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“Addressing the Misconceptions of the Baliw-Baliw Practice in Barangay San Vicente, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu”

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Abstract

Baliw-baliw in San Vicente, Olango Island, Lapu-Lapu City, is staged within a religious celebration, though its practices do not reflect church life. While it holds cultural importance, few studies have explored community perceptions or efforts to preserve it. This study aimed to describe misconceptions by examining its meaning and gathering insights from both locals and outsiders. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews and analyzed the data using thematic and comparative analyses, which were effective for studying cultural beliefs in real-life contexts. The results showed that Baliw-baliw started as a ritual then as a promise to Saint Vincent Ferrer, but many locals have misconceptions about it, leading to stories that become increasingly exaggerated over time. Despite the emergence of misconceptions, most people said it was important to respect the tradition and learn about it so its meaning would stay. The study suggests that awareness of the locals should come first about what their practice or festival represents before it is integrated in the school curriculum. It is also helpful if more research looks into the practice's history, how it has changed, and if original performances are recorded, so the real tradition will be passed on correctly.

Keywords: *misconceptions, Baliw-baliw, practice, festival, religious*

Introduction

A tradition practiced by many people is more likely to survive across generations, even if it appears unusual. However, traditions that involve unconventional activities and attract criticism often struggle to persist due to the influence of public opinion, institutional policies, and prevailing societal norms. In the case of

baliw-baliw, although it is an annual cultural and religious tradition in Barangay San Vicente, Olango Island, it is still perceived as unusual by some members of the community. Many of its activities have been misunderstood as mere binuang (jokes), leading to misconceptions about their purpose and influence. However, every

tradition is rooted in deeper cultural concepts. Therefore, it is essential for the public to be informed of the true meanings behind these practices in order to foster awareness, understanding, and cultural sensitivity.

The baliw-baliw practice has deep spiritual and historical roots, yet origin is still uncertain. It began as a non-religious practice, then mixed with Catholicism in the influence of the missionaries (Mendoza, 2018; The Editors, 2024)., people have already been celebrating it every May when the tide is high and became an official festival in 2018. The word baliw-baliw means “*play-inversion*” or “*play-transformation*,” showing the rituals are not usual (Olofson, 2012). The practice has often been subject to misconceptions by some locals, resulting in criticisms and periodic bans.

Historically, it was believed to bring protection from bad luck (Olofson, 2012; The Editors, 2024). The *Babaylan*, known as spiritual leaders and healers, played a big role in this tradition where wild performances showed defiance or were seen as gifts to spirits. (Gorecho, 2024; Bonifacio et al, 2023). Over time, changes in society and religion made people ban baliw-baliw many times, like in 1936, the 1960s, the 1980s, and the 2020s (Limpag, 2024).

According to Olofson (2012) and Limpag (2024), many participants join baliw-baliw as a personal vow to Saint Vincent or inspired by dreams. Yet, misconceptions continue, as some people who join in the activities are still unaware what it means (Olofson, 2012; The Editors, 2024). Cross-dressing, lively dancing, and phallic symbols are sometimes seen as imitating homosexuals, entertainment, and are linked to sexual imagery (Limpag, 2023). People have also criticized baliw-baliw for using animals (Olofson, 2012; Mendoza, 2018).

While baliw-baliw has faced criticism, similar displays in other Philippine festivals. In Pulilan, Bulacan, where they dress up carabaos to give thanks and show respect (Kneeling Carabao Festival Attraction Details - Tourism - Pulilan, Bulacan, n.d.; Estrope, 2025). In Cordillera Region, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (ICPA OR RA 8371) allows the Igorots for ritual dog sacrifices (Jularbal, 2021). Internationally, Japanese believe that showing wooden or stone phalluses protects them from harm and brings a good harvest (Turnbull, n.d.; Kincaid, 2016). These instances demonstrate how rituals that are unusual and culturally symbolic can have profound significance that goes beyond looks.

