GENDER RELATIONS AND GENDER ISSUES ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE CENTRAL CORDILLERA, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES*

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on gender relations and issues in resource management among the Bontok, one of the several ethnolinguistic groups in the highlands of northern Philippines. The paper begins with a presentation of some theories and models on gender differences that have been assumed to be universally applicable. Most of these models try to explain gender differences in relation to female subordination and male domination. The Bontok case described in this paper shows that the theories on gender inequality, believed to be universal, are not supported, particularly when examining the gender division of labor and resource management in this highland society. Finally, some critical issues on gender concerns in upland resource management are presented, particularly in relation to government development programs/projects that often exclude and/or ignore women as equal partners in development planning and implementation.

Situating Gender and Difference

In all societies, women and men have always been perceived as different in their biological constitution—or sex differences.

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Except for the biological differences in procreative functions and secondary sex characteristics, behavioral differences between women and men are social constructs. These social constructs oftentimes assume political characters. It is the socio-cultural construction that is called *gender,* which results from the interaction of biology and culture. This in turn gives rise to the cultural concepts *"femininity", "masculinity",* and the accompanying cultural behavior assigned by the society. There is, however, diversity in what constitutes "feminine" behavior and "masculine" behavior across cultures and at different points in time. Females and males acquire a gender identity that is guided by the socially and normatively defined notions that constitute *female* and *male.* Some feminist theorists have suggested the notion of two separate spheres of activity: the *public* and *private* domains. The *public* domain is described as the social sphere that centers on the wider social world outside of the house and is associated with political and economic activity above the household level (see Rosaldo, 1977; Helliwell, 1993). This has been described as the men's domain. The *domestic* or *private* domain is said to be the social sphere that centers on the house and is associated with such activities as child rearing and food preparation for household consumption.

Writers have observed that women's sexuality is largely the outcome of ideologies formed by the society. For example, in Thailand, Buddhist notions of gender difference stress female inferiority despite the widespread participation of women in all levels of the economy (Thitsa, 1980; Kirsh 1983). Kirsh has argued that Theravada Buddhism views women as bound to earthly desires, while men are more ready to give up such attachments. This image of women becomes rationalized for job stratification, and therefore referred to as an "ideology of oppression" for women.

Feminist anthropologists have observed from cross-cultural studies that to understand gender relations is to analyze these in the context of time periods, social class, ethnicity, education, ideology, age, degree of acculturation and other experiences as these intersect in their lives. In pre-Revolutionary Vietnam, for example, Confucianism adopted by the upper class subordinated women, whereas among the peasantry, husband and wife equality was celebrated (Ngo, 1974). In Saudi Arabia, government has declared that any mingling of the sexes is morally wrong. This ideology has been translated into the strict segregation of the sexes such as the *purdah.* As a result, Saudi women and men are segregated: in schools, exclusive female institutions, in their jobs, in banks, and in public buses. Female lawyers are also barred from becoming judges, or holding legislative authority. In this Islamic society, the patriarchal family remains the center of social organization (Helliwell, 1993).

What Makes the Difference: Some Theoretical Perspectives

Evidence from cross-cultural anthropological studies informs us that women and men behave differently because more than biological differences, social and cultural processes makes them different. There is cross-cultural evidence that male-female variability is expressed in sexual behavior, in the division of labor, and in the performance of tasks, such as child rearing. This shows that no one characteristic task and subsequent behavior is *natural* to males or females; however, culture and society see the importance in differentiating women and men.

Theories to explain gender differences as basis for the subordination of women and their low status as compared to men have been often attributed to biological differences. Simone de Beauvoir (1953), for example, locates the origin of women's

subordination in her relationship to nature and nature's relationship to culture. She argues that man is freer than woman to pursue transcendence because he is not constrained by the tasks of reproducing and sustaining life. Similarly, Ortner (1974) claims that the *nature/culture* model is a universal construction of sexual inequality, aligning nature with woman and culture with men.

