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Babaylan: She Dances in Wholeness

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"...I do healing with my dance..."

*-Teresita Lugam,
Balyan of the Sama people
of Penaplata, Samal Island,
Davao City (1)*

Mother babaylan Mary John Mananzan, dear sisters and mentors in the women's movement, friends, and co-seekers of an authentic, healing, and holistic Filipino spirituality, magandang umaga / maayong buntag, and I greet you with the warm peace /salaam/ kalinaw aspirations of the Mindanao people!

Daghang salamat, and mabuhay kayo/tayo for launching this gathering of spirited and babaylan-inspired women, (that is now) yearning to come full circle, as we celebrate 100 years of feminism in the Philippines. For having been chosen to keynote this herstorical assembly of babaylans, scholars and believers of our babaylan tradition, I am deeply honored, at the same time overwhelmed, by the responsibility of faithfully reflecting the spirit of the babaylan.

For as balyans or babaylans like Teresita Lugam have always maintained, "It is a balyan alone, Magbabaya's (God's) chosen one, who can perform the dance, she who speaks Magbabaya's language to the tribe". (2) The task, therefore, of entering and understanding the babaylan's world—to see into the wholeness of her culture— can only be done with utmost care and reverence. But I can only speak of a few meaningful encounters with indigenous babaylans, ...and now, I have the audacity to speak on their behalf?...Perhaps my being menopausal is an acceptable qualification?

...But seriously now, it has been written by babaylan history expert, Dr. Zeus Salazar, that babaylan women became babaylan usually during this period in their lives (3), because it takes a long, arduous process for her to be initiated into the sacred ancient wisdom of the women before her, and to be able to master and manifest this gift in the service of her people.

I am not sure if I have been wizened by half a hundred years behind me, or if indeed, the babaylan spirit in my cells / DNA is now rising from its dormant state, but I know one truth: that I have woven in my heart the threads of stories of Mindanao women baylan / babaylan / balyan / waylan / mabalian / beliyon / magbulungay, a number of whom I had

the privilege to meet, and also of women who may not be conferred with this hallowed title, but who have retained the life-affirming elements of our primal culture in their worldviews and ways.

So allow me to introduce to you, though in a very limited way, some of these wise women, whose words, like the rare song of a bird, only a lush forest may hear...

Glimpses of the Babaylan in Mindanao

Meet Iding / Macaria (she's at the extreme left—of this fading picture) the first Manobo baylan I met from Agusan del Sur, whose words, during the first consultation on Women and Religion with Lumad women in 1991, profoundly struck the spiritual chords of a small group of women now called Hinabi Women's Circle:

"Nganong kinahanglan man i-sangyaw sa mga Kristiyanos ang Ginoo / Dios? Dayag man unta ang Dios sa kinaiyahan. Nganong dili nalang kaplagan ang Dios sa kinaiyahan?"(We wonder why Christians need to preach about God, when God's Presence is clear in all of Creation. Why do Christians not allow Creation to make God known to us?) Iding further observed: "The forest is now being destroyed because the Christians removed God from it. They put God in a building. If you do not see God living in nature, you would not hesitate to destroy it..." (The Lumad peoples of Mindanao refer to settlers as Kristiyanos, or dagsa, dayo, Bisaya, or dumagat.)

And this is Tagutong, or Victorina (her Christian name), who was the babaylan of the Manggwangan in New Corella, Davao del Norte (she has crossed over to the next life). Tagutong was the one who performed a ritual for us, asking the spirits to bless the research that we conducted with them. Apart from healing methods, Tagutong's abyan (helping spirit /spirit guide) taught her the gift of looking for the missing dead (like someone who drowned), though the babaylan stressed that she does not have the gift of foretelling, only of healing.

Meet U'ye, who comes from a family of Dibabawon baylans, though not a baylan herself, became a tambalan (community health worker). She once dreamt about an old male spirit who taught her what tree in the forest may be used to cure cases of bughat (relapse). Following the old man's instructions, U'ye searched hard until she found the tree— exactly as her dream visualized it; and as she was told, U'ye picked only the leaves and roots facing the sun, eastwards. U'ye swears by the efficacy of the medicine she discovered through her dream.

Meet Angelita, a Bogobo manghihilot and midwife in Catigan, Davao City. Catigan means "wisdom" in Bogobo. Catigan is blessed with abundant springs, known to be the ancient Bogobo's dasalan or ukom (which translates to "four sacred sites/altars") and now known for sightings of the Blessed Mother Mary. People would bathe in the natural springs of Her grotto and reports of healing are heard now and then. Anyway, Angelita's paternal grandmother, Ampeh, was a sought-after mabalian (shaman) and baek pandae (woman leader), who, she says, in an attempt to make me understand, was both a "Divine Master" and "like a senadora"... I am not sure if "master" and "senadora" are respectable or accurate terms to describe her revered grandmother—but Angelita told me that their Bogobo datus of old would not go to war if Ampeh did not foresee victory for them. Ampeh was a seer, Angelita explained, almost exactly in the words (if translated) Prof. Fe Mangahas wrote about the babaylan, who had a "keen sense of foretelling the outcome of political events and

conflicts, a skill which they interconnected with the omens of the stars and nature and the power of the gods". (4)

A woman settler landowner now acts as the custodian of the Blessed Mother's healing springs, and in our conversation, we noted Catigan's abundant history of divine feminine energies, though their manifestations seem to change with the generally acceptable image at a given time.

