

Agencies of the Environmental State:
Difference and Regulation on the Philippines' "Last Frontier"

by

Noah Theriault

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Katherine A. Bowie, Professor, Anthropology

Kenneth M. George, Professor, Anthropology

Larry Nesper, Professor, Anthropology

Alfred W. McCoy, Professor, History

Ian G. Baird, Assistant Professor, Geography

Paul E. Nadasdy, Associate Professor, Anthropology (Cornell University)

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ABSTRACT

How do invisible beings in the forested hinterlands complicate the work of bureaucrats in the capital? What do dreams and the beings who visit them have to do with governmental power? Questions like these remain marginal to social theory even as questions of subjectivity and ontology have come increasingly to the fore. In an effort to further integrate the environmental humanities with anthropology and political theory, this dissertation proposes a more ontologically diversified understanding of how regulatory authority is (dis)assembled in contexts of difference. My argument is informed by more than two years of ethnographic fieldwork on Palawan Island, the Philippines' so-called "last frontier," where the rise of neoliberal environmental government has coincided with the post-authoritarian recognition of indigeneity. Situating these policy reforms in historical and global perspective, I present a case study of a subset of the indigenous Palawan population as they navigate overlapping and at times contradictory projects aimed at protecting biodiversity, commodifying the forest, and organizing indigenous collectivities. My analysis draws on recent developments in studies of micropolitics, arguing that we can better understand the ambivalent and often unintended consequences of such interventions if we adopt an unconventional theory of agency. To that end, I examine how three different "agencies"—environmental narratives, invisible forest spirits, and forest commodities—both animate and complicate efforts to make the Palawan into agents of environmental government. Conventional thinking in political ecology might interpret this case through the lens of eco-governmentality or a green-washed form of primitive accumulation. My findings, however, suggest that emergent forms of environmental government are not simply an instrument of subjection or dispossession. Rather, they produce a complicated assemblage of forces that consolidate the regulation of ecology, difference, and production, even as their outcomes often defy conventional theories of bureaucratization.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BNCT	Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes
CADC	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim
CADT	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title
CBFM	community-based forest management
CCEP	Community-Based Conservation and Enterprise Program
CI	Conservation International
CNI	Commission on National Integration
DAO2	DENR Department Administrative Order no. 2, series of 1993
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
ECAN	Ecologically Critical Areas Network
FPIC	free and prior informed consent
IPRA	Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (Republic Act 8371, 1997)
MMPL	Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape
NATRIPAL	Nagkakaisang mga Tribu ng Palawan (United Tribes of Palawan)
NCIP	National Commission on Indigenous People
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NIPAS	National Integrated Protected Areas System
NTFP	non-timber forest product
PAMB	Protected Area Management Board
PANAMIN	Office of the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities
PCSD	Palawan Council for Sustainable Development
PD 705	Presidential Decree 705 (Revised Forestry Code)
PIADP	Palawan Integrated Area Development Project
PTFPP	Philippine Tropical Forest Protection Program
SEP	Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan (Republic Act 7611, 1992)
SPPC	Southern Palawan Planning Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Indigeneity, Power, and Environmental Regulation

“Are there Palawan in America?” The first time a Palawan person asked me this question, I was not sure how seriously they take it. Not long before, an older man named Dison¹ had asked me a different question about America, namely “Which crossing is that of America?”² He was referring to the various crossroads and waypoints along the highway in the lowland. Before I could decide how to answer, other participants in our conversation snorted and then, unable to control themselves, erupted into raucous laughter.³ Dison claimed the question had been in jest, but his hesitation suggested otherwise. Afterward, the question became an inside joke of sorts among those who were present, with variations like “Which of these paths goes to America?” and “Which of those mountains is America?”

Thus, when someone asked me if there were Palawan in America, I half expected everyone to start laughing with (or at) the person who asked. But no one did. Everyone stayed quiet in the way they did when I was being “interviewed” by a curious group. I paused, unsure how to respond. No, I thought, there were no Palawan in America, at least none that I was aware of. But such a literal answer did not seem appropriate. Instead, I asked Palaya, the female head of the family I was living with, what exactly she meant with this question. She explained,

¹ Except for public figures, all personal names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

² He asked, in Palawan, “*Embe et kantu et America?*”

³ Palawan consider it cruel to laugh at another’s expense or to make another feel inferior, particularly when it comes to fluency (or the lack thereof) in the ways of lowland society. In this case, the laughter was stifled after a couple of minutes, and a man in the group explained gently to the man that America was, in fact, on the other side of the sea.

in effect, ‘you know, indigenous people like us—poor, belittled, swiddeners, living in the mountains...?’⁴

“Oh,” I said, “well, yes, there are indigenous people in America,” and then tried to explain the past and present circumstances of Native Americans. Palaya and her co-wife, Jiha, exchanged a knowing glance. Someone mumbled “*keingasi*,” an expression of sympathy or compassion. And then we all sat silently for a moment. “So,” Palaya ruminated, “they’re like us,” now addressing others in the group. “But do they speak English?” someone asked. “They do?! Well, then they’re civilized now (*sibilais ne*), also like us.”

This was not the only time I would be asked about “Palawan in America.” Each time my response would prompt interesting commentary—“So they were treated like slaves (*alipin*)? We too are like slaves [to the Christian settlers].” I had to come to terms with my own position in these conversations—a white citizen of a settler colonial society that had once colonized the very society that was now colonizing the Palawan. More than that, though, these conversations helped me understand how the Palawan see themselves in relation to others. And they reminded me of Tania Li’s observation that human knowledge of self and other is formed recursively, including through encounters with anthropologists (Li 2002). Unlike Palawan activists in the provincial capital, the rural Palawan people who asked me this question were not invoking indigeneity as a transnational identity and movement. Their question was, instead, a hypothesis that their own structural position in Philippine society—that of an ethnically, socially, culturally, and spatially marginalized population—was not unique. Where there is wealth and power, they

⁴ Her original question, “Ara Palawan du’t America?”, was asked in Tagalog. At this relatively early point in my research, though I was starting to understand basic Palawan, I was still mostly conversing with people in Tagalog.

imagined, there is likely to be dispossession and subordination. This is an insight they have gained through their long-term dealings with “state-bearing peoples” (Kumar 2010).

What, then, does it mean to be indigenous in a nominally postcolonial world?

Indigeneity, in the sense of first occupancy, has long been an important distinction in contexts of migration and especially in settler-colonial societies. Over the past four decades, however, indigenous groups and their advocates have crossed national boundaries to form a global movement for indigenous rights (Merlan 2009: 303).⁵ They have challenged centuries of discriminatory and assimilationist policies, demanding instead that their territorial claims, cultural practices, and sociopolitical institutions receive legal recognition. Their efforts have had a profound effect. A growing number of states, as well as the United Nations, have adopted (or strengthened) legal regimes that explicitly attempt to redress the marginalization of indigenous people. What’s more, these developments have not been limited to settler-colonial societies like Canada or Australia, or even to the former Spanish colonies of Latin America. Countries in Asia and Africa, too, have participated in this trend, and in Asia the Philippines has been at the forefront.

At first glance, state recognition of indigeneity in the Philippines seems like something of an anomaly. Though the archipelago was a colony, first of Spain and then of the United States, for more than 350 years, it never became a destination for large numbers of settlers. There was no racialized settler/aboriginal dichotomy to serve as a basis for indigeneity. Nevertheless, Philippine indigeneity has its roots in colonial history—a legacy of how colonial authorities

⁵ A variety of specific events are seen as leading to the internationalization of indigeneity, such as actions of the International Labor Organization in the 1950s (Merlan 2009), early alliances between the Inuit and the Sierra Club in the late sixties (Igoe 2005), the founding of the first international indigenous organizations in the 1970s (Niezen 2003), or the World Bank’s embracing of indigenous knowledge in the 1990s (Dove 2006). This history has been addressed by other scholars, whose choices of emphasis inevitably reflect their broader theoretical interests.

divided and ruled the native population (see Chapter 2). As Li (2010: 395) has written, “In parts of Asia where colonial authorities had created a distinct legal category ‘tribe,’ as they did in India and the Philippines, the colonial category transmuted relatively easily into the transnational category ‘indigenous,’ at least from the perspective of the indigenous peoples’ movement.”

After embarking on a process of liberalization and democratization in 1986, the Philippine state became the first in Asia to adopt international standards for indigenous rights. Reforms based on the 1987 Constitution, mostly notably the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997, have provided for indigenous territorial, political, and cultural rights, including the right to assert collective ownership of “ancestral domain” and to self-determination in the use of natural resources.

This dissertation examines the environmental politics of indigeneity in the Philippines as experienced by the Palawan people of southern Palawan Island. The Palawan are among the ten million or so Philippine citizens, distributed throughout the country and representing more than forty distinct ethnolinguistic groups, whom the state recognizes as indigenous (Eder and McKenna 2004: 57). I argue that the recognition of indigeneity is inextricably tied to two concurrent shifts in environmental regulation. These are shifts toward “community-based” or “cooperative” environmental management (co-management), on the one hand, and toward biodiversity conservation, on the other (see Chapters 2 and 3). Co-management aims to give rural communities—and indigenous groups in particular—a direct role in the planning and implementation of conservation measures. By law, groups that seek recognition of their ancestral domains must agree to “maintain the ecological balance” thereof. This expectation rests on a further assumption that “traditional” indigenous practices—customary laws,

livelihoods, beliefs, etc.—are compatible with conservation. In theory, then, these reforms should enable the state to devolve environmental management to indigenous communities whose members already engage in conservation as an inherent part of their way of life.

Given the grim record of dispossession in the Philippines, efforts to protect indigenous land tenure and promote self-determination constitute a significant and laudable step in the right direction. Even the assumed ecological soundness of indigenous practices—which, as I will argue below, is fraught with its own pitfalls—offers an improvement over long-held, negative stereotypes. In practice, however, these reforms have met with a host of unexpected complications and unintended consequences.

