

A Collation of Matigsalug Indigenous Games in Sitio Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City

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ABSTRACT

The study of Matigsalug indigenous games is one of the ten-study projects of an on-going attempt to retrieve and document traditional games among the ethnic communities recognized as local tribes in Davao City. Triangulation methods were utilized using direct participatory, observational approach, in-depth interview, fieldwork and a focus group discussion. The Matigsalug tribes known as people living along the “*Salug*” (Davao) River is one of the aboriginal immigrants of Davao City which identifies a distinct culture and precept in the island. They are divided into five (5) sub-groups; these are *Matiglongilan*, *Pulangion*, *Talaandig*, *Matiglabo* and *Ata tribe*. Prior to the foreign colonization, the tribes already had customary concepts and practices. Diversified rituals for abundant harvests, courtships, fortunes and traditional games are already practiced. But most of these practices especially in traditional games are undocumented and unexplored. Games as commonly known as socializing forces of Filipino family has a distinct meaning in the collation of Matigsalug indigenous games. Most of the documented games of the tribes are not for pastimes but an attempt of seeking and hunting food for survival. The *Lolilid to bonabba* and *Poniting* are means of support in-order to catch wild animals in the forest which uses the “*pana and gossa*” (bow and arrow) and “*pangasso sobbat*” (spear). The *lombok povatas*, *poobitoy diyot weeg*, *ompuan povatas* and *oppuk diyot daum to weeg* are sets of games held in the river to catch for fish, shrimps, crabs, frogs for food and for survival. These traditional practices are handed from generation to generation which serve as socio-historical markers of the tribes. The significance of this study is to document and strengthen the indigenous games particularly of the Matigsalug Tribe, institutionalize tribal Olympics and to unite the aboriginal immigrants of Davao City.

Key words: *Lolilid to bonabba*, *Poniting*, *Lombok povatas*, *Poobitoy diyot weeg*, *Ompuan povatas*, *Oppuk diyot daum to weeg*, *indigenous games*, *traditional games*, *customary concepts and practices*

INTRODUCTION

In the course of my dealings with the Matigsalug tribe in Sitio Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City in the island of Mindanao in the

Philippines, I noted their reference to the word *galow*. Oftentimes, it is used to mean *play*, but occasionally, it is referred to a *period for both work and play*. Play which means game was briefly mentioned by Chernaya (The Game Culture within the Power of Tradition) in her 2012 report. In her account of game culture, she indicated that games should be viewed as one of the oldest cultural achievements of humankind. Some of the games are considered to be part of national heritage, national symbols. They are cricket for Great Britain, golf for Denmark, chess for India and lapta for Russia.

The Philippines may be described as a nation in search of its identity. Identity is embodied in the Filipino people in traditional games that were developed from their ascendants and handed down from generation to generation. Filipino traditional games have originated from different cultures, some of which have pre-Hispanic origin and unique in terms of how they are played.

In Davao City, Mindanao which is located in the southeastern region of the island identified ten (10) tribal communities. One of these is the Matigsalug tribe commonly known as people living along the Salug (Davao) River. They have a distinct culture even during the pre-Hispanic time. At present, the Matigsalug tribe faces a lot of challenges; a very devastating one is that of cultural preservation especially the collation of indigenous games.

In response to the urgency for cultural preservation, specifically the indigenous game, this paper aims to document and strengthen the indigenous games particularly of the Matigsalug tribe, institutionalize tribal Olympics, and to unite the indigenous people of Davao City with respect to their tribal identity. This paper aims to promote Mindanaoan tribal community with respect to their cultural practices to be fully recognized as part of the Philippine cultural heritage, worthy of appreciation and value.

Significance of the Study

Gamelore was briefly mentioned by Lopez in her study of the Philippine Games in 2001 that it is not a completely explored genre in the Philippines, what exists is merely a scanty collection of texts without context. This was also supported by De Luna quoted by Sobrepena (2010) that majority of the traditional systems in the Philippines are undocumented and generally passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth.

The study of Matigsalug indigenous games is one of the ten-study projects of an on-going attempt to retrieve and document traditional games among the recognized ethnic communities in Davao City. It specifically, document indigenous games among the peoples in Sitio Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City. The Matigsalug tribe, along with other ethnic groups in Davao City can be helped in their efforts towards cultural preservation. Furthermore, this study can inform local government units, non-government organizations, people's organizations, national governments, international affiliates and from the academes of cultural practices specifically the indigenous games of the Matigsalug tribe as bases for strengthening their cultural identity.

