

Indigenous Healing Ritual in the Context of Ecological Disaster

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Abstract: The Kankanaey rites have displayed a healing ritual following Typhoon Ompong that devastated the communities in Ucab, Itogon, Benguet on September 15, 2018. The rites highlight the importance of harmonious relationality between the communities and the *adikaila* (*unseen*)—the nature spirits, the ancestors and *Kabunyan*—in a ritual meal. The rites have the popular animal butchering which has become a gesture to signify the desire for healing from the effects of the disaster. It means embarking into a moment when one community anchors itself again in their primal and foundational narratives. The meal strengthens the communities' allegiance with the *adikaila* and fosters the healing of the afflicted communities. The communities harmonize their relationship with the *adikaila*, with those who perished, and with nature. Keeping in harmony with the *adikaila*, the community comes to terms with the tragedy and draws healing unto itself.

Keywords: Kankanaey Ritual • Kankanaey Beliefs • Healing Rites • Disaster Ritual • Emergent Ritual • Ritual Meal • Ritual Analysis • Community Rites

Introduction

This paper discusses three Kankanaey rites performed after a deadly landslide brought about by Typhoon Ompong in Ucab, Itogon, Benguet. It presents

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the indigenous healing practice inherited from the distant past and still observed today. It provides a description of an emerging disaster ritual of healing by describing two instances of the *pamakán* rite and one of the *daw-es* rites.¹ The paper provides an analysis of the rites using concepts and tools from the fields of comparative religion and ritual studies.

Healing Ritual in the Kankanaey Culture

Scholars give much attention to the social, political and religious systems of the cultures.² Anthropological studies deal with the different cultures in the Cordillera and how change takes place in them. Some authors make use of a historical approach,³ while some focus on indigenous traditions, practices, and beliefs.⁴ The

¹ A ritual refers more to the sequence of activities or ceremonials while rite is understood as a specific enactment; ritual implies a general idea to which a rite is a specific example. See, Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 9-10.

² Among other works are those of Kibiten and Goda. See Gaston P. Kibiten, *The Politics of Clan Reunions: Ritual, Kinship, and Cultural Transformation among Kankanaeys of Northern Luzon* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016); Toh Goda, *Cordillera: Diversity in Culture Change: Social Anthropology of Hill People in Northern Luzon, Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2001).

³ Some of the more prominent authors are Scott and Fry. See, William Henry Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1974); Howard T. Fry, *A History of the Mountain Province* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983).

⁴ See Cordillera Studies Center, *Towards Understanding Peoples of the Cordillera: A Review of Research on History, Governance, Resources, Institutions and Living Traditions*, vol. 2 (Baguio City: Cordillera Studies Center, 2001).

Kankanaey communities are among the ethnolinguistic groups whose ritual and ceremonies are studied.⁵

In the Cordillera, the indigenous peoples have been influenced by the so-called megalithic culture complex, relating to or denoting prehistoric cultures. A megalithic culture has been characterized by the cultivation of soil through making terraces, headhunting due to some reasons and occasions, butchering of animals, feasts in order to recognize or approve of something, among others.⁶ The Cordillerans generally share common beliefs and ritual, but they have clear regional variations in terms of cultural traits and social structures.⁷ They have different languages, too. The Kankanaeys share in this pluriculturality and continue to integrate change in their way of life.

The Kankanaey people have inherited their healing practices from the distant past. Many of these ritual expressions were not treated with respect—like in the colonial times—by both strangers and locals. Though the healing rites were not entirely discarded, there are very few written accounts about them, as with the Cordillera culture in general. The few documents about healing rituals are either unscholarly or from an outsider's uninformed view.

Kankanaey healing rites are composed of ritual actions and gestures. In the rites, one significant feature is the ritual meal. The ritual meal is the sharing of food

⁵ The Ibaloy people have very close links with the Kankanaeys in Benguet. Both ethnic groups practice some similar rites and ceremonies. Along with observable minute differences as to performance, both groups use different terms for the same rite. For comparison purposes with the Kankanaey culture, a presentation which includes Ibaloy beliefs, practices and history can be seen in Jimmy B. Fong ed., *Chiva: A Reader on Ibaloy History and Culture* (Baguio City: Cordillera Studies Center, 2017).

⁶ Goda, *Cordillera*, 1.

⁷ Goda, *Cordillera*, 1.

to the *adikaila* or “the unseens,” referring to the spirits, the ancestors and the Great Creator called *Kabunyan*. The *adikaila* is served first. This meal takes place within a bigger community meal. The community or the persons gathered also partake of the meal. The ritual meal is an important part of community celebrations, rites, and ceremonies.

The meal had been misconstrued in the past. The Spanish colonizers thought that the ritual meal was an offering rite.⁸ An example of this thought is a report made about the indigenous communities around Baguio during the Spanish colonization. On August 11, 1624, a conquistador wrote about the *ygolotes*⁹ and described their so called offering ritual.¹⁰ The sky is the god of the *igorots*. This god is called *Cabunian* (*Kabunyan*). The *igorots* offer and sacrifice pigs, carabaos, or cows to this god.¹¹ They call themselves *Gaganayan*, after a star that appears in the west which they call with the same name, from which the term Kankanaey came from.¹² Every time the star appears, the *igorots* go to the fields and plant *aba* or taro and sweet potatoes.¹³ The ritual activity described in the report is actually the ritual meal which is one part or a moment in a ritual ceremony or celebration. Most of

⁸ In a sense it is an offering of friendship or loyalty. But the Kankanaey *manbunongs* usually say: “Come dear *adikaila*. Share of this food the family/the community has prepared.” The butchering as part of food preparation and the sense of invitation and sharing of food are highlights and are stronger gestures.

