

Labels, Stigma Management and Social Identity Formation of a Mountain People in Central Panay, Philippines

Etiketleme, Stigma Yönetimi ve Sosyal Kimlik Oluşturma: Filipinler’de
Central Panay

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Abstract

Throughout history, mountain dwellers in the Philippines have been attributed with a range of pejorative labels that came to stereotype and spoil the identities of mountain people collectively, including the indigenous groups in the highlands of central Panay. This paper looks into the landscape of labels and names accorded to the people and the process foregrounding the role played by “outsiders” (i.e., colonial scholars, local anthropologists, and state agencies) in the construction of identities. Ethnohistory is employed to examine the people’s social identity formation—that complex and continuous dialogue of externally-driven label constructions and articulation of internally-ascribed constructs of identities. Local narratives revealed that social identity formation in this mountain community was borne out of the locals’ need to manage the stigma of past labeling and redress misrecognition. This paper hopes to contribute to the current discourse on the sociopolitical dimension of identity formation, assertion and recognition as well as to the pool of literature on the historical experience of the mountain people of the Philippines.

Keywords: Identity formation, labels, stigma, banditry, Panay Island.

Öz

Tarih boyunca, Filipin dağlarında yaşayanlara, özellikle Central Panay’ın tepelerinde yaşayan yerel halkın içinde olduğu dağ insanlarının tamamının kimliklerini tek tipleştirip bozacak birçok küçük düşürücü ifade atfedilmiştir. Bu çalışma, bu insanlara yapıştırılan yaftaların ve isimlerin incelenmesinden ve bu süreçte “dışarıdan gelenlerin” (örn. Sömürgeci akademisyenler, yerel antropolojistler ve devlet temsilcileri) bu kimlik oluşturma sürecinde oynadıkları rolleri ön plana çıkarır. Kişilerin sosyal kimlik oluşturmalarının incelenmesinde etnik tarihten faydalanılmıştır ve kişilerin daimi olarak dışarıdan gelen etiketleme ve kendi içlerinde oluşturdukları kimliklerin çatışması incelenmiştir. Yerel anlatılar, bu dağ topluluğunda sosyal kimlik oluşumunun, yerlilerin onlara atfedilen eski etiketlerin stigma’sını yönetme ve yanlış tanımlanmayı değiştirme isteğinden ortaya çıktığını göstermiştir. Bu çalışmada hedef, kimlik oluşumu, ifadesi ve tanınması ile ilgili sosyo-politik açıdan güncel söylemlere ve Filipinlerde yaşayan dağ insanlarının tarihsel deneyimini anlatan edebi eserlere katkıda bulunmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik oluşumu, etiketleme, stigma, eşkıyalık, Panay Adası.

Introduction

Mountain dwellers in the Philippines are throughout history a misrecognized group. Spanish chroniclers who explored the archipelago in the 15th to the 19th century has described them as “barbarous race,” “uncivilized,” “warlike,” “brutal,” “primitive,” and “wild,” among others (Blair and Robertson 18:37-38; 40:45, 56). These early chronicles were followed in the 20th century by the works of John Foreman and other western anthropologists who classified inhabitants of the archipelago into anthropomorphic measurements and ocular inspection of the living population. They identified some highland groups called *Negrillos* or *Negritos* and considered them “of extremely low intellect” and “weak brained race” with the physical appearance that was “sickly” and “swarthy,” to the point of describing their women as “perhaps one of the least attractive objects of humanity” (Foreman 121-122). Other American scholars took an interest in the investigation of racial variations and occupied themselves with the tedious tasks of categorizing and classifying Philippine populations into distinct sort (Barrows 368-370; Worcester 791-875; Bean 413-466). Anthropologist H. O. Beyer traced the peopling of the Philippines through waves of migration and in doing so, corroborated the earlier notion that an “inferior population” were pushed to the interior hills when the succeeding groups of “more civilized” Malays came (Jocano 39).

