



# SOME INDIGENOUS CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION\*

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I have worked with many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for more than a decade now. Most of them have dealt with issues and problems being faced by our indigenous cultural communities (ICCs). During all these years, I have been fascinated with the way ICCs have learned to adapt to their immediate environment. As I grow in knowledge and experience, I have realized that the cultural traditions of the ICCs are distilled wisdom of the centuries. Since they have lived on their land since time immemorial, ICCs have developed cultural traditions which are not only marvelous to outside observers but also practical and useful to the people, as well as sustainable to the environment.

This paper intends to provide a very general survey of some of their cultural traditions which have some bearing on environmental conservation. However, this is not an exhaustive study, being based primarily on field work. My conclusions in this paper are very tentative and subject to validation by more extensive studies.

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One cannot overemphasize the need to protect our environment in the age of rapid global warming and destructive man-made pollution. The massive deterioration of our ecology necessitates that studies on ways to conserve the environment for a more sustainable future be made.

The study of the ICCs' way of life may show the world, now gasping for breath, ways toward a development scenario that is more ecology-friendly and of service not to a powerful elite but to the majority of humankind.

I decided to conduct this study to underscore the need for understanding the debate on strategies of environmental conservation. One strategy being propounded by technocrats is the fencing off of an entire area as a means of protecting its bio-diversity from the people who have lived there since time immemorial. I would like to show that such strategies are not viable and even destructive. In this paper, I stress the need for strategies which involve the active participation of the ICCs in the protection of what is actually their natural habitat. It is precisely the people and their cultural traditions which will insure the success of any environmental conservation program.

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Considerations**

One of the major concepts which we need to discuss to understand the ICCs' cultural traditions in relation to the environment is the idea of ancestral land (AL), also referred to as the ancestral domain (AD), or what Filipino anthropologist Ponciano Binnagen prefers to call ancestral homeland (AH). But instead of citing some 'experts' to define 'ancestral land,' I would rather get an idea of the concept from the summarized viewpoint of the ICCs. Thus, the following conceptualization is based on the ideas presented by ICCs in the 12th Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos-Tribal Filipino Apostolate (ECTF-TFA) National Convention on September 4-7, 1990.<sup>1</sup>

### **Ancestral domain**

The ancestral land or territory is a sacred land. It is God's gift to the community or tribe. It is the source of their life, their culture. Where their ancestors lived since time immemorial, organized ICCs are now staking and asserting their claim. The ancestral territory has natural boundaries marked by mountains, rivers, trees, large stones, graveyards, places of worship and other signs marking the ICCs' presence. Ancestral domain includes forest products, hunting pasture and fishing grounds, bodies of water, and mineral resources. It includes air spaces as well as all living creatures like birds, fish, and other animals.

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<sup>1</sup> ECTF Documentation on the ECTF-TFA 12th National Convention held from September 4-7, 1990.

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All these natural resources within the AD need to be protected and sustained, for without them, the land would be unable to sustain nor support the way of life of the community. The ICCs are prepared to defend this land as their communal inheritance, even up to death.

The ancestral land and its natural resources may be utilized but may not be sold or alienated by members or leaders of the community. They are preserved according to the customary laws of the tribal Filipino community. Non-tribals in the area are enjoined to respect customary law. Particular arrangements with outsiders can be made only with the consensus of the entire community. They can never obtain title or portions of the land of the ICCs. Apportionment of these lands among natives is only through a transfer of the right to use or usufruct according to ancestral laws.

All lands, both forested and 'alienable and disposable,' which are occupied by or used for the livelihood of the tribal community, can be claimed as ancestral domain.

We can see that the ancestral homeland of the ICCs is their immediate physical environment. It is a physical reality in time and space with natural resources within. The specific tribe or ICC has control only within its particular ancestral territory. The Buhid Mangyan, for instance, cannot trespass nor make use of lands which is the ancestral territory of another Mangyan group or tribe.

The AH is the physical base of their culture and identity. The preservation of the AH or AD, being the actual physical habitat of the ICCs, is therefore necessary for their survival not only as individual human beings but as a corporate entity — as a people.

Any threat to the land or to the natural resources therein is a threat to their culture and identity, and most especially, to their survival. Dislocation from their AH is a threat to their very lives and identities as distinct peoples.

