

Text and Context of the Blaan's Folk Literature

NEVA BERSAMEN BENITO

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9850-3893>

nev.benito@gmail.com

Southern Baptist College

National Highway Bialong, Mlang, North Cotabato

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ABSTRACT

Blaans are one of the tribes that reside in Mindanao archipelago in the Philippines. This study collected, transcribed, classified, and analyzed Blaan folk literature in the barangays of Sinapulan and Eday in the municipality of Columbio, Sultan Kudarat. This also sought to identify the context that brought about the folk literature's citation and identified the beliefs and practices embedded in these literary texts. These Blaan oral literature were transcribed and translated in Cebuano or Filipino by the informants and analyzed using Alan Dundes' theory of analyzing folklore- through its text, and context. The gathered Blaan folk literature was classified as occasional songs, work songs, and prose narratives depicting legends, and creation stories. It was also found out that the folk literature was recited during important occasions like weddings, tribal assemblies either as a form of entertainment or a form of reminder for the members in the importance of tribal peace and unity as well as their role in protecting nature and their environment. This study also revealed that Blaan folk literature embodies the tribe's values and ideals like generosity, courage, bravery, and traditions like the giving of dowry to their intended bride. They also valued

nature and believed the Supreme Being, they call *Dwata* but whose traits are like the Christian god.

Keywords — Qualitative research, Balaan folk literature, Balaan beliefs, and practices, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is a culturally diverse country with an estimated 14 - 17 million Indigenous Peoples (IPs) belonging to 110 ethnolinguistic groups. They are mainly concentrated in Northern Luzon (Cordillera Administrative Region, 33%) and Mindanao (61%), with some groups in the Visayas area. In recognition of this diversity and under the framework of national unity and development, the Philippine Constitution mandates state recognition, protection, promotion, and fulfillment of the rights of the Indigenous Peoples. Further, Republic Act 8371, also known as the “Indigenous Peoples Rights Act” (Act, 1997) recognizes the right of the IPs to manage their ancestral domains; IPRA has now become the cornerstone of current national policy on IPs (United Nations Development Program, 2013).

According to an article entitled ‘*Oral Literature in the Digital Age*,’ “oral literature are in decline as a result of a cultural focus on literacy, combined with the disappearance of minority languages” (Turin, Wheeler, & Wilkinson, 2013). Given this scenario, there is now the danger that these indigenous people living in our country will somehow forget their own culture and tradition. There were a lot of articles mentioned the importance of folk literature and or the oral tradition in the preservation of culture and tradition. One of which is Foley (2011), who pointed out that “oral tradition was humankind’s first technology of communication.”

In her essay, Fleming (2018) gave emphasis on the importance of understanding the “historical context behind a work’s creation” to better understand a particular literary work. To her, highlighting the historical as well as the social context can give the readers a better understanding and appreciation of the narrative. She added that in analyzing historical or social events, the context could help readers understand what motivates people to behave as they did. “Folktales mirror the cultural values held collectively by the people in each society” (Amali, 2014). This research clearly states the function of folktales in educating children. Another research by Suwanpratest (2016) claims that folktales from countries like Korea, Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, China, and Japan, which have the same motif-

the snail, have presented cultural values that can be used in the field of education, advertising, and tourism.

In the Philippines, there is a decline in the appreciation of folk literature. It was noted that most of the studies conducted on the folk literature in Davao City, all of which are unpublished and therefore considered grey literature, focused on the collection, transcription, and analysis of the folk literature in terms of values and educational implications.

Why the Blaans? In his book "Philippine Language Groups," Llamzon (1978) cited Blaans among the language groups in the Philippines out of the 28 groups he featured. In the census of the year 1960, the number of Blaan native-speakers were 94,738, but in the year 1970, this number decreased to 51,638. ere 94,738.

While there was no extensive collection and study of the folk literature in Columbio, Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao, the researcher thought of responding to some of the recommendations mentioned by previous researches by retrieving and collecting the folk literature of the Blaans.

