

Tracing Bati-Bati: A Dance Tradition

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Abstract:

Sayaw ng Pagbati or Bati-Bati which means to greet or to welcome is a street dance which embodies the joy in the resurrection of Jesus Christ for the Catholic community in the town of San Dionisio, Parañaque, Philippines. This is performed by little girls in white dresses who dance before the images of the Risen Christ and His Blessed Mother in front of the Cathedral of St. Andrew. It is known as original to the towns of La Huerta and San Dionisio. In doing a preliminary study on this dance, I employ Adrienne Kaeppler's moment work and Patrick Alcedo's different perspectives in understanding a religious dance with the following questions: Why was Bati-Bati so important to the people of Parañaque? Who were the patrons, composers, performers, and audiences? How did these dances come to their present complexity? And What could dance tell me about society?

In employing Kaeppler's moment work and Alcedo's various perspectives in understanding a religious festival, this preliminary work on Sayaw ng Pagbati presents the following observations. The San Dionisio community deeply prides itself of its religious activities such as the Sayaw ng Pagbati. Hence, this pride motivates them to make their tradition alive and visually appealing. As I try to trace the development of the dance, it is evident that the Catholic community and the existing culture in the barangay is greatly responsible in shaping their traditions, such as the dance, Bati-Bati.

Keywords: cultural performance, field work, ethnography

INTRODUCTION:

Parañaque City, one of the highly urbanized cities in the National Capital Region, is one among the many towns in the Philippines which is rich in culture and the arts. As cited by numerous theatre and cultural performances scholars, one of its oldest barangays- San Dionisio, prides itself of being known as the home of the traditional performances of the komedya.

From numerous researches, Komedya ng San Dionisio has already been identified to have contributed not only to the cultural prestige of the barrio but most important of all, to its social values ~ spirit of cooperation, unity and selflessness. For the elders of the barrio, it is a thread in a web of community's relations and interaction, a link in a series of feasting and celebrations, an echo and development of folk theatre practices [1]; and that the prominence of this form still enjoyed today is the result of nearly five decades of conscious efforts to popularize the town's komedya [2].

Yet, amongst the residents of San Dionisio, another cultural practice has been in place for several years yet receives lesser attention in scholarly researches, thus deserves the same attention as the komedya. Malu Dandan, a resident and parish coordinator, shares that "This dance [Bati-Bati] is Parañaque's unique way of proclaiming the Good News of the Lord's Resurrection. It is, in a very literal sense, the Gospel put in motion." This is relative to Maricel Arisga's, a former Bati-Bati dancer, who expresses that "It is a sacred honor to be counted among those who will be announcing by dancing [Bati-Bati] Jesus' triumph over death" [3].

Last year, during my 2nd semester in Master of Arts in Theatre Studies program of the University of the Philippines Diliman, I was given the opportunity to look back at my hometown and do a preliminary study in an Easter Sunday dance tradition-Bati-Bati. After that experience, I somehow gained a motivation to make Bati-bati more present in theatre studies.

In this paper, I aim to explore on Sayaw ng Pagbati or Bati-Bati in San Dionisio as a dance tradition. Specifically, my goal is to answer these questions: Why was Bati-Bati so important? Who were the patrons, composers, performers, and audiences? How did these dances come to their present complexity? and What could the dance tell me about society? In finding the answers for these questions, I will take inspiration from Adrienne Kaeppler's "moment" work and Patrick Alcedo's use of various perspectives in understanding religious festivals.

2) METHODS AND METHODOLOGY:

Kaeppler in her paper, *Dances and Dancing in Tonga: Anthropological and Historical Discourses*, explore that dance can be a form of historical and cultural discourse thus an anthropological approach to dance history and ethnography can be employed to excessively analyze, understand and trace the development

of dances in the Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific. Her analogy is that since dance history is linear, and is written based on selected moments, studying dance needs additional methods or sources which ethnography can provide. In addition, she suggests that historical sources can be explored more with ethnography because she debates that framing and interpretation of dancing makes history for the present.

Another important point that she asserted is the invaluable use of “moments” in studying Tongan dance. She explains that “moments” can be analyzed further to provide access to trace developments or periods in a course of events.

Since this article draws on Kaeppler’s perspective that history and ethnography methods can be combined to further understand dance, it employed variety of methods which are analysis of visual history and ethno history, exploration of a variety of accounts and point of view, and ethnographic participant-observation. It is also important to note that she has focused on four “moments” as main frame in tracing the development of Tongan dance, and these “moments” are divided into two- the first two are based on written historical accounts and the other two are based on ethnographic data.

