



The Shaman and the Shameful Headhunting, Cosmology and Bugkalot Masculinity

The Bugkalot is a small Philippine mountain people among whom most men have engaged in 'ngayo', a form of headhunting. The Bugkalot man is said to strive towards autonomy and until recently the ultimate manifestation of this autonomy occurred as the young man cut off the head of another person and tossed it. In this article, besides introducing some of the overall thematics in my ethnographic PhD research, I wish to argue that among the Bugkalot particular ideals derived from traditional headhunting goes together with a certain style of socialization of the person. More specifically, in the attempt to bring forth some perspectives on Bugkalot masculinity, I will follow two interrelated lines of arguments: the first is related to headhunting and the disjointedness of Bugkalot cosmology. From there I will go on to argue that the difficulties that the current generation of adolescent men is facing arise through the continuous association of traditional practices with masculinity.

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Within recent years academics have focused on a particular predicament found among hunter and gatherers around the world: the men continue to be tied to traditional practices and occupations - e.g. hunting, slash-and-burn farming - while the young women move away from these societies to work or to get married. Such trends have been documented among native peoples from South America to Siberia to Southeast Asia. It is part of a tendency that shatters the traditional gender roles and it enters into broader developments that devalue the skills and knowledge that were traditionally tied to the man. This happens in the confrontation with the Christian church, the educational system and a wide array of other institutions under the modern nation state. Though such tendencies have been observed, little focus have been placed on the affects of these changes on the perceptions and conceptualisations of masculinity among indigenous peoples.

Such developments are also encountered among the Bugkalot¹, a small Philippine mountain people of former headhunters, among whom the man is said to strive towards independence, towards becoming the

author and cause of actions. The ultimate act of autonomy occurred as the young man cut off the head of another person and tossed it to the ground. The question one will have to ask is: what happens in this type of society when the man is no longer able to engage in ritual killings? What happens when the man can no longer exercise this ultimate, ritual manifestation of his autonomy?

The Bugkalot managed at large to avoid the process of pacification and colonization that was initiated by the Spaniards and later taken over by the Americans after the Spanish-American war at the end of the 1900th century. For this reason unlike most other indigenous groups in the Northern Philippines (see e.g. Finin 2005:107) there were no significant changes in their territorial and social form of organization until the early 1970s, where the anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo (1980) had the experience that she was witnessing the last phase of an epoch - epitomized by the end of headhunting. Though much has changed within Bugkalot society since her fieldwork, for the most part the Bugkalot in the mountain interior, where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in 2009-2010, still pursue hunting and near-subsistence agriculture focused on rice.

My informants recall a strong heritage of ritual killing, a certain type of headhunting, which was broken - or at least gradually diluted - with the emerging evangelization in the 1960s. These ritual killings are understood to have formed an integral part of society; all social life is to have revolved around the desire of young men to take heads and thus become entitled to wear the insign-

¹ For reasons that go beyond the scope of this article, the Bugkalot changed their name approximately 40 years ago. They were then known as Ilongot, which is also the name most widely used within the anthropological literature and made famous through the anthropological work of Renato Rosaldo (1980) and Michelle Rosaldo (e.g. 1980, 1983). Throughout this article I will use the word Bugkalot.



nia of manhood: the red hornbill earrings. Headhunting, however, continued even after the socio-economic incorporation of the Bugkalot people into the Philippine state economy; many of my informants have taken heads and the most recent headhunting episode that I have been able to document with some certainty was carried out in 1991 by Tó'gap, who is today considered an "elder" and who came to be a close informant of mine. Even though much indicates that ritual beheadings are still taking place every few years, to many Bugkalots today headhunting mainly belongs to the realm of history, myth and storytelling.

In my effort to outline the role of masculinity among the Bugkalot, I will first look into the particular phenomenon of Bugkalot cosmology, which provides some key perspectives on the issue of masculinity and the male autonomy. The Bugkalot have only little shared traditional beliefs as such, that is, no pantheon of spirits or gods, and not even the ancestors are objects of worship, which makes the Bugkalot unique compared to other indigenous groups in the region². By fleshing out their rather disordered, anarchic form of cosmology, I attempt to show how cosmology can be tied to masculinity and, hopefully, provide a preliminary contribution to the debate on the crisis of masculinity in tribal societies.

