

Governing the Rest Day: Gender Roles, Indigenous Political Institutions, and Community Health Resilience in the Bontoc Practice of Tengao

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Abstract

This paper explores how gender roles influence observance of the local rest day (tengao) in Bontoc Community of Bontoc Ili, Mountain Province, and recontextualizes these insights within disciplinary issues of public administration, politics and governance, health. When seen from this perspective, tengao is recognized not just as a cultural tradition, but also as an indigenous, informally institutionalized system of local governance composed of a body of customary rules which are enforced and followed by members of the community, a recognized decision-making authority (the ato), enforcement tasks, and a set of health-protective practices that resemble a local public health and disaster preparedness ordinance. Therefore, the research has four key objectives: first, to determine the types of governance and enforcement tasks carried out by male and female persons; second, to estimate the impact of this division of labor gender-wise upon the level of social harmony and the state of preparedness of community health; and third, to show changes of the level of political involvement based upon gender in different times. The researchers have chosen a qualitative, ethnographic method of the study based on field observation and interviews with selected informants who are the elder men and women within the community, its heads and residents. These data were interpreted according to the ethnographic technique proposed by Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012). It was found that a system of a leader through whom both a hierarchy of subordinates and the subordinates themselves accept the authority (tengao) is at the heart of a locally recognized system of compliance and obedience. Men with formal deliberative and rule-proclaiming powers are through the ato (the traditional council) and the latter functions as the primary traditional legislative and law enforcement authority in the community, while women take on the community's first-line work monitoring, ensuring compliance, and protecting resources, roles that are similar to those of the health department workers and animal and pest control officers in modern governance. This gendered yet complementary split of political work that leads to social order, collective accountability, and adaptive capacity are the main components

of community resilience that is based on their own ways of dealing with health matters rather than formal state institutions. The study also describes the change in gendered political participation in that women are taking greater part in the performance of the traditional *ensalang* (the public proclamation of the rest day) which is a sign perhaps that the community is broadening, gradually, the circle of who can have public power that is a community decision. The results of the paper point to areas that have to do with local governance, gender-inclusive politics in indigenous communities, and the official recognition of customary institutions that can contribute to planning activities related to health and preparing communities for disasters.

Keywords: gender roles; *tengao*; indigenous governance; customary institutions; political participation; social cohesion; community health resilience; Bontoc community

INTRODUCTION

A local rest day can be defined as a particular time set aside in a community in which people will rest, recuperate, or participate in some major collective event. Among the Bontoc community, this local day of rest is referred to as *tengao* which entails the abstaining of the residents from any agricultural activity and moving out of the community either after planting has taken place, after natural calamity, or before a big event is to take place in the community. From the point of view of public administration and governance, *tengao* is a policy tool rather than a mere cultural practice since it is sanctioned by a legitimate authority, is observed by all the people of the community, is observed by various people in the community holding specific responsibilities, and leads to systematic and socially beneficial results.

The government of *tengao* has traditionally been associated with gender. In the past, men were responsible for making important decisions, while women were limited to household tasks. Previously, men were seen as the only people in every community with political power. Today, women seem to be gradually taking on more active roles in this process of decision making, which could be important for understanding the power relations in contemporary governance since women became politically included into the process naturally rather than through official government programs aimed at ensuring gender equality in local governance.

Gender roles can be seen as the social expectations that differentiate the structure of influences exerted by men and women, as far as politics, organization of decision making and law enforcement are concerned, and knowing how indigenous communities govern themselves and organize collective actions aimed at ensuring health and welfare of the communities. In Bontoc, the division of political and administrative functions between the two genders aforementioned is characterized by interdependency of the two entities rather than their separation, since both male political agents and female political managers are important for the functioning of a rest day as a means of maintaining order in the community. The paper describes the process of assignment, maintenance, and renegotiation of gender roles within *tengao* as an indigenous governance structure and explores the possibilities of applying the concepts of indigenous governance in the broader context of political participation, governance and resilience of community health.

Research on gender and governance shows that cultural values and institutional structures affect how people participate in decision-making (Naidoo and Israel, 2021), while people's attitudes towards politics stem from various social factors (Joshi, 2020). Furthermore, according to Enaifoghe (2023), culture defines communication and behavioral styles of individuals, which plays a key role in recognizing legitimate public speakers among members of the community. Cultural influences are passed on from families and peers as well as authorities (Giuliano, 2020), and Lundh (2022) remarks that social and cultural realities remain in place regardless of the existence of formal measures related to gender equality. According to Batang (2021), gender differences are still visible in the Philippines even though there are laws regarding political equality, which reflects the gap between official policies and the realities of governance.