Meanwhile, Patrick Alcedo in *Dancing to Narrate “Authentic” Traditions in a Philippine Festival* suggests various perspectives in understanding Ati-Atihan festival, a street dance held in celebration of the Sto. Nino in Kalibo, Aklan. In his study in his hometown, he explores the construction and mining of heritage through religious festival- Ati-Atihan which is geared on the claim for authenticity. Moreover, he also looks at the use of the bodies to essentialize to negotiate with modernity but also to safeguard cultural heritage. According to him, festivals function as a “tool in understanding contemporary cultural, religious, economic, and political complexities of national and post-national contexts.” With this in mind, I then looked into the cultural, political and economic perspective in studying a religious festival. Using his suggested perspectives, he was able to point out the reasons why the Aklanons consider Ati-Atihan to embody the notion of cultural authenticity. In a gist, his answers can be summarized as the following: the effect of outside influences such as declarations in World Competitions or Festivals, government involvement, interpretations from myth, power of faith in religion, and benefits of tourism/commercialism.

2) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The Dance Tradition

The Philippines, known to be the third largest Catholic country in the world, prides itself of the numerous traditions associated with the Catholic faith. One of its mostly practiced traditions is the Easter Sunday ritual called, Salubong. The Salubong reenacts the meeting of the resurrected Christ and his mother, Mary.

In one of the cities of the country, Parañaque, the Salubong unfolds at dawn around five in the morning with a procession heralding the resurrection of Christ and His reunion with the Holy Mother, Mary. Once the images of the Holy Mother and Son touched, a little girl dressed up like an angel replaces the Blessed Virgin’s black veil of grief and mourning with white as the Hosana, a hymn of praise and adoration common to Parañaque, is sung. The Feast culminates with the celebration of a Holy Mass followed by Sayaw ng Pagbati also known to locals as “bati-bati” a “Welcome Dance” that is claimed to be a Parañaque original [4].

Dulce Festin-Baybay in a local government commissioned book, *Palanyag to Parañaque: A History*, describes Sayaw ng Pagbati as a street dance which embodies the joy in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and is part of the Easter Sunday Celebration in Parañaque. It is commonly known to the locals as Bati-Bati or “Bati” which means to greet or to welcome. The dance is performed by little girls in white dresses who dance before the images of the Risen Christ (Señor Jesus Resucitado) and His Blessed Mother (Virgen Alegria) in front of the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Parañaque. This festive part of the Easter Sunday Celebration (which happens in the month of March or April) is known to be original to Barangay La Huerta- where the Cathedral is located. After several years, the practice of this dance ritual is then followed by the neighboring barangays. San Dionisio, and Don Galo.

The first known recollection of Bati pronounced as /bate/ started with only two girls of the Rodriguez family- Emilia and Avelina, in La Huerta. Tracing the recollection of the earliest teachers or choreographers, the dance already existed in the early 1900s. The two ladies recall that during their time, dancers could wear any color of dress. But as years went by and more participants joined due to promises

made to God by parents, for favors granted and sickness cured, the dresses became more ostentatious and competitive until a ruling was made that only white dresses may be worn.

Bati is also observed with some variations in other parts of the country such as Las Piñas, Taguig, Batangas and Marinduque, among others, but it is Parañaque where it has gained prominence through the years [5]. There are two Bati groups in San Dionisio. One in Bayan which started in 1940 and headed by Dra. Grace Santos; and one in Tramo Uno and Dos which started in 1990 headed Kagawad Regine San Agustin.

Catholic Faith in Parañaque

Parañaque, also known as the home of Komedya ng San Dionisio, is one of the earliest Catholic cities. Its Cathedral Church or mother church is officially founded in 1572 by Spanish Augustinian missionaries and dedicated to St. Andrew the Apostle.

The missionaries' purpose was to evangelize the natives. This would also help facilitate the conquest of islands for Spain. The town was called "Palanyag", the contraction for the word "Paglalayag" which means sailing. At that time, Palanyag consisted of several nipa huts grouped as a residential settlement known as "barangays."

