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Dula-Dula sa Haya: A Documentation of the Kulilising Hari Wake Practice in Cebu, Philippines

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Abstract

So little information has been available concerning the traditional wake practices in Cebu, mainly due to the emergence of modern alternatives. One of these is the *Kulilising Hari*, which is rarely or never practiced anymore. This study aimed to document the nature, background, benefits, and the process of the *kulilising hari* wake practice in Cebu, Philippines. For this research, the researchers purposively selected five key informants residing in Capitol, Cebu, where the observance of *kulilising hari* has been noted. Employing a descriptive analysis approach, the study involved extracting insights from the informants' personal viewpoints, which detailed specific incidents or experiences, the individuals involved, and the settings. The findings highlighted that the *Kulilising Hari* practice mirrors the wake customs of the post-colonial Cebu, a period when

alternative means of keeping people engaged during wakes were quite limited. Additionally, the *Kulilising Hari* serves as an extraordinary showcase of the Cebuanos' exceptional talent for spontaneously composing poetic verses. As a result, the researchers recommended the integration of *kulilising hari* into the curriculum for subjects such as Literature, Philippine History or Drama, emphasizing its role within Cebu's Folk Theatrical tradition. Furthermore, the researchers propose distributing copies of the *kulilising hari* literature to educational institutions and cultural offices to promote broader awareness. To further enrich this research, future investigations could delve into the origins of the *Kulilising Hari*, explore the beginnings of this tradition, as well as the lived experiences of those who participated in this wake practice.

Keywords: *Kulilising Hari*, Wake Practices, Theatrical Play, Documentation, Culture and Arts

Introduction

Rituals or wake practices are ceremonies that adhere to religious rites, revered and traditional ways of honoring a religion or culture. Researchers have examined practices associated with death in various Filipino cultures (Sabanpan-Yu, 2009), yet so little has been known about the observance of these in the country's urban areas hence, it is important to reinforce the documentation of the *kulilising hari* wake practice found to be done in Cebu.

Young men and women engaged in impromptu lyrical exchanges as part of the wooing practice known as *kulilising hari* at significantly practice sized Catholic wakes. There are three different forms of kulilisi recognized in Cebuano cultural history, one of which is the *kulilising hari*, or "kulilisi of the king." The Cebuano lyrical poem known as kulilisi is comparable to the Tagalog duplo. A socio-religious play called "*Kulilising hari*" is played at wakes by grieving family members and others who have come to console the grieving family. (Echavez, 1966).

A Visayan word called "balac" means "many different genres or forms of poetry," including exalting or denigrating spoken word or words that are sung, performed, orated ("quien dize o haze o cante"). It also incorporates the "orasyon", or spoken prayer, in a ceremony (Mansueto, 2006). "Balak" remains the name currently used for poetry in Cebuano, however, it more particularly refers to the "formal application of poetry" according to Mojares (1973) as stated by Dico (2018). The balak poetry form was included in nearly all cultural acts and expressions, including verses, songs, dances, games, and other activities in Cebu, Siquijor, Bohol, Leyte, Negros Oriental, and portions of Mindanao. It is actually permanently entwined with universal cultural manifestations like practices, courtship, conventions, and performances, as a trans-genre that reveals the oral histories of many folks' lives at various moments in time (Dico, 2021).

In a typical Filipino wake, mourners congregate at the funeral home or the deceased's home to pay their respects. Instead of

waiting to be invited, they proactively seek out such households in order to meet cultural expectations (Sabanpu-Yu, 2009) [15]. Meanwhile, the elders of the indigenous people of Benguet carry out a practice known as bangil the night before the funeral. A bangil is a chanted biography-like recitation of the life of the departed. The deceased is guided to paradise by friends and family by beating bamboo sticks together. Similarly, the Ilocano people also have a funeral and burial tradition called pompon which translates to burial rites. This practice involves chanting while weeping which is said to show respect for them and assure that the departed will make it to heaven safely.

There are various beliefs adhered to by the people regarding their death and burial practices and practices which guide the Cordillerans' way of life. These beliefs are regulative in the sense that they serve as significant determinants of the practices and procedures prevailing during the wake. The burial activities are means of communication with the dead relatives mostly done to seek their blessings and assistance, to ward off evil, and to secure for the dead an everlasting place of rest and peace (Celino, 1990).

