



Body Rituals on Mental Health and Maladaptive Behavior during the Prehistoric Philippines

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Abstract: The geography of the Philippine archipelago is a reflection of the cultural diversity present in the Philippines specially its pre-historic past. Each of the islands in the Philippines represents a unique culture which is not comparable to the other nation or belief. These systems of beliefs answer a specific problem of the Filipinos specifically on the mental health care during that period. The introduction of the Spanish colonial mental system disregarded the importance of these body rituals of the Filipinos because of the lack of scientific value which was present on the European nation.

In this research, it will identify the different body rituals on mental health and maladaptive behavior during the prehistoric period. The researcher used historical data's which describe the early rituals on healing mental illness and the implementer of these rituals. Also, the relationship of the different spiritual world- gods/deity, Babaylan & Filipinos will be emphasized on this study which has a great value on the creation of these body rituals. The research concludes, there is a clear structured system of mental health and maladaptive behavior rituals that was practiced by the prehistoric Filipinos, with the guidance of the babaylan/catalonan who can understand and interpret the sign and symptoms which the local gods/deities reply on the prayers of the babaylan/catalonan if the Filipino will retain/regain his/her sanity through the positive or negative sign on the internal organ of the sacrificial animal. Also the Filipinos had a clear idea of the possible medicinal plant to cure for this mental suffering of the Filipinos which is readily available on their environment to prevent to worsen the mental aberration. And these practices of body rituals on mental health sustains the peace and order on the barangay and give a harmonious relationship between the local gods/deity and its people.

Key words: body rituals; mental illness; maladaptive behavior; babaylan; prehistoric Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines during its Spanish occupation, the Spanish government funded to create mental institutions namely Hospicio de San Jose and Hospicio de San Juan de Dios, to cure the increasing number of the *Dementes* or mentally ill patients during that period. These two major

mental health institutions provided the mental health care services in thirty-six province around the Philippines and other nationalities that live here (Paular, 1991)¹. Based on the data, patients were classified as the client's sex, the year the

¹Regino ,P. (1991). Mental Illness in the Spanish Colonial Period: 1865-1898.



client was reported to have manifested the maladaptive behavior, the clients' ethnic place of origin, and ethnic classification as Indio, Español peninsular, Español Filipino, Mestizo español, chino, or Sangley (Paular 1991).

The admission procedure on the *Dementes* was a collaboration of the different government agencies assigned on the peace and order of the pueblos during that time.² Also, based on Ramos 2014 study on the *Dementes* on late Spanish period, these institutions were only specialized in the mental illness and not in the physical health condition of the *Dementes* and limited information of healing them resulting for the *Dementes* to die inside the institution without proper health examinations due to the lack of expertise on the physical health medicine.

Overall, the Spanish government used a more scientific approach of curing the *Dementes* during the Spanish Period. They systematize the mental health procedure accompanied by the different provinces inside the Philippines and the data clearly stated that *Demente curado* who regained their sanity were allowed to go back to their families after the medication with the certification of the medical doctor of the Hospicios. But still, the fact that many of the *Dementes* died inside due to its lack of facilities and health knowledge is very visible.

Statement of the Problem

Since the Hospicios only existed in the late Spanish colonial period, the Filipinos had their own cultural body rituals that helped them to cure this type of phenomenon for a long period of time without any contact with European nation. This research will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the different Body Rituals on mental health during the pre-historic Philippines?
2. What are the medicines during the pre-historic Philippines which cured the mental illness of a person?
3. What are the relationships of the Prehistoric spiritual world on the process of body rituals for mentally ill patients?

²Ramos ,C. (2014). The Conditions of *Dementes* during Spanish Colonial Period: 1858-1898.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research is a historical research. This research used primary sources and secondary sources which discussed the different conditions, customs, belief and culture which occurred in the past. An attempt to establish the fact in order to understand the present problems and interpret the future of this historical event.

This research used early historical accounts of Spanish officials who observed the early health customs of the Filipinos on healing diseases. Primary sources regarding this matter is been translated by an accredited interpreter/translator in Spanish.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Art of the Tattooing: A Test of Mental Strength

One of the unique characteristics of the Austronesian people was the culture of tattooing on their skin as a part of their cultural involvement. In the context of the Philippines, tattoos were applied to men and women because generally, they considered it as an extension of a man's loincloth or a woman's skirt, as a form of clothing. And they considered tattooing rather than not because of the large religious value and cultural identity that was given to them.

