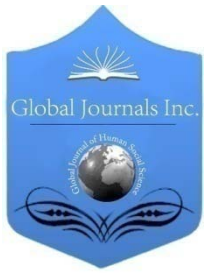
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Argao's La Torta Dance Festival: A Culture Mix of Colonial and Indigenous Elements

By Shella Marie S. Flores, Mary Ann C. Mata, Rema Mae M. Parinasan, Reynaldo B. Inocian & Natividad P. De la Torre

Cebu Normal University, Philippines

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Keywords: ethnography, torta, social mutualism, cultural dualism.

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Argao's La Torta Dance Festival: A Culture Mix of Colonial and Indigenous Elements

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Keywords: ethnography, torta, social mutualism, cultural dualism.

I. Introduction

Cebu is a culture laden and a historically rich island for tourist destinations, in Central Visayas region, Philippines. Her shores have always been opened not only to the beating of the sea waves that strike her pristine white beaches; but also with cultural influences that unceasingly wash ashore for several centuries of her heritage list. One of her precious heritage lists is the celebration of colourful vibrant festivals, which offer a unique window to the island's cultural landscape. Adding to the vivacity of her festivals is the creative beats and rhythms of the sounds of drums, bugles, and lyres that createethnic music. Music is the universal language of mankind and plays an important role in our daily living away from the clutches of desolation and loneliness. It is used for many functions like: therapies, burials, lullabies, weddings, occupations, and anniversaries. To many, "music shrivels when it departs too far from the dance." This simply means that music and dance are inseparable with each other. Rhythms provide artistic projections through the dance as an expression of passion, love, and desire – an important function in stabilizing a culture through social celebrations like her festivals.

According to Panaguiton, Paulma, Chan, Dimaala, Mondejar, and Ibabao (2015), festivals are usually a commemoration of patron saints, reenactment of local historical events, and celebration of bountiful harvest. On the other hand, Buted(2014) accentuates that festivals can be also used to build communities through its collective efforts and experience.Director Romulo A. de los Reyes of the Department of Tourism's Office of Special Projects, as quoted byBaños (2015), rejoins that "cultural festivals are big vehicles to promote the legendary Filipino hospitality and an arena to promote closer kinship and family ties". Major festivals in the Philippines have drawn a considerable number of local and foreign visitors and the number keeps on growing every year as Haguisan, Barato, Linaugo, Mendoza, and Montes (2013) point out. Felsenstein and Fleischer (2014) say that "*local festivals are increasingly being used as instruments for promoting tourism and boosting the economy of the region".*

a) Objectives of the Study

This study determines the embeddedelements of the La Torta Dance Festivals. It seeks to answer these objectives: (1) trace the festival's origin and epitomized ethos, (2) describe the festival's dance steps, props, costumes, music, and courtship, and (3) extrapolate themes and values from the key informant's testimonies of faith.

b) Review of Related Literature

One of the most vibrant festivals in Cebu is the La Torta in Argao. This festival replaces the Pitlagong Festival in 2011. Similar to the Pitlagong, La Torta is a celebration of Argao's cultural heritage. As a cultural colonial town in Southern Cebu, Argao derives its name from *Abgao* or locals call it as *sali-ar-gaw* (*Premnaodorata*) tree, indicative of the townspeople's respect to nature–symbolic of her animistic traditions. La

Author α σ ρ: Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health State Scholar, College of Arts and Sciences, Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines. e-mails: shellajs_259@yahoo.com, maryannmata.mam@gmail.com, maeparinasan@yahoo.com
Author ω: Professor IV, Social Sciences Department, College of Arts and Sciences, Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines. e-mail: inocian03@yahoo.com
Author ¥: Assistant Professor III, Filipino Department, College of Arts and Sciences, Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines.