The people's relationship with one another as well as their relationship to the land is regulated by customary law which has been handed down orally from generation to generation and remembered by the tribe as part of their epics, myths, and rituals.

The land is not only a physical reality occupied by living people. In the ICC worldview, land is inhabited by ancestral and natural spirits. In their minds, the supernatural and the natural exist side by side and interpenetrate one another. In fact, it is necessary to get along with the spirit world to maintain harmony with the natural world and with other human beings.

In a way, what links the people with the land is their ancestors. The ancestors come in the form of traditions, rituals, customs, and beliefs they have handed down to their descendants, particularly, on how to relate with the land and the spirits living therein.

These descendants worship their spirit-form and carry out their ways of life while maintaining the land which they have enriched with the bones and dust of their bodies. And to complete the relation, it is the land that links the people and their ancestors.

### **The Human Activity Systems**

Hitoshi Watanabe, in his study of the Ainu, came up with a framework to understand the relationship of a people with their natural habitat. He referred to this as the 'human activity systems' (HAS).

According to Watanabe, man's life is made up of interrelated activities necessary for his survival, production, and reproduction. Accordingly, "the activity system which is a structure made up of interrelated activities ... has a spatio-temporal structure." This system of interrelated activities is the HAS — the core of man's ecosystem.

The integration of the HAS with the environment makes up the human ecosystem.

Man is the only species [who] can... [as it did] alter his relationship with his habitat by arbitrarily controlling time and space factors of his activities. ... [D]eveloping technology has more and more reduced the spatio-temporal

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limitations of his activity. . . [T]his has been making the adaptation of his activity system to his habitat more efficient.<sup>2</sup>

Let me point out further that Watanabe does not limit the manipulation of spatio-temporal structure to technology. Man also does this through his rituals, ceremonies, and other cultural traditions.<sup>3</sup>

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### **Animism-Shamanism**

When authors usually talk of the great religions or the global religions, they usually refer to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism. Animism is not included at all. Normally it is termed, particularly in the past, as primitive religion.

Almost all peoples passed through the stage of practicing animism. In fact, such practice still exists today, albeit in modified form. In the Philippines, we have what we call folk Christianity or folk Islam which incorporates many animist elements.

With a certain amount of risk, I would like to posit that animism-shamanism is one of the world's great religions by virtue of the length of time it has been practiced and the number of people all over the world who are practicing it in various forms. In fact,

on the level of the ideas, I would posit that it is a legitimate *welstanchaunng* — a concrete complex of explanation for both natural and supernatural phenomena.

Anthropologist John McAndrew, who has done work on Filipino spiritualism and power, observed that known Christian religious leaders talk of dialogues with Islam or Buddhism but never with animists practitioners.<sup>4</sup> I share his opinion that animists are either classified as second-class believers or not regarded at all.

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<sup>2</sup>Hitoshi Watanabe, *The Human Activity System: Its Spatio-temporal Structure* (University of Tokyo, Japan, 1977).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Conversation with John McAndrew in Baguio City On February 1990.

It is impossible to understand, much less dialogue with the ICCs without an understanding of their indigenous spirituality. Thus, it is necessary to discuss, as one of the framework for understanding, the animism-shamanism of ICCs. This has special importance in understanding their view of nature and the environment.

Animism varies greatly in character and practice. Some practices in making contact with spirits are simple, while other philosophical concepts are systematized into extensive ceremonial system. Each culture area has its own distinctive pattern which also varies from tribe to tribe. Basically, the shared belief is that "there are forces outside of man and his immediate physical world which affect man's fate and with which he must maintain relations [so] that he may prosper." Some commonalities among animists are the following:<sup>5</sup>

- 1.) It revolves around the control of the outer world for man's practical ends by utilizing the help of spiritual agencies.
- 2.) The spiritual is conceived of as an all pervading force. Its concrete forms are usually thought of as a number of spirits.
- 3.) Philosophical formulations of the beginnings and aims of life are present but do not form any substantial core of religious thought.
- 4.) Ethics has little to do with religion but rests rather on custom and social control.
- 5.) It is non-proselytizing since the particular religion, i.e., the ancestral spirit, is privately reserved for the tribe alone.
- 6.) Ritual is, by far, the most common means of communicating with sacred forces and beings.

