

IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE PEOPLE OF LOOBAN OUTREACH CHURCH

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Preface

The study of identity is foundational in understanding not only *who we are*, but also *what we can become*. This research examines the development of self-identity in “Looban,” a marginalized, squatter-relocation community, on the outskirts of Metro Manila, Philippines. It focuses on the dynamics of social interaction between “Mother-church,” a large, affluent church from the philippine upper/middle class, and “Looban Outreach Church,” a mission outreach of Mother-church comprised largely of the social and economic bottom of philippine society.

Social Identity Theory serves as the theoretical framework for this case study. It understands that people will do whatever it takes to negotiate a “positive and distinct” identity for their own group, even if it means adopting another group’s identity. To this end, group identity serves to create and maintain a sense of *self-esteem*. The youth in Looban indicate a strong desire share in the identity of mother church, however, their social context seems to keep this desire from fruition.

Philippine social structure is organized as an interpersonal hierarchy of relationships that seem to mimic familial relationships. This hierarchy tends to prescribe and maintain the nature of interactions between differing social classes. Those of higher social class or position function in parental roles as caretakers, providers, and educators. As those of lower class or position are provided for, they, in turn, owe their loyalty and respect to those who have provided. As mother church has sent leaders to aide in the development of the outreach, most of these leaders have carried with them the strong social identity of mother church. Thus, under the *sakop* framework, the roles and expectations of both mother church and Looban have been clearly defined and static,

providing little social mobility. As Looban has tried to negotiate a “positive and distinct” identity for themselves, they find themselves at a split. Are they a functioning part of mother church’s identity? Or are they just a charitable endeavor?

This study utilizes interviews and focus-group discussions combined with participant observation to give an ethnographic picture of the identity formation that took place between these two strongly contrasted socioeconomic identities.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Looban (an alias, pronounced “loh-oh-bahn”) is an urban-poor resettlement community that lies just outside of Metro-Manila. For its size and large population, very little is commonly said or known about the 171-hectare, government-allocated plot of land at the edge of Laguna Bay. For a number of years, the muddy plain saw very little activity other than the daily deposits of garbage that were collected from around the southern parts of Manila and left to decompose on its shores.

The great migration to the community was initiated by government proclamation 704 issued on November 28th, 1995 under the former president Fidel V. Ramos. This proclamation officially designated Lupang Looban as a “socialized housing project.” From an initial 124 families, a bustling community sprang out of the muddy floodplain with in just a few short years. Many of these early settlers literally built the community with their bare hands, moving to the area from economically depressed sub-cultures in Rizal Province as well as from the surrounding areas in Metro-Manila including Marikina, Makati, and Quezon City¹.

There is little exact information known about the present population of the community. The most conservative estimates from barangay leadership hold the community’s population to be approximately 60,000 people,² however the Asia Development Bank has published estimates as high as 125,000 inhabitants.³

1 Kito Ramos. Interview by author, 22 September 2009, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines. Digital recording.

2 Kito Ramos. Interview by author, 22 September 2009, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines. Digital recording.

3Asian Development Bank, *The Garbage Book*, (Mandaluyong City, MM: Department of Environmental and Natural Resources, 2004), 72.

Amid this rapidly developing community, public health concerns and environmental issues have been just a few of the issues that have been raised. Until its closing in 2003, the Looban Area served as one of the 9 major garbage-dumping sites of the Metro-Manila area. The site closed when it reached capacity in 2003. Because of this history, the Looban community presently sits atop nearly 2 million cubic meters of decomposing garbage and it has become synonymous with rampant concerns for both public health and crime. One news article appearing in the *Philippine Inquirer* quotes one public official as saying that Lupang Looban, “has become a sanctuary for informal settlers, a disposal site for domestic and industrial waste and the subject of social clashes due to land tenure and ownership conflicts.”⁴ Notorious for such public identification, the Lupang Looban Resettlement is not only geographically “marginalized” on the outskirts of Manila, but also suffers from deep sociological marginalization as well.

Context of the Looban Outreach Church

In 2002, a fire ravaged through a community known as “Pinestra” (about 10 kilometers from the Looban community). Following the devastation, several families took the opportunity to pickup what things they had remaining and start over again in Looban. Many of these families had been a part of an urban-poor outreach ministry of a large, affluent church (hereafter referred to as *mother church*). As members of the devastated community relocated, mother church took the opportunity and made a bridge to the, now rapidly-expanding community of Looban.

Mission groups from mother church started to hold simple services in the community. They would gather in any open space to hold

4 Jerry Esplanada, “Special Report: Squatter proliferation worsens LLDA garbage dumping woes.” *Philippine Inquirer Online* 10 December 2003. http://www.inquirer.net/globalnation/sec_prf/2003/dec/10-05.htm (Accessed 9 Oct. 2009).

Bible studies and outreach fellowships.⁵ Their mission outreach became known as Looban Outreach Church.

At this time, the community was little more than a dumping ground in the middle of a floodplain. The leaders would often need to drive four-wheel drive vehicles to navigate the unwelcoming terrain. One leader recalls that there were very few houses at that time and boots were needed to travel down the narrow and muddy path to the ministry site in Looban. During those days, leadership and laity from mother church would hold Bible studies and to conduct evangelistic crusades in the community. At times they would have evangelistic film showings for which they would need to bring a generator, because there was no electricity in the community at that time.⁶

Perhaps one of the biggest changes to the outreach in Looban was in 2005 when Looban Outreach Church took shape in the form of a building. The project was a joint effort between a Work and Witness teams from the United States and groups from mother church. Under the direction of mother church, Looban Outreach Church was given a wealth of resources in staff, programs, and materials such as sound equipment, drums and the basic “furniture” that would be expected to come with the church “package.”

The Work and Witness team spent three weeks constructing the frame of the church building on the campus of the local seminary for the denomination. They transported the completed pieces to the Looban community for final assembly. One of the lay ministers from mother church comments that the building was finished in only three weeks and it was different than any other building that can be found in Looban.⁷ After the building was completed, it quickly became the permanent site of the feeding program and several of the weekly Bible studies for the members of the Looban outreach.

5 “Mother church Pastor,” Interview by author, 16 September 2009, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines. Interview Notes.

6 Pulpit pastor, Interview by Author, 22 February 2010, Interview transcript, 3-7.

7 Pulpit pastor, 36.

Context of Mother-Church

The municipality in which mother church is located has its own unique identity as well. It is an urban municipality in the province of Rizal with a population of 262,485 people as of September 2009.⁸ Although it shares in many of the same economic hardships found throughout the Philippines, it carries a well-respected distinctiveness. The socioeconomic and physical profile for the municipality commends the municipality for its active economy, hosting a number of big manufacturing industries⁹ especially its garment industries which supply demand both domestically and internationally.¹⁰ These industries generate substantial employment opportunities and contribute greatly to the economic growth of the area. On November 9th 2007, SM Prime Holdings opened a new 91,920 square-meter SM Supermall. The mall is well known in the area and has developed into a prime *tambay* (hangout) area for youth and adults from around the area.

Mother church is well-known and respected for its programs held in the municipality. The church's high-end, well-produced, energy-filled youth services attract a few hundred youth from around the area. These youth gatherings are often hosted by a well-known radio disk-jockey, who serves as a youth pastor at the mother church. Sunday nights will sometimes feature testimonies from celebrities who have come to know Christ, along with performances from leading bands and singers in the area. Progressive groups of youth and adults from the area seem to

8 National Statistics Office, Republic of the Philippines. (n.d.) Population and Annual Growth Rates by Region, Province, and City/Municipality: 1995, 2000, 2007: 2007 census. Accessed 15 September 2009; available from <http://Ibid.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/2007/municipality.pdf>

9 These industries include: The Philippine Automotive Manufacturing Corporation (PAMCOR), Steniel, Fibertex, Capital Garments, National Panasonic, Singer, PHILEC, and Pacific Products. *Taytay Socio-Economic and Physical Profile Guide*, Section 5.1, 2.

10 National Statistics Office, Republic of the Philippines. (n.d.), *Taytay Socio-Economic and Physical Profile Guide*, Section 5.1.2. (Taytay, Rizal: National Statistics Office, 2004), 55-56.

resonate with the lively messages and innovative means of communicating Christ to the equally progressive area.

Amid the progress, behind the shopping and business centers, and despite the growth, the municipality still shares in the reality of the 30% (2003 est.) of Filipinos that are living at or below the poverty line.¹¹ Mother church has played an active role in working among these groups who have been affected by the widespread cycles of poverty. Mother church has involved itself in many projects around the area. Food, clothing, even micro-economic projects have been facilitated by ministry teams desiring to share Christ's love to the hurting people of the area.

The Relationship

Mother church has a great deal of clout in the Looban community. Mother church leadership continually provides for and nurtures the community, attempting to train Looban Outreach Church to be able to do what mother church does. Simultaneously, they minister to the Looban community in ways that address the issues of their poverty, providing them with feeding programs, relief goods, and other ministries while simultaneously interpolating a gospel message. One member of mother church leadership notes, "if you want to minister to the poor, it must be holistic—they don't buy [accept] spiritual things very easily without something that they can get first."¹² This particular philosophy of "holistic" ministry typically illustrates mother church's approach to inter-socioeconomic ministries in Looban and other less affluent areas around the area.

It is important at this point to consider what is meant by mother church's usage of the term "holistic." To be "holistic" is typically understood to be ministry to the *whole* person. Paul Benefiel, in a paper submitted to the Association of Nazarene Sociologists of Religion, defines "holistic" as considering "the total needs" of a person. To be

¹¹ The World Factbook, CIA.gov. Accessed 16 Sept 2009. Found at: <https://Ibid.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>.

¹² Mother church pastor, Interview by author, 16 September 2009, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines. Interview Notes.

holistic, by his definition, is not only meeting spiritual needs, but also physical, emotional, social, and other needs as well.¹³

In efforts to be holistic, mother church has not only developed the outreach church, but also tried to help with many of the community's social and economic needs as well. Nearly every step of Looban Outreach Church's development as a church has been guided by mother church. This being the case, Looban Outreach Church has remained closely-tied with its mother-church. The success of mother church's youth ministry, called *Youth Corps* (an alias), has inspired a smaller version of the program at Looban Outreach Church entitled "*Mini-Youth Corps*" which features much of the same music, terminology and catch-phrases that can be found at mother church.

Mother church admits a need to develop indigenous leaders within the Looban community, who will be more capable of understanding the context and sociological themes of the Looban community. Mother church leadership is presently mentoring one young adult perceived to be from the community how to lead mother church's ministries in Looban. The church hopes that this youth will someday be able to lead in place of the mother-church leadership, although the transition of leadership has been slow and still goes unrealized.

Despite all the resources and energy that have been put into the Looban outreach, the leadership feels that its relationship with Looban is not moving forward. Mother church Leadership notes that Looban is dependent upon mother church.¹⁴ Very few of the members of Looban Outreach Church have taken ownership of the ministry efforts of the mother-church. Staff, resources, and funding have been poured into the Looban project from outside the community; however, Looban remains a mission outreach of mother church.

¹³ Paul Benefiel, "The Doctrine of Holiness as a Holistic Philosophy of Ministry" (Paper presented at the Third Annual Meeting of the Association of Nazarene Sociologists of Religion, Kansas City, MO, March 6, 1984).

¹⁴ Mother church leader, Interview by author, 10 August 2009, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines. Interview Notes.

One youth minister from mother church who serves in the community comments that Looban Outreach Church seems to be following mother church blindly—readily accepting the forms and patterns presented to them from mother church without developing their own identity.¹⁵ Mother church leadership admits that the Looban community greatly appreciates and accepts the resources of food and support. The youth love the contemporary music at Mini-Youth Corps; however, leadership states that they are not developing into a self-sufficient community. Although, mother church sees Looban as a great ministry opportunity in an underprivileged community, the people of Looban Outreach Church appear to be the receptors of mother church outreach efforts.

Looban Outreach Church is unqualified to be a church on its own for several reasons. District Leadership identifies “the three S’s” which are presently required for a church to be officially organized. They must be “self-supporting,” or financially able to fund ministries and daily expenses without outside funding. Secondly, Looban Outreach Church must be “self-governing,” meaning that they must develop their leadership enough to have a pastor and a full church board. Lastly, they must be “self-propagating,” or showing that they are able to reach out to other people and plant new churches.¹⁶ At this point, Looban Outreach Church is unable to meet any of these requirements. Therefore, the Metro-Manila District Church’s denomination does not recognize Looban as an organized church. It is only a mission-outreach or a “preaching-point” under the supervision of mother church.

