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Of women and monsters: A case study of Philippine creature urban legends

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Abstract

Folklore has always been a part of people's lives, making it an all-encompassing body of culture which persists to exist from pre-industrial times even up to this day (Barber, 2006). Part of its persistence is the values it carries, which have shaped and helped us make sense of the world around us. By purposively selecting texts with the most read counts in a cyber archive, this paper aims to understand Philippine urban legends from a segment of texts archived and circulated online. Employing the structuralist framework by Leach (1973) and folktale category by Propp (1958), it aims to identify forms, motifs, and functions embedded in each creature discoursed in the urban tales. Results revealed that creatures are confined to the *Aswang*, White Lady, and *Diwata* tropes which are mainstream figures in Philippine urban legends. Motifs reinforced a gendered image attached to each monster which consequently led to men as victims and viewed as objects of hostilities, wherein the employment of palette was effective in evoking the intended effect in an urban horror tale. Consequently, these motifs justify the function they play, wherein each is discursive towards social and justice issues, including ecocritical concerns. It can be concluded that the internet as an archiving space is not an enemy of folklore but a critical factor in its diffusion and central propagator of our collective consciousness as Filipinos. Furthermore, it is recommended that expanding the scope of creatures and the amount of corpus to be included in the analysis will provide an array of findings that will reflect more of our rich folklore and literary traditions.

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The discussion within folklore studies regarding modernity vis-à-vis folklore has long existed, where concerns and anxieties about the modern roles that folklore plays in this world are significantly hyphenated. The discourse of storytelling has gone a significant evolution from print to visual texts, and such can be instrumental in the propagation of oral narratives, particularly urban legends. Retelling urban legends over time ensure they become part of a public record. In this modern age, true to digitization, the immediacy of our thoughts and actions, which we often translate into narratives, is prevalent (McLuhan, 1962). The infinite possibilities that media and storytelling have revolutionized the process of cultural production, including the creation of literary texts, particularly contemporary legends or urban legends.

Urban Legends (also known as Contemporary Legends) are contemporary folkloric stories or erroneous facts or representations that have an impact on people's lives in the country where the story was recounted (Noymer, 2010). According to Mullen (1972), these are stories that people believe to be true, whether or not the truth is known, but not all urban legends are based on false rumors; some are based on true events. They become untrue once the narrative has been animated and exaggerated or when too many details have been added. The origin and storyline of characters in urban legends tend to change, resulting in inconsistencies and unreliability. Regardless of the various versions that have appeared out of nowhere, there will always be a similar element: an unexplained incident emblazoned with horror that leads to violence and intrigue. Whether the content of their tales is partly made up or a work of pure rumors and hoaxes, a man may have a natural affinity for storytelling (Fernback, 2003).

Difonzo and Bordia (2014), with their work "Rumor, Gossip and Urban Legends," delineated that these terms can be used interchangeably. They argued that urban legends, contrary to rumors and gossip, are synonymous with modern or contemporary legends stemming from the human need for meaning and arise in contexts where stories are told to yield meaning. Therefore, they function to convey mores and values, and they do so in an entertaining fashion. As a result, the contents of urban legends are funny, horrible, and humorous events woven into narratives that adapt to various locales and times.

Filipinos have always had an affinity for urban legends. It is worth noting that even in this digital age, Filipinos' fascination for urban legends contributes to the collective imagination that helps shape folklore literature in the Philippines (Plasensia, 2004). As technology becomes affordable and user-friendly, everybody can take part in the shaping and reshaping of a narrative- as we can see by the number of blogs, webpages, and social media sites (Fine & Turner, 2001). Stories like urban legends are all enduring and cautionary tales that flourish on these platforms and are still relevant today. Prevalent in these tales is the use of creatures as the embodiment and central focus of the narrative. As Degh (1996) underscores, our belief in the supernatural is articulated in legendary and is never straightforward, and such is embodied in a specific creature where it articulates our collective consciousness. The relevance of creatures in urban legends is reflected in "The Aswang Inquiry", a seminal work of Lynch (1998), where he presented that a large portion of the hegemonic representation in Philippine urban legends is largely credited to our "Aswang beliefs", which is a canonical figure in Philippine folklore. His research in *aswang* stems from his fieldwork in the Philippines in the late 1940s, where he notes that the *aswang* is, for many Filipinos, a living... "belief or near-belief" (198-199).

