

DEFINING *PAG-IPAT*: A MULTIMODAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF MAGUINDANAON'S HEALING RITUAL

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ABSTRACT

Pag-ipat (ritual against disease) is a traditional healing ritual of the Maguindanaon people in the southern Philippines. Devoid of Islamic components, it is based on numerous ideas such as possession, invisible spirits, mythological history, and the offering of sacrifice. This study explores the signs and symbols incorporated in pag-ipat. Through a multimodal semiotic analysis, specifically ethnographic observation, this research determines the meanings conveyed by the semiotic resources used, expounds on how semiotic resources are orchestrated to communicate meaning, and rationalises the ideology expressed in the ritual performance. Findings reveal that the resources utilised in the performance of pag-ipat communicate gratitude and love, recognition, honour, appreciation, journey, generosity, kindness, recognition of their ancestor, invitation to the neighbours and the community, healing, enlightenment, freedom from darkness, identity marker, greediness, and life. Through the manner of installing the pandala (flags), the presence of the sambulayang (set of flags), the quantity of food, the quality of the cloth, the number of days spent in the ritual, the design of the food and clothing material, the dance movement of the medium, and the kulintang music produced by the performers, the healing rite manifests social standing and artistic skill of the performers. The practise of pag-ipat tells us that regardless of Maguindanaon's observance of Islam as official religion, some believe in the existence of ancestral spirits, mythological entities, and spirit animals,

which has a significant impact on their beliefs and behaviour. Thus, ritual elements increase signification and meaning-making potentials in the discourse environment because of their iconicity, indexicality, and meaning-making potentiality.

Keywords: *Pag-ipat*, semiotics, meaning-making, ideology, Maguindanaon

INTRODUCTION

The Maguindanaon people, known as the “people of the flood plains”, are part of the wider Moro ethnic group in the southern Philippines and constitute the sixth-largest Filipino ethnic group. Tracing back history, Maguindanaon is the name of the people living near the mouth of Pulangi or Maguindanao River before the arrival of Shariff Kabungsuan in the fourteenth century and the discovery of the Philippines by Magellan in 1521 (Sugadol 2015). The Pulangi originates in the mountains near the Liguasan Marsh and Lake Buluan. The natives in this vicinity were known as *maginged* (settlers) of the *danao* (lake) (Sugadol 2015). These Muslim inhabitants are known to have distinct beliefs, customs, and local traditions (Guiapal 2003) and they recognise the presence of an array of natural spirits interacting with the human world (Williams 1997). Despite adhering to Islamic principles, some Maguindanaons still believe in unseen spirits and practise old healing rituals, especially in isolated areas unaffected by city activity (Maceda 1984). The *pagagamot* (shaman/traditional healer) has the power to cure anyone who is afflicted with a particular illness by employing rites and incantations to treat illnesses and disorders.

The word “ritual” originates from the Latin terms *ritus* and *ritualis* which refer to the regulated ceremonial order for a liturgical service and the book that outlines this order, respectively (Bell 1992). Rituals are communally planned and carried out events featuring an interaction between memory and imagination expressed via bodily motions (Bell 1992). A healing ritual is a form of traditional or alternative medicine rooted in spiritual or religious practices (Haque et al. 2018). Depending on the culture, a healing ritual may involve various ceremonies and materials to treat physical, mental, or emotional problems. Each indigenous or local community possesses a unique body of traditional knowledge and practices developed over centuries and passed down to succeeding generations. The *pag-ipat* is a healing ritual that dates back to the pre-Islamic Maguindanaon culture. During the said ritual, a medium known as *pedtunong* enters into a trance and is believed to be possessed by a healing spirit. The spirit uses the *kulintang* (musical instrument

made up of metal gongs) a type of melodic gong music, to promote healing, as documented in a study by Maceda in 1984. With the aid of a medium, this ceremony is presented as an act of giving thanks to the spirits or as a treatment for afflictions including a troubled mind, coldness of the body, a persistent fever, and spiritual or physical sickness. Moreover, the *pag-ipat* ritual is infused with meaningful symbols (Maceda 1984), making it a good source of folk expression worthy of scholarly investigation.

This researcher finds semiotics to be a viable optics to investigate the Maguindanaon ritual. Semiotics focuses on the ways people find and construct meaning (Danesi and Perron 1999) by studying signs and symbols as a significant part of communication. It provides a vital lens through which ritual messages may be viewed. Umberto Eco (1976), an Italian semiotician and novelist, claims that every cultural phenomenon might be studied as communication (Caesar 1999). Since all ritual forms are communicative, as Dow (1986) states, a healing ritual makes for an exciting topic to explore using a semiotic framework and analysis.

