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Batok: The Exploration of Indigenous Filipino Tattooing as a Collective Occupation

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Abstract

Batok (also known as Fatek/Burik/Tatak/Batek/Patik) is an Indigenous Filipino tattooing practice where the practitioner marks the skin by hand-tapping the ink using bone/wood implements. Previous research on tattooing has explored an occupational science perspective on European tattooing and its engagement and implication on the individual - recognizing its practice as an occupation (Kay & Brewis, 2017). This research explores how batok is experienced by the person and their identified community. Three Filipino participants with batok and four family or community members were interviewed. Thematic analysis highlighted three themes recognized as *Kapwa*, *Revealing One's Batok*, and *Decolonization and Reclamation as a Cultural Practice*. These themes are situated in the lens of a collective occupation and encapsulate the experience of the batok process among individuals with batok and their family/community members. Findings support the conceptualization of batok as a resistive collective occupation. This research provides deeper insight into the collective occupation of Indigenous cultural practice, with the potential to expand occupational science's understanding of decolonizing occupations.

Keywords: collective occupation, resistive occupation, Filipino tattooing, decolonization.

Background

Batok

Batok (also known as Fatek/Burik/Tatak/Batek/Patik) is an Illokano term describing the Indigenous Filipino tattooing practice where the tattoo practitioner (mambabatok) marks the skin by hand-tapping the ink (typically made from pine soot and water) using bone/wood implements with "needles" (made from iron, steel, brass, bamboo, or thorns of an orange/lemon tree) that were lashed across one end of the tool (Wilcken, 2010). Batok can refer to the physical markings made on the skin as well as the overall process and active engagement of the recipient, practitioner, and community in the tattooing process. With accounts as early as the 1500s, in the pre-colonial Philippines, earning a batok was a sign of nobility, bravery, or maturity after a courageous task or event had occurred (Wilcken, 2010). Through the practice of batok, there was an intertwined experience and expression of words, sounds, imagery, and text, all reflecting on the state of body, mind, and spirit (Clariza, 2019). Batok was used to classify families, socioeconomic status, acts of valor, roles within the community, and forms of treatments such as medicine and fertility (Demetrio III, 2017). The location of the batok represented the nature of the task - and the more batok one had correlated to how brave and noble one was (Ocampo & Castronuevo, 2016). After receiving their first period, women were privileged to have their batok markings as a sign of eligibility of being a life-bearer. In contrast, men received their batok markings as proof of a worthy and courageous task.

Modern-day batok (Philippine post-colonial era) varies in the type of materials used for the practice, but traditional elements of the batok process remain the same. The batok experience involves a ceremony where all members of the batok process are encouraged to participate in celebrating the individual acquiring the batok. Sacred prayer chants, food/gift offerings to the

ancestors and mambabatok, and discussion of ancestral lineage typically occur before markings are made. Stretchers (individuals who stretch the area of skin being marked) are present while the mambabatok marks the skin. Rituals such as the proper release of food/gift offerings and disposal of blood that was shed during the process are completed after the ceremony. The batok ceremony may take hours to days to complete, and rituals are fundamental in the practice of the traditional batok process.

The practice of batok is traditionally approved by an elder of the community, with influential people in the recipient's life gathered to witness the commemoration (Honma, 2015). These community members are in direct, physical contact with the recipient throughout the batok process. This act of intimacy indicates great trust by the participant. In modern-day batok, elderly approval is lenient. In contrast, the stigmatization of tattooing in modern-day Philippine culture and community has hindered many Filipinos who wish to receive a batok tattoo. Ocampo and Castronuevo (2016) found that tattooed people experienced a lack of parental approval, believing that "for their parents, tattooing is not good for anyone's image" and the meaning of the tattoo may differ between the person and their parent "like how the respondents of the study see it as art" (p.87). The connection between the community and the individual acquiring a batok is an important factor that may influence the choice of participating in a modern-day batok.

History of Colonization

Batok is situated in hundreds of years of history in its practice, originating back to the pre-colonial Philippine era that ended in 1965 with the arrival of Spanish colonizers (Wilcken, 2010). The study and documentation of batok is mostly derived from the Cordillera Mountain region of the northern Philippines, where Spanish explorers searched for gold and converted Indigenous

people to Christianity. Though the Spanish could not gain complete control, they were able to convert and stop traditional practices in two regions (Demetrio III, 2017).

