

THE YAKANS OF LAMITAN, BASILAN AND THE EVOLUTION OF THEIR TRADITIONAL COSTUMES

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This study documents the traditional costumes of the Yakans, an indigenous community of Lamitan, Basilan, more specifically: the types of costumes, the purposes and significance of costume in Yakan culture, the manner of production including the weaving process, as well as the evolution of the different types of traditional Yakan costumes in relation to specific occasions for dance and the performing arts. Interviews with selected notable Yakans coupled with constant observation and participation in events such as weddings, Qur'anic graduations, and the Lami-Lamihan Festival were conducted by the researcher.

The Yakan costume basically consists of a *badju* (top), a *sawal* (trousers), and accessories which are entirely made of home-woven or purchased material. Traditionally, these are tight at the sleeves and leggings and may be worn by both men and women but with restrictions as to by whom, where, why, and how they should be worn. The evolution of the Yakan costumes reflects the social and physical changes that have occurred in the environment. The scarcity of certain raw materials, such as homemade spun cotton, pineapple threads, and silk to produce home-woven costumes, has led to the extensive use of mercerized cotton threads and other commercial substitutes. The demands of the tourism industry and the cultural sentiments of the people in the yearly celebration of the Lami-Lamihan Festival have influenced the development and evolution of Yakan costumes.

Lamitan and the Yakan weaving tradition

Lamitan is one of the municipalities of the island province of Basilan, comprising an area of 25,445 hectares. It is bounded by Tuburan on the east, Tipo-Tipo on the south, Isabela on the west, and the Basilan Strait up north. Lamitan is an hour and a half boat ride away from Zamboanga City and less than an hour's travel by land via bus or van. The climate in Lamitan has dry

and wet seasons. The driest month is usually February and the wettest month is August with peak months of rainfall from May to November. This municipality, dubbed by many as the "Home of the Yakans" because of the strong influence of the Yakan culture and the presence of the Yakans, was founded in March 1886 by the legendary hero Datu Kalun. Under the reign of Datu Kalun, Lamitan was constituted by Lamitan town, Tipo-Tipo, and Tuburan. It is told that there was once a group of Spanish soldiers visiting the place who observed the natives were dressed in their full gala attire celebrating a communal feast. One of them inquired from a chieftain about the name of the place. The chieftain answered by giving the name of the feast, *lami-lamihan*, meaning 'merriment' and at the same time 'a meeting of the chieftains.' Thus, the place has been called Lamitan, while the *lami-lamihan* that was traditional after a bountiful harvest during which weddings usually took place as well as the gathering of chieftains, has become an annual "Lami-Lamihan" celebration held at the last week of June, commemorating the founding of Lamitan by Datu Kalun and at the same time an avenue for the preservation, promotion, and propagation of the Yakan cultural heritage (Fig.1). During this festival, one can witness the Yakans wearing their costumes and riding on horseback as they join the civic-military parade. Native braves perform the *tumahik*, the Yakan war dance, an event reminiscent of the past when differences were often settled through combat, accompanied by a *pamansak* or *gandingan* dance (Yakan '*pangalay*'¹) by the women, as others play the *tagunnguh*, the Yakan gong ensemble, and other musical instruments of wood and bamboo.



Figure 1. Yakans participating in the Lami-lamihan Festival, 1983. (Picture courtesy of Mr. Wilfrido Furigay, founder of Lami-Lamihan Festival)

¹ C.f. Amilbangsa 1983.

The Yakans are the native inhabitants of Basilan and their home is in Lamitan. The Yakans are Muslims, although they practice pre-Islamic religious ceremonies like planting and harvesting rituals, birth and death rituals, and spirit and ancestor worship. They speak a language known as Bahasa Yakan, which is a variation of Sinama and Tausug (Jundam 1983). The Yakans are basically farmers growing products like coconut, cassava, abaca, lanzones, cacao, corn, and the most valued among all crops, upland rice. Rituals and prayers are performed with the planting and harvesting of upland rice so as to ensure a bountiful harvest. Coconut palms are abundant in the area, and are exploited for copra and other uses.

