



Narratives of Folklore in Boljoon, Cebu – Beliefs, Myths, and Customs

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ABSTRACT

This study documents and analyzes the folk narratives of Boljoon, Cebu, with the aim of examining local folklore, associated beliefs and practices, and the lived experiences and memories of community members. Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, the research adopts a qualitative approach to identify themes across individual narratives. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected key informants who possess long-standing knowledge of the locality. The findings reveal that folklore in Boljoon functions as a living belief system embedded in everyday life. Several interrelated themes emerged from the analysis, including folklore as a lived and experiential belief system, the coexistence of indigenous animistic beliefs and Catholic faith, folklore as a form of moral and social regulation, continuity and cultural memory, and the interconnected relationship between humans, nature, and the supernatural. These themes demonstrate how folk narratives shape values, guide behavior, and preserve cultural identity. The study also highlights how folklore serves as a medium for intergenerational transmission, allowing continuity of traditions. Narratives related to supernatural beings, religious devotion, agricultural practices, and communal rituals reflect the cultural hybridity and place-based character of Cebuano folklore. Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its small number of participants and its focus on a single community. Future research may expand participant diversity, include younger generations, or conduct comparative studies across other Cebuano communities. Overall, the findings affirm the importance of localized folklore studies in understanding Cebuano cultural heritage and the continuing relevance of oral traditions in contemporary community life.

RESUMO

Este estudo documenta e analisa as narrativas folclóricas de Boljoon, Cebu, com o objetivo de examinar o folclore local, as crenças e práticas associadas, bem como as experiências vividas e as memórias dos membros da comunidade. Guiada pela estrutura de análise temática de Braun e Clarke (2006), a pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa para identificar temas em narrativas individuais. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas em profundidade com informantes-chave selecionados que possuem conhecimento de longa data da localidade. Os resultados revelam que o folclore em Boljoon funciona como um sistema de crenças vivo, inserido no cotidiano. Diversos temas inter-relacionados emergiram da análise, incluindo o folclore como um sistema de crenças vivido e experiencial, a coexistência de crenças animistas indígenas e a fé católica, o folclore como uma forma de regulação moral e social, a continuidade e a memória cultural, e a relação interconectada entre humanos, natureza e o sobrenatural. Esses temas demonstram como as narrativas folclóricas moldam valores, orientam o comportamento e preservam a identidade cultural. O estudo também destaca como o folclore serve como um meio de transmissão intergeracional, permitindo a continuidade das tradições. Narrativas relacionadas a seres sobrenaturais, devoção religiosa, práticas agrícolas e rituais comunitários refletem a hibrididade cultural e o caráter local do folclore cebuano. Apesar de suas contribuições, o estudo é limitado pelo pequeno número de participantes e pelo foco em uma única comunidade. Pesquisas futuras podem ampliar a diversidade de participantes, incluir gerações mais jovens ou realizar estudos comparativos em outras comunidades cebuanas. No geral, os resultados confirmam a importância de estudos folclóricos localizados para a compreensão do patrimônio cultural cebuano e a relevância contínua das tradições orais na vida comunitária contemporânea.

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Introduction

Folklore studies have long been essential as it provides a variety of viewpoints on customs, beliefs, and practices that contributes to understanding the rich cultural diversity and legacy of many communities worldwide. Folklores are an essential component of a culture's legacy and are used to preserve its identity and history, according to Dundes (1984). Dorson (1999) claimed that it has long been acknowledged that folklore plays a significant role in maintaining and advancing cultural heritage.

Folktales from the Philippines are numerous and diverse. This richness and variety are likely explained by their geographic location, the country's archipelagic nature, the wide variety of ethnolinguistic groups that call it home, and the numerous historical forces that have influenced the fate of its people (Eugenio & UP Diliman, 1985). Folklore is essential to the preservation of the Philippines' rich cultural legacy. Filipino folklore may serve to close the generational gap and foster a sense of community.

