

Describing the Subanen Dances of ‘Banwa’ Labo in Ozamiz City, Philippines

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Abstract

Cultural heritage is one of the most important treasures of any race. However, in this rapidly changing world, it is imperative to document and preserve the rich dance cultural heritage of indigenous peoples. This study aimed to describe the Subanen dances of ‘Banwa’ Labo in Ozamiz City, Philippines. Interviews were conducted among key informants to identify the Subanen dances of ‘Banwa’ Labo in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. The tribe had identified four Subanen dances. The study showed that the authenticity of these dances, classifies and describes them based on the basic elements and factors that influence folk dances. These dances are classified as ritual, religious, imitative, festival, and courtship dances. The Subanen traditional dances are rich in character traits and customs, which contribute to the cultural identity of this indigenous people. The findings of this research may provide information on the fundamentals of the Subanen dances. Instructional materials can be developed from the dance notations and the meaning of the dance steps. These dances may be integrated in physical education as a medium of disseminating history and literature.

Keywords: culture, folk, heritage, identity, traditions

Introduction

Each of the three islands in the Philippines has different culture, traditions, and beliefs that have influenced the islands' arts, crafts, and dances (Alcuizar et al., 2015). The Philippines has a diverse collection of traditional dances (Roper, 2016). These dances may have evolved and changed as they have been passed down from generation to generation but have remained true to their roots. Customs and tradition, climatic environment, and economic conditions are factors that influence folk dances in the Philippines (Ossona, 2000).

Provinces in the Philippines have their own identifying folk dances that reflect their unique culture wherein they highlight the elegance and beauty of the way they do things (Peterson, 2010; Tolentino, 2012; Ouano-Savellon, 2014). The 'Subanen' tribal group in Misamis Occidental is an example. A 'Banwa' is a territory of the tribe (Villanueva & Jomuad, 2013). The 'Subanen' people perform ritual dances and play their drums and gongs to be at peace with the 'diwata' or goddess of their tribe. According to Velayo (2000), dance fulfills a multitude of ceremonial and ritual functions for the 'Subanon'. Rituals usually involve processes and the performance of dances which characterizes the type of ceremony being conducted (Anacin, 2009).

Original dances might not be traditional and authentic anymore. According to Namiki (2011), local dances in the Philippines, however, when popularized in the late 1950s, were already modernized and innovated prior to the establishment or codification of solid cultural base or traditional forms of dance. Hence, it is imperative nowadays to examine the dances in a particular tribe and assess if this cultural heritage is still preserved.

Preservation of the heritage does not imply immobility or stagnation. The most effective ways to preserve intangible heritage are by collecting, recording, and archiving. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is much concerned with studying and recording expressions of the intangible heritage (Blake, 2001). Today, many government organizations and private enterprises undertake projects to preserve and

promote arts mainly for education, culture, tourism, and health purposes (Santos, 2016; Lim, 2017).

Hence, this study aimed to describe the Subanen dances of 'Banwa' Labo in Ozamiz City. Specifically, this study determined the kinds, descriptions, and elements of Subanen dances of this particular Subanen 'Banwa'. These attributes of the Subanen dances contribute to the cultural identity of this indigenous people. The findings of this research may provide information on the fundamentals of the Subanen dances. Instructional materials can be developed from the dance notations and the meaning of the dance steps. These dances may be integrated in physical education as a medium of disseminating history and literature.

Materials and Methods

This study used the qualitative research design. The key informant technique of Tremblay (1957) was utilized to obtain information about the Subanen traditional dances and to validate each meaning. Observation method and face-to-face key informant interview were carried out in obtaining the information from the members of the Subanen tribe, particularly the tribal leaders called 'Timuay' or 'Gukum' (male tribal leader), 'Timuay Libon/Bae' (female tribal leader), and some female and male dancers from the tribe. During observation, the movements of the dance performers and other elements of the dances were recorded. Dance notation was also used in translating the different movements and meanings that includes dance steps/terms, timing, dynamics, lead and follow, rhythm and space. Dances were also notated based on the factors that influence folk dances to assess the authenticity of dances. The identified key informants were selected among the three barangays of Ozamiz City found in Banwa Labo namely, Bongbong, Tipan, and Gala.

Apart from the three tribal leaders from each barangay, the number of participants or dancers varied depending on the availability of the key informants as the subjects of the study for observation. Informed consent was secured from the participants before the conduct of the study.

Before the interview with the tribal leaders and other informants, the city tribal leader was consulted. All tribe informants signed the informed consent indicating their voluntary participation.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the kinds, descriptions, and elements of Subanen dances identified by the Subanen in Banwa Labo. The key informants identified dances that the tribes would usually perform during ‘buklog’. The informants revealed that there is no common step counting (time signature) as long as its footwork goes along with the tempo or beat of the ‘agong’, a percussion instrument used during Subanen gatherings.