Yakan traditional houses are rectangular pile buildings of varying size, elevated three to five meters from the ground for safety from enemies and wild animals, and to keep free from dirt or mud during the rainy season. The house consists of three parts: the main building, *lumah*, the kitchen, and the porch, *pantan*. A Yakan house will always have a porch--sometimes between the main room and the kitchen, sometimes along one side of the main house. It may be covered or open. The entrance to the house is through the porch, and access to the porch is usually by steps or ladders made of bamboo, or a notched log. An *angkap* (mezzanine) is usually added inside the main house. The size of the house varies with a floor area of 30 to 100 square meters. The main house has no partitions; it serves as both reception and sleeping area. Along one side of the room are chests for storing clothes, metal trays for serving food, bronze boxes for betel chewing, and other objects made of brass. Mattresses and pillows stuffed with homegrown *kapuk* (from the 'silk cotton tree') are arranged over the chests by day. At night, mats are rolled out and the *kulambuh* (mosquito net) is set. Typically, at one corner of the room, near the door leading to the porch, is a back strap loom.

The Yakans are known to be among the finest weavers in the Southern Philippines. They produce eye-catching and colorful textiles with tiny motifs, and have weaving techniques called *suwah pendan* (embroidery-like embellishment) and *suwah bekkat* (cross-stitch-like embellishment). The weavers fill all spaces on the warp with minute geometric patterns. A weaving technique that has precise categories for each design and each category is restricted only for utilization on a certain motif or design. Weaving is the only important handicraft in their community.

In the past, all Yakan women were trained in weaving. A common practice among the Yakans of the past was that when a female is born, the *pandey* (traditional midwife) will cut the umbilical cord using a *bayre* (other Yakans pronounce this as *beyde*), which is a wooden bar that is part of the

loom and used for 'beating-in' the weft, so that she grows up to become an expert weaver.

The Yakans use the body tension loom or the back strap tension loom—the weaver sits on the floor with the loom being controlled by her body. Yakan looms can be small or large depending on the type of cloth or design to be woven, and they can be rolled up, carried, and easily set up. The rolled-up warp can be held up in one of the beams at a traditional home. The weaver sits on the floor before the loom with a belt on her waist called *awit* and a warp beam, *deddug*, suspended on a house beam, diagonally in front of her. She braces her feet against a piece of wood called *tindakan*, and uses her body to keep the warp threads taut and in place.

The warp is wound eight to ten meters or longer, just enough to make it easy for setting up the loom inside the house. The threads are pulled through a bamboo comb, *sud*, one at a time so that the threads will be evenly spaced. This process is called *pag-hani* (warping). The secret of an intricately woven cloth lies in the comb: the more the number of sticks that make up the comb, the closer its teeth, and therefore the tighter and more embossed or lifted the designs will be. The pattern or design is made by counting the threads of the loom for each row. Each row is bundled with a separate piece of yarn or sack thread so it can be used throughout the length of the loom. This process is called *pag-peneh* (choosing the threads/making up the design). In this way the whole pattern is pre-programmed. This method is used in almost all cloth designs except for the *seputangan* (female head cloth).

The thread for the background color of the woof is wound on a stick, *anak tulak*, that can turn into a bamboo shuttle, *tulak*. The multicolored thicker threads that make up the pattern (supplementary weft) are cut to a length of 30 centimeters or longer, depending on the weaver's skill, and placed in between the warp threads as the pattern requires. Often, Yakan textiles are mistakenly described as 'embroidered' by people not familiar with the production process. Each family boasts with great pride of a distinct style or design that identifies them from others and their status in the community, which other Yakan clans do not have. In the past, if a Yakan woman possesses the three great skills of warping, designing, and weaving, and is able to produce a cloth, sew it, and make a complete set for her husband and children, she is regarded as an honorable woman, wife, and mother in the Yakan community.

