

THE KONTRATA AS A CULTURAL GIFT: A GADDANG MARCHING BAND IN THE FUNERAL RITUALS OF SOLANO, NUEVA VIZCAYA

Rachelle Ann D. Labasan ¹

¹ University of the Philippines, Diliman

Corresponding author:

Rachelle Ann D. Labasan
rdlabasan@up.edu.ph

Received: 3 December 2025

Revised: 21 May 2026

Accepted: 22 June 2026

Published: 30 June 2026

Citation:

Labasan, R. A. D. (2026). The Kontrata as a cultural gift: A Gaddang marching band in the funeral rituals of Solano, Nueva Vizcaya. *PULSE: Journal for Music and Interdisciplinary Practices*, 7(1), 108–133. https://so18.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/pulsejournal/article/view/vol7_1_5/rachelleannlabasan

Abstract

An ethno-linguistic group widely known as the lowland Gaddangs, located in a commercial town in Nueva Vizcaya, has maintained a musical tradition passed down to them since the early 1960s. This study on the emergence of brass bands in Solano and the loss of knowledge and utilization of indigenous traditional instruments calls for another ethnomusicological perspective, especially since the ethnography shows how the Gaddangs transformed the marching band instruments into mechanical agencies of social cohesion. Guided by the Maussian concept of the gift, the research problem seeks to answer the economic implications, social contribution, and the moral exchange that Gaddang musical performances facilitate in the community. Immersion in daily rehearsals captured the zeal of the younger ones as they honed their theoretical knowledge and musical skills, seeking a sense of accomplishment and, mainly, economic sustainability. Their performance as fulfillment of their obligation to the kontrata (contracts) provides first-hand information about how, in their predominantly Western repertoire, the folk songs they

play represent constructs of kinship, flora, and the land. The degree of giving in the Gaddangs of Solano is observed to be *binallay* - Gaddang word for equally divided - reciprocally fair in organizing people and fees, even in musical components that maintained the banda tradition. The continuance of this peripheral activity manifests the town's moral need to satisfy its aesthetic hunger through musicians who will not stop, because, for the Gaddangs, to disband would be to stop giving.

Keywords: Marching Band, Gaddang Music, Labog Band, Gift, Social Cohesion

Introduction

Modernity has shaped humanity's drive for progress, with scientific revolutions fueling a widespread aspiration to be modern. Ascribing to modernity is seen as essential for survival, making comfort and efficiency dominant values in contemporary society. In a society that aims to achieve industrialization, this mindset prioritizes rapid adaptation to demands, often at the expense of collective well-being. As a result, material gain and individual achievement become paramount, sometimes resulting in social fragmentation and moral decline through unexamined communal identities.

Within this context, Eder (2013) claims that the coming years will witness a profound loss of categories for distinguishing identity, particularly as notions of indigeneity are eroded by factors such as geographical mobility, changing livelihood options, shifting employment demands, outgroup marriage, and religious transformation. These factors are categorized as processes of change that directly affect group dynamics and individual motives in either preserving or silencing heritage (Resurreccion, 1999, as cited in Eder, 2013). An effort of preservation was done as response to this phenomenon, with Lomicao-Lora documenting the Gaddang traditions in a book during the early 1990s.

Cash-based economy introduces contracts as a formal agreement compelling the other party to carry out the mandated obligation in a given space and time. In this study however, contract takes on another meaning as the transactional process bonds communities and the activity owned as a community tradition. This

account of exchange and survival is also apparent among the Gaddang people of Nueva Vizcaya, a province in Cagayan Valley that is home to indigenous societies such as the Ifugao, Igorot, Isinay, Bugkalot, and Gaddang. Wallace (2013) highlights the long-term impact of this colonial and religious fracturing by categorizing the group into the Ga'dang (Pagan Gaddangs) and the Lowland Gaddangs (Christianized Gaddangs). Through a 45-year longitudinal research project tracking cultural change, Wallace illustrates this shift, identifying the Christianized Lowland Gaddangs as native inhabitants of northern Nueva Vizcaya—specifically within the towns of Solano, Bagabag, and Bayombong—now numbering around 30,000 individuals (p. 8). The region's historical development highlights a distinct Gaddang gesture of generosity: the intentional gathering of migrants to populate Solano and establish its independence from Bayombong. It began in 1853 when the Gaddang gobernadorcillo, Diego Lomicao, brought the first Ilocano settlers to the area (Malumbres, 1919/2018, p. 140). The gift, understood as an entity that is intrinsically part of an identity, is congruent with this act of reciprocity. Thus, the discourse of this narrative revolves around the actual gestures of exchange, within which musical culture serves as an indispensable fragment.

Initial investigation reveals that while the Gaddangs of Solano face a significant loss of traditional musical practices, their core musical knowledge persists, having adapted to the contemporary sounds that envelop their daily lives. If music is a window into sociological reality, it currently circulates within a complex web of conflicting interests, where cultural survival ultimately depends on the ability to adapt. I position myself to an ethnomusicological stance that argues how musical culture provides a vital account of this lowland indigenous society, precisely because musical traditions are continuously changing (Blacking, 1977). It is an investigation of the traces of indigenous notions embedded in the marching band performances of the lowland Gaddangs in Solano, a commercial town in Nueva Vizcaya. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the Gaddang indigenous elements in this modern expression?
2. What are the economic implications of the band to Solano, and of Solano to the band in terms of reciprocity?
3. What is the band contributing socially to Solano?

