

From Disinformation to Mythification: Rethinking Historically the Mythicized Sidapa-Bulan Queer Romance

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In 2010s, the love story between Sidapa and Bulan, two oft-described as male gods, widely circulated online and eventually became a folkloric representation about the LGBTQIA+ during the pre-colonial Philippines. But in 2019 this queer mythological romance was exposed to be a hoax. However, instead of dismissing the story altogether for being a hoax, especially given the story's already irreversible circulation in popular culture today, this paper rather examines the "mythification" of Sidapa-Bulan queer romance as a case for historical rethinking.

Drawing from a bricolage of digital, ethnohistorical, and historiographical materials, this paper is divided into four sections. The first section dissects this paper's conceptual tools: the use of seemingly anachronistic categories of "queer" and "LGBTQIA+," and how these categories intersect with the concepts of "myth-making" as a sociological (and by extension, historical) phenomenon, and what came to be known as "neo-archiving" (i.e., the use of fiction in response to the gaps in history). The second section explains the paper's methodology and sources, specifically its use of four historical thinking skills in dissecting the Sidapa-Bulan myth. The third section examines the Sidapa-Bulan myth as a historical case, specifically in terms of sourcing and close reading, corroborating, and contextualizing. And the fourth section attempts to offer, albeit in broad strokes, some potential ways to move forward from the damages caused by the Sidapa-Bulan myth.

As such, this paper argues that only by maintaining transparency over its own history, that the Sidapa-Bulan queer romance, as a case of contemporary myth-making (where queer artists, authors, and allies did not merely passively consume the story, but rather actively re-define and appropriate it), can become useful and integral in rethinking and, thus, enriching the Philippine LGBTQIA+ past. But in a practical sense, this paper demonstrates how historical thinking skills can empower the public to detect, dissect, and dispel disinformation today.

Keywords: *LGBTQIA+ historiography, queer mythology, myth-making, disinformation, social media*



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0. Introduction

Claimed to be of ancient Visayan origin, the love story between Sidapa and Bulan, two oft-described as male gods, became a folkloric representation about the LGBTQIA+¹ during the pre-colonial Philippines. Tale has it that Sidapa, the god of the afterlife, lives alone on Mount Madja-as located in the island of Panay in the Visayas. The story goes that, at one point, Sidapa witnessed the giant sea dragon Bakunawa was about to devour the last of the formerly seven moons in heaven. The last moon is believed to be represented by a pubescent male deity named Bulan. Due to Bulan's gleaming beauty, Sidapa found himself suddenly attracted to the young moon god; thus, the older Sidapa prevented Bulan from being eaten by the Bakunawa. Eventually, Bulan and Sidapa are said to have lived together as lovers (see Dapanas and Dazo, 2018; Botero, Xantino, and Botero, 2021).

However, in 2019, this mythicized queer romance between Sidapa and Bulan was exposed to be a hoax. The exposé was published by Jordan Clark in his website *Aswang Project*. Clark (2019) traced the story's origin not from any historical or ethnographic accounts, but from mere fanfiction stories posted in blogsites around early 2010s. The exposé stirred debates, dividing public opinion on whether the story may still remain valid or otherwise (see kolowrites, 2019; stoicaswang84, 2020; Hot_Tailor_9687, 2022; PUP CreaTV, 2022).

Yet, instead of dismissing the story altogether for being a hoax, especially given the story's already irreversible circulation in popular culture today, this paper rather examines the "mythification" of Sidapa-Bulan queer romance as a case for historical rethinking. On the one hand, rethinking the Sidapa-Bulan myth historically can shed light to some deeper contextual problems that led to its creation and dissemination. On the other hand, a historical rethinking of the Sidapa-Bulan story may also render potential solutions toward a more gender-inclusive meaning-making about the Philippine past—be it historical or mythical.

Drawing from a bricolage of digital, ethnohistorical, and historiographical materials, this paper is divided into four sections. The first section dissects this paper's conceptual tools: the use of seemingly anachronistic categories of "queer" and "LGBTQIA+," and how these categories intersect with the concepts of "myth-making" as a sociological (and by extension, historical) phenomenon, and what

¹ The "LGBTQIA" stands for "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "transgender," "queer," "intersex," "asexual (but sometimes, "ally"), while the plus (+) signifies the inclusivity of this initialism for both other existing and future gender and sexual categories.

came to be known as “neo-archiving” (i.e., the use of fiction in response to the gaps in history). The second section explains the paper’s methodology and sources, specifically its use of four historical thinking skills in dissecting the Sidapa-Bulan narrative. The third section examines the Sidapa-Bulan narrative as a historical case, specifically in terms of *sourcing* and *close reading, corroborating, and contextualizing*. And the fourth section attempts to offer, in broad strokes, some potential ways to move forward from the damages caused by the Sidapa-Bulan myth. This paper, thus, argues that only by maintaining transparency over its own history, that the Sidapa-Bulan queer romance, as a case of contemporary myth-making (where queer artists, authors, and allies did not merely passively consume the story, but rather actively re-define and appropriate it), can become useful and integral in rethinking the Philippine LGBTQIA+ past. In a sense, at the heart of myth-making operates a balancing act between a politics of representation and an ethics of truth-telling. Ultimately, in a more practical sense, this paper demonstrates how historical thinking skills can empower the public to detect, dissect, and dispel disinformation today.

1.0. Notes on Some Concepts: Queer / LGBTQIA+, Myth-Making, and Neo-Archiving

Primarily, this study deploys the category of “queer,” as defined by Asianist Audrey Yue in its applicability in Asian contexts, both as (a) an umbrella term for the LGBTQIA+, and (b) a term for anything that disturbs heteronormativity (Yue and Zubillaga-Pow, 2012, p. 4). Hence, naming the mythicized romance between Sidapa and Bulan as “queer” intimates that their alleged love for each other resonates with what would qualify today as “gay” (i.e., romantic or erotic relations between men), and likewise disturbing heteronormative notions of love.

