

Critique of  
**Thomas Gibson's *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands***

By Mila D. Aguilar  
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*Gibson, Thomas. Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands. London: The Athlone Press, 1986.*

**Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands**, published as Monograph on Social Anthropology No 57 in 1986, was, in its original form, Thomas Gibson's doctoral dissertation submitted to the London School of Economics in 1983. There are only two entries by Thomas Gibson at the UP Main Library, one of these being the above book, the other his doctoral dissertation. In none of the works on anthropological theory cited below is his name mentioned.

The book itself, despite its repetitiveness and generally flaccid structure – following as it does the “development of [the author's] understanding of Buid culture and society” – is deceptively simple. (Gibson 1) Bereft of theoretical bravado, it describes the Buid of Mindoro as if the presumably British author had imbibed the simplicity and humility of his subjects, speaking for them rather than of them. “The underlying intellectual and moral assumptions about the way life is and ought to be,” he admits honestly in the first paragraph of his introduction, “are still not entirely clear to me and, perhaps, never will be.” (Ibid.) The map he draws of the location of the Buids, placed below two Mindoro tribal distribution maps, one “after Conklin (1949a)” and another “after Tweddel (1970),” tries not too obviously to contradict the findings of his predecessors by concentrating only on the Buid area. (Ibid. 232-3)

Behind this simplicity and humility, however, is a discovery that may well have overturned all previous anthropological theories before it. The only problem is, Gibson is either too humble or cowed to say so out loud, or does not realize what kind of a discovery he has made.

The Buids are one of anywhere from seven to eleven tribes (depending on who is to be believed, Conklin or Tweddel) scattered all over the island of Mindoro. Theirs is a genuinely egalitarian society under constant siege from external forces. To cope with the constant siege, they have constructed social and religious mechanisms that have rendered them relatively invulnerable as of 1986 to outside incursions. Since this is all that Gibson is willing to say about Buid society, he masks the fact that his study blasts all that is revered about Levi-Strauss as well as most all previous anthropological theorists, perhaps not so much because of his own brilliance, but because he happened to stumble upon the society that could do so by the very fact of its existence.

That Gibson is not exactly aware of the full import of his discovery can be gleaned from the fact that he does not follow up on a lead given in the historical study of Mindoro Mangyans by Violeta Lopez, which is one of his most cited sources. Lopez mentions the “chain of exploitation... – that is, lowlanders exploited the Mangyans and the lowlanders were in turn exploited by the Spaniards” (28) in the island “from point of contact with Spain in 1570 up to the end of Spanish rule,” (53) and how, “confronted with an overwhelming colonial force that sought to subjugate and turn them into vassals and converts, the people could not but change.” (Ibid.) The main change, Lopez suggests, appears to have been, by “inference” at least from “the sources that were examined in this chapter..., that the Mangyans may have constituted themselves as relatively distinct groups as a result of these pressures from the outside.” (Ibid.)

But we could not expect Gibson to examine Lopez’ proposition in more detail, because he is, at bottom, nothing more than an ethnographer.

### Influences

The tradition of Franz Boas runs deep in Thomas Gibson’s veins. Occasionally, he reaches into his pockets for his field notes, quoting from them assiduously. He spent more time among the Buids than he had planned, he writes, first visiting the area in July 1979, returning in October of the same year, contracting malaria and dysentery in the process, and staying on for two long years after his Pakistani wife Ruhi arrived in July 1980 and “humanized (him) even to the most conservative.” (Gibson 6) What happened to his wife after that we are not told.

But the period of Gibson’s writing is early 80s, after the tumultuous changes of the 60s and 70s that affected even the field of anthropology. (Ortner) He cites Conklin’s work not only favorably, but not without some amount of admiration, even mentioning his visit to the settlement together with Maurice Bloch. A reading of four of Conklin’s very short works on the Hanunóo, especially “Maling, A Hanunóo Girl from the Philippines” and “Hanunóo Color Categories,” definitely show the similarity of Gibson’s approach to Conklin’s: he has already learned to portray the tribe from their viewpoint, not his own, and could therefore imbibe, after two years of staying with them, their culture of humility and simplicity. He even exceeds Conklin in his portrayal, in a way: for in “Betel Chewing Among the Hanunóo” and “Bamboo Literacy on Mindoro,” the latter reverts to traditional anthropology, speaking in the third person objective once again. Moreover, Conklin in none of his studies at least of the Hanunóo gets nowhere near the near-thoroughness of Gibson’s study of the Buid, his (Conklin’s) studies being separate little accounts of various facets of Hanunóo life.

