

The Production of the *Pastora* in Camarines Sur, Philippines

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Abstract - The purpose of the study was to document the *pastora*, a song-dance performance during Christmas season that calls to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in two towns of Camarines Sur, Philippines. Specifically, it focused on its production aspect. The categories include: the handing down of oral traditions which influenced the trainers' casting, choreography, costumes, props, musical accompaniment, and performances. The researcher made use of real time data: videotaped *pastora* dances, observer's notes, ex post facto data: stimulated recall and interviews.

There were similarities and differences in the production of these *pastora*. Both of the trainers were exposed to this activity at a young age.

At present, their granddaughters are members of their respective *pastora* groups—one way of handing down the oral tradition to the younger generations.

Both groups have dresses made of silks and laces. With regard to the choice of colors, Mimay prefers to use light colors such as white, light blue, and pink while Rita favors loud colors such as red, green, and golden yellow. At present they use only one kind of musical instrument in their *pastora*. *Pastora* Baaao uses a saxophone while *pastora* Bombon uses a guitar.

The trainers also differ in standards for recruiting members. Mimay prefers to invite girls with good singing voice, good dancing ability, and good physical appearance, while Rita believes that willingness is the most important quality of a *pastora*.

The similarities in the production of these *pastora* reveal the possibility that *pastora* in Camarines Sur came from one source. The similarities also revealed the impact of *pastora* in maintaining religiosity and the socio-cultural environment. The differences are influenced by the tradition handed down to trainers, the trainers' personal outlook, geographical locations, and economic condition.

Keywords: dance, intangible cultural heritage, oral tradition, *pastora*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dance is an indispensable part of the social and religious life of the Filipinos. In the pre-colonial civilization, it was performed to celebrate good harvest, birth, puberty, marriage, and to lament death. Dance in pre-Christian society was also associated with the gods, as also with heroes (Goquinco, 1980).

In the book of Gerona (2011), it was mentioned that pre-Hispanic rituals and festivals were also found in the Bikol region. An example is the *atang*—a thanksgiving ceremony for a bountiful harvest that involved incantations accompanied with vibrating movements by a priestess called *balyana*. Another is *Halea*, a feast celebrated to adore the moon which was performed through dancing, singing, and chanting (Gerona 1986). These ancient practices

tell that dance is one important aspect in the lives of the Bikolanos.

When the Spaniards landed on Philippine shores, the friars had to contend with the pagan beliefs of the natives (Alejandro and Gana, 2002). Since Filipinos of old already had their own religion, music, and dances, Spanish friars integrated the Catholic faith to the ancestral beliefs of the natives through music and dances. Thus, each Parish Church also functioned as a cultural center (Goquinco, 1980). The Spaniards introduced several religious occasions and events such as the observance of the Holy Week, the celebration of the Nativity, and a calendar peppered with fiestas which involved cultural and musical scene. Similar events happened in the lowland Christian provinces such as the Bikol region.

At present, fiestas are an integral element of the cultural life of the Bikolanos. But of all the colourful festivities we have, Christmas is the most awaited and cherished. One of the oldest among the Christmas traditions is the *Pastores or Pastora* which has become popular among the early-colonized Filipinos including the Bikolanos. Supposedly originating from Mexico, this dance called "*Pastores de Belen*" is about the visit of the shepherds to the stable of Bethlehem (CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Arts, Vol. V 1994). This performance has a Biblical basis, specifically on the Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-20) where the angels appeared before the shepherds to proclaim the Birth of Jesus Christ.

In the Bikol region, *pastora* is a song-dance ensemble made up of six or more pairs of boys and girls, or all girls led by a *capitana*. The group dances and sings to the music of the *rondalla*, a native string ensemble. *Pastora* is known to lowland Christian groups such as the Tagalogs, Visayans, and the Bikolanos. The performance revolves in one theme, however, there may be differences in some aspects, like the production. The production involves casting, choreography, costumes, props, musical accompaniment, and performances. The similarities and differences may be influenced by the handing of oral tradition, trainers' personal outlook, economic conditions, and geographical locations.

Thus, the specific objective of this study was to look into the similarities and differences of the production of the two *pastora* in Camarines Sur (*Pastora* Baao and *Pastora* Bombon) according to the following categories: the handing of oral tradition, casting, choreography, costumes, props, musical accompaniment, and performances. This also sought to reveal the impact of *pastora* in maintaining religiosity and socio-cultural environment.

