

Effects of Colonization on the Music of the Chamorro Culture: *Transformation and Adaptation*

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As with other aspects of culture, music of the Chamorro people has been transformed by colonial influences. Vestiges of influences can still be found in the vocal music of Chamorros, although even the traditional vocal music is disappearing. Using old written documents and recordings, evidence of specific musical elements is still apparent. Scale structure, vocal ornamentation, song forms, and even lyrics all provide evidence of connections to the main colonial occupations. Children's games dating back to the Spanish era, the pentatonic scale structure used in Japanese music, the American pop melodies and lyrics of the 50's, all have left their imprint on the vocal music of the Chamorro culture.

Acculturation and adaptation began for the Chamorro culture with the presence of the Spanish. The first Europeans who sailed to the Mariana Islands made no mention of the music. Dr. Melissa Taitano, Assistant Professor at the University of Guam, presented a paper entitled: *I Hineggen Chamoru – People of the Mariana Islands and Their Colonial Record*, at the 5th Marianas History Conference. In that paper she stated that the historical narratives of that period constitute “archival silence,” meaning that the lack of documentation of this important aspect of culture is evidence that it has been erased or silenced.

The first mention of Chamorro music was made by Father Peter Coomans (see Levasque, 1997), who described feasts where the Chamorros danced and sang, with accompanying gestures and a type of castanets. Coomans also mentioned poetic songs that told of fables or myths, and funeral songs sung during a seven-day period of mourning. When the Catholic missionaries arrived, they discouraged what they

thought of as pagan music. Father Diego de Luis de Sanvitores in his account, *Mission in the Marianas*, also documented the music (Barret, 1975). He described, "...twelve or thirteen women forming a circle and singing in verses their histories and antiquities, with point and harmony of three voices, sopranos, contraltos, and falsettos, with the tenor taken by one of the men." He was critical of their singing of *Puntan* (who may have been the first man), describing those songs as "bad verses" and said that there were "antique fables and deeds of ancestors sung at celebrations." At funerals he noted that they sang "melancholy songs" and "dirges that were ingenious and deeply felt." However, his attitude was that the indigenous music was pagan and should be supplanted with religious music. Children were taught songs to honor the Holy Virgin Mary, our Mother, at divine services in the Royal Chapel of Mary.

Charles Le Gobien, a French Jesuit priest, in 1700 wrote:

At first the natives shyly held back upon the arrival of the ships and did not want to come aboard. Sanvitores, however, encouraged them to sing the litany of the Virgin and soon they approached, mixed with the Spaniards and sang with them. Upon entrance into the villages, "Christ's Message" was sung, which had been translated by Sanvitores into Chamorro verses. All came and listened because they loved the singing. During their festivities, twelve or thirteen richly decorated women form a circle. Without moving from their place, they sing the songs of their poets with grace and schooling which would please even in Europe. In the hands, they have small shells resembling castanets. All onlookers, however, are charmed by the expressive bearing and movements which accompany the singing. The men also entertained themselves with dancing and competitions. In jumping, running and wrestling they proved their strength. They recounted the adventures of their forefathers and recited the songs of their poets. With their subjugation, these pagan customs

disappeared and spiritual songs resounded in place of the impure secular singing.”¹

Le Gobien also stated that the missionaries taught the seminary students to play European musical instruments. Father Garcia Salgado, the rector of the Agana church hired someone to teach the students to sing the mass on Saturdays and on some feast days.² Thus, much of the Chamorro vocal music was lost due to the emphasis on the music of the Catholic church.

Not all music, however was related to the church. One type of music that endures through time consists of children’s songs and games which are passed along by word of mouth from generation to generation. An example is the coconut passing game, *Ambas Clap*, which the author recorded on Rota in 1987. Many of the words no longer have any meaning and are probably a mixture of languages. When the author played this song for a group of music educators in San Diego, one woman identified it as a Mexican song. It is most likely that it was taught to Chamorro children during the Spanish colonial era and still survives today.

Example 1: “Ambas Clap” sung by Maria Taitano and Consolacion Calvo, and recorded in 1987:

Ambas clap un fafang
Gabai yanpareti
Ababang
Ayi wa i labandera
Ampa tripi tripi trap.

