

# Sacred Farewell: An Ethnographic Study of Kagan Tribe Burial Tradition and Practices

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## ABSTRACT

This descriptive ethnographic study examined the funerary practices of the Kagan community in Cason, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, with emphasis on how Islamic teachings have reshaped their indigenous traditions. Guided by key informant interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the research involved selected Kagan elders, religious leaders, and community members who shared narratives on past and present burial customs. Findings reveal a significant shift from ancestral rituals toward practices aligned with Qur'anic injunctions, the Hadith, and the Sunnah. Traditional elements such as the chanting of prophets' names, the placement of kilah flowers, and the kuwas soil ceremony have largely disappeared in favor of standardized Islamic procedures supported by increased access to formal Islamic education and madrasah-trained leaders. The community now adopts Islamic protocols, including gender-specific washing, the use of prescribed materials, Salat al-Janazah, and burial within 24 hours. These changes illustrate a deliberate realignment of cultural identity toward Islamic orthodoxy. The study highlights how religious education and leadership drive cultural transformation, contributing to broader discussions on faith, identity, and the evolving practices of indigenous Muslim communities in Mindanao.

**Keywords:** Kagan Tribe, Ethnography, Burial Practices, Indigenous Beliefs, Islamic Traditions, Cultural Identity

## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

In the depths and complexities of human culture, it served as the bridge that united people across generations, linking them through shared traditions and values. Among the most profound expressions of culture were the rituals and practices that surrounded life and death, showcasing the community's belief, spirituality, and its intricate connection with their daily lives. One of the indigenous groups that was rich in culture and tradition found in Mindanao was the Kagan tribe, its name derived from the term "Ka'ag," meaning "to inform or to warn" in their native language, reflecting their historical role as vigilant defenders against external threats (Poraz, 2001, as cited by Yu, 2020).

For the Kagan tribe, an indigenous Muslim community in the Philippines, burial practices held a central place in their cultural heritage. These rituals not only represented their respect for the deceased but also embodied their collective values, religious convictions, and deep-rooted connection to their ancestry. Each aspect of the burial process, from preparation to final rites, was infused with symbolic meaning and reflected the tribe's efforts to preserve their traditions (Yu, Manidoc, & Tsuji, 2022).

However, as globalization and societal changes increasingly impacted indigenous communities, their historic roles as vigilant defenders of culture had often proven insufficient against external influences, placing many traditional practices at risk of fading into obscurity. Recent studies highlighted that globalization, modernization, and changing value systems continued to challenge the preservation of indigenous cultural practices (Diaz-

Sarachaga, J. M., 2023). Their burial customs, while rich in cultural and spiritual significance, remained underdocumented and were vulnerable to the forces of modernization.

Across the globe, burial practices had long been seen as a significant cultural expression, reflecting values, spirituality, and identity as a community (Gire, 2014). For instance, in many Indigenous cultures, such as the Native American tribes, burial rituals were deeply intertwined with beliefs about the afterlife and respect for ancestors. These practices often included specific rites that honored the deceased and ensured their safe passage to the next world, reflecting a community's values and spiritual beliefs. For instance, the Ilocano "átang" ritual involved offering food to appease spirits and honor the dead, underscoring the community's belief in the continued presence of ancestral spirits (Corpuz, 2020). Similarly, the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan performed the "Babukung" dance during funeral ceremonies to protect the soul's journey and ward off evil spirits, highlighting their spiritual beliefs surrounding death (Kusuma, 2020). Historical evidence from ancient Egypt showcased elaborate mummification and burial rituals, reflecting a profound belief in the afterlife and the necessity of honoring the deceased. These practices were integral to ensuring a successful transition to the next world, underscoring the community's spiritual values and beliefs (Knox, 2016).

In the Philippines, it was already known to have different unique and cultural practices that varied from one tribe to another, particularly the burial practices. For example, Indigenous groups such as the Igorots, particularly the Kankanaey Tribe of the Cordillera, were famous for their unique burial customs, including placing coffins on cliffs or within caves (Deere, 2021). In addition, in accordance with the Masadiit tribe, it highlighted how their rituals varied depending on the age or life stage of the deceased, ranging from newborns to the elderly. While some rituals were common across all life stages, others were specifically tied to the circumstances, conditions, or causes of death. This distinction underscored the cultural significance of tailoring rituals to individual life events, ensuring that each practice resonated with the unique aspects of the deceased's life and passing (Sagasag, 2023).

In the local context, although the Kagan tribe possessed a rich culture about life and death, existing literature specifically on burial practices remained lacking, resulting in a noticeable gap in in-depth research. This was due to limited scholars focusing on studying the intricate culture of the Kagan tribe, which resulted in insufficient information and understanding towards their practices, thereby creating a "knowledge gap" (Sultio & Gomez, 2022). Present studies about the Kagan people had been primarily focused on their language, such as the study by Epefania (2023), and the recent studies conducted by Yu, Manidoc, and Tsuji's (2022) research on Kagan folktales, and Yu's study of Kagan folk epics. While these studies aimed to immortalize the Kagan tribe's oral traditions and language, there was no explicit study that addressed other aspects of Kagan culture, particularly on burial practices, leaving this cultural area relatively unexplored.

Contemporary challenges also hindered cultural sustainability as they gradually weakened cultural practices, paving the way for modernization. According to the study by the International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research (2022), modernization negatively impacted cultural practices, potentially leading to the extinction of traditional activities. The research highlighted how the adoption of modern lifestyles and values contributed to the erosion of indigenous customs and traditions. Because of these concerns, this study needed urgent action to delve into these intricate burial practices, exploring their meanings, symbolism, and resilience in times of challenges. By employing an ethnographic approach, this research aimed to document and preserve the unique traditions of the Kagan tribe, contributing to the broader understanding of their cultural identity and the role these practices played in sustaining their heritage and ultimately preserving cultural practices amidst modernization.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to explore the intricate burial practices of the Kagan tribe in Purok-5, Tuburan, Cason, Monkayo, Davao de Oro. Adopting an ethnographic approach, it sought to thoroughly document the unique traditions and customs of the Kagan community. By conducting in-depth interviews, the research endeavored to provide a deeper understanding of how these traditional practices were preserved and sustained amidst contemporary challenges.

The findings of this study contributed to the growing body of cultural knowledge and played a vital role in supporting initiatives for cultural preservation. Moreover, it aimed to promote inclusivity, foster intercultural understanding, and contribute to sustainable development.

## Research Questions

This study explored the burial practices of the Kagan tribe, specifically in Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, focusing on the processes involved, their symbolic meanings, and the religious connections that contributed to a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage. Through this exploration, the study addressed existing knowledge gaps by investigating the following research questions:

1. What were the traditional burial practices and rituals observed by the Kagan tribe?
2. What cultural and spiritual beliefs influenced the Kagan's burial customs?
3. How had Kagan burial practices evolved over time, and what factors influenced these changes?
4. What roles did family, religious leaders, and the community play in Kagan funeral and burial ceremonies?

## Theoretical Lens

This research adopted a multi-theoretical approach by integrating Ritual Theory, Structural Functionalism, and the framework of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) to analyze the burial traditions of the Kagan Muslim tribe. These lenses provided a deeper understanding of how cultural practices surrounding death are shaped by belief systems, social structures, and indigenous worldviews. Together, these frameworks enabled the researchers to examine how burial rites function not only as symbolic expressions but also as systems that sustain the community's social and spiritual fabric.

At the core of this study is Ritual Theory, primarily drawn from the works of Arnold van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1969), who viewed rituals as structured rites of passage that guide individuals and communities through significant life transitions. Within this framework, death is seen as a profound transformation marked by ceremonial acts that represent the shift from the living to the spiritual realm. Turner emphasized the concept of the liminal phase—a transitional stage in which individuals, particularly the deceased, are separated from their former social identity and not yet incorporated into their new spiritual status. This period of ambiguity is not only experienced by the individual but also by the community, as members engage in rituals that symbolically and emotionally process loss, maintain order, and affirm collective identity.

Complementing this perspective is the lens of Structural Functionalism, as articulated by Emile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski, which interprets ritual practices as functional components of society that contribute to maintaining social equilibrium and cohesion. From this standpoint, Kagan burial traditions are not random or merely symbolic; rather, they are deeply embedded in the social structure, fulfilling essential roles such as resolving collective grief, affirming religious duties, reinforcing kinship ties, and transmitting moral values. These rituals help the community navigate the disruption brought by death, reaffirm shared beliefs, and restore balance in the face of existential loss. The structured sequence of actions during burial ceremonies such as washing the body, communal prayer, and prescribed mourning behaviors serve not only spiritual purposes but also reinforce social unity and cultural continuity.

To situate the research within the cultural context of the Kagan people, the study also employed the framework of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), which emphasizes the value of local, orally transmitted, and experience-based knowledge within indigenous communities. In the Philippine context, IKSP is recognized by institutions such as the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) under the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997. This framework affirms that indigenous traditions, including burial practices, are rooted in generations of lived experiences, ecological relationships, and spiritual worldviews. These practices are not merely cultural remnants but are living systems of knowledge that reflect a people's unique way of

understanding life, death, and the afterlife. Applying this lens allowed the study to honor the authenticity of Kagan beliefs while also revealing how these rituals serve as a form of cultural preservation amidst modern influences and religious realignments.

By weaving these theoretical perspectives together, the study examined how the burial practices of the Kagan tribe in Purok-5, Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro serve multiple social and spiritual purposes. Ritual Theory highlighted the symbolic and emotional dimensions of the burial rites, particularly the transitional (liminal) experiences of both the deceased and the living. Structural Functionalism revealed how these practices reinforce social norms, ensure spiritual obligations are fulfilled, and maintain the integrity of the community. Meanwhile, IKSP grounded the study in the lived realities and sacred traditions of the Kagan people, affirming the importance of indigenous voices and knowledge systems in understanding and preserving cultural identity.

Ultimately, this theoretical lens provided a culturally respectful and academically rigorous approach to studying the sacred farewell rituals of the Kagan tribe. It contributed not only to the field of anthropology and cultural studies but also to the broader advocacy of indigenous cultural preservation, especially in the context of religious transformation and modernization. Through this lens, burial traditions are not only seen as spiritual acts but also as pillars of cultural resilience and social unity among indigenous communities.

### **Significance of the Study**

This ethnographic study offered valuable insights into the cultural intricacies of the Kagan community, with a particular focus on their complex burial practices. The primary objective of this research was to illuminate the rich fabric of Kagan culture and traditions, exploring how these practices shaped the community's identity and social dynamics. By raising awareness of their unique heritage, this study aimed to foster a deeper appreciation for the Kagan community and its significant contributions to cultural diversity. This study aimed to benefit the following:

**National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP).** This study could inform NCIP's policies and programs aimed at protecting and promoting the cultural heritage and rights of the Kagan community. The findings could have supported initiatives that enhanced cultural preservation.

**Local Government Units (LGUs).** This study could help LGUs develop policies that respected and incorporated the traditional practices of the Kagan community. Insights from this research could have promoted cultural awareness and preservation.

**Muslim Communities and Organizations.** This study could provide a deeper understanding of the diversity within Muslim practices and culture, promoting cross-cultural appreciation and fostering a more inclusive approach toward different Muslim communities in the Philippines.

**College Institutions.** The study strengthened connections between the community extension office and the Kagan community, facilitating culturally relevant outreach programs that promoted engagement with indigenous populations. It opened avenues for collaborative studies, enriching academic offerings while fostering mutual understanding between students, faculty, and the Kagan community. Additionally, it supported cultural preservation efforts, positioning the institution as a leader in advocating for cultural sustainability.

**Participants.** This study validated and documented the cultural identity, traditions, and challenges faced by Kagan community members. Participants benefited from this study by allowing them to share their cultural practices and beliefs, fostering a sense of pride and ownership over their heritage. Moreover, by documenting and analyzing their burial practices, the research contributed to cultural preservation efforts, ensuring that these traditions were not lost to time amidst the contemporary world.

**Future Researchers.** This study served as a valuable resource for academics and researchers interested in cultural studies, anthropology, and ethnography. The data and insights provided could have facilitated further research and explored related themes and other research regarding cultural dynamics of indigenous communities.

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## Definition of Terms

**The terms used in this study were defined in both operational and conceptual contexts:**

**Alim.** This term refers to a religious scholar or Islamic learned person who studies and teaches the teachings of Islam, including the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic law, guiding the community in spiritual and religious matters.

**Bid'ah.** This term refers to any innovation or practice introduced into Islam that has no basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah, and is often viewed as a deviation from the original teachings of the faith.

**Datu.** This term refers to tribal leader of a group of indigenous people in the Philippines. The datu rules by making decisions, settling conflicts, and guiding the community to maintain order, peace, and tradition.

**Ghusl.** This term refers to the full-body ritual purification required in Islam before certain acts of worship, such as after sexual activity, menstruation, or before burial of the dead.

**Hajj.** This term refers to the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. It is a mandatory religious duty for all adult Muslims who are physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey at least once in their lifetime.

**Ibadah.** This term refers to any act of worship and obedience done sincerely for Allah, including prayers, fasting, charity, and good deeds in Islam.

**Ikawapatan.** This term refers to the bereaved refers to a person or family who is in a state of mourning following the loss of a loved one.

**Imam.** This term refers to a prayer leader or priest in the Muslim community who leads congregational prayers, delivers sermons, and provides spiritual and religious guidance to the people.

**Jamaah.** This term refers to a member of the Muslim community who participates in congregational prayers, religious activities, and communal life, fostering unity and shared faith within the group.

**Kafan.** This term refers to the simple white cloth used to wrap the body of a deceased Muslim before burial, as part of the Islamic funeral rites.

**Kagan Tribe.** This term refers to an indigenous ethnolinguistic group who embraced Islam primarily residing in the Davao Gulf area of Mindanao, Philippines. They have a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in their maritime traditions, as many communities are engaged in fishing and coastal trade. Historically, the term "Kagan" meant "fellow" or "to inform," signifying their role in communicating and warning neighboring tribes of potential threats. Despite modern influences, they continue to uphold their customs, social structures, and communal practices, ensuring that their heritage remains alive for future generations.

**Kila.** This term refers to the local term for the Cordyline plant, a tropical ornamental known for its colorful, sword-shaped leaves and small clustered flowers. Native to Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Among the Kagan tribe in Mindanao, kila is traditionally planted at grave sites.

**Kuwas.** In the Kagan tribe, this term refers to a grave marker or a symbol placed at burial sites.

**Madrasah.** This term refers to the Islamic educational institution where students learn religious subjects such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and Shariah, and often secular subjects as well.

**Masjid.** This term refers to the arabic term for a mosque, a place of worship where Muslims gather for prayer, reflection, and community activities.

**Pamakayd ng Pagkubo (Burial Practices).** This term refers to the burial practices which are customs and rituals followed to dispose of the deceased's body, often involving preparation, ceremonies, and offerings. These practices vary across cultures and religions, aiming to honor the deceased, provide comfort to the living, and ensure a peaceful afterlife for the spirit.

**Salatul Janaza.** This term refers to the Islamic funeral prayer offered in congregation to seek forgiveness and mercy for the deceased.

**Shahid.** This term refers to the arabic term meaning "martyr," referring to a person who dies in the path of Allah, especially while defending their faith or in righteous cause, and is honored in Islam with high spiritual reward.

**Shariah.** This term refers to the Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, guiding all aspects of a Muslim's life, including worship, morality, family, and legal matters.

**Sindong.** This term refers to the small hollowed out side space or chamber within the grave where the deceased is placed, in accordance with Islamic burial customs.

**Tigkare.** This term refers to the gravedigger in Muslim Filipino communities who is responsible for digging graves and preparing burial sites according to Islamic traditions.

**Ustad.** This term refers to the respectful title used in Muslim communities to refer to a teacher, scholar, or expert, especially in religious or Islamic studies.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This ethnographic study explored the burial practices of the Kagan community, located in Purok-5, Tuburan, Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro. Data were collected through direct observation and one-on-one interviews. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method, with six individuals chosen for the interviews. The researchers aimed to include participants who represented key roles in the community: one Imam (Priest), one Datu (Chieftain), one Alim (Scholar), a Tigkare (Gravedigger), an Ikawapatan (Bereaved), and one member of the Jama'ah (Community). This approach ensured the collection of comprehensive and detailed insights into the community's burial practices.

This study highlighted several limitations that may have influenced the depth and comprehensiveness of the findings regarding Kagan burial practices. One significant limitation was the restricted time frame for immersion, which reduced opportunities for prolonged observation and deeper engagement with community members both essential in ethnographic studies to fully understand cultural practices. Sugden et al. (2022) suggested that short-term ethnography allowed for concentrated engagement within a brief period. They pointed out that this approach worked particularly well in settings with high turnover, where participants may have only been involved for a few days or weeks. By using focused observation and video documentation, researchers could collect valuable data even within these limited timeframes.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through in-depth interviews posed potential risks of recall bias and subjective interpretations, as participants' recollections may have been influenced by personal experiences or selective memory. Moreover, the dependence on oral histories increased the possibility of historical inaccuracies, as traditions may have evolved over time or been shaped by individual perspectives.