A greater if not equal influence may have been E. E. Evans-Pritchard. In “Social Anthropology: Past and Present,” Evans-Pritchard argues for the integration of history into anthropology, saying, “neglect of the history of institutions prevents the functionalist anthropologist not only from studying diachronic problems but also from testing the very functional constructions to which he attaches most importance, for it is precisely history which provides him with an experimental situation.” (Bohannan & Glazer 416) Moreover, he declares, the fact that the anthropologist’s problems are generally synchronic while the historian’s problems are generally diachronic is a difference of

emphasis in the rather peculiar conditions prevailing and not a real divergence of interest.” (Ibid. 418) That Gibson should be concerned not only with the past history of the Buid, but with their continuing history, looking at them not, as Conklin merely does, at one point in time, shows that Gibson was informed by this view. Besides, we may add that Evans-Pritchard began anthropology at the London School of Economics, where Gibson also took his doctorate.

The possibility of Evans-Pritchard’s great influence on Gibson is further bolstered by Renato Rosaldo’s description of the former’s **The Nuer**, which Gibson uses in a seven-page section of his book: “studied modesty, executed tongue-in-cheek understatement, thus sets the tone of the narrator’s tale.” (Rosaldo 89) Evans-Pritchard, Rosaldo says, makes “the following modest claim for his knowledge of the Nuer: ‘My total residence among the Nuer was thus about a year. I do not consider a year adequate time in which to make a sociological study of a people, especially of a difficult people in adverse circumstances, but serious sickness on both the 1935 and 1936 expeditions closed investigations prematurely.’” This recalls Gibson’s humble introduction, cited earlier.

For that matter, Marcus and Fischer’s description of **The Nuer** fits Gibson’s book as well. Evans-Pritchard, they write,

...Provides dramatic context by describing almost impossible field conditions, and yet shows how the trained ethnographer can nonetheless see into the society and emerge with a powerful structural understanding. By structure, Evans-Pritchard here means an understanding of the relationships between lineages, age sets, ecology, and other elements of social organization. He contrasts this analytic understanding with the haphazard descriptiveness of Malinowski and Margaret Mead. (Marcus & Fisher 56)

But of course, Evans-Pritchard was writing about half a century earlier, and so Gibson, having benefited from the intervening years of attack on traditional ethnography, and the emergence of Ethnoscience, could, without faking it, sound truly humble, even if he may not have achieved Evans-Pritchard’s requirement of a “powerful structural” as well as “analytic understanding.” After all, he did not merely observe the Buid from the flap of his tent, but actually integrated with them, and not only for one year, but two. And so despite his weakness in analysis, he still did his predecessor E-P one better.

But Conklin and Evans-Pritchard would not have been the only influences on Gibson’s dissertation. Among the works he quotes by way of close examples are Michelle and Renato Rosaldo’s on the Ilongots (before 1986, and therefore pre-“Grief and the Headhunter’s Rage”) and Geertz on Bali. Others that he cites in his bibliography are Durkheim and Mauss, Levi-Strauss, Leach, George P. Murdock, Radcliffe-Brown, Marshall Sahlins, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas. He uses the binaries of Levi-Strauss to discuss relationships within Buid society, but he clearly does not agree with the wife exchange principle enunciated by Levi-Strauss, for he correctly reads the Buid principle of equality in marriage relationships. He also evidently disagrees with Radcliffe-Brown’s “necessary conditions for the existence of a society.” (Gibson 61) In fact, all these anthropologists are merely used as background for his description of Buid society, his mind felicitously working the other way around rather than from the influence of known dogma: that is, starting from the facts, and then only after finding parallels in other practical cases, most often, or overall, not even reaching any theoretical conclusion.

The best proof of his extraordinary capability to work from the facts rather than from dogma is his discussion of one of his central themes, sacrifice. Whereas “Evans-Pritchard saw the essence of Nuer sacrifice as the expiation of a sin,” he writes, and “this interpretation was later taken up and generalized by Levi-Strauss, for whom the fundamental principle of sacrifice is substitution,” “Buid ideas concerning the cosmic hierarchy of predator and prey” is “at complete variance” with these theories. “The only mystical beings which desire to take the lives of men,” he quietly insists, “are the predatory spirits, and for them the life of an animal is no substitute.” (Gibson 179)

Such an open-mindedness to the viewpoint of the “native” could only have issued from the possibility that the most current trends of the 60s, 70s and the early 80s had some impact on him: the issue of gender, symbolic and interpretive anthropology, and perhaps even postmodernism, the first two obviously built into his text, the last vaguely informing it (the possibility of being deconstructed being an incentive for genuine humility). It would also not be surprising if he was aware even just through second-hand information (for it was not in his bibliography) about Said’s **Orientalism**, which was published in 1978, one year before he left for Mindoro, and already current at the time of the writing his dissertation – for otherwise the thoroughness of his taking the mind of the “native” as his own, and thereby erasing the term “native” from our own, could not have taken place.