4. Is the funeral procession still a moral transaction of the band with its surrounding community?

Theoretical Framework

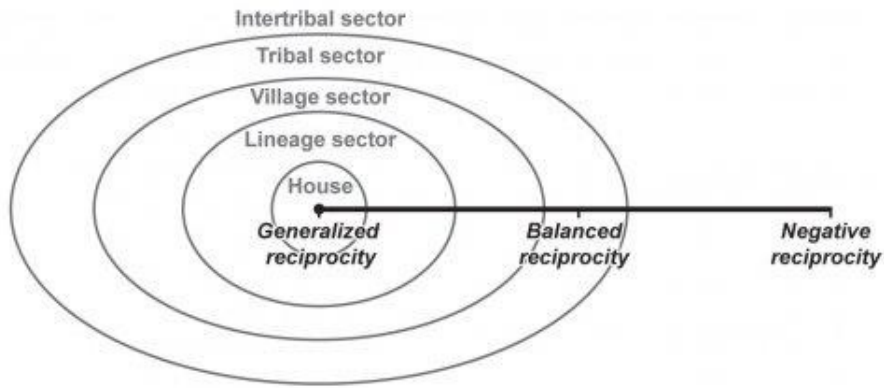


Figure 1: Sahlin's reciprocity sectors or spheres of interaction (1972:199)

The sociology of exchange is central to understanding how indigenous societies, like the Gaddang, engage with a modernized society characterized by a cash-based economy. The spheres of interaction outlined by Sahlin (1972) illustrate how social distance dictates the nature of relationships formed and maintained through material exchange.

As exchange moves outward from the close-knit kinship core toward the periphery, it shifts from altruistic giving to a more parasitic, profit-motivated orientation. At this outermost edge lies negative reciprocity, in which benefits are demanded or extracted regardless of the giver's capacity, driven by an impersonal, socially distant approach. Occupying the vital middle ground is the category that covers the majority of the band's relationship sets: balanced reciprocity. This practical, equivalent exchange hinges on a mutually beneficial material flow, which, in the context of the Gaddang band, is formalized through kontrata (contracts). This framework was employed to capture the full spectrum of exchanges occurring in Solano through the band.

This theoretical framework guided the collection of ethnographic data and the mapping of the band's social networks. The empirical results track the geographical

extent of these sectors, showing how balanced contractual agreements often draw the band outside the immediate borders of Solano for specialized engagements, such as funeral marching contracts.

Conceptual Framework

In her introduction to the work of Mauss, Douglas (1990) argues that The Gift is an important lens in studying societies as she assures that there is ‘no free lunch’, and every gift - both moveable and immovable is intrinsically hinged to an agreement that finds fulfillment in reciprocation. The lunch is not free, so is the banquet, the ritual, the military services, the women, the children, the dances, the festivals, and fairs (Mauss, 1954, p.7). When works of art demand some kind of fee and cease to be a giveaway, anthropology argues that the payment strengthens the social bond.

Historical accounts of indigenous societies could affirm and claim that the existing ways of exchange may not be balanced and fair, as power seeks to accumulate more as it dominates the other. Regardless if the musical activity preserves the musical tradition, investigation of the musical culture through reciprocal interactions have revealed authentic sociological and cosmological implications, at least in the healing of the community achieved through Berava drumming in Sri Lanka (Skykes, 2011).

In a society becoming increasingly capitalist and commodity-centered over time, the lens of studying societies through their exchange system holds importance. The indigenous concept is embedded in the gift’s universality, further supported by Carrier’s proposition that exchange is negotiated through gifts and commodities among people, objects, and relationships, unifying them in a social rhythm (1991). In the context of a meal, for instance, the gift is the food itself, inclusive of its preparation. Using the gift as a lens shows that the processes involved in instrument acquisition, repertoire organization, and tedious rehearsals culminate in the musical performance itself.

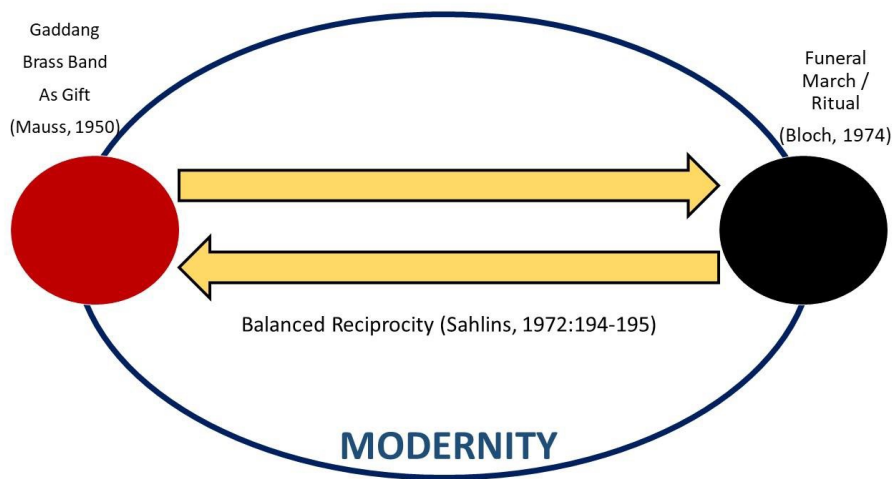


Figure 2: The Conceptual Framework on Exchange in Modernity

To understand the modern marching band as both a commercial entity and a cultural gift, this paper operationalizes Sahlins’ (1972) midpoint category: balanced reciprocity. In the contemporary setting of Solano, the two opposing poles in this exchange—the Brass Band and the Funeral Procession—act as the primary agents. While their interaction is mediated by the modern, practical mechanism of *kontrata* (contracts), it simultaneously functions as a vehicle for preserving indigenous solidarity and ritual continuity within the realm of modernity. The funeral procession itself is a Christian practice that has been solidified over time. According to Bloch (1974), it represents a formalized communication that is non-negotiable and unbound by immediate space and time. This communal gesture of walking to accompany the bereaved family and the mourning congregation to the church and, subsequently, to the cemetery is a deeply embedded tradition in Nueva Vizcaya, particularly in the towns of Solano, Bayombong, and Bagabag. As Bloch and Parry (1982) note in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, the handling of the corpse and the rituals surrounding death are ultimate social decisions; thus, the funeral procession illuminates the very nature of the society and the state of its collective conscience.