The study's delimitations were intentionally defined to focus its scope. Geographically, it was limited to the Kagan community in Purok-5 Tuburan, Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, excluding other indigenous groups that may have had distinct burial customs. The research concentrated solely on burial practices and deliberately excluded other cultural aspects such as birth, marriage, or daily rituals. Participant selection focused on key participants in significant community roles, excluding non-Kagan Tribe members or other indigenous groups. Methodologically, the study employed ethnographic techniques, observation and in-depth interviews without

incorporating quantitative methods or surveys. Finally, the set timeframe for immersion limited the extent of cultural engagement compared to longer ethnographic studies.

These limitations and delimitations helped contextualize the study's findings, highlighting both the challenges encountered and the intentional choices made to narrow the research focus effectively.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This qualitative study employed an ethnographic research approach to examine the burial rituals, symbolic elements, and cultural significance of the Kagan community's burial practices. Specifically, through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, the study explored the meanings embedded in these traditions and how they reflected the community's beliefs about death and mourning.

Ethnographic research provided a structured framework for studying people and cultures in their natural settings. As Creswell and Poth (2023) explained, ethnography requires researchers to immerse themselves deeply in the cultural environment of a community to understand its traditions, social structures, and symbolic practices. This method was especially valuable when studying burial customs, as it allowed for direct observation of rituals and a richer interpretation of their meaning within the broader cultural and spiritual context of the Kagan people.

The decision to use an ethnographic approach stemmed from its effectiveness in capturing the lived experiences and cultural perspectives of the Kagan community. According to Creswell and Poth (2023), ethnography allowed researchers to deeply explore and interpret the cultural meanings embedded within group behaviors and traditions. In this context, the study sought to capture the intricate rituals, symbolic elements, and spiritual beliefs that characterized Kagan burial practices. These cultural expressions not only reflected the community's identity but also reinforced social cohesion and shared values.

To enhance the study's depth and reliability, focused ethnography was incorporated, an approach designed for intensive data collection within a limited timeframe. Knoblauch (2005, as cited by Pink & Morgan, 2013) emphasized that while short-term ethnographic studies covered a brief period, they compensated by using data-rich techniques such as video observations, detailed field notes, and repeated participant interactions. These methods enhanced analytical depth and cultural immersion, allowing for a more precise interpretation of the symbolic meanings behind Kagan burial rituals.

Furthermore, short-term ethnographic studies emphasized active engagement with participants through both observational and interventional methods. As Pink & Morgan (2013) explained, this approach enabled researchers to create meaningful research contexts that uncovered the deeper cultural values and emotions associated with burial traditions. By applying these methods, this study provided a comprehensive exploration of the Kagan community's burial practices, highlighting their cultural, spiritual, and social significance.

To achieve its research objectives, this study employed participant observation as a key data collection method. This approach allowed researchers to observe events, activities, and interactions within a social setting, gaining direct insight into the phenomenon in its natural context (Liu & Maitlis, 2010). Additionally, ethnographic interviews were conducted, often unstructured or in-depth, guided by general themes rather than rigidly standardized questions. Moreover, documentary analysis examined records and publications that provided insights into the cultural aspects of the group (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

### Research Locale

This study was conducted in Purok-5, Barangay Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro. Casoon was a barangay within the municipality of Monkayo in the province of Davao de Oro. According to the 2025 Census of Phil Atlas, it had a population of 6,651, accounting for 7.08% of Monkayo's total population.

A significant portion of this population belonged to the Muslim Kagan community. Since this study focused on the Kagan tribe, Purok-5 Tuburan in Casoon was selected as the research site. While Monkayo was home to various Muslim tribes, Casoon was unique in being exclusively inhabited by the Kagan tribe, with no presence of other Muslim groups. The Casoon Kagan Cooperative and the nearby Masjid (Mosque) served as key landmarks in the area. This location acted as the central hub for the Kagans, making them the most suitable participants for this study.



**Figure 1.** The map of Monkayo, Purok-5 Tuburan, Casoon, showing the location of the study area.

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## Role of the Researchers

In ethnographic research, the role of researchers extended beyond data collection to include translating scientific inquiries into practical methodologies, ensuring the ethical protection of participants and their data, and executing study procedures with care. Ethnographers immersed themselves within communities to develop a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences through direct engagement. However, this level of involvement introduced ethical complexities that had to be carefully managed. Researchers had to establish clear ethical guidelines to balance in-depth observation with their responsibility to protect participant welfare. Transparency in interactions and maintaining professional boundaries were essential to preserving both the study's credibility and the dignity of those involved.

The University of Virginia (2025) highlighted that ethnographers often handled sensitive information that could expose participants to legal, social, economic, psychological, or physical risks. To mitigate these risks, researchers implemented protective measures such as confidentiality agreements, secure data storage, and anonymization techniques. A well-structured informed consent process was also crucial, ensuring that participants fully understood the research objectives, potential risks, and their rights including the option to withdraw at any time.

Beyond ethical safeguards, researchers also had to demonstrate adaptability in their methodologies. Stefanadis (2006) emphasized that modern researchers had to be resourceful and inventive in translating scientific questions into viable research protocols. In ethnographic studies, this meant adjusting research strategies in response to cultural nuances, unexpected findings, or evolving participant dynamics. By combining ethical responsibility with methodological flexibility, ethnographers could uphold the integrity of their research while fostering trust and respect within the communities they studied.

As part of this study, researchers engaged directly with the Kagan community. Before conducting fieldwork, they first visited the community to formally seek permission to conduct the study. They also pre-identified potential participants with the help of the Datu and requested a briefing on any cultural norms or practices that should be observed. This initial step ensured that the researchers approached the study with cultural sensitivity and a well-informed perspective. Additionally, they acted as moderators during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, fostering an environment where participants felt comfortable expressing their experiences and perspectives.

Moreover, the researchers served as data collectors, using audio and video recording devices to document participants' responses, as well as capturing relevant objects, events, and practices. To uphold ethical standards, participants were informed in advance about the recording process and assured that their comfort and privacy would be prioritized throughout the study. This approach ensured data saturation was achieved while respecting participant autonomy.

Therefore, each researcher fulfilled specific responsibilities to ensure the study's success. One served as the interviewer, asking questions during the interviews, while another acted as the encoder, taking detailed notes. A transcriber converted recorded audio into a verbatim written format, ensuring accuracy in capturing participants' responses. Separately, a translator translated the transcribed text into English for data analysis. Additionally, some researchers handled video and audio recording, as well as capturing photos and videos for documentation purposes.

Following data collection, the researchers conducted a thorough thematic analysis to identify key themes emerging from participants' responses. Reviewing transcribed data was essential in recognizing patterns and drawing meaningful conclusions. The themes were based solely on participants' perspectives, avoiding any imposition of unrelated topics. Once the analysis was complete, the findings were presented to both the academic community and the participants, who were the primary beneficiaries of the study. Finally, the research results were shared with the panel and made accessible to the broader academic community, ensuring that the insights gained contributed to the ongoing discourse on burial practices within the Kagan community.

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## Research Participants

This study focused on the Muslim Kagan community residing in Purok 5, Tuburan, Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, specifically exploring the intricate processes involved in their burial practices. To ensure the study centered on participants with direct and relevant experiences, a purposive sampling method was employed. According to Creswell (2014), this approach allowed for the intentional selection of individuals who possessed key knowledge and active involvement in the studied community. In this case, Muslim Kagans from Purok 5, Tuburan, Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, with firsthand experience in traditional Muslim burial practices, were invited to participate. This ensured that all participants had valuable insights and were willing to share their perspectives.

In order to maintain the study's cultural and contextual relevance, non-Kagan individuals were excluded from participating. This decision was made because the research specifically focused on the burial practices unique to the Kagan community. Since these practices were deeply rooted in their cultural and religious traditions, it was essential to include only those with direct knowledge and lived experiences within the community. Otherwise, incorporating perspectives from non-Kagan individuals could have led to interpretations that did not fully align with the authentic practices and beliefs being studied.

Consequently, to gather rich and detailed information, in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) were conducted with six participants from the community. More specifically, these participants were carefully selected based on their roles in the burial process. They included one Imam (Muslim priest), one Datu (chieftain), one Alim (scholar), one Tigkare (gravedigger), one Ikawapatan (bereaved family member), and one member of the Jama'ah (community). By selecting individuals who held key roles in the burial rites, the study ensured a comprehensive understanding of the Kagan's funeral traditions.

In addition to IDIs, participant observation was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the daily routines and social interactions within the Kagan community. During the immersion period, the researchers observed various aspects of community life, particularly their perspectives on death and the afterlife, their resilience in coping with loss, and their involvement as members of the Jama'ah when someone passed away. This combination of in-depth interviews and participant observation, facilitated through purposive sampling, provided a thorough and nuanced perspective on the Kagan community's cultural practices—an essential component of ethnographic research.

To ensure data reliability, participants were selected based on their direct experience and willingness to share their knowledge. The researchers ensured that interview questions were relevant to participants' experiences and clearly understandable. Additionally, to facilitate comfort and accurate responses, translation assistance was provided when necessary.

## Data Analysis

This study utilized Grey's (2015) data analysis methodology to examine the symbolism and rituals in Kagan burial practices. Through a four-phase process, researchers documented, transcribed, categorized, and compared key elements to provide a comprehensive understanding of these cultural traditions.

First, the researchers gathered, documented, and analyzed information from participants, focusing on the symbolism and rituals within the Kagan tribe's burial practices. This process involved meticulous note-taking and careful observation to ensure an accurate depiction of these cultural traditions. Second, interview data were transcribed verbatim, preserving the original language and expressions used by Kagan participants. This ensured an authentic representation of their cultural perspectives. Third, key details (including rites and symbolic elements of Kagan burial customs) were identified and categorized. Researchers analyzed recurring motifs and their cultural significance to understand the core traditions surrounding burial rituals. Lastly, major concepts were identified and compared with etic perspectives (providing an in-depth analysis of how Kagan burial customs aligned with or differed from external interpretations). This comparison offered insights into the cultural relevance of these practices from both insider (emic) and outsider (etic) viewpoints.

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## Trustworthiness

According to Subedi (2025), the credibility of qualitative research was reinforced when the findings resonated with the readers and reflected authenticity. To uphold ethical standards and safeguard participant identities, various measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants, and sensitive details were carefully altered or omitted to avoid identification. Additionally, identifiable information and response data were stored separately, emphasizing the importance of protecting participants throughout the research process. Furthermore, the researchers followed the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to guarantee reliability in a qualitative investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as quoted by Cope, 2014).

**Credibility**, which aligned with internal validity in quantitative research, pertained to the reliability of the research findings. It ensured that the results accurately reflected the data and faithfully represented participants' perspectives. To enhance the study's credibility, triangulation and member checking were employed (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

**Dependability**, as defined by Bitsch (2005, as cited by Anney, 2014), pertained to the consistency of data over time and across varying conditions. It was ensured through peer examination. Bitsch further emphasized that maintaining dependability involved peer examination, the use of overlapping methods in in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, and an audit trail to uphold integrity in the research process. An audit trail provided clear documentation of the research process, offering transparency from data collection to final findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

**Confirmability**, pertained to ensuring that research findings and interpretations were derived from the collected data rather than personal biases or assumptions (Anney, 2014). Achieving confirmability required researchers to maintain objectivity throughout the study. In this research, the researchers did not solely rely on prior knowledge of the phenomenon. Instead, the participants' responses from in-depth interviews and the extensive data obtained through participant observation provided a well-grounded understanding of the subject. Additionally, triangulation was employed through documentary analysis to reinforce confirmability. To verify accuracy, member checking was conducted by returning responses to participants for validation. The researchers also reviewed various literature and studies that either supported or contradicted the study's findings.

According to Anney (2014), confirmability was established when credibility, transferability, and dependability were all ensured. Given the importance of confirmability in maintaining objectivity, an audit trail was implemented in this study. This process provided clear documentation of both the research procedures and outcomes, demonstrating that findings were not predetermined but emerged from systematic inquiry. An audit trail was widely recognized as a key method for achieving confirmability, as it meticulously recorded research decisions and activities, ensuring transparency in data collection, recording, and analysis (Anney, 2014).

**Transferability**, referred to the applicability of research findings to other settings. It was the researcher's responsibility to provide sufficient details about the participants and the research process to enable readers to determine whether the study's findings were relevant to their own context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

In this study, the researchers ensured a comprehensive description of the methodology to enhance transferability. All transcripts and data analyses were handled with strict anonymity and confidentiality through discrete coding. No personal identities were disclosed in any reports, presentations, or publications related to the research. To safeguard the data, all physical documents were securely stored in locked files, while electronic copies were kept in password-protected folders. Only the principal investigator had access to these files. Upon the study's completion, the collected data were retained for three years before being securely destroyed to prevent unauthorized access, use, or disclosure, following legal and ethical guidelines.

## Ethical Considerations

The study acknowledged the significant effects that research findings might have had on participants,

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underscoring the critical need for upholding strict ethical guidelines. These values respect for persons, beneficence, justice, and regard for communities were derived from the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) and Mack et al. (2005).

Respect for persons asked that the researcher refrain from taking advantage of the research participants' weaknesses. To preserve the participants' and the researcher's friendship, confidence, and trust, self-sufficiency was avoided. First, formal permits were obtained from the tribal leader of the Muslim Kagan community, the chairwoman of the Unified Tribal Council of Elders and Leaders Association, Inc. (UTCEL), and the college administrator of Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST). After that, all possible volunteers gave their informed consent. This procedure ensured individuals were well aware of the study's purpose, their rights as volunteers, and the possible risks and rewards.

Consent played a crucial role in showing respect for research participants (Creswell, 2012). This process ensured that all participants and participants fully understood the study's purpose and objectives. To obtain their approval, written informed consent forms were provided. During the orientation, the consent form was explained in clear and simple terms to ensure participants were aware of their role, as reflected in their voluntary participation and signed consent. Once consent was granted, participants actively took part in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and were informed about the study's findings.

The informed consent outlined a comprehensive description of the research, including its benefits, risks, and the participants' right to withdraw at any point. They were also made aware of their right to ask questions and receive a copy of the completed manuscript. Additionally, participants were informed that the recorded interviews would be transcribed, with assurances that their data would remain confidential.

Beneficence entailed a dedication to minimizing risks for research participants rather than solely emphasizing the maximization of benefits. To ensure their protection, participants' anonymity was maintained. Their identities were concealed using pseudonyms. Throughout the study, measures were taken to safeguard 53 participants, with all information files securely managed and never left unattended (Bricki & Green, 2007).

Confidentiality of the results and findings, as well as the protection of participants, was ensured through a coding system that concealed their identities (Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2007). Following their recommendations, all materials, including videotapes, encoded transcripts, notes, and other records, were destroyed once the data analysis was complete.

Justice demanded a fair distribution of both the risks and benefits associated with the research. Recognizing the contributions of all participants was essential, as their involvement was vital to the study's success. They were appropriately acknowledged for their efforts (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Participants were not expected to incur any expenses during the interview, and they received modest tokens as a gesture of appreciation for their participation in the study.

## RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the ethnographic study on the Kagan community at Barangay Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, focusing on their intricate burial practices, spiritual beliefs, its evolution over time, and roles of community members in the burial practices. It presents the findings through evidences gathered during the ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews, and pictures and videos to support claims, highlighting the cultures and traditions relevant to the elements of the study. The results are presented in a structured manner, with figures illustrating the data gathered during the observation phase.

The analysis connects these findings with broader discussions in ethnographic studies, emphasizing the unique practices of the Kagan community. By presenting the collected evidence, including visual documentation, this chapter provides a comprehensive view of the Kagan community's burial practices and social dynamics, contributing to a richer understanding of their way of life.

## Participants

For in-depth interviews there were six (6) key participants from the Muslim Kagan Tribe, all were present in Purok-5, Tuburan, Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, during the conduct of the study. These participants were selected for their relevant knowledge and experiences concerning the Kagan community's culture and traditions. They provided valuable insights through in-depth interviews, with participants particularly responding to specific key elements: one Imam (priest), one Datu (chieftain), one Alim (Scholar), one Tigkare (Gravedigger), one Ikawapatan (Bereaved), and one Jamaah member. Their perspectives offered a comprehensive understanding of intricate burial practices, spiritual beliefs, its evolution over time, and roles of community members in the burial practices. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, the participants were given pseudonyms, as detailed in Table 1.

## Categorization of Data

Following the in-depth interviews, the data collected were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the participants' responses. The transcription process preserved the original language and expressions of the Kagan participants.