The manner of producing and wearing such clothing by the Yakans is part of the identity of the people and is linked to a number of interrelated factors, such as the physical environment and culture. Climate dictates the type of clothing to be worn, as the Yakans inhabit the interior and the

hinterlands. During the wet season when it is cold, they prefer to wear the thick handwoven blouses to protect themselves from cold and rain, whereas when they work in the fields, they wear blouses of handwoven homespun cotton textiles suitable for hot conditions. They make clothes and woven accessories that fit their arms and legs to keep them warm at night or during a storm, to cover or protect their bodies from the sun when traveling, or as personal adornment when attending feasts. The plants in the area determine the raw materials to be used for such clothing; in the past, the Yakans used silk threads and homespun cotton threads and pineapple fibers which were abundant during that time, and the creation of the designs were inspired by the animals that moved around them. Culture and skills ascertain the qualities, aesthetics, and presentation. Most of the designs in their weave and their dress are inspired by geometric figures and by nature. The interplay of these different factors was what established the product known as the Yakan 'Traditional Costume'.

Elements of traditional Yakan dress

One of the most definitive aspects of the Yakan identity is their clothing and textiles. Colorful and eye-catching, these are also their most prominent visual expressions. They wear blouses and trousers of homewoven material or purchased cloth. The traditional attire is complemented by decorative white dots and scribbles on the faces of celebrants made of rice powder or white Chinese powder ('*borak*') for the white dots, and burnt matchsticks or oil spread on the underside of a porcelain saucer held over candlelight for defining black side beards and eyebrows. This is done on occasions such as graduation from reading the Qur'an, 'weighing of the child', and weddings (see Fig. 2).

The present-day Yakans only wear their traditional attire at home and for special occasions. For street wear, the new generation Yakan has adopted modern manner of dressing; however, the older folks are often seen wearing their old Yakan dress on Sundays or *tabu* (market day). In Yakan society, the traditional costume defines identity and social class. This is closely observed especially during a *Pegkawinan* (wedding).

The cut for the basic articles of clothing is the same for everybody from all walks of life; the real contrast is seen in the details of the costumes worn by the members of royalty and wealthy Yakans. Such costumes are still 'worn' in death by a Yakan, placed over the shrouded body in the manner of how the person wore it when he or she was alive, as it is believed a Yakan who grew up with the ways of his or her ancestors will follow this tradition even in death.



Figure 2. Applying the face make-up, circa 1960s. (Photo courtesy of Princess Lily Cuevas)

The Yakan costume basically consists of the *badju* (top) and *sawal* (trousers) which are made of woven or purchased material. In the past, for the Yakans of Lamitan town proper particularly, these garments were made out of a black cloth called *naynay*. Traditionally, the blouses and trousers are tight at the sleeves and leggings. They may be worn by both men and women but with restrictions as to why, how, and by whom the clothes should be worn.

Sawal or the traditional Yakan trousers has tight-fitting legs from the knee down while the section from the thigh going up hangs loose. A band of cloth is sewn at the waist and folded to firmly hold the pants in place. The pants have a knee-joinery line called *bakiyaq*, an embroidery of tiny chain stitches of four to six color bands. A *sapid* (plait or braid made of intertwined threads) is stitched at the section where the woven cloth is sewn together and around the part of the leggings that reach the ankle. One source, Asbiyan Damsali, age 75, an expert weaver who possesses the knowledge on the three skills of a good weaver (how to warp, to make the design, and to weave), stated that "a *sawal* will not be complete without leg tassels made of silk threads called *jambu*", which is symbolic of the horse. Horsemanship is integral in Yakan culture. The Yakans' trousers are designed for comfort when riding on horseback and also when going up a Yakan house using a notched log. Princess Lily Cuevas (granddaughter of Datu Kalun) stated in an interview that however tight the *sawal* is, it is easy to put on by slipping one's foot through a plastic bag or a banana leaf first.

The woven cloth used for the trousers is called *sinelu'an*. This is the most intricate among all the woven designs of the Yakans, having tiny

diamond patterns arranged in columns between stripes resembling the sections of the bamboo. It was a common practice among the Yakans of the past that when they plant upland rice they would make an offering at the center of the field on an altar made of bamboo, so that their crops will grow tall and strong like the bamboo.

