

Rituals of Passage in Ibaloy Death Rituals and Practices

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ABSTRACT

The Ibalays are among the indigenous people of Cordillera in the Philippines who resisted Spanish attempts of Christianization for almost 300 years (Scott 1974), and thus were able to retain many of their traditional practices. I focus on the Ibalays from Loakan, one of the barangays of Baguio City, which was one of the early Ibaloy settlements and formerly part of the municipality of Tuba located in the southern part of Benguet Province in the Northern Cordillera region of the Philippines. This paper examines the traditional death rituals of the Ibaloy people of Loakan, using Van Gennep's (1960) concept of rituals as rites of passage subdivided into rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation or reintegration.

As an Ibaloy born in Loakan where I grew up, I have observed Ibaloy death rituals in the community, deriving information from my participation in the rituals held for close family members. I also conducted the death rituals for my parents in Loakan. Key informant interviews with the only *manbonong* (traditional priestess) in Loakan, ritual practitioners and directors in my locale and other parts of Baguio City were also done to provide additional data and further clarification on specific aspects of the ritual. In addition, written sources on practices similar to the Ibaloy rituals in Loakan were used to corroborate and provide additional explanations to funerary practices common among the Ibalays. Here, key terms referring to processes undertaken and objects used in the ritual are examined to reveal the function of the Ibaloy death ritual as a means by which to ensure the well-being of both the living and the dead.

Keywords: Rites of passage, death ritual, Ibaloy belief, funerary customs

INTRODUCTION

A ritual is an assembly of actions that makes use of objects and materials to communicate with spirits and the Divine for the fulfilment of specific

ritual goals of ensuring the well-being of those engaged. Rituals were conceived to serve specific functions and to satisfy the need for control and understanding the meaning of these events (Malinowski 1961, 48). In the event of death, for example, a series of actions using various objects follows a pattern or order designed to fulfill specific aims. Arnold Van Gennep refers to this as rites of passage, which aim “to insure a change of condition or a passage from one magico-religious or secular group to another.” Rituals are further subdivided into “rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation” (Van Gennep 1960, 10–11). Death creates an imbalance which causes distress to the living, and a situation that requires the performance of death rituals. Here, both the living and the dead undergo the processes of change to be able to restore the balance that is lost because of death in the family or community.

The function of Ibaloy death rituals and practices will not be immediately explicit. Customarily, the conduct of these rites and practices is delegated to the *manbonong* (priestess) or the ritual directors and assistants, who at times, would simply explain these as traditional practices that had been handed down from the ancestors. Ibaloy traditional death rituals follow patterns of the rites of passage which consist of symbols that can explain the function of the rituals. According to Victor Turner, symbols are “the basic building-blocks, the ‘molecules,’ of ritual” (Turner 1977, 4). The actions or objects used in rituals are more than what they appear, because these elements contain information about the significance and functions of rituals. Symbols are means of communicating messages because these are “extrinsic sources of information” (Geertz 2000, 92).

Ibaloy Traditional Religious Beliefs

According to Patricia Afable, who conducted her research in Tublay, Benguet, Ibaloy traditional religious behavior is influenced by two categories of “superhuman beings,” namely, the “beings in the upper world” (*suta warad naykayang*) and the beings that reside in “the world around us” (Afable 1975, 105). Among the beings in the upper world, frequently cited are Kabonian, Dumawid, Kabigat, Aggew (‘sun’), Bulan (‘moon’) and Masiken. The second category of superhuman beings consists of spirits, of which some are malevolent such as the *amdag*, *ampasit*, *timungaw* and *pasang*. This category also includes the *kedaring* (spirit of the dead), which refer to the “supernatural counterpart” of humans who travel to Pulag (Afable 1975). It is a common belief among the Ibaloy that Mount Pulag, the highest mountain in Luzon, is the final destination of all the spirits of the dead.

Florentino Merino (1989, 13), writing about the Ibaloy in Kabayan, classified the spirits of the dead as *kaapuan*, *kaliching* or

kedaring, and *banig* (ghost). He described the *kaapuan* as the highest-ranking spirits who should be accorded the highest respect because when they were alive, they “made generous blessings and celebrated *cañaos* for the spirits of those who had gone before them.” The *kaapuan* have the power “to grant blessings, shower prosperity, long life and healthy living,” but they have likewise the power to cause illness and misfortune. In the middle of the spirit world’s hierarchy are the *kaliching* or *kedaring* who are as powerful as the *kaapuan* but demand less expensive offerings. The *kedaring* (spirits of the dead) are often the objects of religious rituals (Afable 1975). The *banig* (ghost) known to scare people and cause mischief occupies the lowest rung in the hierarchy so they are given little respect and eat only during feasts after the *kaapuan* and *kedaring* have eaten (Merino 1989).