The Treaty of Paris of 1783 gave the United States (U.S.) control of the Philippines, leading to the colonization of the Cordillera region. The U.S. exacted their law in the Cordillera region and criminalized headhunting, which was closely associated with traditional tattooing (Barton, 1949; Salvador-Amores, 2011). During the Spanish and U.S. colonial eras, Christianity introduced the concept of *kababain,* an Ilocano term that means shame. U.S. colonizers deemed those who had tattoos as "uncivilized" non-Christians, while those with no tattoos represented "more civilized Christians" (Salvador-Amores, 2011). The education of younger generations reinforced stigmatization of traditional practices, including batok. U.S. culture influenced the perception of tattoos as shameful, and indicative of a person fallen into disrepute (Salvador-Amores, 2011). Filipino persons were educated to wear clothing, such as blouses and trousers, and to hide their tattoos to obtain jobs. As the Philippines became more religious, modernized, and colonized, the practice of batok continued to diminish.

Being part of the Filipino diaspora is a significant factor in the identity of many Filipinos living away from the Philippines. In the 1970s and 1980s, Philippine President Ferdinand E. Marcos offered overseas Filipino migrant workers continued connection to the Philippines through remittances, regular visits, and investment (Aguila, 2015, p.61). This great Filipino migration granted many Filipino people the opportunity to relocate and work and increased the presence of many Filipinos internationally. In recent decades, the practice of modern-day batok has gained mainstream media attention, highlighting its importance and the preservation of the tradition over the years. This attention has allowed many Filipinos throughout the diaspora to connect and integrate Filipino Indigenous history into their cultural identity (Honma, 2015).

Born in 1917, Whang-Od is considered the last traditional mambabatok and can be credited for popularizing and preserving the practice in Buscalan Philippines, as well as outside the region, including among Filipino-U.S. Americans. The local government in the Cordillera region also supported the preservation and continued practice of batok (Demetrio III, 2017). US-based tattooists like Lane Wilcken have promoted its preservation by becoming a mambabatok and educating others through apprenticeship and authorship (Wilcken, 2010).

Literature Review

Tattooing as an Occupation

Indigenous tattooing has an expansive history and tradition across the world. For the Maori (Indigenous people of New Zealand), "mau moko", which translates to "wearing ink", can be a way to remember a significant life moment, and can symbolize honor or bereavement (Te Awekotuku, 2009). Mau moko, which is made to revere those who have died, serves as a form of narrative, telling the story of what has happened and communicating values of identity, resilience, and mortality (Te Awekotuku, 2009). For Inuit and Yupik women living in the Arctic Circle, Indigenous tattoos are transformative, "creating from the biological reality of the female body the gendered identity of womanhood" (Carrillo, 2014, p. 1). These Indigenous tattooing practices are just two examples highlighting the significance of tattooing for their communities.

While on the surface some motivations for participating in tattooing can be similar, non-Indigenous tattooing differs from indigenous tattooing in its history, culture, practices, and meaning. Kay and Brewis (2017) explored the practice of non-Indigenous tattooing for participants living in the United Kingdom and tied the occupation of tattooing to the concepts of Doing, Being, Becoming, and Belonging (Hitch et al., 2014). Doing is the active engagement of

an occupation (Hitch et al., 2014). Doing is the preparation and process of tattooing, which can take considerable time and effort and Being is about remaining true to oneself and bringing what is unique about the person to their relationships and the occupations they engage in (Wilcock, 1999). Individuals expressed how the tattoo was personal and important to their identity, which ties into being because the individual can express their sense of self. Becoming is about one's impression of a future, despite being reliant on who and what they do in the present moment and being influenced by history (Wilcock, 1999). The tattoos are also a form of expression and acceptance of self and the past, which links into the sense of becoming because they are transforming themselves for the future. Belonging is the idea that the individual is bigger than oneself and that they can be a part of different groups or settings (Hitch et al., 2014). Some tattoos also have a deeper meaning: to connect self with someone who is present or someone who has passed or a physical symbol on the body to identify oneself as a part of the community, hence the sense of belonging. The combination of doing, being, becoming, and belonging is a dynamic balance in achieving optimal health through occupation (Wilcock, 2002; Hitch et al., 2014).

Tattoos have become more prevalent and acceptable, having previously been viewed by society as replete with certain stigmas and risk-taking behaviors. An individual's motivation for getting a tattoo included individual and socio-cultural motivations, such as beauty, art and fashion, individuality, personal narrative, physical endurance, addiction, sexual desire, and impulse. Socio-cultural motivations included group affiliation, resistance, and affiliation to culture or spirituality (Wohlrab et al., 2007). Individuals who consider a tattoo may require a lengthy research process and multiple scheduled visits with the tattoo artist to discuss considerations and precautions (Goulding et al., 2004). Individuals also acquire tattoos to

commemorate and maintain a connection with a significant relationship, whether the person is present or has passed (Kay & Brewis, 2017). Tattoos can also represent an individual's way of healing from past experiences (Claes et al., 2005) and provide empowerment over one's body (Hawkes et al., 2004). Through the process of tattooing, individuals feel more connected and have a deeper understanding of their feelings, self, and others around them.

