

*Nakaparsuaan, Kadagaan,
and Panaglunit ti Daga:*
Climate Justice and Environmental
Ethics in Ilokano Life

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Abstract

The work offers an interpretation of the world as understood and being lived until today by Ilokanos. Such a reading involves the plumbing into linguistic and cultural data as proofs of an inchoate philosophy that has been preserved in the minds of the Ilokano people and which continues to guide their conduct. The world, understood as the physical environment, peoples, and communities, is linked back to the problem of social justice and stewardship of living and nonliving things, to the issue of who calls the shots in the unethical exploitation of these resources, and to the lessons that can be learned from how the Ilokanos have understood their place in the cosmos where ethical co-existence is required and where care of the environment is a must.

Keywords: *Ilokano cosmology, kadagaan, nakaparsuaan, climate justice, environmental rights, stewardship, cosmic healing*

Suitable Seasons and Ilokano Cosmology

Like those trying to piece together what is left of the layers and layers of erasure in the various ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines and the world, my interest on the indigenous issues of stewardship, climate justice, and environmental ethics began while I was growing up in Ilocos Norte, when the cycle of the seasons in that part of the country marked our childhood and youthful innocence about a lot of things. For some years during the summer months, drought would linger, frustrating the farmers that, with excitement and agony, waited for the first rains of May so they could begin to sow their grains. By that ritual act of seeding the furrowed soil, they began to think of the earth, the cosmos, and the universe as their ally in eking out a life of sufficiency, hopefully more abundant than the last time they had the harvest. And when the torrential rains came, these would come for days and days on end as if in vengeance. The *siamsiam*,¹ literally nine days of downpour,

¹ Several days of heavy rains usually leading to flooding; the reference to nine days (*siam*, in Ilokano) is a fossilized metaphor, most likely alluding to a remote past about nine days of downpour; today, the rains need not be for nine days but continuous downpour that last for days. All translations into English, unless otherwise noted, are from the various dictionaries I wrote. Details of these dictionaries are in the reference section of this work. *A note on*

would bring about untold suffering for farmers and their families, with their life on hold, and with their life at the mercy of the elements until the *sirnaat*,² the calm after the rains, came. The streams, used to the laidback way of summer by gurgling gaily and unstoppably, would now be swelling, promptly drowning the flatlands of plotted rice fields. There would be floods of various human names, always female in those days, and the rivers would swell, and on their way to sea in the west, would carry animals and crops and huts and sometimes people and deposit their loot to the big bowel of salty water.³ Because of these experiences,

the Ilokano terms: when used for the first time, these are italicized; otherwise, they are rendered as regular words thereafter.

² A dialectal variation is *sirnaut*. It refers to the letup, that pause and some calm, after days and days of rain.

³ There are a variety of sources that I freely deploy in this essay: (1) my field work in various places in the Ilocos, Ilokianized-areas in Northern Luzon, diasporic Ilokano households in Metro Manila, various Ilokano groups in the Visayas (particularly Metropolitan Cebu) and Mindanao, particularly Zamboanga City, Dapitan City, General Santos City, and Bukidnon; (2) my lexicographic work; (3) my field work in a number of diasporic Ilokano communities outside the country; and (4) my creative work, particularly the novel, where by way of the narrative technique I take a second look at how Ilokanos look at their individual and social experience as they remain or move away from their place of birth.

In the *Dangadang*, I have done a preliminary account of the concept of “land” and “stewardship” through the core concept of *kadagaan* when the key characters of the novel moved from Ilocos to go to Mindanao and take part in the “land of promise” exodus courtesy of the Philippine government. They found the land of promise but realized that there was no promise in the land they found; this forced the characters to go back to Luzon and eke out a life in another land of promise by opening a homestead in Isabela; in that last “land of promise,” the Agtarap family would take root. *Kadagaan* will be explained in full in the latter part of this work.

I began to gradually understand that when a farmer's life is intertwined with the seasons, it was no longer correct to say that the seasons were but two as was taught in the schools, with the seasons either dry or wet, or the divided months of each year either hot or cold.

