

II The Setting

1. The Ethnographic Background

The myth and nearly all the contextual data were obtained from Kaluwan, the inhabited area along the Mabaca River and its tributaries in northern Kalinga, and more specifically from two regions, Buaya and Aciga, located on the middle section of the same river.

The Kalinga form a single ethnolinguistic group with the Tinguian, who are the aboriginal population of Abra Province to the west. The Kalinga and the Tinguian inhabit the eastern and western flanks respectively of that section of the Cordillera, which itself runs from south to north. They were given two names because the area was penetrated by the Spaniards in the 19th century in separate efforts from the western and eastern lowland fringes where they had obtained rather firm control. By 1880 they had succeeded in cutting a horse trail that crossed the Cordillera through the Tinguian-Kalinga territory, connecting their garrisons, but too distant from the Aciga-Buaya area to be affected by it.

Kalinga consists of about 55 politically independent, mainly endogamous, regions. Traditionally, only neighboring regions maintained peace pacts, occasionally interrupted by conflict. When the American colonial government unitized the area into a single administrative unit early during the last century, more trails were constructed, and travel and peaceful contact with more distant regions increased (as did the number of regions holding peace pacts – until each of the 55 or so regions had at least initiated a peace pact with every other one), as demanded by the American military governor.

Up to this date, however, the native political system has rejected attempts towards the establishment of as much as a confederation. The only political unity in the area that we can speak of is that nominally provided by the existence of a central Philippine government. The indigenous political system has not adapted itself to this national entity, although the people accept it, and formal government positions both on the local and national levels are eagerly sought by the Kalinga as much as by other Filipinos elsewhere in the country. Yet, indigenous and national political (and juridical) institutions are not integrated and operate virtually independently from each other.

In the middle sixties, when most of the fieldwork was done (and which is also the ethnographic present here), Buaya had a population of about 1,000 in almost 200 houses, and Aciga had about half that

number. In pre-colonial times, the population density most probably was about half that figure. Traditionally (and until now) the northern Kalinga lived in small scattered settlements of one to about 20 houses each. The 1915 appointment document of the local appointed leader and representative to the sub-provincial council listed twenty settlements in Buaya. At that time the total population in that region was probably not more than 700. With an average occupancy of 4.5 per household, the average number of houses per settlement was almost eight (7.77). During the middle sixties, it was about nine (9.25) in the same number of settlements. Traditionally, the residence rule was *mulieri-local*, or the village of residence of the wife's parents. Since the introduction of irrigated rice fields during the first half of this century, residence has become decided more often by the proximity of the rice fields, either those inherited by either party or newly constructed ones. There is, however, no visible trend toward concentration of the population into fewer and larger settlements as is the case in most of Kalinga; or even into a single large town as in southern Kalinga, Mountain Province, and parts of Ifugao, where the introduction of wet rice dates back to a much earlier time.

The regions are almost entirely endogamous. The few marriages which are contracted outside the region traditionally created *go-betweens* who could travel between neighboring regions that were in conflict to act as official messengers.

In relation to other regions, each region considers itself as a single kinship group. In fact, it consists of overlapping bilateral kinship circles. In its widest application, the Kalinga kinship circle consists of ego's direct ascendants as far as the great-great-grandparents, the siblings, first cousins, second cousins and third cousins of these direct ascendants and of ego, and the descendants of ego and ego's first, second and third cousins as far as the great-great-grand children, plus the spouses of all these. This stretch of nine generations is called a *lunap*.

The people wonder how many *lunap* may have elapsed since the first people were created, but think in terms of two or just a few. (The Bayudang and Gawwa versions of the Buntuk origin myth cited below clearly reflect this perception.)

