

Three Categories of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Three Degrees of Importance: The Case of the Sama-Bajau Igal Dance Tradition of Tawi-Tawi Province, Philippines

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Abstract

In this piece, I assert that several categories may be observed in intangible cultural heritage or property such as dance. Such categories correspond to varying degrees of importance to the community that own such intangible cultural heritage. Cultural workers who wish to sustain intangible cultural heritage must therefore take heed of differences among categories, and devise diverse strategies or approaches that are appropriate for each of them. In order to illustrate the practicality of this approach, three categories of the Sama-Bajau *igal* dance are introduced and described: ritual *igal* found in the various *pag-omboh* (ancestral veneration) ceremonies; secular *igal* found in weddings and other social festivities; and theatrical *igal* found in the repertoires of dance troupes. Examples of *igal* dances belonging to these categories are also described and ranked in terms of importance in the context of social function as well as rarity in performance. The background of practitioners belonging to these categories are also compared in order to gain an understanding of their embeddedness in their respective communities. Based on these categories, performance qualities and embeddedness in communities, a prioritisation scheme for intangible cultural heritage in the *igal* dance is proposed. Based on this prioritisation scheme, a documentary video produced by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts Intangible Cultural Heritage Team is evaluated in terms of comprehensiveness in capturing types of categories, practitioners, and specific dances that belong to the *igal* dance tradition. I, therefore, propose that a comprehensive inventory of what constitutes the *igal* dance tradition(s) must be made before setting out a path towards crafting policies and programs that relate to sustainability. Indeed, the question of what needs to be sustained must first be answered.

Keywords: categories, *igal* dance, intangible cultural heritage, practitioners, Sama-Bajau

Introduction

A chance encounter in YouTube of an uploaded video produced for International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the Auspices of the UNESCO (IHCAP) has prodded the writing of this piece. IHCAP is a centre based in South Korea that was to

“...establish and promote intangible cultural heritage together with forty-eight UNESCO MEMBER STATES in the Asia Pacific Region.” The documentary video is labelled “Philippines-Igal Dance UNESCO.” Its title in the video itself is “*Igal: Traditional Dance of the Sama of Tawi-Tawi*” (hereafter, “*ICH Igal Video*”). The video itself is apparently produced by the “NCCA ICH team” (ICH Links). This means that Philippine government funds were used to create the documentation via the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

As the *ICH Igal Video* rests solidly on the resources and cultural capital of the NCCA as well as the ICHCAP, great expectations are raised concerning the information that it contains as well as the process it followed in documenting *igal*. What categories of *igal* need to be included in a documentary film on the dance tradition? What types of key informants need to be interviewed for such an undertaking? What types of music need to be discussed in relation to the categories of *igal*? I will attempt to provide answers to these questions and to discuss issues that relate to them as I navigate my way through the contents of the *ICH Igal Video*. At the end of this piece, I will introduce an evaluation instrument in the form of a matrix that may help creators of documentary films in interrogating three different categories of *igal*. I believe that these instruments, in modified forms, can be useful in guiding the documentation process in other forms of intangible cultural heritage.

From Great Expectations to Deep Dismay

I am an *igal* enthusiast. Since the summer of 2003, when I encountered the dance tradition in a *lami-lamian* wedding festivity in Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi, I have become a hostage to its irresistible allure as a form of total performance.¹ Thereafter, the southernmost province of the Republic of the Philippines has become my field site in studying the music and dances of the various Sama-Bajau communities.² Later on, Semporna in the District of Tawau, Sabah State, Malaysia has also become one of my favourite field sites for research in *igal* dance and *kulintangan titik* music.

I was filled with much excitement when I discovered the uploaded *ICH Igal Video* on YouTube sometime in September 2023. As it was purportedly produced by the “NCCA ICH Team” and linked to the ICHCAP website where many other intangible cultural properties from all over Asia were featured, I had no doubt that the production values of this piece of creative work will not disappoint.

The film opens with the rhythms of *Titik Tabawan*, a fast-paced *kulintangan* ensemble piece for secular dancing. Suddenly, the eyes are assaulted by the image of Bud Bongao, a sacred mountain to the Sama Dilaut. I see local Dance Master, Hadja Sakinur Ain Delasas dancing on a pier and then later on an immobile *lepa* or a Sama Dilaut houseboat. A very good beginning for a documentary film, I thought. It captured the imagination and drew the viewing audience closer to the screen. Curiosity, well at least mine, was immediately generated.

Five minutes through the film, my generally good feeling about this documentation turned into dismay when the unseen narrator declared:

For diverse reasons and occasions and with many variations, the Sama people of Tawi-Tawi and maritime Southeast Asia perform their traditional dance, the *igal*. It

is a shared heritage among the Sama and other peoples in the western Mindanao area. It is called *pangalay* in Tausug and *pamansak* in Yakan. All the names simply mean “dance.” (ICH *Igal* Video, Philippines Igal Dance, 2020)

This perspective is a hegemonic one, mainly espoused by Ligaya Fernando Amilbangsa in her seminal book, *Pangalay* (1983) and echoed in her entry “Pangalay/Igal/Pamansak” together with Rosalie S. Matilac and Earl Francis C. Pasilan in the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Encyclopedia of Philippine Art (2020). I have long argued against this hegemonic and homogenising perspective along with other scholars of dance (See: Mohd Anis Md Nor, 2017, p. 90; Nepomuceno, 2020, p. 32; and, Hafzan Zannie Hamza, 2013, p. 54, Hafzan Zannie Hamza, 2015, p. 51, Santamaria, 2012a, pp. 117-141, and Santamaria, 2017, pp. 117-141). Why are sets of dances with different movement aesthetics, musical accompaniment, costumes, and properties as well as performance contexts considered one and the same? Why are three different ethno-linguistic groups construed to “share the same tradition”? The different labels that are not used as cognates across these groups indicate difference. Can they not be seen as “related” but “distinct” traditions? I will answer these questions as I discuss the different categories of *igal*. At this juncture, I would like to point out to the holders of this perspective that the practitioners of these three traditions are not one and the same. They sustain and transmit traditions that are not mutually inclusive to all three ethno-linguistic groups.