Mother church has been in this mother-daughter relationship with Looban for about 9 years. Both the Denomination’s Metro-Manila District and mother church had hoped that Looban could have developed into a sustainable, self-sufficient church community, but the daughter church is not advancing in this direction. Looban’s identity

15 Mother church leader, Interview by author, 10 August 2009, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines. Interview Notes.

16 District Leadership, Interview by author, 4 December 2009, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines, Interview Transcript.

appears to be meshed with that of mother church. Looban has been unable to become a fully functioning church with its own identity.

Research Problem and Sub-problems

Both the Looban community and mother church have distinctive identities of their own. Each entity is informed by its own indigenous values and worldviews. However, the identity of Looban Outreach Church seems to have been ambiguously intermingled with that of mother church. The people of the Looban Outreach Church are indigenously from Looban, but in many ways they seem to look and act like the people from mother church. Thus, this study asks, *“What is the self-identity of the people of Looban Outreach Church in view of their relationship with mother church?”*

This question focuses on Looban Outreach Church’s identity and the understanding of themselves that is created within their present interactions and on-going relationship with mother church. This study understands that identity and interaction are both reciprocal and interrelated. The formation of Looban’s self-identity is informed by their interactions with mother church. Similarly, mother church’s interactions with Looban are also influenced by the ways that they perceive and identify the people of Looban. It is often the case that one’s perception of another becomes the reality in which one relates to that other. Thus, there is a vital importance in understanding the way (or ways) that Looban Outreach Church understands itself because it is upon this self-understanding (or self-identification) that they will live and act.

Theoretical Framework

Much of the theoretical considerations for this study come out of the Social Identity approach of social psychology, culminating largely in the works of Henri Tajfel and John Turner.¹⁷ Simply put, this theoretical approach states that when a person belongs to a group, they are very

17 Michael A. Hogg and R. Scott Tindale, *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 433.

likely to derive a significant portion of their self-identity from that group. They also enhance their identities by comparing their own group (the *in-group*) with other groups (*out-groups*) that are not like them.

A group's identity is formed on the basis of "fuzzy" sets of characteristics that "*define and prescribe* attitudes, feelings, and behaviors which categorize the one group and distinguish it from the other groups."¹⁸ These categories can be any sort of distinguishing characteristics, such as ethnicity, race, social class, etc. *In-groups* and *out-groups* are formed and defined based upon observed patterns of similarities and differences. By making such categorizations, people sharpen their identities as they compare themselves to out-groups, or those groups with whom they do not identify and assign particular identities to those perceived social groupings.¹⁹

A great deal of Social Identity theory has to do with inter-group relations. It is concerned with how people understand themselves as members of one group in comparison with other *out-groups*. Specifically, it looks at the particular consequences of such categorizations, such as ethnocentrism and social stereotyping.²⁰

Social Identity theory also affirms that social planes are not always level. Certain groups carry more social power and/or influence than others. If given the opportunity, members of less salient social groups are likely to take on the characteristics and likenesses of foreign social identities, for the purpose of achieving a more positive and distinct social identity for themselves.²¹ Groups with a stronger or more *salient* social identity often have more social influence, carry a greater social power, and are often ascribed authority.

18 Michael Hogg, "A Social Identity Theory of Leadership 5," *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, (2001): 184-200, 187.

19 Naomi Eilmers, Russel Spears, and Bertjan Doosje, *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content*, (New Jersey:Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 8

²⁰ Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory" Vol. 63, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, (2000): 224-237: 226.

²¹ Turner, J.C. *Social Influence* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991). 171.

Simon and Oakes, two recent proponents of this theory, discuss identity and social power. They distinguish both *conflictual* and *consensual* means of social power. Conflictual power is the power by coercion, which involves one group dominating another and controlling by authority. Consensual power is power by influence. In this kind of power, one group affects another group in such a way that the affected group ascribes power and authority to the group who did the affecting. Most power relationships deal with both conflictual and consensual types of power.²²

In a Philippine context this is particularly relevant. Philippine culture commonly exhibits a high-power distancing between social groups of unequal power. Geert Hofstede defines power distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”²³ Thus, in contexts with a high power distancing, members of low-status groups accept and expect domination by other high-status groups, and will often concede power to those of a stronger social identity. These concepts of power distancing and the Philippine social hierarchy are important to consider in this particular case. The Looban Community and the Community of which mother church is a part are at great variance with one another in terms of social power. Thus these concepts are important in an effective framework for understanding the relationship between the two entities.

In view of this, it is also significant to mention the Philippine cultural value of Smooth Interpersonal Relations (SIR). This concept is defined as a way of going about interpersonal relationships in such a way that it avoids the outward appearance of conflict.²⁴ Almost synonymous with this term is the concept of *pakikisama* which is defined as

²² Bernd Simon and Penelope Oakes, “Beyond dependence: An identity approach to social power and domination,” *Human Relations* 59 (2006), 116.

²³ Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing, 2001), 98.

²⁴ Frank Lynch. “Social Acceptance Reconsidered,” found in *Philippine Society and the Individual*, Edited by Frank Lynch (Quezon City: Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, 1984), 36.

“concession” or “going along with” another person or group of people for the purpose of outwardly preserving the “SIR” value system.²⁵ *Pakikisama* concedes one’s personal likes and dislikes in order to identify with another person or group of persons (at least on the surface) for the purpose of maintaining a harmonious relationship. At its best, this cultural value seeks harmony with others and with oneself; however, it is also possible that it can force one to “go along” with other particular social conventions at the expense of one’s own identity.²⁶

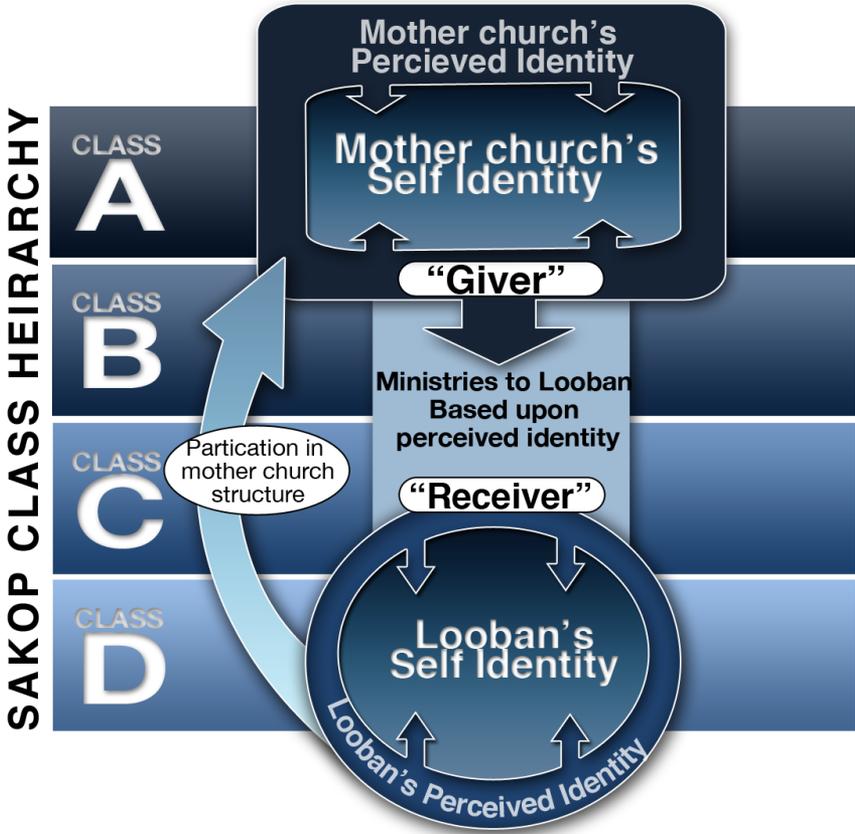
One’s group identity is important because it both *describes and prescribes* who a person is and how they will act in that society. Having a strong identification as a part of a group is vital in the creation and maintenance of self-esteem, and the reaffirmation of the self.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the two distinct identities of mother church and Looban Outreach Church. Each group has their own understanding of themselves (Self-Identity). As the groups interact with one another, there are particular perceptions that are formed on the basis of the ways in which the two groups interact with one another, and each group interacts with one another on the basis of those perceived identities. This process takes place within a social class hierarchy which effects the ways in which the two groups interact.

²⁵Frank Lynch, 36.

²⁶Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano. “Filipino Values and Our Christian Faith.” (MM: OMF Literature, 1990), 24-25.



Looban and mother church have their own respective self-identities. These self-identities are the ways in which they understand themselves in terms of their qualities and potential. As these contrasting identities of mother church and Looban Outreach Church interact, *perceived* identities are formed of one another based upon the ways in which the two groups interact. The two groups interact by mother church providing ministries to Looban Outreach Church and Looban participating in those ministries that are provided for them.

There are two identity layers defined for both Looban Outreach Church and mother church. There is the inner-layer of self-identity (how

the group perceived themselves) and the outer-layer of perceived identity (how the group perceives the other). There is an interrelation between the inner layer of self-identity and the outer layer of perceived identity.

It is important to note that Looban and mother church exist on greatly differing social and economic planes. In this context, the process of identifying the self and other takes place within a hierarchical class system of *Sakop Values*,²⁷ which tends to prescribe the nature of interactions between these differing social classes. This value system, in turn, influences the nature of the identities and interactions between the groups.

Presently, Looban Outreach Church seems to be living amid two possibly conflicting identities: one that is truly theirs and another that is borrowed or imposed. Social Identity Theorists affirm this possibility noting that individuals can identify themselves in terms of “a range of identities within which contradictory interests are embedded.”²⁸ The question remains, *What is the self-identity of Looban Outreach Church in view of their relationship with mother church ?*

Significance of the Study

The study of identity is significant because it is foundational in the formation of not only *who we are*, but also *what we can become*. Seriously asking questions of identity and perceived identities within intergroup relationships can be vital to the effectiveness of those relationships. This is especially true when undertaking the difficult task of communicating between starkly contrasted social, cultural, and economic identities. Without critically making such considerations, it is easy to generalize or to assign a particular, *sweeping* identity to a given group of people, and consequently fall short in the assessment of one’s own role in relation to that group of people.

²⁷ Tomas D. Andres and Pilar B. Ilada-Andres, *Understanding the Filipino* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers), 1987. 56.

²⁸ Simon Bernd and Penelope Oakes, “Beyond dependence: An Identity Approach to Social Power and Domination,” *Human Relations* 59 (2006), 127-128.

It is my personal hope that this study will bring about a deeper understanding of marginalized people groups who are often on the receiving end of outreach and humanitarian aid. I hope that this study will be effective in clarifying a positive and distinct identity for the people of Looban. But more importantly, I hope to clarify the strengths and abilities of such groups of people. It is my hope that their story will bring about a sense of respect for the diversity of ideas and perspectives that could be offered by a wide range of social identities. I hope that such an understanding will serve as a tool to better equip and partner with such groups of people so that they can truly be empowered to minister and lead in their own rites and identities in ways that are most effective for them.

More directly, I hope to aid those interested in church planting to understand some of the social dynamics that are taking place between “mother churches” and their outreaches. Looban provides a prime example of these dynamics. I believe that there are important things to be learned by looking in-depth at a relationship such as this.

This study will attempt to investigate some of these very basic questions to aid potential church planters, organizations, and churches to have a fuller understanding of the dynamics in communicating between such diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups.

Scope and Delimitation

The narrative of this study comes from recorded interviews and dialogues that were held January to March 2010. In addition to the interviews, I have sat in on church meetings and fellowships, attended regular church services and participated in activities in the Looban community from January 2009 until March of 2010. This is an etic, qualitative study examining the self-identification of the people of mother church’s outreach in the Looban community. Specifically, this research focuses on the roles assumed and the self-identities that are adopted in the relationship between the diverse social and economic entities of mother church and Looban outreach church. The study examines the role that the Philippine social hierarchy (*sakop* values) plays

in the relationship between the two churches. Also, the study considers the implications of the particular attitudes and postures held by the mother church Facilitators in Looban outreach church and the Looban community. In particular, this study hopes to uncover what of these attitudes and postures might prevent Looban outreach church from becoming a self-sufficient church in its own right.

