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## Exploring the Peculiar Features of the Palawod Festival of Bantayan, Cebu, Philippines

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### Abstract

*The study described the nature and background, dance properties and peculiar movements present in the dance of the Palawod festival of Bantayan. Utilizing a Descriptive-Qualitative research design, data gathered were analyzed through movement analysis of Francisca Reyes Aquino. The study revealed that the festival was founded to make a social activity that will equal or surpass the Holy Week celebration and to eradicate the misconception that Holy Week is fiesta in Bantayan. There is no definite costume, accessories, props, footwear and other dance properties in the festival as long as it shows Bantayan's culture and history. The music evolved from a live accompaniment to a recorded jingle highlighting the sounds of kalatong, budyong and other instruments with a basic beat that is in 4/4 time signature. Bugsay (paddle), isda (fish), silik (fins) and sulo (torch) were the peculiar movements present in the dance. This concluded that the Palawod festival served as the catalyst in changing people's beliefs towards the religious practices in Bantayan. Furthermore, it gave Bantayanons the opportunity to appreciate their history, showcase their creativity, and strengthen their devotion through movements. A contextualized dance literature served as the product of the study, and it was recommended to disseminate this literature to the community and stakeholders of Bantayan. Documenting the festival will not just help in preserving this culture, but it will also motivate people to patronize the dance which contributed a lot in fighting the threat of deterioration of local culture.*

**Keywords:** Peculiar Features, Palawod Festival, Dance, Festival, Movement Analysis, Documentation

### Rationale

The Philippines as an archipelagic country is known to be diverse in terms of culture and tradition. With more than 7 thousand islands, each island has its own dialect, beliefs, arts, craftsmanship and even practices. One of the common practices in the country is the celebration of different events like festivals.

Festival is a commemoration of culture or heritage and revival of ritual of communities involve in it (Claveria, 2015 as cited by Ladanga et al, 2018). It constitutes typical cases of globalization, as well as the interrelationship of high and low culture. (Caves,2004). Getz (2010) as cited by Mair and Weber (2019)

identified festival into a classical discourse which it concerns about roles, meaning and impacts in the culture and society. Festival is an arena to pass the tradition and share this meaning to the next generation through social interaction (Bermudez, 2015 as cited by Ladanga et al (2018). This is also an avenue to mingle with professionals and other dance enthusiasts (Tolentino, 2020).

Etymologically, festival derives from the Latin festum. However, originally it has two terms for festive events: festum, for "merriment, revelry, public joy," and feria, which means "abstinence from work in honor of the gods. Both terms were used in the plural form, festa and feriae, which emphasized that it will last for many days (Falassi, 1987 as cited by Luna, 2015)

Moreover, these festivals play an important role in the promotion and production of the tourism industry (Getz, 2010 as cited by Mair and Weber (2019). During the hold of these festivals a lot of local and international tourists will visit just to witness the festival. So, this helps the socio-economic status of the people (Gonzales, 2017), and this urges the government to continue doing it Mair and Weber (2019). Festivals provide the tourist the opportunity to indulge how the local communities patronize and enrich their culture and help the visitors to experience these through the help of the host community and let them enjoy and cater their leisure needs. (Raj, 2003)

The calendar is always full of festivals in the Philippines (Firma et al, 2021). Estimated, the number of known major and minor festivals in the Philippines is more than 42,000, in which majority are celebrated in a barangay or village level. Because of this, the Philippines was dubbed as the *Capital of the World's Festivities*. One of the festivals celebrated in the country is the Palawod Festival of the municipality of Bantayan, province of Cebu.