The Absence of Ritual

About three minutes into the film, I saw the face of Professor Mucha-Shim Lahaman Quiling. She currently serves as Director of the Sama Studies Center of the Mindanao State University Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography (MSU-TCTO). She discusses four categories of the Sama people: the Sama Talun (upland Sama), the Sama Dileya (land Sama), the Sama Bihing (coastal Sama), and the Sama Dilaut (sea-dwelling Sama).³ She also notes that the Sama call themselves by their island origin such as Sama Simunul or Sama Tabawan. I believe that this brief discussion rightly emphasises the great diversity found among the Sama-Bajau people, who according to A. Kemp Pallesen (1985) may be divided into at least 10 linguistic groupings (pp. 45-48). Surely, this diversity can also be found in their tangible and intangible cultural properties. In my opinion, such diversity in languages and other properties makes the idea of the sameness of the Tausug *pangalay*, the Sama *igal* and the Yakan *pamansak* rather difficult to defend.⁴

The time marker of the film reads 5:06, and the camera pans towards the face of Hadja Sakinur Ain Delasas who explains that *igal* is “not a Muslim dance.” This opinion is quite correct as *igal* does not have any ritual function directly associated with Islam. At that point, I thought that at any moment Sakinur would start a description of ritual *igal*. Instead, she mentions the “slight differences” between the Tausug *pangalay* and the Sama *igal*. She extends this assessment of “slight differences” in the *igal* traditions among the Sama of Tabawan, Sama of Simunul, the Sama of Sapa-Sapa, and the Sama of Sibutu. Again, I must beg to disagree with this assessment by the most esteemed local dance master for I have observed the *igal*

traditions of the Sama Sibutu, Sama Sitangkai, Sama Tabawan, and Sama Simunul, and the differences among them are nowhere near “slight.” For instance, I observed in the Tausug *pangalay* a very smooth and slow horizontality in the dance. This accounts for *pangalay*’s very refined demeanour. There is hardly any verticality or quick upward-downward movement done by hopping, jumping or via knee extension. The *pangalay* dancer tends one level as he or she moves forward, backward or to the sides. In contrast, the *igal* dance traditions that I observed show a high degree of verticality. Some other observers describe this as “bouncy,” produced by a series of upward-downward movement of the body. Such a movement cannot be seen in the *pangalay*. This verticality characterises *igal* dances. In Tabawan, the verticality is very regular, with the constant rising and falling of the dancer’s body following the very loud ostinato produced by instrumentalists beating the rims of two *agung* or large gongs. Since the styles of dancing as well as music-making are quite distinct, I would even dare say that the dances belonging to these different Sama communities must be treated as ‘traditions all their own’. In a nutshell, there can be no single overarching Sama *igal* tradition as each island grouping exhibit significant differences in terms of dancing and music-making.⁵ The differences are even more pronounced when comparing the Tausug *pangalay* with any of the diverse variants of the Sama *igal*. I will discuss these differences in a later section of this piece.

It appears that the *ICH Igal Video* has missed a great opportunity in its blatant omission of ritual. A discussion of *igal* dance in ritual would have revealed the overlapping spheres of cosmology, performance, and identity. Bruno Bottignolo (1995) notes the distinctiveness of the Sama Dilaut religion from Islam. He calls this religion *Umboh*, thus centering this cosmology on the “the first man, and the great Badjao ancestor” (p. 58). Sama-Bajau rituals are invariably referred to as *pag-umboh*, and are thus dedicated to the *Umboh* (proper name with upper case), and all the other ancestors *umboh* (name with lowercase) that are able to commune with the living and to intercede in order to protect communities from illness, natural disasters, and other calamities. *Igal* dancing is usually featured in major Sama-Bajau rituals. *Igal* in rituals together with sacred music pieces played on the *kulintangan* ensemble induces a conscious trance called *patakan*. During such trances, ritual specialists or spirit mediums supposedly host the spirits of ancestors or their spirit guides, who then recommend certain actions to correct specific communal errors, heal individuals, or avert disasters or calamities.

I have personally observed three rituals that involve *igal* dancing accompanied by sacred ritual music. Among the rituals of the Sama Dilaut, I have studied the *Pag-Igal Djin* (also known as *Magpa-igal Jin*), a monthly ritual conducted by ritual specialists called *igal djin* (dancing spirit mediums) during the full moon at the *pantan* (open-air platform constructed above the shallows) of the *Kalamat* or *Wali Djin* (head ritual specialist) in the Island of Sitangkai, and the *Pagkanduli* (thanksgiving ritual) held yearly in the Island of Sikulan, which is performed by the same *igal djin* ritual specialists (See: Santamaria, 2017; Hanafi Hussin & MCM Santamaria, 2008a and Hanafi Hussin & MCM Santamaria 2008b). In these two rituals, four *igal* dances named after four musical pieces called *titik* played on the *kulintangan* ensemble are performed following a strict order in appearance. *Igal Limbayan* opens these two rituals. Accompanied by a relatively slow piece called *Titik*

Limbayan, this dance is performed by *igal djin denda* or female spirit mediums. After several starts and stops of *Igal Limbayan*, a non-sacred piece called *Igal Tabawan* is performed by persons who are not *igal djin* mediums. It has been explained to me that this performance allows anyone in attendance to dance the piece, but that such a piece is usually performed by the proxies of *igal djin* mediums who could not attend the ritual. This dance can also be performed by both sexes. The accompanying music piece is called *Titik Tabawan*. It features a decidedly fast tempo with a rising and falling melodic line. After *Igal Tabawan*, a sacred piece called *Igal Djin* is performed by the *igal djin lella* or male spirit mediums. The accompanying music is called *Titik Djin*, which has a relatively fast tempo. The last dance is reserved for the *Kalamat* or *Wali Djin*. It may be danced alone or with an *igal djin lella* protegee-in-training to the head ritual specialist.

