



Ecological Themes in Human-Nature Relationships: An Ecocritical Analysis of Bukidnon's Gugud

Vincent Jhun O. Dorias

PhD Student-Department of English, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology, Iligan City, Philippines

Instructor III, Language and Letters Department, College of Arts and Sciences, Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines

vincentjhun.dorias@g.msuiit.edu.ph

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the human-nature relationships, examine how ecological concerns are articulated, and deduce the key ecological themes in the six gugud of the Indigenous communities in Bukidnon, Philippines. Gugud, a traditional form of storytelling, encapsulates narratives of the Indigenous communities, highlighting unique and diverse knowledge of their relationship with the environment. By utilizing ecocriticism as a literature approach and guided by the concepts of human-nature relationships by Nan-sheng & Guangwu as cited by Tang et al. (1989), data from the gugud shows three dominant relationships: humanized nature, set-foot nature, and man-made nature. Moreover, these relationships from the Bukidnon indigenous communities also gleaned three ecocritical themes: humans as superior, will always be part, and coexistent yet adversarial to nature. The elucidated themes highlight the heightened need for humanity to adopt sustainable approaches to the utilization and stewardship of natural resources, urging consciousness and responsibility toward the environment that can ensure the mitigation of ecological destruction and the sustainability of the planet for future generations. This study asserts that Bukidnon, like other Indigenous communities worldwide, views folk literature not just as a cultural artifact, but as a lens that reveals the interconnectedness between humans and the environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The intricate relationship between humans and nature has been a focal point of ecocritical discourse, shedding light on how cultural narratives shape our understanding of ecological environments, particularly in light of the ecological turbulences that have become increasingly pervasive in the Philippines. Recent studies show that the country faces a multitude of environmental issues like marine pollution (Bayani & Corpus, 2024), deforestation (Maohong, 2012), and the effects of climate change (Asiri, 2024). Addressing these urgent challenges requires policymakers and scholars to develop systematic approaches to tackle these life-threatening problems. In this context, Indigenous ecological practices and perspectives, as reflected in both oral and written traditions, are being reevaluated for their importance in addressing environmental issues. These traditions embody traditional wisdom that promotes environmental sustainability, communal harmony, and social equity in the face of resource scarcity (Dahal, 2024; Molnar et al., 2023).

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Bukidnon, situated in Mindanao, Philippines, is home to seven Indigenous cultural communities (ICCs), whose unique and diverse understanding of their relationship with the environment is vividly illustrated through Gugud, an oral traditional form of storytelling that encapsulates narratives of the seven Indigenous communities. This form of oral tradition is also often referred to as historical narratives as they present the development and struggles for survival of the groups through many generations (Unabia, 1985). The ICCs in Bukidnon express their deep understanding of their relationship with their immediate environments through their oral or written traditions like the gugud, encompassing a pressing topic on conservational and sustainable practices and credence that can be hugely traced to an array of ecological knowledge passed down through generations (Pebria-Taga, 2022).

This study seeks to examine how Gugud serves as a reflection and critique of the portrayals of nature and the implications of these representations for human-nature relationships in Bukidnon. Through an ecocritical analysis of the gugud, this paper aims to identify the human-nature relationships in the gugud and unveil the ecological relationships embedded in these stories, highlighting their relevance to contemporary environmental issues faced by the province and the world today. This study emphasizes the importance of indigenous narratives in understanding ecological relationships, offering insights into how local cultures perceive and interact with their environments. This study hopes to raise awareness about pertinent environmental issues in Bukidnon, fostering a deeper appreciation for the region's ecological diversity and challenges.

Ultimately, this study argues that gugud is not merely a cultural artifact, but rather a cultural lens that can shed light on the interconnectedness between humans and their environment, framed to help alleviate the ecological struggles faced in the province and the world at present. Specifically, this study aimed to achieve the following objectives: *a) identify the human-nature relationships in the selected gugud; b) examine how ecological concerns articulated in the gugud relate to current contemporary ecological issues; and, c) deduce the key ecological themes present in Bukidnon's Gugud through the identified human-nature relationships that can raise environmental knowledge in Bukidnon and beyond.*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecocriticism emerged in the late 1970s and began developing as a criticism in literature in the 1990s. This term was first coined by Rueckert in 1978 to focus on applying ecology to literature. However, scholars such as Lawrence Buell in 1995 and Cheryll Glotfelty in 1996 have laid the groundwork for ecocriticism as a literary approach, emphasizing how narratives shape perceptions of nature and the urgent need to integrate ecological concepts in literary studies (Oppermann & Iovino, 2014; Garrard, 2010). Critics also refer to ecocriticism as 'green criticism,' 'green studies,' and 'environmental literary criticism.' Since then, the accelerating destruction of the natural environment, a crucial local and global issue, has made ecocriticism viable and relevant due to its approach to literary and language studies, often not focused on by mainstream linguistic research.

