

# **DOTOC: A Case Study of a Religious Performance in Minalabac, Camarines Sur**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Dotoc is a religious performance where kantura sings hymns for nine consecutive nights before the feast of the patron saints. It is a solemn and colorful performance which entertains and attracts people to come into church. The emergence of dotoc can be traced since the mid-20th century in the Rinconada Area of Camarines Sur, particularly Bula, Bato, Nabua, and other neighboring towns. This paper assessed the status of the third generation Dotoc practice in the municipality of Minalabac through interview, observation, and participation in the community. Constraints and challenges were examined as well as the safeguarding measures to protect and promote such intangible cultural heritage.

Results show that the Dotoc practice is performed in Minalabac municipality however, it was unstable in Mataoroc when the little ermita became the Parish of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. The community failed to raise awareness to preserve and promote Dotoc practice and perform it on a yearly basis. Also, it was found out that there are very limited studies about this topic. It is recommended to conduct in-depth study of dotoc practices in other parts of Camarines Sur such as those performed in different parts of Rinconada area to assess its status and document narratives and history of the practice.

**Keywords**— Dotoc, Religious Performance, Bicol Culture, Minalabac

## **INTRODUCTION**

Devotion is part of Filipino identity. Because of the influence of Spanish culture, Christianity spread and dominated the Philippines in the present day. This can be traced as early as the 16th century, the result of Spanish explorations conquering the country for three centuries beginning in 1521 when Rajah Humabon and his wife, Reyna Juana were baptized and welcomed Christianity. Since then, Spanish friars build churches and baptized native Filipinos converting Filipinos to practice Christian living (Brewer, 2001).

The country became home to religious festivities. Fiesta celebration in the Philippines is associated with the feast of the Patron saints of every locality. Some festivals known worldwide are conducted annually like the Sinulog Festival in Cebu in honor of the Child Jesus. Similar version called Dinagyang festival is celebrated in Iloilo City and Ati-Atihan festival in Aklan which are both celebrated in honor of Santo Nino (Peterson, 2011). There are also religious activities performed in the country such as Pasyon, or the story of Jesus is one of the sacred hymns sung during holy week to commemorate the life of Jesus Christ. Different parts of the country have its distinct version of the pasyon representing their dialects. Another is Santacruznan, a colorful parade to express honor and devotion to Mary and a way to show the story of Queen Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, founder of the Holy Cross (Tiatco, 2019).

In Camarines Sur, christian celebrations are not limited to festivals. Aside from the hymns sung in fiesta in honor of the patron of each locality, some notable performances are Dotoc practice in Rinconada area,

ceremonial songs for the dead in Caramoan municipality, pasyon which are played during holy week, and Aurora involving singing of prayer hymns and processions performed in different parts of the province.

During fiesta celebrations, it is common for the parishioners and the residents that there are colorful, loud, and fun activities in their respective barangays. The common events fiesta in the country are Basketball tournaments, pageants, amateur singing contests, and benefit dance. In terms of church related activities, we have parades or procession, street dance, and eucharistic mass. In Minalabac, Camarines Sur, one of the anticipated events when fiesta is approaching is the Dotoc practice – a religious performance that entertains the people. This paper further assessed the status of the practice in Minalabac, Camarines Sur through an ethnographic survey.

## OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to conduct an ethnographic survey of the Dotoc practice in Minalabac, Camarines Sur. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the geographical location and range of Dotoc practice.
2. Describe the cultural practice in terms of history, significance, practitioners, and mode of transmission.
3. Assess the practice in terms of condition or status of the practices, constraints, threats, issues and challenges faced, and measures and safeguarding measures.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper documented the significant intangible cultural heritage existing in Minalabac, Camarines Sur to promote greater awareness and appreciation of Dotoc as both a religious and artistic performance that caters and solidifies the identity of the Minalabacanon.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

This study explored the religious performance present in Minalabac, Camarines Sur. Because the design is in the form of a case study, terminologies used are in Bikol language. The researcher operationally defined the following words in order for readers to comprehend the words used by the locals.