These were more, the seasons, as the behavior of the cosmos determined the behavior of the farming people as well. In places where the sea provided livelihood, the combined behavior of these external forces provided the universe through which Ilokano⁴ life would be defined.⁵ The

⁴ There are productive variations of this term, with "Ilokano" being used in its technical term being used at the University of Hawaii Ilokano Program and the Mariano Marcos State University Graduate School. The MMSU offers a master's degree in education major in Ilokano Studies, the first of its kind in the Philippines. Popular magazines such as *TMI Journal* and *Bannawag* and other popular religious publications also use that rendition. Others use Ilocano, and in the earlier times, as reported by Foronda, six other variations were used: Yloquio, Ilocos, Ylocos, Yllocos, Ylucos, and Yloco. See Marcelino A. Foronda, Jr., *Dallang: An Introduction to Philippine Literature in Ilokano and Other Essays* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1978), 47.

⁵ In June 2018, on a visiting professor appointment from a state university in the country, I brought my graduates students for a field work in Sitio Hacienda, a remote village in a bigger barrio called Canaam in Vintar, an eastern town of the Ilocos Norte; the town leads to the Cordilleras; the village is peopled by a mix of indigenous group that called themselves Isneg or Itneg, and Ilokanos. In this field work, I learned from the Isneg of the "healing of the land" they call *lunit* and of the process involved, *panaglunit*. All of these have provided the backdrop for a continued critical understanding of the material world as this world reveals facets of the transcendent. In the end, I realized more and more of the meaning of caring for the world, of stewarding it in order to make it a (a) *pagnaedan*, a dwelling-place for all that is alive, and a (b) *paggianan*, "where-they-are-found place" for all that has no life but are important to those who are alive and for the maintenance of the entire make-up of the universe.

account of the *tribunada*⁶ phenomenon in Nagabungan, a sitio in Davila, Pasuquin, comes to mind. All of a sudden, the sea went berserk and swallowed up those who went to fish.⁷ There is a term the people use, both for the sea or for a river or even for a physical space, like the curve of a road or a bridge: *mangal-ala*.⁸ There is a whole lot of social psychology involved in this concept of a “place prone to taking life” or “having the ability to snuff out life at will.” There are, indeed, places of kindness and generosity, but there are places that are capably brutal and violent as well. The key to this is the ecology of that relationship between people and inanimate things, between those who claim that they are at the center of the universe, and those that they dismiss as mere parts of the physical world.

⁶ A squall, a sudden gust of wind, a sudden fierce storm in a particular area usually in a body of water such as the sea, or a violent gust of wind and rain and coupled with strong currents. See Aurelio S. Agcaoli, *Kontemporaneo a Diksionario nga Ilokano-Ingles. Contemporary Ilokano-English Dictionary. Comprehensive Edition* (Quezon City: Cornerstone of Arts and Sciences Publishers, 2011), 1643.

⁷ From the account of various informants in a field work conducted in 1996. *Nagabungan*, a toponym, is the location of a port that has seen better days; the term *nagabungan* (*nag* + *abung* + *-an*) speaks of a place where one has put up his or her hut, the *abung*. Historically, this leads us to the time when the port was still in operation and that those who had something to do with the port operations must have put up their huts in that part of a bigger village, Davila.

⁸ That which takes; that which takes the life of people; that which causes accident to happen and resulting in harm or even death. It is from this inflection: *mang-R-ala*, where R is the reduplicated form of the syllable of the *punget-a-ramut a balikas* (PAR of the word) or the root-stem of the resulting word.

In the life of the Ilokanos, the world as the physical and material universe is both a friend and a foe. When this world brings in sunshine, as predicted at the break of day, this is the world that blesses. When the early evening hours of the *suripet*⁹ comes, and children, out in the yards playing peek-a-boo and boys' war, go home to roost, the young night is a blessing. The night, dark and quiet, is referred to in terms of deep water. For the Ilokano, midnight is simply *adalem*,¹⁰ far down from the surface, some of the time unfathomable. Seduced by the limitless possibilities of the metaphorical, the Ilokano succumbs to the timeless temptation of the equivocal and becomes clearly and intentionally ambiguous. The inexplicable, it seems, is poetic. And it must be so.

Several questions guide the direction of this essay. How are the concepts and practice of stewardship, climate justice, and environmental ethics intertwined? How do the Ilokanos name their world and their relationship to that world? In their naming¹¹ of their world, how do they understand their

⁹ It is the twilight, that moment when day ends and night comes. For the Ilokano, it is much more as this might be the time when nonperson, or nonhuman, entities take cover in the darkness and reclaim their co-existence among people.

