

TRIBAL FLAGS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE TO THE CULTURE AND TRADITIONS OF MAGUINDANAON TRIBES IN THE PHILIPPINES

MILDRED F. ACCAD¹, AMIR KHALID A. NOR² & ABRAHAM S. ACCAD³

^{1,3}Associate Professor, College of Industrial Technology, Sultan Kudarat State University, Philippines

²Scholars, College of Industrial Technology, Sultan Kudarat State University, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Flags are part of ornamental accents in tourist spots, important events and festivities. The need to study their structures is deemed necessary to establish their significant implications to culture. Descriptive qualitative methods of research design were employed utilizing keen observation on actual festivities held from June 2013 to August 2014 in the City of Cotabato and Maguindanao, Philippines. Interviews with key informants and gatekeepers were employed, and triangulated with the prominent tribal leaders and councils of elders. Pandal-+a in Mguindanaon term is the flag usually erected in conspicuous places for festivals, burials, wedding, Eidl Fitr and the welcoming of Haj. The major flag is called Pasandalan while the minor sizes of flags are called Pamanay and those finger-like ones are called Sambulayan. These original flags are diagonally cut against their fiber to produce raffled and swaying effect in a combination of Green, Red and Yellow. The modified ones use violet, blue, and pink color. Red flags are decorated and used for ordinary occasions with common tao while royal people use Golden Yellow. Flags, to the Maguindanaon, reveal the happiness and sadness, richness and poorness of one's family and culture. Understanding these culture and traditions are simple yet complicated, but it is the key to peace and harmony, thus, cultural education is very important

KEYWORDS: Tribal Flags, Festivities, Philippine Maguindanaon Ornamental Poles, Color

INTRODUCTION

Every tradition, belief, and practice of people in a country is affiliated to a culture. It also tells who belong to the current generation and the incoming generations; Culture describes Filipino as a whole just as Chinese is known for their Feng Shui, Lip (1992). In the computer era, the modernization and increasing demand for technology, according to Weidhaas (1989) and (Salvan ,1986), deteriorate the values and appreciation of one's culture and traditions. For the past few decades, our ancestors and elders had lesser chances to write and to share to incoming generations. Thus, Elliot (2005) stressed on qualitative researches, to give justice to non- quantifiable events. One of these cultures is Maguindanaon. The Maguindanaons are divided into two principal groups, each with its own dialect and traditional location: the Tau-sa Ilud (people of the lower valley) and the Tau-sa Laya (people of the upper valley). The Tau-sa Ilud are concentrated in the areas around Cotabato City and extend to South Dinaig. Traditionally, they constitute the Sultanate of Maguindanao based near present-day Cotabato City. Their cultural practices are still alive particularly in the celebration of festivities using flags and their poles. The armed conflict has been accompanied by calls for greater autonomy for the southern Philippines and the Muslim peoples there, including the Maguindanaons. (Molao,2002.) The Maguindanaons are traditionally a peace loving, inland dwelling tribe (Ali, 2014). They have their own, traditions, beliefs and behaviors, emotions and values which are reflected in their culture.(Deigh, 2008). In every event or festival, Maguindanaons install tribal flags along the

streets, near their houses, and even in their cemetery. These tribal flags are varied in color, design and position, thus, this study seeks to uncover their appropriateness to every event based on design, color and structure. Through this study, the missing link between the unwritten meaning and importance of tribal flags to Maguindanaons can help develop cultural appreciation and preservation, considering that artists like them do not have the opportunity to internationalize their creativity, since they are generally poor. (Abbing, 2002)

This study deals with the color and design of tribal flags and ornamental poles of Maguindanaons and their implication to their culture and tradition. Specifically, it aims to determine, describe and compare the authentic and modernized designs in terms of color combination, size and shape, sewing and assembling techniques. Furthermore, it aims to determine how the said ornaments are associated with the Maguindanaon culture and tradition. The call to understand some of their colorful traditions and cultural practices is everybody's concern

METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive research design. Qualitative approach to the various authentic and modernized tribal flags was also employed to determine, describe and compare the color, design, sewing technique in such ornamental material with emphasis on ethical standards by *Groenewald (2004) and Munhull (1988)*. The respondents of this study are the elders, makers of the flag and flaglets, as emphasized by Rubin & Rubin (2005), to generate personality, perspectives and idiosyncrasies. The sensitivity of inquiry (Lee and Renzetti 1993) is triangulated with the Tourism Council of Cotabato City and senior Maguindanaon cultural enthusiasts and tribal elders. Other respondents are identified using snowball technique. The process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations (Rubin & Rubin 2005) helps to elicit information on the cultural significance of tribal flags. The study was conducted in the different communities of Cotabato City using interview schedule of ninety minutes or 2-3 hours, 3 session interviews (Hermanowicz, 2002; Seidman, 1998), 1 ½ to 2 hours transcripts: 15,000-20,000 words (Eliot, 2001), to ten (10) key informants (Morse, as cited in Mason 2010). The locale is the only producer of traditional Maguindanaon flags. Another approach used was observation for which validated semi structure observation checklist was used. An analysis on color, dimensions and design was done using actual photographs and each sample subject was analyzed in common aspects since validity is more important instead of reliability through credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of data. (Kalof, Dan & Dietz, 2008)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Authentic and Modernized Flags

Authentic Maguindanaon flags exclusively in Yellow, Green and Red color. All respondents of the study unanimously stressed that authentic flags are only of three colors. Both authentic and modernized colors used of the flag of the Maguindanaon are used in all festivities and rituals depending upon the owner or customer who orders them for specific purposes. Every color of the flag has its own meaning; Green (peace, love, and hope), Red (bravery), Golden yellow (royal blood family), and Yellow (for healing). The modernized color and design of the traditional flag are added to enhance its beauty. The meaning of the colors is also biblical in Catholicism since Green for the Christian faith is associated with rest (Psalm 23:2), life (Isaiah 15:6, Psalm 23:2, Ezekiel 17:24, Luke 23:31), growth (Ezekiel 17:24), fruitful (Jeremiah 11:16; 17:8, Hosea 14:8, Luke 23:31), fresh / undefiled (Song of Solomon 1:16, Luke 23:31), maturity (Job 15:31-32) and frailty. Likewise, Red is associated with war (Psalm 37:2) and (II Kings 3:22; Nahum 2:3), vengeance

(Isaiah 63:2) temptation of sin (Genesis 25:30, Proverbs 23:31), Nemitz, Carol. 2010. Yellow, on the other hand, is seldom described in the bible but Yellow is used to describe a leperous hair in Leviticus and in some translations, the color of Gold in Psalm 68. The color amber is only found in the KJV book of Ezekiel. Its use demonstrates God's overbearingly bright and immediate presence. Its direct meaning is God's glory and the brightness of His presence. - Ezekiel 1:4; 1:27-28; 8:2 (KJV), it symbolizes Christ as the glory of God - Ezekiel 1:28, II Corinthians 4:6, Revelation 21:23 and is associated with fire - *God's presence* (Hebrews 12:29, Exodus 3:2), *God's judgment* (Genesis 19:24, II Kings 1:10-14, Isaiah 66:15, II Thessalonians 1:7-8) www.biblegateway.com

Some of the colors of the flag were replaced due to the modern generation's adaptation to modernity. Modernized flags are violet, blue, black, and pink in both plain or as sewn in color combinations in addition to the color of the traditional Maguindanaon flag. Purple for them signifies royalty, (Judges 8:26) and riches (Revelation 18:16, Luke 16:19), but also corruption of riches (Revelation 17:4). Symbolism of color is a product of culture, but the optical and aesthetic effects of interacting colors are already an empirical fact. (Dudley and Faircy as revised by Rice 1978:231). Orange, for Roman Catholics, symbolizes wisdom and knowledge as they light peach. Blue, on the other hand, symbolizes tranquility, trust, peace and solemnity according to Dudley, Louise, Austin Faricy and James G. Rice. (1978). Pink is a combination of the Red pigment with smaller amounts of White which symbolizes love

The finding implies that both modern and traditional colors are adopted in festivities unlike the Balinese flags, Umbul Umbuls, which are used for welcomes and celebrations that are usually in red colors only. (<http://www.prestonbailey.com/event-ideas/welcoming-path/>)

Maguindanaon Tribal Flag (Pandala) Color Combination

The Pandala is a combination of Red, Green and Yellow colors. It signifies bravery and green stands for Peace and Love which is also similar to the Chakra Healing Lotus Tibetan Prayer Flags. Some Pandala measure 6-9 meters high. The long rectangular shape of the flag is still the same as it was in the past generations, but, in terms of size, some of the flags are customized. Makers of the Maguindanaon Tribal Flag follow the costumer's prescribed order. The combinations of the modernized flag are Blue, Red, and Yellow, sometimes mixed with black, violet, and pink. Among modern generations some of the Maguindanaon people put different colors as well as the Gay and Lesbian wedding flag although which the traditional rainbow flag underwent several changes over the past decade. The Tribal Flag uses Blue, Black, and Pink to look more presentable to the visitors and to enhance its beauty



