



Kammameros: The Faithful Bol-anon Percussionists

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Abstract: Festivals are pivotal to Filipino communities' cultural identity and social cohesion. In Bohol, percussionists known as *Kammameros* play a vital role in these celebrations, contributing to both auditory experiences and the preservation of cultural heritage. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of *Kammameros* on Panglao Island, particularly in Barangay Bil-isan and Barangay San Isidro. Through semi-structured interviews, it explored how these musicians acquired their skills through intergenerational learning and community mentorship rooted in religious devotion. Thematic analysis revealed their contributions to preserving cultural identity, embodying tradition through performance, and facing challenges due to waning youth participation. Applying the frameworks of Durkheim, Turner, Collins, and Geertz, the study emphasizes the symbolic and social dimensions of their role. Findings suggest that community-led initiatives such as structured music workshops and targeted cultural awareness programs are essential to sustaining musical heritage and reinforcing cultural identity.

Keywords: Bohol festivals, Cultural heritage, Community identity, Kammameros, Percussionists

1. Introduction

Festivals in the Philippines are not merely sites of celebration—they are complex, performative expressions of cultural identity, collective memory, and social cohesion. They function as dynamic rituals where history, spirituality, and tradition converge through symbols, movement, and sound. In these liminal spaces, percussion music assumes a central role: It orchestrates communal rhythm, enlivens ritual activity, and bridges the sacred and the social. In the province of Bohol, the *Kammameros*—local percussionists often self-trained within familial and faith-based traditions—play a vital part in sustaining these sonic rituals. Their performances are not only auditory acts but embodied expressions of cultural continuity and collective devotion.

Although Philippine festivals have been widely studied for their religious and historical underpinnings (Salazar, 2017; Fernandez, 2020), the agentic role of performers like the *Kammameros* remains underresearched. Existing literature often centers on macro-structures—colonial legacies, church-state

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Received: 16 February 2025, Accepted: 11 April 2025, Online: 28 April 2025

Cite as: Galimpin, J. L., Gementiza, C. M. R., & Bulilawa, M. R. Y. (2025). *Kammameros: The faithful Bol-anon percussionists*. *Universal Journal of History and Culture*, 7(1), 30-40. <https://doi.org/10.52613/ujhc.1640767>

dynamics, and ritual iconography—while leaving gaps in the ethnographic documentation of the musicians themselves. This study responds to that gap by focusing on the lived experiences, training processes, and cultural significance of *Kammameros* in Panglao, Bohol, particularly in Barangays Bil-isan and San Isidro. These communities represent active sites of musical continuity, where percussion traditions are deeply woven into everyday spiritual practice and communal identity.

The research is anchored on four intersecting theoretical frameworks that illuminate the ritual, social, and symbolic dimensions of *Kammameros*' performances. First, Émile Durkheim's (1912/2001) concept of collective effervescence explains how emotionally heightened rituals reinforce group cohesion (Pizarro et al., 2022)—clearly observable in the synchrony between *Kammameros* and their communities during festivals. Second, Randall Collins' (2004) theory of interaction ritual chains emphasizes how sustained ritual participation builds shared emotional energy, reaffirming community bonds over time. Third, Victor Turner's (1969) idea of *communitas* provides a lens through which to understand how egalitarian relationships are forged during festival moments, where distinctions between leader and follower, elder and youth, blur within the ritual frame (Schechner, 2017). Finally, Clifford Geertz's (1973) interpretive theory of culture positions the *Kammameros*' music as a symbolic act—one that carries layered cultural meanings, offering insight into the moral and spiritual landscape of the community (Cai, 2024).

To extend the analysis further, this study draws from contemporary performance theory, particularly concepts of embodiment and performativity. As percussionists engage in rhythmic movement, their bodies become both instruments and archives of cultural memory. In this sense, the act of drumming is not only an auditory tradition but a kinesthetic expression of devotion and identity, in line with emerging anthropological studies on performative heritage. This attention to bodily practice situates *Kammameros*' performances within global conversations on how intangible cultural heritage is enacted, embodied, and emotionally transmitted through ritualized acts.

Moreover, the study situates the *Kammameros* within the broader context of cultural sustainability. As globalization, digital media, and shifting youth interests reshape traditional lifeways, there is a growing urgency to explore how local practices are maintained, transformed, or lost. Scholars like Smith and Akagawa (2019) argue for intentional strategies of intergenerational transmission and community-based safeguarding, while UNESCO (2018) advocates for cultural education and participatory documentation as vital preservation tools. In this context, the *Kammameros* offers a compelling case: their role reflects both the fragility and resilience of heritage in a rapidly changing cultural environment.

