

The Artifacts, The Community and Their Story: An Exploratory Analysis

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Abstract— World heritages face diverse threats from several factors including environmental and technological challenges, extremist movements and wars, uncontrolled urbanization, predatory exploitation of natural and cultural objects for commercial purposes, and rapid development of international tourism. This study explored on the practices and experiences of the community in Sorsogon about the cultural artifacts peculiar to their locale. The informants in this study are natives of the different municipalities of Sorsogon who are knowledgeable and/ or with first- hand experience with the cultural artifacts. These were chosen through the guidance of municipal administrators. This study utilized the qualitative-narrative method of research and used thematic coding in analyzing the raw data. The data revealed that the practices of the community are: Religious Practices; Spiritual Practices; Livelihood Practices including a.) Farming and b.) Crafting; Burial Practices and; Defending and Protecting the land are reflected in the cultural artifacts present in their locale and at the same time reflect the values and attitudes of the people in the community. The community employs different ways of preserving cultural artifacts as a way of valuing, protecting, commemorating, and honoring cultural artifacts. These ways were: conducting festivals and feasts; building museums and keeping records; supervising through local government unit initiatives and safeguarding privately. The stories and information about the cultural artifacts gathered by the researcher with the incorporation of her experiences and observations during the conduct of the study are creatively written through narratives. It becomes a story within a story.

Keywords— Artifacts, Community, Stories, Exploratory Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

World heritages face diverse threats from several factors including environmental and technological challenges, extremist movements and wars, uncontrolled urbanization, predatory exploitation of natural and cultural objects for commercial purposes, and rapid development of international tourism. All of which have a negative impact on cultural and natural heritage sites (Egoreychenko, 2020). Cultural artifacts form a distinct characteristic and cultural identity of nations and regions. But something historically and culturally significant as this one is never exempted from challenges. Like humans and any other living things, cultural artifacts in this fast-moving urbanized world are subjected to neglect, forgetting, and loss. In the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky, it is emphasized that interaction with culture plays a role in developing one's sense of identity (Zubaidi, 2015). However, if these cultural artifacts be put aside, their value and stories will be buried, and the cultural identity will completely be unknown to its people. That's why there are several actions and conscious efforts exerted by various sectors and agencies like United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Task Force, and the National Commission to protect and promote cultural awareness and preserve these cultural artifacts.

According to UNESCO cited by Chinwe (2015), the cultural artifact reflects the life of the community including its history and identity. Therefore, it is a good point to be revisited for research. A cultural artifact is an avenue for people to trace back their history. It is defined as objects that reflect the concrete and abstract characteristics such as customs and practices of various historical epochs experienced and developed by a certain group of people (International Council on Monuments and Sites, 2016). Therefore, the practices and values of the people are associated with and mirrored by cultural artifacts. However, according to the United Nations Task Force (2015), threats to cultural artifacts have significantly increased all over the world. In fact, UNESCO identified threats like armed conflict and war to destroy heritages like the National Parks of Garamba and the deterioration of some historic houses in the historic town of Zabid in Yemen.

The Philippines, being rich in cultural artifacts like literature, buildings, sculptures, and paintings, also encounters several challenges in the preservation of its cultural artifacts. Many heritage houses were reported demolished and converted into warehouses or left deteriorating like the Metropolitan Theatre in Manila; and other heritage buildings in Calle de la Escolta, Manila (Cruz, 2017). These mirror the life and

experiences of Filipinos of the past. Though these impel tourism in this place, these are still neglected. It cannot also be denied that the Philippines was the home of many colonizers like Spanish, Americans, and Japanese which affected the artifacts and way of living of the early Filipinos.

Sometimes, challenges are inevitable and unexpected and it forces change to happen. As reported, several heritages in the province of Pampanga, Philippines were damaged by the strong magnitude (6.1) of earthquake that rocked parts of Luzon. This made the Archdiocesan Committee on Church Heritage Pampanga decide on the temporary closure of all heritage churches in the province pending inspection of their structural integrity (Rey, 2019). Other than this problem, Cruz (2019) cited that in promoting the development of a new set of world order, the colonial legacy has set a precedent that replaces the old traditions, ways of life, structure, and buildings, thereby creating a culture of neglect and disregard for the conservation of cultural heritage.

