

# Tongatong

By Natasha B. Gamalinda

*A Tongatong is a bamboo percussion instrument used by the people of Kalinga to communicate with spirits during house blessings. It is made of bamboo cut in various lengths. When you hit it against soft earth a certain drone reverberates through the instrument's open mouth. When an entire set of Tongatong is played in interlocking rhythm and prolonged with the tribal chanting, it could put the audience and the dancers in a trance.*

Cruel, how the stick could lure

hands like mine to grip, hit

and bounce the stick

against soft earth,

open, close the mouth:

sound coming out

as we heave our sighs

droning through the skies,

chanting spirit calls, luring,

ruling what comes rolling

through the tongue, dialectic

twisting of the lung's wind

with the tongue's devil dancing,

devil dancing: you, feet, floating

from the ground, bronze limbs

posing for a flight, i could not breathe,  
could merely hit, fixed, sitting  
on your ground, waiting till  
your dancing stops.

Cruel, how the stick could lure

hands like mine to grip,

hit and crack the stick

against my city's paved concrete

open, close the mouth,

bamboo crying doubt.

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