The *sawal* is classified according to the materials used. *Sawal peyat* refers to a kind of trousers entirely made of *sinelu'an* cloth. If a *bunga-sama teed peneh pitumpu* ('cloth with 70 designs'/ old designs) is sewn below the knees, it indicates the wearer is a person of high status in the community. *Sawal ilaupan* is made from purchased black or white material with only the cloth below the knees made of woven cloth. At times, the joints and edges of the black part are embroidered with multicolored threads called *kinaukulan*, which other Yakans refer to as *binakiyaan*. An older type of *sawal* not worn nowadays is entirely made of *peneh bunga-sama te-ed* or *peneh sawe-sawe* ('python designs', see Fig. 3); it is reserved only for the members of royalty, and is called *sawal bunga-sama teed*. Another type of *sawal* is embroidered with silk threads and can only be worn by the upper class; it is called *sawal binuldahan*.

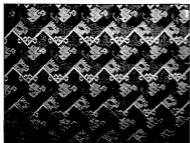


Figure 3. Antique 'peneh sawe-sawe' weaving, pre-1950s. (Owned by Princess Lily Cuevas)

The *badju* is a tight-fitting top (made of woven material or purchased black material called *naynay*) that has tight-fitting sleeves and is decorated with gold buttons called *batawi*. Having buttons that were big in size, and abundant in number, was a status symbol. This garment serves as an overcoat or jacket and is elaborately decorated for use on the occasion of weddings, graduations, or the grand feast of *Lami-Lamihan*. Those of the men are usually open at the front with a pair of *jambu* (tassels of silk threads) sewn at the collar, while those of the women are closed by a string tied to buttons or with a pentagonal chest covering made of the same material as the

blouse. This is usually worn with a white short-sleeved blouse with a wide collar called *lambung*, or with a white polo or t-shirt for the men. The Yakans in Lamitan town proper prefer to wear the black blouse of *naynay* cloth so that the designs they embroidered and the sequins sewn to it will be more evident, making it more attractive and elegant.

The Yakans wear the *badju inaruh* (general term referring to old blouses), also called *badju Yakan* (Yakan blouse), *badju pagal batu* (blouse made of *pagal batu* cloth), or *badju binatawihan* (blouse with gold buttons). This is made of woven cloth called *pagal batu*, or the *sinelu'an* cloth, or from purchased *naynay*. The *badju inintwilasan* is elaborately embroidered with silk threads and metal sequins. This is only worn by the rich families. The *badju lapi*, commonly worn by women, has a pentagonal chest covering decorated with glittering sequins and buttons. A male Yakan chieftain or male royalty could also wear this type. The blouse, including the chest covering, the cuffs, back, shoulders, and arms are embroidered closely with flower and tendril-like designs.

Yakan women weave other articles that form part of the entire costume. For use by men only, the *pis* is a square head cloth measuring one meter or more on each side. It commonly has a red background symbolizing a Yakan man's bravery and strength, and is coupled with green, yellow, and black plaits. Aside from serving the purpose of head protection from heat and during combat, the *pis* serves as a blanket or mat at night or when traveling. When used as head cloth, it is folded into a triangle, with the apex on the forehead and knotted at the nape. The *pis* identifies the wearer's age and stature in the community. If there are pleats or horns formed to the side, the person is still a young Yakan or attending a special activity. If it is folded plainly or there are no elaborations done, the person is already of age. The *pis pangantin* is how the headcloth is worn by the male celebrants during a Qur'anic graduation, the 'weighing of the child', and wedding feasts. This headcloth style distinguishes the male celebrant from the rest of the men; it is characterized by the 'horns' formed in front, a triangle at the rear of the head, and the gold coins and jewelry attached to it. The *pis kinamara* is a style of wearing the headcloth commonly by men attending special occasions. It has elaborate pleats at the sides or two triangles formed through folding. This is only for male members of high status families.