Chaotic Cosmologies

One of the tasks of the anthropologist is to create cohesion in the large quantities of data that he or she gathers in the field. Thus, most anthropological approaches to indigenous cosmology seek to extract systems of classification and map out the cosmology based on the assumption that a cosmos is necessarily inhabited by gods, spirits and/or ancestors that relate to one another and to the human world in specific ways; it is thereby presupposed that within any given society one will encounter a cultural notion of a certain "order" in the world (Holbraad 2007:209, Herzfeld 2001:194). However, the cosmology I encountered among the Bugkalot appeared so disordered and contradictory that I had a hard time establishing such coherence.

I am not the first anthropologist to have been troubled by such cosmological incoherence and recent attempts have been made to generate less rigid approaches to the study of cosmology. Rane Willerslev (2003) argues that knowledge concerning the spirits among the Siberian Yukaghirs is fragmentary because the spirits are pri-

marily used as practical tools in everyday life. Drawing on Heideggerian phenomenology he claims that the spirits are 'ready-to-hand'; like the carpenter who do not need a detailed knowledge of the way a hammer works when he is using the hammer, the Yukaghir hunter does not need knowledge about a large, holistic, all-encompassing cosmology to seek the aid of spirits in relation to his activities.

Similarly, the Bugkalot do not have detailed knowledge about spirits, and thereby their take on spirits at first seems quite similar to what one finds among the Siberian Yukaghirs. Even though I came to know many individuals who had encountered different spirit-creatures that they called by such names as *be'teng*, *agemmeng*, or *pengit*, these names were applied in a more or less random fashion similar to the way in which one might apply the terms 'ghost', 'spirit' and 'phantom' to refer to the same phenomenon. These spirit-creatures were said to live in the forests or in the river, that is, outside the human domain, and they would rarely make any attempt to communicate with people. Another sort of spirit or spirit-force - known as *ayog* - was said to have a more direct influence on the lives of humans and thus played a more conspicuous part in the Bugkalot cosmology. Yet, people's relations to both the *ayog* and the other spirits were characterized by general disagreement with regard to their attributes. Where did they come from? How did they relate to humans? What powers did they possess? Were they evil or good-natured? The answers to such questions seemed almost completely arbitrary. But one significant aspect of the Bugkalot relationship to spirits make their cosmology different from the Yukaghir cosmology: the Bugkalot do not make use of the spirits to maximize the outcome in relation to e.g. hunting, fishing or farming. Thus, the extensive, detailed knowledge about cosmology is not superfluous due to an indigenous pragmatism. In stead, the place where spirits emerged were in conversations. But cosmology was not just something people would talk about; it was something they would continuously challenge.

Tó'gap's magic grass

During my initial attempts to grasp the different non-human agencies in the Bugkalot cosmology, I was often surprised by the way my informants avoided becoming affiliated with the spirits. One of my friends became openly irritated when I asked him if he had ever sought the help of the spirits. He made it clear that it was only a certain kind of person, an *ayog'en* or shaman, who would make contact with such powers. My friend explained to me that the *ayog'en* gained his or her powers by eating a certain type of magic grass. He told

² The earlier literature on the Bugkalot (see R. Rosaldo 1980) confirms that this should not be seen as a recent turn following the emergence of Christian movements in the area.



me to look up old Tó'gap, who was an *ayog'en* and one of the village Elders.

No-one had previously told me that Tó'gap, whom I had already met on several occasions, was an *ayog'en*; in spite of his high age he was very fond of wearing American-inspired hip-hop clothes - an odd sight in the jungle - and I had not imagined that he should have shamanic powers. Nevertheless, I went to visit Tó'gap the next day with Lando, the local schoolteacher, who often came along and assisted me with translations. While we had coffee, I explained to Tó'gap that I was very curious about the magic grass. What did it do? How did he use it? And could I try it? - Could I become an *ayogen*? He looked at me for a long time without speaking and I became more and more convinced that I had been too direct in my approach. Finally he said: "Listen boy, the truth is that I do not like the thought of you using *ga'ek*". That was what he called the grass - *ga'ek*. "You know, it is the grass of Satan! It is a big thing. It is not like in the old days when we did not yet know about Jesus. Back then we could use the grass..." He continued: "But if it is really your wish, I can bring you with me to the forest. Then you can speak to spirit yourself." He said, that *ga'ek*, the grass, would only have an effect if the spirit of the grass "desired" me; then it would embrace me, defend me, and ensure my success when I went hunting and fishing.

