

"The Meranaw Rina-rinaw and its Emerging Semiotic Resources"

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to discover the emerging semiotic resources found in the Meranaw rina-rinaw. Through semiotic analysis, this ethnographic research determines how faithful the rina-rinaw has remained to the prototype, the traditional bayok, or how far it has drifted from the latter. Specifically, this study seeks to identify and discuss how the semiotic resources contribute to the meaning-making function of the rina-rinaw. The findings revealed the emerging semiotic resources such as the use of guitar as a musical accompaniment, the wearing of modern evening gowns instead of the Meranaw traditional malong or landap, transfer of the setting from the torogan to a private residence or more public place, and less formality and exclusiveness of the contemporary rina-rinaw event which, unlike the traditional bayok, is performed for the delectation of the general public. These semiotic resources have evolved in its own time. There are also evidence of departures or breaks where singers no longer exhibit the typical Meranaw arts of "kakini-kini" and "kakurum." Instead, the onor walks naturally toward the stage. Moreover, the rina-rinaw event is open for everyone. The audience is no longer as exclusive as that of the traditional bayok; it is more heterogeneous. The participants could become rowdy or boisterous.

1. Introduction

Semiotic resources are the actions, materials and artefacts used for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically – for example, with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures – or technologically – for example, with pen and ink, or computer hardware and software – together with the ways in which these resources can be organized.

Van Leeuwen's definition of 'semiotic resource' draws both on Halliday's (1978) view of language as a social semiotic resource whose meaning-making potential is dynamic and simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the social contexts in which it is employed, and on Gibson's (1979) notion of 'affordances', or perceptible, physical qualities of objects that, together with the needs and interests of users, define their possible uses. These semiotic resources have a meaning potential, based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime.

Further, in these times of rapid and prodigious change, the task of preserving and transmitting native culture, particularly such folk materials...becomes more exigent and imperative. The present generation's indifference, or utter ignorance of the rich and vast body of Meranaw oral traditions – e.g. *toto*, *pananaroon*, *antoka*, *bayok*, *katharo sa lalag* – is doom writ large for this rich cultural heritage. If scholarship in the field fails to stem the rising tide of indifference and ignorance, oblivion seems to be the inevitable fate of much Meranaw native art forms.

In light of all this, the researcher finds this study timely and urgent. It is offered as a contribution to the preservation of an interesting contemporary popular Meranaw literary form – the *rina-rinaw*. The researcher believes that in this form endures, or

can be discerned traces of the traditional *bayok*. She posits a continuity of the *bayok* tradition for in a sense, the Meranaw *bayok* lives in the *rina-rinaw*, hence, the compelling need to subject the latter to serious study. Through semiotic analysis, the *rina-rinaw* and other elements of the art form which make each *rina-rinaw* a complete performance package is done to bring to light language use and interesting features and conventions in this verbal art that make it an interesting art form.

The aim of this inquiry is to discover the emerging semiotic resources found in the Meranaw *rina-rinaw* and its distinctive features that make it *sui generis*, a class in itself, as well as those features that link it to the traditional *bayok*. Through semiotic analysis, the researcher should be able to determine how faithful the *rina-rinaw* has remained to its prototype, the traditional *bayok*, or how far it has drifted from the latter. Most importantly, this study is an attempt to add spurs to interest in academic research on Meranaw folk songs, like the Meranaw lullaby, work-related songs (fishing songs), dirges and other occasional songs.

2. Review of Related Literature

Linguistic theorist, Michael Halliday, introduced the term 'social semiotics' into linguistics when he used the phrase in the title of his book, *Language as Social Semiotic*. This work argues against the traditional separation between language and society, and exemplifies the start of a 'semiotic' approach, which broadens the narrow focus on written language in linguistics (1978). For Halliday, languages evolve as systems of "meaning potential" (Halliday, 1978) or as sets of resources that influence what the speaker can do with language in a particular social context. For example, for Halliday, the grammar of the English language is a system organized for the following three purposes (areas or "metafunctions"):

- Facilitating certain kinds of social and interpersonal interactions (interpersonal),
- Representing ideas about the world (ideational), and
- Connecting these ideas and interactions into meaningful texts and making them relevant to their context (textual).

