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IGAL CAMPUR: INTERROGATING HYBRIDITY IN SAMA TRADITIONAL DANCE
(Lightning Paper)

Introduction

Igal is the dance tradition of the Sama or Sinama-speaking peoples of maritime Southeast Asia. It is traditionally accompanied by a *kulintang* ensemble which is composed of a *kulintang* set of graduated knobbed gongs arranged in a single row, two (*agung* or *tamuk*, large, wide-rimmed gongs) or three (a *tamuk*, a small and wide-rimmed *bua*, and a narrow-rimmed *pulakan*) hanging gongs, and a Spanish-derived *tambul* drum. The relationship between *igal* dance and *kulintang* music is extremely close in such a manner that it may be described as exclusive (Santamaria, 2012). Scholars of Sama music and dance have observed that specific *kulintang* music called *titik* define the dance as well as its label (Hanafi Hussin, 2008; Hanafi Hussin, 2012; Hanafi Hussin & Santamaria, 2008). As such, most specifically in the context of ritual performances, *Titik Limbayan* exclusively accompanies *Igal Limbayan*; *Titik Djin* exclusively accompanies *Igal Djin*, and so on.

In recent times, the exclusivity of the relationship between *titik* and *igal*, among others, appears to be increasingly eroded via contemporary artistic experimentation. Dance styles or movement vocabularies which used to be specific to or associated with certain island communities are combined to create new dances. Music(s) or specific *titik* are either interchanged or combined in various dance performances. Music(s) or songs from other ethnic groups are used to create new *igal* performance pieces. Costumes or property deviate from traditional forms or are appropriated from other groups. These practices, among many others, have contributed to the rise of new hybrid forms which may be categorized under the label of *igal campur* [Sama *igal* + Malay *campur*, meaning “to mix” or “mixed”] (Babylyn Kano-Omar, personal communication, July 15, 2012) or *igal lamud-lamud* [Sama *igal* + Sama *lamud-lamud*, meaning “mix-mix”] (Al-shadat Mohammad, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012), invariably meaning “hybrid *igal*.”

Sites of Construction

Igal campur or *igal lamud-lamud* may be observed in two types of “sites of performance construction.” The first type refers to geographical sites of cultural nexus. Bongao, Tawi-Tawi Province, Philippines and Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia are two important local sites of cultural nexus of various Sama groups coming from diverse island communities. These two veritable “melting pots” of Sama cultures churn out new forms, both desirable and non-desirable ones, during yearly festive events where *igal* performances figure prominently: the Kamahardikaan Festival of Bongao and the Regata Lepa-Lepa of Semporna. In these two sites, these researchers have observed hybridity in willful abandon. In Semporna, dancers can be seen with their costumes and property decorated with multi-colored Christmas lights. It is also in this site where these researchers heard a candidate for *Ratu Lepa-Lepa* (Lepa Queen) proclaim her love for dancing *Igal Lelang*, a dance associated with male spirit mediums. In Bongao, performers can be seen dancing to *kulintang titik* combined with marching band music. It is also here where these researchers observed a choreographed *pas de deux* version of *Igal Tarirai*, a solo version usually associated with female dancers.

What accounts for hybridity in these two geographical sites of cultural nexus? Future research may support or refute the following three possible explanations. First, participants to these two festivals largely come from the younger generation. A movement from the island community to the regional melting pot also

means a movement from one site where there is a critical mass of old vanguards of tradition to another site where there are few or none. Barriers to innovation, acceptable or profane to traditional vanguards, therefore are less felt. Second, these sites are where Sama individuals often meet a large number of non-Sama individuals, usually in performance. Ensuing processes of comparison and mimicry are therefore not surprising. Third, the sites of the two festivals are also administrative centers or seats of government. Government, through the secular rite of festivals, engenders innovation via competition among island communities or via tourism programs that seek to increase local income. In terms of geographical distribution therefore, one can observe more instances of innovation and hybridity in administrative and cultural centers like Semporna and Bongao, and much less in the far-flung island communities where traditional forms due to traditional folkways and mores prevail.

The second type of site refers to its performance context (Refer to Table 1). Ritual sites demand conformity and continuity. In these sites, *igal kamattoahan*, old or classical *igal* performance models or pieces prevail. In old-style *igal* a one-to-one correspondence of movement with the music can be observed. Ritual *igal* dancing invite either *djin* (spirit guides) or *omboh* (ancestors) to enter (in-dwell or *masuk djin*) the body of spirit-mediums to co-celebrate the event with the community. As the dancing is that of the ancestors or the spirits of the olden times, the style is decidedly circumscribed or traditional. The same cannot be said of the performance contexts of social, theatrical or commercial events. In performances of *pakiring*, a new style of dancing where the swaying of the hips is done frequently, Ellorin (2011) observes that synthesizer or organ music has largely displaced the *kulintangan* ensemble. Mixed instrumentation may also be observed (Santamaria, 2009). Indeed, these non-ritual sites show a high degree of innovation and hybridity as the next section of this paper will illustrate.

