Hearing *Ginhawa* In and Out of Panay Culture

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper establishes the meaning of the concept *ginhawa* within the context of Panay expressive culture. Using Kwabena’s nexus analysis (1990), the paper aims to explain *ginhawa* using discourse in medical anthropology, folk literature, and music theory. The paper also places *ginhawa* within a broader context in relation to a Panay Bukidnon ideological construct called *sibod*, roughly glossed as synchronicity, harmony, and unity, in pursuit of mastering structure and play in music-making as well as in dance.

**Keywords** *ginhawa*, *sibod*, Panay culture

This paper explores the concept of *ginhawa* (breath) and its elemental presence within and outside of the community of Panay Bukidnon (the highland people of Panay in Central Philippines). I establish the said community’s perspectives of *ginhawa* as ‘sound’ along with its other metaphorical bases to find relationships in and across various cultural contexts.

In this article, I refer to the nexus analysis of Kwabena (1990) that looks at relationships maintained between a particular subject and anything integrally related to it. The presence/absence of correlations and relationships between various components could be observed in everyday events, routines, or even in rituals that become part of people’s symbolic and meaningfully constructed activities. I also lift this process of analysis to include *ginhawa* in the discourse of music theory and other cultural frameworks.

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**IN THE PANAY BUKIDNON PERSPECTIVE**

The *sugidanon* or epic chanting of the Panay Bukidnon gives *ginhawa* a major role in the lives of heroes and heroines. It can make or break a person’s power.

Durupan, a Panay Bukidnon chanter, shares that “…ginapa-adidos ang tono sa sugidanon paagi sa ginhawa” (…one finds one’s voice in chanting through one’s breath). Articulated as *daenhay* in archaic Kinaray-a, breath is signified as a life force in one of the narratives of a *sugidanon*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dænhay</th>
<th>Breath</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pamunuan ka mga pwersa kang mga datu</strong></td>
<td>The source of strength among <em>datus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pag-tiladi ko’i bunga</strong></td>
<td>Make me a betel nut chew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to bring with me to my journey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paglung-i ko’i libacao</strong></td>
<td>Make me a betel nut chew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to bring with me to my journey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hay, gi dumarao kong denhay</strong></td>
<td>As it is a cure to my life breath</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why the use of betel nut? Durupan explained that “Sa pagmama kang mga datu, ang ginhawa gakusog” (Upon the chewing of the betel nut, one’s breath becomes stronger, more potent). In this regard, there is a quality of breathing that is required among heroes so that they build their strength and prepare for their adventures. The reference to curing one’s life breath through the betel nut is also stated; this presumes the hero’s past fall or illness in his travels that his body needs to heal before heading to another journey.

In looking at the structural constitution of the word ginhawa, ‘gin’ entails an action, or to do something; on the other hand, ‘hawa’ is some kind of space. To give space is a kind of opening up or providing a place for someone or something to occupy.

In another epic chant entitled Sinagnayan, ginhawa is stored in an animal’s body. The ginhawa of Sarandihan, the brother of Labaw Dunggon, is hidden inside a talunon (wild boar) through an egg. Inside an egg is a bee; if you kill the bee, you kill the breath/life force of Sarandihan, and he dies. Interestingly, there are 3-layered forms of breathing in this epic chant story: the hero’s breath is inside an egg, which is inside a boar; and inside that egg is a bee.

This sense of containment is manifested in other writings. Salazar (1999) and Covar (1993) illustrate this life force in the inner recesses of one’s being – sa loob ng loob – metaphorically in objects like jars which have depth. Covar (1993) goes further than this containment schema to include spirituality in his discussion of depth, soul, and the multiple dimensions of life and death.

In the musical language of the Panay Bukidnon, ginhawa entails a process where a force is produced. This force becomes operational or effective when it is cycled back to the person who exhaled it, and it is perceived as a form of sabat, or response. For instance, in the playing of musical instruments such as the tulali (flute), an individual uses his/her own ginhawa to blow into that instrument (Muyco, video documentation, 2009).

The release of air into the flute’s resonating body allows movement of air particles, a vibration that is scientifically recognized as “frequency.” When repeated, we hear frequency as a pitch or tone. Panay Bukidnon elder Conchita Gilbaliga refers to the successful production of sound as sibod. A repeated sound wave comes back to be heard, or to be sensed/recognized, an energy outside of the tulali that responds or cycles back to the player.