Many accounts from written sources, as well as from ritual leaders, practitioners, and community elders, validate the common belief that the spirits of the dead and other spirits in nature continue to affect and influence the living. Illness or misfortune is attributed to “interventions of supernatural forces—such as malevolent nature spirits and ancestral spirits—which were offended, provoked, or forgotten” (Lacanaria 2000, 251) and that “[t]he dead can make a living relative sick if it needs something and is not given by the latter” (Baucas 1998, 108). In other instances, the spirits of the dead contact the living to communicate their grievances and needs. The Ibaloy who practice the indigenous rituals in Loakan accord their dead the proper rituals and observe the necessary practices because they also believe that “an empty-handed spirit may find himself unwelcomed and unaccepted in his new world” which may cause said spirit “to bring evil and disease upon his people” (Celino 1983, 54).¹ For instance, a spirit conveyed information through a spirit medium to Kawani Batiyeg (pers. comm., 2019), an elder in Loakan, that it was feeling isolated (*nay-dasin*) from spirits of relatives because the children had failed to perform the proper death rituals.

Ritual practices in Loakan have been maintained and continue to this day mainly because of resistance to external interventions, which kept the conduct of and participation in these exclusive to community members. Otto Scheerer (Scheerer 1931–32) and William Henry Scott (Scott 1974) mention that in 1755, the Ibaloy in Loakan prohibited entry into the community by outsiders when a ritual was ongoing. The same sources also include an account written by a Spanish missionary of an encounter with the *manbonong* in Tonglo, the first missionary station set up within present day Tuba area which previously included the area of Loakan. The *manbonong* protested against and prevailed over the Spanish missionary who tried to prevent the rituals from being conducted in his presence. However, Loakan was subjected to intensive missionary work and urbanization starting in the early

20th century, which led to changes in land tenure and administration. These resulted in economic, cultural, and political changes in the Ibaloy community that eventually affected the functions and thus, the practice of rituals (Prill-Brett 2015).

In Loakan today, the Ibaloy's traditional religious belief in the Divine and the spirits is no longer as complex or no longer as hierarchical and composed of numerous spirits that exert different influences on the people to perform different rituals. The distinctions of "beings in the upper world" (*suta warad naykayang*) are no longer commonly known especially by the younger generations. Only the Kabonian is mentioned by the *manbonong* (priestess) in her prayers and referred to as the one and the same God to whom all others pray. Additionally, the *manbonong* mentions *Shios ja Emarsua* (God the Creator). This change also reveals the Christianized influence to the traditional religion of the Ibaloy in Loakan. Only the elders know the term *kedaring* as the spirits of the dead because the equivalent term, *amed*, is more commonly known. In prayers the *manbonong* refer to the spirits as the "*epang-pangdo*," literally translated as "the first ones," which can also mean "those who have gone ahead" or "those who lived before in time" (Ameda, et al. 2011, 356), referring to the ancestors. The loss of information on the pantheon of spirits has consequently led to the loss of some rituals. The elders in Loakan cite various rituals that are no longer practiced because the *manbonong* available no longer has the knowledge necessary to officiate these.

Among the rituals that survive to this day are the death and healing rituals.² These rites are conducted by the *manbonong* under the direction of elders who are experts on the types of rituals, and knowledgeable of ritual processes and objects. When the conduct of rites is required, community members consult the ritual directors regarding the steps to be undertaken and materials required by the ritual, such as types of animals to be offered or ritual objects to be used. Ritual assistants take charge of ensuring that the ritual needs of the *manbonong* are available during the ritual, and help the *manbonong* cut and allocate the ritual offerings of meat to be placed on the *degao* (winnowing basket) and *sahob*, a foot square basket made of *bolo* bamboo.

Rites of Passage in Ibaloy Death Rituals and Practices

Van Gennep's concept of the rites of passage posits that ritual is necessary for a person to shift from one status to another in situations that cause imbalance. Thus, the rites of passage function "to reduce the harmful effects" of the changes in conditions (Van Gennep 1960, 13). For the Ibaloy of Loakan, death causes unsettling changes with the change in status of the deceased from a human being who is alive

to a spiritual being, who must find its rightful place among the spirits. Those bereaved are likewise unsettled because of the loss of a loved one. Rites of passage in the death rituals help both the living and the dead to face these changes in status. The process begins with the rites of separation.

The belief that upon death, the spirit goes to another world which is analogous to our own is common (Van Gennep 1960). For the Ibaloy, the spirits of the deceased go to Mount Pulag where they continue to live with the *epang-pangdo* (those who have gone ahead). In the Ibaloy language the word used to refer to the deceased is “*etey*.” “*Etey*” also sounds similar to the interjection “*eti*” which means “Let’s go; come on.” The second meaning of “*eti*” is “to dry up especially a water source” (Ameda, et al. 2011, 187) The similarities in the pronunciation between “*etey*” and “*eti*” and the meanings of “*eti*” are significant because they characterize the status of the person whose life has ended like water that had “dried up,” consequently the dead is now set to go, to leave and to embark on a journey.

Since death means leaving for another place, the surviving family members must help the spirit of their dead make that journey successful, be received well by the spirits of relatives, and thus, avoid being an outcast in the spirit world. To aid the spirit in this journey, funeral rites that involve rites of separation and transition that involve both the living and the dead are held.

Rites and Practices of Separation for the Living

According to Van Gennep the mourning period for the living “is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society” (Van Gennep 1960, 147). Among the Ibaloy in Loakan, wearing the *karing* (bracelet) on the third day of the *aremag* (wake) marks the beginning of the rites of separation for family members. The *karing*, made from the maguey or abaca plant, is worn by the children of the deceased to identify them during the wake. It signifies that the person wearing it has a family member who just died, which the Ibaloy in Loakan use as a notice to the debtors to pay their debts to the dead. The *karing* is removed before burial as part of the rite of reintegration for the living.

