

Textiles that Wrap the Dead: Some Ritual and Secular Uses of the Binaliwon Blanket of Upland Kalinga, Northern Luzon

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The focal points of this exposition are the shifting sacred and secular aspects of a particular upland spirit world cloth—the *binaliwon* blanket—and its ritual uses within and external to indigenous funeral contexts. Yet there is also a previous journey all *binaliwon* blankets make as secular mercantile items, threaded and knotted on the weaver's loom, and bought and sold in the realm of economic exchange.¹ Notwithstanding, what I will explore here is the nature of the *binaliwon* as people bring it into the realm of ritual exchange, and the uses to which people put the blanket specifically because of its taboo nature and deep spirit world connection.

Previous ethnographers of the Cordillera have described general characteristics and actions of spirits and spirits of the dead; among them Barton (1930, 1938), De Raedt (1989, 1993, 1996), Dozier (1966), Scott (1969) and Suguiyao (1990). Barton (1963) and Fay-Cooper Cole (1922) also briefly report on upland funerary practices and mortuary textile use. However, local people's ritual use of the Kalinga funeral blanket, particularly in regard to its taboo characteristics and the exchange practices to which people adhere, remains to be fully explored.

I begin this exploration with a short vignette. Peter is a farmer in his fifties, an artisan and active member of Torcao village. He has never been short on stories of Torcao's past, or on enthusiasm in detailing aspects of its culture for me over my year-long stay in the community in 2008. He lives with his family in a modest home on the periphery of the village, a wet-rice cultivating *barangay* of around 150 households in the southern Kalinga uplands. One day Peter spoke to me of Koya, a man from a neighboring village who had many years ago come to Torcao on a hunting raid, but who had himself met with a violent end. People say he had become a *miratoy*, a fearsome spirit who at nights still comes to Torcao in search of the descendants of those who had killed him. To this day the spirit still carries with it a head axe, and wears a *binaliwon* blanket—the customary blanket used to wrap the dead in their coffins, and which is then taken with the spirit into the hereafter.

Lasting imagery like this serves to strengthen the connotation local people have of the *binaliwon*, its connectedness with spirits of the dead

(*achogwa*) and the aura of danger it evokes. It is important to establish from the outset that the *binaliwon* is the blanket of dead people, and as such is never used domestically. For instance, people consider it unimaginable to sleep with this blanket, and to wrap oneself with it against the cold would only be a portent of one's own death. Accordingly, people will not display or unnecessarily handle the blanket. Those who own a *binaliwon* will typically store it out of sight and particularly out of reach of children, who are the most susceptible in these communities to sickness and mortality. And it is not just more traditionally-minded members of the community who treat this mortuary blanket with caution. Even younger people who generally dismiss their



Figure 1. A *binaliwon* blanket, sometimes called a 'black and white.' (Photo by Rikardo Shedden. All the photos used in this article are by the author.)

parents' and grandparents' old beliefs (*ugali*) as 'pagan' often speak of their unease at even looking upon a *binaliwon* blanket.

The apprehension the *binaliwon* inspires in people derives not only from the above imagery, but from an entire indigenous cosmological perspective that takes into account the nature of spirits of the dead and other spirit beings, interdictions and their consequences, origin myths, and local natural surrounds endowed with spirit power, to say nothing of the Christian cosmos, itself immersed in three or four generations of village history.² And because of its connection to the dead and symbolic reference to the spirit world, some people have extended their use of the *binaliwon* in rituals external to the funeral context.

One way to interpret the lateral transposition of the *binaliwon* from obsequies to other rituals might be through Geertz's (1973) notion of the dual characteristics of sacred symbols—namely their referential potential as well as their potential to orientate people's actions. In our case, there might not only be a propensity for people to shape their practices around symbolic objects like the *binaliwon*, but also to draw upon the apprehension these blankets evoke to reconstitute their ritual utility elsewhere. This can be seen in a number of non-funerary rituals. Additionally, the funeral period itself could be thought of as a temporary moment of liminality where, among other things, lamentation of the deceased is interspersed with precautionary practices to guard against the spirit of the deceased. In examining this interstitial stage of passage



Figure 2. *Binaliwon* detail.

rites, Turner (1979), following van Gennep (1960), provides a valuable framework in which to set Kalinga funerals and their complex of ritual practices.

Moreover, when someone in the village dies certain relatives of the deceased will, if they have the means to do so, offer a *binaliwon* blanket to the bereaved household for use in the coffin. As there is no telling how many people will donate blankets at any given funeral—and as only one blanket is needed to line a wooden coffin and enshroud the deceased—the bereaved family is often left with many additional blankets. After the funeral any excess blankets not making the journey into the tomb at this time are divided among adult members of the family.

