

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

### Folklore and Media

“Folklore” is defined as traditional learning (“lore”) of the common people (“folk”) who are bound together by the same language and/or culture. It encompasses, according to Filipino folklorist Damiana Eugenio, “all kinds of oral literature, their arts and crafts, customs and beliefs, games and amusements, their magic and ritual.” This traditional knowledge is handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth or by constant exposure of the young to the practices of their elders. In the Philippines, folklore is almost always automatically associated with the way of life of Filipinos who live in the rural areas which have not been substantially changed by modern culture prevailing in urban centers of the archipelago.

But are the concepts of “traditional” and “modern” really mutually exclusive? Is the folk culture of the provinces and barrios essentially different from the “popular” culture that prevails in the big cities and town centers? If the questions were asked some 50 years ago, the answers would probably be in the affirmative. But in 2009, the replies would definitely be a resounding “no”. For not only has modern urban culture made significant and irreversible inroads into the most distant towns of the country through the educational system and, more potently, through the print and electronic media; but also, and in a reverse movement, the rural folk from all over the archipelago have over the last century migrated in huge and regular waves to the urban centers in search of jobs and better living conditions. These provincial folk have necessarily brought their beliefs, customs, and forms of expression with them, strengthening or reviving whatever elements of folk culture survived among the city-bred and educated who were most probably raised by servants and grandparents steeped in folk culture and beliefs. Proof that folk culture lives in town and country is the persistence of the belief in *aswangs*, the flying creatures of Philippine mythology whose appearances continue to be reported in city tabloids, as well as in community newspapers.

There is no doubt that folklore is alive and well and living in even the most urbanized centers, informing the daily lives of city-dwellers, whether through the rituals of folk Christianity (as seen in the devotion to the Quiapo Nazarene) or the skirmishes of rival tribes (as seen in the gangster wars of Tondo) or the feudal practices of political dynasties (as seen in national and local elections) or the content and forms, the worldview and values of the programs and projects purveyed by the

print and the electronic media. This issue of *Plaridel* focuses on the complex relationship between folklore and media, discovering and analyzing the many ways in which folklore has appeared in or influenced the media and assessing the negative and positive ways in which the media has used folklore.

Far from being museum pieces for academic study, folk literary forms have been resurrected in new configurations by the different media. Patrick F. Campos argues that the fantasy adventure film series of *Enteng Kabisote* are modern epics because they contain the ethnoepic's traditional themes, concerns, and characteristics. For his part, Alvin B. Yapan analyzes the same phenomenon, the fantasy adventure, but this time in the popular television series called *telepantasya*, like *Encantadia* and *Super Inggó*. Yapan explains that the elements of fantasy in these TV series are borrowed from Western movies like *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, where the world of fantasy is totally divorced from the world of the real. This contradicts the traditional concept of *kababalaghan* (the mysterious), which "surprises" (*gitla*) because the folk imagination believes that that which is different from reality is real and impinges on one's existence. In the third article, Christine S. Bellen focuses on the stories of Lola Basyang written by Severino Reyes from 1925 to 1942, many of which are based on popular folktales of his time. Bellen describes how the original stories were adapted to radio and then to film in the pre-World War II era, and then later published as a series of picture books before they were adapted to theater by the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), to dance by Ballet Manila, and to radio again by Jesuit Communications. Bellen discusses the changes required by each adaptation, showing how the stories continue to be enjoyed more than 80 years after their first publication.

Folk beliefs survive to our day, but in new contexts and with slightly different rationales. Jema M. Pamintuan analyzes the prize-winning video game *Anito: Defend a Land Enraged* produced by the first game developer in the Philippines, Anino Entertainment. According to Pamintuan, this "role-playing game" (RPG) which uses folk concepts like *Anito* (spirits of ancestors), folk instruments (e.g., *agong* and *kulintang*), and folk costumes (e.g., native Filipinos of the 16<sup>th</sup> century), succeeded in the West because it mystified the historical experience of 16<sup>th</sup> century Maroka/Philippines and promoted the illusion that the player gains access to the "cultural other" by mastering the game. On the other hand, the interview with anthropologist Michael L. Tan by Danilo A. Arao explains among other things, how folk beliefs/stories continue to proliferate in

the city as urban legends because they embody ways of expressing the common people's anxieties and fears (e.g., of death, rape, HIV, the night). The belief in *aswangs* today, for example, may therefore be seen as an expression of the contemporary male's fear of strong women who are perceived as a threat to patriarchy.

