

# When There Is No More Music...or... Dumagat Internal Refugees in The Philippines and The Issues of "Cultural Objecthood"<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In 2002, groups of disparate "indigenous" peoples from the Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines sought refuge somewhere in the Cavite province to escape escalating armed conflict in their localities. Among these groups of people were the Dumagat from the Rizal Province. Long absorbed into the national body politic that has resulted to the loss of an indigenous way of life, this particular Dumagat group disappears from the eyes of the culture brokers as a "cultural object." The purpose of this article is twofold. On the one hand, it aims to interrogate the praxis of ethnomusicology set amidst the backdrop of a culture industry emanating mainly, if not entirely, from the state and its apparatuses. On the other hand, it explores the avenues by which ethnomusicology might be able to refunction, in realising the social realities faced by some of its chosen subjects.*

**Keywords:** *internal refugees, indigenous peoples in conflict, loss in music, cultural objecthood*

*What then is there for him to know about us,  
when we have no more music?*

Nanay Adeling (in translation)  
*Kanlungan* refugee centre

*...they took all the trees, put 'em  
in a tree museum  
and they charged the people  
a dollar and a half just to see 'em...*

Joni Mitchell  
*"Big Yellow Taxi"*

## INTRODUCTION

I am speaking on a subject that for reasons of convenience had to be excluded from my Doctoral Dissertation. Critical as I might have been in the writing of that work (Baes 2004a), I look back to that experience and reflect on how dissertation writing could be a Hegelian exercise which, following up from the work of Harvey (1996: 50–51), might as well be comparable to the Hegelianism in the creation of nation states. Its accounting of contradictions through synthesis, selective processes, and its mutual transformations of "parts" and "wholes" formulate, albeit momentarily, notions of the "absolute." One of my intentions in this paper is to interrogate the praxis of musical scholarship in what appears as its attempts to create, in various degrees, the "absolute." From here I will try to critique that ontology as defined by the structures of power, and plunged into the politics of cultural appropriation.

The other intention is to attempt to push the limits of a field that we have labelled as "ethnomusicology" in the Philippines. In its beginnings, ethnomusicology in the Philippines (and elsewhere) has had peoples alienated from mainstream society as its chosen subjects. The main concern of this study therefore is praxis: theoretically informed action, rather than theory itself. Its reflexivity and dialogic nature is an attempt to a more dynamic, or I might say, a more advocacy-oriented scholarship. In this study therefore, not only are the Dumagat the chosen subjects but cultural workers like Sergio, and "ethnomusicologists" like myself are given focus. This is to say that it is not really the subjects that are given emphasis but the encounter between the subject and cultural worker; subject and "ethnomusicologist;" cultural worker and "ethnomusicologist."

The enticement with so-called indigenous peoples among a number of academics in the Philippines may have progressed from mere curiosity to the excitement of (re)discovery and its imagined significances. The 300 years of colonial subjugation, resulting to the alienation of those who resisted colonial rule—now labelled as "indigenous peoples"—have paradoxically served the purpose of (re)discovery. "Lost" has therefore been used to justify a significance imagined mainly—if not only—by the scholar,<sup>2</sup> and may have contributed significantly to the invention of what is to be referred to as "culture." "Lost" has induced the (re)construction and revival of practices labelled as "cultural" ones. The so-called indigenous peoples have in turn been seen as cultural objects and repositories of once prevalent, and "authentic," pre-colonial cultures in the Philippines. And from thus emerges the creation of institutions and agencies of what could be referred to as a culture industry, with its power derived from the mechanisms of the state and civil society.

It is within that backdrop that I present the case of a particular group of people we have labelled as the Dumagat. This Dumagat was among the disparate groups of people who from 2002 to 2003 have sought refuge somewhere in the Southern Tagalog Region to escape

escalating military presence in their respective localities. Having lost whatever objects or practices that may pertain to their so-called "ethnicity," this particular group of people disappears from the eyes of the culture industry as its cultural object. The issue I wish to present poses hard questions to the field of ethnomusicology, which has traditionally studied music within the rubric and the seduction of "difference."

