

'PATANGIS-BUWAYA'

Reflection and praxis ten years after engaging with Iraya-Mangyan internal refugees

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Abstract

In January 2003, I heard the news that a number of Iraya-Mangyan families from Mindoro Island had fled their homes and ancestral domain to seek refuge in the island of Luzon. The news reported that they were escaping a growing militarisation of their island. Having engaged the Iraya-Mangyan in ethnomusicological research from 1982 to 1987, I felt the dire necessity to at least find out who these families were and what the situation was on the island. Through a reliable network of cultural workers and after a month's search, I eventually found them in a place they called *Kanlungan* (a 'place of refuge') and there heard horrifying stories of terror inflicted by paramilitary units, of arbitrary arrests and of summary executions. That was too much for a people who have lived through the land and relied mainly on the forests for sustenance. I am a composer and an ethnomusicologist by profession and while my academic position in one of the most prestigious universities in the Philippines gives my praxis some degree of stature, my work both as ethnomusicologist and composer fits uncomfortably in both those fields. In looking back, ten years after my last engagement with the Iraya-Mangyan, I reflect on my praxis and the manner in which the plight of the Iraya-Mangyan informed the creation of my composition 'Patanngis-Buwaya', a work that attempts to give insight into the Iraya-Mangyan experience for international audiences.

Key Words

Iraya-Mangyan, internal refugees, Philippines, Mindoro, Luzon, 'Patangis-Buwaya'

Introduction

My rather awkward engagement with the Iraya-Mangyan people (discussed in Baes, 2007) taught me so much, even beyond my profession as composer and ethnomusicologist. I had found the right opportunity to *give back* their music in the form of the production of a CD of Iraya-Mangyan music entitled *Nostalgia in a Denuded Rainforest* (2001). I have had very little contact with the Mangyan internal refugee community I previously engaged with after my last encounter with them at a forum in 2004. Security issues in Luzon have led them to avoid public scrutiny and awareness of their current locations. The only manifestations of their presence for me in my everyday life are the CDs of their music which I see from time to time in Non-Government Organisation offices, or sold at public forums on ancestral domain rights. Some five

years ago, Norwegian missionaries approached me with regard to the CDs, which were to be used to re-introduce the young people to their old traditional music. I donated remaining copies in my possession to those missionaries. In these regards, the CDs have now acquired an independent life of their own - and a social one at that. I hope I have begun to address the very powerful question that Iraya-Mangyan spokesperson Anghel Anias (a key person during my 1980s' research) asked of me: What good could [my] study of [their] songs do in the disputes over their ancestral domain?



Figure 1 – Map of the Philippines showing location of Mindoro and Luzon islands

Praxis

Most of my writings since that experience have tended to look inwards, reflecting on the ontology of my praxis as researcher. Perhaps the most significant articles I have written on this topic are the aforementioned one, published in the first volume of *Shima* (2007), and a more recent one on Dumagat Internal Refugees (Baes, 2012). More than ever, my encounter with the indigenous internal refugees has taught hard lessons about music (especially concerning its absence), human life and human struggle. Sadly however, I saw how indigenous peoples in states of crisis like the internal refugees can disappear from the eyes of the academe and institutions concerned with the production of knowledge. This seems to show that to those studying culture (who in this country are more likely to address themselves to the culture industries), indigenous peoples are viewed as mere repositories of 'pre-colonial Philippine culture'. No other scholar in the field of Philippine ethnomusicology, for instance, has shown any genuine interest in the internal refugees, or reflected on the absence of music involved. When I first lectured about internal refugees at the University of the Philippines, even major scholars of Philippine traditional art had little idea what an 'internal refugee' was.

The militarisation of Mindoro Island from 2002 to 2003 was more than a mere 'clean-up drive', as the official media portrayed it. As the internal refugees in Kanlungan themselves declare, the entry of paramilitary units in the hinterlands relates to a bigger picture that has to do with mining interests in the island. The refugees' views indicate the place of the Philippines in the global political economy. Today, ten years on, the situation has yet to show any significant improvement. Indigenous peoples continue to be threatened by the encroachment of gigantic transnational and national industries (see Olea, 2011, for instance). The warlord families of the neo-feudal political structures, especially in the hinterlands, guarantee the maintenance of that status quo. Recent stories of mining exploits have highlighted the terrorising tactics deployed against the B'laan people in Mindanao Island (see Lopez, 2012), and the deceit practiced by very influential families against Palawan people and environmental activists in Palawan island (see Rainforest Rescue, 2011). I once again invoke Anghel Anias: How can composers and ethnomusicologists utilise their praxis in this contestation over ancestral domain?

The only answers I have are musical ones.