⁹ This is the term used by conquistadores to refer to the natives; the term eventually became *igorots* in the 18th century.

¹⁰ See, William Henry Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1974); see also, William Henry Scott, “Igorot Responses to Spanish Aims: 1576-1896,” *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 1970): 695-717.

¹¹ Scott, *Discovery of the Igorots*, 44.

¹² Scott, *Discovery of the Igorots*, 43.

¹³ Scott, *Discovery of the Igorots*, 45.

the healing rites in the communities consist of this ritual meal.

Furthermore, the ritual meal may be confused with the popular ceremony known as *kanyaw*. Many people usually say that *kanyaw* is an offering ritual to the spirits, the ancestors, and *Kabunyan* because it includes the butchering of chickens, pigs, cows, and other animals. The act of butchering is viewed as sacrificial. However, the butchering of animals is not an isolated ritual act; it is always a part of a certain rite, ceremony, or celebration. The act of butchering is connected with the dance, the music produced by indigenous musical instruments like gongs, the community meal, or the *watwat*, which is a piece of boiled or slightly grilled meat distributed and meant as take-home portions. When animal butchering is done during wakes and burials, anniversaries, feasts and other events like weddings, planting, harvesting, accidents, and healing sessions, it means that there would be a special meal for the community, for a family, or for particular individuals. The same preparation is done when someone would dream of a departed person in the community.

This brief description about the Kankanaeys and their ritual by a conquistador a hundred years after the Spanish invasion is an evidence of the existence of traditional systems in the Cordillera region long before the colonial intrusion.

Some of the Kankanaey ritual practices and beliefs observed today have semblances with animistic beliefs, in which spiritual beings are considered as part of human affairs and bring either help or harm in human activities. In this belief, every cultural community has its own dose of openness to such spiritual beings who are connected always to times of crises or unusual phenomena. The Kankanaey ritual practices and beliefs have also some elements similar to those of ancestral veneration. In

particular, the Kankanaey ritual possesses elements that are present in different beliefs, particularly about the cares of the community in relation with the sacred. In the healing rites of the Kankanaeys, some elements and patterns similar to those of animism and propitiation of ancestors seem to form part. Kankanaey rituals and beliefs share commonalities with the cultural elements found in the Cordilleras but they also have features that the other cultures do not have. It will also be interesting to see the link of these Kankanaey traditions, or any other Cordillera culture healing practice, with that of the present-day *babaylans* in the archipelago.¹⁴

The Kankanaeys believe in spirits-protector of nature. The spirits of the mountain, rivers and water, sky and rain, rice fields and paddies, animals and trees, are facets of the Great Creator *Kabunyan*. These spirits are considered the mediators¹⁵ to *Kabunyan*. The Kankanaeys also express great respect for their dead and ancestors. At the passing away of an individual, the affected family and community perform rites so that the ancestors would receive the individual. *Kabunyan* is regarded as a Supreme Being who is the source of goodness. In most of the rites, the *manbunongs*, who are regarded as the religious authorities, healers, and moral leaders of the communities,¹⁶ mention *Kabunyan's* goodness as something expressed in creation. Rites are performed in order to seek health, fertility for either women or vegetation, good luck and wellbeing, among others. Rites are also performed to counter the opposites:

¹⁴ For an example of a work exploring contemporary expressions of *babaylanism*, see Ferdinand D. Dagmang, "Babaylanism Reconsidered," *Diliman Review* 42 (1/1994): 64-72.

¹⁵ Leonardo N. Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992), 44.

¹⁶ There are *manbunongs* (and there are those who train to become one) who utilize this function in order to acquire money especially from rich individuals and families.

sickness, infertility, bad luck and poor state of life, among others. The access to the good things and the avoidance of the unpleasant ones depend on the ancestors,¹⁷ who either grant the favor or not. The community needs to secure the favor by performing the indicated rite for a certain need as it also asks the goodness of *Kabunyan*.

The ancestors are also spirits. In the ritual meal, the *manbunong* asks the ancestors to share of the food, drinks, *tapey* or rice wine, cigars or cigarettes, and everything that is prepared. The meal is made when the community asks for help and favors from the ancestors. On the same occasion, the community reaches out to *Kabunyan* for good health, luck, and protection. Good health and luck are usual reasons for community celebrations with the ancestors and *Kabunyan*.¹⁸

The rites are usually performed by the *manbunong*. The *manbunong* prays on behalf of people and leads in the ritual prayers. *Bunong* is a prayer which is acted out, not only recited. The *manbunong*, who is usually an elderly man or woman, does the *bunong*. The *manbunong* listens, advises, and offers ritual remedy for those who seek his or her help. Most of the time, the *manbunong* performs healing as she or he invokes the guidance and blessing of the spirits, ancestors, and *Kabunyan*. What the *manbunongs* do is important because ritual performance depends on them. They know how to perform rites and ceremonies properly and efficiently. It is necessary to do ritual and to do it right.

This ritual and belief tradition, however, is not recognized by the mainstream society. Many Cordillera peoples say that they have disregarded their cultural beliefs. Among the usual reasons given for the abandonment is that these beliefs are of the past and belong to paganism. Many of the educated and learned

¹⁷ Scott, *Discovery of the Igorots*, 193.

