

An Ethnography of Pantaron Manobo Tattooing (Pangotoeb): towards a heuristic schema in understanding Manobo Indigenous Tattoos

Andrea Malaya M. Ragragio, author

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Abstrak

ABSTRAK

Pangotoeb refers to the traditional tattooing among the Pantaron Manobo of Mindanao, a practice that has not been given a systematic description and analysis before in Philippine or Mindanao studies. After giving a review of early historical and recent reports on this practice, this article provides an ethnographic description of Pantaron Manobo tattooing on the following aspects: (a) the tattoo practitioner (and her socio-symbolic contexts); (b) tools and techniques; (c) variations in body placements; (d) basic designs; and (e) the given reasons why present-day Manobo tattoo themselves. In terms of Philippine tattooing technique, this study highlights the importance of distinguishing three modal hand movements: hand-tapping, handpoking, and incising techniques; this last is unique to Mindanao relative to the rest of the Philippines and perhaps Southeast Asia. This paper also opens a comparative and exploratory cognitive approach in studying Manobo tattooing practice. Calling for a methodological declustering of the study of tattooing from its frequent association with male/warrior identity, this article concludes by selecting a limited set of figures that appears to be an enduring schema underlying Manobo tattooing practice: (a) the central role of the female gender; (b) the unique importance of the navel/abdomen as a tattooing region of the (female) body; and (c) the importance of the ridge-pole (and the house in general) in naming tattoo figures and attributing significances. These appear to be more resonant with many other aspects of Manobo culture to warrant giving this schema a heuristic value for future studies.