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Capturing indigenous Bontoc Dances: Basis for Writing Dance Literature

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous dances are one of the many indigenous practices of the people worth preserving. Capturing indigenous dances then is very timely when many of our cultural practices are being fast forgotten. One of the most fitting ways of immortalizing the dance movement is through dance literature. This paper then aims to notate the live dance performance of the selected indigenous dances of Central Bontoc through the use of documentation for cultural base and context of dance presentations. It is apparent that these dances: sagni, pattong are commonly known as Pattong – the Bontoc community dance. These are generally social dances being danced in festivities and being choreographed in various presentations. This study establishes culturally sensitive staging among theatre artists and empowering awareness among the Bontoc young people on how to dance their very own dances. Also, this study produced dance literature capable of communicating the dance when a live body is absent.

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

In this era of modernization, many indigenous dances are also becoming homogenised. A lot of indigenous dances have come to be influenced by today's times and space as exemplified with in movements and in its performance meaning and symbol. The need then, to review and capture the indigenous dances can be a simple help in the revitalization and preservation of cultural identity on dancing as a basis for writing dance literature that can be viable and useful for propagation and instruction purposes.

Dancing is a form of art and a reflection of man's culture and heritage. It is said that indigenous performance is an important part of indigenous culture –

ceremony, storytelling, celebration, and mourning, coming together and telling of events. Among this wide range of similarities of indigenous dances, there is a great diversity of indigenous dance forms and styles among indigenous communities.

Consequently, the indigenous performing arts are important means of expressing indigenous heritage – past, present and future. Culture and the arts resonate in singing and dancing of each ethno-linguistic group. These forms reflect the faith and beliefs of people. Bontoc, the focus research locale, like any other ethno-linguistic group in the place, likewise has its own culture – a living tradition. The richness of their culture is seen during their festivities they perform and enjoy. Prominently, they feature their indigenous dances in festivals.

The culture and the arts then are very important in the life of a country unfortunately, this precious intangible cultural heritage is fading away due to migration and urbanization. The Philippine Association of Folk Dances acknowledges the limited and even non-existence of literature of some of the indigenous dances of certain ethno-linguistic groups like Bontoc cultural community in Mountain Province of the Cordillera Administrative Region. Only Ragsakan dance has its written literature that is coming from the province of Kalinga. This recognized dance then is being learned and showcased by not only the Kalinga people but as well as other performers of indigenous dances and theatrical artists during conventions like Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges. The indigenous people in CAR, commonly termed as Igorots share some common dances but are varied. It is noteworthy that indigenous culture are living and evolving entities which are not simply historical phenomena but also features the variations of culture of each groups. Developing a dramatic work then often involves adapting or reinterpreting tradition for contemporary works.

In view of the aforementioned, this paper features the captured indigenous dances of the Bontoks of Central Bontoc, Mountain Province, Cordillera Administrative Region. This study is limited on the documentation of the indigenous dances of the research locale not published especially their respective dance patterns or movements. The dance title, historical background, costumes, music, props, and dance steps served as bases for the dance literature of Bontok. The study focused on the documentation and identification of the selected most danced traditional dances of the Bontoks. The literature developed was based on the documented traditional dances of the group in the actual and staged performances, the historical backgrounds of the given dances, and the concept provided by the Bontok elders. The literature of the dances were developed and evaluated in the basis of perceptions given by the experts in the field. Trial of the developed Bontok literary dances was not part of the scope of the study.

METHOD

The qualitative study is focused in Central Bontoc, which is found in the capital town of Mountain Province in CAR. Since there is no written dance literature of the focus research locale, this paper focuses on documenting the culture base and context of selected indigenous dances of the Central Bontoc – these are *pattong*, and *sagni*. It followed consultation among the key informants who are selected guardians and interpreters of the Central Bontoc Culture and some choreographers on Bontoc indigenous dances that can give authentic interpretation and representation on the dances.

Video documentation, active and interactive performance were observed to identify the nature of the selected dances of the research locale that which was a basis for the writing of dance literature capable of communicating dance when a live body is absent.

Dance literature on this research followed what the Philippine Folk Dance Society (2016), and likewise utilized by Domondonet. al. (2018) in their creative work on indigenous choreography dance literature. Such outline follows: dance title, historical background, costume, time signature, props, dance steps, and music score.

