



Maharadia Lawana: The Indigenous Filipino “Ramayana” by Way of Diaspora and Hybridity-Heterogeneity

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the diasporic and heterogeneity-hybridity interplay of a Filipino epic namely the Maharadia Lawana. Maharadia Lawana is indigenous with the locality of the Philippines though resembling the tale of a folklore epic in India as its original counterpart—The Ramayana. It is also highly inarguable that Maharadia Lawana is based on the Indonesian/Malaysian version of the adaptation. This paper discusses the Maharadia Lawana's main plots compared to the three other versions of the epic namely Hikayat Seri Rama (HSR) or the Hikayat Maharaja Ravana (HMR), the Fairy Tale (Maxwell version) and the Sanskrit Ramayana (Ram.). There are characters in the four versions playing a similar role yet having different names. Maharadia's main character who is Maharadia Lawana is a 7/8-headed king in the kingdom of Sultan Pulu Bandiarmasir. He is a monstrous ruler and lusts over a princess figure in the story. Such characteristics and role of the character is reminiscent of “Maharaja Duwana” of the Fairy Tale (Maxwell version) and “Ravana” of the Hikayat Seri Rama (HSR) or the Hikayat Maharaja Ravana (HMR), and the Sanskrit Ramayana (Ram.). These differences may involve linguistic and cultural elements which influence the origin of the four epics. For instance, since Maharadia Lawana is a product of the Philippines during the Islamic period, the allusion to a Hindu deity namely “Hanuman” who is also the Hindu God Monkey is replaced with “Laksmana” in Maharadia Lawana. This paper further discusses the influence of diaspora and heterogeneity-hybridity in Maharadia Lawana as seen from its characters, settings and plots. Nevertheless, Maharadia Lawana still remains a great epic which enrich the cultural refinement of Filipino folklore. This is so since it is highly contextualized with the Filipino setting and cultural orientation.

Keywords: *folklore epic, heterogeneity, hybridity, diaspora, The Ramayana.*

1. INTRODUCTION

“It narrates the adventures of the 7/8 headed man, *Maharadia Lawana*, whom the Gods have gifted with immortality” (Francisco 163). “Francisco believed that the Ramayana narrative arrived in the Philippines sometime between the 17th to 19th centuries, via interactions with Javanese and Malaysian cultures which traded extensively with India” (Francisco 172). “The character names, place names, and the precise episodes and events in *Maharadia Lawana's* narrative already had some notable differences from those of the Ramayana” (Francisco 185). “Some changes had already been introduced in Malaysia and Java even before the story was heard by the Maranao” (Francisco 195). “The language aspect of this influx is purely borrowings of the vocabulary rather than syntactical, which, more or less, is the nature of the borrowings from Indian languages by the languages of South East Asia” (Francisco 193). “These borrowings are made through the intervention of the contiguous languages-Malay and Javanese, languages which belong to the same family of languages, known as Austronesian, to which Maranaw also belongs” (Francisco 193). “The story was “further indigenized to suit Philippine cultural perspectives and orientations” (Francisco 201).

“The influence of the Rama story in the literature of Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo and other countries in Southeast Asia is no longer a debatable problem” (Francisco 21). “The Rama story has been source of almost every known composition [...] In Malay literature, it is the main story-theme of the famous *Hikayat Seri Rama (HSR)* and the *Hikayat*

Maharaja Ravana (HMR). The Fairy Tale was originally published *in extenso* in both the English summary and Malay-Arabic text and believed to be founded on the Ram” (Francisco 22). “In 1910, another tale was published in the same journal, entitled *Hikayat Seri Rama* with a preface by Sir William E. Maxwell” (Francisco 213) which suggests a more western character to the folktale. Such is the case, interpolations and accretions of the *Maharadia lawana* to its other counterparts in this paper shall be referred to as a diaspora and hybridity phenomena. This is due to the fact that *Maharadia lawana* is itself a product of diaspora and hybridity. Thus, it becomes purportedly proper to study *Maharadia lawana* in the process of comparison with its South East Asian counterpart *Hikayat Seri Rama (HSR)* or the *Hikayat Maharaja Ravana (HMR), the Fairy Tale* (Maxwell version) and the *Sanskrit Ramayana* (Ram.).