This is Emil, a Banwaon Manobo babaiyon (woman datu) from Balit, San Luis, Agusan del Sur, whose aunt was a baylan. Emil's indigenous name is Inay di Kalayuban or "Unwavering Mother with a Strong Foundation". In my last encounter with her, she and her tribe were having trouble with the military contingent that was organizing Lumad CHDFs (Civilian Home Defense Forces) in Balit. She and an organization of brave Banwaon women called KABUDAGAN, thus initiated a dialogue with the military men to complain about the recruitment of their husbands into the CHDF. Before this meeting, the women prevailed upon their husbands to not join the dialogue, claiming that if they left it to the men—"mag-init lang ang panaglalis" (the dialogue will definitely turn into a heated argument). During the dialogue, Emil and the women candidly asked, to the amused consternation of the military men: "If our men became CHDFs, this will mean they won't be beside us at night. Who will provide us warmth during cold nights? And who will help us till the land?" Women like Emil certainly know the difference between the heat that warms the heart, and the heat that conflagrates!

On certain occasions, Emil continued to narrate, one of the KABUDAGAN women would flag down a logging truck to "inspect" it for depleting their tree resources. Then she proceeded to narrate to me what she told another Manobo woman who purportedly betrayed her tribe by serving as an "inte" or spy for the military, which we might find meaningful for these, our chaotic and trying times: "Abi nimo, (you know)," she told me, "I told this woman who kept denying that she was a spy for the military, 'You are not Manobo if you are dishonest towards your people!'"....If only we can proudly say the same thing as a people, as Filipinos: You cannot call yourself a Filipino if you are dishonest with your kapwa Filipino....

Tomasa, a soft-spoken Sarangani Manobo magbulungay in Biton II, Malita, Davao del Sur explained that the way to deal with the busaw or "evil spirit" (because there are malevolent as well as benevolent spirits), is to calmly propitiate him/it. She befriends the disease-causing spirit through a trance or a dream, with the help of her abyan. She also described Timanem (God) as One "...who is just beside me....Timanem accompanies clouds as well as mud..." Another baylan in Biton II is an expert in "dam-dam", the practice of using seven special herbs for healing festering wounds.

I have been regaled with stories of how Crescencia, an industrious peasant woman settler, deals with environmental problems in their uma (farm). Crescencia reveals that the kwahaw (kalaw) bird's call "Kwahaw! Kwahaw!" signals a dry spell (kaya di ba parang "Uhaw! Uhaw!") She would place a frog in the middle of the parched field nakadupa (nakatihaya), to implore for rain from God. It should be said that ground water sources like this well, which provided accessible and potable water for Crescencia, her growing family, and her farm's needs, have never dried up in barrio Anibungan, Compostela Valley, Davao del Norte. But in 1997, banana plantations like Marsman and Ayala started to be installed in Compostela Valley. Ground water sources started to disappear; four years later, in 2002, water from Crescencia's well completely disappeared.

It is plain to see that the plantations' giant pipes have siphoned off all of the ground

water sources of Crescencia's land. Non-stop flowing and oftentimes wasted water that could be seen spilling out from these pipes, seem to mirror the irony of nature's abundance—now under the control of the greed of a few. Still, Crescencia and her husband would place crabs in their now-dry well, hoping these crawling helpers will point them to other sources of water.

In the past, the vines of this tree, which were originally two meters above a clean river, were clung to by Crescencia's children and their playmates, before diving for a cool, soothing bath. But soil erosion caused by flashfloods, caused by the proliferation of logging concessions in surrounding mountains, has dried up and raised the level of the riverbed; this tree's vines are the silent but eloquent witness to the environmental changes harming the sources of water—and consequently, the reproductive and productive work patterns of women like Crescencia. She now relies heavily on rain for water, confident that the hordes of *ibus* insects would faithfully announce the coming downpour. She feels blessed, however, that tap water has been finally installed in Anibungan, even if she now has to cough up hard-earned funds, to pay for water she has now to fetch from afar.

Manikwan, a cheerful B'laan shaman-healer from Nueva Villa, Lawa, Davao del Sur, was the one I felt the strongest connection with, and yet I do not have a picture of her, when I sought her out sometime in 1997. (Because I never thought I'd be doing this!) I did not, because I heard and read about another B'laan priestess, Mokayo, who shunned picture taking because (she believed that) it incurred gaba (a curse). Instead, this is a picture of a rather sad-looking B'laan. It was Manikwan, who, like this B'laan woman in her colorful, tinkling, shaman m'long garb, who lamented before me: "*Huu D'wata! Unsaon na ang pag-ampo kon wala nay kalasangan?*" (How can we worship You, D'wata—without the forest?) The lush forest groves of Lawa seemed to disappear at the same time when Lawa (which means both "bodies of water" and "the human body"), was renamed after a Spanish settler, Don Marcelino... (Oh yes, Manikwan also lamented the fact that I did not bring a camera!)