There is no cleavage between the animate and inanimate nor between man and animals who are credited with human attributes.

To clarify the term 'shamanism,' I would like to present a definition of the word 'shaman' and show why it is intimately linked with animism.

A shaman is any individual recognized by the community as one who can bridge the world of the phenomenal and supernatural — one who is able to or has the power to communicate directly with the other world, i.e., the spirit world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>*Colliers Encyclopedia*, Vol. 19. Crowel Collier Educational Corporation, U.S.A. 1969. The discussion on Animism was found under the heading of Primitive Religion.

<sup>6</sup>Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1975).

Perhaps an appropriate description of shamans in relation to the ICCs' worldview and outlook towards nature can be summed up by the following:

While shamans have no fixed dogma or religion, they all believe in the universal web of power that supports all life. All elements of the environment are alive and all have their source of power in the spirit world. Rocks, plants, animals, clouds and wind are charged with life and must be paid due respect for the maintenance of harmony and health. Shamans consider all life forms to be interconnected and a mutually supportive balance among them is essential for humankind's survival. Our job is to understand this balance and to live in harmony with it, always taking nature into consideration in every endeavor. The web of power in nature is the life-giver and the source of all successful activity.<sup>7</sup>

## Some Common Beliefs and Practices

### Sacred land and sites

ICC.s have always looked at their land, and all the earth for that matter, as suffused with life and, therefore, sacred. This idea of the sanctity of the land and all things in it makes the ICC.s treat the land with respect. They in fact will not talk of preserving the environment as if it were a separate entity. In their worldview, they are part of nature and not separate from it.<sup>8</sup>

Here are two leaders of the ICC.s, one from Cordillera and the other from Mindanao, speaking about land.<sup>9</sup>

To claim a place is the birthright of every man. The lowly animals claim their place, how much more man? Man is born to live. Apu Kabunian, lord of us all, gave us life and placed us in the world to live human lives. And where shall we obtain life? From the land!

To work the land is an obligation, not merely a right. In tilling the land you possess it. And so land is a grace that must be nurtured. To enrich it and make it fructify is the eternal exhortation of Apu Kabunian to all his children. Land is sacred. Land is beloved. From its womb springs our Kalinga life

Macliing Dulag

The earth is sacred to us. We are connected to the earth; if it is lost so are our lives. Until recently, we Lumad did not wear shoes because the land is an extension of our bodies

The earth is our parent; it is our father and mother who helps us grow and wakes us from our sleep. The earth is dear to our bodies. When our bodies are pinched, it hurts. When the land is ravaged it hurts in the same way. When the land is abused, the Lumad [s] are one with it.

Datu Mampadayag

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<sup>7</sup>Jose Stevens and S. Lena, *Secrets of Shamanism* (New York: Philip Lief Group Inc., 1988).

<sup>8</sup>Rene Agbayani, Personal Notes, 1990.

<sup>9</sup>*SUWARA* (Official publication of the Lumad-Mindanao) Special issue, Davao City, 1990.

Not only is the earth itself sacred; there are areas within the ancestral territory set aside as sacred sites. In fact, in a protest demonstration against the Mt. Apo Geothermal Project of the PNOC, the Lumads said, "Apo Sandawa is like your church to us. If you were a Christian, a priest or a Catholic would you allow a hole to be bored into your church?"<sup>10</sup>

Mt. Apo or Apo Sandawa to the Lumad, is a sacred mountain, a sacred site. All ICCs have this in common. An area or areas considered to be sacred and therefore cannot be trespassed by man unless he comes to worship or to perform important community healing rituals. Cultivation or use of the natural resources within the sacred sites are strictly forbidden.

Particular sacred sites of the Bondocs were studied by Brett. This include the *papatayan* in a grove of pine trees above the village where sacrifices are performed on rest days of the village. Cutting trees and branches from this area is punished by fines and supernatural sanction, with the latter being invoked most of the time.<sup>11</sup>

The Hanunuo Mangyan leaders in Mansalay and Bulalacao towns of Mindoro Oriental refuse to allow mining operations and similar extractive corporate intrusions into their area because they believe that this will disturb the spirits residing in the sacred sites.

