



# Introduction

“Someday I will go to the forest. Maybe I will go and I just stay there. I don’t come back.”

Tóse exhaled these words through cigarette smoke. He was squatting on the damp ground, hungover. The young man was barefoot, dressed only in shorts and a large, red basketball t-shirt that hung from his skinny shoulders like a tent canvas after a storm.

“It’s like sitting next to a loud noise, sleeping next to a big truck. I just want to hold my ears,” he said while covering his ears with his dirty hands. “I want to close my eyes.” Tóse moved his hands to his eyes and held them there quietly. Apparently, he did not notice the cold morning drizzle that was coming in from the valley. With his hands over his eyes he could not see me, yet I nodded, agreeing with him. I too was still drunk though it was quickly wearing off and I was starting to feel the well-known pressure of two fat thumbs on my temples. The wedding we had attended in the neighboring village had been a “no alcohol wedding.” Yet bottles of cheap synthetic gin—the liquor that were flooding the mountains—had been passed around in every shadow. Tóse had been drinking twice as much as I had, and he had been loud, aggressive, embarrassing. Though I could not explain exactly why at that exact moment, somehow I found the image of the loud truck to encapsulate the life of Tóse perfectly.

The foundation for this book is an ethnographic study of a group of men that I came to know in the southern Sierra Madre Mountains of Luzon in 2009. “Bugkalot” is the endonym most commonly used among

the around 20,000 people who have traditionally inhabited this area. I was repeatedly told during my stay that what men aspire to is, above all *beya*. This Bugkalot term can perhaps best be translated as “knowledge-autonomy,” that is, the establishing and maintaining of a strong imperiousness to the world through accumulated experience. Yet, such autonomy cannot be converted into prestige or actual, assertive power, but rather entails the privilege of sameness—of being like other men and entering into egalitarian relations.

Being exposed as not autonomous, on the other hand, entails daily mockery—a circumstance that befell the young men in the community where I stayed. Though under normal circumstances men in the Sierra Madre Mountains attempt not to challenge each other, self-assertion and dominance are ritually performed in acts that have, historically, taken the form of violent killings. Even today these performances may be transgressive as set against the ordinary conduct of daily life. My goal in this book is to place such acts in relation to masculinity and egalitarianism at large. How are such seemingly opposed characteristics of male life—the egalitarianism and the assertive performances—interwoven, and what are the wider effects of these conjunctions in relation to social life in the mountain communities? These are the questions that will be pursued in the following chapters.

By exploring the interplay between masculinity and cosmology, I set out to clarify how a particular form of egalitarianism is socially produced. While, as we will learn, this type of egalitarianism manifests itself as individual composure and sameness among men, it is paradoxically tied to assertive acts that seem radically juxtaposed against the men’s behavior in everyday life. What this book depicts, then, is a society in which egalitarian relations between men are an empirical reality, though the social values that buttress the egalitarian ideal appear to go directly against egalitarianism.

By not belonging to a moral domain *per se*, this form of egalitarianism upturns certain widely held anthropological understandings of egalitarianism. Furthermore, as we will learn, the assertive individualism, which is an ideal, is socially subversive and *demonic*, and much effort is put into harnessing such individualism. Thus, while leadership, dominance, and assertiveness are key masculine values, paradoxically egalitarianism is the dominant form in which society manifests itself. The crux of the following chapters will thereby be to show that egalitarianism and hierarchy, rather than being oppositions, are intertwined as part of the same social or sociocosmological dynamics among the Bugkalot.

I thereby depict a society that is its own potential other; it is a social form that can only be comprehended by including what it may, at any

time, become. The “truth of society” thereby does not, as Vivieros de Castro claims to be the case among certain Amazonian peoples, lie “in the hands of others” (1992: 287), that is, in the hands of people beyond one’s immediate social group to which one has relations of animosity. Rather, this truth should be found in the not yet realized becoming of Bugkalot society itself.

