IDENTITY CRISIS AND INDONESIA’S PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL UNITY: THE CASE OF ACEH
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INTRODUCTION
In a corner of the provincial museum in Banda Aceh hangs a small painting of a plane flying over an undulating landscape of paddy fields. There is nothing artistically significant about the exhibit. No explanation is provided, and an outsider might wonder at the reason for its place there.

But those who are born and raised in the conflict-torn province of Aceh need no explanation. They know the story by heart. It was the first plane owned by Indonesia after gaining its independence from the Dutch – bought from the money donated by the people of Aceh and given as a gift to Jakarta.

While this tiny part of history is fading from the memory of many Indonesians, the Acehnese hold on to it with pride. For them the painting is not kept there simply to record the past – it is a symbol of Aceh's stake in the birth of the Indonesian nation.

Today, when separatist sentiment dominates the province, such historical memory emerges as a potent political statement. The Acehnese no longer use this piece of history to mark their share in a nation-state. Instead, they use it to emphasise the rejection of a dominant power alienated from them. The story of the plane has been narrated through the years, employing different interpretations. This time it is to fuel Aceh's aspiration for self-determination. The story is told time and again to show the injustice that has been done to Aceh by the 'ungrateful' Javanese.

The sudden change that came during the time of post-Suharto Indonesia has brought along many critical challenges; among them being several conflicts that pose a threat to national stability. These conflicts have raised the question of how the country can survive without first breaking apart. The answer, perhaps, lies in Indonesia's ability, or inability, to maintain its unity through its people's perception of a common identity as citizens of one nation.

The departure of East Timor was concrete evidence of such a threat. At the forefront of provinces following East Timor's lead, is Aceh where secessionist struggles have gained momentum.

Jakarta sees Aceh's secessionist sentiment as the most threatening challenge. But while a big part of the Acehnese community clearly distinguishes its traditional identity from that of the rest of Indonesia, the answer to the question of whether identity difference is the root of the Aceh conflict remains arguable. From my observation, the Acehnese traditional identity per se was not a part of the problem in the beginning. Its role, however, has become significant as the situation continues to develop since it helps to justify Aceh's rejection of becoming part of another identity – that of Indonesia's.

Contributions by a multitude of ethnic groups to Indonesia during its early state of nation-building are recorded in history. Benedict Anderson wrote that among the different ethnolinguistic groups that gathered under the guidance of nationalism in the early state of nation-building, only one had separatist ambitions. The fact that all the rest were competitive under the single political system showed the ability of ethnic identity to function under the concept of nation-state without the element of conflict.

That differences have now emerged, and often manifested themselves in an orgy of violence, is worth exploring. If the nature of identity is not fixed but instead changes according to the situation, as Tung Ju-lan
wrote, it follows that identity can adopt different faces at different times. The case of Aceh also suggests that a local identity can emerge with a new interpretation as a response to political changes, and become a major factor in the conflict itself. In this process, the product of such an identity can also be reproduced and thereafter used selectively by groups in conflict to serve a particular goal. Despite its strong local identity, the case of Aceh shows that it takes more than identity difference to make people take a stand against their official state.

The conflict in Aceh started when people began to question their relations with Indonesia. While Anderson defined 'nation' as an imagined political community possessing the concept of sovereignty and existing within limited boundaries, Chaiwat Sathalanand pointed out an obstacle to its existence, which he called an 'imagination deficit'.

According to Sathalanand, the imagination deficit occurs when members of that community can no longer imagine themselves as a meaningful part of the whole of the nation. It happened, he wrote, where there were gross injustices such as in the case of East Timor and Aceh, which suffered from a long history of betrayal.

Another important factor that has put Indonesia's national unity in trouble since the beginning is the weakness of its state-built national identity. Indonesian expert Max Lane pointed out that the reason was the absence of the fundamental factors needed for a true sense of nation-ness. The factors he meant are a national culture that goes beyond that of different traditions, and common national institutions that give people a sense of belonging. “Indonesia was, and therefore is, the product of a conscious struggle for democracy and not a manifestation of cultural, ethnic or religious unity,” he wrote. Moreover, he viewed Suharto's repressive regime as a serious interruption of Indonesia's nation-building process within a true democratic atmosphere. This, he wrote, resulted in the beginning of localism in the country.

To deal with the Aceh challenge, Indonesia perhaps needs a change in its fundamental perception of national unity. Decades of war between Aceh and Indonesia are evidence that the established concept of unity imposed on people by force did not yield a good result. A solid national identity, which is the foundation of national unity, can only be built through a real democratic approach.

This paper is a result of my ten-month research in Indonesia. It is based on interviews with different groups in Indonesian society especially those in conflict areas. The interviews focused specifically on their interpretations of the current situation of the country, the ongoing conflicts, their perceptions of national identity, and their hopes for the future.

As each conflict has its own depth and complexity that requires space to elaborate, the focus of this paper will be on the Aceh conflict as it is one of the most obvious challenges to Indonesia's territorial integrity.

ACEH: THE HISTORY OF CONFLICT
Prior to Indonesia's 57th anniversary of independence on 17 August 2002, citizens of Aceh – the resource-rich province on the northern tip of Sumatra – received a message from the rebel group Free Aceh Movement, popularly known as GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka). It called for a general strike to coincide with the anniversary, urging The Acehnese to halt all business activities and remain at home unless absolutely necessary.

The open challenge from Aceh has long posed the most dangerous threat to Indonesia's national unity. There is no sign of an end to the 50-year-old conflict that is littered with human rights abuses comprising over 7,000 deaths during the ten years of a special military operation initiated under the Suharto regime. And despite the fall of the New Order, pervasive killings in Aceh continue. Last year alone, the International Red Cross reported over 1,000 deaths in the province. From January to August 2002, the death toll was over 800. The violence has severely disrupted the lives of citizens. Indeed, Aceh today is effectively a war zone.

The Aceh conflict has its root in the history of Indonesia's nation-building. Rizal Panggabean elaborated that among the factors contributing to this conflict are people's participation in decision-making, the distribution of resources, legitimacy and identity, that is, people's self-definition and allegiance to the nation.
Nevertheless, the nature of conflict between Aceh and Indonesia in the beginning was far from being centred on the issue of secessionism. The first disagreement emerged in 1948 when Aceh was included as a sub-province of North Sumatra. The Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh (PUSA, or Association of All-Aceh Islamic Scholars), which was established in 1939 by Muslim leaders opposed to Dutch colonialism, demanded Aceh’s own provincial status. PUSA leaders cited the differences between Aceh and the rest of North Sumatra in terms of economy, religion, education and law as reasons for their demand, given that Aceh then was the poorest area. PUSA’s demand, however, fell within Indonesia’s principle of sovereignty.

