

ASIA-PACIFIC NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

READING RUTH IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PHILIPPINE-*BABAYLANISM*

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Biblical Studies—Old Testament

BY

JOSEPHINE MONARES TAN

TAYTAY, RIZAL

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WE HEREBY APPROVE THE THESIS

SUBMITTED BY

Josephine Monares Tan

ENTITLED

READING RUTH IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PHILIPPINE-*BABAYLANISM*

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DEGREE

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN THEOLOGY  
(BIBLICAL STUDIES—OLD TESTAMENT)

Dr. Mitchel Modine  
Thesis Adviser

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Dr. Phillip Davis  
Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Dr. Darin Land  
Faculty Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Prof. Jeri Gunderson  
Faculty Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Dr. Rowena Bailon  
External Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Dr. Dick Eugenio  
Academic Dean

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Dr. Larry Bollinger  
President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## ABSTRACT

This study sees Ruth as the redeemer in the book of Ruth and reads Ruth in the perspective of Philippine-*Babaylanism*. The purpose of doing this is to provide a Philippine contextualized reading of Ruth. First, the study explores Philippine-*Babaylanism*. The two principal characteristics of *Babaylans* that emerge from this study are *Babaylans* as Healers and *Babaylans* as Redeemers. These two characteristics connect well to the story of Ruth. The study sees Ruth to be analogous to the *Babaylans* in two aspects: (1) in healing for Naomi and for Boaz and (2) in redeeming of the house of Elimelech and Israel. In this perspective, Ruth seems to be the most important character in the book of Ruth since she healed Naomi's childlessness and Boaz's passivity and redeemed Elimelech's hurting and dying family line—and Israel as a whole. Although there are many differences, the similarities demonstrate that reading the book of Ruth in the perspective of Philippine-*Babaylanism* is a worthwhile strategy.

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## **DECLARATION**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Josephine Monares Tan  
Author

July 10, 2020  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

To all women: I hope that this will remind you that you have a space, and in that space comes responsibility.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mabuhay!

So, this is the part where it gets a little emotional especially writing this during COVID-19 Enhanced Community Quarantine.

I would like to begin with God the very source of my being. The source of every good gift. Through Him, I am renewed day by day. Some nights were just too tough and yet, joy comes in the morning! He has brought me safe thus far! He is faithful! He never fails!

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Seven years ago, during my first year at Visayan Nazarene Bible College (VNBC), I read through an illustrated book of Ruth in the library which captured my interest. I was not satisfied with the book alone. I went to a couple of secondary sources. Later, I also reviewed different resources which enhanced my understanding about Ruth, including visual resources. Scrolling through different commentaries, pictures, and videos about the book of Ruth increased my interest. Since my interest had grown, I remember sharing and preaching about Ruth on three different occasions. After the last sermon, I began to see Ruth with a different lens.

#### **Background of the Study**

In 2017, during one of the prayer meetings of VNBC, I delivered a sermon on Ruth. After preaching, I realized that there were points I wanted to add and things that I forgot to mention. The following day, I began to see Ruth being a redeemer for Naomi in chapter 4 and Boaz in chapter 3. I wanted to re-read Ruth and re-do my preaching to bring people to see it through another lens. That desire did not leave me from then on, even after I started my graduate studies at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary.

Every time I had to hand in papers to my seminary professors, if there were chances to study the book of Ruth, I would. During the summer of 2018, one of my

professors suggested the book, *Reading Ruth in Asia*.<sup>1</sup> Upon reading the book, there was a dissatisfaction in me about how a Philippine perspective was absent. The book, however, quoted from two other books which also attempted to capture Ruth from Asian and Third-World perspectives but still lacked a Philippine-contextualized reading.

I saw a need for a Philippine-contextualized reading of Ruth after reading *Reading Ruth in Asia*. I saw the lack of Philippine-oriented essays in books as an opportunity to do a Philippine-contextualized reading which led me to consider it as my study. My next big step was figuring out which specific Philippine perspective I must use.

On August 18, 2018, I was introduced to Dr. Melba Maggay, a Filipina social anthropologist and social activist. Through her, I learned about a local Philippine feminism called *Babaylan* Feminism. I searched for and tried to familiarize myself with it. After further research into it, I had the epiphany that birthed this study. Aside from my main objective of reading Ruth from a Philippine perspective, I also aimed to bring people to see through the lens of Ruth being the redeeming agent for Boaz and Naomi.

After considering *Babaylan* Feminism as the specific Philippine perspective I will read the book of Ruth from, I learned about its significance to Filipinas through my readings. *Babaylan* Feminism originated from the essence of *Babaylanism*, which has played important roles in the Philippines dating back to the time when the Philippines was not under any colonizers yet and ancient Filipinas celebrate not only freedom but authority. According to a writer with the pseudonym, “Bagongpinay,” the *Babaylans*

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<sup>1</sup> Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau, eds., *Reading Ruth in Asia*, International Voices in Biblical Studies Number 7 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015).

were an empowered class of women who reigned prior to the arrival of the Spanish colonizers in the 1521, were healers, advisers of men, intercessors between material and spiritual worlds, inspirers of arts and crafts, and believers of a holistic world view.<sup>2</sup> In the foreword of Mangahas and Llaguno's book *Centennial Crossings: Readings on Babaylan Feminism in the Philippines*, Shahani gave a description of the *Babaylans*. She wrote that *Babaylans* were considered by their indigenous communities as spiritual and cultural guardians, honest, trustworthy, healers of physical and spiritual ailments, and guardians of the environment.<sup>3</sup> They were also significant in the ancient community setting. The *Babaylans* were accepted to have authority equal with the other leaders in pre-colonial society: the *Datu* (the local chieftain), the *Panday* (the blacksmith), and the *Bagani* (the chief warrior or hero).<sup>4</sup> Although the conceptualization of this feminism took so long to be discovered due to scarcity of materials and records from the past caused by the alterations and burning by colonizing newcomers, scholarly examinations claim that this feminist phenomenon is unique to the Philippine culture of the pre-colonial society.<sup>5</sup> Still according to Shahani, the seed of the *Babaylans* caused enlightenment to Filipinas' female consciousness and became the seed of strong and self-reliant womanhood,

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<sup>2</sup> Bagongpinay, "Babaylan Files: Feminism Ala Babaylan," *Babaylan Files*, 16 December 2010, accessed October 17, 2018, <https://babaylanfiles.blogspot.com/2010/12/feminism-ala-babaylan.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Leticia Ramos-Shahani, "Foreword," in *Centennial Crossings: Readings on Babaylan Feminism in the Philippines*, ed. Fe Mangahas and Jenny Romero-Llaguno (Quezon, PH: C and E Publishing, 2006), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ramos-Shahani, "Foreword," 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ramos-Shahani, "Foreword," 11.

unshaken by the Macho culture of the Spanish and the Anglo-Saxon culture of the Americans.<sup>6</sup> This idea of womanhood eventually took on a life all its own.<sup>7</sup>

Shahani also suggests that the essence of this local feminism makes sense to Filipinas as the reason why despite the possibility of losing one's identity due to globalization, many Filipinas often continue to have national pride, self-reliance, collective will, concern for the well-being of the members of one's community, love for nature, and faith in a Supreme Spiritual Being.<sup>8</sup> For Mangahas and Llaguno, *Babaylan* Feminism is also seen in one's desire to heal by drawing from nature's bounty, be nourished by the same, and learn lessons through communion with God's green earth.<sup>9</sup>

Through my readings on *Babaylan* Feminism, I took notice of the insistence of the authors to make readers understand its essence as impactful and important to Filipinas of today. I also decided to focus on the foundation of *Babaylan* feminism which is the essence of *Babaylanism*. My further readings led me to ask the following research questions necessary in achieving my objective, which is to read the book of Ruth in the perspective of Philippine-*Babaylanism*.

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<sup>6</sup> Ramos-Shahani, "Foreword," 12–13.

<sup>7</sup> Ramos-Shahani, "Foreword," 12–13.

<sup>8</sup> Ramos-Shahani, "Foreword," 12.

<sup>9</sup> Fe Mangahas and Jenny Romero-Llaguno, eds., *Centennial Crossings: Readings on Babaylan Feminism in the Philippines* (Quezon, PH: C and E Publishing, 2006), 16; When the authors said "communion with God's green earth," it may not mean a Judeo-Christian value but a reflection of the communion of the ancient Filipino foremothers with the earth as they believe that lesser divinities or deities inhabit the surrounding world and they maintained social relationships with them resulting to an idea of stewardship of the earth as those lesser gods communicate with the greater god, the creator-god, *Bathala* who is ultimately responsible for the good things people enjoy. For more on this see, Fernando G. Elesterio, *Three Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, Monograph Series no. 7 (Manila, PH: De La Salle University Press, 1989), 4–5.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The focus of this study was to answer the question: How is the book of Ruth read from Philippine-*Babaylanism* perspective? In order to fully answer this primary question, two sub-questions were addressed:

1. What is *Babaylanism*?
  - a. Who are the *Babaylans*?
  - b. What characteristics are unique to *Babaylans*?
2. How do I apply the concepts of *Babaylanism* to the book of Ruth?
  - a. What theme can be gleaned from *Babaylanism*?
  - b. How will the theme gleaned from *Babaylanism* connect to the book of Ruth?

### **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

I pursued this study due to the lack of Philippine-contextualized writing on Ruth from the book that I mentioned earlier titled, *Reading Ruth in Asia*. Furthermore, in the aspect of interpretation, it has been an enduring inclination in Biblical Studies over the past few decades to recognize and carefully heed to the voices of the marginalized. Western feminisms cannot fully perceive how their readings suffered from a lack of consideration of other feminist perspectives like those of Africans and Asians.

The study focused on and only considered a particular feminism called the *Babaylan* Feminism. However, I strongly insisted on the use of *Babaylanism* instead of *Babaylan* Feminism for reasons I explained in Chapter IV. The materials on *Babaylanism* are limited as well. Shahani talked about studying *Babaylanism* as a difficult undertaking

due to the scarcity of materials and the dearth caused by the destruction of indigenous records and artifacts encouraged by the Spanish missionaries who wanted to establish a Catholic foothold in the Philippines.<sup>10</sup>

The study is not a proposal for the revival of *Babaylanism* and the spiritual practices tied with it. The study is moving toward establishing the legitimacy of *Babaylanism* by focusing on two characteristics of *Babaylans*: *Babaylans* as healers and *Babaylans* as redeemers. In this study, I do not claim a personal identity of being a *Babaylan*. However, as their heir, I am privileged to examine how Filipinos can deal with their traditions in a process of critical retrieval. Critical retrieval examines cultural traditions in four categories: what a society has lost through natural processes; what it has lost through conscious decision; what has been maintained through conscious decision; and what should be maintained and applied. The understanding of critical retrieval was brought to my attention by Dr. Darin Land who led me to examining two separate articles imploring critical retrieval by Bunge and then Stonehouse in the book, *Children's Spirituality*.<sup>11</sup>

### **Significance of the Study**

I aim to contribute a new reading of the book of Ruth through the lens of *Babaylanism*. This study will help enrich the understanding of Filipinas' identity.

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<sup>10</sup> Ramos-Shahani, "Foreword," 12.

<sup>11</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, "Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 42–53; Catherine Stonehouse, "Children in Wesleyan Thought," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 133–48.



Filipinas, Filipinos, and foreigners can all benefit from this understanding. This is so because Filipino readings of Scripture are coming into their own, and the scholarly world is increasingly paying attention to voices from the majority world. It will also give Filipinas an understanding of some unique roots, beliefs, and characteristics present in the soul of ancient Filipinas.

A Philippine-contextualized reading of the scripture will reveal how unique the Philippines is among Asia and why Filipinos cannot fully embrace a uniformed Asian identity. A Philippine-contextualized reading will also help address a few questions about the Philippines that cannot be answered from a larger Asian perspective.

Finally, this study will develop a feminist reading of the book of Ruth that is Philippine contextualized with the hope that this will be of use to present and future Filipina Biblical scholars and studies of Philippine feminism of any sort.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature divided into three sections: Asian Reading of the Scripture, *Babaylan* Feminism and Filipino Feminism, and Reader-Response Criticism. The arrangement of the sections is also based on the development of the study. My study originated from my interest in Ruth. This interest led me to find out that there are existing Asian readings of Ruth. I decided to review how Asians of varied contexts have been reading parts of the Scripture which is the first section of this chapter. As I explored the resources which talk about Scripture in Asia, I aimed to find how the Filipino context can be similar and different from other parts of Asia. In line with *Babaylanism* as the lens that I used to read the book of Ruth with, in the second section, I reviewed resources that talk about *Babaylan* Feminism and Filipino Feminism. Lastly, I reviewed Reader-Response Criticism resources since I read Ruth using this discipline.

#### Asian Readings of the Scripture

In *A Filipino Resistance Reading of Joshua 1:1–9*, author Apura emphasized how different the Western Christian worldview that has been going around and influencing the Philippines is in comparison to the nation's context itself.<sup>1</sup> She mentioned having only

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<sup>1</sup> Lily Fetalsana-Apura, *A Filipino Resistance Reading of Joshua 1:1–9*, International Voices in Biblical Studies 9 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2019).

two seasons in mind despite singing summer, winter, springtime and harvest.<sup>2</sup> She also mentioned facing many problems being labelled as the weaker woman growing up. People around predicted her to only fail as a teacher despite studying in a seminary. However, despite that, she cultivated a love for the Hebrew Bible. Aside from that, she had one thing that was unusual. She saw how problematic it was that Christianity carries a Western worldview. She was also aware that such things as using the Scripture for personal interests can happen which for her must have been part of the intentions of the Western Colonizers who brought Christianity into the Philippines. She believes that the Scripture liberates, gives life, and speaks to those who need it-the weak and oppressed.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of Apura's book is to read Joshua 1:1–9 in the context of the obstacles the Filipino people faced to attain a better life.<sup>4</sup> For her, the said scripture can be an imperial blueprint in favor of the dogma of the dominant groups.<sup>5</sup> The book suggests that the Bible can be a resistance literature since in its context, ancient Israel struggled against many oppressive systems but when it comes to reading Joshua 1:1–9, most Anglo-European reading perspectives are from the more dominant power.<sup>6</sup> Filipinos are the opposite. Filipinos are victims of imperialistic powers of Christian nations such as Spain and the United States who introduced Christianity through oppressive cross and sword.<sup>7</sup> The book lets readers recall that Christianization was associated with

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<sup>2</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, xi.

<sup>3</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, xii.

<sup>4</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, xii.

<sup>5</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 4.

colonization, destruction of local cultures, exploitation, and oppression. But the book also proposes a solution to this problem through resistance hermeneutics. Resistance hermeneutics help rediscover the contextual meanings of Biblical texts to open Biblical scrutiny as it aims to oppose dominion of any form.<sup>8</sup> Joshua 1:1–9 may appear as an authorizing text for violent conquest stories but from the perspective of colonized people like the Filipinos, as Apura sees it, such interpretation is problematic. The text can mean it further supports present imperialist and colonial policies.

The Bible must be interpreted with consideration of the context of the readers. A text of the weak surely means another thing when interpreted by the dominant power.<sup>9</sup> The book emphasized the importance of sound hermeneutics which may link the Bible and the receivers of the word when properly done.<sup>10</sup> The Philippines relates not to the imperial powers but to the weaker nations. To solve this issue, the author gave an elaboration of the setting of the Ancient Near East in comparison to that of the Philippines. The Filipinos are not Israelites and its policy and identity will never be identical. Joshua 1:1–9 speaks of Israel to Israel in which God and the people stress the need for strong leadership particularly in relation to colonialism, against which Israel has to contend for most of its history as a people.<sup>11</sup>

Joshua 1:1–9 was written in Biblical Hebrew which language anchors the text in a particular setting and culture. The meaning may change as translated into another

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<sup>8</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 167.

language and context, yet Israel's context begs for it to be interpreted as a resistance text due to its valiant efforts to resist and survive massive forces of oppression and internalization.<sup>12</sup> Resistance reading gives priority to dominated communities like the Philippines. In this manner of reading, the context of the Philippines may be made parallel to the text. Looking at those factors, Apura made a contextualized version of Joshua 1:1–9. She suggested in the book that the text can teach Filipinos the importance of national unity, good national leadership, obedience to the law, having a leader who defends the patrimony of the nation, secures the well-being of the people, studies the law, observes the law, listens to the people, who are responsible, strong, and courageous.<sup>13</sup>

The book is just one evidence that Filipina women have ventured into Biblical studies to bring in the Filipina feminist perspective that critique domination of masculinity of texts and interpretations. Since the Philippines has been dominated, it finds its place very well in resistance reading as a reaction to dominance. In some ways, domination has had a benefit to Filipinas in seeing that there is a need for Filipinas to react against domination which they do to express their voices. The book employs contextual methodologies for identifying the context of the text, the text itself, and the receptor's context to recover a resistance meaning of the text. As a Filipina myself, I have been able to fully relate to this article since even where I grew up, there are plenty of Westerners going around introducing their faiths. Many of their resources had Western images and examples. And in my case, my family was able to relate better to a Filipino pastor who gave out contextualized sermons about our small unit of community in the

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<sup>12</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 174.