More recently, ecocriticism has shifted its paradigm from a mere approach to literary criticism to a more comprehensive analysis, employing diverse methodologies that aim to encapsulate the complexities of environmental crises. These new ecocritical perspectives extend to Black studies, indigenous studies, and media studies, to explore environmental issues from multiple dimensions. Concepts like 'eco-anxiety' and 'eco-grief' have recently emerged, reflecting the emotional toll of climate change narratives on individuals and communities (Gaard, 2020). This underpins the significant evolution of the field from just merely reading and interpreting the texts as they are, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of local and global ecological relationships (Tsai, 2017), underpinning deeper causes and reasons that may have influenced one's positioning towards the environment. Post-colonial ecocritical perspective, for example, examines the relationship between marginalized

Indigenous communities and their environments, highlighting ecological exploitation experienced by Indigenous peoples (IPs) that are hugely linked to the interconnectedness of culture and nature (Afzal, 2017; McCarthy, 2012).

Human-nature relationships are commonly underscored in ecocritical studies. These relationships are bidirectional, which means that human attitudes and behavior toward nature are at the root of environmental change, while changes in the environment affect human attitudes and behavior (Liu et al., 2020). Similarly, the body of investigations related to these relationships is dispersed across varied research disciplines related to science such as ecology, deep ecology, kinship ecology, and environmentalism. Biocentrism, for example, views humans as one species among many in an ecosystem and holds that nature is valuable independent of its usefulness to humans (Humphreys, 2016). Anthropocentrism posits that nature is inferior to humans (Kopnina et al. 2018). Ecofeminism underpins women have a special connection to nature, especially in addressing issues related to environmental degradation and human oppression (Puleo, 2017). These relationships are just a few scholarly ventures over the past years that aim to elucidate the interconnectedness of humans and nature in varying aspects. In this light, examining human-nature relationships through an ecocritical lens, literature is seen to deeper resonate with contemporary environmental challenges and promote a more sustainable future.

In the Philippines, ecocritical scholarship has begun to illuminate the intricate relationships between culture and environment. Purcia (2022) elucidated the ecocritical semantics in the Sidays, a form of Waray poetry, written by Nemesio "Totoy" Baldesco. The study revealed that ecocritical semantics encourages the Warays to protect, preserve, and conserve the resources offered to them by the environment. Wakit & Aguila (2021) applied ecocriticism to municipal hymns and folksongs in Nueva Viscaya, particularly "Samiweng Ti Umili," to identify ecological themes and metaphors. Their analysis revealed that these hymns reflect the natural landscapes of the towns. Similarly, Bermisio (2018) studied the oral literature of the Manobo Tribe in Agusan del Sur, uncovering eco-knowledge centered on preserving essential elements like air, water, land, and forests through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Culajara (2016) examined Satur Apoyon's Visayan short story collection, "Ang Gakit ni Noebong Ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon," identifying five themes regarding nature: as a destroyer, source of suffering, divine abode, mysterious entity, and feminized concept.

In Bukidnon, several research studies focusing on Bukidnon folklore have been conducted by scholars. Taga (2022) explored environmental themes in selected Talaandig lyric poems by Waway Saway II, focusing on literary devices and creating a teaching guide for ecocriticism. Using Buell's ecocritical waves, the study identified eight themes: a) nature as life, b) humanity's responsibility to nature, c) impacts of human activities, d) nature's sustenance for humanity, e) restoring human-nature relationships, f) weakened connections, g) human experiences affecting these relationships, and h) the importance of symbiosis. Singcolan (2015) examined the Bukidnon ritual Pangapug, aiming to define it, identify its various rituals, and uncover their meanings. Through ethnography and focus group discussions, the study found that Pangapug is vital to the Talaandig community, with signs and symbols holding significant meanings for Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, Valdez et al. (2011) investigated Bukidnon folk stories related to water protection practices among seven indigenous groups. Interviews revealed that these practices have significantly declined due to modern influences, and the oral traditions, including chants and stories, have largely faded as storytellers have passed away, leading to the deterioration of water protection practices.

These existing studies in the country forward the relevance of ecocritical analysis in addressing the prevailing ecological issues, hoping to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony between men and nature. Moreover, although the studies mentioned above were conducted using varied data texts from different locales within the country, they all forward the growing necessity to address and give attention to the adverse environmental effects that are felt at present, taking into consideration

the embedded cultural predispositions that hugely influence how they see, understand, and respond to their relationship with nature in their respective communities and origins. In summary, it can be deduced that while scholarly discussions that utilized ecocriticism are present, the specific intersection of oral folk literature like the gugud and human-nature relationships remains to be a notable gap. Understanding how gugud articulates these relationships can provide insights into both cultural heritage and environmental consciousness. This study, therefore, aims to address this deficiency.

3. FRAMEWORK

Ecocriticism and Indigenous studies intersect significantly, exploring particularly their shared focus on human-nature relationships and the examination of modern practices that are treated as the major causes of the current environmental imbalances. This intersection is increasingly relevant in the new perspective offered by ecocritics, where indigenous practices and beliefs on land, forests, and resources are revisited as they offer vital insights into sustainable practices and decolonial approaches (Lopez-Serrano, 2023). Cooke and Denney (2021) further forward the importance of bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous narratives, encouraging the exploration of various literary forms to articulate environmental concerns across cultures. These perspectives on ecocriticism guide the present study in analyzing the selected gugud of the Bukidnon ICCs.