Although *Mag-Djin*, the Tausug name for this Sama Dilaut ritual, was mentioned in passing, none of the above repertoire of very important *igal* dances and *kulitangan* pieces were captured by the *ICH Igal Video*.

The other Sama-Bajau ritual that I have personally witnessed is the *Pagjamu Bohe' Deya*. This ritual is performed by the *duwata* ritual specialists of the Island of Tabawan. This ritual is offered to the ancestral spirits of the community as well as to the protector spirit of the sacred well found at the centre of the island. It is usually performed once in five-year cycles, at times when the water of the well turns salty or non potable, or when illness or disasters strike the community. In this ritual, only one music piece accompanies all the dances for ordinary men and women as well as the *duwata* ritual specialists. This piece is called *Titik Lenggang*, a fast-paced composition which is strikingly similar to the *Titik Tabawan* of Sitangkai. Dances in the community are named according to the gender of the dancer, that is either *igal denda* (*igal* for women) or *igal lella* (*igal* for men) or according to the property the *pang-igal* (dancer) carries, that is, *igal tumbak* (*igal* with a spear), *igal kayab* (*igal* with a fan), *igal kalis* (*igal* with a bladed weapon), *igal panyuh*, and so on. Apart from the *Pag-umboh Magpaibahau*, the ritual offering to the new rice which the Sama Tabawan share with the Sama Sitangkai and other communities in Tawi-Tawi Province and the eastern part of Sabah, Malaysia, there are two other rituals in Tabawan which I have yet to witness. One of these is the *Pagjamu Laitan*, the ritual feeding of ancestors done in the shallows of Tabawan Island during low tide.

The other one is the *Pagjamu Entosan*, the ritual feeding of ancestors done in front of the *pandan* leaf press that is owned by the whole community. As these rituals are done in five-year cycles or as needed by the community, quite a huge investment in time, money and effort is needed to sufficiently capture these events. As such, the apparently parachute-type of documentation done by NCCA ICH Team, that is research documentation done in short periods of time in a limited number of visits to the field may be deemed to be insufficient in capturing *igal* dance as embedded in cyclical rituals. There is no mention of the *Pagjamu* rituals of the Island of Tabawan. There is also no mention of the dances found in this particular ritual, as well as the music pieces that figure prominently in this ritual. There is, however, a mention of the ritual of *Magsalba* found in Siasi. Alas, no filming of it or photograph of this ritual is seen in the documentary.

Given the absence of examples of *igal* as embedded in ritual, the *ICH Igal*

Video may be deemed to have ‘failed in documenting this most important category of *igal*’ as an example of intangible cultural heritage.

Misunderstanding Movement, Music, and Costumes

Shortly after her discourse on “slight differences,” Delasas talks about what constitutes *kamanisan igal* or beautiful *igal*. At the time marker of 5:49, she mentions that in *igal* performances, the dancers move “against the music.” She adds that “the fastest (sic) is the music, the slower is (sic) the movement.” This description is quite disconcerting and quite confusing. First of all, if the tempo of the music is used for the basis of slowing down, then one still moves with the music. It can never be “against it.” What happens here is that when the music accelerates in tempo, the dancer decelerates the execution of movement. Instead of finishing a movement motif in four counts, one extends this to eight, sixteen counts or more. The dancer still dances to the music! An opposite relationship can be observed. It is still a relationship that pegs the movement to the music, and never against it. Secondly, this description fits the aesthetics of the Tausug *pangalay* rather than the Sama-Bajau *igal* traditions where a fairly consistent one-to-one correspondence with music and movement can be observed (See: Santamaria, 2017, Santamaria, 2019, Abdul Hamid Chan, Hafzan Zannie Hamza & M.A. Santaella, 2015).

At the around time marker of 6:45, the discussion appears to pick up and start to become very interesting. Delasas starts talking about movement. Rightly so, she says that the traditional *igal* is not choreographed, that the movements are “not repeated” (an observation which is not entirely correct), that they appear to be “random” (well, they indeed appear random to the observer, but are actually quite intentional to the *pangigal* dancer), and that the movements “come out from your heart...from your mind” (entirely, no argument with this poetics as all improvisational forms come from the heart or the mind). She then starts describing movements in the Sinama language “*pasuron jin ni baran nu*” and then “*paluwas nu ya ma tangan nu*” (move your hands inward and then move them outwards). She demonstrates movements called *angolles* or *kelloh* (outward rotation of the palm) and *kollek* (inward rotation of the palm). However, she does not call them by name. I would have expected a local dance master to have compiled, at least from her immediate community the “movement vocabulary” or labels of the specific movement of the *igal* dance tradition. At the marker of 12:23 and onwards, the sideward movement of the feet is shown. Its name, *ingsud-ingsud* (aka *hengsod-hengsod*) which portrays the movement of the sea snail, however, is most unfortunately omitted. Scholars of *igal* have already started to compile local labels for movement units. (See: Santamaria, 2013; Mohd Anis Md Nor, 2021). Most unfortunately this documentary does not even skim the surface of this rich area of inquiry.