Compared with the coastal areas and town centers, the mountains were relatively spared from the blow of colonialism due to its remote location, however, the very fact the people run to the mountains to escape from colonial authorities made the mountain areas connected to the whole colonial experience; mountain dwellers were branded as “fugitives,” “outlaws,” and “bandits” by virtue of their refusal to integrate with the mainstream population (Foreman 120-128) and the story went on generating centuries of label-constructions, misrepresentation, and misrecognition.

This study suggests that the history of misrecognition was not only an offshoot of colonial experience but as well caused by hegemonic impositions of the state and the academe. Along the line of what Taylor denotes as the “dialogical relation” of “inwardly derived” and “socially derived” identities (Taylor 34), this paper foregrounds how people respond to constructs of their identities by others, articulating local contexts and self-ascriptions in the pursuit of equal dignity and recognition. This brought into play the narratives of seven informants. Elder Doroteo, the tribal leader, was engaging as he recounted the history of the village, particularly the role that banditry played in the destruction of the village and stories of its revival. His son, Elpidio, clarified ethnic names and some obscure points in the conversion of the village from mainstream to a tribal village and his engagement with state agencies in charge of these conversions. Farmers Bagaw, Pados, and Tamba shared everyday life narratives in the mountains; housewives Mary and Budak generously disclosed compelling thoughts on Catholicism and their local moral world. Secondary sources were reviewed to support and validate the oral narratives and thus confirmed the understanding that all identities have histories.

The Mountains Village of Busog: Periphery within a Periphery

The municipality of Valderamma lies in the most interior part of the province of Antique in the western coast of Panay Island, west of Philippine archipelago. Rolling mountains enclose the town proper that one would see mountains regardless of the direction where one is looking at. The municipality is disadvantaged in many ways: limited access to government projects; underdeveloped transportation system (especially farm-to-market roads); short in livelihood industries and alternative source of income; high rate of adults with no formal education rendering them underqualified for regular employment, etc. The town of Valderamma has 22 villages or *barangays* (the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines), lying in the innermost is the village of Busog named after a nearby river. *Busog* can be translated into “full” (as in a “full stomach”) and rightly so because the river used to be a rich fishing ground and the community’s main source of food and water supply. The village is 26 kilometers far from the town proper and cut from the center by the bigger Cagarangan River and the rugged mountain terrain. It is reached only by foot. Trek to the village would usually take 8 hours, which by the local standard is already “fast enough”. A trip to Busog would involve negotiating slippery rice paddies, dangerous cliffs, and rugged riverbanks. The village is comprised of 28-30 households with 259 registered residents (Philippine Statistics Authority), many of them are children. The locals subsist on upland farming and other forms of alternative and traditional livelihood available in the area (e.g., fishing, rattan gathering, hunting, livestock and poultry raising, etc.). Education is not accessible in the village that parents had to send their school-age children to the town proper to avail of formal elementary education. They too speak *Kinaray-a*, dress in the lowland fashion and in general appearance, look like any other lowlander.

Notes on Language

Kinaray-a is derived from “*Raya*” meaning “upstream” or upper part of the place where the source of the river is located. While the language is spoken by the majority of the population in Panay Island, the one that is considered as the dominant language is *Hiligaynon* the language of its financial and cultural center, Iloilo City. *Hiligaynon*’s dominance could be traced back from the Spanish occupation when it became a major trade language spoken by the traders. For purposes of trade, the Chinese traders who reached Panay Island endeavored to speak the native’s *Kinaray-a* but could not properly pronounce the words, especially those that are highly laden with “r”. *Kinaray-a* scholar Leoncio Deriada explained that instead of forcing the Chinese who controlled business and commerce to master the language of the place, it was the natives who accumulated the linguistic deficiencies of the foreigners. As a result, new pronunciation evolved, which was later believed to be the precursor of the *Hiligaynon* language. Spanish priests also contributed to the dominance of *Hiligaynon* by publishing grammars and catechisms in the said language until it eventually became the widely used language of print and broadcast media in Panay. Here, Deriada illustrated how economic and cultural power could shape the language of power. When the elite adapted *Hiligaynon* language, *Kinaray-a* lost its position and dignity as the mother language and became associated with the workingmen of the farms

and highlands, i.e. the *sacada* (migrant laborers employed in sugarcane plantations), *muchachos* (household helpers) and the *taga-bukid* (mountain dwellers). It is therefore implied that to be a *Kinaray-a* speaker is not a favored self-image. Its association with the *sacada*, *muchacho* and *taga-bukid* make it more than an ethnolinguistic category but also a class category that dichotomized landlord-laborer, master-helper, and lowland-upland relations.

