
THE MANIFESTATION OF FILIPINOS' RELIGIOSITY IN THEIR ORAL LITERATURE

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Abstract: Recent studies have reported that there is a correlation result indicates that the religiosity and spirituality among Filipinos are strongly associated (Batara, 2015). This was confirmed by Jones (2012) that in a recent study carried out in the United States, it was revealed that more number of Filipinos believe in the existence of God compared to citizens of any other country. Another scholar (Miller, 2015) reported that Filipinos has been regarded as one of Asia's religious groups. As a nation, Philippines has also been considered as the only Christian in Asia. As evidenced to this, Miller added that largely the country has been dominated by more than 86 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 6 percent belong to various nationalized Christian denominations, and another 2 percent belong to well over 100 Protestant affiliations.

This paper will present the religiosity of the Filipinos' as this was revealed in their oral literature. This form of literature was evident by means of urban legends, also known that are set in an urban environment and reported as true (sometimes in newspapers) but that contain patterns and motifs that reveal their legendary character. The context of these legends may be contemporary, but the stories reflect timeless concerns about urban living, including privacy, death, decay, and vermin. These kinds of stories are a good example of folklore, as the latter refers to the traditional belief, custom and expression, handed down largely by word of mouth. Every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore.

As part of the research design, ethnographic fieldwork method was used in gathering the urban legends as the source of folk/oral literature. Critical content analysis was used for employing a qualitative research. Three phases were involved: collection and decoding of data, analysis and interpretation of data, which data from key informants in the form of a story, conversation or speech were obtained.

Findings of the study revealed that Filipinos' religiosity is viewed as having a deep faith in God. As their lives are very intimately attached with religion; this is tangible - a part of everyday life. As they ascribe human traits to supernatural Gods/beings so with the beings (mystical creatures) around whom they alternately gives them a threatening force, which paves way for their appeasing God for help and mercy. As a result, prayer then becomes an important component of a Filipino life. Innate religiosity enables them to comprehend and genuinely accept reality in the context of God's will and plan. Thus, tragedy and bad fortune are becoming accepted and some optimism characterizes even the poorest of the poor among the Filipinos. Filipinos faith in God and religiosity are then viewed as sources of strength and courage. This has also reference to his ritualistic dimensions of his faith such as the possession of rosary, recitation of sacred code, singing of religious songs, and ritualistic behaviors which include blessing of his house for good luck and to drive away evil spirits. Filipinos' religiosity is a significant facet of our national culture. Hence, Filipinos' faith in God and religiosity are viewed as sources of strength and courage.

Keywords: Filipinos, Religiosity, Faith in God, Oral Literature, Urban Legends.

Introduction: Background And Rationale Of The Study:

Literature offers a rich compendium of literary sources, which is considered an art whose raw materials are gathered from a person's experiences. These may pertain to a man's grief, love, sorrow, pain, happiness, which he expresses in his day to day living. It is a representation of life. It delves deeply into an individual's psyche and goes beyond his inner self towards his external environment.

Before, the print culture literary forms use the oral tradition as a means of transmission. Thus, primitive forms such as myths, legends, riddles, fairy tales, folk songs, proverbs, ballads and epics fall under oral literature. Students, readers and instructors identify this body of knowledge of oral literature as folklore. These forms of lore have no established author, and are handed from one generation to another by word of mouth.

A vital segment of Filipino heritage as lies in the folklore material that abounds in most Philippine communities. Books on Philippine folktales written by Filipino authors and published by Filipino publishers are not as many as one could wish. Moreover in the historical context, Manuel stressed the importance of folkloric studies. According to him, "in the Philippines where there is lack of ancient documents and writings, folklore studies could be one of the handmaidens of prehistoric studies." In the same manner, Richmond (as cited by Inte, 2003) claims that, folklore conditions history because it influences how attitudes, beliefs, customs, legends, songs, and the like of the common man were created, transmitted and perpetuated.

On the other hand, Jocano (1971) noted that in the Philippines, in spite of the richness of available data on traditional lore studies of Filipino folk literature

have not yet received the attention that their significance could warrant. In the past, folklore studies have been devoted primarily to collecting and publishing recorded texts without taking note of the sociological context from which they have been lifted. Yet, studies of folk literature as an object of the total cultural configuration may shed light on the nature of Filipino culture and society.

In the same light, modern or contemporary age paves way for the sprout of modern folklore which is known as urban legend, urban myth or urban tale, consisting of stories thought to be factual by those circulating them. Like all folklore which includes legend, urban legends are not necessarily false, but they are often exaggerated, distorted or sensationalized over time.

