

A Walk in the Cordilleras—September 1986

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Looking Backward, Walking Forward

Twenty four years ago I spent three weeks walking in the Mountain and Ifugao Provinces, Cordilleras, Luzon, the Philippines. I was a man on a mission, open to experiencing a world unlike my own, upon a mountain landscape that seemed, to this flatlander, sublime. I had been drawn there by a consultancy on behalf of the Anglican Consultative Council of the Anglican Communion of Churches (which includes the Episcopalian Church of the Philippines, and the Philippines Independent Church). In my capacity as Project Officer for a major global survey of families and communities involving consultancies on different aspects of family and community life in over seven Anglican Provinces, covering such locales and themes as Hong Kong (urban poor), Canada (domestic violence), Australia (Aboriginal families and communities), and Kenya (rural-urban migration), I cobbled together a report that was published in 1986,¹ and submitted along with six other consultancy reports, to the 1988 Lambeth Conference, a meeting, held every ten years in England, of the world's Anglican Bishops.

The photographs I took on that journey have not till now been exhibited in public. They constitute a recollection of a short wandering – exercises in critical reflection on nostalgia, the “remembrance of things past.” But since they depict as well the great biblical and

¹Trevor Hogan, *Communities of Resistance, Communities of Hope: Philippines*. Consultancy Report No. 3, International Report on Family and Community, December 1986, 63p.

romantic tropes of the young man's rites of passage to adulthood – wandering, wilderness, apprenticeship, Questing – they belong not just to me but to the viewer who may re-frame, re-interpret, re-invent them, irrespective of my intentions as the photographer, or of their original settings and contexts, or even of the people whose images they “capture.” Always, around us, there abides a superfluity of value and meaning.

But they *are* photographs, which means that beyond their fleetingness or the inadequacy of their technique, beyond the viewer's ideological frames, they project the objectivity of a time lost, and of measurable and constant change, and of real people operating in real landscapes.

Truth: What do we know and how are we to act?

As a young man, I was naïve but not innocent. I received my education in the material comfort of twentieth century west coast Australian suburbia. I grew up in a religious family committed to local community work, my parents were card carrying members of the local branches of the Australian Labor Party, not to mention an Anglican Parish and the School Parents and Citizens Committee. I had some knowledge and training in both the natural and social sciences, and from Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia, I obtained a Bachelor of Arts in *Population and World Resources*, majoring in urban studies, although I puttered around as well in economics, environmental science, politics, and urban sociology. In 1986, at the time of my visit to the Cordilleras, I was only one subject away from completing my theology degree, in connection with which I had done a bit of study of the sociology of religion. I became acquainted with the challenges of community studies through the purview of occasional fieldwork, and while I did not receive any training in ethnography, I was exposed to development studies and development economics. Regrettably, I was not a beneficiary of a generation of studies on the cultural construction and contexts of technology, published subsequently and as exemplified by the excellent reader *Photography's*

Other Histories,² I had little exposure to the long traditions of historical and anthropological research in the Philippines, including Harold Conklin's *Ethnographic Atlas of Ifugao*, which was published in 1980. I received an excellent introduction, however, to the politics of their place and time from the Igorots, themselves, from my wise and experienced local consultants, and from several Manila-based church workers, and community development workers.

I had previously been to the Philippines on an ecumenical study tour sponsored by the Australian Council of Churches, hosted in January-February 1985 by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. This occurred in the last year of the Marcos Regime, and our hosts pushed the 11-person Australian delegation through a month of arduous travel, and various encounters with communities, churches, unions, social movements (overground and underground) and their representative staffs, activists, workers and supporters. Outside Manila we visited the Bataan Peninsula, including the U.S. base on Subic Bay, and Olangapo City, its "RnR" city. In Mindanao we were taken through the cities and their hinterlands of Zamboanga, Pagadian (and Midsalip), Cotabato City, and Davao City. My partner and I then took a week's leave in Cebu City, before setting off for Surigao, and Siargao Island, which is just off the east coast of Mindanao. Such an itinerary surely contained all the elements (or at least the solid prospect), of scientific knowledge, political activism, social solidarity, and righteous moralism. But, as the reader can guess, since the knowledge was partial, and the activism sporadic, these could not possibly have added up to moral innocence. To have taken sides would not have eased the suffering of the locals. The extent of my identification with the poor, and with the victims of a brutal regime, was nowhere near anything that might have helped me to ease my own conscience. Indeed, two decades on, I see that our gestural politics has not in the least contributed to a shift in the balance of powers in the world order. But my visits and encounters have increased my knowledge of the world, and have put a human face to near neighbors in the Asian region who had until that time remained beyond the ambit of my consciousness. And it prepared the way for my ongoing engagement with the Philippines and its people.

²Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (eds), *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

Beauty: Ways of Seeing

I could not claim to be an innocent, but did I at least qualify as one who had an “innocent eye”? The young man, John Ruskin, dreamed of “truth to nature,” a romantic passion to see nature empirically because truthfully – that is, without adornment, without artifice.³ He was a passionate advocate of drawing and painting straight from nature to glorify God by witnessing to God’s truth and speaking prophetically to society. This demanded not so much technical verisimilitude as a romantic capacity to see the essential truths of nature, its eloquent forms and order, for humans and their societies to mimic faithfully in order to attain a peaceable order and justice. The arrival of the new technologies of the camera and the microscope, and of everything they represented, threatened to bring disorder to Ruskin’s vision and hope, as did the utilitarian and competitive individualism of Darwinian evolutionary discourses of nature, which he likewise strenuously opposed.

Into the twentieth century, the camera has become the plaything of billions in everyday life, deployed mainly to mirror to ourselves the practices of our most private consumption – in our imagined capacity as tourists of our own souls, seeking the ghosts in the reflections of our embodiment. As nature recedes in the face of our own technological domination, we romanticize nature to produce the picturesque, beautiful, and sublime backdrop of our own explorations into our collective unconscious. Relentlessly has the backdrop receded – seems to have receded altogether – rendering itself irrelevant to our collective narcissistic urge to flash peace signs and smiles into each other’s cell phones. Ruskin lamented the problem at the dawn of the new age, but into the twentieth century it is the critical attention and the critical sensitivity contained in the essays of Walter Benjamin in *Illuminations* (1968),⁴ and of Susan Sontag in *On Photography* (1977),⁵ that have brought to surface both the aura and the contradictions of the image in an age of mass culture. But, in 1986, as a young man still, I had read neither Ruskin, nor Benjamin, nor Sontag. They came later. I

³Cf. John Ruskin, *Selected Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

⁴Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968).

⁵Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Strauss and Giroux, 1977).

had neither studied the aesthetics and techniques of photography nor been enrolled in classes on the subject. I was a member, however, of the *Lonely Planet* generation, and I did wander the earth in my own rite of passage to adulthood. Like many Australians of my generation I was apt to frame the landscape, but without focusing on the people in the foreground. It takes quite a feat of the imagination to de-people Asia, yet many Australians have achieved it, with extensive slide collections of buildings and landscapes, but without humans in them. As we packed our backpacks and our cameras into them, there was a world of advertisements, films, photos, coffee table travel books, already filling our heads with ways of seeing. Our forebears, too, who had gone before us on the hippie trail from Sydney to London, were there to reckon with. And sitting somewhere in the back of our heads, unbeknownst to our everyday consciousness was the world of British imperial orientalism contained in our children's literature.

Technology: Framing the Truth, Capturing the Beauty

The camera I used was a Canon AE-1 Program, and I shot with Fuji color slide film. En route to the Philippines, in Hong Kong, I bought two lenses – a 128mm and a 28 mm, to complement the 56mm lens. It felt clumsy and heavy, and was plain annoying to constantly have to replace the one with the other, although it was a boon to shooting long distance as well as wide-angled photos. It was a boon as well to unobtrusive or non-intrusive people pictures (these were days before ethics committees at Australian universities demanded individual form signing for photo permissions). Generally, in taking my pictures, I observed three rules of thumb: (1) I avoided shooting directly at the sun; (2) when framing a picture, I did not cut people off at the knees; (3) for landscape-versus-sky-and-vice-versa settings, it was either a 2:3, or a 1:3, that I deployed, never 50:50. Several times, though, in the heat of the moment, I failed to abide by these rules. This means, of course, that in what follows, the reader should not expect to find either the photographs of a professional, or the work of an aesthete, or the photos of a sophisticated, self-reflexive cosmopolitan, but only and, overridingly, the work of a young man.

