



## THE KAHIMONAN RITUAL OF THE MAMANWA: EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE AND SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS AMONG COSMOS, PEOPLE, AND NATURE

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**ABSTRACT** – This study examined the *Kahimonan* ritual of the *Mamanwa* as an embodied expression of cultural knowledge that affirms the community’s interconnected relationship with people, nature, and the cosmos. Using a phenomenological approach complemented by semiotic analysis, the research explored how ritual movements, offerings, prohibitions, and sacred speech revealed a worldview grounded in reciprocity, purity, and ecological-spiritual balance. Data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews with elders, *baylan*, and culture bearers, and audio-visual documentation of two ritual events conducted in 2023 and 2024. Ritual narratives in *Minamanwa* and *Waray* were translated into English and validated by community members. Findings showed that the *Kahimonan* functioned as a lived pedagogy and a dynamic sign system through which dance, prayer, fasting, and offering mediated relationships among humans, *Magbabaja*, and the natural world. Ritual elements like the *haklad* and *ma-ma* offerings, animal sacrifice, and the sequencing of performance embodied divine reciprocity. Taboos on food, scent, dress, and movement cultivated bodily discipline, reverence, and resilience essential to ritual efficacy. Gendered roles in cooking, chanting, dancing, and officiating were found to be complementary yet flexible, indicating continuity alongside adaptive social organization. Sacred spaces such as the *bagobayan* (altar) and restricted practices such as the *tud-om* demonstrated boundaries between the sacred and the profane, reinforcing communal identity and spiritual privacy. Overall, integrating emic interpretations with etic analysis, revealed the *Kahimonan* is integrative cosmological practice that sustains cultural memory, social cohesion, while embodying an ethics of dwelling that links human action with the land, the spirit world, and *Magbabaja* (deity). Through this embodied ritual life, healing, protection, and cultural continuity were enacted.

*Keywords: embodied knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, phenomenology, ritual, semiotic signification*

### INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) was grounded in the deep interconnections between land, language, and everyday lifeways (Battiste, 2005; Shava, 2019). Rabasso and Rabasso (2014) emphasized that for Indigenous Peoples, land and nature are not mere resources but vital components of identity and cosmology. The *Mamanwa* people, like many Indigenous communities in the Philippines co-existed

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harmoniously with nature and the cosmos (Biclar et al., 2018; Haliya, 2017). This ontological orientation manifested in their rituals, ceremonial dances, and sustainable use of the forest—a space regarded not only as a means of subsistence but also as a sacred, spiritually charged landscape.

Similar patterns are observed among other Indigenous groups in the country. Camacho et al. (2012) noted that Indigenous beliefs were expressed through ritual, music, dance, and place-based practices in agriculture and forestry, with species such as *Ficus* trees believed to house ancestral spirits (*anito*). For these communities, nature-based ontologies shaped language, oral traditions, healing practices, kinship systems, and social institutions, revealing a deeply ecological epistemology.

Rituals served as key embodiment of these knowledge systems. Shannon (2015) explained that ritual, derived from the Latin *ritus*, referred to proper conduct or procedure in sacred or customary acts. She further noted that rituals are performed at significant moments—life transitions, specific days, or places—and typically involved food, clothing, symbolic objects, music, and dance. Among the *Mamanwa*, such practices took highly specialized forms. Tomaquin (2013) described the *Binaylan* as a shamanic ceremony where the *baylan* mediated with the Supreme Being—*Tahaw*, *Magbabaya* or *Magbabaja*—through dance, *ma-ma* offerings, and the *tud-om* chant performed in trance to seek guidance, protection, and blessings. Comparatively, he identified the *Kahimonan* as a sacred gathering celebrating life and communal unity, characterized by trance, chants invoking ancestral spirits, and offerings such as pigs, chickens, dogs, and ritual objects. However, Tomaquin’s study provided limited information on which *Mamanwa* communities continued practicing the *Kahimonan* and offered no detailed description of the ritual choreography or protocols. Moreover, ritual terms common in Surigao are unfamiliar to the *Mamanwa* of Basey, Samar, highlighting regional variation and a significant gap in documentation.

This gap was further compounded by acculturation, displacement, and economic hardship (Tomaquin, 2013). In Basey, the transmission of ritual knowledge was deteriorating as fewer elders practiced the rituals and youth participation continued to decline. Despite losing access to ancestral forests and sacred sites in Gigakit, Surigao, the *Mamanwa* of Basey continued to sustain the *Kahimonan*—not through fixed geography, but through memory, movement, and embodied practice. The ritual endured as a reaffirmation of relational obligations to *Magbabaja*, to their ancestors, and to the community.

The *Kahimonan* held profound cultural, spiritual, and social significance. It served as a primary means of sustaining the community’s relationship with *Magbabaja*, affirming collective identity, and transmitting ancestral knowledge. Through prayer, dance, sacrifice, and communal participation, the ritual expressed faith, sought protection, and maintained harmony with natural and cosmic realms. Social cohesion was reinforced through values of reciprocity, humility, discipline, and resilience. Semiotically, dreams, gestures, offerings, and chants functioned as symbolic codes that made the *Kahimonan* both a repository and a living enactment of Indigenous epistemology despite shifting sociocultural conditions.

This study examined the *Kahimonan* of the *Mamanwa* in Basey, Samar, as embodied knowledge by documenting its ritual sequences and interpreting their meanings through emic and etic perspectives. Specifically, it aimed to: (a) describe the ritual’s sequential structure, and (b) interpret how participants experienced it as an expression of interconnected relationships among the community, the natural environment, and the spiritual realm. Accordingly, it addressed the following questions: Why, when, and how was the *Kahimonan* performed? Who could participate? What symbolic meanings were embedded in its performance?

The analysis was grounded in Welch’s (2019) concept of “embodied ways of knowing,” drawing on Burkhart’s (2004) notion of embodied knowledge as lived experience. Giurchescu’s (2001) distinction between syntactic and paradigmatic meaning elucidated how ritual actions formed a coherent narrative

linking human, ecological, and divine realms while symbolically distinguishing the sacred from the ordinary. From phenomenological standpoint, the *Kahimonan* revealed the *Mamanwa* lifeworld, where belief and meaning were enacted through lived experience (Waugh & Waugh, 2004). Through a semiotic lens (Miranda-Medina, 2021), the ritual was understood as a system of culturally charged signs—animals, dreams, chants, gestures, and offerings—through which spiritual meaning is communicated. These frameworks illuminated the *Kahimonan* as an embodied and symbolic structure that articulated *Mamanwa* cosmology, spirituality, and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study employed a phenomenological method to explore how the *Mamanwa* embody, interpret, and transmit cultural knowledge through the *Kahimonan* ritual by examining the lived experiences of ritual participants, elders, and culture bearers. Phenomenology prioritizes first-person experience and provides a lens for understanding the emotional, sensory, and spiritual meanings embedded in ritual movement and practice (Houston, 2011; Schutz, 1970; Greening, 2019). Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and reflective accounts, allowing participants to articulate how they perceive relationships among people, nature, and the spiritual realm. Meanings were derived through descriptive and interpretive phenomenological analysis, in which narratives were coded and thematically analyzed to reveal shared essences and processes of “meaning-making” (Houston, 2011; Seko & van Katwyk, 2016). Throughout the study, reflexivity, positionality, and bracketing were practiced to identify and suspend the researcher’s assumptions, recognizing knowledge as co-constructed between researcher and community (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### *Data Collection*

Data collection was undertaken through a relational, respectful, and reciprocal process of entering the *Mamanwa* community as an outsider, guided by Indigenous research ethics and protocols. Initial entry was facilitated through community leaders and elders, with whom trust-building conversations were conducted to seek permission, explain the purpose of the study, and clarify the intended use and protection of ritual knowledge. Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), a Memorandum of Agreement, and a Certificate of Precondition from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) were secured to ensure that participation was voluntary, culturally appropriate, and collectively sanctioned. Purposeful sampling then identified elders, dancers, and cultural bearers who embodied and transmitted knowledge of the *Kahimonan* and related rituals. Data were generated through sustained community immersion, including repeated visits, whole-day gatherings, participatory conversations, and on-site observation, allowing knowledge to be shared in a manner consistent with *Mamanwa* relational practices (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interviews and discussions were conducted primarily in *Minamanwa* and Waray, with translation and member validation to safeguard the integrity of meanings and prevent misrepresentation of embodied and sacred knowledge. Ritual observations during ceremonies held on December 27, 2023, and February 24, 2024, were documented only with collective consent and were interpreted collaboratively to respect cultural boundaries regarding what may be recorded, analyzed, and disseminated. Throughout the process, reciprocity was practiced through feedback sessions, return of findings, and acknowledgment of the community’s intellectual and cultural ownership, ensuring that embodied knowledge was not extracted but honored, protected, and co-interpreted within the community’s ethical and spiritual frameworks.

### ***Research Instrument***

Data were generated through interview-based demographic questionnaires, in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and photo-video documentation. Because some participants had limited literacy, demographic information (age, gender, education, marital status, occupation, and community role) was gathered orally through guided questionnaires. In-depth interviews with elders, dancers, and culture bearers were treated as co-constructed conversations in which meanings emerged through dialogue rather than fixed responses (Houston, 2011). To preserve linguistic and cultural accuracy, translation proceeded from *Waray* to *Minamanwa* and then to English, with validation from the adult members.

