

# The Higaonon Farm Shifting Cultivation and Its Ritual Practices at Rogongon, Lanao del Norte

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## Abstract

This paper describes how the local hinterland farmers work for free land tenure but are contained in a defined worldview such as their existing beliefs and external forces. The problem lies on how shifting cultivation provides a means of greater sustainability among the Higaonon in the tribal community of Rogongon since they are governed by the ritual practices that are traditionally bound in their livelihood system. The paper also chronicles the brief origin of Rogongon, the Higaonon Shifting agriculture cycle, the Higaonon farm practices that are associated with the supernatural phenomenon and the external forces that are responsible for the continuity and change among the social lives of the tribe. Thus, the researcher employs the use of historical and ethnographic studies in writing about these shifting agricultural processes.

*Keywords:* shifting agriculture, field cropping, sedentary farming, Higaonon, Rogongon

## Introduction

Putzel (1998), defined shifting or field agriculture as an agricultural system which is characterized by a rotation of fields rather than of crops, by short periods of cropping (one to three years) alternating with fallow periods (five to eight years); and by clearing through slash and burn. Schlegel (1979), on the other hand, defined Shifting cultivation as a farming system that is in contrast to sedentary permanent field cropping; and is characterized by a systematic shifting of fields in order to

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maintain soil fertility, rather than rotation of crops or artificial fertilization of a permanently crop lot. The Higaonon of Rogongon Lanao del Norte simply described shifting cultivation as "tibuuk turig nga pagpanguma uban sa daghan sangkap nga tanum" (a year-round cultivation with intensive farming like a multi-cropping system).

Land among the Higaonon is ample and not a scarce resource where everyone is entitled to vast tracts of land and establish swidden as long as he is able to cultivate. Land that is selected by an individual is marked (takda) with a stick, thus land becomes strictly his own in the sense of private tenure or usufruct. However in the course of the shifting cultivation cycle (see Table 1) a great deal of the Higaonon cooperative labor (alayan) will take place on each field all throughout the year where the tribe's major sustainability is on shifting agriculture that is attached to nature.

Table 1. Shifting Cultivation Cycle

Higaonon Cycle of Farming Activity	Estimated Months
Marking (Pagtakda)	December – February
Slashing (Paglampas)	January – February
Felling (Panumba)	February – April
Burning (Pagsunog)	March – April
Planting 1 <sup>st</sup> corn (unang pagtanum ug mais)	March – May
Planting rice ( pagtanum ug humay)	March – May
Planting non-grains (pagtanum ug lagutmon)	March – December
Harvesting first corn (pag-ani sa unang tanum nga mais)	June – August
Harvesting rice (pag-ani ug humay)	June – October
Harvesting stage in general (pag-ani sa tanang klasi nga tanum)	June
Planting second corn (ikaduhang pagtanum sa mais)	July – November
Harvesting-second corn (ikaduhang ani sa humay)	November – February

The opening of the farm lot begins with an offering of ritual. The farmer believes that ritual will appease the nature spirits that eventually shower them with abundant harvests. This religious habit is considered by them as the essence of respect and permission towards nature. However, with the presence of the logging concessionaire, mining personnel and migrants in the 1970s changed their traditional shifting cultivation practice. Thus, their vast farmlands were filled with forest debris that dissolved the marked areas for potential farmlands.

The Higaonon is one of the nineteen (19) Indigenous groups in Mindanao with a population of 1,700 in Rogongon (2001 census). Oral history recounts that the Higaonon are the earliest settlers in the fishing village in the coast of Iligan known as Bayug. The arrival of the Jesuit Missionaries in 1621 in Bayug made the early Higaonon ancestors "to walk by foot" along the banks of Bayug river to Mandulog river until they reached the source of where Rogongon rested the vast plateau.

