

ALTER-LYRICISM IN THE SAMA *LAGU-LAGU*:
EXAMINING THE CREATIVE SOURCES OF THE *SANGBAY*
SONG TRIBUTE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE *IGAL*
DANCE TRADITION

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In this paper, I share my thoughts on alter-lyricism in the form of an analytical narrative.¹ I first relate how I encountered the *sangbay* song tribute in a collection of Sama *lagu-lagu* (songs) during the course of my research in the Sama Dilaut *igal* dance tradition. Afterwards, I present a brief content analysis of a *sangbay* selection and then relate this to the *igal* performance. In the following section, I introduce my conceptualization of alter-lyricism and link this to the Sama notion of *bunga* aesthetics. Finally, I note the evolution of trends in Sama performance and theorize on how this relates to the Sama sense of community and continuity in culture.

Encountering the Sama Lagu-Lagu

I stumbled upon the Sama Dilaut *sangbay* in April 2005 when I was doing dance research for the Institute of Philippine Culture. I was walking down the “Chinese Pier” of the Tawi-Tawi Provincial Capital of Bongao when I chanced upon a DVD shop built on stilts standing on the waters of the small harbor. At that time, I was in the company of Marine anthropologist Cynthia Neri Zayas, Japanese Theater expert Adelina Amparo Umali, III and Hamka Malabong, my research assistant-translator. I noticed something peculiar showing on the shop television screen: a singer in red donning “Hollywood style” sunglasses was singing in the background as two girls in black were dancing to the traditional *igal* dance style in the foreground.² Every now and then, the two girls would break their traditional postures and start wriggling

to the sexy postures of the Philippine novelty song-dance, the “Ocho-Ocho.”³I later found out upon inquiring with the storekeeper that this was a popular DVD by Sitti Aida and her twin daughters. This strange hybrid of tradition and contemporaneity, the conservative and the risqué definitely caught my eye. From then on I collected DVDs of “Bajau *Lagu-Lagu*” primarily for the sake of studying a “modern” form of *igal*.⁴

In May 2006, I found myself in Kota Kinabalu doing preliminary research on the *igal* in Sabah, Malaysia for the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP). Knowing that the DVDs that I found in Bongao were produced in Kota Kinabalu, I purposely sought out the product in the market. This activity proved to be an easy matter. All I needed to do was to follow the distinct strains of the Sama *lagu-lagu* blaring from the loudspeaker of a vendor. Again, I bought a set of DVDs that I took back home to the Philippines.

Viewing the DVDs in Manila, I noticed (thanks to the karaoke/subtitled format) that certain words referred to dancing (“*pang-igalan*,” “*pangalayan*”) or to the dance (“*igal*” or “*ngigal*”). Upon closer examination and upon consultation with my Sama assistant, Hamka Malabong, I confirmed that almost all of the songs in my growing collection of *lagu-lagu* were Sama “*sangbay*” tribute songs. Just like the *igal*,⁵ the *sangbay* were songs of the same titles or labels that were sung in variation by singers while accompanying *igal* performed in festivities such as weddings. The *sangbay* were highly improvisational; words were changed to describe the dancer or the performance site, or to express an aspiration. My meandering in the field has led to an accidental discovery of a Sama literary form that was performance- and site-specific. Thanks to globalization, the transnational aspect of culture, and digital technology, this literary form is now documented for posterity in the commercially produced artifact of the video-oke type of DVD.

The Sangbay and its Contents

What follows are my preliminary observations of the *sangbay* as a Sama genre of literature. The *sangbay* is decidedly “oral” and self-reflexive. It talks about itself as “*sangbay*.” It expresses its intention and even its character or condition. This excerpt from a version of “Lolo” by Selma Binti Wilson talks about repetition. This implies that this excerpted version followed another

version sung to the same tune, that is, of course with different lyrics. The *sangbay* opens with the following phrases:⁶

Lo... lay...loday lolay lolo lolay lolay
Balikan ko paglolay na eh kun a panangbay ma si tukang pangalay
Kalu masi tapakay ma madlis ramay-ramay ba lolay
(“Lolo”, Selma bt. Wilson Sama)

[Lo... lay...loday lolay lolay lolo lolay lolay
I repeat the song Loday, my tribute (*panangbay*) to the dancer
May it bring joy to one and all, lolay]

In another version by Rashid Julkarnain, it appears to direct its attention to a specific dancer with *dayang ku*, a somewhat flirtatious manner of addressing a young lady, and then suddenly shifts its attention to other young ladies, perhaps a strategy dictated by the norm of indirectness. Note that it still talks about itself as “a song:”

Lo...lay lolay lolay lolay... iluun na raying lolay
Kalu masi apanday ka untuk itu panangbay
Bang siga magpangalay asal randa mabuhay ba lolay
(“Lolo”, Rashid Julkarnain, Sama)

[Lo...lay lolay lolay lolay... Here it comes, dear princess, the lolay
Simply a song...this is, I must state
If you dance, all you fine ladies, long live! mabuhay ba lolay]

Although I have stated earlier that this study is supposed to be preliminary, my initial sifting through the material gives me much confidence in saying that the *sangbay* is “*igal* performance-specific.” Yes, the singer reflects about his or her song but then he or she eventually relates this to dancer and the dance. A performance dichotomy of “here I sing and there you dance” becomes apparent in Wilson’s version of Lolo. Here, she reveals the practice of complimenting the dancer with garlands of bills:⁷

Loday lolay lolay...minditu tagnaan ku angigal ka mandilu daka
mgalaat sumu
Pandain paminat nu ganta ma sangon itu na sumilan gih waktu daang
kabalikan ku

Bay na andh-andah ku bang igal buwat tilu asal ka'a ru guru panji ba
 mag ibu-ibu
 Bang du ma Pilipino danda ba si anu-anu
 ("Lolo", Selma bt. Wilson)

[Lolay lolay lolay...Here, with these words, I begin my song
 Dance over there and be not weary
 Impress your admirers this evening
 A time I that hope to repeat
 This dance most refined can only be
 In my eyes your sole creation
 Met with garlands, stringed bills in thousands!
 Renowned Filipina, of great substance truly you are!]

