



Persistence of the Duwaa Kaja: Medical Implications of an Ancestral Rite

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In the Southern Philippines, the practice of an ancestral rite called pagkaja is seen to permeate the lives of some members of Tausug society. This rite is a homage to the ancestors, a mechanism for the removal of misfortunes and illnesses believed to be caused by the ancestors, and a fulfilment of a traditional pact called janji. This study presents the nature, performance, and persistence of pagkaja, and argues that its persistence is deeply rooted in tradition and is difficult to breach. This study also argues that the polygynous Tausug marriage perpetuates the rite, the fear of ancestors' wrath construed in a phenomenon called sukut, as a vehicle for the continuative performance of the rite, and finally the medical benefits derived which contribute to its continuance.

Key words: *Sukut, pagkaja, janji, ubat, pagpudji.*

Introduction

Studies on health, healing and the living dead in cultural traditions of simple and traditional societies often reflected the indispensability and utility of rituals. Rituals such as rites of passage from boyhood to manhood, the rendering of bridewealth in the conduct of marriage, botched circumcision, and even failure to fulfil ancestors' wishes rendered in dreams often linked the living with dead ancestors (Bogopa 2010, 1-7). Geertz (1973) posited that human beings in the conduct of rituals do not only convey things with the use of words, but also with actions through rituals and ritual objects which convey meanings understood by the community practising such rituals. In primitive societies, for example, human beings do their day as well as simple ceremonial rituals because the need of reasserting tribal morale and its cosmic conditions shall constantly be felt, resulting in the persistence of such rituals (ibid).

The persistence of an ancestral rite in modern times attributes its function to the members of society practising such a ceremony. Durkheim (1975) viewed ritual as a vehicle by which

members of the moral community were brought together as a group, necessarily for the formation of religion. In a study on the relationship between rites and historicity Geaneă (2005, 349-61) argued that the need of "unforgetting" the ancestors was a fundamental need of humans, and this involves memorialization through ritual commemoration. In the same vein, Morioka (1984, 201-13) was in his study on Japanese ancestor worship led to posit that the continuative practice of rituals is due to the following functions: status legitimization, stabilization of inter-generational relationships, motivational strengthening for household continuation, and unification of kin. Among the Buryats of Mongolia, ancestors are propitiated in the aspiration for the removal of poverty and addressing bad luck and life's misfortunes believed to be caused by "origin spirits" neglected during the state suppression of religion under socialism (Buyandelgeriyn 2007, 127-47). The Buryats believed that the vengeance of the ancestors caused their present miseries (ibid). In some villages of Central Japan even fires, droughts and earthquakes were thought to be caused by resentful spirits (Oyler 2006, 90-18). Remembrance of distant ancestors through the performances of rituals predicated ancestral veneration in the Irish context (Butler 2015, 94-18).

Artifacts such as altars and monuments represent reverence toward the living dead (ibid). In ritual, the ancestors are neither forgotten nor neglected, thus paving the way for a smooth relationship with the dead and the perceived preclusion of misfortunes in life. A harmonious relationship between the living and the dead is aspired to in marriage rituals in some traditional societies. Linking the newly married couple with the living dead is manifested through such practice as the presentation of the newlywed at the tomb of ancestors. Among the Tausug practitioners of the *pagkaja* rite, the introduction of the couple in the ancestors' tomb is a legitimization of marriage by the ancestors, apart from the legitimization of marriage by the solemnizing officer or Imam. Similarly, among the Hakka of Sarawak, Malaysia, newlyweds are required to present themselves at the tomb of the groom's ancestors, thereby introducing the bride to the groom's genealogy (Chai 2013, 35-47). The Hakka believed that the ancestors are there to bless them with children, thereby ensuring the propagation of lineage, to have a union devoid of troubles and as a safeguard against future malady in life (ibid).

The continuance of rituals is not confined to the social merits derived thereby, but also to the perceived medical benefits that rituals effectuated. Traditional healing practices have been used to redress ailments believed to be caused by supernatural agents as well as sickness brought about by personalistic etiology of diseases (Foster and Anderson, 1978) and by the supernatural causation of illnesses (Murdock, 1980). Among the Tausug *pagkaja* practitioners, the ancestral rite of the *kaja* has been observed to persist until the present day. Its persistence has been due to the function it served, as *ubat* or cure. *Ubat* in the Tausug lexicon is medicine, and in anthropological parlance, this may be translated as the panacea of illnesses, as the rite is construed to address broad symptoms of bodily ailments encompassed in the state of *sukut*. Amidst the influence of western medicine, marginalized sectors of Philippine society such as



indigenous peoples often rely on indigenous knowledge systems and practices known to them for addressing illnesses.