The incest taboo extends to the first cousin degree of relationship. A complete count in Buaya (mid-1960s) revealed that about 20% of all marriages are between persons related in the second cousin degree of relationship, 40% in the third cousin degree, and 40% between persons who, by Buaya reckoning, are not related (i.e., fourth cousin degree and beyond). The same count also revealed that half of the population were engaged by their parents during their infancy (the parents of the male child taking the initiative); yet, half of these engagements did not result in marriages due to deaths and other causes. A Buaya marriage is not

normally the result of a romantic courtship. Two out of five persons with married children had been divorced at least once (exclusive of the broken parental engagements referred to above). Comparing the infrequent divorce rates in southern Kalinga (specifically, in Tulgao) to the very frequent divorces in northern Kalinga, this striking difference seems to be related somehow to the absence in the latter, and the presence in the former, of premarital romantic courtships. Part of the same cluster is also the near-absence of extra-marital affairs in Tulgao, and its high frequency in Buaya-Aciga. No count was possible, but it was generally agreed in Buaya-Aciga that it was frequent, and it was spoken of with approval. As a matter of fact, the traditionally two most exciting things in life were headhunting and paramour relations. Most of the intra-regional killings in the north were related to adulterous affairs that had become known to the offended party's (the woman's) kindred. Almost all paramour relations were of the illegal, secret, type. These two activities, headhunting and adultery, are not considered immoral, and involve a high degree of risk taking. Both of them give a man renown.

Headhunting, as a social behavior, still looms large in Buaya-Aciga culture, society and psychology. The killing of a non-village mate always has sacrificial connotations; a headhunting career (established after killing two) was traditionally the fundamental and earliest step toward leadership and a political career; and the act of killing found deep resonances of need-fulfillment in the personality.

In Kal-uwan, traditionally, leadership had mainly a triple basis: the status of being a headhunter, economic independence, and legal expertise. All three have, as a motivating factor, the common element of achievement, which is one of the core values in the area.

Headhunters look fearful because of their tattoo, which in local color categories produces a red-black pattern, meaning deadly aggressiveness. When settlements were still under the constant threat of invasion by other regions, the local headhunters were viewed as their chief human protectors. They were also the chief security of their respective kinship groups when internal feuds erupted. But their fame on account of their bravery and skill in fighting and killing did not by itself assure them of leadership.

A prospective leader also had to prove himself economically successful. It was not enough to be economically independent by inheritance; he had to prove that he had the skill and industry to add to it on his own. A wealthy person, by local standards, is one who never has to depend on others for his needs. Such a dependence is evidenced by the need to exchange heirlooms (the traditional reserves in the form of prestige items, such as beads, gongs, precious jars and gold ornaments) for food. Hence, the people refer to the wealthy as the *managu't tagu* ('who make people live'). When in need, others can obtain food from them in exchange for heirlooms, or work for them (sometimes

as total dependents), or simply borrow food which is to be repaid with increment. The people appreciate their presence as dependable resources for their survival needs, and admire them for their capacity to constantly produce surplus. Along economic lines two categories of people are distinguished: those who are never in need and can always help, or the wealthy; and those who are chronically or constantly in need, or the poor. Hence, there is a distinction in their idiom between the “good people” (*napiya’n tagu*) and the “bad people” (*kawas a tagu*). These expressions have the further moral connotation that stealing befits, and is expected only of, the poor, and that the wealthy are prepared to provide economic security in times of crisis. The wealthy are honored for their wealth, either inherited or as a personal achievement, but that prestige is not a basis for leadership unless, as stated, it is at least in part a personal achievement.

Aside from the two preceding requirements—achievement in headhunting and wealth—a leader must have profound knowledge of the custom law, and the ability to express himself during public sessions of adjudication. As a specialist in legal matters he represents his kinsmen or co-regionists in disputes, or may be called upon to render decisions in matters involving others. Aside from his legal knowledge, his headhunting exploits and economic status give him clout. Since logic alone does not resolve disputes, he sometimes has to threaten, which he cannot do unless he can back up his threats with his reputation as a killer and his economic resources to be used eventually in the payment of indemnities after killing.

