

## The Commanding Amigo and Its Spirit Embodiment: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Manobo-Visayan *Compadrazgo* Social Relationship in the "Modern" Manobo Cosmology and Ritual



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### [ *Abstract* ]

The entry of the logging industry in the once heavily forested riverine middle Agusan Valley where aboriginal Manobos live meant the entry of the material practice of wage labor into this out-of-the-way place. Wage labor converted the once relatively isolated, subsistence animist Manobos into laborers of the expanding capitalist regime. A symptom of modernity, this wage labor also accompanied the coming of Visayan settlers (also loggers paid by wage) who introduced indigenous Manobos the *compadrazgo* social relationship. This friendly relationship across ethnic identities legitimated social ties and is a social material practice represented in recent bilingual Manobo possession rituals where the Visayan spirit is incarnated along with Manobo spirits. To understand the idea behind spirit embodiment, I explore Manobo ritual as mimesis or poesis. This representation is shaped by concrete material realities as much as these realities, in turn, are reconfigured by ritual practice. In the older Manobo cosmology, which is based on subsistence economy

and dependent on the forest and rivers, individuals have an externalized self (as manifest in the idea of twin soul), in which the inner vital principle is co-extensive with a spirit double in cosmos. Manobos imitate the perceived workings of nature in ritual so as to control them in times of illnesses. In contrast, the mimesis of the Visayan spirit is based on a different political economic set up with its attendant asymmetrical interpersonal relationship. By symbolically representing the Visayan patron as friend, Manobos are able to negotiate the predicament of their subalternity in local modernity.

**Keywords:** compadrazgo, cosmology, ritual, mimesis, poeisis

Agusan Manobos liken the experience of participating in their spirit-possession ritual as collective dreaming. They feel euphoric, suddenly become open to others, and are enthused in attending ritual enactments where their individual wills are absorbed by group consensus. During ritual, they become absolutely agreeable to collective decisions, following the spirit voices that are incarnated in the medium's body, which stands as a symbol of authority or of customary law, even as, at the same time, they feel disputatious in dialogues with spirits from which they learn the causes of things. They do rituals with a sense of duty, holding them with a sense of compulsion and urgency, especially in times of sicknesses and crises, when prior consultations with religious specialists (*baylanen*), who envoice their spiritguides, make it clear that there is a need for it.

Manobos call their ritual "hinang" ("to make," parallel to the classical Greek concept of poeisis), which emphasizes the active or participative dimension of their social selves.<sup>1)</sup> To make" means to collectively produce a culturally-specific form, a ritual, which conjures a "picture" (a *mimema*) in the minds of

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1) Mimesis is the "reception of mental images," while poeisis refers to the "production of objects intended to create mental images." The former is "passive," the latter is "active" but both entail one another (Sörbom 2002: 24-25).

the Manobos, of their relationship to things outside of society, of their interpersonal ties with relatives and neighbors, or of connections to nature and the cosmos. Borne of their imaginative faculty, ritual as image (*mimesis*), however, is not a mere set of objects, speech, song, and movements to be heard and seen in performance that impresses in the mind of the participants. It is something felt bodily and vividly for Manobo ritual is a concrete, multi sensorial performance moment. From their epistemological standpoint, *to make a dream image of human-human and human-nature relationships is to invite participants to enter a mode of reality where contacts with the extraordinary or spirit world is affirmed.*

As it shall be shown, the kinds of ritual that the Manobos make are bound to a common purpose of controlling the relationships between humans and the forces of nature (embodied in the form of spirits) or its elements (embodied in tangible objects that are displayed and manipulated as symbols in ritual). Ritual is intentioned and purposive for it attempts to divine the causes of things with a view of remaking the unfathomable harmonious workings of nature that were "disturbed" or about to be disturbed by human activities. In anthropological parlance, one can call the dream-like mental image or representation of Manobo ritual as "magical" for it is about *practical effects* that come about as humans control the state of nature in ritual,<sup>2)</sup> bargaining with the incarnated spirits not to cause further harm despite human intrusions. In a way, the mimetic nature of Manobo ritual bespeaks its fundamental role as a technology for getting into reality at close range, a capacious means for configuring what must have been into what should be (Taussig 1993: 19-32).

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2) I draw here on an aspect of Maussian theory of magic that states that magic is practical, i.e., it is done to achieve tangible effects. However, Agusan Manobo possession ritual is also religious in nature because it concerns belief in the supernatural, embodies morality, and is held in public. Recent theorists have extended the Maussian notion of magic such as Taussig who, discussing Jean Rouch's ethnographic film *Les maitres fous* (1953), see film technology as "magical" (as cited in Huggan 1997-98: 98).

This control is sensitive to the flow of time or is contingent. A wish for safe travel, for example, demands a prophylactic waving of a chicken (and, therefore, the use of this ritual object that is sacrificed and eaten after ritual event and manipulation of the spirit of the wind) so as to make it appear that the impending future is secured from a most unlikely incident of illness and death. In occasions when an undesirable human behavior had already caused harm through spirit-caused illness, Manobo ritual becomes a space to redress human wrong doings and therefore restore ideal human-to-nature relationships that have tangible effects on human relations. Manobo ritual, specifically the elaborate one, entails animal sacrifice and ends up with the feeding of spirits and a commensal meal. In short, a representation that is magically efficacious, Manobo ritual is an artifice of culture, something made-up or constructed; it is a product of a human creativity in actively apprehending reality so as to influence its outcomes.

The motivation for producing Manobo ritual is, of course, the Manobo faculty of the imagination. Manobos say that this need is often passively revealed to mediums in individual dreams or in spirit incarnations in ritual, which, as mentioned already, are dreamlike. Given the fact that Manobos hold their rituals for some very specific purposes, generally on the need to acquire favors from nature such as health and auspicious human activities, Manobos believe that *there is no gap between the mimetic representation that they make and the things in nature that this mimesis (imitation) represents*. It is not that they see the gesture of possession in the medium as a mere pictorial "mental image," but believe that the form and shape of those images, when ritually manipulated by the appropriate human agent at a correct moment, do have the actuality of unleashing power inherent in the objects ritually manipulated.<sup>3)</sup> The belief of a real spirit truly incarnating or infusing in the medium's body after the rhetorical invocations is not felt as an illusion, but is always considered felicitous to external reality. Thus, if feeding a crocodile icon with

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3) I discussed this proposition in another paper "Causation and the concept of agency in Agusan Manobo Ritual."

palm fronds (so as to prevent evil from eating human society) is a representation of the human desire not to be harmed by nature, Manobos do not distinguish the crocodile icon (a replicated mimema) to its referent. Even a replica of the crocodile can really eat up human beings.<sup>4)</sup>

In short, I argue in this paper that, for the Manobos, the concept of mimema is *both form and substance* and this, in turn, cannot be isolated from the magical actuality that, when acted upon, becomes a representation that it always embodies. This is the belief in the mimetic correspondence between the image and its represented where the medium/form and matter/substance are inseparable. Another way of stating this is that form is always already congealed with substance. This Southeast Asian belief departs radically from the classical Greek-Roman understanding of mimesis in which the mimema or representation is just a "make-believe," i.e., understood as icons that are separate from the real or their referent-objects (Sörbom). To investigate this argument, I address the following theoretical questions.

