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978-0-521-29562-8 - Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life
Michelle Z. Rosaldo
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# 1. The Ilongots

There are probably some 3,500 Ilongots, inhabiting a forested area of about 1,536 square kilometers, primarily in the province of Nueva Vizcaya, Northern Luzon, Philippines (see Map 1). An initial survey of the Ilongot region, which included visits to and hikes in the vicinity of current and abandoned mission bases, revealed a world of over thirty-five dispersed settlements, each from twenty minutes to a several-hour hike from its nearest neighbors, and composed of two to nineteen households, with an average of seven inhabitants in each household.[1] Excepting the four instances where houses clustered around a mission home and airstrip, the most striking feature of these settlements was their apparent lack of physical organization. Houses, built near gardens under immediate cultivation, were as much as half an hour from each other, and between them there were no communal buildings, no recognized public grounds – only rivers, ill-marked forest trails, and an occasional field of ripening rice.

William Jones, an American anthropologist whose diary record of the "picturesque" and fertile country where he was killed in 1909 first interested us in the Ilongots, had also noted this lack of any local organization: "Village life as I know it in America is wholly absent. At this moment, I can only liken it to a country community, with the Ilongot community on a much abbreviated scale" (1908:6). And Jones remarked, as we soon did – when seeking in vain for words to denote "big man," "chief," or "leader" – on the perplexing absence of formal structure, the casual and informal quality of Ilongot social life: "Society is pretty simple, and government is largely according to custom" (Rideout 1912:105).

Though William Jones would find himself attracted by "the free life in these wild rugged hills and silent gloomy jungles" (1912:198), this lack of an articulated system of local controls ultimately proved fatal to him. His ethnological interests led him to develop an extensive collection of material culture during his year of research with the Ilongots, a laborious and disappointing process among people who, as he would



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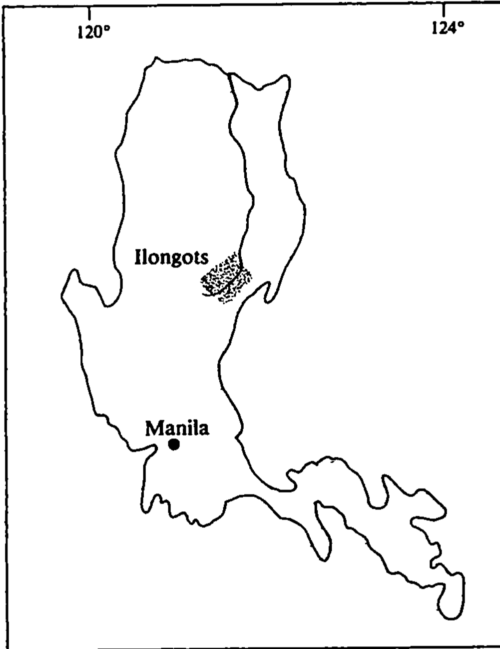


Map 1. The Ilongots on Luzon

write just weeks before recalcitrant helpers killed him, were "definitely exasperating from a practical point of view" (Rideout 1912:198). Much like his contemporaries in the colonial government, Jones struggled to make sense of men who did not share his view of obligation: "These . . . people sorely disappointed me. I expected better treatment. It is not a case of their having forgotten. They have their pay and do not intend to give a single thing. They have things but expect me to pay for them. Some things they have kept out of sight." He was particularly disturbed to find that government-appointed headmen lacked authority, an observation that may still hold true today: "The headman has no power whatever. Even if he spoke his people would not heed" (Diary, Book 9, 49).

To ship his goods, Jones required a small battalion of bamboo river rafts, but rumors of cholera in the lowlands as well as the sheer difficulty of mobilizing services from the necessary numbers of adults so frustrated him that he threatened to arrest the men he held responsible for his belongings. What we can glean from Jones's own account, reports of the constabulary who investigated his death,[2] and the memories of contemporary adults who themselves had seen the odd American known as 'Doctor' is that Jones's threats to his reluctant