The Palawod Festival is held every 29<sup>th</sup> of June in celebration of the feast of Sts Peter & Paul. Tourists coming from different regions will come to Bantayan just to witness the festival. This shows that festivals are marketed as tourist attractions and draw definable tourist flows (Bandala, 2018). The Palawod festival is a yearly competition participated by the different contingents, composed of elementary and highschool students in the municipality of Bantayan. During the festival, contingents will showcase their costume and short routine during the street dancing parade and after that they will compete during the ritual showdown performing the Palawod dance (Carino, 2011 as cited by Tolentino, 2020)

The Palawod Festival is the only festival in the province of Cebu that became the champion for three consecutive years in the *Pasigarbo Sa Sugbo Festival of Festivals*-a yearly festival competition participated by the different municipalities of Cebu Province. Bantayan always won because of the hard work of the participants and also the support and leadership of the local government unit. Moreover, Palawod Festival is always adopted and staged by various performing group because of its choreography, costume, musicality, props and other dance properties.

This Palawod dance has been performed for years, but until now there is no study yet that document and contextualize the dance. Documenting dance will not just preserve the dance but also help people understand the dance. According to Getz (2010) as cited by Mair and Weber (2019), there is a limited study about festivals that help people understand its meaning, importance and impact. There is a need to document these festival dance like Palawod festival

because as the country progresses, our culture and arts are slowly deteriorating because of the Filipinos adaptation to foreign culture (Tabuena, 2022). People are celebrating the popular culture rather than original or authentic culture (Crespi-Vallbona and Richards, 2007 as cited by Bilason et al, 2020).

The study aims to document the Palawod Festival of Bantayan and produce dance literature with the contextualization of the basic steps or movement. This will help the Bantayanons especially all the dance enthusiast in teaching and learning the dance. Furthermore, documenting the dance will enrich and preserve the culture and tradition of the municipality of Bantayan.

### **Purpose**

The study documented the Palawod Festival of Bantayan in order to produce a contextualized literature of the dance. Furthermore, the study answered the following questions:

1. What is the nature & background of the Palawod Festival of Bantayan?
2. What are dance properties of the Palawod Festival dance in terms of:
  - 2.1 Costume;
  - 2.2 Accessories;
  - 2.3 Props;
  - 2.4 Musicality;
  - 2.5 Accompaniment;
  - 2.6 Formation
  - 2.7 Footwear
3. What are the peculiar movements/steps present in the Palawod Festival dance?

### **Scope & Limitation**

The study focused only on the documentation of the nature and background, dance properties and peculiar movements/steps of the dance. Data that was presented in the study was only limited to the information being shared by the informants (founder, choreographers, dancers, and the people of Bantayan). Furthermore, the process and journey of making the festival, impact of the dance on the people, to tourism and to the economy of the municipality is not included in the study.

### **Significance**

The study aimed to document the Palawod Festival of Bantayan which included the nature and background, dance properties and peculiar movements/steps of the said festival. The expected product of this research is a contextualized dance literature of the festival. Through this, choreographers, dance masters, dance instructors, educators and dance enthusiasts will have a guide in teaching and learning the dance. This study will also help the Bantayanons to better understand the festival that they celebrated annually. Furthermore, this study is also beneficial to the local government unit, especially to the tourism sector for this will help promote and preserve the municipality's culture and performing arts.

## **Methodology**

### *Design*

The study utilized Descriptive Qualitative research design. According to Singh (2006) as cited by Punongbayan (2018), the descriptive method of research is used in identifying the point of present needs and the present conditions and, to study immediate status of a certain phenomenon, finding facts, and examining

characteristics. Descriptive method includes describing, recording, analyzing, and interpreting results (Firma J.R et al, 20)

### *Informants and Sampling Design*

The study was participated by the founder of the festival, composers of the musical jingle, choreographers, dance masters, performer and alumni of Palawod Festival. Furthermore, the performer of the said dance was selected through Purposive Snowball Sampling. They were selected through these criteria:

1. Age atleast 15 years old
2. A resident of the municipality of Bantayan for atleast 5 years
3. Danced and participated in the Palawod Festival for atleast 5 years

Since the sampling includes snowball, participants can recommend other participants as long as they will qualify the set criteria.

