



# EXPLORING THE RITUALS OF ATA-MANOBO TRIBE IN THE PHILIPPINES: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

*The main purpose of the study was to determine the views of the Ata-Manobo Elders in Barangay Gupitan, Kapalong regarding the signs and symbols used in their rituals and cultural preservation. The signs and symbols used in their rituals were studied using semiotic analysis and the method used in this study was the qualitative research design. Moreover, the approach utilized in this inquiry was the phenomenological approach. The first theme used in this study was about educating young ones which stimulated the exposure and teaching of the young Ata-Manobo on conducting rituals in varied intentions and celebrations. The second theme in this study was about the celebration of culture, this fortified their aesthetic and unique culture. The third theme was the display of craft which particularly elaborated the use and meaning of the signs and symbols in various rituals. The fourth theme was the practice of rituals which evidently marked the preservation of the culture. This study had pronounced impact on the country in terms of cultural heritage awareness and preservation. Filipinos most particularly in the Municipality of Kapalong and nearby municipalities will then become aware of the signs and symbols used in the rituals of the Ata-Manobo Tribe in Gupitan.*

**KEYWORDS** – Ata Manobo, rituals, Philippines, signs and symbols, semiotic analysis

## INTRODUCTION

Each ethnic group has its own rich tradition and practices including their own symbols and culture. Some of them call themselves as Ata-Manobo. These people are abundant with culture which outlines them from what is common as well as trenches the idea to interestingly study their culture, for one is their absolute mottled symbols and signs used. [1]

The Ata-Manobo signs and symbols relatively manifest matching rituals that they do practice throughout the years. Approximately, the number of tribal groups that are grouped linguistically on the “Manobo” family is 25. The meaning of the word Manobo is simply “person” or “people”; other names attached with Manobo are the Minuvu and Manuvu. The cultural nomenclature may have sprung from “Mansuba”, a word that results from the compounding of the words man (people) and suba (river). Moreover, Manobos are typically endemic in Bukidnon, Davao, Surigao del Sur, Agusan, Cotabato and Misamis Oriental. Usually recognized as the Atas of Davao, Ata- Manobos reside in northwestern Davao del Norte, particularly in Kapalong and Talaingod; also in Davao City. Approximately, there are a number of 7,047 households of Ata-Manobo who are located in Kapalong alone. The place with most population of Ata-Manobo is Talaingod followed by the two towns of Kapalong Municipality which includes Barangay Gupitan [2].

Moreover, Ata-Manobos also participate in a ritual wherein they interact with the other neighboring ethnic groups in Tagum City.

This ritual is dubbed as the Kaimunan which pertains to their performances and actuations of tribal dances, tribal songs, and other rituals for the sake of their Magbabawa (God). In this gathering, together with the Ata-Manobos are the Mandayas, Kalagans, Dibabawons and Mansaka for a big event or celebration. [3]

In addition, the Ata-Manobos specifically situated in Municipality of Talaingod perform their symbolic practices in the form of tribal dances. These tribal dances may vary in accordance to the symbolic purpose of the said dances. They may dance for war purposes which is called *kalasag*. They may also dance for the purpose of courtship which they usually called as *pulutawi*. Another is the *bangkakow* which is a dance intended as a prayer to *Manama* (God) for a bountiful harvest. These just prove how colorful the culture of Ata-Manobos in terms of their symbols and rituals. [4]

Considering all of these, it is evident and apparent that the Ata-Manobo people does not only feature a unique culture, but it also sports a spectrum of rituals which draw vibrant colors to their one of a kind ethnic identity. Also, these signs and symbols of the Ata-Manobo postulate different insignia as representations of distinctive meaning and phenomena. Hence, these set of rituals, signs and symbols shape the study of Ata Manobo culture which will be interpreted meaningfully and linguistically through qualitative and semiotic analyses



## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my study is to unleash and unearth the rituals, signs and symbols and their preservation in the Ata-Manobo tribe at Barangay Gupitan, Kapalong, Davao del Norte. In addition, my study focused on the semiotic analysis of the signs and symbols found on the rituals and divulge the manner of preservation of the Ata-Manobo community.

Thus, this study was guided with the following research questions:

1. What are the rituals in the Ata-Manobo tribe?
2. What are the semiotic features of Ata-Manobo signs and symbols?
3. How do the Ata-Manobos preserve these signs and symbols?

This research questions would be answered in the results and discussions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methods and procedures used in the conduct of the study are presented in this section.

### Research Design

This research is qualitative in nature. The researcher used qualitative research format which is the study of things in their natural settings, tempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings, people bring to them. Qualitative research is an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. [5]

Moreover, the study employed phenomenological approach with refraining from any pre-established framework, but still holding true to the facts. This was utilized to collect information about the respondents' experience on being acquainted with rituals with signs and symbols. This was achieved by using Triangulation which is composed of In-Depth Interview (IDI), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Observation in collecting valuable information that provided meaning and explanation about the signs and symbols in a semiotic analysis of the Ata-Manobo rituals. In the In-Depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion, a set of interview guide questions made by the researchers was utilized to serve as a research compass during the interview session, although other follow-up questions may arise during the interview to ensure the richness of respondents' responses. Through this guide question, valuable information in the form of feedback was elicited from the informants and participants which were of great help in the accomplishment of the study. In addition, this research employed direct observation in the identification of the key participants.