Definition of Terms:

The following a list of several key terms defined as they will be used in this study:

Barkada - A term for a *Filipino* friendship group used to describe a close, intimate group of friends in which the relationships are relaxed, tolerant, and guided by the principle of *pakikisama*.

Church - A community of confessors who gather together for holy fellowship and ministries.²⁹

Etic Research - Research that is approached from the “outside,” in which the researcher does not share in the direct identity of the context of research. This is contrasted to *emic* research in which the subject of research shares in the identity of the researcher.

Kasama / Patron-Client Relationships - a kind of informal sharecropping agreement between landlords and peasant farmers based on a mutual sense of *utang na loob*. This kind of relationship is characterized by mutual obligation and long-term dependency.³⁰

Outreach Church - A group sponsored by the local church or district who meets regularly with the goal of becoming an organized Church.³¹

Pakikisama - a sense of getting along with one another in which the desires of the one are often suppressed for the desires of the group.³²

²⁹ Blevins, Dean G., Charles D. Crow, David E. Downs, Paul W. Thornhill, David P. Wilson, *Manual: Church of the Nazarene, 2009-2013* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2009), 37

³⁰ Willem Wolters, *Politics, Patronage and Class Conflict in Central Luzon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984), 24.

³¹ *Manual: Church of the Nazarene*, 339.

Perceived Identity - one's particular interpretation or understanding of another's potential and qualities.

Priesthood of All Believers - The Christian belief that *all people* who are in Christ are qualified to do the ministry and work of Jesus Christ.

Sakop values - an interpersonal hierarchy of relationships that seem to mimic familial relationships.

Self-Identity - the recognition of one's own potential or qualities.

Utang na loob - A debt of gratitude; A characteristically strong sense of obligation for gratefulness that is treated with great seriousness in Philippine culture.³³

Values - the principles or standards of a person's behavior which are at the core of one's worldview.

Worldview - the way in which one understands the world and society around oneself. This is the filter through which one interprets the meanings of actions and interactions with others.

Assumptions:

The present study assumes that:

- Every social group in human society has its own unique identity.
- There are an infinite number of differences or variations from one group to the next.
- Differing groups influence each other through interaction.
- Group identity is of great value in that it informs us not only of who we are, but what we can become.
- Group identity inevitably leads us into action in that knowing who we are informs us of what we can do.

³² Niels Mulder, *Inside Philippine Society: interpretations of Everyday Life* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1997), 121.

³³ Rolando M. Gripaldo, Ed., "*Filipino cultural traits: Claro R. Ceniza Lectures*," (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), http://books.google.com/books?id=hXJe6vKMjroC&printsec=frontcover&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed: January 3, 2011).

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- Group identity and its interactions with other groups are both reciprocal and interrelated to one another.

CHAPTER II

NARRATIVE AND ANALYSIS

Looban represents many things to many people. For the uninvolved many, it is just another squatter community where the unnameable “others” of Philippine society find their dwellings. For the visiting relief workers following a recent and disastrous typhoon, “*Kawama*” (*pitiful*) became a nearly synonymous term for Looban when the former dumpsite-turned-community became an expansive lake, as flood waters engulfed a massive portion of the area. Investors see the rapidly expanding community as easy cash, while for nearly 100,000 Filipinos, “*babay ko*” (my home) is a far more fitting nomenclature. What it is to each person, of course, all depends on how each person interacts with it.

Identity and interaction stand at the heart of this study. These two terms are understood to be related and reciprocal. Our identities are formed by how we interact with the people and world around us, and our actions are influenced by who we understand ourselves to be. Thus, if we attempt to answer questions about the reflexive perceived self-identities between mother church and Looban Outreach Church, we must first examine the interactions between the two groups.

The Relationship Between the Churches

The relationship between mother church and Looban Outreach Church is that of parent and child. The parent looks after the needs of the child, including its leadership and financial support based upon the understanding that the child is not yet capable of taking care of itself.³⁴ The goal, in this model, is that the young and developing church will eventually gain independence. Before it can be independent, the church must be able to generate enough revenue to support its own pastor, pay

³⁴ District leadership. Interview by author, 19 January 2010, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines, Interview Transcript, line 45.

its bills, and maintain its own facilities. Secondly, the church must be able to govern itself, making its own decisions through a church board that it is independent of the parent-church. Lastly, the church must be capable of being a parent-church itself, that is, it must be able to plant other churches. Because of the context of the Looban community, there has been some difficulty in reaching a point where these three goals are able to be sufficiently met. Essentially, the child has had some difficulties in imitating its mother. The turn-over of leadership has not yet happened for Looban Outreach Church, mother church is the parent and Looban is the developing child, learning from the parent how to stand on its own.³⁵

Looban Outreach Church began with a simple outreach. This is a typical beginning for most urban poor church plants on this district of the denomination. In this model, a local church will start a church plant by conducting a simple “outreach ministry” which provides something for the community, such as a feeding program, a film-showing, or evangelical outreach program. Once the leadership from the parent-church has made sufficient connection with the community, they will begin holding regular worship services at the site and try to develop a weekly church program with regular attendance.³⁶

Once the outreach has formed regular church services, it will be referred to as a “recognized church,” or a “mission church.” This means that the district recognizes the outreach as a church with a leadership and government in development. It is during this process that the recognized church begins to develop its own offering and begins to support itself; however, it is still an outreach--and not able to officially be a church in the denomination.³⁷

The final step, and goal of this process is for the mission-outreach to become an “organized church” which is fully recognized by the district. However, this requires that the church is able to lead and support itself. This was the development model used by mother church.

³⁵ District leadership, 47.

³⁶ Ibid, 99.

³⁷ Ibid, 100-101.

First, a feeding program was started in the Looban community. Children would gather and eventually the program leaders would get in contact with the parents of the children. After this, a weekly church service, patterned after mother church services was started with similarly styled worship and preaching, and the relationship between the two groups began to form.³⁸ The hope that somehow throughout this process, the necessary shift from *outreach* to *church* would happen, but it has yet to be seen.

An important leader from the district (*referred to as "District Leadership" from here on*) is in charge of the oversight of "outreach-churches" like Looban Outreach Church.³⁹ The leadership believes that the Looban Outreach Church is developing, but not in a way that will be beneficial to both the mother church and the local church. The leadership asserts that the way that they are presently developing, "[Looban] will continuously be a burden on the mother church, and it will create a continuous dependency on the part of the local people in [Looban]."

District Leadership has noticed that leadership in Looban always tends to be equated with assistance, such as the feeding program. In other words, the people who are doing the ministry, giving the food, and providing the relief, those are the ones who are in charge of the church. District Leadership feels that the ability to make decisions is a very important factor in leadership. The District is aware that the people of Looban are often assisting with many of the outreach programs, but the decisions of how much money will be spent, what kind of food will be given, those decisions are all made by outsiders--they do not come from Looban. District Leadership says, "I believe, if they will be given the opportunity to decide and be given responsibility and to be accountable for their actions, then they will develop."⁴⁰

In this relationship, it is important to consider a few factors. Mother church and Looban Outreach Church are two entities of greatly

³⁸ Mother church Leader, 106.

³⁹ District Leadership, 5.

⁴⁰ District Leadership, 81-82.

unequal status and power. Mother church generally represents the upper ranks of Philippine society and Looban is at the very bottom. Mother church has provided land and a building for the people of Looban, as well as utilities. They have staffed the church with workers who regularly provide worship services, food and donations to the people of the community. It is important to ask here what are the outcomes of a relationship such as this? In Philippine society, one almost inevitable outcome in a context such as this is *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), or the feeling that something is owed in return for a particular favor given.

More specifically, the social context of the relationship between mother church and Looban runs parallel to a particular kind of class relationship, called a “*kasama* relationship” which has been deeply rooted in Philippine society since the 18th century.⁴¹ The center of this kind of relationship was a kind of informal agreement between landlords and peasant farmers. The landlord would supply the peasant farmer with the land, advance seeds and financial help for the planting and harvesting of the field, while the farmer would in turn till and farm the land, often using his tools and animals. In this way, the two would work together each providing a need of the other. In addition, the landlord would often be obliged to help the farmer with his daily needs, often giving him advances without interest.

This kind of relationship pivoted on the concept of *utang na loob*. However, the landlord was the more powerful figure, and was in a position to determine the price of the goods, thus controlling the *utang*. As time went on, problems arose in that issue of *utang* kept the peasant farmer in a constant position of dependency on the landlord.⁴² The resulting cultural phenomenon is a system of inter-class relationships that are based on mutual obligation and long-term interdependency.

This is the social background of the *sakop* values system that is seen in Philippine culture. This system stresses an interpersonal hierarchy of social relationships that seem to mimic familial

⁴¹ Willem Wolters, *Politics, Patronage and Class Conflict in Central Luzon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984), 24.

⁴² Wolters, 25.

relationships.⁴³ Within the *sakop* understanding, the parents are responsible for the children, and children owe their loyalty and gratitude to the parents, whether they are biological parents, or figurative societal "parents" such as a mayor, pastor, or other form of group leader.

The parent-child model of church planting calls for the parent to initiate, plant, and empower the child to be independent and then move on.⁴⁴ The ideal is that the parent and child learn to function independently of one another free of *utang no loob*, or a socially-based debt of gratitude. However, the present social and cultural context may require just the opposite. This could create particular difficulties in constructing a healthy and productive relationship as is ideal in the parent-child model.

The Leadership Team and Their Interactions

The leadership team in Looban (referred to as *Leadership* from here on) consists of 4 members of mother church, who serve in the community on a volunteer basis. The team is composed of a coordinator, a lay pastor, a pulpit-pastor, and a younger member from the mother church youth group who serves as a youth leader in Looban. The coordinator and lay pastor carry a great deal of responsibility for Looban. The coordinator manages the feeding program on Saturdays, while the lay pastor conducts Bible studies in homes, and does pastoral visitation all throughout the week. Pulpit-pastor visits the community once or twice a week ministering and delivering the Sunday sermons on a weekly basis.⁴⁵

The pulpit pastor arrives in the Looban community on his motorcycle every Sunday at about 8am. He is met there by lay-pastor and coordinator, who are brought by a service tricycle which takes them from their home which is outside of the Looban. It takes about 20

⁴³ Tomas D. Andres and Pilar B. Ilada-Andres, *Understanding the Filipino* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1987), 56.

⁴⁴ District Leadership, 44-46.

⁴⁵ Pulpit pastor, Interview by Author, 22 February 2010, Interview Transcript,

minutes to travel the long road and through the dry and dusty--or muddy and water-laden streets of Looban (depending, of course, on the season).

Worship usually consists of a mixture of English songs (many of which can be heard at mother church *Youth Corps*) and a small selection of favorite Tagalog songs. Preaching is generally done by Pulpit-pastor, who is in charge of the preaching for the outreach. Only recently has children's Sunday School been offered during the morning worship. These classes are usually led by the older Looban youth, following curriculum and direction of Coordinator, who manages Christian education in Looban. Following the services, three Sunday School/small groups gather: the *Kananayan* (adult women), the *Katatayan* (the adult men), and the *Kabatayan* (the youth). Coordinator serves as the leader for the *Kananayan*, Lay-pastor for the *Katatayan*, and Michael for the *Kabatayan*.

The Youth Leader, Michael (*an alias*), remains quite busy and is in charge of leading the youth and the worship on Sunday Mornings. The other members of the Leadership comment that Michael is unique in that he is perceived as *from* the Looban community where they have been ministering. In regards to identity, this makes Michael quite different, although, is somewhat of a hybrid. Although he lived in Looban briefly, he was initially a member of mother church, has participated in their ministries, been a part of their small groups, and has been under the mentorship of one of their youth pastors. Michael and his mother moved to the Looban area from Laguna, however, Michael only resided in the Looban community for a short while. He has more recently taken employment in mother church.