Cebuano folk literature is renowned among regional folklore for its rich oral traditions that capture the customs, beliefs, and practices of its people. Cebuano folklore, which contributes to the rich tapestry of Philippine folklore and shapes the Cebuano identity, reflects the history, common experiences, and daily lives of the Cebuanos through its vibrant culture. Previous ethnotextual research on Cebuano legends has shown that folklore mirrors the collective psyche of the people by expressing shared fears, beliefs, and moral values embedded in narratives of mythical creatures and supernatural forces (Ogdock-Gascon, 2015).

Southern Cebu, a home of vibrant and diverse cultural identity, holds a rich folk tradition as the local customs and interactions with nearby communities, as well as the region's unique geographic characteristics, have a significant influence on the folklore of the area. However, despite the cultural significance and influence, there are still a lot of unexplored folklores in the region. There are limited studies that delve into southern Cebuano folklore as Cebuano folklore is frequently generalized in existing research without taking into consideration the nuanced differences across regions. Related studies have emphasized that folklore is deeply shaped by the relationship between people and place, where local landscapes, environments, and lived experiences give meaning to beliefs and narratives (Rios, 2022). With this, the study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring and analyzing the folk narratives of southern Cebuanos, shedding light on their cultural and literary significance.

Every aspect of human artistic expression, whether through words or deeds, is infused with life. It is similar to folk literature in that it presents the intricacies of life in a straightforward and primordial way. Among other things, it knits the intrinsic values of life into sayings, beliefs, stories, and customs (Sanburg, 1944). A person can use folklore as an effective mirror to get a glimpse of something important from the past that can help them

navigate their current life. Additionally, it can serve as a vehicle for appreciating life's deeper concepts, such as duty and morality (Dundes, 1969).

Despite having similar experiences, everyone reacts to them in a unique way—suffering and hunger, hot and cold weather, happiness and dejection. Although people's responses to these events may vary, they are all unavoidable. Folklore gives us the ability to understand these events from different angles. It proves that all challenges and victories happen in all cultures. Although every person is different from the next, they are all connected by these moral principles (Fluery, 2021). As it demonstrates how people from all walks of life are united by common beliefs and tales, folklore does, in fact, provide a singular window into the complexity of human experience.

Philippine folklore reveals the historical and vibrant tapestry of culture, tradition, and ancient artistry of the people, reflecting the Philippines' significant reservoir of rich cultural heritage and illustrating the identity of the people. These insights frequently serve to embed their values and beliefs, as oral traditions, myths, and legends reflect the experiences and worldviews of various ethnic groups throughout the archipelago.

While addressing universal themes like life, death, and the supernatural, these stories frequently serve as moral guidelines and standards, upholding cultural norms (Pertierra, 2020). Furthermore, folklore demonstrates the Philippines' rich history of cultural hybridity by acting as conduits for both indigenous customs and colonial influences (Zialcita, 2005).

Within the province of Cebu, the municipality of Boljoon stands out for its enduring customs and historically grounded traditions. Tested by time and circumstances, the location is brimming with a wealth of values and customs that date back to earlier times. The community's infamous parish church shapes its members, resulting in a distinctive and powerful folk literature (Cebu Daily News, 2018).

This study seeks to document the folk narratives of the local community of Boljoon, Cebu. Specifically, the paper focuses on (1) local folklore, (2) associated superstitions and practices, and (3) the folk narratives based on the narratives, knowledge, descriptions, personal experiences, perspectives, and memories of the local people in Boljoon.

Methodology

The study employs a descriptive phenomenological method, a qualitative approach, to investigate the folk narratives of southern Cebu. By utilizing this method, a deeper understanding and analysis of the rich cultural narratives of the Southern Cebu folktales is explored. Through a field interview, the three key informants of this study are the local residents of southern Cebu, in the town of Boljoon where there are eleven barangays in total. With the aid of an interview questionnaire, the interview was conducted among three respondents who are residents from three different barangays of Boljoon namely Barangay El Pardo, Barangay Poblacion and Barangay Upper Becerril.