The analysis of the data involved four phases, as outlined by Grey (2015). First, the researchers collected, documented, and described the data, paying close attention to the nuances of the Kagan community's intricate burial practices, spiritual beliefs, its evolution over time, and roles of community members in the burial practices. Second, the transcribed interviews were reviewed, and significant descriptors and components were identified and categorized. This step involved organizing the data into coherent categories that reflected the core aspects of Kagan culture. Third, patterns related to intricate burial practices, spiritual beliefs, its evolution over time, and roles of community members in the burial practices were identified. Finally, the major descriptors were compared to the etic views and descriptions, offering a comprehensive analysis of how the Kagan community's practices align with or differ from external interpretations.

To enhance the accuracy and depth of the analysis, the researcher also requested assistance from a professional specializing in data analysis. This collaboration ensured that the analysis was thorough and aligned with the study's objectives.

**Table 1: Participants' Information**

Pseudonym	Gender	Functions and Positions	Research Code
Imam	Male	Priest	IDI-P1
Datu	Male	Chieftain	IDI-P2
Alim	Male	Muslim Scholar	IDI-P3
Tigkare	Male	Gravedigger	IDI-P4
Ikawapatan	Male	Bereaved	IDI-P5
Jamaah	Female	Community member	IDI-P6

To protect the identities of the participants while retaining the cultural and contextual relevance of their roles, the researchers employed culturally grounded pseudonyms. These terms Imam, Datu, Alim, Tigkare, Ikawapatan, and Jamaah are not randomly assigned but are deliberately chosen to reflect the participants' actual functions or social positions within the Kagan community. Imam refers to a religious leader who leads prayers and provides spiritual guidance, making it a suitable pseudonym for a participant who functions as a priest. Datu is a traditional title for a tribal chief or leader, aptly representing the participant who serves as the community chieftain. Alim is a term for an Islamic scholar, used to refer to a participant with deep knowledge of Islamic teachings.

Tigkare, a localized term in the Kagan context, refers to a person who performs the role of a gravedigger a crucial figure in burial rituals. Ikawapatan, derived from local dialect, refers to someone in mourning or the bereaved, fitting for the participant who had recently lost a loved one. Jamaah is an Islamic term referring to a group or congregation and is here used to represent a female community member actively participating in collective religious and social practices. Using these culturally and functionally appropriate pseudonyms allowed the research to preserve the ethnographic integrity of the study while safeguarding participant confidentiality.

Moreover, Data were displayed using graphic organizers such as matrices or tables, alongside evidence such as pictures, to facilitate the drawing of conclusions. The researchers reviewed the data multiple times to gain familiarity and ensure thorough understanding. Initial findings led to the identification of several themes, which were then refined with the help of a data analyst. This process involved revisiting the data to validate conclusions and ensure accuracy.

**Research Question No. 1: What are the traditional burial practices and rituals observed by the Kagan tribe?** The following questions were asked during the in-depth interviews in order to develop a broad discussion regarding the aforementioned research question. How does the Kagan tribe prepare the body before burial? What are the key steps involved in the Kagan burial process? What materials, clothing, or objects are traditionally used in Kagan burials? What are the specific prayers, chants, or rites performed during the burial ceremony? How does the Kagan’s burial practices vary according to social status, gender, age, or cause of death?

Essential themes, significant descriptors and central ideas emerged from the responses to the questions presented above, as indicated in Table 2.

Essential themes	Significant Descriptors	Central Ideas
<b>Presence of Indigenous Symbolisms and Rituals in Kagan Burial Practices Amidst Islamic Integration</b>	Strong influence of the elders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elders once honored the deceased by burning fragrant plants and chanting prayers mentioning the Prophet Muhammad.</li> </ul>
	Localized integration of Islam in Kagan practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sprinkling water near the deceased was believed to bless the soul, a practice from Arab origins made more intentional in the Philippines.</li> <li>Islamic burials used wood markers</li> </ul>
<b>Intricate burial practices anchored in Islam</b>	Timely, structured, and practical burial process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timely Interment: Observing the 24-Hour Burial Tradition in Kagan Burial Practices</li> </ul>
	Gender-specific body preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Body preparation is gender-specific, with extra care for women to ensure modesty and respect.</li> <li>Females were given two red "kilah" flowers, males one, as part of the traditional burial rite.</li> </ul>
	Use of new and pure items.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only new items are used to wash and wrap the body, emphasizing ritual purity and spiritual cleanliness.</li> <li>Intricate burial steps that symbolize order and sacred closure.</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Essential themes, Significant Descriptors, and Central Ideas of documentation and description of the traditional burial practices and rituals observed by the Kagan tribe.**

	Family obligation and preservation of dignity	In Kagan burial customs, the family handles the deceased's preparation especially ritual bathing to ensure dignity, privacy, and respectful care from close relatives.
	Gender roles in burial practices and physical labor	In Kagan burials, men handle tasks such as digging and carrying the body, while women are traditionally restricted from the burial site due to cultural and religious norms.
Religious and Communal Leadership in Ritual Practices	Leadership roles and religious authority in burial	In the Kagan tribe, male leaders and the jamaah manage burial rites, lead prayers, and support the bereaved, with only men permitted near the grave.
	Condolence Practices and Cultural Flexibility	In Kagan culture, offering condolences by visiting the bereaved family is encouraged but not obligatory.
	Funeral Rites and Worship Adaptation, Communal Burial Duty, Reverent Body Handling	Kagan Muslims pray for the dead inside the mosque, standing without prostration, using a funeral-adapted form of worship.  The Kagan community encourages assisting in burials for spiritual reward, emphasizing respectful and careful handling of the body during burial.

**Presence of Indigenous Symbolisms and Rituals in Kagan Burial Practices amidst Islamic Integration.**

The burial practices of the Kagan tribe reveal a rich continuity of indigenous symbolisms and rituals, maintained even as Islamic beliefs have become integrated within their burial customs. This persistence highlights the community's respect for ancestral traditions while simultaneously accommodating Islamic practices introduced through religious conversion and cultural exchange. The elders, recognized as the primary custodians of these traditions, play a vital role in the transmission and performance of these burial rites.

The data were primarily gathered through in-depth interviews with participants of the Kagan community, who possess extensive knowledge of both indigenous and Islamic burial customs. These participants described in detail the unique blend of symbolic acts and prayers that characterize Kagan burial rituals duely influenced by the Kagan elders. Their narratives were supplemented by observations and informal discussions with other community members, providing a holistic understanding of the practices. In the process of exploring the burial practices of the Kagan community, the research initially focused on identifying the specific rituals performed during burials and how Islamic influences have shaped this over time. However, during the course of the interviews, an unexpected yet powerful descriptor emerged: the significant role of elders in preserving and performing these rites. The participants have shared or at least mentioned during the interview that it was the elders who influenced burial traditions, both indigenous and Islamic.

**Alim said:**

Ang Islam is naa na daan, pero among mga katigulangan sauna ang pagsabot nila sa Islam is self-study lang (IDI-P3).

(Islam already existed back then, but our elders' understanding of Islam was based only on self-study.)

**Tigkare also said:**

Sauna, ang katigulangan jud ang nangunay sa kung unsa ang mga pamaagi jud kay sila man ang nay kahibalo jud sa kultura ug sa Islam, unya mau to ang pasa (IDI-P4).

(In the past, it was really the elders who took the lead in the practices because they were the ones who truly had knowledge of the culture and of Islam, and that was what they passed on.)

**Alim further said:**

Ang Islam is dati pa. So ang dire sa atua sa Pilipinas, ang mga katigulangan sauna nag initiative sila or nag initiate sila nga unsaon nila ma-process ang isa ka patay nga tuo nila nga unta nga mahilangit. Mau tung daghay mga ritwal nga nahitabo (IDI-P3).

(Islam has existed long ago. So here in the Philippines, it was the elders who initially decided how a dead person should be processed, believing it would help them enter paradise. That's why many rituals took place.)

Although the study aimed to gather a general overview of the burial customs, it became evident that Alim and Tigkare offered a more detailed and authoritative understanding of these practices. As long-time observers and practitioners of the Islamic burial rites, their account not only enriched the research but also illustrated how the elders function as cultural anchors.

**Localized Integration of Islam in Kagan Practices.** In exploring the burial customs of the Kagan community, the research revealed how Islamic beliefs have been localized and integrated into indigenous practices. Originally, the study aimed to identify the core Islamic elements within the rituals. However, Imam and provided insight that emphasized a more nuanced, localized version of Islam that blends faith with cultural heritage.

**As shared by Imaam:**

Pero sauna pajud tungod sa mga panagkita pud sa mga dayuhang arabo ug among mga katigulangan, naa najud silay nahibaloan sa Islam, mau tuy gi adopt nila sa ilang culture (IDI-P1).

(But even long ago, because of the encounters between our elders and the foreign Arabs, they had already gained knowledge about Islam, which they then adopted into their culture.)

**Imaam also shared an example:**

Sauna, pag gawas sa kanang Janada, kumbaga sa inyuha lungon pero sa amoa janada, pagawas ana sa katigulangan, aduna pa silay murag I kanta nila kumbaga pero pangalan sa propeta ilang lambitun, ilang I sulti mag silage "Allahuma salli ala Sayyidina Muhammad" unya, balik balik ana sila sa ilawm, alsahun ng minatay, unya ang tag tungod mismo kumabaga amahan ang namatay ang asawa ug anak mu suong (IDI-P1).

(Before, when the Janaza was brought out by the elders, they would chant something like a song, but what they recited were the names of the prophets. They would say repeatedly, "Allahuma salli ala Sayyidina Muhammad." They would keep repeating this underneath, then they would lift the deceased. And the ones directly behind, like if it was a father who died, his wife and children would walk closely behind.)

Such integration shows how the Kagan community maintains Islamic faith while expressing it through culturally specific rituals, reflecting both respect for religion and preservation of tradition.

**Sprinkling Water Near the Deceased: A Localized Ritual with Arab Origins.** The practice of sprinkling or pouring water near the deceased is one of the most meaningful examples of how Islamic traditions have been reinterpreted within the Kagan community. Initially observed as a cultural element in Arab countries, this act has taken on deeper, intentional significance in the Philippines.

**Imaam shared:**

Naa silay panalangin unya mag bubu sila ug tubig kay sa ilang pagtoo, moabot didto sa minatay. Pero kana siya gi-practice lang na sa Arab country kay wala man kaayo silay tubig didto. Pero pag-abot diri sa Pilipinas, murag nahimo na siyang intensyonal (IDI-P1). (They say a prayer and pour water because they believe it will reach the deceased. It was originally practiced in Arab countries where water was scarce, but here in the Philippines, it became more intentional.)

**Islamic burials used wood markers.** During the exploration of burial practices within the Kagan community, the study uncovered distinct customs involving the use of wood has been buried in the area. All of these practices are rooted in traditional burial practices.

**Alim shared:**

Dire pud sa tradisyon sa Islam or sa Kagan, is dire sa tiilan ug dire sa uluhan nga gina butangan ug kahuy mau na siya ang tradisyon (IDI-P3).

(In the tradition of Islam or of the Kagan, wood is placed at the feet and head of the deceased; that is the tradition.)

**The Timely, Structured, and Practical Burial Process in Kagan burial Rites.** One striking feature that emerged was the community's commitment to a timely, structured, and highly practical approach to burial practices. Rooted in both Islamic requirements and longstanding indigenous discipline, the Kagan people ensure that the deceased are buried within 24 hours, following a set of carefully ordered procedures. These include ritual washing of the body, gender-specific handling, wrapping in clean, unopened cloth, offering of burial prayers (Salat al-Janazah), and a swift but dignified burial. This process not only fulfills Islamic injunctions but also reflects the community's cultural ethos of respect, efficiency, and spiritual care for the dead.

**Datu said:**

Ang Kagan tribe once nga adunay mga pamilya namo nga namatay, duna sa mi ginabuhay ana nga mga ritwal, 24 hours kinahanglan jud namo na ilubong... kung tag-as na ang koko pamutlon to siya, linison... kung lalaki ang mamatay, lalaki ang magpaligo, kung babae, babae pud... pagkahuman ato pahumoton, butangan ug perfume (IDI-P2).

(In the Kagan tribe, when someone from our family dies, we perform these rituals. The burial must happen within 24 hours... if the nails are long, we cut them and clean them... if the deceased is male, a male will bathe him; if female, a female... after the bath, we perfume the body.)

**Alim also said:**

Ang gisubay namo ang gi sulti sa Propeta Muhammad Peace be upon him nga pag tao mamatay, kung siya ang iyang buluhaton is maayu, naga sunod ba sya sa Islam, ang ingun sa propeta kung kana nga tao mamatay dalia ninyu ang pag lubong, kay para matamasa niya ang maayung niyang kabutang sa iyang lubnganan, ug katung ta pud nga makasasala, ingun pud sa propeta dalia pud ninyu ang pag lubong kay mahitungod, para matagamtaman pud niya kung unsa ka lisud ang iyahang lubnganan (IDI-P3).

(We follow what Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said— that when a person dies, if he has done good deeds and followed Islam, he should be buried quickly so he may enjoy the blessings of the grave. And if the person was sinful, the Prophet also said to bury them quickly, so they may begin to experience the difficulty of their grave.)

**Figure 2: Timely internment of a deceased person from the Kagan Tribe**



This emphasis on timeliness reinforces the urgency of burial in Kagan culture. It demonstrates how Islamic beliefs about the afterlife and accountability deeply influence the structure and pace of their burial rites. The practice highlights the Kagan's commitment to both religious obedience and the dignified treatment of the dead.

**Gender-Specific Body Preparation in Kagan Burial Practices.** In Kagan burial customs, the preparation of the body is carried out with great care, particularly observing gender-specific roles in accordance with Islamic guidelines. This distinction underscores the tribe's strong adherence to modesty and propriety, as well as a deep respect for the dignity of the deceased. Male bodies are prepared by men, and female bodies by women, ensuring cultural and religious boundaries are maintained throughout the process. This practice reflects the Kagan community's burial practice in accordance to of Islamic teachings.

**Datu said:**

Bago namo na balutan ng patay na lawas sa namatay, amo sa na siyang pagaligoan... paglalaki ang mamatay lalaki ang magpaligo sa iyaha, kung babae, babae pud ang magpaligo sa iyaha (IDI-P2).

(Before we wrap the deceased's body, we bathe them first... if it's a man who passed away, a man gives the bath; if it's a woman, then a woman does it.)

**Alim also added:**

Ang dire lang sa pag ligo, dri lang sa proseso sap ag prepare sa patay, pero sa pag lubong walay kalahian same lang, dire lang mag lahi sa pag ligo kay ang sa babae kay ang buhok nila is gina sentiped pana sya, sintepiron ang buhok ana nila, tapus ang sa babae pud ang pag saput sa ilaha, pag balot sa ilaha is murag naa pud silay murag Sanina nila ba, murag I Sanina sa ilaha (IDI-P1)

(The only difference is during the washing process, just in the preparation of the body. But when it comes to the burial, there is no difference—it is the same for all. The distinction is only during the bathing, because for women, their hair is braided or arranged neatly. Also, when wrapping the body of a woman, it is done in a way that resembles clothing, as if she is being dressed.)

This gender-specific process also includes careful grooming of the deceased. Fingernails are trimmed, the body is bathed using items similar to those the person used while alive such as soap and shampoo and scented with perfume to honor their memory.

**Symbolic Use of Flowers in Kagan Burial Rites.** In Kagan funerary customs, symbolic elements are carefully woven into the burial process, reflecting indigenous values merged with Islamic practices. One such symbolism is the placement of red kilah flowers which is used as subtle gender identifiers and as signs of honor for the deceased. This tradition, while not strictly Islamic, continues to be observed by many Kagan families as a way to preserve cultural heritage.

**Tigkare said:**

Ang timailhan kuno nila kung babae, duha ka bulak ang ibutang sa ulohan ug tiilan; kung lalaki, isa lang sa ulohan. kanang gina tawag nga "kilah", bulak na siya nga murag San Francisco pero mo dahon ug color pula (IDI-P4).

(They say that if it's a woman, two flowers are placed one at the head and one at the feet; for a man, just one at the head. That which is called "kilah" is a flower that looks like the San Francisco plant, but its leaves turn red in color.)

**Figure 3: “Kila” Flower used as burial signage in Kagan cemetery**



This gentle act of placing flowers expresses reverence and emotional connection to the departed. While the practice may be fading or altered under stricter Islamic interpretations, its persistence in many households shows how indigenous symbols endure in ways that are respectful and meaningful to the Kagan community.

**Use of new and pure items.** Purity is a key value observed in Kagan burial traditions, especially in the preparation of the deceased's body. One of the most distinct practices involves the exclusive use of new, unused items such as fabric, soap, and grooming materials. This reflects both Islamic teachings on cleanliness and the community's own emphasis on giving dignity to the dead through untainted and respectful handling.

