

# Symbolic Actions of Cultural Characters in Davao Folk Narratives

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## Abstract

*This study mirrors the symbolic actions of cultural characters in Davao folk narratives. It utilized descriptive-narrative and narrative-conversational methods to collect and analyze the folk narratives in the Davao region. The Cultural Symbolism theory of Clifford Geertz was used to reveal the interweaving culture of the indigenous people. Thus, the symbolic actions present in the texts are the following: pangayaw (tribal war), divine intervention, hunting, trading, belief in the existence of heaven, usage of magical instruments, cursing and casting enchantments, and patronizing a Datu. Hence, this study contributes to the preservation of culture which is slowly vanishing due to the effects of colonization, modernization, and globalization. Thus, further studies on myths, folktales, folk songs, folk speeches, and folk epics should be done to promote the cultural awareness among postmodern Filipinos.*

*Keywords: symbolic actions, cultural characters, folk narratives, Davao, Philippines*

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## 1.0 Introduction

The apparent postmodernist lifestyle of globalizing people nowadays sets aside the cultural value of folk narratives. Cultural characters play vital roles in social redemption in pre-colonial times as they conquer and save people through their quests. They also mirror the resistance of ethnic groups against violating some communal norms in their society. Thus, they entail different traditions common to a particular culture, subculture or ethnic groups (Mishra & Satpathy, 2020). Hence, colonization, globalization, and modernization hovers the importance of the indigenous peoples' oral tradition in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao, as they become marginalized in the present society, and the young Filipinos does not fully appreciate their cultural heritage (Aleria, 2020). According to Anoe-grajekti et al. (2019), each folk story contains values and moral messages worthy of recognition by the next generation. Therefore, collecting, evaluating, interpreting, and analyzing

these oral traditions should be done before they vanish forever.

Symbolic actions are acts mirrored by traditions, oral history, herbal heritage, nearby landmarks, food culture, modern art, and different things identified and cherished by the tribal humans themselves. Where problems are part of the equation, they are identified internally and from experience as an alternative than with the aid of outside factors that affect the actors. It is an act that enables humans to place themselves as the respectable actors of social norms in their society; it lays the foundations of human empowerment. It entails how tribal individuals create and articulate their values; it approves inner meanings to be externalized and shared with others. In a democratic context, cultural movements are a fundamental human proper because they allow men, women, and groups to define themselves and their beliefs and no longer solely be defined with the help of others (Matarasso, 2007).

According to McDonald (2006), cultural characters refer to any person who has to become well-known or well-acknowledged, usually due to an exclusive or unique attribute or skill. They are the result of man's early hypothesis on the foundation of the world. The first glimpses of actual records only appear when tribal names are interested in the genealogies beneath the cover of eponymous ancestors. It is the outcome of speculation but of a hypothesis based on facts. All the members of the tribe are presumably descended from them as their ancestors, and some other related tribes also descended from the same ancestors. On these supposed individuals, the names of the tribes are conferred; and they provide a sort of genealogical framework which continues to be stuffed in with the help of their specific culture until the age of the archives.

Moreover, Eugenio (2007) defined folk narratives as stories written in prose. This collection includes myths, legends, folktales, and numskulls tales. Myths are narratives believed by the societies that created them to be true accounts of events that happened in ancient times and used to explain the way things exist in the world while legends are stories about heroes and local tales of buried treasures, enchanters, fairies, ghosts, and saints. They are believed to have happened more recently than myths and are regarded as authentic by their traditional narrators. Furthermore, folktales are classified into tales and fables, magic falls, humorous, novelistic, and religious and didactic tales.

Thus, this study aims to evaluate the symbolic actions of cultural characters in Davao folk narratives using the cultural symbolism theory of Clifford Geertz to emphasize the deeper meaning of these oral traditions handed down from one generation to another by the different ethnic tribes in the region. The researcher wanted to show the symbolic identity of Davao's way of life manifested in the cultural texts. Hence, if the folk narratives of

different tribes found in the Davao region will not be collected and critically analyzed by avid scholars, these traditional treasures are endangered to lose their embedded social value that may help in the rebuilding process of national cultural identity for Filipinos.

### Literature Review

This section gives a more profound understanding of the worldview of indigenous people regarding folk narratives, the Davao folk narratives, and a brief overview of the lives and works of ethnic groups in the Davao region.

Old folks consider folk narratives as truthful accounts that happened in the remote past; stories are transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition. These narratives include myths, legends, and folktales. Myths are narratives believed by the societies that created them to be true accounts of events that happened in ancient times and used to explain the way things in the world. Legends are about heroes and local tales of buried treasures, enchanters, fairies, ghosts, and saints. They are believed to have happened more recently than myths and are regarded as authentic by their traditional narrators. Folktales are classified into tales and fables, magic falls, humorous tales, novelistic tales, and religious and didactic tales (Eugenio, 2007).