### *Locale*



The study was conducted in the municipality of Bantayan. Bantayan is the locale of the study since this is where the Palawod Festival is held and celebrated. It is a first class municipality situated in the northern part of the province of Cebu with a geographical location of  $11^{\circ}12'N$   $123^{\circ}44'E$ . The municipality has a total area of  $81.68 \text{ km}^2$  ( $31.54 \text{ sq mi}$ ) includes outlying islands. Bantayan has 25 barangays with a total population of 86,247 (2020 census).

### *Instrumentation*

Due to the nature of the study, the researcher served as the instrument of the study. Semi-structured interview was utilized in the gathering the data with interview guide and observational instructions adapted from the dance research of Dr. Rosita Hernani. However, cellphones and video recorder was used in documenting the basic dance steps which were notated by the researcher. Furthermore, Zoom was also utilized to gather information especially in interviewing the proponent/founder.

### *Data Gathering Procedure*

A transmittal letter was sent to the tourism officer of the research locale and to the municipal mayor to ask permission to conduct the

study in the municipality of Bantayan. After the approval of the municipal mayor, informed consent form was given to the prospect's participants. After negotiating with the participants, interview commenced right away.

### *Data Analysis*

Movement analysis through dance notation was the researcher's way in analyzing the data. From the videos of the participants performing the dance, the researcher notated the dance following the process of dance notation of Francisca Reyes Aquino. This includes determining the basic movements, direction, counting, number of measures and number of repetitions.

### *Ethical Consideration*

Ethical standards were observed in the entire duration of the study. Upon gathering the data, the researcher sent informed consent form to the prospects participants and it was emphasized that their participation is completely voluntary and they can decline without any sanction. Identity of the informants was hidden and it will be substituted with pseudonyms to observe anonymity and confidentiality. Moreover, each informant will be given an honorarium as a way of expressing the researcher's gratitude to them.

### **Results & Discussion**

After the interview and observation, data analysis followed. The following results were presented following the context of Philippine Dance notation by Francisca Reyes Aquino

#### **Palawod Festival**

**Meaning:** A festival dance showcasing the history and fishing culture of the municipality of Bantayan, Bantayan Island

**Dance culture:** Lowland

**Place of Origin:** Bantayan, Cebu

**Ethnolinguistic Group:** Bantayanons

**Classification:** Religious/Memetic Dance

**Performer:** Men and Women

#### **Background/context:**

The Palawod festival started in the municipality of Bantayan, Bantayan Island, way back in 2001. It was founded by the former tourism officer, Mr. Vince Escario with the help of his team Mr. John Ray Pagalan, Mr. Junie Tampus, Mr. Patricio Junjet E. Primor Jr. and the rest of the Synchronous Dancers. The Palawod festival is one of the festivals that was formally established in the entire province of Cebu under the leadership of Mayor GERALYN Escario Canares and Vice-mayor Remedios A. Escario.

The term Palawod (Pa-la-wod) is a Cebuano term which means going to the deep part of the sea to fish. It is derived from a Latin word "Duc In Altum" (Luke 5:4) which means "into the deep". The name is associated with the founder's vision in making a festival which is more on celebration of fishing culture and fishing folks of the Bantayanons since fishing is the common livelihood in the island because of the abundance of the sea. Moreover, this also portrays the livelihood of one of their patron saints, Sts. Peter which is also a fisherman.

There were two primary reasons why the Palawod festival was created. First, to make a social activity big enough to equal or not even surpass the holy week celebration in Bantayan. Second, to

eradicate the misconception that Bantayanons celebrated fiesta during Holy Week.

The Bantayan fiesta is held every 29<sup>th</sup> of June in honor of the patron saints, Sts. Peter & Paul. Prior to the staging of the festival, the Bantayanons have this practice in which the balikbayans will only come home during holy week which is held usually every month of March or April. The fiesta is just an ordinary day in the lives of the Bantayanons and there is no celebration and community involvement at all. Moreover, most of the time tourists will only visit Bantayan during the holy week because of the beliefs that it is fiesta in the island. This phenomenon happened because the island has a papal indult that permitted them to eat meat during holy week which eclipsed to the misconception that holy week is fiesta in Bantayan. However, this papal indult already expired long time ago, but the act of eating meat and making holy week a celebration continues. That's why Rev. Father Rev. Fr. Camilo Aliyah, the former parish priest encouraged the founder to make something that will change people's perspectives towards the Holy Week in Bantayan and that's where the creation of Palawod festival started.

