

The Persistence of Social Differentiation in a Rural Philippine Village

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A Very Rough Draft

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Abstract

This paper examines how unequal commodity relations and reifying ethnic difference sustains social differentiation between so-called uplanders and lowlanders on Palawan Island in the Philippines. Drawing on various case studies, it examines how two seemingly distinct social groups -- migrants and the indigenous Tagbanua -- use their respective positions in society to mark differences in ethnic identity and livelihood, and how despite these differences, many social and economic 'markers' have become blurred. NGOs that borrow and construct notions of indigeneity as a means to facilitate and strengthen their programs, neglect how identity and livelihood overlap among the poor in each group. As NGOs construct and reify notions of indigeneity in support of land claims and conservation, they render ethnic differences explicit and influence how locals act out such differences accordingly. The paper concludes that while NGOs attempt to remedy the long-standing disparities between each social group, their simplification of local landscapes supports earlier stereotypes of people and land uses.

Introduction

Forest conservation is a neutral, objective act that impedes the loss of forest cover, reintroduces new species, or replants endemic varieties. It remains an overriding global imperative for protecting biodiversity and a rational, scientific act in the face of competing political and economic interests. Despite the persistence of this narrative however, burgeoning literature states the obvious: conservation is laden with subjective values and assumptions that societal conditions and norms define (Kellert *et al.*, 2000; Wilshusen *et al.*, 2002; McCarthy, 2005). In particular, actors in civil society support the subjectivities of forest conservation by steering policy and practice according to two pervasive discourses: a combined front of indigeneity and sustainability (Agrawal, 2005). Despite still being branded as environmental villains, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) ally themselves with indigenous peoples in order to ensure they internalize and reproduce an ecological ethic, one of awareness and stewardship. By reinforcing “self-regulation” among indigenous communities, NGOs (and the state) ensure that they rekindle a dwindling conservation ethic associated with indigeneity by producing “subjects that govern their own actions” (Bryant, 2002, p.270).

This paper examines how the NGO community on Palawan Island in the Philippines increasingly focuses on the identity and livelihood practices of indigenous peoples that are considered unique and sustainable, particularly platforms of indigeneity, in order to sell and secure conservation objectives in forest villages (Li, 2000; Bryant, 2002). I investigate how and why actors in Philippine civil society reproduce their own subjectivities by circulating messages among resource users such that discourse becomes

entrenched and articulated locally. I examine the ways in which NGOs circulate conservation discourse and how indigenous peoples who participate in livelihood projects appropriate this “external” discourse in order to articulate an identity of difference among their migrant neighbours. A cautionary note is offered in that, as NGOs support and circulate “how to” messages, they can tap into, steer and sharpen social and political differences among resources users.

Since the mid-1980s, moves from punitive to devolved conservation ensure that actors in civil society are within arms reach of local leaders and rural peoples. Different NGOs move closer to work with specific rural groups whose ethnic identity and culture they essentialize in order to uphold their environmental cause. Local extension officers and “community organizers”, among others in positions of power, assign traditional peoples with particular cultural attributes and stewardship qualities that are upheld in activist and bureaucratic quarters as cornerstone of sustainable practice. As they convey implicit and explicit messages of the “right way” to access and use forest resources, external conservation agendas are internalized by local leaders who enforce “how to” messages among their constituents. However, rather than accept environmental doctrines per se, like anyone anywhere, locally important people and their followers fuse the urgency of that doctrine into their political culture which they uphold as significant markers of cultural, political and economic difference (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). While such difference is imagined at first, it becomes enacted through socio-political and economic exchange and manifest physically in local society and environment. In time, the many struggles that local users face over resource access and use takes on a new character that

can polarize real or imagined differences within and between social groups who depend on forest resources. Although social boundaries are clearly permeable, the ways in which the real-politik of local and extra-local settings affects the political and economic standing of individuals informs the character of boundary construction and maintenance. In this sense, as NGOs frame and promote conservation strictures on ethnic terms, such as indigeneity, they reify perceived differences within and between users that compete over natural resources. The construction of social difference according to ethnic and environmental lines becomes sustained as conservation objectives merge with the political strategies of resource users, however epistemic.

By drawing on a case in the uplands of Palawan where migrant Filipinos and Tagbanua (a traditional peoples) co-mingle, trade and compete over forest resources, I shed light on how the local NGO communities' implicit and explicit effort of producing and circulating notions of good "environmental governance" is part of broader colonial constructs of ethnicity and environment. In the Philippines, the uplander-lowlander dichotomy defined during the Spanish and American colonial period is still pervasive in contemporary environmental discourse and influences policy and practice "on the ground". As I wrote elsewhere, colonial institutions simplified a complex society into 'uplander' and 'lowlander' peoples according to ethnic lines, agricultural practices and elevation. Most often land titles and legitimacy were reserved for lowland Filipino who cultivated 'productive' agriculture, while 'tribal' uplanders were considered illegitimate farmers who cultivated 'primitive' agriculture without title (Dressler, 2006). Although this dichotomy still produces images of "primitive" and "advanced", NGOs have partly

replaced and merged primitive with traditional and indigenous as essential conditions for demonstrating that indigeneity supports conservation, at least when uplanders are involved. For community-based conservation to succeed, the message was and still is: if you are *tribo* [sic] and *katutubo* (indigenous uplander), you can and must practice *kaingin* (swidden) sustainably; if you are *Kristiano* and *dayuhan, diwan* (outsider, migrant lowlander), you can and must practice paddy rice. The examples I offer demonstrate that, while local social divisions have become blurred and complex, actors in civil society continue to perpetuate colonial dichotomies of “traditional - primitive” and “modern - advanced”. While locally perceived differences between who is and is not indigenous are strengthened through conservation agendas, often leading to new or stronger articulations of difference, other factors such as intermarriage, levels of wealth, and self-ascription, have blurred identities such that political and economic markers become soft. In this sense, then, the ways in which NGOs buoy ethnic difference promotes shifting allegiance between migrants and indigenous peoples, with poorer migrants “becoming” indigenous by ascribing to notions of indigeneity and the political status it affords them.

Why are NGOs reinforcing this division of identities when in reality the divisions between peoples are much more subtle and nuanced? For NGO practitioner and local leader (and others), the reasons are instrumental. I argue that maintaining this ethnic bifurcation allows NGOs to pursue environmental goals of good governance and sustainability on platforms of “noble savage” and “inherent conservationist”, while local leaders align themselves with NGO sentiment in order to avail of benefits. For other

community members, however, articulating indigeneity through local understandings of being *katutubo* represents a form of opposition against wealthier migrants who control the “means of production and rights to share production returns” (Wilmsen, 1996, p. 3). Social groups “produce” and articulate ethnicities out of necessity, often against the claims of dominant ethnic groups. As Tagbanua use the term *katutubo*, they consciously tap into broader fields of political power that their own representatives and actors in civil society sustain from far away. The cautionary tale I tell is that as this unfolds, external interventions reinforce older social-ecological strictures that sustain socio-economic inequalities between each social groups.

NGO interventions are often misguided because of the apolitical and ahistorical nature of their policies and program (Mosse, 1997). Parochial policy and practice avoids incorporating the complexity of local context. Simplifying ethnic heterogeneity, unequal land holdings, and competing claims over resources ensures policies can “link up” with broad and easily managed problems (Mosse, 1997; Li, 2002). The problem, of course, is that as interventions proceed with simple assumptions of local reality, they allocate resources to the wrong people, for the wrong purpose. Such misadventures only exacerbate local livelihood problems. In the community of Cabayugan in central Palawan, where Tagbanua and migrants articulate their ethnicity during unequal production and exchange, NGOs have tried to reduce economic disparities by focusing on difference. By targeting Tagbanua indigeneity, they advertise reasons why migrants must trade fairly and stay off ancestral lands. In doing so, Tagbanua elites and NGOs have together strengthened and politicized social boundaries, despite their overlapping

character. Ethnic differences among the poor in each group, for example, are less sharply drawn: poor migrant households claim to be *katutubo* (or a type of Tagbanua) because of shared experiences of discrimination and poverty. Despite this, NGOs still consider the social and political distinctions between migrants and indigenous peoples as relatively fixed and homogenous.