Davao folk narratives include the elements of supernatural beings like ghosts, spirits, poltergeists, and creatures of lower mythology that have their classification, motive, and values. It additionally follows the typical constructions for narratives. The most frequent establishing is the orientation hook. Most of these narratives have no climax and ending but have resolutions. These oral stories are used for social exchange while others give records or entertain humans (Chiongson, 2009).

The tribes of the Davao region are closely related to one another because of intermarriages; they can only be differentiated by the dialectical

peculiarities of the places where they reside. The *Mandaya* tribe, known for their *bagani* warriors, protects their territory in times of trouble. They are the pacific coast occupants, who are also popular with their own clothing *dagmay*, which is made of abaca hemp. Another tribe is the *Mansaka*. This group is known as the people of the clearing (*saka*); they go to the mountains and farm. Found in Davao region, too, is the *Tagakaolo* tribe, who is known to be the people of the river because they live in the stream's headwaters (*olos*). Additionally, the *Sama* tribe is situated on Samal Island at the North end of the Davao Gulf. They are also known as the people of the sea. The *Kagan* tribe is known as *Davao Moros* because they are the only *lumad* tribe in the gulf that embraces the Islamic religion while the *Manobo* tribe is the most fearless warrior in the region. They practice human sacrifice and beheading of enemies from the other tribes. The *Dibabawon* tribe lives in *dibabao* or uplands. They are also known as the warriors in the mountains. The *Bagobo* tribe who resides in Mt. Apo is a group of warriors who also have a culture of human sacrifice. The *Ata* tribe, considered the dark-skinned tribe of Davao, is also known as the less developed in terms of material culture and social organizations. The *Matigsalog* tribe is known to be the people of the river (*salog* for most of them live near the Davao River (Tiu, 2005).

Hence, if the folk legends of different tribes found in the Davao region will not be collected and critically analyzed by avid scholars, these traditional treasures are endangered to lose their embedded social value that may help in the rebuilding process of national cultural identity for Filipinos.

### Theoretical Framework

Culture is a web of symbols. Symbols are to be interpreted; it features as "interpretants" concerning precise movements as indicated by the cultural character's lifestyles expressions. It is the cultural activities that count through the symbolic interpretation. According Geertz (1973),

there are steps to interpret symbolic actions: First, isolate the symbolical action. Second, specify the internal relationships of the symbolical action to the tribe's culture. Third, characterize the whole system according to the core symbols around which it is organized, the underlying structures of which it is a surface expression, or the ideological principles upon which it is based; however, be careful that such hermetical approaches might distance from cultural analysis of its proper object, which is the informal logic of the actual life. Fourth, understand the symbol systems from the perspective of the tribe to have empirical access to their culture. Fifth, comprehend the cultural systems with a certain degree of coherence to establish a tight analysis of culture. Sixth, the critic inscribes social discourses to interweave the symbolical meanings and interpretations behind the inscriptions.

A symbol system offers a context for describing the specific actions of these cultural characters. In other words, it is "in phrases of" or "as a characteristic of" such symbolic rule from the signifying conduct of the cultural characters. In this sense, the image is the rule for decoding empirical actions. It is indeed human behavior that is in question. It is the action that has to be considered symbolic and, in this sense, as having to be interpreted.

In this study, the cultural characters possess symbolic actions that are perceived by society. The symbolic action system comes from a casual good judgment of authentic life. For it is in the social action that cultural varieties locate articulation. Therefore, the coherence of the close symbolic systems is not the principal check of the validity of their description. The interpretation of cultural characters rests on reading "what happens." It has to lead us to the heart of what is the interpretation of the action.

In the vocabulary of action theory, motivation characterizes the understanding of a singular action. There is a want to contextualize positive beliefs, dispositions, and feelings that constitute

the instructions of a feasible grasp of the context of actions. The motivational context of human conduct would succumb to the social level of acceptance through the symbolic means of action. Hence, the way of life is contextualized inside which events, behaviors, institutions, and methods can be described in an intelligible way by the cultural characters. Thus, cultural critics may choose anything in a culture that interests them and give details to inform their readers about meanings for they are attached to symbolic forms, including words, rituals, and customs (Geertz, 1973).

## 2.0 Method

### Research Design

This qualitative research utilized descriptive-narrative and narrative-conversational methods in the study design. Clandinin and Caine (2012) defined descriptive-narrative inquiry as a method of comprehending experience and Butina (2015) regarded narrative-conversational as an inquiry that happens when obtained stories are transformed into raw data. It also used the comparative textual approach to describe the Davao folk narratives. A textual analysis is an evaluation of the interpretation of texts and an analysis of the social context in which these texts occur (Fairclough, 1989). Thus, the application of the cultural symbolism theory of Clifford Geertz conceptualizes the symbolic meaning of the actions of characters present in oral literature.

