

The Buklug of Gutalac, Zamboanga del Sur

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Gutalac is 180 kilometers south of Dipolog City and 231 kilometers from Zamboanga City. It is situated on the southern part of Zamboanga del Norte; its boundaries are the Sulu Sea on the north, Baliguian on the south and west, and Labason on the east. The municipality is situated on slightly rolling hills, and although level areas are found in barangays and along the coastal sections.

Gutalac was created a Municipality under B.P. Blg. 19 on March 6, 1979 and presently has 26 Barangays. It is the fifth largest municipality in the province with a total land area of 48,926 hectares.

There are two pronounced seasons in the area, the dry period which starts from January and ends on the month of May to July, while the rainy season starts right after the dry period up to December.

The soil types in the area are the Luisiana-Jasaan complex, San Miguel silt loam and mountain soils. Majority of these land can be utilized for cultivation while the rest is suited for grazing. Most of the open areas are covered with cogon grass.

As of 1987, Gutalac has a total population of 14,730 (Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator Data) with a 1988 estimate to reach 15,225 at an annual growth rate of 3.36%.

Cebuano is predominantly spoken in the area followed by Subanen,

Hiligaynon and other dialects.

Natural Resources

Mineral deposits such as chromite, quartz, gold, manganese and marble abound in the area. The coastal sites are rich in marine resources. Local and commercial fishing operators are common. Fresh fish is cheaply sold in the market by peddlers and hucksters. Dried fish is more commonly sold in the market on local and market days.

Forest land comprises an estimated area of 21,656 hectares, second only to the agricultural. Timber is more heavily exploited compared with rattan and anahao, which at the same time is partially depleted due to extensive commercial harvesting.

Gutalac has a total of 23,237 hectares of exploited agricultural land, with various crops planted. Rice is planted, rainfed or with improvised irrigation. The return often does not equal the expectation from the harvest. Corn and root plants are intercropped along rolling hills, although the chance of getting break-even harvests are slim. Vegetables like tomatoes, cabbage, pepper and green onions grow abundantly in the area and are usually produced above consumption levels.

Commercial trading is sufficient to serve the needs of the area. Commercial stores and eateries are found in the marketplace. Saturday is the market day and neighboring traders bring their stuff and sell their products in makeshift stalls provided for them in the market. People in the upland, mostly Subanen, travel down, bringing their cash products and handicraft to be sold in the market.

Presently, there are four elementary and 10 primary schools with a total of 2,870 pupils enrolled and having a workforce of 48 teachers.

Health services are available in the municipality with one nurse, three midwives, a sanitary inspector, malaria officer and 30 trained barangay workers.

Nipa houses with cogon grass roofing are common in the area with some concrete houses made from lumber and hollow blocks, with GI sheets as roofing materials.

Communication outside the community is through the postal services and a telegraph station set up by the Bureau of Telecommunication.

Transport system is available and there is an appreciable number of public

jeepneys plying the route from Gotalac to Labason. Business and more solvent people residing in the area have their own transport means.

The Group:

The Subanun (Synonyms: Subanen, Suban'on)

Lebar (1975) stated that the term Subanen means "upstream people," while Christie (1909) said that "the name Subanun means river-dweller, from the word *suba*, river." He further stated that "this term was applied to the tribe because its members are met in going up the rivers from the coast, in distinction to the Moros and Christians of Zamboanga Peninsula, who are coast-dwellers" (p. 11). The term itself, however, is not Subanun but comes from Cebuano.

Geographically, subanuns were distinguished by four groups (Christie 1909:16); the Subanun of the south coast of the Peninsula from Tukuran to the neighborhood of Buluan; those occupying the small end of the peninsula, on both sides, from Buluan on the east coast to Kipit on the west; the Subanun living on or near Sindangan Bay; and those occupying the high country behind the Christian towns in Misamis Province and the eastern part of Dapitan Subdistrict.

Peralta (1989), on the other hand, citing Cirilo Lonsido (OSCC, Pers. Com.), divided the Subanen into five groups: 1. Sindangan, 2. Salug, 3. Lapuyan, 4. Gotalac/Siocon/Sibuco/ Baligyan, and 5. Tuboy.