### Dance Properties

#### Male & Female Components

#### *Costume, Accessories, Props & Footwear:*

It was highlighted by the proponent that there was no fix or definite costume, accessories, props and footwear in Palawod festival. The festival was made to give Bantayan a sense of history. For example, if the artist wanted to portray Bantayan in the pre-colonial period in their concept, then they can integrate costumes, accessories, props and footwear during the pre-colonial period or any Christian-based costuming. However, the dance artists have been given the freedom to explore possibilities of their creative works based on the wide range of possible research materials.



*(Pictures of Diverse Costumes of the Palawod Dancers)*

#### *Musical Instrument*



The music of the festival started with an abridge version of the Sinulog beat of Cebu City, Philippines. It was accompanied by a live band especially kalatong. The kalatong (left picture) is a percussion instrument made of bamboo. Bamboo was used because of its symbolism in Bantayan culture. Majority of the boats and water vehicles in Bantayan are made of bamboo.

Four years after, due to the expense of having a live accompaniment, Mr. Escario together with Mr. Junie Tampos, the lyricist and Mr. John Ray Pagalan the saxophonist composed the Palawod jingle entitled "Huni sa Palawod". The composers envisioned making a jingle that is simple, singable and relatable.

Years later, the Pasigarbo sa Sugbo Festival of Festivals Competition was staged and the performances evolved. They rearranged the jingle with the presence of technology where orchestration was possible through digital. This led to the two-time win of the Palawod jingle being Best in Musicality in the said competition. In addition, in the Palawod jingle the sound of budyong was also highlighted. Budyong (right picture) is a seashell that once blown, it will produce sound. The budyong played an important role in the history of Bantayan because it was used to gather the people at the same time to warn the people if the intruders are coming.



### **HUNI SA PALAWOD**

#### *I*

*Bugsay paingon sa lawod  
Bugsay paspas ug dyutay  
Balud sa kasaganahan  
Damgong labing bililhon*

#### *II*

*Hugtan ang pagtoo  
Ngadto sa kahitas-an  
Mangamuyo kang San Pedro  
Manalangin kang San Pablo*

#### *III*

*Managtigum kita  
Ug maghudyaka*

*Mag ambahan kita  
Saulogon tang nakamtan tang grasya  
Uban sa paghigugma  
Uban sa pagbugsay ta*

*Awit sa kalipay  
Awiton ta, Bantayanon  
(Huni sa PALAWOD)*

*Chorus  
Palawod!  
Palawod!  
Adto kita sa lawod!Palawod!  
Palawod!  
Adto kita sa lawod*

*Tara bay, Adto na kita!  
Panakay kamo, Palawod kita!  
Tara bay, Adto na kita  
Panakay kamo, Palawod kita*

*Back to II, III, Chorus*

*Back to III (except last line)*

*Kauswagan makab-ut unta  
Awiton ta!Awiton ta!  
Awiton ta, Bantayanon*

*Huni sa PALAWOD.*

The original jingle can be accessed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKoy6LdWOOw&t=1s>

The latest version can be accessed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JJUjqIfGMO>

Beat: 4/4

Count: 1, 2, 3, 4

Formation: No definite formation

### Movements Peculiar to the dance/Basic dance steps

#### PALAWOD DANCE TERMS

BUGSAY: Movement of the fisherman as they paddle in going to the sea

ISDA: Imitating the movement of the fish

SILIK: Imitating the movement of the fins of the fish and other sea creatures

SULO: The act of using and waving torch as the fishermen goes fishing especially at night

The dance is a combination of locomotor and non-locomotor movements. It is being performed by standing. The dance can be performed either solo or by group. The same steps can be performed regardless of if the dancer is man or a woman. There is no specific variation in every step. It depends on the dance artist and the performer.

