

philippine studies

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

An Historian Looks into the Philippine Kaleidoscope

William Henry Scott

Philippine Studies vol. 24, no. 2 (1976) 220–227

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Notes and Comments

An Historian Looks into the Philippine Kaleidoscope*

WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT

The Bureau of Tourism and such Luneta pageants as the *Kasaysayan ng Lahi* have recently focused public attention on the colorful variety of life in this Republic. The display has quite appropriately been called "Philippine Kaleidoscope." The brilliant patterns that we see when we hold the kaleidoscope up to our eye and turn it around are caused by bits and pieces of broken glass falling into place accidentally. Just so, the variety of Filipino life with its colorful minorities — and no less colorful majority — is caused by the fact that the Filipino people are shattered and fractured by the accidents of history, and they do not choose to project the entertaining image the tourist enjoys. The rich fabric of Filipino life is not a tapestry with a deliberate design, nor even an oil painting executed by some creative artist. Rather, it is like the display of brilliant paints spilled on the floor of the artist's studio. It is, in other words, something of a mess.

This is a situation which calls for comment by the historian. For it is the business of historians to tell us how we got in the mess we are in. Probably nobody would be interested in the past if he were really satisfied with the present. By this line of reasoning, I presume there are no historians in heaven — not because they don't deserve to be there, but because they would have no work to do there: nobody would care how he got in. Similarly, I suppose the other place is full of historians — not because they deserve to be there, but because they would have a lot of work to do: everybody would be asking how the hell he got in.

As an historian, therefore, I will address myself to the present condition by saying something about how the mess was created. Perhaps the Department of Education or the Supreme Court or the

*This is a revised version of a talk given at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, 23 January 1975.

Commission on National Integration will be able to clean up the mess, but at least I will try to describe how all that paint got spilled in one particular studio in the first place. The place I have in mind is the Gran Cordillera Central, a region whose habitants have the dubious distinction of being one of the most colorful tourist attractions in the archipelago.

This sonorous Castilian phrase, *Gran Cordillera Central*, is applied to the great mountainous backbone of Northern Luzon which forms the watershed between the Cagayan Valley on the east and the Ilocos coastal plain along the South China Sea on the west. Filipinos born in this region have traditionally been called Igorots — literally, “people of the mountains” — though it would be more accurate to refer to them by the names of the languages they speak, as we do in the case of the Ilocanos or Tagalogs or Bicolanos. A glance at the map of Luzon will show the province of Kalinga-Apayao in the far north. In its two sub-provinces of Kalinga and Apayao, native-born Filipinos speak various dialects of the Kalinga and Isneg languages respectively. To the south is Mountain Province, where Bontoc and Northern Kankanay are spoken, and still farther south, Benguet, where people speak either Kankanay or Ibaloy. And on the east is Ifugao, where several dialects of that language are spoken.

But this linguistic picture must be completed by reference to the lowland languages which historically surrounded these mountaineers. At the time of the Spanish invasion in the last quarter of the 16th century, Ilocano was spoken on the west, and on the east, Ibanag in Cagayan, Gaddang in Isabela, and Isinay in Nueva Vizcaya, with Pangasinan in the south in the province of that name. In the past four centuries, however, the forces of history have caused the speakers of some of these languages to be grouped together as cultural minorities and the remainder as, presumably, the cultural majority. Lowlanders who speak Ilocano, Ibanag, Gaddang, Isinay or Pangasinan are simply referred to as Filipinos — the cultural majority, that is — while highlanders who speak Isneg, Kalinga, Bontoc, Kankanay, Ifugao, or Ibaloy are called cultural minorities. Yet the former languages do not form a common linguistic entity: indeed, each of them is closely related to its particular neighbors in the latter group. Highland Ibaloy, for instance, is more like lowland Pangasinan than highland Ifugao, and lowland Pangasinan is more like highland Ibaloy than lowland

Ilocano. And the explanation for this is historically simple. At the time of the Spanish advent, the peoples of Northern Luzon were neither culturally nor politically divided into two groups, highlanders and lowlanders. Everybody was a member of his own particular ethnolinguistic group, whether highlander or lowlander, and nobody was a cultural minority or a cultural majority. How they became thus divided can be shown by a brief review of the history of the Cordillera.

But a cautionary little footnote to begin with: Igorots are not organized into tribes. To think that they are would suggest a highland-lowland dichotomy which historically did not exist. What we casually refer to as "mountain tribes" are simply ethnolinguistic groups with their own languages and customs. They do not have "tribal" governments; quite the opposite, each village was historically an independent unit like an ancient Filipino barangay – and they still tend to feel that way today. They do not fight "tribal" wars: there was never a time when all Ifugaos, for instance, went to war with all Bontocs – just as there was never a time when all Tagalogs went to war with all Bicolanos. Rather, back in the days of those head-taking vendettas we call "tribal wars," one town would seek revenge from another, not from all the speakers of that town's language. And what we romantically call "tribal chieftains" are simply the local leaders who made the political decisions in these villages back before the imposition of a Western-style constitution by a centralized government. The Kalingas have never been obedient to a common chief or tribal council any more than the Ilocanos have.