It is interesting to note that Wilson refers to a "Filipina," though many Sama in Sabah have already acquired residency or even converted to Malaysian citizenship. This identification with a label that has been assumed to be alienating by many Muslim Filipinos needs to further examined. Perhaps, outside the territorial borders of the Philippines where the "othering" of citizenship becomes even more oppressive, Filipino identity becomes an appellation of last resort or of resistance.

In the following passage from Julkarnain's version, he reveals the improvisational character of the *sangbay* "in different versions," as well as the effective control of the singer/musician over the length of the dance performance:⁸

Lolay lolay
 E lolo ku manditu angigal ka
 Patantut sinagbay liyu-liyu
 Danda ba si malimpiyu
 sukup kapandayan nu
 Sinindil ka manditu
 Ayi karagalan nu hangkan na tilosa ku
 Anongkah aku maytu na ra'a aawam tipu ayi karugalan nu
 ("Lolo", Rashid Julkarnain)

[Lolay lolay
 E lolo ku... Here, you will dance the igal well
 I will sing this sinangbay in different versions.]

Here, fine lady, of your skill I'll sing
 I've sought to know what you dislike
 And now I sing for I have studied well
 So do not fret or shy not away
 for this song's performance, I'll extend]

The sangbay also reveals a conversation between the song and the dance. In the following stanza Wilson issues an imperative and at same time reveals an aesthetic standard for Sama women (“oh violin-like figure”), and a kinetic knowledge of Latin dance forms, such as the *cha-cha*, among the Sama:

...
 Lolo bang pininda raying pakale gih sinoho
 Pinabisaigal binayla-bayla
 Pantun chinatcha cha-cha
 Si hawakan biyula ba lolay
 (“Lolo”, Selma bt. Wilson, Sama)

[If in the Lolo we make changes, princess, listen
 For it commands you to perform a dance of effect
 Release your dancing to its fullest like the movement of the cha-cha
 Oh violin-like figure... ba lolay]

Julkarnain who “prays” for the forgiveness of artistic sins, again underscores his control over the length of the performances and issues a consolation for dance well done (albeit, interrupted):

Bang niya suilap tukang sangbay ampunin gih manga bagay
 Hangkan na pinahati
 ni randa magpanari igalan sigi-sigi na aku amahati
 Ra'a du ka alonely bang randa serba boleh asal du ka rang okey
 Angigal sigi-sigi
 (“Lolo”, Rashid Julkarnain, Sama)

[If this singer errs, forgive him my dear friends
 This thought from singer to dancer sent
 Proceed to dance, and from me you'll know
 when your dance must end
 but be not sad beloved dancer
 for you have danced so well]

The link between the *igal* performance and the *sangbay* becomes even more apparent in the following passages of Wilson and Julkarnain. Wilson mentions movement vocabulary that can only be understood by dancers of *igal*. The “*palele, pinalete lete*” denotes a crawling movement executed in excruciating languidness. The characteristic movement of the shoulder in this dance, a movement that Mhd. Anis Noor Mohamed refers to as “the ripple,”⁹ is also alluded to. Julkarnain, on the other hand, fixes his gaze on the hula-like swaying of the bottom (*buli*) and also notes the aesthetic of the over-extended elbow, a shared element with Balinese, Javanese, Khmer, and Thai classical dance forms:¹⁰

Lo... lay... lolay lolay lolay
 Igal ka sigi-sigi enneng daka pahali
 sinambungan heh kami danda Beautiful lady
 bang angigal palele, pinalete
 Lolay lolay lolay.... Aku magparassaya soal kappa nadayan
 na asal du ka biasa band du ma tanah Sabah
 Yana ni asa-asa ilu anghadiya angaluwas min bulsa
 Lasahan pisita jhangkan daka palabba
 Sambatan paminatta bang angigal baran na oh!
 (“Lolo”, Selma bt. Wilson, Sama)

[Lo... lay... lolay lolay lolay
 Keep to your dance, break no rest, oh young maiden
 Beautiful lady, for you the dance music we prolong
 If you oblige us with your dance steps palele, pinalete palete
 (crawling, pinalete-lete, as it crosses, palele)
 Lolay lolay lolay... Regarding your skill, this I fully trust
 And your dance is not a stranger in the land of Sabah
 In demand, most desired, oh to the high degree of danger!
 Your shoulders in motion bring tears to your flock
 Lady of great demand, to you they come and bear gifts]
 Tinalima na igal na ra' ka arugal
 Bang singnabay pinalanjil randa si original
 Minnitu ku maglapal kaba siraka lokal-lokal
 Ka bantug ni bandal manjari pamasyal bang bulih pinahibal
 Sambatan deyom bandal ambal siga anandal ambal siga anandal
 Tattap siga pabungkal ilu na pinatampal
 Tinampalan ni ka'a na ra' ka ngalamma
 Lolo awwal masa ambal gih abaluba