However, most research looks at Philippine traditions in general, missing the unique aspects of San Vicente’s Baliw-baliw. There is also little study on how the local community understands these activities resulting in misconceptions or how they work to keep or change the tradition. Moreover, there is little discussion about how baliw-baliw has changed with modern times.

This study aimed to determine the meaning of “*baliw-baliw*” and how people perceive it to dispel misconceptions by speaking with individuals who attended or watched the event. The researchers examined the information about the meaning and purpose of baliw-baliw and noted what people said about it, pointing out incorrect ideas and observing how the community attempted to address them. The results can help researchers, leaders, and local people think more carefully about traditions from the past and those mixed with new practices. Knowing more about baliw-baliw can help link this tradition with modern beliefs and religion, which can help keep its continuation.

To do this, the researchers spoke with community leaders, elderlies, and others who had attended. Specifically, it asks: (a) How did people see baliw-baliw in Barangay San Vicente, Olango Island? (b) What misconceptions did people have about baliw-baliw? (c) How do people address these misconceptions of the practice of baliw-baliw? (d) What are the actions and strategies initiated by the government and the community in addressing these misconceptions? The study also planned to make an educational puppet video to help more people to be aware of and understand the topic.

Methodology

Design

The researcher will integrate a Descriptive Qualitative Research Design to explore the misconceptions encircling the *baliw-baliw* practice. According to Koh and Owen, this approach is based on the premise that problems can be solved and practices improved through analysis, observation, and description. This aims to present a clear and comprehensive summary of events as experienced by participants (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). By utilizing this method, the study aims to describe the different perceptions of the individuals regarding the *baliw-baliw* practice. It will depend on in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis to come up with a comprehensive understanding of the practice and the misconceptions associated with it. Through this approach, it seeks to present a well-rounded discussion that highlights the historical relevance, evolving perspectives, authenticity while ensuring that the findings remain grounded in the experiences of the participants.

Informants and Sampling Design

The study will include both locals and tourists who have different levels of knowledge and experience with the baliw-baliw practice. Participants will be chosen through purposive sampling. Locals are people who live in the barangay and have direct experience. To qualify, they must have witnessed or taken part in the practice for at least three to five years, be at least 18 years old, and be able to share their thoughts clearly. Tourists are visitors from other places who have heard about or discussed the practice. They must have seen the baliw-baliw at least once, be at least 18 years old, and be able to explain their understanding or any assumptions they have. Including both groups will help the study compare how the practice is viewed from within the community and from outside, and will provide a better understanding of its cultural meaning and any misconceptions.

Environment

The study will be conducted on an island in Barangay San Vicente, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. This location offers a genuine cultural setting where the researcher can engage with local traditions, observe community life, and gather direct information about how the practice is perceived.

Instrument

The researcher will collect information through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This approach offers flexibility to explore participants' views and ask follow-up questions about important topics that come up. All interviews will be recorded, with participants' informed consent and attention to ethical standards. The researcher may also review observational notes and relevant documents to support the analysis.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before:

Before data collection, an approval letter will be addressed to the adviser and will be presented by the researcher to obtain permission to conduct the study with the chosen participants within the research environment. Additionally, a formal request letter will be submitted to the barangay captain to seek authorization to carry out the study within the community. The letter will include details about the study, such as its purpose, the number of participants, and the scheduled research dates. Informed consent forms (ICF), along with letters of invitation, will be sent to the selected participants who meet the research's criteria.

During:

Researchers will approach and give the consent forms to each participant noting that their participation was voluntary during the agreed date and time of the interview. During the data collection, participants' responses will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. Observations of the practice's activities, rituals, and audience reactions will also be documented to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context.

