

ANTHRO-HISTORIOGRAPHIC NOTES
ON THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
OF NEGROS ORIENTAL: RECENT FINDINGS

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OF THE RECOGNIZED Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous Cultural Communities (IPs/ICCs) in the Philippines today, two groups live in the hinterlands of the province of Negros Oriental. These are the Negritos, locally known as Ata, of Barangay Canggohob, Mabinay and the Bukidnon (literally, hill/mountain people) of Barangay Tayawan, Bayawan and Barangay Cabatuanan, Basay in southern Negros.

Until many lowland migrants moved to the place, lured there by bright economic prospects, the early inhabitants of the Mabinay mountain areas were the Negritos (Ata) and the Bukidnons, two different cultural groups, each competing for the same space in the ecosystem. The Negritos were traditionally hunters-gatherers while the Bukidnons practiced shifting cultivation. Both have been displaced from their ancestral lands as lowland migrants from Cebu and other places on both sides of Negros island settled in the area one after another. The economic prosperity offered by the place attracted more upland migration which resulted not just in the intensified exploitation of forest and other natural resources, but also in a stiff competition among the settlers, including the two indigenous groups, for use and consumption of resources that were clearly not inexhaustible. What has taken place was some kind of triadic competition between different ethnic groups for the same ecological niche and for the same limited resources. This process may have led the Bukidnons to leave the area. It is equally possible that they were pushed farther into the interior of southern Negros, which would explain why there are no more members of this group in this place today. The Negritos, also pushed farther into the hinterlands, remain the only indigenous group living in the area.

Anthropological studies (R. Cadelifña 1983; E. Oracion 1983) conducted on these communities strongly suggest that these two IPs/ICCs may be slowly disappearing, biologically and culturally. Biological and

sociocultural relationships with outside cultures may account for this situation. Biologically, assimilation, through the uncontrollable and inevitable processes of interethnic marriages, has accelerated the biological extinction of pure Ata and Bukidnon population today. The reconstructed genealogical diagram of each of these three indigenous communities affirms this assertion. These marriages are between Ata and Cebuano lowland migrants on one hand, and between Bukidnon and migrant settlers from Cebu and Panay (Iloilo, Antique, and Capiz) on the other. Such mixed-marriages have resulted in the disappearance among the younger generation of much of the biological features characteristic of pure Ata or Bukidnon individuals.

Culturally, recent studies found little traces of what may be described as uniquely Ata or Bukidnon traditional cultural practices or systems of knowledge. The inevitable process of acculturation, facilitated by steady cultural contacts with outsiders which intensified during the influx of upland migration in the 1970s, has slowly but irrevocably transformed the culture of the Negritos and the Bukidnons. Acculturation, defined by E. Adamson Hoebel (1966: 599) as "the process of interaction between two societies in which the culture of the society in the subordinate position is drastically modified to conform to the culture of the dominant society," explains the changes in behavior patterns, social and value system, material or artifactual of both Ata and Bukidnon. Changes in the upland ecosystem in the identified three areas which have adversely affected the lifestyle of today's indigenous communities have further accelerated the present bio-sociocultural changes. Evidence of these changes can be seen in the transformation of village economic activities from the traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering to the monetized, cash-based economy today.

Setting of the Study

Mabinay

Mabinay, an interior municipality where the Negrito settlement of Canggehob is located lies 87 kms away from Dumaguete City, the Provincial Capital of Negros Oriental. It is 42 kms from Bais City, 67 kms

from Bayawan, and about 48 kms from Kabankalan, Negros Occidental. It is located at the central portion of Negros Island, geographically located within a valley, surrounded by rugged mountains to the east, and by a terrain of rough plains and rolling hills to the south. It has a total land area of 36,226.35 ha (142.6 sq km), most of which are classified as agricultural and planted to sugarcane, corn and rice, the town's major crops. The place used to be the main source of forest products of the province and at present it has a vast reserved area for reforestation projects.

Formerly a satellite of Bais City, Mabinay became a municipality on January 1, 1960. Later, the territory of Mabinay was enlarged with the annexation of a number of identified barrios of Manjuyod and Bais City. These sitios have become today the barangay of this newly-created municipality. At present, Mabinay has 32 barangays with a total of 228 sitios and/or *puroks* and is still considered a fifth class town.

Canggohob. Although barangay Lamdas was the original Negrito settlement founded by a Negrito chieftain by the name of Gardian Empel sometime in the 1950s, population pressure from lowland migrants forced the Negritos to leave and relocate in barangay Canggohob, one of the 32 barangays of Mabinay. The settlement, considered today the last frontier of the resettled Negritos, has a small population of Negritos. Specifically, the Ata settlement is found in the former project area of Silliman University (Maturan 1978), then the Negrito Research-cum-Action Project of Silliman University (R. Cadelina 1983). Barangay Canggohob itself is accessible by vehicle through the barangay feeder road, but to reach the Ata settlement, one has to hike through the hills from Barangay Canggohob proper to the settlement. The steep downhill and uphill trail traversed by a creek leads to the area which is a few strips of rocky narrow valley and hills, many of them bereft of vegetation except for clumps of *cogon* (*Imperata cylindrica*), *talahib* (*Saccharum spontaneum*), and *hagonoy* (*Chromolaena odorata*). The present condition of Negrito farms, mostly located in the hillsides and sloping terrain, shows that the top soil is gone and their farm are badly eroded. Calcareous rock appearing at the surface is a sign of deteriorating soil condition and high rate of soil runoff during heavy rains.