Grace and Hope

I look back on my younger self ruefully, through a darkling glass of perennially reconstructed memories (memories supported and at the same time challenged by the documentary evidence of the report and the photos, and without recourse to those who lived there then. I dedicate these photographs nonetheless to the Igorot peoples, my hosts, as well as to my translators, my interpreters, as well as my guides, Winnifred Annayo and Soledad Longid (oh where are they today?). The Igorots had at the time saved the region from the immediate threat of the proposed World Bank-sponsored, Marcos government-driven Chico River hydroelectric dam scheme. Today they face challenges seemingly more intractable, insofar as these appear tied to the quest for sustainable development.

I take this opportunity to record again my thanks to my project colleagues at the time: Digby Hannah (who also trekked, sang and drew pictures of our journey) and the project directors, Joan Clarke and Alan Nicholls.

I thank *Budhi*, its editors, for their patient and gentle persistence over three years, in urging me to shift these photos from a private archive into the public gaze.

Throughout the consultancy we were struck by the strength of the ties that bind traditional life in the Mountain Province barrios. In many ways, Igorot society, even today, can still be classed as a tight kinship society which emphasises social and mutual responsibility and accountability between and within tribes, families and peer groups.



Family Portrait

Family and community structures, however are changing rapidly. The challenge facing the local church is to determine what kinds of families it wished to promote. Notably, the church has not endeavoured to develop social work and professional counselling services to families in distress as has its counterparts in western societies; rather, it has sought to build up community life which it views as essential to cohesive family life. Nevertheless, several church members, clergy and laity alike, registered their concerns on a number of matters relating to how the church affects family life. It is not uncommon for the church to be described in terms of the metaphor "the family". How the church treats its own kin, therefore, is a matter of great concern:

For two Australians, a visit to the mountains of Northern Luzon is in many ways like an encounter with a distant sub-conscious memory of a paradisaal state in which all humankind "once happily co-existed". Especially in the more remote barrios(villages) of the rugged Cordillera Mountains, where there are no cars, no electricity and few consumer durables, family and community life appear at first glance to continue on as always. The traditions and ways of their forbears are not only remembered and revered by the present generation of Igorots but are incarnated in their lives also.

Yet, our very presence as western visitors also reminded us of the dangers of romanticizing the Cordillera as some sort of "paradise lost". Such a picture would say more about our own sense of alienation and displacement than provide an accurate representation of the Igorot situation. Evidence for the effect of modernization processes on tradition Igorot society is abundant.

Change is now of as characteristic of Igorot society as it is of any western society today - albeit on a smaller scale and at a slower rate. Change is a key hallmark of modernity and the one which is most de-stabilizing to traditional societies, for it is directly inimical to the preservation of its worldview and social organization.

The Episcopal Church, as an American church, was in many ways a precursor to, the inaugurator of, modern western consciousness as expressed in the Judeo-Christian ethic, a western education system, and rationalized bureaucratic institutions such as hospitals, schools, law-enforcement agencies, and the church itself. New forms of technology were also introduced and, along with them, money with which to exchange goods and services.

Whereas the Igorots successfully resisted all previous military and political invasions, now for the first time they have to cope with a socio-economic invasion from the west of revolutionary proportions. The effects of modernization on family and community life in the mountains, especially since World War II, have been marked. In no particular order of priority, the following social changes are notable:

- Increasing isolation of individuation of families into independent, self-contained socio economic units;
- Increasing separation and breakdown of family life as husbands and/or wives leave the region in search of employment, and/or children are sent to the cities often to a distant relative for education and employment;
- The breakdown of traditional concepts and functions of marriage - such as the binding of families together;
- The emergence of new separate categories of groups within community life such as young adults and the elderly (who, in particular, are becoming more isolated);
- The loss of some traditional roles and responsibilities for men in the community and therefore loss of identity;
- The bureaucratization of decision-making processes and the gradual erosion of the authority of elders, of traditional wisdom, and in collective co-operation in work and decision-making;
- Child care patterns are changing as the "olog" and "dap-ay" decline and nuclear family homes are made larger; decision making in all areas of life is increasingly the responsibility of individual family units but at the same time they are becoming more dependent upon external political authorities and economic market forces; and,

