

advantages and disadvantages, they express worry about how their children would fare in it, lacking the skills and interest.

Patriarchal notions when it comes to gender roles were also still evident among the informants we interviewed, especially in terms of inheriting the business and the lands. Some female farmers, although willing to hand down their farms to their daughters, still expect male members of the family (or in this case, their daughter's future husband) to take over the operations in the farm. Mrs. MT is hesitant to let her daughter, an older child, inherit their farm: "*Sana (...), sana, sana, pero babae eh. And depende rin kung yung mapapangasawa nila eh ganun din*" (*I hope so, but she's a girl. And it also depends if the one they would marry would be [into farming, too].*)

Conclusion

The shift from vegetable to flower farming in Bahong driven by environmental, socio-economic and political factors brought some changes to the child-rearing practices in the farming community. The indigenous flower farmers of Bahong continue to pursue agricultural cultivation that has for years supported them and their families financially. However, their chosen path is largely susceptible to various shifts and trends, especially in the current economic situation such that the challenge of an unpredictable future is still something that they must face head-on.

The farmers' knowledge, training, and experiences in growing up in a farming community like Bahong, in a world of rapid globalization and an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, has shaped not only how they practice farming, but also how they raise their children. How they nurture, influence, and protect their children have also shaped their children's skills, attitudes, and interests, which, together with their aforementioned farming and overall life experiences, affect what they want their children to do moving forward.

Congruent with the barangay's goals of sustaining a productive farming industry and maintaining children's health and well-being, the local government of Bahong and its community are

challenged to provide and foster proper avenues and projects to restore its industry's bloom while making sure the children are not left behind.

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"Igorot" Dogs: A multispecies ethnographic research on the social, economic, and embodied relationships between humans and dogs in Barangay Beckel, La Trinidad

Gianina Elisha Ortega

Introduction

Dogs are a familiar presence in the community of Barangay Beckel in the municipality of La Trinidad in Benguet, evidencing frequent interaction between dogs and people. Observing this, I was encouraged to inquire about how the relationship between dogs and people is embodied by people in Barangay Beckel, specifically in Sitios Lamut and Central Beckel.

Barangay Beckel¹ is set in the mountainous Cordillera Region, with 42.27% of its land area used for agricultural purposes. Many residents in Lamut, the most populated sitio in Beckel situated along Shilan-Beckel Road, are cut-flower farmers. Nearby, only a tricycle ride away from Lamut, is Central Beckel where the barangay hall is situated. This sitio, compared to Lamut, can be characterized by numerous establishments. In both Lamut and Central Beckel, whether in areas of industry, residence, or public spaces, dogs can be found.

Dogs, as members of the local ecology, are often overlooked as actors contributing to how cultures emerge, persist, and adapt. Dogs and humans have a long, shared history.² First tamed to become accustomed to human presence, the temperaments of previously wild wolves (*Canis lupus*) slowly changed over time to become the domesticated dog species (*Canis familiaris*) we refer to today.³

Dog breeds emerged due to both natural and homogenic processes.⁴ Today, the prestige of dogs largely depends on the pureness of their lineages,⁵ which has also made them susceptible to various genetic diseases.⁶ While the American Kennel Club recognizes only 199 dog breeds, scholarship identifies between 350-400 dog breeds.⁷

In the Philippines, archaeological evidence shows the interaction between dogs and humans since the terminal Pleistocene period.⁸ Other indicators of early social and cultural significance attributed to dogs by people can be gathered from dog burials in Luzon.⁹ The cultural practice of dog-eating from 500 AD prevails in the Philippines, but can only be legally consumed by indigenous groups for cultural purposes¹⁰ under the



Aspin walking on the streets of Central Beckel and Lamut

Indigenous Peoples Right Act (IPRA) of 1997¹¹.