Methodology

This ethnographic study was anchored in the three commonly employed methods in anthropological research: Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Participant-Observation. A total of 14 participants was purposively selected, four of whom are Imams or shamans of the rite. All participants profess the Islamic faith and are migrants from the Sulu Archipelago who, because of the law and order situation of their homeland settled in the relatively safer place of Sitio Panubigan, Barangay Balagunan, Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte. The four shamans are also migrants from Sulu who are authorized to solemnize the *Duwaa Kaja* or the pagkaja rite by the Sultan of Sulu. The *Sulat Gulalan* or the Certificate of Appointment legitimizes this authority to celebrate rituals. Done intermittently, the author's exposure in Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte, began in December 2013 and ended in March 2015. A period of one year is the minimum requirement for fieldwork in his Ph.D. studies. Repetitive in-depth interviews were done intermittently to secure as many data as possible. He convened an FGD, and this served as another venue for data gathering, validation of data gathered during the KII. He started his investigation with a visual observation in December 2013. In an informal meeting, he made my intentions known to a respected former MNLF commander of the area. He also had a small group gathering with the Barangay Chairman of the community and four other tribal leaders of Panubigan. Proper protocol was observed, such as the rendering of the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) before each interview. Establishing rapport with the entire community was begun in December of 2013, and coupled with field observations. He observed the physical arrangement of houses especially the northward orientation of their main doors as this is indicative of the practice of old, that the main doors of practitioners oriented toward the mountain and the north. He also took photos of the sacred tombs distinguished by the presence of a *luhul* or cloth canopy, ritual objects such as *bhai bhai* or miniature houses and garments.

Research Site

The research locale for the study is Sitio Panubigan of Barangay Balagunan, Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte. Siocon is a six-hour bus ride from Zamboanga City. To get to Panubigan, one takes a ten-minute motorcycle ride from Poblacion, Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte to Sitio Dolungin, Barangay Matiag and a *banca* (a motorized water vessel) ride of average five minutes from the shores of Dolungin.

Sitio Panubigan is home to more than one hundred households only, and the majority of the residents are Tausugs. Most residents are migrants from Sulu who transferred to this place because of the volatile peace situation in the 1970s. The population of Barangay Balagunan is

1,812 (2015 census). Sitio Panubigan provided peaceful living and economic activities for the migrants to this area, such as small-scale fishing and small-scale commercial fishing opportunities. As the Siocon Bay has been a bountiful source of different species of fish ranging from large catch such as tuna, bonito, skipjack, sailfish, barracuda, snapper to smaller fish such as mackerel, flying fish, sardines, and anchovies, small-scale fishers thrive in this area. This ecological niche as in many seas in the Philippines is also abundant in shellfish such as clams, crabs, prawns, and lobsters. One can still find wildfowls such as the *labuyo*, and coconut crabs in this ecological niche. The attraction to this source of livelihood becomes a determinant for migrants from Sulu in permanently establishing residence in Sitio Panubigan. While fishing is one primary source of income, an equivalent mode the residents engaged in is farming. However, this is for only those individuals who have titled farmlands or those who have at least farms by "claims."

In this sitio, farmlands are mountainous and mostly planted with coconuts, a product that yields an income twice a year. Cassava is the staple cultivated all year round. Farming becomes necessary as the fishing cycle is subject to the vagaries of nature. All residents in this locale profess Islam, and many are adherents to the *duwaa* particularly the *duwaa kaja*. Having migrated from Sulu, they carry with them the belief and practice of old that non-practitioners consider as superstition. Although they have established residence and engaged in economic ventures in this area, many go on pilgrimage to Sulu. As far as the *kaja* ritual is concerned as it is home to the shrines of their ancestors. Some practitioners who are economically dire or too weak to make the pilgrimage have opted to have the solemnization of the *kaja* rite under the care of Salip Karon in Santa Maria, Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte. That is relatively near as it takes only about 15 minutes in a banca ride from the coast of Sitio Panubigan. Other *duwaa* such as the *duwaa pataas* and *duwaa salamat* are periodically performed in Panubigan by the any of the *tawmaas* authorized by the Sultan of Sulu.

