

Causality, Power, and Cultural Traits of the Maguindanao

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Life is mysterious. It is amazing to many how we humans come into this world, and equally as puzzling how (and why) we leave it after a life sojourn. The statement of the ersatz philosopher, 'We are born, we live, and we die,' contains a modicum of truth, albeit oversimplified. Many of us are not content to leave the extent of life experience to just that. We desire to know "the meaning of life and the challenge of death." We want to understand "human well-being and the threat of misfortune." "Success and the danger of failure" consume us at different times. "[C]ontrol [and] the uncertainty of the unknown also plague us. We crave "meaningful relationships" with others, and we "fear ... rejection, hostility and abandonment" (Hiebert 1989:49).

Man's grappling with the above has led him ultimately into the 'religious experience.' The renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1979) postulated that "religion ... can be shown to be intrinsically although indirectly connected with man's fundamental, that is, biological needs" (p. 45). How religious expression responds to the "fundamental needs" of people in their life experience is the basis for this study. The religion is Islam, and the people are the Maguindanao of Mindanao, the largest Muslim people group in the Philippines.

Noted Muslim scholar Dr. Cesar Majul informs us that Islam entered the southern Philippines "... by the end of the thirteenth century or at the beginning of the fourteenth

century" (1974:3). Many people equate Islam with Arabs and Middle East culture. But as Islam spread from the Saudi peninsula, through the Balkans, across the Indian subcontinent and into Malaysia and Indonesia, it encountered peoples of many different cultures. Wherever Islam settled, vestiges of Middle Eastern dress, architecture, and even language, settled as well. Adaptations to "local culture" were evident concessions made since they appear also in many other "Islamized peoples elsewhere in the Malay World" (Gowing 1979:69).

Why did Islam not just replace the former religious beliefs and practices of the Mindanao people, namely the Maguindanao? Islamicist Dr. Bill Musk (1989) answers this by detailing the differences between what he calls "Official" and "Popular" Islam:

Official Islam [deals with the] issues [of] life, death, heaven, hell, salvation, eternity, believers, [and] non-believers from preaching [and teaching]. Popular Islam [deals with the] issues [of] fear, sickness, loneliness, guilt, revenge, shame, powerlessness, longing, meaninglessness, disease, [and] crisis from everyday life [experience] (p. 202).

Malinowski also speaks of this in his studies of tribal peoples in the Trobriand islands: "[Popular, or folk, religion] is to be expected and generally to be found whenever man comes to an *unbridgeable gap*, a hiatus in his knowledge or in his powers of practical control, and yet has to continue in his pursuit" (1979:43; emphasis added). In failing to "bridge the gap" of the problems in day-to-day life, Islam could not supplant the 'former practices' of the indigenous Filipino beliefs; therefore, "adaptations" occurred. In another writing (1979), Dr. Musk addresses specific adaptation-practices of folk Islam:

[P]opular Islam has added a whole life-way of animistic beliefs and practices. The use of the rosary for divining and healing, the use of amulets and talismans ..., the use of hair-cuttings and nail-trimmings, the belief and practice of saint-worship, the use of charms, knots, magic, sorcery, the exorcism of demons, the practice of tree and stone worship, cursing and blessing—these and many other animistic practices belie the *gap* between the theological religion and the actual religion (p. 175; emphasis added).

Whatever "official" (or orthodox) Islam cannot answer, therefore, is responded to by its "popular" form, commonly known as folk Islam (Gowing 1974 & Hiebert 1989). This form of Islam "... is more common than orthodox Islam, and tremendously *powerful* in the lives of ordinary Muslims" (McCurry 1979:186; emphasis added). Issues of 'power for good' and 'power against evil' present themselves for examination vis-a-vis the causes of different life situations and conditions of Maguindanaons.

Indeed, culture has become inextricably linked together with the religion of the Maguindanaons - Islam - especially in its adapted, *popular* form. Many significant cultural traits, therefore, can be explored just by observing certain religious practices and causality responses. Dr. Musk proves helpful again as he has developed a list which explores cultural traits in just this manner (1989). The topics from that list form the parameters for this study, as follows:

- I. Fear of the Unknown;
- II. Fear of Evil Spirits;
- III. Powerlessness Before the Power of the [Sorcerer];
- IV. Fear of the Future;
- V. Shame of Not Being in the In-Group;
- VI. Sickness;
- VII. Helplessness in Crisis;

- VIII. Meaninglessness of Life; and
- IX. Vulnerability of Women (p. 76).

Whenever possible, I have confirmed the results of cultural practices through personal "ethnographic interviews" (Spradley 1979) of Maguindanaon informants, and "participant observation" (Grunlan & Mayers 1988:235-236; Spradley 1980) of cultural activities. Other verification of research comes through the "approach of comparing" (Grunlan & Mayers 1988:237) cultural practices from secondary sources— in this case, both of Muslim and non-Muslim Filipinos.

I. Fear of the Unknown

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1972) states that something is "unknown" (or "unknowable") when it lies "beyond the limits of human experience or understanding." Musk (1989:76) distinguishes three areas in probing the "unknown:" a) worship, or devotion, of spirit-beings; b) using amulets or talismans; and c) passing down 'superstitions.'

A. Worship/Devotion of Spirit-Beings

Formal adherence to "official Islam" involves belief in one God, a supreme being named ALLAH. Muslims also believe in "spiritual creatures" called angels. Sheikh

Omar Pasigan (1994) describes these beliefs as follows:

TO BELIEVE IN ALLAH: [H]e is eternal; He is infinite; He has neither beginning nor end; He is the cherisher of all the world, the Guide, the Helper, the Merciful, the Compassionate, etc....

TO BELIEVE IN ANGELS: Angels are spiritual creatures of Allah, ever obedient to His Will and Commands. They have no material bodies, but can assume any form they like (p. 8).

Despite the formal practice of adherence to one Supreme Being, devotion to spirit-beings less lofty than God is much more widespread amongst Maguindanaon devotees. One such being is known generally as the "angel" (*malaykat*). Maranao researcher Esmail Disoma comments on this belief when writing about his own people, blood-related to the Maguindanao:

[Angels] are also believed by the Maranaos to be their protectors. Each person has some *malaykats* protecting him from illness, guiding him in his works, making him active, diligent, and good [?]. However, they cannot talk or borrow a voice from a person, neither do they treat

sick persons (n.d.a:88; emphasis in original).

