



BUGKALOT CUSTOMARY LAWS IN TRANSITION: A STUDY ON CULTURE CHANGE

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Abstract: *Cultural communities in the Philippines today live within a social system with formalized constitutional and legal order, yet many of their cultural, social, and political practices remain to be regulated by customary laws. Customary law refers to a body of unwritten rules, customs, and practices traditionally observed, accepted, and recognized by a social group. They are the product of the people's customs, traditions, and experiences which define the indigenous social order.*

The Bugkalots of Nagtipunan, Quirino is one cultural community currently experiencing subtle changes as its socio-political system is affected by external influences. The indigenous worldviews, which their ancestors have long cherished and preserved for centuries, have become the hallmark of their cultural identity. However, this has been slowly modified by modern concepts, which affected the Bugkalot's social life ushering the present Bugkalot generation into a new epoch characterized by tension and consequent peripheral modification of their customary laws. Thus, this study sought to ascertain the sustaining and intervening factors responsible for the preservation and modification of Bugkalot customary laws.

The anthropological research methods such as fieldwork, interviews, and case studies were used in the study considering that it sought to document the sustaining and intervening factors responsible for the preservation and modification of Bugkalot customary laws. Focus Group Discussion was used to ensure comprehensive collection of the data. The data gathered in the study were qualitative in nature. Hence, content analysis of the responses was undertaken.

From the Bugkalots' experience in Landingan, the old socio-political institutions that embody the Bugkalot way of life have been influenced by new concepts. But despite the ongoing pressures and the influence of the dominant society to the Bugkalots' indigenous social order, the cultural traditions contained in the indigenous worldview are not completely lost. Present-day Bugkalots still carry with them the vestiges of the old social order and is a source of their identity which is strong enough to spark a cultural group. Whatever the



current social and political environment today, the Bugkalots want to maintain the central features of the old social order that they themselves determined. Such is the basic essence of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA) which highlights the quest for self-determination of indigenous Filipino communities. Self-determination means that the Bugkalots can preserve their traditional social order amidst current and pressing forces. It further allows them to re-define, re-develop, and re-defend all aspects of their lives in order to restore their rich culture and continue to shape their own destiny as a people.

Keywords: Bugkalot, customary laws, indigenous social order, anthropological research methods, Nagtipunan, Quirino

INTRODUCTION

The ability of a cultural community to progress and preserve itself as a distinct people is anchored on a social order that is nurtured and shaped by the people themselves. This social order, particularly known as customary law, determines the existing social relationships in the community and to the land they claim to be their own. Although customary laws are unwritten, they are, nonetheless, committed to collective memory; thus, ensuring order in the community. These laws are the product of the peoples' century-old customs, traditions, and experiences. They are the source of sound wisdom enough to dictate all aspects of social existence. If these laws are violated, the identity of the people is threatened and social life is threatened too.

Many of the cultural communities today are facing serious threats to their cultural identity due to the modification of their customary laws. Such modification is brought about by their displacement from their ancestral lands to pave the way for the implementation of government projects or as an effect of a government policy to be integrated them to the mainstream population. The separation of the cultural communities from their most treasured ancestral lands has brought dramatic changes to their lives since the land is where their history and identity are rooted. Their worldview as a people is based on their concept of land as the basis of their continued survival. For this reason, a change in their environment, particularly land, would mean a change in their customary law with which they are governed.

The Bugkalots of Nagtipunan, Quirino is one cultural community currently experiencing subtle changes as its socio-political system is affected by external influences. The indigenous



worldview, which their ancestors have long cherished and preserved for centuries, has become the hallmark of their cultural identity. However, this has been slowly modified by modern concepts. These new concepts have affected the Bugkalots' social life. They have had a profound effect on their family and community life, thereby ushering the present Bugkalot generation into a new epoch characterized by tension and consequent peripheral modification of their customary laws.

The tension in the Bugkalot society is an unavoidable reality. Such tension is an initial effect to a society that is facing new concepts, perspectives, and schema brought by modernization. However, this tension had its immediate resolution as the Bugkalots started to innovate and strategize. Peripheral modifications or minor changes in their customary laws were made which can be conceived as part of the reconstruction of their cognitive structures and experiences steered by migration, religion, and politics. In the process of internalizing these new concepts, they were forced to innovate and strategize to effectively cope with the current pressures of modernization. These innovating and strategizing process made them understand and evaluate their social life in a better and more functional way.