Externally-Derived Identities

The Pejorative Colonial Labels

Mountain dwellers of the Philippines throughout history have been rife with negative identities. They were generally described as geographically isolated, thereby projecting a picture of economic and cultural backwardness. The 15th century chronicles of Francisco Colin described them as “barbarous race” (45) and “uncivilized” (56). He called them *Negrillos* because like the Negroes, these mountain people have dark skin and kinky hair (54). Aside from primary accounts archived in Blair and Robertson, Foreman’s accounts in “The Philippine Islands” conveyed an array of derogatory labels portraying mountain people as “primitive,” “poor,” “fierce,” and generally “bad citizens”. Moreover, Spanish clerics also had their share in this label-construction; they were as critical of the mountain people calling them *infieles* or “pagans”—groups that remained in their “primitive ways” and suggesting an “absence of moral fiber” as a consequence of their refusal to accept Christianity (120-128).

In the Southern Philippines, this historical episode of refusal to submit and distancing from the center were not just a reaction against Spanish subjugation. In writing about maritime raiding and slave trading in the south during the 18th and 19th centuries, James Warren directly linked inhabitants’ upland movement to fear of the *moros* as well as of the *Iranun* and *Balangigi* raiders from Sulu:

Some look for new sites, often on elevated grounds; others abandoned the coast altogether for an equally harsh life in the “eligible, non-state spaces” of the mountain fastness of the interior where sometimes many were reduced to eating tubers and grass to survive. The Spanish labeled as fugitives, these peripheral people who were out of reach. They call them *cimarrones* and *remontados*. (82)

It is apparent that more powerful groups other than the Spaniards contributed to the upland and lowland divide. As a consequence of raiding and slave trading, some of the inhabitants who moved to the highlands “never settled down again; joining the ranks of the *remontados* or *tulisanes*. For centuries, they plagued the countryside and were regarded as “fugitives” and “bandits” (122).

The “Bandit” Identity

To facilitate colonization, Spanish administrators required the natives to move in a permanent and concentrated settlement in the lowland following the *reducción* set-up. Some refused and opted to settle away from the *reduccion*; to live away from the center meant freedom from taxes and the prying eyes of Spanish

authorities and the Catholic Church. However, this also implied “cultural backwardness” because “they lived too far away from the Center to be able to absorb Spanish culture” (Agoncillo 80).

The *reduccion* was a civilizing device to make the Filipinos law-abiding citizens of the Spanish crown, and, in the long run, to make them “ultimate little brown Spaniards” adapting Hispanic culture and civilization. The more courageous unbelievers among them who rejected Spanish dominion went to the hills and became *remontados* (from *remontar* meaning “to go up”), *cimarrones* (“run-away slaves”), *ladrones* (“fugitives”), *monteses* (“from the mountains”) or *tulisanes* (“bandits” or “outlaws”) in the eyes of the Spaniards. (80)

Records of fugitive bands in Panay could be traced back to the early 19th century; local historian R. Morales Maza spoke of marauders from neighboring towns often coming to attack the province of Antique. They came in big groups to steal cattle and farm produce. This case, however, is not isolated in Panay; studies have pointed to the proliferation of fugitives in the mountain regions, especially in the northern part of the archipelago (Keesing 83, 214-215; Foreman 122).

By the time the American occupied the Philippines in the early 20th century, banditry was observed to be “far more audacious than its predecessor” (Foreman 548). American policies considerably altered the social and political landscape resulting in new forms of social relation and reshaping new social dynamics. Resistance movements took on a new expression from a mere “band of bandits” to a more organized resistance movement. The movement became a force to contend with that the American government passed the Brigandage Act of 1902 officially labeling all Filipino freedom fighters as “bandits” and “outlaws” (Uckung). To some Filipinos, however, there was never a wide difference between banditry and insurgency (Foreman 551).