Type	Site	Music	Descriptive Notes
<i>Igal Kamattoahan</i>	Ritual Sites	<i>Kulintangan</i> Ensemble <i>Pulau</i> (Flute) Music [during <i>igal djin</i> initiation rites]	One-to-one correspondence of music (instrument) and movement ornamentation
<i>Igal Pakiring (Igal Modern)</i>	Social Events	Synthesizer/electronic organ music with vocals (<i>Sangbay</i> or <i>Pagsangbay</i>)	Pronounced swaying of the hips (<i>kiring-kiring</i>)
	Theatrical Events		
	Commercial Recordings	<i>Kulintangan</i> music with orchestral music Others	Appropriated movement fragments from external sources

Table 1. Styles, Sites and Music(s) in the Sama Igal Dance Tradition(s)

A Variety of Hybrids: Three Contemporary *Igal Campur* Pieces

In this section, three *igal campur* pieces are interrogated through a video-viewing and a focused group discussion with four insider-practitioners/informants of *igal* dance and *kulintangan* music: Basar A. Jalaidi (Male, 20 years old, *kulintangan* instrumentalist), Munir I. Jawadil (Male, 24, *silat* practitioner), Al-Shadat A. Mohammad (Male, 23, *igal* dancer), and Calsum J. Telso (Female, 27, *igal* dancer). The “interrogation” was done at the University of the Philippines Diliman on 15 May, 2012. All of the participants in this focus group discussion are residents of Bongao, Tawi-Tawi Province, Philippines and were at one time or another members of the Tambuli Cultural Troupe of the Mindanao State University-Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography.

Ocho-Ocho is a commercial video project of the Sama popular singer, Siti Aidah (2004) produced in Semporna, Sabah. It features the singer performing in the background while her twin daughters, wearing Punjabi dresses apparently adopted from Bollywood films, dance a more or less traditional *igal* routine in the foreground. Traditional dance movement yields to appropriative innovation during the refrain when the twins

suddenly break into an amusing if not naughty rendition of the *ocho-ocho* movement, a wavy, snake-like movement of the torso placed forward and parallel to the ground. This movement produces an aesthetic shock as it is inlaid in an otherwise traditional composition of *igal* dance. Although the song-dance obviously parodies the Filipino novelty song hit of comedian Bayani Agbayani who composed it sometime in 2002, it retains the form of a traditional *pagsangbay*, *sangbaian pangigalan* or *sangbay-igal*, a tribute song-dance where the singer describes the movements and the qualities of the performing dancer (Santamaria, 2010). This rendition of *ocho-ocho* into the form of a *pagsangbay* is more than well-received by the insider-practitioners. Munir mentions that he is impressed by seeing beautiful *igal* performed to a song that “uses four languages: Tagalog, Sama, Tausug, and Malay.” (Munir I. Jawadil, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012) Basar notes the “very natural movement” in the *igal* dance and the impressive performance of a song “without memorization” (Basar Jalaidi, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012). Calsum is equally impressed with the “the dancers creating their own *igal* without (a pre-planned) pattern” while the singer “describes the dancer in a lively manner” (Calsum Telso, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012). The *ocho-ocho* movement is seen to be both “funny and entertaining.” Based on these statements, it appears that the continuity with highly improvised or free-style nature of traditional *igal* dancing as well as the free-style invention of lyrics by the singer is well appreciated by the informants.

Contemporary Pakiring is the entry piece of the Semporna delegation to the *Pesta Igal* 2010 Festival that was held at the GT-Toyota Asian Cultural Center, Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman on 14 and 15 July 2010. The piece is performed by two Sama male dancers, Ellwine Joe Donny and Azizan Alimat, and two Sama female dancers, Marlana Jaafar and Rohaya binti Malbel. The piece is a work by Samsul Ismail, a professional choreographer of Tidung ethnic background. He is also the composer of the non-traditional music accompaniment using synthesizer and vocal music. The dance starts with the two male dancers, costumed as fishermen, who cast their nets into the sea. Sporting ornate head-dresses, the female dancers crawl on the floor every now and then arching their backs and extending their hands that are replete with theatrically over-sized *sulakengkeng* ornamental nails, mimicking the movement of big waves. At one point the dancers execute huge western classical ballet-like leaps as if to convey the strength of the waves in a tempest. Eventually the waves calm down and the fishermen row their way back home in safety. This piece is unanimously very well received in terms of choreography. Al-Shadat notes that “there is a connection between our tradition and their tradition as well” (Al-shadat Mohammad, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012). Munir notices that *silat* movement was incorporated into the movement of the male dancers. He is also quite impressed by the extra-long *sulakengkeng* that were well manipulated by the female dancers (Munir Jawadil, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012). Al-shadat however expresses his partiality for more restrained costumes that do not take the attention away from the movements (Al-shadat Mohammad, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012).



