

Kami Kadto: Retelling Oral Narratives towards Sustaining Philippine Heritage

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ABSTRACT

The practice of retelling oral narratives holds a vital role in shaping and strengthening families and communities across diverse cultures. These narratives, often transmitted across generations, serve as vital tools for passing down values, traditions, and shared history—thus, Philippine heritage. This research paper attempts to provide additional empirical evidence from qualitative inquiry and asks about the retelling process of oral narratives on norms and customs in building families and communities in the Philippines. After exploring the retelling process situated in the context of Calabanga, the researcher examined the possibility of transforming the literary piece from text to theater, adhering to theater-in-education principles. The script's content was based on interviews with selected native senior citizens of the town, who shared the traditional practices and beliefs they followed before entering married life. The story “*Kami Kadto*” (literally meaning, *us before*) was written to focus on the traditional course of building a family. It was based on the true-to-life love story of a senior citizen, who revealed the “process” of her love story from courtship to marriage. It also highlighted other significant old beliefs and practices followed in the town. The current investigation not only adheres to the ideals of heritage preservation but also wishes to contribute and bring about novel ways of documenting and transforming oral narratives to suit the varying viewer's palate for heritage appreciation and education. The need to revive old practices in order to preserve, protect and promote local heritage is encapsulated in the retelling and transformational processes from oral narratives, to written text as script for theater productions and potentially as movies that shall entice young generations of audiences. Overall, the retelling of the script and incorporation of original songs significantly contribute to preserving and celebrating Calabanga's cultural heritage. This initiative offers opportunities and inspiration for sustained literary tradition, theater practice, and education, highlighting the rich history, culture, and values of the town and the Bikol region.

Keywords: Calabanga, customs and traditions, heritage preservation, oral narratives, retelling process

INTRODUCTION

The practice of retelling oral narratives holds a significant role in shaping and strengthening families and communities across diverse cultures. These narratives, often transmit across generations, serve as vital tools for passing down values, traditions, and shared history. Oral narratives play a crucial role in family life, fostering intergenerational bonding and transmitting cultural heritage. Within families, storytelling becomes a means through which elders impart moral values, wisdom, and life lessons to younger members [1]. These narratives create a shared sense of identity, connecting family members to their ancestral roots and providing a sense of continuity in the face of change [2]. Through retelling, family members strengthen emotional ties, building a sense of trust and belonging [3]. In communities, retelling oral narratives extends beyond the nuclear family, playing a pivotal role in building collective identity and unity.

Shared stories and myths serve as a cultural glue that binds individuals with a common history and values [4]. These narratives foster a sense of belonging, promoting social cohesion by reinforcing a sense of shared purpose and heritage [5]. Through communal retelling, communities strengthen their bonds, enabling members to navigate challenges and celebrate achievements together [6]. Oral narratives are carriers of cultural values and traditions, guiding family members and community members alike. The act of retelling allows cultural norms, rituals, and customs to be communicated from one generation to the next [7]. Through these narratives, families, and communities preserve their distinctive identity, even in the face of modernization and globalization [8]. By instilling these values through storytelling, families, and communities ensure the transmission of their core beliefs. Retelling oral narratives constructs the identity and worldview of individuals within families and communities. These narratives offer insights into the collective history, experiences, and aspirations of a group [9]. They shape how individuals perceive themselves within their familial and communal contexts, contributing to a sense of self within a larger narrative [10]. Through these shared narratives, a framework is provided for understanding one's place in the world, cultivating empathy and a sense of responsibility toward others [11]. The intertwining of personal and collective narratives within families and communities enhances the significance of retelling oral narratives. Personal stories become interconnected with the broader narratives of families and communities, illustrating the intersection of individual lives with shared experiences [12]. This interplay fosters empathy and mutual understanding, as individuals recognize the common threads that bind their stories together [13].