The Japanese invasion of the Philippines in 1941 was an impetus that enabled a small number of untrained, unorganized rebels to join the guerilla force in a fight against the Japanese. The Communist Party of the Philippines was the best organized and the most active group during the early years of the occupation and peasants often viewed them as the most effective and visible opposition to the Japanese (Smith 22). In 1942, the rebels merged with peasant organizations to form the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (HUKBALAHAP) or the “Anti-Japanese Army”. HUKBALAHAP or “*huk*” for short became a national buzzword up to the post-war era.

The *huks* were engaged in typical guerilla operations, hit-and-run, and were usually conducted at night (Greenberg 61). The Japanese government as a countermeasure launched an anti-*huk* campaign that was both a military offensive against an armed insurgency and a propaganda blitz to combat communism. Due to this massive government campaign against the *huk*, the mountain people of Busog had a very strong recall of the period when *huk* forces flocked the mountains calling such decade as *tiempo huk* (time of the *huk*). Against the national backdrop of a postwar era characterized by socio-political instability and harsh economic realities, the mountains of central Panay became susceptible to roving groups of hungry and jobless young men who stalled the countryside to

scavenge and steal. *Tiempo Huk* in the village extended long, even decades after the post-war period.

Banditry and the Destruction of the Village

The village of Busog traced its origin from a certain Melchor Canja, a prominent *buyong* (*kinaray-a* for “bandit.”) from a neighboring town who sought refuge in the mountains of Valderamma. He met peace-loving mountain dwellers living in scattered areas and forged a marriage with one of the mountain lass. The couple bore a son who also became a *buyong* like his father. The family lived along the banks of Busog River; they were the ancestors of the Canja family who later on became village leaders. Based on the accounts of the tribal leader Doroteo, the village of Busog was formally established in 1951 during the peak of the *Huk* menace. Its first administrator was Doroteo’s father, Oyong, who ruled for 18 years. Oyong was followed by a succession of male leaders all related to the Canja family either by birth or affinity.

The community coexisted harmoniously with people from the nearly barangay, especially with Culiat, its nearest neighbor. Sharing and intermarriage ensued until several years later when the peaceful community life was disturbed by a feud that became a turning point in the history of both villages. The feud started in 1986 when local politicians allegedly spread rumors and provoked hostility between the village of Culiat and Busog. Each village then took turns in stealing each other’s cattle. This cattle rustling continued for more than a year. Sometime in 1988, several *buyong* from Busog took all the cattle of Culiat residents. This event forced the people of Culiat to seek the help of other *buyong* from the village of Casilayan and raided Busog; they burned the village and massacred the residents that they chanced upon. To set scores, Busog sought the assistance of allies from other mountain village and raided Culiat.

The villagers were terrified of this tragic encounter that they evacuated from the area to escape from violence; in the 1990 census, there were no houses left in the village when it had more than 100 in 1980. Some families migrated to the neighboring provinces of Capiz and Iloilo, and some went as far as the island of Mindanao south of the archipelago. A total of 18 households found their way to the town proper and settled adjacent to the dike along the banks of the Cagarangan River. In this new landscape, there were no farms to till, and the mountain people were left with no alternative livelihood except for the scarce and seasonal employment as household help and farm laborers. Life was harsh. People do not speak of the tragic experience regularly. They would often dismiss this part of their history as “a thing of the past that should no longer be brought up.” While the tribal leader declared that animosity no longer existed between their neighbors, the researcher observed that intra-village relation remained sensitive; it appears that adverse repercussions can erupt should stories of past events go unchecked.

The Revival of the Village

After ten years of continuous stay in the evacuation area and realizing that the mountains were already safe, Doroteo decided in 1999 to return to the mountains and rebuild the village. He recounted: “I urged my wife to return to the mountains so that our people would follow. Life is relatively better in the mountains. Harvest

is good. You can't do much in the lowland. You cannot depend on paid labor forever.”