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Torta Festival focuses more on the Spanish tradition of baking *torta*(see photos in Figures 1,2, 3, 4 and 5), a popular cake with fresh *tuba* popularly known as *lina*, palm wine without a *tungog* (*Excoecariaagallocha*), which Brogan (1979) calls it as powdered mangrove tree bark (coloring to tarten its taste). This mangrove grows abundantly in the town's shoreline, as an indigenous ingredient. Although the production of *tuba* through the *pitlagong*, as a cleaning brush of a *tuba* bamboo pitcher called *sugong*, is more indigenous, La Torta certainly brings a classy, festive, and more colorful dance showdown in Argao. The festival serves as a thanksgiving in honor of St. Michael the Archangel, Argao'spatron saint. The celebration also depicts the history, cultural practices, and folklore of Argao's townspeople. Common to the *pitlagong* and the *la torta* is the depiction of Argao's picturesque landscape of tropical palms that provides the production of *tuba* or palm wine, swine for native oil, and eggs of the *manukbisaya*or native chickens (*Gallus gallusdomesticus*).



Figure 1 : Tartened Tuba in several decanters, Provenance: Mark Mayol Magallanes (nd)



Figure 2 : Prepared Raisins as Torta enhancers, Provenance: Flores, Mata & Parinasan (2015)

The supply of eggs, for the egg white (albumen), is used in the construction of buildings and in the baking of *torta* (egg yolk) many centuries ago. Joven (2013) enumerates the process of baking the exotic *torta,* which comprises the following steps: (1) pour the purified*tuba*or *lina* into the flour and add salt. Mix well, (2) add the sugar gradually into the egg yolks while beating well, (3) add the oil and blend well, (4) put the mixture into a pan lined with paper and greased with butter or oil and add anise, (5) wait for 7 hours before baking (to allow the butter to rise). However, if the weather is cold, wait for 8 hours before baking, and (6) bake at 325 degrees Fahrenheit until baking is done.

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Figure 3 : Mixed Torta Ingredients in molders ready for baking, Provenance: Flores, Mata & Parinasan (2015)



Figure 4 : Argao's Traditional Baking Ovens, Provenance: Flores, Mata & Parinasan (2015)

During the Spanish occupation in the Philippines (1565-1898), the construction of Catholic churches all over the islands is needed to fulfill their Catholic mission. In Cebu, one of the major elements in the construction of churches is a massive piling of *tinableya* or rectangular bricks of corals, which the *Indios* (poor Filipino masses) are deputized to work through hard labor. The building of the Catholic churches symbolizes the mighty power of Spain and her slavery among the Filipinos during the three centuries of colonization, for the sake of wider Christianization. The Encyclopedia of Philippine Art (2015) validates the oral lore that plants sap, molasses, and even eggs are mixed into the mortar to make the building construction more durable or binding.



Figure 4 : Baked Exotic Torta Delicacy of Argo Provenance: Flores, Mata & Parinasan (2015)

In order to strengthen its foundation, Villalon (2014) laments "that hundreds and thousands of chicken eggs are beaten regularly", in order to utilize the albumenin mixing with a naturalized lime, as paste, that fixes the said construction. With the yellow egg yolks left to waste; the villagers in Argao, mostly women find a way to make this egg material functional through the baking of the *torta*. With the passage of time, the celebration of the La Torta Festival has improved. As a result, the festival has attracted tourists to come to the Philippines and witness the festival. The need to study the La Torta Festival, in its wholeness, isa paramount importance to cultivate love and appreciation of Cebu's unique and vibrant cultural heritage.

The review of related studies traces the culture, tradition, and beliefs of different festivals around the Philippines. Aquino (1978) states that "the Filipinos are lovers of music and dancing as a part of recreation, the only way to express their ideas through dancing as cultural and recreational activity which lies in the spiritual satisfaction and the preservation of the people's culture". With this, the La Torta Dance Festival is a microcosmic representation of Cebu's response for merry-making as an expression of faith. This study focuses on the uniqueness and the embedded ethos of the dance festival, as an important feature of Argao. Argao's large flatlands and plains are located along the highway in sub-urban areas; while the central portions are mountainous and very steep. These town's landscapes are covered with tropical palms called coconuts (*coco nucifera*), upon which one of the villagers' means of living is dependent on. Three fourths of their livelihoods are sourced from *tuba* (palm wine) in Figure 1, through *pananggut* (palm wine extraction), *panlulukay* (coconut fronds gathering) for the weaving of