One member of the lay-leadership comments that the four of them in leadership have been very busy with the ministry in Looban. This is the first time that they have been able to create a full 12-month calendar of events for the church. The leader adds, "I think the leadership inside the church is quite good." She explains the process of decision-making for the leadership team; the four of them will talk together and make plans, after about an hour of deliberations, they will come to an agreement, settle, and commit. She explains the importance,

in this process, of having open communication among the team that is united with a common ambition.⁴⁶

The coordinator boasts that Leadership in the Looban outreach is better and busier than ever. Following a recent typhoon, Leadership, along with the mother church brought relief to many people in Looban. Leadership counts this as a blessing in disguise, as it has increased their attendance and allowed their ministries to flourish. Leadership envisions more livelihood programs for the community, a school, and a greater capacity to develop the Looban community in the near future.⁴⁷ This would be in addition to an already busy weekly schedule. Presently, on a weekly basis, the Leadership provides Sunday Morning worship, a youth service (“Mini-Youth Corps”) on Sunday afternoons, as well as home Bible studies, a feeding program on Saturdays, and other special events that are scattered throughout the calendar.

The pastoral staff usually wear *Barong Tagalog* or *Camisa de Chino* with black pants as their general Sunday attire, excluding Michael, who dresses much more casually, often sporting a Youth Corps T-shirt and Jeans. During rainy seasons, the Leadership from mother church will often have to either wear boots or change into these clothes upon arrival in the community, since the trip into the community tends to be a muddy one.

Sunday afternoons in Looban belong to the youth. The youth begin gathering for Mini-Youth Corps at or around 2pm. Not too long ago, these services had been led by a youth leader from mother church. However, in more recent day, Michael has entirely taken over the program, leading the songs and giving the message.

The feeding program has been a long-running ministry of mother church. It is supported through a monthly gift of about 14,000PHP (~\$300) to mother church from a donor in the United States.⁴⁸ Coordinator began working with the feeding program in Looban in 2005.

⁴⁶ Outreach coordinator, Interview by Author, 8 February 2010, Interview Transcript, 118.

⁴⁷ Outreach coordinator, 122.

⁴⁸ District Leadership, 48.

She would come to the community for several hours every Saturday morning. At this time, they had no tents or buildings and were forced to conduct the simple program under the heat of the morning sun. The ministry was small but rewarding. They would put on a simple program for the children and provide them with a hot meal of rice and *ulam*. Coordinator comments that she loved her ministry with the children, “the children were very eager to smile and to form lines to get their food.”⁴⁹

Apart from feeding program and weekly services, Leadership began involving themselves in the community through home Bible studies. Lay-pastor was responsible for the development of many of the home Bible studies that have been done in the ministry. He comments that it has been slow development from the time that he first began ministering in 2000.⁵⁰ These Bible studies would often be held in the homes of the local members of Looban Outreach Church, often at the request of the Leadership. Leaders indicate that they had some difficulties in operating a ministry such as this, in that there was poor attendance and a lack of cooperation from the homeowners.⁵¹ Regardless, Leadership felt that bible studies such as this were significant in helping to nurture the spiritual lives of the people in Looban, while keeping them connected with the church.

Aside from ministering within the community, Leadership has also, at times, brought the people of Looban to mother church to join for fellowship and special services. Usually during these times, special programs are held, meals is served, and/or donations of clothing and necessity items are given. Most recently, mother church held a “family day” for the people in Looban. About 500 people from the Looban community were brought to mother church taking multiple trips with one van. Several members from mother church met with the people from Looban, played games with them, and distributed donation packages.

⁴⁹ Coordinator Coding: 16.

⁵⁰ Lay pastor, Interview by Author, 8 February 2010, Interview Transcript, 12.

⁵¹ Outreach coordinator, 74; Pulpit pastor, 68.

Through the efforts of the Leadership from mother church, the outreach has been able to expand. The feeding program and surrounding outreach programs were considered a success as people kept returning week after week. Coordinator recalls that several of the regular youth present today were products of that very program.

Development of Local Leadership

There is a unanimous indication from the Leadership that they desire to see strong leadership from the youth, however they show some ambiguity as to whether Looban is capable of such leadership. Coordinator believes that it will be difficult and take a long time to develop lay-leaders in Looban, “it will take time for a *kapwa-Looban* to believe that God can change the lives of some [of the] Looban people. It will take time--except in the case of Michael. Michael is from Looban. Other than Michael, we have no leader any more coming from Looban. So, we are praying for another Michael to be raised up by God.”

The Pulpit-pastor indicates that he has tried to aid in the development of leaders from the adult men by assigning them positions in the church, such as chairman, co-chairman, treasurer, and so on. Pulpit-Pastor allowed the men to think of the roles through which they could serve in the church, and then assigned them titles so that they would sense that they were leaders.⁵² It might be important to note here that the Leadership still made the decisions and controlled all of the church’s funds, despite the assignment of these roles. Preaching-Pastor explains that he did this so that they would realize that one day they would be on their own. He has also instructed for Looban Youth Leader to do similar role assignments with the youth.⁵³

When asked about the gifts and abilities of the other youth within the community, Coordinator laughed and jokingly mentioned two particular youth who are believed to be especially unfit to lead. This leader then cites reasons, on the basis of maturity, that would make these

⁵² Pulpit pastor, 104.

⁵³ Pulpit pastor, 105.

persons unsuitable. The leader's list continues, mentioning several more inadequate leaders, and a couple who would be ideal as assistants. After some additional thought, this leader is able to name two youth (present Sunday School teachers) who are believed to have the attitudes of a leader.⁵⁴ Coordinator does admit to seeing strong leaders from Looban. She specifies, "specifically leaders with submissive hearts, because every time you talk to them and I name my plans, they are not arguing. They follow."

In addition to this, members of the leadership team list, "cooperation," "willingness to continue what has been planned," and "a willingness to follow commands" as positive characteristics of potential leaders in the community. Mostly these characteristics deal with the fulfillment of the plans of the mother church in the community.

This is a very telling statement made by Coordinator. Coordinator implies that the Leadership is looking for leaders who do not make decisions for themselves. They are looking for leaders who will not stray from the course that the present leadership has set. This would seem to indicate a lack of trust in the abilities of the people of Looban and a fear that they might not continue in the path presently defined for them. Why look for leaders who are defined by their ability to follow? This seems to be a contradiction.

Coordinator indicates that, given a commitment to the ministry, Leadership is able to delegate work to the people in Looban. Coordinator names a few tasks such as the assembling of children for feeding program and cleaning the church. One of the reasons that Coordinator has an aversion to allowing members in Looban to lead is that they lack confidence or have fears of leadership. She mentions two youth who are skilled in music, but states, "they cannot handle Bible studies, because they told us that they are afraid to teach."⁵⁵ So far, only Michael has been given the opportunity to lead and make decisions.

One member of the Leadership notes that, as a developing church, it is necessary that they try to take care of Looban's needs,

⁵⁴ Outreach coordinator, 165

⁵⁵ Outreach coordinator, 169

improve their living conditions, and help them to take care of their families. She believes that if these needs are addressed, and Looban is given sufficient food on their tables, then they will be able to worship Christ more. By doing these things for them, they are allowing them to worship Christ.⁵⁶ This leader sees a great future involvement in the Looban community, including a school and a livelihood program, as well as a bigger church building.⁵⁷

Why Looban is still not ready

Leadership in Looban cite and imply a number of various reasons that make it difficult to raise up a leader from the Looban community:

Looban is poor. Looban leaders have been waiting for the Looban project to generate enough money to support a full-time pastor, but Looban doesn't seem able to bring in enough money in its offerings. One member of the Looban leadership explains that many of the people are dependent upon collecting loose garbage to earn a living, so only a very few people have any money.⁵⁸

Looban is poorly educated. Many of the people in Looban are not fully educated. One leader from Looban explains that Leadership must spend extra time with the people from Looban because of this factor.⁵⁹ He adds that it is important that Leadership preaches to them using the simplest Tagalog, because there are many things that they are not able to understand. He says that, "the words [we use] are the simplest Tagalog that we have, but some of them, they do not understand, because some of them stopped school, and never finished; that's why we need to take time, especially with the Bible."⁶⁰

Looban is a big investment. The outreach is the recipient of various funds and assistance from churches abroad, missions teams, and NGO's. District Leadership notes that there is fear that Looban must be

⁵⁶ Ibid, 147.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 122.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 45.

⁵⁹ Pulpit pastor, 93.

⁶⁰ Pulpit pastor, 99.

able to perform for its sponsors, “If Looban will die, what answer will [the leadership] give to these people who are interested in the development of Looban?”

Looban cannot do it as well as mother church. District Leadership believes that there is a fear that if the leadership would allow Looban to lead, they will not be able to deliver the same results as what the mother church would be able to deliver.⁶¹ Essentially, there is belief that the outreach would be sacrificing quality of work if they would allow Looban to lead. District Leadership believes that Leadership in Looban have fears because they want to ensure that the Looban project is operating well.⁶²

In addition to these reasons, Leadership commonly cites numerous social problems in the community such as gambling, drinking, gossip, and violence. They mention that this is a part of the “mindset” of the people in Looban.⁶³ This is never directly connected to Looban’s inability to lead. However, this perception seems to stand forefront in the minds of the Leadership and is presented as a notable part of the identity of the people of Looban.

District Leadership says that the inherent problem here is that Looban is being measured by a foreign standard. Looban Outreach Church is not mother church. But, it seems that they feel that they need to be like mother church in order to be sufficient for self-leadership. District Leadership notes that they should be measured with respect to their own context. He adds, “we might think that if they will take the lead--they are not efficient in doing [the work], but we don’t know what the people are thinking. They might see [their work] as ‘super-efficient’ because that is their level. Point is--they should be given a chance.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ District Leadership, 89.

⁶² District Leadership, 110-111.

⁶³ Outreach coordinator, 79.

⁶⁴ District Leadership, 92-93.

A Mother Church Leader takes a different approach

One notable leader from mother church (*referred to as “mother church Leader” from here on out*) has been particularly disappointed with the Leadership at Looban Outreach Church. He believes strongly in mother church’s responsibility to train and educate the people of Looban to do things for themselves. He believes that the present leadership has failed to do this and that much of the interaction throughout the years has been “ineffective.” He says that a great deal of the interaction between the mother church and Looban Outreach Church has been limited to the feeding program, support, and relief work.⁶⁵ In the relationship between the two groups, “There is a giver and a receiver—and Looban is always the receiver.” He adds, “I think they are dependent, because they have been groomed to be dependent; they were cultured to be dependent, and this is the sad reality of the relationship.”⁶⁶

About three years ago, mother church Leader set out to help develop the youth of the church. He wanted to build relationships with the youth of Looban, mentor them, and help empower them to do the ministry for themselves. He committed to go to Looban every Sunday to hang out with the youth there and share the word of God.⁶⁷ He indicated that this kind of interaction was qualitatively different from what had been done previously. Each week, he would bring some of the other mother church youth with him and they would play guitars and share Christ with the youth of the community. It was not easy at first, the leader says that it took a while for him to “break through” to the youth in Looban. He recalls how shy they were at first. Their self-esteem seemed very low. He recalls that most of his conversations were “one way”; he would talk to them and they would answer back, but there seemed to be very little connection beyond that.

Mother church Leader observed that social class had much to do with the difficulties in his interactions. Mother church Leader and the

⁶⁵ Mother church leader, Interview by Author, 27 January, 2010, Interview Transcript, 74.

⁶⁶ Mother church leader, 76.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 15.

youth from mother church would often relate with the youth in Looban as elder siblings or mentors, giving the youth encouragement and support. He notes that it was during these early interactions that the people of Looban began to take note of the living standard of the people at mother church in comparison to themselves. “They knew about who we are, about how we are living--you know, our status is kinda way better than theirs,” the leader commented. “I think that’s when they realized how far [apart] ‘we’ and ‘they’ are, in regards to status.”⁶⁸ The youth make reference to the trips that they have made to mother church. They indicate that they are happy to be a part of *Youth Corps*, but simultaneously ashamed because they feel poor and *pangit* (ugly) in comparison with the other youth at mother church.⁶⁹

It took nearly two years until mother church Leader began to see this pattern of one-way, question-response communication to change. Eventually, these awkward interactions began to seem more like friendship, however their self-esteem still seemed to remain low.⁷⁰ Mother church Leader recognizes the issue of their self-esteem and notes that this makes the delegation of leadership very difficult in that the youth often doubt their ability to lead. He believes that empowerment must come though encouraging them, and allowing them to realize that they can do it too. Mother church Leader believes that mother church presence in the community is vitally important to encourage the people of Looban and show them how to minister, however the people in Looban should be the one’s to do the ministry.⁷¹

Mother church Leader indicates that leadership in Looban should empower the local people to do things for themselves—given that they have been provided with adequate training and education. He adds that the Leadership should have a strong involvement and interaction in the lives of the people in Looban, so that they can learn to teach, preach and organize themselves. Then, Leadership should let go and allow the

⁶⁸ Ibid, 23-24.