The interview guide focused on eliciting the culture bearer's experiential knowledge of ritual, specifically: the occasions and motivations for performing the *Kahimonan* and related ceremonies, the roles and selection of participants, the local names, forms, and performance processes of the dances, the symbolic meanings of movements, objects, and spatial formations; and the personal and communal values, teachings, and spiritual significance derived from participation. Photographic and video documentation of two ritual events complemented the interviews by capturing embodied movement, spatial patterns, and orally transmitted protocols for further interpretive analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

Qualitative data were analyzed using a descriptive-interpretive phenomenological approach that integrated both emic and etic insights to provide a holistic understanding of the *Kahimonan* ritual. The emic analysis followed an inductive process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), allowing patterns and meanings to emerge from participants' narratives, observations, and ritual performances. This phase emphasized how movements, gestures, and spatial formations conveyed social, sociological, and spiritual relationship within the *Mamanwa* community. These culturally grounded insights were then placed in dialogue with etic interpretations drawn from dance studies, phenomenology, and semiotic theory to situate local meanings within broader analytical frameworks rather than position them in opposition.

Anchored in the theory of Embodied Knowledge (Welch, 2019), the study treated ritual actions as vessels of lived experience and cultural memory. Ritual movements were examined through syntactic and paradigmatic lenses (Giurchescu, 2001), enabling a deeper exploration of how the *Kahimonan*'s movement vocabulary functions simultaneously as embodied practice, symbolic communication, and cultural expression. By combining phenomenological interpretation and semiotic signification, the analysis illuminated the experiential depth and symbolic complexity embedded in the ritual.

Interview transcripts, field notes, video, photo, and audio recordings were subjected to systematic coding to identify recurring themes, movement motifs, and symbolic actions (Biehl, 2013). Guided by semiotic analysis (Miranda-Medina, 2021), the *Kahimonan* was treated as a system of cultural signification in which bodily movement functions as a primary sign vehicle, linking form (expression) and meaning (content). This process uncovered layers of embodied knowledge—ritual intent, cosmological beliefs, and relational values—and revealed the essential structures of meaning underlying the ritual's performance.

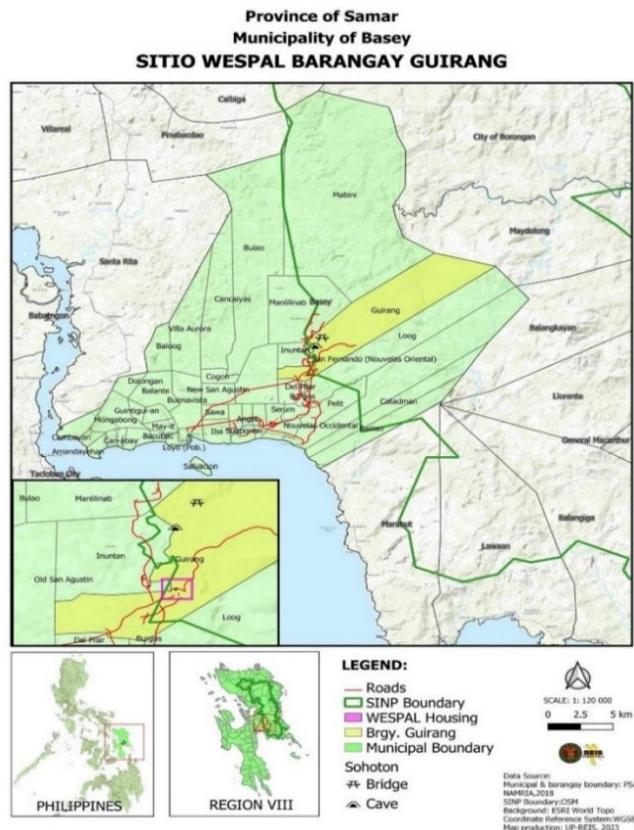
Grounded in phenomenology and semiotics, the framework situates the *Kahimonan* within lived experience and symbolic interpretation. Phenomenology elucidates how participants perceive and enact the ritual as a fusion of sensory awareness and reflective consciousness (Husserl, 1962; Waugh & Waugh, 2004), while semiotics interprets ritual movements, objects, and utterances as signs that convey shared cultural meanings. These perspectives produce a comprehensive and culturally responsive interpretation of

the *Kahimonan* ritual.

**Study population and locale of the study**

This study focused on the ceremonial dances of the *Mamanwa*, an Indigenous group dispersed across Eastern Visayas (Region VIII), with particular attention to the community in Sitio Wespal, Barangay Guirang, Basey, Samar (Figure 1). At the time of the study, the sitio comprised 29 families with a total population of 111 individuals. Although *Mamanwa* settlements are also found in Las Navas (Northern Samar), Marabut (Samar), Burauen (Leyte), Almeria (Biliran), and San Francisco and St. Bernard (Southern Leyte), the present research was delimited to the Basey community, where sustained access and community consent were established.

The *Mamanwa* of Basey are semi-nomadic, maintaining a relatively stable home base while practicing seasonal mobility in response to environmental conditions and the availability of forest resources. Their livelihood relies on subsistence farming and the production of Indigenous crafts, including woven mats, baskets, hammocks, and ornaments made from locally sourced materials.



**Figure 1.** Location of the Mamanwa study population in Barangay Guirang, Municipality of Basey, Samar, Philippines

The demographic distribution of participants reveals important patterns in terms of age, gender, and marital status (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Percentage Distribution of Participants' Profile.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	30	53.57%
	Male	26	46.43%
<b>Status</b>	Married	44	78.57%
	Single	11	19.64%
	Widow	1	1.79%
<b>Age Group</b>	90+	1	1.79%
	60+	9	16.07%
	50-59	2	3.57%
	40-49	13	23.21%
	30-39	10	17.86%
	20-29	12	21.43%
	10-19	7	12.50%
	Below 10	2	3.57%

Research participants were drawn from this community composed of elders, adults, and youths involved in ritual and dance practices. As shown in Table 1, the sample was almost gender-balanced, with females comprising 53.57% and males 46.43%. Most participants were married (78.57%), while 19.64% were single and 1.79% widowed. The age distribution ranged from children to elders aged 90 and above, with the largest proportions in the 20-49 age groups and a significant representation of those aged 60 and above. This broad generational composition indicates that knowledge of the *Kahimonan* and related ceremonial practices is shared across age groups, supporting the intergenerational transmission of embodied and ritual knowledge within the *Mamanwa* community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *The Mamanwa's Spiritual Beliefs and Tradition as Embodied in the Kahimonan*

*Mamanwa* spirituality is grounded in a pluralistic and immanent worldview centered on *Magbabaja*, the Supreme Deity, alongside spirit beings inhabiting the natural world. Guided by the *baylan* and performed in open landscapes, rituals employ dance, chant, offerings, and prayer as communicative acts with the spirit realm. Sacred knowledge is transmitted orally through storytelling, ritual practice, and dreams, sustaining continuity while allowing adaptation. Reciprocity underpins their ethical life, emphasizing balanced relationships among humans, nature, and the unseen world.

The *Kahimonan*—also called *paghimunan* (*Minamanwa*) or *pagtuman* (*Waray*) means fulfilling a covenant and the central ritual expression of this cosmology. As a fulfillment ceremony, it integrates

communal dancing, chanting, music, and sacrificial offerings for thanksgiving, healing, and protection, embodying the interconnectedness of the divine, the environment, and social life. Through embodied movement and symbolic gestures, the ritual functions as both worship and pedagogy, transmitting ancestral values of harmony, respect, and relational responsibility and reinforcing cultural identity across generations.

Traditionally performed during or near the full moon to align human intention with sacred timing, the *Kahimonan* enables communion with *Magbabaja* for healing, prosperity, and spiritual guidance. Two rituals observed in this study—on December 27, 2023 (with white chickens) and February 24, 2024 (with a white pig)—illustrate its semiotic system, in which white signifies purity and transcendence appropriate for the Supreme Deity called *Magbabaja* or *Magbabaya*, while darker offerings are reserved for ancestral and nature spirits. The first was conducted for documentation, and the second followed a dream interpreted as a divine summons, highlighting the dynamic interplay between human agency and perceived sacred communication in the *Mamanwa* lifeworld.

### ***Ritual Sequences and Protocols in the Kahimonan Ceremony***

Each *Kahimonan* follows prescribed ritual sequences called *pagkatagik*, which function not simply as procedural steps but as sacred acts encoded in *Minamanwa* language. Following Waugh & Waugh's (2004) assertion that language stores cultural memory and shapes collective behavior, presenting these sequences in *Minamanwa* preserves their spiritual resonance and cultural specificity. These protocols constitute moments of spiritual negotiation, pedagogical transmission, and communal reaffirmation, demonstrating how the ritual generates renewal rather than closure. Through invocation, offering, movement, and shared feast, the *Kahimonan* sustains relational commitments among the *Mamanwa*, *Magbabaja*, and the land that nourishes them. In this convergence of phenomenological embodiment and semiotic structuring, the ritual affirms a coherent cultural system that binds the community together in ongoing sacred continuity. The account that follows details these stages as witnessed and interpreted alongside *Mamanwa* elders and cultural leaders.

#### ***Pagkatagik (Seq.) 1. Ja Baylan nanumaid ka Magbabaja nga may dakot ya Kahimonan***

(The *Baylan* sought God's permission for the conduct of the *Kahimonan*)

The *Baylan*, as spiritual mediator, initiates the *Kahimonan* by appealing directly to *Magbabaja*. This preliminary stage involves a private prayer and the offering of money—symbolic acts known as *pangamujo* (*Minwa.*) -- an entreating prayer—and *pangaliya* (*Minwa.*)—request for permission. The ritual cannot proceed without divine consent, as discerned by the *Baylan*. The *Mamanwa* understand this step as one of spiritual negotiation and humility. The *Kahimonan* itself is referred to as *paghimunan* (*Minwa.*) and *pagtuman* (*War.*), denoting a fulfillment of a vow or covenant—usually in exchange for healing, safety, or deliverance from hardship.