Plate 1. *Igal Pakiring* of Semporna. (Photo: H. Hussin)

Paean to Rizal is an exhibition piece performed by the Manila-based Bunga Arts Link (BAL) in the *Pesta Igal* 2010 Festival. The piece is constructed around the recitation of *Mi Ultimo Adios*, a poem written by the Philippine national hero, Jose P. Rizal. In this piece, a male lead dancer, MCM Santamaria, recites the poem while articulating its meaning through movement together with two female dancers, Katrina Luna and Hiromi Iwasaki. The male dancer sports a traditional *batik badju lapi* shirt and *sawwal kantiu* loose pants. The female dancers wear *kebaya* blouses over *sawwal kantiu*. The recitation and dance is further accompanied by a recording of Sergei Rachmaninov's *Vocalise* sung by the legendary lyric Soprano Anna Moffo. The choreographer incorporates sliding movements of the feet as well as hand positions found in *Nihon Buyoh* (Japanese traditional dance) and *Ryukyu Buyoh* (Okinawan traditional dance). *Paean to Rizal* is received with self-reflection. Al-Shadat says that "it is amazing because it combines poetry, music and *igal*. It is a new kind of dancing that allows me to think of *igal* in a new way that I hope to explore" (Al-shadat Mohammad, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012). An equally effusive Munir says that "the costumes are beautiful, the dancing is beautiful and so is the music...even the words (of the poem) although I do not understand them...the pure *igal* movements were truly beautiful" (Munir Jawadil, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012).

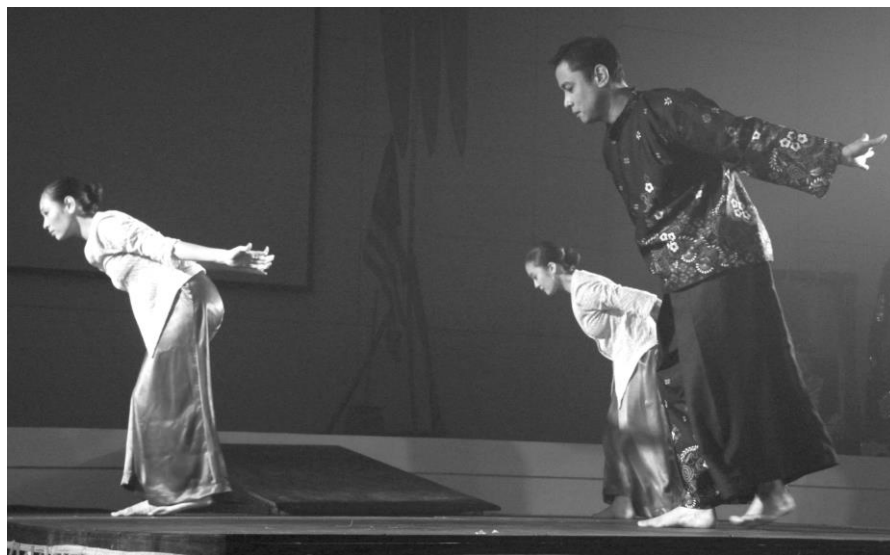


Plate 2. *Paean to Rizal*. (Photo: H. Hussin)

Conclusion: Hybridity, Appropriation, the Poetics and Politics of Reception

Igal campur, in the three cases briefly described above, may be seen as a trans-cultural product that results as a function of cultural appropriation. As can be seen in Figure 2, the process of appropriation comes in several combinations. In the case of *ocho-ocho*, a Sama singer appropriates a Filipino novelty song and uses it as a *sangbay* to draw attention to the dancers and the dancing of *igal*. The young Sama dancers, in turn and most likely with the intervention of a choreographer-coach who is most likely the singer herself, appropriates the most popular gyrating movement phrase in the popular *ocho-ocho* dance as an "inlay" in their otherwise relatively conventional *igal pakiring* performance. In the case of *Contemporary Pakiring*, a non-Sama choreographer (who is also the composer) of Tidung ethnic origin combines *igal* with a few western classical ballet movements in order to create a dance piece for Sama dancers. In the case, of *Paean to Rizal*, a non-Sama choreographer combines *igal* movement with that of other Asian forms and sets this to the musical accompaniment of a western classical vocal piece in order to create a dance performance for non-Sama dancers. Without doubt, what has been discussed here is simply a limited set of elements of appropriation. More may be observed with an expanded sampling.