<sup>13</sup> Fetalsana-Apura, *Filipino Resistance Reading*, 164.

province. The congregation was also composed of the locals. Encountering this article helped me find my position better and gave me a few beneficial guidelines on writing my own contextual reading.

Another compilation of readings of the Scripture is from Northeast Asian authors in a book edited by one of the contributors, Hisako Kinukawa titled *Migration and Diaspora: Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*.<sup>14</sup> The papers in this volume comprise presentations from the third meeting of Society of Asian Biblical Studies (SABS) held at the Sabah Theological Seminary, Malaysia on June 13–15, 2012 which reflect on the theme of “Migration and Diaspora.”<sup>15</sup>

The five writers are women/feminist scholars from Korea, People’s Republic of China, and Japan who trace readings of the Biblical text within the basis of their cultures. Authors are from the three countries which are known for three big world religions; Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism and even some native cultic beliefs. The authors believed that women in these areas have been discriminated, despised, and marginalized. In the contexts of the authors, they wrote about seeing more and more immigrant workers coming as laborers. They have become more conscious of classism and discrimination against different ethnicities where women are always at the bottom of the ladder of discrimination.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hisako Kinukawa, ed., *Migration and Diaspora: Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, Society of Biblical Literature International Voices in Biblical Studies Volume 6 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 1.

These articles are another representation of women/feminists' scholars in Biblical hermeneutics who have raised questions against traditional, male-centered interpretations in almost everything in life. Lee Yoon Kyung begins with socio-political analysis of the Biblical texts and talks about the Korean conversion experience and highlights the foreign wives as seen as the "others" in the society.<sup>17</sup> Lin Yun questions the activities of Amos and Micah and suggests an interest in the execution of social justice in the context of migration and diaspora.<sup>18</sup> Yani Yoo reads the book of Esther stating that the story is about a few elite successful people with power. To her, the book of Esther is a warning against the empire and human greed as she draws attention to the diaspora who have been looked down upon because of their ethnicity. The empire regarded them as little more than cheap labor.<sup>19</sup> Chanhee Heo had an intertextual reading of the story of the Samaritan women (John 4:1–12) alongside a Korean novel and analyzed how the woman in the novel finds autonomy and dignity of life through her migration or diasporic experiences in life.<sup>20</sup> Hisako Kinukawa sees the Syrophoenician woman in Mark as one in diaspora and in parallel to her own Japanese religious migration and sees what transformation the encounter of Jesus brought.<sup>21</sup>

With different social locations, each author was committed to finding justice for women in contemporary contexts in dialogue with Biblical texts hoping to shed some new and distinct light from feminist eyes upon the interpretation of the texts. In one

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<sup>17</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 4–18.

<sup>18</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 19–30.

<sup>19</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 31–46.

<sup>20</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 47–62.

<sup>21</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 63–69.

portion remarkable to me, Kinukawa talked about Jesus being challenged by the woman who insisted that she and her daughter were also the ones that should be fed because they were marginalized in her society where he changed his attitude as if he learned a new lesson.<sup>22</sup> The challenge resulted in his crossing the border of ethnicity, which, we may say, made him a diaspora metaphorically, if not physically which the author encourages readers to reflect on.<sup>23</sup>

Those who move for Jesus then are the “diasporas” in their society. They belong to a group of minorities that run against the institutional establishment of the time. If one really wants to be a part of Jesus’s movement, there is no choice other than by becoming “diasporas.” Becoming a member of Jesus’s movement entails becoming a “diaspora” wherever one is located. We are invited in this article to struggle to transform the mainstream that is unwilling to accept those who are “others” and become “diasporas.” These articles relate to the Scripture in a way that the contexts of the authors are considered as similar to being recipients of the migrants. They call those of similar context to be a diaspora in their social locations and to be like Jesus in such a society. As a Filipina, I cannot fully relate to their contexts since Filipinos/Filipinas are the ones who venture to the other lands to find opportunities which place them in the positions of being migrants especially to the countries mentioned. However, if I relate these texts to my context to have a parallel perspective with the authors, I might need to focus on the fact that in Luzon, the part of the Philippines where I am currently residing, many Filipinos/Filipinas from the rural provinces move here to find better opportunities, me

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<sup>22</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 68.

<sup>23</sup> Kinukawa, *Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, 68.



included. What I learned from this book is the art of applying whatever is written to my social location as well.

*Reading Ruth in Asia*, which I have mentioned a few times much earlier, aimed to help readers realize that the status of Asian Biblical criticism cannot be fixed nor be inclusive.<sup>24</sup> The book is a collection of contextualized readings from different parts of Asia.

*Reading Ruth in Asia* contains a section about the Israelite identity of Ruth. In the world of the book of Ruth, Israelite identity is primarily defined by a right relationship with YHWH, as expressed in acts of **חסד** (*chesed*) which means loving kindness involving sacrifice and risk demonstrated through an examination of four characters: Boaz, Naomi, Ruth and YHWH.<sup>25</sup> That explanation sounds very literal and is fully understandable. However, it pushed me to connect my thoughts regarding the *chesed* of each character unto God. We see Boaz's demonstration of his love to God by not leaving the widow of his relative Elimelech in her distressed state. It is hard for me not to conclude that his devotion to God was not part of this sacrifice since he was well oriented with Israelite ways and often spoke blessings in the name of the Lord to Ruth. Naomi, despite feeling empty handed, although her view towards herself was weakened and she called herself bitter, she still believed that the Lord was behind what was happening, and she was willing to trust the Lord in every step of her life. Ruth surrendered all her will to the God of Naomi. Aside from their *chesed* unto YHWH, God being faithful, enabled everything to come to its picturesque resolution.

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<sup>24</sup> Havea and Lau, *Reading Ruth*.

<sup>25</sup> Havea and Lau, *Reading Ruth*, 18.

In the book, there is also a reading based on the context of the Kachin tribe of Myanmar. The Kachins have been practicing some form of levirate marriage, called *karat hta ai*, which means picking up a widow left behind by his brother.<sup>26</sup> I had the chance to discuss the process of Kachin's levirate marriage with my Kachin dormmate and she clarified that Boaz's being a relative redeemer can be relatable, however nowadays it is not practiced by distant relatives but real brothers. The term levirate is derived from the Latin word *Levir*, meaning brother-in-law, occurring as יבם (*Yabam*) in the Hebrew Bible, which as a noun is defined as a husband's brother and as a verb as doing a brother-in-law's office.<sup>27</sup> When a man dies without leaving a son, the husband's brother takes the widow as his wife and performs the *Levir's* duty (Deut. 25:5–10) in a union called levirate marriage.<sup>28</sup> In reading the book of Ruth, the part most likely to be attractive and relatable to the Kachin would be the marriage of Boaz to his relative's widow, Ruth.

We find also in the book that according to Goh, a Chinese writer, the character description אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל (*ēšet chayil*) or a woman of virtue in Ruth 3:11 echoes Proverbs 31:10.<sup>29</sup> Following that lead, a chapter on *Reading Ruth in Asia* opened more correspondences between the two Biblical texts through an intertextual reading, focusing on the characterization of *ēšet chayil* in Ruth as a person and in Prov. 31:10–31 as the

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<sup>26</sup> Edmund Ronald Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma a Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 91, 140; Herman G. Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth: The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1974), 34.

<sup>27</sup> Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary [General ed.: David A. Hubbard; Glenn W. Barker. Old Testament ed.: John D. W. Watts. New Testament ed.: Ralph P. Martin]; Vol. 6, B (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 606.

<sup>28</sup> Havea and Lau, *Reading Ruth*, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Elaine W. F. Goh, "An Intertextual Reading of Ruth and Proverbs 31:10–31, With Chinese Woman's Perspective," in *Reading Ruth in Asia*, ed. Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau, International Voices in Biblical Studies Number 7 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 57.

personified wisdom, reflecting on the question, “How does *ēšet chayil* contribute to our understanding of Ruth the Moabite and of Lady Wisdom?”<sup>30</sup> *Ešet chayil* as a woman of strength, was the cultural perspective for Goh’s reading. A woman who aspires to survive, albeit by shrewdness, is still a tough woman in the same way that Chinese women of strength were identified throughout history and even at present, ensuring households run smoothly, that stomachs are filled, and that the future is secured.<sup>31</sup> This same strength for a Chinese woman’s perspective is what Ruth had.

The book also informs us that Ruth has been a beloved Old Testament female figure in Korea for different reasons. In *Reading Ruth in Asia*, Lee and Park, mentioned and led readers to another book which I read a portion of through PDF where they inform the readers that many Korean Christian women have loved Ruth because she was a good and obedient daughter-in-law, who converted to following the God of Naomi, married Boaz, was blessed with a son, showed the key concepts of obedience, concern for family ties, conversion, self-sacrifice, and devotion.<sup>32</sup> The authors think that Korean Christians have been reading the book of Ruth through strongly biased Neo-Confucian lenses which have strong moral teachings.<sup>33</sup> Also, in the late nineteenth century, according to Lee, women whose husbands had many wives, concubines, and widows could not remarry because of the ban against remarriages.<sup>34</sup> These were of the first generation of Christian

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<sup>30</sup> Goh, “Chinese Woman’s Perspective,” 73.

<sup>31</sup> Goh, “Chinese Woman’s Perspective,” 77.

<sup>32</sup> Kyung Sook Lee and Kyung Mi Park, *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible, Church and Society* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Lee and Park, *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Lee and Park, *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible*, 44.

women who received and loved to read the story of Ruth because Ruth interconnected with the ideal of Korean women during the *Chosun* dynasty.<sup>35</sup>

An Indian scholar read Ruth from a very different perspective. This view was different in comparison to western feminist scholars and the majority of feminist scholars from different social locations with intersecting perspectives when it comes to race, color, region, themes of migration, dislocation, nativity, and others.<sup>36</sup> The article examined Naomi's relationship in the light of the household and joint family system in comparison to the patriarchal dynamics that are common to the ancient household system and the contemporary joint family system in India.<sup>37</sup> The author argues that Ruth and Naomi's choice to cling together is neither a concession to patriarchy nor a feminist move.<sup>38</sup> Instead, it is a choice of a relationship, of sisterhood that is established with no terms, expectations, benefits, or rules.<sup>39</sup> The reading focused on reflection upon the status of a daughter-in-law in her household in the Indian marriage system, where a joint family system is still prevalent both conceptually and existentially.<sup>40</sup> This point may be a little similar with the Korean context mentioned in the previous paragraph about an obedient daughter-in-law, but this one is basically focused on the concept of a joint family system.

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<sup>35</sup> Lee and Park, *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible*, 44.

<sup>36</sup> Surekha Nelavala, "Patriarchy, A Threat to Human Bonding: Reading the Story of Ruth in Light of Marriage and Family Structures in India," in *Reading Ruth in Asia*, ed. Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau, International Voices in Biblical Studies Number 7 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 45.

<sup>37</sup> Nelavala, "Family Structures in India," 89–90.

<sup>38</sup> Nelavala, "Family Structures in India," 91.

<sup>39</sup> Nelavala, "Family Structures in India," 91.

<sup>40</sup> Nelavala, "Family Structures in India," 90.

When we understand that each culture within Asia is unique from another, we see the value of why there are different contextualized interpretations of the Scripture. In my attempt to understand how different Asians could read Ruth, I appreciated how the Bible can be absorbed by one culture in a completely different way from another. I then understood why Wickeri highlighted the importance of scrutinizing Asian's identity and insisted that identity and context are important in an Asian Biblical approach.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Babaylan Feminism and Filipino Feminism***

A book titled, *Centennial Crossings: Readings on Babaylan Feminism in the Philippines*, centers on studies about the Babaylans.<sup>42</sup> This book is a culmination of the year-long celebration of the feminist centennial in the Philippines. In this book are gathered data about the *Babaylans*. We are informed here that they are said to be of equal or of higher authority than men in the Philippines in the pre-Hispanic setting. This book reveals their role in the society as healers in a holistic way and as spiritual. The editors proposed that the *Babaylan* phenomenon is a root of women empowerment in the Philippines.

The intention of the book is to popularize *Babaylanism* among Filipina feminists who are very much influenced by Western perspectives. It aims to bring feminists, and even other readers, to the country's very own specific historical and cultural context of feminism. Some articles discuss how the authors met and encountered with the *Babaylans*. The authors also noted how they rediscovered a *Babaylan* spirit in

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<sup>41</sup> Preman D. Niles and Philip L. Wickeri, *Scripture, Community, and Mission: Essays in Honor of D. Preman Niles* (HK: Christian Conference of Asia, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*.

themselves. Those authors desired for every Filipina reader to share in the same discovery and to enhance each Filipina feminist's authentic Filipina feminist perspective. Although for me there are practices which were not applicable to today's generation of Filipinas or seem questionable to the Christian faith, exploring the values of the *Babaylans* may enhance within Filipinas a selfless heart to seek the well-being of others, the peace of the community, the dignity of every individual encountered, and the holistic healing of everyone.

A book about *Babaylans* and the development of Philippine women empowerment was edited by Strobel and titled, *Babaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous*. A chapter written by Mananzan discussed her journey towards building a feminist theology and her constant position when it comes to injustices and theology.<sup>43</sup> Mananzan in that chapter talked about the inner psychological and spiritual liberation she and her peers experienced in getting themselves involved in socio-political movements.<sup>44</sup> She saw how her involvements with the struggles of her people re-shaped her theology from simply religion, where they only pray and care for the souls to action where many concepts and practices inside the church became irrelevant.<sup>45</sup> Mananzan's initiatives influenced the views of Philippine feminist theologians that theology must deconstruct oppression and reconstruct liberation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "The Babaylan in Me," in *Babaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous*, ed. Leny Mendoza Strobel (Davao, PH: Ateneo de Davao University, Research and Publications Office, 2010), 59–68. I only considered Mananzan's chapter here because she is one of the pioneers of Filipina feminism.

<sup>44</sup> Mananzan, "The Babaylan in Me," 64.

<sup>45</sup> Mananzan, "The Babaylan in Me," 62–64.

<sup>46</sup> Mananzan, "The Babaylan in Me," 65.

Mananzan saw how the struggles of the body should not be neglected for the soul to be saved. Her exact words were, “There is no soul that is saved without the body.”<sup>47</sup> For her, the fact that the soul is inside the body and it is the body that we see, is the reason why the Filipino people need to be not only concerned but involved in the social struggles around. She believed social transformation is impossible without the concern for the body. She pointed out that half of the oppression happening in the country involves the women and gender issues integral in social transformation.<sup>48</sup> One reason for this is that the Catholic religion seems to condition women as weak, taken out of a rib of a man, made for the sake of men not to be lonely, insignificant and guilty of the first sin.<sup>49</sup>

Mananzan was a chairperson of GABRIELA, a federation of women organizations systematized according to sectors, interests, and issues for the purpose of uniting woman to be able to have the power to cause change.<sup>50</sup> The chapter listed women successes through the organizations. Mananzan herself founded the institute that first published feminist books in the Philippines which also had a Radio Program that reaches out to women and developed special modules: Gender Sensitivity for Men and Gender-fair Education.<sup>51</sup> Mananzan and her peers wanted to live lives that mirror the reign of God shown through love, compassion, and joy and denounce injustices which are obstacles to the reign of God.

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<sup>47</sup> Mananzan, “The Babaylan in Me,” 62.

<sup>48</sup> Mananzan, “The Babaylan in Me,” 63–69.

<sup>49</sup> Mananzan, “The Babaylan in Me,” 63–69.

<sup>50</sup> Mananzan, “The Babaylan in Me,” 63.

<sup>51</sup> Mananzan, “The Babaylan in Me,” 63.

Reading through this chapter made me see how passionate the Filipina women were when it comes to the fight towards ending oppression. I, myself, have not seen the battle as real until I read how Catholicism labeled the women as weak. This portion of the book showed me the development of feminism from someone who was dissatisfied with what she cannot do until she did something about it. The way it is written spoke to me persuasively. I believe it is not only informative towards the readers but also enlightening. As a Filipina also, I began to see how religion contributed to almost everything regarding the Filipino/Filipina identity. The book not only helps evaluate the history of women in the Philippines but also allows the readers to be challenged to think radically in what ways they can contribute changes. I saw how instead of letting religion be an agent of oppression, readers like me whose context in the Philippines allows this, can start using and seeing religion as an agent of change and liberation through ways I am capable of.

Mananzan's own book, *The Woman Question in the Philippines*, helps local Filipina women understand their current situation by looking through the historical context of women in the Philippines.<sup>52</sup> What is more is that it talks about many recent challenges faced by Filipinas in context and the efforts they did after being awakened by those challenges through women movements, feminisms, and women empowerment which are needed to overcome those challenges. The book is good educational material for those who are beginning to see the importance of women studies and to those who would want to enhance their knowledge about Filipina feminism. This book will be of

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<sup>52</sup> Mary John Mananzan, *The Woman Question in the Philippines* (Pasay, PH: Daughters of St. Paul, 1991).



interest to anyone thinking about women and social movements, gender and war, or masculinized ambivalence. It does give justice to its title answering most basic questions about Philippine women. Women movements include women's organizations, women's studies, and theology from women's perspective.

