

Identities, Space and Interactions: The Case of Ethno-Linguistic Groups in Naguilian, La Union, Philippines

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Abstract

At present, the town of Naguilian in the province of La Union, Philippines is known as a predominantly Ilocano town, with Igorot inhabitants in its fringes. This set up can be traced from the events that transpired in the town and its surroundings provinces from 1850 to 1915. This research focuses on exploring the consequences of the territorialization of space to the identities and interactions of the Ilocanos and Igorots in Naguilian. Space refers to the locus of the distribution of things and activities, the formation of boundaries and the patterns of movements which are all intimately bound up with the ways in which we live out our lives. The fluidity of space is exemplified in the beginnings of Naguilian when it was still considered as a rancheria. And the integration of Naguilian to the province of La Union in 1850 and its involvement in the development projects engineered to reach Baguio during the American period illustrate the power relations at work between the town and the colonial state as the latter plays an active role in the partitioning, re-organizing, homogenizing and territorialization of space. With the town of Naguilian, we see how “through time, people define space just as space also mediates the identity of people.” And through time, a people’s knowledge of their past is also shaped, and their identities re/constructed.

Introduction

Situated in the Northern part of the Philippines, within the province of La Union, is the town of Naguilian. It lies within the famous Cordillera mountain range, which is primarily known for its cold temperature and for the rich history of the Igorots, the indigenous peoples who were original inhabitants of the area. Naguilian is bounded by six towns (Bagulin in the northeast, Burgos in the east, San Fernando in the north, and Bauang in the west, Caba and Aringay in the south). The first two (Bagulin and Burgos) have been inhabited by Igorots for much of their early history until the present time, while the other four (San Fernando, Bauang, Caba and Aringay) have been occupied mostly by the Ilocanos. My frequent references to the Cordillera and the Igorots, and to the Ilocanos, in my attempt to characterize the town of Naguilian shows how this town’s historical experience is fraught with relentless interactions between and among the said indigenous peoples—interactions that involved a sequence of marked encounters in the geo-political spaces that served as locus of their social and economic relations. This is made even richer

and more nuanced, given the Philippines' colonial experience under the Spaniards and Americans.

In this paper, I will attempt to show that what transpired in the area—changing landscapes and persistent movements and interactions of peoples demonstrate to us in very concrete terms how “through time, people define space just as space also mediates the identity of people.”³ And through time, a people's knowledge of their past is shaped, and their identities re/constructed. The case of Naguilian calls into question the very notion of ‘creation,’ if not possibility, of identity, since the town's *space* is one that resulted from external (mainly political) factors, and is in constant flux both in terms of its geo-political role and its people's ‘sense of belonging.’

This research is the result of my undergraduate thesis completed in 2014. Much has changed since then, and I hope to incorporate those changes here. In the said research, I focus on a specific period of the town's history, total of 65 years. This is from 1850 (which is the official date of the creation of the province of La Union, decreed by the then Spanish Governor-General Antonio Blanco), until 1915 (which is the date when the Naguilian Road, a national highway named after the town, was officially opened for travel from the Ilocano lowlands up to the Cordillera mountains). I explore the consequences of the territorialization of space to the identities and interactions of the Ilocanos and Igorots in Naguilian. Note that by ‘space’ I mean the locus of the distribution of things and activities, the formation of boundaries and the patterns of movements which are all intimately bound up with the ways in which we live out our lives.¹

For organization purposes, I divided my presentation to three parts: firstly, the present characteristics of the town (much of which I already mentioned in brief a while ago); secondly, what transpired in the area under examination *before* 1850, which I characterize by the ‘fluidity of space’²; and finally, to trace the developments and subsequent effects to space and/or identities by looking at 1850-1915, characterized by the partitioning, re-organizing and homogenizing of space and identity.³

Present day Naguilian

Today, town of Naguilian in the province of La Union, Philippines is known as a predominantly Ilocano town, with Igorot inhabitants in its fringes. (map) The town is not only famous for being one of the major arteries leading up to Baguio City, the summer capital of the Philippines, but also for *basi*—the fermented alcoholic beverage made from sugarcane. Basi is also known as the ‘Ilocano wine’.

¹ Ma. Nela B. Florendo, “History, Space and Ethnicity: Re-visiting Felix M. Keesing's The Ethnohistory of Northern Luzon,” *The Journal of History*. Vol. LVII (January-December 2011): 75.