Customarily these blankets are reserved for future funerals of other relatives.

By way of a brief visual sketch, a *binaliwon* blanket is sufficient in length and breadth to completely wrap an adult.³ It is distinguished by its lengthwise alternating bands of dark and white, making it unlike any other Kalinga weaving.⁴ Many of my older informants in the village were often hard pressed to recall details about the origin of this mortuary blanket. Yet what these *lalakay* do remember is that in the time of their forefathers the first type of cotton blanket people in upper Kalinga were able to obtain was the *binaliwon* (*whiraliwon* in the Torcao dialect). According to these elders textile weaving was not a common practice in the local vicinity. These early blankets were acquired through trade for sacks of husked rice which people would carry along the north-south track to Bontoc, a township a day and a half walk away. Some elders spoke of how people went to great lengths in the old days to procure cotton blankets for the occasion of a relative's death. One *lakay* recalled that "A long time ago in Torcao a whole family died in a house fire and their relatives exchanged a rice field (*payao*) for a blanket. Imagine that, one whole rice field." Recollections like these are telling, not only for the preference people historically had for wrapping the dead in woven cotton textiles, a preference that has now become an indispensable aspect of virtually every contemporary Kalinga funeral, but also for the enormous value originally placed upon these once exotic blankets. Presently many of these textiles are produced in the central Kalinga weaving town of Lubuagan, and can be readily bought in the provincial



Figure 3. The deceased is placed on a *binaliwon*.

capital of Tabuk, as well as in other towns or municipalities around the province.



Figure 4. A *binaliwon* lines the inside of a plank coffin.

The *binaliwon* in contemporary funeral practices

Whenever someone dies in the community, text messages to distant relatives follow inconsolable grief and wailing that can be heard across the village. Later that day tarpaulins are erected to extend the shelter of the bereaved family's house as people start to gather and relatives and neighbors pitch in with the myriad preparations that will be needed for the coming days. These will include carpentering the wooden coffin and constructing the cement tomb next to the house,⁵ in addition to preparing the food for guests. Women attend to the washing and dressing of the body. They lay the deceased on a *binaliwon* and when all is ready many hands lift the blanket, body and all, up and into the waiting coffin (*karungkung*). The loose ends hanging out over the sides of the coffin are folded over the deceased before the lid is sealed on the third day. Occasionally a second *binaliwon* might be placed inside to support the head. Among other activities groups of women alternate in

keeping vigil throughout the night, and during the day would find moments to catch up on sleep in a corner somewhere. A minority of men would also remain until dawn, passing the night with hymns they would sing from books brought over from the church. Members of the host family would continually make the rounds serving coffee and gin and sugar cane wine (*wayas*).

Older women relatives constantly care for the deceased throughout the wake, keeping a candle lit, passionately lamenting and, if a factory produced casket is used, periodically wiping down the glass panel through which the deceased's face can be seen. Much of this is done to help assuage the *achogwa*, or the spirit of the deceased. A person's spirit is thought to permanently separate from its corporeal half at death, but is believed to linger around the house and surrounds during the period of heightened activity at a funeral. It will eventually become still and unheard from, but for the first weeks after death it poses a threat to people in the form of serious sickness, particularly in children. In hindsight people often attribute disturbing dreams or accidents, or persistent illness in the days, weeks or months following a funeral to a deficiency in customary funeral proceedings. Typically during a funeral people would comment if there is any lack in ritual attention paid the deceased. Being most intimately connected to the deceased in life, and now most responsible for the deceased in death, the people most likely to fall foul of an unquiet *achogwa* are the bereaved family themselves.

Earlier during my stay in the village a funeral was held for a young mother who had died of cancer in hospital, leaving behind seven children, the youngest of whom was only months old. Upon arriving at the house for the wake, relatives, particularly women, made their way directly to the coffin, crying loudly. Addressing the deceased woman in a long-drawn-out, stylized chant called *ewhil*, mourners professed how much she would be missed, and reminisced of times when they all worked side by side in the fields. People also acknowledged the suffering the deceased woman endured because of her protracted illness. Again, implicitly, much was said to soothe her lingering *achogwa*. Additionally, as this woman's life was cut short by illness she was entombed on the fourth day. Accidental or intentional death also falls into this category. The even-numbered day is thought by many people to cast off the dreaded circumstance, so that an untimely death would not befall anyone else in the community. Funerals of elderly people, however, those who have accomplished much in their lives and have left behind many grandchildren, are occasions not for grieving but for celebration. While the family still mourn the loss of their loved one, games and competitions of skill and strength are often played to the delight of large crowds, and are an important way in which the community shows support for the bereaved family while honoring the deceased. These celebratory funerals are customarily held for three days, as people believe the odd-numbered

day to be favorable, hoping that the enviable situation of a long productive life ensues for all.

