

**KARL M. GASPAR, CSsR**  
Interfaith Scholar, Theologian, Missionary

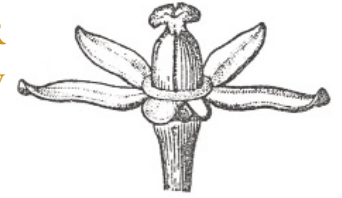


Photo credit: Karl Gaspar

“My personal experience is in contributing to the liberation of Indigenous peoples (IPs) from what does not add to the fullness of life – perhaps this is what missionaries are supposed to do in a location such as Mindanao, in southern Philippines, where there is a substantial IP population.”

Carlito “Karl” Gaspar was born in Davao City in Mindanao. His father is from Capiz in the Visayas and his mother is from Pangasinan in Northern Luzon. Both his parents migrated to Davao City just before the Second World War broke out.

Karl is a well-known sociologist-anthropologist, theologian, interfaith scholar and missionary and has given talks and written numerous books, articles and liturgico-cultural plays about his experiences. During the last three decades he has lived and worked with indigenous communities in Southern Mindanao, including the Mandaya in Davao Oriental, the Manobo in Cotabato and Bukidnon, the Subanen in Zamboanga del Sur, and the Dulangan Manobos in Sultan Kudarat. He holds a PhD in Philippine Studies. During the Marcos era, he spent 22 months in prison and was adopted by Amnesty International as a political prisoner.

“I grew up in Digos in Davao del Sur and have many memories of the Bagobos who came down from the uplands to the town center to sell their produce. I continued to encounter other indigenous people while I was in college and later when I did graduate work. It was these early exposures to the indigenous communities that eventually would contribute to my having a great interest and passion for the IPs, especially the Lumad<sup>1</sup> in Mindanao.”

Culture as an integral part of social,  
ecological and divine relations

After graduate school, Karl then worked with the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) that undertakes projects to alleviate poverty, and had many occasions to work with the IPs before joining the Redemptorists in 1985. After his profession of vows, he was assigned to an itinerant Redemptorist mission team. It was with this team that he experienced years of living and working with the Lumad.

“My experience at theologizing from the perspective of the Lumad in the last three decades came about as I was challenged by my everyday experiences with them. Their indigenous and meaningful faith expressions and symbols deeply encouraged me to reflect on my own faith experiences and their meanings.

“I found myself asking: why are we here with the indigenous? What brings us to this type of ministry? What underlies our intentions in the area of development and in dealing with the major urgent issues and discourse of land ownership and tenure? How do we relate to their indigenous belief systems? What are the challenges in terms of dealing with the discourse of inter-faith dialogue between the Lumad and the Christian lowlander-settlers? Is there a parallel with the inter-faith dialogue that is already taking place between the Muslims in Mindanao and the Christian settlers?”

Karl considers a number of key issues that missionaries and development workers of non-government organizations (NGOs) should deal with if they decide to show solidarity with the Lumad. First is the issue of ancestral domain ownership and control. While the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 is indeed a State acknowledgement of the rights of the IPs to their ancestral domain, Karl sees that “it is nonetheless very difficult to implement this law today. Land in Mindanao is a much-sought resource for the land-hungry peasants, agri-business and multi-national mining companies because of the richness of the soils and the mineral resources. The State has also allocated very limited funds for the delineation and titling of ancestral domain claims filed by the IPs.”

Another area that Karl considers a key issue involving the Lumad is “the prevalence of poverty compounded by the stark inaccessibility to basic services. The IPs merit very little attention from the State; consequently, very inadequate funds are allotted to improve the infrastructure in the uplands, school and health care facilities and the like.”

There is also the issue related to the continuing logging operations, which along with the opening up of more lands to agri-business plantations (banana, pineapple, oil palm, rubber and similar cash crops), have led to the massive disappearance of forests. “As more and more forests disappear and with very little reforestation taking place, the first to suffer greatly are the IPs, who for centuries have been dependent on the forests for food, housing materials, medicine and products used for rituals. With deforestation, the IPs’ situation has gone from bad to worse. One can tell this is not just a matter of material poverty, but it affects their very soul since their whole belief system revolves around nature, around the richness and bounty of forests.”

It has been in the field of development work that Karl has tried to make a difference, even as he insists that the work he does has remained quite modest. His solidarity work on behalf of the Lumad was initiated along with church and NGO efforts to alleviate the IPs’ marginalized status, as well as in the defense of their basic human rights. These include their rights to their ancestral land, protection from political, military, and business institutions that can deprive them of their civil liberties, as well as their right to worship the God of their ancestors. Through the years, he found himself confronted with the challenges brought about by the IP concerns.

Recently, Karl, along with other colleagues, asked if the initiatives undertaken by civil society groups – especially those of the churches and NGOs - are culturally sensitive, and respectful of the people’s indigenous faith traditions and sustainable? Another important consideration is the matter regarding being respectful of the IPs’

right to a free, prior and well-informed consent once partnerships are established.