First, even though recognition and conservation are mutually implicated in policy, they are the prerogative of multiple and often competitive government bureaucracies. Their respective policies, moreover, provide a vague and inconsistent vision for the rights and responsibilities that indigenous people have with respect to conservation (see Chapters 3 and 4). As a result, implementation hinges on officials' varying interpretations of the law as well as on their personal views of indigenous peoples' role in environmental change. Resulting inconsistencies become a source of frustration among indigenous people who, in some cases at least, perceive conservation policies as both unclear and unfair (see Chapter 4; Minter 2010).

A second source of complications is the assumption that indigenous traditions are inherently in line with conservation. While it is true that some indigenous traditions favor an ethic of ecological restraint, such ethics are often based on ontological assumptions that differ radically from those of modern bureaucracy. From the perspective of conservation officials, indigenous peoples' decisions about land and resource use can thus appear arbitrary and even

opportunistic (see Chapter 5). What results is better described as a mutual sense of disappointment and distrust than the sort of seamless cooperation envisioned in policy.

Third, the process of recognition requires indigenous groups to create new institutions but has failed to provide a consistent legal framework for how they are to go about doing so. Philippine laws presume that the government is merely lending formal recognition to indigenous institutions that already exist. What actually happens is that government agencies or NGOs organize tribal councils (also known as people's organizations) which then serve as the "legal personality" of the group in question. Poor coordination and even competition among these external authorities mean that, in some cases, multiple indigenous councils will claim to represent the same territory (see Chapter 6). Meanwhile, the structure and function of these organizations is supposed to reflect local indigenous customs. But the reality is that few indigenous groups, least of the Palawan, actually had anything analogous to formal tribal councils. As a result, these organizations are formed and entrusted with regulatory functions, but the process of actually building them into a functioning bureaucracy rarely takes place.

This might seem to avoid some of the pitfalls observed in, say, Canada, where First Nations must completely restructure themselves in the image of a bureaucratic state (Nadasdy 2003). But, in fact, the Philippine approach is no less problematic. Instead of building their own governments, indigenous groups are left largely unable to exercise their rights or fulfill their obligations without external assistance. Their resource rights can be coopted by capitalist financiers (see Chapter 6), and their low level of actual participation in environmental regulation becomes a scapegoat for the government's own failure to address the broader drivers of resource depletion and degradation (see Chapters 4-5; Minter 2010).

It's not that Philippine indigenous groups do not attempt to assert their rights or to participate in environmental regulation. Rather, I contend, their efforts to do so are hampered by differences of culture and power that existing policies do not address and even exacerbate. Post-1986 reforms have had profound impacts on indigenous people, but have done little to empower them to protect and manage their own environments.

Theoretical Concerns

Consider the following excerpt from a Survival International press release dated August 2010:

The Palawan tribe of the Philippines is celebrating after a local government panel refused to give the go-ahead to mining giant MacroAsia to mine on their traditional territory. [...] [The panel] heard evidence from a Palawan indigenous leader and other experts about the Palawan communities' opposition to mining on their land, and how MacroAsia's explorations have been predominantly in highly protected areas of virgin forest. (Survival International 2010)

This triumphant declaration contrasts starkly with the imagery of marginalization and exploitation found in the remarks of Palaya and others. Part of the explanation for this contrast is historical: Filipino policymakers and activists only recently redefined indigeneity into something positive. Palawan activists may be familiar with this new signification, but many rural Palawan, like Palaya, are not. For the latter, the English word "indigenous," which is widely used among activists, is often incomprehensible. Rather, to identify as *tribu* or *netibo* or *katutubo* or simply Palawan is to be marginalized in all the ways mentioned above.⁶ This is a product of colonial rule, as I will explain in Chapter 2.

⁶ *Tribu* and *netibo* are both derived from Spanish. *Katutubo* is from Tagalog. These words are often used interchangeably, though in policy and activist discourse the English word indigenous is typically translated as *katutubo* rather than as *tribu* or *netibo*. The Palawan language does not have a generic word for indigenous, which is part the reason why I was asked if there were Palawan in America.

Ultimately, though, neither of these perspectives makes explicit what for me is the most important valence of indigeneity in the contemporary Philippines. For that, I turn to Jimi, Palaya's husband. When I first met him in 2008 and we were discussing the external recognition of different Palawan leaders in the community, he explained the situation to me thus: "In the past, the Muslims organized us. Now it's the NCIP [a government agency] and the NGOs." As a government-recognized "chieftain," he was perhaps more aware than anyone that indigeneity is also a form of regulation. For reasons I will explain below, Jimi was also keenly aware of the fact that the Philippine state has tied the recognition of indigeneity to environmental regulation.

Many scholars have addressed the role of indigeneity in environmental politics. Their major concern has been the close but ambivalent relationship between indigenous peoples and transnational environmental movements. Where some scholars have seen opportunities for novel forms of collaboration across difference (Li 2000; Tsing 1999, 2003, 2005), others have emphasized an unrealistic and potentially disempowering set of assumptions about cultural authenticity and ecological benignity (Brosius 1997; Conklin 1997; Conklin and Graham 1995; Kirsch 2007; Nadasdy 2005).

Comparatively fewer scholars have addressed indigeneity in relation to environmental *regulation*. To make this connection, let's begin with thinking about how indigeneity in general operates as a form of regulation. Merlan (2009) has argued that the recognition of indigeneity is a byproduct of the "political culture" of liberal democracy. As liberal democracy has become increasingly hegemonic over the past half century, so too has indigeneity as a form of recognition within liberal democratic states (i.e., those that have liberal democratic constitutions). "Within such cultures," Merlan writes, "there are values that facilitate both recognition and regulation of those who are not only patently 'different' but also marginalized

and disadvantaged” (2009: 304). When adopted into law, indigenous rights cease to constitute a challenge to the legitimacy of liberal states and instead become an effect of their administrative logic. Creating what Niezen (2003: 141) calls the “Weberian dilemma,” this logic enables the conditions for potentially radical forms of political action at the same time as it domesticates them. This dilemma is what Povinelli has eloquently termed the “cunning of recognition.” In liberal regimes, Povinelli reasons, “[a]lterity is not seen as a threat or challenge to self- and national coherence, but is seen, instead, as compatible with an incorporative project, ‘an invitation to absorption’” (Povinelli 2002: 184, citing Brown 1995: 53). This is an apt characterization of the Philippines, where recent reforms have deliberately sought to convert mass resistance to authoritarian rule into a liberal democratic political culture (Bryant 2005).

I fear, however, that the focus on liberalism overlooks the political economy of recognition. In an argument that seeks to bridge these concerns, John and Jean Comaroff (2009) have proposed the concept of “Ethnicity Inc.” A characteristic feature of postindustrial capitalism, Ethnicity Inc. refers to a dual process of incorporation and commodification, whereby politically charged forms of difference are both drawn into the legal-bureaucratic sphere of regulation and reduced to claims to economic freedom. For the Comaroffs, the ideological underpinning of indigenous recognition is not liberalism, but *neoliberalism*. Drawing on Foucault, they make the following distinction:

classic liberalism took the “natural” freedom of the individual as a precondition of rational governance, believing that any undue constraint on “human nature” endangered government itself—the task of which, by implication, was to nurture that freedom. By contrast, neoliberalism, which reduces social life to economic cost-benefit calculation, limits government to the “artificially-arranged” protection of the “entrepreneurial and competitive behavior of economic-rational individuals.” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 50, citing Lemke 2001: 200 on Foucault’s 1979 lectures)

Indigenous claims for recognition and sovereignty, which could constitute a threat to liberal regimes of freedom, gain traction in a neoliberal world order insofar as recognition enables new forms of commodity exchange. The Comaroffs provide numerous examples, including the formation of Native Corporations in Alaska (Dombrowski 2002) and the emergence of Indian gaming throughout the United States (Cattelino 2008). In these cases, indigenous populations have gained some measure of sovereignty *as indigenous populations*, but their sovereignty as such depends entirely on legal provisions enabling their control of commodities.

Sovereignty per se is not part of the calculus in the Philippines, but commodification certainly is. As I will show in Chapter 6, the apparatus of recognition in the Philippines revolves around facilitating indigenous marketing of certain commodities, particularly non-timber forest products, that were traditionally part of their subsistence and trade. This is meant to provide a “sustainable” and culturally appropriate way for them to participate in the market economy as well as an incentive for their protection of their ancestral domains.

We have, then, come upon the convergence of indigeneity and environmental regulation. To account theoretically for this convergence, let’s begin with one of the most basic dimensions of state power and one of the most basic concerns that states have: territoriality. What Vandergeest and Peluso (1995: 385) have termed “internal territorialization” has been one of the major undertakings of colonial and postcolonial states in Southeast Asia as they have sought to intensify their control of frontier and hinterland regions. Though all modern nation-states are defined in terms of territorial sovereignty, territorialization is a multifaceted, context-specific process. At its essence, it involves “the creation and maintenance of spatialized zones within which certain practices are permitted based on the explicit or implicit allocation of rights,

controls, and authority” (Peluso 2005: 2). In the hinterlands of Southeast Asia, it has often involved the establishment of local administration connected to the central government and of regulatory institutions that control local land and resource use; the state-backed expansion of markets, plantations, and concessions; the attempted assimilation of minority people; and the production of scientific knowledge about the geographic area in question. This process, therefore, often involves direct physical coercion of minority populations as well as coercion through markets. From the perspective of such populations, the process might as well be termed colonization.