Rosaldo (1977:8) further elaborated on the above views, and argues that an emphasis on women's maternal role leads to a universal opposition between domestic and public roles that are necessarily asymmetrical. Women, confined to the domestic sphere, do not have access to the sorts of authority, prestige, and cultural value that are the prerogatives of men. Another view offered by Sanday (in Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974:11), suggests that reproduction, subsistence, and defense are crucial aspect of any society's survival, and in particular, women's reproductive role may limit their participation in defense. Thus, women's contribution to subsistence is a crucial variable in determining their status. Sanday further argues that if the fruits of production are controlled by men, and women produce most or none—the status is low. Women's status is highest where the contribution to subsistence is relatively equivalent to that of men. Sacks (1974:222) observed that for the attainment of full social equality, men and women's work must be of the same kind — the production of social use values. In other words, where the sexes engage in productive activities with different ends, such that women engage only in production for private use while men engage in production for exchange or social use values, then women have low status.

The following section presents the Bontok case to describe gender relations in the Cordillera highlands. Ethnographic data would show that gender models that emphasize dualism as discussed above are not universally applicable.

The Bontok[1] of the Cordillera Highlands

The interior mountainous terrain of northern Philippines, known as the Gran Cordillera Central (see Scott, 1974) is home to several distinct cultural groups. The major ethnolinguistic groups are the Bontok, Ifugao, Kankana-ey, Isneg, Ibaloy, Kalinga, Tingguian and Kalanguya.

The municipality of Bontoc in the Mountain Province occupies 22 sq. km. at an altitude of 1,680 meters. It lies within the Central Cordillera mountain chain, which extends about 270 km. from north to south and about 24,000 sq. km. with a maximum altitude of 2,500 meters in the south central area. Most of the area lies in the tropical submontane zones (100-2400 m). The climate is a monsoon type, with a definite dry (Nov.-Apr.) and wet (May-Oct.) season. Radiating out of the Mt. Data watershed are four main drainage systems. The Chico flowing (to the north), and the Asin (to the east) drain into the Cagayan River. Both the Cervantes River (to the west), and Agno River (to the south) empty into the South China Sea.

Bontoc town, the capital of the Mountain Province can be reached by land from Baguio City, which is about 150 kilometers south of Bontoc town. There are 15 *barangays*[2] (roughly equivalent to villages) in this municipality. In pre-colonial Spanish and American periods, and up until the Philippine Republic, each village was autonomous from any other in the conduct of their socio-cultural and political affairs.

Bontok settlements are situated in narrow valleys and on mountain shoulders with elevations ranging from 500 to 1,300 meters above sea level, whenever water sources are sufficient to irrigate rice terraced fields. The Bontoc area has a total population of 17,093 distributed among 15 compact villages or barangays. Village populations may range between 600 to 3,000 persons.

The Bontok economy is largely based on subsistence wet rice agriculture, cultivated on terraced mountain slopes, with one to two croppings annually. Although wet rice agriculture appears to dominate Bontok subsistence economy, swidden cultivation is considered as complementary to the rice agricultural system. Sweet potatoes, a wide variety of beans, millet, maize, sugarcane, taro, peanuts, and some vegetables and fruits are planted primarily for household consumption. A minimal percentage of their produce is sold for cash at the Bontoc town market[3].

Historical Sketch

The Bontok area, like the rest of the Cordillera, was able to resist Spanish domination for almost 400 years of colonization in the Philippines (Scott, 1974). It became part of the Philippine State through negotiation rather than conquest, during the American colonial period (Fry, 1983). Early American policy in the region stressed local control over economy and resources. The colonial administrators (see Jenista, 1987) assigned to the Cordillera respected the indigenous customs (with the exception of headhunting), and exercised minimal intervention in the affairs of the villages. Although formal education and western health practices were introduced, indigenous customs governing natural resource management were largely left to the communities that continued to practice control over their indigenous political institutions and local resource management through their customary law (Prill-Brett, 1987; Voss, 1983).

The following section describes the indigenous resource management system situated in the larger context, by first looking at the natural resources such as land, water and forest, and the indigenous property regimes. Next, we look at gender relations in the allocation of rights to community resources, the division of labor, and gender ideology.