In selecting the respondents, specific criteria were applied: participants were required to be long-standing residents “lumad” of the community, aged 70 years and above, capable of sustained conversation, and possessing knowledge and personal narratives related to local cultural traditions, folk tales, and supernatural beliefs distinctive to the area.

In gathering the data, a researcher-made interview questionnaire was evaluated and verified by research experts before it will be used in the study. The interview questions were designed to elicit the respondents’ personal backgrounds, life experiences, and connections to the community, including their childhood, family history, occupations, and experiences about local traditions and folk narratives. The interviews were conducted in the Cebuano language through home visits or informal settings outside the respondents’ homes to ensure comfort, clarity of expression, and the authenticity of narratives.

The entire data gathering procedure was done through field interviews. To ensure ethical issues were considered, the study secured an ethics clearance. To address ethical concerns, the researcher made the participants understand the informed consent form through their emails to establish the privacy and confidentiality, and trustworthiness of the data.

After the evaluation of the research instrument, the securing of ethics clearance, and the signing of informed consent forms, the data-gathering schedule was finalized. Field interviews were conducted using mobile phones as audio-recording devices with the respondents’ consent. The interviews lasted at least 30 minutes per key informant, after which the responses were transcribed, verified, and thematically analyzed. The overall duration of the data-gathering process was approximately one hour.

This study employs the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), a qualitative analytic method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The framework provides a systematic yet flexible approach to organizing qualitative narratives into themes that capture shared experiences and cultural significance.

The recordings were compared and transcribed following the interview. In order to identify possible themes, the finished transcription was read several times. Extraction of the main themes and important sub-themes from the participant's reported experiences was done with great care. The themes and subthemes that were extracted were then supported by pertinent quotes. Finally, a study of the themes and subthemes was conducted.

Results and Discussions

This section presents the data collected from Respondents A, B, C, and D. Guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, the data from the three respondents were examined to identify recurring patterns of meaning across individual narratives. Through familiarization, coding, and theme refinement, several shared themes emerged. These themes reflect how folklore functions collectively within the Boljoon community.

Table 1.
Cross-Case Analysis of Respondents A, B and C

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Respondent A</i>	<i>Respondent B</i>	<i>Respondent C</i>
Folklore as a Living Belief System	Folklore is experienced as real and active in daily life rather than symbolic or historical	Belief in mythical creatures, miracles, sacred objects (Silver Bell)	Personal encounters with sigbin and kuwi, negotiated belief	Encounters with non-human beings as part of everyday reality
Cultural Hybridity (Animism and Catholicism)	Indigenous beliefs and Catholic faith coexist and reinforce one another	Miracles of Patrocinio de Maria Santisima	Folk healing alongside rational skepticism	Magical lore combined with Catholic moral teachings
Folklore as Moral and Social Regulation	Folklore guides behavior, discipline, and community order	Faith promotes peace, discipline, and devotion	Folklore shapes resilience, work ethic, and values	Cautionary tales enforce justice and accountability
Continuity, Memory, and Cultural Transmission	Oral traditions preserve identity and connect generations	Historical narratives of Boljoon	Childhood memories shaping identity despite relocation	Communal rituals and inherited traditions
Human–Nature–Supernatural Relationship	Nature is sacred and governed by unseen forces	Divine protection from disasters	Agricultural practices aligned with natural cycles	Environmental respect enforced through supernatural belief

Folklore as a Living Belief System

Across all respondents, folklore emerges as an active and experiential belief system embedded in everyday life rather than as a symbolic or historical residue. Respondent A's accounts of mythical creatures, miraculous events, and sacred objects demonstrate belief grounded in lived encounters and communal affirmation. His recollection that elders warned children about supernatural beings— "Naa kunoy abat... naa sad sigbin..." ("They say there were ghosts... and also sigbin...")—reveals how folklore is transmitted as unquestioned truth rooted in ancestral authority. Even when acknowledging that such stories may function as warnings, belief remains anchored in tradition: "mutuo gyud ko kay naa man sa kinaraan..." ("I truly believe it because it comes from the old ways").