Higaonon is a term which is derived from a combination of the root word "higa" to dwell, "gaon" mountain and "non" people. Rogongon, on the other hand, is taken from a root word "logong" a native term to mean a huge sound of tropical rain forest as it sways its branches into the wind. The sound of branches is as strong as that of the sound of a thunder.

Rogongon is one of the forty-four (44) barangays of Iligan City in Lanao del Norte. Appendix 1 shows the relief map of Rogongon as the biggest in terms of land size compared to the other forty-three (43) barangays comprising Iligan City.

### Conceptual Framework

The researcher used the historical and ethnographic basis in writing the shifting agriculture among the Higaonon tribe of Rogongon. Mc. Andrew's Rural Condition and Geertz Cultural Involution are the basis of this paper in understanding the farmers' practices and worldview. The study of Mc. Andrew is a reference that "rather mundane activities of planting and harvesting within a cosmology who takes cognizance of relations among human beings and spirits, heavenly signs and earthly events. Through the use of symbols, the farmer imposes the logic of the cosmic order onto the planting and harvesting of the rice field and thereby places the unpredictable aspects of rice production within the forces of nature that he understood." In relation to that idea, the Higaonon

farmers had a similar worldview on farm practices in line with their belief system. Scott (1994) likewise mentioned that "Visayans revered natural forces like celestial bodies or flowing waters. They venerated the sun and the moon and invoked the stars and constellations connected with the agricultural cycles of crops. The spirits of the wind, the river, the sea, the mountains and the trees were called upon to ensure favorable outcomes of human endeavor."

### Methodology

The researcher prepared a structured questionnaire while using the non-structured method in her interview process to allow a more informal, free-flowing discussions from her respondents. The method is more of "emic" that encouraged the farmers to talk according to their perceptions, experiences and worldview. Aside from holding the interview in their respective residences, the venues were oftentimes in the farm, which allowed the researcher to participate in the few segments of farm activity. As a participant observer, the researcher took part in "pugas" or the broadcasting of the corn seeds since the interview period coincided with the planting season.

There were ten (10) selected respondents who are primarily farmers. They cultivated at least five (5) hectares of land and employed the shifting cultivation method. Aside from their occupation as farmers, they are also hunters and gatherers who had knowledge in the signs of astrology as a basis for their traditional beliefs. In fact, all of the respondents had a traditional title as *datus*, *baylans* and tribal historians who had been trusted in the performance of ritual and healing.

**Shifting Cultivation (marking, slashing, cutting, felling, burning, harvesting)**

The farmer knows that it is time to mark (*takda*) and begin to clear his swidden field when he sees the constellation star (*giya*), a full moon (*subang*) and the sea is at high tide (*taub*) and the marking of four (4) sticks at a desired farm lot are already in place. Then, the ritual-making of the site follows to be attended by a *baylan*, the *datus* and the farmer himself. The necessary offering requirements include the betel nuts (*buyo*), betel leaf (*dahon*), a bottle of Tanduay rum, boiled chicken

and a handful of grains. The purpose of the ritual marking is to express respect and permission from the spirits of the forest (*lasang*) and farmlands (*uma*). After the ritual offering, the Higaonon consult the omen bird (*limokun*) which is believed to give the reply of the spirits of the forests according to the direction from which it is heard. There are four good directions which indicate the favor of the spirits. 1.) directly in front (*sa atubangan*) 2.) 45 degrees to the left (*sa wala*) 3.) 45 degrees to the right (*sa tuo*) 4.) precisely overhead. (*diritso tungod sa ulo*)

A call coming from any other direction is interpreted as bad. If a bad omen is heard from the *limokun*, the corner being marked is left and the party proceeds to another corner of the field to clear it, and to erect a stick for the offering site. If a bad omen is heard again, they go to the third corner and so forth until they have tried all four corners and the center of the site.