At the time marker of 17:23, Delasas correctly explains that “traditionally, a good dancer, the real *igal* dancer will never start the movements for as long as the music is not good to the ears.” The documentary film immediately shows *kulintangan* (a.k.a *tagungguan*) ensemble playing. In this case, the ensemble only features a single *agung*, an acceptable minimum to instrumentation accompanying the *igal*. However,

noticeably absent is the extra *ostinato* at the highest pitched gong in the *kulintangan* instrument. This is called the *solembat* or *tungtung*, which may be struck by one or two sticks by the player. Delasas does not mention the *solembat* or *tungtung* which provides an extra layer of rhythmic patterns or “drone” to ensemble playing. She however mentions the *agung* and the desirable instrumentation of three hanging gongs. She likewise does not mention their names which are the *agung* which is a large gong with a wide rim, the *bua* which is a large gong with a narrow rim, and the *pulakan* which is a medium-sized gong with a wide rim. She also gestures with her hands as if playing a *gendang*, which is a double headed drum associated with the Tausug and not the Sama-Bajau whose *kulintangan* ensemble instead features a single headed *tambul* drum. This hybridity or confusion is left unexplained in the documentary, despite the availability of the seminal works by Martenot and Maceda (1980) that mapped out the variants of the *kulintangan* ensembles in the Sulu-Sulawesi area. Perhaps, Delasas’ mixed Sama and Tausug lineages may account for this confusion or liberal crossings in musical traditions.

Liberal crossings in dance traditions are likewise shown in the costumes worn by the performers filmed in this documentary. At times, the women including Delasas are seen wearing the Tausug *biyatawi* (aka *bitawi*) blouse while the men sport the *baju lapi* (Chinese collared-shirt) featuring an unbuttoned asymmetrical-cut placket, which is likewise associated with the Tausug and not with the Sama-Bajau groups. It is quite unsurprising that a question was posted in the comments section of the YouTube video asking: “Sorry asking why the costume looks like a suluk costume?” The commentator is befuddled by this strange and unexplained mix as this writer. Traditional Sama-Bajau costumes for women consist of either a long-sleeved blouse called *sablay* or a short-sleeved blouse called *sambra*, which is worn with a *tadjung* tubular skirt. Another *tadjung* may be folded over several times and then worn over one shoulder as a decorative piece, which is also called a *sablay*. Sama-Bajau men wear a *badju lapi* shirt sporting a Chinese-style collar with a closed or buttoned placket. For pants, they wear a *sawwal kantiu*. At several instances, Delasas is seen wearing a yellow and green, top, and bottom combination. These colors are associated with the *igal djin denda* or female spirit mediums of Sitangkai (See: Clifford Sather, 1997, pp. 302 and 307). The film is mute about this association and it appears that these colors are randomly linked by the makers of film with any Sama Dilaut *igal* dances, thus showing no distinction between secular and sacred contexts in performance.

Based on what has been presented in the film, I can say that the creators have missed the opportunity to identify specific movements and show how their labels connect to the natural environment of the people. It has not been able to present the diversity of instrumentation and musical pieces across Sama-Bajau communities. It has also failed to discuss how traditional garments or costumes vary across ethno-linguistic communities in the Tawi-Tawi Archipelago.

No *Igal* dancing in *Lami-Lamian Merry-Making*

Another context where *igal* dancing may be observed that ought to have been captured by the ICH *Igal* is the *lami-lamian*, literally a merry-making event held during

weddings and other important festivities. Three types of *igal* recognizable according to musical accompaniment may be observed in *lami-lamian* evenings: (a) *igal* accompanied by a *kulintangan* ensemble; (b) *igal* accompanied by a *gabbang* (bamboo xylophone) or a vocalist singing to *gabbang* music, which is called the *pagsangbay* (aka *sangbay* or *sangbayan*) or *igal* accompanied by a *gabbang* player with or without a vocalist; and (c) *sangbaian pangigalan* or *igal* accompanied by a vocalist singing to music played on an electronic organ or synthesiser.

Secular *igal* performances accompanied by a *kulintangan* (a.k.a *tagungguan*) ensemble have been well documented by Martenot and Maceda (1980) wherein two pieces stand out. The first and most popular dance is *Igal Tabawan*, which is accompanied by a music piece of the same name called *Titik Tabawan*. This is a dance favored by women but otherwise can also be danced by men during *lami-lamian* evenings leading to the *pagsandang* (presentation night of the bride and the groom) held at the evening of Sama-Bajau weddings. The piece is danced to a music of relatively fast pace. Properties such as the *bola'-bola'* wooden or bamboo clappers as well as *sulakengkeng* (aka *salingkuku* or *janggal* in Tausug) may be used by women in this dance. The second dance is called *Igal Tarirai*, which is accompanied by a music piece of the same name called *Titik Tarirai*. The music features syncopation and slight pauses which are interpreted kinetically by the dancer through the exaggerated jerking of the shoulders (*kidjut*), stamping of the feet (*tandak*), an accented raising of a leg (*sintak*), or tip-toeing on two feet (*engke*) (See: Santamaria, 2019). Both dances are highly improvisational and rely on individual dancers to show off their personal styles while sticking to the acceptable kinetic vocabulary of the *igal* dance tradition. I have seen various renditions of these two dances accompanied by the *kulintangan* ensemble in wedding and public events in Sitangkai Island and Tabawan Island, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines and in Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia. Sadly, these two dances have given way to a more contemporary form of *igal* accompanied by vocalists singing to electric organs or synthesizers. The *kulintangan* ensemble has become a rarity in *lami-lamian* merry-making evenings.