In a handful of studies focused on Philippine folklore, Damiana Eugenio's work significantly shaped the folklore landscape in the country. As a pioneering folklorist in the Philippines, she defines "legend" through her clear-cut classification where she does not designate it as fiction (2002: 26-28); it is rather a story that is believed to be accurate or a story that attitude towards belief is at issue. This undeniable *aswang*-dominated construct fixates our idea of folklore wherein there has to be a creature or a monster that

somewhat represents our anxieties and fears relative to the issues of our society.

This is reflected in Lim (2015), wherein her study on Aswang transmediality frames monstrosity as a quality being attached to women, and *Aswang* is a creature that is the displacement of patriarchy. According to her, the *aswang* is a transmedial, transgeneric figure that has been interpellated by gender-essentialist agendas while still epitomizing disruptive gender instabilities. It was ascertained that *aswang*, as a “folklore creature,” is a gendered creature. This explains how media translates this construct by having women and gendered characters occupy such space attached to being an *aswang*.

Another investigation that resonates with the same idea on creatures and folklore is in the work of Pertierra (1993), wherein she delves into female sociality in Philippine creature lore, particularly the viscera sucker locally known as “Aswang.” In her paper, it was clear that *aswang* or other creatures function as a symbol that allows Filipino to communicate or express a state of fear, anxiety, or apprehension felt during times of personal or communal stress. In relation to sociality, she made clear that the monstrous *aswang* is always associated with women with dangerous manifestations who prey on unsuspecting men and parturient women hence commenting on the problematic position of women in society.

Given the status of urban legends as an understudied and underappreciated genre in Philippine literature, there is a need to explore the relevance of folklore in the digital age as a way of understanding our cultural and literary identity. Thus, Brunvard (2001) believes that becoming aware of our modern folklore, which we all have to some degree, is a revelation in itself, but going beyond to compare the tales, isolate their themes and motifs, and relate them to the rest of the culture can yield rich insights into the state of our current civilization, hence the relevance of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Edmund Leach’s framework on structuralism was used to complement and foreground the type of texts being dealt with in this paper. It is assumed that urban legends are a series of myths that have sprung from one stories-reproduced into multiple versions, hence making up a system that performs a certain function in our society. Leach (1973) offered a more dynamic structural framework of analysis that provides a novel way of discovering interrelated cognitive patterns underneath a wide variety of myths which in this paper are in selected urban legends. Additionally, Vladimir Propp’s seminal framework in understanding and analyzing folktales were also used. In his work, *Morphology of Folktale* (1958), Propp’s emphasis on the permutability of narratives captures the malleability of urban tales. Since the paper’s focus is on the structure and function of the urban legends, it will be used in analyzing the formalist elements in order to (a) identify the forms of monstrosity, (b) extract motifs presented in each text, and (c) frame the functions monstrosity relative to the motifs and forms discoursed in each text.