Some of Karl's musings in this field of engagement and partnership include the following: "Collaboration work and partnership with the IPs in mission areas take time to be established and deepened. We should do our best to be patient in doing our work with them. Our presence should not be too brief; otherwise we would hardly be able to accomplish anything. It should also not last for so long as to foster dependence. We should be quite honest and reflective as to why we are present among them, what motivates our solidarity work with them, how we can do our best to sustain whatever efforts were started. Another important question is our 'missionary religious motivation'. How do we conduct ourselves as missionaries so that there is never any attempt at proselytizing that can come only from a deep and genuine appreciation of the integrity of their faith belief system? Where lies our flexibility so that we are never tempted to unconsciously – or worse, to wittingly - manifest to them that it is our Christian belief tradition that is the more superior and thus the one that they should eventually embrace?"

Karl shares his points of reflection as to the theological underpinnings of the work and service he has committed to and hopes to continue in the future:

*1. The presence of God across the land (with its forests, lakes and rivers, ravines and caves) and its implication in relation to faith*

"In upland areas where there are mountains and forests, lakes and rivers, it is easy to understand why the people living in such habitats manifest a strong belief in an Almighty Being, in the God of their ancestors. For the lowlanders, especially those who were raised in urban areas, the first thing that strikes them once they encounter the IPs face-to-face for the first time is how delightfully real their faith is in the world of the spirits and the benevolence of the Almighty



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Photo credit: Karl Gaspar

“God is anywhere and everywhere. The sense of the sacred in the whole of creation is integral in the belief system of the IPs. In this sense, they need not be taught about the core meaning of the term ‘integrity of creation.’ They live the meaning of this phrase.”

Being. They may refer to this Being as *Magbabaya* (Creator for the Subanens and Manobos), or *Apo Sandawa* (the God who resides up on the high mountains for the Bagobo-Tagabawa), or *Manama* (the Powerful Being for the Arakan Manobo).

The Lumad’s sense of the spirits’ presence is very palpable. It is manifested in the everyday reality of going through the various rhythms of life and in peak moments such as the passages of life (childbirth, weddings, funerals) and of seasons (planting, harvesting, hunting). IPs feel very much at home in a location where the home is also the abode of the spirit world. Their dwelling places often are located in the core of forest areas where there is minimal disturbance, manifesting a distinct identity of being true believers of the divine. They live in places that are truly homes for their bodies and souls. Conversely, once dislocated from this abode, they face extinction as the benevolent spirits also get alienated.

## 2. *The Creator and creation myths: how people appropriate experience of faith to the totality of their experience*

“For the *Arakan-Manobo*, their ancestors believed that *Manama* created an island in the sea. So that the island stays in place, *Manama* placed a river flowing across the island. Eventually *Manama* also created a man and a woman and they were ordered to stay only around the center of the island, forbidden to move to its edges. But they did not follow instructions and walked towards the island’s edges. *Manama* punished them for this and the man became a tree and the woman a cave. However, *Manama* created another man and woman who were more obedient. As a reward, *Manama* gifted them with children.

“Other Lumad have their own distinctive creation myths like the B’laan, the T’bolis, the Mansaka and others. If one were to compare these myths, there are convergent elements as well as differences in emphasis. It is interesting to share these myths with other communities, whether those of Christian settlers or other IPs. The

elders are especially able to bridge the different creation myths and deduce meanings in relationship to their life and faith.

### 3. *Integrity of creation*

“God is anywhere and everywhere. The sense of the sacred in the whole of creation is integral in the belief system of the IPs. In this sense, they need not be taught about the core meaning of the term ‘integrity of creation.’ They live the meaning of this phrase. They embody the meaning of this phrase in the way they live their lives. Their primal belief in a direct relationship with nature, the forests and rivers, the animals and trees, is manifested in a belief that the spirits’ habitats are in the very same elements of the environment. From the perspective of their worldview, they not only believe in the importance of defending and protecting nature, especially the forests, but it is unthinkable for them to imagine life without the whole of creation. Human nature exists because nature provides people with ‘brothers and sisters’ that will provide for their needs. In this sense, it is also unthinkable to ‘waste’ anything that they find in their surroundings, as all these are sacred. If they get from nature more than what they need, they show disrespect for the spirits and they would be held accountable. What is taken from the generosity of creation should not be possessed individually. These must be shared with kin and everyone in the tribe or community. No one can be greedy and hoard supplies. Naturally, during seasons of bounty everyone has their fill and in the seasons of drought, all experience hunger. Humanity exists where there is community. Creation is a gift for all.

“From 1987 to 1989, our mission team was in San Fernando, Bukidnon. We all collaborated in stopping the logging operations in this area when it was made clear that the continuation of logging would worsen the ecological crisis faced by the people. In the course of the campaign, the Manobos of the area were split in terms of their engagement in the advocacy to stop the logging operations. Those who remained true to the vision of their ancestors naturally

saw the importance of protecting the forests. Unfortunately, there were some Manobos, led by a few of the chieftains who benefited from the logging companies, who did not want to give up these privileges. They did not take part in the campaign and some were even used by the logging company to defend the interests of the logging operations.

“This is a sad reality among the IPs, which is one reason why one cannot romanticize their belief system in the importance of nature, of forests. Once beholden to powerful forces with little concern for ecology, some IPs could be used to go against the worldview of their own ancestors. In working among IPs, one must accept that tribal leaders could turn into ‘tribal dealers.’ Tribal leaders who deal with political and military interests for their own benefit can forget the good of the whole tribe.

“Among church circles, there is fear and anxiety when there is talk about the benevolence of the spirit world. The discourse on inculturation can easily rattle and upset many when anthropology influences theology. There is fear that this may lead to engagement in pantheism. The fear comes about with the misunderstanding regarding the view as to the multiplicity of “gods” within the pantheon of the spirit world.”