¹⁰ An adjective, it means literally deep, as in "*Adalemen ti rabii idi simmangpetda.*" ("It was already midnight when they arrived."). Two English phrases, both idioms, come to mind here: "deep of night" or "dead of night." Both allude to silence, the quietest of the hours when life seems to be at a standstill.

¹¹ The naming of the world and human experience, a willful act as seen in the act of the epic hero, Lam-ang, is common among Ilokanos. See Leopoldo Y. Yabes, *The Ilokano Epic: A Critical Study of the "Life of Lam-ang", Ancient Ilokano Popular Poem, with a Translation of the Poem Into English Prose* (Manila: Carmelo & Bauermann, Inc., 1935).

place in this bigger scheme of things of which they are just a speck? Why is there a need to care about the universe when people do not last, when people go back to the earth after a brief, peregrine existence?

In trying to understand these questions that relate to the concepts of caring for the world, for doing what is fair to the “earth of mankind,”¹² and for translating into action our commitment to a balanced relationship with the environment, I will do (a) a lexicographic reading of the key terms used by the Ilokanos in the everyday, and (b) a discursive accounting of what these terms mean in the context of the broader life practices of the people. The performative dynamic of locating these terms in their broader context or contexts, hopefully, will result in a tentative synthesis on how Ilokanos fully understand their place in this world and how they get morally engaged with the environment in order to sustain life on earth, life that is not only human but also

For other discussions on value of naming in the bigger work of decolonization and de-programming, and thus, toward more emancipatory practices, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2006). Include Paulo Freire on “naming” as an emancipatory praxis: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000). Also, in the many erroneous and colonial act of naming for the wrong reason in Ilocos, see Isabelo de los Reyes, *History of Ilocos*, V1 and V2, trans. Maria Elinora Peralta-Imson (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2014) and Juan A. Foronda and Marcelino A. Foronda Jr., *Two Essays on Iloko History* (Manila: Arnoldus Press, 1972).

¹² Cf. Pramodya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind*, trans. Maxwell Lane (Jakarta: Hasra Mitra, 1980).

cosmic, transcendent, and ecological. Towards the end, I will also argue that the Western ideas of (a) anthropocentrism, (b) absolute and unrestrained private property, and (c) capitalistic exploitation of nature are the very antithesis of climate justice and environmental ethics. These are harmful practices that are contradictory to how the Ilokanos understand who they are in this earth of mankind.

Naming Oneself, Naming the Cosmos

The awareness of the world within and without—the world in the interiority of a person and the world outside that interiority—is perhaps best demonstrated in that very act of Lam-ang of naming himself. As soon as the boy Lam-ang was born, he told his mother, Namongan: “Ay, mother Namongan, when you have me baptized, baptize me with the name Lam-ang, and my god-father shall be the old man Guiban.”¹³ The translation of “baptism” into English, of course, does not do justice to the original way it was worded to account a world—a phenomenon I have called “wor(l)ding” in previous works—where Ilokano can imagine and reside in. The world, as imagined, comes from word or that limitless possibilities of finite human language to bring into fruition new realities that are, in most cases, drawn from the significant human

¹³ The original Ilokano from the Yabes composite runs this way: “*Ay, ina ngamin Namongan, / no innakto pabuniagan / tinto Lam-ang kaniak maiapanagan. / ket ti manganak ni lakay Guiban.*”

experiences. In that translation of “baptism,” something was lost, the reference to a mythic and metaphysical world of the Ilokano rendered incomprehensible. The key to that naming-as-related-to-baptism is the Ilokano *panagbuniag*, or the process of going through the rite of baptism. The English language cannot capture the Ilokano experience here. The inflected word, *panagbuniag*, comes from prefix (*panag*), a PAR (cf. footnote number 8) *buni*, and an excess suffix, possibly a fossilized form of an older suffix, or a part of the PAR, *-ag*. The reference to the *buni*, either a god occupying a top tier in the Ilokano pantheon of divinities much like Lungao or Lung-aw, indicates a religious experience of the Ilokano, one requiring a rite and a ritual, the ceremony apparently communal. There are no details of this *panagbuniag* in the epic, but a clue to what this is all about leads us another rite, a renaming. This is called *buniag-iti-sirok-ti latok*, and it continues to be practiced in the more remote places of the Ilocos and Ilokanized areas.¹⁴