Tó'gap agreed to take Lando and me to the place where we could find the grass, and I was excited by the thought of getting to try this magic remedy. But Lando had doubts. On the way back to his hut he said to me: "I'll have to think! What if I begin to spend all of my time out in the forest? That is what happens to those who use *ga'ek*. The spirit will want you to stay in the forest. What if I'll rather want to spend my life in the forest than with my family? I'll never know if it is *me* who want this or if the spirit is whispering in my ear." During the next few days Lando continued his attempts to persuade me against using *ga'ek*; he repeatedly explained to me that it was too dangerous, that he was afraid that the spirit of the grass would take control of us. And little by little, I started to disregard my hopes of becoming *ayog'en*.

Longelong – the "true" shaman

Months later Lando introduced me to Longelong - another of the Elders in the area, a man said to be of great wisdom. He told us that only a brave person could control the grass. Nevertheless, he said, many men choose to seek the help of the grass, since it gave them good fortune. Longelong seemed offended as I

asked him whether these men, then, should be regarded as *ayog'en*. "No", he said, "an *ayog'en* is very different from the men who are just making use of grass". "Does that mean", I continued, "that the grass has nothing to do with being an *ayog'en*?" He nodded: "Those who use *ga'ek* are very different. They can use *ga'ek* to become more brave or to catch wild pig. But a true *ayog'en*... I do not need to use *ga'ek*, because the power is a part of me, you see? And when the young men come to me before going hunting and I tell them that they will have success, well, then they catch many animals!" I tried to get him to explain, whether the grass should really be understood as a kind of spirit. This he dismissed with a sigh rolling his eyes, clearly indicating that he found this conversation dreary. I tried to explain to Longelong what Tó'gap had previously told me, that the grass whispered to the person who made use of it; if the grass whispered there *had* to be a spirit present! Instead of answering this question Longelong said with a serious look on his face: "Tó'gap does not have this kind of knowledge, my friend. Tó'gap only knows where to find the *ga'ek*. But he is not an *ayog'en*. Does Ekgat know that something bad is about to happen before it happens? No! And then he cannot be an *ayog'en*."

I felt dispirited after this conversation. Up to that time, I had assumed that Tó'gap had provided me with a valid over-all version of how the Bugkalot cosmology was constituted, how the spirit and human world was interconnected. And Tó'gap had gone so far as to offer me the opportunity to position myself locally as an *ayog'en*. Though I had long since abandoned the hope of this, I had spent much time and many pages of field notes mapping out the spirit world as Tó'gap had disclosed it to me. I had seen Tó'gap as an expert who could speak on behalf of the Bugkalot and thereby his account had come to represent *the* Bugkalot cosmology. But now, through Longelong's laconic replies, I had encountered an alternative version; he had made clear that the power of the *ayog'en* was an inherent part of himself. Either you had it or not. In this view, Tó'gap was just an ordinary man who gained certain powers through the help of a magic remedy.

As I started making more inquiries about *ga'ek*, I realized that even though people had different ideas of exactly what it was, most agreed that "magic grass" was something one should avoid if possible. Interestingly, the way they talked about *ga'ek* was similar to the way they would in other contexts talk about alcohol; alcohol was said to make men boisterous and self-confident, but at the same time alcohol, like *ga'ek*, was tied to something inauthentic; Longelong



believed that Tó'gap's deeds and accomplishments should not be ascribed to Tó'gap as a person, but to the spirit that helped him. For this reason, my informants would rarely admit that they used *ga'ek* - or alcohol for that matter.

One way of distancing oneself from *ga'ek* is found in the following example: before a fishing trip, Edwin, a skilled spear fisher, challenged some of the younger men by claiming that they used *ga'ek* to increase their catch. Even though they denied this and even seemed slightly perplexed by Edwin's accusation, Edwin continued: 'Now, If you just stop using *ga'ek* we will see who will catch most fish in the river!' Again the other men protested and claimed that they did not even know where to find *ga'ek*. This did not seem to convince Edwin, who concluded the conversation dramatically by asserting that in his view using *ga'ek* was the same as cheating. He then turned to me and whispered loud enough so everyone could hear: 'One is not a real man, if one does not rely on his own capabilities'. Though it seemed to me as if none of the other men "cheated", Edwin clearly demonstrated his own moral and practical superiority - especially since he indeed did catch as many fish as all of the other men. Edwin made clear that he was an independent person, for whom success only depended on his own, individual proficiency.