The settlement used to be part of the Bais Forest Reserve which covered a total area of 9,816 ha. Of these total land area, only 24 ha are left today as resettlement site for the Negritos through the intervention of Silliman University in 1960. What the Negritos call the Silliman site is known today as Sitio Macabines. Every Sunday since July 1995, it has become the local market center (*tabu-an*) of both Negritos and Cebuano settlers in the area. The most recent development indicating social changes taking place in the area is the fiesta celebration introduced for the first time on September 17, 1995, two months after the *tabu* was established by a Cebuano settler in the area with the consent of the Negritos.

Bayawan

Bayawan, in whose municipality the Barangay of Tayawan belongs, is located on the southwestern tip of the province of Negros Oriental. It was the last town of southern Negros until June 15, 1968 when Basay, its biggest and most progressive coastal barrio, 27 kms away, became a municipality. The municipality of Bayawan is bounded on the north by the provincial boundary of Negros Oriental-Negros Occidental and the Sagunayon River which runs easterly until it meets the source of Ilog River which intersects the Bais-Tanjay boundary line. To the east is the Camandagan Creek which flows downstream to Sicopong River upstream and due northeast to a point marking the boundaries of Bayawan-Sta. Catalina and Tanjay; to the south by the Sulu Sea, and to the west by the Pagatban River and the municipality of Basay.

Bayawan has a total land area of 55,795 ha (484.75 sq km) and is 101.9 kms south of Dumaguete. It has presently 27 barangays. It used to have a plywood factory (Marli Plywood Factory and Veneer Corporation) which produced lumber and wood byproducts for export in 1950s. Big companies, such as Ang Tay Sawmill Company, established lumber mills which exploited the town's rich timber land. Bayawan is agricultural and has an abundant supply of rice, corn, and staple crops. The establishment of the Tolong Sugar Milling Company (TSMC) in Sta Catalina in 1969 provided the impetus for the expansion of sugarcane fields on the coastal lands and rolling hills in the upland of Bayawan. The logged-over areas of

what were once forested regions have been converted to sugarcane fields. Bayawan also has good fishing grounds which have attracted fishermen from other areas to come and fish in this part of the province.

Tayawan. Tayawan is an upland barangay, 26 kms away from Bayawan. The barangay site covers 37.5 ha and is the biggest of the 27 barangays of Bayawan. The entire barangay has a total land area of 12,440 ha surrounded by hills and steep mountains which are generally devoid of primary forest cover. Cogon grass and patches of stunted trees cover the open lands and dominate the vegetation components in the upland. The northern portion of Tayawan is considerably higher and more rugged than the eastern and southern portions. The western portion is rugged foreland which extends to the edge of Pagatban River. The Pagatban River has always served as a natural boundary that separates the regions of Tayawan and Cabatuanan.

Tayawan is basically an agricultural community with its lands planted to coconuts, rice, corn, sugarcane, bananas, camote, cassava, gabi, ube, and others. Lower hill slopes are generally cleared for upland rice cultivation. Of the total land area of 12, 440 ha, 33% is classified as agricultural. In line with the thrust on countryside development of former Pres. Ferdinand E. Marcos during martial law years, Tayawan was declared as the "Palayan ng Bayan" of southern Negros. The latest data gathered on the total cultivated land show that about 35% is planted to coconut, 25% to rice, 10% to corn, while the remaining 30% is planted to sugarcane, fruit trees, and others.

According to accounts provided by respondents, the present barrio of Tayawan used to be the center of rituals and ceremonies in the past and was therefore considered a hallowed ground by the Bukidnons. As such, it was the venue for the celebration of the annual rice harvest festival which brought together members of the Bukidnon community. The gathering was a festive occasion of dancing, eating, drinking, and singing which usually lasted for a couple of days. This was also both the time and the place for married as well as unmarried males to meet eligible females which often led to marriage negotiations among families. Games and competitions were also slated among the Bukidnons from different groups. Those male Bukidnons who "chicken-out" during the competitions were called

tayawan, a Bukidnon or *binuki* version of the Visayan-Cebuano word *talawan* which means coward. This word was part of the local lingo in the past and referred to a particular behavior. Since then, the place has been called Tayawan among the Bukidnons and the name was carried over when the lowland migrants came.

In the early 1950s, Tayawan was then fully covered with thick forests, except those patches of swidden fields in the lower hill slopes and plains which the native Bukidnons owned. According to Pedro (Pidoy) Villanueva, an old timer from Capiz and a resident of Tayawan, the Tayawan area was still forested when he first came to the place in the 1960s. His job as a forest guard of Soberando's logging concession enabled him to meet and befriend some of the Bukidnons in the Tayawan area particularly Tonyo Wala, Tonyo Tuo, Juanito Trono, Carpo Balor, and other tribals who were considered hostile to the lowland migrants. In Pedro Villanueva's account, the Bukidnons in the 1960s wore loin cloth (*bangan*) extracted from a soft bark of a tree locally called *Talobang* and *Dalal-og*.

Basay

The municipality of Basay where barangay Cabatuanan is found is the last town of Negros Oriental in the south. It is 122.6 kms away from Dumaguete City and 27 kms away from Bayawan. Basay separated as a barrio of Bayawan and became independent on June 15, 1968, later becoming a municipality on January 1, 1971. Basay has 10 barangays and a total population of 18,500 according to the NSO Census of 1995. It is still a fourth class municipality of the province. The municipality is bounded on the north by the provincial boundary of Negros Oriental-Negros Occidental and by the Pagatban River which runs northeasterly and serves as a natural boundary between Basay and Bayawan; on the east by the municipality of Bayawan; on the south by the Sulu Sea; on the west by Sangke River which serves as natural boundary between Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental. To the south, running as a narrow coastal belt of the south are coralline limestone formations and raised coral platforms, except in Basay poblacion, between Pagatban area and Tayabanan.