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several *puso* (rice pouches), and other related coconut products. These products are one of the lists of Argao's homegrown industries like the torta, weaving, vinegar and pickle making, tuba, which all exist today according to Newman (2015). Ramos quotes Sales (nd) that "the weaving industry in Argao is as old as the town itself", describing women as busy *tejedoras* (weavers) or *hiladoras* (spinners). Like these homegrown activities, baking of *torta* is basically associated with women, while the *pananggut* is associated with men. This means that work among Argao's townspeople, during colonial times, are highly gendered.

The Department of Tourism reports that there are over 1,000 festivals in the Philippines. These festivals reflect the unique traditions in terms of: faith, bountiful harvest or product, remarkable trait, appeasement for unity, art, thanksgiving, legendary hero, and other cultural elements that define the Filipino identity. As substantiated, Wendt (1998) mentions that "festivals can disseminate the new faith, values and ways of life".In terms of faith, Bajos(2013) recounts that the *sinulog*, a dancing to imitate like a *sug*or *sulog*(a river water current)in Cebu, traces its historical and religious origin when the Portuguese explorer Fernando Magallanes arrives and plants the cross for Christinaity on the shores of Cebu, claiming the territory for Imperial Spain. He presents the image of the Holy Child Jesus, *El SeñorSanto Niño de Cebu*, as a baptismal gift to RahaAmihan, RahaHumabon's wife, who then later namedas Queen Juana, in honor of King Carlo I's mother. Among the rulers of the island, some 800 natives are also baptized to the Roman Catholic Church (Bajos, 2013).

Defining a unique Filipino trait, Buted (2013) laments that the Tinapay Festival in Cuenca, Batangas puts the spotlight on the hardworking bakers or *panaderos*of the place, the reason why the town is dubbed as a "Home of the Bakers". This title defines the assiduous trait of the Batangueñosin the Philippines. Another exemplification of a Filipino trait in terms of thanking for bountiful farm harvest is the Pahiyas Festival of Lucban, Quezon, where the townsfolks celebrate a thanksgiving in honor to San Isidro Labrador, the farmers' Patron Saint (Rosaroso and Rosaroso, 2015).This claim is also supported with the Dinagat Festival of Cordova, Cebu, where the townsfolks participate in the street dancing and the fishing rituals of a bountiful catch of the sea, more especially the*bakasi* or moray eel (*Anguilla japonica*)in honor of SeñorSan Roque, the town's Patron Saint (Rosaroso, Abao, Daygbil, Macan, Pogoy, and Cardillo, 2013).

As regards to appeasement of the battle, in the interior highlands of Mindanao, the province of Bukidnon celebrates the Kaamulan Festival. Dr. Carmen Unabia, who conceptualizes Bukidnon's famous Kaamulan Festival in 1974, stresses the need for research on "The Roots of Filipino Culture and their significance in Filipino Festivals" (Baños, 2015). The Kaamulan starts a conflict solving of the seven warring tribes of Bukidnon, Higaonon, Talaandig, Manobo, Matigsalug, Tigwahanon, and Umayamnon to have the *amul* (a gathering for reconciliation). To ease tensions of the conflicting parties, dances and songs are included in the gatherings, in order to achieve unity. Similar to the Kaamulan, is the Sanduguan Festival of Bohol, which symbolizes a blood-sealed peace treaty between the natives of Bohol, which is represented by Datu Sikatuna and the Spaniards, represented by Spanish conquistadores Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, in March 16, 1565 (Festivals and Fiestas of the Philippines, 2010).

In terms of thanksgiving, festivals and fiestas in the Philippines identify the people of Baguio to celebrate the Panagbenga Festival, as a month-long annual flower festival as a celebration of life to rise from a killer quake devastation in 1990. The term is of Malayo-Polynesian origin, meaning "season of blooming". The festival every February includes floats that are covered mostly with flowers. The festival highlights street dancing clad in flower-inspired costumes that are inspired by the Bendian andIbaloi dance practices of the Cordilleras (Festivals and Fiestas of the Philippines, 2010).