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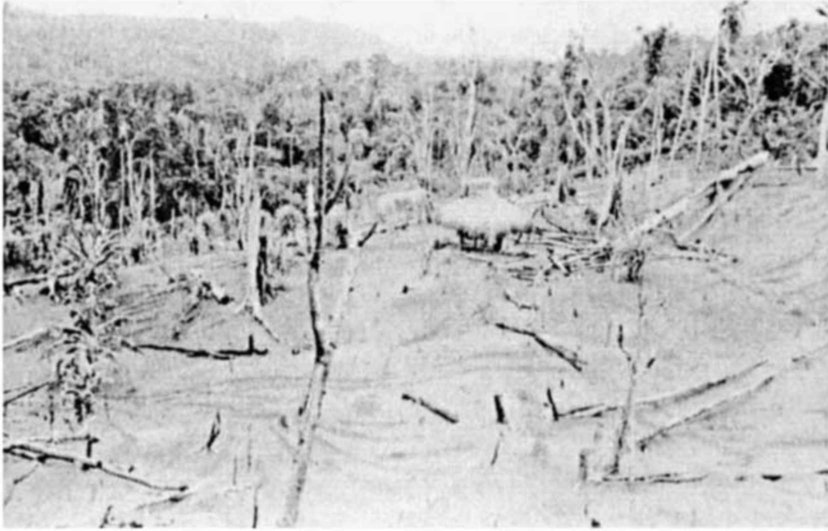

Forest and garden newly planted in rice

hosts were themselves so disturbing that the local Ilongots arranged to take his life. Over fifty years later, Renato Rosaldo and I experienced similar difficulties in organizing Ilongot carriers and guides – so much so that, on Ilongot persuasion, we built an airstrip where a mission plane could land with our belongings. We thus avoided problems Ilongots never face: of making formal claims on people by purchasing their labor, when, ideally, cooperation should be governed by the reciprocity appropriate to kin.

The "customary" ordering of Ilongot social life as we encountered it is, as Jones remarked, quite "simple." As hunters and horticulturalists whose environment – to Jones in 1908 and even to us in the late 1960s – appeared both fertile and abundant, Ilongots recognize no differences in class or status. The only imbalances in their social field obtain between unmarried youths, who labor in the homes and gardens of adults, and their married seniors, and between women cultivators and men who choose their garden sites, clear their swiddens, gather wild foods, fish, and hunt. Society, much as Jones observed, ". . . is on a very simple plan. I cannot yet make out if anything like social caste exists. If it exists, it is very, very feeble. Where a good hunter is mated to an industrious wife there is a commodious dwelling and one or two grannaries (sic); in his home there is much to eat all the time" (1908:5). The Ilongot diet, consisting of dry rice, supplementary root crops, fish, deer, wild boar, and more periodic cultivated sugar cane, fruits and greens, wild ferns,

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palm hearts, frogs, and birds is as universally available as it is diverse. Although they exchange meat (and, in Jones's time, tobacco and rattan) for bullets, ornaments, knife blades, pots, and cloth, Ilongots are not dependent for subsistence goods on trade. Encroaching settlers since 1960 have led individuals in certain areas to lay claims to previously cleared territory, but Ilongots do not recognize among themselves exclusive rights to land. In fact, differential status identities have decreased since Jones's day, when shamans had not yet been killed by Japanese, or converted, as they have been since 1955, to fundamentalist Christianity:

> . . . over here is a man who is reputed to have mysterious power; he can see into the future, can heal the sick and commune with unseen powers. Another yonder has killed one or more of the enemy and is regarded a brave man, a fierce fighter. An old wisehead has the reputation of knowing everything. Yet in none of these instances have I been able to see where the man has been lifted above his fellows (1908:5).

According to Jones and, as we will see, to Ilongots themselves, theirs is an essentially egalitarian way of life.

Today as in the past, one-room houses provide shelter for between one and three monogamous nuclear families, along with, possibly, widowed senior kin, adopted children, and occasional visiting bachelors. The family – at times called *tan tengeg*, 'one trunk,' or *matambē yek*, 'husband and wife, fellows in intercourse' – has primary responsibility for the care and socialization of unmarried children. It is often the unit of agricultural production and typically enjoys at least a hearth and a corner of the household structure where adults and infants sleep and personal goods are stored. The relations among families within a household are shaped by a universal rule prescribing uxorilocal postmarital residence – so that with very few exceptions, coresidents may include married sisters or parents and one or two married daughters, but not married brothers or sons. When daughters are newly married or when senior kin are very old, the household may be a unit of agricultural production. But even when individual families cultivate and store their rice in private granaries adjacent to their fields, households, not families, are units of consumption. In the home, all able-bodied persons work; raw produce is pooled for cooking, and cooked and equal portions of rice and viands are distributed to all inhabitants at their, minimally, diurnal meals.