2. Results And Discussion

The Bontoc Indigenous Dances: The Context and Cultural Base

The Bontoc indigenous dances are found to be rooted on their cultural practices and beliefs. Their dances such as *pattong* and *sagni* are used for celebrations and rituals. Specifically, *pattong* is one of the most performed dances in any occasions whether it be a ritual or cleansing or a community celebration. *Pattong* is being performed by men and *sagni* by the women. However, as taken, *pattong* also is a collective term to refer to the event of the dances. Each dance complements each other on the event of dancing.

Traditionally, the Bontoc socio-political structure used to be centered on village wards called *ato* or *ator* containing about 14 to 50 homes. Prill – Brett (2015) writes, this physical structure are used for social and ritual functions. Young unmarried men and women lived in dormitories and only go home to eat meals with their families during day time. These “dormitories” are called *ato* and *ulog* respectively. This gradually changed with the advent of modernization, Christianity, and education among other factors. This place, *ato/ris* a socialization cite. It is the usual venue of dancing during community feasts up until today. Most witnessed and participated feast is the grand community celebration called *Pasok-ey*. Communities participate by small group or *citios*; each are by group of men and another for women. The dancing takes place in the front grounds of the said ward.

On these occasions are the stories, chants, dances are witnessed among the *ato* members and those who enjoined them. *Pasok-ey* is called such because,

before, the women participants *sensuk-ey* insert leaves between their beads and hair to support them from scorching heat of the sun as during summertime. Also, women give out to gong players gifts in the form of tobaccos and leis during the said affair. *Pasok-ey* is an *ato* feast where there are gong playing and dancing, singing, praying, eating and drinking, and sharing. Men and women in the community bring to the *ato* having the feast tobaccos and drinks like *tapey* (rice wine), *fayas* (sugar cane wine) and San Miguel gin, and soft drinks. Men and boys take turns in playing the gongs; women and girls from the different *atos* also take turns in distributing to the gong players tobaccos and leis (Ngodcho, 2007).

The Bontoks recognized three types of tattoos: The *chak-lag'*, the tattooed chest of the head taker; *pong'-o*, the tattooed arms of men and women; and *fa'-tĕk*, for all other tattoos of both sexes. Women were tattooed on the arms only. It is note taking that these forms of tattoos are elaborately shown during social dances in the *ato/r*.

Indeed, the Bontoks perform this dance in a circular rhythmic dance acting out certain aspects of the hunt, always accompanied by the *khang'-sa* or bronze gong, which is called the *pattong* and women follows in the circle while swaying their bodies with spread up like an eagle - *sagni*. There are no singing or talking during the dance drama, but the women took part, usually outside the circumference. It is observed to serious or jovial relevant to the music made with the gongs. This ceremony are perceived to be pleasurable event for all concerned, including the children.

Ceremonial performances are still seen as the core of Bontoc cultural life. These ceremonies bring together all aspects of culture song, dance, body decoration or *fatek and chak-lag* known as tattoos. Music, song, ceremony performance and dance were and are still today a very important part of Bontok life. This is imminently seen during *ato orator* rituals and feasts: *manerwap*, *pasok-ey*. The dancing ground of the Bontoks is typically undertaken in front of the *ato/orator*. Seldom is done outside these parameters as it is *lawa or ngaag* (bad) to do it on other occasions such as wedding feast and death in contrast with what the nearby places do.

In all this dancing, there is perfect rhythm in music and movements. There is no singing or even talking – the dance is a serious but pleasurable pastime for those participating. The impact of indigenous dances in the lives of the Bontoks is beyond just leaping and hopping or skipping. It is more than a dance; it mirrors Bontoc's cultural values.

Pattong is a dance played and parted by men leading the dance in a circular manner and being followed by the women in *sagni* body movement with usual steps. A typical dance will begin when young men who have been in the *ato/orator* or gathered nearby from other *citios* in Central Bontok such as Samoki, Foyayeng, Fatayan, and Lanao comes at random group and take turns in beating the gongs with a padded stick. The group of men with 7 to 14 lead

the dancing in a solemn and graceful way and women follow with the sways, turns and body tunes as with the changes of step, direction, gong position, and body position.