They also wear the *kandit*, a traditional belt for men, which reaches fifteen meters or longer and is made of red cotton cloth called *gilim*. This belt is tediously coiled around the waist with tassels of unwoven *sine'luan* cloth sewn at one end that covers the genital area. The belt is worn for

protection during combat and at times used as hammock for resting or as a pillow at night.

The tubular skirt called *olos*, which is woven using silk threads intertwined with a cotton background, is worn by the women. There are four types of *olos*: the *olos pinalatupan* contains a design representing the lines formed by the rainbow; the *olos kuta batu* is a bright and metallic tubular skirt borrowed by the Yakan from neighboring tribes, the Tausug and Maguindanaw; the *olos binuldahan* is embroidered with silk threads of flower and tendril-like designs and worn by the royalty on special occasions; the *olos inalaman* is the most formal or ceremonial *olos*, made from an intricately woven material with diamond designs or *kabban-buddi*.

Over the *olos*, the women wear the *seputangan*. This is a woven cloth a square meter in size with geometric designs and the most expensive part of the female costume due to the intricacy of its design. This piece of cloth is folded and tied over the *olos* to tighten the hold of the skirt on the waist. It may also be worn as a head covering. It is also placed on the shoulders of brides and grooms during weddings.

As accessories, the Yakans wear the following: the *sappa* or *lutuan* (betel nut container tied around the waist), *barung dende* (long blade with the scabbard inlaid with mother of pearl and silver coins, worn by females) *barung lella* (long blade with the scabbard wound with *nito* vine, worn by males), *saruk* (*nito* hat), *dublun* (coin brooches) *gallang* (bracelets), *pammang* (earrings) and *sugley* (comb of gold and bedecked with stones, worn by women).

The evolution and stylization of Yakan costumes

So-called 'Traditional Costumes' must be reflective of identity and mirror the tribe's rich historic past. One of the most 'sought-after' and 'abused' costumes is that of the Yakan. 'Traditional costumes' of the Yakans today are usually paraded during pageants, seen in department store boutiques, worn during shows, programs, and performances at hotels, and used in movies or documentaries. Oftentimes however, they are styled according to the taste of designers or dance teachers who lack knowledge, or have no knowledge at all, about the 'traditional costumes' of the 'tribe' they are showcasing.

Nowadays, the Yakans only wear Yakan costumes for weddings and during the grand feast of Lami-Lamihan, which is held annually on the last week of June, with its aim to preserve, promote and propagate the rich Yakan cultural heritage and to commemorate the founding of Lamitan by Datu

Kalun (Pedro Cuevas Sr.), whose costumes dating back to the early 1800s can be seen at the Municipal Museum. It is at the Lami-Lamihan Festival, which was formally introduced as a town feast in 1983, where one can witness a Yakan in complete regalia. It is also at this celebration that one can observe how the traditional Yakan costumes have evolved through the years.

Profound changes in the evolution of these traditional costumes have been brought about by 'modernity', the market, and technological advances. The scarcity of certain raw materials, such as homespun cotton, pineapple threads and silk to produce homewoven costumes, has led to the extensive use of mercerized cotton threads and other commercial substitutes. Better transportation and communications, radio and television, and now the Internet, have connected even the most distant villages of the island province with the rest of the world such that younger Yakans would imitate other modes of dressing, as they probably observed and drew inspiration from how their favorite actors and actresses would dress up.

The demands of the tourism industry and the performing arts each year, specifically the dance competitions and 'cultural presentations', have largely promoted the evolution of costume materials and design. The modification and extensive use of glittery material to embellish their traditionally plain black attire made of *naynay* (for those Yakans from the Lamitan Town proper), have resulted in a more attractive style which became the most 'definitive' form of a Yakan black *badju* and *sawal*. This costume through the years has been worn and accepted as the 'Yakan dancing costume' in Lamitan, other parts of Basilan, and Zamboanga City, due to its compatibility and suitability on stage for the kind of dancing to be done.