### **Where Once Was a Forest . . .**

My fieldwork was set against the backdrop of a recent event: a road had been opened that allowed trucks to reach far into the mountain interior during the dry season. My interlocutors often recalled how the mountains had until recently been covered in moist forest, only interrupted by fast-flowing streams, scattered villages, and the adjacent vegetable gardens. At the time of my fieldwork it was only in the more secluded areas of the mountain interior that slash-and-burn methods of subsistence farming were still being used. While for the most part the Bugkalot were still pursuing near-subsistence agriculture focused on wet rice at the time, the traditional forms of living in the forests were yielding to modern forms of specialized, agricultural production. A patchwork of farmland was expanding since the road enabled rice and vegetables to be distributed to the Philippine market. The drone of powerful diesel engines could now be heard in remote communities and became a premonition of the rapid, discernable changes that would soon take place.

The road was the foundation for the extensive agricultural industry that was being developed throughout the mountains. Property was changing hands as people from other provinces—referred to with the Tagalog word *kaingineros* or the Bugkalot word *beninyagen*—bought up local land rights from the Bugkalot and the settlers turned the primary forest into farmland so quickly that one could detect the changes from week to week. By making the transportation between the mountain villages and to the lowland much easier, the new road caused immigration to escalate dramatically. Also cheap building materials could now be transported to the villages, and the traditional huts with thatched roofs were quickly giving way to lowland-type houses that required a minimum of maintenance: roofs made of galvanized iron sheets and walls made from hollow blocks. Several families were considering using gas rather than open fires for cooking.

The incursion of lowlanders into the area quickened the pace of the deforestation and caused pollution in the rivers, which severely threatened the traditional livelihood of the families in the villages. Until a few

years earlier, the families had relied on hunting, gathering, and fishing most of the year. However, around the villages there was no wildlife left, and though most men still went on hunting trips they had to walk for hours to reach areas of the mountains that were still untouched by loggers where lizards, snakes, different types of deer and monkeys, large rodents, and, preferably, wild boar could still be seen.

Traditional forms of horticulture changed to an economy based on specialized agriculture that was closely tied up with the wider Philippine economy. As a result, hunting—and rural subsistence in general—suffered a swift and perhaps irreversible decline. Instead, with the expansion of the monetary economy, a large number of intermittent *sari-sari* stores were cobbled together and offered a limited range of products, including rice, unrefrigerated soft drinks, instant coffee, sugar, soap, gin, and cigarettes. Since all families had increasing access to money and decreasing access to foodstuff from the forest, different types of candy and cookies made their entry into the Bugkalot diet.

Such was the current situation in the village where I carried out a large part of my fieldwork. This village, which I call “Ki-tegen,” consisted of forty-two households and had achieved *barangay* status in 1982, which meant that the state now recognized it as an administrative division or a district in the Philippines. With the institution of the *barangay*, the position of *punong barangay*—the official head of the district—was also introduced. This position is up for election every three years.

Curiously, whereas anthropologists have often noted that the state and its administrative techniques are widely regarded as alien impositions among other rural communities around the world, this was not the case in a Bugkalot context in any straightforward way. They found no difficulties in adapting the political forms of the state in village life. But when viewed through local ideas of authority, such forms were little more than performances; the men that I came to know who held or had previously held the position of *punong barangay* admitted that this position had entailed only a minimum of authority. Even after the introduction of the *barangay* structure the de facto largest political unit was the individual household, referred to as *ten tengeng*, one trunk.

Most of the households in Ki-tegen consisted of four generations of family members. It was difficult to establish exactly how many individuals lived in any given household since couples, especially the younger ones, tended to move a lot. Not only did men go down to the lowlands to work, but they also tended to spend periods of time in their home village. While the Bugkalot identify themselves patrilineally by descent through the male line, they have traditionally practiced a matrilineal form of postmarital residence: the man was expected to move in with his in-

laws until he had paid the bridewealth (*lango*). This often entailed the man moving to a community where he had a limited social network. My younger informants wanted to avoid the traditional conjugal procedures that they saw as outmoded and frustrating. Prior to the wedding it was, for instance, expected that the future husband would work for the wife's family, a practice known as *tognod*, which could sometimes last for several years.

