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Narrative Voice and Cultural Identity: Examining Storytelling Techniques in Filipino Creative Writing

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Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between narrative voice and the formation of Filipino cultural identity through the medium of storytelling. Authors from the Philippines serve as stewards of history, incorporating the nation's collective memory and the realities of society into their works of writing. Enhancing cultural representation is accomplished by the utilization of real language, which includes the utilization of regional dialects and the telling of stories in many languages. The narrative voice is also utilized by writers in the context of social criticism, with topics such as migration, poverty, and resilience being considered. By combining traditional methods of storytelling with digital platforms, cultural narratives can be expanded even farther while also being preserved. The use of symbolism and metaphor enhances the storytelling experience by reinforcing concepts such as resistance, displacement, and identity. Writers' strikes a compromise between the freedom to express their creativity and the requirement to be culturally responsible, seeking advice from elders and cultural experts to maintain authenticity. To maintain a vibrant literary tradition that contributes to the development of national consciousness and cultural continuity, Filipino writers consistently experiment with new narrative voices.

Keywords: *Narrative Voice, Cultural Identity, Filipino Literature, Indigenous Storytelling, Language Authenticity, Social Critique, Symbolism*

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Introduction

Storytelling occupies a central role in Filipino culture, functioning to preserve history, transmit values, and reinforce collective identity. From precolonial oral traditions to contemporary literary works, narratives have served as cultural anchors reflecting the complexities of Filipino life. Epic chants such as the Hudhud of the Ifugao and the Biag ni Lam-Ang of the Ilocano people exemplify how oral traditions encapsulate both indigenous knowledge and communal memory (Manuel, 1985; UNESCO, 2008). These narratives are not merely entertainment; they embody moral lessons, social structures, and cosmological beliefs. Modern Filipino writers continue this legacy by employing diverse narrative voices, whether first-person, omniscient, or oral-tradition inspired, enabling them to negotiate cultural themes, connect with readers, and assert a uniquely Filipino worldview.

This study examines the link between narrative voice and cultural identity, focusing on how Filipino writers merge indigenous storytelling practices with modern literary conventions. Such an exploration aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, particularly in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Literature functions as both a mirror and a vessel of cultural heritage; thus, studying narrative voice provides insight into how Filipino authors preserve tradition while adapting to contemporary contexts. As San Juan (2000) and Lumera (2016) observe, Filipino literature has always been a negotiation between colonial influences and local realities, and narrative voice is a key site where cultural identity is asserted, challenged, and reshaped.

The role of narrative voice in shaping cultural meaning has been widely recognized in global literary studies. Genette's (1980) narratology highlights the importance of focalization, perspective, and voice in mediating the relationship between text and reader. These elements determine how stories are told and how cultural values are embedded in literary form. In the Philippine context, scholars like Mojares (2006) and Abad (2015) argue that indigenous oral traditions continue to influence contemporary writing, creating a continuum between past and present. For instance, the narrative structures of epics and folk tales are echoed in the works of modern writers such as Nick Joaquin, whose use of myth and history creates layered explorations of Filipino identity (Hau, 2017), and F. Sionil José, whose narratives highlight the intersections of class, history, and nationalism (Roces, 2019).

Beyond the Philippines, Filipino diasporic and Filipino-American writers also demonstrate how narrative voice is crucial in negotiating dual cultural identities. Garcia (2014), for example, examined how Filipino-American authors utilize narrative voice to reconcile heritage with contemporary cultural experiences, showing how

storytelling becomes a negotiation tool between assimilation and cultural preservation. Such works illustrate that narrative voice is not a neutral element of style but a deliberate act of cultural positioning.

Despite these contributions, gaps remain in current scholarships. Much existing research focuses on thematic analysis, postcolonial critique, or linguistic representation in Filipino literature. While these perspectives are valuable, they often overlook the conscious creative processes through which Filipino writers craft narrative voice as a deliberate strategy for reinforcing cultural identity. Little has been written about how authors conceptualize and implement narrative voices through perspective, diction, or structure, as a means of cultural preservation in the face of globalization. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing qualitative insights into how Filipino writers consciously use narrative voice to articulate, sustain, and evolve cultural identity. By foregrounding the creative practices of writers, this research highlights the artistic dimensions of storytelling and underscores its role in cultural continuity and innovation.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the role of narrative voice in shaping cultural identity within Filipino creative writing by analyzing storytelling techniques used by Filipino writers.
2. To examine how Filipino writers utilize indigenous and contemporary storytelling methods to convey cultural themes, values, and perspectives in their narratives.
3. To investigate Filipino writers' experiences and creative processes in developing narrative voices that reflect Filipino cultural identity through qualitative insights and thematic analysis.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of narrative voice in shaping cultural identity within Filipino creative writing. A phenomenological approach was utilized to gain in-depth insights into the storytelling techniques, creative processes, and cultural representations embedded in the works of Filipino writers. The study focused on understanding how indigenous and contemporary storytelling conveyed cultural themes, values, and perspectives.

