

7 ICLLCE 2017-48 Genevieve Jorolan-Quintero

Mga Saysay sa Katigulangan (Tales of the Folks): Re-telling Unwritten Stories, Re-viewing History

Genevieve Jorolan-Quintero
Humanities Department, University of the Philippines
Davao City, Philippines
gjquintero@up.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Oral narratives, including the stories of the folk and contemporary urban legends, continue to fascinate researchers and those who are fond of listening to accounts that inspire awe, curiosity, even horror. Although considered as woven by imaginative minds, these narratives may also contain truths or facts relevant to the local history of a place. Brgy. Mintal, home to UP Mindanao is rich in the culture of its people whose stories are yet to be told and written down. It is these narratives that hold significant information about the history of the place and the experiences of its settlers. The output of this project is a collection of oral narratives recorded from members of the Senior Citizens Association of Brgy. Mintal. The narratives are grouped into four (4) themes: 1) Mintal Landmarks which deals with the history of important institutions and structures in Brgy. Mintal; 2) The Japanese Gold which deals with the various accounts about how the Japanese buried treasures all over Mintal and how these were retrieved years after the Second World War; 3) The Road to Progress which briefly narrates the economic growth of the barangay and the role of key political figures as perceived by the resource persons; and 4) Other stories which include a ghost story and a brief account on the well-known healer of Mintal, Nong Hildo.

Keywords: Sugilanon, Brgy. Mintal, Japanese Gold, Japanese Occupation, Brgy. Mintal Senior Citizens Association

Introduction

The Second World War marked the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Historical accounts claim that “For over three years and right to the day of Japan’s surrender, the Philippines were to suffer grievously under the depredations of military occupation.” (<https://sites.ualberta.ca/~vmitchel/fw6.html>)

The impact of the Japanese presence in the country was marked by unrest, economic decline, and political instability, which finally led to the liberation and declaration of independence in 1945.

Japanese occupation of the Philippines was opposed by large-scale underground and guerrilla activity. The Philippine Army continued to fight the Japanese in a guerrilla war and was considered a back up unit of the United States Army. Their effectiveness was such that by the end of the war, Japan controlled only twelve of the forty-eight provinces. The major element of resistance in the Central Luzon area was furnished by the Hukbalahap (Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon - "People's Army Against the Japanese"), which armed some 30,000 people and extended their control over much of Luzon. Japan’s efforts to win Filipino loyalty found expression in the establishment (Oct. 14, 1943) of a “Philippine Republic,” with José P. Laurel, former Supreme Court justice, as president. But the people suffered greatly from Japanese brutality, and the puppet

government added little support... In August 1944, Vice President Sergio Osmeña became president. He returned to the Philippines with the first liberation forces, which surprised the Japanese by landing (Oct. 20, 1944) at Leyte, in the heart of the islands, after months of U.S. air strikes against Mindanao. The Philippine government was established at Tacloban, Leyte, on Oct. 23.

(http://www.philippinecountry.com/philippine_history/japanese_colonization)

Aside from the capital city of Manila, the War also caused havoc in the southern part of the country, particularly Davao City in Mindanao. Corcino (2011) described the condition of this part of the country in his manuscript "Davao: An Introduction to its History."

When the City of Davao began on March 1, 1937, its population was listed at about 68,000. By 1940 it increased to 98,000. By 1945, despite the toll and dispersion caused by the Japanese invasion in December 1941, the city's population by estimate in 1946 increased to 111,263. World War II brought considerable destruction to the new city and numerous setbacks to the earlier economic and physical strides made prior to the Japanese occupation. Davao was among the earliest to be occupied by the invading Japanese Forces, and they immediately fortified the city as the bastion of Japanese defense system. It was subjected by the returning forces of Gen. Mac Arthur to constant bombing, long before the American Liberation Forces landed in Leyte in October 1945. In the US Liberation of Davao, the Japanese Forces put up their tenacious stand in countless pillboxes and tunnels. It was here where the longest battle campaign took place in the liberation of the Philippines: six months duration and the enemy holding on for over a month more following the official surrender of Japan in mid - August 1945. More lives were lost here than in any other city in the country. Davao's destruction, followed by a swell of thousands of guerrillas who wanted to squat former-Japanese owned plantations, together with a deluge of sickly refugees from the mountains, added to the physical and economic problems of the City. (<http://www.davaocity.gov.ph/davao/profile.aspx>)