The first *Kahimonan* ritual was officiated by Roger Calinawan, a *Baylan* from the Marabut municipality group (Figure 2a). The second occasion was led by Efrin Cabadongga, with the assistance of his father, Pedro Cabadongga, both respected *Baylans* of Basey *Mamanwa* community (Figure 2b-c).



**Figure 2a.** Roger Calinawan, *Baylan*, praying over the *manok* (chickens).



**Figure 2b.** Efrin Cabadongga, *Baylan*, praying over the *buog* (pig).



**Figure 2c.** Pedro Cabadongga, *Baylan*, praying at the *bagobayan* (altar).

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 2.** *Pagkawa han kaliwaan daw bulos na ajibi* (Getting the wood and young palm leaves)

The materials used for the altar, or *bagobayan*, are themselves sacred and carefully selected. The leader, Jennifer, and her husband Jessie had wood branches gathered from a particular tree from the forest, the *Koyla* or *Ughayan/Pamitaogon* (*Shorea palosapis* (s.n.), Family Dipterocarpaceae) for building the altar. Each wood piece measures up to 2.4 meters (eight feet) in length and stripped to expose its white surface, symbolizing purity and readiness. Its ends were tapered to points and embedded into the ground to serve as structural supports for the altar. Jennifer explained the rationale behind the choice of wood:

*Kay daw maputi iya bagobayan Koyla daw bitaog nga liwaan ya gamiton kay daw kon parutan maputi madayan sulungan.*

(So that the altar will appear white and clean. The *koyla* or *pamitaogon* tree was used for building the altar, because its bark can be easily peeled, revealing a white wood underneath.)

Coconut fronds (Family Arecaceae) were divided into halves and softened to form decorative streamers, affixed at the altar.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 3.** *Paghinang ka bagobayan* (Installation of the altar)

Following the approval from the *Baylan*, the community came together to construct the *bagobayan*. The task was a shared responsibility, with both men and women working in unison. The altar's structure comprised interlocked tripods formed from the pointed wooden poles. A wooden platform was laid between the tripods, where offerings—including animals—would later be placed. The palm fronds were draped from the upper poles like curtains, symbolizing both beauty and boundary (Figure 3a-b). Jennifer and Loren described these thus:

*Butangan ka bagunhay kay daw madajaw pagsulungan. Ani jay tuldo na Magbabaja nga gamiton ya bagunhay.*

(The palm leaves are placed that way so that it would look good. That is what God taught us to use as decoration.)

The altar was positioned facing the mountain—a gesture that connects the ritual space to ancestral landscapes and spiritual orientations.



**Figure 3a.** A community member, removing the stick from the palm strands.



**Figure 3b.** Community members assembling the altar.

***Pagkatagik (Seq.) 4. Nangapog kay an sugudi pagkahimonan ka panada*** (Prayer to start the *Kahimonan* as fulfillment)

The ritual began with the *Baylan*, together with the *malaas* (elders) and *sinarigan* (assistants), gathering before the altar to perform *pangaliya* or the act of asking permission (Figure 4a). At the center of the space, they placed a small table holding the ritual offerings: neatly arranged plates containing *dapon/bojo* (betel leaves), *mam-on* (betel nut see), *apog* (pulverized snail shell powder), and a cash offering (Figure 4b). These items collectively form the sacred *ma-ma*, a ritual betel chew used in prayer. A glass of water was also included to signify purity and openness. After the *Baylan*'s first prayer, the assistants chewed the *ma-ma* in a slow, purposeful sequence, followed by shared drinking of water—gestures that embody reverence and communion with the spirit world (Figure 4c). Only those with prepared *ma-ma* participated, while the rest observed in respectful silence.

For the *Mamanwa*, chewing *ma-ma* is a deeply spiritual act—an embodied form of prayer believed to strengthen their connection with *Magbabaja* and support healing. The mixture used in rituals is intentionally purified; unlike everyday chewing practices, ingredients such as tobacco are excluded because they are considered harmful and incompatible with sacred communication. As explained by Maricel Dirmodis and Elma Calinawan, the ritual mixture must remain clean and untainted to ensure the sincerity and potency of the prayers offered.

*Ya ma-ma nga pagabutang paghaklad ka lamesa, diri lakipan ka tabako, kay diri maajak ya Magbabaja, nga maydakot ya magapakaunga.*

(The betel chew that is place on the table as offering, does not contain tobacco, because God does not want harmful chemicals.)

This prohibition reveals the ritual's emphasis on bodily sanctity and spiritual clarity. What enters the mouth in prayer must reflect purity of intention and health.



**Figure 4a.** Initial prayer led by the Baylan and elders.



**Figure 4b.** *Ma-ma* offering, for the opening of the ceremony.



**Figure 4c.** Opening prayer.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 5. a.** *Pagtaga daw Ja mga malaas nagsugodi pagsajaw ka may agong daw gimbar* (Summoning the community members to assembly while the elder people started dancing to the beat of the gong and stick/hand drum)

After the installation of the *bagobayan* (altar), community members gradually gathered in and around the function hall. Some watched from their balconies as the ritual began. Wooden benches surround the space providing seating for the spectators. Meanwhile, the *sinarigan* (ritual assistants) prepared the live animals for offering, and the musicians' initiated the ceremony with rhythmic beats from the *agong* (metal gong) and *gimbar* (stick-hand drum).

The *agong*, suspended on a makeshift stand, was struck with carved hardwood mallets, while the *gimbar*—an improvised drum made of a large tin can covered in tarpaulin—was played by a male member using one hand and a stick (Figure 5a). The traditional version, made from the skin of *halo* (monitor lizard) and the wood of the *anahaw* tree, is no longer used due to legal and environmental restrictions.

Women played the *agong*, and the drumming served as a sonic call to assembly. Excitement filled the ceremonial venue—especially among the younger generation, many of whom had never witnessed such a ceremony. As the music intensified, the older men entered the dance floor wearing *patadyong* (waist cloths) and holding *banay* (handkerchiefs), which, while traditionally white, were improvised with available fabrics. Their movements were dignified and expressive: accented foot stomps, bouncing tiny mincing steps, with torso twists, and shoulder pulses while the kerchiefs hang loosely between the fingers of both hands. Arms were stretched at the sides and moved them sideways to front and back in a slow lifting manner coming from the upper arms and elbows. Arms were bending and stretching laterally. Two women in white garments joined the circle, mirroring the steps in a graceful, restrained style. Movements were non-linear—no set floor pattern was followed—and performers danced barefoot or in sandals (Figure 5b).

The use of *banay* (kerchiefs) was not only aesthetic but symbolic; as dancers passed them to others, they were transferring the embodied knowledge of the tradition itself (Figure 5c). This phase of the ceremony lasted around nine minutes, a fluid yet structured beginning to what would soon become a profound spiritual offering.



**Figure 5a.** Musicians playing the *agong* and *gimbar*.



**Figure 5b.** Adult members (mixed groups) performing the ritual dance.



**Figure 5c.** Adult women performing the ritual dance.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 5. b.** *Pagtalama kay magsugudi panugawa, gapuson ja boog daw manok, darahon di ngaro ka bagobayan, nang iguos ka* (Preparation for the start of the offering prayer, bringing and tying of the pig or chicken to the altar and bounding them)

Simultaneous with the dancing, the “*sinarigan*” (assistants) brought the animals to the altar – white chickens and, later, a pig. Each animal was tied securely to the platform (Figure 6a-b) with deliberate and solemn coordination. Jennifer explained:

*An laong di baylan nga gapuson dija buog (pig) sab manok kay isapat di ka bagobayan. An mga sinarigan na baylan ani an sapat kabuog ngaro ka bagobayan (altar) masabot sab manok nga ugis (white) kon buog (pig).*

(The *Baylan* instructed the assistants to tie the animals and bring them to the altar. The assistants of the *Baylan* bring the animals, either white chickens or a pig, to the built precipice.)

These instructions were carried out with precision, reflecting the *Baylan*'s spiritual authority and the community's reverence for sacred protocol.



**Figure 6a.** Bringing the sacrificial animal to the altar.



**Figure 6b.** The *sinarigan* (assistants) tying the pig at the altar.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 6.** *Ya baylan nintindog ka bagobayan kay manugawa* (The *Baylan* stands in front of the altar to pray for the offerings)

Once the chickens or pig were secured, the music ceased and the room quieted. The *Baylan* approached the altar and stood facing it. He began to utter prayers, then poured water over the animal/s—first gently, then in a swift, singular motion—symbolizing purification (Figure 7a-b). This act of water offering marked the formal beginning for the ritual. Jennifer and Loren elaborated:

*Ya pagbubo ka sapa, anijay paghugas kay daw an hinglo ya ihaklad ka Magbabaja. Ya Magbabaja an sugilon ka Baylan, pinaaji ka Tud-om. Ka nikan nga pagtud-om, nagsugilon ka pagtuldo ka mga sajop ka mga sakop. Diri isab kon Minamanwa ya pagpanaba na Baylan kay Minenuvu. Nakasabot kami ka kanikan nga saba.*

(The pouring of water means cleansing the offerings for God. *Magbabaja* will give a message through the *Baylan's* chants (song-like) in the *Kahimonan*. His chant is about teaching the members. The language spoken by the *Baylan* possessed by God's spirit is not *Minamanwa* but *Minenuvu*. We understand his messages.)