Manikwan also claimed that her (abyan's) healing power ebbs when members of her tribe do not follow the teachings of D'wata (God), which, coming from her, sounded as simple and natural as the rustle of trees: Do not dominate. Sow no intrigues. Be generous. Dance. Sing /Chant. For the fructuous use of the land, offer rituals of permission and thanksgiving to the guardian spirits. Her niece and interpreter, Irene, claimed that Manikwan is able to heal unusual maladies that even doctors cannot cure.

Manikwan's abyan is her own daughter whose birth interfaced with death, and is said to have been fathered by an engkanto (enchanted being). It was Manikwan who endearingly said to me, "Had I known that you believed in our ways, I would have brought *her* (referring to her abyan) with me to sing for you", giving me and co-seeker of stories, Ditz Villas, the goose bumps. The B'laan women around us nodded their heads at our apparent disbelief, describing for us the beautiful otherworldly voice of Manikwan's abyan-daughter. Today, Manikwan can no longer be contacted as the long drought has forced her to search for a less harsh environment—perhaps where kinder spirits are...?

Here is Myrna (2nd from right), a T'boli woman from Marbel, South Cotabato, who said during the 1991 consultation of Lumad women: "D'wata has no image...But now we see pictures of God as a man. Still, we believe that God has no image, because D'wata / God is all." She also uttered these memorable lines, which I have synthesized for brevity: "The land is being overworked, ravaged, and so are we as women.... Let the violation stop. Let the land and women rest from giving.... We need to regain our lost strength and energies...."

...And these are the Aromanen Manobo baylans of Pigkawayan, Cotabato,

introduced to us via a friend, Karl Gaspar. An all-women group clad in white and led by a baylan oversees the thanksgiving for the earth's yield in a year-end (December 30) ritual. In this picture, you see a baylan, who in the previous evening, communicated with her abyan to divine the future of the village. The baylan, as she appears here, and other older women, lead the procession of more than a hundred women towards the ritual site. The women are guiding the girls through a circular movement.

The rest of the women clad in their malongs and the girl children we previously viewed—who wear white bandanas—are the 'virgins' who were the first ones to follow the baylan's instructions to stay at the women's lodge the night before. There, they received precious advice from the baylan, in an evening all-women ritual.

Offerings to the spirits or abyans are set up on the main ritual site or altar. The men, some of whom are datus (chieftains) also dressed in white and yellow, gather around the ritual site, as they wait for the women to arrive....

You must be wondering why the color white and yellow... I, too, am in wonder, and can only show you this picture of the "Women in White" silent protest action during the height of the Estrada administration's all-out war in Mindanao, when Erap and his uniformed henchmen, bombed the Narciso Ramos highway in Cotabato City and several Moro communities, in blatant violation of a ceasefire agreement with the MILF (Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front); later, Erap clad in fatigue—added a mocking insult to injury by eating pork in the Moro camp his men destroyed. We also conducted the same Women in White mass action during the initial stages of the balikatan (American military training) exercises under the present dispensation, this time with gongs and kulintang to sound the alarm....(Not exactly a "serenade", as the news caption says.)

Babaylan-like sisters in Davao and I once wore white or yellow for basking and ritual in the healing energy of one October full moon, when it was at its "second strongest". That these were potent colors, according to a Chinese feng shui expert, were all we knew then. As we did our 11 o'clock evening ritual, on the elevated grounds of a seminary, the moon's silver light energized the water we brought. (This photo is not that October full moon, but it is the moon alright). The women would look forward to rare rituals like this one, which they say is energizing food for their hungry, weary spirits....

...So, to continue with the Arumanen Manobo women in white...All the villagers and guests then move in a circle around the ritual site. The movement only stops when the baylan announces that the spirits have arrived. After another round of four circle movements, the women return to the all-women house. The men then take over, with a cock fight of two ugis (white roosters). They are very interested in the outcome of the cockfight, because it validates the abyan's foretelling of the future through the baylan. The forecast last year was that 2005 is neither a good or bad year for the Aromanen Manobo. Let us hope it is the same for the rest of us—for the rest of the year!

...From these stories of holy, healing, mystic women, one can glean qualities or a consciousness that lays buried in the underworld of our collective unconscious, because of historical realities that started with the Spanish friar, and yet manifests now and then, in many of our beliefs and practices as Filipinos, especially of our women.

Our reclaiming of a babaylan consciousness obviously speaks of a need for appropriate ways for it to fit into our present (feminist) consciousness. But what is this need or void that we are trying to fill? Or what are the implications of this reemergence of a

babaylan consciousness...the babaylan spirit that is asserting her self now among us?