Materials and Methods

This paper approaches urban legends from a transmedial lens since the corpus used as texts were all part of an archive hence the possibility of multiple versions. These archived narratives/texts were unpublished and are from the [Philippine Urban Legends](#), an urban legend portal where convergence and exchanges among readers interested in urban legends are prominent. Texts were selected based on the number of reads reflected in the website’s read counts. It is worth noting that these materials may not be reliable and established sources, hence the inclusion of the framework by McLuhan (1962), where he regards the internet-mediated texts as an extension of what he calls “transmedial narratives”. Thus, justifying these

materials as forms of literary texts regardless of being unpublished and devoid of accuracy. Additionally, the multiplicity of versions and variations makes urban legends distinct from other literary texts, making accuracy not an issue (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). The paper also employs a formalist approach since it recognizes the importance of orality in literature and recurring patterns present in a given text. The main goal of the structuralist/formalist approach is further echoed in the paper's objectives, where forms, motifs, and functions are central to the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Forms of Monstrosity

The following forms of monstrosity extracted in the urban legends were consolidated since the mechanism of the source site is done by collating interrelated versions of an urban tale and having it posted as a single post. From there, people read an array of stories under the same trope or tale. The following forms were not based on Propp's categorization since it does not capture the contextual aspect of folklore in the Philippines, hence the need for contextualization when adapted as a framework. In this analysis, monstrosity is framed as the figure and creature being discoursed in each tale which forwards the idea of Blank (2009) as an embodiment of our social and cultural fears, thus being literalized in the given texts. Furthermore, it does not need to be distorted but simply a vessel of society and humanity's unarticulated anxieties and unresolved issues that do not cease to exist until modern times.

The Lady in White

One story that is a staple tale in the Philippine urban legends is the White Lady or commonly known as the Babae sa Balete Drive, which is a sub-story that has sprung from the white lady concept—a derivative form of a series of ghost stories. This tale has generated a plethora of tales springing from the original story, where in the archive, a total of seven (7) versions were collected. From the cyber archive, <<http://philurbanlegends.blogspot.com>> are polarized versions where stories like: (1) A woman was raped at the same spot at Balete Drive by Japanese soldiers in the time of World War II. The woman's ghost remains to avenge her death as it was not justified until now; (2) The ghost is a teenage girl who was run over and killed by a taxi driver at night, then buried around a Balete tree in Balete Drive; (3) A woman who lives in one of the old homes along Balete Drive was murdered by her own family, and now she flags down every passing car for help; (4) Some say she was a real person killed in a hit-and-run case along Balete Drive; (5) A student from the University of Philippines who was molested and murdered by a cab driver on her way home and her body thrown by the Balete tree; (6) A famous white lady called 'Babae sa Balete Drive; (7) It appears and haunts motorists starting at midnight.....sometimes appears in the rear-view mirror or sitting at the backseat of one's car". It is important to note that in the context of urban legends, no version is more accurate than the other (Deigh, 1996). Common to these versions is the depiction of the Lady as a figure of horror that scares the motorists, particularly taxi drivers.

Another addition to the Lady in the Balete Drive is the ghost sightings in renowned hunted places in the Philippines. Description-wise, the ghosts were all white and known to have bloody and wounded faces. Such descriptions are similar to all texts gathered in the analysis. It was stated that an apparition of a woman wailing with hollowed eyes and a blood-stained white dress. These sightings happened in Bahay na Pula in Bulacan, the Diplomat Hotel and White House in Baguio, and the Manila Film Center. Tales nestled in these locations are known for the female ghosts in white dress; further descriptions say that it wails and would suddenly disappear.

It can be argued that the image of a woman wearing a blood-stained white dress implies a monstrous

creature, wherein sightings of it evoke a feeling of horror, thus magnifying the element of monstrosity attached to the creature. One version of the tale describes the woman who transforms from a human appearance, and slowly, her face changes into a bloody, wounded with a decapitated head. The Lady in white trope is considered a universal creature transcending all cultures worldwide (Farrer, 1975). The one that is predominant in our context is the depiction of the Lady as a victim of men-induced atrocities leading her to become an unrested soul hence the frequent appearances at the site of the incident.