Collective Occupation

Occupations are defined as "the everyday activities that people do as individuals, in families, and with communities to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life" (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2012, para.2). Occupations, in this context, are meant to serve as a reflection of the individual and their desire to fulfill certain everyday activities that bring meaning and purpose to their life - whether individually or with other people. Fogelberg and Frauwirth (2010) expanded on this idea and explored occupations as being shared with other individuals. They created a framework that conceptualized occupations as being "systems" across different collective levels, which included the "individual, group, community, and population" (Fogelberg & Frauwirth, 2010, p. 132). Every occupational system is centralized to the individual's occupation, but it is shared with others based on their desire to do the occupation.

Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2015) further developed Fogelberg and Frauwirth's (2010) framework, suggesting collective occupation as a term to define occupations "engaged in by individuals, groups, communities, and/or societies in everyday contexts" that "reflect an intention towards social cohesion or dysfunction, and/or advancement of or aversion to a common good" (p. 10). Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2015) utilized the African ethic of 'ubuntu" as an ontological perspective that can shape our understanding of collective occupation, as it highlights

how humans are “always being shaped in our interaction with each other" (p. 11) and “both the individual and the community are in a constant shared process of becoming” (p. 12). Collective occupations are also situated in a historical and cultural context and involve an array of “communal relationships that provide to individuals a sense of identity in social relations” (Valderrama Núñez et al., 2021, p. 1). The collective doing of that group impacts this sense of belonging and identity within a community. Peralta-Catipon (2009) examined how Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong gathered weekly in the square as a liminal sphere where they participated in shared meaning-making through occupation. Collective occupation holds the community together and strengthens the “social fabric” through doing together across time and space (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017). Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2015) highlighted that the critical factor in collective occupations is the individual's intentionality and shared vision across all levels of an organization. The idea of intentionality in collective occupations strengthens the perspective that a collection of individuals completing an occupation will allow the occupational system to benefit from the chosen occupation.

Colonialism and Resistive Occupation

The intention of collective occupation can also be used as resistance to ameliorate injustices caused by oppressive forces, including colonialism (Valderrama Núñez et al., 2021). Colonialism indicates a situation where a more powerful nation “exploits, and controls Indigenous peoples and their land” (Huff et al., 2022, p. 23). Colonialism can include many forms of violence, including physical harm to persons and the environment and the erasure of cultural traditions and opportunities to engage in meaningful occupation. Certain values resist oppression, such as Ubuntu in South Africa (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015) and Sutra, A’wna and Sumud in Palestine (Simaan, 2017), through “daily-forms-of-resistance”, built on a “communal values

system" which recognizes the connection between people and environment (Simaan, 2017, p. 520). Occupations such as artisanal fishing and harvesting medicinal plants in Chile (Valderrama Núñez et al., 2021), olive growing in Palestine (Simaan, 2017), income-producing occupations for women in Tanzania (Huff et al, 2022), use of graffiti by Warlpiri adolescents in Australia (Russell, 2008), and the practice of oral transmission in Palestine (El-Qasem, 2019) are examples of collective occupations that are active forms of resistance to colonial ways of thinking and acting, through daily occupation. It could be argued that collective occupation is a process of decolonization, defined as "a form of bottom-up disobedience that revives Indigenous ideas and lived experiences to challenge the impact of historical colonization and reverse its trajectory" (Decolonization, n.d.). These collective and resistive occupations may also be viewed as decolonizing occupations whose intention and purpose are to undo the effects of colonization with the aim of liberation through occupation. Given the impact of colonialism on occupation in the Philippines, especially the practice of Indigenous tattooing, the concepts of decolonizing and resistive collective occupations are important to consider in the exploration of modern-day batok.

Previous occupational science research on European tattooing recognizes its practice as an occupation (Kay & Brewis, 2017). However, little attention has been paid to Indigenous tattooing practices - specifically batok - and the experiences of the person and their community. This study used an occupational lens to explore the experience of the occupation of batok for the recipient and their identified community. The guiding research question was: What is the experience of the occupation of batok for the individual and their community?

Methods

Design

A phenomenological approach was chosen to reveal the meaning of people's lived experiences and the meaning of a phenomenon (Carpenter & Suto, 2008). According to Husserl, a phenomenological approach focuses on the life world of the participant and their search for the essential essence or meaning of the experience (Creswell, 1998). In this study, the experiences of a sample of Filipino batok recipients living in the United States and their family and/or community were explored through interviews. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, which allowed researchers to explore and learn through the study participants' lived experiences of the participants as Filipinos with batok. The Institutional Review Board's approval for the research was granted through [University Name].

