

COSMOLOGY OF THE MANDAYA

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This study on Mandaya cosmology seeks to explore the following questions: What do the Mandaya understand about the composition of their *cosmos* or universe? How do they live this understanding about the composition of their cosmos or universe? How do they resolve conflicts among themselves and with others and with the spirits in their environment?

The Mandaya believe that their one world is populated by myriads of beings; and that humans are just one of these. That some non-human beings or spirits are stronger than humans while many others are weaker, jealous, tricky, playful, wicked and harmful. I found the Mandaya did not believe that these spirits were gods, but they believe in the existence of one distant *Labaw na Magbabaya*—the one Source of all beings and the one who ultimately decides for everything that exists and occurs inside His *dunya* or realm, the world. For this belief in and respect for the existence of spirits in the same universe, missionaries branded the Mandaya and other indigenous peoples as “animists”, from the Latin word *anima*, spirits.

This study then investigates myths, symbols and rituals developed by the Mandaya as *homini religiosi* (religious human beings) for the purpose of creating and maintaining harmonious relationship with all the spirits in their one and only *kalibutan* or world with its *Langit* (heaven), *Lupa* (land), and *Ugsuban* (underworld). This is then also a study on the geography of the Mandaya universe, of the Mandaya perception of the harmonious relationships between human and the other spirits populating the *kalibutan* (world).

Keywords: *Mandaya, cosmology, langit, lupa, ugsuban, diwata, busaw, balyan*

Introduction

In my first contact with them in the mid 1960's, I realized that the Mandaya were not yet affected by the global religious movements that believe in a two-world universe—where this “material, temporal and secular world” is despised and rejected in favor of a “spiritual, eternal and transcendent” world

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(such as that which is preached by the Hindu, Buddhists, Taoists, Shintoists, Confucians, Zoroastrians, Manicheans, Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Hellenists, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Gnostics, and others). The theology and rituals of these universal religions consist in “cleansing rites”, purifications and decontamination from this world’s evil world. Their dualistic worldview revolutionized primitive and archaic forms of religiosity, a phenomenon which started two thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Initial investigations show that the Mandaya are aware that this present world is their only *kalibutan* or *dunya*. I was amazed to come upon the Mandaya people virtually isolated in their mountain homes still developing and practicing such monistic¹ spirituality, straddling between the primitive and the archaic levels of development of the religious cultural systems. For us, who seem to have lost contact with our pre-colonial ancestors’ religion and spirituality, studying Mandaya cosmology becomes a step in a journey to discover our forgotten (but still existing) religious cultural heritage (cf. Scott 1982).

The data used in this paper have been obtained through participatory observation and a 'dialogical method' among the Mandaya since the mid-60s. I first interacted with the Mandaya when, as a missionary and secular priest of the Prelature of Tagum, I facilitated requests for baptism. This context and how the conduct of research proceeded will be discussed further in a section below.

I started living with the Mandaya in 1965 in the parish of Baganga, Davao Oriental. It was in the parish of Moncayo, Compostela Valley where they taught me the monistic concept of humans living in a three-tiered but a single universe. In 1968, the Mandaya of Sangab, Caraga (Davao Oriental) openly asked for baptism. I agreed to the request provided that we (myself with the Mandaya of Sangab) first study Mandaya religiosity by a thorough discussion of each religious point. This took place in an overly large chapel where everyone who wanted to participate could be accommodated.

They were already used to me; I would eat and sleep in their homes, and participate in their rituals like the *Bakallag* (one of their healing rituals). I emphasized however that they can not become Christians without losing their Mandaya culture. At present, in my last visit this 2014, they are already Christians but still maintain and assert their Mandaya identity.

¹ Monism is a view that a complex entity (as the universe) is basically one; there is only one world, not two worlds—the good and the evil.

Who are the Mandaya?

The term “Mandaya” refers to ‘the people living in *daya/ilaya* or upstream/the upper portion of rivers flowing from the Eastern Cordillera of Mindanao or the Diwata Mountain Range into the Pacific Ocean: such rivers as the Tago, Hinatu-an, Bislig, Bostom, Cateel, Dapnan, Bagangan, Manurigao, Caraga, Manay, Kasallman, Kinono-an, Lingayaw, Bagwan, Tagsagawng, Bitanagan, Mayo, Kabwaya, Makamboll. The term Mandaya also denotes a linguistic group. Mandaya-speaking people settled in the headwaters of rivers flowing into the Davao Gulf like the Sumllog, Kingking, Hijo, Libuganon, Lasang, Davao, and Malita from the 16th century. They did this for two reasons: first, to isolate themselves from Muslim and Christian incursions; and, second, to be as close as possible to their slave-hunting grounds. The Mandaya people were said to be fierce warriors. They moved along the Pacific coast of Mindanao on sea-going *balangays* or *bidays* (boats) and scoured the jungles around the riverbanks. In those days, the objects of their hunt were other jungle dwellers, bands of hunter-and-food-gatherers.

When the population of these “*dullog batang*” (‘people who find shelter in fallen tree trunks’), “*tahu maya*” (‘humans like *maya* birds’) or “*lu-og*” (‘wild and naked’) people ceased to be found, the Mandaya slave-hunters next preyed on the dark-skinned and curly haired Mamanwa in Surigao, around Lake Mainit, Mangguwangan in Manat Valley and Saug River in present-day Compostela Valley province, and Ata-Manobo in the marshlands around Tagum, Carmen, and Panabo in Davao del Norte province². These new subjects of slave raiding were already incipient horticulturists unlike the uncontacted peoples mentioned above. The Mandaya sold their captives to other Mandaya who employed them their in slash-and-burn farming (*kaingin*) of aromatic rice, banana, root crops, and medicinal and aromatic herbs. Surplus manpower was sold to slave markets. Some female captives were taken as wives. The Muslim Kalagan (whose language is mutually intelligible with Mandaya) purchased these *biyags* or captives, transporting and selling them as slaves in the cosmopolitan markets of Cebu and Butuan, and much later, in Islamized Maguindanao.

Slave hunting is one of the reasons why Mandaya-speaking peoples split into several sub-groups. The other reason is the incursion Muslim and Christian religion. In the present time, Mandaya-speaking people are divided

² Personal communication from Datu Mandiyaon of Panaga, Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte (circa 1970s).

into several groups called “*Visayâ nga Kinamayo*”, which refers to the Mandaya in the province of Surigao del Sur who converted to Christianity; “*Visaya nga Davaweño*” which refers to the Christianized Mandaya in Davao Oriental, “*Mandaya*” in Davao Oriental and parts of Compostela Valley Province, “*Mansaka*” in Compostela Valley Province, “*Samaleño*” in Samal and Talikud islands, “*Tagakawlo*” in the mountains of Davao del Sur and Sarangani Province, and “*Kalagan*” in coastal communities in Davao Oriental and along the Davao Gulf.

The Mandaya-speakers found today in San Francisco, Bayugan Tres and Rosario in Agusan del Sur are descendants of the “*Tagabaloyes*” mentioned in Spanish missionary reports (Schreurs 1989, Proculo Daipan, pers. comm.). They were the Mandaya of Tandag coastal area who ‘went over’ *baloy* or mountain ranges to raid Banwa-on and Mamanwa villages and to sell their captives as slaves. The “*Sallupan Mandaya*” mentioned by ethnographers in the beginning of the 1900s (Landor 1904) were slave raiders who migrated westward to capture the Manggwangan along Saug River and the Ata-Manobo in the crocodile infested lands in Tagum, Carmen, Dujali, and Panabo areas.

Linguistic studies (Llamson 1978, McFarland 1980, and Rubrico 2006) show that the Mansaka and the other Mandaya-speaking peoples are members of the Central Philippine Group of Languages. This means that the Mandaya-speaking people came from the same original speech community that the languages Tagalog, Bicolano, Visayan and Mamanwa developed from. The people whose language eventually evolved into Mandaya drifted to the East Coast (“*contra costa*”)³ of Mindanao riding on seaworthy *balangay* (boats) in search of slave hunting grounds. We may venture to say that these migrants chose to settle (probably around the 10th century) at the northern bank of a river called Karagan (a derivative of *karayan* or *kagayan*, meaning “river”) because it is the only river mouth in the entire Pacific Coast of Mindanao where a natural fortress of a wide limestone rock stands as guard. At present this is still the name of river where the municipality of Caraga in Davao Oriental derived its name. Islamized Mandaya speakers thus proudly call themselves Kalagan even if they do not live in Caraga. The Mandaya in Kagan Valley (the headwaters of Caraga River as it bends through Mt. Kampalili in New Bataan, Compostela Valley) and its environs, call themselves “*Mangallagan*”. The Mandaya and the townspeople of the municipality of Caraga today call themselves “*Caragueños*”.

³ *Contra costa* is a commonly used term to refer to the East Coast of Mindanao in the Pre and Post-War period, reminiscent of the east coast of Spain which is also referred to as *contra costa*.