¹⁸ Scott, *Discovery of the Igorots*, 193.

individuals and families have been alienated from their own cultures. Some educational and Church institutions even denounce cultural identity and pluriculturality. Most of the Christian denominations, the Catholic Church included, use the pulpit, catechism, and media to condemn most of the indigenous beliefs and practices even today. From their ranks, one less sensitive and less informed claim is that these cultural beliefs and traditions are works of the devil. As a result, many indigenous peoples are confused and do not feel comfortable displaying their own ways. However, they have come to tolerate such acts of condescension or suppression. Among the Kankanaeys, many families and entire communities continue to perform their rituals, especially their healing rites.¹⁹

In Barangay Ucab, the *manbunongs* claim that a good number of Kankanaeys adhere to the beliefs that their ancestors taught them. Accordingly, ninety percent of the Kankanaeys in the sitios of Malasin, Keystone, and Garrison seek the services of the *manbunong*. The *manbunongs* have responded to the disaster brought by Typhoon Ompong by performing the healing ritual. One *manbunong* said that doing the rites anchors the community to the *adikaila* and is a means to seek their help. The rites help in mitigating some of the immediate adverse effects of the tragedy.²⁰

¹⁹ Among several instances, I had the chance to participate in a ritual by joining the *manbunong* as ritualist in an elaborate whole-day activity on January 6, 2020 in Irisan, Baguio City. In the rites, making peace with dead relatives had brought relief and healing for the concerned family.

²⁰ The narratives, below, are based on Jaime Doctolero's *Benguet Field Notes* (September 2018), unpublished.

An Emergent Disaster Ritual

In the performance of the healing ritual, what has emerged is a kind of a disaster ritual comprising of two *pamakán* rites and a *daw-es* rite. A *pamakán* rite is performed so that the spirits, the ancestors and *Kabunyan* are invited to partake a meal with the community. A *daw-es* rite is a cleansing rite at the end of observances concerning a dead relative or member of the community.

The word *pamakán* is derived from the Ilocano *makán* which means food. *Pamakán* which is equivalent to the Tagalog *pakain* carries with it the intention to feed or give aliment. According to the *manbunong*, the *pamakán* is intended for the *adikaila* and the dead victims. *Pamakán*, therefore, is a term for that ritual meal shared with the *adikaila* during community meals. The term *adikaila*, which literally means *unseen*, is used to signify spirits, ancestors and *Kabunyan*. The community needed to honour the *adikaila* by having meal with them. The *manbunong* added that it was also to seek assistance and protection for the rescuers and volunteers.

The first *pamakán* was done in the morning of September 23, 2018 in Sitio Bagto where the communities and visitors gathered at the barangay covered court. The *manbunong* led the butchering of two pigs in the space designated for the ritual meal. The *manbunong* sat with his folded legs with buttocks almost touching his ankles. Bottles of alcoholic beverages, cigars and cigarettes, and soft drinks were in front of him. The *manbunong* poured gin into a cup and started to pray. He invited the *adikaila* to see what was to happen; that they would not see anything unpleasant in what they were about to witness. He called the *adikaila* using hand gestures to join the gathering. After saying prayers, the *manbunong* gave the signal for the slaughter of the pigs.

The pigs, held by able men, were cut on their sides with a sharp knife. A sharpened wooden stick was inserted through those cuts and pushed to pierce the heart. The pigs squeaked loudly and died. Only a small amount of blood dripped into the ground because the manner of slaughtering was meant to accumulate blood in the inside.

The pigs' skin was torched and scraped. After cleaning, the pigs' abdomens were cut open and the internal organs removed. The accumulated blood was scooped out and put into a container. The liver was cut out and given to the *manbunong*. The *manbunong* examined the condition of the livers and lifted the parts which covered the gallbladders. He interpreted the colors, positions and sizes of the gallbladders. He concluded that the overall condition of the livers were good. Accordingly, the *adikaila* are happy about the community's inviting them and agree to the requests of the community. The *adikaila* give their consent to the ongoing retrieval and relief operations, too. The *adikaila* are in favor of what takes place at ground zero, at the portal, and in Sitio First Gate.

A group prepared and cooked the food. In the middle of the assembly, gong players beat the gongs. Elders, officials and leaders led the dance by taking the *sunob* or lead gong. Those who wanted to dance joined. After some rounds of playing gongs and dancing, leaders and visitors were given the time to deliver messages. The playing of gongs and dancing resumed afterwards.

When the meat and rice were ready, the *manbunong* placed a plate of rice and meat near the beverages. The *manbunong* invited the *adikaila*, repeating most of the content of his initial prayer. He again requested the *adikaila* to eat well and be full with the food prepared by the community. He repeated begging the *adikaila* to ensure safe evacuation operations and protection of the

communities from further catastrophic calamities. He supplicated that the remaining victims underneath the mud, more or less thirty six persons, would be located, given proper burial and buried in the right place. He also asked guidance for the government officials so that they would demonstrate true service and responsible governance. Meanwhile, the assigned persons distributed plates of rice and large pieces of meat to those who were present. Those who preferred soup and salt asked for them. Then, the *manbunong* told the community to eat to their hearts' content.

The gathered assembly was like a meal gathering of the living community and the *adikaila*. This community had engaged the unseen forces face to face. The *adikaila* had reciprocated, too. The ritual meal was like dining with unseen beings.

The *daw-es* rite was realized on September 30, fifteen days after the disaster, at the second incident command post in Sitio Malasin. The event was organized by the barangay officials and the local government unit of Itogon. At this command post, the recovered bodies, already at an advanced stage of decomposition, were identified by forensic experts. The same *manbunong*, who headed a number of elders and *manbunongs*, said that *daw-es* was needed to respond to the complaints of some fire fighters and volunteers in the search, rescue, and retrieval operations being hounded by images and smell of death.

One of the *manbunongs* was a retired Anglican priest. This Kankanaey priest practices and promotes the indigenous rites and ceremonies, infusing into these cultural practices Christian teaching and belief. According to him, the primary purpose of the *daw-es* was to cleanse the memory of the survivors and volunteers from the horrible effects of direct physical contact with dead bodies. The *manbunongs* prayed for the cleansing of

the place from the bad effects of the accident and having dead people there, for clearing the memories of the volunteers who had contact with dead bodies, and for the prevention of similar disasters. They also thanked the *adikaila* for the survivors' lives.