### Weaknesses

Unfortunately, Gibson’s strength – that is, the capacity to proceed from the point of view of the Buid, without imposing anyone’s framework on them, not even his own – is also his weakness.

Like all pure ethnographers in the Boasian tradition, a tradition carried through by the ethnoscientists, he refuses to raise his findings to a higher level of theory beyond contraposing them with the conjectures of Durkheim, Levi-Strauss, and to a lesser degree Mary Douglas, about primitive societies. Sharing, therefore, is contraposed to reciprocity, and companionship to kinship, as equality between the sexes is advanced timidly against Levi-Strauss’ wife exchange, or the virtues of the only differentiation in Buid society, young and old, as against the hierarchies described and understood by well-known Western anthropologists.

And yet, in describing Buid society not only graphically but also faithfully and calmly, he has blasted so many dearly held constructs in the minds of Western anthropologists, including Evans-Pritchard who described a similar culture but could not quite handle it. That Gibson does not say so directly is very Buid-like, and extends Giddens’ structuration theory one layer more: social researchers do not only alter the world they are studying, (Ritzer 393) they too are altered by it.

But Gibson is not only Buid-like. He is also, like all Boasians and ethnoscientists, chary to the etic approach. While he does not hesitate to borrow methodologies, he is too timid to broach theories.

In fact, if he had gone further, he would have been able to posit a rather world-shaking anthropological theory, or rather, at the very least, refined, to a great degree, a very old theory of society and social change.

One road he could have tread was to follow up on Lopez' suggestion of a break-up of Mangyan cultures for the sake of survival. "Until late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century," she writes, "the Mangyans were known as a homogeneous people." (Lopez 47) It was a Ramon Morera Jordana, a Spanish historian and naturalist, who classified them into three ethnic groupings in 1885, on the third century of Spanish rule. Of course, Lopez presents no evidence at all as to how the break-up could have happened. There could have existed distinct ethnic groups from the start, but Spanish chroniclers were too lazy to distinguish them until Jordana came into the picture. That Lopez herself did not deepen this insight through further research could very well be attributed to the same laziness.

But there definitely should be something here. Juan R. Francisco, another source that Gibson cites, in his compilation of articles entitled **The Philippines and India: Essays in Ancient Cultural Relations**, contends, "Cultural elements undergo changes as they get incorporated into a host culture to fit into its accepted patterns...." (128) He was, of course, talking about literary tradition in this particular piece. But his overall theme is that, whatever field of the culture and the arts he came upon, from the archeological artifacts of Beyer to language and literature, all Philippine regional and tribal groups indigenized whatever influences came down upon it. Writing about Indo-Philippine paleography, he states:

...Writing argues further for the view that Philippine culture is *homogeneous* [underscoring mine]. This homogeneity is especially significant in view of the variety of languages using the different systems. I stated earlier in this essay that writing has been widely used in the Islands and that all the writing systems belong to the same paleographic tradition, with similar if not identical paleographic traits. These systems of recording the various languages of the Islands imply, if they do not fully prove, the simplicity and unity of the phonetic systems of Philippine languages with very slight divergencies. These divergencies are due merely to the idiosyncrasies of each language owing perhaps to relative geographic isolation or to the fact that the Philippines is composed of many islands. (Francisco 75-6)

Francisco is not the only scholar to plead the case for Philippine homogeneity. A recent study of Philippine and other Malayo-Polynesian languages reveals, according to Dr. Ricardo Nolasco of the U.P. Department of Linguistics, first, a higher level of development among Philippine languages in terms of more complexity in morphology and other linguistic norms, and second, a definite homogeneity among all Philippine languages despite the distinctiveness of each.

Once related to Lopez' suggested implication, Francisco's contention leads us to a historical situation that may confound both anthropologists and sociologists alike: aggrupations of people strewn over more than 1,700 islands, living in different cultures but united nonetheless by an astounding homogeneity in language, literature, writing systems, and beliefs.

How could this have happened? Zeus Salazar, verbally quoted by Fe Mangahas, may have the answer: there are indications that the inhabitants of the Philippine islands come from a culture much older than most of its neighbors, and even older than we have been conditioned to think, one of these being the proliferation of terms for the *babaylan*, which other countries in Southeast Asia do not have as many of.