² Ana Maria Alonso, “The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 23 (1994): 380.

³ See Alonso: Understand the state as a mask, and look at it as a “historically constructed and contested ‘exercise in legitimation, in moral regulation.’” The mask came from the long-held notion of the “separation of the political and the social” when it comes with the state. Whereas in state formation, these two blur in that “modern relations of rule and forms of discipline construct and are constructed in everyday practices” and that “state formation is cultural revolution—everyday state routines, rituals, activities and policies... constitute and regulate the social making of meaning and of subjects”.

Now, throughout its history, the town of Naguilian has experienced a series of changes as to its boundaries and territories, which portray the shifting political character and significance of this town.

Fluidity of Space

The fluidity of space is exemplified in the beginnings of Naguilian when it was still considered as a *rancheria*.⁴ To explain what I mean by fluidity of space, we must go back to the beginnings of the town.

As far as the Order of the Augustinians are concerned, the town of Naguilian was founded by the Augustinians in 1839. In particular, they identified Naguilian as one of the *rancherias* that comprised Calanasanes, described in the following lines: “[t]he Calanasas were heathen barbarians who lived in the clefts of the mountains and other rocky places in Northern Luzon.”⁵ The Augustinians may have been referring to the Igorots who went down from the mountains of Benguet and settled at the valley below, recorded in other primary records.

For example, the local history of Naguilian, which is reprinted every year through the pages of souvenir program magazines of the province of La Union, recounts the following:

It is said that during the early years, Naguilian was first inhabited by mountaineers from the foothills of the sub-province of Benguet. Because of continuous waves of Christian immigrants from the coastal plains of La Union during the early part of the nineteenth century, these natives were gradually pushed to the Cordillera Ranges along the La Union-Benguet boundary and abandoned their settlements in this place, now called Naguilian.⁶

Such local history also narrates that the name of the town “Naguilian” means “*ili* (the Ilocano term for town) *a napagadedan*,” signifying the beginnings of the town as “the place which used to be occupied by the natives who were forced to move to the eastern and northern hills of the municipality and its adjoining areas before the Spaniards came to the country.”⁷ Indeed, at present the Ilocanos are the majority in Naguilian, while the Igorots live in the southern, northern and eastern boundaries. Such narratives from the local history of the town give much insight as to why the Augustinians originally designated Naguilian as a *rancheria* and associated the town with Calanasanes.

It is also interesting to note that such information concerning the Igorots of Benguet is also found in the stories⁸ recounted by the *barrios* or barangays of the town. For instance, the history of barangay Al-alinao Norte⁹, recounted by the elders of the community, says

⁴ *Rancheria* was the Spanish term for the settlements of the “unpacified mountain peoples”, in contrast to the *pueblo* which pertains to the settlements of the Christianized lowlands. In Ma. Nela B. Florendo, “Space and Ethnicity: Ilocos-Cordillera Interactions in History,” *The Journal of History*. Vol LII. (January-December 2006): 58.

⁵ Emma Blair and James Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*. Vol 38. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark. 1903-1909), 206.

⁶ “Municipality of Naguilian Brief History.” *135th Foundation Anniversary of La Union Souvenir Book*, March 2, 1985, 134.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁸ These are unpublished accounts prepared by the heads of the barangays, compiled in the folder “History of Naguilian” located at the Naguilian municipal library. Some of the accounts were in Ilocano, while most were in English; some were typewritten while most were encoded.

⁹ See **Appendix B** for the Naguilian Base Map, from the Municipal Planning and Development Council Office, Municipal Hall of Naguilian, La Union.

that the barangay was named after a certain Igorot, Alinao, who is said to reside in the areas during its earlier history. The same is true for the history of barangay Angin. (map)

But these details from the people's own recounting local history are complicated by other sources. Historian of Northern Philippines Felix Keesing designates Bauang and Naguilian as part of the *Pangasinan* area, but Blair and Robertson indicated Bauang, Bavan or Bauan to be a "village in Union Province, formerly in Ilocos."¹⁰