The Mandaya were carpenters, blacksmiths and basket weavers; they were *kaingineros* (slash-and-burn) farmers specializing in the production of aromatic mountain rice, millet and *aglay* (Job's tears), root crops, bananas, aromatic herbs, and vegetables. They hunted wild pigs, deer, and wild chicken, and fished from the rivers which were teeming with fish, eels and shrimps. Mandaya women made *ikat* woven abaca cloth into *dagmay* tube skirts, and embroidered blouses and shirts. They decorated their bodies with beadwork and bracelets and rings. They exchanged captives for imported iron ingots and iron tools and weapons, bronzeware and porcelainware which were distributed as gifts; tokens of admiration and loyalty. They played several kinds of musical instruments of their own making, and they chanted *dawot* (epic poems), or *bayok* (spontaneously composed and recited poems). They composed and told short stories, jokes, proverbs and riddles. They brewed a strong drink from fermented sugar cane juice (*bya-is*).

The Mandaya became known as fierce raiders, astute traders of slaves, and generous gift givers—during feasts, which were occasions that also served to create and promote harmonious relationships among family members, friends, allies, and neighbors.

Isolation of the Mandaya

The word “Mandaya” also indicates defiance against political, cultural, and religious proselytism by both Muslim and Christian missionaries. Migration to the hinterlands was a coping mechanism resorted to by the Mandaya speaking people to get closer to their slave hunting grounds and to create distance or barrier between them and invading Muslim slave traders or from Christian colonizers. The Mandaya and the Kalagan traders refrained from living together in the same settlement; they met only at appointed times and places to transact business—the exchange of Mandaya captives (*biyag*) for imported iron ingots and iron tools and weapons, bronzeware, porcelain ware, textiles, colored cotton threads, and glass beads.

The Spanish colonial government prevented Mandaya expansion northward by establishing a small fort (*fortaleza*) in Tandag in 1609. The reaction of the Mandaya-speaking population to this was to go further upstream and 'cross over the mountain ridge' (*yagballoy*) to hunt for the Banwa-on and the Mamanwa. Some joined the sea-raiding Islamized Kalagan, a few became the first Christian Mandaya of Tandag. Not much conversion work was done by the Augustinian Recoleta missionaries, who were dwindling in number and whose last mission station in the last quarter of the 1800s was in Cateel. It was here in Cateel that in 1797 the leaders of

Caraga Mandaya met the *Alcalde Mayor* of Tandag (capital of Caraga Province). They formally requested the Spanish government to build a fort and to assign a permanent priest in Caraga to help defend against Kalagan slave raiders who were hiding in the neighboring town of Manay. The Mandaya promised to come down from the mountains to establish a *pueblo*, to help build the church, and to help the soldiers defend the town hiding in Manay. The plan started to be implemented in 1874, when Jesuit missionaries were assigned to Caraga. The *reducción* strategy⁴ of conversion was employed and the Mandaya who were converted called themselves *Visaya nga Davaweño*.

The Jesuit missionaries labored among the Mandaya until 1939. Their work was continued by French Canadian missionaries - Priests of the Foreign Mission Society of Quebec (PME Fathers) - who manned the parishes in Davao Oriental until the beginning of the 1960s. By mid-1960, there were still unbaptized Mandaya in Kampawan, Binondo, Tigbawan and Batawan in Baganga (whom I met in 1966); in Lamiawan, Lu-ay, Lubganon, Bullâ, Di-at, Magsayap, Batyano, Sangab, Butay, Katagbakan, Langgwisan, Pongpong and Tagdallungdong in Caraga (in 1968); in Makopa, Manay and in Panansalan, in Cateel, and Macopa and Danawan in Manurigao (in 1970) – all located in the present Davao Oriental province. They had to some extent successfully isolated themselves from Muslim and Christian influence and preserved much of their archaic religious culture.

However, this isolation was soon broken when logging roads penetrated into the rainforest that had become their homeland around the 1960s. The Mandaya started asking for baptism 'in order to become Bisayan'. Aram Yengoyan, an Armenian-American Anthropologist who was there in the 1960s became aware of this strange phenomenon among the Mandaya asking to be baptized. He called it the "Bisayanization" process (Yengoyan 1966). There was no religious motivation behind their request for baptism. The Mandaya saw that the Visayan migrants were economically and politically better off than them; they thought that by 'becoming Bisaya' or mainstream Filipinos they would have better opportunities. So they came to the priests requesting to be transformed into Visayan through baptism.

Data gathering (and conversion) using the Dialogical Method

To help the Mandaya satisfy their desire to be baptized, I had to organize catechumenates. Since they were asking for baptism, it was convenient for

⁴ Reducción is the 'improved' Jesuit-style of hamletting Mandaya who have undergone 40 days Jesuit retreat.

me to gather my respondents/informants in assemblies first to review their traditional Mandaya religious beliefs and practices. It was an exchange of information: they openly shared narratives with me about their traditions and I also shared with them my personal understanding and experience of Christian beliefs and practices. This methodology allowed each of the Mandaya catechumens to review what he or she knew of the indigenous religion, and in fact, to participate actively in data verification and analysis. Essentially it entailed a community effort to formulate a comprehensive picture of what Mandaya beliefs and practices are all about. This was conducted in the Mandaya language, which I became fluent in as early as 1966. With these data, we (I and the Mandaya participants) gained a reliable picture of the status of Mandaya religious system at the time. The aim was to determine 'growth points' within the traditional religious system into which new religious elements could be grafted or developed.

My informants were not inhibited from volunteering information because they had confidence that such knowledge was not to be used against their interests. My goal was to help them enter mainstream Filipino society without losing the Mandaya cultural identity, and this included their traditional religious system. If, given the dissimilarities and uncertainties uncovered by this learning and sharing method, my Mandaya informants decided to become Christians, it would be their own decision, one I did not force upon them. It would also be the catechumens themselves to introduce changes into their indigenous religiosity, such that Christian beliefs, principles and practices could be incorporated. I call this method of data gathering (and conversion) the Dialogical Method.

Reflections on Mandaya cosmology

My informants and I, through this participatory and dialogical method of data gathering, discovered that the Mandaya world view is monotheistic—they believe in only one God—but at the same time as animists they also believe that this one world is filled with all sorts of spirits. These spirits are neither gods nor demons. They are not worshipped but only befriended or appeased; we must carefully relate with them because these spirits can harm us if not treated with respect.

This led me to ask, is there such a thing as animistic monotheism? Many scholars do not accept the existence of an animistic population who truly believe that there is only one "*Labaw na Magbabaya*" or 'One Who Wills Everything'. Ethnographers (e.g., Garvan 1931, Benedict 1916) and missionaries of Mindanao (e.g., Pastells 1933) call the spirits "deities", or

“gods and demons”. Thus Filipinos have been accused of practicing polytheism and idol worship when what they were doing was to create or restore harmonious relationships between themselves and the spirits that they believe surround them. Can the Mandaya and other indigenous peoples not be Christianized without first teaching them to become Jews, Greeks, Roman, Western Europeans, Protestant Americans or westernized Filipinos? The quarrel of St. Paul on behalf of the Gentiles continues⁵.

Three-storey universe, one world. During these assemblies, we found out that the Mandaya did not see the universe as composed of two 'worlds' the way Islam and Christian doctrines do. My informants explained that the Mandaya cosmos or *dunya* is a three-tiered world, where the highest level is called *Langit* (the heavens), the lowest level is called *Ugsuban* (underworld), and the middle level *Lupa* (earth or land). To make it easier for my ignorant mind to understand, they compared the world to a bamboo tube with three nodes (*bukó*) filled with all sorts of spirits. To maintain order, each spirit had been assigned to live and operate in one of these three *bukó* or nodes.

I first listened to narratives about this cosmological concept of a three-tiered or three-storey universe in Kampawan, Baganga in 1966. The same information was repeated to me in 1967 (Duday Constancia Reyes-Labrador pers. comm.) and echoed by their Dibabawon neighbors. In this universe, populated by all kinds of spirits, human beings are concerned to maintain personal, social, and cosmic harmony in order to attain specific goods—e.g., rain, good harvest, offspring, health, good fortune, wealth, fame, and respect of family members and neighbors.

The Mandaya religious culture is monistic—they are oriented to a single cosmos. They know nothing of another realm of reality that is considered more 'exalted' or infinitely more valuable than this here-and-now world. The emergence of “world rejecting religions” occurred two thousand years B.C. (Bellah 1978). How the Mandaya had succeeded to resist encroachment by world-rejecting religions into their religious cultural system, was in itself, I felt, also a wonderful phenomenon. The Mandaya whom I met in mid 1960s stated that there is only one cosmos: all beings found in heaven, on earth and in the underworld are found therein. Through healing rituals like the *balilig*, the Mandaya create and maintain harmony in the world. The Mandaya religious activities consisted primarily of establishing harmony with the forces of nature, and with the powerful spirits who dwell in the *Langit* as well as those in *Ugsuban* (see the list of Mandaya rituals appended). These spirits or mythical beings are characterized as actively and sometimes

⁵ This can be read in the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament.

willfully controlling the natural and human world, and as beings with whom men must deal in a definite and purposive way.