Objectives

The study sought to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To identify the Matigsalug indigenous games,
2. To document the Matigsalug indigenous games and;
3. To imprint into the consciousness of succeeding generations the value of indigenous cultural practices specifically the indigenous games.

RELATED LITERATURE

Games in general context is viewed as one of the oldest cultural achievement of humankind which exist in every race and tribe in every religion notwithstanding the level of civilization and cultural development

(Chernaya, 2013). Traditional games, which express the ethics, aesthetics and mentality of the ethnic group show the rich cultural practices of a tribe.

Indigenous community or tribal society, taken in its broad ethnographic sense, is defined by Yamut (2009) as generally primitive in its origin, culture, language, religion and other characteristics that distinguish it from other sub-ethnic groups. They have developed a constant tribal practice which allows the people in the community to establish tribal identity. At present they face various challenges which determined the tribal people to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their centuries-old collective experience, ancestral territories and ethnic identity.

The Matigsalug tribe was briefly described by Gascon (Traditional Ecological Knowledge System of the Matigsalug Tribe in Mitigating the Effects of Dengue and Malaria Outbreak) in his 2011 study as people living along the “Salug” (Davao) River. They are one of the aboriginal tribe of Davao City which has identified a distinct culture and precept in the island. These tribes were divided into five (5) sub-ethnic groups. The *Matiglongilan* from Paquibato District, the *Pulangion* and *Talaandig* located from Davao City to Bukidnon and the *Matiglabo* and *Ata tribe* which are situated in Davao del Norte.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution mandates the State to conserve, promote and popularize the nation’s historical and cultural heritage and resources to preserve them for future generations of Filipinos and ensure continuity of Filipino identity and cultural belongingness.

Tribal ceremonies were an integral part of the ancient tribal practices. Some of the elements of the present practices harken back to the primordial aspect of its culture from which at present ceremonies like Kadayawan in Davao City draw their origin.

METHODOLOGY

The study is ethnographic in nature. The gathering and interpretations of the Matigsalug Indigenous games was obtained from

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original fieldwork in Sitio Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City. This area belongs to the 3rd Congressional district and estimated three hours away from the city proper.

Triangulation methods were utilized using observational approach, in-depth interview, and a focus group discussion. These approaches enable the Matigsalug people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of tribal games. This would mean learning from rural people directly on the site by sharing information and ideas.

Resource Person	Generation	Age	Role
Modesta Agton Astilla	Older	74	Adviser
Datu Mendez Maing	Older	59	Coach
Datu Vicente Maing	Older	57	Coach
Melba A. Robrigado	Older	56	Facilitator
Alona Maing	Older	53	Facilitator
Lolita Maing	Older		Adviser
Lito Anal Pandian	Older		Facilitator
Alberto Robrigado	Older		Facilitator
Anecler Guadalupe	Younger		Cook
Divina Sibunga	Younger		Timer
Saysay Morden	Younger		Recorder/Secretary
Lyn Maing	Younger		Cook
Gregorio Sibunga	Younger		Player
Jordan Danguinon	Younger		Player
Jonaire Kalapuan	Younger		Player
Sonny Boy Papa	Younger		Player
Honeybel Papa	Younger		Player
Glen Estilla	Younger		Player
Jonalyn Papa	Younger		Player
Arcelyn Poliran	Younger		Player
Bernadet Julian	Younger		Player
Angelica Castares	Younger		Player

In order to fully appreciate and extensively document the indigenous games of the Matigsalugs, the researcher sought the assistance of the following resource persons.

Study Site

The study was conducted in Sitio Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Matigsalug Indigenous Games

1. *Lolilid to Bonabba*

Players: *Mama* (Any number of young men)

Settings: Wide open yard or field.

Properties:

Pangasso Sobbat, a sharp spear made of bamboo of two meters long and a dummy which represents a wild animal.