This is where Gibson's study fits in. The Buids, with their social constructs of sharing, companionship, equality, and consensus democracy may represent a survival of the oldest form of Philippine society, capable of surviving this long because they have been around even longer. While other barangays around them have had to adapt to external pressures, they have been able to maintain their values because they were fortunately situated in the more interior parts of an island small enough not to be accorded too many invaders and large enough to accommodate enough hiding places for them.

All this, of course, should take a lot more working out, and Gibson's dissertation, concentrating as it does on being ethnography, may not have been the correct venue for such.

### Theories

However, if Gibson's theoretical framework were, though within the bounds of anthropology, broader than Ethnoscience, his book would still have been ethnography, yet made a difference.

Totally ignored in Gibson's worldview is the Marxist theory of social stages. Yet his ethnography of the Buids verifies the Marxist theory of social stages.

Engels, in **The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State**, argued the existence of "a primitive stage when unrestricted sexual relations prevailed within the tribe, every woman belonging equally to every man and every man to every woman." (35) And farther:

Mutual toleration among the adult males, freedom from jealousy, was the first condition for the formation of those larger, permanent groups in which alone animals could become human. And what, in fact, do we find to be the oldest and most primitive form of family whose historical existence we can indisputably prove and which in or two parts of the world we can still study today? Group marriage, the form in which whole groups of men and whole groups of women mutually possess one another, and leaves little room for jealousy.

What, then, does unregulated sexual relations really mean? It means that the prohibitive barriers which are or have been in force did not prevail. We have already seen the barrier of jealousy go down. If there is one thing certain, it is that the feeling of jealousy develops relatively late. The same is true of the conception of incest. Not only were brother and sister originally man and wife, sexual intercourse between parents and children is still permitted among many peoples today. xxx *...It does not necessarily follow from this that a higgledly-piddledly mixed mating was daily in practice. Separate pairing for a limited period was by no means excluded, just as in the cases of group marriages today the majority of relationships are of this character.* [Underscoring mine]

Does this not fully describe the Buid situation Gibson portrays in his book? Yet he makes no mention at all of it, as if the theory did not exist. This could be the result either of the anti-communist syndrome in anthropology, which only in the past few years seems to have been lifted in Europe and the United States, or the simple emic stance of Ethnoscience. I would, however, suspect the former more than the latter, for despite his adherence to Ethnoscience, Gibson is not beyond borrowing methodologies from structuralism and symbolic/interpretive anthropology.

In truth, the Buid tribe is a perfect illustration of a primitive communal society slowly, very slowly, adapting to diffusion from external sources. It is only just starting to adopt pairing marriage, not so much from an internal mechanism of growth, but because of an indigenous agency/actor named Yaum, who brought the idea over from neighboring Christian influences, and is now using it to try to preserve and maintain his deep ancestral roots.

Most of those who try to study Marxism are put off by its so-called determinism. Because Engels outlined the development of societies as proceeding from a primitive communal stage to slavery to feudalism to capitalism to socialism and then communism, the slightest deviation from the model was thought to be an argument against it. Marxism itself, however, contains the antidote to its own perceived determinism. Materialism is supposed to be dialectical; that is, the mechanism for change is contained within the thing itself, not in any dogma outside of it. It can happen, therefore, that some societies develop in the manner outlined by Engels, while in others, stages are jumped for the simple reason that the internal mechanisms may have been weaker than in others, and those more developed also more freely encroach on them, diffusing their own developments upon them. As Marx said, "All things change except change itself." That this change goes through generally foreseeable routes does not mean that it cannot branch off at some point and establish its own channels towards the same general direction.

If Gibson had applied the Marxist method of analysis, he would have been able to explain a lot more about Buid behavior and society than he was able to do. One of these is a question he himself never gets to ask: Why is it that, if Buid society is egalitarian and non-sexist, their "mediums" – and here note that Gibson has no name for them – are all male? The answer may immediately be in Salazar's study of the *babaylan*:

Ang pangatlong kinasapitan ng tradisyong taglay ng babaylan ay ang pagpapatuloy ng kanyang kaalaman, dahil sa ang kinabibilangang grupo ay nananatiling Malaya. Maraming lipunan at grupong etniko sa Pilipinas ay nanatiling Pilipino; iyong tinatawag natin ngayong mga "tribu" o "cultural communities (pamayanang pangkalinangan). Sila ay nanatiling Pilipino at ang papel ng babaylan ay naroon pa rin sa karamihan sa lipinang ito, maliban sa ilang mga kagaya ng taga-Kordilyera na napakalapit ang kontak sa mga Kristiyanong lugar. Iyong mga lugar sa Kordilyera – Ifugao halimbawa – ay napakalapit sa mga pari sa Kailokanuhan, kaya magkakakaroon ng maraming babaylang lalaki. Parang stimulus diffusion ang nangyari, dahil lalaki ang mga paring Katoliko.