Results

Some Perspectives on Dreams, Rituals, Illness, and Healing

In traditional societies, illnesses are attributed to supernatural and natural causations (Mordock, 1980), to causations governed by personalistic and naturalistic systems (Foster & Anderson, 1978), and also to the aetiologies of illnesses (Morley & Wallis, 1980). Healing of diseases revolves around these parameters: dreams and dream interpretation, divination, and rituals. Among the Sama Dilaut of the southern Philippines, dreams of ancestors going hungry and in search of a particular food indicates which food to offer in the ritual of the *pagomboh* (Jumala, 2011). Dreaming of ancestors is interpreted as communicués, and most Africans found difficulty in ignoring this phenomenon as often dreams may reveal impending injuries or may convey the message that ancestors are there to comfort the living or provide words of wisdom (Fairley 2003, 541-65). Ancestral dreams may also carry complaints of the dead ancestors to



the descendants about being neglected or not keeping their tombs clean (Astuti and Harris 2008, 714-30). In Madagascar, enduring dreams of the living dead are construed to be a serious matter, and this necessitates food offering and rituals to appease the spirits (ibid). Among the Xhosa, dreaming about the dead served as the ultimate evidence of the existence of their ancestors and can influence their daily lives (Hirst 2005, 1-22). In other words, dreams manifest that the ancestors continue to be ever-present. In the worldview of the Sama Dilaut of Zamboanga City, Philippines, the ancestors or *omboh* are believed to have not left the human plane, and although they are invisible to humans, their presence is nonetheless made known through dreams (Jumala 2015). Consequently, the failure of the living to fulfill ancestor wishes rendered in these dreams can cause grave illness among the practitioners. Similarly, in the worldview of many cultural groups in South Africa, the belief that the spirit realm can influence health aspects of the living is predicated on the notion that the ancestors live on and are capable of such influence (Bogopa 2010, 1-7).

As the ancestors are construed to be conveyers of messages, providers of protection against illnesses and social malady, renderers of some divine favours or charismatic grace, they also wanted something in return from their living descendants. They expect the living to uphold tradition and render propitiation periodically (Munthali, 2006, 360-70). When ancestors are angered they may withdraw their protection making the living descendants prone to malevolent spirits, and when this happens, the living sees the need to perform conciliatory rituals to calm the disgruntled ancestors (Machinga 2011, 1-8). Hence, the need for rituals. Religious ceremonies then become essential in appeasing angered and forgotten ancestors as in the ritual drama of public rites where the invisible become visible in real or symbolic form, the forgotten are remembered, the unspoken spoken and the hidden known (Turner 1975). It is also in rituals where a plethora of descendants' and ancestors' needs show presumable realization. For rituals to have dramatic effects worthy of re-enactment and to produce imprints on the psyche of adherents' memory, the need for ritual artifacts and shrines become essential. Memorials in the African belief system are spaces construed as abodes of deities, spirits, and ancestors, and adherents must treat them with awe, fear, and respect, and maintain cleanliness as this is reflective of their religiosity and identity (Ezenweke 2017, 45-56). These sacred places are also venues for the promotion of various social and religious activities in many African societies (ibid). Shrines are physical features of sacred spaces that are construed as homes of divinities (Ngozi 2016, 1-16) and may come in the many forms such as burial grounds, ancestor tombs and temples, and landscapes such as mountains and hills. As shrines are often construed as abodes of ancestral spirits and divinities and therefore sacred, these spaces the adherents believed possess therapeutic functions (Pirani 2009). In rural Punjab society, the primary features of the shrines revolve around spiritual healing and satisfaction as in these shrines is the recital of the *duwaa* or prayer of supplication that provided the practitioners with a connection with God and the ancestors (Khan and Sajid 2011, 66-77). These shrines also gave a sense of satisfaction as practitioners readily love to spend as much time they can spare in

these shrines (ibid). Sacred tombs, rituals, and ritual objects are intrinsic in Tausug *pagkaja*. Among the adherents *pagkaja*, the *tampat* or tomb of holy persons becomes the shrine. Healing is also the aspiration, for the performance of the rite and satisfaction is felt, since the performance of the ritual means the fulfillment of an obligation to the ancestors.

Who the Practitioners are

Revealed in this study are four sets of practitioners. The first set of practitioners are those who claimed genealogy to Tuwan Makdum or *parkatan*. They are those practitioners who claimed ancestry to the seven shariiefs or *salip* who, according to the “Kissa sin Tau Nakauna” (the legend of the first people in Sulu) first preached Islam in Sulu. They also introduced the rites of supplication, and the *pagkaja*, being the first rite introduced by Makdum, becomes the primordial rite as it precedes all the other rituals. They belonged to the *kasalipan/pangkatan*, which in the past became a highly regarded social status. The second set of practitioners is the *kadatuan* or royalty. They are those who claimed lineage to the sultans or royal blood under the sultanates of Sulu. The third set of practitioners is those who by affinity to either of the *kasalipan* and *kadatuan* became practitioners. They are those individuals who, by marriage to a practitioner automatically transformed himself into a practitioner. The fourth set of practitioners are those individuals who by circumstance *partook* of the ritual food, thus converting them into the status of the practitioner because of the construct that the *pagkaja* is contagion or *makalamin*.