Filipino identities are formed parallel to our relations with dogs.¹² Unfortunately, not all Filipino identities concerning our historic entanglements with dogs have been positive.¹³ Lasco¹⁴ further argues that Philippine colonial history paves the way for greater value to be ascribed to foreign dog breeds over the Philippine endemic dogs in present times. Today, there are efforts geared towards taking pride in Philippine endemic dogs, in being Filipino, and reclaiming the unprejudiced and culturally significant relationship and identities we developed with and imprinted on each other through our longstanding history. Stepping away from human-centric beginnings, the study of culture in the field of Anthropology now extends to the investigation of the influence and agency of beyond human actors. This study will use a multispecies ethnography¹⁵ approach to the study of life in Beckel while using the Embodied Cultural Ecology (ECE) framework¹⁶ to look at how interactions between humans and dogs make imprints on both species. The ECE framework holds that relations between bodies are not only reflected in the practices, beliefs, structures, and cultures created. Humans and dogs are part of a network of interrelated bodies which make up an ecology, connected to an even greater network of ecologies. Connections can be physically and physiologically traced in the bodies that compose ecologies. Physical traceability refers to imprints that can elicit sensorial simulation, while physiological traceability pertains to feelings and emotions, caused by bodily functions involving the brain, neurotransmitters, glands, and the overall interaction among the body's systems. Physiological reactions may arise from sensorial interactions between bodies, namely, humans and dogs.

Before pursuing this study, my knowledge about the relationship between humans and dogs in general and notions of dogs in the Cordillera region was rudimentary. I only saw dogs as playing a peripheral role in society. Upon arriving in Beckel, intrigued by the number of dogs in the community, how they behaved, and the attitudes of people towards them, I was encouraged to study the human-dog relationships in Beckel.

In this pursuit, I realized how complex human-dog relationships are, and how these affect and reflect several dimensions of both our species' existences and mutual becomings.

To better understand how human-dog relationships are embodied, I investigated the local notions of dogs and appropriation of the "Igorot" Dogs' community and cultural value, commodification, and agency.

My classmates and I stayed in Barangay Beckel for our Anthropology

Field School (AFS), a trademark requirement of the Anthropology undergraduate program at the University of the Philippines Diliman. The field site for AFS was determined by our AFS 2022 Director, Dr. Hector Guazon. Before AFS, I had not been to Barangay Beckel. Ethnographic research methods were employed to gather data for this research. Participant observation was done for two weeks, from June 24 to July 9, 2022. Within this time period, I lived with a member of the community who owned *aspins*, and was able to observe how the dogs were taken care of, as well as how they behaved. I visited dog kennels which sold purebred puppies or were homes to purebred dogs recognized in international dog competitions. I also observed the prominence of dog-eating-related statements in the members of the community referring to *aspins*. I was able to better observe the extent of community relations when I attended a *cañao*, a traditional celebration, held to commemorate a wedding. I also ate in local eateries, availed of beautician services, *tambay-ed* (rested) in a *sari-sari* store (small store), traveled via community jeepneys and tricycles, and had coffee with hospitable members of the community. These gave me opportunities to engage in casual conversations with locals. Additionally, I was also given a tour of a flower farmer's greenhouse, where I learned more about the terrain of Lamut.

Semi-formal interviews were conducted to further understand observed phenomena. Research participants were selected as per their regular interactions with dogs: as veterinary science practitioner and clinic owner, pet supply owner, breeders, and dog owners. Ten people were interviewed, specifically, a barangay worker, 28 years old, an animal scientist who co-owns a veterinary clinic, 34 years old, an animal supply shop owner, 34 years old, two dog breeders, 25 and 40 years old, and five dog owners, ages 26, 40, 46, 61, and 66 years old. Interviews were held at places participants felt comfortable in and deemed convenient to meet. Afterward, themes and topics for discussion that emerged were summarized into a data table.

To illustrate how the human-dog relationship is embodied by the community of Barangay Beckel, this research paper will first discuss the different notions of dogs and their ownership in Beckel. Then it will report different ways they are appropriated in Beckel—the social and cultural significance given to dogs in the community, the value ascribed to them in the economy, and how they exhibit agency.