The Palawod dance has four basic steps. These basic steps should be properly emphasized by the choreographers as they make their own routine of the dance. The basic steps are the bugsay, isda, silik and the solo. Bugsay is a Cebuano term for paddle. The step mimics the movement of the fisherman as they paddle in going to the sea. Isda means fish. This step mimics the movements of the fish as they swim and go out of the water. Silik refers to the fins of the fish and other sea creatures. This step portrays the movement of

the fins of the fishes and other sea creatures as they swim in the water. Sulo is a Cebuano term for torch. This step shows how the fishermen use and wave the torch as they go fishing especially if its nighttime.

### Contextualized Basic Movements of the Palawod Festival

Legend:

R-right	SWR-sideward right
L-left	SWR-sideward left
ct.-count	M-measure

#### Bugsay

Starting Position: From a normal standing position, feet are parallel to the ground, arms are place in front chest level, R arm above L, both palms are close (like holding a paddle)

- Scoop the arms going to the R side of the body, R foot is step forward, body and knees are slightly bend forward (ct. 1, 2). Go back to the starting position (3,4)..... 1M
- Repeat A 3x..... 3M

#### Isda

Starting Position: From a normal standing position, feet are parallel to the ground, two hands are attached to each other pointing forward

- Wave hands going to the R (L hand over R), step R foot going SWR (ct.1), wave hands going to the L (R hand over L), step L foot close to R (ct.2), wave hands going to the R (L hand over R), step L foot going SWR (ct. 3), hands are slightly attached to each other, scoop from above the head moving downward and hop L, foot is on the air, R foot is in the ground (ct. 4)... ..1M
- Repeat A going to the L.....1M
- Repeat A-B.....2M

#### Silik

Starting Position: From a normal standing position, feet are parallel to the ground, arms on the side.

- Rotate wrist moving inward, step R foot going SWR (ct. 1), prepare to rotate wrist, step L foot close to R (ct. 2), rotate wrist moving forward, step R foot going SWR (3), prepare to rotate wrist, step L foot close to R (ct. 4).....1M
- Repeat A going to the L.....1M
- Repeat A-B.....2M

#### Sulo

Starting Position: From a normal standing position, feet are parallel to the ground, L arm is on the waist, palm close, R arm is raised upward palm close (like holding a torch).

- Step R foot going SWR, head and R arm is slightly swing SWR (ct. 1), step L foot close to R, head and R arm is slightly swing SWL (ct. 2), step R foot going SWR, head and R arm is slightly swing SWR (ct. 3), step L foot close to R (ct. 4).....1M
- Repeat A going to the L.....1M
- Repeat A-B..... 2M

## Conclusions

The Palawod festival served as the catalyst in eradicating the misconception towards the religious practices in Bantayan. The dance has no definite dance properties except for its music that evolved from a live accompaniment to a recorded jingle. Bugsay, silik, isda and sulo are the peculiar movements present in the dance. This concluded that the festival gave Bantayanons the opportunity to appreciate their history, showcase their creativity, and strengthen their devotion through movements.

## Recommendation

The LGU of Bantayan especially the tourism office should keep on promoting the Palawod festival especially on its authenticity and peculiarity. Seminar workshops on the nature and the proper execution of the basic steps is necessary especially for the Bantayanon and on the new generation of choreographers or dance artists.

Moreover, a dance literature of the festival was produced out of this research. It is recommended to disseminate this dance literature to all the schools and barangays for the Bantayanons to be fully aware what the Palawod Festival is and how the basic steps can be properly executed.

The Palawod festival can be integrated as well in the teaching of Araling Panlipunan and MAPEH to assure indigenization and appreciation of local culture. The basic steps of the dance can be used as an alternative physical activity in the teaching of Physical Education in the basic education and in the tertiary.

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