Sound becomes sound when from the wellspring of one’s inner being there is a connecting respondent. Panay Bukidnons refer to this response and the continuity that the breath establishes a tayuyon (flow). This concept is part of sibod, a Panay ideology that is embodied in the pursuit of mastering structure and play in music-making as well as in dance. Thus, ginhawa is not a singular essence – it is coupled by another, and linked to another complementary energy, motion, or force.

BELIEFS ACROSS CULTURES

It is interesting how ‘sound’ becomes a metaphor for health and well being in various cultures. For

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1 In some versions, the egg is inside a golden lion, not wild boar.
instance in this saying, “Sound in mind and body,” sound is established as a state of equilibrium, where the mind is sane, and the body is in good condition. Ginhawa translates this balanced state as breath, life-energy, or spirit in the Philippine national psyche. In another level of meaning, it is ease, relief, and comfort.

Medical anthropologist Michael Tan (2012) highlights ginhawa in the cultural context of health and wellness through the integration of the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of a person. His point is related to the idea of Mercado (1994) on ginhawa as holistic and has no dichotomy. In the Filipino mind, it is a spirit and is inseparable from the body. He quotes the Hebrew word ruach, similar to the Latin word spiritos (spirits). In a more specific context, ruach refers to one’s disposition and habitual attitudes.

Tan (2012) also acknowledges the contribution of Verzosa (2011) linking ginhawa to the coping mechanism of people affected by disasters and hardships. For Tan, Verzosa presents a more elaborate and powerful concept of ginhawa than ‘well-being’ or ‘wellness.’ She writes about the effects of disasters and catastrophes to our ginhawa such as the effect of distress. This and other negative emotions bring about pagkahabol-hininga (literally chasing after the breath), paghihingalo (panting for breath), pagbubuntong-hininga (sighing), pagkapas sa hininga (running out of breath), and to a certain extreme, ending one’s life with huling hininga (last breath). Verzosa advises that a psychosocial intervention should be given to disaster victims and survivors, and to address the two necessary levels – the individual and the community.

Psychosocial intervention does not mean caring for individuals in a one-directional manner. Verzosa (2011) sees the importance of allowing transformations to happen from being passive, dependent victims to empowered survivors who are actively aware of their situations. They should have the conscious effort to develop a positive view. In this case, victims focus on their individuality and help preserve their well-being (Section 4).

The process that I see in this psychosocial intervention is bi-directional where there is a gin, or motion; and hawa (towards a space). As a result, the victims who survive and strive to help themselves and their communities gain a ginhawa, which in this case, means sense of relief, better life, and wellness. Thus, gin-hawa can be a tool to achieve ginhawa.

As a medical anthropologist, Tan recalls the goal of his work in understanding the cultural context of health and illness. He traces his inspiration to historian and ethnologist Zeus Salazar (Tan on Salazar, 2012) who first wrote about ginhawa many years ago. Salazar built his discussion of this notion to “…hininga, which isn’t just physical but carries notions of inner energy and the spirit” (par. 8).

To relate the notions mentioned above about ginhawa, I look at another culture in the Visayas. In particular, I discuss the ma-aram (Magos, 1992), or medicine man of Antique, Western Visayas. In Magos’ explanation, the ma-aram utilizes ginhawa as an instrument of healing. In the context of his ritual, ginhawa termed as tayhop (air, positive energy), is produced by blowing through the head of an ailing person with a formulaic chant. Providing his breath to another, this act of blowing brings an outcome of a cured, balanced, and healthy individual. Similarly, among the Tagalog, this process involves the ihip (blown air) used as a healing aid to bring a sick person back to his or her normal state.

In a deeper stance, Magos (1992) thinks of ginhawa as a complement to prayer. In her research, the ma-aram’s curing process is activated through tayhop. Healers chant their prayers or supplications. This is reinforced in the act of blowing the top of an ill person’s head. Thus, prayer and ginhawa are unified aids to alleviate one’s ill condition. Ginhawa alone could not complete the process to healing; chanting or praying activates the air that produces the expected relief.