Any sentence in English is composed like a musical composition, with one strand of its meaning coming from each of the three semiotic areas or metafunctions. Bob Hodge generalizes Halliday's essays on social semiotics into five premises:

1. 'Language is a social fact.'
2. 'We shall not come to understand the nature of language if we pursue only the kinds of question about language that are formulated by linguists.'
3. 'Language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people's lives.'
4. Language has 'metafunctions', which in English are: ideational ('about something'), interpersonal ('doing something') and textual ('the speaker's text-forming potential.')
5. Language is constituted as 'a discrete network of options.'

However, according to Van Leeuwen (2005), Social Semiotics is not 'pure' theory, not a self-contained field. It only comes into its own when it is applied to specific instances and specific problems, and it always requires immersing oneself not just in semiotic concepts and methods as such but also in some other field. Moreover, Social Semiotics is a form of enquiry. It does not offer ready-made answers. It offers ideas for formulating questions and ways of searching for answers. For Theo Van Leeuwen (2005), there are three things semioticians do: 1) collect, document and systematically catalogue semiotic resources; 2) investigate how these resources are used in specific historical, cultural and institutional contexts, and how people talk about them in these contexts; and, 3) contribute to the discovery and development of new semiotic resources and new uses of existing semiotic resources.

Therefore, the term 'semiotic resource' is a key term in social semiotics. It originated in the work of Halliday who argued that the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a 'resource for making meanings' (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Furthermore, a semiotic resource is defined as the actions and artefacts that people use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically – with vocal apparatus; with the muscles used to create facial expressions and gestures; - or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc. Traditionally they were called 'signs.' For instance, a frown would be a sign of disapproval, the colour red a sign of danger, and so on. Signs were said to be the union of a signifier – an observable form such as a certain facial expression or a certain colour – and a signified – a meaning such as disapproval or danger. The sign was considered the fundamental concept of semiotics. One of the most famous definitions of semiotics is that of Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) "A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable." In Social Semiotics the term 'resource' is preferred, because it avoids the impression that 'what a sign stands for' is somehow pre-given, and not affected by its use. As Hodge and Kress (1988) have put it, "signs may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse...and cannot exist, as such, without it." So in Social Semiotics, resources are signifiers, observable actions and objects that have been drawn into the domain of social communication and that have a theoretical semiotic potential constituted by those past uses and all their potential uses and an actual semiotic potential constituted by those past uses that are known to and considered relevant by the users of the resource,

and by such potential uses as might be uncovered by the users on the basis of their specific needs and interests. Such uses take place in a social context, and this context may either have rules or best practices that regulate how specific semiotic resources can be used, or leave the users relatively free in their use of the resource.

Semiotic resources are not restricted to speech and writing and picture-making. Almost everything humans do or make can be done or made in different ways and therefore allows, at least in principle, the articulation of different social and cultural meanings.

Further, In Chagas' (2003) review of Eero Tarasti's *Signs of Music: A Guide to Musical Semiotics*, he said that musical semiotics quickly establish itself in the 21st century as an independent discipline, along with historical musicology. The growing importance of this field of investigation, which concerns itself both with theory and analysis, can be explained in the light of different developments. The changing of our musical understanding plays an important role. Since music becomes a product of technical reproduction, pieces of different historical periods are more readily accessible to listeners, and the musical experience of the past is continually being recreated by new interpretations, which update the "meaning" of individual works and music styles.