### Data Collection

In this study, the researcher used a guide questionnaire to help interview the recognized participants living in different areas of the Davao region. The tool was written in the most common language of Davao Ethnic tribes residing in the Southeastern part of the Philippines. The personal interviews were video and voice recorded using a cellular phone to generate data. Hence, the result of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key

Informant Interview (KII) underwent translation from Visayan to the English language.

On the other hand, the criterion for the selection process of Davao folk narratives was their popularity, peculiarity, influence, familiarity, admiration, and acceptance of different tribal people living in the region. It gave total confidence that the information from the participants has credibility, authenticity, and validity. The researcher interviewed the participants about their prior knowledge of their legendary stories and the tribal practices within them. However, the value of confidentiality was observed throughout the study. The researcher respected the participants' option not to reveal personal information like their names and addresses. Hence, the answers serve as tribal, local knowledge that helped the researcher in this study.

The subjects of this study are the folk narratives in the Davao region; they are as follows; *Tagakaolo* tribe's "*The Story of Lumabet*," *Ata* tribe's "*The Story of Anit*," *Mandaya* tribe's "*The Story of Mandabon*," *Sama* tribe's "*The Story of Talicud*," *Bagobo* tribe's "*The Story of Toglay*," *Manuvu* tribe's "*The Story of Tuwaang*," *Matigsalug* tribe's "*The Story of Apu Gusasa*," *Mansaka* tribe's "*The Story of Kimod*," *Kagan* tribe's "*The Story of Manog*," *Dibabawon* tribe's "*The Story of Datu Makaway*" and *Manobo*'s "*The Story of Tulalang*." In understanding the content of Davao folk narratives, the researcher had some relevant information from the interviews of the participants to further substantiate the analysis. This process provided a leeway to comprehend the Davao region's symbolic meaning and shared cultures of different ethnic tribes.

### Data Analysis

This study is centered on the symbolic actions of the cultural characters in Davao folk narratives. Thus, a comparative textual analysis was done to shed light on the symbolic meaning of the symbolic actions in oral literature. Some relevant information

from the FGD and KII interviews of the participants was also used to substantiate the analysis further. It has provided a leeway to comprehend the Davao region's shared cultures of different ethnic tribes.

### 3.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the different symbolic actions of the Davao region's cultural characters and their symbolic meaning and interpretation. It also showcases the interview of the key informants to secure the authenticity and validity of the results.

#### *Pangayaw* (Tribal War)

The declaration of war by the *Kagan* hero *Manog* embodies the symbolic action of *pangayaw* that the tribe is still practicing until now. In the lines, "*Manog* demanded the reason for their coming. The "*alubalang*" said that they have come to get the people who could not pay their debts to the *Sultan*. Then, *Manog* told them to go back to the *Sultan* and tell him that he would not allow the people of *Summug* to be taken back from Maguindanao or they would have *pangayaw*." *Manog* is ready for any form of fighting and this signifies his willingness to risk his own life in *pangayaw* to save the people of *Lupon* from the tyranny of the *Sultan*. The symbolic action of *pangayaw* of the *Mandaya* hero *Mandabon* is a revengeful action of killing the enemies who exemplify a delinquent act inside the territory of the tribe. The tribe will not stop the brutal killings until they satisfy the pleasure of avenging their tribespeople. In the lines, "*He ferociously killed all of them and fed them to the crocodiles which abounded in the lower Agusan Marsh.*" The wrath and anger from his own family's death in the hands of the enemies intensify his desire to do *pangayaw*. The villains *Makansad* and *Likyam* of the *Ata* tribe, have done *pangayaw*, a brutal act of killing anyone from the other tribe to manifest supremacy, strength, and power. The warriors organize several brutal actions to disturb the societal equilibrium. In the lines, "*These warriors mercilessly murdered his*

*wife and children,*" thus, this cruel action of the *Mangangayaws* is an unforgivable undertaking against the other tribe. The symbolical action of *pangayaw* (tribal war) transcends the culture of *Ata*, *Mandaya*, and *Kagan* tribes in the Davao region, as reflected in their folk narratives. It symbolizes these indigenous peoples' supreme power, strength, and superiority in protecting their territories and securing the community's welfare against some invaders from other tribes. This act also implies that the culture of ethnic tribes in the Southeastern Philippines is inclined toward the customary and traditional belief regarding the essence of having warfare against anybody because they consider it a way of life. The theory of action and symbols have a critical intersection and interrelationship. Hence, there is no human action unless it has symbolic articulation, mediation, and interpretation. The symbolic forms of action are considered cultural processes from different human experiences.