Definition of Terms

1. Dance - a graceful and rhythmical movement; a powerful rite shared by all members of the culture, and essential to its well-being (*Kraus and Chapman 1981*).
2. Pastora/Pastores- a song and dance ensemble that roam the streets to proclaim the birth of Jesus Christ
3. Para-pastora- a member of *pastora* group

4. Oral tradition- is cultural material and tradition transmitted orally from one generation to another (Wikipedia).
5. Intangible Cultural Heritage - the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

II. METHOD

Research Design

This is a qualitative study of the production of *pastora* in Camarines Sur (Bikol region). In this study, the researcher compared the similarities and differences in the production aspect in the towns of Baao and Bombon. The comparison was categorized according to the following: how the oral tradition was handed down to the trainers, casting, choreography, costumes, props, musical accompaniment, and venue of performances. The analysis was based on the data gathered from interviews and observations. Furthermore, the researcher made use of real time data, i.e., videotaped *pastora* dances in Baao and Bombon, observer's notes, and ex post facto data.

Locale of the Study

The study sites are the towns of Baao, fifth district (or *rinconada* district) and Bombon, a town belonging to the third district (or central bay district), province of Camarines Sur.

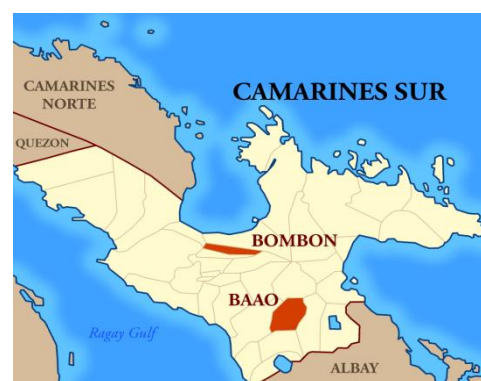


Fig. 1 Map of Camarines Sur

Research Participants and the Procedure of the Study

Geronima "Mimay" Barcelona (Illus. no. 1) is from Agdangan, Baao, Camarines Sur. Aside from training *pastora*, she is also a trainer of *dotok*,

sinakulo and *tanggal*, which are also examples of religious presentations.

Rita Alto (Illus. no. 2), who hails from San Francisco, Bombon is the research participant for *pastora Bombon*.



Illus. No. 1. Mimay Barcelona



Illus. No. 2. Rita Alto

The interview with the research participants centered on the production aspect of *pastora*. Specifically, the following were the focus of the query: how the oral tradition was handed down to the trainers which they applied in the casting, choreography, costumes, props, musical accompaniment, and performances. Additionally, the interview sought to answer how the trainers

learned the *pastora*, why they maintain the tradition, and why they use certain props and costumes.

Instruments of the Study

Interviews and video documentary were the main instruments of the study. Documents / manuscripts (i.e., souvenir programs, annual plans, newspapers) and books also served as additional research materials.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Similarities and Differences in the Aspect of Production

The similarities and differences in the production of *Pastora Baao* and *Pastora Bombon* were divided into these categories: the handing down of oral tradition, casting, choreography, costumes, props, musical accompaniment, and performances. The following tables summarize the production of the two *pastora* as culled from the interview with the research participants.

Note:

- ✓ Is used to mark the similarities
- ❖ Is used to mark the differences

Table 1. The Handing Down of Oral Tradition

Background	<i>Pastora Baao</i> (Mimay Barcelona)	<i>Pastora Bombon</i> (Rita Alto)
1. Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Exposure and participation at an early age ✓ Trained by her aunt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Exposure and participation at an early age ✓ Trained by her aunt
2. Factors that hindered the continuity of the <i>pastora</i> tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Her pregnancies and giving birth to her children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The outbreak of world war II
3. Motivation to revive the <i>pastora</i> tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ She dreamt that she was told by the Virgin Mary to do her obligations as trainer of some religious activities (<i>pastora</i> included) ✓ She took her dream as a sign to revive the <i>pastora</i> tradition. ✓ She made a covenant (<i>panata</i>) to revive the <i>pastora</i> and teach a <i>pastora</i> group for as long as she can. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ She dreamt one night that she could no longer perform <i>pastora</i> in spite of her excellent dancing and musical skills. ✓ She took her dream as a sign to revive the <i>pastora</i> tradition ✓ She made a covenant (<i>panata</i>) to revive the <i>pastora</i> and teach <i>pastora</i> groups for as long as she can.
4. Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The <i>pastora</i> trainer of her daughters namely, Crisanta Dato gave her the loose manuscript, the songs and verses of the <i>pastora</i> were written. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The copy of songs came from other <i>pastora</i> trainers that she knew and the dance movements are recalled from her memory.