Stirring up or offending these spirits will force them to take revenge by unleashing destructive forces or simply with holding blessings.<sup>12</sup>

Sacred places have a dynamic character. Departure of a local group from a sacred place or the death of a medicine man result in the loss of meaning of a sacred place. Another place may then become sacred should certain experiences in a new place are interpreted by the medicine man as investing sanctity on the area. There is a constant interaction between the people and the environmental spirits in the course of everyday activities as in swiddening, hunting, fishing and travel when the appropriate rites are performed.<sup>13</sup>

### The belief in critical hours

In a study on forest-conserving beliefs made by Charles Castro, he discovered that "[m]any rural communities in the Philippines consider certain times of the day— usually high noon and twilight— as sacred and/or critical. During such

<sup>10</sup>Part of the chapter I wrote in TABAK's *Struggle Against Development Aggression* (1990). It was a direct quote from one of the Lumad leaders from Mt. Apo.

<sup>11</sup>June Prill Brett, "The Bontok: Traditional Wet-Rice And Shifting Cultivators of the Philippines," in: Marten G. G. (ed.), (Boulden and London: West View Press, 1986)

<sup>12</sup>Chapter written by Danilo Geiger in TABAK's *Struggle Against Development Aggression*, 1990.

<sup>13</sup>Ponciano Bennagen, "Indigenous Attitudes Towards Land And Natural Resources of Tribal Filipinos," *NCCP Newsletter*, October-December 1991.



hours it is also taboo to go outdoors, build a fire in the fields, or engage in noisy and vigorous activities. The belief is that spirits are active and prone to doing harm to human beings during such times."<sup>14</sup>

In his study, he also cited Brett concerning similar beliefs among the Bontoc.

There are designated times of the day, from 11 [a.m.] to noon and from 5:30 to 6:30 [p.m.], that are believed to be dangerous for walking the mountain trails. These designated times are dusk and the hottest part of the day, times when malevolent spirits that push people over the mountainsides are believed to be roaming around. Beliefs like these are based on the assumption that for activities there is a proper time and place to be observed and respected in order to be in harmony with the supernatural beings in the area. This is the Bontoc's way of structuring their relationships with the environment; since they perceive themselves to be sharing the land with these supernatural beings who hold them responsible for the stewardship of the land.

I have also observed during visits to Kalunga and Bontoc communities that there are certain times of the year where a specific village would declare a "holiday" in observance of certain customs. During these times, the people would do no work but instead take part in community ceremonies. None among the villagers may leave the territory of the village nor can outsiders get in during these times.<sup>15</sup>

Castro interprets this belief by saying that though it may appear as insignificant idle time, this has prevented people from frenetic activity that results in the exploitation of the environment. In the Cordillera, it prevented possible forest fires and was helpful in the preservation of the pine forests.<sup>16</sup>

### **Beliefs and practices related to shifting cultivation**

Majority of the ICCs, including wet-rice cultivators, practice shifting cultivation or swiddening. This type of agriculture involves site selection, clearing, burning, planting, weeding, harvesting, replanting and then fallowing. Normally, burning begins during the driest months of the year just before the onset of the rainy season.

The calendar of activities are based on the information they receive from the "bio-physical" environment. The Tirurays consult the position of their Zodiac constellation in the night sky before sowing rice seeds in the fields. ...The Taubuid of Mindoro use the arrival of migratory birds and the blossoming of certain trees and vines as signals for the start of the swidden cycle. Most

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<sup>14</sup>Charles P. Castro, "Beware of Trees With Fireflies: Forest Related Folk Beliefs and Practices and Their Implications For Social Forestry," *IESAM Bulletin*, July-September 1990.

<sup>15</sup>Rene Agbayani, Notes, *op cit*.