FRAMEWORK

"Folklore is universal: there has always been folklore, and in all likelihood, there will always be folklore. As long as humans interact and in the course of so doing employ traditional forms of communication, folklorists will continue to have golden opportunities to study folklore" (Dundes, 1969). Dundes and Bronner (2007) also claimed that folklore is an invaluable reflection of a particular culture's conditions and values.

Dundes (1980) in his book *Interpreting Folklore*, stated that folk is any group of people who share at least one common factor, no matter what linking factor that is - it may be a common occupation, language or religion.

He also proposed that any given folklore, regardless of its genre, may be analyzed into three (3) categories, namely, through its texture, its text, and its context.

For Dundes, the texture is the language - the specific phonemes and morphemes used. In verbal forms of folklore, textural features are linguistic features like rhyme, alliteration, stress, pitch, juncture, tone, and onomatopoeia.

The second category is the text itself. The "text of an item is the version of it," according to Dundes. And the third category is the context. The context of any folklore is the specific social situation by which said item is actually used.

This study, however, did not dwell on the texture of the gathered folklore because the researcher relied only on the translation. However, she established the categories, like the way it was rendered, whether it was sung or recited. She also paid great attention to the context, like how the community uses the gathered oral literature and how these embody their values, beliefs, and traditions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to collect, transcribe, classify and analyze the oral literature of the Blaans in barangays Sinapulan and Eday in the municipality of Columbio, Sultan Kudarat. Specifically, it attempts to answer the following objectives, (1) identify the types of Blaan folk literature are found in barangays Sinapulan, and Eday in the municipality of Columbio, Sultan Kudarat, (2) discover the contexts of Blaan folk literature recited, and (3) identify the beliefs and practices are manifested by these Blaan folk literature.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is qualitative in nature employing ethnography and textual analysis. Alsop (2013) highlighted the role of ethnography in English studies, particularly in two (2) disciplines, namely: travel writing and audience response criticism.

In this study, ethnography is utilized during the collection, transcription, and translation of data. The researcher, with the help of the gatekeepers and personnel from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), conducted several visitations to the place and meetings with the identified informants. The validation of the data analysis was done by the community as well. As an outsider, the researcher did not inject her subjective observation since she depended only on the information given to her by the informants.

The textual analysis was done after the transcription and translation were done. Textual analysis, according to Bauer, Bicquelet, and Suerdem (2014), “involves reading any artifacts ‘showing designed texture’ of a symbol system and reflecting regularities in social practices.” In this study, the researcher attempted to look at the life-world of the Blaan, their everyday activities, and practices, through the texts drawn from their folk literature.

Participants

The study was made possible through informants' help from the two (2) barangays, namely Sinapulan and Eday of the municipality of Columbio, Sultan Kudarat.

The informants were residents of the two (2) barangays mentioned. The researcher asked the help of the barangay captains of barangays Sinapulan and Eday, as well as their barangay councilors and their barangay tribal leaders to assist her in her research by recommending people, especially the elderly in their respective barangay, who know and still can recall any native song, legend, myth, proverb, riddles and the like.

With the help of the barangay captain of Barangay Sinapulan, the researcher was able to retrieve songs from a church pastor of the Alliance of Church of God and the Indigenous People's Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of the said barangay. To transcribe and translate the folk literature, she also sought the help of the wife of the former barangay captain of barangay Sinapulan, and the formerly identified key informants.

In barangay Eday, the researcher sought the help of its barangay captain and its barangay secretary, who served as gatekeepers of the community. They introduced her to one of the elders of barangay Eday, who was, in turn, helped by his cousin in recounting Blaan stories. The researcher was able to get three (3) stories from these two elders and record it on video. Aside from these two elders, the researcher was also able to meet and interview - the tribal dancer and singer of barangay Eday, who shared a song to the researcher with the accompaniment of her tribal guitar called "*fuglung*" complete with Blaan attire. The transcriptionists of the recorded collection were the barangay secretary and a day center teacher of Barangay Eday.