2. OBJECTIVES

This paper discusses the theme which is hybridity and diaspora as seen in *Maharadia lawana*. *Maharadia lawana* is a prose tale in Maranaw and the text is in madrasa. The tale is indigenous with the locality of the Philippines yet resemble greatly with the tale of the other folklore epics, particularly, in India as its original counterpart the —*The Ramayana*. The epic that is the *Maharadia lawana* is juxtaposed in this paper with the Indonesian/Malaysian version of the adaptation. In fact, to allow a more comprehensive discussion on the matter, this paper also discusses juxtaposition of the *Maharadia lawana* with the so-called western version of the epic namely the *Fairy Tale* (Maxwell version). “The *Maharadia lawana* (sometimes spelled *Maharadya Lawana* or *Maharaja Rāvāna*) itself is a Maranao epic which tells a local version of the Indian epic Ramayana” (Francisco 151). “Its English translation is attributed to Filipino Indologist Juan R. Francisco based on Francisco's ethnographic research in the Lake Lanao area in the late 1960s” (Francisco 162).

3. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The notion that is hybridity and heterogeneity is based on the idea that “instead of thinking of culture as something that is unchanging and transmitted “vertically” from one generation to another, she argues that culture is also worked out “horizontally” between communities and across lines of gender, race and national origin (Lowe 132). “Foreground commonly thematized topoi, of immigrant cultures: the disruption and distortion of traditional practices [...] as a part of entering a society with different class stratifications and different constructions of gender roles” (Lowe 134). Therefore, such conditioning is the foregrounding “that produce identity: the process that produce such identity are never complete and are always constituted in relation to historical and material differences” (Lowe 136). On the topic of history, Lowe posited “like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation, far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Lowe 136).

On the other hand, the notion of the diaspora as proposed by Radhakrishnan is related to the diasporic phenomena which occur in the United States involving ethnic groups from India and the discussion about the Ramayana as an indigenous piece of the Indian ethnic as a product of interpolations and accretions of the Western world. On this, he said “The diaspora is an excellent opportunity to think through some of these vexed questions: solidarity and criticism, belonging and distance, insider spaces and outsider spaces”. He added dealing with the subject that is identity “Identity as invention and identity as natural, location-subject positionality and the politics of representation, rootedness and rootlessness” (Radhakrishnan 129). Further, Hall on the topic that is identity, posited “perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 110). “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories but like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation; far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall 112).

4. METHODS

This paper thus discusses the interplay of these theories as related to the diasporic and heterogeneity-hybridity phenomenon that is the *Maharadia lawana*. To enable a succinct, compartmentalized yet elaborative discussion of the folklore, the discussion is focused on the *Maharadia lawana*'s main plots being compared with the three other versions of the epic. The comparison is aimed to enable a clear pattern of the hybridity-heterogeneity and diasporic elements as seen through each part of the main plots in the epic. Explication of the anthropological and historical situation which enables the production of the plot to be in such a manner will not be the primary focus because it will be too wide a discussion in this short paper. To delimit the discussion of *Maharadia Lawana* in the framework on hybridity-

heterogeneity and diaspora, the paper will mainly focus on the differences in the plot of the *Maharadia Lawana* with its other three counterparts as a product of the hybridity-heterogeneity and diasporic interplay

5. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The table below shows that the characters of the *Maharadia Lawana* play similar roles to its other three counterparts. This is because the four versions are very saliently similar in plot. Some characters play a similar role yet have different names such as *Maharadia's* main character who is Maharadia Lawana is a 7/8-headed king in the kingdom of Sultan Pulu Bandiarmasir and he is a monstrous ruler and lusts over a princess figure in the story. Such characteristics and role of the character are reminiscent of Maharaja Duwana of the *Fairy Tale* (Maxwell version) and Ravana of the *Hikayat Seri Rama* (HSR) or the *Hikayat Maharaja Ravana* (HMR), and the *Sanskrit Ramayana* (Ram.).