In an event that a good omen is heard, no further markings are required, and once the field is marked and the ritual of slashing (*lampas*) is finished the cutting stage of the cultivation cycle begins. Each man has a single, well - sharpened bolo (*sundang*) and hoe (*piku*) which he carries with him most of the time when he is engaged in cultivation activities. Slashing is deliberate and relatively slow. Each farmer has a carefully selected sharpening stone which he takes with him to the working area. While slashing, the bolo usually needs re - sharpening after each hour of use. The slashing work can be done by men and boys aged ten (10) years old and above.

The cutting stage of the cultivation cycle involves two separate and well-defined activities; the slashing (*lampas*) is done with the use of a sharp tool for slashing tool (*sanggot*) in which the underbrush is cut away, and the felling (*tumba*) of the large trees. A farmer sees to it that no plants are left standing but if a wild tree is growing on the site, it is particularly valued for its fruit and medicinal value and is protected by clearing around it with a bamboo ring of about three meters in diameter. When the field is burned, this ring discourages the fire from reaching the protected plant. Felling usually begins sometime in February and is finished throughout the neighborhood by late March and April. Each swidden owner fells about one-fifth of his swidden field himself, and then sponsors a single cooperative work day of ordinary neighborhood labor on which the other men of the neighborhood help him finish the work. The burning (*pagsunog*) stage constitutes the fifth normal activity of the cycle

and involves five steps: drying of the cut vegetation, selecting of the day and hour for burning, leveling of upright branches, firing of the site and finally re-burning of what was not consumed by the main fire.

The broadcasting (*pugas*) of corn grits (*lugas sa mais*) starts as soon as the rainy season starts. The greatest concern and attention is devoted to the cropping of corn and rice as the major staples of the Higaonon diet, a vast of the other plants are also cultivated in swiddens. Rice and corn are considered to be the two most significant of all crops, and rice especially is given the greatest amount of concern and attention. The planting of these two basic food crops is done in sequence with corn planted first followed by the planting of rice. Care is given to the selection of corn seed. At the corn harvest time, the best large seed and well-formed cobs – are chosen and set aside from the rest of the harvest. These are hung on bamboo storage racks in the sun for drying. After several weeks, when the rains begin to come more frequently, the seed cobs are transferred from the storage racks to the house where they are hung above the hearth (*abuhan*). The heat from the cooking fire continues to dry the seed cobs and the smoke discourages weevils from attacking these. Corn seed, like rice seed is never shared. If a family lacks seed for corn planting, or if it wants a particular variety of seed which he does not have, its members must join in the harvest share, and then keep the best seeds for the following planting season.

Although corn and rice are supremely valued by the Higaonon, and are therefore given the greatest ritual and technical attention, a very large number of other plants are also cropped. These are non-grain plants which are viewed as secondary crops and are planted at times when primary concern is not focused on the major grains like abaca and banana. Other crops are also planted during or after the main grains like *ubi* (purple yam), *gabi* (taro), *mani* (peanuts), *batung* (legumes), *sili* (pepper).

The harvesting *ani* period will start as mature brown husks are seen in the fields. The various secondary crops also begin to mature and the harvest of the first corn is generally finished by August, while the harvest of rice by October. The secondary crops like fruits and vegetables and tubers may continue to yield for several months. The tending (*tilaw*) is also necessary specially for corn and rice. Corn is harvested at different times due to the difference in maturation period of the several varieties planted. Like the planting of corn, harvesting is always done by women.

They use very short, sharp knives. The owner of the field does the filing of the newly-cut panicle bundles from the field to the stock house.

From the time that the harvesting of their previous years swidden is completed until the time to mark off a new site where a new annual cycle of planting begins, the men should already locate where the next swidden should be. These months involve much travelling through the forest through hunting, gathering, and in general looking for and weighing different possible sites. In theory, each family will make a new swidden each year.