Funeral wakes also provide opportunities on many levels for drinking, eating and other social interaction. People spend long idle hours sitting and talking. Some play chess, or give haircuts, or weave soft brooms to pass the time. Some younger people even consider a funeral an unplanned-for opportunity for courting. My neighbor's teenage son spent a whole afternoon sprucing himself before joining a group of his male friends to see which young ladies may have arrived for the wake. Each family who attends is also entitled to chunks of



Figure 5. A catechist leads the final prayer before a tomb is sealed.

uncooked *carabao* (water buffalo) meat distributed on bamboo skewers. Meat of any kind is a treat for most families in the village, but it is generally only at large events like funerals, weddings or *bodong* (peace-pact) celebrations that *carabaos* are slaughtered.

Directly following the final blessings by the priest or catechist, and the sealing of the cement tomb, people generally resume their daily domestic lives and barely ever speak of the deceased again.⁶ One way to approach this three (or four)-day public affirmation of death would be to see it as a particular cultural construct which engenders a temporary period of uncertainty and apprehension, of grief and separation. This time of emotional upheaval for the bereaved family and sense of measured chaos around the house could be conceived of as punctuation, a momentary period after which life resumes poise, normality and

secularity. In this regard the syncopated moment, the funeral, is consistent with Turner's (1979) extrapolation of van Gennep's (1960) original study of passage rites, or life crises rituals. Of these van Gennep delineated three distinct successive phases: separation, margin and aggregation—not all of which are emphasized for funerals. However, Turner's focus on the liminal or 'betwixed-and-between' phase of ritual processes of transition—coming after rites of separation and preceding rites of (re)integration—is relevant in many ways to an understanding of Kalinga funerals. For instance, the aforementioned days of grieving and other activities during funeral wakes present a form of temporary inversion or negation of normality in social order. In a Durkheimian sense this creates a momentary sacred space, defined against a backdrop of relative secularity. This period of flux Turner describes as the 'interstructural' character of the liminal phase (1979, 234).

Moreover, Turner's concept of the transitional period of rituals could equally apply in our case not just to the deceased, but similarly to the spirit of the deceased, the surviving spouse, the bereaved family and the community at large. The focus on a multiplicity of participants at funeral rites is addressed in Hertz's (1960) study of the collective representation of death. Accordingly, the three-day Kalinga funeral could firstly be thought of as a transitory period for the body of the deceased, an interstitial phase in between a state of animation and final interment. And secondly, as the body lies in state people have their last opportunity to talk to the deceased, to lament him or her. Hertz describes the action of mourners as the necessary participation of people in the mortuary state of their relative, or community member (1960, 86). Additionally, and partly out of respect for the bereaved family, people do not go out to work their fields until the final blessings and entombment are over, or if they do they do so surreptitiously. Breaking this custom would be considered a slight to the bereaved family, a possible source of tension. Conversely, the dampening of normal agricultural activity beyond the village periphery consequent to someone's death could be thought of as a spatial extension of the center of ritual activity at the bereaved household—a veil of mourning extending even over the fields.

Finally, if the transitory period for the corporeal deceased is the three-day funeral, the transitory period for the spirit of the deceased extends beyond entombment of the body. A particular ceremony demarcates the end of this transient period. Nine days after entombment⁷ close relatives and a few neighbors are invited to the house for sticky rice and a casual get-together. It is implicitly understood that the *achogwa* is present also. People believe this day marks the last day of the spirit before it departs, never again to be heard from. At one point, and without obvious ceremony, a token amount of sticky rice is bundled up in a tiny basket woven from stick grass (*siripat*) and hung outside the door of the house in a practice referred to as *upican nan natoy*. The family keep this

symbolic packet of food for the spirit to take with it as it departs. However, because their deceased relative, in spirit form, still poses danger to the family, it is no longer welcome to enter the house to eat. This former household member's transfigured state renders it separate from the living community and in many ways is a threat to it. The placing of the *upican* outside the house, as an act enforcing boundaries between the living and the dead, is an extension to the way people endeavor to protect themselves from an unquiet spirit at funerals. In addition to paralleling van Gennep's discussion of obsequies as rites of separation-reintegration (1960, 147), the *upican* ritual is also consistent with his observation that funeral proceedings for some societies may primarily consist of defensive measures against the spirit of the deceased (193).