Phenomenological researches tend to be integrated with other equally substantial qualitative approaches such as hermeneutics (study of symbols in religious practices), ethnography, and symbolic interactionism. Pure phenomenological research aims to describe more than just to explain, and to start from a standpoint free from the bounds of preconceptions or

hypotheses. Phenomenological methods are certainly proven effective in bringing to the frontlines the perceptions and experiences of individuals from their own viewpoints. Added with the interpretive dimensions, phenomenology enables researcher to have a basis for practical theory, allows it to convey information, and even support, or challenge action and policy. [6][7]

### Role of the Researcher

Researchers are known to be an instrument that collaborates and interacts to the participants in order to gather data. It is my responsibility to ensure the smooth proceedings and measures in conducting this qualitative research.

I played many roles as a researcher such as interviewer, translator, analyst and encoder. As an interviewer, I established first rapport and respect with my participant. I called all the informants through the help of my gatekeepers for some introductions, and asked them if they are willing to participate in my study. As an interviewer, I used personal empathy to make the participants feel more willing to tell their stories. During the interview and observation, I applied some techniques like: asking probing questions, then listening and thinking, then asking more probing question to get to deeper levels of the conversation. As a transcriber and encoder, I transcribed all the recorded interviews, and translated correctly and organized them into Standard English statements. Lastly, as an analyst, I employed suitable analysis methods and procedures fitted for a qualitative research, such as thematic analysis, numeration, and cross-case analysis. Based on the concepts of Corbin and Strauss, it is the duty of the researcher to interpret the meaning hidden in the data because she is a primary instrument for data collection and analysis. [8][9]

### Research Participants

In this phenomenological study, the participants of this study were selected elders of Ata-Manobo tribe from Barangay Gupitan. There were 18 Ata-Manobo elders considered as the informants and participants. Ten served as research informants for the In-Depth Interview while eight served as the research participants for Focus Group Discussion. According to references [9], the size of a focus group discussion ranged between 6-10 (sometimes 12) people. Fewer than six people would limit the potential of the 'collective wisdom' whereas too large a size would make it difficult for everyone to participate. When designing a focus group study, the two key technical questions to decide are (a) whether to have homogenous or heterogeneous people in a group; and (b) how many groups to have.



The purposive method of sampling was used in determining the respondents of the study. Ata- Manobo elders whose age were at least 50 years old were selected and they were residents of Barangay Gupitan, Kapalong. Additionally, the research informants and participants were selected based on their cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher took specific steps in collecting the data and relevant information for my study. Before the conduct of the study, I underwent a meeting with my adviser so as to what and how I was going to conduct my research which only showed that I made a plan regarding the conduct of the study. After the meeting, I had a discussion with my gatekeeper concerning about the proper way of interviewing the informants and to be guided about her responsibilities as an interviewer.

A gatekeeper is an indigenous member of the community who has either direct or indirect influence with the culture. This person in my study knows the native language of the Ata-Manobo for the informants to feel comfortable to use their language and also for them to express freely their ideas about questions that were being asked. [10]

There are important devices that were used during the conduct of the study such as camera, video camera and voice recorder that served as important instruments for the foundation of strong evidence that all written information along with their expressions are solely from the point of view of the informants.

The camera was one of the useful devices that was used in the interview for it can give a factual basis for the emotion and expressions in which it served as the pillar for the research through the strong points in the process of the interview.

Video camera was also for the detailed observation of the interview, like the camera it also shows the emotions of the informants upon how they expressed their answers only that the video camera shows more detailed information that the camera cannot give, which is also the reason why it is used in the study.

Voice recorder was also very important technological device that has been used in the interview although it cannot give pictures and record the informant's facial expressions still it can give a clear voice record that is very essential in the study.

All the three instruments were used in the conduct of the study which were all stated above. Hence, this research, images and projection or emotions and expressions justified the study.

Beforehand, I wrote a consent letter to the Tribal Office of Kapalong addressed to Datu Art C. Davao. I personally asked permission to conduct a study in the said municipality. The letter was intended for the in-charge of the Tribal Office to be informed

that I was going to conduct a study in the place and requesting key informants for the interview. The said document assured confidentiality and agreement between the informants and the researchers.

After the interview, the retrieved documents helped me to have clear vision of the semiotic analysis on signs and symbols of Ata-Manobo rituals. Through this manner, each tape-recorded was transcribed verbatim to ensure greater degree of accuracy during the data analysis.

The researcher conducted an in-depth interview, focus group discussion and observation among the Ata-Manobo. This is also known as triangulation. The gathered data were subjected for treatment and interpretation. Relevant information will be presented in the following chapters to have a clear view about the undergone research.

To add relevant information, triangulation is a method for validation or checking; qualitative researchers broadly utilize this technique to ensure that an account is rich. This also seals the robustness of an account. Apart from such, this process also guarantees its comprehensiveness and being well-developed. [11]

The results of the interview were presented, transcribed and discussed. The information were analyzed, explored and treated based on the problems of the study. In order to concretize idea, the results were supported with related studies and literature.

Lastly, to ensure the correctness and veracity of the Ata-Manobo words being analyzed, the researcher verified the analysis from an Ata- Manobo who was both knowledgeable on Ata- Manobo language and English.