### 4. *Greater ways of dealing with good and evil*

“Among the Dulangan Manobos, there are the *beliyans* (shamans) and *datus* (chieftains) who maintain the beliefs by way of governance and rituals. These rituals are celebrated during various passages of life such as from birth to death, planting and harvesting, droughts and times of heavy rains. Their beliefs in the benevolent spirits are manifested in these rituals that can be powerful occasions to establish strong social relationships among the population. Their belief in the *busaos* (malevolent spirits) is also very powerful and their fear of the *busaos* can bring them to a point of paralysis and fatalism. It is important for missionaries and NGO workers to

accept this belief system and not to be judgmental as if these are residues of the “primitive” stage of their development. This arena is a powerful location for inculturation in terms of development work, e.g. in the realm of the community-based health program. It is a difficult task and the existing models are still quite limited. More efforts are needed in this area, but such efforts should begin with the premise that these are sacred areas for the IPs. Outsiders have to tread gently and carefully so as not to trespass on the sacredness of this reality.

“There are areas of concern for example in the realm of violence. Among many IPs, there is the practice of the *pangayaw* (a form of tribal vendetta). Among the Dulangan Manobo, for example, if a favorite grandson dies, the grandfather could only deal with his pain and grief by engaging in an act of violence. He just might pick up his machete and kill anyone in sight who is not a member of his family or kin. What should be our attitude with such cases? How should we deal with such phenomenon? How do we begin to challenge such behavior and help to bring in the role of the civil authorities such as the local police? Should the indigenous legal system be the one that prevails over that of the laws of the land that are Western-based? There are many questions to be asked in order to arrive at decisions about morality and ethics that are appropriate to the lives of the IPs.

“It is also interesting to relate to how various sections of the population deal with deep emotions. During funerals among lowland settlers, it is the women who have the loudest lamentations. But among the Dulangan Manobos, men shed more tears. In one funeral I attended of a young woman who died at childbirth, I was taken aback by how the men were weeping in public. This manner of manifesting emotion was truly a big surprise for me. These things are important considerations in understanding indigenous cultures.

“Among the Bagobo-Tagabawa, there is the belief in the goddess *Mebuyan*, whose abode is under Mount Apo. Deconstructing this myth, one explanation is the high infant mortality rate in the area.

*Mebuyan* arises as one who takes care of the countless children who die and are separated from their mothers. She has many breasts to nourish these babies who die prematurely and need to be prepared for the day when they, too, can move on to the Sky world.

“Again, such myths have important meanings in the lives of the Bagobo-Tagabawa. If one were working among them, this is a powerful myth that should be engaged in the various occasions where discourses can be pursued. One can imagine the power of this myth when dealing with issues affecting women and children.”

##### 5. *Symbols of water, oil, fire, blood, betel nut, coins, food and drink*

“The Subanen of the Zamboanga peninsula have the most elaborate rituals that can go for months if food is available to feed all those who attend on these rare occasions. At the heart of their thanksgiving ritual known as *buklog*, is a platform of 5 to 10 feet. All the materials used are only available in the forests, from tree trunks that serve as platform posts, to the rattan vines that hold the bamboo and palm leaves used in the festive decoration of the ritual site. Every step of building this platform has its own ritual, as there is a need to ask permission from the spirits for the use of all the materials. When it was still possible to hunt, wild pigs and deer were offered; the rituals were far more complex than now, when the animals are bought in the local market. These are occasions of firming up family and social relationships, apart from providing the venue for strengthening tribal networks and consolidating alliances. It is during such events when the tribe’s histories are celebrated and when the memories of ancestors are once more given prominence and the young are initiated into the ways of the adults.

“Among the IPs, the dualism that is so deeply entrenched among lowland Catholics (also referred to as split-level Christianity) is almost non-existent. The IPs’ faith is more integrated. It has a holistic orientation to faith and life, to the individual in relation to the overall





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society, to life on earth and the life beyond. This is why theologians can be so pleasantly surprised and delighted once they encounter the IPs. There is such a freshness and child-like character that has long vanished among cynical Christians in urban settings. There is a world of meaning – embodied in a very gentle system of beliefs that encompasses forests and spirits, mountains and goddesses, rivers and nymphs, caves and *busaos*, communities and ancestors. All these give a far greater reason to sustain and nourish nature for the sake of the generations still to come.

“This is why, in reality, the indigenous people themselves can evangelize us, the missionaries and development workers.”

<sup>1</sup> *Lumad* has become the word popularly used to refer to all the indigenous peoples of Mindanao; it literally means the people from the bowels of the earth or those native to a particular place.



## Extending environment and resource equity for coming generations

### ALISTAIR MACDONALD Amateur Birdwatcher and Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines

When Alistair MacDonald took up his current posting in the Philippines in November 2006, he was not a stranger to the country, but more a *balikbayan* (a returnee to the Philippines). He worked as First Counsellor in the EC Delegation from 1990 to 1995, and also worked closely with the country in his earlier posting in Bangkok from 1985 to 1990 and his earliest visits in the 1970's.

He acknowledges that the EU involvement in the country puts environment in high profile that provides additional strategic approaches by which to tackle poverty, which is the EU's overall priority in its development agenda.