Aside from being physical aesthetic for the Filipinos, it also reflects the roles in society, tribal identity, status, prestige, eligibility for marriage and for personal beauty of a Filipino (Wilcken)³. But many of us know, the spiritual beliefs were the main reason why many Filipinos preferred to put tattoo.

Tattooing was part of recognition of the manhood and personal accomplishments for men. For women, it conveys the beauty of the woman and promotion of fertility and the continuity of the family or village.

But the art of tattooing not only displays the accomplishment or manliness of the Filipino but also signifies the mental strength of the Filipino. The process of tattooing requires a lot of physical effort and mental stability to finish the

³Lande W. (2010). Filipino tattoos: ancient to modern.

whole process of tattooing. The Isneg legend of the Origin of Tattoos gives us the preview of the mental stability needed in order to surpass the process:

One day, a man named Halos-sab was sleeping. While he slept, he dreamt a very handsome man with tattooed forearms walking towards him. He asked Halos-sab if he would like to be admired and respected by his barriomates. Because of his wish for more respect, Halos-sab answered "yes". The man told Halos-sab how he could have tattoos on his arms like his. The man told Halos-sab he must first carefully fasten five to ten needles onto the end of a curved piece of unsplit rattan. Then he must collect carbon [charcoal] for burning another piece of rattan. Then he must take the tool and use it to make the design on his skin. Afterwards he should rub the carbon onto the wounds. He explained that when it healed the tattooed portion would be black. The dream man told him it would never wash off or change. The man further told Halos-sab that he must persevere so that when Haos-sab was able to kill any man, he would be well known as a brave man and as a man prepared to fight whenever provoked.⁴

Based on this legend, it motivates young to continue tattooing for personal development. During the process of tattooing, young male indicates his strong will to withstand the needles. This activity indicates, the young man's strength, courage and bravery. If he had survived the rigid physical and psychological test, it means he is capable of protecting his tribe.⁵ Also, it also serves as a basis for the elders if the young boy shows a capability for making knowledgeable decision since this is a type of test that also measures the mental stability of a young boy who wants to be a man or leader someday.

Overall, the process of tattooing serves not only as cultural and spiritual development, but also as a psychological test of the Filipino for young men. It serves as a pre-examination for the possible mental patient during that time that can cause disorder of the communities.

Therapeutic Rituals and Practice: Body Ritual and Medicinal Plants for Mental Illness

Even though the Filipino was not exposed to the different mental health knowledge of the European nation, their expertise on curing some of the mental illnesses was not a problem on the part of the Filipino due to the presence of the rich body rituals with different herbal medicine.

These herbal medicines are used as an alternative for chemical type of drugs which had some side-effects on the mental system of a human. These herbal plants are readily available on the local environment which they settled.

Miguel de Loarca mentioned that Filipino used different medicinal herbs to cure mental and health disease. Each native Filipino had an antidotes for every kind of poison. Loarca described the belief of medicinal plants to the anitos which the babaylan guided in this journey by the sea, for the fields and some for curing disease. This sacrifice was described by Loarca as follows:

"The mode of sacrifice was like that of the Pintados. They summoned a catalonan, who is the same as the baylan among the Pintados, that is, a priest. He offered the sacrifices, requesting from the anito whatever the people desired him to ask, and heaping up great quantities of rice, meat, and fish. His invocations lasted until the demon entered his body, when the catalonan fell into a swoon, foaming at the mouth. The Indians sang, drank, and feasted until the catalonan came to himself and told them to answer that the anito had given to him. If the sacrifice was in behalf of a sick person, they offered many golden chains and ornaments, saying that they were paying a ransom for the sick person's health. The invocation of the anito continued as long as the sickness lasted.⁶

This practice of the babaylan-catalonan who was the local shaman was practiced and inherits the knowledge of using of herbal medicine to the local for assurance of continuing of this healing practice and communicating to the anitos. Even this knowledge of using herbal medicine simple compared to the present treatment for mental

⁴Adapted from Reynolds, et al. pp. 308-310

⁵Regino P. (1992). Body Rituals of the Prehispanic Philippines.

⁶ F. Landa J. (1975) The Philippines at the Spanish Contact. MCS Enterprises, Inc. Manila, 1975, pp. 98-102.



illness. The assurance of the cure and retrieval of sanity are highly assured. This therapeutic concept helps an instant or gradual treatment for mental aberration.