Filipino writers who had actively engaged in creative writing and had published literary works reflecting Filipino cultural identity were selected as

participants. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the participants had significant experience writing narratives incorporating cultural themes. A total of ten writers participated in the study, each contributing valuable perspectives on the development of narrative voice in their works.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews in person or via online platforms. The interviews focused on the writers' experiences, storytelling techniques, and their use of indigenous and contemporary methods to shape cultural identity. Additionally, a thematic analysis of selected literary texts authored by the participants was performed to examine how narrative voice contributed to cultural representation. Field notes and reflexive journals were also maintained to capture observational insights during the data collection.

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the collected data. Interview transcripts and literary texts were systematically coded to identify recurring themes related to cultural identity, storytelling techniques, and creative processes. Patterns emerging from the data were analyzed to understand how Filipino writers constructed narrative voices that embodied cultural heritage and values. The findings were then categorized based on the major themes identified through the qualitative analysis.

Ethical approval was secured before conducting the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and ensuring that all personal information remained protected. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences.

To ensure the study's credibility, member-checking was conducted, allowing participants to review and validate the accuracy of their responses. Triangulation was also applied by comparing interview data with thematic analysis of literary texts to enhance the reliability of the findings. A detailed audit trail was also maintained to document the research process and decisions made during data analysis.

Results and Findings

Exploring the Role of Narrative Voice in Shaping Cultural Identity in Filipino Creative Writing

In Filipino creative writing, narrative voice emerges as a powerful vehicle for preserving cultural memory, asserting identity, and engaging with social realities. More than a stylistic choice, it serves as a conduit for collective experiences, carrying past generations' wisdom, struggles, and resilience into the present. Through their voices, writers embody oral traditions, regional languages, and historical consciousness, ensuring that stories of ancestors, indigenous practices, and political

struggles remain alive in the national imagination. The use of local dialects and culturally specific idioms further roots narratives in place, allowing readers to experience the richness and authenticity of regional identities. At the same time, narrative voice is a tool for critique and social commentary, resonating themes of poverty, migration, injustice, and resilience. Whether reflective, raw, or allegorical, these voices amplify marginalized perspectives and challenge dominant narratives, transforming literature into cultural preservation and resistance. In this way, Filipino writers position themselves not only as artists but also as custodians of memory and advocates for change, demonstrating how storytelling sustains identity while engaging with the urgent issues of society.

Embodying Collective Memory Through Narrative Voice

Filipino writers use narrative voice to preserve and transmit cultural identity across generations. Their works' voices often reflect collective experiences, oral traditions, and historical consciousness. Through storytelling, they capture the Filipino people's struggles, victories, and resilience. This process strengthens national and ethnic identity by ensuring historical narratives remain in literature.

Storytelling in Filipino creative writing is not merely an artistic endeavor but a cultural obligation. Writers perceive themselves as keepers of collective memory, ensuring that past generations' wisdom, trauma, and triumphs are not forgotten. Through their narrative voice, they bring historical struggles, indigenous practices, and traditional beliefs to life, reinforcing a sense of shared identity among readers.

Participant Insights:

Writing stories about the Martial Law era is my way of ensuring the younger generation understands the sacrifices made for our democracy. If we do not write about it, it will be forgotten.

I weave my ancestors' stories into my work because they were never written in history books. Literature allows us to reclaim what was lost.

Regional and Linguistic Authenticity in Storytelling

The choice of language, dialect, and linguistic patterns in Filipino creative writing is an essential cultural identity marker. Many writers incorporate local dialects, indigenous expressions, and culturally specific idioms to make their narratives more authentic and reflective of Filipino life.