Autonomy of a man

Within anthropology there is a long tradition for understanding humans - not least non-westerners - as relational beings; cultures develop through influences from the outside, social groups identify *vis-à-vis* each other and individuals are socialized into the environment in which they live their lives. However, as Martin Sökefeld (1999) has rightfully argued, this anthropological conceptualization of the self primarily pertains to non-westerners, whereas the "western self" is often being defined by the negations of these qualities; it is perceived as egocentric and autonomous. Thus, he argues, where the Western subject is imbued with an *identity*, there has been a widespread tendency to picture the non-western self as a relationally constituted entity.

My Bugkalot informants do not share this notion. They claim that one of the highest values for a man is to become autonomous and fearless. Independence is understood as the male capacity to act without letting oneself be influenced by the surrounding world. Besides being an inherent attribute of the person that "awakens" in puberty, they claim that the man generates himself through a process that involves the accumulation of certain defining experiences and acts,

which all help constituting him as an autonomous entity. Headhunting is understood to have played a significant part in this project. Through cutting off the head of another person without showing signs of fear or remorse a man manifests his independence. In this sense, killing another person might be said to be a radically unsocial act.

Also, this detachment from the world can be enacted through certain immediate practices; since there is a strong connection between the external and the internal character of the person - referred to with the same term, *inkatoon* - one can, for instance, by decorating one's clothings with the color red, the color of bravery, lessen one's fears and insecurity. In a similar way a man can strengthen his independence by "acting" independence. This is especially done through a certain dance, *ta'gem*, in which the warrior exposes his chest while extending his arms out to the sides, one arm slightly towards the front and the other pointing in the opposite direction - as if the former is holding a shield whereas the latter is preparing to strike a terrifying blow with a sword. The legs are bent, the back is lengthened, and the head is raised, alert. Every muscle is tense, and the facial expression is focused, stern, and impervious to the circumstances of the dance - whether it has to do with preparing for a raid or just performing in front of spectators. One should dance in accordance to the steps of the ancestors and at the same time be untouched by the outside world, decisively confined to oneself and one's performance. This, my informants explained to me, was the way a man should live his life.

This appreciation of the autonomous subject - and the subsequent egalitarian power structure that exists to this day - I encountered in numerous conversations with informants. The following is an example of this.

The anthropologist Renato Rosaldo conducted fieldwork among the Bugkalot in the early 1970s with his wife Michelle Rosaldo and I often referred to their accounts and theories in conversations with my informants. At one point, I told a group of Elders one of Renato's anecdotes (in R. Rosaldo 1980:38). His story goes something like this: Renato and one of his male informants were clearing some vegetation and Renato stumbled upon an old bottle hidden in the grass. He asked his companion if this has once been made by Bugkalots. Clearly irritated the companion answered: 'Yeah, it belonged to granddaddy - yeah, granddaddy *turd!*' In his book Rosaldo goes on to state that knowledge and vision among the Bugkalot are tightly interlinked; since he had not *seen* who had left the bottle the informant was unable to come up with a suitable an-



swer and replied in an aggressive way.

Today, forty years later, my informants seemed partly confused and partly amused by that explanation. How, they asked sensibly, could Rosaldo have missed all the spirits? The spirits were invisible to the eyes of man (most of the time) and yet people know they exist. 'What then could have made Renato's helper so angry?', I asked. They responded at once: The young man would have been angered had he been told what to do all day and had he been incessantly overrun with questions. He had felt cornered and reacted through assertive spontaneity - with "passion". I came to agree with my informants. I encountered no distinctive relationship between knowledge and the visual rendering the invisible un-knowable. On the contrary, the invisible seemed to guide many domains of social life. What took place in the confrontation, I will argue in the following, had to do with a particular form of masculinity that relates to certain values about individual autonomy.