Nevertheless, in recent years, minority groups have undertaken their own projects of territorialization, often leading to demands for territorial recognition of *indigenous* land and resource claims. These efforts are a response to centuries of dispossession and marginalization, but they also represent a further naturalization of the “peculiarly territorial currency of the modern state” (Nadasdy 2012: 503). Concerned about events in Indonesia, Li (2002) argues that ethnicized territorial claims enact a “hierarchy of belonging” that can encourage acts of violence against migrant “aliens.” With the exception of Mindanao, the Philippines has seen little such violence in recent years. To the contrary, the post-1986 emergence of “local territorializations” (Peluso 2005) in places like Palawan has been a bureaucratized process from the very beginning (see Chapters 2 and 6). Indeed, the Philippine government’s recognition of indigeneity, while enabling indigenous territorialization, also constitutes an extension of state power. This policy, after all, does not confer sovereignty, but rather a collective form of property. The legal recognition of communal land tenure, as Li (2010) has argued, also therefore represents an effort to “manage dispossession” so that the state can maintain control of hinterland resources more effectively than if it allowed land markets to expand. In Palawan, ancestral domain claims have

not simply codified existing territories, but have instead imposed territorial boundaries on populations with very different ways of thinking about sociopolitical belonging (see Chapter 6; McDermott 2001).

Important though it is, territoriality is not the only form of power activated in the entanglement of indigeneity with environmental regulation. As noted, a key feature of recent Philippine reforms has been the decentralization of environmental regulation. Various laws and policies have called for “community-based” or “participatory” approaches to management of public lands and protected areas (co-management). Indigenous groups and their customary regulation of resource access are assumed to be a natural fit for these new institutional forms. As with the recognition of territory, the conceit of these policies is that they are merely codifying what already exists in customary form. In reality, as numerous scholars have pointed out, co-management is an exercise in *producing* particular types of subjects. Foucault’s theory of governmentality—and its subsequent reworking into eco-governmentality—is useful here.

Foucault introduced his theory of governmentality in a series of lectures he gave at the College de France in the late 1970s (Agrawal 2005: 216). His earlier theories of power, including those focused on sovereign territorial power and individuated disciplinary power, had addressed “technologies of domination” that operate through spectacle, surveillance, and various forms of punishment (Foucault 1977). With the theory of governmentality, his focus shifted to understanding the “government” of populations. Government, in Foucault’s usage, is not a synonym for the state, but rather refers to “a multiplicity of state and nonstate actors, who work with relative autonomy” (Cepek 2011: 503). The work of government involves “optimizing” and “normalizing” the population through the regulation of health, hygiene, sexuality, kinship, environment, etc. Governmental power works through the cultivation of knowledge, desire, and

“techniques of the self” that lead individuals to behave in ways that collectively optimize the population. People’s internalization and naturalization of government is what produces governmentality.

Thus, in contrast to sovereignty and discipline, which require constant intervention and enforcement by state institutions, governmentality depends on self-regulation. Foucault argues, however, that territorial and disciplinary forms of power are not displaced by governmental power; rather, the latter makes the former all the more hegemonic. It is through governmentality that the basic ideological features of modernity acquire a naturalized ontological realness. For Foucault, the individual, the population, the state, the economy, etc., are not “structures” that cause humans to behave in particular ways, but rather the “effects” of those behaviors.

Crucial to the theory of governmentality is the making of subjects (or “political subjectivities”) who internalize the logic of government. The “making of subjects” refers to the process by which people come to see themselves as belonging to a political formation and thereby internalize particular assumptions about their rights and obligations vis-à-vis others (e.g., as citizens of a nation-state, members of an indigenous group, members of an oppressed class, radical anarchists, etc.). Here Foucault offers up the figure of *homo economicus*—the rational economic man—as the basic form of (neo)liberal subjectivity (Foucault 2008: 146-50; Lemke 2001: 200). Under liberal and neoliberal forms of government, ensuring the “freedom” of *homo economicus* is the first and most essential step to optimizing the population. “Freedom” here means participation in the market as a rational individual endowed with natural rights, including the right to private property. Neoliberal government takes this a step further by making the market—and its profit/loss calculations—the organizational model for society as a whole. Neoliberal government aims to create a social “*milieu*” that provides incentives for optimizing

behaviors in the realms of commodity exchange, the environment, health, and so on (Foucault 2007: 46). And it is that milieu that is, in turn, supposed to produce self-regulating subjects.

Although governmentality clearly has its roots in Western capitalism, scholars have documented its influence on policies and processes worldwide. One of the primary manifestations of global neoliberal governmentality is the aforementioned shift toward decentralized or participatory environmental management. This restructuring of environmental law, far from unique to the Philippines, was promoted throughout the global South by the World Bank and a variety of other international regulatory organizations and NGOs. As a result, we have seen the emergence of what Goldman (2001, 2005) calls the “environmental state.” The environmental state is a transnational political formation whose constituent states are amenable to large-scale capital investments—everything from hydroelectric dam projects to conservation enclosures—all conceived under the banner of “sustainable development.”

One of the ways in which this new political formation operates is through “eco-governmentality.” Necessary for the “sustainable development” of the hinterlands, eco-governmentality aims to turn marginalized, resource-dependent populations into “modern eco-rational subjects” whose resource management practices complement the logic of environmental government. Unruly hinterland peoples and environments are thus subject to a newly consolidated territorial and governmental power. This power, however, is not coterminous with the nation-state that claims sovereignty over the area. Rather, Goldman (2001: 500) observes, “the environmental states that are emerging around the world today are marked by new global forms of legality and eco-rationality that have *fragmented, stratified, and unevenly transnationalized* Southern states, state actors, and state power.”

The obvious question at this juncture is whether (eco-)governmentality actually exists as anything more than a theory. Does government succeed in cultivating the self-regulating subjects of its dreams? I will consider this question below, but first I wish to explain more precisely why I think these concepts are analytically relevant to circumstances in the Philippines. I have four reasons.

First, as Cuasay (2005), Bryant (2000, 2002), Dressler (2013; see also Dressler and Pulhin 2010: 452), Eder (2010), and others have pointed out, there could hardly be a clearer example of eco-governmentality than the legal expectation that indigenous groups take responsibility for conservation. Even if the law purports that indigenous people already behave as self-regulating eco-subjects, it nonetheless constitutes an effort to produce them as such.

Second, as mentioned above, ancestral domain instruments promote selective commodification of the forest in an effort to incentivize ongoing stewardship and enable “sustainable development.” The most common form this takes is in the state- and NGO-assisted marketing non-timber forest products (see Chapter 6). Recently, though, new programs that aim to monetize “ecosystem services” and carbon sequestration (e.g., through the REDD initiative) have been touted as a way to incentivize indigenous stewardship over and against mounting pressures to clear the forest. Although I do not discuss such programs in this dissertation, they definitely fit alongside the NTFP markets in the category of neoliberal eco-governmentality.

Third, in the Philippines, indigenous recognition and environmental regulation are by no means controlled entirely by the state. They are technologies of government that involve a host of different actors and institutions, from different agencies within the state itself, to local, national, and transnational NGOs, to supranational organizations like the UN and World Bank.

In the case of the ancestral domain and protected area at the center of my research, the state has actually played a secondary role relative to internationally funded NGOs (see below and Chapter 3). Here and in subsequent chapters, my use of the term “environmental government” denotes this plurality of actors and institutions.

Fourth and finally is question of empowerment. Both recognition and co-management promise Philippine indigenous groups empowerment, whether in the form of a greater say in policymaking or greater control of resources. And indeed, as we saw above in the Survival International press release, some indigenous groups have found themselves empowered in novel ways. Nevertheless, we must remember that recognition requires indigenous groups to subject themselves to new forms of territorial and governmental power. To quote Nadasdy (2012: 500): “To the extent that it requires formerly disempowered peoples to alter their personhood and society as a prerequisite for the exercise of that power, ‘empowerment’ must also be viewed as a form of subjection [...]” The theory of eco-governmentality, as with poststructuralist theory in general, brings this critical awareness to the fore.

With that said, I return now to the question of whether eco-governmentality actually achieves its aims. Before bringing my own findings into the fray, I should first mention that other scholars have come to different conclusions. Most analyses of contemporary conservation regimes focus, as I have done so far, on locating eco-governmentality in discourse and policy (e.g., Cooke and Kothari 2001; Fletcher 2010; Luke 1995).

To date, Agrawal’s *Environmentality* (2005) constitutes the most robust empirical argument on behalf of eco-governmentality as something that actually exists in practice—in this case, among forest-reliant villagers in Kumaon, India. His analysis begins by tracing how the

colonial state first used statistical measurements to produce the forest as an object of government and then, when faced with peasant resistance to restrictive policing of the forest, devolved regulatory authority to village forest councils. Through participation in the practice of government, he argues, villagers have come to internalize an environmental rationality—what he calls “environmentality”—that makes them “care” for the forest.

As Agrawal acknowledges, the concept of governmentality presents the daunting methodological challenge of measuring subject formation. For evidence, he draws on ethnographic interviews, longitudinal surveys, enforcement records, and forestry statistics, all of which lead him to conclude that “Kumaonis control themselves and their forests far more systematically and carefully than the forest department could” (Agrawal 2005: 8). Certainly, if decentralization had met with continued resistance and failed to increase forest yields, those would be clear indications that the desired kinds of subjects have not been formed. But even if decentralization has succeeded on those fronts, it seems hasty to conclude that there has been “a harmonization of the interests and organization of state and community” (Agrawal 2005: 121). How does one decide, for example, whether interests have truly harmonized or only appear to be so as a result of, say, “harmony ideology” (Nader 1990)? A further weakness of Agrawal’s study is his failure to consider the broader political-economic interests served by the formation of environmental subjects in Kumaon. As Paul Robbins points out, Agrawal should have drawn on Althusser’s notion that “subject formation is a part of interpellation—the ideological disciplining of self-recognition within state and economic systems that produce and appropriate value” (Robbins 2006: 715).