Cultural artifacts undergo a battle of being recognized, protected, and valued even in other regions of the country despite their great significance to the history of the place. Even if there is provided information about the cultural artifacts, most of it focuses on narrative scholarly facts but few of these are written in stories or less scholarly articles that will reach the interest of the common tao more importantly the young generation. The manner of presentation of the history goes beyond the level of comprehension of ordinary readers. The majority of the Bikolanos still remain in their traditional state of historical sleep (Gerona, 1998). Jamoralin (1994) also affirmed this in his claim that most Sorsogonans go about their daily lives understanding little of their historic heritage.

With the numerous challenges reported, other observable threats in these cultural artifacts in Sorsogon were the road widening project of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) that will possibly affect the ancestral houses in the municipality of Juban and vandalism in the Presidencia in Barcelona. If these continuously happen among other cultural artifacts without the transfer of information as a way of preservation, these cultural artifacts may die along with the residents of the place who have first-hand facts and personal experiences with the cultural artifacts. The books of historians may be present and may reach these young ones but never enough to present the information in the subtlest way. With the highfalutin words from

these scholarly articles, the interest and queries may never be met.

Thus, these drive the researcher to explore and delve into a research of cultural artifacts, stories underlying it, and the experiences of the Sorsoganon that can be an authentic or localized material in literature as an engaging tool for asserting one's identity. These short informative texts sought to also help her province in preserving the cultural artifacts through narratives. This further upholds the content standard in K to 12 curriculums, particularly in Grade 7 Philippine literature which mirrors Filipino ideals, talents, and identity, and Grade 10 English wherein learners are expected to present a research report on relevant socio-cultural issues and Senior high school students to compose writings on contemporary socio-cultural issues. Furthermore, during the In-Service Training for teachers conducted which the researcher had attended, it was discussed that the content of the lesson and materials used are advised to be contextualized (localized) so that students can relate the lesson in real life context (Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Enhanced Basic Education Act, 2013).

Finally, this study aims to revisit the cultural artifacts of Sorsogon by crafting narratives about the stories underlying the practices and experiences of the community. Through this study, the readers may be able to determine the practices and stories of the communities in Sorsogon relative to their cultural artifacts.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored on the practices and experiences of the community in Sorsogon relative to the cultural artifact's peculiar to their locale. Thus, the following questions were investigated:

1. What are the practices of the communities' relative to cultural artifacts in their locale?
2. How do the communities preserve the cultural artifacts distinctive to their place?
3. What stories may be compiled that tell the practices and experiences of the communities about the cultural artifact's peculiar to their locale?

Research Design

This study showcased the artifacts of the community with their stories gathered from informants, therefore preserving cultural identity through literary text. It utilized a qualitative narrative which is a qualitative

research design that can be spoken or written text, giving an account of an event or action that is chronologically connected (Czarniawaska,2004). It extracted information from the informants of each municipality focusing on their cultural artifacts.

In gathering data from the informants, the researcher transcribed the recorded information to construct a narrative informative literary collection. The collected information was classified into themes. This, according to Creswell (2007) includes examining and reducing the collected data into themes through coding and recoding process; and representing the data in figures, tables, and narratives in a final text. The information was categorized into themes through coding schemes by using a deductive approach. A deductive approach helped in forming one common theme from the coded information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 Religious Practices

Part of the Filipino practices is attending masses and offering a prayer. In the province of Sorsogon, it is also mirrored in their cultural Artifacts. For instance, the municipality of Donsol and Castilla both have religious images as their cultural artifacts. Donsol has an image of St. Joseph which they call Itay, the patron saint of the place. This was originated from the Franciscan missionaries who stayed and introduced Christianity in the place. From then, the community of Donsol believe that St. Joseph or Itay is miraculous and consider it as part of their daily lives. Their faith to St. Joseph is shown through organizing and offering nine-day novenario masses (prayers) every 9th day of May. Similar practice is also shown by the community in Castilla about their cultural artifact, Divinorostro. They offer novenas and mass during the feast day of Divinorostro (Holy Face).