Nonetheless, this usage of “queer” (as well as LGBTQIA+, SOGIESC,² etc.) in both non-Western contexts and pre-modern periods always faces the charge of “anachronism.” Yet, against such accusations, this study adopts what some queer scholars argued for as a “strategic anachronism”—that is, using modern terms like “queer” in periods before such terms even existed (Giffney, Sauer, and Watt, 2011).

² SOGIESC stands for sexual orientation (SO), gender identity (GI), gender expression (GE), and sex characteristics (SC). A much later development from its earlier versions such as SOGI and SOGIE, the category SOGIESC attempts to comprehensively cover the diverse aspects of human sexuality and gender expansiveness.

Such strategy resonates with queer historian Rictor Norton's (1997) critique against the great "fear of anachronism."³ To which Norton contends that such anachronistic language not only bridges the gap between past and present, but it is also a better approach than to use historically-accurate, yet stigmatizing categories. The point being, therefore, is that the categories like "queer" or "LGBTQIA+"—although relatively "new"—undoubtedly describe realities (as well as possibilities) that were contemporary to the period where these categories are used by today's historian (Norton, 1997, pp. 127–147). This point is no different from how historians "insert" concepts and their periodization into their re-construction of the past (see Stanley, 2021).

Such contention against terms like "queer" parallels with a similar contention, but this time against the paradox of "myths." For one fundamental, yet paradoxical, understanding about myths is that they are "at once false and true" (Garcia, 2021, p. 83). And despite this paradox, myths function as a recuperative "vessel of sacred values" in bridging both premodern and contemporary narratives and experiences (Bouchard, 2017, i). As such, the making of myths (i.e., "myth-making")—albeit involves both truth and falsehood—generally tends to empower a social group by providing them a source of collective representation (Bouchard, 2017, pp. 80-85). Myth-making enables such representations primarily through a creative appropriation of folkloric materials (Garcia, 2021 pp. 85-86). In effect, myth-making produces a positive value, which comes from its subjective borrowing of metaphors and "truths," a process which is always "an intimate and personal one" (ibid.).

Moreover, giving attention to such affective aspect of myth-making corresponds to what literary scholar Erica L. Johnson (2014) called "neo-archive." Rethinking the neo-archive here rather as a process (henceforth *neo-archiving*), it then becomes especially attentive to how the affect transforms the potential of fictions onto their actual abilities to create alternative histories to fill in the gaps in historiography. Neo-archiving can thus help in explaining why the Sidapa-Bulan myth came to be. That is to say, the myth in question was invented for no same-sex love archetypes exist in Philippine mythology. In this sense, Philippine folkloric facts about Sidapa and Bulan have been creatively appropriated in order to

³Such a fear of anachronism, especially in reading historical and folkloric texts, resonates with the comment of one of this paper's anonymous reviewers (1 Nov. 2023), stating that "queerness and LGBTQIA+ categories are fairly 'new' in that other concepts of homosexuality/sociality pervaded in the communities that produced these myths."

mythicize a queer romance aimed at filling in the said void. To such an aim, the Sidapa-Bulan myth succeeded. Yet, reframing the Sidapa-Bulan myth as neo-archiving remains problematic, because neo-archiving could obscure rather than expose the myth's invention. Even more ethically problematic, however, is the neo-archiving's use of fiction to fill in gaps in history, especially knowing that history rests not on fiction but on facts. Moreover, reframing the Sidapa-Bulan case as neo-archiving may likewise be mis-interpreted to be (as if) promoting misinformation.

Nonetheless, an alternative solution may come from the Canadian sociologist Gerard Bouchard's (2017) dissection of *myth-making* (which he termed "mythification"). Sociologically, myth-making can be unpacked down to its four main components, that is: a myth is created by appropriating (1) "collective imaginaries," like folkloric materials and archetypes, which are produced by the myth's (2) "social actors." These social actors then communicate the mythicized story to a (3) "target population" who not only receives the story but may also render it with further adaptations and redefinitions. Ultimately, these processes generate (4) "power relations"—that is, how myths can be both empowering and endangering for one social group vis-à-vis another. In this alternative logic of myth-making, both the roles and responsibilities of the actual human agents (i.e., social actors) in myth-making become more emphasized (Bouchard, 2017, pp. 80-85). Thus, by emphasizing that myth-making is in itself a human-mediated (thus, historical) process, it thus underscores the need for evaluating myth-making, not only in terms of its political capacity to render representations, but also the ethical decisions and actions made by these actors.

As such, combining both Bouchard's sociological theory on *myth-making* and Johnson's concept of *neo-archiving*, this paper asks: Can the Sidapa-Bulan myth-making still be regarded as a form of neo-archiving? If so, does neo-archiving also have the tendency to be dangerous? These questions shall be addressed in the fourth sections below.

2.0. Methodology and Sources

Framed by the concepts above, this paper focuses on rethinking the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance as a case for historical rethinking. At the core of this paper's methodology, "historical rethinking" is based on the Stanford History Education Group's formulation of their "Reading Like a Historian" (RLH) method (Reisman, 2012). As a strategy for engaging primary sources in history, the

RLH method covers four historical thinking skills, namely: (1) *sourcing*, or identifying the origin, authenticity, and purpose of a historical material; (2) *close reading*, or considering the source's claims and word choice; (3) *corroboration*, or comparing multiple accounts against one another to establish the most reliable source; and (4) *contextualization*, or positioning the historical material in its period, place, and culture to interpret its deeper meanings, causality, and processes.

