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ANCESTRAL DOMAIN, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SELF-DETERMINATION:
THE CASE OF THE LUMADS

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INTRODUCTION

Our ancestors and our Apo Sandawa entrusted to us this land which we should protect because it is the source of our life, our hospital, our everything...

Datu Tulalang, Bagobo elder¹

Our land comes first. We T'boli are nothing without our land. Everything must come after recognition of our ancestral domain ownership...Look around you, our ancestors cultivated here and planted the bamboo and kapok trees.

Crispin Simpai, T'boli²

The above statements are in themselves an indigenous discourse on what constitute a people— a humanity— and their relationship with the land. They are voices of the indigenous peoples of North and South Cotabato whose homelands are threatened by resource expropriation either by the State (Mt. Apo Geo-thermal Project among the Bagobo) or the expansion of capitalist development, (ANSA Ranch Farms among the T'boli). Historically marginalized and neglected, indigenous peoples like the Bagobos and the T'boli have come under renewed assaults as resource competition for "development" expands in the Philippines. Due to twisted legal intervention, their land and resources have been placed under the domination of the State. The dual forces of state-building and capitalism have encapsulated the T'boli and the Bagobo, and other indigenous peoples in Mindanao, resulting in a conflict which can be traced to the incompatibility of social systems (indigenous peoples'

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cultures and the state) and differing modes of production (kinship and capitalist).

The Philippines is a society that is not only marked by class, regional and urban-rural stratification but also, significantly by a sociocultural plurality and its acknowledgment is essential in understanding why indigenous peoples are resisting expropriation of their homelands. To this day, culture remains the great unanswered issue in development (Obomsawin 1992) in the Philippines and elsewhere across the globe. Ethnic-cultural issues are as fundamental as the economic issue. They are, in fact, inseparably linked. Ethnicity is not a reactionary process but an assertion of a historically-based cultural identity system.

LUMAD ANCESTRAL DOMAIN: A SOURCE OF PLACE AND IDENTITY

The land is entrusted by our ancestors for the life of succeeding generations. It consists of everything below and above it, like air, sunshine, darkness, moon and stars...

Apo Tomas, Bagobo elder³

We are not aware of titles. Our plants are our titles, for example the bananas, the bamboos, the big trees and the waters. So even if we do not have titles there was never any trouble among us because we have our own law since our grandfathers were still living.

Perido Kusin, T'boli⁴

The Bagobos and the T'boli are among the 18 known non-Muslim indigenous peoples in Mindanao, generically called Lumad (Rodil 1990:5). Literally, it means indigenous or "grown from the place" (Agbayani 1990:25). The term Lumad as

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a collective identity came into use only in the last fifteen years as a result of common experiences of disenfranchisement among various indigenous peoples in the region (Duhaylungsod 1992; Duhaylungsod and Hyndman in press). They have retained many distinguishing cultural characteristics which set them apart from the mainstream but more significantly, they derive their distinctive identity from their different relations to land and productive processes.

To indigenous peoples, places achieve identity and meaning through human intention towards them and the relationships between those intentions and the physical setting and activities within it (Cosgrove 1978). Places have physical, emotional and experiential realities for those that historically inhabit them. It is therefore necessary to be "inside" a place to fully grasp it, which fundamentally contrasts the insiders' way of experiencing place and the outsider's way of conventionally describing them (Buttimer 1980). "Insidedness" in a place and the corresponding experience of space altogether constitute the past and present of that place (Rodman 1992; Buttimer 1980; Tuan 1975). Culture, and not landscape and topography alone, determines spatial limits. The cultural creation of place, whereby landforms are differentiated symbolically and assigned specific values, is an ideology of spatial relations that serves to organize sociopolitical actions and cultural forms (Thornton 1980). Combined with a sense of ancestry and history, this also defines the territory over what to the outsider is simply "natural space". The entire

landscapes of indigenous peoples are a historical record, testifying to the unique identity of the people and continuity is established by symbolically reiterating and renewing the relationship between society and the ecosystem (IIC 1991).

History and a homeland are therefore focal symbols of the Lumad as a people and they derive their identity from attachment to the past and present of their ancestral domain. The continuity of shared access to cultivated land and labor forms the cornerstone of their identity.