The Ritual of the Pagkaja

The Tausug *pagkaja* is a rite performed for showing respect and reverence toward the ancestors, remembering the ancestors and as a mode of healing as ancestors are believed to be the supernatural causes of some illnesses. This construct predicates that the ancestors had been dismayed in the actuation of the living descendants. Sicknesses from fever to shock or even insanity may involve the ancestors. The fulfillment of a pact or *janji* marks obedience among the adherents. Failure to fulfill the sacred agreement shall result in the state of *sukut* or conditions construed as a demand for the payment of debt toward ancestors. These conditions characterize misfortunes, recurring illnesses, and even death.

The *pagkaja* ritual involves five essentials: the prognosis of illnesses, the sacred space, the ritual food, the ritual prayer, and the ritual dining.

The Prognosis of Illnesses

The ritual of the *pagkaja* begins with the prognosis of the state of *sukut*. Revealed in the author’s fieldwork are four (4) methods of prediction: prognosis by a medicine man or by a

mangungubat, forecast with the utility of the *taadjul muluk*, diagnosis by way of the *timbalun* and finally, prognosis by *lambungan*. The highly regarded method is the *taadjul muluk* or *tadjul muluk*. This procedure does not mean, however, that the utility of the book is the most effective. Instead, it is the pronouncement of the shaman, as he is the medium by which ancestors' wrath becomes revealed.

Once the prognosis of *sukut* becomes final, the ailing person has two options. One is to have the ritual performed soon after all the needed expenditures are at hand. The other option is to make a *tanggu* or a pledge to the ancestors that a practitioner shall have the ritual performed in an indefinite future when the petitioner has saved money to finance the ceremony. In a community where poverty is salient, the *tangguh* serves as a mechanism by which the practitioner can bargain the time until he can fulfill the prescribed mandate. The average expenditure for the performance of the *kaja* ritual at the time of my fieldwork was between 10,000 pesos to 15,000 pesos which are a burden for many to shoulder, hence, the need for the *tanggu*. This bargaining with the ancestor manifest by hanging an egg or several eggs wrapped in a white cloth and attached to the corner of the house. This act served as a constant reminder of his promise to the ancestors.

The Sacred Space

The *tampat* or a holy grave of an ancestor is central to the performance of the *pagkaja*. Tombs of the *salip* in the practitioners' belief system are construed as tombs of holy persons and are believed to possess *barakah* (supernatural powers) and given utmost respect and reverence by the living descendants. Differentiated from a common grave, a tomb of a *salip* exhibits a canopy made of white, green or yellow cloth and a cloth wrapped around its grave marker. In other words, some of these tombs became enshrined. However, not all tombs of *salip* elevate to the status of a shrine. Three determinants attribute to the sacredness of a grave: *barakah* (charismatic grace and supernatural powers), *mamud* (mound forming without human intervention), and *lunas* (cure of ailments). *Barakah* manifests in mystical ways such as fulfillment of the practitioner's wishes or the removal of misfortunes.

Lunas (relief or cure) derived from the graves of *salip* even by simple visitation or beseeching the person entombed, which also defined the sacredness of a tomb, as worthy of enshrining. If this attribute becomes established by family members or lineage, then the one buried becomes worthy of *pagpudji* or homage. Hence, the grave shall not be defiled by the descendants in any manner but is kept clean and attended. New *luhul* (canopy over the tomb) and new *pis* (cloth wrapped around the grave marker) must replace the old when they become discoloured. Once a grave becomes sanctified and legitimized by the immediate descendants of the entombed, this transforms into a *tampat*. The sanctity is also shared by other practitioners though they

belong to different ancestry. After all, they are believed to have descended from the seven preachers or the first missionaries to Sulu.