In the Philippines, the practice of retelling oral narratives holds a profound significance in the creation and cohesion of families and communities. Former investigations delved into the unique role of retelling oral narratives within the Philippine setting, examining how these narratives contribute to the strengthening of familial bonds, the formation of communal identities, and the preservation of cultural heritage. In the Philippine context, oral narratives are more than mere stories; they embody cultural heritage and shared history [14]. These narratives are passed down from one generation to another, providing a conduit for transmitting traditional values, moral teachings, and collective experiences [15]. They reflect the diverse cultural tapestry of the archipelago, encompassing myths, legends, folktales, and historical accounts that are rooted in local contexts [16]. Through retelling, families and communities perpetuate their cultural identity and ensure the continuity of cherished practices [17]. Within Filipino families, the act of retelling oral narratives fosters bonding and nurtures familial relationships. Elders often serve as storytellers, imparting wisdom and instilling values through engaging narratives [18]. These stories create an intergenerational bridge, linking grandparents, parents, and children through shared experiences [19]. The oral tradition becomes a means of communication and connection, generating a sense of belonging and shared history among family members [20]. The emotional resonance of these narratives deepens family ties, enhancing understanding and empathy [21]. In the context of Filipino communities, retelling oral narratives contributes to the formation of collective identities and social cohesion. The Philippines' diverse ethnic groups and indigenous communities often use oral narratives to trace their ancestry and assert their distinctiveness [22]. These narratives serve as cultural anchors, reinforcing a sense of community pride and unity [23]. The sharing of communal narratives during gatherings, festivals, and rituals fosters a shared sense of purpose and belonging, transcending individual differences [24]. Retelling oral narratives serves as a conduit for transmitting cultural wisdom and ethical values within Filipino families and communities. They provide insights into the practical application of cultural norms and traditions, offering individuals a blueprint for ethical conduct [25]. Through storytelling, families and communities ensure that these values are not only understood but also internalized by younger generations [26]. The fusion of personal and collective narratives within the Philippine context deepens the impact of retelling oral narratives. Personal stories intertwine with larger narratives, reflecting the interconnectedness of individual lives with shared histories [27]. This interplay creates a rich tapestry of experiences that strengthen the sense of shared identity within families and communities [28]. The stories of individuals become woven into the fabric of collective memory, fostering empathy and understanding among diverse voices [29]. Despite the enduring power of retelling oral narratives, challenges persist in the Philippine context. Therapid urbanization and migration

of individuals disrupt traditional storytelling practices within families and communities [30]. The advent of digital media introduces new platforms for retelling, but also poses challenges to the authenticity of oral narratives [31]. Balancing cultural preservation with evolving communication technologies demands careful adaptation [32]. While retelling oral narratives can be transformative, challenges arise due to changing cultural dynamics and technological shifts. The rapid pace of modern life can erode the tradition of storytelling within families and communities [33]. In an age of digital media, oral narratives must adapt to new platforms while retaining their cultural authenticity [34]. With these challenges and gaps in the literature, amongst the intricacies in dealing with the retelling process of local oral narratives in the Philippines, it is clear that this is an area worthy of further research. This research paper attempts to provide additional empirical evidence from qualitative inquiry and has for its problem statement included: (1) What is the retelling process of oral narratives about norms and traditions in building families and communities in Calabanga, Camarines Sur, Philippines? After exploring the retelling process situated in the context of Calabanga, the researcher examined (2) how oral narratives are transformed as literary pieces from text to theater in revitalizing culture and heritage.

This investigation adheres to the comprehensive theoretical framework on performance ethnography in understanding and analyzing the role of oral narratives within specific cultural contexts, as well as their adaptation into theatrical performances. This approach emphasizes the performative aspects of storytelling, including the relationship between storytellers and audiences, the embodied nature of narrative transmission, and the cultural meanings embedded in storytelling practices. Key concepts of this theory comprise of: (1) *Performance as Cultural Practice*, that is viewing oral narratives as performative acts deeply rooted in cultural traditions and social contexts; (2) *Embodiment and Gesture*, such as exploring how storytellers use gestures, movements, and vocal techniques to convey meaning and engage audiences; (3) *Audience Reception* in analyzing the dynamic interaction between storytellers and audiences, including the negotiation of meaning and the co-construction of narrative experience; and (4) *Adaptation and Transformation*, that is examining how oral narratives are adapted and transformed in the process of theatrical production, considering issues of authenticity, representation, and cultural appropriation. Performance ethnography offers valuable insights into the embodied nature of storytelling and its significance within specific cultural contexts [35].

