

RAPID SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG IGOROT MINERS

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During the summer of 1962, the author conducted a series of interviews as part of a study of rapid social change among Philippine Episcopalians under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Joseph G. Moore, then Director of the Episcopal Church's Unit of Research in Evanston, Illinois. Thirty male Igorots employed in the gold mines in the Baguio area of the Mountain Province—now Benguet Province—were interviewed, and thirty of their same age groups, nativity and education living in their home barrios. The reports of these interviews were duly forwarded to the Unit for analysis and interpretation, but the present article is based on a talk given at the Seminar on Development of the Baguio Mining Community on May 9, 1964 sponsored by the Baguio Cooperative Mining Ministry. A shorter version, abridged by the Editor of *Church and Community*, appeared in that journal, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1967), pp. 22-27.

Three aspects of local culture proved a minor handicap in eliciting accurate information, both in the mines and in the barrios. In the first place, there was strong reluctance to acknowledge wealth in any form or to discuss financial matters. Then there was a concept of being the victim of one's environment so that attempts to examine relations with "the Company" or "the Mission" critically were considered perplexing, eccentric or impertinent. And finally, interrogation was seen as a kind of personal contest rather than a means for eliciting information and attempts to pursue an argument to a logical conclusion frequently roused resentment.

Workers were interviewed at Antamok Tram, Antamok, Acupan and Balatok, all of whom were employed by the same company, and at Baguio Gold, where working conditions and wages differed slightly. At the time, all the mines provided bunkhouses for their men and their families — two or three-story barracks-like buildings with porches on front and back, each individual quarters being a strip approximately 10 x 20 feet from one porch to the other, usually divided into two or

three makeshift rooms by the occupants. Large public toilets and washrooms of concrete were provided in separate buildings, and a few bunkhouses had running water in the individual quarters. Electricity was provided in all. The large mines had hospitals and medical care, elementary school education, and such recreational facilities as a library, movie theater, billiard hall, and basketball courts. All merchandising was done in regulated licensed concessions and alcoholic beverages were strictly forbidden but readily available.

The mines also had areas where they permitted employees to build their own shacks outside the fenced-in mining area itself. In some of these squatter settlements, water pipes, public toilets and electricity were available. Reasons given for preference for living outside the bunkhouses were freedom from such restrictions as those against raising pigs and chickens, inspection of goods being brought in or out, interference by police with rowdy conduct and noisy drinking, and the police right to inspect bunkhouses for stolen property, contraband goods, or homemade smelters. Despite the comparative cleanliness and solid construction of the bunkhouses and the wretched appearance of the flattened-tin can shacks of the squatters, overall living space and luxury did not vary greatly. With one exception, every dwelling observed in the mines was distinguished from the typical barrio house in having some sort of bed and warm blankets of commercial manufacture.

Ten farmers were interviewed in Besao, most of them illiterate and all of them fairly representative of their age groups in a modern Mountain Province town on the national highway, with public and private elementary schools, a mission-supported church, and a local rural health unit. Seven men were interviewed in Sagada of widely varying backgrounds, Sagada being a comparatively prosperous community with an atypically high percentage of literate and cash-earning citizens. Three men were interviewed in Mainit and one in Guinaang (Bontoc), all illiterate practicing pagans in communities as conservative as any in the province. Three men were interviewed in Masla and Lubong, both towns being accessible by bus and the latter being comparatively prosperous and progressive. Six men were interviewed in Agawa, Balili, Data and Taccong, all isolated settlements off the highway, in most of which it was impossible to find the exact opposite numbers of the miners interviewed in cases of higher education. (Men who have gone to high school are expected

to find paying jobs elsewhere rather than returning to their old farming communities.)

It should be noted that since no college graduates were encountered in the mines, the relatively important class of village school teachers is not represented in the survey.

All these men in the barrios lived within walking distance of an elementary school, and a shorter distance from public water pipes (or, in the case of Guinaang and Mainit, natural springs). With few exceptions, they all used pit toilets or piggens; all were engaged in farming or had land being farmed; all raised pigs and chickens for their own consumption, and few were dependent upon purchased food. Their diet included the same items as the miners'—rice when they could afford it and camotes when they couldn't, supplemented by vegetables, salt, lard, canned goods, sugar, tea, coffee and milk depending on their income, and in that general order or preference. Eight men who were over 35 and had less than a fourth-grade education were wearing G-strings. With only two exceptions, all men found their only recreation in conversations with other men, often accompanied by light drinking, and usually in the *dap-ay*, the community male "clubhouse" platforms.