Table 1. Character variations and respective roles in the four versions of the epic

Maharadia Lawana	Fairy Tale	Hikayat Seri Rama Hikayat Maharaja Ravana	Sanskrit Ramayana (Ram.)
Radia Mangandiri	Sri Rama	Seri Rama/Rama	Rama
Tuwan Potre Malano Tihaiia	Sakutum Bunga Satangkei	Sita Dewi/Sita	Sita
Laksamana, son of Radia Mangawarna by Potre Langawi	Kra Kechil Imam Tergangga	Tabalawi/Jangga-Pulawa	Kusa-Lava
Radia Mangawarna	Raja Laksmana	Laksmana/Laksmana	Laksmana
Laksama	Shah Numan	Hanuman/Hanuman	Hanuman
Maharadia Lawana	Maharaja Duwana	Ravana/Ravana	Ravana

Source: J. R. Francisco, *Maharadia Lawana*. Philippine Folklore Society, 1969.

Another fact is the presence of Laksmana as a monkey figure and friend of Radia Mangandiri who is named Shah Numan in *Fairy Tale* (Maxwell version) and *Hanuman* in *Hikayat Seri Rama* (HSR) or the *Hikayat Maharaja Ravana* (HMR). Such variation is related to the notion that the identity “Identity as invention and identity as natural, location-subject positionality and the politics of representation, rootedness and rootlessness” (Radhakrishnan 129). Each difference of names is rooted in “the politics of representation, rootedness and rootlessness” which structure the production of character differences as seen in the four versions of the *Maharadia Lawana*. These differences may involve linguistics as well as cultural elements which are prevalent based on the origin of the four epics. For instance, as *Maharadia Lawana* is a work from Islam period of the Philippines and the *fairy tale* is a product of the Western civilization which is inevitably influenced by Christianity, the allusion to a figure of Hinduism is not present as “Hanuman” who is also the Hindu God Monkey is replaced with “Laksmana” in *Maharadia Lawana* and *Shah Numan* in the *fairy tale*.

A similar notion is also evident in the differences in the name of where the setting takes place as seen on the table below:

Table 2. Place of setting comparisons in the four epics

Maharadia Lawana	Fairy Tale	Hikayat Seri Rama Hikayat Maharaja Ravana	Sanskrit Ramayana (Ram.)
Pulu Agama Niog	Tanjong Bunga	Mandu Puri Nagara/Mandurapura	Ayodhya
Pulu Bandiarmasir	Kachapuri	Bukit Serindib (Later, Langkapuri)/Lngkapura	Lanka

Source: J. R. Francisco, *Maharadia Lawana*. Philippine Folklore Society, 1969.

The difference in the names of the setting is also contingent on the notion of diaspora as "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories but like everything historical, they undergo a constant transformation; far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall 112). The names of the places in the settings of the *Maharadia Lawana* may be related to the Philippines' history as part of the big ark that is the Malayan archipelago which explains the presence of the "Bandiarmasir". This can be related to "Banjarmasin" which is the capital of South Kalimantan, Indonesia. It is located on a delta island near the junction of the Barito and Martapura rivers. As it is a tale of the Philippines' pre-colonial time, the distinction between Indonesia and the Philippines was not yet present. The only assuring fact is that both which are now known as the modern-day Philippines and Indonesia are very close to each other, Kalimantan is just southeast of the Philippines and it is the closest Indonesian island to the Philippines. Purportedly mercantile actions were very rampant during those times and thus generate the allusion of "Bandiarmasir", a city that is now part of the former Dutch colony, present-day Indonesia.

On Heterogeneity, Hybridity, and Diaspora as Seen in Maharadia Lawana's Plot:

The discussion of heterogeneity, hybridity, and diaspora as seen in Maharadia Lawana's plot becomes inevitable considering various historical, cultural and religious influence that the Philippines underwent at the time of its production.

In the long years of encounter between Islam and the indigenous cultures, as well as the culture that was introduced by Spaniards and the Americans in the later years of Philippine history, conflicts were inevitable. But in the process certain adjustments had to be made by each to be able to coexist peacefully later on. These adjustments, one of which is seen in the development of the song or hymn as part of the Islamic literature in the Philippines, are important and meaningful. For the indigenous and the alien -Islam, and Christianity- shall be in constant contact in the years to come. The alien had come to stay, and yet it has to draw its nourishment from the soul and soil of the indigenes (Francisco 111).