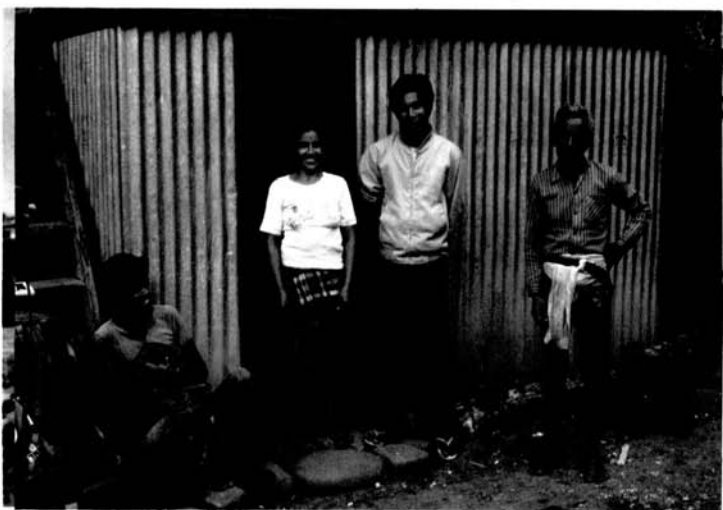
- Women are emerging as a new political force to be reckoned with in general community life, and yet they continue to carry the brunt of responsibility for holding families and communities together.

Both in economic and ecological terms, the survival of Igorot society has been greatly undermined by these rapid changes and by the incursion into the area of large foreign corporations and National government agencies seeking to "develop the region". In this consultancy, we examine some of these developments and their effects on Igorot social structures. The overall trend for Igorot society is one of the marginalization and under-development. The result is the stagnation of the Igorot traditions, economy and social life, the destruction of the ecosystem upon which their subsistence agriculture is so dependent, and the large scale migration from the area by its young people in search of employment.

Change, instability, and uncertainty are the new hallmarks of Igorot society. The church has been part of that change and is now helping the people to confront these changes creatively. The issue is no longer change or no-change, but what kind of change the people want. In this consultancy, we learnt of some initiatives taken by Igorots to resist changes that they believe are destructive to their identity and future, and of how the church is beginning to organize itself as a community of hope. In the midst of these changes, Igorot society still maintains a strong sense of community ties, cooperative structures and family responsibilities. The challenge before the Episcopal Church is to stem the tide which threatens to uncritically swamp traditional Igorot culture and values, and yet to also

recognize the radically new context which has been created by modernization and "Christianisation". Out of this contradiction lies the seeds for an indigenous theology which proclaims the Good News, affirms the integrity of the people, fosters community life, and empowers them to confront forces which threaten to marginalize and disenfranchise them. The Igorot peoples of the Cordillera have a proud history and tradition of being communities of resistance; the challenge before the Christian church is to assist those communities of resistance; the challenge before the Christian church is to assist those communities of resistance to become communities of hope.

In the compass of this short morale tale, nearly all of the key elements of traditional Igorot culture and everyday life are encapsulated: the people's dependence upon nature to sustain their subsistence economy, strong family and dependence upon nature to sustain their subsistence economy, strong family and tribal solidarity in the face of economic and social adversity, and the reality of inter-tribal warfare, headhunting and revenge where public respect is lost or shame incurred. Finally, in the peace pact, (called by the Bontocs a "fechen" but known by the Kalingas as the "Bodong"), the story reflects the concern of the Igorot tribes to overcome warfare which led to the needless loss of life and economic impoverishment of the people. In all of these elements the social ties that bind families, communities, and tribes together are strong and steeped in tradition.