Nonetheless, this study re-fashions these historical thinking strategies, similar to how Culminas-Colis, Garcia, and Reyes' (2016) adopted the model. That is, this paper also combines both *sourcing* and *close reading* in its examination of the available traces of the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance. Primarily, the sources for the Sidapa-Bulan myth are mostly traced from digital materials, particularly from what Clark (2019) has qualified as "fanfiction stories" found in multiple blog accounts (see damiendavid, 2013, 2016; lights, 2015, 2016). Adding to these digital materials are the rendered aestheticized depictions of Sidapa and Bulan, often illustrated together as lovers, in various graphic art-works and curated photographs for online exhibitions (see Nañoz, 2018; Sapnu, 2021; Agocoy, 2020; Prowess Supremacy Production, 2021; Botero, Xantino, and Botero, 2021). Yet, this paper's *sourcing* and *close reading* will only cover a summary of the hoax's important details for two reasons. One is to avoid replicating the already exhaustive description of the hoax narrative itself done by Clark (2019). Two, the copyright of visual works involved in the myth-making of Sidapa-Bulan queer romance limits this study from presenting such visuals for proper close reading. Nonetheless, this paper combines *sourcing* and *close reading* with Bouchard's conceptual tools, thereby identifying the Sidapa-Bulan myth's collective imaginaries, social actors, target audience, and power relations.

Meanwhile, *corroboration* and *contextualization* are treated in separate sections. On the one hand, *corroboration's* purpose is to extract from the ethnohistorical materials the verifiable details about Sidapa and Bulan. Such details shall be mobilized to counter the collective imaginaries made about the two male deities' supposed love story. Sources for *corroboration* are derived from the early Spanish colonial records (e.g., Loarca's *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas*, 1582; Plasencia's *Costumbres de los Tagalos*, 1589; Noceda and Sanlucar's *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*, 1754), down to the early folkloric works during the American period (e.g., Henry Otley Beyer's ethnographic collection in the National Library of the Philippines [NLP], and other anthropological works of Miller [1904], Benedict [1913], Cole [1913], and Garvan [1931]) and later ethnographic studies by

Filipino scholars in the postwar period (e.g., Jocano, 1968; Realubit, 1983). On the other hand, unlike how the first three historical thinking skills (i.e., sourcing, close reading, corroborating) are directly working with historical source materials, doing *contextualization* rather involves chronological and causal reasoning skills. Such reasoning skills would require guidance from theoretical and historiographical literature, especially in reading the Sidapa-Bulan myth's deeper historical conditions. Likewise guided by Bouchard's concepts, *contextualization* further unravels the "power relations" involved in the myth-making in question.

3.0. Rethinking the Sidapa-Bulan Case Historically

3.1. Sourcing and Close Reading the Traces of Sidapa-Bulan Myth

Sourcing for earliest sources of the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance leads to neither pre- and early Spanish colonial accounts nor American-period ethnographic works. But rather, the myth in question was only traceable back to the early 2010s, specifically from stories posted in *Blogspot* (also called *Blogger*) made by two accounts, namely *damiendavid* (2013, 2016) and *lights* (2015, 2016). As what Bouchard would regard as myth-making's "social actors," both these above-mentioned bloggers appear to be mainly responsible in fabricating the Sidapa-Bulan myth (Clark, 2019).

Notwithstanding, close reading reveals how these blogs fail to prove the following Sidapa-Bulan myth's "collective imaginaries": (a) that there exists a well-documented folkloric material relating both Sidapa and Bulan in one story, be it romantic or otherwise; (b) that this story actually originated from the pre-colonial period, and; (c) that there exists a same-sexual love between two male deities in any Philippine myth.

To wit, one major flaw common across these blogs is that they fail to provide any sources for the alleged romance between Sidapa and Bulan. Instead of citing actual sources, these blogs merely employ rhetorical mystifications, so as to reinforce their claim that such love story originated from the pre-colonial period. For one, these blogs deliberately use scholarly jargons such as "pre-colonial," "Philippine myth," and even "banwa" (i.e., community). This rhetorical move suggests these bloggers attempt to mimic legitimate scholarly language. These blogs also mystify the Sidapa-Bulan myth's origins, which give off the myth a feeling of

being, as if, authentically ancient (such as “A long time ago” in English and its Tagalog-Filipino counterpart, “Noong lumang panahon...” or “Noong unang panahon...”).

Moreover, to further reinforce their invented collective imaginaries, these bloggers added multiple images with undocumented sources alongside such stories (see Figure 1). These images are clearly appropriated by such bloggers, for some of these images are recognizably depicting other country’s male deity (e.g., a seemingly Thai male model labelled in the blogs as Sidapa), if not a photograph of an anonymous child (i.e., a young boy cosplaying as Bulan) or a local celebrity (i.e., Julia Barretto labelled as Haliya). Moreover, the presence of the same images across these supposedly independent blogs indicates that these blogs are, in fact, inter-referencing (if not recycling) one another. In effect, the combination of these rhetorical mystifications, appropriated images, and inter-referential recycling contributed to the presumed credibility of the myth’s supposed pre-colonial origins. Such a presumption can be alarming, especially when its collective imaginaries were widely, yet uncritically received by the public.