Though some of the original meaning gets lost in the translation, the point here is that these angels are helpful and sought after for the protection they offer. Another spirit-being is known as *tunung* to both Maranaos and Maguindanaons; it simply means "spirit" (Disoma n.d. a:87). *Tunung*

live in the sky, in the water, in the mountain, or in the trees. If their names are mentioned, they listen attentively to the prayer.... They can converse with people by borrowing a voice from the *pendarpa'an* (medium).... They are of great help to the people. They protect them from illness and their crops from pest... (p. 87; emphasis in original)

Even more so than the *malaykat*, the *tunung* serve an intermediary function, speaking to this felt need that official Islam does not answer for Maguindanaons. The story of "Dr. Monkey," from a small village just outside of Cotabato City, details this need for intermediation quite well:

[T]he newscaster began excitedly telling a story about "Dr. Monkey." As he talked,

pictures were being shown of scores of white-capped Muslims making their way to a nearby village where a spirit-empowered monkey resided. The story had circulated that an extremely ill child had touched the animal and was instantaneously healed. This inspired the faithful of the community to go on pilgrimage to the pond where the monkey lived and seek supernatural release from their physical ailments. If the monkey could not be touched, it was adequate to offer him bananas. Many Muslims filled bottles with the pond's water which was supposedly energized by the monkey's presence. This water was used as a healing agent by drinking it or by external application to the body. (Parshall n.d.:83)

My primary informant hails from this village, and vouched for the veracity of this report. His brother has seen "Dr. Monkey" climb in the rafters on their house!

B. *The Use of Amulets or Talismans*

Social researcher Ashley Withers has noted that "amulets (*anting-anting*) are commonly used for protection from evil spirits...." (1993:1). We will touch on the "fear of evil spirits" in depth in the next topic (II), but we will address the use of amulets here.

There are many different things that can become amulets of protection for Maguindanaons. Filipino Islamicist Gene Lara has recorded first-hand knowledge of a "brown stone ... [and] the horn of a wildcat" being used specifically to prevent bullets from injuring or killing the owner (1995:1). A Protestant missionary, Rev. Gerald Otis (1979:10-11), likewise confirms this from his experience with the Tausug, the third largest Filipino Muslim group. Linguistic researcher Dan Rusch (1993:1) has commented on the Maguindanaon use of the "Hand of Fatima," a stone-carved talisman, that has its origin from other places in the Muslim world (Burnett 1988:152 & Musk 1979:180). My informant mentioned knowing a Maguindanaon man who used a "boar's tusk" for protection against spirits and enemies. This is corroborated by the practice of Tausug practitioners who use crocodile and shark teeth for similar reasons (Otis 1979:7).

In all cases above, protection from the unknown (because of fear) is the key. Orthodox Islam does not provide what these devotees are looking for.

C. *Passing Down 'Superstitions'*

There is a wealth of beliefs that fall under this category of 'superstitions,' more than can be mentioned in this study. Concentrating on the ones that emanate from fear motivations leads

us to beliefs in mythological characters. The chief one is *Bantugen*, hero of the great epic poem of both the Maranao and the Maguindanao called the *Darangen* (McKaughan 1995b:9). We mention this character here because of an incident that was recorded by historian Dr. Najeeb Saleeb in the early part of this century:

Get the Moro [Muslim] in a position of pressing danger, where he stands face to face with disease or death, then he may forget Allah and Mohammed, and call for Bantugen, his hero god and the god of his forefathers. In the Mindanao campaign of 1904 the panditas invoked Allah and Mohammed, but the masses looked for help from Bantugen and trusted in his power (in Gowing 1974: 286).

The deistic notion that Filipino Muslims have concerning ALLAH is quite evident here. He is too far away or too lofty to help the common "ordinary Muslim" (Musk 1989:15). Power, instead, is found in the 'lesser beings.'

'Superstitions' certainly play on the fears of the ordinary person. A few from Maranao experience serve to illustrate, paraphrased as follows:

1. "Don't eat outside or in the 'open-air' because evil spirits will share the food with you!"

2. "Don't look at the moon and a cat at the same time, or you will go crazy!"

3. "Don't look at the moon with its 'crown of light' [glow], or else a famous beautiful woman in your family-clan will die!" (Palawan n.d.:71)

One of my informants verified the above to be true also for Maguindanaon experience. (The close blood relationship between the two peoples accounts for this). Another belief of note forewarns people who point their index finger at rainbows: they will get that finger cut off by a spirit! (p. 72 & Cardoza 1986:4) In a similar vein, beliefs about dreams border on "omens:"

1. "If you dream about losing a tooth, a close relative will die soon."

2. "If you dream about being surrounded by 'big water' [true meaning unclear], then death will come soon." (Plawan n.d.:72)

Sometimes dreams can indicate something good: a dream about

someone dying or getting sick means just the opposite (Ewing 1955 & Teo 1989:127). Anthropologist Harry Nimmo summed it up well when he concluded that dreams reflect "... those areas of [Muslim] life which are most difficult ... to control or comprehend...." (1966:56) Meaning to say, it is an issue of power.

II. Fear of Evil Spirits

Fear is, by far, the biggest motivator for folk Muslim practices amongst the Maguindanaon. A plethora of evil spirits and mythological creatures are found in the belief system of the Maguindanao. There are far too many to report on, but several significant ones will suffice.

In an area where 'official' Islam and folk Islam agree, the chief adversary, Satan, is given a name by the Maguindanao: *Datu na Gyadsal* (IBS 1995:20ff). Satan, however, is not often the object of concern. There are many more evil spirits and creatures to worry about; specifically, the "witch."

A. Witch/Cannibal

The "witch," which is known as either *aswang* or *balbal* (Unte n.d.a:73), is a most horrifying creature for Maranaos and Maguindanaons because of its cannibalistic tendencies (Sullivan 1986). General characteristics of the

aswang (believed by Filipino Muslims and non-Muslims alike) are that it is

an evil spirit that allegedly eats the liver of human victims.... It may not be proper to use the term 'spirit' in the case of the *aswang* since it does have a body. In fact in some provinces a witch is sometimes considered an *aswang* (Elesterio 1989:10; emphasis in original).

