

## ANIMISM IN THE RICE RITUAL OF LEYTE AND SAMAR

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The pagan Filipino farmer made offerings to the sun and moon, rain, thunder, and lightning as the gods who gave him rice. He offered sacrifices of good will to them during the planting season and again of thanksgiving in one form or another during the harvest season.

Hand in hand with nature worship went the ancestor or "anito" worship. The farmer considered his dead ancestors, who had been farmers also, as the guardians of his field; or he believed that blessed spirits, *encantados*<sup>1</sup> lived in the field protecting his crops. The farmer, therefore, worshipped them too.

In places where the influence of the Catholic Church has only been sporadic and loose this ritual is partially preserved. In Catholic strongholds like Tacloban and Palo the "anito" worship is practically no longer in existence.

*Securing permission for clearing a field:*—In Kawayan (Northwest Leyte) the farmer asks before clearing a new rice field the permission of the spirit who is dwelling on the land. He kills a pig and a white rooster to feed the spirit. After this he proceeds to clearing the field.

In Leyte, Leyte (Northwest) this story is told by a farmer who wanted to clear a piece of forest to plant rice. When he started work, he became suddenly afraid that *agtas*,<sup>2</sup> black spirits, might dwell in this place, so he stopped work and tried to get home. But the *agtas* punished him. He could not find his way back to the house and was lost in the forest. When he had wandered around and become tired he remembered the old cure for finding one's way home. He changed on the spot his clothes by turning them inside out.<sup>3</sup> In this way the farmer reached home, but he was afraid that *agtas* might further punish him, if he continued clearing

<sup>1</sup> *Encantada* is a fairy of white complexion. According to the belief today in Leyte, these fairies or *encantados* are spirits who live like men with their belongings in big trees and other selected places. They can appear to men they like. They come out of their places at moonlit nights and appear to men. If offended they may do harm until they are pacified by sacrifices which consist in a brown hen, a pig, or a goat. The food has to be brought close to the place where *encantados* are supposed to live.

<sup>2</sup> The *agta* is a spirit of black complexion who may take the form of a man. He lives in forests and swamps. In Leyte these black spirits are believed to be small people, in Samar they are believed to be big, tall and black.

A similar spirit is the *aghoy*. The *aghoy*s are dwarfs and possess magic power. They usually live in forests and in the farms far from town. They eat fruits of trees, but they also like the food of men. They are friendly towards men and visit them often in their house; they eat their food, but they will not sleep in the house. They are especially useful in finding lost articles. If there is a quarrel in the house, the *aghoy* will disappear, he likes to make friends only with those who are peaceful and calm. He whistles as a signal for his coming. (Folk-belief in Leyte and Samar)

<sup>3</sup> This is to fool the *agta*, who does not recognize the farmer anymore.

the forest. He, therefore, called a *herbolario*<sup>4</sup> who told him to secure a white pig and a red rooster. At six o'clock in the evening the *herbolario* and the farmer went to the place where *agtas* were believed to reside. Upon arriving the *herbolario* in a squatting position uttered his prayers and then shouted: "You *agtas*, living in this place where my friend is making a clearing I command you to go away. Here are the payments for your home. Go right now, for if you do not do so, I'll kill all of you." Following his words he threw the white pig and the red rooster in the forest and went home. On the following day the farmer continued the clearing.

In another place near Pastrana (Central Leyte) the farmer when clearing a forest or planting, in a polite way addresses the *encantados*: "I would like to cut down these big trees; if you are living here, please move out; look for another forest." If the farmer hates his neighbor or any other person who owns a forest or has big trees growing in his parcel, the farmer would mention the name of his enemy so that the *encantados* would move to his enemy's place and molest him.

*Spirit meal before planting:*—A barrio 45 kilometers away from Abuyog has still an elaborate ritual of "anito" worship. This barrio is secluded and can be reached only by a *sakayan* or *banca* (small boat). Most people of this barrio come to town only once a year during Lenten Season. This explains partly the adherence to old practices.

Before the planting season the owner prepares a big meal with meat, fish, rice, rootcrops, and other foods. Relatives and friends are invited to this meal. Before the meal actually starts, the farm owner with the members of his family and visitors bring the most delicious food and drinks to the place where planting will take place. There they pray and sing and offer the delicacies to the spirits of their dead and to the invisible owners of the land. They call strange names and invite the spirits to take their meal. After this ceremony they go back to the farmstead for a celebration which includes eating, drinking and dancing.

The following day the owner wakes up early and goes to the field. If he finds out that there is still plenty of food left from the previous day he will not proceed with planting, because he believes that the spirits do not favor his intention to plant, and would punish him for doing so. In case he finds most of the food consumed (which is often done by hungry neighbors, friends and wild pigs) he goes home, calls his helpers and planting starts. He believes that the spirits favor him and that the harvest will be abundant.<sup>5</sup>

In Balangiga (West Samar) the ceremonies for planting differ slightly. When the field is cleaned for planting and the seedlings are ready, rice and two chickens, male and female, are cooked in a pot. Early in the morning, the master of ceremonies who according to Balangiga farmers' belief is endowed with extraordinary powers, goes alone to the place of planting with his cooked rice and chickens. He places the food on a small table facing the rice field. Then he prays to God for the dead, and against the evil spirit. Nobody knows the exact words of the prayer except the master of ceremonies, because according to the farmers these powers are inherited.

