



DIWANG BALAAAN/BANAL: A DECOLONIAL DISCOURSE ON PINOY SPIRITUALITY

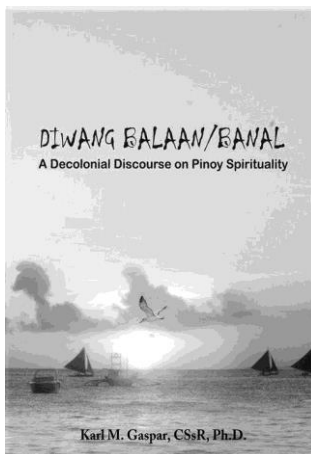
by Karl Gaspar, CSsR

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An invitation to journey - this is what Karl Gaspar's book is. It invites the reader to look at who she is, where he comes from, and where they are going.

I received this invitation by email (however else?) in Wadjemup just off the coast from Booroloo in Whadjuk Noongar country. Others in exactly the same place would have identified by its nickname "Rotto," off the coast from Perth in southwest Australia. The island was named 't Eylandt 't Rottenest ("Rats' Nest Island") by Dutch ship captain Willem de Vlamingh, who landed there in 1696 and encountered quokkas, native marsupials that look like large rats.



Behind its “smiling” mascot’s face and its billing as a quintessential Western Australian holiday destination, Wadjemup/Rottnest/Rotto has a dark colonial past. It was named “Black Prison White Playground” by Glen Stasiuk, Noongar writer and film director, in his 2014 documentary.

For a hundred years Wadjemup/Rottnest/Rotto was a prison and a graveyard for close to 4,000 Aboriginal men and boys seized from their homelands in a history only until recently systematically erased/cancelled by government-sponsored tourism.

Despite the differences in place names, the people, the animals, the explorers and colonizers, the significance of the invitation to write this foreword is not lost on me. It is the same in my homelands in the Philippines. There too is layer upon layer of names, stories and rituals that must be stripped off physical places. And there, too, are lenses to be removed or refocused to see what still dances underground, although trivialized, silenced, and condemned.

Bro. Gaspar does this in *Diwang Balaan/Banal: A Decolonial Discourse on Pinoy Spirituality*, revealing beneath the constructed present a world that pulses as it seeks to name and value itself versus Western frameworks.

He has written a book with a heart that lies at the literal center with a collection of essays that challenge paradigms of theology, philosophy, and development strategy in his beloved Mindanao. And grounded in what is now called the Philippines, he uses these essays as invitations to others across geopolitical locations and colonial differences in such lands we now recognize as Australia, Latin America, and North America.

And so, squirm as you look at the mirrors he holds up and the questions they engender. Who are you who can no longer trace your indigenous roots and yet talk about being a *babaylan*?

And what is authentic spirituality, now that we are neither this nor that? What conversations do we need to have about the Creator, Self, Neighbour, Homeland, Development? Do we dare think of a covenant with indigenous people to journey with them toward a shared and better future?

Accept the invitation. Prepare to be unsettled. Connect with others who are.

Rev. Sophia Lizares

Minister

Kalamunda Uniting Church & St Martin's Foothills
Uniting Church, Australia