### **Data Analysis**

Highlighted in the systematic and retrieved document with recorded view were treated in the data analysis. The use of audio and videorecorder became a tool to document the interview. The gathered documents and data were transcribed into written for the body. As defined in the references [12], qualitative analysis as systematically arranged the data which could be done through working, organizing and breaking it into managing, synthesizing, searching for patterns, discussing what is important and what is to be learned thus, it requires in-depth analysis of the raw data with its logical meaning of categories.

In addition to a more comprehensive analysis is the qualitative content analysis. It was defined first as the use of replicable and valid method for making inferences from the text to other states or properties of its source. [13] Following the analysis of the research all analyzed information are all have the basis down from the authentic source which come from the informants.



Moreover, qualitative content analysis collection of sample usually consist purposely selected instance which reflects the research questions being investigated. The researcher needs to set aside all prejudgment bracketing his or her experiences. This idea is necessary to keep balanced between subjectivity and objectivity. It plays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings from the phenomenon rather than numeric significance, qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of the language in communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text. Which is why all the result that was being shown in the preceding chapters are practically based on the answers of the informants that gave the better understanding of this research. [14][15]

Qualitative content analysis usually consists of purposely selected instance which reflects the research questions being investigated. The researcher needs to set aside all prejudgment bracketing his or her experiences. This idea is necessary to keep balanced between subjectivity and objectivity. It plays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings from the phenomenon rather than numeric significance.

To apply qualitative content analysis in this study, I asked the help of an expert data analyst to synthesize the useful materials which could represent the results of this study. The whole process started with my data analyst receiving the transcriptions of the focus group discussion and in-depth interview from me for valid analysis. My data analyst then grouped the common ideas that surfaced from the transcriptions which are based per research question. Afterwards, these group of ideas were categorized and labelled one by one to represent these clusters of useful ideas. This labels then resulted to the themes which become the manifestation of this study's results.

In this study, data reduction is also used to analyze the data of this study. This process simply means the deletion of unnecessary data and modification of these said clusters of information to become a useful material for the sake of the study. This is for the purpose of making the data comprehensible for the readers. In this method, my data analyst was also the one who employed data reduction, aside from merging, managing, sorting and categorizing the data in the phase of qualitative content analysis.

As to my role in data analysis, I conducted semiotic analysis to the symbolic data that I gathered in this study. Semiotic analysis is defined as the breaking down and examining of the sign and symbol to highlight its semiotic features such as its rich meanings and components. [16] In this inquiry, I analyzed the data which pertained to the semiotic features of the Ata-Manobo rituals. The data that were used in semiotic analysis were derived from the researcher-made matrix which was filled up by each participant of this study. Through such matrix, I initiated the sign and symbol analysis by listing down the common and significant semiotic features relevant to each ritual documented in this study. Useful representations of these data were established as commonalities among the responses of the Ata-Manobo participants of this study

were highly observed by me.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

When I conducted the qualitative research, I put into account the responses of my informants. I also meticulously considered all the details of the data. I checked and rechecked all the transcriptions and the importance of the data that relate to each other on their themes.

To establish trustworthiness and credibility in the study, it was suggested the choice of legitimacy of the procedures. The discussions about trustworthiness are governed by the research lens and its paradigm assumptions that can help the procedures in the study. I contend that in this study, the plausibility was determined by the response of the informants. [17]

**Credibility** is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a "credible" conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data. To address credibility, I used three techniques. First, I presented the credibility of the experiences as an intent of truthfully illustrating and knowing the facts which are phenomenon in which my participants are included. Second, in designing the research procedure, I conducted a focus group discussion which extracted ideas on the marriage practices and language analysis of Ata-Manobo and also its process and systems how it is being used. Third, I deliberately asked the informants to list Ata-Manobo words they used during conversations and compared them with the Ata-Manobo words used in the simulation. My intention here was to create layers of data from each participant. Accordingly, this technique will provide a richer and credible data. [17]

**Transferability** is the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project. To address transferability in this study, I have included in the Appendix about several of the data analysis documents used to give answer to the research question in order to gain access to the possible inquiry. This would give other researchers the facility to transfer the conclusions or recommendation as bases for further study. [17]

**Dependability** is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and phenomenal explanation. In order to address dependability, I established an audit trail of the participants' responses. In such audit trail, I also made sure that the respondents' identities were treated with utmost confidentiality. This material enabled my auditor to assess the conjectures and interpretations that I made in this study.

**Confirmability** is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected. To address the issues of confirmability in this study, I banked on an audit trail of the participants responses wherein their identity were treated with confidentiality. After the video and audion tape was transcribed, the text were given back to the respondents for authentication and were asked to sign a verification form. For confirmability, I asked the audit of a competent peer who is a language teacher and at the





same time knowledgeable on Ata-Manobo language. After the completion of my data analysis, the results in Chapter Four, and the discussions in Chapter Five, my auditor had assessed carefully my audit trail with original transcripts from the interview, data analysis documents. The auditor had assessed the dependability and confirmability of the study by signing the verification letter. [17]

In my study, confirmability was done through transcribing, member checking and triangulation. All participants were asked to review, interview transcripts and add anything that might have been left out. The information will be shared with the participants in a taking circle to ensure that we interpreted the data correctly. Taking circles are a method of discussion that can be comforting to research.

Use of reflective commentary description of backgrounds, qualifications and orientations of the researchers lead to valued research. Group of experts check the data collected and interpretations or theories formed. Thick description of phenomenon under scrutiny of previous research is employed to frame findings. In this manner, this will increase the trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study.