Scholars studying multimodal semiotic phenomena aim to identify how various forms of communication interact to create meaning within texts. They analyse how language, gaze, gesture, vocal features, and proxemics work together in semiotic acts and discourse. Understanding these interactions can help us better appreciate the range of semiotic phenomena and affordances discernible in multimodal texts. Scholars who have built their work on Halliday's social semiotic theory of language (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Martin 1992), also known as systemic functional linguistics theory, have shown the way to a comprehensive explanation of multimodal semiosis by calling attention to sign-making as a motivated social process rather than just as a product and (isolated, self-contained) sign system. They cite Hodge and Kress' (1988) focus on the "functions and social uses of semiotic systems, the complex interrelations of semiotic systems in social practice" (Bateman 2008: 8; also, O'Halloran 1999, 2004; Baldry and Thibault 2006; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2001; Jewitt 2009; Lemke 2002).

More investigation regarding the traditions and practices of Maguindanaon needs to be done. Unfortunately, only a few works of literature that tackle their traditional beliefs are available (Guiapal 2003). Most of the research studies were conducted in the 1980s by foreign researchers. With this in mind, this study would like to explore the healing ritual of the Maguindanaon as a medium for communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is based on the study of signs or semiotics, by employing the Multimodal Social Semiotic Theory. Social semiotics takes a distinct approach to language as it focuses on the use of language in social circumstances and how language shapes society, rather than describe a set of grammatical communication standards (Danesi and Perron 1999). Social semiotics moreover demonstrates how the communicator uses semiotic instruments, whether in verbal or visual communication, to achieve their aims. Social semiotics allows for the uncovering of the social role and meaning potential of representations within the context of communication, and how these create and contribute to cultural environments. Furthermore, social semiotics examines linguistic characteristics of communicative acts to observe social interactions, power dynamics, meaning, the motivations of sign producers, the intended audience, and the social goals that texts serve (Alvarez 2016). However, the shift in the current communication landscape, from purely linguistic to a combination of various forms of communication, also calls for a conceptualisation of new theories of meaning and communication (Jewitt 2008; Jewitt and Kress 2003; Kress 2003). The difficulties posed by linguistic description due to the modifications in textual production, design, and distribution are addressed by multimodality. Following Halliday’s thinking, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), Jewitt (2006), and Machin (2007) have established the multimodal social semiotic approach to communication.

Multimodality refers to “approaches that perceive communication and representation to be more than just about language and which respond to the complete range of communicational forms humans use such as image, gesture, gaze, posture, and the links between them” (Jewitt 2009: 2). The foundation of the multimodal approach is a social semiotic understanding of language and communication that employs a heuristic method of examining meaning construction and sign generation components. This approach shapes how individuals create, negotiate, and distribute meaning. The multimodal method dissects texts into constituent parts through which their relationships can be understood (Alvarez 2016). Several scholars have acknowledged that all communication is multimodal (Kress, 2010; Machin, 2007; O’Halloran and Smith 2011).

Influenced by Halliday’s (1978) work and derived from different perspectives on meaning-making and multimodality, this study uses the following concepts: semiotic resource, mode, affordance, and orchestration.

A semiotic resource is central to multimodality. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that a semiotic resource connects representational resources with what people do with them. Van Leeuwen (2005) describes semiotic resources as follows:

Semiotic resources are the actions, materials, and artefacts we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically, for example, with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures, or technologically, for example, with pen and ink, or computer hardware and software, together with how these resources are organised. Semiotic resources have a meaning potential based on their past uses and a set of affordances based on their possible uses. These will be actualised in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to a semiotic regime. (285)

Within social semiotics, emphasis is given to the idea that rules are socially made and changeable through social interaction (Van Leeuwen 2005). Incidentally, Van Leeuwen also notes that the notion of resource has begun to replace the notion of sign (2005).

The idea of a semiotic resource then allows researchers a starting point from which to consider semiotic systems and the function of the sign creator in the meaning-making process. According to this viewpoint, signs result from a social sign-creation process. A person (the sign creator) picks one sign from a system of available semiotic resources. They combine a signifier (a semiotic tool) with the message they wish to convey (the signified). However, humans express meaning by selecting from the semiotic resources that are available at any given time. The system decides on the selection process. Nevertheless, this decision is always socially situated and controlled by those who have access to the resources. In the same vein, the selection process is also affected by surrounding discourses that shape and control people's use of modalities. Discourses pertaining to power and identity (such as gender, social class, race, generation, and institutional norms) significantly impact how individuals utilise semiotic resources. These are social rules rather than codes in the sense that they cannot be altered and are just there (Van Leeuwen 2005). In the healing practice of the Maguindanaon, the semiotic resources including music and performances were the objects utilised in the ritual.