Interestingly, the innovations and coping mechanisms of the Bugkalots vis-à-vis new habitus and field were integrally woven with their old views, i.e. customary laws on property and inheritance, thereby making them more responsive and attuned to their present socio-political needs and structures. This also ensured healthy social relationships between and among them as exemplified by social cohesion and absence of documentary evidences on disputes regarding property and inheritance in the barangay and municipal records. Instead of creating conflicts the new and old mental paradigms rather enhanced their consciousness as indigenous community. This proves that the Bugkalots' network of relationship along politics, religion, and family were not affected by the integration of new concepts in their customary laws. They rather complement each other. The complementation of the new and old habitus and field in the Bugkalots' customary laws may be attributed to their pragmatic view about life. Flexibility, rather than rigidity, was exhibited in viewing the changes in their society since it is more practical to fit these new structures and schemas than doing the contrary. For them, these changes are indispensable and fighting them will do more harm than good in so far as their social equilibrium is concerned. Hence, this study sought to



ascertain and document the sustaining and intervening factors responsible for the preservation and modification of Bugkalot customary laws.

METHODOLOGY

The anthropological research methods such as fieldwork, interviews, and case studies were used in this study considering that it sought to document the sustaining and intervening factors responsible for the preservation and modification of Bugkalot customary laws. Structured interviews were conducted to understand the preservation and modification of Bugkalot customary laws.

The research was sustained by methods of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* such as *pakapa-kapa* approach considering that the researcher is unfamiliar with the research area and its people. Thus, during the first part of the immersion, the data collection was made through *pagmamasid, pagtatanung-tanong, pagsubok, pagdalaw, pakikilahok, and pakikisangkot*.

Interviewed for the study were the local group leaders, elders, barangay officials, and some community members in Landingan, Nagtipunan, Quirino, who were willing to discuss and share their customary laws particularly on property and inheritance. Majority of the informants are males aged 40 and above and are married. Others belong to the age bracket of 20-40 years old. Old informants have not gone to formal schooling, but they can speak Tagalog and English. Few of the informants have at least elementary education, but all of the informants are farmers by occupation.

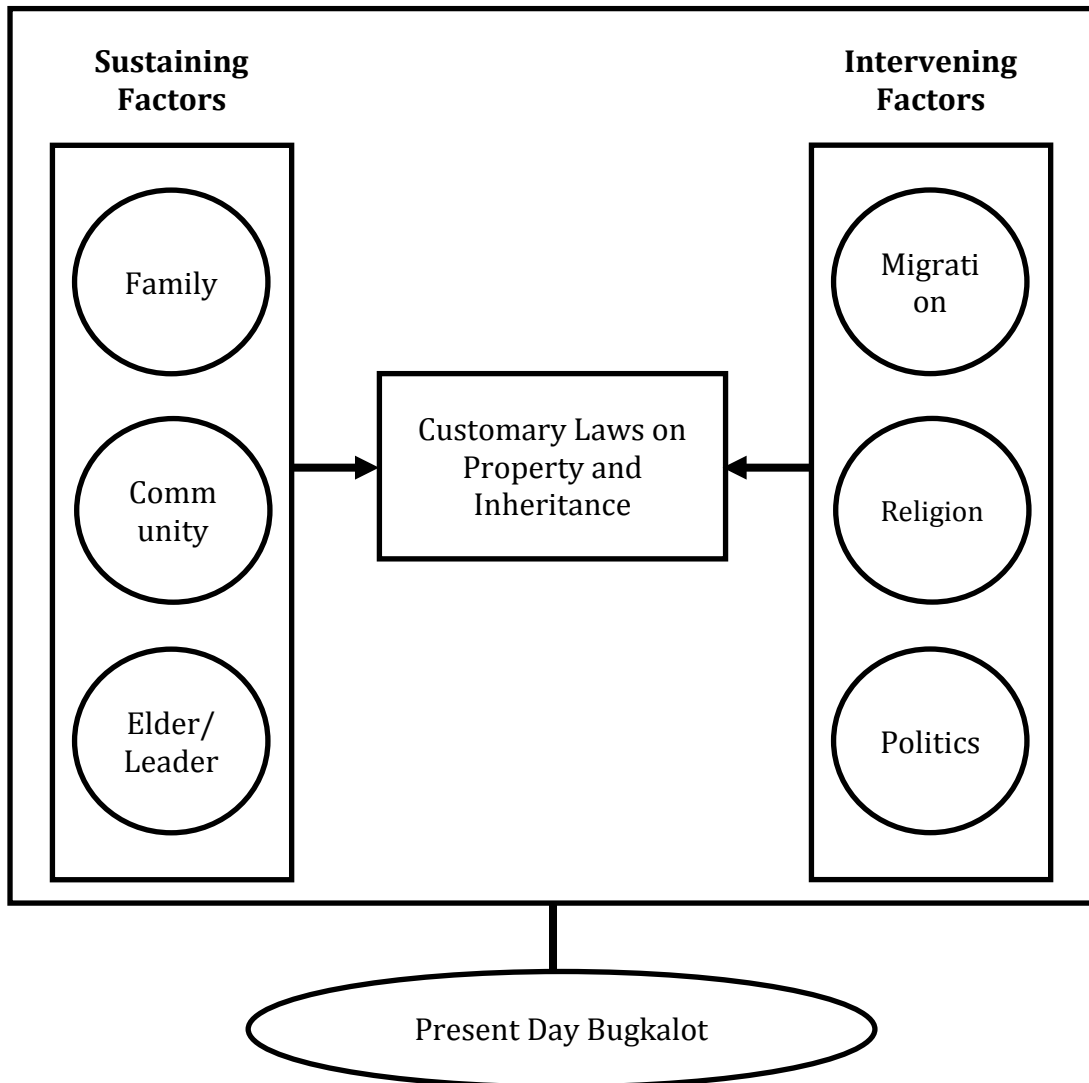
Focus Group Discussion was used to ensure comprehensive collection of the data. The data gathered in the study were qualitative in nature. Hence, content analysis of the responses was undertaken.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This presentation tries to unveil the realities, based on observation of the Bugkalot customary laws particularly the social and political institutions that may decide for the preservation or modification of the life of the people. The diagram below shows the institutions that preserved the Bugkalot Customary Laws and the factors that cause the peripheral modification of the Bugkalot Cultural Traditions by Present Day Bugkalot Society.