According to Tung, nationality is a modern concept that “demands that all groups within its officially announced boundaries submit themselves to the unified, homogenizing values of newly established nationhood.” The rejection of localism clearly showed in the early stage of the Acehnese conflict with Indonesia. In his response to PUSA’s demand, S.M. Amin, the governor of North Sumatra, stated that the creation of North Sumatra was based on a new premise concerned with economic and political unity, not on old and narrow foundations such as ethnicity and religion. According to him, Indonesia is founded on Indonesian nationalism, and therefore there was no place for ethnic particularism.

The establishment of an ideology of nationalism at the beginning of Indonesian statehood formed a rigid framework of state policy toward Aceh. Consequently, the province responded by joining the Darul Islam rebellion in 1953, which ended in 1962.

In the midst of the 1956 rebellion, autonomous status was granted for the first time to Aceh with the hope that it would help ease the conflict. But before Aceh enjoyed its fruits, policy change in Jakarta, which led to the era of Guided Democracy under President Sukarno in 1959, brought about a centralist system that ended the region’s dream of autonomy. This continued in the 32 years that followed under this regime.

In the late 1950s, Aceh saw a period of stability and development. However, the repressive regime under Suharto became fertile soil for the growth of the seeds of the movement against Jakarta. Human rights abuses by the military, extreme poverty among the people and exploitation from both the government and multinational corporations led to the establishment of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in 1976.

GAM was established with a political objective that is significantly more radical than that demanded by past Acehnese leaders. GAM leaders, with silent support from a big part of the Acehnese population, insisted on the province’s independence from Indonesia. The military regime in Jakarta responded by turning the province into a military operation zone (Daerah Operasi Militer: DOM), a condition that lasted for ten years (1989-1998). That period saw a drastic increase in human rights violations.

A sign of change emerged after the end of the Suharto era. Later, the pro-independence referendum in East Timor under the brief period of President B.J. Habibie inspired the Acehnese. It also encouraged the open involvement of Acehnese civil society in conflict resolution after decades of silence. Positive gestures from Jakarta continued during the period of President Abdurrahman Wahid, when several positive policies were initiated. However, no concrete step was taken to solve the problem because of his quick decline and the increasing power of the military.

It is clear that after the independence of East Timor, the Jakarta ruling elite was in no mood for another provincial breakaway. Nevertheless, Jakarta did come up with some interesting initiatives that were at least different from the hard-nosed military approach of the past. During the time of the Wahid government, the policy to apply Syaria’h, or Islamic law, in Aceh was made with the hope that it could go some way towards placating the demands of the Acehnese – the majority of whom are devout Muslims – by recognition of their religious identity.

The Wahid government also started a dialogue with GAM brokered by the Swiss-based organisation Henry Dunant Center (HDC).

But the most significant move came under the Megawati government in 2001 with a law known as Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) that gave special autonomy status for Aceh. The law covers greater dimensions of Aceh autonomy compared to earlier laws, including the identity dimension by incorporating a lot of terms from the Acehnese language. The law gives more economic autonomy as the province will receive 15 per cent of oil and 30 per cent of gas revenues in addition to the earlier share of 55 per cent of oil and 40 per cent revenues.
of gas revenues for a period of five years. Politically, the law guarantees direct election for governors and lower-ranking local administrative posts instead of leaders being directly appointed by Jakarta.

But the situation in Aceh remains severe despite this new development. GAM and several human rights groups accuse Jakarta of having a two-faced policy that obstructs the progress of peace. Indeed, along with the implementation of the new policies, more security forces were deployed in the province. In early 2001, the Megawati government re-established a military unit in Aceh, a move that led to more clashes between the military and the rebels, resulting in more deaths among civilians caught in the conflict.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IDENTITY IN THE ACEH CONFLICT

Over the years, the separatist movement in Aceh has forged a rather unique identity. The ethnic Acehnese have their own cultural heritage, including their own spoken and written language and history. Aceh was once a great Islamic kingdom that served as a centre of trade between the region and other continents, especially for traders from the Arab peninsula. Thus, while Hinduism and Buddhism have largely influenced Javanese culture, what distinguishes Acehnese culture from that of Java is the fact that the tradition of the former, especially Islam, has a much closer connection to the Arab world.

Such an identity, however, did not emerge as a problem during the formation of Indonesia in the early years. On the contrary, Aceh was among the many provinces that gave strong support to the independent movement. The Acehnese still take pride in the fact that they were the last group to hold out against the forces of the Netherlands East Indies.

The strength of Acehnese cultural identity, which later acted as a political motivation for its people, manifested itself in the form of a poem. *Hikayat Perang Sabi* (Legend of the Holy War), called *Perang Sabi* in short by the Acehnese, was written in 1881 in the Acehnese language by Islamic scholar Chic Pantee Kulu (1836-1894) who returned to his hometown of Piedie after studying in Mecca. In his poem, the poet urged his fellow countrymen to ‘fight in the name of Allah’ and be rewarded in paradise.

Perang Sabi became popular soon after it was written and became an important factor in the war against the Dutch. The following is a part of the poem as translated by S. Jaafar Husin:

Thus written in the Holy Book,  
The words of my Lord,  
Listen to the words and understand the meaning,  
The Holy War is most pious of duties.  
When then your soul to God returns,  
The highest of paradise its throne guaranteed,  
Be thus convinced my dear fellow men,  
For those with faith, eternal happiness is sure waiting.

Be ready to sacrifice your soul and possessions,  
As expenses for the Holy War,  
Allah will pay and price so high,  
The paradise above the return is promised.

In this case, Acehnese religious identity was given life in an artistic form through the Acehnese language to become a source of inspiration. This inspiration called for the Acehnese to sacrifice themselves in the struggle for independence, and later for the birth of a new nation called Indonesia.

Regardless of the vague meaning of nationalism in the context of their own traditional culture, the fact that the Acehnese were willing to die for what they had not traditionally known and lived with proves an important fact. It shows that the existence of a traditional identity does not have to go against the idea of nationalism despite the fact that by accepting such a concept, this identity allows itself to be reduced to a less important part of a new community.