Research Procedure

The researcher complied with the process set by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) based on NCIP Administrative Order Number 1, Series of 2012 entitled "*The Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) and Customary Laws Research and Documentation Guidelines of 2012*".

She first went to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Office in Poblacion Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, on June 29, 2017, since the municipality of Columbio is under the jurisdiction of said NCIP office.

She sent a letter to the NCIP Provincial Officer on July 3, 2017, informing him of the researcher's intent to study Blaan folk literature in the municipality

of Columbio, Sultan Kudarat. The Provincial Officer instructed the researcher of the process she has to go through based on the NCIP Administrative Order No. 1, Series of 2012.

On July 27, 2017, the researcher had her first consultation meeting with the tribal leaders and barangay officials in barangays Sinapulan and Eday, together with the NCIP team.

The second consultation meeting and drafting of the Memorandum of Agreement were done with the same barangay officials and tribal leaders on August 8, 2017, by the researcher with three (3) NCIP personnel.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed on August 17, 2017, between the researcher, the NCIP with its Region XII Regional Director represented by the Provincial Legal officer of NCIP Isulan, who went with her in the area and translated the said Memorandum of Agreement in Cebuano language and explained to the tribal and barangay leaders all its content.

The researcher started collecting the texts on December 19, 2017, soon after getting hold of the notarized Memorandum of Agreement. It should be noted that the collection and recording of the text were immediately followed by the transcription and translation of the text. These two processes were done collaboratively by the chanter/singer and the transcriptionist and the translator.

The informants translated the texts in Cebuano and Tagalog from their original Blaan texts. Because the researcher was limited in understanding the Blaan language, she also conducted a validation of the analysis through a meeting with the community with the help of the NCIP personnel.

Finally, a Compliance Certificate was given to the researcher by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Region 12 on August 28, 2018.

Textual Analysis

In analyzing the gathered texts, the researcher re-encoded and categorized the transcribed and translated texts. For the texts gathered from barangay Sinapulan, the original Blaan texts were translated to Cebuano by the informants themselves. For the texts gathered in barangay Eday, the Blaan texts were translated to Tagalog by the informants since they are used to speaking Tagalog. Then she read the texts again to analyze their literary elements. For instance, the songs were analyzed by looking at their sense and structure, i. e. lines in a stanza and chorus, persona, and images. The researcher could not analyze the sound element because she was dependent on the translation. For the story, the researcher analyzed its narrative elements like characters, setting, conflict, and theme. In the instances of the

creation story, the researcher looked for a similar version in other researches.

In analyzing the context in which the texts are sung or recited, the researcher asked the informants which occasions these texts are used. They were also asked to explain how the recitation was done and if the text had a specific function to the community.

Using textual analysis, the researcher re-read the texts gathered to look for traditions, beliefs, and practices, and highlighted lines from the song and sentences or paragraphs from the stories that discuss Blaan's values, beliefs, and practices.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher observed the ethical requirements in conducting studies among the indigenous people. She sought the necessary permission by complying with the prescribed Free, Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) protocol defined by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). She also ensured the confidentiality of the names of the informants by not naming them in the text. She also validated her results with the community to ensure that what is contained in this study are in consonance with the information they have shared with the researcher. Validation was done through a meeting called for by the NCIP and was attended by representatives of the two barangays. They were their respective barangay captains, their Indigenous People mandatory representatives (IPMR), their barangay sectaries, and the informants themselves. The original Blaan texts, as well as their translated version in Cebuano and Tagalog, were re-read to them by the researcher. The representatives were asked to comment if the texts read to them were correct. The two barangay captains of Sinapulan and Eday were asked to sign in the validation form provided by the NCIP after all have signified the correctness of the texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher was able to gather seven (7) folk songs and three (3) narratives. These are: '*Fais*,' which is a wedding song, two versions of '*Kastifun*' or a song for tribal gatherings, '*Amyak Ago de Solko*' and '*Bunga ng La Bugal*,' examples of work songs, '*Kafwe Banwu*' and '*Kulo Se Bong Tay Kdon*,' examples of worship songs. The three (3) narratives were The Legend of the Deer, The Legend of the Chicken, and the Creation Story.