The shifting nature of the sacred

People ordinarily treat the *binaliwon* as a taboo item—an item which, because of its potential to bring about death, is cautiously separated from domestic and intimate use, folded and stored away out of sight. When they are brought into the funeral sphere, however, there is a subtle shift in the way they are treated. I have seen gift blankets at funerals indifferently piled up in a corner, some recently purchased and still in their plastic carry bags. Others were casually draped on a clothes line strung up across the room, then nonchalantly brushed out of people's way when the room filled to capacity for hymns and prayers. I was even told that at some celebratory funerals of elders, when entertaining competitions are organized in the afternoons, a *binaliwon* might be offered as a prize in a game. Such games include the *bitbitnag*, the vigorous thigh-slapping duel played between two combatants, the winner of which is awarded a winnowing basket or sometimes a blanket. And at one particular funeral a spare *binaliwon* was hung up like a canopy above the coffin. I was told this was to deflect or absorb the heat of the sun coming off the tin-roofed house and so impede the decomposition rate over the course of the funeral.

Moreover, as a traditional Torcao practice (*ugali*), the widow or widower during a funeral is supposed to sit or lie in a corner of the room hiding under a *binaliwon* blanket. I was told they should remain this way day and night for the entire funeral, keeping out of sight of the deceased's *achogwa*. This is done for fear that this spirit would try to entice the surviving spouse to join it in the spirit world. Sugguiyao notes that this is a practice consistent with other Kalinga groups (1990, 99). Alternatively, a *binaliwon* could be strung up partitioning off a small corner of the room where the surviving spouse would remain concealed from their partner's *achogwa* until the coffin is taken outside for entombment.

Further to this, some say that for the period immediately following entombment (but still within the liminal period for the spirit of the deceased) the grieving spouse should not venture outside their house. As they would still be a potential target for the as yet lingering *achogwa*, he or she should continue to drape themselves with a *binaliwon* to remain hidden and protected. Another reason for them to stay inside is to minimize their chances of seeing a pair of butterflies fluttering in tandem, an omen that the surviving spouse would soon follow their deceased partner into the spirit world. This period of liminality for the surviving spouse elapses on the ninth day with the *upican nan natoy*, the sticky rice ritual held for the departing *achogwa*.

The blanket's casual or utilitarian treatment, its resumption of commodity value as a game prize, arguably lessens the *binaliwon*'s taboo characteristics. This inversion of sacred quality correlates with the blanket's appearance at funerals. During these times its sacredness is provisionally diminished, its potency temporarily overshadowed by the lingering *achogwa*.

In his seminal work on the study of religious sociology, Durkheim, in describing characteristics of religious phenomena, states that these "always suppose a bipartite division of the whole universe [...] into two classes which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other" (1947, 40), i.e., the sacred and the profane. For Durkheim there is an irresolvable dichotomy separating all that is considered sacred (albeit by a particular group of people at a particular point in history) from all that is not considered sacred, and this fundamental distinction is immutable and enduring. The *binaliwon* as a ritual object ordinarily separated from the profane, from the domestic world, clearly falls on one side of this dichotomy. But under particular circumstances this mortuary blanket tends to be used familiarly, pragmatically, even intimately if only by the surviving spouse. Immersed as it is in local spirit world beliefs and endowed with taboo (sacred) characteristics, the blanket subtly shifts in character as people bring it into the funeral sphere.

Death ceremonies are interruptions to mundane life, and as such they present a temporary period of inversion of normal states of being. In this situated state of flux people's attention tends towards the deceased and its spirit. Conversely, the usual sense of apprehension people reserve for the *binaliwon* momentarily diminishes. In this hierarchy of potency the *achogwa* eclipses the mortuary blanket. But after the funeral those blankets not interred are taken to other homes of family members and resume a state of potency and continue to inspire caution in people. In a sense they become sacred again, until they are brought to the next funeral.

The inclusion of *binaliwon* in new caskets

Some well-to-do families in the remote *barangays*, having the means to do so, might employ an externally manufactured satin-lined casket in lieu of a plank coffin carpentered locally at the wake. For instance, I once attended the funeral of one elderly Torcao man whose relatives from the provincial capital of Tabuk hired a lorry to bring with them a factory-finished casket for his interment. And the young mother who died prematurely in a Bontoc hospital was transported back to the village in a white funeral-home casket. While mortuary blankets are invariably



Figure 6. A typical coffin being carpentered.

used to line the inside of homemade wooden coffins, finely-finished caskets are plush and need no additional lining. Nevertheless, families who employ a commercially constructed casket will open it and place a neatly folded *binaliwon* inside.