Language carries cultural nuances that cannot always be translated. Using native languages and dialects, writers ensure their stories feel deeply rooted in specific regions and traditions. The distinctiveness of the Filipino narrative voice often comes

from its multilingual nature, mixing Tagalog, regional dialects, and even English in a way that mirrors real-life conversations in the Philippines.

Participant Insights:

Writing in Cebuano makes me feel a stronger connection to my roots. It is how my ancestors spoke; I want my readers to experience that cultural richness.

There are expressions in Ilocano that lose their essence when translated into English. Keeping them in the original language preserves their emotional and cultural weight.

The Narrative Voice as a Medium for Social Commentary

Filipino writers use their narrative voice to reflect and critique social realities such as poverty, migration, corruption, and resilience. Their stories serve as mirrors of society, capturing both its strengths and struggles.

Storytelling in the Philippines has long been used for resistance and awakening. Many writers adopt a critical and reflective tone to expose societal flaws and injustices. Whether through satire, allegory, or realism, their narrative voice amplifies the voices of the marginalized and challenges readers to question the status quo.

Participant Insights:

My protagonist's voice is angry and raw because it reflects the frustration of our people. Literature should not only entertain, but it should also provoke thought and inspire change.

I write about migrant workers because their struggles are often ignored. Their pain, their longing, their resilience, that is what I want readers to feel.

Examining the Use of Indigenous and Contemporary Storytelling Methods to Convey Cultural Themes, Values, and Perspectives

Filipino literature continues to thrive as a dynamic space where tradition and modernity converge, particularly through revitalizing indigenous oral traditions. Contemporary writers integrate elements such as folk epics, myths, and legends into modern narratives, employing cyclical structures, repetition, and oral rhythms that echo the spoken-word traditions of their ancestors. This blending of past and present preserves indigenous knowledge systems and demonstrates their timeless relevance in today's cultural and social contexts. At the same time, the rise of digital media has expanded the possibilities of storytelling, with writers transforming oral traditions into webcomics, podcasts, and interactive platforms that engage younger audiences while maintaining cultural authenticity. Symbolism and metaphor further enrich these works, drawing from nature, folklore, and history to represent continuity, resilience, and identity themes. In doing so, Filipino writers transform traditional forms into powerful cultural tools—bridging generations, reimagining myths for contemporary

struggles, and ensuring that indigenous narratives remain central to the evolving national story.

Revitalizing Indigenous Oral Traditions in Modern Literature

Filipino writers integrate indigenous storytelling techniques such as folk epics, myths, and oral narratives into contemporary fiction. It allows for preserving and reinvigorating traditional storytelling practices in a modern context.

Indigenous storytelling is deeply rooted in Filipino culture, often passed down through spoken word rather than written texts. Writers who incorporate these elements in modern literature create a bridge between the past and present, ensuring that indigenous knowledge systems remain relevant. They often employ cyclical narratives, repetition, and call-and-response structures reminiscent of traditional oral storytelling.

Participant Insights:

I structured my novel like an 'alamat' (legend), using the same rhythm and repetition. It helps the reader experience the story as our ancestors did, through spoken words.

Indigenous narratives hold wisdom that still applies today. I adapt them to modern settings to show their timeless relevance.

The Hybridization of Indigenous and Digital Storytelling

With the rise of digital media, Filipino writers are blending traditional storytelling techniques with contemporary platforms such as webcomics, interactive fiction, and AI-assisted narratives.

Storytelling is evolving, and Filipino writers are finding new ways to share cultural narratives through digital platforms. By incorporating multimedia elements such as visual storytelling, podcasts, and social media narratives, they reach broader audiences while maintaining indigenous themes. This hybridization allows for both preservation and innovation.

Participant Insights:

I turned an old folktale into a webcomic series. The younger generation engages more with digital media, and in this way, they still learn our myths and legends.

Technology does not erase our traditions; it gives us new ways to tell them.

Symbolism and Metaphor as Tools for Cultural Expression

Filipino writers use metaphorical storytelling to represent deeper cultural themes, using symbols from nature, folklore, and history.

Symbolism allows writers to embed layers of meaning within their narratives. Rivers often symbolize life and continuity, mountains represent ancestral wisdom, and mythical creatures like the diwata (fairy spirits) are guardians of forgotten traditions. These literary devices enrich the storytelling experience, deeply reflecting Filipino cultural values.