This is because Naguilian was one of the three *visitas* of Bauang. (map) After all, in 1839 it was the Augustinians who ordered the construction of the church in Naguilian, hence the name "St. Augustine Parish Church" after the patron saint of the said Order. Note that during the Spanish period in the Philippines, "the usual reason for creating a town was the desire of the priests to consolidate the results of the missionary work."¹¹ During the Spanish colonial regime in the Philippines, there was "no separation between the Church and State." And hence, "it was always the priest or religious sector that initiated the creation of towns. The need was assessed according to the terms of convenience of the priest."¹² That the Church in Naguilian was constructed and the town established as separate from Bauang are therefore indicative of the Augustinians' desire to consolidate rule among their subject populations. This action of the Church (and the state) to partition space was for the end goal of effective and convenient administration of the people in Bauang and Naguilian. For the case of Naguilian the Augustinian friars, whose Order was assigned to administer the areas found on the northern third of the Pangasinan province, were the ones who established the town of Naguilian.

In addition is the question on space. Because Naguilian was situated in the foothills of Benguet and was one of the *rancherias* consisting Calanasanes, the Augustinians recorded Naguilian under their missions in Benguet. Blair and Robertson, on the other hand, understood Bauang within which Naguilian was originally a part, to be a province of Ilocos. Whereas Felix Keesing included Baratao (Bauang and other settlements in its interior) in the Pangasinan area, one of the culture zones he created as divisions of Northern Luzon, because the people were "of the same race as those who inhabit Pangasinan." In the same line, records of the Bishopric of Nueva Segovia during the 1630s recognized the different towns of La Union including Bauang, initially understood as villages, as part of the province of Pangasinan. This poses a question on where to appropriately include or exclude Naguilian during its beginnings. It is located on the fringes of the Cordillera, and on the area where the portions which Pangasinan relinquished to form the province of La Union in 1850 marks a separation from those areas which Ilocos Sur gave to the union as well.¹³

Partitioning, Re-organizing and Homogenizing of Space and Identity

So from the very beginning, Naguilian mattered to the Spanish and American colonizers because of its *location*—that is, its proximity to the "unpacified" Igorots and rich

¹⁰ Emma Blair and James Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1903-1909) index.

¹¹ Jes Tirol. "Ontogeny of Civil Towns in Bohol" *The Journal of History* Vol XLIX. No 1-4. (January-December 2003): 164.

¹² *Ibid.*, 158 and 163.

¹³ See **Appendix D** for Map of the Military Provinces and Districts in 1860 from William Henry Scott. *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon*. (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1974), 230.

Cordillera. The town first appeared in historical accounts through the chronicles of the earliest Spanish *conquistadores* and friars who visited the mountains of Benguet.

But why the need to consolidate certain areas (of which Naguilian is included) and form a new province in 1850? Why the need for *la union* of parts of Ilocos, Pangasinan and Cordillera? Why was it significant to establish (politically) a space by virtue of an executive decree by the governor-general? The answer to these, and the subsequent developments and territorializations through a series of town-state regulation and colonial interventions on space in the form of new labels on settlements, implementations of state programs and policies, and social processes, were recounted by Spanish and American historical records:

1. TOBACCO. Continued interactions between Ilocanos and Igorots (with the latter being considered 'unpacified' still).
 - a. The *Royal Audiencia* considered it an urgent task to oversee the affairs of the Infeles or Igorotes, together with collecting tributes, taxes, tobacco, persecuting "smugglers" of tobacco crops and commanding the army. [This will be explained by point 2]
 - b. Collection of tributes were hindered by floods and destruction of bridges, and the farmers would take the opportunity to trade their tobacco produce with the Igorots for a better and fairer price than what the Spaniards offered.¹⁴ They would cover up such an activity with the reason that production was low but the Spanish authorities on the other hand would look at the farmers' activity as smuggling.¹⁵
 - c. the Igorots was to grow tobacco for lowland smokers who secured these from them free from tax.¹⁶ This led to the then Governor Basco's directive to confiscate the tobaccos from the Igorots, and eventually effected the appointment of Guillermo Galvey as *Comandante* of *El Pais de Igorotes y Partidas del Norte de Pangasinan*, whose main motive for surveying the Benguet during this time was "to cut off the trade at its roots."¹⁷
 - d. *Comandante* recorded his initial efforts to fulfill such a task. He wrote in 1829, "This was the first expedition on which I penetrated into the interior. On my preceding ones I had not gone beyond the first mountain chain, as the large fields of tobacco planted clandestinely, which I had to destroy, detained me many days."¹⁸
 - e. Note that horses and carabaos were being traded in La Union in 1875, and a little coffee, cacao and beans in 1880 from Benguet and the Trinidad Valley. And after some time, lowland traders began to "appear regularly in the Cordillera with hogs for sale, and even opened a few stores where they sold cotton blankets, G-strings, heavy wire, and red cloth to the Igorots."¹⁹
2. Conversion of Igorots and the unstable and increasingly becoming uncontrolled economic conditions the colony. The first half of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the Spanish government's attempts to exercise political control over its "beleaguered settlements" in northern Luzon.²⁰ Four provinces were created during this time: Nueva Vizcaya in 1840, Abra in 1846, La Union in 1850 and Isabela in 1856. Upon their creation, these provinces were