The importance of this act, this inclusion, situates itself in people's cosmological understanding of the *binaliwon* as an item that makes the transition, along with the *achogwa*, into the spirit world. Some people

even include bundles of rice in the tomb. And a few of the deceased's personal belongings and old clothes, things the *achogwa* might return for, are also likely to be included in the coffin. Following age-old traditions, however, virtually priceless heirlooms like a woman's agate beads or gold earrings will almost certainly be inherited by daughters in the family. Regardless, the seemingly perfunctory act of putting a folded *binaliwon* inside a new casket reiterates a cosmic logic relating to the nature of *achogwa*, while maintaining customary practices people regard as indispensable for containing the dangers associated with the liminal character of a funeral.

Moreover, that the increasing use in rural *barangays* of elaborate externally produced caskets over hand-planed wood coffins could be construed as a form of cultural adaptation, an instance of ongoing exogenous influence, that might not be considered extraordinary by authors like Sahlins. The conflation of traditional and introduced cultural elements, according to Sahlins (1985), is a natural and



Figure 7. A funeral-home casket (with a *binaliwon* folded and placed inside).

historically recurring process. He argues that externally induced yet indigenously orchestrated cultural change has been a part of people's daily lives for millennia. People's addition of a *binaliwon* to an externally manufactured product in no need of further lining is demonstrative of the uses the blanket serves beyond practicality. The strength of the blanket's historic and cultural position then, its spirit world immersion, shapes people's use of commercial caskets as they are brought into the

realm of the *binaliwon*, echoing in its own way Sahlins's argument about locally enacted change in society.

Donations and distributions

In Torcao it is customary for relatives of the deceased to donate a *binaliwon* to the bereaved household at the funeral wake. The familial relationship between donor and receiver varies depending on the general age of the receiver (the deceased). For instance, *binaliwon* blankets are typically donated by the families of married siblings of the deceased, that is, if the deceased was relatively old and had married siblings. Alternatively, the families of married siblings of the parents of the deceased would donate a blanket if the deceased had died relatively young, a child who had no married siblings, for example. Ordinarily, unmarried siblings are not expected to contribute to events like funerals and weddings as they would generally not have the economic means to do so. In other words, if the deceased had siblings who had their own adult children, these nieces or nephews of the elderly deceased would be expected to find the means to donate a blanket, or in other ways contribute to the considerable expenses involved in a funeral. Conversely, if the deceased was a child, his or her uncles or aunts would be expected to provide a blanket on the occasion.

Of the blankets donated at a funeral, if there happens to be more than the one (or occasionally two) needed for the coffin, the excess is customarily distributed among the bereaved family. One is typically given to the surviving spouse, while the remainder are divided among the married children of the deceased. Should the deceased be a child, and without adult married siblings, then any excess blankets are kept by the parents of the deceased child for future funerals. Moreover, the married children of the deceased, the ones who receive an excess blanket at the funeral, are expected to present a *binaliwon* at the future funerals of their parents' siblings, their aunts or uncles. Thus, as a general guideline, the movement of blankets tends to run along the niece/nephew to aunt/uncle meridian. In this way it could be argued that a *binaliwon* (but not necessarily the very same textile) is over time returned to the same household from which it originally came, there to be interred or inherited. In a way all blankets brought into the liminal space of a funeral are intended for the deceased and become a part of his or her inheritable possessions, to be later divided among his or her adult children.

Mauss (1969) in his foundational exploration of the relationships created and sustained in gift-giving societies, argues that gift giving, initially understood by scholars as voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, is in truth obligatory and interested (1969, 1). Following Mauss, I suggest that the impetus for relatives to counter-donate a

mortuary blanket conforms firstly to social obligations which inherently support families and unify a community. Secondly counter-donations harmonize with people's spirit world convictions, which are themselves in chorus munificent and self-interested. That is, much that people do at funerals to lament or console a spirit is arguably also done to protect themselves from spirit-related illness and misfortune. But in many ways relatives may be compelled to bring a *binaliwon* to a funeral because in the eyes of many in the community it would be dishonorable, even shameful not to.