⁶⁹ “Michael,” Interview with author, 28 January 2010, Interview transcript, 336.

⁷⁰ Mother church leader, 18-20.

⁷¹ Mother church leader, 84-86.

people to continue using the skills that they have been given by mother church to continue the ministry.⁷² In regards to livelihood and community development, he indicates that there is a time and a place in which it is good to give relief, but the more important thing is that the people are trained to graduate and have jobs.⁷³

Mother church Leader critiques the present leadership saying that they do not fully trust the people in Looban and that prejudice against education and status are largely why they are not accepted. He then gives his own requirements for leadership, and adds a very telling qualification. He comments that, “as long as they have a relationship with Jesus and *they have gone back to work or school*, then they are ready to lead.”⁷⁴ The leader critiques the Leadership for their prejudice against the people in Looban, only to supplant another qualification based upon education and economics!

Mother church leader vies for the liberation of the people in Looban. He believes strongly in their empowerment, however he gives a very salient point. His foremost requirements for leadership are having a job or enrollment in school, following their relationship with Jesus. By “work” and by “school” the leader once again implies that their poverty and education stand in the way of them being able to lead themselves. What is mother church leader’s answer to this dilemma? The mother church must help fix the poverty and the poor education, then Looban will be able to lead.

The implied message here is that the people in Looban are not able to manage themselves in a full sense without outside help. Before they can lead themselves they must first be able to rise to meet the standards set by the mother church. However, the very structure of the mother church requires well-organized finances, programs and staff, which are not readily available to the Looban community. Thus these resources must be brought from the outside in order to help Looban to fit the imposed structure.

⁷² Ibid, 78-79.

⁷³ Ibid, 132.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 71.

It is important to consider the expectations placed onto the people of Looban at this point. If they are to be empowered, what are they to be empowered to do? The imposition here is that mother church gives the structure, sets the programs, and Looban is then “freed” to follow the course that has been set for them by the mother church. But, what is their destination? If they are given a “Mini-Youth Corps,” what is its end goals? No doubt to be like the real *Youth Corps*. If they are given the blueprints for the mother church’s administration and structure, what will they build? No doubt, they will attempt to build another mother-church. This is not something that they are prepared to do, nor does it fit the community of Looban.

What Makes Michael So Different?

Mother church Leader notes that he had spent years in Looban, looking for the right person to lead in Looban. His search came to an end when he found Michael (who currently is the youth leader in Looban). He says that, with Michael, he knew “this is the person.” Michael was perceived to be from Looban, but had already been attending church at mother church.⁷⁵ Michael recalls that it was the mother church Leader who “fully integrated” him into the life of the mother-church. Michael started attending Youth Corps and before long, Michael was also a part of the small group ministry at mother church. Membership in this ministry is requisite for people who wish to be in leadership at *Youth Corps*. Michael faithfully attended both of these ministries, and became a part of the youth group at mother church.

Several of the Leadership cite Michael as standing out among the other Looban youth. They indicate that Michael is unique, and “has a different kind of life from the ordinary Looban youth,” they cite that he “is working for his family,” he is putting himself through school, he is respected by the other youth, and he does not join with *barkadas* (tight social grouping) in Looban.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid, 55.

⁷⁶ Outreach coordinator, 158.

Michael is doing something that many of the youth in Looban have not been able to do. He is living outside of the perceived identity that it commonly held for the other youth in Looban. Michael carries a different social identity from the other youth. The Leadership points out that Michael did not join with the *barkadas* in Looban. This indicates that Michael might not have had strong relationships or a solid identification with Looban at the beginning. Michael confirms that he had an early dissociation from the Looban community. He did not want to attend church in Looban, because it was a slum area and he did not like the community when he first moved there. Michael recalls that he knew about the church which met in Looban, but he notes, “I didn’t like going to church there in Looban because it is *pangit* (ugly),” citing the broken shacks and the people standing by, playing cards and discussing with one another.⁷⁷ It was on the basis of his dissociation from the Looban community, that he began attending church at mother church.

This is another important factor to consider, unlike the other youth in Looban, Michael did not start at Looban Outreach Church. Before ever entering the church in Looban, Michael was a member of the youth group at mother church.⁷⁸ He started attending mother church in Taytay, shortly after moving to the Looban area from Laguna.⁷⁹ It was during this time that the Looban lay-pastor and coordinator noticed Michael, and began to build a relationship with him. Michael says, “They introduced themselves to me and tried to build their rapport.” He notes that he was not aware of it at the time, but they were starting to “disciple” him to lead in Looban.⁸⁰ At mother church, Michael became involved in *Youth Corps* as well as the *Youth Corps* small-group ministry at mother church. Michael’s membership in this small group ministry is significant in that it serves as the training ground for all *Youth Corps* leaders. Membership in these small groups is required for all potential youth leaders at mother church.

⁷⁷ “Michael,” 39.

⁷⁸ A common term used for someone who is a regular attender of *Youth Corps*.

⁷⁹ “Michael,” 38

⁸⁰ “Michael,” 50.

One great factor that made Michael so different was that he did not carry the common identity of Looban, rather, he had taken on the identity of the mother church—at least to some extent. Michael kept regular attendance in the programs and services at the mother-church, joined in its small groups, and had been taken under the mentorship of one of their pastors. It is possible that what made Michael ideal for leadership, was his likeness and identification with the image and structure of the mother church.

This is significant in that Michael did not initially see himself as coming from Looban. Michael had only recently moved to the area, so his identity was not strongly that of either Looban or the mother church. Because of Michael's ambiguous identification, he was given a social mobility that the other Looban Youth, would not have been able to have. Michael was able to at least marginally identify himself with both the mother church and with Looban and thus it was possible for him to “pass” as a potential leader.

Michael Starts His Ministry in Looban

On August 6, 2006, Looban Outreach Church celebrated its first service in the new building. This was Michael's first time to attend church in the Looban community. Michael indicates that he was immediately asked to be involved with the work in Looban. He started his ministry in Looban Outreach Church by managing the overhead projector during worship services. Michael notes that it was in these early days of standing in front of the church that he was deeply affected. He had been reading his Bible and listening to the words of the songs. He notes that it was during one of those moments that he was standing before the church, singing and managing the transparencies, that God spoke to him, and he began to cry. Michael recalls, “I think that, at that moment, God spoke to me clearly, saying ‘that was you before’ and ‘this is you now’ and I felt comforted. Maybe that is the reason that I kept on going.”⁸¹ Michael notes that what happened during that service was something that had been building between he and God—something that

⁸¹ Ibid, 71.

was not directly connected with the service itself or with the ministers of the church.⁸²

Along with Michael, mother church Leader was able to start a new Sunday Afternoon youth service in Looban Outreach Church, called “*Mini-Youth Corps.*” mother church Leader indicates that he leads by example. At first, He would lead the youth gatherings, preach, and play the guitar during worship, while Michael served as the song leader. He served as the leader of the gatherings for some time before he and Michael “swapped places.” Mother church Leader recalls that, at first, Michael was uncomfortable with standing in front and speaking because mother church Leader was there listening. The youth leader reassured him, “I’m here. I’m your *knyya* (older brother), your mentor. You don’t have to be shy.” Mother church Leader recalls that after Michael would finish giving the message, he would always complement him and then give him some tips on public speaking and structuring his sermons. Mother church Leader also trained Michael how to take down notes from sermons and how to lead devotions. Eventually, this led to Michael taking some subjects at the bible school extension which met at mother church.⁸³

“Modeling Leadership” for Looban

Mother church Leader’s approach to leadership seems to fit well within the ideals of leadership described by the District Leadership. District Leadership suggests that the mother church should “little by little” expose the people of Looban to the leadership, so that they feel that they are in control, noting the importance that they feel that control is coming from within the community, rather than from the outside.⁸⁴ The mother church Leader sees a great importance in modeling leadership, teaching and training the people of Looban to do the ministry. Mother church Leader notes that he is committed to

⁸² Ibid, 72.

⁸³ Mother church leader, 48-49.

⁸⁴ District Leadership: 39-40.

empowering the youth for leadership, and helping them to see that they can to it too.

As a part of the developing relationship between the youth of Looban and mother church, the mother church Leader would often bring the large yellow cargo truck from mother church into the Looban community so that after the *Mini-Youth Corps* meeting, the youth could load into the truck and attend the main *Youth Corps* at mother church. Mother church Leader and the Looban missionaries seem to be in agreement that these kinds of excursions are useful in building a strong relationship between mother church and Looban Outreach Church.

The Looban youth indicate that they greatly enjoy going to *Youth Corps*, however they indicate that it is a mixture of joy and envy. Many of these youth consider *Youth Corps* to be their “inspiration” in what they do at Looban Outreach Church. The Looban youth want to be able to replicate the style of mother church, but they are not fully able to. One youth admits, “one of the reasons that I go to *Youth Corps* is to get their style and to learn how they do what they do and why there are so many people going there, but they are not answering my questions of how they do things. I want to know what they are doing to have so many youth.”⁸⁵ This comparison of abilities and seeming inabilities leads to envy in the youth. One comments, “It creates in us envy because their program is well done, and they are doing things well, like how they play music.”⁸⁶

Whether they have intended it or not, mother church has set a particular standard for ministry. The implication here is that the youth are coming to mother church to see how to do the ministry and it is this

⁸⁵ Focus group of 10 Looban youth, Interview by Author, 14 April 2010, Interview Transcript, 15.

Original Tagalog: *“isa sa mga hangarin ko kung bakit ako nag-je-Youth Corps ditto kasi kumukuba rin ako ng style nila kung paano yung ano, kung paano yung ginawa nila kung bakit naging ganoon karami yung ano, minsan tinatanong ko yung ibang ano kasi iba yung sinasagot sa akin e, hindi ako sinasagot ng mga tinatanong ko e. Kaya ayun, gusto ko malaman sana kung ano yung ginawa nila bakit naging ganoon karami iyong youth nila.”*

⁸⁶ Focus group of 10 Looban youth, 13.

Original Tagalog: *Parang nakakainggit kasi parang maayos naka program labat ng ginagawa nila mas maganda iyong tugtugan siempre mga music lover maganda talaga.*

implied standard that they are following at Looban Outreach Church. The youth openly comment that *Youth Corps* is their inspiration, they state that they go to mother church to get their style.⁸⁷

Let us return for a moment to Social Identity Theory. It is natural that people organize themselves into individual groupings, based upon similarities in characteristics, which serve to increase their *self-esteem*.⁸⁸ *Self-esteem* is an important concept here, simply for the fact that mother church has much, and Looban Outreach Church has very little. Social Identity theory also affirms that people will do whatever it takes to negotiate a “positive and distinct” identity for their own group, even if it means adopting someone else’s identity. The youth in Looban indicate an attempt at such a shift in identity. They would like to join and be a part of the more salient social identity, but they cannot do it fully.

Michael “Connects”

Michael offers something unique. There is a mutuality in the way that he relates with the youth in the community. At the same time, he indicates somewhat of an ideological separation from the goals of mother church in his leadership of the youth, and is very clear in asserting his identity apart from the Leadership.⁸⁹ He indicates that much has changed within *himself* from those early days when he was attending mother church. Before he started working in Looban, he recalls that he avoided Looban Outreach Church altogether (even though his mother lived there) because of the low-status of the community. He notes that God put compassion in his heart to feel what the youth in Looban feel, to live like them, to share and to help physically. He notes that he used be full of pride, but it has lessened through his work in the Looban Community.

Michael critiques the leadership style of the Leadership noting that they have a strong tendency to be very controlling. “[Lay-pastor]

⁸⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁸⁸ Michael Hogg, “A Social Identity Theory of Leadership 5,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* (2001): 184-200, 187.

⁸⁹ “Michael,” 135.

just keeps on commanding the youth, ‘kailangan gantio, kailangan ganito’ (you have to do this, you have to do that). This troubles Michael, because he fears that young christians will see this kind of behavior from the more mature christians, and they will think that it is proper behavior. Michael indicates that he is troubled by the example that this leadership style might be setting. He comments that the people in Looban automatically think that whatever mother church does is the best thing for them. They expect that everyone who comes from mother church is skilled in what they do and are equipped in God’s word, “but they are wrong,”⁹⁰ he adds. Michael quite frankly states that it all comes down to a matter of respect for the people in Looban.