Households, called (like families) *tan tengeg*, 'one trunk,' *tan bubungan*, 'one roofbeam,' or *tan 'abungan*, 'one home,' are joined in loosely organized and unnamed units I designate "settlements" or "local clusters." Denoted by the names of rivers or other striking features of the immediate environment, these groupings of related houses are often fragile, united largely by the cooperative efforts of men who distribute

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game among their clustered dwellings and collaborate in collective hunts with dogs. The boundaries of a settlement are not always clear, as individuals move, guests come and go, and not all affiliated households join consistently in meat distribution. But in each there is at least a core group of closely related families who are apt to share a history of common residence, having lived in close proximity over years of intermittent movement in search of fertile lands, abundant forests, or freedom from the lowland law. It is this history of coordinated moves, through times of inward-turning 'concentration' and then 'dispersal' toward the lowland margins of Ilongot lands, that lends a settlement its viability as an ill-defined yet generally recognized and cooperating social group.

Thus, Kakidugen, the settlement where we chose to live – largely because of its traditional appearance, and, in particular, its social and physical distance from established mission sites – had as its core two aging brothers, Lakay and Tagem, who lived with their married daughters. It also included two married nieces who had been raised in the home of one of the brothers and the families of two married 'sisters' (one, a first, and the other, a second cousin) of the old men. Their identity as a unit dated from at least the year 1923, when ancestors of the present people of Kakidugen were living with a large 'collection' (*'upug*, 'to gather, collect, concentrate') of their kin in the interior region known as Keradingan (see Map 2).[3] In revenge for past beheadings from the Keradingan area, the Ilongots of Payupay had led lowland troops to the interior, where Lakay – one of the aging Kakidugen brothers and the man whose house we shared – and a number of his fellows were arrested for killings they had not, in fact, performed. Freed from prison some months after his arrest, Lakay, a bachelor at the time, was told that he must live within the range of government surveillance. He therefore settled near the town of Kasibu, then partly Ilongot and now the lowland center of the municipality of which Kakidugen is a part. Finding himself among potentially antagonistic strangers, Lakay had the good fortune to encounter men whose great-grandmother was reputed to be a kidnapped bride and kinsman of his parents. Pleased to so 'discover' himself in the company of long-lost relations, he urged his closest kin in Keradingan to join him on the margins of Ilongot territory, his new home. Lakay married there, and there saw born all of the children whom we knew during our visit. His wife died as a result of complications that followed on her last child's birth. Shortly thereafter, he married again, to a young woman living as a 'visitor' in the home of nearby kinsmen. His brother, Tagem, married a traveling companion and first cousin of Lakay's new wife.

As it turned out, the 1920s were dramatic years for Lakay's fellows left behind in Keradingan. In fact, those years seem to have had similar

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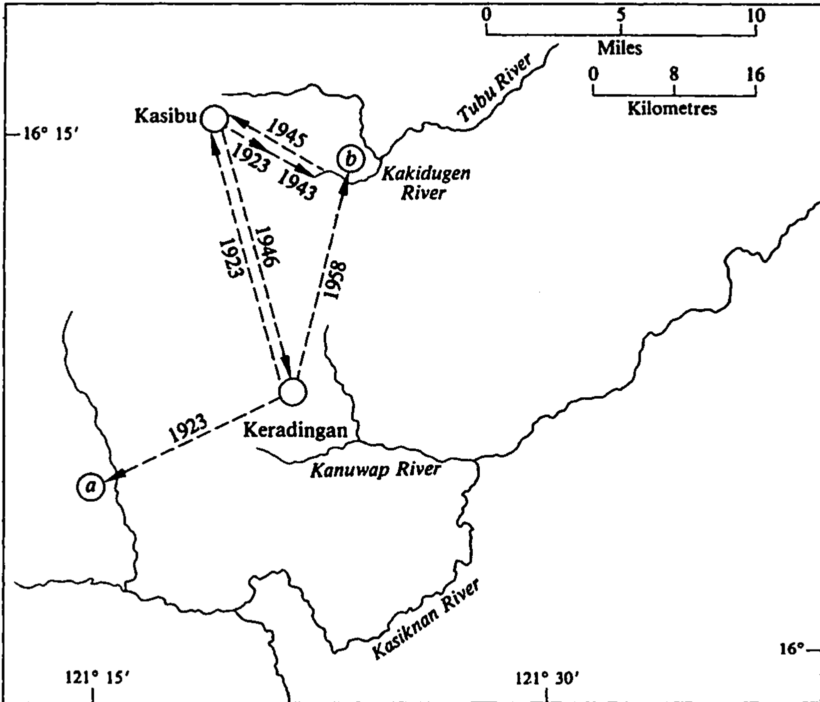