Other accounts of naming lead us to the very source of Ilokano or Ilocos itself,¹⁵ away from the narrative of the Spanish colonizers where language did not solve problems but instead gave the Ilokano people trouble, with them

¹⁴ An elaborate renaming ritual aimed at curing the ailment of someone, usually a young person. The assumption is that the person’s given name does not suit him or her, and thus, he or she needs to be given another name.

¹⁵ See Aurelio S. Agcaoili, *Kontemporaneo a Diksiionario nga Ilokano-Ingles/Contemporary English-Ilokano Dictionary* (Quezon City: Cornerstone of Arts and Sciences Publishers, 2011), 578-579.

almost always unable to understand what the Spaniard was asking but, acting out of respect, submission, or ignorance or a combination of any of those, the Ilokano answered nevertheless, hence, the almost farcical stories about how a place has been named or how something that is important in the life of the people has been given a name. In all these colonial accounts, the Ilokano has always been portrayed as the village idiot.

One of the latest *ili*,¹⁶ a town in the Ilokanized part of Quirino in Cagayan Valley Region, decided to name itself Nagtipunan (nag + *tipun* + an). From a social perspective, it is a place where people came into a union, the Ilokano concept *tipun*¹⁷ providing the engine in which a new place could come into being out of an old one or as in the case of this *ili*, out of the “coming together” of portions of some of the older places. In this new place, a new group of people were born, the “Nagtipuneros.” Here, in Nagtipunan, while Ilokanos dominate the demographic, other people have come into the place to share the same goods of the Nagtipunan earth. It is the promise of the earth of giving a new lease on life that moved people to come here, carve out farming lots from meadows and prairies or hillsides, and coax the soil to nourish the seeds the farmers sow. The common saying runs this way: “*Taripatuem ti daga ta taripatuennaka met*—You take care

¹⁶ Politically and administratively today, it is a town. Culturally, it is the community of the same people.

¹⁷ Gathering or assembly; also, the union of separate parts or individuals.

of the earth because it also takes care of you.”¹⁸ It is a saying that is heard most often in the Ilocos, whether this Ilocos is referred to an Ilokos Makin-uneq (or Inner Ilocos, referring to the original Ilocos provinces) as opposed to an imagined, but also real Ilocos called Ilokos Makinruar (or Outer Ilocos, referring to the Ilokanized areas in the Cordilleras and the Cagayan Valley, the Central Luzon area, some parts of the Southern Tagalog, and by extension in the Visayas and Mindanao).

From a topographic sense, Nagtipunan also means a “convergence point,” the exact place where three tributaries from Aurora, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino flow into the mighty Cagayan River. The waters converging bring about multiple possibilities of a better life; with water, the people can farm better, can coax the river to give off fish for food, and can help temper the mapping of the cosmos, that act of navigating it by way of a “magnetic north” such as that which is produced by a compass is realized by the Ilokano in a different way. To understand the physical and where you are in that physical world, you only need to summon two cosmic elements: the wind and the sun.

The Ilokanos of the past, until today, do not have to have a recourse to that mechanical apparatus that tells you the

¹⁸ Initial field data were collected in May 2008 when the author first set foot in Nagtipunan, then only twenty years old. The town was founded on February 25, 1983, and by way of a plebiscite, was approved on September 24, 1983.

four main directions. The first of the elementary direction, the sense of the north, is provided by the source of the wind and where it goes. In the logic of correlativity, the *amian*—the north wind—comes from the north and blows south whereas the other part of the correlative, the *abagat* (or south wind), comes from the south, and blows north. The lesson is clear here: when one is attuned to the seeming vagaries of the weather, one can also discover some constants, like the *amian* serving as a reference point. Today, for instance, the Ilocos is referred to as Northern Philippines, and it is so because the cold north wind comes from there and blows south. The locative suffix, *-an*, completes the north-south direction: *amianan* (the place where the *amian* comes from) and *abagatan* (the place where the *abagat* comes from).