Even if we accept that Agrawal's analysis is valid in the case of Kumaon, a number of recent studies cast doubt on the efficacy of eco-governmentality in other parts of the world. Although she does not use the language of governmentality, West's (2006) analysis of the "failure" of an Integrated Development and Conservation Project in Papua New Guinea is a case in point. West argues that this project—very much an exercise in neoliberal eco-governmentality—failed because it did not follow the rules of the local moral economy. Likewise, numerous recent studies have shown how new approaches to conservation often end up reproducing long-standing forms of inequality and exploitation rather than offering any meaningful form of empowerment to local resource users (e.g., Brockington and Scholfield 2010; Chernela 2005; Dressler 2009; Haenn 2005; Hanson 2007; Igoe and Croucher 2007; Sodikoff 2012).⁷

Cepek (2011), in particular, offers a trenchant argument against the notion of ecogovernmentality as a lived reality. Drawing on his work with Cofán people in Ecuador, who have long been involved in "collaborative conservation" programs, to caution against imputing eco-governmentality onto real people, Cepek (2011: 505) argues that, "[e]ven though [the Cofán have learned to] perform a set of governmental technics with precision, they continue to maintain a critical consciousness of their practice." For the Cofán, participation in conservation is not a self-imposed form of care, but a process in which their labor is alienated (see Sodikoff 2012 for a similar argument about conservation projects in Madagascar).

My own findings suggest that most Palawan—at least those whom I came to know—have not internalized eco-governmentality *despite living within both a recognized ancestral domain and a protected area*. This statement is admittedly premature—the policies in question are

⁷ For critiques of conservation and development in Palawan, see Dressler (2009), Eder (1994), McDermott (2001), and Novellino (1999, 2003, 2007).

relatively new, and things could look quite different in a generation. Even so, unless circumstances in the region change dramatically, I have serious doubts that anything resembling the tidy production of eco-subjects or a “regulatory community” (Agrawal 2001) will be forthcoming. Accounting for such outcomes requires paying close attention to the practices of government and NGO officials as well as to those of the Palawan themselves.

Both the ancestral domain and the protected area are the latest in a long series of incomplete state and NGO projects (see Chapter 3). The degree of coordination and consistency it would take to actually foster a regulatory community have never been sustained, and there is no reason to believe that this will change in the short term. The protected area is supposed to be “harmonized” with the ancestral domain and other overlapping enclosures, but what that means remains unclear.

Officials involved in management of the protected have contrasting views of the Palawan role in both environmental change and its regulation. The protected area’s management board consists mainly of politicians, bureaucrats, and NGO personnel, and is fraught with bureaucratic rivalries, which are themselves exacerbated by the controversy over mining (see Chapter 3). Finally, officials have struggled to bring indigenous people into the park’s management in any meaningful way. The indigenous members of the management board do not participate actively, and with the exception of a handful of small, NGO-sponsored projects, little effort has been made to enlist people at the local level in day-to-day conservation-related activities. People are simply told that they should refrain from illegal activities and report any that they witness. Minter found a similar situation in her research on Agta people living in a protected area in northern Luzon. She aptly notes that:

By pushing the Agta into a role of forest guardians, government agencies [...] put the weight of their own responsibilities on the Agta’s shoulders. They thereby burdened

the Agta with tasks for which they are not equipped, not trained, not authorized, and not compensated. By continuously emphasizing the Agta's role in stopping [...] resource destruction, government bodies *mask their own lack of political will to enforce the law*.

(Minter 2010:286-287, also cited in Eder 2010: 8, my emphasis)

Among the Palawan among whom I conducted research, I found expressions of alienation and distrust much more prevalent than any sense of responsibility to government. Since its establishment, their ancestral domain has been implicated in patron-client relations that undermine prospects for collective stewardship (see Chapter 6). People were aware of this, and even though they might support the ancestral domain in principle, many felt it served certain individual interests rather than those of the group. Indeed, like the Cofán in Cepek's study, Palawan I knew maintained a "critical consciousness" of their position within conservation and the broader political economy. From their perspective, conservation seems like one among the many forms of negative reciprocity imposed on them by outsiders (see Chapter 4). Moreover, though they must at times make themselves "legible" to government, they nonetheless maintain their own ethics of land and resource use. Their ethics overlap in some ways with environmental government, but are derived from a radically different constellation of ontological assumptions and egalitarian practices (see Chapter 5).

Among other scholars working on Palawan, analyses by Eder (2010), McDermott (2000, 2001), and Novellino (1999, 2003, 2007) also cast doubt on the efficacy of eco-governmentality for many of the same reasons I have already listed. With respect to the presumed compatibility of indigenous people with eco-governmentality, Eder had made the following very important point, worth quoting in full:

[T]he conceptual distinction between indigenous peoples and others, seemingly so clear in theory (and so necessary to making resource zoning "work"), may in practice be muddied by intermarriage between indigenous and non-indigenous people and by a loose local definition of what it takes to be a member of an indigenous community [...].
(Eder 2010: 15)

Though the Palawan with whom I worked remain in many ways distinct from the surrounding settler population, they also participate in a complex web of social relations—most notably through commerce, intermarriage, and religious conversion—that cannot but complicate efforts to graft conservation onto their customary practices.

Dressler (2013, forthcoming) has recently begun to argue that Tagbanua in central Palawan have “internalized” government discourses that stigmatize swidden and valorize “modern,” market-oriented livelihoods. Such outcomes are probable, particularly in the area where he works (in the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, where conservation efforts began earlier and have been more intensive). But his recent observations in this regard also stand in tension with his earlier work. Namely, Dressler has long argued that community-based conservation was overridden by preexisting, more coercive enforcement strategies, that the benefits of livelihood incentives were coopted by elites, and that as a result the Tagbanua were alienated. In any event, the evidence for effective, “actually existing” eco-governmentality in Palawan is very limited. Cepek (2011: 505), I believe, is right to “worry that researchers will be unable to understand a population’s perspective on such issues as conservation if we sacrifice open-minded attention to the sociocultural form of its members’ discourse and practice.”

In a preemptive strike against this sort of skepticism, Goldman (2001: 506) asserts that eco-governmentality need not actually succeed for it to have a profound impact on the world. What he means is that its growing hegemony lends an ontological reality to the world it envisions regardless of whether that world can be located empirically. Even if we cannot identify actual persons who live as self-regulating “eco-rational subjects,” the existence of these subjectivities in discourse and law is enough to extend the reach of neoliberal government over

new spaces and populations. Conservation, it bears recalling, has become a billion-dollar global industry, fueled by shifting philanthropic priorities, by the eco-tourism industry, and by the financialization of biodiversity and carbon (Brockington and Scholfield 2010; Igoe and Croucher 2007; Igoe, et al. 2010). The “conservationist mode of production” specializes not in tangible outcomes, but in the making of spectacle—“a prepackaged matrix of imagined connections between things and people who do not readily present themselves as connected” (Igoe, et al. 2010: 501). This observation certainly applies to the protected area in which I conducted fieldwork.

The protected area in question—known as the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape—was established largely through the efforts of transnational organizations, particularly Conservation International (CI), which Igoe et al. (2010) consider one of the most prominent global purveyors of conservation spectacle (see Chapter 3). The MMPL features prominently on CI’s website as a “as a field model towards demonstrating how ecosystem services benefit humanity and how protected area management that values and protects nature’s assets supports human well-being at the community and livelihood level” (Conservation International 2013). The park’s long-term financing strategy, which CI composed, focuses on attracting tourists, monetizing “ecosystem services,” and tapping into carbon-credit markets. All of this is premised on close cooperation with the park’s indigenous residents, but in fact only the appearance of cooperation is ultimately required. Indeed, so long as the spectacle of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development continue to create new market value, it may be irrelevant to ask whether global environmental government actually produces eco-subjectivities on the ground.

Nevertheless, even as I remain deeply skeptical of its efficacy, I do not think that eco-governmentality can be so easily bracketed. This dissertation is a testament to both its power

and its limits. In my view, governmentality is a powerful discourse that has shaped institutions in every corner of the globe. But the complexity of the world in which those institutions operate ultimately thwarts many of their plans. The pressing question, then, is not whether emergent forms of environmental government succeed in establishing eco-governmentality, but what exactly it is they do.

A generic answer to this question is that environmental government entails a reconfiguration of power relations, though not necessarily in the manner intended by its proponents. Before proceeding, then, it is first necessary to make explicit what I mean by power. Above I suggested that differences of power undermine the ability of recognition and co-management to achieve their stated goals. But I also said that recognition, even when it leads to empowerment, constitutes a “form of subjection” (Nadasdy 2012: 500). The tensions between these statements owe not to inconsistent reasoning, but to the dual nature of power. Simply put, my analysis resists treating power exclusively in either materialist or poststructuralist terms. Power both results from the control of resources *and* inheres in “regimes of truth”⁸ that transcend individual control. For this reason, it makes little sense to treat power as if it exists in only one “currency,” such as territory, capital, or authoritative knowledge. Rather, both the constitution and operation of power are highly context-specific.

With that in mind, I follow Paul Nadasdy’s (2003) distinction, which he adapts from Eric Wolf (1990), between “tactical” and “structural” forms of power. Tactical power refers to the ability of an actor to “circumscribe the actions of others within determinate settings” (Wolf 1990: 586 in Nadasdy 2003: 10). This type of power need not always be exercised consciously, but it

⁸ Foucault (1980: 131, cited in Dodge 2006): “Each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.”

is exercised at the level of individual actors or “operational units.” Moreover, tactical power is shaped by the specific cultural and institutional settings in which it operates. For example, a shaman may wield great power within a community that attributes ontological force to shamanic ritual; yet, outside that community, he may have very little power, ritual or otherwise. Likewise, a professor may wield considerable bureaucratic power, but that power will diminish considerably if she finds herself in a community that does not reward expertise in the same manner as a university. A corporation may be exceptionally powerful in jurisdictions that grant it personhood, but be considerably more constrained in other cases.

In these examples, the tactical power of the actor in question depends ultimately on the second type of power, “structural power,” which determines the categories of thought and action that are thinkable within a given domain. Structural power, Nadasdy writes, “not only operates within a given organizational setting (as does tactical power) but it also organizes (and makes possible) those settings themselves” (Nadasdy 2003: 10). Structural power is exerted in the form of law, knowledge, custom, and culture. Some actors are tactically better positioned to influence structural power, but no actor controls it single-handedly. Rather, it is the product of constant negotiation and struggle. Domains of structural power are overlapping, but hierarchically nested. To continue on an earlier example, the professor’s status as an expert gives her considerable tactical power in the domain of its recognition, but much less in the other. However, if the structural domain of the former (e.g., a bureaucratic state) encompasses that of the latter (e.g., an indigenous community), then she may retain tactical power on the basis of her status within the higher-level domain. Thus, one can say that different actors or groups “have” differing amounts of tactical power relative to one another, while also asserting that empowerment involves subjection to a new form of structural power.