- *Dotoc* – A loud, colorful, and lively activity performed in nine nights where selected kantura are singing hymns in order to tell the story of Christian celebration, baptism, feast, and honoring Jesus Christ.
- *Hymns* – This refers to the texts/hymns sung by the kantura.
- *Kantura* – This refers to the singers of the hymns.
- *Minalabac* – a 2nd class municipality composed of 25 Barangay, situated in the 2nd congressional district of Camarines Sur in the Bicol Region.
- *Religious Performance* – this refers to the activities performed or conducted in the chapel/churches.
- *Rinconada* – This refers to the language used in the 5<sup>th</sup> congressional district of Camarines Sur.
- *Rinconada Area* – This refers to the municipalities situated in the 5<sup>th</sup> congressional district of Camarines Sur
- *Camarines Sur* – This refers to the province in Bicol region located in the southeastern part of Luzon island in the Philippines.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the mini ethnographic design through interview, direct observation, and participant observation to collect data. This study used the standardized cultural mapping form used by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), specifically form 4B (Intangible Heritage – Performing

Arts). Data was gathered and validated in Barangay Mataoroc, Manapao, Sagrada Familia, San Jose, and Baliuag Viejo from November to December 2019.

### Locale of the Study

Minalabac is a 2nd class municipality composed of 25 Barangay, situated in the 2nd congressional district of Camarines Sur in the Bicol Region. This municipality is rich in culture and history, home for Bicolano revolutionaries who fought Spaniards. The present study selected 5 Barangays that practice Dotoc namely Mataoroc, Manapao, Sagrada Familia, San Jose, and Baliuag Viejo.