Bugkalot men distinguish themselves from women in ways that often made my fieldwork challenging. I stayed with a family in the Kabugkalotan mountain interior and attempted to establish a good rapport with the villagers by behaving in a way that was in accordance with my age and gender. This meant participating in the work in the rice fields, collecting lumber in the forest, fishing in the river, etc. I thereby tried to become part the group of young, unmarried men. However, it was almost impossible for me to get into contact with the young men. They appeared extremely insecure. Where the young women were curious and ready to communicate - even in English - the young men would often go to great length to avoid looking at me when I addressed them. Instead they covered their mouth suppressing an embarrassed laughter or just stared straight ahead with blank eyes. What caused this insecurity, this shamefulness? I asked Maribel, the mother in the family that I lived with, this question. She answered:

[The young men] think they know how to do everything; they *have* to know everything. But they don't and that's the problem, you see? That's why they want to stay out in the forest. They go there because in the forest there's no pressure. But here when someone looks at them it's as if they cannot move!

Maribel explained that the men are supposed to take initiative, to be socially active and to be knowledgeable. The women, on the other hand, are expected to be

passive when it comes to decision-making since they are said to act on emotions and not on *beya* - knowledge. To be considered a man you have to be able to make decisions without being influenced by others. Such requisites seem to place the young men under much pressure and cause a certain negative emotion, which they call *ang-betang*. *Ang'betang* comes from the terms *betáng*, meaning a place far away in the wilderness, and *ébtang*, which means 'to be separated'. The particular emotion was explained to me as having to do with standing outside of the community in a way that you have not chosen yourself, of being vulnerable and exposed, but it was directly translated as "shame". The young man experienced such feeling of shame when he became confronted with his own ignorance or when he was not capable of acting independently. In short, shame arose when there was as a discrepancy between the ideal and the actual.

In the local high school, Bugkalot High, the teachers experienced reluctance from the Bugkalot boys towards attending school. Out of 37 students in Secondary School only 7 were boys. The cultural ideals of male autonomy and the imperative about being "knowledgeable" is difficult to combine with being a student within the modern educational system and this might, somewhat ironically, explain why the women in many cases were the ones who managed to get educated. They did not see the exposure of ignorance or the acceptance of hierarchies as particularly damaging to their sense of selfhood. One of the teachers, a lowland Filipina, who was at a complete loss about the Bugkalot approach to child raising said to me clearly frustrated: "The women here give milk to their babies when they cry. And when the children can crawl they can just go wherever they want. It's as if the parents do not care about them! Even the small children can just leave! And then you'll find the boys hunting birds in the forest instead of going to school..." Though she was clearly exaggerating (I knew several affectionate parents who paid a great deal of attention to their children) her statement echoed a sensation, I had experienced during the initial phase of my fieldwork. The boys *did* seem to spend much less time with both older and younger family members than the girls and encountered little or no encouragement from their parents towards attend school. But what at first appeared to be neglect or indifference on behalf of the parents was perceived as a key element in the nurturing of the child, and the parents I talked to insisted that it was an important way of teaching the children to become independent. Consequently, the boys developed strong bonds within their gender- and age group and spend the main part of their time together



participating in collective tasks such as farming, hunting and logging.

The embarrassment of weddings

From the age of 6-8 the interaction between the genders is kept at a minimum. This separation is reproduced effectively though the social mechanism of awkwardness. Though this awkwardness emerges in numerous contexts on a daily basis, it manifests itself and is rendered intensely visible during one particular occasion: the wedding.

Weddings are large, public events involving visitors by the hundreds from both nearby villages and far-away provinces. However, the Western style wedding has been introduced during the recent decades and is in stark contrast to the traditional ceremony, the *pogon*. The *pogon* still takes place today but its importance is slightly diluted and seems less spectacular compared to modern wedding. The *pogon* is typically carried out a few months before the wedding and is interesting since it does not directly involve the bride and groom in any significant sense. In stead, the focus is on the families who meet and settle old conflicts and discuss such matters as how to organize the wedding, where the couple will live in the future, and how they will be able to support themselves after the marriage. In this situation, the bride and groom are rarely heard and have no influence on the events. They have, so to speak, surrendered their independence and put their future in the hands of their families. Especially the man is thereby placed in an atypical, seemingly shameful situation; if one takes into consideration that we are dealing with a society where the male autonomy is highly valued it is hard to imagine that the man would feel comfortable leaving such important decision-making in the hands of others. However, a different picture emerged, since all the young men I talked to about this event had only good memories about their *pogon*. They talked about the *pogon* as if it made up a social space in which customary values and imperatives were temporarily dissolved. As the man is expected to listen submissively to the words of the Elders, the pressure of masculinity is, so to speak, temporarily being suspended. The pressure is lifted.