The traditional native houses in the barrio were one-room windowless structures with a thatched roof and no chimney, heated by a pine fire in an open hearth. The more expensive and impressive modern houses were characterized by a roof of galvanized iron and a separate kitchen so that the living space was cleaner and colder. (People "progressive" enough to own a G.I. house expected to keep warm by wearing additional clothing.) Additional features of G.I. houses, in ascending order of affluence, were windows, additional rooms, one bed and one table, glass in the windows, doors between rooms, window curtains, furniture (tables, chairs, wardrobes, cabinets), and a second story. Kerosene was used for cooking only by people with a steady cash income not living in their home towns.

Cooperative agricultural work in all of these communities was traditionally associated with public pagan sacrifices and few farmers found it possible to exist in isolation from the system. At least half the men interviewed performed pagan sacrifices themselves, and ten others participated passively by contributions—e.g., a vestryman of a parish church who held the common view that pagans and Christians

should mutually support one another's civic enterprises for the common weal.

With the exception of a few storekeepers or municipal employees, people in the barrios rarely saw cash, their only access to which being seasonal agricultural labor for those wage-earners who did not work their own fields, and from this meager source they purchased such things as matches and salt or pencils and notebooks for their children. The most frequently expressed concern in this line was for the school expenses of high school age children or the truly staggering sums involved in sending a child to college in Baguio or Manila.

Igorots in the mines, on the other hand, lived on a strict money economy—none of those interviewed subsisted off rice brought from their home barrios even where available, and every mouthful they ate was purchased in cash. Wages were difficult to establish because of the reluctance of miners to admit their affluence: almost all readily named the going minimum daily wage of ₱3.99 or the few centavos deducted for social insurances, but vigorously belittled the possibility of additional bonus from “making their contract,” that is, by meeting a certain quota in cubic content excavated, in proportion to which they were paid more than the minimum. The fact that mine regulations called for the dismissal of workers who repeatedly fail to make these quotas, however, indicates that such pay was not an oddity but the norm, and a local superintendent confidentially stated that eight or ten pesos a day was probably average with twenty by no means rare. Many mining families supplemented this income by other means—weaving cotton cloth, bringing in vegetables or operating stores, running kitchen smelters, dealing in lucrative contraband, lending money at high rates of interest, or “high-grading.” (“High-grading” is stealing ore of such high grade as to make a quantity small enough to be secreted on the person worth the risk.)

It was noteworthy that household furnishings conspicuously implying increased living standards—wall clocks, tablecloths, proper dish storage, reading material, etc.—were not observed as a distinction between people in the mines and those in the barrios; rather they were found in both environments but only in the homes of those who had gone as far as high school. Indeed, some well-paid veteran miners lived with no more physical amenities than they had been used to at home.

Each person interviewed was asked to compare his present status with conditions ten years ago; did he think he was better off or worse off? Here again, reluctance to admit wealth moved the prosperous to answer so inaccurately that bystanders all snickered. One storekeeper, for instance, who had doubled his stock the year before and installed a flush toilet and electric generator, said he could see no improvement in his living standards. At the other extreme, however, in the barrios, the answers were unambiguous: farmers now had more mouths to feed on the same number of fields and therefore had fewer clothes and "never tasted good food" any more.

Conversations seeking to discover the comparative happiness of miners and farmers elicited no contrast whatever, for all expressed the same aspirations—the desire for material amelioration (especially in food), and the education of their children. This latter incentive was named by practically every miner as his reason for laboring in the mines. Some said, on the one hand, that they would be happy to have their children follow the mining profession but, on the other, that they wanted them to escape such drudgery—some expressed this in terms of wanting to give Fate the chance to determine whether their children could make the grade or not.

All men with any experience in the mines were agreed that the work was cruel, unhealthy and even dangerous. Many considered it normal or necessary to quit after a year or two to "rest up" at home for a similar period before returning to work, and many reported as a common expression that "Everytime you go underground you take your life in your hands." These grim facts, however, were accepted as inevitable, and little interest was expressed in the mild agitation of labor unions (which were headed almost completely by lowlanders) for better hours, wages, benefits or working conditions; instead, words like "luck" and "Fate" came easily to the lips of miners discussing their particular underground assignments. Many contrasted the miner's lot with the farmer's by saying that at least in the mines when your shift was over you could clean up and relax. But the most frequently mentioned advantages of life in the mines was the ready availability of cash to borrow when you needed it.