For Tausugs, Maranaos and Maguindanaons, the *aswang* and the *balbal* are one and the same. Over 60 years ago, the world-renowned journal *The Moslem World* included an article by a native of the Tausug homeland about the origin of the *balbalan*. Jose Collante concluded this article by stating that these 'cannibals' are "... much feared, specially at night, not only by the Moros [Muslims] but by many people throughout the length of the [Philippine] archipelago" (1936: 245). Being known to enjoy the "liver of children and [the] guts of old persons" (Ramos 1995b:354), these 'cannibals' also have the ability to detach the top half of their body from the trunk and fly in the air searching for their victims (Elesterio 1989:10 & Ramos 1995b:354). This type of *balbal* is known as *salimbadut* to the Maguindanao. My informant was not too keen to talk about this

creature, as he believed it was real. When I showed him an article that appeared in a Manila daily (Eduarte 1996:1-2) about the sighting of a *manananggal* (same as *salimbadut* in Maguindanao language), his comment was, "Uway, su kalangan ku lun na benali nya!" (Meaning, "Yes, I think this is true!")

Another informant was much more "cosmopolitan" in his approach to these subjects. He said that the *aswang* exists only in stories—"in the comics." Another creature called the *kurita* is known commonly as a "many-limbed, pernicious monster ... [who] eats all creatures it can find [and] digs [its] claws into the hero's flesh" (Ramos 1995b:371). My "cosmopolitan" friend relegates this creature to being "just an octopus." There was still fear in his voice as he spoke about it, but he could explain it in 'real-world' terms. My other informant, however, was not so sure these creatures could be so easily explained.

A quick mention of the Filipino witch's "... penchant for human *exuviae*" (Demetrio 1990:322) is in order. The *balbal* is said to "... supplement its staple food of human viscera with discarded human phlegm..." (Ramos 1995b: 129). Human nail-clippings and hair-cuttings are carefully discarded (often buried underground) so that the "witch" cannot use it against them. One of my Maguindanaon

informants admitted that when his wife got her hair cut, she carefully folded up all the long strands of hair and buried them in the ground behind their house. In like manner, the placenta (after giving birth) is carefully disposed of by burial in the ground next to the house, preferably facing towards Mecca, the Muslim holy city (Kiefer 1972:125 and Macaraya n.d.:79). There is no specific mention of 'voodoo' in any Filipino vocabulary. Despite this fact, Maguindanaons are careful not to leave their *exuviae* lying around for "witches" to gather up and use in such voodoo-like activities (Ramos 1990a:109-110). The *aswang* and *balbal* are believed by most Maguindanaons to have this ability.

B. Rituals and Feasts for Spirits

There are myriad rituals in the Maguindanaon experience of life and death. But again, we will limit ourselves to examining a few in relation to gaining power or control over life situations or, especially, spirits.

First is an interesting ceremony that takes place after a formal "hair-cutting" ritual called *kanggunting*. Fellow researcher Richard Schlitt (1988) relayed the details of his observation in his Maguindanaon neighbor's house:

[A]nother ceremony performed by folk Islamic

practitioners [involves] ... a crocodile... formed out of rice and has pieces of chicken placed on it. Incense is carried around the crocodile. At the appointed moment, siblings and cousins of the baby eat the chicken on behalf of the twin spirit of the baby (p. 4).

This then is a tangible manifestation of the 'power' the family attempts to wield over the "twin-spirit" (*lepang*) of the infant child (Williams 1996:1).

Another ritual is called *ped-timbangan* ("balance") by both Maranaos and Maguindanaons. It is "... performed on a child or an adult who is given up as hopeless [for recovering from an illness]" (Labay n.d.:95). The set-up of the ceremony is most intriguing:

When the Imam [Muslim priest] arrived, 10 gantas of palay [rice] set on 10 trays were placed in the sala [living room] and on top of each were two one-peso coins.... [T]he Imam tied a piece of rope to a beam under our roof, got a pestle, and tied the rope at its center to balance it. The baby was placed inside a *malong* [tube-skirt] hanging on one end of the pestle. The other end had palay placed inside a separate *malong*. When both sides balanced, the Imam chanted some more prayers for the early recovery of the girl

or a quick death if she was destined to die.... The ritual was also applied to my mother-in-law's father who also died a week after the *petimbangan* ritual (p. 95; emphasis in original)

Again, the desire for control over the powers of life and death reveals itself as the primary motive in such a ceremony.

A third ritual of note involves the time of "rice-planting." Maranao researcher Dr. Nagasura Madale (1974: 74-80) has done a fine job of relating the details of this ritual called *kashawing*. He states that when he personally witnessed this ritual, a most surprising prayer was offered that day:

[The practitioner said out loud]: Praises to Allah! Pray that we will not commit sin in invoking the *tonong* of the lake. He created the *tonong* who are invoked when the farmer clears the field. We wish to invite *apo* Taraka, his children and children's children; *apo* Babowa, *apo* Mipesandalan of Masiu, his descendants from here to Maguindanao to Sulu.... (p. 76; emphasis in original)

We see many elements come into play in this ritual. Again, we

are introduced to the *tunung*. *Apo* is the Muslim term for "dead ancestor," and they too play an important "intermediary role" in the Maguindanaon farmer's desire to have success with his rice crop. Remember, the Almighty God is too high and lofty to help. The *tunung* and the *apo*, however, offer the power to overcome circumstances and, more importantly, evil spirits!

A last look at rituals in Maguindanaon religious experience deals specifically with the ordeal of death. It is a three-pronged ritual, explained as follows. First, there is the "public-crying" for the dead. Maguindanao informants and a Maranao source vouch for "this old practice" (Tawano n.d.:81) even today. Secondly, is *kaligu* - the "bath for the dead" (p. 82). Just as purification is important in other matters of religious duty, so it is important to prepare the body for "clean" transition into the after-life. Of final note, during the first seven-days after death is the invitation for prayers from "holy men" to "... ask God to forgive the dead for sins committed in life." This is followed every night for those seven days with the "night vigil" (Tawano n.d.:82-83).