1.2 Spiritual Practices

In relation to the artifact of Donsol which is Itay, another form of practice observed was use the said artifact for healing. As stated by the informant his Lola prayed for the intercession of Saint Joseph to heal the eyes of his uncle. Through a dream, an old man believed to be Saint Joseph instructed her to fetch water from one of the wells in the church and use it to wash the eyes of the informant's uncle. The instruction was followed and the eyes were eventually healed.

It is related to the study of Mansukhani (2017) about becoming a shaman of our own self. Mansukhani mentioned that ordinary people who are not classified as

shamans can perform shamanistic technique of healing through interpretation of dreams. That people interpret their dreams as message from another dimension of reality that has the capacity to heal and restore their illness or personal problems. Furthermore, Harner (in Manzukhani 2017) states that shamans use the guidance of dreams to know the cause and cure of the illness.

In the case of the informant's story, his grandmother also believed in her dreams because of the intercession of Saint Joseph. This shows that spiritual practices are strengthened with the connection of religious images. It is also observed by the researcher that people in some church touch religious images or apply holy water to specific body areas in need of healing. From this, we can implicate cultural artifacts with the spiritual practices of the community. The same practice was observed in the case of a seriously ill bank employee who was able to survive through a praying the novena the Nuestra Señora de la Salud (Our Lady of Health) (Cal, 2017).

1.3 Educational and Political Practices

In some parts of Sorsogon, the cultural artifacts present are relative to education and political system. In Barcelona, one of the municipalities of Sorsogon has a structure they call "Stone Building ". This was once, according the informant of the place who is a tourism officer, a school for children of the ilustrados or wealthy people. With its edifices still standing after so many years, it is cleared that it really was made meticulously. Beside it is the Presidencia which was the seat of the municipal government that was headed by the *governadorcillo* back then. Across it is the municipal church that was built in 1874. These three historical buildings stand facing each other giving an impression of power between the church and the state. Similar findings were found in Gubat. Another ruins also known as the La Presidencia was also the seat of the municipal government before. This too is located near the municipal church. Based on the location of these cultural artifacts, it can be observed how the education, the church and government created balance and power over the place.

1.4 Livelihood Practices

Livelihood is defined as practices/ activities, assets and capabilities required for a means of living (Chambers and Conway, 1991). People adapt to their environment to survive. Therefore, factors like geographical location, affects the means of living in a community influencing the man- made cultural heritage anchored to their livelihood practices. In this study, livelihood practices

relative to their cultural artifacts were classified into two. These are: Farming and Crafting:

a. Farming

Cultural Artifacts were developed for different reasons. Just like the panghag-ot in Juban and the Pambakod in Irosin. Irosin, considered as the rice granary of Sorsogon, had this cultural artifact called Pambakod. This was made of bamboo with an end split in half and the other end had a sharp metal. This was used by the community as tool in upland or dry rice farming. The Pambakod was used in pounding the land where the palay would be planted. Moreover, this tool had an extraordinary characteristic. The split ends of the bamboo create a rhythmic sound when pounding. This became the music of the farmers in the farm. While planting rice, other women would also cook hinagom (rice pudding) and linusak (sweet pound cassava cake) and would sing together while working. On the other hand, the panghag-ot in Juban, is composed of the — a sharp pointed knife-like metal stick with a wooden handle, and hag-ot — a large and heavy saw-like tool with a wooden handle. This tool is used by the community before in extracting abaca fibers, as one their source of living. However, when the abaca trees vanished and became scarce in the community, this tool was never used again.

b. Crafting

Artifacts in Magallanes and Irosin depict different practices of the community. In Magallanes, they have their cultural artifact like the anchor and paraw (sailboat). They were known for being skilled in making sailboats because the place was the artillery of Galleons by the time of the Spaniards. People were taught and labored to make Galleons. Paraw is the term used by the community for sailboat, a huge boat with two sails. These sailboats were used by the community as transportation when going to Visayas and Manila before when land transportation were not yet available.