At this point, I must insist that my Mandaya informants do not consider their powerful spirits like the “*diwata*”, “*busaw*”, “*tagamaling*” and all the numerous “*tawagunon*”—which denotes all the nature spirits who are invited during healing rituals—, to be “gods” and “demons”⁶. While spirits may dominate particular parts of it, there is still only one world. The relations among the spirits are a matter of speculation, but human life is affected by the quality of the relationships existing between humans and the spirits. The Mandaya would invite all the *mugbungay* (higher, heavenly) spirits during the healing rituals, like the *pagbalilig*, *pagbakallag*, *pagmana-ug*, and the *tawagunon* (lesser, nature spirits) for simpler rituals like the *pag-alimo* and the *paglimpas*, also healing rituals and maintaining harmonious relationship with the spirits. Even those considered dangerous and harmful are an important part of the whole reality. They too are invoked and appeased; they are to be befriended, not worshipped.

The heavens (Langit or Gabawnœn). *Langit* or 'the heavens' is a mysterious place beyond the clouds and the blue skies, and usually invisible to the naked eye. Other names for *Langit* are *Gabawnon*, *Pagawanan* or *Patiwayan*. The English word 'heaven' is not an exact translation, because in modern usage this concept involves belief in another world, a wholly different world relative to which the actual world is utterly devoid of value. Mandaya *Langit* is not described in detail by my informants, except that it is the abode of powerful spirits, intelligent beings who are not human. Surprisingly, there are also human beings in *Langit*. The human beings in heaven do not have to work in order to eat. They don't have to earn a living. There is always feasting and good music, but the partygoers feast only on the sight and smell of fabulous dishes being served. Their main source of pleasure is “*yang pagmamâ*” or the chewing of *buyô* leaf (a vine related to black pepper family) with the following wrapped in it: sliced *areca* nut or quid (*mama-on*), lime powder made from charred shells of edible fresh water snails (*apug*), sliced *lawingan* vine, and tobacco (an ingredient introduced only after the coming of the Spaniards). Some informants explained that those who dwell in *Langit* do not get hungry because they have no internal organs. Hence, they eat only the spirit of the rice and other foods served to them. When not attending banquets and parties, the heavenly beings spend

⁶ This is contrary to the impressions of western and westernized missionaries and ethnographers including Pastells (1933), Garvan (1931), and Benedict (1916).

time chewing betel quid. I was not told how they could have a constant supply of these chewing condiments in *Langit*.

The fortunate human beings in heaven are there because they were 'raised' to heaven (*byaton*) by a powerful spirit friend (*abyan*). There are two kinds of beings in *Langit* that you can call to help you (*magka-on* or *mugbungay*), powerful spirits that can become *abyan* or spiritfriends of human beings: the mild and gentle *diwata*, and the cruel, bloodthirsty and haughty *busaw*. The *abyan* of a medium or *balyan* are "*diwata*" whom she invokes to descend into her and help in curing illnesses. The *abyan* of a high-ranking warrior (*bagani*) are *busaw*, invoked to descend upon him, and on his lower-ranked warriors or "*manikllad*" and "*mangayaws*" (braves) to make them brave and strong when they raid enemy tribes and unaware villages.

As *abyan*, both *diwata* and *busaw* are invoked to cure illnesses. The bloodthirsty *busaw* are asked to infuse their devotees with the courage, skill and strength in combat which makes blood flow from their victims and which pleases the *busaw*; thus harmony is restored and the *busaw* will drive away the debilitating illnesses and misfortunes that usually afflict inactive fighting men and their families. Bravery must have been an earlier and important value among the Mandaya. *Diwata* help the *balyan* find the 'soul' or *kal-luwa* of a sick person, and to negotiate with the *busaw* who had captured the lost soul and hidden it behind the sun. The term *diwata* is derived from the Hindu religion and the concept of a friendly female spirit is apparently a later element in Mandaya religious beliefs; it may have been borrowed from Sanskrit through contacts of our Austronesian ancestors with Hindu traders.⁷

The *Labaw na Magbabaya* ('Controller of All') is said to live in a distant highest ('seventh') heaven. I have not heard the *Labaw na Magbabaya*'s home described as a luxurious court like that of Zeus in Mt. Olympus, or some Indian and Middle Eastern potentate, or a European emperor.

Not much is known about *Langit* except some details my informants remember from listening to Mandaya *ullubaton* (a legend, or an episode of a *dawot* or epic) and *umanuman* (narrative stories also called *sugilanon* in Bisaya) relating the adventures of favored human beings who had been raised to the sky world. Here are some of the stories:

⁷ I like to think that when the concept was adopted, the gentle and peace loving characteristics among local spirits were assigned to the *diwata* while the warlike and bloodthirsty characteristics were assigned to the local *busaw*. This "theorizing" still needs further study.

*Biabaton si Bal-lak*⁸

If the rest of *Bal-lak's* story needs to be told, before he was taken up to heaven (*baton*) he was already a faithful devotee (*matinaya-on*) of an *Abyan* (a Spiritfriend or Patron), who happened to be a gentle, peace loving *Diwata*. After leading an exemplary life as expected of a *matinaya-on*, a dying old beggar asked him for something to eat. In a gentle voice he answered the beggar, “Lady, this is a time of a very long drought. My family and I are also starving. But I'm going to give you the last food we have so that you can experience one full meal before you expire.” After she ate, the beggar thanked *Bal-lak* for his generosity. She awarded him a large handkerchief and instructed him to spread it on the ground and wish for food or anything he might need, and he would find it on the handkerchief. Then the old woman disappeared. The time of famine ended for *Bal-lak* and his friends. He also discovered that he could cure sickness. His fame as a good-hearted man spread far and wide. His virtuous life on earth ended when his *Abyan* decided to raise him and his family to heaven, where he continued to be generous and thus incurred the ire of one of the powerful heavenly spirits for threatening to over populate the heavens with his human friends.⁹

A moratorium against *Pagbaton ni Bal-lak*

A story explains why *Bal-lak* had to stop raising his fellow human beings to heaven. One of the powerful heavenly spirits (*Tagalang*) was known to his Mandaya devotees as *Busaw Sallagintungan*. As a *Busaw* he enjoyed descending into his

⁸ Known as *Ban-lak* to the *Dibabawon Manobo* of Moncayo and La-ak. Note also that the person “Badla” reported by Fr. Pastells as one of the “gods” worshipped by the Mandayas together with Mandarangan and Mansilatan (Pastells 1933) may had been *Ban-lak*. The name “*Badlâ*” could be a mispronunciation, which I believe may have occurred because the informant was chewing tobacco (*lagot*). To answer the interview question, the informant placed the lagot between the upper front teeth and lip, producing the wrong sound “*Badla*”.

⁹ Several epic poem episodes of *Bal-lak* and his brother *Agyo* could have been sung all over the *Manobo* lands. Learning about *Bal-lak's* adventure and exploits would educate modern Filipinos of the worldviews, life style, value systems and norms of conducts of their forebears. It is also interesting to note that in Cebuano, to “*balak*” is to recite poetic verses; and in Tagalog, to “*balak*” is to plan

humanfriends, the *bagani* (warlords) and their *mangangayaw* (soldiers), transforming them into brave and fearless warriors, ruthless and cruel, clever and strong. The intermittent raids carried out on villages on earth were of his making. Being a bully, *Busaw Sallagintungan* was jealous of *Bal-lak's* growing popularity in *Langit*. To stop the migration of human beings to *Langit*, *Sallagintungan* confronted *Bal-lak*. They had a skirmish. The *busaw* seized *Bal-lak's* wife, *Sugnayo*, and threatened to kill her unless *Bal-lak* would promise to stop his project to raise (*baton*) all his humanfriends to heaven. *Bal-lak* was obliged to make the promise. To commemorate *Bal-lak's* pledge, bloodthirsty *Sallagintungan* bit off *Sugnayo's* index finger and spat it in the direction of the setting sun. Until today, we can witness the *Sallagintungan-Bal-lak* Pact when we look up the evening sky and see *Sugnayo's* blood spurting from her finger, painting the sunset red.

Tapokak's fiasco

A legend relates how a Mandaya named *Tapokak* (or *Tapokanon*) was taken up to the heavens together with his family by another human being, an epic hero: the long time resident of *Langit* named *Bal-lak*. Upon arrival, the group of *Tapokak* was informed that they were to attend a feast given by the *Tagalangs* (spiritdwellers of *Langit*). However, they were instructed not to swallow food during the feast but to get satisfied just by seeing and smelling the delicious food being served. In fact, they were specifically warned not to ingest any food being served. Being a comedian, *Tapokak* ignored the instruction and ate hard the way he would in any party on earth. In the middle of the banquet, he got into trouble. His stomach was so heavy with food that he had to seek a comfort room, and there was none. Since no one physically ingested solid food in heaven, they did not find it necessary to construct a toilet. Everybody laughed at poor *Tapokak*. Somebody pointed out to him a flimsy scaffolding outside of the window. While in the process of defecating, the scaffolding broke down and down fell to earth our friend *Tapokak*. His blood is sprinkled on all colored and variegated plants still seen today like the *ballanti*, the *kila*, the *malisa*, the *allum*, the purple skinned *tubo* (sugar cane), *wakag*, *pawda* (sweet potato), *huya* (ginger), etc. The

fiasco of *Tapokak* supported *Busaw Sallagintungan's* complaint that humans are already a nuisance in heaven¹⁰.