The *pagsangbay* originated as a particular style of singing that accompanies the *Dalling-Dalling* dance, a choreographic piece associated with the Tausug *Pangalay* Master Albani that reached its heyday in the 1930s through the immediate postwar period (See: Ricardo Trimillos III, 1972, p.117). The Sama-Bajau adopted this genre using their own language in their original compositions. The *pagsangbay* which is categorised under the *paggabbang* musical tradition is hauntingly captured in H. Arlo Nimmo's (1994) novel titled "*Songs of Salanda*." I have personally seen *igal* accompanied by the *gabbang* as well as by the *pagsangbay* on two occasions in Semporna, Malaysia. The first one was in 2013 during the Regata Lepa Festival performances. In a performance titled "Lolai," three ladies from Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia, presented a group dance, featuring a singer accompanied by a *gabbang* and a *biula*, a native violin. The second one involves several pieces featured in the *Kulintangan* and *Gabbang* Competition Festival held on the 19th to 22th June 2022, also in Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia. The event was sponsored by the Southeast Asia Music, Education and Research Exchange (SEAMEX), an organisation based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. The playing of the *gabbang* for the purpose of accompanying an *igal* dance performance has become very rare.

The *sangbaian pangigalan* is currently the dominant mode of vocal music accompanied by an electronic organ or synthesiser combined with a contemporary form of *igal* dancing called *igal pakiring*. Bernard Ellorin (2011) cites the following conditions in the southern Philippines that led to this shift in instrumentation:

As a region historically known for its political instability, the Philippine-Sama musical instrument manufacturers, musicians, and singers work abroad. Because musicians are required for celebratory occasions, Sama musicians remaining in the Philippines have found affordable means to supply their community's demands for performances of traditional and contemporary music. Hiring musicians using the [electronic keyboard] is affordable for low-income families because it requires compensation of three performers as opposed to compensating the entire traditional five-musician gong ensemble. [Hence the electronic keyboard has largely replaced music of the traditional *kulintangan* gong chime and the *gabbang* bamboo xylophone.] (p. 74, emphasis mine)

I have attended a *pagsandang* or presentation of the bride and groom to the public in Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi Province, Philippines in May 2005 and November 2007. On both occasions, I have observed singers standing behind or next to synthesisers or electronic organ keyboards towards the side of the *pagsandang* stage (Santamaria, 2010, p. 170). Their songs describe the dancers, honoured guests and even the event itself. Sometime in October 2012 during a visit to the *kampung ayer* or water village of Bangau-Bangau in Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia, I find myself being pushed on stage dancing to an improvised *sangbaian pangigalan* following the tune of a song titled “*Lolai Loloh*.” As my Sinama is very poor, I was unable to interact with the famous singer named Jenes, who according to my hosts described my movements and even introduced my credentials as a scholar “from the Asian Center, University of the Philippines” (See: Santamaria, 2014, pp 1-3). This interaction between the *penyanyi* (singer) and *pangigal* (*igal* dancer) is a core feature of this genre of music and dance. The *igal pakiring* that is usually performed in these kinds of events is rather flirtatious, characterised by side-to-side leaning of the torso (*pakiring-kiring*), swaying of the hips (*kembot-kembot*), and jerking of the shoulders (*kidjut-kidjut*). This genre of *igal* is what I call “social *igal*” (Santamaria, 2012b). Like in any other social dance, dancing between the opposite sexes is often seen but not in the rigid norm as dancing between or among women, or between or among men. Dancing among “*bantut*” or transgender men may also be seen.

It is again most unfortunate that the ICH *Igal* Video is unable to capture the category of social *igal* as well as the context of its performance. The character of *igal* movement vocabulary changes as the instrumentation or accompanying music changes. Featuring his transformative character of *igal* would have underscored the dynamism of the living tradition. Luckily, its absence in the ICH *Igal* Video is made up for by thousands of uploads in YouTube for those who wish to see representations of this genre. Capturing social *igal* in its embedded sites of performance would have illustrated the great diversity of individual styles that exhibit creativity and artistic liberalism while staying within the traditional conventions of *igal* vocabulary and kinaesthetics. The sites of social *igal* are sites of enculturation, where Sama-Bajau

young men and women are exposed to *igal* dancing, and where they learn via personal experimentation and mimesis. The site also permits allowable forms of socialisation between members of opposite two sexes, a place of meeting potential partners in life where limited physical contact actually occurs. One example of permitted socialisation, in this case, allowable physical contact between opposite sexes can be seen in the practice called *panji-panji* or *sabud-sabud*, where admirers may place folded bills in between the fingers of the *pangigal* dancers during performance. Again, the ICH *Igal* Video as a documentary film with an intended global audience has failed to capture this important dimension of the *igal* dance tradition.

Theatrical *Igal*: A Staged and Dis-embedded Context

What was captured by the ICH *Igal* Video? To recapitulate, the ICH Video did not capture *igal* in a ritual context. It also did not capture *igal* in a social context. What it captured is theatrical *igal* in a staged context. “Theatre” comes from the Greek word *théatron*, which means something that is meant “for viewing.” I therefore refer to “theatrical *igal*” as something that is primarily choreographed or arranged for viewing (See: Santamaria, 2012b). Theatrical *igal* has a “performance context” as well as a site. This can be a school performance in a classroom or a basketball court, a commercial performance in a theatre or auditorium, a free public performance in a field, or even performance done through the streets of a certain municipality, such as the choreographed street dance version of *igal* which was captured by the ICH *Igal* Video in Simunul Island.

Apart from the street dance performance context, the ICH *Igal* Video does not capture any organic performance context of theatrical *igal*. Capturing the performance context as well as the organic site of theatrical *igal* is important because aspects of choreography and aesthetics as well as audience-performer dynamics may be seen to change depending on the context. ICH *Igal* Video is only able to capture what it commissioned to be performed in an empty dock or pier, an empty space fronting what appears to be a *masjid*, or an immobile reproduction of a *lepa-lepa* houseboat. None of these show organic spaces of real performances with specific contexts. Instead, they were staged for the production of the ICH *Igal* Video. The scenes are not able to capture reality as it existed. They are instead directed scenes of choreographed dances for film.