“The environment as an issue of connecting with poverty is highly related to the degrading environment, and it is a vicious cycle. In recent years, the effort has been to look at the environment not just in relation to poverty and quality of life in this generation, but all the more to consider with climate change and the generations yet to come. The EU is pushing for genuine practical effective global responses to the dangers of climate change. Scientists are saying it is already happening. What must be avoided is a warming of more than 2 degrees, and a warming of more than 3 degrees will put us at high risk. There are of course the huge implications of increased carbon emissions and reduction is the general idea.”





“When we refer to the environment in relation to poverty, sometimes this refers to forests, to rivers or to the seas. All of the population does not entirely depend on the environment. But there are the people who live on the margins of the forest, people dependent on the harvest of the seas, people dependent on the state of coral reefs; these are all directly affected. Rice farmers, whose prosperity and productivity are dependent on availability of water, need the watershed secured. They can forget about rice production if there is no water. A citizen of Manila or of other Philippine cities will have concerns about water supply for drinking and domestic needs. There are 12 million people in Manila, and the environment has a lot to do with their daily lives. People closest to the environment are often the indigenous peoples, who are at risk because of the power dynamics in mainstream Philippine society. Illegal logging and mining are putting pressure on the environment and these carry particular risks. The environment affects everybody who is dependent on it for their livelihood and on the water supply.”

Alistair is a Scotsman and sought to compare the population changes between Scotland and the Philippines and where these changes affected the environment and the resources. “I find it very hard to imagine what the Philippines was like 100 years ago when 70% was covered by forest. Two hundred years ago, there were more Scots than Filipinos; 1.8 million Scots as against 1.6 million Filipinos. Today there are 80 million Filipinos and six million Scots. Obviously, population is putting pressure on the environment, but this is not the source of change. Most of the damage to Philippine environment is done by illegal, uneconomic, exploitative utilization of natural resources. And maybe climate change will wield the greatest damage. With 7,000 islands, the risk of natural climatic phenomena, such as landslides, is very high. The Philippines is at great risk from global warming - the impact of rainfall increases and decreases and the related disasters will affect people’s lives and livelihoods. However, I do detect increasing attention being given to climate change.”

The question of human rights was also raised. It was during Alistair’s term that the EU initiated very direct attention-focusing initiatives on the spate of unsolved killings and enforced disappearances of activists in the country in recent years. Alistair explained the distinctions that need to be made when relating the category of human rights to the complexities of pressures brought about by poverty, resource competition and access, and the indigenous peoples’ situation.

“Human rights have a much clearer basis within the existing political and civil definitions than do economic and social rights. In the environmental area, there are many instances where the attraction of more extraction leads to direct violation of political and social rights, and where ‘resource capture’ is enforced, but breaches human rights.”

“Economic and social rights need to be concerned about impact and definitions have been stretched to accommodate these distinctions. It is clear that any opportunity of better addressing the governance of the resources on which these communities are depending is also dependent on the ability of local community, or indigenous communities, or lowland people living in marginal areas. But they need the proper governance to reconcile interests with the broader interest of the whole.”

“Mining in the country has a very bad history in relation to its operations and their unsustainability, leading to mining being seen as evil. In 2002-2003, the EU developed the policy in favor of mining, if sustainable. There is a need to separate logical reason to support that mining can be carried out.” In the Philippines, it appears that mining is politically unable to do so and is seemingly not capable of being carried out sustainably. Its track record is a bad one, and is not a deviation from the past. Alistair then says that what we “need is another form of engagement and enforcement.”



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With the EU’s priority on poverty in the Philippines, there is a focus now on basic social services, especially health, and in supporting the Department of Health and local governments. Previously, the EU’s rural development portfolio, with its end focus on poverty, provided assistance to projects directly related to forest protection and strengthening protected areas.

The share of EU funds going to environment is about 15-20%, and that also maintains the poverty alleviation programs. The environmental concern is substantial, around 61 million euros for four years under the bilateral programs. With the thematic programs to support projects in the ASEAN, there is an additional five to six million euros available.

“The Philippines, for better or for worse, is middle income,” Alistair says. “Statistics puts the country just above middle income and there are many other countries with lesser economic prospects. The EU wants to further develop the poorest countries, even if the progress is going very slowly. The humanitarian assistance to Burma is still there, addressing most concerns such as tuberculosis, malaria, HIV/AIDS. The fraction is smaller in the Philippines because as a lower middle income country, the Philippines is not in a position to benefit from EU funding, but must ensure that funds are used better.”

In responding to where the improvements will be in the Philippines, Alistair says that, “there is tremendous scope for the environment in the Philippines. And the factors contributing to this are: 1) that the Philippines, since 1986, has had a vibrant civil society which continues to be very effective in switching policy positions; and 2) since 1991, when the Local Government Code (LGC) was passed, the opportunity arose for municipalities and provinces to shape development and its evolution. There are few countries in Asia with this scope. The problem is that local potential can also be used for the bad rather than the good.”

When the LGC was adopted, Alistair informs us he was in the country and the “focus was for the provinces to take advantage of the opportunity. There are more municipalities now, which is a very good trend in the evolution of local government. There are two things contributing to

a positive project: the local government involvement and the reduction in the population growth. Opinion polls are saying that where the church is very negative towards government population policy, citizens do not pay too much attention.