Schematic Diagram: The Dynamics of Present Day Bugkalot Society vis-à-vis its Customary Laws



Sustaining Factors of Bugkalot Customary Laws

A. Family (*Tan-Abungan*)

The view that the family is the basic social unit of the society holds true not only among rural communities. Whether urban or rural, social life is organized around the family; it is through this social unit that the society and its cultural traditions may be preserved, maintained, or disposed.

The salient function of the family in regard to societal existence and the preservation of cultural traditions are well illustrated among the Bugkalots of Quirino. Through this reproduction function, the family is able to replace its members and has allowed the



continuous existence of the group despite its experiences against colonialism and death of members due to internal feuds.

The Bugkalots in Quirino, particularly in Landingan, still constitute the majority of the population. This means that the family is performing its primordial function in maintaining the Bugkalot society. In the community profile conducted by the National Commission on Indigenous People in 2003, Landingan registered a total Bugkalot population of seven hundred forty nine (749), of which three hundred ninety five (395) are males while three hundred fifty two (352) are females. It has a total household of one hundred forty seven (347).

Paramount to the increasing number of Bugkalot families is the role of the family in transmitting its cultural traditions to the younger generation. This role of the family is evident in the observance of their customary laws particularly on property and inheritance whereby traditional concepts on property transfer are observed, thus avoiding the occurrence of property disputes among siblings and in the community as a whole. Through these concepts, the Bugkalots have learned to respect each other's property by not appropriating for themselves the property of others. For this reason, respect for each other's property has become the basic tenet in the Bugkalots' social life. This is shown by the fact that property dispute has never been the source of major conflict among family members and the community. This is so because transfer of property and inheritance is governed by customary laws that were passed on to them by their ancestors and which have proven to be important instruments in maintaining harmony and peace among the Bugkalots.

The transfer of customary laws from parents to children is made possible during the socialization process in the family. The family, particularly the parents, instills among children the social standards of the group making them responsible members and bearers of cultural traditions of their group. Speaking on his personal experience, an informant reveals the following fact: "At an early age my parents, particularly my father, taught me the traditions of the group. A basic custom that I learned from him was respect for the property of others. This is probably the reason why dishonesty is rarely committed among us. We respect the ownership of others, so they will also respect ours." This role of the parents is enhanced by the child's interaction with the other members of the community.



Through observations and interaction within the family and elsewhere, children learn these cultural standards enabling them to internalize the norms and become their bases for human behavior. This is possible when young Bugkalots are involved in occasions that showcase the application of customary laws such as marriage ceremonies, burial, and settlement of disputes decided on by the elders or the *begangit*. It is a tradition that in the resolution of disputes, community members are invited to witness the trial.

The elders or the *begangit* explain the basis of the decision; hence, allowing the children to learn and live by these laws themselves. Witnessing the rigors of the legal system of the barangay would also discourage the children to violate laws and instead become living advocates of the traditions.

