JANICE S. ZAMORA-MORALES. Aguman Sanduk: Meanings of Cross-Dressing Performances in a Kapampangan Festival. M.A. Sociology (October 2011)

Aguman Sanduk: The Meanings of Cross-Dressing Performances in a Kapampangan Festival investigates rituals in a town festival that represent community’s solidarity. The festival held in Minalin, Pampanga is a public performance where boys and men cross-dress and inverse the stereotyped masculine appearance and demeanor. The Aguman Sanduk (Fellowship of the Ladle) began in 1931, and is celebrated every New Year’s Day. Activities on the festival include the float parade of cross-dressers from various barangays of Minalin and the awarding of the Aguman Sanduk queen.

The main objective of this study is to examine the representations and meanings of the cross-dressing performances of the men of Minalin during the Aguman Sanduk festival. The specific objectives of the study are: 1) describe the formation and origin of the Aguman Sanduk festival and the activities done during its celebration; 2) identify the meanings and contested meanings attached to the festival through the years; 3) examine Minalin men’s attach meanings to their cross-dressing performance in the festival vis-à-vis the expected Kapampangan ‘macho’ appearance and behavior; and 4) examine how cross-dressing in a festival serve as a medium towards strengthening of the community’s sense of solidarity.

The study is guided by theories and concepts drawn for Cliffoe Geertz’s Interpretivism, and Barbara Ehrenreich’s collective joy/merriment. The research combined multiple data collection methods such as in-depth interviews, analysis of documents, observation and field visits.

Cross-dressing, the study found out, was not intended to bend gender norms, but rather, was done to strengthen the community’s bond. It is in pamamiblas babai or cross-dressing of a man like a woman that the community is able to achieve collective merriment. In the Aguman Sanduk Festival, men from all walks of life cross-dress and dare to step out of their statuses. It is with utmost pride as Minalenos and pamakiabe (camaraderie) that a man form Minalin will dare step out of his status to give joy (pikatulan) to his people. Tula and pamakiabe, which are essential elements of the Aguman Sanduk festival serve to affirm, reaffirm, and strengthen the Minaleno’s ties and communal solidarity.