Through the observations, and in corroboration with the findings of Reid (2009) on the Guina-ang dancing and music notes, *pattong* may typically be started when one man may be appointed by common consent to take the lead in the dance, or if somebody desires to be the leader, he may just start off into dancing area without consulting his companions. The leader usually starts out with a large step, body, upright, often with a grotesque facial expression, and gong held waist high; as his companions follow closely, the dancing steps become shorter, and he begins to introduce some variations in style. The dance is always performed counter clockwise.

On other body semiotics and music rhythm, men always lead the women dancers. The first in line will be followed in domino motion until it reaches the last in line either it is in circular or linear formation (at times as a variation dance).

The ritual in the *ato/ator* before has changed with respect to the use of attire as seen in the contemporary *ato/ator* feasts. Video documentations show dance renditions outside the *ato/ator*, Bontok performers take pride in the authenticity of the movements and music rhythm but do add still color through using various elaborate indigenous Bontok attire from the costume, props, and make-ups.

In corroboration with some online short writing write-up on Mountain Province, dances note that the *Kankanaey's* major dances include *tayaw*, *pattong*, as Igorot wedding dance, and *balangbang*. *Pattong* is a dance classified under Mountain-Igorot dances. Such dance is usually performed in February, March, and April, during the dry seasons. It is with a belief that it is to implore the god *Lumawig* to send rain, similar in purpose to that of the rain-calling ceremony of Native American tribes.

In other portrayals witnessed and made by the researcher in various feasts and choreographies made nowadays, *pattong* is also staged as a War Dance account mimicking it with the forgotten tradition of the Bontoks as head hunting. *Pattong* showcase war ceremonials as backdrop inciting feelings of strength and courage as the warriors prepare to stalk their enemy. Much of the movements are improvised; two camps of warriors are usually featured pursuing each other, culminating in a melee where a fighter from one tribe kills one of his opponents. All warriors are performed only by males and females are not seen with major roles. Such depiction mirrors the then observance of gender roles on war.

Evidently, *pattong* steps as a dance is the known dance identity of the locale. Although, choreographers do variations as showcased during presentations, these are limited on the themes of the presentation. Both the elders, dancers and

performers adhere with the authentic dance movement. Choreographers of the dance share that performing this dance in the wrong context and wrong movement can ridicule that dance. Also, there are many dances that cannot just be performed. It is imperative to review the dance context of performance and cultural base. The big impact of context in a performance leads to the re-evaluation of the appropriateness of the work on the time and occasion. How we contextualize the performance matters so as not to “exotify” or bastardize pieces of performing works but rather be faithful with the origin of the culture after all it is the culture that is being portrayed.

Bontoc Indigenous Dances – *Pattong* and *Sagni*:

On the Musical Instrument: The Gong

Each of the gongs makes unique sounds as harmonized to produce the music that makes the sound for the *pattong*. The gong is termed *khangsa*. The average size of these gongs is from twelve to eighteen inches in diameter, with a flange about two to three inches wide at right angles to the face. Two holes have been bored about four inches apart on the flange. And through these pass the fastenings for the hand piece. In the olden times, this consisted of a jawbone taken from a vanquished enemy in a head hunting activity, but none of these have been spotted today. Some use wooden handles crudely shaped into a V to represent a jawbone or any form to safeguard the hand to a handle; others have boar tusks or other pieces of bone as a substitute. The padded stick uses to beat the gong is made from a piece of rattan about nine inches long. Through a split, in the end, is placed a pad of cloth which is then bound tightly before with strips of rattan. Nowadays bands are used.

The gongs are not made in this place but are believed to be imported through the early interactions of the Bontoks with other nearby places. Reid (2009) notes in his writing that it could be brought up from the lowland provinces. Further, these gongs are said to have originated in China.

On the Dancing Movement

Pattong: Men are on the lead. They are being followed by the women dancers. Common steps are as follows: holding of gongs; beating the gongs with the use of padded sticks; swinging of foot right foot across the left foot; raising the foot slightly above the floor; moving in a queue for a circular manner; and, body swaying very slightly downward and upward gracefully in every motion.

For women, *sagni*, their direction, and movements are following the men’s movement and rhythm of the gongs. The following are the common steps as followed with: Putting hands on waist or on the chest level, Raising of heels while executing every step; Swinging of right foot in synchrony with the males movement and beating of the gongs; Raising foot slightly above the floor; Lifting of arms sideward slightly above the shoulder level with fist closed with the thumb pointing upward; Raising both arms sideward and body swaying

very slightly downward and upward gracefully in every motion following men's' direction.