The transmission and preservation of customary laws, particularly on property and inheritance, are generally attributed to respect for elders, which is the major characteristics of Bugkalot families. The elders, usually represented by the parents and symbolized by the father, assume all the powers and authority in the family. He is the decision-maker on the family affairs. Bugkalot children comply with what is taught to them paving the way for the preservation and transmission of customary laws. The family instills in the young members the customary standards that are acceptable. The elders are in a better position to supervise and control nonconforming behavior among young members.

Adherence to the family and societal norms related to property and inheritance is best illustrated in the concept of *tekwator manangturo*. This concept has prevailed across time and has efficiently elaborated the authority of the parents towards the young particularly in the distribution of property. Among the Bugkalots, the father has the sole authority to designate which parcel of land has to be inherited by a family member. Although equal share in the distribution is ideally observed, a family member has no right to choose the location of the inherited property.

The father, then, through his authority in the family, pinpoints (*turo*) the share of his member that becomes binding to all inheritors. It is understood that obedience of the children to the authority of the father is based on their respect to the head of the family.

B. Community (*Bertan*)

The *bertanis* the largest unit of the Bugkalot social system. Each *bertanis* composed of persons who choose to reckon their descent from their parents. Hence, a *bertanis* a



community of families, households, or local clusters living together with a common purpose. The Bugkalot is usually composed of several *bertans* which speak the same language though with slight differences in tone and diction (Zialcita, 1996:9).

Rosaldo as quoted by Salgado (1994:52) notes the composition of the *bertan* in these words: *Timeless and discrete collections of related persons who share an origin from unknown common ancestors who once lived together "downstream," "in the lowland," "on an island," "near a mountain," in short, in some environment from which the bertan takes its name.*

Similar description is given by Rosaldo (1980) in Salgado (1994:53) of the *bertan* in these terms:

So closely linked are the members of relatively concentrated bertan that their speech is often destructive in dialect. These differences in dialect range from the intonation and speech to distinct lexical items and features of grammatical form. Aware of those bertan-specific varieties of speech, Bugkalots delight in imitating the speech of other bertans.

The clan system of grouping in the Bugkalot society is still practiced today; although names and customs are not as they were in the past due to the emerging phenomena that try to disrupt the Bugkalot family. Migration, intermarriages, and politics have profoundly affected the transmission and preservation of the customs by the young Bugkalot generation.

Generally, however, the socio-economic survey of the National Power Corporation and other source of information, show that the Bugkalot community has so far maintained its cultural identity by sharing a common language, customs, and traditions. All lands and natural resources are passed on by their ancestors to the present generation, and group boundaries are identified among the Bugkalot's group in the area. The use of the ancestral land is apparently distributed to each individual or household (Salgado, 1994).

Fr. Salgado (Salgado, 1994:54) further noted in a Public Hearing of the House of Representatives Committee on National Cultural Communities the following testimony of Mr. Edilberto Ponsal testified on February 13, 1993:

The Bugkalots are clan-oriented and recommended that the resettlement program should preserve the integrity of such system and respect the identities and boundaries of each clan. Grouping all clans in one resettlement camp will inevitably lead to inter-clan clashes.

The Bugkalot grouping into *bertans* is premised on the idea that important activities such as raiding, celebrating, wedding ceremonies, and hunting are communal activities. These



activities had kept the value of grouping themselves together in order to collectively achieve their set goals (Zialcita 1996:11).

However, more than the idea of grouping themselves for the purpose of transmitting its cultural traditions to future or incoming generations, each *bertanis* known to be a “storehouse” of the Bugkalots’ cultural traditions.

With a relatively small number of members ranging from 67-300 members, each *bertan* closely teaches the young the customary laws governing social life. They are basically taught to respect and not to encroach on the territory of other *bertans* especially if there are no peace talks arranged between them.

Obedience to societal norms in this regard is necessary to maintain harmony in the group. All group members shall be accountable to a violation made by a single member by virtue of his being a part of the group or *bertan*. The major concept emphasized along property and inheritance is the observation of *binantan*. This cultural concept upholds the idea that the property of a group member or a fellow Bugkalot should be respected by others. This concept that is one of the most important customary laws among Bugkalots abhors the taking or stealing of other’s property. This customary practice has been followed by the Bugkalots though there are no records kept in the barangay office along this matter. In fact, an informant narrates that:

Among Bugkalots stealing or taking others’ property constitutes a grave misconduct. This is a form of dishonesty that may lead to killing. Among us, the penalty for stealing is death because you disrespect other people by taking their property for yourself. We practiced headhunting in the past as a requirement for marriage, much more so when we are robbed of our property. Today, when we cross the river to visit our farm at the other side, we leave our slippers at its bank and get it when we go home. We strictly observe honesty here in our community.

