Quiapo Church itself became a major center of liturgical music. Certain families of musicians and organists, such as the Carrion and Mata clans, became closely associated with church musical life. Numerous devotional compositions were created specifically for Quiapo's rituals, including masses, hymns, rosaries, and processional pieces.

Among the most significant compositions associated with Quiapo are Francisco Santiago's *Ave Maria* and Lucio San Pedro's hymn *Nuestro Padre Hesus Nazareno*. These compositions became integral to devotional culture and continue to be performed in religious settings throughout the Philippines.

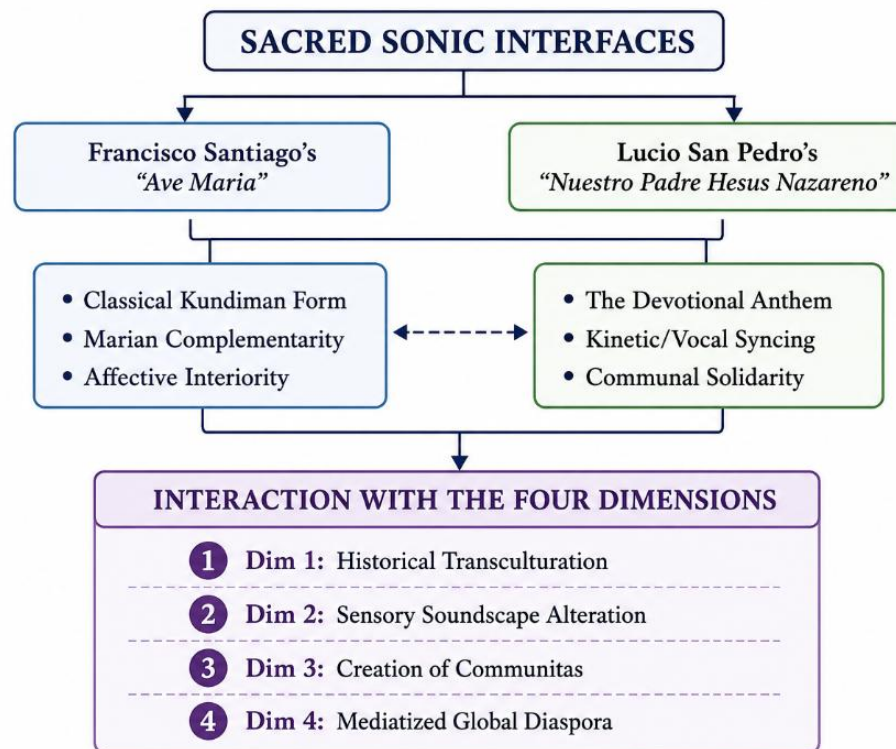
Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) observes that Quiapo's urban soundscape is characterized by an extraordinary convergence of sacred and secular sounds: church bells, processional hymns, traffic noise, commercial music, videoke singing, street cries, and Islamic calls to prayer. This layered sonic environment constitutes a distinctive form of urban ritual experience.

During feast days, brass bands parade through the streets performing marches and devotional music. The annual *bangaan*, in which bands compete to outplay one another during the Feast of the Jesus Nazareno, illustrates the performative and communal dimensions of sacred music culture.

These musical performances transform ordinary urban streets into sacred ritual spaces. Sound becomes a mechanism for organizing movement, sustaining communal participation, and intensifying emotional devotion.

## Integration of Sacred Compositions into the Conceptual Framework

Within the Musical Dimension of the performative sacred space of Quiapo, specific musical texts function as the aesthetic and theological anchors of popular devotion. Rather than treating music as a passive background accompaniment, this framework conceptualizes compositions like Francisco Santiago's *Ave Maria* (1919) and Lucio San Pedro's *Nuestro Padre Hesus Nazareno* (the official hymn of the Black Nazarene) as active structural interfaces. These works synthesize historical, sonic, socio-cultural, and contemporary realities into embodied ritual actions.



### 1. Intersections with the Historical Dimension

The presence of Islamic devotional practices in Quiapo highlights a vital trajectory of postcolonial migration and cultural reclamation. While Spanish colonial accounts emphasize the total Christianization of the district beneath the *pealing of church bells* (Brillantes-Silvestre, 2008a), the contemporary reality of Quiapo reflects a profound historical re-centering.

Following the socio-political displacements in Mindanao during the 1970s, a massive wave of Muslim migration to Manila established the Islamic community around what is now the Quiapo Golden Mosque, constructed in 1976 (Wong, 2015). Islamic vocal performance, therefore, represents a historical layer of cultural *transculturation* and urban spatial negotiation. It challenges the singular colonial narrative of Manila by re-introducing pre-colonial, Islamic sonic and spiritual geographies into the heart of the capital.