This article presents an unfinished project, and is like a three-part story that has no ending. It begins with a description of the internal refugees, then zooms-in into the story of the Dumagat named Nanay Adeling. Following that, it will present a remarkable experiment made by the culture worker Sergio of a theatre piece composed with the Dumagat and then performed by them. This theatre piece becomes the basis for my reflections in last segment of the paper, describing my own unfinished project with the so-called Dumagat. The article is like a long background to a foreground that is yet to exist, and its conclusions manifested for the time being, only in my hopes. Therefore, this article attempts to go beyond the questions of music as culture, distorting its imbedded Hegelian manifestations.

#### **BACKGROUND: INTERNAL REFUGEES IN AN "ALL-OUT-WAR" POLICY**

"Internal refugees" refer to those who have escaped the crossfire of ongoing armed conflict in their localities. The perennial confrontation between the government's armed forces with various rebel groups in the hinterlands have caused thousands of local residents in war-torn places to seek refuge in nearby towns and provinces even during the time of the Marcos regime in the 1970s and up to the present (National Council of Churches in the Philippines [NCCP-PACT], 1984; Tunay na Alyansa ng Bayan Alay sa Katutubo [TABAK], 1990; and further reports by e.g., Indigenus-Pilipnas, 1997; Yap and Riches, 1998; see also more recent reports like those in Araya, 2003; Castaneda, 2004). Because the sites of these conflicts are usually in the peripheral "backlands" and "out-of-the-way" places, the so-called indigenous

peoples living in those places are those who bear the consequences and feel much of the impact. As the mountains could no longer provide them with effective "zones of escape," it is necessary for them to leave their homes and livelihood and escape to refugee shelters.

This study is set in one such refugee centre called *kanlungan* (i.e., sanctuary), where 29 families of so-called indigenous peoples from Mindoro Island and Rizal province were given temporary refuge from 2002 to 2003. They include the Iraya-, the Alangan-, and the Hanunoo-Mangyan from Mindoro, as well as the Dumagat and Remontado people from Rizal. Stories heard from those rather disparate groups of people centre on military abuses, which include summary execution, torture, illegal detention, and other forms of harassment and terrorism. Refugees from Mindoro claim that abuses commenced when nine battalions have been fielded for "clean-up" operations in the island, while those from Rizal relate the abuses to geothermal dam projects of a government agency in their province. The people also claim that armed but low-intensity conflict is a follow-through of the government's "all-out-war" policy, following the declaration of the communist New People's Army (NPA) as a terrorist group, in line with the U.S.-led "Global War on Terrorism."

Many refugees in *kanlungan* however see even further from the alleged abuses of the military. Many would claim that militarisation is merely set within a backdrop of commercial interests in the local resources found within their ancestral domain.<sup>3</sup> Those from Mindoro, for instance, are suspicious of the interconnections between military operations and the projects of mining firms, allegedly from Norway and Canada, which for years have had failed attempts to commence in the mountains. Ka Undo,<sup>4</sup> a Hanunoo-Mangyan finds it rather conspicuous that... (in translation) "the military increases in number when the mining operations in Mindoro could not get started because (those of us from the mountains) were against it." Arman, a young Iraya-Mangyan also claims that,

(in translation) a Canadian firm started mining operations in Mindoro in 1998, but they failed in bribing (the people of the mountains) into selling their lands; they tried to bribe some people by giving them wrist watches, at first, then I think (cash)...but we from the mountains could not be bought by those things; we do not like to give up our lands!; they are not ours to give...they are for our children...<sup>5</sup>

Both the so-called Dumagat and the Remontado relate their plight to their opposition to the building of a dam project that would have encroached into their ancestral lands. Despite all claims by the military, the refugees in *kanlungan* all deny any connection with any armed rebel group. However, many of them actively participate in various "inter-tribal" organisations that fight for their ancestral domain claims. One such case that I would zoom-in is that of the family of Nanay Adeling.

### **(TATLONG SALAYSAY) THREE STORIES**

#### **(Salaysay 1) Nanay Adeling's Story**

I first met Nanay Adeling through the cultural worker Sergio in February 2003. Nanay Adeling is a small and slim woman in her 50s. She was about to take a nap in a makeshift *pahingahan* (resting shelter) when we arrived, and beside her were two of her children. I immediately recognised one of her children, the three-year-old Junior, from a picture in one of the locally published magazines with the caption that read: *Kailan kaya makaka-uwi si Junior?* (When will Junior ever come home?).