Elements and Implications of the Babaylan's Dance

I am sure insightful and inspiring thoughts about these concerns shall dance around us in abundance today, which is why we are all gathered here. For my part, may I just humbly propose these interweaving elements of an *evolving* babaylan consciousness—which I shall also call the babaylan's dance—and their implications:

Implications for evolving a Filipino feminist (spirituality) paradigm that is holistic and authentic.

Perhaps we all agree that the seed of an inclusive, immanent and holistic Filipino (indigenous) spirituality was first sowed in the seedbed of our babaylan tradition. And though its full blossoming may have been derailed and delayed by both forcible and subtle alien influences on our psyche, it is to the credit of the babaylan's persistent dance, in the shadows of our psyche, or in what the psychoanalyst Carl Jung terms as our "collective unconscious", that has kept the seed alive. Otherwise, we would not be inviting her to take center stage as we are doing now. Or perhaps she is really the one inviting us to her dance, so that the message of the Divine, through our different healing spirit guides, may be more perceptible to us.

....The babaylan seems to invite us to first understand that in her dance, body and spirit are one. In our indigenous cultures, although there is a word for spirit beings—*diwata* or *anito*, I still have to hear a distinct word for "spirituality", because spirituality for them, and for our first ancestors, is as natural as breathing or dancing. The closest one could get is "*pag-diwata*", but still, it is quite not the same as "spirituality". This seems to imply that the spirit or the Divine is not split from the body in a binary way. For as Iding, the Manobo baylan, said, creation (which is physical) is suffused with the Spirit/spirits/the Divine. Josefina, a Dibabawon woman (extreme right), during one focus group discussion, likewise reflected: "Sagrado kita. We are sacred because we come from Magbabaya. Why do Christians go to such lengths in trying to prove this?"...And then she further asked a research partner, Vivien Nobles: "Just because we cannot read—or read the bible—does that make us less sacred?"

It is now said by scientists that the movement of atoms, even in every stone and rock of nature, is that of a dance. Don't our indigenous sisters and brothers know this so well?... This implies that there is no such thing as "inanimate" in creation; one only becomes inanimate when one does not fulfill one's part in—and partake of—the dance of life.

We are thus invited by the babaylan's dance to be more embodied in our spirituality: to speak the voice and move the movements of the Divine /Divinity already present in each one of us. The babaylan's psyche, her body, is the channel of the Divine, when her body dances the healing movements and her voice chants the message of the abyan, her spirit guide who is helping the people through her. Beyond the ritual she presides, she dances. Her dance is both literal and metaphorical, and these also do not seem to be clearly differentiated in the babaylan.

Since our original babaylan consciousness has been reinterpreted—mangled— by the threatened Spanish friar and conquistador, we have been habituated into dualistic thinking.

But so-called dualisms like the spirit and the body /earthy/sensual, the ancient and the new, the mystical and the scientific, the beginning and the end, the rational and the intuitive, conscious and unconscious, (with)in and (with)out, light and dark/shadow, god and goddess, female and male, anima and animus, nature and culture, sexuality and spirituality, immanence and transcendence, certainty and mystery— all imply each other, are brought into balance, in the babaylan's dance.... And she, with her people, dances not only in joyous thanksgiving and celebration, but even in the most precarious conditions, like during an epidemic, to ward off or propitiate the dis-ease-causing spirits. Indeed, in her dance, wala siyang kaparis!

And perhaps the babaylan's dance is saying that the political, as well as the personal, moral/ethical, spiritual, cultural, socio-economic, environmental and cosmic realms are not unrelated, but intertwining parts, of the whole/totality. Feminists know this only too well in proving that the personal is also political, and the divide between the reproductive and productive spheres an artificial social construct. It would seem that in the babaylan's dance, one realm cannot be "more central" than the other. In other words, babaylan consciousness seems to be circular and cyclical /spiraling, not linear and dichotomous, where a new development cancels out the other, or the past. And because her dance is cyclical, a movement that is in synch with nature's ways, it cannot but manifest itself in whatever way possible, no matter the repression wrought on her, our babaylan.

Consider the original babaylan and the realms she navigated, internalized, and interfaced in her dance: She presided over all the rituals of her people, from planting to harvest, from birth, dis-ease, to death, from weddings, hunts, wars, to victory. Aside from being a priest, she was an empowered healer, midwife, herbalist, a trusted confidante, a reputed and wise counselor/adviser, a mediator (between humans), a medium or bridge (between humans and the spirit world), a historian, a visionary/clairvoyant, an environmentalist and cosmologist. She was not only a mystic/ shaman, but also an influential leader grounded in almost all of life's different spheres; she was not only a talented poet / chanter and dramatic artist, but it has also been written that she was a "proto-scientist". (5) And in the words of Fr. Francisco Demetrio, she had "the ability to read the secrets of men's hearts....For a person who can engage the foes of the community, especially the unseen ones, enter into struggle with them, and come out usually victorious, cannot but be a psychological pillar of her people". (6)