A further perusal of the history of Davao City will highlight the economic contribution of the Japanese to the City. They occupied a specific area known today as Brgy. Mintal. In its website, Brgy. Mintal provides this brief description of the Japanese occupation:

Mintal...was once a portion of the vast land property of Datu Intal, who was a Bagobo chieftain, who left the legacy of its name when he died in 1889. Later, the first wave of Japanese came in the year 1901. Mintaro (Japanese pronunciation for Mintal), flourished and was the first place in Davao to be known as "Little Tokyo" characterized mainly by its progress in the fields of agriculture, industry, and commerce. In 1941, with the collaborative effort of groups of Cebuanos and Boholanos, who were pioneers, Mintal rose anew from the ashes of World War II. (<http://www.barangaymintal.info/index.php>)

In 2004, Ayson and Campado conducted a research about Brgy. Mintal entitled *Barangay Mintal, Davao City: The Little Tokyo of Prewar Philippines, 1900-1942*. Included in their report is a description of the relationship between the Bagobos who were the original settlers of the area, and the Japanese colonizers who came during the Second World War. Ayson and Campado referred to the works of Hayase (1984) and Mori (1988):

Hayase (1984) reports that the early Japanese had the opportunity to establish harmonious social relations with tribal people, particularly the Bagobo. The Bagobo highly esteemed the former that several became datus. The abaca boom in World War I, however, changed the landscape of the Japanese-Bagobo relations. It brought in a great number of Japanese capitalists to the area pushing the Bagobos further into the middle and upland regions. The opening of virgin forests to abaca plantation consequently resulted in the destruction of the habitat of wild animals and birds. Some creeks became dry depriving the Bagobo of their sustenance, such as fresh fish, wild animals, and fowl... (Mori, 1988).

This historical account on the abaca plantations in Brgy. Mintal is echoed by the narratives shared by the resource persons of this current study. Published historical data such as those of Hayase and Mori provide the reader or students of history relevant information about a particular event or phenomenon. Oral history which is unwritten and unpublished is inspired by the collective experience and collective memory of a people. These oral accounts become keys to data and information which may otherwise be missed out by written history. As Thompson (1988) puts it:

Oral history provides a source quite similar in character to published autobiography, but much wider in scope. The overwhelming majority of published autobiographies are from a restricted group of political, social, and intellectual leaders, and even when the historian is lucky enough to find an autobiography from the particular place, time, and social group which he happens to need it may well give little or no attention to the point at issue. Oral historians, by contrast, may choose precisely whom to interview and what to ask about. The interview will provide too a means of discovering written documents and photographs which would not have otherwise been traced. The confines of the scholar's world are no longer the well-thumbed volumes of the old catalogue.

Sangster (1994) echoes Thompson's idea stating that, "Oral history may also illuminate the collective scripts of a social group, revealing, for instance, how and why peoples' memories of their workplaces or communities are created." In the case of Brgy. Mintal, the elder folks, members of the Senior Citizens Association, shared similar perceptions and details about how events in their barangay came to be, a phenomenon described by Vansina (1985):

Group accounts are the typical oral traditions of many authors. They are the oral memories of groups such as villages, chiefdoms, kingdoms, associations... they embody something which expresses the identity of the group in which they are told...they are often the property of a group...

Complementing Vansina's concept, Green (2004) points to Halbwachs' theory of collective memory as memory that "functions as a mechanism that unites groups and cements identity...which ignores conflicting memories, and tends to suggest that those memories that do not accord with the group gradually fade from memory." This establishes the relevance of referring to the residents of a community about events, phenomena, even peculiarities related to their place and experiences. This study paves the way to learning more about Brgy. Mintal through the narratives of its folks.