Meanwhile, the gold and silver buttons and metal sequins on the *badju* have been replaced by alloy buttons and ricrac. The *sinelu'an* cloth sewn below the knees which costs ₱1,500 to ₱2,000 a meter is often replaced by a glittering cloth of similar design bought at a local barter trade or a department store.

At present, the 'dancing costumes' have become a local symbol of the community's identity simply because costumes and dances are two inseparable elements in a folk dance performance or 'cultural presentations' in pageants, cultural shows, documentaries, etc., supposed to depict the people's way of life. The borrowing of styles from other groups, modification of minute details of embroidery and weaving techniques and adaptation to new technologies have resulted in a 'Yakan costume' that in due time has also begun to look similar to that of the old sets of costumes. The Yakans themselves wear these modified and adapted forms of costumes and have accepted them as 'traditional'. To a traditionalist, this development

would seem to be an abuse of 'tradition'. However, most of the costumes produced at present in Lamitan and Zamboanga City are such adaptations of the original attire or woven designs.

The only exceptions are those Yakan families who were able to preserve their old sets of costumes well and pass them on to the younger generation, utilizing modern techniques for acquiring the original designs of the costume and other woven textiles. Despite replacing the handwoven fabric with imported cotton cloth and other techniques, these Yakans maintained the traditional forms and styles due to the reproduction and imitation of the older costumes but utilizing modern technologies such as machine embroidery, computer scanning, and cloth printing that have resulted into materials that look quite similar to the original, although in closer inspection, the quality of handiwork on the older textiles are usually embossed, finer, intricate, and superior.

The original Yakan costumes were made of fine, hand-woven material with exquisite detail, elaborate patterning, and styling. But when viewed from afar, many of the beautiful yet miniscule details are not visible anymore. Adapting the Yakan costume to the needs of the stage or theater entails both simplification and stylization, to attain a clearer effect of a particular presentation, role or character played by an actor or dancer, and the setting of a theme or storyline. Stage performances or dances need practicability and easy wearing of costumes, especially at times when the dancers need to appear on stage within minutes. Rugged fabrics with designs similar to that of a Yakan cloth which can withstand quick changes are replacing the fragile *sinelu'an* or *bunga-sama* cloths. Zippers, velcro fasteners, and even safety pins take the place of hooks and eyes. In general, the new 'Traditional Costume' allows for greater freedom of movement. Mrs. Vistoria Siason, director of the Lamitan Yakan Family Ensemble, said in an interview that when this stylized Yakan costume was worn by the members, they felt more comfortable, had lots of freedom to move, and could quickly remove or change their costumes.

It is understandable that with the rising cost of commodities, dance troupes in Lamitan and Zamboanga (and the Yakans) have adapted the use of materials that are similar to the original but are less expensive, especially for use in street dancing competitions, like the one held during the Lami-Lamihan Festival and other commercialized tourism activities. However, though made of adapted materials, their dancing costumes still reflect the traditional costume worn by the Yakans. One of the dance troupes in Zamboanga City, the Western Mindanao State University Jambangan Dance Troupe, a pioneer in the preservation, promotion and propagation of the

dances of Zamboanga Peninsula, has represented the city in local, national, and international folklore festivals and competitions with “Yakan” as its main repertoire. Their set of costumes consists of the *badju* and *sawal* made of black satin that looks similar to the *naynay*. The arms, back, and chest covering (for girls) are decorated with colorful *intuwilas* (sequins) or gold ricrac. The *jambu* (leg and collar tassels) are made of mercerized cotton threads. The chest covering or the *badju lapi* is attached to the blouse with magic tape and Velcro instead of the traditional string tied to buttons. From a typical blouse with a white and collared undershirt, the ‘new’ blouse only has a white cloth or a ‘cut’ collar sewn to its neckline. The *sawal* is garterized at the waist and with zippers sewn on the tight leggings for purposes of quick change and the comfort of the dancers. The *batawi* are replaced with gold alloy buttons which, along with other accessories such as gold earrings, bracelets, and combs, are bought from department stores or from local Chinese merchants.

