

LEADERSHIP AND CONTROL IN A SUMAGUI RIVER BANGON SETTLEMENT

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Among the Sumagui River Bangon of Mindoro, Philippines, the leadership positions are filled by a man and his family. Decisions reached by this power unit are mainly based on economic considerations. They are deeply influenced by outside groups such as settlers, traders, and the interior Bangon who have temporary rice swiddens in the area. These Bangon reside in villages on the upper reaches of the Bongabong Rivers and through various mechanisms often control the decision-making so that the Sumagui settlement functions as their satellite village.

The Bangon settlement near Mabarria on the interior Sumagui River, Mindoro, is a small dispersed village of eight houses with approximately 50 inhabitants. The people represent a family group and their friends who moved there from more interior villages to cultivate the fertile soils of the Sumagui. Most of their dry swidden fields (*kaingin*) are located on low ridges nearby. Rice is cultivated as a cash crop, while sweet potatoes, yams, corn, squash, and beans are the chief subsistence crops. Their yearly horticultural activities are similar to the general cycle of other slash-and-burn cultivators in the Philippines such as the Hanunoo (Conklin 1954) or the Gaddang (Wallace 1967).

The acknowledged leader of the village is Linoom, who with his immediate family constitutes the power unit (Figure 1). Brother Liomnan is the village healer, whose skills as a medicine man are often in demand in Buhid and Bangon villages.¹ Biluay entered the family by marrying Linoom's two sisters. Although Yum-ay is not a blood relative, he was adopted as a boy by Linoom's parents and raised as their

son. Lunaw, a more recent addition and also unrelated by blood, became part of the power structure by buying one of Linoom's wives. These men are all subordinate to Linoom, as are the rest of the villagers, but he listens to and often follows their advice.

Outside of this select group are family friends who have left their more remote villages to plant rice under Linoom's leadership in hopes of gaining cash with which to buy lowland goods. This they did for several reasons. In many interior areas, to give one such reason, the soil is rocky and poor in nutrients. Again, the distance from lowland areas is great, and roads have not been constructed to bring goods to market. There are also strong cultural barriers which inhibit the cultivation of rice in these interior villages. As a consequence, several young men now plant and raise rice in Linoom's village. Some have moved down to the settlement, while others have kept their usual residence, merely cultivating rice on land lent by Linoom. These are the interior Bangon who constitute the major labor force of the area and are linked to Linoom in a symbiotic relationship. He allows them usufruct rights, and they labor for cash or rice in the Sumagui River swiddens.

There are two other groups in the area who occasionally seek Linoom's help. He does not control these groups, economically or politically. A small family group of Manihala Buhid are cultivating lands across the river, about 45 minutes hike from the Sumagui settlement. These people were pushed out of their southern swiddens by lowlanders who confiscated their