In the context of the nationalist revolution in the 1940s, Indonesian leaders were able to gather strength from many traditional societies that existed together under the Dutch, in order to serve one absolute goal – Indonesian nationalism. Aceh was one of these traditional societies. The spirit of *Perang Sabi* is still a powerful inspiration for most Acehnese today. Different people reproduced the message of the poem in many different forms. For example, A.D. Pirous, an Acehnese who is internationally known for his calligraphy, has one of his masterpieces displayed in his gallery in Bandung, a drawing of Teunghu Umar, the Acehnese hero during The Dutch War. Pirous used a line from
Perang Sabi to serve as the background, “I would rather die in the battlefield than in the bed of my wife; I would rather die on the ground than at home surrounded by my family.”

But today, Perang Sabi finds its place in a completely different situation. In November 1999, the poem was read in front of a mass gathering in front of the central mosque in Banda Aceh. The gathering, with participants numbering close to a million, was to demand a referendum for the independence of Aceh. This time, ironically, it was Jakarta that replaced the Dutch. The independence the poem inspired now is Aceh’s independence from Indonesia – the nation the Acehnese were urged to die for decades ago.

While Acehnese local identity has a significant role in the dispute, it alone can hardly be taken as an answer to the conflict. When the Wahid government legalised Islamic law in the province, saying that it was a way to solve the conflict as it answered the Acehnese’s demand for their religious identity to be accepted, many groups, including civil society and GAM, came out in protest. According to them, the problem of Aceh lay in other courses rather than religion. Despite its significant meaning for Acehnese spiritual life, Islamic law was not an answer to the problem.

**SOURCES OF THE ACEH PROBLEM**

While no one denies the uniqueness and strength of the Acehnese local identity, it is known that the lesson for the on-going conflict lies in other things. The following are the most important sources of the conflict that I found:

**The nation-building process**

The state of Indonesia since its establishment has made clear that maintaining national unity is an absolute task for all sections of the society. Different mechanisms have been made to ensure that national stability remains untouched. However, the emergence of the separatist movement in Aceh and other conflicts indicate the failure of the project. An important question to ask is what went wrong with the country’s nation-building process that it still failed to guarantee stability despite the time and energy the country has invested in it.

From the time before Independence in 1945, influential secular nationalist leaders have employed as the philosophical basis of the newly-born Indonesia the invented state ideology Panca Sila. Panca Sila, which refers to five principles consisting of belief in God, humanity, unity, democracy and social justice, has been used alongside the state motto ‘Unity in Diversity’ to urge all ethnic groups to assimilate under one nation. Governments, acting as the fundamental state apparatus have since taken this as state ideology.

But questions remain on the justification of the ideology, and therefore, a lot has been said regarding its weaknesses. Firstly, the ideology is centralistic as it was created under a political atmosphere dominated by a political elite based in Java while the presence of the outer provinces was lacking. The absence of local participation in a crucial part of the nation-building process makes the ideology fail to justify itself before those seeking to reject the presence of Indonesian nationality. On top of that is what critics call Java-centric imperialist behaviour reflected in the unjustified annexation of some outer territories such as West Papua in 1963 and East Timor in 1974. The result is the rise of localism among the outer territories.

Secondly, critics view the concept of national identity based on the state ideology as being ill-defined. As Tung wrote, the problem came earlier from a reluctance among the then ruling elite to clarify the boundaries of a national culture supposedly constructed out of the country’s multi-ethnic traditions. Thus, for Tung, the concept of ‘Unity in Diversity’ was nothing but a reflection of such vagueness.

The Suharto regime was able to hide such weaknesses behind its repressive policy. Instead of giving the identity space for mature development by providing open debate that involved the society at large, the regime chose to maintain unity by rules and force. For example, rules to prohibit discussion on ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group differences were created on the grounds that they would help guard national unity. Consequently, ideologies which differed from the ones propounded by the state were considered as threats to unification.

From its beginnings, the Indonesian state has never been able to bridge the gap between its ideals and the aspirations of the local community. The state’s obsession for nationalism and unity has done nothing but drive the people away from its grip. The Aceh conflict is an...
example of the people's alienation from, and rejection of, such an approach.

**Multinational investments**

As with many developing countries, globalisation manifested itself in Indonesia in the form of multinational corporate investments. What makes a difference is that their presence in Indonesia has also fuelled the conflict between Jakarta and its troubled regions. The investments of the US transnational ExxonMobil in the Arun natural gas field in Aceh, which started in 1968 and generate approximately US$1 billion annually for Indonesia, is one of the most obvious examples.

A big proportion of the Acehnese sees ExxonMobil as a loyal counterpart of the central government. The Acehnese have pointed at the investments not only as a threat to the people's traditional way of life, but also as a contributor to the propagation of violence against them.

According to several studies by human rights groups both in and outside Indonesia, ExxonMobil's investment in Aceh strongly relates to the financial interests of Indonesian security forces. The obvious cases involve soldiers and police hired by the company to provide security for the investment sites. Such security service is a major financial source for Indonesian security personnel both in Aceh and in other places with multinational investments. Over the years, there have been several cases of murder, torture, kidnapping, and rape of the locals by security forces in Aceh. Last year, International Labour Rights acted on behalf of 11 Acehnese villagers who were victims of human rights abuses in suing ExxonMobil in a United States federal court. The group mentioned that ExxonMobil provided barracks where the military tortured and detained villagers, and lent the military equipment such as excavators to dig mass graves.

Worse still, the investment of ExxonMobil failed to bring about economic development to Aceh. The transmigration policy that brought workers from Java and other islands to work with the company has discontented the Acehnese majority who still suffer from poverty and unemployment.

For many Acehnese, the presence of ExxonMobil is a symbol of injustices perpetrated by the state. One of the consequences was the 2001 attack on ExxonMobil's operations in Arun by GAM, which led to operations closing doors for three months.

**The security policy**

Military solutions to the Aceh conflicts are still Jakarta's most favoured approach. Although the departure of the Suharto regime helped end the ten-year special military operation that claimed thousands of lives, Jakarta continued with Operation Rencong I, II and III, a series of coordinated Indonesian police and military operations.

Since the beginning of the Megawati government, more troops have been deployed in the troubled province for 'security reasons'. The presence of security forces has generated more violence in the province as more clashes with GAM occur. The idea of imposing martial law in Aceh as intended by Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Political Security Lt. General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in July 2002, clearly shows the government's tendency towards a security-based solution.