Nanay Adeling greeted Sergio with a warm smile as he handed her a pack of native coffee and some brown sugar. Sergio introduced me as his friend, co-worker, and as one who wants to know about music among the *katutubo*, as the so-called indigenous peoples in the Philippines are so labelled. Nanay Adeling immediately answered him, but in a nice way, (in translation) "What then is there for him to know about us when we have no more music?" Perhaps that was resentment on her part to a field of inquiry such as mine, where because of the loss of tradition, she would have disappeared from my eyes as a "culture object." I immediately expressed that I did not come for music, but rather to get to know the stories of people in *kanlungan* most especially the Iraya-Mangyan living here, since I have known some of them when they were children. That was when she opened up to me to tell her story.<sup>6</sup>

Nanay Adeling opens her story with an equal amount of resentment: "We had to escape here because my husband was "salvaged" (summarily executed) in our province; he was suspected to be (a member of the) New People's Army, but that is not true." She tells of how her husband spent years, from one presidential regime to another, organising the Dumagat and Remontado living in the mountains of Rizal. They were against a plan to build a dam that would have encroached and driven them away from their ancestral lands. "We are farmers (slash-and-burn horticulturists); (and) if that dam were built," she says, "We would not know where to go. The mountains would not provide us with water." She said that government agents were hindering them from burning the land, as did upland horticulturists. She also saw a great hindrance at going further into the foothills because a government agency has already planted trees in the surrounding areas, so it was no longer possible for them to raise crops since the large roots of the trees would hinder the growth of their crops. And besides, this government agency had put up fences surrounding the reservation, so anybody caught near the area was severely dealt with.

"Land to the *katutubo*," Nanay Adeling emphasises, is life. If the dam (project were) to push through, we would lose all our means of livelihood (which is tantamount to) losing our lives.

At first, some people sought to bribe her husband by making offers to provide him with a land title for his property. "My husband demanded that if that were so, (they) should provide land titles to all (the Dumagat and Remontado families), and not just him." But her husband's option was refused. Sometime later, her husband was gunned down in a gasoline station in Rizal when he was on his way home to bring food for his family.

They (first) made it appear that he was about to rob the gasoline station... (then) they also accused him of being the highest commander of the (communist) NPA. They took a picture of him and published this in the newspapers...with a gun leaning (on his dead body). But all they found with him were a bag with papers from the (tribal organisation) and some bread.

Nanay Adeling's horrifying story did not end there. With the help of some concerned groups, they went to the Philippine Commission on Human Rights to demand justice and due process. From there they were given a chance to speak their case in congress. But like all the other internal refugees in *kanlungan*, Nanay Adeling's case was delayed for "weakness of evidence," to their great dismay.

We brought all our evidence with us...their (the military's) claims were inconsistent, (and yet) the government said we were telling lies, Nanay Adeling angrily said.

To that day, Nanay Adeling was left with empty hopes for her family.

I never dreamed of getting into (this kind of) situation where I would be so helpless, asking for help, she lamented. But now all I could do is asking for some help because we do not have any means of livelihood here (in the refugee camp).

I asked if she ever wanted to return home, and she declared:

I will only want to go if my husband's death is brought to justice. She feared coming home at that point because, as she says, "they might force (her) to surrender," and that her other son is in the "order of battle" of paramilitary units in their area. "The worst," (she claims painfully), is that I have heard that some of the *katutubo* have had a hand in my husband's death.

She was referring to some Remontados and Dumagats who have sold their lands for a very cheap price to the geothermal project.

But I will do my best to unite (the *katutubo*) once more. The most important need of my children now is the land that they have inherited from their father!

### **(Salaysay 2) Sergio's Story of The Production of Pag-uwi**

In this section I turn momentarily from Nanay Adeling's story to the story of Sergio's production of the short children's play *Pag-uwi* (i.e., coming home). Sergio is a playwright and theatre director, and my long-time colleague as cultural worker from Southern Luzon. He came across the case of the Dumagats in *kanlungan* in 2002 and, bearing the zeal of a politicised cultural worker, had sought to produce a play on their story, having the Dumagat children themselves as its actors.