Dietary restrictions are also observed by surviving members of the family. Members of the immediate family do not partake of the meat from the animals butchered during the wake of their kin.³ Today, this restriction applies only to the surviving spouse and some relatives who prefer not to eat the meat from the animals offered during the *aremag*. The widow or widower is also prevented from staying in the same room where the wake is being held, advised to limit movements

inside the house, and avoid mingling with the people to safeguard against the spread of the “contagion of death” (Van Gennep 1960, 193), or bad luck and disease that can harm the bereaved from inadvertently noticing (*gway-gway gwayen*) anything they might see. These practices that illustrate the separation of the living from the dead during the aremag (wake) are also called prophylactic rites (Van Gennep 1960).

Rites of Separation for the Dead

Human life is not measured in terms of the limited time spent among the living on earth. It is “preceded by a pre-existence and continued in a postexistence. ... Hence for the religious man, death does not put a final end to life. Death is but another modality of human existence” (Eliade 1961, 148). Rites of separation of the dead from the living mark the departure of the dead from the physical world and prepare the spirit for its the journey to the other world.

The earth is symbolized as the fertile mother who gives life and holds knowledge of the mystery of the origin of life. When an Ibaloy dies, the body is immediately laid flat on the floor as close to the ground as possible (*i-depnag*). Even when the death occurs at the hospital or away from home, the body is first laid on the floor during the waiting period before embalming or placement in the coffin. This Ibaloy practice is akin to the ancient Chinese practice of laying the dying person on the ground to return the soul to its origin, Mother Earth (Eliade 1961). The act of laying the body on the floor helps the dead to continue the cycle of existence and move into that state of postexistence, which for Ibaloy, takes place in the company of spirit relatives that inhabit Mount Pulag.

“*Bo-day*” is the Ibaloy word for “ground” or “earth.” It also means “to bring, take something outside” (*i-bo-day*), “to go outside,” “to rise,” and “to be born” (*on-bo-day*). As part of the rite of separation, laying the dead on the floor signifies that the breath of life has gone out of the deceased, that its spirit has gone outside the body and “born” into another status of life. As such it should now prepare to arise and commence the journey towards Mount Pulag.

Before the body is dressed in burial clothes, the ceremony called *sha-dop/da-nop ni dopa* (washing of the face) is done. One hand of the dead is taken and placed close to the face in the act of washing while the ritual conductor says, “*Kala man-sha-dop/da-nop say mapteng ngo la e aspul shima dagwanmo.*” (Come, wash your face so that you arrive well in your destination). This is a “sacred symbolic act of cleansing and new beginning, a serious ritual with spiritual significance” (Ameda, et al. 2011, 470). The act of washing signifies separation in two steps: cleansing that distinguishes the person from the rest, and cleansing of the self of the vestiges of the old life as another phase opens. As part of

the rites of separation, washing of the face is a recognition of the new status of the deceased as a spirit who must prepare to meet other spirit relatives. Preparations then continue with choosing the proper death blankets (*oles*) to use for wrapping the body.

The role of death blankets is two-fold: to indicate the status of the deceased and to ensure their comfort in the afterlife. Ibaloy regard death blankets as among the necessities that the spirits must bring with them to their destination so these must be provided and worn correctly by the dead. The blanket is believed to be used in the afterlife by the spirit to make them acceptable in the company of spirit relatives, with whom they shall spend the afterlife. Three types of death blankets are used in Loakan. These are chosen based on the quality of rituals performed by the dead when the individual was still alive. In Loakan, the rich (*baknang*) who had performed the prestige rituals called *pechit* or *sabeng* use three blankets: the *alipuspos* (off-white) as the first layer, *banshala* or *kolebao* (off-white cotton with black at edges) as the second layer; and *sapey* (*safey* in Loakan; dark-colored with white stripes), for the third layer. The *safey* is used only by those who had performed either the *pechit* or *sabeng*. The poor (*abiteg*) or those who had performed rituals wherein only one or two pigs were butchered use one blanket, the *alipuspos*. However, if the dead had performed rituals wherein three or more pigs were butchered, an additional blanket, the *banshala*, is also used. Elders familiar with the ritual history of community members are given the role of who can use the different types of blankets. With the proper *oles* laid first in the coffin the dead is then placed inside and wrapped with the blankets.

In the olden times, the Ibaloy in Loakan used the *aradan*, a death chair with an arm rest, to prop up the dead. The head and arms of the corpse are secured to the chair in a sitting position for the wake. Today, a makeshift wooden chair is set up beside the coffin to represent the *aradan* where it is believed the spirit of the dead sits during the wake. At the end of the wake the *aradan* is discarded.

The Ibaloy words for "coffin" are "*dungon*,"⁴ "*kolong*," meaning "to cage, to imprison something," and "*kobo*," which is also a verb which means "to care for a pig in a pen." Furthermore, "*kobo*" also recalls another Ibaloy word "*Kobo*," which is "a kind of fish trap." (Ameda, et al. 2011, 269). In this nexus of intersecting meanings, placement in the coffin becomes tantamount to an entrapment to effectively separate the deceased from the living.