- 1) As a representation, how can it proven that the Manobo ritual *mimema* has a substantive link to objects in the Manobo cosmos?
- 2) What does this belief tell us about Manobo ideology on nature and on self-other relationships, which is linked, in turn, to the idea of Manobo society?
- 3) How does Manobo ritual, as a socially constructed imagination, configure the really real Visayan settler hegemony?

To make my interpretation coherent, my discussion on mimesis will revolve around the theme of the *relationship between self and the world through signs*. I shall offer an interpretation of the meanings of a specific ritual tukajan and of rituals in general that are so central to Manobo cosmology. An

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4) See Buenconsejo, "Spirit of the Act."

understanding of Manobo cosmos would include exploring notions of self-other relationships that Manobo ritual represents as both mental image and embodied/indicative ritual expression. As mimetic image, ritual harnesses the natural power that inherently accompanies ritual performance as a social action. After establishing this, I shall present the recent local history of the place, particularly detailing the Visayan regional domination of the research area so as to demonstrate how the attendant asymmetrical political relation is embodied in the paternalistic *amigo* (friend) spirit who advises subaltern Manobos.

### **I. The Manobo concept of Externalized Person (Utow) in the Manobo Cosmos: Life (Ginhawa), Dream, and Death (Umagad)**

Manobos think of a self that is in constant interaction with external entities of the world such as with all kinds of spirits (bound and unbound), souls of animals and plants, and souls of departed relatives. Even then, the self's doing-in-the-world is believed to have an awesome power for it can coerce the physical force of the cosmos, e.g., as in one's disorderly non-conventional illogical behavior which brings about the *anit* (lightning and thunder). As in spirit possession rituals, spiritual agencies of nature continually affect humans. Some are beneficial as in receiving grace (*pamaja*), while most are harmful to humans when they are smelled (*hankos*), touched (*dagpi*), and seen. In short, the Manobo idea of self is one construed as existing in a world of resemblance where animate things of that world are in sympathies with one another and they can affect other things multidirectionally; thus, the many prohibitions. The act of planting made by a pregnant woman, for example, can influence the foetus inside her womb by virtue of her activity of growing a plant that is competing with her own body's nourishing of its foetus. Likewise, Manobos believe that forces inherent in two similar things, e.g., often clashes. This was the case of two sick siblings who were advised to be separated from each other

because each of their *ginhawa* (vital principle) was affecting the other. The Manobo self therefore is not an autonomous bounded entity in the world with its enduring essence but an entity that resembles all other entities in that world. Just as spirits can unbind themselves to enter human bodies, even shift shapes as in witches, human beings too have a capacity to break the boundaries of the body and hence transgress the inner and outer dimensions of the embodied self. In the ensuing exposition, I explore the multi-dimensionality of the Manobo self, which is made up of inner and outer components that are capable of movement across the domains of the cosmos.

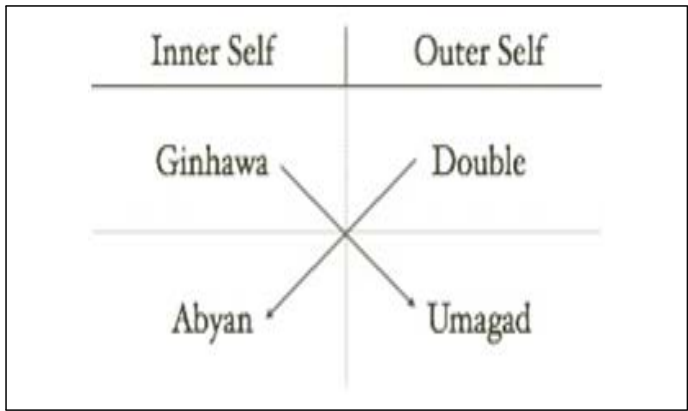


Figure 1. The Manobo Concept of Externalized Self

### 1.1 Ginhawa

Manobos call the vital principle of life inside the body, *ginhawa* (breath). This is a holistic concept, subsuming (1) physiology, (2) emotion, (3) thought, and (4) will. In Table 1 below, one can see the multi dimensionality of the Manobo concept. In the right column of the table, I list the specific senses or references to the term “*ginhawa*” as they were uttered in different contexts of speaking. In the table, the word is used to mean physical breath (see first row), as feeling (2nd row), as inner will (3rd row), and as thinking (4th).



**Table 1.** Denotations to the word *ginhawa*

Enunciative context	Actual statement	Sense
<b>1) Story:</b> Old woman approaching orphaned siblings and asking for food saying	Please give me a little food. <i>Apasi new ubag.</i> There's breath of mine which is poor. <i>Kæ ginhawaku' nmayetey.</i>	physiological
<b>2) Story:</b> narrator describing how sad the rejected wife of Ujahay was	Her breath was supposed to be heart broken. <i>Te ginhawa din pedem pagsubu din.</i>	emotional
<b>3) Ritual excerpt:</b> Sacrificer explaining to ritual officiant or sacrificer about his mistake	I warned them, but I didn't allow my will indeed. <i>Kabeye ku kandan, peru wada man isugut ginhawa ku.</i>	agentive (Will)
<b>4) Story:</b> Narrator describing the breath of the policeman as he was seeing the dying Juan.	"Eh," said the policeman, a policeman indeed, <i>"E," kagi't ka pulis, ne gajed ne pulis,</i> (who was) figuring out his breath there. <i>matik-matik ma't diya ginhawa din.</i> It was known. <i>Nama-an man te kuwa.</i>	rational (mind/thought)
<b>Ritual excerpt:</b> Ritual interpreter explaining the misunderstanding among patients being "diagnosed" by edium	Perhaps there was misunderstanding among you. <i>Siguru medu-en mge diperensya new.</i> Your "breath" had grievances. <i>Migsawa te ginhawa new.</i>	*rational (mind/thought)