Thus, "going home" to one's natal village to visit family and friends was given high priority and was looked forward to with joy by all men. These marriage customs had become less common in the past few decades. I encountered several young men who claimed that they would rather remain unmarried than marry a Bugkalot girl. Accordingly, out of the six weddings I attended, only three were between men and women who were both Bugkalot, and only in two of these cases did the marriage involve *tognod*. This new tendency of young people marrying non-Bugkalots was not frowned upon. On the contrary, many adolescents were directly encouraged by their parents to marry non-Bugkalot Filipinos, who were considered harder working and better off. The threat that this development poses to Bugkalot customs, identity, and language attracted little attention from my interlocutors and friends.

Other aspects of the current changes received more attention. In some villages, the migrants had started to outnumber the Bugkalot, and migrant communities were rapidly evolving throughout the mountains. For instance, Pinagá, a two-hour hike from Ki-tegen, was a valley that housed a growing community of migrant workers. At the end of the 1990s the valley was still covered in primary forest, but only ten years later it had been completely deforested. Now the valley was creased with the path of an almost dried-out stream, its slopes were covered with brown grass and bushes, and strips of rock broke through the thin layer of soil. This change had happened exponentially as the number of settlers from the neighboring Ifugao Province had increased around the turn of the millennium. But rather than seeing this as a threat, my interlocutors were pleased that immigration was stimulating the economy in the area. By buying up idle land, the settlers provided the Bugkalot families with much-needed cash.

## Shadows in the State

Ki-tegen began to be gradually drawn into the administrative nexus of the Philippine state only by the early 1980s. Yet it was not until the turn of the millennium, with the development of the first highland roads in

the area, that this development intensified and started to have any real significance to the villagers. As the road was gradually improved, the inhabitants of the area gained easier access to the lowland. On a brief visit back to Ki-tegen in 2011, it was possible for me to reach Ki-tegen by truck even during the rainy season; this had been unthinkable only a few years earlier. The villagers had started to ride down to the lowland on a monthly basis on the vegetable trucks to visit relatives, buy consumer goods, visit health clinics, pick up medicine, and so on. Due to the devastating effects these developments had on the forests, I was at first surprised to learn that almost all the Bugkalot considered this progress.

As I asked my Bugkalot informants how they expected the new road to affect the mountains, they did not answer the way I expected them to. They empathetically argued for, rather than against, the road, claiming a need for better access to the lowland vegetable markets. My consternation when confronted with these views reflected my initial commitment to the pervasive myth that indigenous people live in harmony with nature or are somehow closer to nature than modern Europeans. Certainly, my Bugkalot friends did not feel tied in any affectionate way to "nature."

Though a few of my Bugkalot friends expressed the concern that they were starting to feel like strangers on the land where they used to hunt, this was mostly seen as a minor drawback, considering the immense gains and improvements that they expected would follow this development. In this hope lay their awareness that their history was unusual compared to other indigenous peoples in Luzon. Most notably, the Bugkalot managed, by and 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 in 1898. For this reason, unlike most other tribes in the northern Philippines (see Finin 2005: 107), there were no significant changes in their form of territorial and social organization until the 1980s.

The forest was also left largely untouched until the late 1970s, which was quite extraordinary when compared to the rapid deforestation in the rest of the country: more than half of the forest in the Philippines was lost in the post-World War II period due to industrial logging. However, the numbers are, in fact, much more startling, since at the end of the nineteenth century, 70 percent of the total land area was covered with forest; this was reduced to 20 percent in less than a hundred years (Lasco et al. 2001). Moreover, while in 1934 the country had more than 10 million hectares of old-growth, dipterocarp forest, in 2000 less than 3 million hectares remained (van den Top 2003: 49).