¹ Quoted by Fritz, Georg in *The Chamorro, A History and Ethnography of the Marianas*. 1904. P. 22. Reprinted by the Division of Historic Preservation, Saipan 1986. P. 46

² Hezel, Francis X. *Micronesia, Winds of Change* 1979 Omnibus Program for Social Studies and Cultural Heritage. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Education Department Saipan. p. 48



Jacques Arago visited the Mariana Islands in 1819. He wrote extensively and published his observations in, *Narrative of a Voyage Around the World* (1823).³ He stated that:

Music is one of the most agreeable amusements of the inhabitants of the Mariannes; they sing the moment they awake, they sing during the hours of rest, and they fall asleep singing. Their airs are languishing, harmonious, and for three voices. There are also two or three boleros and some seguidillas, but in general they prefer that which lulls and composes to that which animates and enlivens; and their singing may be considered in some measure an emblem of their life.⁴

The most well-known vocal music of the Chamorro people is the Chamorrita. It too has changed over time. What remains of this long-standing vocal tradition are the words, the poetic form, and a basic melodic pattern. Traditionally, it was a song used as a flirtation between young men and women, often while they were working in the fields, weaving palm fronds, net fishing, husking corn, grinding coconuts, or other communal work. Two singers, often a young man and a young woman, would toss verses back and forth, improvising new words upon the previous verse sung by the other person as a way to show wit and

³ Arago, Jacques. 1823). *Narrative of a Voyage Around the World*. London Treuttel and Wurtz.

⁴ Ibid, Part II The Marianne Islands Guam Agagna Letters LXXXVIII – CIII. Letter CI, page 49.

humor and the singer's ability. It incorporated layers of meanings or double meanings, figurative expressions and slang expressions that only the younger generation understood.⁵ It was also a way to transmit hidden messages, not only among the young people, but later during the Japanese era to send messages the Japanese would not understand. Usually, the man began the song and the woman responded. Sometimes others joined in at the end of a line. The last person on Rota who was able to improvise in this manner was Bartola Ogo.

Repetition is a method singers incorporate when improvising lyrics, to give them time to think up new lines. Some Chamorritas use repetition this way, repeating the last line of one verse in the first line of the next verse. In his Chamorrita, *Dingu I kompanirå-mu*, Isidro Manglonå repeats line 1 of verse 1 in verse 2, line 2, and line 3 of verse 1 as line 3 of verse 2:

Dingu i kumpanirå-mu!
Basta i kumbetsasion!
Sa' yangin hahagu ha'na maisa,
Ti un iningak tentasion.

Esta i kumbetsasion
Dingu i kumpanirå-mu,
Sa' yangin hahagu ha' na maisa
Tunas hao ha' gi karerå-mu.

Another trait Chamorritas have in common with other improvised vocal forms is that successive verses within one song often do not relate to each other. For example, the song, *Yangin Hågu na Manguaiya*, as sung by Rudolfo Atalig Mundo, begins with the first four verses, all independent of each other:

⁵ Flores, Judy, n.d. *Chamorrita Songs and Related Poetic Chants* University of Guam MI 502: ProSeminar, Micronesian History Term Paper.

Yangin hãgu na manguaiya
Togi ya ta alapat.
Sa' ti piniti yu' na bai mâtai
Guini pãpa' na lugat.

Si Mapongo' maila' hattalum Mapongo'
Ya un li'i' kao pine'lo-mu
Sa' intereru ha' chinili'
Inapaka'-mu yan inatilong-mu.

Si Solaki pula' lindo magagu-mu
Ya bai hãnao ya bai fa'gãsi
Sa' ti bai hu atbidon nai gapgap
Lao bai atbidon nai fã'i.

Hãgu fumañãgu i patgun
Guãhu bai hu nã'i sustansion-ña
Ya tatayut si Yu'us
Ya hu tali'i' dinankulo-ña.