Objectives

The main objective of this project is to collect, record, and put into writing the oral narratives, the *sugilanon*, of the residents of Brgy. Mintal. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What stories about the history of Brgy. Mintal do its folks, the elder members of the community, still recall?
2. What are the common themes, or subject matter, of these stories?
3. What are the most popular stories among the folks of Brgy. Mintal?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant for the following reasons:

1. The narratives contain information about the local history of a specific area, in this case Brgy. Mintal in Davao City, which may not have been considered or recorded in published written history. This information can be validated by scholars of history for further research.
2. The narratives, as they are coming from actual residents/ informants, are first-hand or primary sources of information about the culture, economic and political growth of the area.
3. The narratives will inspire creative work from students of writing, especially from the Creating Writing Program of the University of the Philippines, and from recognized local and national writers as well as artists. Stories, both fiction and creative non-fiction, are mediums of communicating significant shared experiences.
4. The narratives will provide relevant materials for further historical studies and researches on the history of Brgy. Mintal, Davao City, and the Philippines especially related to the Japanese occupation and its impact on Philippine society.

Materials and Methods

Both the interview and the focus group discussion were used in the recording of the narratives. Twenty (20) members of the Senior Citizens Association of Brgy. Mintal, aged 65-75 years old, participated in the sharing sessions.

To achieve the objectives of the project, the following specific steps were done:

1. Selected members of the Senior Citizens Association of Brgy. Mintal as resource persons
2. Recorded the oral narratives as told by the resource persons
3. Transcribed and Wrote down the narratives
4. Translated the Visayan transcriptions into English
5. Conducted a final consultation with the resource persons to validate the written texts

Related Literature and Studies

Stories have always been fascinating to people, whether they reflect real events or the imaginative creations of the storyteller. In the past, and in the absence of written records, knowledge and information were passed on by word of mouth, through narratives. It is therefore not surprising that oral narratives are considered to be valuable especially among indigenous communities as they are sources of knowledge and information about events especially those in the past, knowledge which need to be shared and spread for posterity.

Despite the influx of information through technology which is making knowledge about the world more accessible, there are stories, narratives of shared experiences that

need to be recorded and studied further to determine their relevance to what is known and what is yet to be known.

In his article “Oral Narratives of Personal Experience,” Labov (1997) defines narratives as “as one way of recounting past events...” and that “...most adult narratives are more than a simple reporting of events.”

Anderson (2012) stressed that “Oral narratives similarly inhabit an invisible territory; with each word drips another second in time, thought in space, and connection to memory.” In telling and sharing stories, therefore, the bard or the narrator relies on memory based often on actual first hand experiences, or a remembered story retold.

Lott (2002) in her study of the Griots of West Africa noted that:

In West Africa, written history is something new. African history was written in European languages during the colonial era beginning in the late 1800s, and has been around in Arabic for centuries. But societies in the Sahel and Savanna regions of West Africa have long kept their own history, in their own languages, orally, in the form of epics.

Dickason (2005, as cited by Johnson, 2015) pointed out that “indigenous history cannot be read literally, but must be interpreted and this is largely to the present as an ongoing process” Memory according to Wheeler (2005, as cited by Johnson 2015) “is a beautiful gift, and in context with Indigenous oral traditions is resonant on senses that evoke emotional responses and causes a relationship to grow between the storyteller and the listener.” Wheeler further observed that “historians are slowly coming to realize that Indigenous oral traditions offer new insights and valuable information on significant historical events.”

In her study of a Northeast Indian community, Darlong (2014) described the recorded oral narratives of the community:

The general themes of the tales are adventures, love, beauty hunting, hero tales, legendary tales, revenge and vengeance. The tales also manipulate the customs, rites and rituals of the people, beliefs faculty to form the plots and sub-plots or the wardrobe of it. On the other hand, they also record all the notable events of the past embedded with thought provoking stories revealing the historical, cultural, inhabitation, religious aspect and names of the kings, queens and chieftains of the community in the past.

This puts the oral narratives and history on the same level, where the former becomes medium for transmitting knowledge and information, and the latter is the record of these.

Results and Discussion

The FGD with the members of the Brgy. Mintal Senior Citizens Association yielded several narratives ranging from their recollections of the history of Brgy. Mintal from the Japanese occupation to the official creation of the barangay in the 1950s, and also included some fantastic stories like a ghost story and the story of Nong Hildo the Healer.