How, then, do we track the effect of environmental government on power relations?

Here the study of micropolitics offers a theoretical and methodological starting point. By decentering the state, Foucault's theory of governmentality has already provided a helpful first step: environmental government comprises what we think of as "the state," but it also works through non-state organizations like NGOs, businesses, and indigenous tribal councils. Governmental power is not, therefore, an external intervention into on-the-ground practices, but rather is realized as an effect of practical encounters among a diverse array of actors (Day 2002; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Li 2007, 2007; Mitchell 2002; Nadasdy 2003). As Foucault and Mitchell have argued, it is practice that generates the state and other loci of power, not the other way around. If these institutions seem to acquire a naturalness or ontology independent of practice, it is because a tremendous amount of labor is exerted to produce and maintain them as such.

In this regard, Nadasdy has aptly written that "it is [...] more accurate to think of state power [...] as emerging from the complexity of state processes and people's day-to-day interactions with those processes rather than as a quality possessed and wielded by a monolithic state-as-entity." "It is," he continues, "people's interactions with these agents and their often conflicting agendas, rather than some grand design conceived of and implemented by 'the state,' that gives rise to people's ideas about the state's legitimacy (or illegitimacy)" (2003: 4; cf. Ferguson and Gupta 2002). Although my own perspective decenters the state, I take Nadasdy's point that we must look to everyday, micro-level practices if we wish to understand what environmental government actually entails. This theoretical and methodological principle informs this dissertation as a whole, but is especially crucial in Chapters 4-6.

If the study of micropolitics helps to shed light on the production of power relations, it also calls forth a potentially overwhelming array of everyday practices. Thus, scholars taking this approach typically narrow their focus to language (Hanson 2007), knowledge (Nadasdy 2003), identity (DeHart 2008; Theriault 2011), and other specific domains of practice. In this dissertation, I seek to broaden the scope of micropolitics. Specifically, I attend to some of the unexpected factors or “agencies” that shape Palawan relations with environmental government. I am inspired here by Latour’s writing on “actor-network theory,” but I would like to be clear from the outset that my analysis does not adopt the whole of Latour’s program, nor do I attempt to describe an actor-network as such. Instead, I draw selectively on Latour’s theory of agency to help render visible some of the unexpected complications that environmental government has encountered in Palawan.

If we set aside all of the specialized jargon (actor, actant, etc.), the essence of Latour’s theory is that virtually anything—human, animal, plant, object, technology—can be an agent. Having agency simply means influencing the action of other agents. The term agencies, then, refers to the potentially innumerable influences that “make actors do things” in a given situation. Pluralizing agency in this manner helps us avoid relying too heavily on theoretical assumptions that yield tidy but deterministic accounts of cause and effect. It also encourages us to pay attention to human actors’ own accounts of “which agencies are making them act” (Latour 2005: 184). Latour (2005: 45) puts it thus: “we should begin [...] not from the ‘determination of action by society’, the ‘calculative abilities of individuals’, or the ‘power of the unconscious’ as we would ordinarily do, but rather from the *under-determination of action*, from the uncertainties and controversies about who and what is acting when ‘we’ act.”

Unlike those of Latour and other proponents of ANT, my analysis stops short of treating nonhumans as actors. Likewise, I resist Latour's "psychologically minimalist" treatment of human motives and anthropomorphized treatment of nonhumans (Taylor 2009: 85). By adopting a pluralized theory of agency, I aim instead to identify some of the extrahuman agencies that both enable and complicate the work of environmental government—not because they have intentionality of their own, but because they influence people to act in particular, often unanticipated ways. One might wonder whether this is simply an oversignified way of describing culture, ideology, economics, and all the other factors that shape human decisions and practices. I contend, however, that explicitly examining extrahuman agencies offers a substantially different perspective on micropolitics by requiring more careful attention to ontology and materiality.

In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour advises identifying agencies about which there is controversy—i.e., when the question of what makes actors do what they do is subject to uncertainty and debate. Thus, although one could derive a much longer list of agencies from the ethnographic accounts I offer, I focus on three: (1) environmental narratives; (2) invisible forest people; and (3) forest commodities, primarily a tree resin called *almaciga* (Manila copal). In the final section of this Introduction, I will summarize the way in which each of these things constitutes an agency around which there is controversy. For now, I will say simply that each of these agencies plays an ambivalent role in environmental government. On the one hand, each influences people to behave in ways that thwart the elegant designs of environmental government. On the other, each plays a role in reconfiguring power relations so that government of some form becomes not just thinkable but inevitable.

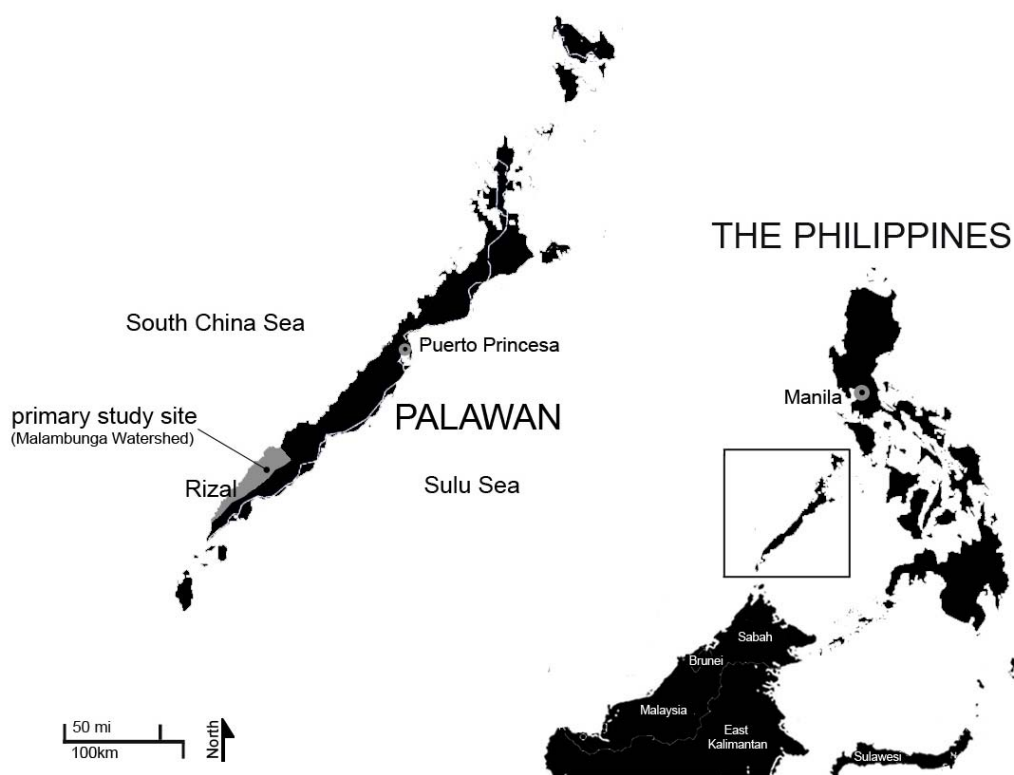


Figure 1: Map of the Philippines and Palawan

The Research Site

Palawan Island

Among all the regions in the Philippines, Palawan has arguably been the most deeply implicated in the emergence of environmental government. Due to accidents of geography and history, which I will detail in Chapter 2, Palawan emerged from the Philippines' long colonial occupation (1565-1946) looking very different from most of the rest of the archipelago. Its forests remained largely intact and, unlike minority groups in other regions, the island's indigenous population had yet to face a demographic explosion of Christian Filipinos. It was not long, however, before things started to change in dramatic ways. Beginning in the 1950s, what had been a trickle of migration from neighboring islands became a flood of migrant settlement

from regions near and far. Commercial logging, too, pushed into even the remotest corners of the island. By the 1980s, uncontrolled deforestation was threatening to replicate the ecological devastation that had unfolded in so many other regions.

Activist efforts to “save Palawan” began in earnest after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. It was in this period, too, that postauthoritarian governments moved to recognize indigenous rights and decentralize environmental regulation. The result has been a proliferation of ancestral domain claims and protected areas throughout the Palawan region (see Chapter 3). The entanglement of ancestral domains with biodiversity conservation, characterized above as a project of eco-governmentality, has arguably had limited impact on the transformation of Palawan as a whole. And yet, for the island’s indigenous groups, these measures have brought significant changes. Today they find themselves playing an increasingly central role in environmental politics even as they remain socially and culturally marginalized.

Although Palawan is today one of the most ethnolinguistically diverse parts of the Philippines, only three groups are considered indigenous to the island—the Tagbanua, the Batak, and the Palawan.⁹ This volume focuses on the experiences of the Palawan, who live in the southern part of the island and have been the least studied of the three. My fieldwork focused, in particular, on a small segment of the Palawan population living in the far southwestern part of the island. I chose to work where I did for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to know whether postauthoritarian reforms were in any way deterring dispossession and forest overexploitation. It thus made sense to look at a relatively remote area that was, so to speak, at an earlier “stage” of

⁹ On outlying islands within the province of Palawan, there are other ethno-linguistic groups with recognition as indigenous, including the Agutaynen, Cuyonon, Kagayanen, and Molbog. The Cuyonon have recently sought to fashion themselves as *the* emblematic indigenous culture of Palawan Island, to which their ancestors migrated seasonally for generations, eventually comprising the first wave of frontier settlement in the twentieth century (Eder 1999, 2004). These groups are distinct from Palawan’s main indigenous populations in that the first three have long been Christianized, and the Molbog Islamized.

the transformations documented elsewhere. Second, southwestern Palawan is the site of some of the first ancestral domains established in the province, and these have, since 2009, been included within a protected area known as the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL). For most of my fieldwork, I resided in a village that was within both an ancestral domain and the MMPL. Finally, my interest had been piqued by other scholars' writings—particularly those of Macdonald—in which the Palawan are presented as radical egalitarians who hold personal autonomy in the highest regard. I wondered how such a population would respond to the expectations of recognition and conservation. Before introducing my field site in more detail, allow me first to provide a basic introduction to the Palawan.