This paper first considers how and why social and political differences arise and underpin livelihood differences by examining past and present literature on identity and social differentiation. This theoretical analysis supports the idea that social and economic differentiation represents an interrelated process whereby “social divisions of gender, ethnicity and class relate to one another” as a bricolage, and that, when NGOs do intervene to support livelihoods, they affect multiple, overlapping facets of local life (Eder, 2004, p. 629). It then describes how each group’s identity was informed by socio-political and economic differences and how NGOs began to reify these differences by upholding particular constructs of ethnicity and livelihood on Palawan.

As background, section two describes how both groups came to settle and trade in an area called Cabayugan. It describes how both groups started off with similar livelihood pursuits, which they often pursued together, until migrants claimed and controlled resource access and use. While migrants soon hired Tagbanua to plow and cultivate their fields, the area’s social dynamics changed, as an influx of migrants increased ethnic heterogeneity locally. Section three describes how some Tagbanua and migrants consider themselves distinct from each other according to socio-political character and livelihood

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strategies. Section four examines how NGO interventions bank on indigeneity to sell particular projects and renders these differences explicit among locals, while section five and six conclude that while differences exist between each group, they less sharply drawn as NGOs make them out to be. I claim that members of each group may also form identities that overlap in character and purpose, and that as NGOs miss these differences while searching for indigeneity, they only exacerbate local differentiation.

Section I: *The Dynamics of differentiation and identity*

The interface between regional and local political and economic processes has affected the ability of households to produce and exchange resources for several centuries on Palawan. Tagbanua inhabiting coastal regions traded extensively with Chinese and Muslim merchants, and other land-based neighbours such as Batak (Venturello, 1907; Fox, 1954; Kress, 1977). At this time, Tagbanua still occupied lands and mediated commodity relations without major repercussions.

Broader changes in land uses and market prices, among others, in what became a “complex frontier society” produced new constraints and opportunities to which migrants and Tagbanua react differently (Eder, 2004). Their responses reflect “historically sedimented” practices and present day circumstances that further define and shape their socio-political position relative to that of others (Li, 2000, p. 151). Local outcomes of such situations are perhaps best described as arising from social and economic differentiation: an interrelated, multi-scale process describing how social groups who share common characteristics begin to differ from one another with respect to those characteristics (McDermott, 2000, p. 25). When commodity relations are involved,

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differentiation entails a "cumulative and permanent process of change in the ways in which different groups in rural society...gain access to the products of their own or others' labour, based on their differential control over production resources and often...on inequalities in access to land" (White, 1989. p. 20). However, while the degree of access to and use of productive resources influences production and consumption, differentiation is social and political in character.

I follow Hefner (1990) and Wilmsen (1996) in arguing that multiple, interrelated socio-political factors affect one another to generate social differences that influence livelihood dynamics. This, of course, includes NGOs and state parastatal. Hefner (1990, p. 25) suggests that "actors' interests are never directly derivative of relations of production [...] social differentiation cannot be understood in terms of objective relations of production or surplus extraction alone. It must also be grasped in relation to community and life-style...and the identity and commitments they imply" (ibid., p. 26). While quantitative factors explain the growth of disparities, changing social and political relations clearly work together to influence social differences in local and extra-local settings.

The growth of social difference becomes more complex in how the process is informed and shaped by identity and ethnicity, both of which involve self-identification and livelihood changes (e.g., land holdings etc). Earlier literature theorizes "identity" as an individual and collective *process* of relational association and self-affirmation through maintaining and transforming social relations and culture (Barth, 1969; Roosens, 1989). Through such social relations, individuals experience a sense of belonging to a social

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category and network; such "belonging" influences their group "structure" and use of physical space (Roosens, 1989). It is thought that indigenous people may link identity with space in their claims to define and defend their indigeneity. In doing so, they strengthen their social *and* economic positions relative to that of outsiders and in the process produce opportunities from which to negotiate new claims (Agnew, 1987).

I argue that on Palawan identity is constructed through a fragmented social and political process that fluctuates and depends upon circumstance. Identity among Tagbanua and migrants is constructed in different situations and for different reasons. It is formed through sets of relations shaped by past and present circumstances, which are articulated explicitly in relation to dominant power groups. Through such articulation, identity takes on a particular meaning to which others might also ascribe. However, it is a process in which individuals actively recreate identity and meaning by engaging their social and physical worlds. Such a process may encompass power structures, cultures and worldviews, among other things. Rather than being fixed in space, identity is formed through social and political clusters of interaction that informs group membership (Agnew, 1987). Yet, since identities consist of different elements it follows that group membership is far from absolute. Those who ascribe to one group over another can reshape socio-political relations that define membership and thus the social boundaries of groups. Group formation remains a fluid process where locals may opt in or out of so-called "collectives." While both Tagbanua and migrants create boundaries through processes of inclusive and exclusion, which reinforces their identity, the boundaries they reproduce remain permeable and shift due to myriad of influences (Gupta and Ferguson,

1992). The political dynamic between Tagbanua, migrants and NGOs characterizes such power relations.

Ethnicity arises from the process of identity formation, or "a special category of identity" (McDermott, 2000, p. 40). Early characterizations of ethnicity referred similarly to the individual or group process of "relational association and self-affirmation" except that sharp social distinctions are made between two or more groups (Barth 1969, p. 10). By sharing social relations and norms, individuals experience a sense of belonging to a social category and/or network with an understanding that it determines their own group structure and any attempts to reinforce it (Roosens 1989). Barth (1969, p. 11) argued further that "ethnic groups" are formed through "membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order".

I depart from Barth's earlier interpretation of ethnicity by arguing in line with Wilmsen (1996) that the "essence of ethnic existence lies in differential access to ..." particular political and economic opportunities that groups in power control and exploit. A group may self-identify based on how it articulates past and present experiences in relation to dominant power structures and how this shapes their particular positions in society (Li, 2000). As Li (2000) writes, the conjunctures at which (some) people come to identify themselves as indigenous... are the contingent products of agency and the cultural and political work of *articulation* (p.151, emphasis in original).

The fluidity by which ethnic identity is formed is revealed by how individuals ascribe to more than one "ethnic group," a process shaped by different socio-political, economic and/or environmental conditions. Pressure to conform to a particular identity may also arise by how the state defines a particular social group, such as with the migrant "lowlander" and indigenous "uplander" dichotomy. In such cases, ascription to ethnic identity can project claims of indigeneity which become contested because social boundaries typically overlap. Indeed, individuals may move across or straddle boundaries. While the continuity of these factors reinforces social boundaries, such boundaries are permeable as individuals may shift allegiances to other groups and adopt other notions of ethnicity (McDermott, 2000). Fields of power relations also influence how and why Tagbanua must reinforce and negotiate their own identity and its "ethnic character". For many, the strengthening of ethnic identity and culture is based on a process of individual self-reflection and reassertion. Tagbanua continue to anchor their right to self-determination on retaining a strong socio-political and cultural orientation. How and why such 'orientation' forms, persists and/or overlaps between each group to shape identity and livelihood practices, particularly when confronted with external intervention, is the main thrust of this paper.

Section II: The growth of local differentiation

Cabayugan Then

Tagbanua settled in Cabayugan during the mid-to-late 1800s. They traveled north from Aborlan, Napsaan and Apurawan in small clusters to Marufinas and Malipien where they

cultivated swidden on flat, fertile lands by St. Paul Bay (Fox, 1954) (see Map 1).⁴

Marche (1890 reprinted in 1970), an early French explorer, writes that Tagbanua lived in the coastal inlets of Ulugan Bay, an area flanking Cabayugan. Fox (1954, p. 27) also documented the arrival of a 'self contained' group of Tagbanua from southwestern Palawan. In time, Tagbanua pioneers cut swiddens by the St. Paul Mountain Chain and assigned place names and meanings to a variegated landscape.