### Ethical Consideration

To ensure a pleasant scientific practice in research, the ethical codes are given importance in which it is observed and applied towards the informants as well as into the context that concerns with the agreement of both the participants and the researchers.

In order to gain trust from the participants, the research should involve great deal of cooperation and coordination among the informants that has varied disciplines and intuitions. [18]

In addition, ethical standards promote the values that are collaborative work such as trust, accountability, respect and fairness. There are legal requirements that had been complied to which it includes data protection legislation and the appropriate things to do in the researchers that work with the group of people.

Moreover, the study would also require conforming in the internationally required standards of good practice research and that is to protect the key informants. The confidentiality is also ensured in our phenomenological study. All the gathered data kept with utmost secrecy to respect to the identity of my key informants in order to ensure the informants to feel safe. The uses of pseudonyms were advised to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Also, all the considerations had been incorporated in the research design stage. The destruction of documented instruments are encourage after 20 years. The contracted service providers for interview recording, transcription and the like were required to provide signed agreements to protect the confidentiality of research data and information.

Moreover, the main concern of my study were individuals whom I do not have any relation with. Therefore, I have to ensure their safety, give them full protection so that they will not lose their interest to me. I followed ethical standards in conducting this study. These are the following: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality. [19]

**Respect for persons** needs an obligation of the researcher not to exploit the weaknesses of the research participants. Self-sufficiency was avoided in order to maintain friendship, trust, and confidence among the participants and the researchers. Beforehand, I asked permission from the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) at Provincial Capitol of Davao del Norte. Afterwards, I also asked permission from the Tribal Head Office and chieftain of Ata-Manobo community located at Gupitan, Kapalong, Davao del Norte. This was done to pay respect for the individuals and governing bodies concerned in the study. [8]

**Consent** is another important way of showing respect to persons during research. This is to instill awareness to the participants as to objectives and purpose of the research study that they are going to involve. To address this aspect of ethical considerations, I let them sign a written consent in their own personal discretion. After getting their nod, they have actually participated the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Of course, they were informed on the results and findings of the study. [8]

**Beneficence** requires a commitment of minimizing risks to the research participants rather maximizing the profits that are due to them. To address beneficence, I kept the anonymity of the interviewees in order not to put them into risks. At all times, I protected the participants' identities. I did this through keeping track of this study's files and not leaving them unattended at all times. [20]

**Confidentiality** pertains towards the protection of results and findings including the safeguard of participants. To address this, I employed a coding system to refer to each participant in the study. Meaning, the participants' identities were hidden. Other than that, I also made sure that all materials including videotapes, encoded transcripts, notes, and others should be destroyed after the data were being analyzed. Some of the informants were hesitant to be interviewed at first because they were afraid of what to say but because of my reassurance to them with regards to the confidentiality of their responses, they later gave me the chance and showed comfort in answering the interview questions. I was extra careful with my questions and due respect was given importance to this study. [21]

**Justice** requires a reasonable allocation of the risks and benefits as results of the research. It is very important to acknowledge the contributions of all participants as they generally become part of the success of the research. They must be given due credits in all their endeavors. To address this, I made sure that all participants were not able to spend any amount during the interview. I also gave



sensible tokens to them as a sign of recognition to their efforts on the study. [22]

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the details of the results of the qualitative analysis.

### Research Question No. 1

#### What are the different Ata-Manobo rituals?

The Ata-Manobo people do have different rituals as depicted on their culture. Even though they have various rituals, there are some point of which the meaning and the reason of conducting such rituals are the common with one another.

#### Buya or Fixed Marriage /bŭj/

One of the notable rituals of the Ata-Manobo community is the fixed marriage. The practice of this had started hundreds of years ago. This distinguished the mutual agreement between two families who wish to set their sons and daughters into marriage.

In this kind of ritual, the two involved people in Buya do not know they have been fixed to marriage. Only then they will know they have been arranged on the very day of their marriage.

When it comes to the signs and symbols, there are no certain signs such as dresses to be worn during the Buya. However, there are also instances that they will wear one. Hence, they can celebrate their marriage with or without the succumbed cultural dress for wedding.

#### Pangujab /pəŋʊdʒəb/

This is the ritual that consents on the healing of a sick person. Pangujab asks the Holy Spirit or *Abyan* to heal the illness.

#### Pangayaw /pəŋajaw/

The *Pangayaw* is the declaration of a tribal war. This is a form part of revenge. This usually happens when a family member has been killed by other tribal member. In some cases, in couples, when the man has been caught committing illicit relationship with other woman, he can be immediately killed. But if it happens to be the woman who committed the said adultery, the woman will not be killed for they believed that slaying a woman is meeting a bad luck. However, if in case the treachery has been made known by the Datu, it can be settled and killing will be motionless.

Pangayaw can be done through using a spear, arrow, bolo or a modified gun. The execution can also be inflicted to the relatives and the raised animals of the foe. Innocent individuals will not be harmed as much as possible. The *Pangayaw* is an announced ritual.

#### Damag /damaŋ/

This is the Burial Rites. The dead body can either be put in a thin skin of a wood and be covered with a blanket. Some tribal members put the corpse in a native mat and are covered as well with a blanket. The wake does not last long. If the person dies today, it will be buried today. However, some members have

embraced the embalming wherein the dead body can be seen by the relatives especially those who are residing far.