This direction, a clear reading of the physical world, is complemented by the tropical life of the Ilokanos, their dependence on the sun one of clarity. As the sun metaphorically rises, its rays streak through the clouds and mountain fastness of the Cordilleras. The rays, *raya* in Austronesian and which the Ilokano language appropriated as *daya*, is where the east is while the west, the place where the West Philippine Sea is, is the *laud*. The allophones work in this lexicographic account: with the r/l/d allophone operating in the *daya/raya* pair (for the east) and d/t allophone working in the *laud/laut*. With this set, one cannot be lost in the Ilocos: where the mountains are and where the sun's rays come out, that is where your east is;

where you see the sea, that is your laud. Here, the Ilokano, at least lexicographically, does not think in terms of the “rising” and the “setting” of the sun as initial metaphors in the sense of direction; instead, we have landmarks offered by the wind and the sea. In a different light, in the level of the poetic, there is reference to these, with the operative words *singising or leggak* (where the sun comes out) and *lennek* or *lenned* (where the sun sets or sinks) but this is not warranted by the literal level of the lexicographic entries accounting for the amian, abagatan, daya, abagatan, laud, and daya (north, east, south, west).

The material world, thus is mapped by Ilokanos by summoning a variety of approaches to wit, (1) verisimilitude, in Simmaba, like the *saba*, banana; (2) ordinary event, in Nagpartian, where people had the *parti*, the act of slaughtering, (3) historical event, in Pinili, a chosen *ili*, town), or (4) celebration of being a new townspeople in a new place usually in exile or in the diaspora, in Kavintaran for a barrio in Valencia City, in Bukidnon, where there are so many people coming from a town in Vintar, Ilocos Norte or Kavintaran in Nueva Vizcaya, where the settlers came from that same Vintar town in Ilocos Norte. There are other forces and reasons for this mapping of a terrain, a geography, or a place but these four are sufficient for now.

This leads us to the more important point in understanding the three concepts problematized by this essay: *kadagaan*, *nakaparsnaan*, and *panaglunit ti daga*.

Kadagaan, a noun abtracized and further nominalized from another noun, *daga*, is a complex word. The prefix *ka*, in this example, speaks of a description, with the power of the absolute superlative being referenced, as in the case of *kaimbagan*, the “best” or better yet, “the most good.” Let it be noted that this is not the superlative that requires comparison—that it did not come from measuring two things and then figuring out which has more of the quality than the other. Instead, *kadagaan* is a result of an act, like a man moving to another place, usually an unfamiliar and a new one, and there, discovering if that land is a fit, if that land is meant for him, if that land is the one that has been promised him.

The allusion to “a promised land” is invoked here in order to open up the possibility that not all lands—and we refer here to physical lands that are physical spaces too—are suitable to everyone. Or the opposite is possible: that the one moving to a new place is suited to its character, to its vibe, to the opportunities it offers, or to the demands it exacts from the stranger that just came in. Somewhere in my work on the sociohistorical novel, *Dangadang*,¹⁹ I narrated of the story of the Agtarap family that tried to move to Mindanao to take part in the “land of promise” narrative of the government only to find out that the place is not their

¹⁹ Aurelio S. Agcaoili, *Dangadang* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2003).

kadagaan. Life was harder there. The Agtarap brothers were often sick than healthy. As farming folks that relied more on their physical stamina than anything else, sickness is a sentence when one is worried about the delicate ways of taking care of the land, of adjusting to the cycle of sowing and harvesting, and of fighting off the vagaries of the seasons, suitable or unsuitable. In effect, kadagaan is both grace and a gift: grace because it could be an unmerited favor from the heavens, and gift because it was willingly given by whoever grants good life to those who have just moved to a new land. It is also a bane as it is pathological, as it causes anxiety or pain, as it causes one to lose hope in making a living with a little bit of ease. When a place is not one's kadagaan, the result is *dis-ease*, a metaphor that suggests to the newcomer to better leave and find another place, another land, another soil, or another earth.