Mananzan also talked about the bigger movements where Filipina theological feminism belongs like the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). The author believed that issues on women has not only been women's concern but the race's concern. Mananzan ended with a statement that women movements are not only for liberation but also for survival of the human race.<sup>53</sup> The book makes readers see that women's movements in the Philippines have come to a point of no return and must be embraced. Looking at different experiences of the Philippine women throughout history brings a new perspective unto Filipinas. The freedom of Philippine women being experienced now is to be understood properly, defended, fought, and cared for. Filipinas must be stewards, willing not only to treasure what is now but also educate themselves and learn how to enhance their rights, voices, and wisdom.

Another book that talks about the development of women empowerment in the Philippines is titled, *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines* which focuses not only on the survival of Filipina women during the Japanese era but also on their strength.<sup>54</sup> The book gives an overview of what Philippine women were like against Japanese power. It critically analyses the bravery of Filipino

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<sup>53</sup> Mananzan, *Woman Question in the Philippines*, 50.

<sup>54</sup> Vina A Lanzona, *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex and Revolution in the Philippines* (Quezon, PH: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2010).

women who belong to the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (Hukbalahap)* or the Philippine league against Japanese power.

The *Hukbalahap* was a peasant-based movement in the Philippines. The book narrates the said women's situations from the beginning of the brutality of Japanese power until the war ended. The author captures the lives, stories, and voices of women during the Japanese era and how they shine a light to the men and the situations despite violence and hopelessness. In the midst of the uncertainty, violence, and rebellion, these women also pursued and encouraged personal lives, falling in love, giving life, and raising families. They were also often comrades-in-arms with men.

The book gives a look into women's complexity, wit, and strength during the said period. Women worked hand in hand with Filipino men to resist the first Japanese initiatives in the country and even after World War II, to challenge the new Philippine republic. Although, scholarship was not yet evidently seen during this period, one can witness through this reading that Filipinas had something in them that wanted to cause change and be of help to the nation.

### **Reader-Response Criticism**

An article from Treto in a book titled *The New Literary Criticism and The Hebrew Bible* talks about reader-response criticism where he introduced his two step work following the patterns of Fish and Gate.<sup>55</sup> In Treto's two-step interpretation, he first examined Amos 7:10–17 based on power relations which asks the questions who in the

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<sup>55</sup> Francisco Garcia-Treto, "A Reader-Response Approach to the Prophetic Conflict: The Case of Amos 7.10–17," in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A Clines (Sheffield, ENG: JSOT Press, 1993).

text is in power, who is powerless, and which side does God take. According to him, this step borrows Fish's notion of interpretive communities.<sup>56</sup> Treto then proceeded to his second and final step where he did a performance intertextuality which is the process of redressing the imbalance of power so the powerless will remain in the power game and will have the last word.<sup>57</sup> In his second step, he borrowed Gates's concept of signifying.<sup>58</sup> In the step of signifying, the powerless becomes significant by having the power. Treto concluded his reader-response criticism of Amos 7:10–17 by persuading the readers of his position that the ultimate power was not with those monopolizing the throne or the temple but belongs only to Amos's God.<sup>59</sup>

Based on Treto's reader-response work, he was able to play the good reader's role by applying contemporary power relations into the Biblical text. He makes a good point considering specific factors to examine the text well. What I saw beneficial in this criticism is that you can practice a more creative reading and also practice your reading discipline by basing conclusions on real events and true Biblical contexts. Reader-response criticism challenges our skills of using older methods and more recent ones, for it allows us to partner it with different schools. It just requires for someone to be careful enough in linking one context to another and be guided still with sound hermeneutics.

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<sup>56</sup> Garcia-Treto, "Reader-Response Approach," 114–24; Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, 11th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 167–73.

<sup>57</sup> Garcia-Treto, "Reader-Response Approach," 114–24.

<sup>58</sup> Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, 1. Oxford Univ. Press paperback. (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 110–11, 124.

<sup>59</sup> Garcia-Treto, "Reader-Response Approach," 124.

In his book, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*, Fowler used reader-response criticism to pioneer a new method of reading the Gospel of Mark.<sup>60</sup> In Fowler's first reader-response criticism of the Gospel of Mark, he invited contemporary readers to participate actively in making the meaning of the Gospel. He also demonstrates how the narrative provides both direction and indirection for the reader through its use of irony and paradox. Rather than providing a complete exposition of Mark, this book offers hints and suggestions about how readers can read Mark and style it with contemporary meaning for themselves. It shows Mark was read historically and how it can be examined in new lenses.

Fowler encourages more recent formalist literary criticism of the Bible to show how we can move on from only philological-historical criticism. His reader-response criticism suggestions of the Gospel of Mark root from his nineteen years of reading history from a more historical criticism to a modern one. It is not mainly about the Gospel of Mark but a suggestion of how the Gospel can be experienced in another Biblical criticism especially under the criticism pattern of Stanley Fish who stressed the authority of the interpretive community.

Fowler insists that the Gospel has been read under the shade of historical ideas but not in our own encounter with the text. Fowler proposed the adoption of a new reader-language into the old familiar insights of the Gospel, translating the history of the text to the history of reading, creating reception history. For him, reception history is far more important than philological-historical criticisms in the production of meaning. He

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<sup>60</sup> Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*, Trinity Press International. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001).

believed that the text should no longer have only one stable meaning awaiting to be excavated. The author encourages a more rhetorical than informative reading. However, he welcomes readers' critiques about his readings. The book is not a complete reading of Mark as commentaries do. The author believes that the intended readers are never limited and can be anyone until today, male or female. The author believes that every reading can be a powerful experience and every story is expected by the author to be read, and the reader or the hearer has a role in the reading process. He argues that Mark forms its audience depending on any type of reader inviting readers to make meaning of the text. In the same way, it may be true that the original author also had in mind whoever would read it in the future and thought that they might perceive, conclude, and apply based on the text.

A portion of Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard's book *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* talked about Fowler's words about the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 under the section reader-response criticism.<sup>61</sup> Fowler disregarded or was not applying historical criticism at all to limit the interpretation of the events, taking the point of view of a first time reader of Mark who has not yet read the last supper.<sup>62</sup>

Questions were enumerated from 2 Samuel 11:1 regarding Uriah, David, and Bathsheba and suggests that those gaps are to be filled with the reader's suggestions. This manner of reading leads to a more conservative reader-response criticism. A more conservative reader-response criticism fills gaps that historical criticism does not supply. If there is a conservative category, a more radical reader-response criticism gives a

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<sup>61</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 73.

meaning that is entirely or almost entirely a product of the reader however, still considering the interpretive community in which the possibility of shared or similar meanings with others may happen. For Stanley Fish, the founder of this wing of reader-response criticism, no matter how similar, there will always be slight differences in interpretations.<sup>63</sup> Tolbert suggested as an example the situation between the prodigal son and the father which many would link to Freud's id, ego, and super-ego.<sup>64</sup> However, there are still other interpreters of different disciplines or fields who may suggest other meanings.

In the case of a more radical reader-response criticism, relativism becomes the basis. Even if one's idea is good, it must still be agreeable with the interpretive communities. In this criticism, former interpretations were and are still significant. In fact, those who use this method use it with other methods for better outcome. However, it focuses on the need of the text to meet with the current changes, modern challenges, new data, and current perspectives. To stay away from syncretism, the context of the text must be carefully considered with higher value. It must be a good thing still that it tries to meet the context of the text with the current context, for the purpose of the Biblical text is still to liberate.

For the purpose of getting informed about my thesis topic, I reviewed various literature. In this chapter, I enumerated my reviews of literature related to my study divided into three sections namely, Asian readings of the scripture, *Babaylan* Feminism

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<sup>63</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 74.

<sup>64</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 74.

and Filipino feminism, and reader-response criticism. The next chapter will lay out the methodology for the study.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

My main aim in this study, as I have mentioned in the first chapter, was to read Ruth in the perspective of Philippine-*Babaylanism* due to my discovery that there was a lack of Philippine-contextualized reading in the book, *Reading Ruth in Asia*.<sup>1</sup> This chapter contains the research methodology, sources of data, and treatment of the data.

#### **Research Methodology**

The research design of this study was an incorporation of critical retrieval, descriptive research, reader-response criticism, and feminist criticism (*Babaylanism*).

My first step was to do an emic-descriptive research on *Babaylanism* based on two major *Babaylan* roles and characteristics, being a healer and being a redeemer. By using this method, I was able to gather information recorded, described, compared, interpreted, and analyzed by first-hand *Babaylan* researchers. In pursuit of this goal, I visited some of the biggest libraries in the Philippines, namely, the Main Library of the University of the Philippines, the Rizal Library of the Ateneo de Manila University, and the Miguel de Benavidez Library of the University of Santo Tomas. The resources were located in the Filipiniana sections of the aforementioned libraries. After the resources were gathered, I examined them in an emic perspective as an heir of the *Babaylans* to

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<sup>1</sup> Havea and Lau, *Reading Ruth*.



glean how the resources talk about the two-point focus of this study, *Babaylans* as healers and *Babaylans* as redeemers. I also compared and contrasted how authors talked about the two-point focus of this study through triangulation. Through triangulation, an idea is made even more credible as it is compared and validated with other authors' ideas for similarities and differences. The results of this research are reflected in Chapter IV.

The descriptive research of *Babaylanism* was my foundation for the next step, which is doing a reader-response criticism of Ruth while using critical retrieval. Aside from the critical retrieval articles of Bunge and Stonehouse which I mentioned in Chapter I, I also found useful the article of Lange about the role of choice and rationality in the Christian pilgrimage and Sarisky's book which tackled on seeking to retrieve similarities from three confessional traditions to know how to go about with tasks.<sup>2</sup> I also incorporated feminist criticism with reader-response criticism in association with critical retrieval. Reader-response criticism is a reader-oriented criticism which finds importance in the reader in the production of text meanings based on their different world views by how they respond to the text.<sup>3</sup> In this criticism, the reader plays the main interpreter role through one's understanding of the text. Reader-response criticism, as part of the current literary criticisms, gives remedy to the perceived lack of the role of the reader or hearer in the narrative transaction.<sup>4</sup> On the later development of this criticism, respect to the interpretive communities as a general frame of reference is encouraged. In observance

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<sup>2</sup> Frederik de Lange, "Becoming One Self: A Critical Retrieval of 'Choice Biography,'" *J. Reform. Theol., Critical Retrieval* 1.3 (2007): 276–93; Darren Sarisky, ed., *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal* (LDN; NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 37–52.

<sup>3</sup> Garcia-Treto, "Reader-Response Approach," 114–16; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Fowler, *Reader-Response Criticism*, 9.

with the interpretive community's role, the interpretation of the reader must still consider maybe not the majority's but a number of acceptances. In other words, the meaning generated by the reader should not only be true to him or her but also to one's community.

One weakness of reader-response criticism is relativism, which is the high or low possibility of the work to match the meanings generated by other interpreters.<sup>5</sup> To address this weakness, I conducted a more conservative rather than radical reader-response criticism. A more conservative reader-response criticism helpfully explores possible gaps in the text in which the reader can freely supply one's own meaning.<sup>6</sup> As I read, I was interacting with the text and still captured what the author says. However, I kept a balance that is not overly conservative since the purpose of a critical research is still to critique and challenge, to transform and empower.<sup>7</sup> Reader-response criticism is usually associated with other methodologies or disciplines. In this study, as I have mentioned earlier, I associated it with critical retrieval and feminist criticism. The association of critical retrieval into this criticism is something new but using other criticisms with reader-response criticism is common. As for McKnight, reader-response criticism is often associated with other schools such as feminist criticism, which is also incorporated in this

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<sup>5</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 73; Edgar V. McKnight, "Reader-Response Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning, Revised and Expanded: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 247–48.

<sup>6</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 73.

<sup>7</sup> Sharan B. Merriam and Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 34.

study.<sup>8</sup> The incorporation of feminist criticism focused only on two points, Ruth as a healer and Ruth as a redeemer. After I finished my reading of Ruth, my final analysis is written in the fifth chapter of this study.

At last, after all the steps were executed, I was ready with a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future readers, which is the content of Chapter VI.

Below is the outline of the study based on the procedures I executed in each chapter.

#### CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter contains the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Scope and Delimitations, and Significance of the Study.

#### CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The second chapter contains the review of related literature studies and works which is divided into three sections: Asian Readings of the Scripture, *Babaylan* Feminism and Filipino Feminism, and Reader-Response Criticism.

#### CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The third chapter contains the Research Methodology, Sources of Data, and Treatment of the Data.

#### CHAPTER IV: AN EMIC DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH ON *BABAYLANISM* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN HEIR OF THE *BABAYLANS*

The fourth chapter contains the result of my descriptive research of *Babaylanism* with two main sections: *Babaylans* as Healers and *Babaylans* as Redeemers.

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<sup>8</sup> McKnight, "Reader-Response Criticism," 247.

CHAPTER V: READING RUTH IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PHILIPPINE-  
*BABAYLANISM*

The fifth chapter contains the result of my reader-response criticism of Ruth associated with the critical retrieval and feminist criticism. It has two main sections: Ruth as a Healer and Ruth as a Redeemer.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sixth and final chapter contains the: Conclusions of this study and Recommendations to future readers.

**Sources of Data**

Three kinds of resources were needed to complete the study. First are resources containing sections of deeply analyzed first-hand information about the roles and characteristics of *Babaylans*, such as *Centennial Crossings: Readings in Babaylan Feminism in the Philippines* edited by Mangahas and Llaguno, Salazar's *Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*, and Nono's *Song of the Babaylan: Living Voices, Medicines, Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*.

Second, I referred to a number of secondary resources that have given particular focus and have critically analyzed writings about the *Babaylans*.

I also considered, examined, and thoroughly analyzed other studies, literature, peer-reviewed articles, online academic materials that articulate *Babaylan* Feminism or anything about *Babaylans* and *Babaylanism*.

## Treatment of the Data

In critically reading and analyzing Ruth in the perspective of *Babaylanism*, I employed the following data analysis strategies in the descriptive study of *Babaylanism* and the reader-response criticism of Ruth: data organization, immersion of data, and analytical interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

In the descriptive study on *Babaylanism*, as I mentioned earlier, I organized the data collected into two major themes: *Babaylans* as healers and *Babaylans* as redeemers. They were noted separately on color coded memos. Then, I immersed myself in a closer reading of the collected data, examining the connections and differences of one from another. Lastly, I analytically combined the similar ideas through triangulation for credibility.

The two-category data gathered from the previous descriptive study: *Babaylans* as healers and *Babaylans* as redeemers, were the feminist lens I used in the reader-response criticism of Ruth. In doing a reader-response criticism of Ruth, the data collection was also divided into the same two categories: Ruth as a healer and Ruth as a redeemer. The data collected were noted separately on colored memos. I reread and re-examined the collected data thoroughly to find comparisons and contrasts. The similar ideas under each category were combined through triangulation for credibility.

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2011), 207.

**CHAPTER IV**

**AN EMIC DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH ON *BABAYLANISM* FROM THE  
PERSPECTIVE OF AN HEIR OF THE *BABAYLANS***

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, in order to pursue this study, doing an emic descriptive research on *Babaylanism* is fundamental as this will be the lens used in the contextualized reading of Ruth in the next chapter. This chapter addresses the first research sub-question of this study found under the Statement of the Problem section in Chapter I. After further research into this topic, I have decided to use *Babaylanism* instead of *Babaylan* Feminism for the reason that I believe it is a phenomenon in the Philippine pre-Hispanic and precolonial era, putting it under the umbrella of feminism—a modern concept—would be a mis-categorization.

So why do I lean towards using *Babaylanism* instead of *Babaylan* Feminism? First, since *Babaylan* feminism is already considered as a feminist view, going back to history would trace the comparison between feminism and *Babaylanism*. Before the usage of the Spanish word *femenina* in the Philippines, there was the word *Babaylanismo*—a form of women’s consciousness indigenous to the Philippines in a sense that women enjoyed relative freedom compared to European women, Middle Eastern women, and even women from Asian societies of the same period.<sup>1</sup> Second, *Babaylan* feminism prides on a different aspect compared to most feminisms. *Babaylan*

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<sup>1</sup> Pennie S. Azarcon-Dela Cruz, ed., *Kamalayan: Feminist Writings in the Philippines* (Quezon, PH: Pilipina, 1987), 8, 10; Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 21.

Feminism celebrates the essence of *Babaylanism* in Filipinas—self-reliant womanhood entering into the world of and reflecting from the *Babaylan* women of a specific historical and cultural context. This current local Philippine feminism named *Babaylan* Feminism also follows after the shadow of ancient Filipina women who aimed for the healing of individuals and wellness of everyone in the community and brought balance between the physical and spiritual world. Contrary to some feminisms, *Babaylanism* is a purposeful indigenous phenomenon and not a product of chaos nor oppression. However, even if *Babaylanism* was of a different context, like other feminisms, it was also a response to the need for adapting and surviving in the ancient environment full of changes and uncertainties.