The Filipinos celebrates art through the art of tattooing, as evidenced in the Boxer Codex. *Pintados* (tattooed people), whose title is derived from *pinta* or tattoosserves as a status symbol,much like a general's badge of today (Agoncillo and Mangahas, 2010). It marks courage, rank and strength most especially during a successful battle in the early times. The bravest warriors are heavily adorned with tattoos which cover every inch of their bodies, head to foot. Indeed, these men are in fact such an unusual sight that the western missionaries consider them frightening and uncivilized upon their first glimpse in these warriors (Festivals and Fiestas of the Philippines, 2010).

II. Methods and Materials

a) Research Design

The study employed an ethnographic design, which described the elements of the La Torta Dance Festival in a holistic cultural system. Focus group discussions (FGDs) among Argaos' selected informants were conducted. There were 5 key informants and 5 casual informants in Argao, who represented as the emic group. To Pelto and Pelto as quoted by Whitehead (2004), an emic approach attempts to understand components of a cultural system from the perspective of the group being studied. Another 5 general informants were chosen outside of Argao, who were foreigners and other local tourists to represent the etic group. An etic approach analyzes a cultural system with research

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paradigm brought by the researcher outside of those systems (Whitehead, 2004). This is done to avoid bias in the results and discussions of the study andto explain further the similarities and differences regarding their own culture and customs. Participant observation and in-depth interviews are conducted in order to analyze and interpret the informants' narratives. In connection to such study, it is observed and learned that the behavior, customs, and faith in God of the Argawanon (Argao's townspeople) are boundless.

b) Selection of Research Informants

The five key informants (KIs) were selected using these criteria: (1) elderly who ages 60 or beyond, (2) or a resident of Argao. The five casual informants (CIs) were selected La Torta choreographers, designers/artists, dancers, and music experts. Another five from local government officials of the town and tourists were selected as general informants (GIs). These KIs and CIs represent the emic or inside views regarding theethnography of the La Torta Dance Festival. To provide a balance perspective, the GIs were selected, in order to provide the etic or outside views of the festival. GIs are selected based on these criteria: (1) local and foreign tourists, (2) residents from the neighboring towns of Argao who heard about the festival.

c) Ethical Considerations

The researchers and the informants established a rapport to determine the most convenient time for the interviews and participant observations were conducted. Names of the informants were withheld in order to maintain utmost confidentiality.

III. Results and Discussion

a) The Festival's Origin

Argao'sLa Torta Festival is coined from an exotic*torta*, a sponge cake, the town's famous product. With it, there are arguments encountered that La Torta should not be a festival name because festivals are believed to have religious connections; but because Argao is really known for a delicious*torta* for centuries, as attested by residents, tourists, and celebrities. The town mayor, commission heads, and department heads have approved the La Torta Festival. On the other hand, the replacement of the *Pitlagong*as the first festival name to La Tortais based on popularity that a *torta*is widely known in Argao–making it unique from other places. CI-4shares that:

> *"Because of former Governor Gwen Garcia's' project 'Pasigarbosa Sugbo' (Showcasing Cebu), which promotes a product in support with the Department of Trade and Industry's "One town, One product" or OTOP policy. Pitlagongis not a product is not widely known as a popular product, unlike the torta".*

With it, they believe that *pitlagong* has to be replaced; because it is used to clean the *sugong* or thetuba pitcher, which the *manananggot*, palm oil gatherer commonly uses, before the wine is placed in the big*galun* (decanter) or *banga*(jar), as a permanent container. During the drinking session, usually attended among male comrades in the village, the *hungot*, coconut shell is used as a traditional wine glass to perform a *tagay*, social drinking, which they can consume more than one *garapun* (a liter) to one decanter or even a jar as the *tagay* continues.Though *tagay*has formed a social significance of *barkadahan*, *comradeship,* which the *pitlagong* has shaped, itcreates a distinct culture of the Cebuanos in the south; however it might bring a bad image of excessive drinking among the other sectors, thus, it is replaced with the La Torta.