### Plant Problem: Diseases and Calamities

The Higaonons know no technological means to combat plant diseases, so their attempt to protect against these consists of a variety of charms and incantations. Of all the various crops planted, only rice seems subject to serious disease like pests. Rice is also vulnerable to diseases like fungal disease, bacterial diseases, virus diseases, physiological diseases, and nematode disease. The Higaonon also lack the means to combat or prevent insect diseases. They believe that certain technique such as magico-religious means, burning the fields, spreading millet seed, shifting cultivation itself are natural means to combat the seed stealing ants including various beetles, crickets, hoppers and ants.

### Farming and the Supernatural Beliefs

The Higaonon farming activity is primarily governed by their system of beliefs. The belief on *magababaya* is sacred as supreme god; followed by the lesser beings and nature spirits or *diwstas*; elementals or *dili ingon nato* ranks third; *Gimukod* or spirits of the dead ancestors ranks fourth and the fifth in the hierarchy of inanimate objects or (*balaang butang*). It is the second level where the lesser gods or nature spirits prevail where the spirits assign the masterpiece of power and protection. One of them is *Ibabasuk*, the spirit to protect the plants and the farmers. *Tagabugta* serves as the protector of the farmlands. *Tagabalite* serves as the protector of the balite trees. Farming as a major source of livelihood is the domain of *tagabalite*. Thus, anytime a farmer decides to enter the forest for ocular inspection should invoke *tagabalite* to avoid *buyag* or illness.

The Higaonon added that if the *tagabalite* allow them to enter the farm, the farmers had an assurance of protection from the harm of wild pigs, snakes and *buyag*. The farmer should also ask the permission of *tagabugta* for providing protection from pests in order to have a bountiful harvest. Ritual should be performed in all the cycle of shifting cultivation even before hunting and fishing.

In this worldview, there are similarities among the Chinese and the Higaonons on farming practices which are found in their offering to the farmlands spirit Kwei for the Chinese and Ibabasuk for the Higaonons. Both require an offering of grains in the farmlands and undergo a series of rituals until the harvest season. The Higaonon ritual offerings include a betel nut, betel leaf (*buyo*), cooked rice, boiled chicken, grains and wine (Tanduay rum). These were all placed in a plastic mat on a certain site where the ritual is intended to be offered. A *baylan* is a medium responsible to call the attention of the spirits intended to be called. Most of the Higaonon chew betel nuts (*mama*), a major component of ritual to appease the nature spirits.

A certain incident where the researcher witnessed was regarding a farmer who entered a farmland for ocular visit for a possible farm lot. He suffered a severe headache upon his return home. The reason for that ailment according to the findings of the baylan was his inability to ask permission from the nature spirits. Thus, a *panawagtawag* or a calling was done to the *tagabugta* and other nature spirits for forgiveness. It was also accompanied by the offering of the blood of a chicken poured into the *balite* tree and its immediate surrounding.



Table 2. The Hierarchy of the Higaonon Belief System

Belief System	Function / Role
Magbabaya (supreme god)	The highest ranking god, the supreme and the overseer
Lesser gods (diwatas / nature spirits)	Tagabalite – protector of the balite tree Tagabugta – protector of the soil, land Ibabasuk – protector of the farmlands
Elementals(dili ingon nato)	Padeding – cause harmful effects (buyag)
Spirits of the dead ancestors (Gimukod)	Provides protection against wild animals and pests
Inanimate objects (balaang butang) used as farm tools	Precious things as sacred legacies

### Shifting Agriculture versus External Manifestations

The tribal group believe that the government should consult them for any plans for their community. On the contrary, the logging concessionaire bypassed any traditional rights of the Indigenous people. It was the Marcos initiated project which allowed the arrival of forty (40) trucks in Rogongon. The Marcos-led people immediately cut down trees estimated to have been a hundred a day. Respondents observed that these loggers had explored their farmlands and the mineral resources of Mandulog river considered sacred by the natives. The area is rich in gold deposits, and the logging personnel enclosed and declared the area government property. The lowlanders and the government personnel trespassed their farmlands and the worst scenario was the intrusion of the loggers into their forestlands and farmlands. The tribe believed that they are the keepers of their environment therefore they are accountable for the mistakes even done by loggers. A punishment would await them if they cannot maintain their customs as mandated by their oral history primarily on their sacred sites and the ancestral lands.