Participant Insights:

I use the 'kapre' (a giant tree-dwelling creature) to symbolize the struggles of indigenous peoples whose lands are being taken away. The legend takes on new meaning in today's context.

For me, the sea represents migration and longing. Many Filipinos leave the country, but the ocean always connects us back home.

Investigating the Experiences and Creative Processes of Filipino Writers in Developing Narrative Voices that Reflect Filipino Cultural Identity

Storytelling in the Philippines is more than a form of artistic expression; it is a cultural practice deeply intertwined with history, identity, and collective memory. Filipino writers often draw upon personal and communal experiences to craft authentic and culturally rooted narratives, weaving autobiographical elements and real-life events into fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. This reliance on lived realities reflects a desire to create stories that resonate emotionally while remaining grounded in the complexities of Filipino society (Mojares, 2006; Hau, 2017). At the same time, writers face the challenge of balancing creative freedom with cultural responsibility: the need to innovate through new forms and techniques while remaining faithful to traditions, values, and indigenous knowledge systems (Lumbera, 2016; UNESCO, 2008). Many, therefore, consult community elders, oral historians, and cultural experts, treating them as living repositories of heritage whose voices enrich literary works with authenticity and depth (Abad, 2015; Manuel, 1985). In this sense, Filipino literature emerges as both a site of resistance and renewal, preserving cultural legacies while adapting to global influences. Writers thus play a crucial role in artistic creation and cultural preservation, ensuring that narratives continue to embody Filipino identity even in an era of rapid globalization and change.

The Role of Personal Experience in Crafting Authentic Narratives

Writers draw heavily from personal and community experiences to craft stories that feel authentic, relatable, and deeply rooted in cultural identity. Their lived realities, shaped by family histories, regional traditions, socio-political struggles, and collective memory, become the foundation for literary expression. These experiences not only influence the themes they explore but also shape the development of their

narrative voices, giving their works a distinctive character tied to place and culture. Many Filipino writers incorporate autobiographical elements, weaving fragments of their lives into fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction. In doing so, they ensure that their narratives remain emotionally resonant, grounded in real-life contexts, and reflective of the complexities of Filipino society.

Community experiences also play a vital role in sustaining cultural authenticity. Writers often rely on elders' stories, communal rituals, and shared struggles to create narratives that capture the collective spirit of their communities. For example, rural writers may highlight agricultural life, folk beliefs, or oral traditions, while urban writers may focus on migration, poverty, or modernization challenges. As Mojares (2006) observes, literature has become a means of documenting community histories that might otherwise be forgotten, transforming everyday realities into enduring cultural texts. Hau (2017) further explains that these localized experiences, when narrated, acquire broader cultural significance, serving as reflections of national identity and social consciousness.

Participant Insight:

My stories come from the realities I see around me. Fiction feels truer when real people and experiences inspire it.

By embedding personal and communal experiences in their work, writers bridge the gap between individual subjectivity and collective memory. This practice allows literature to resonate across generations, affirming shared heritage while giving voice to diverse Filipino experiences. In this way, personal stories transcend the private realm, becoming cultural artifacts that preserve identity, express resistance, and foster continuity in the face of globalization and change.

Balancing Creative Freedom with Cultural Responsibility

Writers often struggle with the delicate balance between innovating their storytelling techniques and remaining faithful to cultural traditions. On one hand, artistic freedom grants them the liberty to experiment with form, language, and structure, enabling them to respond to global literary trends and appeal to broader audiences. On the other hand, many Filipino writers feel an equally strong responsibility to preserve the authenticity of cultural memory, values, and history embedded in traditional narratives. This tension becomes most apparent when writers attempt to adapt indigenous oral traditions or historical accounts into contemporary forms of literature. For instance, reworking epics like the Hudhud or the Darangen

into modern poetry or prose requires sensitivity, as innovation risks distorting sacred meanings or misrepresenting cultural identity (Manuel, 1985; UNESCO, 2008).

Participant Insights:

I want to experiment with storytelling, but I also have a duty to portray my culture authentically.