1. If you're in love,
Stand and let us be side by side.
Cause I will not be sad to die
Down here at this place.
2. Mapongo' come further inside, Mapongo'
So you can see if it is your putting.
Because it took all
Your whiteness and your blackness.
3. Solaki, take off, Lindo, your shirt
And I will go and I will wash it.
Cause I won't starch it with arrowroot

- But I'll starch it with rice water.
4. You bore the child,
I will provide the nourishment.
And we pray to God.
And we'll see him grow big.

Chamorrita is definitely not a narrative form. Sometimes stories or events are alluded to, but more in terms of a personal allusion, rather than a method of telling a story. The subject matter is personal, most often dealing with love, courtship, marriage or abandonment and the loss of love.

The poetic form is a quatrain, or four-line verse. In her research, Kim Bailey compared the verses to the romance form of Spain and Mexico. She described the form as quatrains of two octosyllabic couplets. There are two eight syllable couplets per quatrain; however, many examples sound more like two longer phrases that are rhyming couplets. Isidro Manglona of Rota, took only one breath and held only two notes in each verse. Other singers, possibly due to their age, breathed three times in one verse. Examining the lyrics, rhyme scheme and melodic contour help determine the general form.

The rhyme schemes are not always consistent. Occasionally lines one and three rhyme, but in almost every case, lines two and four rhyme. Other rhyme schemes include all four lines rhyming (AAAA), alternating rhymes (ABAB) or AABA form. These are not common patterns however, and the lines could be construed as not four, but two lines that rhyme – rhyming couplets. Musically, this could be true, as the melodic line would indicate two musical statements rather than four.

Examining the melodic structure reveals a strong Spanish influence. Much of Spanish folk music is in the Phrygian scale or mode, rather than the major minor scales which are the standard scale structures of Western European art music.

The Spanish Phrygian scale employs half steps between the tonic note and the second, between the fifth and sixth degrees of the scale and the sixth and seventh degrees. This is an incorporation of the Arabic modal system introduced to Spain by the Moors.⁶ Some listeners, unfamiliar with Spanish folk music have mistakenly thought that the Chamorro singer was singing, “out of tune.” It is well to remember that music of other cultures do not have the same musical structure as Western European art music. Another Moorish influence in Spanish music is the use of vocal ornamentation, embellishment, melisma, slides and other performance practices. These techniques were also audible in the singing style of some of the older recorded Chamorro singers.

Example 2. Vocal ornamentation and the flattened sixth degree of the scale can be heard at the end of the phrase in the Chamorrita, “Dingu I Kumpanirã-mu” sung by Isidro Manglona.

This version is as recorded. No attempt has been made to notate the variations that Mr. Mangloña incorporated into his singing. Rather, the following transcription is a general outline of the melody. Mr. Mangloña varied the melody of the Chamorrita from verse to verse, therefore the version notated is a compilation of the variations. In addition, no attempt was made to place bar lines, as Mr. Mangloña’s style is closer to declamatory singing. There is not a set meter apparent. In some cases, two different pitches were used in different verses. These are indicated in the notation as two different pitches on the same stem.

Referring back to Arago’s account, he stated that the Chamorros sang boleros and some seguidillas. These two musical forms are from the fandango family of music from Spain. As a dance, the fandango was a courtship dance which may have Moorish origins. As a vocal form, (cante)

⁶ Manuel, Peter 1986. *Evolution and Structure in Flamenco Harmony* Columbia University current.musicology.42.manuel.46-57.pdf <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D88051HJ> Accessed 2 February 2021.



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⁷ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. "Fandango". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date, <https://www.britannica.com/art/fandango>. Accessed 11 February 2021.

⁸ Flamenco One <https://flamenco.one/en/glossary/buleria/>

The German occupation of Rota was quite brief. Their musical influence is much more evident in the marching dances found in other areas of Micronesia, especially the Marshall Islands where the dance is called leep, and in Palau where it is called matumatong. However, Georg Fritz, the District Captain in Saipan, was very interested in Chamorro culture. In a letter to his parents in 1902, Georg Fritz recounted dancing and singing at a wedding on Rota. The dancing included a Scottish polka and the waltz was accompanied by a concertina and violin. He also mentioned German songs that were sung at every mass. In his work, *The Chamorro: A History and Ethnography of the Mariana Islands*,⁹ he discussed the Chamorro love of music and observed that at every feast there was music, singing, and dancing. He noted that at fandangos, while the people were eating, an orchestra performed which included a violin, accordion, guitar, triangle, and perhaps an organ. After eating, the dancing started. He noted that the dances were all European, including polkas, mazurkas, contre dances, and the Spanish fandango which was danced by the wedding couple.