Travel seems not to have been a significant difference between men in the mines and those at home. Few miners had gone farther than the mines and a good number of men in the barrios had travelled

either to Tabuk or Baguio, or to the mines themselves. A few miners had visited the neighboring province of Pangasinan or the seashore with fellow miners from those places, and a select few had become miners only after considerable knocking about in the lowlands in their youth. All miners had gone home during their first few years and built a G.I. house, and some had remained there for the pagan period of taboo appertaining, but the infrequency of visits to the old home town was noteworthy and must represent a considerable factor in the changing society of which these men are a part. However, they almost unanimously retained strong emotional loyalty to their birthplace and expected to die and be buried there; one exception was a well-established police sergeant who had grown up in the mines and whose children had been born there.

Although the main recreation of men both in the mines and in the barrios was conversation, little interest or knowledge was shown in subjects beyond the immediate environment. A few men who were regular newspaper readers were enough aware of world events to suggest that "if America keeps talking tough, there'll be no need to fear Russia," but admitted that they had no companions with whom they could discuss such topics. (One reported that better-informed people like himself had noted with interest that President Kennedy's election had given America "its first non-Anglican president.") The usual topics of conversation in the barrio were the hardships of life and speculation on possible government aid, while in the mines it was the unpleasant working conditions or the injustices of overseers. When qualified voters were asked why they had voted for the candidate of their choice in the last national elections, the young said they voted as they were told, others said they blamed the rising prices on the last administration or that they had heard so much about its corruption, while still others had voted for the one they thought was going to win.

No significant difference was noticed in marital relations between the barrio and mining communities. Although direct inquiry was not possible about extra-marital intercourse or concubinage, against which there are strong sanctions in both traditional and modern society, in both environments there were cases of wives being replaced with an extra-legal straightforwardness not rare under a Civil Code which forbids divorce. The basic family household was the same in both—a couple with their unmarried children or occasional children

of siblings—but the extensive relatives who are an important part of the barrio environment were completely lacking in the mines. This was an immediate material advantage to the miner for, although ready help in non-monetary form was wanting, the steady income from wages need not be shared but could be invested privately or even secretly. Lively conversation was forthcoming every time the interviewer enquired about some miner known to be earning high wages but living frugally; speculations indicated that the purchase of land in Tabuk or the lowlands, or the construction and renting out of houses in Baguio, were favored areas for such surplus wealth. The ability of men to invest large sums of money without even their closest neighbors or companions discovering it was an impressive evidence of the impact of the new money economy upon the life of the Igorot.

But this same separation from such relatives and neighbors as exercised strong social controls on individual conduct has had a serious disrupting effect, too, one which was aggravated by two traditional characteristics of barrio life. The first of these is that, while parental obedience is required of young adults, children are rarely disciplined by their own parents, and the other is that mild social drinking is the normal adult male pasttime. Given this background and the new availability of cheap strong drink, it was probably not surprising to find mining families helplessly deploring the fact that their undisciplined children of all ages were more at home in the teeming streets than in the house. Not a few miners who were respected members of their communities and leaders in the local church habitually gave themselves over to drinking as soon as the rugged day shift was over, falling asleep at night from a state of semi-consciousness so that their children rarely saw Daddy really sober. Understandably, juvenile delinquency was both widespread and serious, with school-age truants more often a part of the household than not. It is an ironic fact, and the source of some disillusionment to the parents involved, that although all miners gave as their main incentive for working in the mines the desire to educate their children, few had seen all their teen-agers graduate from high school.

It is important to add, however, that where financial emancipation from the traditional restrictions of society was met with in the barrios, juvenile delinquency was also present, and although it never reached such extremes as attempted “thrill killings,” the difference would seem to be one of degree rather than kind.