In line with the Papal instruction of May 1493, known as the Inter Cetera, which enjoined the Spanish rulers to spread the gospel to the inhabitants that they would come to rule, it was tasked to the Augustinians to spread Christianity in the lands that they conquered. One town was Palanyag (Parañaque). The pioneer missionary in Parañaque was Fray Juan de Orto, OSA Although based in Manila, he started to administer to the spiritual needs of the village folks in 1575.

In 1580 Fray Diego de Espinal was appointed superior in the convent of Parañaque. He established a mission house, with its spiritual jurisdiction reaching up to Cavite El Viejo. He was assisted by Fray Francisco Campos, OSA The Conference of Chiefs of the Religious Order, held on May 11, 1580, accepted Palanyag as an independent town, and it is in this date which the foundation day of the Parish of St. Andrew the Apostle was officially known. In the same year also, St. Andrew the Apostle, being the patron of fishermen was officially declared the patron and defender of the said church.

During the 16th and 17th century, the Parish of St. Andrew was made up of only a few homes, found mostly along the Parañaque River and Manila Bay in the present barrios of Don Galo, La Huerta and San Dionisio. Later, Tambo, Santo Niño and Baclaran developed. Barrios Don Galo, La Huerta and San Dionisio built bisitas, or satellite chapels with facades built facing the St. Andrew Church. The San Nicolas de Tolentino Chapel, the one located at Barrio La Huerta, still has the inscription 1776, the year the said chapel was erected [6].

Pagsasayaw ng Bati (Dancing the Bati)

The three barangay's Bati dancers dance in joy as the town celebrates the resurrection of Christ during Easter Sunday after the Salubong Mass. They are joined by the dancing images of Christ and Mary, and similarly joyful Catholics who watch in awe of the beautifully-clad girls and boys.

Sayaw ng Pagbati is danced right after the culmination of the Salubong mass outside the St. Andrew Cathedral where all the Bati of different barrios in Parañaque join together and make their first Bati dance or devotion of the day. The three neighboring barrios participate in the first dance of Bati – one group is composed of girls and boy-dancers in blue and white from Barangay Don Galo, another are girls in white-blue dresses from Barangay La Huerta, and the San Dionisio Bati dancers in red-green-white dresses. The dance is witnessed by hundreds of Catholics who stay after the Salubong mass to enjoy the first Bati dance of the Easter Sunday. The dancers are joined by more than one pair of images of Mother Mary and Jesus Christ – who sway in beat atop male devotees of Bati-Bati.

According to an interview with the organizer of Sayaw ng Pagbati in Tramo Uno and Dos, the dance is described to be derived from a basic folk-dance step which is waltz. The basic footstep is Sway Balance with a brush. At the beginning of the dance, all three groups turn around. This is followed by the swaying of the "bandera" or flag tied to a "baton" or handle to both sides. The start of the dance greatly excites the crowd as cheers and shouts are heard from the background. The "indayog" of the San Dionisio dancers is different compared to the neighboring dancers. This energy is further emphasized by the sea-cloud image created by the swaying of their skirts. Their movement also includes resting their "bandera" on the side partnered with a brush-step feet movement. This is followed by turning backward while "bandera" are moved from right to left. It is interesting to note that in dances like this, supportive parents are always around to assist the child whenever they miss a flag or their dress gets tangled. After the first few steps in unison, the three barrios start showing their unique choreography. The observable similarities

are the feet movement, swaying of skirts, flag movement from right to left and the bending of the upper body which sometimes looks like a bow.

After the culmination of Salubong Mass, with Sayaw ng Pagbati, the Bati of different barrios go back to their respective “bisita” or chapels to spread the joy of the Risen Christ. In an interview with Kagawad Regine San Agustin, instructor and organizer of Tramo Uno and Dos, San Dionisio, he narrates that: [Filipino] “Pagkatapos ng Sayaw ng pagbati, yun na yung pinaka-Salubong mass. Pagkatapos ng Salubong Mass, magsasayaw ulit lahat ng barrio sa katedral. Pagkasayaw nun, pagkatapos ng sayaw, kanya kanya nang puntahan sa barrio. Doon na mag-uumpisa ng pag-iisip ng devotion ng Sayaw ng Pagbati sa bawat barrio.”

[English] The Salubong mass is followed by the dance. All the dance groups will dance together after the mass. After which, the dance groups will have their separate dances in their own barrios. This serves as a means of spreading their devotion onto their barrio.

The Bati dancers of San Dionisio Bayan dance outside the San Dionisio chapel to signal the start of the street dancing around the barrio. Their supportive parents and family members fill the yard of the bisita (chapel) as they wait for the Sayaw ng Pagbati to move out of the chapel and into the streets.