Generally, the Bontok men dances called *pattong* while they beat the gongs in que leading to a semi-circle direction while the women come in groups or simultaneously come besides, near or opposite the men dancing and swaying as *sagni* to the music. The Bontoc *pattong* is quite solemn and slower than the other nearby ethno-linguistic groups.

The changes of steps are many, and the description is difficult and inadequate because the foot placing is very finely adjusted to the rhythm of the gongs and such a relationship is not easy to define. Thus, there are varieties of gong position as well as body motions depending on the rhythmic jump.

Material Culture used for Costume, Make-up, and Props

Nowadays in the *ato/ator* feast and rituals, the attire of the dancers are quite modernized but still is very colourful during with elaborate use of the indigenous attire of the Bontoks. With such modernity, men dancers wears modern shirts and trunks shorts with *wanes*. The material culture used for costumes, make-up, and props in the dances are the following, gongs and sticks as musical instruments played by men; females Bontoc attire – *lufid* (/lU-flId/), *wakes* (/wa'kêS/), *appong* (/ä'pUng/) or headdress, and male Bontoc attire – *wanes* (/wa-nes/) and *falaka* (/fala'ka/) for the dancers' clothing costumes; and, tattoos for make-up are taken differently, where women are on the arms taken for beautification purposes, and on men's chest as social signifier. With this dance is the war dance taken as freestyle and thus, two opposing men will relive a free war dance style with *tufay* (/tU-fay/) and *pinnang* (/pIn-nang/) as props.

Description of the Dance Literature of Indigenous Bontok Dances

Title: This refer to the name that was given to best describe the dance. Bontoc dance title follows the movements or actions of the dancers, males for *pattong*, and females as *sagni*. Both are action words that depict what the dancers do.

Historical Background: This is the overview of the dance. It gives the identity of the dance based on the cultural base and context of the Bontok community dance culture.

Dance Steps: These refer to a sequence of foot and arm movements that make up a particular dance. The mood is generally jovial; stance is erect; performers are females and males; musicians are the males; and, formation is generally in circle, line, and column.

Music: Pattong is played by an ensemble of 7 *khangsa* (gong), each played by a male musician who joins in the dance. It composed of two music in 4/4 (a) and 2/4 (b) time signature.

Costumes: These refers to the materials the dancers use. They follow the traditional Bontok attire: the *wanes* for males and *lufid* for females.

Props: These refer to the materials that Bontoks use in dancing.

Notation – Continuing the Bontoc Culture:

The Prepared Dance Literature

Following the observed, practiced and documented nature and body motions of *pattong* and *sagni*, its literature is hereby presented.

Bontoc Community Dance: *Pattong*

Pattong is taken as a community dance of feast. This is typically danced in the *ato/ator* front grounds where the men and women both old and young enjoined. It is one of the central socialization of the community members during important rituals and celebrations. The dance is usually performed in February, March, and April, known as *kesep* or dry season to implore the god Lumawig to send rain known as *Manerwap*, similar in purpose to that of the rain-calling ceremony and is culminated during the *Pasok-ey* feast. These practices are still highly observed and participated by the community members until today.

Pattong is also known as the Bontoc War Dance connectively as in the early times, *pattong* is part of the headhunting and war ceremonials inciting feelings of strength and courage as the warriors prepare to stalk their enemy. Much of the movements are improvised; two camps of warriors are usually featured pursuing each other, culminating in a melee where a fighter from one tribe kills one of his opponents.

Music: Composed of two music in 4/4 (a) and 2/4 (b) time signature

Girls’ heels are raised while executing every step.

Introduction

Facing the audience.

Double line formation with the Boys in front and Girls at the back.

Girls’ movements:

- (a) Hands on waist: Swing R foot across L foot on cts. 1, 2.

Repeat on L foot on cts. 3, 4. Repeat all
2M

Boys’ movements:

- (b) Beat the gong twice while swinging the R foot

across L foot on cts. 1, 2. Repeat on L foot on cts. 3, 4.

Repeat all

.....2M

Figure I

Music A. Facing the audience

Girls’ movements:

- (a) Hands on waist. Starting with the R foot, take four change steps in place. Raise R foot slightly above the floor.