¹⁴ "History of La Union," *135th Foundation Anniversary of La Union Souvenir Book*, March 2, 1985, 23.

¹⁵ Anavic Bagamaspad and Zenaida Hamada-Pawid, *A Peoples' History of Benguet*. (Baguio: Baguio Printing and Publishing Company, Inc. 1985), 154.

¹⁶ Anavic Bagamaspad and Zenaida Hamada-Pawid, *A Peoples' History of Benguet*. (Baguio: Baguio Printing and Publishing Company, Inc. 1985), 154.

¹⁷ "Events in Filipinas, 1801-1840," Compiled from Montero y Vidal's *Historia de Filipinas*, in Blair and Robertson, Vol 51, 55, cited in Anavic Bagamaspad and Zenaida Hamada-Pawid. *A Peoples' History of Benguet*. (Baguio: Baguio Printing and Publishing Company, Inc. 1985), 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Distrito de Lepanto* (Manila 1877), 32, cited in William Henry Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon*. (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1974), 239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

immediately flanked by *comandancias politico-militares* which Scott defines as “zones of military occupation necessary for consolidation and defense.”²¹

- a. Governor-General Narciso Claveria in a decree issued in 1846 said: “to promote the conversion and civilization of the Igorots and other pagan tribes that inhabit the southern part of the Cordillera, increase their relations with the Christian population and improve the agriculture, industry and commerce of that beautiful land (referring to Benguet).”²²

The partitioning of the provinces of Benguet, Ilocos Sur and Pangasinan which resulted to the re-organizing of space into the new province of La Union has had profound implications not only to Naguilian but all the towns involved as well. The consolidation and label “La Union” may imply a homogenizing connotation, in the sense of La Union being largely Ilocano and relatively pacified despite of or in contrast to the issues of the state with the geographically close unassimilated Igorots. It should be underscored that at the provincial level, that is, when La Union was created as a province, Naguilian was integrated into it and was never problematized at that. Despite the homogenizing action of the state to fuse a number of towns under one heading, i.e. “La Union,” it could not be denied that it was the La Union that had close relations (and/or issues, from the perspective of the Spanish colonizers) with Benguet and the Igorots that Naguilian joined in 1850. This is one example of the Spanish colonial state’s way of organizing space without regard of the people’s sense of space and boundary. Even with this fact, however, from the year 1850 onwards the history of Naguilian as space will be permeated with interactions and boundary changes vis-à-vis Benguet and the Igorots.

This attempt to intervene on space and in effect to the peoples, continued through the American period. Naguilian was further developed upon the coming of the Americans during the early 1900s through development projects primarily engineered to reach the city of pines, Baguio City, such as road constructions. Following this, in 1915 another colonial power, the American regime, carried out an action which was national in nature that involved the town of Naguilian, namely, the opening of the Naguilian Road as one of the main channels to the then increasingly publicized colonial hill station, Baguio in the province of Benguet.

3. The need for a mountain health resort for American colonial government, for which the cool climate of Baguio serves as a perfect option. As early as 1892, zoologist Dean Conant Worcester had already heard about the existence of “a region with pines and oaks blessed with a perpetually temperate climate and even with occasional frosts”²³
 - a. In the diary of Daniel R. Williams, he recorded his journey with David Barrows of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes and Dean Worcester. On 10 June 1901, he wrote, “We left civilization today and headed for the mountains.”²⁴ They first stayed overnight in Bauang, La Union, then stopped for a rest in Naguilian and continued on to Sablan where they again stayed for the night. Williams further recorded, “the ocean and the sky

²¹ Ibid., 233.