Michael notes that he does not point his youth to the leadership of the church, but he points them to God. Michael counsels, “you know you don’t have to look up to people, to the ministers, or even to me; you just need to look up to God and pray, read his word and God will bless you.” Michael notes that many people seem to naturally follow the people of mother church, assuming that they know best. He indicates that they do this because of the differences in social position; because the people of mother church are from a higher social class, they are automatically assigned respect. He indicates this social structuring is the reason for their low-self esteem.⁹¹

Michael sees a lot of leadership potential coming from the youth in Looban. He states this frankly and without a moment’s hesitation. Just as plainly, he admits that the leadership from mother church do not see that potential. In regards to the youth’s capabilities for leadership, he responds, “I think [they can], because it emanates.” He believes that their leadership abilities are demonstrated by their actions, and by the passion with which they serve. Immediately Michael launches into a story about one of the youth. “Like Lenny, he is a speechless person (he is shy, speaks very little). He doesn’t talk well or keep on speaking, but when he speaks. . . everybody listens.” Michael recounts a particular instance in which a conflict had arisen between the youth and the

⁹⁰ “Michael,” 315.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 305.

Leadership of the church, regarding how funds would be spent. The Leadership had one opinion and the youth had another, at that moment this particular youth, one who usually never speaks, spoke up and offered some common grounds on which the two groups could agree. He settled everything with just a few words.⁹² Michael adds, “And I know that they are blessed with Lenny.”

As for the abilities and maturity of the other youth. Michael seems to nearly get lost in telling stories of their qualities. “And I saw a very good thing in Herbie,” Michael continues, “He is really obedient to God. You know what happened to him? His brother is in jail and he is really hurt because of that. He feels so sad. On top of that, his brother’s wife just died. He has been carrying all of the burden.”⁹³ Michael recalls the previous Sunday when Herbie stood up to speak in church. He tells that Herbie began to open up to the church, telling the biblical story of Job, referencing all of the tests and trials that he had been experiencing in his life. Herbie began, “I really thank God that I have been here in this church,”⁹⁴ and he told everyone that he saw love there. Herbie exhorted the congregation from the story of his life and told the crowd that they must all be like Job and remain faithful to God even when it feels that we are carrying all of the burdens in the world. Michael recounts, “I think that was not just a testimony—it was a sermon—because he explained why it happened, why God allowed it [to happen] in order to make us stronger. He allows [things like this] to test if we really trust him.”⁹⁵ Michael warmly reminisced about the spiritual maturity that he had seen in his friend, “and at that moment that he spoke to us teary-eyed, and then when he sat down, he cried. Michael recalls many times that the two of them have shared with one another, they would always close in prayer. “My heart broke every time that I talked to him,” Michael said, “because I could feel the experience in him, and I cried. I cried, a lot.”⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid, 184.

⁹³ Ibid, 188.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 194.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 196.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 198.

During one of their meetings together, Herbie said to Michael, “you know, *Kuya* Michael, I don’t know why I am here. You know, I don’t know why I am still here. Even though, I don’t have money, I don’t get anything from this church, but I am still here.”⁹⁷ Michael then turned to Herbie and said that it was because of God’s Love that he came and continued to come. Michael recalls, that at that moment Herbie slowly bowed his head in silence. As Herbie’s hand began to clench into a tight fist, Michael saw the tears beginning to fall to the table. “Shocking,” Michael recalls, “Herbie did the very, very good cry—from deep within—the table was almost completely wet.” As he recalled the stories of the young people in his group he kept interjecting how blessed he was with each one.

Michael has also been building a fruitful relationship with one new youth at Looban Outreach Church who struggles with gender identity issues. Michael notes a particular softness in this young person’s heart and a sensitivity to God. He notes that transformation is becoming evident in his life. Michael comments, “[He] is Amazing. Every night, he keeps on sleeping in the church, because he wants to read the Bible every night.”⁹⁸

Michael recalls one particular conversation that he had with this youth. The youth had texted Michael asking, “*Kuya* Michael, How can I have faith in God? You see, I keep committing all these sins. Will God forgive me?”⁹⁹ Michael notes that he was blessed to be asked such a question. He is blessed that the youth entrust him with the struggles of their spiritual lives. Michael says that he was blessed because he can see that there is a real change in in this youth. He is feeling a conviction that was not there before. “Michael texted him saying, “. . .God can forgive every sin, as long as we repent and we ask for forgiveness within—deep within our heart.”¹⁰⁰ He has asked them to start journaling, and they talk and share together about what is going on in their lives.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 217.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 224.

⁹⁹ Original: “*Mapapatawad paba ako ng diyos?*” “*kasi nagagawa--maraming din naman akong nagaganang kasalanan.*”

¹⁰⁰ “Michael,” 219.

Michael's approach is different. He has connected with the youth of Looban in a way that no other leader from mother church has been able to connect. He sees strong leadership qualities in the youth of Looban as they are now. He tells them that they are the channel through which God's can bless others.¹⁰¹ This is significant because it focuses on the youth as the doers and the ministers. They are the ones through whom God's blessing is known—rather than placing that identity on the leadership. He cites the qualities of their passion, their genuineness, and their love, which he believes makes them ready to lead themselves. He does not seem to refer to the mother church for leadership and development.

Michael is greatly pleased with the honesty and openness of the people that he has encountered in Looban. Over and over he comments on how blessed he is by the youth in the community. He cites a time when he told the youth, "You know guys, you think that I am the blessing for all of you, but you're wrong. You are all the blessing for me."¹⁰² It is because of these relationships that he continues to minister in Looban. He adds that he cannot find relationships he has found in Looban at mother church. He comments, "They (mother church) have money, they have everything, but I feel the compassion, the passion of being a Christian here in Looban. Every time I talk to the youth, I cry. Actually, I told God, 'Lord, even though you gave me this responsibility—a very huge responsibility, I don't doubt to obey. Because of them, I am blessed. I am really blessed.'"¹⁰³ He notes that he would much rather serve in Looban than at the mother church.

Michael indicates a particular sense of pride in the qualities of the people in Looban, however, the youth do not seem to see the same qualities in themselves in comparison with the mother church. The Looban youth greatly admire the people from mother church. They especially admire the passion, organization, and talent that go into the *Youth Corps* program. Reciprocally, they comment on their own

¹⁰¹ "Michael," 215.

¹⁰² Ibid, 256.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 250.

inabilities to produce such a program. They very readily note that people from mother church are “respectable.”¹⁰⁴ However, they often find it difficult to really connect with the youth at mother church and sometimes they even feel rejected.¹⁰⁵

The youth seem to readily defer their identity as a church to mother church, indicating that Looban is only a piece of the mother-church. Oftentimes, it seems that the youth are unable to talk about Looban, without also comparing themselves to mother church. One youth directly comments, “mother church is the main [vine] of Looban and Looban is its branch. Looban still can’t stand on its own, so it depends on mother church.”¹⁰⁶

The youth indicate that in order for Looban to stand on its own, it must be able to do what the mother church is doing. Mother church is the church model for Looban Outreach Church, however, Looban is unable to be like the mother church because they lack the resources, namely money. One male in the group comments, “mother church supports Looban because the people in Looban can’t run the church yet, they can’t do it yet, and mother church helps Looban grow.”¹⁰⁷ One youth indicates that mother church built a branch of itself in Looban for the purpose of “helping people and saving them and so that many people can go to church.”¹⁰⁸

The youth indicate doubt in their ability to stand on their own for several reasons. One significant reason is that they lack money. They cite issues such as the inability to pay for the church’s electric bill, and so forth. They indicate that it is their lack of money that keeps them from

¹⁰⁴ Original: “*titignan mo yung mga tao doon talagang karespe-respeto.*”

¹⁰⁵ Focus group of 10 Looban youth, 147-150.

¹⁰⁶ Focus group of 10 Looban youth, 21.

Original Tagalog: *Kasi iyong ano e, mother church diba, iyon ang main ng Looban, tapos branch lang iyong Looban, kasi iyong Looban hindi niya pa kayang mag-isa, tapos dumedepende pa siya doon sa main.*

¹⁰⁷ Original Tagalog: *mother church iyong tumutulong sa Looban iyong parangsumosoporta, kasi iyong tao sa Looban hindi pa nila kayang magsarili na sila na iyong magpatakbo ng church, hindi pa nila kaya iyon.*

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 45.

growing. One youth comments, “what makes mother church grow is their money and their offering.”¹⁰⁹ Aside from money, several of the youth indicate that large attendance is prerequisite to becoming a church on their own mother church has provided feeding programs and relief work which has generated a large attendance for the church. Looban youth indicate that without mother church, this attendance would not be possible, and the ministry in Looban would not be able to stand on its own. The youth are aware of the implied requirements for standing on their own, but they are often frustrated with their own abilities at meeting these requirements. The youth note that they are markedly less organized than mother church. The comment was that they lack unity and are “lazy” at times.¹¹⁰ They note that they sometimes have devotions scheduled for 6, but no one shows up until 7:30. Looban youth comment that they get frustrated with one another when they are not able to maintain such organization. However, they add, “something good is also happening; when we are together, we have bonding, and we get to understand each other why one can’t attend and we correct the negative thoughts we had of one another.”¹¹¹ Another youth comments, “Yes, it can stand,” he says. “If [mother church] is gone, of course [Looban] Church would ‘lie low’, but it’ll keep pushing even though it’s hard. It is hard, but it can be done.”¹¹² One youth concludes, “I can see in the youth that we are happy when we are together and that is what we want.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ “Michael,” 102-103.

¹¹⁰ Focus group of 10 Looban youth, 183.

¹¹¹ Focus group of 10 Looban youth, 179.

Original: *pero mayroon ding magandang nangyayari kung magkakasama kami. Kasi pag nagkakasama kami nagkakaroon kami ng bonding-bonding nalalaman namin yung mga dapat, parang naiintindihan namin yung mga dabilan niya kung bakit siya nagiging ganoon. O, nagkakaintindihan kami kung minsan kasi nga nagkakausap-usap kami na minsan nakikita namin bakit kaya ‘di nakaattend si ganito na minsan nag-iisip agad kami ng mali para sa kanya, negatibo para sa kanya.*

¹¹² Ibid, 113.

Original: *pag nawala iyong mother church syempre iyong Looban Outreach Church talagang mag la-lie low lie low yan pero pipilitin pang bumangon kabit na mahirap kakayanin.*

¹¹³ Ibid, 181.

Several of the youth were appointed as “leaders” to teach children’s Sunday school classes and lead their own Bible studies.¹¹⁴ Michael and these youth have kept regular fellowship together. They indicate that something genuine and of their own identity is developing among them. One youth narrates:

before knowing the Lord while I was still in the province, my life was very different from now, because I hadn’t yet realized what God’s plan for me was. But, when I went to the Church, I realized slowly that I can teach children, or I can lead a Bible study, things like that. I realized I can share the word of God to other people. Before, I was ashamed to carry the Bible. That’s why my life was different before, because I have really gotten to know the Lord in the Church. I really cry hard whenever we pray, and I tell the Lord: ‘Lord, please take control of my life, develop in me what I can do to serve you.’ I said that and it’s like the doors are being opened so I can serve Him more. There is happiness in serving Him with friends whom you know are concerned for you.¹¹⁵

Original: *nakikita ko lang sa mga youth masaya lang kami ‘pag magkakasama kami at pag iyong bangarin namin isa lang...masaya.*

¹¹⁴ “Michael,” 198.

¹¹⁵ Female youth, Interview by author, 14 April 2010, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines, Interview Transcript, 7-10.