Local Notions: The Dogs of Beckel: *Lahat Sila Aso*

A stroll along the streets of Beckel would inevitably lead to an encounter with wandering *aspins*. Short for "*asong pinoy*," *aspin* refers to the type of dog endemic to the Philippines. In many parts of the country, *aspins* are not typically kept as pets. Because of their tendency to loiter, they are usually seen as dirty and inferior to dogs with breeds. In Beckel, *aspins* are not seen in such harsh light. Contrary to popular depictions of *aspins* as undomesticated and aggressive, people in Beckel do not generally see these dogs as harmful, especially not to members of the community.

Also members of the Beckel community are dogs with breeds such as golden retrievers, Alaskan malamutes, Siberian huskies, shih tzus, pitbulls, and American bullies. Dogs with breeds are kept as pets and are usually caged or chained and kept indoors because, unlike *aspins*, they would not be able to come back home. The care given to dogs with breeds varies, but they are generally seen as more 'high maintenance' than *aspins*.

A third type of dog in Beckel is the mixed breeds or mongrels. Many dogs with mixed breeds, simply called "mixed breeds," are the offspring of a dog with breed and an *aspin*. There are also mixed breeds whose parents come from different breeds. These dogs are deliberately bred to produce offspring with desirable characteristics, be it physical or behavioral. The former type of mixed breed is usually associated with *aspins*, while the latter with dogs with breeds.

While the community in Beckel distinguishes among *aspins*, mixed breeds, and dogs with breeds and their different roles in the community, as will be discussed



Aspins walking on the streets of Central Beckel and Lamut

in later sections, one type of dog is not seen as intrinsically superior to the other. At the end of the day, as aptly put by Don, “*Lahat sila aso*” (All of them are dogs).

There are no dog pounds in Beckel. This was the first fact I was told about the barangay that was related to dogs. I found out that the community did not need a dog pound because all types of dogs, whether aspins, mixed breeds, or dogs with breeds, are considered suitable companions/pets.

People of Beckel generally reflect upon their community as dog-loving. Dogs, both aspins and with breed are described as pets, friends, and family. Van notes how isolation due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic encouraged people to adopt or purchase dogs to keep them company.

The human-dog companionship begins in several ways. Many humans initiate a relationship with dogs by giving the latter names and sometimes collars. Sharing their homes with dogs also signifies this, most especially for aspin pets, if they return to their home at the end of the day.

It is important to note that there are some differences in the way aspins and dogs with breeds are treated as pets, which is also related to the roles ascribed to them in the community. Aspins wander in the streets during the day. They visit other dogs in other houses, sunbathe in areas touched by sunlight, then eventually, at the end of the day, return to spend the night in the place they consider home. They are also known to be tougher than bred dogs in terms of their immunity, making them low maintenance pets. For this reason, aspins are also kept as pets for security purposes.

Dogs with breeds, in contrast, are fed dog food, taken for walks for their exercise, and have regular visits to their veterinarians. Because they are more expensive and high maintenance pets, purebred dogs are also seen as symbols of their owners’ socio-economic status.

People and dogs living closely together in Beckel have both positive and negative outcomes, one is that it allows for diseases like rabies and mange. To

mitigate this, government institutions conduct free anti-rabies vaccine drives twice a year. Meanwhile, allergic reactions to dogs are not so common. The small portion of the population who did develop rashes, asthma, and mild allergic symptoms, however, continue to enjoy the company of their dogs regardless.

The proximity of humans and dogs are not only traceable through physiological health, but also through perceptions on personal wellbeing. Dogs are seen as protectors. Their presence elicits a feeling of safety for the members of the community, while presenting a threat to outsiders. Physical contact also evokes mutual comfort for dogs and humans.

“Masaya kang pag may kinakalabit kang aso” (There is a feeling of happiness when you are able to pet [your] dog)

according to Manuel. Lorie notes how her dogs like being petted and played with by customers who enter her salon, and shares that based on her experience, dogs become friendly if they are treated with kindness, and become aggressive if treated with violence. Ida also finds that petting her aspins while they are young also helps them grow to be more tame adults.