However, it's not possible to enumerate all indigenous instruments that the Filipino and babaylan-catalonan used in the body rituals to prevent or cure mental ailments due to lack of historical data about them. However, there is a report of Pigafetta (1521) which enumerates some domestic instrument possibly used by early Filipino in making incisions, cuts or wound or human body, by cutting of herbs and plants and therefore, the preparation of medical extracts (Paular 1991).

The list prepared by Pigafetta (1521) enumerates the following tools:

Indigenous Words (Cebuano Pigafetta, 1521)	Cebuano Equivalents (Encarnation, 1885)	English Translation (Webster 1969)
copol; sunda	Copol; sundan	knife
Catle	Catli	Scissor
Dagu	dagom	needle
Bossug	bosog	bow
Ogon	odyong	arrows
calix; caladao	Calis; baladao	sword
campilan	campilan	dagger
baancan	bangcao	lance

Aside from the use of the hands in crushing the leaves, flowers, fruits, or seeds of the plants and herbs for the extraction of their juices or fluids, the healers availed of one or two of the aforementioned instruments in the cutting of herbs or plants and the preparation of herbal medications. It is expected that they also utilized sharp object like pointed rough or heavy stones to crush, slice, or trim herbs and plants (Paular 1992).

Prehistoric explanation for maladaptive behavior

A maladaptive behavior refers to an unusual physical manifestation which to the eyes of the prehistoric Filipinos and the local shaman (babaylan or catalonan) was a mental malady or aberration that needed diagnosis and treatment. Based on the biological perspective of Sarason, all disorders, physical or behavioral, have biological causes. Causes may lie in heredity, genetic

accident, or bodily infection, or trauma (Sarason, 2005)⁷.

Since there is no scientific name used before to distinguish or classify the difference between the mental illness and maladaptive behavior, the local shamans do the same practice of body rituals to clear the said illness since they believed that the gods/deity impose this type of mental aberration to the Filipinos.

The prehistoric Filipinos believed that when a villager succumbed to a mental aberration or manifested a maladaptive behavior, it was believed to be the handwork of a disgruntled local deity of god/goddess. In order to stop the anger of this god and appease him from incapacitating permanently the villager, the local shaman or babaylan intercedes on the villagers behalf by invoking the god's or goddess' sympathy and forgiveness. This he discovers by analyzing the "sign" that are manifested directly to her by his gods or indirectly, through the inner organs of a recently-slaughtered sacrificial animal (e.g. pig). If the signs are negative, meaning that the god does not approve of an assistance or, in the interpretation or scrutiny of the babaylan, the parts of the said organs do not show any semblance of assistance, pardon or approval then the villager's mental aberration becomes irrevocable and therefore, he was condemned as an insane person with no hope of being treated of his illness. However, if the signs are positive, that is, the babaylan's ritual was acceptable to the god/deity, hence sympathetic to the unfortunate villager, then this mentally-deranged person becomes cured of his mental ailments and lives again as a normal human being.

The prehistoric Filipinos' fear of the destructive and castigatory power of the local gods were such that the former had to offer them sacrificial animal, food, precious objects, or articles in order to pacify or dissuade them from not punishing the innocent trespassers or culprits. Beside the local gods there were also some evil spirits which the early Filipinos believed to be responsible for a number of miseries suffered by the villagers especially related to physical diseases or mental aberration. Consequently, the Filipinos having worn on their neck anting-anting or

⁷ Sarason, I., & Sarason, B. (2005). *Abnormal psychology: The problem of maladaptive behavior*. (11th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.



talismans objects even before or during the Spanish regime was an act of protecting themselves from the fury of evil spirits. It was also done to offer themselves good luck or well-being through the protective intercession of a local god. In fact, this belief in the anting-anting still persists in the present Filipino society, especially in the remote rural areas of the Philippine Archipelago. One vivid incident during the 1960's was the case of the Lapiang Malaya's firm belief that with their amulets or anting-anting on their necks, they could confront the Constabulary's guns and bullets and yet remained unharmed. Unfortunately, the result was tragic. Most of the members died and the myth on the invulnerability of their anting-anting was shattered to pieces. However, in this incident Filipinos are more interested in the members' strong adherence to the powers of the anting-anting.

They believed that it is an instrument of protection against dangers and enemies and as a source of strength and power. While the effects of the contemporary incident proved otherwise, nevertheless, the Filipinos of today still look at this anting-anting as an awesome tool of protection or source of power.