In exploring this notion it is important to note that *binaliwons* are wholly interchangeable one for another. It is the category of blanket, its symbolic value and ritual use, which is of importance. For instance, at one funeral I attended I was given a *binaliwon* as repayment to account for a previous debt I was owed. I gratefully accepted and stored the blanket away in my backpack with other collectibles from my travels. However, months later a woman from the other side of the village, knowing I had a *binaliwon* in possession, came asking for it as her father had passed away and they did not have a blanket to line his coffin. I was assured out-of-town relatives would bring *binaliwons* with them over the next few days, but presently it was necessary to get things underway. As I gave up my souvenir I was promised that I would receive a replacement after the funeral, which I did, but a slightly less perfect example. As a commodity item a *binaliwon* can exchange hands for many reasons. As such a blanket may get passed on to people unrelated to the family, re-stored, re-donated and re-distributed all over again, until it is eventually interred with a corpse and crosses the threshold into the spirit world.

No one quite knows how, but through the process of interment or the action of the *achogwa* a second, spirit-form *binaliwon* is generated. One could imagine that while the original woven cotton textile enshrouds the corpse in its coffin, the *achogwa* takes with it a kind of spirit world imprint of the blanket. It is in this sense that people believe the blanket transcends into the spirit world. Sometimes favorite clothes, smoking pipes or sunglasses are also included in the coffin for the *achogwa* to use in their spirit form. And the same would be true of bundles of rice included in the tomb.

It is not just mortuary blankets that trace movement through a system of reciprocity at funerals. Because of the huge costs involved each family who attends a ceremony is also expected to make a small monetary contribution. And while many people unselfishly pitch in with all manner of help in organizing a three-day funeral, the material donations, along with the names of those who made them, are recorded in a memorial booklet. Reciprocal payments and attendance at other families' funerals may be influenced according to who has attended and contributed to one's own family funeral. As people believe the

achogwa of the deceased is honored if a large crowd gathers and waits around the house, people's participation at other families' funerals helps ensure that, in time, a similarly large crowd attends their own ceremony.

But keeping track of 'returnable' items is not necessarily the only purpose of the recordkeeping. My neighbor once showed me the memorial booklet for his young daughter's funeral, a ceremony which I myself had attended years previously. He turned the pages with a sense of pride in the numbers of people who had come and showed so much support for his family at that terrible time. Smiling he pointed out my name on the page. The record book marked a bond between us, as it did between him and every other family named among the pages. In a sense



Figure 8. Rice bundles being placed on top of a coffin in a cement tomb.

a matrix of unpaid debt (*utang*) holds relationships together in the community, and this may be just as true for monetary donations among unrelated people as it is for gift blankets among related families.

Furthermore, the type of funerary accoutrements used in certain upland regions can reflect on the social standing of the bereaved family. Referring to current practices in Sagada, Mountain Province, Piluden-Omengan (2004, 142) details the differentiation, based on the social status of the deceased, of both death blankets and the attire in which the deceased is clothed. Piluden-Omengan observes that there are certain mortuary blankets for the rich and others for the poor. Additionally, the upper and lower garments and headbands in which the deceased is dressed also differ in design and color according to how the deceased was socially and politically situated in life. Historically in upper Kalinga

people may have dressed their dead in traditional Kalinga attire like the *wa'er* (woven cotton lower body garment for men) or the *ginamat* (woven cotton wrap-around skirt for women), but from what I have seen locals tend to use a fresh shirt and trousers or a new dress on a deceased relative.

All Torcao funerals fall under a similar pattern of blanket use, donation and cautious treatment of the *achogwa*. Generally where funerals differ is in the extravagance of the casket purchased, the quantity of *carabao* slaughtered, the number of out-of-town guests, and the ability the family may have to persuade the priest to conduct for them a requiem mass in the church. Such was the case that year at the funeral of the mayor's father. People's use of the *binaliwon*, however, cuts across social stratigraphy in that its employment at funerals is not merely appropriate but essential, regardless of the social location or political position held by the deceased in life. Rather than a levelling mechanism, though, people's standardized application of the *binaliwon* lends it a unifying or identificatory characteristic. It is often spoken of as an enduring element of Kalinga culture, but perhaps more so in the rural *barangays* than in large urban centers.

The *binaliwon* in other rituals

That the *binaliwon* is the blanket of the dead evokes in people a certain apprehension which leads to its cautious treatment in the domestic world. This sense of trepidation has extended the blanket's ritual utility laterally, culminating in people's use of it in several rituals variously contiguous with death, but not directly situated within a funeral.