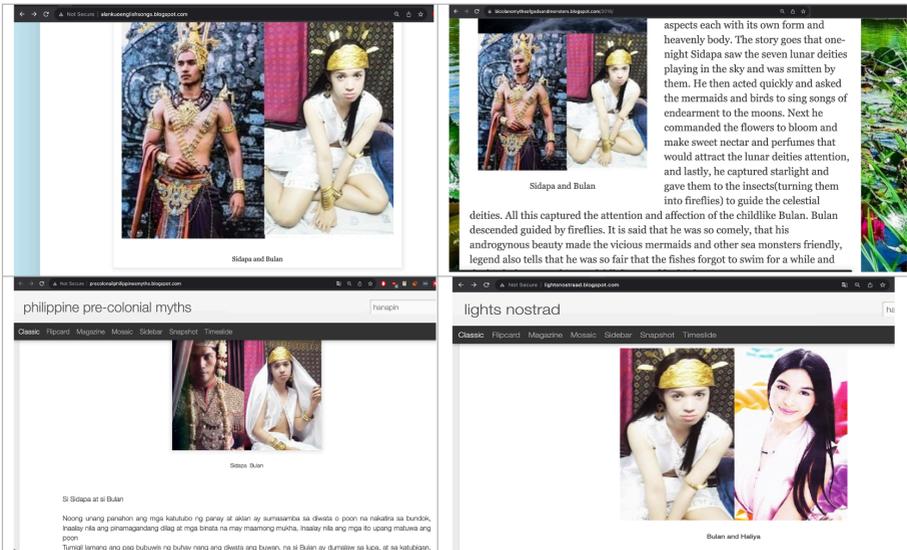


FIG. 1. Screenshots of several blogs with accompanying images allegedly representing Sidapa and Bulan (damiendavid, 2013, 2016; lights, 2015, 2016).

Unfortunately, such uncritical reception became the case with the Sidapa-Bulan hoax. A handful of artists, LGBTQIA+ allies from the general public, and even authors—some of which are also academics—became the “target audience” of the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance. For them, the collective imaginaries of the Sidapa-Bulan myth appeared to be convincing. In the following years since the story’s invention, several graphic artists (e.g., @japhers, 2016, 2017) started to experiment with their illustrations of Sidapa and Bulan, adding some aestheticized representation that proved to be widely appealing. Eventually, more artists became interested with the Sidapa-Bulan narrative and began rendering the deities with more sophisticated visual re-interpretations. Such visual reinterpretations vary, from digital drawings (e.g., Nañoz, 2018; Sapnu, 2021; Agocoy, 2020), down to styled photoshoots (e.g., Prowess Supremacy Production, 2021) and curated visuals for international online art exhibit (e.g., Botero, Xantino, and Botero, 2021). Yet it is crucial to note that given the creative license often accorded to artists, most of these artistic works do not provide well-documented citations as to the basis of their work.

Nonetheless, the growing number of visual re-interpretations of the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance not only added another layer of problem to the already problematic inter-referential recycling by and among the pioneering blogs. But also these growing and improving visuals capitalize on the increasingly “highly visually-susceptible online culture.” Scaffolding this intense visual sensibility nowadays are the Internet’s increasing accessibility, the rise of social media (such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* [now *X*], *Instagram*), and the inevitability of Internet-mediated technologies (IMTs), especially among the younger generation (De Luna, 2019; Chu and Kamal, 2008; Wang, 2016; Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). However, a clear downside of this highly visual sensibility is that online contents were quickly browsed for their visual elements. If ever online users read texts, they mostly just scan the textual elements briefly, instead of digesting the content’s substance as a whole. Such downside, in effect, became conducive for the spread of disinformation (e.g., the Sidapa-Bulan myth itself). Ergo, the synergy of these factors can help explain why a significant portion of LGBTQIA+ artists, authors and allies have been persuaded by the Sidapa-Bulan myth.

Yet, on a second thought, one may ask: were the LGBTQIA+ artists, allies, and authors involved in the Sidapa-Bulan myth-making merely “persuaded”? That is, are they, in Bouchard’s terms, merely the myth’s “target audience”? In a sense, however, these artists, allies, and authors eventually became the myth’s “social actors.” And as “target audience”-turned-“social actors,” these creative and

intellectual workers, in one way or another, contributed to the proliferation and reinforcement of the Sidapa-Bulan myth's collective imaginaries. To note, some of these audience-turned-actors are also academics. Some of them produced literary works with explicit reference to the moon deity as queer (e.g., Dapanas and Dazo, 2018), while others debated for or against myth's historicity (e.g., Chan, 2019; PUP CreaTV, 2022).

Notwithstanding, no consensus exists among these scholars as to whether the supposed Sidapa and Bulan's romance holds water. Yet more crucially, these academics and creatives' involvement undresses the "power relations" involved in the mythicized queer romance. Specifically, whether these academics and creatives are for or against the myth in question, their respective intentions seem to be toward engendering a more gender-inclusive Philippine mythology. Such mythology, thus, could function as a recuperative "vessel of sacred values" in bridging the present and the past (Bouchard, 2017, i).

Yet, despite the now-established status of Sidapa-Bulan myth as a hoax, it remains curious to track how such a deceptive myth-making came to be. To address this curiosity, one needs to uncover the conditions of possibility that produced the story in the first place. But to do so, it is necessary to firstly corroborate the elements of the myth's collective imaginaries with ethnohistorical data about Sidapa and Bulan, which data have been manipulated by the creators of the myth in question, in order to fit their invented hoax.

3.2. Corroborating Sidapa and Bulan in Ethnohistorical Materials

Corroborating the myth in question's collective imaginaries with authenticated ethnohistorical materials about Sidapa and Bulan draws from multiple points in Philippine history, namely from the early Spanish colonial records, down to the early folkloric works during the American period and later ethnographic studies by Filipino scholars in the postwar period.

The earliest known source pointing to Sidapa was the Spanish conquistador Miguel de Loarca's 1582 account, where he relates the following about the sky god Sidapa, "possesses a very tall tree on mount Mayas. There he measures the lives of all the new-born and places a mark on the tree; when the person's stature equals this mark, he dies immediately" (trans. Blair and Robertson, 1903 p. 131). Similarly, Austrian ethnologist Ferdinand Blumentrit ([1895] 2021) mentioned Sidapa, but neither of Bulan nor any relationship between the two. However, unlike these

earlier accounts, the Filipino anthropologist F. Landa Jocano, in his “Notes on Philippine Divinities” (1968) described Sidapa as rather a female (p. 179). It is curious, however, why has Sidapa become a female in this later documentation.