“The” Palawan

With their present numbers estimated at somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 (Macdonald 2007: 11), the Palawan represent a sizeable minority in the island's five southernmost municipalities. Given this relatively large population and the rapid but uneven processes of differentiation they are experiencing, I hesitate to speak about “the Palawan” as single group with shared characteristics. Nonetheless, I will outline some of the features that most Palawan would, I believe, consider part of their “traditional” way of life—what they call the “ways of the ancestors (*keedatan et kagurangurangan*).

The demonym Palawan—occasionally spelled Palaqwan, Pala'wan, or Pälawan—refers to a common, self-ascribed ethnolinguistic identity. But it also overlooks a lot of variation, not all of which can be attributed to recent influences.¹⁰ As such, this demonym is more meaningful as a boundary between Palawan and non-Palawan, whilst Palawan subgroups identify one

¹⁰ Alternative spellings reflect local variations in pronunciation, which in turn correspond with dialectal varieties of spoken Palawan (Macdonald 2007: 12). I follow Macdonald's spelling as it seems the most inclusive.

another with terms that mark association with particular places or ecological orientations.

Southern Palawan is drained by dozens of small rivers, which serve as reference points for subgroup identification—e.g., *taw't Ransang* for people of the Ransang River, *taw't Malambunga* for people of the Malambunga River, and so on. Likewise, Palawan refer to one another as *taw't daya* (upstream people) or *taw't napan* (downstream people) depending both on place of birth or residence and on cultural orientations.

Traditionally, the Palawan relied on swidden agriculture, hunting, fishing, and the collection of other wild foods for their subsistence. Their list of traditional cultigens is long, including most importantly rice, cassava, banana, taro, yam, corn, sweet potato, and variety of other tubers, cereals, and medicinal plants.¹¹ They hunted a wide variety of game, including such animals as jungle fowl, fruit bats, squirrels, pangolins, civets, and most importantly wild pigs. Depending on the size and behavior of the prey, hunting methods included blowguns, trained dogs and spears, various kinds of traps and snares, as well as the more recent addition of air guns and “pig bombs.” River fish and crustaceans provided an important source of protein, as did marine and mangrove species for Palawan near the coast. Other wild food sources included honey, various parts of the sago palm, wild tubers, and a very long list of other plants. Beyond subsistence, Palawan were also long engaged in the trade of forest products for goods they did not produce locally, especially salt, kiln-fired ceramics, and metals (Macdonald 2007). Their contact with Muslim traders seems to have been especially influential in terms of shaping marriage practices and other aspects of customary law (Macdonald 2008).

¹¹ That some of these originate in the New World does not make them non-traditional. I resist coming up with a technical definition for the word “tradition” because I am hoping not to define an “essential” set of Palawan characteristics, but rather to identify some of those that have existed, from their perspective, since time immemorial.

Palawan's relatively pronounced monsoonal pattern results in a dry season of January to May and a rainy season of June to December. The Palawan swidden cycle was attuned to this seasonality, as was the corresponding ritual calendar. The swidden rice spirit (*Empuq et Parey*) is one among many invisible humans of various demeanors with which the Palawan must maintain relations. I will defer a more detailed discussion of Palawan ontology and ritual to Chapter 5. Here it suffices to say that, despite recent changes and the disappearance of many rituals, many Palawan remain quite distinct from their settler neighbors in terms of their beliefs and ontological assumptions about the world.

So far I have been speaking about Palawan practices mainly in the past tense because many have undergone dramatic changes in recent years. For example, although it seems safe to say that the majority of Palawan still practice swidden, swidden yields have declined as the Palawan have lost access to land and started to invest more of their time in other activities. Hunting, too, is much less common than it used to be, especially in lower-lying areas that have been deforested or otherwise overexploited. Instead, Palawan increasingly engage in cash-oriented activities—particularly the marketing of forest products and wage labor—to purchase food, medicine, and other consumer goods that they feel they need.

Macdonald provides a comprehensive, if somewhat formulaic view of this variation. Based on his decades of fieldwork throughout southern Palawan, Macdonald (2007: 12) describes what he calls an “inland-coastal gradient” along which the Palawan vary, on the one hand, in terms of their ecological and economic orientation and, on the other, in terms of their “beliefs and representations, [and] practices relating to the supernatural.” This gradient downplays many past and present complexities, including the movement of Palawan people from

the coast to the mountains (and vice versa) as well as the blurring of boundaries between the Palawan and other ethnolinguistic groups. Still, certain patterns remain evident.

Palawan who live at higher elevations are characterized by an all but universal involvement in swidden and are more likely to hunt, some still employing traditional methods like the blow gun. Despite their distance from lowland markets, cash-oriented trade in forest products (especially rattan, almaciga, and live-caught exotic species) has become increasingly important. Those who live nearer the coast, while often still involved in swidden and hunting, are more likely to be involved in intensive agriculture (as both seasonal laborers and smallholders) and other cash-oriented livelihood activities, such as charcoal production. Across the inland-coastal gradient, bilateral kinship remains the basis of social organization and uxorilocality the dominant residence pattern; however, settlements vary in structure and size, with larger, more diverse settlements more common near the coast, and smaller, more uniform clusters more common in the mountains.¹² Monogamy remains the dominant pattern across the population, with cases of polygamy anecdotally more common high in the mountains and among Islamized Palawan.

Palawan ritual practices also vary along the gradient; however, with shamanic practices in decline it is increasingly difficult to generalize in this manner. Near the coast, many Palawan have recently converted to Christianity, and there remains ongoing a long-term process of

¹² The Palawan do not have an elaborated system of clans, lineages, or ranks. As is the case throughout much of Southeast Asia, individuals reckon genealogy bilaterally and, with few exceptions, have a shallow historical memory of specific ancestors.

ethnogenesis involving an Islamized population known as the Penimusan.¹³ Among residents of the lower elevations who have not converted to Christianity or Islam, traditional ritual practices tend to favor large gatherings, music, dance, and other forms of performance, with the possibility of female *belyan* (shaman). For their part, the Palawan in the mountains are more inclined toward introspective shamanic rituals led exclusively by male *belyan*. In either case, the figure of the *belyan* remains important, albeit diminished from what it once was.

One arena of Palawan tradition that remains relatively robust is customary law (*adat*). Contact with hierarchical, state-based societies has had profound impacts in this area, as have new forms of social differentiation associated with money and accumulation (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, many Palawan groups maintain their customary institutions separate from those of the state, and many remain strongly egalitarian in their practices and values. To the extent that the Palawan have “leaders” of any kind, they are elders (*pegibuten*, “the one who is followed”) whose opinions are respected and often heeded, but are in no way binding. Those who develop expertise in *adat* and the oratory skill necessary to participate in public hearings (*bitsara*) can command respect as spokespeople or arbitrators (*memimitsara*, *menunukum*, *panglima*). But their authority to negotiate marriages and settle disputes depends entirely on their efficacy in building consensus among the parties to the negotiation, not on any coercive powers.¹⁴ The law they practice is basically advisory and conciliatory rather than punitive (Macdonald 2007).

In all cases, the respect afforded to a trusted *pegibuten* or a skilled *menunukum* is not reckoned in terms of mutually exclusive territory, but through networks of kin that depended on

¹³ It seems that the ethnogenesis of the Penimusan is following a similar pattern to that of the Molbog people of Balabac Island, who were once a Palawan subgroup but who became increasingly distinct through intensive contacts with Muslim traders and settlers beginning in the eighteenth century (Blanchetti-Revelli 1995).

¹⁴ Customary law experts are referred to variously as *memimitsara*, *panglima*, and *manunukum*. *Panglima* is clearly derived from the Sulu Sultanate—a trace of that state’s influence on the Palawan.

trust and mutual assent. Since the 1970s, some Palawan have gained state or NGO recognition as the leaders of particular territories (often under the title “chieftain,” “kapitan,” or “panglima”). Being recognized by the state as a chieftain may add to one’s credibility as a *menunukum*, but it does entitle one to recognition by fellow Palawan. That must still be earned. Likewise, while some such title-holders leverage their recognition in the pursuit of greater wealth and power, mostly these representatives are there simply to deal with the government, NGOs, and other outsiders. Bureaucratic recognition of Palawan leaders has led to no end of frustration on both sides since the state often expects a recognized leader to exercise authority on a jurisdictional basis and to make binding commitments on behalf of a territorially defined community (see Chapter 6).



Figure 2: People gathered for a prenuptial negotiation. (photo by author, March 2011)

To Macdonald, Palawan sociopolitical practices evince not just an egalitarian ethic, but a “non-structural” social system. What he means is that, outside of the household, there is no enduring social structure of any kind, but rather flexible forms of “fellowship” that take shape on an ad hoc basis (Macdonald 2011). As a result, there is no socially sanctioned way to deprive another of their means of subsistence or their freedom.¹⁵ One can use persuasion or even magic, and lateral social pressure can certainly amount to a form of coercion. But there is no institution or authority figure entitled to dictate others’ behavior. This radical equality applies not just to relations between men of similar age, but also to relations between men and women and even in some way to adults and children. Like Macdonald, I was amazed to see Palawan parents act as if they had no recourse when a child blithely ignored their orders.

This system is possible because each household is technically self-sufficient, can relocate with relative ease, and does not *need* to cooperate with any other. I do mean to say that Palawan do not share or cooperate. To the contrary, they are constantly giving gifts of food to one another, and they will engage in reciprocal labor exchange when they want to clear a large swidden. But their basic needs can be met without the coordination of labor at a higher level of organization. Under these conditions, Macdonald suggests that a deeply ingrained fear of conflict and violence plays an important role in holding back the emergence of hierarchy.¹⁶ An egalitarian anti-structure such as the Palawan opens up some very interesting about questions

¹⁵ Palawan claim that their ancestors used to kill people in extreme cases of incest, but that such acts were rare and considered a necessity to protect the community from divine punishment.