I must emphasise at this juncture that theatrical versions and choreographies of *igal* are also important. They affirm the creativity of local artists who continue to work with the genre as they teach in institutions such as the MSU-TCTO. The renowned choreographer and dance artist, Ligaya Fernando Amilbangsa, is known to have started this practice upon establishing the Tambuli Dance Troupe in the said institution. Mahail “Mark” Hajan and Hadja Sakinur Ain Delasas have followed suit by taking over the directorship of the group after Amilbangsa. What is most apparent to me in the video is that fragments of the repertoire of the Tambuli Dance troupe are what appears to have been captured by the ICH *Igal* Video documentary as produced by the NCCA ICH Team.

The Tambuli Dance Troupe repertoire includes several dances that may be found in the video. *Igal Linggisan* is a mimetic dance featuring the flight of the frigate

bird (*Fregata ariel*). *Igal Tabawan Bola' Bola'* is an *igal* dance featuring bamboo clappers danced to Titik Tabawan.

Igal Kabkab is *igal* danced with a fan. The version with a *kabkab* or fan on the right hand and *sulakengkeng* or ornamental nail extenders on the left hand is a version particularly associated with Delasas. *Mag-ambit* renders in pantomime a traditional fishing technique of the Sama Dilaut. *Igal Tarirai*, wrongly referred to by Delasas as a “courtship dance” also features the use of the bola'-bola' and an abrupt raising of a foot during a brief pause in the music. I have already discussed this theatrical version of Tambuli Dance Troupe as quite different from the practitioners of Sibutu and Sitangkai Island, where the dance supposedly originates (See: Santamaria, 2019). It is most unfortunate that all of the above are not properly identified and labelled in the narration and the subtitles of the documentary film.

Different Categories of *Igal*, Endangerment and Sustainability

In the second section of this work, I have briefly described the great diversity in terms of movement and music found among the different *igal* dance traditions in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi Archipelagoes. I have also emphasised that in terms of music-movement relationship as well as kinaesthetics, a great difference can be observed between the Sama *igal* and the Tausug *pangalay* traditions. In this section, I would like to discuss the diverse characteristics of *igal* as found among the different categories and relate it to the idea of endangerment.

Endangerment directly relates to the idea of the rarity of the performance and the type of performer. Table 1 below shows that ritual *igal* requires it to be performed by ritual specialists or spirit mediums. Since the main audience for such performances are ancestors and other spirits, the ritual *igal* cannot simply be performed by anybody. Otherwise, *busong* or curses in the form of ailment or even death are believed to be incurred. The time of performance must also be determined by ritual specialists who choose from certain auspicious dates of the year, usually occurring during the full moon. Other restrictions such as, among others, some distance from the time of death of a fellow ritual specialist are known to be observed by the *igal djin* of Sitangkai. As such, the performance of the ritual *igal* may be considered to be rather rare and may be given a valuation of “3.”

In contrast to ritual *igal*, the performance of social *igal* is fairly regular or frequent. Social *igal* dancing may be observed in wedding celebrations and other festivities. These are normally scheduled during full moons or during the nights leading to the full moon. In such gatherings, there is a very porous line between the performers and the audience. Individuals at one time become performers and at other times become members of the audience. This type of inter-activity may be observed in many social occasions. In this vein, social *igal* is generally fairly regular, and therefore may be given a rarity valuation of “2.”

Theatrical *igal* follows no rules in terms of type of performer and auspicious dates. It may be performed by anyone at any time. Even non-members of the community or non-Sama Bajau are welcomed and able to present their individual versions of theatrical *igal*. Whether such performances are deemed to be aesthetically good or not is not my concern in this paper. Rather, I would like to point out that

anyone can study and claim to perform any theatrical *igal* piece without being subjected to religious, cosmological, or social strictures. As such, theatrical *igal* may be deemed to be quite common, and therefore it may be given a rarity valuation of “1.”

Table 1

Category of Igal and Rarity of Performance

Category of Igal	Performer	Audience	Times (Frequency) of Performance	Rarity Valuation
Ritual <i>Igal</i>	Ritual Specialist	Mainly for Ancestors other Spirits	Determined Dates (Infrequent)	Rare to Very Rare (3)
Social <i>Igal</i>	Members of the Community	Members of the Community, Interactive Audience	Auspicious Dates, Full Moon (Somewhat Frequent)	Regular, Expected (2)
Theatrical <i>Igal</i>	Members and Non-Members of the Community	Non-active, Viewing Audience	Any Time (Very Frequent)	Common (1)

Given varying degrees of rarity, it would be most sensible for producers, writers, and cinematographers of documentary films to exert greater effort in capturing the rarer categories of *igal*. In this case, their primary goal should be to try to capture ritual *igal* during the rare instances when it is performed. Social *igal* should be the next target, and this should be relatively easy to film as social celebrations often happen every month during the full moon. Theatrical *igal* should therefore come after the two other categories. Most unfortunately, the ICH *Igal* Video is only able to capture the theatrical *igal* category. And again, most unfortunately, except for a few clips of street *igal* in Simunul Island, the ICH *Igal* Video also failed to capture a socially embedded context of a local performance. Instead, it appears that the producers directed scenes with *igal* dancing to be captured via filming at their convenience.