In creating this production Sergio recognised from the beginning that he was dealing primarily with the Dumagat's recent history, more than what he termed as "cultural" issues. (The Dumagat) have, for instance, no memories of their indigenous songs, as they relate more to protest songs (in light of their present situation). He had chosen to highlight their present condition—primarily to the killing of Nanay Adeling's husband—because this was the issue at hand, and all the members of Nanay Adeling's family are presently feeling its impact. That story of Nanay Adeling is strongly connected to those of other internal refugees, with its running themes of minoritisation, marginalisation and militarisation.

The most remarkable aspect of the production is how Sergio had drawn out from Nanay Adeling a number of significant aspects in the play. "We first tried to connect with them by presenting Nanay Adeling with pictures showing traditional Dumagat culture," he said. He had prepared a folio of pictures collected from anthropological reports on the Dumagat, from the past, showing the people's traditional modes of dressing and other implements. These were like cultural objects and knowledge "returned" to their rightful owners in the mode of pictures.

Sergio describes the response from Nanay Adeling:

When Nanay Adeling saw the pictures, all her stories were drawn out. We did not need to ask her about anything. When she saw (a particular) picture of a Dumagat woman wearing a black cloth around her neck, she told us of how the Dumagat (in the past) mourned the dead. She said that the black cloth was worn for a year and after that was left behind in the burial place. Then she also saw the *talikod-mundo* (a kind of lean-to shelter made of coconut leaves and bamboo). She narrated her youthful experiences with that. Those images and objects found their places in our production of her story...of what happened to her family...the colours, the traditional way of life of the Dumagat, the *talikod-mundo*, and (most especially) the death of her husband.<sup>7</sup>

In that sense, the Dumagat, particularly Nanay Adeling was actually composing the play alongside with Sergio. Sergio merely provided the mode of production, which is the play, while Nanay Adeling filled-up all the significant spaces within that mode of production. The play itself was to be presented by Dumagat and Remontado children from *kanlungan*.

Using simple props and stage actions, the 15-to-20 minutes play was mounted in several protest rallies and forums made by internal refugees, with support from local concerned organisations in the Southern Tagalog region. "The children (performing for *Pag-uwi*) see it all as a game," Sergio declares. He continues:

Our rehearsals were in the style of games. Nanay Adeling constructed a *talikod-mundo* for us, and we joined the children in playing inside it. I would tell the children (for instance,) oh, it's getting hotter on this side, what are we to do? and the children would answer, let's turn the shade the other way. The *talikod-mundo* generated so much interest to the children (for this production that they) went there everyday (to play and rehearse). It also became their resting place.

We could not use any concept of rehearsals, bearing in mind that this would be too difficult for the children. We first tried to rehearse in the mode of a workshop, but this (made the children quite) bored that many of them would just leave anytime he or she wanted to. That was why we had to make the rehearsals, and (ultimately) the play itself in the mode of a game.

Just the same, *Pag-uwi* is so flexibly structured that performing the play is like playing a game. Instead of speaking lines, which were to be a burden for children to memorise, it makes use of text placards in the shape of balloons, which the audience could read aloud. The play opens with one of the children of Nanay Adeling showing placards marked "Who are they?" then comes another, "They are the *katutubo*," and another, "Are they the *Badjao*?" and then, "No they are the Dumagat-Remontado." They highlight their way of life by playing in the *talikod-mundo*. It ends by zooming-in to the death of Nanay Adeling's husband.

To Sergio, the very point of putting up the production is to highlight the ultimate aspiration of Nanay Adeling, which in his own words was: to come home and (resume) their simple (sic) life. He adds, "*Pag-uwi* somehow expresses their desire to be understood by mainstream society, and their aspiration to be given a chance to tell their story."