In reference to vocal music, he wrote down the lyrics to a song which he thought was the only remaining Chamorro song. The words are very similar to the existing Chamorritas of the 20th Century. He thought he had heard the same song in South America. This is again evidence of the Spanish influence on Chamorro music.

Referring back to children's music, the Chamorro game, *Esta Bala Para*, has exactly the same game instructions as a German children's game, *Die Goldene Bruck*, which is still played in Germany. There is a similar game in Colombia called, *El puente esta quebrado*. The English version is *London Bridge*.

⁹ Fritz p. 47.

Example 3. *Esta Bala Para*, sung by Ana Songao Inos

First singer:

Esta bala para pinta

Pinta disat dilamot

Pikala pickala

O a en la

Pika la fot

Ai mia mot.

Second singer:

Ai no kino di balin

Don pitmin dominos.

Two children stand facing each other, holding hands with arms raised, forming an arch.

They decide in advance on two items they will represent such as fruits, pets, etc. (e.g. mangos and papayas)

The other players form a single circle that moves either clockwise or counterclockwise, passing under the arch.

As the children pass under the arch, they sing the song. On the last word, whoever is under the arch is caught.

The caught player is asked which item he/she chooses. Then they stand behind the player on the side of the arch that represents the item chosen. When all the players have been caught, the players pull, in a type of tug of war, trying to pull the opposing side across to their side.

Strong musical influence is evident from the Japanese era. *Hotaru No Hikari* was very popular in Japan in the 1930's during the Sino-Japanese war that preceded World War II. It is an interesting example of cross cultural musical transmission because it was introduced to Japan from Scotland in 1881. Due to the use of the pentatonic scale in both traditional Scottish music and Japanese music, it was easily assimilated

and new lyrics added. It is the melody of *Auld Lang Syne*, a song by Robert Burns.

It is still sung today at graduation and alludes to studying hard (by the light of the firefly on snow). There are more verses to the song than the one verse sung by Rainaldo Mangloña. For more information see Wikipedia.

Example 4. *Hotaru No Hikari*, sung by Rainaldo Manglona

*Hotaru no hikari, mado no yuki,
Fumi yomu tsukihi, kasane tsutsu
Itsushika toshi mo, sugi no to wo,
Aketezo kesa wa, wakare yuku.*

Light of fireflies, snow by the window,
Many suns and moons spent reading
Years have gone by without notice
Day has dawned; this morning, we part.

Some songs maintained the Japanese melody, but new Chamorro lyrics were given to them. An example is “Floris Rosa”.

Example 5. *Floris Rosa*, sung by Isidro Manglona.

1. *Mafañågu un sen gatbu na floris
Floris nai hu guåiya
Anaku' na tiempu na hunananga ha' hao
Sa' hågu solu i guinaiya-ku
Gi halum linayan.*

Refrain:

*Sa' suabe yan kariñosa
Kulan hao i floris rosa
Piot yan chumalamlam.*

2. *Megai siha mansengatbu na floris*
Mangaigi gi kantun chalan
Mañechechet yan mañecheffa siha
Lao nisikera hu atendi
Sa' hãgu ha' solu i guinaiya-ku
Gi halum linayan.

Refrain:

Sa' suabe yan kariñosa
Kulan hao i floris rosa
Mamis yan guãiyayun.

3. *Hu ufresi hao i tataotaohu*
Yan kuntodu i anti-hu
Sa' hãgu solu i guinaiya-ku
Gi todú i lina'la'-hu.

Refrain:

Sa' suabe yan kariñosa
Kulan hao i floris rosa
Mamis yan guãiyayun.

*

Rose Flower (English translation)

1. *Born was a very beautiful flower,*
A flower that I love.
A long time I'd been waiting for you,
Because you only are my love
From the crowd.

