An ethnographic exploration of burial practices of Masadiit tribe in Boliney, abra Philippines

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ABSTRACT
The study is focused on the burial practices of the Masadiit Tribe specifically in Barangay Poblacion, Baoyan and Dumagas, Boliney, Abra, Philippines along their preparations, actual burial, and the post burial. There were ten Panglakayen (Elders of the tribe) including the bereaved family who served as respondents of the study. Digital cameras and mobile phones were utilized in the documentation. Unique cultural features were observed such as a ritual of singing and relaying good memories with the sick person called “Canchannag” or “urfaab”. Friends and relatives gather to show support to the sick person (Farufur) and when she/he dies Fukaang follows, a way to inform friends from other nearby places of the news. Other details on the actual and post burial practices are considered in the succeeding pages. This paper helps to awaken awareness and appreciation of the cultural setting of the tribe under study.

Keywords: burial practices, Elders, Itneg, Masadiit tribe, indigenous people.

1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY
For quite some time, the ethnic groups in Abra have not been given priorities. In 2000, there were 39,115 or 18.70%. There are however, only a few literatures about these groups. The Itneg or the Tingguians have landed in the province with a great number. Through the conduct of researches like this, awareness about them is enhanced.

The word Itneg is derived from “i-tineg”, which literally means people living near the Tineg River. “I-tineg” is combined form of the prefix /i/ that indicates a place of origin, and the name of one Itneg municipality and major river system in Abra which is Tineg. The word is driven from “iti uneg” which literally means “the interior”. National Council for Indigenous Peoples or NCIP forwards that Itneg is what the Tingguians are known for.

Abra is a province that is full of ethnolinguistic groups. To count, there are eleven (11) groups, namely: Masadiit, Maeng, Illaud, Moyadan, Adasen, and many others.

The Masadiit Tribe, which is the focused of this study, are among the earliest inhabitants of Abra; sporadically distributed in the areas and places in Sallapadan, Bucloc, Sitio Sapdaan (in Manabo), Poblacion Boliney, Bao-yan, and Dumagas. Geographically, the municipality of Boliney is hilly and
mountainous with all its 8 barangays situated along the Ikmin River. The municipality is bounded on the east by the province of Kalinga, on the west by the municipalities of Manabo and Luba, on the north by the municipalities of Bucloc and Sallapan, and on the south by the municipality of Tubo. The masadiit tribe settled on mountains tops identified only by the presence of bamboo that they planted. By around 1700 however, the masadiit settlements were abandoned due to an epidemic that delimited the population coupled with constant attacks from tribal enemies. It is believed that some of the settlers went down to Manabo and Bucay with some going to Narvacan, Ilocos sur. At present, the residents are a mixture of 3 distinct tribes namely: the Masadiit Tribe, represented by barangays Poblacion, Baoyan and Dumagas; the Balatok Tribe, represented by barangays Amti, Danac East and Danac West and; the Oplai Tribe, represented by barangays Dao-angan and Kilong-olao. The Masadiit Tribe is comprised by the people coming from Bucloc and Sallapadan while the Oplai Tribe are those inhabitants coming from Belwang, Mountain Province. The Balatok Tribe are those coming from Kalinga. There are many practices of the tribe but this paper dealt only on its burial practices specifically on the preparations, actual, and post burial practices.

2 OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

This study revolves on the burial practices of the Masadiit tribe along:

a. preparations,
b. actual burial, and
c. post burial

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive ethnographic study which involved an in-depth study on the culture and traditions of the Masadiit Tribe in Barangay Poblacion, Baoyan and Dumagas, Boliney, Abra. Protocols and procedures prior the conduct of this research was adopted like the consent of the informants on the documentation during the conduct of the burial, presentation, and finally on the publication of the collected data. Participant observation and documentation were the primary tools in collecting the ethnographic data relative to such cultural setting. Interviews with the Elder-participants and the bereaved family were considered. Further, the collected data were discussed with respondents, checked, validated, and reviewed to acquire the targeted results.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In all societies, the human body is prepared in some fashion before it is finally laid to rest. It was stated by Redmon (ND) that the Neanderthals, who lived in Europe from about 200,000 to 28,000 years
ago, were among the first humans to practice deliberate burials. Today, washing the body, dressing it in special garments, and adorning it with ornaments, religious objects, or amulets are common procedures. Sometimes the feet are tied together possibly to prevent the ghost of the deceased from wandering about. The most thorough treatment of the body is embalming, which probably originated in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians believed that in order for the soul to pass into the next life, the body must remain intact; hence, to preserve it, they developed the procedures of mummification.

As Wakit (2012) has noted, there is another burial practice in the Arctic regions is the disposal of the body which is linked to religious beliefs, climate and geography, and social status. Burial is associated with ancestor worship or beliefs about the afterlife; cremation is sometimes viewed as liberating the spirit of the deceased. Exposure, another widespread practice, may be a substitute for burial in Arctic regions; among the Parsis (followers of an ancient Persian religion) it has religious significance. Less common are water burial (such as burial at sea); sending the corpse to sea in a boat (a journey to ancestral regions or to the world of the dead); and cannibalism (a ceremonial act to ensure continued unity of the deceased with the tribe). During the Pre-Hispanic period, the early Filipinos believed in a concept of life after death. This belief in an afterlife prompted Filipinos to create burial customs and beliefs to honor the dead through rituals. Due to different cultures from different part of the Philippines, different burial practices have emerged from different tribes. For example, the Manobos had to bury their dead in trees. The Ifugaos had to seat their corpse on a chari before it was brought to a cave and buried elsewhere. These funeral practices and cultural beliefs are myths created by these indigenous people to try making sense of the world that they are living in as a way to compensate for their lack of understanding. The present day Filipinos had retained the belief of life after death from their ancestors. This is why it is customary for the present day Filipino to also honor the dead through different practices. One of the prominent practices of honoring the dead is by holding a wake as a way for the loved ones to properly mourn the death of one dear to them. Most Filipino Christians hold the wake at the funeral homes but others also hold them at their own household wherein the wake would be held for three to seven days and the family members would be required to wear either black or white clothing during the procession. Unlike their Christian brethren, the Filipino Muslims are required to bury the dead 24 hours after the time of death. This custom dates back to the times when the spread of disease was prominent. The Muslims had to promptly bury their dead as soon as possible for sanitary reasons such as avoiding the widespread disease that could come from the rotting corpse. One thing common between these two systems is that both practices believe in mourning even after the burial. In the case of Filipino Muslims, the mourning period actually lasts 40 days wherein they are required to wear black clothing to represent their mourning while the Filipino Christians have the "waksi" or death anniversary and the end of mourning on the 40th day.
5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The burial practices of the Masadiit tribe comprise three stages, namely: the preparation, actual burial, and the post burial activities.

5.1 ON THE PREPARATION

**Farufor** is done when friends, relatives, and neighbors gather to show support to the sick person and his family. Chants called “Canchannag” or “urfaab”- a ritual of singing songs and memories of happiness with the sick person. The relatives of the sick person gather together, sing songs to show support. Upon death, relatives help one another to proclaim to other relatives, friends, and neighbors of the news called **Fukaang**.

In the early times, the **bekaang** was done by sending young men on foot or on horseback, shouting in a loud voice the information to the relatives of the deceased person in other barangays and municipalities. The coffin is made up of wood or bamboo depending upon the budget of the family.