Participants

Given the essential communal role of family in the batok process, the authors included family and/or community members as participants. Researchers networked with a community liaison known to the researchers, who possessed a lived experience of batok and connections to the batok community. Inclusion criteria encompassed anyone who identified as Filipino, had participated in a batok ceremony and received a batok tattoo (Table 1), and had family/community member(s) willing to discuss the individual's batok and process (Table 2). Snowball sampling was used for selecting participants. Initial recruitment flyers were posted on the researchers' and the community liaison's social networking pages. Interested participants contacted the researchers through direct messaging for information about the study and an email describing the study was issued. Participants were sent a secure online form, which included a consent and demographic questionnaire form. All participants provided demographic information

and determined their own pseudonyms to protect their identity (Table 1, Table 2). Participants were grouped by "family," consisting of the individual with the batok and at least one family or community member.

Table 1. Description of the participants with batok

Pseudonym	Age	Pronouns	Ethnicity	Country of Residence
CS	30	She/Her	Filipino, Finnish, U.S. American	Switzerland
S.C.C	28	She/Her	Filipino, U.S. American	USA
Lauren E.	23	She/Her	Filipino, Italian, Czech, U.S. American	USA

Table 2. Description of the participants' family/community member

Pseudonym	Relationship to the Individual with Batok	Age	Pronouns	Ethnicity	Does the Member have a Batok?	Country of Residence
Dela	CS's Sister	33	She/Her	Filipino, Finnish, English, Scotch, Irish, U.S. American	Yes	USA
Celeste	CS's Sister	30	She/Her	Filipino, Finnish, U.S. American	Yes	USA
SKC	S.C.C's Partner	29	He/Him	Filipino, Chinese, U.S. American	No	USA

Chad	Lauren E's Partner	25	He/Him	European, U.S. American	No	USA

Data Collection

In order to target the essential essence and meaning of an experience required of a phenomenological approach, interviews are used as the main method for collecting data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While some interview questions were more descriptive in nature, other interview questions were guided by a phenomenological approach and asked the participants about their experience of batok and the meanings ascribed to the phenomenon. Interview questions were developed using the guiding frameworks of Doing, Being, Becoming, and Belonging and Collective Occupations. The Doing, Being, Becoming, and Belonging framework were created as initial guiding questions, but due to the "Western-oriented notions" of the framework (Simaan, 2017, p. 510), collective occupation guiding questions were added. Interview questions were separated into two categories: (1) questions about the individual with the batok and (2) questions about their community and its impact on the individual's batok process. Each category of questions was asked to the individual with the batok (Table 3) and their family/community members (Table 4).

An initial pilot interview with the community liaison was conducted to screen interview questions for cultural relevance and appropriateness. This data was not included in the final analysis. Seven individual in-depth interviews were conducted in English. The interviews lasted approximately one hour, with the first 15 minutes used to reintroduce the study's purpose and review the interview process, while the remaining 45 minutes served as the formal interview.

All interviews were video recorded, and audio transcribed using the software Otter (Version 3.0.1).

Table 3. Select questions asked by the interviewer of the individual with a batok

Interview Questions for Individual with Batok
Individual: ● What was your experience like going through the process of receiving your batok? ● How did you prepare for the batok process? Are there any strategies that you use or any techniques or rituals that you've done prior to getting it? ● Tell us in detail about your batok. What does your batok mean to you? ● How did your experience with your batok make you feel after the process? Community: ● Has this process made you feel closer/connected to your family/community, ancestors, and/or culture? How does your family feel about your batok? ● When you received your marks, what was your family or your community's reaction upon seeing them? ● How did this experience improve your sense of belonging? What does community mean to you? ● What do ancestors and family mean to you? ● What communities are you a part of or want to be a part of in the future? ● During the process, how did you feel your ancestors were present? In what ways? How did this process make you feel in relation to your ancestors and your culture, did you feel closer? Did you feel more distant? ● In what ways or what are the signs that you're closer to your ancestors from your batok? ● After you received your batok, did you ever feel you were part of a community after receiving your batok? Is there anyone else in the community that you've been closer with since getting your batok?

Table 4. Select questions asked by the interviewer of the family/community member

Interview Questions for Individual's Family/Community Members

Individual:

- How does Western tattooing differ from batok for you? What is your opinion on Western tattooing and batok?
- In what ways were you involved during the ceremony?
- In what ways would you change your involvement if you would be able to do it differently?
- What is your opinion about the participant receiving a batok/the final outcome of their batok?
- How meaningful do you think receiving the batok is to the participant?
- What was your reaction to the overall batok? The meaning behind it? How did you feel about it?

Community:

- Were there other people in your life that helped you understand more about batok?
- Were you familiar with your ancestors prior to the ceremony and what do they mean to you?
- What communities would you say you're a part of?
- How has modern batok shaped your perception of Filipino culture?
- During the batok process was there anything that you learned that enhanced your knowledge of Filipino culture through the process?
- How would you say their family's reaction was to them getting batok?
- How has it impacted your relationship with your ancestors and your family?
- What ceremonies or traditions does your family practice?