The *Baylan's* chant, known as *Tud-om*, is believed to be divinely inspired—uttered in a spiritual language that transcends the everyday. It is prohibited to record or photograph this moment. They explained:

*Kon mag tud-om ja baylan diri masabot nga kodakan kay minglingbit ja puwat, makahimosong.*

(It is prohibited to record the chant because it is sacred, it would lead to malediction.)

On this occasion, out of respect for the presence of outsiders, the *Tud-om* was not performed. However, the prayers conveyed the overarching themes of intercession: healing, protection, and gratitude. Remarkably, the *Baylan* also prayed for the visitors and acknowledged my role and the funders in helping several community members obtain driver's licenses—a powerful gesture that reflected their orientation toward reciprocity and collective well-being.



**Figure 7a.** Roger Lantaaw, *Baylan*, resident of Marabut, Samar



**Figure 7b.** Efrin Cabadongga, *Baylan*, resident of Basey, Samar

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 7.** *The Sinaot dance* (The sword dance, a reenactment of the slaughtering of the pig offering.)

After the *Baylan*'s prayers over the offerings, the *agong* and *gimbar* resumed, and another round of dance began. One of the *sinarigan* performed the *Sinaot* (sword dance), which dramatized the impending sacrifice of the pig. Initially, the dancer moved without the *ludju* (machete), which hung at his waist. As the tempo increased, he unsheathed the blade and executed a series of precise movements—slashes, thrusts, spins, crouches, and parries. His body bent and rotated, while his arms cut through the air with dramatic flair (Figure 8a-d). He pranced forward and backward, crouched down, and turned around. The performance was not martial but metaphorical—a ritual enactment of the act to follow:



**Figure 8a.** The *Sinaot* (sword dance) performer dancing with the elders.



**Figure 8b.** The *Sinaot* dancer with another community member.



**Figure 8c.** Performance of the *Sinaot* dance.



**Figure 8d.** The *Sinaot* dancer.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 8.** *Panubadtubad pandarangin han buog ka pagtubos nga bulhuon di ja buog* (Prayer over the animal/s offered as a ransom and for its slaughtering)

After the *Sinaot*, a *sinarigan* approached the altar and uttered a loud, impassioned chant over the tied animal/s (Figure 9). This *panubad-tubad* is a plea to the spirit of the animal, asking it not to take vengeance on the community and to accept its role as a sacrificial ransom on their behalf. Anlyn Obeina explained:

*“Ani pagpangamujo ka hajop kay daw diri majuhot ka nami, kay siran an tubos ka nami.”*

(The prayer for the animals is for them not to take revenge upon us, because they will be the ransom for us.)

This act reflects the *Mamanwa*'s profound respect for the life offered. The ritual is not about domination over the animal but about engaging in a reciprocal exchange—life for life, health for sacrifice. It is a spiritually sensitive negotiation grounded in humility, not conquest.



**Figure 9.** *Panubadtubad* (prayer chant) led by an assistant, Recky Cabadongga.

***Pagkatagik (Seq.) 9. a. Pagsajaw para pagdayaw ka Magbabaja daw nanimaja kay nakatuman di*** (Dancing to praise God and glorify for the fulfillment)

Following the offering prayers and purification, the community broke into celebratory dance once again (Figure 10a-c). Movement now bore a different character—one of exaltation and spiritual release. I observed how bodies, animated by joy and faith, moved with unrestrained vigor. The performers lifted their gaze upward, smiling with open hearts. For the men, dancing became an ecstatic expression—stomping, tapping, leaping, hopping, skipping, galloping—with arms outstretched like wings, and turned or shifting laterally. Some shouted joyfully into the air, “Woouoooo!”

By contrast, the women’s movements were more restrained. Their steps were smaller, with accentuated stomps and mincing footwork, while their arms were kept at or below shoulder level. Pedro Cabadongga, the most senior elder, intervened when he saw younger women extending their arms above their shoulders. He reminded them:

*Kay ani katong in haod ka pagsajaw na mga kaapo-apoan. In haod ka nami kaniran nga pagtuldo.*

(That is how our forefathers taught us to dance. We follow what they taught us.)

This gendered distinction in movement revealed how bodily discipline encodes social roles and cosmological understandings. Women’s refined gestures expressed poise and modesty, while men’s more expansive motions symbolized strength and exuberance. Each was essential to the ritual’s balance.



**Figure 10a.** Marlon, Belen, & Lorna dancing.



**Figure 10b.** Shirley, Loren, & Leo dancing.



**Figure 10c.** Ryan, Loren & Shirley dancing.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 9. b.** *Pagbulho ka boog, ka pagtubos ka kapaladan* (Slaughtering of the animal/s as ransom or to redeem life)

As the dancing continued, the *sinarigan* (assistants), including the *Sinaot* performer, proceeded to the altar. With solemn efficiency, they beheaded the chickens using machetes and knives (Figure 11a). On the occasion involving a pig, the *Sinaot* dancer enacted the culmination of his performance: he approached the animal, located its heart from above the front leg, and drove the blade into its chest in a swift, clean motion (Figure 11b). Blood gushed from the wound. The dancer then raised the blade skyward with both hands and withdrew—his movements choreographed as if part of a sacred script. All throughout this part, dancing by other members continued (Figure 11c).

The act, while graphic, was not grotesque; it was reverent. The community watched silently—wide-eyed children among them—aware that this was a *pagtuman* (*War.*), the fulfillment of a sacred promise to *Magbabaja*. The animals, according to the *Mamanwa*, had become *tubos* (*Minwa. / War.*), redemptive agents on behalf of the people's suffering, illnesses, and misfortunes.

After the blood had drained, the animals were carefully removed and taken to the cooking area. This marked the transition from spiritual offering to communal nourishment.



**Figure 11a.** The *Baylan* pourin water over the chicken prior to slaughtering.



**Figure 11b.** The *Sinaot* dancer, performing during the slaughter ritual.



**Figure 11c.** The slaughtered pig, with a community member dancing.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 10. a.** *Hubadan di ya buog o manok ka bagobayan, and dancing* (Removal of the offered animal/s from the altar, and dancing)

As the animals were removed and brought to the cooking area (Figure 12a-b), the rhythm of the *agong* and *gimbar* pulsed through the entire community, and dancing persisted. From elders to children, performers moved in and out of the floor, taking turns with *patadyong* wrapped around their waists and *banay* (kerchiefs) in their hands (Figure 12c). Pedro once again stepped forward to correct posture and technique, particularly among the young girls attempting to participate for the first time.



**Figure 12a.** The altar after the removal of the sacrificial animal.



**Figure 12b.** The slaughtered pig was brought to the kitchen.



**Figure 12c.** *Mamanwa* members continuing the dance.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 10. b.** *Hingloan di, pagkiskis ya buog o manok, lapaun ngan pagbahin-bahin o handugon han kada pamilya, daw sinakupan nagsayaw, daw nag "mama"* (Cleaning, shaving/dressing the pig or chickens, slicing and sharing of the offered animals to each family, community dancing, and chewing betel

nut).

Meanwhile, in the cooking area, the men boiled water and prepared banana leaves as makeshift mats and chopping surfaces. Chickens were dipped into hot water, plucked, and butchered. The pig was also cleaned and sliced into small portions, each family receiving an equal share (Figure 13a-c). Children watched both the dance and the preparations, absorbing the ritual's full pedagogical arc—from sacred offering to sharing of meals.

The gendered division of labor remained clear. Men performed the heavier tasks, while women danced, hosted guests, and assisted with meal preparations. Their attentiveness to children and sensitivity to visitors' needs illustrated the depth of *Mamanwa* hospitality. Even small gestures—such as modifying the adobo dish with ginger, believing it would be more palatable to outsiders—reflected their care and cultural fluency.

While the musicians alternated between playing the *agong* and *gimbar* as the dancing celebration continued, some members chewed the betel nut.



Figure 13a. Cleaning the pig.



Figure 13b. Slicing the pig.



Figure 13c. Dividing the meat among the families.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 10. c. *Pag-sun-ad ja haklad* (Cooking of the offering)**

The first batch of meat prepared was for *Magbabaja*. It was cooked plain, without salt or additives (Figure 14a-b). Jennifer and others explained:

*Nang unahon pagtula ja ihaklad, kamhan diri bitsinan, diri asinan an tinola. Hasta pakaluto na ihakladay nga tinola. Kay ani iton kanamin kinaijahan kamhan ani sab iton nga pagadawaton na manunubos.*

(The meat soup for the offering is cooked first without monosodium glutamate and salt. Then when the food/meat soup is ready, it is offered. That is our tradition and what God accepts.)

Only this sacred dish—*tinola* (*Minwa*.) was offered, but they did prepare *adobo*, a native cuisine, for the outsiders. The separation of divine and communal food symbolized a ritual hierarchy of recipients, emphasizing their belief in reciprocity and respect.



**Figure 14a.** Men at the cooking area.



**Figure 14b.** Male community members cooking the food.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 10. d.** *Namag-iman kay nakatuman, kamhan may may sajaw daw nagatuldo nga malaas ka pagsajaw ka mga babaji daw bata* (Merrymaking due to fulfillment, through dancing and teaching the women and children)

As celebration continued, the youngest among the community imitated what they saw. Toddlers, too young to grasp the ritual's complexity, nevertheless copied the dancer's footwork and gestures. Pedro patiently guided their motions, ensuring that each child learned the proper form. As dancers moved in circles—some clockwise and opposite, some freely—teaching occurred in real time (Figure 15a-b).

The event thus became a living classroom, where sacred dance served not only as offering but as education. The *Mamanwa's* deference to authority and their elders' wisdom was evident. Protocol was followed not out of fear but out of respect to their elders and tradition.