It would still be better for me to respect and treat *Babaylanism* as a phenomenon of when women were once a glue or creator of connection and balance between the physical and spiritual world. Even though I prefer to respect and learn from it the way it is, I also think that the way the recent *Babaylan* Feminism celebrates Filipinas by bringing Filipinas back to their lost roots and forgotten identity is not only a good step of remembering the past heritage, it also allows the people to learn and look at life in the perspective of healing, well-being, and wholeness which I see is needed today.

In this chapter, as I study about a portion of the past, I like to borrow the idea of Arcilla. Looking at the importance of how we came to be from the past is as important as going through a job interview where our background is our qualification in thriving with life's difficulties.<sup>2</sup> I will also be focusing more on the positive sides of *Babaylanism*.

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<sup>2</sup> Jose S. Arcilla, *An Introduction to Philippine History* (Quezon PH: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1971), 1.

Nono suggested that we must focus and give importance on the positive events of history because they speak of our survival and identity.<sup>3</sup> In line with focusing more on the positive, I will be mentioning less of Filipinas' possible greed for anything foreign and their probable lack of nationality which could have caused authenticity of identity to be altered and fail to survive.

Speaking of the positive events, we look into this period where Filipinas had authorities and lived as instruments of healing and peace. Although we focus on this positive period of the Philippine history, as mentioned in the previous chapters, I am also employing critical retrieval in this chapter to see the significance of the previous values and standards as compared to the present—what has been consciously and unconsciously maintained and what has been consciously and unconsciously lost, what should be applied and not.

An emic descriptive research on *Babaylanism* allows me to see Filipinas in the context of pre-Hispanic Philippine history in comparison with today. These women were foundation of today's Philippine womanhood. Although I have mentioned in the first chapter about the scarcity of resources regarding topics about pre-Hispanic or pre-colonial period of the Philippines, some libraries maintained available data about the *Babaylans* in books. The data gathered in this chapter are from Philippine resources available in some of the Philippines' biggest libraries which I have already mentioned earlier. We must also note that the chief source of data is oral tradition preserved in

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<sup>3</sup> Grace Nono, *Song of the Babaylan: Living Voices, Medicines, Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers* (Quezon, PH: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2013), 380.



Filipino folks' practices relating to the natural environment.<sup>4</sup> As we will explore Filipinas' authenticity and identity by going back and being reminded of their roots, we will learn about the idea of individual holistic healing, well-being of the community, and balance of the totality of life aimed and practiced by the *Babaylans* in the context of the past.

In the guideline also of critical retrieval, as I have also mentioned in the scope and delimitations of this study, I will not pursue any encouragements for the revival of the *Babaylans'* spiritual practices but focus on the deeper intentions they have for doing what they were doing, which is to bring healing and balance. Following that, as I mentioned earlier, I have made two points: *Babaylans* as healers and *Babaylans* as redeemers. In this study, *Babaylans* as healers concerns what they do for every individual's holistic wellness. On the other hand, *Babaylans* as redeemers means that they are instruments of bringing balance to their community. This is following Ingerman, Harner, Achterberg, and Elaide's description as quoted by Castillon in his research and by Demetrio agreeing that the primary task of these practitioners was to help restore the wholeness to the individual and/or the community.<sup>5</sup> I will spend the rest of the chapter to describe both characteristics of a *Babaylan*—healer and redeemer. There are of course other characteristics present in a *Babaylan*, and it is a fallacy for me to suggest that these two

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<sup>4</sup> Florentino H. Hornedo, *The Favor of the Gods: Essays in Filipino Religious Thought and Behavior* (Manila, PH: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2001), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Kenny R. Castillon, "Babaylanic Beliefs About Health, Illness, Its Etiology and Healing Modalities: Implications to Community Health Nursing" (The Graduate School, University of Santo Tomas, 2014), 10; Francisco R Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols, Philippines* (Manila, PH: National Book Store, 1990), 321.

are the most important aspects of *Babaylans*. However, these are the characteristics I see operating also in Ruth the Moabite.

### ***Babaylans* as Healers**

What made the *Babaylans* do what they do and be put in such position was their environmental context. *Babaylanism* is grounded on primary researchers' outputs pointing to the existence of a distinct *Babaylan* consciousness prior to the entry of the Western concept of feminism.<sup>6</sup> Along with their concluding of their existence, researchers also came up with a finding that their context also needed two other specialists existing in the pre-Hispanic Philippine context which I have already mentioned in Chapter I: the *Datus*, and the *Pandays*. If the *Datus*—the head of the community—were specialists in the field of military, politics, law, and economy and the *Pandays* were experts in the technological and technical field, the *Babaylans* were proto-scientists and specialists in religion, medicine, literature, history, psychology, theory, practice, sociology, and theology of their context.<sup>7</sup> They represent a subversive, powerful, and intricate woman with religious leadership.<sup>8</sup> This was possible since women in the early pre-colonial society of the Philippines enjoyed a bilateral system where women and men have equal

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<sup>6</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Zeus A. Salazar, *Ang Babaylan Sa Kasaysayan Ng Pilipinas* (Quezon, PH: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1999), 4–6.

<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Hants, ENG; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 85.

rights when it comes to properties and heirlooms and are relatively equal, if not, women were of superior status than men.<sup>9</sup>

So how did the *Babaylans* gain authority when it comes to healing and bringing community balance? I remember a discussion I was involved in under one professor's class in the Bible school that there is a hole in every soul. As human beings, we are religious by nature and as long as human societies exist, there will be religion, and this is applicable even in the Philippine pre-Hispanic setting.<sup>10</sup> Filipinos had a native religion prior to the arrival and influence of Roman Catholicism, Islam, and American Protestantism.<sup>11</sup> The ancient forefathers believed in the *Ivatan* system, having the two-world idea: visible and invisible worlds and that there are divinities or deities inhabiting the surrounding world so they maintained social relationships with them.<sup>12</sup> They believed that these supernatural beings controlled all phenomena basic to human beings' survival—weather, diseases, success of crops, and so forth.<sup>13</sup>

Monotheism was not the dominant characteristic of the pre-Hispanic Philippine religious system for they believed in more principal and lesser gods.<sup>14</sup> However, in this hierarchy of gods, there appear to them a supreme being or a supreme god who was

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<sup>9</sup> Azarcon-Dela Cruz, *Feminist Writings in the Philippines*, 10; Mary John Mananzan, *Ang Pangkababaihang Isyu Sa Pilipinas* (Manila, PH: Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College, 2001), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 80, 114.

<sup>13</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 5; Zamora Lawlers and Robert Similan, "Philippine Mythology and General Education," in *Religious Beliefs and Life at the Beginning of the Spanish Regime in the Philippines*, ed. F. Landa Jocano (Dumaguete, PH: Silliman University, 1964), 92.

<sup>14</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 5.

recognized in different names by some of the ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup> The highest category among the gods composed of the god/s of high heavens and the ancient Filipinos call this creator god *Bathala* (Total Creator) or *Captan* or *Maguayen* or *Sidava* and so on.<sup>16</sup> To them, the creator god/s were ultimately responsible for good things human beings enjoy.<sup>17</sup> In order to find favor in their eyes, pre-Hispanic Filipinos believed that to reach the highest of the gods, one had to go through channels—through the lesser gods.<sup>18</sup> The second category of gods are the gods of the underworld, while the third category consists of the gods of the earth—where on earth, they believed that good and evil spirits were surrounding them.<sup>19</sup> The *Babaylans* were mediators between humans and the lesser gods while the lesser gods connected humans to their higher gods.<sup>20</sup> They are selected as mediators between the spiritual world and the world of human beings.<sup>21</sup> By mediators, we must consider very carefully that they were just tools through which supernatural gifts are given to human beings.<sup>22</sup> These mediators are tools for healing broken bodies and spirits,

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<sup>15</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Arcilla, *Philippine History*, 5; Azarcon-Dela Cruz, *Feminist Writings in the Philippines*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 6–7.

<sup>20</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 5–7.

<sup>21</sup> Francisco R. Demetrio, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, and Fernando Nakpil-Zialcita, *The Soul Book: Introduction to Philippine Pagan Religion* (Quezon, PH: GCF Books, 1991), 121.

<sup>22</sup> Dante Ambrosio, *Balatik Etnoastronomiya: Kalangitan Sa Kabihasnang Pilipino* (Quezon, PH: University of the Philippines Press, 2010), 1.

assisting the dying, and helping usher one's soul or spirit to the next life.<sup>23</sup> However, they were not just randomly selected.

The person was chosen because of her inherent physical, mental, or in short, holistic qualities. In terms of mental capacity, it can take almost a lifetime to be a real *Babaylan* since one has to be fully equipped with skills in medicine, religion, and anything that concerns the culture of her ethnic community.<sup>24</sup> In the aspect of behavior, the person is of a quiet nature, soft spoken, and of few words.<sup>25</sup>

Physically, they are mostly in their menopausal stage and are assisted by younger women in the community.<sup>26</sup> In addition to that, the *Babaylans* were a special type of women, mostly widows or elderly whose childbearing and childrearing days were over, who rose to their position of power and prestige by virtue of their special skills and knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Emotionally, the person must have a good heart with pure intentions. This was reflected on how Visayans called *Babaylans* as *Daitans* because *Dait* is an old Visayan or old Cebuano word which means friendship and peace.<sup>28</sup> To be able to mediate between

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<sup>23</sup> Fe Mangahas, "The Babaylan: Historico-Cultural Context," in *Centennial Crossings: Readings on Babaylan Feminism in the Philippines*, ed. Fe Mangahas and Jenny Llaguno (Quezon, PH: C & E Publishing, 2006), 23–24.

<sup>24</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 18, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121.

<sup>26</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Fe Mangahas, "The Status of Filipino Women from Pre-Colonial Times to the Early American Period," in *Kamalayan: Feminist Writings in the Philippines*, ed. Pennie Azarcon-Dela Cruz (Quezon, PH: Pilipina, 1987), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Francisco Ignacio Alcina, María Luisa Martín-Merás, and Maria Dolores Higuera, *Historia de Las Islas e Indios Visayas Del Padre Alcina, 1668*, trans. Paul Lietz (Madrid, ES: Instituto Histórico de Marina, 1975).

the god/s and human beings and be close to and have friendship with the god/s, the person must have a pure heart.<sup>29</sup> Based on these records, the intention of the heart of a person was a necessary foundation of this vocation. One Sama *Baylan*, named Natividad said, “The Spirit watches over the one with a ‘good heart’ and chooses her to be one’s voice.”<sup>30</sup> Huizer and Lava wrote about these healers being able to produce cures if they had good forces concentrated within themselves.<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, this research has been beneficial to me in appreciating my heritage in the sense that I myself, a Filipina, a few years ago, also stereotyped the *Babaylans* as evil witches. That is why when I had to answer or explain to people about this research, I understood, and I am not surprised anymore about their same prejudgments. Alcina also mentioned that there were some that were assisted by the devil or pretended to be *Babaylans* but were not equally esteemed with the real *Baylans*.<sup>32</sup> Demetrio made a more elaborate comparison between the *Babaylans*, who were called by the good spirits and endowed with special powers for intermediating between the divine and human world, and the witches, who were those who refused to go through the process of *Babaylan* transformation and also disobeyed and isolated themselves from the Divine Transcendent One to be free to enter into

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<sup>29</sup> Alcina, Martín-Merás, and Higuera, *Las Islas e Indios Visayas*.

<sup>30</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 67. During the pre-Hispanic era, *Babaylans* had different names from tribe to tribe. Some Visayan people groups in the Philippines also call *Babaylans* as *Baylans*.

<sup>31</sup> Gerrit Huizer and Jesus Lava, *Explorations in Folk Religion and Healing* (Manila, PH: Asian Social Institute Communication Center, 1989), 39.

<sup>32</sup> Alcina, Martín-Merás, and Higuera, *Las Islas e Indios Visayas*.

immanence and finitude by themselves.<sup>33</sup> The quote below shows the difference between *Babaylans* and the rest of the evil practitioners.

Ancestors of the *Indios* had a vague idea of the true God... of the One and only Maker that with the passing of time... due to the deceits of the Devil, the concept was obscured... Moreover, these ancient people distinguished between good and evil spirits whom they tried to appease by means of various sacrifices performed only by the “true” *Bailan* or *Daetan*. Thus, they also differentiated between a *Babaylan* and a *Manggagaway* (those who drew powers from dark forces or spirits).<sup>34</sup>

Spiritually speaking, they had to be ready to be deal with sacred things and travel the sacred world. In fact, during the missions of the Spanish priests to convert *Indios* to Christianity, their first target were the *Babaylans* since they dealt similarly with sacred things and the priests were knowledgeable in medicine as well.<sup>35</sup> The process of supernatural involvement in crossing the boundaries of the physical world to the spiritual is termed by recent studies as entering into Altered State of Consciousness (ASC) which is initiated today by fasting, dehydration, extreme pain, blood loss, sleep deprivation, drumming, and chanting.<sup>36</sup> To be given the task as a *Babaylan* was not easy. According to an ethnographic researcher focusing on the *Babaylanic* healers, for *Babaylan* to grow well and live in a state of wellness, it was important for her to have a connection of the mind, body, and spirit in her.<sup>37</sup> To be a mediator and an instrument of healing and

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<sup>33</sup> Demetrio, *Philippines*, 318–20.

<sup>34</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 35–36. The *Indios* were the indigenous peoples of the Philippines.

<sup>35</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Castillon, “Babaylanic Beliefs,” 9.

<sup>37</sup> Castillon, “Babaylanic Beliefs,” 39.

equilibrium requires for a person to be holistically ready to devote oneself for the good of many.

The qualifications for a *Babaylan* to be chosen sound difficult for Filipinas of today, like me. A woman of today reading these could probably not imagine how much pressure and stress a *Babaylan* had to go through as the community entrusted her with such a substantial responsibility.

One very interesting thing to learn about *Babaylans* is their aim of bringing healing to everyone in the community and the community itself as a whole. The *Babaylan* is responsible for every individual's health in the community. That is why my first point in this chapter focuses on how they heal each individual. In the aspect healing, they have their own concept of sickness—that each one is sick in one aspect and is suffering and, in some ways, they are in need of healing.<sup>38</sup> Healing that is not only beneficial for one aspect but holistic healing and wellness as we would term it today. To make it clearer that their aim is holistic, I have put the different aspects of holistic healing they pursue into three sub-topics—spiritual, emotional, social, and intellectual, and physical.

### **Spiritual**

Healing of sicknesses and diseases to them means something is wrong with one's spirituality. To their awareness, illness is caused by two forces of physical and supernatural where if the supernatural spirits' powers are not appeased, there can be no cure for the physical affliction.<sup>39</sup> Spirituality for them is as natural as breathing or

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<sup>38</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 66.

<sup>39</sup> F. Landa Jocano, *Folk Medicine in a Philippine Municipality* (Manila, PH: PUNLAD Research House, 2003), 196.



dancing.<sup>40</sup> *Babaylans* deal with the spirituality of the person where holistic well-being starts. In doing so, they needed faith in dealing with the supernatural realm. To them, without *sampalataya* (faith), healers are powerless to cure patients and even to perform other elemental rituals.<sup>41</sup> Ancient Philippine faith healing surgeries were knifeless and scar-less and were solely dependent on faith unlike other faith healings, although during healing rituals there is an evident penetration of the psychic surgery process.<sup>42</sup> To them, healing and spirituality are interrelated just as sound and music are.<sup>43</sup> This journey towards wholeness in healing is very much rooted in spirituality.<sup>44</sup> In the same way, *Babaylans* also believe that what can heal the person most and make one whole is one's faith in whichever deity/ies one believes in.<sup>45</sup>

### **Social, Emotional, and Intellectual**

I have linked social with emotional since when the individuals in the community were in conflict with others, conflicts affect their emotional well-being leading to illnesses or sicknesses. In the same way, when the person is also emotionally disturbed, one can lose power leading to depression and a series of misfortune.<sup>46</sup> Their conscience in doing something wrong or sinning to someone played a big role in their idea of being ill. When a person does not have peace with others, the person can be sickened. They believe

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<sup>40</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 58–59.

<sup>41</sup> Jocano, *Folk Medicine*, 197.

<sup>42</sup> Huiizer and Lava, *Explorations in Folk Religion and Healing*, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 122.

<sup>44</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 66.

<sup>45</sup> Castillon, "Babaylanic Beliefs," 38, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Castillon, "Babaylanic Beliefs," 44.

that the soul is not at rest when a person is upset or angry—emotions involving the mind developed through social encounters.<sup>47</sup> They believe that a part of the soul can be lost during emotional trauma and may cause depression or grief or coma or illness and so on.<sup>48</sup> Kiley enumerated a few examples of having wronged someone—even murder—being the reason for a person to suffer sickness.<sup>49</sup> Since the *Babaylan* was a peace advocate and a conflict resolution person, she also tried to appease the spirits which were causing a person to suffer and she tried to restore every individual's emotional peace.<sup>50</sup> The process is slightly different in the way *Babaylans* deal with the mental side. In this case, the *Babaylan* journeys to another realm to restore the person's loss of power for it is power that makes one's mind put together.<sup>51</sup>

## Physical

Physically, *Babaylans* try to harmonize together the *Kaluluwa* (soul), *Ginahawa* (breath), and *Pagka-tao* (person) of a person.<sup>52</sup> Their enemies in maintaining or restoring the person's wellness are the *Aswangs* or whatever names they call them depending on where the community is (shape-shifting evil-spirits).<sup>53</sup> The ancients believe that these

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<sup>47</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Castillon, "Babaylanic Beliefs," 44.