**(Salaysay 3) Thus, My Story Continues...**

Though far from the ideal...or perhaps...Sergio's approach in the production of *Pag-uwi*—particularly in how pictures of Dumagat "objects" had drawn out memories and stories from Nanay Adeling—had demonstrated how objects that have been appropriated by outsiders could be "returned" to their rightful owners. Somehow, it had shown how objects that have long been alienated from the present generation of Dumagat (i.e., Nanay Adeling's children) could be re-claimed and thus become even more meaningful to them. Perhaps this case exhibits what Patrick Flores (2004)<sup>8</sup> had elsewhere labelled as "utopic redemption." But let me qualify Flores' statement in line with the case of Nanay Adeling and Sergio by asking: is the production "utopic" because it seems to have cancelled out a significant conflict in Nanay Adeling's story, that is, her allegations that some Dumagat or Remontado have betrayed their cause, sold their land to the geothermal dam project, and even had a hand in the killing of her husband? That may have been a necessary move on the part of Sergio, though. Thinking perhaps of his audience—the mainstream of Philippine society—he would need to present the Dumagat collectively as the "other."

My reading of Sergio's purpose seems clear. He wanted to introduce this so-called indigenous group to the audience on the cultural level, so that their plight may also be presented and well understood on the political level. The production was a way by which, as he would assume, "the Dumagat's voices (would have been) heard." This is where the production of cultural difference is a politically necessary action in Sergio's praxis as a theatre worker. This probably explains Nanay Adeling's volition to participate freely in the enterprise. To her perhaps, a cultural worker like Sergio is there to work with them (and not only "for" them) in a theatre production.

Recognising what Sergio and the Dumagat had achieved, I understand very well the resentment Nanay Adeling may have felt when I was first introduced as someone who "wants to know about indigenous music." What role, if any, has ethnomusicology assumed in bringing out the voices of those it has chosen as its "subjects?"

Ethnomusicology in the Philippines has already acquired a stable position in a thriving culture industry of festivals, recordings, "schools for living traditions," artificial villages, publications, museums, and even the use of traditional elements in music composition. Ethnomusicologists have in a number of ways metamorphosised from being academics to being "authorities" in the cultural enterprise. Ethnomusicological "projects," like museums, seem to address more the need for nation states to show itself to its own citizens and to the world in the way it wants itself to appear. The situation seems to run parallel to the way Bennet (2005) puts it, that museums are actually "civil laboratories" that also relates to the governance of societies. In the same way, an increasing number of people—many of them commercial artists—have also found in ethnomusicology a "new" arena by which they could negotiate marketability and even influence in the culture industry.

Government agencies and other institutions have worked hand-in-hand with some ethnomusicologists and other researchers on a number of re-generative projects, such as International and National Festivals as well as the so-called "Schools for Living Traditions." In most, if not all, cases however, the so-called indigenous culture bearers are relegated, as mere repositories of tradition, while spaces for their self-determination even in cultural production are not clearly provided.<sup>9</sup> The paradox of the matter is that while these activities have provided spaces for the production of tradition, these activities have also emerged as yet another arena where the so-called culture bearers are marginalised. In seeing themselves to be alienated in these modes of cultural production, they might also be alienated from themselves in being seen as mere repositories of tradition.

Ethnomusicology has made musical instruments, songs, epics, or rituals into cultural objects.<sup>10</sup> In the same manner, sound recordings—the most significant storage apparatus of ethnomusicological knowledge—have also become cultural objects. It has made the intangible (sound), tangible (tapes, CDs, or MDs); it is musical performance in a reified mode. The appropriation of knowledge through ethnomusicology make them more privileged than those like Nanay Adeling and her children, who have been alienated from their tradition because of external pressures and change. However, I keep coming back to Sergio's story and his production of the *Pag-uwi*. And just as Sergio had presented a folio of pictures to the Dumagat, I sought to engage the Dumagat in a listening session.

As I had no recordings of Dumagat traditional music, I did not really know how to begin. How could an ethnomusicologist engage a group of people in a study, when the very object of the study—the music—is lost? On one occasion in *kanlungan*, I was invited in a solidarity meeting among all the internal refugees to speak of my experience with the Iraya-Mangyan of Mindoro in the 1980s. All the tribal representatives of internal refugees were present, among them Nanay Adeling. I presented to them my then recently produced CD of Iraya-Mangyan music, "Nostalgia in a Denuded Rainforest," playing a number of tracks to the delight of those from Mindoro. It was also the occasion where I donated 300 copies of the CDs to be sold in solidarity forums to generate funds for the internal refugees of *kanlungan*. After the session, I went to talk to Nanay Adeling to ask if she remembers any songs like those of the Iraya-Mangyan. She smiled and then responded... "oh, a little similar but the language is very different..."