The paraw, angkla and the galleon they have created mirrored their skilled hands and them being artisans. The sailboats provided earnings from the fare paid by the passengers making it one of their livelihood practices.

Because of these experiences, the people in Magallanes were trained and honed over time and today, they exhibit great talents in handwork especially in the making of sea vessels. They remained attached to the meticulous woodwork and expertise of making paraws.

Irosin have crafted the pambakod out of bamboo. This pambakod was used in their farming that was mainly their primary source of income. Crafting the pambakod paved an easy way in upland farming making the crafted pambakod a very important tool in their livelihood practices.

1.5 Burial Practices

In San Francisco Bayugin, which is located in a mountainous part of Bulusan, there are recovered jars of different sizes believed to be burial jars. In the study of Fitzpatrick (2013), it was described that the jars that were locally made in the Philippines were of different sizes and with lids. The jars recovered have lids which looks like a stone slabs shaped to cover the mouth of the jar. The appearance exhibits similarities with the jars in Buraburan, Juban, Sorsogon based on the observation of the researcher. According to the informant (M3), the jars were recovered from their farmland. They were able to get bones, teeth and sibatsi or a necklace when the jars were unearthed.

From the aforementioned statement of the informant, the said jars showed that people back then practiced burial rites. It is evident in the claim of the informant (M3) that there were bones and jewelries recovered from the jars. It is associated with the findings of Barreto-Tesoro (2008) that in other parts of the Philippines like Calatagan, Batangas similar jars were also recovered which contain human remains and some glass beads and bracelets. These jars with human remains were located and recovered from caves, mountainous and cold places.

Based from where the jars in Bulusan were recovered, it implies that these burial practice of the people back then includes putting the jars with human remains in cold secluded mountainous places. It also shows how people value their departed loved-ones through these jar burial practices.

1.6 Defending and Protecting the Land

From the stories gathered from the informants about the cultural Artifacts, it was found out that one of the practices shown by the community in the different municipalities of Sorsogon is Defending and Protecting the land and the people. These municipalities are the Bulan and Sta. Magdalena. Bulan which is located at the southern portion of Sorsogon and is located near coast, is very rich in culture. There are different cultural Artifacts present in the place like the old municipal building, the casa, sewing machine, charcoaled flat iron (plantsang de uling) and Japanese Tunnels. Bulan

became the home of Japanese people before therefore also making it home of the tunnels. This became the refuge of the Japanese during war. There were Bulaneños together with the Taiwanese who were forced to do labor in excavation to make the said tunnels. In this sense, Bulaneños were opened and exposed to wars and different forms of defending the land which developed resiliency of the people. Meanwhile in Sta. Magdalena, the Moog (watchtower) and mortar were considered as artifact of the place. The Moog was then the watch tower of the natives whenever the Moros or enemies would attack the place. It was one way of the people to supervised and protect their land against any invaders.

2. The ways on how the community preserves the cultural artifact distinctive in their locale.

Present or not, the cultural artifacts become alive in the minds of the people because of the different creative ways on how to maintain and preserve it. In the province of Sorsogon, the following are ways employed by the community to remember and preserve the cultural artifacts they have and the stories it would tell.

2.1. Conducting Fiesta and Festivals

Fiesta is a significant day for Sorsogonans to honor their patron saints and to showcase their culture. It has been the way of the people to present and remember their cultural artifact. Stories about it are also incorporated in their festivals. Among these municipalities that showcase their cultural artifact through Festivals are the Donsol, Gubat, Castilla, Irosin and Magallanes. In Donsol, they celebrate Butanding Festival which also includes the celebration of the feast of St. Joseph or Itay. Gubat celebrates Ginubat Festival along with the celebration of the town fiesta. In this activity the dancing begins to the center and goes to the port area. Through this they give the importance of the civil center of the town on the 19th century which is the church and the La Residencia. In Castilla, the way of the community to preserve the culture and the value of the artifact Divino Rostro is done during 8th of May. It is the feast dedicated to the said artifact. In Irosin, the community preserve their cultural artifact, pambakod, by commemorating the paghasok or rice farming during the Paray Festival. And in Magallanes also incorporates the story of their artifact, Galleons, paraws and the anchor in their festivals called Magalleones Festival.