Access and Management of Natural Resources: Property Regimes

Access to resources such as land, water, and forest products within the territory of each village, are governed by rules that guide the management of each property regime. These fall under the following classifications (see Prill-Brett, 1992, for more details on the indigenous resource management system):

1. Common property regime includes two kinds:
   - Communal, and
   - Indigenous corporate
2. Individual property regime.

Communal Property

Resources classified as *communal* include lands and other natural resources that do not fall under *corporate* or *individual* ownership. These are resources that have not been claimed by individuals or groups through permanent improvements. Any citizen of the village may gather forest products, open up swidden gardens, tap water from mountain springs for irrigation or domestic use, gather fuelwood and lumber, hunt wild animals, collect mushrooms, rattan, wild vegetables and fruits.

Corporate Property

Corporate property refers to areas claimed by founding ancestors (females or males), who have put improvements on arable land and forest stands. These resources have been devolved to all the descendants who have equal use rights to the common land (*tayan*). Non-members may use the land only with the permission of corporate members.

Individual Property

Individual property regimes are properties belonging to individuals, usually inherited from parents. These are primarily terraced pond fields, but would also include house lots, and swidden gardens close to the settlement. These have been invested with permanent improvements. The most valued resources among the central Cordillerans are the terraced irrigated pond fields. The rules that govern access and management of these properties are more restricted than those that control common property resources.

Rules of Access to Natural Resources

The three kinds of property regimes have their rules of access that accompany rights and responsibilities in its management. All community members have rights to use resources that are considered as communal. The channeling of water and the building or repairing of irrigation canals involves both women and men; the men usually carry out the heavier tasks. Nonmembers of the village may exploit resources only with permission from the community.

The village owns prior rights to water sources within each community's territorial boundaries.[4] However, rights become restricted when the source is tapped, by channeling water toward permanently constructed ditches by a group of people (women and men). It is through this procedure that the original canal constructors establish prior rights to use the water for irrigation. Subsequent pond field constructions must always be built below the original pondfields to respect the prior rights to water use by the original constructors. Irrigation activities carried out just before rice planting is a community affair that is scheduled by the community elders. Both women and men are involved in the repair of eroded canals and in the proper distribution of

water. However, it is the men who carry out the tasks that require the carrying of large rocks for repairing irrigation walls. The persons who own or work pond fields located in a particular locality generally manage these irrigation canals. Therefore, households that belong to the same irrigation canal group who fail to send a representative to help in the activities are fined (see Prill-Brett, 1985).

Inheritance Patterns

Similar to most of the Philippines and Southeast Asia, the Bontok kinship pattern is bilateral, where kinship relations are equally traced from both mother's and father's line. Inheritance pattern is not based on sex, but on birth order.

The first-born child gets the lion's share of property such as pond fields, usually upon marriage. However, there are variations where the first-born gets all the property of the mother (if a female) and all the property of the father (if male) or, first born chooses from both parents' properties. The younger siblings, following birth order usually inherit property acquired by parents during their union. After marriage the family jointly manages the couple's properties. Control over any decision-making that involves the couple's individually inherited property, particularly on decisions that involve the alienation of pondfields, remain with the individual owner. Parents often retain some of their property, after allocating their properties upon the marriage of their children. This is to assure them of social and economic security during their non-productive years. Whoever among their children takes care of their needs will inherit these fields when the parents die.

Divorce is practiced if the couple does not produce any offspring, or if there is continuous death of children born to the couple. Elders of both spouses usually advise the couple to

divorce, since failure to produce children is attributed to the displeasure of the ancestors. Should divorce be carried out, both would withdraw their individually inherited properties. Any property acquired during their union is equally divided. The house built for the couple is usually retained in favor of the wife.

Gender Division of Labor

The following is a description of the division of labor in agricultural rice production, which is the most important subsistence economic activity. The rice agricultural cycle is surrounded with rituals that also coordinate the scheduling of the rice agricultural cycle activities. Compulsory "rest days" called *teer/tengao,* are declared by the elders of the *ward*[5]. During these sacred rest days no persons are allowed to enter or leave the village, lest they be fined by the community (see Prill-Brett, 1986, for a description of the agricultural cycle rituals and activities). The women are considered as more effective then the men in policing the village during the compulsory village confinement period.