## 2. Intersections with the Musical Dimension

Within the acoustic ecology of Quiapo, the *muezzin's* call to prayer (*adhan*) and the practice of *Qur'anic* recitation introduce a sophisticated vocal tradition that reframes Western concepts of music. While Islamic orthodoxy limits the use of instrumental music in structural worship, vocal performance possesses deep performative and microtonal complexities (Nasr, 1997).

- **Melismatic Sonicity:** As musicologist Ma. Patricia Brillantes-Silvestre (2008b) observes, the *muezzin's* call to prayer is deeply embedded within Quiapo's layered soundscape. The sustained, melismatic vocal lines—characterized by the singing of a single syllable of text while moving between several different notes in succession—contribute significantly to the district's multicultural sonic identity.
- **The Interlocking Soundscape:** This sacred vocal performance does not exist in isolation; it dynamically collides and overlaps with the profane noise of Quiapo's commerce and the ringing bells of the nearby Catholic Basilica. The rhythmic phrasing, precise tonal variations, and strict rules of oral transmission (*tajwid*) required for *Qur'anic* recitation serve as an alternative sonic architecture, transforming the physical atmosphere of the streets into an active auditory sanctuary (Nelson, 2001).

## 3. Intersections with the Socio-Cultural Dimension

Islamic performative rituals function as essential sites for community solidarity, identity formation, and urban survival among Muslim minorities in Manila.

- **Acoustic Claims to Belonging:** The broadcast of the *adhan* through the minaret loudspeakers of the Golden Mosque is a sonic marker of territorial presence. For a minority population navigating systemic discrimination and marginalization in a predominantly Christian metropolis, this public auditory performance acts as a powerful declaration of citizenship and "urban belonging" (Wong, 2015).
- **Communal Solidarity:** During Ramadan, the performance of collective prayers (*tarawih*) and communal breaking of fasts (*iftar*) triggers the production of an Islamic *communitas*. The shared, physical alignment of bodies in rows during congregational worship breaks down ethnolinguistic barriers among diverse Muslim groups—such as the Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Tausug—uniting them into a single, cohesive *Ummah* (global Muslim community) within the urban space of Quiapo.

## 4. Intersections with the Contemporary Dimension

In the contemporary era, Islamic devotion in Quiapo dialogues aggressively with the forces of commercialization, globalization, and digital media.

- The Halal Marketplace: The geographic perimeter of the Golden Mosque has evolved into a bustling socio-commercial hub, mirroring the "religious marketplace" observed outside the Catholic Basilica. The performative dimension of faith extends to the public domain through the sale of Islamic apparel, religious texts, prayer mats, and *halal* food products, creating a space where sacred identity and economic survival are completely porous.
- Mediatized Recitation: Furthermore, the traditional oral transmission of *Qur'anic* recitation has found new life through digital platforms. Local Muslim youth and religious leaders in Quiapo actively utilize smartphone apps, YouTube recordings, and Facebook Live broadcasts to stream congregational worship and international *Qur'anic* reading competitions (Nelson, 2001). This mediatization deterritorializes the Quiapo Muslim community, creating a digital bridge that connects the local community to global networks of Islamic scholarship and identity.

The coexistence of Catholic processions and Islamic devotional recitations underscores Quiapo's pluralistic religious character. Both traditions utilize public ritual acts, sound, embodied participation, and collective memory to sustain communal identity.

Quiapo therefore emerges not only as a Catholic pilgrimage center but also as a multicultural performative sacred environment where multiple religious traditions coexist and interact.

### **Postwar Urbanization and Commercial Transformation**

Postwar urbanization transformed Quiapo into a highly congested commercial district characterized by migration, informal economies, and intense pedestrian activity.

Religious performances adapted to these changing urban realities. The *Senakulo* evolved into large-scale community productions staged in streets and plazas. The *Pabasa* increasingly utilized microphones and loudspeaker systems that amplified devotional chanting into surrounding neighborhoods.

Commercialization likewise became deeply embedded in ritual life. Vendors, religious merchandise, food stalls, sponsors, and tourism activities became integral components of devotional events.

Brillantes-Silvestre (2008) observes that contemporary Quiapo continues to preserve "the enticing air of a permanent fiesta" despite urban decay and commercialization (p. 11). Religion and commerce coexist within a complex ritual ecology where sacred and everyday life remain inseparable.