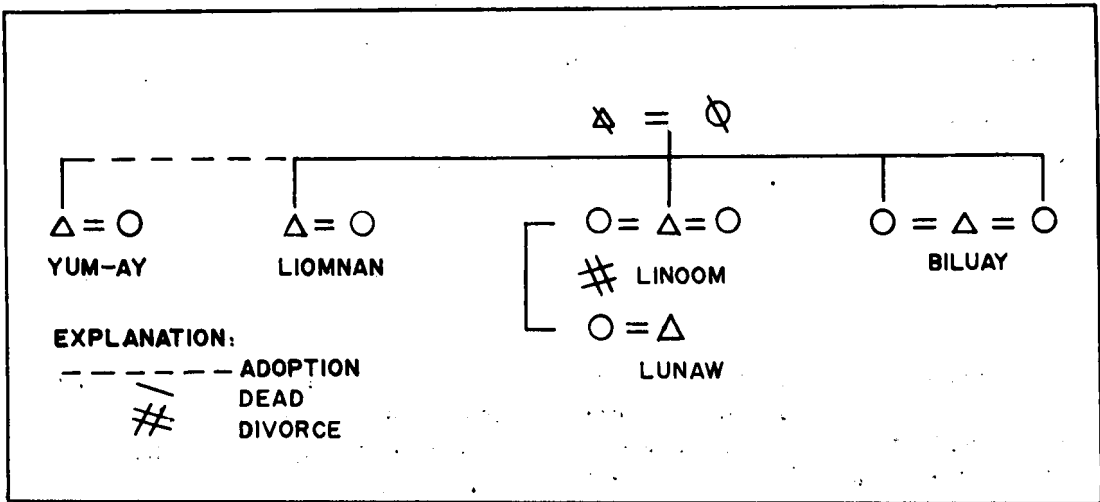


Figure 1. Kinship ties of the power group

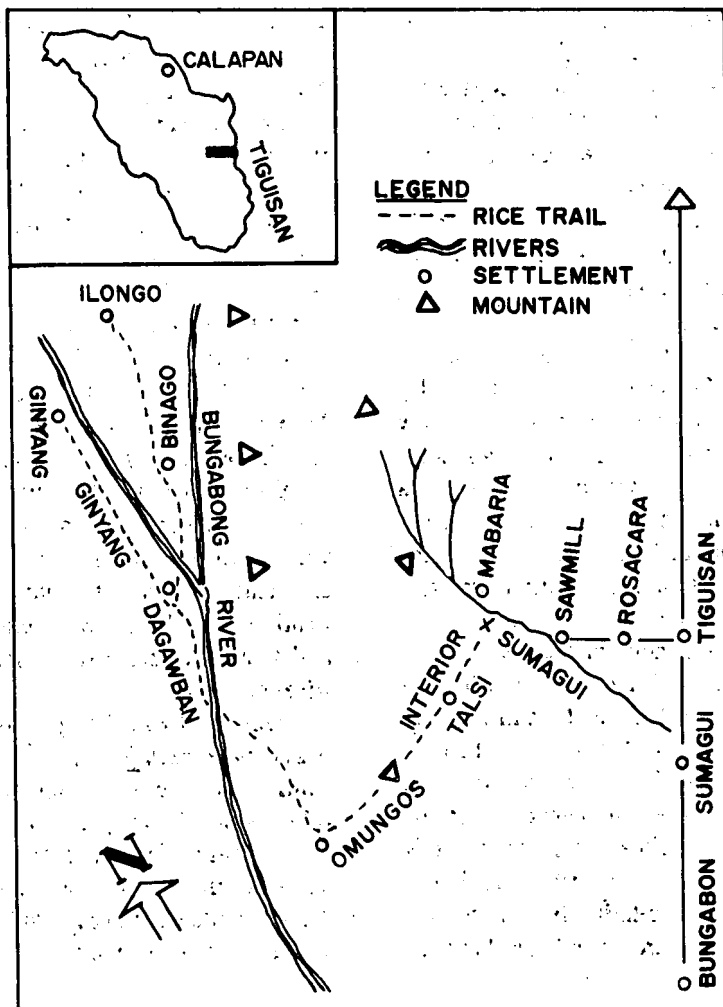


Figure 2. Map of the Sumagui River Bangon Area

property for pasture land. When trouble with lowlanders arose, these Manihala Buhid went to Linoom for help, but little action resulted. They now feel he is concerned only about the problems of his own family. A few Batangan are also in this area, but they have little communication with Linoom.

Linoom's power is a self-made force; he inherited his position but created his power. His leadership is maintained on the basis of wealth. In a settlement where lowland goods are highly valued and the chief means of obtaining these luxuries is through the cultivation of rice as a cash crop, Linoom harvests the most rice. Table 1 shows that he seeded his two kaingin with two cavans of palay (unhusked rice) and harvested 50 cavans.² The closest to him in terms of total output is Liomnan, who harvested 30 cavans. However, Liomnan expended 3-2/5 cavans in seeding his three hectares and also had several pre-harvest problems. The table indicates that Linoom, on the other hand, is minimizing his seed input, but devoting time to cleaning and guarding his land adequately, so that in terms of input-output ratio, he is far ahead of the others. This has been going on for some years, with the result that Linoom has accumulated the signs of wealth: countless chickens, two carabaos, and a number of small

lowland possessions.