After:

After data gathering, the researchers will provide the participants an honorarium or compensation as a gesture of appreciation and recognition for their contributions. This approach acknowledges their participation without associating monetary rewards with performance outcomes, ensuring that ethical guidelines are upheld while appropriately recognizing the participants' participation in the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher will integrate Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke's and Comparative Analysis to examine the data collected from interviews and observations. According to Lochmiller, thematic analysis is one of the most ambiguously analytic techniques in the qualitative research field. While on the other hand, comparative analysis method involves systematically comparing different perspectives to identify patterns, similarities, and differences within the dataset (Ragin, 2014). By integrating this approach, the study aims to uncover misconceptions surrounding the *baliw-baliw* practice and provide a comprehensive discussion of its cultural relevance. Thematic analysis examines the data collected and comparative analysis enables a broader understanding of the phenomenon by evaluating local and tourist viewpoints, leading to deeper insights into how the practice is perceived and interpreted across different groups (Esser & Vliegthart, 2017).

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is evaluated through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To ensure credibility, the researcher built rapport with participants, used purposive purposive sampling, and applied Thematic and Comparative analysis for rigorous data validation. Dependability was maintained through well-documented life histories, expert-reviewed questions, and participant feedback. Confirmability was ensured by minimizing bias through manual coding, expert guidance, and continuous validation. Lastly, transferability was addressed by providing insights into misconceptions of the *baliw-baliw* practice, offering valuable recommendations applicable to similar cultural studies.

Ethical Considerations

The study commenced only after receiving approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC), ensuring that all ethical

protocols were strictly observed before data gathering. Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to the interviews, with clear communication regarding confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To minimize risks, the researcher assured participants that they could decline or stop the interview if distressed, and psychological support was available when needed. All data, including recordings and transcripts, were kept strictly confidential through password-protected files and pseudonyms, while proper citation was observed for all related works. Finally, participants were fairly treated, compensated with honoraria, and assured that no conflict of interest influenced the study.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the knowledge and views of some locals and tourists who have attended and witnessed the Baliw-baliw practice in San Vicente, Olango Island, Lapu-lapu City, Philippines.

I. Local's Views and Knowledge

A practice is a part of life in a community. It can be perceived that the community must be the most grounded in its history and background. However, it cannot be denied that in some cultures, even some locals are not knowledgeable or do not fully understand their practices yet. Thus, it is essential to first assess how well the locals of Barangay San Vicente understand their practice, while also knowing its true purpose(s). It contains Baliw-baliw's *cultural significance*, continuity despite the views of *religious and social authority*, and the *practice preservation*.

Cultural Significance

The practice started with people dancing by the sea, originally name as "*Sakay-sakay*." Some locals who dreamed of Saint Vincent Ferrer, claiming that it was a sign for them to do the practice, and vowed to fulfill every highest tide of the year. Those dreams led them to include their acts in the fluvial celebration.

The original activities include men cross-dressing, *comparsa*, *dandaria* (the performers of *Salubisyon*), etc., added with personal vows like *kumadruna*, *bana-bana/asawa-asawa*, parade of phalluses, etc. Each act or play has its meaning following the devotees' prayers to the saint. Those who failed to fulfill, become ill or die, as a form of punishment. Illnesses like diarrhea, cholera, and skin diseases. They believed it was the beginning of the curse. In the 1970s, even people in their 80s at that time could not say when it started. As the practice attracts more attendees, more ways are made to show their devotion to the saint. At present, the elders claim it has long been part of their way of life. One participant recalled;

"Mga lolo ug lola nako, wala sad sila kabalo kanus-a nagsugod pero ug mawala daw daghan masakit...Kasagaran magkalibanga ang mga bata pagkawala sa Baliw- Baliw. (My grandparents told me that they do not know when it is originated, but, if the Baliw-Baliw isn't held, many people get sick. Usually, children get diarrhea when it's not held.)" IP4

However, according to Olofson (2012) and Festivalscape (2020), the term *Sakay-sakay* is an older related practice, not necessarily a direct "*original name*." On the other hand, Limpag's (2024) findings affirms that *baliw-baliw* trace back to its fluvial origins which is now linked with dreams and inherited vows for Saint Vincent Ferrer, and when it was banned in 1936 by the church, a cholera outbreak occurred, interpreted as divine punishment.

Limpag (2024) added that earlier anthropological accounts also noted that failing to fulfill vows was believed to bring sickness, resonating with testimonies in this study's findings.

