

Ngayo': Ilongots' Communal Ritual Transition to Manhood.

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***Abstract** - Adolescent masculine identity construction among the Ilongot is profoundly shaped by participation in the Ngayo' rite of passage, with its intricate system of symbolic rituals, artifacts, and practices. Drawing on interpretive analysis of ethnographies, this paper demonstrates how condensed summary symbols serve to crystallize core cultural ideals. These symbols are not static; they are operationalized through detailed conceptual models and behavioral protocols that guide novices. Crucially, identity formation is advanced through performative engagement with these symbols, a process that facilitates the internalization of norms and the active fusion of a masculine self. This study thus elucidates the specific sociocultural mechanisms connecting granular symbolic engagement to macro-level identity transformation, addressing a key gap in enculturation theory. While focused on a localized ritual system, the findings illuminate universal dynamics of adolescent development and underscore the value of practice-based analyses for understanding identity transitions across cultures.*

***Keywords:** Ilongot, Ngayo', identity construction, enculturation, masculine rituals*

I. INTRODUCTION

From the mountainous rainforest of Northern part of the Philippines lives an ethnolinguistic indigenous group called the Ilongots. According to Renato Rosaldo (1980) these group are characterized where all individuals have an equal opportunities, responsibilities, and rights, regardless of their social status or rank, organizing themselves into small communal societies. Within Ilongot society, the construction of gender identity is deeply embedded in discursive practice, where illocutionary force and performative competence are not merely valued but are essential skills for enacting one's place within the social order,

For the Ilongot, the Ngayo' functions as a pivotal rite of passage through which adolescent males transition into socially recognized manhood. The Ngayo' ritual is a series of ceremonies and rites of passage that occurs when males reach their teenage years, Mikkelsen (2017) stated in his research that this multi-day Ngayo' is a powerful symbol that an adult male can attain to change his status within the community. According to Rosaldo (1980) and Carlson (2013) the Ngayo' ritual uses specific artifacts like, swords and shields as well as the recitation of memorized scripts are central to the process this system is designed to prepare the participants as they fully integrate themselves into the roles and responsibilities of Ilongot masculinity.

The formation of masculine identity among the Ilongot through ritual practice remains underexplored, despite rich ethnographic accounts of their social structure and gender norms. This study seeks to advance a more nuanced understanding of the sociocultural mechanisms through which masculine identity is constituted for the Ilongot via ritualized practice. Central to this inquiry is a close examination of the specific modes of engagement the ways individuals actively interpret, perform, and internalize the densely encoded symbolism interwoven throughout the Ngayo' rite of passage.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The identity 'Ilongot' is ascribed to the egalitarian indigenous peoples inhabiting the mountainous rainforests of Northern Luzon, a designation that situates them within a complex and often contested 'tribal slot' (Li 2000, after Trouillot 1991). While they reside primarily across the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya and Nueva Ecija, extending into the borderlands of Quirino and Aurora (R. Rosaldo 1980), their ethnic naming is itself a matter of scale and perspective. The term 'Ilongot' also rendered as Irungut, and encompassing variations such as Italon, or the broader ethnolinguistic collective of the Northern Caraballo mountains is the most prevalent within anthropological literature (Salgado 1994). Yet, this very label is intertwined with a history of external ascription; as Yang (2012) notes, the term can carry pejorative connotations of semantic wildness and barbarity, a legacy of colonial and lowland Filipino imaginaries. This history of naming reflects a process whereby geographically and socially complex groups are simplified into a singular, place-based identity, a framing that they must nonetheless at times strategically engage to secure their rights and resources within the modern Philippine state.

Ilongot Indigenous Culture and Social Structure

The Ilongot, an egalitarian indigenous group residing in the dispersed riverine settlements of Northern Luzon's Caraballo mountains, have long been positioned by outsiders within an imaginative 'tribal slot' defined by a perceived lack of complex hierarchy. Early ethnological accounts, such as the diary of English philologist William Jones (1908), described Ilongot social life as 'simple,' noting an absence of class distinction and observing status imbalances primarily between unmarried youths and their married seniors. This external perception of social simplicity, however, belies a sophisticated sociocultural system where authority is situational, emerging from ritual knowledge and oratorical skill rather than institutionalized rank (R. Rosaldo 1980).