The folk have for centuries evolved various mechanisms for coping with the phenomena around them in order to prevail over those that threaten their lives or well-being or to strengthen the unity of the community and promote social harmony. One ancient way by which the folk have "tamed" their environment is by creating myths or legends that embody their dreams and aspirations. In ancient times, folk ancestors of present-day Filipinos created ethnoepics which sang the glorious adventures of an ethnic hero who championed the ethnic group's cause against their tribal enemies. Such were the superheroes Lam-ang of the Ilocanos and Bantugan of the Maranao. In contemporary Philippines, these ethnic heroes have been replaced by national icons, whose feats and battles against the oppressors in Philippine society are dramatized in action films that may be seen as episodes of the modern epic. Arminda V. Santiago reviews Alfonso B. Deza's book on the biggest mythical icon of Filipino *bakbakan* movies, Fernando Poe Jr. Titled *Mythopoeic Poe, Understanding the Masa as Audience Through the Films of Fernando Poe Jr.*, the book shows how FPJ became an icon because the masses saw and accepted him as one of their own and because they saw in him the savior who could eliminate by himself the problems they faced in real life. Myth-making too, but on a larger scale, is the focus of Joseph T. Salazar's *Media and Myth-making in Contemporary Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia*. Salazar explains that each of the countries have used the myth of nationalism in commercial advertising (Philippines), in the films of the *Reformasi* era (Indonesia), and in the Multimedia Super Corridor (Malaysia) in order "to establish the modern order". However, the use of local practices in the discourse of modernity only succeeds in posing a "serious threat to the very fabric of the local cultures in the region". Finally, another folk way of coping with enemies, i.e., through tribal battles, lives in the urban setting of Tondo where gang members use savage weapons to erase each other's tribe/race. Fernando A. Austria Jr. reviews Jim Libiran's award-winning film, *Tribu*, which he says is as real and as gripping as a news story, although "it begs for an in-depth investigative report to make sense of and give meaning to the complexity that Libiran represents in his film."

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No doubt folklore and folk culture are very much present in modern media and urban society. But it is also clear that media still have to learn how to use folklore in a positive manner. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency for the different media to use folklore for sensationalism, in order to sell tabloids (e.g., *aswang* sightings) or horror movies (e.g., *Shake, Rattle, and Roll I-VIII*) or telenovelas (e.g., *Da Adventures of Pedro Penduko*) or video games (e.g., *Anito*), unmindful that in this way media are only using and propagating folklore's "dark shadow". But a careful understanding of the meaning of folklore in its original context can reveal the many ways in which folklore can benefit a young nation like the Philippines. For one, it is folk culture that can indigenize the media which were all introduced from the West. This is exemplified by the way radio, as American gadget, was Filipinized in the pre-war and war years with the airing of Filipino folk songs and the dramatization of Filipino folk stories. This is the theme of Elizabeth L. Enriquez's book, *Appropriation of Colonial Broadcasting: A History of Early Radio in the Philippines, 1922-1946* which is perspicaciously reviewed by Ricardo T. Jose. Moreover, as Michael L. Tan points out in the interview already mentioned, folklore can provide sources and materials for evaluating and interrogating contemporary customs and values. He points out that the Panay folk goddess, *Alunsina*, who defied her husband *Tungkung Langit* by insisting on going down to earth to create the trees and flowers, is a strong role model for contemporary Filipino women who are trying to empower themselves and overthrow the patriarchy. Tan further argues that local folklore, especially folk literature, should be preserved by scholars, disseminated by teachers, and propagated by the media because ancient folklore provides and invests contemporary Filipino culture with an identity of its own, distinct from any other nation on earth. As Tan puts it, "If you don't keep them (folklore) alive, you lose them. Remember that when we lose words, stories, and riddles, we lose part of ourselves."



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