In 2016, a total of 30 households had returned to the Mountain Village. The Catholic Church provided water system; series of pipes connected the stream to the village, and people no longer need to walk kilometers to fetch water. A generator was also installed and was managed by the village leaders. It made possible the regular supply of electric lights even only for 3 to 4 hours at night. There were criticisms over how the generator was managed, and tension arose among villagers, particularly against those who do not contribute to fuel expenses. This community generator that seemed to symbolize positive transformation has unexpectedly produced social pressures bearing on the quality and rhythm of community life and re-shaping social relations in the village.

Conversion from Mainstream to a Tribal Village

In 1997, The Philippine Congress passed Republic Act 8371 or the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) highlighting the State's commitment to “guarantee the rights of the Indigenous Cultural Communities / Indigenous People (ICCs/IPs) to freely pursue economic and cultural development” (Indigenous People's Rights Act). Section 18 of this law mandates the creation of tribal villages. The Legal Assistance for Indigenous Filipinos, a non-government organization composed mainly of lawyers started to facilitate in the year 2000 the conversion of Busog and its neighbor Culiati into tribal villages. Proponents of the conversion declared that the area is predominantly inhabited by indigenous people (Arquiza 20-26) and government records identified them as *sulud-bukidnon*, obviously in reference to the general data found in the works of Jocano and Magos.

The conversion to tribal village according to the tribal leader was not easy. It was delayed “because of the municipal council's failure to comprehend the import of the tribal village”; moreover, the approval of the conversion did not necessarily imply that elected town officials were in full support of the welfare of the IPs. Many of them remained indifferent to the reality that the tribal villages had needs distinct from the mainstream population. In this tribal village set-up, the village was governed by an elected executive and a legislative council following the Local Government Code of the Philippines plus a Tribal Leader whose authority was mandated by the IPRA. The elected officials decide over administrative matters. They held decisions about community projects like the operation and management of the community generator and others; the tribal leader, on the other hand, represents the village in IP-related seminars and gatherings at the local and national level. During casual drinking session, one could hear the tribal elder Doroteo advising elected councilors on matters dealing with erring community members and sharing with them farming tips.

Busog's conversion from mainstream to the tribal village was more than a political transformation. It provided the people not only with a new category as a political unit but a new identity as well – an IP identity. Since this was a state propelled transformation that took place in the lowland and involved only the tribal leader and IP advocates (who were outsiders of the villages), many of the residents of Busog were not aware of this conversion, and this new “IP” category neither were they aware of the ethnic names referred to them as an IP Community.

Ethnic Names and the Role of Local Anthropologists and State Agencies

Notwithstanding the pejorative colonial labels discussed earlier, the mountain people of Busog have also been assigned ethnic names to which many of them were unaware of. The researcher herself had referred to this mountain people as *Suludnon* based on government records provided by the local branch of the National Commission of Indigenous People (NCIP) an agency mandated to promote the interest of the indigenous people of the Philippines. The researcher proceeded with fieldworks using such category, and no one among the locals corrected her nor clarified such concept with her, in fact, the locals too used such category in their dialogue with the researcher. However, when asked what for them constituted *Suludnon* identity, just then that the researcher discovered that the concept is vague to many of the locals. Many admitted that they do not know about *Suludnon*, saying, "It's what our tribal leader told us, that we are *suludnon*". Some never even heard of such a name; they asked, "Is that similar to being Catholic?" This confusion prompted the researcher to explore further published and unpublished local literature to validate her claim. What she found, however, were additional labels all referring to the mountain people of Panay such as *Panay-Bukidnon*, *Tumandok*, *Iraynon*, and *Halawodnon*.

Local anthropologist with their longstanding interest in classifying and categorizing people they study took the lead wittingly or unwittingly in the naming of indigenous people in the archipelago. In Panay Island, two local anthropologists played a dominant role in the naming of IP groups in the upland area. They were: F. Landa Jocano and Alicia Magos.