The male and female household members carry out the rice agricultural tasks. Unmarried women who belong to the same peer group usually form semi-permanent exchange labor groups (*ogfu or obfu*). Unmarried men from the different *ators* are often invited to join their work group, of which several social arrangements are practiced (Reid, 1972). Exchange labor groups are arranged among the young men and women in the girl's dormitory (*pangis/ulog*). Each female member of the labor group is given the opportunity to control the products of their labor as leader (*pumango*) of the group. However, female leaders who belong to the upper class often waive their right to collect the day's labor payment in favor of the lower ranking peer group members. These female labor groups sometimes endure

throughout the members' lifetime. Women who belong to these informal peer group associations often work together from adolescence throughout adulthood and into old age. I have interviewed a few women in their late sixties and seventies from Samoki and Tukukan, who still maintain working relations with some of the members of their original peer group.

Agricultural Activities

The agricultural activities in rice production are land preparation, plowing/turning the soil, sowing, transplanting, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, transporting paddy, drying, pounding and storing the crop. Men and women cooperate in carrying out the above tasks. However, men often perform the heavier tasks such as plowing (especially if the water buffalo is used), and assist in the harvest and transporting of the harvest to the village. The tasks of sowing, transplanting, and weeding the paddy fields are mostly done by women. Overall, women are the primary agriculturists.

Swidden farming activities also need the labor of both men and women. Men clear the forest, pollard the trees, dry and burn the brush and branches. The women do the planting, and both harvest and transport the produce to the village.

Livestock raising of pig, chicken, carabao (water buffalo) and cow is an important activity. Pigs and chickens are found in almost all households, since these are ritual animals. The care of these livestock is the responsibility of household members. Pig feed is gathered by women from the swidden and carried home after work from the fields. Grandparents, husband, or wife—whoever among them is left in the village, does the cooking of pig food and the household meal. Male household members are usually responsible for the grazing of water buffalo and cow in the communal pastureland.

Child Care

Childbirth is a cooperative effort of the wife with the assistance of the husband and an *inchawat* (midwife), or an elder female family member. The men are not excluded in this event, but are expected to be around, especially if the delivery is difficult.

Among the Bontok, there is no preference for male or female children, since both are valued by the society. Males and females are distinguished by their biological identity, which will determine which gender behavior is appropriate for them to follow during their enculturation period. The tasks identified with male or female are largely interchangeable and quite flexible. Thus, childcare is the responsibility of either, the father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, older siblings (male or female), whoever is left behind in the village while the other family members are involved in other tasks out in the farm or forest.

The structure of the Bontok house (see Scott 1971) accommodates only the husband and wife and their very young child. It does not include rooms for their older children. It is considered improper for brothers and sisters to sleep under the same roof. Thus, the adolescent boys sleep in the *ator,* while the girls sleep in the *pangis* or *ulog.*

Socialization in the *Ator*

The *ator/ato* or ward (see Prill-Brett 1987) has several functions: it is a dormitory for unmarried men, young boys, and widowers; where male visitors are housed; a council house where intervillage politics is carried out (i.e., warfare and peace treaties); where ceremonies and rituals are performed for its members; it is where boys are trained to carry out tasks that prepare them to assume their role as male citizens. They are trained to respect the wisdom of elders who teach them the ethnohistory of the village including old enemies and friendly

villages, of customary law, respect of the supernatural forces that "own" natural resources, of etiquette and proper behavior toward enemies, strangers and friends, of their responsibilities as defenders of the village and cooperation, chores in the *ator* such as providing firewood for the fireplace of the *ator* sleeping place that is kept burning the whole night long, as messengers to announce village rest days and public gatherings. The older men teach the boys skills directly applicable to their economic activities. The *ator,* as a center for political activities such as mobilization for war (in the past), and the forging of peace treaties with other villages is the "school" where young boys learn their lesson in local politics and diplomacy.

