

Traditional Burial Practices of Bontoc, Mt. Province, Philippines

By: WAKIT, JORELYN
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RITUALS FOR THE DEAD

The family of the dead will butcher pig for “mang-mang” (pag-uurnungan). This is butcher for the morning of the first day of the dead. The dead is covered with a cloth called “chap-pong” or “kaw-wit. In the afternoon the “amam-a” (elder or it’s like mambunong) will announce the dead. If the dead is old man he will be then dressed with clothes called “wanes” or g-string and it should be colored “chinagta” (white), however the extra cloth left from the “chinagta” should be dressed on the head of the dead. For dead woman she should be dressed with “lufid” (Bontoc tapis or traditional skirt) and “tochong” (head dress).

The “kachangyan” (rich people) will celebrate the dead for 5-7 days including the nights. If the dead is a man, he should be placed inside the house near the door and for dead woman, placed farther away from the door. In placing the dead unto the “sangachin” (coffin) the body of the dead will be tied and the “anifat” (bundle of palay) carried by the “inin-a” (old woman) together with the “kupkop” (butchered pig) left during the “mang-mang” will be brought out. After the burial the relatives of the dead would celebrate “am-amo” (reunion) for the dead.

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The dead must be respected. During the death of the dead, the brother and sister of the dead are not allowed to drink soup while the wife can drink but with the permission of the “amam-a” and the wife should refrain from going out of the house. The family, brother and sister of the dead must not harvest or cut plants for it will bring bad luck to them. “Mangyafig” (40 days waxy) of the dead, family should not take a bath until they are told by the “am-amas”. The “am-amas” will also prepare their things needed to take a bath.

For the family who cannot afford to buy a coffin for the dead, men who volunteer help the family to build a stone coffin. For “pusi” (poor) people they will celebrate the dead for 2-3 days and for middle class for at least 4 days.

If the family completed the task they will place “fo-ot” (cloth) on the eyes of the dead. The relatives of the dead must turn their back during the burial.

POST BURIAL PRACTICES AND RATIONALE

After the burial, several pigs must be butchered. At least one is butchered, cooked and served in the house where the wake was held, to women and children only. Another pig is butchered, cooked and served in another house for men only. Unmarried men must not eat of these pigs. Chickens must be butchered for them.



“Inasin” or salted meat

- Best preservation of meat of Bontoc People.

The morning after the burial, meat leftover from the pigs butchered the day before is cooked and all relatives get together to eat. The neighbors and friends who provided food during the wake for immediate members of the family are now returned. Other members of the community are no longer expected to stay around. Only relatives to the third cousin level stay on to participate in the culminating rituals which will last for an additional four days. These have to be observed strictly to protect the living from any bad intentions of the spirits who are always out to get more to join them in the spirit world.

The next four days is for the members of the immediate family to stay home as a part of the observance. If any children or siblings are married, their spouses may go to their rice fields or gardens to attend to chores necessary for the health of their plants.

Cawed also wrote that on the second day after the burial rites, the men go to the river for the “cachiw” (fish found in the Chico river), which is used in a feast for that night in the house of the dead. The third day is called the “alis” (transfer), because all members of the family transfer from the house of a relative to another for a “canao”. This kind of “canao” in each house is an offering to the “anito” (spirit gods) of the dead for prosperous life among living relatives. It is the duty of departed now in the land of ancestors to look after the welfare of those left behind. The feasting and gathering of relatives are done at noon and in the late afternoon.

The fourth day is a rest day. All relatives of the dead must remain in their houses abstaining from hard work. The fifth is the “tipi” (canao for the spirit). A pig is offered and distributed among the relatives. The sixth day is again “tengao” (rest day), and the seventh day is the “cachiw”. Again, the men go to the river to catch fish, while the women go to the field to get “ku-ti” (shells). The mollusks are cooked in the evening for another feast, where only fish is eaten. The eighth day is “sang-po” (anti- climaxed of the burial custom). In this “canao”, several pigs are butchered and left uncooked and given away to the relatives. The following day is a rest day, and the tenth day is climaxed by the catching of fish in the river.

More rituals have to be observed to finally end the requirements of the death rites. The first to be done is the “cleansing” rite. The oldest child must carry water from a nearby spring. An elderly relative who walks ahead to ensure no person accompanies him or animal crosses the path of the one crying water. The ritual has to be repeated the next day

if either animal or person crosses his/her. Not to repeat the rite will spell bad luck for family. A successful trip from the spring signals that the members of the family can now take a bath at dawn the following day.