The song ‘*Fais*’, talks about a male persona wooing his lady love, falls under courtship and wedding songs of Eugenio (2007); the songs “*Kastifun*”, “*Kulo Se Bong Tay Kdon*” and “*Kafwe Banwu*” can fall under occasional songs. “*Kastifun*” technically means ‘gathering’ invokes the listeners to promote unity and peace among themselves. “*Kulo Se Bong Tay Kdon*”, on the other hand, is a worship song, and it reflects the tribe’s gradual assimilation with the settlers. It can be noted that in this song, there is a line that mentioned Golgotha, which reflects the Christian teachings of the church. “*Kafwe Banwu*,” is still a worship song that talks about their God, *Dwata* as the creator. The other two songs could be considered as work songs; these are “*Amyak Ago de Solko*” and “*Bunga ng ‘La Bugal.*” The song “*Amyak Ago de Solko*” has something to do with a persona hunting for a ‘*kalaw*,’ a kind of bird and the song ‘*Bunga ng “La Bugal,*” another work song, in which the persona goes beyond appreciating the beauty of his place and exhorts the listeners of his song to stop mining. The term ‘*la bugal*’ is from ‘*La Bugal*’ Blaan Tribal Association which is a known Blaan organization. The other three texts fall under Prose Narratives as what Lumbera and Lumbera (1982) called. These are the Legends of the Deer and the Chicken, and their Creation story. In the two legends, it depicted the tribe’s closeness to nature. Both stories show how hunting animals like deer and chicken used to be closed to humans, were punished because of some offenses and were since then being hunted for human consumption. Their own version of the Creation Story tells the readers about the opposing forces of the good and the bad, but the good god’s idea was given more credit.

Mabel Cook Cole (1916) in her book entitled ‘*Philippine Folktales*’, mentioned a Blaan creation story and names like “*Melu*”, “*Fiuweigh*,” “*Diwata*,” and “*Saweigh*” were also present similar to the ones collected by the researcher.

The study revealed that Blaan folk literature is recited during wedding celebrations, during their gatherings, just like the municipality’s annual festival, some for entertainment purposes, and some were intended on worship service. On the other hand, the narratives were written a long time ago when Blaans still practice hunting as a way of finding food.

It was also found that Blaan songs and stories are reflective of Blaan’s own values, beliefs, and practices. That Blaans value generosity. This act of generosity is manifested when one gives his/ her most treasured possession, shares his/her own blessings to others, or gives himself selflessly so others will have a better life. Blaans also value valor and courage. They fight for their rights, go out to one’s comfort zone even if this could mean discomfort and inconvenience, and try

to resist something that is forbidden are traits of people that show bravery and courage. But their valor is tempered because they are also willing to dialogue or “kasfala” as a way of resolving conflicts. In terms of tradition, they still believe in “Dwata” as their Creator and other supernatural beings. They have a close relationship with nature, and they love animals.

The findings mentioned above were also validated by a diary published by Fr. Peter Geremiah, PIME, a missionary priest assigned in the parish of Columbio for 32 years in his diary entitled ‘Dreams and Bloodstains,’ (Geremiah, 1987).

CONCLUSIONS

Blaans have their own collection of folk songs and narratives that are recited for certain occasions. These songs and narratives are reflective of their beliefs, values, and practices. These songs are recited on certain occasions like weddings, municipal festivals, entertainment and worship service. Their narratives were written a long time ago, which reflect their way of life during that time when their ancestors used to hunt for food.

These folk songs and narratives are good examples of literary pieces which can possibly be shared among the pupils and students alike, especially in Mindanao where majority of the indigenous people reside. Blaans too, along with other tribes in the country, has a unique culture, tradition, and beliefs that need to be documented before all of these become extinct.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The findings of this literary criticism can be translated into a textbook so later on can be of help in the community within the region and even in the whole country, especially in the field of K-12 program of the Department of Education. The textbook drawn can be evaluated by the authorities concerned for acceptability and impact.

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