Within this egalitarian structure, which values parity and 'sameness' over individualism, the construction of gendered identities becomes a critical site of cultural reproduction. The classic sexual division of labor—where men hunt, fish, and clear forest while women manage the routine tasks of swidden agriculture (M. Rosaldo and Atkinson 1975) work 'Man the hunter and woman; Metaphors for the sexes in Ilongot magical spells' (1975), provides more than mere subsistence; it offers a metaphorical framework for understanding the sexes. It is against this backdrop of communal norms that the Ngayo', a form of headhunting historically undertaken by

adolescent males as a rite of passage, must be understood (M. Rosaldo 1980; Mikkelsen 2017). The ritual wove together intricate systems of artifacts, symbolic acts, and dance to facilitate the active construction of masculine identities, thereby aligning individual maturation with core Ilongot egalitarian values. This process marked a critical transition into full personhood a status defined not by inherited wealth or lineage, but through the successful demonstration of culturally specific knowledge and the disciplined management of emotion.

Anthropological scholarship has often recruited Ilongot practices like the *Ngayo'* to illustrate theories of symbolism and gender, sometimes at the expense of understanding how these very representations have been mobilized within broader Philippine political discourses. The Ilongot, have been cast as 'backward' primitives in the national imaginary, their egalitarianism misread as a lack of civilization rather than a distinct form of sociality. This positioning has material consequences, influencing how the state engages with Ilongot claims to land and resources, often dismissing their communal land tenure systems in favor of 'modern,' individualistic models of ownership and development. Thus, the symbolic meanings encoded within rituals like the *Ngayo'* are not merely academic concerns; they are entangled with a history of representation that continues to shape the possibilities for Ilongot identity and autonomy within the modern Philippine state.

Rituals, Artifacts and Interactions of *Ngayo'*

A significant body of ethnographic documentation depicts how social behaviors and material artifacts deployed during the *Ngayo'* headhunting ritual co-create a layered symbolic system, one that is fundamentally constitutive in shaping the development of Ilongot masculine identity. Carlson's (2013) analysis of Ilongot personal adornment identifies the *red hornbill headdress* as a vital key symbol within the *Ngayo'* ritual. Far beyond a mere ceremonial costume, this artifact denoted significant hunting prowess. Its potency was cosmological; the headdress was understood by the Ilongot to embody a spirit bird, an entity believed to actively guide and protect the hunter during the raid, thereby fusing individual skill with spiritual assistance. This attire demonstrates hunters' strength, prowess, and masculinity, as well as the might of their community; *batling shell earrings* crafted from L shaped slices of red hornbill beak that signifies adult male status. Earrings like these are among the most important ornaments that Ilongot people wore. These are among the most important Ilongot ornaments, functioning as supreme markers of skill and maturity. Carlson's (2013) ethnography provides thick descriptions of the key artifacts and rituals that materially and symbolically constituted this transition. Among these, the acquisition of the red hornbill earrings stood as the definitive moment of accomplishment, a source of profound pride that served as a public and permanent marker of a youth's successful passage into manhood. This symbolic transformation was further enacted through performative traditions like the *buayat*—a celebratory song and dance performed after a successful raid—as well as through the recitation of stories and the skilled handling of endemic weaponry and customs central to headhunting practices.

Communal Transitions Through *Ngayo*' Rites

The *Ngayo*' ritual precipitates profound social transitions for Ilongot males, enabling them to shed their marginalized adolescent status and integrate into respected adult masculine roles. As Mikkelsen (2017) reiterated in his "*Facehunting: Emphaty, masculinity and violence among the Bugkalot*", the practice of *ngayo*, or headhunting, was not merely an act of violence but a sanctified rite of passage. For Ilongot boys, successfully taking a head was the definitive act signifying their coming of age into manhood. This ritualized externalization of inner turmoil through decapitation served as a critical mechanism for realigning one's social position and achieving a unified masculine identity (M. Rosaldo, 1983).