Binantanas a concept of property is critically emphasized among members of each *bertan* and its relation to other *bertans*. Each *bertanis* independent and oftentimes at war with each other. Entering into the territorial domain of other *bertans* just like in the case of clearing a plot for kaingin purposes would lead to killing a member that will also directly involve other members of the group. Stealing the property of a member of another *bertan* would likewise jeopardize the relations of the two since the action and behavior of a



member is also taken as the collective behavior of the group. This practice will lead to conflict and usually end up to a collective activity such as headhunting.

For this reason, the *bertan* with its few members who are closely knitted with each other undertake the responsibility of emphasizing the concept of *binantanto* to all the members. This is done to preserve this customary law for the general welfare of the community.

C. Elder/Leader (*Begangit*)

The title of the *begangitis* is the most sought after position in traditional Bugkalot society. The title connotes a conglomeration of virtues of a headhunting group like what the Bugkalots are known for. A *begangitis* is a man of valor as evidenced in the number of heads he collected during his headhunting expeditions. He is also a man influential enough to rule his subjects as indicated in his capacity to articulate the aspirations of the people. Likewise, he is a man strong enough to enforce the customary laws governing all aspects of social life to maintain social order and cohesion. The *begangitis* is known for his leadership, agility, and wisdom. Respect for him is lifetime.

These qualifications of the *begangitis* are confirmed and supported by the observation of L.E. Bennet (Rosaldo, 1994:57) then American Governor of Nueva Vizcaya. Bennet notes thus:

By mutual consent of a majority of the inhabitants, a person is selected as chief of the settlement. He is generally the largest property owner of the settlement, but may also have been selected because he is considered the bravest man. Generally, the bravest member of the settlement is also the largest property holder.

Being the acknowledged leader, the *begangitis* is tasked to enforce customary laws pertaining to all aspects of their social life. Wilson (1967:16) enumerates such laws as: not to kill his companion, for the murderer to support the family of his victims; not to commit adultery, for the culprits are severely beaten; not to lie, for the liar pays a fine to the chief; not to disobey her husband, for the disobedient wife is first scolded and may be punished more severely; not to neglect to pay his debts and not to steal, for whatever one steals will turn to hurt.

It is clear from Wilson's presentation that the Bugkalots lived by laws since time immemorial. L.E. Bennet (Rosaldo, 1994:58) affirms this by saying that the Bugkalots are governed by customs and traditions which they have followed well. He expounds:



They have a well-acknowledged but unwritten code of common law regulating the payment of debts, property rights, marriage, divorce, adultery and are generally way morale people. Property may either be owned by a man or a woman.

Being the highest leader in the village, the *begangit* decides on the basis of those customary laws and sees to it that they are properly observed and applied especially to erring members. The *begangit* adopts these customary laws and sees to it that they are religiously upheld for a sound judicial decision.

One of the most known cultural practices associated with the *begangit* is the practice of *sinabbi*. The *sinabbi* is a cultural process initiated by the *begangit* to settle a dispute brought to his attention. This tradition among the Bugkalots subjects both the accused and the complainant into a physical ordeal to determine the real culprit. In a ceremony held for this purpose, both are asked to dip their fingers into a pot of boiling water and whoever gets injured the most shall be declared guilty of the case. This process is a group activity as kinsmen of both accused and complainant are asked to attend in order to witness the trial. By virtue of this ceremony, Bugkalots are reminded to become strict followers of the customary laws and to refrain from violating them. Such activity also kindles group solidarity among members.

Customary laws are the product of the people's beliefs and practices. The *begangit* applies it for the common good. With this in mind, it can be said that the *begangit* is a living institution for the preservation of customary laws. He does not only enforce the laws but sees to it that they are properly applied to members irrespective of status. His position connotes knowledge of the group cultural practices. It is by virtue of this position that customary laws are preserved and handed down from one generation to the next.

In recent decades, however, there are external forces which caused the dwindling observance of customary laws among Bugkalots. It appears that migration, the coming of the New Tribes Mission and politics have been identified as the factors that have caused the modification of Bugkalot customary laws.