The animal butchered was a dog. The *manbunongs* and elders explained that dog is used in *daw-es* because it is the nature of a dog to guard. The dog shoos away bad spirits, memories, and experiences, including death itself. The dog bites negative vibes and luck. For other Cordillerans, like the Kalanguyas and Ifugaos, rites similar to *daw-es* are performed to protect the living relatives from the spirit of a dead relative. For the Kankanaeys, the *daw-es* is a cleansing rite that signifies the end of a period dealing with the dead. The *daw-es* performed in Malasin coincided with the end of the search and retrieval operations.

The last instance of ritual performance in connection with the deadly landslide was assigned to a *mumbaki*, the Ifugao counterpart of *manbunong*. The *manbunong* asked the *mumbaki* to prepare and do another *pamakán* at ground zero below Sitio First Gate. The *manbunong* thought that, since the majority of the small scale miners who perished in the landslide were from the province of Ifugao, the *pamakán* rite would be made among the Ifugaos themselves. According to the *manbunong*, the main reason why the *pamakán* had to be realized at ground zero was for the sake of the dead victims of the landslide. The dead were given food, referring to having ritual meal, so that they could have strength finding their way home. They were also given transportation money so that they could go back to where they came from.

Assessment of the Rites

The Kankanaey healing rites are viewed using several ritual lenses.²¹ One may also consider the contributions from various authors dealing with one or more aspects of ritual.²² The Kankanaey rites are analyzed using the concepts of focus and display, ritual time,²³ qualities of ritual action, ritual criticism and ritual field mapping.²⁴

²¹ The lenses employed by Paden and Grimes. See, William Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion*, with a new preface (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).

²² See, Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961); Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* Translated by Joseph W. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971); Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Trans. by C. J. M. Hubback (London, Vienna: International Psycho-Analytical, 1922) or Jean Laplanche, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955); Louis Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004); Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974); Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* Trans. by Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* First Perennial Classics ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001).

²³ See, William Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

²⁴ See, Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1982, 1995).

The Rites as Focus and Display

The Kankanaey rites have several characteristics. First, the rites are a concentrated display of what the Kankanaey people regard as necessary in overcoming the effects of the disaster. The first *pamakán* rite is for extending relief to the traumatized individuals and families. The *manbunong* initiated the butchering of pigs and the giving of food to the *adikaila* to seek for their help during this difficult time. In the midst of fear and restlessness and while most of those present engage in different activities in the search, rescue and retrieval operations, receiving food and donations, and managing the desks, the *manbunong* then requested the leaders and elders to agree on doing the rite. The *manbunong*, who is the current barangay chairperson, asked the consent of the former barangay chairperson, the command post commander, the small scale miners' association president, and myself (recognized as a priest present in the area) at the first incident command post near ground zero at around eight in the evening. The *manbunong* claimed that the ancestors who dwell in the mountain could have been offended by individuals or by the community. The rite was to win back the *adikaila*'s favor and seek their help in the search, rescue and retrieval operations. The request of the *manbunong* was granted.

Second, the rites are made to be purposefully special. The rites are done in a concentrated and distinct manner. In particular, the ritual meal is an important part of Kankanaey celebrations and healing ritual. Sharing meal with the *adikaila* is a key ritual element. The first *pamakán* comes in a grander scale because of the presence of the communities and visitors. The *pamakán* brings into focus what is out of focus. Meaning to say, the gathered people come to understand the present

preoccupations and concerns. They see the connections between things. The deaths and accidents are seen in their context. In a way, the *pamakán* gives sense to the death of loved ones. It allows the families to comprehend the inevitability of natural disasters and their consequences. It also becomes easier to understand that the deadly incident happened because of the non-cooperation of the small scale miners and residents in Sitio First Gate in the evacuation efforts and the negligence of local authorities. The evacuation of families did not materialize.

Moreover, it is a fact that both big and small scale mining protocols and environmental requirements are not being met. The Benguet Corporation that owns the Antamok Mines reported to have ceased operations in 1991 has left hundreds of hectares of surface and subsurface areas, rivers, streams and other sources of water contaminated and in continuous deterioration. The portal and ground zero areas where the incident happened belong to the mining company. A good number of people in the municipality and in the nearby places are aware of the use of influence by the big mining companies in order to secure government permits and certifications for their operations. The small scale mining groups also lobby with the big mining companies and the local government for their own operations. In these negotiations, done under the pretext of progress and of providing jobs for the people, environmental safety is compromised or undermined. These factors and their connection with the life of the communities are now seen by some participants in the ritual activity.

Third, the atmosphere of the rites is not controlled. In the first *pamakán* and in the *daw-es*, other activities are being carried out. In the *pamakán*, lots of movements are happening: elders and leaders delivering their speeches; donors arriving with food, water and relief goods; several

groups bagging these goods; a group of people cooking; individuals consulting the desks of the DSWD, police, the medical team, among others. Many of those who are present converse with one another. There is dancing and playing of gongs. These activities take place in the context of the *pamakán*. The rites have an indulgent characteristic.

Fourth, the time of the rites constructs space. One clear instance is the community meal in the first *pamakán* which evokes a different sensation on the participants. The community and visitors enter into ritual; even mere spectators are drawn into it. As one enters into the ritual activity, one grasps the meaning of the symbols used and actions. The rites exclude matters that are not part of them. The rites separate objects, persons, and activities that have nothing to do with the event, even though these are present. In other words, it is in the ritual space where ritual time is realized. Ritual moment defines the space. In ritual time, change can happen. In the *pamakán*, a change comes about when the *manbunong* begins to invoke the *adikaila*. In the invocation, time demands the full attention of those who are present. This change in the sense of space and time is distinct when the pigs squeaked loudly while being killed.