During my residence in a solidly Maguindanaon neighborhood of Cotabato City, our landlord who was a pro-

minent figure there died. It was during this distressing time for the neighborhood that I learned a lot about the significance of those first seven days of death. A formal feasting ceremony called a *kanduli* must be done always on the seventh day after the death. In the case of our landlord, he was so prominent and wealthy that there were six distinct *kanduli* held for him during the first year of his death: 3-day; 7-day; 20-day; 40-day; 100-day; and one-year anniversary *kanduli* of the death. Each of these *kanduli* are lavish rituals of offering prayers and sacrificing animals to speed the way of the dead person into "Paradise" (heaven). The sacrificed animals then also feed the hundreds, if not thousands, of people who attend these gatherings.

There is some notion of "purgatory" in Islam, though it is not called that. According to common belief, performing as many *kanduli* as can be afforded by the family lessens the dead person's time spent in "purgatory." One of our landlord's four wives explained to my wife that this is exactly why it was done for him: to lessen his suffering and usher him into Paradise.

III. Powerlessness Before the Power of the [Sorcerer]

Illness and madness (permanent or temporary) are supreme forms of powerlessness for Maguin-danaons. Ascertaining the cause, and the cure, of these physical and mental ailments is the purview of the Muslim *sorcerer*.

A. *How Spirits are Caused to Enter their Victims*

Over ten years ago, anthropology researcher Rod Cardoza (1986) came to southern Mindanao and lived in the Maguindanaon village of Bunao, near Tupi (north of General Santos City). In four short months, Cardoza tabulated eight specific areas of "How the Saitan [Spirit] Enters & Probable Effects." He isolated thirteen distinct effects resulting out of these eight "causes" (p. 10). Dan Rusch (1993), commenting on the value and scope of Cardoza's research, affirms that

the spirit world is very real to the Maguindanaon. [T]hey try to manipulate this spirit world [using sorcery]. Sorcery is used for causing injury, revenge, enemy alliance, sexual attraction, and even self-confidence. One sorcerer reports that before conducting sorcery to harm he "must abstain seven days

from performing any prayer or ritual washings prescribed by Islam ... since I call on Saitan (Satan) for help and not Allah (God)" (p. 1)

Cardoza's report was over 20 pages long; therefore, we focus on a few significant examples for analysis.

Our 'focal points' are three-fold: "protection;" "injury with;" and "love." Under the first point of "protection," two specific examples present themselves. The first of these is called *sendad*, meaning "offering." One informant reported to me,

"Especially before a child will travel over water, the adult will shave some gold off of his jewelry into the water as *sendad* to the spirits. Recently, a small boat capsized and two small children drowned; perhaps the adult in charge did not offer *sendad*."

Cardoza's version of this "offering" practice differs from common understanding here in north-central Mindanao. The village where he did his research is in the southern in-land region. There are slight, though significant, language and culture differences between the Maguindanaons of north-central coastal Mindanao

(called *taw-sa-ilud*) and those of the southern in-land regions (called *taw-sa-laya*).

Another example of "protection" is the removal of a *nununuk* tree from a field to be farmed. The *nununuk* tree, which is known as *balete* in other places in the Philippines, is not just problematic to Filipino Muslims. The non-Muslim Subanen people are close relatives to a smaller Muslim group, called the Kalibugan. For the Subanen,

the *balete* tree is generally believed to be the house of some spirits and we are taught to be careful when approaching a *balete* tree. As a matter of fact, Subanens do not cut down *balete* trees because they are afraid. If they happen to farm a place with *balete* trees growing in the area, they have to do some rituals, asking for the transfer of the inhabitants therein elsewhere (Lingating 1994:150; emphasis in original).

Maguindanao informants confirmed this in their understanding. One said, "*Aden a'ntu, nya ba su pegkalebenan'u malaykat; aden a'ntu, su pegkalebenan'u manga saytan!*" (Meaning, "Sometimes, it is the home for good angels; sometimes,

[it is] the home for evil spirits.") Another reported: "You cannot cut down the *nununuk* tree without befriending the spirits who live in it. I know of a man who cut down a *nununuk* without performing *pangabatan* [protection-ceremony], and one week later he was dead." The steps of this procedure are specified for the sorcerer/practitioner:

After performing the offering on the altar, I'll put an axe in the *nununuk's* trunk and wait until morning. If the axe has fallen out by morning, we know the *saitan* [spirit] left, but if it's still there, we know he's there too. [Then] I'll write the *Kulho Allaho akad* in Arabic around the trunk: "*In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say: God is one the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.*" As soon as I finish the *saitan* will have surely left; no day of waiting is needed (Cardoza 1986:12-13; emphasis in original).

The melding of official Islam and folk Islam surfaces again in the description of this protection ritual.

The second focal-point is "injury with." One specific example in which a "flying egg"

is used (called *pantak* by Maguindanaons) is most illustrative:

Pamama Lumaguinding, a college graduate, describes the first time her father was attacked by sorcery with the [*pantak*] egg in 1957. "One night we saw some kind of spark fall to the ground but we didn't know what it was.... The next day we saw an egg in the spot where it landed; then we knew [it was *pantak*]. My father's health slowly deteriorated" (Cardoza 1986:5).

One informant told me, "True, I know about this." He also indicated that the *pantak* is prevalent in such *taw-sa-laya* regions as Datu Piang, Maguindanao Province, which agrees with a statement Cardoza made in his report (p. 5).

The third and final focal-point Cardoza (1986) calls "love." He itemizes three potions possible to make, but we will look at only one: the "attraction" potion, known as the *palamanis*:

[The *palamanis*] oil (*lana*) is most common for attraction.... The oil is usually applied lightly to the tip of the nose, eyebrows, and hands: "when people see you they'll warm up to you and think you are

most beautiful; they'll give you all their attention" (p. 7).

My principal informant mentioned that one time he saw a beautiful young woman walking arm-in-arm with a rather homely-looking young man. The thought that flashed through his head, he told me, was that he must be using *palamanis* to attract her.

B. Sorcery to Counteract Sorcery

The Rev. Gerald Otis, in his work and interaction with the Tausug and other smaller Muslim groups, makes an interesting comment on this practice which speaks to the 'heart' of the issue: "It should be noted that females, if they so desire, can wear amulets to protect themselves from the love magic of males. In such case[s], it becomes a case of 'may the most powerful amulet win!' (1979:13) Indeed, the 'heart' of the issue is *power*, and the question of who has "the most powerful amulet" - or sorcery - enters into the thought and relationships of Maguindanaons every day.

