

The Last Script Writer, recreating the **Palawán** Script in Cinema Kanakan-Balintagos

1. Introduction.

a. Learning the Script

I learned the Palawan Script directly from my grand-aunt Upo Majiling. She fondly called the script simply as Aborlan, for it originated from Aborlan she says. I belatedly discovered that I have indigenous Palawán blood. Coming from the first generation of the Palawán, born in the city of Manila. My mother belongs to a lineage of Tungkul or Shaman-Chieftains in South Palawan. She was sent to Manila to study as part of the Philippine Government's program called "Minority Scholarships", sending brilliant indigenous children to Manila to be "educated". The indigenous people of South Palawan were called Palawán before the whole region was called Palawan. Surat Inaborlan became the general term of the Philippine National Museum for the Palawan Script, perhaps as not to confuse with the municipality of Aborlan. The Palawán script is one of a number of closely related scripts used in the Philippines until the 17th Century AD. It is thought to have descended from the Kawi script of Java, Bali and Sumatra, which in turn descended from the Pallava script, one of the southern Indian scripts.

b. Writing the Script-

double meanings "Script" as Screenplay & "Script" as the Ancient Script.

In the period of 1995- 2002, I lived with my tribe and learned the culture of my people. I presented two ritual-dramas in the University of the Philippines & the Cultural Center of the Philippines, namely "Ibun, Palawan's Child" (1999) & "Palawan Banar, Palawan Truths" (2002) respectively. I also made two documentaries namely "U'po, Granparent & Grandchild" (1999) about the elders of my tribe and "Basal Banar, the Sacred Ritual of Truth" (2002) which was presented at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in Japan & won Best Feature Documentary at the Montreal First People's Festival in Canada.

In my shift in 2005 to fiction filmmaking, I recently made a feature film with the main theme of cultural remembering and the Palawán script as the main dramatic action and the spine of the screenplay entitled "Baybayin, The Palawán script". I was also the scriptwriter of the film. Writing the script or the screenplay of the film involved putting the symbols of the Palawán script on the screenplay so that my actors will learn how to write it and which symbols will be used in each scene. The fascinating thing about the script itself is that an Ancient Script is within the script of the film.

c. The Last Script Writer

Through the invitation to present this film at the South East Asian Workshop of Endangered Scripts, I realized I am the last "script" writer of the Surat Inaborlan in my Mother's hometown of Puring in South Palawan. My Aunt who also learned from Upo Majiling & the other elders who wrote the script have all sadly passed away, one by one the past decade. I am not an academic but a culture

bearer artist, a direct descendant of the indigenous Palawán . Learning the Surat Inaborlan was a birthright. But sadly no one else from my community, namely my relatives, were interested in learning the Surat Inaborlan . When Upo Majiling died last year, I realized that I am now the last one with the knowledge of the ancient script in my Mother's community in Puring, South Palawan. I am the Last Script Writer in Puring, my Mother's land.

2. The Script in Cinema & in Life

a. Baybayin, the film & the inspiration:

The way the ancient script was used as my elders taught me were incorporated in the film. Baybayin, the Coast and Baybayin, the common term for Ancient Scripts from the Philippines. I intended to intertwine these two meanings through this film about a ménage a trois of the last writers of the ancient Palawanon alphabet set in the coasts of Palawan. A Unique Tale of two half-sisters who fall in love with a man who can't hear and speak to them- proof that love can speak even in Silence. Their only way of communication is the Surat Inaborlan, an ancient Palawanon script. Their love grows amidst the silences and letters in the pristine coasts of Palawan. In the end they accept each other's love, transcends themselves and decide to follow the ancient Duay tradition where two sisters married the same man. Love's Language is Silent and interpreted through the Palawan Script.

I was specifically inspired by this account of how the Palawan Script healed a boy who was uttering unintelligible words. And somehow one of the elders figured out that what the boy was uttering was actually the chronology of the Palawan Script itself ! And when they wrote it down, the boy stopped the "giberreish" and was healed. The Ancient Script as a way of healing. Somehow telling us that remembering can heal our people.