For married couples where one dies ahead of the other, the *keljaw* (shout) rite is done on the following morning after death. The manbonong, who officiates the *keljaw* rite, shouts to the spirit of the dead saying, "*Dawkad ma daguanmo tep inudira e biagmo. Adiwanem ngo iya injekjasmo. Egmo ngo ipa-pades e dineknam ni inketeymo say mapteng ngon ulay e enjekjasanmo.*" (Go where you are bound to go since your

life was already withdrawn, but take care of your surviving spouse. Do not transfer to her/him whatever caused your death so that he/she stays in good health despite your departure). A bottle of wine or rice wine is used during the ritual as an offertory but after the prayer the wine is thrown away, not drunk as is usually done in other rites whenever wine is offered. The *keljaw* rite heightens the stark reality of the couple's differing conditions by telling the spirit to start disassociating itself from the surviving spouse because it already has a different state of being.

These preliminary activities for the dead mark the first stage of the spirit's journey. As rites of separation, these activities are concerned primarily in making the spirit become aware of his or her new status, and in preparing the dead for the next stage, the rites of transition.

The Aremag (Wake): Transitional Rites for the Dead

Ibaloy traditional death rituals have transitional functions. In her study of mortuary rituals in Tublay, Patricia Afafe writes: "Ibaluy mortuary rites, generally called *shilus ni minatay* and more specifically referred to as *siling*, may be characterized as transition rites, effecting the passage from a human (*tu'u*) state to the *kedaring* state, i.e., life after death" (Afafe 1975, 110). The *siling* encompasses the entire duration of the "funeral celebration from bathing of the newly-deceased to the final offering at the close of the funeral" (Ameda, et al. 2011, 448). The transitional state is devoted in preparing and providing the needs that the spirit shall take with them to the afterlife.

The aremag (funeral wake) marks the transitional period of the funeral celebration, with the physical presence of the deceased's physical body in the earthly home (Van Gennep 1960). The family, in consultation with elders, agree on the number of days for the aremag based on the manner of death (suicide, accident, sickness, old age, etc.), age (young or old), civil status (single or married), number of children (or absence thereof), and economic status of the deceased. If the dead is single with neither children nor property, two to four days for the wake are sufficient. For infants and children, two days can be deemed appropriate. For those with many children, or own many properties, a longer period for the aremag is allotted.

The Ibaloy designate certain numbers as *bilang ni minatay* (the numbers for the dead) and *bilang ni mabiday* (numbers for the living). Although there is no known traditional system of numerology in Ibaloy culture that will explain the meanings of numbers, credence to recourse to drawing from Chinese interpretation can, is, perhaps, be historically traced to the influence of the Chinese on the Ibaloy settlers of southern Cordillera that have been recorded in various accounts.⁵

The duration of the aremag is based on *bilang ni minatay* (the numbers for the dead), which are 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17. The word for the number 4 is similar to the word for “death” in Chinese, and as such, is considered the unluckiest number, as is any number associated with 4, such as 14. It is also easy to understand why 7 is considered as a number for the dead, since the Chinese associate it with the ghost month and as the day when the spirits arise and roam the earth. But number 7 is also an auspicious number that sounds like the word for “arise” and “life essence.”

Therefore, not all the numbers for the dead are unlucky. Number 2 means germination, harmony, double and balance which are positive, since for the deceased, this brings in the idea of the start of another type of life, congruent with the Ibaloy belief in existence in the physical and spiritual realms. Nine is deemed lucky because it conjures the sound of the word for eternity or longevity.

On the other hand, the Ibaloy also designate 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18 as *bilang ni mabiday* (numbers for the living). Still drawing from Chinese interpretation, some plausible explanations can likewise be obtained. According to Chinese interpretation, the numbers 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8 are auspicious numbers. The sound of number 3 recalls another Chinese word that means “to live or life” and it sounds like “birth.” The number 5 is auspicious because it is related to the five essential elements of earth, water, fire, wood, and metal. Number 6 sounds like the word “flow” which means progress in life and good fortune. The luckiest number is included among the numbers for the living because number 8 sounds like “to prosper, wealth and fortune” which spells success, wholeness and completeness. The numbers for the living were chosen to ensure that death shall leave no harm for the surviving family but in fact bring them good fortune as they undergo the transition period.

During aremag in Loakan, how the casket is positioned depends on whether the deceased is male or female. If the deceased is a male, the head is oriented to the south so that the body faces north; if the deceased is a female, the orientation of the head is to the east, such that the body faces west. By positioning the coffins in this manner, the deceased are apprised of the transitional nature of their status and thus must prepare themselves, just as preparations are also being done by the living for their departure.

Loakan is located in the southern part of Benguet. By making the corpse face the north, the deceased is oriented towards the direction of the spirit’s final destination, Mount Pulag, located in the northern part of Benguet. Further, the rivers flow south from *sedong* (the northern upstream areas) in Benguet. The north, thus, becomes a metaphor for the source of water and life for the Ibaloy people (Ameda, et al. 2011, 430).