Their settlement pattern is clustered in three to twenty dispersed households. Houses are constructed in a typical rectangular thatched style with cogon grass roofing material. Granaries are commonly constructed near the house. A household is usually settled with a single nuclear or polygynous family.

The Subanen engage primarily in shifting agriculture (Lebar: 1975), though they have adapted to wet farming methods. They prefer rice as staple food, although they can use maize as a substitute. Secondary crops are cultivated, like job's tears, sweet potato and manioc. Sea and freshwater fish and crustaceans are eaten as side dishes, as well as vegetables. Chicken and pigs (domesticated and wild, though the latter is quite difficult to get) are prepared and eaten as ceremonial food. Metal-forging of bolos and other bladed tools are locally done with the aid of the wheeled blower-worked forge.

Weaving and pottery-making, which used to be flourishing technologies, have completely disappeared. Traces of these are found only in stories from the old folks. Western clothes are preferred over traditional attire.

Filing of teeth which used to be common is also a disappearing art. During this writer's stay in the area, he found that the younger generation had completely eliminated it as a practice. Very few people were seen with their teeth filed and blackened: only about eight old women and three men were observed.

Material wealth that were observed during the Buklug consisted of beads, old upper garments of women finely embroidered, with gold and silver buttons, beads, the *pes* (working knife) and *barong* (Muslim working knife), baskets, local stoneware jars, *kulintang* and gongs, old headdress for men, and earrings for women.

Kinship

In any social organization kinship is basically a major form of organizing principle. The Subanen kinship system is bilateral. This means that an individual reckons specific types of relationship with both sides of his maternal and paternal relatives.

Lebar (1975) has the following kinship terminology

Gr Pa	- Gapu	Sib, Cousin	- Pasted
Fa	- Gama	So, Da	- Bata
Mo	- Gina	Sib, Ch	- Manak
Pa Br	- Kia	Gr Ch	- Gapu
Pa Si	- Dara		

Peralta and Barbosa's (1989) kinship terminology based on Sindangan and Gutalac has the following categories:

Mother	- Gina	Wi	- Dii Bun-ngo
Father	- Gama	Fa Bo Da	- Minsan Tindeg
Mo Bo	- Kia	Fa Bo Da	- Minsan Tindeg
Mo Si	- Dada	Hu Wi Mo	- Ugang
Fa Bo	- Kia	Hu Wi Fa	- Ugang
Fa Si	- Dada	Wi Si	- Ipag
Mo Fa	- Apo	Wi Bo	- Bati
Mo Mo	- Apo	So Wi Fa	- Bala-i
Fa Bo Wi	- Ipag		
Fa Si Hu	- Bati		
So	- Manak		

Subanen Religion

Religion is characterized by belief in and an emotional attitude toward the supernatural being or beings, and a formal mode of approach - ritual - toward them (notes and queries on Anthropology, 175).

The Subanen practice of religion is a type of social interaction between them and the supernatural world. Their belief in the spirit world has the same valid universal explanation as other religions, although the methods of performing the rituals and the pantheons of gods and spirits vary from those of other cultures.

Christie (1909) has elaborated on the belief system of the group. He described the worldview of the Subanen in accordance with their concept of religion. He stated that the most elaborate festival of the Subanens is the Buklug.

The Buklug described below, is very different from what has been recorded by Christie 80 years ago. Religious practices vary through time, practitioners and the innovations that take place in the cultures of peoples. Although the Buklug that we witnessed has innovation and varies from the traditional, the intention of making it a social process is still evident. The influence attached to it in maintaining the internal variables in their sharing of cognitive orientations justifies their *concept of their existence* and their interaction with the world around them.

Christie (1909) comments on the Buklug as follows:

This is the most elaborate festival of the Subanuns. It is prepared by raising a structure some 10 to 18 feet high consisting of a highly resilient platform supported at the corners by upright beams. A beam passes through the middle of the platform (floor) which above extends like a maypole, and below reaches to a short, thick log laid on the ground. This log is hollowed out as much as is practicable, and lies almost immediately over a number of large earthen jars sunk in the earth, which serve as resonators ... A crosspiece which joins the long central pole or beam to the platform makes it go up and down with the latter as the Subanuns dance ... This dancing platform - buk-lug - gives its name to any festival or ceremony in which it is used, but the dancing is only an incident. The more important features of the occasion are the feasting, drinking, and religious ceremonies.

