

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Ecophilia and Ecocide: The Struggle for the Philippine Environment

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Philippine Studies vol. 37, no. 3 (1989) 345–356

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Notes and Comments

Ecophilia and Ecocide: The Struggle for the Philippine Environment

DOMINIC T. GAIONI

"We the people of Be-ew are poor. All we have now are the mountains, the trees, the rivers and especially our freedom. All these the CRC (Cellophil Resources Corporation) is threatening to take away from us."¹ So declared Demetrio Lubigis, a Tingyan Elder from Tubo, Abra, during an intertribal meeting on 25 January 1979. At another meeting in Kalinga just across the Central Mountain Range from Abra, another elder said: "If the government deprives us of our lands, they might as well do it with bombs, because we will not leave our lands, nor allow them to destroy our fields while we have blood in our veins."² These two statements from tribal leaders of Northern Philippines describe quite dramatically the struggle being fought in most of the developing countries in the Third World for the control and use of the environment, particularly the land tribal groups live on.

Ethnic minorities are particularly sensitive to this issue, because many of the world's natural resources, still untouched by modern technological exploitation, are located in areas inhabited by these groups. The Southeast Asian Archipelago, in particular, is targeted for quick socioeconomic exploitation by governments and development corporations. Two hundred thousand Ibans of Sarawak, for example, are threatened with resettlement by the construction of a huge hydroelectric project. Although still in the preparation stage, this plan has already shown the symptoms of the main problem encountered in resettlement projects in Africa, South America, and other parts of

1. Anthropological Association of the Philippines, *The Tingyans of Abra and Cellophil: A Situation Report*, Baguio City, 1979.

2. *Monta News*, Baguio City, November-December 1979.

the developing world; the problem of "dealing with people still largely content with the old ways of life" and with different views concerning their relationship to the environment surrounding their habitat.³

War and guerrilla activities have not stopped companies, many of them foreign-owned or controlled, from occupying vast lands and exploring natural resources, displacing at the same time, small subsistence farmers. Dispossessed of the land they had planted to rice and corn, the small farmers are becoming landless laborers and wage-earners. The tribal minorities have been the most seriously affected by the developments in the region. They have lost their lands to the lowland settlers, ranchers, miners, plantation owners; and their forests to loggers. The feeling of security they previously experienced with the land they have lived on for generations is gone. Eviction threatens them because the land is not released to them, and most, if not all, do not have titles to the land. One example will suffice to describe a widespread situation in the island of Mindanao.

THE PAITAN MANOBOS AND THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS

On 28 September 1976, seventy Manobo families were evicted from their ancestral homes in Paitan, Quezon, Bukidnon. Their land is now occupied by the Bukidnon Sugar Company (BUSCO). The event climaxed the Manobo's long struggle to hold on to the land of their fathers and to keep the land for their children. Long before BUSCO came on the scene, lowland settlers and ranchers had taken over ancestral land. Although Manobos had in many cases knowingly given part of their land to interested parties, their generosity was repaid with increasing encroachment on their land. The entry of one Christian rancher Jose Escano especially angered the Manobos. In 1974, the rancher was declared the "owner" of the land in Barrio Paitan and the Manobos who had lived there for generations were termed "squatters" by the Court.

In a May 1975 affidavit, Marciano Gatawan, a Paitan Manobo, stated:

I was born in Paitan, just as my parents and tribal ancestors have been born and lived in Paitan and its neighboring area.

My grandfather Datu Mandaghaan was the head of our tribe here in Paitan when the first foreigner, Manolo Fortich first set foot in our land. Fortich asked my grandfather for some land where he could pasture his cows. Seeing the land was such a wide plain, a part of which we did not

3. Elizabeth Colson, *Human Problems of Kariba*, vol. I (Manchester, 1960), p. xvii.

need, my grandfather divided our land and gave the area on one side of the Kiantig River up to the Upalon Spring to Manolo Fortich while the land on the other side he reserved for our tribe.

From then on, our tribe has honored and lived up to the agreement between Datu Mandaghaan and Manolo Fortich. After the agreement was made, Manolo Fortich brought his cows to the area my grandfather gave him. Manolo Fortich did not bother to build fences for his cows and allowed them to graze anywhere they liked. We did not mind this situation because the land was still so vast and our tribe's needs were few.