A similar practice is also observed in other parts of the world, specifically in Ireland. When a loved one passes away in a rural area of Ireland, friends and neighbors gather around the body to "wake" it. After spending some time in deep mourning for their lost loved one, the group gathers to honor the life of the deceased with food and whiskey. Irish and Celtic poems and prayers written from both the perspectives of the mourners and deceased loved one are often heard at the wake and funeral. At the wake and funeral, it's common to hear Irish and Celtic poems and prayers written from the perspectives of the mourners and the deceased loved one. (Bakken Young, n.d)

While such practice during wake is still present in the indigenous localities in the Philippines, it is extremely rare to see one in Cebu. According to Tongco (2019), the characteristics that make us Filipinos are at risk of extinction due to modernity. Furthermore, Tongco emphasized that while advancement is beneficial, it should not be a drawback in our efforts to protect the things that should be saved as a piece of our customs and way of living. This prompted the researchers to study the wake practice in Cebu in the hopes of learning about the significance and thus coming up with ways to spread awareness about it and preserve this wake culture.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to document the nature, background, benefits and the process of doing the *kulilising hari* wake practice in Cebu, Philippines.

Materials and Methods

Design

The study will utilize the Descriptive Qualitative research design. This design will produce data from the informant's personal perspective detailing the incidents or experiences, the people involved, and the setting (Kim *et al.*, 2017) [8]. In contrast to other qualitative designs, qualitative descriptive research does not necessitate a conceptual or highly abstract rendering of the data, and it should be viewed as a categorical, as opposed to a non-categorical, alternative for inquiry. It is also less interpretive than an "interpretive description" approach because it does not require the

researcher to move as far from or into the data; and, in comparison to other qualitative designs, does not require a conceptual or highly abstract rendering of the data (Sandelowski, 2012). Through this approach, the wake practice in Cebu which involves offering verses will be documented and interpreted in its unique context.

Informants and Sampling Design

The study will be taken part by the Cebuanos or the people residing in Cebu. Six (6) prospective informants will be carefully considered for involvement in this study. Purposive sampling was utilized in selecting these informants. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method where participants are selected based on specific characteristics or qualities because they possess qualities that the study requires in the sample (Nikolopoulou, 2022) [12]. Choosing informants utilizing purposive sampling techniques necessitates the researcher to specify criteria for inclusion (EdTech Books, 2020) [6]. The participants of this research will be selected on the basis of the following requirement: (a) is living in Cebu, Philippines for at least 20-30 years; (b) must be at least 18 years old or above; (c) has the knowledge and experience of balak giving play during the wake; and (d) who has the will to share the information.

Locale

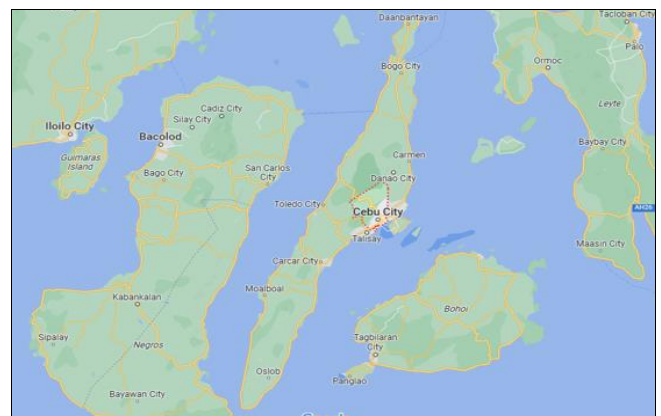


Fig 1: Map of Cebu

The study will be conducted in Cebu. Cebu is the locale of the study since it is said that this is where the *kulilising hari* practice during wake was done before. The island of Cebu is 122 miles (196 km) long, although it is little more than 20 miles (32 km) wide in many places. The Visayan Sea, Tanon Strait, Bohol Strait, and Camotes Sea border the area on all four sides. (East). (Brittanica, 2013)