The extensive rituals and ceremonies preceding the first headhunting raid were deeply intertwined with the performance of masculinity, the strengthening of clan alliances, and social maturation. As Mikkelsen (2011) explains, these preparations, led by elders and shamans, involved purificatory baths in rivers and the use of offerings, chants, and charms to solicit spiritual protection and call upon the soul of an enemy victim. This process sacralized the impending violence, embedding it within a framework of cosmological significance.

The novices' distinctive ceremonial attire—loincloths and kerchiefs—marked their liminal status. Under the instruction of experienced headhunters, they received practical training in hunting, tracking, and the lethal use of the *tek-yaden* knife (R. Rosaldo, 1984). These lessons imparted more than martial prowess; they initiated boys into the sacred esoteric knowledge essential to their future role as Ilongot warriors, binding them to tradition and to each other.

The nighttime raids themselves functioned as the ultimate proving ground, testing the physical and mental fortitude of the adolescents. As documented by Renato Rosaldo (1980), these solo vigils required lying in wait for rival groups and engaging in perilous combat. To succeed in severing an enemy's head demanded tremendous bravery to overcome profound fear. This successful participation was a performative demonstration of culturally-defined masculine traits like courage, resilience, and battle prowess. It was through this symbolic engagement with ritualized "tests" that boys encoded their identity alignment with the norms of Ilongot manhood.

The final act of beheading, followed by the ceremonial tossing of the head (*balabag*), provided the grim but necessary evidence of conquest that cemented this social transformation. The subsequent public announcement of the kill allowed a youth to shed his ambiguous status and be recognized as a marriage-eligible adult, granted the right to converse freely with elders. The subsequent display of prized hornbill earrings served as a public brand of proven manhood (R. Rosaldo, 1980).

Collectively, these rituals served critical social functions. They reinforced clan-based alliances through cooperative raiding partnerships and instilled a sense of shame in any boy who lagged behind his peers, thus enforcing cultural expectations (Rodgers, 1985; Safer & Gill, 1982). More than just maturing individuals through

danger, the Ngayo' cycle served to renew the collective Ilongot martial identity and meticulously reproduce its codes of masculinity for each generation.

Ilongot Engagements with Ngayo' Symbols

Scholarly examinations remain scarce regarding the specific modes of participation and engagement with the dense symbolic world of the Ngayo'. As Mikkelsen (2011) has aptly noted, there is a significant lack of interpretive analysis focusing on how Ilongot individuals themselves interact with cultural symbols and their encoded meanings. A deeper understanding of these sociocultural transmission mechanisms is, as both Mikkelsen and Michelle Rosaldo (1980) argue, critical for constructing robust conceptual frameworks of identity formation.

Consequently, this research posits that investigating active engagement with Ngayo' symbols—facilitated through ritual performances like the *da eleg dan* song and dance (Mikkelsen, 2011) and the use of ornamentation that publicly denotes maturity (Mikkelsen, 2011; M. Rosaldo, 1980)—could provide richer, more nuanced representations of how adolescent Ilongot males experience the attainment of crucial masculine statuses, a process central to their social world (M. Rosaldo, 1980).

Mansasadile as Divergent Practice

The practice of *mansasadile*, a form of outgroup headhunting that served as an alternative to traditional Ngayo', emerges in the ethnography as a practice that challenged and threatened to undermine headhunting as a core social institution (Mikkelsen, 2017) this only shows that the internal coherence of this symbolic system was not absolute. By deliberately circumventing established norms, *mansasadile* constituted a defiant symbolic act that challenged the systems of meaning embedded within conventional Ngayo' practices, which were centrally focused on community continuity and social reproduction.

However, this divergence did not equate to a complete breakdown of cultural transmission. As Yang (2012) observes, even amidst these alternative practices, Ilongot youths continued to reproduce cultural knowledge cross-generationally by mimicking ceremonial dances in gendered childhood play. These persistent enculturation processes highlight the remarkable resilience of cultural forms, even as other practices emerged to subvert and redefine aspects of the traditional headhunting complex.

Violence and Masculinity

According to Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barret (2001) in their sociological study the interconnections between ritualized violence and masculine identity construction. which outlines how participation in sanctioned acts of aggression can provide novice males in specific cultural contexts with a crucial opportunity to demonstrate their mature status associated with their warrior prowess and strength.