Jocano's Suludnon

F. Landa Jocano's pioneering study on the "Kinship System and Social Organization of the Mountain People in Central Panay" (1968) propagated the category *Sulud* or *Suludnon* to categorize the groups found along the banks of Panay River in the neighboring municipalities of Tapaz and Jamindan, Capiz. Given the unavailability of historical and ethnographic literature, Jocano was confronted with the problem of naming the group in the area which at that time was known in so many ways (i.e. *Panaynon*, *Halawodnon*, and *Bukidnon*). He admitted that the term was a "compromised description" and that he merely adopted the category *Suludnon* "based on what *Sulud* neighbors call their neighbors rather than what individuals call themselves" (7).

Suludnon came from the root word *sulud* meaning "inside" or "interior" thereby implying a state of being enclosed as by tall mountains. *Sulud* is also an action word that means "to enter" or "to go inside" whereas, *suludnon* is a noun denoting "people of the interior." One informant speculated that the name might have been coined by an outsider to commemorate its entry to the area; this is congruent to Jocano's position that the name is an outsider's construct and not native to the community. The term later circulated through popular media and articles disseminated by state agencies mandated to look into the concerns of indigenous cultural communities like the Office of Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC) the forerunner of the NCIP.

While the village of Busog is geographically connected with the areas where Jocano's *Suludnon* came from, the village nor the town of Valderamma itself was

never mentioned in Jocano's study. It remains a question how the former OSCC and now the NCIP were able to attribute *Suludnon* as ethnic name to the mountain groups in Valderamma such as those in the village of Busog and its two other neighboring villages, Culiati, and San Agustin.

Magos' Iraynon

Almost three decades from the publication of Jocano's study, Alice Magos in her article, "Sea Episodes in the Suguidanon (Epic) and the Boat-building Tradition in Central Panay" (1999) brought to the fore altogether different categories. She delineated Panay's mountain people into four categories using the river as a point of reference: *Pan-ayanon* are those who stay close to the headwaters of Pan-ay river; *Halawodnon* are those living near the headwaters of Halawod River and *Akeanon* are those staying close to the waters of Akean river. For mountain dwellers of Valderamma, however, the name *Iraynon*, which means "living towards the interior" was given (6).

State's Adherence to Magos' Category

Earlier discussion indicated how ethnic names derived by anthropologists like Jocano and Magos became the widely held categories in the records of State institutions. Tribal leader, Elpidio narrated that the adaption of the name *Suludnon* was a result of a "meeting" between the representatives of National Commission for Indigenous People (NCIP) and the tribal leaders of Valderamma IPs. The parties present "agreed that *Suludnon* should be adopted as the ethnic name" for the people of the neighboring villages of Busog, Culiati, and San Agustin. Years later, Elpidio learned through the NCIP Commissioner that *Iraynon* should be the "more appropriate ethnic name." Elpidio welcomed this new term without question because it came from no less than the Commissioner himself whom they considered as the person in authority and therefore a reliable source of information.

At present, *Iraynon* or sometimes *Panay-Iraynon* is the category used by the media and cultural workers to refer to the mountain people not only of Valderamma but of the neighboring towns as well. Government initiated festivals were celebrated, and short films and documentaries were recently produced to promote awareness and obtain wider public recognition for these people. It is easy to notice the dominance of Magos' category among the local state institution in Panay as a local bias. She hailed from Antique province and served the University of the Philippines Visayas' as professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for West Visayan Culture Studies (CWVCS), and it is for this reason that she was able to establish a dominant position as a specialist of West Visayan culture. These scholars were the ones who influenced state decisions, and the state became the cultural brokers defining the indigenous people's identity before the mainstream society.