The Ritual Food

The procurement of ritual food ingredients and utensils necessary for the preparation of the ritual dishes and food preparation follows the prognosis of illnesses in the ritual process. The food ingredients include eleven chickens or one goat, a half sack of white rice, sugarcane or brown sugar, coconuts, turmeric, ginger, eggs. Attendants, known as the *sabi* and the *magaadjal* become employed in the preparation of the ritual dish. The *sabi* (male attendants) and *magaadjal* (female attendants) become responsible for putting together the ingredients of the ritual food. Male attendants are responsible for fetching water, procuring firewood, coconuts and coconut leaves that are essential in the making of the *tambusa* (small basket/food tray), and the extraction of the juices of the sugarcane. Female attendants or the *magaadjal* are assigned to weave the coconut leaves into food containers, cleaning the *panggung* (ritual cookhouse) and finally the cooking of the ritual food and the arranging of the ritual dish in the *tambusa*. All these tasks had to be done a day before the *duwaa kaja* or the devotional prayer. The *magaadjal* (female attendants) according to Imam Assidin and other informants must not be on their menopausal stage, as menstruating women are construed to be unclean. Furthermore, Imam Assidin asserted that women knew of this condition such that they refrain from attending the ritual if their period is about to occur, even if they are not members of *magaadjal*. Very young girls who have not yet reached their menarche may serve as assistants to the *magaadjal*. The interplay between cleanliness and ritual is characteristic in many animistic societies worldwide. Where the bride or the wife suddenly had her menstruation, as sometimes this organic phase is unpredictable due to irregularity in her period, postponement of the ritual is inevitable. Even sexual relations are prohibited twelve hours before the *kaja* ceremony. This prohibition is for fear that their presence may render the rite unclean thereby displeasing the ancestors. The preparation of the main dish called *pyanggang manuk* starts by chanting a prayer over a chicken, followed by the slaughtering, gutting, cleaning and finally cutting the middle of the chest section, and opening it in a butterfly manner. A paste, known as *pamapa* which is a mixture of ground burnt coconut meat, turmeric, and ginger coats the entire chicken. Salt does not form part of the seasoning of any dough or dish. According to Maymuna, a practitioner in this locale, salt is distasteful to the spirits. Coconuts are husked and grated then squeezed by hand to extract the milk. Then, the coated eleven chickens are boiled with the coconut milk but just enough to tenderize the meat. Roasting the chicken is the final stage of the cooking. The roasted chickens are now called *pyanggang manuk*. Traditionally, the extracting of juices from stalks of sugarcane is through the utility of a device called the *pagiintusan*. In some cases, nowadays, instead of sugarcanes, brown sugar has been the substitute for sweetening the *haluwa*, one of the ritual dishes. It is a pastry made of ground

white rice that requires sweetening. According to my informants, “*dayih dayih da makabi sukal dayng sin tubu*” (sugar can be easily bought compared to sugarcanes).

The *panggung* (the ritual cookhouse) is built out of local materials and located near the tampat. It is an open structure except for one side where the hearth situates. The *pagiintusan* is a vital artifact in the performance of the *kaja* ritual, as it is the traditional device used to extract sugar juice from sugarcane. Sugarcane is essential in the preparation of the ritual food.

The journey to the sacred place and the tediousness in the food preparation translate into an act of sacrifice and homage in the ritual process. These acts are also felt by the attendants as they are part of the sacrifice, and in their worldview, they are part of the appeasement of the ancestors. The passing of time may have created an adaptation in the procurement of sugar such as the purchase and utility of brown sugar for one reason or the other. But in Sulu, the usage of the *panggung* and the traditional methods in food preparation persisted as these were the ways of the ancestors, and must be performed by conventional means. The persistence of the utilization of this traditional method anchors in fear of failure in the ritual process which may displease the ancestors. Hence, the strict observance of the methods of old becomes pervasive.

The Ritual Prayer

In those days, the recitation of the *duwaa kaja* was from six o'clock in the morning till six o'clock in the afternoon (Rixhon, 1972). Today, the reciting of the *duwaa* comes around ten o'clock in the morning or when the imam calls for it. Recited in Arabic, the *imam* begins the *duwaa* by mentioning the spirits of the first seven preachers. In all cases, the imam who initiates the rite belongs to the genealogy of the *kasalipan* and in most cases of the newlywed. Therefore, he knows the names of the ancestors beseeched upon in the *duwaa*. Also, the *usba* (relatives of from the father side) and *waris* (relatives from the mother side) of the newlywed provide the other names to beseech.

Embedded in the supplication is the *pangayu-ngayu* or plea. This plea translates as seeking a blessing for the success of a marriage, the procreation of a child, protection from illnesses, prosperity in trade, and good fortune. Also embedded in the ritual prayer is the renewal of the *janji* (pact) between the ancestors and the practitioners and the pledge to continuously perform the rite in the days to come. Solemnness characterized the delivery of the *duwaa*.

The Ritual Dining

Absolute silence characterizes the ritual dining. Tabooed is the utterance of even a single word. Sign language becomes the *mode* in communicating during this entire process. Those present

merely take and consume their share of the ritual food. The *lalabutan* (food offering to the spirits) and the *pagjajamuhan* (food partaken by those present in the ritual and those at home) are the same. This offering consists of the *pyanggang manuk*, a bowl of white rice, a slice of egg and *haluwa* a pastry resembling a Maja Blanca made of ground white rice topped with the jelly made out of the cooked sugarcane juices. Served in a banana leaf, the eating of this pastry is by hand. Salt shall not be part of the condiment as it is distasteful to the spirits. Eaten in total silence this mode of consumption is reflective of the solemnity of the ritual process. The *magaadjal* arranges the *pagjajamuhan* on top of an improvised table made of bamboo. Once the food is ready, total silence dominates throughout the ritual dining. In the days of old, coconut shells serve as bowls and plates. This manner replicates how Makdum ate his meals in the ancient past.