The emphasis on the military solution inadvertently impedes other solutions from emerging. It does not only prevent political solutions from developing, but also creates doubts among the Acehnese on both the efficiency of the talks and the sincerity of the government in solving the problem. In the end, such a solution has not yielded Jakarta any fruitful results. On the contrary, it has alienated the central government from the provinces, and Indonesia from many of its people.

**Injustice**

There are many reasons for the unpopularity of the special autonomy law in Aceh. One of them is its failure to answer one of the most important questions posed by the province – the question concerning economic and political injustice.

There is still no answer from Indonesia regarding the demand for an investigation of those responsible for the 7,000 civilian deaths during the DOM period. Despite apologies from the government and the military for violence committed by the state apparatus during that time, violence continues in the same manner. An attempt by the Wahid government to ease the separatist sentiment by setting up a trial for the 1999 killing of Muslim Acehnese Tengku Bantaqiah and his supporters
turned out to be a disappointment. The shaky political position of President Wahid made him unable to send soldiers suspected of abuses to the human rights tribunal as demanded by the Acehnese community. Instead, pressure from the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) led to a trial by a joint civilian-military court.

Pervasive violence in the troubled provinces widely believed to be committed by Indonesian security personnel has alienated people from the centre. The failure of the following governments to bring about justice after the end of the Suharto regime has increased the locals’ distrust of Jakarta even more. Out of distrust came a rejection: the Acehnese’s negative response to the special autonomy laws is a part of this rejection.

Injustice also came in the form of imbalanced economic opportunities for the people of the provinces compared to those at the centre. Aceh accounts for 30 to 40 per cent of all oil and natural gas export production in Indonesia, which is the world’s largest exporter of liquefied natural gas. But most of the income from that investment went to the centre while much development is still needed for the locals.

Violence and economic discrimination, which are seen by the Acehnese as injustices done to them by Jakarta, naturally led to an ‘imagination deficit’ among the people of the province. Unless the people feel a fairer treatment coming from Indonesia, there will be no end to the war in Aceh.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Two fundamental questions struck me at the end of my ten months in post-Suharto Indonesia. Is the country ready for change? And if it is, in which direction will it go? The answers to these questions remain elusive.

Coming from Thailand, I see some similarities between the two countries. Both nations, for most of their modern history, have flirted with military rule. While Suharto and his junta reigned for 32 years in Indonesia, Thai generals took turns seizing political power in the past few decades. The concept of ‘the military as the nation’s guardian’ has been applied in almost the same manner in Indonesia and Thailand.

But there are significant differences between the two – Indonesia’s ethnic and cultural differences are much more diverse, and the two countries have different historical backgrounds especially concerning their respective processes of nation-building, thus providing different grounds for conflict management.

Until recently, Thailand’s ‘unity’ was challenged by the Pattani separatist movement, which operated in the country’s key southern provinces. But the government was able to contain the conflict by changing the core of the problem from one of secession to one that is negotiable within its national borders. The military solution is thus replaced by political solutions, creating space for political negotiations.

In 1988, the Thai government announced the New Hope policy for the rebellious southern provinces, where there had been violent clashes between the Thai military and the Muslim separatist movement PULO. The policy was to promote political freedom and recognised the people’s rights to participate in democratic development and national administration. This policy followed an earlier government policy in dealing with the communist insurgency which mooted a special law in 1983 giving amnesty to members of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). As a result, thousands of students and intellectuals who fled military violence to join the CPT in the jungles since 1976 returned home, and the armed insurgency was quickly put to an end. Likewise, New Hope saw the laying down of arms by a majority of PULO’s members and the weakening of the movement in the early 1990s.

Although the government continued to apply security measures in both cases, these were minimised under the new policies. Curiously, the state institution assigned to carry out the policy was the Thai Army itself.

To return to Aceh: a good sign was shown with the beginning of the peace talks in 2000. Despite the ongoing violence and chaos, the fact that both sides at least officially recognise an alternative to the security approach helps many to sustain hope for a peaceful end to the conflict.

While there is a long way to go before Aceh and Indonesia reach the point Thailand is at right now, the latter today is still far from being conflict-free. On the contrary, while old conflicts between the people and the state are put to rest, new conflicts emerge, be they environmental, economic or social. Perhaps the lesson from Thailand’s and Indonesia’s quests for peace and
territorial integrity is that a rigid solution, especially a military approach, may not be the best answer to the question of conflict resolution.

Notes

1. This story was mentioned in several interviews with separate groups of Acehnese. For example, a businessman based in Banda Aceh expressed his feelings: “The Javanese never said ‘thank you.’” In this context, Indonesians of other ethnic groups, especially those in conflict areas, often use the term ‘Javanese’ to refer to the government or the ruling elite. In many cases the term also means the ethnic Javanese in general whom Indonesians believe receive more favour from the powers-that-be.
5. Chiwat Satha-anand, *The Paramnesia of Southeast Asia: Looking at Indonesia’s & Malaysia’s Presents from Thailand’s Past*, Thailand, Australia & the Region: Strategic Development in Southeast Asia, National Thai Studies Center, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian University, 2002.
7. Ibid, 2002. Max Lane noted, “Even in Java, people are demanding provinces of their own, such as Cirebon.”
12. Despite the fact that Islam is the religion of the majority of Indonesians, Islam has never been a major factor in Indonesian politics since the concept of national unity ignored all identity differences including those of religions.
15. Ibid.
16. Translated by an Acehnese during the interview with A.D. Pirous in Bandung in May 2002.
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IDENTITY AND EVERYDAY LIFE AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE CORDILLERA OF NORTHERN LUZON, THE PHILIPPINES

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INTRODUCTION
This project is about the ‘encounter of other-ness’ and is a self-reflection about the indigenous peoples of Cordillera in Northern Luzon of the Philippines who face processes of development in that nation. The author, who is neither a Filipino nor an indigenous person, tried to understand the problems of the indigenous peoples of Cordillera. The methods used in trying to understand this group of people were a combination of conventional research methods such as a review of literature, field research (interviews and observations) and drawing from the author’s own experiences.

The last was done when the author immersed himself with the people and their problems, through the delivery of lectures and obtaining feedback, working with the community, and getting actively involved in the issues of the indigenous people through networking with governmental and non governmental organisations (NGOs).