The decline of theaters and elite domestic music-making also transformed Quiapo's artistic landscape. Many old performance venues disappeared, while newer forms of entertainment such as cinema, videoke, and amplified popular music reshaped urban sound culture.

Nevertheless, devotional performance traditions persisted, demonstrating remarkable resilience amid modernization and urban transformation.

### **Contemporary Digital Devotional Culture**

The twenty-first century introduced new transformations in Quiapo's religious performing arts through digital media technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of livestreamed Masses, online novenas, virtual prayer gatherings, and social media broadcasts. Devotees from different parts of the Philippines and abroad can now participate remotely in Quiapo's devotional culture.

The Feast of the Jesus Nazareno increasingly incorporates drone coverage, livestreaming technologies, amplified sound systems, digital projection screens, and social media documentation.

Similarly, Pabasa sessions and devotional music performances are now circulated through online platforms, extending ritual participation beyond local geographic boundaries.

These developments have transformed traditional understandings of sacred space and communal participation. While bodily presence remains central to many rituals, digital mediation created new forms of devotional accessibility and virtual *communitas*.

Contemporary religious performance in Quiapo therefore demonstrates extraordinary adaptability. Rather than disappearing under globalization and modernization, devotional traditions continue to evolve through technological mediation while preserving core symbolic meanings.

### **Religious Performance, Cultural Memory, and Heritage**

One of the central findings of this study is that religious performing arts in Quiapo function as mechanisms of cultural memory and intangible heritage preservation.

Through repetitive ritual enactments, communities transmit historical narratives, devotional values, musical traditions, and collective identities across generations. The persistence of the Pabasa, Senakulo, processional music, devotional hymns, and the *Traslación* demonstrates the resilience of embodied cultural memory. At the same time, these performances remain dynamic rather than static. Communities continually reinterpret rituals according to changing historical conditions, technological developments, and urban realities.

Heritage preservation in Quiapo therefore involves continuous negotiation between continuity and change. While commercialization and media spectacle risk commodifying devotional traditions, adaptation also ensures cultural survival and public visibility.

The elevation of Quiapo Church as the Minor Basilica and National Shrine of Jesus Nazareno further reinforced the district's symbolic importance within Filipino cultural identity.

Ultimately, Quiapo's religious performing arts reveal how ritual, music, theater, and sacred sound continue to sustain communal meaning in a rapidly transforming urban environment.

## **Conclusions**

This study demonstrates that the religious performing arts of Quiapo District constitute an enduring and adaptive cultural system through which faith, music, identity, historical memory, and communal belonging are continuously expressed and negotiated.

From colonial liturgical dramas and sacred chants to contemporary digital devotional practices, Quiapo's religious performances reveal the dynamic and participatory character of Filipino religiosity. Rituals such as the Pabasa ng Pasyon, Senakulo, processional music traditions, the Traslación of the Jesus Nazareno, church choirs, brass band competitions, and Islamic devotional recitations illustrate how performance functions simultaneously as spiritual devotion, cultural production, urban practice, and collective memory.

The integration of Quiapo's musical history into the analysis reveals that sacred performance in the district cannot be separated from its broader artistic culture. Churches, theaters, schools, plazas, streets, and private homes historically formed an interconnected network of performance spaces where sacred and secular musical traditions intersected.

Grounded in performance studies, ethnomusicology, cultural memory theory, and heritage studies, the findings suggest that Quiapo's rituals are best understood as living repertoires of restored behavior that preserve continuity while accommodating social transformation. These performances create liminal spaces where communal identities are reaffirmed through collective participation, sound, bodily enactment, and devotional emotion.

The study further highlights the importance of recognizing religious traditions as forms of intangible cultural heritage rather than static historical artifacts. Despite pressures from urbanization, commercialization, technological mediation, and globalization, Quiapo's devotional practices continue to evolve creatively while preserving their symbolic and communal significance.

The coexistence of Catholic and Islamic devotional practices additionally underscores Quiapo's pluralistic religious character and demonstrates how urban sacred spaces can accommodate multiple forms of religious expression within a shared cultural landscape.

Ultimately, Quiapo emerges as a performative sacred environment where ritual, music, commerce, memory, and urban life converge. Far from diminishing under conditions of modernization, the district's religious performing arts remain vital mechanisms for sustaining cultural continuity, communal solidarity, and spiritual meaning in contemporary Philippine society.

Future research may further explore Quiapo's musical archives, processional repertoires, devotional compositions, and oral histories through ethnographic fieldwork, digital humanities approaches, soundscape studies, and comparative analyses involving other Southeast Asian pilgrimage centers.

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