**Datu said:**

Dili pwede mogamit ug tela nga ginamit na. Katung cotton nga wala pa na ablihan, mao toy gamiton. Unya pagkahuman ug ligo, mao toy ipahid para matuyo siya (IDI-P2).

(You're not allowed to use used fabric. Only unopened cotton is allowed. After the body is bathed, that new cotton cloth is used to dry it.)

**Figure 4: Use of clean and fabrics for wrapping the deceased body**



**Emphasis on Ritual Purity: Using Only New Items in Kagan Burials.** Among the Kagan, the preparation of the deceased is marked by a careful adherence to ritual purity, most notably through the exclusive use of new and unused items during washing and wrapping. This practice not only aligns with Islamic prescriptions on cleanliness but also reflects the community's deep reverence for the sanctity of death and the soul's journey beyond.

**Datu said:**

Dili pwede mogamit ug tela nga ginamit na. Katung cotton nga wala pa na ablihan, mao toy gamiton. Unya pagkahuman ug ligo, mao toy ipahid para matuyo siya (IDI-P2).

(You are not allowed to use fabric that has already been used. Only unopened cotton should be used. After bathing the deceased, that new cotton cloth is used for drying.)

**Intricate Burial Steps that Symbolize Order and Sacred Closure.** The Kagan burial process is composed of meticulously ordered steps that symbolize not only procedural care but also a sacred transition toward closure. From the moment of death, the community swiftly mobilizes to perform the rites, ensuring that each phase—washing, wrapping, prayer, and burial—is carried out with reverence and exactness. This structured sequence reflects a spiritual discipline anchored in Islamic tradition while honoring the emotional and communal dimensions of parting with a loved one.

**Tigkare said:**

Gikan sa pagka wapat, ligoan man jud na siya no, ligoan then baloton, unya mao nato siya ang last nga proseso sa iyaha pangadyean or simbahan ang last proseso ato didto najud e lubong siya sa bangag na (IDI-P4)

(From the moment of death, the body is washed, then wrapped, and the final step is to pray or conduct the religious rites before burial in the grave.)

**Datu also said:**

Ang Kagan tribe once nga adunay mga pamilya namo nga namatay duna sa mi ginabuhar ana nga mga ritwal, 24 hours kinahanglan jud namo na ilubong amo jud dayun ng ilubong dili na namo dugayon, ikaduha ana bago namo na balutan ng patay na lawas sa namatay amo sa na siyang pagaligoan, kung tag as na ang koko pamutlon to siya linison unya paglalaki ang mamatay lalaki ang mag paligo sa iyaha kung babae, babae pud ang magpaligo sa iyaha. Kung unsa atong gigamit sa pagligo nato, mao gihapon to sa iyaha parehas sa sabon ug shampoo, pagkahuman ato pahumoton butangan ug pefume para mahumot jud siya, dili pwede mogamit ug tela nga ginamit na unya katung cotton nga wala pa na ablihan, pagkahuman ug ligo mao toy ipahid para matuyo siya mao toy gamiton tung wala pa naablihan unya bago siya ihatod sa lubngan niya mag prayer sa mi mao nay gitawag sa arabic ug salatol janaza pag ampo sa patay kay mangayo mi sa Ginoo nga unta siya iligtas siya kung unsa man to iyahang sala sa Ginoo. Sa kagan tribe lalaki, og bata o tigulangan ang paglubong mao ra once nga adunay mamatay hinloan paligoan, baloton ug ampoan (IDI-P2).

(In the Kagan tribe, whenever a family member passes away, we perform certain rituals. The body must be buried within 24 hours; we never delay the burial. Before wrapping the deceased, we first wash the body. If the nails are long, they are trimmed and cleaned. If the deceased is male, a male will bathe him; if female, a female will do so. Whatever we use for our own bathing, such as soap and shampoo, we also use for the deceased. After that, we apply perfume to make the body smell good. We are not allowed to use used cloth; only new, unopened cotton cloth is used. After bathing, the new cotton cloth is used to dry the body and to wrap it. Before bringing the deceased to the burial site, we offer a prayer called Salat al-Janazah, a prayer for the dead where we ask God to forgive and save the person from their sins. In the Kagan tribe, whether it's a man, a child, or an elder who dies, the process remains the same: the body is cleaned, bathed, wrapped, and prayed over before burial.)

**Tigkare also added:**

Gikan sa pagka wapat, ligoan man jud na siya no, ligoan then baloton, unya mao nato siya ang last nga proseso sa iyaha pangadyean or simbahan ang last proseso ato didto najud e lubong siya sa bangag na (IDI-P4).

(From the time the person passes away, the body is washed first, then wrapped. That is part of the final process before offering prayers or taking them to the prayer area. After that, the last step is to bury the person in the grave.)

**Tigkare further added:**

Butangan ang kilid sa sindong ug tabla, matabunan tanan nga dili makita ang tela nga walay yuta ma butang sa minatay. Pero dinhi sa amoang na andan, itabon sa namo ang last layer sa puti nga tela before ang tabla. Pero

walay nag contradict ato, pwede rajud diristo ang tabla. Sa katigulangan man gud ang timailhan kuno nila kung babae, duha ka bulak ang ibutang sa ulohan ug tiilan kung sa lalaki isa lang sa ulohan lang. Ang ingon sa Alim, bato lang ang perfect nga ilhanan (IDI-P4).

(Planks of wood are placed on the sides of the grave to cover everything so that the cloth is not exposed and no soil directly touches the body. But in our usual practice, we place the final layer of white cloth over the body before putting the wooden planks. However, there is no contradiction in doing it differently—it's also acceptable to place the planks right away. According to the elders, a sign that it's a woman is when two flowers are placed, one at the head and one at the feet. For a man, only one flower is placed at the head. But according to the Alim, using a stone is the most appropriate marker.)

**Figure 5: Intricate Burial Steps on processing the deceased body for internment.**



**A White Cloth from the Hajj Pilgrimage Can Be Used to Wrap the Deceased.** In Kagan burial practices, particular emphasis is placed on the use of spiritually significant materials for wrapping the deceased. One revered custom includes the use of a white cloth worn during the Hajj pilgrimage, the Islamic journey to Mecca. This cloth, known as ihram, symbolizes purity, humility, and submission to Allah. When available, it is respectfully used to wrap the body of a deceased Muslim, marking their death with the same sacredness as their spiritual journey.

**Alim said:**

Kung nakapag Hajj – pilgrimage diba, katung ginagamit bitaw nga puti nga ginagamitan sa nag pilgrimage nag Hajj, katu siya kung madala niya dre pwede to siya ibalot sa iya (IDI-P3).

(If someone has performed the Hajj pilgrimage, the white cloth they used for Hajj can be used to wrap them when they die.)

**When Transport Is Impossible, Mujahideen Are Buried Simply On-Site with a White Cloth.** In certain circumstances where transporting the deceased is unfeasible particularly in times of conflict or harsh environments the Kagan community follows a pragmatic yet respectful burial practice for fallen Mujahideen. Instead of bringing the body back home, the deceased is interred promptly at the place of death, wrapped simply in a white cloth. This white cloth symbolizes purity and adherence to Islamic burial customs, even in austere conditions.

**Alim said:**

Pag nay mamatay sa mga mujahidin nga dili na kaya ibaba dire sa baba kay tungod sa ka init sa sitwasyun ang ginabuhat ilubong sila didto sa area nga ilang namatyan butangan lang ug puti nga tela dre sa ulo in ana lang, kung unsa to ilang gisulot, mau nato sya, butangan lang ug white dre (IDI-P3).

(When a Mujahideen dies and cannot be brought down because of the heat or situation, they are buried right there where they died, just wrapped in a white cloth on the head, using whatever they wore, simply covered with white.)

**Restrictions on the Burial Practices.** The Kagan community observes a number of religious restrictions in their burial practices that reflect deep adherence to Islamic teachings and reverence for the sanctity of death. These prohibitions are not arbitrary but rooted in religious doctrine, guiding what may or may not be done during and after the burial process. Among the key restrictions is the Islamic rule against stepping on graves, which is considered a serious act of disrespect. To prevent this, the Kagan people place distinct markers to ensure that burial sites are clearly visible and not accidentally desecrated.

**Alim said:**

Sa Islam... dili lang sa Kagan, prohibited po nga tamakan ang lubong sa Islam, so mao nang gibutangan ug sign para dili matamakan (IDI-P3).

(In Islam not just among the Kagan it is prohibited to step on a grave, so we place signs to prevent that from happening.)

**Stepping on graves is forbidden in Islam, so markers are placed to protect burial sites.** In Islamic tradition, stepping on graves is strictly prohibited as it is considered a sign of profound disrespect toward the deceased. The Kagan community has adopted this principle by implementing physical markers around burial sites to safeguard them from accidental trampling, thus maintaining the sanctity of the resting place.

**Alim said:**

Sa Islam... dili lang sa Kagan, prohibited po nga tamakan ang lubong sa Islam, so mao nang gibutangan ug

sign para dili matamakan (IDIP3).

(In Islam not just among the Kagan it is prohibited to step on a grave, so we place signs to prevent that from happening.)

**“So’ul Khatima” in Burial Practices.** In Islamic belief, “So’ul Khatima” refers to a bad or unfortunate death, often associated with those who die in sin or without repentance. Such individuals are treated differently in burial customs, as elaborate funeral prayers and ceremonies are withheld. Instead, they are buried simply and directly, without the usual rites or prayers.

**Alim said:**

Katung mga nagpakamatay, mau nay ginatawag sa Arabic nga ‘So’ul Khatima’ — kanang pangit nga pagkamatay, which is impyerno jud na siya, mau nang dili na siya dad-on sa simbahan o dili na siya sambayanan. Ang pagsambayang sa iyaha nag-ampo man ka, I pray nimo kana nga namatay, diba? So ilubong nalang na siya direktso (IDIP3).

(Those who die by suicide are said to have a ‘So’ul Khatima,’ a bad death condemned to hell. They are not brought to the mosque nor given funeral prayers. Since praying for them is also a prayer for the deceased, they are buried immediately.)

This practice underscores the community’s strict adherence to Islamic teachings regarding the spiritual status of the deceased and reflects the gravity of certain deaths within their belief system.

**Islam forbids leaving belongings with the deceased, as they won’t be needed on Judgment Day.** In Islamic burial practices, it is forbidden to leave any personal belongings or items with the deceased. This prohibition is rooted in the belief that such possessions will not be of use to the individual on the Day of Judgment. The focus is on spiritual purity and detachment from worldly goods as the soul transitions to the afterlife.

**Alim said:**

Bawal sa Islam ang magbilin ug gamit sa patayng lawas. Bawal sa Islam ang magbilin ug bisan unsang gamit niya kay di man gihapun magamit pag sa Day of Judgment (IDI-P3).

(Islam forbids leaving any belongings with the deceased because they will not need them on the Day of Judgment.) This rule reflects the Islamic emphasis on the soul’s journey beyond material possessions, ensuring that burial customs remain simple and spiritually focused.

**Bringing fire, even as small as a lit cigarette, into Muslim cemeteries is forbidden.** In Kagan Islamic burial customs, bringing any source of fire into Muslim cemeteries is strictly forbidden, including small items like lit cigarettes. This rule underscores the community’s respect for the sanctity and safety of the burial grounds.

**Alim said:**

Bawal ka magdala ug bisan unsang klase sa kalayo, dili ka pwede magdala ug yosi nga naka-sindi diha sa lubnganan, labi na sa Muslim cemetery (IDI-P3).

(You are not allowed to bring any type of fire, not even a lit cigarette, inside the cemetery, especially Muslim cemeteries.)

This restriction serves to protect the graves from harm and maintain the sacredness of the burial site, reflecting Islamic teachings on respect for the deceased and their resting places.

**Miscarriage Timing and Burial Practices.** In Kagan funerary traditions, the handling of miscarried infants is informed by both Islamic teachings and culturally specific interpretations. The timing of the miscarriage—

particularly whether it occurs before or after four months of gestation—determines the type of burial process. This distinction aligns with Islamic views on when the soul is believed to be breathed into the fetus, marking a turning point for when full burial rites must be performed.

**Alim said:**

Ang kanang sa inahan nga makuhaan, pag makuhaan ang isa ka mama gikan sa iyahang pagbuntis basta wala ni abut ug four months ang idad sa nakuha, dili na sya liguan, baluton nalang sya dretso tas ilubong. Pero pag mulagpas gani ug four months nga makuha ang bata, muagi jud na sya proseso, same sa mga tao nga buhi na or mga dagko na (IDI-P3)

(When a mother miscarries, if the fetus is less than four months old, it is not washed—just wrapped and buried. But if the fetus is older than four months, it undergoes the same burial process as a full-grown person.)

**Miscarriages Before Four Months Are Buried Simply; After Four Months, With Full Rites.** Kagan burial customs distinguish between early and late miscarriages based on the four-month gestational mark, reflecting both Islamic beliefs and cultural sensitivity. Fetuses lost before four months are not subjected to full ritual washing; instead, they are respectfully wrapped and buried without undergoing the complete rites. This practice aligns with Islamic teachings that associate the ensoulment of a fetus with the fourth month of pregnancy.

**Alim said:**

Ang kanang sa inahan nga makuhaan, pag makuhaan ang isa ka mama gikan sa iyahang pagbuntis basta wala ni abut ug four months ang idad sa nakuha, dili na sya liguan, baluton nalang sya dretso tas ilubong. Pero pag mulagpas gani ug four months nga makuha ang bata, muagi jud na sya proseso, same sa mga tao nga buhi na or mga dagko na (IDI-P3).

(When a mother miscarries, if the fetus is less than four months old, it is not washed—just wrapped and buried. But if the fetus is older than four months, it undergoes the same burial process as a full-grown person.)

This nuanced treatment of miscarried infants illustrates the Kagan community's careful observance of both spiritual and religious boundaries. It shows reverence for life at all stages while upholding theological distinctions about personhood and ritual obligation.

**Burial Preparation for Women.** In Kagan funerary customs, the preparation of women's bodies for burial involves additional steps to ensure modesty and respect, demonstrating cultural and religious sensitivity. Gender-specific practices are observed not only in who performs the washing—females for females—but also in how the body is treated, such as careful hair preparation and the use of garments to mimic clothing.

**Alim said:**

Dire lang maglahi sa pagliligo kay ang sa babae kay ang buhok nila is gina-sentiped pa na sya, sintepiron ang buhok ana nila. Tapos ang sa babae pud ang pagsaput sa ilaha, pagbalot sa ilaha is murag naa pud silay murag sanina nila ba, murag isaninà sa ilaha (IDI-P3).

(The difference is in the washing: for women, their hair is combed in a centipede-like braid. Then in wrapping them, it's as if they're dressed in a piece of clothing—something like putting a dress on them.)

These practices highlight the Kagan community's commitment to upholding both Islamic values of dignity in death and cultural norms of female modesty. The thoughtful details in handling a woman's body reflect a broader ethic of care and sacred responsibility entrusted to the living.

**Women's Burial Includes Hair Arrangement and Special Wrapping for Modesty.** In the Kagan burial tradition, women are prepared with particular attention to their modesty, signified through careful hair grooming

and the use of cloth to simulate clothing. These gender-specific practices emphasize the community’s deep respect for cultural decorum and Islamic values even after death.

**Alim said:**

Dire lang maglahi sa pagliligo kay ang sa babae kay ang buhok nila is gina-sentiped pa na sya, sintepiron ang buhok ana nila. Tapos ang sa babae pud ang pagsaput sa ilaha, pagbalot sa ilaha is murag naa pud silay murag sanina nila ba, murag isaninà sa ilaha (IDI-P3).

(The difference is in the washing: for women, their hair is braided in a centipede pattern. Then during wrapping, it’s as if they are clothed—something like dressing them in garments.)

This practice reflects how the Kagan people integrate modesty into burial rites, ensuring that women are treated with dignity in accordance with both traditional customs and Islamic principles.

**Research Question No. 2: What cultural and spiritual beliefs influence the Kagan's burial customs?**

To explore this, several questions were asked during in-depth interviews, such as what the Kagan tribe believes about the afterlife and how these beliefs shape their burial practices, how Islamic teachings and indigenous traditions influence their burial customs, which elements of their burial practices are linked to Islamic teachings, and how taboos and superstitions affect the way the dead are buried. The Kagan tribe’s burial customs are deeply shaped by their cultural and spiritual beliefs. Their understanding of the afterlife guides how they honor and prepare the deceased, reflecting respect for the journey after death. Islamic teachings and indigenous traditions both influence these practices, blending religious rules with local customs. Certain aspects of the burial follow Islamic teachings, while others reflect indigenous traditions. Taboos and superstitions also play a role in guiding the burial practices, as these are important in their cultural worldview.

From the discussion on the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Kagan tribe, major themes, categorized descriptors, and central ideas were identified.