Significant to the study is the human-nature relationships by Nan-Sheng and Guangwu as cited by Tang et al. (1989). This concept identifies six specific relationships that highlight humans and nature as interdependent vital elements or that nature is indivisible in the degree of its relationship to human society. These six relationships are *unknown nature*, *known nature*, *set-foot nature*, *humanized nature*, *man-made nature*, and *nature as the human body*.

Unknown nature is the first level of the human-nature relationship. This relationship describes nature as farthest from man. In other words, this part of nature is known the least. This level depicts nature's transcendence, finiteness, and limitedness, which are commonly not known by humans because they have not yet explored and ventured into by science. On the other hand, known nature, the second relationship, is the opposite of unknown nature. These relationships are part of nature that are considered untouched yet already known through science. Examples of this level are the celestial bodies known to men, such as the solar system, stars, and moons.

Set-foot nature is the third relationship. This relationship describes parts of nature known to humanity since they have stepped, touched, and experienced them. However, this relationship highlights that even though they are known to men, these areas remain in their original form. The fourth relationship is humanized nature. These parts of nature are those that man transformed for their usage and benefit, e.g., agricultural lands, pasture lands, orchards, fields, and other landforms. The signs of its primitiveness still categorize this relationship. However, there are marks of humans intensely utilizing it.

Man-made nature is the fifth relationship. This relationship is defined as materialized intellect (e.g., airplanes, vehicles, buildings, bridges, and houses). This part of nature includes those that are produced and reproduced by humans. The last relationship is between nature and the human body. This relationship depicts the human body as a certain level of nature concerned with its ability to know and reform the human body. This concerns depictions and the presence of diseases and substances in the human body and nature, e.g., influenza, HIV, pandemic, and others.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative-descriptive research method utilizing the lens of ecocriticism and the specific human-nature relationships by Nan-Sheng and Guangwu as cited by Tang et al. (1989) of the selected six gugud from the book published by Lao (1998) entitled *Oral Sources on Bukidnon*

Society and Culture, retrieved from the Bukidnon Studies Center, a repository of Bukidnon archivers and artefacts, of Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. The gugud used in the study were readily available English-translated narratives, gathered and translated by Madronio M. Lao, a prolific researcher of Bukidnon Indigenous studies.

The selection of six gugud for analysis is based on key considerations that provide a comprehensive understanding of ecological themes in Bukidnon's cultural narratives. These texts reflect diverse perspectives on the human-nature relationship, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their ecological implications and traditional wisdom. Chosen for their cultural significance, each gugud addresses contemporary environmental issues. The first two are fictional, offering imaginative interpretations of ecological themes, while the next two focus on lifestyle, illustrating sustainable practices within the community. The final two emphasize tradition and culture, highlighting the role of indigenous beliefs in maintaining ecological balance. Together, these six gugud enrich our understanding of ecology, lifestyle, and cultural identity in Bukidnon.

Gugud 1 (G1): The Great Deluge – This gugud narrates the origin of the ICCs after a great deluge that happened to renew humanity.

Gugud 2 (G2): The Origin of Sinuda - This gugud explains the history of Sinuda, formerly known as Simod, a sacred place for the Bukidnon IPs. This gugud further describes the transformations that happened to the place after being intruded for commercialization.

Gugud 3 (G3): The Early Lifestyle of the Matigsalog – This gugud explains the early lifestyle of the Matigsalog, IPs living near the waters, especially when building a house, hunting for food, and performing rituals.

Gugud 4 (G4): Gugud About Panimaloy- This gugud narrates the life of a Datu named Panimaloy and his journey together with his daughter.

Gugud 5 (G5): The Tradition and Culture of the Bukidnons in Tagaloan- This gugud explains the life of the people of Tagaloan before the onset of the Second World War. This gugud tackles issues of the IPs related to displacement and war.

Gugud 6 (G6): Gugud Covering Various Subjects- This gugud explains Manupali a place also named Paniningawan which was the exact place where a Maguindanao leader pledged to choose Pangantucan.

The study then categorized and validated the relationships deduced through coding procedures, identification of dominant themes, and examination of the underlying factors as to why and how these relationships were used in the gugud. Moreover, the researcher followed several protocols in all steps undertaken in the study, ensuring that all names of people and institutions indicated in the gugud were hidden to secure their anonymity and confidentiality.

The researcher also sought expert guidance and input with Bukidnon IP members and experts on Bukidnon Cultural Studies from Bukidnon State University throughout the research process to ensure cultural sensitivity and accuracy in interpreting the gugud.

It has to be made clear, however, that this study is only limited to a specific selection of six gugud, which may not represent the full spectrum of ecological themes present in Bukidnon's cultural narratives. This selection, while diverse, is inherently limited by the choice of texts and may overlook other significant narratives that also contribute to understanding the human-nature relationships of the Bukidnon ICCs.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the analyzed and interpreted data attuned to the specific objectives of the study. The discussion is organized based on the following specific problems of the study: the human-nature relationships and ecological concerns presented in the gugud (5.1) and the ecological themes deduced from the human-nature relationships (5.2). Following the human-nature relationships of Nan-sheng & Guangwu as cited in Tang et al. (1989) in the six gugud, three relationships dominated the data: the *humanization of nature*, *set foot nature*, and *human-made nature*.

