

# **Medical and Healing Practices of the Mamanwas in Surigao del Sur**

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## **Rationale of the Study**

As is well known, culture is very important because as the sum of the human persons' feelings, beliefs, thoughts, behavior, and lifeways, it provides people with the overarching context of their actions. In fact, according to Vossughi and Javaherian (as cited in Azimi, 2013), culture "forms people's everyday life, their views, lifestyles, basic assumptions, their perceptions and above all, the culture shapes the individuals' relationship". It is also through culture that people can comport themselves well in their own "world" and draw meaning from it. It is also important to note that culture is responsible for forming an identity as a nation; hence, the talk about Filipino culture, Asian culture, or American culture. Indeed, culture plays an important role in a person's life.

However, because of the intrusion and penetration of the forces of globalization into a particular community or nation, a displacement of the recipient culture by the colonizing ones, or an erosion of cultural identity, may necessarily ensue at some point in time. According to Gladyshev et al. (2019), globalization has a strong tendency to erode cultural identity. Now, some of the remaining pristine cultures today are the indigenous ones. As a matter of fact, many indigenous cultures in the world, particularly in Southeast Asia and Latin America, have not been fully integrated into the global system. Some of these indigenous cultures have not even been touched by the forces of globalization or have not been fully intruded and penetrated by the forces of globalization. Nonetheless, there is no question that sooner or later, given today's unprecedented technological advancement coupled with unbridled movement of global trade and commerce, these indigenous cultures will eventually be integrated into the global economic system. When this happens, indigenous peoples can hardly live harmoniously with Nature and their fellow human beings. They will no longer have something to draw strength and meaning from. Globalization will surely erode indigenous cultures leaving only memories of a culture gone by. It is for this reason that this proposed research aims to document the medical and healing practices of the Mamanwas in Surigao del Sur, particularly the

medical and healing practices of the Mamanwa indigenous people, as a way of preserving and conserving cultural identity.

The researchers argue that there is a need to document the medical and healing practices of the Mamanwas in Surigao del Sur so that even when the time comes that they are fully integrated into the global system, they can continue to draw strength and meaning from their culture. The researchers also argue that the culture of the indigenous people, the Mamanwas in Surigao del Sur in this case, is worth preserving and conserving because this culture can be considered an alternative to globalization. For example, individualism, one of the defining characteristics of the capitalist-driven globalization, can be countervailed by the “culture of cooperation” inherent in indigenous communities. Hence, the significance of this proposed research is twofold: on the one hand, the preservation and conservation of indigenous cultures in the face of globalization, and on the other hand, the countervailing of the destructive tendencies of globalization.

The theme of this proposed research project revolves around the following questions:

1. What are the medical and healing practices of the Mamanwa indigenous people in Surigao del Sur?
2. What is the current condition of the Mamanwa indigenous people in the face of economic globalization?

## **Literature Review**

Several scholars have already conducted important studies on the preservation and conservation of the indigenous communities in the Philippines, such as Oona Paredes, Neil David, and Karl Gaspar. These scholars have studied the cultures of some of the biggest groups of indigenous peoples in the Philippines. However, as we can see, these scholars (and other Indigenous Studies scholars, particularly in the Philippines) have not touched on the medical and healing practices of the Mamanwa indigenous people in Surigao del Sur. Moreover, given the continued intrusion and penetration of the forces of globalization into the Mamanwa community in Surigao del Sur, a sustained understanding and analysis of the nature and dynamics of these indigenous community is necessary. This proposed research will directly respond to this point as it also aims to highlight recent trends and developments on the marginalization of this indigenous people. Let us now briefly sketch the key concepts of the work of the scholars just mentioned.

In “Preserving ‘Tradition’: The business of indigeneity in the modern Philippine context”, Oona Paredes examines the nature and dynamics of the Higaunon indigenous peoples in northern Mindanao. Paredes was interested in studying the Higaunon in northern Mindanao because for her, these indigenous peoples have been responding to participatory development that require increased engagement with government bureaucracy for more than three decades already. In this study, Paredes also clearly showed that the Higaunons defined and employed the concept of indigeneity in the service of “preserving tradition”. While it is quite clear that Paredes’s work has greatly contributed to the scholarship surrounding indigeneity and cultural preservation in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao, it is evident, as already intimated above, that it did not touch on the medical and healing practices of the Mabono and Mamanwa indigenous peoples in Surigao del Sur.

In relative vein, Neil David’s “Preservation of Indigenous Culture of Bataan through an Ayta Magbukon School of Living Tradition (SLT) Program” attempts to contribute to preserving and conserving the Ayta Magbukon indigenous culture through the promotion of oral literature and documentation of traditional skills, which includes traditional dance, songs, chanting, traditional cooking, and traditional medicines. In doing so, David employed ethnography as a research design. While David’s study included the documentation of the medical and healing practices of the Ayta Magbukon in Luzon, it did not touch on the medical and healing practices of the Manobo and Mamanwa in Surigao del Sur.