## 1.2 Umagad

In addition, *ginhawa* is not bound to the body since birth; it is a detachable element, like a spirit or a soul of the cosmos, which can involuntarily or voluntarily move on its own. In the state of detachment or un-awareness such as in dreams, illness, and death, the *ginhawa* becomes another term, *umagad* (soul), a word that, I argue, does not differ in substance from the

ginhawa, but only in its state, i.e., the ginhawa is inside the body, while the umagad is outside of it. (See the arrow from upper left pointing to lower right in the figure above). That said, one can say that the umagad is an “alternate” term for ginhawa.<sup>5)</sup> Below are locutions that support my interpretation. These statements were culled from a recorded ritual performance. In the first, a ritual participant recounts his dream about a woman who killed a black dog and this speaker reflects on his thought using the word “umagad” (and not ginhawa) because he was in a dream state (read: his self was not in its usual place, which is inside the body). In the second and third locutions, the ritual interpreter describes the ill state of the patients, using the word “umagad” (not ginhawa) to mean the “souls” of the patient. In the last statement, the ritual officiant hails the soul of a dead relative.

**Table 2.** Denotations of the word umagad

Enunciative context	Actual statement	State
1) A ritual participant getting the “floor” of the ritual conversation to speak about his dream.	I dream about a woman who was black, <i>Migtaga-inep a behi ku ne ma-itum</i> , who got angry at me regarding (the person) <i>nabeyu ku'n kanay dew</i> who killed the black dog. <i>hintat migtigbas te kan iduq ne ma-itum</i> . My <u>soul</u> was able to say <i>Naka-iling isab te <u>umagad</u> ku ne</i>	The person or umagad in a <u>dream state</u> .
2) Ritual interpreter explaining to the sick patient about the cause of her illness	Eh, you were tied, your <u>soul</u> . <i>Eh, pighiketan kad ku'n te kuwa, nu <u>umagad</u></i> .	The person or umagad in an <u>ill state</u> .

5) Like the Christian Visayans' “All Soul’s Day,” Manobos also spend an effort in remembering the umagad of dead relatives annually.

Enunciative context	Actual statement	State
<p>3) Ritual interpreter speaking to the possessed medium after the spirit revealed (<i>nawnagen</i>) the image of catching the patient's soul</p>	<p>But Sabuya_n caught them,  <i>Peru nasakpan ni Sabuya_n</i>,  because this one has been chosen.  <i>kay si-e sabu-uk iyan napili-an.</i>  The soulwascaughtindeed.  <i>di nasakpan da te umagad.</i>  It was already going there (i.e., place of death).  <i>Egpatideg en man pedem diya.</i></p>	<p>The person or umagad in an <u>ill state.</u></p>
<p>4) Ritual officiant invoking the souls of the dead</p>	<p>Pity, I'm kneeling in front of <i>Adangay, migyuhud a't atubangan</i> of Iya Ibing's soul, (<i>clears throat</i>) <i>umagad ni Iya Ibing</i>, especially (because she is) our grandparent,  <i>ne mahilabi ka man te mge apuq ta</i>, including your soul Teryo. <i>hastasikunaTeryo.</i></p>	<p><u>Souls of the dead</u></p>

The English words "breath" for "spirit" and "soul" do not make this distinction, i.e., between entities of the body that are either inside or outside of it. Nor does the common, or what seems to be a Christian, understanding of the Filipino ethnopsychology about *ginhawa* and *kaluluwa* (the equivalent of the Manobo *umagad*), the former being located in the liver and the latter as "head soul" (Salazar). Based on the principle of detachability and fluidity of Manobo self's components, *ginhawa* does not co-exist at the same time. Unlike Christian Filipino ethnopsychology in which *kaluluwa* is the 'head soul' or is the substance of conscience, the Manobo concept of self, to re-iterate, is not interiorized, which does not mean Manobos do not have a capacity for self-awareness. In fact, guilt and wrong doings are admitted in public, in rituals that validate the socio-centric definition of individual lives. John Garvan, e.g., lists the many types of "trial by ordeal" in which the truth of guilt is established. For the Manobos, *ginhawa* or life is all there is inside the body, the seat of which is the liver.

### 1.3 Dungan (spirit double)

Connecting this permeability of the self, which has both inner and outer realms, to the right column of the paradigm (i.e., Figure 1 above), Manobos also believe that each living person has inherent linkages with nature in the form of a spirit-double who resides outside of oneself but is connected to the self's inner core by default. This elusive spirit double (in nature) of a person is referred to in Table 3 below, which is a recorded excerpt of ritual performance. The ritual participant, a woman, discloses that she no longer does the obligation to hold rituals in remembrance of her spirit helpers. The ritual interpreter accepts this statement about her forgetfulness, but then assures the woman that she has always been accompanied by her spirit-double and that is why real men still lust for her. The sponsor of this specific ritual, who happens to be the mother of this woman, reveals that this spirit resides in a tree, using the word "dungan" (or spirit-double).

**Table 3.** Excerpt of ritual where concept of spirit-double is articulated

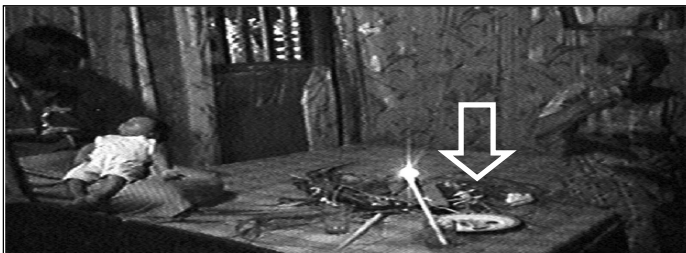
Excerpt from conversation among three ritual participants:	
<u>Woman:</u> I no longer remember the ritual obligation, child, since no resources are available to me.	<i>Wada ku'd man, utuq, demdema kan, su wada'g paka-apjew kanay.</i>
<u>Ritual Interpreter:</u> Correct. But you had always been accompanied there. That is why you desire the men.	<i>Lagi. Peru du-en da ikew pirmi da'g дума-дума. Purhisu kaliyag ka'g kuwa te mge yukes.</i>
<u>Ritual sponsor:</u> Wow! (Like a) 14-year old (teen-ager)! Together with that tree "double" in Waloe.	<i>Yati! 14 years old! <b>Dungan</b> te kan bænu diya't Walo.</i>
<u>Ritual Interpreter:</u> Indeed. Inherited (the lustful behavior).	<i>Iyan. Pamaka-irhinsya. (laughs)</i>
<u>Woman:</u> Why is that (lustful spirit) still seen?	<i>Nekey man kankatæ-an pad man?</i>

In everyday life, Manobos do not spend much time idly speculating about the invisible double that any person has, not until it is believed to bother the self, i.e., by giving the host person unease, sometimes very frequently and intensely.