Despite its name, a typical urban legend does not necessarily originate in an urban setting. The term is simply used to differentiate modern legend from traditional folklore in preindustrial times. For this reason, sociologists and folklorists prefer the term "contemporary legend".

Urban legends are contemporary stories that are set in an urban environment and reported as true (sometimes in newspapers) but that contain patterns and motifs that reveal their legendary character. The context of these legends may be contemporary, but the stories reflect timeless concerns about urban living, including privacy, death, decay, and vermin.

These kinds of stories are a good example of folklore, as the latter refers to the traditional belief, custom and expression, handed down largely by word of mouth. Every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore.

It is in this light that this study aspires that like other cultural communities scattered all over the country, the Filipinos are endowed with an abundance of folk literature inherited from their ancient past. This heirloom, indeed, teems with social lights and historical shadows ranging from historical contexts to the urban legends of the people of the Philippines.

This study, foremost, would provide two essential benefits to the Filipinos. The first one has something to do with the educational value of urban legends, as it views the general living conditions, belief, and ideology of culture. It communicates the traditional learning and knowledge to the young and the uninitiated; it advises people how to act in situations and warns them against doing the wrong thing. This educational essence is dramatized by an example that is the narrative content of an urban legend.

The second one has something to do with the arousal of Filipino heritage. Having an access to these recorded stories of urban legends, Filipinos would gain new perspectives in understanding the existence

of beliefs and value systems shared and displayed collectively in the behavior of his people. This, in turn, will make him more understanding, tolerant and accepting of such cultural trait and embrace it as one of the trademarks of his being a Filipino.

Theoretical Background Of The Study: The aesthetic beauty and value of the urban legends can be best appreciated by following a set of principles and theoretical arguments that were directed by literary experts. These principles and theoretical arguments are supported by the literary theories of mimesis, mythological and archetypal motifs.

In this light that **mimetic** criticism seeks to see how well a work accords with the real world. Then, beyond the real world are approaches dealing with the spiritual and the **symbolic**--the images connecting people throughout time and cultures (**archetypes**). This is mimetic in a sense too, but the congruency looked for is not so much with the real world as with something beyond the real world--something tying in all the worlds/times/cultures inhabited by man (<http://www.ksu.edu.sa/colleges/art/eng/461-Eng/Literary%20Criticism%20Map.htm>).

On the other hand, Swenson (2009) said that critics look for the recurrent universal patterns underlying most literary works. A central concept in mythological criticism is the archetype, a symbol, character, situation, or image that evokes a deep universal response. The idea of the archetype came into literary criticism from the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. Jung believed that all individuals share a "collective unconscious," a set of primal memories common to the human race, existing below each person's conscious mind. Critic Campbell identified archetypal symbols and situations in literary works by demonstrated how similar mythic characters appear in virtually every culture on every continent.

Lastly, mythological approach to literature that seeks to identify what in a work creates deep universal responses in readers, by paying close attention to the hopes, fears, and expectations of entire cultures (http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/litgloss/LitGlosscode/litgloss_m.html). Mythological critics (sometimes called archetypal critics) look for underlying, recurrent patterns in literature that reveal universal meanings and basic human experiences for readers regardless of when and where they live. These critics attempt to explain how archetypes (the characters, images, and themes that symbolically embody universal meanings and experiences) are embodied in literary works in order to make larger connections that explain a particular work's lasting appeal.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be gleaned that the study has anchored on three principles and theoretical arguments. For without these standard

critical thinking tools it is difficult to analyze, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate this literary work of art and more importantly, understanding these approaches would help a person to determine why it is necessary to read literature.

Methodology: This study is a qualitative research which makes use of critical content analysis, the ethnographic fieldwork method was used in acquiring the urban legends as the source of folk literature. This method entails the obtaining of data from the context in which it naturally occurs or is to be derived from key-informants in the form of story, conversation, dialogue or speech.

In addition, the study employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD), wherein people from similar backgrounds or experiences were brought together to discuss a specific topic of interest to the investigator/researcher. FGD is a qualitative method. Its purpose is to obtain in-depth information on concepts, perceptions and ideas of a group. In this case, the needed data will focus on the urban legends.