Internally-Derived Identities

***Katoliko* and the “Righteous People” Identity**

Catholicism reached Panay Island as early as the 16th century. General records showed that local religious leaders challenged Spanish authorities and stalled people’s submission to the new faith. Two religious uprisings were recorded in the nearby regions: the Tamblot revolt in Bohol (1620) and the Bangkaw revolt in Leyte (1622). In Panay island, however, resistance was not as zealous; an Augustinian priest serving Antique province wrote in 1699 to the provincial of the order that “this ministry is going well, thank God, have improved in every way, and the people are obedient and jovial” (Maza 11). One particular group of missionaries – the Mill Hill missionaries - an international fellowship of priests, brothers and lay missionaries who reached the Philippines in 1906 from England in time to respond to the problems confronting the Catholic Church during the American period were strongly felt in the province of Antique. Given a provincial population of 300 Catholics, served by four priests, the missionaries learned the local language and assisted the local clergy in the administration of the sacraments (What the Archives Say 3:9). They served the town of Valderamma since 1908, but they were not able to reach the mountain village of Busog until the early 1960s, a decade after the formal establishment of the village. Since then, masses were held once a year, during the village *fiesta* (the feast of San Isidro Labrador, the Patron Saint of farmers). Villagers would excitedly wait for the arrival of the Parish Priest and his party a day before the *fiesta*. They would look forward to this as a religious and social occasion,—an occasion to celebrate faith and an opportunity for marriage and baptismal ceremonies.

It should be noted that due to the distance of the village from the town center and owing to lack of information, the villagers were not especially mindful of their obligation to register their newly born to the local civil registry. The sacrament of baptism, therefore, becomes a substitute procedure for birth registration where children acquire Christian names and where birth dates were made final and official. Unless baptized, whatever name given to the child was considered “temporary.” This makes the sacrament of baptism one of the most anticipated Catholic rituals for the locals in Busog. Parents name their children after characters of popular radio drama (e.g., Alex, Jennifer, Jiji, Jeomar, etc); after movie celebrities (e.g. Gretchen and Jestoni); or after their lowland employers and even after the name of the town mayor.

The introduction of Catholicism and the eventual conversion of the locals into Catholics was a landmark occasion not only because it changed people’s belief system but also people’s perception of themselves. They readily embraced the lowland’s religion as a positive reinforcement to their self-image. Catholicism gave them a degree of semblance with the lowland population. They can no longer be branded as “pagans” and “primitive” because of this integration with the larger Catholic community. The housewives were not happy to discuss those days when their ancestors “did not yet know how to make the sign of the cross.” Pre-catholic traditions and beliefs were likewise dismissed as “wrong beliefs” that should no longer be brought up.

According to one housewife, religion made them “righteous people” (*“matarung nga tawo”*) because to believe in Jesus Christ entails the observance of good behavior, further explaining that “misbehavior occurs when people forget about God that is why it is important for people to be reminded of their catholic faith all the time.” Catholicism provided the people with new codes and moral standards around which to build their new identity.

The “Upright Farmers” Identity

The mountain areas provide for very limited livelihood choices for the mountain dwellers. This lack of livelihood opportunities was a factor that forced some of their ancestors into banditry, a way of life that stigmatized even the recent generation. While it is not in the nature of the people to aggressively argue against the derogatory labels thrown at them by outsiders, it can be observed that there is a conscious effort on their part at projecting a positive image and reject the stereotype.

When asked to describe the people of Busog, they would automatically describe themselves as farmers, “people who do farming and swidden agriculture, they fish and gather mollusk as well” after which they could attach the qualifier “upright” (*“wara gahimu sayod”*) because such qualifier categorically distinguishes them from other farmers engaging in unscrupulous activities like lowland robbery or cattle hustling. “Upright farmer” therefore is more than just a description of themselves as a collective but also a rejection of the stigma-laden bandit label. To cast-off, the stigma is to show that the community engages in legitimate livelihood as hard and physically arduous as farming. Doroteo explained, “It is only through farming that one survives life in the mountains” those who do not farm therefore are suspected of engaging in illegitimate or unscrupulous economic activities.

Through the expression of categories like *“Katoliko,”* “righteous people” and “upright farmers” the mountain people of Busog were redefining their identity in ways that are meaningful to manage the stigma of past labeling and to carve a more “respectable” self-image within the larger society.

Conclusion

This paper brought to the fore various labels—mostly externally-derived—that have been associated with the mountain village of Busog in Panay Island. At the forefront of this labeling process are the colonial scholars, local anthropologists and the state, whose interests in classifying and categorizing people and groups were premised on political, administrative and intellectual agenda of their period. Since the state and the academe are institutions of power, the various labels that they were able to derive about (and to some extent imposed on) people and groups became powerful labels with long-term consequences on peoples’ and groups’ identities.