A significant difference between the *pogon* and the newly introduced type of wedding is that during the wedding the man has to expose his love for the woman publicly. The kiss, which I personally associate with the cheerful lightness of the American wedding, appear awkward when applied to the Bugkalot context. Instead of defusing an otherwise too ceremonious and solemn atmosphere (which might be how the kiss functions in the American case) among the Bugkalot the kiss is the source of much awkwardness. Because of the

little interaction between the genders in everyday life, the sudden exposure of intimacy seems mind-boggling and intriguing to the spectators (to the couple it is just terrifying). I witnessed several occasions where the man became so mortified with embarrassment after the pastor had announced the groom was expected to kiss the bride that the kiss did not take place in spite of the visitors' encouraging commentary.

There were, however, contexts in which the young men were not shameful. The same men who made my fieldwork difficult by going into great length in their attempts to avoid me during the day, were more than willing to talk to me during drinking sessions. One bottle of liquor (called *eyab*, which also means "seeing") costs less than a dollar. But even though it seems inexpensive, drinking causes a critical cut into family budgets. Since salary workers can make around 3-5 dollars a day from logging, farming, or from transporting vegetables to the lowlands, little is left to the family after alcohol, tobacco and betel nuts have been paid for. Frequently, the drinking sessions, which in some periods took place 3-4 times a week, created conflicts between husbands and wives, and I witnessed several instances where men had to seek refuge among their relatives after having been beaten by their spouse.

Then why do young Bugkalot men drink? In answering this question it is tempting to enter the pitfall of monocausal explanation. However, it did seem worthy of note the extent to which the men would become loud, persistent and even aggressive in ways that contrasted greatly with their more gentle, sober dispositions. I thereby venture to suggest that by turning insecure young men into talkative and extrovert individuals, alcohol acts as an agent that expunges the incongruity between the actual and the ideal; through the support from alcohol the man is made *brave* and regains some of the lost autonomy. However, the autonomy evoked through alcohol is seen as inauthentic. Since the young men through consumption of alcohol behave in ways that they ordinarily will not - e.g. letting themselves become centre of attention through fighting and loud talk - the behavior is said to not represent the "real" person. During the loud drinking sessions, the other villagers would often comment that it was not the person but the alcohol that did these things. The drunk, boisterous men would be criticized for their incapacity to exercise the degree of spirit and self-confidence without the influence of alcohol.

The actual and the ideal

One starts to see the outline of a society where it is difficult for the young men to live up to the cultural



criteria that define them as men. Through my research, I attempt to raise the question if the male shamefulness and crises found among the men could be related to the changes that I am sketching out. The traditional knowledge that is tied to the male sphere of ritual life is becoming increasingly devalued, while the school is an institution that collides with the ideal of male independence. My female informants, however, does not experience the changes in the same way as the men. Today many women are able to find work in the lowland cities and a handful are working abroad. The fact that they learn English in school becomes an immense advantage. For instance, Maribel worked eight years as a nurse in Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia. While she was abroad her husband, Lando, had to take care of their children. The money she sent home was invested in farmland and today Lando and Maribel are among the more well-off in their village.

The current development seem to be part of a self-perpetuating process: the men will get increasingly sidetracked *vis-à-vis* the modern development, and as their land is purchased by immigrant farmers the men will have to make themselves available for temporary employment in the fields or hire themselves out as labourers on the trucks that transport vegetables to the lowland. At the same time the women will continue to marry non-Bugkalots and find work in the cities. The marginalization of the men will intensify with the increasing immigration to the Bugkalot areas from other provinces; the Bugkalot men will become increasingly confronted with their own lack of knowledge when it comes to for instance language-skills and more technical agricultural know-how.