From the 1950s onward, migrants departed from islands (Luzon, Mindanao, Mindoro etc) where civil conflicts, land, and resource scarcity were prevalent, to settle at Cabayugan (then Buenavista), Palawan (Kerkvliet, 1977; Eder, 1987; Eder and Fernandez, 1996). Palawan was considered resource abundant and peaceful, an exception to other Philippine islands. At the time, the migrant population was relatively homogeneous in Cabayugan, with the predominant ethnic groups living among Tagbanua being Bulinao from Anda Pangasinan and Iloilo from Ilocos (Central Visayas).

The arrival of pioneer migrants and their followers led to changing trade relations and gradual increases in the conversion of forest into farmland in Cabayugan. As I describe elsewhere, migrants cleared forest for swidden with the labour of Tagbanua who would clear weeds, sow seeds and harvest yields once swiddens were converted into paddy fields. Flat valley lands flanking the Cabayugan River were well suited for paddy fields which grew in size and yielded more rice (Dressler, 2005b). As Tagbanua cleared land of forest and produced goods for migrants, production and exchange relations – once

⁴ Aborlan lies in south-central Palawan and is considered the "cultural cradle" of Tagbanua society (Fox, 1954).

characterized by reciprocity – became geared toward fledging commodity markets where trade and work relations became “asymmetrical” (Eder, 1987). New social divisions of labour arose as indigenes redirected time to produce commodities for markets owned by migrants. Tagbanua farmers lost increasing control over access to forest resources and subsistence production, particularly for familial needs and different types of ceremony (Dressler, 2006).

Although migrants and Tagbanua initially held similar livelihood portfolios, with both using reciprocal labour exchanges for clearing and cultivating swidden and other times hunting pig together, migrants eventually claimed and controlled productive resources. They claimed flat lands, converted swidden into paddy fields, and sometimes tendered lands as private title. With secure title, wealthier migrants easily expanded paddy rice, while Tagbanua and poorer migrants cultivated swidden on usufruct plots. As a result, their socio-political structures, culture and economic positions became increasingly differentiated over time. Tagbanua households relied heavily on swidden, with few being able to cultivate paddy rice with any great success, as migrants expanded their fields and adopted advanced farming technologies (e.g., hybrid seed varieties and water pumps) (Dressler, 2005b).

The ability of pioneer migrants to claim flat, productive lands and then register that land as private title, gave them security to produce and sell rice surplus in local and/or city markets. Any profits were often reinvested in wet rice production, their homestead, and their children’s education. New levels of wealth supported their political networks and

holds on local power. The ability of migrants to claim productive lands and exploit local trade relations continues today and ensures that they control access to and use of forest resources, socio-political networks, and certain types of wealth. Migrants' socio-political and economic dominance has only increased social and economic differentiation in Cabayugan.

Cabayugan Now

By comparing the social and economic motives of the younger and older generation of each social group, it becomes possible to understand what conditions reproduce social differences in Cabayugan. To suggest that social differences are due to one or two main factors, or conditions fails to reflect the complexity involved in how differentiation arose over time and influenced self-identification. When coupled with broader political and economic forces, changes in resource availability, social relations of production and exchange, and socio-political factors converge to reproduce local difference. Hence, processes of differentiation reflect multiple changes rather than any single social or economic driver. The following considers how this process arises, with subsequent sections explaining how Tagbanua actually voice their "identity of difference". I follow McDermott (2000) in using the "one-drop" rule of hypo-descent and local claims of indigeneity in order to elaborate on self-identification. This discussion is then juxtaposed against the influence of NGO interventions on social differentiation in Cabayugan.

Although the initial migrant population was relatively homogenous in Cabayugan, ethnic heterogeneity increased considerably from 1970 onward. In 2001, the local population now consisted of 14 different ethnic groups, with a growing number intermarrying. The number and diversity of migrant households (69%, 109) now out number the descendants of the original inhabitants: Tagbanua households now represent 31% (48) of the population (N=157).¹ Despite the increasing ethnic diversity among migrants, the reasons for migrating and settling are similar to those of pioneers.² Among newly formed households, for example, the offspring of migrant pioneers (20 households) born in the early 1970s (18%), indicated that, as their parents had, their reason for remaining was to access a "better livelihood" (14%) (15 households), get "married" (12%) (13 households) and/ or because they had "followed their parents" (9%) (10 households).

First generation migrants were raising children and expanding into new households and, once settled, cultivated paddy rice upon land inherited from and cleared by their parents. Since land and ownership rights passed bilaterally between generations, recently formed households could use lands in usufruct and then opt to file for private title. Receiving flat, cleared lands from their parents saved them considerable time and energy otherwise needed for establishing an initial homestead and paddy field. Younger households were thus incorporated into the well-established paddy rice economy that their forefathers and mothers had setup, giving them an immediate productive advantage. Both old and new migrant households were thus interested in claiming flat lands for paddy rice farming because it still offered them a productive advantage. First generation migrant households

¹ Contained in the Tagbanua sample are mix-marriage households. These households identified themselves as Tagbanua.

² Respondents could choose multiple answers to one question.

thus stayed put because they believed paddy farming was still economically viable and socially esteemed.

Other new households from the same population cohort (born in the 1970s) indicated they had settled due the small, but growing number of *off-farm* employment opportunities in the area, including part-time health work, teaching, and trade-related work, such as carpentry and machine repair. The motivation and ability of younger migrant households to secure "service sector" employment is characteristic of a strong set of "access qualifications", such as political ties and education, which came about from parental support and broader social networks (Blaikie, 1985, p. 7). Compared to the 1960s, migrant control and resourcefulness have created a range of economic multiplier effects that increased the number and diversity of occupations in Cabayugan. Nevertheless, others suggested during open-ended interviews that, since they could access service sector work in Puerto Princesa City, there were now fewer reasons to remain.³

Among Tagbanua, while the motives of the younger generation to remain in Cabayugan were similar to those of migrants from the same population cohort, they had fewer opportunities to move beyond subsistence in Cabayugan. For example, fourth generation Tagbanua (born between 1940 and 1950) settled or remained in the area due to marriage (2%) (1 household) and livelihood improvements (3%) (2 households).^{4 5} Similar factors once drew elders to the area.

³ Tagbanua who arrived in Cabayugan are not migrants because they did not originate (at least in the last 1000 years) from outside of Palawan Island. As other indigenous peoples have done, they have moved within their descent group's broader territory, central Palawan.

⁴ The fourth generation's children were born from the mid- 1960 to the late 1970s.

Compared to migrants, new Tagbanua households were very dissatisfied with current livelihood productivity and opportunities. They lamented that, in contrast to their parents' time, soils in swidden fields were less fertile and the number of pests and inclement weather had increased. Many suggested that limited employment opportunities in Puerto Princesa City and pressing familial obligations kept them in Cabayugan. With little education and few political ties, most young Tagbanua worked swidden fields or manual labour inside (ploughing of migrant fields) and outside of Cabayugan (construction, road work in the city, etc).

Geographical characteristics, settlement motives and socio-political networks thus began to shape each group's distribution, access to natural resources, broader livelihood patterns and overall differentiation. Where households settled – or were forced to settle - - directly shaped access to forest resources and land for agriculture. Most migrant households⁶ are situated in the flat valley towns of Manturon and Centro where they cultivate paddy rice and swidden along the main market road. Realizing that cultivating paddies on flat lands near the market road makes for easier processing and transport, new households continue to build homes on lots behind homesteads that already occupy the roadside strip. Migrant farmers will haul their rice surplus onto jeepneys that regularly run the road to public markets and the National Food Authority (NFA), the state rice buyer. Moreover, living among one's own ethnic group ensures that farmers receive support from friends and family during ploughing, tilling and harvesting of paddy fields.

⁵ Respondents could choose multiple responses to one question.

⁶ The remaining three migrant households are located just beyond the periphery of each community's territory, as defined by local standards.

In contrast, most Tagbanua households occupy and cultivate usufruct lands as swidden and sometimes paddy rice at the hillier uplands of *sitio* Sugod Uno. Old and new Tagbanua households occupy hilly land further in the forest and assist one another with swidden, while still regularly working on migrant-owned paddy fields. Even here, however, migrants purchase the little remaining flat land as private title for paddy rice and tree cropping, particularly in the *sitio* centre. Tagbanua recognize that migrant purchase of their usufruct plots now leads to internal displacement.⁷ By moving farther into the forest, their access to resources for domestic production and market exchange is hindered, which, in itself, is a prime driver of differentiation.