¹⁶ Palawan share this fear of “non-violent” peoples of Southeast Asia, including the Buid of Mindoro (Gibson 1986), the Semai and Temiar of the Malay Peninula (Benjamin 1993; Dentan 2008), and the Punan of Sarawak (Sellato 1994).

about human sociality and its many potentials. But it also seems, a propos of my broader theme, a very unlikely partner for an inherently hierarchical regulatory system such as that of environmental government.

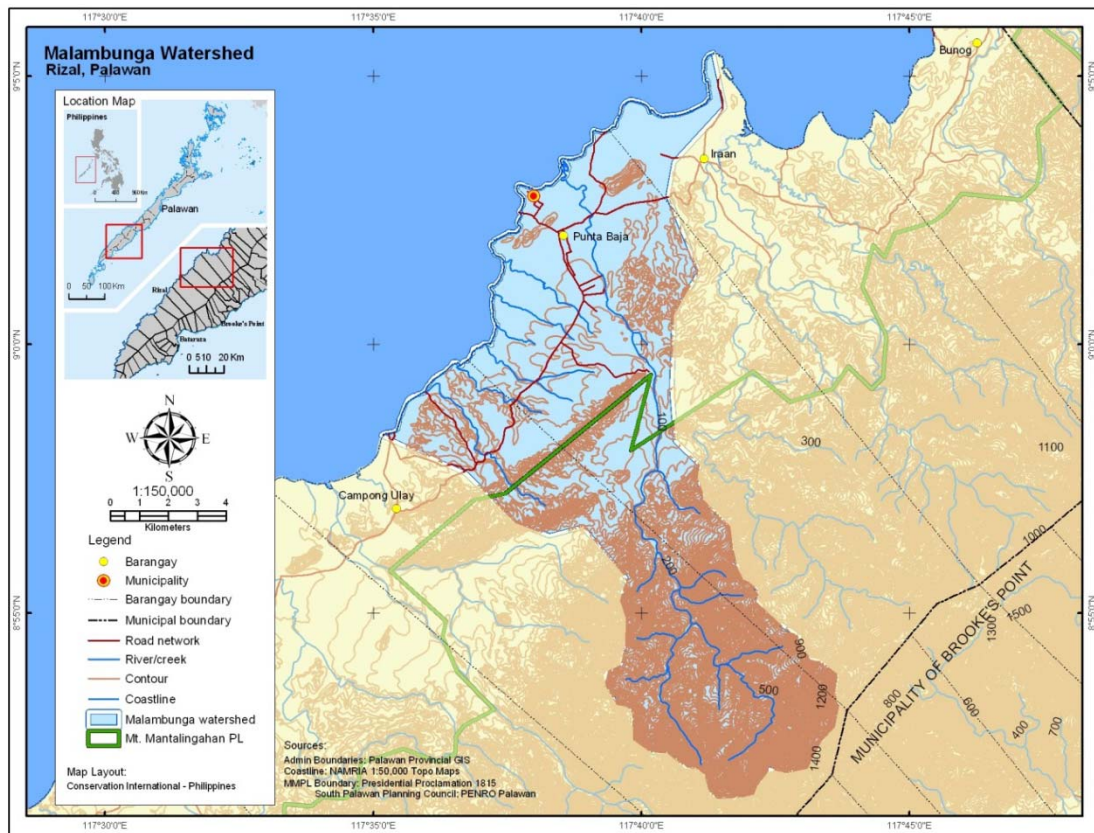


Figure 3: Map of Malambunga Watershed showing boundaries of MMPL.
Source: Conservation International.

Tenga't Gebaq

To understand the effects of environmental government at the local level, clearly I had to immerse myself in the everyday lives of people living with those effects. Thus, as noted, I chose to focus on a village called Tenga't Gebaq because of its location within both an ancestral domain claim (established in 1997) and the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (established in 2009). Chapter 3 will detail the history and composition of these institutions, while Chapters

4-6 will examine how they unfold in everyday, micro-level encounters. What follows, then, is an introduction to the village as it was during my residence there (March-December 2011 and July-August 2012).¹⁷

Tenga't Gebaq¹⁸ is a small village in the western foothills of the mountains that bisect southern Palawan. It was home during most of my fieldwork in 2010-2012. Although I was never able to find the village on a government map, it is usually listed as a sitio of barangay Punta Baja in the Municipality of José Rizal.¹⁹ Some believe that it is, in fact, within the neighboring barangay, Campung Ulay, and indeed this has been the subject of some controversy (see Chapter 6). Whatever the jurisdiction, Tenga't Gebaq emerged as a settlement because a number of pathways that intersect there. For one, it sits atop a hill just west of the Malambunga River, which provides for a steady source of fish, eels, and other riverine foods year round, as well as for easier hiking into the interior during the dry season (Jan.-May). For two, it sits at the end of a rough, long-neglected logging road that follows the river up from the lowlands. This road enables skilled (and brave) motorbike drivers to travel from the village to the municipal seat of Rizal in less than an hour. For three, the village is at the base of the mountains, making forest products like rattan and almaciga resin more accessible. This strategic positioning has made the village a locally important site for selling forest products from the interior and buying consumer goods from town.

¹⁷ My residence in the village was punctuated by trips to the provincial capital and, on occasion, other regions. I typically spent two to five weeks in the village at a time.

¹⁸ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁹ Barangay are the smallest administrative units in the Philippines. In rural areas, villages and hamlets within barangay are referred to as sitio. In urban areas, barangay are subdivided into purok. Some rural sitios are organized as purok, which can elect a representative to liaise with the *barangay* council but do not have formal political authority.



Figure 4: A view of the Malambunga River, near Tenga't Gebaq. (photo by author, April 2011)

With two exceptions, everyone living in Tenga't Gebaq was of Palawan descent. The exceptions were two Christian men—one a Batangueño, the other a Bisaya—both of whom had settled in Rizal and married Palawan women. These men were among a handful of non-Palawan people who owned land in and around Tenga't Gebaq. Most Palawan in the village identified not just as Palawan, but also as *taw't daya* (upstream people). Moreover, most women as well many men identified as *taw't Malambunga* (people of Malambunga), but more men than women identified with other areas because of uxorilocal residence.²⁰ All of the households were related

²⁰ Such distinctions are generally of minor significance in daily life. When they do become significant, it is usually as an exonym. For example, one Palawan might refer to another (most likely not to the person's face) as a "taw't napan" to emphasize how the person in question has strayed from Palawan traditions. Or, someone might be referred to as "taw't daya banar" (*really* an upstream person) to emphasize their isolation from modern influences. I also found that Palawan in one area will often express varying sentiments of trust and commonality with Palawan in other areas. For example, many people in the Malambunga area said that Palawan in Iraan and Ilog-Ilog were trustworthy and "just like us," whereas those in Ransang and on the eastern side of the mountains were prone to sorcery and violence. Such stereotyping, I believe, is mostly an index of familiarity, with the nearer Palawan subgroups more likely to be trusted than those further away. In some instances, though, these views have personal

through blood or marriage except for one Palawan family (“*taw’t Ransang*”) who had moved to the village to distance themselves from a dispute in their natal area.

Estimating the population of Tenga’t Gebaq was difficult for a number of reasons. Though I call it a village, it did not resemble a lowland village centered around a church or some other public space. It was, rather, a cluster of related households. During my time there, the number of households in residence varied from around fifteen to around two dozen (including the two small clusters of houses within a half-kilometer downstream). Some households varied their residence seasonally, preferring to stay by their *swiddens* during the weeding, guarding, and harvesting months (May-September). Others preferred to build their *swiddens* nearby and stay in the village year round. Others still moved around for any number of other reasons, such as finding employment on a farm downstream, wanting to live closer to one’s *almaciga* trees, starting or ending a marriage, getting into a dispute with the in-laws, or needing help with a new baby. Some houses in the village sat vacant, waiting for their owners to return; others were taken apart and moved elsewhere.

The only structures in the village that were not houses included a small cock-fighting ring and a vending stall with an aluminum roof. These were used for the weekly *tabuqan*—a gathering, attributed to Muslim influence, where people from the village and neighboring settlements gathered to play cards, gossip, and sell food items. Though the cock-fight ring was used as a shelter for playing cards and preparing food for wedding parties, never once was an actual cock fight held during my time there.

origins. One woman, for example, told me that she would never travel to the eastern side of the mountains because her father had died after being poisoned during a visit there (presumably through sorcery).



Figure 5: Residences in and around Tenga't Gebaq. Clockwise from top left: houses in Tenga't Gebaq proper; a *kelang benwa* (large house for hosting gatherings) under construction just downstream of Tenga't Gebaq, near Tenga't Gebaq; a tree-top-style house to the west of Tenga't Gebaq; a small cluster of houses several kilometers upstream of Tenga't Gebaq. (photo by author, 2011-2012)

Palawan in Tenga't Gebaq described the village to me as an example of how they had become “*sibilais*” (civilized). It was only within the last generation, they said, that *taw't daya* like them had begun living in such large settlements. The traditional pattern had been to live in smaller, more spatially dispersed clusters (*rurungan*) and to move semi-annually to be near active swidden fields. Newly formed households often lived near their *pinemikitan* (“the one to whom one sticks”), usually the wife’s parents or parents’ siblings, for several years before eventually becoming the anchor of their own *rurungan*. Both of these “traditional” patterns factored into many of the comings and goings in Tenga't Gebaq. We can conclude, therefore,

that long-standing patterns of residential mobility and impermanence remained evident in Tenga't Gebaq even as people spoke of the village as a symbol of their modernity. It was indeed a much more lively and dynamic place than the term "village" might imply

Though they continue to engage in many of their traditional subsistence activities, including swidden and hunting, people in Tenga't Gebaq have increasingly diversified livelihood strategies. Like Palawan elsewhere, men in particular are increasingly drawn to wage-labor opportunities in the lowlands and sometimes in the provincial capital or even other provinces. I noted several examples of men from the village leaving for weeks or months at a time to earn money through farm labor. Others stay in the village, but walk downstream on a regular basis to work in farms along the road, in some cases clearing and planting land they themselves had sold to settlers. Despite the increasing emphasis on waged work, the forest remains the most important source of their subsistence and income. A majority of households in and around Tenga't Gebaq rely on almaciga and to a lesser extent rattan as their main source of cash income. Some people make baskets, brooms, and other handicrafts to supplement their income, with one household specializing in elaborate rattan furniture. Almost everyone in the vicinity of Tenga't Gebaq continue to make swiddens, though they are widely said to be smaller, less diverse, and less critical to survival than they were in the past.