In an interview last 2019, respondent 1 stated: "*Walay mahitabo nga pangayaw kung walay mamatay. Kung naay mamatay mubalos dyud ang pikas nga tribu ug mao tu ang ginganlang pangayaw nga sugdan sa mga Bagani nga magbalantay. Ang away sad sa tribu kay nay kasulbaran, kung makadala ug makahatag ka sa ilahang ipangayo kanimo sama sa kabayo, agong ug uban pa aron lang makabayad.*"

"*There will be no tribal war if nobody dies. If someone dies, the other tribe will find a way to take revenge, and we call it tribal war; it will be started by the tribal warriors who give protection to the tribe. However, the misunderstanding of the tribes may also have some solutions; for example, if you could bring them the things they are asking for such as horse, musical and instruments, it would be enough to pay them.*"

The symbolic action of *pangayaw* (tribal war) possesses a socio-cultural significance because it is one way of preserving and defending different people's lives in the community. This collective behavior is necessary to promote survival and extend

the territories of their societies. It also shows the social roles of the *bagani* (warriors) to serve, secure, and protect the people against any harm that may come along the way. In the folk narratives, *Manog* of the *Kagan* tribe, *Mandabon* and *Mangangayaws* of the *Mandaya* tribe, *Makansad*, and *Likyam* of the *Ata* tribe divulge this social practice to manifest vengeance, proliferate power, outspread land possession, and proclaim justice and peace to their lands.

### Divine Intervention

The divine intervention is the symbolical action of a supernatural being *Anit*, who is genuinely praised by the *Ata* tribe in Davao del Sur. The tribespeople give the utmost faithfulness to his divinity, asking for enormous protection and deliverance against the treatment of evil entities. The lines, "*Anit the protector of the tribe sent an enormous millipede to run after them, so the two bagani climbed up the mountain.*" The enemies boast and brag about a mystical intercession by *Anit*. He gets mad and starts to run after them. In this story, the *Mansaka* deity *Tamisa's* symbolical action is divine intervention. In the tradition of *Mansaka* tribe, the gods and goddesses deal with human beings to help or test them. This ethnic group believes in paganism or the presence of multiple mystical creatures that protect the environment. In the lines, "*Your wife has indeed rejoined us here in heaven. She is now with her unmarried sisters to go, touch, and pick the right maiden. But bear this in mind; I shall kill you if you pick the wrong one.*" He then led *Kimod* to the room and indicated to him the group of women. He is a severe and brutal god that puts pain on the neck of the hero *Kimod*. The villain deity provides different tasks to the hero for him to pin down; he will never hesitate even if it costs the life of *Kimod*. The symbolic action of divine intervention interrelates with the culture of *Mansaka* and *Ata* tribes of the Southeastern Philippines, as seen in their folk narratives. It symbolizes the faith, deliverance, and providence

of the tribal people who devotedly praise their gods and goddesses. These divine beings can defend the oppressed, provide blessings, and chastise the sinners of the land. This act also symbolizes that the culture of ethnic tribes in the Davao region is accentuated by the custom, tradition, and belief that there are supernatural beings who live in paradise that can make or break human endeavors in life. The first level of modality ties within which a group or a society that possesses cultural significance represents the symbolic existence of tribal characters. The productive activity of symbols is present in social actions. It reflects a specific cultural community's aesthetic, moral, political, and religious symbols that constitute a distinct layer of societal practices, traditions, and beliefs.

In an interview last 2018, respondent 2 stated: "*Among tapukon ang mga bato ug mangayo mi sa ginoo (Manama/Magbabayo) ug sa ispiritu nga tag-iya sa humay, naa sad kanta namo niining panahona ug kini nga proseso gitawag namo ni nga pagalas. Pagkahoman niini sunogon na namo ang yuta ug mag-alay mi ug manok para sa tag-iya sa humay ug siya magtabang kanamo para sa maayong panahon sa pagtanom.*"

"*We gather the rocks all together and ask for the blessings of the Lord (Manama/Magbabayo) as well as to the spirit who owns the rice grains, we also sing a tribal song during this time, and we call this process pagalas. After this, we will burn the land and sacrifice a chicken for the mystical owner of the rice grains, and this spirit will help us in the planting season.*"

The symbolical action of divine intervention holds a socio-cultural significance due to the spiritual undertakings promulgated by the different ethnic tribes. These ritualistic endeavors of tribe members are essential to connect and communicate with the supernatural beings for them to have some sort of earthly blessings. However, there are times that these gods and goddesses are also capable of giving some forms of punishment to the people who commit mistakes. Hence, it reveals



the societal roles of tribal members to submit and dedicate themselves to the authority of these mythical creatures to sustain a good life. In the folk narratives, *Tamisa* of the *Mansaka* tribe and *Anit* of the *Ata* tribe succumbs to this religious belief of the tribal individuals as they interfere positively and negatively with the activities of human beings.