For the great majority of babaylans before the Spaniards came, according to Salazar, Guerrero and Mangahas, were women. Mangahas, in a parenthetical remark to one paper, says that the babaylan "could be male or homosexual but was predominantly female." (155) Guerrero, in support of this claim, writes:

Father Diego de Aduarte, in discussing the state of religion in the Philippine colony, points out that the greater enemy were the female priestesses rather than the priests. In 1685, when the Dominicans apprehended known and suspected babaylan in the town of Bolinao, in the province of Zambales[,] and confiscated their instruments as tools of worship of the "devil," thirty-five were women and only eleven were men. While nearly all the married women engaged in the worship of an *anito* (or ancestor), it was the old women (*viejas*) who functioned as teachers to the other *aniteras*.

According to Fray Agustin Maria de Castro, O.S.A., the office of the female priestesses was a noble one, and was usually inherited by first-born women.

Usaban más de sacerdotizas o aniteras que de sacerdotes, aunque estos también tenían algunos, gente vil y con mucha razón, desestimada, por vivir feísimamente. En estas aniteras o hechiceras entraba el demonio y daba por ellas sus respuestas, y por medio de estas y de aquellos hacían sus supersticiones y sacrificios para aplacar a sus anitos. (Merino, 1954, p. 211)

But “si algun hombre hacía este oficio (por ser de mucho interés) se vestía de vestidos y efectos de mujer.” It is evident from these remarks that the male priests could have access to the spiritual world and play a role in the realm of ritual only by first becoming women. (Guerrero 167-68)

In fact, Mangahas adds:

Philippine myths can also help explain the relatively high status of the babaylan in 16<sup>th</sup> century Philippine society. Our myths basically conceive of the creation of the first man and first woman as coming from a bamboo pole or hatched at the same time from two separate eggs. This implies that man and woman come from the same source and are co-equal in substance and origin. The word *bathala*, itself, provides other clues. The first syllable *ba* comes from the female word *babae* and the third syllable *la* from the male term *lalake*. Together with *tha* which means light/life, their union signifies cooperation of equals to produce life/light. Thus, between man and woman, there is mutual union, not subordination. (Mangahas 159-60)

The possible overstretching of the meaning of the word *bathala* notwithstanding, Mangahas, as well as Guerrero and Salazar, uphold the findings of Gibson regarding equality between the sexes in an early Philippine society like the Buid. As to why and how Gibson’s “mediums” became all male, and Spanish-period *babaylan* predominantly male, can be explained only through a Marxist framework, for Salazar’s immediate profference of “stimulus diffusion” as a reason may be superficial.

The key to the answer can be found in Gibson’s own description of the Buid economy:

The Buid practice what Conklin terms an integral system of shifting cultivation. By this he means that it does not form an adjunct to permanent field agriculture and that it is the only form of agriculture they are ever known to have practiced. Further, the Buid have achieved a more or less stable equilibrium with their natural environment, and do not regularly pioneer new areas of virgin forest, unlike the Iban, for example. (Gibson 33-4)

And farther on:

Among the Buid, by far the largest amount of economic cooperation occurs between husband and wife, who, while belonging to the same household, maintain separate swiddens. ...People can and do perform tasks normally assigned to members of the opposite sex. The work normally assigned to women is of the continuous, repetitive sort such as weeding, harvesting root crops and carrying moderate loads. Men tend to perform heavy, discontinuous work such as clearing thick underbrush, felling trees and building houses. Fetching water and firewood, cooking, feeding the animals and caring for children are all tasks shared equally by men and women. I have never known a Buid woman to hunt, but hunting is carried out more for the protection of crops than for its contribution to the diet, and no great prestige attaches to the successful hunter. There is

no question of men being held responsible for the production of highly valued foods, and consequently receiving an exaggerated recognition of their economic contribution as among most hunter-gatherer groups, or even such hunter-cultivators as the Ilongot and Ndembu. Among the Buid it is domesticated animals which are of social and ritual importance. Their production and ownership are not sex linked. (Gibson 40)

Economically, then, the Buid constitute a crop producing and vegetable eating, rather than a hunting-gathering, society. Combined with the fact that they are only on the threshold of pairing marriage, these circumstances make for a culture of equality between the sexes. As Engels said, pairing marriage meant “the overthrow of mother right” and consequently, “the world historical defeat of the female sex.” (65) What he was not able to account for was the existence of societies such as those that grew in the Philippines, where there was no such thing as “the domestication of animals and the breeding of herds [developing] a hitherto unsuspected source of wealth and [creating entirely new social relations.” (61) For in most societies in the Philippines, as with the Buid, food came from horticulture, and later agriculture, rather than animal husbandry. This, combined with the fact that the products of hunting and gathering were mainly used for ritual purposes, gave no particular reason for society to worship male strength, and therefore produced the equality that Gibson so perceptively gleaned from the Buid. That Michelle Rosaldo did not fully see this in the Ilongots, where hunting and gathering came side by side with horticulture rather than superseded it, could also be attributed to her conditioned blindness to the Marxist explanation of social stages.