Basay has a land area of 237.8 sq km. In the 1950s the upland was a vast forest area with numerous ranges of rolling hills and mountains. The interior areas today are rugged and the mountains are bereft of forest and other vegetation cover due to massive forest destruction by the commercial logging company, the invasion of lowland migrants from different ethnic backgrounds, and by the *kaingin* system of the native Bukidnons. Patches of vegetation of noncommercial value grow luxuriantly on some steep slopes or foothills, but most of the steep slopes as well as open areas are invaded by *cogon* grass, *talahib*, other coarse grasses and shrubbery. Farmlands situated on sloping grounds show signs of heavy soil erosion except in places bordered by small valleys. The soil deposits in these valleys are generally fertile and safe from erosion. These areas are given to upland rice cultivation. The mountain springs provide continuous supply of water. Recent data gathered show that a total of 300 ha in the upland of Basay are already reforested by Local Government Units and some private individuals.

Cabatuanan. Barangay Cabatuanan is one of the 10 barangays of Basay. Located in the interior, 17 kms away from the town, it is the farthest barrio of the municipality of Basay. The 1995 *Census of Population* recorded 107 households and a population of 543 (NSO 1995). It became a barangay in 1972. The Cabatuanan barrio proper is situated on the ridgetop overlooking the mountain slopes, the trails, valleys, and ravines which are generally steep. The place got its name from a tree called *batuan* which once grew abundantly in this area. The *batuan* tree bears a fruit that is sweet-sour when ripe. The unripe fruit is very sour and is popularly used as condiment.

When Oracion did his field research in the Cabatuanan area from 1949 to 1951, he described this part of Negros as still "covered with thick forest all visible from the coasts" (T. Oracion 1954: 1; 196: 205; 1967: 159). In the 1960s, however, the logging operations of Ang Tay Sawmill Company devastated large portions of the Cabatuanan mountains and other interior barrios whose rolling hills and mountains were once cloaked in primary rain forest. Only the natural obstacle presented by the steep mountain slopes of the northwestern and northeastern sides of

Cabatuanan prevented the logging operations from penetrating the remaining forest, thus sparing it from further exploitation.

The Negritos of Canggohob

In the absence of recorded history and written documents, Beyer's theory of migration offers the earliest speculation about the Negritos as the first group of migrants to reach the Philippines during the late Pleistocene (Ice Age) about 25,000 BC (Jocano 1967: 132). As theorized by Beyer, the Philippines at this time was connected to the mainland of Asia by exposed land masses or land bridges (Beyer 1921: 971; Salcedo 1967: 3). In the course of time, when the sea level went up due to climatic changes in the temperate zones (deglaciation), these land bridges were cut off and sunk to the floor of the China Sea, possibly a drop of 100 fathoms (Yengoyan 1967: 177), thus isolating the nonnavigating primitive Negritos from others of their kind (Beyer 1921: 917).

Following this theory, Beyer speculated that the Negritos came overland and wandered to these islands via land bridges. However, when geological changes took place and various islands separated, the Negritos, being no seafarer, were stranded in the places where their descendants now live. Ethnographic data on their lifestyle, material culture, and social organization tend to reveal the unlikelihood that these highly mobile people had at any time ever developed a high culture.

In the island of Negros where they are still found, and some freely roaming around, notably the Negros Occidental group, they are popularly called Negritos (little Negroes). Spanish documents mentioned that when the Spaniards came to the island, they encountered in their first contact these strange little blacks who abound in the coastal area, close to the mouths of the rivers, and on the reaches of headwaters, hence the island came to be known as Negros. Rahman quotes from a 17th century account by a Spanish missionary in the Philippines, Fray Antonio de Mozo, which noted the numerous presence of the Negritos throughout the island. In this account, the Negritos were described as (1963: 139):



Fig. 1: Some members of the Negrito indigenous community
(photo: Ceres E. Pioquinto • digital imaging: Christian K. Schales)

...very dark in skin color, not black but rather brownish or pallid black, their hair is curly (kinky), lips not thick; many of them are very corpulent, and all have large abdomens, generally both men and women appear feeble.

Rahman also quotes from another account by Fr. Paul Schebesta, SVD, which describes the Negritos as follows (1975: 210):

The Negritos are not a homogenous race. Since prehistoric times, racial elements of melanesoid, veddoïd, premongoloids and australoid origin, together with the Negroid base, have entered into the constitution of the Negrito race. The Negritos are a short-statured but by no

means dwarfish group of mankind; some characteristics exhibit them as Negroid. Basic to all Negrito group is (pygmoid) racial complex (dark skin, curly hair, brachycephalism, short-stature, with undifferentiated characteristics)...although in varying combinations. Thereby the similarity if the racial image is accounted for, the differences result from other racial components through racial mixture.

The Ata of Canggohob are believed to have descended from the first stock of Negritos who occupied the island of Negros during the pre-Hispanic time and are considered today to be the last of the remaining groups who used to inhabit the hinterlands and outlying areas of Mabinay.

Studies show that once widespread throughout the island, the early generation of Negritos held complete possession of mountains and valleys, streams and forests. Being nomadic in lifestyle and characterized as hunter-gatherers, they made no cultivation, although not incapable of doing so. Instead, they wandered freely, depended for food and medicine on forest products collected for the day, or on the game and fish caught and hunted. They had no concept of time; could not remember their ages, or where and when they came from. The onset of hunger was a signal to go out and hunt for game or gather food again.