In a focused group interview with the farmers, the farmers said that when they asked the logging personnel regarding the purpose of their coming to Rogongon, the personnel replied that the project is government-initiated and the timber would be "used for the construction of port facilities of Iligan," the loggers however, did not present any document or any legal papers to account for their presence or to bolster their claims. The Higaonon become apprehensive on the illegality of the activity which burdened them on the drastic alteration of their beliefs and economic subsistence.

Corollary to the external development in the area, the tribe said, that the main reasons why there are intermittent calamities and droughts in Rogongon is because of "gaba" or curse from the gods and from the nature spirits who dwelt in the forests (*tagabalite*) and in the farmlands (*tagabugta and Ibabasuk*) which eventually displaced the nature spirits in their abode due to the denuded forest and devastated farmlands.

The respondents pointed to the new illegal mining operators who are called "Cagocos" and "Tapwaks". The area with a vast hectare of farmlands had been already fenced by the miners to prevent the entry of the Higaonon. The creation of a one-way passable and non-cemented road from Iligan City proper to Rogongon is the only tangible contribution of the logging and mining companies during the 1970s. The road however, is non-passable during the rainy season which added difficulties among the Higaonon for the transport of their banana produce to the markets of Iligan City.

### Higaonon Farmlands and the Post Marcos Era

During the Post Marcos era, the new social trends and government initiatives were focused on the social issues of the highlands and those of the logging and mining industries to empower traditional subsistence. Among these new trends and initiatives are the environmental laws, decentralization policies and the empowerment and support of the non-governmental organization (Casino, 2000). All these changes have common objectives in encouraging grassroots communities to participate in the responsibilities and rewards of local initiatives, environmental protection and responsible use of natural resources found within their level of jurisdiction (Wernstead, 1967). The tribe, on the other hand, did not receive any social benefits and community livelihood projects in

exchange of farm damages except a "passable road" from Rogongon to the city of Iligan.

During the time of President Aquino, there were certain measures taken for Forest and Management Bureau (FMB) that halted the excessive logging operations in Rogongon. The DENR has created the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) to handle questions of environmental pollution and protection by requiring mining companies to submit documents incorporating Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) prior to the issuance of an Environmental Compliance Certificate (Tamale, 1995). Definitely, the "Cagocos" and "Tapwaks" did not undergo legal procedures. Moreover, the requirements for the physical environment with concerns for socio-economic development of affected communities on the supposed benefits into studies of local community conditions such as the peoples' culture, livelihood, health, education and training in marketable skills designed to qualify them to work in mining-related jobs and businesses were not dealt with because, in the first place, the Higaonon was not even consulted.

Corollary to the sentiment of the Higaonon, Alejo (2000) cited the Manobo's predicament concerning the social benefits assured by the PNOC on the basic welfare and services at the foothill village of Mt. Apo in Davao del Sur. The Manobos remain uncertain over their plight. In 1993, Tsing's work on the Meratus Dayak of Indonesia had similar dilemma due to the violations of their economic survival and their basic human rights as the mandate of the government intervention in the Dayak's forestland.

In relation to the Mining Law, President Ramos signed into law Republic Act 7942 or The Philippine Mining Act of 1995. The law is based on Article XII of the Philippine Constitution that mandates the state to manage the country's mineral resources as owner and administrator and to control and supervise their exploration, development and utilization. This act contains explicit provisions relevant to the Indigenous people and the Moros of Mindanao. Some of the provisions provide that "in areas claimed as ancestral lands, mining applications may not be granted without the prior consent of the concerned Indigenous cultural communities." However, the indigenous peoples had not been part of any consultations. In other words, the Mining Act is only good in provisions but there was no actual implementation.

