

folklore, gender, and meaning in philippine society



Folklore or folklife has always been part of our daily lives. Growing up we were told about legends, epics, and folktales. Tales such as that of Maria Makiling, origin myths like Si Malakas at si Maganda and stories that explain things and events we often encounter as we go on with our daily life activities. That is why we have narratives that explain why the pineapple has many “eyes” or why the lizard makes its distinctive “tuko” sound at dusk. There are also regional epics similar to *Biag ni Lam-ang* in Ilocos and the *Hudhud ni Aliguyon* in Ifugao. Folklore includes not only tales, epics, and myths but also proverbs, riddles, songs and ballads, dances, games, traditional crafts, rituals, and festivities.

Folklorists, like for instance Alan Dundes (2007), argue that in folkloristics, it is important to not only analyze the text but also to probe into the context in which folklore is situated. Examining the context reveals not only the significance of folklore in the lives of its bearers but also how it mirrors societal norms and values like for instance those associated with gender. It may also reinforce gender norms thus, rationalizing the dominant power dynamics among the genders (Moran, 2019). The functionalist perspective supports the view that folklore socializes, especially the younger generations, to the norms and values of a society (Bascom, 1954) and to reproduce and reinforce such values to maintain the status quo (Gilman, 2018). De Luna’s contribution to this volume accentuates the gender power dynamics in the lore of consent in the myths of Maria Makiling and *The Girl who Turned into a Fish* as well as in 3 other contemporary narratives associated with consent in sexual harassment. In all five tales, De Luna interrogates how folktales reinforce the role of women as the subaltern. Landicho’s article on the other hand, shows how women associate with Mary the mother of Christ in the Catholic religion and, possibly, with the virtues of the virgin as well to uphold archetypes of femininity. As devotees of the virgin, women’s role as *kanturas* during festivities for the *Our Lady of Caysasay* excludes the men. In contrast, the *traslacion*

during the feast of the Black Nazarene is participated mostly by men, though there are already some devotees who are women. Thus, festivities, rites and rituals involve gendered performances.

In establishing the text and context of folklore, it is vital to demonstrate the dynamic nature of folklore. Folklore evolves to signal shifts in the broader societal context. It can serve as a platform for subverting norms (Nenola, 1999). Folklore as an instrument of contestation is evident in the Chinese legend of Hua Mulan. Originally a ballad, it tells the life story of Mulan who was born as a woman but was forced by circumstances to live a life of a man in ancient China. Several variations of the ballad of Mulan exist in several localities in China. Emerging narratives that redefine traditional roles is evident in Caliguia III's article on the Sidapa-Bulan queer romance. While Caliguia III contends that the tale is a hoax, he also proposes that the emergence of the tale within contemporary social circles is evidence of the attempt to achieve certain ends such as possibly enriching the Philippine LGBTQIA+ experience through a redefinition and appropriation of folklore.

Folklore as part of our everyday lives entrenches dominant gender paradigms. Through folkloristics, gender norms, roles and expectations are decoded and reveal significant underlying cultural structures. On the other hand, folklore can question existing dominant paradigms and reflect evolving social norms such as those of gender. In this instance, folklore serves as a vehicle for social change. Folklorists believe that change is inevitable for folklore to remain relevant and for its continued existence.

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