Bati-Bati in different barrios begin at different times in the afternoon but lasts for one to two hours. In San Dionisio, the Bati dancers gather at around two o'clock at the bisita or chapel Tata Dune (St. Dionysius). At half an hour before 3 in the afternoon, they offer their first dance of the afternoon in front of the image of Tata Dune, inside the chapel. At the back of their line are adult men devotees carrying the images of Señor Jesus Resucitado and Virgen Alegria owned by San Dionisio residents at their shoulder. They sway in tune of the lively music played by a “musiko” or marching band named as Parañaque Original band. One of the players of this band, mentioned in an interview that the music is titled as “Tugtog Pagbati” and is in the $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature. The entire group do one more set outside the chapel where the barrio is given signal that the parade will commence soon. What follows next is the “showcase” the dance around the barrios. The dancers stop and selected parts of the street, where a Bati dancer resides.

Streets around the barrio of San Dionisio are taken over by this Easter festival throughout the afternoon. In this photo, the residents of San Dionisio and visitors do not mind the heat as they witness this town's religious dance.

According to a former Bati dancer, they do not mind the heat and physical tiredness after more than an hour of street dancing, because their all-day panata culminates in a gathering or party organized by Doktora Grace, with food, gifts, raffle-draws and trophy-giving (personal communication).

Dance Analysis

In this preliminary attempt to trace Bati, I have considered combining Alcedo's and Kaeppler's views on understanding a dance tradition. In the following sections, the moments are not clearly specific time periods but are recollections of San Dionisio residents with Sayaw ng Pagbati. Their yearly participations and dedication with this tradition make their statements notable. Furthermore, through the interviews with organizers, instructors, dancers and musicians; and my years of participation as an observer I was able to investigate the different perspectives where Bati may have been influenced.

Paglalayag and the bandera of Sayaw ng Pagbati

As I aim to trace the important motifs of the dance, I came to associate the original name of the barrio. The old name of San Dionisio town was simply “Palanyag” or town proper and it is said that this was where the name of the entire municipality was taken. Palanyag is the contraction for the word “Paglalayag” which means sailing. San Dionisio which is in the southern part of Parañaque is located beside the coastal water, and part of Manila Bay. With this proximity with the sea, the main means of living of the townsfolk were trade and fishing. In their fishing activity, sailing has been an important element as proven by having the towns old name [7].

The image of “paglalayag” or sailing, involves the use of a ‘bandera’ or ‘flaglet.’ The flag is used by fishermen for navigation and providing signal with other fishermen [7]. In addition, in the neighboring barangay and where the Sayaw ng Pagbati is an original, La Huerta another festivity devoted to fishing is called karakol. Karakol as described by Festin-Baybay, the karakol features a fluvial parade of lavishly decorated banca or small boats. The decorations include the use of flowers and banderas [5].

The town's patron saint can also be related to “paglalayag.” The Cathedral is named as Cathedral of St. Andrew which is attributed to one of the apostles who was known as a fisherman. This was believed to be the case because of Parañaquenos are mainly fishermen.

With these, I relate the relevance of bandera in the townspeople's means of living with the use of the flaglets in the dance.

Self-pride in Musiko

In an interview with Kagawad Regine, I have learned that the music accompaniment for Sayaw ng Pagbati was composed by Francisco Rodriguez and is played by a marching band or "musiko." Musiko is highly used in numerous festivals in Parañaque, particularly in La Huerta and San Dionisio. The performance of Komedia ng San Dionisio has always been accompanied by a musiko, a marching band which includes brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments.

In a conversation with a friend, who is one of the musicians who play the Sayaw ng Pagbati music or "Tugtug ng Pagbati" the piece is a Parañaque original and was intendedly made for the dance. His statement is consistent with Kagawad Regine's as he states that before, only Parañaque residents are allowed to play it and that the piece was exclusive to the town. Neighboring towns who wish to start their own Sayaw ng Pagbati has to learn the piece by watching and no copy of the piece is easily given to them. He describes the tune to be a lively tune. It is lively and joyous in nature to accompany the feeling of joy in the resurrection of Christ. He also shared that after Sayaw ng Pagbati gained prominence in San Dionisio, the music "Tugtug ng Pagbati" has been incorporated in one of the main parts of Komedia ng San Dionisio. In a komedia which has a torneyo or competition for the hand of the princess, and eskaramosa is done and the accompanying music is the "Tugtug ng Pagbati." In this way, the religious Sayaw ng Pagbati has taken part in the barrio's cultural pride.