Sometimes it just takes one scene for a filmmaker to be inspired. And this dramatic story was the great catalyst for making a whole feature film about the Palawan Script. It would be hard to describe the film itself, so it is best to watch the work and see how magical Cinema can become when re-interpreting stories in a modern world.

b. the Batang-Batang ng Palawán

The Batang-Batang ng Palawán is the chronology of symbols of the Surat Inaborlan. One of the most fascinating way that I discovered when I asked each elder in the past to write the Palawan Script is that all of them did it in the same order which is totally different from the western Alphabet that goes by the ABCDs or Abakada. Alphabets, or phonemic alphabets, are sets of letters, usually arranged in a fixed order but the Inaborlan is a Syllabic alphabet, that consist of symbols for consonants and vowels. The consonants each have an inherent vowel

which can be changed to another vowel by means of a dot. When a dot is placed below the symbol, the sound becomes an o or u sound, and when placed on top of the symbol it becomes an i or e sound. It also written on the write side, down going up.

So when I asked the elders before to write the Inaborlan, it all went into a different chronology of sounds-

“Mo-ma-mi, Do-da-di, Yo-ya-yi, Go-ga-gi, To-ta-ti, U-A-I, Ko-ka-ki, No-na-ni, So-sa-si, Po-pa-pi, Lo-la-li, Ngo-nga-ngi, Wo-wa-wi, Bo-ba-bi, Ro-ra-ri.”

c. Excerpts from the Baybayin Script : Prologue

I include here an excerpt from the script of Baybayin just to show the Palawan Script itself and how it is written. (there is no translation yet but in the film itself there are subtitles).

BAYBAYIN



a film by Kanakan-Balintagos

PROLOGO:

1. INT. KUBO. UMAGA.

Makikita ang isang batang lalaki, si Bagtik, na nagsasalitang walang tigil, kaharap niya ang Baliyan o Manggagamot,. Pinapalaspasan siya ng mga dahon at bulaklak ng RUKO-RUKO. Nasa likuran niya si Philippe Tiessen, isang Canadian Linguist.

Batang BAGTIK:

... Mo-ma-mi, Do-da-di, Yo-ya-yi, Go-ga-gi, To-ta-ti, U-A-I,
Ko-ka-ki, No-na-ni, So-sa si, Po-pa-pi, Lo-la-li,
Nga-ngo-ngi, Wo-wa-wi- Bo-ba-bi, Ro-Ra-ri...

VOICE OVER ni PHILIPPE TIESEN:

(habang nagsusulat sa Notebook)

It has been three days since this boy have started uttering
these unintelligible words.

But there is an apparent pattern...

The chief-shaman has been trying to heal him with no effect.

No sleep, no food, not even a drop of water.

He will die if he does not stop blabbering tonight.

Lalapit ang isang babae papainumin ng tubig ang bata. Sasagiin nito ang baso.
Tatapon ang tubig sa kawayang sahi.

2. EXT. KUBO. UMAGA.

Darating si Sadya kasama ang dalawang anak na babae si Alba at Alban.
Kasama nila ang mga lolo at lola ni Bagtik, sina Upo Jakiru at Upo Majiki.
Dala dala ng matatanda ang malaking Gongs o Agung.
At sakbit-sakbit sa balikat ng mga mga batang babae ang malilit na Gongs o Sanang.

VOICE OVER ni PHILIPPE TIESSEN:

On the third day, My wife Sadya
brought the boy's grandparents
to play the same gongs that deafened him.

VOICE OVER Batang BAGTIK:

... Mo-ma-mi, Do-da-di, Yo-ya-yi, Go-ga-gi, To-ta-ti, U-A-I...

Naririnig sa labas ang boses ng batang si Bagtik.
Papasok sa luob ang mga mag-ina at matatanda..

3. INT. KUBO. UMAGA.

Pagpasok sa kubo, tatakbo ang batang Alba kay Tiessen, yayakap ito sa ama niya.
Habang tutulong sa pagsabit ng mga Agung at Sanang ang batang Alban.
Tutulungan ni Sadya ang mga Upo sa pagsabit ng mga Gongs. Lalapit si Upo Majiki sa apo niya.