‘Self-reflection’ means the comparison of the author’s imagination concerning the indigenous peoples of Cordillera at the time when he wrote the proposal in Indonesia and the reality of the indigenous peoples’ struggle for their self-identity. In October 2000 in Indonesia, I proposed the following research questions: (1) What historical milestones are related to the indigenous peoples and their position in the Philippines? (2) What actions are involved in the indigenous peoples’ issues and for what position? and, (3) What do the indigenous peoples need in facing development and how do they fulfil their needs?

However, I have a hidden ‘ambitious agenda’ in this public intellectual activity, which is to understand the problem of the identity of the indigenous peoples in the Cordillera region of the Philippines, from their everyday lives (through a case study in one village) to a wider perspective, like national issues.

The problem of the indigenous peoples in the Cordillera lies in a contestation between the State and the indigenous peoples regarding the position of the latter in Philippine society. The State has, through the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act, placed indigenous peoples under the state’s power. On the contrary, indigenous peoples have their own identity that is to be self-determined.

From Jakarta the author went to the Philippines where he visited Manila, Baguio City, Sagada, Ilocos and Abra, and resided in a village in the province of Kalinga, named Balbalasang. He conducted interviews, made observations, read printed material, gave lectures, worked with the community, attended seminars and conferences from the municipality level to the national and international level, and attended Cordillera Day festivities.

Getting involved with the community for several months gave the author firsthand experiences with the people. He attended several life circles rituals, community meetings, conflict settlements, engaged with military personnel, attended the vouchong (peace pact) celebration, worked on a documentary, joined in the dancing and singing, followed the people preparing for tribal war, and attended mass in church.

What did the author achieve? What do the objectives mean? The author believes that the ethnographer’s own racial, national, political, financial and professional position was inextricably at play in the processes of recording and interpreting the field (Gardner 1999:47).
DEFINING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: FROM IDEOLOGY TO TERRITORIAL BASES

The Philippines's Indigenous Peoples Right Act (IPRA), Republic Act 8371, 1997 defined an indigenous people/indigenous cultural community (IP/ICC) as:

A group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organised community on communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilised such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonisation, non-indigenous religions and cultures, became historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos.

This definition on the one hand, gives a new label to the indigenous peoples of the Philippines from that of the Colonial to post-Colonial periods. In tracing history, one can see that old labels were given by the colonial state, such as tribal independiente (Spanish Occupation, 1575-1898), ‘Non-Christian Tribe’ (American occupation, 1899-1942), ‘National Minority’ (President Ferdinand Marcos’s regime, until 1984) and ‘Cultural Communities’ (President Corazon Aquino’s regime, 1986-1992). The Spaniards also used other labels, such as ‘savage’ and ‘barbaric’.

The new definition also gives power to the state through the NCIP to interplay the authenticity of the indigenous peoples with the notion of ‘ascription by other’ through the certification of their ancestral domain. There are some necessary requirements in claiming the ancestral domain, such as written historical documents, mapping of the ancestral domain and written documents about customary law.

Sociologically, however, the definition has loopholes, particularly involving the notion of ‘homogeneous society.’ This is based on the fact that with prevailing circumstances there is no homogeneous society; every society is heterogeneous in terms of gender, economic status, religion and the like. If a society is not homogeneous, the IPRA is not going to recognise it as an indigenous group of people in the Philippines. As such, there are no indigenous peoples in the Philippines following the term ‘homogeneous society’.

However, both the colonial state and the nation-state of the Philippines are two agencies with the authority to give definitions, labels and ‘ascription by other’ for indigenous peoples. The Spaniards employed the term indio for a dark-skinned person wearing pants that attended mass, paid taxes, obeyed Spanish Law and only went to war when the government told him to.

On the contrary, the mountain peoples of Northern Luzon obviously did not conform to this pattern, be they the Igorots, Tingguians or Zambals, so they were collectively referred to as tribus independientes (Scott 1998:3). Then, when the United States replaced the Spaniards in occupying the Philippines, a new Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes (BNCT) was formed. Label ideology was apparent during the American period. This bureau was formed not to improve the overall life of the indigenous peoples, but to control their natural resources. However, the BCNT was abolished in 1938 and no agency took care of the national minorities, until 1941 when a Commissioner for Mindanao was established.

In the post-colonial era after 1946, the new Philippine government had the task of pacifying Muslims and other national minorities and thus set up the CNI in 1957 which functioned in almost the same way as the previous BCNT. The government looked at the indigenous peoples of the Philippines in a similar manner as the American government did. The Philippine government called for the ‘Non-Christian Filipino or National Cultural Communities’, as stated in their objective, “. . . to effect in a more rapid and complete manner, the economic, social and moral and political advancement of the non-Christian Filipinos or National Cultural Communities, and to render real, complete and permanent, the integration of all said national cultural communities into the body politic (Reyes 1986:160).” In the eyes of the government, the ‘non-Christian Filipino’ needed to be integrated in the nation-building of the Philippines.

When Marcos was in power, the CNI was transferred to the president who acted as the Adviser on National Minorities (PANAMIN). The label employed was still the same, but he used the PANAMIN to subordinate indigenous peoples under his control. Later on, some cases proved to the public that the PANAMIN was there to serve the president’s needs and not the needs of the indigenous peoples themselves.
After the first EDSA in 1986 that put Corazon Aquino in power, a new vision for the indigenous peoples in the Philippines came about: from the Spaniards with their label *tribus independientes* or *tribus salvajes*, to the American colonialists with their non-Christian Tribes, to the CNI with its non-Christian Filipinos, the PANAMIN with its National Minorities, to Aquino’s regime which called them Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICC). During the formation of the new Constitution in 1987, the term ICC was present in the Constitution: “State shall recognise, respect and promote Indigenous Cultural Communities.” By definition, there was a shift from an ‘ideological’ perspective (*tribus independiente, tribus salvajes*, non-Christian Tribe, non-Christian Filipino, and National Minority) to issues of ‘ancestral domain’. It was the first time that the Philippine Constitution mentioned indigenous peoples. However, it is important to note that a global movement on indigenous peoples was on the rise during that period and this influenced the Philippines’ decisions.

Cory’s successor, Fidel Ramos with his Social Reform Agenda (SRA), recognised indigenous peoples as a marginal sector that needed to achieve a higher status. In October 1997, he signed Republic Act 8371 into law. The Act was “an act to recognise, protect and promote the rights of indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples, creating a National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, establishing implementing mechanism, appropriating funds thereof and for other purposes…(IPRA, 1997).” It seemed a comprehensive law for indigenous peoples and made promises of a better life for them.