Ang Kagalakan ng San Dionisio

In numerous interviews with the organizers and devotees, the dances symbolize the angels in heaven rejoicing. Yet the use of spectacular costumes, not only the image of a typical angel is created, but an image of sea of clouds, which is similar to the ideal image of the heavens.

Though they follow the white dress only rule, the groups have their ways to go around this rule to make their dancers more visually appealing.

Family, Lay-people and the Church

The lay people who initiate the preparations of the Bati dance and the Church greatly take part in the changes of the choreography of the dance and how the dance is named or called.

Historical books and actual accounts of residents are consistent in mentioning that Bati-bati started with fewer girls who can wear any dress. Yet in 1990 when Rev. Fr. Paul Foulon was the Parish Priest, the wearing of white dress only was implemented. They also recollect that Sayaw ng Pagbati started to be a separate from the Salubong Mass. It starts at around 6 in the evening, yet the lay people decided that all the Bati in different barrios should dance together in the Cathedral in the morning and go back to their own barrios in the evening.

The lay people who initiate the preparations of the Bati dance greatly takes part in the changes of the choreography of the dance and how the dance is named or called. Kagawad Regine explains:

[Filipino] "Kasi dito noong araw kasi, parang hindi Sayaw ng Pagbati [ang pangalan ng sayaw] eh. Kasi 'pag nakita [na ang mga bata, ang sinasabi ng tao ay] 'Ay andyan na yung Bati /bate/'. Parang naging talk of the tongue lang na 'Andyan na yung Bati.' So parang ayaw namin maging hanggang sa ngayong generation eh yun pa rin ang makakagisnang mga bata, 'yung 'Bate.' So talagang pinopromote namin yung 'Sayaw ng Pagbati' which means Welcome dance."

[English] "The dance was at first not known as, 'Sayaw ng Pagbati.' What people say when they see the girls is 'The Bati /bate/ is here!' The organizers would like that the new generation refrain from calling the dance as Bati /bate/. This is why we promote that the dance be known as 'Sayaw ng Pagbati' which means Welcome dance."

In this statement of the organizer, they aimed for the present generation to call the dance with its proper name than its local term, "Bati" pronounced as /bate/ because of other associations in the local term's pronunciation.

When asked as regards the standard choreography, he states that,

[Filipino] "Actually, nag-iiba iba lang ng style pero the same step din e. Iba lang 'yung, let's say, may isang step na mag-uumpisa sa right side, may isang step na mag-uumpisa sa left side. So [ka]pag nag-start kami ng sabay sabay, kung magkakasabay sabay ibang barrio, iba iba 'yung style eh. Pero iisa lang din ang galaw. Iba lang yung movement ng kamay, pero the same din yung paa. Nandun parin yung basic, hindi mawawala yung basic step. Mayroong mga ibang step na pinapalitan namin na iba 'yung sa part ng tugtog ng ganito, may part na iba yung ginagawa namin."

[English] “Actually, the style from each barrio is different, but still highlighting the same steps. The differences will be on which side the dancer will be facing. When all the barrios dance together, the difference in style is noticeable but the basic step will not be amiss.”

5] CONCLUSION

In employing Kaeppler’s moment work and Alcedo’s various perspectives in understanding a religious festival, this preliminary work on Sayaw ng Pagbati presents the following observations.

The San Dionisio community deeply prides itself of its religious activities such as the Sayaw ng Pagbati. Hence, this pride motivates them to make their tradition alive and visually appealing. They use relevant images in the community such as –bandera and sea of clouds, in the dance to associate meanings in this panata.

Barangay San Dionisio, being the town proper and proximately beside the Cathedral of St. Andrew, is dominantly Catholic in religious faith. It is hence expected from its people to develop a great sense of debt to Christ. With this sense of debt, the families believe that a female child who have not yet been born is already promised to join the Sayaw ng Pagbati. In this dance tradition, the unity of the barrio is highly observed as they voluntarily devote time and effort to sponsor the event in all aspects – as patrons, as performers and audiences.

As I try to trace the development of the dance, it is evident that the Catholic community and the existing culture in the barangay is greatly responsible in shaping the dance tradition of Sayaw ng Pagbati in San Dionisio, Parañaque.

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