**Table 3: Essential themes, Significant Descriptors, and Central Ideas of documentation and description of the cultural and spiritual beliefs influence the Kagan's burial customs**

Essential Themes	Categorized Descriptors	Central Ideas
Religious Influence on Kagan Burial Customs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burial honors gender and religious customs.</li> <li>Death marks the soul's peaceful passage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burial preparations observe distinct customs based on gender roles and spiritual practices.</li> </ul>
Cultural Influence on Kagan Burial Customs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remembering death deepens faith.</li> <li>Burial is a community responsibility respecting faith</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Kagan hold that the essence departs the body, emphasizing calm and respectful farewells.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on mortality deepens spiritual awareness and inner cleansing.</li> <li>• Honoring the deceased involves community participation cultural and religious boundaries.</li> </ul>
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**Burial preparations observe distinct customs based on gender roles and spiritual practices.** Illustrating how burial rites are not only spiritual obligations but also cultural expressions that distinguish male and female roles in honoring the dead. These practices have been preserved and respected across generations, signifying the community’s commitment to the teachings of Islam while maintaining their cultural identity.

The data for this aspect were primarily collected from an in-depth interview with a key informant (IDI-P1), a community elder and religious leader with firsthand knowledge of burial customs. During the discussion, the informant elaborated on the specific arrangements and procedures undertaken during burial ceremonies, emphasizing the importance of adherence to religious guidelines passed down from Prophet Muhammad.

**The Imam shared:**

Sama sa Christian, naa pud mi pag-ampo sa minatay pero sa sulod na sa Masjid. Sama lang sa ordinaryo nga pagsimba, walay limit ang gusto mosulod pero dili na magyukbo, magtindog lang. Unya ang babae magtindog dihaa lang sa pusod nga bahin sa minatay, ang lalaki sa dughan dapit. Dikitdikit lang. Dili pud pwede nga pares ang linya, dapat bungkig na siya—pwede lima, pito basta dili lang pares kay mao na mana ang guidelines nga gihatag sa Labawng Makagagahom, Propeta Muhammad. Kay ultimo ang tela, dili jud na siya pwede parison kung gamay lang ang tela, tulo ang pinaka-gamay; kung ubay-ubay, lima ka sapaw, pero depende sa kadakon pwede pud pito. Kung sa babae, pito ka bangan ang paghikot sa minatay: sa ulo, liog, dughan, pusod, tiil, paa, ug tiilan. Kung lalaki, lima ka bangan: sa ulo, abaga, pusod, tuhod, ug tiil (IDIP1)

(Just like Christians, we also have prayers for the dead but it's done inside the Masjid. It’s similar to an ordinary worship— anyone who wants to enter may do so, but they don’t bow; they just stand. The women stand at the navel area of the deceased, the men at the chest area. They stand close together. The line must not be even—it should be uneven. It can be five, seven, just not an even number, because that is the guideline given by the Almighty, Prophet Muhammad. Even the cloth must not be made even. If there’s only a small piece, three layers is the minimum; if there is more, five layers, and depending on the size, even seven. For a female, there are seven ties on the body of the deceased: the head, neck, chest, navel, legs, thighs, and feet. For a male, five ties: the head, shoulders, navel, knees, and feet.)

**The Kagan hold that the essence departs the body, emphasizing calm and respectful farewells.** They believe that death is not the end, but a transition where only the soul leaves the body. This belief encourages a calm and respectful environment during burial, one that honors the peaceful journey of the soul.

While sadness is a natural response, the Kagan discourage loud wailing, as it is believed to disturb the tranquility that should accompany the soul’s departure. This practice aligns with their view that death, though painful, is a

moment of spiritual release and return to the Creator. Maintaining composure is seen not as emotional suppression but as a gesture of respect for the deceased and the divine process unfolding.

This insight was shared by a key informant (IDI-P2), who emphasized that although quiet weeping is natural and acceptable, raising one's voice in grief is discouraged.

#### **Datu shared:**

Bawal sa amoa ng hilakan ang pagtuo sa Kagan ang tao nga namatay ang soul ra ang nawala ana. Normal rana ang naay mohilak pero dili jud kanang tiyabaw (IDI-P2).

("In our belief, crying loudly is not encouraged. In Kagan belief, when someone dies, only the soul is gone. It's normal for someone to cry, but not to the point of wailing.")

**Reflecting on mortality deepens spiritual awareness and inner cleansing.** The burial practices of the Kagan community not only observe Islamic customs but also serve as moments for personal and communal reflection. For the Kagan people of Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, the remembrance of death is essential in strengthening one's faith and purifying the heart. This belief is in harmony with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, which guide both the external rites and the inner spiritual journey of the living.

This aspect emerged during an in-depth interview with another key informant (IDI-P3), a respected elder in the community known for his deep religious insight. His reflection highlighted how thinking about death is a spiritual exercise one that purifies the soul and realigns a person's values toward righteousness. He explained that these beliefs are not simply symbolic; they are daily reminders to live a life worthy of the hereafter.

#### **The Alim explained:**

Ingun sa Propeta Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wassalam, kung mamatay ang isa ka tao, muoban sa iyaha ang tulo ka butang, una ang iyahang kwarta, pamilya, ug binuhatan, pero magpabilin ra ang binuhatan. Ang kasingkasing sa tawo gina kalawang kung puno sa mga sayop, ug ang duha ra ka butang ang maka tangtang sa kalawang— ang pag basa sa Qur'an ug ang pag hunahuna sa kamatayun (IDI-P3).

(The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said that when a person dies, three things follow him: his wealth, his family, and his deeds—but only his deeds remain. A person's heart becomes rusted when filled with wrongdoing, and only two things can remove that rust—reading the Qur'an and reflecting on death.)

This teaching is often shared within the community as a way of encouraging spiritual mindfulness. For the Kagan, remembering death is not morbid; it is a form of worship that calls for the renewal of the self. It affirms the belief that what truly matters at the end of one's life are not material possessions or relationships, but the righteousness of one's actions.

**Honoring the deceased involves community participation cultural and religious boundaries.** The Kagan community regards burial as a shared spiritual duty, where everyone contributes to honoring the departed. The funeral prayer, *salatul janaza*, is held in the Masjid and led by the Imaam. Community members are strongly encouraged to help with burial preparations, as assisting in the burial is believed to bring great spiritual reward. However, it is preferred that no one replaces another in performing the burial rites, since greater merit is given to those who actively participate themselves.

The elders have traditional markers to distinguish burial practices by gender: women are honored with two flowers placed on their head and feet, while men receive one flower on the head. In kagan term, it is called *kilah*, a red-flowered plant resembling San Francisco is widely being used as a marker, but religious leaders discourage this practice, considering it an innovation (*bid'ah*) that is forbidden in Islam.

The use of smoke or cigarettes during burial is strictly prohibited, emphasizing respect and purity at the gravesite.

### **Tigkare shared:**

Ang pag-ampo sa patay paga hitaboon sa Masjid o gina tawag na ‘salatul janaza’. Naa mi gina tawag nga mujjahideen, mao na sila ang mga Islamic fighters nga ga defend sa among religion, kung mamatay sila nga naa sa gyera wala nami gi obliga nga ligoon pa sila, baloton pa, kung unsay namatyan nila nga ilang gi soot mao nato, diritso na, gi tawag pud na sa shahid o espesyal nga kamatayon. Sila rajud ang special ang pag lubong sa among belief. Kadtong mga martyr. Tanan jud sa amoa gina encourage mo tabang ang tanan kay dako mana ug ibadah o reward pero as magkakarehay kung mahimo dili mi mag papuli sa pag tabon kay mas dako man ug gantimpala nga maka tabang ka sa pag tabon. Sa katigulangan man gud ang timailhan kuno nila kung babae, duha ka bulak ang ibutang sa ulohan ug tiilan, kung sa lalaki isa lang sa ulohan lang. Ang ingon sa Alim, bato lang ang perfect nga ilhanan. Kanang gina tawag nga ‘kilah’, bulak na siya nga murag San Francisco pero mo dahon ug color pula. Pero amo jud na siya nga gina discourage kay dili jud na pwede, bid ah na siya, ‘kullu bid ah tin dalala wa kullu dalala tin finnar’. Kana pong pa aso bawal na siya, even sigarilyo, dili pwede manigarilyo, diha sa iyang lubnganan (IDI-P4).

(The prayer for the dead is performed inside the Masjid and is called ‘salatul janaza.’ We have mujjahideen, Islamic fighters who defend our religion. When they die in battle, we are not obligated to wash or shroud them; whatever they wore at death is what they are buried in. This is called shahid, a special death. They alone have special burial rites in our belief. All of us are encouraged to help because it is a great act of worship and reward, but if possible, we avoid substituting others in covering the deceased because greater reward comes from helping personally. The elders say that for women, two flowers are placed on the head and feet, and for men, one flower on the head only. According to the Alim, a stone is the perfect marker. There’s a flower called ‘kilah,’ which looks like San Francisco with red leaves. But we discourage that because it is considered bid‘ah, ‘kullu bid ah tin dalala wa kullu dalala tin finnar.’ Smoke is also forbidden, even cigarettes; no smoking is allowed at the grave.)

The burial customs of the Kagan tribe reveal a profound synthesis of faith, culture, and communal identity that transcends the mere act of laying the dead to rest. These practices are not isolated rituals but living expressions of a worldview where life, death, and the afterlife are interconnected in a continuous spiritual journey. The Kagan’s observance of Islamic teachings alongside indigenous traditions reflects a dynamic cultural resilience—one that respects religious doctrine while preserving ancestral wisdom passed through generations. Their burial rites are deeply gendered, symbolizing distinct roles and responsibilities that honor both the deceased and the community’s collective values.

### **Research Question No. 3: How have Kagan burial practices evolved over time, and what factors have influenced these changes?**

To facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the research question, the following probing questions were used during the in-depth interviews. What are the key differences between traditional and modern Kagan burial practices? How has modernization or external cultural influences affected the way the Kagan conduct funerals? In what ways has the introduction of formal Islamic burial practices changed Kagan traditions? What cultural traditions have been preserved despite changes in burial practices over time? How do younger generations of the Kagan tribe perceive and practice traditional burial customs today? From the aforementioned questions, major themes, categorized descriptors, and central ideas were identified, as presented in Table:

**Table 4: Essential themes, categorized descriptors, and Central ideas of the historical evolution of Kagan burial practices and the factors that have contributed to these changes.**

Essential Themes	Categorized Descriptors	Central Ideas
Realignment of Traditional Practices to Qur'an and Hadith Teachings through Islamic Education.	Alignment with Qur'an and Hadith.	Practices are strongly grounded by the Islamic teachings, practices not found in Qur'an are removed.
	Discontinuation of non-Islamic customs.	Exposure to formal Islamic education influences burial practices as both old and new teachings are traced back to Prophet Muhammad.
	Remembering death deepens faith.	Culture persists but must conform to Islamic rules.
	Rejection of Ancestral Non-Islamic Practice.	Ancestral burial practices are discouraged because they are considered bid'ah.
	Ancestors' initiative to create burial rituals.	Ancestors developed burial rituals based on their own understanding of how to attain salvation.
Challenges in the Transmission of Islamic Teachings Due to Limited Access to Education and Language Barriers	Lack of formal Islamic education among ancestors.	Ancestors practiced Islam through self-study without formal guidance.
	Ritual practices as sincere efforts to follow Islam.	Rituals were practiced out of sincere intentions and ancestral initiatives.
	Language barriers and access limitations	Limited access to Arabic translation hindered proper understanding of Islamic teachings.

**Alignment with Qur'an and Hadith.** The most direct expression of this transformation is seen in the alignment with Qur'an and Hadith, which serves as the central source of religious guidance. The central idea, Practices are strongly grounded by the Islamic teachings, practices not found in Qur'an are removed, highlights a conscious and deliberate purification of traditional burial customs. The Kagan people have begun to measure the authenticity of their rituals by referencing Islamic texts, ensuring that burial practices align strictly with what is permitted or prescribed by Islamic law. Rituals and customs that were once passed down through generations regardless of origin are now subject to scrutiny. If they lack basis in the Qur'an or Hadith, they are considered illegitimate and subsequently removed from practice. This represents a significant theological realignment that not only redefines how death is honored but also reinforces the role of Islamic teaching in guiding daily life.

**Datu shared that:**

Ahmm diri sa amoa sa Kagan diri sa Casoon nagpabilin mi ug unsa ang mga pagtulun an sa una kay mao raman amoang ginasunod pero adunay mga pagtuo ug mga butang nga amoang gikuha kay nahibal an namo nga ang katung ilahang mga gigamit sa una wala nakasunod sa Qur an maong makaingon ko nga walay kalahian pero

nay gikuha tungod kay wala sa Qur'an pero in general naa, kay nawala naman tung mga mali nga pagtulun an (IDI-P2).

(Ahmm, here in our Kagan community in Casoon, we have continued to follow the teachings and practices from before, because that's what we've grown up with. But there were certain beliefs and practices that we removed after learning that some of the things used in the past were not in accordance with the Qur'an. So, I can say that there's no big difference, but some parts were taken out because they weren't based on the Qur'an. In general, yes, there were changes because the incorrect teachings were removed.)

**Culture Persists but Must Conform to Islamic Rules.** While many non-Islamic customs are being removed, not all cultural elements are discarded. This complexity is reflected in the central idea, "Culture persists but must conform to Islamic rules. This finding highlight that the Kagan community in Casoon, Monkayo, Davao De Oro, do not seek to erase their cultural identity, but rather to preserve it within the bounds of Islamic teachings. There is now a selective and evaluative process in which cultural practices are allowed to remain only if they do not contradict the Qur'an and Hadith. This selective retention suggests a flexible, yet principled, approach to cultural evolution, one that affirms tradition while upholding theological integrity.

This balance between cultural preservation and religious discipline reflects a sophisticated negotiation of identity. It shows that the Kagan in Casoon, Monkayo are not entirely abandoning their heritage but are instead adapting it to reflect their current understanding of faith. This strategy ensures that their traditions continue to carry meaning in today's context both as symbols of community identity and as expressions of Islamic piety.

#### **Alim shared that:**

In the present, sa pagka karun, tungod sa development sa studies nga ang Philippines especially ang kagan, kami sa batch nako sa Saudi is we are 9 kagan so among school lang ahh sa among school lang, so sa panahon karun naa natay access nga makapa school sa Saudi para ma eskwelahan ang Islam so katu sila ang ni uli dire nga mau to sila ang nag deliver karun kung unsa ilahang na eskwelahan but walay gi ingun nga karaan nga tulun an ug bag o nga tulun an kana tanan gikan sa propeta Muhammad sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam. katung ingun ninyu gaina nga tradisyon or culture dili mana mawal sa isa ka tribu diba dili na mawala pero sa islam naa mi rules sa Islam nga "Al adatu muhakkama" ang pasabut ang katung "Aada" ibig sabihin ang culture or katung naandan is pwede sya ma hatulan. (IDI-P3).

(At present, due to the development of studies, especially here in the Philippines and among the Kagan people, in my batch in Saudi Arabia, there were nine of us who are Kagan. In our school—just in our school—we had the opportunity to study Islam in Saudi. Those who returned here are now the ones delivering or teaching what they learned. However, there's no such thing as 'old' or 'new' teachings; all of it comes from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Regarding what you mentioned earlier about tradition or culture—not all of that disappears in a tribe, right? It doesn't vanish. But in Islam, we have a principle that says, 'Al- 'adah muhakkamah' which means that custom or culture can be judged or evaluated within the framework of Islam.)

**Rejection of Ancestral Non-Islamic Practice.** The shift toward religious realignment becomes more evident when ancestral customs are directly challenged by Islamic teachings. The descriptor "Rejection of Ancestral Non-Islamic Practice" and its central idea, "Ancestral burial practices are discouraged because they are considered bid'ah," underscore a theological position held by many in the Kagan community today. The term bid'ah, meaning "innovation," refers to religious practices introduced without basis in the Qur'an or Hadith and is considered impermissible in many Islamic interpretations. By identifying some ancestral burial rituals as bid'ah, the Kagan community demonstrates a heightened religious consciousness and a stricter adherence to Islamic teachings.

#### **Tigkare shared that:**

Tama man jud ni karon kay kung meaningang ang Hadith ug Qur'an ni prophet Muhammed mao man gyud ang insakto. Lahi man gud to ang nahimo sa among mga ninuno sa una. Pero amo jud na siya nga gina discourage

(referring to the burial traditions practiced by the ancestors) kay dili jud na pwede, bid ah na siya, “kullu bid ah tin dalala wa kullu dalala tin finnar” (IDI-P4).

(What we are doing now (referring to the present burial practices) is truly correct, because when we look at the Hadith and Qur’an of Prophet Muhammad, that is what is truly right. What our ancestors practiced before was different. But we are really discouraging those practices (referring to the burial traditions of the ancestors) because they are not acceptable—they are considered bid’ah (innovation). As the saying goes, “Every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance leads to the Hellfire.”)