Original: *yung bubay ko dati, na nakakilala sa Panginoon sa province, ibang iba sa bubay ko ngayon na diyan sa Church, kasi dati hindi ko pa ano, hindi ko pa, parang hindi ko pa nadedevelop kung ano ba talaga yung plano sa akin ni God kung ano ba talaga iyong gusto Niyang mangyari sa akin, pero noong napunta ako sa Church, parang unti-unting nabuksan iyong ano, na kaya ko palang magturo sa bata, na kayak o pa lang maglead ng Bible study, iyong mga ganoon? Na kaya ko pa lang magshare ng word of God sa ibang tao na dati, pag dala dala lang ng Bible, hiyang hiya na ako. Iyon! So sabi kong ganyan, ano e, iyong bubay ko dati ibang iba, iyong nakilala ko talaga Siya diyan sa Church, todo iyak talaga ako niyan kada may prayer, iyak talaga ako, tapos sabi ko, “Lord ano..,” sa prayer ko, sabi ko, “Lord, Ikaw na po babalang mag ano sa bubay ko, mag control,” tapos sabi ko, “i-develop Niyong pa yung kung ano pa iyong kaya ko, se-serve ko sa Iyo.” Sabi kong ganyan, hanggang sa unti-unting nabubuksan iyong ano, iyong parang mga pinto, something na mga ganoon, para makapag serve pa ako lalo sa Kanya, tapos mas masaya iyong feeling na nageseserve ka sa Kanya na kasama mo iyong mga kaibigan mo na ano, alam mo naman na may concern sa iyo, di ba?*

Many of the youth tell similar stories, indicating a firm faith in God, good deal of capability to lead among themselves, and comfort in the support of the fellowship that surrounds them. However, when they are asked about Looban's ability to be a church apart from mother church, their self-concept seems to immediately lessen. They seem to realize that something good is happening in their midst, yet, forefront in their analysis of themselves is the fact that that they still do not match up with the abilities of mother church. Michael also indicates that something genuine seems to be developing among the youth. They indicate frustration with themselves that they are not able to hold service on time, and maintain the organization and unity that they see in mother church. Looban seems to be in an awkward and potentially unhealthy position of straddling the line between two social identities.

A Matter of Oppression?

The youth feel that they should be able to imitate the programs and style of mother church. The youth indicate that this imitation of the mother church is somewhat prerequisite to being able to stand on their own as a church. The thought here is that Looban came from mother church, it is a branch off of a central root, a part of a greater whole. They have been modeled community development projects that they cannot afford without outside help. Thus, until they are able to imitate the mother church, they feel that their programs and development must be controlled by administrators from the mother church.

Once again, if Looban is going to be empowered, what will they be empowered to do? In the present model, mother church gives Looban its structure, they develop its programs and model the mother church ideal for ministry. Looban is then "freed" to follow the course that has been prescribed for them. But is this freedom at all? Sociologist Paulo Freire would define this as "oppression."

Freire asserts that there is a fascinating tendency in the dynamic struggle of the oppressed toward liberation that rather than fighting for liberation from the system that holds them, the oppressed will instead adopt the ways of the oppressors and become oppressors themselves.

The belief here is that the oppressed develop a certain level of adhesion to the oppressors. Their very structure of thinking about themselves and the greater system of which they are apart has been conditioned *by* the oppressors. Essentially the oppressed internalize the image of the oppressor and adopt its guidelines for living.¹¹⁶ Apart from this, the system of the oppressor is all that they know. Walking away from the system and doing something entirely indigenous is frightening for those seeking liberation. At the same time, the way of the oppressor is a strong social convention, thus the image of the oppressor becomes the standard toward which the oppressed strive in their development.

We can take an example from the *Kasama* relationships that were previously described. A peasant farmer, living in an *utang na loob*-driven *kasama relationship* with a landlord, does not dream of a life removed from the oppressive *kasama* system itself, rather he dreams to one day be a landlord who also has farmers working under him, who are also oppressed. This seems like liberation, but it is only a shifting of positions from being oppressed to being an oppressor. Freire argues that is it not directly the oppressor who oppresses, rather, oppression comes from a greater system of oppression of which both the oppressor and the oppressed are apart. Liberation, in Freire's terms, is being able to live outside of the system, seeking true autonomy and responsibility. If Looban must lead, it cannot be done on the basis of the blueprints that have been given to them, but it must be on their own terms.

One of the very basic elements of an oppressive relationship is *prescription*.¹¹⁷ The behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following guidelines that have been set out by the oppressor. Mother church Leader notes that Looban is capable of leadership provided that they are also educated by the mother church. They see a great benefit in modeling leadership for the people in Looban, but this raises a few questions. Looban has been given models, ideas, and guidelines from a stronger social identity. If they are empowered to lead themselves, they will merely continue on in the foreign identity which they have adopted.

¹¹⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1970), 46-47.

¹¹⁷ Freire, 47.

Freire believes that, until the oppressed find liberation, they cannot live authentically. They suffer from a “duality” or split-identity that sinks down to their very inmost being.¹¹⁸ Looban is presently “stuck” between two identities. They are Looban in a very deep sense, yet they feel that they need to be (and want to be) mother church. Looban must figure out what it means to be Looban Outreach Church for themselves. They cannot follow someone else’s blueprint. Liberation must rise up out of the oppressed and provide true autonomy and responsibility.

The youth recall that during *Ondoy* their church became something like a bustling depot or trading post with people standing around everywhere, but when the relief was gone, so were the people. The only ones remaining now are the ones who are under sponsorship. He guesses that if those sponsorships are gone, they might lose as much as half of the congregation.¹¹⁹

This bears some striking resemblance to the experiences American Missionary, Michael Duncan recorded in his book, *Costly Mission*. Duncan narrates the story of their community development mission among the urban poor of Metro Manila in 1988. The Duncans, through their mission organization provided loans and micro-enterprise financing to people living in the slums. They wanted their ministry to be “holistic” and to meet the physical and developmental needs of the community alongside of their spiritual needs. Therefore, they began simple church gatherings which met separately, and in a separate location from their livelihood ministry. Duncan notes that they did their best to keep these two ministries separate. The church gatherings were kept solely for the purpose of church alone, not livelihood or community development work.

Duncan notes that their livelihood ministries quickly gained popularity in the community. Duncan recalls that his church plants seemed to keep growing, quickly expanding beyond what their small

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 48.

¹¹⁹ “Michael,” 123.

meeting places could hold¹²⁰. However, Duncan cites a problem, he writes,

We were worried. We would sing the praise songs but it seemed there was little worship. I felt I had been preaching to myself. There was no sense of involvement in the service. We were going through the motions, doing what was expected, adhering to form, but despite the encouraging numbers, I felt that all was not well.¹²¹

Surveying the mature believers in his church fellowships, he found similar responses as what has been recorded from the youth in Looban. “There are only a few genuine Christians,” Duncan records. The members of his congregation informed him that it was *utang na loob* (a debt of gratitude). The people attended because they felt that they were indebted to attend. They asked those that they had been helping what they should do. The response: “*Stop the loans and mercy ministries!*”¹²² This came as a shock to the missionaries. Puzzled, they inquired to the people that they had been helping and found that not only were their ministries creating a mass of “rice Christians,” but it was also bringing about communal break-down. Duncan writes,

“The very fact that we had to choose one person over another when giving loans was leading to misunderstanding, jealousy, and strained relationships in the community. In other words, the social cost of all our giving was too high. Even though they were poor, these people preferred relational harmony over material gain.”¹²³

Michael notes many of the cultural implications that come along with such giving. Many of the people who have received relief from the church feel pressured to continue attending. Michael notes frustration with members of Missionary leadership who monitor the attendance of

¹²⁰ Michael Duncan, *Costly Mission: Following Christ into the Slums*, (City: MARC, 1996), 39.

¹²¹ Duncan, 40.

¹²² Duncan, 41.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 40.

those who have received support, indicating that it creates a kind of angst based on *utang na loob*.¹²⁴

Michael indicates that many of the families in Looban Outreach Church have felt pressure to attend church. Following the typhoon, around the same time that relief was being given, Leadership began a new scholarship program to help families in Looban to send their children back to school. This is a help to many families that otherwise might not be able to send their children to school. The scholarship support is only for members of Looban Outreach Church, so attendance is monitored weekly. Michael says, “If the parents miss one Sunday. They will confront them, ‘*Hoy! Bakit hindi ka nakakapag-church on Sunday?*’” (‘Hey, why weren’t you at church last Sunday?’) Michael is disappointed in the Leadership because church has become an obligation.

The youth indicate that something genuine is forming among them, yet they are discouraged to see that a large portion of their church is largely disingenuous in their attendance. Michael calls it “*binog sa pilit*,” that is, the people are “forced to be ripe.” He believes that Leadership is forcing the people of Looban into church and faith before they are ready. The people are attending not because they want to but out of social and cultural obligation.¹²⁵

It is important, at this point, to consider the interactions between the Missionary leadership and the people of Looban Outreach Church. Even before *Ondoy*, Leadership interacted with the people of Looban as outreach facilitators. Leadership refers to themselves as pastors and church planters, but they concern themselves with providing help, support, and leadership to the Looban community, in a way that an outreach would. But is Looban an outreach or a church?

It is important to consider the separate the identities of a “Church” and an “outreach.” The 2009-2013 manual of mother church’s denomination describes the General Church as a community of confessors. The Manual affirms:

¹²⁴ “Michael,” 285-287.

¹²⁵ “Michael,” 269-287.

We believe in the Church, the community that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, the covenant people of God made new in Christ, the Body of Christ called together by the Holy Spirit through the Word.¹²⁶

Beyond this definition, the constitution of the denomination states that the church “. . . organizes itself in culturally conditioned forms; exists both as local congregations and as a universal body; [and] sets apart persons called of God for specific ministries.”¹²⁷ In either of these definitions, the church’s identity is namely held in its fellowship, and ways of living and relating with one another and with God. A church is composed of people, and carries its own sense of “being.” It has its own unique identity.

An outreach is different, and features a different set of goals and ambitions. “Outreach” is mentioned three times in the denominational Manual. Each time, it is mentioned as an action that is done *by* one entity *for the benefit of* another entity. In this case, Looban Outreach Church is the entity which is being reached; they do not carry the identity of the outreach. The outreach in Looban is a part of mother church’s identity. It extends from mother church’s identity as an outreach. As long as the church in Looban is a an outreach church they will always, definitionally, be an extension of the mother church’s identity. Outreach can be done *by* a church, but being *reached out to* does not constitute that a group of people is therefore a church. Until now, Looban Outreach Church remains ambiguously identified as an outreach church.

Another important consideration here is that Looban is not reaching out for themselves. They are still being reached out to, by mother church. The outreach is an outgrowth of the identity of mother church, Looban is merely the object of that endeavor.

¹²⁶ *Manual: Church of the Nazarene*, 339.

¹²⁷ *Manual: Church of the Nazarene*, 37.

Looban Youth Leader Offers a Solution

The question now becomes, “in what ways *should* the mother church interact with the people of Looban?” The interactions of the Leadership are largely addressing the physical, structural, and administrative needs of the community. Mother church Leader’s interactions are largely focused on educating and training the people of Looban to rise above their present life situation by modeling mother church’s Leadership and encouraging the people that they can all do likewise. In both of these scenarios, low self-esteem seems to be a common characteristic among the general youth of Looban throughout their interactions with mother church. Michael feels that mother church’s difficulty in connecting with Looban is one central need that is not being addressed. He believes that real relationships and communication is key in the relationship between the two groups. Michael indicates that the social leveling that took place with his own *barkada* at mother church was a significant part in the process of lifting his own self-esteem.¹²⁸ Michael adds that, “if the people of Looban will become *barkada* with the people of mother church, that boulder [of division] will be gone.”¹²⁹

It is important, at this point, to consider the implications of this word. *Barkada* is a *Filipino* word used to describe a close, intimate group of friends. The word refers to a kind of close-knit group with whom one shares a common or equal identity. Relationships in the *barkada* are relaxed, tolerant, and guided by the principle of *pakikisama*.¹³⁰ That is, people in the group meet on equal terms and are motivated to minimize the importance of that which holds them apart—in this case, economic status and social influence.

Returning to Social Identity theory, a *barkada* is a kind of powerful in-group which is held together based upon perceived

¹²⁸ “Michael,” 332.

¹²⁹ “Michael,” 334.

¹³⁰ Neil Mulder, *Inside Philippine Society* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1997), 41.

similarities in the characteristics of the people which compose it. Groups such as this serve to increase the self-esteem of the people in the group by giving them a particular place and social identity. This would imply that, if mother church were to truly become the *barkada* of Looban, the shared characteristics that held the groups together would have to be greater than the characteristics that held them apart. Factors in the relationship such as education, social status, and personal finances would have to be minimized and the groups would have to find a shared social plane upon which they can meet.