Common dances are ‘pangalitawo’, ‘tagdel’, ‘manok-manok’, and ‘salilingan’. ‘Pangalitawo’ is a Subanen courtship dance usually performed during the harvest time and in other social occasions (Bautista, 2017). In ‘pangalitawo’ (pronounced as pahng-AH-lee-TAH-woh), performers execute ‘patay’. It is a dance term which means to bend the head downward and support the forehead with right or left forearm (Tulio, 2008), the female usually facing downward and bends her trunk while dancing. The Filipino dances, are performed with very little or no bodily contact at all. In the old days, the male partners were provided with handkerchiefs. Based on the interview with the Subanen women, as they perform ‘pangalitawo’, it will favor an acceptance for suitors. When the woman drops the handkerchief, it means no for courtship, and if the woman allows it on her shoulder so it is an acceptance for courtship or marriage. The woman executes “patay” all throughout the dance to defend herself by not letting the men touch their hands or any part of their bodies.

In ‘pangalitawo’, traditional costumes are worn. However, the paper of Villanueva and Jomoad (2013) pointed the apparent modifications in the traditional Subanen costumes as a result of adaptation to the modern-day clothing and style and other factors which even include the lack of consultation by local government agencies with the Subanen as to the specifics of the traditional costumes. Nevertheless, the wearing of the Subanen traditional costumes in all their dances as shown in this study is still a cultural expression of this tribal group.

Table 1. Kinds, descriptions, and elements of Subanen dances.

	Kind or name of dance			
	‘Pangalitawo’ (rival/dance)	‘Tagdel’	‘Manok-manok’	‘Saliingan’
Description/ Mechanics	<p>- It is a courtship dance which is popular among the tribe members.</p> <p>- It is usually danced among female and male dancers during social occasions.</p> <p>- Two or more dancers may participate in the dance. A male dancer has to bring a handkerchief.</p> <p>- Throughout the dance, the male should put the handkerchief on the female’s shoulder. When the lady drops the handkerchief, it means no for courtship, and when the lady allows it on her shoulder so it is an acceptance for courtship or marriage.</p>	<p>- It is a type of dance that is usually performed among men in the tribe. As the male dances, he spiels or chants a poem in ‘Subanen’ dialect.</p>	<p>- It is a dance for all. Performers imitate the action of a flying bird or chicken.</p> <p>- This dance usually performed during social gatherings like wedding or baptismal.</p>	<p>- It is a worship dance usually performed during ‘Buklog’</p>

Continued: Table 1. Kinds, descriptions, and elements of Subanen dances.

	Kind or name of dance			
	'Pangalitawo' (rival/dance)	'Tagdel'	'Manok-manok'	'Salingan'
Costume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dancers are dressed with their traditional Subanen costume. - Handkerchief is optional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional Subanen costume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional Subanen costume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional Subanen costume with "palaspas"
Hand gesture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Hayon-hayon' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hayon-hayon' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hayon-hayon' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hayon-hayon'
Footwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Simulakot' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Simulakot' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Simulakot' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Simulakot'
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow, quick, quick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow, quick, quick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow, quick, quick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow, quick, quick
Lead and follow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female takes the lead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any male in the crowd can take the lead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anyone can lead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anyone can lead.
Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swinging movement of the arms, female dancers usually facing down. - Dancers bend their trunk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swinging movement of the arms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swinging movement of the arms, female dancers usually facing down. - Dancers bend their trunk and hop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swinging movement of the arms, female dancers usually facing down. - Dancers bend their trunk.
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any desired formation may be done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any desired formation may be done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any preferred formation may be done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any desired formation may be done.

When 'pangalitawo' is performed during social occasions, the women hold shredded banana leaves in each hand, while the men hold a 'kalasay' or shield in their right hand. The shaking of leaves calls the attention of the diwata (goddess) and the sound of the leaves is most beautiful to the gods' ears (Lasay, 2006).

The hand gestures, footwork, and timing are the same in all the dances identified in this study. 'Hayon-hayon', the hand gesture used in all the dances, is a Visayan term which means to place one forearm in front and the other behind the waist (Tolentino, 2012). Footwork refers to dance technique aspect related to feet, the foot position and foot action. During the interview, the informants referred to the step or footwork in Subanen dances as 'sinulakot' which means a series of steps. The music or beat of the 'agong' determines the footwork of traditional dances (Browner, 2004). Footwork in other traditional dances is also similar (Schroeder, 2012). The dance timing is slow at the beginning then becomes quick that also goes along with the tempo or beat of the 'agong'.

Lead and follow are designations for the two dancers comprising a couple. The lead is responsible for guiding the dance and initiating transitions to different dance steps. The lead communicates choices to the follow and directs the follow by means of subtle physical and visual signals, thereby allowing them to smoothly coordinate (DeMers, 2013). It is the woman who takes the lead in 'pangalitawo'.