<sup>49</sup> Henry W. Kiley, ed., *Filipino Tribal Religious Experience: Proceedings of the Second Annual Colloquium Between Social Scientists and Theologians*, Biblical and Non-Biblical Revelation Series no. 2 (presented at the Colloquium Between Social Scientists and Theologians, Quezon, PH: Giraffe Books, 1994), 167.

<sup>50</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Castillon, "Babaylanic Beliefs," 44.

<sup>52</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 18; Kiley, *Filipino Tribal Religious Experience*, 166.

*Aswangs* put elements inside human beings' stomachs which made them sick and in cases that the *Babaylans* were unsuccessful in casting those elements out, people die.<sup>54</sup> This is the root of faith-healing in the Philippines.<sup>55</sup> Her healing powers guide a sick person back to one's body and to health.<sup>56</sup>

### **Holistic Healing**

Healing according to the *Babaylan* consciousness means not just relieving diseases, eliminating pain, or curing but bringing back balance and holistic well-being. The perfect restored health stage for them is called *matipuno ang katawan* which is the ideal of a good and healthy individual having the sum quality of the physical robustness, intellectual alertness, and emotional well-balance rooted in one's spirituality.<sup>57</sup> The next paragraph describes more of this holistic healing process.

### **Recent Terminology**

The *Babaylans* used to have what is now termed by scholars as the dance of wholeness. Only they alone can mediate and perform the dance of wholeness (a dance performed to bring the person back to wholeness), entering into the world of *Babaylan* with much care and reverence.<sup>58</sup> The *Babaylans'* dance of wholeness is supposed to give out healing energy to individuals and healing in this ritual is a process, a movement, a

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<sup>54</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 6, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121.

<sup>57</sup> Jocano, *Folk Medicine*, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 49.

transition toward balance, connectedness, meaning, and wholeness.<sup>59</sup> The specific details of the processes they execute in different rituals to control away what the evil spirits are doing to human beings can be read in a book edited by Kiley—with some steps still surviving today in Philippine society like the festive eating during funerals, stepping on moistened ashes, and washing of hands after attending burials before returning home.<sup>60</sup> I did not even know that they did these before for the purpose of keeping the *labang* or evil spirits out.

### **Recent Practices and Applications**

Today, that state of change which happens when a person is restored into having *matipuno ang katawan* is termed as wholistic change inside from sickness to wellness.<sup>61</sup> Contrary to that, in a more recent study by Castillon, he discussed a differentiation between disease with illness—disease to be pathological and most often physical while illness is to be more on interior personal feelings.<sup>62</sup> However, he leaned on the side of the *Babaylans'* idea of wellness by arguing that one can have the absence of disease but still be ill inside.<sup>63</sup> In agreement with this point of view, I can say that a positive inner wellness is better to possess than a physically healthy body having no peace inside unless one has both balanced aspects of health. But then again, that is not how they viewed wellness back then. They had their own paradigm that was limited to their historical

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<sup>59</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 66.

<sup>60</sup> Kiley, *Filipino Tribal Religious Experience*, 6–7.

<sup>61</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 100.

<sup>62</sup> Castillon, “Babaylanic Beliefs,” 6.

<sup>63</sup> Castillon, “Babaylanic Beliefs,” 6.

context. They did not have terms such as holistic. Yet, I can somehow say that the *Babaylans* had a good point on their concept of illness. Some people even find better cures by going through this process of wellness compared to the other means of healing or the purely clinical ones done by physicians alone.<sup>64</sup> These days, I notice that people are starting to go back to the process of quiet and peaceful healing.

The traditional practices of *Babaylans*' folk-medicine (which consists of herbs, *hilot*, natural birthing, dance of wholeness, and ritual) is considered today to be what we call alternative modalities belonging to the business of healing and wellness while western medicine is mainly in the business of curing and sickness.<sup>65</sup> Apart from her healing methods, being a help to the spirit or being a spirit guide (especially guiding a person's spirit to after-life since they believed in an after-life as a continuation to how one lived on earth), one modern *Babaylan* stressed that they did not have the gift of foretelling, only of healing.<sup>66</sup> This statement from a *Babaylan* is contrary to most descriptions about them regarding their wisdom of the future.

Speaking of their persisting practices, some *Babaylans* still live in a way that is similar but not identical to the ancient views and practices while some are already adapting themselves to be *Babaylans* to find wellness amidst modernization. To help visualize this Salazar has given us two categorizations: *Babaylans* can be *Babaylan ng tunay na Pilipino* and *Babaylan ng Elite*. According to Salazar's categorization, there were the *Babaylan ng tunay na Pilipino* which were practicing blood heirs and another

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<sup>64</sup> Huizer and Lava, *Explorations in Folk Religion and Healing*, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 65.

<sup>66</sup> Kiley, *Filipino Tribal Religious Experience*, 197; Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 51.

group of *Babaylans*—the *Babaylan ng Elite* or the thriving ones.<sup>67</sup> With regards to modern *Babaylan ng tunay na Pilipino*, it has been studied that modern *Babaylans* combine the magic or art of speech with modern modalities like *Ibanag* rites together with the Apostle’s creed.<sup>68</sup> They have used the Apostles’ Creed as the rite to heal but added Jesus’s healing in it since modern practitioners are aware that the Apostles’ Creed does not mention Jesus’s ministry of healing. Whether this incorporation of the Apostles’ Creed into their modern healing rites influences the effect to achieve their aims towards holistic healing and well-being of people, they still continue to try to promote well-being and balance even today. In a 2014 ethnographic research by Castillon, he asserted that recent *Babaylan* healer informants view health and well-being as holistically interrelated which springs from a good relationship with a higher entity and in return this enables them to perform their daily routines and have a harmonious relationship with that entity—the creator god—in all they do.<sup>69</sup>

But I will not differentiate these two categorizations any further but proceed into an example of a *Babaylan ng Elite*. The next paragraph talks about the importance of finding oneself in the position of pursuing wholeness like what the *Babaylans* did and why it is beneficial in a modern Filipina’s life.

The person we will mention is not a practicing *Babaylan*. She just practices the essence of wholeness and well-being that starts with the spiritual. One true to life experience of Nono being brought back to wellness done to her through the help of a

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<sup>67</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 27–29.

<sup>68</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 94.

<sup>69</sup> Castillon, “Babaylanic Beliefs,” 37–38.

more recent *Babaylan* made her follow *Babaylans'* examples, and made her believe that it is a restored and well-balanced spirit of a person that cleanses, energizes, heals, not only those around her but herself even.<sup>70</sup>

Nono shared her healing experiences along with the *Babaylans'* help.<sup>71</sup> She said that she had suffered from two separate occasions of lingering illness following close engagements with the *Babaylans*. A question eventually came to my mind while reading this, "Was it caused by them or it has to do with her personal intentions? Were her motives right?" This question I had was eventually answered along my reading. Since engaging with the *Babaylans* means engaging with the spirit that they are dealing with, Nono suggested the need for careful and serious preparation when encountering with them.<sup>72</sup>

Like the *Babaylan*, one must have the guidance and protection of one's spirit helper(s), whether these are ancestral spirits, or Jesus, or Allah, or some other guardian, when engaging with entities that one may not be familiar with. One must also learn to discern the spirits, for as many of the *Babaylan* in this study have told us, spirits are not all beneficent. Finally, one must try one's best, despite obstacles, to maintain purity of intention, seeking only good, and to give respect to all. Inversely, disrespect, ignorance, and recklessness could find oneself lost along dangerous paths that one may not be psychically and physically prepared to tread. The *Babaylans* are priestesses, healers, oralists, beyond which they are like other priests, doctors, artists, or other elements of creation, vulnerable to weaknesses, as they are to dispensing divine potentialities. Furthermore, in engaging with spirits, one must take care not to be seduced by phenomena, and the world of appearances. More important than the spectacle of magical powers is the state of one's heart, mind, and soul. In the end, we all need guidance and encouragement to choose the path of love and compassion.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 124.

<sup>71</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 381.

<sup>72</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 381.

<sup>73</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 381.

By preparation before any encounter, Nono may have meant the preparation of the heart of the person and their intentions. I believe that the preparation suggested by Nono would be similar to the procedures and preparations that matter to the *Babaylans* since this is the same spiritual worlds they travel to. Perhaps each encounter with the spiritual world causes strain in their hearts. Therefore, their hearts must be wholly prepared. Since most of her previous encounters with them were fueled by the drive for research, I think it must have something to do with that, or she just happened to have acquired sickness after each visit due to a weak health. This is my summary of her personal experience of being healed.

The first was in the late 1990's and the second in 2008.<sup>74</sup> A recurring fever for the first occasion and for the second, literally being bedridden for weeks, coughing incessantly, unable to speak, or sing, despite all sorts of medications.<sup>75</sup> On both occasions, she shares that doctors of Western medicine could not properly diagnose or heal her.<sup>76</sup> Her eventual healing was brought about by a combination of herbs and other alternative therapies, Christian prayers, and a ritual conducted by Mang Henio, whom she had known for many years, and whose heart she had come to trust.<sup>77</sup>

Nono felt herself put back together after those instances: a healing that made her get to know herself despite the rubble of neo-colonialism and modern living, discover goodness and beneficence she had maligned and misunderstood, and these paramount to

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<sup>74</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 381.

<sup>75</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 381.

<sup>76</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 381.

<sup>77</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 381.



her own healing.<sup>78</sup> Through this, we understand that healing can be possible when a person will be taken out from a state of wondering or from being colonized or influenced to being able to get to know herself and connect with herself.

Through all of these, I do not propose that all the rituals done by the *Babaylans* like the dance of wholeness nor the *pagtatawid* or guiding of the spirit of a person towards the afterlife for the purpose of healing be followed after nor revived in any means. For a good reason, I believe in today's practice of faith within an individual that allows her or him to connect directly with God in whatever he or she is concerned of. There is no need for a mediator in that sense. However, ministers are also mediators of healing at the same time.

I do see though that the *Babaylans*' idea of an individual's holistic healing rooted in spirituality—mediated or not—can be of help to today's women. And from my perspective as a Christian, I would agree that when we are not spiritually in a good state which has something to do with our relationship with God, every other aspect of holistic wellness and balance is impossible. Mangahas explained that human beings cannot enter into the sacred web of love (probably love for God, others, and oneself or interdependence of love in a community) and the other two of the trilogy, faith and hope, unless they have learned to believe in a greater power, God, whose love is inclusive and unconditional.<sup>79</sup> And I think when one has this trilogy, one is healthy. I believe genuine health produces fruits that are welling from the inside and seen on the outside. And this hope, faith, and love in a person creates a chain of healing unto others also.

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<sup>78</sup> Nono, *Spiritualities of Philippine Ritualist-Oralist-Healers*, 380.

<sup>79</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 168.

Women, and even men of today, at the same time, are to create healing. Our works and deeds must be inclined to promoting healing. We must create and do something that heals. And this happens only when personally, one is truly well and balanced. By well and balanced, I mean all aspects of holistic health is in their best possible state, especially the spiritual. A journal article by Corbin and Pangrazi talks about wellness the same way stating that wellness is a multidimensional state of being which is acted out on how everything is materialized by an individual.<sup>80</sup>

Lastly, in an interview done by Mangahas with Villariba, a recent *Babaylan*, Villariba learned that in order to be properly called a *Babaylan*, one must be holistically balanced; one's faith, hope, and love to the community must be evident; and one's daily work must produce wisdom and goodness in the community.<sup>81</sup> I believe in *Babaylanism* in the sense that not only does it promote the healing and well-being of everyone but it also suggests that one's healing must concern the community's well-being, including physical concerns such as economic justice, gender equality, and ecological preservation. I turn now to this point.

### ***Babaylans as Redeemers***

As I have mentioned earlier, the second point talking about *Babaylans* being redeemers will focus on their role in bringing balance to the community. They did not just come to be an important person in the community without any reason although according to real life practitioners and blood heirs of the *Babaylans*, they were living

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<sup>80</sup> Charles B. Corbin and Robert P. Pangrazi, "Research Digest," *President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Toward a Uniform Definition of Wellness: A Commentary* 3.15 (2001).

<sup>81</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 169.

examples already since they lived simply, were devoted, gentle, unassuming, hospitable, accommodating, just, calm, slow to speak, patient, peaceful, prudent, humble, and happy to serve.<sup>82</sup> There was an environmental aspect of the pre-Hispanic Filipino ancestors which called for them to have a mediator which are then the *Babaylans*. They had bio-ecological foundation which means that they consider the process of ecological factors—climatic, cosmological, physical, social, and normative—to explain phenomena.<sup>83</sup> In the context that they were in, they had formed their own paradigms, beliefs, wisdom, and attitude which guided them in their lifestyle, decision-making, and actions.<sup>84</sup> The volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and stormy weather gave them an idea that there is a spiritual world full of good and bad spirits and a supreme deity or creator they referred to as *Bathala*.<sup>85</sup> These ecological factors—geography, nature, and climate were also the same major antagonists and negative factors resulting to the inadequacy of power, people, and supply on the invading Spaniards taking it longer for them to fully invade the Philippines.<sup>86</sup>

The archipelago's fragility and abundance placed a group of women into the role of *Babaylanism* where they healed broken bodies and spirits, assisted the soul of the dying to the next life, negotiated blessings, averted misfortunes, and predicted future

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<sup>82</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 80–81.

<sup>83</sup> Jocano, *Folk Medicine*, 38.

<sup>84</sup> Ambrosio, *Kalangitan Sa Kabihasnang Pilipino*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Ambrosio, *Kalangitan Sa Kabihasnang Pilipino*, 225; Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 23.

<sup>86</sup> John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spain Aims and Filipino Responses* (Rizal, PH: Cachos Hermanos, 1985), 41.

events (although some would not agree that they had skills or even practice telling future fortunes as I have mentioned earlier).<sup>87</sup>

Aside from individual healing responsibilities mentioned in the previous section, *Babaylans* also had the ability to discern the connectedness of bodily health to the health of the environment, and their healing dance further extended to the community's wellness concerns.<sup>88</sup> A *Babaylan*'s spirit signified concern for well-being of the community, love for nature, faith in the Supreme Spiritual Being, and leadership qualities in an abundant tropical world where people fished and gathered food from the rivers and sea during dry season, hunted and planted during wet season, where women could participate in anything, as they belonged to a community in which property was communal and everyone belonged to a bilateral kinship system.<sup>89</sup> The *Babaylans*, together with the warriors, and the other physical and spiritual leaders of the people, safeguarded the equilibrium of all.<sup>90</sup>

As the *Babaylans* invited people for wholeness, rooted in their spirituality, they became not only psychological but holistic pillars of the community where the people relied for everything on these wise women who toiled for the health of the earth, abundance, and the well-being of the planet.<sup>91</sup> In the same way I have categorized the

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<sup>87</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 23.

<sup>88</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 65.

<sup>89</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 14–23; Ambrosio, *Kalangitan Sa Kabihasnang Pilipino*, 228.

<sup>90</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121.

<sup>91</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 63.

*Babaylans* as healers into holistic aspects in the previous section, I will also do the same in this section evaluating how they help and redeem the community holistically.

### **Spiritual and Physical**

I have linked spiritual and physical since the ancient Filipinos saw a deep connection between the physical and spiritual world. Whatever is happening around, the spirits have something to do with it. A *Babaylan* power is a work from within that to connect to the divine power; she is both independent from and interdependent with them like the rest of nature's species are and respects spirits to be part of the entire community.<sup>92</sup> They were necessary persons for physical tribal community survival. The ancient Filipinos considered the *Babaylans* to be intermediaries between people from the land to the spirits around, in heavens, and in the underworld and they have trusted them of rituals that start and finish the growing season of crops until harvest season, assisted by the *Datus* who were specialists in economic aspects of the ancient Philippine context.<sup>93</sup> They believed that in the presence of misfortunes, natural calamities like storms, typhoons, earthquakes, and the like are due to unfavorable disequilibrium.<sup>94</sup> They perform sacrifices in which the natives set apart offering of prayers and sacrifices to their gods in cases of seed-growing and war.<sup>95</sup> The natives called these sacrifices as *balyanes* and the

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<sup>92</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 68–69.

<sup>93</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Jocano, *Folk Medicine*, 44.