The concept of mode is another significant notion involved in this research. A group of semiotic resources is called modes of communication or modes of meaning. A set of resources for meaning creation that is socially and culturally moulded is frequently described as a mode. Various factors

might be considered to determine if a set of resources qualifies as a mode. The Halliday three meta-function test is the most often used test to determine a mode. The resources of colour, for instance, may be utilised to build social ties (the doctor's white dress), depict the world as it is (the gardener's green garment), and foster coherence (the background colour against which different images are set in a magazine). This test only functions if a specific group of mode users has been identified. For a form of meaning to be recognised as a mode, there must be a common understanding of that form of meaning formation in accordance to the identification of a community of users (Van Leeuwen 2005).

Another test called the community test comes into play. While someone's words or gestures may hold personal meaning, they may not be universally accepted by all members of a particular social or cultural group. If they do, they may be thought of as belonging to a specific mode, if they do not, they can be thought of as distinctive ways of meaning production that are nonetheless significant and still of interest to social semioticians. In other words, a group of resources must have developed regularities before it can be considered a mode. These patterns result from material forms used historically, socially, and culturally (sounds, parts of the body, etc.) (Van Leeuwen 2005).

In addition, modal affordance describes what a mode may readily express and convey (Kress 1993). According to Kress, a mode's affordances are related to its material, cultural, social, and historical usage. A mode's capabilities are shaped by its past usage and the cultural norms that dictate how it is used in a particular setting. Each mode has its own logic and offers various communicational and representational potentials (as it is implemented in a given social context). For example, speech is governed by the logic of sequence in time: sounds are uttered, words are said one after another, and syntactic and textual elements are said. This order becomes an opportunity, meaning potential, since it opens the options for placing items earlier, later, or in another order.

Lastly, multimodal orchestration is another valuable concept employed in this investigation. Each message's meaning is dispersed over many modalities, but only sometimes equally. Each mode in the ensemble carries many meaning-related components in its unique way. Each mode in that ensemble only conveys a portion of the message; speech and writing are neither an exception nor a complete representation of the meaning. To examine each mode's unique contribution to the multimodal ensemble and how it interacts with and influences the other modes, multimodal research pays attention to

how the various modes interact with one another. Two modes can sometimes align in their meanings, and at other times they can be complimentary, or they can each be used to refer to different meaning-related characteristics and be contradictory or in conflict. As Lemke (2002) states:

No written text is an image. Furthermore, no image or visual representation means anything, only in the same way that some text can. This essential incommensurability enables genuine new meanings from combined modalities. (303)

As an illustration in the case of *pag-ipat*, every element in this ritual has been designed to contribute to a general meaning: the colour, the music, the food, and the performances all combine to generate a specific message.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This investigation employed a qualitative method to explore the meaning-making used in the performance of the *pag-ipat* healing ritual by the Maguindanaon. Specifically, this study utilised participant observation which is one of the leading ethnographic data collection methods. With the intention to compile a systematic account of the behaviour and belief systems of the Maguindanaon, the researcher watched, interviewed participants, documented, described, analysed, and interpreted the practice of healing rituals by this group. The study was conducted in Datu Odin Sinsuat, a second-class municipality and capital of Maguindanao del Norte, Philippines. Most of the residents in this area are farmers who live a simple and meagre life. All the informants were Maguindanaon.

Observation and documentation through field notes, interviews, and audio recordings were employed during data gathering. The ritual proper was conducted for three days from 24–26 March 2019. It started after sunset (in the evening) and lasted an hour or more, depending on the number of people who asked for a cure and consultation. Aside from the sick person and his/her family, relatives and other community members also joined. The concluding steps of the ritual were done early in the morning (before sunrise) on the last day. To further validate the gathered data, ten key informants were interviewed comprised of three *pagagamot* (healers) and individuals who sought healing.