Lebar (eds. 1975) stated that:

A festival may be sponsored by an individual in fulfillment of a vow, e.g., following recovery from illness or after a good harvest. Festivals are marked by competitive singing, drinking of rice beer, and dancing on a raised, flexible platform - connected by an upright pole to a resonator in the ground, they may continue for three days or more, with as many as 200 people present.

There are two kinds of Buklug according to Christie (1909); Buklug to celebrate recovery of the sick and Buklug in memory of the dead. However, Mr. Cirilo Lonsido, our Subanon informant and Head of the Socio-Cultural Development, Office of the Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC), and Mr. Valter Timol, also a Subanen and Sanggunian Bayan member of Gutalac municipality, have provided us with three types of Buklug:

1. Buklug Pelento/Pelukub
2. Buklug Samaya Getao/Benua and
3. Buklug Gaus

Buklug Pelento or Pelukub - Is the merriest and the most highly attended among the three buklug. This celebration is in honor of the dead (immediate family and relatives).

The principal sponsor announces to the neighboring barangays his intention of celebrating a Buklug in memory of his dead kin. Any family that wishes to join in honoring its own dead may join by giving its share or contribution of food, drinks, work force services and others. Since the Buklug is a very expensive celebration and is held only once every eight or ten years, a lot of families join in the celebration which usually lasts for one week, depending on the resources available.

The Buklug Samaya Getao/Benua is a thanksgiving celebration for the immediate recovery of a sick or dying person or a newly transferred family that, for several years of residence in the area, did not meet any hardship and where everything was a success. The Buklug Gaus is intended as thanksgiving after a bountiful harvest.

The construction of the Buklugan is a collective effort of the Subanen. As mentioned earlier, the hosting of the Buklug requires great preparation. The sponsor has to prepare for a long period of time before his intent can materialize. As soon as he is ready with everything, he sends messengers with strips of rattan with knots representing the days before the festival. However, in the Buklug that we witnessed this practice was not observed. Instead, the Timu'ay (a traditional Subanen headman) was just called to the Municipal Hall and was informed that his

participation was highly counted upon in the Buklug that the Mayor was sponsoring. He was informed that the Buklug Gaus was intended not only as part of the municipality's founding celebration but as a showcase where people could learn and participate in a Buklug festival.

Several days before the start of the construction, the Subanen sent several people to the forested area of Sto. Niño to gather the timber and bamboo poles needed for the structure. Given this assigned task was a set of people who were familiar with the types of wood that would be used. The local names of the timber that were employed in the construction were *kambabalod*, for the dancing platform beams, and *hanagdon* and *lawaan* for posts and bamboo for the flooring.

The gathering of wood in the forest usually takes place in the morning. An elaborate ritual has to be performed before the woodcutters enter the forest and cut down trees. In the present case, the leader of the group just went straight to the forest and upon entering just asked permission from the forest spirits that they be allowed to get the wood needed for the Buklugan. After this simple ritual, they proceeded into the forest and started cutting selected trees. In the past, the felling of the trees had to be accompanied by shouting and singing and even by the playing of gongs and other musical instruments. Nothing of the sort happened on this occasion. After the tree cutting and cleaning, the timber was carried down to the edge of the forest. A truck provided by the Mayor picked up these materials and brought them to the construction site.

The rattan needed for lacing, which was quite difficult to acquire in the forest, was bought from people engaged in rattan trade. It was preferred for its ability to withstand the marathon dancing on the platform. Large stripped rattan lashings were used all throughout to assemble the parts.

Each worker assigned to the tasks of tying beams together was an expert in the technique. Their lashing methods were all similarly done. For instance, the *tunglunans* required a set of heavy lashing since these beams were the main support for all the minor beams. Each person assigned to these parts had to have the same thickness of lashing to use as that in the other three corners.

In the *sagupit* portion, another size of lashing, proportionally reduced, was again employed; the same binding technique was used. The *paniwag* beams also received the same treatment.