### Hunting

The symbolical action of *Toglay* in the *Bagobo* folk narrative is hunting. It is a natural way of survival by the tribe to sustain life. They mainly depend on what nature could give them at every possible moment. It is also why they have the utmost respect for trees and animals. The line, "One day, he went outside to catch a chicken and slept into the woods all night." shows that the hero is reliant and confident that the flora and fauna in his area help him with life's challenges. The symbolical action of *Kimod* in this legend is hunting. In the early times, the *Mansaka* tribe resolves this practice to survive in life. They believe that nature would give everything to sustain their primary needs for living. The lines, "Dawn was yet breaking when the mother got up to cook. As soon as the food was ready, *Kimod* started to eat. And after he had eaten, he rose to go hunting, taking with his *sumpitan* (blowgun)." signify that they are part of greater biodiversity as they praise gods and goddesses. The symbolical action of hunting draws a parallel relationship towards the culture of *Mansaka* and *Bagobo* tribes living in different areas of the *Davao* region, as revealed in their folk narratives. Hunting symbolizes the survival of these ethnic groups against the burden of starvation and famishment. This act also implies that several tribes living in the Southeastern part of the Philippines are delineated by their traditional and customary belief that nature will give them everything they need to prosper in life. The symbolic mediation creates some signals to the tribal characters of a socio-cultural group. A symbol works in a system of construable signs and models synergetic significations. The

meaning of symbolic structures of action is established at the social level. Understanding a specific cultural practice is identified in terms of group conventions, beliefs, and institutions that form the framework or fabric of a culture.

In an interview this 2020, respondent 3 stated: "*Ang tanang tribu kay naay tagsa-tagsang lugar kung asa sila makadakop ug mga hayop sa lasang. Ang ilahang ginagamit kay sibat ug lit-ag aron makahuli sila ug manok, usa ug baboy. Busa usa nila ni pakabuhaton kay mag ritwal (dawot) sila kay mananghid sa ispiritu nga nagpuyo sa lasang.*"

"All tribal people have their own designated places/territories to hunt different animals in the forest. They used spears and traps to catch wild chickens, deer, and pigs. However, they will also perform rituals to ask permission from the spirits living in the woodlands."

The symbolic action of hunting possesses a socio-cultural significance because it serves as one of the main reasons for the community's survival. This activity is significant in the lives of tribal people due to its societal relevance that upholds their continuous existence in the land. It also shows the social roles of male members of the tribes as sole participants in this particular endeavor. In the folk narratives, *Toglay* of the *Bagobo* tribe and *Kimod* of the *Mansaka* tribe perform this economic practice to foster the gifts of nature for the sustenance of life in their respective lands.

### Barter and Slave Trading

The practice of slave trading is the symbolical action manifested by the *Sultan* of *Maguindanao* to sanction the people of *Lupon* from their liabilities. The slave-trading is one of the oldest traditions of the tribes under the influence of Islam in *Mindanao*. This exercise is indeed a form of oppression that suppresses the freedom of human beings. In the lines, "When the *Sultan's* men came to collect the payment for the *Sultan*, most of the people could not pay them because of the recent drought and a poor harvest. But the *Sultan* was firm and told his

*"alubalang" (forces) to bring back to Maguindanao all the people who indebted him.*" show the relationship between rich and the poor within the tribes. The symbolic action of Maranao in this story is barter-trading, one of the industrial practices by different tribal people in Mindanao during ancient times. The different goods and materials are exchanged to distribute the primary products of each tribe. The lines, *"During the time of harvest, Apu Gusasa used to have a Maranao visitor, and they barter/trade some goods."* show that Maranao was welcomed by the leader of the Matigsalug tribe Apu Gusasa with utmost courtesy given. The Maranao is there to barter-trade some products in their place. The symbolical action of barter and slave trading orchestrates Kagan and Matigsalug tribes' culture as elucidated in their folk narratives. Barter trading symbolizes the abundance and productivity of the tribes during harvest seasons; hence, they are willing to exchange farm produce with some other material resources. On the other hand, slave trading symbolizes misfortune and adversity as it portrays a result of unpaid debts or a selfish endeavor of someone who misuses power. This act also showcases a symbolic understanding that a traditional market system evokes the culture of ethnic tribes in the Southeastern Philippines to interconnect with other tribes in the region.