And the babaylan who was a spiritual warrior, also became a warrior in the corporeal sense (7), when times called for it. For example, Lina Sagara Reyes wrote that Salud was a legendary babaylan of Kagayhaan who is said to have "led a revolt against the invading religion". (8) And as researched by Carolyn Brewer and our feminist scholars who are with us now, the babaylan fiercely resisted, and in fact made it extremely difficult, for the Spanish friars' taking over our people's landholdings, our culture, our bodies, and our psyche. And even in these times when we think that babaylans may have lost much to assimilation, journalist Germelina Lacorte wrote that the Sama priestess Teresita Lugam, chanted: "Magtanud kanami! Protect us from the Bisaya! We've always been persecuted, maltreated, looked down upon. This has become a show. Magtanud kanami! Protect us!" during a government tourism-sponsored Pangapog (thanksgiving ritual in time for the August harvest), that she was "commissioned" to preside over. When asked why she chanted such words, Teresita told the journalist that these are Magbabaya's words, not hers. (Teresita's Catholic baptism did not prevent her from becoming a balyan, like her grandmother and great grandmother before her.) (9)

Contemporary Pinay feminists are no stranger to such kinds of risks the warrior-babaylan took, although it has been also written that there were babaylans who chose to

"penetrate" the new religion. (10) And I'm sure there'll be more very interesting data from this symposium about how the babaylan coped with the invaders.

In this seed of wholeness of our primal culture, the Filipino woman was originally privileged in both her spirituality (as babaylan) and sexuality (the *mujer indigena* who was originally at home in her body, which was considered the matrix of creation's generative capacities.) But eventually, as we now would know, the bodies of our babaylan and our *mujer indigena* became demonized as "satanic" and "the root of evil"... Yet, the pristine/pure (holy) and wild (which really means "in its original, natural state", and not "obscene") still seem to have the same meaning for many of our indigenous peoples—like the T'boli, Teduray, or the Palawan.

In our newly conceptualized ecofeminist /women and wholeness project, named *Gihambin*, in Davao, so as not to confuse spirituality with the old school concept of it being "palutang-lutang" (out of touch), "hiwalay" (separate), or "hindi naka-ugat sa konkretong situasyon at sa lupa" (not rooted in the concrete situation and on the ground / earth), we most of the time refer to "spirituality" as simply "wholeness". And also because the word "spirituality" seems to connote that the spirit is privileged over honoring our bodies as sacred, that it is separate from flesh and blood realities, and the fact that there seems to be no exact indigenous word for it.

Of course, in any religious tradition, as it is in any culture, both life-giving and life-denying practices exist. The project of reclaiming the liberating teachings of religion for women, i.e. Christianity and Islam, has already been well-developed by feminist theologians. But our Western overcoat, which our feminism, may also have, to some extent, consciously or unconsciously adhered to, has been covering the beautiful body of our primal spirituality for too long a time. Our bodies and psyches are saying that we are outgrowing that constricting coat. Should our abiyans choose to discard it or to recycle—reweave it with the redeeming patterns of our primal spirituality?

Whatever we do, perhaps we are also called to remember our Asianness. Our babaylan energy resonates more with the energies of Asia's rich heritage of different spiritualities, and they could also be summed up in a spirituality of Oneness. I would like to quote Madonna Kolbenschlag's synthesis of these spiritualities: Life and Death are One; Time, Space, and Matter are One; Knowledge and Sensing are One; Nature and Human Consciousness are One; Either/Or is really Both/And; You and I are One; and We are One Body of the One. (11)...Yin and Yang.

14,000 years ago, according to a new DNA study, 200 people from Asia crossed the land bridge to North America—and became the progenitors of all Native Americans. (12) This connection all the more makes the fact that our Lumad /Katutubo and Native American / Indian peoples have very similar worldviews, not surprising.

...The babaylan's dance intuits for us the whole, inviting us to take wholeness as our "point of departure" in our spirituality. She dances in, and also towards wholeness.

A holistic spirituality inevitably brings us to implications for our ecology, indigenous peoples, and our health / wellness.

When we study the issues of women, ecology and indigenous peoples, we cannot but come to the conclusion that the health of our planet is inextricably linked to the well-being of indigenous peoples who are her most devoted stewards, and to the nurturing qualities of

the human species, especially of women. The disparaging of the wisdom and life ways of indigenous peoples and women has taken its toll on the health of our planet.

And like Manikwan, how can the babaylan be when our forests are balding? How can we fully enter the dance of the babaylan, when our land is hemorrhaging? How can the cat-alonan be, without the talon, which literally means both forest and waterfalls? No wonder, present indigenous babaylans are hardly the picture of what she once was—as lush, proud and rich as the earth herself.

A Subanun woman once said, “When they took away our forest, they took away God from us”. (13) Even as I speak, the Subanen people in Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte are risking their lives while resisting a Canadian-funded mining company threatening them if they do not vacate their homes, their land. Unrestricted mining companies brandish like a weapon the so-called “constitutionality of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995” and licenses granted by GMA, making a mockery of the Subanens’ only semblance of legal protection left: a hard-earned Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT). (14) All over our islands, but especially in Mindanao, huge environmentally unsustainable and unsuitable plantations and logging concessions, like the ones near Crescencia’s barrio, continue to operate “legally” while small-time or impoverished violators of environmental laws are the ones being penalized.