Mental Health Curative Prescriptions

Presently, psychologist prescribes to the patients who are suffering from mental illness to take medicinal drugs after the examination done by the psychologist to prevent possible mental attack. But many of the medicinal drugs had side effects that can cause a more imbalance of physical and mental health system because of the large amount of chemical/ drug taken by the body. But in fact, psychiatry still doesn't understand what causes psychological distress, and the primary theory proposed; the idea that unwanted behavior and depression are due to an imbalance of serotonin and dopamine in the brain has never been proven. And can cause for a more complex mental health illness. Many Filipinos cannot accommodate to the go to mental facilities because of the possible social digression and financial incapability's cause for the patient to worsen the tantrums and possible death.

Since the local shaman or babaylan/catalonan was knowledgeable on the possible cure of the patient, it still depends on the will of the local god or deity. The babaylan's role in this case was merely a diagnostician or an interpreter of "sign: (positive or negative) that was he or she would evaluate the direct pronouncement

of the gods or read the "sign" reflected in the inner organs of the sacrificed animal and tells the patient or his family about the said outcome. The patient was deemed permanently sick or deranges if the reading was negative and freely cured, if it was positive.

It is too difficult, at this instance to ascertain the validity of the babaylan's diagnostic capability, based on the direct and decisive pronouncement of the god or the interpretation he had read from the signs of the inner organs of a sacrificed animal.

More so, his capability to detect the signs, whether or not with his eyes, had special powers to translate the so called sign into positive or negative meaning. Presently Filipinos knew for as fact that these claims do not have scientific bases more so the impossibility for a human being (including the babaylan) to have these supernatural powers. However, let us grant the probability that he may have such occult powers; nevertheless, it is more logical to state that his having convinced the patient or his family of the outcome of the reading could be a case of hypnosis. Having put himself into hypnotic trance, after frenzied dancing and vociferation, the babaylan in that instant was under hypnotic spell and was influenced to giving certain pronouncements that have been fed into his mind through self-hypnosis.

Consequently, the patient and his family were also strongly motivated by the babaylan's physical and verbal manifestations and therefore, succumbed to the same hypnotic spell, believing and feeling that he was either cured or not cured at all.

In case a villager's being poisoned, either by engulfing poisonous plants extracts or physically affected by the plant's venomous parts or fluids, the former may die instantly or suffer excruciating pains. Besides these painful effects, the patients could also manifest unusual or maladaptive behaviors due to the toxicology of the plant extracts. It was also possible that the plant's poison or chemical composition had neutralized or strongly blocked by the use of other medicinal plant which had active chemical elements what could help neutralize its deadly consequences.

The prehistoric Filipinos were very much adept in the arts of poisoning and counter-poisoning. Either they learned this art/science from the local medicine man or from their great grandparents and had practiced it with great ease and facility through the centuries. In fact, several

foreign chronicles had written accounts about this practice and commented that the counter poisoning activities of the prehistoric Filipinos were unique and effective.

In 1712, Pablo Clain or Klein (1652-1717), a Jesuit priest, published his book entitled *Remedios Faciles Para Deferentes Entermedades* (Easy Remedies for different Ailements). A part of the content of the entire book tells of the following matter:

Madness- Bathing oneself oftentimes of a roasted raven, toasted in an oven, if it is mania or melancholy, purge them with an infusion of San Grogorio seeds. Place a human excrete on their head. Let them drink a pig's milk. The liquor made from a flowery bunch of tamohilan should be sprinkled on their heads. If it is melancholy, it is cured like the case of a hypochondriac, if it is mania (which are furious) like the frenesi, except that after the bloodletting they should be given purgatives. Place in their forehead crushed live crabs which should be moved when these become dry.

The specific medical instruction of the aforesaid part of the said book, detect indigenous concepts, particularly the use of local plants (which in this case, supposed to be medicinal) for the treatment of certain medical aberration. It is possible that when the said missionary wrote the book, he has actually observed the Filipinos practiced the aforesaid type of therapy or curative medicine and what he only did was to put it in writing for posterity's sake.

According to the missionary priest, these patients did not only manifest certain physical abnormalities but also to their ways of talking, thinking, and behaving. Nevertheless, there were also insanity cases during the advent of Spanish colonization (at the beginning of the 16th century) and their diagnosis and manner of curing them manifest Christian or Catholic beliefs and remedies.