In an interview this 2020, respondent 4 stated: *"Daghan bihag sa una nga mga ulipon tungod sa barter. Kaniadto gibaligya ang bugas, buyo, mama ug uban pa nga ipalit sa usa ka bata. Nanggikan kini sa mga lahi-lahing mga tribu sa dakbayan. Nagapanghitabo ning tanan tungod sa pangayaw, aron dili patyon ang pamilya manguha ang mga bagani ug usa ka bata aron mabarter sa uban nga mga tribu."*

*"There were so many captives before who became enslaved because of barter and slave trading. In ancient times, they sold rice, buyo, mama, etc., in exchange for a little child. They came from different tribes in the region. All of these happen because of*

*pangayaw (tribal war); for a family to preserve their lives, the bagani warriors will abduct one child from them and pursue barter to the different tribes."*

The symbolical action of barter and slave trading acquires a socio-cultural significance because it is one of the main reasons why different societies mingle with each other through the exchanges of their products. This activity signifies importance for the tribal community because they can share and gain cultural knowledge from other ethnic groups in their area. It also shows the social roles of the tribal leaders in this undertaking as they play major roles during the trading. In the folk narratives, the Sultan in the Kagan tribe legend and the Maranao in the Matigsalug tribe legend instigate this economic practice to portray their amusing traditional way of marketing to interact with one another.

### **Paganist Belief in Heaven**

The Tagakaulo hero Lumabet ascending to heaven is the symbolical action in the folk narrative. It is a belief that a worthy person with good deeds here on earth is capable of becoming a supernatural being. In the lines, *"Lumabet stretches his bow and arrow to hit the horn perfectly. Lumabet said, "This will indicate that I will live in heaven, and you, Kalnabung will live here above Mt. Matutum."* Lumabet is a powerful and just warrior who gives the appropriate punishment to his enemies; he is indeed blessed because of his moral behavior to their community as a leader; this is the main reason why he receives some gifts from heaven. The symbolical action of the tribal hero Tuwaang is his acquiescent belief in the gods and goddesses in heaven. Since then, the Manuvu tribe has had an undying faith in several divinities who dwell in heaven. They give a huge amount of respect to them because their supernatural abilities can bless or curse them. In the lines, *"He is a man of righteousness and wisdom. So in no less time, Tuwaang has been called into heaven together with his younger sister Ubmayan, a wonderful woman."* Tuwaang and his sister come



to heaven, and they immediately follow the orders of the deities because the hero might receive some revelations for the welfare of his people in the land. It is now portrayed that *Tuwaang* is a faithful servant of the divinities. The symbolic action of *Awawo* in this narrative is his deed of filling up stones for him to reach heaven. This is a religious practice of the *Dibabawon* tribe because they believe that a worthy member of the tribe will have the capability to receive enormous power and eternal life. The line, "*Awawo wanted to make a ladder going to heaven by filing big stones ut Makawoy refuses to help.*" signifies that the *Dibabawon* tribe of Davao del Norte believes that there is a heaven where gods and goddesses dwell. The symbolical action of believing in the concept of heaven links the cultural connection of *Tagakaulo*, *Manuvu*, and *Dibabawon* tribes in the Southeastern part of the Philippines as replicated in their folk narratives. It symbolizes the holiness and reverence of these ethnic groups towards the divinities who watch over them in the land. This act also clenches a symbolic understanding that the culture of ethnic tribes in the Davao region is inclined toward the ritualistic belief of paganism that patronizes multiple gods and goddesses within a specific tradition.

In an interview this 2020, respondent 5 stated: "*Ang mga lumad kay magbuhat ug ritwal, aron makapangayo ug pasaylo sa mga tanom nga ilahang nahilabtan nga gipanagiya sa mga dili ingon nato. Mao kini ang rason nganong kada tuig naay pasalamat pinaagi sa ritwal sa pagpangapog/paghalad para kini sa mga manindutong pananom nga gihatag sa ginoo sa langit (Magbabaya).*"

"*The indigenous people create a ritual so that they could ask forgiveness to the mystical creatures who own the plants that they were able to ravage. It is the main reason they celebrate thanksgiving every year through the ritual of pagpangapog/paghalad for the beautiful plantations given unto them by the Lord in heaven (Magababaya).*"

The symbolical action of believing in the

concept of heaven resonates with a socio-cultural significance due to the mystical patronization of the different ethnic communities. These ritualistic happenings of the tribal people are indispensable because of their societal perpetuation of receiving paradise within the span of living or after death. Hence, it divulges the societal roles of tribe members to dedicate their lives to supernatural beings so that they will receive heaven in the afterlife. In the folk narratives, *Lumabet* of the *Tagakaolo* tribe, *Tuwaang* of the *Manuvu* tribe, and *Awawo* of the *Dibabawon* tribe capitulate to this religious culture to embrace the heavenly blessings showered upon them.