The land which my grandfather gave to Manolo Fortich has been passed on to his relatives and heirs. Some years ago, Dodong Fortich and Pepito Escano came to me and asked for land from our side. Because they were both my friends, I agreed and signed some papers, which stated I was giving them a large tract of our land. Some years before, another rancher, Moran, established his ranch on our land. We generously did not mind it because there was still plenty of land for us.

Another rancher, Christian like the rest, Jose Escano joined the group. Not content to take his share from his rancher companions, he established his ranch right where our tribe put up our barrio—Paitan. We resented this action very much because it seems that after all our generosity with our ancestral land to the ranchers we were to be deprived of our home.

Even before Jose Escano's coming, we felt we were being oppressed. One time, we approached Mr. Gurrea of the Bureau of Forestry in Maramag. We, Mr. Gurrea, Dodong Fortich, and I went to Paitan and its neighboring area to survey the land. Mr. Gurrea said the ranchers were justified in putting the ranches there because the land was not cultivated by us. I replied, 'It is very difficult to work on the land with the presence of Fortich's cows.' Dodong Fortich got very mad and tried to kick me. I jumped away from him. Gurrea appeased Fortich's anger by saying that because the land was left uncultivated, its status will be reverted from 'alienable and disposable' to 'forestal.'⁴ Dodong laughed aloud. I did not understand why but I felt it was something in his favor.

Our tribe felt injustice had been done to us when the government awarded a title to Jose Escano which made him the owner of the land

4. With the opening of BUSCO, Mssrs. Benedicto, Africa, Nieto and Jose Zubiri, BUSCO manager and Mrs. Lobregat, acquired leases to these Manobo lands, as reforestation programs (tree planting). However, instead of trees they turned them into sugar plantations. With the change to administration in 1986, the local Visayan farmer groups who had also been claiming these areas, tried to enter on the grounds that the planters had violated their lease agreement. Mr. Dominguez then head of the Department of Natural Resources promised to expedite the cancellation of these leases. But he was transferred to the Department of Agriculture and since then nothing has happened. About seventy families of Manobos evicted from Sunny Side Farms, managed by Mrs. Lobregat, were allotted a few hectares along the Pulangi River not far from BUSCO. Congressman J. Zubiri who has a farm of his own, Valle Descondida, had houses built for them. Since they lack sufficient land for cultivation they try to make a living fishing, and many have contracted sistosomiasis as a result.

where our people had their home long before any Christian had set foot in Paitan.

Because we know the land is rightfully ours, we stayed on.⁵

The ranchers filed suit in court against the Manobos for squatting. Datu Subog, the leader of the natives in Paitan, appealed to government offices to help—Bureau of Lands, Bureau of Forestry, PACLAP (Presidential Advisory Commission on Land Problems), CNI (Commission on National Integration)—without success. In 1974, the Court decided the case in favor of the rancher Escano, on the grounds that the rancher had the title to the land. In December 1974, Datu Subog along with other members of the tribe were imprisoned for twenty-one days for "squatting" on the land the tribe has owned and lived on since time immemorial. The Manobos were issued a court order to leave Paitan. The deadline was 28 March 1975.⁶

By the start of 1975, Paitan and the surrounding areas were gradually being converted to sugarland. The land of the Manobos which grew rice and corn for their subsistence became one of the targeted areas for growing sugar cane to feed the foreign market.

THE KALINGA CASE

Some of the most controversial and potentially explosive socioeconomic projects envisioned by the Philippine government have been taking shape in the Cordillera region of Northern Luzon. The Kalinga Hydroelectric Development Project, and the Timber Concession and pulp factory of the CRC in the neighboring province of Abra, reached world attention and could be considered textbook cases on the question of unilateral economic versus integral human development.