Further detail in local differentiation resides in the distribution of overall land holdings, the type of agriculture and the extent of private title between each group. Since arriving in the late 1950s, migrants have accumulated 421 ha while Tagbanua claimed 121 ha of agricultural lands prior to 2002.⁸ For overall landholdings in 2001, migrants collectively claimed 191 ha of swidden and 149 ha of paddy rice fields with other plots making up the remaining 81 ha, while Tagbanua claimed less paddy rice than swidden at 11.75 ha and 74.25 ha, respectively.⁹ The remaining 35 hectares were cultivated with other crops.

⁷ The irony is that such land is viewed as marginal farmland due to its undulating nature and poor soil fertility. This farmland is also difficult to access because it is 5-7 km in from the main road.

⁸ The data for land holdings/ accumulation and those of the subsequent wealth ranking are obtained from a supplemental questionnaire carried out in 2004. All other data presented in this chapter (graphs and tables) are derived from the main livelihood questionnaire.

⁹ Tree crop lands represent the only other land use of increasing significance in Cabayugan. From 1950 - 1970, migrant households claimed 12.5 ha of land with tree crops with that number increasing to 20.92 ha during the period of 1971 - 1990. Half the amount of land was cultivated under tree crops from 1991-2000. As with other agriculture, with the exception of swidden, Tagbanua planted less land with tree

Migrants sustain this acquisition of property by purchasing Tagbanua lands that had been cleared of trees for swidden or paddy rice. In 2001, for example, 26% (12) of Tagbanua households had sold land to migrants. Finally, over 20 migrant households held private title, whereas Tagbanua held none as freehold. Most indigenes and poorer migrants demonstrated *de facto* ownership by using Tax Certificates as proof that taxes had been paid on cleared and cultivated land – an economic condition that poorer members in both groups had in common. Overall changes in land holdings between each group have thus proven to be an important driver of differentiation over time. While the outcomes of this commodity flow are more complex than I describe, the fact that wealth is in the hands of migrants is abundantly clear. By claiming substantial amounts of land, wealthier migrants consolidate their power base and hold poorer migrant and Tagbanua in subservient positions.

As part of the broader societal hierarchy embedded in Philippine society, conceptualizing ethnic difference is tied to the productivity and sustainability of agricultural practices that are concurrently projected upon farmers' own characteristics, and vice versa. Claiming additional plots of private title for paddy rice, which locals and the state consider as lucrative and esteemed production, raises the social and political status of migrant farmers. In contrast, state continues to criminalize swidden as a backward and low yielding form of rice production, which is projected upon Tagbanua farmers. While the state criminalizes swidden and swidden farmers because its "shifting nature" destroys

crops, with not more than 10 ha being cultivated with fruit, coffee and or coconut trees at any one time from 1950 - 2000. Only a few migrant households have tree plantations comprised of mahogany. Overall, migrants claimed 68 ha of land as tree crops while Tagbanua claimed less than half at 32 ha.

forest on “public domain”, indigenes and poorer migrants in general are held subservient because neither fit broader national ideals of what constitutes a “good citizen”.

Recognizing their subservient position, Tagbanua and now *poorer migrants* express particular forms of indigeneity collectively in spite of or in deference to those in power, whether local elite or NGO. Tagbanua respond to such social pressures by articulating notions of indigeneity that belong to a broader pan-indigenous solidarity on and off Palawan Island. In particular, they use *katutubo* in a locally condensed form that branches out to express regional solidarity in ways that reassert specific rights to access and use natural resources (Lewellen, 2002). Beyond indigenous peoples, actors in civil society have appropriated the terms for the own political and economic purpose. NGOs increasingly use the term to tap local notions of indigeneity in order to instill an ethic of environmental conservation. In what follows, I describe how Tagbanua lean on the term *katutubo* to impart greater legitimacy to their effort to reclaim ancestral lands and how NGOs have found ways to essentialize and naturalize *katutubo* to ensure that Tagbanua remain “ecological stewards”.

Section III: Enduring Social Differentiation

While the persistence of economic inequality still sustains social differentiation, both Tagbanua and poorer migrants reflect and act on their social positions in response to mergers of past and present conditions in Cabayugan. “Both social identity and status depend...on a combination of ascribed and achieved qualifications” which are influenced by changes in trade relations and availability of forest resources, among other factors

(Berry, 1989:42). As a result, individuals come to perceive and express their identity in different ways. Some have adopted the term because they realize it gives the option to resist, which, depending on its application, opens up new political and economic opportunities. Others distance themselves from the label for fear of not conforming to “modern” migrant culture and settings. The following reveals how Tagbanua brandish the indigeneity card under the label of *katutubo* in different social and economic circumstances.

During a discussion on local perceptions of poverty, several Tagbanua farmers stated that although migrants may belittle them, they retain unique qualities that cannot be shared with others. One Tagbanua suggested that:¹⁰

There is a big difference. The way I see it, I think there is a big gap [between us]; those who are not *katutubo* [indigenous or innate], they belittle the Tagbanua. Hey, he is only a Tagbanua. Look at him! That is how we are different from them; there are confrontations sometimes because of these kinds of words, those that belittle the Tagbanua. [They would say] do not mind them because they are only Tagbanua. Or look, he dresses up like a Tagbanua because he has no money! They would look at our clothes and say, they are Tagbanua, that is why they are dressed that way.

The way I see it, I would say there is a big gap between the *katutubo* and the migrants because as *katutubo*, we could not give them our culture, but we could get the migrant’s culture from them. They could not get our culture, because we have secrets.

An outspoken Tagbanua elder offers a clearer statement of how his own ethnic identity (being *katutubo*) was a legitimate means to resist migrants claiming his land. Being indigenous to Cabayugan, the land belonged to him and his ancestors.¹¹ He argues:

¹⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Leonardo Maneag, Tagnipa Crossing, Summer 2002

¹¹ Focus Group Discussion, Thomas Madarcos, Tagnipa Crossing, Summer 2002

We used to have a system of *api* [a feeling of shame or disgrace], you are like a slave and people belittle you; no one respects the person when he is humiliated, that is the meaning of *api*. ...the *katutubo* were afraid, they were afraid and they just follow the outsiders/ migrants. They are the ones who used to hold our lives. But really, we *katutubo* have the right to stop people from coming in. I can because I am Tagbanua and this is our land and entire region!

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The same elder then explains why, as *katutubo*, he needs to defend his lands from outsiders. In a few sentences he points out how land belongs to Tagbanua and how outsiders claiming that land, produces

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He argues:

The reason I came here was because the land is close to the seashore. My children use the land in Arorogan (close to Martape) today for paddy rice and they have a small kaingin (swidden) nearby. They also fish there. So you see they have not sold any land because I want to keep the land for my children. If I clear any land it will be in flat areas because that is where the soil is best. There is no sense to clear the land "*sa taas*" [up high] since the soil is not fertile there, the plants do not grow well. Most of us like to sow flat land.

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But what we need is private ownership of land so that migrants will not get our land.

Our ancestral lands are important to me because it reminds me of my mother – I remember the plants they placed, such as Nyog, and all the different areas that they cleared. They way they cleared the land is what gives me remembrance"

An additional Tagbanua woman puts it more succinctly:¹²

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We need our land because we are not finished with it, and the next generation will need the land also. That is why we'd like to keep the land in our blood line. Generally, if there are no emergencies then we will keep our lands but when we need money immediately we sell it for cash. We must own land because we have different needs and different livelihoods that fulfill them. The land is important to me because I was born here and so were my parents. The land will also allow our children to study in school and we can plant fruit trees. Even if we don't have any money we can still survive off the land. Because of this, we value the land more. We need the forest products for our

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¹² Focus Group Discussion, Percy Madarcos, Tagnipa Crossing, Summer 2002

livelihood. But we cannot make paddy rice where and when we want, we have the uplands and they have the lowlands.