Aside from healing, many of the activities encompass different livelihoods, such as the *ungguy-ungguy*, coconut palm wine in the sea, the selling of rice crust, etc., which reflects the daily struggles of survival asking for a bountiful harvest or to extend gratitude for abundance (Festivalscape, 2020) by offering the leftovers of what they got e.g., the rice crust symbolizes that they have rice eaten and the *ungguy-ungguy* with banana symbolizes their was a bountiful harvest of banana; monkeys perceivedly likes banana.

Over time, some locals and tourists called the acts as "*pabaliw*," relating to the belief in the thunder god, the act of provoking nature by doing unusual things, punished through being struck by lightning, expressed with "*purya-baliw*". Many of the locals have believed that the activities were done solely for fun as a way of celebration. Which resulted to uncontrollable gestures such as the phalluses was being thrust back and forth during the fluvial procession, exaggerated cross dressing by gays, the rice crust was replaced with cow or horse dung, and the fluvial originally accompanied with comparsa players was replaced with rock music.

Former Barangay Captain Cyrus Eyas recognized the *pabaliw* activities as acts of "*baliw-baliw*" and it officially became its name as a festival in 2018. Elders objected that the term meant fake, if they consider the background and purpose of the practice, the proper term is Pabaliw Festival. Scholars trace its origin to pre-Hispanic play-inversions, noting that *Baliw* was the name of the thunder god able to transform people into beasts and cause disasters. While *daetan* or male transvestite had the capability to manage the offerings to *Baliw* to avert punishment and disasters (Festivalscape, 2020).

Religious and Social Authority

With the emergence of new baliw-baliw activities, it faced a lot of negative feedback, which led to numerous bans even in the early 1936 by priests. In the 1980s, the parish priest, Father Jen, disapproved of the event because it included wooden sex organs, calling it vulgar. Further disapproval stemmed from the gestures of some performers. Other acts not part of the baliw-baliw practice also contributed to the priest's disapproval, such as some *mananambal* (healers), who would gather flowers initially offered to the saint to mix in healing oil called *lana* for prosperity, and generally called *palina*. Some even took parts of the saint's statue, like arms and decorations (Olofson, 2012; Festivalscape 2020).

Over time, the Parish church has only allowed modification of gestures and omission of certain activities for years already. Although dressing as women is still permitted, the fiesta is not as lively as it used to be. As one local said;

Sa pagka karon, ang padre kora namo ang nagpugong nga di na pwede mag bali-baliw, di na pwede mag make-up, magbinabaye okay ra. mao ng dili kaayu sadya ang fiesta. (As of now, our parish priest is the one stopping it, no more bali-baliw, no more makeup, though dressing up as women is still allowed. That's why the fiesta isn't as lively anymore.) IP7

Additionally, part of the original practice of the fisherfolk was to bring dogs, cats, and monkeys as props or as the main part of an act, such as in *pamasol* and *unggoy-unggoy* were examples of play-inversions (Festivalscape, 2020). However, others have

normalized trying to fight different animals like cats, dogs, monkeys, turkeys, and cocks, there the Animal Welfare later got involved, claiming animal abuse (Limpag, 2018). While the usage of pets was defended in the studies of Olofson (2012) and Festivalscape (2020), stating that the pets were not harmed but treated as pets, and their use was symbolic as props in a vow. Adding that the activities invert natural relationships and are often expressed through animals. In recent years, barangay officials and priests have emphasized the novena, fluvial procession, and Mass, shifting focus away from the *Baliw-baliw* (Limpag, 2024).

Practice Preservation

The lack of knowledge and documented history of the practice was not a hindrance for the believers of Saint Vincent Ferrer to continue the passed-down tradition. Oral accounts suggest that the practice was already practiced by their generations. One participant have shared that,

"Di gyud ko (kaingon) sa sakto nga tubag kung kanus-a nagsugod kay pagkataw namo mao naman na...Ako 60 years old, posible nga 60 years plus na ang baliw-baliw." (Ever since I was born, it was already happening...I'm 60 years old now, so it's possible that Baliw-baliw has been around for over 60 years.)

