

**Transcript of Podcast of PCIJ's interview with Ludy Opeña, Bukidnon ethnographer.  
Interview by Vinia Datinguino, conducted on 28 February 2007 in Mrs. Opeña's home,  
Springside, Malaybalay.**

Introduction: In February, the people of Bukidnon gathered for Kaamulan, its annual festival celebrating the ethnicities of the different tribal groups that inhabit the province. A massive street dancing was easily one of the highlights of the festivities, all of which lasted for one month. There was food, music, dancing, singing, games, conferences. Tourists came, and the Bukidnons stood proud. But not everyone was happy. Ludy Opeña is an ethnographer for Bukidnon. She is 78 years old, was born in Bukidnon and has lived in the same place almost all her life.

Nanay Ludy: Amul is to gather. Kaamulan, meaning to say 'a gathering for a purpose.' These are the three original occasions for Kaamulan among the indigenous people of Bukidnon: a wedding, a celebration of a ritual, and testing of the newly harvested rice. And sometimes, general worship of the community in a certain hereditary worship place. Whenever people gather, that's Kaamulan. First time that Kaamulan was brought to the municipal level was on May 15, 1974. So Kaamulan was here from 1974 to this time, that's 32 years. Kaamulan has been celebrated since then yearly.

So now this Kaamulan now here, the biggest event is street dancing. And the day-to-day feature are the karaoke bars which is not part of the culture. The karaoke bars is making the Kaamulan a mardi gras of high-tech singing and that is not part of the culture.

PCIJ: These are the bars that line up the Kaamulan grounds, those are what you refer to. In your time, there was no karaoke.

Nanay Ludy: No.

PCIJ: In your time, when you were young, Kaamulan festival was not done this way. There were no karaoke bars. What was the emphasis of the old Kaamulan festivals.

Nanay Ludy: The emphasis was really on the natives. They were the star.

PCIJ: And now, what is the star?

Nanay Ludy: Well the municipal government is the star because the municipal government presents their dancers. Some are natives, some are not. And then they are choreographed. Now I tell you, I am not against choreography. I'm not against the dance clinic because you know, they say imitation is the highest form of compliment. Because they say that the native dances are very monotonous, the *dugso* steps are repetitious they said, it's not good for stage presentation, they said. So the choreographers get high-paying jobs, and they spend hundreds of thousands of pesos to be able to win prizes. The criteria is that the dancers should be 50 percent native and the steps should be 50 percent authentic, but how do you quantify that?

I suggest that there must be a day that would be designated for the indigenous dances only and the indigenous dancers from the cultural communities and that there should be a place ... the karaoke bars

would last for two months ... there should be a place where the weavers of the *kamuyot*, our backpacks, there should be a part of the exhibit where it will show how these things are woven, how these bracelets, so many things, are woven and they will also be selling these things.

PCIJ: So you're saying *po* there are so many things people can see about Bukidnon culture that should be showcased by Kaamulan.

Nanay Ludy: Not the karaoke bars. There is an ethnic dance portion. I appreciate that very much. But the budget for that is only P75,000. I suggest that there must be a day aside from the street dancing which is a compliment, there should be a day designated for the native dancers and their native dances. You may ask me, what are these native dances that are unchoreographed? They are the *inagong*, imitating the movement of the male and female hawk doing their courtship in the air. Another one is the *salumpi*, the rice pounding dance. I appreciate the dance clinic, the ethnic games, I appreciate that. But there must be a day allotted only for the native dancers from the different cultural communities in the mountain peripheries because they are now driven there.

Link #1: But it is not only the old ways of the Kaamulan festival that Nanay Ludy longs for. She misses interacting with the Manobos who would come down to Malaybalay to trade their sweet-smelling rice. She misses the guava trees that used to grow everywhere.

PCIJ: Aside *po* from your observations about Kaamulan, and the changes, the karaoke bars, what other things from your childhood do you remember fondly that you no longer see now in Bukidnon? What is it that you miss about the Bukidnon of old?

Nanay Ludy: There's so much I miss. When I was very young you could pile sacks and sacks of rice *palay* or corn along the highway nobody steals it. Because among the Bukidnons, if you pile those things, you just make a knot out of grass and it says off-limits. The knot means off-limits.