The Aswang

Considered a staple tale in Philippine urban legend, the creature “Aswang” represents the Filipino horror concept (Lim, 2015). Numerous tales of and about *Aswang* constitute such construct. *Aswang* does not refer to a singular folkloric monster but is an encompassing term that ensembles supernatural creatures with many names and guises in a. many places in the Philippines (Lynch, 1976). According to Azuma (2012), *aswang* is a supernatural being and frequently appears in the folk beliefs and folklores of the Philippines, especially in those Christian communities in lowland areas. *Aswang* is cultural; hence the image attached to the name but speaking of *Aswang* in diverse forms, Ramos (1990) roughly classified it into five different categories: (a) Vampire, (b) Entrails-Sucker, (c) Therianthrope, (d) Ogre, (e) Sorcerer. *Aswang*, as the most transmedial creature in the texts, has long been “monstrosized” from how it was depicted in films and other media.

In the context of the collected urban tales, *aswang*-related stories were generated because of “suspected” sightings. Another tale that falls under the encompassing form of *aswang* is “Maria Labo”. The tale has provoked horror and aversion for a long time, especially in the Visayas, where her story is claimed to have occurred. Maria Labo (labo is an Ilonggo term which means “to slash” using a bolo knife or itak) is a woman, turned *aswang*, somewhere from Iloilo or Capiz, that took rural and urban communities by storm. A loving mother and wife wanted to provide a better life for her family, so she went to Canada to work as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). This lady was believed to work for an employer afflicted with an undisclosed ailment. The employer thereafter handed on his purported vampiric power to the unaware caregiver before dying. The lady embraced the authority without realizing the enormous price she would have to pay. The curse’s effect only became apparent after the OFW returned to the Philippines. Her desire for human flesh became so strong that she slaughtered and cooked both of her boys. When her husband returned home and discovered his wife’s perverted behavior, all hell broke out. The affliction’s lunacy and her desire for human flesh drove her to offer the cooked meat to her spouse. The husband’s rage pushed him to attack his wife with a bolo. With a mad passion, he was slashing. The woman had a nasty facial wound but managed to flee. She is claimed to be still roaming the Philippines in quest of her next meal. This lady would become renowned as the woman with the scar on her face over time.

These stories depict *aswang* as a shape-shifting, bloodthirsty creature that is blamed for being the cause of missing children in places where sightings were reported. Another attribute of monstrous attribute characterizes the creature to victimize pregnant women, which highly resonates with folklorist Maximo Ramos’ description where he describes it as a winged monster whose long threadlike tongue enters the body of a pregnant woman to suck out the unborn child in her womb. On the same sphere, perched on the roofs of houses or concealed under bamboo floorboards, *aswang* eats human liver and fresh corpses and has a taste for infants and young children (Lynch, 1985). This is in the same fashion as how Pertierra (1983) writes that an *aswang*- “looks like an attractive woman by day, buxom, long-haired, and light-complexioned”; come nightfall; however, she “discards her lower body from the waist down and flies” in search of human prey (pp. 28-29). Such description embodies how the *aswang* was told relative to the description of those who witnessed it. The texts’ description and characterization of the *aswang* may be different, but it has a

clear-cut underpinning of monstrosity.

The Temptress Punisher/Diwata

Ramos (1990), in his seminal work on Philippine Mythology, defines *Diwata* as a type of deity or spirit who were said to reside in large trees such as acacia and balete and are understood to be guardian spirits of nature who cast blessings or curses upon those who brought benefits or harms to the forests or mountains. Typography of *Diwata* would describe it as an enchantress and or a fairy. They are characterized as fair-skinned, beautiful creatures, which are prevalent in the southern Philippines.