Positive elements that are helping the Philippines address issues are the increasing environmental awareness, and also “the trend set during the last mid-term elections in 2007, where personalities took a beating in the midterm elections. For me, this suggests that the prospect for national and local government is improving.”

Alistair shared with us some of his youthful memories in Glasgow that related to the environment and where he saw the impact of change. “When I was 14 or 15, I was growing up in Glasgow, a city dominated by heavy industry. It was a black city. Buildings were black, soot-covered from the coal fires, from the industrial pollution. The air was dark. Then, sometime in 1963, Glasgow introduced a city ordinance that you can burn only smokeless fuel and that from a certain day, the selling of ordinary coal would be illegal. This was introduced in November or December. At age 14, I smelled spring for the first time, the flowers and grass! The air was clear. In later years, the city cleared up, buildings were sandblasted and the colors returned, and went back to whites, pinks, reds, yellows in the city. This made a tremendous difference to health and the quality of life. I found myself walking down the street, sniffing the air and saying to myself, ‘It’s different.’”

There was also an experience in Palawan, when he was starting to work in the area. “An ADB-funded project that would repair roads and irrigation schemes was looking for a suitable counterpart for the fund. This project was part of the Palawan Integrated Area Development then. My colleague pointed out the need to protect the forest in the area to protect the infrastructure and for me, that was a very simple common sense observation that made a modest change to the larger development of Palawan.”

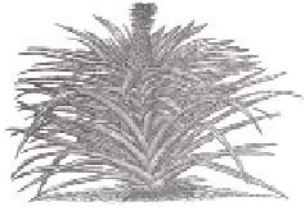


Palawan forest

Alistair also reminds us that the framework for addressing environmental and poverty issues must go beyond our generation. “What makes environmental issues crucial is the question of intergenerational equity. Poverty itself is intergenerational. The way we address problems now and the resources or the equity of the different users must be considered not just in the context of this generation, but of the following generations.”

Alistair considers himself an amateur birdwatcher and is enjoying his visits to the various sites around the country from Candaba Swamp to Liguasan Marshes, as well as being shown around Iwahig wetlands penal farm by detained birdwatchers. Born in Scotland, he is a graduate of Glasgow University and started his professional career as an academic, teaching political economy, economic history, and European Studies at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia and Loughborough University in England. His wife Bridgette and two children have lived in the Philippines for many years, but the children are now grown and have flown the coop.





**RANDOLF DAVID**  
Sociologist, Columnist

## Taking responsibility for the realm of the public

Professor Randolph “Randy” David cuts a public figure as a professor of sociology at the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City. He writes a weekly opinion column called *Public Lives* in one of the national broadsheets, where he shares his thoughts and analysis on Philippine society, as it struggles and responds to the changes in the political and sociological landscapes as a society and a democracy in transition. From 1986 to 1995, he hosted an award-winning public affairs television talk show, *Public Forum*, which tackled socio-political concerns at the national and local levels. He also authored a book titled *Public Lives*.

However, Randy’s thoughts on the Philippine environment, specifically in relation to where he grew up and the context of the landscape, and riverscape in his case, evoke provoking images of local culture and a way of life that continues to change, and through which he now raises questions of responsibility and management.

Randy grew up in Betis, a well-known area in the town of Guagua, Pampanga, for its wood sculptors. The name Betis may have its Spanish origin, but it has been locally incorporated into the myth of a tree (*Madhuca betis*) that once stood so tall that it cast a shadow as far as Mount Arayat. Betis is part of the riverine settlements in this swampy area of Central Luzon where fishponds are the main sources of livelihood.



“My grandfather operated fishponds and related to river systems very intimately. As children, we grew up in this environment. He ran the fishponds for some rich families, and eventually acquired his own. Through his eyes, we, his grandchildren are re-learning how to run fishponds, how to draw water from the rivers that abound our place, and also how you subsequently replace.

“Then came Pinatubo<sup>1</sup> and the river shrank. It is now only a stream and the riverbanks widened. Today, these riverbanks are filled with informal settlers and have become a quaint kind of slum, a situation repeated elsewhere in other parts of the country. Guagua on the mouth of the river is one of the towns that sits on the periphery of a sea of fishponds abutting Manila Bay. “I realized how close the towns were to each other only from the chopper, when I had the opportunity to fly in the wake of the lahar devastation,” Randy recalls.

“My grandfather had an interesting relationship with nature. It was like a secondary religion, and from where he drew his sustenance. What struck me were two images that remain with me to this day, to which I have referred to some lectures in the environment.

“One is how the fishpond owners expanded the boundaries of private properties to the river. They used backhoes in the guise of deepening the river, but once the mud was put in, these created further expansions. The river was shrinking in width, until it became a strip. It’s amazing how the river declined in prominence.”

“My grandfather and father are dead, and we inherited the properties. We leased these to fish growers. This image is where I feel a little bit guilty, as I realize the kind of theft that was happening with a public resource such as a river, was not by informal settlers, but by rich landowners.”