Although Linoom harvests the most palay, the key to his power lies in what happens to his palay and the palay of the others. Immediately after the harvest, most of the debts which the Bangon have built up during the year are liquidated by payment of palay to the lowlanders. These debts represent, for the most part, returns for cash borrowed for the hiring of workers to clear, clean, and plant the swidden fields. The interest on these monies is prohibitive. For example, money borrowed against the 1973 harvest was to be prepaid in palay at the rate of one cavan for every 10 pesos. When prices sailed upward during the 1973 rice crisis, the lowlanders made a sizable profit, turning their 10-peso investments into 60-80-peso returns.

Thus, most of the harvest is immediately sent to lowlanders to settle last year's debts. Linoom, however, harvests enough palay to be able to store a large quantity of seed, which he appropriates to others who were forced to liquidate their palay for cash. His power is then reinforced by means of the *pasama* system (from *sama*, Tagalog, "accompany").

The *pasama* system comes into operation after harvest time. Linoom provides the seed and shares the clearing, cleaning, and planting costs with the actual operator of a kaingin. The

Table 1

*Selected information on swiddens owned by members of the power group
(Sumagui River, Mindoro)*

Owner	No. of kaingin	Total area in rice (has.)	Seed palay, used (cavs.) ¹	Preharvest problems	Total harvest (cavans palay)
Linoom	2	2	2	None	50
Yum-ay	1	1-1/2	1-2/5	Wild pigs	20
Liomnan	1	3	3-2/5	Poor clearing, rats, pigs	30
Biluay	1	2-1/4	2	Wild pigs	20
Lunaw	1	1-1/3	1-7/10	Poor soil	15

¹One hectare equals 2.47 acres; one cavan of palay, or unhusked rice, weighs about 44 kilograms or 96.8 pounds.

operator then acts as a foreman, hiring the labor force for the various tasks and supervising their work. If the *kaingin* is small enough, he may do all the work of cultivation assisted only by members of his own family. In this way, he can cut costs considerably. At harvest time, after the reaper's share of one-third or one-fourth has been deducted, the remaining palay is then divided between Linoom and the operator of the *kaingin*. Thus, in 1973, Linoom harvested 50 cavans from his own *kaingin*, but since he had also lent seed and shared costs with six other people — two from his village and four interior Bangon — his total harvest was approximately 70 cavans.

In other words, almost a third of his palay was gained under the *pasama* system. No one else in the village has yet reached this level of wealth, where they have accumulated enough palay to reap the benefit of the *pasama* system. However, Biluay and Yum-ay are approaching that level: this year they did not borrow seed from Linoom or from some Tagalog, but saved and planted their own.

Linoom's power, acquired through economic superiority, was recently given pseudo-governmental approval through the personal efforts of a policeman of the township of Bansud. This official organized and directed the installation of a local governing body controlled by Linoom as the Barrio Capitan and Liomnan, Yum-ay, and Vargas as Councilors. The people in the settlement realized that the election or appointment procedure was irregular, but they have accepted the results as official.

The policeman who managed this move is married to the woman who runs a store in the lowland barrio of Tiguisan. Many of the Bangon are in debt to this corner store, yet the woman-proprietor does not take advantage of them, and her buying prices are generally above the local norms. For example, when the price of palay recently dropped from about P70 to P35 a cavan, she was still purchasing at P50 a cavan and rented a truck to transport the palay to town. This couple is a powerful influence in the settlement, she representing the country store and managing the major flow of goods and cash between the town and the Bangon, he giving

the stamp of quasi-governmental approval to the local power politics and functioning as the law in settling local grievances.