Similarly, by orienting the woman's heads to the east, the body is made to face the west or "*ditop*" in Ibaloy, where the sun sets. Further, "*ditop*" also means "to draw back, withdraw (as from a doorway)" (Ameda, et al. 2011, 156), indicative, too, of a state of transition and changing status as the deceased withdraws from earthly life. The direction where the deceased faces reiterate the transitory state of the aremag which aims to prepare the spirits to travel, arrive at their destination, and be welcomed into the spiritual world in Mount Pulag. The failure to complete the journey will not bode well for both the spirit of the deceased and those who have been left behind.

Since death is considered to be the commencement of a journey, packages containing personal belongings of the deceased are prepared. These are placed under the coffin during the wake. The practice is also common among the Iballoys in Takdian, Tublay, as described by Isabel Leaño in the following:

The *shagi*⁶ of the man (if the deceased is a man) is packed with his personal belongings—his old blanket, his hat, his *kalapjaw* (anahaw rain protector brought from the lowlands), a ganta of rice, a bag of salt, some seeds of beans or whatever he planted during his life. If the deceased was a woman her personal belongings were packed in her basket (*kaybang*) plus a ganta of rice, a bag of salt, some seeds which she planted during her life. (Leaño 1958, 194)

In Loakan today the most commonly used containers are boxes or bags, and from my experience, the use of the *kayabang* (bamboo basket) as container for personal belongings has become rare, as was the case with an aunt who died in January 2019. Although the containers may vary, the contents of the packages are generally similar. These include personal belongings such as clothing and other personal effects, gardening tools, and complete sets of cooking utensils. In case the package lacked anything which the dead would have wanted to bring along but the family missed to include then the spirit of the dead is told to get whatever is lacking in the package.

Food is also an important part of the provisions allotted for the spirit's journey to the afterlife, and the animals, rice and drinks that each child or other family members offer during the wake are believed to accompany the spirits of their dead as they journey to Mt. Pulag. Provisions are also sourced from the personal properties of the dead. These food offerings are made on designated days during the wake.

The days corresponding to numbers for the dead are the days during the aremag when animals owned by or purchased with the money of the deceased are offered. On the second day of the wake, a dog owned by the dead is butchered and cooked so that its spirit also accompanies its master and continue to guard the latter in the spirit world.

On the other hand, the days corresponding to numbers for the living (3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16), are designated for the children to butcher and offer animals for the dead, and for other relatives to give their *opo*⁷ or *ofo* (gift), with the request to bring said gifts to the designated recipients in the afterlife. Previously, these gifts consisted of sweet potato, taro and rice wine, but today the donors prefer to give money as their *ofo*.

The transition rites for the dead are conducted on the belief that the spirit of the dead are embarking on a journey which they need to prepare. These preparations are concerned with ensuring that the spirit knows the direction to take in its journey, thus, the proper direction in positioning the corpse; that enough time is given for the surviving family members to meet their obligations thru giving of animals, thus the appropriate number of days spent for the aremag; that the spirit of the dead is assured with enough supply of food and animals to tend in the afterlife, thus the daily butchering of animals; that the dead brings along in order to receive a favorable reception from the community of spirits of relatives, thus the *ofo* given to bring along and distribute to the recipients; that the spirit shall have sufficient basic needs, thus the packing of personal things.

But Ibaloy death rituals during the transition stage are not only meant for the welfare of the dead but also for the living, thus, the numbers for the living are designated to ensure that they receive and enjoy a prosperous life.

Rites of Incorporation

The Burial (*Ibeka*): Rites of Incorporation for the Dead

To be incorporated means to be part of something. For the Ibaloy, the ultimate purpose of the death rituals is to ensure that the spirit of the newly-deceased reaches its destination, is not consigned to isolation in limbo (*maydesin*), and is accepted into and received well by the community of spirits of relatives. This practice is indicative of the belief that death is not the end; rather, it is a beginning of another life whose needs are the same as the living. The observance of proper burial rites ensures that the spirit achieves this.

At four o'clock in the morning on the day of burial, the casket is closed and any ordinary blanket is draped over the casket for at least an hour. Covering the casket signals the deceased that the day of burial has arrived, and that the spirit must now make its final preparations for departure. To aid the spirit during this final transition phase, complete silence is observed so that the spirit can take account of all the offerings made, and materials to bring along in the final journey. More importantly, the spirit should now start making its path towards

its destination so that when burial comes it can go without difficulty. After an hour or two, the blanket is removed.

All the animals owned by the dead, including those that had been bought using the deceased's money, are butchered during the burial. This is because it is believed that the dead will continue to keep and tend to these animals as a source of food in the afterlife. In addition, the number of animals that accompany the spirit in the afterlife are indicative of status so if they once owned carabaos or horses during their lifetime these should also be butchered in pairs during burial. Therefore, the spirit is able to retain the reputation held during the earthly life in the spirit world. Animals given as offerings are marked with the initials of the dead to indicate ownership and prevent other spirits from "taking" these animals. An elder then invokes the spirit of the deceased (*imadmad*) and says: "We have fixed things for you. Here is your coffin. We have given you clothes and blankets, and butchered (animals) for you to bring to your destination."