Refrain:

Because courteous and affectionate
You're like a rose flower
Especially when you blink.

2. *There are many beautiful flowers*

*They are there close to the road.
They're hissing and whistling,
But I did not pay attention
Because you only are my love
From the crowd.*

Refrain:
Because courteous and affectionate
You're like a rose flower
Sweet and loving.

3. *I offer you my body
And also my soul.
Because you only are my love
In all my life.*

Refrain:
*Because courteous and affectionate
You're like a rose flower
Sweet and loving.*

Many other Japanese folk songs were taught to Rotanese school children including hiking songs, humorous songs, war songs, and traditional story songs. Mr. Albert Toves sang several of these.

Example 6. *Moshi Moshi Kameyo*, sung by Albert Toves.

*Moshi Moshi Kameyo
Rabbit and the Turtle: The race*

*Moshi moshi kameyo kamesanyo
Sekaino uchede omaehodo
Ayumino noroi monohanai
Doshite sonnani naroinoka
Nanto osharu Usagisan
Sonnara omaeto karekurabe
Mukono oyamano fumoto made
Dochiraga sakini kakitsukuka*

*Donnani kame ga isoidemo
Dose banmade kakaru daro
Kokorade chotto hitonemuri
Gu – gu – gu – gu – gu – gu – gu – g- u
Koreha nesugita shikujitta
Pyon – pyon pyon pyon pyon pyon pyon
Anmari osoi usagisan sakkino jiman ha
Doshitano*

*Hello hello turtle, Mr. Turtle
You are the slowest walker in the world
Nobody can walk as slowly as you
How can you walk so slowly like that?
Wait a minute Rabbit, Mr. Rabbit
If you say so, why not race with me?
Can you see the bottom of the hill over there?
Let us find out which one wins the race.
No matter how fast Mr. Turtle goes,
I know it will take him until midnight.
I think I'll take a short nap right here
Snore snore snore snore snore snore snore.
Oh my gosh I slept too much, it's no good
Hop hoppity hop hop, hoppity hop hop.
Mr. Rabbit you are way too slow
Where has your bragging gone to now?*

Mr. Toves also recalled other songs that alluded to being homesick for Japan.

When World War II ended, Americans brought their influence to the Mariana Islands, sharing their folk and popular music with the local population. An example of an American folk song with new Chamorro lyrics is, “Palasyon Riku,” which is sung to the tune of, “The Old Folks at Home.”

Example 7. *Palasyon Riku*, sung by Rainaldo Mangloña

1. *Ni ti un palasyon riku
Nai gaigi gi gima'-hu.*

*Sino un popblin guma'
Yu' nai mafaña'gu.*

Chorus:

*Ya ti siña hu tulaika,
Sa' tatmas gef saga.
Gi åyu siha na isla,
I islas Marianas.*

2. *O mamis tano'-hu
Yan gaigi hao gi otru tånu'
Magufyan gef saga
O hahagu' tano'-hu
Ti siña u malefa.*

3. *Ya tåya' gi hilu' tånu'
Siña parehu-mu,
Gi åyu siha na isla
I islas Marianas.*

O mamis tano'-hu.

Example 8. Rich Palace

1. *Not in one of the rich palaces
That my house is there.
Otherwise, one poor house
That I was born*

Chorus:

*And I can't change
Cause not much good living
at those islands
The islands in the Marianas.*

2. *Oh my sweet land
If you're on another land*

*Happy and good living
O, my reach out land
I can't forget.
And there's nothing in the world
Can be similar to you
At those islands
The islands in the Marianas.*

O my sweet land.

Since that time, many popular melodies have been given lyrics in Chamorro, either as translations of the original lyrics, or with new words. “*Si Nana Gi Familia*,” sung by Johnny Sablan, used the tune of “*How Much Is that Doggie In the Window?*” a popular 1950’s song. With new words, it was a dedication to mothers. You can still hear it sung on You Tube!¹⁰

As with other aspects of tradition, music changes with the influences of other cultures, borrowing melody, harmony, instruments, lyrics, and form; adapting to the current music of the culture.

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¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Johnny+Sablan+Si+Nana+Gi+Familia+

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