IV. Fear of the Future

Divination and acquiring the means by which to foretell future events is emphasized here. Two specific forms of divination are mentioned by Cardoza (1986:8): *pagagalamat* and *kalangan*. Slight differences in the *taw-sa-ilud* and

taw-sa-laya dialects render the first term *ebpamangalamat* for my informants. Divination of predictions in Maguindanaon religious experience are of three types: "compatibility of [different partnerships];" "safety in [activities];" and, "recovery of ... property" (Cardoza 1986:8). Two express examples suffice here.

A. Calculation and Divination

First is a method of calculation (*kalangan*) that the *ebpamangalamat* uses to determine compatibility of potential spouses.

One method used by fortune-tellers [*ebpamangalamat*] to determine marital compatibility is by calculating the numerical value of the two names involved.... If a man wants to marry, he'll come to me with her name and I'll tell him if they're compatible by the numerical value of their names (Cardoza 1986:8).

The rest of the procedure is too lengthy to reproduce here. In a nutshell, if the numbers do not "add up," then the marriage is doomed to disaster. Cardoza ends the quote by mentioning that someone's "... uncle and sister got a three, five, seven and they're doing great" (p. 8). There is power in saying what the numbers mean, and *believing* it.

The second example deals with "time-telling," known by those who use the 'oracle' as *pakutikan* (Sullivan 1986). In Bunao, Cardoza (1986) recorded instances in which the *pakutikan* was always interpreted through the sorcerer/practitioner: "He will tell us whether or not it is safe, exactly what time to leave, and what direction to walk out of our homes" (p. 9). Interestingly enough, my "cosmopolitan" informant admitted to having a *pakutikan* oracle (book) that he used to determine when he should travel - and where or how. One day, he did not show up for a meeting with one of our mutual friends just because the oracle indicated he should not leave the house *at all* that day! Other informants expressed that there is widespread use of such oracles, especially in Maguindanao *taw-sa-laya* regions.

B. The Power of Omens

Omens of different kinds provoke fear of what lies in the future. Bad omens, known as *tupag*, are the most dreaded. Most bad omens relate to impending death, but a quick look at a first one reveals something different.

J. Franklin Ewing, SJ, spent many years interacting with the Tausug. His findings have bearing on Maguindanaon experience as well: "If the owl *sambal* hoots at

night, particularly children and sick people are afraid, since the owl possesses a *saitan* that eats one's liver, causing death" (1967:21). A slight twist on this, though related, is the knowledge of the *aswang* that has "a chicklike creature [that] entered his stomach and grew there. The creature makes him crave for human flesh" (Ramos 1990a: 100). When Maguindanaon informants were asked, they agreed that it could be an owl inside the *aswang*, but they actually thought this fit more with the description of the *balbal*. Despite these discrepancies, the "owl-hoot" is ominous indeed.

Bad omens that precipitate knowledge of death are certainly not well-received by the general populace. Three are notable, since informants testified to the veracity of each. First is the "call of the kingfisher" bird: the informant said when he and his family heard it, the next day a relative had died." Second is the "howl of the dog." This is corroborated by Ewing (1967): "The howling of a dog in a village is a sign of sickness and death about to befall someone in the village" (p. 21). The Muslim Traditions, called the *Hadith*, reinforce the truth that "Muslims have no love for dogs" (Parshall 1994:215). To hear them howl must be most disdainful for them, as they equate it with an omen of bad future events. Third and final is

interesting: "If a *tagatek* [*butiki* in Tagalog] falls on you, then it means that a close relative will die soon." My primary informant was the source for this one, and I sensed it represented Maguindanaon belief in this matter.

V. Shame of Not Being In the In-Group

Curses is the main topic in this category (Musk 1989:76). There is much more experience with curses in other parts of the Muslim world, especially with regards to protection by the "Hand of Fatima" (Burnett 1988:150-152 & Musk 1989:26-30). There are two forms of cursing, however, that are known to most of the Maguindanaon informants I spoke to: "spoken curses" and "the evil eye."

A. Spoken Curses

Curses that are spoken are called *sinta* in the Maguindanaon language. One informant indicated that a mother who calls her son, "You good-for-nothing, get over here," speaks a curse upon her son. Others like, "I wish you were never born," or "I wish you were dead," connote very serious meaning for harm against the person 'attacked.' Like the belief in the divining power of numbers above, there is power - to do good or to do harm - in the spoken word.

B. The Evil Eye

Informants gave three specific instances of the "evil eye" that Maguindanaons try to avoid: the "eye that wounds;" the "narrow eye;" and the "hot eye." The "eye that wounds" is known as *makapatay i kadtulik'in*. *Matay* is the root word for "die" (Sullivan 1986:407). In a strict idiomatic sense then, the phrase carries the intention of wounding to cause fatal harm. A rough English equivalent is found in the expression, "If looks could kill, you would be dead now!" This, my informants tell me, is the true intention of *makapatay i kadtulik'in*.

The "narrow eye" is called *pedsumbaki mata nin*. This refers to the squinting of the eyes when one is angry, perhaps very angry. My primary informant said that he once had an uncle like this; always seemed to be angry at everybody. He finally died of a stroke, and everyone said it was his *pedsumbaki mata nin* turning back on himself.

Mayaw i mata nin alludes to the look of the "hot eye." One time, I was travelling outside of Cotabato City, in order to deliver a message to one of my secondary informants. My primary informant accompanied me, since he knew how to get to his place (and I did not). This informant's house was a couple of kilometers "inside," off the main

highway. We arrived without incident; everyone greeted each other politely and cheerfully. About an hour into the visit, some rough-looking soldier-types in khaki-dress came by "on their rounds." They were bodyguards for the mayor of that township. One bodyguard in particular was very curious that a *Milikanu* (American) would be out in the recesses of the countryside. He looked and stared at me for several minutes, finally broke away and continued his rounds with his companion. Several days after this incident, my primary informant mentioned that this man had died. He further said that he had looked at me with a "hot eye" that day - "a look of avarice" (closest English rendering). Obviously, his evil thoughts to harm me or to steal from me backfired on him; hence, he died.

"The eye is the window to the soul," another ersatz philosopher has said. If some people's souls are filled with evil (many Maguindanaons believe this to be true), then any of the above "evil eyes" can do damage. There is power there, real power to be feared!