Anangbay ku maka'a ka randa si lanuh luwa
 Ka si malantik siku na lolo asal biasa
 Biasa magpangalay randa tukang pangalay
 hangkan na pinasulay minsan ma ayi ma ayi
 (Lolo, Rashid Julkarnain, Sama original)

[Your dance is known by all here
 Near and far may proudly travel
 As in this village many say, they cannot well resist
 The movement of your bottom
 With this, all rise up to approach you.
 To you, their tribute in abandon, give.
 To you, yell out their admiration
 May your dance reach not its unwinding end
 Your dance to the old song Lolo and whose beauty never fades
 I sing of a woman, a vision of beauty,
 I sing of the undulation of her curved pliant elbows
 This lady who at present dances knows her dance so well]

Julkarnain's takes on an even more profound self-reflexive tone suggesting that the sangbay is a source or document of the Sama peoples' memory. Memory in the form of "stories of the people" is portrayed as a "mobile" form of wealth that can be brought anywhere; it is indeed most appropriate for the "nomadic" Sama. Sabah is once again alluded to in the toponym, Semporna, the other half of Sitangkai... two communities united by blood relations but separated by the territorial discourse of the Philippine and Malaysian states.¹¹

Maitu ku angongkah na ra'a du ka mandara na
 Randa ba si kumalah kaba aksyon deyoh
 Deyatahlupal min mandusiya ambal lugih pangaltah
 Ka minsan piingga hula
 bang mareyom Sampulna biasa du ka ni andah
 ka minsan piingga hula
 asal du ka rang tanda
 ("Lolo", Rashid Julkarnain, Sama)

[Here, I will sing so do not shy away
 gem of a lady whose dance in movement rises and falls.
 The stories of the people are sources of great
 wealth that can never be lost wherever they may go

For if in Semporna your dance is well received,
 then it may be taken to all other places...
 There too it may live and be seen]

The self-reflexive quality and reference to dancers is seen in another song “shared” by Siti Aida and Selma bt. Wilson. In “Manis Malenggang,” Wilson declares the “repeat” of a song while noting the dancing of a “sweet lady.” Sitti Aida, on the other hand, “again link(s) words” and draws attention to Alleng and Ida.

Balikan ku sab kalangan
 Waina na raying pangigalan
 Saa min dilu oh aawam
 Sinoh lagi dayang kinansangan
 Na na, na na listen my love
 Na na, na na manis malenggang
 Lil lal la lil la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Selma bt. Wilson, Sama)

[Once again I repeat the song
 And over there a sweet lady dances
 Oh, there by surprise do not be taken
 When you are made to dance more often
 Na na, na na listen my love
 Na na, na na manis malenggang
 Lil lal la lil la la lal]
 Sambungan ku pabalik bissala panangbayan si randa-randa
 Oy duwangan amayla-mayla sa Alleng maka si Ida
 Na, na, na, na, na, dengar la sayang,
 na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Nana”, Sitti Aida, Sama)

[Again I link words to sing to a maiden
 Hail the dancing pair of Alleng and Ida
 Na, na, na, na, na, listen love, na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Sitti Aida, trans. under the title “Nana”)]

As attention is drawn to particular people and particular actions, the sangbay privileges the performance moment. The occasion, in many ways, is made special by the sangbay that may now be seen as a “tailor-made” artifact that more than documents the occasion. “Manis Malenggang” therefore becomes the “Manis Malenggang” of that particular nexus of people in a particular time and place with “Morgan’s child dancing and Selso manning the organ.”

Hangkan na sinindil kinalang kasilasa ma danakan
 Anggal anak-anak si Morgan iya lalla Selsu ang-organ
 Na, na, na, na, na, dengar la sayang,
 na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Nana”, Sitti Aida, Sama)

[And thus, this is sang as a lullaby to a sibling well loved
 Morgan’s child is dancing and Selso mans the organ
 Na, na, na, na, na, listen love, na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Sitti Aida, trans. under the title “Nana”)]

In Wilson’s “Manis Malenggang,” the musician’s traditional control over the length of the dance performance is once again emphasized in Rashid’s giving of a sign. In this manner, the sangbay becomes the channel bearing the message that allows for negotiations between musicians and dancers to occur. Unmentioned are the non-verbals emanating from the dancer herself using her body/dance as the other channel of communication with its own language consisting of shoulder shrugs (*kidjut*), glances, and others.

Anggal ka iya raying ku
 Na si Rashid atiya ma bihing ku
 Ang-signal du dayang ni kau
 Makahati du sab ba itu
 Na na, na na listen my love
 Na na, na na manis malenggang
 Lil lal la lil la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Selma bt. Wilson, Sama)

[Dance as always, O lovely lady
 By my side here is Rashid
 He'll also give a sign to you
 I hope with that... we understand
 Na na, na na listen my love
 Na na, na na manis malenggang
 Lil lal la lil la la lal]

The aspect of performance privileging place acquires greater specific-ness in the following passage from Sitti Aida's "Manis Malenggang." Batu no. 4 is "kilometer no. 4" in the Malaysian system of ascertaining distance in its highway system and may be assumed to be a place just off Semporna.