Simultaneously, following World War II, the Philippines experienced an immense population growth. But, unlike other regions of northern Luzon, the southern areas of the Sierra Madre Mountains did not experience the population pressure that caused interregional migration in all the neighboring provinces. This isolation was caused by several factors. In general, the Sierra Madre mountain range was known as an unsafe place. After the declaration of martial law in 1972, the communist guerrilla group, the New People's Army (NPA), established a stronghold in the mountains from which they carried out raids against institutions and individuals associated with the political and military establishment in the lowland (van den Top 2003: 47). However, the NPA stayed in the mountains throughout the 1980s and became especially infamous in the area after carrying out a series of random executions in the Bugkalot villages.

Though this conflict made the mountains an unappealing area for migrant farmers, the Bugkalot themselves ascribe their relative isolation to their reputation for engaging in headhunting. The Bugkalot continued these ritual killings long after all other mountain peoples in Luzon had abandoned the practice. Gerard Finin (2005) explains the decline of headhunting among the other highlanders in the region with reference to the interference of the American colonial officials. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a U.S. army base was established in the Cordillera Mountains west of the Bugkalot territory. This military presence, Finin argues, changed the spatial and social relations between the ethnic groups in the area through active attempts by the Americans to establish diplomatic relations between various groups. Thus, a shared ethnoregional consciousness was established among people who had earlier fought each other. The Cordilleras underwent rapid modernization, with the establishment of infrastructure, towns, and schools.

A growing mining and logging industry attracted further development to the area. However, while this was taking place in the Cordillera mountain region to the west, where the Americans had their primary focus, the Bugkalot who lived in the eastern regions of Luzon, in the Sierra Madre Mountains, had few encounters with American officials. The distance between the colonial administration and the Bugkalot was, in fact, actively enforced through the bureaucratic categorization of Christians and non-Christians in Eastern Luzon: an act in the early American rule declared that non-Christian tribes in the Sierra Madres were exempted from paying tax (40). No attempts were made to "pacify" or integrate the Bugkalot into state bureaucracy as was done with the Igorot tribes, who lived in the mountainous areas of Luzon where the

United States had financial interests. In effect, the Bugkalot continued to be shadows in the Philippine state.

## Egalitarianism and Dominance

While “Bugkalot” is the term most commonly used among my friends in Ki-tegen, this indigenous group has become famous in the ethnographic literature under the name “Ilongot” due to the seminal body of works written by the anthropologists Michelle and Renato Rosaldo. They carried out the main part of their fieldwork in the early 1970s in the village of Kakidugen, a day’s walk from Ki-tegen. The Rosaldos drew attention to how cultural conceptions of personhood and emotions among the Bugkalot could be studied through the cultural institution of headhunting, *ngayó*. In the ethnographic record headhunting tends to be used as a generic term referring to organized ritual killings, in which the severed head of the victim is given a specific ritual meaning (Hoskins 1996: 2; McKinley 1976).

This particular form of ritual killing among the Bugkalot was gradually abandoned—or at least diluted—alongside the emerging evangelization of the 1960s. Although the Rosaldos admitted that *ngayó* had already ended as a common practice years before their most extensive fieldwork in Kakidugen in the early 1970s, they continued to study the men in the village through the prism of headhunting. While several diverse attempts were made to explain what had prompted men to engage in these ritual killings, one account is presented more persistently than the others. In this explanation, *ngayó* appears as an act carried out from time immemorial—an act that was, ostensibly, fueled by the desire of men to be like those among their peers who had previously taken a head. Envy (*avet*) was thereby conceptualized as a social engine that continually created “sameness” among peers (M. Rosaldo 1980: 140).