The interior Bangon who work in Linoom's area come mainly from four settlements on the Upper Bongabong Rivers, Dagawban, Binago, Ilongo, and Ginyang (see Figure 2). They are all close-knit family groups controlled by hereditary male leaders, or *fun*, similar to those described by Kikuchi (1972) for the Bayanan Batangan. The four groups consider themselves separate family groupings; however, preliminary research on the kinship ties of each village reveals that the four are all related by intermarriage of distant relatives. Relations between the four are friendly, if reserved. Visits by the young men to each other's villages are infrequent and for specific purposes. These young men also meet one another, for they travel to the Bangon settlement near Mabaria to cultivate nearby lands or till the soil as hired hands in the swiddens of Linoom's group. The "rice trail" from the Sumagui Bangon to the interior Bangon settlements is a well-worn path during harvest, clearing, and planting seasons.³ During these times, a steady flow of palay, cash, or goods returns to the four settlements.

Dagawban, Ilongo, Binago, and Ginyang are all in various stages of involvement in rice production, an involvement which may be summarized in these brief statements.

1. Dagawban is the only settlement which produces rice in its home swiddens, all for local consumption.
2. Some residents of Dagawban, Ginyang, and Binago have rice swiddens in the Talsi and Mabaria areas.
3. Laborers in the rice fields of the Talsi and Sumagui Bangon come from all four interior villages.

Of the four villages, Dagawban is the most involved in the various facets of rice production; providing laborers for Linoom, working extensive *kaingin* on the interior Talsi and Sumagui Rivers, and experimenting on home soil. Ilongo, a large village of perhaps 75 people in 12 houses, is minimally concerned, only sending their young men to work in the rice

fields of others. In contrast to Ilongo, the other three interior villages have supplemental swiddens in the Talsi or Sumagui River areas. Here they come into direct contact with Linoom's authority, since he controls the land in this region. When they slash and burn fields for rice crops, it is done only with his permission. He only allows them usufruct rights, and does not "give" them land as he "gives" it to members of his own group. Linoom also lends the interior Bangon the seed to plant in their kaingin, and under the rules of the *pasama* system, he shares in the harvest of these fields. If he lends them land and seed, does he thereby exercise control over the interior Bangon?

Test case: The eviction of an anthropologist

I began working in the Sumagui River settlement in September 1973, my aim being to establish the base for an ethnobotanical study among the Bangon of the Upper Bongabong River. After I had befriended Linoom, he provided me with guides and I visited many villages, spending a few days each in Dagawban and Binago. The reception was cold, the people obviously afraid and unsure of my intentions. My Sumagui guide kept insisting, however, that familiarity over time would lead to friendship. I decided to come back in late October and stay a month in Ilongo or Binago, collecting plants and cultural data.

On the return trip in October, I acted as my own guide, since my previous companion was sick and unable to carry a load over the hazardous trail. On arriving in Binago, my new assistant and I were refused a night's lodging and instructed to build a lean-to in the nearby forest. In the morning, the men came by our shelter and asked us to leave. We went on to Ginyang, where the people allowed us to live in a cockroach-infested abandoned house, but absolutely refused to cooperate with my project.

One night, the people from Ilongo came from their mountain village across the river, carrying pitch torches to light the way, and demanded that I leave. They said I would not receive any cooperation from anyone along the

river, because the women were afraid of me and my presence made them unable to dig in the sweet-potato fields. Furthermore, the children were so frightened that they cut their legs running away through the forest. Weary from arguing, I decided to spend the rainy season among the friendly Sumagui Bangon, and began collecting plants and vernacular names at the Sumagui River site.

My main informant was Linoom's brother, Liomnan, who was an expert. Asked to identify several hundred specimens, he failed on only six, some of which were introduced into the area by lowlanders. After several days of assistance, however, he refused to cooperate, saying that if he helped me any more, Linoom would have him placed in jail. A talk with Linoom seemed to have solved the problem, but Liomnan still refused. He insisted that even if Linoom gave his approval to the project, the interior Bangon forbade him (Liomnan) to help me. Liomnan explained that if he helped me, the interior Bangon would withdraw from their Talsi and Sumagui swiddens, refuse to work for Linoom, and last, apply spirit pressure on the Sumagui people. In effect, I was evicted from the Sumagui village by a group of people who lived two mountain ranges, a big river, and many kilometers away.