The following week, I looked into the ethnomusicological archives of Jose Maceda for any recordings of Dumagat music. After acquiring his permission and trust, I was allowed to make a copy of some of the recorded items, and soon after went back to *kanlungan* to meet with

Nanay Adeling and Sergio so that we all could listen to the recordings...thus, my story continues.

## NOTES

1. This article originally appeared as a lecture with the same title delivered at the College of Music, University of the Philippines in September 2004. The present version has been slightly revised from a paper read at the 10th Anniversary Conference of the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) held in Chiang Mai, Thailand in December 2005. A sequel paper follows this present article for a conference on "Small Islands in Transition" to be held in Hong Kong in 2006. The title alludes to an important book published in the 1970s by David Werner, Carol Thuman, and Jane Maxwell (1977/1992), entitled *Where There Is No Doctor*. Narratives in the paper are labelled as *SALAYSAY*, Tagalog word for "narrative," alluding to the structural basis of this paper, which is the three-movement musical composition I wrote in Penang, Malaysia in May 2000 entitled *SALAYSAY* (the story of a story about telling a story called "story"), in admiration of the work of Jean Baudrillard.
2. Yes, one might argue that culture loss is a concern not only of the scholar but even more of the so-called indigenous "culture bearers," as exemplified by people like Bennicio Sokkong or Bai Lolita Tenorio (see Baes 2004a). I strongly believe that Sokkong and Tenorio are true advocates of their respective causes, as they negotiate authenticity and recognition in the field of cultural production. However, perhaps as a historically and socially necessary consequence, these individuals appear to have also become "culture brokers;" they have appropriated and have plunged into the modes of cultural production as set by the locus of power. Those not in the field of cultural production—like for instance Nanay Adeling or Undo mentioned in this paper—are not as concerned with "traditional culture," in the sense of plunging into the field of cultural production set by the mainstream of Philippine society.

3. This is also attested, for instance, in the fact-finding mission reports in Mindanao. See further Indigenus-Pilipinas 1997, or Yap and Riches 1998.
4. Most references to names in this article have been changed so as not to implicate any particular individual in any ongoing conflict, armed or otherwise. The statement is from an interview at *kanlungan* in February 2003.
5. The statement is from an informal get-together in March 2003 with some Iraya-Mangyans who used to live in the Caagutayan area, where I conducted my ethnomusicological research in the 1980s. Arman is an Iraya-Mangyan who remembers me from his childhood.
6. Nanay Adeling's narration (in translation from the original Tagalog), which unfortunately could only be paraphrased in the body of the paper because of its length, will be made available in another upcoming publication.
7. I had a long conversation with Sergio during breaks at a performance of *Pag-uwi* at the University of the Philippines in Los Banos, Laguna (Southern Tagalog) in April 2003.
8. Patrick Flores had brought up the notion of a "utopic redemption" in May 2004 during my Doctoral Dissertation defence at the University of the Philippines.
9. I am citing the cases of Bai Lolita Tenorio from among the Tagakaolo, Molino Oguít from among the Tagabawa-Bagobo, Benny Sokkong of the Kalingga, and Kanapia Kalanduyan of the Maguindanao. Case studies of these individuals appear in my Doctoral Dissertation (Baes 2004a). Another source that has cited other cases is found in the work of Albert Alejo, especially in his account on the Global Indigenous Cultural Olympics/Summit (2000).

10. I am drawing partly from the theories of "cultural objecthood" advanced by Alec McHoul (1994) in relation to cultural objects being items that are alienated from its "sources." My recent reading of a work by Bennet (2005), which was not brought to my attention during the writing of the SEASREP conference paper in November 2005, also further attests by theory and critique of cultural objecthood.

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**Photo 1** *Kanlungan* shelter somewhere in Southern Tagalog



**Photo 2** Kailan Uwi Si Junior (When will Junior come Home?)  
Nanay Adeling and youngest son



**Photo 3** Dumagat children performing *Pag-uwi* in Southern Tagalog