In their portrayal of the traditional political structures of the Cordillera people, Prill-Brett (2004) points out that the Bontok's gender roles are based on complementary duties rather than a strict hierarchy. Both men and women participate in agriculture, rituals, and decision-making in the community, although their responsibilities are still divided in accordance to gender. Furthermore, Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) assert that traditional rituals act as means of governance that define who may wield power and whose role is involved in the decision-making process. Connell (2005) further asserts that gender is a form of social structure influenced by institutions such as political or cultural ones, but also changing with the change of social values. Gender is seen in this context through the lens of various indigenous groups of the Philippines. In their research, Camaya and Tamayo (2018) demonstrate that indigenous women are taking part in community empowerment and cultural governance with the same amount of respect to their traditional functions, which indicates that political inclusion of indigenous women tends to mean adaptation of traditions instead of their substitution. Another dimension of the matter is the role of cultural traditions and taboos that shape the conditions for the particular governmental activities that community members can perform. Oloko et al. (2023) illustrate how traditions continue influencing people's access to power and decision-making in local communities. Overall, current literature provides the evidence that indigenous customary institutions are functioning as informal institutions of local governance with their own requirements for who can participate, how decisions can be made, and what rules must be followed.

This research relies on Gender Role Theory, which describes how standards in society alter working, outlooks and standings, including the stature and power of people according to the sex. According to Eagly and Wood (2012), individuals attain the understanding of such expectations quite early in life due to the influence of socialization factors like family, education, mass media and culture, which results in a habitual way of behavior being formed. Connell (2005) goes further to explain that ambiguity concerning gender roles creates resistance, as well as that in course of time values get changed, helping new modalities of being accepted. Gender Role Theory provides an explanation for man's traditional supremacy regarding governance matters and the crucial importance of women's progressive involvement in enforcement and, lately, in the proclamation process.

This study benefits immensely from the use of Feminist Anthropology, which allows us to look into the power relations in customary systems of indigenous people. Moore (1988) states that this viewpoint is important in revealing the patriarchal prejudices embedded in social and political systems and in putting an emphasis on the role of women in them. In their turn Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) argue that focusing on what women and other marginal groups experience leads to a fuller description of how the given community manages itself. Feminist Anthropology allows to analyze tengao not just as a ceremony but as a political institution in which authority, enforcement, and speech are assigned according to gender, and particularly this assignment is conditioned by negotiations and steady changes. Both approaches make it possible to see tengao as an example of indigenous local governance that has certain gender characteristics which can lead to important conclusions in terms of public administration and health-resilience: how authority is exercised, how rules that secure the wellbeing of people are enforced, and how participation in the exercise of this power can be widened without breaking the traditional legitimacy of the authorities.

Theoretical Framework

The research is anchored on Gender Role Theory, which elaborates how social norms influence a person's behavior and attitudes and the role assigned to individuals depending on their gender. According to Eagly and Wood (2012), people start internalizing these gender expectations during their early life because of agents of socialization like family, education, media, and tradition, leading to a consistent behavior of individuals that is taken as appropriate to one's gender

in a particular governance environment. Connell (2005) builds on this characterizing the violation of established gender roles, including the position of public authority holder, as providing impetus for social conflict, while emergent social norms can lead to the acceptance of new behavioral patterns. When applied to tengao, Gender Role Theory enables explaining that in atu, deliberation and proclamation powers were primarily given to men and that the increased participation of women in enforcement and lately in barangay proclamation indicates a significant transformation in governance practice rather than a minor alteration of tradition.

Feminist anthropology provides additional power analysis support for this study with its lens that allows analysis of distribution of power among indigenous traditional institutions. Moore (1988) claims that this lens is useful to reveal patriarchal biases in social and political structures and highlight women-related experiences and contributions. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) believe that concentrating on the experiences of women and marginalized groups provides a full picture of the way a society organizes itself for governance. In the current case, Feminist anthropology allows the study of tengao as not simply a ritual but as political practice where authority, force, and voice are distributed along gender lines with negotiation of this distribution being a subject of gradual transformation. Thus, these two frameworks provide a context for understanding tengao as an example of indigenous practice of governance which has various implications for public administration and health resilience matters.

Statement of the Problems:

This study sought to examine gender roles in the local rest day (tengao) as a form of indigenous governance, and their implications for political participation and community health resilience in Bontoc Ili. Specifically, it addressed the following questions:

- a. What are the specific governance, enforcement, and ritual roles performed by men and women during the observance of tengao?
- b. What are the effects of this gendered division of authority on social cohesion, community order, and community health resilience?
- c. What changes or shifts in gender-based political participation related to tengao have occurred over time?