It is within this ritual interplay that the Gaddang brass band transcends a simple commercial transaction and embodies Marcel Mauss’ (1954) classic concept of the gift. While the *kontrata* fulfills the economic requirements of Sahlins’ balanced

reciprocity, the Music, services, and presence provided by the band become a source of profound aesthetic emotions felt by the mourning congregation.

The brass band's persistence as a peripheral musical activity demonstrates the Gaddang community's desire to make its presence felt. The researcher argues that this is of paramount importance in contemporary Solano: the band utilizes the framework of balanced, contractual reciprocity to enact a Maussian gift—a moral, rather than purely mechanical, transaction of giving oneself to others in an era otherwise dominated by individualistic pursuit (Mauss, 1954, p. 77).

Together, these theoretical and conceptual alignments provide the basis for the qualitative methodology employed in this research, mapping how the band's geographic movements mirror the expansion of Solano's sociological networks through the funeral ritual.

Methodology

In her instructional dissection of commonly used ethnomusicological theories, Stone (2008) presents structural-functionalism as a framework that examines a musical phenomenon and its consequences within broader aspects of society. This theory allows the researcher to investigate social interaction and study how people come together, as this musical activity is understood to strengthen the Durkheimian idea of social solidarity. Fieldwork was conducted in the commercial town of Solano, Nueva Vizcaya, focusing specifically on the Labog Brass Band. Participants included a purposive sample of 15–30 key informants, consisting of pioneering band elders, contemporary band directors, active youth musicians, and local community members who frequently engage the band for ritual services.

The method operationalizes musical performances as the central “gift” being studied, following a framework in which interactions between the brass band and funeral rituals—facilitated in a particular space and time—reveal the indigeneity embedded in the gestures of giving and receiving. Primary data were gathered through intensive participant observation from April to June 2022, during which the researcher attended daily rehearsals, engaged in casual conversations (*pakikipagkwentuhan*) with band members, and recorded significant observations in field notes. Follow-up field visits were subsequently conducted whenever the

data required further clarification. This ethnographic material, including musical scores and existing literature on the Gaddangs in Solano, was evaluated using qualitative thematic analysis. Data were coded to identify recurring themes aligned with the research questions: instances of binallay (fair division), structural indicators of kontrata (balanced reciprocity), and expressions of aesthetic emotion (moral transactions). The rich results of these participant interactions, with special emphasis on the band itself, are presented as a musical ethnography that maps the precise ways these gifts contribute economically, socially, and morally to Solano and neighboring towns in Nueva Vizcaya.

Ethical Considerations

Since December 2021, the researcher has applied for a study permit from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Provincial Office in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, to conduct this research project. Under NCIP Administrative Order No. 1, Series of 2012, this requirement aims to safeguard the interests and rights of indigenous groups, as well as to guide academic researchers in carrying out responsible and culturally sensitive methods of study.

The institutional process involved meeting directly with the leaders and elders of the Nueva Vizcaya Gaddang Indigenous Peoples Organization (NV-GIPO) to discuss the research intent, and hosting a comprehensive community conference with Gaddang representatives from each town across Nueva Vizcaya to collectively validate the project. This community validation was officially approved on February 11, 2022. Following the completion of the fieldwork and adhering to NCIP protocols, the preliminary results of the study were returned to the community, and the final research findings were formally validated by Gaddang Leaders and Elders on October 16, 2024.

Results And Discussion

Gaddang Instrumental Music in Solano

Like other indigenous societies, the Gaddang found refuge in the highlands during the colonial period (P. Labog, personal communication, November 2020). Consequently, the Gaddang who remained in the lowlands became more open to

assimilating external cultural practices. In tracing the remnants of Gaddang music in Solano, it is highly instructive to compare how Music is integrated into the lives of the highland Gaddangs in Paracelis, Mountain Province.

Wallace (2013) classified seven rituals of the anitu - or deity - and one of which is the balog. This ritual is celebrated as a bond of the children and the anitu as a spiritual power (p. 97). Among the seven rituals, balog is the only ritual in which the child formally becomes a participant in both the ceremony and the lifeways. His fieldnotes unfold the actual activities - the gongs used as a primal element to demonstrate a young citizen's life cycle and transition to be fully part of the community. It is in this paradigm that we explore the metaphysical similarities between the highland gongs and the lowland brass band, positioning both as dynamic physical agencies of social cohesion (Wallace, 2013, pp. 100-102).

Photo 1: The Labog band, photographed during their first musical performance after the end of the war in 1945



A description of daily activities related to this brass band tradition would help further the discussion of the search for indigenous notions in this modern expression. Musicking practices are therefore described as events that hold social meanings (Small, 1998) as we attempt to describe a Gaddang society immersed in the lowlands.