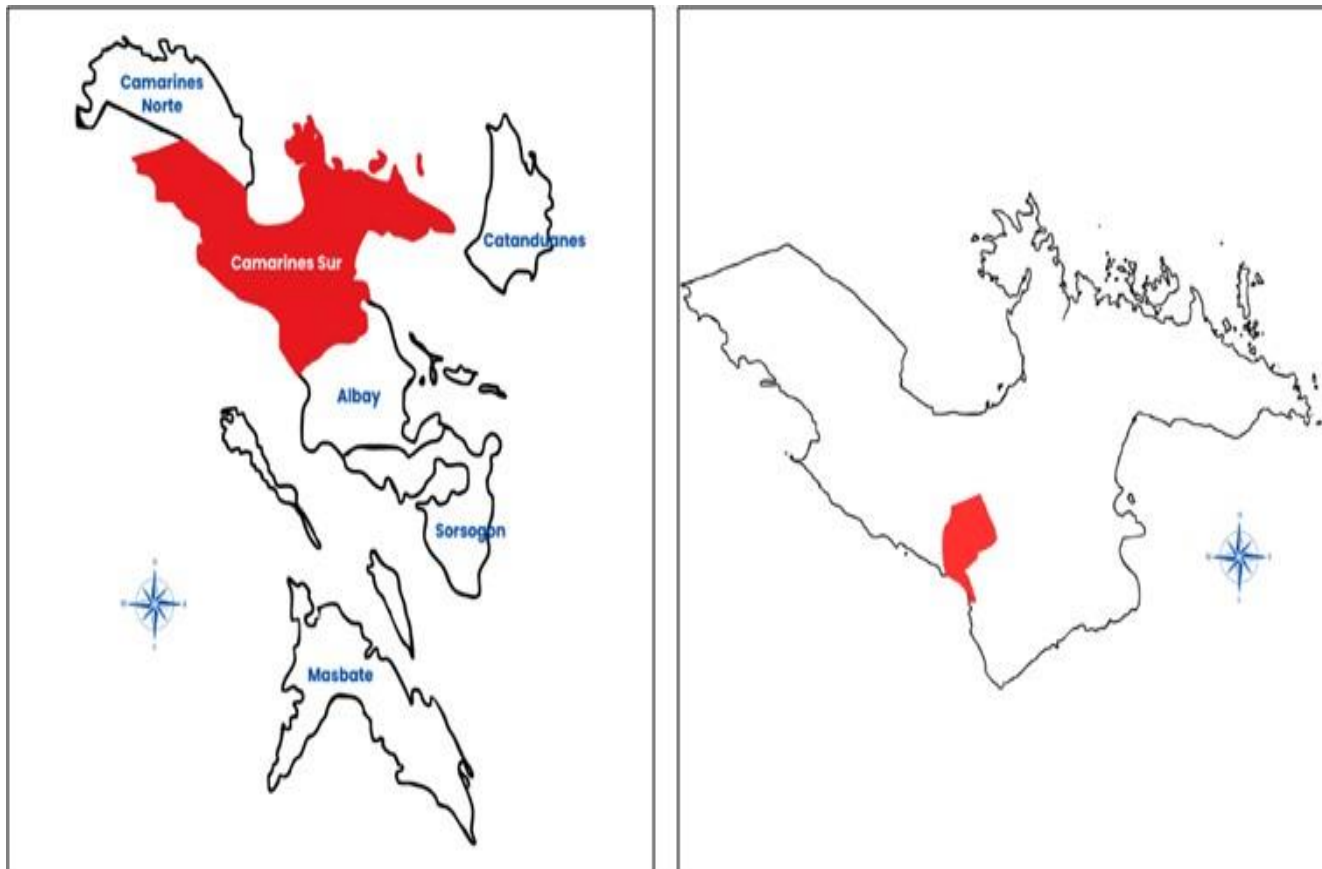


Figure 1. Map of the Bicol Region highlighting the province of Camarines Sur and the municipality of Minalabac

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Geographical Location and Range of the Element

Based on the stories of the key informants, the emergence of DOTOC could be traced since the mid-20th century in the Rinconada Area of Camarines Sur. It is well known in the municipalities of Bula, Baao, Nabua, and other neighboring towns in the fifth congressional district. Technically, the town of Minalabac is not part of the ‘Rinconada Area’ as it is geographically located in the second congressional district. However, Dotoc is practiced in the Barangays of Manapao, Mataoroc, Sagrada Familia, San Jose, and Baliuag Viejo of Minalabac. These five above-mentioned Barangays are located in the eastern-most part of Minalabac wherein it is surrounded by the Barangays of Tagbong in Pili; Binobong, Pili; San Isidro, Bula; and San Ramon, Bula which practice Dotoc too and are all Rinconada speaking barangays. Valiente and Gonzaga (2017) mentioned that the extent of Dotoc practice is active in the towns of Nabua, Canaman, and Bigaa, Legazpi. This is called Lagaylay in Canaman, a ritual in the form of Santacruzán while in Nabua, this

is performed in the form of Komedya focusing on the search of the Holy Cross. On the other hand, Minalabac is the only municipality in the 2nd congressional district that has DOTOC practice.

According to the respondents, since the mid '90s, Dotoc has been played in the chapel of Mataoroc, Minalabac. The neighboring Barangays have also performed Dotoc since 1970's. Early residents of Minalabac adapted this activity from the 'Rinconada Area' and perform annually before the feast of the patron saint of the Barangay. Dotoc continues to exist in the five Barangays of Minalabac municipality namely Mataoroc, Manapao, Sagrada Familia, San Jose, and Baliuag Viejo.

The present DOTOC performance is conducted nine consecutive nights before the feast of the patron saint of the Barangay. Table 1 shows the detailed schedule of DOTOC performance in the five Barangays of Minalabac.

*Note: These schedules are Dotoc practice before the pandemic. At present, the fiesta celebrations were changed in accordance with the feast of the patron from the catholic church.*

*Table 1. DOTOC SCHEDULE*

<b>Barangay</b>	<b>Patron Saint</b>	<b>Dotoc Schedule</b>	<b>Feast of the Patron Saint</b>
Mataoroc	Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal	November 18-26	November 27
Manapao	San Vicente Ferrer	April 17-25	April 26
Sagrada Familia	Sagrada Familia	2nd Thursday to 3rd Friday of January	3rd Saturday of January
Baliuag Viejo	San Antonio de Padua	June 4-12	June 13
San Jose	San Jose	May 9-17	May 18

### **Description of Intangible Heritage**

During the Dotoc performance, the verses of the hymns were sung by the cantors or the Kantura. As the Kantura sings, they were accompanied by either an organist or acoustic players but sometimes, a marching band. Traditionally, the Kantura consists of four groups of singers depending on their role in the performance – Kantura, Cubacho, Mura, and Angels. The main Kantura sings in pair (pair #1, pair#2, and so on). They consist of 8 members that perform in nine consecutive nights. The Cubacho are optional depending on the choice of the Pastoral Council as well as the Mura while the angels play the important role in the performance for reminding the community to share love, peace, and to glorify God.