According to Olofson (2012), there were no written history of *pabaliw* exists. Its origin in uncertain, and researchers in the 1970s found only oral accounts. This is seconded by Limpag (2024), saying that historians and local scholars have tried to trace the beginnings of *Baliw-baliw* but with little success. Elders and locals testimonies suggest the practice has been practiced for at least half a century (Festivalscape, 2020). Today, only a few among the practices situated in the Baliw-baliw remain observable. Some locals miss the livelier celebration, as one of them shared,

"Ganahan ko mabalik kay lingaw baya." (I want it to come back because it's fun.) IP4

However, some locals would agree not returning the described "*law-ay*" (vulgar) practices because of the observable orderliness and peace of the barangay. But, for those who would want to retain the practices suggested to the parish priest to allow them to hold the practice on the first day of the novena, but the priest did not allow it. Barangay officials and knowledgeable individuals have organized to raise awareness among locals and neighboring barangays through seminars, particularly before the COVID-19 pandemic. Some attendees of the practice suggest that proper education about the meaning and the proper ways is the way to have it back. Saying that,

"Saktong pag ekswela. Lisod sad mo answer tas sa question nga wala ta kabalo." (Proper education is key. It's hard to answer questions when we don't know the right explanation ourselves.) IP1

To avoid misinterpretation and to foster respect for cultural practices that may otherwise be judged superficially be preserved meaningfully instead, requires contextual education (Pillai, 2015; UNESCO, 2017; Limpag, 2024). The practice retains fragments of the old *pabaliw* but in a sanitized, church-approved form (Festivalscape, 2020).

II. Tourists' Views and Knowledge

A practice attracts an audience through various factors, including aesthetics, uniqueness, the number of attendees or performers, or

effective promotion (Getz & Page 2020). To know the audience's views and knowledge is another way to know the background of a practice in terms of how well the public knows about it, by any means. It contains tourists' *indirect knowledge and awareness of the culture, perceptions and interpretations*, and the prevalence of *respect for the practice preservation*.

Indirect Knowledge and Awareness of the Culture

In the 1970s, Carlos Abusan, a researcher who tried tracing the roots of the practice described the baliw-baliw as a "*rare culture*," arguing that the ancestors of those locals are not crazy; they carried symbolic meaning behind those actions. Yet, both locals and tourists have expressed that they heard and saw negative feedback, even from locals. The majority of the tourist participants shared that they only heard of the *Baliw-baliw* through interviews in person and posts online.

Scholars who encountered the *pabaliw* in the 1970s – 1980s noted that although the practice is linked as *baliw* (crazy), the acts were symbolic and deserved scholarly attention (Olofson, 2012; Festivalscape, 2020). Its revival in 2018, amplified on social media, brought both awareness of the festival and attracted bigger chaos afterward. These highlights the need for contextual education to understand the practice. UNESCO Bangkok (2021) and Achilles (2021) have reported that misunderstood cultural practices gained acceptance after being explained in educational contexts.

The parish church, however, was aware of the deaths in the past as well as the claims of the healers about their dreams of commanding rituals to ward off disease (Olofson, 2012). The parish church expressed that the belief in continuing the *Baliw-baliw* is rooted in fear and ignorance, rather than true devotion (Limpag, 2024). Saying that, using images of saints in their healing practices, but most of them did not go to church. In line on that, Festivalscape (2020) stated that the church criticized the action as misguided. But, after the 2018 viral incident, not just the church took action, but also the LGU, Department of Tourism, and animal welfare groups intervened.