Preliminary Games:

- Ground preparation - a 30 x 30 meters of open field is allocated for the area of this game. A dummy which is made of a rattan was rolled to form a circle and tied by a rope of approximately 5 meters long and handed to one of the facilitators as a living target.
- Formation – Participants stand 10 meters away from the dummy.
- Assignment of roles – Elders in the community are chosen to form a panel of judges. If no old people are present, friends of the players are drafted.
- Objective – To hit/catch the dummy (wild animals) using the spear (*pangasso sobbat*).

Movements:

1. The competitors stand ten (10) meters away from the target holding a spear as implement for the competition. (See Figure 1)
2. At the given signal, one of the facilitators who is holding the rope with a dummy at the other end will start to run while the participant tries to hunt. The striker throws the spear at the dummy any moment he feels confident.
3. The striker requires no limit of attempts. Every time they fail to hit the target they lose a turn. The fastest to recover each implement can start to strike again is valid and acceptable. The fastest reaction time and the number of consistent attempts will have the best opportunity in winning this game. (See Figure 2)
4. The striker wins if he succeeded to hit the target clearly using the spear. If he fails, the opportunity continues for the rest of the players. (See Figure 3)

The decision of the judges is final. Sometimes the judges and audience are impressed in the exposure of skills by the competitors. They are considered one of the best hunters of the Matigsalug tribe. According to one of the Datus, the winners in this event also signify more chances of survival in the mountains by hunting wild animals for food to provide for their family. Also, winners in this competition will gain honor and respect and sometimes they are given chances to become one of the assistants to serve the Datu or one of the trusted leaders in the community.



Figure 1. The participants are waiting for the signal to strike the target.



Figure 2. The participants require no limit of attempts to hit the target.



Figure 3.
One of the participants shows a clear shot against the target using the spear.

2. *Ponitning*

Players: *Mama* (Any number of young men)

Settings: Wide open yard or field.

Properties:

Pana and *gossa*, a bow and arrow made of bamboo and a vine which serves as string and a dummy for a target which represents wild animals.

Preliminary Games:

- Ground preparation - a 30 x 30 meters of open field is allocated for the area of this game. A dummy which is made of a rattan was rolled to form a circle and tied by a rope of approximately 5 meters long and handed to one of the facilitators as a living target.
- Formation – Participants stand 10 meters away from the dummy.
- Assignment of roles – Elders in the community are chosen to form a panel of judges. If no old people are present, friends of the players are drafted.
- Objective – To hit the target (dummy/wild animals) using the bow and arrow (*pana* and *gossa*).

Movements:

1. The competitors stand ten (10) meters away from the target (See Figure 4) holding a bow and arrow as implement for the competition.
2. At the given signal, all of the participants will start to attack the target as shown in Figure 5 and Figure 5a.
3. The striker will require no limit of attempts. The most consistent and focused striker who hits the target first will be judged by the elders as the winner.
4. The striker wins if he succeeds to hit the target using the bow and arrow. If he fails, the opportunity continues for the rest of the players until somebody successfully nails the target. (See Figure 6)

Also the decision of the judges is final. This competition will challenge the skills of the Matigsalug people in terms of hitting a particular target using the bow and arrow. This game is an imitation from the actual hunting of the tribes in the mountains and rivers of Davao City in searching for their food and by means of a weapon for survival. Some of the trusted people of the Datu in the community still own this kind of tool.

The Matigsalug people believe in the power of nature, since most of them mentioned that they listen to the movement of the environment. Most of their attempts in searching for food for survival are synchronized with nature. They use the environment to their advantage.



Figure 4.
The participants of the game *Ponitning* holding the bow and arrow as implements of the game.



Figure 5.



Figure 5a.

(Ponitning) The participants released the bow in an attempt to hit the target.



Figure 6.

(Ponitning) The striker successfully pierced the target with the arrow.

3. *Akkow no kayo*

Players: *Mama* (Two or more young men)

Settings: Wide open plain yard or field

Properties:

Each player should have a pair of *Akkow no kayo*. This is made of improvised Bamboo or wood stilts used for balancing.

Preliminary Games:

- Ground preparation – Parallel lines are drawn 15 meters apart. One is the starting line and the other is the goal line.
- Formation – Participants stand side by side at the starting line parallel to the goal line.
- Assignment of roles – Elders in the community are chosen to form a panel of judges. If no old people are present, friends of the players are drafted.
- Objective – To finish the course using the improvised bamboo or wood stilts to travel from the starting line to the goal line without falling to the ground.