In fact, the continuing matricentrism of Philippine society, despite more than three centuries of feudal imposition and a century of capitalist intrusion, and the natural as well as infused development of pairing marriage besides, could be explained by the fact that Philippine society all throughout, having become hunting-gathering only in a few areas and even there only partly, has since the beginning been horticultural, making possible the utilization of male and female labor alike in the process both of production and reproduction. Traditional anthropological binary categories of matrilineality/patrilineality, patrilocal/matrilocal, and other sex-divisive classifications, always seems out of place when applied to the Philippine situation, because the original condition was equality, over which an artificial patriarchalism was forcibly imposed. The response of agency to the forced patriarchal structure was the constant, everyday plea to motherhood, the structure having been imposed even on the men, who were and are neither historically, socially or economically prepared for the burden of patriarchy, never having passed through the hunter-gatherer, nor for that matter slave-owning, or industrial worker, stage, where stupendous male brawn could have proved its worth; feudal lord, yes, but to use the Tagalog idiom, only in the sense of *pyudal-pyudalan* (playing feudal) – for only in a few areas of Luzon was feudalism in the sense of the ownership of large tracts of land fully developed during the Spanish times, and even there no fiefdoms in the European sense were established.

The lack of a Marxist framework is also the reason behind Gibson’s conclusion that “sharing as practiced by the Buid has a fundamentally political, and not economic, significance.” (217) He forgets that in his description of the Buid environment and economy, he says that aside from practicing “an integral system of shifting cultivation,” (33) “external trade has always played an essential role” in it. (49) Thus,

As Freeman points out, shifting cultivation of the type practiced by the Buid is almost unthinkable without iron tools, which must have been obtained from traders for many

centuries prior to European contact. The northern Buid do not construct the Malay piston-bellow forge in use among the Hanunóo, nor do they weave cloth on back-strap looms. The southern Buid are familiar with both techniques, and must have been one of the main suppliers of wrought-iron blades and cloth to the northern Buid in the past. In addition to iron, the Buid historically obtained salt, pottery and textiles from other highland groups. Salt was obtained from coastal groups such as the Hanunóo in the form of cakes, or simply of bamboo tubes filled with concentrated sea water. Pottery was produced by the southern Buid, who traded it with both the Hanunóo and the northern Buid. In return, the northern Buid traded, and still trade, their basketry, famous throughout the region; and resin, which is found only at higher elevations, and is used for torches.

Equally important for the Buid were certain prestige items such as beads and plates from China, and brass gongs and bells from Mindanao. These were brought in by Muslim traders from the south, who were stopping at the coastal market towns as late as 1940. All these items play an important role in Buid ritual life, and glass beads had an additional function as a medium of exchange. Beads are now obtained from Christian storekeepers in the coastal towns.... Most are imported from Taiwan. They still play an important role in divorce settlements, but they have now been largely replaced by cash as a medium of exchange. (Gibson 49, attributions cut)

Moreover, “maize has now almost entirely replaced rice as the grain crop planted in the first year of the swidden cycle.” (Ibid.) And this is because maize has become a major trade product with the lowland Christians.

In other words, Gibson’s own research and ethnography disprove his conclusion that “sharing as practiced by the Buid has a fundamentally political, and not economic, significance.” In fact, the roots of Buid sharing, and its transformations through time, as well as its repercussions on their concept and practice of animal sacrifice and religion, are buried deep within a very strong economic foundation. And this is that, through the centuries – even before the coming of the Spaniards more than four centuries ago – they have had to deal in all manner of external trade, exchanging goods with all manner of peoples, from the Chinese to the Malays to the Muslims to the Spaniards to the Filipino Christians, aside from the cultivation of their swiddens. They have always been and still are self-sufficient in terms of food, therefore accounting for their strength in resisting basic changes to their system of sharing within the community and companionship with their spirit allies up to at least 1980 or 1981, the time of Gibson’s observation. But for certain appurtenances in life outside of their food, including in fact the procurement of iron tools essential to the cultivation of that food, they have also always had to rely on external trade, and relationships with peoples outside of their immediate environment; for this reason, therefore, they have established relations with outsiders not within their system of sharing, but similar to their relations with the *andagaw*, who “desire the lives of neither humans nor of their animals,” but “offer their own animals to men in order to create a social bond” (Gibson 179) and possibly lure the innocent Buid into a debt relationship. (Ibid 197) And since the source of their food, the shifting land, has especially since the time of Spanish colonialism been subject to the depredations of greed and power, they have had to shield themselves by strengthening their mechanisms of *tultulan*, even to the extent of adapting the modern *miting*, in effect assimilating the vitality of the swinging pig “in order to drive off the predatory spirits.” (Ibid. 179)