The concept of individual land ownership was unknown then. Land and forest had traditionally been the property of all and members of the groups were all free to roam and claim hereditary rights to exploit and hunt in it (Reynolds 1983: 165). This concept of land ownership is

fundamentally communal based upon actual use, and none of the individuals claimed any exclusive rights over the land. Unfortunately, this traditional concept of communal ownership had grave consequences for the Negritos. Not being in possession of any legal documents certifying private rights to their land, they were ultimately dispossessed of their domain by encroaching lowlanders and migrant settlers and displaced to the remotest areas. Since family survival and adjustments to new environmental conditions and lifestyles are closely tied up with land ownership or its acquisition, it implies that the present generation of Negritos, pushed now to the hinterlands, are facing grimmer prospects for survival than their early ancestors ever did.

The present territory of the Negritos is characterized by a resource base that has become largely deforested as a result of commercial logging, influx of lowland migration by Cebuanos, and hillside swidden (*kaingin*) cultivation by Negritos themselves. These factors, "local environmental stresses" (Hoffman 1982: 82), have altered the environment's faunal and floral composition, consequently destroying the traditional resources where the Negritos used to hunt and collect "food, medicine, materials for tools and housing construction" (R. Cadeliña 1983: 176). This has forced the Negritos today to seek alternatives and substitutes from nontraditional sources such as material cultures and finished goods from the local market. As a consequence, the Negrito economy today is becoming more and more monetized. Once an egalitarian society, the Negritos, having been exposed to the influence of the Cebuano lowlanders, now prefer private ownership of property as a form of security for their families.

The deforestation activity has likewise forced the Negritos today to reconstruct their traditional technology "from a forest-oriented technology" dependent on forest products and slash-and-burn agriculture to "an open, cultivated farm" (R. Cadeliña 1983: 177). The recent study has observed that the Negritos have now adapted new farming techniques such as the use of the cow/carabao-plow agriculture, the practice of bush-fallow period, the use of *bunglay*-hoe agriculture in steep or hilly farms in the absence of draft animals for plowing, and the adoption of new crops and new cropping patterns. Unlike their predecessors who roamed the forests freely in the past, the present-day Negritos are tied permanently to

one spot because of these new farming schedules and the unavailability of land on which to open new swidden fields. It has also been observed that the shift of the Negrito traditional economy to a monetized market system has spurred the growth of wage labor (*pasuhol*) and increased the need for odd jobs as sources of cash. Without skills or education, the Negritos hire themselves out for work in the farms of Cebuanos or as paid laborers in sugarcane fields of a *hacendero* or corn fields of a local Cebuano in the area for P50.00 for a 10 x 10 sq m *kumbada* or *pakyaw* (piece work). Negrito girls help bring in additional income for the family by working as househelp in lowland households.

The many socioeconomic transactions and interactions between the Negritos and the Cebuanos have resulted in closer links between the two groups as well as facilitated intermarriages between them. The genealogical diagram revealed that most of the third and fourth generation of Negritos are offsprings of mixed-marriages. This explains why a considerable number of new generation Negritos today no longer look like their "pure" Negrito forebears, but appear taller, with lighter skin color, and hair that is not so curly or kinky but wavy. In the Negrito community today, these *meztizos*, or mixed-breeds, are better-known as *sambog* or *kalibugan*. The interesting findings are that Negritos themselves favor and encourage exogamous marriages among their children. This may be a form of coping mechanism for interethnic relations and acceptance by the dominant group in society.

In the area of sociocultural activities, the influence of the Cebuano lowlanders has also been pervasive. Negritos are now involved in a number of Cebuano-initiated social activities such as the *tabu* (local market), barrio dances, and barangay fiesta. In the newly-organized barangay fiesta, the Negritos sponsored their own Negrito representative in a money-contest search for the fiesta queen. This may suggest the extent to which the Negritos have accommodated themselves not just to a monetized economic system of the more dominant group, but also to the commodification of culture and women that underlies practices such as beauty contests. Even more disturbing is the way this situation also suggests the extent to which the Negritos have allowed their cultural identity to be undermined by the practices of the dominant culture. The

fact that the rapid demise of the Negritos' own culture is partly, if not mainly, due to their own willing participation is no small irony.

Predictably, these interactions between the Negritos and the Cebuanos have also bred negative side effects as Negritos pick up vices such as drinking and gambling. It was observed that even youngsters as young as five-years-old drink liquor, smoke tobacco or cigarette, or chew betel nuts, practices they have learned from their own parents as well as from their Cebuano neighbors. A disquieting observation is that parents appear tolerant of their children's behavior.

On the other hand, Cebuano lowlanders complain that the Negritos are lazy (*tapulan*) and prefer to ask for money, cigarettes or drinks even from strangers rather than buy or work for these items. In particular, Cebuanos are critical of what they find as the Negritos' wait-and-see attitude, lack of initiative and self-reliance, and opportunism. Unflattering as they are, these characteristics might be explained as the Negritos' attempt at "sociological adaptability," their way of leveling with the more dominant group which has, for a long time, cheated, exploited, and treated them as social inferiors.

As far as the concept of political leadership is concerned, the Negrito traditional system in which leadership was associated with an individual's religious and healing powers and thereby conferred political authority on medicine men and religious leaders has become a thing of the past. Since it is believed that these religious leaders have special relations with the spirit world that inhabit the natural environment, the destruction of this environment itself might have led to the marginalization of these traditional symbols and figures of authority and the decimation of their cultural practices. Most likely, the community's absorption into the present political system has hastened the demise of these traditional practices.