<sup>4</sup> A *herbolario* is known in the eastern Visayas as *tamabalan*.

<sup>5</sup> Similar meals for the spirit are held in Pastrana, Leyte, Leyte, and Burauen. And especially in many places in Samar: Darangan, Bascy, Homonhon, and Balangiga.

The farmers were told that the theme of this prayer is to call for the dead and let them feast on the rice as their share of the past harvest. They hope that in the next planting the spirits will help them to have a better harvest.

The master of ceremonies also calls for the evil spirit to feast on the chickens so that the chickens will fly with the evil spirit away to a far distant land where he could no longer bother the farmer.<sup>6</sup> After inviting or summoning his dead ancestors to feast, the master of ceremonies leaves the place for four or five hours. Then the master of ceremonies goes back and takes the food from the table to his house where his family eats all believing that the spirits have already eaten. The next day rice planting can begin.

Referring to the extraordinary powers of the master of ceremonies, the farmers of Balangiga say that for decades these powers have run through one family and its close relatives. At present there is only one man in Balangiga who has these powers. When he dies, his son will succeed him. If he should refuse because of education and position, he would suffer the consequences. The farmers believe that the spirits would punish him. He either would become blind, crippled or his face would rot. Then the successor will be a relative who is closest to that family.

*Promoting growth:*—After the planting is finished the owner picks a handful of rice and throws it in all directions saying: "This is for the animals and insects which intend to taste my plants. I hope that you defend my plants from harm, and watch over my plantation until harvest season so I can serve you once more in payment for your goodness and cooperation."<sup>7</sup>

When the rice plants have grown seven inches high, the farmer kills a red rooster. With its blood he goes around the rice field. At every corner of the field he puts a drop of blood on the rice leaves. Upon reaching the place where he started he prays to spirits that they may take good care of his plants. This performance is called *Pagpunas*.

*Curing sick rice:*—Should the rice in one place of the planted field not grow well, the owner calls a *tamabalan* (quack-doctor). He believes that in that particular corner of the field a spirit got angry and killed some of the rice plants. The owner, therefore, securing the help of the *tamabalan* prepares a meal for the spirit and apologizes to the spirit, trying to pacify him with a good meal. He also apologizes to the souls of the former landowners and asks forgiveness for his having neglected them.<sup>8</sup>

Another method of curing diseased rice plants is the method of *pagluon* (smoking) which is practiced in many municipalities of Leyte and Samar. The owner with a kind of incense, *camangyan*, goes around the rice field. The incense is placed in a coconut shell with a fire in it to keep it smoking as the farmer goes around the field. While walking he prays to St. Isidro (this is Christian influence; in other places there is the invocation of spirits) that he may drive away the diseases, watch over his plants, and make the rice field productive.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Similar belief in the Province of Leyte in the towns of: Alangalang, Pastrana, Santa Fe, San Miguel.

<sup>7</sup> Practiced in Calubian, Leyte.

<sup>8</sup> Practiced in Barauen, Leyte.

<sup>9</sup> Practiced in Calubian, Leyte.

In some places of Western Samar, the farmer of an infested rice field employs the only son or daughter of a family to cure this sickness. This person builds a fire at the corner of the rice field using the skin of animals (nowadays also old tires of trucks) and leaves which produces plenty of smoke. In addition he places some lysol on the sides of boundaries of the field. After this he goes three times around the field. This is done at twilight when nobody can see and even the birds have gone to their resting place.

*Protecting the growth of Rice:*—If the rice is putting on grains the farmer again is afraid that spirits from the forest might be envious seeing the golden grains of rice. The farmer in Basey believes that these spirits have the power to reverse the growth of the rice so that at harvest time one will find empty ears without any rice.

To avert this calamity the farmer builds open fires around the rice field. This fire is fed with wood and other substances deep out of the forest. The smoke of this fire and its odor keeps the spirits away, so that they may not harm the growth of the crop.