The origin of the La Torta Festival is creatively organized by the town mayor, commission, and the department heads. They conduct a meeting to replace the Pitlagong Festivalinto something new because of its product is commonly produced in most towns of the country. With that conference, they brainstorm with different names even naughty names as combinations of their unique products in Argao. Suddenly, at the middle of their meeting, an unknown woman stands up and shouts "La Torta". Another conference is conducted and finally, they have defended La Torta with the majority's support among the townspeople. This narrative is supported by Woosnam and Aleshinloye (2015), that "a festival is created in an effort to attract tourists; rural communities promote their festivals that are unique to the area and local culture".One casual informant supports it that a:

> *"torta is more famous and known than thepitlagong and qualifies as important product for DTI's OTOP". – (CI-4)*



Figure 6 : La Torta's Gasa steps Provenance: Piccio (2015)

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The approval of the La Torta as a new festival of Argao constitutes a certain form of *social mutualism,* a collegial decision transcendent with the local government policy. After La Torta has been approved, the town joins the Pasigarbosa Sugbo (showcasing the best for Cebu) in 2011. For the first time, it leads them to become more famous because of their awards received during performance like Best in Showdown Competition that garners the following awards as: 3rd Place, Best in Festival Jingle, Best in Street Dance Competition and many others to mention a few.

i. *The Festival's Epitomized Ethos*

The La Torta Dance Festival uses the *casa real*, a typical colonial Spanish house, as backdrafts. It represents the preservation of their fabulous culture inherited from their Spanish colonizers during a celebration a town's fiesta in honor of the town's patron saint, Saint Michael Archangel. The colonial*casa real* represents an affluent social life of an *illustrado,* the rich and famous in the town, with sweet smiles as sweet as their *torta*. The festival is typically a Spanish dance using the basic steps of: *paso, gasa*, and *polka*. These dance steps indicate the adaptability of the villagers' kinesthetic artistry as shown in the actual dancing.

ii. *La Torta Dance Steps*

Figure 7 shows the *paso* execution. *Paso* is a dance step that progresses a movement forward in any direction. The hand is in the second positon of the fundamental arm position also known as lateral position. In performing the paso, La Torta dancers march on the dance floors with confidence, incessant smiles, and enthusiasm to entertain the crowd.

iii. *Cebuano Enduring Hospitality*

"This dance step is performed gracefully and signifies hospitality to welcome the villagers' visitors during the fiesta celebration" – (CI-3).

A Cebuano enduring hospitality is symbolic through the movement of the hands that shows thanksgiving of nature's bounty such as the produce of the town's highlands and lowlands, the picturesque of a peaceful town facing towards the vast immensity of the sea, and the divine assistance of the patron saint. Another dance step in Figure 6by Piccio (2015) is the *gasa*, which means to scoop, or swing the arm upward and downward, projects animated rejoicings and vivacious attitudes throughout the dance.

iv. *Mystical Tradition of Faith*

"This dance step signifies the praising and offering as their thanksgiving to their patron saint–a gift of profound love to Saint Michael the Archangel" – (CI-2).

This mystical tradition of faith shows how the Argao villagers share their blessings to their visitors, as a unique form of pride. Such mysticism is rooted from their animist tradition before the beginning of the Spanish colonization, which is maintained to flourish by the Spanish religious authorities through the use of religious images of saints. Lastly is the *polka* in Figure 8 (Piccio, 2015), a dance step that begins with standing from Right to Left or from Left to Right directions, a preliminary hop and a step forward on a free foot. This dance step projects merry-making in a social celebration.



