

Doyo, Ma. Ceres P. 2015. *Macli-ing Dulag: Kalinga Chief Defender of the Cordillera*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press. 92 pp.

Ceres Doyo wrote *Macli-ing Dulag: Kalinga Chief Defender of the Cordillera* as an expanded version of her award-winning article published in the *Panorama* magazine in 1980. The article “Was Macli-ing Killed Because He Damned the Chico Dam?” earned for her a Catholic Mass Media award in 1981 handed to her by Pope John Paul II no less. She included a final chapter by Nestor Castro for the current book version to give a broader context whence the story of Macli-ing’s heroism unfolds.

She writes about Macli-ing Dulag, a *pangat* (leader) of the Butbut tribe in Kalinga known for protesting against the Chico River Basin Development Dam Project in the seventies. The dam project was conceived in 1965 but only pursued when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries quadrupled the cost of gas in 1973. The plan was to build four dams from 1977 to 1982 along the Chico River, the longest and most elaborate river system in the Cordillera, with the intention to generate 1010 megawatts (equivalent to the generation of two nuclear power plants). The author figured that this costly PHP 2.4 billion top-priority project would affect six municipalities with an estimated 100,000 population. The project would submerge six villages, displace 1000 families, and wash away PHP 31,500,000 worth of rice lands (based on 1972 prices), 1,200 terraces, 500 hectares of fruit trees, and national roads.

Macli-ing is regarded as a hero for being the spokesperson of the indigenous people who would be affected by the Chico River Dam Project. Doyo records Macli-ing’s simple, yet profound words that show one did not need formal schooling to possess a logical mind. He eloquently defended their land and argued why they had the right to life in a place where his people had resided for centuries. Doyo characterizes the leader and hero of the Kalinga and Bontoc people as someone who courageously defended and communicated their position with state officials, but was also peace loving. Before dealing with the greatest issue he faced, Macli-ing played a role in settling disputes between tribes through many *bodong* (peace pacts).

Ceres Doyo says that too little is known about the man. He had four wives (which was acceptable in his culture and circumstance) and

six children from a third wife who passed away before he married his fourth. He worked as a *caminero* (road worker) earning a daily wage of PHP 405.00, and worked eight *payaos* (terraces) with his children on weekends. The man had no formal schooling, could not read or write, but could sign his name. Yet he earned respect among his ranks by placing other's interest before his own by readily giving up work to participate in peace processes between tribal groups. He was thrice elected barangay captain of Barangay Bugnay, and later was recognized as the spokesperson for the indigenous people of the Cordillera, preventing the construction of the dams not just for the Butbut but also for the other indigenous groups that would have been affected by the project.

Through his involvement, Macli-ing gained a broad perspective, seeing problems in relocation centers in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija where others had been relocated from dam projects in Binga and Ambulkaio in Benguet. He knew the extent of their problem, seeing the connection between Tondo slum dwellers and their own problems of not possessing titles to their lands.

The costs of the dam were high especially for the indigenous peoples who are sacrificed in the face of development and would not have benefitted from this type of infrastructure. Building the dam would have ruined their age-old culture devoid of usury. Land was not just a source of food but a sacred gift that they understood themselves to be stewards of—a people whose economic, cultural, political, religious, and ecological life had revolved around the land. One could understand why they resisted the project. They were never consulted, only promised relocation when what they wanted was to be heard despite the futility of the effort.

He convinced tribal leaders to unite and stand up against the common enemy—the Chico River Dam Project. Doyo mentions several unifying peace pacts led by him: a bodong in Barrio Tanglag in 1975, one in June 1978, another in December 1979, which was the biggest ever bodong attended by 2000 Kalingas and Bontoc (a huge number by the standards of the indigenous peoples). He was adamant and could not be bribed. Handed an envelope, he responded:

There can only be one of two things in an envelope: letter or money. Since I am illiterate, this is hardly a letter. As for money, it is given only to someone who has something to sell. I have nothing to sell. (Doyo quoting Ugnayang Papers, a collection of papers on Macli-ing Dulag and the Cordillera, prepared for the commemoration of Macli-ing's death in 1995).

Doyo hoped to uncover the truth surrounding the circumstances of his death based on first-hand accounts, weaving a story from multiple sources. She interviewed a villager working his field during the night of Macli-ing's "execution," a para-military-cum-Office of the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities employee, a militant Kalinga leader (who would have not been able to testify had soldiers not mistaken the Kalinga leader for his pillow, shooting it instead of the person), a telephone operator of the then Ministry of Public Works and Highways, and a line man. She wrote about the testimonies by military personnel in the courtroom. The accounts were slim as the killing of Macli-ing was done at night when most of the villagers would have been sleeping. She relied on varied voices of people that encountered Macli-ing, lawyer, visitor, and scholars. There may probably be more that can be learned from oral accounts of those who knew him well from his village, assuming some of them are living, if we truly wanted to know the man.