In the selected texts, the *Diwata* resembles the overarching description, which justifies the temptress image it projects. As Fansler (2001) pointed out, the word *Diwata* is equivalent to an *anito* or ancestral spirit. In the context of the urban tales selected from the [Philippine Urban Legends](#), the *Diwatas* are presumed to be the doers of the killings, particularly in bodies of water (as revealed in the texts). This is prevalent in nature-related tales in which female “diwatas” are known to be the punishers of those who abuse nature. Tales like *Mercedita*, a famous *engkanto* of Binangonan Rizal, are renowned for luring young men inside a cave and killing them. Another tale is the Lady of Mt. Banahaw of Quezon province, who intentionally and intends to make mountaineers who went deep into the mountains lose their way out. Accordingly, some have been reported dead since they cannot find their way out of the mountain, similar to the Lady of the Venado Lake of North Cotabato. Famous for its beauty that attracts mountaineers, some claim they get lost and cannot get out of the place. Some have been reported to have entered the lake premises and been reported missing ever since. The Lady of Malitangtang Bridge of Surigao del Sur and Wawa Damn of Rizal share the same scheme of luring their victims and drowning them as a way of taking their lives. This is observed in some water-urban tales, which can be traced back to “sacrifice-” monstrosity, meaning lives have to be taken as a sacrifice as a way of maintaining balance and also giving back what was taken from nature (Ortiz, 2002). The description and the form attached to *Diwata* may differ from that of *Aswang* and White Lady— being a beautiful temptress, but such does not exempt it from being monstrous.

Motifs

The analysis was consolidated to arrive at an interpretation representational and inclusive of the motifs that make up the pattern of the entire narrative. As Thompson (1946) defines it, motif refers to the smallest unit in a narrative having the power to persist in tradition embedded with something unusual and striking. Similarly, Boroda (1982) regards the significance of motifs in the field of folkloristics and narratology as the sequence provider considering the malleability and flexible physiognomy embedded in texts under this genre. The analysis leans on the definition of motif provided by Thompson (1946), where he classified it into three classes- actors in the scene, certain items in the background, and last single incidents, which comprise the entire narrative of the urban tales.

Creatures as Gendered

The dominance of female creatures in selected urban legends speaks a lot about our society and consciousness as a whole. This motif can be classified under the category that Thompson (1946) opined as the actors in the scene. Women as monstrous creatures is a representation motif that traces back to the literature of antiquity (Felton, 2013). Creatures in folklore and mythology are coded as women, whom all spoke to men’s fear of women’s destructive potential. These texts then somewhat, to a certain extent, “fulfill a male fantasy of conquering and controlling the female.” This subversion is exhibited in the selected texts by the inevitable pattern that gendered creatures into being female.

In the context of the *aswang* texts, all “suspected” *aswangs* were claimed to be women. The number

of read counts proved that there is an influence of normalizing women as *aswangs*, and the idea of seeing a male *aswang* is odd and unusual. This monstrosity is an inscription of patriarchal values that women are turning against women, which can be anti-feminist by description. Based on the textual analysis, no single detail would point out a male *aswang*, and all are female. On a different note, it could be norm and gender-bending to have a male *aswang* knowing that it is already a gendered creature. This echoed what Nadaeu (1999) reveals, that homosexuals or baklang *aswang* were already occupying the space that women once occupied. The image of *aswang* transcends various contexts that have influenced social, economic, and religious realities in one community. It is inevitable that part of our culture is connected to viewing *aswang* to be the female monster and that culture is a non-debatable construct, and the monstrosity attached to it is already “exclusivized,” and gendered has grown extensively and culturally reproduced throughout generations.

In the case of ghost stories, there is this reflexive culture in directly associating ghosts with women. A ghost in a hotel, a theatre, an abandoned house, and many more these places filled with female faces. It perplexes how such a direct correlation is that whenever a ghost sighting was reported, it is always a female, and just like the *aswang*, a male ghost would seem unusual. The case of the *Diwata*, being the temptress-punisher that she is tales, can be associated with the eco-feminist idea that women are caretakers of the environment that provides for the needs of men. If abused and destroyed, lives have to be taken as payment for these hostilities. They are biologically fit for the role since they are related to nature and possess attributes such as empathy, sensitivity, tenderness, and tranquility. Debunking a few myths, it is clear that there is no such thing as having these terms possessed naturally. All of these characteristics are imposed on women by patriarchal patriots. When something is taken from nature, it is the role of women to retrieve it. Thus, this act of gendering significantly has a lot to do with our tolerance towards patriarchy which constitutes what we consider the norm. It is safe to say that by the light of the selected texts, monstrosities in urban legends preserve not just our cultural traditions but also patriarchal inscriptions.