Figure 7 : The Paso step of the La Torta
Provenance: http:wwwyfcebu.com (2012)

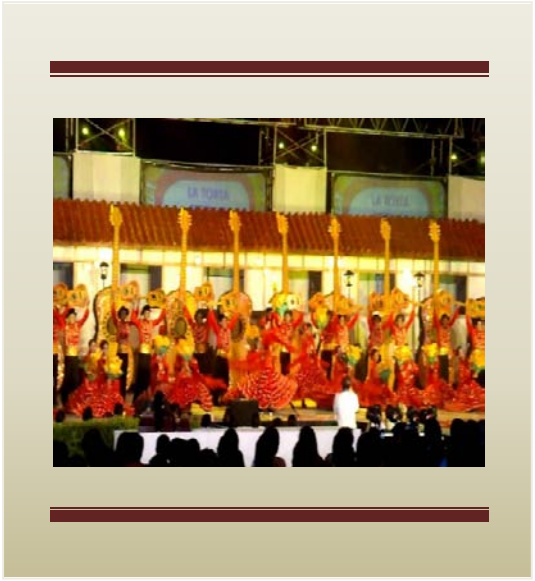


Figure 8 : The Polka step of the La Torta
Provenance: Piccio (2015)

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v. *Expression of Inner Peace*

"The polka represents their profound joy and happiness by the blessings received to every town individual, family, and institution" – (CI-1).

The polka symbolizes the expression of inner peace through the dance. The feeling of solitude, being blessed by God, through the intercession of the patron saint, St. Michael Archangel, protects the townspeople and the town from the destruction of natural calamities.

a. La Torta Props

The dance is creatively conceptualized in context to the town's cultural life. The props and the backdrafts *(casa real)* represent the preservation of Argao's Hispanic culture heritage as seen as a background in Figure 8.



Figure 9 : Torta as props
Provenance: Flores, Mata & Parinasan (2015)

Figure 10 : Gultara as props
Provenance: Santos Martnez (nd)

b. The Collective Values

Figure 9 shows a big *Torta,* as one essential prop isused in the dance, which symbolizes the town's *strength, unity*, and *sweetness*. The golden yellow color contrasts the red color of the suits. The shape of the flower represents the town's profound love. The form and shape of the delicacy represent an indigenous concept of a typical shape of a *batya* or basin that looks like a *tansan* or soda cap, which is commonly used to feed the hogs before these are butchered during the town fiesta. The *mantika* or pork oil is basically one of the elements in the baking of the *torta*, which makes the town's delicacy unique compared to the rest of the other baked *torta* in the Philippines. The shape of a basin, the pork oil, the egg yolk, the albumen, and palm wine create such unique elements of the indigenous townspeople's way of life, blending the colonial Christian tradition as a way folk religion. This represents a theme of *cultural dualism*. Cultural Dualism is the process of blending the two cultures such as the native animistic Cebuano traditions and the Spanish Catholic practices. The *torta* epitomizes the townspeople's socio-economic life to be resilient to all the challenges that the town might experience, a sterling vow they commit that they are nothing without nature and God. The abundance of nature is bestowed by God to them unconditionally. It is their response to nature (animistic) and to God (religiously colonial). These elements bind them together, being responsible people in the village.

c. A Symphony of Love and Devotion

The *Guitara* or guitar in Figure 10 represents a musical instrument during the Spanish regime and is used for courtship in the dance by the male dancers. The female dancers hold flowers as an offering to the patron Saint. The dance integrates an angel praising in the introduction of the dance, which shows the towns people's religiosity. The way of courtship during the Spanish regime is also presented during the introduction of the dance. The guitar depicts a social reality of building *symphony of love and devotion*.

"When a man strums his guitar and sings a harana (serenade) to a woman he loves to grant his heartfelt intention is a metaphor, that is, compared to devotees intention to please Saint Michael Archangel, as protector of the town and shower them with abundant blessings" – (KI-4).

vi. *La Torta Costumes*

a. The Female Costumes

Based on the interview of both the choreographer and the designer, the costumes of the