There are two kinds of rehearsals: one where they gather informally without a specific time, and a formal rehearsal that strictly monitors members' attendance to rehearse for a contract. The formal rehearsal finalizes who joins the funeral march and who gets part of the ballay.

The repertoire shows the inclination towards the songs of the time. The band members themselves arrange most; others are imported from other brass bands, such as the Army Band, Malabon Brass Band, and the Veterans' Band. Even the acquired pieces echo the extent of the reached social networks to sustain the band tradition.

Repertoire

Photo 2: The handwritten pieces of the LA Band (Labog-Aliac Band).



This band does not purchase pieces but re/writes them in detailed sets in music notebooks. The first column of the handwritten materials indicates the set of pieces ranging from A to E, which is an efficient technique for the band during each performance, as each letter set contains different songs already lined up in order. Labelling them as sets already reduces the time spent locating the pieces individually. The second column represents the variation in tone, and the numbers 1-3 indicate that musical arrangements may include up to 3 voice parts contributing to the overall band harmony and orchestration. The final column indicates the specific instrument for which the arrangement is intended. The organization of these pieces used for performance is both ordinal and systematic, patterned in a Western orchestral orientation. Nevertheless, it also speaks to a musical activity that endures over the years through creative and conscious effort.

Gaddang Folk Songs

A strong Gaddang expression, however, is found in their folk songs. Lumicao-Lora (1984), in her chapter on song compilation and lyric translation, mentions a Gaddang musician, Orlando Maddela, who believes that some songs were originally poems chanted by intoxicated Gaddang bards during merry-making, which were later recited in pentatonic tones. The folk songs are examples of how Gaddang culture manifests in the lyrics, which contain glimpses of their beliefs, sentiments, and ways of life, and are expressed through melodies with rhythmic themes of *allegro*, *danza*, and *marcha* (Borromeo, n.d.).

In one night, the band played four folk songs for a client in Bagabag: *Ope Manque Wayi*, *O Lappao* with *Nataloffu*, and *E Masetac*.

Ope Manque Wayi is a famous Gaddang folk song in both Solano and Bayombong. To some locals, this song has been an indicator of Gaddang indigeneity, as it was widely assumed that one is not Gaddang without knowing how to sing it (T. Palitayan, personal communication, 2020). It has become a song even for Christmas caroling (ND. Labasan, Jr., personal communication, 2020), and was once taught as a local folk song in Solano public high schools during the 1980s (M. Manalese, personal communication, 2021). The second stanza presents two extremes: someone who is worthier is chosen over someone poor and lowly (Lora, 198, p. 28). The lyrics express emotions with intensity, mentioning the hurt that could cause one to die (p. 29). In an interview, the band leader perceives this folk song as not a romantic love song but a song to a sibling or relative expressing feelings of neglect (Phone interview, July 2022). However, *wayi* is used in several love songs, and let us take, for example, some lines from the folk song *Macuacad Uahi* (1984:20). *Wayi*¹ here becomes a term of endearment, akin to the use of *ading* in Ilocano.

Ecological References in the Folk Songs

Steven Feld (1996), in his fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, mentions

¹Wallace has used the word *waiyi* as one of the words used in his measurement on the extent of cultural change in Social Concepts of Gaddangs of Paracelis within a span of 45 years (2013:120), and his result shows a relatively low score in the retention of Gaddang cultural concepts (2013:123).

placenames as the Kaluli way of ascribing memories in a location. Revel (2003) compares two representing tribes from the northern (Ifugao Hud-hud) and southern (Kata-Kata of Sama Dilaut) parts of the Philippines and proposes that the Ifugao Hud-hud reflects a time frame encompassing topography and social space (p. 273). Wallace (1967) distinguishes between two agricultural terms: *abafini*, referring to the time to grow palay from August to December, and *mamula*, referring to the time to grow edible crops from January to July. Wallace (1967) describes Gaddang swidden agriculture as a ligature between man and nature, a term that further implies a synchrony between the combined agricultural period and human calendrical time. These incorporated themes lead us to heed ecological references in the Gaddang folk songs performed in a 'last night' vigil.

O Lappao was the first song played in this medley of two songs played on a vigil in Bagabag. *Lappao*, which means flower, is personified and compared to a love interest. It is then specified as a rose – a kind that is known for its sight and smell as the beloved is treasured in one's *nacam* (mind). It ends with a statement about whom the caresses are for. *Magawa-gawwayyannak Ngad*, popularly known as *Nataloffu*, is the second song in the medley. The first stanza describes a plant growing from the heart as roots take over the body, implying how the plant and the body unite. The *taggang*, or the chest, opens to reveal a flower full of scent. The second stanza presents two extremes: a poor heart and a mind that rejoices upon the thought of someone dear. The third folk song has another reference to flora, this time with a garden that involves flowers and fruits that are likened to the rays of the sun, an essential element for the growth of the land. The emotional depth of these lyrics reminds the researcher of a time in fieldwork when the band leader repeatedly explained to the young members how one's playing should come from what one feels; thereby measuring one's competence as the section leader by expressive playing rather than technical virtuosity.

By consciously including folk songs in their line-up, a band accustomed to playing popular repertoire may have taken a stand at a social event. It is observed that the ecological references amplify the sentimental lyrics, showing how man and nature can be harmoniously interwoven. This intersection of the traditional and the contemporary epitomizes the ethnomusicological framework of Alan Lomax

(1959), who is fittingly cited in the Nueva Vizcaya Gaddang Indigenous Peoples Organization recognition book for his assertion that “the crossroads are where folk songs bloom” (p. 2). Even in the commercialized, multicultural crossroads of modern Solano, the band’s performance becomes the exact site where localized Gaddang folk traditions continue to bloom and retain their expressive power.