<sup>95</sup> Miguel de Loarca, "Relacion de Las Yslas Filipinas," in *The Philippine Islands, 1582-1583*, ed. Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson (Cleveland, OH: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1903), 131–33.

priestesses performing this were called the same.<sup>96</sup> Through the offering rituals of the *Babaylans*, they bring rain that ended drought and famine.<sup>97</sup> She strengthens and supports the spiritual life of the community as well.<sup>98</sup> As spiritual pillars, she engages and struggles with the foes of the community, especially the unseen ones, and usually comes out victorious.<sup>99</sup> *Babaylans*, full of faith and love, crosses the ocean from poverty, injustice, and violence towards *ginhawa* or state of wholeness and well-being as what Contreras would translate it.<sup>100</sup>

### **Physical and Social**

Another vital physical concern of the pre-Hispanic Filipino community was the reproductive health and fertility of each individual which also affected them socially since reproductive health contributed to a woman's dignity. *Babaylans* control reproduction and health in the community where these women enjoyed prominent and prestigious status and were being held in high esteem as the forerunners of the tribe or community since reproduction and fertility were highly valued due to the limited number of population in their societies.<sup>101</sup> Being held in high-esteem, they surpass the average women and lay the basis for the claim that some women in pre-colonial times were equal

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<sup>96</sup> Arcilla, *Philippine History*, 7; Carolyn Brewer, *Holy Confrontation: Religion, Gender, and Sexuality in the Philippines, 1521-1685*, 1st ed. (Manila, PH: C. Brewer and the Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College, 2001), 160.

<sup>97</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 151.

<sup>98</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121.

<sup>99</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121.

<sup>100</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 129.

<sup>101</sup> Azarcon-Dela Cruz, *Feminist Writings in the Philippines*, 12, 86; Mananzan, *Pangkababaihang Isyu*, 3.

or even superior to men.<sup>102</sup> Their control over the reproductive spheres (health, diseases, fertility, etc.) gave them the pre-condition to maximize their participation and remain competitive with the men in their other spheres (economic, political, religious) even to the extent of becoming socially equal, at times, even superior to, in some respects, the rest of society.<sup>103</sup>

### **Mental, Social, and Emotional**

I have linked the mental with emotional and social since in the processes that involved the mind, they interact with each other and in turn, live in harmony with each other. This I believe is also promoting the emotional health of everyone. The *Babaylans* also used their knowledge in sharing astronomy knowledge to people of the community in telling if the guide star is already visible which appears in between January and February in the sky for them to start working together in clearing fields for growing season.<sup>104</sup>

Aside this aspect of community survival, the office of the *Babaylan* goes deeper into achieving the psychic balance of her community.<sup>105</sup> She is a psychological and mental pillar of her people, conflict resolution person, and problem solver.<sup>106</sup> She is a peace advocate.<sup>107</sup> The *Babaylans* symbolized readiness, ready to heal near or far. They

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<sup>102</sup> Mangahas, "Filipino Women from Pre-Colonial Times," 13.

<sup>103</sup> Mangahas, "Filipino Women from Pre-Colonial Times," 13.

<sup>104</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 6.

<sup>105</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121; Salazar, *Babaylan*, 14.

<sup>106</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121.

<sup>107</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 66.

readily faced trials and dangers not only for herself but also for the well-being of those subject to her affection, the community, and yet even for foreigners.<sup>108</sup> The *Balyanes* perform the *Balyanes* sacrifices in which the natives work together in helping her for others' sake in sacrifices, offerings, and prayers to their gods in cases of sickness and in redeeming those who are confined in infernal regions.<sup>109</sup>

If we come to look at it in their context, all aspects of holistic healing are interdependent. There is no physically healthy person alone but only a holistically healthy one. They just have different terms, worldview, and processes to know and achieve that which was fit for their context. Today, we have different aspects of health which they did not have before and they relied mostly to the idea that sickness has something to do with spiritual. In other words, they spiritualized everything. They were there to remove all sorts of discomforts and so the people and the community will be restored to well-being from chaos to order.

Although it is beneficial to learn from *Babaylanism*'s insights of healing and harmony, it is also a bias not to talk about their evil deeds that we must refrain from following. Firstly, I do not see rituals involving chants and sacrifices to be relevant today. Secondly, there were times they became leaders of revolts due to hostility posed on them by Spanish colonizers. The *Babaylans*' devotion to spiritual and temporal welfare of the ancient community became a threat and a rival to the Spanish colonizers.<sup>110</sup> In converting

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<sup>108</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 129.

<sup>109</sup> de Loarca, "Relacion de Las Yslas Filipinas," 131–33. During the pre-Hispanic era, *Babaylans* had different names from tribe to tribe. Some people groups in the Philippines also call *Babaylans* as *Balyanes*.

<sup>110</sup> Brewer, *Religion, Gender, and Sexuality in the Philippines*, 155; Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 36.



ancient Filipinos' beliefs to Roman Catholicism, the *Babaylans* were the priests' first targets since they dealt similarly with sacred things.<sup>111</sup> The *Babaylans* persuaded liberation from Spaniards by animal killing, demolishing of houses, uprooting of vegetations, sacking churches, mutilating and mocking statues of the Roman Catholic saints, and evacuating to mountainsides.<sup>112</sup>

Castillon noted how the Spaniards eliminated the *Babaylans* by slaughtering, mutilating, chopping, and feeding them to crocodiles to make sure their bodies would never return.<sup>113</sup> From then on, the priests renamed the *Babaylans* as *Bruhas* or witches.<sup>114</sup> Although the actions they executed were responses to the threatening changes of colonialism, I see their violence as opposing to advocating healing and harmony that they used to practice. Salazar noted though that the *Babaylans* were able to enter and adapt inside the colonized environment while keeping their practices and values with them.<sup>115</sup>

Some of their heirs are still Biblical while aiming for wellness at the same time.<sup>116</sup> Teresita, daughter of a *Babaylan* once said, "You are a true *Babaylan* if the rhythm is in your body."<sup>117</sup> One of the persons following after the *Babaylans*' pursuit for wholeness or well-being, Mananzan, who also described them as indigenous spiritual leaders in a community with egalitarian status, also incorporated her struggle and heart for justice and

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<sup>111</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 18.

<sup>112</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 38.

<sup>113</sup> Castillon, "Babaylanic Beliefs," 8.

<sup>114</sup> Brewer, *Religion, Gender, and Sexuality in the Philippines*, 155.

<sup>115</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 19.

<sup>116</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 83.

<sup>117</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 65.

social transformation with the spirit of that of a *Babaylan* (socially-oriented and with strong character) regarding wholeness.<sup>118</sup> She believes no soul is ever saved without the body therefore we must also be concerned about the body's issues and fights like oppression in the society and poverty.<sup>119</sup> Modern-day advocates of the essence of wellness that *Babaylanism* used to value and practice set examples to women and men of today that an individual's healing should bring balance to the community as well.

### **Conclusion**

As I was studying this subject, I can only imagine a community where people cared for each other and the health of one is the health of all. The ancient community as we have learned aims for balance and wellness of everyone for everyone. They worked not just for individual benefits but for the common good. Although, there could have been numerous imbalances, problems, and conflicts to solve, the *Babaylans* initiated harmony and balance in their community. What a sight it would have been to see such a harmonized ancient setting alive in today's Philippine culture.

Although growing far and far from our roots, recognizing the roots of the *Babaylans* where we originated from, knowing how we came to be from there, and learning from them, we find ourselves carried back into harmony as we are inspired with the influence, intentions, and generosity of these women of our past. I am made aware that to fit into the present feminist consciousness, Filipinas recover this *Babaylan* consciousness, an authentically local feminine holistic spirituality paradigm, to seal the

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<sup>118</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 135.

<sup>119</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 141.

foundations of Filipina identity where the well-being of everyone in a diverse community working interdependently is encouraged but once again, I am not sold out to the idea of it being a feminism as it is a phenomenon that is not a result of rebellious intentions but a community that seeks for answers from nature, deities, and pursues the balance of everything. Learning about these made me ask myself if I am still a piece of thread woven in the fabric of my culture or one trying to be sewed in another foreign fabric? As a Filipina, I evaluated my paradigms. It is challenging but learning about this ancient holistic phenomenon, I also have to draw the line of being a person having faith in the Judaic God and everything tied to Him while holding the inspiration of *Babaylanism*.

As a Christian from the holiness group, I reflected upon John Wesley's principle about the intention of the heart producing good works. I recall his heart for the poor. As the inspiration of the *Babaylans* about well-being and John Wesley's purity of intention met halfway in my studies, I can say that healing is not a chapel-, nor a sermon-limited process. Although in the aspect of looking at the *Babaylans* as community redeemers from my modern context, I can say that in a certain aspect of making connections, they can be compared to the instruments called of God, like ministers and teachers, who let people get to know and get close to Him. A redeemer for me can be someone who opened my eyes about the truth of God and the ones who helped and are still helping me cling to my faith. And mediating in this case is also done interdependently in a community of faith—the body of Christ. In the Christian church, one insight we can take note of from the *Babaylans* is the holistic concern of the *Babaylans* for the community. In application, we are to be concerned with the community of faith and even those outside. This study personally opened me to a new dimension of looking at religion. True religion is love and

it means growing fully in one's love for God and neighbors similar to that of Wesley's heart for the poor. John Wesley was a man who considered all the edges and details of life and not only spirituality. An upbringing of continuous poverty produced a social pioneer like Wesley—from a leader in education and development among the masses in developing their sense of personal worth and responsibility, to powerfully affecting abolition of slavery and reform of prison system.<sup>120</sup> Wesley had much to say and concerned himself about almost every phase of human life, upon almost every human interest and problem.<sup>121</sup> There is a connection that Wesley makes between works of mercy and the sanctified life. He is concerned in the holistic understanding of the scriptural salvation as forgiveness (justification) and as healing the various faculties or dimensions of the human soul (sanctification).<sup>122</sup> It is sin removed from the soul of man and the heart made perfect in love toward God and all men. This is the heart of Wesley, for people (including the poor) to grow deeper and deeper in Christian perfection. "Let your soul be filled with so entire a love of Him that you may love nothing but for His sake," this is Christian perfection to him.<sup>123</sup> Of course, for me really, all of the broader aspects begin within ourselves—within our hearts.

Learning from the *Babaylans*, we must be in the pursuit of holistic health. I believe that the fullness of life can be experienced when there is wholeness or holistic

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<sup>120</sup> E. Douglas Bebb, *Wesley: A Man with a Concern* (LDN: The Epworth Press, 1950), 1–2.

<sup>121</sup> T. Crichton Mitchell, *Meet Mr. Wesley: An Intimate Sketch of John Wesley* (Kansas, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1981), 78.

<sup>122</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 252–53.

<sup>123</sup> Bebb, *Wesley*, 76–78.

health in us individually that is fully rooted in our Spiritual balance.<sup>124</sup> Having a right relationship with God makes a passionate heart. That is having a heart passionate enough to be God's hands and feet to address the holistic needs of this world—economic, religious, etc. Whatever God has given us are for harmony and balance. We must use whatever we have been given to build what is beneficial and knock down what blocks our people from betterment. I believe this is possible when it is from the inside. With the idea that they are independent, have autonomy from outsiders' support, have reliance on their own resources, and that they have come up with solving poverty by commonality of goods, I believe in the ability of each one to cause change and healing. In a community like that of today, I believe everyone whose heart is right before the Lord and who is concerned for others' state of being can be a resource of wholeness.

With the challenge of social media being a barometer of our life, I would personally commit to advocating well-being awareness. I believe this is inner liberation. Like the *Babaylans*, we must work to be contributors of making whole the broken, relieving pains, and giving space to those who feel they have no space and value in the society. We are to create communities that seek for each individual's healing and working for the balance and well-being of each one so we can move as one in facing every challenge tossed by the changing times.

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<sup>124</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 77.

## CHAPTER V

### READING RUTH IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PHILIPPINE-BABAYLANISM

In Chapter I, I stated the second sub-question: How do I apply the concepts of *Babaylanism* to the book of Ruth? This will be addressed in this chapter. I have stated in Chapter III that I am employing post-modern reading strategies, namely, reader-response criticism and feminist theology along with critical retrieval. I have chosen a reader-response approach because, while historical-critical study, though it remains a valid approach, leaves some important questions unanswered. In the book of Ruth, we find many gaps that readers can helpfully supply meanings to. Historical criticism answers questions about authors and the original audience while reader-response criticism attempts to capture how the text can communicate to the present.<sup>1</sup> In supplying meaning to the gaps we find in the book of Ruth, I am less interested in the questions that historical criticism can answer. But in this reading, I will also heed my understanding. Like Veling, I believe in the importance of the re-imagining the scripture in parallel to the modern world. Intentional Christian communities must focus on contributing to postmodern imagination where the new world can be imagined or involved.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in using reader-response, as I have mentioned in Chapter III, I will lean to a

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Shelly Matthews, and Ann Graham Brock, eds., *Searching the Scriptures* (NY: Crossroad, 1993), 248–49.

<sup>2</sup> Terry A Veling, *Living in the Margins: Intentional Communities and the Art of Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 103.

more conservative criticism considering the interpretive community in agreement with Aichele insistence that the importance of intersections of ideas in the production of meaning—agreeing and intersecting with other interpreters in the aspects of power, discourse, and ideology must be carefully observed.<sup>3</sup> In filling the gaps, despite a more conservative reader-response approach, I will still pursue it to be challenging since some of the purposes of a critical research is still to critique and challenge, to transform and empower.<sup>4</sup>

As I am also advocating a feminist perspective in this study, I have looked at the aim of feminist theologians which is to challenge patriarchal dominance in the Scripture where women's voices and experiences were usually excluded.<sup>5</sup> Thus, I am going back to my aim of bringing the readers to see Ruth from a different perspective. The redeemer image is tagged to Boaz. However, in this study, I aim to demonstrate that, among the three main characters—Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz—it was Ruth who became the redeemer.<sup>6</sup>

In the previous chapter, I enumerated two characteristics of the *Babaylans*—healers and redeemers. As we read Ruth in the perspective of *Babaylanism*, these two aspects seem most relevant and, as mentioned above, these aspects will help address the second research sub-question of this study found under the Statement of the Problem in Chapter I. These two do not constitute all of the characteristics of the historical

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<sup>3</sup> George Aichele and Bible and Culture Collective, eds., *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 255–56.

<sup>4</sup> Merriam and Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Veling, *Intentional Communities and the Art of Interpretation*, 106.

<sup>6</sup> When I indicate that Ruth is a redeemer, I do not intend to slight Boaz, especially since the text does refer to Boaz as a *go'el*. I merely emphasize, in analogy to the *Babaylans*, that Ruth accomplishes a redemptive task, though in a different way than this concept is normally understood.

*Babaylans*, but I put emphasis on these two since based on my previous readings and primary observations and interactions with the book of Ruth, these characteristics were relevant to Ruth's character as she filled these roles—healer and redeemer—based on what she did for Naomi, Boaz, the house of Elimelech, and Israel. I see these characteristics of Ruth as analogous to that of the *Babaylans*. To enumerate the analogy of the two, I have created two sections which look at Ruth as a healer and as a redeemer.

### **Ruth as a Healer**

In the previous chapter, I argued that the *Babaylans* being healers meant that they are tools of holistic health to individuals. In this section, we will examine how Ruth was able to execute this kind of activity unto Naomi and Boaz as individuals. In this section, I have made two sub-points which elaborates the healing activities Ruth has done first to Naomi and then to Boaz. The following points will make visible how Ruth, maybe not in spiritual practices but like the *Babaylans*, also used her body as a tool to create healing instances to Naomi and Boaz.

#### **Naomi**

First, I will consider Ruth's healing effect upon Naomi. To understand this, let us look at the problem of Naomi that needed to be addressed. With regards to Naomi, we see here a more explicit problem which we can read in Ruth 1:11–13:

And Naomi said, “Turn again, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there yet to me any more sons in my womb, that they may be husband to you? Turn again, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you stay for them until that when they were grown? Would you stay for them from not



having husbands my daughters? For it grieves me than it is harder for you that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me.”<sup>7</sup>

And we read also in Ruth 1:20–21: “And she said unto them, ‘Call me not Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt with me very bitterly. Accomplished I went out and empty the LORD has brought me home again. Why call me Naomi, seeing the LORD has testified, and the Almighty has inflicted me?’” From these verses, we can conclude that Naomi considers this a problem. There could be other problems we will find as we study the words of Naomi, but we will focus on her problem of childlessness explicitly written in the text after losing her family.

First, I looked at why this has become such a burden for Naomi. I have noted that, in a patriarchal context, an old widow with no sons stands in a difficult position, to say the least.<sup>8</sup> Women’s fates in that context were determined by having men in their lives and their principal worth was in producing children.<sup>9</sup> So if we look at this, what Naomi was saying is such a plain fact. She really was empty. Naomi no longer is in childbearing age; she does not have a husband.<sup>10</sup> She would have had a little more chance not of childbearing but of having grandchildren if her sons were still alive. But her sons were also dead. The moment her sons died; she did not have the right to keep her daughters-in-law anymore.<sup>11</sup> She had no use even to her daughters-in-law. Even Naomi seemed to

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<sup>7</sup> All Scriptural translations are my own.

<sup>8</sup> Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroines: Women’s Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 184.

<sup>9</sup> Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Women’s Bible Commentary*, Expanded ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 84–85.