**Ancestors’ Initiative to Create Burial Rituals.** This discussion would be incomplete without acknowledging the historical context of these changes. The central idea, “Ancestors developed burial rituals based on their own understanding of how to attain salvation,” provides a compassionate explanation for the origins of the now-discontinued practices. These rituals were not created with the intention of going against Islamic principles but were instead sincere expressions of the community’s spiritual beliefs at the time crafted in the absence of formal religious education. The ancestors’ actions reflect their effort to make sense of death, the afterlife, and divine approval, based on what they had access to.

Understanding this historical initiative is important in order to avoid viewing the past with condemnation. Rather, it should be seen as part of an evolving religious journey, one that has grown deeper and more informed over time. The current generation’s abandonment of those ancestral rituals is not a rejection of their intent, but a refinement of their approach—an acknowledgment that while the past was shaped by sincerity, the present must be shaped by scriptural clarity.

#### **The Alim shared that:**

Naay mga trabaho sa pag ligo sa patay pag lubong sa patay nga nay mga ritwal nga dala satung mga katigulangan. But it doesn’t mean nga katu nga time gibuhat nila buhaton pud nato sa pagka karun (IDI-P3).

(There are tasks involved in washing the dead and burying the dead that include rituals passed down from our elders. But that doesn’t mean that just because they did those things in the past, we have to do the same today.)

**Lack of formal Islamic education among ancestors.** A recurring insight from participant narratives is the recognition that earlier generations of the Kagan community practiced Islam primarily through self-study, without the benefit of formal religious instruction. This finding aligns with the central idea: “Ancestors practiced Islam through self-study without formal guidance.” It highlights a religious foundation grounded more in sincerity than in scholarly precision. In the past, the community relied on limited religious knowledge passed down through oral tradition, informal instruction, and communal interpretation.

Without direct access to trained scholars or structured Islamic curricula, elders developed rituals based on their understanding of what they believed to be right especially in matters of death and burial. These efforts stemmed not from defiance, but from devotion under constraints.

This absence of formal education does not imply a lack of faith. Rather, it reflects the historical and social limitations that shaped religious life in their time. Participants describe how their elders fulfilled Islamic obligations with reverence, even if their practices occasionally deviated from the doctrinal foundations of Islam. It is a context where spiritual conviction precedes theological clarity.

#### **Alim shared that:**

Ang Islam is naa nana daan pero among mga katigulangan sauna ang pagsabut nila sa Islam is self study lang (IDI-P3).

(Islam was already present before, but our elders in the past understood it only through self-study.)

**Ritual Practices as Sincere Efforts to Follow Islam.** The participants' narratives highlight how the Kagan community's earlier burial practices arise from sincere intentions rather than formal religious instruction. The central idea Rituals were practiced out of sincere intentions and ancestral initiatives captures the community's understanding that their ancestors, though lacking structured Islamic education, still sought to fulfill religious obligations as best as they could. Burial rituals were not performed arbitrarily but were rooted in deeply held beliefs about honoring the dead and securing salvation in the afterlife.

The absence of direct access to Islamic scholars or formal learning structures led elders to take initiative in shaping burial customs based on what they believed would please Allah. This initiative often resulted in the creation of rituals that were believed to spiritually benefit the deceased, particularly with the hope that their souls would attain paradise. These practices were expressions of piety, not innovation for its own sake.

**Alim shared that:**

Ang Islam is dati pa. So ang dire sa atua sa Pilipinas ang mga katigulangan sauna nag initiate sila or nag initiate sila nga unsaon nila ma process ang isa ka patay nga tuo nila nga unta nga mahilangit mau tung daghay mga ritwal nga nahitabo (IDI-P3). Islam has existed since long ago. So here in our place in the Philippines, our elders in the past took the initiative to figure out how to process a person's dead body in a way they believed would help the soul reach paradise. That's why many rituals were practiced.

**Language Barriers and Access Limitations.** The participant narratives reveal that one of the most significant barriers faced by the older generations of the Kagan community is their inability to access Islamic teachings due to language. This issue is captured in the central idea: Limited access to Arabic translation hindered proper understanding of Islamic teachings. While Islam was introduced long ago, the language barrier, especially the community's limited understanding of Arabic prevented elders from fully understanding the teachings of the Qur'an or from engaging directly with Islamic scholars who visited their region. Without someone to interpret or contextualize the teachings, understanding is partial and often based on assumption or imitation.

This shows the impact of language as a structural barrier. It is not merely the lack of religious texts that limits understanding, but the absence of mediators who can bridge the gap between Arabic-speaking educators and the local community. The result is that even when authentic Islamic sources are physically present, they remain spiritually and intellectually inaccessible.

**Alim shared that:**

Let's say sa panahon nila nay arab muabot dre sa pilipinas but kinsay mu translate sa ila? Diba, kinsay mu translate sa mga katigulangan sa Arabic nga bisita nga kini diay maury pasabut ani kinsay mu translate ana so dili nato sila ma blame nga 101 katigulangan kay mahitungod mau rapud ilang naabut sa ilahang paningkamut pud (IDI-P3). (Let's say during their time, an Arab came to the Philippines but who would translate for them? Right? Who would translate for our elders what this Arabic visitor was saying, and what it really meant? So we can't blame the elders, because that was all they had access to and it was through their own efforts.)

**Research Question No. 4: What are the roles do family, religious leaders, and the community play in Kagan funeral and burial ceremonies?**

The following questions were asked during the in-depth interviews in order to develop a broad discussion regarding the aforementioned research question. What roles do family, religious leaders, and the community play in Kagan funeral and burial ceremonies? What are the responsibilities or the immediate family in preparing and conducting the burial? How do religious leaders guide and officiate Kagan funeral rites? What communal activities are performed before, during, and after the burial? How does the Kagan tribe burial customs, and how do they influence funeral proceedings?

From the aforementioned questions, major themes, categorized descriptors, and central ideas were identified, as presented in Table

**Table 5: Essential themes, categorized descriptors, and Central ideas to explore the roles of family members, religious leaders, and the community in the conduct of Kagan funeral and burial ceremonies**

Essential themes	Categorized Descriptors	Central Ideas
Social Roles and Cultural Responsibilities	Communal Duty and Spiritual Unity	The Kagan community views burial rituals as a shared duty that brings spiritual rewards and strengthens communal and religious bonds.
	Family obligation and preservation of dignity	In Kagan burial customs, the family handles the deceased's preparation especially ritual bathing to ensure dignity, privacy, and respectful care from close relatives.
Religious and Communal Leadership in Ritual Practices	Gender roles in burial practices and physical labor	In Kagan burials, men handle tasks such as digging and carrying the body, while women are traditionally restricted from the burial site due to cultural and religious norms.
	Leadership roles and religious authority in burial	In the Kagan tribe, male leaders and the jamaah manage burial rites, lead prayers, and support the bereaved, with only men permitted near the grave.
	Condolence Practices and Cultural Flexibility	In Kagan culture, offering condolences by visiting the bereaved family is encouraged but not obligatory.
	Funeral Rites and Worship Adaptation, Communal Burial Duty, Reverent Body Handling	Kagan Muslims pray for the dead inside the mosque, standing without prostration, using a funeral-adapted form of worship. The Kagan community encourages assisting in burials for spiritual reward, emphasizing respectful and careful handling of the body during burial.

**Communal Duty and Spiritual Unity.** The most visible expression of this value appears in how burial practices are shared responsibilities that unite the Kagan people spiritually and socially. The central idea, The Kagan community views burial rituals as a shared duty that brings spiritual rewards and strengthens communal and religious bonds, highlights the significance of these practices as both moral and spiritual imperatives. Participating in tasks such as digging the grave and carrying the body is seen not only as a physical necessity but as a spiritual obligation that earns divine blessings from Allah.

**Jamaah shared that:**

Responsibilidad namo na tabangan sila tabangan labi na katung kuan kay kanang kuan man gud dili man gud na basta basta na ma kwara sa usa ka tao. halimbawa kanang pag kalut or pag alsa padung didtu sa lubnganan kinahanglan tanan man gud na siya kay usahay kanang naa man gud nay mga gina sulti ang quran ana dili nalang nako ma kuan ug unsa to basta ang among madungog labi na kinsa tung makatabang ana daku kaayu na siyag mga kuan benefits ba kumbaga kaayuhan sa allah sa kuan sa allah sa pag hukum ana na siya (IDI-P6).

(It's our responsibility to help them because it's not something that one person can just handle alone. For example, digging the grave or carrying the body to the burial site really requires everyone's involvement. Sometimes, there are things mentioned in the Qur'an about that—though I can't recall exactly what they are—but what we often hear is that whoever helps in these tasks receives great rewards or benefits from Allah, like blessings or goodness from Him when judgment comes.)

**Family obligation and preservation of dignity.** Reflects the deep respect and sense of duty that the Kagan community places on the family's role in caring for the deceased. This practice is rooted in the belief that only

close kin can properly manage the physical and emotional sensitivity involved in preparing the body, particularly when dealing with physical conditions or marks that require discretion.

**Jamaah shared that:**

Sa membro kung ang kuan ana, siya ang leader mag kuan nana siya kumbaga mo padayag nana siya, halimbawa karun mag ligo nata, mag ligo nata unya ang kuan man gud ana ang pinaka the best man gud ana siya halimbawa naay namatay karun naay namatay ang pinaka the best ana na mo trabaho gyud ang iyang mga kapamilya kay nganu man kay kung pag ligo niya kung naa siyay mga makit an didtu na mga kuan sang lawas sa iyang mga sa minatay sa iyang relative murag dili na kaayo ma voice out ba (IDI-P6).

(In the group, if someone let's say the leader he will be the one to initiate, like he will declare it, for example, now, we will bathe now, we will bathe now. And the thing about that is the best thing really is, for example, someone just died, someone died the best ones to do the work are really the family members. Why? Because when bathing the body, if they see something there like something on the body of the deceased, their relative it's like it won't be voiced out that much.)

**Jamaah added that:**

kung lalaki siya, mao nang muingung ang leader na kinsa ang tagtungod, pangitaon gyud nang kuan ana igsoon ba o anak kay para sila ang mo trabaho sailang tagtungod, kung babae pud pangitaon pud tung mga babae nga mo kuan mo limpyu ato (IDIP6).

(If he is male, that's why the leader will say, who is the close relative he will really look for, like, a sibling or child so that they will be the ones to do the task for their relative. If it's a female, they will also look for women who will, do the cleaning of that.)

**Jamaah also added that:**

Sa mga pag ligo pud dili napud to pwede ang mama ikaw mo ligo nga anak na lalaki, dili pud pwede, kung gawas saimong asawa kay imo man nang asawa ang anak gale nga babae murag dili naka pwede ana mo hikap saimong anak na babae, kay ang pag ligo man gud ana kanang mga kanang parts sa mga kuan sa mga babae apil man gud siya limpyuhan mao na dapat babae lang mo kuan ato, pero kung imung asawa way problema (IDI-P6).

(In bathing also, it's not allowed that the mother, her son will bathe her that's not allowed, except for your husband because he is your husband. Even a daughter, it seems she is no longer allowed to touch her daughter, because in bathing, you know, those parts of the private areas of the woman must also be cleaned that's why only a woman should handle that. But if it's your spouse, there's no problem.)

**Gender roles in burial practices and physical labor.** The findings highlight the structured division of responsibilities between men and women in Kagan burial customs, shaped by long-standing cultural and religious expectations. Men are expected to perform physically demanding tasks such as grave digging and transporting the body acts that are not only labor-intensive but also regarded as religiously meritorious. These responsibilities are often seen as a way for men to fulfill communal and spiritual duties. In contrast, women's roles are deliberately limited, with their presence at the burial site often discouraged or limited out of respect for religious prescriptions regarding modesty, emotional expression, and ritual purity.

**Jamaa shared that:**

Sa dire ta sa mga kalalakinhan, syempre ang mga buluhaton namo ana naa gyud mi ana sa mga part sa mga hard mga hard namo nga trabaho, kay daghan man gud ug halimbawa kanang pagkalut hard man gyud na siya, ug kanang pag bitbit sa minatay kay bug-at bug-at pud na siya, pero ang kuan ana ang pinaka the best ana kung mag lubong nami syempre mo sabay man mi ana, ang mga lalaki ana mo lahos ra, unya ang mga babae dili jud na sila pa apilon didtu or paduolon, ibilin jud na sila didtu kay bawal sa mga babae na mo kanang mo dungaw ba,

mao pud nay akung na saksihan pud diri na muingon nang leader nga diha ramo kutob ha mga babae , oh pero sa kuan ato wala ko kabantay ngano man to, pero sakung nakit an ila gyung barahon ang babae na dili pwede na mo kuan kay mga lalaki ra ang mo trabaho didtu (IDI-P6).

(Here on our part as men, of course the tasks for us, we really have those, especially in the hard parts of work, because there are many for example, digging, it's really hard, and carrying the deceased, that's also quite heavy. But the thing about it, the best thing is that when we are about to bury, of course we go along with it the men go all the way, and the women are really not allowed to join there or come close. They are really left behind because it is forbidden for women to, you know, look over. That's also what I've witnessed here, that the leader will say, "That's as far as you go, women." Oh, but in that case, I didn't notice why that was, but from what I saw, they really hold the women back, that they are not allowed to go because only the men are the ones who do the work there.)

**Only men are permitted near the grave**, which highlights the gender-specific responsibilities in Kagan burial traditions. This restriction is rooted in cultural and religious values that assign grave-side duties such as lowering the body and its proper placement inside to men. While women may participate in mourning and other supportive roles, the final burial steps are reserved for men. This division of roles emphasizes respect, discipline, and the importance of preserving religious protocol during such sacred moments.

**Datu emphasized that:**

Diri sa Casoon ang jamaah kami na ang molihok sa mga lihokonon kung unsay angay I andam. Isip usa ka datu sa tribu sa Kagan motabang jud ko sa pagdumala sa panahon sa paglubong kay tungod dako kayo na ug ganti sa Ginoo pwede sab ako ang mag lead para sa pag ampo sa namatay sa wala pa dalaha sa lubnganan ug isip usa ka leader inig human sa paglubong ginabisita jud namo ang namatyan ug kumusta na sila kay gina encourage jud namo ang mga jamaah, kami nga jamaah nga bisitahon ug kumusta na ang pamilya sa namatyan ang mga jamaah pwede kayo mohatag sa kinasing kasing nila nga gusto ihatag tungod kay kabalo mi nga mas nanginahanglan sila sa among tabang panahon sa nay mamatay, dili man sa pagkuan ha, pero sa Makita nako sa uban nga relihiyon kung kinsa pa tong namatyan mao pay magpakaon sa mga bisita pero sa kagan nga tribo kami nga mga muslim kami ang mopakaon ug kami ang motabang kung nay mamatay og naay namatyan. didto sa lubnganan ang mga lalaki rajud ang makaduol sa lubong ang babae layolayo sa lubnganan kay ang lalaki raman ang maglihok (IDI-P2).

(Here in Casoon, it is the jamaah (community members) who take charge of the necessary preparations. As a datu (leader) of the Kagan tribe, I personally help oversee the burial process because it is believed that such service brings great reward from God. I may also lead the prayer for the deceased before they are brought to the burial site. As a leader, after the burial, we make it a point to visit the family of the deceased and check on them. We, the jamaah, encourage each other to reach out and offer comfort. The jamaah are free to give whatever they sincerely wish to share, as we understand that the bereaved family needs our support most during that time. This is not to criticize others, but from what I observe in other religions, it is often the grieving family who provides food for visitors. In contrast, among us Kagans—being Muslims—it is the community who prepares the food and offers help when someone dies. At the burial ground, only men are allowed to approach the grave; women stay at a distance, as it is the men who carry out the burial tasks.)

**Imam then stated that:**

Pagka human ug lubong naa ra sa amoa kung mo adto pami sa ilaha aron mo paabot ug mga pagpahalipay. Kay basin mapugos lang sila, dili mani compulsory pero mas maayo (IDI-P1).

(After the burial, it's up to us whether we visit the family to offer our condolences. We consider that they might just feel obliged if we do—it's not compulsory, but it's better if we do.)

**Tigkare added that:**

tanang jud sa amoa gina encourage mo tabang ang tanang kay dako mana ug ibadah o reward pero as magkakarehay kung mahimo dili mi mag papuli sa pag tabon kay mas dako man ug gantimpala nga maka tabang ka sa pag tabon (IDI-P4).

(All of us are truly encouraged to help because it brings great ibadah or reward. However, when it comes to taking turns, we prefer not to rotate in doing the covering because there is a greater reward in being able to help with the covering.)

**The Kagan community encourages assisting in burials for spiritual reward, emphasizing respectful and careful handling of the body during burial.** Participation in the burial process is seen as a good deed with religious value. Community members are reminded to treat the deceased with dignity, ensuring the body is handled gently and in accordance with Islamic teachings. This reflects the Kagan people's deep respect for the dead and their commitment to fulfilling religious obligations with care and compassion.