Being a leader produces certain indirect economic rewards. The people are aware of this, but find it equitable in return for his protection, advice, and free service during times of crisis and long judicial deliberations. This triple achievement, with influence and leadership as a result, constitutes the pinnacle of success for a man.

Rice is the greatest source of food and wealth. Since the introduction of irrigated rice fields in the 1930s, it has become more abundant, to the extent that it has replaced other carbohydrates as the main staple, and is even being exported in exchange for trade goods. Hence, also, the population increase (contra Lawless 1977) from the second quarter of this century onward. The general culture, however, still reflects the old tradition of shifting cultivation, and the population is still sparse.

Low population density, and the local climate and type of forest growth make the area suitable for swidden cultivation. A brief dry season in March-April, barely short enough for clearing and burning activities, interrupts a regular, almost year-round rainfall. The mountains are covered with a thick rainforest, whose clearings regenerate immediately when abandoned after a two or three-year cultivation period. The same area is not cleared again until after a period of about fifteen years. On account mainly of the abundant rainfall

throughout the year, the low population density, and the long periods between clearings, there is no evidence of soil depletion or other ecological deterioration. Most of the forest, particularly to the north, is still uninhabited virgin forest.

The crops consist mainly of rice, supplemented with yams, bananas, taro and other vegetables such as beans. A good proportion of the vegetable diet is still obtained from non-cultivated plants in the forest.

It appears that with the introduction of shotguns and rifles, game (mostly wild boar and deer) is not as abundant as it used to be. Nowadays, most meat consumption occurs during sacrifices and other celebrations for which only domesticated animals (chicken, pig and water buffalo) are killed. The people claim that there were also more fish in the rivers and brooks in earlier days, when the population was smaller.

Aside from their irrigated rice fields, the people still make clearings for mountain rice, but with the main intention of planting the swiddens with vegetables, after the rice is harvested, for another year or two. The construction of new rice fields is still going on, partly because of the growing population. The effect of this shift on their cosmology is still hardly noticeable in Kal-uwan (see De Raedt 1964; 1969b, 277-279). The chief changes produced by the introduction of irrigated rice fields are from a traditional predominance of a residence rule where women stay in the settlements of their birth to settlements in the proximity of most of the new household's fields, inherited from either side, and the increased emphasis on rice as a source of wealth. (For more details on the social setting of the Buntuk origin myth, see De Raedt 1969a, 11-56; 1969b, 679-778 and *passim*; 1977a; 1977b).

2. The Physical Setting: The Buntuk Scene

The scene of the primordial events in the Buntuk origin myth is an area along the Mabaka River just beyond the present boundaries of the Buaya region with the Aciga region as one travels downstream (and eastward) from Buaya. The scene provides a view unequalled elsewhere in Kalinga, not because of its beauty (neither in Kalinga nor Western terms), but because of the unusual concentration of large boulders several stories high, in and on both sides of the river, which lie scattered in a relatively small area. The earth contains boulders of all sizes throughout Kalinga, but not in the exceptional number and size with which they are found here.

The larger Buaya and Aciga settlements in the area surrounding the myth site, Bagwang and Buntuk, respectively, are less than a 20-minute walk apart. Others are even closer. The scene of the myth stretches from the upstream end of the Buntuk settlement until about halfway between these two settlements. Since this places it outside the Buaya

territory, from where most of the ethnographic data were obtained, questions may be raised as to the relevance of Buaya culture to the analysis. A brief historical discussion is therefore in order here for the sake of establishing the cultural unity of the area.

A close distance between settlements of different regions is rather unusual for Kalinga. There were, in fact, more settlements close to the mythical scene in the past. Across the river from Buntuk is the Magsiyakan settlement, and a little upstream from there, just inside the present Buaya region and across from Bagwang, is the location of the old and now abandoned Kal-uwan settlement. The entire river valley with all its regions is named after this settlement and the Buaya claim that this is the oldest settlement in the Mabaca River valley, from which all others were populated.