Fifth, the sense of time and space does not only become deeper, it also expands. The participants in the rites see themselves in relation with the cosmos. The gesture of inviting the unseen counterparts urges participants to recognize the presence of cosmic beings. The recognition leads these members to dance and play the gongs. The dance turns to be a dance with the unseen forces. One of the sensations effected by the ritual meals and the dancing is harmony. The meals and dancing are harmonizing gestures. Elderly people and *manbunongs* always mention that these gestures mend crooked or

disturbed relationships between communities and the *adikaila*. Having a meal with the *adikaila* creates a feeling of relief and assurance. In other words, the rites open up to the cosmos, charging time and space with quality.

The other basic feature of the Kankanaey rites is display. First, the rites embody their truth in acts. The first *pamakán*, the *daw-es* and even the second *pamakán* exclusively performed by the Ifugao families and their *mumbaki* show their significance through acts. In the first *pamakán*, the calling of the *adikaila* through gestures, the killing of pigs, the dance, the communal eating, among other actions, express meaning. Having meal with the *adikaila* means reconciling the community with them and asking their favor and assistance. This act indicates that the community is in distress and in need of help. It signifies the community's relation to the *adikaila*. This is implied in one of the supplications of the *manbunong* that the ancestors receive in their midst those who perished in the landslide. The *manbunong* explains that the ancestors become godly or divine because they are with *Kabunyan*. Thus, acts carry with them their own meanings. In a wider sense, the rites are grounded in action and the *manbunong*, the community, and even the spectators are human actors.

Second, the Kankanaey rites utilize objects and require settings. The use of objects and the setting up of the space make the ritual event unique. The space of the ritual meal, which is usually covered with cogon grass or where some of the things and possessions of dead persons are displayed, is prepared in a designated place. In the first *pamakán*, two pigs are butchered in the ritual space. The ritual food, the sharpened wooden stick used to slaughter the pigs, the displayed pig's gall bladders, gongs, bottles of alcoholic beverages, cigars and cigarettes, soft drinks, and cup of liquor are in this space.

The *manbunong*, leaders, old folks and elders, after eating their food, smoke cigars or cigarettes while they converse. This scene gives the impression that there is satisfaction and harmony among those who have shared the meal.

Third, the same rites construct a reality that is appreciated through the sense of sight. The Kankanaey rites create a kind of environment for the eye, literally building a visual universe recognizable by both participants and spectators. The gathered community and even those who are not so concerned about the rite can visualize what is transpiring. What is portrayed in these ritual events is a panorama of a community coming together with the *adikaila*. Some refer to this as a kind of intuitive passive reception, almost contemplative experience, which is something that rational or discursive approaches cannot achieve.²⁵

Fourth, the Kankanaey rites put together the objects, acts, and setting as one, weaving the different acts and varied objects together. The acts and objects are like small units that comprise the vital media of the rites. The objects and acts render tangible what is symbolized. The ritual meal completes what has been recited, particularly the invocation and invitation to the spirits, the ancestors and *Kabunyan*. The persons dancing with the music of the gongs do not dance and play gongs by themselves; the *adikaila* dance and play with them. The ritual meal presents both visible and invisible beings sharing the same food. Thus, the objects and acts portray a meal in which the unseen counterparts are invited, talked to, danced and ate with.

Fifth, the community rites also enact, forging new outlook of life and relationships. Rites, through words

²⁵ Dagmang, "Babaylanism Reconsidered," 72.

and acts, define things before the communities' eyes. The rites aid the survivors, the families of victims and the traumatized communities to realize the inevitability of the disaster and that no one could stop it from occurring. Moreover, the leaders are affirmed of their offices and performance despite what happened. Part of the *manbunong's* prayer is asking forgiveness for the corrupt practices of some of the government officials and personnel. The leaders, who have failed and are irresponsible at times, remain to be in charge but now they are aware that they need to practice true service for the communities. The rites, particularly the first *pamakán*, inspire the community and leaders to recover from the tragedy, move on and work for the better.

Rites of Disaster or Crisis

Ritual has a lot to do with time. Rites exist in time and ritual is synonymous to time. Ritual time is the moment, event, or phase when certain and necessary rites or ceremonies are done. The first major kind of ritual time is about regular celebrations of the enduring foundations of worlds. The second kind of ritual time concerns rites of passages. The other kinds of ritual times are when rites are brought about by crises. These rites arise out of any significant life situation.

The Kankanaey rites fit in the third kind of ritual time. The rites were needed by communities on their knees due to the disaster. Crying, uneasiness, and confusion filled the air. The affected families were at the mercy of other people and divine intervention. The communities gathered to do ritual, to get down to the deeper dimensions of life, and to pray. For the Kankanaeys, the rites were forms of prayer. The prayers were their performed response to the disaster. It has been pointed out that "prayer is a response to certain critical

times, and rites are often tantamount to dramatized prayer.”²⁶ The rites performed by the communities represented their distress and coping through performance. The rites dramatized the communities’ reaching out to the *adikaila*. The *manbunongs* from the Mountain Province, the barangays of Loakan, Gumatdang and Tuding, and the sitios of Malasin and Garrison in Barangay Ucab, confirm that the mere performance of rites gives inner peace and relief. The reason for this is that what the *manbunongs* do is necessary as taught by the elders and ancestors. The rites were occasions to pray for healing. In Europe and in some parts of the world, this kind of prayer or liturgy is called disaster ritual. In a disaster ritual, a community or a group of people gather at the site of the disaster, usually at ground zero, to do liturgy or to pray. People gather to commemorate the event.²⁷ The Kankanaey rites were done in the context of environmental crisis. The deadly landslide led to the performance of the rites.