The coffin is also laid on the *apay* (*afay* in Loakan) before the burial. This act ensures that the spirit of the dead knows where it shall go. The *afay* is the place where all the animals were offered and butchered during the aremag (wake).⁸ Every animal offered on the *afay* is sent to accompany the spirit of the dead towards Mount Pulag. Therefore, to place the coffin on the *afay* is a gesture of sending the dead to go as well to Mount Pulag and look for his or her rightful place among the community of spirit relatives. To be the last place to stay before burial, the *afay* represents death but at the same time symbolizes a platform from which the dead takes the first step to the tomb and to a journey that awaits.

Before final interment, an elder reminds the spirit that since all funerary rituals were done, the travel shall not be undertaken alone and that the spirit will not arrive in the otherworld empty-handed. It will be accompanied by spirits of the animals given as offerings, and the spirit will also be well-provided with rice, drinks, and money that were given during the wake. During the burial, a pack of rice and meat (*balon*) is also placed inside the tomb. This being the case, the spirit is also advised that there is no need to bring along a companion from among the living relatives along and so they should be just left alone to continue with their own lives.

So that the spirit will not be tempted to take anyone along in its journey, people whom the deceased mingled with in life are removed from sight. Leaves of the *sapsap* (*Miscanthus sinensis* reed), or the *runo* reed with thorns are waved above the head of the corpse "to confound the spirit and prevent him from identifying people in the crowd" (Afable 1975, 119). As part of the incorporation rites, this final act signals the end of the spirit's stay on earth.

The spirit is made to focus on the journey that lies ahead. Although during the wake, orientation of the head of the corpse differs for males and females, orientation of the head for all is to the north in the final interment. This is deliberate and consistent with Ibaloy beliefs in the afterlife. Loakan is located in the southern part of Benguet and Mount Pulag is found in the northern part of Benguet. By pointing the head to the north when the body is interred, the spirit is set on a straight path to Mount Pulag so that it will not dally and or lose its way because if a spirit is led astray and never reach the community of spirits, this would not bode well for both the spirit of the deceased and the surviving family members.

One of the last acts of the surviving spouse is to walk in a counterclockwise direction once around the casket before the burial of the deceased spouse. The counter-clockwise direction signifies the opening to a new state of being for the dead and a new status for the surviving spouse as a widow/widower. After the walk is done, the surviving spouse is instructed to immediately enter the house without looking back. In earlier times, the surviving spouse steps over the coffin instead of walking around it.

The *Kapi/Kafi* and *Sapnak ni Bangkilay* Ritual: Post-Burial Rites of Incorporation

In Ibaloy funerary practice, the burial ritual does not end with the interment. The *kapi/kafi* and *sapnak ni bangkilay*, represent the post-burial rites of incorporation which have a twofold function: the final assimilation of the spirit of the dead into the community of spirits; and the commencement of the new relationship between the surviving family members and the deceased. Here, we see that although no longer part of the living, the spirit continues to exist as a part of the family that was left behind. Although the spirit now rightfully belongs to its eternal home, Mount Pulag, it is nonetheless still welcome to return to earth, and free to visit family members. To let the spirits know that they remain welcome in their children's homes, the *kapi/kafi ni bangkilay* is performed on the eighth day after the burial. This ritual requires the butchering of two pigs, one on each day of this two-day ritual. Eight days after the *kapi/kafi ni bangkilay*, the *sapnak ni bangkilay* is held which means the repetition of the ritual for the *bangkilay*.

These rites of incorporation function as a prayer to Kabonian to guide the spirit, ensure the success of the journey, and facilitate the spirit's incorporation into the spirit world in Mount Pulag.⁹ In Loakan, the *kapi* and *sapnak ni bangkilay* involve two key elements to effectively attain the spirit's incorporation: the *bangkilay* (platform) and the *ba-diwo* (chant).

The *bangkilay*, an elevated platform constructed during the *kapi* ritual, is used as an offertory table. It measures around four feet in

height, with posts and braces made of pine wood and tied together with rattan. *Runo* reeds also tied together with rattan form the top. This is where the sacrificial pig is butchered and where its cooked meat is placed for the *manbonong* to pray over.

Eight *runo* reeds with leaves, and three without leaves are tied on one corner of the *bangkilay*, where a jar of rice wine is also secured. The *sinkalong* (a pair bolo bamboo that measure less than a foot and connected together) containing the *difeg* (rice part of rice wine) and meat soup, including a pair of wrapped rice in *ava* (taro) leaves with a piece of *namit* (meat), is also positioned here. The *bangkilay* functions as a ladder or staircase (*pan-agshanan*), for the dead to use in its ascent and integration into the spirit world.



Figure 1. The *Bangkilay*.

The *ba-diw* is also chanted during the *kapi* and *sapnak ni bangkilay* daily. The *manbonong* begins the chant by saying:

"Man seket ka (name of the dead) tep dinegwitan shaka. Inbangkilay sha ha awat mo ma. Afo shiyos iyaknem da ni tungawantod ma daguanto say guaray pasengton ekararag e asagwa/anakto."

("You (name of the dead) because your spouse (or children) has called for you and made a *bangkilay* for you, accept it. God, provide a chair for (name of the dead) in his/her destination so he/she can pray for her/his spouse/children.")