What first attracted Spanish attention to these peoples was the reputation of their gold mines. The Igorots traded gold to lowlanders in Ilocos and Pangasinan for rice, pigs, cloth, and wine, and these lowlanders refined the gold and distributed it throughout the land. All during the Spanish regime the colonial government tried to control or prevent this trade, but it continued right up until the 20th century. Local feuds between highlanders and lowlanders were not important or frequent enough to break it up, not even after these feuds were aggravated to new proportions by Spanish intervention. When the Spaniards tried to get this gold at its source by force, they led whole armies of lowlanders up to the mountains to fight the Igorots – once in such large numbers, as a matter of fact, that there was a rice shortage and famine in

Pampanga because of the drafting of farmers away from their fields. Thus, a new cause of enmity was introduced, and relations between highlanders and lowlanders consequently fluctuated between warfare and commerce during the whole Spanish occupation. As an Augustinian historian said in 1630, when the Igorots are on the warpath they come down to take heads, but when they are at peace, to trade gold.

Spanish conquistadores first reached the gold mines in 1576, only five years after they first set foot on the shores of Luzon, and they made attempts again in 1583, 1596, and 1608. It is significant that not until this date do we hear any reports of traditional highland-lowland animosity. But from then on, friar reports are full of Igorot "atrocities." They were now highwaymen, bandits, and murderers who killed for purposes of revenge, robbery, intimidation, or extortion, and mutilated the bodies of their victims — and these victims, of course, were good lowland subjects of His Spanish Majesty, if not Spaniards themselves. Worse yet, they prevented other Filipinos from becoming Christians, kidnapped baptized children to raise as pagans, provided refuge for lowlanders escaping Spanish domination, and prevented Spaniards and their vassals from traveling freely between different areas under Spanish control. Thus the Spanish presence in Northern Luzon produced one of the predictable results of colonial occupation — a new enmity between the conquered and unconquered native population. Moreover, a pattern was being set which categorized the unconquered as savage and backwards, but the conquered as civilized and progressive in direct proportion to the amount of alien influence they accepted.

In 1618 Spain joined the Thirty Years War and so had a new incentive for exploiting the Igorot gold mines. In 1620, 1623, and 1624, accordingly, huge expeditions actually occupied the Baguio mines for short periods despite stiff local resistance. The Igorots would plant the trails with camouflaged spikes, block narrow passes with felled trees and underbrush, attack the invaders from above with stones and spears, and roll big boulders and tree trunks down on them. These tactics failed to prevent Spanish seizure of the mines, but one final tactic did prevent their continued occupation of the mines: the Igorots would not feed them. That is to say, Spanish conquistadores never grew their own food, and the Igorots were willing to abandon their fields and homes, or even

burn them, to deprive the invaders of supplies. Thus the Spaniards found it impossible to maintain the long supply lines necessary to get food from the subject Filipinos who did grow it for them in the lowlands. So, in 1625 they called the whole costly adventure off. Only once more did they try to occupy any Igorot gold mines, and that was in 1668 when they learned about the deposits in Mankayan (that is, Lepanto). But then too, they could not maintain themselves: their whole garrison got sick, and the Igorots simply told them to get out or be cut to pieces. So they got out.

Spanish control of the Ilocos coast was thus never able to prevent trade between highlanders and lowlanders on the western side of the Cordillera, but their activities in the Cagayan and Magat River valleys on the east did have a tragic and long-lasting effect on Filipino internal relations. Spanish invasion of the lower Cagayan Valley encouraged upstream migration by the Ibanags into Gaddang territory, and Gaddangs into Ifugao and Isinay territory, and then occupation of the area around Bagabag and Aritao in the present province of Nueva Vizcaya intensified this pressure. Thus the Ifugaos themselves told the Spaniards in both the 18th and the 19th centuries that relocated lowland converts to Christianity were occupying what had formerly been their own territory – with Spanish blessings and protection, of course. The escalating antagonisms which resulted from this situation included attempts by lowland Christians to prevent conversion of their mountaineer neighbors so they would not lose their trade monopoly with them, and by lowland garrison troops to prevent final pacification so they would not be disbanded and lose their own illegal profits. Kiangang itself, the old capital of Ifugao, was first invaded some time in the 1750s, and punitive expeditions entered this area with fire and sword on an average of once a decade from then on right up to the end of the Spanish regime. It is hardly surprising that this lowland-highland warfare continued into the 20th century – nor is it surprising that it is described in colonial accounts as unprovoked attacks by savage headhunters from the mountains on peace-loving Spanish vassals in the lowlands.