PCIJ: You no longer see this.

Nanay Ludy: No. Put something, and maybe in ten minutes it will get lost. Another thing is that, I miss the *lumbayaw* rice.

PCIJ: What is the *lumbayaw* rice?

Nanay Ludy: Long ago, there was commerce between the Magobos of the Tigwasalug Valley and the upper Pulangi region, between the Dumagats or the Christians and the Manobos. You know, in those times, Pulangi river was still deep, Tigua river was still deep, they were navigable. There was not then any denudation yet. These Manobos raise sweet-smelling native rice that is very very soft. So many varieties of them – there was the *payungan*, so many of them. These natives raised that, the traders – two of them were my uncles – the traders would bring up to the mountains sardines and salt, the luxury of the Manobos, oil, cloth, whatever, and in exchange, barter trade, no cash, they will barter *palay* with it. How do they sack this? It is sacked in a thing called *langkap*, a sack made of bamboo and *bagikik* leaves. That will drip down Pulangi, up to Sugod Mailag and will be taken from the merchants. That was the era where the Manobos and the Dumagats had a commerce between themselves. Although the practices were crude but there was it. After the second world war it was revived and when the loggers

like Valderrama and sons, and Almendras, started plundering the forests, that stopped because the rivers are no longer navigable, very shallow already. And there are so many Ilonggos and the migrants from other provinces who invaded the upper Pulangi, upper Tigwa salug valley – no more.

I miss the *lumbayaw* rice. I miss the honesty that was there before. And you know, before, when it's harvest time – it starts in July to December – you'll see Manobos coming to Malaybalay because they are trading. They have the rice to sell here, and they are making business with us. Now you cannot see them anymore. You will see them only begging on Christmas time, which is very sad. Before they never used to beg.

PCIJ: Those were the days.

Nanay Ludy: Yes.

PCIJ: And those days are no longer here. Bukidnon has changed already.

Nanay Ludy: Yes. Another thing that I miss. The guava that could be found anywhere in Bukidnon. Any vacant lot is full of guavas. But now there are no more guavas. You can find guavas that are for sale but they're not the real ones they're already genetically improved guavas. When I was teaching in Alanog starting 1974 we had plenty, hundreds or thousands of guavas just growing anywhere. So everyday the Home Economics teacher will mix guava jelly, we buy bread, and it was free. My children eat guavas. So that when I transferred to Xavier University after three months the gums of my children started bleeding because they don't have anymore the vitamins from the guava. Now you can't find guavas anymore.

Link #2: Her seven children gave Nanay Ludy and her husband 33 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. Sadly, Nanay Ludy says, the younger generation will no longer get to know what Bukidnon used to be.

Nanay Ludy: And it's very sad. I asked one of my grandchildren where does the egg come from? She said, "*sa tindahan.*" She does not know that a hen lays eggs. She has not witnessed how the cock courts the hen, how the hen lays the eggs, how the hen takes care of the chicks. That's very sad.

PCIJ: What do you think is the Bukidnon that your great-grandchildren are going to grow up in?

Nanay Ludy: It would be a Bukidnon with very little natives known. Because they're driven into the mountain peripheries. They were pushed by the in-migration of the Christian Dumagats or people from along the sea into the plateau. They were attacked by the Maranaos from the west, and the Maguindanaos from the south, and they are not friendly with the Manobos from the mountains. But the Bukidnons are not war-like. Now, the Bukidnon language is now dying because of nominal use. Why? Because it is not being cultivated.

PCIJ: It's not being used.

Nanay Ludy: It's not being used. And there is no institution that has a program of promoting it. The Bukidnon Heritage Foundation began teaching but no. It's a start but it's not included in the school

curriculum. It should be. I suggest to the Department of Education that in the Bukidnon schools the Bukidnon oral literature should be introduced from grade one up to college. I have a graduated course of study for that. It's in my hand. I aim to see the division superintendent.

PCIJ: You will make a proposal.

Nanay Ludy: I will make, but I don't know if they will listen to me.

PCIJ: You were saying earlier, when I was asking you, what is the kind of Bukidnon that your greatgrandchildren will grow up in, and you were saying that it's a kind of Bukidnon where you no longer see a lot of natives.