However, during his time, Ramos also signed into law Republic Act No 7492, popularly known as the Philippine Mining Act of 1995. Some provisions of the law threatened the concept of ancestral domain as stated in the Constitution of 1987, and later in IPRA 1997. It was not surprising why many NGOs were not in favour of the IPRA. Indeed, shortly after IPRA was signed into law, a civilian took the IPRA to the Supreme Court and questioned some of its provisions, stating that they were unconstitutional.

When Joseph Estrada came to power in 1998, and after learning of the case of the IPRA in the Supreme Court, he decided to freeze the budget for the NCIP. All IPRA activities for indigenous peoples came to a standstill. The promises of the Constitution and IPRA to ‘promote’ the rights of indigenous peoples lapsed during the Estrada administration. Estrada concerned himself with the problems in Mindanao and promoted himself among the urban poor.

Then, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became President during the ‘street oath-taking’ of EDSA 2001. She looked into the Indigenous Peoples’ issues in her first Executive Order (EO 1) which provided for the formation of the Office for the President for Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs (OPAIPA). She served as the temporary Presidential Adviser and oversaw matters such as renewing and revitalizing the NCIP, forming new commissions, strengthening legal frameworks and the like. The Arroyo administration seems to have brought about a new wind of change concerning indigenous peoples’ rights in the Philippines.

At the national level, the author discovered interesting facts in his encounter with indigenous peoples of the Philippines and their issues, which date back from the Spanish era and have persisted until the present time period. I found the workings of an ‘ascription by other’ when the colonial state as well as the Philippine state and government placed labels of identity on the indigenous people. The labels of identities shifted from ‘ideological’ bases, like what the Spaniards, Americans, CNI and PANAMIN employed, to a more ‘territorial’ one during Cory Aquino’s regime i.e. related to the notion of ancestral domain, similar to that of the 1987 Constitution and Ramos’s IPRA 1997.

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CORDILLERA: HISTORY OF RESISTANCE**

Presently, the term ‘Cordillera’ refers to an administrative region in Northern Luzon in the Philippines which is composed of six provinces, Benguet, Mountain Province, Kalinga, Ifugao, Apayao and Abra. This administrative region is supposed to be an autonomous region emanating from certain provisions of the 1987 Constitution.

Two Republic Acts (RA) came about for the purpose of autonomy. First, all provinces, except Ifugao in its plebiscite of 1990, rejected RA No. 6766, otherwise known as the Organic Act of Cordillera. Then, RA 8433 came about as an amendment to the Organic Act. The people, except in the province of Apayao, in the 1997 plebiscite, rejected it again. Those who
rejected autonomy were ignorant of their past history of resistance from the Spanish colonial era up to the present time. While many dreamt about autonomy and self-governance, the Cordillerans rejected those initiatives from government.

The late William Henry Scott, an American historian, (Scott 1998) wrote about the motives of the conquerors to occupy the Cordillera area during the Spanish era (1575-1898) and how the natives resisted this occupation. The whole thing started with Spanish expeditions searching for gold, but most of them failed or found the operation was not viable. However, the natives, resisting through ambushes, tortured and killed members of the expeditions. These groups were composed of Spaniards and native lowlanders. Because of the forceful resistance of the natives, the Spaniards placed negative labels on these people, calling them ‘barbaric’, ‘killer savages’ and the like. The people also resisted the tobacco monopoly.

When the author interviewed an elder from Balbalan of Kalinga, the elder said, “The Spaniard was a colonialist, but America was not; the Americans were friends!” However, the late William Henry Scott, himself an Anglican missionary, had a different point of view: the American government, the Protestant missionaries and the Roman Catholic missionaries had the same goal: to make the Filipinos more like the Americans and less like the Filipino (Scott in Reyes 1986:5). Further, Scott told a story about Bishop Brent, the first Anglican Bishop of the Philippines, who was advised by some American Presidents not to allow Filipinos to gain independence, because they were not competent to govern themselves.

From 1898 to 1946, the Americans were perceived as colonialists who labelled the indigenous peoples in Cordillera, part of the grouping called ‘non-Christian Tribes’. The Americans then tried to immerse themselves with the Cordillera peoples when they appointed some pangat (tribal leaders) for local government positions to build schools and introduce English as a medium of instruction, to introduce American history, to build a hospital, and to open a road in Kennon. It was understandable why the old man from Balbalan said that the Americans were their friends.

However, a documentary entitled Bontoc Eulogy told the story of a Festival in Saint Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. in 1904, which featured the Igorots and labelled them as ‘headhunters’ and ‘dog-eaters’. Similar to the Spaniards, but using different approaches, the Americans finally occupied the gold area in the Cordillera and Christianised the people.

In Cordillera, the American colonial government appointed some pangat for government positions, who acted as the presidents of municipalities, in order to attract the people. The appointments of these local leaders were not because the Colonialists appreciated their existence, but it made it easier for the Americans to approach them.

THE COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE OF CORDILLERA
When the author attended a discussion about the Cordillera Image at the University of the Philippines campus in Baguio, a lady questioned the speaker on the use of the terminology ‘Cordillera’, since she preferred the term Igorot. Her question was one of never-ending debate about the ‘Cordillera identity’ among the middle class, the activists and indigenous peoples’ political movements in the region. Igorot literally means ‘people from mountain’. However, for some lowland groups, the meaning of the word took on a derogatory slant when stereotyping and ethnocentrism among certain people associated the word with backwardness.

Among activists and political movements, the term Igorot became the basis for a collective identity indicating the value of resistance, since the Igorots believed the Spaniards were not able to occupy their land. Nevertheless, the term Igorot was rejected by some of groups in the Cordillera itself, such as people from Kalinga and Ifugao. They preferred the term ‘Kalinga’ and ‘Ifugao’ or ‘Cordilleran’. According to these people, the term Igorot refers only to people from Benguet and the Mountain Province areas. The word Igorot came to denote a political identity and Cordillera, a territorial identity.

Presently, the image of Cordillera as a united political movement resisting state domination is pre-eminent among advocacy groups such as non governmental organisations and other ‘middle-class’ organisations: youth associations, political parties, women’s groups and the like. It was different during the Marcos period, when the issue of the marginalisation of the peoples of the Cordillera was prominent. The protests against
the Chico dam at Kalinga-Mountain Province and Cellophil at Abra united most groups in the Cordillera area.