Angigal ka iya amnsak na bang maitu ma Batu 4 (ampat)
 Ilu na pasakat anabulak asal du ka Alleng magsikat
 Na, na, na, na, na, dengar la sayang,
 na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 ("Nana", Sitti Aida, Sama original)

[Dance to your liking, dance while here at Batu no. 4
 Here she comes climbing up to spread gifts,
 Alleng, you too will gather fame
 Na, na, na, na, na, listen love, na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 ("Manis Malenggang", Sitti Aida, trans. under the title "Nana")]

Sitti Aida's displays improvisational virtuosity as she wryly notes the extended nature of her sangbay. She expresses being tired in the third person and even manages to tease young dancers to give her a commission, from the night's earnings. She then refers to her own skills in the following passage by emphasizing the "trans-ethnic or transnational" demand for her singing:

Minsan si Aida amaleh-maleh angigal duwangan ondeh-ondeh
 Angandah baanan sekeh minsan arikih sinohoh mamhagih
 Na, na, na, na, na, dengar la sayang,
 na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 ("Nana", Sitti Aida, Sama)

[Even Aida has grown tired, two children still dancing
 Attention dear partners, give a share, even just a bit
 Na, na, na, na, na, listen love, na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Sitti Aida, trans. under the title “Nana”)]

Aku pain angangganta kalu-kalu ambal na ataha
 Bang alanu pinaongkah-ongkah oy! Bay ni order du eh Sinah
 Na, na, na, na, na, dengar la sayang,
 na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Sitti Aida, Sama)

[Only I will adjust my estimate perhaps it is not at all long
 Hey! If you're good you'll be asked to sing,
 requested also by the Chinese
 Na, na, na, na, na, listen love, na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Sitti Aida, trans. under the title “Nana”)]

The Chinese in this case could very well refer to members of overseas Chinese communities who may be seen all over maritime Southeast Asian settlements and who have long commercial ties with the Sama Dilaut in the trading of items such as pearls, *bat* (Bahasa Malayu: *tripang*, or sea cucumber), shells, and other sea products.

In an inter-reflexive segue where the song is “aware of itself as a song” as it rallies the dance to an encore or a repetition, Sitti Aida appears to refer to either a “minus-one” or *karaoke*, or a prior recording of the song that she is presently performing.

Steady ka indah ha Alleng atiya na maitu ka lelung
 Aluhay du kita anangbay pabing asal du ataha recording
 Na, na, na, na, na, dengar la sayang,
 na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 (“Manis Malenggang”, Sitti Aida, Sama)

[Just keep steady there, Alleng here's the dance
 The recording is long and it's easy to sing
 Na, na, na, na, na, listen love, na, na, na, na, beauty overflowing
 Lil lil lil lil...la la la la lal..lil lal lal lil lil la la la lal
 ("Manis Malenggang", Sitti Aida, trans. under the title "Nana")]

Apart from privileging the dancer and the dance, the song is even more important, that is, at least in terms of my interest in the topic of border-crossing, because of its reference to technological change. It is most curious to note that Sitti Aida did not say "the song is long and it's easy to sing. Instead, she says... "the recording." The "techno-type" of the song which can be, among others, a music notation or a video documentation, and in this case, a "recording," brings in a whole slew of meanings and contexts. Well aware of the possible criticism of over-reading, in my opinion, this reference implies an awareness of self as a "professional singer" singing lagu-lagu that are now made available in the commodified form of commercial DVD recording. Indeed, Sitti Aida is inarguably the first Sama Dilaut to reach trans-border superstar fame. She is called the "Mega Idol" and her DVD recordings sell well in the market streets of Bongao and Kota Kinabalu. Apart from having crossed the national borders of the Philippines and Malaysia, the *sangbay* and its animated partner, the *igal* have now crossed media, from site-, performer-, and performance-specific and actual events to a globally mobile artifact in digital form.

Sangbay, Igal and Philippine Popular Music

Another development in lagu-lagu and *igal* performances is revealed in a cursory survey of commercial DVD materials produced in Kota Kinabalu. Sama Dilaut artists routinely record their skillful adaptations of externally produced songs. I have so far seen the adaptations of Western songs such as "Diana," (1957, Paul Anka) and "500 Miles," (1969, Hedy West) in Sama Dilaut lagu-lagu DVDs. Apparently, the Sama Dilaut also do quite a lot of adaptations from Bollywood movie songs which they refer to as "Hindustan songs." In this category, a song titled Tadj-Tadja, an adaptation from a Bollywood film, seems to be the local favorite. However, what truly caught my eye was Sitti Aida's adaptation of "Ocho-Ocho," a Philippine "novelty song" by Bayani Agbayani (2003).

Philippine novelty songs are often characterized as songs with funny and catchy tunes. Songs of this genre were popularized by Yoyoy Villame in the 1970s. Villame was later dubbed “King of Philippine novelty songs.” Villame first captured Philippine popular imagination in 1972 with his first recording, “Magellan.” In this piece, Villame sings about Philippine history and successfully brings it to the realm of the popular. However, Yoyoy Villame’s most popular song is inarguably his 1977 composition, “Mag-exercise Tayo.” This song actively exhorts listeners to move to its kinetic cues. Bayani Agbayani’s “Ocho-Ocho” is of the Villame lineage. Like Villame’s “Mag-exercise Tayo,” Agbayani’s “Ocho-Ocho” also features kinetic cues mainly in its refrain “Tayo’y mag-ocho-ocho” (Let us do the ocho-ocho), a movement executed with a wave-like motion of the back horizontally positioned parallel to the floor with the hands placed on the knees for support. The “wriggling” movement considered to be *de rigueur* in the performance of what is now a “novelty song-dance” that is at once seen to be humorous and sexy. The level of its popularity in the Philippines was unprecedented. An “Ocho-Ocho mania” ensued in the years 2003 and 2004. Almost all spaces of performance, from schools and town plazas to television shows and even police boxes (a highly under-researched Philippine performance venue) either had “Ocho-Ocho contests” or proudly featured it as the main event.