**Figure 15a.** Pedro Cabaddongga dancing and teaching women and children.



**Figure 15b.** Children dancing while the audience cheers.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 10. e.** *Pag "ma-ma" (Betel nut chewing)*

While the dance and cooking continued, some tribe members engaged in *ma-ma*, or betel nut chewing—a customary practice that, for the *Mamanwa*, carries spiritual and medicinal significance. The ritual *ma-ma* offered earlier to *Magbabaja* differs from the daily *ma-ma* chewed by an individual. The latter includes tobacco leaf, a component excluded in ritual contexts for its perceived impurity.

The process involves placing a portion of *mam-on* (betel leaf), a slice of betel nut, and powdered snail shell inside a tobacco leaf, then chewing it slowly (Figure 16a-c). As they chewed, users eventually spat out red-tinged saliva, careful not to swallow it. Jennifer and several elder women shared:

*Nagmama ya iba, kamhan namagsajaw ya iba. Ya maajak ka.*

(Some are chewing the betel nut, while others are dancing. Only those who like it.)

The *ma-ma* serves as a form of comfort, healing, and spiritual alignment. It is simultaneously mundane and sacred—integrated into the *Kahimonan* not as spectacle but as an act of communion with the divine.



**Figure 16a.** *Mam-on* (betel piper leaf)



**Figure 16b.** *Bojo* (betel seed)



**Figure 16c.** *Mama* ingredients, tobacco, betle piper leaf, betle seed & *apog* (pulverized snail)

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 11. a. *Pag Haklad ka mangamujo*** (Offering of the cooked food to God through prayer)

When the time arrived to offer the cooked food to *Magbabaja*, all dancing ceased. A table was prepared with a symbolic offering: a plate of the *haklad* (unsalted meat offering), a plate with paper bills containing the betel chew (*ma-ma*), and a glass of water. The *Baylan*, his assistants (*sinarigan*), the elders, and I encircled the table in solemn prayer (Figure 17a-b).

No one in the community touched food before this moment. To do so would be considered disrespectful to the divine. Jessie Obeina and others cautioned:

*Diri pakaunan kon diri pon mahuman ya paghaklad ka Magbabaja. Kataghan sa kon may an una pagkaon hasta ha pagkahuman na haklad, kay may manuhon ka lawas nga diri kon madajaw,*

(No one eats until the offering to God is done. We would know if someone ate before offering the

food at the banquet because he would feel bad.)

This withholding was not only an act of self-restraint, but also a reverent acknowledgment of divine hierarchy. The community chose hunger over sacrilege, affirming once more their deference to *Magbabaja*.



**Figure 17a.** The *haklad* (food offering).



**Figure 17b.** The *haklad*, consisting of unspiced meat, rice, money, “ma-ma” (betel chew)

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 11. b.** *Pagsaro-saro na mga sinarigan na baylan* (Partaking of the food with the assistants of the *Baylan*)

As the prayer concluded, the *sinarigan* partook of the offering. They chewed *ma-ma*, ate the meat, and drank from the water glass (Figure 18 a-b). This act of communion was both a sacred participation and a symbolic performance of unity between the people and the divine. Jennifer emphasized:

*Iton na pagsaro-saro na mga sinarigan ani ijay pagpamatuod nga kami tanan nagkaisa ka Magbabaja.*

(The partaking of the assistants shows that we are in communion with God.)

The *sinarigan*, as proxies of the larger community, enacted a collective healing and reaffirmation of faith. Their actions were not only ritual compliance, but gestures of sincerity and spiritual entreaty.



**Figure 18a.** The *sinarigan* partaking of the offered food.



**Figure 18b.** The *sinarigan* drinking from a glass of water.

**Pagkatagik (Seq.) 12.** *Makig-isa di kapangaon ja mga sakop* (Partaking of the food by members)

After the ceremonial consumption by the *Baylan's* aides, the rest of the tribe joined in the communal meal (Figure 19). Children, elders, and guests partook of the food with deep respect. To eat from the same offering shared with *Magbabaja* was, for the *Mamanwa*, a sacred act of communion—an expression of gratitude and unity with their deity.

Every member waited patiently for this moment, acknowledging the sacred sequence of the ritual. They believe that food becomes healing when it is first sanctified and that consuming it afterward seals their bond with the divine.



**Figure 19.** A community member partaking of the food offering.

***Pagkatagik* (Seq.) 13.** *Hukason di ja bago bayan* (Disassembling the altar)

Following the feast, Jennifer instructed the *sinarigan* to dismantle the *bagobayan* (altar). The *Baylan* once again stood before it, offered prayers in *Minamanwa*, and poured water to wash away the blood from the sacrifice (Figure 20).

Each piece of wood was carefully removed and stored. This was not merely a logistical act—it was sacred care. As Jennifer and others explained, the altar pieces are never reused nor allowed to be stepped on. Their sanctity remains, even after the ceremony concludes.

While tradition holds that the altar should be dismantled the following day, the group made an adjustment due to the altar's location in a frequently traversed space, and the presence of visitors who will leave for home. This act reflected a pragmatic flexibility that does not undermine but rather reinforces the ritual's vitality in contemporary conditions.



**Figure 20.** Photo of the *Baylan* washing the altar with water.

***Pagkatagik (Seq.) 14. Manguli na ha mga lagkaw*** (Returning to their abode)

As the day's ritual concluded, members slowly began to disperse. Those who lived nearby returned to their homes. Jennifer and a few elders remained behind to debrief and discuss the events, while others lingered to listen.

We, too, eventually left the venue—sated not only by food but by the completeness of the ceremony we had just witnessed and, in part, participated in.

***Ritual as Embodied Pedagogy, Memory, Beliefs, and Traditions***

The *Kahimonan* ritual of the *Mamanwa* is a living pedagogy—an embodied convergence of memory, belief, and tradition that reveals how spirituality, communal ethics, and ecological relationships are demonstrated rather than merely spoken. As an invited outsider, I witnessed a covenant expressed through movement, sound, prayer, and the tactile work of preparing altars, offerings, and sacred spaces. Phenomenologically, the ritual shows a world where the divine is encountered through the senses: in the drumbeats, in the *Baylan's* prayers, in the kinaesthetic rhythms of dance, and in acts of communal sharing. Semiotically, each object and gesture—white animals, the *bagobayan* (altar), the *Sinaot* dance, and even the chewing of *ma-ma*—functions as a sign within a rich spiritual grammar that encodes purity, reciprocity, and cosmological order. *Kahimonan* thus emerges as a coherent system that intertwines sacrifice, healing, ancestral memory, gendered labor, and ecological stewardship, while also embodying the community's trust and openness in allowing outsiders to witness their sacred world. What follows is a thematic discussion of these insights through phenomenological and semiotic views.

***Spiritual Mediation***

This section discusses the *Kahimonan* as an embodied and meaningful ritual sequence through which the *Mamanwa* experience, interpret, and communicate their relationship with *Magbabaja* and the spirit world. Using a phenomenological lens, it foregrounds how prayer, fasting, offering, dance, and communal partaking are lived as moments of reverence, discipline, and communion, revealing how the body and emotions participate in the sacred. Through a semiotic perspective, it also interprets ritual acts, objects, and sequences—such as the animal offerings, *ma-ma*, *haklad*, and the ordered participation of the *Baylan* and *sinarigan*—as signs that translate cosmological beliefs, ethical values, and social hierarchy. These

approaches show that the *Kahimonan* is not merely a cultural performance but a structured system of lived meanings and symbolic exchanges that continually renew the *Mamanwa*'s spiritual identity, ecological relationality, and communal bond with the divine.

### ***Dreams as Reality: Epistemology of Visions***

For the *Mamanwa*, dreams are not symbolic illusions but real encounters with the divine. They function as instructions that signal illness, misfortune, or obligations to *Magbabaja*. Phenomenologically, dreams are lived experiences that direct action—an example of Husserl's intentionality, where consciousness is oriented not toward metaphor but toward divine will. Semiotic patterns further shape this understanding: certain animals in dreams, such as pigs or chickens, signify a command from *Magbabaja* and trigger a ritual sequence of interpreting, preparing, sacrificing, and later feasting. As elder Belen explains:

*Kon ya isang ka tao in patagainop, kaajak nikan an pakighigara ya Magbabaja. Nga unay-unay de magpatagainop kanikan kon sikan magatuman. Nga makalingkawas sikan ka mga mao nga nga diri madayan nga mga pandatong.*

(If a person is made to dream, it means God is friendly toward him. Also, he will continuously dream if he fulfills it and will be saved from misfortune.)

Thus, dreams serve both as signs and as catalyst for ritual action, forming an epistemological bridge between humans and divine. They are not merely imagined but embodied truths that guide moral choices and community practices. Through phenomenology, dreams appear as direct experiences of divine presence, through semiotics, they become coded messages that only gain full meaning when acted upon. In this way, dreams for the *Mamanwa* are epistemic events—moments where the divine enters human life and demands response.

### ***The Baylan as the Mediator between Magbabaja and the Mamanwa Community***

Integral to the *Kahimonan* ritual is the presence of the *Baylan*, who serves not only as a spiritual guide but also as the community's intercessor to the divine. The *Baylan* mediates between the *Mamanwa* and *Magbabaja*, a role that affirms the group's belief in sacred communication. Through the *Baylan*'s entreaties, the *Mamanwa* believe *Magbabaja* speaks to the people—offering messages, protection, and guidance.