Among Ilokanos, there is that persistent connection with the land, the connection friendly and familiar when man the caretaker knows how to take care of it. When one is born outside the Western medical health care institutions such as hospitals and clinics, the midwives or their assistant can get so busy with getting the umbilical cord, have this kept on an open earthen pot, and then either let this left in the river to float and then flow toward the sea. Others would hang this on the topmost part of the tree or have it buried deep in the ground. Failure to do these things would result in the infant becoming lost and unable to find his way in the world;

becoming stupid (when the umbilical cord is just thrown away); or being unable to find his corner of the earth under the sun. In this act of burying the umbilical cord, man becomes earth—becomes a man of the earth. In return, the earth becomes man's—becomes the earth of mankind.

In all these patterns of everyday life of the Ilokano, we see the constancy of that connection between people and the world. For the Ilokano, the world, as understood in the cosmological sense, is *lubong*.²⁰ But *lubong* here is a bit tricky, as it is also passion, desire, eros, lust, and all those that refer to the creative as understood in various myths, the Greek myth of the erotic included, which is a concept that is antithetical to *Thanatos*, or death. In this world as physical and external, there is the heaven upward, the *langit*, where the firmament is, the *tangatang*, and where below, apparently, is a place of suffering, *kasanaan*. There is the active concept of liberation of the souls (or spirits) of the dead, and death is not death per se, but a moving on to another place, a crossing of the river of life, with that other side of the river poeticized as the place of rest. The whole concept is termed *panagballasim*, that act of crossing over by paying the boatman with coins, and the payment, a small act of justice, must be exact.

²⁰ Aurelio S. Agcaoili, *Monolingual a Diksiionario ken Tesoro nga Ilokano*, manuscript, due for release in 2019.

In that *lubong*, we have the elements: the bodies of water, the mountains, the wind, the sun, the moon. The remnant of the Ilokanos' reverential regard of these elements is the use of the *apo* in a number of this, for instance, Apo Init (Reverend Sun), Apo Bulan (Reverend Moon), Apo Daga (Reverend Earth), and the like. One of the more fluid concepts in Ilokano, the *apo* as a word of respect is also applicable to the divine, *Apo Dios* (Lord God or Reverend God), or to the saints, like Apo Virgen Maria (Reverend Virgin Mary). But it is also used to give honor to leaders, to esteemed members of the community, or to the elders in the family or in the village, thus, Apo Mayor, Apo Presidente, or Apo Lakay. Apo is initially assigned to inanimate things, to people and to the divinities, but it is an extended word of reverence and respect to the sun, the moon, and to the earth. The earth, where the soil is, is not just earth: it is Apo Daga. It means that it is alive, or that some semblance of life must be accorded to this earth on which human beings live, reside, love, celebrate, hope, and pray to their gods and goddesses. This earth as an Ilokano concept extends to its astronomical meaning.

Healing the Earth

In various healing practices of the Ilokanos, one that comes out that is close to the issue of climate justice and environmental ethics, is the tradition of the *baglan*. Like the Visayan *bailan/baylan* (or *babaylan*), the Ilokano *baglan* is the one called to become the intermediary between the healing

gods, spirits, divinities, and cosmic forces. It is thus a vocation. One must be called to do this service to the community; you do not gain this. In the true scheme of things, the *baglan* is but an intermediary, with the power to heal coming from outside him or her. Linked to this concept is the possibility that one might hurt other nonhuman entities if he or she is not careful, hence, the need to always say those warnings that sometimes sound like limericks, but function as prayers or incantations. For instance, one does not just cut a tree without asking permission from the spirit that lives under or around or on the tree. Failure to ask permission might mean the occurrence of sickness inflicted upon by the *mangmangkik*, that *anito* that lives in forests, in trees. One incantation that is still being used until today is this: “*Bari, bari/ Dika agung-unget, pari/ Ta pumukankami/ Iti pabakirda kadakami.*”²¹ One cannot cut a tree at will; that is what this “*baribari*” is all about. One is connected to the tree, to the soil that holds the tree, and to the mountain that gives home to the tree. And one must ask permission from that nonperson entity that dwells there. In this relationship with the earth and its elements, it is easier to fail than to succeed, hence, the ceremony of appeasement comes in handy to correct such mistakes, such callousness, and such

²¹ De los Reyes, *History of the Ilocos*, V1 and V2, p. 87. The free translation would be: “*Bari, bari/ Do not get mad, sir/ I would just cut/ That which was asked of me to cut.*”

disregard for other beings coexists with people in that same material and physical space.