Agbayani’s “Ocho-Ocho” closely follows the “early morning routine” theme of “Mag-exercise Tayo,” perhaps paying tribute to Yoyoy Villame’s earlier formulation of his novelty song on physical fitness via an “echoing” strategy of linking. This is seen in the straightforward lyrics as follows:

Pagmulat ng mata pag-gising sa umaga
 Iunat ang kamay bumangon na sa kama
 Kung inaantok pa lumundag-lundag pa, ahaha

Kung wala pa rin huwag ma ng pilitin
 Buksan na lang ang TV o sa radio ay hanapin
 Tunog at bagong step na nakakagising, ihihing

One plus one equals two, two plus two equals four
 Four plus four equals eight double the
 Let’s do the ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho na
 Let’s do the ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho do the ocho-ocho keep pa...
 Wow! (“Ocho-Ocho” Bayani Agbayani, 2003)

[When you open your eyes, when you wake up in the morning
Stretch your arms and rise from the bed
If you're still sleepy, jump and jump around, ahaha

Do not force it, if there is no effect
Just turn on the TV or listen to the radio
For the new sound and the step that wakes you up, ihihing

One plus one equals two, two plus two equals four
Four plus four equals eight double the
Let's do the ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho now
Let's do the ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho do the ocho-ocho keep on...
Wow!]

Unlike other examples of Philippine song adaptations observed in the 1970s that more or less sought to reproduce the essence of the original from a foreign source, Sitti Aida completely ignores the lyrics as text and proceeds to use the music of “Ocho-Ocho” as a vehicle for *pagsangbay* (song-tribute making). In the first stanza, she sings of the qualities of the dancer. It seems to indicate here that to be “Chinese-looking” is aesthetically pleasing to the Sama Dilaut. Also, as in many of her other sangbay, the name of the dancer as well as her skill are mentioned. In this case, it seems obvious that the dancer's maternal lineage is privileged perhaps indicating the individual process of transmission of the techniques in dancing:

Atiya na heh ku sinambungan pangigalan danda lanjang-lanjang
Pinaka luwa lannang-lannang paminat magbaanan
Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho na
Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... pa

Iya koh ni si Elbina na anak-anak si Umailia
Asal du sab biasa ka'a du pag-asa
Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho now
Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... keep on
(“Ocho-Ocho” first two stanzas, Sitti Aida, Sama)

[This song I will sing continuously
as a girl with height quite tall will dance
Her face looks Chinese and her admirers are quite a lot
Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho now
Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... keep on

The one named Elbina, the child of Umaila
 Truly a woman of skill, and your dance is much anticipated
 Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho now
 Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... keep on]

As in the other sangbay mentioned earlier, Sitti Aida's "Ocho-Ocho" describes the dancer and the dance. The subject, Elbina, is said to have an aquiline nose like that of a Japanese. The Chinese face and the Japanese nose (differentiation, alas, not fully explained) appearing in one song just a stanza away from each other seem to constitute one possibility of a combination of physical features that is seen to be desirable. More importantly, specific dance vocabulary is mentioned referring to one of the most basic feet movements of the igan dance genre, the *ingsud-ingsud*, a lateral movement of the feet done through the alternate shuffling of the feet to the sides.¹² Apart from artistic license or a performative change in focus that could have been accompanied by kinetic indication, such as using the hands or fingers to draw attention to a currently performing person, the singer's shift in the use of pronouns from third person—"a girl," "Elbina"—to "you" appears to indicate what Bauman calls the "emergent qualities" in a performance that allows for the privileging of place, persons, and even the transformation of social relations.¹³ This emergent quality can be observed in many performances that utilize the creative technique or strategy of improvisation.

Paminat un pa sekot-sekot angigal danda ba akayog-kayog
 Na boh tapeh nab a pa ingsud-ingsud kilay na pa kalluk
 Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho na
 Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... pa

Wai na iya ba takiyum-kiyum paminat kasubulan a'a kamemon
 Laila danda si pansung ilung sali jipun-jipun
 Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho na
 Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... pa
 ("Ocho-Ocho" last two stanzas, Sitti Aida, Sama)

[Admirers approach you slim lady as you dance
 And then she does the ingsud-ingsud (snail walk)
 with eyebrows raised in a curve
 Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho now
 Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... keep on

Is she here? Young admirers and all with smiles inquire
 My God! ...the lady with aquiline nose like that of a Japanese!
 Tayo'y mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho now
 Mag ocho-ocho, ocho-ocho mag ocho-ocho... keep on]

It is clear at this point that Sitti Aida has appropriated a piece from the Philippine novelty song genre and used its melody to create a particular *sangbay* to accompany a particular dancer (or perhaps even several dancers, as repetition of the same tune to “altered” lyrics for individual performers are observed in the field) in a particular event that is most likely a wedding celebration. We know this as a fact as she mentions particular names with a particular genealogy. Her *sangbay*'s subject is a slim woman with a Chinese-looking visage, a Japanese “high” nose, and the name of Elbina. The transformation from Philippine novelty song to an adapted *sangbay* is however not at all perfectly seamless. I have already mentioned the rather jarring pronoun shift from third person to second person as probably a function of license during an improvised performance. Although retaining much of its folksy and danceable character making it one of the most popular contemporary *lagu-lagu/sangbay* pieces to date, some degree of disjointedness may be seen in the shift from the parts of the lyrics that characterize the dancer to the part that is generally known as the “Ocho-Ocho” refrain. The result is that at one point we hear about the “aquiline nose,” and immediately after the mention of the nose, we hear the admonition to “do the Ocho-Ocho” (*Tayo'y mag-ocho-ocho*). This disjointed quality is only made known upon a content analysis of the song as translated from the Sama language. Without translation, non-Sama speakers would probably assume that Sitti Aida's “Ocho-Ocho” is merely a Sama adaptation in the conservative sense of the word, that is, the preservation of the essence using the vernacular. This adaptation is interesting because of the presence of an adapted part and a retained part, a combination that apparently does not bother the popular aesthetics of the Sama fans of Sitti Aida.