Data Analysis

The use of thematic analysis aligns with a phenomenological approach as it "stresses subjects' perceptions, feelings, and experiences subjectively" (Chang & Wang, 2021, p. 6), and aims to "achieve an understanding of patterns of meanings from data on lived experiences" (Sundler, et al., 2019, p. 736). Specifically, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was used as the method for data analysis, which is not tied with any specific methodology but is theoretically flexible and aligns well with the process of phenomenological reduction and bracketing. Data analysis using a phenomenological approach involves a "process of reduction, analyzing participant statements and themes, and searching for meaning" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). The qualitative data analysis software management program, Dedoose (version 9.0.46), was used in the coding process. In phase one, researchers immersed themselves in interview transcriptions

with repeated readings of the data. In phase two, researchers generated initial codes of the data. To account for bias, at least two researchers coded each transcript; then, all the researchers re-coded the transcripts collaboratively, and generated codes amongst the entire data set. During phase three, researchers generated initial themes and collated all coded data relevant to each initial theme. In phase four, initial themes were shared amongst all researchers, and data were re-read to accurately represent themes amongst data collection and ensure consistency. In phase five, three overall themes were identified, as well as eight sub-themes that offered a broader understanding of the main themes. In phase six, researchers produced a written report capturing the narratives that went beyond transcription data and connected its impact on research aims.

Data were analyzed using reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflective thematic analysis was determined to be appropriate for use with a phenomenological approach, as phenomenology aims for bracketing or suspension of judgment (Creswell, 1998). This aim to suspend all judgment has been criticized as it might not be fully possible to set aside all researchers' assumptions, prior knowledge, and life experiences (Carpenter & Suto, 2008). To address this limitation, the researchers used reflective thematic analysis and engaged in the process of personal reflexivity to determine how their values and experiences shape the research process. Four of the researchers identified as Filipino U.S. American, and one researcher identified as U.S. American. All researchers currently live in North America. Before the initial interviews with the participants, researchers discussed opinions on tattooing and Filipino culture. Following the discussion, each researcher created narratives dissecting their views of tattooing, personal experience of Filipino culture, and batok. Narratives were shared amongst the team to enhance trustworthiness and account for bias before conducting interviews and referenced during

data analysis. Once the coding was completed, data was sent to participants for review to ensure that all interpretations were aligned with their values, beliefs, and truths.

Findings

Kapwa

Kapwa (or Pakikipagkapwa) is a Tagalog sentiment defined as the connection between oneself and others among the Filipino community. Kapwa recognizes that the Filipino identity is shared and that all humans have an equal value in relation to each other (David et al., 2017). Kapwa consists of a collective identity that is shared among the community, ancestors, the individual, and their batok. In this collective identity, the shared connection is not binary but rather symbiotic, as there is purpose in each role of every individual participating in the batok process. Through the occupation of batok, individuals with batok and their community could better understand who they are and their purpose within their collective identity. Participants expressed an increased sense of self, symbiotic connection to nature, and shared connection among others through their batok experience.

Sense of Self

Participants built a stronger sense of self and belongingness throughout their journey participating in the batok experience. Discovering a sense of self is challenging, but through the occupation of batok, participants built upon themselves by distinguishing their values, truth, and collective Filipino identity.

> I've never taken that to heart too much, but particularly on the Filipino side, I always felt like I was never Filipino enough. And so once I got my batok and realized that even though it's half of

> me, that half is more than enough and that half is very very relevant, and so important. (Lauren E.)

The process of discovering themselves empowered participants and allowed them to become more conscious and connected with their inner selves. With a greater sense of self, participants found a sense of belonging to the community and strengthened their connection with others. Furthermore, the meaning behind a batok brought a deeper understanding and appreciation of their culture.

Symbiotic Connection in Nature

Participants nurtured a symbiotic relationship with nature, ancestors, and themselves as they went through the batok process. Participants listened to nature to connect with their ancestors in the belief that ancestors would reveal their spirit through nature. They remarked that to hear your ancestors, you would need to be in a state of quietness to recognize their messages.

> I meditated a lot on it and, at that time, I didn't feel like I was necessarily praying to my ancestors. I was really sitting with it… feeling the sensations in my body. I believe we were made up of these energy channels in our body that we hold. If you sit long enough, sometimes you can feel them strongly in different areas. Maybe even at particular times too. For instance, in very intense times or moments when you enter natural environments, you'll be able to feel something… like an alert in your body. I would not say that I was prepared for that because I didn't know that's what was going to happen. I just listened. (Dela)

Batok often reflected a spiritual tie to their ancestors through markings symbolizing nature. These connections required a sense of respect and responsibility among those who possessed the markings, as they proposed a more significant spiritual meaning through symbols.