Biabaton si Ongmong

Another legend tells how *Ongmong* and her brother, known only as *Kimud* (youngest child) were taken up to heaven. A Mandaya community was busy drying the *Pyadallungan* River up to catch fish. They had been working hard, but the water remained deep. They were already tired when a man and a woman arrived. The people did not recognize them immediately. After asking what their problem was, the man planted his staff (*bankâ*) in the middle of the river and the water separated into two parts, one part flowing to one bank, the other part flowing to the opposite bank. He took his sister's *suwat* comb, carved from the *dawmullan* (a bamboo), and buried it on the sand, and the river became dry. The people could not contain their joy gathering the wriggling *kaya* (fish, eels and shrimps) into their bamboo fish baskets and other available containers. The people suddenly recognized the couple as the heavenly beings (*manlangitnon*) *Mansilatan* and his sister *Limbong*. In thanksgiving they hurriedly made *tuba* or *bya-is* (fermented sugar cane juice or honey) to welcome the heavenly visitors. They pushed one another to extend their arms offering the traditional Mandaya beverage to their favorite heavenly spirits. The competition became more unruly when *Mansilatan* declared that the man whose *bya-is* container would be received by *Limbong* would become her husband. Many containers were spilled on *Limbong's* lap. One young woman, named *Ongmong* grabbed *Limbong's* *dagmay* (tube skirt) and held on to it. Suddenly, the heavenly couple started levitating. *Limbong* took the *bya-is* from the hand of *Kimud*, *Ongmong's* younger brother, who was standing shyly at the back of the crowd. He and his sister floated on the air with *Mansilatan* and *Limbong*. They alit at the headwaters of a river to wash off the reddish stain of the *bya-is* from the lap of *Limbong's* skirt. The color of the river immediately turned reddish brown. From then on it

¹⁰ A similar story is told among the Ata-Manobo people of the Upper Libuganon area about a character named Pugak (cf. *Ka Nangnangonon ni Pugak* in Bajo 2004:171-175).

was called the *Mallallag* Creek (between the headwaters of Manurigao River and Cateel River). *Mansilatan* took *Ongmong* as his wife. *Limbong* married *Ongmong*'s brother, *Kimud* (youngest sibling) whose real name my informant can no longer remember¹¹.

Pagbaton ni Balla-oy

Balla-oy is an example of a religiously devoted man (*matinaya-on*). He was a hard working farmer. He was never selfish. He was always ready to share with others whatever he had. Every harvest time he had a large tract of land planted to rice (*humay*), taro (*wakag*), sweet potatoes (*palluda*), and other crops. He harvested only the food that his family needed to survive until the next harvest. The rest he offered to the spirits, especially to *Andagaw* and his wards. As a reward for his exemplary behavior, his *diwata* told *Balla-oy* that the heavenly spirits (*manlangitnon*) would be happy to have him live with them. He and his family would be raised to heavens. On the appointed day and hour, he gathered his family members inside the house to offer a sacrifice to the *diwatas*, and to partake of the *diwata*'s leftovers. Unfortunately, one of his household members ran outside the house to fetch drinking water from a nearby mountain spring. The house was already a foot or two from the ground when the boy arrived home. He immediately climbed up the house leaving his bamboo tube filled with spring water (*dagtong*) leaning by the ladder. The *dagtong* was left standing when *Balla-oy's* house was lifted up to heaven. This took place on Pujada Island at the entrance of Pujada Bay in Mati, where *Balla-oy* farmed his last *kaingin*. Today there must be a species of yellow rind bamboo growing in Pujada Island with smooth yellow rind bamboo, descendant of *Balla-oy's* *dagtong* (bamboo water container).

Other human beings who were thought to have been raised to heaven were *Balyan Sabina* or *Gawa-onon*, *Balla-oy* and *Meskinan*. I interviewed a *balyan* (or shaman) who said that her *diwata* had offered to raise her to heaven; but she refused the offer because of her love for her family. The *balyan* I have interviewed refused to name their *abyan* out of fear and respect. The names of these *abyans* were never mentioned (referring to the

¹¹ Narrated by Julius Alimbon in Pantuyan, Caraga, Davao Oriental (2009).

spirit that descends and possesses the *balyan*). In the incantations that I heard, *abyan* were also called “*mugbong*”, “*umayon*”, and “*mallbas*”. Thus, the *balyan* would invoke and invite the *Umayon ni Sabina*, the *Mugbong ni Gawa-onon* ('the spirit that descends upon Sabina', 'who possesses the consciousness of Gawa-onon') without naming him or her. Many *balyan* had developed a very intimate relationship with their *abyan* such that they would converse with them as friends even outside of rituals and ceremonies. Many *balyan* believed and hoped that their *abyan* would raise them to heaven in the near future in spite of the moratorium set by *Busaw Sallagintungan* long ago in the days of *Bal-lak*. They believed that in heaven they would have a better life than they already have on the earth, *Lupa*.

Other names for *Langit* are *Patiwayan* and *Gabawnon*. Other named spiritdwellers of heaven or *manlangitnon*, aside from *Sallagintungan*, are *Mansilatan* and *Mandarangan*¹². The *Manlangitnon* are not worshipped, they are only propitiated, often for some unintentionally made offenses. The *Manlangitnon* communicate with human beings on the earth or *Lupa* through their *balyan* friends. They communicate their desire for sacrifices of pig's blood and human blood by allowing illnesses and bad luck to come to us humans. They also maintain *omlis* or intelligent birdlike messengers whose whistling voice could be heard and understood only by the *balyan*.

During one's lifetime, a Mandaya strives to discover an *abyan* for himself/herself with whom he/she could communicate and relate to. When the *balyan* invokes the *abyan* to come down from the heaven and descend upon her, she chants:

“ <i>Oyapong Kaw ni Gimball</i>	Come down riding on the drumbeats,
<i>Sakay Kaw ni Lalawdon</i>	On the vibration of the drum,
<i>Ni Lalawdon pyapagdagat</i>	Vibrations that make waves like the sea
<i>Ni Gimball pyapagdalluyon</i> ¹³	Drumbeats like giant waves beating the shores

These verses show that the horizon is where *Lupa*, *Langit* and the *Ugsuban* meet. It seems that the blue skies and the sea are one contiguous reality. One could indeed get this impression, when from hills of Caraga, he would study the endless horizon of the wide Pacific Ocean on a clear sunny day. In one *dawot* (epic poem), the hero, a young boy *Maylan* (also called *Makallanos*), had to paddle his way towards the blue horizon to reach the

¹² Fr. Pastells (1933) mentions *Badlâ* as son of *Mansilatan* and also a *busaw*.

¹³ Chanted to me by Madugilay Maglintang in Katigud in 1968.

underworld *Ugsuban* and retrieve a lost top. It was a heroic act because the earth was already flooding because *Makallanos'* top was plugging the great hole in the *Bilibolan sang Dagat* ('the navel of the sea').

The word *magbayâ* means 'to will, to control, to decide'. My informants believe in one Ultimate and Almighty *Magbabaya*: 'One Who Decides for the World,' *Magbabaya sang Dunya*, who is always good to His creatures, always patient and caring. It is the lower beings that affect humans. *Magbabaya* lives in the highest or seventh level of *Langit*. But human beings do not worry about Him. Powerful spirits are the guardians or protectors (*magbabaya*) of the rain and the winds, the springs, streams, deep pools, rivers and lakes; hills and mountains, precipices and caves; the plants, trees and forests; the wild animals like the crocodile, the deer, the wild boars, the wild chicken, the fish, the snakes, the lizards, the rats, the insects, the birds, etc. They must be respected and propitiated when offended because they can always retaliate. They are the ones who can cause all our good fortunes and our troubles. The Mandaya must establish some way to deal with them.

Land (Lupa). The Earth is also called *Salladan* or *Mandalluman na Banwa*, 'dwelling place below the heavens'. This is the proper abode for the living human beings and the spirits of nature. *Lupa* is the land on the surface of the earth. This is where the Mandaya are born, where they struggle to live a successful life, to propagate themselves and raise their families, the place to die of accidents, sickness or old age, or meet an honorable death in combat. During his lifetime, a human has to contend not only with his fellowmen but also with other intelligent beings, some purely spiritual beings; others are *tibaglimaw* (half-human/half-beast) monsters. There are intelligent spirits residing not only on land *Lupa*, in the heavens *Langit*, but also in the underworld *Ugsuban*. These beings who are *di magsing-iling kanaton* ('not like us'; in Visayan, "*dili ingon nato*") are usually invisible to the naked eye but, if they wish to, they have the power to appear to humans in any form, including human form. The Mandaya believe that most of these beings are more powerful than humans. Most are mischievous and often hostile to humans. They make jokes and laugh at human mistakes, failures, and bad luck. They bring about all sorts of difficulties, misfortunes, sickness and death. They enjoy playing with human's destiny. A human goes through life learning how to deal with these beings to his own advantage. The essence of the Mandaya religious beliefs and practices consists of trying to establish and maintain a favorable relationship with intelligent beings in his universe that are "*di mag-unawa, di magsing-iling kanaton*" or 'not human like us'.