This development following the increased influence of the central government in the rural areas of the Philippines is understood by the Bugkalot to have brought them much good; because of the building of roads and improvement of trails people now have access to hospitals, children's mortality rate is improved, schools are being built, the position of the women has been improved. All my informants - women and men - agreed that as a whole this should be considered as progress. Nevertheless, the men simultaneously experience a loss as the traditional ritual practices became less important.

The cultural profile of many tribal societies is, arguably, defined by a ritual life that especially optimizes the prestige of men. Among the Bugkalot this revolved around headhunting. From a gender perspective it might be considered problematic to classify a society as a 'headhunting society', since only the men participate

in the actual headhunting. Thereby, one reproduces what Bourdieu (2001) has coined "the androcentric unconscious", that is, the widespread assumption that it is the male part of any given society who define its profile. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid the notion of the Bugkalot society as being at least an ex-headhunting society; stories of headhunting continue to play a significant role and many words that originally derived from headhunting practices has now found new meanings. The women, however, did not have a counterpart to headhunting and so have not tied their identity up with this spectacular aspect of tribal life. As a matter of fact, several women told me how dreadful and traumatic it had been in the old days where people risked being killed even in broad daylight by hordes of young men on a raid. This was not the way that the men talked about headhunting. Unlike the women they tend to romanticise it and often claimed that the Bugkalot had lost something of great importance.

Breaking the Rules

In the early 1970s, when the Rosaldos lived among the bugkalot, the larger part of the ritual life of the Bugkalot society still circulated around the desire of the young men to participate in headhunting. After having cut of the head of another person (and tossed the severed head to the ground) the young man earned the right to carry the symbol of manhood - the characteristic red earrings made from the beak of a hornbill. The main part of the Elders has participated actively in these ritual killings. However, the headhunting stopped as a widespread phenomenon in the 1970s - not least because of increasing pressure from the Christian missionaries.

One of the Elders told me about the powerful experience when a headhunting raid had been successfully concluded and he and the other young warriors performed the song *da eleg dan* back in their village. He said: "If you have never killed and you hear *da eleg dan* you will also want to kill. You'll become brave, you understand? And then, when it becomes your turn to sing *da eleg dan*, you will tell the world, that you are not one of those who write with pens and go down to the lowlands to make signatures. No more of that. Because the only thing you want is to take a head..." The elderly man explained that the men in the old days (that is, before people were making "signatures", which some among the Elders saw as a curious, modern phenomenon) would go to great length to avoid becoming classified as *dépyang* - someone who had not yet taken a head and so were not yet included into the world of men. Similarly, today the word *dépyang* is used as a patronizing term about those



who in spite of having the right age are not perceived as men - for instance because of bad behaviour, alcohol abuse, or because of being too economically dependent on their families. The *dépyang* are those who are not invited to the community meetings and if they do show up, their opinions are ignored. In a sense, the *dépyang* found and still finds themselves on the other side of the barrier, which separates the visible from the invisible part of social space. *Dépyang* is clearly a term that is tied to specific values relating to masculinity, though it not only has to do with one's individual characteristics as a man. It also has to do with not standing out, of "sameness".

The anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo (1983) argues that among the Bugkalot there is a close connection between fear of "standing out", the appreciation of the male autonomy, and the egalitarian power structure, which is still maintained within society. She argued, that in a society where all men are concurrently considered autonomous and equal, social hierarchies will be kept at a minimum and this has to do with minimizing conflicts. I found it curious that the society that she had studied - one where all men strive simultaneously towards being autonomous and the same as each other - contained such disagreements (for instance in relation to cosmology as described earlier in this article). One gets the impression that her informants were highly conform and afraid of conflicts, which can seem paradoxical if one takes into consideration that they were supposedly also aggressive headhunters, which is a practice that would obviously cause many conflicts. Nevertheless, I also encountered these ideals regarding egalitarianism and individual autonomy. My informants would tell me that one should strive towards maintaining social balance and avoid speaking if one's words would be cause of quarrel.