Socialization in the *Pangis/Ulog*

The *pangis* is where young unmarried girls sleep at night, since the Bontok house is where the whole family eats and perform household chores during the day. However, only the husband and wife and their small child sleep in the house at night. The boys sleep in the *ator* while the girls sleep in the *pangis* as mentioned above. An important function of the *pangis,* aside from its being the sleeping place of the girls at night, is the place where the unmarried men and women arrange the *ogfu* or labor groups. It is usually during the harvest time that these temporary reciprocal labor groups are formed. Courtship usually develops in the *pangis* since courtship in the woman's house is considered improper, thus, the *pangis* is also the proper place for courtship. Young women develop strong ties with female peer groups early in their association. Likewise, unmarried men and women develop close social ties and respect for each other as they work the fields of each member's family rice fields and other tasks where the men and women exhibit cooperation. These work groups are important in fostering village solidarity.

Men's Work vs. Women's Work

In relation to the Bontok perception of work done by men and women, there is no higher value attached to work done by men, in comparison to work done by women. Neither is women's work perceived as having low status. Both are valued in the society, although viewed as different — yet complementary and often interchangeable. Tasks that are usually considered as "women's work," such as cooking the household meals. Child-care are also men's concern in Bontok society.

Decision Making

Sexuality

A Bontok woman has more freedom in relation to her sexuality during her unmarried life. Decision-making pertaining to female sexuality is largely under her control. Her male kinsmen hardly interfere in this domain. It is when she decides to get married that her parents come into the story to arrange for the wedding to forge alliance with the groom's family. It is only among the upper ranking members (*kakachangyan*) — male and female, where sexual relationships are more restricted by the parents who frown on marriages between their children with non-*kakachangyans.* Fertility, more than virginity, is highly valued in traditional Bontok society, since infertility is a primary ground for divorce. Infertility is not perceived as the fault of either spouse, but believed to be caused by the ancestors' displeasure of the union.

Brother-Sister Avoidance and the Incest Taboo

In matters pertaining to male-female relationship among siblings up to third cousins—is a strong sexual avoidance. Brothers and sisters must avoid membership in the same *ogfu/ogbu* work

group. A man must avoid courting a girl in the same *pangis/ulog* where his sisters or cousins sleep. Brothers and sisters may not sleep under the same roof in the traditional Bontok society. It is considered *kadudugis* ("dirty"). Any sexual jokes or words with sexual connotations should be avoided when closely related males and females are together. This sexual avoidance is the expression of the incest taboo among the Bontok. It is only among the *kakachangyans* that marriages between first cousins have been practiced. This is said to preserve the wealth within their line. However, purification rituals are performed during the wedding celebration to negate supernatural sanctions (i.e., infertility during the union).

Community Welfare Decision-Making

The most senior female and male members of the village are the elders who make decisions concerning the welfare of the community. However, the male elders have more opportunities to exercise decision-making for the whole community, especially in intervillage conflicts. However, women have a way of influencing the decisions through their husbands who echo these during deliberations in the *ator*. This "male domination" of intervillage politics was especially true in the past, when warfare was endemic.

The role of female elders is exhibited in the performance of public rituals such as the religious rites carried out during the commencement of the traditional rice agricultural cycle. Such activities involve the ritual sowing of rice seeds, and the observance of its success, which is performed by an old woman in behalf of the whole community.

Male elders are responsible for the rituals that involve sacrifices to the village guardian spirits at the *papatayan* sacred groves for the welfare of the community. These elders are called the

pumapatay, who perform rituals to alleviate the effects of storms, droughts and epidemics. The *ator* elders (*kumakapia*) recite long ritual prayers during the performance of marriage celebrations, purification rites related to headtaking, and the forging of peace pacts with other villages.