Even as I speak, our natural source of water in Davao, our watersheds, are fast depleting because of an imbalanced demand and supply (simply put, wastage), effluents from nearby banana plantations, and the dry spell caused by related environmental factors. The irony is that while our watersheds are fast diminishing, there are more and more occurrences of flashfloods everywhere in our country. And concerned environmentalists and scientists all over the world urgently meeting in Europe are saying that the planet’s sea level is alarmingly rising because of global warming, which in turn is causing extreme cold in other parts of the planet.

I am sure we all agree with Myrna that the Earth is saying she has had more than enough abuse. And that she is very angry. She is now licking her deep wounds all over the places of her body and will do what it takes for her to recover from all the brutality inflicted on her. Because she has to regain her balance, she has to heal herself. Even if her body is shivering with chills on one part and with high fever on the other, she seems to know what to do, with or without us. For it is the human species, who are out of synch, and in a self-destructive, extinctive mode, not she. What are her tsunamis compared to the collective horrors and holocausts power-hungry men of the world have for centuries riddled on Her body, on “inferior” peoples and other species, and on the bodies of women?

So perhaps this is why it is urgent, indeed, that we invoke the power of our babaylan consciousness in full force. “You are a real baylan if the rhythm is in your body,” said a daughter of the Sama baylan, Teresita. Mukhang sinasabi ng Inang Kalikasan / Kinaiyahan sa atin, sabi nga ni Maria Morales sa akin—“Sabayan na natin siya”, she seems to be leading the way, speaking out for us women and indigenous peoples, and we should maximize this situation to speak out with her, and learn how to heed Her signs like a babaylan does.

...The babaylan’s ability to intuit the connections of the health of the environment with bodily health in her healing dance further brings us to our wellness concerns. It has been written that in shamanic cultures, dancing and drumming are believed to have jump-started an ailing spirit, or we can say, a weakened immune system. (15) The babaylan tradition of so-called folk medicine (which consists of herbs, hilot, natural birthing, dance, and ritual) and what we now call “alternative” modalities, belong to the business of healing and well-

ness; while allopathic or Western medicine is mainly in the business of curing and sickness. Even so, it has been pointed out that there are more and more Filipino women doctors and this owes in no small amount to the inclusive trait of the babaylan in them.

Sometimes the question may occur in our minds (as it does with me): What right do I have being in the business of wellness, when I myself am not in perfect health? The answer, again, lies in the absence of duality in indigenous cultures. Richard Katz, a clinical psychologist who has studied the healing traditions of a number of indigenous peoples says that the Zhu /twasi of Kalahari (Southern Africa) taught him that: "...healing itself is not based on rational, acquired knowledge but on shared, spiritual energy. ...There is no boundary between the healer and the one being healed; each of us is suffering...everyone in a healing dance receives healing energy because everyone needs it. Curing a particular illness is only one small part of healing....Healing is a process, a movement; it is a transition toward balance, connectedness, meaning and wholeness. When we see healing as movement rather than outcome, we discover a beautiful truth: Healing is not a once-and-for-all process....If we create healing communities—people who get together, work with each other, and warmly support each other—healing becomes part of everyday life". (16)

That one's healing journey is very much also a spiritual journey is a story I am sure we all share. Let us then share our healing stories and create more healing circles.

...Holism also has implications for justice, peace and dialogue. The babaylan also tells us that dialogue and conflict-resolution are both an art and skill that have to be tapped from our rational, spiritual, and intuitive resources. She encourages us to continue to learn the art of knowing, sa pagpupulso, pag-pakikiramdam, pagtantiya, sa angkop at tamang timpla ng medisina at kung napapanahon nga ba, when to dialogue, placate, and when, like Emil, said, that the one way to deal with a busaw is "Mag-rally!" This does not only mean street protests, but showing our collective will, and our readiness to defend it.

In our present context, especially in Mindanao, this is an extremely difficult thing to muster. Years of painstaking efforts at dialogue and peace on the ground are always brought many eons back by each regime's simplistic, superficial, insensitive, Manila-centric, hypocritical and uninformed tack—or should we say attacks—on the peace agenda and processes of our ever-simmering Mindanao. (Hindi nakapagtataka kung ang batang "bakwit", evacuee, na ito, ay matandang "bakwit" na, pa rin, hanggang ngayon.)

Still, the fact that there are peace advocates working in remote areas, from Cotabato to Lanao to Zamboanga to Jolo, who have not given up, is inspiring to the (Mindanawon) soul. And yes, women have been the traditional peace-weavers of their tribes. The Talaandig people of Bukidnon say that in their culture, when a crisis in their tribe becomes untenable, it is a woman leader who is called upon to mediate the conflicting parties. Among Moro communities, we find women who can be both healer and peace-negotiator. (Ironically, women also are the ones who end up doing the mopping up operations, after the men leave their spoils of war.) As another Sama balyan, Natividad Lorenzana, maintains: "The Spirit watches over the one with a 'good heart' and chooses her to be His/Her voice". (17) The need to bring to the peace negotiating table more of "the ones with good hearts", especially those among the women, is still an aching need to be addressed.