In this creative negotiation, writers seek to innovate without erasing or diluting the core of Filipino traditions. According to Lumbera (2016), Philippine literature has long been shaped by this push-and-pull between colonial and indigenous influences, where writers must simultaneously resist cultural homogenization and embrace new literary possibilities. Similarly, Hau (2017) notes that many modern authors deliberately weave folklore, myths, and local idioms into contemporary genres, using hybrid storytelling to affirm cultural authenticity while remaining relevant in a globalized literary scene. This balancing act highlights how narrative voice becomes both a site of resistance and renewal, allowing Filipino writers to sustain cultural legacies while crafting fresh perspectives for modern readers. Ultimately, the struggle reflects a broader cultural challenge: preserving heritage without stifling creativity and modernizing without losing the identity that defines the Filipino literary tradition.

Community Engagement as a Storytelling Resource

Many Filipino writers consult community elders, oral historians, and cultural experts to refine their narratives, recognizing that these sources serve as living repositories of indigenous knowledge and cultural memory. Elders and storytellers embody traditions that predate colonial influences, offering perspectives deeply rooted in local values, rituals, and collective experiences (Manuel, 1985; Mojares, 2006). By engaging with these cultural bearers, writers ensure that their works reflect authentic voices and preserve the richness of oral traditions such as the Hudhud chants of the Ifugao or the Darangen epics of the Maranao (UNESCO, 2008). This collaboration helps bridge the gap between written and oral forms of literature, allowing modern narratives to remain connected to their ancestral roots. Moreover, oral historians and cultural experts provide critical context that enables authors to reinterpret myths, folklore, and community practices in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences while maintaining cultural fidelity (Abad, 2015; Lumbera, 2016). In this sense, Filipino writers are not merely producing individual works of art. However, they are participating in an ongoing cultural preservation and evolution process, where literature becomes a conduit for transmitting values, identity, and collective memory across generations.

Participant Insights:

Before writing about indigenous stories, I speak to elders. Their insights add authenticity to my work.

Discussion

Narrative voice plays a crucial role in preserving and shaping Filipino cultural identity. Writers serve as custodians of history, embedding collective memory in literature through stories that reflect struggles, victories, and traditions. By capturing historical narratives, particularly those omitted from mainstream records, they ensure cultural continuity and awareness among younger generations.

Language authenticity further strengthens Filipino storytelling. Writers incorporate regional dialects and linguistic patterns to maintain cultural nuances, ensuring their narratives remain deeply rooted in Filipino life. Multilingual storytelling, blending Tagalog, regional dialects, and English, mirrors real-life conversations and enriches cultural representation.

Beyond preservation, Filipino writers use narrative voice for social critique, shedding light on poverty, migration, corruption, and resilience. Literature becomes a tool for resistance and advocacy, amplifying marginalized voices and challenging societal norms. Stories about migrant workers, for example, humanize their struggles and provoke critical thought.

Indigenous storytelling techniques, including folk epics and oral traditions, remain vital in modern literature, bridging the past and present. Digital storytelling through web comics, interactive fiction, and AI-assisted narratives expands the reach of cultural narratives, ensuring their relevance in contemporary settings. Symbolism and metaphor further enrich Filipino literature, with elements from nature, folklore, and history conveying themes of identity, displacement, and resistance. Mythical creatures, landscapes, and traditional motifs serve as powerful cultural symbols, adding depth and meaning to narratives.

Writers balance creative freedom with cultural responsibility, drawing from personal and community experiences to craft authentic stories. Many consult elders and cultural experts to refine their work, fostering intergenerational knowledge-sharing. Ultimately, Filipino storytelling transcends artistic expression; it reclaims history, strengthens cultural ties, and fosters national consciousness. By continuously evolving their narrative voices, Filipino writers ensure that their literary tradition remains dynamic and reflects the nation's identity.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of narrative voice in shaping cultural identity in Filipino creative writing, highlighting its function as a medium for preserving collective memory, fostering linguistic authenticity, and providing social commentary. Findings revealed that Filipino writers use narrative voice to document historical experiences, reinforce national identity, and reclaim marginalized stories. Participants emphasized that storytelling is a cultural responsibility, ensuring that past struggles and indigenous traditions remain part of contemporary discourse.

Additionally, language choice emerged as a critical element in authenticity, with writers integrating regional dialects and indigenous linguistic patterns to maintain the depth of cultural expression. The study also found that narrative voice is often used for social critique, addressing themes such as migration, inequality, and resilience. The findings underscore the significance of narrative voice as both a cultural bridge and a transformative tool in Filipino literature. Writers navigate the balance between tradition and innovation, ensuring that storytelling continues to evolve while staying rooted in Filipino identity.

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