Based on the common topics, the narratives are categorized into four (4): 1) Mintal Landmarks which deals with the history of important institutions and structures in Brgy. Mintal; 2) The Japanese Gold which deals with the various accounts about how the Japanese buried treasures all over Mintal and how these were retrieved years after the Second World War; 3) The Road to Progress which briefly narrates the economic growth of the barangay and the role of key political figures as perceived by the resource persons;

and 4) Other stories which include a ghost story and a brief account on the well-known healer of Mintal, Nong Hildo.

Mintal Landmarks

One of the most important landmarks of Mintal is the Catholic church which was built in 1958. The presence of the church paved the way to the creation of the Mintal Catholic Association after the WW2. Many of the natives were converted to Catholicism.

In 1948, the Abaca plantation was a major factor that contributed to the peopling of Mintal. Because of the abundance of abaca, immigrants from Ilocos, Iloilo, and Negros came. The Japanese also settled in Mintal. They were from the Otha Development. However, the abaca production declined after the liberation. The gunpowder from the weapons of war caused the contamination of the abaca.

The Japanese Gold

The Japanese contributed to the development of Mintal. They initiated the construction of an ice plant, a paper mill, and a tennis court. Several monuments were also built. These monuments were believed to be markers of buried treasures. The acacia trees were also considered as markers, most of which could be found in the cemetery. The treasures included gold and Japanese commonwealth coins. There was a rumor that the mausoleum of the Dacudaos hid such treasure. Filipinos defecated unknowingly defecated in the mausoleum, unknowing of the treasure buried in the vault.

To hide the treasures, the Japanese were believed to have constructed tunnels, and placed markers over them that looked like pyramids. The tunnels exit to rivers and caves. It was rumored that there was such tunnel in Dr. Ipil's house, and in the children's playground in the Elementary school. A tunnel was also located near a balete tree where two Japanese samurais were found. The Cawa-cawa river was probably another treasure site. One time, the residents dug up a jar found in an old chapel believing it contained treasure. But when they pried it open, there was only soil. The Japanese carried away the chapel gate, and rumors had it that the gold was hidden in the posts.

Another account told of a Japanese couple who owned 10has of land planted with ginger and monggo. There was a mango tree in the land which served as marker. At midnight, the Japanese couple bulldozed the mango tree and dug out six container drums. After that night, there was no sign of the couple. They were gone and left behind the bulldozer.

A certain Sancho found a number of whetstones while plowing his field. He brought it home thinking they were just ordinary whetstones. One day a scrap iron buyer came by and bought the whetstones from him. It was later that he learned they were actually gold bars.

Another account was that of a small culvert which was removed by highway workers because it caused a bump on the road. One day, it was taken by the Japanese. It was believed that it contained gold. Some gold were believed to be delivered and hidden under a body of water. It was believed that when there is grease on the water, there was gold underneath. One such location was in Power where a large boulder was inscribed with the words "Remember me." The boulder was pushed aside by the Japanese. Underneath it was gold.

The Napolcom used to be home to a rich Japanese. One post was dug up from a riprap. It took nine people to carry it. Again, it was believed that it contained gold.

The Road to Progress

When the Japanese went back to their country, they left behind their properties, including hospital equipment. The upkeep and the responsibility over the management of Mintal then became the tasks of the Filipino politicians. They helped in the further development of Mintal. Among these were Mayor Teves, Tenyente del Barrio Ruperto Tagalog, Mr. Cenon Quizon, Brgy. Captain Tolero, Mr. Elias Lopez, and Atty. Zozobrado.

In 1960, Mintal was a residential area. It was Atty. Zozobrado who initiated the creation of the Mintal townsite and the subdivisions with the help of Ignacio construction. Mintal became the center of business in Tugbok District. The Church site was first offered to Tugbok, but it was refused because there was no revenue there. When it was offered to Mintal, Mr. Ledesma immediately accepted. With the church and the marketplace located in Mintal, its progress accelerated.

Other Stories

Santan St. in Brgy. Mintal is setting to some ghost stories. There was a story about a white clad apparition who frequents the street. According to accounts, anyone who passes this way would feel his or her hairs stand on end because of the uncanny presence.

Two healers were known in Mintal back in the 1950s. They were Nong Hildo and Nong Iyoy, the healers of ailments caused by unknown invisible forces. Nong Hildo was more popular. He would use gabi leaf to heal a toothache. Accounts would say that worms would visibly fall out from the affected area.