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative, ethnographic research design to gain an in-depth understanding of how gender roles operate within the customary governance of tengao, and how this arrangement shapes social interaction, community order, and collective health-protective behavior.

Research Locale and Participants

The research was undertaken in the Bontoc Ili region, one of the central areas of the municipal town of Bontoc, Mountain Province, known as a place of strong moral institutions in governance and culture. Bontoc Ili was the right locale in which to study the roles of gender in traditional governance and nature of community engagement in relation to observing the local period of rest. Participants included community elders, local leaders, and residents who were ready to take part in the research.

Data Gathering Instrument

The accumulation of data was achieved via field observation and interview of key informants, enabling the researchers to understand not only the actual use of tengao but also the local people's understanding of its importance in governance.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the start of data collection, consent and approval were obtained from local community members, community leaders, and barangay officials. Participants were informed about the study. Both focus group discussions and key informant interviews were employed for

data collection. The data were checked by referring the information back to the participants once the data collection process was completed.

Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out by using the ethnographic method as elaborated by Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012), which relies on observation and interviews including the analysis of cultural artifacts. This technique required the researchers to be fully engaged and present in the participants’ community, listening to what the participants have to say, and being fully aware of their own position and any biases in the course of research. As a result, the researchers produced a narrative report that effectively blends various aspects of participant statements with researchers’ interpretations to create a multi-layered understanding of the way in which the structure of gender defines the traditional governance of tengao and influences health resilience in the given community.

Ethical Considerations

This investigation followed a code of ethics appropriate for community-based research. Community leaders were informed about the research efforts ahead of time, and respondents were voluntarily participating in the investigation with their informed consent. The researchers ensured anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process. Respecting local customs related to knowledge-sharing practices was integral to conducting the research with cultural sensitivity.

RESULTS

The gender roles in the community of Bontoc inform the governing system of the indigenous people as they specify the allocation of power and enforcement during the observance of the local rest day known as tengao. These roles play their most significant role in the various types of tengao being practiced in Bontoc Ili, which include changtey, mangamang, ocyad, tut-ulod, and fa-oy, since in each case, either men or women hold certain administrative and ritual roles.

Governance and Enforcement Roles of Men and Women during Tengao

Deliberative authority regarding tengao takes place through the ato, which is viewed as the traditional men’s council where the men decide whether or not to declare the following day as a rest day. The authority to declare the implementation of tengao according is to the ensalang which is basically the public announcement of tengao, an action that is similar to the passage of legislation in government. It is important to highlight that nowadays, not only men can proclaim tengao, which indicates an expanding role of various people in performing the public function.

At changtey, men are responsible for performing various rituals during which special ceremonies take place where an example is chicken slaughter at ato. At the same time, women are responsible for monitoring the situation, which means that they protect agricultural products and make sure that nobody works on the rest day. During fa-oy, women are responsible for observing the rice fields and for making sure that people from the community do not leave, which means that they impose restrictions on the movement of people while men perform the slaughtering of animals and get rid of lolo which is the symbol of finishing or indicating that of the tengao.

The research tells us that governance authority in tengao runs along complementary lines. While men predominantly wield power with regard to rituals and deliberations, women step in things like frontline enforcement and resource protection. We see indications of a shift coming up in this arrangement. Women’s involvement in ensalang proclamation is also indicative of this.

Table 1. Gendered Governance and Enforcement Roles Across Types of Tengao

<i>Type of Tengao</i>	<i>Men's Role (Ritual / Deliberative)</i>	<i>Women's Role (Enforcement / Compliance)</i>	<i>Governance Function</i>
<i>Changtey</i>	Ritual butchering of a chicken in the ato.	Safeguards agricultural resources; monitors and	Resource protection and rule enforcement.

		enforces the community-wide prohibition on working during the rest day.	
<i>Fa-oy</i>	Ritual slaughter of pigs and chickens; removal of the lolo (ritual boundary markers signifying the tengao's conclusion).	Monitors the rice fields; ensures residents do not travel outside the community during the restricted period.	Mobility restriction and ritual closure.
<i>Mangamang</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>
<i>Ocyad</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>
<i>Tut-ulod</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>	<i>Not specified in the data collected.</i>

Note. Role details for mangamang, ocyad, and tut-ulod were not elicited in the key informant interviews and field observations conducted for this study. Future data collection should probe these three observances specifically to complete the governance-role profile of tengao.

