

# Constants and Variables of North Mindanao Folk Ritual (Abstract)

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Ritual serves the function of integrating man and the supernatural world. The preharvest corn ritual in northern Mindanao expresses the farmer's thanks primarily to the spirits, but also the saints and God, for the year's crop. In his view it also brings long life, happiness, and good health. The ritual consists of four parts: (1) the preliminary prayer to call the spirits, or *huyop*; (2) the spirit meal, at which the spirits are invited to partake of the offerings; (3) the feeding of the spirits' animal pets which when commanded by their masters may cause harm, or *pamalabag*, and; (4) the eating of the food offerings by the *baylan*, or religious functionary, and later the participants. Until the ritual is completed, not a grain of the regular corn harvest may be eaten or sold if sudden illness or death of farmers or their work animals is to be avoided.

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The *baylan* is clearly distinguishable from the other participants by his more formal attire and his control over the ceremony. He arranges the food offerings and conducts the ritual service with formal, reverential gestures and prays in a humble, conversational tone. The participants, on the other hand, mill about informally during the ceremony in casual attire and with no special role to play beyond that of spectators.

The outside observer gets the impression that people go through the ritual through sheer custom without themselves experiencing any spiritual or emotional involvement. An alternate interpretation suggests that the *baylan* in his role as mediator and spokesman for the propitiating spectators embodies the group's attitudes to the spirits, saints, and God, so that the people's external behavior during the ritual is not really important.