One effort to strengthen the identity of Cordillera is strengthening the ‘collective remembrance’ through annual events such as Cordillera Day on 24 April. The annual event commemorates Mangli-ng Dulac, a chieftain from Kalinga who was killed by the military. This was the price of his struggle against the development of the Chico Dam. The anti-Chico dam movement united many tribal groups, including those not living along the Chico River. At the time, they used a traditional mechanism called vochong as part of their struggle. In addition, New People’s Army (NPA) was also involved in the movement to oust the Marcos regime.

IDENTITY AND EVERYDAY LIFE: THE BANAO OF BALBALASANG KALINGA

The Banao in the Balbalasang village of Balbalan, Province of Kalinga, has been classified as a sub-group of Tinggian, as most of its population inhabits the province of Abra (Peralta); others (Saboy 1995; Puyao 1999) classified them as a sub-group of Kinalinga of Kalinga. Both classifications are valid, since the Balbalasang village is located in the border area of Kalinga and Abra, and migration between the two different groups are frequent.

The Banao was always associated with the name of a lake in Pantikian, adjacent to a village of Balbalasang. The area around the lake was first inhabited by these people before they migrated to other places, including Balbalasang and Talalang in the present Balbalan Municipality of Kalinga, and in the municipalities of Daguroman and Malibcong of the present province of Abra. Balbalasang was named after sacred trees in that area and related to a story of womanhood. In Ilocano, the word balbalasang means woman.

During the Spanish period, few writings mentioned the Banao of Balbalasang. However, Alexander Schadenberg, a German chemist who passed by Balbalasang in 1886 in his trip to the interior of Cordillera published some information about the area. The publication gave some important firsthand information about (1) the existence of the Spaniard’s military post in the area and the fact that the relationship between the military and the people were close; (2) the inhabitants were scattered in 13 rancherías; (3) the practice of animism; (4) the agricultural system, housing construction and clothes; (5) the practice of tattooing; and (6) food habits. His information, although biased towards the West and inaccurate in terms of naming traditions, is important because it shows that even at this late date, Spain and Christianity had not yet influenced the area.

Contact with western culture became intensive during the American period, especially from 1907 to 1925. In 1907 an American government official reported that a situation in Balbalasang caused many people to migrate to other areas because of diseases and calamities. However, contact with Anglican missionaries was the most significant factor for the changing traditions of the Banao. The Anglican missionaries not only provided churches, but schools and dispensaries. The church served as the centre of religious activities and was successful in changing the original religion of Balbalasang from a strong belief in Kabunian (supreme God) to a Christian ideology, and at the same time replaced the mandadawak (traditional priest) with a Christian priest. In the same manner, the role of education using the American system gave the people a chance to learn to read, write and absorb information. A new lingua franca between Banao and the English language was invented.

In the era after independence was granted in 1946, the Banao underwent a nation-building project centred on the identity of being Filipino. They introduced political, educational, market and developmental systems.

DE-TRADITIONALISATION OF BANAO

In a travel book about the Cordillera, the author wrote about Kalinga as a ‘scenic place’ and made a mention of ‘headhunting’, followed by a picture of a man wearing a G-string. That image can influence one’s impression about Kalinga and Banao. Afterwards, when the author was staying in Baguio City, a colleague, an NGO activist, said, “be careful there,” and when the author was waiting for public transportation to the Banao area, a friend from Mindanao said, “I don’t want to go there, many communist rebels.” That information shaped the author’s first impression of Kalinga and Banao: that although the environment is nice, the people are strange.
However, the author’s findings were contrary to what he had heard. Banao people are completely alike to his neighbours in Baguio City. Imagining people with G-strings, tattoos, wielding bolo (big knife), who are headhunters, and threatening foreigners is a complete misinterpretation, and such images were true only in books published before the 1950s.

Influenced by the education system, Christianity, intermarriage and development projects, the Banao at present are experiencing a condition of de-traditionalisation. Tradition is not disappearing, but the people have more choices. For example, pagtong and gangsa, both traditional dances of Cordillera are exhibited only for fiesta or school events, but during Christmas night, they perform them as part of the entertainment. In the same manner, bodong (peace pact) is still practised, but people also use national laws to solve the problems. All traditions are created, not natural. There is no pure traditional society; there are reasons for the creation of traditions and customs, and one of them is power (Giddens 2001).

Balbalasang is presently composed of around 900 people with 250 households. They inhabit three sitios (hamlets), namely Balbalasang proper, Ibong and Saltran. The dominant religion is Anglicanism (77%). It was the only dominant religion after tribal elders in 1925 declared a ban on religions in Balbalasang other than Anglicanism. However, there are now some other religions, such as the Charismatic movement, Spritista, Roman Catholicism, United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), Islam, and other denominations.

In terms of their livelihood, the Banao of Balbalasang combine agriculture, services and gold mining. Agriculture is for subsistence needs, with an emphasis on producing rice for daily consumption from wet-rice fields and dry-fields (kaingin). The Banao also plant vegetables, but only for family consumption. The Balbalasang was well-known as a producer of Kalinga Orange during the 1970s; however a virus attack damaged all the orange trees.

Now, gold mining has become an important livelihood. They have their own mining areas in Gaang, and recognise them as part of their ancestral domain. Under the management of Banao Bodong Federation (BBF), all those with blood and marriage relationships with Banao are free to mine the gold. However, they also allow people from other villages within the municipality of Balbalasang to mine but only within a certain quota. On the other hand, adjacent tribes from different municipalities are not allowed, based on reasons of peace and order. The Balbalasang people also use the forest for hunting animals, finding wood and non-forest products. However, the forest area is declared as part of the Balbalasang National Park.

Several problems related to the environment were raised in a community workshop including (1) forest fires, (2) illegal logging, (3) unregulated hunting, (4) forest-product gathering, (5) illegal fishing, and (6) the encroachment of mining corporations. Behind those environmental problems, there are some economic, cultural and political problems as well, such as the deterioration of cultural practices, the lack of employment opportunities, low incomes, boundary disputes, encroachment of territorial jurisdiction, unprocessed Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADT), the lack of land tenure titles, the lack of environmental awareness, the lack of knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples Right Act (IPRA) and the non-functioning of the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB).