Stemming from nature, this concept of spirit-double connected to a person at infancy is further evidence of the concept of the world of resemblance in which society and nature mimetically corresponds to and which is co-extensive to each other. No ritual can be so vivid a support to this interpretation than the *tukajan*, which is held for the benefit of an infant. In this example, I show evidence that ritual objects as icons do have substantial links to their actual referents in external reality.

#### 1.4 Tukajan

Tukajan is done to a young infant during periods when it is misbehaving, e.g., when it is always crying, a symptom of which—Manobos believe—is caused by irritations made the bound spirit of the skyworld who “owns” infants called Manda-it. The difficult-to-please infant undergoes this ritual for it is believed that the spirit-double of the baby is now signalling (with the consent of Manda-it, the owner of the twin-soul) that it wishes to connect with the ginhawa of the real infant, thus causing the baby to be prone to crying and tantrums. Manobos verbalize that the purpose of the ritual is *to register the existence of the baby in the spirit world, an idea that is consistent with the idea of mimetic correspondence among things in the cosmos being explained in this essay*. In the ritual, the pairing of the baby's ginhawa to its inherent counterpart in the world of nature, the baby's *twin-soul, its double*, is made. Despite the separateness of the body of the child and the body of the spirit-double, they are inherently linked to each other in Manobo perception.



**Plate 1.** Tukajan ritual. (Still photo from video documentation by the author)

In this ritual, the parents of the baby (left) seek the services of herbalist (right), oftentimes the midwife who assisted in the childbirth, and who then collects different plant species (at the center in the photo), the physical attributes of which will be magically or metaphorically transferred in the ritual proceedings to the two anthropomorphic carvings on tubers. (pointed out in the photo)<sup>6)</sup> These are the main objects of this type of ritual and they represent the real baby and its double. The ritual officiant talks to these icons in front of the real baby (being carried by his or her mother) and to its invisible counterpart in the cosmos or external reality. The icons are magically wiped with various species of plants so that the perceived characteristics are metaphorically transferred to the tuber representations that are believed to affect the real infant in actual world. A domesticated chicken is then sacrificed and the ritual officiant feeds the twin-figures with a mixture of rice, charcoal, and chicken blood, all of which are vital substances of human existence: rice for individual health, charcoal for earth (as all life leads to death), and sacrificial blood as a symbol of the spirit world that a person has to contend with in life. While feeding the icons of twin-souls with mixed substances, the officiant speaks to them as if alive, even chiding them to obey the feeder by tickling them, a representation of domestication or the incorporation of the baby's life to both society and nature. The icons are then placed in a ritual salver together with that plants and the representation of the sacrificial chicken. This is suspended on a bamboo pole outside the house for the spirits to see, an act recognizing or affirming the existence of the individual into the world of human society and nature spirits. These objects are signs that register the embeddedness of self in the world.

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6) The material of the twin replica is non-edible (for it is not possible for the ritual officiant to "cannibalize" one's own children).



**Plate 2.** Ritual officiant feeding the twin-figure in the Tukajan ritual.  
(Still photo from video documentation by the author)

## II. Enchantment or Spirits of the Old Environment

As Manobos grow up in a world filled with animate things—harm-inducing (sagman) environmental spirits, bloodthirsty ones, fickle-minded souls of departed relatives—some spirits, for mysterious reasons, are attracted to certain individuals, especially those who have a quiet and melancholic demeanor. Just as in the cause of tukajan in which the spirit-double desires to be coupled with the self's ginhawa, the attraction of nature spirit to the individual is dangerous for it yields illness on the part of person whose body becomes a host to a foreign entity. As in many cases, the person's spirit double harms the person and frequency of contact can range from mild to severe, the latter demanding that a mature and practicing medium is consulted to minister the divinatory ritual called *suyad*, which discerns the wants of the spirit double. Depending on the intensity of spirit-harm done, *suyad* is held through the years to fully appease the double's "desire" (*kiham*). In some instances, however, what causes the affliction are the spirit-familiars previously "owned" by dead relatives, and, in this case, those family-owned spirit-familiars

(*diwata*) are inherited from a previous generation. [See arrow from upper right pointing to lower left in Figure 1 above).

A “spirit-desired” person normatively becomes a medium later on in life, learning the lore, techniques, and practices of healing in “public” as he or she undergoes treatment in the divinatory rituals serially done for many years. Thus, to be a person in Manobo society is to be a consistent participant in Manobo rituals that, as it should be clear by now, is a mimetic representation of the Manobo cosmos or nature. What Manobo ritual effectively articulates is the concept of a non-interiorized self in which subjectivity is constantly renewed through ritual symbolizations in public. It is for this reason that ritual is coached as a social obligation. It is, in fact, as most rituals elsewhere, an external instrument or a technology necessary for validating one’s identity. Ritual fosters a sense of belongingness and puts an individual into a social category in the cosmos or community.<sup>7)</sup>

Ritual interpreters whom I interviewed about this matter mention that a sick person begins to incarnate spirit symptoms, manifesting them first in dance in the early years of the healing period, and then, through singing, which happens only at the end of the healing period. Thus, a metamorphosis of the body of a sick person materializes. Song is heard as a voice of the spirit in the medium’s body when it is finally “befriended” or “domesticated” to speak. A spirit-possession ritual, the most complex of all Manobo rituals, re-lives the mimetic transformation of a spirit, once hostile, but now invading the medium’s body as a compassionate being.