Intervening Factors of Bugkalot Customary Laws

A. Migration

The Philippines like many other developing countries is faced with a fast movement of its people both internally and externally. Over the years, internal migration is seen as an



important dimension of Philippine demography, most especially at the sub-national level. There are many reasons for this increased activity of internal migration in our country. The obvious disparity in wealth and resources among provinces motivate people to migrate and participate at least in the labor-forces of developed provinces (Tamayao, 1999).

In his study on migration, Tamayao (1999) recounts that internal studies in the Philippines reveal that in 1960, nearly thirteen percent of the population of all ages (representing some 3.4 million persons) were living in a region different from their birth of origin. By 1970, this life migration grew to 13.2 percent or 4.8 million persons (Perez, 1978). During the period between 1960-1970, Flieger, et. al (1976), found that five million persons or fourteen percent of the population in 1970 resided in municipalities different from those they had lived in 1960. Of this number, fifty-one percent crossed regional boundaries and fourteen percent crossed provincial boundaries.

Migration in Quirino province particularly Nagtipunan found its history in the effort of the government to integrate the Bugkalots into mainstream Philippine society. To effect this policy, the government started to deforest the Bugkalot mountains, which not only opened the area to loggers, but paved the way for settlers to live in Bugkalot lands.

Proclamation No. 1498 issued by President Ferdinand E. Marcos made Quirino province a resettlement area for migrants. In the distant past, Quirino was all forest and mountains inhabited solely by Bugkalots and Negritos.

These migrants composed of Ilocanos, Ifugaos, Igorots, and other groups got disclosed due to the establishment of the Ambuklao and Binga dams. Other than these groups, the government encouraged inhabitants from other regions to settle in the Bugkalots forest and mountains. The phenomenon of migration in the province has likewise resulted into the intermarriages of Bugkalots and non-Bugkalots.

Settling in the new territory, the migrants came into a closer interaction with the Bugkalots who became their neighbors and regular acquaintances. Constant association with one another especially on the part of the young familiarized them on each other's qualities leading eventually to marriage.

In Landingan, intermarriage with migrants is a widespread phenomenon although the Bugkalots still constitute the largest indigenous group. Their cultural tradition on endogamous marriage has been altered when it comes to marriage outside their cultural



group – a practice alien to the Bugkalot tradition. This practice was introduced by the members of the migrating groups, who after a short stint of settlement in the place, intermarried with the Bugkalots. At present, intermarriage with a non-Bugkalot has become a part of the Bugkalot marital practices.

Consequently, intermarriage among the Bugkalots has been known as one of the foremost reasons for the slight modification in their customary laws. Children usually adopt the practices of the non-Bugkalot parent and shows growing interest in the non-Bugkalot customs. This observation is true to all Bugkalots who marry a non-Bugkalot.

Finally, it can be said that the cultural elaboration of the Bugkalot culture is attributed to a new kind of socialization taking place in the family. Ilocanos, Ibanags, Itawes, Igorots and Tagalogs who marry a Bugkalot are known to be children-oriented and influence the lives of their children to a great extent. With further socialization taking place in school where Bugkalot children are labelled as “headhunters,” Bugkalot children find it more comfortable to be identified as a non-Bugkalot. With this stigma attached to them, present day Bugkalots prefer to adopt the practices of the non-Bugkalot parent resulting to the erosion of the Bugkalot culture.

B. Religion

The Bugkalots embraced a new set of beliefs and practices in the 1950’s in response to the alarming conditions of uncertainty, powerlessness, and scarcity as a result of foreign colonialism and the security problems during the First Filipino Republic. Throughout history, the Bugkalot community life has been characterized by these conditions as they became the subject of many military expeditions during the Spanish and the American period and Japanese occupation. The Bugkalots during these periods experienced adverse conditions in varying degrees including hunger, starvation, displacements, and even death especially during the Japanese occupation. One-third of the Bugkalot population died due to Japanese brutalities.

In almost every period, the Bugkalots’ response to every external invasion is to retreat into the interior mountains where they gather strength to defend their territory. Moving into a new environment means abandoning the resources available to support life. These experiences of the Bugkalots brought great frustrations and ineptness into their lives.



Amidst this insurmountable social condition, the Bugkalots found hope, strength, and higher meaning in their human sufferings when the New Tribes Mission Philippines (NTMP) in the 1950's penetrated the Bugkalot territories by means of the New Tribes Mission Piper Club. The Piper Club used by the NTM was the first airplane to land in the Bugkalot territory.

The New Tribes Mission (NTM) is an organization of evangelical Protestants from the United States whose interest is to Christianize the Bugkalots. Its primary thrust is to organize a New Testament Church that would empower the natives both in administrative and evangelizing capacities so as to spread the good news of the Holy Bible especially the New Testament. Since 1955, there have been sixteen (16) missionary sites established in Quirino and Nueva Vizcaya.