Basically the two groups, the inhabitants of these regions and the agencies of change, look upon one and the same environment, and have plans for its utilization and for the control of goods that may

5. From affidavit of Vincent Subog and Marciano Gatawan, 30 May 1975, Malaybalay, Bukidnon.

6. Manuel Elizalde, of PANAMIN, helped implement the eviction of the Manobos from Paitan, Quezon, Bukidnon in September 1976. The Philippine Constabulary and local security guards carried out the eviction from the Escano land. The Manobos were taken to Pontian, Kitaotao, twenty kilometers to the south and held there pending the erection of a PANAMIN reservation at nearby Dalorong. In the meantime, the local Church which PANAMIN was opposing had to feed them. The reservation was set up, but partly due to the rivalry of Datu Subog of Paitan and Datu Manlatas of Dalorong, their reservation was not a success. The Manobos including Datu Subog sold or mortgaged most of their land to lowland Visayans and relatively few Manobos presently own land in the area.

result from the manipulation of that environment. In everything else, "the two groups live in two different worlds, so different from one another that except one gradually absorbs the other, they will not meet on any common ground."⁷ The interests of the planners are bureaucratic and administrative. The interest of the peasants is to secure the next crop for the evening meal.

Those who ultimately harvest the biggest profit from a socioeconomic project are usually working by proxy, and do not appear on the scene. The situation therefore requires a change of strategy, particularly on the part of those who plan and utilize intensive methods in the exploitation of the environment. M. Nelson-Richards in his study of the Chunga irrigation project in Zambia, feels that "until the privileged class transforms itself from the stage where it sees development only as a concept, to a point where it perceives it as an objective of all human groups, inequity will prevail."⁸

In the Kalinga irrigation case, the controversy over the proposed construction of high dams on the Chico River is a classic example of how not to undertake infrastructural developments projects. The original plan was to build four dams which would generate a total of 1,010 megawatts of hydroelectric power annually. The dams, however, would unfortunately submerge 2,753 hectares of agricultural land and displace over a thousand tribal families from their terraced rice fields and other ancestral lands. In February 1974, the National Power Corporation refused to heed the pleas of tribal elders to delay the entry until they took their grievances and objections to the highest authority of the land, the president himself, and entered Kalinga territory by force to start a preliminary ground survey.

Given the fact that "planners and organizers, and various committees are not able in any meaningful way to communicate with the peasant farmers (much less with tribal farmers) due to their paternalistic and ambiguous attitude towards them," what followed in the Kalinga project was an easily predictable sequence of events.⁹ It began, first of all, with a great deal of distrust and skepticism, based on the lesson of broken promises and assurances experienced by hundreds of families in other areas of the Cordillera Region. The Kalingas knew what happened to their brothers affected by the construction of the Ambuklao, Bingan and Pantabangan dams. These projects had all yielded experiences of deceit, betrayal and broken promises for the displaced people, who are still awaiting a permanent resettlement thirty years later.

7. M. Nelson-Richards, *Where Development Agents Fail* (Nairobi, 1978), p. 112.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 114

9. *Ibid.*

During the year 1974, five Kalinga tribal delegations were sent to Manila to dialogue with the president and other authorities. They all ended in failure. The consistent misreporting of events by the national media, which repeatedly tried to give the impression that the affected people had been persuaded to accept the resettlement plans offered them, certainly did not enhance the cause of better understanding and communication. The media took a step further and began branding independent analyses of the problems as "subversive," culminating in the arrest and brief detention of anthropologists who tried to undertake objective studies in the affected areas. A turn for the worse in the already precarious situation occurred when the Presidential Assistant for National Minorities made his disastrous entry in late 1975. Since this government branch often availed itself of military personnel in dealing with problems affecting ethnic minorities, the feeling of distrust turned into one of hostility.

Most independent observers credited this entry of the military for the arrival of another armed group, the New People's Army, the military arm of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines, which logically enough entered the controversy by siding with the increasingly harassed natives. The process of alienation had taken its full course: from distrust, to hostility, to conflict. Arrests, detentions of over one hundred Kalinga oppositionists, both men and women, soon followed. Abuses by the Philippine Constabulary Strike Force Battalion stationed in Kalinga multiplied.

By the end of 1979, one last group entered the scene. The Minister of Defense, Juan Ponce Enrile, accused the Church of Kalinga of having "taken advantage of tribal conflicts and dislocations brought about by the development of the Chico River dam, to rally the people against the government. . . . (thereby) contributing to the establishment of a political environment favorable to the communist elements. . . ." To this Bishop William Brasseur of Baguio City retorted: "Is it not natural that people who are victims of all kinds of abuses, oppression, and injustice look for support and help to the religious sector, because there is no one else to listen to their grievances?"