Perceptions and Interpretations

By Baliw-baliw's name alone it intrigues, yet looks unusual if explained and witnessed. A participant shared that,

"It makes me think of the phrase 'play stupid' being extravagant, odd, or even acting crazy in a way that's perceived negatively." OR07 Another participant added that, "Some practices like cross-dressing and animal fights are not really pleasant for us to see." OP4

It might look funny for some tourists, but others think it is offensive or beyond what is acceptable. Others expressed that it seems like a mix of entertainment and something strange, which people easily misunderstood. The name of the practice left misconceptions, and its practices caused moral shock and misleading impressions and information have distanced the practice from its deeper purpose. One of the participants have shared that,

"I see that while some people may misrepresent it, the tradition itself is not as bad as it's portrayed." OP7

According to Festivalscape (2020), the name of the practice provokes misconceptions, as visitors equate it with madness rather than ritual, while Olofson (2012), described how tourists perceived it as slapstick entertainment. Tourists' misreadings encouraged

exaggerated antics, distancing the event from its healing origin (Festivalscape, 2020; Limpag, 2024). Defenders insist its intent was never vulgarity (Olofson, 2012) that the bad image comes from misconceptions, not from the tradition itself (Festivalscape, 2020).

While the parish church knew about the impulsive action taken by Captain Cyrus Eyas in naming the practice. They expressed that maybe it is only that is how he saw it. A name which was later accepted by the majority of the locals and later on by the tourism office in Lapu-lapu City. The church argues that their law states that if we are talking about saints, especially celebrating a saint's feast, it should be done in a sacred and holy way. In addition, they expressed that the usage of any religious symbol in such practices would offend the church. That is why the Baliw-baliw was banned because it goes against the true purpose of a fiesta, saying that, "*Instead of honoring, it's dishonoring. God does not engage in foolishness.*" OP3

According to Olofson (2012) and Festivalscape (2020), faith-healing elements blended into the fiesta were framed as superstition, not legitimate Catholic practice. The Archdiocese of Cebu ordered the Olango parish to work with the community to suppress these practices after some barangay officials were scandalized by photos and videos that went viral on social media wearing bikinis and carrying around dildos and wooden phalluses. In response, Fr. Edgar Lumarda suggested that residents revert to the old *Sakay-Sakay* or fluvial festival. While Barangay Captain Edilberta Eyas Lambojon suggested that they prioritize banning the most scandalous and outlandish components of the practice: sexually explicit and offensive displays (Limpag, 2024).

Respect for the Practice Preservation

On the positive side, some tourists believe that even without experiencing it directly, they should not judge it harshly. Saying that,

"It has become part of the culture, tourists should respect that." (OP3)

Arguing that beliefs should not be imposed, even if some traditions seem strange, they carry deep meaning for the community that has practiced for generations. What matters is understanding it in its true context.

In the view of the church, the locals can still do their practices, just not as part of the celebration of the feast of Saint Vincent Ferrer; they must not be associated with the fiesta or the image of the saint, because it creates a negative image of the Catholic church. The suggestion of the priest is to hold it three days before the first novena, or three days after the feast.

According to Wei (2024), respecting cultural practices, even if they appear strange to others, is essential for intercultural harmony. Anthropologists argue that tourists should refrain from immediate condemnation; rituals deemed bizarre often carry profound local meaning, urging cultural sensitivity (Olofson, 2012; Festivalscape, 2020). However, the church embraces inculturation, but stresses that cultural practices cannot override the sacred meaning of liturgy (Go Teach XIII-13: Inculturation & Religiosity, n.d.). Nevertheless, archdiocese clarified that cultural practices may continue, provided they are detached from the liturgical feast of Saint Vincent Ferrer (Limpag, 2024).

III. Similarities of the participants' Views and Knowledge

The Baliw-Baliw Festival of San Vicente, Olango Island, reflects how cultural traditions are interpreted differently by locals and tourists. While locals emphasize ancestral vows, fertility symbolism, and healing rituals tied to San Vicente Ferrer, tourists rely on secondhand information, social media, or observation, often interpreting the festival as humorous, odd, or controversial. Despite these differences, both groups acknowledge that the ritual holds deeper cultural and symbolic meaning (Limpag, 2024).