METHODOLOGY

Following the research and development approach [36] and guided by the theatre in education principles [37], [38], [39], the objective of this article was achieved through the social science investigative process. This investigation aimed to explore and understand oral narratives through sustainability concepts in terms of culture and arts in theatre-in-education, hence the constructivist paradigm of inquiry [40], [41], [42]. The basic tenet of this theoretical worldview is that people active in the research process advance socially constructed reality, and they attempt to comprehend the complexity of lived experience from the perspectives of those who live it [43], [44]. Reference [45] argued that to develop objective and subjective knowledge, a constructivist methodology needs to be interpretive, inductive and historical. The combined nuances of qualitative research approaches as grounded theory, phenomenological and historical case designs [46] reflect the uniqueness of oral narratives and stories along customs and traditions, and the depth by which this was investigated. A research protocol (e.g., a modified case study from [47]) was designed to guide researchers on the ethical as well as sound methodical implementation of research activities. Nine (9) experts and key informants from Calabanga and in the provinces in Bicol region, Philippines were identified and, in their absence, the 'snowball' principle was employed until saturation in the data collection. Interviews were supported by documents and archival artefacts drawn from locally available books and references and were further triangulated through focus group discussion and expert-guided sessions including consultation with mostly senior citizens. The conglomeration of all data gathered was analyzed through a narrative analysis approach which examined the structure, themes, characters, and storytelling techniques employed in the oral narratives before translating them into a script suitable for staging [48].

Essential steps for narrative analysis approach implemented in this research are: (1) *transcription* – from participant’s oral narratives to the writer’s first draft, (2) *identification of narrative elements* – use of dynamic storytelling through careful selection of characters and their characterization including the use of appropriate language and use of a musical flare; (3) *theme identification* – the author focused on customs and traditions with emphasis on the trail from courtship to marriage in the Bicol context; (4) *character-plot-setting analysis*–the written script employed actual and real events from the perspective of the research participants; (5) *staging considerations* – realistic semi-musical presentation was considered; (6) *revision and refinement* – written literary piece subjected to series of critiquing from expert and validation from original sources of data; and (7) *interpretation and analysis* – sustainability of the local heritage was one main goal with the author faithfully observing the logical and cohesive presentation of oral narratives in the written script. Retelling oral narratives involves different stakeholders – key informants, secondary resource persons, authors of local books, actors, and other community members. To minimize susceptibility to ethical issues (like social and cultural sensitivities, privacy and confidentiality, and risk to participant and researchers) and to ensure ethical conduct of the whole research project, participants were given an information sheet and briefing as to the nature of their participation and were only asked to proceed after confirming their participation through an informed consent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The written script entitled, ‘*Kami kadto*’, literally meaning, ‘*us before*’ stemmed from the narratives of an old woman who has experienced first-hand the processes entailed from the courtship up to the wedding feast in a traditional Calabanga setting. The script’s content was strengthened with interviews among selected native senior citizens of the town, who shared the traditional practices and beliefs they followed before entering married life. It was based on a true-to-life love story of a senior citizen – a *Calabangueña*, who revealed the difficult yet entertaining process of asking permission from the maiden’s parents for their engagement, captured in the tradition known as ‘*bahon*’ – resembling ‘*pamamanhikan*’ (supplication or request) in Filipino. The written script also highlighted other significant old beliefs and practices generally observed in the town. The six-part written script was set in the 1950s with dozens of characters enlivening the rich culture and traditions of Calabanga. The protagonists and lovers, *Selya* and *Estong* found difficulty in pursuing their love through a seemingly antagonistic tradition involving arduous tasks which need to be complied with to satisfy the almost sacred traditions of their families. Arguably, it is only in Calabanga that the practice is said to have thrived but is on the verge of extinction amid the fast-paced modernist culture pervading the locality. One senior citizen research participant vehemently recommends the preservation of their heritage through written account and occasional practice of the tradition that shall remind young generations of their past saying, ‘*importante na manudan kan mga hoben ngunyan an mga agi-agi kan panahon sa paagi kan mga babasahon asin padagos na pagsagibo kaini (it is important for the youth to learn traditions and customs from the past through written text and practice)*. The preservation of dying heritage in the form of text to theater is crucial for safeguarding cultural diversity and historical continuity [49]. Efforts to document, revive, and transmit endangered traditions ensure that valuable aspects of human experience are not lost to oblivion [50]. Through community engagement and archival initiatives, endangered heritage can be revitalized and celebrated, contributing to the richness of the global cultural tapestry [51]. The current investigation not only adheres to these ideals but also wishes to contribute and bring about novel ways of documenting and transforming oral narratives to suit the varying viewer’s palate for heritage appreciation and education.