**USAGE IN LANGUAGE**

Among Filipinos, there is a common adage that states, “Kung may hirap, may ginhawa” (If there is hardship, there is ease). This statement, which has antecedent and consequent phrases,
alludes to *ginhawa* as a reward for sacrifice. It also offers one hope – that there is tomorrow, a day to look forward to because *ginhawa* is waiting after one bears a problem. Christian Filipinos can relate well with *ginhawa* as a form of merit. The value put in sacrifice, such as fasting during Lenten season, is believed to help one deepen one’s spirituality and understanding of sacrifice as exemplified by the so-called Savior of the erring Christians, Jesus Christ. With his eventual death, the promise of salvation, which is another connotation of *ginhawa*, is given to believers whose souls can be saved if they have the power of faith.

This binary contrast of difficulty-and-relief resonates with other sayings that point to *ginhawa* as a life of no worries, stress-free, and where needs are filled. Sometimes, there is also the suggestive notion of abundance and affluence particularly as implied in the phrase “Gi-ginhawa rin ang buhay mo” (Your life will become better/ free of worries).

Among Ilonggos, there’s a saying, “Ginhawa mo nalang gani kapaigo-igo ang centimos” (trying/putting effort so as to make centavos or coin currency stretch its buying power). In this context, *ginhawa* is one’s attempt to find a way to solve a problem, that is, to extend the value of some coins in buying basic needs. So, *ginhawa* is making do with what is available, and surviving amid tight and trying situations.

**GINHAWA IN MUSIC THEORY**

Based on my research about the gong-playing and drumming of the Panay Bukidnon in relation to their *binanog* (hawk-eagle dance), *ginhawa* is an important element in sound and silence, as well as a challenge to the perspectives of time.

Breathing occupies a space in the patterning of musical rhythm. For instance, I observed that drummers take a deep breath between the emphatic beats of rhythmic structures in the *binanog*. When I transcribed the recordings I made of this drumming and presented the notation among ethnomusicologists in a lecture, there was a question about a half pulse that comes in before another strong beat of a rhythmic pattern. It almost produced a kind of half value (1/2) of a pulse that could not be readily notated within the pattern: “*pa-tak* (breathe) *da-nga da-lu-nga*.” This was an inhalation of the player before an accented beat, in a way contributing to the number of counts in-between time spaces of the drummer. And yet, because it was too brief, and almost in-between ‘sound and silence,’ it posed a challenge in quantification.

*Ginhawa* can be visual. I observed during my fieldwork in Panay highlands, particularly in Tapaz, Capiz in 2003, that drummers lifted their shoulders while breathing between rhythmic patterns. On the other hand, when they rhythmically lifted their shoulders and felt a certain groove, they called this *kido-kido*, a kind of “feeling in” or getting into a state of joy and excitement while playing the drum. Another expression that goes with breathing is looking up while playing; this, as they explained, was their connection with the spirits of the *ibawbawnon* (upper cosmos). This visual aspect of showing one’s use of *ginhawa* in playing the *tambur* (drum) supports the auditory perception of breathing between rhythmic patterns, particularly during their continuous music-making and dancing in the *binanog*.

Locating the element of breathing in music theory, one can say that music is not sound and silence alone, but breathing as well. It is neither sound, nor silence.

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1The lecture happened in an Ethnomusicology seminar of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Music, November 2006. The seminar was moderated by Prof. Timothy Rice, an ethnomusicologist.
It factors itself inside the constitution of music that serves as a way to make a piece of certain music more expressive, and in some instances, meditative. I encountered this phenomenon when I experienced playing the small hanging gong in a gagaku (an ensemble that plays Japanese court music) in Los Angeles. In the Japanese Buddhist notation, the lines are clear as to the divisions of 4 beats in a measure. However, when playing it, there is an invisible note on the rendition that is supposed to be part of the count in the rhythm. I was taught by one of its members, a Japanese, that the breathing part, which is almost a slight pause, is the unwritten note between bar lines.

I found it interesting as the players actually can have a feel of rubato in that part, if not a slight “taking your time” way of playing. This is almost like the tambur-playing in binanog that I mentioned earlier. I find this expressive manifestation very Asian, in contrast to the attention to precision which Western music gives. Moreover, I realized the significance of breathing in developing consciousness to one’s inward or inner voice. When I finally got the element of breath in every measure of the gagaku music, I felt like I was in a state of meditation, a kind of spiritual journey in and out of myself.