Name

Both locals and tourists recognize that the name Baliw-Baliw stems from how people describe the unusual and humorous acts during the celebration. a local explained:

"Ang ngan nga baliw-baliw sa mga taw nga nag obserbar... 'unsa mani nga klaseha sa pista, nagpabaliw man'" (The name 'baliw-baliw' came from observers saying: 'what kind of fiesta is this, they are acting crazy') IP2.

Similarly, a tourist connected the name to the performance of reversal and play:

"The word Baliw-Baliw, binabaliktad, di naman talaga buang-buang siya pero ginawa na lang nilang tradisyon." (The word Baliw-Baliw means reversal; it's not literally madness but became a tradition.) OP1.

Ancestral Vows and Symbolism

locals highlight ancestral vows as the basis of the practice:

"Gibuhat na namo kay sumusunod rapud mi sa katung nag-una namo... magdala mi og artificial [penis]... ang laki mag dress og babae para kuno masagana ang fertility" IR2.

Both groups agree on the identity of the event as the Baliw-Baliw Festival of San Vicente, Olango Island. tourists often refer to it by its popular name, while locals emphasize it as a local's vow, reflecting its rootedness in the community. This alignment on the name demonstrates shared acknowledgment of its cultural visibility (Olfonso, 2012).

Community Struggles

Tourists also associate its origin with the past struggles of the community against illness:

"Sabi nila... kapag hindi natuloy, may mga namamatay, mga nagkakilabanga... kaya naging tradisyon na" OP2.

Both groups confirm that the festival happens at the same time as the feast of San Vicente Ferrer every April, usually during the novena. locals recalled:

"Tanan activity will be full on the tenth day of novena" IP2.

Tourists noted the same annual timing:

"Actually okay naman siya... kasi during ng festival may 1 week preparation" OP1.

Spiritual Purpose: Gratitude, Healing and Protection

locals highlight that the festival is a way to give thanks, ask for healing, and seek protection:

"Kung unsay imoha panginabuhim imoha ng ihalad kang San Vicente. Dili mana tae sa baka, panata gyud ni namo nga para baskog mi, moapil mi sa iyang prosesiyon" (Whatever livelihood you have, you offer it to San Vicente. This is not nonsense, this is our vow so we stay strong and join his procession) IP2.

tourists, though with less detail, also recognize its deeper purpose:

"Oo... sa mga naririnig ko sa matatanda, mas may malalim pa na kahulugan" (Yes... from what I heard from elders, it has a deeper meaning) OP2.

"Yes, I think the ritual really has a deeper meaning because it won't be a ritual or a tradition to the people there if it doesn't have a meaning to them." OP8

These parallels suggest that both groups recognize the sacred and symbolic significance of the Baliw-Baliw Festival, even though their engagement differs. As Bonifacio et al. (2023) argue, shared recognition of meaning across community locals and tourists strengthens cultural continuity despite differences in interpretation.

Promote Cultural Understanding and Respect

Another point of similarity is their awareness of misunderstandings and misjudgments. Both groups admit that tourists sometimes mock the tradition, while locals recognize that distortions can arise when visitors exaggerate or misinterpret the rituals. Despite these differences, both locals and tourists stressed the value of respecting the practice. tourists expressed that:

"Bisan paman lahi-lahi og sabot ang uban, para namo bilihon gihapon ni nga tradisyon nga angay respetuhon." (Even if others interpret it differently, for us this is still a valuable tradition that deserves respect.) IP3

Meanwhile, a tourist shared:

"I actually don't understand what they are doing but as long as it doesn't harm others... I will just respect their tradition because we are all different from each other." OR6

This mutual call for respect demonstrates that, despite contrasting perspectives, both locals and tourists acknowledge the cultural importance of the practice. As The Editors (2024) emphasized, traditions, even if unusual, retain their cultural value when communities and audiences practice awareness and respect. Likewise, Olfonso (2012) explained that seemingly chaotic rituals carry deeper meanings, reminding us of the need for sensitivity in interpreting them.