Figure 1: The Authentic Maguindanaon Flag for Installation on a Bamboo Pole

Sambulayang-Maguindanaon Tribal Flag

This flag is locally called Sambulayang. It is one of the colorful wedding decorations hanging above the couple-to-be's house. It is also used to welcome tourists and government officials. Its shape is like human hands. It has the

same shape to the Sambulayang in Malaysia, but has different traditional color combination. The traditional color of Malaysia's Sambulayang is red, white and black while the Maguindanaon flags is Green, Red and Yellow

This is somewhat similar with the healing flag called Chakra where the seven (7) flags are on a string on each set; each flag measures a Large approx: 21cm wide by x 23 cm High. The colors are bright and match each Chakra: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet. (<http://www.hotfrog.com.au/Companies/Prayer-Flags-Wholistic-Gifts-Australian-Online-Gift-Store/Chakra-Healing-Lotus-Tibetan-Prayer-Flags-213272>)

According to Saglayan and Kubinto, as makers of the Tribal Flag of Maguindanao , the previous method of assembling was manual but is presently sewn in a machine. The sewing of the Tribal Flag is by raffle, nothing had changed the style of the sewing technique. In a more swaying effect with the wind, bias cutting is also used. This is contrary to the Umbul Umbul flags in Bali which are plainly sewn with single color in each pole. (<http://www.theflagfactory.com.au/silk-bali-flags-umbul-umbuls>)



Figure3: The Proper Dimension and Placement of Authentic Tribal Flag called Sambulayang



Figure 4: The Vertical Positioning of Flags along the Streets or Set Venue to Signify that the Celebration is Special and the Guests are of Royal Family



Figure 5: The Slant Positioning of Flags Signify that the Celebration is Ordinary and the Guests are Non –Royal blood

Sewing Technique

Similar to the Bali flags, these are handmade. They do vary slightly; the average of bottom width is approx 510mms. The pole is a specially designed, collapsible fiberglass pole, extending from 1m up to 6.0 m. In Maguindanaon flags, 2-3” bamboos are used as pole inserted on the sewn cloth, unlike in the Bali flags that are lightweight, very easy to erect and have a rubber tip at the end so that they won't poke a hole through the end of the lovely flags. (<http://www.theflagfactory.com.au/silk-bali-flags-umbul-umbuls>)

Assembling Technique

In assembling, the fabric of the flag has a visible opening into which the bamboo is put in place. To properly position the flag, a hole is dug in the appropriate place. The depth of the hole is dependent upon the height of the flag for it to stand well. Installing the flag should conform to the social status of the group which will use it. For upper class people, it should be installed straight; for middle class and commoners; it should be in slanting position. For them, the slant flags are a direct implication of unstable economy and unsecured life, similar with the meaning of lines in ancient teaching where slant lines signify line of action or motion, like the man running, beating rain or tree against a strong wind according to Ortis, M.A., R.,T. E. Erestrain, A.G. Guillermo, M. C.Montano, SA. Pilar (1976). The degree of action is shown in the diagonal line. It implies halfway of independence. Vertical lines mean self-sufficiency, power and stability which are always man-made. Lines are the simplest, most primitive and most universal means for creating visual art according to Dudley and Faircy as revised by Rice (1978: 2150)

How the Ornaments Affect the Maguindanaon Culture and Tradition

Kalilang (Muslim Wedding)

Traditional marriage of the Muslim Filipinos expects the man to court and marry a woman who comes from the same economic and societal status as he has. A gift or dorey for the bride is an essential part of any proposed union. It is meant to compensate the bride's family for the loss of a woman-member and to reimburse the cost of her upbringing. Because marriage is considered an alliance of families, relatives on both sides have a say on the union. (Ali,2014). According to Sabpa (2014), the family of the bride will be upset if the flag is not present at the wedding. According to Saglayan (2014), if there are no flags decorated, the blessings will not pour out for married couple. Likewise, Basilon (2014), stated that flags are not used if the couple wants a secret ceremony. If the prescribed color of the flag is not observed, the flag should be removed and immediately replaced. The families, either the bride or groom or the relatives,

have the authority to decide whether flags should be used or not. They feel happy upon viewing the flag during the wedding. Dris (1980) and Ortiz (1976). Similar to weddings in Bali traditions, flags symbolizes abundant ideas for inspiration. Creation of entryway for guests is based on traditional Balinese flags. Umbul Umbuls are used for welcome and celebrations. (<http://www.prestonbailey.com/event-ideas/welcoming-path/>). Furthermore, colors have effects on the perception of the eyes. According to physicists, the color wavelength varies depending upon the hue. Red has been studied as having the longest wavelength. Colors may become light or dark in the presence of another color. All these make sense. The color is, in fact, light. (Goodwin, 1995:429), thus, people are happy once colorful flags are present in an event