This framework finds its specific expression in the Ilongot context. As Renato Rosaldo (1986) elucidates in his work on Ilongot aesthetics and selfhood, participation in sanctioned headhunting raids offered adolescent males a definitive path to demonstrate the very prowess that signified adult maturity. Mikkelsen (2017) deepens this analysis, arguing that the act of severing and discarding an enemy's head operates on two levels: it signals an external severing from inner psychological turmoil, and it necessitates a process of dehumanizing the victim. This dual mechanism is central to the ritual's function, allowing boys to realign their sense of self with cultural expectations of stoic manhood.

Critically, and as these analyses suggest, while Ilongot customs bestow high valor on successful headhunting, the acquisition of a trophy head appears secondary to the practice's primary psychosocial role. The paramount function is the relief of emotional burdens and the channeling of aggressive impulses into normative adult roles through structured, symbolic engagement. For the Ilongot, therefore, the violence embedded within the Ngayo' ritual is best understood not as senseless brutality, but as a sanctioned performative practice. It provides the necessary stage for youths to enact and internalize cultural norms of masculinity, thereby facilitating their transition into defined and respected roles as men—an outcome far more significant than any immediate material gain.

Transitions Through Decapitations Rites

Participation in the Ngayo' headhunting ritual facilitated a profound transformation for Ilongot males, encompassing shifts in identity, emotional state, physical embodiment, and social position. As Michelle Rosaldo (1980) notes, this process was characterized by the accrual of cultural knowledge and a corresponding dissipation of social marginalization. The assumption of a sanctioned headhunting role served to realign community power dynamics, effectively elevating youths into positions that garnered adult respect.

Critically, the act of severing a head enabled a symbolic detachment from feelings of shame, anxiety, and envy, allowing for the construction of a unified masculine identity. This internal realignment was given external form through bodily decoration with ornate symbolism; the wearing of ritual ornaments served to fuse inner turbulence with collectively valued ideals of valor and strength, realized through shared practice.

The existing scholarship provides crucial insights into the sociocultural mechanisms underpinning this identity construction. While rich ethnographic accounts by scholars like Renato Rosaldo (1980) and Michelle Rosaldo (1983) meticulously document Ilongot communal culture and headhunting customs, they often stop short of a dedicated interpretive analysis of the symbolic engagements that constitute the rite of passage itself.

This analysis builds upon that foundation to argue that participation in this transitional ritual was fundamental to achieving alignment with the norms of courage, prowess, and stoicism that constitute Ilongot manhood. As Yang (2011) and Mikkelsen (2017)

demonstrate, by decapitating enemies during prescribed raids, novice hunters relieved internal burdens through a powerful symbolic externalization. This act was the definitive threshold through which they ceased to be marginalized youths and assumed central roles as recognized warriors and adults.

Therefore, investigating the specific modes of participation within the Ngayo's dense system of symbols will elucidate the precise sociocultural mechanisms that shape masculine identity development. Advancing these conceptual frameworks on identity formation through practice holds significant relevance, extending its analytical power well beyond the specific context of Ilongot adolescent experiences.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. **Research Design:** This study employs a qualitative, literature-based research design, utilizing the techniques of symbolic anthropology to analyze the Ilongot Ngayo' ritual and its constitutive role in the construction of masculine identity for adolescent males. The interpretive frameworks of Clifford Geertz (1973) and Sherry Ortner (1973) guide the examination of the ritual's symbolic dimensions and its broader sociocultural functions.

Data for this analysis will be drawn from a purposive sample of published ethnographies, academic accounts, and primary reports that document Ilongot culture and the Ngayo' rituals. Key sources include foundational texts such as *The Diary of William Jones* (1908), Renato Rosaldo's seminal work *Ilongot Headhunting* (1980) and his later reflexive analysis in *Grief and a Headhunter's Rage* (1984), alongside contemporary ethnographic accounts like Henrik Mikkelsen's *Facehunting: Empathy, Masculinity and Violence among the Bugkalot* (2017). This selection of materials, sourced from academic databases and digital libraries, is intended to provide the "thick description" necessary for a robust symbolic analysis.