These sentiments reinforce how "being Tagbanua" and *katutubo* have become (re)shaped as part of their resistance against migrant control over access to and use of productive resources. Although some Tagbanua emulate migrant production and consumption patterns, many articulate social difference by distancing themselves from migrant lifeways. In this sense, principles of inclusion and exclusion vaguely define group membership, which determines who may live among "Tagbanua". As McDermott (2000) documents for Kayasan, just 15 km south of Cabayugan, Tagbanua and Batak (a neighbouring indigenous peoples) also use the term *katutubo* to regulate group access. While their use of the term denotes and conveys "insider" as an indirect means to differentiate themselves from migrants or *dayuhan* (the "outsiders"), it now qualifies who can access and use forest resources on ancestral lands in Kayasan and Cabayugan (see below). Increasingly, Tagbanua rely on the collective identity of *katutubo* on political grounds in order to mediate and resist outsiders over-exploiting their resources, sustained discrimination and resulting economic marginalization. It should now be clear that the basis of such terms is not directly rooted in biological relatedness (e.g., kinship etc). Rather, the use of *katutubo* (or *kristiano*) is expressed as a "unity of elements" that defines "collective" positions relative to those in power (Li, 2000, p. 4). Being or becoming *katutubo* is part of achieving "... a goal oriented strategy" against those holding them in marginal position (ibid, p. 4).

While it appears that social differences are growing between each group, greater scrutiny distills how poorer members of *both* social groups find common political currency in ascribing to the notion of *katutubo*. Migrants that share poverty traits similar to Tagbanua have become allies in order to access support that arises from belonging to the same “social rank”. Through a shared sense of poverty, poorer migrants find greater socio-political and economic support among Tagbanua than wealthier migrants. Poorer migrants become a type of “Tagbanua” so they can tap and benefit from the “indigenesness” once reserved for Tagbanua. However, as notions of indigeneity and being Tagbanua are confirmed and contested, those identifying themselves as “real” Tagbanua (who claim consanguinity (high blood and low blood) to original Tagbanua settlers), have found greater legitimacy in their claims of indigeneity. In particular, being “pure” Tagbanua has become easier because numerous NGOs continue to reaffirm and thus essentialize such claims. NGO interventions that support ancestral land claims and sustainable livelihoods, now ride local claims of indigeneity, which, for better or worse, offers political currency to “being katutubo”.

Section IV: Civil Society “Propping Up” Social Difference

Since the early 1990s, the number, type and agenda of NGO grew rapidly in Puerto Princesa City. NGOs bore witness to Ferdinand Marcos’ legacy of environmental destruction on Palawan and elsewhere in the Philippines. Cognizant of the need to act quickly, NGOs formed and reformed under the platform of forest conservation. Until the mid-1990s, Palawenos lost as much as 19,000 ha of forests annually. While many NGOs held a preservationist mandate, others believed broader solutions were necessary

to account for both social and ecological factors. Since the upland territories of indigenous peoples overlapped with mature forests, NGOs (and state agencies) followed an integrated, grass-roots approach to support indigenous peoples' rights and livelihoods in support of forest conservation.

Many local organizations were led by charismatic leaders who tapped into several new environmental laws and programs on Palawan including the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) (1992), the National Integrated Protected Areas Act (1992), and the more recent Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (1997). NGOs in Puerto Princesa City had formed from older networks and soon had field officers working among Tagbanua and migrants in Cabayugan. By forming an NGO consortium, they pooled their technical expertise, coordinated project implementation, and lobbied government collectively. As Hilhorst (2000) notes, such networks were rooted in mutual obligations that were reinforced through trust and friendship and moral undertones that supported "their cause". In time, NGOs aligned themselves with indigenous peoples' concerns *and* prioritized their own conservation efforts. The political grease for implementing livelihood projects under conditions of indigeneity and sustainability was now well placed.

One major initiative in support of Tagbanua rights and environmental protection was NGO involvement in the establishment of the Cabayugan CADC in 1997 (see Fig X). Several Palawan and Manila-based NGOs with satellite offices formed extensive social and political networks with different Tagbanua elite in Cabayugan (and Kayasan). On

the one hand, NGOs used their personal relations with Tagbanua leaders as access channels to convey project information, grant legal assistance, and educate other community members on environment and conservation, particularly for sustainable livelihoods. On the other, certain Tagbanua gained political and economic advantages by learning how to capitalize on their ties with NGO leaders and different forms of livelihood assistance. Working with NGOs, these elites and other community members heard and came to realize that particular NGOs valued the “locally defined” ethnic marker of *katutubo*, which, in turn, ensured that key members of each party could secure political opportunities and future project benefits. NGO support for and Tagbanua claims of indigeneity soon congealed physically as a racialized zone known locally as the Tagbanua ancestral domain claim (i.e., the Cabayugan Ancestral Domain Claim). Although the claim was to reduce migrant land grabs, remedy unbalanced trade relations, and regulate access to forest resources, NGOs facilitated and advertised their own political and environmental agenda on the side. Upon accepting external conservation grants, they adopted government and foreign management discourse of how to best support the livelihoods of uplanders. While the discourse advocated “tapping” traditional knowledge for “sustainable management”, few practitioners had an adequate understanding of the underlying causes of social differentiation. As local and foreign NGOs flocked to Cabayugan with policy agendas and expectations of "livelihood sustainability", interests in expediting successful projects led to misreadings of the local landscape.

How the propping up began

In the early 1990s, a new NGO consortium accessed the Departmental Administrative Order no. 2 (S. 1993) and later the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (1997) in order to delineate the domain claim in Cabayugan. By working with officials at the provincial and national Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSDs), indigenous rights and environmental NGOs mobilized Tagbanua to form a local association called TICKA (the Voices of the Tagbanua in Cabayugan). In time, certain Tagbanua elites would use TICKA as the collective “indigenous voice” for restoring legal claims to ancestral lands as well as access to and use of non-timber forest products. Claims made by Tagbanua over resources in the CADC rested on their ability to articulate and advertise indigeneity among their own, their migrant neighbours and local NGO community. The irony, of course, is that since NGOs had helped form TICKA, they benefited by promoting indigeneity among TICKA members as the discourse supported collaborative livelihood projects.

Three main indigenous rights organizations, the Legal Assistance Centre for Indigenous Filipinos (PANLIPI)¹³, Indigenous Peoples’ Apostolate (IPA)¹⁴ and United Tribes of

¹³ A Manila-based NGO, PANLIPI stands for *Tanggapan Panligal ng Katutubong Pilipino* – The Legal Assistance Centre for Indigenous Filipinos. PANLIPI-Palawan’s lawyer wore two hats at the time as she also formed the new office of the Environmental Legal Assistance Centre. The local ELAC office was formed in 1994 and provides paralegal training and enforces different national/ provincial environmental laws in and around Puerto Princesa Subterranean National Park.

Palawan (NATRIPAL),¹⁵ facilitated the planning, delineation and implementation of the CADC. First, the IPA's own staff began by organizing Tagbanua into their own Peoples' Organization (TICKA) so that community leaders could work effectively with other NGOs and the provincial Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Second, NATRIPAL and PANLIPI funded various scoping exercises in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund, Philippines, and the DENR in order to facilitate CADC delineation, which included kinship genealogies, oral histories and ocular inspections, among other zoning procedures. The steps leading to the delineation and official release of the 5,092 hectares (of public domain) for the CADC involved lengthy negotiations between DENR staff, NGOs and Tagbanua leaders, most of whom were dismayed at the bureaucratic depth of the procedures (Pinto, 1999).

Partly because of NGO efforts, Tagbanua became increasingly aware of their political rights and pursued new options open to them. Options often advertised included, among others, securing *de facto* land tenure, greater control over the trade in forest products inside and near the domain claim, and growing political networks with the DENR and NGOs. Engagements with NGOs produced a new sense of political unity among Tagbanua which, in turn, was fused with notions of indigeneity and conservation. Notions of indigeneity now underpinned how some Tagbanua differentiated themselves from migrants, differences which have been blurred in some instances and strengthened

¹⁴The IPA is an arm of the Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines. The IPA was originally named the Tribal Filipinos Apostolate.