#### Use of Magical Implements

The symbolical action of the tribal hero *Datu Makawoy* is the acquisition of a *talihan* or amulet that makes him a strong *bagani* who can surmount any opponent along his way. Even now, the *Dibabawon* tribe still believes in the presence of these magical charms to guide and guard them against the adversaries that may happen in the span of their lives. The lines, "*When Makawoy returned to Mt. Tampungon to conquer the land of his enemy, he saw the Tagamaling (spirit) dancing above the place where the stones were being piled. And when the Tagamaling saw him with a gesture of prowess, he gave him a talihan or "anting-anting."* illustrate that the *Talihan* also serves as their utmost protection against some unscrupulous elements that may bother their existence. The symbolic action of the tribal hero *Tulalang* is praying towards a *tubaran*, a magical tribal instrument of the *Manobo* tribe that they still magnify nowadays, knowing that it will give all of the necessary help in times of trouble. The lines, "*When Tulalang prays over tubaran, it showed something like a magical mirror. So he consulted his tubaran and learned that the power of Kalamkalam came from saldawan bird. Kalamkalam hid his power in the heart of the bird.*" show their utmost faithfulness towards the *Magbabaya* (Creator), the promulgator of this powerful object, who assist

and caution them every time they encounter life problems. In the legend, when the hero *Tulalang* doesn't know what to do to defeat the enemy, he prays and consults this ethnic material to see the villain's weakness. The symbolic action of using magical implements reverberates towards the culture of *Manuvu* and *Matigsalog* tribes in the Davao region, as portrayed in their folk narratives. It symbolizes the practice of mysticism that fosters some particular ways to unravel an answer to a difficult situation. This act also interplays a symbolic manifestation that a traditional belief influences the culture of ethnic tribes in the Southeastern Philippines in instruments or animals that could give them good fortunes as they conquer different obstacles in life.

In an interview last 2019, respondent 6 stated: *"Ang mga busaw muatake na sa mga tigulang ug bata. Naay mga bagani nga nagbitbit ug mga hiyas nga mao nay makapildi kanila. Ila ha nang tigbason ang busaw ug musalikway ang dugo niana."*

*"There were evil mythical creatures who would attack both young and old members of the tribe. However, some bagani warriors hold magical implements that could defeat them. They will also slash them with their spears, and the monster's blood will squelch everywhere."*

The symbolical action of using magical implements possesses a socio-cultural significance through the enchanting powers that it may give to the tribal members of their society who believe in its efficiency and efficacy during troublesome times. These mystical belongings of the tribal people play a vital role in protecting them against any harm that circumstances in life may bring. It also reveals the social functions of individuals from the tribe who hold these extraordinary instruments to help secure the community. In the folk narratives, *Datu Makaway* of the *Dibabawon* tribe and *Tulalang* of the *Manobo* tribe succumb to this societal tradition of mysticism as they want to save people from the appearance of several catastrophes.

### Cursing and Casting Enchantments

The symbolical action of *Apu Gusasa* in the folk narrative is casting a magical spell. The *Matigsalog* tribe believes that anyone from their community can master a mystical ability if they have the utmost faithfulness to *Manama* (god). The lines, *"Apu Gusasa shouts a magical spell to stop the catastrophe, 'langon ulog geap-apilan tu sa bato' meant it was just a child's play. He climbed into the house as the sun rose as if nothing happened."* Show that the tribal people who can do magic garner some respect from the tribal people because they can help them in times of trouble. This ancient ethnic belief is a way to become a good leader of the tribe because of his capacity to protect society. The symbolical action of the villain *Mahuraw* is dealing with the curse that kills all his wives. It is a social practice that the *Manuvu* tribe still believes. In the lines, *"But there was a certain man whose name is Mahuraw, he acquired a curse that every wife that he will have dies on his arms."*, the *Manuvu* tribe believes that if a man is not earnest about receiving something from a worthy member of the *Manuvu* tribe, he/she will suffer from a curse. The symbolical action of enchantment exemplifies the culture of *Manuvu* and *Matigsalog* tribes in the Southeastern Philippines as viewed in their folk narratives. This act symbolizes sorcery and wizardry that these indigenous people patronize to shield the community from adversaries. This act also implies that the culture of ethnic tribes in the Davao region is inclined toward the customary and traditional belief regarding the ability to cast a magical spell or curse individuals to safeguard the community against misfortunes and enemies. Hence, the tribal members with the utmost faith and devotion towards the divinities shall receive these extraordinary abilities.