Map 2. Lakay's movements of 'concentration' (toward Keradingan) and 'dispersal' (toward Kasibu)

*a*–Persons who moved, in 1923, toward *(a)* have tended since then to move to the area west and south of Keradingan, although they rejoined their pre–1923 familiars in the period of 'concentration' following World War II.

*b*–The area north and west of point *(b)* was settled by Ilocano, Ifugao, Ibaloi, and Kallahan farmers in the period between World War II and the present; in 1974, there were firm indications that these newcomers would continue to settle lands to the east and south.

consequences for the Ilongot population as a whole. Headhunting forays from and against distant Ilongot settlements *(ngayu),* internal killings 'by deception' *(ka'abung),* and repeated raids by soldiers all encouraged the dispersal of once dense and 'concentrated' internal clusters, some of which then moved to other margins and began, by the end of the decade, to send their children to the new, American-sponsored schools. In consequence, the period from 1929–35 appears to have been one of relative calm for the Ilongots, who recall that they were worn out by violence and attracted by the promise of a useful education. Killing was therefore virtually abandoned – some say because they feared that youngsters would let their teachers know of headhunting forays by adults. In this

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Lakay in 1974

period of relative quiet and, subsequently, of relaxed control, Lakay and his family moved closer to the interior, to near the Kakidugen river.

But by the mid-1930s the Depression and administrative changes associated with the 1935 Declaration of Commonwealth in the Philippines ended state-supported schooling, and late in the decade killings were resumed. The early 1940s saw intense violence, and Ilongots killed even those people recognized as kinsmen, taking them

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A tatoo fashioned after American military "stripes" keeps alive the memory of World War II.

'by deception' in their homes. At much the same time, Japanese troops landed in Manila, and rumors of fighting and disruption in the lowlands led to a partial recongregation of the people of Keradingan. Lakay's family therefore found themselves increasingly involved with kinsmen they had broken with some twenty years before. But when, in 1945, American troops swept the then starving and defeated Japanese toward the presumably "uninhabited" hills of Nueva Viscaya, the group was forced to separate again. Hunger, illness, and murder at the hands of desperate Japanese cost Ilongots close to one-third of their population in the subsequent months of crisis. And although some Ilongots survived the onslaught of Japanese stragglers by hiding in the forests, Lakay's family, acquainted with the lowlands, fled toward familiar margins. There, American soldiers promised safety, friendship, and much-needed medicine and food.

After the war, Lakay remained close to the lowlands as his eldest daughter, Wagat, married an Ilongot from the area where he himself had first wed. But once again, a development in which they had small part – the rise of the Communist-oriented Hukbalahap movement in the 1950s – stirred Lakay's kin to movement. Lakay's daughter left her husband (she is one of the very few Ilongots I know to have experienced divorce) and followed her father's family back toward the interior, where she and her brothers married into another cluster of Keradingan families, people

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who were associated with the settlement of Pengegyabēn in the years of our research. Intermarriages and headhunting raids directed primarily toward lowland settlers marked this final period of 'concentration' in Keradingan, which lasted until 1958. Then, internal conflicts, renewed killings, and rumors of settlers laying claim to previously cultivated lands led Lakay, his brother Tagem, and some of their fellows to again move outward toward the flat lands around the Kakidugen river. Additional families joined them there, while others left to 'follow' closer kinsmen. But Lakay and Tagem managed to stay in Kakidugen, where they continued to be the central figures in a settlement that was barely resisting incursions by displaced Kallahan, Ibaloi, and Ifugao tribesmen at the time of our arrival in 1967.