Table 1.1 Casting, Choreography, and Performance

	Pastora Baao (Mimay Barcelona)	Pastora Bombon (Rita Alto)
1. Participants' Qualifications	❖ Prefers girls with good singing voice, good dancing ability, and good physical appearance	❖ Willingness is the most important quality of being a <i>pastora</i> .
2. Choreography	❖ Applies the choreography of a former trainer	❖ Dance steps are recalled from her memory—the dance movements she learned long before the Japanese occupation
3. Performance (schedule and venue)	✓ First performance takes place at the church patio (illus. No. 2) on Christmas eve before going house to house	✓ First performance takes place at the church patio (illus. No. 3) on Christmas eve before going house to house

Table 1.2 Costumes, Props, and Musical Accompaniment

	Pastora Baao (Mimay Barcelona)	Pastora Bombon (Rita Alto)
1. Costumes (include material and color)	✓ Costumes are made of silks and laces (illus.no.4) ❖ Light colors are preferred	✓ Costumes are made of silks and laces (illus.no.5) ❖ Loud colors are preferred
2. Props	✓ Present: Hats made of cloth (illus. No. 6)	✓ Present: Hats made of abaca (illus. No. 7)
3. Musical Accompaniment	❖ Saxophone (illus. no. 8) Past: violin, double bass, guitar	❖ Guitar (illus. No. 9) Past: violin, guitar, flute, saxophone



Illus No. 3. Baao Parish Church



Illus. No. 4. Bombon Parish Church



Illus. No. 5. Pastora Baao Costume



Illus. No. 6. Pastora Bombon Costume



Illus. No. 7. Hat: Baao



Illus. No. 8. Hat: Bombon



Illus. No. 9 Musical Instrument of Pastora Baao: Saxophone



Illus. No. 10 Musical Instrument of Pastora Bombon

The researcher witnessed how Mimay works with her family and close friends so as to maintain the tradition. Her residence serves as the venue for the participants to gather and start to rehearse the religious presentations.

The following statements can summarize Mimay's purpose of maintaining the tradition and the preparations she does to carry out this activity:

1. She continues the tradition of her family
2. Annual organization of various religious activities is her covenant (*panata*) with the Virgin Mary.
3. Long-time exposure to the *pastora* performance made it easy for her to do the preparations.
4. Her neighbours, family members and friends help in carrying out these religious activities.

On the other hand, during the course of the interview, the researcher felt the strong devotion and dedication of Rita to teach *pastora* and to maintain its tradition. Her poor economic status and her wavering physical condition do not stop her from fulfilling her covenant.

The following statements summarize Rita's motivation in keeping the tradition:

1. Teaching *pastora* is her covenant (*panata*). She believes that something undesirable happens to her or her husband whenever she fails to train a *pastora* group.
2. Her deeply rooted devotion and her music and dance skills help in the achievement of her goal although she is the only one in-charge of the overall production.
3. She finds it easy to look for participants because the girls are mostly volunteered by their parents to join the group.

Comparative Analysis in the Production of Pastora Baao and Pastora Bombon

This section analyzes the production aspect of the two *pastora*.

a. The handing down of oral tradition

Both trainers at an early age were exposed to the *pastora* tradition. Mimay and Rita were trained by their respective aunts.

The strong devotion of the two *pastora* trainers that motivated them to make a covenant reflects their deeply religious outlook in life. This is one distinct character of a Bikolano. "*The lives of the good people in Bikol reflect quite faithfully the Gospel teachings*" (O'Brien, 1990). It was earlier mentioned that Bikolanos were the first people in Luzon to undergo the process of evangelization. As a predominantly Christian region, the Bikolano people's devotion to the Catholic faith is deeply rooted. The various religious activities and traditions in this region such as the *pastora* attest to the enduring spirit of Bikolano religiosity.

"*The pastora is both an expression of faith and religiosity contextualized with the local mores and folkways*" (Nasayao, 2000). The people usually establish personal relations with God through keeping and maintaining the *pastora* tradition. Like in the case of Rita, she believes that something undesirable happens to her whenever she fails to train a *pastora*. Instead of taking this situation as a co-incident or a natural circumstance, she finds in it a spiritual significance. The negative situations she encounters in her life inspire her more to

strongly hold on to her devotion. Meanwhile, Mimay revived the tradition because she believes that the Virgin Mary told her to do so through her dream. Mimay's interpretation of her dream is very much alike to how some characters in the Bible interpreted their dreams as a message from God (Genesis 20:3, 31:11, 31:24...). Thus, the strong devotion of Mimay to the Catholic faith and Gospel teachings is very evident to how she interpreted her dream, which motivated her to maintain the tradition.