The Bukidnons of Tayawan and Cabatuanan

The Bukidnons of southern Negros have been in this area for many centuries, but how or when they first reached the island of Negros is still uncertain. The theory popularized by Beyer claims that the Philippines was populated by several "waves of migrations" in various periodic time

sequence (Manuel 1967: 25; Jocano 1967: 130; Dizon 1983: 39). Beyer speculated that the next group of migrants who came to the Philippines after the Negritos were the Indonesians who came by sea (Beyer 1925: 917; Salcedo 1967: 3; Manuel 1967: 25; Jocano 1967: 131). In Oracion's own account, these Indonesians "formed the basic population in all larger Bisayan islands at the time when the later Malayan inhabitants arrived" (Oracion 1954: 1).

The Bukidnons of Negros were alleged to be the descendants of what Beyer classified as "Indonesian Type B" (one of the seven physical types Beyer hypothesized) in his "The Non-Christian People of the Philippines" (*Census of the Philippine Islands 1916*) and *Population of the Philippine Islands in 1916*. The former material has, according to Manuel, "remained standard work for a long time and it is the most referred to by students and scholars, though now out of date" anthropologically (Manuel 1967: 25). Beyer described the characteristics of "Indonesian type B" people as,

...relatively dark-skinned, shorter in height, thick-set body, large rectangular face, thick large nose with round flaring nostrils, large mouth with rather thick lips, and large round eyes. (Beyer 1921: 918)

while the "Indonesian Type A:

...represents the tallest type of migrating peoples who reached the Philippines shores. They stand from 5 ft. 4 inches to 6 ft. 2 inches, with an average 5 ft. 7 inches. They are characterized by rather light skin-color, slender body, sharp thin face, high aquiline nose with elongated nostrils, thin lips, high broad forehead, and deep-set eyes. (Beyer 1921: 918)

The present generation of Bukidnons both in Tayawan and Cabatuanan show certain marked physical characteristics found in Beyer's description but their features reveal more or less a Mongoloid-Malay admixture. Some

are shorter in height and have small-to-medium-built bodies, light-to-dark brown skin color, straight-to-wavy, coarse, light brown-to-black hair, and sharp thin face. Others have distinctly rectangular jawline, flat forehead, thin lips, and chinky deep-set rather than large round eyes. The Mongoloid features are more marked in some of the Bukidnons observed in the two areas. The taller Bukidnons today may have descended from the Indonesian Physical Type A (Beyer 1921: 918) while the shorter ones with Mongoloid features may have been the descendants of the Malay (Beyer 1921: 918; Oracion 1964: 235). Possibly, those early Indonesians who came into contact with the Negritos (also known as Proto-Malays), who were numerous at that time, took their spouses from this latter group and produced a progeny with a chocolate-brown skin complexion, short stature, and medium-built physique seen in many Bukidnons today. The Bukidnons in Tayawan and Cabatuanan share the same physical appearance and cultural features. These physical descriptions above were noted by the Task Force in both Bukidnon communities of Tayawan and Cabatuanan.

T. Oracion's studies, however, did not include the Bukidnons of Tayawan although in fact these two groups are interrelated in some ways, historically and genetically. There have been intermarriage alliances between the two groups with either group providing the female partners. The reconstructed genealogical diagrams revealed that many of these people are related to each other by blood and are therefore kinsfolk. Despite the physical separation imposed by the Pagatban River which forms the geographical boundary and territory of both regions, both the Cabatuanan and Tayawan Bukidnons are not completely isolated from each other. They often cross the river (said to be crocodile-infested at that time) to visit relatives on the other side by means of *balsa* (a raft made from several cut whole-bamboo tied together by strips of rattan).

Personal observations of the current situation, however, attest that only these physical features remain to bestow on the Bukidnon some remnants of a cultural identity. Integration through culture contact with lowlanders and interethnic marriages with migrant settlers have hastened the disappearance of what may be considered a distinctively Bukidnon culture or *Buki* consciousness, a subject which the Bukidnons themselves

found difficult to define. This current state of affairs in the two Bukidnon communities may be traces to a number of factors.

First, the Lacson's Marli Plywood Factory and Veneer Corporation started its commercial logging operations in the area in the mid 1950s. The Ang Tay Sawmill likewise extended its logging operations from the uplands of Basay, crossing the Pagatban River to the adjacent mountains of Tayawan. The presence of the Ang Tay Sawmill Company and the Marli Plywood Factory and Veneer Corporation in the areas adversely affected the lives of the Bukidnons by destroying the resource base and the physical environment of the Bukidnons. Ironically, the Bukidnons themselves, attracted by the money, unwittingly aided in the destruction of their natural resources by working for the logging companies. Because of their practice of *kaingin*, the Bukidnons had the "reputation of being excellent woodcutters" (Maceda 1978: 13). This gave them the opportunity to work in the logging companies for wages. However, this eventually gave way to resentment when many of them were dispossessed of their lands.

Consequently, the management of the various logging concessions had to resort to a variety of strategies to maintain good relations with the hostile Bukidnons. One was to allow them to ride in or on logging trucks which later became their favorite pasttime. Another was to give them money, food, or cigarettes. According to Pedro Villanueva, a migrant former worker in the logging company, he used to resort to these schemes himself and consequently became the Bukidnons' benefactor. In this position, his advice was often sought after by the Bukidnons each time a quarrel broke out among them. His way of handling petty quarrels among the Bukidnons was to withhold any form of aid if a conflict arose. Thus, to the Bukidnons, the commercial logging activities in their area were at first welcomed for these provided temporary conveniences such as the thrill of riding on the logging trucks and the acquisition of money, food, cigarettes, and cheap household items.