> The larger triangles that are on the outside represent crocodile teeth, and they often show up in a lot of designs but they're mainly for protection… When they tattoo these crocodile teeth, they actually carry a curse that if anyone is to like to mess with me or my ancestors, they will have the wrath of my ancestors. (Lauren E)

The symbols of the batok markings are often derived from natural elements, such as crocodile teeth, and are uniquely tailored to the individual based on their ancestral lineage. Through the batok process, these markings create a metaphysical connection between the individual and their ancestors. Participants expressed this shared understanding of the responsibility that their markings possess and enhanced meaning when the batok represented their ancestors.

Shared Connection

Participants reported feelings of greater shared connection within their community, family, and culture. Participants felt that their batok journey had strengthened their familial relationships as they could educate themselves about tradition and their ancestral lineage and therefore felt more rooted and connected within their culture.

> It brought me closer to my family. It's brought me closer to SCC's (participant with batok) family, just because they know that I'll support her and they support her and what she loves to do, and I feel like it was an eye-opening experience for her parents because it showed that she does love her culture. (SKC)

The participants' experience of connectedness expanded to other Filipinos in their community. Participants reported that by recognizing their Filipino identity, they were able to experience this shared connection.

> Now, I feel every time that I see somebody that I know is Filipino, I just feel more connected to them. I kind of feel like when you have [batok] markings, they're just not physically there, you already have them. In the same way that I feel like "oh wait, this has been here my entire existence." The way I look at everybody it's like there is potential of knowledge of this [batok] practice already in your body. It's just not showing yet but it will… it could. I don't want to say it's like belonging to a club, but definitely more of a deeper sense of connection, of community. (CS)

The moment of recognition becomes an empowering experience for the participants. This communal experience of connectedness among Filipinos is shared amongst everyone in the Filipino community, and through the process of batok, is deepened within the sense of collectiveness.

Revealing One's Batok

Revealing one's batok is defined as a spiritual calling from nature or within themselves that solidified the decision to engage in the batok practice. The marking designs are not chosen by the individual but rather passed down for generations according to the specific region of their ancestors. Through participating in the batok process, the participants felt as if the batok was always part of them and was being revealed.

Calling/Intuition

Many batok participants expressed that the process of researching family identity, meditation, listening to self, and being with nature led to a spiritual calling from nature or from within themselves that confirmed their decision to participate in batok.

> To receive [a batok], I was really in that spot where I was just like, "I think this is something that I want to do, and I feel called to this." Take your time with it, that's all I have to say. Take your time, even if it's years. Just trust that it'll be the right time, whenever it's the right time, and even if you want it to be the right time. (Dela)

The experiences of the spiritual callings were different with all the participants who were involved in batok. Some felt the calling more than others, akin to intuition, while some were still trying to learn and listen to their calling.

> I think for Celeste like she physically feels that her body wants more, like in particular places like she's already having those sensations. I'm not quite there yet, I'm a little bit behind. Just like I was open to the idea, but something didn't feel like, "okay, this is the moment to have it." (CS)

"Like they've always been there"

Participants reported that the batok was always part of their body or under their skin, and through the process of batok was when it was physically revealed.

> When speaking to someone who has received that the marks honestly do feel like they've always been part of me underneath the surface of my skin. If that makes sense. They feel so much a part of me, like they've always been there, and even before receiving them. Like I was saying, I could feel it there beforehand. But I recognize that that's always been a part of me. Yeah, so I don't know. Definitely feels good to have them revealed and be present on my body and visible. (Dela)

Participants also revealed a difference between batok and non-Indigenous tattoos. The participants reported batok being beneath the layer of skin that needed to be revealed through the process of batok, whereas non-Indigenous tattoos are felt to have lesser importance.

> The senses of the corpse are really just being revealed as something that's always been there and it's just different. I will say even when I was younger and wanting my Western a certain way

> after receiving batok, I have no problem getting shady western tattoos that I don't care about because it's just such a different level for me now. (Celeste)

Participants felt positive emotions related to the revelation of their batok.

> Yeah, um, I wouldn't say any barriers, I just like I said after I got it, I was so so happy. It just felt so normal, and it felt so, it felt like it was a piece of me that had been uncovered, that I knew was there, I didn't know was there before but like, has always been, in a sense. (Lauren E)

Participants felt that through choosing whether to engage in the batok process, they experienced a calling from a spiritual being. Through participating in batok, participants shared a positive impact and expressed that they felt their batok was always part of them.

Decolonization and Reclamation as a Cultural Practice

Despite the revival of the practice, stigmas and barriers remain for the participants living in the United States due to the colonization of the Philippines. By engaging in batok, the participants are actively participating in breaking down barriers to decolonize and reclaim their traditions and a connection to the past.