The Kantura sings the hymns which consists of 18 pages for an hour of performance. Each verse in the hymns has a number (1, 2, 3, and 4) that indicates what pair will sing and what melody will be used. Each number in every verse has a different range of pitch and rhythm, each has a distinct melody. The text in the hymns is written in Bikol dialect and some verses were written in Latin. First generation performers were not able to provide information where the sacred text originated. According to the elders, early residents of Minalabac had a copy of the hymns even before the end of the 20th century.

The nine nights of performance were held in the chapel. The performance usually begins with a novena where elders pray the Holy Rosary followed by singing a short chant as part of the Dotoc. The Kantura starts outside the chapel while they slowly jive and march towards the altar. The Kantura form their line by pair in front of the entrance of the chapel, the cubacho/s stays inside the chapel, the Mura waits in the entrance of the chapel while the angels stay in the altar. The hymn tells that during the fiesta, the community

should reach and receive ‘bendicion’ so the people celebrate and praise God in the form of singing the novena.



Figure 2. Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Parish

The first set of verses of the hymns mentioned *Vamos a Belen* which encourages the community to join the Holy Land or Bethlehem in the form of the altar so that they will receive ‘bendicion’. During the performance, the *Kantura* harvested baskets filled with flowers which were hung in a banana tree as offerings for the altar. In the middle of their journey, the *Kantura* meet the two *Mura* who do not believe in Jesus. They are under the spell of the demons so they discourage the *Kantura* to reach the altar. Instead of celebrating, they preferred to stay outside and blocked the *Kantura*. The *Kantura* and the *Mura* are conversing through singing. The *Kantura* are convincing the *Mura* to join the celebration and to be a follower of Jesus while the *Mura* insist that it is a nonsense activity since it’s against their belief. The *Kantura* showed the image of Jesus in the form of the Crucifix but still, the *Mura* object. When heaven heard the commotion, God sent angels to convince the *Mura*. The angels once again showed the image of Jesus and the *Mura* accepted it. After they convinced the *Mura*, the Journey of the community (*Kantura*) towards the altar continued so that before the feast, they already received ‘bendicion’.

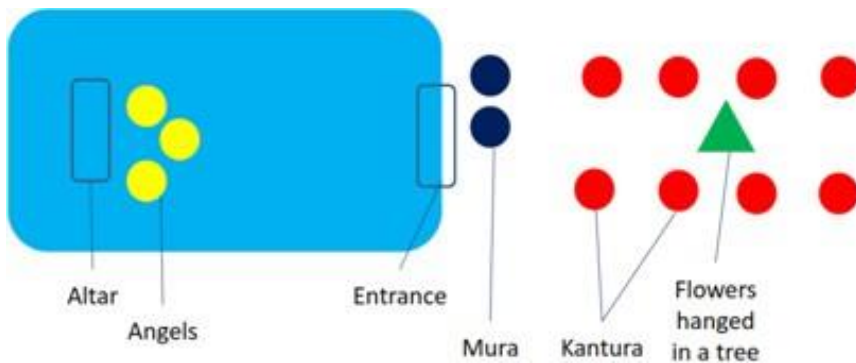


Figure 2. Formation of Kantura

The Dotoc players may also vary depending on the choice of the priest and the Pastoral Council of the Barangay. There are times that Dotoc is played by the elders (*mga gurang / seniors*), married young adults (*mga inaguman*), teenagers (*mga daraga*) – the most common, and the childrens (*kaakian*). All *Kanturas* are

female who wear a gown during each performance. Each group of Kantura must have a similar outfit depending on the assigned motif (ex. 1st night-green, 2nd night-blue, etc.) The Pastoral Council of the Barangay is the one who chooses the set of Kanturas, wherein they are also assigned to teach the Kanturas the proper way of singing each verse in the hymns. In the case of Ms. Avila (the informant), she is inspired by her mother who was a previous Kantura during her teenage days and her older sister as well.



Figure 3. Kantura (photo from the respondent)

Being a Kantura is passed through generations from parents to their children as well as from siblings, from the oldest to the youngest. The present Kantura are training the Cubacho so that they will be prepared to be the main Kantura when they reach their teenage days. The main Kantura are teaching the Cubacho and other interested girls for the proper way of singing each verse. Some elders also teach little children so that they can acquire the basic knowledge in singing the hymns. Elders also encourage every child to experience being an angel and they provide free tutorials to train the voice of the children.