2.2. Building Museums and Keeping Records

If other community commemorates their artifact through Festivals and Fiestas, some have it through having museum and records. Among the municipalities in

Sorsogon that observed this practice are Sta. Magdalena and Bulan. These two municipalities constructed museums and hold records of the history of the place including the story of their cultural artifacts. In Sta. Magdalena, their museum holds movable cultural artifacts like coconut shell food storage, kanyon (mortar/ and charcoaled flat iron. However, immovable cultural artifact like the moog (watch tower) which cannot be stored in the museum, are adorned with flag lets to symbolize that the place is historical. Bulan also owns a museum containing their cultural artifacts such as sewing machine, charcoaled flat iron and materials for reading.

2.3. Supervising through LGU initiative

Most of the immovable cultural artifact which are not highlighted in Festivals or Fiestas and in museums, are being supervised by the local government. This is done to protect and preserve the cultural artifact from any form of loss or damage. In Sta. Magdalena, their artifact which is the Moog (watchtower) is protected and preserved by the Local Government through cleaning the vicinity and proposing a resolution for its recognition as cultural artifact and historical site. Similar procedure is done by the municipality of Bulan to protect and preserved cultural artifacts and sites. In fact, the local government conducted cultural mapping to really identify those cultural artifacts and sites.

2.4. Safeguarding privately

There are several cultural artifacts in some municipalities of Sorsogon which are privately owned by a certain individual. Among these are the (burial) jars in Bulusan and the panghag-ot and ancestral houses in Juban. Jars in Bulusan are owned or/and in the custody of the informant.

Some of the huge lids of the jars are used as flooring of their farmhouse. Meanwhile, the panghag-ot in Juban is owned by a 75- year old farmer of Puting Sapa Juban. It is in his custody since 1960. He inherited the said artifact from his father. To preserve the said artifact, he keeps it even though paghag-ot (extracting abaca fiber) is no longer in practice in Juban.

3. The stories compiled that tell the practices and experiences of the community about the cultural artifacts peculiar to their locale

This study explores on the stories underlying the practices and experiences of the community in Sorsogon province about the cultural artifacts peculiar to their locale.

Since the objective of this research is to come up with a story from the collected data showcasing the cultural artifacts of a certain locale, the researcher used creative non-fiction to re-story the experiences and stories of the community. This was a narrative of a story within a story which is the output of this study.

Hidalgo cited by Ateiza (2017), defined Creative Non-Fiction as a nonfiction prose which has the authority of facts and fiction but written creatively.

The researcher served as the storyteller and researcher through exploring on the cultural artifacts and stories of the community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the findings, the following conclusions were drawn: The practices of the community are reflected in the cultural artifacts present in their locale and at the same time reflect the values and attitudes of the people in the community. The community employ different ways of preserving cultural artifacts as a way of valuing, protecting, commemorating and honoring the cultural artifacts. It can be through conducting festivals and feasts; building museums and keeping records; supervising through local government unit initiative and safeguarding privately. The stories and information about the cultural artifacts gathered by the researcher with the incorporation of her experiences and observations during the conduct of the study are creatively written through narratives. It becomes a story within a story which is the output of this study.

Based from the conclusions, the following recommendations were offered: The Local Government Unit may conduct cultural mapping to trace those undiscovered cultural artifacts as well as the practices mirrored by these artifacts; The Local Government Unit of some municipalities in Sorsogon province may pass resolution recognizing these artifacts as cultural heritage; The compiled narrative stories that was developed by the researcher may be used in teaching literature to engage the students to historical issues and concerns through creative non-fiction; Lessons about cultural artifacts and experiences of the people of the locality may be integrated not only in social studies but in literature as well to educate these young people who were not yet born during the time of its establishment to define their identity; The school may conduct and employ cultural/historical shows or activities inside the school to develop cultural awareness and cultural preservation; The output of this study may be translated

to any forms of dialect in Sorsogon province to have wider range of readers; and this may be used as a reference for future researchers.

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