The analytical process will involve a systematic coding of these texts. Initial descriptive coding will identify and label concepts pertaining to Ilongot cultural elements, Ngayo' symbolism, coming-of-age rituals, and processes of identity construction. This will be followed by a phase of focused coding, which will categorize these initial codes into overarching themes aligned with the research questions—specifically, themes concerning cultural context, symbolic meanings, the structure of transitional rituals, modes of participant engagement, and impacts on identity formation. Constant comparative analysis will be employed to refine these categories by identifying convergent and divergent patterns across the ethnographic accounts.

Throughout this process, the use of interpretive memos will aid in conceptualizing the relationships between codes and themes. The final output will be a descriptive thematic analysis that elucidates how engagement with Ngayo' symbolism shapes masculine identity transitions.

This methodological approach is not without its limitations. The analysis relies exclusively on published observer accounts, which may contain inherent ethnographic biases or interpretive gaps. Consequently, the findings are necessarily constrained by the depth and perspective of the original authors' symbolic analyses. Although bounded in its scope, this focused case study aims to provide a critical foundation for future ethnographic and theoretical research directions into ritual and identity.

2. **Participants/Data Sources:** While this research did not select human participants, the sampling involved choosing which existing studies to include. Purposive sampling selected literature that directly addresses the research questions and through snowball sampling the researchers used references from key papers to find additional relevant studies.
3. **Tools and Instruments:** The tools used include academic data bases for sourcing related literature and Turnitin as plagiarism checker.
4. **Procedures:** When the research questions were already stated clearly, the researchers did a systematic search using different academic databases, considering inclusion/exclusion criteria to find credible sources. The chosen literature was evaluated for quality, organized thematically and analyzed to identify trends and or contradictions. Findings were then synthesized to create conclusions and recommendations.
5. **Analysis Techniques:** This research is grounded in a dual analytical approach, combining thematic and comparative analysis of ethnographic data. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, organize, and interpret recurrent patterns and core concepts across the existing literature on Ilongot society. This was supplemented by comparative analysis, which examined points of convergence and divergence between different ethnographic accounts, theoretical perspectives, and authorial interpretations.

To analyze the Ilongot ngayo' ritual, this study applies a dual theoretical lens drawn from the seminal work of Clifford Geertz (1973) and Sherry Ortner (1973). This combination provides a robust framework for a systematic examination of the ritual's symbolic dimensions and its broader sociocultural functions.

From Geertz (1973), this study adopts the conceptualization of culture as a system of interconnected symbols that confers shared meaning. His hermeneutic approach is utilized here to contextualize the symbols of the ngayo' ritual within broader Ilongot cultural patterns, analyzing how these ritual phenomena both expressed and helped to structure social life.

Ortner's (1973) framework is recruited to complement this holistic view by focusing on the specific operation of key symbols. Her typology which distinguishes between emotionally charged "summarizing" symbols that condense cultural ideals and cognitive "elaborating" symbols that provide models for

behavior offers a precise tool for analysis. This research applies Ortner's model to identify ngayo' symbols that function as fundamental interpretive structures, examining primary ethnographies for evidence of symbols that summarize ideals of masculinity or elaborate conceptual pathways for the transition to manhood.

By integrating Geertz's (1973) macro-level cultural perspective with Ortner's (1973) micro-level symbolic analysis, this study constructs a multi-layered interpretation of the ngayo'. This dual lens not only grounds the inquiry in established anthropological traditions but also provides the specific analytical tools necessary to elucidate the relationships between ritual symbolism, cultural modeling, and the lived experience of social transition.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study conducted a focused thematic analysis examining how engagement with symbolic rituals, artifacts, and practices during the Ilongot Ngayo' rite of passage shapes the development of masculine identity for adolescent males. Several key themes emerged from the data related to rituals encoding cultural meanings, identity transitions precipitated through participation, and modes of sociocultural engagement with symbolic elements.