Implications for Social Cohesion, Community Order, and Health Resilience

Traditional gender roles were said to influence social interaction, participation, and community involvement. Elder people play an important role in deciding when and how tengao is acted upon. In community meetings held in multipurpose venues, both men and women take part in discussions and decisions. However, the matter is different when the meetings take place in ato, which is a more traditional governance space; there only men are allowed to take part in the discussion. Thus, when answering the question asked by one of the participants of research, it was mentioned that in case of availability of multipurpose venue, women are able to participate in discussions of tengao but if such a venue is not available, deliberations are shifted to ato, which does not allow the presence of women.

In spite of this different access to deliberative space, the community holds both genders in high esteem. The idea of the men managing ritual and rule-making functions while the women partake in monitoring, preparation, and enforcement is a case in point. This division of administrative work facilitates cooperation, partnership, and responsibility sharing, serving as a model of cooperative governance of accountability. From time to time, generational tensions appear when younger members of the community challenge the traditional authority or preferences. Still, all the gender roles and the intergenerational connections work together to preserve cultural identity.

Changes in Gender-Based Political Participation Over Time

According to the findings, the participation of women in tengao governance is undergoing gradual changes, resulting from several factors including differences in generational experience, exposure to modern ways of living, and changes in social norms. As it was noted in the traditional culture, men were the only people in the ruling positions, while women traditionally were involved in the accompanying activities, such as cooking, monitoring compliance with the norms, and passing knowledge to the next generations. However, today it has been noticed that the younger generation quite actively performs the duties outside the traditional frameworks of gender behaviour, which causes some problems for decision-making among the older generation.

Nevertheless, the functions at the ato are still being largely performed by men, while women mainly take their place in cooking national dishes, but playing the role of being the guardians of the culture. This conclusion shows that despite the mentioned changes, the political

involvement in tengao processes takes place gradually, meaning there are official authority structures existing even nowadays with the presence of new opportunities such as the ensalang announcement.

Table 2. Traditional and Emerging Patterns in Gender-Based Participation in Tengao

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Traditional Pattern</i>	<i>Emerging Pattern</i>
<i>Deliberation and proclamation (ensalang)</i>	Performed exclusively by men through the ato.	Increasingly performed by women as well, reflecting gradual gender inclusivity.
<i>Ritual leadership in the ato</i>	Held by men.	Remains predominantly held by men.
<i>Preparation of tapey and fayass</i>	Performed by women.	Remains predominantly performed by women.
<i>Compliance monitoring and enforcement</i>	Performed by women.	Remains predominantly performed by women.
<i>Task boundaries generally</i>	Fixed by gender, with limited crossover.	Younger community members increasingly take on tasks outside traditional gendered boundaries, occasionally generating elder–youth friction.

Note. The table synthesizes respondent accounts of tengao practice as reported to the researchers; it reflects reported patterns rather than a longitudinal measurement of change.

DISCUSSION

The findings are discussed below through the three lenses that frame this study, public administration, politics and governance, and health, treating tengao as an indigenous, informally institutionalized system of local public order in which authority, administration, and health protection are distributed by gender.

From the point of view of public administration, the outcomes point to the way a community formulates its decisions and puts them into practice without any invoking state mechanisms. A key moment is the functioning of the ato and the pronouncement of a decision by the ensalang. That being said, it is necessary to acknowledge that the implementation of the decision hinges upon a clearly defined division of labor: the frontline monitoring, resource-protection and enforcement work is done by women, while men conduct the rituals that formally bring the process to completion. This is basically the utilization of consent-based mechanism of governance that helps bring the policy process to successful conclusion without involving state authorities. The value of acknowledging this type of administration lies in the fact that local government would be consciously using this information aiding them to make better decisions.

From the perspective of politics and governance, women's gradual entry into the ensalang proclamation is important in itself but it is different from the issue of who is able to carry out the decision. Rather, it has more to do with who can deliberate and speak on behalf of the community. This makes it clear that political participation is possible without any gender-based policies from outside but rather through processes that begin with these institutions having an impact on the communities. This means that the local governance policies or indigenous political participation policies have the potential to succeed in the presence of customary institutions like the ato.

From a nursing perspective, *tengao* reflects how communities draw on their own knowledge, traditions, and collective practices to protect health and support one another. Nurses working with indigenous communities can learn from these practices and recognize them as valuable resources for health promotion, risk reduction, and community resilience. By understanding how people protect their resources, observe community restrictions, respond to risks, and support one another, nurses can provide care that respects the community’s culture and

way of life. Rather than replacing customary practices with formal health interventions, nurses can work alongside elders, cultural leaders, women, men, and other community members to identify practices that can be strengthened or complemented by health services. In this role, nurses become a link between indigenous knowledge and formal healthcare, helping ensure that health programs are culturally respectful, meaningful, and responsive to the community's needs.