This experiential reality is echoed in Respondent B's narratives, where encounters with the sigbin and kuwi are described through sensory perception rather than visual certainty. Her statement, "Morag anino lang na siya" ("It's like just a shadow"), indicates that belief does not

require physical visibility to be considered real. Similarly, Respondent C frames encounters with non-human beings as part of everyday existence tied to specific times of day and natural spaces, reinforcing the idea that the supernatural is woven into the rhythm of ordinary life.

The findings support earlier studies that describe folklore as an active part of everyday life rather than a set of old or symbolic stories (Dundes, 1984; Dorson, 1999). The respondents' narratives show that beliefs in mythical beings and supernatural events are grounded in lived experience and community tradition. These beliefs continue to shape how people understand and explain their surroundings. This confirms that, in Boljoon, folklore functions as a living system of knowledge that remains meaningful in daily life.

Interweaving of Indigenous Beliefs and Catholic Faith

A second dominant theme across the data is the seamless coexistence of indigenous animistic beliefs and Catholic devotion. Respondent A's accounts of miracles attributed to Patrocinio de Maria Santisima exemplify this hybridity. His narration of an apparition during a typhoon— "Bata... bagyo to... nawala ang bata" ("There was a child... it was during a storm... then the child disappeared")—frames natural disaster as divine intervention rather than coincidence. The community's belief that fiestas remain peaceful because of the saint's protection further illustrates how faith regulates social life.

Respondent B similarly negotiates belief and skepticism, particularly in her experience with folk healing. While initially doubtful— "Dili gani to katuohan" ("It's really unbelievable")—she accepts the healer's explanation grounded in sensory logic rather than blind faith. This reflects a worldview where traditional healing, Catholic belief, and rational reasoning coexist without contradiction.

Respondent C's discussion of magical practices such as paghilot, panghimalad, and pagbarang further highlights this synthesis. These practices are framed not as oppositional to Christianity but as moral systems that reinforce accountability, restraint, and justice.

The data clearly show that indigenous beliefs and Catholic practices coexist in Boljoon, supporting studies on the cultural hybridity of Philippine folklore (Zialcita, 2005; Pertierra, 2020). Rather than replacing older traditions, Catholic faith blends with animistic beliefs such as folk healing and supernatural explanations. Respondents treat both belief systems as compatible and mutually reinforcing. This finding aligns with Cebuano folklore studies which emphasize that spiritual practices evolve through integration rather than conflict (Ogdock-Gascon, 2015).

Folklore as Moral and Social Regulation

Another shared theme is the function of folklore as an informal moral and social regulatory system. Respondent A's narratives illustrate how belief enforces discipline and communal order. Strict adherence to oración schedules— "Kung dili ka mu-tunga anang ala sais, mabunalan gyod ka" ("If you don't come home by six, you'll be whipped")—demonstrates

how religious routine disciplines behavior within the household. Likewise, beliefs surrounding fiestas and offerings regulate communal conduct through fear of spiritual consequence and hope for divine favor.

For Respondent B, folklore informs values of perseverance, responsibility, and resilience. Her repeated reflection— “Bisag unsaon og paningkamot, wala lang gihapoy mahimo” (“No matter how hard we tried, nothing seemed to improve”)—reveals how folklore does not romanticize hardship but contextualizes suffering within a moral framework that values endurance. These narratives show how belief sustains dignity and meaning amid socioeconomic struggle.

MeRespondent C’s cautionary tales surrounding pagbarang and panggasa further reinforce this regulatory function. These stories warn against jealousy, abuse of power, and emotional manipulation, framing supernatural punishment as a moral corrective.

The findings also confirm that folklore plays an important role in shaping moral behavior and social order. Beliefs related to rituals, discipline, and supernatural consequences guide how individuals act within the family and the community. Respondents’ narratives show that folklore promotes values such as responsibility, perseverance, and respect. This supports the view that folklore functions as an informal moral system that influences behavior beyond formal rules and institutions (Pertierra, 2020).