...But the babaylan is also saying that the dance is being jeopardized by the fact that almost all indigenous cultures, including our own, are at risk in terms of their survival. We cannot talk about wholeness or indigenous peoples' wellsprings of wisdom, or the babaylan, without recognizing that they face the possibility of cultural genocide, along with the loss of their ancestral domains. We have an obligation to give *back* something of what has been

taken away from our indigenous peoples. And it is said that respectful collaboration, more than appropriation, is the right option for our mutual growth....

And babaylan consciousness has implications for Filipino women (re)claiming their own power and identity, sisterhood, community, diversity and interdependence.

The babaylans Iding, Tagutong, Tomasa and Manikwan are not arrogant, but not necessarily self-effacing. This encourages us to not hide anymore or negate our ways of knowing and perceiving the world. Claiming shamanic power, it is said, is not only a conceptual work but a work from within. Once we begin to step and act outside of our conditioning, this also gives new space for our core, but oftentimes latent—because it has been repressed in various ways—energy, this energy that other cultures call the awakened “kundalini”. Dancing the babaylan is all about claiming inner power that already lives in our very core, our inner depths, our kaloob-looban or kahiladman, that we may own the divine power that is already within.

We have come a long way—(more than) a hundred years— in our processes of mentoring each other, challenging each other, affirming each other, all in empowering nurturance of each other, and ever vigilant that we do not fall into the very same models—traps— we criticize. Of course, the “peaks and abysses”, as Sr. Mary John Mananzan put it, (18) again, are part and parcel of the spiritual journey—of the healing dance. We are still fashioning new paradigms, we are works in progress—which all the more makes connecting with each other imperative.

The babaylan’s dance also points to possible alternative meaningful symbols for our counter-consciousness project. As searching feminists, we may be now familiar with ancient goddesses of different cultures and may have been inspired by the images they evoke, as symbolic of our own journeys. And perhaps, we are now looking to our own (potentially) inspiring goddess myths, like perhaps that of Maria Makiling...and other indigenous mythical earth goddesses who seem to be calling out to us, to recreate a realm that seems to still pulsate with primordial energy— the realm of what has been termed “the dangerous submerged memory”, the ancient stories—the songs never heard—of our people.

...Babaylans like Manikwan, Tagutong and Tomasa belong to a community and at the same time tend to be outside of it. The original babaylan seemed to also be sufficient unto herself, yet worked in a team, hand in hand with other members of our indigenous “four-cornered” leadership of the barangay: the datu (chieftain), the panday (blacksmith), and the bagani (warrior). Instead of being “four-tiered”—which is hierarchical—it is four-cornered, which seems to validate their roles in equal measure, though the datu was politically the head. The babaylan also has some of the qualities of the other leaders who tended to be male. She is both independent and interdependent with the rest, much like nature’s species are.

Diversity is also a worldview that seems to be ingrained in the babaylan’s dance. A closer look at nature points to infinite diversity as a given. As it is with nature, to be an asog or a homosexual are not considered aberrations in our primal culture. This is true among the Teduray of Cotabato, as it is true in Chile, where their shamans, who are called macha (not in the sense of how macho women are called “macha” among some feminists here). Their macha / machi are 85% women and 15% gay men.

The babaylan’s dance also assumes that other species and spirits (from those of our ancestors to nature deities), not only human beings, are very much a part of the entire community.

Remembering, Reclaiming, Reinventing the Dance of the Babaylan

...I have encountered the babaylan not only in the persons of Iding, Manikwan, U'ye, Myrna and Emil. Her spirit lives in the women and men behind ecology and spirituality farms, that you and I have witnessed growing roots and sprouting, whether in Mendez, or in Baguio, in Davao; We have heard her singing soothing, nostalgic, and playful Philippine lullabies; She is in my sister in Davao who can immobilize cancer cells by the very acts of her compassionate nature, and when she accompanies a friend in the throes of death across the gate of the afterlife; She chants and dances for our tired spirit in her stylized indigenous tunes; She or he crafts culturally sensitive art work as well as original ideas and theories (and some are right here among us now); and of course, she is your babaylan-warrior advocate of women's rights. She is alive in your holistic doctor and in my dentist who talks about opening up the chakras, meridians, energy blocks, the psycho-emotional issue/meaning behind this bodily ache and that, when she honors the intuitive decisions of "my higher self"(and other dentists call her a weirdo); She is in the mothers who came before us, like my mother in law, who prepared an aromatic post-partum bath of healing herbs for me, and in my own mother who lovingly prayed over me when I was sick, as well as over a coconut tree dangerously leaning over her home, one stormy weather...Where women lean on, and reach out to each other, she is there.