Multimodal semiotic analysis was employed, which involved different modes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; van Leeuwen 2006) ranging from music, food offerings, colourful costumes, flags, language, and others. Informants

were asked about the purposes of the various objects utilised in the ritual. The transcripts of the interview were then read and reviewed several times. The conveyed meanings of each semiotic resource were extracted from the participants' statements. The relationship between modes in multimodal ensembles created meaning, given that each modal resource's meaning affected the other modal resources in a text. This led to further examination of the mode which they orchestrated to communicate a particular ideology. The analysis made was then corroborated and triangulated with the available literature.

Ethical considerations were considered during the study. The researcher ensured respect, rights to privacy, and protection from physical and psychological harm for the participants involved in the study. A letter requesting the participant's approval was sent before the observation. Upon approval, the participants were informed of the "confidentiality clause" which guaranteed that the dignity of the informants was respected by treating all personal information as confidential.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Underlying Meanings of the Semiotic Resources

Items that are created and utilised in culture are hardly just things that are generated at random. Rather, they are part of a system of signification that reflects dimensionalities of meaning that characterise the total signifying order. Archaeologists use the objects they find at a site to recreate past societies. The bits and pieces they discover in sites, such as jewellery, clothing, furniture, decorations, tools, toys, and others, enable them to recreate the object system of the ancient civilisation and reconstruct the society's signifying order to varying degrees of completeness. Authentically insightful hints about the likely makeup of an extinct culture's signifying hierarchy can be found in artefacts (Danesi and Perron 1999).

Analysing items believed to have mystical properties is critical in studying ancient signifying orders. Even though all artefacts are valued intrinsically in all cultures, some are also regarded as having magical properties. In the case of the Maguindanaon, the semiotic resources utilised in the performance of *pag-ipat* possess affordances that reflect the ethnic group's values and behaviour. The following objects used in the healing rite are believed to convey meaning.

First is the incense. The composition for the incense includes dried leaves and fruit peelings from *buan* (lansones) and *marang* that are burned over hardwood embers to generate a fragrant scent. The ritual's opening incense is essential to draw the spirits, bless the participants, and guests. The incense is burned as a sign of sacrifice to the god and the *jinn* (unseen spirits) and as a tool for prayer. It is a way of clearing the environment and summoning a gathering of invisible spirits. Its sweet scent is thought to ward off evil spirits and please the gods. According to many Maguindanaons, the technique replenishes energy and purges terrible energy. Since burning incense is a form of offering, it connotes an expression of gratitude and love.

Second is the *puyutan* (hammock) which is positioned outside the home along with a two-meter miniature *awang* (boat). The hammock may move back and forth since it hangs from the ceiling. The swinging of the *puyutan* represents the perishing of the illness or misfortune of the sick individual and his family. The evil spirits that cause the disease move out of the body and house of the sick as the boat "sails". The *puyutan* with a boat signifies a journey.

Third is the food offerings. On the *awang* inside the house, the following offerings were placed: grains of *palay* (unhusked rice); grains of *begas* (husked rice); grains of *balatong* (mongo beans); tubers of *ube* (sweet potatoes); *kameis* (corn); and *sulabay* (rice pancakes), wrapped in a banana leaf. Six large bronze *talam* (trays) laden with food offerings are scattered around and under the boat. Six of the trays are covered; two in *maputi a ginis* (white cloth) two in *gadung a ginis* (green cloth), and two in *maliga a ginis* (red cloth).

On the first pair of trays, there were *geti* (popped rice) spread all over the two trays, *naluto a leman* (boiled egg) standing on the tray of white rice, *mama* (pieces of betel nut) along the outer edge of the trays, and *sulabay* lying around the trays. On the second pair of trays, there were *begas* spread over both trays, *meilaw a leman* (uncooked egg) placed in a tray of black rice, *mama* around the trays, and *sulabay*. On the third pair of trays, there were *palay* spread over both trays, *meilaw a leman* standing in the middle of each tray, *mama* around the trays, and *sulabay*.

A type of bamboo, *kling*, with thin leaves was planted beside the *awang* outside the home. On its branches were rice cakes wrapped in palm leaves, and leaves twisted into pleats that form geometric patterns. The bird's figure is strung like an ornament on a Christmas tree.

Two *sabakan* (table) or altar-like bamboo structures were built, each measuring about 2.0 meter high and 1.5 meter in width and length. Each

had four poles, two levels, and a roof made of leaves. Two poles from each structure were linked and positioned next to one another. Two sugar canes almost the same height as the posts were fastened to the other two posts of each *sabakan*, and four sugar canes were fastened to the ends of both altar-like structures.