My experience in binanog and gagaku reminded me of healing rituals that I witnessed in the Panay highlands. When a woman healer (whom I met in many instances between the years 2003-2004) chanted and danced with a repetitive rhythm, she breathed from slow to a fast tempo. In the process, she was moving toward a state of spiritual transcendence. Her feet also executed a kibang (rhythmic pounding) as her voice changed as if another entity entered her body. In this instance, she established a connection with a deity as she was touching the head of a sick person at that time and supplicated for that person’s healing. This experience of a healer whose ginhawa has propelled her to a different state of being (and also later occupied by another being with ginhawa) was a realization of how ginhawa works in transforming one’s being in order to supplicate for another person’s recovery and cure. Thus, ginhawa is instrumental to the transformation of a person for the purpose of another, or as a whole, for the community’s well-being.

CONCLUSION

Earlier in this paper, I established the community’s perspectives of ginhawa as ‘sound’ from various cultural contexts. The title of my article that includes the phrase “…breathing in-out and across cultures” implies a process that interweaves one’s production of air in music-making, and in other cultural expressions that bridge connections between the human and the divine.

Ginhawa has metaphoric allusions to health (e.g., the adage “sound body”) and well-being. This wellness is also synonymous to wealth (may ginhawa, or comfortable living), content, and sense of fulfillment. Ginhawa is an important concept in various cultures shared as a positive component for one to survive and live continuously. We see these processes working among the Panay Bukidnon as well as with other aforementioned cultures.

Even as Salazar (1999) and Covar (1993) illustrate this life force in the inner recesses of one’s being – sa loob ng loob – and metaphorically, in objects like jars (Covar, 1993), or inside wild animals as projected in folk narratives (Muyco’s field notes, 2013), I see ginhawa as a dynamic force ‘outside’ the periphery of loob (inside) – an energy that is free, just like the energy that responds back to a person’s production of sound, as shared by bamboo flute player, Conchita Gilbaliga. This energy that comes from the inside (e.g., breath) and goes back from the outside to the inside of a person’s breathing achieves a certain kind of cyclicity or figuratively a completion and balance that is pursued for healing. This is true in the study of Magos (1992) among the ma-aram, or healers of Antique where ginhawa complements one’s prayer. It is used in healing by tayhop, or blowing air on top of an ill person’s head, in order to revive positive energy.

This brings us back to the nexus analysis of Kwabena (1990) that looks at relationships maintained between a particular subject and anything integrally related to it. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the presence/absence of various components around a particular subject (in this case, the ginhawa), could be observed in everyday events, routines, or in formal gatherings. Among these are
rituals where people express their symbolic as well as pragmatic expressivity. In the case of this article, through music and dance, it is also observed to construct meaning. One example is seen in healing or in establishing a spiritual connection. This article further adds on the stance of nexus analysis. Through the Panay Bukidnon’s use of ginhawa, a meaning can transcend and transform one into another “state of being-ness.” This can be made possible through tayuyon, or a directed flow (Muyco, 2009, 2016) that is part of the Panay Bukidnon’s sibod, or ideology as applied when mastering a dance or a musical instrument. Ginhawa achieves cyclicity in tayuyon as it cycles back to a player’s air so that sound becomes audible. We also see transcendence in Panay Bukidnon’s use of ginhawa when healers breathe in and out consciously, moving this breathing to a different tempo and achieving connections to heal and supplicate cosmic spirits.

Ginhawa is an important component of music aside from the presence of sound and silence. This theoretically puts the representation of sound (via notation) into a challenging position where counts become relative and dependent on the player who makes the music more meaningful.

As the epistemology of the word ginhawa goes, ‘gin’ in “ginhawa” is to put into action a ‘hawa’ or space. This space becomes one’s channel to life and the pursuit of continuous energy in whatever form it may take.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


KEY INFORMANTS

Federico Caballero, 80 years old, Barangay Garangan, Calinog Iloilo (Philippines)
Romulo Caballero, 73 years old, Barangay Masaroy, Calinog Iloilo (Philippines)
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Feliza Castor, Barangay Nayawan, Tapaz, Capiz (Philippines)