Thus, a striking general point about this loosely prescribed procedure was that it was carried out without at any point invoking any spirits, gods, or ancestors. Rather, the Rosaldos claimed, the Bugkalot referred to their individual *desire*, that is, a craving after accomplishing the same as their peers, whereby they could cast off feelings of despair and shame that caused anger and unrest.

Like the Rosaldos’ informants in the village of Kakidugen, people in Ki-tegen recalled a heritage of headhunting. And as the Rosaldos realized, headhunting was closely and strangely tied to the production of “sameness” among men. In this book, however, *ngayó* will offer an ethnographic context for a wider discussion of egalitarianism as a political reality.

Recent anthropological discussions have their beginning in the idea that egalitarianism may be manifest as one of two principal types. The first, which is encountered especially in certain areas of the Western world and in the “big man” systems of Papua New Guinea, refers to “egalitarianism of opportunity.” This implies that, initially, people have equivalent access to resources and power, though inequality will gradually evolve in the societies. The second, which is particularly present among hunter-gatherers, is called “egalitarianism of outcome” (Riches 2000: 671). In this book, I particularly focus on this second form of egalitarianism, which refers to societies of near equals and, more specifically, a flat power structure.

As a societal form, egalitarianism of outcome implies that there are few or no formal methods of giving authority or power to certain individuals or groups; thus all (male) members of such societies have an equal right to speak, and all members can choose not to follow an order. Morgan Fried (1967) defined egalitarian society as a society containing as many positions of prestige as there are members. This, in fact, captures the dynamics of Bugkalot society. For instance, the historian William Henry Scott (1979) excludes the Bugkalot from the other highland warrior societies based on the argument that headhunting did not have any significant influence on the social status of the killer. He further noted that there were no class terms for esteemed warriors with special privileges among the Bugkalot: they did not “practice coup counting which might produce a warrior elite” (156).

The classical ethnographic record is brimming with examples of egalitarian social formations, which is most commonly associated with groups of hunter-gatherers. The egalitarian power structure is often explained as arising from the automatic restraints placed on the accumulation of property in such groups; material goods cannot readily be carried from camp to camp, and one individual is therefore not able to gain more wealth than others. Further, due to the paucity of material goods, no instructions or sanctions are even required to reinforce sharing; egalitarianism is, so to speak, the natural, primordial foundation of human society: “the baseline upon which stratification develops” (Cashdan 1980: 116). It is, however, clear that egalitarianism cannot be explained only on a material basis. For instance, the Bugkalot are not nomads and have been living in permanent settlements for hundreds of years. Yet, they organize themselves with an absolute minimum of leadership.

James Woodburn (1982) has observed that egalitarian forms of organization primarily pertain to hunters and gathers and tend to erode as social groups move away from hunting economies. Among the Bugkalot, however, egalitarianism was still deeply rooted after they had be-

come integrated under the Philippine state and the market economy. In this sense there are significant parallels between the Bugkalot and other peoples of Luzon. Famously, among the neighboring Ifugaos, social organization is sustained without a government and without courts, judges, or statutory law.

Leaders, the *kadangyang*, have no authority or assertive power but act as go-betweens in disputes. The *kadangyang* are the elite among the Ifugao, and admittance to this stratum is achieved by acquiring sufficient wealth to sponsor feasts (Comfort 1990: 76). The Bugkalot equivalent of the *kadangyang* is called the *purun*. There are, however, important differences between the two that will help us gain a better understanding of Bugkalot society. While the *purun*—like the *kadangyang*—attempts to settle conflicts, the role of the *purun* does not belong to a certain category of people. Rather, the *purun* is a role that can be occupied by any well-liked person with acknowledged powers of oratory. Thus *purun*-ship is not ascribed to an elite over time.

It is a common assumption in the anthropological literature that egalitarianism will always, eventually, be corrupted by sociopolitical reality (see Robbins 1994). In this sense, hierarchy is conceptualized as a fundamental, cross-cultural, and inexorable condition of social life, while egalitarianism is merely part of the superficial appearance and idealized but seldom achieved form of society.