As such, the rites were events of meeting the sacred in the communities’ experience. The rites anchored the communities in crisis to the pillars that strengthen them during turbulent and unfamiliar moments. The rites were there to help the communities cope with the crisis.

Qualities of the Rites

Attributing qualities to rites is a tricky task. The attributes that furnish description to rites are numerous and overlapping. However, it is not easy to delineate the mark between the definition of ritual and qualities of ritual action. Ritual does not have a single definition but

²⁶ Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 119.

²⁷ P. Post, et al., *Disaster Ritual: Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).

can have many qualities.²⁸ In Table 1, a list of qualities which scholars consider in the study of rites is presented.²⁹

Table 1. List of qualities of ritual action

qualities of ritual		
Cluster	variables/qualities	what ritual supposedly is not
Performed	embodied, enacted, gestural	not merely thought or said
Formalized	elevated, stylized, differentiated	not ordinary, unadorned, or undifferentiated
Repetitive	redundant, rhythmic	not singular or once-for-all
Collective	institutionalized, consensual	not personal or private
Patterned	invariant, ordered, rehearsed standardized, stereotyped	not improvised, idiosyncratic, or spontaneous
Traditional	archaic, primordial	not invented or recent
Valued highly or ultimately	deeply felt, sentiment-laden, meaningful, serious	not trivial or shallow
Condensed	multi-layered	not obvious; requiring interpretation
Symbolic	referential	not merely technological or primarily means-end oriented
Perfected	idealized, pure, ideal	not conflictual or subject to criticism and failure

²⁸ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 14.

²⁹ The researcher put into a table form the list of ritual qualities made by Grimes, demonstrating possible clustering, variants, and opposite traits. See Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 14.

Dramatic	ludic (playlike)	not primarily discursive or explanatory; not without special framing or boundaries
Paradigmatic		not ineffectual in modelling either other rites or non-ritualized action
Mystical	transcendent, religious, cosmic	not secular or merely empirical
Adaptive	functional	not obsessional, neurotic, dysfunctional
Conscious	deliberate	not unconscious or preconscious

The advantages of this chart over definitions is that it is fuller than any one of the qualities in the list and it does not give the idea that a quality is definitive.³⁰ Some of these qualities are attributable to the Kankanaey rites. Table 2 illustrates these including the other specific traits, those in *italics*, of the rites.

Table 2. Qualities of the Kankanaey rites

Performed	enacted, gestural	not merely thought or said
Collective	institutionalized, consensual	not personal or private
Valued highly	serious	not trivial or shallow
Symbolic	referential	not technological or means-end oriented
Dramatic	ludic	not discursive or without special framing or boundaries

³⁰ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 14.

Religious	cosmic	not secular or merely empirical
Adaptive	functional	not obsessional, neurotic, dysfunctional
Conscious	deliberate	not unconscious or preconscious
<i>Ethnic</i>	<i>multi-ethnic</i>	<i>not restricted to one ethnicity</i>
<i>Ecological</i>	<i>ritual of nature</i>	<i>not performed if no reference to nature</i>
<i>Ecumenical</i>	<i>inter-confessional</i>	<i>not exclusive to one denomination</i>

The qualities in Table 2 are suitable descriptions of the Kankanaey rites though these are observable in varying degrees. Some traits appear to be ambivalent; the rites possess particular traits but do not clearly show them. For example, the first *pamakán* rite is not performed as a drama, the way one normally thinks of a drama which is organized, but unfolds in a dramatic fashion. The whole drama of the rite takes place from nine in the morning up to lunchtime. The qualities identifiable in the rites are: performed, collective, symbolic, dramatic, religious, adaptive, and conscious. The traditional Kankanaey rites are consciously and symbolically adapted, performed and dramatized by the community in order to anchor itself (community) to what it considers sacred or religious.

Moreover, the qualities of the Kankanaey rites show an important base: performantial action. The qualities are realizable through performance. The execution of the rites objectivises the fear, trauma, loss, vulnerability, or confusion brought about by the tragic landslide. The rites can channel emotions through the symbolic objects and movements. Emotions can be contained and expressed in ritual like in the Balinese cockfight which is a “deep play”

actually not of roosters but of male individuals.³¹ When the Balinese men take their bets, their identity, dignity and worth are also put in the line. These men can even lose their land and properties just to be able to bet. Seemingly there is great pride in being able to be just there in the arena and bet.³² The cockfight is sophisticatedly colored with ‘our class or group is better than or superior to yours’ complex.³³ As a channel for bursting into a sort of regulated but legitimate and violent emotion, the cockfight is a form of self-expression for Balinese men.³⁴ Also, the cockfight dramatizes and expresses their status.

Ritual as performance is curative.³⁵ Performantial action creates what it represents and transforms it. In healing, performance represents by providing definitions of reality as understood by the sick person and by others who are healthy. It transforms by allowing shifts in mood and a re-arrangement of its symbolic components and a redefinition of the meaning attached to them in the sequential organization of its episodes.³⁶ The concept of the sickness and the emotion that goes with it are given structure. The sick persons are made to see in the healthy others (community) what and how it is to be healthy. This

³¹ Clifford Geertz, “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 276.

³² Geertz, “Balinese Cockfight,” 287.

³³ Geertz, “Balinese Cockfight,” 296.

³⁴ Geertz, “Balinese Cockfight,” 297.