In possession rituals, the ritual intermediary invokes the presence of a spirit familiar to incarnate in the medium’s body so it can divine the causes of illness and misfortune. The Manobo term “hinang” (to make) is synonymous with the act of

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7) Anthropologists of religion distinguish between modes of articulation and individual identity, between that borne in ritual and that which is formed through conscience and sincerity. See Adam Seligman, *Ritual and Its Consequences*.



the medium trembling or *yana-an*, a symptom of spirit incarnation, which is accompanied by the spirit's voice singing *tud-om*. This enchanting song is the indexical icon, a mimetic sign of the spirit's presence as it transcends its spiritual sphere to become human-like in the beginning of the act of possession. In my research, I found out that different kinds of spirits emanate from the medium's body as proofs of what are taking place in various moments in the ritual performance as it unfolds. In my research, I analyzed complete ritual discourses in order to find out the underlying pattern of the appearances of the singing spirit. This spirit appears at the onset of possession. The male elder spirit soon follows, incarnating during the time when the pig sacrifice is about to be killed. This spirit, depicting its status as once a warrior, dances around the sacrifice before killing the animal. Manobos narrate that the harm done to the animal substitutes for the patient's illness, thus the animal's death functions in a symbolic exchange in which customary justice is exercised. In the part of the ritual before the commensal meal, the spirit of cooked offerings appears as the mimetic gesture of demonstrating the dwelling of happiness as food is received by the spirit and shared to participants, both spirits and humans. The singing spirit is associated with human compassion and is heard in critical moments as a gesture of expressing pity. No wonder, its being heard in the beginning of the ritual marks the transformation of the spirit's alterity into an identity, resembling humans who take pity on each other.

If the enchanting song represents the world of Manobos whose landscape was once heavily forested, the present world shared with the Visayan settlers spells another real social world. In the next section, I shall explore how the Visayans have encroached Manoboland, especially during the logging boom of the 1950s to 1960s, bringing with it the silencing of the enchanted Manobo ritual voice-in-song and the introduction of another form of human sociability and culture that corresponded with the local modern hierarchical Visayan-Manobo society. It is this context that led to the emergence of a hybrid Manobo ritual.

### III. Manobo Experience of Visayan Modernity, Compadrazgo Social Relations, and its Embodiment in Hybrid Manobo Ritual

Manobos have had contacts with coastal peoples who speak Butwano and Cebuano languages deep in their local history. Their land used to be guarded from encroachments of Muslims in the South who were known to have abducted people for slave trade, by a Spanish fort in Linao (now called Bunawan) built sometime in the 18th century (Schreurs). Proof of this is the incorporation of the 18th century Spanish popular dance music *fandango*, which is still in the repertory of struck bamboo zither music (Buenconsejo 2008). In late 19th century, settlements were trading posts formed that went hand in hand with the Spanish effort to evangelize the natives to Catholic religion. The Spanish colonial government adopted the strategy of bringing with them Christian-baptized coastal people (*binenyagan*) whose sedentarized lives enticed the native population to live in what the Spanish officials called *reduccion* that later evolved into towns. It was this colonial history of cross-cultural encounter between coastal Filipinos and inland "pagans" that transformed Manobo culture. From this encounter, Manobos learned to build two houses, one along the market roads leading to the Visayanized settlements and one in the forest where their gardens are located and where traditional rituals are still performed. This colonial encounter continued into the 20th century, but the most radical changes that transformed Manobo landscape came as a result of massive in-migration of Visayan peoples who worked in logging camps from 1950s to 1960s. In the following, I provide details into inland-seacoast commerce because this forms the political-economic context by which to understand the embodiment of the Visayan spirit friend *amigo*.

In May 1947, a Butwano-speaking native from Talacogon named Demokrito O. Plaza (nicknamed "D.O.") inherited the logging concession in Loreto.<sup>8)</sup> He inherited it from his uncle Mr.

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8) Coastal natives with whom the inland Manobos have traded presumably before the Visayans came and who speak an entirely different language called

Osin, who could not manage the concession because he was then busy with local politics (see Viacrucis; Severino).<sup>9)</sup> D.O. enlisted the help of the Manobos in Mamba-os to survey the land concession of the forested interiors and concession borderlands and enticed them to cut the trees for him in *exchange for household goods*. At this time D.O., aged 26, was already an experienced trader in the lower parts of Agusan River, having worked as a storekeeper (tinderu) in a coastal town, later as a cutter of logs near Talacogon (where he originated), a farmer of rice, corn and tobacco in Prosperidad, and finally as a river trader. He paddled upriver to buy rice, corn and other farm products to sell in Butu-an downriver. In turn, he bought goods in Butu-an which were needed in the upriver towns. He earned enormous profits as a go-between in this trafficking of farm products inland and manufactured goods from the coast.

During the early phase of D.O.'s logging operations (1947-1956), when no mechanical instruments were available, logging work was difficult. The only extension of the Manobo's "manpower" was the carabaos (lined up together in as much as a group of seven), which dragged the trees to "landings" called "skids." Some trees along the banks were simply brought down *tumbatubig* (Ceb. phrase meaning "felling the tree on water"), drifting in the river current to the "landings" where they are collected.<sup>10)</sup> There the logs were tied together with iron bands before they were ready to be floated further downstream to the main "log pond" in Sabang Kawayanan. These logging techniques continue to the present day. In the past, D.O. Plaza measured the logs in cubic meters and paid the Manobos involved for their logging labor.

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Butwanon which is now going extinct due to Visayan hegemony.

9) Severino reports in his article that some Manobos believed D.O. to be a Manobo because he can speak Manobo. He pointed out how D.O. "cultivated" this myth.

10) Some of the tree species cut were apitong, molave, lawa-an, lanipaw, narra, nangilan, and bay-ang.



**Plate 3.** Logs floated downstream for the market (Photo by Charles Buenconsejo)

In 1953, D.O. Plaza established a logging base in Mamba-os (originally in Bahayan, Trento in 1952), where the main operations of his logging enterprise were to be supervised.<sup>11)</sup> This was not the only logging camp in Loreto. Plaza had stations in Johnson and Binukayan, deep in the forested interior. Furthermore, many other logging camps were established about the same time and later. The base in Mamba-os was to survive until 1975, and Manobos in Poblacion have vivid memories of the place, some working there from mid 1950s to mid 1970s. For this base D.O. brought with him hundreds of workers from the Eastern Visayan region and neighboring provinces in Mindanao. In 1967 alone, the logging base in Mamba-os had 1,672

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11) At around the same D.O. had already began diversifying into river transportation, which transported passengers to and fro Butu-an and the river towns. In 1954, he acquired a “department store” in Butu-an where D.O.’s employees bought their necessities, in effect multiplying D.O.’s profits: D.O. gave “wages” to his employees who then “return” them by buying goods from his own store and paying for the rides in his river launches. When D.O.’s logging company mechanized, he also instituted the D.O. Plaza Enterprises which was, in fact, the engineering service component of his logging instruments, but which also made new launches thus expanding his river transportation business more. Later on, he had buses plying the national highway, a sawmill in Butu-an. He had also expanded into real estate in Cebu and bought a cement plant in the same province, then one of only two cement companies in the country. Some of this cement was exported to the U.S.A.

employees. According to an interviewee who worked in the payroll department of this logging camp during that time, around 75 percent of the workers were Manobos. They constituted the “unskilled” work force, while the remaining 25 percent “white collar” jobs in the logging stations were given to Visayans.