Whenever two regions in Kalinga have settlements at close distance on either side of their common boundary, a single original region has split into two, usually through the process of internal strife. Something similar also happened here.

The Buntuk settlement together with other settlements downstream from the present Buaya is known as Matucad. Together with a group of settlements east from there, one of which is Aciga, Matucad now forms a single endogamous region, called Aciga. The Buaya remember that there was much communication between Matucad and the present Buaya in the past, with mutual exchange of economic assistance and frequent attendance of each other's feasts and funerals. The nature and frequency of the exchanges and visits point to multiple kinship ties between the two areas, as normally exist only within a single endogamous region. This assumed earlier unity of Buaya and one half of the present Aciga is further evidenced by the identity in all its detail of their marriage customs, while the same differ somewhere from those of the rest of the present Aciga region. Such internal differences of custom are also found elsewhere in Kalinga, and are always the result of recent assimilation of earlier independent regions or fractions of regions.

The earlier unity of the Matucad and the Buaya settlements finds further confirmation in the late date at which Buaya and Matucad made a peace pact. Throughout Kalinga, neighboring regions have had peace pacts from time immemorial (see De Raedt 1969a, 20-24), while those with more distant regions are almost all of recent origin – less than a century old. Buaya and Matucad make an exception. Around the turn of the century, the Buaya invaded Aciga proper in revenge for the rape of one of their women who was married there. It was convenient for the Buaya to pass through Matucad, but the latter had put up a no-trespassing sign – which the Buaya ignored. No bloodshed between Buaya and Matucad occurred at the time, but the settlement of the offense of trespass became the occasion for the establishment of the first peace pact between Matucad and Buaya, and a definite political split between

these two parts of the old Buaya region with a clear demarcation of their common boundaries.

The trespass turned out to be an occasion for the official confirmation of the fact that Matucad had become incorporated into Aciga through frequent intermarriages. The two had become a single endogamous region. For some time before that, the Aciga had become numerically weak in comparison with the Buaya, roughly a one to five ratio. In addition, since the incest taboo extends to the first cousin degree of relationship, a small population is severely limited in its choice of suitable marriage partners. This created another motive to look elsewhere for marriage partners. Through intermarriage, then, the Aciga had succeeded in wresting a part of Buaya away and adding it to their own region – or at least neutralizing it.

Until now, Matucad and the rest of Aciga maintain separate peace pacts with Buaya. This is not unique in Kalinga. It sometimes happens that two or more sectors of a certain region maintain separate peace pacts with one of the other regions with whom the home region has peace pacts. Internal differences about the peace terms as well as recent consolidation of the region are most common causes.

When the intermarriages between Matucad and Aciga increased, those between Matucad and the rest of Buaya of necessity decreased; and so, in due time, did the strength of their internal political relationships. The annexation of Matucad to their region may not have been intended initially by the Aciga but the increasingly close kinship relations made it inevitable; and it can be expected that the still existing (superficial) cultural differences will in due time be washed out. Incidentally, another small region, Manat, north of Buaya became incorporated into Buaya around the same time through the same process. The people still recall that at one time a dispute arose between Buaya and Manat. There was a strong desire on the part of many Buaya to make war against the Manat. However, the invasion never materialized since there was at least one Buaya man who exempted one or more of the Manat households to the point that all had a protector. Since there were no enemies to kill, the invasion was called off. Manat is now fully endogamous with Buaya.

Actually, on a deeper level, the culture and social structure in the Kal-uwan area remains unaffected by these political realignments. Cultural diversity in this river valley is on the level of minute and, from the analytical point of view, insignificant detail. A substantiation of this claim would take up inordinate space and is not necessary for the present purposes. It was sufficient to establish the recent unity of Buaya and Matucad where the scene of the origin myth is located.