The Kalinga case is a good example of the accuracy of Elizabeth Colson's assessment that "massive technological development hurts." This is a fact largely ignored by economic planners, technicians and political leaders, for as Colson says, "in planning drastic alterations in environment that uproot populations or make old adjustments impossible, they count the engineering cost but not the social cost."¹⁰

10. Elizabeth Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement*, Kariba Studies IV, University of Zambia (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1971), p. 1

The approach used by the groups involved in the Kalinga case could not be more different. The natives look upon the environment as their home, their property, their land. It is the land of their forefathers, the land on which they have lived for generations and the land which is the foundation and the object of their economic activities. This land constitutes the basis of their social and political structures, such as the intertribal peace pact system. The land inhabited not only by the Kalingas, but also by a pantheon of superior beings, including the spirits of their dead kindred who are buried in the very villages the dam constructors want to submerge. Kalinga land represents and encompasses the entire existence and survival of the people.

This comprehensive view was uppermost in the minds of the tribal leaders in the very early stages of the dispute and throughout. They were not against progress nor relocation per se. But they were rejecting this one project whose benefits they could not perceive. The Kalingas knew their history, passed on as oral tradition from generation to generation. They knew that their ancestors had always worked for improvement. How else could they have built such an impressive system of terraced agriculture? Not even the concept of river damming was strange to them; their irrigation and fishing systems were based upon new and (to them) progressive principles.

But, ironically, their sense of history also brought them to approach the entry of new technology with skepticism and precaution. They wanted to talk, to be consulted, to consult, to make sure that all promises were kept, because they remembered the history of the Ambuklao, Binga, and Pantabangan dams and the tribes adversely affected by these projects; as good anthropologists they could predict the outcome in their own case.

Reynolds and Grant encountered the same divergent views in their study of the Apayao people, the northern neighbors of the Kalingas.

The Isneg (also called Apayao) regard the land as theirs unless it has been sold to immigrants. For hundreds of years, they have lived in Apayao, every hectare of land has belonged to a particular family, whether they are farming it that year or letting it lie fallow, everyone in the sitio knew what property belonged to each family. In former years, each man was ready to defend his and his neighbor's land from intruders; and the penalty for trespassing on Isneg land was death.¹¹

As to the government's view of Apayao land they wrote:

11. Reynolds-Grant, *The Isneg of Northern Philippines* (Dumaguete City, 1973), p. 29.

The Philippine government regards the vast area of Apayao as one of its undeveloped, but potentially valuable resources. It sees mineral deposits that may produce vast wealth; virgin forests; water resources, which can be used for power and for irrigation; and large tracts of land, which may one day meet the needs of land-hungry tenant farmers in the lowlands.¹²

The development planners had the same narrow view of the Kalinga habitat. First of all they did not live there, and logically the problems meant much less to them than to the Kalinga tribesmen. All the values the natives attached to their land were not, and perhaps could not be, understood by the development planners. Theirs was purely and simply an economic calculus and their judgement was necessarily and methodically narrow and fragmentary.

In spite of what is happening to the ecosystem of the world in general and to its human components in particular, the economists, locked up in the ivory tower of their mathematical computations, still give vastly more weight to the short term rather than to the long term results, because in the long term, if the present pace and direction of modern economic development patterned after nuclear development in the West continues, then we are all dead. Second, economic gains are based on a definition of costs which excludes all "free goods," that is, the entire natural environment, except for those parts of it that have been privately appropriated. The entire natural environment is taken as given, as permanent and indestructible. This means that an activity can be economic although it wreaks havoc with the environment, and that a competing activity, if it conserves and protects the environment at some cost, will be uneconomic.

A good case in point is the Kalinga Project. In the fifties and sixties everybody thought that big dams meant instant progress, and Third World countries were easily persuaded that there was nothing like a big dam for a fast economic take-off. Dozens of big dams went up from Pakistan to Ghana, Egypt to Brazil. Few people worried about aftershocks in the ecosystem.