As for Bulan, the earliest records that named this moon deity is found in the ethnographic notes gathered during American rule over the Philippines. First among them was John Maurice Miller. In his book, Miller (1904) narrated a creation myth, said to be of Visayan origin, which mentioned a moon deity named “Libulan.” Curiously, this story recounted in Miller’s book parallels with another myth—that of Rosario Bonto (1927), a local of Tabaco, Albay (in Bikol). Her version was gathered and, thus, became part of the ethnographic collections of Henry Otley Beyer. Although nearly similar with Miller’s version, Bonto identified the Bikolano moon deity with a slightly different name, that is, “Bulan.”

Notwithstanding, not only the names of Miller’s and Bonto’s respective moon gods are similar. They both described their version’s respective moon deities as a “copper-made man.” They both, too, added that their moon deity is deemed “weakling.” Yet only Miller described the moon god as “timid.”

However, neither of Miller nor Bonto clarified why the moon god’s being a “weakling” (and timid) should matter in the myths they respectively related. Perhaps, this quality is supposed to contrast both moon gods, Bulan and Libulan, vis-à-vis their older brother, the sun. In Bonto’s (1927) version, she narrated that Bulan was needed to be “constrained” by his brother, the sun, in order to be convinced to rebel against their grandfather (p. 2). Miller recounts a nearly identical story. Only that his version, instead of “constrained,” used “induced” (Miller, 1904).

Similar to “weakling,” another Bikolano version of a similar myth related Adlao (the sun), however, as rather the “coward” one. In his version, however, Arturo M. Arcilla (1929) recounted a quarrel between two brothers Adlao and Bulan, who, after hurting each other, eventually became the sun and the moon. Their quarrel began, Arcilla maintains, when Bulan became arrogant, starting to claim superiority over his older yet much stronger brother Adlao. When Adlao simply laughed, Bulan felt belittled, and so he taunted back to Adlao and called him a “coward” (p.1).⁴

⁴Linguistically, however, even before the 1960s, becoming “weakling,” “coward” and “fearful” were often conflated into being a *bakla*. Nowadays, *bakla* pertains to a person born male but acts in ways deemed “unmanly” (Garcia, 2008; see also Abaya and Hernandez, 1998). But an ethnographic note from the 1960s described the word’s use for naming “transvestites, to

Noticeably, there is a similarity between Miller’s story about Libulan from the Visayas and Bonto’s account of Bulan from Bikol. Their similarity does not only stem from how they named the moon deity, but also from almost identical details of their respective stories. Such similarity was often alluded to—especially in online discussions—so as to support the claim that the story of Bulan from Bicol could have possibly been of Visayan origin. Another claim is that Libulan’s story simply migrated from Visayas to Bikol, which migration also corresponds to his name change from Libulan to Bulan (see Clark, 2019). Such claims, if true, would also entail that Bulan and Sidapa were likely both Visayan from the start. Notwithstanding, present pieces of evidence do not suffice to support these claims.

Nonetheless, further corroboration of other Philippine folkloric materials may perhaps help in finding any earlier reference to a moon deity that would parallel with Bulan (or Libunan). A contemporary of Loarca, the Spanish Franciscan friar Juan de Plasencia (1589) mentioned that the early Tagalogs worshipped of the moon, but without any further specifications (p. 186). Whereas in the southern Philippines during the American period, the anthropologist John M. Garvan (1931) related that the Manobo people believed that the moon was married to the sun, and the stars became their children. Similarly, Garvan’s contemporary and fellow anthropologist Fay-Cooper Cole (1913) reported that for the Tagakaolo people (i.e., located in present-day Davao del Sur) the phases of the moon are caused by the moon’s “putting on and off of her clothes” (p. 106). Curiously, in both American period ethnographic reports, the moon is gendered feminine.

Meanwhile another American anthropologist Laura Benedict (1913) recounted a curious quarrel between the Bagobo community’s sun and moon deities. *Prima facie*, this quarrel looks similar with Arcilla’s (1929) account relating a fight between the sun and moon in the Bikolano myth. But unlike in Arcilla’s

effeminate males, and even to boys who are simply less active than others in games and outdoor activities” (Sechrest and Flores, 1969, p. 9). However, an archival study rediscovered that *bakla* already carries a similar sense (i.e., as a nickname used in teasing femininely looking and acting boys) as early as the 1920s and 1930s (see Caliguia, 2021). Adding to these ethnohistorical details was the rare account of homoerotic practices found among the “*Suwa-suwa* dancing boys” of Jolo in the early half of 1900s. These boys, besides performing a flirting dance, were also noted for being younger receptive sex workers for older males (Bowers, 1960, pp. 260–262; see Santamaria, 2014, pp. 9–10). These semantic connotations that inform *bakla*, as such, might help explain as to why—between Sidapa and Bulan—it was more imaginable to characterize Bulan as a “child-like” and, thus, as the submissive one in the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance.

version (where the Sun and Moon gods are brothers), Benedict recounted that in the Bagobo myth these deities were rather husband and wife. And similar to Cole's record of Tagakaolos' folklore and Garvan's on the Manobo's, Benedict detailed that the Bagobo moon deity was also gendered feminine.⁵ The moon goddess, Benedict maintains, was said to have given birth to a daughter who, at one point, was smashed by her husband (the Sun) and became the countless stars.