After all the major and minor beams for the platform were secured, the leader pre-inspected the work to ensure the firmness of the lashing. After the inspection, he made some comments and eventually minor adjustments were carried

out. While he was doing this, a set of workers started constructing the ladder. The structure was made from timber and bamboo with two side supports for handholds to be used in the climbing.

As soon as the ladder was mounted, the split bamboo slats for flooring were brought up. Minor cleaning was done before each bamboo splint was positioned on the floor joists. Each bamboo pole was approximately 700 cm. in length and split into four parts. Unfortunately, the bamboo supply provided for the flooring ran short and delayed the construction.

Workers alternated in resting and working to speed up the work. Working conversation was encouraged to reduce boredom. Shouting, laughing and occasional songs were heard to assuage the seriousness and fatigue of everybody.

Lashing the bamboo flooring was done in a simple overhand knot. The bamboo flooring was positioned flatly on a North-South orientation. The tying started from the east side and ended on the western edge. The flooring was typical of a house flooring where slots were left open on each side of the bamboo splits. The bamboo flooring was tied to the longitudinal *paniqwag* beams oriented to the east and west.

On four sides of the dancing platform railings were provided to keep people from falling off. Improvised benches of horizontal bamboo poles were also lashed to the posts for everybody.

The main feature of this structure was the log resonator. According to early accounts, the sound created by the resonator could be heard as far as two kilometers away and was the only music that animated the dancers. It also invited listeners to join the celebration and signaled that the celebration was taking place.

The *duloggan* (log resonator) was made of yakal wood. It was 293 cm. in length and 32 cm. in width gouged at both ends and hollowed out at the center. A slit about 7 1/2 in width was prominent on one side. The inner hollowed portion of the log had a central protrusion with a 8 cm. height and 31 cm. length.

The log resonator used in this Buklug was not new because the outer portion was worn out. This confirmed by the previous user that since a resonator was quite difficult to make and the size of the tree needed was hard to find, they resorted to using an old resonator.

Now, a trench measuring 55 cm. in width and 280 cm. in length was dug for the resonator. At the center of the pit was a round hole about 10 cm. in depth and

10 cm. in width. Straddling the pit were two small support beams mounted at 30 cm. depth from the surface. These two support structures were resonator rests and held the resonator above the ground over the trench with its slit side toward the ground.

The small hole situated at the center of the pit substituted for the large earthen jars (Christie 1909) buried in the ground to serve as the hollow that forced the vibration to bounce and create the loud booming sound.

Now, the *peglao* - a long slender pole - is mounted at the center of the platform just above the resonator laid in the ground. Inserted on top of this pole is a three-node bamboo segment decorated with several palm fronds. This pole was secured in between two pieces of 2" x 2" lumber attached to the support beams of the dancing floor and was prevented from falling through by the cross piece. One meter from the lower end of the pole, a ring centered the pole on the resonator and was tied with rattan onto the four side posts.

Once the pole was secured the resonator was tested to find out its effect. The workers did not attempt to dance at this time, but merely pulled and dropped the pole in the manner of a pestle. Although the sound was not a booming one, they immediately stopped and, apparently satisfied, went back to previous work.

One remarkable part that was not expected was a carved human head executed on the middle post in the western side of the platform alongside the ladder. This post was left towering among the rest and commanded the entrance from the ladder to the platform.

According to the carver and some informants the carved head represented a guardian spirit. This spirit traditionally drove away malevolent spirits from inflicting any harm on anybody during the celebration. The head was tied down with a piece of plastic wrapper instead of the traditional textile and palm fronds.

The celebration was not started right after the completion of the structure. It was previously announced that the opening of the buklug was scheduled at 3:00 a.m. The final opening took place at 6:00 in the morning. The guests, municipal officials, *timuays*, workers, *balian*, and others were already positioned ready for the program.

Before the ritual signalling the start of the dance, a program was held allowing the Subanon leaders and municipal officials to take part. They talked on the 10th Anniversary of Gotalac, government programs for the people of the area and Subanon committees, and the merits of the present mayor in his role of reviving the Buklug.