I also noticed paw prints tattooed on the hands of Lorie. She explains that her relationship with dogs is very meaningful to her. She grew up surrounded by dogs, took care of dogs, and is now in business related to dogs. In deciding to inscribe this relationship onto her body, she shows the significance of human-dog entanglement to her personal becoming and embodies an undeniable commitment to dogs.

Appropriation of dogs: Community and cultural value

Beckel has a close-knit community. I’ve learned from my casual conversations with them that members of the community know a lot about each other. Many of the residents are in some way networked with one another through blood, work, organizational affiliations, or frequent encounters and proximity. Community

relationships are important to the people of Beckel, and this is reflected in networks involving dogs.

Dogs are acquired in several ways. Commonly, they are bought, adopted, and gifted. Dogs with breeds are usually procured through the formal economy from dog breeders. The act of purchasing a dog is not only a prerequisite for building a relationship between the dog and its owner, but also welcomes humans into the community of owners of a given breed. Van and Don share that they met each other through an informal group of American bully owners. Among themselves, they talk about methods of care, physical traits that are gaining popularity for bullies, and opportunities for dog-breeding.

It is not uncommon for people to adopt the aspins that like to stay in the vicinity of their homes. When aspins reproduce, people often raise the puppies or give them to neighbors and relatives. Lyn’s aspins are the generational offspring of one of her late grandmother’s dogs. She tells me, “*Kinuha namin yung nanay ng mga yan sa grandma namin kasi yung lola namin, mahilig mag-alaga ng mga aso–yung mga aspin... Ang ginagawa namin, prenepreserve na lang namin...parang remembrance niya s’amin*” (We got the mother of these [dogs] from our grandmother who liked to take care of dogs–aspins. We preserve her memory by taking care of [her] dogs). She also mentions how the siblings of her dogs Scorpio and Chookie are owned by her siblings.

The cultural value ascribed to dogs also strengthens community bonds. Beckel is one of the few places where dog-eating is still practiced by members of indigenous groups like Van who is Kankanaey. According to Van, aspins are usually eaten by soldiers during times of war for them not to go mad (“*para hindi masira yung ulo mo*”). Dogs are held in high regard for their special abilities. “*Dinadasalan [yung mga aso] na kung ano man yung nakita o nagawa ng tao, mawawala na. Hindi didikit sa ulo mo.*” (Prayers are offered [to aspins] so that [traumatic] events and images are erased from the memory of the soldier). Though satisfying the palette is not a motivation for eating dogs, Van describes dog meat as “*Pinakamasarap na karne*” (The most delicious

meat). Additionally, those from outside cultures tend to see dog-eating as being done for practical purposes like warming the body. When asked if his cultural relationship with dogs affect his relationship with his dogs who he deems companions, he says, “*Wag lang alaga ko [yung kainin] ... parang mahirap lunukin*” ([Dog-eating is okay] As long as it is not my pets [that are eaten] ... That would be hard to swallow).

According to Van, dog-eating is done today only for special occasions and covertly because ideologies prevailing in fast-industrializing and fast-commercializing Beckel drive the practice away. This is problematic for Van in that it frames tradition as irrelevant in a place of “progress.” But he maintains that it is the belief of people who hold fast to their roots. These people have kept this culture alive, keeping tradition meaningful in a community experiencing continuous change.. In his words, “*Pero kami dito, parang naniniwala pa rin kami. We still believe [in] our culture and tradition...Parang yung hindi ma explain. Yung nga, pag you believe, maintindihan mo.*”

Commodification and ethics

Recent years have seen the commodification of dogs in Beckel. The monetary value of dogs differs according to breed and lineage. The most expensive dogs are purebred dogs which meet rigid standards for the breed’s physical characteristics. Purebred dogs can be sold for ten thousands to millions of pesos in Manila and overseas markets. Certification of recognition from dog shows can increase the prices of purebred dogs. Mixed breeds with purebred parents of different breeds are sold for 5,000-8,000 pesos, while mixed breeds with one aspin parent are sold for 2,000-3,500 pesos. Van, who was selling aspin mixed-breed puppies, expressed that in the past, he would have given the puppies away to those who wanted them, but growing inflation and financial demands pushed him to sell them. Notably, aspins are not sold as pets in Barangay Beckel, but aspins from Beckel that do end up in the market are likely stolen to be sold for consumption in neighboring places. According to Manuel, they sell for 5,000 pesos.