<sup>10</sup> André Lacocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 47.

<sup>11</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (NY: Schocken Books, 2002), 248.

describe her worth as reproductive only as she thought that marriage and sons were where women could only find security. She persisted in this view until they arrived in Bethlehem (1:11–13).<sup>12</sup> She even told the people who asked if it was her as she came back empty. Empty here can refer to a lack of offspring, absence of marriage, or scarcity of grains.<sup>13</sup> In addition to this, see Ruth 3:1: “And Naomi her mother-in-law said, ‘Shall I not seek rest for you that it may be well?’” From this verse, it is clear how much Naomi clearly values the idea of a woman having a man to complete her. The words of Naomi give hints that she only considers Ruth well until she finds a man. As for the moment things have probably not gone well with Ruth in Naomi’s perspective.

In comparison to how the world of *Babaylans* would view this, this situation of Naomi would be very problematic as well. The context of the *Babaylans* also suggests that reproduction and fertility are of high significance since they have small communities pushing them to resolve fertility problems through rituals.<sup>14</sup> The world of Ruth can be more patriarchal compared to that of the *Babaylans* but they similarly valued women in the measure of reproduction. Having offspring was similarly important to the *Babaylans*. In her case, Naomi would stand as someone physically unhealthy which might affect her emotional health and social standing—maybe holistically even. And if we examine her words, she indeed showed signs of not being in a well stage—*matipuno ang katawan* (holistically well) that the community of the *Babaylans* aimed for everyone to have.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 86.

<sup>13</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> Azarcon-Dela Cruz, *Feminist Writings in the Philippines*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Jocano, *Folk Medicine*, 69.

As a twenty-first century woman whose context is derived from the *Babaylans*, I do not see the problem of childlessness at old age as a major issue of life and death anymore to Filipinas of today. However, others still label this state to be shameful. In connection to that, we have this familiar term in Tagalog “*tandang gorang*” usually tagged to them which may mean old and haggard in English. This tagging may not be true in general. However, I believe also that somehow single, childless, and widowed Filipina women may suffer being worried about the perception of the people about them for at least some time of their lives. I believe that this is just similar to what Naomi has gone through even if she was in a different context.

In my case, as an heir learning from the *Babaylans* and Ruth, this is where I can step in and follow their examples, especially Ruth’s. I will not explain any longer how I can follow Ruth step by step, but I can apply the essence of being there for those in the situation of being not so well and understanding that they need company. We read below how Ruth, through her initiatives and actions, was able to bring healing to Naomi’s state of being.

I want to shift the focus here from my piece of application thought to the actions Ruth did that led to Naomi’s healing and wellness. So why and how was Ruth a healer to Naomi? I took note of these initiatives she executed not just once but twice. First, note that Naomi asked to release her daughters-in-law already in the first chapter which we read in Ruth 1:8–18. Ruth decisively came along with her by choice.<sup>16</sup> When we read this from the perspective of *Babaylanism*, we find similar willingness and kindness extending not only to the subject of their affection—their close relatives—but also even towards

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<sup>16</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*, 242.

foreigners analogously acted by Ruth.<sup>17</sup> Naomi is somewhat already considered at this point as a foreigner for Ruth since the link that is supposed to bind them—Mahlon, her late husband—already died. She was even offered to go back to her home and yet she chose, willingly, to be a company to Naomi. In this case, I see Naomi as someone really needing this help. It seems to me that she was depressed and empty and could really use company.

Secondly, she initiated in Ruth 2:2, in which we read: “And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, ‘Let me now go to the field, and glean after in one among whose ears in whose sight I shall find favor.’ And she said to her, ‘Go, my daughter.’” Ruth seeks here a means for both her and Naomi to be fed and survive. This is analogous to the *Babaylans*’ desire in ending famine and hardships. In the world of the *Babaylans*, they bring rain to end famine and mediate for people to have a good harvest. They perform sacrifices in which the natives set apart offering of prayers and sacrifices to their gods in cases of seed-growing and war.<sup>18</sup> The *Babaylans* were used as tools in bringing rain that ended drought and famine.<sup>19</sup> Ruth became a means for Naomi to receive physical harvest. Ruth’s initiative found both of them a means to be filled—in the aspect of grain—instead of being empty.

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<sup>17</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 129.

<sup>18</sup> de Loarca, “Relacion de Las Yslas Filipinas,” 131–33.

<sup>19</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 151.

After an action started by Ruth that seemed favorable to both her and Naomi, Naomi's tone seemed to change. Hearing Ruth working for Boaz, and Boaz taking notice of her, she gave words of blessings to Ruth.<sup>20</sup> We read this in Ruth 2:19–20:

And her mother-in-law said, "Where have you gleaned today? And where is he who did take knowledge of you to have work of, may he be blessed." And she showed her mother-in-law whom she had worked with and said "I worked today in the field of the man whose name is Boaz." And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed is he of the LORD, who do not leave off his covenant loyalty to the living and to the dead!" And Naomi said, "The man is a near of kin to her, one of our next kinsmen."

These are the first words of blessing Naomi has spoken to Ruth since she said blessings (out of distress) to Orpah and Ruth in Ruth 1:8–9. In the next chapter (2:8–9), the narrator fills out these words of blessing through Boaz's own speech:

Then Boaz said unto Ruth, "Do you not hear my daughter? Do not go to glean in the field of another, and neither go on from this, but stay close to the maidens. Let your eyes reap that on the field, and you do go after they reap. I have charged the young men that they shall not touch you. And when you are thirsty, go unto the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."

Here she finally said another blessing which was addressed to a man named Boaz that Ruth was telling her about. Even after Ruth pledged company and loyalty to her and her God, the text was silent about how Naomi felt about it. In this case, the initiatives of Ruth finally started giving Naomi a revived perspective that kindness still existed, and that kindness was at hand.

And finally, the healing of Naomi came when Ruth used her body for being almost like a surrogate mother for Naomi. An instance that healed her childlessness. We read the main problem we are focusing on—childlessness—being resolved in Ruth 4:14–17:

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<sup>20</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 87.

And the women said unto Naomi, “Blessed is the LORD, that do not leave you outside of a kinsman, may His name be famous this day in Israel. And he shall be to you a restorer of life, and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, that loves, and is better to you than seven sons, and has born him to you.” And Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom and became a nurse. And the women, her neighbors gave to her its name, saying, ‘There is a son born to Naomi.’ And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.”

Although Ruth finally had a child which, according to the text, she did not yet have, the blessing however went to Naomi. First, in Ruth 4:15, she was credited for having a daughter who was better to her than seven sons and two verses later, she was also credited of a son born to her that she cared for.<sup>21</sup> In this case, as noted above, Ruth became like a surrogate mother for Naomi. It is one thing that Ruth became a corrective tool to Naomi’s narrow perspective.<sup>22</sup> It is another thing that she also became a tool of total healing for Naomi by giving Naomi access to be a woman of dignity in her context. Above all that, going back to the root of all health where wholeness resides, the love of Ruth for Naomi renewed her faith in the works of God and in God Himself.<sup>23</sup>

## **Boaz**

The challenge I saw in the book of Ruth that pushed me to dig deeper through this study is the strong patriarchy in most of its interpretations. We usually hear Boaz labeled as the hero of the book of Ruth for what he did to Ruth and Naomi. This is one of the lessons I remember so clearly when I was seven years old in Sunday school. Like the usual, it leaned towards Boaz being the hero. To restate, I want to bring people to see

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<sup>21</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology* (Manila, PH: St. Pauls Philippines, 2004), 261.

from a point of view that it is Ruth who is the healer of both Naomi and Boaz and in this section, it will be challenging but we will look more on Ruth's healing impact unto Boaz.

In comparison to Naomi's problem, Boaz seems to have a more implicit one which was addressed later through the person of Ruth. We find this in Ruth 3:10: "And he said, 'Blessed are you my daughter of the LORD! You have showed more covenant loyalty in the latter end than at the beginning, by not going after young men whether poor or rich.'" We are safe to assume here that he is old. Less clear here is if he had children but the text never mentions it. The text does not even mention how he felt about having no child if he had none unlike Naomi's outspoken grief about her situation. By reading through his actions, he was interested in having a wife as he was willing to go through the process of publicly being acknowledged, and through the sacrifice of taking someone who had been the wife of another. There was perhaps a need in him that will be addressed after doing all those steps.

We also notice how much he admired Ruth by calling her an **אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל** (*ēšet chayil*) in Ruth 3:11: "Now my daughter, do not fear. All that you require, I will do, for the city know that of my people you are a virtuous woman." Boaz acknowledges Ruth as deserving of highest commendation because although she had the right to go after younger men, she did not.<sup>24</sup> He commends her for not going after young men and for some, the words of Boaz could indicate not only concern but attraction.<sup>25</sup> Boaz saw Ruth as a noble woman and his concern for her resembles some other instances in the Bible

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<sup>24</sup> Donald A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing, 1974), 206.

<sup>25</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 87.

showing pre-marriage actions (Genesis 24; 29, Exodus 2:15–22).<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, Ruth never showed the same kind of admiration unto Boaz. Filling the gap, I see Boaz to have really wanted not only a child in comparison to Naomi, but a wife, and not only a wife but a wife like Ruth. Perhaps a void in him could only be filled by such a noble woman who has so much **חסד** (*chesed*) in her.

Reading from the perspective of *Babaylanism*, the expressions and actions of Boaz would probably be related to his physical and emotional needs. In the *Babaylans'* eyes, his childlessness can also be a problem since the text suggests he was unmarried. But his concern for her goes far more than physical. He was also concerned about her reputation and cared for who or what were important to Ruth—Naomi and Elimelech's hurting family. He addressed these concerns by first extending blessings of grains to Naomi and then marrying Ruth giving Naomi a son which also patched the about-to-be-cut-off lineage of Elimelech.

His actions also reflected the importance of women in the community. His continuous expression of admiration showed how much a woman like Ruth has the capacity to complete him. As noted above, women in the *Babaylanic* world were also highly esteemed as front liners since fertility was highly valued due to the limited number of populations in their societies.<sup>27</sup> But as we see here, this man was interested in more than Ruth's potential to bear children. Instead, her being an *ēšet chayil* and having the fullness of *chesed* intrigued him.

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<sup>26</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 87.

<sup>27</sup> Azarcon-Dela Cruz, *Feminist Writings in the Philippines*, 12, 86; Mananzan, *Pangkababaihang Isyu*, 3.



As a woman of the present, I wish to apply what can be gleaned in Ruth's interactions with Boaz in pursuing the good of others. Doing this can be beneficial not only to the one we are doing it for or the recipients of our good works but may be attractive to others as well. This may bless those around us and serve an example to them. Being noble will never be outdated. I am not talking about women of today pursuing worthiness and loving kindness for spousal purposes only. If we pursue nobility, in the sense of putting others' sake and wellness first, we may not know the extent of our actions to others. We can make a better and healing environment which was similarly the *Babaylans'* aim for their community. Speaking of nobility leading to healing, Ruth was able to do that for Boaz as we will see below.

Boaz is said to have been a rich man of good standing, but it seems to me that he could also represent an image of passivity. And that is also probably the reason why he was assumedly spouseless. Ruth was able to provide correction for this. In Ruth 3:10, we see here how Boaz saw in Ruth a full extent of *chesed* which provided him a motivation of marrying her.<sup>28</sup> Newsom and Ringe also mentions about this, suggesting that Ruth provided cure for the passivity of Boaz moving him to act as a גואל (*go'el*) unto the house of Elimelech and initiating proper meetings and processes.<sup>29</sup> Having a *go'el* here symbolizes the due process of returning a person or object which was lost to the rightful owner.<sup>30</sup> He stepped up and did what this unnamed man was not willing to do. He took the shame. The motive for this action is not stated in the text. However, it is reasonable to

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<sup>28</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 87.

<sup>29</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 84, 89.

<sup>30</sup> David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 39–40.

assume that someone would do this because the person knew something good was coming. Perhaps Boaz must have thought that all that he was doing was in exchange for something greater.

Boaz recognizes that Ruth is something special by telling her that she is an *ēšet chayil* which can be translated as noble or worthy woman. He even tells her that he will protect her, and he did! Ruth was not only admirable but also desirable to him. Looking at these actions, he might have seen in her something that might be able to help him in his distress. Aside from that, Boaz was really praising Ruth's *chesed* action which he must have needed also. This *chesed* that he saw in her was evident given that she could have just remained unmarried. However, she did the opposite, which resulted in benefit and protection for Naomi's property.<sup>31</sup> Boaz himself recognizes that what Ruth was doing was an act of loyalty to Naomi and Elimelech's family although this family is no longer rightfully tied to her.<sup>32</sup> Although Ruth has no more obligations to Naomi and Elimelech, she places herself under the act of *chesed*.<sup>33</sup> To be clear, it is not stated whether a widow has the right to inherit a land but in Naomi's case, the issue was more on her not having any male heir to pass it on to which was changed and resolved by Ruth after the harvest.<sup>34</sup> Once again, *Babaylans* might see Ruth here as someone relatable when it comes to extending care for the wellness of foreigners, individually.

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<sup>31</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 88.

<sup>32</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*, 248.

<sup>33</sup> Lacocque, *Ruth*, 98.

<sup>34</sup> Katrina J. A. Larkin, *Ruth and Esther*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, ENG: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 27.

Above all, even though the world they lived in was strongly patriarchal, the behaviors and actions of women significantly affected men's dignity and honor.<sup>35</sup> This was seen as we take note that Boaz evidently felt good. Boaz was pleased and rejoiced in the fact that this younger, attractive, noble woman with *chesed* had chosen him which stirred him to action and even met his perceived physical and emotional needs.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, he also rose in honor purchasing something that was of concern to the people of Israel.

### **Ruth as a Redeemer**

As discussed also in the previous chapter, the *Babaylans* being redeemers meant that they were tools of holistic health and wellness to a bigger and more collective unit—to the community as a whole. In this section, I have listed two sub-points which elaborate the redeeming activity done by Ruth. The following points explain how Ruth became a tool of creating redeeming instances to Elimelech's family and to Israel as a whole. In the sub-points below, we will read how the healing activities that Ruth had done to Naomi and Boaz by using her body as a tool or redeeming agent also connects to the benefits of bigger units, the house of Elimelech and Israel itself.

#### **The House of Elimelech**

The lineage of Elimelech threatened to fade away the moment all the men died. This was a very problematic sight. However, we still read in the text that the people

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<sup>35</sup> Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Bellis, *Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, 185.

around them were continually concerned about this. The concern of Naomi was about her childlessness, but the people saw the problem in the hurting house of Elimelech. We read this in Ruth 1:19; 2:11; 2:20; 3:11–13; 4:1–2, and 4:17.

Ruth 1:19 says: “So, the two went until they came into Bethlehem. When it came to pass, they came into Bethlehem, and all the city was moved about them; and said, ‘Is this Naomi?’” Here we see the concern of the town for Naomi. They knew her and perhaps in the back of their minds, were asking where the rest of the family was and what could have happened. She was quick to point out her misery though. Imagine also someone like Ruth who is a foreigner coming with her. What could have been the reaction of the people about this? Surely, she was also a talk of the town.

In Ruth 2:11 we see an evidence leading to my proposal in the previous paragraph that indeed, she could have been the talk of the town when she came in: “And Boaz answered and said to her, ‘It has fully been showed to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and you have left your mother and your father and the land of your birth, and have come unto a people that you do not now heretofore.’” However, our focus is not here at the moment. Instead, it is on how the people cared and talked about what she has done for the dead. The dead means the house of Elimelech. In this case, we see that what happened to the house of Elimelech was known to the town and they never forget to see the need of the dead.

Ruth 2:20 says: “And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘Blessed is he of the LORD, who do not leave off his covenant loyalty to the living and to the dead!’ And she said, ‘The man is a near of kin to her, one of our next kinsmen.’” Naomi herself was very glad because of Boaz’s concern not only for the living but also for the dead. Aside from

that, we also see that Naomi knows her townspeople. This goes to show that everyone knew everyone and perhaps considers the good of everyone.

In Ruth 3:11–13 we hear Boaz tell Ruth that the townspeople not only know Ruth but consider her to be noble. He says:

“Now my daughter, do not fear. All that you require, I will do, for the city know that of my people you are a virtuous woman. Now it is true that I am a near kinsman; and however, there is a kinsman nearer than I. This night, stay, and it shall be in the morning, if he will perform to you the part of a kinsman, well, let him do kinsman part, but if he will do not redeem, as the LORD lives, I will do the part of a kinsman. Lie down until the morning.”

In addition to, and perhaps because of, Ruth’s honorable status, Boaz himself was willing to act as a redeemer for her and Naomi’s family. Thus, he showed concern for the house of Elimelech that was showing so much *chesed*.

In Ruth 4:1–12, the action of both Boaz and the other man showed that dead family lines needed to be redeemed. And the approval of the people indicated agreement with this idea. In summary, we find the people’s concern for what has been going on with the house of Elimelech: everyone was concerned for each family line. Look at the mention even of the names of the ones who were dead also who made significance through bearing remarkable children denoting how reproduction is a pride for them.