WHO ARE THE BANAO: IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY

As the author mentioned earlier, the Anglican Church is an agency that significantly changed the everyday life of the Banao people. The dogma and the practices of the church are changing the worldview of the people over time. Religion, education and health changed the people. They now enjoy new institutions, such as the Sunday mass, a fiesta every second week of January, Christmas, a church choir, weddings, Holy Communion and the like. The people recognise a new leadership of the priest and his clergy.

In the past, the pangat (chieftain), mengol (tribal elder), and mandadawak (traditional priest) were the mediators in charge of connecting with the Kabunian (Almighty); now the people look upon religion and its elements, such as the padi (priest), the clergy, the Episcopal Women’s Church and Ayalak (Youth organisation) as the agencies answering their needs. However, there came a time when other denominations came into the scene, and the people became divided based on denomination.
Education also significantly changed the life of the Balbalasang people. An elementary school owned by the government and a high school run by the Anglican Church have been built in the area. Having a private high school became an advantage for the Balbalasang people towards obtaining a higher education beyond that offered at the villages in Kalinga. The nation-building project sponsored by the government at the elementary school and the American-style education at Saint Paul Memorial High School are transforming the identity of the Balbalasang people. The educational system has opened a wider window for the Balbalasang people and connected them with the world beyond their own. Many of them now can finish college or at least can experience studying in a college. It is not surprising that the percentage of people graduating from college is higher than those finishing high school.

Another factor changing the identity of Balbalasang is intermarriage with other tribes in Cordillera and with the lowlander Ilocanos. Most of the prominent people in Balbalasang are of mixed parentage belonging to the Balbalasang and lowlanders from the Ilocos region. The geographical location of Balbalasang makes it more accessible for the people from the Abra and Ilocos area, than from the Cagayan region, therefore influencing marriage patterns.

What Giddens has noted about de-traditionalisation is happening in Balbalasang. Tradition is not truly lost, but society now has the choice. For instance, the Balbalasang still practice *vochong* (peace pact) which is the traditional way to solve boundary conflicts, they still exhibit traditional art for fiestas and they practice *waksi* for the death rituals.

**GOVERNMENT, SHADOW GOVERNMENT AND NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS**

Three agencies are significantly involved in the local politics of Banao: the Local Government Unit (LGU), the New People's Army (NPA) and NGOs.

Balbalasang is a political unit known as barangay (village), which is under the management of the municipality of Balbalan and the Province of Tabuk. As a political unit of an LGU, Balbalasang is also dependent on the political dynamics of the political system. During elections – national, provincial, municipality and barangay – the people of Balbalasang experience a division due to political factionalism, supporting one candidate and criticising others. In that situation, kinship line, power and wealth are the important elements for getting support from constituents. During the barangay election of 2002, the people were divided by kinship factions in supporting their candidates for barangay captain and kagawad (village representative).

During the 1980s, the rest of the municipality of Balbalasang, including Balbalasang proper was a well-known stronghold of a ‘shadow government’. This term is used in reference to the area as a stronghold of the NPA, the armed element of the Communist Party of the Philippines. The NPA played a vital role in the Balbalasang community during 1980s. They were not involved with political matters, e.g. the campaigning against the government and the execution of government leaders who were corrupt. However, they were involved in the everyday life of the people and in important events, such as *vochong*, conflict settlements and even the private lives of the people. Nonetheless, when the power of the government became stronger, people who were members or supporters of the NPA were labelled as belonging to ‘the other side’.

Currently, the NPA is still trying to get involved with community concerns. They actively participate in some occasions in the community, such as fiestas, *vochong* celebrations, death rituals, wedding parties and conflict settlements. Due to their conflicts with the government, the armed forces and the police, they hide in the mountains and forests during daytime, and visit the community at night. A slight difference here compared to other NPA areas is that the NPA's ‘revolutionary tax’ is not issued in Balbalasang.

Another institution involved in Balbalasang is the NGO. NGOs are trying to give an alternative model of development, which is different from that of the government. Two types of NGOs are involved in Balbalasang. The first type is the advocacy NGO with its focus on political movements and human rights issues, and the second type is the development NGO who works for the welfare of the community.

The Cordillera People Alliance (CPA) through the Kalinga chapter is an alliance of various NGOs, people’s organisations, and professional groups that emphasise political movement for indigenous peoples. Their two main goals are self-determination and the defence of the ancestral domain of indigenous peoples. However, they
rejected the idea of the Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR) and Indigenous Peoples Right Act (IPRA), the reason being that both ideas come from the government and are not genuinely from the indigenous peoples.

Through their chapter in Kalinga, the CPA comes to the village with their campaigns for their own versions of self-determination and indigenous peoples’ rights, which is the opposite of the government’s ideas. Some informants in Balbalasang said they do not like NGOs who just talk and criticise the government without giving any practical solutions. The people need something practical and related to their welfare, such as programmes relating to agriculture and income-generating activities.

The second type of NGO is one whose work is related to the development of mini-hydroelectric power. This NGO does not provide technological expertise, but organises people to gain knowledge on how to maintain and manage electricity. Under the supervision of Anglican priests, the people of Balbalasang are self-maintaining their electrical production. Most of the people have accepted the presence of the NGO simply because electricity is necessary to light their lamps, to run their electronic appliances and for other purposes, such as fiestas and vochong celebrations.

CONCLUSION: IDENTITY AND SELF-REFLECTION

The indigenous peoples in the Cordillera region experience in their everyday life the conflict between ‘self-identity’ and ‘identity by other’. On the one hand, the people have their own names, territories, aspirations and ways; on the other hand, the state applied ‘identity by other’, through the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act and government policy, and the authentication of indigenous peoples as reflected in the document entitled Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim.

To benefit from development projects, the indigenous peoples need birth certificates and authorisation from the NCIP. However, identity is something fluid, and the indigenous people’s community uses the system for their pragmatic concerns. They agree to be certified, but they also practise their traditions, which is contrary to the government’s rules and regulations.

Like other indigenous groups in the world, the Banao and the Cordillerans are experiencing de-traditionalisation. Their tradition is not disappearing, but they maintain the authority to use tradition for pragmatic matters.

Living with the Banao and getting involved with the Cordillera’s middle class movement showed the author that his original research plans were too simple and too romantic. The problem of indigenous peoples does not only involve civil society and the state, but also other agencies like non-indigenous groups, communist rebels and other pressure groups. However, the author firmly believes getting actively involved in the everyday life of the people is the best way to understand their problems.
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