Additionally, there seems to be a relationship among three factors: the place of residence of dog owners, their occupation, and the type of dog owned. Lamut and Central Beckel differ in that there is more opportunity for business in Central Beckel as it is situated along the main road. Almost all the research participants who reside in Central Beckel owned dogs with breeds and participated in an industry surrounding these, while all the research participants who reside in Lamut own aspins. The research participants concede that owning any kind of dog is a big responsibility, but dogs with breeds can be more expensive and difficult to care for. Location and having an occupation in line with owning expensive and high maintenance pets may provide a reason as to how relationships of humans with dogs with breeds thrive.

The case of dog breeders provides an example. Breeders receive a return on investment for the time, energy, and resources they exhaust in owning and caring for dogs with breeds whenever they sell purebred puppies for high prices. Their strategic location in Central Beckel helps their business prosper.

In contrast, in the case of Edna and her son, the quality of care given to their husky is compromised because they tend to be occupied with work that is unrelated to dog-owning. Edna runs a convenience store, while her son works at the neighboring water refilling station in Central Beckel. Their businesses are successful, but Edna noticed that providing the best care for their husky is often neglected. She explains that taking care of their husky is laborious. They have to be taken to the veterinary clinic monthly, walked regularly, groomed, and be closely watched when pregnant. *“Sa totoo lang, minsan naaawa rin ako sa mga aso.”* (Honestly, I feel bad for the dog sometimes), Edna admits. *“Maganda siguro yung ganun [to own a dog] pag wala kang ibang trabaho, matututukan mo”* (It is probably better to own a dog if you don’t have other jobs, you’d be able to watch over it). Given their experience in owning a purebred dog, Edna says that she and her son would probably not take care of another one in the future.

Though both aspins and dogs with breeds are taken to the veterinarian, Charm, who runs a veterinary clinic with her vet husband, noticed that owners have different motivations for they bring their dogs to the clinic. *“Yung mostly kasi na nagdala ng mga breed sa clinic, yun yung mga breeder–yung mga nagbebenta talaga. Pero yung mga iba na kahit walang breed na aso na dinadala nila sa clinic, yun yung mga may pet. Kasa-kasama talaga nila sa bahay yung mga aso nila. Yun yung talaga yung kapag nawala yung aso nila, iiyak sila.”* (Most of the people who bring dogs with breeds to the clinic are the breeders. Others bring their dogs to the clinic even if they don’t have breeds. Those are the pets. Those are the dogs whom they share their homes with. They would cry if their dogs got lost), she says. In accordance

with this, Van holds that the economic motivations for owning dogs with breeds and continually caring for them cannot be overlooked– *“Alangan naman magwawaldas ka ng milyon for companion lang”* (It is unlikely that one would spend millions just for a companion).

However, I am not suggesting that this economic relationship between humans and dogs has replaced the companionate bond between dogs with breeds and owners, because I also saw that breeders sincerely took care of their dogs. Before they started doing business, they were first dog owners.

Based on my research, the market-driven relationship humans have with dogs have made more perceptible imprints on dogs than humans. As previously mentioned, the prestige associated with purebred dogs have evidently produced changes in the physical characteristics of dogs, resulting in differentiation of breeds.¹⁷ Dog breeders take extra measures to ensure that their dogs are valuable and saleable in the market. Because of this, Don, a dog breeder, makes sure to give his dogs high quality dog food. He says that this gives their coat a healthy glow which would not be achieved by feeding them leftovers. Though buying dog food is more expensive, Don willingly spends on quality brands. According to him, *“Kung ano bibigay mo sa aso, yun rin bibigay niya sa ‘yo”* (What you give to a dog, the dog will give back to you).