Continuity, Memory, and Cultural Transmission

The findings also highlight folklore as a mechanism of intergenerational continuity and cultural memory. Respondent A’s recollections of Boljoon’s earlier landscape— “Daghan pa ato ang mga kahoy-kahoy” (“There were still many trees back then”)—situate folklore within historical memory, linking past environments to present identity. His narration of the Kampanang Ogis (Silver Bell) further illustrates how unresolved mysteries preserve communal memory through storytelling.

Respondent B’s narratives demonstrate how memory persists despite physical relocation. Although she moved from Sitio Ylaya to Poblacion, her identity remains anchored in remembered labor, poverty, and ancestral land. Her stories transform memory into a living presence rather than a nostalgic past, showing how folklore sustains identity across spatial change.

Respondent C emphasizes communal rituals and traditions passed down through practice rather than text, reinforcing folklore as collective inheritance. The narratives highlight how folklore preserves cultural memory and connects generations through storytelling and lived experience. Respondents recall past environments, family practices, and community traditions that continue to shape their present identities. These findings support Philippine folklore research that views oral tradition as a bridge between past and present (Eugenio & UP

Diliman, 1985). In Boljoon, folklore remains a key means of transmitting cultural identity across time and place.

Relationship between humans, nature, and the Supernatural

A final cross-cutting theme reflects a worldview in which humans, nature, and supernatural forces are deeply interconnected. Respondent A attributes Boljoon's protection from strong typhoons to divine intervention— "Giprotektahan gyud mi sa amo patron" ("Our patron truly protected us"). This belief frames nature as governed by sacred authority rather than randomness.

Respondent B's agricultural practices similarly align with natural rhythms, as seen in her emphasis on planting according to tides— "Mag-agad kon taob ba, hunasan ana" ("It depends on whether it's high tide or low tide"). Respondent C extends this worldview by framing trees, rivers, and landscapes as spiritually guarded spaces, where disrespect invites supernatural consequence.

Across cases, folklore functions as an ecological ethic that promotes respect for the environment through belief, fear, and reverence. This interconnected worldview reinforces balance and harmony, illustrating how folklore mediates human interaction with both visible and invisible forces.

The findings reveal a shared belief that humans, nature, and the supernatural are closely connected. Respondents view natural events, agricultural practices, and landscapes as guided by unseen forces or divine will. This supports place-based folklore studies that emphasize how beliefs are shaped by local environments and lived interaction with nature (Rios, 2022). In this context, folklore promotes respect for nature and encourages balance between the human and spiritual worlds.

Conclusions

This study aimed to document and analyze the folk narratives of Boljoon, Cebu by focusing on local folklore, beliefs, practices, and the lived experiences of community members. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, the study was able to identify clear patterns that answered the research objectives. The findings show that folklore in Boljoon functions as a living belief system that shapes values, behavior, and identity through themes such as cultural hybridity, moral regulation, memory and continuity, and the relationship between humans, nature, and the supernatural.

The results confirm that folklore is not simply a collection of old stories but an active part of everyday life. Folk narratives continue to guide moral conduct, strengthen religious devotion, and preserve cultural identity despite social and environmental changes. Through storytelling and practice, traditions are passed on and adapted, allowing folklore to remain relevant across generations.

This study, however, has certain limitations. The number of respondents was limited, and most participants were elderly, which may not fully represent the perspectives of younger generations. In addition, the focus on one community limits the generalization of the findings to other areas.

Future studies may include more participants from different age groups and social backgrounds to capture a wider range of perspectives. Comparative research across other municipalities in Southern Cebu or other regions may also provide deeper insights into regional differences and similarities in folklore. Further research may also explore how local folklore can be integrated into school curricula or community programs to help preserve cultural heritage.

This study proves that folklore in Boljoon is not only a window into the past, but it can also serve as a model for the future. Cultures and societies change in tandem with the world's continuous transformation. Hence, folklore serves as a foundation and bridge that spans the gap between one generation to the next.

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