After the speeches the ritual was started. The *balian* (a woman priestess in traditional attire) positioned herself, facing the east, before the prepared offerings. She sat crosslegged and started chanting. As she was doing this, her eyes were cast to the east, as she sent her messages (*panimunag*) to unseen spirits. Her voice gradually became louder when she reached the point of asking the spirits that the people be allowed to go on with the Buklug and be spared of any misfortune during the celebration.

After her incantations, she got a burning charcoal in a metal plate and sprinkled it with incense. This part was said to purify the prepared offerings and cast out bad luck.

The makeshift altar was a mat on the floor. The offering consisted of the following: rice cake wrapped in a grass leaf, steamed rice cake, a live brown hen, water in a basin and plastic jug and one third (stoneware jar) of *pangasi* (rice wine).

As soon as the incense was believed to have purified the sacrificial area, the *balian* stood up and took the basin of water. She washed her hands, scooped the water and sprinkled the surrounding areas. The remaining water was poured over the center pole. Right after, the chicken's neck was slit and allowed to bleed on the area. While this was taking place, the *balian* scooped several pieces of rice cake and tossed these into the air signalling everybody to partake of the food. Everybody present in the platform had to get a share of the offerings and eat this to avoid any misfortune.

The *pangasi* was also shared by everybody, sipping the wine through a *bugsok* (a bamboo straw). There were two straws positioned at the center of the jar's mouth. The sticks were stuck on the leaves covering the mouth. After the drinking, additional water was poured into the jar to mix with the wine. Only when the wine was consumed did the dancing commence.

The first set of dancers, composed of the *bailan*, *timuay* and workers, positioned themselves forming a ring around the vertical pole. Everybody joined hands and began dancing with inward-and-outward movements simultaneously moving counter-clockwise. What was remarkable with the movement was that once they moved in the inward direction they stamped on the floor with the left foot and jumped in an animated way. This ecstatic movement was quite interesting to observe since it was performed in what seemed like a state of trance. This state was broken only when they moved again to the backward position. There were four beats to the rhythm: stomp forward with the left; the weight shifts to the right foot; step back with the left and finally step to the right with the right foot to move the circle of dancers counterclockwise.

Now, the inward leap was really intended to force the center of the dancing platform to bounce. This bouncing was necessary in order to make the pole hit the resonator in the ground. When this pole struck the log resonator, a booming sound was created. The hopping cries of the dancers plus the slapping movements of bamboo slats on the platform beams also contributed to the musical beat accompanying the dance movements.

When one dancer gave up his place, another would take it. The dance was open to all. Anybody who wished to dance would just tap the shoulder of the person where he wanted to position himself.

During the peak of the dancing, young girls were pushed through to the center of the ring and allowed to stay to hold on to the pole. Sometimes, there were two or three young ladies at the center and while they were in this position the audience and dancers kept laughing and howling. After several minutes the ladies were allowed to resume dancing. Surprisingly, no male was subjected to this role, since everybody waiting on the ground was anxious to take part in the dancing; those who were done with their dancing religiously volunteered to go down and to be replaced by others.

The dancing was non-stop and usually lasted from two to five days, depending on the resources available from the sponsors. The sponsors, this time the Mayor and the Sangguniang Bayan officials, were in charge of the expenses for everything including the feeding of the people. Of course, during this celebration some Subanen brought their own provisions. Some of them did not stay; once they had taken their part they returned to their respective communities.

Discussion

The social setup of a particular society is sometimes so well defined that when one views it in a macro level, it is easy to comprehend. However, in societies where social institutions are not highly defined and observable, an observer may be confused and may find difficulty in understanding the system.

The festival was highly institutionalized. The earlier accounts of Christie (1909) stated that "The Buklug is the most elaborate festival of the Subanons the dancing is only an incident. The more important features of the occasion are the feasting, drinking and religious ceremonies" (p. 73). He further added: that the festival was celebrated for the recovery of the sick, in memory of the dead, and as thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest.