¹⁵ A Palawan-based Peoples' Organization, NATRIPAL is the federation of indigenous peoples on Palawan (the "United Tribes of Palawan") and functions in the capacity of an NGO, except with a broad constituency of indigenous peoples. It is comprised of "local associations" in different indigenous communities, which were united in 1989 under NATRIPAL.

in others. As I show below, the results of the CADC interventions and subsequent projects granted Tagbanua new political rights over land and natural resources, which were now guarded by a *de facto* political boundary. Both Tagbanua and NGOs would, in turn, use this boundary to strengthen their sense of community by incorporating some and excluding others.

Turning to their own NGO-supported Peoples' Organization, TICKA, individual and local Tagbanua elites spoke on behalf of "their" community on issues concerning livelihoods security and political rights. Belonging to the CADC and being a member of TICKA qualified a shared sense of "Tagbanuaness", of being *katutubo* (innate) rather than an outsider (*dayuhan* or *diwan*). CADC membership and attending meetings with TICKA, where the politics surrounding the CADC and "being Tagbanua" was circulated, served as "critical factor in shaping who could gain, control and maintain the use of" natural resource inside the CADC, particularly land (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 42). TICKA meetings and CADC membership was thus an "access mechanisms...[which] intended to impart greater power to individuals by making them members of [a]larger (indigenous) group" (ibid, p. 42). While the terms of the engagement were partly bounded by project politics, Tagbanua saw the CADC as a means to defend their land and thus their position of *katutubo* (Li, 2000).

During the summer of 2002, I attended several TICKA meetings to investigate how Tagbanua ideas of the CADC influenced their sense of identity in relation to natural resources and migrants. Often I would pose questions to the entire group or conduct

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individual interviews after meetings had ended. During the main chorus, it became apparent the CADC was valued for how it protected Tagbanua livelihoods against the claims of outsiders, particularly non-timber forest products. One middle-aged Tagbanua argued that,

The CADC is good. If not for the CADC, the whole area would be a park. We could not have any *kamote* [cassava] and could not even cut one tree for ourselves. We depend on the forest for pig and honey whereas the park prohibits us from getting all types of products. The CADC gives us new opportunities to use and save our resources. Other people may not enter unless they have the supporting papers. We will also get our own land soon. By getting our land inside the CADC we defend and manage it also.¹⁶

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Another Tagbanua woman expresses how the CADC provided new freedom to access resources in a relatively unimpeded manner. She states enthusiastically,

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...the CADC is important to use because we are now free to get any type of product inside of it! Before it was difficult to get permits from the Government, but today it is much easier to get permits from our own kind, the Chief. I think the CADC can keep people outside because we *katutubo* have the right to stop people from coming in. I can because I am Tagbanua and this is our region!¹⁷

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Finally, a Tagbanua elder points out how the CADC supported resource access through its regulatory structure that was imposed on Tagbanua collectors. He states,

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... Since we have our CADC the migrants give a little more respect to us. Some may follow the rules and write a letter to the leaders to ask permission to enter the area. But others still don't.

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Very few Ilocanos [a migrant group] come to get rattan now. Before they come here to collect rattan, but now they must ask the permission of the CADC holders. They must ask permission of the Tribal Council

¹⁶ Key Informant Interview, Demetrio Augusto, Sugod Uno, Summer 2002.

¹⁷ Key Informant Interview, Percy Madarcos, Sugod Uno, Summer 2002

first. If they do not ask permission, then they cannot cut rattan inside the CADC. Because we really protect our rattan...¹⁸

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With few expectations, most Tagbanua consider the CADC as a direct means to secure overall political and economic well-being. It offers them the opportunity to rally behind different environmental and political causes that might regulate migrant incursions. Most accept how organizing, implementing and managing the CADC renewed political solidarity and economic opportunity, and that NGOs were instrumental in ensuring the claim's delineation.

However, while the CADC claims to offer preferential rights over resources and supposedly curbs migrant encroachment, initial public consultations led to little social interaction and reconciliation among migrants, Tagbanua, and/or ethnically mixed households. Even today, little factual exchange about the CADC aims to reduce socio-political tensions. Tagbanua use domain claim boundaries to protect forest resources and livelihoods, while migrant farmers and resource managers protect fields and forests with cadastral boundaries. During the initial delineation phase, migrant perspectives of the CADC stood in stark contrast to the Tagbanua. It seemed that social and economic differences had only sharpened in Cabayugan.

To illustrate, as PANLIPI-Palawan assisted the provincial DENR in expediting the CADC in 1993 under DAO no. 2, it facilitated a series of local consultations with migrants and Tagbanua (McDermott, 2000). The taskforce assigned to the task ensured that public consultations proceeded by targeting *key* Tagbanua and migrants leaders in

¹⁸ Oral History Interview, Manong Thomas Madarcos, Sugod Uno/Martape, Summer 2002

Sugod Uno (and Kayasan). Not everybody agreed with the ancestral domain claim initiative. During the consultations recently settled non-tenured migrants that were farming *inside* of the CADC feared eviction from their lands. Their fears were warranted. Anyone who farmed for less than five years on ancestral lands was subject to eviction (Cabayugan Ancestral Domain Management Plan, 1997). Moreover, the City Government voiced concern over how to manage an ancestral domain claim that fell outside the Strategic Environmental Plan's zoning, as if to assume that the ancestral domain was part of its management jurisdiction (Pinto, 1999).¹⁹

Years after the consultations, the sentiments of pioneer farmers remained the same; most were loathe to accept that the CADC could grant *katutubo* land title. My own interviews reveal that pioneer migrant farmers are still vehemently against the Tagbanua land claim. Many argue that *katutubo* should not be given land when their own paddy rice fields remain untitled, despite having been cultivated in the 1960s (see Dressler, 2006). The irony, of course, is that migrants continued to cultivate parts of these lands without title, despite previously being settled and cultivated by Tagbanua. One migrant elder and a retired Barangay Captain remarked:²⁰

For me, all I can say is that before they start implementing for the *katutubo*, all areas must first be zoned properly. The CADC may not be in favour for *tribo* only! I mean we should have a policy that sets out equality for land ownership for all, whether you are Christian or a native. There should be equality, there should be no favoritism unlike last time when they issued ancestral land I really did not want to help that much because we the Christians were taken aside. They told me though as a Barangay Captain I

¹⁹ Although the SEP's Environmental Critical Areas Zoning has a designated "Traditional Use Zone", within which the CADC would be encompassed, DAO no. 2 clearly falls under the jurisdiction of the provincial DENR.

²⁰ Oral History Interview, Manong Eduardo Castillo, Cabayugan Centro, Spring 2001.

should really help and participate with the CADC. So I ended up signing the official papers for the ancestral lands. Many of the officials were reluctant to participate in the implementation of the CADC.

Another early migrant farmer from the Manturon area held a similar position:²¹

The CADC idea should give lands to Christians and to the natives since they both have needs to own lands. For example, if the natives will be given an area, we should also be given the same amount of land. That is all we ask for really!

These sentiments arose frequently, with other migrants suggesting that Tagbanua should not own land or have the opportunity to tend it because they were “ignorant” (*mangmang*) or “lazy” (*tamad*). Others stated that if Tagbanua received their CADC and eventually titled their lands, they would sell rather than invest in their plots, a transaction frequently carried out by migrants. For example, one migrant stated:²²

When their land is already titled, they always sell it. That’s the problem with them. When they have their own land, they will sell it at once. They don’t keep it...

Another migrant farmer responded similarly in reference to the CADC leading to private title²³:

They should not be given the title, there are plenty of them, what will happen if it is all given to them and they just share it. There will be little land left over for the rest of us....the difference is [that] with the katutubo is if they have authority with the title, they will sell it and everything will be gone. And if they get the title, they will sell it and the other people [meaning migrants] will buy the land.

None of the interviews conducted or documents reviewed suggested that migrants and Tagbanua would be brought together over the long term to discuss how CADC zoning issues would affect their livelihoods differently. Rather than heal old wounds, multiple NGOs interventions simply exacerbated the socio-political and economic differences

²¹ Oral History Interview, Manong Joseph Torres, Manturon, Summer 2002.