Among the dominant spirits on *Lupa* are the *Tagamaling*, the *Tibaglimaw* (who are half human and half *diwata* or *busaw*), the *Apila* (who are giants or ogres), *Tamâ* (like elves), *Dagaw* that are dwarves or tiny people, and the different kinds of earthbound ghouls (*Mamang*) or *Mangudlaway* (which are also called by the borrowed Bisayan term “*Aswang*”) or *Manintallay*. The *Mabinaybay* and the *Madinagat* of the sea coast are 'harmful spirits' (*Mamang*), as are the *Amamalloy* and the *Andagaw* living just below the ground surface, and the *Gamawgamaw* of rivers and streams. *Mantiyanak* who were once upon a time women who died in childbirth are likewise harmful spirits (*Mamang*). They attack men to remove their genitals because they blame the male for their deaths. *Tallakatak* were men who were victims of the *Mantiyanak*. They attack women to seek vengeance. *Bingit* attract their victims by pretending to be helpless newborn babies. *Manguyatot* eat only raw food. Like the *Dagaw* (dwarves) they will steal your root crops, fruit and grains. *Apila* (giants), the *Tama* (elves) and the *Dagaw* (tiny people) are playful spirits of nature; but they can also hurt humans. *Siling* play practical jokes until their victims would get confused and could not find their way home. *Pungkoll* who are armless and *Buta* who are blind are also given their share of the offerings made especially during rituals celebrated before planting crops. *Omli* are good spirits, whose voices sound like birdcalls. They are friendly messengers from the *Manlangitnon* or beings in the heavens and can be understood only by *balyan*.

The *Tagamaling* are generally earthbound benevolent spirits, who have contributed much to the development of Mandaya culture: crafting and playing musical instruments like the *kudlong* (two stringed guitar), the *suding* (bamboo made Jew’s harp), *paundag*, *sagoysoy* and *bunabon* (kinds of bamboo flutes), blacksmithing, *dagmay* (abaca fiber cloth) weaving, making use of medicinal herbs and nursing the sick—all these arts and crafts which differentiate the Mandaya from less sophisticated tribes in Mindanao are believed to have originated from the *Tagamaling*. *Tagamaling* are believed to be more intelligent and more powerful than humans. Said to reside in huge *budbud* or *balete* (*Ficus sp.*, relative of the banyan trees), they keep to themselves and do not mix with the people around them. But it is said that in the beginning they were generous neighbors and would lend dishes and tableware, if requested. Unfortunately, some borrowers took advantage of their generosity and failed to return the borrowed items. Who could these people have been?

If *Tagamaling* reside in the *budbud* or *balite* tree, the spirit of nature called *Andagaw* and his wards of pests haunt caves (*langub*), the shallow

caves (*gikub*), and gulleys or cracks on earth's surface (*bito*). One has to keep silent and behave with respect and decorum when inside a forest or when passing by a *budbud* tree. There are *budbud* trees so sacred that you have to pay (*bunall*, as in *bunawan*) fines or tribute (*buwis*, as in *buwisan*) as you pass within the vicinity. A traveler must refrain from making jokes or vulgar laughter because the place is *palili*—taboo or sacred—to the spirits. One also has to refrain from making any funny comments when passing a field ripe with grains, or when harvesting rice, lest *Andagaw* hear, get jealous and steal the harvest. This explains why everyone keeps silent when harvesting rice. Bathing a cat, making fun of a monkey, laughing at the physically and mentally disable, mentioning names of sea creatures like fish and sea shells when one is in the *ilaya* or upstream portion of the river insults the upland spirits. It is *palili* (forbidden). The spirits may retaliate, and may punish transgressors with sickness and bad luck. Partners in incestuous acts are stricken by thunder and lightning. Stories are told of how transgressors were turned to stone. Fever and stomachaches among children during harvest time are said to have been caused by the *Madinagat* and the *Mabinaybay*—spirits from the sea coasts who come to visit the *daya* or *ilaya* upriver to partake of the harvest. All these spirits must be appeased by rituals and sacrificial offerings, if one is to get well or avoid sickness.

It must be noted there that omens and dreams play very important role in the life of the Mandaya. Planned journeys and all sorts of undertakings can be hampered by bad omens. The *limokon* bird, a member of the wild pigeon family, is sacred to the Mandaya because it is believed to be a harbinger of good or bad news from one's *abyan*. If it coos just before someone leaves the house or directly in front of the traveler, it is a warning for him not to proceed because certain danger awaits. A legend says that is how a whole family was swallowed by a giant eel. They did not heed the warning of the *limokon* bird. For several days, they stayed inside the stomach of the leviathan and breathed the air it breathed. One day, when they felt that the eel was lying motionless, they heard the cooing of the *limokon*. This gave them the signal that they were on land. With a few strokes of the Mandaya *kakana* (large knife) they were able to open the side of the eel. This and many other stories strengthen the Mandaya belief in the usefulness of consulting the *limokon* for every trip or journey one makes. One would commonly find a cage or two of the *limokon* bird hanging from the eaves of a Mandaya house.

Another sacred messenger producing sounds like a bird is the *Oml*. It may be hard to see this bird. Other informants do not believe it's a bird. Everybody accepts that *balyan* can communicate with their *abyan* through

the *Omlì*. Through whistling sounds, an *abyan* can also communicate information regarding the sickness of stricken individuals.

I am not aware if the Mandaya practice divination to consult the will of the spirits or to foretell the future. The closest is the *pagtali* when a *Balyan* consults the spirit of a *pataklla*, a Maranao-made bronze box, containing chewing condiments, or a sacred stone, and which indicates (by its swinging movement) the proper healing ritual to be performed that could appease offended or aggressive spirits.

The underworld (Bilibolan or Ugsuban). The concept of the Underworld is similar to that of the Hebrew *Sheol*, or the Greek *Hades*: it is an unseen world, the abode of the dead. The Mandaya *Ugsuban* is the resting place of the dead, an underground region located below the surface of the earth, where darkness and great silence reign. In the middle of the Underworld grows a huge papaya tree with two branches reaching out to the surface of the earth. Those who die a natural death pass through one branch of this mystical tree of life, those who die of accidents and war pass through the other branch. The *Ugsuban* is a shadowy and gloomy world, where the dead have a conscious but dull and inactive existence.

The Guardians of *Ugsuban* are two great ancestors, a husband and wife, more familiarly called *Usug* (meaning 'Male') and *Buyag* (meaning 'The Old Woman'). Regarding their identity, I have gathered two versions. One account says that *Usug* is also called "*Bakllog*" (a term of endearment for an old man), and his old wife is called "*Eboll*". Upon further inquiry, I later learned that the term *Eboll* is an endearment term for *Maybullan*; *Ugsuban* is also called "*Huya ni Maybullan*" (Home of *Maybullan*), "*Huya ni Eboll*", or *Bilibolan*. Sometimes, it is also called *Dudnganon* or *Lungsod ni Kamatayon* (Village of the Dead). The second version recounts the quarrel of two great heroes - *Mansilatan* and *Maybullan*. They were the sons of a couple named *Eboll* and *Ladiana*. At the dawn of time, the family was residing in *Dudnganon*. While *Mansilatan* was taking his afternoon nap on a rattan hammock, *Maybullan* asked his mother, *Ladiana*, for some *upì* (gabi seedlings). Soon as *Ladiana* came home from the field to give *Maybullan* the *upì*, *Mansilatan* sulkily asked why the *upì* was only for *Maybullan*. *Ladiana* gave most of the *upì* to *Maybullan* because it was he who had asked for it, and the rest she gave to *Mansilatan*. This made *Mansilatan* very jealous; he accused his mother of favoring his brother over him. In anger, *Maybullan* commanded the earth to open so that he, his father *Eboll* and his mother *Ladiana* and his sister *Langkawan* could descend to *Ugsuban*, far

from the bad-tempered *Mansilatan*. At the same time, *Mansilatan* grabbed his sister, *Limbong*, and set himself to climb the *Bulla na Tandalluyâ* (fast growing magic rattan vine) to ascend to *Langit*. Before they parted, *Maybullan* told his brother that from now on he will always get more share than *Mansilatan* because most of the humans will go to the underworld *Ugsuban* when they die and only a few will go to *Langit*. The Guardians of *Ugsuban* are two great ancestors, a husband and wife, called *Usug* ('the Man') and *Buyag* ('the old Woman'). The Old Man (or *Bakllog*) is *Eboll*. His wife the Old Woman is *Ladiana*. A third powerful spirit in the underworld is *Maybullan*, son of *Eboll* or 'Eboll Junior'. That is why the *Ugsuban* or the *Lungsod ni Kamatayon* (Village of the Dead) is also called *Huya ni Maybullan* (Home of Maybullan) or *Huya ni Eboll* (Home of Eboll), or *Ibull*¹⁴.