An Authentic Musical Tradition?

Mary Talusan (2021), in her recent work on the Philippine Constabulary Band under the direction of Col. Walter Loving, established Filipino identity through its representation of the country at the 1904 St. Louis Fair, leading us to appreciate the Filipino Banda Tradition as present notions of its authenticity are revisited. She used the concept of imperial ear to evaluate how authenticity is perceived and who expects it to be distinctive from Western Music. She argues that the authenticity of a musical culture lies in discovering its metaphysical essence. That hybridity can be used to describe “the Other” – or cultures that have come into contact with the West (p. 19–20). In this light, it could be inferred that musical structures are secondary factors in proving the authenticity of a musical tradition, given that modernity has made cultures more hybrid than ever. To rely solely on their musical transcripts would result in a superficial description (p. 49) of the Gaddang version of sustaining an indigenous band tradition. The fact that this tradition is strongly felt in the community speaks of band musicians who advocate for their own sense of ethnic pride (p. 66) in a time when external influences could obscure the Gaddang culture and identity (Lora, 1984).

The Gongs in Paracelis allude to the Marching Band in Solano (Wallace, 2013). As the instruments transform into an agency that amplifies the ritual, becoming a venue for empowering the younger generation, a place and time for community fellowship, and a space that caters to the exhibition of individualized freedom, affirmed by collective reception, the ritual ultimately shows the synchronization of man and Music in a modern context.

The Economic Aspect

The research setting, Nueva Vizcaya, was described by Spaniards as a lush, green meadow, and in its beauty, they named it after their province, Vizcaya. To subdue it, the authorities transformed it into a politico-military province. At present, Nueva Vizcaya is an agricultural province given its geography, and Solano is described as the commercial center of the province.

Initial interviews shed light on a musical practice that traces back to the Spanish colonization period, when missionaries trained a band in which Domingo Bangad, a great-great-grandfather, was a member. Bangad Band was said to be the first brass ensemble organized in Nueva Vizcaya. Remnants of this band have continued the ensemble until the death of pioneering instrumentalists. The continuation of this brass band tradition relies heavily on practicality and resourcefulness. Historically, Palmerin Labog mentioned that the band tradition, starting with the Bangad band, used old, available instruments left by the Spaniards.

Juan Aliac, a son of Nicolas Bangad Aliac, made an effort to reorganize a brass band. With the loss of instruments, Jack P. Labog, already a retired member of the US Army, was prompted to return to America. One of his agendas was to procure musical instruments for the children they had trained to play in the ensemble. Luckily, some of the sons and daughters studying in America were members of public high school bands. Unused or old instruments of the foreign ensemble were brought to Solano (Personal Communication, November 2020).

Ballay: The Material Hinge to a Moral Transaction

Musical Service Component	Fee in Philippine Peso	Fee in US Dollars (2022)
Interment Procession	6,500 Php	\$115.08
‘Last Night’ Vigil Performance	5,500 Php	\$97.37
Total Base Package Fee	12,000 Php	\$212.45
Total Inclusive of Band Transportation	12,500 Php	\$221.31

Note: Calculated at an exchange rate of approximately 56.48 PHP per USD in 2022.

Ballay is the Gaddang word for share. After every performance or procession, everyone else gets their share at the headquarters based on the following matrix in Philippine Peso:

Note: Calculated at an exchange rate of approximately 56.48 PHP per USD in 2022.

At a 2022 exchange rate of approximately 56.48 Philippine Pesos to the US Dollar, the individual payout per performance translates to roughly 14 to 18 USD. For a local minimum-wage earner, this single disbursement represents a substantial financial supplement, equivalent to two full days of labor.

It was discovered that young band members continue to join the band for the extra income it provides. One adult member also attests that she was able to purchase a tricycle sidecar by joining the band. For children and adults alike, the band tradition becomes a significant source of income² that helps augment their daily allowance. Wallace’s study of the Gaddangs in Paracelis demonstrates how the means of exchange (i.e., kiring, or marriage beads; rice cakes; and pigs) were central to maintaining a solid union between a man and his wife (2013, pp. 76, 85-87). The economic act now takes on a social meaning: the exchange of gifts, services, or cash creates a bond between the giver and the receiver.

² Another source of income for the Gaddangs in the Labog Band Compound is their assistance in the operations of Small-Town Lottery. It has been part of their daily afternoon routine.

Solano is a first-class municipality known as a center of economic activity in the province, serving as a melting pot of different cultures. People from the town's outskirts purchase their daily necessities from establishments and the commercial center. The band provides another perspective on this economic interplay between the band and the community's funeral procession, as the ballay serves as a simulacrum that facilitates balanced reciprocity while negotiating its identity within its own economic context. The instruments become objects that give them a sense of ownership, affirming their participation in the community.

In a generation accustomed to dependence on labor-saving devices, the band uses its strength and ability to foster unity among the citizens, relatives, or strangers alike. The funeral procession then transforms into an agency where bereaved families can find the company they need in a rather unfortunate event, which shows why, until this time, people have been availing contracts with the band. Thankfulness manifests in the ballay acquired in exchange for an aesthetic hunger only filled by Music, in a continuum of a community walking together.