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dancers are designed according to the nature of the dance, which depicts the cultural practices of the town. CI-1 and CI-2 believe that the *mantones* (shawl)serves as a cover of their shoulders symbolizes the elegance and conservativeness of Argao's women during the Spanish regime, which they commonly wear mostly in special occasions like weddings, fiestas, and anniversaries (See in Fig. 11). Their *gown* has a layered Castilianskirt commonly with ruffles popular in Spain and in Latin American countries. This signifies formality in social convention and social regard for femininity. According to CI-1, the *red color* symbolizes the villagers' passion, love, and devotion to Saint Michael. It is also a belief among the elderly natives that during the Spanish colonial times, color red symbolizes power and authority. CI-2 has a different interpretation; the dominant red color in the La Torta costumes symbolizes the villagers' love of the tradition. The designers add that the *white shoes* symbolize women's purity and contrite religious intentions.



Figure 11 : Female Dancer's Gown
Provenance: Flores, Mata & Parinasan (2015)

b. The Male Costumes

According to CI-4, for male dancers, a red *long sleeved* with ruffles and *black slacks and shoes* are flamenco inspired. It signifies that whenever they court a woman, formality should be observed in order to catch the eye of their beloved and also in attending socializations and in formal conventions (See Figure 12).

Flamenco is derived from a Latin American term for a music or dance genre. It is *flamenco* inspired because of Argao's Hispanic cultural influences, during colonial times. Lorenz (2007) expounds that flamenco reflects the spirit of desperation, struggle, hope, and pride of people during the time of persecution of the Gypsies, nomads from India, in Andalucia, Spain. This context is also similar to what Cebuanoshave experienced from the abuses of the Spaniards during the colonial times for more than three centuries, vis-à-vis, the La Torta Dance Festival is a projection of pride among Argao's folks, with standing their feeling of desperation and struggle under the Spanish rule.



Figure 12 : Costume of the Male Dancer
Provenance: Flores, Mata & Parinasan (2015)

c. Regality in the Dance

"When I wear the gown during the actual festival, I dance like a princess back in time". – (CI-5)

Regality in dance is shown with how the dancers carry the gowns and project their body and facial expression that captures the life of an*ilustrado* (the rich and famous) during Argaos's colonial times.

d. A Chivalric Act

"Wearing the costume during the dance festival, it reminds me a culture that is totally different from what it is at present. It made me feel chivalrous". – (CI-4)

Unique in a flamenco inspired dance, that the male dancers respect gentlemanly the female dancers during the actual dance more especially in the part of the courtship ritual.

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e. La Torta Music

The music of the La Torta Festival is the best festival jingle all over the province of Cebu. This is composed and arranged by Russel Alegado who is a known Cebuano writer and an arranger of Festival songs. The jingle undergoes three changes just to achieve its attraction. It has a *quadruple meter* and its dynamics is *allegro*, which means faster that made the song to have an up-beat rhythm and much enjoyable to dance. Its texture is *homophonic* since it was accompanied by a rondalla together with a soloist. Its structure or form is ternary like all of those common songs in our generation. *Ternary* form has three different melodies heard in the first, second, and the last part of the music. Lastly, this music is inspired from Latin American genre particularly Flamenco music, which is sounded of group of string instruments specifically the guitar.

f. La Torta Courtship

Alfonso (2012) emphasizes the courtship episode in the La Torta dance festival as depicted in Figure 13. As revealed, the key informants view *pangulitawo*in Cebuano or *panliligaw* in Tagalog, which means courtship as very significant in the dance because this reminds the townspeople's values of a man's authentic intention to win the woman's heart, before a formal endearing relationship like that of a romance starts (See Figure 13). A woman in the dance is expected to be *pakipot* (playing hard to get), as a way to tell the man that he has to work very hard in order to win her love (Business World, 2002).



Figure 12 : Courtship (Alfonso, 2012), Provenance: De Leon, Felipe (2012)

IV. Themes and Values

a) Testimonies of Faith

Culture and religion refer to a complex set of an integrated pattern of people's learned behaviors, shared and transmitted through interaction; their lifestyle, surviving records, and physical results. It is culture that gives people praise and thanks giving to their patron saint.