Even earlier, in 1956, some 2,000 workers were said to be employed by D.O. This estimate is probably exaggerated, but it reveals that the logging industry was already in full swing at that time (for the “official” data regarding Philippine sawn log exports, see Severino 31). “Manpower logging” required a tight-knit coordination of many men and carabaos. In 1956, D.O. mechanized his operations and bought from Japan noisy machines that cut, pulled, and dragged logs into the vehicles. In March 1958 (just a few years after gaining the Japanese capital), D.O. Plaza’s log production had soared to seven million board feet a month (Viacrucis 60). This frenzied deforestation was to be sustained for many years, well into the 1960s. In that decade, the Plazas were said to be exporting some 10,000 cubic meters of wood out of Butu-an, earning as much as 80 million pesos over the decade (Severino 32). In 1967 alone, the logging base in Mamba-os had 35 dump trucks (some can still be seen abandoned there, together with the cemented flooring of some of the buildings of the camp), 28 trailer-trucks, 31 trucks, and six yarders. Some of D.O.’s boats, totaling 40, pulled the logs accumulated in Sabang Kawayanan all the way to Butu-an where some “saw logs” were processed for plywood and timber while the prized, hardwood “round logs” went to Japan.

The establishment of the D.O. logging base in Mamba-os created a different form of exchange between Manobos and Visayans. It created a kind of trading *which looked more like “employment” or alienated labor, where Manobos now sold their labor like commodities*, unlike in the days of older plain trading, where Manobos cut logs and exchanged these with household goods that D.O. had in Sabang Kawayan.<sup>12)</sup> However, the new

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12) This was the older trade relationship when the Manobos bartered their abaca hemp with the Visayans for household goods in the past.

mode of exchange did not simply supplant the older barter-like trading. The two forms existed side by side and the barter form is still very much in existence in Loreto today, where isolated individuals are “contracted” by merchants in Butu-an to cut trees for them in exchange for money.<sup>13)</sup>

Along with this concept of alienated or commodified Manobo labor came a growing Manobo desire for Visayan goods. While a small volume of trade items in the past resulted in the procurement of the inexpensive household items listed above, during the 1960s, ready-to-wear jeans, t-shirts, and battery-operated phonographs were deducted from Manobo salaries in exchange for more “luxurious” goods. Today, of course, electronic amplifiers and microphones are exchanged for such labor.

Indeed, a profound social and material transformation accompanied the entry of Visayan capital into the research area (beginning in the 1950s). Many of the logging personnel whom D.O. brought with him to the logging camp opted to remain in the area after the company closed operations during the mid 1970s. But by that time, the town was already established and looked roughly the way it does today. An intricate government bureaucracy had already established itself, supporting services such as public education, health clinics, and the always-present military operations of the state. Coveted positions in this bureaucracy went to the Visayan logging workers who stayed behind, predictably enough, because the government institutions could not have existed without the technology of writing that the outsiders practiced. Even during the 1960s, of course, the government bureaucracy included Manobos who had acquired the necessary educational capital needed to enter civil service. But since the Visayans brought these institutions, the number of

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13) In fact, this is the very problem that is happening in areas near Kasapa (where forest cover is still available) right now. Instead of selling their logs to Sta. Inez—which has the full legal right to the logs because of a timber license agreement (TLA)—isolated individuals preferred selling them directly to merchants in Butu-an who are willing to pay for them at a higher price. This disadvantages the management of Sta. Inez because the cuttings are illegal from the company’s point of view, i.e., they should have gotten of the logs in the first place.

Manobo workers has been historically few and continues to be low today. The Visayans comprise the majority of the present local elite, and almost all of them know how to read and write. Literate Visayans contrast with most of the inland Manobos, particularly those living outside the town center, whose culture is still primarily oral. Literacy is therefore a very palpable material sign of “modernity” which Manobos in town use to differentiate themselves from other indigenous, “savage” groups in the mountains. Along with literacy, Manobos in town look into the imported notion of civility and new ways of behaving in a public space.

In terms of sociability, friendships or non-kin ties between Manobos and Visayans evolved from the cross-cultural encounter just mentioned. This social relation is fostered by the Catholic religion itself in which sacraments given to new members of the church are witnessed by their *parents with their friends, neighbors, and peers*. This social system of friendship is called *compadrazgo* and is validated in Christian rituals like baptism and marriage where parents of the celebrants normatively seek the role of godparenthood as *ninong* (Spanish: *padrinos*) and *ninang* (*madrinas*) the children of their friends, co-workers, and neighbors.<sup>14)</sup> In some instances, prospective godparents themselves would volunteer to assume the position.

Biological and godparents call each other *kumpare* or *kumare*, a naming relationship that hails reciprocal, affective, moral bonds among them, however non-enduring the relations may be, and thus creating a social network in a community that cross-cuts blood-based kin grouping. *Compadrazgo* is glossed in Philippine Studies as “ritual kinship” because, unlike consanguinous and affinal ties, the relation is expressed in the

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14) There is a rich literature on this topic on social organization in Philippines Studies, which has been mostly theorized during the 1970s using the then dominant structuralist-functionalist framework. The more recent study by Paul Matthews (1994) is interesting because it characterizes the system as fluid and highlights the study from a more processual standpoint such as using the concept of performance theory and symbolic exchange of shared children that creates social order in a peasant community in Surigao.

said Christian rituals that are highlighted with feasting, drinking, and fellowship.

Dominant in lowland Christian Filipino culture throughout, but with varying degrees of instrumentality elsewhere in the Philippines, the system that I observed and documented in Agusan Manobo clearly fosters mutual-help between rich and poor families, an instrumental social function that does not, of course, exclude moral rights and social obligations to the interpersonal relations. The fortunate families are sought after by the less fortunate ones so as to gain access to money and other resources in times of need and employment in the local bureaucracy, while the latter would reciprocate by readily accepting requests for assistance of labor for their better off counter parts, especially during fiestas and other needs. This system lends an appearance of solidarity despite the seething material gap between rich and poor in terms of access to resources that characterize social life in Agusan del Sur or elsewhere in the Philippines.