Instrumentation

To obtain the acceptable data needed, the researchers will serve as the instrument in gathering the data that is suitable for the study. Semi-structured interviews will be employed in combination with some guide questions. There will be open-ended questions based on the presented related studies, identified gaps, and the informant's perceptions of the *kulilising hari* wake practices of Cebu. Informants will be required to respond verbally to the questions, which will take about 15-20 minutes and will be recorded using cell phones.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers will participate in a research design hearing with the experts to ensure a better outcome for the project. All of the feedback will be taken into account and used as a basis for revision. The researchers must then adhere to the standards set forth by the Research Ethics Committee after receiving approval from the panel. (REC). The university's ethics review board will assess this work to ensure that no unethical behavior will be seen during the study's conduct. The researchers may begin the study once the board provides their approval. The university president will receive a transmittal letter together with the article in order to request approval for the researcher to carry out the study. Once the study is approved, the researchers will formally invite the qualified key informants to participate in the study by sending them informed consent. On the basis of the informant's convenience, process orientation and scheduling for one-on-one interviews will be negotiated. Following data collection, the researchers will analyze the data using the methods outlined above under the direction of a research adviser.

Data Analysis

According to Kim *et al.* (2017) [8], qualitative descriptive research produces data that expresses the "who, what, and where of events or experiences" from a subjective viewpoint. According to Lincoln *et al.* (2017), this research approach aligns well with constructionism and critical theories that utilize interpretive and naturalistic methods on a philosophical level.

Descriptive qualitative analysis has a number of common features.

1. Analyzing and organizing the data.
2. The original data collected by observation, interviews, documentation analysis, etc. is given codes.
3. Adding remarks (memos), reflections, etc.
4. Attempting to spot words, concepts, relationships, and sequences that are similar.
5. Using these trends and topics will assist to concentrate the upcoming data collection phase.
6. Developing a limited number of generalizations that address the trends you notice in the data over time.
7. Connecting these generalizations to a body of information that has been formally organized into constructs or hypotheses.

Rigor of the Study

Four procedures—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability—that Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed were used to ensure reliability for each research parameter.

Credibility. Concurring with Maher *et al.* (2018), validity guaranteed that the study's estimations were on target to depict member reactions. This can be finished by making compatibility and creating a relationship of belief earlier to information gathering. Before the meeting, the analyst welcomed most sources and briefed them on the reason for the investigation.

Dependability. To guarantee that adequate points of interest were given in which the ponder might be duplicated by other analysts, dependence was reliably connected (Maher *et al.*, 2018). All collected data was based on the reactions of key sources. After interpreting the meeting tapes, the analysts will guarantee that the collected information will be approved by the pertinent witnesses. One open-ended

address will be postured, and as it were the reactions of key sources will be considered for follow-up. A bunch of inquiries about pros assessed the address for approval reasons.

Confirmability. To guarantee the study's reproducibility, the researchers will consolidate an information examination strategy that is suitable for the study's nature. In expansion, the original copy must clearly demonstrate that manual coding was performed with the help of an expert, in understanding Braun and Clarke's subject investigation. This will be done to confirm that the collected information is accurately inspected. All data will be double-checked to affirm that information was based on source reactions and there was no inclination within the information investigation.

Transferability. Transferability will be utilized to relate the appropriateness of the consideration to diverse settings or areas of research (Maher *et al.*, 2018). The center of the study will be on the documentation of the *kulilising hari* in Cebu, Philippines. The researcher will work as the study's investigator. Recordings and field notes shall comprise the researcher's notes, journal, paper, and information investigation. Specific consideration will be paid to the determination of the full number and capabilities of key informants. The researchers will allow other analysts to assess the transferability of the consideration to their claim.

Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed by the university's Research Ethics Committee (REC) to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines. The committee's approval of the study's ethical clearance signifies its support to conduct the study. The informants received informed consent before the one-on-one interview. Moreover, the interview guide questions were also reviewed and approved by the research experts to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines. The informants were given grocery goods for their cooperation in the study as well. Authors of relevant research and works cited in the study were properly credited or cited in the manuscript and reference section.

Results & Discussions

This section presents the nature, background, benefits and the process of doing the *Kulilising Hari* wake practice in Cebu, Philippines.