<i>Igal</i> Piece	Choreographer	Dancers	Movement	Mode	Music	Costumes/ Props
<i>Ocho-Ocho</i>	Sama	Sama	<i>Igal</i> and Filipino Novelty/ Popular	Improvisational	Filipino Novelty Song (as <i>Sangbay</i>)	Non-Sama (Punjabi dress)
<i>Contemporary Pakiring</i>	Non-Sama (Tidung)	Sama	<i>Igal</i> and Western Ballet	Choreographed or pegged	Contemporary Instrumental and Vocal Music	Non-Sama (Theatrical Costumes and Props)
<i>Paean To Rizal</i>	Non-Sama (Davao)	Non-Sama (Tagalog and Japanese)	<i>Igal</i> and Japanese and Ryukyu <i>Buyoh</i>	Choreographed or pegged	Western Classical Music and Poetic Recitation	Sama and Non-Sama (Theatrical Costume and Malay <i>Kebaya</i>)

Table 2. *Igal Campur* and elements of appropriation

Although cultural appropriation is no longer rare in human expression, strong reactions that reject it can still be heard. It appears that these voices favor a nostalgic if not impossible process of cultural creation that assumes the feasibility of conceptual purity and other notions of distinction. An example of such comes from Rosalie S. Matilac who refers to the *ocho-ocho* as:

An insult to them [the Sama]. To give a brief background, this otso-otso dance with sexual innuendos (like pumping torso movement) was propagated by Philippine popular media, particularly ABS-CBN network, to promote a screwball comedy film of the same title, *Otso-Otso* [Star Cinema, 2004]. “Otso-Otso” dance is a good example of the incursion of pop culture into the Bajau realm, and a bad influence at that (R. Matilac, letter to B. Abels, November 8, 2010).

Matilac appears to miss the cultural discourse on three points: First, the development of the *pakiring* as part of the *igal* tradition ought to be studied as a transformative if not a hybridizing or appropriating process. It ought not to be evaluated in normative terms. Its relationship to the *sangbay*, an improvised poetic and sung form of expression describing the dancers or the dance, offers scholars the opportunity to see how traditions are transformed by insiders themselves. To say that it is good or bad is not the role of scholars. Second, Matilac’s severe criticism of the *ocho-ocho* in *igal* form reveals aesthetic and seemingly moral issues that appear to bother her person, but not the Sama. As Al-shadat says of Matilac’s reaction, “Actually, it’s not an insult to the Sama people, because they are doing right things and making new dances and new songs. We are having fun. There is nothing wrong with embracing that kind of *pakiring*” (Al-shadat Mohammad, Focused Group Discussion, May 15, 2012). It appears that Matilac only sees the dance fragment (*otso-otso*). She seems to be unaware of the *sangbay* and the appropriative nature of *igal*. Third, the Sama will continue to choreograph in the *pakiring* style and continue to appropriate from various sources, thereby producing hybrids or hybridized forms. Scholars ought to examine these emergent forms ask questions relating to the hows and the whys of the indigenous creative process.

Nearing the final point of discussion, perhaps it is best to end with some words of wisdom from Arjun Appadurai (1991):

As music, the novel, television, and tape cassettes begin to enter the fields of the epic, the folk song, and traditional performances generally, what is emerging is a whole new series of hybrid forms...These newly emergent hybrid forms...do not necessarily constitute a degenerate and kitschy commercial world to be sharply contrasted with a folk world we have forever lost. In fact, it may be the idea of a folk world in need of conservation that must be rejected, so that there can be a vigorous engagement with hybrid forms of the world we live in now. If we embark on this task, our understanding of the textual and intertextual complexities of the past will stand us in a good stead, and we will not likely plunge into a premature requiem for the ‘lore’ of the ‘folk’ (p. 474).

Regardless of opinions of scholars and/or practitioners at the center, the Sama will continue to mix elements, appropriate forms, and innovate according to their own aesthetic terms and conventions. Normative assessments of such processes and results, perhaps, ought to be avoided. Instead, an interrogation of how *kacampuran* or *kalamudan*, conditions or states of mixing or hybridity, happen and an examination of related processes of contemporary creation can help enlighten scholars understand how the *igal* tradition(s) is/are transformed through a variety means across time and space.

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