Such imagining of the moon deity as feminine is also corroborated by other ethnohistorical sources, both from the periods before (i.e., Spanish colonial) and after (i.e., postwar period) these American ethnographic works. For instance, Jocano (1968) reported that the early Tagalogs also worshiped a feminine moon deity, although their moon goddess was rather named Mayari (p. 171). However, Mayari's origin might remain forever unbeknownst, for Jocano himself did not provide citation as to the provenance of this data. Yet, the name Mayari can be compared with the archaic Tagalog word *Colalaiyng*. Spanish friars Noceda and Sanlucar (1754) recorded *Colalaiyng* as what the Tagalogs "would call the moon or what they believed to be a maiden residing on the moon, as per the advice of the elders" (p. 90).⁶ *Colalaiyng* may also refer to the moon's shadows ["sombra de la luna"] (ibid.). While literary scholar Maria Lilia F. Realubit (1983) mentioned that Bikol people also worshipped a moon goddess. But contrary to Beyer's ethnographic notes around the early 1900s, Realubit likewise reported a different name for the Bikol moon deity named Haliya (p. 155).

At this point, it may be interesting to enumerate the noticeably inconsistent genders assigned to both Sidapa and Bulan, as well as to all other moon deities, in various myths where they are documented. However, within the limits of sources corroborated above, this essay could only infer these explanations as to why moon deities were gendered differently across Philippine cultural communities, thus:

⁵ Although linguistically the Bagobo language belongs to the Manobo group of languages, current scholarship distinguishes Bagobo and Manobo as two separate cultural communities (see NCCA, <https://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/culture-profile/glimpses-peoples-of-the-philippines/bagobo/#>). Likewise, in a recent conversation with NCCA's Culture and Arts Officer Roche Severo (28 Nov. 2023), Severo affirmed that in their textile research, the NCCA distinguishes the Bagobo and Manobo communities, even both communities share the same *ikat* tradition.

⁶ "Original Spanish: "Asi llamaban a la luna, o a una doncella en la luna, segun sus consejas."

1. The folkloric materials examined in this section often paired their moon deity with the sun deity, whether they be brothers or a couple. In stories where sun and moon are both masculine, the moon was remarked to be of a weaker status.

2. The association of being “weakling” to the moon deities could have been attributed to the actual celestial body’s weaker illumination. As the Bikol myths exemplified, this allusion to moon’s “weakness” might parallel with being “fearful” and “coward,” which altogether conflated in the historical semantics of *bakla* (see footnote 4.)

3. Similarly, likening the changing phases of the moon with the putting on and off of clothes, may also explain the inclination of some cultural communities (e.g., Bagobo, Manobo, Tagakaolo) to associate the moon deity more with the feminine gender. More so, the cycle of moon’s phases parallels with the number of days the female’s menstruation cycle takes.

Moreover, corroborating the respective sources about Sidapa and Bulan reveals how implausible is their mythicized queer romance in the first place. Geographically, on the one hand, Sidapa’s story originated in Central Visayas, while Bulan’s story was documented in Bikol. Temporally, on the other hand, the primary sources about the Bulan of Bikol can be traced only in the ethnographic works of Henry Otley Beyer in the early 1900s (that is, around 300 years away from Sidapa’s earliest documentation). As such, their spatial and temporal distances expose another historiographic problem for Philippine mythology. That is, if Bulan’s story cannot be traced before 1900s, then the collective imaginaries over Bulan as a pre-colonial deity would now become likewise questionable.

3.3. *Contextualizing the Sidapa-Bulan Myth-Making*

Dovetailing the insights drawn from the previous sections with the theoretical and historiographic literature, this section teases out how the myth-making of Sidapa and Bulan’s queer romance can be symptomatic of some deeper contextual problems. In a sense, these conditions, which made the Sidapa-Bulan myth possible, also expose how such myth ties both itself and its social actors to the “power relations” across LGBTQIA+ struggles, problems of disinformation in the age of post-truth, and the view of social sciences (with History in particular) on the category of “myth.”

Firstly, one of the conditions that had produced the Sidapa-Bulan myth is the increasing realization about the struggles and rights of LGBTQIA+ persons. Yet arguably the most crucial, but also the most unfortunate event that made the general public aware of the LGBTQIA+ struggle was the murder case of Jennifer Laude in 2014 (Wong, 2020). Jennifer Laude’s tragic murder became an eye-opener for the country to recognize the reality of gender-based discrimination and violence faced by the LGBTQIA+ persons on a daily basis. Jennifer Laude’s death bolstered the fight, through legislation, for SOGIESC equality (House Bill no. 4982, 2017; Senate Bill No. 139, 2022). Jennifer Laude’s death also ensued an increasing visibility of queer lives and narratives in television, films, and social media, such as the eventual popularity of Boys’ Love (BL) series and drag race competitions. Jennifer Laude’s death became part of the LGBTQIA+ community’s battle cry during the yearly Pride marches. Jennifer Laude’s death likewise coincided with a growing body of works, both creative and critical, celebrating Filipino LGBTQIA+ stories (e.g., *Libulan*, 2018; *BKL Bikol / Bakla*, 2018; *Tingle*, 2021; *More Tomboy, More Bakla Than We Admit*, 2021).

In a sense, the fabrication of the Sidapa-Bulan myth has likely emerged as a “symptom” amid these developments. However, to say so does not necessarily equate such fabrication with the above-mentioned real-world advancements fought for by the LGBTQIA+ academics, advocates, and allies. Although unquestionably improper, the the Sidapa-Bulan myth echoes an underlying desire to have an available queer representation in the realm of the mythical. It is curious, nonetheless, how the Sidapa-Bulan myth coincided with another condition, which arguably contributed to the myth’s emergence.