After the manbonong another elder chants to support and reiterate the invocations which the manbonong made earlier and asks God to help the spirit of the dead to travel directly to his/her destination without difficulty (*say mandiretso et eg pedegaten ni Afo Shios*). Anybody can chant their *ba-diw* as long as they are able. During the *sapnak*, the *ba-diw* would say, "Now that the *sapnak* is done, go and find your rightful place. Where you go there you shall find your companions" (*Iya ma epuspos e sapnak ni kapi, makaamta ka ngo la ni tuway pampuwestoanmo. No nantoy dagwanmo la sikatoy pakitabtabalanmo*).

The surviving spouse and the children must keep the embers from the fire used to cook the animals butchered burning after they perform the *kapi* and *sapnak* rituals to signify these have been duly complied with, and they welcome the spirit of their dead into their homes. For practical considerations a candle is used especially in the absence of a dirty kitchen inside the house. It is believed that when the spirits see the fire, they are assuaged because the necessary rituals have been held, and that their needs when they get to their final destination have been provided and secured.

As in the aremag, mealtime also plays a significant role during *kapi ni bangkilay* and the day of burial. The *tafajag* meal (*pangan*) that is shared among family members and the spirits that have been invited also plays a symbolic function in the rites of incorporation. Like the giving of *ofo*, the meal reunites all surviving family members with each other and the spirits of the dead relatives.

For the Ibaloy, burials are always held after lunch. This allows the family and other participants to share a final meal with the dead. When everyone has eaten and the plates and tables are cleared, the casket is brought out of the house. Here, we see that death does not constitute the severance of relationship of the living and the dead. Instead, Ibaloy death practices provide the venue for continuing relations between the dead and living because the spirit of the deceased is still relied upon for guidance and blessings by the bereaved. The bonds between the departed and the living are sustained. The *kapi ni bangkilay* and *sapnak* (or *sepnak*) mark continuity as a unique feature of the Ibaloy traditional rituals.

Rites of Reintegration for the Living

Ibaloy death rituals and practices not only help in the incorporation of the spirit of the dead into their newfound community, but also to facilitate continuity for the living.

Before the burial, the family members plant taro and sweet potato because “[t]he purpose of planting the cuttings is to leave luck to the family” (Leaño 1958, 194). In this ritual of planting, the children ask the spirit of their dead to bless their source of livelihood represented by the crops.¹⁰ Likewise, the act of planting represents continuity because the cycle of life is renewed in re-planting. After planting, the manbonong asks the spirit of the dead for continued blessings of health, prosperity, luck, and success in all endeavors of the surviving kin (“*pan-diteng mo era, pan-kasakasat mo era, iyaknem ni neta tan kinaketsang sha*”). The children are then given *tafey* (rice wine) called *tageptep*¹¹ to drink.

After drinking the *tageptep*, the children remove the *karing* (bracelet) that they began wearing on the first day of aremag. This marks the symbolic end of the mourning period, and the lifting of attached prohibitions so that the children of the deceased are now ready for reintegration into life as it was prior to the event of death.

To begin the return to normal life, participants must undergo cleansing rituals to ensure good health (*diteng*) and be able to return without complication to their regular daily routines. Care is taken to ensure the safety of all participants who have been exposed and made susceptible to possible adverse effects due to contact with death. Water and fire are used as cleansing agents for this purpose. After the burial, a container of water is provided for people to wash their hands. If the interment is done in the cemetery, a fire is built across the road where people pass, and those in attendance are made to skip over the fire.

Part of the rite of reintegration by the surviving spouse is the counter clockwise walk once around the coffin before the burial of the deceased. Counterclockwise is the direction of opening to release something, in this case the surviving spouse releases him/herself from the deceased spouse. It also means the lifting of restrictions imposed during the aremag so he/she can be reintegrated to the community.

The *sigid* or *shilos ni nanbanbantay*, roughly translated as “ritual for the watchers (during the wake)” is done to ensure that the living can return to their usual activities after the burial. During this time, the premises are cleansed. *Sigid* means “to sweep,” which refers to the cleaning done in the residence of the dead after the burial. If the period for the wake was short, then the *sigid* can be done on the same day after the burial. Otherwise, it is done the following day. The removal of all remaining vestiges of the wake signals the end of the aremag, and the end of the period that the spirit is allowed to linger on his/her residence. A pig is butchered during this rite to feed those who came to help with the cleaning. In Loakan all left-over food from the aremag (wake) are removed from the house, and all articles used during the wake are thoroughly cleaned so that the surviving spouse is in no danger of eating the food or touching any of the items

used during the wake. After the *sigid* ritual, a *porong*, *sapsap* grass, is inserted under the roof of the house or kitchen. The Ibaloy believe that when this is seen by the spirit, it is reminded of the latter's new status and its rightful place in the cosmos.