#### Pangapog /pəŋapog/

This is a ritual that is done first in planting. Initially, it is finding or considering for an area where it shows a sign that it is productive and is likely to provide a great harvest. The ritual in this will include the sacrificial animals like chicken or pig, but the chicken is frequently offered.

Afterwards, in the harvest time, the same ritual is applied. If plants nearly mature, the tribe shall harvest a small quantity then they will put it in the *tambaran* or altar to give thanks to the Gods for the successful planting and harvest.

### Research Question No. 2:

#### What are the semiotic features of Ata-Manobo symbols?

##### BUYA

The following are the basic or major signs and symbols used in *Buya* as their ritual.

**Mamoon** /mAmoon/ (Pica – Pica). *Mamoon* (figure 1) became a form part in preparation of a ritual to have *Mamoon* out of Betel nuts. The people and *Datus* use to share the *Mamoon* after the spoken prayer because the *Mamoon* do serve as their cultural compact that fortifies their bond



Figure 1. Mamoon

through sharing it. This bond could be given emphasis as two parties arrived in a given arrangement with regards to marriage for particular.

##### Analysis

*Mamoon and its overall components (apog, betel nuts, and betel leaves) constitute for stronger bond of the Ata-Manobos. This signifies that Ata- Manobos have strong bond and relationship towards one another. Mamoon has its materials (Betel nuts) derived from the bosom of nature. This signifies the natural relationship that transpires between the Ata-Manobo people and the nature which provides all the materials needed by the Manobos to survive. In connection to such, it is believed that Mamoon renders longevity to the lives of the people who consumes this material. This then leads one to the signification that Mamoon signifies long life and long-lasting relationships to those who undergo the ritual of buya.*

**Abyan** /Abjan/ (Holy Spirit). The *Abyan* is believed to be the

Holy Spirit that hears the prayers of the *Baylan* and the people of every ritual. The *Abyan* is considered as the holy spirit of the *Ata-Manobos* who enters the body of the *Baylan* and uses it between the intercession of the people and the ritual. The *Abyan* blesses the decision made between the two families with regards to the marriage. Also, ahead of time, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is asked all throughout the planned marriage. Any kind of ritual or attempt will be of no success unless the presence of the *Abyan* is asked of as well as the sacrifices and other offertories are offered.

### Analysis

*Abyan* refers to the spiritual concept of mighty, invisible supernaturals that govern both the spiritual and human realms. Hence, *Abyan* is the omnipotent entity that is involved in the ritual of *buya*. This then signifies that the intercession of *Abyan* in an *Ata-Manobo* wedding gives blessings to the newlyweds. It is believed that *Ata-Manobo* should always seek the favor of the *Abyan* at all times. This includes the wedding or the ritual of *buya*.



Figure 2. Baylan

**Baylan** /bʌjlʌn/ (Priestess or Ritual Initiator). The *Baylan* (see figure 2) is the main human character in every ritual. The *Baylan* initiates the ritual and most of the time is the one being consulted of what to prepare during the ritual. The *Baylan* knows and demands what are the materials needed and what are to be offered for the sanctity of the rituals.

The *Baylan* is the one who does the ritual once the unanimity of the Holy Spirit and human body transpires.

### Analysis

*Baylan* refers to the chosen and more experienced person who has a connection to both the world of the spirits and the world of the mortals. Through his or her wisdom in many rituals, *baylan* helps the humans in their endeavors to gain the favor of spirits in their own undertakings, which includes the wedding or *buya*. Hence, it can be said that the *baylan* helps in establishing a relationship in good terms with the mortals of the earth and the spirits of the spiritual world.



Figure 3. Horse

**Dowry.** Dowry is something that is given in exchange of the favor being made. This could be an animal, gift, gold, or any that the concern party had demanded. Thus, a horse (see figure 3) of which this has been one of the dowries given. The horse is the prime grant that is set as the dowry to the kin of the woman for it means pure spirit. On the other hand, the horse serves as their medium of transportation, basically carrying their crops and things in traveling.

Horses are of great use. They ride on this especially in traversing the high ground areas and rivers. It is a good carriage. Horses are known to have strong limbs and muscles; runs fast than other domestic animals. Thus, setting this as dowry is a main choice in the tribe.



Figure 4. Carabao

**Carabao.** The carabaos (see figure 4) are known to be the no. 1 animal to consider when talking about cultivating or plowing land. Many consider this animal as *dowry* because most tribesmen own land to till or nurture. Moreover, this animal symbolizes hard work. Carabao can also carry heavier baggage than horses can especially during harvesting of crops. Other animals (see Figure 5) like goats, chickens, pigs or wild boars, monkeys, etc. can also become dowries. However, most animals indicated are set to be the *tubad no hayop* or offered animals during rituals for *buya*.



Figure 5. Goat

### Analysis

Dowry serves as a price that justifies the ritual that is to be initiated. Dowry usually consist of animal livestocks or objects of great value which signify that marriage is a valuable ritual to practice. Moreover, dowry elevates the value and specialness of tribal marriage because it makes the family of the woman feel convenient and leaves the impression of being special as they receive presents from the family of the man.



**Man and Woman.** These are the people who are meant to marry as parents have agreed, that in time, they will espouse. They will strengthen the bond of each family through following the arrangement made by the kinship.

### Analysis

*They are the main elements of the ritual of buya. It is because it is through the unison of two Ata-Manobo individuals that buya becomes a celebration to all the Ata-Manobo families that are concerned. It is the manifestation that Ata- Manobos consider the creation of families as a vital aspect which reflects their family-oriented culture and inherent close familial ties.*

### PANGUJAB

The following are the basic or major signs and symbols used in *Pangujab*.