Hand-embroidered designs on the costume are now created by machine on a satin base. However, the woven articles like the *sinelu’an* (cloth sewn below the knees), *olos pinalantupan* (tubular skirt woven with metallic threads), *seputangan lime-mata* (headcloth/belt with ‘five-diamonds’ or ‘five eyes’, for females), *kandit* (male belt), and the *pis* (male headcloth) are all still originally woven and ordered from Lamitan. Due to the large warp combs in use today, the designs produced by weavers are blown up or enlarged, thus different from the original *suwah pendan* or *suwah bekkat* designs.

The final product combining original woven materials with adaptation to the stage for dance purposes has been approved by the elders of the Yakan community through Princess Lily Cuevas (pictured in Fig.4), the members of the Yakan ensemble, and some notable and respected weavers and traditional costume designers of the tribe. It is now the reference point for designing Yakan costumes by other dance troupes in the city and Lamitan.

Preserving Yakan weaving and costume tradition

The practice of the art of weaving, *tennun*, has declined, and would go extinct if not for the efforts of some Yakan families who take pride and honor in preserving their heritage. It is a fact that not all Yakan women at present know how to weave. The traditional skills such as embroidery done on the *sawal* (trousers) and the *badju* (blouse), and old techniques applied to weaving such as the *suwah pendan* (embroidery-like embellishment) and *suwah bekkat* (cross-stitch-like embellishment) are not anymore practiced. In the past it was only members of well-to-do clans who could acquire these

skills and techniques. Moreover, it is a common practice among a family of weavers to keep the technique only amongst themselves and a secret from other weavers not belonging to their group, clan, or class. Young weavers prefer to adopt less time-consuming ways of weaving and producing the costume and most of them have traded their costumes and other woven textiles for the more conventional pants or slacks they wear nowadays. The women who have the skills usually weave more than what is needed for themselves and for their family so they could sell the surplus to non-weavers, the ones who go around and look for possible buyers. In this way they could make a living for themselves, even to a limited extent.

In the past, for the Yakan women in Lamitan, the entire Basilan, and from the Yakan village in Zamboanga, weaving would have been only part time work which gave them extra money, but nowadays, it has become a job, nearly becoming their only source of income. Some women make a living in this way, weaving all day long, though more of them have preferred going abroad to become domestic helpers, exchanging their looms and textiles for the 'greener pastures' farther away from where they came from.



Figure 4. The author with Princess Lily Cuevas.

At the height of the conflict during the 1970s between the military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the residents of Bohe Bessey, Badja, Bohe-Ibu, Panandakan, and Parangbasak were forced to evacuate. Some of them managed to find a better place in Upper Calarian, Zamboanga City. With no means of livelihood, the Yakan women took up their looms again to weave. Some transferred to the city, the rest stayed in Lamitan Town where woven cloths are still produced and turned into table runners, doilies, bags, wallets and other contemporary accessories bought by tourists and Yakans alike. The revival of traditional backstrap loom weaving serves a two-fold purpose: one, to support the family's basic needs, and two, as a

form of preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the Yakans, by teaching the younger women how to weave.

As much as one's culture is evident in one's dress, the Yakans' efforts in producing such costumes has gained them recognition as a tribe with beautiful pieces of artwork and reawakened in them the consciousness to things which they have taken for granted. This has happened despite the negligence of the generations past along with the different factors in the Yakans' environment such as the scarcity of materials used for weaving, old techniques that were not passed on to the next generation of weavers (when the old weavers died, so did the secrets of the loom), the unstable peace and order situation in the area, and the lack of interest among the younger Yakans about their culture. The culture and the people are not so much 'lost' as gradually placed to the background as modernity takes root.