Two change steps in a measure

.....2M

Boys’ movements:

- (b) While beating the gong, take four steps in place. Raise R foot slightly above the floor. Two change steps in a measure.....2M

Figure II

Music A. Forming a double circle with Boys inside and Girls outside

Girls’ movements:

- (a) Raise both arms sideward slightly above shoulder level in arc form. Fists closed with the thumb pointing upward. Starting with R foot, take sixteen change steps moving forward to a circle formation

.....8M

Boys’ movements:

- (b) While playing the gong, starting with the R foot, take four change steps moving forward to a circle formation

.....2M

- (c) Execute another four change steps moving forward with slightly bended knees and trunks. Sway the body slightly with the gong to the right side.....2M

- (d) Repeat (a) and (b) forming a double circle.....4M

Figure III

Music B. Double circle with the Boys inside and Girls outside

Girls’ movements:

(a) Raise both arms sideward slightly above the shoulder level. Open palms facing sideward. The body is swayed very slightly on the right and arms are swayed downward and upward gracefully in every measure. L foot forward.....4M

(b) Do the same body and arm movements as to (a). Starting with R foot, take eight small hop steps moving backward with the L foot remains on the ground. Two hops in a measure4M

(c) Repeat (b) with the L foot forward moving at the center to interchange with the boys4M

(d) Repeat (b) going back to meet with the boys to form one circle. Face counter-clockwise on the last count4M

Boys' movements:

(a) While playing the gong, bend trunk forward and gongs at the knee level. L foot forward4M

(b) Repeat (a) moving towards the center executing eight small hop steps on L foot with the R foot remains on the ground. Two hops in a measure. Straighten the body and raise the gong at head level on the last measure4M

(c) Repeat (b) moving backward to interchange with girls4M

(d) Repeat (b) moving towards the centre and meet with the girls to form one circle. Face counter-clockwise on the last count4M

Figure IV

Music B. Circle formation facing counter-clockwise

- (a) Starting with R foot, execute sixteen change steps following the circle in counter-clockwise with the girls holding the waist of the boys.....
...16M
- (b) Execute the eight change steps to finish in a double line formation facing the audience with the boys on the left side of the girls. Girls’ hands on waists
.....8M

Finale

Music A. Double line formation

Girls’ movements:

- (a) Raise both arms sideward slightly above the shoulder level. Fists closed with the thumb pointing upward. Starting with the R foot, take sixteen change steps moving counter-clockwise with the boys; exit
.....8M

Boys’ movement:

- (a) Starting with the R foot, take sixteen change steps moving counter-clockwise with slightly bended trunk and knees2M
- (b) Repeat (a) with the straighten trunk and knees2M
- (c) Repeat (a) and (b); exit
.....4M

3. Conclusion

There are varied indigenous dances of the Central Bontoc such as commonly and collectively termed as *Pattong* that it takes its historical background on the *ato* context of the place for rituals, and community feasts such as celebrations and successful war taken as head hunting activities way back before the 1930s and culture of the community people on festivities and social-affairs. The material culture used for costumes, make-up, and props in the dances are the following, gongs and padded sticks as musical instruments played by men;

females Bontoc attire – *lufid* (/lU-flid/), *wakes* (/wa'kêS/), *appong* (/ä'pUng/), and male Bontoc attire – *wanes* (/wa-nes/) and *falaka* (/fala'ka/) for the dancers' clothing costumes; and, tattoos for make-up taken differently, where women are on the arms taken for beautification purposes, and on men's chest as social signifier. With this dance is the war dance taken as freestyle and thus, two opposing men will re-live a free war dance style with *tufay* (/tU-fay/) and *pinnang* (*pin-nang*) as props.

The literature of the dance is now forwarded following a dance notation body motion for the movements and music. The dance is divided accordingly with music, and dance movements, for men and women.

This dance literature is a guide for choreographers for staging the unique culture of the past..

4. Recommendations

1. New studies can be done on other types of short fiction on the Cordilleran folklore to authenticate one's cultural heritage.
2. Language and Literature teachers in 21st-century literature should encourage their students to be aware of the biases and stereotypes being committed in all types of communicative acts and they should be given orientation on how these biases are avoided.
3. Curriculum makers should integrate into the curriculum the study of gender roles, gender stereotypes, and biases in the study of literature to train students to be conscious of the usage of male-dominated language and the affirmative remunerations of applying non-sexist instructional materials in the classroom.
4. There should be continued research on the effects of gender stereotypes in books and television programs.

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