Traditionally, the *Baylan* enters a trance state during which he recites the *Tud-om*, a sacred chant believed to contain divine instructions. However, during both of the *Kahimonan* ceremonies I observed in Samar, this segment was omitted due to the presence of outsiders. The decision was made in consultation with tribal elders and respected leaders. Jennifer, along with Myrna, Lorna, Norma, Loren, Maricel, and Josephine explained:

*Ya Baylan, wara mag Tud-om, dikay nagsugilon ja Ginoo ka mga sakop garing ka Baylan, kay wara sa kami duro ka banwa. Kay mao nga iton mabatian na iba.*

(The *Baylan* did not chant the *Tud-om* where God gives a message to the members through him, because we were not in the mountain. It is forbidden that outsiders should hear what he says.)

This distinction adheres to the sacred confidentiality of the *Tud-om* and the cultural protocols that protect its sanctity. While *Baylans* in Surigao may also serve as shamans or healers, the *Baylans* in Basey are primarily viewed as spiritual leaders. Despite regional variations in their roles, the *Baylan* consistently

embodies the bridge between the earthly and spiritual realms.

Phenomenologically, the *Baylan*'s role illustrates intersubjectivity: he embodies the community's relation to the divine, channelling messages that are collectively experienced. His body, voice, and trance state are lived modes of spiritual mediation. Semiotically, the *Tud-om* (sacred chant) is a key signifier. Paradigmatically, it distinguishes sacred speech from ordinary speech; syntactically, it structures the ritual's climax. Its omission in Basey due to outsiders reveals how signs are guarded to preserve sanctity. Thus, the *Baylan* is not simply a leader but a symbolic bridge—his presence both lived and signified as communication with the divine

### ***Purity and Reverence in Offering: Cleansing the Sacrifice***

During the ritual, the *Baylan* pours water over the animal as a symbolic act of purification. Phenomenologically, this gesture embodies the lived experience of cleansing—an act that not only prepares the sacrificial body but also allows the community to feel the weight of humility, reverence, and readiness before the divine. The coolness of water touching flesh becomes a sensory reminder of renewal, of removing what is deemed impure, so that prayer may ascend unburdened. Semiotically, the act operates as a sign of purity and worthiness: water signifies life, cleansing, and transformation, while the purified animal becomes the visible token of respect offered to *Magbabaja*. In this moment, ritual practice articulates a worldview in which bodily acts carry layered meaning, mediating between human intention and divine reception, between material offering and spiritual acceptance.

### ***“Ma-ma” as Ceremony: Expression of Faith, Communion with the Divine, and Healing Practice***

Among the *Mamanwa*, chewing *ma-ma*—a mixture of betel nut, leaf, and lime, with tobacco added only in everyday use—functions as a deeply spiritual and embodied practice rather than a casual habit. It is regarded as a form of prayer, communion, and healing, as expressed by Joel Natonio, who emphasized that:

*Ilong ka naming pagmama, diri iton masajon-sajon, in pangamujo nami iton kay magatuo kami nga iton makadajaw iton ka may paga manuhon nami.*

(Our practice of chewing "mama" is not in vain; we pray when we do it because we believe it would cure our sicknesses).

Within the *Kahimonan*, *ma-ma* becomes a sacred medium of communion with *Magbabaja*. It is carefully prepared and purified by excluding tobacco, which is deemed inappropriate for offerings. Phenomenologically, its warmth, taste, and the reddening of the mouth are lived as tangible signs of faith, while elders' prayers during chewing and the participation of children transform the act into embodied transmission of devotion and ritual discipline across generations.

Semiotically, *ma-ma* operates as a layered sign of purity, vitality, kinship, and cultural identity. In ritual form, it signifies a worthy offering to the deity; in everyday use, when combined with tobacco, it connotes strength, healing, and endurance, especially among elders. Shared chewing marks social bonds and the circulation of oral knowledge, expressing an ethic of balance and reciprocity. Thus, *ma-ma* is not merely a substance but an embodied sign that unites body, belief, memory, and community.

### ***The Haklad: Sacred Food***

The cooked food serves during the culminating part of the offering is called *Haklad*. The cessation of dance and the collective stillness during the *Pag Haklad ka mangamujo*, mark a shift from celebration to

reverent waiting. Hunger, restraint, and silence are not experienced as deprivation but as devotion. The body is disciplined to recognize divine precedence, as expressed in Jessie Obeina's warning that eating before the offering would bring physical and spiritual unease. This lived withholding intensifies the community's awareness of *Magbabaja's* presence and authority.

When the *sinarigan* partake first, the act is felt as communion rather than consumption. As Jennifer stated, their eating "proves that we are in unity with God." The assistants embody the community's collective intention, transforming eating into a moment of healing, trust, and submission. Finally, when all members share the food, the experience becomes one of restored balance—hunger gives way to gratitude, and separation from the sacred is replaced by felt closeness. The meal is thus lived as sanctification of the body and renewal of the bond between humans and *Magbabaja*.

Semiotically, the ritual sequence encodes a clear hierarchy and order: offering → prayer → proxy consumption → communal sharing. The *haklad* (unsalted meat), *ma-ma*, money, and water function as signs of purity, reciprocity, and life. The fasting before the offering establishes the opposition sacred/profane and divine/human, while the act of waiting signifies submission to cosmic order.

The *sinarigan* operate as mediating signs. Their first consumption represents acceptance of the offering by *Magbabaja* and re-signifies the food from ordinary substance into blessed sustenance. Their role stands for the whole community, making their eating a symbolic bridge between the divine and the people.

When the wider community partakes, the food becomes a sign of shared covenant and restored harmony. Eating after consecration signifies healing, unity, and closure. In this way, the *haklad* sequence functions as a semiotic chain that transforms hunger into faith, food into sacrament, and communal eating into a visible sign of divine-human communion.

### **Interconnectedness with the Cosmos, Nature, and People**

The *Kahimonan* ritual reveals the *Mamanwa's* holistic worldview in which faith in *Magbabaja*, ecological relationality, and divine reciprocity are inseparably woven into lived practice. Devotion to *Magbabaja* is not confined to belief but enacted through embodied ritual acts—prayer, dance, fasting, offering, and communal sharing—that align human life with cosmic order. Nature is not treated as a mere resource but as a sacred co-participant, where forest materials, animals, water, and food become mediators between the human and the divine, reflecting an ethic of dwelling within, rather than over, the landscape. This relational network culminates in reciprocity: humans offer respect, restraint, and sacrifice, while *Magbabaja* grants healing, protection, and abundance. As a whole, these dimensions express a cosmology where people, environment, and deity exist in dynamic communion, sustained through ritual sequences that affirm unity, balance, and the continuity of life.

#### ***Faith in Magbabaja as Ritual Praxis***

Among the *Mamanwa*, faith in *Magbabaja* is lived as ritual praxis. The *Kahimonan* is not merely a ceremony but a covenantal response to divine prompting, enacted through trust, obedience, and reciprocal offering. The community believes that presenting chickens or pigs secures divine favour, healing, and protection from misfortune. Phenomenologically, this faith is embodied: it unfolds through walking to the ritual site, preparing offerings, dancing in gratitude, and waiting in reverence. In Merleau-Ponty's (2002; 2012) terms, the body becomes the locus of meaning, revealing how belief is realized through movement rather than abstraction. Semiotic meanings deepen this understanding: sacrificial animals signify reciprocity

and covenant, while cleansing with water symbolizes purity—signs intelligible only within the ritual code mediating human-divine communication. As Marlon expressed:

*Magatuo kami nga kon kami magkahimonan, kanami nga kapaladan andajaw. Kay ya Magbabaja, ani ya an luwas kanami.”*

(We believe that if we do the *Kahimonan*, our fate will be good. Because God will save us.)

Faith in the *Kahimonan* is also communal and inclusive. As Lorji, daughter of the *Baylan*, generously shared:

*“Ini nga Kahimonan, para ini ka kadajawan nami nga tanan, kamhan para isab ka majo nga wani dini koman. Iba kamo kani.”*

(This *Kahimonan* is for the good of all of us, and also for you who are here now. You are included in this.)

That welcome illustrates how the ritual extends beyond the immediate community, drawing outsiders into its sphere of blessing. Snowber (2019) further illuminates this dynamic by describing the body as a site of spiritual wisdom and discernment, where dance becomes a form of embodied prayer. In the *Kahimonan*, such movements serve as expressions of gratitude and relational harmony, revealing faith not as a static belief but as a living, embodied covenant with *Magbabaja*.

### ***Ecological Relationality: Dwelling with the Sacred Landscape***

The *Kahimonan* embodies the *Mamanwa*'s symbiotic relationship with nature. From constructing the altar to preparing offerings, all materials—*Koyla* wood, palm leaves, animals, and *ma-ma*—are gathered and used with reverence, then treated as sacred after the ritual. These practices reflect an understanding of the natural world not as mere resource but as a co-participant in spiritual life.

This orientation resonates with Heidegger's (1971) notion of “dwelling,” in which humans live in attunement with the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. In the *Kahimonan*, reverence for the earth is expressed through careful use of forest materials; alignment with the sky through timing and rhythm, acknowledgment of the divine through prayer and chant; and recognition of human finitude through fasting, dance, and communal sharing. The ritual thus becomes an existential act of dwelling—a lived affirmation of the *Mamanwa*'s bond with land, *Magbabaja*, and one another.

Semiotically, animal sacrifice is central to this relational ethic. The *panubadtubad* (prayer of appeasement) re-signifies killing as reciprocity than domination, transforming the animal into a sign of ransom and exchange between humans and the divine. Jennifer explained:

*Ani pagpangamujo ka hayop kay daw diri majuhot ka name, kay siran an tubos ka name.*

(The prayer for the animals is to ask them not to take vengeance on us, for they will serve as our ransom.)

Phenomenology, this shows lived reverence for life; semiotically, it functions as symbolic mediation that binds nature and divine benevolence within the moral economy of the *Kahimonan*.