The *bayanihan* spirit is strongly felt in Mimay's residence during the preparations for the various religious presentations. On the other hand, Rita receives support from parents who volunteer their children/teens to join the *pastora*. The support of the community reflects the Bikolanos' strong value of social relationships and being one with others.

Aside from Mimay, there are other well-known *pastora* trainers in Baao. The presence of several trainers and the support they get from the people in the community reflect the Baaoneños attachment to the tradition of *pastora*, which must have been inspired by the town's patroness, the Divine Shepherdess (*Divina Pastora*). The town of Bombon, where Rita comes from, used to be a barrio or a "*visita*" of Quipayo, one of the first few towns of Camarines Sur. Bombon, as located just beside Quipayo might have embedded religious teachings and practices from the Spanish friars, which include the celebration of the Nativity.

Mimay and Rita let their daughters and granddaughters join their respective *pastora* groups. This is one way of handing down the oral tradition so that when they retire as trainers, some members of the family belonging to the new generation would maintain the tradition. The exposure of their granddaughters to the *pastora* (and other religious activities) at an early age helps in the appreciation and preservation of the tradition—similar to what their older family members did when they were young. One way of developing the culture within the younger generations is through social situational learning, wherein one learns from other members of the social group, not necessarily through language but through situations (Kottak, 1991). Additionally, the trainers' younger generation of family members learns the culture consciously or unconsciously through interaction with others involved in the activity, where cultural tradition is incorporated within them through the process of enculturation. Sometimes culture is taught directly, but culture is

also transmitted through observation. Kottak (1991) also adds, that "*people become agents in the enculturation of their children, just as their parents were for them.*"

b. Choreography

The devotion and enthusiasm to maintain the *pastora* tradition enables the trainers to teach the dance movements even in the absence of notated dance steps or any other visual aids. Dance steps are purely recalled from memory.

As to the presentation of the two groups, the execution of movements in *pastora* Bombon is more energetic and precise compared to that of *pastora* Baao. This may be attributed to the teaching style of Rita, where she actually demonstrates the movements as she is very particular with the timing of dance steps to the music. She also mentioned that she never puts an end to rehearsals until she is satisfied with the movements that every *para-pastora* demonstrates. Her innate and considerably high musicality is a great influence to the good quality of performance by the *pastora* Bombon. Rita's playing of guitar as an accompaniment helps in closely monitoring the dance movements executed by the *pastora*. *Pastora* Baao, on the other hand, is less energetic and somewhat indifferent in their performance. Mimay never mentioned about her being particular with the precision of movements. The researcher also observed that Mimay is less connected with the *para-pastora* in terms of correcting the movement execution.

c. Casting

The trainers do not set very high standards in choosing *pastora* members. Even if Mimay said that she prefers girls with good singing voice, good dancing ability and good physical appearance, she still accepts girls that are being volunteered by their parents to join. Even if Rita said that willingness is the most important quality of being a *pastora*, the researcher observed that the *capitana*, the one who occupies a conspicuous place in the group is the prettiest. "*Religion is the main field on which the pastora in Bikol operates*" (Nasayao, 2000). The parents volunteer their children to join the *pastora* because of a covenant (*panata*) made with God that they will let their children join in return for the granting of their prayers and wishes or a sign of their gratitude, thanking God for His blessings.

d. Costumes and Props

The style of the costumes of *pastora* Baao and *pastora* Bombon are very much alike. The dresses with billowing skirts, which are made of silks and laces, are of Hispanic and Mexican motif. Mimay prefers to have light and gentle colors for the costumes. White is her most favored color, although she also made use of light blue and pink colors before. These colors are patterned after the colors of the dress of the Virgin Mary, whom she has a special attachment to.

Rita, on the other hand, prefers to make use of loud colors for the costumes. Her *pastora* group wore golden yellow dresses during the performance, but she said that they also made use of red and green colors for their dresses. Rita stressed that she patterns the colors of her *pastora* group after the color of the Sto. Niño's clothing. Using such colors in a way honors the Infant Jesus—His birth being the main reason for performing the *pastora*.