5.2 ACTUAL BURIAL

During the burial, the **Batakan** is done and is composed of the following rituals and activities: 1) **Sineklatan** are materials to be used for the burial and made from bamboo, elongated shaped tied with
rattan (seklat) which symbolizes the close and tight bonding of the relatives gathered during the wake. Relatives and friends of the family are gathered for an activity called Bagongon or wake and folks sing songs of lamentations. Visitors from different municipalities, sitio or barangay gather to mourn with the bereaved family. Foods are served bountifully starting from the first night of the wake. Cattle and pigs are butchered to serve the visitors. 2) Pinalayak—an exclusive ritual for the retirees of any elected public position. The materials needed in this practice are two old plates, usually the expensive ones (panay), matches, and tobacco. Usually, the wake is set at the Municipal Hall or at the Barangay Hall for all the folks to have the chance to mourn with the bereaved family. 3) Ababao- This ritual is done if the dead was married and still has his/her wife/husband, widow/widower who is covered with either black or white cloth during the course of the wake. He is instructed not to eat some served food, not to join in festivities, not to perform some jobs/chores, and not to cut his/her hair for a year. 4) Pakpakada is a farewell activity where the members of the family, even children and infants are presented by known elders in the village and sing their emotions, wishes, and prayers to the bereaved family. The family members stay near the dead during the wake and give their lamentations too. The Masadiit tribe bury their dead just a nearby place or even at the backyard to be near them.

5.3 POST BURIAL

The post burial practices of the Masadiit tribe are composed of the following: 1. Wagwag- a native dance with the gongs being played right after the entombment of the dead. The friends, relatives, and members of the family need to dance in order to shake off bad luck and misfortunes brought about by the death. 2. Golgol- a kind of cleansing after the burial. The family members, relatives, and friends go to the river with burned rice straw called “arutang” mixed with oil. This is anointed at the forehead of all present before they plunge themselves into the waters, all at the same time. No one turns back once they take off from the waters, otherwise bad luck await him. 3. Kasiyam, the ninth day after the burial where the family members prepare native delicacy called “katamay” made from glutinous rice or diket to be distributed to all the relatives or every household to remind them on the ninth day of the Dead and his journey starts to the afterlife. Festive moods follow and the folks do the native dance, Tadek. 4. Waksi. A year after the entombment of the Dead, the family members and relatives gather for this occasion. An animal is butchered and served as their food. The villagers are invited; they dance with the gongs and sing native songs.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The researcher concludes that the Masadiit Tribe particularly in Poblacion Boliney, Bao-yan and Dumagas have rich and unique cultural setting and heritage. Their burial practices vary from the different
ethnic groups in the province of Abra, from the last days of the sick relative, his/ her death, way of informing relatives and friends, actual burial, and post burial. The Masadiit tribe show comfort to any bereaved family in their community by their satisfying actions of support, endearment, and compassion. The tribe manifests selective burial practices for social functions and positions. Further, the study finds symbolic materials intended for their Dead as signs of their love to him/ her. Death is inevitable for the inhabitants as explicated by the festive moods and lavish merriment after the burial.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The rich cultural heritage of the Masadiit Tribe must be sustained and preserved. With the influx of more Tingguians in the province of Abra, it is deemed necessary to conduct parallel studies of other burial practices of the different tribes for all the Abreños to be aware on the richness of their culture and tradition.

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REFERENCES


ANNEXES

1. *Farufor*- Friends, relatives, neighbors gather to show support to the sick person and his family. Chants like “Canchannag” or “urfaab” are made.

2. *Bagongon* or *Wake* - Relatives and friends of the family are gathered and folks sing songs of lamentations. Visitors from different municipalities, *sito* or *barangay* gather to mourn with the bereaved family.
3. The coffin is made by the folks themselves. Usually it is made of bamboo or wood depending on the financial capability of the bereaved family.

4. The Dead is usually buried near the house of her own family. In this documentation, the burial is done in the backyard.
5. On the ninth day, the family members pray for the soul of their Dead. A part of their tradition, native delicacy called “katamay” which is made from glutinous rice or diket is cooked to be distributed in every household. The inhabitants believe in the journey after life starts on this day.

6. After the burial, the folks enjoy the lavish merriment through dancing of the native dance called Tadek, women and men alike. Men usually play the gongs. (Picture in #7)