5.1. Human-Nature Relationships and Ecological Concerns

5.1.1. Humanized Nature

The humanization of nature refers to how different aspects of the natural world have been transformed by humanity for use and consumption. In the context of the Bukidnon ICCs, these transformations reflect both their struggle for survival through the utilization of immediate natural resources and the impact of immigrants from other parts of the Philippines who have come to the province for commercial purposes. These immigrants, often described in the gugud as commercialists, have sometimes diminished the value of nature by treating it as a mere resource, leading to actions that overlook its intrinsic worth and agency. This approach has contributed to the degradation of significant ancestral areas in Bukidnon, emphasizing the need for a more respectful and sustainable relationship with the environment that honors both cultural heritage and ecological integrity. The gugud highlights three dehumanizing activities: *overhunting*, *forest burning*, and *logging*.

Frame 1 consists of depictions of humanized nature shown in the following excerpts from the gugud (Statements 1-6). In Bukidnon's gugud, the humanization of nature is shown in words and statements depicting three major dehumanizing transformations in nature; overhunting (statement 1 from G2), forest burning (statements 2-3 from G5 and G6 respectively, and logging (statements 4-6 from G6).

Overhunting

1. *It is a common hunting ground because all wild animals abounded in this place such wild rats, wild pigs, wild cats, deers, monkeys, chicken, squirrels, lizards, wild fruits, rattan etc. (G2)*

Forest burning

2. *The ranchers burned our forest land so that grasses would grow for the cattle. (G5)*
3. *We came to think of this because we believe we own the forest and the mountains including the land taken over by ranchers which they converted into big cattle ranches. (G6)*

Logging

4. *We also lost the source of our herbal medicines because forests were already overlogged by many logging companies. (G6)*
5. *The operation of the logging companies in our forest also meant their intrusion into our sacred grounds like the Lantawan mountain where my house is constructed. (G6)*
6. *Our sacred mountains were destroyed by logging companies (G6)*

Frame 1. Lines from the gugud that show humanized nature

The gugud *Origin of Sinuda* (G2) shows overhunting in a place called Sinuda, a virgin forest with tall trees towering along the bank of the Simod River. The gugud describes Sinuda as a sacred land. For Indigenous communities, sacred lands are usually chosen for three main reasons: 1) if it is a worship place, 2) if it is a burial place, and 3) if it is a source of life and livelihood. Hunting or *mangangasu*, commonly practiced by earlier IPs, is performed by a head hunter named *mangangayaw* and is a primary source of living and sustenance. The act of hunting is performed by a head hunter named *mangangayaw*. Through hunting in Sinuda, products such as meat, vegetables, fruits, and herbal medicines are produced by the IPs for consumption. However, because of overhunting done by the non-IPs who intruded on Sinuda for-profit interests, the once-rich place became exploited and

overconsumed, resulting in the scarcity of their daily food, medicine, and other survival supplies. As a result, the IPs struggled to sustain and maximize available resources left in their sacred land.

Generally, the Bukidnon IPs have been stewards of their natural resources. This is evident up to the present time as most of them are still occupying ancestral domains and mountainous areas in the province, sustainably. The act of hunting, a common practice for them, may have consumed aspects of their original nature such as wild animals, however, they remain the primary stewards of these resources. In Bukidnon at present, there are already two protected areas: Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park declared through Republic Act 8978, and Mt. Kalatungan Range Natural Park through Presidential Proclamation No. 305. These areas are considered to be the home of endemic species in the country, whose biodiversity is not only important for the Bukidnon province but the whole country. Other pertinent laws i.e., Republic Act No 11038 or the 2018 Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act were enacted and implemented in the country to counter destructive activities that pose a major threat to several thriving and unique land and water portions in the country, whose roles impact biodiversity in a wider scope.

At present, wildlife hunting is becoming one of the main reasons for animal extinction and is considered illegal to practice in the Philippines. Over the years, the sole purpose of hunting as a means of survival has evolved as an alternative livelihood, especially for the poor. There are also instances of wildlife hunting for leisure and collection, resulting in the Philippines ranking fourth in the world with the highest number of threatened species. Hence, the need to monitor the existing hunting practices must be focused and enforced. This necessary action for the prohibition of hunting is stipulated in the Philippines' Republic Act 9147 otherwise known as the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act. This act is clear in its prohibition of the collection and hunting of threatened wildlife to reduce the rising number of extinct animals in the country.

Results further accentuate the changes brought about by the emergence of forest burning to create ranchers and pasture lands for cattle propagation, as shown in Frame 1 statements 2-3 from the G5 and G6. Forest lands were humanized and utilized by ranchers as pasture lands. Areas in Bukidnon are mainly forest land and mountains, which are not ideal for ranching and cattle propagation. However, when the immigrants, termed in the gugud as ranchers, came to Bukidnon, they converted these forests into commercial and pasture lands by burning the trees and forests. It can be gleaned from the gugud that these land transformations were destructive, hence posing a threat to the biodiversity and lives in Bukidnon.