Movements:

1. The participants will start to walk using the Akkow no kayo after the facilitator gives the signal. (See figure 7).
2. The first team or player who completes the course with no errors of falling to the ground will be declared the winner to this competition. (See Figure 8).



Figure 7. (*Akkow no kayo*) The participants start to walk after the signal was given.



Figure 8. (*Akkow no kayo*) One of the participants advances against his opponents.

The *Akkow no kayo* game is one of the tribal games of the Matigsalug tribe since the materials used in this game are available within the community. Bamboo is also one of their food sources since the young bamboo shoot can be cooked in any variety of delicacy. They also use bamboo as a cooking material. They call it *nilutlot* (See Figure 9). Also they use the *akkow no kayo* in some other event like reaching for fruits from tall trees and crossing the riverbanks or canals.



Figure 9. *Nilutlot*, one of the tribal practices in cooking food.

4. *Akkow no bekong*

Players: *Molitan* (Two or more young women)

Settings: Wide open plain yard or field.

Properties:

Each player should have a pair of *Akkow no bekong* (See Figure 10). This is made of coconut shells.



Figure 10. (*Akkow no bekong*) The participants use a pair of coconut shells.

Preliminary Games:

- Ground preparation – Parallel lines are drawn 15 meters apart. One is the starting line and the other is the goal line.
- Formation – Participants stand side by side at the starting line parallel to the goal line.
- Assignment of roles – Elders in the community are chosen to form a panel of judges. If no old people are present, friends of the players are drafted.
- Objective – To finish the course using the coconut shells to travel from the starting line to the goal line without falling to the ground.

Movements:

1. The participants will start to walk using the *Akkow no bekong* after the facilitator gives the signal.
2. The first team or player who completes the course with no errors of falling to the ground will be declared the winner to this competition.

This game uses coconut shells which are very abundant in the area. The mechanics of *akkow no bekong* is similar to *akkow no kayo*. The Matigsalug tribe recognizes the use of coconut shells as kitchen utensils like spoons, cups, ladle, etc.

5. Siklot no bato

Players: *Molitan* (Two or more young women)

Settings: Indoor or outdoor game

Properties: Pieces of small stones.

Preliminary Games:

- Ground preparation – none
- Formation – The players pair off. They sit down and face each other.
- Objective – To catch the stones one by one after flipping.

Movements:

1. The pieces of stones are placed on the back of the palm of a player then flips it altogether. (See Figure 11).
2. The player will try to catch the stone after flipping. If she fails, she loses a turn. Another player will start movement 1. (See Figure 12).
3. The first player to complete the game will be declared as winner.



Figure 11.

(Siklot no bato) The player flips the stones using one hand.



Figure 12.

(Siklot no bato) The player tries to catch the stones after flipping

The game is popular among the Matigsalug tribe who go out to catch crabs, frogs, shrimps and fish at the riverbanks. Although the Matigsalug people mix their work with a little play, they are wise enough to provide sufficient food to bring home to their family.

6. *Siklot no bingala*

Players: *Mama or Molitan* (Two or more young men or women)

Settings: Indoor or outdoor game

Properties: Sticks of cassava leaves.

Preliminary Games:

- Ground preparation – none
- Formation – The players pair off. They sit down and face each other.
- Objective – To catch the sticks of cassava leaves one by one after flipping.

Movements:

1. The pieces of cassava sticks are placed on the back of the palm of a player who flips it. (See Figure 13).
2. The player will try to catch the cassava sticks after flipping. If he/she fails, he/she loses a turn. Another player will start the movement 1. (See Figure 14).
3. The first player to complete the game will be declared the winner.



Figure 13.

(*Siklot no bingala*) The player flips the sticks of the cassava leaves.



Figure 14.

(Siklot no binggala) The player tries to catch the sticks of the cassava leaves.

Matigsalug people who play the game are seen in the cassava groves where it is easy to find sticks of cassava leaves. Matigsalug men, on the other hand, both player and spectators, engage in the game.

7. *Ompuan povatas*

Players: *Mama or Molitan* (Any number of young men or women)

Settings: River

Properties: Bamboo, rope and logs

Preliminary Games:

- The challenge – The players need to cross the river using one (1) piece of bamboo or log.
- Formation – players stand side by side at the riverbank.
- Objective – To cross the river first using one (1) piece of bamboo or log.