The dynamics of a dance expresses the way in which the shape of movement is executed. From the point of view of Rudolph Laban effort's theory, space (direct or indirect), time (sustained or sudden), weight (light or strong), and flow (free or bound) are the four main factors that make up the dynamics of movement (Rai, 2016). The dynamics in all the dances identified in this study is the same. There is swinging movement of the arms and female dancers usually face down, and all dancers bend their trunk except in 'tagdel'.

Space is an element of dance (Koff, 2000). It refers to the space through which the dancer's body moves (general or personal space, level, size, direction, and pathway, focus). In this study, the space is also the same in all the dances. Any preferred formation can be done in Subanen dances in this study.

'Tagdel' is a dance performed among men in the tribe. As the men dance, they spiel or chant a poem in 'Subanen' dialect. There is no existing literature about this dance. The Subanen dances are therefore considered to be one of the most unique among the other ethnic groups (Martinez, 2014). Another all-male dance is 'sohten' that dramatizes the strength and stoic character of the Subanon male. 'Sohten' is a traditional all-male war dance of the Subanon tribe, originating from the Margo Sa Tubig, Lupayan District, Zamboanga del Norte. In this pre-battle ritual, the men carry shields and cut dried palm leaves and perform soaring, combative gestures to appease the gods in order to receive protection and success in war (Hiyas Philippine Folk Dance Company, 2011).

'Manok-manok' and 'salilingan' are also new dances identified in 'Banwa' Labo in Ozamiz City. These Subanen traditional dances are indeed rich in character, traits and customs which may contribute to the cultural identity of this indigenous people. 'Manok-manok' is a dance for all usually performed during social gatherings like wedding or baptismal. This dance is unique because the performers imitate the action of a flying bird or chicken. 'Salilingan' which is a worship dance usually performed during 'buklog' (pronounced as 'gbecklug') is the most colorful and expensive Subanen celebration. It is a rite observed after a happy event, such as good harvest but is also held to commemorate a dead person so that his acceptance into the spirit world may be facilitated (Velayo, 2000; Berdon-Georsua, 2004).

Other worship dances are 'diwata' and 'lapal'. 'Diwata' is a dance performed by Subanon women in Zamboanga del Norte before they set out to work in the swidden and even before fishing and hunting to seek permission for resource use and supplications for a bountiful yield (Roxas & Duhaylungsod, 2004). 'Lapal' is a dance of the "balian" (medium or Shaman) as a form of communication with the 'diwata' or goddess.

Subanen dances belong to the “traditionalist” groups (Bautista, 2017). They fulfill a multitude of ceremonial and ritual functions. As mentioned, the Subanen dances are influenced by different factors. Each factor indicates special meanings that describe the authenticity of a kind of dance.

For example, the Filipinos by customs and traditions especially the women of the past, are shy, sensitive, modestly slow, and reserved, and these traits are found in courtship dances. In ‘Pangalitawo’ for instance, the female is usually facing downward and bending trunk while dancing. The Subanen dances are performed with very little or no body contact at all. In the old days the male partners were provided with handkerchiefs.

Climatic environment has a great influence upon the nature of the dances of any nation. It can tell very easily where certain dances came. Cold regions have vigorous, passionate, and energetic steps. They abound by skips, jumps, leaps, hops, springs, turns, and running steps. The movements are suitable to the climatic conditions. However, tropical countries have slow, languorous, weird, and dreamy dances. Most dances in the Philippines belong to the slow and moderate type. ‘Tagdel’ for instance is a gentle dance while the male spiels or chants a poem in Subanen dialect. Nevertheless, there are dances in the Philippines that are fast and energetic like ‘tinikling’.

Economic conditions greatly influence also the kinds of dances in a country. In some places where the economy is good, the dances are gay and frolicsome. In this study, the Subanen people during the interview conformed that the economic conditions among their tribe are depicted in ‘pangalitawo’, ‘manok-manok’, and ‘salilingan’ that are regarded as high-spirited dances as they swing their arms with handkerchief and ‘palaspas’ or leaves. Whereas, ‘tagdel’ affirms that life is tough when the Subanen people have to dwell far into the mountains.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Four dances were identified in 'Banwa' Labo in Ozamiz City. They are newly documented and classified as ritual, religious, imitative, festival, and courtship dances. These dances are additions to the existing literature on the Philippine folk dances. The Subanen dancers used only one traditional costume that implies the genuineness of a dance. The Subanen dances are rich in character, traits, and customs, which contribute to their cultural identity as a tribe.

The Subanen people have to teach the new generation the basic and authentic steps of their different dances. The local government should strictly observe the modification of the steps during town festival. Academic institution is a good avenue in preserving intangible heritage by collecting, recording and archiving these kinds of dances among the Subanen people. Instructional materials could be developed from the dance notations gathered for the mobilization and integration of these dances in teaching physical education. This initiative could be a means of disseminating local history and literature.

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