Nature and Background of Kulilising Hari

Cebu, known as "The Queen of the South," sets itself apart with its thriving literary culture. A fourth of the population of the nation speaks Cebuano, and Cebuano literature is widely available in Cebu, Bohol, Siquijor, and Negros Oriental. Among these literary pieces is the *kulilising hari*.

The cultural heritage of Cebu includes three distinct forms of kulilisi, with "the kulilisi of the king" being one of them. Kulilisi, which can be likened to the Tagalog duplo or poetic verse, is an essential element in Cebuano culture. The term "mga berso sa kulilisi" pertains to the poetic verses used in these kulilisi performances. The *kulilising hari* is a folk theatrical play in which individuals recite poems while competing with one another after prayers are done during wakes. It was originally a courting argument presided over by the *kulilising hari*, who arbitrates the verbal duel (Echavez, 1966). Meanwhile in Libos, Leyte, there exists a variation of kulilisi referred to as *kulasasi* or *hari'hari* (also known as *panyung palaran*, which translates to "lucky

handkerchief"). This form of *kulilisi* which aligned with the description of the key informants in this study is still performed during wakes as a traditional folk activity, allowing individuals to demonstrate their skills in spontaneous verse composition, as documented by Albuero in 2006.

"It started during the 1900's, maybe 1950's, 40's or 30's. I was born in 1957 and when we arrived here in 1969, I was eleven years old." - KI 4

"It's been a long time, back when I was 16 years old, in 1981, my father was already involved in kulilisi as a hari, but aside from my father, there were others who also took the role of another hari in that tradition." - KI 5

As per the accounts provided by the informants, the earliest instances of the *kulilising hari* practice that they observed and participated in Cebu can be traced back to approximately 1915 and continued until around 1981. During this time, elders from various provinces would come to offer their condolences to grieving families in Cebu. Additionally, Sala-Boza's 2007 study, "The *Kulilisi* of the King," documented a similar practice in Barili, Cebu, around 1950. Although it is believed that this tradition developed during the Spanish colonial era, no specific proponent of the *kulilising hari* can be identified, as the transmission of this practice relies on the oral traditions passed down by the elder members of the community.

"It's like a game to play for people to not feel sleepy. It's just for fun. Because there were no cards nor mahjong before. It's not the same now that you gamble during wakes." - KI 4

"Yes, it's just to get rid of boredom, that's really what I remember. I can't recall it very clearly, but what I distinctly remember is that, as long as our boredom went away. It's different now, as when people gather there, some of them gamble to dispel their boredom, but it doesn't always work." - KI 1

The motivation driving this wake tradition, as indicated by the gathered accounts, all converge on a single underlying factor: entertainment. According to the informants, although it was crucial to show respect for the deceased during their wakes, people in the past often struggled to stay alert, which led to the emergence of this wake practice. This assertion contradicts the notion presented by Sala-Boza (2007) [16], which characterizes *kulilising hari* as a folk-Catholic courtship practice. Simultaneously, it aligns with Geertz's concept of a "blurred genre" (1983) since the *kulilising hari* proved challenging to classify within Western performance genre conventions.

The Process

The *kulilising hari*, which is often conducted during wakes to provide entertainment, is manifested as a debate regarding a variety of subjects involving two or more participants. To start the play, the *kulilising hari* commences by tossing a handkerchief into the air and waiting for it to descend before the next participant delivers their verse. In addition to the *kulilising hari* and its participants, an intermediary also

intervenes to facilitate and oversee the exchange of verses.

Formation: Round formation

Props: Chairs for participants
Handkerchief (white or red)

Themes: No specific theme (depends on the initiator or the participants)

The *kulilising hari* play follows a structured series of steps to ensure smooth and entertaining verse exchanges:

1. *Kulilising Hari's Opening*: The *kulilising hari* takes the initial role and sets the stage for the play by launching the handkerchief into the air, signaling the beginning of the exchange.

Lupad panyong palaran (fly, handkerchief, fly and)
Tugpa sa akong ginhalaran (alight on the lady I admire;)
Minyo siya kon dalaga (whether she's single or married) *Hala, Inday, ako tubaga* (now, lady, respond to me)

This passage is from a courtship play called *kulilising hari*, which explores the intersection of religious themes. It can be found in the book "Folk Culture of the Central Visayas Kalinangan Series 2" published by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports. While there isn't a portrayal of this play in a funeral context, it is understood that the first two lines are recited and then followed by lines that delve into specific themes or subjects.