The economic condition also limited the original quality and ornamentation of the hats. For practical reasons, Mimay said that she now utilizes hats made of cloth, which can be laundered for further usability. She further said that *buri* hats do not last that long so it will cost more to replace the hats every year. Rita, on the other hand, still uses hats made of *abaca*, a material that abounds in the Bikol region. During her time as a performer, they covered these native hats with silks and they put intricate designs on them. This kind of hat, she referred to as "baronet," was very expensive and required a long time to make. Such change in the kind of material reflects the difference of the past and present economic condition.

e. Musical Accompaniment

The research participants identified several musical instruments used in their *pastora* in the past. The musical instruments that they identified were: violin, flute, double bass, guitar, and saxophone. Going back to the historical accounts of Bikol, the playing of western musical instruments was among the curricular offerings during the Spanish regime. It was in 1663 when musical instruction was made compulsory and the ability to play these instruments was a requirement. "*Fray Geronimo de Aguilar, a musician of excellence was the first to teach music in Camarines, later leaving some religious compositions in manuscript forms*" (Jarcia, 1999, in Obias, et. al. 1999). Simultaneous

with the Spanish music education of the Bikolanos was the Church's proscription on singing and playing indigenous music. Thus, the Bikolano's musical education and training in playing western musical instruments were evident in the musical accompaniment they had in *pastora*. The use of saxophone as another musical instrument that accompanies the *pastora* probably began in the American period. It was during this period that jazz music became popular to the Bikolanos, and the Filipinos in general. Some of the instruments in jazz music are brass instruments like saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, and trombone.

The present economic condition of ordinary people limits the number of musicians to accompany the *pastora*. The organizers can hardly afford to pay compensations to the musicians at present. In addition, the strong American influence in our music is another probable reason why fewer and fewer individuals become interested to learn how to play *rondalla* instruments. Furthermore, the younger generations might not find it "cool" to play old, native music.

Rita's musical ability is a great advantage because even in the absence of some musicians, she can very well play the guitar herself to accompany her *pastora*. As a daughter of an excellent musician, she had been exposed to music and various musical instruments at an early age.

f. Performances

Pastora Baao and *Pastora* Bombon never fail to perform first at the church on the 24th of December before going house to house on the Christmas day and onwards. This makes them different from other carollers here in the Philippines who, at the start of the Advent season would be heard singing in the streets. There is a stronger religiosity in performance of these *pastora* groups for they await the birth of Jesus Christ before they roam the streets to proclaim the Nativity. This also reveals the origin of the *pastora* where it was usually performed in Spain and Mexico. This sacramental act brightened Christmas eves of past centuries in these countries (Tiongson 1994).

At present, they visit nearby *barangays* and towns only during the Yuletide while in the past they could go as far as another province. Such limit in the itinerary is also affected by our present economic condition because going to farther places would require more budget.

IV. FINDINGS

The production of *pastora* Baao and *pastora* Bombon is similar in some aspects as to how the oral tradition has been handed to them by older family members. At an early age, they were both exposed to this tradition and their older family members functioned as 'enculturative' agents. At present they do the same thing by training their granddaughters who may be the next tradition bearers.

There are also some similarities in costumes, props, and musical accompaniment. These are patterned from the *pastora* they learned in the past, though at present they apply their own beliefs in their choice of color for the costumes. They also consider practicality in using props and consider the availability of musical accompaniments. Both groups also perform at the church patio before they roam the streets on Christmas day until the end of the Christmas season. These similarities reveal that *pastora* in Camarines Sur came only from one source.

They also differ in some aspects like the standards in recruiting a *para-pastora*. As for Rita, willingness is the most important quality of being a *para-pastora*. She said that during her time, willingness was the only standard set to qualify in the *pastora*. However, the researcher observed that the one occupying a conspicuous place in the group is the prettiest, the best singer and dancer. As for Mimay, she prefers to invite girls with good singing voice, good dancing ability, and good physical appearance though she also accepts girls who are willing to join the *pastora*. This also reveals that *pastora*, aside from its religious objectives, is also a form of entertaining people—and people love seeing beauty in the performances, which the trainers like to compensate.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Documentation of intangible cultural heritage should be done because their authenticity is already threatened.

More extensive studies on the breadth and depth of Philippine dance should be done as this strengthens the historical account of a locality.

Still a great number of *pastora* in the Bikol region and other parts of the country, which have not received any attention in the field of research deserve similar attention.

An extensive comparison of *pastora* from different provinces may also be done.

More *pastora or pastores* festival should be organized by local governments so that trainers who decided to stop organizing a *pastora*, (which in effect forgetting a part of our history) may be encouraged to revive the tradition and enhance our cultural identity. However, careful setting of criteria should be taken into account by the organizers because the long-time trainers complain that they are over-powered by the 'modernized' *pastora* presentations as they are more colorful and extravagant yet lacks in tradition.

Additionally, this should be included in school activities so that younger generations will be more appreciative of this tradition, which plays an important role in our history.

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