Peculiar to the Mansaka and Mandaya belief is the concept that the primary duty of the Guardians of the Underworld is to keep the dead within the precinct of *Ugsuban* so that they don't roam around and scare their living relatives on land *Lupa*. Two powerful spirits of the *diwata/busaw* rank are in-charge of *Ugsuban* to make sure that the dead behave; that they don't escape to visit their relatives and cause sickness, especially to the children. These two powerful masters of the *Ugsuban* are nicknamed *Usug* (Male) and *Buyag* (Old Woman). As we will see later, the Old Couple is not always successful in their job as wardens because there are times when infants and children get sick from having been visited and played with by their dotting ancestors.

The second obligation of the old couple is to gather the hair of the dead and weave it into a *dagmay* (Mandaya tube skirt) so that at the end of the world everyone will have a piece of cloth to wear. *Ladiana* hung her *habllon* (back strap loom) from the western most edge of the world and sat at the eastern most end of the world. The *us-usan* (warp) extended from east to West. From each dead person one hair strand is taken for the *pugawa* (woof). To help provide *Usug* and *Buyag* with a steady supply of human hair, the Mandaya men and women used to wear their long (keeping themselves neat by tying it into a stylish knot called the *pinangko* or *linunggô*). The Mandaya believe that the end of the world will come when the weft of time is spent, and *Ladiana* runs out of woof¹⁵.

¹⁴ Told to me by Julius Alimbon of Pantuyan, Caraga, Davao Oriental, who now lives in Matilo, Compostela Valley (2009).

¹⁵ This belief in the Guardians of the *Ugsuban* (Underworld) may perhaps be related to some of the beliefs of the Bisayan and Tagalog Christians, as is evident when

Buyag and *Usug* could grant reprieve to their wards so that they could roam around the *Lupa* and visit their relatives. Whenever this happens, living human beings on the earth or *Lupa* are beset with mysterious sicknesses described as “*pyaghampangan sang ka-ompoan*” or ‘being played with by the ancestors’.

The Mandaya that I shared religious ideas with agreed that every human being is composed of a mortal *lawas* (body) and an immortal *kal-luwa* (soul). The mortal *lawas* dies and rots but the *kal-luwa* remains alive and separates itself from the *lawas* after death. The individuality of the human person resides in his *kal-luwa*. After death, as a *kal-luwa*, the human individual is transported to the Realm of the Dead (*Banwa ni Kamatayan*) the residence of *Eboll* (*Huya ni Eboll*). The human individual, as *kal-luwa*, continues to live even after the end of the world, and beyond. No informant could tell me what happens to all the dead after they wear their hair-cloth tube skirts at the end of the world. It is implied that each *kal-luwa* will join its own *lawas* that will wear a newly woven hair-cloth *dagmay*. My informants could not tell me what happens next.

It is interesting to note that my informants earlier had classified *Mansilatan* as a dweller in *langit* or *manlangitnon*, while his parents, *Usug* and *Buyag* are guardians of the *Kingdom of the Dead*. This means that the categorization as to where each spirits belongs is not rigid or exact. There are spirits who can cross the zones. The place of the old couple *Buyag* and *Usug* is *Ugsuban*, but they and their wards often visit *Lupa* and entertain themselves by playing with the life and good health of their victims¹⁶.

someone comments “Oh! What a healthy child you have”, mothers would react immediately, lest some Spirits hear about the comment, get jealous and bring illness to the child. The Cebuano-Bisayan mother would immediately exclaim “*Puera Buyag* (Begone, Old Woman!)”; while the Tagalog mother would automatically say “*Puera Usug!* (Begone, Old Man!)” Both women would not have any knowledge of the ancient personages they were invoking. In Cebuano-Bisayan, a child who suddenly gets sick is *gibuyagan*; in *Tagalog*, the child is *na-usug*. We can unwittingly bring down *usug* or *buyag* to small children. To avoid causing *usug* or *buyag* to an infant, wet your thumb with your saliva and gently sign the child's forehead with it before returning the infant to its mother. The folk religiosity of modern Filipinos has succeeded to erase the memory of who *Usug* and *Buyag* were, but not to remove the fear that these names represent.

¹⁶ *Eboll* is pronounced “*aboll*” when used in cursing: “*Tyata kaw sang Busaw, dagdag kaw ng Aboll!* (May the Busaw feast on you, you child of *Eboll!*) From

Busaws like *Mandarangan* (also called *Mandalingan*), the spirit of warfare and bravery, are classified as *tagalang* that reside in *Langit*; but they also crave sacrifices consisting of human flesh and blood¹⁷. These offerings are made to them by their devotees who conduct intermittent raids on unsuspecting neighborhoods and villages. Each *bagani* is thus a male medium. It is said that the *bagani* and their men are possessed by the spirit of their *abyan* when conducting these raids. In this particular case their *abyan* are the *busaw*. The place of these *busaw* is in *Langit*, but they conduct their operation here on earth, *Lupa*, through humans. Other informants believe that all the non-human intelligent spirits can travel everywhere; and only human beings are confined to *Lupa*.

But how are humans and the *busaw* related? I was told a story that in the beginning of time, when the first couple, *Suga* or *Similat* (Sun) and *Bullan* (Moon), had their first children, the wife would not permit the excited husband to look at them. "If you look at them, they will wilt and die!" warned *Bullan*. The woman had to leave their house for a while. When she returned she cried aloud. Her children were dry and dead! In anger, she chopped them to small pieces and threw the pieces into the sky. The remains of *Similat* and *Bullan's* children were turned into the stars. From then on, *Similat* took care not to gaze upon his children. Human beings are brothers and sisters of the stars. They have the same Cosmic Parents, *Similat* and *Bullan*, Sun and Moon, who may be powerful spirits but did not create the Universe. They had been assigned by the one *Labaw na Makagaga-um* (the Most Powerful) or Great *Magbabaya* to care for all their dead children, especially those who are already resting in the Underworld and are waiting for the end of the time.

Further comparisons

Analysis of the Mandaya cosmology described above also leads to the insight that the religious system developed by the Mandaya tends to be relational, not confrontational. When a farmer decides to clear a portion of a forest for *kaingin*, he invokes all the spirits, regardless of whether they are benevolent or malevolent, and invites them to partake of a feast where the blood of domestic animals (pig or chickens), and alcoholic beverages from fermented

these words, it is clear that the Mandaya consider both *Maybullan* and his father *Eboll*, as *busaw*.

¹⁷ During the first decade of American colonization, gullible Governor Edward C. Bolton was treacherously killed by the Tagakawlo chief Mangulayon, who promised to guide him to the grave of *Mandarangan* on some mountain slopes behind Malita town (cf. Tiu 2005).

sugarcane juice, live chicken, eggs and choice chewing condiments are offered. Before all these invited spirit guests, he presents his plan to open a *kaingin* farm. He requests all spirits residing in the same area to move out and no longer disturb his *umá* or farm site. At the same time, he requests the benevolent spirits and the souls of his loving relatives to encourage the soul of the rice to grow, and to protect the crops from bad weather and pests. The Mandaya religion tells the farmer that he lives in the same world as the other spirits do. He cannot exclude or reject any spirits. To create and promote harmony in this world, he must maintain diplomatic relationship with all the spirits.

In the practice of Christianity among Christianized lowland Filipinos, the 'blessing' of a farm site or a newly constructed house is a confrontation. Evil spirits are exorcised, driven from a hallowed ground. The Christian believes he has a righteous claim over the space, and that the evil spirits are like squatters in this world.

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APPENDIX: Common Mandaya Rituals

Religious ceremonies in Mandaya are basically healing rituals to restore a broken relationship between humans and other spirits of this universe. Wars, sickness, bad luck and misery are deemed punishments for such transgressions as neglect of or disrespect to other spirits, whether human or inhuman, which happens when the Mandaya talk about other spirits with disrespect, act boisterously in such sacred places as a wooded area or cave, in front of a large tree, a body of water, a cliff, or a large rock because these places may be a home of some easily offended spirits, by clearing a forest for *kaingin* without their permission, etc. The Mandaya are 'cursed' (*tyutungayaw*) for urinating or trampling on the noses of unseen earth dwellers when its already getting dark, for cutting ordinary looking shrubs near a *budbud* (*ficus*, balite) tree because the plant is actually an ornamental plant of the spirits residing in the *budbud*. Laughing at defects of the physically disabled, at clumsiness of animals like the monkeys, bathing cats, making fun of upriver fishes by talking about sea animals – all these are *palili* or prohibited by custom and can incur the ire of the spirits. It is also *palili* to lie when swearing an oath. One can suddenly get sick or get struck by thunder and lightning or turned into a stone for doing so. When this happens, the individuals involved are said to be *byaballoy*. Incest is punished by *pyagballoy*. The permission of the spirits must be sought before a hunting or fishing trip, and before cutting down trees to cultivate a *kaingin*. Friendly spirits get offended when their devotees neglect to communicate with them through prayers,

ceremonial dance and sacrifices of chicken, pig and sometimes human blood.