This skepticism about any claims of egalitarianism was especially caused by the emergence of the poststructuralist and Marxist-inspired feminist critique of the 1970s. The feminist critique began in the attempt to show the various ways in which women were “subordinated to men in all known societies” (Ortner 1972: 8). From such critical perspectives it seemed fundamentally flawed to characterize a society as egalitarian when approximately half the population, that is, the women, held little authority: the egalitarianism of egalitarian society was an egalitarianism of men (Flanagan 1989). These new interests of anthropology undoubtedly sharpened the general anthropological ability to detect inequalities in all domains of social life and drew the attention of anthropologists to forms of power and domination that had largely been ignored in the literature up to then.

This is reflected in Anthony Cohen’s assertion that the attribution of egalitarianism to a society “generally results from mistaking the absence of structures of differentiation—say, class, or formal hierarchies of power and authority—for the apparent absence of differentiation as such” (Cohen 1985: 33). Rather, he states, a society’s *putative egalitarianism* should be treated as exactly *that*: “It is the presentation to the outside world of the common interests of the members of the community” (35).

In Cohen's view, egalitarianism is communicated across the boundaries between communities in order to accentuate differences. A community's members may "denigrate the disparities of wealth and power, or the competitiveness which they perceive elsewhere, to justify and give value to their espousal of equality" (35–36). Thus, what ethnographers have been (superficially) describing is a contrasting identity rather than a social structure.

The skeptical stance toward egalitarianism, however, is not new. Marshall Sahlins argued as early as 1958 that truly egalitarian societies cannot exist: "Theoretically, an egalitarian society would be one in which every individual is of equal status, a society in which no one outranks anyone. But even the most primitive societies could not be described as egalitarian in this sense" (1958: 1). Sahlins thereby made himself an advocate for the idea that egalitarianism and related terms should be discarded. His reasons for doing so, however, emerged from a very particular understanding of egalitarianism; one might say that in this approach, any form of inequality in a society disqualified any attempts of viewing this society through an egalitarian, ethnographic lens.

Though such understandings of egalitarian versus hierarchical society have, in turn, been subjected to various forms of anthropological critique in recent decades, I particularly find Joel Robbins (1994) contribution to the debate productive. Joel Robbins argues that the presence of hierarchies is not in itself a valid reason for abandoning "egalitarianism" as an ethnographic term. In fact, he states, equality has become such an empirical nonstarter in Western thought that it has caused blindness among social scientists: in our overwhelming attention to inequalities, we have become unable to see equality as an important feature of social life. He suggests that we draw on Dumont's (1970) understanding of egalitarianism as a society's *paramount value*, which serves to structure the relation between other values. But this does not exclude empirical inequalities.

A society can have equality as its key value or ideology while in fact being marked by hierarchy. For instance, according to Dumont, Scandinavia provides an example for this form of egalitarianism as a paramount value in spite of its "manifold network of inequalities" (1970: 265). In the Scandinavian countries, egalitarianism is a value in the sense that social hierarchies are considered morally wrong, as unnatural to the world's order and, therefore, as something that must be warded off. This does not mean that hierarchies do not saturate social reality—but such hierarchies are downplayed through various social practices.

As Richard Jenkins has recently observed, in Denmark, there is a harsh "repertoire and vocabulary for ensuring that individuals do not

get above themselves” (2012: 95). Yet the widespread resentment about social status and differentiation is the very foundation of the continuing popularity of the Danish royal family. This institution is rendered abstract through the combination of the sacred aura of the monarchy with the media depiction of the royal family as completely ordinary people who go shopping, smoke, marry commoners, and get speeding tickets. In other words, the position of the monarchy is “independent of its successive incumbents. Persisting outside time, the monarchy is consecrated in a way that individual monarchs are not” (128). The ordinarieness of the individual family members is what allows for the institution to stand out in its perceived grandeur.