The process of burning trees for land and pasture cultivation is presently called the Kaingin System. This is a widely known illegal environmental activity that results in various ecological disturbances. This method of cultivation is widely known for its negative effects such as flash floods, landslides, and global warming. In the Philippines, however, transitioning forest land to commercial or pastoral land is permissible to selected areas. Presidential Decree 705, Commonwealth Act No. 452, and DENR Administrative Order No. 99-36 known as the Forest Land Grazing Management Agreement support the conversion of forest lands to grazing lands, provided that all necessary steps are to be undertaken, legally.

Moreover, this idea of forest burning that existed years back could also be the reason for the growing cattle industry in the province of Bukidnon. The province at present is known for its growing, varied, and abundant cattle industry which serves not only the province but also the entire country. The Department of Agriculture reported that Bukidnon is one of the provinces in the country which is a beneficiary of the Special Area for Agricultural Development Program of 2018 under the Cattle Production Project. The towns of Damulog, Kibawe, Kitaotao, Kadingilan, Kalilangan, Pangantucan, and Quezon are the main municipalities covered in the said project since they were noted to have the

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most ideal lands for cattle propagation. To date, Bukidnon locals are expecting more growth in its cattle industry in years to come, which in turn could mean the conversion of more trees and forests into grazing lands.

Aside from overhunting and forest burning, the gugud, as shown in Frame 1 statements 4-6 from G6, highlights logging as a significant threat due to dehumanization. Illegal logging, almost similar to forest burning, has also negatively affected the lives of IPs. Trees are the ultimate source of life for all humans. In the gugud, trees are seen as a vital component for survival. However, timber corporations of the non-IPs have dehumanized forests and commercialized them. These timber corporations went to Bukidnon to utilize the rich and advantageous trees of the area. These timber corporations have excessively consumed the trees for the sole purpose of profit and business. This logging also resulted in the loss of medicinal plants of the ICCs, which they have sought as the only healing provider for their diseases. IPs, especially those whom they call as *mamumulong*, still greatly rely on the environment for herbal medicines rather than science. With the rampant cutting of trees, the IPs struggled to continue this practice.

Illegal logging greatly results in an imbalance in the Philippine ecological system. These overarching problems of illegal logging which result in forest degradation are still prevalent across the country, despite it being popularly known for destroying the environment. As a measure, the existing Presidential Decree Revised 905, or the Forestry Code of the Philippines is continually being strengthened and revisited. Republic Act No. 9175 of 2001 reiterates the banning of logging activities in the country which includes ownership, possession, sale, transfer, and importation of unauthorized logging activities. Rainforests in the Philippines are considered the richest biodiversity in the country, covering roughly 90% of the country's land area. However, due to incessant deforestation and other logging activities, these forests were reported to have reduced to less than 10%, especially in the years between 2011 to 2016 (Perez et al., 2020).

5.1.2. Set-foot Nature

Following the most dominant relationship is set-foot nature. Set foot nature is shown in the gugud as depictions of three forms of nature: *mountains, forests, and rivers*. Despite the IPs settling in these areas, these forms of nature remained original and primitive, with no traces of transformations as they are utilized by the Bukidnon ICCs sustainably.

Mountains

1. *The mountains, forest, and the whole earth were completely submerged by the flood. (G1)*
2. *On top of Mt. Kimangkil landed Bae Gahomon and Tohoban, her son, whom she married. (G1)*
3. *The mountain which the older brother climbed is Mt. Kapay. (G1)*

Forests

4. *They guarded our virgin forest, our sacred land. (G6)*
5. *The healing plant I use is found the deep jungle. (G6)*
6. *It grows well in virgin forests. (G6)*

Rivers

7. *... Higaonons controlled the rivers going to the sea passing through the Tagoloan river. (G6)*
8. *In the past, fishes were abundant in the brooks and in the rivers. (G4)*
9. *Fishes in Kulaman river like 'anga' were plenty. (G2)*

Frame 2. Lines from the gugud that show set-foot nature

Mountains are described as the primary settling place for the Bukidnon ICCs. These mountains were then the source of civilization since the IPs' forebearers had settled within these mountains after they resisted the influence of colonizers in their original settling grounds. The early Bukidnon IPs' lives were generally agrarian as they settled and lived in the mountains. For IPs, mountains, trees, and forests are not simply natural resources to be exploited for commercialization. As their ancestors before them,

these communities understand that their well-being, identity, and future depend on the protection of their mountains.

Several mountains are mentioned in the gugud entitled *The Great Deluge* (G1), as shown in Frame 2 statements 1-3, narrating the origins of the IPs and how they started their own families and groups in the realms of mountains after a great flood. These depictions of mountains in the gugud emphasize the idea of the importance of mountains to the IPs as mountains served as their primary, first habitat and source of life. Stories about a great flood are found in many cultures. In fact, major ethnic groups in the Philippines like Ilocano, Bicolano, and Igorot have also their versions of the flood myth, varying only on scenes and settings. These myths are mainly focused on the idea of destroying civilization due to its harmful practices and eventually having the flood to give a resurgence and restart to new breed of settlers. Generally, although there are lots of versions of these flood myths all over the world, they all revolve around the concept of having a flood to destroy the disobedient original population.