The three types of economic relationships that the Buid have had to conduct for centuries, in fact, correspond to the three levels of socio-political relationships they have dealt with

in the same period, resulting in the three kinds of animal sacrifice that Gibson observed. To wit:

	Internal to Buid society	Relationships with traders	Relationships with exploiters
Religious beliefs	Companionship with spirit allies	<i>Andagaw</i> : possibility of deceit	Ghosts and predatory spirits
Socio-political mechanisms	S h a r i n g C o m p a n i o n s h i p T u l t u l a n M i t i n g	(Not described by Gibson, but this is where reciprocity may apply, practiced with not a little amount of caution)	Barriers (the fence built by Agaw) Disdain (as shown to Christians begging for meat)
Economic base	Shifting cultivation for food, for a long time for self-sufficiency, but now, re maize, also for trade	Trade with other peoples	Constant threat of exploitation by external forces

That the socio-political mechanisms with regard to their relations with traders and potential exploiters were not fully worked out by Gibson further shows the weakness of his plea for the political rather than economic significance of the Buid practice of sharing.

To round out this part of the critique, the answer to why the Buid mediums encountered by Gibson were all male lies in the Buid's present economic base. Having to trade with other peoples for much longer than four centuries and, moreover and more importantly, faced with the constant threat of exploitation and depredation by external forces for the last four, the gentle culture of shifting cultivation and horticulture has already had to give way to at least one symbol of male strength: the brawn of the male medium. The non-warrior society must be able to fight both masked and open potential aggressors with at least the warriors of religion. And since the aggressor societies are obviously patriarchal, as dealings with them would show, the answer to their incursions must also issue from male voices. I submit, again, that if Gibson had used a Marxist framework, he would have gleaned all these and thereby shown the significance of his study, instead of allowing it to gather dust, recognized only by Filipinos who could discern in it the trunk leading to their roots.

### Reflexions

At this point I must, like the postmodern anthropologists of the 80s, shift from the third to the first person, in order to more trenchantly convey my concerns regarding this book. First, let me explain my concerns; second, let me explain how they came to be my concerns.

My first concern is the dialectic between base and superstructure; the second is, the dialectic between agency and structure.

With regard to the first, I believe that Western objections to the base-superstructure idea lies, aside from its deep-seated but largely unfounded anticommunist syndrome, in the incorrect perception of its non-malleability. That is, the misconception is that the relationship is one way: the base dictates, the superstructure merely follows. This misconception is complicated by the fact that, in anthropology as in the arts and letters, culture is given primacy, while the superstructure is perceived to disregard culture if not relegate it to politics.

Such fears would have been allayed had still another fear not arisen on top of it; that is, the even more intense fear of Maoism. But it was Mao who proffered the dialectic that though “social being determines consciousness,” consciousness, on the other hand, “can become a material force.” This is another way of saying that, while economics constitutes the base, and therefore foundation of all social, political and cultural structures, the superstructure can at some point eat into the base, eventually eroding it. After all, isn’t this the point of revolution, which Marxism espouses?

The fear is lifted somewhat with the agency-structure formulation of the practice and structuration theorists, which include Giddens, Bourdieu and Habermas, and was presaged by Ortner. Giddens, despite his having been eventually co-opted by Tony Blair of Britain’s Labour Party, to my mind offers the most “progressive” theory, emphasizing as he does the primacy of agency over structure, though results may not turn out as intended. However, the agency-structure formulation even in Giddens’ structuration theory cannot account for the refinements of social change, which only Marxism, I believe, does with its recognition of the role of new instruments of production in spurring changes in old relations of production. One reason why the intentions of Giddens’ agency are most always not achieved is that his agency is “actor” rather than “author,” role-playing rather than fulfilling the mandate of history. The result would naturally be, again to use a Tagalog idiom, “*suntok sa buwan*,” flailing at the moon. In recognizing that even the forces of production cannot change history unless the instruments of production that could spur the reversal of their relations within the process of production have arisen, Marxism minimizes the possibility of so many “*suntok sa buwan*” and therefore the consequent disillusionment over agency itself, as well as its being overwhelmed by structure as are Western scholars without exception, including Giddens.