The Persistence of the Pagkaja ***The Polygynous Tausug Marriage***

The author argued that the marriage type among the Tausug attributes to the persistence of the *pagkaja* ritual. Tausug marriage is polygynous, where a man may take as many as four wives within the limit prescribed in Islam. While monogamous marriage is normative, polygyny becomes the ideal among those who belonged to the *kadatuan* or royalty and the *kasalipan* or nobility especially among the rich. Although social stratification in the present Tausug society characterized the classification by economic standing, such as the upper class down to the lower level, the ancient strata described by the royalty and noble descent still pervades their identity. In other words, the preference for endogamous marriage still permeates the practitioners' ethos, that is, a practitioner marrying another practitioner.

The union of a *salip* man to *salip* woman procreates offspring who are all *salip* regardless of their gender. Because of the perceived purity of bloodline and the highly regarded status, this was the preferred marriage. As such, this preference inculcated into the minds of generations who followed that, in turn, preserved the fulfillment of the traditional pact and hence the persistence of the rite. Through the process of enculturation, the importance of the *janji* became established. From the 1400s down to present day, the six hundred years of the performance of the *pagkaja* and the construct of the *janji*, from the emic perspective of the practitioners became a social reality.

Further, the author argued endogamy as an agent for the persistence of the rite manifest in the following instances. A marriage of a *salip* man to a non-*salip* woman procreates offspring who are all *salip* by the noble descent of the father. On the other hand, the union of a *salip* woman to a non-*salip* man procreates offspring with a social class known as *buburanun*, which is still a highly regarded status but is lower to the *salip* social stratum.

The Medical Benefits of the Pagkaja

Finally, the author argued the medical benefits derived from the *pagkaja* as an agent for the perpetuation of the rite. In the foreground, the fulfillment of an old agreement, the polygynous behaviour of Tausug marriage and the ritual as contagion, demonstrated why the practitioners continuously performed the ceremony amidst its dismissal by non-practitioners as superstition. Also, the fear of ancestors' wrath felt by the practitioners as powerful, and existent in the state of *sukut* reinforced the continuative performance of the rite. Still, another reason for the persistence of the *pagkaja* is the construct that it can remove illnesses. In other words, it is a panacea of diseases. These illnesses take the form of *significant sicknesses such as daran pagkapakpakan* (miscarriages), *magkalawa ha panayu* (erratic behaviour), *magkarupang* (insanity), and *magkabuta* (blindness). Minor diseases such as *ugud* (skin diseases), *daran pagtangis* (tantrums), *sungut* (asthma), *daran magkapunung* (recurring loss of consciousness), also become subjects of healing.

Case # 1: A case of daran pagkapakpakan (recurring miscarriage)

Farzina, a lady professor of the Western Mindanao State University, Zamboanga City commented “*dumatung da in waktu sukutun kaw* (the time shall come for the reckoning) when asked about the consequence of curtailing the performance). Her time of reckoning was on her first and second miscarriages. Fear of a third miscarriage came to the attention of her mother who advised her to perform the rite. Unknown to her, she belongs to the genealogy of the *kasalipan* or *pangkat*. Her mother, a devout practitioner, was instrumental in convincing her of the behaviour of *sukut* and finally her submission to the performance of the rite. But being educated and married to a Catholic, she shunned this phenomenon and dismissed this as superstition until she became the recipient of this dreaded event in her life. Her husband, a devout Catholic and a professor in the same university saw nothing wrong with submitting to the ritual. After the performance of the ceremony, her third pregnancy was fruitful, and her child is now in her third grade in the same school. Strange as this may be, Frazina now believes in the phenomenon of *sukut* and the efficacy of the *pagkaja* ritual. In the course of my fieldwork, there were two other cases of *pagkapakpakan* (miscarriages) I accounted.

Case # 2: Tantrums, skin disease and asthma

Recurring illnesses confirmed by the shaman characterize the medical conditions occasioned by supernatural causations. Among these are recurring conditions such as *ugud* (skin disease), *daran pagtangis* (tantrums in infants), and *sungut* (asthma). Related by Daya, an informant from Siocon, ZDN, is the *pagpabayhuh* or the presentation of the child at the *tampat* of her ancestors in Pasil, Sulu, to introduce her child to the ancestors. Recognition of the child by the ancestors posits protection against illnesses caused by ancestral spirits. Once the ancestors

recognized their descendant, the practitioners hoped that they would not inflict sickness or mishap on the child in the future. In other words, the presentation is preclusion from the future medical malady. In the words of Ansali, *hangkan da di maig in pagkaja pasal ubat yan* (the reason why this ritual is persistent is that it is medicine).