Herein lies the productive force of rituals to reconfigure the contradictions of the material world or reality.<sup>15)</sup> Christian ritual of the compadrazgo relations in Agusan del Sur masks the true political asymmetry by simulating social harmony in peoples' lives despite the cultural and material gaps. And this masking is also evident in the hybrid type of Agusan Manobo ritual where a Visayan-speaking spirit is incarnated. It is interesting to note that this spirit is addressed as *amigo* (friend) and noticeably comes from the body of an officiating Manobo medium that is bilingual, having lived in a place populated by Visayans who are neighbors and friends.<sup>16)</sup> To compare, the spirits in the older Manobo pantheon of spirit familiars embody the once-enchanted world in

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15) For a recent extensive discussion on this issue, see Seligman, *Ritual and its Consequences*.

16) This type of Manobo ritual is characterized by the use of guitar simulating the gong-and-drum pair, different ritual offerings that correspond to the Visayan spirit identity which does not drink sacrificial pig's fresh blood raw, but drinks fresh egg instead and smokes cigarettes. See Buenconsejo, *Songs and Gifts at the Frontier*.



which Manobo subsistence is based (rotational swidden farming, occasion hunting, and frequent fishing). In contrast, the amigo spirit is an embodiment of the new Visayan-dominated social order. The male elder of the past—appearing during the killing of the animal sacrifice—is an icon to customary justice and symbolic exchange of blood sacrifice. In contrast, the amigo appears like a Visayan friend of the *compadrazgo* who offers paternalistic commands and offers Christian morality.

Below is an excerpt of a ritual dialogue with the Visayan spirit, who is addressed as *amigo*, which is a non-kin term. In this excerpt, the Visayan spirit speaks in Visayan but the ritual interpreter speaks Manobo. In conversational lines before [F], the medium remembers the wrongdoing of bringing the patients to the hospital within the proscribed three-day period after an initial healing ritual, which was not complete (it had no sacrificial altar outside the house). The medium informs the patients that they were punished since they were not, after all, cured in the hospital. The medium then asserts that spirit helpers are not Satan's creation. Mention of this Christian concept of evil brings the topic of judgment day in [F]. The medium speaking the Visayan spirit's voice uses the Visayan term "maymay," which refers to the act of advising that nags. This is evident in the following statements in which the medium repeats the topic of the patients' family's wrongdoing. The *amigo* spirit therefore has a commanding presence and, unlike the Manobo male elder—addressed as grandfather and is appeased with blood sacrifice—the *amigo* spirit is a mimesis of Visayan authority, which may remind of Visayan patrons—the priest, the logging company boss, the local leader, the school teacher—whose opinions are respected in day-to-day life.

Medium: That my friend will be good  
that, but...in those past days my  
friend,

they trespassed.<sup>17)</sup>

Ritual Interpreter or Intermediary:

*Kana amigu ma-ayu ra man kana,  
peru...kadtung nag-agi amigu nga*

*adlaw, naglapas sila.*

*Sayup man silakay, wala may urder*

They made a mistake, since they didn't have any order

*nila*

to bring the sick to the hospital. They were given three days to stay put.

*nga i-adtu sa huspital. Gitagalan pa sila ugtulu ka adlaw*

Medium: It's necessary my friend.

*Kinahanglan amigu.*

If this (spirit helper) will no longer assume responsibility, my friend,

*Kung dili na kini amigu,*

Ritual Interpreter: If they surrender, that is the time

*Kung musurindir siya, kana ayha pa,*

when the spirits will suggest that they can bring the patients there.

*kay motudlu man sila nga i-adtu didtu.*

But since Brother Narciso made a mistake, that is why, that is their

*Peru kay nakalapas man si Pare Narciso, ma-u na nga, ma-u na'y ilang*

Medium: That was punished my friend! That happened so they will realize. Indeed.

*Kana gisilutan, amigu! nga kana gipa-ila. Ma-u kana.*

Patient's grandmother: Correct, the sick were brought to the hospital instead.

*Lagi, nasi ing-andiya't huspital.*

The Visayans are against this, (like) this ritual.

*Kontra't mge bisaya, anged te si-e.*

Medium: That...what happened? Here.

*Nga gi-unsu kana? Kini.*

Audience: (The ritual) can be contemplated upon, can be made.

*Masud-ung, mabuhat.*

Medium: This (ritual), ritual my friend. Because there was no...what was that?

*Kini, buhat-buhat amigu. Kay walay ...unsu kadtu?*

(The ritual) wasn't complete in preparation there my friend.

*walay mga kumplitu amigu diha kaninyu.*

Hhm, this one wasn't there. None of this.

*Hhm, kini wala pa. Wala kini.*

Ritual Interpreter: Yes, since they should have been done together.<sup>18)</sup>

*U kay unta dungan na sila.*

Medium: If they were only together, some results could have been seen.

*Kung kana na, na-a nay makita.*

There should have been an altar here.<sup>19)</sup>

*Na-ay balay-balay diri ba.*

Then this will be completely done together here...the pig.

But we my friend, (we ask for) nothing. We don't need, we'll just help.

Hhm. We'll help as long as we can. What will that do? These spirits my friend,<sup>20)</sup>

those are not from Satan. Huh! In fact, my friend, those evil spirits and what else?

Ritual Interpreter: (Bad) Mind.

[F]

Medium: That's it, my friend. But they were advised, my friend,<sup>21)</sup>

that they won't make that, since the judgement day of God is near already. Huh.

[clipped]

That's it. We know, my friend, since we always visit (human beings).

Ritual Interpreter: They said that they always visit there.

Medium: Those who ask for pity, my friend, no matter what mistakes, my friend,

we don't...what is that?

Ritual Interpreter: Hhm, they will still, will still help, will still be received by the

Companions. Sometimes

Medium: (referring to the patients' parents) They made a mistake. They brought them there (to the hospital),

Without us knowing my friend. But this one made a mistake,<sup>22)</sup>

that this friend came here in order to get the herbs/medicines in order

*Unya kumpletu magdungan  
kini...babuy.*

*Peru kami amigu, wala. Dili kami  
magkinahanglan, basta mutabang  
kami.*

*Hhm. Mutabang kami kutub sa  
mahimu. Mu-unsang kana? Kini amigu  
mga engkantu,*

*dili nga kana mga Satanas. Huh! Gani  
man, amigu, kanang mga da-utan ug  
mga unsa kana?*

*Huna-huna.*

*Kana amigu. Peru gimaymayan sila,  
amigu,*

*nga dili buhatun kana, kay du-ul na  
ang paghukum sa Ginu-u amigu. Huh.*

*Ma-u kana. Kami nasayud kami  
amigu, kay kanunay kami nagbisita.*

*Kanunay daw sila nagbisita didtu sa.*

*Kanang magpakilu-uy amigu, bisan  
unsa'y kasaypanan amigu,*

*wala kami... nag-unsang kana?*

*Hhm, nagku-an gihapun, nagtabang  
gihapun, gidawat gihapun sa mga*

*kasama. Usahay.*

*Sila nakasayup. Gisulud nila didtu,*

*nga wala kami masayud amigu. Peru  
nasayup kini,*

*nga nag-anhi pa dinhi kini si amigu  
nga mukuha'g tambal nga para*

to...what's that?