Proceeding from a discussion on rarity, I would now like to propose a definition of “endangerment” in the context of performance, specifically dance performance. For this purpose, I would like to adopt the definition “endangerment” from the UNESCO statement on “Language Vitality and Endangerment” (hereinafter, UNESCO Statement) produced by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (2003). As such, with slight modifications, I define performance endangerment as follows:

A performance tradition, form, genre, subgenre, or particular piece is *endangered* when it is on a path toward extinction. Without ‘adequate documentation,’ a performance tradition that is extinct can never be revived.

A performance tradition, form, genre, subgenre, or particular piece is in danger when its practitioners cease to perform it, perform it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. That is, there are no new practitioners, adults, or children.

Like the writers of the UNESCO Statement, I place great importance on “adequate documentation” as such a process may be used to attempt to revive or to recreate performance traditions that may have gone extinct. I also place great importance on the variable frequency of performances given a certain definite time period such as within a month or within a year as well as on the variable of transmission to the next generation of performers. Given these considerations, I propose to adopt from the said statement a matrix for the assessment of endangerment for performance as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Valuation Matrix for Assessing Performance Endangerment

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Performer Population
<i>safe</i>	5	The performance genre, subgenre or particular piece is performed by all ages, from children up.
<i>unsafe</i>	4	The performance genre, subgenre or particular piece is performed by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
<i>definitively endangered</i>	3	The performance genre or subgenre or particular piece is performed mostly by the parental generation and up.
<i>severely endangered</i>	2	The performance genre or subgenre or particular piece is performed mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
<i>critically endangered</i>	1	The performance genre or subgenre or particular piece is performed mostly by very few practitioners, of great-grandparents generation.
<i>extinct</i>	0	There exists no performer.

The usefulness of the valuation devised above can be observed in the specific indicators of endangerment which can either be pegged onto the type of population in terms of the observable range of age of the performers. This may also be modified to

be mainly based on the “frequency of performance” or “rarity of performance” which can likewise be assigned an “adjectival value” or “numerical value.”

Further developing the model adopted from the UNESCO Statement, I have devised another matrix as indicated in Table 3 in order to relate categories of *igal* to degrees of endangerment as well as other variables such as audience and significance to the people or owners of the so-called intangible cultural property. Here we will see that ritual *igal* is linked to the cosmology of the people which is undergoing fast change due to conversion to Islam. This category of *igal* is mainly concerned with ancestors or other denizens of the spirit world. This belief often conflicts with Islam, which is gaining converts among many Sama-Bajau communities. *Pag-omboh* rituals are giving way to this process of religious conversion. In fact, some Sama-Bajau believers of Islam consider *pag-omboh* rituals, where *igal* trance dancing and *kulintangan* music- making figures prominently, to be “un-Islamic.” I have already noted the apparently unsustainable replacement rate of *igal djin* spirit mediums in Sintangkai Island who are mostly in their 60s (Santamaria, 2018). As such, ritual *igal* a rating of “2” or “severely endangered” in terms of degree of endangerment.

Social *igal* play an important role in the socialisation functions among members of Sama-Bajau society or communities. As a category, it cannot be immediately rated by itself as a whole. Instead, forms of social *igal* that may be distinguished according to the accompanying music constitute subgenres all their own. As already mentioned earlier, among the subgenres, *igal* accompanied by the *gabbang* or what may be called *pagsangbay-igal* has become very rare. Instrument makers have become fewer through the years. Also, very few members of the older generation of *penitik* or *gabbang* players have passed on the skill to the next generation, as such this genre of interactive performance among *penitik*, *penyanyi* (singers) and *pangigal* (*igal* dancers) may also be given a rating of “2” or “severely endangered.” The other subgenre in this category is social *igal* accompanied by a *kulintangan* ensemble. Although production of instruments has declined in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi Provinces, the Meranaw of Tugaya, Lanao del Sur as well as the Rungus of Kudat, Sabah, Malaysia still produces gongs for this ensemble. The main threat comes from economic considerations, as already mentioned by Ellorin (2011, p. 74), as well as a change in taste for music accompanying *igal* performances among the members of the younger generation. With these conditions, this subgenre is given an endangerment rating of “3” or “definitely endangered.” The subgenre of social *igal* that is nearly hegemonic and most popular with nearly everyone is *igal pakiring* accompanied by the electronic organ or synthesiser. This is given an endangerment rating of “5” or “safe.” The last category is theatrical *igal*. This category is sustained mainly through dance troupes many of which are school organisations. Theatrical *igal* is important in its function in creatively and artistic content. It also has a commercial function as found in the numerous productions of CD and DVD recordings of Sama-Bajau artists, many of whom are based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. This category is generally doing very well in terms of production and consumption, and as such may be given an endangerment valuation of “5” or “safe.”

Table 3

Categories of Igal, Degrees of Endangerment and Other Variables

Category	Significance	Audience	Degree of Endangerment	Source of Endangerment
Ritual Igal	Cosmological	Spirit World: <i>omboh</i> , <i>djin</i> and other spirits	Severely Endangered (2)	Ageing Practitioners Religion Change
Social Igal: <i>Pagsangbay / Gabbang</i>			Severely Endangered (2)	Ageing Practitioners Economic considerations Decline in instrument producers Change in Taste
Social Igal: <i>Kulintangan Ensemble</i>	Socialisation Function	Performers = Audience	Definitively Endangered (3)	Ageing Practitioners Economic considerations Decline in instrument producers Change in Taste
Social Igal: Electronic Organ			Safe (5)	None
Theatrical Igal	Artistic Expression and Market Value as “Content”	Strictly Non-Performing Audience	Safe (5)	None

As implied in the UNESCO Statement, documentation is the very foundation of crafting strategies or policies for sustaining intangible cultural property. As resources are finite, the process of documentation must prioritise what needs to be immediately captured in film and sound recordings. In order to achieve this goal in a rational manner, a system of “valuation” or “evaluation” must be followed based on instruments that allows for comparison and ranking. I believe that the matrix present above is a step towards the development of this kind of protocol that can guide future endeavours and processes of documentation.