The performance of the cleansing rituals is usually carried out in the *ator,* of which the sleeping place and ceremonial stone platform is taboo to women. The *ator* functions are varied, but it is primarily the place where the mobilizations of all able-bodied men of the village gather to prepare for war rituals, beginning with the observation of omens. It is here where the seasoned warriors plan and brief the men about strategies of warfare, how they should carry out their attack. Since women do not directly participate in armed conflict, especially in the *faroknit* (face-to-face combat), they have no knowledge about warfare strategies and therefore cannot make decisions pertaining to warfare. One explanation for the taboo on women entering the *ator* was explained to me by old warrior informants who said that women were ritually "dangerous" to the men during the period before the men engage in warfare. Women, because of their sex would negate the men's power in warfare. Thus, the men are withdrawn from the household and retire to the *ator* to prepare for war. They must not sleep with their wives during this critical period. They must stay away from the womenfolk for the duration of war preparation and mobilization. Women may deliver the food of their menfolk to the *ator,* but they must keep their distance from the *ator,* or ask the young boys to do the chore. However, after the men arrive from their armed encounter, they in turn, are considered "dangerous" to the women. They must not go home right away but proceed directly to their respective *ators* to perform the cleansing rites so that they will not negate the women's reproductive power (fertility), most specially if their

wives are pregnant. It is clear that both women and men can be considered as "polluting" at different times, and this kind of "pollution" does not carry a superior or an inferior valuation — both can be dangerous to each other depending on the situation.

The social status of decision-makers are more often than not, based on their life's experiences, and their wisdom in deciding cases, which are considered to be fair and judicious. Male and female elders are given the highest prestige due to their closeness to the ancestors, and their rich experiences in life. Old women, particularly, are known for their ability to communicate with the spirits of the dead as mediums (*mensip-ok*) during public rituals.

Perceptions of Gender Violence

Any kind of gender violence within the community is considered abnormal, and calls attention to the neighbors. Gossip reaches the *ator* where the elders advise the violent person to mend his ways. Likewise, if it is the female who exhibits violent behavior toward her husband, the men of his *ator* would tell their wives to interfere and advise the wife to mend her ways.

Another violent behavior that does not seem to occur in the traditional Bontok society is "rape". During my 1968 to 1970 field research on Bontok warfare (see Prill-Brett 1987), I found no term for rape and the absence of any case of rape (see Casambre et. al., 1996, for a survey carried out validating this behavior among the Bontok). When I interviewed the *ator* elders and later, the old women, I realized that this concept of rape is absent in the culture. When I questioned my informants regarding this phenomenon the reply was "it is inconceivable for a man to force a woman to have sex if she does not consent to it. If a woman rejects a man, there are many other ladies to court." Even during intervillage warfare, women from the enemy village

were never sexually violated (see Prill-Brett, 1975). Women who are caught in the rice fields can defend themselves by baring their sexual organs and cursing the men to "go back to where you came from." This is considered "bad luck" for the enemy, since it is believed that in the forgotten past when the men pursued their revenge, they were cursed and literally lost their heads. Thus, during inter-village warfare, warriors made sure that the women of the enemy village who are found in the rice fields should not be warned to prevent them from cursing them by exposing their sexual organs. The lesson has been handed down to Bontok warriors who sometimes took women's heads in revenge, but did not commit rape, which they considered *lawa* or *inayan* (taboo).

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the description of Bontok resource management, that the *nature/culture, domestic/public* dichotomies, in relation to gender differences and women's subordination and male domination, do not seem to apply in the Bontok case. The division of labor clearly shows that Bontok women are not trapped, nor confined to the "domestic" or "private" domain. Women are not confined to the home, since both husband and wife work out in the fields or forest in the daytime, while grandfather, grandmother, or older siblings care for the baby or young children.

The "domestic" versus "public" spheres, where women are said to be associated with domestic or private activities while men are considered to operate in the public sphere, is not supported by the data. Both men and women participate in public rituals and ceremonies. Male and female elders perform public rituals for the community, although male elders have more occasions to perform more ceremonies — such as those related

to warfare, peace-making, intervillage conflict over boundaries brought about by resource competition.

Social and economic activities involving women are carried out most often outside the home. These activities are largely associated with food production and some trading (e.g., the production and trade of hand-woven fabrics, clay pottery, coffee beans, and some vegetables). Women often freely socialize with their peers during public feasts and other social occasions. Women inherit valuable productive property such as pondfields, which they often manage, and largely control the allocation of produce.