What had happened to the general outlook, the “world view,” so to speak, of the Igorot who left his ancestral village and took up life in the mines? In the barrio way of life, for instance, a guaranteed reward for personal diligence was unknown and the good life was seen as the result of proper personal relations between the “have-nots” and the ‘haves’, which latter category includes deities and deceased relatives as well as powerful mortal members of the community. Did the miner’s experience with regular wages for regular labor suggest a more mechanistic explanation of the universe to him? Evidently not. The miner saw the getting of jobs, promotions, disability benefits, X-rays and vacations as dependent upon magical slips of paper obtainable only by good personal relations with somebody in authority, and remembered with praise such American missionaries as knew how to “get along with people,” by which they meant, not cordiality between pastor and flock, but the ability to manipulate such sources of bounty as a mine superintendent at whose whim a truckload of used lumber might be dumped down for the construction of a chapel.

As part of the same pattern in the old philosophy, individuals rarely bore personal responsibility for their behavior—it was a man’s “nature” to be hot-headed or lazy; school children “have to” be naughty under certain temptations; even one’s soul may impetuously wander off to hobnob with another soul and bring about illness or insanity. So, too, the mining community has given birth to an Igorot verb, *menbulakbol*, which nicely refocuses guilt from the individual to society at large: it stems from the term “blackball” which is applied to any miner caught stealing ore—he is blacklisted and can’t get a job in any other mine—but it is used to mean hanging around pool halls or barber shops, or general deliberate vagrancy. As a teen-ager remarked, “If nobody gives me a scholarship, I won’t go home and work the farm. I’ll *menbulakbol*.”

Nor did there seem to have been any modification of that traditional equation of the desired with the desirable which makes “I do not like” a statement of reason rather than appetite. Miners discussing contracts of the Company’s role in the community never spoke in terms of legality, justice or equity, but of the welfare of the employees involved. Miners might serve as well as their barrio counterparts, too, as examples of one of the tenets Dr. Frank Lynch, SJ, has analyzed as basic to a pan-Philippine metaphysic—“The good is limited.” It was the concensus both in the mines and in the barrios that stealing

in particular and crime in general was the result of poverty, and that it was the Government's job to keep prices down to protect the common people because it was natural for the strong to take things away from the weak.

The interviews produced no information suggesting any change in miner's ethical views, either. High-grading, for instance, was considered so acceptable a practice ("A carpenter's allowed to take the chips home, isn't he?") that the interviewer wasn't even able to get the question across, "Are there any miners who think it's morally *wrong*?" People kept replying, "Sure, some are afraid they'll be caught." The vigorous reaction of the mining companies to high-grading was accepted as a justifiable part of the life-and-death struggle of a world of limited bounty rather than as being based on any intrinsic rightness or wrongness. An incident which was current at the time of the interviews may serve to demonstrate how loyally the mining community preserved the value judgments of the old "clan" culture. Sergeant Jaime Gateb of Posposaan [not true names] was one of five policemen searching miners going off duty when he discovered some stolen ore on a miner who had whispered too late, "You fool! I'm from Posposaan!" Following the miner's dismissal, others from Posposaan petitioned the company for Sergeant Gateb's dismissal, and the sergeant's brother, an influential foreman in a nearby mine, rushed down to smooth things out. As the brother explained it, "I told them Jaime couldn't help it—the other policemen would have reported him if he'd failed in his duty."

To this generally negative picture must be added a few positive examples of a changed or changing world view among members of the Igorot mining community. In discussions of factors involved in making one's contract (that is, earning the bonus for exceeding a day's minimum work), it was agreed that success depended upon the geologic location of one's assignment or his relationship with his foreman, but in private conversations miners would comment that people who worked steadily and paid attention to their business seemed to make higher wages—that is, miners who did their digging instead of wasting time looking around for high grade ore to steal.

Truly noteworthy was the miner's evident emancipation from his native xenophobia, for all seemed to be willing to work in two-man teams with a member of another ethnic group or province, requiring only that he be a hard worker. Experienced miners felt that no one

tribe was any lazier or more hard working than the next, nor did they distinguish between Igorots and lowlanders in this matter. Moreover, in marked contrast to the barrio attitude that the Mountain Provinces were the poorest part of the Philippines, miners attributed the predominance of Pangasinan natives in the mines to the poverty of non-landowners in that province—"After all, no matter how poor we are at home, we can always live on camotes, but poor lowlanders can't even get a bite to eat except from their landlord."