Further disjointedness may be noticed upon re-examination of the song in relation to the dance performance in the commercial recording. In the DVD, Sitti Aida's “Ocho-Ocho” as *sangbay* is dis-embedded from the “original” context linked to the performance of *igal* by a woman named Elbina. Instead of a “slim lady” of “Chinese” looks and a “Japanese aquiline nose,” we see two girls of grade school age, dancing in front of Sitti Aida. These two girls are apparently her twin daughters. The two girls are famed for their skills in *igal* dancing.

The recording reveals a most interesting trio combination. In this number, Sitti Aida, the mother as the singer, is seen yielding the downstage position to her twin daughters. The stage, in this case, is no longer the traditional *pantan* platform that is built on stilts above the shallows. The performers appear to be at the port area near the market of Semporna. They are performing on a concrete floor space without a roof. Perhaps this improvised stage is a pathway to the port itself. Immediately behind them is the sea and quite visible in the far background is a *kampung ayer* or water village, a type of settlement favored by the Sama Dilaut but may also be seen in various communities all over maritime Southeast Asia. Other performers wearing headdresses called *panumpang* and costumed in the traditional *sawal kantiu* or loose pants, topped with the *sablay*, a kimono-cut type of blouse, or the *baju alal bimbang*, a blouse with butterfly-shaped collar, may be seen in the camera frame, presumably waiting for the taping of their respective numbers. Sitti Aida wears a western-style blouse of a rich red color over black slacks. She completes her “idol” getup with a pair of dark sunglasses and high-heeled shoes. The two twins appear to wear black modern *kebaya* tops with flared sleeves over black leggings. For footwear, they don very untraditional but obviously very practical sport sneakers.

This particular *igal* performance to Sitti Aida’s *sangbay* starts with the twins executing alternate up and down arms movements to the side called *limbay* (aka *limbai*). As in traditional *igal*, these are followed by stances with specific hand positions. One such stance places one hand with the palm in flexion in front of the chest while extending the other arm to either side, also with the palm in flexion. Another stance places the hands in front of the chest with both palms crossing at the wrist. Another places one hand in front of the chest with the other just above the forehead, again with both palms in flexion. A combination of these stances are performed by the dancers in standing, kneeling and sitting positions as well as in tandem with walking, running, and other decidedly mobile or across space actions. The stance ends as it starts, that is, with the *limbai* movements. The pace of this *igal* performance belonging to the so-called *igal modern* sub-genre is noticeably faster than what can be seen in traditional *igal* performances such as those found in weddings and in rituals of religious character such as the *pagkanduli*. Still, up until the entry of the “Ocho-Ocho” refrain, the traditional movement vocabulary is maintained. Upon the singing of the chorus, the twin dancers abruptly drop the traditional movement vocabulary and immediately do the wriggling notion of the *Ocho-*

Ocho. As soon as the “Ocho-Ocho” refrain is finished and the other stanzas of the song begin, an instant recovery into the traditional *igal* style is performed in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner. It seems that it is in this rather postmodern and hybrid device of choreography where the popular aesthetic attraction of the “Ocho-Ocho” *sangbay* can be found. The “flagrant” elemental juxtaposition of the traditional and the modern as well as of the internal (or the endemic, that is, referring to elements that can only be found in a particular cultural group) and the external (or elements originating from outside a particular culture) results in an effective evocation of feelings of surprise, shock, and amusement in antithetical or unexpected aesthetic pairings. In the case of my first encounter with this piece, it left a feeling of ambiguity leading to a degree of profound questioning. Was tradition parodied? Or, was it modernity? Was the dominant “lowland Christian” culture of the Philippines subverted in an act that combined cultural production and commodification? Or, was a critique of overly assimilative Sama culture presented? Perhaps a longitudinal survey using an expanded sampling of similar pieces has to be done in order to shed ample light on the issues raised by these questions.

At this point, it is perhaps sufficient to recognize the existence of such a paradoxical artifact.

Alter-lyrics, *Bunga* and Parallel Improvised Structuration with *Igal*

I term the highly improvisational process of song-making, or more precisely song lyrics-writing, *alter-lyricism*. As implied by “lyrics,” unlike improvisation in the genres of jazz, the blues, and even in Baroque music that realize differentiation in the melodic structure of the piece, what is of concern here is the narrative text of a song. Unlike the witticism or verbal play projected in Bolivian Quechua¹⁴ song duels or the Tagalog “*Balagtasán*” poem debate traditions, the challenge presented to the singer by the aesthetic convention of the *sangbay* centers around the tribute given to the co-performer. Unlike the *Balagtasán* artist who gains points by crafting repartee or insults in meter and rhyme, the *sangbay* singer gains points or fame through the ability of heaping appropriate praise on the co-performer and through appropriately describing the performance moment. Unlike the play-off seen between two poets or two singers in the cases of the Tagalog *Balagtasán* poem-debate and the Bolivian Quechua song duel respectively, no play-off among co-performers is seen in the *sangbay*. Instead, a heightened aesthetic experience is expected from the resulting