²² Key Informant Interview, Juan Badenas, Manturon, Summer 2001.

²³ Key Informant Interview, David Dandal, Manturon, Summer 2001.

within *and* between both groups. In particular, three cases reveal that as NGOs used CADC delineation and implementation to prop up notions of indigeneity in Cabayugan, they worked with Tagbanua to politicize the notion of *katutubo*, while migrants continued to resent the idea.

First, in the years leading up to CADC delineation, the consortium of NGOs mentioned, tapped funds from the Vienna Institute for Development Cooperation and the USAID-funded Biodiversity Conservation Network²⁴ in order to strengthen NATRIPAL's "functional integrated program structure" (Pinto, 1999, p. 67). Upon securing a larger BCN implementation grant in 1995, the project entitled the "Community-based Conservation and Enterprise Program (CCEP) for Indigenous Communities in Palawan, Philippines" arose. Under the Biodiversity Support Program, the enterprise-based conservation strategy hypothesized that "if local people directly benefit from a business that depends on the biodiversity at a given site, they should have the incentive to act to protect it against... threats to its destruction" (Biodiversity Support Program, 1999, p. 2). Building on this hypothesis, the consortium developed a broader thematic program strategy known as the 4Ks: "*Karapatan, Kabuhayan, Kapaligiran/Kalikasan para sa Katutubo ng Palawan*," referring to "Rights, Livelihood and Environment/Nature for the Indigenous Peoples of Palawan". In essence, it articulated that indigenous peoples' ethnicity and claims to land on Palawan were sufficiently unique to offer (*katutubo*) land

²⁴ The Biodiversity Conservation Network was a USAID funded program (USD20 million) covering much of the Asia-Pacific region. The project ran from 1993 until 1999 under the administration of the Biodiversity Support Program and was implemented by the WWF-US, Nature Conservancy, and the World Resources Institute. The consortium communicated with the BCN regional office in Manila which served as an intermediary with the WWF-US, Washington, D.C. (McDermott, 2000).

security, resource rights and livelihood opportunities (Pinto, 1999). The project's goals were to support the capabilities of NATRIPAL and, in turn, to strengthen the local associations of indigenous peoples, such as TICKA, in order for them to defend their rights to forest resources and land. This alone associated indigeneity and land rights as a unified socio-political position. In Cabayugan, this meant using DAO no. 2 to facilitate the delineation of the Ancestral Domain Claim and instilling a sense of “indigeneness” among Tagbanua. Following program objectives, the best way for NGOs to support delineation was to encourage livelihood enterprise developments under a platform of land rights, livelihood security and indigeneity. Domain claim boundaries would soon define resource access and use according to ethnic group membership. Inclusion and exclusion was based on relatively simple ethnic lines: indigenous and non-indigenous (Cf. McDermott, 2000 for Kayasan).

BCN consultants and consortium members chose Sugod Uno, Cabayugan, as an initial CCEP project site because of the conflict arising from migrant encroachment, a lack of control over forest trades, and the potential loss of biodiversity. The choice was also opportunistic because the indigenous NGO, the Indigenous Peoples Apostolate, had already established TICKA, which made it easier for BCN managers to organize Tagbanua collectors (Encarnacion, 1999). With preparations nearly complete, the CCEP's project staff had to determine how local resource production could serve as an incentive to protect the forest. The choice was to *re-structure* the local trade of non-timber forest products and consumer goods so that Tagbanua had greater control over the terms of trade with migrants. By introducing enterprise developments with local

resources within the domain claim's framework, planners granted Tagbanua legal access to harvest and sell all marketable non-timber forest products. In doing so, *katutubo* could by-pass *diyuhan* interests. While Tagbanua rights were grounded in boundaries and identity, untenured migrants' land claims and NTFP concessions could well be removed (DAO no. 2, 1993). As *katutubo*, Tagbanua had new rights and external support to redress unequal trade relations. Targeting and improving livelihoods among Tagbanua was now served as an outlet to "prop up" ethnic difference.

To intervene in the trade of non-timber forest products, the consortium's staff initially coordinated activities with local Tagbanua elites and their allies, such as the first Tagbanua president of TICKA and NATRIPAL Board member. An initial step was to build a trading post known as the Area Servicing Unit (ASU) for cooperative and smaller micro-enterprise development in the centre of Sugod Uno, in particular for rattan and handicraft production. The servicing unit was to encourage Tagbanua to merchandise household goods themselves at prices lower than what migrants offered them for goods during everyday transactions.²⁵ Migrants typically sold or provided credit in the form of basic goods to Tagbanua at (drastically) over-inflated prices or interest out of their own *sari-sari* store. Since few other purchasing options were available, many Tagbanua households were compelled to buy from them. Second, the servicing unit also stored goods and could offer a greater supply and variety of items at a close proximity to the village. Third, the federation used the servicing unit to supply short and long-term credit

²⁵ Key Informant Interview, Juneen Banuaga, Executive Director of NATRIPAL, Summer 2002

to Tagbanua rattan collectors, among others, with the intention to remove them from the debt-bondage cycles associated with migrant middlemen.²⁶

Migrant middleman traditionally managed loans and advances to Tagbanua rattan collectors and then consolidated the poles on behalf of financiers in Puerto Princesa City. Financiers then re-sold processed poles to buyers in Manila (Kilmer, 1994). As profits moved outward, the middleman, who also re-paid debts to his financier, rarely paid collectors the going market value of their poles. Since collectors did not contest the price they received, the continued cycle of indebtedness continued (McDermott, 2000). To counter this trend, consortium staff used the Area Servicing Unit to ensure more equitable transactions. Rather than having collectors sell poles at undervalued prices to middlemen, they would market and sell rattan, honey and handicrafts through the ASU. NATRIPAL ensured that Tagbanua received a fair price by purchasing non-timber forest products from them at the ASU and then storing and re-selling the products in Puerto Princesa City. NGOs thus served as financier and trained Tagbanua to purchase honey and rattan on their behalf at the ASU at a price higher (.50 centavos higher) than the "forest gate" price (Encarnacion, 1999, p. 4). This was one incentive to ensure that Tagbanua collectors exchanged with Tagbanua buyers at the servicing unit rather than with migrant middlemen.

Despite good intentions, NGOs could not overcome deeply entrenched patron-client relations in Cabayugan which had "traditionally" dictated the terms of trade. With few

²⁶ Key Informant Interview, Provincial Coordinator, Palawan, Coastal Resources Management Project, Summer 2002

production opportunities, most Tagbanua returned to sell rattan directly to middlemen due to pre-existing debt-bondage.²⁷ In Sugod Uno, as elsewhere, the middleman not only facilitated resource exchange, but was also politically influential among households. He benefited from collectors' efforts and often owned the necessary capital to collect and then transport rattan out from the forest. Owning capital signified wealth and greater socio-political status – one not normally associated with indigeneity. The consortium staff's effort to re-structure the terms of trade between Tagbanua collectors and middlemen was for naught. Middlemen used social and political pressure to sustain their previous exchange relations and perpetuated the debt cycle.²⁸

Project mismanagement eventually led to the BCN withdrawing funds and ending project operations in Cabayugan. Rumors circulated that revenue from the ASU and its revolving fund apparently filtered back illegally into TICKA, the organization that prominent Tagbanua had headed.²⁹ One Tagbanua elite, for example, benefited from the ASU sitting on the edge of his land. Moreover, the accounting records of NGOs should gross financial irregularities, which led to a string of accusations at the local and municipal level.

In short, rather than redress unequal relations of production and exchange, the BCN projects strengthened the power base of a few local elites and conveyed a message that differences between Tagbanua and migrants exist and are now somehow insurmountable. While being indigenous meant being unique, the political status it afforded was still

²⁷ Key Informant Interview, Provincial Coordinator, Palawan, Coastal Resources Management Project, Summer 2002.

²⁸ Key Informant Interview, Manong Temporano, Rattan Middleman, Summer 2002.

²⁹ The Area Servicing Unit was on land that Jose and his family had claimed.

insufficient to redress what appeared to be unbalance trade relations that led to local differentiation. When taken together, then, NGO-induced resource use conflicts had further sharpened ethnic boundaries.