Upo JAKIRU:

Anin, at Upo Ku. Magnunga Bilog ya.
(Kawawang apo ko, gumaling ka na sana).

Magtutugtog ng AGUNG (Big Gong) at SANANG
sina Upo Jakiru at Upo Majiki. Matagal. Sasayaw ang Baliyan.
Wala pa ring tigil sa pagsalita ang batang Bagtik.

Batang BAGTIK:

... Mo-ma-mi, Do-da-di... ... U-A-I... ... Bo-ba-bi...

SADYA:

Ibun-ibun ku, magnunga pikiran dya.
(Batang maliit, gumaling sana ang isip).

Tatango si Tiessen. Nakayakap sa kanya nang mahigpit si Alba.
Lalapit si Sadya, yakap yakap ang batang Bagtik, matinding pinapakinggan ang sinasabi nito.
Palakas nang palakas ito!

Batang BAGTIK:

... Mo-ma-mi, Do-da-di, Yo-ya-yi, Go-ga-gi, To-ta-ti, U-A-I,
Ko-ka-ki, No-na-ni, So-sa si, Po-pa-pi, Lo-la-li,
Nga-ngo-ngi, Wo-wa-wi- Bo-ba-bi, Ro-Ra-ri...

Mapapahinto sa pagtugtog ang isa sa dalawang matanda.

Papakinggang mabuti ang sinasabi ng bata. Mukhang mauulinigan din ng ikalawang matanda ang sinasabi ng Bata. Magtitinginan sila. Titingin sila kay Sadya...

SADYA:
Nakasaudan ko!
(Naiintindihan ko!)

Lalapit kay Upo JAKIRU, bubulungan ito.

Upo JAKIRU:
(Tatango)
Da-on at Punti ! (Dahon ng saging!)

Ituturo ang dahon ng saging. Tatakbong palabas si Upo Jakiru.
Kukuha ng tangkay si Upo Majiki. Papatalasin ito ni Upo Jakiru ng kanyang Budyak.
Ipatatong ni Sadya ang dahon sa sahih.
Pakikinggan mabuti ng dalawang Upo ang Batang Bagtik.

Batang BAGTIK:
... Mo-ma-mi, Do-da-di, Yo-ya-yi, Go-ga-gi, To-ta-ti, U-A-I,
Ko-ka-ki, No-na-ni, So-sa si, Po-pa-pi, Lo-La-li,
Nga-ngo-ngi, WO-wa-wi- Bo-ba-bi, Ro-Ra-Ri...

Hawak-hawak ang matalas na tangkay, sisimulang iuukit ni Sadya ang mga Baybayin ng mga Pala'wan sa pagkasunod-sunod nito. May pagtatakang panonoorin ni Thiessen ang ginagawa ni Sadya.

Batang BAGTIK:
.... MO-MA-MI...

Upo JAKIRU:
Mo-ma-mi.
(isusulat sa simbulong Baybayin ni Upo Jakiru)



Batang BAGTIK:
DO-DA-DI.

Upo JAKIRU
Do-da-di.
(Isusulat ang simbolong DO-DA-DI sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:
YO-YA-YI!
(Isusulat ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:
GO-GA-GI!
(Isusulat ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:
TO-TA-TI!
(Isusulat ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:
U-A-I.

Upo JAKIRU:
Kwantin ! (Tama!)
U-AAA- I..
(Isusulat ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:
Ko-ka-ki !
(Isusulat ng matatanda ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:

No-na-ni!

(Isusulat ng matatanda ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:

So-sa si, Po-pa-pi...

(Isusulat ng matatanda ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:

... Lo-la-li, Ngo-nga-ngi, Wo-wa-wii...

(Isusulat ng matatanda ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



Batang BAGTIK:
... Bo-ba-bi, Ro-ra-ri...
(Isusulat ng matatanda ang baybayin sa dahon ng saging)



PHILIPPE TIESSSEN:
(kay Sadya)
Anung gina-sulat nila?