Before being filled with rice grains (consisting of uncooked white rice on the top tier and popped rice on the lower floor) and a cooked egg in the middle of each tier, the lower tier of the structure is covered with white fabric, and the upper tier with yellow cloth. Next, a portion of the same rice grains was moved to the left *sabakan*, and cooked black rice grains were put on each tier at the top. Each *sabakan* has pancake-shaped rice cakes dangling from its eaves. A few meters in front of the *sabakan* was a representation of a man-made banana stem. A tiny clay pot with cooked purple rice and a coconut shell containing the feathers of five sacrificial chickens and their internal organs were placed next to it.

The food that served as offerings to the unseen spirits was partaken by the people joining the ritual. The food inside the house was allotted for the sick and his family while the food prepared outside, specifically those displayed in the *sabakan*, was for the relatives and the other community members who came to participate. The offering placed on a type of table, *tinungkop*, and the *awang* outside the house was the share of the medium.

Offering food is a meritorious act that reminds people not to be greedy or selfish. It is a means to release selfishness and open the heart to the needs of others. For the Maguindanaon, hungry spirits represent greed, thirst, and clinging, which bind people to sorrows and disappointments. By giving away something people crave, they unbind themselves from their clinging and need. Thus, food offering during ritual suggests generosity and kindness.

The fourth object was the *buaya* (crocodile) which is constructed from cooked black rice that has been moulded and fashioned into the figure of the revered river creature. A green banana leaf covers the 40 centimetres long crocodile whose eyes are made with two fried, unshelled eggs, and a thin row of bananas for fangs. Seven pieces of each of the seven varieties of rice cakes were dispersed around a roasted chicken lying on its back. These cakes had many shapes and names, including Maguindanaon delicacies like *panyalam*, *baki*, *balebed*, *kalintubo*, *sulabay* and *dudul*. Seven betel nut pieces were placed beside the crocodile alongside the rice cakes.

Some Maguindanaon think that they are born with a spirit crocodile twin. A participant shared that:

...so mga matuwa na palityala sa aden lepeng nu kaped a mga taw...
(our elderly believes that some of us have a twin brother/sister who
cannot be seen. It could be in the form of a crocodile.) [P5]

One of Maguindanaon’s ancestral beliefs is that the crocodiles are their ancestors. This belief has been handed down from generations to generations. This notion could be associated with the research findings of Gutierrez “Teng” Mangansakan II (2008), who stated that:

In the Philippines, indigenous communities still believe they are intimately related to crocodiles. For example, the Maguindanaon in the Ligauasan Marsh narrates that after the *datu* (male royal) was born, a small crocodile emerged from the mother’s womb to the surprise of the couple. Believing the creature was their son’s twin, they kept it in a separate cradle beside the infant *datu*. As the *datu* grew, so did the crocodile. The couple showered it with the same care as they did with their son. Finally, when the *datu* was an adolescent, the crocodile was so enormous it could no longer fit in a cage in the house. After much thought, the couple decided to free the crocodile in the river. (135)

The role of the crocodile is observed after the dancing and the healing ritual when it is reduced to pieces and distributed as food to special guests inside the house. Thus, the presence of this iconic crocodile connotes recognition of their ancestors. Moreover, it implies selflessness and thoughtfulness since it is eaten and distributed among the visitors.

Fifth, the *kulintang* is the idiophone of metal gong kettles placed horizontally on a rack to produce a whole set in Maguindanao. Two wooden beaters were used to strike the bosses of the gongs during playing. The *kulintang* is also known as *kolintang* among the Maranao and those in Sulawesi, *kulintangan* or *gulintangan* by those in Sabah and the Sulu Archipelago, and *totobuang* by those in central Maluku because of its use across a broad number of cultures and languages (Cadar 1996). *Basalen* or *palabunibunyan*, which both mean “an ensemble of loud instruments” or “music-making” or, in this instance, “music-making employing a *kulintang*”, are the traditional Maguindanao terms for the entire ensemble (Liao 2013: 2). *Kulintang* is made up of a line of small gongs that are laid out horizontally and larger gongs and drums that are hanging. In the ritual, the *kulintang* functions basically to produce the *tagunggo* music. It is played before the ritual begins to signify that a *pag-ipat* will be performed. As the music is played, it invites the neighbours and the community to come, join, and witness the healing ritual.