The Social Aspect

Don Simon

Gaddang Lyrics

Don, Don Simon, niggam si appompol
Mang a nacaual, namarambang si gayang
Dumatang na sicuara, ininao y ataua na
Binalle-balle na, sicuara a masasina
Ammem matangit, eteng, se acuam a pempel na
Ammem mattangit, adong, se accuam a ulo na
Ammec! Ammec ya! (Spoken loudly)

Don Simon

English Translation

Don, Don Simon, armed with a bat
Went harrowing and caught a crow
Upon arriving home, his wife cooked it
He divided it among his wife and children

Do not cry, my daughter, you will have the legs
Do not cry, my son, you will have the head
No! I do not like!

The social aspect is symbolized by another folk song, “Don Simon,” which describes how a father divides the hunt equally among his children. *Binalle-balle na* means he divided it equally according to what his children wanted.

Separation becomes imperative when a portion is imagined apart from the whole. To attain balance, the whole temporarily ceases to be a single entity, in consideration of fairness in the shares. If the ballay is a noun that refers to the share, binallay is the active process of division.

When the elders and representatives of the Gaddang tribe met at Bagabag, Nueva Vizcaya, in February 2022, the organizational president presented a theme: “What one Gaddang is saying should be the same thing another Gaddang is saying.” This invitational slogan has been the theme for that specific year, seeking to address misunderstandings and to harness organizational unity to fulfill Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) requirements as soon as possible. In light of the band’s forms and reorganizations over time, the Labog band’s current disposition echoes the theme of independence and autonomy across generations, almost analogous to Don Simon’s intention to attain equity among his family members by negotiating to give each member a fair share of their preferences. In a Gaddang wordplay, binalle-balle na (He divided it).

In Solano, one of the most undeniable expressions of Gaddang identity is the marching band tradition. To this day, the Aliac and Labog bands maintain strict independence in managing the kontrata (contracts) with community members who seek their musical services. On that same day in May 2022, both bands played for separate contracts. Acquaintances from both groups greet one another as they meet. While the dead receive the final mass inside the Bayombong Cathedral, both bands wait patiently outside, but in separate places.

Binallay, or divided they may be, the bands are both agencies in promoting self-development, creatively audible in a collective sound, as their Music becomes

the invisible thread that maintains a relationship between themselves and the community. A journey through their world of objects would guide further understanding of what this sonority brings to society.

The Journey of Musical Instruments

In Actor-Network Theory, Latour (1991, as cited in Bates, 2012) contends that objects, as actors, are capable of translating the ideas they convey, redefining them, and sometimes betraying them. The musical instruments that are preserved, acquired, utilized, and redefined contain a much-needed explanation of what happens in a collective.

The journey begins when the Spanish missionaries taught the natives of this politico-military province to play their brass instruments. A random interview with a Gaddang elder recalls her father as a musician and a longtime cantor (choir member) at a cathedral in Bagabag after the liberation. According to her, their father would always require them to attend church. As a child, she describes a memory of her father singing songs which she could hear and appreciate but could not understand (F. Fabenal, Personal Communication, September 2023). Like the foreign lyrics, the use of these brass instruments was orchestrated with the prerequisite of teaching the natives to read the Music brought by the friars. In organizing the Bangad band, being in charge of an instrument parallels the charge to attain a set standard for comprehension. The first conductors were not disappointed - the first brass band organized in Nueva Vizcaya even went as far as Echague, Isabela, to perform.

Many years have passed, and the bodies that once carried the instruments in spectacles have grown weak. Juan Manat Aliac, born in 1888, desired to relive the moments by recreating a new breed of performers through repetition of the process for musical comprehension and mastery. The instruments outlived the years, with the Labog-Aliac band playing not only for funerals but also for fiestas, weddings, and Christenings, inside and outside the province. The training process was deeply ingrained in the young members, especially when the time came for the Labog and Aliac bands to go their separate ways. The instrument collection grew while Jack P. Labog was in America, as this US Army officer laments the fate of the children who were trained to read and play Music but are left empty-handed. These children,

now grown men with families, could vividly remember how the elders divided a guyabano fruit during a music lesson to demonstrate the concept of note values. A makeshift basketball hoop, which the boys had erected themselves, was also dismantled when they were instructed—or rather, forced—to master the playing technique of their musical instruments over the athletic play of a ball. As lunchtime approaches, the scent of sopas being cooked by their mothers motivates them to finish the rudiments and routines led by the elders.

Like a brass instrument, this tradition literally weighs much for the Gaddang community; the beauty of its sound demands a certain amount of pressure to be exerted from their bodies; the technical dexterity of the fingers to the keys translates the mental and aesthetic capacity of players, and lastly, the instrument was made for a spectacle that tunes in to harmony.

The Gift of Gaddangs

According to a research interlocutor, there is no specific word for a gift, but there is a term for giving. Intriguingly, the Gaddang word for blood is da (or ada in localized dialects), which shares a striking etymological and phonological resonance with the word for giving, adda. It could be linguistically inferred that the Gaddang notion of a gift is not so much a noun – the material gift itself – but in the act of giving. The young band leader strengthens this assumption in a statement during an interview; despite navigating intense operational and financial hurdles, he insisted that dissolving the ensemble is not an option, stating: “Nasa dugo na namin ito” (It is already in our blood) (J. Labog, personal communication, 2022). In the social meaning of their band tradition, to disband would be to stop giving.

The Labog Brass Band emanated from the Juan Manat Aliac Band. The Labog and Aliac band, once united, was now operating in their own separate ways. Structures presented in various situations represent the Gaddang notion of giving, illustrated by a pattern of actions and interactions, thereby establishing a network of social relations strengthened by the Gaddang brass band and the cohesive element their Music gives to society.