On a hill in Karawan, Indanan, Sulu are three tombs of three *salip* whose names I reckoned are results of labelling brought about by the propensities of healing three ailments; *sungut* (asthma), *ugud* (skin diseases) and *tangis* (tantrum). One is called *apu sungut* and children presented at the tomb are those with asthmatic conditions. According to Daya, many asthmatic children found the cure in the tomb of *apu sungut*. Otherwise, the *pagpabayhuh* or the presentation of the child at the *tampat* is meaningless and would not have persisted till present. The second *tampat* is the tomb of *apu ugud* whose healing power is the cure for skin diseases. The third belonged to a female *salip* who spent most of her life in grief, and that is why her descendants called the entombed as *apu tangis*.

Apu translates into grandparent and *tangis* as a tantrum. Accordingly, practitioners who had babies exhibiting outbursts find relief of this problem upon the presentation of their child at the tomb of *apu tangis*. Construed by the practitioners, it is that the ancestors are the causative agents of these medical ailments and the presenting of children at their graves translates into the preclusion and removal of illnesses. The *pagpabayhu* is as tiresome as the *kaja* because of the pilgrimage to those sacred places. But it is not as costly as the *kaja* ritual as the food offerings can be simple, depending of course on the economic status of the practitioner making the presentation. The prayers of supplication are not as long as the *duwaa kaja*, and accordingly, what mattered was that the child presented was thereby recognized by the ancestors. Healing is believed to follow as the ancestors now know the child and shall remove the ailment as their ire became placated by the presentation at their tombs.

Case # 3: A case of pagkadupang (insanity)

Harim, an informant, related the fact of a state of *pagkadupang* (insanity) brought about by *sukut* that happened to his brother. This is the most severe case I learned in the course of my fieldwork. Harim's brother was a regular and jolly person, but their family did not practice the ritual any more, due to poverty. Their economic status forced them to hide their identity as practitioners, and for many years nothing unusual happened to any of their family members. Their curtailing of the practice known as *paglupus* (to curtail the rite) or *pagtapuk* (to hide one's identity as a practitioner) saved them from the economics of the performance of the ritual, and the stigma of being a practitioner who could not fulfill the obligations relative to the rite. All went well until his brother exhibited strange behavior that worsened, forcing them to shackle his brother to a coconut tree. This condition went for months until a shaman diagnosed the sickness. The verdict was *sukut*, and according to Harim, they have to loan money to perform

the ritual of the *pagkaja*. After the performance of the rite, his brother exhibited recovery, and eventually, the symptoms of insanity vanished. His brother is now a non-commissioned officer in the Philippine Army.

Case # 4: A case of swollen limbs

Isnira, a migrant from Indanan, Sulu, established residence in Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte in the 1980s where she and her family thrive in the coastal area of Balagunan, Siocon. In the year 2000, she complained of a swollen hind limb that the medical doctors of Siocon diagnosed as arthritis. Accordingly, she religiously took her medicine for many months to no avail. As her condition did not improve, she reckoned that an alternative indigenous healing method could be functional. She consulted a shaman in the area, who gave the verdict of *sukut*.

The advice of the shaman was to make the pilgrimage to Sulu and perform the ritual at the shrines of her ancestors. After incurring the amount of money needed for the journey, she had the performance of the *duwaa*. A few days after her return, she felt the condition improved.

Today, this crutch merely served as a reminder to Isnira that the ancestors are sometimes displeased with the actions of descendants. When appeased, they are there to protect the living, but when angered they render *sukut* to their living descendants.

Case # 5: A case of manic behaviour

Revealed to me in Siocon was a case of *magkalawa ha panayu*, construed as losing control of oneself that in medical science is likened to manic behavior. Reported by a mother, her son suddenly exhibited erratic behaviour while still in his high school years. He did not attend his classes. Instead, he merely roamed around the campus. This behaviour persisted until it came to the attention of the school principal, who advised them to submit their child for medical assessment. The medical doctors of Siocon did not find any organic cause of the behaviour. Further, they advised the parents to take him to Zamboanga City Medical Center for a complete check-up. Similarly, the doctors of the second hospital did not find anything wrong with the individual and just gave relaxant pills and anti-depressants. My informant then decided to consult the shaman who rendered the diagnosis of *sukut*. They decided to travel to Indanan, Sulu and performed the ritual at the shrine of their ancestors. A few weeks later, the child was on his way to recovery, and at the time of my fieldwork, he was in his junior years in college.