Fig. 2: A Bukidnon hut in Tayawan, Bayawan
 (photo: Ceres E. Pioquinto • digital imaging: Christian K. Schales)

A second factor was the influx of settlers from Panay island in the 1950s. These migrants composed the pioneer population in Tayawan and in the interiors of Basay. They came in search of better economic prospects which their home province could not adequately provide. In these parts, they found arable lands for cultivation. Despite the steep slopes, these migrant upland swiddeners came to farm the logged-over areas of Marli Plywood and Ang Tay Sawmill and cut and burned newly reforested areas and the remaining undergrowth. The years saw more migrants from a "variety of ethnic and technological background" moving into the area and who "rode the logging trucks ever deeper into the forests" or simply "follow[ed] logging roads to new clearing location, built a modest house, and cut and burned the remaining vegetation nearby" (Griffin 1985: 89 & 97). Even the steep slopes were cleared in no time at all. As a consequence of the logging operations and the flow of migrants into the area, the

Bukidnons were forced to go live in other settlements though these places were not actually distant from the orbit of change and influence of lowland communities today.

With the expansion of the logging operations to Cabatuanan and the pressure of upland migration, the Bukidnons of this area soon experienced the same fate as that of their kinsmen in Tayawan. As commercial logging in these parts in the 1960s claimed valuable territories and lowland migrants occupied the newly opened areas and apportioned for themselves the logged-over sections for homestead and farms, Bukidnons found themselves pushed farther into the hinterlands. This environmental change adversely affected the lives of the native Bukidnons in the interior areas. After they were pushed to the interior, the Bukidnons occupied this remaining area for hillside swidden. The upland area, now invaded by cogon grass, is not fully cultivated by the Bukidnons. The top soil is eroded and depleted (*bantod*) of its natural fertility. Despite the use of commercial fertilizer, the land does not give a good yield of crops.

A third factor that marked another change in the life of the Bukidnons and also caused their further displacement was the operation of the Tolong Sugar Milling Company (TSMC) in 1970. Although it brought prosperity to the town, the operation of this sugar company entailed the acquisition of more and bigger ha of land which only influential sugarcane planters were able to do with their political connection. For the Bukidnons, this meant only one thing--the loss of their land. In anticipation of a better prospect for sugarcane production, big landowners hired tenants and laborers, Bukidnons among them, to clear much of the upland area to give way to sugarcane cultivation.

Finally, the entry of the Construction Development Corporation of the Philippines (CDCP) Mining more or less sealed the fate of the Bukidnons living in the area. Prior to the exploration of CDCP Mining Corporation in 1971, the steep slopes and mountains of Cabatuanan were partly forested areas. There were clusters of remaining forests left in some inaccessible areas. The CDCP construction in 1976 and its full operation as a copper mine in 1977 further depleted the remaining forest reserves in this area. The lumber materials used in housing and other construction projects of CDCP came from the remaining forest supplied by the

Bukidnons themselves. The full operations of CDCP Mining Corporation subsequently dislocated a number of Bukidnon families in Mohong where the CDCP's Mill Site is located. Driven out of the place, they moved farther north closer to the Pagatban River. The construction and operation of the CDCP Mining Corporation in the upland of Basay has not only displaced the Bukidnons further and destroyed their physical environment, but polluted their water and air as well.

After CDCP closed down in July 1984, the Bukidnons came back to the area. Of the total 43 families identified by the SU Task Force, four Bukidnon kin-related families live in Barangay Cabatuanan proper today. These four families have intermarried with migrant settlers. Some live in the vicinity of the former CDCP mining while others are found along Pagatban River in Sitios Mohong and Matab-ang where they do hillside farming on the slopes or narrow valleys.

Over the years the lives of the Bukidnons in Tayawan and Cabatuanan have inevitably changed as a result of various events that took place in both areas since the 1950s. The consequences of these events have been serious for the Bukidnon and their cultural identity. Changes were evident in the Bukidnons' style of clothing, technological tools, housing, and few lowland material cultures for household use. Bukidnons today dress as the lowlanders with second-hand clothes obtained mostly from *okay-okay* (second hand clothes sold cheaply and widely) either by direct purchase, barter, or by working for the lowlanders. They acquire them mainly during the *tabu* at the Tayawan barrio proper during market day. Every Saturday is a market day (*tabu*) in Tayawan proper. The *bolanteros* (itinerant vendors) from neighboring towns come to peddle their wares. The Bukidnons come down from their farms to attend the market day activity. This gives the community the opportunity to interact freely and socialize with one another.

From their various social interactions with other groups, Bukidnons have been influenced in many different ways. The influx of migrants to the Bukidnon areas changed some of their belief systems. While in the past they practiced animism, today some are members of religious denominations either as Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventist or Iglesia ni Cristo. There are other religious sects in the area such as

Universal Church, Philippine Biblical Apostolic Holiness Church, Anak sa Amahan, Church of Christ, among others. Although their religious affiliation discourages the continuance of traditional practices associated with beliefs in environmental spirits such as *taglogar*, *tamawo*, *subid* or *engkanto*, the practice of *pamuhon-puhon*, *dolot*, *padaga*, *padiwata*, *buhat* or *halad-halad* (offerings, rituals and ceremonials intended for the spirits) are individual family activities which still survive today and are usually performed by the *sorohano* or *babaylan* (medicine man).

Another influence derived from contacts with the lowlanders is smoking cigarettes although smoking rolled tobacco leaf and chewing betel quid (which consists of betel nut, tobacco leaves, *buyo* or arica leaves, and lime powder) have always been a part of the Bukidnon traditional cultural practices during work, pasttime, and social encounters with friends. Both young and old Bukidnons have learned to drink liquor and to gamble on card games, cockfighting, billiard, pool, and even on sports such as basketball.