The Moral Aspect

Lungabang was the former name of Solano, derived from the Gaddang word *lungab*, meaning ‘cave’. The Gaddang word used to describe the topography of a place changed into a gesture of recognition to the foreign dignitary who legally formalized the town’s autonomy. As a known commercial center in the province, the municipality has always been committed to progress, even if it meant fully adapting to modern constructs.

Reciprocity is a mechanism of participation in society and a powerful signifier of a person’s willingness to take part in the whole system (Thompson, 1987). The continuity of transactions uncovers an enduring partnership of two willing participants - the bereaved family and the band. The clients embody the citizens of the specific community who need Music, as the Labog brass bands represent Music and the Gaddang identity. Talusan (2021) describes this as an incorporation of foreign signs, symbols, and ideas into indigenous meanings and actions (p. 24). In the context of Solano, Gaddang music is a participatory endeavor that responds to the community’s preferred demands.

Patterns of the musical tradition, richly described through a sociological lens in the previous chapter, support the contention that it has consequences for the prevailing social system (Gouldner, 1960). The pattern of exchange in the Labog band shows how a generation of players is honed through days of rehearsals, translated into hours of performance, and culminates in almost a minute of transaction when the fee is finally collected from the bereaved family just after the ceremony. In terms of the band’s functionality within its community, it affirms the following assumptions: first, that the bereaved family reciprocates the band’s services; second, that the payment is contingent upon a worthwhile presentation; and third, that the payment is entirely based on the service (p. 163). It implies that when the band is forced rather than motivated to reciprocate, the performance ceases to be a gift. When the people solicit the medium of exchange without any effort to compensate, the Gaddangs’ shared notion of equity in the act of giving could disintegrate.

Mauss (1954) describes how reciprocity strengthens participants’ moral system by forming an indissoluble alliance through ritual and Music during times of distress

(p. 42). This exchange thereby reflects the two phases of mortuary rituals, in which a phase of reinstallation - or the collective determination of victory over death - follows a phase of disaggregation (Bloch & Parry, 1982, p. 4). This point of view helps explain why the band plays lively, happy songs after burying the dead in the cemetery.

Mapping Grief: The Gaddang Band Recontextualizing Contemporary P-Pop

As the ultimate evidence of its moral contribution, the study presents an arrangement of a P-pop (Philippine Pop) ballad by SB19, which resonated across the country as it gained popularity. MaPa literally translates to ‘map,’ but is also a portmanteau of Mama and Papa, serving as a dual metaphor for parents as the compass of life. This section provides a detailed musical analysis of the arrangement, examining its harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, and textural components to demonstrate how these elements are manipulated to align with the community’s instrumental forces and the performance context of a death ritual procession.

The original rhythm and melody of the vocal lines were not strictly adhered to, as they were intentionally recontextualized within a brass band framework. For instance, measure 8 departs from the original vocal line, arranged instead to match the idiomatic playing style of the woodwind instruments.

Two sections of trumpets provide a stable harmony by sustaining thirds in whole notes, yet introduce rhythmic variation in the cadences through the use of half notes. This stable rhythm acts as a cohesive element within the section, melodically sustaining the notes that form the underlying triad. In the chorus, one trumpet section joins the primary melody while the other tracks a third below or above it. This brass configuration takes on a new rhythm halfway through Section E, imitating a marching cadence initiated earlier by the alto saxophones.

Measure 14 reflects the traditional banda practice wherein the woodwind and brass sections take turns with the solo, a formal feature characteristic of localized funeral processions. This structural turn-taking is evident again in Section F. Furthermore, the bridge in Section H reintegrates the rhythmic patterns of Section E, characterized by a marching-band harmonic rhythm anchored by the trombone’s accompaniment.

Although the original song's half-step modulation was omitted in Section L, every note of the vocal soloist's improvisational ad-lib was faithfully transcribed, exactly as sung, and arranged polyphonically for clarinet, saxophones, and trumpet. After emphasizing this climactic section, the trumpets return to their structural role as sustained harmonizing tones toward the end of the piece.

While the clarinet delivers a clear, driving melody throughout, the alto saxophones support the texture by executing marching rhythms in third-interval harmonies before returning to the primary melody during the chorus. In the final section, this collective harmony resolves to a full triad in three distinct voice parts, concluding the song.

Acting as a sonic bridge, the tenor saxophone reinforces the brass harmony through sustained whole-note patterns. It ultimately provides the final cadential phrase, utilizing a suspension that resolves the piece to concert Bb major (written G major for the transposing instruments).

The song choice itself stands as a profound moral decision. It contextualizes itself entirely within the Filipino core value of *utang na loob*—the lifelong acknowledgment of parental sacrifice—distilled into the piece's compelling lyrical anchor: '*Pahinga muna, ako na ang bahala*' (Rest for now, I will take care of everything). Contrary to the institutional, conservatoire-culture of symphonic virtuosity designed to impress a seated audience, this piece is arranged as a functional, sacred gift: a sonic accompaniment to the heavy expanse of time it takes for a grieving family to journey with their dead loved one toward their final resting place.

Summary And Conclusion

This Gaddang band counters the dangers of modernity by adapting its songs to the times. It is acoustically evident that musical works performed are arranged in a way that is manageable to play in a procession through uncomplicated patterns of variation in a reciprocating routine - band players faithfully hold on to their part despite lengthy walks to the cemetery, frequently competing with cars and trucks on the highway under the scorching heat. It also reveals the techniques they have learned as members of the band, as the folk songs were played by memory, with

improvised embellishments. They were good musicians, if not excellent, because their elders trained them at an early age; this shows that even a pandemic did not stop the recruitment and training of adolescents. All of these observations add up to the sustenance of musical activity by a collective that, since the town's inception, has been giving a part of itself to the community.