### ***Divine Reciprocity***

For the *Mamanwa*, *Magbabaja* operates beyond human logic, making the *Kahimonan* not an act of persuasion but an act of surrender in which participants entrust their fate to divine agency.

Phenomenologically, this surrender reflects what van Manen (1990) calls “attunement to the lifeworld,” a sensitivity to how people live, embody, and interpret their world. Attunement requires openness to the community’s embodied experiences—the sacred prohibitions, rhythmic movements, prayers, and silences—treating the ritual not as performance but as a lived event where faith, ecology, kinship, and identity intersect. Semiotic interpretation further reveals how divine reciprocity is encoded in ritual signs: the purified *ma-ma* symbolizes sacred intention, the *patadyong* marks modesty and ritual presence, and the *Baylan’s* withheld chant signals divine transcendence. The ritual sequence itself—preparation, sacrifice, invocation, and communal sharing—functions as a structured sign system expressing reciprocity between humans and the divine. As Konadu (2007) notes, indigenous spirituality involves mobilizing both “natural and supernatural abilities” through ritual acts and sacred objects. In the *Kahimonan*, bodily movement, offering, and invocation converge to materialize the *Mamanwa’s* understanding of spiritual agency, where visible gestures and invisible forces remain deeply intertwined.

### ***Embodied Pedagogy: Memory in Motion***

The *Kahimonan* functions as an embodied system of education in which cultural knowledge is learned, remembered, and transmitted through movement, ritual discipline, and shared responsibility. Gendered roles within the ritual demonstrate flexibility within continuity, as men and women assume complementary tasks that sustain both spiritual order and social balance. Communal participation—through the *Baylan*, *sinarigan*, elders, youth, guests—cultivates social cohesion, ensuring that ritual knowledge, values and protocols are collectively done and passed on. The discipline required in fasting, waiting, observing taboos, and following ritual sequence nurtures resilience, teaching patience, self-restraint, and reverence. Acts of cleansing and sanctifying offerings emphasize purity as a moral and spiritual principle, while hospitality and cultural sensitivity toward participants and visions affirm the community’s ethic of respect and inclusion. As a whole, these practices reveal the *Kahimonan* as a living pedagogy where memory is inscribed in the body, social harmony is ritually reinforced, and cultural continuity is sustained through shared, reverent action.

### ***Gendered Roles in the Kahimonan Ritual: Flexibility within Cultural Continuity***

Gender roles in the *Kahimonan* ritual are observable yet fluid, reflecting a cultural logic that values communal balance over rigid division. Men typically carry out the physically demanding tasks—such as butchering animals, preparing the *haklad*, and handling musical instruments—while women attend to hosting, caregiving, and ritual dancing. These roles however, are not imposed; community members emphasized that responsibilities shift depending on the situation, especially when no visitors are present. As one participant explained:

*Kon wara ya bisita, kami-kami ka, namagtinabangay. Ya mga ama-ama ani ya nagtadtad ka buog nang inhandog ka kada lagkaw, samtang nagasun-ad ja mga babaji ja iba namagsajaw di.*

(If there are no visitors, we work together--men divide and distribute the pig to each family, women cook, and others dance.)

This adaptability aligns with Shannon’s (2015) assertion that women’s orally transmitted knowledge carries equal epistemic weight, and with Byczkowska-Owczarek’s (2019) argument that dance helps sustain social order in many traditional cultures. Women, in particular, play a crucial role in teaching ritual movement to younger generations, ensuring continuity of identity through embodied practice. Phenomenologically, these differentiated roles reflect distinct embodied experiences of the ritual; semiotically, they operate as flexible cultural codes that adjust to context while maintaining coherence within

*Mamanwa* social life.

### ***Social Cohesion: Communal roles and Knowledge transmission***

The *Kahimonan* is also a collective expression of social solidarity. The ceremony relies on coordinated participation—each member fulfilling a role with dignity and purpose. This is akin to what the *Mamanwa* call *pagtinabangay* (mutual assistance), comparable to the Tagalog concept of *bayanihan*. Phenomenologically, it manifests Heidegger's (1971) being-with-others, the lived experience of solidarity. Semiotically, communal acts—sharing food, chewing *ma-ma*, dancing—serve as signs of unity. Paradigmatically, they mark insider participation versus outsider inclusion; syntactically, they weave together into the narrative arc of the ritual.

From wrapping the *patadyong* for dancers to guiding children to correct steps, or assisting in butchering and cooking, all contributions are integrated and recognized. The *Baylan*, the elders, the *sinarigan* (assistants), and even children perform roles suited to their capacities. Sharing the *haklad* (food offering), chewing *ma-ma*, and praying together all point to an ethic of *pakig-isa*--the sense of being one with each other and with God.

These acts not only demonstrate the resilience of indigenous communal structures but also highlight how traditional knowledge is transmitted, owned, and protected collectively.

### ***Resilience Cultivated through Ritual Discipline***

The *Kahimonan* reveals how resilience is cultivated in *Mamanwa* ritual life. From morning until midday, both adults and children refrain from eating until the ceremony reached its proper moment, a discipline grounded not in internalized spiritual ethics rather than coercion. This restraint, along with the careful and equitable distribution of food to each family, reflects practices of patience, gratitude, and communal solidarity. Phenomenologically, such endurance is a lived expression of reverence; embodied in habits through which the *Mamanwa* engage the sacred. Semiotic interpretation further shows that fasting signifies respect for *Magbabaja*, while shared food symbolizes divine justice practiced within the community.

In contrast to the immediacy of contemporary life, the *Mamanwa* demonstrate a time-honored resilience rooted in Indigenous spirituality. The capacity to endure hunger, wait in silence, and move through the ritual with humility reflects not merely physical fortitude but an ethical orientation—an embodied way of honoring one another, the community, and their Creator.

### ***Cultural Sensitivity and Hospitality***

What struck me most, perhaps, was the *Mamanwa*'s cultural sensitivity toward visitors and outsiders. Before the sword-dance performance, Jessie, Jennifer's husband, gently warned me not to be alarmed:

*Ma'am, ayaw kahadlok. Kaajakan iton.*

(Ma'am, do not be frightened. This is part of the ritual.)

This gesture reflected mindfulness and hospitality, considering how non-members might interpret their sacred practices. Similarly, the community prepared separate dishes for us during the *haklad*, conscious that visitors may not be accustomed to their unseasoned broth (*tinola*). The offering for *Magbabaja* was kept pure—no salt, no MSG—but for us, they prepared adobo with the usual spices.

Phenomenologically, this is expressed in lived gestures of hospitality, as when I was welcomed into sacred space. Semiotically, differentiation in offerings—pure broth for *Magbabaja*, seasoned food for guests—signals both reverence and inclusion. Thus, boundaries are maintained while hospitality is extended.

### The Sacred and Forbidden Aspects of the *Kahimonan* ritual and Dance Traditions

Participating in the *Kahimonan* ritual provided a unique opportunity to witness how the *Mamanwa* community intertwined spiritually with embodied cultural practices. To interpret this experience phenomenologically requires attention not only to what is visible and enacted, but also to what is withheld, prohibited, and consecrated as sacred. These prohibitions reveal the lived intentionality of ritual practice, while semiotic analysis illuminates how taboos function as signs that mediate between the community and the divine, illustrated as a paradigm wheel (Figure 21), and presented in Table 2.



**Figure 21.** Illustration of the Sacred and Forbidden Aspects of the *Kahimonan* and Dance Traditions as Reverence to *Mamanwa* Deity *Magbabaja*

#### ***Natural Purity: Prohibition of Commercial Toiletries and Artificial Scents***

One of the first taboos I encountered pertained to bodily preparation. Participants were not allowed to use commercial soaps, lotions, perfumes, or shampoos when attending the ritual. Scented or chemically manufactured toiletries are deemed offensive to *Magbabaja* (God), who is believed to reject artificial odors. Jennifer and Jessie emphasized this:

*Kon maydakot ja Kahimonan, diri masabot nga an parigo nga may sabon daw shampoo. Kinahanglan wara ja mahamot nga gamiton.*

(During the *Kahimonan* ritual, it is not allowed to bathe using soap and shampoos. There should be no scented products.)

Instead, natural alternatives are used—coconut oil or *gogo*, a plant-based shampoo, or unscented vine soap (*salugay*). Even if they resemble modern toiletries, they must remain devoid of industrial perfumes. This echoes a broader Indigenous ethic of ecological harmony, where purity of body reflects reverence for the earth and its divine source.

From a phenomenological perspective, forbidding industrial soaps, perfumes, and shampoos shapes the ritual body as a site of ecological and spiritual purity. For participants, the scent-free body is not simply “clean” but ritually aligned with the natural world. Semiotic analysis highlights this as a paradigmatic

**Table 2.** Sacred and Forbidden Aspects of the *Kahimonan*: Phenomenological and Semiotic Analysis

Sacred / Forbidden Aspect	Phenomenological Function (Lived Experience)	Semiotic Significance (Symbolic Meaning)
<b>Prohibition of commercial toiletries / artificial scents</b>	Shapes the body as ecologically pure and ritually aligned with nature	<i>Natural vs. artificial, pure vs. polluted</i>
<b>Restriction on recording the <i>Baylan's Tud-om</i></b>	Preserves sacred privacy; lived as exclusive spiritual experience	<i>Sacred vs. profane knowledge, public vs. hidden</i>
<b>No tobacco in ritual <i>ma-ma</i></b>	Marks offering as pure, oriented toward health and divine approval	<i>Sacred vs. ordinary, healing vs. harmful</i>
<b>Sanctity of the <i>bagobayan</i> (altar)</b>	Transforms ordinary wood into sacred material requiring reverence	<i>Profane vs. consecrated, ordinary vs. ritually marked</i>
<b>Fasting before the <i>Haklad</i></b>	Discipline the body, prioritizes divine needs over human appetite	Ritual sequence: <i>sacrifice → offering → consumption</i>
<b>Prohibition on leaving before ritual ends</b>	Embodies wholeness and total commitment to the ritual	<i>Incomplete vs. complete, ritual closure maintained</i>
<b>Dress protocol (modest attire, <i>patadyong</i>)</b>	Shapes the body as a vessel of respect and reverence	<i>Covered vs. uncovered, reverence vs. irreverence</i>

opposition: natural vs. artificial, pure vs. polluted. By choosing coconut oil, *gogo*, or vine soap, participants embody a cultural code that privileges harmony with *Magbabaja* and the forest.