Another study that also dwells into Social Semiotics in music is by David Machin. In his paper "Towards a Social Semiotic Approach of the Analysis of Emotion in Sound and Music," he explores the Social Semiotic approach to popular music in order to document the voice qualities, melodies, and instrumental sounds found in popular music using the case study of Michael Jackson's 'Billie Jean.' He explores how semiotic features of sound communicate and reveal something of the subjectivity, the emotional world, created by the musicians. He analyzed and explored Jackson's use of restricted pitch ranges, breathiness, melodic patterns, gentle disjunctive articulation showing how it all helped communicate the 'tension,' and 'trouble' in the song.

3. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research which employs ethnography in the data collection. However, in the data analysis, semiotic analysis was used as a method. The corpus used in this study were audio and video recordings. Semiotic analysis is used in naming the semiotic resources which contribute to the meaning-making. The corpus of this study was taken from the audio and video recordings of a *rina-rinaw* performance during the Angcolo Clan Kandori or Thanksgiving which took place at Brgy. Batuan, Balabagan, Lanao del Sur, last October 29, 2017.

4. Results and Discussions

This section is concerned with the presentation of the emerging semiotic resources found in the Meranaw *rina-rinaw* and their analyses and interpretations.

A. The Semiotic Resources and their Contributions to the Meaning-making of the Meranaw *Rina-rinaw*

Semiotic resources, as defined by Van Leeuwen (2005), are the actions and artefacts that people use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically – with vocal apparatus; with the muscles used to create facial expressions and gestures – or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc.

The semiotic resources that contribute to the meaning-making of the *rina-rinaw*, refers to the singers' costumes, and their musical accompaniment (the guitar), setting and the *onors* or singers.

1. COSTUME

The first semiotic resource considered in this study is the costumes of the singers. It was found out that the *onors* (specially the lady *onors*) change their costumes every time they appear on stage.

According to Saber (1979), the typical Meranaw woman seldom veils her face with a part of her pilgrim's turban or scarf, but she encloses herself in a *malong*. Macarambon (1979) defines the *malong* as the most colorful unisex garment of the Meranaws. In one sense, it is simply a barrel or tubular-formed skirt with equal circumferential opening on both ends. Yet, it is also a delicate garment involving great weaving skill and art. Expressive of the rich artistic tradition of the people, it is also probably the most versatile apparel in the world. Moreover, one of the most common substyles or varieties of the *malong* is called the *landap* which literally means "beautiful to look at." The *landap* is distinguished by the widest horizontal stripes of either red, yellow, blue, violet, green or abaca leaf green. According to Macarambon (1979), these woven stripes are generally of primary colors and are dazzling in the sunlight.

Among the Meranaws, the colors golden yellow, maroon, purple and green are most commonly used. Golden yellow and purple are associated with royalty. The *landap* has its accent the *langkit* that runs vertically or down the length of the *landap*. It is a broad bond, ornately and exquisitely decorated with geometric designs or forms.

In this study, there were three (3) *onors* during the *rina-rinaw* performance: two ladies and one gentleman. Princess Norlyn changed her gowns three times. As shown in Photos 1-3, she wore a light violet evening gown of rich material during her 1st performance, a reddish evening dress, again of rich material, for the 2nd performance; and, during the 3rd performance, she wore a beautiful green gown. All her gowns were heavily embellished with sequins and/or appliques, particularly the first gown. She has a relatively rich wardrobe compared to the other lady *onor*, Potre Monaoray.



Fig. 1. Princess Norlyn during her 1st performance



Fig. 2. Princess Norlyn during her 2nd performance



Fig. 3: Princess Norlyn during her 3rd performance

In the photos shown above, the lady *onor* wears a modern-day gown which contrasts with the traditional dress of a Meranaw woman, that according to Saber (1979), symbolizes feminine modesty and immediately makes known her identity as a Meranaw. Traditional *bayok* performers wore *malong* and a long sleeved blouse that could invite an outsider's curiosity about her physical features and customary way of life. So attired, the *bayok onor* would regally walk on stage, delicately holding her *malong* and would even give a demure demonstration of how to arrange it in different ways. The *rina-rinaw* singer does away with such dramatic entrance.