Conclusion

Intangible cultural heritage is not a monolithic entity. More often than not, it is made up of categories and subcategories that reflect the complexity of the socio-cultural reality of communities from which such cultural properties emerged. The Sama-Bajau *igal* dance tradition(s), and please note the implication of the pluralization in parentheses, veritably show(s) this complexity. Within *igal* as an overarching tradition and label for a particular dance practice, at least three major categories may be observed. In this piece, I identify the following categories: ritual *igal*, social *igal* and theatrical *igal*. I have shown that each category exhibits variations in terms of rarity of performance and endangerment. Under the category of social *igal*, three sub-categories based on musical accompaniment and performance can be further identified. These are: *igal* accompanied by the *pagsangbay* (vocal music with *gabbang* instrumentation), *igal* accompanied by a *kulintangan* ensemble, and *igal* accompanied by *sangbaian pangigalan* (vocal music with electronic organ or synthesiser). Again, each of these categories exhibit varying degrees of rarity and endangerment.

By understanding the existence of categories within a single tradition or intangible cultural heritage and their corollary degrees of rarity and endangerment, producers of documentary film will be able to decide whether or not to cast the widest net possible, that is, to attempt to capture all types of categories, or to target specific categories that may be deemed to be the rarest or the most endangered. Such a decision cannot be done without proper knowledge of the intangible cultural heritage found in the field. In the case of the *igal* dance tradition as captured in the ICH *Igal* Video, the casting of the net is not at all wide. It is also unable to reach a certain depth in knowledge production. The ICH *Igal* Video is only able to capture the theatrical *igal* category. And again, most unfortunately, except for a few clips of street *igal* in Simunul Island, the ICH *Igal* Video is also unable to capture the socially embedded context of a local theatrical performance likewise. Instead, it appears that the producers directed scenes with *igal* dancing to be captured via filming at their own convenience.

This NCCA ICH Team that produced this video could have avoided this failure by following good research protocols. First, the team should have reviewed the literature on *igal* that has been published both in the Philippines and elsewhere in order to learn more about ritual and performance. As the references of this piece indicate, much has already been published on the *igal* dance tradition in both the

Philippines and Malaysia. Second, it should have gone to different sites where different manifestations of the *igal* dance can be observed. Limiting field work to provincial capitals like that of the Municipality of Bongao and the nearby Municipality of Simunul severely constricts the range of *igal* categories and styles that may be observed. Finally, reliance on a few dance informants (three actual practitioners in the ICH *Igal* Video), also does not paint a full picture of the *igal* dance tradition as an *intangible* cultural heritage. It not only tends to cultivate hegemonic views of experts at the regional centres, but it also renders mute the multiple voices and views on one of the most diverse performance traditions found in maritime Southeast Asia.

Endnotes

¹Like many other Asian performance forms, *igal* often combines the artistic expressions of poetry, song, musical accompaniment, and aesthetic movement. In its ritual forms, *igal* combines movement with prayers, ancestral admonition, and other utterances that makes for a most rarefied performative expression.

²My first foray in the field was made possible through a Faculty Merit Grant from the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC), Ateneo de Manila University. Accompanying me in the field sites of Tawi-Tawi were Dr. Cynthia Neri Zayas, a Maritime Anthropologist based at the Center for International Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman; Dr. Adelina Amparo Umali III, a Performance Studies and Japanese Literature Expert also based at the CIS, UP Dilman; and Ms. Marta Lovina Prieto, an Independent Scholar and Documentation Specialist. In the field, Hadji Yusup Malabong, Hadji Musa Malabong and Hamka Malabong served as our co-researchers. I produced a draft monograph titled “Capturing Pangalay.” It served as my terminal report for the IPC grant. This fieldwork experience helped me in forming my views on the difference of the Tausug *pangalay* and the Sama-Bajau *igal* dance tradition.

³In most of my works, I adopt Pallesen’s Sama-Bajau label (originally Sama-Bajaw) to refer to the wide linguistic sub-family of the Sama or Sinama-speaking peoples which include the Christianized Abaknon of Northwestern Samar and the Yakan people, who have since dropped the “Sama” appellation.

⁴The *pamansak* is also called *pansak*. This label can also be observed among the Sama Siasi and the Sama Bangingi (aka Balanguingui). The Yakan is actually a Sama or Sinama-speaking group based mainly in the Island of Basilan. I believe that the terms *pamansak* and *pansak* are related to the Indonesian labels of *pencak* (as in the martial arts form of *pencak silat*) and *mancak*. Some sources state that the term may have come from the Sanskrit *panca*, meaning “five” (perhaps, for five basic postures) or the Chinese *pencha* or *pungcha* which means to parry, deflect or to strike.

⁵I have already discussed this very close and inextricable relationship between *igal* dances and their corresponding *kulintangan* music(s) or *titik* accompaniment in a chapter of mine titled “Necessary Reunions” in Mohd Anis Md Nor and Kendra Stepputat (2017).

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Biography

MCM (Matthew Constancio Maglana) Santamaria is a professor of Asian and Philippine Studies at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman. He received his Doctor of Law in Political Science from the Kyoto University Graduate School of Law in 1999. He is currently the assistant dean for cultural affairs of the Asian Center. He has published many book chapters, articles, and essays on the themes of ethnic conflict, Sama-Bajau ethnography, ritual and performance, and dance studies. He is also a renowned theater choreographer who pursues his advocacy in helping sustain Sama-Bajau traditional music and dance through the Bunga Arts Link (BAL), a performance group that he established in 2004.