SADYA:
Baybayin.

Hihinto ang Bata sa pagsasalita.
Mag-iiyakan ang mga Matatanda
Paiinum ni Sadya ng tubig ang Bata. Inom si Bagtik.
Magpapasalamat ang Baliyan sa buwan.
Lalapit si Tiessen sa dahon ng saging na naka-ukit ang mga letra. Titingnan ng Dalawang Batang Babae ang dahon ng saging.

Voice-Over PHILIPPE TIESSSEN:
The deaf boy was reciting a Palawan script

Hawak-hawak ni Tiessen ang dahon ng saging.
Lilitaw ang pamagat ng pelikula-



BAYBAYIN

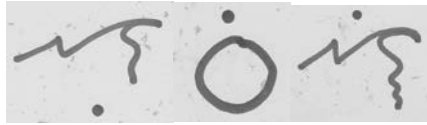
4. . EXT. GUBAT. UMAGA.

Matataas ang mga puno sa gubat .Tumatakbo ang dalawang batang babae sina Alba at Alban na parang naghahabulan – nag-uunahan.

ALBAN:
Bilisan mo Alba!

ALBA:
Dyan na ako, Alban!

May hinahanap sa mga matatayog na puno. May makikitang nakaukit na baybayin sa isang puno si Alba.



Susubukang basahin ito.

ALBA:
Su... su... bi...

Lalapit ang batang Alban babasahin ito.

ALBAN:
Su bi li--- Sumbiling!

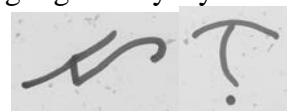
ALBA:
Ano yun?

ALBAN:
Maliliit na Kawayan!
(Ituturo) Dun!

Matutuwa ang dalawang bata at tatakbo muli papunta sa mga kawayan.

5. EXT. MGA KAWAYAN. UMAGA.

Darating ang magkapatid sa mga kawayanan. Hahanapin nila ang maliliit na puno ng kawayan. Mapapahinto ang dalawa. Mapapansing nakaukit sa isang kawayan, ang mga Baybayin.



ALBAN:
Da....

ALBA:
Nu....

SABAY:
Danum!

ALBAN:
Saan?

ALBA:
Dun sa ilog!

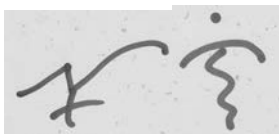
ALBAN:
Naliligo na si Bagtik!

ALBA:
Di na siya amoy baboyramo!

Magtatawanan ang dalawang bata at tatakbo papunta sa ilog.

6. EXT. ILOG NA NAGHAHALO ANG TABANG AT ALAT. UMAGA.

Darating sa ilog ang magkapatid. Sa pagod ay mapapainom si Alba sa umaagos na tubig sa batuhan,. Mapapansing may lumulutang na bangka gawa sa kawayan na ang layag ay dahon na nakaukit ang baybayin. Lalanguyin ni Alban ang bangka-bangkaan. Babasahin ang baybayin sa dahon.



ALBA:
A....

ALBAN:
Gi....
Agiw?

ALBA:
Diki. (Hindi)
Agis!

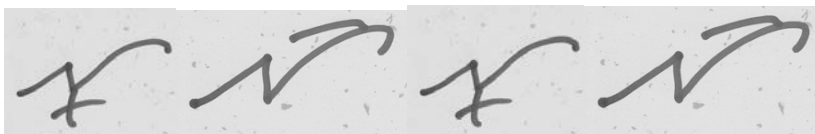
ALBAN:
Buhangin!

ALBA:
Sa Gusong (sandbar) !

Tatakbo ang dalawa papunta sa puting buhangin.

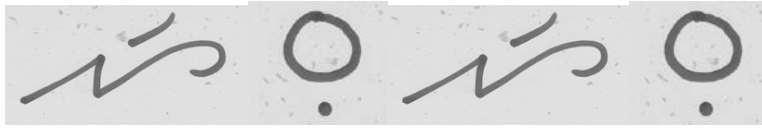
7. EXT. SA GUSONG (SANDBAR). UMAGA.