For example, one morning some of my neighbors in the village were organizing to take down the electricity wires running between their cluster of houses and one nearby. Electricity had not flowed through those cables, or any others in the community, for almost a year by then, ever since the micro-hydro generator ceased up. There were no funds to have it repaired. And a serious problem had arisen. Over the past few weeks, under the cover of darkness, some one had been helping themselves to the idle cable, likely whisking it away to a township where they could sell the copper coil. Concerned with the worsening situation, my neighbors were trying to protect what little remained of the electricity wire, taking it down for safekeeping. Later, in an effort to find the thief, elders of the community held a certain ritual called *sapata*.

The *sapata* ritual is a swearing of the truth at a gathering primarily of men to publicly clear their name from involvement in a particular offense, in this instance theft. People take this oath with the strong belief that dire consequences will befall them should they not be telling the truth. In one version of the *sapata* people who have assembled to

clear their name would hold a shiny peso coin up to the morning sun and swear that they are without guilt, and that should they be lying their eyes would turn white with blindness. For most people such a pledge is a dreaded thing and no one would utter it lightly. I was told another version of the *sapata* involves each person present taking turns wrapping their arms around a large ceramic wine jar and swearing their innocence with the belief that their stomach would distend to the size of the jar should they not be telling the truth. Or worse, that their family would die if they are lying. To add a spirit world subtext and a sense of foreboding to the ritual, a cutting from a broad red-leaved plant (*changra*, a shrub some believe grows on ground where people have been killed) is placed next to the jar, together with a *binaliwon* blanket. Because of its intimate connection to dangerous *achogwa* and the sense of foreboding it inspires, the use of the *binaliwon* is ideally suited to a context where an element of anxiety would be considered beneficial to the procedure.

At another point during my stay in the village I was told of an incident in the capital Tabuk in which a Torcao man was assaulted by men from another Kalinga group. The residential areas around this provincial capital comprise a number of settlements of upland peoples who have over the years migrated to the city, not all of whom have peaceful relations with each other. The mother of this Torcao man happened to be a well-known spirit world practitioner and, incensed by the attack on her son, undertook a particular ritual involving the use of a *binaliwon* blanket. This ritual, the *marasad*, is a fear-provoking form of chanting and cursing historically performed while holding a spear and shield, and sometimes while wearing a mortuary blanket. I was told people intend for the ritual to incite the *achogwa* of the victim to avenge itself, and in the case of death, to reciprocate by taking a life among its enemies.⁸

As another example a *binaliwon* blanket could be used to announce the death of a *bodong* (peace-pact) holder—a person skilled in brokering strained relations between opposing communities, and who holds the responsibility of maintaining peaceful ties between them.⁹ I was told that historically this announcement would have been made by an adult son of the deceased. He would wear for the occasion a *binaliwon* like a sash across one shoulder to make known the death of his father to his father's counterpart in the corresponding village. The next day a formal contingent from the partner village would accompany the bereaved son back to his *barangay* for the funeral. By wearing the *binaliwon* in this way for this formal announcement people draw on the blanket's strong symbolic language of death, here also intertwined with the pressing politics of assigning a replacement community leader.

One way to conceive of these additional ritual applications of the *binaliwon* would be through Geertz's (1973) influential treatment of

symbolic objects as both gloss and template. Geertz argues that to better grasp the nature of people's cosmological perspectives and the dispositions these beliefs inspire in them, we need to do more than identify correlations between particular ritual acts and their social ties. Geertz suggests we additionally investigate how people's notions of reality, their beliefs about the cosmos, in point of fact shape their actions, their daily lives (1973, 124). He describes an intrinsic twofold characteristic of symbols, or sets of symbols, in that they firstly parallel, imitate or simulate relationships or processes in society, but that more than this, they provide a model under whose guidance these relationships are organized.

That is, the conceiving of and manipulating of symbol configurations to more closely resemble people's social world is but one part of the theoretical framework. People's maneuvering or shaping of their social world in relation to their symbolic organization dovetails the two halves of Geertz's concept (1973, 93). In regards to the *binaliwon*, I have suggested here that the blanket is an object symbolically tied to the world of Kalinga spirits. But, following Geertz, not only does it refer to a broader cosmology, its symbolic reference provides a template for people's use of the blanket in other creative but related ways (e.g., *sapata*, *marasad*, *bodong*). In other words, the spirit-related nature of the textile engenders in it a certain potency which shapes people's behaviour toward it, and toward each other in relation to it.