<sup>16</sup>Castro, *op cit*.

often the information coincides with the change in seasons in their particular locality, such as the start of the dry season or the coming of the rains.<sup>17</sup>

Almost all ICC shifting cultivation practitioners have their own specific ceremonies associated with the swidden cycle. Bennagen, citing an anthropologist-missionary on swidden practices, stated that "[e]nvironmental spirits need to be propitiated to ensure abundant harvests. Permission to clear new fields must be sought from the spirits and gods of the forests who own the land. These practices are found among various groups throughout the country."<sup>18</sup>

Strictly speaking, the people have no concept of ownership of land *per se*. Rather, there is stewardship as a right. "This is so because land and natural resources belong to gods, spirits and ancestors. Land use depends not only on the initiative of the occupants but on how well the occupants relate to gods, spirits and ancestors."<sup>19</sup>

The ICCs have a deep knowledge of their immediate environment. The Hanunuo Mangyans of Mindoro know 87 basic swidden crops, 78 percent of which are for food and the rest for medicine, technological needs, trading, rituals, and cosmetics. They can also distinguish 450 animal types and 1,600 plant types.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Virginia Cuevas, "The Continuing Problem Of Shifting Cultivation in the Philippines: A Human Ecology Analysis," *JESAM Bulletin*, July-December 1991.

<sup>18</sup>Bennagen, *op cit*.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>20</sup>Harold C. Conklin, *Hanunuo Agriculture: A Report on An Integral System Of Shifting Cultivation in the Philippines* (Rome: FAO-UN, 1957).

The Negritos of Zambales are able to enumerate 43 plants eaten by birds; 17 species of palm by civets, 38 by fruit bats, 12 by pigs, and 21 by deers.<sup>21</sup>

ICCs plant different varieties of crops of different maturation. This enables them to spread labor activities during harvest over a longer period of time to have more food for a longer period of time with minimal storage.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the Bontoc swidden field is well organized and structured in time and space to maintain continuous crop cover and to fully utilize sunlight. This, with terracing, is done to minimize soil erosion.<sup>23</sup>

Traditional shifting cultivators also know the importance of long fallow periods. The T'boli of Lake Sebu will clear a plot of land in the rainforest. After two or three years when the soil is exhausted they leave the area to open a new plot of land. They will not come back to the area until after another 20 to 30 years. By then the forest has completely regenerated.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, such practice is changing. Many studies have pointed out that increasing population pressure and pressures on the land have caused a number of ICCs to shorten their fallow periods or limit their cultivation to the same plots of land.

But whenever they can, the ICCs try to maintain their traditional ways. For example, the Tirurays of Cotabato attempt to avoid permanent destruction of the rainforest and its conversion into grasslands. "They allow for a minimum of six to eight years fallow period sufficient to restore soil fertility. They prefer virgin forests for swiddens as it is believed easier to clear than a second-growth forest. In clearing the forest for swidden, they make sure that certain useful fruit trees are protected. . . . They are aware that repeated slashing and burning without sufficient fallow period effects succession into grass land, which to them is useful only as a source for thatch roofing."<sup>25</sup>

### **Other beliefs and practices**

The Agta of the Sierra Madre are people who combine shifting cultivation and hunting and gathering. They normally try to live below the carrying capacity

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<sup>21</sup> J. P. Brosius, "The Zambales Negritos: Swidden Agriculture and Environmental Change," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 1983.

<sup>22</sup> Cuevas, *op cit*.

<sup>23</sup> Brett, *op cit*.

<sup>24</sup> Rene Agbayani, Personal Notes on Observations in Lake Sebu, February 1984.

<sup>25</sup> Bennagen, *op cit*

of the natural environment. Some of their practices that are of particular interest are the following<sup>26</sup>

- 1.) Camp movement as much as twenty time a year as soon as re sources are depleted;
- 2.) Extensive food-sharing which allocates food resources among, members, thus preventing over-exploitation of resource-poor areas;
- 3.) Prohibition of fishing in certain rivers during the spawning and growing season of certain fish species; and
- 4.) Harvesting cultivated food crops only as needed for domestic consumption.