Sixth is the set of *pandala* used to decorate the small boat inside the house. One flag stood on each side, and a *pandi* (taller flagpole) and two shorter poles with umbrella-like structures called *bpagiyuntay* (kind of flag) were on the bow and the stern. Outside the house, *pandala* were also installed. They were used as ornamental objects that add colour to the occasion. The authentic *pandala* are in green, yellow, and red colours. According to Accad (2015), the different colours of *pandala* are associated with different emotions, ideas, and objects. For example, green connotes peace, love, and hope, red signifies bravery, and yellow implies healing. Aside from the *pandala* and *bpagiyuntay*, the *sambulayang* (set of flags), which is shaped like a human hand, may also be included depending on the ancestral lineage of the family asking for a cure. According to one of the healers:

Niya sambulayang anya, nyabu pakagamit kanu noget a gay na mga royal blood o mga datu endo bai. Di mapakay apya ten bu pamilya makagamit lun. Uged saguna gay dala metu a pidtalo ka apya ten pakagamit den sa sambulayang anya. (Those who came from ordinary or commoner family are not supposed to put the sambulayang. It should only be used by those whose lineage came from royal family. However, it is observed now that even commoners are utilising it. Probably because they were not informed of this practice.) [P2]

The seventh item is the candle. The lighted candles signify enlightenment and freedom from darkness. On the bow and stern of the boat, two candles were present. As the ritual began, these candles were lighted purposely to enable the unseen spirits to see the food offerings. As mentioned by the informant:

...so lansok na pegkugitan para kadtabangan so mga di kailay a mga taw para mailay so pegkan a ipagengay salkanin. (the candle is lighted to let the unseen spirit see the food offered to them.) [P3]

The eight item is the *sagayan* dress (dress in the colours of yellow, red, and green worn by the medium for dancing) and the cloth. Aside from the medium, other *sagayan* performers outside the house also wore the same attire. On the other hand, a piece of cloth in red, green, and yellow was used to cover the *tinungkop*, the *sabakan*, and the *dulang* (food tray). These shades are believed to be the favourite colour of the unseen spirits.

So maliga, gadung, endu benaneng na paborito nu mga di kailay a mga taw. Katuba e tanda na pagali ka nilan. (The red, green and yellow are the favourite colours of the jinn. Utilising these shades will inform the unseen spirit that you are a relative.) [P4]

As emphasised by the informants, the spirit will recognise a person as their *pagali* (kindred) if they wear yellow, red, and green. Thus, those shades facilitate faster healing. Moreover, the various shade of cloth and costumes by the medium and other performers add life to the ritual. Thus, the vibrant dress connotes festivity and merriment.

The ninth item is the *tarabusaw* (effigy of a man). It is shaped using a banana stalk erected a few meters before the *sabakan* and placed outside the house. The effigy is associated with the *tarabusaw*, the second monster in Moro mythology described as an ugly creature in the form of a man living in Mt. Matutum. He devours the people including those from places far and wide laying waste to the land.

In the ritual, the *tarabusaw* represents evil spirits. During the concluding part, the medium cuts the banana effigy in two, isolating the evil spirits from the feast. The effigy connotes man's negative qualities like arrogance, pride, superiority, selfishness, greediness, and other undesirable traits.

The tenth item is the basin of water. On the last and final day of the ritual, the final step was performed early in the morning, before sunlight. A basin of water was first prepared with certain botanicals. The medium took soft, fresh branches of the *daliday* (betelnut plant), *salumbangun* (a type of plant), and *bakawan* (mangrove), anointed them with coconut oil, then passed them over the incense three times before chopping them into little pieces and letting them fall into the water basin.

The *pagagamot* cut the remaining *daliday* branches in half with a sharp knife then added more water, which he poured from a freshly opened coconut shell. He untied the hanging *daliday*'s top branches, dipped them in the sanctified liquid, and then sprinkled it over his audience. It is believed that the water has spiritually cleansing power signifying life.

The Orchestration of Semiotic Resources

Based on the interviews and observations, particular semiotic resources orchestrate to transmit certain concepts. For example, the manner of installing the *pandala*, the presence of the *sambulayang*, the quantity of food, the quality of the cloth, the number of days spent in the ritual, the design of the food and clothing material, the dance moves of the medium and the *kulintang* music produced by the performers impart Maguindanaon's ideology.

An informant stated that installing a *pandala* should conform to the social strata of the individual or family. For example, for upper-class people, it should be installed straight; for middle-class and commoners, it should be slanting.