The Sabosab as Rite of Integration

The *sabosab* ritual, which is intended for the surviving spouse and everyone else, is done after burial using internal organs of the animals butchered during the day of burial. At the end of the ritual the people can eat said meat. This ritual for good health is done to ensure that all who partook of food prepared for the entire duration of the burial rites do not experience stomach aches and remain in good health. Water, as the cleansing element, is central in the *sabosab* ritual. Here, two containers are prepared—one for water and the other for soup with small slices of choice cuts of meat and two pieces of *sapsap* shoots (leaves of *tali-ti* or wild sugar cane grass (*Miscanthus*) or *runo* reeds if no *tali-ti* tree or sugar cane is available). The meat used in this rite should not have been taken from any animals butchered during the *aremag*. The *sabosab* ritual is officiated by the *manbonong* who dips the *sapsap* shoots into the container of water then sprinkles the people with water. Afterwards the *manbonong* dips the *sapsap* shoots into the meat soup and taps these on the people's extended palms. The healing process through the *sabosab* will enable the surviving family members and others who helped during the rituals to remain healthy and capable of resuming their normal activities after the post-burial activities and rituals.

CONCLUSION

Ibaloy traditional death rituals follow the pattern of the rites of passage. The different rites of separation, transition, and incorporation or reintegration aim to help both the living and the dead to manage the changes in their status resulting from the event of death.

For the deceased, the burial rites ensure that the spirit can peacefully leave behind its earthly existence and be accepted and incorporated into the community of spirits in Mount Pulag. For the surviving family members of the deceased, these ensure that they are able to provide for the needs of the deceased relative in the journey of transition to life in the spirit world, as well as help the spirit of the dead to attain the dual objective of reaching Mount Pulag, their final destination, and joining the community of spirit relatives. The pattern begins at the moment of death, when the rites of separation are undertaken for both the living and the dead. The rite of separation concludes with the placement of the corpse in the

coffin followed by the aremag which marks the start of the rites of transition to prepare the journey to Mount Pulag. There are two parts of the rites of incorporation that follows: the burial and post-burial rites of *kapi ni bangkilay* and *sapnak* that have similar aims to facilitate the incorporation of the spirit of the dead to the community of spirit relatives. The *kapi ni bangkilay* and *sapnak* rituals have an additional objective to welcome the spirit of the dead into their homes. This second aim distinguishes the rites of passage for the Ibaloy death rituals because the rites lead to continuity of relationships instead of closure. The spirits of the dead continue to be a presence whose needs the living would again provide when needed. In the same manner, despite the physical separation, the living continues to rely on the spirits for guidance and blessings.

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END NOTES

1. An account by CICM priest, Fr. Alfonso Claerhoudt, who wrote about the Ibaloy in Bokod, also refers to the consequences of failing to provide the needs of the spirit. He says, “Alas! How often the spirits of dead folks and tribes bring evil and disease upon their own people, because they failed to offer a horse, or a *nuang* (carabao), or a dog, or a pig, or a chicken the ghosts needed yonder in their abode of eternity” (Claerhoudt 1966, 21).
2. My research on death rituals has also produced a related article titled “Ibaloy Beliefs and Values in Healing and Death Practices” (Camte-Bahni 2017), in the book *Chiva*, edited by Jimmy B. Fong and published by the Cordillera Studies Center.
3. I learned this during the wake of an older brother who died when I was around five years old. I recall complaining to my mother because we were made to eat sardines instead of meat like what was being served to the other people.
4. Coffins are made of pine wood and put together with wooden pegs to avoid using metal nails, which can pierce (*metbek*) the bones and cause discomfort to the dead. In the olden times coffins were made from large trees hollowed to fit the body of the deceased. Furthermore, the clothes worn by the dead should have no non-biodegradable objects attached, such as plastic or metallic buttons, clasps or decorations.

5. Historical records from 1575 refer to the Chinese pirate Limahon or Limahong and his men who evaded Spanish capture in Pangasinan. According to Felix Keesing, "some of Limahon's men escaped by fleeing to the Cordillera heights, becoming the ancestors of the "Igorots." Reference is also made to the supposedly lighter skin color and slanting eyes of the mountaineers in the southern part of the Cordillera" (Keesing 1962, 19). Keesing documents another version which states that "these southern mountaineers were descendants of Chinese who were 'shipwrecked' on the coasts 'long before the Spaniards arrived" (Keesing 1962, 19). The possibility that Chinese people coming from the low lands had settled in southern Benguet is supported by the study that the movement of the first migration in the peopling of Benguet was made during the pre-Hispanic period from the west and southwestern plains of Pangasinan (Prill-Brett 2015).
6. A *shagi* is a "bamboo pack frame with shoulder straps to which a load is tied" (Ameda, et al. 2011, 471)
7. Pronounced as *ofo* in Loakan.
8. All animals are butchered atop the *afay*, a mat of *sapsap runo* leaves. A new layer of *sapsap runo* leaves is laid over the old every time an animal is butchered during the aremag and the accumulated *apay* is removed during the *sigid* or cleaning held after the burial.
9. In Takdian, Tublay the ritual signals the detachment of the spirit from the living so that it can proceed to take the journey to its destination: "After the *kafi* is celebrated, the deceased is believed to say, 'Ah, I cannot return anymore, because they have already celebrated *kafi*.' The *kafi* is celebrated for the separation of the spirits of the dead from the living members of the family" (Leaño 1958, 197).
10. According to Leaño, the Ibaloyos "in the past ate camotes and *gabi* more than rice because they sold the rice or *palay* instead of eating it" (Leaño 1958, 208).
11. Today, gin or soft drinks are sometimes used instead of rice wine.

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