The photos below show the costumes of Potre Monaoray, the second lady *onor*. She wore a golden yellow gown adorned with golden lace for her 1st and 2nd performances and changed into an attractive violet evening dress for the finale or last performance. The gowns are as lavishly embellished as those of Princess Norlyn.



Fig. 4. Potre Monaoray during her 1st and 2nd performance



Fig. 5. Potre Monaoray during her 3rd performance



Fig. 6: Mangoda Pyagma during the *Rina-rinaw* performance

The lone male singer (as shown in Fig. 6) wore a light brown or cream polo shirt with a green undershirt. Unlike the female singers, he did not change his attire in the entire *rina-rinaw* performance.

These semiotic resources are considered new in the *rina-rinaw*. These resources showed a shift from the traditional *malong*, for example, *landap*, or some other variety. This shift from the traditional art crafts and materials to modern designs and fine clothing (imported cloth or textile) signifies or mirrors the evolution of the *Meranaw* society in terms of their way of dressing. Like the *rina-rinaw* texts, costumes fall under material culture and are thus vulnerable to change. Loom weaving is now rarely done by *Meranaw* weavers, hence, the rare occasions on which the traditional *malong* is displayed; these cultural artefacts are "rare finds" and are costly. They are now considered prized possessions or heirlooms. It is thought more practical and cheaper

for the *onors* to wear long gowns. Mass-produced, reasonably priced textiles are readily available in the market. Not so the traditional attire.

It must be noted that according to Sarangani (2010), the proper way of dressing is part of the "facework" of the Meranaws. This facework or impression management entails attention to correct posture, appearance, and dress code, which are all part of the Meranaw ideal called *kambilangataw*.

2. GUITAR

Another semiotic resource present in the Meranaw rina-rinaw is the guitar used to provide musical accompaniment to the singer's piece. This is a very important resource since this makes the *rina-rinaw* different from the traditional *bayok*. According to Princess Norlyn, *rina-rinaw* is primarily for the "*kangodaan*" or the young generation. And these young people prefer listening to *rina-rinaw* than the traditional *bayok* (or sometimes called *sinlad*) because the accompaniment makes it more entertaining.

The guitar, a stringed instrument introduced by the Spanish colonizers, belonged to the lute family and is either plucked or strummed (CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art, Vol. VI, 1994). Although it is the most widely used instrument in the Philippines as musical accompaniment to the vocal genres, including *rina-rinaw*, it is not native to the Meranaws, as the *kulintang* and *kudyapi* are. According to the same source, this plucked lute variety is favored by elders on formal occasions and merrymaking that characterize *kandori*. However, as pointed out, *kudyapi* music often "has subtle metaphorical meanings concerning love, thus it is not generally played during festive occasions for its music is easily drowned out by the noise. It is more appropriate for courting and other more intimate occasions. Given modern mass society or the large crowd gathered at a *kandori*, semiotically, the shift to guitar use is understandable. Moreover, with other changes introduced in the vocal genre known as *rina-rinaw*, a more appropriate musical accompaniment is provided by the more versatile guitar.

In the *rina-rinaw*, as shown in Fig. 1-6, the *onors* play the guitar while singing. This is a common image in the entire *rina-rinaw* performance. Once the *onor* starts singing, he/she strums the guitar. This is at once recognized as a departure from the traditional *bayok* which does not require the *onor* to play an instrument as he/she renders a vocal performance. The *bayok* is a general term for "song" among the Maguindanaons and Meranaws; it refers to "love song" among Subanons of Zamboanga. The Meranaw *bayok* is distinctive, dealing with various topics, such as praising important people *bayok kapamodi*, narrating adventures of the hero Bantugen of the epic Darangen in *bayok kandarangen*, and expressing one's personal experience in *kapranon*, including one's lost love in *bayok kapangoragis* (CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art, Vol. VI, 1994). As further described in the same source, this particular genre is rendered solo and unaccompanied, featuring the Meranaw melismatic singing in loose meter and performed by the professional entertainer, the *onor* or *pababayok*.