Labor exchange is a normal practice among ICCs. Not only is it sanctioned by the tribe and by custom law, it is also a strategy that minimizes labor shortage at the peak labor activities such as clearing. Exchange is done among the households within the village. Everyone benefits from this exchange with the mutually agreed upon sharing of the harvests.<sup>27</sup>

When the ICC go hunting whether for deer or wild boar, the successful hunters give a share to every member of the community. There are in fact, traditional means of dividing the meat with the best part going to the most prestigious or honored members. ICCs have rituals where the better-off members of the community redistribute part of their wealth to the community by means of communal feasts.<sup>28</sup>

What is clearly noticeable among these people is this custom of sharing their resources. While it is very clear that their custom law provides for communal ownership of certain lands and properties, the ICCs are well-known for their capacity to give. In Bukidnon, one of the reasons why natives were disenfranchised was because they were willing to "lend" their land to outsiders. Since land is a gift from God, they (the Lumad) do not own it; they allowed lowlanders to cultivate the land. In their minds, ownership is conferred once you cultivate the land. Once you become an absentee landowner, it reverts back to the community. However, they were unaware of the fact that once the lowlanders got the land, they titled it under their names and, thus, depriving them of the land.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Cuevas, *op cit.*

<sup>28</sup>Rene Agbayani, Personal Notes as ACTF Staff.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

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To the traditional ICC, owning land or presenting a piece of paper as proof of ownership is incomprehensible.

You ask us if we own the land and mock us. Where is your title? When we query the meaning of your words you answer with taunting arrogance. Where are the documents to prove that you own the land? Title. Documents. Proof (of ownership). Such arrogance to speak of owning the land. When you shall be owned by it. How can you own that which will outlive you. Only the race owns the land because the race lives forever!

Macliing Dulag

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### **Some Tentative Conclusions**

The concepts of ancestral land, human activity systems, and animism-shamanism interrelate in the life of the ICC.

Animism-shamanism, as a belief system handed-down from generation to generation, guides the ICCs' thinking and behavior. Because they look at the land and all things in it as sacred, they pay due respect to nature. Since all of nature including the inanimate are suffused with life and are connected to the spirit world, they treat the environment with care. Contrast this with the user-used, consumerist, and profit-oriented worldview of dominant society and we can begin to understand why there is massive environmental degradation in our world today.

We may illustrate it this way. A logger looks at trees as potential dollars. So he does not care if he cuts them all down as long as he profits. But the ICCs look at trees as brothers inhabited by spirits. If he needs a particular tree to build his house he must first perform a ritual (sometimes expensive) and ask the guardian spirits permission to cut the tree. It is no wonder that ICCs have lived in the midst of the rainforest for centuries without irretrievably damaging it, allowing it to regenerate itself.

The belief system is related to the ancestral land in the sense that AD is their natural habitat and the physical base of their culture, identities, and belief systems. There are specific recognizable spirits, ancestral spirits and local gods, who are understandable only in the context of the specific AD of the ICCs.

We can link the concepts of ancestral lands and animism-shamanism also in relation to the human activity systems. The ICCs have cultural traditions that skillfully manipulates time and space factors to maximize benefit to their community while minimizing damage to the natural environment.

Sacred sites act objectively as wildlife sanctuaries for both flora and fauna. ICCs could elect to cultivate any site or cut trees and gather food and materials there. Yet, they refrain from doing so.

In shifting cultivation, by making maximum use of limited space by planting different food crops, the ICCs ensure that they have food throughout the year. At the same time, planting many crop varieties help enrich the soil.

The ICCs can also elect to fish or hunt anytime. But in consonance with their traditions, they let off hunting or fishing during the spawning or birthing season of particular animal and fish species.

Furthermore, as Castro notes, prohibitions from doing certain activities at certain specified periods of time help prevent frenetic activities that may be the cause of forest fires or associated with the cutting of trees. The critical times or periods of rest also make for greater in-group solidarity and a turning towards the divine which in the ICC's worldview is associated with natural spirits.

From here, we can now appreciate the contributions of the ICCs to environmental conservation. They are not *kaingeros* or shifting cultivators who cause forest denudation. They are not, as generally believed, backward and superstitious. As we have seen, their cultural traditions are borne out of their intimate knowledge of their natural habitat. Their cultural traditions, whether classified as either technology or beliefs, are adaptation to their environment. While different organizations flaunt their accomplishments and contributions in saving the environment, the earliest and original ecologists in the country were the ICCs. We have a lot to learn from them in preserving the environment.