To the Lumad, land is not something to be expropriated. Rather, it is their homeland for both the present and succeeding generations. The land and its owners are not subject to any higher authority (i.e. the state). Nor is land vested in anyone's proper name or quantified over a given period or area. Land tenure for appropriation of territory follows ancestral rights. Each settlement has defined property rights over territorial lands around which members of the community usually take up land for cultivation. When cultivation is abandoned, its ownership reverts to the community. Ownership is circumscribed by extensive and intimate knowledge of place. It is a "user right" through membership in clan groups identified with the names of their cultural landscape.

The Lumads have managed their lands for long periods of time. Economy and environment among indigenous peoples like them are integrated into a humanized, cultural landscape and these communities are aware of ecosystemic processes and their place within them (Clarke 1990:245-47). Not only are

they dependent on their environment for survival, but their territorial domains are "embodiments of a people's history, spirituality and life held sacred and in perpetuity for the descendants" (Barrameda 1990:2). Thus, the Bagobos' observation that their Lake Agco has become muddy due to the digging of the geothermal well upstream is not altogether baseless.⁵ Lake Agco is similarly sacred to the Bagobo and they view the current physical changes of the lake as an indication of the wrath of their Apo Sandawa on the government project. Nor are the Lakag T'boli's persistence to keep their valley unreasonable because that particular area is much more lush than the alternative farms they are being exchanged for and that the land is where their ancestors lived and died.⁶

All lands of the public domain, waters, minerals, coal, petroleum, and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy, fisheries, forests or timber, wildlife, flora and fauna, and other natural resources are owned by the State. With the exception of agricultural lands, all other natural resources shall not be alienated.

Art. XII, Sec. 2. Philippine Constitution

The State, subject to the provisions of the Constitution and the national development policies and programs, shall protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands to ensure their economic, social and cultural well-being.

The Congress may provide for the applicability of customary laws governing property rights or relations in determining the ownership and extent of ancestral domain.

Art. XII, Sec. 5. Philippine Constitution

The incorporation of indigenous territories into states has dismembered, if not outrightly eliminated, ancestral

domains. Massive energy infrastructure projects like the Mt. Apo Geothermal Project and agricultural intensification of both local and transnational agribusiness in South Cotabato completely ignore the presence and existence of the Bagobo and T'boli. The core of both state and economic development ventures are premised on two myths: that these frontier are empty of people and that these lands are burgeoning with natural resources. The state wrongly identified these lands as uninhabited lands. The institutionalization of land laws from the time the United States acquired sovereignty over the Philippines did not carry any recognition of the communal ancestral domain laws. State laws and policies have since then been discriminating against the Lumads. Ancestral lands have become public lands rendering the indigenous peoples virtual squatters in their homelands.

In the 1950's, Mindanao was touted as "wilderness", untamed, unknown and unclaimed. Such image inspired the government-induced massive migration of Ilocanos and Visayans to the island and lured agribusiness corporations to invest technology in ventures that have "generated enormous profits for the owners and executives" (Tadem 1992:7). But Mindanao wilderness areas are in reality Lumad ancestral domains, created out of humanized landscapes in which indigenous people have been a major ecological component, actively manipulating, modifying and culturally creating it (Clarke 1990; Hyndman 1991). They are not unoccupied nor are these lands to be given up without serious environmental and human disruption.

KINSHIP VS. CAPITALIST MODES OF PRODUCTION

We, natives, do not normally operate on profit, the way settlers do. We follow a different way of life."

Datu Tulalang, Bagobo elder⁷

The generous spirit of the T'boli is seen in the end of the day. If there is seed rice left over, it is always divided up between those who have helped plant- even if it is just a handful each. In fact, that's what the leftover seed rice is called, nkem 'a handful'. If the seed rice is considered to be of especially good quality or if it is a variety of rice they don't have, then this handful is taken home to plant "so that it multiplies". But if it isn't needed as seed, then it is taken home and pounded to make rice-soup for the children.

The generous spirit of a people who have all experienced being "hungry for rice" is seen again in the amount of rice cooked for the meal to be eaten at the house after planting is finished. If at all possible, enough is cooked not only to completely satisfy the workers, but to make sure that each mother has two or three packages of cooked rice to take home to her children. This same custom is followed when they have women help them weed or harvest.