Men's Work and Women's Work: Interchangeable and Complementary

Men may perform tasks, which are considered as "domestic" and "women's work". These tasks include the preparation and cooking of the household meal and pig's food. The husband or the grandfather usually takes care of babies and children while women work in the rice fields and swidden garden, especially during the weeding and transplanting of rice seedlings.

Sexual Equality

There is a strong notion of sexual equality in the context of Bontok society as indicated by the following observations:

1. Customary law on access to critical resources is gender neutral, with primary emphasis on birth order in the inheritance pattern. Women inherit valuable productive property such as pondfields, which they often manage, and largely control the allocation of produce.
2. Women have a high degree of autonomy. Women may control productive property such as pond fields, and the production of woven fabrics and pottery for exchange.

3. They control their own sexuality without the intervention or control of male kinsmen.
4. Women are not confined to the home, or to home activities. Men and women equally share *domestic* work, such as cooking and childcare. Women often freely socialize with their peers during public feasts and other social occasions and form enduring social groups.
5. There are no dichotomies between men's work and women's work, there is no assignment of a higher value to men's work and lower to women's work.
6. The preference for male children over female children is absent in traditional Bontok society, since both are desired. This has been validated by several ethnographic studies carried out in the Bontok and western Mountain Province communities (see for example Cherneff, 1981:155; Bacdayan, 1977; Jeffremovas, 1994).
7. The fruits of production resulting from the joint efforts of husband and wife are jointly managed; both share in decision-making.
8. The tasks carried out by women in food production are complementary to men's work and even interchangeable, with the tasks of men.
9. Both men and women share production and reproduction. Both controls, to a large degree their own sexuality, especially during their unmarried life.
10. Except for defense and warfare — decisions concerning this nature are necessarily the domain of men. The men of the *ator* handle peace pacts, which entail the policing and defense of the community's integrity from internal or external violations or threats.

The high rate of interchangeability of "women's work" and "men's work" appears to be an important factor in gender equal-

ity among the Bontok. My own study strongly supports Bacdayan's (1977:285) finding in his northern Kankanaey study; particularly when he argues for the high degree of mechanistic cooperation of males and females. This is defined by the high rate of tasks done together. Bacdayan's data show those 81% of tasks found to be interchangeable, are the most crucial and most frequently performed tasks necessary for the operation and survival of the society. Most of these are agricultural tasks by which the family or household is maintained. I should also add, that based on my own research, another important factor leading to gender equality in Bontok society, is women's ownership and control of valuable resources such as pondfields—critical to the family's survival. Customary law supports the right of women to inherit irrigated rice fields, equal with the right of males, based on birth order.

Overall, there is a sharing of economic, social and ritual powers between men and women in the domestic and public contexts. This is expressed in the full participation of women in the ceremonial aspects of public life. There is also freedom of women, similar to the men, to form associations or ties with other members of the community and outside the community, such as the enduring association of female peer groups (*kapangis* and *khakayam*[6]). Thus, they are neither confined to the house, nor isolated from other public (social) activities.

The dualistic models such as the *public/private* in which women have been identified with the domestic sphere, and men with the public or social sphere do not necessarily apply to most of the highland societies of northern Philippines, especially the Bontok. This has been argued in this paper.

Finally, in the context of Bontok gender relations we return to Sacks (1974:222), who argues that the attainment of full social equality is when men and women's work are of the same

kind, which is the production of social use value. Furthermore, as I have argued here, women's ownership and control of productive resources critical to the production and reproduction of the family, and the interchangeability of tasks largely explains for sexual or gender equality in Bontok society.

The concluding section of this paper looks at development programs introduced to upland communities, and the issues arising as a result of the lack of understanding and sensitivity to highland cultures.

SOME LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE UPLANDS AND GENDER PERCEPTIONS

Most development projects may be well meaning in their objectives, such as, to alleviate poverty in the uplands. However, a common criticism is the lack of sensitivity to the cultural context of their "target" communities. The social structure and indigenous institutions are often neglected, while implementing programmes or projects, which often ignore traditional gender relations.