²² Decree of November 25, 1846 (NA Guerras) in William Henry Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon*. (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1974), 239.

²³ Dean C. Worcester. “Baguio and the Benguet Road,” *The Philippines: Past and Present*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 451.

²⁴ Daniel R. Williams, *The Odyssey of the Philippine Commission* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1913), 259-274, in Ma. Nela B. Florendo, “Building a Colonial Hill Station: The Genesis of Baguio,” *The Journal of History*. Vol LVI (January-December 2010): 349.

met and blended on the far horizon, while through the deep green of wooded hills and valleys meandered the silver thread of the Naguilian River.”²⁵

4. And on 1 June 1903, the Philippine Commission approved the following:

On Motion, RESOLVED, That it be declared the policy of the Commission to *make the town of Baguio*, in the Province of Benguet, the summer capital of the Archipelago and to construct suitable buildings, to secure suitable transportation, to secure proper water supply, and to *make residence in Baguio possible for all the officers of the Insular Government for four months during the year*, that in pursuance of this purpose the Secretary of the Interior, the Consulting Engineer to the Commission, the Chief of the Bureau of Architecture, and Major L. W. V. Kennon, United States Army, whom it is the intention of the Commission to put in actual charge of the improvements in Benguet Province, including the *construction of the Benguet Road*, the erection of the buildings and the *construction of a wagon road from Naguilian*, be appointed a committee to report plans and estimates to the Commission for the proposed improvements in the Province of Benguet and to submit same to the Commission for action and necessary appropriation...¹¹³ (emphasis is the researcher’s).²⁶

And it should be noted that even before the outbreak of World War I, work was already ongoing with the rack-and-pinion railway in Naguilian. But during the said war, work was halted.²⁷ It was Baguio’s mayor and city engineer Alpheus Daniel Williams who ordered the conversion of this railway into what is known as Naguilian Road at present. And as recorded in the biography of E. J. Halsema, the Naguilian Road was opened by Williams in 1915.²⁸ In which case, the opening of the Naguilian Road and of the Benguet Road (eventually called Kennon Road after its lead engineer who replaced Captain Meade), led to further developments not only to Baguio and Benguet at large, but to the surrounding areas as well. In 1918, it was recorded that a “large increase of agricultural products, including many varieties of fresh vegetables which are shipped to Manila.”²⁹ And this made a strong demand for transportation using both roads. Today, the Naguilian Road is one of the main arteries used by people in visiting Baguio city.

So Naguilian as space was developed by the American colonial administrators during the early 1900s primarily due to the plans of transforming Baguio into a mountain health resort for American officials. The town has had every potential of being developed on and for its own, considering its great significance since the Spanish period through the American period. However, it has always been treated by colonial officials as that town which is adjacent to the more important Benguet. Such a geographic characteristic and spatial nature vis-à-vis Benguet was already endowed with Naguilian even before its official establishment as a town in 1839, and was maintained so for the most part of its history—form fluidity, Naguilian has become a part of a series of partitioning, re-organizing and homogenizing interventions on space, by powers exerted both by the state and the town itself.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Report of the Philippine Commission*, Part 1, 1903, 58, in William Cameron Forbes. *The Philippine Islands*. Vol 1. (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1928), 460.

²⁷ James J. Halsema, *E. J. Halsema: Colonial Engineer* (Quezon City: new Day Publishers, 1991), 170.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Howard T. Fry, *A History of the Mountain Province*. Rev. Ed. (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1991), 113.

To a certain extent, the interventions of the state on space was successful—they were able to penetrate the Cordilleras, and today Naguilian is predominantly Ilocanos, having ‘displaced’ or ‘pushed’ the Igorots to the fringes, yet still closer to the Cordilleras.

But in the final analysis, what this research hopes for is a more informed understanding of not only how Ilocanos *differed* from Igorots, or the Ilocos from the Cordillera (specifically Benguet), but how such groups of people share a *common* history of social interactions, economic exchanges, and colonial rule among others. How they understand themselves (and others understand and perceive them) has been shaped by their rich historical experiences, so that identities in this case must be seen not as fixed, but one that is continuously constructed, reconstructed, made/remade in light of one’s knowledge of their past.