Barriers

The participants shared that they overcame barriers (internal and external) to engage in batok occupations to practice decolonization. Multiple participants shared that their families had confusion about batok due to remnants of colonization in the modern Filipino culture.

> Well, they're still pretty confused. And honestly, I don't think we've really had discussions, at least with my Filipino aunts and uncles. They see it, and then they acknowledge it, but they don't really ask questions. They don't really get it or want to get it. Even our relatives in the Philippines, it's like, just kind of some crazy thing their American nieces are into. (Celeste)

Participants also discussed internal barriers. They explained that they questioned whether they "deserved" to engage in this practice.

> In terms of barriers, I also waited maybe three years after meeting manong [mambabatok; tattooist] to actually set up a ceremony, because I would say I had some internal barriers. I was questioning myself, like, do I deserve this? What makes me feel like… after all these years… I'm finally trying to figure out who I am… like, is this okay? It took a lot of me asking myself, "is my intention pure?" And "how can I achieve that connection and do my part before I receive batok?" (SCC)

The questioning of whether one "deserved" to engage in the practice is an aspect of modern batok that was discussed with participants. The participants' engagement in batok includes research (family tree and geographical roots) and self-reflection.

Connection to the past

As part of decolonizing oneself and reclaiming their Indigenous heritage, participants felt that one must acknowledge, learn, and respect the past. Participants reported that their batok served as a way to honor the past, their ancestors, and themselves.

> For me, it just reminds me how important this [batok] is as claiming sovereignty over my own body, and I think that's extremely important for re-indigenizing ourselves and decolonizing ourselves. So, it just made me even more honored to be wearing these [batok] again because it's not a joke when we think about people literally dying because of this as a cultural practice… Now I know every day, every moment that I have this, my very existence is a rejection of that and bringing honor to so many generations that we're not allowed to have sovereignty over their body and proclaim this. … I just feel incredibly, incredibly honored. (CS)

As batok has connected the present with the past, a participant explained how her batok represents the future. It served as a reminder to continue the work of decolonization and resistance that their ancestors were fighting for.

> What else does it [batok] represent? For me, it also represents, like, resilience. And in me wanting to take the step to be someone that my ancestors are proud of. You know, that saying, "you are your ancestors' wildest dreams" ... I feel like I'm unpacking a lot of the toxic traits that our family carries. So I'm really, really trying to do the work. And this is in my blood. To me, it is like a constant reminder to keep doing the work, it'll be worth it, it might be hard to go through, and especially to go through it alone, but it's going to be worth it. (SCC)

Batok served as a pathway to honor their past and reclaim traditions that were stolen from them and part of the work of recovery from the harms of colonization.

> It's also like a daily physical reminder again that my very existence here is bringing honor to where I come from, carrying forward our, our culture, and our truth, teeth and our beliefs. And you know the memory of everyone that's come before me and anyone that comes after me. And kind of… when I can claim sovereignty over my own body in a way that my not-so-distant relatives were punished and persecuted… I think it's a step towards generational healing for those traditions, for those who use that strength for myself and for all those in my family, on all sides and in all paths. (CS)

Decolonization is a continuous process that cannot end until its impact ceases to affect the people of the present. Batok as an occupation plays an irreplaceable role in this process, both at an individual and community level. As the participants mentioned, batok serves as a reminder of the past, ancestors, and honor. On a community level, it has components of ceremonies and physical and spiritual processes that community members can engage in simultaneously in one space. On both personal and community levels, batok continues to challenge societal attitudes,

rules, and expectations set in place by colonizers and reclaim Indigenous ways of being and doing.

Discussion

By building on previous research on tattooing as an occupation, the findings contribute to diverse understandings of tattooing through exploring the experiences of families and individuals who engaged in the occupation of batok. The findings suggest a strong link between batok and collective occupation and resistive occupation concepts.

Batok as a Collective Occupation

European or non-Indigenous tattooing can be meaningful and motivating for an individual acquiring the tattoo, as documented by Kay and Brewis (2017) through the framework of Doing, Being, Becoming, and Belonging. Within the European tattooing process, individuals who have acquired tattoos have usually done extensive research (Goulding et al., 2004). This process implies an individualized, intrinsic motivation to acquire their tattoo (Kay & Brewis, 2017). However, the European tattooing process differs in comparison to the batok process. The individual does not choose the markings, as they are determined through consideration of the geographical location of ancestral lineage. The European tattoo process involves both the individual acquiring the tattoo and the collaboration of the tattoo artist creating their desired tattoo design. The practice of batok has the same implications when acquiring their markings. However, communities of ancestors, family, community and mambabatok apprentices play a pivotal role in the batok ceremony.