Ang **GUSONG** ay isang malawak na islang buhangin na lumilitaw lamang kapag tagkati. Makikita nating nakaukit sa buhangin ang mga Baybayin ng Palawan.



ALBAN:
Amat-amat....

ALBA:
Dahan-dahan...



ALBAN:
Ibun-Ibun....

ALBA:
Maliliit na yapak...
At nandun na kami!

Sinusundan ang mga baybayin sa baybay- dahan-dahan silang naglalakad nang maliit ang hakbang hanggang umabot sila sa dulo ng buhangin. May huling simbulo na nakasulat dito.



ALBAN:
Ba....

ALBA:
Ti...

SABAY:
BAGTIK!

Mula sa dagat lilitaw ang batang BAGTIK, may hawak-hawak na SUPOK (Pala'wan blowgun). Akmang susupukin ang dalawa-lalabas ang tubig mula dito. Magtatawanan ang mga bata. Tahimik ang tawa ni Bagtik, malaking ngiti lamang ang bakas ng kanyang tuwa.

Iaabot ni Bagtik ang pang-ukit na tangkay sa dalawang batang babae. Magtitinginan sila.

SABAY:
Kami naman!

Tatalikod si Bagtik. Simulang tatakbong papalayo sina Alba at Alban.

ALBA:
(habang tumatakbo)
Saan tayo magtatago?

ALBAN:
Sa Banwa ni Indu! (Sa bahay ni Ina).

Tuloy sa pagtakbo na tuwang tuwa ang dalawang batang babae.
Masayang-masaya ang kanilang paglaro.

8. EXT. SA GUSONG (SANDBAR). UMAGA.

Pagdating sa dulo ng Gusong na malayo na kay Bagtik.
Iuukit nila ang malalaking baybayin.
Iuukit ni Alban ang salitang BANWA (Bahay)



Iaabot ni Alban kay Alba ang tangkay. At isusulat ni Alba ang baybayin sa buhangin- ang salitang INDO (Ina)



At pagkatapos ay tatakbong papalayo ang magkapatid.
Patungo sa bahay ng kanilang ina.

3. Conclusion

a. Purpose of the Film

This citation from the Jury of the ImagineNATIVE Film Festival in Toronto, Canada- the biggest film festival for indigenous filmmakers sums up the purpose and meaning of the film-
“The winning film for the category of Best Indigenous Language Film is a beautiful poetic story that incorporates the use of language in every aspect of the story. By rooting the importance of communication in writing, speaking and even medicine this film captures the depth of language and its central role in the richness of culture. This year the award goes to Baybayin.”

b. the Next Step

I now believe that I have a great duty to discover more writers of the Surat Inaborlan in other Palawán indigenous communities. If they still exist, I will search the remotest parts of South Palawan. On this journey, I will also present the history, purpose and origins of this ancient script that leads to the modern times and the existing problems that are endangering the script and its writers, the indigenous Palawan people. I also hope to find concrete ways where we can preserve this ancient Filipino way of writing. And that will be the theme and great purpose of my next work, a personal documentary – the search for the Last “Script” Writers of the Surat Inaborlan!

c. A Culture Bearer

I recently used my tribal name Kanakan-Balintagos which was dreamt by my Shaman-Uncle, Maman Rampang who recently passed away. I have found my true meaning as a filmmaker and culture bearer. The name means “Hunter of Truth” .

Here is an excerpt from my interview for Browntourage.com, on my advice on young artists:

What is the most important piece of advice you'd impart to young creatives as they are attempting to reconcile their histories and cultural stories through their art?

You are not only an artist nor a storyteller. You are an activist against forgetting; You are well of memory of your ancestors waiting to be remembered. A weaver of things felt, smelt, seen, heard, dreamt and tasted that others have not tasted, dreamt, heard, seen, smelt nor felt... You are a hunter of truth .

Manunga banar (for beautiful truths),
Kanakan-Balintagos