

building banwaan



When the Folklore Studies Program was established under the leadership of Dean Francisco Nemenzo, Jr. in 1980 at the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)—the precursor of the current College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (CSSP), College of Arts and Letters (CAL), and College of Science (CS)—one of its objectives was to promote the study of folklore through various projects and initiatives. The program was envisioned to serve as a hub that will provide space for scholars from here and abroad to come together, exchange ideas, and conduct research on themes relating to Philippine folklore.

But what is folklore? One of the challenges to folklore studies is determining its identity. In some universities, folklore and folkloristics deal with matters that may be categorized otherwise as subjects for investigation in cultural anthropology. Other universities focus mainly on oral literature, therefore classifying folklore with literary studies. Some universities consider folklore as a study of antiquity. More recent suggestions prefer folklife instead of folklore because the latter is regarded as inadequate and also archaic and colonial when applied to non-Indo-European cultures. While these various definitions and classifications may be viewed as a challenge in establishing the identity of Philippine folklore, the multiple interpretations or the lack of a canonical definition allow us to explore, locate, and contextualize what folklore and folklore studies mean to us. It allows us to define folklore on our terms and research and consider categories such as *kaalamang-bayan* and *dunong-bayan* as core organizing concepts of Philippine folklore. It provides us the opportunity to develop a theory of folklore based on Philippine voices and experiences.

Oftentimes folklore is regarded as quaint, unsophisticated, and peripheral. Reframing this view and the notional definition of folklore as a collection of traditions and beliefs of the rural to one that refers to accumulated meanings learned through common experiences, community-specific struggles and innovations will prove essential in our attempts to understand our identities and

place as a people. It will also allow us to see connections, not only with other communities in the archipelago, but also with the larger Southeast Asian and Austronesian communities.

As a field of study, what makes folkloristics different from related disciplinary fields is that it is always transdisciplinary. It can be literature with psychology, linguistic diachrony and phylogeny, or kinesiology and culture history. The possibilities for multidisciplinary investigations are numerous and the cross-disciplinary collaborations may prove beneficial to disciplines that have long been in isolation.

It is hoped therefore that the Folklore Studies Program can provide a space and facilitate these multi-disciplinary collaborations and exchanges through its various activities and projects. One of these projects is a journal of folklore. This journal is envisioned as a space for connections, explorations, and dialogues on themes that have been traditionally classified as folklore and topics that may not be considered folklore notionally but offers a reimagining and recontextualization of folkloristics in the Philippines.

We have decided to call the journal *Banwaan* because it reflects all the things that we imagine for this journal. *Banwa*, the root word of *banwaan*, is a ubiquitous and persistent term within the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family. The term and its cognates are found in various languages in the Philippines such as Itbayaten, Pangasinan, Kapampangan, Buhid, Cebuano, Subanen, to mention a few. It has cognates in languages that are genetically related to Philippine languages within the Malayo-Polynesian group such as Iban *menua*, Toba Batak *banua*, and even in the Oceanic languages such as Tongan *fonua*, Samoan *fanua*, and Maori *whenua*. The term was inherited, retained, and has a wide distribution within the language family. Diachronic linguists reconstruct the ancestral Proto-Malayo-Polynesian form as **banua*. However, the word has varied meanings. In some languages, it means a town, a village, a community, or a settlement. In others, it means a landing place or a port. The term also refers to the sky and the heavens, and even the underworld. The complexity of the semantics of the term points to a category of space that encompasses not only the land or the village itself but all spaces—physical and spiritual—needed to support the life of a community. It is no wonder that in some Oceanic languages, the cognates of *banwa* have gained an additional meaning, through metaphoric extension perhaps, of “placenta.”

Banwaan, a common form in languages like Bikol, has added what may be a locative suffix [-an] to the root. What may appear to be an unnecessary redundancy of adding an affix that expresses location (a place where x happens) to a root that is a location begs reconsideration of the already complex semantics of the term. It seems to indicate that *banwa* is not just a space that includes the physical and spiritual spaces as mentioned above but it is also something that is performed. *Banwa* then is a category best considered as a non-binary space where the support for the life of a community is performed. With this in mind, it is hoped that the journal will not only be a space for ideas but also a place where the community is built and performed; a space of folklore and folklife.

There are three articles in this inaugural issue. These were papers presented at the second *Pagdiriwang* International Conference hosted by the Folklore Studies Program in March 2021 on Christianity and Popular Devotions to commemorate the 500th year of the introduction of Christianity in the Philippines. The conference focused on the transformations and incorporation of Christianity and popular devotion in the cultural and social lives of local populations; a conversation about faith that has been localized and contextualized through intimate and collective acts of devotions.

Ma. Crisanta Nelmidia-Flores' article titled *The Folk in Filipino Catholic Christianity* adds her voice in the conversation that surrounds the idea of Folk Catholicism. Framing the current view using syncretism and inculturation, she interrogates the (possibly) unintended bifurcation between the folk (pagan) and western (Christian) in earlier studies as she problematizes the folk in Filipino Folk Catholicism.

The conversation continues in the article *Vernacular Religiosity and "Grace" in Bicol Christian Devotion*, written by Jazmin B. Llana. In the article, Llana investigates conversion and inculturation and the surfacing of vernacular religiosity and the laicization of grace as exemplified in the *dotoc* of Bicol, a devotion to the Holy Cross.

The third article in this issue, Mary Josefti C. Nito's *Folk Devotion in the Waterscape of the Pasig River: The 1653 and 1748 Fluvial Processions of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* analyzes the detailed descriptions of two fluvial processions of the Our Lady of Antipolo as documented by Pedro Murillo Velarde, S.J. The article shows the importance of the communal performance in these fluvial processions

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along the Pasig River, a cultural-spiritual space, in the expression and articulation of popular devotion and inculturation in early Spanish colonial Philippines.

These articles are just the beginning of our *banwaan*. Starting in 2022, we plan to come out with two issues per year, one in June and another in December. After 41 years of existence and multiple attempts to establish a journal, the Folklore Studies Program finally launches its journal's inaugural issue.

Welcome to Banwaan.

JESUS FEDERICO C. HERNANDEZ

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