The truth is that the primordial fear of the West with regards to Marxism is its advocacy of bloody revolutions, not its so-called determinism. However, as recent history has shown, not all bloody revolutions succeed, and even bloody revolutions which succeeded in the past have not necessarily toppled the present capitalist order worldwide, or led immediately and unequivocally to the formation of communist societies. They were not even successful in installing full socialisms. So why worry?

But now, how are these concerns connected with Gibson’s book? They are not. They are connected, rather, with the Buid authors of their own history, at the time of Gibson’s writing led by such personages as Yaum and Agaw. For it is they who have grasped the winds of change blowing about their land and turned these into a material force using the instruments of production that cannot but transform their societies. Yet they have done so knowing fully well their historical roots, and pushing these roots deeper down their soil even as they grow new leaves. Will they succeed? If John Phelan, in 1959, noticed that, while hispanizing the Philippines, the beliefs the Spaniards spread were being indigenized, how could the Buids not succeed, with all the centuries already in between?

At this point I must introduce myself. I was underground for thirteen years during martial rule, and in prison for another one and a half. I managed to get out of prison only because of the EDSA revolt. After prison I taught at St. Joseph’s College in Quezon City for two years, after which I made video documentaries, and later web sites and, as editor and contributor, coffee table books, for a little more than twelve years.

As a result of my circumstances of the last twenty-nine years, I have been all over the Philippines, from north to south, and have integrated with practically all strata of Philippine society, with varying degrees of depth and shallowness. My specialty area was Mindanao, my underground field of specialization the United Front. Ignorant as I have been of the methodologies of ethnography till now, I have, to a certain extent, conducted my own unrecorded “ethnographies,” if they can be called that, of various Philippine cultural groupings, among them the Visayans of Davao, the lower middle class of the poorest section of Project 3 (by the creek), at least one practically dispossessed prominent landlord family from a town in Batangas, the teachers and students of one hitherto prominent exclusive school in Manila, and Filipino born again Christian groups, not to mention the CPP underground movement.

Throughout these almost thirty years of integration with my people, I have, I think, not ceased to be an actor in, indeed author of, social movements. The underground movement of which I could reasonably count myself as a leader in the 70s and first three years of the 80s, though a failure in terms of the capture of state power, was the main force that led to the eventual toppling of the Marcos dictatorship, and, by sheer strength of the message it brought across the nation in its heyday, can be held responsible for the ever-deepening studies of Philippine history, society and culture currently being conducted by those it moved and influenced in the course of its advocacy. Even when I stepped out of that underground movement I continued to be an advocate of freedom and democracy through my writing, video and other activities, and am confident that along the way I did continue to influence people in my limited capacity.

And here is the main point of this reflexive exercise: Like Yaum and Agaw, like the Buid, like all the rest of my people from what I have learned about them in my integration with them, I refuse to be engulfed, entrapped and overwhelmed by the structures posed over my head by the forces of oppression. I will not even acknowledge Foucault’s fear that these forces of oppression are internalized within me. My consciousness of them is what expunges them from my system, and even if some of their juices remain, they do not dilute my blood enough to incapacitate me. Here is where I, not as myself, but as a Filipino, differ from the Western theorist. We, the nation to whom I belong, regard ourselves as the authors of our fate, no matter how fatalistic they read us to be, and we refuse to be cowed by the structures that overwhelmed Foucault and continue to constrain Giddens, no matter that they regard us as a meek and submissive people. We are not only agency, we are actors; and we are not only actors, we are authors of our many little histories, our many streams that all flow into bigger rivers and finally into one big sea, refusing to be dammed in by all the concrete structures that are mere constructs of the Western mind.

This, I suspect, is what Gibson realized from his study of the Buid but could not thoroughly articulate, being too much under the constraints of anthropological scholarship. But his last two pages give us a glimpse of what he may have wanted to say:

The extreme emphasis on egalitarian values I have been describing among the Buid is intelligible only as part of a larger structural system in which those values have been elaborated in opposition to the hierarchy and coercion practiced by the surrounding lowland societies.

xxx

The historical creativity of the Buid was not extinguished when they finally decided to form large permanent settlements and pay taxes to the state.

xxx

I have no doubt that even if they take on Christian ideology, they will try to make it their own in a manner impossible to predict.

Touché.

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