In terms of their cultural traits, T. Oracion's 1967 account has this to say about the Bukidnon (173):

In his economic endeavors, he is concerned completely with the present. The idea of providing the necessities of life or storing or stocking of needed food for the future plays a small part in his economic life. This is one of his cultural traits. If he has enough to fill up the day's wants, he would not bother for the next day. When his corn or palay crops are harvested, he gives up his other economic activities or occupations....and sits at home consuming the crops or bartering them for some cheap liquor that a Christian neighbor may bring. He only realizes later that his supplies are running short, then he begins to work harder again.

Recent observations of these people reveal little changes in their character from Oracion's earlier descriptions of them. To outsiders, the Bukidnons appear lazy (*tamaran*). Unlike their lowland Christian neighbors, they tend to take life easy. Bukidnons have been observed as

generally indifferent to work and are not used to working as laborers either in the sugarcane hacienda for wages, as *tinawo* (caretakers-workers) of somebody's farm or in his own farm. Nevertheless, given the difficulty of life, they have little option but to work in order to survive.

In addition, the Bukidnons have also been observed to be seemingly unaware of the practice of *dagyaw/bolhon* (a voluntary collective work process in the community) in their community activities. They tend to exhibit a strong individualistic and wait-and-see attitude instead of cooperating with others in the community. One striking example involved a militiaman assigned in Cabatuanan at the height of the insurgency problems in the area. Despite his request, the community simply refused to help him fence the detachment camp although the project was also meant to provide them protection.

Similarly, Bukidnons have been known for their profit-oriented mentality which drives them to want to make money even from aid projects meant to alleviate their economic condition. For example, it is a widespread knowledge that the carabaos provided under the animal dispersal program of the Central Visayas Regional Project (CVRP) were either sold or slaughtered by the Bukidnons themselves and the meat exchanged for corn. Another incident involved the sale of a set of carpentry tools donated to the community by the government agency.

Further, it has been the experience of outsiders including the research team that the Bukidnons are generally suspicious of any outsiders coming to their place. When asked, they talk little and rarely volunteer an answer beyond what is asked of them. They are invariably unresponsive or indifferent to outsiders whom they think might regard them as lowly individuals or as "mere Bukidnons." They are also wary of outsiders who they fear might exploit their perceived backwardness or illiteracy claiming that *ginapuhunan*, *ginabaligya*, or *ginapanguwartahan lang kita sina* (literally, to be used or exploited for personal gains). Ironically, the research team's experience with them is that they refused to attend seminars and meetings unless snacks were served. It was equally evident that Bukidnons were prepared to cooperate with any endeavor only if certain gains could be expected from it. In their social relations with lowlanders, a few of them have the reputation of being *inosenting-tuplok* (cunning or sly) with the

ability to outsmart even the educated ones. They are not ashamed to ask for help from individuals or any government office using their impoverished state as a excuse.

As evidenced by the above information, Bukidnons of the two areas today are the products of environment and culture contact with people from the lowland. Changes in their behavior, social values, outlook in life, beliefs, and material cultures will continue in the next generation as agents of change from the outside world continue to exert influence on their way of life. No longer isolated today, they are forced to adopt coping mechanisms in order to survive or else face extinction. Coping mechanisms such as interethnic marriages, working for wages, change of religious affiliations, membership in sociopolitical organizations, and getting a formal education comprise their economic and social interactions with outsiders. In the process, traditional practices that are deemed no longer functional in the new environment are discarded.

The Magahat¹ Controversy

One of the most noteworthy findings of this study relates to Dr. T. Oracion's contention that the *Magahats* were a group distinct from the Bukidnons (T. Oracion 1953, 1954a, 1954b, 1955, 1956, 1958, 1959, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1974, 1978). The data of T. Oracion's published materials on the *Magahats* and Bukidnons were taken mostly in the 1950s and the latest available information was 1978. There has been a wide gap of almost two decades between the earliest and the newest information from the last research work published by him in 1978. Between that time and the time of his death to the present, neither ethnographic data nor anthropological studies on the Bukidnons of southern Negros or on the *magahat* have come out. Hence, there is a need to update the existing data.

According to Oracion's ethnographic materials of the 1950s, the *Magahats* were a separate, distinct group with established social boundaries different from its neighbors, the Bukidnons (Oracion 1954: 1). Yet, the intriguing aspect of this article is also Oracion's claim that the *magahat*

¹ For purposes of clarification in this study, the word *magahat* with a capital letter M refers to a group of people as claimed by Oracion, while the one with a small letter m refers to the practice.

refers to the practice of killing: "When a person kills another because of a death of any member of the family, he is called a Magahat. This *practice* is now minimized because of the frequent association with Christian neighbors...." [Underscoring added] (1954: 1, fn. 4). In his ethnographic accounts, Oracion describes this process of ritual killing in this manner (1954: 12):

...the corpse is wrapped with a pandanus mat and is not buried until all the people in the village have a chance to see the body. *Sometimes [sic] the members of the dead person's family or relatives go out on a raiding party to the coastal regions to kill.* Once they succeed in killing they return home and can now bury the deceased. *This practice is known as [m]agahat.* If they are unsuccessful, they kill any animal they see upon arrival. Then they bury the dead person [emphasis added].

As Oracion's data never established the difference or the distinction between the *magahat* as a people and as a practice, these conflicting claims continue to becloud the issue up to the present.