Festival

In every festival like the Guinakit Fluvial Parade, which is the re-enactment of Shariff Kabunsuan's (an Arab-Malay missionary from Johore, Indonesia) who arrival in Mindanao some 500 years ago in a Guinakit (covoy of bancas) along the banks of Masla Pulangi, now Rio Grande de Mindanao. Dris (1980). The arrival of Shariff Kabunsuan started the spread of Islam in the country. Guinakit Fluvial Parade is part of the Shariff Kabunsasun Festival celebrated every 19th of December by the people of Cotabato City. The flags add attraction to the boat that they are ornamenting. The fluvial parade is not only celebrated by Maguindnaons but also by other Filipino Christians in other part of the Philippines like those in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao islands. Color was discovered by Sir Isaac Newton (1665). As the light makes it way through a prism, it is bent, or refracted. This forces the narrow beam to spread out and change, until it merges on the other side of color ranging from red through yellow, green, and blue, to violet, thus, creating multi-color flags is like creating a solar power effect in a prism that brings great festivities with nature. Stavridis (2004), Weidhaas, (1989) and Salvan (1986) remarked that Fluvial structures are like buildings made and designed with ornamental elements

Ritual

When a festival or any celebration comes, a ritual game must be play which is only exclusive for Datus. They played two versions of games, the "*sipa sa lama*" and "*sipa sa manguis*." In the first game, the men gather in an open field (*lama* means playground) in a circle formation and take turns hitting the ball and keeping it on air as long as possible, the one nearest the descending ball shouting that he will take it.(Lopez,2003).The *manguis* (literally means "sweet victory") is similar with the *pabitin*, but a lot bigger, with a lot more boxes hanging three layers deep, and perched up much higher, up to about 10 meters high. The game's intention is to hit as many boxes, but what counts are only the boxes that fall. Flags are also used to signify start of the game, warning or a violation aside from swaying them once they win the game. (Dartilag, 1980).To explain such use of flag as go signal to start or warn the players in a game, this are just some reasons. In time, scientists' determined that light is a series of waves of different lengths. We see the different wavelengths as different because this object had been able to throw back, or reflect one and absorbed the others. Take for instance, the flower looks red because it reflects the red light and absorb the others. But it is observed that Red is more visible in any direction because of its longest wave while the players could not see weaved flags in violet, although it symbolizes royalty as the Kasipa sa Mangis is a game for royal families, because violet fades only in its shortest. (Cofield, Francis, 1995) and Hepler, D. E. And P I. Wallach, (1987)

Burial

Maguindanaons do not celebrate birthdays and all - souls day. They use flag to pay respect to their loved ones who pass away. This religious practice of Islam in caring for the remains is similar to the biblical meaning of white clothes associated with purity / refinement / being unblemished / righteousness / heavenly (Psalm 51:7, Ecclesiastes 9:8, Daniel 7:9; 11:35; 12:10, Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:3, Luke 9:29, John 20:12, Acts 1:10, Revelation 3:4-5;18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9;13-14) . It can also be a victory (Revelation 6:2; 19:11;14) and false righteousness (when only outward) according to Matthew 23:27, Acts 23:3 .Dead jihadists or holy warrior in the Muslims term, or those fighting in the war; have another way of burial. Usually, the remains are not buried immediately without going through the ritual of noted “martyrs “who dies in the war. Maguindanon tribal flags resemble Chakra Healing Lotus Tibetan Prayer Flags which are handmade by the Tibetan people in Nepal that, frays in the wind over time and sends its powerful healing messages out into the world.(<http://www.hotfrog.com.au/Companies/Prayer-Flags-Wholistic-Gifts-Australian-Online-Gift-Store/Chakra-Healing-Lotus-Tibetan-Prayer-Flags-213272>) The color of the flag for burial is white and it has never been changed since then. The prescribed color of the flag should be followed or else the family will probably get upset and feel disrespected. It is imperative to have white flags during burials. These findings are opposite to military ritual in a battle wherein flaglets or handkerchiefs are waved to signify surrender (Deigh, 2008). Likewise, in Maguindanao, red flags are placed or hang outside the house of the dead warrior to signify bravery (Ali, 2014). In the tradition of the Chinese, if the deceased would be dressed in red, he/she will become a ghost.(<http://traditionscustoms.com/death-rites/chinese-funeral>)