The tourism industry, the performing arts, and last, but not the least, the cultural sentiments of the people of Lamitan and Zamboanga and the Yakans, have largely influenced this development and evolution of Yakan costumes as seen in the yearly celebration of the Lami-Lamihan Festival in Lamitan. In a way, the festival (re-)educated the Yakans, the people in Lamitan, and the general public as a whole. The weaving competition has become one of the celebrated events during the Lami-Lamihan Festival in June and the Hariraya Feast, a sumptuous feast celebrated after Ramadhan, with each Yakan community boasting of the best woman who could do the *peneh* (counting the threads), *hani* (designing the weave), and the *tennun* (actual weaving). The champion weaver is chosen based upon her skill in weaving the traditional designs of a typical Yakan cloth: color combination, technique used, and craftsmanship.

What the Yakans wear, from the woven articles to the use of purchased commercialized products, has mirrored the social and environmental changes in their society. As the weaving process and techniques changed, though working on the same loom, the production of the costume changed as well. As Princess Lily Cuevas stated in a documentary film made by a local filmmaker,

"It's a dying culture. How can we continue to weave the way our ancestors did a long time ago, with all these conflicts around us, with this present peace and order situation in the province? How could we? A bullet does not choose its target. Pity for those who were hit...Good for those families who maintained the weaving techniques and adapting to the present situation by utilizing modern means of producing the cloth itself and the costumes...."

(Dayoc, 2008).

Asbiyan Damsali is an old weaver who used to serve the royal family. She is also skilled in embroidery. Due to her failing eyesight, she no longer weaves but now only teaches her female relatives the old techniques. She relates that when she was younger and still able-bodied, she made a set of costumes for Sultan Unding's (son of Datu Kalun) family which she personally warped and designed. She felt fulfilled and proud seeing the members of the family wearing the costume she made.



Figure 5. Parangbasak National High School students.
(Photo by Earl Pasilan)

Among the many who participated during the 2010 Lami-lamihan celebration, it was only the Parangbasak National High School students who paraded with an almost complete set of costumes. When asked why they chose to wear the traditional costumes, they replied "*Pegge semmek inin si me' kepapu'an kun...*" ['Because this belonged to my ancestors']. Another stated, "*Pegge dinaak weh mastal kami hin... pegge niyah peglami-lamihan*" ['because we were required to wear it...because we'll be attending the Lami-Lamihan Feast']. At the same event, an old man was wearing a very peculiar set of pants, ones worn only by rich clans of the past. It was made of *bunga-sama* cloth and embroidered at the leggings. He was asked 'Why do you own that kind of old trousers?' He replied "*Pu si papu' kun inin... Masa ne. Ga neh niyah kami sawal kuweh inin.*" ['This is of my grandfather... an old style. We don't have any other trousers as this one.']

According to Awsalin and Damsali, “the production of the costume itself is painstaking, from the warping, to the designing of the pattern, to the weaving process, to the cutting and sewing of the cloth, and adding the details of the costumes like the embroideries, to making the leg tassels, setting the gold buttons... All require patience and understanding...It’s not an easy job... A process requiring total involvement of the body, mind and spirit....” (Pasilan 2002). A great weaver like Ambalang Awsalin, who is in her late seventies, when asked about her craft would say (as she puffs her favorite cigar),

“Na aku, ga’i ku pereheng megtennun... Bisan niya, miyaan, pei’in te, meh Abu Sayaf, niyah meh M.I. Iye ruh ku tinallew dehu dem anu, bang niya ne issab siye megtimbak. Bang gah ne niyah siye magtimbak, na pabalik ne ku si lumah. Na, megtennun ne ku issab....”

The translation goes this way:

“I won’t stop weaving even if there are dangers, like possible attacks from Abu Sayaf or MILF. I only get afraid when they begin to attack. But when the firing ceases, I go back home and start weaving....”

Conclusion

‘Traditional’ Yakan clothing still continues to evolve and adapt to new developments. The disappearing traditional skills and knowledge for making these costumes are now being replaced with modern adaptations but still keeping typical designs and techniques, which are at present culturally accepted and followed. All these perhaps shall eventually become tomorrow’s ‘tradition’ of the Yakans of Lamitan, Basilan, still fitting their popular designation as “an artistic and colorful group among the Islamic tribes from the Southern Philippines.” (*Uwang Ahadas...*, n.d.)

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