#### **Ikawapatan stated that:**

Porke kay kabalo ka mo hugas, ikaw na dili na pwde. Dapat pd na ang nag process kay graduate sya sa Arabic kumbaga sya ang mag guide kung unsay buhaton. Pero sa pag putos na sa patay sya lang isa, gitabangan ang sya pag alsa. Gumikan sya ang naay dako nga kahibalo ana nga process (IDI-P5).

Just because you know how to wash the body doesn't mean you're already allowed to do it. The one who leads the process should be someone who has graduated in Arabic studies—someone who can guide others on what needs to be done. When it comes to wrapping the body, he does it alone, although others help carry it. He is the one with the most knowledge about the proper process.

## **DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the discussion of findings, implications, and concluding remarks based on the study, which aimed to thoroughly explore and document the burial practices of the Kagan community in Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro. The research focused on understanding how Islamic teachings and indigenous cultural beliefs are interwoven in their burial customs, how these practices have evolved, and how they continue to define the spiritual, communal, and cultural identity of the Kagan people.

The study involved six (6) participants from the Muslim Kagan tribe in Casoon, Monkayo. These participants were selected based on their experiential knowledge of traditional and contemporary Kagan burial rituals. Data were collected through participant observation, in which the researchers engaged directly with the community and took part in actual burial-related practices. This method allowed for rich, contextualized understanding and deeper cultural immersion.

The research adopted a qualitative design employing a descriptive ethnographic approach. As Creswell and Poth (2023) explain, ethnography involves studying a cultural group in its natural setting over a prolonged period by collecting observational and interview data to understand the shared patterns of behavior, language, and actions of the group. In this study, participant observation enabled the researchers to grasp both the observable practices and the underlying meanings of Kagan burial rites, including rituals such as kuwas (sacred soil preparation),

body treatment, symbolic floral use, and community prohibitions related to death. Through five days of immersion in the field, the researchers documented the lived expressions of faith and tradition in the Kagan community. Burial customs were examined not only for their ritual components but also for their roles in preserving identity, enforcing gender norms, and negotiating between ancestral beliefs and Islamic reform. This approach aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2023) emphasis on the ethnographer's responsibility to interpret cultural patterns and provide a holistic account of social practices.

### **Intricate Burial Practices Anchored in Islam**

The burial practices of the Kagan community are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, as reflected in their observance of rituals, prayers, and ceremonial acts that highlight both religious faith and cultural identity. Based on the study's findings, these practices are more than prescribed obligations they are structured responses to death that preserve dignity, honor tradition, and reflect deep spiritual meaning.

Through the lens of Ritual Theory, these rites symbolize the transition of the soul, with each step from the moment of death to burial marking an important passage. As the data show, community members perform ritual washing, wrapping, prayer, and burial with reverence and precision, underscoring both their spiritual commitment and collective discipline. The use of structured rituals like Salat al-Janazah (funeral prayer), and timely burial, reflect a devotion to divine will and the community's responsibility to uphold these values.

From the perspective of Structural Functionalism, these organized practices help preserve community order and unity. The requirement to bury the deceased within 24 hours promotes quick mobilization and cooperation among families and neighbors. Interviews revealed that this practice is adhered to without delay, ensuring the emotional and spiritual needs of the community are met. Tasks such as nail trimming, washing with soap and perfume, and the use of new, unopened fabric demonstrate the community's high regard for ritual purity and order.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) also guide these traditions, particularly in the community's adaptation of Islamic burial teachings to local realities. Participants shared that the washing of the body mirrors their personal bathing practices, symbolizing familiarity and care. Women receive specific preparations, including hair braiding and multiple wrappings, which highlight the community's cultural expressions of modesty and respect. Though not required by Islamic texts, these acts reflect indigenous interpretations of honoring the dead.

Gender-sensitive roles are strictly maintained, with male relatives preparing male bodies and female relatives handling female deceased. This division reflects both religious principles and cultural propriety. Furthermore, symbolic markers such as red kilah flowers placed in twos for women and one for men continue to be used by some, despite Islamic discouragement of grave adornment. These practices reveal the enduring influence of Kagan identity even within an Islamic framework, as highlighted by IKSP.

Cleanliness and the use of new materials are strongly emphasized, reinforcing both religious and cultural values. Informants shared that new, unopened cotton cloths must be used for drying and wrapping the deceased, and that reused materials are prohibited. This reflects the concept of taharah (ritual purity), and also serves as a final gesture of care. Ritual Theory helps frame these acts as sacred symbols of spiritual preparation and farewell.

The sequence of handling the body after death in Kagan practice follows an ordered and respectful process. Immediately upon death, the body is washed thoroughly using water, soap, and perfume. Fingernails are trimmed and the body is carefully cleansed, following the same products typically used by the living, symbolizing dignity and familiarity. The body is then dried using new, unopened cloth and wrapped in fresh cotton shrouds. Women are given extra coverings and their hair is sometimes braided, in accordance with cultural expressions of modesty. Once the body is prepared, it is taken for Salat al-Janazah the funeral prayer offered in congregation where the community asks forgiveness and mercy for the deceased. After the prayer, the body is brought to the grave and placed gently. Wooden planks are laid on either side to protect the body from direct contact with the soil, and the grave is sealed. In some families, a final piece of white cloth is placed over the deceased before the grave is covered, symbolizing sacred closure. These carefully observed steps emphasize both Islamic obedience and communal responsibility.

The data also revealed unique practices that adapt Islamic teachings to local conditions. One example is the wrapping of the deceased in a white cloth from the Hajj pilgrimage when available. This act is imbued with meaning, connecting the deceased to a spiritual journey of devotion and humility. In cases where burial must occur immediately in remote locations such as the death of a Mujahideen participants reported that a simple white cloth is used, and burial occurs on-site. These adaptations, seen through Structural Functionalism, demonstrate how practicality and belief intersect to uphold sacred obligations under various circumstances.

### **Prohibition and Limitations in Kagan Burial Rites**

The burial practices of the Kagan tribe reveal a deep respect for religious boundaries and sacred customs, rooted in both Islamic teachings and cultural principles. These prohibitions and limitations are not arbitrary; they are

meaningful expressions of reverence for the deceased and reflections of the community's commitment to purity, discipline, and moral order.

One of the most prominent prohibitions observed by the Kagan community is the forbiddance of stepping on graves. This practice aligns with Islamic teachings, which consider stepping on graves a serious act of disrespect (Al-Saif, 2019). To avoid such violations, the Kagan people place physical markers or signs on burial sites. These markers are intended to safeguard the sanctity of the graves and ensure that they remain undisturbed. This practice is a reflection of Ritual Theory, which emphasizes the importance of symbolic actions in preserving spiritual meaning during transitional rites, such as burial.

Another significant restriction is the prohibition against placing personal belongings inside the grave. The Kagan community, in accordance with Islamic beliefs, asserts that material possessions hold no value in the afterlife and therefore should not accompany the deceased (Al-Haj, 2019). This belief is rooted in the Islamic understanding of the Day of Judgment, where the soul stands alone before Allah, judged solely by faith and actions. This strict avoidance of superstition and focus on spiritual purity aligns with findings by Rahman (2021), who explains that detachment from worldly possessions in death reinforces a life guided by Islamic discipline. This principle illustrates how the Structural Functionalist perspective ensures social cohesion through commonly accepted religious boundaries.

The study also revealed that any form of fire especially lit cigarettes is strictly prohibited in Muslim cemeteries, including those of the Kagan community. According to participants, this rule is enforced out of both religious and practical necessity. The presence of fire is perceived as disruptive to the solemnity of the cemetery and a potential hazard to the sacred environment. This is consistent with the views of Khan and Ahmed (2020), who emphasize that Islamic cemeteries must remain peaceful, clean, and respectful spaces. The prohibition of fire reflects how Islamic rituals shape not only the acts themselves but also the spaces in which they are performed, aligning again with Ritual Theory and IKSP, which guide culturally appropriate religious observance.

A particularly unique application of Islamic belief in the Kagan context is the treatment of individuals believed to have died under "So'ul Khatima" a concept referring to an unfortunate or sinful death, such as suicide or dying without repentance. In such cases, the deceased is not given the usual rites, such as the Salat al-Janazah or communal prayers. Instead, a simple and immediate burial is performed without the ceremonial honors typically accorded to the faithful. This reflects a theological position that spiritual intercession must be earned through righteous living, as discussed by Hussain (2020). It also reflects the community's commitment to maintaining doctrinal integrity and moral instruction, showing how Structural Functionalism helps uphold religious norms and ethical expectations.

These prohibitions against stepping on graves, leaving personal possessions, bringing fire to cemeteries, and performing rituals for those with So'ul Khatima demonstrate how the Kagan tribe has effectively integrated Islamic jurisprudence with their cultural traditions. These limitations are not simply about avoiding improper behavior; they are essential to preserving the spiritual structure and sacredness of burial practices.

### **Circumstances in Burial Practices**

The burial practices of the Kagan tribe are deeply shaped by Islamic teachings and cultural circumstances that affect how death is honored across different situations. These circumstances include miscarriage, gender-specific rites, religious prohibitions, community roles, and adjustments made during unique life events such as pilgrimage or conflict.

The Kagan community maintains several important restrictions during burials to ensure spiritual sanctity and cultural reverence. Among the most emphasized is the prohibition against stepping on graves, viewed as disrespectful under Islamic law. To prevent this, the community places stone or wooden markers at burial sites (Ali & Yusuf, 2019). The presence of fire, including lit cigarettes, is similarly banned in Muslim cemeteries to protect the purity and safety of the burial grounds (Khan & Ahmed, 2020).

Additionally, the Kagan adhere to the concept of "So'ul Khatima" a bad death resulting from sin or unrepentance. In such cases, individuals are buried immediately, without Salat al-Janazah or full rites. This practice reflects a strict observance of Islamic doctrine on spiritual accountability and illustrates how burial can also express moral and religious judgment (Rahman, 2021).

Islamic burial customs also forbid placing personal belongings with the deceased, based on the belief that material items are of no use in the afterlife. This principle reinforces spiritual detachment from the material world, preserving purity in death rituals (Siddiqui, 2020).

The treatment of miscarried infants in the Kagan community follows both cultural logic and Islamic law. If the miscarriage occurs before the fourth month of gestation, the fetus is wrapped and buried without ritual washing or prayer. If it occurs beyond four months marking the presumed entry of the soul the fetus receives full Islamic burial rites (El-Tahawy & Abou-ElWafa, 2019).

This practice illustrates the community's careful attention to theological milestones and spiritual value assigned to life stages. Under IKSP, this distinction is preserved through oral tradition and passed down generationally. Structural Functionalism explains how the community maintains social cohesion by assigning appropriate rites based on religious and cultural logic.

Special care is taken when preparing deceased women for burial. Genderspecific rules are strictly followed: female relatives or women from the community wash the body, braid the hair in a traditional "centipede" style, and wrap the body in a way that simulates clothing, preserving modesty and dignity (Almuhanha & Azmi, 2020; Yasin & Alhassan, 2019).

These actions reinforce cultural respect for women and Islamic teachings on female modesty. Ritual Theory highlights how these symbolic acts mark spiritual transitions, while IKSP affirms their role in preserving traditional knowledge that fosters group identity.

In conflict zones or during armed encounters, such as with deceased Mujahideen, retrieval of the body may not be possible. In these cases, the Kagan community buries the body on-site, wrapped in a simple white cloth, in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence. The same occurs when burial must happen swiftly for practical or environmental reasons.

Additionally, for those who have performed Hajj, burial in the white ihram cloth used during the pilgrimage is permitted. This sacred cloth symbolizes submission to Allah and marks the individual's return to Him in a state of purity (Nasr, 2018). These practices reflect IKSP as they represent localized interpretations of faith, adapted to context without compromising spiritual meaning.

At its core, the Kagan burial process is a spiritual journey. The belief that death is a sacred passage not an endpoint pervades all aspects of burial. From the orderly steps of washing, wrapping, praying, and burial, to symbolic customs like floral markers or hair arrangement, these rituals create a sense of peace and sacred closure.

Ritual Theory explains how these structured acts mark transitions for the deceased and provide emotional meaning for the living. Meanwhile, Structural Functionalism frames them as crucial to maintaining community solidarity, particularly in times of grief.

Gender roles are clearly defined in Kagan burials. Men bury male relatives and perform the physical tasks of interment, while women prepare female bodies. These customs are rooted in both Islamic law and cultural propriety. Social roles are also reinforced through the participation of elders and community leaders, who guide the process and ensure that traditions are properly followed.

This division of responsibility not only upholds spiritual integrity but also social order. Structural Functionalism supports the view that such roles strengthen community bonds, and IKSP validates them as lived knowledge passed through generations.

Burials serve as moments of deep spiritual reflection in Kagan life. Silence is maintained at the gravesite, and overt mourning like loud wailing is discouraged. These practices are grounded in Islamic teachings that emphasize solemnity and respect during the transition of the soul (Kamal et al., 2019).

Funerals also serve as reminders of mortality known as *tadhkirat al-mawt* in Islamic thought. Through these events, the Kagan community affirms the moral weight of life, emphasizing that only good deeds accompany a person into the afterlife. This moral lesson, embedded in ritual, reinforces religious values and ethical behavior for the living.

The circumstances surrounding Kagan burial practices from miscarriages to Mujahideen deaths, from gender-specific rituals to prohibited actions reveal a richly textured tradition rooted in Islam and shaped by indigenous knowledge. These practices not only provide spiritual guidance but also sustain social structure and collective memory.

### **The Evolution of Kagan Burial Practices and the Factors that have Contributed to these Changes.**

The burial practices of the Kagan tribe have undergone a significant transformation, driven by increased access to formal Islamic education and a deeper engagement with the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. This evolution marks a clear shift from a culturally blended tradition toward one that is more aligned with religious orthodoxy. The community's current approach to burial rituals reflects not only a change in practice but also a transformation in spiritual consciousness and collective identity.

Previously, Kagan burial practices incorporated a variety of indigenous rituals passed down through generations. These were expressions of sincere spiritual devotion, rooted in local knowledge systems and cultural memory. From the perspective of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), these ancestral customs were shaped by lived experiences and community interpretations of how to honor the dead and attain salvation, especially in the absence of formal religious instruction. The crafting of these rituals reflects what scholars have called practical religiosity, where tradition, oral knowledge, and the wisdom of elders guided spiritual actions.

However, with the introduction of madrasah education and guidance from *ustadh* (Islamic teachers) and *alim* (Muslim scholars), the community gradually began re-evaluating its traditional burial customs. Practices that could not be directly traced to Islamic scripture were identified as *bid'ah* (innovation) and were gradually discontinued. This aligns with Structural Functionalism, which suggests that religious practices evolve to maintain the moral and social order of a community. The reinterpretation of these rituals allowed the Kagan people to reinforce a collective sense of religious identity while also preserving social cohesion under new norms.

This shift represents more than a passive acceptance of religious change. It reflects a deliberate and active engagement with faith, where the community assesses each burial ritual according to scriptural authenticity. The burial process is now treated as a religious obligation structured and precise, following the jurisprudential standards of Islam. In this context, Ritual Theory, particularly Turner's concept of liminality, helps explain how the Kagan community experiences this change. Burial, as a rite of passage, has become a structured transition not just for the deceased, but for the living as well transforming the way they understand death, identity, and devotion.

At the heart of this realignment is a new way of defining what is considered sacred. While older customs were once embraced as expressions of cultural identity, they are now subject to theological review. The alignment with the Qur'an and Hadith serves as the clearest expression of this transformation. Rituals that were once practiced out of habit or ancestral respect are now evaluated through the lens of Islamic texts. If found to lack foundation in the Qur'an or Hadith, they are removed from practice, reinforcing a more defined boundary between religious legitimacy and cultural invention. This process is supported by Gamon and Tagoranao (2022), who argue that the institutionalization of Islamic education empowers communities to critically reassess local customs in favor of scriptural authenticity.

In parallel, the discontinuation of non-Islamic customs represents the community's growing ability to distinguish between what is religiously required and what is culturally inherited. This change has been made possible through education, which promotes both doctrinal clarity and critical reflection. Sali and Ancho (2021) emphasized the essential role of madrasah teachers in shaping community understanding of Islamic practice. This educational foundation has enabled the Kagan people to redefine their spiritual responsibilities with greater precision and intentionality. Where once rituals were preserved simply because they were ancestral, now they must be justified through reference to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings.

Despite these changes, the Kagan community has not entirely distanced itself from its cultural roots. Rather, the Alim of the Kagan community in Casoon, Monkayo emphasized that "culture persists but must conform to Islamic rules" which reveals a more balanced and reflective approach to tradition. The community does not aim to erase its identity, but to refine it preserving those elements of culture that are not in conflict with Islamic principles. As Mababaya (2024) noted in her study on Islamic schools, cultural expressions are welcomed as long as they align with moral and religious standards. This thoughtful process of cultural retention ensures that the Kagan tribe remains connected to its heritage while remaining faithful to Islamic obligations.