Rituals Encoding Cultural Meanings of Masculinity

The findings of this analysis reveal that the Ngayo' ritual functions as a sophisticated cultural system encoding specific ideals of Ilongot masculinity and warrior prowess through an intricate matrix of symbolic practices, ornamentation, and performative songs (Carlson, 2013; Mikkelsen, 2011; M. Rosaldo, 1980). Ceremonial elements, such as the red hornbill headdresses, battling shell earrings, and purifying river baths are imbued with symbolic messages concerning valor, honor, and martial skill. Furthermore, the performative aspects of the ritual, most notably the tagem and da eleg dan songs and dances, where it is characterized by its rhythmic movements that are performed to the beat of musical instruments served to bind novice hunters to ancestral traditions during preparations for headhunting raids (Mikkelsen, 2011), constituting a comprehensive preparatory framework for masculine identity formation.

Within the theoretical framework of Ortner (1970), these potent artifacts and performances operate as summarizing symbols, condensing complex cultural ideals of courage, honor, and masculine power into evocative, condensed forms. They provide foundational metaphors for comprehending societal expectations and outline key scenarios for appropriate masculine conduct. Furthermore, consistent with the perspective of Geertz (1973), active participation in these dense symbolic rituals through donning ornamentation, performing dances, and singing songs facilitates the internalization of a cultural meaning system that fundamentally equates masculinity with prowess in headhunting and raiding.

Consequently, the interpretation of these specific symbols and performative practices embedded within the Ngayo' ritual provides nuanced insight into the mechanisms of socialization through which Ilongot adolescent males were integrated

into culturally specific ideals of manhood. This analytical perspective contributes targeted empirical detail to broader conceptual frameworks exploring cultural learning and identity development. While further contemporary ethnographic research is warranted, this study aims to advance the current understanding of enculturation dynamics and their pivotal role in the construction of social identities.

Identity Transitions Through Participation

The Ngayo' ritual, particularly the act of raiding and the taking of a head, was far more than a violent act; it was a profound and deliberate practice of identity-making for Ilongot adolescent males, a rite of passage that actively transformed their social position within the community (Mikkelsen, 2017; M. Rosaldo, 1980). Successfully navigating their victim and stealthily entering enemy territory, overcoming profound fear and self-doubt, and fulfilling the ritual decapitation was not merely a test of courage but a performative demonstration of maturation. This successful performance earned them more than recognition; it earned them the fundamental right to be seen as adult men, effectively moving them from the margins of boyhood to a central role as a respected social actor.

As theorized by Ortner (1973), the act of severing a head served as a critical elaborating symbol, providing a clear, sequential model for this transition. The ritual's protocols offered a cognitive and behavioral scaffold that guided youths in actively "realigning" their identities, allowing them to shed feelings of shame, envy, and weakness (Mikkelsen, 2017) and reconstruct themselves in line with culturally valued ideals of warrior prowess.

However, to view this ritual only through an internal functional lens is to risk reinforcing the very "tribal slot" (Li 2000, after Trouillot 1991) that has historically confined indigenous groups like the Ilongot to a simplistic, primitive categorization. This analysis instead highlights the ritual's role as a sophisticated mechanism of sociocultural continuity. In a context where external forces from Spanish colonizers to the modern Philippine state have sought to define, displace, or dismantle indigenous identities, practices like the Ngayo' ritual represent a powerful assertion of self-definition. The "conceptual frameworks and behavioral models" learned were not abstract; they were the very tools for reproducing a distinct Ilongot identity against pressures to assimilate. Therefore, these findings do more than contribute to a universal understanding of male identity development; they provide a crucial case study in how marginalized communities have historically mobilized their own cultural practices to enact and secure a sense of self, sovereignty, and place on their own terms.

Modes of Sociocultural Engagement

Closely examining the various modes of sociocultural engagement with the dense symbols embedded in the Ngayo' rituals also elucidated the mechanisms by which adolescent Ilongot males construct masculine identities. The ethnographies revealed how dancing the celebratory buayat dances to mimic the narrative structure of headhunting raids, proudly wearing the ornate red hornbill helmets and other ceremonial regalia such as the batling shell earrings, and loudly announcing and

orally retelling their successful kills and exploits all publicly cemented the adolescent warriors' newly achieved masculine status and stature among their communities (R. Rosaldo, 1980; M. Rosaldo 1983). By performatively engaging with the potent symbols of Ngayo' through these somatic and verbal displays, the adolescents fused the deeper cultural knowledge encoded in the symbols into their own habitus, actively constructing masculine identities through practice.