Rituals are the means to communicate with the spirits. These rituals are calculated to appease offended spirits and restore a harmonious relationship between humans and the spirit world. Physical healing occurs when the 'curse' (*tul-lon*) has been lifted and the broken relationship has been restored.

The top three rituals in this list are of the highest importance in terms of solemnity and expense because they require the sacrifice of the life of a pig. They all require a *balyan* to officiate, the slaughter of a domesticated pig, and the beating of the *gimball* (drum). The *Manaog* and the *Balilig* require a building where the rituals are celebrated (called *pyagmanaogan* or *pyagbakallagan*). Before the *pagMana-ug* or *pagBakallag* can be celebrated, the *Balilig* is a prerequisite. It is during the *Balilig*, that the *balyan* determines whether or not the spirits require the healing ritual to be upgraded into a *pyagmanaog* or a *pyagBakallag*.

a. Major rituals

pyagMana-ug – This ritual may take about three years to complete. A special house, called the *Pyagmanawgan*, is constructed for this purpose. The house is positioned according to the four cardinal directions: *Amiyanan* (Northeast), *Abagatan* (Southwest), *Silatan* (East), and *Sallupan* (West). Its main features are the *linadladan* or dance floor located in the middle of the house, supported by four or eight sturdy posts, strong enough to carry the weight of the guests, several *balyan* and the dancing activities that are bound to take place during the ritual. The floor is raised beyond man's height above the ground so that on rainy days those who could not be accommodated upstairs, would have a place to shelter themselves on the *agdallum* or ground floor. Raised floors (called *dagpon*) on four sides of the *linadladan* (about a foot above it) are reserved for family members and important guests. The floors are made either of flattened white wood or black *bahi* boards from the split trunk of the *patikan* or fish tail (*Caryota sp.*) palm trees. In the olden days, these boards were flattened using only a *kakana* or large knife made by their own village *panday* (blacksmith). The Mandaya also had axes (*atsa*) and adzes (*bingkung*). They used a red hot iron rod (*berbeken*) to bore holes so that strong *bahi* pegs could be driven to fasten the beams into the posts. Then they lashed the posts and the beams together with strongly tied and woven rattan vines. They have names for each stylish way of tying and weaving rattan knots.

The *pyagmanawgan* is the best example of Mandaya skill in carpentry, architecture and engineering. The original *pyagmanawgan* structure was built without using nails. The posts, the girders, the trusses, the floor boards, the cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) thatched roof, the studs, the rafters, the *tambullang* (a variety of bamboo) walls were joined together using only pegs fashioned from sturdy *bahi*, *pugahan* or *tapikan* palm tree and the *bulla* (rattan vines). The posts are made of round timber hard wood; their number depends on the size of the *Pyagmanawgan* house and the number of expected guests. A long straight beam is placed on top of the pitched truss, joining and holding all the trusses together. Both ends of this beam extend about a meter's length outside the roofed portion house and an extended piece is called *palla-os*. It is about three to four inches thick, carved and painted with intricate squares and angular lines, the totality of which represents the open mouthed head of the fierce man eating *buaya* (crocodile).

At the end of every post and on the rafters are tied carved *Inutaw-utaw* or *Talipuso*—wooden statues of the *Mana-ug*, the *abyan* or friendly spirits being invited to descend into the *Balyan* and partake of the sacrifice. *Inutaw-utaw* are usually carved from the wood of the *bayog* tree. The style of carving does not try to create a true-to-life representation of the subject. The *kakana* knife is the only carving tool, used to chop *bayog* timber into a four sided piece of about three inches by three inches by twelve inches lumber. The head of the statue is separated from the body by a straight vertical notch at about three inches from one end of the lumber. The notch itself represents the neck, and the remaining nine inch portion represents the body. To help create the impression of a head, the sharp right angles are sliced away, leaving a protruding piece to represent a comb, if the image represents a female *abyan*. The male version wears a band of red cloth tied around the forehead and a miniature *kakana* tied to the waist. The eyes are made of seeds of the *magoba-ay* tree.

Talipuso are simpler, consisting of just the head and the trunk without any indication of whether the statue represents a male or a female *abyan*¹⁸.

On the *Silatan* (East) side of the structure, and behind the raised *dagpon* floors, are two rooms. The northern room is *pallangka sang kawbayan*—sleeping quarters for the women, while the southern room

¹⁸ I recognize similar simple *talipuso* design decorating the top of wooden posts of stairway railings of old homes and rectories in the city.

is for the family of the sponsor. When tired, males can sleep anywhere on the *dagpon* and the *linadladan*.

A kitchen and a dining room are located behind the raised floors on the *Abagatan* (southwest) side. The *tawagan* or 'altar' is located on the raised floors in front of the sleeping area for the women, appropriately decorated with colored plants like the *malisa* and the *kilalla* (a variety of fortune plant). Laid on it are chewing condiments for the betel nut quid or *mama-on*, consisting of: *buyo* leaves (betel), *apug* (lime), *Tres-B Mascada* (chewing tobacco), and a piece of *amllong* vine. From time to time, a glass full of *bya-is* or *tuba* (alcoholic drink made from fermented sugar cane juice) is laid on the *tawagan*.

Manaug is celebrated to restore good health to a sick family member. It is also offered because of a special vow, as with the rituals *Balilig* and the *Bakallag*. Celebrating the *Manaug* can be a very expensive devotion. During the entire duration of *paglindug* or the act of celebrating a rite, innumerable pigs are slaughtered; one pig is offered every day. Oftentimes, relatives may offer to contribute a pig or two. On the other hand, the sponsor acquires prestige for feeding his neighbors even if there are times when the *Manaug* may not result to granting the healing the sponsor is requesting.

The ritual itself is basically similar to the *Bakallag* and in the *Balilig* described below.

pyagBakallag – This ritual lasts about a year to complete. This rite is performed every afternoon even when it rains. The rite is held at sundown so that the *balyan* can observe the opening of the sun and ask her *abyan* for the delivery of the sick person whose *kal-luwa* ('soul') is believed to be hidden by the *busaw* behind the sun. It takes place inside a four-posted hut without walls so that spectators can observe and participate. The hut may or may not have a bamboo floor raised about a foot above the ground, although the bamboo slat flooring is preferred because it reverberates nicely to the rhythm of the footsteps of the dancing *balyan* during her *paglindug* (celebration of the rite). The *balyan* would face the east dancing frenziedly to the beating of the *gimball* drum (made of a tree trunk and deer skin) while chanting invocations, prayers and incantations (as also happens during the *Mana-ug*). The sacrificial animal is the pig, which is placed with its four legs tied together on a *tawagan* ('altar') in the room where the sick person lies. While she dances, the *balyan* fans herself with a ceremonial fan (*kuyab*) and shakes a ceremonial shield (*kallasag*) so that the cowrie shells tied into it sound like so many castanets in

harmony with the *basall* drumbeat. Other offerings are the chewing condiments and a glass filled with *bya-is* (fermented sugar cane juice). The *tawagan* is decorated with a newly opened *mamaon* blossom, *malisa* and *kilalla*.

The Mandaya believe that in the middle of her trance, the *balyan*'s *abyan* would come and possess her. When the *balyan* stabs the pig with her *padí* (ceremonial knife) and drinks of its blood, the Mandaya believe that it is her *abyan* doing it through her. This is a basic principle of Mandaya spirituality. The *balyan* is believed to be a *medium*, a special person chosen by a powerful spirit, upon whom the spirit descends, communicates and interacts with human beings. The ceremony ends when the *balyan* falls down unconscious. When she recovers her senses, she picks up a stick, dips it into the pig's blood and anoints the forehead of the sick.

Only a *balyan* can officiate a *bakallag*. The reputation of the *balyan* grows as the number of sick persons she has coaxed to good health increases. The health of the Mandaya community attests to the efficacy of their healing rituals.

Balilig – A prolonged mysterious illness, which does not respond to other cures, will need the intervention of the *balyan*, who consults her *abyan*. If the *abyan* prescribes *pyagmana-ug*, the family of the sick person can bargain for (the less elaborate and expensive) *pyagbakallag* or *pyagbalilig*. It is during this rite when the family of the sick makes a vow to celebrate either one of the three major healing rituals. This negotiation occurs during a ceremony called the *Pagtalla*.

Balilig is performed only once. The sick person could then either get cured immediately, or the spirits may ask for more complicated rituals like *bakallag* or *manaug*. The presence of the *balyan* is necessary because the *abyan* is requested to come down. A communication between the *Langit* and the human community is being asked. The *balyan* chants *panawagtawag*, while dancing to the rhythm of the *gandang* (drum beat), and invoking her *abyan* to descend upon her and for the other spirits to partake of the feast. The drumbeats facilitate her entry into a trance. A pig is slaughtered to welcome the *abyan* and to propitiate the other spirits, who are also welcome to partake of pig's blood.