The contents of these development models are usually based on values, practices and ideologies, which are, at most, alien to most upland communities. These objectives are often formulated outside the context of the "target" communities. For example, the concept of household head (farmer) in relation to resource management appears to occupy a central position in rural development programming. Households are assumed to be headed by a male. As a consequence, women are rarely included in training workshops where project orientation is carried out, although in the indigenous culture women and men are equal partners in resource management and food production.

Another issue is the introduction of irrigation programmes with the objective of increasing food production in the rural areas. There appears to be a mistaken assumption that only men are involved in traditional irrigation activities. Thus, government-introduced irrigation projects do not include women as independent members of irrigation associations. However, current development policies are beginning to pay attention to gender concerns.

A problem often faced by women is the difficulty experienced in their attempts to avail of credit resources in formal institutions. In the Philippines, women may not avail of credit without the husband's written consent, before entering into formal contracts (see for example, Illo, 1988:77). Current developments show that advocates of women's rights in this area are actively working to correct this problem.

It has been reported that with the introduction of new technologies to rural communities, inequality has been created. However, this situation has not been observed to affect the gender relations in Bontok yet, since technology introduction has been minimal. It has been observed elsewhere, however, by some researchers, to result in the displacement of females by male labor (e.g., mechanization, introduction of chain saws, outboard motors, etc. (see Colfer, 1981, for an example, based on her East Kalimantan study; D. McKay, 1993).

Another issue is the role of development agencies and experts in the imposition of western categories and technical knowledge. Some researchers find the displacement of local knowledge and expertise problematic. However, these agencies are increasingly moving towards recognizing and even valuing indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, this has come face-to-face with the issue of "property rights" — its control and management. Critical question such as, "who owns indigenous knowledge?" is the subject of current academic debates in relation to resource competition.

Diversity in the highlands has to be emphasized such as diversity in the physical environment, including cultural beliefs and practices, natural resource access, management, and social organization. These diversities have to be taken into consideration in the planning and development for upland communities. There is also the diversity in ethnic perceptions among upland women — which are not unitary, in spite of the fact that they are women, and that they are from the Cordillera. For example, it has been found in a survey study carried out by Casambre et. al., (1996), that the women in the Cordillera have different perceptions about the same kinds of experience such as their views on "sexual harassment." Furthermore, there are differences among women, even within the same ethnic group or community. Thus, analysis must consider the intersections between gender, class, age, education, and exposure to western culture, urbanization, overseas work experience, and the like.

Before introducing change or development intervention in upland communities, it is important to conduct reliable studies that would help understand the existing gender relations in household and community social arrangements, and in the customary rules governing resource access and management in areas that still practice indigenous resource management. This is to gain a better understanding of gender relations, and to better assist development agents — government and non-government organizations — in the planning and implementation of more realistic development plans.

Finally, development should promote economic self-reliance and equity in the management of upland resources, where economic and political participation recognizes women as important moving forces promoting change, rather than as mere targets of change (see Warren and Bourque, 1989).

ENDNOTES

[1]To avoid any confusion, I use the word Bontok (spelled with a final "k") to refer to the villages, the language, and cultural practices that are shared in this ethnolinguistic groups; while the word Bontoc (spelled with a final "c") is used here to refer to the Municipality and the Town /*barangay* with that name.

[2]*Barangay* is the smallest political unit of Philippine government.

[3]Some Bontok communities are beginning to plant cash crops such as temperate vegetable, especially in settlements located at higher altitudes.

[4]*Community* and *village* are used interchangeably in this paper.

[5]The *ward* refers to the men's house called the *ator/ato.* Each family is formally affiliated with one of the several wards in the village through the male head. The ward is a corporate group that carries out political, religious, and economic functions in behalf of its family members and the village as a whole. The ward, as a corporate group, owns and manages property (Prill-Brett, 1993).

[6]*Khakayam* is a social relationship contracted between the unmarried women members of a *pangis/ulog* (girl's dormitory) of one *ili* and the unmarried male members of another *ili* that form an informal working relationship for the purpose of recruiting labor to work the ricefields of the women. This is one way in the past, that led to intervillage marriages, although this was not approved by the community members, where endogamy was valued.

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