Secondly, the other condition that could have produced the Sidapa-Bulan myth is today’s “post-truth politics.” As chiefly characterized, post-truth politics came into being out of synergizing technological developments, such as the growing access to the Internet, social media, and digital devices. Nonetheless, the crux of the post-truth’s problem rather lies on its ideological baggage, i.e., relativism of truth. Yet, despite post-truth’s recent popularity (Oxford Languages, 2016), the term was already coined back in 1992. And, although the technological factors of 2010s materialize the defining conditions of what constitute today’s post-truth context, post-truth’s ideological roots are traceable back even to decades prior, particularly the 1980s and 1990s. Today’s relativism of truth echoes the epistemic condition of 1980s and 1990s, which is more familiarly named as the “postmodern condition” (D’Acona, 2017; Lyotard, 1984).

But why does this postmodern condition (or simply “postmodernism”) matter in the invention of the Sidapa-Bulan myth? Postmodernism’s legacy, arguably, is a crucial factor in bringing Sidapa-Bulan myth into being. For one, postmodern line of thinking introduced that truth may be relative to culture, language, or any frames of reference (Windschuttle, 2000). Postmodernism’s being open to multiplicities of possible meanings, playing around the boundaries of facts and fiction, and its “incredulity to grand-narratives” (Lyotard, 1984) became crucial tools in the theoretical arsenal of many academics. Such benefits of postmodernism were true, especially within literary and cultural circles, and specifically among specialists in gender, sexuality, and queer studies (see Butler, 1990; Traub, 2013; Blasius and Chu, 2021). However, these factors also hint as to why a significant portion of these academics (working under the varying degrees of postmodern influence) could have been convinced by the Sidapa-Bulan myth. Simply put, postmodern-influenced thinking tends to privilege deconstruction even without prior evaluation of sources. In extreme cases, even source evaluation itself has been discarded by postmodernists (see Menon, 2008; cf. Traub, 2013).

Thirdly, such problems about both post-truth and postmodernism become more apparent, particularly by looking at how the term “myth” has become synonymous to falsehood, especially as used by social scientists. Social scientists often associate myths with illusions, deception, and outright disinformation (Bouchard, 2017, p. 5). In Philippine historiography, the term “myth” became an anathema used in blaming earlier historians for their supposedly anachronistic insertions of concepts into the past (see Stanley, 2021), such as mythicizing a hero (see May, 1996) or inventing of categories (see Woods, 2017). In more concrete terms, myth-making is blamed for the widespread “red-tagging” of politically-articulate citizens, the popularization of the “Tallano gold” hoax, as much as the false nostalgia over Marcosian dictatorship as a “golden age” in Philippine history (see Punongbayan, 2023; Guiang, 2022; Posetti et al., 2021; Vera Files, 2018; Bautista, 2018). Thus, this negative connotation carried by the category of “myth” is deeply echoed within the political and ethical dimensions of many social science disciplines, particularly in History.

Politically, the noticeable refrainment among professional historians to discourse about LGBTQIA+ topics resulted in a yet limited historical writings about Philippine queer past penned by actual Filipino historians. To with, most historical works about Philippine LGBTQIA+ were written by scholars outside the discipline of History. Historians’ refrainment, although one could not help but

merely infer, was perhaps because of the relative dearth of historical evidence about the specifics of past queer lives. This dearth of evidence thus entails a recourse to approaches and sources deemed unconventional for historians, such as reliance to theory and historical imagination (see Stanley, 2021). Likewise, this condition resulted in a limited knowledge as to the spaces occupied by queers in Philippine history. In a sense, the limited participation among Filipino historians exposes a persisting politics within the historical profession, where LGBTQIA+ narratives remain in the margins of the nation's history.

Such a condition produced an uneven representation of queers in the Philippine past. To date, most information about the Philippine queer past rest on a limited scope. The precolonial period echoes the narratives of the babaylans (i.e., shaman-priestesses). The shamans whose gender would resonate with today's trans women were called *asog* among the Visayans and *bayoguin* among the Tagalogs. From the 16th through the 19th centuries, Spanish colonialism transmogrified the *asog* and *bayoguin* onto sinful *hermafrodito* and *hombre maricon*.⁷ In the early 20th century under American colonialism, the gender and sexually non-conforming Filipinos were reframed as cases of perversions. And around the post-colonial decades of the 1960s and 1970s, they became medicalized as homosexuals (Tan, 1994; Garcia, 2008; Suarez, 2017; Caliguia, 2021, 2023). Moreover, most studies on the LGBTQIA+ history focus on queer figures whose gender and sexual representations would parallel with today's notion of bakla. (It should be noted that bakla, as well as its counterparts in other Philippine languages, can be roughly translated to "gay men" and/or "trans women.") While little has yet been researched on lesbian-queer-trans histories. Thus, there remains a call for the Philippine historical discipline to open its doors for Filipino LGBTQIA+ scholarship, which may not only enrich and expand Philippine historiography, but also balance the discipline's uneven politics of representation.

Ethically however, this refrainment among Filipino historians to discourse about LGBTQIA+ past could have also contributed as to why the Sidapa-Bulan myth has gained its persuasive force. For among social science and humanistic

⁷ Both the Spanish terms *hermafrodito* and *hombre maricon* at the time resonate with the notion of "effeminate man." Although in European, the term *hermaphrodite* was rather referring to a person "who has two sexes" [*qui a les deux sexes*] (Sobrin, 1721, p. 288). It remains uncertain if such sense of *hermaphroditism* as "sexual dysgenesis" was already known in the Philippines at the time, for Noceda and Sanlucar (1754) only provided "*gallo como gallina*" [i.e., hen-like rooster] and "*binabayé*" [i.e., effeminate] as *hermafrodito*'s synonym and translation, respectively (p. 81).

scholars, historians are arguably the most equipped with fact-checking tools (i.e., external and internal criticism of sources), even before the term fact-checking became popular in recent years. Philippine historiography provides a number of antecedents to this ability of historians. The most exemplary, perhaps, is how the historian William Henry Scott (1992) had detected fictitious accounts, which historians before him used to believe as credible primary sources in Philippine history. Historians' valuable skills on source criticism could have benefited the detection of the Sidapa-Bulan myth-making during its earlier phase. Therefore, this case of Sidapa-Bulan myth's deception poses a strong ethical call, not only for historians but also for all academics and the wider public, to always interrogate the provenance of queer myths and histories despite their promising representational and reparative possibilities.