In sum, this study contributes to the fields of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and heritage studies by

illuminating how ritual performance, communal identity, and spiritual embodiment intersect in the lives of the *Kammameros*. It explores how traditional musical knowledge is acquired, enacted, and endangered while proposing culturally responsive strategies for its continuity in the evolving landscape of Bohol and the Philippines at large.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of the *Kammameros*—traditional percussionists in Bohol—within the socio-cultural framework of local festival practices. Rather than merely documenting musical activities, this approach sought to capture the nuanced perspectives, values, and cultural meanings that shape the *Kammameros*' participation in ritual performances. Emphasis was placed on understanding how musical knowledge is transmitted, practiced, and sustained across generations.

Fieldwork was conducted in Barangay Bil-isan and Barangay San Isidro on Panglao Island. These barangays were purposively selected due to their cultural significance in local religious celebrations. Barangay Bil-isan is frequently associated with rhythmic accompaniments during novenas and processions, where percussionists perform as an integral part of devotional rituals. Barangay San Isidro, meanwhile, is recognized as the ancestral and residential base of senior *Kammamero* members, including elders and leaders who serve as cultural stewards of this musical tradition. Their roles in mentoring younger percussionists and upholding ritual protocols made these sites highly relevant to the study's objectives.

Participants were native *Kammameros* with a minimum of 15 years of active engagement in local festivals, specifically those proficient in the *gurung-gong* and *sinu-og* rhythmic styles (Gementiza, 2023). The exclusion of trainers, choreographers, or institutional organizers was intentional; the study prioritized those who acquired their musical skills through informal, intergenerational transmission rather than through formal instruction or choreographic structuring. This decision ensured that the narratives reflected authentic, community-embedded learning processes central to understanding traditional modes of cultural perpetuation.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews designed with open-ended and probing questions to elicit in-depth responses. This flexible format allowed participants to share their stories, reflections, and spiritual insights in their own terms. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis, which involved systematic coding, theme development, and the creation of a thematic map to

reveal patterns and divergences in participant experiences.

To ensure validity and reliability, a verification committee—comprising representatives from the Municipal Tourism Office, the chapel president of one participating barangay, and a local historian—reviewed the interview protocols and research instruments. Their cultural and institutional insights contributed to the contextual appropriateness of the study.

Ethical protocols were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after briefing them on the study’s aims, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Participants’ identities were anonymized in all records and publications. Sensitivity to cultural norms and religious practices was maintained throughout data collection and analysis.

While the study offers rich cultural insights, it is not without limitations. The research was geographically limited to two barangays on Panglao Island, which may not capture the diversity of *Kammameros*’ experiences across Bohol. Additionally, as the study relied on self-reported narratives, there is a potential for participant bias, such as selective memory or socially desirable responses. Future studies could address these constraints by expanding geographic coverage and integrating longitudinal observation of musical practices.

3. Results and Discussions

The interviews with the *Kammameros* surfaced key themes that reveal the depth of their lived experiences and their cultural significance in the context of Bohol’s festival traditions. Each theme is closely examined through both empirical data and theoretical interpretation.

3.1 Influence of Origin and Tradition

The participants consistently cited their roots in San Isidro (Dauis) and Doljo (Panglao) as critical to their identity as percussionists. Early exposure to festival music—usually from childhood—came through familial observation and participation in local celebrations. This connection between place and early musical immersion illustrates Durkheim’s (1912/2001) concept of collective effervescence. As children absorb the emotionally charged atmosphere of festivals, their sense of belonging and identity becomes tied to these ritual experiences. The continuity of this cultural immersion reinforces collective memory and cohesion within their communities (Pizarro et al., 2022).

Table 1*Emergent Themes, Categories, and Sample Verbatim Narratives from Kammameros' Interviews*