The Winning of Tuan Potre Malano Tihai/ Potre Malano Baganding

"A game of the *sipa* is to be played among the suitors, and whoever kicks the rattan ball to the *lamin*, penthouse, where the princess lives with her retinue, to him shall she be wed. Radia Mangandiri kicks the *sipa* to her penthouse and wins the hand of the princess. *The Fairy Tale* (Maxwell) and the *HSR* do not tell of the winning of Sakutum Bunga Satangkei by Sri Rama. They open with the married life of both being described as childless" (Francisco 189).

The *HSR* and *HMR* tell of the winning of Sita's hand by Rama's shooting one arrow through forty palm trees, which was the condition set by Sita's guardian, Kala, that whosoever pierces these forty trees with just one arrow to him shall Sita be wed. While the *HSR* and the *HMR* show the use of the bow and arrow in the winning of Sita, it is only the bow that plays a significant role in the winning of Sita in the Ramayana. King Janaka offers Sita in marriage to whoever could raise and string the bow of Siva. Rama instead of merely raising and drawing it with just one arm also snaps it asunder. He wins the hand of Sita in marriage (Francisco 189).

The differences in plots supports the notion on hybridity and heterogeneity which states "instead of thinking of culture as something unchanging and transmitted "vertically" from one generation to another, she argues that culture is also worked out "horizontally" between communities and across lines of gender, race, and national origin (Lowe 132). Purportedly it signifies the role of the bow and arrow as a main weapon in the Malaysian archipelago and India compare to the Philippines and thus the presence of the weapon in the Indian and Malaysian versions which cannot be found in the Maharadia Lawana. Instead, the game which uses the bow and arrows is replaced by the *sipa* game. The *sipa* game

itself is a native Filipino game which predates the 15th century Spanish rule in the country. The term *sipa* in English means kick. The Philippines attained the game by the Spaniards who brought this game during the colonial Era. The game's objective is to toss a rattan ball in the air and kick it as many times as possible without letting it fall to the ground. The game is similar to another popular South-East Asian game, known as *sepak takraw*.

The Return of Potre Malaila Ganding

Tarrying in Pulu Bandiarmasir after their victory over Maharadia Lawana, they make preparations for their return to Pulu Agama Niog. For this Laksamana tells them that he will undergo such an event. He calls all the crocodiles on whose backs all the subjects may ride across the ocean to Pulu Agama Niog. The biggest crocodile with the broadest back becomes the mount of the prince and the princess, and Radia Mangawarna and Laksamana. The people of Agama Niog were frightened, but Laksamana announces to them that they should not fear, for Radia Mangandiri with his bride Potre Malaila Ganding and Radia Mangawarna are returning from a long travel.

The return of Sita in the *Ram.* agrees with the return of Sita Dewi in *HSR* and Sita in *HMR*. Sita is carried back to Ayodhya by Rama in the magic car of Kubera which was forcibly appropriated by Ravana from the god of wealth. No mention of the magic car or flying chariot is made in the *HSR* and *HMR*, while Sakutum is carried off to Sri Rama by her son. No flying car or magic chariot is used. A fire-purification is given to Potre Malaila Ganding, from her "contact" with Maharadia Lawana. The fire ordeal is not necessary, as it is in the *Ram.*, the *HSR* and the *HMR*, for the purification of the heroine because it is her son who took her away. Moreover, Sakutum Bunga Satangkei is sanguinarily related to Maharaja Duwana, who stands to her as a father to a daughter. Thereby no chastity test and purification ceremonies are necessary. Both the *Maharadia Lawana* and the *Fairy Tale* end with the metamorphosis respectively of Laksamana and Kra Kechil into handsome prince/datu. (Fransisco 222)

Such variations of plots is also imbued with the notion of hybridity and heterogeneity which “foregrounds commonly thematized topoi, of immigrant cultures: the disruption and distortion of traditional practices [...] as a part of entering a society with different class stratifications and different constructions of gender roles” (Lowe 134). The presence of the notion that is hybridity and heterogeneity as expounded is permeated in the part of the folklores: a fire-purification given to Potre Malaila Ganding in *Maharadia Lawana* from her "contact" with Maharadia Lawana, Sita being carried back to Ayodhya by Rama in the magic car in *Ram.* and in both the *Maharadia Lawana* and the *Fairy Tale* that end with the metamorphosis respectively of Laksamana and Kra Kechil into handsome prince/datu.