Mount Kitanglad, Mount Kalatungan, Mount Tangkulan, Mount Dulangdulang and Mount Capistrano are some of the mountains mentioned in the gugud. These mountains are known as homes of the first and second-degree IPs in Bukidnon, classified as those who are traditional and full-blooded by nature. Despite their settling, it is depicted that these mountains are sustainably thriving in terms of their balanced ecological systems. At present, these mountains have greatly contributed to the rising and sustained agriculture-based economy of the province. Aside from being identified as tourist destinations, the Department of Agriculture has also featured these mountains as the main source of agricultural products and raw materials in Region 10. Javier & Sison (2023) further forwards that agriculture specifically organic vegetable production is a trend in the agriculture sector of the province. Moreover, these mountains in Bukidnon also play a part in the balance and adequate watershed and habitat for endangered and endemic floras and faunas of the country such as the Philippine Eagle and Rafflesia.

Forests are also elaborated on in most of the six gugud, specifically in the Gugud Covering Various Subjects (G6). These forests remain original regardless of how IPs see them as a means of living. As for the ICCs, they must serve as stewards of the forest as these also serve as their source of life. However, in the gugud, forests are also depicted as parts of nature continuously challenged by the intrusion, burning, and logging. Due to the rampant forest intrusions of primary immigrants and timber companies in Bukidnon, adverse environmental effects have occurred.

This clearing of the forests could also be extensively traced to the overarching problems of illegal logging, which also resulted in several connecting problems on flooding, landslides, and climate change. In the gugud, Bukidnon IPs relied on the forests as these provide a sustainable agriculture system. As the forests are slowly being over-logged for commercialization, IPs are also continuously being challenged.

Bukidnon forests still hold the biggest area in the entire Region 10 with approximately 200,000 hectares. These forests are essential in ecological balance not only in the province but also in the entire Mindanao. These forests provide services such as clean water for domestic settlers and also shed agricultural biodiversity for its residents and other neighboring areas. IPs are also at the forefront of protecting the bounties of forests in Bukidnon in partnership with the Philippine Government and several non-government organizations in the country. However, prevalent cases of forest burning are still present not only in the province but also in other forest lands in the country.

At present, almost two-thirds of the Bukidnon uplands are denuded which results in the flooding of areas downstream Bukidnon and also in Cagayan de Oro City, a neighboring city of Bukidnon. A

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recent study conducted by Jayme et al. (2020) highlights Bukidnon's forests house 82% of the documented species being endemic to the Philippines, which entails that the destruction of these forests could also result in the extinction of these species. The Cinchona Forest Reserve, for example, is particularly noted for its high species richness, underscoring the ecological importance of these areas not only in the province but the country in general.

Moreover, rivers were also highlighted in the gugud G4, G6, and G2 respectively. These depictions of rivers revolve around the fishes for consumption which the Bukidnon IPs can get from the rivers. In Bukidnon, rivers and other water forms have always been part of their culture. In fact, two Bukidnon ICCs were also named after the rivers found in their respective domains and territories. For example, the Matigsalugs, the people who live along the Salug river, and the Tigwahanuns inhabit the banks of the Tigwa river. Moreover, the gugud also elucidates that rivers at present are less abundant than they were before. These changes in Bukidnon waters could be traced to several causes like industrialization, forest denudation, and the dying waterways of the IPs (Valdez et al., 2011).

The statement, '*In the past, fishes were abundant in the brooks and in the rivers*', in the gugud about *Panimaloy*, implies that rivers at present are not as abundant as they were before. These changes in Bukidnon waters could be traced to several reasons and causes like modernization and industrialization, deforestation/ forest denudation, and the dying of waterways chants and stories of the IPs (Valdez et al., 2011). To date, there are six major river systems in Bukidnon, namely: Pulangi, Tagoloan, Cagayan, Manupali, Muleta, and Bobonawan Rivers. These rivers make up the entire landscape of Bukidnon as well as provide the source of water and fish which are essential in the survival of the IPs. These forms of water are also considered essential and protected by the IPs, implying that these bodies of water must remain unpolluted.

In the Philippines, water and air, which are considered essential for survival, are becoming polluted. Some rivers dried up. New forms of harmful organisms and diseases are continuously spreading, hampering almost all forms of human interactions. Statistics show that out of more than a hundred Filipinos, roughly 10% still rely on unsafe water supplies. As a result, water-linked diseases which include gastro-enteritis, diarrhea, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, hepatitis, and more recently, severe acute respiratory syndrome, are affecting most Filipinos every single day according to the World Health Organization. Industrial wastes and agricultural runoff are traced as the main contributors to pollution in Philippine waters e.g. raw sewage, detergents, fertilizer, heavy metals, chemical products, oils, and improper solid waste disposal.

As a measure to address this issue, the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004, or Republic Act No. 9275 was implemented. This act aims to protect and preserve the bodies of water of the country from threats like pollution from industries, agricultural runoff, and communities. The main tenets of this act are the prohibition of dumping or discharge of prohibited chemicals from hospitals and factories to any water forms, the need for industries to secure permits and pass a series of evaluations from authorities before operation, and the imposition of proper waste segregation and disposal in barangays and municipalities.