Victimization of Men

Men, as always, the victim of monstrosity does reflect a lot about what these tales try to underpin. This motif falls under the third category, which refers to the single incident that defines the entire narrative, where in this case, the death of men, are presumed to be the doings of the *Diwata* and creatures alike. The series of incidents about reports on punishing, scaring, and even killing the victims were all cases of men. As revealed in the tales, except for the *aswang* tales, men were the recipient of the monstrous catharsis. Like in the tale of *Diwata*, a common attribute of these *Diwata* figures is that they lure and kill men. This is associated with seeing men as the downfall of society. Gleaning from an eco-feminist lens, destructive human activities that had led to an oppressive approach to nature can be associated with patriarchy since women are equated to nature, according to Ruether (1997). Since urban tales are created in response to pressing issues, these tales tackled how the oppression of nature could lead to a destructive future for humanity. The analogy of destruction and death is synonymous with where these hostilities could lead. Technically, nature is tempting with the beauty it gives and could provide leisure for someone who seeks it, but once abused, it could be destructive, leading to someone’s demise. This explains why, in the context of the urban tales, the *Diwata*, as the temptress punisher, seduces men— an action that subverts patriarchy; hence, destruction.

This victimization is also exhibited in the Lady in White tales, in which the image speaks of the function they perform- a reminder of power abuse and seeker of a failed justice. It is also a pattern that most of the sightings that happened were mostly reported by men who claimed that the Lady appeared before their eyes, especially on taxi drivers. The way the Lady in the Balet Drive is presented is not only

exclusive to the exact Balete corner, but it represents injustices caused by men. As a way to remind them, they appear before them and project what they see as a form of “monstrosity.” This justifies the recurrence of such motif in the majority of the tales and that the act of monstrosity liberates women from issues and bondage imposed by men; thus, punishing and even killing them reminds us of a more profound, untapped truth as to why they become the subject to object.

Color as Evoker of Horror

The sense of orality attached to urban legends significantly makes it highly reliant on descriptors, including the use of colors and palettes to embellish the narrative to go along with the feeling or reaction it aims to evoke. Hutchings (1991) implicates that the concept and use of color in literature, particularly in folklore, help listeners better understand characters and events. He added that the employment of colors represents something unique to oral narratives – it is essentially descriptive and reinforces the tone and mood inscribed in the tales. Urban legends, as a genre of literature, requires a hyper-descriptive approach to narrative; hence, the exaggeration of details by adding and modifying them. Colors are a part of it since it makes the reader visualize, considering that these tales are coded with creatures where the need for a representational image makes it necessary to accomplish the narrativized effect.

The form of a ghost dressed in a white dress implicates a pallet of horror. As Chelsea Davis forwards in her work “Color in Horror: The Grim Rainbow of Gothic Fiction,” “The first and most formidable weapon in each story’s arsenal is one that draws its power from inborn human reactions to certain colors, using our biology against us.” This supports that the way we view white as a color is totally different in the context of ghost stories, wherein it is already attached to the image of the creature. Color is a way to trigger primal feelings intuitively, and it does not get much more primal than horror; one thing that is common in the form aspect of the Balete Lady is the projection of the contrast between red and white. The innocence and vulnerability signified by white relate to the disposition of women that primarily speaks of how men think of them- weak. The red stain or the blood marks on the dress is reminiscent of the violence and injustice caused by men. The prominence of the contrast between white and red implicates an act of violence. The departure from white as a symbol of purity and peace shifting into the red mark indicates a state of war and chaos, which is endemic within the genre course of urban legends.