The rejection of ancestral non-Islamic practices, especially those deemed as bid'ah, further reflects a heightened religious consciousness within the community. Kamid's (2021) study on the Maguindanaon found similar patterns, where burial customs not sanctioned by Islamic texts were abandoned in pursuit of religious authenticity. For the Kagan, this rejection is not rooted in shame or disrespect toward their ancestors, but in a sincere desire to follow Islam as accurately as possible.

Finally, understanding this transformation requires recognition of the ancestors' initiative to create burial rituals based on their spiritual understanding at the time. Without formal education or scriptural access, previous generations of Kagan Muslims constructed rituals using inherited knowledge and sincere faith. Awa and Langkit (2021), in their study of the Maranao, described this process as a form of practical religiosity—a localized effort to fulfill religious obligations within the limits of available resources and knowledge. Seen in this light, the evolution of burial practices is not a break from the past but a continuation of a long-standing tradition of seeking spiritual truth, now enhanced through education and access to Islamic texts.

This transformation can be understood not simply as the abandonment of tradition, but as a careful and intentional process of redefinition where cultural heritage and religious obligation are brought into thoughtful balance.

### **Educational and Linguistic Challenges in the Transmission of Islamic Beliefs**

The earlier generations of the Kagan community faced significant barriers in learning and practicing Islam, primarily due to limited access to formal education and language constraints. While current burial practices reflect stronger alignment with Qur'anic teachings, older customs were shaped by self-guided learning and oral traditions. These were not signs of religious neglect, but rather a reflection of the historical absence of trained scholars, institutional support, and accessible Arabic texts. As a result, religious understanding especially in rituals related to death and burial was grounded in ancestral interpretation and sincere intentions.

Through the lens of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), these early practices can be seen as valid expressions of spiritual knowledge transmitted through lived experience. Without formal instruction, elders relied on community memory, practical religiosity, and elder-led customs to fulfill religious duties. These were contextually appropriate responses to the resources available, highlighting how indigenous systems adapt and sustain meaning even in the absence of written or institutional guidance.

This adaptation is further explained through Structural Functionalism, which emphasizes the importance of rituals in maintaining social stability. The Kagan's burial practices, though lacking formal theological precision, offered structure in moments of grief, reinforced social roles, and unified the community in collective mourning. Even without doctrinal accuracy, these customs preserved moral order and spiritual purpose.

Ritual Theory, particularly Turner's concept of rites of passage, also provides a useful framework. The burial process remained a sacred transition for the Kagan marking the passage of the soul, guiding emotional behavior, and reaffirming community values. Acts such as body washing, prayer, and silent mourning served as liminal experiences, helping the community navigate the boundary between life and death, even when these rituals were shaped by local rather than scriptural instruction. The lack of structured Islamic education exacerbated these challenges. As Sali (2023) and Mangadang et al. (2025) point out, the effectiveness of programs like ALIVE (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education) is often limited in rural or minority-Muslim communities due to the shortage of trained teachers and learning materials. This mirrors the experience of the Kagan, who depended on communal interpretation rather than formal instruction to guide their religious practices.

In addition to limited access to educators, the Kagan also encountered language barriers that further complicated religious learning. The Qur'an and other primary Islamic texts are written in Arabic, a language not commonly spoken or understood by many in the community. Bansil (2024) emphasizes that this linguistic gap hinders effective Islamic instruction in similar Philippine contexts, reinforcing the need for culturally and linguistically responsive education. Without access to accurate translations or interpretive guidance, Kagan elders relied on stories, local symbols, and intuitive meanings to shape their practices some of which later diverged from formal Islamic rulings.

From an IKSP perspective, this form of adaptation was both necessary and valid, preserving religious intent and cultural coherence. Structural Functionalism explains how, even in the absence of Arabic literacy, these modified practices helped the community maintain cohesion, fulfill religious roles, and navigate the responsibilities of death. Ritual Theory reminds us that despite the lack of scriptural grounding, these burial rites remained deeply symbolic and meaningful serving as sacred acts that marked spiritual transformation.

The educational and linguistic challenges experienced by the Kagan community did not weaken their faith but shaped how it was expressed. Guided by sincerity and cultural values, earlier generations developed ritual practices that balanced spiritual devotion with practical realities. As access to formal Islamic education improves, these traditions are being re-evaluated, not as errors, but as part of an ongoing journey of religious understanding rooted in community, history, and faith.

### **Social Roles and Cultural Responsibilities**

In the Kagan community, burial customs reflect a strong sense of social duty, shaped by religious values and communal expectations. Responsibilities such as digging the grave, carrying the body, and bathing the deceased are not only physical tasks but also considered spiritual acts that bring blessings from Allah. These duties are shared across the community, fostering solidarity and reaffirming social order.

From a Structural Functionalist perspective, these practices serve to maintain communal harmony and reinforce social roles. Tasks are distributed according to gender, kinship, and spiritual obligation. Men handle the physical labor and public burial rites, while close female relatives prepare the deceased in private, ensuring modesty and emotional care. This structure provides stability and upholds moral expectations during times of mourning.

Ritual Theory, particularly Turner's concept of *communitas*, is evident in how these shared experiences transcend individual roles and create a collective spiritual identity. Participation in burial rites becomes a communal expression of faith, where grief is managed through unity and purpose. The act of digging the grave or carrying the body is elevated from a simple duty to a sacred contribution, symbolizing mutual support and religious devotion.

Meanwhile, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) explain how these customs are grounded in cultural memory and passed down through generations. The ritual bathing of the deceased by family members reflects a belief that the final care should be performed with dignity and discretion. This intimate responsibility carries emotional and spiritual weight, symbolizing the family's lasting obligation to the deceased and their role in preserving tradition.

As noted by Walter and Bailey (2020), funerals reinforce familial and cultural roles, often shaped by religious teachings. In the Kagan context, this is especially clear in how ritual tasks are performed with precision, guided by both community custom and Islamic belief. Similarly, Jan Assmann (2006) highlights that funeral practices transmit cultural memory and reinforce identity a process mirrored in the Kagan's sacred handling of burial rites.

The structured gender roles within burial practices further demonstrate how cultural and religious frameworks coexist. Men engage in physically and spiritually significant duties, while women maintain modesty and emotional restraint, following both Islamic principles and local customs. As Leila Ahmed (1992) suggests, such divisions reflect complementary roles rooted in spiritual discipline and communal respect rather than inequality.

### **Religious and Communal leadership**

Religious and communal leadership plays a central role in ensuring that Kagan burial practices are performed with both spiritual accuracy and cultural coherence. These leaders are not only guides during times of grief but also guardians of the community's moral, religious, and cultural order. Their presence ensures that rituals remain meaningful and connected to both Islamic teachings and indigenous tradition. From a Structural Functionalist viewpoint, leadership fulfills essential social functions by reinforcing communal participation, guiding behavior, and preserving shared norms. Religious figures such as the jamaah and local ustadh lead prayers like the salat al-janazah, while tribal authorities like the datu organize communal efforts and provide emotional and logistical support to grieving families. This collaboration reflects a dual responsibility spiritual and social that maintains stability in the community during times of loss.

This leadership dynamic also reflects Ritual Theory, particularly in the way religious figures ensure that sacred acts are carried out correctly. By overseeing the preparation of the body and leading ritual prayers, they help guide the community through the liminal phase of death facilitating the transition from life to afterlife with reverence and clarity. Their theological expertise safeguards the ritual's integrity, ensuring that it aligns with Islamic doctrine while remaining deeply rooted in cultural expressions of respect. Through the lens of IKSP, communal leaders such as the datu or pyagmatikadung serve as custodians of traditional knowledge. Their role bridges the ancestral wisdom of the Kagan people with the evolving expectations of Islamic practice. As Sultio and Gomez (2022) note, these leaders are responsible for overseeing traditional customs, including burial, and ensure that cultural values are upheld even as the community adopts formal religious practices. Adaptations in ritual, such as the performance of funeral prayers (janazah) while standing in the mosque without prostration, demonstrate the community's sensitivity to both Islamic principles and local spiritual expression.

This form of prayer reflects solemnity and collective unity, making it appropriate for the occasion. As Tariq Ramadan (2009) argues, such contextual modifications in Islamic rituals reflect the religion's adaptability, allowing Muslim communities to harmonize theological teachings with cultural and social realities. Ultimately, the presence of both religious and communal leadership ensures that Kagan burial rites are not only faithfully observed but also meaningfully experienced. These leaders serve as the spiritual and cultural backbone of the rituals preserving sacred traditions, guiding community behavior, and transmitting values across generations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has explored the burial traditions and practices of the Kagan tribe in Cason, Monkayo, highlighting a unique narrative within the broader context of Philippine Muslim ethnography. What distinctly sets the Kagan community apart is their strict and deliberate adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Sunnah, most notably through the complete discontinuation of indigenous rituals that are no longer consistent with Islamic doctrine.

Unlike other Muslim subgroups in Mindanao such as the Maguindanaon or Maranao who continue to practice a syncretic form of burial customs that blend Islamic rites with indigenous traditions (Kamid, 2021; Awa & Langkit, 2021), the Kagan tribe of Cason has exhibited a firm theological realignment. The community has consciously ceased performing ancestral practices such as the chanting of prophet names during Janazah, the

sprinkling of water near the grave, and the kuwas soil ceremony, recognizing these as bid'ah (religious innovations) that are incompatible with Islamic law.

This shift has been made possible through access to formal Islamic education, the presence of religiously trained leaders, and the influence of madrasah-based instruction resulting in a burial system that aligns with Islamic jurisprudence while minimizing cultural residue. Scholars such as Torres (2020) have noted that many Filipino Muslim groups maintain hybridized rituals for cultural continuity, but the Kagan community's deliberate abandonment of such practices is notably rare. Similarly, Abinal (2023) emphasized that among Muslim communities in the Davao Region, the Kagan in Casoon stand out for their institutional rejection of ancestral customs that are unsupported by Qur'anic and Hadith sources.

More importantly, this study addresses a significant gap in the existing literature. While the Kagan tribe has been previously studied for its language and oral traditions such as in the works of Epefania (2023) and Yu, Manidoc, and Tsuji (2022) there has been a noticeable lack of focused ethnographic research on their burial practices (Sultio & Gomez, 2022). This study fills that void by offering an in-depth analysis of their funerary customs, contributing new knowledge to the field of Islamic anthropology and Filipino indigenous studies.

The tribe now follows standardized burial procedures: gender-specific washing of the deceased, use of new and pure items, prompt interment within 24 hours, observance of Salat al-Janazah, and strict cemetery protocols all aligned with Qur'anic injunctions and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. This strong adherence affirms the claims of Gamon and Tagoranao (2022) and Mababaya (2024), who assert that access to Islamic education cultivates discernment between religious obligations and cultural expressions, particularly in ritual practice.

Theoretically, this transformation is framed by Ritual Theory, which explains the transition from symbolic indigenous practices to strictly religious meanings; Structural Functionalism, which highlights how such standardized practices reinforce both spiritual order and social cohesion; and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), which emphasizes how elders played a crucial role in guiding the shift toward Islamic orthodoxy.

In conclusion, the Kagan tribe of Casoon, Monkayo exemplifies a rare and exceptional model of faith-driven cultural self-revision. Their burial traditions reflect not only reverence for divine instruction but also a conscious and collective effort to uphold Islamic purity over inherited ritual. This community-wide theological realignment sets them apart from other Muslim subgroups in Mindanao and contributes a valuable case study to the broader discourse on religious authenticity, cultural preservation, and Islamic identity in indigenous Philippine contexts.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study offers several recommendations based on the data collected, the ethnographic immersion, and the findings from the burial practices of the Kagan tribe in Casoon, Monkayo, Davao de Oro.

**Local Government Units (LGUs).** Local government units are encouraged to recognize and integrate indigenous Islamic burial practices such as those of the Kagan tribe into local cultural preservation programs. LGUs can support the Kagan community by developing policies that safeguard intricate burial practices. Initiatives such as creating their own muslim cemetery, cultural heritage mapping, documentation projects, and community-based training on indigenous Islamic customs can help bridge the gap between modern governance and traditional knowledge. By valuing these practices, LGUs not only preserve cultural identity but also promote inclusivity and interfaith harmony within their jurisdiction.

**Muslim Religious Councils and Community Elders.** The findings emphasize the central role of elders in transmitting and safeguarding burial knowledge. It is recommended that religious councils formally include community elders in discussions and programs regarding Islamic funeral education. This approach can preserve ancestral knowledge while ensuring alignment with Qur'anic teachings. Establishing a dialogue between madrasah educators and tribal elders could foster a respectful synthesis of religious orthodoxy and cultural expression, ensuring that future generations retain a balanced understanding of faith and heritage.

**Educational Institutions and Islamic Learning Centers.** Madrasahs, universities, and basic education institutions are encouraged to include indigenous Muslim cultural practices in their Islamic Studies curricula. The example of the Kagan burial rites highlights the dynamic interplay between formal religion and lived tradition. Educators should emphasize how communities like the Kagans have historically navigated religious identity through local adaptation. Case-based teaching, community immersion, and the integration of ethnographic methods into Islamic education could greatly enrich students' understanding of cultural diversity within Islam.

**Implications for Future Researchers.** The ethnographic study of Kagan burial practices lays foundational ground for future research into indigenous Muslim cultures in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Several avenues remain open for deeper investigation.

**Cultural Continuity and Religious Reform.** Future researchers may explore how indigenous communities negotiate between inherited customs and reestablishing Islamic teachings. Longitudinal studies could assess how intergenerational changes affect the retention or abandonment of practices labeled *bid'ah*, and how communities redefine authenticity in light of religious education.

**Comparative Burial Ethnographies.** There is a need for comparative research that examines burial practices across various Muslim tribes in the Philippines, such as the Maguindanaon, Maranao, and Tausug. These studies could identify shared themes like elder leadership or gendered rituals as well as culturally specific adaptations. Such comparisons would contribute to a richer understanding of the plural expressions of Islam in the region.

**Language, Access, and Islamic Education.** Given the barriers identified in this study related to Arabic literacy and formal Islamic instruction, future research may examine how language and access to religious education influence the transmission of Islamic practices. Studies focusing on how communities learn, translate, and reinterpret Islamic texts could offer insight into the evolution of faith-based customs.

**Ethnographic Reflections on Liminal Rituals.** As observed in the Kagan *kuwas* ritual, burial rites are liminal moments charged with meaning. Further anthropological or phenomenological work could examine how rituals surrounding death shape collective memory, identity, and theological imagination in indigenous Muslim settings.

By pursuing these directions, researchers can deepen our collective understanding of how Islam is lived, practiced, and adapted in culturally diverse communities, thereby contributing to both academic scholarship and the respectful preservation of intangible heritage.

## Concluding Remarks

The study entitled *Sacred Farewell: An Ethnographic Study of Kagan Tribe Burial Tradition and Practices* has provided a rich and detailed portrayal of how the Kagan community harmonizes indigenous traditions with Islamic religious principles in their funerary customs. Through immersive ethnographic methods, the research has illuminated the spiritual, cultural, and communal dimensions that define Kagan burial practices, revealing them as more than mere rituals rather, as deeply meaningful expressions of identity, belief, and continuity.

The findings show that while the community has increasingly aligned its practices with the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith abandoning some ancestral customs labeled as *bid'ah* this realignment does not represent a rupture with the past. Instead, it reflects a conscious and respectful reinterpretation of tradition through the lens of Islamic knowledge. Practices such as gender-specific body handling, symbolic floral offerings, and elder-led rites illustrate how indigenous meanings are preserved within the framework of religious orthodoxy.

Crucially, the study underscores the role of elders, religious leaders, and family members in sustaining these customs. Their participation ensures the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, reinforces communal bonds, and affirms the sacredness of death as a moment of accountability and spiritual transition. Burial is not seen merely as a personal or familial responsibility, but as a collective act of devotion an *ibadah* (form of worship) that calls the entire community to uphold respect, modesty, and theological order.

This ethnography also highlights the resilience of Kagan cultural identity amidst historical and educational shifts. By integrating formal Islamic education with inherited wisdom, the Kagan people have crafted a culturally adaptive yet theologically faithful approach to burial. This process reflects a broader narrative within Muslim indigenous communities where the negotiation between heritage and religion becomes a site of growth, reflection, and renewal.

Ultimately, the burial practices of the Kagan tribe serve as a lens into their evolving sense of self: as Muslims grounded in scripture, as descendants proud of their ancestral legacy, and as members of a community committed to honoring the dead with both spiritual reverence and cultural authenticity. This study affirms that even in the face of change, tradition endures not through resistance, but through informed adaptation that honors both the past and the sacred path ahead.

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