Data Gathering Procedure: In executing the methods involved in this study, there were three phases observed: (1) collection and decoding of data, (2) analysis of data, and (3) interpretation of data. The first phase in this study was the collection and decoding of data, it is in this stage where the intended informants was determined through fishbowl method as determined the address of the target respondents. In authenticating the retrieval and the sources of urban legends, audio-visual recording devices – tape recorder/video camera was used in recording the interview with the research-informants. After which, the recorded interview was standardized for the purpose of a clean and well-organized presentation of the materials.

As part of the analysis of data, which served as the second phase of the study, the English version of the urban legends functioned as the primary verbal data for analysis of the study. Based on the mimetic theory, the analysis phase of the study utilized archetypal criticism in identifying the ethnic archetypes reflected in these urban legends of Cagayan de Oro, Philippines.

The third phase in this research was a thorough examination and analysis of some archetypal phases and symbols used in delineating each pattern depicted in the urban legends collected. The symbols were analyzed as they appeared in each urban legend and were examined closely as to their significance in relation to the Filipinoculture and literature.

Highlights Of The Findings: The Filipino spirit is alive and strong. The Filipino's identity is evident in the traits, traditions, and attitudes of people with a diverse and unique culture for Filipinos' sense of self governs their behavior that is deemed within the limits of acceptable social standards. Filipinos are never an exemption of this remarkable thought and behavior. This has been manifested through the analyses of Cagayan de Oro's urban legends. A Filipino persists to manifest certain characteristics which may or may not be shared with other ethnic groups around the country.

Filipinos' religiosity tops the list among the manifested cultural traits embedded in these urban legends. As a group of people, they have a deep faith in God. As their lives are very intimately attached with religion; this is tangible --- a part of everyday life. As they ascribe human traits to supernatural Gods/ beings so with the *beings* (mystical creatures) around whom they alternately gives them a threatening force, which paves way for their appeasing God for help and mercy. Delos Reyes (2002) disclosed that spirits are everywhere. As a result, prayer then becomes an important component of a Filipinolife. Innate religiosity enables them to comprehend and genuinely accept reality in the context of God's will and plan. Thus, tragedy and bad fortune are becoming accepted and some optimism characterizes even the poorest of the poor among the Filipinos. Filipinos faith in God and religiosity are then viewed as sources of strength and courage. This has also reference to his ritualistic dimensions of his faith such as the possession of rosary, recitation of sacred code, singing of religious songs, and ritualistic behaviors which include blessing of his house for good luck and to drive away evil spirits. Delos Reyes (2002) distinguishes a religious person from a superstitious man; a religious man is the one who acknowledges God as his creator and for this reason he practices goodwill. On the other hand, a superstitious man is the one who relies on the aid of God in order to achieve his desires through magic and other types of amulets. This same passion makes him blindly and that he really possesses such power. He also posited Filipinos' religiosity is a significant facet of our national culture.

As also reflected in the oral contemporary tales of Filipinos' faith is related to *bahalana* or come what may attitude, which enables him to have resignation in times of difficulties and shortcomings to the Almighty to sort things out. This attitude can result in overwhelming in confidence that everything will work out in his interest without doing anything. Filipinos often put in God, as they became certain that God will take care of them. The other seen

results of a Filipino's faith are courage, daring, optimism, inner peace, as well as the capacity to genuinely accept tragedy and death.

On the other hand, through these urban legends, another sense of Filipinos' religiosity is also manifested and this is better expressed through the reference to Fr. Bulatao's (1984) concept of *Split-Level Christianity*. These manifestations were evident in the co-equal belief of animism, on the regards of spirits inhabiting the *balit* tree and that of Spanish-Roman theology. Philippine animism is then regarded as something very feasible which in itself has already embedded and has formed part of the Filipino spirit, much more alive and resilient than the Roman stones. Hence, the animistic consciousness of the Filipino will remain in the periphery of Roman theology. Bulatao further claimed that this religious aspect of Filipinos' faith is more "form than substance," that it lacks internalization of proper moral and ethical values," that their form of "worship contains magical elements," resulting in what he categorizes as "veneer Christianity".

Religious rituals as practiced by Filipinos' is better explained by Jocano (1967) by saying that the within their cultural context, they may be described as a psychological construct which underlie the emotional behavior of the people. They make possible the psychical capacity of an individual imaginatively to take situations external to himself into his private experience in such a way that self-assurance is achieved. She further added that without these religious rites, unsanctioned by the church as they may be, the capacity of the people to have an awareness of their limitation and an understanding of the "whys" of society would scarcely develop. For the rural folks, the rituals and the basic beliefs surrounding them not only draw together all the separate strands of traditional practices and lore, but they also provide the outline upon which the people themselves may acquire a clear picture of the way their activities blend with local concepts, and an example of the manner in which the practice rites strengthen the central values of their lives.