**Figure 6. Lirong**

**Lirong** /liron/ (Winnowing Basket). *Lirong* (see figure 6) is used as the basin or container of other materials used by the *Baylan* in the ritual. It is believed that *Lirong* encapsulates all the necessary objects that are needed to sanctify and to offer to the *Abyan* or the guardian spirit for the said ritual.

### Analysis

*Lirong* serves as an object that contains all the materials needed for the ritual of *pangujab*. From this, it can be inferred that *lirong* serves to unify and sanctify all the elements which could free the Ata-Manobo people from certain illnesses. Also, *lirong* is made from the materials derived from the resources of nature. This manifests the Ata- Manobos' theme of being synchronized and intimate with the nature itself.



**Figure 7. Moirob**

**Moirob** /moIrob/ (Bolo). In some particular rituals, the *Moirob* (see figure 7) is requested by the *Abyan* or chosen by the *Datu* to be part of the ceremony. Commonly, the use of the *Moirob* in rituals is to be included as one of the offerings to the spirits.

### Analysis

*Most of the time, it is used as the main material that signifies the way of living of the Ata- Manobo. Moreover, they use it for their*

*living and seemingly, they cannot go and live without this. It is like an integral part of their daily lives.*



**Figure 8. Cometa or Siu Hoc Tong**

**Cometa or Siu Hoc Tong** /kɔmɛta or ʃɔktoŋ/ (Tonic Wine). It (see figure 8) is one of the offertories during the ritual of *pangujab*. Basically, it is a tonic wine which can be purchased from any accessible stores in Gupitan.

### Analysis

*It is believed that any ritual could never be started nor conducted successfully without the offering of this wine. This wine signifies a sort of invitation to the Abyan to partake and help the Baylan during the process of liberating many Ata- Manobo people from certain illnesses that afflicted them.*



**Figure 9. Tubad no Hayop**

**Tubad No Hayop** /tɔbAd nɔ hɔjɔp/. The *Tubad no Hayop* (see figure 9) at times are requested by the *Abyan*. These are animals that are sacrificed for the fulfillment of the ritual.

### Analysis

*These animals are offerings to the Abyan for the sanctity of the ritual. Their blood consecrates the holiness of the ceremony. These served as a divine offering for the Abyan for Him to free the Ata-Manobo people from a certain widespread illness.*

**Abyan** /AbjAn/ (Holy Spirit). The *Abyan* is believed to be the Holy Spirit that hears the prayers of the *Baylan* and the people of every ritual. The *Abyan* is considered as the God of the Ata-Manobo who enters the body of the *Baylan* and uses it between the intercession of the people and the ritual.

### Analysis

*Any kind of ritual or attempt will be of no success unless the presence of the Abyan is asked of as well as the sacrifices and other offertories are offered. The Abyan is believed to heal the illnesses or any diseases that affect the Ata- Manobo people. Through the Abyan's supernatural powers, the afflicted Ata-*





*Manobo people are granted with the cure for their illnesses.*

**Baylan** /bʌjlʌn/ (Priestess or Ritual Initiator). The *Baylan* is the main human being in every ritual. The *Baylan* initiates the ritual and most of the time is the one being consulted of what to prepare during the ritual. The *Baylan* knows and demands what are the materials needed and what are to be offered for the sanctity of the rituals.

### Analysis

*The Baylan is the one who does the ritual once the unanimity of the Holy Spirit and human body transpires. Through the Baylan, the wills of mortals and spirits are unified. Hence, the Baylan serves as a connector to both worlds of mortals and immortals in order to fulfill the ritual of pangujab.*

### PANGAYAW

The following are the basic or major signs and symbols used in *Pangayaw*.



**Figure 10. Moirob**

**Moirob** /mɔɪrɔb/ (Bolo). Usually, a *Moirob* (see figure 10) has a sharp and a blunt side but some of them have two sides that are both sharp. These types are used to slay anything at the back and front. These are usually used in *Pangayaw* or slaying.

### Analysis

*Moirob is one of the instruments utilized in the ritual of pangayaw. Its sharp edges signify the fangs of justice which could deliver righteous judgment to those who are at fault as well as to those who were wronged. Moirob serves as an instrument to embody justice as well as the battle superiority of the Ata-Manobo warriors.*



**Figure 11. Bangkaw**

**Bangkaw** /bʌŋkʌw/ (Spear). It has known to be that *pagpangayaw* is a declaration of tribal war and is done because of revenge. As such, there are spears used in this ritual. The spears (see figure 11) used in *Pangayaw* vary from the others.

There are those classified as wide spears of which these are used on killing animals like monkey, boar, and the like along the *pagpangayaw*. On the other hand, the narrow spears are truly designed for the killing of humans during the *pagpangayaw*.

*Pangayaw* has grounds to consider before compelling. *Pangayaw* can be done considering the following acts. If the husband has been caught cheating, once caught will be immediately killed. However, if the *Datu* had known the illicit affair, negotiations such as the husband shall pay the wife or the family is possible. If the woman committed the affair with another, she will not be killed because they believe killing a woman will bring misfortune. If a tribesman shall be disrespectful and deviant of any form of rules within the tribe, and has not changed after discourse with chieftains, shall be lay open to *Pangayaw*. If a foe had killed kin, *Pangayaw* can be done through killing foe's family or domesticated animal.