According to Accad (2015), slanting flags are a clear indication of an unstable economy and a precarious way of life, much like the meaning of slanting lines in ancient teaching, which denote lines of movement or motion, such as a man sprinting, beating the rain, or a tree fighting a strong wind. It is obvious that the celebration is exceptional and that the attendees are members of the royal family by the vertical placing of flags along the streets or at the ritual's location. The flags' angled placement denotes that the celebration is informal and that the visitors are not of royal blood. On the other hand, the *sambulayang*, shaped like a human hand, is part of the *pandala* set, usually used to embellish the streets and houses during festivities. The presence or absence of *sambulayang* indicates the social status of the family.

Historically, Maguindanao society is stratified and family-oriented, with those who trace their ancestry directly to Maguindanao royalty are accorded the highest rank. Communities usually consist of closely related families and are headed by an individual with the title of *datu*. Such a title indicates descent from royalty and membership in a lineage that traces through Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuwan or Sultan Kudarat to the Prophet Muhammad himself. The descendants of the *sultanates* and *datu*s are said to be of royal blood, while the rest are just commoners and ordinary.²

As one of the healers mentioned, the *sambulayang* is installed only by those whose ancestors came from the royal family. Ordinary, nonroyal blood individuals are not allowed and prohibited from using it.

So mga datu endu bai so pambetad endu penggamit sa sambulayang kano nuget a gay. (Those who came from royal family are the ones who are supposed to use the *sambulayang*.) [P8]

Moreover, the food offering is a central element in the ritual. The various kinds of rice (unhusked, husked, white, black, purple, sticky, popped), rice cakes (*panyalam*, *baki*, *balabed*, *kalintubo*, *sulabay*, *tinadtag*, and *dudul*), a significant number of chickens, trays of eggs, and others suggest that the process requires sufficient money to cover the expenses. A family from the lineage of the *datu* (royal family) is expected to provide a tremendous amount of food, while an ordinary family may afford a lesser quantity. Similarly, the quality of the cloth used to cover the *sabakan*, *tinungkop*, and *dulang* reflects the social strata of the family. The *inaul* (a kind of cloth), an expensive *malong* (tube-like wrap around skirt), is usually used by the royal family. However, those who belong to the lower class may use inexpensive cloth during the ritual.

The *pag-ipat* may be performed within one day, three days, seven days, or fourteen days. Individuals whose ancestry are from the sultan and *datu* are expected to conduct seven or fourteen days of ritual, while the commoners may have it for a day or three. Meanwhile, the presentation of different food shapes during the ritual, the display of clothing materials in geometric designs, the use of colourful attire, the dance performance of the medium, and the music produced by the *kulintang* performers illustrate the aesthetic part of the ritual.

Dance is defined as “a specific kind of intentional, performative motor behaviour” (Stavrianopoulou 2006). Together with music, dance belongs to the non-verbal elements transmitted primarily orally and aurally (Gladigow 2004). The dance occurs beside the voice of the ritual actor reciting a text but also in place of reading, recitation, song, or appeal. Thus, dance is simultaneously a carrier of text, giving the ritual performance a form. The medium in a trance dances around the suspended boat three times clockwise with frequent stops and turns about, waving two handkerchiefs held sometimes in one hand and sometimes in both hands. In the dance, he leads his body first with one foot, then with another, and retraces his steps by pivoting, suddenly dashing to stop, chanting, and dancing repeatedly. As the *tagunggo* music plays faster, his movements become more agitated. Thus, refinement in the movement of the medium is necessary to please and entertain the *tunong* (spirit). Dance movement, therefore, is a display of the artistic skill of the medium.

In the southern Philippines, the *tagunggo* is a type of music traditionally played by male musicians dressed in their festive fineries. This sample of *tagunggo* is used only to accompany healing rituals with tranced dancers performing *sagayan*. The main instrument of *tagunggo* music is the *tagunggoan*, which takes its name from the sound that it makes (Alesna 2018). The *tagunggoan* is comprised of six to eight hanging gongs on a pentatonic scale (Miller and Williams 2008). The Maguindanaon instruments are typically crafted from wood and metal in a combination of geometric curves, linear and arc-form patterns. These patterns exhibit the Maguindanaon culture.

Music is an essential element during the healing rite. It serves as a means of inviting the spirits and putting the medium in a trance. The spectacular production of the *tangungo* music, just like the dance performance of the medium, demonstrates the performers’ skill.