... It is said that this age which is now upon us, is the age of women, water, healing, and memory. Among the indigenous people of Peru, there is a Quechua term "Nayra pacha" which means both "the future" and "remembering the past." Again, one implies the other. Ang pagalaala sa kasaysayan ay siya ring pagalala para sa hinaharap. Our memory, as women, seems to be serving us well today.

The babaylan has long trodden a path to the Divine for us that only now science is beginning to comprehend. She comes to us, so that we may come full circle in our evolution, in our emerging as authentic women Pinays. May the flowering of, what Prof. Mangahas has coined as "babaylan feminism", bear abundant fruit today and always.

Seeing the babaylan in you, now smiling at (the babaylan in) me, shows that she is alive and well, she who continued, added to, or reinvented the cultural resources of her community, into what she perceived to be meaningful for the times. Honoring the babaylan of our common heritage is, after all, all about be-ing, and honoring who we really are.

...May we all continue to dance with the babaylan, the dance of wholeness, so that all may have life in its fullness.

Maraming, daghang salamat, at mabuhay ang babaylan!

NOTES

(1) Germelina A. Lacorte. "The Balyans of Penaplata", www.Mindanews.com Vol. II No. 99. A Publication of the Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center, August 14, 2003.

(2) *ibid.*

- (3) See Zeus Salazar. "Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas", *Women's Role in Philippine History*, 2001, p. 217.
- (4) Fe Mangahas. "From Babaylan to Suffragettes / Filipino Women from 1500s to the Early 1900s", revised and reprinted from Kamalayan, ed. by Pennie Azarcon, 1987, p. 6.
- (5) See _____. "Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas", *Women's Role in Philippine History*, 2001, p. 213.
- (6) Demetrio, Fernando, Zialcita. *The Soul Book*. Quezon City, GCF Books, 1991, p. 131.
- (7) Marian Pastor-Roces, cited by Carolyn Brewer. *Holy Confrontation / Religion, Gender and Sexuality in the Philippines 1521-1685*, Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College, Manila, 2001, p. 168.
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- (12) Ilya Garger. "Notebook". *Numbers*, Time Magazine, June 6, 2005, p. 15.
- (13) Peter Leonard, SC. *Journeying with Others / The Art of Being a Soul Friend*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ, U.S.A. Claretian Publications, 1992, pp. 3-4.
- (14) Maryanne Mutch. *Mining Company tells Subanen Community to Cooperate or Face Immediate Eviction*. DIOPIM Committee on Mining Issues (DCMI), February 14, 2005.
- (15) Vicky Noble. *Shakti Woman Healing Our Fire, Healing Our World The New Female Shamanism*. HarperSanfrancisco, 1991, p. 242.
- (16) Richard Katz. "The Wisdom of Ancient Healers", *Sacred Stories A Celebration of the Power of Story to Transform and Heal*, ed. by Charles and Anne Simpkinson, New York, 1993, pp. 255-259.
- (17) _____. "The Balyans of Penaplata", www.Mindanews.com Vol. II No. 99. A Publication of the Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center, August 14, 2003.
- (18) Mary John Mananzan, OSB. "Emerging Spirituality of Women: The Asian Experience", *Dialogue with Women...The Encounter of Spiritualities*, Info on Human Development, Vol. 18 Nos. 3-4, March-April 1991, p. 11.

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Separate conversations with Maria Morales, Chic Ramoso, Albert Recknagel, Karl Gaspar, and Floramie Labella.

Visual credits (As presented in Flash):

Mandaya babaylan photos- Development Education Media Services (DEMS),
from personal collection

Bogobo tribe painting- Mark Tolentino

Lawa scenery and Sarangani Manobo photos- PROTEAM Services

Catigan photos (Angelita, grotto)- Fr. Carlos Abesamis, SJ

Crescencia, environmental problems in Anibungan- Floramie Labella

Friar juxtaposed with babaylan and crab drawings- The Soul Book

Arumanen Manobo baylan and ritual- Bro. Karl Gaspar, CSsR

The Babaylan's Dance (drawing/diagram)- Agnes N. Micalat-Cacayan

B'laan trio- Philippine Daily Inquirer magazine

Mujer indigena photo- from the thesis "Unframing the Mujer Indigena",
by Maria Asuncion Azcuna

Moro women dancing- Philippine Art Scene, _____

Palawan forest and denuded mangrove- PTFPP

Macaria, Myrna, Emil, Tagutong, and Manggwangan and Dibabawon women-
Hinabi Women's Circle

Manobo altar- SILDAP-SIDLAKAN, Inc.

Ancient Goddesses (Nakatasuhime, Snake Goddess, Laussel Venus, and Isis),
acid rain, and war (Russia and Vietnam) photos- J.M. Roberts, World History

Artists of Filipino goddesses:

Tuglibong- Roberto Feleo (The Soul Book)

Maria Makiling- Rosel Valenzuela

Mebuyan (3 interpretations)- Nana Buxani, Roberto Feleo (The Soul Book),
and Mark Tolentino

Other photos from personal collection

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