In spite of the fact that Linoom lends land and seed to the interior Bangon, they possess the means to countermand most of his orders, and in cases where they are directly involved, such as the one above, the Bangon clearly dictate the outcome. One of the mechanisms they employ is the threat of withdrawal from their Talsi swiddens. Since Linoom shares in their harvest, any such withdrawal constitutes an economic loss for him.¹ Second, the Bangon can, if they wish, remain in the area but refuse to work in the swiddens of Linoom's family group. Since there is a shortage of adults in the region, the Bangon form a powerful labor force. Their striking would automatically decrease the amount of land cultivated in some swiddens, and thus cause a marked drop in output at harvest time. However, Linoom would lose not only in terms of rice production, but in cash income as well. Lowlanders often contract

Linoom to provide them with workers for several days to clear or clean their land. As a foreman, he receives two pesos for each worker, and since he pays them only ₱1.50 each, he makes a profit of 50 centavos per worker. If the Bangon left the area or refused to work under Linoom, he would lose an easy source of money. This may be highly important to him because he is in the terminal stages of tuberculosis and unable to work himself; he can only direct the efforts of others.

The third mechanism whereby the Bangon influence the Sumagui River people is through the fear of spirit reprisal. The interior Bangon live in constant fear of spirits; if the rules and traditions of their culture are not strictly observed, these transgressions are punished severely. The people believe death will come to those who deviate from the old ways, and punishment will often extend beyond the sinner to include his family and even the whole village. When Linoom was installed as Barrio Capitan, supported by the Bansud policeman, the interior Bangon informed Linoom that some of them would leave their kaingin at the Sumagui River site because they were "afraid of death." The reason for this fear, they said, was because in their tradition, there is no such office as Barrio Capitan, and the recognition of that position constituted a violation of the old ways whereby the old men and the hereditary male leader make the decisions.

I encountered another example of this dread of spirit reaction on one of my trips to Binago. The people there continually talked about a man who had deserted his wife, and whose present whereabouts were unknown. The conversation centered around his wife, his parents, and the chances of his returning. The prevailing opinion was that he would never return. Mate desertion is a serious sin, and the people were afraid for the wife, the parents, and the entire community. Indeed, the atmosphere of the conversation and the aura of the people conveyed an impression of impending doom. This same gripping fear is the most powerful mechanism employed by the villages of the Upper Bonga-bong Rivers to exert pressure and in key situa-

tions control the Sumagui Bangon. Further pressure is applied through economic channels: the threat of withdrawal from Talsi and Sumagui River swiddens (thus denying the Sumagui Bangon a share of the crop) and the threat of a labor strike where the interior Bangon refuse to work for Linoom's group. These are the mechanisms which allow the interior Bangon to virtually control Linoom's decision-making in many situations.

Notes

The author submitted this note to PSR while still engaged in fieldwork in southeast Mindoro. In all, he spent 12 months there (July 1973 to July 1974) supported by a Fulbright award, with additional assistance from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. He received the Ph.D. in anthropology from Washington State University in 1975 and is presently with the Small Tribes Organization of Western Washington (STOWW), a corporation of twenty-three Native American tribes.

1. For clarification of the name problem, see Tweddell's 1970 article. I am using the name Bangon following Conklin (1949). These people are separate from the southern Buhid and the Batangan ("true" Bangon or Taubu-id).

2. I observed most phases of the 1973 rice harvest. However, the figures for this table were furnished by the family of Mr. Bushio Ceyanio, who lives nearby and works year-round with the Bangon.

3. After crossing the Bongabong, the "rice trail" has many alternative routes. The fastest is known only to the interior Bangon, who can travel from Ilongo to the Sumagui River area in one day.

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