Usually, a female *onor* covers her mouth with a daintily or beautifully decorated fan when singing; on the other hand, a male *onor* places a fan on his chest. The *pababayok* is frequently invited to perform during festive gatherings called *kalilang*, *kandato*, and *hariraya*.

The Meranaws share with other people the universal love for music which enlivens life. They sing old songs of love and adventure in *bayok*, epic (darangen) and other forms of vocal entertainment. However, according to Saber (1980), their native instrumental music is all the more interesting as evidence of their rich cultural, artistic, and literary heritage which persists along with the new ways.

Fontanilla (1999) enumerated the three types of the Meranaw's musical ensembles—the *kulintang*, *katagungko* and the *kapanirong*. The *kulintang* is another Meranaw ensemble consisting of five instruments. The *kulintang* deserves special mention here as it is one musical instrument that the *onor* is expected to be adept at, though obviously, like the *kudyapi*, it has been replaced by the guitar (played by the modern *onor*). A *kulintang*, placed on a wooden frame measuring 160 mm. in length, consists of eight bossed *gongs* of graduated sizes, arranged according to the sounds they produce. These bossed *gongs* called *kulintang* play an important soloistic role in gong ensembles, as shown in Book 1 (Vol. 1) of the Darangen on "*Paganay Kiyandato o Diwata Ndaw Gibon*". Diwata Ndaw Gibon was the founding ruler of Ililan a Bembaran. The depicted scene is the triumphant return of Gibon from his expedition on quest of alliances with other powerful kingdoms. He returns with a bevy of new wives. The ancestors of the Meranaws were known for "marriage politics" which were contracted for political expediency or to form alliances. The entire kingdom goes en fete and prepares a grand welcome for the returning Ayonan with no less than the Queen consort, *Paganay a Bai*, presiding over and leading the merrymaking as her royal role demands. Despite a heavy heart, she plays the *kulintang* and sends a message carried by the wind to her husband that she is welcoming him back and his wives, too. The music she plays says it all for her.

The *katagungko* is another Meranaw ensemble which is composed of a snare drum called *rambo*, two small gongs called *pong*, a pair of cymbals called *pandaupan* and a *gong* called *agong*. Lastly, they have the *kapanirong*. It is an ensemble which consists of a two-stringed lute called *kutyapi*, a two stringed bamboo zither with a flapper called *sirongaganding*, bamboo jew's harp called *kubing* and a flute called *insi*. This musical ensemble is mostly used when serenading a lady.

Saber (1980) also described another musical instrument called the *borodiyawa* or *kapagalotang*. It is a miniature and informal *kulintang* entertainment that does not involve the use of the series of graduated eight brass gongs. Instead, the instrument used is a bamboo or wooden xylophone of graduated lengths for the member pieces, also arranged on a horizontal frame stand.

Another musical instrument called the *saronay* was used by the Meranaws before (Saber, 1980). It is a metal xylophone having a sound distinct from that of the bamboo *borodiyawa*. It has eight graduated rectangular plates with knobs (*bosel*) arranged in a series on a stand. With stick beaters, it is played like the non-metallic xylophone. It is also used to train young girls before they could expertly perform on the *kulintang*.

Meranaws also have the *tagotok*, which is a bamboo instrument played with two beaters. It is a primitive one, more of a noise-maker used to drive away the rice-bird *ogona* when the rice plant is ripening and turns yellow. Aside from driving away the birds from the ricefields, however, the farmer's children watching the ripening plant play the instrument to break the monotony of their work from sunrise to sunset. It produces the sound *krak, krak, krak, tok, tok, tok*, hence, the instrument's onomatopoeic name, *tagotok*. The meaning is in the sound.