Welcoming of Hajj

A religious duty for Muslims which must be carried out at least once in a lifetime by all adult Muslim who are physically and financially capable is called the Hajj. It is one of the five (5) pillars of Islam. The place where they perform a series of rituals is only in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The family prepares a kanduli or thanksgiving upon the arrival of the hajj from Mecca. Likewise, a traditional flag of the Bajau people in Semporna Town, Malaysia is used during special occasions such as Regatta LEPA, wedding ceremony, National Day or welcoming of VIP visitors. This decorative sails in shades of gold, red and blue hang from a 5 to 7 meters tall T-framed mast topped with a ceremonial umbrella to symbolize sheltering of inhabitants from sun and rain. (<http://www.etawau.com/Semporna/LEPA/LEPA.htm>)

Eid

Flags are used during the Eid. The term is derived from Arabic word which means “celebration”. The Muslim society celebrates festivals like Eid’l Fitr, Eid Mubarak and Eid Adha as part of their traditions. Food is prepared for thanksgiving. It is in this celebration that Lhadhar, the largest and very tall vertical flags are used. They are white in color, usually without any text, and contain ribbons of red, yellow, and blue. Lhadhar are displayed in front of important places, such as monasteries and palaces, and one must be formally dressed to enter these places. Among Maguindanaon, similar flags are displayed. Lhadhar represent victory over the forces of evil, and are commonly inscribed with the four powerful animals, the tiger, the snow lion, the dragon, and the Garuda (a celestial royal bird). These animals are also on the four outside corners of a Lungdhar prayer flag, surrounding and guarding the Wind Horse. (<http://wanderlustandlipstick.com/blogs/debbysdepartures/2011/11/19/in-the-presence-of-prayer-flags/>)

Cultural and Traditional Implications of Flags on Thanksgiving or Kanduli

Kanduli is a Maguindanao term for the thanksgiving banquet. It is the Muslim's traditional practice of asking blessings by preparing food for the guests. According to Ali,(2004) if there is a kanduli, the family puts flags outside their houses in order to acknowledge the crowd. Others can't afford to buy or rent flags because of their high price, but it is considerably understood. Any member of the family or relative is allowed to choose whether flags will be decorated or not. They feel pleased seeing stunning flags during the event. Modernization has come to the community and many are now use galvanized iron instead of nipa palms for roofing of Maguindanaon houses however, flags are still present in many celebrationssimilartothewearingofbright cotton materials for their malong.

<http://www.livinginthephilippines.com/culture-and-people/philippine-culture/culture-and-traditions/1291-maguindanaos-culture-customs-and-traditions>

This finding is similar with that of the Goendhar, the smallest prayer flags, which are located in the middle of a rooftop of a home. Rectangular in shape, they are white with ribbons of green, red, yellow, and blue attached to the edges. These flags are blessings for welfare prosperity, and harmony in the family. (<http://wanderlustandlipstick.com/blogs/debbysdepartures/2011/11/19/in-the-presence-of-prayer-flags/>)

Healing Flag

Long time ago, the yellow color of the flag was used for healing purposes but this was forbidden by the Elders and people were encouraged to only have faith in God (Allah) who has the power to heal sickness. Yellow means happiness, joy, freshness, celebration and healing and Gold is Gold: Glory, Kingship, Words of Wisdom while Red blood is *life* (Genesis 9:4-5, Deuteronomy 12:23), *sacrifice* (Exodus 12:13; 23:18), *remission of sin* (Hebrews 9:22, I John 1:7, Revelation 1:5), *covenant* (Exodus 24:8, Matthew 26:28, Romans 5:9, Hebrews 9:12; 13:12), *war* (I Kings 2:5, I Chronicles 22:8) In addition, Red symbolizes the Blood of Jesus, Salvation, Sacrifice, War. Observing all biblical meanings of color, it can be reflected that Yellow as healing color is a Christian faith, thus, it does not fall under tradition but of religion. Catholicism teaches that the most populous healing grotto is the image of Immaculate Conception with Yellow rose flowers on each of her feet when it was seen by St. Bernadette. (Barren, 2015.)

CONCLUSIONS

Tribal flags and ornamental poles of Maguindanaons have significant implications and connections to the lives of the tribesmen, particularly, on their culture and traditions. Although, colors are modified based on the availability of cloth and the desire of the individual celebrators, it is still connected and accepted by the tribe. Meaning of flag colors are interrelated with both tradition and faith brought about by religion

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