Theme	Category	Sample Verbatim Narratives
Influence of Origin and Tradition	Place of origin	<i>"Taga San Isidro, Dauis, Bohol mi. Naa puy taga Doljo, Panglao sa amoa... sa among mga ginikanan ug kanunon-an."</i>
	Family influence	<i>"We are from San Isidro, Dauis, Bohol. There are also people from Doljo, Panglao among us... from our parents and ancestors."</i>
Familial and Communal Training	Observational learning	<i>"Adto nagsugod sa pamaagi nga nakakita kami sa among mga ginikanan, among mga amahan, tiyo, ug parente, na manukaray. Nakita namo ang bili sa unsa kadasig ang imuhang pagtuo pinaagi sa paghalad sa talento."</i>
	Family influence	<i>"It all started with how we saw our parents, our fathers, uncles, and relatives as they play instruments. We realized the value of how strong your faith is through the offering of your talent."</i>
Belief and Faith	Religious motivation	<i>"Ang among pagtuo na kini makalipay sa Ginoo."</i> <i>"Our belief is that this brings joy to God."</i>
Festival Preparation	Daily routine	<i>"Imbitaron kami una sa mga chapel president para maoy mu-kumparsa (tukar) sa mga kapistahan. Samtang gahalad sila ug buwak o offerings sa patron, manukar mi. Samtang sa among pagtukar, dunay mga katawhan musayaw samtang ga-ampo sila."</i>
	Festival preparation	<i>"We were first invited by the chapel presidents to play music during the fiestas. While they offered flowers or other offerings to the patron, we played. As we performed, some people would dance while praying."</i>
Cultural Representation and Heritage Preservation	Cultural representation	<i>"Ang among ginarepresentar jud kay ang pista barangay. Saunang panahon pagyud, kung naay manukar-pasabot kini nga pista an. Manukdok ug karaang yantas ug gimbao."</i>
	Historical continuity	<i>"What we truly represent is the barangay fiesta. In the old days, when someone played music, it signified that there was a fiesta. They would strike old car rims and gimbao (a type of drum)."</i>
Identity and Recognition	Community recognition	<i>"Kami, nailhan mi sa mga opisyal sa parokya ug kapilya nga maoy tigtukar ug sinu-og o guring-gong kada pista. Wala gyud miy estandards, ang sa amo lang makatukar ug makahalad para sa mga kapistahan."</i>
	Informal validation	<i>"We were recognized by the parish and chapel officials as the ones who played sinu-og or guring-gong during every fiesta. We never followed any set standards; for us, it was simply about being able to play and offer our music for the celebrations."</i>
Challenges and Future Prospects	Generational challenges	<i>"Ang henerasyon karun di na kaayo mutagad sa mga ingon-ani nga tradisyon. Maglisud mi ug hatag kadasig ilabi sa mga batan-on."</i>
	Engagement with youth	<i>"The current generation no longer pays much attention to these kinds of traditions. We struggle to inspire enthusiasm, especially among the youth."</i>

Note. Themes and categories were derived through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with Kammameros. Verbatim responses appear in both Cebuano and English translations to preserve linguistic authenticity and cultural nuance.

3.2 Familial and Communal Training

Training among the *Kammameros* is non-formal, familial, and highly communal. Participants described how they learned through watching their elders, mimicking movements, and participating in informal rehearsals held in community spaces. This reflects Turner's (1969) notion of *communitas*, where hierarchical roles dissolve within the liminal space of community rituals. In these moments, everyone—young or old, skilled or learning—shares an egalitarian connection through sound and rhythm. Communal rehearsal spaces become incubators for shared identity, where musical practice is less about instruction and more about cultural bonding.

3.3 Belief and Faith

Faith emerged as a major motivational driver. Participants saw their music as a *halad* (offering) to God, and believed it brought spiritual joy and blessings. Here, Geertz's (1973) interpretive theory of culture provides a lens to understand music as a symbol-laden act. The rhythmic performances of the *Kammameros* are not just musical contributions—they are sacred, encoded acts of devotion that convey deeper cultural and religious narratives. Their music becomes a spiritual language through which communities articulate reverence, hope, and identity.

3.4 Daily Life and Festival Preparation

Festival preparation is a significant part of the *Kammameros*' routine. They are invited by chapel leaders to perform during key rituals. As the community offers flowers and prayers to the saints, the *Kammameros* play rhythms that accompany dance and supplication. This ritualistic coordination embodies the interaction ritual chains theorized by Collins (2004). The repetitive nature of these performances generates emotional energy not only among the percussionists but also within the community. However, the loss of regular practice or participation, especially among youth, interrupts these ritual chains and weakens communal solidarity over time.

3.5 Cultural Representation and Heritage Preservation

Participants spoke of their performances as living representations of the barangay fiesta. From striking old *yantas* (car rims) to playing traditional *gimbao* drums, they preserve musical practices inherited from previous generations. This cultural embodiment reinforces both Durkheim's and Geertz's frameworks—festivals become repositories of collective memory while also serving as dynamic platforms

for the transmission of symbolic knowledge. The *Kammameros*' performances are thus both historical continuities and acts of cultural renewal.

3.6 Identity and Recognition

Recognition comes informally through parish and chapel officials. There are no official standards; what matters is the ability to contribute meaningfully to the festival. This informal system of recognition aligns with the communal ethos emphasized by Turner's *communitas*—status is conferred not by hierarchy but by active participation in shared ritual space. The inclusive nature of this validation underscores the embeddedness of the *Kammameros* within the moral and cultural fabric of their communities.