The NTMP established its first missionary church in Northern Luzon named the Sinabgan Mission in Landingan, Nagtipunan, Quirino. Landingan is an Ilocano word which means "where an aircraft landed," the place where the Piper Club of the New Tribe Mission landed. Landingan became a political subdivision only in 1970.

Mr. Joseph Lee, National Director of the NTMP and Pastor Romeo Tiangson of the Sinabgan Mission reported that the first set of missionaries who laid down the spiritual foundation of the Bugkalots in Quirino did not encounter so much resistance from them due to the militarization of the countryside. The security problems created by the New People's Army pushed them to be receptive to peace efforts. The missionaries offered spiritual conversions to the natives with the hope that they find inner peace within themselves.

Coupled with the willingness of the people to be converted for their spiritual nourishment, the missionaries prepared themselves to be able to undertake their missionary tasks in a place known for its headhunting practice by learning more about the Bugkalot society and culture and by providing literacy and health services. It is a policy of the NTMP that no missionary shall pursue his mission without knowing the natives' culture and society. Having fully learned the language, customs, and traditions of the people, the missionaries created a convenient atmosphere necessary for the spiritual conversions of the Bugkalots. Preaching the gospel in the local language and living with them manifested the sincere interest of the missionaries to help them embrace the new religious faith.

On the other hand, the missionaries came to the lives of the natives in a period when they seemed to have been completely abandoned by the government. By providing literacy



education and health programs to the Bugkalots, the missionaries were treated by the natives as the messiah coming to their rescue. Missionary teachers extended literacy education to both young and old Bugkalots enabling them to learn the basic principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Missionary doctors and nurses attended to their health problems that were at their peak due to poor sanitation and other related causes. Free medication was extended for the first time in a place where hospitals were non-existent and roads were lacking. With the experience of Christian concern and love from the missionaries, the natives became open for conversion. Evangelization crept deeper into the Bugkalot territory.

A few years after they began their evangelization in 1955, the NTMP saw the fruits of their labor as they were able to translate the Bible into the Bugkalot dialect with the help of the pioneering converts who serve as translators of the Bible. To the Bugkalots goes the reputation of being the first indigenous people who translated the Bible. Also, the Bugkalots, in their desire to prepare themselves to become church leaders, wrote a book titled "God and Man" which serves as their manual in teaching the scriptures effectively.

Mr. Joseph Lee further notes that the Bugkalots' conditions in 1950's have led the latter to embrace the new religion as they were able to translate Jesus' sufferings to their present life and draw inspiration from it. The New Tribes Mission never intended the Bugkalots to turn their backs to their culture but instead aimed to preserve the natives' most cherished cultural traditions. Nonetheless, there were group practices which run counter to the teachings of the church such as headhunting, adultery, idolatry, and others. Through the teaching of the core spiritual and moral values, the Bugkalots learned to completely abandon these practices particularly headhunting – a tradition the group has been known for centuries. Eliminating this practice has created a new identity amongst the Bugkalots and has brought them closer to the lowlanders who are also Christians.

On the impact of the NTM to the Bugkalots, AmaBasilang, one of the early converts of the mission in 1955 said:

The greatest legacy of the missionaries to me and the other Bugkalots is to teach us the evils of headhunting and to get rid of it. Without them, the natives should have been wallowing still in the darkness of sin, killing fellow Bugkalots and the lowlanders. With the coming of the NTM, we were taught how to love our fellowmen and value our life. Today, we value life



that's why there is concern and love among us. The missionaries further taught us how to live with a purpose and to live harmoniously with others. They brought us peace and taught us to become instruments of peace. In doing these, we learned that we should not put so much value on material things because this has always been the source of feuds and wars between and among families and community members. Too much interest on material wealth will imperil our relationship to our fellowmen and to God.

One may say that the Bugkalots concept of property to some extent has been influenced by the new faith. This new influence would have been a paradox to their century-old concept that land is the most important property that every Bugkalot should possess. Among the Bugkalot converts, possession of material wealth particularly land should not be the “end all” and the “be all” of life.

With this perspective, the transfer of customary laws on property and inheritance has been slightly changed. From a generation where property, especially land, was much valued and considered to be the most important instrument to sustain life comes a new belief. This is the belief that more than material wealth, there is life beyond which is the source of inner peace and eternal happiness.