Other things that link us back to this need for sensitivity to the earth would be (a) *pateted*, the spilling of wine as soon as the first bottle has been opened onto the ground, with the incantation, “Bagiyo, apo!” (“Partake of the same wine!”) or (b) the *padara*, the spilling of blood (usually from chicken or from a pig) before one can ever put up the post of a house. With all these, we realize that the idea that people are the center of the world, the cosmos, the universe, is a wrong concept. There is no center in this relationship except that relationship that binds all. The anthropocentric view from the West that justifies our exploitation of earthly (or natural) resources is based on the premise that people have been given the license to do what they please in the world. This is absolutely wrong for the Ilokano: you get what you need. Do not get what you do not need. And then you produce—and produce only what you need. There is no need for excess, for oversupply. When a wrong has been done, propitiation becomes a must. The *atang*, a part of the narrative of healing the fissure in the relationship, must be resorted to, and the one who offers the *atang* is the person who erred or his representative. The one that initiates that propitiation before everything comes in too late is the human being, not the nonhuman entity. The role of the *baglan* here is to divine what went wrong and to serve as the intermediary in the healing process.

Climate Justice and Environmental Ethics

The Ilokanos have come into the 21st century, and yet all these rites and rituals have remained part of their daily lives in this age of social media. Even in the diasporic communities, those who understand the importance of these practices in the past continue to perform this, thereby making the practice current, and the memory attached to this practice alive. Somewhere in Laoag, the belief in the storm coming from the sea is that someone caught and slaughtered a *pawikan*, a marine turtle, and that it is avenging its death. Somewhere, too, in Bacsil, a remote barrio of that same city, there is this concept of *banata*. The *banata* works this way: some lands, some forests, or some parts of the communal spaces are collectively agreed as something no one owns, or no one can ever own. This is reserved for all members of the community, and thus one can freely gather firewood or bamboo shoots or mushrooms from that *banata*. After more than four hundred years of Spanish colonization in the Ilocos (the Salcedo group claimed the Ilocos for his king in 1572) that, historically, led to the idea of private property and the titling of lands that rendered the original inhabitants of the Ilocos dispossessed except those inhabitants that learned to cheat the others by allying with the colonizers, *banata* has stood the test of time, and continues to be a communal practice in many areas. In the *Bali Principles of Climate Justice*, Article 18 stands out in relation to what this work wants to achieve: “Climate justice

affirms the rights of communities dependent on natural resources for their livelihood and cultures to own and manage the same in a sustainable manner, and is opposed to the commodification of nature and its resources.”²² Prior to the coming of the Spaniards and the other colonizers, land titling was practically nil in the Ilocos. No one could claim the seashore. No one could claim a mountain as his property. No one could claim the black sand in rivers. But with everything commodified and disposed for profit, all these natural resources have been treated no longer as part of the earth as Earth, the Apo Daga, or Lubong. We have lost the eros in the Lubong as a result, and now, Thanatos had found its way into the world of the Ilokanos, with mountains being dug up or tunneled for whatever mineral deposits these might have for those hungering for gold and silver and some other things that they can sell to the global market.

In this changed way of looking at the world, there has been a collapsing of the concept of nature as *nakaparsuaan*, and with the *pinarsua* totally rendered as objects, things, inanimate, and commodities, while *namarsua* has been reduced to a spectator. The reverential “Apo” relationship has been lost, and the exploitation of the physical world

²² See International Climate Justice Network, “Bali Principles of Climate Justice,” accessed September 30, 2018, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/bali-principles-of-climate-justice>.

continues. At the *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*, there is a portion of the "People's Agreement" that says a lot about what people have done and not done, and about its obligation to correct the iniquity it has created in the world: "Developed countries, as the main cause of climate change, in assuming their historical responsibility, must recognize and honor their climate debt in all of its dimensions as the basis for a just, effective, and scientific solution to climate change. [. . .] The focus must not be only on financial compensation, but also on restorative justice, understood as the restitution of integrity to our Mother Earth and all its beings."²³ Part of that restorative approach to the problem is the idea that there is climate debt that must be paid, not by the dispossessed, not by the poor, not by the developing countries but those who have exploited other people's natural resources.