Family Portrait 1



Family Portrait 2

Some anthropologists believe that the family is the key social unit in traditional Bontoc Igorot society. Such has been the strength of social ties within each village, however, it may be truer to say that the community rather than the nuclear family is the key social unit. The long tradition of heavy dependence on wet rice farming has strongly influenced the formation of social structures. The economic need for strong social cohesion brings all families in a village close together and a significant proportion of daily decisions and tasks are made, and take place, at the community level rather than within individual nuclear family units.

Problems on family, persona;, and community relations, land ownership and justice were almost always resolved along traditional norms and according to a strict code of ethics. Although Igorot culture was not literate traditions were carefully handed down from one generation to the next through story telling and through the enforcement of mutual discipline. For example, the Bontoc Igorots told the story of Lumawig (Lumawig is the Bontoc name for God)². According to Bontoc tradition, one of Lumawig's favourite sons came down to earth, married and lived in Bontoc. His name was also Lumawig as he was identified with the father. When he returned to the father he left his people with his commandments. This unwritten code of ethics was strictly observed down the centuries.

1. Never to lie, for good people do not live with lies.
2. To respect the properties of others, for people must lead good honest lives.
3. To be brother and sister to all humankind.

Community discipline was usually enforced by strong punishment of any violations of these commandments with exclusion from society, confiscation of properties, and in some cases death. The sharing of moral stories coupled with a religious fear of evil spirits and of the ever ambivalent character of "mother-nature" itself, also acted as strong deterrents to recalcitrance.

In marriage, both man and woman bring inherited properties from their respective parents. Together they work their property and may acquire more fields through purchase or barter. It is usually the eldest child who inherits most of the properties from parents. Younger children only receive unit what is left which is usually very little or none at all. In cases where a couple is childless and where one spouse dies, the properties owned before marriage are not given to the surviving spouse but are reverted to a relative who will finance the rituals involved in the funeral wake. However, properties acquired in marriage remain with the surviving spouse, in addition to properties inherited from the parents. (Cawed, op.cit., pp.40-43).



The Old Ato and the New

MA-init is a barrio of about 1,000 people or 200 families. To reach the settlement, it is necessary to walk for about one hour, as vehicles cannot proceed beyond a nearby village-- Guina-ang. Several features make this barrio unique:

- (i) its hot springs;
- (ii) its hardworking women, and;
- (iii) its gold.

The Hot Springs. Through the centre of Ma-init runs a river of hot water which bubbles from a boiling spring. Residents bathe daily in its soothing pools. Many of the older residents maintain a belief in the spirits which are said to live in the springs. During past times of tribal-warfare these spirits would be offered rice wine and called upon to protect the village. Often the answer was swift as the heat and rising steam frightened would-be intruders. The presence or absence of the spirit and its contentment or anger are indicated by the noises which emanate from the springs, particularly at night. Certain sounds are an omen of bad luck or accident.

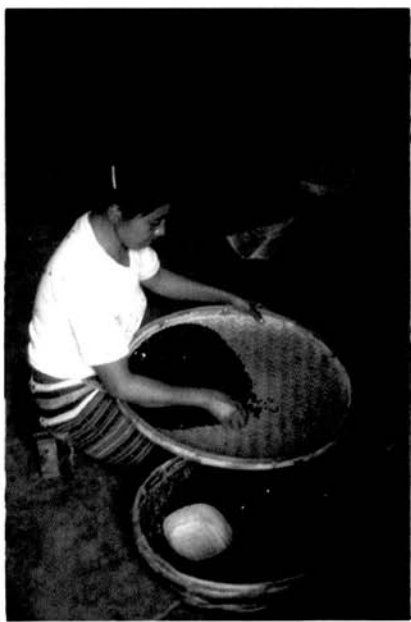
The younger members of the barrio are somewhat skeptical of such stories, as they are when the entrails of a slaughtered pig are used to predict the success of the forthcoming rice season. The village elders are generally discontented with the emerging attitudes of the young - their questioning, their reasoning and their disobedience. The most obvious sign of deteriorating discipline is the extent of gambling and drinking which, apart from a brief period of control instigated by the itinerant New People's Army, have become a popular pastime even among the younger boys. The council has found itself powerless to dissuade the menfolk of their obsession.