Friar missionaries also tried to subjugate the Igorots for Christ and King as they tried to subjugate all other Filipinos, and not a few gave their lives in the attempt. When they were not actually accompanied by troops, they were able to hike in and out of head-taking country with confidence, and a few actually took

up residence on the heights of the Cordillera. But in the course of three centuries of proselytizing zeal, only one or two ever remained longer than ten years. Some died, a few were killed and a few were driven out, and the others got sick or discouraged and left. The stumbling block which none of these missionaries could overcome was that in the Spanish Empire conversion to Christ also meant surrender to King. Therefore, Igorots willing to make this double submission generally moved down to the lowlands to do it and became lowlanders in the process – that is to say, their descendants today have no memory that their ancestors were Igorots. And conversely, lowlanders who were unwilling to submit often took to the hills like Igorots and disappeared from colonial tribute lists – that is, they became highlanders. Thus the major impact of the missionary endeavor on the Cordillera was to open a new cleavage between independent and subjugated Filipinos which was expressed in religious terms – that is, pagans versus Christians. The Spaniards' American heirs of empire inherited this concept in their turn and so created the old Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. And so, indeed, has the Republic of the Philippines: the latest ethnolinguistic map published by the National Museum is labelled "The Filipino People," but this people is represented in three different colors, one for Christians, one for Muslims, and one for those who are neither Muslims nor Christians.

It was neither gold nor Gospel which finally took the Spaniards back onto the Cordillera in force, however, but tobacco. In 1781 the colonial government declared a monopoly on the production and sale of this crop and put the colony on a paying basis for the first time in 225 years of occupation. The Igorots quickly responded to the challenge and sabotaged the new source of revenue with contraband sales. So the government established a contingent of revenue agents to invade Igorot territory and literally cut the contraband off at its roots. Ten years of destructive expeditions in the 1830s failed to produce the desired results, however, so the Tobacco Monopoly began to buy Igorot crops instead. But they did produce the greatest loss of life and property ever suffered by any one group of Filipinos during the Spanish regime. Their famous – or infamous – commander, Colonel Guillermo Galvey, cut down Igorot crops by the hectares, burned their houses by the hundreds, and decimated their population with smallpox by the thousands. By 1840, La Trinidad's 500 houses had been reduced to less than a

hundred; by 1860, there was no Igorot community of more than 250 persons in the entire Agno Valley; and by 1880 all the rice terraces southwest of Kiangan were abandoned due to disease. Whatever effect these excursions may have had upon the relationships between the highland and lowland protagonists involved, they certainly helped the former to become a minority statistically.

Of course, while these Igorots were becoming a cultural minority, their lowland brethren were becoming the cultural majority. While the Ifugaos and Bontocs and Kalingas were continuing their traditional ways of life, the Ilocanos and Tagalogs and Bicolanos were more and more giving up their traditional ways of life in favor of new ways introduced by their conquerors. To indicate the extent of these changes, and the thoroughness with which the process has been forgotten, it will be enough to point out that first-generation Spanish accounts describe headhunting in what are now the provinces of Zambales, Tarlac, Laguna, Pangasinan, Nueva Vizcaya, and Cagayan. Nor must it be thought that the Spanish control which produced these changes spread across the lowland Philippines overnight. At the end of the 17th century, the Dominican Procurator estimated that less than one out of every four Filipinos had been converted, and the Archbishop of Manila was complaining that safe communications between the capital and the Cagayan Valley were impossible because of independent tribes around Mt. Arayat. As late as 1836, Governor Salazar admitted that the only territory under Spanish control north of Pangasinan were the beaches of Ilocos and the banks of remote rivers in Cagayan. Even in 1840, police protection could not be provided subject Filipinos against Moro raids as far north as Aparri. But whenever and wherever the colonial government was able to extend its control, there Filipinos became less like their ancestors than their independent neighbors were. And it is the descendants of those independent neighbors whom we call cultural minorities today.

Thus, even a cursory glance at the history of the Cordillera provides us with a clue as to how we got into the mess we are in — that is, a society which considers part of itself a set of cultural minorities. For just what do we mean by the term “cultural minorities”? What do these minorities have in common? What do the terrace-building Ifugaos have in common with the jungle-dwelling Negritos of Zambales or the brass-working Maranao of

Marawi City? And what do any of them have in common with those 24 cave-dwelling Tasaday in Mindanao? (Or are there now 25?) Not their language, not their religion, not their clothing, nor even the color of their skin. These Filipino citizens have only one thing in common that might justify lumping them together as distinct from all other Filipino citizens, and it is simply this: they are more like their ancestors than other Filipinos are like their ancestors. That is why some historians do not like the term "cultural minority" or any other term which reduces part of the Filipino people to broken bits of glass in the colorful Philippine Kaleidoscope. For the kaleidoscope was not produced in the Garden of Eden by divine plan but right here in the archipelago by the colonial experience of a whole people.

Not so long ago I was invited to contribute to a new Philippine encyclopaedia whose first volume was to be entitled, "The Cultural Minorities." I was given a long questionnaire to fill out that wanted to know where they lived, what they are called, what languages they speak, what weapons they use, and so on. I said I would be happy to contribute if the title of the volume were changed to "The Filipino People." But these are not really the Filipino people, I was told: they are different from other Filipinos. Then, I said, they should include the Filipino minority which is the rarest in the whole land, that cultural minority whose houses, names, languages, and weapons are more different from all other Filipinos than any other cultural minority – and I volunteered to do the necessary research to fill out the questionnaire myself.

I was referring to that native Filipino tribe whose natural habitat is Forbes Park, Makati, Rizal.