Maguindanaon’s Cultural Ideology

The analysis discloses that the performance of *pag-ipat* manifests the Maguindanaon’s cultural belief in the spirit and the unseen. The Maguindanaons have a cultural tendency to think that no matter how fantastic or horrible a phenomenon is, the person harmed is never the one who created it. The *tunung* (spirit) serves as a crucial middleman who provides humans the ability to defeat obstacles and, more importantly, malevolent spirits. This trait corroborates the statement of Mark S. Williams (1997), who claims that despite the official practice of adhering to one Supreme Being, Maguindanaon worshippers tend to have widespread devotion to spirit beings that are less exalted than God (Williams 1997). One interviewee stated:

Palityala ako sa su Allah so pinaka pakagaga sa langon. U gayd na su pamilya nami na pagadat bun sa adin mga taw a di kailay. Nya ba su naukit nami a pakagamot. (I believe that Allah [God] is the most powerful of all, however our family pay respect to those creation in another world, the unseen spirits. It has been our tradition to perform this ritual to heal us from sickness.) [P9]

In a study conducted by Pew Research Center (2012) regarding the beliefs and practices of Muslims, findings reveal that belief in supernatural forces, at least seven-in-ten Muslims affirm that *jinn*s (spirit) exist. This finding is based on the data taken from South Asian countries. Moreover, the study also disclosed that many Muslims claim to seek out traditional religious healers when they or members of their family are unwell. Muslims in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa frequently engage in this activity (Pew Research Center 2012).

In addition, the performance of the healing ritual indexes the social status of the individual who avails it. Social status refers to the relative respect, competence, and deference accorded to society’s people, groups, and organisations (Sauder et al. 2012; Anderson et al. 2015). In the context of the Maguindanaon, social standing refers to the hierarchy of the family based on their ancestors. For example, they may be classified as royal blood if their ancestors are sultans and *datu*; otherwise, they are just ordinary and familiar people. Status hierarchies in the Maguindanaon decide who gets to “call the shots”, who is worthy, and who is expected to spend more significant resources. In so doing, shared cultural beliefs uphold systems of social stratification by making inequality in society appear natural and fair. Generally, the manner of

installing the *pandala*, the presence of the *sambulayang*, the quantity of food, the quality of the cloth, and the number of days spent in the ritual manifest social status.

Moreover, the colourful costumes, artistic designs of food and cloth, and the impressive presentation of the *kulintang* performers and the *sagayan* dancers imply that the ceremony is an avenue to show the artistic skill of those involved. This supports the claim of Danesi and Perron (1999) that ancient societies utilise art in rituals to appease the gods.

This investigation on linguistic “performatives” clarifies that ritual is more than simply acting out of beliefs. As claimed by Rappaport et al. (1999), the oral and bodily gestures performed in this traditional service generate “statements” about the reality that communicate both information and attitudes, especially acquiescence to the reality so defined (Rappaport 1999; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994).

CONCLUSION

The discourse made available through this study divulges that the hidden meanings embedded in the customary practice of the *pag-ipat* are communicated through various semiotic resources. Almost no item or artefact in human existence is without a deeper meaning. Objects are specific types of signifiers with a wide variety of connotative and annotative signified throughout the civilisations of man. The meanings of semiotic resources are coded in terms of the signifying order, much like all the other dimensions and elements of culture.

Islamic rituals coexist now with indigenous beliefs such as the worship of gentler spirits, the belief in sorcery to protect against imminent danger, and the belief in malevolent spirits. Williams (1997) claims that the primary motivation behind such customary obligation is revealed to be the desire for control over the forces of life and death. Despite converting to Islam, there are Maguindanaons who have continued to practise the traditional ritual against sickness to avoid punishment. Some believe that they will eventually suffer the consequences if they do not respect and recognise their ancestors and the unseen spirits. These people are under pressure from the spirits to perform the healing ritual. Therefore, it can be inferred that numerous unseen spirits, occasionally adapted from epics, populate the Maguindanaon space (Loyre 1998).

As the preceding discussion implies, the objects used, the offerings, the social context, the culture, and the performances of both the healer and the sick are all inextricably intertwined in ritual interpretation. Ritual is a universal phenomenon of human culture. It is intrinsically interesting as an affluent area of human self-expression. A deeper understanding of it might, just as linguistics do, clarify the fundamental nature of the human species. This study provides a realistic insight into cultural practises that reinforce and strengthen the understanding of the Maguindanaon culture. Therefore, ritual elements increase signification and meaning-making potentials in the discourse environment because of their iconicity, indexicality, and meaning-making potentiality.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Informed consent was sought from all the participants. The research protocol was approved by the College of Arts and Sciences, Mindanao State University-Maguindanao.

NOTES

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¹ This idea of Bakhtin is mentioned by Jeff Bezemer (see <https://multimodalityglossary.wordpress.com/semiotic-resources/>)

² See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amhara>

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