VI. Sickness

As with all Filipinos (all people in the world, for that matter), sickness is a major issue for Maguindanaons. I am a Westerner,

and I cannot truly appreciate the consternation that sicknesses cause for the common (and even educated) Muslim. In the West, we relegate the cause, effect and cure of sickness to the realm of *science*. We secularize this facet of our lives, whereas folk Muslims (like the Maguindanao) do not. The difference here is emphasized in the following discussion-illustration (set hypothetically in Africa):

Tribesman: This man is sick because someone worked sorcery against him.

White Doctor: This man is sick from malaria because he was bitten by an infected mosquito.

Tribesman: Yes, he was bitten by a mosquito, but who sent the mosquito? (Burnett 1988:109)

In his dealings with the common people and sorcerer-practitioners of Bunao, Cardoza (1986) confirms that the above is true for Maguindanaons in their beliefs. In one of his report-taxonomies, he includes the following list:

Illness may include one or a combination of the following, depending on how angry the *saitan* is:

1. frequent crying
2. red eyes
3. stomach pain/bloating
4. headaches
5. diarrhea
6. yellow skin, jaundice
7. bodily convulsions/
collapse
8. death (p. 10; emphasis added)

This then is the issue: Where did the cause of the sickness come from? *Who* (or *what thing*) caused it to come? In Dr. Musk's listing of "Causality and Sickness in Popular Islam" (1989: 105), eight classifications of "cause" are given, followed with category listings of "diagnosis," "practitioner," and "remedy." Of those eight, only one fits into the Western scientific worldview: "natural causes." Again, we survey the pertinent topics for analysis.

A. *Healing Magic (Shamanism)*

There are three distinct titles of "healer" for Maguindanaons and Maranaos. The first is called *pangagamot* in Bunao (Cardoza 1986:11). Maguindanaons of *taw-sa-ilud* extraction call him the *ebpamanggamut*. Though little more is said about this practitioner, Cardoza did find this one distinction: "[T]he terms of *pangagamot* and *tabib* are nearly synonymous since all *tabibs* are *pangagamots*, but not all

pangagamots are *tabibs*. *Tabibs* have acquired more knowledge, ability, and skill" (p. 11; emphasis in original).

This leads us to the second title: *tabib*. In his interactions with Maguindanao neighbors, Richard Schlitt (1988) notes that the *tabib* acts as a "religious functionary," also serving to "cure sickness caused by spirits." His role and function in this "date back to pre-Islamic times" (p. 8; emphasis in original). A detailed description of illness-diagnosis practices of the Maguindanaon *tabib* appeared eighty years ago in the *Philippine Journal of Science* (Gomez 1917).

In summary, an egg is cut into five sections, three equal and two smaller, and arranged in a coconut shell to stand up erect. Then,

a pinhole is made at the center of its smaller end, and after praying God to indicate the true nature of the disease, a piece of burning charcoal is applied at the bottom of the egg. The heat dilates the air space of the egg and expels some of its contents, and according to the area in which they are split, the cause of the disease is indicated (p. 265)

In true "divination-style," then, the *tabib* renders his diagnosis of

the spiritual cause of the sickness to the Maguindanaon patient. My "cosmopolitan" informant ventured to add that the *tabib* "does not give herbal or 'science' medicine; he gives spiritual healing only."

The third one is called *pamumulung*. In "folk belief," there are three ways "by which one can attain the gift of healing: A. Through Dreams;... B. By Learning from Another; ... [and] C. Through Possession by the Pagari or Inikadowa" (Dirampatan n.d.:74-75). Space allows us only to look at the last one: Possession by the "Spirits" (illustrated as follows):

[D]angko's mother had asked her to refrain from swimming in the lake... [When she disobeyed,] her mother gave her a severe pinching and a thrashing with a broom. Dangko cried and cried to the point of nearly losing her breath.... When [she] found that her daughter had fallen unconscious, the mother became terrified.... When her mother began to ask her questions, Dangko said that she was actually Dangko's *pagari* or *inikadowa* [twin-spirit] who was now speaking.... She got sick and was in bed for three days.... [There was a healing ceremony for her and] after the propitiation, Dangko was

cured and, in addition, the *inikadowa* even came whenever it was called.... As a *pamomolong* now, Dangko herself claims that her *inikadowa* and not herself cures her patients (p. 75; emphasis in original)

In the 'world-that-is-seen,' *pagali* is a Maguindanaon word that means "kindred; a person's extended family or relatives" (Sullivan 1986:248). But in the 'world-of-the-unseen,' informants report that *pagali* refers to a spirit-companion - a twin-spirit - sometimes in the form of a crocodile (Williams 1996:1).

The ceremony involving the "crocodile rice-cake" (Schlitt 1988:4; see above p. 13) is done to prevent such possession by the *pagali* twin-spirit. But as another researcher reported to me, some people "look for ways to become 'croc-men' because it is a power that can be used for 'good' things" (Williams 1996:1).

B. The Power to do "Good Things"

In Filipino thought and history, it is the *shaman* who is sought for the power to do "good things" for others (Demetrio 1990:320). The power that the *pamumulung* taps into, then, is not seen as evil; rather, it is a power most Maguindanaons would wish for themselves. Since

ALLAH is "too far way" to help in this matter, this power to do "good things" is cherished and sought after.

VII. Helplessness in Crisis

Issues under this topic relate to the taking of vows and the intercession of the saints (Musk 1989:76). The former in Maguindanao religious experience is found in the institution of the *tampat*. The latter is shrouded in mythology and rituals concerning dead ancestors. Also for discussion is the situation of "over-emotionality" as a cause for distressing life situations. This deals with the "fine line" between sane actions and virtual insanity.

A. Shrines and Holy Places

Rev. Otis reports in his experience that "a *tampot* is supposedly a grave of an extremely holy or powerful ancestor or a person descended from the Prophet [Muhammad] whose power can be tapped into" (1979:9). In describing a specially-decorated pile of rocks along the side of the main highway (just south of Cotabato City), my primary informant concurs as well with the above: "People toss coins at the *tampat* and say *pangeni-ngeni* (prayers) as they pass by in their *ebpagedan* (vehicle)." More than a sign of respect for the dearly-departed, it is done in such a

fashion as to "gain favor" with the dead holy one for whatever purpose the devotee intends.