*mu...unsa kadu?*

Ritual Interpreter: In order to place them on the patients' body supposedly, but when they came back

*Para idapat unta, peru pagbalik nila*

Patient's Father: In order that the sick will be able to defecate. That was why,

*Para maka-indes iyan. Kaling man,*

this tried hard, your posses see<sup>23</sup>). I also made a mistake.

*naningkamot si-e, pigbeyesan new. Nasayep a man iyan isab.*

Indeed we met on the way to the hospital. I was able to reach the hospital first,

*Nahitagbu da man gajed. Naka-unasi-e lang gamay diya't huspital,*

before she got out of the place there (where she gathered herbs). Yet it was a good day,

*adesir kandin makayegwa duten. Peru madejew da man isab,*

the sound of the turtle dove was favorable.

*te kuwa din limuken.*

#### IV. Summary and Conclusion

From the exploration above, I discussed the crucial role of Manobo cultural imagination in "imitating" or making copies of the real into a sign that, in turn, configures that reality, the sign's referent. This mimetic sign, in complex form, is multisensorial ritual, a man-made product (*hinang in Manobo or*

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17) Medium reminds of the ritual taboo violation again.

18) The interpreter is suggesting here that the preparations for the rituals of the *Inajew* and the personal spirit, Sul\_an, should have been planned simultaneously.

19) Referring to the simulated house where food offerings are placed for the spirits. See *Songs and Gifts*, Chapter 3.

20) The medium uses the term *engkantu*, because the spirit speaking in the medium is Visayan.

21) Medium reminds of the previous advice given by the spirits that the patients should not have gone to the place where they got ill.

22) Medium expresses that she herself also made a mistake; she should have not assumed the responsibility to cure the patients. After all, the patients' family did not trust her.

23) Referring to medium's effort to cure.

*buhat-buhat* in Visayan) that represents Manobo relationships with spirit-filled nature and society. Everyday practices of swidden agriculture, gathering of forest products, fishing, occasional hunting, and travels in the Manobo cosmos always potentially carries risks of offending the environmental spirits and Manobo rituals are the very means of controlling these inexplicable supernatural forces that bring illness and death. Rather than the mere mirroring of this external reality or its impressing an image into one's mind (*mimema*), I have shown that rituals create—by way of poetic imagination—that reality by imposing a constructed social order into it. They produce the ideology of self-other relationships that is the basis of the concept of the externalized self.

Manobos exhibit their understanding of themselves in ritual, which is put to good use when spirits identities are inverted so that they become human-like in ritual, expressing pity on humans. The transformation of nature-as-other into the image of one's self is also best observed in *tukajan* ritual where the twin-soul is fed with food to domesticate the foreign entity into a cultural being. The idea of magic operates here because, by acting on the sign/representation of the real, the Manobos get to influence that reality.

In short, mimesis is taken up not as a mere pictorial mental mage of nature but a *poetic sign that truly incarnates a spirit substance in a ritual performance*. Unlike classical Greek concept of mimesis as "make believe," ritual is "magical" for the Manobos in two senses: 1) it is real because what is seen in ritual is "true" (i.e., the image has a substantial link to the cosmos, a belief in a world of resemblance), and 2) because, in Maussian terms, ritual has practical efficacies that spirit incarnations indicate and bring about.

In Manobo ritual, it is *the spirit-substance that enables the materialization of dialogue between humans and spirits*. Through this self-other conversation, humans are able to negotiate with spirits about causes of illnesses, just as they are able to name and domesticate the twin soul in *tukajan*. This exchange of

words between selves and others is also paralleled with the symbolic exchange of death with life in elaborate versions of Manobo ritual, thanks to a sacrificial animal victim, a surrogate, which mediates the gap between nature and society. It is important for us to appreciate that this mimetic mind is more pronounced in a group of people who have depended upon nature's gifts for its survival.

But what happened in a context when survival meant no longer the hunts and fruits of the forest, but exchanging one's sweat or labor—death (to invoke Braudillard)—for the modern abstract paper money that the Visayan settlers had brought with them inland and that Manobos now depend on survival?

I discussed in the second part of this essay the Visayan settler Christian *compadrazgo* friendship relation that reconfigured social relationships between Manobos and Visayans into amity or social harmony despite the material gaps between those who have the means and the have-nots in the research area. It is most likely that the Manobos had incorporated the imported non-kin rituals of *compadrazgo* since the 1950s with less effort because *compadrazgo*, being associated with food, drinking, and merry making, is irresistible. Ritual feasting that solidifies interpersonal Christian ritual kinship relation is an easy ingredient to legitimate the new social order.

The incarnation of the Visayan spirit in the hybrid Manobo ritual bespeaks the same impulse in which Manobo social experience of the dominant coastal Visayan culture is contained and talked to across difference. This is an efficacy of magic again in the Maussian mode. The other—the Visayan spirit—is incarnated, addressed as a friend who is forced to respond. Embodying a local colonial history, this spirit is clearly a mimesis of the current political economy. What is demanded in the present mixed Manobo-Visayan community with hybrid modern culture is no longer blood sacrifice that is pertinent to the previous world of hunting-gathering culture. Instead, present hybrid Manobo ritual constitutes a representation that simulates friendship ties and social harmony, reconfiguring the actual

contradictory asymmetrical exploitative economic set-up of alienated or commodified labor.

Herein lies the power of ritual; at the level of symbols, it is at ease with ambiguities and is at home to norms and ideals. At least for now, hybrid Manobo ritual is able to reproduce a social order—the Manobos experiencing life in a Visayan-dominated local modern world. In this essay, Manobo ritual is not an unchanging practice but has responded to culture change. It had gained new meanings and transformed itself. Indeed it must adapt to the vicissitudes of the modern cosmos, which unleashes spirits that are really substantially rooted and linked to material world.

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