Movements:

1. Players stand side by side at the riverbanks. At the given signal, competitors will swim to the other side of the river using one (1) piece of bamboo or log. (See Figure 15).
2. The player who arrives at the other side first will win the game.



Figure 15.

(*Ompuan povatas*) The player tries to cross the river using one (1) piece of log.

The game is popular among the Matigsalug people since they live along the Salug (Davao) river. During their idle time, people stay beside the river and swim. They are very knowledgeable in catching frogs, crabs, shrimps and a variety of fish. Children at a young age are forced to learn swimming since their livelihood is connected to the river. Vegetables, fruits and other products from their community are transported to the market by using *Gakit*. (See Figure 16).



Figure 16. *Gakit* is a form of transportation for the Matigsalug tribe.

8. *Oppuk diyot daum to weeg*

Players: *Mama or Molitan* (Any number of young men or women)

Settings: River

Properties: None

Preliminary Games:

- The challenge – The competitors need to hold their breath under water.
- Formation – Informal
- Objective – To be the person who can hold his/her breath underwater the longest.

Movements:

1. At the given signal, the competitors sink underwater and hold their breath as long as they can. (See Figure 17).
2. The competitor who holds his or her breath the longest underwater wins the game.



Figure 17.

(*Oppuk diyot daum to weeg*) Participants are waiting for the signal from the facilitator to sink under water.

This game requires the Matigsalug people to test their breathing capacity. The longer they can hold their breath underwater, the more

physically fit they are. Many members of the community get challenged and eventually join the game because this requires more physical conditioning since the pressure underwater add difficulty to the game. The participants and audience excitedly cheer for their own bets. Also, the game is related to their livelihood since they need to acquire this kind of physical conditioning in order to catch fish, frogs, crabs and shrimps for food.

9. *Lombok povatas*

Players: *Mama or Molitan* (Any number of young men or women)

Settings: Outdoor game; to be played at the river

Properties: None

Preliminary Games:

- The challenge – Swimming across the river.
- Formation – Informal
- Objective – To be the first player to reach the goal line.

Movements:

1. At the given signal, the participants start to swim across the river. (See Figure 18).
2. The first participant who reaches the goal line wins the game.



Figure 18. (*Lombok povatas*) Participants swim across the river

10. *Poobitoy diyot weeg*

Players: *Mama or Molitan* (Any number of young men or women)

Settings: River

Properties: Bamboo – to be used as hanging board for the player

Preliminary Games:

- The challenge – Endurance
- Formation – Informal
- Objective – To be the last remaining player.

Movements:

1. Participants will hang on one (1) piece of bamboo and make an acrobatic jump to the river. (See Figure 19).
2. The last person who still has enough energy to perform the acrobatic jump again and again wins the game.



Figure 19.

(Poobitoy diyot weeg) The participant holds the bamboo in preparation for the acrobatic jump.

This game requires endurance to enable the Matigsalug people to repeatedly execute the acrobatic jump until only one swimmer remains and is declared the winner. The longer the performance, the bigger chances of winning. The game will continue until everybody gets exhausted.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

There are ten (10) indigenous games documented from the Matigsalug tribe in Sitio Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City in the island of Mindanao. In these games, majority of the younger generations in the community are confused and have no idea on the mechanics of the games. Even the elders who facilitated the games were a little unsure regarding the exact movements. Only the games that they remembered are documented.

This documentation of the Matigsalug indigenous games is only the first study of the ten (10) study projects that attempt to retrieve and document traditional games among the recognized ethnic communities in Davao City.

This documentation will help to inform local government units, non-government organizations, people's organizations, national governments, and universities of the rich cultural practices of the Matigsalug tribe specifically of the indigenous games as bases for strengthening their cultural identity.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

The ten (10) indigenous games that were documented from the Matigsalug tribe in Sitio Malamba, Marilog District, Davao City in the island of Mindanao should be published and be included as one of the historical markers of the priceless ancestral heritage of the Philippines. These games should remain relevant as they provide the non-Matigsalug people the opportunity to learn, appreciate and experience aspects of their culture as bases for strengthening their cultural identity.

Tribal Olympics should be institutionalized in the city of Davao during the Kadayawan Festival in August as tribute for their contribution in the city and to unite the indigenous people of Davao City with respect to their tribal identity.

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