collaborative effort as the song (singer) accompanies the dance (dancer) and vice-versa. These elements in the performance structure must be recognized in this conceptualization of alter-lyricism as improvisation of a particular kind that pays tribute to a performer, in this case, the *igal* dancer. I however have to mention that “inter-reflexive views” have been expressed over the performance of the *sangbay*.¹⁵ As the singer pays tribute to the dancer by extending the song and by singing, as Filipinos are wont to over-emphasize, *with feelings*, the dancer repays this tribute to the singer by taking movement cues from the singer and by molding her dance performance, in certain instances, to the words of the singer. In my mind, the act of imaging or imagining a *sangbay* without *igal* becomes unthinkable. *Igal* however can be performed without the performance of a *sangbay*. As such, although not an indigenous term, it is possible to think of a sub-genre of *igal* with the label of “*igal-sangbay*” performance.¹⁶

Alter-lyricism as a function of improvisation is grounded in the Sama term, *bunga*. Literally, *bunga* means flower. In various conversations with local dancers and choreographers, I gather that it can also mean “art” or “style.” In the non-performing arts such as textiles, the weaving of *tepo* (mats) or *ukkil* (carving), the term takes on the meaning of “embellishment” or “visual flourishes.” In my opinion, *bunga* is indeed a most appropriate metaphorical term in that it suggests a point of origin, a seed, so to speak, from which creative expression emerges. In both *sangbay* and *igal* performances, individual artists employ stock phrases in the form of verbal or kinetic vocabulary via specific strategies and techniques to create songs and dances that they could call their own. Indeed, mastery or virtuosity is measured through improvisation skills within certain rules or conventions that allow the artist to leave his or her *tatak* (mark) or *ginis* (distinction) in the minds of the audience members long after the performance event is terminated.

As I alluded to earlier, improvisation is not uncontained. Robin Moore notes that “...the act of improvisation might be likened to other creative and yet culturally structured behaviors such as everyday conversation, ad hoc comedy sketches, or prose writing” and that “in an important sense, improvisation is *not* free” (61-84; emphasis added). Moore observes that improvisation works well with audience that possesses a certain degree of familiarity to the improvised piece or repertoire. He cites the hypothetical (but actually the very likely common) case of vocal (and perhaps even piano) improvisation of Gershwin’s *Summertime* in an American nightclub. A “typical” member of the audience in

America, perhaps with the caveat of a generational qualifier, would have already heard the piece several times in the past and would therefore be very familiar with the melody from the musicale “Porgy and Bess.” This shared familiarity produces the following positive results in performance:

This basis in common musical understanding, both in terms of a generational musical aesthetic and familiarity with the specific piece, allows for a heightened appreciation of the improvisatory event on the part of those listening. The musician is able to use group expectation to his advantage, variously deviating from and returning to the original melody, using scales, motives, timbres, rhythms, and other stylistic components derived from Afro-American vocal traditions. Gershwin’s melody and harmonic sequence become referents, a backdrop against which melodic motives variously conform to or deviate from the original version. (Ibid.)

Like Gershwin’s *Summertime*, the *sangbay* repertoire consisting of “Lolai,” “Manis Malenggang,” “Dalling-Dalling,” among others, as well as the appropriated “Ocho-Ocho” hybrid *sangbay* serve as referents for improvisation performances. They constitute the so-called “standards” (referring to standard pieces) of the *sangbay* repertoire that are repeatedly performed in occasions such as *pagsandang* wedding celebrations and pre-*pagsandang lami-lamian* preparatory nights. They are therefore known not just to the bride, the bridegroom, their respective families and guests, but to almost all members of the community.¹⁷ Ricardo Trimillos in his study of improvisation in Tausug vocal music calls this Type Two or “named piece” improvisation. Trimillos insists that non-Western models need to be developed for a deeper understanding of non-Western improvisation (23-35).

At this point of the discussion, it would be worthwhile to mention some observations that I have noted in my review of the *sangbay-igal*’s development. Figure 1 presents an evolutionary illustration of what I call the *sangbay-igal*’s process of separation. Originally, as illustrated by (A) the *sangbay* and *igal* are conjoined expressions. Sung without microphones or other sound equipment, the *sangbay* was solely accompanied by the gabbang wooden xylophone. As mentioned earlier, it extolled the dancer or privileged the *igal* dance performance. From the description of informants, this “original,” or more precisely, older form of *sangbay-igal* performance seemed to have been rather restrained compared to its much louder orthodox contemporary incarnation

that is often accompanied by the synthesizer and amplified by the microphone. The advent of audio-recording enabled the aesthetic experience of enjoying the *sangbay* separately from the *igal* (B). Thus, Sitti Aida's voice could now be transported to faraway places where, with the aid of a boom box or some other audio equipment, people removed from the original context of the *sangbay* may now consume it sans the dance. It is also at this theoretical point, for when exactly the *sangbay* was first recorded is unknown, that alter-lyrics of well-known performers became "frozen" through encryption, and thus, also became repeatable or copy-able to other performers or ordinary people who wish to sing as their "singing idols." Finally, with the digital revolution making video-recording accessible to a vast number of people, a later development is noticed. This time, the *sangbay* with its alter-lyrics frozen to a particular *igal* performance context and event, is grafted to an *igal* dance number created for commercial VCD or DVD production (C). This newly created *igal* dance number is often not at all related to the original *igal* performance privileged by the alter-lyrics of the recorded *sangbay*. As such, some dissonance might be felt by audiences knowledgeable in the Sama language. Apparently however, the dissonance is hardly felt by Sama consumers of these who explain that the dance and the song may be enjoyed separately. It has also been explained that the "new" dancer's interpretation of the music and the alter-lyrics that is not about her person is also treated as an aesthetic experience.