The second image that Randy shares relates to a common practice by fishpond operators in preparing fishponds. “An uncle of mine, who married my father’s only sister, was more successful than my

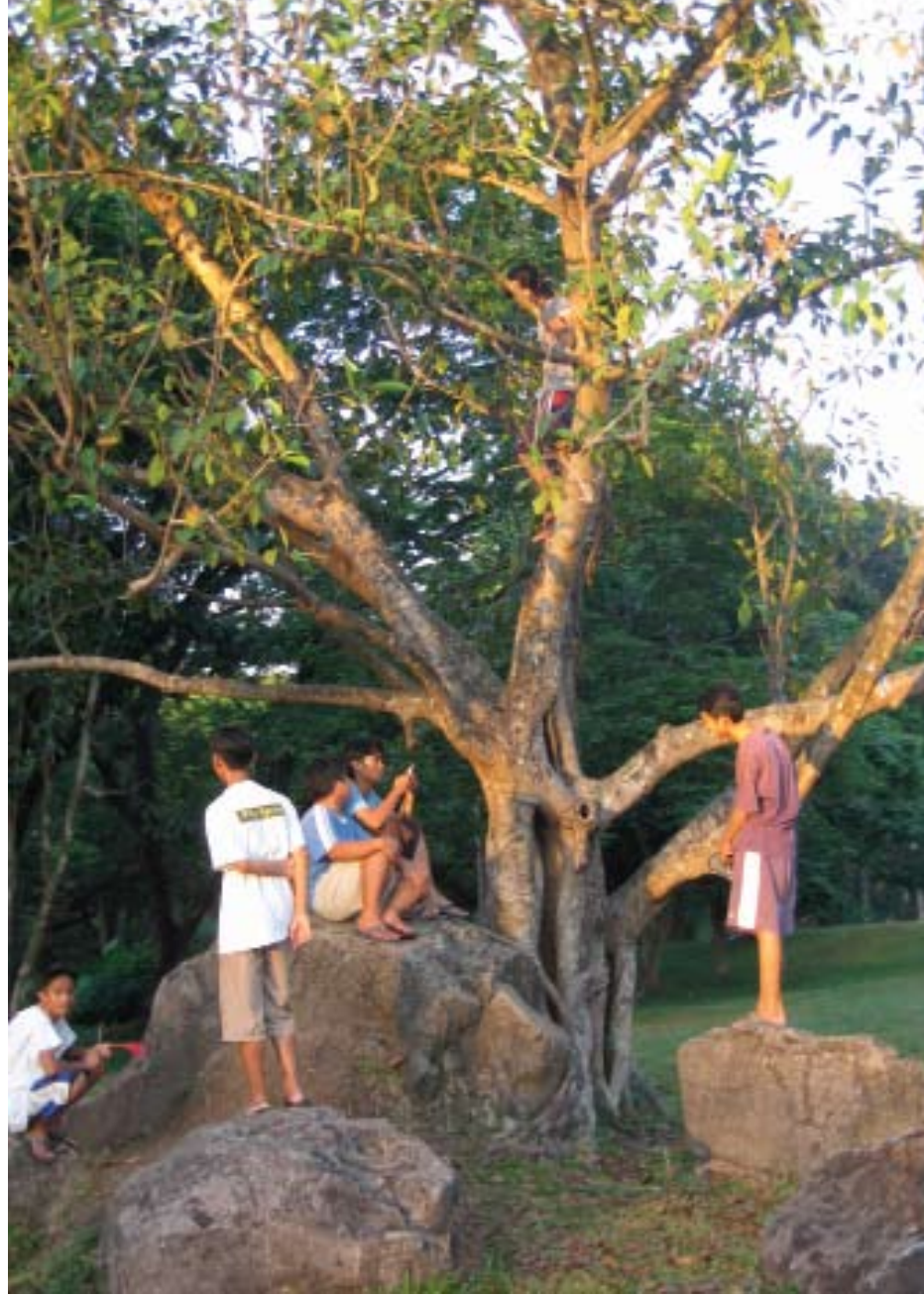
grandfather. I did not realize how injurious the practices were that passed on to the new generation of aquatic resource operators. As the fishpond is prepared, the floor is dried in the sun until it cracks and the drier and harder it becomes, the better. It becomes fertile for growth of *lablab*, a combination of algae and plankton. However, there was also an interest in killing whatever wild fingerlings remained in the mud, usually the native and wild species of mudfish and other river species. My grandfather was content to use the heat of the sun, but the younger generation, like my uncle, did something else and they were very efficient. He flushed the floor with endrine<sup>2</sup>, a highly toxic pesticide that is also used to kill termites. This kills the snails. As endrine floods the floor, water is then let in from the river. The endrine-laced water is then flushed back to the river. This wipes out not only what’s inside the ponds, but also what’s outside in the river. Even diluted, the chemical continues to be lethal. I was observing this in high school, and with our classes in biology, I was beginning to understand then the impact of this practice to the river and other life forms.”

Also, the river lost its appeal for Randy and his family. “After we learned about the flushing of endrine, we never dared to swim in the river again. Relatives dissuaded us. Some fisherfolk also told me how this practice of releasing the endrine solvents killed the native fish and encouraged the survival of aggressive types of fish that can ‘bite people.’ People began to spin a part myth, part legend, to stop this practice.”

“These images stayed with me when I became a sociologist. Then, people did not make a distinction between lives, livelihoods, homes. There is no such word as environment. Your world is your world.”

Randy and his siblings restored their ancestral house in Betis, when this was damaged in the aftermath of the Pinatubo eruption. While Betis was not directly hit by the lahar flows, unlike other towns such as Bacolor, it sat in the resulting floodwaters. Their house is one of the oldest in the town, and instead of tearing it down and building





Campus life, the communal tree of texting

a new one, the David siblings had their house jacked up on pillars and cemented the ground floor. It is easily distinguished from afar with its *nipa*-thatched roof amongst a sea of galvanized iron sheets. Randy observes that his town is “also a small Middle East as many have gone and come back as overseas Filipino workers, or OFWs. This is a town of carpenters and masons, but when they repaired their houses, they made them concrete.”