In the past few years, however, dam owners the world over have begun to compare notes and discover that when a dam backs up water behind it, everything changes: the water's chemistry, the kinds and numbers of indigenous flora and fauna, the fertility and salinity of the soil downstream, the pressures on the earth's crusts and the tendency, therefore, to earthquakes and landslides; and the many changes in the way of life for all the people who lived on the land before the dam came. Moreover, whereas the promised progress is usually a lot less

12. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

than expected, these changes produce problems that are real and proliferating.

On the basis of this narrow and fragmentary view of the total environment on the part of development planners, serious errors were committed before and during the unfortunate attempt to bring massive technological changes into the heart of the Kalinga lands. The failure to consult the people most likely to be directly, and most especially adversely, affected by the project; the failure to earn their trust by correcting the mistakes committed in previous dam construction sites; the failure to allow them to participate in the decisions leading to the introduction of new technologies affecting their way of life; the failure to translate into reality assurances and guarantees on behalf of ethnic minorities codified in the Constitution and laws of the land, such as the law concerning ancestral lands; the use of rhetorical appeals to patriotism, forgetting that the development of one area of the national community at the expense of another has invariably resulted in conflict situations in the past, and has never contributed, in the long term, to the welfare of the collectivity; the systematic attempts to co-opt through promises and intimidations, the tribal political leadership by manipulating their peace pact system; and worst of all the use of force, arrests, and imprisonment, torture, murder, and the introduction into the area of military forces. All these factors turned the Kalinga country into a theater of pain, suffering and total confrontation.

It all started because the Kalingas saw their environment with a holistic approach and the development planners saw it from a cost-benefit point of view. For the Kalingas, the value of their ancestral lands was and is immeasurable. For the development planners it was computed at ₱10,000 and two hectares of distant land per resettled family. The myth of growth turned into a myth of revolution.

THE MYTH OF GROWTH

Elizabeth Colson in her study on the consequences of the Kariba dam project for the Gwembe Tonga people, mentions among other things that "they were asked to make enormous sacrifices for the long-term good of a larger national community with which they did not identify."¹³ The dramatic reality of the "calculus of pain," as Peter Berger defines it, is amply borne out by the two cases described and analyzed in this article.

Everyone can accept the fact that the history of birth, the history of growth, and indeed the history of mankind, is a continuous suc-

13. Colson, *Social Consequences of Resettlement*, p. 3.

cession of painful events. But one finds difficulty in understanding why the pain inflicted by men on each other is the indispensable raw material for bringing about that ultimate economic illusion called Industrial Revolution. Economists and students of the sciences of man, let alone the experts in the science of God, have not yet satisfactorily explained why peoples who have led a hunting-and-gathering tribal existence for at least the past half million years, should now be the victims of a tomorrow's hypothetical progress. There is no doubt that they have done a reasonably much better job in the use and preservation of the environment than have the massive technological approaches of our era, which justify rapid and often permanent ecocide for equally rapid but often questionable economic benefits. "In aiming at progress . . . you must let no one suffer by too drastic a measure, nor pay too high a price in upheaval and devastation, for your innovation," warned Maunier in 1949.¹⁴

This cry unfortunately has gone mostly unheeded in the last forty years. The so-called more "developed" nations have descended upon resources-rich but technologically poor "developing" countries brandishing the tools of social change based upon two ideological models: capitalism and socialism. According to Peter Berger, both of these models impose unwarranted human costs on large defenseless populations of the world and both are myths to be debunked. Capitalist ideology, based on the myth of intensive growth, utilizes policies that accept hunger, pain, displacement, destruction of the cultural system, oppression and even violent intimidation, while promising affluence tomorrow. Socialist ideology, based on the myth of revolution proposes policies that accept terror today, a day which for some tribal groups in Asia has lasted for decades, on the promise of a humane collective order tomorrow. "Both models are based on the willingness to sacrifice at least one generation for the putative goals of the experiment. Both sets of sacrifices are justified by theories. The theories are delusional and the sacrifices are indefensible."¹⁵ What is even more tragic from the point of view of human cost, is the often overlooked historical fact that not a few ethnic groups and nations of the world have been unwillingly exposed to the pains inflicted on them by both ideological camps within the span of one or two generations.