Although Bugkalot customary laws on property and inheritance are still handed down to the present, the traditional perception of land being the supreme purpose of human existence is slowly changing. This is manifested in some prevailing practices such as sale, mortgage, and lease of properties like land. However, the tradition of perfecting the transaction among the Bugkalots themselves as a practice constitutes the core value of Bugkalot customary on property.

C. Politics

Politics is an indispensable component of the social system. Its major function is to enforce the laws necessary for the protection of the people and for the maintenance of social order. Unlike other structures of the social system, politics is associated with power and the authority or rule imposing its supremacy over the subjects. In preliterate societies, politics is vested on the hands of the native elders or leaders.

Politics among ethnic communities is undergoing gradual changes. Among the Bugkalots, the power to rule or the authority to manage affairs of the community is traditionally kept in the hands of the *begangit*. As its acknowledged leader, he is the sole decision-maker in the



community. His functions include settling of disputes according to traditions, making and imposing community laws, and punishing offenders of the laws. His ascending to the ranks is based on the number of heads he had cut and his ability to articulate the needs and aspirations of the community. The *begangitis* the sole political figure in the Bugkalot society. But subtle changes in the political structure of the Bugkalot community started in 1970 when Landingan became a barangay of Maddela, Quirino and one of the sixteen (16) barangays of Nagtipunan, Quirino in February 21, 1981. Although most of its leaders are also native elders, the prestigious title of a *begangithas* been transferred to the barangay officials signifying their assimilation to the state political structure and their submission to state laws. Although the government recognizes the cultural integrity of the group, there are general laws that demand conformity even if it means violation of the cultural traditions. Since its recognition as a barangay unit in 1970, Landingan has been headed by respected barangay leaders like SalawagDangpal, Tabewang Ramos, Ruben Ramos, Angel Gonzales, and presently Teddy Raciles. All these officials gained their position through the democratic process of an election. From then on, there has been gradual transfer of authority from the *begangitto* a state-run bureaucratic structure. Being a part of the state political structure can be seen in the following instances:

1. Decision-making was traditionally the sole function of the *begangit* based on the customs and traditions of the people. Today, such power is exercised by the barangay council whose members are elected by the people. It is noted, however, that despite the shift in political power, the *begangit* still plays a major role in the formulation of ordinances. Consultation with the *begangitis* made often by the barangay council which is a vivid reflection that his status and authority are acknowledged. His wisdom and opinions are sought by the council on matters affecting the barangay making him an adviser of the community. This reflects that the structural change in the polity did not totally set aside the basic framework of their customary practices. The central configuration of their customary law which is represented by the power and influence of the *begangit* remains alive and functional.

2. The introduction of the western judicial system has also greatly influenced the lives of the natives. By tradition, civil and criminal cases were settled by the *begangit* based on the Bugkalot tradition. Acting as a judge, the *begangit* settles disputes not only on the merits of the case but on the social implications of the decision to the entire group. At present, cases



are categorized as civil or criminal and then brought before the local court whose decision is final. Furthermore, since cases are decided based on the evidence presented, they entail long and tedious court litigation. In this sense, the party who can avail of the services of the best lawyer and have the most financial resources would most likely be in an advantaged position over the other party. With this new system, the Bugkalots find the judicial process disturbing, laborious, and expensive. In conflict resolution therefore, they prefer to utilize the process used in their customary law. In many instances, disputes on properties are resolved in the barangay level with the mediation of the *begangit*. His intervention does not create political tension with the power of the elected barangay officials because they recognize their experience in conflict resolution. With this unique blend of new political structure and traditional procedure, no record from the municipal court shows that disputes were forwarded and settled in the formal court. Again, this mirrors the preservation of the central elements of the Bugkalot customary laws with peripheral changes in its structure and processes.

CONCLUSION

It can be deduced from the Bugkalots' experience in Landingan that the old socio-political institutions that embody the Bugkalot way of life has been influenced by new concepts. But despite the ongoing pressures and the influence of the dominant society to the Bugkalots' indigenous social order, the cultural traditions contained in the indigenous worldview are not completely lost. Present-day Bugkalots still carry with them the vestiges of the old social order and is a source of their identity which is strong enough to spark a cultural group. Whatever the current social and political environment today, the Bugkalots want to maintain the central features of the old social order that they themselves determined. Such is the basic essence of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA) which highlights the quest for self-determination of indigenous Filipino communities. Self-determination means that the Bugkalots can preserve their traditional social order amidst current and pressing forces. It further allows them to re-define, re-develop, and re-defend all aspects of their lives in order to restore their rich culture and continue to shape their own destiny as a people.



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