There are also prevailing opinions that humans have an ethical responsibility towards dogs, regardless of what people can gain. As Edna acknowledges, dogs should only be taken on by owners who have the capacity to and if their doing so will not cause distress to their dogs. Ongoing projects to widen Shilan-Beckel Road concern Manuel. He says that if the road becomes too busy and unsafe for his dogs, he will hesitate to add more to his current kennel of seven. Meanwhile, Don demonstrates ethics by practicing responsible breeding. He only mates his bullies once a year to ensure that the puppies will be well taken care of and the mothers’ reproductive system is not overworked.

Agency of dogs

Human-dog entanglements are not only made up of humans. Dogs have agency in the formation of and response to our two-way relationship. Dogs recognize and claim the names given to them by their human companions. They respond to calls and commands, fulfilling the roles given to them in the community. They take care of people, too. Lorie shares how her dogs are observant and sensitive to her dispositions. When she is quiet or is facing problems, her dogs would approach her, lay their snouts on her lap, and extend their front limbs to her as if offering a comforting hug.

Like how people choose dogs, dogs choose people. Lyn shares how



Companionship. There are no dog pounds in Beckel



Aspin at a sari-sari store (small shop) lays its head on my lap to be petted

when her sister bought a chow-spitz mixed breed, the seller asked her to put her hand out, and the puppy that would come forward would be hers. She also tells the story of her grandmother who got her aspin from the street. One day, on her way home from the greenhouse, she encountered a puppy who followed her on her route. Bonding from their journey, her grandmother decided to adopt the puppy and since then, the puppy would come home to her grandmother.

Conclusion

Based on what I gathered from my research, I posit that human-dog relationships play significant roles in constructing present-day culture in Beckel. Community values are created, reflected, and reinforced through human-dog relationships, and the entanglement of humans and dogs are embodied in both species. Dogs are viewed as intrinsically equal in Beckel, there being relationships between all types of dogs – aspins, mixed breeds, and purebreds – and humans. It can also be seen how dogs keep the Barangay Beckel close-knit. Living in proximity with one another, the companionate relationship between dogs and humans have become traceable through tattoos, feelings of safety, joy, the risk for sharing diseases in humans, in the improvement in the health of dogs, and attitudes they develop towards humans. The community’s long-standing relationship with aspins also prevails and is kept alive by the beliefs of those who uphold it. These are embodied by the warmth and trauma relief one experiences after ingestion of an aspin. Novel forms of human-dog relationships have also emerged due to increased economic demands brought about by industrialization and commercialization. The commodification of dogs has produced physically observable changes in dogs, which produced today’s dog breeds and ensures the maintenance of their physical appearance today. Additionally, this research also garnered insight about the agency of dogs.

The relationships among the community of Beckel, the proclivity of Lamut and Central Beckel as places for flower farming and commercial business,

respectively, and the local practice of dog-eating among members of indigenous groups in Beckel, are factors that shaped human-dog relationships in the site. While there is much to learn about the human-dog relationship in Beckel, it is hoped that this study will help provide preliminary information for future research projects that can further explore the unique and special bond between the community of Beckel and the “Igorot” Dogs.

After finishing the first draft of this paper and consulting the members of the Beckel’s community regarding the findings presented, community members expressed their desire for a more in-depth study to be conducted on the history and present cultural practice of eating aspin, which were not discussed in this paper due to research restrictions outlined by the Nation Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). It is important to study this to better understand the human-aspin relationship in Beckel and why there are plenty of aspins in Beckel. It was suggested by the community that the significance of aspins in *Daw-as*, a Kankanaey cleansing ritual, and in Kankanaey burial traditions could also be looked into to enrich the existing body of knowledge about “Igorot” Dogs and the culture of Beckel.

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Aspinmixed-breed puppies for sale at Beckel

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