Macli-ing's death is celebrated not only because of how he was unyielding and stood by simple principles that protected his people from an unwelcome project to build dams. He prevented the building of four dams in the Chico River basin that would have inundated their villages and rice terraces. He is exalted for his valor and for withstanding oppression, detention, and ultimately paying with his life for articulating their concerns. Military men who called on him at ten at night were asked to return in the morning. They shot him through the door instead and instantly killed him. (Part of the door bearing bullet holes was preserved by the Museo Cordillera in the University of the Philippines Baguio. This significant roving artifact was lent and displayed during the UGAT/Anthropological Association of the Philippines conference held last 20-22 October 2016 at the Ateneo De Manila University old library foyer.)

The piece following Doyo's document, "A Peek into Cordilleran History, Culture and Society: In Search for Self-determination" by Nestor Castro, gives an overview and context to the story of Macli-ing. He describes the political organization and describes the significance of the main river systems emanating from the deep gorges of the Cordillera that make the area conducive for hydroelectric projects. The Chico River that drains into the Cagayan Valley is only one of the identified places for hydroelectric power projects. However, the Cordillera is also home to 28 percent of diverse indigenous groups found in the country and is known for the world heritage site declared by UNESCO. Castro

describes Cordillera culture as “marked by a strong sense of communalism,” “governed by usufruct use rights,” and people who practice social leveling mechanisms or redistribution of wealth through the *cañao* (or *baki* ritual feasting). They are categorized as rank societies having unequal prestige but equal access to resources and power.

Castro explains that the categorization of indigenous people as “minority” was a result of our colonial history since the sixteenth century. The indigenous peoples in the Cordillera managed to avoid Spanish incursion and would be contrasted to the assimilated lowlanders. He says that the Americans maintained and institutionalized political divisions to gain control of the region, but this also helped preserve indigenous culture. Until the 1970s, Castro says development thrusts were geared toward benefitting lowlanders so much so that the Cordillera remained underdeveloped. Conditions made it ripe for the establishment of the first Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army squad in Ifugao, to expand in other areas (Benguet, Mountain Province, and Abra). However, there would be setbacks due to heavy militarization, people’s inability to identify with the cause of “national liberation” born out of feudalism, and the effort to agitate that led to conflicts between classes that were once harmonious.

The longer quotes of Macli-ing’s words in Castro’s work reveal the extent of the former’s eloquence and dispels the notion of the “uneducated” as ignorant. He may have lacked formal education, but he had experience in mediating and maintaining peace among indigenous groups and learned to confidently express their position on the Chico River Dam Project from their standpoint.

Anthropologist Mariflor Parpan helped make known their plight through church officials, who in turn communicated with Malacañang and other state representatives. The New People’s Army picked up on their frustration to be heard that led to heavy militarization in the area, including the killing of Macli-ing on 24 April 1980 (24 April is a day now celebrated as the Cordillera Day).

President Marcos finally shelved the Chico River Dam project in October 1981. President Corazon Aquino would permanently scrap the project. The people’s struggles that Castro narrates eventually led to the establishment of the Cordillera Autonomous Region or CAR, stipulated in the 1987 Constitution; CAR’s scope would be later defined by President Aquino’s Executive Order 220. But until now, Castro feels the recognition of ancestral domain is an “elusive dream.”

While Doyo valorizes the bittersweet death of Macli-ing, Castro surmises that the struggle for self-determination continues.

Students today who now have this book as reference are lucky to find material about Macli-ing. It is not surprising that a book such as this would only be made available thirty-five years after the death of Macli-ing because it was perilous to reveal human rights issues under martial law. The author herself said that writing an article about Macli-ing led to her “interrogation and chastisement” by military authorities in those times.

The experience of Macli-ing and the tribal groups thirty-five years ago is still relevant today. Witness accounts attest to how imposing development programs for the sake of “common good” upon tribes along the Chico River would not and did not work. For the 100,000 tribal people, the Chico Dam project was an unwelcome development in a space where they lived for several generations. Relocation was not an option for them, who considered the land integral to their existence. They could not imagine any other life, as they were excluded from the “good” intended by the building of the dams. It was too costly as they paid with their lives to defend their ancestral lands.

The story of Macli-ing is a story of bravery and resolve despite futility, and recognition of powerlessness. Opposition meant death and he knew it. His story forces us to question how development initiatives are pursued today. The story reminds us that insistence of a development project despite strong opposition has catastrophic consequences and impresses the importance of dialogue—to listen intently rather than insist on coercive processes. It reminds us that people who fight for principles are not silenced by death. Their voices become louder in fact. This book, which makes known the story of Macli-ing Dulag years after the death of the “great apo,” shows that curtailing life serves as a catalyst for people to collectively speak on the dead’s behalf, revealing that which was attempted to be suppressed.

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## REFERENCE

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