“We needed to raise our house as the original level of the road was elevated. So we raised the original house and created a second floor. Around the yard in our old house, there were 36 *chico* trees, the sweetest you can find, and other fruit trees such as mango, *dubai*, *makopa*. There was a clump of bamboo behind our house and in the evenings, it was filled with fireflies. All the *chico* trees perished in the flood, they just could not survive six months under water. The bamboo is also gone. The creek behind our house where we used to fish and play is now a dirty waterway and on the other side is a furniture and sash factory that looks like a dumping ground for all sort of junk. We planted some fast-growing mangoes and other plants, but the yard has become very warm compared to the cool garden we had before.”

“There are 13 of us in the family, seven boys and six girls, and we all grew up in this house. Now, nobody lives there, but it has become a venue for us to get together and hold family reunions. I go there some weekends to taste home-cooked meals the way my mother cooked them, and also to bring my granddaughter Julia over to visit. I have a respite at the weekends and for me, this is an aspect of the tradition that you don’t just keep alive, you actually live it.”

When Randy invited us over to their Betis house for lunch with his brother Dante and granddaughter Julia, the brothers shared with us how their family managed mealtimes. “When we have our meals, my mother would be the last one to eat to ensure that there was enough food for all 13 of us. It would usually take one to one and a half hours for a regular meal to start and end and involved the use of four tables. When I and my brothers got married, my mother gave our wives personal



hand-written recipes and instructions of the food she cooked for us.” Randy and Dante are aware that it’s a tough act to follow for their wives.

“My father was a hobbyist, a gardener, who grew hogs to finance our high school education. I remember that at one point, we also had 200 pairs of pigeons, poultry, and geese! We mixed our own feeds. I should have taken up animal husbandry, not sociology,” Randy says with a laugh.

During the rainy season, they would go northwest, to the Candaba swampland, another pooling area for the waters coming from the central lowlands of Luzon, to hunt for birds and big lizards, snipes, and wild ducks. “I am now a birdwatcher, and I realize that birds are more beautiful alive than dead and how many years these birds have been coming to our country.”

Randy’s province is nationally known for its rich cuisine and wildlife is part of the Pampanga cuisine, and “frogs, crickets, locusts, are part of our diet. The diet of the Kapampangan has changed tremendously over the years. My brother and I would spend our summers with our maternal grandparents and go to the park and gather small beetles. We would cook them and put them in a kind of basin, where they are fried just enough to make them crunchy to eat.”

Randy’s other home is in the UP where he has lived on campus for the last 47 years. “I lived in the UP for more years than I have lived in the province. I came in when I was 15 and this has been my home since 1961. After I got married, we settled in the hilly part of the campus, Area 1, which is also the highest portion. When I was an undergraduate student that was the forest area in the UP campus. My wife, children, and I lived there since 1974 and continue to live in the oldest house in the area. There were no fences then, as fencing your house was forbidden. If you don’t make a cut, a barrier between your area and what’s outside your area, everything melds naturally.

“However, as the years passed, I saw how encroachments began to creep in and continue unabated. The university loses hectares of property every year due to these encroachments. Our area is particularly affected because our house is near Balara and Commonwealth Avenue, where there is an entire colony of informal settlers nearby.”

“To secure our house without building a fence, I started with a hedge, but the neighbors’ dogs, chickens, goats came into our yard. So we decided to put in a low-lying chicken wire fence. I didn’t like it. Then, I brought in some bamboo from Bataan and now we have a bamboo fence. There is now a vacant lot outside my area of responsibility, and some youths are claiming the area by using it as a place to drink and even for marijuana and *shabu* sessions,” Randy sadly says. Before this it was part of his extended view and informal responsibility.

Going back to his earlier analysis, Randy reiterates that in the early years, no distinction was made between the environment (outside) and what is inside our homes and yards or areas of immediate activity. “We have made a cut of what is private, but without any notion of the public, only the private. We are in a situation where we have moved from a way of life that’s basically communal. We made a cut of what is private, but did not need the public.”

Randy says that in modern societies there is responsibility for both private and public, but in transitional societies such as ours, “The birth of the private domain does not give birth to a public domain. Everything that lies outside our private area is a dumping ground, such as the rivers, the streets. And even with high environmental awareness, we are only just beginning to see the realm of the public as also our responsibility. And it is not going very fast, I’m afraid, and the losses are huge. Folk wisdom tells us that the moment you make a strict separation in our surrounding between what is home and what may be someone else’s source of livelihood in the environment, then the communal responsibility is gone.”

Randy remembers one of the television documentaries he did that dealt with environmental concerns. There was the case of the piggery farms in Bulacan that filled the rivers and streams with hog manure and infested the surrounding communities with the biggest green flies he has ever seen. Popular response was to put up mosquito nets in their homes and eat their meals inside these nets. One group, in a valiant attempt to protest that was so reminiscent of the peasantry who burned cane fields in previous historical protests, wanted to shoot and massacre the pigs. Randy's group wanted to speak with the owners, but more than half are in Taiwan and could not care less what happens in a far-off community in Bulacan, Philippines.