4.0. (Potential) Ways to Move Forward

Rethinking the Sidapa-Bulan myth-making historically undresses the dangers of disinformation in this post-truth period. And in the face of the hoax's already irreversible circulation in popular culture today, Sidapa-Bulan myth's case in particular thus offers some historiographic insights toward a more gender-inclusive meaning-making about the Philippines' queer historical and mythical past.

Returning to both Bouchard's sociological theory on *myth-making* and Johnson's concept of *neo-archiving*, here it is asked: Can the Sidapa-Bulan myth-making still be regarded as a form of neo-archiving? If so, does neo-archiving process also have the tendency to be dangerous? Answers to these questions can be both a yes and a no. Yes, on the one hand, because regarding myth-making as neo-archiving may create confusion. Particularly, not only that myth-making (such as the Sidapa-Bulan case) may capitalize on its target population's longing to fill in a void in their queer past. But also, such a myth-making manifests alongside other forms of disinformation and falsehoods in this period of post-truth politics. No, on the other hand, because myth-making may still be regarded as a mode of empowerment. Using myth-making's productive potentials remains beneficial in producing alternative narratives for the marginalized peoples such as the LGBTQIA+ Filipinos, present and past. This point is especially true when historical data are relatively few. In short, reframing myth-making as a form of neo-archiving may highlight how it can still serve a recuperative purpose in restoring a sense of past-ness; yet a past-ness that is never lost, because it never was a fact.

Ergo, in the face of the Sidapa-Bulan myth-making problem, what else can be done? The present essay, although in broad strokes, offers potential solutions, thus: Firstly, one can revisit the existing literature on Philippine folklore and re-track the possible queer spaces. One can also work on folkloric materials which queer vestiges are already preliminarily sketched, if not verified, by scholars. Examples of which are Lacapati, the fertility deity whose sex was often debated as whether female or intersex, and Bathala, the supreme deity who was described as at once both feminine and masculine. (The inferences made at the end of this essay's *Corroboration* subsection demonstrate such potential.)

Secondly, researchers and students of LGBTQIA+ history must revisit previous studies, especially the pioneering ones, and reevaluate the scaffolding of the latter's scholarship. One may be surprised that some of the established claims in the current LGBTQIA+ historiography are, in fact, merely inferred (if not "mythified") details. Such are the cases of Tamblot (Medina, [1630]1893) and Sumuroy (Blair and Robertson, vol. 38, 1909, pp. 102-127), whose alluded transgendered-ness are not explicitly mentioned in the actual primary accounts, but rather resulted from historians' inferences out of corroboration with other existing accounts about transgender shaman-priestesses at the time. But for now, contemporary artists, such as Bunny Cadag's embodiment of the babaylan archetype (Guerrero and Wong, 2022), draw inspirations from the ongoing conversations between pre-colonial shamanism and trans-ness.

And thirdly, a more critical yet also controversial solution is this: Instead of dismissing the Sidapa-Bulan myth as a mere fanfiction, it may be more proactive to simply accept it as a product of modern-day *mythification*. This potential solution does not only recognize the facticity of Sidapa-Bulan's invention, but it also respects the collective agency of the wider queer community who engages with the myth. Acknowledging this agency entails a *reframing* of how the queer community (of artists, academics, advocates, et al.) can be perceived. That is, the LGBTQIA+ community and allies—rather than being mere passive recipients of deception—have instead creatively adapted and redefined the Sidapa-Bulan myth. Yet only by maintaining transparency over the myth's history, that LGBTQIA+ artists, authors, and allies can re-appropriate and, thus, recuperate the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance as LGBTQIA+ community's very own.

5.0. Conclusion

By rethinking the mythicized Sidapa-Bulan queer romance historically, this paper unraveled how “myth-making” should balance, at once, both politically empowering and ethically endangering possibilities. Empowering representations for the LGBTQIA+ community can emerge through myth-makings. Yet myth-makings may also endanger the same community if myth’s provenance is deliberately obscured. As such, at the heart of myth-making operates a balancing act between a politics of representation and an ethics of truth-telling. Therefore, only by liberating the Sidapa-Bulan myth from all its falsehoods that its true potential can be realized. Specifically, by maintaining transparency over its own history, the Sidapa-Bulan queer romance, as a case of contemporary myth-making (where queer artists, authors, and allies did not merely passively consume the story, but rather actively re-define and appropriate it), can become useful and integral in rethinking the horizons of a much richer Philippine LGBTQIA+ past—be it the historical or the mythical. Ultimately, in a more practical sense, this paper has demonstrated how strengthening historical thinking skills can empower the public in detecting, dissecting, and dispelling disinformation today.

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Acknowledgment

My sincerest gratitude to Prof. Jesus Federico C. Hernandez, the CSSP Folklore Studies Program coordinator and my professor in historical linguistics, Prof. Dr. Soledad Natalia M. Dalisay and Prof. Noreen H. Sapalo, the issue editors, and the two anonymous reviewers for their generous and trenchant comments. I also thank Dr. Raul Roland R. Sebastian, our dean in the PUP College of Social Sciences and Development for his encouragement, as well as Roche Severo, NCCA Culture and Arts Officer, Gregg Alfonso G. Abbang, Researcher II of National Museum's Archaeology Division, and Prof. Sherrenne De Amboy, PUP Department of History, and Rafael Pamplona for their insights regarding Philippine cultural communities.