Yet, I also encountered a strong, but rarely pronounced, fascination of the person who "goes against the rules", that is, the person who through his actions demonstrates that he does not respect nor recognize the necessity of upholding the egalitarian order. This fascination would become verbalized in stories of headhunting; the elderly headhunters told me on numerous occasions that headhunting had to be a joint venture led by one of the village Elders. By taking the young men in the village on a raid the Elder would pass on his knowledge and thus create continuity between the generations. Thereby, sociality and permanence were emphasised. But the atmosphere seemed to change, the storytelling became more forceful and people listened more intensely, when a narrator mentioned the *mansasadile*. This term refers to a handful

of individuals who went on raids unescorted. While my informants often insisted that headhunting was a collective enterprise, in reality some of the most famous and admired killings were carried out by men who were not given permission to do so and who by-passed the ordinary traditional practice. I witnessed how these elderly men who had disregarded the "rules" were treated with a certain fear and respect; as soon as they entered a hut the young as well as the old would humbly fetch them rice and water. These Elders, the *mansasadile*, gain recognition because they challenged the norms and acted autonomously. But this "autonomous headhunter" is also considered an asocial person, and in some cases these Elders never married but live fairly solitary lives.

Mansasadile is a term referring to the type of headhunting, which, because it represented an alternative to the traditional practice, challenged and threatened to undermine headhunting as an institution. For this reason the term is still used to characterise individuals and specific actions that are dangerous, that create social unbalance and carries the germ of conflict. Therefore, it is not openly endorsed. However, the unspoken fascination with the *mansasadile* - this asocial, anarchic individuality - is the key to understanding the account of the chaotic cosmology with which I started out this article. The reason why it is unspoken seems to be because of the egalitarian power structure, which leaves little room for exceptional individuals. Individuals will both avoid standing out or openly give their support to other men and thereby create the basis for hierarchies and leadership to emerge.

Talking oneself into the world - a conclusion

In the attempt to bring forth some perspectives on Bugkalot masculinity, I have attempted to follow what I hope will appear as two interrelated lines of argument - the one dealing with "chaotic cosmologies" and the other dealing with "masculinity and modernity".

During my encounters with the shamans, Tó'gap and Longelong, along with other "experts", I gradually became aware of the fact that I would never unearth some congealed corpus of esoteric knowledge about spirits or cosmology. The knowledge concerning spirits was too difficult to map out, since apparently all of my informants had their own, subjective version of the spirit world. However, by changing my focus from the *content* of the cosmology to the cultural *context* under which cosmology was being talked about, I started to understand one of the roles of cosmological knowledge within Bugkalot culture. The bugkalot approach to cosmology is, I believe, more than anything based in ideals concerning personhood and sociality. Bugkalot



men are reluctant towards accepting any official versions of a cosmology, since such an acceptance would entail rendering oneself inferior in knowledge to another person. In a society where men seek to maintain a balance between autonomy and *same-ness*, that is, upholding one's individualism while concurrently avoiding to become excluded and cause conflict, the spirit world is a medium through which men can indirectly challenge each other. By talking about spirits the men can indirectly draw attention to themselves as superior to others, knowledgeable, brave and as carriers of certain skills; this happens as stories become challenged and reinterpreted. Thus, no one holds the position as *the* authority on spiritual life. Stories are challenged making any attempt to establish a shared cosmology futile.

It might prove challenging to operate analytically with these incoherent and opposing layers of male selfhood that revolve around 'autonomy' and 'same-ness'. However, appreciating this incoherence, I hope, might be turned to an advantage. In my work with the ethnographic material that I have fleshed out in this article, I will seek to understand how the co-existence of a public discourse on egalitarianism and an ideology about an un-social, anarchic individuality could be the key to gain insights into the disjointedness of the Bugkalot cosmology and to explain how it can exist over time. I thereby venture to suggest that a corpus of shared, cosmological knowledge cannot be generated in an egalitarian society, where individuals through challenging notions of such cosmologies finds a legitimate way of expressing their own superiority.

During my fieldwork it was made clear to me that the young men were in the process of marginalizing themselves from their own community. Through repeated acts of wrongdoing - aggressive behaviour, picking quarrels and making themselves obnoxious - they were gradually increasing their social isolation. The women on the other hand were in a different situation. Because of the male emphasis of the Bugkalot customs, the women have lived in the periphery of the ritual life. This means that today it is easier for the women to adapt to the new conditions. So while the women reaches for all the opportunities that modernity offers, the men still clings to an anachronistic set of ideals, which at least until now have found little use outside of the traditional headhunting society.

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