The inclination to Western Music in their repertoire is a determination to confront and interact with the pressing circumstances, transforming it into an economic leverage, a tool for social interaction, and an agency of an identity expressed from the creativity embedded in sound produced and distributed in the community through bodily motions as it reaches captives of sense perceptions through the Music. As for the Gaddangs, their way of surviving rests in the act of giving - a moral transaction - which the people in and outside Solano deem unwise to reject.

Following Talusan's claim, the imperial ear may not consider such musical activity to be indigenous expression, as it categorically isolates the Music as a mere reiteration of colonial constructs. In a time of greater connectedness than ever, the distinction between the local and the global blurs, calling for ethnomusicological theories that validate the integrity of lived fieldwork. A community organically births a song; to analyze it detached from its ethnographic locus reduces it to a mere fraction of its entirety. Thus, to claim that the Gaddang marching band of Solano is simply a repository for Western repertoire constitutes a profound cultural misappropriation.

Sociological and anthropological theories employed in this study did not flatten but rather illuminated the decolonizing standpoints and strategies used to study the intricacies of this musical activity, as well as the actual words of Gaddang interlocutors, a musical tradition. Furthermore, defining morality solely within the bounds of a single ethnolinguistic culture might have dangerous implications.

Perhaps Marcel Mauss composed his dense essay to demonstrate how peace and social cohesion are possibly achieved across human civilizations through the gift, the material or immaterial representation of intentions. Ultimately, harmony should be a musical concept experienced in our shared reality because, after all, Music is humanly-organized sound, and man is inherently musical (Blacking, 1973).

References

- Bates, Eliot. "The Social Life of Musical Instruments." *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 3 (2012): 363–95. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.56.3.0363>.
- Blacking, John. *How Musical Is Man?* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973.
- . "Some Problems of Theory and Method in the Study of Musical Change." *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 9 (1977): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/767543>.
- Bloch, Maurice. "Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation: Is Religion an Extreme Form of Traditional Authority?" *European Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 1 (1974): 54–81. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600002824>.
- Bloch, Maurice, and Jonathan Parry, eds. *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Borromeo, Mauricia. "Transcriptions Gaddang Folk Songs." Unpublished manuscript, n.d.
- Carrier, James. "Gifts, Commodities, and Social Relations: A Maussian View of Exchange." *Sociological Forum* 6, no. 1 (1991): 119–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01112730>.
- Douglas, Mary. *Foreword to The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies, by Marcel Mauss, translated by W. D. Halls, vii–xviii*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990.
- Eder, James F. "The Future of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines: Sources of Cohesion, Forms of Difference." *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 41, no. 3/4 (2013): 273–94.
- Feld, Steven, and Keith H. Basso. "Senses of Place." In *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, 1–21. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996.
- Gaillard, Gerald. "The French Tradition and the Institut d'ethnologie." In *The Routledge Dictionary of Anthropologists*, translated by Peter J. Bowman, 90–91. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Gert, Bernard, and Joshua Gert. "The Definition of Morality." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, Fall 2020. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/morality-definition/>.

- Giddens, Anthony. *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013.
- Gouldner, Alvin W. "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement." *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (1960): 161–78. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2092623>.
- Gregory, Chris A. "Gifts to Men and Gifts to God: Gift Exchange and Capital Accumulation in Contemporary Papua." *Man* 15, no. 4 (1980): 626–52. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2801537>.
- Lumicao-Lora, Ma. Lourdes. *Gaddang Literature*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984.
- Malumbres, Julián. *Historia de Nueva Vizcaya (1632-1897)*. Manila: Tipografia Linotype del Colegio de Sto. Tomas, 1919. Reprint, Manila: 2018.
- Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Translated by Ian Cunnison. New York: W. W. Norton, 1954. Originally published as *Essai sur le don* (Paris: L'Année Sociologique, 1925).
- Panoff, Michel. "Marcel Mauss's 'The Gift' Revisited." *Man* 5, no. 1 (1970): 60–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2798804>.
- Sahlins, Marshall D. *Stone Age Economics*. London: Routledge, 1972.
- Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011.
- Stone, Ruth M. *Theory for Ethnomusicology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc., 2008.
- Sykes, Jim. "The Musical Gift: Sound, Sovereignty and Multicultural History in Sri Lanka." PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2011. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Talusan, Mary. *Instruments of Empire: Filipino Musicians, Black Soldiers, and Military Band Music during US Colonization of the Philippines*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2021.
- Thompson, Barry A. "The Archaic Present: The Social Thought of Marcel Mauss and His Successors." PhD diss., Stanford University, 1987. Stanford University Libraries.
- Wallace, Ben J. "Gaddang Rice Cultivation: A Ligature between Man and Nature." *Philippine Sociological Review* 15, no. 3/4 (1967): 114–22.
- . *Weeds, Roads and God: A Half Century of Culture Change among the Philippine Ga'dang*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2013.

Declaration of ai use

In the preparation and finalization of this manuscript, the researcher utilized automated text-editing software (Grammarly) and a generative artificial intelligence model (Gemini, 2026) exclusively for grammatical correction, stylistic refinement, and syntactic polishing. The theoretical frameworks, ethnographic data analysis, and core arguments remain entirely the original work of the author.

Supplementary Document