3.7 Challenges and Future Prospects

Participants expressed concern over the declining interest of younger generations. They described difficulty in motivating the youth to participate or carry on the tradition. This reflects Collins' (2004) theory, which emphasizes that rituals only sustain emotional energy through repeated interaction. The interruption of ritual continuity disrupts emotional bonds, weakens communal identity, and threatens the sustainability of cultural practices.

3.8 Theoretical Synthesis

To provide a holistic understanding of the findings, this section synthesizes the themes with the study's theoretical anchors:

Collective Effervescence (Durkheim)

Early exposure to music within emotionally charged festival settings fosters lasting communal ties and reinforces shared cultural memory.

Communitas (Turner)

Egalitarian and informal training environments build solidarity and intergenerational cohesion through shared musical practice.

Interpretive Theory of Culture (Geertz)

Music acts as a symbolic language of faith, identity, and resistance—transforming rhythms into culturally encoded narratives.

Interaction Ritual Chains (Collins) The vitality of *Kammamero* tradition depends on sustained ritual participation. Disruption of these chains, particularly among the youth, endangers the transfer of emotional and cultural energy necessary for community cohesion.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences, cultural functions, and symbolic practices of the *Kammameros*—traditional percussionists in Bohol—through an anthropological lens grounded in collective effervescence (Durkheim), interaction ritual chains (Collins), *communitas* (Turner), and interpretive cultural theory (Geertz). The findings affirm that *Kammameros*' performances are not merely musical contributions but embodied rituals that reflect deep communal bonds, spiritual devotion, and cultural continuity.

Themes such as origin and tradition, familial and communal training, faith-based motivation, and festival preparation reveal how traditional knowledge is passed on not through formal instruction but through observational learning, performative participation, and ritual engagement. These processes foster a strong sense of belonging and symbolic identity, especially when situated within communal and sacred spaces. The use of local instruments, oral traditions, and intergenerational mentorship further anchors their role as cultural custodians in the evolving heritage landscape of Bohol.

However, the study also highlights urgent challenges, most notably the declining participation of younger generations. This break in the ritual chain diminishes the emotional energy and community solidarity that sustain such traditions. The *Kammameros*' case illustrates the precarious position of intangible cultural heritage in a rapidly globalizing world, where modernization, digital distractions, and shifting cultural values often threaten traditional practices.

Critically, this research emphasizes that preserving cultural traditions like those of the *Kammameros* must go beyond documentation. It must include active, embodied engagement, supported by cultural institutions, community leaders, and educational systems. The spiritual and symbolic dimensions of their music must also be acknowledged and nurtured—not just as performance but as ritual practice and performative identity.

Implications and Recommendations

1. **Cultural Education and Transmission:** Develop culturally responsive educational programs and

workshops that introduce traditional percussion to the youth, integrating it into music, history, and civic education curricula.

2. **Community and Institutional Support:** Strengthen collaboration between local government units, cultural agencies, religious institutions, and artists to provide platforms for *Kammameros* to mentor and perform.
3. **Spiritual Integration:** Encourage churches and chapels to formalize the role of traditional musicians in religious celebrations, validating their contributions as sacred, not just cultural.
4. **Archival and Digital Documentation:** Invest in the digitization of performances, oral histories, and techniques to ensure long-term preservation and accessibility for future research and cultural revival.
5. **Innovation and Engagement:** Encourage creative approaches such as fusion performances, digital storytelling, or festival-based competitions that blend tradition with innovation to reignite youth interest.

In conclusion, the *Kammameros* exemplifies how music functions as both a performative and symbolic act, sustaining spiritual life and communal identity. Their traditions offer valuable insights into how local communities ritualize meaning and memory. Ensuring the continuity of this heritage calls for integrated efforts in education, embodiment, performance, and preservation, making space for tradition to thrive alongside transformation in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Authors Contributions: Jay L. Galimpin significantly contributed to the conception and design of the study, actively participated in data collection, and was involved in the analysis and interpretation of data. He also played a key role in the writing of the manuscript and contributed to the critical review of its content to ensure clarity, coherence, and academic rigor. Chrystel Mariz R. Gementiza was extensively involved in the conception and design of the research and led the data collection process. She contributed to the analysis and interpretation of data and played a central role in writing the manuscript. Additionally, she provided essential input in the critical content review, conducted the literature review, and ensured the study adhered to academic standards. Mary Roselle Y. Bulilawa contributed to the conception and design of the study and was involved in data analysis and interpretation. She provided technical and material support, assisted in the writing of the manuscript, and took part in the critical review of content to enhance the manuscript's quality and relevance.

Artificial Intelligence Statement: Quillbot assisted in paraphrasing and generating APA 7th edition-formatted citations, while Grammarly ensured grammatical accuracy and consistency in a scholarly tone.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure: No potential conflict of interest was declared by authors.

Plagiarism Statement: This article has been scanned by iThenticate.