This example suggests that egalitarianism as a cultural value may be contingent on and sustained by a reality marked by powerful hierarchies. The Bugkalot society urges us to pursue this idea, while in fact placing the model on its head. Although in most recent ethnographic cases equality is believed to be continuously undermined by hierarchies, I set out to depict the situation whereby egalitarianism as social force undermines power.

In itself this is not a novel idea, but I seek to push it further. I argue that it is not egalitarian values but ideals of *hierarchy* that structure and reproduce the social, egalitarian reality in Ki-tegen. I thereby urge you, the reader, to imagine a society with empirical equality that is based on an ideological charter for hierarchy. What I present is from the outset a society of paradoxes, which compels us to reconsider certain anthropological ways of understanding egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is not an ideal as such, yet it is an empirical fact. On the other hand, assertive leadership, which is an ideal, is never actualized. Paradoxically, we will see, the ideals among the Bugkalot men should not be realized.

## A Final Comment

In the following chapters, I attempt to explore the world of a group of Bugkalot men and the everyday events and critical junctures that shaped their lives in a time of transition. By disclosing what is at stake for these men and examining the concerns and fears that occupied their consciousness, I argue that they are haunted by the specter of their own inner being—a specter made up of both the ideals and potentials that are prowling at the core of masculinity. In doing this, I am not attempting to relate the particulars of their situations to the Bugkalot in general; many differences are encountered between villages and families across the Sierra Madre Mountains.

Among the Bugkalot—as among people in all societies—social groups constantly spring up and dissolve, which makes it impossible to make an exhaustive study of the Bugkalot people in all its particulars. Therefore, when I use the term “Bugkalot,” I am resorting to ethnographic shorthand for those individuals that I came to know and who informed my research. I also do not claim that what follows is representative of all Bugkalot *men*: idiosyncrasies, oddities, and caprice dominated the characters of my closest informants to such an extent that it often made me doubt whether an ethnography of the Bugkalot could be made. Yet, while this book contains paradoxes of its own, it is an attempt to do exactly that.

In order to do so I have found it necessary to disregard important current initiatives that are being made in various communities. For instance, during my fieldwork, a group of Bugkalot living in the lowland cities attempted to raise awareness of cultural heritage. Most notably, through government grants the group, which consists mainly of pastors and individuals considered to be professionals, managed to establish “schools of living traditions” in accessible areas of the mountains. Here various elders were paid to teach traditional forms of dance, cooking, and the making of artifacts to younger generations. While I recognize such initiatives to be crucial to preserving Bugkalot cultural legacy, my informants in Ki-tegen showed only little—if any—interest in such developments. Here, then, I attempt to provide insights into the lives of certain men who, due to a generous willingness to participate in my work, have come to constitute and inform the following chapters.

By drawing on their stories—combined with the indispensable critical reflections offered to me by key female informants—I lay out the argument that to understand Bugkalot society one must be sensitive to the ways in which the egalitarian and the hierarchical are intertwined, rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive. I will argue that to understand egalitarianism among the Bugkalot, one must look into how masculinity is performed through transgressive acts, which will draw our attention to the fact that rather than egalitarianism, leadership, assertion, and power are the key values. However, paradoxically, sameness continues to be an empirical fact. Thus, by taking paradoxes in social life as a central focus, I point to the way that life among the men, rather than being organized coherently, is, in fact, lived as a paradox. I emphasize the importance of the arbitrary in human life. The ordered, the ultimately predictable, the fulfillment of potentials, on the other hand, is dangerous, as it entails a demonic form of detachedness.

I thereby point to open-endedness as an important aspect of social life, which, I will argue, is especially critical among Bugkalot men. As

we will learn, the socially subversive among the Bugkalot is brought about when potentialities are actualized. While the mountains underwent rapid changes the paradoxes in the lives of Bugkalot men endured. Perhaps more than ever, their world was guided by demonic ideals that threatened to subvert society and disconnect the individual from the whole.