#### ***The Tud-om: Sacred Speech Prohibited from Reproduction***

Perhaps the most profound restriction concerns the *Baylan's Tud-om*, the sacred chant believed to convey the voice of *Magbabaja*. Uttered in trance, it is not meant for public recording or archiving, and is performed only when the community is alone and ritually attuned. During the *Kahimonan* I observed, the *Baylan* withheld the chant in the presence of visitors, thereby protecting what is considered divine from exposure.

This practice reflects a deep understanding of spiritual privacy. Connerton (1989) contends that present experiences are shaped by a shared reservoir of memory that legitimizes social and ritual order. Phenomenologically, the prohibition situates the *Tud-om* as knowledge that can only be lived and transmitted within the intensified consciousness of ritual trance. Semiotic analysis further shows that this restriction establishes a syntactic boundary: the chant belongs exclusively within the sacred sequence and cannot be detached or commodified. Its silence in public contexts thus functions as a powerful sign of divine exclusivity and reverence.

#### ***Purity of Offering: No Tobacco in Sacred "ma-ma"***

In contrast to daily chewing habits that include tobacco, the *ma-ma* offered during the *Kahimonan* ritual is purified—devoid of tobacco. Members believe *Magbabaja* detests its pungency and the harm it brings to the body. Maricel explained:

*Ya minama nga paghahalad ka Kahimonan diri pagasakutan ka tabako. Kay бага diri ja Manunubos kay bahuan.*

(The *ma-ma* offered during the *Kahimonan* must not contain tobacco. Because God does not want its pungent smell.)

In effect, the *ma-ma* becomes a sanctified medium of communion, its purity reflective of the community's health and intent.

While tobacco is common in daily chewing, its exclusion from ritual offerings highlights the phenomenological sense of purity in communion with the divine. Semiotic analysis again reveals a paradigmatic distinction: sacred vs. ordinary, healing vs. harmful. Here the *ma-ma* is transformed from a mundane substance into a sanctified medium of offering.

### ***Sanctity of the Altar and Ritual Space***

The *bagobayan* (altar), assembled with select wood and palm leaves, is treated as a sacrosanct structure. Passing beneath it—especially by children—is taboo, and once dismantled, the materials are never reused or left where they might be casually trodden on. Jennifer reaffirmed:

*Kamhan pagkawa ka mga liwaan, dajawon ja pagbutang nga diri maajihan na mga tao, maunga iton masagitan. Kamhan diri di iton gamiton bisan uno pon nga hinangon.*

(After removing the wood used, it must be stored where no one would walk on it. It cannot be used again for anything else.)

This demonstrates the ritual transformation of objects. Once part of the *Kahimonan*, the wood is no longer mere material—it becomes spiritually invested and thus must be protected from desecration.

Experientially, the *bagobayan* (altar) transforms ordinary wood into a sacred structure requiring reverent care. Semiotics explains this transformation as a syntactic re-coding of material: once used in ritual, the wood carries the sign of sacredness, marking a shift from profane to consecrated. The prohibition on reuse maintains the coherence of this symbolic order.

### ***Fasting as Devotion: No Eating Before the Offering (Haklad)***

During the entire course of the ritual, no one—adult or child—ate until the offering to *Magbabaja* had been formally made. Eating beforehand is believed to result in discomfort or even illness. This act of fasting is both an expression of devotion and a communal discipline, reinforcing that the deity's needs precede human appetites.

Phenomenologically, fasting disciplines the body to prioritize divine over human appetite. Semiotics interprets this practice as part of the ritual sequence (sacrifice → offering → consumption), where breaking the order would signify disrespect and disorder.

### ***Completing the Ritual: Prohibition on Leaving the Venue Early***

One's presence at the ritual is considered a commitment, not a convenience. Leaving before the altar is dismantled or the food offered is completed is not permitted. This became evident when a visitor attempted to excuse herself. Pedro, one of the eldest members, quickly intervened:

*Abay naa pagpanaw, humanon naa ya para ka Manunubos,*

(Do not leave yet. We have to finish what is for God.)

His gentle but firm rebuke was a reminder that rituals are holistic processes. Participation implies full engagement until the closing act—disassembling the altar—is completed.

By waiting and staying until the “bagobayan” is removed is the ritual’s conclusion which embodies a phenomenological sense of wholeness, where presence is not partial but total. Semiotic analysis identifies this as a syntagmatic closure: the ritual cannot achieve completion without the collective presence of participants until the altar is dismantled.

### ***Attire as Worship: Modesty in Dress as a Sacred Protocol***

The *patadyong*, a cloth wrapped from the waist down, is not just decorative, it is ritual attire that signifies respect before God. Bare shoulders, thin fabric, or exposed legs are deemed offensive during the ritual dance. Roland Calinawan and Joel Natonio stated:

*Ya kanamin pagloob ka lawas kay daw diri kon malaw-ay na pagsulong na Magbabaja.*

(We are covering our body so that it will not appear detestable in the eyes of God.)

When a blanket was passed on to a woman wearing a sleeveless, sheer blouse, she respectfully declined:

*Diri masabot nga an sajaw hao kay manipis ya bado kamhan waray butkon. Kay maonga pagsulungan.*

(I cannot dance because my dress is see-through and sleeveless. It is not appropriate.)

The requirement to wear the *patadyong* or modest attire phenomenological shapes the body as a vessel of reverence, disciplining posture and appearance as part of worship. Semiotic interpretation situates this within a symbolic code: covered vs. uncovered, reverence vs. irreverence, rendering clothing an embodied sign of liturgical presence rather than mere fabric.

More broadly, the sacred and forbidden aspects of the *Kahimanan* are not incidental constraints but constative sources of ritual meaning. Phenomenology reveals how these prohibitions are experienced bodily as reverence, restraint, and alignment with the divine, while semiotics reveals how taboos encode symbolic oppositions and sustain the ritual’s coherence as a sign-system. What may appear to outsiders as limitation thus emerges as theological affirmation: each restriction enacts purity, safeguards sanctity, and ensures the continuity of the *Mamanwa*’s dialogue with *Magbabaja*.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The *Kahimanan* ritual stands as an embodied enactment of *Mamanwa* cosmology, where movement, sound, offering, and prayer become the living vessels of cultural memory. Far from being a mere performance, it is a covenant that unites belief, tradition, and communal identity. Each gesture within the sequence—whether preparing the altar, invoking *Magbabaja*, or engaging in rhythmic dance—reveals how spirituality, environmental stewardship, and embodied pedagogy coexist in a single, coherent ritual system. Through these acts, the *Mamanwa* teach not only what is done, but why it must be done, transmitting ancestral knowledge through the body and the landscape itself.

The ritual also demonstrates how deeply nature, divinity, and social life are intertwined in *Mamanwa* thought. Sacred materials, dream-guided instructions, collective chewing of *ma-ma*, and

sacrificial offerings all serve as semiotic markers that sustain reciprocity between humans, non-human life, and the spiritual realm. Even taboos—framed as embodied theology—anchor participants to purity, reverence, and relational alignment with *Magbabaja*. At the same time, the community displays remarkable cultural intelligence by adapting ritual practices to new contexts while maintaining the integrity of their symbolic grammar. In doing so, they affirm Indigenous sovereignty over their bodies, beliefs, and lands.

Ultimately, the *Kahimonan* reveals a spirituality that is both steadfast and flexible—a faith continually in motion yet anchored in ancestral wisdom. It reconstitutes ties between past and present, elders, and youth, humans and the divine, making ritual not an isolated event but a continuation of *Mamanwa* life itself. As an invited researcher, bearing witness to these practices stresses the responsibility to honor the trust extended, recognizing that the altar may be dismantled but the embodied memories of the ritual endure. In the footsteps, rhythms, silences, and shared intimacies of the community, the *Kahimonan* continues to breathe, teaching us how the *Mamanwa* live, remember, and remain.

To sustain the vitality of the *Kahimonan*, it is recommended that efforts prioritize cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission, ensuring that elder’s ritual knowledge is documented and passed on through community-led teaching and embodied practice. At the same time, researchers and institutions must observe ethical, culturally grounded engagement, upholding sacred boundaries, informed consent, and the *Mamanwa*’s ownership of their knowledge. Protecting the environmental and ritual landscapes that hold spiritual significance—such as forests, rivers, and traditional gathering sites—is likewise essential to safeguarding the cosmological foundations of the practice. Finally, robust institutional and community support should affirm *Mamanwa* cultural sovereignty by integrating culturally sensitive programs, educational initiatives, and policies that reinforce their right to practice, adapt, and transmit the *Kahimonan* on their own terms.

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This study is the property of the *Mamanwa* people of Samar, who provided the data about the investigation. The writer initiated the concept, conducted the literature search, gathered the primary and secondary data, developed the research questions, and prepared the write-up. The knowledge owners collaborated on data analysis with the author.

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