Second, toward 1997, the new CADC boundaries that Tagbanua held offered them stronger claims to territory and thus indigeneity. Just after the CADC was delineated, several NGO interventions rendered Tagbanua indigeneity explicit in order to capitalize on and steer their ecological knowledge to a position of “self-defense”; that is, defense of intellectual property rights through the CADC as a means of ensuring sustainability. The first came about when Palawan-NGOs had conducted workshops with Tagbanua in order to educate them on how to protect their intellectual property rights (IPRs). While a laudable and necessary cause in itself, members of the Tagbanua elite used the notion of IPRs to screen who could and could not enter the CADC on behalf of the community. Using their knowledge, Tagbanua leaders asserted their difference by claiming that another NGO and certain researchers, who initially came to assist in CADC preparations, had been bio-prospecting. In one case, a charge of biopiracy was communicated from Tagbanua leaders to NGOs in Puerto Princesa. The supposed investigation, conspiracies and suspicions floating around eventually forced NGOs to leave Cabayugan. In turn, programs and projects closed.

Third, migrants and Tagbanua were brought together in order to come to terms with their social “differences” during a training session for the new UNDP Community-based Sustainable Tourism initiatives in Cabayugan, which considered the CADC as a potential

development node. During the workshops, a community organizer from a Palawan/Visaya-based NGO convened a debriefing seminar that involved educating Tagbanua and migrants on Sustainable Tourism in Cabayugan. During this seminar, the community organizer pointed out why specific legislation, such as the IPRA (1997), targeted indigenous peoples rather than migrants. She facilitated the discussion by contrasting and comparing the apparent physical and cultural differences of each group by having one Tagbanua stand up and have the audience/ participants “show” why he was different from migrants. For obvious reasons, those in the audience suggested that the (now rather embarrassed) Tagbanua had different culture and was darker in skin colour than migrants in the audience. While this act was not necessarily malicious, the outcomes clearly sharpened ethnic boundaries and entrenched cultural difference.

While the apparent differences between migrants and Tagbanua are subtle indeed, the different exercises of “demonstrating difference” further exacerbated locally perceived differences between migrants and Tagbanua. As such interventions end, they tend to produce and sustain divisions: members of each group fall back on their claims of difference, whether *katutubo* or *Kristiano*, as local rhetorical devices. Rhetoric can manifest itself physically, however, through land grabs and discrimination. It is in this context that many Tagbanua may reassert their claims to indigeneity independent of or in “collaboration” with NGOs, or simply withdraw from engaging migrants altogether.

Section V: Discussion

The examples above highlight how NGOs have produced local conditions that *partly* influence how and why Tagbanua articulate and assert claims to indigeneity in Cabayugan. The moves of Manila and Palawan-based NGOs to strengthen the political and economic position of Tagbanua against control over productive lands, trade relations, and political power has sharpened perceived ethnic boundaries in ways that support forest conservation. The ways in which NGOs initiated and sustained their engagement with Tagbanua fits well within the bureaucratized discourse of sustainability through indigeneity. Local engagements by NGOs parallel the Indonesian case described by Li (2000), where others speaking on behalf of “indigenous subjects” have the “capacity to present cultural identity and local knowledge in forms intelligible to outsiders” and that notions of indigeneity are redressed to fit neatly into predefined “national and international environmental debates” (p. 169).

Embedded within this discourse of engagement, however, are local level contests within and between Tagbanua and migrants to adhere to shifting identities that somehow define degrees of differences between them. In this sense, both NGOs and Tagbanua had certain political and economic needs for articulating indigeneity and stewardship through the philosophy and boundaries of the ancestral domain claim. The domain claim and its projects had propped up Tagbanua indigeneity and supported their claims over resources and political power at the expense of non-members (see McDermott, 2000). The boldness with which Tagbanua expressed their identity and claims to land was in spite of

wealthier migrants. Justification was not hard to come by since migrants also redefined *katutubo* in *negative* terms. Migrant prejudice toward indigenes' resource use and lifeways undercuts unequal transactions and reproduces a subordinate "other". They character Tagbanua as a "lazy people" who are unable to farm paddy rice or capitalize on the economic opportunities given to them by NGOs and the government. Tagbanua thus re-appropriate and reformulate "negatively defined social differences" in ways that offer them political and economic advantage (Barth, 1969, p. 15). NGOs have assisted in this regard.

While actors in civil society identify and reify the identities of local peoples according to their conservation goals, and local people adopt such identities, there are others who occupy the periphery of this "discursive frame" (Li, 2000). Those locals situated at the periphery occupy a space between identities, where they reposition their ethnicity according to strategic needs and concerns. Finding that their level of wealth is a mismatch with their identity, they reposition themselves in a social and economic space that reflects their position in life. For example, if local users recognize that others share similar poverty traits, they often gravitate towards them in hope of receiving or engaging in mutual support. In the local periphery, there has been a recent merger of social and economic difference among poorer migrants and Tagbanua, which NGO (and state) interventions have partly strengthened.

Up until recently, the negative perception that some migrants had towards their indigenous neighbours, and vice versa, was fed by NGOs and shaped by unequal access

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to productive resources and commodity relations. Today there are groups of migrants that, being defined poor locally, find equal value in expressing their livelihoods and land base as being true to *katutubo* lifeways. The right to retain land and swidden in the uplands supports their right to identify with being a “poor katutubo”. This includes migrants who have married into Tagbanua family as much as those who have traveled from afar. Increasingly, poorer migrants adopt notions of *katutubo* (indigeneity and associated livelihoods, including swidden rice) in order to qualify for membership among Tagbanua.

Often neglected by NGOs, then, is that degrees of within group differentiation have arisen in present day Cabayugan. The kinship lines of two once relatively homogeneous groups are now blurred such that rendering the differences of each social group explicit is misplaced, particularly as part of livelihood interventions. Due to growing ethnic heterogeneity and differences in wealth, "inter-group" associations have arisen in ways that different claims of indigeneity correspond to social, political and economic status. The interface of NGO influence, socio-political discrimination, and economic poverty partly facilitates this shift in identity. Explaining “ethnic” differences between social groups solely on kinship and cultural traits is of less relevance in Cabayugan today. In many ways, the attributes of indigeneity have come to resemble class attributes whereby peripheral migrants and Tagbanua group themselves under a general "condition of class poverty" (Wilmsen, 1989, p. 277). Certain households have ascribed to the class attributes of impoverishment, where the status differential is weaker than usual. As Wilmsen (1989, p. 277) writes:

...ethnicity merely functions as one of a constellation of markers to assign class status to individuals. But these ethnic categorizations are today, as in the past, neither homogenous nor immutable... [and] they mask underlying class conflicts.

Section VI: Conclusion

The fact that beyond the "core" migrant population are poorer migrants who intermarry and live among Tagbanua households in the uplands is as much due to unequal commodity relations as it is from NGOs increasing the esteem and "privilege" of being *katutubo*. However, the fact that NGOs consider indigeneity as instrumental for achieving tenural security and conservation objectives still masks overlaps in identity and poverty between both groups.

Facing similar struggles to sustain subsistence and fend off discrimination, poorer migrants have ascribed to markers of Tagbanua identity and thus political orientation. Conservation practitioners tend to neglect the "blurring of boundaries" as they actively seek out two discrete social groups. As NGOs render perceived ethnic differences more explicit and entrench cultural differences locally, the prospect of delivering tangible livelihood support will likely diminish. Indeed, both poorer migrants and Tagbanua now resist the marginalization brought on by unequal trade and land holdings by sharing in an "ethic of access". Sharing similar levels of poverty, few are denied opportunities to access resources in a time of need (Peluso, 1990). Both poorer migrants and Tagbanua share portions of their harvest when others have little.

In this sense, the overlapping identities between poorer migrants and Tagbanua do not adhere to NGO frameworks that require the presence of “pure” *katutubo* in order to facilitate and sustain conservation objectives. Failing to find indigeneity, NGOs may move on to rural peoples that offer “more authentic” cultural and physical characteristics that lend greater legitimacy to their cause. They seek out the “primitive”; failing this, they invent it.

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