Nanay Ludy: Yes. Because like now, the greatest problem now of the Bukidnons that are still in the cultural communities, they are less educated, is how to get the approval of their CADT, the certificate of ancestral domain title and how it should be distributed properly. That is because most of the places had been occupied by landed people, by ranchers, by corporations and by government institutions. That's one of the greatest problems at this moment.

PCIJ: These are the issues that you think Bukidnon is facing now. Land issues, the dying populations of tribal communities, they are being driven away. So Bukidnon has changed from the time you were young.

Nanay Ludy: Yes, because that's acculturation. You cannot deny that.

PCIJ: But if you were to be given a choice will you choose to live somewhere else or will it still be Bukidnon?

Nanay Ludy: I'd still live in Bukidnon. I like the climate in Bukidnon. This is where I grew up, this is where I'm gonna die. I love the place. I can accept the change, because there is no such thing as pure culture. If you say 'this is a pure Bukidnon culture' the social scientists will laugh at you because there is no such thing as pure culture.

Link #3: Nanay Ludy has very strong opinions about culture. And, it seems, she harbors similarly strong opinions about electoral politics. Since coming back from a ten-year stay in America in 1994, Nanay Ludy has never gone to the polling place to vote. And, she says, it is not because she became invalid after a severe accident while she was in the United States.

Nanay Ludy: It was not just the lack of mobility. It was a choice because politics has been muddled. The Filipino voters are not educated. Whoever is popular, they will vote for them even if they do not have something in between their ears. I asked my granddaughter, 'I'll vote for Fernando Poe because his movies are hit.' I said what does have to do with governance? *Basta popular ganda na yan.*

PCIJ: In 2007, have you decided who you will vote for?

Nanay Ludy: For senators, I will pick. I am not for Gloria, although I recognize she works hard. Gloria works hard and the peso is getting well. But that is misunderstood. They keep repeating 'hello garci,

hello garci' ... Everyone is guilty of buying votes, not only the administration but also the opposition!

PCIJ: Is there a politician in Bukidnon that stands out for you is a good politician?

Nanay Ludy: [takes quite a long pause] Good politician? My lord. Let me see this ... Fortich was not a corrupt politician, but then he belongs to a political dynasty.

PCIJ: And you do not like political dynasties.

Nanay Ludy: Let's give chances to others. But because people worship and they have blind loyalties. Now there are people here right in Malaybalay who should be in their place but they don't have money.

PCIJ: For you, there should be opportunity for the new kind of politician.

Nanay Ludy: Yes there should be a set of new politicians who are not yet sick with this political sickness of corruption. Now I blame also the people. Yesterday, I sent a note to councilor Dinlayan asking for the picture of his father that I would incorporate in the book. My daughter said, 'Mama if I did not see the letter had come from you you will not get it because there are hundreds and hundreds of people' and 200 of those people were asking for cash. No wonder the politicians will go corrupt because where will they get those money?

Link #4: Not that Nanay Ludy wastes any time creating theories about why public officials become corrupt. More important things occupy her mind. While she has slowed down, Nanay Ludy still keeps herself busy with various academic projects. There are books to write, conferences to attend, and, in the end she says, knowledge to impart to the younger generation.

Nanay Ludy: If God will let me live and somebody would finance it, I would like to work on a Bukidnon language dictionary. The projects I have in my mind is the introduction of the Bukidnon oral literature into the curriculum. I have already the outline of what I will present to the division superintendent. And then the dictionary, and the folk tales. My book now, the ethnohistory of the Bukidnon tribe, it will deal on that the traditional and historical journey of the Bukidnon people from the seashores of Misamis Oriental into the Bukidnon plateau, and it will tell about their perils, their triumphs, their love affairs, their glories.

PCIJ: There's a lot that you want to do. Where do get *po* all the energy?

Nanay Ludy: Now, being invalid like me, who's unable to walk, will not stop you from learning. Learning starts from the cradle to the grave and if God has given me a set of grey matters to use then I can use it to propagate God's kingdom, I can use it also to develop the culture of my country, I can use it to teach. What I need is – I don't want to aggrandize myself or make myself important, but what I want to do is to transfer whatever knowledge I have to the younger Bukidnons.