³⁵ Bruce Kapferer, “Entertaining Demons: Comedy, Interaction and Meaning in a Sinhalese Healing Ritual” in *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, No. 1, (February 1979), pp. 108-152. Berghahn Books, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23159678>, 109 (accessed 11 June 2020).

³⁶ Bruce Kapferer, “Emotion And Feeling In Sinhalese Healing Rites,” *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, No. 1, (February 1979): 153-176, Berghahn Books, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23159679>, 153-7 (accessed 16 May 2020).

knowledge and desire to behave as healthy persons create an opening for transformation or healing.

This process happens in the Kankanaey rites which dramatize the disaster event, creating moments when emotions are dealt with. In the first *pamakán*, the music and dancing around the ritual space are therapeutic movements. The foreparents saw in the dance healing movements that shake away illnesses, burdens and other forms of cares. All sicknesses and troubles are taken care of by *Kabunyan*, the ancestors and the spirits who can bring good things to the communities. The foreparents determined in the *tadek* or *takik* dance the healing actions of *Kabunyan*. They considered the *tadek* as a sacred dance. The *tadek* done together with healing prayer and dancing is connected to the divine power of *Kabunyan*. When the community is happy, it is filled with gratitude and so it dances the *takik*. The celebration of all that is good, of the gifts of the earth, harvests, water, etcetera, is thanksgiving for the unity, prosperity and good health of all.

In the *tadek*, those who dance call the sick persons to dance. If a baby is sick, someone carries the baby and dances as the community watches. The elderly people say that the movements shake off sickness or unpleasant conditions in the body. This curative process happens with the active involvement of the community.

The community's focused attention has a big contribution in the healing process.³⁷ The rites' healing efficacy can be attributed to the therapeutic presence of the community members. The rites are models of a reality which shows to sick persons and those present how wellness is perceived.³⁸ As mentioned earlier, the representative and transformative aspects of a rite act upon the participants. A healing rite is organized to effect

³⁷ Kapferer, "Entertaining Demons," 135.

³⁸ Kapferer, "Emotion And Feeling," 158.

a cure.³⁹ The *daw-es* rite effects the healing desired by those gathered. In the *pamakán* rites, wherein the ritual gestures bring about relief and harmony, the Kankanaey and Ifugao communities have become aware that the crisis can be weathered through.

In addition, the Kankanaey rites exhibit ethnic, ecumenical, and ecological characteristics as italicized in Table 2. In all the ritual meals, communities and groups were present. In the second *pamakán*, Ifugaos were involved. In the bigger first *pamakán*, most of those present were Kankanaey but a good number of Ibalays, Kalanguyas, Kalingas, and Ifugaos were present; Ilokans, Pangasinenses, Tagalogs, and Visayans were also there. The majority were Catholics and the others were members of the Episcopal Church, the Assembly of God, and the United Church of Christ of the Philippines, among others. Despite the differences in ethnicity and confessions, the attendees had cooperated and participated in the ritual activity.

The rites are also related to the environment. The link is explicit in the ritual meals and prayers. In ritual meals, a *manbunong* usually invites the *adikaila* who reside in the mountains and who take care of nature. He or she requests the *adikaila* to protect the community and to provide the needs of the families. In the *daw-es* rite, one of the *manbunongs* prayed that no similar ecological incident would happen again. The *manbunong* in the first *pamakán* said that he was not really aware of any relation of the rite to the environment but needed to invoke those who take care of it. It was during the first *pamakán* that the connection was most obvious. The rite was also intended to show respect to the *adikaila* who live in the mountain where the landslide happened. The ritual meal in the *pamakán* was to make peace with the

³⁹ Kapferer, "Emotion And Feeling," 158.

adikaila who might have been forgotten by the communities.

The ritual space had a visual connection with ground zero. One could be conscious that the rite being performed was closely linked to nature, the environment, and natural resources. The ecological disaster was a sign for the leaders and elders to perform *pamakán* for the *adikaila*. The communities needed to harmonize its relationship with the *adikaila* and allow nature to rest.

The Contexts of Interpreting the Rites

The Practical Context

The Kankanaey rites are dealt with using a combination of tools to understand their significance. The outcome can be used to facilitate a dialogue between the indigenous rites and the healing practice of the Church. This study can be employed for inculturation purposes among the Kankanaeys. The assessment of the rites is a borderline case which may invite conflict or lead to a controversial result. Such is the nature of the assessment and the exploratory study.

The Kankanaey rites are concrete expressions of indigenous cultural worldview. The communities execute their rites in different ways, and modify them in time. When the rites are performed, the communities communicate and affirm their culture and identity. The rites also manifest the religious worldview of the communities; these are expressions of values and beliefs. Dealing with the rites, therefore, implies cross-cultural and interreligious contact. That contact necessitates mutual respect and equal treatment.

The assessment of the rites is an etic description.⁴⁰ The interpretation comprises much of my point of view. However, I take seriously the differences between the Kankanaeys' view and my standpoint. I am also an insider of the culture. Being one, I need to negotiate with other insiders.⁴¹ In this manner, I, the insider-researcher, construe the behavior of fellow insiders. I take a critical, not a superior, stance. Being an observer-evaluator, I do not assume expertise and authority on both ritual and the Kankanaey culture. The study holds both perspective and objectivity as helpful interpretative factors, maintaining that the critique of rites serves its performance and not its performance serving critique.⁴² The study has to be brought back to the communities for further dialogue.