One of the main areas of investigation in the interviews was the relationship between these men and the Episcopal Church, and here participation did not appear to be significantly different between mining families and those at home. In both places, church attendance was predominantly female, although there were more young men regularly present in the mines than in the barrios. There were civil marriages in both places, but a larger proportion of pagan weddings in the barrios were not subsequently blessed by a Christian service. There were almost no unbaptized children in the mining community but there were a number in the barrios, as well as a larger number of men with unbaptized wives. In both places there were also a few "members" who had never been baptized at all, as well as some older illiterates who had not entered a church since the day they were carried in for baptism in their mothers' arms. The eagerness with which these nominal members were claimed by the Christian community in the mines, together with the attendance by young men, is probably indicative of a greater need for group identification there.

Attitudes toward other denominations did not vary between barrio and mine, but according to the presence or absence of other groups. Where the Roman Catholic Church rewarded its members with regular handouts, the comment was made that it seemed more like a business than a church, while in the barrios with pentecostal sects, informants stressed the need for broadmindedness toward other Christians. But it was the common concensus in both environments that (1) all churches are basically the same ("There's only one God, isn't there?"), (2) it's a sin to be baptized twice, and (3) everybody ought to remain loyal to the church into which he was baptized.

Everybody interviewed was asked what he thought was the Church's role in society, and here there was a marked difference between the opinions of Episcopalians in the mines and those in the barrios. With the exception of an ex-catechist who said that the

Church's job was to worship God, barrio folk were unanimous in their view that the Church's *raison d'être* was to convert pagans, make peace between warring tribes, educate children, and assist the Government in ameliorating the physical plight of the people. The emphasis given material charities ranged from Sunday-school chairs to fully equipped and staffed clinics; a number of thoughtful farmers saw no reason why relief goods like cornmeal or milk powder should not continue indefinitely; at least one believed that priests could readily be replaced by school teachers; and most thought the idea of a barrio's supporting its own clergyman was impractical or even ridiculous.

In the mines, on the other hand, people recognized that government and Company agencies had taken over this older Church role, and castigated as childish such people as would change denominations for a sack of cornmeal or used clothing—although they did not doubt such tactics would bring nominal Anglicans back to the fold. More than one discussion group entertained the possibility of paying a clergyman's salary in cash or in kind, but not until there was more faithful attendance by the large majority of lax members in the mines. Like the barrio folk, the miners, too, were fairly unanimous in defining the Church's role—but they considered it to be the spiritual education and moral guidance of both children and adults since men are naturally greedy and given to crime.

All interviews were concluded with a request for specific suggestions as to how the life of the Church could be improved and how the Church could better serve the community. As was to be expected in the light of what has been said above, the barrio people recommended increased material aid—with the exception of one progressive community whose loyal members pointed to the large number of modern houses with G.I. roofs as evidence that the Church had already done a successful job. Igorot miners, however, limited such material requests to recreational facilities for children, and reflective laymen suggested that with the existing shortage of clergy, the responsibility for poorly attended services lay with the people rather than the priests. But everywhere the complaint was heard that the clergy were not “with the people” enough. In the barrios the priest's limiting his personal contact to the church, his office, and pastoral calling, instead of passing his leisure in the common village gathering places, was strongly criticized. In the mines it was frankly stated that the periodic administration of the Sacraments was good but not

good enough, and that laymen should be “authorized” to read and explain the Bible, and, significantly, miners tended to evaluate the possible residence in the community of a Filipino catechist higher than an English-speaking missionary as a means of ameliorating this condition.

Summary

Igorots in the Baguio gold mines live in more crowded conditions than in their home towns, but enjoy such physical amenities as electricity and community toilets and washrooms with running water, as well as minor medical attention and recreational facilities like basketball courts and movies. They live on a strict cash economy, and are able to invest their surplus earnings without sharing it with a large group of relatives, but suffer a higher rate of juvenile delinquency and adult alcoholism. Marital relations, church attendance, ethical outlook and personal morals, travel to other provinces, and disinterest in national politics and world events do not seem to differ significantly from those of Igorots in the barrios, with the exception of an awareness that Igorot economic conditions are no worse than other farmers' and an open-mindedness about Filipinos of other ethnic backgrounds. As far as attitudes toward the Episcopal Church are concerned, Igorots in the barrios see it more as a means of material amelioration than miners do, but both are agreed on its role as a means of moral uplift and the failure of its clergy, both Filipino and foreign, to identify with the people they serve.