In view of this utter disregard for the painful consequences caused by methodologies which refuse to deal with questions of political ethics in their approach to the use of the environment and control of its human components, Peter Berger proposes "that policy should seek

14. Quoted by John H. Bodley, *Victims of Progress*, (Menlo Park, Calif., 1982), p. 149.

15. Peter Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 13, 14.

to avoid the infliction of pain in those cases where policy does involve either the active infliction or the passive acceptance of pain, this fact requires a justification in terms of moral rather than technical necessity."¹⁶ Human beings, particularly tribal societies, have been living for centuries in a meaningful world. They have the right to continue to live with an environment which is meaningful to them. As assessment of the costs of policy must necessarily include a 'calculus of meaning.' "It is folly to allow technology to determine policy."¹⁷

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Most of the Filipino cultural-linguistic groups have a word that encompasses the totality of their way of life. This word is *ugali*. There is perhaps no better term to express the holistic view with which tribal peoples look upon and relate to their environment. Everything and everyone has a role and a meaning within society because it is *ugali*. Every relationship with the physical environment, with the members of the society, with kindred, with the spirit world, is explained and based upon, nurtured and transmitted through the concept of *ugali*. Economic, political, social and religious activities occur because of the *ugali* handed down by the ancestors. *Ugali*, therefore, could be applied to almost everything: tradition, custom, law, culture, teaching, heritage, way of life, system, etc.

In other words, when a Kalinga or a Tingyan explains that he is behaving in such and such a manner, performing such and such an action, relating in such and such a way because it is the *ugali*, he is actually saying that all this is done and said because it is *meaningful* to him. Neither collective nor individual life is possible without a framework of meaning. A society cannot hold together without a comprehensive set of meanings shared by its members. Meaning, in other words, is not something added to social life, that one may or may not want to look into, depending on one's particular interests. Rather, meaning is the central phenomenon of social life. The issue of change, therefore, whether it be caused by internal evolutionary processes or by acculturative forces, has to be handled within the framework of the *ugali* concept.

Correct, therefore, was the statement of Governor Barbero of Abra in December 1978, when he presented his philosophy of development in these terms:

16. Ibid., p. 165.

17. Colson, *Social Consequences of Resettlement*, p. 3.

Industrialization cannot be grafted to a country or province like a foreign body. It has to grow within it and be tested against the temperament, attitudes and cultural background of the people, and at their own pace. What is required is that development, economic growth and technology be subordinated to social and human needs. And from the process shall come the discovery of our own potential power to initiate development ourselves with minimum outside aid or assistance."¹⁸

Unfortunately, this moment of sincerity did not last very long. Two months later the same authority reverted to a more familiar philosophy of ethnocentrism, when he stressed the difficulty with developing the mountain (Tingyan) municipalities, because "the people do not come up to required levels of competence." He further stated that the development of these people through training and education must be undertaken or else even with a "million-pesos worth of infrastructure . . . those roads, those bridges and irrigation dams will just go to naught."¹⁹ Obviously his philosophy of development did not apply to tribal minorities, since the Tingyans, in his opinion, are "incompetent," and must be molded to fit into the modern infrastructure and industrial development being imposed on them from the outside.

One hundred years ago there was another governor in Northern Luzon, who, after two years of anti-Kalinga campaigns, finally realized the folly of the Spanish government efforts to resettle tribal Filipinos in the lowlands. Evaristo de Liebana y Trincada in 1881 said:

Everything that can be promised them in the lowlands they already have in more abundance in their own villages; why should they leave their fields which are better cared for and richer than those of the (lowland) Christians? Destroying their terraces, or retaining their walls . . . would be no irreparable damage, . . . the work of restoring them would be nothing compared to what they would have to put forth to make them anew in the lowlands. Nor could they transfer the remains of their ancestors there, which for greater respect and veneration, they inter beneath their houses so they cannot be profaned. Without the need of proposing other reasons, the following occurs to us: is it possible with one stroke of the pen to eradicate the customs, religion . . . and independence of a whole people, even if this people be Igorots?"²⁰

History evidently has not taught us much in the past one hundred years; and the dream of a holistic, meaningful approach toward the use of the environment, a philosophy of ecophilia rather than ecocide, may very well remain a utopia for another one hundred years.

18. A. Barbero, *Gansa* (official paper of Abra's governor's office), December 1978.

19. Barbero, *Rangtay* (official paper of the Cellophil Resources Corporation), Abra, February 1979.

20. W.H. Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1974), p. 339.