Forsberg 1988:28

Little is understood about indigenous resource management strategies but indigenous peoples have generally maintained the quality of their lands, waters and resources. Such feature can be appreciated best when examined within the context of their mode of production. For most indigenous people the goal of production is subsistence and there is usually no significant surplus realized in production. Production within subsistence-oriented societies then is most commonly geared to simple reproduction. Any surplus realized in production is usually appropriated in reciprocal exchanges through feasting, gift-giving or in communal religious rituals which further cement the kinship relations

that bind people together. This production logic permeates the various dimensions of their existence, including the moral order of their society (Barrameda 1990:2). Thus, exercise of political power and authority in indigenous societies like the Lumads were "reckoned always in consideration for the others: fellow humans, creatures, lands and domains of Mother Earth" (Barrameda 1990:2). Internal social differentiation is commonly based on kinship and age and gender distinctions which define the division of labor, legitimized in terms of the specific beliefs and values of culture (Schmink and Wood 1987:40). Kinship relations determine the forms of access to resources and the means of production, organize the labor processes and determine the distribution and circulation of the products of social labor (Godelier 1977:24-25; 1978:86-87).

Subsistence producers measure their product in terms of use-values, they do not calculate the exchange-value of their products in advance (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1982:242). Use rights to land are for subsistence production and symbolic purposes. Scattered homestead membership forms the basis of production and embraces an awareness of shared rights to resources within the homeland. The production and use of goods are characterized by group work exchanges and sharing. Among the T'boli, this ethic is generally referred to as *s'basa* and dominates virtually their socio-economic life (Hyndman 1992; Duhaylungsod and Hyndman in press). The Bagobos' harvesting season festival known as *gatok-biaan* or *pakakaro* engages the entire community in one big celebration capped by a solemn rite to insure continuity of the practice

(Gloria 1987:40). It is this ethos of reciprocal sharing that have insured the survival of the Lumads for hundreds of years. Wolf (1982) aptly describes this indigenous system as following a kinship mode of production which contrasts markedly and fundamentally conflicts with the capitalist mode of production.

The goal of capitalist production is realization of surplus, whereas the goal of kinship production is subsistence. There is an inherent dialectical conflict between a productive system founded on subsistence production and simple reproduction and one based on expanded production and private accumulation (Thomas, *et.al.* under review). These different and contradictory productive principles have different implications on the human appropriation of the natural environment (Schmink and Wood 1987:40). Because the kinship mode of production does not produce any significant market surplus, states throughout the world often complain that indigenous people occupy, exploit, and do not produce anything of capital value on large areas of valuable land which have potential for other forms of resource exploitation. The spurious national development, argued on the basis that the lands are underutilized and can be potentially made productive, brought the lands of the Lumad and their resources under the domination and expropriation of the state.

Most of Lumad homelands are destroyed by capitalist exploitation through "corporate intrusions" (Tadem 1992) and internal colonialism brought about by massive migration which escalated in the 1960's and 70's (Duhaylungsod and

Hyndman in press). With the unbridled quest for lands and natural resources to meet the demands of the market, Lumad's lands and resources have also become commodities to be appropriated and exploited in capitalist production. The kin-ordered, subsistence-oriented mode of production of the Lumads increasingly conflicts with the capitalist mode of production in the face of advancing resource competition on the frontier.

Initially, the interior mountains of the Lumad homelands provided a cultural safety valve in which they managed to continue with their kinship mode of production wherein food, goods and services only circulate reciprocally within their communities. Today, with interior lands no longer available for further retreat, they find themselves directly confronted with and enmeshed in the capitalism mode of production. Kinship and capitalist modes of production are not complementary relations. For the Lumad, the ethos of private, individual accumulation of material wealth and commodity form of exchange completely undermine the cultural fabric that insured their survival as a people for hundred of years. Their kinship mode of production, based on an ideology of reciprocal exchange, worked for the sharing and redistribution of goods and resources, thus enabling the survival not merely of individuals but, more significantly, of the community. The continuing clash of kinship and capitalist logic of economy places the Lumads in a serious cultural dilemma for which they are unprepared but are now suddenly forced to cope with.

STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION

Many groups of Lumads forged a dyandi (pact), ending their friendly relations with the lowlanders responsible for such threats to their lives. In the past, the Lumads were befriended by lowlanders and were asked for portions of their land. The Lumads being warm and generous people gave portions of land, but later realized they were being exploited. Now they have severed their friendly relations with these people as embodied in the pact and symbolized by the cutting of a vine (rattan). They are also committed to defend their inherited ancestral lands.

Datu Tomas, Bagobo^s

It is here that our elders died, therefore it is also here that we decide to die. We are ready to die and defend our land no matter what happens. My defending this land is not for myself but for everyone, especially the T'boli. We do not want that our children will steal in the coming days. And when we old people die our children would take over in cultivating this land. Therefore we must go back to our ancestral domain and live in peace.

Turing, T'boli^s

Due largely to the misrepresentation of indigenous peoples, their cultures have sometimes been viewed as static, if not atavistic, amidst the political and economic forces impinging on them (Hirsch 1990:58). The government has created special agencies for their welfare as part of a "civilizing" mission but more often than not, these bodies even become mechanisms of control. However, they are neither apathetic nor do they collapse suddenly and completely when their cultures and homelands are invaded. Throughout the islands of Mindanao, there have been isolated, though unrecorded, acts of Lumad resistance against exploitation and encapsulation.

The Lumads may have lost much of their ancestral homeland but they are also actively resisting

transformation from "tribal to peasant" which Schlegel (1979) asserts has already reconstituted the nearby Tiruray as virtually indistinguishable from the mass of the peasant class. They have begun to empower themselves by joining in political solidarity for ancestral domain and self-determination (Rodil 1990; Duhaylungsod 1992; Duhaylungsod and Hyndman in press). The Lumad's claim to their lands is "not just an ordinary land claim. It is an affirmation of a whole history where a piece of the earth becomes culturally defined to a point that touches the deepest of human sentiments spurring one to act heroically to uphold and defend it" (Barrameda 1990:2).

The exploitation, distribution and control of resources in the Philippines is mediated by differential and unequal relationships of power such that indigenous peoples like the Lumads continue to suffer discrimination and exclusion, perpetuated by the hierarchical distinction between "civilized" and "primitive" peoples. They have become victims of double discrimination as landless and "primitives". Their kinship mode of production has been an enduring one and many Lumads have a fierce desire to retain their identity, culture and land. Retention of land and kinship mode of production are inextricably linked, but it does not imply reversion to a traditional subsistence existence. The Lumads do not live precisely as their ancestors did, but they are responding with past ways of living that ensure more permanence and sustainability of their ancestral domain (Duhaylungsod and Hyndman in press). As resource competition expands, the system that has worked

for hundreds of years is being destroyed but indigenous peoples are increasingly mobilizing themselves for autonomous resource control and self-determination. Indigenous peoples' organizations among the Lumads are growing in both numerical and political strength.

Genuine development requires the understanding of their persistent cultural system (Spicer 1971) that has deep historical foundations and legitimacy. Respect for the integrity of the Lumad sociocultural system is essential. It necessitates the recognition of the validity of their claim to their ancestral domain and their struggle for self-determination. Any development intervention that fails to consider these dimensions will not only endanger them, but simply add to the growing mass of landless and impoverished sector of Philippine society.

NOTES

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1. Field notes of L. Duhaylungsod and R. Plopino, October 20-26, 1992.
2. In Duhaylungsod and Hyndman in press.
3. Field notes of L. Duhaylungsod and R. Plopino, October 20-26, 1992.
4. In Duhaylungsod and Hyndman. in press.
5. The Bagobos claim the lake was crystal clear prior to the geothermal project.
6. The Lakag T'boli have been struggling to regain their ancestral lands for two decades now. ANSA Farms has offered the displaced T'boli a certain portion of the ranch under the volutary-offer-to-sell(VOS) scheme of Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) which in effect would have the T'boli amortize for the lands.
7. Field notes of L. Duhaylungsod and R. Plopino, October 20-26, 1992.
8. In a statement during "A Conference Against Environmental Destruction in Unity with the Indigenous People's Struggle for Ancestral Domain", unpublished ms. July 17, 1990. PSSC Bldg. Quezon City.
9. In Duhaylungsod and Hyndman. in press..

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