> *"According to local lore of their ancestors, Argao's townspeople chose Saint Michael as their patron saint happened during the skirmishes between the Spaniards and the locals, when Spaniards are trying to operate the canyons, it has been said that it does not work; but it only gives out "bunot" (coconut husks) instead of bullets" – KI-3.*



Figure 12 : Argao's Patron St. Michael fighting against the devil, Provenance: Flores, Mata & Partnasan (2015)

This folklore shapes the culture of Argao's townspeople as regards to their faith to the village patron saint. Since Saint Michael is the commander of all guardian angels (Figure 14), they have chosen Him to be their patron. From then, they are very thankful for the blessings and guidance that he bestowed on them. This *faith is based on miracles*. These are the testimonies and petitions granted from Saint Michael, which KI-2 narrated:

> "*When I receive a lot of torta orders from customers, I thank St. Michael for the blessings and before I made it, I'll do the sign of the cross and thank Him for the good weather for my ingredients are in good condition. Asking him for a good weather is very important because if the weather is not so good, I*

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would have bad results within my product and that made all the difference". (3rd price of Best Torta in town, 2009)

b) *Expression of Gratitude*

Firstly, the *torta* becomes an *expression of gratitude,* which means that when devotees manifest good intentions and improve their *torta* business, they owe everything from Saint Michael Archangel. Folks know how to do good because nature provides them the best results, which make the La Torta Dance Festival, a celebration of faith and life.

"Because of St. Michael, I received the first prize of the Best Torta in town competition. Because of this award, I started the business and gain more money. Because of Him, many people order torta from me during our town fiestas. I thank Him for the blessings". – KI-4 (1st price of Best Torta in town, 2009)

c) *Shower of Blessings*

Secondly, the*torta* brings a *shower of blessings*. Strong faith in God results to manifold blessings, a mystical experience of faith and a strong devotion, that no one can fathom.

"Last 2014, a week before our town's fiesta, I washed our clothes outside our home. When I stood up for I was going to hang it to dry, I slipped out; but suddenly I have held a wood beside me. Thanks to Saint Michael who guides me not to totally slipped out from there, because probably for having a big body like this, I would have rushed to the hospital". – KI-1 (teacher and aSt. Michael devotee)

d) *Protector of Life*

Thirdly, Saint Michael the Archangel is a *protector of life.* He protects everybody's life and honors the best of life ina form of thanksgiving and merrymaking during the celebration of the La Torta Dance Festival. This has a closer resemblance of the Dinagat Festival of what Rosaroroso, et al (2013) have accounted that thatSeñorSan Roque has saved the Codovanhon from the epidemic strains of diarrhea, leprosy, and other forms of diseases that hit the town of Cordova in several years ago.

V. Conclusion

Argao's La Torta Dance Festival is a culture mix of colonial and indigenous elements as depicted in the dance steps, props and costumes, music and courtship, similar to the Dinagyang Festival of Iloilo, City Philippines, where it depicted a fusion of Roman Catholicism and the indigenous culture of the Panayanons, the people of Panay (Panaguiton, et al, 2015).The La Torta dance steps bestowed an enduring hospitality, a mystical tradition of faith, and an expression of inner peace of the Cebuanos in the South. The props and costumes represented the townspeople's collective values. The torta props symbolized strength, unity, and sweetness equated with the symphony of the guitar nuanced a passion of love. The costumes of the dancers symbolized women's regality and men's chivalric act shaped in a passionate attraction for courtship. La Torta Dance Festivalepitomized townspeople's ethosin the light of cultural dualism, that is, both indigenous and animistic within the townspeople's dependency with nature aided with a strong influence of Castilian heritage left by the Spanish colonizers for more than three centuries in the Philippines (1565-1898). The *torta* remains a symbolism of the townspeople's testimony of faith, an expression of gratitude, and a shower of blessing, which united the townspeople through a colorful festival as a symbol of faith to their patron saint–the protector of life.

VI. Recommendation

It is recommended that aspiring composers, arrangers and choreographers may continue the La Torta Festival and encourage going beyond their imagination to improve its future choreography, without altering the essence of its unique indigenous and colonial origins.

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