Functions of Monstrosity

For years, urban legends have found their place in a media-saturated society where information travels in rapid fire. This somewhat helps oral folk culture to survive and develop alongside modernization. Its existence in cyberspace is indicative of our attempts to ensure the continuity of tradition and to bring forth issues that are being disregarded while at the same time embracing change (Brunvan, 2001). The inclusion of context in the interpretation and the relationship between the narrator and the audience operate that urban legends mirror the individuals’ preoccupations within the societies in which they circulate. Hence, many Philippine urban tales focus on supernatural or bizarre phenomena where they serve as the collective answer to the group’s crises and serve as warnings not to violate community standards. Within the Filipino’s collective consciousness, there is a reason why urban legends continue to exist even in modern times, where everything is verifiable, and any misinformation can be subjected to a series of interrogations. Urban legends are still relevant and do not circulate unless the topic is important for the individual who listens and spreads the story; we call attention to a factor in telling that narrative, thus, perform the following instructions.

Commentary on Social and Justice Issues

One quality that makes urban legends different from other tales is the timeliness that the “creature” embodies concerning the issues tackled in society. As forwarded by Mullen (1972), urban legends are not

just unverified rumors but are also good indicators of what is going on in the current society. As transpired in the analysis, the creature per se is an embodiment of our subconscious fears and anxieties, making it relevant to our social consciousness. Some tales may have sprung from these societal anxieties, and some were sensationalized at a drastic pace, making them recognizable. In a similar vein, social scientists and folklorists even theorized that urban legends that evoke horror or urban horror legends reinforce the worldview of the group within which they were told, sometimes through acting out of the legends themselves: as a form of 'ostension' (Amos, 2013).

As reflected in the tales, this is exemplified by the wailing female ghosts whose souls are unrested and still seek justice even in the afterlife. These forward the issue towards lack of justice caused by atrocities of a patriarchal society. An underlying theme common to these tales is that it underpins misogyny. The sheer diversity of these tales speaks of defeminizing women by sexualizing them. Like in the case of Bahay na Pula (Red Horse), it was famous for being the place where Filipinas became comfort women during the Japanese occupation and that their apparitions signify the call for justice. It was reported and even revealed in the texts that some of these apparitions died being comfort women -due to excessive sexual abuse and hunger. This is also similar to the Diplomat Hotel, where cases of raping and decapitation of nuns were considered the reasons behind the reported apparitions. In addition, as revealed in the texts, many people have seen headless apparitions at night and reported hearing screams, cries, banging on doors, and other strange and desperate noises. This has led to unjustified wrongdoings inflicted upon them that contributed to their forms and the nature of their monstrosity. The nature of their monstrosity appears greatly on men since they are all victimized by men, and as restless souls, they yearn for justice. This has contributed to our consciousness that whenever there is a lost female soul-we directly refer to it as a rape victim. No wonder why these tales speak to our way of understanding since their relevance re-inscribe as the forgotten issues that are worth addressing that is mostly a product of collective trauma and systemic patriarchy. Such an idea asserts the claim of Blank (2007) that the supernatural and the unexplained entities are necessary elements in the development of a certain community as a way of assessing issues and concerns that were not being addressed as a way of moving forward and that includes our justice system.

In the case of Maria Labo, as a one-hit wonder, this tale can be regarded as a socio-political commentary on the lack of employment and insufficient wage in the country. The time this tale proliferated was also in sync with the large flock of OFW going overseas searching for a greener pasture in response to issues the government failed to address. Being an OFW is never an easy job; where some workers lose their sanity, which is similar to what happened to Maria Labo, which still exists up to this moment where Filipinos think of going overseas as the solution to their problems which is a wakeup call to the country's responsibility to its people. Clearly, as a passive tale, it still taps into similar issues and constantly reminds us of the plight of our OFWs, who are the majority of women who left the comfort of their country in order to provide for the needs of their families. These tales are a constant reminder that even now, such issues still exist. Their relevance in today's society says a lot about why we still subscribe to being a vehicle of transport to such a body of literature regardless of living in a society mediated by verifiable information.