In June 2018, on a visiting professor appointment from a state university in the Philippines, I brought my graduate students for field work in Sitio Hacienda, a remote village in a bigger barrio called Canaam in Vintar, an eastern town of the Ilocos Norte; the town leads to the Cordilleras; the village is peopled by a mix of indigenous groups that called themselves Isneg or Itneg, and Ilokanos. In this field work, I

²³ Indigenous Environmental Network, "World People's Conference on Climate Change," accessed September 30, 2018, <http://www.ienearth.org/world-peoples-conference-on-climate-change/>.

learned from the Isneg of the “healing of the land” they call “*lunit*,” and the process, “*panaglunit*.” That was my first-ever encounter of that kind of a conceptualization of a reality that is part of the day-to-day life of the Isneg/Itneg and the Ilokano people who live among them. I knew of *lunit* from a lexicographic perspective, but I did not know it as part and parcel of the collective of the Sitio Hacienda people. Our informant, Bert Agbayani, explained to us the *lunit*/*panaglunit* phenomenon. He said that when the rains come and the roads are not navigable, the people of Sitio Hacienda and all other communities similarly situated, carve out trails from the slopes of the mountains usually. The trails usually follow the river. They would use these trails to go to the town to sell their goods or buy their weekly supplies. When the summer months come and the roads have been repaired, the people allow the trails to grow plants and shrubs to strengthen the soil clinging from the mountain sides. They call this the *lunit* and the whole process of allowing the soil of the trails to heal, *panaglunit*. When the feeder roads have become impossible to navigate again, they would open up the trails, and carve up footpaths for people to use.

Conclusion: Nature *Naturing*, Nature *Natured*

In the Latin world, and as explained by medieval philosophy, there is the binary that explains the divide in the concept of “nature.” There is that nature that is created, the *natura naturata*, so says a philosopher in his cosmology; there

is that nature that is also uncreated, and thus, is the cause of the created nature. This is the *natura naturans*, “nature naturing.” This is to differentiate it from the first form of nature, the created one, that nature that is “natured.”²⁴ In the Ilokano mind, there is clarity of the location of man in these idea of the “cosmos,” the “universe,” and all the other elements that constitute such realities, whether physical or transcendent or both. In the whole scheme of things, the Ilokanos are clear about two things, a form of a binary, but is not a totalizing binary: “*namarsua*” and “*pinarsua*.” *Namarsua*, from the root “*parsua*”, is a nominalized verb, a past participle becoming a noun: the one that created, and thus, creator. *Pinarsua*, on the other hand, is the created, the result of the act of the “*namarsua*,” (*nang* + *parsua*, from *mang* + *parsua*, “the one who will create”). *Nakaparsuaan*, the condition of having been created, suggests about the *natura natura* as understood by Spinoza in his cosmology. There are terms related to this *nakaparsuaan*, to wit, (a)

²⁴ There is a continuing interpretation and re-interpretation of this binary between “nature naturing” and “nature natured” (or *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*). We can find these in the following: “[B]y *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in-itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as expression of an eternal and infinite essence, that is [. . .] God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause. But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God’s nature, or from God’s attributes, that is, all the modes of God’s attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God.” See Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 29, Scholium, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin, 1996).

nakaisigudan or (b) *nakaiyanakan*, with (a) suggesting about something being innate, and (b) that which is in-born.

One way to start the healing process is to put an end to the undue regard for the place of human beings in this earth. Instead of the anthropocentric view, we look at the reality that the world around us is oozing with life, is practically breathing, is communing with all of creation and that, when one part or aspect of that creation is destroyed, the whole of creation is going to be poor. Worse, it might not be sustained at all. We look into conditions of iniquity in the world and we see that those who have more have been able to exploit more, and those who have been exploited end up more miserable, poorer, dispossessed, and unable to participate fully as part of the *nakaparsuaan*, creation. We talk of climate justice and we insist on this debt: that we owe the world this debt, and that those who are responsible for this debt must be held to account. They must, in the ways of the Ilokano, consult the *baglan* and begin the healing process by going through the whole process of cosmic appeasement, with the *atang* at the center of this ritual and rite of doing things right, of correcting the errors, and thus, start to live with the world again in that synergy. They can only happen if human beings begin to realize that this is the only earth and world that they have got.

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