### **The Hymns**

According to some of the locals, pasyon is not actually the right term to call for the manuscript of hymns. The problem is limited knowledge on the origin of the texts and the history of the performance. These hymns are written in Bikol language and some parts are written in Latin that tells a story, not a prayer. The researcher and the locals can interpret the story portrayed in the Bicol text however, half of the hymn is written in Latin which no one in the community can understand.

### **Stories/Narratives Associated with the Element**

There are stories that tells how important the Dotoc practice in the Barangays of Minalabac because this is not only a legacy to be passed or a heritage to be shared. It is the identity of the municipality that makes unique from the other towns in the 2nd congressional district. According to the elders, being Kantura makes a woman to be completely blessed. Singing the Dotoc hymns leads to holiness of an individual since the text is sacred and it is about reuniting with Jesus and celebrating the feast of the patron saint.

For them, the dotoc performance reminds them of their teenage life. Having Dotoc also make the celebration of fiesta more meaningful.

### **Significance of the Practice**

The Dotoc practice in Minalabac was effective in attracting the community to come into church and realize the true essence of fiesta celebration. By listening to the lyrics of the Dotoc, the people unite in commemorating Jesus Christ and his redeeming work, especially his sacrifice for the sake of all humankind

through his crucifixion and by that, the Minalabaqueños become closer with the Almighty God and their belief strengthen. Aside from the spiritual significance stated above, there is social significance from performing Dotoc because this practice serves as an avenue to hone the skills and talents of the Kantura and through the performance, they were able to share it to the community.

### **Assessment of the Practice**

There are minor problems encountered during Dotoc performance like the bad weather and the availability of the Kantura. However, Dotoc still exists in the Barangays of Minalabac except in Mataoroc which became unstable in the present time. Unlike the other Barangay, the Dotoc practice in Mataoroc is controlled by the parish priest of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Parish. Before, Dotoc is performed in the chapel of Barangay Mataoroc but based on the history of the said Barangay, the year 2004 brings major changes when the little ermita became the Parish of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Because of the changes brought by the different parish priests who manage the church, the Dotoc practice became unstable, some priests allowed, others did not. The cultural background of the priest managing the parish significantly affect the events that will be conducted. Thus, parish priest assigned in Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Parish is not permanent and changes every after some years. Moreover, conducting Dotoc practice needs long time of preparation in order to prepare the singers in the performance. Thus, Dotoc practice is costly because aside from the attire of the singers, food and snacks are prepared after the event yet the budget is highly dependent on sponsors. Lack of sponsors means no Dotoc practice.

As the researcher tried to examine the constraints and challenges faced as well as the safeguarding measures to protect and promote Dotoc practice, it was revealed that people failed to raise awareness to preserve and promote Dotoc practice and perform it on a yearly basis.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This pioneering study on the dotoc practice in Minalabac faced challenges in gathering data since there is limited published study exploring this topic. The presented data above are based only in the interview from the respondent and direct observation of the performance in the locale. Since the lyrics of the hymns are written in foreign language, there is limited information presented on the meaning of the story they are trying to portray. Also, the locals have limited knowledge on the history of the practice as well as its origin.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Dotoc is practiced in the Barangays of Mataoroc, Sagrada Familia, San Jose, Manapao, and Baliuag Viejo. Such religious activities do not just simply add color and fun for the people but play a significant role in uniting the people, attracting the community to come into church and realize the true essence of fiesta celebration. Dotoc is a living proof that Minalabaqueños are religious and talented so the leaders of the community as well as the people should promote the activity, raise awareness on the significance of the event to the identity of Minalabac and its people, and conduct in-depth study about Dotoc practice. Documenting this significant intangible cultural heritage existing in Minalabac, Camarines Sur aimed to promote greater awareness and appreciation of Dotoc as both a religious and artistic performance that caters and solidifies the identity of the Minalabacanon. Areas for future studies are suggested in order to have an in-depth understanding of the dotoc practice. It is suggested to explore the lyrics of the hymns in order to understand the story portrayed in the performance. Also, there is a need to conduct in-depth study of dotoc practices in other parts of Camarines Sur such as those performed in different parts of Rinconada area to assess its status and document narratives and history of the practice.

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