Another story was about Nong Hildo and Nong Iyoy going down a cave towards a long dark tunnel crossing to Samal island. They would encounter snakes of different sizes but were never harmed. First there would be numerous small snakes. Then they would pass through the sea. Before reaching the island, they would encounter large snakes but would not be harmed. When they returned from their journey, they would be bringing medicines. It was believed that they possessed special abilities, for no ordinary mortal could pass through the tunnel. It was also told that they never brought light with them despite the darkness. To this day, no one knows what happened to Nong Hildo and Nong Iyoy.

Summary and Conclusion

This research is able to yield stories shared by members of the Senior Citizens Association of Brgy. Mintal categorized into four (4) themes: 1) Mintal Landmarks which deals with the history of important institutions and structures in Brgy. Mintal; 2) The Japanese Gold which deals with the various accounts about how the Japanese buried treasures all over Mintal and how these were retrieved years after the Second World War; 3) The Road to Progress which briefly narrates the economic growth of the barangay and the role of key political figures as perceived by the resource persons; and 5) Other stories which include a ghost story and a brief account on the well-known healer of Mintal, Nong Hildo.

The bulk of the narratives shared by the resource persons focuses on what they recall about the Japanese occupation, specifically on the legends of the Japanese treasures allegedly buried in many parts of Brgy. Mintal and were later on dug up by Japanese treasure hunters. There was much banter and animated accounts among the story-tellers, each narrative complementing the others, reflecting collective memory. What is interesting about these stories is that when one searches published history, no

account about the Mintal treasure hunts can be found. And yet, the stories are popular and are a common knowledge and favorite among the folks.

There are more narratives and oral histories of Brgy. Mintal that need to be collected, recorded, and published. They can be considered as essential materials in drawing up a balanced and more comprehensive historical narrative about the area and that of Davao City as a whole, or perhaps rewriting and strengthening what has already been written about it.

References

- Anderson, Isobel (2012). *Voice, Narrative, Place : Listening to Stories*. (retrieved March 17, 2017) <http://journal.sonicstudies.org/vol02/nr01/a10>.
- Ayson, E.E., Campado, A.V (2004). *Barangay Mintal, Davao City: The Little Tokyo of Prewar Philippines, 1900-1942*. Banwa Vol. 1 No. 1, .
- Darlong, Benamina (2014). *Literature of North East India: Oral Narratives as Documents for the Study of Ritualization in the Darlong Community of Tripura*. The Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities Tripura University, Tripura, India. rupkatha.com/north-east-india-oral-narratives-documents-study-ritualization-darlong.
- Dickason, Olive Patricia (2005). *The Many Faces of Canada's History as It Relates to Aboriginal People*. Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and their Representations. Ute Lische and David T. McNab, eds. Pp. 117 – 148. Wilfrid Laurier University Press: Waterloo, Ontario.
- Green, A (2004). *Individual Remembering and Collective Memory: Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates*. Memory and Society Vol. 32 No. 2, .
- Johnson, Paulina (2015) "The Nêhiyawak Nation through Âcimowina: Experiencing Plains Cree Knowledge through Oral Narratives," Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology: Vol. 23: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol23/iss1/8>.
- Labov, William (1997). *Oral Narratives of Personal Experience* (retrieved 17 March 2017). Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Language Sciences. <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/Papers>.
- Lott, Joanna. *Keepers of History* (retrieved March 16, 2017). Penn State News.
- Sangster, J (1994). *Telling our Stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history*. Women's History Review Vol. 3 No. 1.
- Thompson, P (1988). *History and the Community*. The Voice of the Past: Oral History 3rd Edition Oxford University Press Inc., New York.
- Vansina, J. *Oral Tradition as History* (1985) . University of Wisconsin Press, USA .
- Wheeler, Winona. *Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories*. Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and their Representations (2005). Ute Lische and David T. McNab, eds. Pp. 189 – 213. Wilfrid Laurier University Press: Waterloo, Ontario.
- Wheeler, Winona (2010). *Cree Intellectual Traditions in History*. The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region. Alvin Finkle, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna, eds. Pp. 47-61. Athabasca University Press: Edmonton, Alberta.