Defining batok as a collective occupation further enhances the perspective on the practice. It recognizes that there is a shared belief of and intention by the community to honor the individual, their community, and their ancestors, which can support social cohesion (Ramugondo

& Kronenberg, 2015). Batok enhanced their connection with a social community, resonating with themes of strengthening the social fabric through collective occupation from Kantartzis and Molineux (2017). Participants felt Kapwa was enhanced through the collective occupation of batok, which connects them to self, community, ancestors, and nature. Kapwa as a collective identity echoes the meaning of Ubuntu (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015) and A'wna (Simaan, 2017), which both highlight the interconnected relationship between self, others, and nature. A'wna also relates to concepts of belonging, connectedness, and contribution to collective well-being (Simaan, 2017). Like the findings and implications noted by Simaan (2017), the themes of this research widen the concept of doing, being, becoming and belonging by emphasizing the communal and collective way Filipinos resist colonization through occupation.

Batok as a Resistive and Decolonizing Occupation

Batok was experienced by participants as resistance to colonization and reclamation of Indigenous heritage through decolonization. Pyatak and Muccitelli (2011) coined the term "resistive occupation" as an active form of resistance through the participation in occupations that challenge the colonizing or dominant culture. Batok can be identified as a resistive occupation as it was reclaiming an occupation condemned by ongoing colonial imposition in the Philippines and U.S. Historically batok served as a marker of identity and roles, but this was actively erased by colonization (Demetrio III, 2017). The process and impact of colonization still continues today and reclaiming this practice was empowering for participants, and batok was part of a process of decolonizing or "re-indigenizing" oneself and reclaiming their past. Batok also represented the future and was a reminder for participants to continue the ancestral work of decolonization and resistance. Like olive growers in Palestine (Simaan, 2017) who actively resist

current occupation, the participants who experience batok resist the legacy of historical colonization that deprived them of their valuable cultural traditions. These works of decolonization and reclamation in a cultural practice among all members of the batok ceremony present similarities to Ramugondo and Kronenberg's (2015) explanation of collective occupations of working towards a common good. By reviving an occupation that was stolen from them by colonization, the participants are engaged in decolonizing occupations and the liberation of a culture through collective doing.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The first limitation was the lack of participant diversity. The majority of participants and their family or community members identified as women raised in America aged 20-40 years old. Furthermore, all participants with batok received their markings from the same mambabatok practitioner. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of diverse gender(s) and age ranges of participants to learn more about gender and generational influence of the batok practice and incorporate batok markings from a variety of mambabatok practitioners to better represent the many regions where batok is practiced in the Philippines.

Another potential limitation was the researchers' lack of direct experience with batok. Four of the researchers identified as Filipino- U.S. American; however, they had limited knowledge of the batok process as they did not possess batok markings. While their lack of familiarity with batok might also be a strength as it may limit preconceived notions of this occupation, the researchers took efforts to learn from those with lived experience. Participant experience, knowledge, and expertise of their batok process and recommendations from the community liaison were highlighted and guided the development of this study. Future research

could harness enhanced participant involvement throughout the research process, utilizing participatory research methods that would empower participants and communities through inclusion.

The concept of collective occupation guided this study and therefore utilized both individual and community/family member interviews. The researchers initially planned to observe a batok ceremony in the winter of 2020, but this was not possible due to restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further studies may enhance rigor by using data collection methods that are more collective in nature, such as group participant observation, focus groups, or community interviews. While the research question aims to understand the experience of both the individual and their community, the interview questions could have also been phrased to focus on more of a collective than individual experience. Future research may utilize approaches to explore how a community experiences resistive collective occupation, as detailed by Lavalley (2017) asking "How well are we doing together?"

Conclusion

Batok's resurgence has revived an occupational experience for those native to the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora. Kapwa, revealing one's batok, and decolonization and reclamation as a cultural practice were identified as facets experienced by participants. Previous research explored the motivation and meaning of receiving a European tattoo (Kay & Brewis, 2017). This research furthers our understanding of tattooing and adds to the occupational science literature on collective occupation (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017; Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015; Valderrama Núñez et al., 2021). The practice and possession of the physical markings were defined as being in opposition to dominant colonial impositions from the Philippines, thus identifying the practice as a resistive occupation (Pyatak & Muccitelli, 2011; Simaan, 2017). Its

exploration within an occupational science framework can aid in reducing the residual stigma from colonization through uplifting resistive occupations that challenge the attitudes that nearly contributed to batok's annihilation. Further acknowledgment of the importance of diverse and non-sanctioned occupations on an individual's communal identity and the impact that community has on their experience, calls for occupational scientists to explore occupations from collective and Indigenous perspectives. Future studies researching the communal experience of colonized occupations would not only provide recognition of stolen occupations but also potentially aid in the liberation of collective and resistive occupations in other areas of the world.

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