B. Seeking Intercession of Dead Ancestors

The *alwak* is the "soul or spirit" of a living person (Sullivan 1986). Informants, however, reported to me that the *alwak* also relates to the "souls of the dead people," especially in the observance of the *kapamagalwak* ritual. Esmail Disoma describes this ceremony from the Maranao point of view, as follows: "Old folks believed that during Muslim holidays the *arowak* (souls of the dead) come on earth to visit their living relatives and friends because the Kaaba [holy shrine in Mecca] is opened to them...." (n.d.b:103; emphasis in original) One informant mentioned that since the Kaaba (the "house of Allah") is "opened" to the *alwak* at these times, by performing the *kapamagalwak*, there is the hope of urging them to intercede of behalf of the living.

Other "dead ancestor" spirits that are helpful to the living are the *apu* - literally meaning "grand-parent" (Sullivan 1986). *Apu* are sought for "help and protection" (Labay n.d.:99) from many distresses in life. They are also believed to be the predecessors to *tunung*, as mentioned by Maranao researcher Dr. Madale (1974:74).

Sometimes they are reclusive, and only visible to the practitioner. Other times, Maguindanaon folklore supports the fact that they will reveal themselves plainly to ordinary people, perhaps in the guise of a crocodile (Wein 1986:8-24). Again, the felt-need for "intercession" crops up, as well as the need for power to endure life's hardships and trials.

C. "Over-emotional" Causes of "Bad Things"

One other area of "helplessness in crisis" for Maguindanaons relates to what Cardoza calls "over-emotionality." He speaks to this powerfully in his explanation of "over-emotional" causes of maleficent occurrences:

The three most common over-emotions are during great excitement (*subra kagalo*), extreme loneliness (*subra lidonaginaowa*), and intense anger (*subra kalipungat*). If the *saitan* enters during overexcitement, a person might go crazy or run around naked in broad daylight.... If a person is over-lonely, perhaps because he is desperate for the companionship of a far off friend, relative, or spouse, he may go crazy or commit suicide.... The *saitan* may also enter someone if they are over-

angry, perhaps because his property was stolen or destroyed (1986:3).

Maguindanaon informants reported to me that these are all true causes of strife in people's lives. In the *taw-sa-ilud* dialect they are called *sangat'a kagalaw*, *sangat'a lidu na ginawa*, and *sangat'a kalipunget*, respectively.

Cardoza (1986) makes an important discovery as he makes "interpretive conjecture" about this. He maintains

Maguindanaons of Bunao do not think one lacks self-control if he is overexcited and does something "crazy." They believe the *saitans* cause such behavior.... [T]he "victim" [therefore] is not wholly responsible for his actions. Though a murderer will be prosecuted, a grace exists in everyone's mind that he was victimized by the *saitan*. (p. 15)

This finding by an undergraduate anthropology student (after only four months of field observation) is *most significant* in understanding the Maguindanaon worldview. I will comment on this later in the concluding remarks.

VIII. Meaninglessness of Life

Musk (1989:76) gives only one parameter in this topic: "turning to the spirit world." Dan Rusch identified specific spirits in Maguindanao experience that are known to possess others. Unlike the case of the *pagali*-possessed *pamumulung* above, most are terrifying and not desired:

Heavy Possession

Laununul: powerful; when possessed, a person may howl like a dog

Datu Ambalguiam: male

Putri: female

Sandal Sumandal: very powerful, people afraid to say name

Other Trans: speaks to people and gives orders

Datu Manaung: two-headed snake...

Twin spirit: everyone has one and must not offend.... (1993:1)

My informants did not want to comment too readily on any of these spirit-beings; it was truly too frightening for them. What did

come through was the fact that people who are known to be *buneg* - "crazy" - are thought to be tormented by spirits.

In one such case, a *buneg* who lives in our neighborhood (with his relatives) was a former *mujahideen* (religious rebel fighter). During a skirmish with government troops, so the story goes, a grenade went off in his foxhole, killing a couple of his comrades and injuring him in the head. When they found him, he was not in sound-mind. His family is now convinced that he is possessed by spirits. He stands around, smoking cigarettes and talking to himself, sometimes yelling violently at children who taunt him. The spirit that possesses him, so it is said, is not a *pagali*; rather, it must be one of the terrible spirits (above) that frighten all Maguindanaons.

If the spirit that possesses can be controlled, as in the case of the *pamumulung* or the "croc-man," then it is desired. If it cannot, then it is respected but feared. May ALLAH help all against such as these!

IX. Vulnerability of Women

This final topic relates to the human female as the weaker sex: she must be protected and cared for against the dangers of everyday

life. Most of these instances relate to 'superstitions' designed to protect a wife during conception and birth. Some other notable instances document negligence in 'religious duty' which works to ruin the female in later life.

A. Beliefs for Women Before and After Birth

Practices involving the newborn child were discussed above. There are also practices and beliefs involving the woman before and after giving birth. One such belief is acknowledged by Rev. Otis in his interactions with the Yakan, a smaller Muslim group in the same region as the Tausug:

"[A] pregnant woman is considered to be in dire danger if an eclipse of the moon occurs during her pregnancy. A ritual bathing while a frying pan is held over head is an anecdote (*sic*) [antidote?] against spirits on this occasion" (1979:6).

Another practice that concerns the health of the mother as much as the baby is the proper cutting of the umbilical cord at birth. "[C]onsidered to be a religious official in her own right" (Kiefer 1972:124-125), the *walian* - "midwife" - uses "... a piece of *bacayawan* bamboo sharpened

with a knife..." (Glang & Convocar 1978:27; emphasis in original) to cut the umbilical cord. Practically-speaking, the bamboo is cleaner for cutting than a metal knife. But ritually-speaking, the bamboo must be used in the 'special way' ordained by the attending midwife.

Another belief for a woman who has given birth is that she "... may not bathe until 40 days after delivery. When this period is over, an authorized person may bathe her at an early hour while at the same time say some prayers over her" (Unte n.d.b:77). Again, in the Western view, this goes against all good hygiene sense. But these are people who regard *spirits* as the cause for illness and hardships *over and above* hygiene and other natural causes.