In his *The Lumad’s Struggle in the Face of Globalization*, the famous Filipino scholar and anthropologist Karl Gaspar showed us the historical struggles of the Lumads in Mindanao since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book, of course, talked about several aspects of the Lumads in Mindanao, such as the Lumads’ concept of land use and changes in social fabric, but one telling part of the book talked about preservation and conservation of cultural identity. As a matter of fact, Gaspar clearly showed how the Lumads in Mindanao have been impacted by globalization and the way in which they struggled to prevent the displacement, or better yet, the erosion of their cultural identity. Indeed, we can glean from Gaspar’s work the call to preserve and conserve indigenous cultures. Needless to say, Gaspar can only do so much given the vast aspects of the indigenous peoples in Mindanao. Hence, this proposed research will deal with a specific aspect of the Lumad cultures in Mindanao, especially in terms of the preservation and conservation of Lumad cultural identity, that has not been touched by Gaspar.

As we can see, as far as our knowledge is concerned, no scholars so far have conducted a study on the medical and healing practices of the Manobo and Mamanwa indigenous people in Surigao del Sur. In fact, the recent related literature just reviewed

have not touched on this topic. Therefore, this proposed research is timely as it attempts to address an urgent social issue and is necessary given the magnitude and seriousness of the problem.

## **Methodology**

The researchers will employ semi-ethnography as a research design in this study. According to Allen (2017), Ethnographic research design is a qualitative research method in which the ethnographers or researchers immerse themselves in a particular community or organization to observe the behavior of the members. It is also important to note that ethnographers actively participate in the community or organization to gain an insider's perspective and to have experiences similar to the community members. The researchers for one will use the term "semi-ethnography" in this study because they will not spend longer time immersing themselves in the Lumad communities in Surigao, one that is expected in "ethnography" in the strict sense of the word. The researchers are convinced that semi-ethnography is the most appropriate design in this study as they want to go to the Lumad communities in Surigao, particularly the Mamanwa community, and observe and document their medical and healing practices.

In addition to semi-ethnography, the researchers will also employ an archival research design. For this reason, the researchers will visit the Mindanao Studies Center of the Ateneo de Davao University to acquire reliable documents on the history of the Lumad communities of Surigao, particularly the Mamanwa community, as well as documents relating to their medical and healing practices.

This proposed research will be conducted mainly in Lanuza, Surigao del Sur. Lanuza is a coastal municipality in the province of Surigao del Sur where the Mamanwa community is residing. The municipality has a land area of 290.60 square kilometers or 112.20 square miles, constituting 5.89% of Surigao del Sur's total area. The household population of Lanuza in the 2015 Census was 12,000 broken down into 2,783 households or an average of 4.31 members per household. This represents 2.12% of the total population of Surigao del Sur province, or 0.49% of the overall population of the Caraga region. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 47 inhabitants per square kilometer or 122 inhabitants per square mile. The municipal center of Lanuza is situated at approximately 9° 14' North, 126° 4' East, in the island of Mindanao. Elevation at these coordinates is estimated at 10.7 meters or 35.0 feet above mean sea level (Lanuza, n.d.).

The researchers choose this research locale because it hosts one of the largest groups of indigenous peoples in the Philippines, namely, the Mamanwas. Furthermore,

the researchers choose the Mamanwas as research subjects because they are some of the indigenous communities in the Philippines that have been directly impacted by the agents of globalizations, such as mining and logging. Also, the researchers choose these indigenous communities because their medical and healing practices form an integral part of their cultural identity. It would be better if the researchers will include Lumads or Indigenous Peoples in other parts of Mindanao and the entire country, but given the timeframe and resources, the researchers will focus only on the said indigenous community.

### **Ethical Consideration of the Study**

Before the conduct of the study, a Prior Informed Consent (PIC) will be secured from the Chieftain of the Lumads. Full disclosure of the Study will be explained to respondents. Individual Consent (IC) from each respondent will be voluntarily secured. Anyone who refuses to participate in the interview shall be excluded from the survey.

### **Research Output and Communication Strategy**

The expected outcome of this proposed research project will be in the form of a journal article. We aim to publish the output of this proposed research project either in Asian studies journal or in sociology and anthropology journal. This communication and outreach strategy is a very effective way of disseminating the output of the project. With this communication and outreach strategy, the effect of this proposed research project will be threefold, namely: first, a better, more nuanced, understanding of the impact of globalization on the Mamanwa community in Surigao del Sur; second, the enhancement and promotion of theory-building and the issue of bridging the gap between theory and practice; and third, to contribute to the preservation and conservation of indigenous cultures in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao.

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