Animals appropriate sacrificing are part of the family; they are domesticated or *iyayop*, cared for, not a wild beast or *illallas*. The *balilig* is celebrated as a votive offering, to fulfill a sacred promise to the *abyan*. So, even if it is not as expensive as the two other two, it still is considered a major healing ritual.

b. Minor rituals

Minor healing rituals do not require the presence of *balyan* to officiate. An ordinary *matinaya-on* (religious person) may preside over these rites.

Inampo – During harvest time, the *Mabinaybay* and the *Madinagat* are believed to travel upstream to visit relatives and to partake of the new harvest. Their presence could cause sickness to the highlanders, especially stomachaches among children. The *inampo* is a ritual designed to gracefully send these visiting spirits back to their homes in the seacoast. A *matinaya-on* farmer (with the religious knowledge) would celebrate this ritual to appease the *mabinaybay* and the *madinagat* even if no member of his family is suffering from harvest-time diseases.

The farmer must build an *antall* (outdoor 'altar') along the main path leading towards his house coming from downstream. Located about thirty feet away from his house, the small four-posted structure is oriented towards the four cardinal directions. The four round timber posts can be made of the following woods chosen for their fine grain and texture: the *sallapo*, the *hanagdong*, the *ananayop* and the *tullo*. The floor and the sidings are also of the same materials, but instead of round timber, the wood is split into flat boards (with the use of the *kakana* or large knife), and fastened together to the post with *bullá* or rattan vine. Both ends of the flat board sidings are decorated with *palla-os* (carvings). The middle portion of the sidings is painted with black charcoal and the red juice of the *kanallum* vines. The regular motifs are angular and diamond designs.

Standing on the northern side of the *antall* and facing the East they place *inutaw-utaw* or *talipuso*, hurriedly carved from the same building materials as the *antall* itself. These represent the spirits from the lowlands.

On the level of the *inutaw-utaw* and the *antall* stands the *siklat*—a bamboo pole of the thin-skinned *tambullang* variety, the upper node of which is split into three parts and woven into a basket with split *bullá* (rattan) vines in order to contain several eggs. The top of the eggs had already been opened¹⁹. Gifts are laid down on the flattened board

¹⁹ If left outdoors for several hours, especially at night, the eggs may become a host of penicillin producing bacteria, which, if taken by the sick, may unwittingly help the sick recover from illness.

floor of the *antall*, among which are a live chicken with legs tied together so it could not move, a glass or bowl of *langis* or squeezed juice of the sugar cane, a glass or two of *ba-is* (alcohol from sugarcane), the regular chewing condiments, and a large plate heaping full with newly harvested rice. Another special gift to encourage the *mabinaybay* and the *madinagat* to leave immediately and go down the river after partaking of the meals is a carved wooden boat placed on top of the *antall*.

A *balyan* starts the ceremony with *panawagtawag* or calling all the spirits to come to partake of the gifts set before them. Somebody forcibly splits (*si-ak*) the mouth of the chicken down to its throat. Holding the chicken firmly by its legs, the *balyan* dances frenziedly around the *antall*, blessing the gifts with chicken blood. During the process, she is seized with a trembling fit. She is forced to sit down. The spirits have already descended upon her and possessed her senses. She has now become the spirits' medium. She mumbles, at first incoherently then succeeds to reproduce a conversation with the visiting spirits, usually regarding the *bidú*²⁰ (curses) incurred by the people and their illnesses. The ceremony is over when the spirit bids goodbye and the *balyan* would cease to speak.

The *Ampo* can be officiated by a non-*balyan*; and even if a *balyan* does the officiating, there is no chanting and beating of the *gimball* as happens during the three major healing rites of the *Pyagmana-ug*, the *Pyagbakallag* and the *Pyagbalilig*.

Tinagamaling na Alimo – As mentioned earlier, the *Tagamaling* are held responsible for that is good and useful in the life and culture of the Mandaya. This ritual is, therefore, a ritual of thanksgiving when the family would express gratitude for the well-being and the good luck it is enjoying. It is often celebrated on happy occasions such as a wedding. However, the therapeutic rationale behind all Mandaya rituals remains. *Tagamaling* are believed to be good natured and generous, but they are also easily offended by ingratitude, sloth and wastefulness. So, this rite is celebrated not only to give thanks for blessings and good luck they have bestowed upon the family and its members, but also to appease the *Tagamaling* for all the instances when they may have been displeased by rough language and disrespectful behavior. Repentance for all past mistakes is expressed. Prayers for protection, good health and good luck are offered,

²⁰ The accent is on the first syllable to distinguish it from a similar word meaning 'hermaphrodite'.

especially for newlyweds. It is not necessary that a *balyan* officiate in this ritual, but the prayer leader tries his/her best to speak in the archaic Mandaya language sacred to the spirits and pleasing to their ears.

As in the ritual of the *balilig*, an outdoor altar is built. This *antall* consists of several layers of wooden discs, placed one over the other and supported by three clay pots. The largest wooden disc is laid at bottom of this pyramid; the smallest wooden disc is placed on the top and the same basic decorations that are placed on a *tawagan* or indoor altar, consisting of *malisa*, *bagaybay* and *kilalla* plants. The chewing condiments and the glass filled with *ba-is* are set on the *antall* together with *dagmay* (abaka tube skirt), *pyanahi* (embroidered Mandaya blouse) and *byatata-an* (embroidered blouse), and *ayop* (beadworks). The chewing condiments, the alcoholic beverage, clay pots, the woven abaca cloth, the embroideries and the beadwork are works of art believed to be gifts given by the *Tagamaling* to the Mandaya. In this ritual, the relationship between the *Tagamaling* and the Mandaya is again recognized, restored, strengthened, and renewed.

Bongkas – When someone in the family is afflicted with convulsion, it is attributed to the displeasure of spirits who reside in high places like the rooftop. To appease these spirits, a *bongkas* ritual is necessary. A *tambullang* bamboo pole is passed through the thatched roof where the sick person lives. The last node of this bamboo pole, located outside and over the roof is split and woven into a platform using bamboo sticks fastened with rattan vines. This *siklat* platform is fastened firmly to remain outside the roof on a horizontal position parallel to the ground. On it are placed the gifts consisting of boiled rice, chicken entrails and wings. So while the *siklat* for the *Ampo* is woven into a basket, but the *siklat* for the *Bongkas* is woven into a platform. The father usually officiates in this rite. Speaking humbly in archaic Mandaya tongue, he prays to the spirits in high places to come and partake of his gifts, to forgive whatever transgressions he and his family has made against them, to spare his family from pains, fears and sorrow brought about by the present illness, and to protect his family from future harm. He hopes that this sacrifice would restore the harmony between his family and the offended spirits. He promises not to forget these spirits in the future.

Llabid* or *Syagollabid – Similar to *Ampo*, only it is offered for curing illnesses of pregnant or newly delivered women. It can be offered as thanksgiving for safe delivery and for protection against postnatal illnesses. A three cornered altar is erected in front of the house. The

three posts do not stand erect, but are inclined, in such a way that they cross one another half way above the ground, where they are tied together. The top portion of the posts supports a three cornered platform, made of flattened board. The sidings are decorated with *palla-os* carvings and diamond and angular lines drawn with black charcoal and red juice of the *amllong* vine. The offerings are placed on this platform.

Abli – Offered for dwellers of the Underworld, for the dead members of the family to whom *Eboll* (the old woman who guards the underworld) may have given the permission to visit their grand children and by so doing bring sickness to them. A hole is dug into the ground. At the bottom of the pit is placed the *pallatina*, a decorated silver disc made from an old Mexican silver peso, an heirloom worn over the breasts by Mandaya women. On the *pallatina* are placed gifts consisting of a glass of *tuba* or *bya-is* and the usual chewing condiments of *buyô* leaves, *apug*, chewing tobacco, and chopped *amllong* or *lawingan* vine.

Dullok – A ritual celebrated after a person comes home ill from a journey. The traveller may have stepped over, bumped into, or made disturbing noises and behaved in a manner offensive to the spirits on the road. He must retrace his steps, begging forgiveness and sprinkling along the way the blood flowing from the neck of domestic animal that he has slaughtered for the purpose of appeasing the offended spirits and in exchange for his health and life.

Limpas – A ceremony to bless a house either while it is still under construction or when it has already been built. Like the *Tinagamaling na Alimo*, the altar for *Limpas* is made of several discs of different sizes supported by only one post that passes through the center of these discs. On the top most disc is placed the *pallatina* (silver disk heirloom) and on it is placed the offerings consisting of a glass of *tubâ*, a bowl of juice of the *malisa* herb squeezed in water, and chewing condiments. Also placed on the altar is *bagaybay* or the newly opened blossom of the *mama-on* or *areca* nut palm.

Bulloy – Another version of the *Ampo*, offered with less solemnity and less decorations on the 'altar'. It is offered to avert sickness or to cure existing illness. It is also offered as part of another ceremony to ask for good harvest.

Alin – A ritual to request a cure for stomachaches that occur outside of the harvest season. A piece of bamboo with three nodes is used: the nodes at both ends are cut into half and scraped in such a way that the

scrapings are left hanging from the tube and form part of the decoration. The bamboo is rolled seven times over the stomach of the sick person saying the appropriate prayers requesting for a cure.

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