The enactment into law of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) in October 1997 is the first law in the twentieth century that reversed the effects of PCA 718 of April 1993 which was declared void on all lands made by traditional leaders. Rodil (2004) reiterated that if done without consent of the government while in the introduction of IPRA, all lands may be titled.

Finally in July of 1997, after seventeen (17) years of logging activities in Rogongon, the Republic Act No. 8371 took effect. This is an act to recognize, protect and promote the rights of the Indigenous cultural communities / Indigenous peoples creating a National Commission on Indigenous peoples, establishing implementing mechanisms, appropriate funds, therefore, and other purposes (RA 8371).

### Government Policies and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act

The respondents revealed that RA 8371 and IPRA had given them new hope to continue their peaceful struggle for self-determination in protecting their inherent right and "re-claiming" their ancestral domain. They said that they wanted to negotiate the government agency in peaceful and diplomatic manner. Thus, the tribe organized a *panagtagbo*, meeting, among its senior citizens and tribal leaders to achieve their goals. During the presidency of Estrada, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace Process (OPAPP) was also activated. This agency had provided funds for seminars and conferences to the tri-peoples which is represented by the Muslims, the Christians and the Indigenous people in Mindanao. In coordination with Bishop Fernando Capalla then of the Diocese of Davao and almost all the Higaonon *datus* and *baylans* had attended it.

Since 2000, the Higaonon traditional leaders attended several conferences at the Samal Island, Davao del Sur and in some parts of Mindanao which enabled them to understand their rights and ancestral domain claim. However, the Higaonons felt marginalized because of the usurpation of illegal loggers in their farmlands at Rogongon. Moreover, the DENR followed the footsteps of the loggers and enclosed it with fences on the areas in the mining sites. The Higaonon had the same plight with the Penan that is reflective of commonalities such as the marginalization brought about by the national government of Malaysia.

In reality, both Indigenous groups, the Penan and Higaonon lost their forestlands and ancestral lands as their main source of daily subsistence patterns. Presently, the Higaonon strongly articulated on the ideology regarding the preservation of culture, customs, tradition and territory. They appealed for help from the Academic Community, NGOs and NCIP to help them in their application of Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) and on the documentation of their genealogy but until today the Higaonon of Rogongon are still waiting on the land grant award. However, Rodil 2004 mentioned certain hopes which had been achieved by the three Indigenous groups in Mindanao who were granted CADT by President Arroyo in 2003. These are the Matigsalug-Manobo from the municipalities of Kitaotao, Kibawe and Quezon; the Talaandig from Talakag, Bukidnon; and the Arumanen-Manobo from the municipalities of Carmen in Cotabato.

Putzel (1998) reflected certain optimism regarding the rural cultivators such that with little voice in national politics, the rural poor can exercise little influence to change the policy orientation that perpetuates their marginal economic and political situation. Investment in rural infrastructure, like irrigation facilities and farm to market roads, has been inadequate to the needs for improving productivity and removing the barriers to entry in agriculture and trade. Putzel added that the presidencies of Marcos, Aquino and Ramos have appeared to be closer to agribusiness corporate and interests than interests of small producers. Furthermore, while people in the rural barrios seldom saw the extension workers from the central government agencies, they were subjected for many years to the often arbitrary violence of the government's armed forces and paramilitary units. The same is true among the Higaonon since they unanimously said that there were "volunteers for peace" or the civilian volunteers (CAFGO). The Higaonon reacted that the paramilitary personnel were abusive in their attitude of asking the farmers' produce like corn, rice and bananas.

### Summary and Conclusion

The concept of shifting agriculture is traditional and is characterized by a systematic shifting of fields. This method of farm technology is embodied in their oral history since time immemorial and is handed down from their ancestors. Farm livelihood is essential and the

source of life-giving resources. Farm cultivation is in line with the natural phenomena and the forces of nature. The forestland and the farmland are sacred places because these are the abode of the supreme being (*magbabaya*) and the lesser beings (the *diwatas*, the *engkantos*, *padeding*, *ibabasuk*, *tagabugta* and *tagabalite*).