As theorized by Geertz (1973), by employing meaningful cultural symbols in active practice, individuals gain opportunities to engage in deep cultural meaning-making that powerfully shapes their self-concept and identity. This investigation into the rituals of Ngayo' thus fulfilled Yang's (2011) call for increased examination into how sociocultural learning and transmission occurs through practiced usage of potent symbols. The results of this study offer empirical validation for Mikkelsen's (2017) proposition regarding the importance of analyzing adolescent modes of sociocultural engagement for comprehending identity developmental mechanisms. Specifically, this research addressed a lacuna in the literature by providing texturally rich exemplars of how such engagement modes facilitate processes of identity construction.

The identification and interpretation of ritual elements like the buayat celebratory dances, batling ornamentation displays, and exploits narrations as performative modes of engagement helpfully elucidated their specific sociopsychological functions linking enactment practices to internalization outcomes. By illuminating these nuanced linkage processes, the current study meaningfully advances conceptual models seeking to explicate complex dynamics of enculturation and identity formation through ritual participation and symbolic engagement within cultural apprenticeship frameworks.

While not furnishing conclusive evidence given inherent limitations of a single qualitative work, these findings offer provisional empirical support for and theoretical development of relevant sociocultural perspectives. Continued rigorous empirical investigation and theoretical refinement will undoubtedly move the field closer to more comprehensive understandings of identity development within ritual contexts.

V. CONCLUSION

This examination of the Ngayo' ritual has moved beyond a mere decoding of its symbolic architecture to reveal how these practices constitute a profound site of Ilongot self-making. By applying an integrated lens drawn from Geertz and Ortner, we have seen how condensed "summary" symbols like the red hornbill headdresses and the performative scripts of the buayat dances do more than crystallize cultural ideals; they are the very mechanisms through which Ilongot adolescent males actively fuse normative identities, asserting their place within an egalitarian structure that values demonstrated skill over inherited status.

Yet, as this analysis has detailed the intricate sociocultural mechanisms facilitating masculine identity construction, it also underscores a critical tension. The very potency of rituals like the Ngayo' has historically made them a focus for external

anthropological scholarship, often recruited to illustrate theories of symbolism at the expense of understanding their lived political reality. This process of external interpretation risks consigning Ilongot culture to a static, ahistorical "tribal slot," where their egalitarianism is misread as a lack of complexity rather than a distinct and sophisticated form of sociality. The findings of this study, therefore, do more than fill a gap in anthropological literature on enculturation; they provide a crucial counter-narrative. They recenter Ilongot agency, revealing how identity is not passively inherited but actively built through engagement with a dynamic symbolic world.

However, the question remains: how do these deeply localized practices of identity formation engage with the modern Philippine state? The demonstrated importance of the Ngayo' ritual reinforces the sophistication of Ilongot customary systems. This has material consequences. A state that dismisses Ilongot society as "simple" or "backward" is a state that can more easily justify imposing "modern," individualistic models of land tenure and development, undermining the very communal norms that rituals like the Ngayo' work to reproduce. Thus, granular analyses such as this one are not merely academic; they become essential tools for documenting the depth and coherence of cultural systems that are often the foundation for claims to ancestral domain and autonomy.

Looking forward, the most pressing scholarly inquiries must be critically engaged with this political context. Future research should not only conduct primary fieldwork to document shifts in ritual practice but must also trace how these changes are inflected by ongoing struggles over land and resources. A longitudinal study of masculine identity would be most powerful if it also examined how Ilongot men navigate their identity within both the ritual sphere and the bureaucratic arenas of the state. Similarly, investigating challenges to ritual norms, like mansasadile headhunting, is crucial to understanding how Ilongot culture is not a relic but a living, contested, and adapting system. Ultimately, this practice-based analysis establishes a model for understanding how Ilongots, like the Igorots of the Cordillera, continue to jump scale—using the deeply local knowledge of ritual to navigate and resist globalized forces of assimilation and dispossession. In doing so, they ensure that their place, and their identity, is defined on their own terms.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This research is a collaborative effort of the researchers. Each one contributed to a certain extent from the conceptualization phase to the collection and analysis of data and eventually to the formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

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