Some examples that the informants shared were along the lines of "*nagtanum kog sa sangig daplin sa kamalig, sa gugma mo ako dili magpasalig*" (I planted by the bamboo grove next to the hut, in your love, I will not be complacent.)

2. *Verse Delivery*: The individual closest to the landing point of the handkerchief then takes their turn to deliver a verse, typically on a chosen topic or theme.

In Aklan there is a practice called *luwa*, which is performed during funerals. *Luwa* verses were traditionally recited at gatherings held after someone's passing as a way to playfully penalize the person who lost in games, like *konggit*, truth or consequence or *bordon*. These verses are especially valued when they include rhymes, rhythm and a dash of humor. (Cichon, 2012)

Pag-agto ko sa Ibajay, (When I arrived in Ibajay,)
May hakita ako nga patay; (I encountered a lifeless body on my way;)
Ginbagting ko ra eagay, (I just tapped it lightly, nay)
Mas mabaskog pa sa lingganay. (But it was even louder than a rooster's bay)

3. *Response with Verses*: The verse delivery will set off a chain reaction, as another participant responds with their own verse, often in direct response or continuation of the preceding one.

Moreover, one informant shared an example of a dialogue that revolves around poetry during a courtship between a male and female.

Lalaki: Lamalamanuha ning akong kamot na tuo wala kini kubali sa tako ge kubalan kini sa daro (I'll cherish this right hand of mine, though it may endure the scars of life's trials.)

Babaye: Akoy dili molamano sa kamot mong tuo kay abi nalang unya sa mga tao nga kita managtrato (I won't dare clasp your right hand, for let the world assume what it may about our connection.)

4. Mediator's Role: At a certain point, a mediator intervenes to maintain order and ensure that the exchange of verses remains engaging and coherent. The mediator may announce their agreement with the verses or provide feedback on the verses exchanged. The last speaker in the current round then tosses the handkerchief to signal the continuation of the exchange.

5. Continuation of Exchange: The exchange of verses persists, with participants taking turns to deliver their verses, building upon or creatively responding to the previous contributions. The mediator periodically steps in to manage the flow of the exchange.

6. Conclusion by Mediator: When all participants have had the opportunity to contribute verses, the mediator intervenes one final time to summarize or conclude the segment of the play, ensuring that it concludes on a cohesive note.

7. Kulilising Hari's Closing: The *kulilising hari* officially ends the play by making an announcement or gesture, signifying the conclusion of the entertaining and culturally significant *kulilising hari* event.

Gutierrez (1961)^[7] expresses concern that Cebuano-Visayan literature remains in a fragmented state, with little effort invested in its collection and preservation. For example, the *balitao*, once considered the pinnacle of Visayan creative expression, and the *kulilising hari* are scarcely documented in print. These literary treasures may still be primarily held by Cebuano writers themselves, their relatives, or are sporadically found in publications awaiting publication. Despite the modernization of cultural practices, the traditional art of *kulilising hari* still persists as a resilient vestige of Cebuano heritage, deserving of documentation and conservation for the benefit of future generations.

Conclusion

The *Kulilising Hari* serves as a showcase of the Cebuanos' remarkable talent for spontaneous and poetic verse composition. The absence of a specific point of origin, coupled with its enduring presence based on oral traditions within the provinces of Cebu, showcases its deep-rooted cultural significance. Furthermore, this wake practice reflected the customs of wakes during the post-colonial period, a time when alternative means of entertainment to keep people alert were scarce.

Recommendation

Having documented the *Kulilising Hari* wake practice, it is recommended to strengthen its inclusion in the curriculum for subjects like Literature, Philippine History or Drama at the elementary, high school, and college levels, emphasizing its role within Cebu's Folk Theatrical tradition. Furthermore, it is suggested that a copy of the *Kulilising Hari* literature be distributed to educational institutions and cultural offices to

facilitate wider dissemination.

To enhance and enrich this research, further investigations can explore the beginnings of this wake tradition and lived experiences of those who experienced it.

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