From the Spanish colonial period, the mountain people’s experiences revealed to us that identity construction is a continuing process. While the lowland gradually developed as a nascent colonial society, the mountain areas became a refuge to those wanting to escape Spanish rule. To live in the mountains and away from the

center was to turn away from the “cultural advancement” that the colonial state and the church were introducing. It is for this reason that throughout the colonial and post-colonial years, the mountain people of the Philippines has lived with derogatory labels; these labels were to a large extent reproduced by the academes—historians and anthropologist in particular.

In the lens of labeling theory, the reproduction of these labels caused the people to identify with and behave in ways that reflect how they were labeled. Hence, while the mountain people do not necessarily agree to the labels as an authentic representation of their identity, they have come to live with the hegemonic and oppressing social constructions. Through the post-colonial era (and with the growing anti-colonial sentiments), labels such as *huk*, or *buyong* (bandits) were recognized as an authentic identity that villagers acknowledge to own sensitive accounts of the bandit encounters and involvement.

People’s conversion to Catholicism in the 1960s allowed them to acquire a new identity in addition to what they already have. This “Catholic identity” gave the people semblance and connectedness with the lowland population, thereby blurring the lowland-upland distinction. More importantly, they strongly articulated that conversion made them “righteous people.” Such is an affirmative strategy to manage the stigma of past labeling and redress the misrecognition.

The implementation of the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997 paved the way for more sustained attention to names of identification and classification. It is through this legislation that the village was converted from mainstream to the tribal village using the official name *Suludnon* - an ethnic name derived from local anthropologist, F. Landa Jocano, one of the pioneers on the study mountain people in Central Panay. A few years later, the village acquired a new name, *Iraynon*. This was derived from Magos’ in reference to the direction where the river flows, which is to the *iraya* or “upstream.” The adaption of such name tells of the critical influence of local anthropologists in state policies for distinct ethnic groups - scholars who were at the forefront of studies on the mountain people of Panay were given the privileged position in the naming process by the state agencies.

While the conversion of Busog to tribal barangay formalized and codified the community into an Indigenous Cultural Community, this state categorization and ethnicization are remote from the prevailing self-understanding of the majority of the village population. The fact remains that *Iraynon*, as a label was not collectively recognized in the community nor were the majority of the locals aware of this classification at the time of the research. Unlike other ethnic groups in the Philippines who aggressively pursue recognition of identity. This particular mountain group is relatively muted. They were unable to articulate difference or boundary-marking features that identify them from other communities except for their location. Representation of them as an indigenous group was actively carried out by the tribal leader who together with state agencies “agreed” to adopt the ethnic name. This action by the tribal leaders is understandable in the light of the political situations where an indigenous identity is a politically useful identity especially when they are linked to statutory policy to tangible benefits such as ancestral domain claim, access to free education, employment opportunities, etc. as provided by the law. The few locals who had the opportunity to learn about

these ethnic names do not particularly contest the idea as long as it does not evoke further negative identity.

These landscape of colonial labels and ethnic names that constitutes a multitude of misrecognition comes in dialogue with the on-going identity constructions articulated by the locals. These local constructs speak not of the overt traits but of symbolic identity that they have appropriated for themselves to redefine their identity. People asserted that they have become “upright farmers” and “righteous people” because of Catholicism. Indeed, the Catholic has become an important self-identification, and it is interesting to note that while it was the Catholic institution that was historically instrumental in the discrimination and labeling of mountain people during the colonial period, the current generation of mountain people embraced the religion readily as a positive reinforcement to their identity. The Catholic identity, which is a colonial identity continues to prevail as a powerful social identity.

While many cultural identities emerged out of oppositional identities involved in the dialogue of inter-group conflict and some have risen out of state actions, I argue that that mountain people of Busog are not yet in a position to aggressively pursue identity assertion, at least for the time being. Their present identity was a construction of context (along the context of spontaneous historical forces) more than of politics.

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