However, information gathered during the various field trips made by the SU-DENR Task Force in 1995 and during the survey and final investigative research work conducted by the same team in 1996 provided convincing evidence that the term *magahat* referred to a practice. The latest research data suggest that, contrary to Oracion's claims, the so-called *Magahats* did not refer to an ethnic group that existed independently of the Bukidnons. The Bukidnons themselves in the interior mountains of Basay (Barangay Cabatuanan) and Bayawan (Barangay Tayawan) denied having ever heard or known of the existence of the *Magahats* as a group of people. Elderly Bukidnon informants, who also call themselves *Buki* or *Tumandok* (native of the mountains), claimed that the *Magahats* were the same people as the Bukidnons but the word itself did not refer to an ethnic designation but to a ritual practice involving the act of killing. According to these informants, Cresenciano Bunghay and Agapito Balor of Tayawan, Bayawan and Salduga Trono and his brother Rustico of Cabatuanan,

Basay, it was the performance of this act that made one a *Magahat*, a word ostensibly derived from the Cebuano-Visayan term that means “to kill.” The act called *magahat* refers to the killing of an innocent person while the perpetrator is known as *Magahat*.



Fig. 3: Salduga Trono, Bukidnon tribal chieftain and his brother Rustico
(photo: Ceres E. Pioquinto • digital imaging: Christian K. Schales)

Bukidnon key informants supplied information about the varied *magahat* practices of their forebears and the beliefs associated with the practice. In the version of Salduga Trono, the elderly Bukidnon chieftain of Cabatuanan, Basay and his younger brother, Rustico (Listic) Trono, when a Bukidnon died, one able-bodied male member of the bereaved family was obligated to kill someone to go with the dead. The sacrificial victims were either the Negritos (Ata) or lowland Christian Filipinos

(*damagat* or *banwahanon*) whose souls were believed to be ritually offered to the dead Bukidnon to accompany him in his journey to the after world.

Subsequent interviews with the elderly Trono bothers of Cabatuanan on September 28, 1996 provided additional information about the *magahat* as a practice. In their version, when a *Magahat* killed a lowlander (*dumagat* or *banwahanon*), he extracted a tooth from his sacrificial victim and placed it inside his bamboo betel-chew container (*malam-an*). This *malam-an* was then placed in a belt pouch which he tied around his waist with a piece of stripped rattan and carried wherever he went. If he had another occasion to kill a *dumagat* or *banwahanon* because of another death in the family, the tooth previously extracted was thrown away and replaced with a new one he had just extracted. The tooth inside his *malam-an* was believed to be an amulet that could protect the carrier from unfriendly spirits, such as his previous victim.

According to the Tayawan informants' version, the *magahat* practice involved cutting the hands and feet of the sacrificial victims, an act symbolic of the belief that the victims did not only accompany the spirit of the dead Bukidnon but also worked as his slaves (as represented by the severed hands) and docile attendants (represented by the cut feet) in the afterworld. If the departed member of the Bukidnon was a child, only the hands of the victims were cut; if an adult, both the hands and feet were cut.

A common practice was that an individual rarely went out and killed alone but was often accompanied by a handful of male relatives to form a raiding party. Each was armed with a spear (*bangkaw*), bolo (*pinuti*), and long knives (*talibong*). A kind of bonding agreement existed between the members of the raiding party which obligated one to help the other in case an untoward incident happened along the way. As practiced in the past, any Bukidnon raiding party also included one person who did not actively take part in the raid but took care of the food provision of the raiding group. His other task was to serve as a lookout for the group and to bring the news of the raid to the community.

The Negritos of Canggehob, on the other hand, have a variant interpretation about the *magahat*. A Negrito informant, Agustin Requel, from Mabinay claimed that the *Magahats* are the Bukidnons whom the

Negritos of Canggohob referred to as *Ata'ng Puti* (light-skinned Negritos) and with whom the older generation Negritos had "blood feuds" in the distant past. This claim coincided with the version of the Bukidnons themselves. Requel still recalls the story about the *magahat* raid in their area as told by his grandfather, Gardian Empel, a former Negrito chieftain. He remembers quite well the name of the leader of the raiding party, known to the Negrito elders as Sebyo Balangkawitan, who was noted for his agility and dexterity. Sebyo Balangkawitan was allegedly a notorious Bukidnon who together with his men used to ambush the Negritos on their way to a nearby spring along the ridges or on cliffs and behind clumps of bamboo. Forced to defend themselves, the Negritos, under the leadership of the chieftain Gardian Empel, managed to repulse Sebyo and successfully drove away the latter's men.



Fig. 4: Agustin Requel, Negrito tribal leader and children
 (photo: Ceres E. Pioquinto • digital imaging: Christian K. Schales)

Agustin Requel also narrated that it was usually the wife of the Bukidnon who challenged her husband (*laki*) "to kill" upon the death of a member of the family or nearest relatives. It was believed that to perform the killing act would put the soul of the departed in peace. Otherwise, it would continue to molest them. If the husband hesitated, the wife usually taunted him by calling him a coward (*dugo-dugo si laki*). She and her children would then lose respect in him. The husband, forced to take up the challenge of his wife, would then round up volunteers, mostly male relatives. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether it was culture or his sense of shame (*ulaw ni laki*) or male pride that eventually dictated the husband's acceptance of his wife's challenge. Successful or not, the party returned home after three days of prowling. In the case of an unsuccessful raid, the group would kill the first animal they met on the way to appease the soul of the dead person. Still, a human sacrificial victim was preferred for its presumed significant function to the dead in the afterlife.

Although the versions from both Bukidnon and Negrito informants vary in their accounts of the different practices involved in the ritual killing, they invariably and consistently suggest that the word *magahat*, does not refer to a group of indigenous people but rather to a practice of killing for ritual purpose. Why Oracion described the ritual killing to take place only "sometimes" (Oracion 1954:12) is unclear. In light of this new information, the prevailing idea in Oracion's studies about the *Magahat* as a separate, distinct cultural group in southern Negros appears debatable. If these new findings have any validity, then the need is for more than just an update of the existing data. The contrary findings of the Task Force insinuate the urgency for a new and systematic investigation of the subject. ❖

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