Compared to the early descriptions of the Buklug, religion still played an important role in the festival albeit a lesser one. It was celebrated not only to please those for whom the celebration was intended but was done as a gesture of prestige. A prestige feast is done to elevate one's status to the higher social ranking in a particular society. For instance, before any rich Ifugao is elevated to the Kadangyan position, he is required to render a feast that will allow the people to judge his resources by feeding them continuously for several days. He will have to secure a prestige bench (*hagabi*) that, when completed, will be deposited under his house as a sign and symbol of his status in the society. The feasting and ritual usually exhausts the resources of the sponsor, so that after the feasting he is left practically penniless for a time.

Dr. Jesus T. Peralta (1989, personal communication) states that among the Iwak even though the sponsor is depleted of his resources, he does not mind it because his elevation to the higher social ranking is more valuable than the riches that he can accumulate. He is considered wealthy and is respected by everybody, although he is short of money.

The event described above, though comparatively quite similar, is quite different in methods. The Hagabi and Buklug feasts are sets of highly institutionalized practices that are embedded in the Ifugao and Subanen cultures.

The cultural forms which comprise the Buklug: feasting, drinking and religious ceremonies (though not prominently exercised in this particular Buklug under discussion) manifest the Subanen as a group of people sharing a series of common cognitive orientation, a comprehension and interpretation of the world around them, which set the terms on which they feel life is lived (Castillo, 1988). The value system which is evident in the celebration is a reflection of the persistence in time of the Buklug and its stability in Subanen culture.

The role of the *balian* is very significant among the Subanen and more importantly in the Buklug. To point out such significant role, the team, while conducting the interview, was not able to illicit information whether or not the *balian* would participate in the ceremonies. Unfortunately, the feedback was that no one knew. One former *balian* who was converted to Protestantism stated that no *balian* was allowed to set foot on the structure because the spirits would be offended and the structure might just collapse. During the opening of the Buklug, surprisingly, there were several *balian* (mostly women). In fact, the one who performed the ritual in purifying the structure was a woman.

The denial of the presence of a *balian* in any ritual confirms Christies' account that:

as a rule, the Subanun, like most other men, is averse to talking to an outsider and unbeliever. . . about the subject of a foreboding that they may, by doing so, perhaps offend some spirit or spirits and thus get themselves or their families into trouble (1909:70).

Many changes have taken place in the Buklug. For instance, there are substitutions of materials and variations in ritual. The changes noted were not made to make their buklug "modern" but that the materials needed were not available. The rituals related to the feast have undergone changes. External variables were the major factors that caused the omission of necessary rituals. Christie stated before that: "It is possible, moreover that ceremonies are changed from time to time even in the same region" (1909:70).

His statement did not explain why these changes are taking place. The external factors that are causing changes in the religious system of the Subanen can be summed up here:

- a. there are very few religious practitioners that are engaged in the activity;
- b. majority of the Subanen are adhering to a syncretic form of Christianity;
- c. the materials needed for the Buklug construction and rituals are getting scarce;
- d. observing all the rituals prior to the construction of the Buklug will be an additional expense for the sponsor;
- e. resources in terms of food to be used to feed the people are limited and very expensive, a state that is causing them to limit their intended rituals and the number of days for their festival; and lastly,
- f. the Buklug workers and the Subanen practitioners follow the demand and wishes of the sponsor of the feast.

Summary and Conclusion

The Buklug of March 4, 5 and 6, 1989 was a manifestation of the survival of a highly organized social institution among the Subanen. The Buklug construction and rituals involved in the festivity have been described. An attempt has been made to compare the work of Christie in 1909, to give the reader an idea of what transpired 80 years ago. Short discussions are made only on points that needed clarification and explanation. The time for the Buklug observation was quite short and inadequate to document everything.