1. An indigenous prehistoric Filipino who went to the forest to gather firewood became confused and suffered from a kind of insanity which made him wander through the hills without recover himself. Later, he regained his normal senses when a relic of Agnes Dei (Lamb of God) was hung on his neck.

2. Another prehistoric Filipino who used to see or imagine horrible visions when he is alone particularly of black persons whom were threatening to kill him. However, with confession and the blessings he received from the missionary priest, his mental disturbances disappeared.
3. A member of the principalia (local elite) a woman whose insanity is manifested through her suicidal tendencies, oftentimes would smash herself through the walls. She regained her sanity when she was sprinkled with holy water and confessed her sins with the priest.
4. Another prehistoric native Filipino suffered from phobic reaction towards lightning. The mere invocation of the Most Holy Name of Jesus Christ mitigated and stopped her fears.
5. A woman suffered violent convulsion after she picked a fight with a sorceress, who could have forced her to throw herself involuntarily outside of the window. She recovered her consciousness when she touched the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) relic.

Undoubtedly similar psychological disturbances could have been manifested by the Filipinos prior to the coming of the Spanish missionaries and they may have asked the assistance of the local shaman- the babaylan (among Bisayans or the catalonan (in the Tagalog regions) for the treatment of similar insanity of maladaptive behaviors.

Conclusion

Based on the data stated, it can be concluded that there is a clear structured system of mental health and maladaptive behavior rituals that were practiced by the prehistoric Filipinos, with the guidance of the babaylan/catalonan who could understand and interpret the signs and symptoms which the local gods/deity replied on the prayers of the babaylan/catalonan if the Filipino would retain/regain his/her sanity through the positive or negative sign on the internal organ of the sacrificial animal. Also the Filipinos had a clear idea of the possible medicinal plant to cure for this mental suffering of the Filipinos which is readily available on their environment to prevent to worsen the mental aberration. And these practices of body rituals on mental health sustain the peace and order on the barangay and give a harmonious



relationship between the local gods/deity and its people.

The relationship of the different spiritual worlds- gods/deity, body rituals/body of knowledge of babaylan/catalonan and Filipinos, reflects the reaction of each aspect of the prehistoric Filipino society on mental aberration which the gods implied on the negative actions of the Filipinos towards its cycle of life or because of the evil spirits that surround our environment and go inside the spiritual mind of the Filipinos.

Furthermore, this system of knowledge of body rituals had been a product of the centuries old interaction of the Filipinos on their gods/deity which helps them to understand more that facets of the Filipino mental care and to accommodate the possible mental patients. Based on the data, many pre-psychological examinations were practiced to prevent the possible insanity of the Filipinos (e.g tattooing). it means they can prepare themselves on the possible insanity of their family member and can consult to the local shaman (babaylan/catalonan) for the possible cure to stop the mental aberration to become worst.

Even this research did not identify the specific procedure on curing on this mental illness. The babaylan's knowledge on interpretation of signs and preparation of proper medication/ medicinal plant on the gods/deity, the Filipinos can assure the end of suffering on this mental aberration.

Even the local gods/ deity can impose the mental aberration. Still the geography or natural resources of the Philippines help the Filipinos to communicate and prevent the insanity that is happening on its people. The wide range of fauna (animals) and flora (plants) help to the process of the mental health healing since all the possible cure is readily available. The animals (e.g pig) become the ritual sacrifice and all the possible answer for the insanity is located inside the body (e.g internal organ) of the sacrificial animal after the babaylan does its prayers to appease the gods/deity which cause the insanity of the Filipino. Then the fauna (plant) serves as the medicine for the possible treatment for the mental illness.

Also, many babaylans know how to create poison and counter-poison for the Filipino which helps to neutralize the human brain and stop to possible insanity, since the local shaman uses these medicinal plants for medication. It can be consider the babaylan as the first pharmacist who can extract juices and fluids for curing mental illness.

Because of the extensive relationship of the babaylan to his god and deity in Kalinga, local shamans are taught the rituals by the gods themselves and not the older priestesses (Billient 1974).

Overall, a complex system of interaction between the Filipinos and its god/deity showcased that even the Spanish colonial government implied a more scientific way of looking this type of illness, Filipinos can still cure it using our own body rituals and medical knowledge. With the help of the different personalities present on prehistoric history; Filipinos can still survive this type of phenomenon.

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