However, today's time, if any conflict will arise, the *Datu* will take dialogues to forbid slaying.

### Analysis

*Bangkaw* varies according to functions. If the spear's edge is wider, it is intended for hunting and slaying animals. If the spear's edge is usual in form, it is intended for slaying humans. *Bangkaw's* length also varies in function. If it is longer, it is intended for long-range hunting. Aside from that, the longer version of *bangkaw* has a pliant other bottom. This was intentionally made for the *bangkaw* to fly longer distance when thrown. If it is shorter, the *Bangkaw* is meant for short-range hunting. It can also be used as a walking stick or a helping tool used to climb steep areas or muddy paths.

**Abyan** /ʌbjʌn/ (Holy Spirit). The *Abyan* blesses the *Ata-Manobo* people as they have the *Pangayaw* and is that the *Abyan's* protection on every *Ata-Manobo* individual is being asked along the way as they seek for revenge and justice during the tribal war journey.

### Analysis

*Abyan* refers to the spiritual concept of mighty, invisible supernaturals that govern both the spiritual and human realms. Hence, *Abyan* is the omnipotent entity that is involved in the ritual of *pangayaw*. This then signifies that the intercession of *Abyan* in *pangayaw* gives blessings to the *Ata-Manobo* warriors to uphold justice and righteousness.

**Baylan** /bʌjlʌn/ (Priestess or Ritual Initiator). The *Baylan* prays for the success of the *Pangayaw* and safety of the *Ata-Manobo* involved on the said ritual.

### Analysis

*Baylan* refers to the more experienced person who has a connection to both the world of the spirits and the world of the mortals. Through his or her wisdom in many rituals, *baylan* helps the humans in their endeavors to gain the favor, guidance

and blessing of the spirits in their own undertakings, which includes the delivery of justice. Hence, it can be said that the baylan helps in establishing a relationship in good terms with the mortals of the earth and the spirits of the spiritual world.

### DAMAG

The following are the basic or major signs and symbols used in Damag.



Figure 12. Kubow (for Male - center) and Sugkad (for Female - right)

**Kubow** /kɔbɔw/ and **Sugkad** /sɔgkʌd/ (Headdress). The Datu's Kubow has the mane of a horse or goat that served as the filaments while the women in the tribe wear the Sugkad as an adornment on their head. These are usually worn on gatherings and burial rites of the Ata-Manobo community.

The Kubow and Sugkad (see figure 12) are one of the signs of the socio-political status of the Ata-Manobo tribe. It sets as their crown. The more it is specially made, the higher is the rank of the person who wears it. These are usually worn on gatherings and burial rites of the Ata-Manobo community.

### Analysis

The Datu's Kubow has the mane of a horse or goat that served as the filaments while the women in the tribe wear the Sugkad as an adornment on their head.

The Kubow and Sugkad are one of the signs of the socio-political status of the Ata-Manobo tribe. It sets as their crown. The higher the value of the adornments (horse mane), the higher is the rank of the person who wears it.

**Abyan** /ʌbjʌn/ (Holy Spirit). The Abyan gives consent to the spirit of the human to be at peace with the Lord. The Abyan blesses and guides the spirit of the dead as the dead's spirit seeks for peace and reincarnation on the spirit realm.

### Analysis

Abyan refers to the spiritual concept of mighty, invisible supernaturals that govern both the spiritual and human realms. Hence, Abyan is the omnipotent entity that is involved in the ritual of Damag. This then signifies that the intercession of Abyan in Pangapog gives blessings to the Ata-Manobo especially to the departed soul to be granted with a peaceful rest.

**Baylan** /bʌjlʌn/ (Priestess or Ritual Initiator). The Baylan is the one who does the ritual once the unanimity of the Holy Spirit and human body transpires. The Baylan initiates the ceremony of requesting the Supreme beings to accept the spirit of the

person and be at peace with them.

### Analysis

Baylan refers to the more experienced person who has a connection to both the world of the spirits and the world of the mortals. Through his or her wisdom in many rituals, baylan helps the humans in their endeavors to gain the favor and blessing of the spirits in their own undertakings, which includes the ritual of pangapog. Hence, it can be said that the baylan helps in delivering the departed soul to his or her peaceful rest.

### PANGAPOG

There are various signs and symbols used when the Ata-Manobo people plant and harvest their crops. These are the following:



Figure 13. Ilab

**Ilab** /ɪlʌb/ (Small Knife). The Ilab (see figure 13) is used and brought every day for it serves as the immediate scalpel whenever they want to cut and sharpen something in the forest or anywhere, and serves as their table knife at home.

Their culture has had different sharp edge materials that have gone or remained and the Ilab is one of the persisted materials which they use every day particularly in planting and harvesting of crops.

### Analysis

Ilab is a sharp and edgy material that is considered conventional by the Ata-Manobo people. They usually use it to cut anything related to crops and other agricultural yields. It is considered by the Ata-Manobo as very important in their daily life. It is because they cannot leave their homes without it for it also functions as an immediate weapon for protection, especially on unforeseen danger or circumstances. Moreover, because it is handy, it becomes usable in situations wherein the Ata-Manobos need to instantly acquire food as they traverse the lush forests.