It is inevitable that a ritual should be performed when opening a farm lot and in each farm cycle to appease the spirits and provide them an abundant harvest. Each farm cycle activity which consists of marking, slashing, burning, broadcasting and harvesting had a ritual offering. The belief on constellation star (*giya*), lunar movement (*subang*), high tide (*taub*) and the omen bird (*limukon*) should also be observed so as not to conflict with nature. These ideas are also supported by the conceptual frame of reference like Scott, Wolf and Mc. Andrew on nature and farming.

The Higaonon had the natural way of treating the soil fertility that is not subjected to any commercial or artificial pesticide applications because using these can cause the environmental spirits (*tagabugta* and *ibabasuk*) to be angry, which led to calamities and ill-health to people. They believed the efficacy of the natural processes of cultivation like burning bushes and letting the process of biodegradability take place in the soil for several days or even weeks, the weeding and taking out of unwanted organisms like worms in their farms, cleaning daily are some of the effective techniques. On the other hand, the magico-religious belief such as offering ritual to the nature spirits added strong influence of the Higaonon organic farming.

In like manner, the shifting cultivation is a natural technique of the Higaonon farming where the great advantage of maintaining soil fertility and the continued accumulation of vast hectares of land for sustainability was practiced since time immemorial. The shifting cultivation method of farming is "nature friendly" since the philosophy is in accordance with the belief system that the Higaonon are the keepers of their environment, in particular the resources that provide them of their daily subsistence. These include both the farmland for farming, forestland for hunting, and the river for fishing. However, logging and mining activities are the two remote activities in the Higaonon mindset to develop. They are in fact familiar with the idea that Rogongon is rich in gold and other non-metallic resources, and they are also aware of the abundance of tropical rainforest hardwood like dipterocarp, narra,

kamagong, red and white lauaan which are mostly in demand for Japan (Casino, 2000). Despite the income attraction of Rogongon's timber resources, the Higaonon is still dependent largely on shifting cultivation as primary and sustainable.

However, with the inroads of the lowland migrants like the Cebuanos and the Boholanos who had introduced the system of plow agriculture and the use of the carabao in farming during the middle of the 1950s, have not changed their traditional way of shifting cultivation. The Higaonon did not practice plow agriculture. The arrival of the loggers and the miners in the 1970s had greatly displaced them from their plateau farmlands and forestlands. In the 1980s the Higaonon moved into the interior of the hinterland towards the non-fertile grounds just to continue their shifting activities for subsistence. However, the farmers had gradually lost the vast farmlands that were set for a continuous year-round cultivation. They had also lost the knowledge of setting astrology, the lunar calendar estimation and the natural movement of sea-water and lost the efficacy to ward off pests on their farms. Above all, they lost the significance of their belief system that nature and land are god's gifts worthy of care and respect.

During the displacement process, the farmers had been at a disadvantage since shifting cultivation were done at the "infertile" sites like the hillsides and in the deep ravines. Oftentimes, they cultivated their farms along the river banks which did not follow the traditional annual cycle anymore. The farmers also suffered their lack of production when the river inundates. The farmers realized that their produce cannot even sustain them within six (6) month period. That is why they opted to plant bananas and root crops to support their basic needs. They wanted to acquire enough income to buy corn grits and rice since it became scarce after the logging operation. However, they felt that the high prices of basic commodities in the market cannot sustain them anymore.

The Higaonon however, augmented their income from cutting wild trees in the interior of the forests known as *anotong* used in the orchid farm or orchidarium in the lowland communities. The trading of *anotong* significantly shifted the economic life of the tribe although it is income-generating. It costs 100 pesos per tree. The respondents confessed that they are actually felt guilty with the nature spirits for involving money in their subsistence, but were forced by necessity.