IV. Differences of the Participants' Views and Knowledge

While both locals and tourists acknowledge that the Baliw-Baliw Festival carries meaning, their perspectives differ significantly in terms of knowledge depth, interpretation of religious appropriateness, and opinions on how the practice should continue. locals speak from lived experience and participation, while tourists mostly rely on observation and secondary accounts. These differences reveal varying levels of attachment, authority, and sense of responsibility toward the tradition.

Source of Understanding

locals rely on participation and oral tradition:

“Kay niapil ko ana, mga 12 or 13 (years old), 8 years nako nag participate” IP1.

tourists, however, mainly know about the ritual through social media or brief encounters:

“Narinig ko na yan... dito na ko na-assign. Marami nang nag-interview... marami ng nagpunta dito na mga schools” OP1.

tourists rely on secondhand accounts or visual impressions, which often lead to partial or distorted interpretations. As noted in literature, traditions often become vulnerable to misconceptions when their symbolic meanings are not directly communicated or practiced by the wider public (Olfonso, 2012; The Editors, 2024).

Interpretations of Religious Appropriateness

locals stress that their intent is not indecency but devotion:

“Amao ipadayag nga dili binastos mi nila. Sila ray naghatag og lain nga pagsabot” (We explain that we are not being indecent; it is tourists who give it a wrong meaning) IP1.

tourists often echo criticisms that it is “binuang” (nonsense):

“Sa religious na, dili mana igo sa pista ang inyo gihimo, ‘binuang mana’” (From a religious perspective, what you are doing is just foolishness) OP4.

This aligns with Bonifacio et al. (2023), who noted that chaotic ritual practices are often dismissed by external observers but are in fact embedded in indigenous spirituality.

Continuation and Cultural Identity

In addition, locals want the festival to remain ongoing as part of their cultural and community identity:

“Kung mawala ni, mawala pud ang among pagkatawo isip komunidad” (If this disappears, our identity as a community disappears too) IP3.

In contrast, tourists expressed that while they respect the practice, they believe it should not coincide with the feast day of San Vicente Ferrer:

“They may continue with the practice, just not during the feast of San Vicente Ferrer, and they must not use religious symbols or saints in their foolish practices.”. OP3

Scholars emphasize that traditions are more likely to endure if widely practiced, even when unusual, as long as they do not violate social norms or laws (Bonifacio et al., 2023; The Editors, 2024). However, practices that receive criticism or misunderstanding face greater risks of being discontinued, as shown in repeated bans of Baliw-Baliw throughout history (Limpag, 2024).

Conclusion

Both locals and tourists shared views and knowledge about Baliw-baliw including the misconceptions surrounding it. However, they differ on the source of understanding, interpretations of religious appropriateness, and stand for its continuation and cultural identity. The tradition is viewed as their way of getting closer to Saint Vincent Ferrer, yet, several misinterpretations and misconceptions were identified by the researchers namely (a) staging during a religious celebration despite its non-religious (culturally paganism) origin, (b) the mixture of beliefs of thunder god and Saint Vincent

Ferrer, (c) the play-inversions (thunder god beliefs) do not reflect the life of the church, (d) the belief of dying or getting sick if the practice is stop, (e) the giving the name which distanced to its true intention, and (f) the change of original gestures of the activities and the activities itself. Nevertheless, both locals and tourists emphasize the importance of contextual education and respecting the practice.

Recommendations

Having studied the Baliw-baliw practice, it is recommended to raise awareness to the locals about what a festival is, the types of festivals, and its essence. The locals should consider refining their ways of celebration in accordance with religious ways, or stage it in a way that would not be associated with the fiesta. After a refinement to what Baliw-baliw represents, it should be integrated into the curriculum for subjects like Social Studies, Values Education, Arts, Drama, Literature, Anthropology and Sociology in primary to tertiary levels to help preserve heritage, build identity, correct misconceptions, foster respect, and emphasize Cebuano culture and connect it to global contexts. To deepen and broaden this research, additional studies may trace the roots and development of this practice and document the original activities and their proper gestures.

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