Chickens are butchered as a basic accompaniment to rituals. All the children and siblings of the dead person must butcher chickens after they have bathed to enable to eat fresh vegetables and fruits without reprisals from a spirits. Chickens are butchered as an act of cleansing, to remove the “dirt” which is death

The living spouse on the “ngilin”, (observance and staying home for an additional month after the cleansing rites.) Other members of the family are allowed to go anywhere they need to. A specified dress code for windows is imposed on the living spouse to remind him or her not to marry again until after the prescribed year is over. Not to observe the period could result to misfortune or even death.

FINISOR DEATH RITES



Natives call this Alongan or Sangachin.
This is a native coffin.

Any person who dies at hand of another person must be accorded the “finosor” (killed by a fosor or enemy) rites. This is done for all persons who are murdered, even if the perpetrator is not an enemy. This death is considered doubly dirty and, therefore, must have different set of ritual for family members left behind.

If the body has been retrieved, it is put on death throne and set up beside the door outside. If the body is unavailable, for one reason or other, rites are still done, with his clothes or other belongings in the place where the body would have been set up.

Some pieces of board are placed before the death throne, with or without the body. All women in the community who no longer have young children and the elderly unmarried woman gather in tight semi-circle in front of the dead.

Child bearing woman are not allowed to join this group because the bad luck suffered by the dead might transfer to them and they surely will pass it on to their children who, because of their tender age, are susceptible recipients.

After the women are so gathered, an old man butchers two chickens in front of the death throne .He does this by cutting of the heads of the chickens, one at a time, while saying a prayer directed to the spirits, including that of dead person. He invokes the, to avenge the death of the person. He then throws the headless chickens into the air, one after the other, as if to let them fly.

The women in semi –circle simultaneously shout to the top of their voices, the headless chickens flap their wings and move around before finally falling down in death. The woman must make sure the chickens stay within their circle.

To allow the chickens to get beyond the circle will invite all the rats from nearby mountains to converge on their “palay” plants and eat them. The community will suffer from a very lean harvest.

An average six chickens are butchered daily in this manner but are not cooked to be eaten. All the bodies of these chickens are buried in pit dug of purpose. All the heads are put into receptacle made for purpose to be hung above the pit.

All the women participating in ritual must have their in disarray or uncombed. They clap their hand, stomp their feet, pound on the boards in front of the dead, and chant a song special for events such as this one. The song repeatedly mentions the name of the dead and the murderer, if such person is known .If unknown but somehow the home barrio of the suspect is known, then the name of his barrio is chanted in place. The chanting and the killing of chickens are believed to incite the spirits of the dead person to avenge his own death.

Unlike during the wakes of regular deaths, no food is cooked to be served the people who attend the wake. Even the lone pig that is butchered in addition to the chickens also thrown into the pit to buried together with the chicken. Death by murder is considered extremely “dirty” that one would dare eat in the house for fear of contamination.

Anyone who attend such wake, must before going home, go to public place to rest for at least half an hour to clean the air around himself/herself or go to a spring to wash up. Either or both actions will ensure that bad luck will either evaporate or washed away. This ensures safety for the members of his/her family from infection with bad luck.

Victims of murder are always buried at sunrise along periphery of the community designated by the elders. Every male person in community must be present at the burial. A pig is butchered to be cooked for men to eat in any of the public gathering places. No meat from the ritual may be taken home by any of the men. To do so will invite bad luck to befall their families.

The family then engages the services of an old man known to be knowledgeable in the prescribed observances for murders. The old man guides the family in their activities and observations so that further bad luck will not befall them. The family in return must provide rice and meat to the old man the whole year round for his services.

The old man while in their “employ” is expected to observe a clean life for the whole year. This means he must never drink liquor, eat dog meat or any other meat from the wakes of other people, attending social gatherings. He must all butcher a chicken each time the moon changes shape. In other words, he is in total employ of the bereaved family

which has to provide for all his personal needs and the chickens he has to butcher as prescribed.

The rituals for murdered person are very expensive. This explains why some people who cannot afford all the required animals to be butchered, opt to do the ordinary death and burial ritual.

rites of victims of accident

The observations done for the regular wake are also done for victims of accidents, except that only woman and children eat the meat from animals butchered during the wake. It is believed that for men to partake of the meat served during this particular wake would be detrimental to them as the stronger gender. Being a victim of an accident is perceived as a sign of weakness. Men must be strong.

Fatek

It is a practice that has ended but it is seen to old women of Bontoc. It is a tattoo art on the hand of old women that beautifies the body and it looks good performing with traditional dance. A man or women without "fatek" uses oil with pounded charcoal and spread it to their body parts. Fatek is not only an art of designs, but it symbolizes more on Bontoc.



The Last Frontier of Tattoo Art.

Ref.: <http://thefiveamchat.blogspot.dk/2012/10/traditional-burial-practices-of-bontoc.html>

Look more here: www.burial.philippineculture.ph and www.ethnicgroups.philippineculture.ph