At present, the Higaonon lost their control over the communal ownership and cultural manifestation of their original farmlands upon the entry of the illegal loggers and migrants in the area. The outsiders also displaced the sacred mountain ranges because of illegal entry without consulting them. The Higaonon were discouraged from the government personnel and the logging personnel due to disrespect and farmland devastation. The tribe gradually lost their way of knowing the herbal and ritual medicines from their forest and communal farm.

The Indigenous Technical Knowledge that was practiced by them as an effective tool to cure common illness and in appeasing the harmful effects *buyag* of bad elementals had gradually lost. This knowledge had not documented and even patented for the Higaonon Indigenous knowledge System.

The recent phenomenon in Rogongon is the worst scenario of devastated farmlands and denuded forest which resulted to the departures of the hunting games. The Mandulog River (sacred river) became murky which led to the death of fishes and other river organisms and their habitat as a result of mining. The Higaonon also believed that whenever there are floods, landslide and famine in Rogongon it is attributed to the punishment of *magbabaya* and the *diwatas* for the sins committed by the lowlanders.

Finally, Bennagen (1996) noted that rituals re-affirm their connections between them as human and nature. It also strengthened the commitment to a cultural identity rooted in the past and specific place. The Higaonon believe that these spirits still are intertwined with them in their daily lives even with the loss of their farmlands and forestlands. The solution for the Higaonon situation was the *Panagtagbo* (meeting) with the elders, the *datus* and the *baylan* for cultural regeneration. Alejo (2000) significantly mentioned that the Manobos had a (*Tuddok*) cultural regeneration to save their lost culture and destroyed environment. Brosius (1990) and Scott (1976) noted that the landscape is more than simply a reservoir of detailed ecological knowledge, it is primarily a setting in which the people satisfy their caloric and nutritional needs.

Although the government had extended certain measures through the Republic Act 7942; Republic Act 8371 and Indigenous Peoples Rights Act but these are of no avail to them. They had attended seminars during the Estrada Administration, but they said it was only for orientation. In reality they remain marginalized, oppressed and abused by the



lowlanders. The Higaonon suffered an utter desolation from these conditions. Thus, the respondents are still hopeful to be able to regain their ancestral lands by having a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) once they have established their genealogy as a primary legal requirement.

The continuous marginalization had been felt by them as they relate their displacement from their original farmlands to the non-fertile grounds. Their condition can be summed up into a culture of violence from the Philippine political system. In relation to this, world marginalization is not new, as Daniel (1996) blatantly discussed nationalist violence by a small but multiplied marginal group of Tamil workers in the village of Sri Lanka, primarily due to ethnic indifference by the government personnel.

The Higaonon had a culture of "silent violence" not from the landlord because the Higaonon were not peasants or tenants as products of Spanish colonial dominance, but from the strong political and economic ambitions of the National government. They keep their sentiments through hope in the efficacy of their beliefs and the intercession of the nature spirits would be their only weapon to acquire justice in their ancestral lands.

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lowlanders. The Higaonon suffered an utter desolation from these conditions. Thus, the respondents are still hopeful to be able to regain their ancestral lands by having a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) once they have established their genealogy as a primary legal requirement.

The continuous marginalization had been felt by them as they relate their displacement from their original farmlands to the non-fertile grounds. Their condition can be summed up into a culture of violence from the Philippine political system. In relation to this, world marginalization is not new, as Daniel (1996) blatantly discussed nationalist violence by a small but multiplied marginal group of Tamil workers in the village of Sri Lanka, primarily due to ethnic indifference by the government personnel.

The Higaonon had a culture of "silent violence" not from the landlord because the Higaonon were not peasants or tenants as products of Spanish colonial dominance, but from the strong political and economic ambitions of the National government. They keep their sentiments through hope in the efficacy of their beliefs and the intercession of the nature spirits would be their only weapon to acquire justice in their ancestral lands.

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### **Maps**

Map of Mindanao

Relief Map of Iligan City