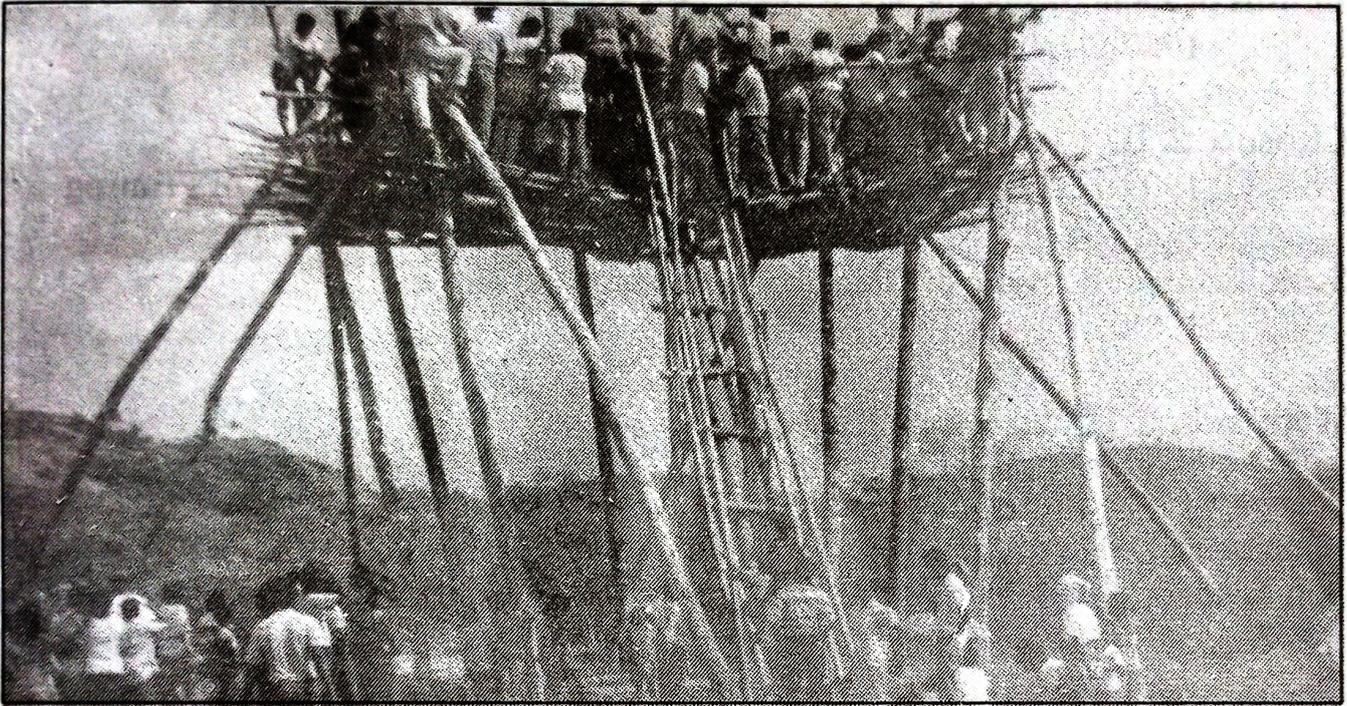
In the Buklug, though there was an attempt to reconstruct the old tradition, some of the rites were omitted in order to make the construction faster and to minimize expenses. As far as the youth were concerned, they were socially aware of the value of the Buklug, though they preferred to do it within the context of the present mode of action and behavior. For instance, instead of wearing the traditional costume when dancing they were in western attire. Drinking *pangasi*, which should be the drink of the occasion, has been substituted with commercial bottled liquor.

The older people showed more aggressiveness in their participation in the Buklug, together with the traditional dance which they performed. This aggressiveness was not openly seen among the youth. They were shy and perhaps in a dilemma about their cultural identity. Many of them stated that even where they live the other local people (the outsiders who came to encroach in their land) regard them as second-class citizens.

The Buklug plays a critical role in the preservation of the value system of the Subanun. This value system which was observed during the celebration (e.g., beliefs, the body of traditions, rituals, ceremonies, etc.) are indicators that no matter what changes are taking place in their social system the above will give stability to the Subanen culture.

Acknowledgments

The writer wishes to thank all the Subanen informants, hosts and guides. Special thanks go to the Local Government of Gotalac for inviting us to be part of the celebration and lastly to Dr. Jesus T. Peralta, who was then Curator of the Anthropology Division and now Director III of the National Museum, Mr. Nick Cuadra, Ms. Eufemia Catolin, of the Fort Pilar, National Museum Branch at Zamboanga City, and Ms. Annie R. Cuadra, all from the National Museum, who were part of the group that documented the Buklug festivity.



View of the Buklugan where three days of continuous dancing on top of the structure took place.



Some Subanen perform their dances on the ground to entertain others.

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