Figure 14. Tubad no Hayop



**Tubad No Hayop** /tɔbʌd nɔ hʌjɔp/. This *Tubad no Hayop* is one of the important quantities in the ritual. This refers to the animals (see figure 13) used as offering of the ceremony with regards to thanksgiving for a successful planting activity or a bountiful harvest.

The *Hayop* is set as the life sacrifice for the blood of the *Hayop* sanctifies the ritual. The *Tubad no Hayop* should be alive not until the cutting is made after the offertory.

### Analysis

*These animals are offerings to the Abyan for the sanctity of the ritual. Their blood consecrates the holiness of the ceremony. These served as a divine offering for the Abyan for Him to bless the planting and harvesting of Ata-Manobo's agricultural crops and products.*

**Abyan** /ʌbjʌn/ (Holy Spirit). The *Abyan* blesses the harvest of the people from the *Magboboot*. As such, without the guidance and blessing of the *Abyan* on the planting of the crops, the people will be planting in vain and will harvest less or nothing of what they had sowed.

### Analysis

*Abyan refers to the spiritual concept of mighty, invisible supernaturals that govern both the spiritual and human realms. Hence, Abyan is the omnipotent entity that is involved in the ritual of pangapog. This then signifies that the intercession of Abyan in pangapog gives blessings to the Ata-Manobo for a blessed planting and bountiful harvesting of agricultural products.*

**Baylan** /bʌjlʌn/ (Priestess or Ritual Initiator). The *Baylan* asks the *Abyan's* providence to make the planting and harvesting successful. The blessing from the *Abyan* as interceded by the *Baylan* will determine the success and failure of the planting of the crops.

### Analysis

*Baylan refers to the more experienced person who has a connection to both the world of the spirits and the world of the mortals. Through his or her wisdom in many rituals, baylan helps the humans in their endeavors to gain the blessing of the spirits in their own undertakings, which includes the rituals of planting and harvesting. Hence, it can be said that the baylan helps in establishing a relationship in good terms with the mortals of the earth and the spirits of the spiritual world.*

### Research Question No. 3:

*How do the Ata-Manobos preserve the sesymbols?*

### Educate Young Ones

It was revealed in the in-depth interview that one way of preserving the Ata-Manobo signs and symbols is to educate the young ones. It is further stated that Ata-Manobo should never forget and forsake the culture that they possess through letting the young know and practice the same set of rituals.

### Cultural Celebration

Another theme has emerged during the in- depth interview. It was unearthed that another way to preserve the signs and symbols is to celebrate the culture of Ata-Manobos. It was further elaborated that performing the cultural rituals every month is one way to celebrate their culture.

### Display of Craft

During the focus group discussion, it was discovered that another way in preserving the signs and symbols of Ata-Manobo is to display their craft. One participant mentioned that during the ritual pangujab, the tribal members sport their ethnic materials such as the sagubadbab, samanoy, bagoyboy, mamaon, apog, buyo and umpit.

### Practice Rituals

Another way for one to preserve the signs and symbols of the Ata-Manobo culture is to practice the rituals. It was accentuated that they still do an array of Ata-Manobo rituals even nowadays. These include the buya, pangujab, pangayaw, damag, and pangapog.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

My study entails the written documentation of the culture of the Ata-Manobo of Gupitan, Kapalong, Davao del Norte. In a way, this is a help on preserving their culture since most of the literature are in the Ata- Manobos of Talaingod, Davao del Norte. This study fortifies the idealism of the elders in Gupitan area to reunite culture to their people and to hand down their practices to the young folks. Their culture is fascinating. Their people and rituals are beautiful.

The findings of my study from the voices of Ata- Manobo people, particularly the elders, were viewed to the subject of having the semiotic analysis on the signs and symbols being used in Ata-Manobo rituals. Further research could be conducted with another set of participants to find out the view and insight of the informants that will lead to more authentic results of the aforementioned study.

Also, further research may be done through re- conducting the study or interview some participants in my study again to validate the results of the study. This would investigate the same phenomenon among the Ata- Manobo people with regards to their rituals' signs and symbols that are purposely used for this will give clearer and additional information related to the concept under study. Other exploration and research studies with regards to the semiotic analysis of signs and symbols on Ata-Manobo rituals on other barangays or municipalities as well as to other regions may be conducted. Perhaps, the results and findings of my study paved the way to the awareness and enlightenment of the importance and value of the different sign and symbols as taken from the answers of the informants.

As to the learnings I gained, one of the insights I learned is that constant practice and celebration of their rituals, signs and





symbols may preserve the continuity of their culture up to the forthcoming years. Another is that education and cultural preservation can still coexist in the lives of the Ata-Manobo through incorporating the Indigenous People (IP) Education to the academic curricula of educational institutions. In this way, the Ata-Manobo can still enjoy the benefits of education without fearing the elimination of their own ethnic identity. Another is the fact that local government units (LGUs) and national government agencies can empower the preservation and practice of these fading rituals through conducting more cultural celebrations and rendering government support and protection to these groups of individuals. In this way, the Ata-Manobo heritage can endure more numbers of generations in the coming future.

To conclude this research endeavor, I would like to express how thankful I am for having this rare opportunity of probing this extraordinary group of people. Also, I would like to encourage my fellow researchers to study the lives of the Ata-Manobo. It may be about their ways of living, their perceptions in life, and anything else which could surface out the beauty of their peerless cultural heritage. In such way, all of us could help in bringing to the global fore the amazing culture of the Ata-Manobo – one of the unified cultures that are proudly Filipino.

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