In summary

In sum, the aggregate of ritual and secular complexities demonstrated through people's varied use of the *binaliwon*, both integral and supplementary to the funeral process, endows it with a nature which transcends simple bipartite categorization. The way people relate to this textile—from apprehensively and cautiously to, on occasions, intimately and irreverently, and back again—reflects the constant shift the blanket makes between sacred and secular spheres. In the domestic world people handle the blanket with care, storing it out of sight. In the highly charged environment of a funeral the blanket's potency is overshadowed by the spirit of the deceased, which is considered the real source of danger in the room. Thus the *binaliwon* is subject to an inverse relationship with the dead, in a sense becoming impotent in the presence of the loose *achogwa*, only to regain its potency after the spirit has departed.

The period in which the deceased lies in state, being mourned by relatives and neighbors, correlates to a slightly lengthier period wherein the deceased's spouse is most at risk from the deceased's spirit. Turner's (1979) exploration of the liminal period of transition rituals and van

Gennep's (1960) study of separation rites are both useful in understanding the intertwined relationships between spouse, spirit and mourners. Additionally, Geertz (1973) argued that symbolic items, for instance the *binaliwon*, have a double aspect to them in that they can refer to broad conceptual (cosmological) frameworks on the one hand, while shaping people's actions on the other. In other words, the imagined cosmos to which particular symbols refer does not only mirror an array of social relations among people, but concomitantly provides a form to which people orientate themselves. But more than this, because the blanket evokes certain emotive responses in people, it has also found utility in other ritual arenas. This is apparent in people's derivative use of *binaliwons* in the *sapata* (to determine guilt), the *marasad* (to incite revenge), and to a lesser extent the announcement of the death of a *bodong* (peace-pact) holder.

Moreover, the gradual, internally orchestrated refashioning of some elements of village funeral practices vis-à-vis urban funeral practices has neither led to the cessation nor the diminution of the *binaliwon* as a vital aspect of Kalinga funeral culture and cosmology. Arguably the use of satin-lined caskets has rendered redundant the enshrouding application of a blanket, yet families who employ these caskets, in lieu of a plank coffin, will still place a folded *binaliwon* inside. For not to do so would compromise the relationship the living have with their dead. In short, what I have attempted to show is firstly the blanket's alternating nature in traversing between sacred and secular realms, having its taboo quality temporarily altered as it does so. And secondly, that the cosmological perspective it engenders in people, and to which it refers, also shapes people's creative use of the blanket in rituals external to the funerary context.

From mercantile trade to ritual exchange, from mundane to sacred, from physical to spirit world use, the *binaliwon* is conceivably the most unique of Kalinga cloths. That this mortuary textile is considered an indelible aspect of local ethos is reflected in common discourse. As one man at a funeral in a neighboring village so succinctly put it, "The *binaliwon* is a part of our culture that will never be erased." This definitive statement captures the strength of Kalinga cultural identity as it draws upon the immutable, enduring connection people have with the blanket in relation to the ritual treatment of their dead, a connection which positions the *binaliwon* as an object pivotal to secular spheres of materiality and otherworldly spirit landscapes.

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NOTES

1. For general discussions on the production and uses of Cordillera textiles see, among others, Casal 1981, Milgram 1999, Pastor-Roces 1991.

2. Catholic missionary presence in the immediate area dates to 1938; Anglican missionary presence in the village began in 1976.

3. Approximate measurement is 183 cm by 122 cm.

4. By comparison more southerly Cordillera groups like the Ifugao use for their funeral practices striped cotton blankets called *gamong* and *baya'ong*, for which there appears to be notably more historic and contemporary literature in contrast to the Kalinga blanket. See, e.g., Casal 1981, Milgram 1999, Barton 1938.

5. People are buried or entombed on their own house lot; the village has no communal cemetery.

6. People believe that an *achogwa*, any time after death, can be drawn to the sound of its name. This is undesirable because contact from a spirit is believed to result in sickness.

7. The ritual is held on the eighth day if the deceased's life was cut short.

8. See also Barton 1930, plate XXVII (a) & (b), and 1963 introductory plates (unnumbered), for early references to rituals which incite the spirit of the deceased to revenge its death.

9. The Kalinga peace-pact institution, or *bodong*, is a complex system of laws, or *pagta*, which are brokered by chosen representatives (*bodong* holders) from opposing communities in multi-day ceremonies involving the slaughtering of many *carabaos* and the exchanging of many gifts between leaders—all intended to facilitate peaceful relations, safe travel, and trade in a region historically known for inter-village violence and, in a bygone era, headhunting. See also Barton 1949, 174-208; De Raedt 1993, 26-32; Dozier 1966, 212-35; Goda 1999, 23-44; Picpican 2008, 119-121; Sugguiyao 1990, 47-79.

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