B. Neglecting "Religious Duty" to the Detriment of a Woman's Upbringing

Instances of neglecting a woman's "religious duty" to the detriment and ruin of her character are as follows. One specific Maguindanaon incident is narrated by Gene Lara:

When Ali's father was still alive, he possessed some powers he got from the spirits. It's a small round light that flies at night. One time a woman displeased him because he did not like how

she dressed. To teach the woman a lesson, one night at two o'clock he summoned the woman in her sleep to meet him under a balete tree. There he raped her (1995:1-2).

In the eyes of this pious Maguindanaon man, the outfit of the woman spoke ill for her as a good Muslim woman. Had she had the proper religious upbringing, she would not have had this disgrace happen to her (so people would say).

Another like incident is related by Badjao researcher Saladin Teo (1989):

Manisbuwahan claimed that she had illicit relations with Daihani. The headman then told Daihani to marry her but he refused because, according to him, Manisbuwahan was no longer a virgin. The headman imposed a fine on Daihani but did not force him to marry the girl.

After some months Manisbuwahan was caught by her father in the act of sexual intercourse with another man named Bakuna. The headman asked Bakuna if he would marry Manisbuwahan but he refused for the same reason: she was not a virgin. He merely paid the penalty.

Manisbuwahan's aunt recalled that the girl had not undergone the pag-Islam [female circumcision] when she was a child because her mother had died early and her father had married another woman, forgetting about his religious obligation to his daughter. Thus she became a flirt and sexually aggressive (p. 117).

Though no Maguindanaon informant could recount any similar instances, a couple of them shook their heads in affirmation to these stories. "*Uway, nya nin manggula mayai, ugayd di ku katawan u panun tampal i manggula nin.*" (Meaning, "Yes, it happens this way, though I do not know how exactly.")

Women are indeed vulnerable to the "wiles of the world." Their men will want to do whatever they can to ensure that evil spirits will not cause anything bad to happen - either to the women or to the rest of the family.

Concluding Remarks

Causality and power are strong themes in Maguindanaon culture. Well-known for his studies of Filipino Muslims, the late Dr. Peter Gowing stated that the "synthesis" that gave birth to 'Filipino Islam' is unlike any other variant of Islam in the world (1979:68). In another

writing, Dr. Gowing made the following concession regarding this "synthesis:"

How Muslim are the Muslim Filipinos? ... Doubtless Muslim groups can be found elsewhere whose faith in Allah the Merciful and Compassionate is less compounded with worship of spirits and whose Islamic rituals and customs are less mixed with adat [customs] as the case with Muslim Filipinos.... But from the standpoint of their "disposition to be Muslim," their emotional and psychological allegiance to Islam as they understand it; there are no people on earth more Muslim than the Muslim Filipinos (1974:292; bold emphasis in original).

Elsewhere, Dr. Gowing mentioned that when "... foreign Muslim teachers have tried to say this or that Muslim custom was un-Islamic, ... [they were] repudiated by the local religious leaders on the grounds that *they* (the foreigners) were the ones deficient in Islam" (1979:68-69; emphasis in original). The synthesis of orthodox Islam and Mindanaon folk religion, over five-hundred years ago, continues to survive to this day in the form of folk Islam.

Dr. Musk's listing of "Felt Needs in Popular Islam" (1989:76) gave us the necessary parameters to explore the "unbridgeable gap" (Malinowski 1979:43) that Maguindanaons encounter when their faith in Allah fails them at critical moments. This point was poignantly made above in the account of Filipino "Moros" calling out to their "hero god," *Bantugen*. He will help them if they are "in a position of pressing danger" (Gowing 1974:286), whereas ALLAH cannot help them (according to their deistic thinking).

In this study, one cultural trait stands out above all others: events and situations, whether good or bad, were *caused* by something else other than the individual it affected. Why is this true for the Maguindanao? Linguist and anthropologist Dr. R. Daniel Shaw (1988) reminds us that "language and culture each contribute to our understanding of the other" (p. 25).

Linguistic researcher Ruth Stickney analyzed Maguindanaon grammar and verb forms as part of her work and study here (1994). In order to appreciate what she uncovered, let us first look at one aspect of the grammar structure of Tagalog, one of the main languages in the Philippines. In her work *Basic Tagalog* (1974-revised), the late Professor Paraluman S. Aspillera made this statement in *Lesson 40: Magpa- and Pa-in Verbs*: "They [these verb forms] are used

with roots to signify an act done on one or to another" (p. 124; emphasis in original). Recent linguists are calling this verb form "causative" in Filipino languages. Therefore, it is in Lesson 15 ("Causative") of Stickney's reference work that she makes a subtle yet astounding statement: "Causative verbs are used often and speech which uses them only infrequently sounds unnatural" (1994:43).

This 'general principle' found in Tagalog and Maguindanaon grammar forms reveals the following: Maguindanaon culture presumes that *something* always *causes* something else to happen! This prevalent cultural attitude was verified by Cardoza (above) when he reported that Maguindanaons "... believe the saitans *cause* such [extreme] behavior.... [T]he "victim" [therefore] is *not wholly responsible for his actions*;... [instead] he was *victimized* by the saitan (1986:15; emphasis added).

Realizing that Maguindanaons attribute just about *everything* to causes *outside of themselves* gives us the proper understanding of the 'worldview' of the Maguindanao. This worldview includes the reality of ancestral-spirits, "mythical beings;" and spirit-creatures, which greatly affects the beliefs and actions of these one million Muslims of Mindanao—regardless of formal adherence to the religion of Islam.

Four-thirty in the morning - the *adzan* (call to prayer) sounds for the faithful Maguindanaon to arise and do the prayer ritual in the mosque. At this time of day, ALLAH is very real to him - a lofty supreme Being to be feared and respected. But after the ritual prayers are uttered, and the prayer mats are slung back over the shoulders to return home, a heartfelt prayer to *Bantugen* - or some *tunung* or *apo* - will be offered when the Maguindanaon is "in a position of pressing danger" (Gowing

1974:286) or intense felt-need. Then, at noontime when the *adzan* sounds again over the loudspeaker, the faithful will return to the mosque to pay homage to the ALLAH, the Almighty God.

This is the dynamic tension that characterizes the "synthesis" that is Filipino Islam. These accentuate the chief cultural traits of the Maguindanaon people, even to the present day.

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