*Spirit meal before harvest time:*—As soon as the rice is ripe for harvesting the landowner calls his most trusted tenant to serve as master of ceremonies *paratikang*. The wife of the tenant reaps a few gantas<sup>10</sup> of the new palay<sup>11</sup> and makes rice cakes "suman" and many other delicious dishes. She also prepares a strong black tea, strong chocolate, a few cups of tuba<sup>12</sup> together with cooked chicken or pig. Afterwards this food is placed in small rations at the center of a small portable table; surrounding them are the drinks in small cups or glasses. The master of ceremonies accompanied by members of his family, relatives and friends, brings the food to the field where the palay is to be harvested. Only the master of ceremonies and two close assistants go into the field, the rest stay about 50 feet away. The master of ceremonies with a loud, but polite voice calls the names of the spirits inviting them to come and eat. The master of ceremonies and his two assistants taste a bit of every kind of the food and nib at the drink on the table to assure the spirits that the food and drinks are all right. After tasting, they all leave the scene with permission of the spirits who are already supposed to be enjoying the party. Food and table are left in the same position until the following morning; then the same persons who performed the ceremony in the evening dispose of the food and table.<sup>13</sup>

Similar practices exist in many places of Western Samar, but the arrangement of foods and drinks vary slightly. So is in Basey the food prepared without any spices, because spirits, it is believed, do not like spices and salt.<sup>14</sup> In Basey the master of ceremonies starts around six o'clock in the evening. He calls the spirits of the rice fields, of the mountains, and the dead ancestors. He thanks them for not having done any harm to his rice. If this thanksgiving ceremony is not performed, the people believe, the rice would be, little by little, taken away by the spirits.

<sup>10</sup> *Ganta* is a volume measure. One ganta cleaned rice contains 2.30 kg.; one ganta of palay contains 1.72 kg.

<sup>11</sup> *Palay* is the unhulled rice grain.

<sup>12</sup> *Tuba* is a fermented drink from the sap of the coconut tree.

<sup>13</sup> Practiced in Leyte, Leyte.

<sup>14</sup> Saltless cooking for spirits is practiced also in other municipalities of Leyte, for example Calubian.

The animistic elements in this Rice Ritual of Leyte and Samar are evident. They are practiced in barrios distant from the municipality where Catholic influence has been weak. The people are baptized Catholics but mostly uneducated in Catholic doctrine. They have no difficulty in combining their Catholic religion with the spirit worship. It is to be mentioned that these spirits are not adored or venerated in the strict sense. God alone, who is believed to be the creator of these spirits, receives the supreme worship of adoration. The spirits are believed to be powerful; therefore the people like to play safe both with God as well as with the spirits.

Many of middle and high class Filipinos are unaware of this animistic worship; they did not believe the writer until confronted with facts. Some rich landowners were aware that their tenants performed some strange rites, but few had knowledge of what it was all about. They stated that they have to permit their tenants to perform these ceremonies, otherwise they would become worried and unhappy.

There is a Christianized Rice Ritual in Leyte which is only a few steps away from animistic worship. This ritual is better known and has been treated by the writer on another occasion.

## ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS OF THE CHILD IN THE RURAL PHILIPPINES

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The large part that Philippine children in some rural areas play in the family economy and the extent to which their cumulative efforts aid maintenance in daily life is one facet of culture which strikes the newcomer from America. The writer was impressed with the diversity and number of activities which children engage in, in daily life, when first she began to collect the data for a series of "typical days" for boys and girls in the age span 3 to 10. This article is a brief documentation of that activity.

The material was gathered from half a dozen informants in pointed questioning and from personal observation during a brief stay in a Visayan village in November 1955. The area in which the material was gathered was that of Siaton poblacion in Siaton municipality in southern Negros Oriental. The occasion for gathering the data was a two week preliminary survey conducted in Siaton prior to a more extensive study in another area.<sup>2</sup>

With this brief introduction, then, and within the limitations which the brevity of the study impose on the material, it may be said that in Siaton the child becomes a functioning member of the family as a producing and maintaining unit at about the age of five. The transition from non-productive organism to worker is gradual and the child will begin to accompany its parents or older siblings through their daily tasks much earlier in its life. The youngster is taught by instruction and precept and assumes the appropriate responses through play and imitation.

There is no sharp division of labor between the sexes and this is a situation which is mirrored in adult activity. Boys and girls both carry water. Both pasture and water goats, horses and carabaos, although girls husband the larger animals only rarely, for it is felt that they ought to care only for the smaller and safer animals. Both boys and girls gather vegetables, and both care for the chickens and pigs. Both sexes work in the kitchen helping the mother or older sister by tending the fire, watching the cooking food, washing the ubiquitous dishes, and both males and females cook and serve food. Boys' activities in kitchen domesticity are slightly less common than are girls' activities and this experience is apt to terminate quite early, probably about the age of fourteen. It is noteworthy that this training stands the boys in good stead in later years for it is the men who do most of the ceremonial cooking.

In the main, girls take care of the bedding and the clothes-washing, but again, children of both sexes may act as messengers, as carriers of the many burdens, and as purchasing agents, the last being more important in areas where there is a market. Boys and girls sweep house floors and the ground under the house, and the side, front, and back yards. And

<sup>1</sup> The writer is a Fulbright fellow doing research in the Philippines in 1955-1956.

<sup>2</sup> The writer is indebted to Dr. Donn Hart. Dr. Hart first studied the community of Siaton poblacion and the nearby barrio of Caticugan in 1951.