While the script is set for a dramatic production, the script writer wrote original songs adding elements of music and dance which accentuated the joy expressed by characters despite the struggles each has to face to pursue their objectives in the story. The transformation of oral narratives into stage play material involves a creative process of adaptation that bridges storytelling traditions with theatrical performance [52]. Overall, incorporating original songs into the script involved collaboration between the writer, the participants, and the local musician, focusing on capturing the spirit of the love story and the tradition of ‘*harana*’ in the

Bikol culture. Additionally, the lyrics and melody (music) of the songs used in the play were revised to put measures and rhymes. Through the incorporation of dialogue, characterization, and dramatic structure, oral narratives are reimagined for the stage, engaging audiences in dynamic theatrical experiences [53]. This adaptation process often involves collaboration between playwrights, directors, and community members, ensuring the authenticity and resonance of the original narratives [54]. With the help of local artists and members of the community the written script was enhanced through the critiquing, iteration, and enrichment processes.

After writing the script's first draft, it was presented to two (2) consultants who are both script writers and theater directors. One of the consultants suggested textual appropriateness such as finding an older term for 'Nana' (grandmother) and advised checking some of the words used in the script to ensure their suitability. The significance of text appropriateness in transforming oral narratives into written scripts lies in preserving the authenticity and integrity of the original storytelling tradition [55]. The expert also suggested emphasizing the traditions for marriage rather than branching out to other traditions to make the story complete and to include a timeline to enhance the contextualization of the story. The second expert is nuanced in making the script closer to reality if it is to be staged as a retelling of the Bikol courtship tradition. Adhering to the appropriate linguistic and cultural nuances ensures that the essence of the oral narrative is accurately conveyed on the written page [56]. Additionally, maintaining the rhythm, cadence, and emotive elements of oral storytelling enhances the readability and impact of the written script [57]. Text appropriateness thus serves as a bridge between oral and written traditions, facilitating the transference of rich narratives from one medium to another. The laying out of conflicts, including internal and external conflicts, should be improved. Similarly, the consultant suggested that the Bikol heritage should also emerge as the protagonist searches for a solution to the problem created by the writer which then emphasizes on the audience being able to identify with the characters. The script was revised and finalized to be a comic story depicting the traditional courtship and marriage practices of the people of Calabanga. It also incorporated other cultural practices and values unique to the town, highlighting the richness and diversity of its heritage, which was noted during the interviews. As the Bikol heritage unfolds, the solution or catharsis of each character slowly unfolds to the audience. With engaging characters, lively dialogue, and vivid scenes, the play offers a window into Calabanga's past and present customs and beliefs. Improvements to the story's focus, appropriateness of language, character development, and conflict resolution highlighted the revision of the written script. Experts stressed the significance of integrating Bikol heritage into the story to present a holistic depiction for the younger generation. Finally, revitalization of heritage represents the emerging theme across the process of retelling and transforming oral narratives to creative practice. The need to revive old practices in order to preserve, protect and promote local heritage is encapsulated in the retelling and transformational processes from oral narratives, to written text as script for theater productions and potentially as movies that shall entice young generations of audiences.

CONCLUSIONS

The retelling of the script inspired by the culture and traditions of the people of Calabanga has significant implications for the town's cultural and heritage preservation. This article aims to document and share the traditional practices and beliefs followed before entering married life, which may otherwise be lost over time. By creating a play that showcases the customs and values unique to Calabanga, this article hopes to raise awareness and appreciation of the town's rich cultural heritage and offer novel ways of documenting and presenting heritage to various audiences. In addition to cultural preservation, the transformation of oral narratives has implications for education – the absence of original practitioners of the tradition entails a huge challenge in its preservation, hence a text and theater production shall aim to appease the constraints. Through retelling the script, students and the general public can learn about the customs and traditions of Calabanga and the Bikol region. The play offers a unique opportunity to learn about history, culture, and values engagingly and entertainingly. As the play incorporates poetic verses and original songs, it also allows students to learn about the art and music of the region. Incorporating original songs into the play also

impacts the town's musical heritage. The involvement of a local musician in the project highlights the importance of supporting local talent and preserving traditional music. The songs composed for the play may inspire future generations of musicians and artists in the region. It is therefore recommended to share the retelling process with educators and lifelong learners as a form of community extension of the university to safeguard the process and to polish the same in investigating other customs in building families and communities. Overall, the retelling of the script and incorporation of original songs significantly contribute to preserving and celebrating Calabanga's cultural heritage. This initiative offers opportunities and inspiration for sustained literary tradition, theater practice, and education, highlighting the rich history, culture, and values of the town and the Bikol region.

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