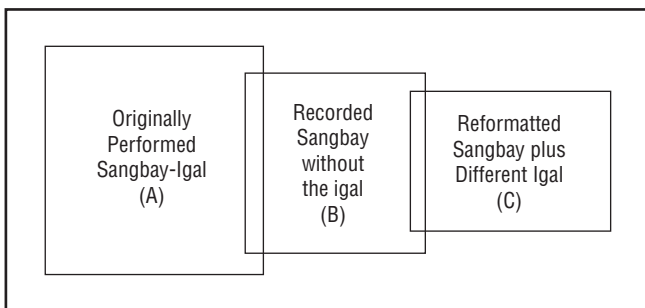


Figure 1. Sangbay-Igal Development

The *sangbay-igal* is a conjoined artifact of continuity in change, and change in continuity. In terms of change, as it moves across media it also moves across space, from the *pantan* to the global market of sounds and images.

In its recorded forms, it takes on the qualities of templates for performance comparisons. Alter-lyrics as well as other performance elements of musical arrangement, costume and property, and movement vocabulary may now be compared outside the original performance context as well as outside the constrained duration of the *sangbay-igal's* original performance. In terms of continuity, the introduction of new media does not seem to stifle the creation of parallel *sangbay* versions both in terms of musical arrangement or alter-lyrics. In fact, its rebirth in the new VCD and DVD media seem to have spawned a lively competition of alternate versions. I for one have seen five versions of DVD-recorded “Lolai.” This creative tension that anchors the production of artifacts onto the sea floor of tradition seems to be an important component of the wellspring of Sama living expressions. It affirms diversity within shared conventions, the importance of canon pieces along with newer works, and the legitimacy of both internal and external sources of creation. The creation of alter-lyrics found in the new *sangbay-igal* performances is a kind of (re)wording that has in many ways led to the (re)experiencing of the Sama people’s sense of community in their world of expression... transformed, revived and relived.

Notes

1. This paper was written for the *(Re)wor(l)dling Conference, November 2007, University of the Philippines Diliman*. This paper was made possible through a Toyota Foundation Grant via the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program.

2. *Igal* is the traditional dance genre of the Sama or Sinama-speaking peoples of maritime Southeast Asia. See: Amilbangsa, Ligaya Fernando. *Pangalay: Traditional Dance and Related Folk Artistic Expressions of the Sulu Archipelago*. Manila: Ayala Museum Filipinas Heritage, 1983.

3. The so-called “Philippine novelty songs” are danceable tunes with decidedly folksy rhythmic patterns and sometime with “risqué” lyrics. The recognized “father” of this genre is the recently departed Mr. Yoyoy Villame.

4. The term “bajau” is a Malaysian and Indonesian term. Their preferred label is “Sama.” “Igal modern” comes from Sama usage. They use this to differentiate a new style of dancing from an older and more traditional one which they refer to as “kamaasan” (literally, golden) or “kamahatuan” (literally, olden).

5. No two *igal* dances are the same even if they bear same name and even if they are performed by the same dancer. This aspect of *igal* performances has confounded many dance researchers who still adhere to the idea of “one label, one form.”

6. Translation by Hamka Malabong and the author.

7. Another manner of artistic remuneration is for members of the audience to come up the stage and slip money between the fingers of the dancer. The practice can be quite overwhelming in cases of performances of very popular dancers where the dance could hardly be seen due to audience interruption.

8. In older kamahatuan style performances, dancers are forced to halt their performances upon the fading out of the kulintangan ensemble music. Popular dancers have their performances effectively extended by the musicians who simply do not stop playing.

9. Personal communication, May 2006

10. Mahail Hajan distinguishes between the Tausug pangalay and the Sama igan in terms of aesthetic emphasis.

11. The peoples of Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines and Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia acknowledge their relations as belonging to the same line. Sitangkai is referred to as the older place of origin. Judeth John Baptist of the Department of Sabah Museum points to the ritual of mag-paiibahau as an indicator of the two communities' close relations. Ritual rice for the mag-paiibahau of Sitangkai is brought to Semporna before its own ritual may commence (personal communication with John Baptist, May 2006).

12. This step was termed "opposite tortilier" by National Artist Francisca Reyes Aquino and "mincing steps" by Pangalay Guru Ligaya Fernando Amilbangsa.

13. Solomon 378-414. By "emergent," Solomon refers to the ability to change aspects of social relations as well as contents or themes in song duels during and in the actual process of performance.

14. For a detailed discussion please refer to Solomon 378-414.

15. Sitangkai-based local scholar Hadji Musa Malabong shares this inter-tribute or inter-reflexive view of the song and the dance. (Personal communication, November 2007).

16. As far as my field experience has shown me, only igan has been utilized in sangbay performances. But given the human propensity for innovation, I am not discounting the possibility of a sangbay accompanying a dance form apart from igan. If and when this happens, another label, for instance, hip-hop-sangbay performance will most likely be warranted.

17. I remember hearing a small boy of about six years of age singing "Lolai" for about two straight hours as members of my research team and I took an eight-hour *lantsa* boat ride to the Island of Tabawan for fieldwork.

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