In most of the gugud, water forms like the rivers are the central focus, positioning water as a tangible, substantive resource that is an indispensable component of the Philippine biodiversity. Presently, water ecosystems in the country have been identified as one major issue that affects millions of Filipino households, highlighting that almost 50 of the major rivers in the Philippines, which supply potable water for consumption and offer marine resources, were already considered dead due to pollution and other illegal marine activities in 2004 (Rola et al., 2015).

This issue poses a threat to most Philippine households since insufficient access to water hampers daily transactions and could even cause health problems due to unsafe consumption. This framing of the of the gugud reflects an ecocritical concern that natural resources, like water, are often viewed instrumentally, rather than for their inherent value. People, then, should be more aware of the importance of water that resonates more than just consumption but evokes bigger implications in life and existence in general.

5.1.3. Human-made Nature

The third dominant human-nature relationship is human-made nature. In the gugud, these human-nature relationships are shown through the materialization of houses, barrios, schools, and civilization. These depictions in the gugud explain how certain areas embraced civilization and how these human-made natures affected the lives of the Bukidnon ICCs. This means that IPs then were already influenced by technology, maybe because of the influence of the immigrants or the innate need for additional needs as they learned to deal with the laws of nature.

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|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>They built houses near the lake. (G1)</i> 2. <i>Simod is a communal place for our ancestors but we will make this into a barrio so that we can make a school for our children and other things like irrigation for the better living of our people. (G2)</i> 3. <i>Tagoloan is believed to be the center of civilization in Mindanao. (G5)</i> |
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Frame 3. Lines from the gugud that show man-made nature

For example, the building of houses was emphasized. Houses then and now are deemed significant in the lives of IPs. It is scientifically proven through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that houses are classified as a primary need, essential for survival. This alone manifests the reality that since then, houses, regardless of where, what, and how these were built, are needed for shelter and protection from dangers in both weather and wild organisms. In context, the gugud, *The Great Deluge* (G1), tells the origin of the IPs and how they started their own families after a great flood. This also explains why the IPs chose to build houses near the lake because bodies of water like rivers and lakes are sources of water and other essential resources for survival. Similar to the building of houses in the mountains. In the gugud, houses were a good and advantageous product of materialized intellect. This is shown in how houses were built for the IPs, such as strategically protecting them from enemies and making them easily accessible to the source of living, like fish, animals, and fruits.

On the other hand, the gugud *The Origin of Sinuda* (G2) shows how man-made nature has positively and negatively affected the lives of early IPs. Back then, Sinuda was treated as a sacred land, and these former datus surrounding the Sinuda have agreed to prohibit anyone from settling within this land because all those wild animals might be gone. However, with the influence of immigrants who intruded on Sinuda, the once prohibited place to settle was converted into a barrio. The creation of barrios within the grounds of the Sinuda and the opportunity to have electricity are two reasons it is deemed advantageous for the IPs.

Establishing a barrio can enhance educational opportunities, improve infrastructure with better roads and accessible transportation, and provide various livelihood options. Barrios have equipped IPs with valuable knowledge about their surroundings. However, this development has also led to the intrusion and alteration of their natural environment, which serves as their source of livelihood and resources. This transformation represents a significant challenge for the IPs, affecting their way of life not just in Sinuda, but also in other areas. Balancing progress with environmental preservation is essential to ensure that the benefits of development do not come at the expense of their cultural and ecological heritage.

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At present, Bukidnon is made up of 20 municipalities and 2 cities with 464 barangays in total. In the year 2020, Bukidnon was ranked 5th in the list of richest provinces in the Philippines according to the Commission on Audit. Moreover, Bukidnon's ways of living may be classified into degrees. The first degrees are classified as those who are living in deep forests and watershed areas/ rivers. These IPs are the most traditional and are full-blooded. The second degree are those who reside within the fringes of the forest and boundaries of the lowlanders. The third degrees are classified as the highly assimilated IPs and those who can send children to school. The fourth degrees are known for assimilating the ways of urban life. The fifth degrees are classified as immigrants. The presence of these classifications manifests the effect of civilization not only to their communities but including their identity.

Moreover, results reveal that Tagoloan, as stated in the gugud *The Tradition and Culture of the Bukidnons in Tagaloan*, (G5) was explicitly described as a place where original traditional customs and beliefs (Batasan) were practiced. It is the cradle of the Bukidnon civilization since the first Batasan (organized set of rules) was organized there. However, the dynamics in Tagoloan have shifted significantly due to the impacts of conflict and immigration. The IPs who originally inhabited the area faced the challenge of relocating to neighboring regions in search of improved living conditions. This displacement has posed considerable struggles for the ICCs, highlighting the need for support and strategies that honor their heritage while fostering resilience in the face of change.

Yambao et al. (2022) identified the displacement of indigenous communities due to militarization and commercialization resulting in marginalization as a prevailing, overarching problem of the ICCs in the Philippines. Presently, Tagoloan is already classified as a first-class municipality under Misamis Oriental. As for the IPs and other ICCs, it can be concluded that the idea of man-made nature has positively and negatively affected them. Man-made developments, such as schools, electricity, barrios, and the broader framework of civilization in Tagaloan, have created valuable opportunities for the community, enhancing access to education and resources. However, these advancements have also led to the displacement of some individuals, prompting a need for careful consideration of how to balance progress with the preservation of cultural identity and community ties.