I remember my conversations with the members of the Kinaiyahan Foundation Inc. They narrated that while covering the T'boli reforestation program, they observed how the old T'boli men could identify more than a hundred tree and plant species in the rainforest while the forester who accompanied them could only identify a little more than ten tree species.<sup>30</sup>

I believe that programs like the IPAS (Integrated Protected Areas Systems) will not succeed if they continue to hew to the idea that the IPAS areas should be bereft of and protected from people. Many studies have shown that the more successful reforestation programs were those initiated, implemented, and

<sup>30</sup>Interview with Kinaiyahan personnel on April 10-11, 1991 in Kidapawan, North Cotabato.

completed by the community whereas those monopolized by the local governments were not as successful.

The ICCs, especially with respect to their ancestral domain, must be encouraged to actively participate in environmental protection programs.

### **Indigenous communities and culture change**

The ICCs, at present, are no longer in isolation. Their culture and traditions are dynamic, not eternal and forever unchanging. It is a fact that what were once self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and isolated communities are now the targets of corporate and state intrusion.

State and corporate invasion of ancestral domain is changing the structure and function of the ICCs. The cash economy has intruded into their society and has begun to dominate and dictate the operating economic relations in their communities. The dominant culture, particularly with its consumerist and highly individualistic aspects, is penetrating their society which was previously based on labor exchange and communal sharing.

Global and national forces are swirling into and drastically affecting the land and people of these communities. Thus, we see Aytas from the Sierra Madre who are very adept at using chainsaws to cut trees, working for cash and food giveaways from logging concessionaires. We see also many Ifugao communities who have stopped tilling their rice terraces and no longer keep family and clan woodlots. They now completely engage in woodcarving for cash. Former wet-rice cultivators in Benguet are now planting potatoes for McDonald's, as well as other vegetables for the market. In this new type of commercial farming, they use petroleum-based pesticides and fertilizers which are very harmful to the environment.

Not only is the domination of cash and Western farm products evident in the ICCs. Traditional feasts, rituals, weddings and the like are no longer practiced in a number of communities. I have been to a very isolated area in Agusan and after a so-called traditional wedding, disco tunes on a portable stereo were played for the enjoyment of the majority of the Manobo guests instead of following the traditional Manobo customs.

Even in my own area in Bukidnon, where the majority of the populace are "natives," very few will admit their identity much less engage in indigenous practices which would earn them the pejorative label — pagan. I mention this because, we may tend to romanticize the traditions of the people and their indigenous knowledge. We may fall into the trap of thinking that their culture does not change. That it must be preserved at all costs. I would like to point out that political forces in this country have done this to win power for themselves.

For example, former rebel priests have taken on a romanticist pseudo-indigenous political line to project themselves nationally and try to win a mass base among indigenous peoples. Some religious personalities in Bukidnon, for example have used the indigenous ideas of the people to claim that since they have no concept of ownership it is alright for them to give away their ancestral lands to lowlanders, i.e., big religious corporation!

The task of anthropologists and other scholars should be to act as "mirrors for the human community." Thus, I present what I view as traditions, beliefs and practices which I feel should be maintained by the people because they seem to help sustain the environment and protect it. However, I also point out that other communities have left behind these practices. Besides, in the final analysis, it is the people themselves who will decide the fate of their traditions, beliefs, and practices. That is self-determination.

A lot has to be changed, though. A class-based power elite continues to lord it over the country. They do not care a bit for the poorer classes nor for the marginalized ICCs.

But hope springs eternal. I would like to end with words I wrote down some years ago:

Yet, in all these, the Indigenous Peoples are aware that they are not alone. They know that others share the belief that the earth, the trees, the animals, the stars and humans are made from the same basic material. And because of this belief, all are connected to each other, in a community of interest with nature and other fellow human beings.

Because of this kinship with one another, this human bond, we can come together and help one another. We can unite to change their situation — and ours, too.<sup>31</sup>

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**"State and corporate invasion of ancestral domain is changing the structure and function of the ICCs. The cash economy has intruded into their society and has begun to dominate and dictate the operating economic relations in their communities. The dominant culture, particularly with its consumerist and highly individualistic aspects, is penetrating their society which was previously based on labor exchange and communal sharing."**

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<sup>31</sup>This is from the chapter, "Collision of Worlds," which I co-wrote with the editor in TABAK's *Struggle Against Development Aggression*, 1990.