The presence of a fire-purification given to Potre Malaila Ganding in *Maharadia Lawana* is strongly suggestive of the fact that *Maharadia Lawana* is a piece of pre-colonial Philippines folklore when Islam is very strong. Islam is still prevalent in present times especially in the Southern part of the country in Mindanao where this epic originates. As such, the allusion to the Islamic teachings permeates the different constructions of gender roles as suggested by the hybridity and heterogeneity theories. The teaching of the *ha·ram* (forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law) lingers because one of the teachings states that when a woman who was touched by a male who is not her spouse or relative should undergo a purification ritual. This is also related to the teachings of women of being obliged to cover themselves with the *hijab* to always be *ha·lal* (religiously acceptable according to Muslim law). This is also related to the preservation of the women's purity. The case is similar to what happened to Potre Malaila Ganding as she performed the purity ritual as she was touched by a man other than her spouse or relative. Purportedly this becomes the reason as well why the process of purification is not present in the other counterparts of the folklore.

The *Maharadia Lawana* and the *Fairy Tale's* ending where a metamorphosis happen respectively to Laksamana and Kra Kechil into handsome *datu* is a product of heterogeneity and hybridity and purported influence of Christianity and Islam. *Maharadia Lawana* as a folklore imbued with Islamic teachings and the *Fairy Tale* version as a product of the West which is inevitably influenced by Christianity becomes the reason the monkey figures in both of the stories are turned into handsome young men. This is supportive of the teaching from both religions that both regard human beings as a higher and better creation compared to animals. Unlike animal figures which perform the role of gods and goddesses in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam emphasize the "superiority" of the human being compared to other creations. This causes the monkey counterparts in both of the stories to be rewarded in becoming a creation above its prior form; to be rewarded the gift of humanity after his success in accomplishing his mission. Such phenomena are part of the heterogeneity which foregrounds thematized topoi, of immigrant cultures: the disruption and distortion of traditional practices. Indeed, the presence of the foregrounding of the thematized topoi with religious influence becomes greatly the case in these variations.

Sita is carried back to Ayodhya by Rama in the magic car in *Ram.* offers an instance of diaspora since the part does not exist in the other three counterparts including the *Maharadia Lawana*. “The diaspora is an excellent opportunity

to think through some of these vexed questions: solidarity and criticism, belonging and distance, insider spaces and outsider spaces” (Radhakrishnan 129). It is inarguable that the Indian *Ramayana* which Maharadia Lawana is highly influenced by is a product of the enticement of Indian culture and tradition. The presence of chariots or magic cars in Indian tradition is very much evident considering the roles of the *Vimana* and *Ratha* which are flying chariots as mentioned in various Sanskrit epics. Such particularity performs as the foregrounding of the discourse on “insider spaces and outsider spaces” as purposed by Radhakrishnan. This is due to the presence of these flying chariots are only in the *Ram.* and cannot be found in other counterparts of the folklore. The insider space which is the presence of the chariot as aligned with the Indian tradition contradicts the outsider space which is the unavailability of the chariots in the *Maharadia Lawana*. *Maharadia Lawana* as “the story [of the Sanskrit Ramayana which] was “further indigenized to suit Philippine cultural perspectives and orientations”(Francisco 201) becomes the main prompt as to why it is considered as part of the “outsider space” since the “insider space” is the Indian *Ramayana*.

6. CONCLUSION

Maharadia Lawana which is profuse with the interplay of various cultures which is materialized in the form of identity as seen in characters, settings, and plots highly suggest the involvement of diaspora and heterogeneity-hybridity. This becomes the main proposition in this paper and is supported with a thorough analysis of the matter at hand. Nevertheless, *Maharadia Lawana* remains one of the greatest epics which enrich the cultural refinement of Filipino folklore. This is so since it is highly contextualized with the Filipino setting and cultural orientation.

7. COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

This article is clear of any conflicts of interest related to data collection, analysis, and publication process.

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