5.2. Ecocritical Themes Deduced from the Human-Nature Relationships

From an ecocritical perspective, the humanization of ancestral lands and the engagement of non-indigenous groups with Bukidnon ancestral lands can be viewed as a complex interaction that invites reflection on the relationship between humans and nature. While these interactions have led to significant changes in the landscape, they also present an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the sacredness and intrinsic value of natural resources, which hold deep meaning for Bukidnon Indigenous communities and the country as a whole. These ideas on humanization and dehumanization in the gugud postulate the first ecocritical theme that can be gleaned from the most dominant human-nature relationship, that is, *man is superior to nature*.

Humanity cannot exist without nature so utilizing natural resources is a resort. This mindset often leads to the exploitation of natural resources without regard for ecological balance. The idea of superiority can justify unsustainable practices, such as those issues emerging from this human-nature relationship in the gugud. This ecological theme calls for a more holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all living and non-living elements within the natural world. In this sense, individuals then are called to become more responsible consumers of natural resources, recognizing the need for humanity to actively engage in initiatives that aim to protect and safeguard the natural balance of the ecosystem while consuming its richness. The recognition and incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and sustainable stewardship practices as valuable contributions to environmental conservation and management, as gleaned from the gugud, are deemed crucial in alleviating the present environmental crises globally.

Moreover, following the second most dominant human-nature relationship known as set-foot nature which are depictions of mountains, forests, and rivers are expected in the gugud since IPs in the province have extensively relied on the bounties of nature. It could also be gleaned that IPs have always been concerned and protectors of these parts of nature. Seeing these areas as a means to survive elucidates the values of preservation and conservation that they have been doing since then. Moreover, this relationship on the oneness of man and nature, as shown in how the IPs highlight land and water forms as part of their existence, is a manifestation of another human-nature relationship theme from the gugud. This second ecocritical theme is that *humans will always be part of nature*.

Unlike the immigrants, the Bukidnon IPs see themselves and nature as coexistent components where they live alongside nature better. In other words, Bukidnon IPs are harmoniously coexisting with all forms of life on earth, as shown in how they regard and value the bounties of the natural environment. This framing of the gugud also aligns with key ecocritical principles that reject the human-nature dichotomy, recognizing that humans and nature are symbiotic in a relationship. That is humans, as stewards of the environment, are inherently responsible for being constructive agents of change, suggesting shared responsibility and active environmental stewardship as major roles of humanity aside from just consuming the bounties of the natural resources offered.

The third human-nature relationship, man-made nature, postulates the third ecocritical theme that can be deduced from the gugud: *humans are coexistent yet adversarial to nature*. In this sense, humans rely on nature for essential resources such as water, food, and air. This interdependence highlights a fundamental coexistence where human survival is linked to the health of the environment. Industrialization and modernization have led to the exploitation of natural resources for economic gain, often disregarding ecological balance. This creates an adversarial relationship where nature is seen primarily as a resource to be dominated. Ecocritically, this theme can also be seen as a call for environmental justice, conservation, and sustainability highlighting the importance of repairing and nurturing this relationship, fostering coexistence rather than destruction.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed the presence of 3 dominant human-nature relationships in the gugud, namely: humanized nature, set-foot nature, and man-made nature, describing the dehumanization of nature as a significant threat to the lives of the Bukidnon ICCs; mountains, forests, and rivers as parts of nature that were set foot on by man that hold significant importance; and the creation of houses, barrios, and schools as evident examples that positively changed the lives of IPs yet harmed the natural environment. Moreover, these relationships posit three ecocritical themes. The first theme, humans as superior to nature, reflects a deeper historical perspective that positions humanity, as the highest form of rational organisms, above the natural world, often justifying the exploitation of natural resources. The second ecocritical theme, humans will always be part of nature, emphasizes the intrinsic connection between humans and the environment, acknowledging a symbiotic relationship, i.e., humanity is not a separate entity from nature but rather a part of it. The last ecocritical theme from the analysis, that humans are coexistent yet adversarial to nature, highlights the complex dynamics of the relationship where humans coexist with nature while simultaneously engaging in practices that can harm the environment. In a nutshell, the findings reveal complex dynamics that are essential for understanding humanity's place within the natural world, underscoring the multifaceted nature, that can either sustain or destroy human-nature relationships. Ultimately, this study recognizes that Bukidnon, just like other Indigenous communities around the world, sees folk literature not merely as a cultural artifact, but rather as a viable cultural lens that can shed light on the intricate connection between humans and the environment. This ecocritical analysis of the gugud, including other similar studies across the globe, urges its readers for a re-evaluation of values and behaviors including ecological consciousness. It is recommended to expand the analysis to include a broader range of gugud, incorporating additional texts

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that reflect various cultural, ecological, and historical contexts. Comparative studies between different regions or communities could also enrich the understanding of how diverse narratives inform ecological practices. Only through such, an environmental transformation, can ensure the health and sustainability of our planet for future generations to come.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Vincent Jhun O. Dorias is currently a doctoral student in English Language Studies at the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology, Iligan City, Philippines. He has a master's degree in English Language Teaching from Bukidnon State University. His research interests include ecolinguistics, ecocriticism, discourse analysis, and the interplay of language, society, and culture..