And Boaz went to the gate and sat down; and behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spoke came by. And he said, “Turn aside here, kinsman, sit down.” He turned aside and sat down there. And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “You sit down here.” And they sat down. And he said to the closest, “Naomi, that has come again from the land of Moab sells a parcel out of the country that was of our brother, Elimelech.” And I thought to advertise you saying, “Buy it before the inhabitants, before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem but if you will not redeem, tell me that I may know; for there is none beside you and I to redeem it.” After that, he said, “I will redeem.” Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must buy also Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the dead, in order to raise the name of the dead on his inheritance.” And the kinsman said, “I cannot redeem. If I redeem it, I mar my own inheritance. You redeem for my right, for I cannot redeem.” Now in former time in Israel,

concerning redeeming and concerning changing, to confirm all things: a man plucks off his shoe and gave to his neighbor—and this was a testimony in Israel. And the kinsman therefore said to Boaz, “Buy it.” So, he drew off his shoe. And Boaz said to the elders, and to the other people, “You are witness this day that I have bought all that is of Elimelech and all that of Chilion and Mahlon from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabite also, the wife of Mahlon, I have purchased to be my wife, in order to raise the name of the dead on his inheritance, and not cut off the name of the dead from among his brothers, and from the gate of his place. This day you are witnesses.” And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders said, “We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman to come into your home like Rachel and like Leah, that built two of the house of Israel; and you do worthily in Ephrathah, and be famous in Bethlehem. Let your house be like the house of Perez, who bore Tamar to Judah, of the offspring that the LORD shall give to you of this young woman.”

We find in Ruth 4:17 another instance of the neighborhood rejoicing with Naomi who was finally restored by having a son. The text reads: “And the women, her neighbors gave to her its name, saying, ‘There is a son born to Naomi.’ And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.” Through these verses we get hints that each family in Israel must be significant to them and must maintain their lineage and this concerns everyone. The problem with the family line of Elimelech being cut and how this affects everyone as mentioned several times in the book of Ruth goes to show how important this is for other people around Naomi and not only for her or Ruth. The people concern themselves so much if Naomi will have a son and will continue with the family line of Elimelech.

Why is this a problem from the view of the *Babaylans*? The prominent problem here would still be the problem concerning childbearing and reproduction. However, it shows more on the health of one family affecting all families. *Babaylans* believe in the harmony of people with the divine power; where everyone is both independent and

interdependent in the entire community.<sup>37</sup> In view of the *Babaylans* trying to knit the community together in wellness, they might see an evident effect of distress within the community among with regards to what was happening to Elimelech's dying family.

Where do I see myself today in the aspect of being concerned for others in the midst of collectiveness? As someone living in a community where standards and cultures vary, I must live as an example that is concerned with others' wellness. I should say this is quite similar to Filipino society. This brought me back to learning from how I used to see my community interdependent with each other back in my province when I was just a child. I remember so clearly how my mother would always send food to our neighbors which were not so near. They also did the same for us. Most of the exchanged items were harvests from each family's garden or farm like bananas and coconuts. The distance between houses at this time was approximately one hundred meters. And if we are also lacking in something, to our surprise, often they would come knocking on our door with a little something to share. Not only that, during problems of family fights, the neighbors were always there to mediate. I am starting to see the significance why my parents and my neighbors used to do such things when neighbors were supposed to be no longer their responsibilities. I cannot bring this time back where interdependence was evident.

However, I can still find my in recent context an avenue to practice this.

As someone living in a community with diverse cultures, this is challenging. I might or might not please everyone with my actions. But as an application, it is not about getting but giving. A good place to practice interdependence as I am foreigner to most people, like that of Ruth's case, is where I am right now as a seminarian staying in a

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<sup>37</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 68–69.

dorm where I am the only Filipina. In pursuing this, I must, again, always check to see if my motive is receiving or giving. This community I experienced in my dormitory in graduate school has become a family. It somehow helped me develop how it is to be of help to other cultures that I was never exposed to before coming here. The setting has provided me an avenue to apply concern for everyone regardless of who they are or what their preferences are. And perhaps, wherever and whatever I do next, I may even take this practice to the next level.

And how was Ruth able to address the grief in an interdependent community where everyone's heart was concerned about Elimelech's family line? The stepping in of Ruth in the life of Boaz, fills the gap of Elimelech's and the rest of Elimelech's relatives' concern about family lines. Through this marriage and childbearing, redemption of the hurting family of Elimelech happened. This redemption of one family in Israel is a benefit to all Israel and this is the focus of the next sub-point.

### **Israel as a Whole**

Let us go back to Ruth 1:19: "So the two went until they came into Bethlehem. When it came to pass, they came into Bethlehem, and all the city was moved about them; and said, 'Is this Naomi?'" We see here that the returning of Naomi stirred the whole town. Perhaps it was a small town where everyone knew everyone like what I mentioned earlier. If we fast forward to the last chapter, the absence of the character of Ruth in the story would mean the absence of David as a king of Israel as well. This would be a big problem that Israel had to face. By the beginning of the book Ruth, we learn that they were ruled by the judges. However, there was a shift to kingship later on and whether we



like it or not, Ruth was one of the major tools for bridging the rulership from judges to kings since it was through her that Boaz became an ancestor of David.

What is the problem this makes in the sight of the *Babaylans*? *Babaylans* have the responsibility paired with the ability to discern the connectedness of bodily health to the health of the environment and her healing dance further extends to the community's wellness concerns.<sup>38</sup> The problems Naomi and the hurting house of Elimelech were probably more on bodily concerns—specifically reproduction—however, they were a concern to the town and unto Israel as we learned also in the previous sub-point. And the blessing of Naomi was also considered by the people as a blessing unto Israel. In the sight of the *Babaylans*, this kind of environment would be ideal and almost identical to theirs where everyone acknowledged that favor is from God. Similarly, the *Babaylanic* world also sought the favor of the divine to receive blessings.<sup>39</sup> The *Babaylans*, together with the warriors, and the other physical and spiritual leaders of the people, safeguards the equilibrium of all.<sup>40</sup> *Babaylans* would see the actions of Ruth leading to the actions of Naomi and Boaz as a step of bringing back equilibrium that Israel has lost.

I see a challenge here for myself to seek the favor of God for others also not only for me. Intercession is also good but if possible, I should make an effort to be a tool for others to know God better, experience Him in their lives, and receive wellness from God that addresses their holistic needs. My concern must not only be for other's spirituality yet should start from their spirituality to the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual

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<sup>38</sup> Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Elesterio, *Essays on Philippine Religious Culture*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Demetrio, Cordero-Fernando, and Nakpil-Zialcita, *Philippine Pagan Religion*, 121.

needs of others—from poverty and injustice or in whatever needs I can apply this to—to fullness. Again, following Ruth’s example as a woman, my motive must be grounded in *chesed* as well.

When we talk about Ruth’s *chesed*, it was even to the extent of not only helping by caring for an old woman as her own mother but even childbearing. The effect of the action Ruth has done has now elevated from affecting individuals to the redemption of Israel. Through the childbearing of Ruth, she became a tool of redemption to an Israel, which was bound for uncertainty, by being an ancestor to David, the greatest Israelite king who ever lived. We find all of these in Ruth 4:17–22:

And the women, her neighbors gave to her its name, saying, “There is a son born to Naomi.” And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Perez, Perez fathered Hezron; And Hezron fathered Ram, and Ram fathered Amminadab; And Amminadab fathered Nahshon, and Nahshon fathered Salmon; And Salmon fathered Boaz, and Boaz fathered Obed; Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

The birth that she had was important to everyone in the sense that Naomi’s security was renewed, Boaz was given a descendant, Elimelech’s memory relived, and Israel now had a grandfather for the future king David.<sup>41</sup> Her character secured for herself, her mother-in-law, Boaz, and the Davidic line a space for the unspaced and a future. This giving space to the unspaced is one of the advocacies of *Babaylanism*. Ruth secured the birth of a son to Naomi, marriage to Boaz, continuation of the lineage of the house of Elimelech, and

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<sup>41</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*, 253.

future for the Davidic line moving everyone from emptiness to fullness.<sup>42</sup> I must therefore conclude that Ruth affects redemption of everyone in the story like no one else did.<sup>43</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Now that these two healing and two redeeming instances by Ruth were enumerated and elaborated in my study, I want to conclude by laying out a general comparison of Ruth and the *Babaylans*. It is important for us to see that Ruth somewhat possessed some traits that were analogous to the *Babaylans* to see her standing as a redeemer. Also, we will be able to find where Ruth's place is in the understanding of the *Babaylans* when it comes to individual and collective wellness in general by comparing them.

The world of Ruth and that of the *Babaylans* of course differ. While the world Ruth was moving in was a patriarchal one, the *Babaylans* were living with authority in a more egalitarian world. They were held in high esteem as women leaders of the community. However, we find one common thing that both worlds value so much—fertility and reproduction. In the eyes of *Babaylanism*, the restoring of Naomi and Boaz into fertility would be something heroic. And the one who helped make this happen was Ruth. In short, Ruth would be the hero in this aspect.

Note that the *Babaylans* lived in a pre-colonized era. The Israelites also had a different experience when it comes to this aspect. Yet similarly, the contexts of the *Babaylans* and of the book of Ruth both suggest a society of harmony and peace only

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<sup>42</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 84.

<sup>43</sup> Danna Nolan Fewell and D. M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 187.

troubled by famine due to deities' favors and curses. The setting in the book of Ruth was not like the one of the same historical periods with Judges 19—21 where chaos and misbehavior was evident.<sup>44</sup> All characters were significantly seeking for God's blessing, finding ways to show *chesed* willingly, and acted justly towards one another according to moral and legal obligations.<sup>45</sup> In the book of Ruth, human interrelationship shown in *chesed* is being portrayed as possible and within the capability of human beings.<sup>46</sup> *Babaylans'* community also cared for each other as a whole as each attempted to put others first. Their *chesed* for each other in the book of Ruth is analogical to the need of the *Babaylanic* community for a socially healthy environment and united people. And when one is not socially well with others, something is wrong with one's heart which is actually connected with the Spiritual and emotional health of the person as well. And in the case of Ruth being seen from *Babaylanic* view, Ruth was the one who did the most difficult sacrifices for others' wellness. Ruth had the most admirable role because she had *chesed*.

Both worlds acknowledge the presence of a deity who was the source not only of curses but also of blessings. As we read the book of Ruth, we strongly notice that there is an absence of God's consistent activities. However, the people still perceived of His existence and blessings.<sup>47</sup> He was not completely absent though. יהוה (YHWH) was mentioned once and was credited to have caused Ruth's conception in Ruth 4:13. Yet,

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<sup>44</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*, 118, 238.

<sup>45</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*, 238.

<sup>46</sup> Edward F. Campbell, ed., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible 7 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 81–82.

<sup>47</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*, 242.

despite the minimal actions of God in their lives, we clearly read in the text that the people continually sought His favor and blessings. For instance, Naomi acknowledged God as her strength, nourisher, satisfier, and the all-sufficient One for her and for this reason she resorted to accepting her fate, rather than complaining.<sup>48</sup> They had nothing like the rituals the *Babaylans* resorted to for appeasing spirits because their context differs. They had a God who continually revealed Himself to their people in the past but this kind of desire for Divine's protection and providence is similar that of the *Babaylans*.

The famine they experienced was usually acknowledged in the OT to mean as God's judgment on sin and disobedience.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in a *Babaylanic* world, they believe that the soul is not at rest when a person is upset or angry or has done something wrong.<sup>50</sup> When a person does something wrong, a person may suffer sickness.<sup>51</sup> We see here both worlds' credit everything to their spirituality. At the end of it all, in the book of Ruth, the people gave the glory back to the Lord that it was all because He has not left them which we read in Ruth 4:14: "Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may His name be renowned in Israel!'" This is analogous with the *Babaylans*' view of the people having good connections with God first before being fully well in the rest of the aspects of lives.<sup>52</sup> To them, the spiritual health of a person results in good deeds.

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<sup>48</sup> Joyce Marie Smith, *Ruth, a Woman of Worth*, New Life Bible Studies (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979), 24.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Ruth, a Woman of Worth*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Salazar, *Babaylan*, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Kiley, *Filipino Tribal Religious Experience*, 167.

<sup>52</sup> Jocano, *Folk Medicine*, 69.

This spiritual health resulting into good deeds can be seen in the storyline of the book of Ruth. Ruth, a noble woman after following Naomi's God, pursued *chesed* in all she did and brought balance to everyone's different points of poverty—outward and inward—to holistic wellness. Ruth analogically became a *Babaylan* based on the aspects enumerated above. In the book of Ruth, Ruth was indeed an important redeemer to everyone. Lastly, all of these comparisons lead us to a conclusion that the book of Ruth can be read in the perspective of Philippine-*Babaylanism*.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I will give a summary of the steps I have observed in this study. This is followed by my conclusions after I completed the contextualized reading of the book of Ruth. Finally, I will list recommendations for further studies.

#### Conclusions

There were two things I wanted to prove in this study. First, I wanted to shift the readers to see Ruth as the redeemer in the book of Ruth. This led me to attempt a Philippine contextualized reading of the book of Ruth. Second, I wanted to show that Ruth could be read in the perspective of Philippine-*Babaylanism*. The first thing I did was to research further into Philippine-*Babaylanism*. In doing so, I came up with two points—*Babaylans* as Healers and *Babaylans* as Redeemers. I saw these same points to also be relevant in the story of Ruth.

I am speaking as an heir of the *Babaylans*. My thoughts may not be true to all present Filipinas neither are my claims validated by the *Babaylans* nor Ruth. As an heir and as a woman, I do see though the importance of research to bring back the significant insights that can be gleaned from the *Babaylans* and Ruth. Thankfully, I found sufficient resources to conduct this research. After comparing and contrasting, I found Ruth to be analogous to the *Babaylans* in two aspects: (1) in healing for Naomi and for Boaz and (2) in redeeming of the house of Elimelech and Israel. Ruth seemed to be the most important

character in the book of Ruth since she healed Naomi's childlessness and Boaz's passivity; and redeemed Elimelech's hurting and dying family line, and Israel as a whole. Although there were many differences, the similarities proved that the book of Ruth is a possible candidate for being read in the perspective of *Philippine-Babaylanism*.

### **Recommendations**

The following are my recommendations for further studies which are based on the procedures I followed and the findings I made.

1. Wellness and wholeness are as important to individuals as well as the community, therefore, these must be pursued.
2. Aside from the usual view of Boaz being the redeemer to Naomi and Ruth, the book of Ruth can be re-examined to see how important each character is and how interdependent they are.
3. Further research on Ruth being a redeemer can be done.
4. Future contextualized reading of the rest of the scripture from a *Babaylanism* perspective can be pursued. Examples are plentiful: Esther, Deborah, Miriam, Rahab, and many others from the Bible; and Judith and Susanna from the Apocrypha.
5. Future contextualized reading of the book of Ruth from other Philippine perspectives can be pursued.
6. A critical retrieval based on a further look into the spirituality of ancient Philippine people can be done.
7. Explore how modern day *Babaylans* might read the book of Ruth.



8. Explore whether the Anglicized terms *Babaylans* and *Babaylanism* should be replaced with the Filipino *mga Babaylan* and *Babaylanismo*.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I gave the summary of the procedures I followed in this study, my conclusions, and my recommendations for future studies. This study has moved me closer not only to the field of theology, but also in understanding other aspects of life like womanhood, health, wellness, richness of history, and so much more. I hope that this research will also be an inspiration to others.

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<sup>1</sup> This term refers to a form of women's consciousness indigenous to the Philippines in a sense that women enjoyed relative freedom compared to other European women, Middle Eastern women, and even women from Asian societies of the same period. See Azarcon-Dela Cruz, *Feminist Writings in the Philippines*, 8, 10; Mangahas and Romero-Llaguno, *Readings on Babaylan Feminism*, 21.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Josephine Monares Tan  
Everlasting Hope, Topaz St., Francisca Village, Guadalupe, Cebu City,  
Philippines  
Phone: 0906-023-2423/0908-636-3081  
E-mail: jojomonarestan@gmail.com  
josephine.tan@apnts.edu.ph

### Education

ASIA-PACIFIC NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
Master of Science in Theology 2017–2020

VISAYAN NAZARENE BIBLE COLLEGE  
Bachelor of Arts in Theology 2013–2017  
Holiness Sermon: “The Great Divide” (Jeremiah 24)  
Honors: Cum Laude, Holiness Sermon Writer  
and Preacher of the Year

OSPA TRAINING CENTER-TESDA ACCREDITED  
Shielded Metal Arc Welding-NCII 2012  
Honors: Best in Basic Welding Theory

### Teaching Experience

PHILIPPINE NAZARENE COLLEGE  
Hebrew 1 Facilitator – Summer Module Class 2018  
Developed syllabus and overall course structure  
and administered all grades.

### Languages

CEBUANO– native language  
FILIPINO– national language  
ENGLISH– speak fluently and read/write with high proficiency  
CLASSICAL HEBREW– read with basic competence  
KOINÈ GREEK– read with basic competence