Such histories of coordinated dispersal and concentration are shared by the core inhabitants of all Ilongot settlements – some of which are composed of several family clusters; although others, like Kakidugen, are clearly dominated by one. To the outside investigator what this means is that although local residential bonds are influenced by uxorilocal preferences after marriage, settlements – unlike households – are quite diverse in composition and rarely have a fixed or constant shape. A history of related moves, interpreted within an idiom of bilateral kinship[4] and reinforced by bonds of marriage, permit most members of a settlement to construe themselves as kin, who (as Ilongots express it) share a 'body' *(betrang)*. But accident, death, and – more significantly – the shifting orientations of young men and women when they marry, make local groups more fragile than the nuclear families of which they are composed. What continues over time is not a stable group but a tradition of relation. Those people who have shared in hunts, along with kin in other settlements with whom they have been wont to live at times of 'concentration,' will tend to see themselves as members of a single *bērtan,*[5] a largely endogamous 'bilateral descent group,' or, to use a more general translation, as persons of a single 'kind.'

*Bērtan*, unlike settlements, are seen by Ilongots as timeless and discrete collections of related persons who share an origin from unknown common ancestors who once lived together 'downstream,' 'in the lowlands,' 'on an island,' 'near a mountain' – in short, in some environment from which the *bērtan* takes its name. As the largest units of the Ilongot social system, *bērtan* are composed of all persons who choose to reckon their descent group identity through either parent.[6] They are typically associated with a discrete locality, and though theoretically unbounded, a strong tendency to endogamy, clear regional affiliations, distinctive dialects, and an inclination to give *bērtan* members unique personal appellations mean that membership can be treated as clear and unam-

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biguous in those contexts in which a *bērtan* label is important: visits, marriages, and other interactions with unrelated *bērtan*, and in the determination of potential victims in intra-Ilongot feuds.

Thus, most of the people who once lived together in Keradingan see themselves as members of the Rumyad *bērtan*, a label that they use in visiting adults of other 'kinds,' in organizing support for covenants with one-time enemy *bērtan*, and in explaining why disputes among themselves should not occasion major confrontations, being the petty differences of kin. Historical evidence suggests that in the past, *bērtan* have split (new segments acquiring as their *bērtan* name a feature of their new environment) and it appears as well that severely ravished populations have merged, at times, with *bērtan* of their conquerors or kin. The Kakidugen people, for example, are associated not only with Rumyad but also with a presently nonlocalized and reduced group known as Peknar, and it is the latter identity label that they invoke when wishing to dissociate themselves from the activities of more distant Rumyad fellows. Furthermore, the fact that almost every Ilongot can trace ancestry from some foreign *bērtan* means that individuals from Rumyad may, for example, affiliate themselves with Tamsi, Pugu, Bē'nad, and a number of other *bērtan* when such assertions of relation are politically desired. But whatever the empirical flexibility of *bērtan* designations, Ilongots speak as if their world were readily divided into a set of at least thirteen enduring localized descent groups, whose present residential foci are indicated on Map 3.

Like concentric circles, the Ilongot social world can, then, be construed as a set of ever more inclusive units – family, household, settlement, *bērtan*. Each of these units "physically" contains the others and each is composed of related persons who may or may not be able to calculate strict genealogical connection, but who nonetheless experience their bonds in terms of the cooperative orientations that unite them and lend substance to the claim that they are kin. Flexible in composition, all of these units change through time, as does the reckoning of kin ties that connect them. And kinship itself, like other aspects of Ilongot social discourse, tends to minimize acknowledgment of enduring differences, permitting people who – for whatever reason – come to see themselves as related to express at once equality, independence, common interests, and cooperative concerns.

Terminologically, the Ilongot speaker distinguishes related persons primarily in terms of generation, as 'siblings' *(katan'agi)*, 'children' *('anak)*, 'mothers' *('ina)*, 'fathers' *('ama)*, 'grandparents' *('apu)*, and 'grandchildren' *(maka'apu);* optional terms mark distinctions with reference to consanguinity, relative age, and sex. Affines of the same generation call one another *'aum;* and parents- and children-in-law use the

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