Ecocriticism

One penultimate function exhibited in the texts is the discourse on critical issues surrounding environmental concerns. This is prevalent in the texts related to the temptress punisher. It can be inferred that drowning-related deaths in bodies of water (included in the tales) and cases of disappearances were all connected to the *Diwata* protecting the area where the incident happened. Like in the case of hitchhikers who camped and stayed overnight in Venado Lake and Mt. Banahaw, the incident of losing their way out could be traced back to reports of littering where campers left their trash in the area without bringing it

back. As defined by Ramos (1990), the role of the *Diwata* is to safeguard the welfare of nature and make sure to punish whoever abuses it. This assimilation has been used in contexts like forests and bodies of water where supernatural occurrences and incidents are associated with *Diwata*. This is exhibited in cases of exploitation and trespassing, which were considered the “supposed” cause of death in the Wawa dam in Rizal. It is obvious that these tales are cautionary that prohibit people from doing something as a way of inscribing warnings and a sense of deterrence. These cases may sound cliché, but they tackle pressing issues in today’s society, and that includes environmental concerns. Within the modern context, these narratives play upon deep, unresolvable fears from ‘reality,’ exaggerating (and sometimes solving) them in fictional scenarios. In this case, it alludes to an inevitable dystopia, where fears must be confronted and solve the problems that spawn them (Ng, 2004, p. 6).

The ecocritical function of urban legends implicates that the need for environmental preservation should be taken into consideration; hence, the relevance of such tales where issues and concerns about global warming are apposite nowadays. This implies that urban legends provide insightful commentaries about cultural and environmental issues that are disregarded. What’s notable in these tales is that it is embedded with a lesson that people can glean from and that going against it could bring you into an unfortunate predicament like what the victims have gone through. Furthermore, this outlined that attaching an element of fear and anxiety to issues explicitly concerning the environment will serve as a deterrence; hence, the relevance of urban legends.

Conclusion

It is revealed that the forms of creatures presented in the texts were representational of the mainstream folklore figures, which have already occupied the scene in significant discourses. Giving light to the first objective, the analyses revealed that the creatures do not fall within the forms provided by Propp’s categories since it only captures the western context and is too far-fetched when used in framing the ASEAN context, particularly in Philippine literary texts.

The motifs are distributional relative to Thompson’s framework, wherein it made use of actors, agents/items, and incidents as reinforcers of the thematic focus. The texts carry and hold gendered creatures, wherein the monstrosity each possesses is displaced to men as an act to subvert hostile forces. The employment of color that goes along the narrative compliments the horror that each tale aims to evoke, which further forwards the function that it intends to perform. Thus, Philippine urban legends are not just for entertainment, and the creature or monster’s frame of reference was nature and society and the system of laws in the context where it was present, hence the relevance of the functions they perform. The texts were able to accomplish psychological and social functions, making them important and relevant as they express and exemplify fears, creates an alert for the fact, and provides insight into the dynamic changes of folklore as a lens in framing new formations in the context of modernity and mediated instruction. Furthermore, the proliferation of urban legends as supported by Fernsler (2005) that “people prefer entertainment over accuracy.” Philippine urban legends, with their oral context, are richly evocative of society’s fears, hopes, anxieties, and prejudices. In this paper, the selected narratives/texts reveal our cultural attitudes and literary identities that are meant to be preserved. Hence, it is recommended by the researcher that to improve the premise of the present study, a more extensive scope in the corpus has to be considered, and contemporary approaches and methods in folklore studies should be employed to capture the dynamics of an urban legend as a literary genre.

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