Today, as reflected in the *rina-rinaw*, these musical ensembles are no longer used. Instead, the *onors* play a guitar as an accompaniment. This material resource represents the evolution of the Meranaws in terms of musical ensembles. The *onors* have adapted to Western music industry and now follow the example of modern performers singing to the accompaniment of the guitar. This only shows that culture is never static. It is dynamic. Some modern influences are adopted or absorbed. Cultural change is inevitable.

3. THE SETTING

The *rina-rinaw* performance took place at Brgy. Batuan, Balabagan, Lanao del Sur last October 29, 2017 for the Angcolo Clan *Kandori* or Thanksgiving. It was part of the festivities hosted by the clan for their three-day Annual Grand Reunion. It was a rainy afternoon when members of the clan and other people from nearby barrios started to arrive. The said event was open to the public. Fig.7 shows the stage area which was decorated by the young members of the clan. In the background, curtains with beautiful woven materials, usually of the *balud* kind, served as tapestry or backdrop. There were also two *ampas* (a decorative piece of sequined cloth traditionally used to cover the *tabak* but now used as wall or ceiling decor). A *mamandiang* was also used to cover or drape the ceiling. The golden pieces of metal (bronze, silver or stainless) which were placed around the stage or its apron are parts of a *tabak* which are used as decorations and for food servings.



Fig. 7: The Setting during the *Rina-rinaw* Performance

As shown in the photo above, the venue of the *rina-rinaw* event was the house of Datu Diamla Angcolo which is located at Brgy. Batuan, Balabagan, Lanao del Sur. It is part of the Unayan State, particularly East Unayan.

Lavishly decking up the venue for a festivity is imperative in the Meranaw culture. Every detail announces, indicates or signifies something. Whatever is displayed reflects on the stature or station of the family sponsoring and holding the event. Thus, it is expected that the best and most treasured of their collections are exhibited or displayed on such occasions. This is revelatory of

a tendency more or less typical of Meranaws. They unabashedly flaunt or show off their affluence/possessions and socio-economic status. It has to do with the concept of "face" or maintaining a positive image (*maratabat*). The worst thing that can befall a Meranaw family is "*kapakaito*" which roughly means diminishment or loss of face in society. This explains the attention paid to details. The Meranaws do not go for minimalism or understatement (less means more). They go all out, go for broke, and go the opposite of minimalism – ostentation or flamboyance to the point of excess. Like size or magnitude, quantity matters a lot to the Meranaws.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The *rina-rinaw* is a new existing Meranaw song genre and the semiotic resources and their perceived meanings attest to the recontextualization of this new genre as an adaptive response to change in the modern world. Thus, this investigation on the emerging semiotic resources found in the Meranaw *Rina-rinaw* is deemed necessary.

The Meranaws being the major stakeholders in the preservation of their traditional art forms, should be at the forefront of the preservation effort. More apostles of the native or indigenous culture and arbiters of taste should rise and face the threat of extinction looming over oral traditions like the *darangen*, *bayok* and *rina-rinaw*. These verbal art forms should be showcased in seasonal festivities and other cultural events. They must continue to be preserved and displayed not as prize items for libraries, museums, or archives but as living traditions. The concerted effort needed in this preservation must involve the local government and traditional leaders.

In this study, several findings were made, such as using modern gowns by the *onors* or singers, the use of guitar as a musical accompaniment, the setting which is no longer held in wide *torogans* and that it uses a variety of lavish accessories and artifacts. Indeed, the folk genre, *rina-rinaw*, have evolved in its own time. There are evidence of departures or breaks where singers no longer exhibit the typical Meranaw arts of "*kakini-kini*" and "*kakurum*." Instead, the *onor* walks naturally toward the stage. Moreover, the *rina-rinaw* event is open for everyone. The audience is no longer as exclusive as that of the traditional *bayok*; it is more heterogeneous. The participants could become rowdy or boisterous.

Through semiotic analysis, it can be concluded that the goal of understanding the culture of a particular community is very relevant in today's globalized setting. Future researchers, then, may dwell in capturing other semiotic resources found in the said folksong genre.

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