The hot springs themselves are a factor in the weakening social fabric of Ma-init. The springs attract a regular trickle of tourists who enjoy the curiosity of naked bathing in these "health restoring" baths. Their presence, their money and sometimes their habits all present a threat to the fragile social and economic balances of the community. Should a vehicular road be extended as far as the barrio the tourist flow would increase significantly.

The Women. The women are the backbone of Ma-init. They work at home and in the fields from sunrise to sunset. They are determined, self-controlled and suffer their oppression in quietness and dignity. They rise before the sun, prepare food and go to the fields where they till, plant, weed and harvest the rice, camote and the few other vegetables which are grown. The men collect firewood, assist with fence and terrace construction, and if they own caribou, help with the ploughing. Even some jobs which have traditionally been the man's responsibility, such as collection of cogon for roof thatching, have now fallen to the women. In past times, the task of defending the barrio against the warring tribes belonged to the men. These days peace reigns, as a consequence of a system of "bodongs" or peace pacts, which are regularly renewed.

Many of the men and even the young boys also engage in gold panning. The wet season from June-September includes the July harvest which is the busiest month of the year. The wet season also affords the opportunity for gold panning, a very popular labour intensive activity, but one which provides an important supplement to the income of the people.

What will be the future for Ma-init? the elders are watching helplessly as the younger people go their own way, and lose interest in corporate decision-making or united action. Many of the men are turning to destructive pursuits in response to an enroaching order which partially displaces their traditional roles. The women continue quietly and bravely to carry the burdens of the village, providing for and nurturing their families. The young women alone are accepting the rigours of education. Will they be as long suffering with their menfolk as their mothers have been? There is need here for community development. The church has a presence in Ma-init and a very great challenge.



black rice



Hotsprings at dawn



*A young man and his
caribou ploughing*



Rice Terraces, Ifugao Province



Rice Terraces, Ifugao Province
(other view)

The rice terraces of Banaue have been declared a national monument and a special two-laned cemented highway was constructed by the Marcos government in 1975 to link the town to the main Manila road in the next province. The cost of the project was 90 million pesos (approximately US\$20 million). This highway ensures that tourists can travel in comfort directly from Manila and stay in the government-developed Banaue Hotel. Facilities for the tourists, however, stand in stark contrast to the government's provision of roads, housing and medical facilities to the rest of the province. Perhaps the most bitter irony of the Banaue tourist road was that its construction actually destroyed whole areas of rice terraces in the region. Compensation was promised to the farmers - albeit at "ludicrously low government assessment levels" (Tribal Forum III:2, February-March 1982, P.18). In the end, however, not even this amount was paid.

Opposition to the construction of the highway rose to the point where one of the construction camp outfits was burnt down. In order to ensure the speedy implementation of the project, the region was heavily militarized.

Today, to the north of the main town, there is an especially erected tourist viewing spot of the rice terraces. At this location there are now dozens of small Ifugao wood handicraft stores. Wood carving is a skill for which Ifugaos have been renowned for hundreds of years in the region. There are also several elderly men and women who dress in traditional tribal headgear and clothes in order to earn extra income for their families. Neither the handicrafts nor traditional head gear have any integral function to play in present-day Ifugao culture. Rather, they have been especially redeployed to capture the tourist market.

Of the two activities, the former is easily the more profitable and dignified. For their part, the elders earn perhaps 5 pesos a day from having their photographs taken by tourists (approximately 20US cents).



*Shooting the Shooter or
Tourism Re-Invents Tradition*



*Monument to the people of
the Mountain Province in
their fight against the
Chico River Dam Project Proposal*



Episcopal Church, Sagada

The arrival of the Episcopal church to the Mountain Province in the early twentieth century was generally accepted by the people as an extra cultural layer rather than a new way of life. The early attitude of the church, however, was to associate Bontoc culture with evil paganism and assume that the Western Civilization and Christianity were one and the same. Attempts were made for instance to exchange traditional rest days for Sunday observance, and to introduce Western modes of dress. In conversation with many of the village elders, we learnt too that children were forcibly taken away from their parents and placed in boarding schools. This was greatly resented, especially as children were an invaluable source of labour in the fields. Some positive contributions were also made by the early church. Notable amongst these were:

a) the promotion of the "bodong" or peace pact as