The Cultural Context

The rites are performed in a postcolonial context. The Kankanaey people are among the indigenous peoples in the country fighting for their rights and dignity. They, too, suffer the brunt of subordination, exclusion, and marginalization in the society even in the present times. On the one hand, the behavior of Christians remains ambiguous. Many Christians from different confessions look down on the indigenous peoples, languages and cultures. They cite passages from the bible and doctrines to condemn indigenous beliefs and practices. On the

⁴⁰ Emic criticism has something to do with intracultural or intrareligious judgments. It pertains to analysing one's own ways and thoughts. For example, what do the Kankanaey think about their ritual practice? Here, the insiders' view is explored. While etic description asks questions like, what does the researcher say about a particular rite? How does the researcher describe the Kankanaey rites? Here, an outsider's analysis is given.

⁴¹ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 20.

⁴² Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 20.

other hand, as they seek meaning in life, community to belong, and relevant ritual, the Kankanaey communities still adhere to what they have inherited from the past.

The appreciation of the rites emboldens the respect for one's culture and the culture of others. It enhances one's perspective as well as that of the others. It safeguards the objective understanding of the indigenous viewpoint. However, the Kankanaey people themselves must have the willingness to deconstruct critically.⁴³ They need to have the ability to take out whatever stunts identity.

The Ritual Field Map

The field in which the Kankanaey rites take place is viewed by mapping.⁴⁴ Mapping shows the entire picture of the different elements in the rites. What follows is the ritual field map of the first *pamakán* rite.

The space chosen for ritual is a covered basketball court used for different community activities and occasions, aside from sports and recreation. The court has a cemented floor with steel beams and galvanized iron roof. A designated area of the court is prepared for the rite. In the east is the eroded part of the mountain or site of the landslide. The Catholic church lies to the left. The municipal road is to the west. The *manbunong*, government leaders and civic officials have access to the ritual space, positioning themselves at the center. The participants and spectators watch and listen. Some participants are allowed to speak. The leaders and some of those present play gongs and dance. In the prayers, the *manbunong* invokes the *adikaila* and shares food and

⁴³ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 27.

⁴⁴ Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1982, 1995) 24-38. The guideline questions come from Grimes and are here answered.

drinks with them. The *manbunong* is at the centermost of the ritual space. Through the rite, the *manbunong* and the assembly momentarily sacralise this ordinary space.

The main ritual object is the ritual meal, the food set aside for the spirits, ancestors and *Kabunyan*. The meal comprises of boiled meat, soup and rice served together with alcoholic beverages and cigarettes. The gongs, too, are significant objects. These are placed at the center where players pick them up to play and return them after playing.

The first *pamakán* rite is prepared early Sunday morning. At around 9 o'clock, the *manbunong* signals that everything is set for ritual. The rite begins and unfolds. Meanwhile, activities related to the ongoing search, rescue and retrieve operations are conducted at the left side of the court. Each time a message is given, it is always mentioned that tragedy is part of life, that bad experiences end and that the communities can begin anew.

What has prominence are the sounds produced and speeches delivered. The messages are about understanding, helping one another, strength to get through, solidarity, harmony, among others. Also, music is produced by playing a whole set of gongs. In the dance, the pleas, petitions and prayers are shouted out. Usually, the *manbunong* shouts prayers and blessings to persons in their turn to dance. The dance and music have a slow rhythm, unlike the usual celebratory mode.

The *manbunong* has exercised his function as elder and ritualist. He has prescribed what was needed to be done and got the consent for doing it. The *manbunong* has learned about the different rites and their uses by participating and observing, like most *manbunongs* do. The *manbunongs* consult and discuss among themselves regarding their experiences and learnings. A *manbunong* adopts the rites to the circumstances. The ability to blend

or to be creative is part of ritual competence. A ritualist knows how to act ritually when there is no ritual to do; a ritualist must do ritual and do it right, which includes skills of improvising.⁴⁵ The *manbunong* also facilitates the cooperation and participation of those present.

The function of the *manbunong* does not seem to extend outside the ritual arena. The *manbunong* happens to be the barangay chairperson and individuals and groups consult him and seek his services. However, he is aware and that he does not mix the two functions. He performs ritual only on weekends or after work.

A *manbunong* inherits his or her function. The function is for both men and women. It is passed through apprenticeship. If there are no candidates from the family, an apprentice may be found somewhere else. The *manbunong* chooses whomever he or she deems able and worthy. At the same time, it depends on the apprentice to accept the function or not. The function is to do ritual in behalf of an individual, a family or the community.

The entire ritual action is symphonic. The prayers, butchering, speeches, dance, gestures, among others, suggest a harmonious interaction of presence and absence. One is aware of the reality within ritual and the experience outside ritual. The central gesture, the ritual meal, builds up a consciousness of the relationship between the *adikaila*, the newly dead and the communities. The actions are meaning-laden and symbolic.

⁴⁵ Ute Hüsken, review of *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* by Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, Bennett Simon, *Religion* 40 (2010): 212–226. doi: 10.1016/j.religion.2010.01.004 (accessed 20 May 2020).

Conclusion

The assessment presents the emergence of Kankanaey healing rites in the context of a disaster. The ritual features of the two *pamakán* rites and the *daw-es* rite are determined. The healing process of the afflicted communities has two stages. In the first stage, the rites help mend the relationship of the communities with the *adikaila* or sacred forces. Part of the feeling of relief is the realization that the community's dealing with the *adikaila* is harmonized. The ritual meal is a medium in which the encounter between the communities and the *adikaila* happens ritually. The *pamakán* rites have revealed this potential. The ritual meal objectifies the communities' desire to get healed from the traumatic disaster. It is a liminal stage for a community to anchor again its existence, strengthening its allegiance with the sacred beings. Part of the desired harmony is peace with those who perished in the landslide. The first stage leads to the second stage, the stage of healing. With the harmony, relief and healing are achieved. The traumatized individuals realize that the tragedy is temporary and whose effects are not lasting, and that there is suffering and pain but everything can be normal again. The community comes to terms with the disastrous event.

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