Michael envisions strong and socially-leveled interactions between the mother-church and its daughter.¹³¹ However, many of the interactions between mother church and Looban seem to have accentuated the social and economic gap that separates the two groups. Michael suggests that Leadership might invite some of the *katatayan* (adult men) from mother church to fellowship and share testimonies with the *katatayan* of Looban. He believes that something like this would be a great encouragement to the men of Looban. He says, “If the people can be inspired, our imagination works. Then, the positive thinking and the optimism will come.”¹³² Michael indicates that, if the people of Looban will be given their self-esteem through such positive and encouraging interactions with people who see themselves as the *barkada* (or equals) of Looban, then change will come. What is interesting about the change that Michael describes is that it is not change that is prescribed from the outside. This is change that rises up from within the people of Looban, and he believes that change begins with Looban’s self-esteem.

Can Looban Lead?

The youth have demonstrated the beginnings of an identity all their own. They connect deeply with one another. They have their own

¹³¹ “Michael,” 332-345.

¹³² “Michael,” 344.

networks of support and trust that have developed among them. They lead themselves in prayer and devotions and keep one another accountable to God. However, foremost in their evaluations of themselves is the fact that they do not match up with the mother church. They still cleave to an identity that is not their own.

Michael, however, has developed a strong sense of independence apart from the mother-church. He says that his leadership style is completely his own. He takes full responsibility for the leadership and development of the youth, and does it outside of the auspices of the Missionary leadership. However, Michael still indicates a cleaving to the mother-church as well. He indicates disappointment that the youth of mother church “don’t do their part” in evangelizing the people of Looban and still hopes for mother church to be the *barkada* of Looban to aid in the development of Looban Outreach Church.¹³³ He is independent to an extent, but still relies on an external system of support.

The construction of this relationship raises a few questions. Michael wants a *barkada* with mother church, but is this a realistic endeavor? Is it possible for mother church to genuinely be the *barkada* of Looban? Or does the social situation dictate that mother church be the gracious patron-landlord who gives and supports a markedly poorer group in exchange for the loyalty of its people? If mother church would become the *barkada* of Looban, this would require a major renegotiation of their own identity in relation to Looban.

Barkada is defined in terms of mutual trust and support, it is guided by a principal of *pakikisama*. This means that there must be some sort of social leveling to take place in order for the *barkada* to function. According to Social Identity theory, if they are going to share the same in-group, they must be able to negotiate a common identity in which they share a sufficient amount of similarities. However, the stark differences in social class between the groups make this almost impossible. Mother church and Looban would have to meet on terms that do not accentuate

¹³³ Ibid, 324.

the great chasm of socio-economic differences that separate them, such as education, organizational abilities, and economic status. At present, almost all of the interactions between the two groups continue to accentuate all of these differences.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Identifying Looban

In view of their relationship with mother church, Looban's self-identity is this: Looban is poor and poorly educated. They are a progeny that is unable to live in the image of their progenitor in terms of both economics and ability. This self-identification has been largely molded by the group's interaction with mother church. The basis of their interactions has been that the mother church *has*, and Looban *has not*. Mother church *knows*, and Looban *knows not*. This implies that mother church must give and Looban must receive. Mother church must teach and Looban must learn. These are the foundational interactions of the relationship, thus these interactions quickly and readily become the very identities and realities in which the two groups interact.

While the community's poverty and lack of education may be true to some extent, these factors cannot be the basis upon which mother church understands the community of Looban. There has to be a foundation of mutual respect and trust in the ability of the indigenous to figure things out for themselves and negotiate their *own* positive and distinct identity. If mother church solely interacts with Looban on the basis of its poverty, lack of education, and inabilities, Social Identity theory affirms that this is the reality in which both groups will live.

Carl Rogers understands that human beings are multi-faceted and infinitely complex. He pioneered the person-centered approach to psychotherapy which is founded on maintaining *unconditional positive regard* for the self and the other person in relationships with people. He believes that an environment such as this creates a threat-free and fertile context for growth and development. Rogers believes that creating this kind of environment is key to creating healthy and productive relationships that are based upon a sense of mutual trust, honesty, and

acceptance.¹³⁴ People in such environments are given the opportunities and encouragement for creativity and expression of their own self-identity. People brought up in an environment such as this are given the opportunity to fully actualize themselves.

The self-actualization of indigenous leadership at Looban Outreach Church *can* happen, however it must happen independent of the mother church. Filipino self-actualization is deeply rooted in the *interdependency* of a collective group. In other words, self-actualization must begin with the “*tayo*” (Filipino collective pronoun: “we, us”).¹³⁵ *Self-identity* in a Philippine context is understood in terms of a similar interdependency of persons. “We are in this together” is the driving force behind the self and its actualization. Thus, if Looban will lead, it must happen with the church community as a collective whole. Such a notion is seen in the Philippine cultural value of *bayaniban*, which carries a distinct pride in the interdependence of the collective whole. It is important to realize that self-actualization may not likely happen with the naming of a single rogue leader (such as Michael), or by appointing a talented leader from the outside who is able to “appear” indigenous. Culturally speaking, Looban’s self-actualization must rise up from within itself as it negotiates its own identity.

Social Identity theory holds that identity is created and maintained through social interaction. People naturally organize themselves into groups with the implicit goal of achieving a “positive and distinct position for the in-group.”¹³⁶ Looban’s identity is presently spread across a broad social and economic divide, including both mother church and Looban. Until Looban can understand themselves as Looban alone, it will never develop its own positive and distinct self identity. Looban must come to a self-realization and negotiate its own identity as Looban *Church* (as opposed to Looban Outreach Church). If

¹³⁴ Rogers, Carl, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 283-284.

¹³⁵ Jamie Bulatao, *Phenomena and Their Interpretation* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992), 276.

¹³⁶ Turner, J.C. *Social Influence* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 171.

this does not happen, its split identity will continue to be an obstacle for its development.

Recommendations

The identities of mother church and Looban Outreach Church need to be separate, distinct, and respected for what they are in their own right. However, because of the dependency dictated by the present structure of the relationship, I do not believe that this kind of separation is immediately possible. Looban is not only dependent on mother church for its finances, and leadership, but also for its very identity. They understand themselves as a branch, a fragment of a greater whole. This calls for a serious (and difficult) process of renegotiating identities.

Renegotiating the identity of Looban Outreach Church may require several steps backward, and a renegotiation of the foreign church structure that is imposed upon them. There is presently a fear that, if mother church will leave Looban Outreach Church, it will fail. This might be true, to some extent. The present structure of Looban Outreach Church (its programs, administration, and facilities) is not that of the indigenous people. The structure was designed for a church that is able to meet certain social and economic requirements. It requires staff, resources, and consistent revenue in order to maintain the building, pay the electric bill, meet the living expenses of a pastor, and continue the expensive outreach programs. If Looban negotiates its own indigenous identity as a church, it will also need to renegotiate its own external structures. Looban was planted as the outreach ministry of a more affluent group of people. It was planted with foreigner leaders in mind. They can manage it, but the people of Looban cannot.

Both mother church and Looban must realize that neither identity nor liberation can be given to Looban by the mother church. These realities must *rise up* from within the people of Looban themselves to provide true autonomy and responsibility.¹³⁷ This must happen in a *deep* sense. The church must be *theirs*. Not only in its funding and its

¹³⁷ Freire, 48.

leadership, but its very identity and the actualization of indigenous leadership must be its own.

Both mother church and Looban Outreach Church must focus on what Looban does have, and what they can do, rather than what it does not have, and what it cannot do. As affirmed by Social Identity theory, Looban must establish a “positive and distinct” position for itself as a church community, which distinguishes it from other church communities. Mother church has the opportunity to greatly help Looban, by encouraging and reaffirming Looban in *who they are*, rather than trying to “pull them up” to something higher or better. They must understand each other, and themselves, as full and complex human beings, rather than interacting with the community on the basis of their social and/or economic statuses.

Economics and education are greatly useful to those in ministry, however they should not be prerequisite for leaders in the church. I recommend that mother church seriously affirm a shared belief in the “priesthood of all believers.” If someone’s life has been changed by Christ, and they have the desire and ability to assemble a community of the regenerate who meet for holy fellowship and ministry¹³⁸ then we should encourage them in that endeavor. We must seriously believe that all people in Christ are capable, because Christ makes them capable. Looban Outreach Church cannot be measured by a foreign standard.

Looban church must know deeply who they are as a people, but even more so, they must know who Christ is. Mother church Leaders must be descriptive of *who God is*, rather than *prescriptive* of how Looban church should live and act. Mother church Leaders must strongly encourage the indigenous to figure out who they are and what it means to live in the way of Christ in their own particular indigenous identity. Looban cannot be themselves and someone else at the same time.

Based on the findings of the study, I recommend that mother church be cautious to ensure that they are connecting the people of Looban to God, and not to the mother church. The daughter-church model of church planting tends to place a strong emphasis on the

¹³⁸Manual: Church of the Nazarene, 2009-2013, 37.

mother church as the source for everything that the aspiring daughter church might need. The daughter looks to the mother church for teaching, preaching, and theological insights. Rather than living like Christ, the daughter church lives like the mother church, trusting that it is a reliable source for Christian living. The danger here is that the mother church can become a kind of intermediary between the daughter church and God. Such a phenomenon is especially true in inter-socioeconomic contexts such as with mother church and Looban. It is not so much that the mother church intends to be an intermediary, but that the social positioning between the groups requires it.

This being the case, I recommend that the district add one more requirement to their list of essential characteristics for their “recognized churches.” Churches on the district should not only be capable of self-support, self-governance, and self-propagation, but that they should also be capable of “self-theologization.”¹³⁹ They must be allowed to interpret for themselves what it means to live in the way of Jesus as Looban church, in Looban’s context. Beyond this, it is important that the local indigenous context defines what it means to fulfill these four requirements, rather than allowing the requirements to function as a set of prescribed socio-economic mandates and expectations.

Lastly, It is important that mother church make a healthy separation between social and economic assistance, and church development. It is important to note that these two identities must be separate. A church is a community of faith, a body of confessors, a fellowship of believers that have been unified by their faith in God. A church is a living entity, and carries a sense of “being.” “Outreach” is based on transitive verb. There is a doer of the action, and there is a receiver of the action. There are those who are reaching out and those to whom the reaching is done. This is not a church. It is possible, however, that a church (as a community of faith) does outreach. But an outreach cannot, also, be a church. By definition, an outreach is one-way, it lacks mutuality, and cannot be a church. Outreach can be done *by*

¹³⁹ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Baker: Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), 196.

a church, but being *reached out to* does not constitute a group of people as a church.

To aspiring church planters and out-reachers, I recommend: if you want to plant a church, then plant a church; if you want to reach out, then reach out, but it is important that the two are not confused or mixed. I strongly believe that a church is capable of doing outreach, but an outreach is not capable of becoming a church. If an outreach is to ever become a “community of confessors” (a church) then it must rise up from within the people of the outreach and be authentically theirs. An outreach can touch lives, who then go on to become a church, but it is important that its identity is its own, belong to the community of confessors, those sharing in faith who identify themselves with Christ. It is from here that this indigenous faith community can reach out and touch the surrounding indigenous culture and community. In this regard, it would be helpful for mother church to withdraw from the outreach activity in Looban, so that Looban can develop this kind of identity as a fully responsible and functioning church.

I believe that it is important that we define the church as a living organism. The church is not an organizational franchise; it is people. If we define the church in terms of an organization rather than an organism, then we are apt to be more concerned with its function than its life. If the church is seen as a business, there is a strong tendency to focus more on the success of the business than the relationships of the people within it. When planting a church, we must start with people and allow them to figure out what it means to be the people of Christ in their own particular context.

Beyond this, Trueblood brings attention to what seems to be a present obsession with “marketing” the church. He describes a paradigm in which the Church is presented with banners, billboards, and advertisements, making the church appear more as a “thriving business, of which the pastor is the CEO.”¹⁴⁰ The question then becomes, if the church participates in an identity such as this what might this communicate to people living in an area such as Looban? What does an

¹⁴⁰ Trueblood, 28.

image such as this have to communicate sociologically? He notes that such a business model is an impediment to the central message of Christ.

This is why it is important that Looban break away. It must negotiate its *own* identity apart from the mother church. Until it is able to do this, it will not be able to live authentically. It will continue to suffer from a split-identity that will continue to make it dependent on the mother church.

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