Aside from the performance of the *duwaa kaja* were other requisites such as the building of three *bhai bhai* (miniature houses), provisioning of a healing room, and some garments.

Each *bhai bhai* contained a set of apparel, a *sawwal* (trouser) and upper clothing. These represent the clothes that the *jin* spirits wear while inside the miniature houses. The three small houses translate into residences of the three ancestors construed as protectors of the patient against future medical malady. These fetishes also translate as modes of satisfying the ancestors' ire. Accordingly, providing the *bhai bhai* reflects devotion and will show the ancestors that they are welcome in the residences of the living descendants. The colours of white, yellow and green are the colours for the ancestral spirits. Similarly, in my study of the Sama Dilaut *pagomboh*, I observed the same colours in their *lumah lumah* (miniature houses) for the *omboh* (ancestral spirits). The sharing of identical colours and the construct of providing small dwellings may be attributed to cultural borrowing or acculturation. The *bhai bhai* of the Tausug and the *lumah lumah* of the Sama Dilaut also translate as residences of the spirits of foetuses in cases of miscarriages. Instead of burying a foetus, a coffin-like box became its resting place and placed inside the miniature house. Members of the family occasionally and symbolically feed the spirit of the foetus.

This symbolic feeding is in remembrance of a family member. Providing food translates into pleasing the spirit of the foetus for fear of *sukut* as the spirit of the foetus now belongs to the realm of the ancestors, and may cause medical malady when neglected. Among the Sama Dilaut, the fear of the soul of a foetus equates to the fear of the *omboh* (ancestors), thus when a living sibling acquires new apparel, for instance, the mother must sew a tiny garment for the foetus and place this inside the *lumah lumah* (Jumala, 2011).

In some cases, a shaman may require a *bilik paguubatan* or healing room. This room also serves as the patients' bedroom. The *bilik paguubatan*, according to Isnira, provides the patient comfort and assurance that the ancestors are there to protect him. In the same manner, the utility of such a place was existent in Taluksangay, Zamboanga City, where clients are prayed over by the shaman.

Case # 6: A case of nearing blindness

The case of Ansali exhibited an illness that runs in his genealogy; *magkabutah* (a condition of going blind). Some fifteen years ago he consulted one of the eye physicians from Manila who came to Zamboanga City in a Medical Caravan for the less fortunate. Accordingly, his diagnosis revealed a condition that needed surgery. But he could not afford the amount of one hundred thousand pesos for laser surgery. A family member advised him to consult a healer, the *shaman* of Mampang, Zamboanga City, and the latter pronounced the condition of *sukut*. Then the ritual of the *kaja* became imminent, and the performance followed. *Manjari, sakali yaun pag batih ku sin maynaat, maytah ba yaun, dimayaw na in pangitah ku* (then after waking up the following morning, why on earth can I see better already) exclaimed Ansali in an interview at the Western Mindanao State University. Incidentally, *pagkabutah* was also the



case of her sister whose performance was too late, as she was already blind before the visit to the shaman. A week after the performance of the rite his vision returned to normal.

Conclusions

The continuative practice of ancestral rites in the Tausug society reflects the interface of a belief system rooted in tradition, with modernity that dismisses the former as superstition, devoid of function and meaning. This belief, however, is felt by the practitioners as a cultural reality and not a product of superstitious construction, as the rite of the *pagkaja* serves many functions. From the ethos of the Tausug practitioners, the ritual is a way of showing homage towards the ancestors, a form of manifesting obedience to the will of the ancestors predicated on an old pact, as preclusion from misfortunes and finally as *ubat* or panacea of illnesses. The legitimacy of the *pagkaja* derives not only from the continuative practice of the rite or tradition but also the granting of authority for the solemnization of these rites by the sultan of Sulu through the *Sulat Gulalan*. All these benefits are real and not superstitious in any manner as perceived by the practitioners.

While the supernatural causations of illness may seem unsound in medical science and the healing methods of healers and shamans are not scientific methods in addressing sickness, the field of medical anthropology and the anthropology of religion provides merits and explanations for the persistence of these rites. The phenomenon of *sukut*, which is peculiar only to the practitioners of the Tausug *pagkaja*, reflects a syndrome defined within the Tausug culture that may qualify within the matrix of culturally bound diseases worldwide.

The interface between traditional and scientific methods in addressing illnesses may continuously undermine the former, but, as these rituals of healing still pervade simple societies worldwide. We cannot deny that this indigenous knowledge and these practices are functional and have a place in today's construct of holistic medicine. Inasmuch, as prayers formed part of man's religion, where God is the ultimate healer and saints are intercessors, the Tausug *pagkaja* reflects this similar phenomenon in life. Hence, it must be understood in the context of the practitioners' worldview.



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