The study clearly demonstrates the correlation between gendered governance practices and community health resilience. The enforcement responsibilities carried out by women in the safeguarding of agrarian resources, compliance with rest days, and limitation of movement during the festivity serve the purposes of public health and disaster preparedness. Women show that this is equivalent to compliance monitoring under a health law. The functions carried out by men include legitimization of the acts of enforcement carried by women as well as rendering them possible. This division of labor results in creating a social structure, a collective responsibility, and adaptive capacity so important for resilience of communities, i.e. the capacity to organize and enforce protective laws in the time of stress. Thus, tengao comes forth as a tool of indigenous governance implementation.

Alternative Interpretations and Counter-Perspectives

One of the interpretations of tengao's gender division of labor as being a source of resilience and complementarity is not the only interpretation possible in the literature and discussion of this interpretation should be widened. Radcliffe (2015) argues that development and governance ideologies that present the indigenous gender systems as being complementary minimize the effects of the colonial and patriarchal past on these relationships, while indigenous women in these societies are still often excluded from power despite cultural narratives of balance. Gabriel (2017) examines the issue of the marginalization of indigenous women in the Philippines, which is rooted in their limited access to education, resources, and official decision-making role. In relation to this work, these sources indicate that it cannot be assumed that the absence of women in the ato decision-making process is a purely traditional or harmless phenomenon but rather a certain form of political exclusion that is being accepted and normalized under the idea of complementarity.

The second group of studies complicates the health-resilience claim in a specific sense. Herd and Moynihan (2024) in their writing in the area of public administration argue that allocating the responsibility of compliance monitoring and enforcement to a one group in the governance system is not a value-free allocation of function, but a form of controlling – that is, an administrative burden that exists particularly when it is unpaid and uncompensated and is associated with certain health hazards for those who perform it. Indeed, Seedat and Rondon (2021) pointed out that the undue burden of unpaid and uncompensated work negatively affects women's wellbeing. These findings make women's role in tengao not only a significant contribution to the health resilience of the community but also an example of unpaid work performed exclusively by women, which is linked to unseen costs for their health and wellbeing.

While they do not negate the findings of the study, these opposing views illustrate the contrast between an emic reading of gender roles resting on the assumption of mutual support between men and women and an etic, structural reading that regards the same division of labor as characterized by unequal power relations and unequal mobility. Future research should incorporate both ethnographic and critical governance approaches and investigate women's own opinions about the personal costs or benefits of their police work.

CONCLUSION

This paper describes a gendered division of labor in governance in tengao, wherein different but supportive roles work together to facilitate effective governance of the rest day. Males mainly participate in decision-making, rule-making, and ceremonial leadership as the traditional legislative and ceremonial part of tengao, while females are mainly involved in enforcement,

resource management, and compliance monitoring as the administrative and regulatory part of this practice. Collectively, these roles constitute a traditional governance system that promotes health resilience in the community by creating order, encouraging responsibility, and building adaptive capability.

The distribution of authority along gender lines, although unequal, favors cooperation, builds trust, and instills a sense of community efficacy, which are the basis of social harmony and health resilience. At the same time, the gradual introduction of women into the proclamation of *ensalang* shows a process that is internally created with a view to inclusion in the public sphere, which is widening the circle of influence without defeating the legitimacy of custom and the continuity of harmonious governance. In this context, *Tengao* is both an expression of culture, and customs as a form of local governmental system and a type of institution aimed at public welfare and health resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Barangay authorities are encouraged to consult community leaders and traditional leaders to document the customary laws or *sekeb* for *tengao* in the form of a barangay cultural ordinance and written community guidelines, which will formalize the *ato* and its ceremonies as a legitimate institution in local governance. This will lead to the preservation of indigenous political knowledge for future generations.
- It is important that local governments and community organizations create more opportunities for talking between the elderly and the young people to reduce the tension in relations based on the issue of traditional power, value the processes concerning further expansion of political participation expressed by increased role of women in terms of *ensalang*, and make sure that the process is conducted through community dialogue, not imposing ideas from outside.
- It is suggested that educational establishments and local administration programs include indigenous governance rules, roles of women, and community health practices into programs for creating aware citizens.
- It is urged that local health and disaster-resilience planning entities recognize and involve local specific practices, such as *tengao*, to establish methods of compliance and execution together with public health and disaster preparedness.
- Future research should consider looking into gender roles, traditional governance, and health resilience among various indigenous societies utilizing cross-disciplinary approaches in public administration, political science, and public health so as to develop culturally appropriate governance and health policies that would advance indigenous institutional integrity and community health.

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