One outcome of my engagement with the Iraya-Mangyan internal refugees in Kanlungan was the completion of what I regard as my most exciting and yet most difficult composition project to date, which I have entitled 'Patangis-Buwaya' ('And the crocodile weeps'). I conceived 'Patangis-Buwaya' as a compositional counterpart to the symbolic 'return' of Iraya-Mangyan songs in the form of the previously discussed CD production. First the work appropriates the word *patangis-buwaya* (literally 'making the crocodile weep'), a statement used by Iraya-Mangyan elders to describe the ideal performance of music played on the *bangsi* bamboo flute. The term derives from the tale of legendary hero Aletawu, who, at the end of his narrative, angrily hunts down the evil Baleyayasun for raping and causing the death of his wife Diyaga. It is said that just as Aletawu was leaving to retaliate, he called his hunting dog with a flute, whose sound was so full of anguish, it made even the crocodiles weep.

I found it very significant to talk about tradition with the refugees. Stories and legends were drawn from a few elders and told to children, beginning from an afternoon listening

session devoted to the *Nostalgia* CD. It was here where I thought of telling the story of the Iraya-Mangyan to others in an entirely different mode. I wanted to tell their story through a music composition.

The composition 'Patangis-Buwaya' appears on score as a one-page grammar of a syntactic structure. The actual music is realised by the performers, utilising their own musical language, drawing on their backgrounds as practitioners. Written for an ensemble of four wind instruments coming from any culture, the score is comparable to a 'lead-sheet' of a standard jazz tune, which jazz musicians realise in their own way. To give an example, I consider this concept as essentially similar to that of US jazz keyboard player Chick Corea playing the composition 'Autumn Leaves'; where the standard tune (written by Joseph Kosma in 1945) is a mere springboard for us to hear more of Chick Corea *through* the original tune. The process of performing 'Patangis-Buwaya' involves agency that warrants the performers' facilities for reflection and action... or in the sense of Gramsci and Freire, *praxis*. In the process, musicians are also made aware of the narratives of the Iraya-Mangyan people, which serve as the imagery in the spontaneous invention of events in the music. The musical score is like a grammar that can be further manipulated, or subject to mutation.



Figure 2 - Performance of 'Patangis-Buwaya' at the Denzuin Temple in Tokyo by the Malle Symen Quartet (2003)

'Patangis-Buwaya' is therefore a work of music that 'composes itself'; it aims to create an oral tradition that has a global dimension; and furthermore, is imbued with a dynamism that makes it a continuously unfinished project. Its various protean forms appear through its changing instrumentation, the musicians' agency and the milieu where any performance is taking place. This is therefore the essence of its aesthetics.

Every situation of its performance will manifest something different: a new music festival in Kuala Lumpur, will produce an entirely different manifestation of the work from a radio broadcast in Budapest, for instance. All of which will be different from a performance in a small barrio in the hinterlands of Bolivia. Moreover, the political conditions of production will be entirely different in a performance of the work by German recorder ensemble in Tokyo to a performance by traditional flute players in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. It is particularly interesting to see how traditional musicians in the adjacent nations of Indonesia and Vietnam appropriate the idiom of the new music; and such will be the direction of this project in the coming years. Ten years since its premiere in 2003, 'Patangis-Buwaya' has been rendered an average of once a year in different places, and with different instrumentation. Its tenth year was marked with a performance at the prestigious Monday Evening Concerts at the Colburn Music School in Los Angeles, California on January 14th (as part of an 'Archipelagos' event). The 'orality' resulting from the kind of notation and mode of performance is a result of my sustained ambitious project, that will perhaps exceed my lifetime, to invent a 'tradition' that allows for the struggles of those like the Iraya-Mangyan internal refugees to be known by a greater portion of the world.

In the end, the uncomfortable fit of my work to both the fields of ethnomusicology and composition is perhaps due to the fact that a political stance of the nature I allude to is 'unbefitting' of conventional ethnomusicological inquiry; while 'temporariness' of my compositional work seems to deny the already reproducible complexity that developed out of the practice of new music today. But I welcome such uncomfortable fits. I believe that such is the nature of my praxis. For me, praxis itself should transcend boundaries. It is some sign of the marginalisation, enforced displacement and virtual 'disappearance' of the Iraya-Mangyan that I have been so far unable to locate community members that I was previously in dialogue with to share the reception of 'Patangis-Buwaya'. The work remains a testament to their presence and heritage and a personal response to their predicament; and reconnection of the two remains a goal.

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Audio-Visual Material

Various artists (2001) *Nostalgia in a Denuded Rainforest: Iraya-Mangyan Music from Mindoro, Philippines* (audio CD) recorded and produced by Jonas Baes, Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts and Tunugan Foundation

Performances of 'Patangis-Buwaya' are archived online on YouTube via the following links (all operational as of January 2013):

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULo4UzBaWRU (Tokyo performance part 1, 2003)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRvE7idzKeE (Tokyo performance part 2, 2003)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktPyKbT9fLw (Budapest performance, 2006)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2syr07wlywl (Ho Chi Minh City performance, 2007)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmtVEBCH_JM (Kuala Lumpur performance, 2009)