The movement of people, the new patterns of land ownership, and the differing values that people put on the land are three elements Randy spoke of in understanding the relations of people with the land and its resources. He gets to observe these as he goes birdwatching and motorbiking in the mountains of Bataan.

"In Dinalupihan, Bataan, my mother put up a house for our brother, Ambo, who is a priest and now a bishop. This is also our house when we are out of Betis. Around the house, the secondary growth forests thrive; there are a lot of fruit trees, and many other local species. The place is very shady and the birds are coming back. But I also see the increasing number of people who migrated to the area since 15 years ago, and who are now coming in and taking over the farms. The land invasion by a quadrupled migration population is seen in areas that used to be occupied by the Negritos (IPs) that have been pushed more to the uplands. I don't know how the vegetation will survive in the next 10 years."

"In Central Luzon, you have groups of people from sections of Mindanao moving into the slopes of the mountains, and there is no semblance of continuity. There is a lack of association, of affiliation, as there is so much movement of people. This happens not only in cities, but also in the countryside and at the same pace."

"In Orani, I know of a group who plans to convert an area to its natural habitat as much as they can. The area they want to work on used to be a huge coffee plantation in the 1950s but has since been abandoned. The plan is to develop some sections into leisure farms with many of the local trees. How long this regeneration can occur, I don't know."

"In Central Luzon provinces, there's been a shift in land ownership patterns as a large number of *haciendas* are being cut up into smaller holdings and sold. This is partly due to agrarian reform and partly due to the absentee landowners who moved into the cities. The farming of the land is not important. The pattern now involves wealthy Filipino-Chinese buying up land as a window dressing to their newfound wealth. Thus, while land ownership is being lost in the old rich, it continues to be an aspiration of the new rich. The new owners fence the land, but don't do the land and let it stay idle, probably thinking of themselves as gentlemen farmers."

"Another thing I noticed is that farming has declined in importance. While this can partly be attributed to the government's failure in modernizing farming and as old irrigation systems declined, it is also because the new generation has no taste for farming. It is amazing and sad. Many are just waiting to leave the country. And the reason for this they tell me is that in farming you need capital and you're not even sure if you can profit."

"I bought 1.8 hectares of cogon (*Imperata cylindrica*) land and what I want to do is plant an experimental mango hybrid, the Philippine carabao mangoes with the Indian and Thai varieties. I already bought 35 of these plants. I asked a family to look after the land and not to let the goats and stray animals in. This family planted sweet potato and cassava in between, and borrowed money to plant string beans and had a good crop but no profit. In this they remain basically at the subsistence level, living from season to season, and I don't know if they can make it in trading. Traders work against farmers, not with farmers."



Randy acknowledges that the geography of a place and the sociological dynamics must deal with the present environmental realities. What these dynamics are is “a primary question that needs to be answered. But natural scientists are not talking with the social scientists.” Sociology and geography are not together and therefore people and place are very difficult to imagine. Lahar is a re-formation of the land that demanded reformations and transformations socially. He agrees that there is no connection with the land and if people are removed from the place itself, the farms are not the basis of one’s livelihood, but of business. The relationship with poverty is also crucial.

Randy belongs to a big family and while retaining their ancestral house pulls them together as a family even with their parents gone, it also gives them pride of place. All the younger children are not rooted as Manileños. One of his daughters wants to set up a sculpture school and bring together all the indigenous wood artisans. This use of old houses to bring together families may be another exodus outside the city, but it is not just to escape the pollution. People are seeking to reconnect with the values they grew up with and want these to be shared with the younger generation. And with this new generation, there is an expectation and preparedness for the greater responsibility they will need to take as they respond and take action.

<sup>1</sup> *Mount Pinatubo in the Zambales region of the Philippines erupted on 15 June 1991, considered as the second largest volcanic eruption in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An estimated 10 cubic kilometers of material were released into the atmosphere and large amounts of aerosols into the stratosphere, more than any eruption since that of Krakatoa in 1883. Ten billion tons of magma and 20 million tons of SO<sub>2</sub> along with vast quantities of metals and minerals were ejected into the surface. The eruption devastated Central Luzon and its ecosystems. Around 700 people were killed and thousands evacuated. But many lives were saved as successful predictions of the onset of the climactic eruption led to the evacuation of tens of thousands of people from the surrounding areas. But thousands of houses and other buildings were destroyed as the surrounding areas were severely damaged by pyroclastic flows, ash deposits, and later, lahar caused by rainwater that released earlier volcanic deposits. The effects of the eruption were felt worldwide. Over the following months, the aerosols formed a global layer of sulfuric acid haze. Global temperatures dropped by about 0.5 degrees Celsius and ozone depletion increased substantially, but has since recovered.*

<sup>2</sup> *Endrine is a synthetic form of toxic pesticide belonging to the chemical group organochlorine or OC, as these are derived from chlorine. Other examples in this group are DDT, lindane, methoxychlor, pentachlorophenol, camphechlor, endosulfon, and imidacloprid. The symptoms of OC poisoning are tremors, headache, dermal irritation, respiratory problems, dizziness, nausea, and seizures. OCs may also cause neurological and respiratory illnesses and are implicated in cancer. The OCs are more persistent in nature but are relatively less toxic than the organophosphates or OPs, the other chemical group of toxic pesticides.*

With granddaughter Julia