Another important facet of the Filipino psyche is his *tu-u-tu-u* or *superstitious belief*, which is closely related to the above discussion on Split-Level Christianity. Superstitious behavior as imparted by Brunvand (2004), relates on the assumption that among others an individual relies on the beliefs, practices and behaviors based upon conscious and unconscious assumptions, usually concerned with the nature of the cause and effect. Upholding, a belief in the supernatural order above the human and natural order is another concept which describes this conviction. There can be no doubt that these beliefs will still pervade in the Filipinos' way of life. The urban legends' mystical characters such as monster

(*balbal*), evil birds (*ik-ik*, *wakwak*) and *tikbalang* (half-man-half-horse creature) and others will continue its popularity as long as its narrative circulation from individual to individual, in oral form persists in the modern society. Further, the appeal brought about by these creatures provides a fantasy element and a sheer entertainment among the urban dwellers of Cagayanon de Oro. Brunvand even claimed that urban legend is less stigmatizing as compared to *myth*, which describes things that are widely accepted as untrue. Delos Reyes presented the data that Filipinos rank highly in their belief in supernatural phenomenon which is undoubtedly due to the central Catholic doctrine of redemption. Belief in the supernatural order, however, has not erased the folk animistic beliefs since Filipinos continue to believe in fortune telling, amulets, folk hearing and magic.

The above findings also conform to Russell's paper (2013) on *Christianity in the Philippines*, where she testified that there is adaptation of Christianity to the local context - Filipinos were mostly *animistic* in their religious beliefs and practices prior to Spanish intervention. In most areas they revered the departed spirits of their ancestors through ritual offerings, and also believed in a variety of nature spirits. Such beliefs were central to healing practices, harvest rites, and to maintaining a cosmological balance between this world and the afterlife. Spirits were invisible, but also responsible for both good and bad events. Spirits could be blamed for poor harvests, illness, and bad luck generally. Yet Filipinos believed that proper ritual feasting of the spirits would appease them, and result in good harvests, healthy recovery of the ill, and the fertility of women.

While urban legends are alleged to be true since it is just plausible as enough to be believed. With these urban legends, Filipinos' have developed another distinctive behavior and that is *mahinadlukun* (fearful/frightful). This has two connotations; first it would appear inevitable that people developed fear in the course of his life. Fear of the unknown presupposes the existence of evil or devil which makes it a "real" struggle in one's life. Demetrio (1991) asserted that fear is one of man's initial experiences. For man is a creature born envired in fear and anxiety.

Conclusion: Hence, Filipinos' religiosity is aptly regarded in the concept of Split-Level Christianity. These manifestations were evident in the co-equal belief of animism, on the regards of spirits inhabiting the *balit* tree and that of Spanish-Roman theology. Philippine animism is then regarded as something very feasible which in itself has already embedded and has formed part of the Filipino spirit, much more alive and resilient than the Roman stones. Hence, the animistic consciousness of the Filipino will remain in the periphery of Roman theology. Bulatao further

claimed that this religious aspect of Filipinos faith is more “form than substance,” that it lacks internalization of proper moral and ethical values,” that their form of “worship contains magical elements,” resulting in what he categorizes as “vener Christianity”. A Filipinos’ religiosity is deemed in this level when there is the coexistence within the same person of two or more thought-and-behavior systems which are inconsistent with each other. So it is with the split-leveled person; at one level he professes allegiance to ideas, attitudes and ways of behaving which are mainly borrowed from the Christian West, at another level he holds convictions which are more properly his “own” ways of living and believing which were handed down from his ancestors, which do not always find their way into an explicit philosophical system, but nevertheless now and then flow into action.

In totality, superstition has been deeply rooted in Filipinos culture. As folklorists claimed that a nation rich in culture is equally rich with its treasure trove of magnificent mythos. There is also a sense of truth in these superstitious beliefs as a number of them tell that a howling sound at night signifies an impending catastrophe, because of some creatures have shaper-advanced senses that humans. Filipinos might not be aware but there are countless of superstitious beliefs that dominate his being from the moment he gets up every morning until he retires in his bed. There is no extent as to how many these superstitions have been associated to everyday activities. For these beliefs have effortlessly paved way into the collective consciousness, which thus created a socio-cultural norm that Filipinos must take heed. Considerably, modern society has accepted and adhered to these time-old traditions.

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