In an interview last 2019, respondent 7 stated: *"Sa mga tribu lain ang tag-iyá sa mga kalasangan ug lain sad para sa mga kalag. Mao na buntag palang magpa-aso na mi kay mao na ang sumpa aron manghawa ang mga dili ingon nato kay dili sila*

*ganahan sa baho sa aso ug kini manghatag sa among kalawasan ug kaayuhan."*

*"For the different ethnic tribes, there are mystical creatures who own the woodlands and the spirits. It is the main reason we use to have some smoke every morning through the burning of dried leaves. It is a curse that the bad elements will move away because they do not want to smell the smoke; it will also give our bodies utmost healing."*

The symbolical action of enchantment holds a socio-cultural significance as it gives an extraordinary ability to shield the community against any harmful events that might take place. It also reveals a yin and yang perspective because it positively or negatively affects society. It also shows the social roles of chosen individuals of the tribe who learn this capability to serve and protect their tribe members from any obstacles in life. In the folk narratives, *Apu Gusasa* of the *Matigsalug* tribe accedes to his powerful skill of casting a magical spell to stop the heavy rain that disgraces his people. On the other hand, *Mahuraw* of the *Manuvu* tribe is a curse victim as his wives died before he could hold them. Thus, the society of ethnic groups in the Southeastern Philippines succumbs to these undertakings as they prosper in their cosmic beliefs in life.

### **Patronizing the Datu**

The *Datu* in *Sama* folk narrative is the father of Princess Tali. He is a strong leader who faithfully follows the culture and tradition of *Sama* tribe. He also possesses loyal servants willing to serve them all their lives. In the lines, *"In a faraway land, there was a beautiful kingdom ruled by a Datu and his daughter Bia (Princess)."* The *Datu* embraces their culture from his deepest soul, and he wants his people to follow it with utmost obedience to help preserve their culture. *Datu Makawoy*, in *Dibabawon* folk narrative, is known to be the father of all *Dibabawons* because of his supreme strength and power to defend the tribe against the conquering enemies. In the lines,

*"When Datu Makawoy receives talihan, it was the beginning of his leadership and quest to protect his tribe from invaders.",* the *Datu* possesses some bizarre abilities that would lead him to become an influential tribal member who can protect and save his people. The symbolic action of patronizing a *Datu* is replicated in the cultures of *Sama*, and *Dibabawon* tribes, which mirror their folk narratives. It symbolizes supremacy and control over the tribal members in their society. The authority and wisdom of a *Datu* are unquestionable because he is the sole influential leader of his community. This act also symbolizes that the culture of ethnic tribes living in the Davao region is accustomed to their fascination with the capabilities of their leader to guide and protect them through the advent of their existence in this world.

In an interview this 2020, respondent 8 stated: *"Ang mga Datu sa una sa mga tribu kay naa silay dako nga katungod kung kinsa ilang patyun kay tungod naa silay gasa para niini. Ang makapugong lang sa ilaha kay ang mga katiguwangan sa tribu nga naghatag ug malawom nga nga pulong kay sila magpasayod nga pwede pa madala sa istorya ang tanan."*

*"All tribal Datu before has a huge authority towards whom they wanted to kill because of their power. However, the set of people who could stop them is the elders of the tribe who gives some deeper wisdom as they believe that everything could be settled through modest conversations."*

The symbolic action of patronizing a *Datu* holds a socio-cultural significance because it is a political undertaking that is recognized by the different tribal communities. His administrative functions are defined through his social roles in guiding and protecting the community. Hence, the tribal members are keen on following the will of a certain *Datu* because of his wisdom in governing the tribe. In the folk narratives, the *Sama*, and the *Dibabawon* tribes sustain their *Datu* as the Supreme Being who elucidates a pervasive way of surviving and living in this dynamic world.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

It has been concluded that the symbolical actions of the cultural characters in Davao folk narratives reveal a transcendence of culture that goes beyond the usual limits of understanding classical belief systems in a regionalist manner among the ethnic groups of Southeastern Philippines in Mindanao. Hence, the critical evaluation of cultural distinctiveness and socio-cultural sense was deciphered using the Cultural Symbolism theory of Clifford Geertz. It helped in a deeper understanding of the interweaving culture present in the folk narratives found in Davao region. Thus, the cultural contents present in the folk narratives are the following; *pangayaw* (tribal war), divine intervention, hunting, barter, enslaved person trading, belief in the existence of heaven, usage of magical instruments, cursing and casting enchantments, and patronizing a *Datu*. Through this study, the folk legends of the *Tagakaolo*, the *Ata*, the *Mandaya*, the *Sama*, the *Bagobo*, the *Manuvu*, the *Matigsalug*, the *Mansaka*, the *Kagan*, the *Dibabawon*, and the *Manobo* people provide the readers an exemplified knowledge about how rich are the tribes of the Davao region in terms of culture. Indeed, they possess commonalities in cultural ways. Thus, the folk narratives can hint at an ethnic-kinship relationship that revolves around their society. Hence, regardless of having different ethnic tribes in Davao, there are commonalities in their cultural practices that interweave with one other and unify their existence in the region.

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