If we scale up beyond the village proper, we find the surrounding hills and mountains dotted with a mosaic of forests, swiddens, the occasional paddy field, and a few areas overtaken by cogon grass. Smaller settlements, often comprising no more than two or three households, are scattered in the heavily forested mountains upstream. Many of those living upstream have kin in Tenga't Gebaq and come there periodically to visit, gossip, buy consumer goods, and sell forest products.



Figure 6: People gathered in the evening for the weekly *tabuqan*. (photo by author, April 2011)

Downstream the landscape is less densely forested, with large areas having been cleared for swidden and other purposes in the relatively recent past. (Between 1968 and the early 1980s, the area was selectively logged, as I will explain in Chapter 3.) Though most non-Palawan settlers live near the coast—and none lives upstream of Tenga't Gebaq—several settler households have farms along the Malambunga within easy walking distance. One such couple,

who settled there in the early 1990s, also established an Adventist church and mission. Today the small church sits amidst a cluster of Palawan households alongside the old logging road about a half-hour walk downstream from Tenga't Gebaq. During my research, the church had two resident missionaries, both Filipinos from other provinces, and around twenty fairly regular Palawan attendees. Similar "tribal missions" of various denominations dot the foothills and even the mountains of southern Palawan, some established as early as the 1970s.

As one proceeds further downstream of the church, one encounters large areas that are in the process of being cleared for rubber, pineapple, cassava, and coconut plantations (see Chapters 3 and 4). These are owned by Christian or Muslim settlers, though an increasing number of Palawan from Tenga't Gebaq and environs perform wage labor on these lands. After about an hour's walk downstream, the old logging road meets a larger road that leads to the coastal "highway" and is maintained by the municipality. At the intersection of these roads sits the "Area Servicing Unit" of the local ancestral domain claim or CADC. For people in Tenga't Gebaq, this crossroads marks an important boundary. Upstream is a world where one rarely crosses paths with an unfamiliar person and, indeed, is likely to be related in some way to nearly everyone one sees. Downstream is a much more diverse world, one dominated by settlers. Many Palawan live on the outside of this tacit boundary, and many Palawan from inside traverse it on a daily basis on their way to the market, school, the health center, government offices, relatives' houses, etc. But it nonetheless marked a significant point of demarcation in the local geography of difference.



Figure 7: The Area Servicing Unit for the CADC. (photo by author, July 2012)

During my time in Tenga't Gebaq, I stayed with a family headed by a man named Jimi and his wife, Palaya. Their three children lived in the house with us, and their eldest daughter and her Christian husband lived next door. Jimi's second wife, Jiha, lived in a separate house several meters away. Incidentally, theirs was the only polygamous marriage in the immediate vicinity, though there were several others further upstream. They were also relatively well off by Palawan standards, though by no means by lowland standards. They had a motorbike as well as the village's only gasoline-powered generator and TV set, around which everyone in the village would gather several times a week to watch an hour or two of a Korean soap opera or Filipino action flick.

Together, Palaya and Jiha ran the only store in Tenga't Gebaq—a tiny operation attached to the side of Palaya's house.²¹ Their wares included cigarettes, packaged snack foods, canned sardines, dried fish, and on occasion government-subsidized rice. Virtually every household in the vicinity bought consumer goods from this store when they had money to do so (though some would save up and make trips to town where the mark-up was lower). In addition, Jimi served as a middleman in the almaciga trade (see Chapter 6). Frequently, people would sell almaciga resin to Jimi and then use the money to buy goods from his wives' store. Unlike many similar operations in the lowlands, they did not allow fellow Palawan to rack up debts that would then lock them into patron-client relations. Keep in mind that virtually everyone involved in these transactions were related in some way. Nevertheless, Jimi and his wives definitely had a role in the socioeconomic and cultural changes that I will describe in Chapters 5 and 6.

How and why, one might wonder, did I end up living with this particular family? I first met Jimi in 2008 when I came to Rizal for preliminary research. He was the government-recognized chieftain in the area, so it was customary that I began my queries with him. He was affable and talkative, but not in a way that suggested ulterior motives. In fact, when I first called at his house, he turned me away, explaining politely that he was too busy to “entertain” me at that moment, that I should return the following day. It was a perfectly reasonable and honest response to an unexpected visitor, but also one that I had almost never encountered in the rural Philippines.

²¹ When I first arrived in the village, they actually had separate stores that competed with one another. This soon proved financially unviable, so they combined them. Although they helped each other out here and there with everyday chores, like tending the swidden and fishing, they also lived separately in many ways. They frequently shared food, but rarely ate together. They maintained separate swiddens and separate finances. Jimi would spend a few nights with Jiha, then a few with Palaya. And so on. Palaya and Jimi were married for some ten years before Jiha came into the picture. Out of respect for their privacy, I will not include the details of how the second marriage was arranged, but I will say that polygamous marriages are sometimes accepted by the senior wife as the lesser of two evils.

But what really struck me about Jimi was the incisiveness of his commentary on Palawan relations with NGOs and the state. As a chieftain, he cast his lot with the NCIP, a government agency, but he maintained a critical view of it all, one that I have returned to frequently in crafting this dissertation. Thus, our initial conversations about the ancestral domain, the protected area, and environmental government in general shaped my decision to return to this area for fieldwork in 2011. I did not expect that I would end up living with his family for as long as I did; my original plan involved residing in several different villages. But I found that building rapport and trust with Palawan, particularly those unaccustomed to interacting with outsiders, took a long time. Likewise, I found it indispensable to be associated with a well-trusted person who would vouch for me. Jimi is considered by many in the area to be a highly skilled executor of customary law and someone who can be trusted to deal sagely with outsiders. The fact that he was, in effect, responsible for me did not automatically make me trustworthy, but it helped.

For example, Jimi's support helped me disprove rumors that I was there in search of "gold"—a common and historically informed suspicion that people in rural Palawan attach to foreigners who are not missionaries.²² People were kind to me from the very beginning, but some definitely had their suspicions. Fortunately, and thanks in no small measure to Jimi, most people eventually seemed convinced that I did not have any ulterior motives. My commitment to learning the language and my constant, publicly visible labor on my field notes also helped in that regard. Whatever the reasons, over time many came to treat me with a genuine sense of familiarity and trust. I cannot claim that everyone was convinced of the value of a job that

²² Many people in rural Palawan believe that the Japanese hid gold in the mountains during World War II, and apparently some foreigners believe this as well. I met a German man who said he had brought a metal detector with him when he first came to the area in hopes of finding buried treasure.

involves “loitering around and asking questions,” as one man teased me. But I feel confident that I overcame the initial challenges of building trust.

Now, my association with Jimi also had its tradeoffs. There was some jealousy in the community about his government recognition, his family’s relative wealth, and indeed his American guest. At first I found that some people were hesitant to engage in frank conversations about matters of controversy. To address this issue, I simply invested time getting to know them and did what I could to demonstrate my independence from my hosts without violating their trust. Although one can never know what people are thinking but not saying, this strategy seemed effective as I heard “I don’t know” or “just ask Jimi” less and less frequently. For example, my initial conversations with people about the recognition of chieftains suggested wide agreement that the government should use heredity in awarding the title. Jimi’s father had been a chieftain and, therefore, Jimi was his rightful successor. Later on, though, I learned that people did not, in fact, agree universally with this practice. Isu, a deeply respected elder *belyan* and *menunukum* explained it thus: Jimi had a claim to be chieftain because he was a respected *pegibuten*, as his father had been, but there was no reason why some other respected elder should not merit consideration by the state.²³

Another way in which my association with Jimi limited my research was in my relations with his rival and his rival’s associates. The topic of Chapter 6 is a bitter dispute between Jimi and a fellow Palawan man named Bordo. In 1997, Bordo was appointed by an NGO to serve as the “president” of the ancestral domain, which Jimi had refused to sign on to. By the time of my fieldwork, their rivalry had culminated in a protracted lawsuit over almaciga permits. I took time

²³ For the record, Isu claimed that he would not want the title since it meant having to deal with outsiders all the time.

to build rapport with Bordo, and he was always extremely accommodating. But I know that he never fully trusted me. His associates were mixed bag. One of them expressed to me in confidence that they agreed with Jimi's position. But another was hostile, even to the point of helping to spread those rumors about my search for gold. In the end, I was able to learn a number of valuable insights from my conversations with Bordo and his associates, but I was never able to become a part of that community. It was too far from Tenga't Gebaq for me to visit more often than every few weeks, and spending extended amounts of time living there would have damaged my rapport with Jimi. So I did everything I could to gain multiple perspectives on anything to do with the dispute, and then I accepted my position as one of perceived bias. I valued my rapport with Jimi too much to sacrifice it for the sake of balance. As they say, relationships require compromise.

A Note on Methods

Prior to moving in with Jimi's family in Tenga't Gebaq, I spent the better part of four months doing background research on the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape and its implications for ancestral domains. In addition to gathering government and NGO reports, I conducted interviews with an array of officials involved directly or indirectly with the park's management, including four of the five Palawan representatives who then served on its management board. These interviews led to many follow-up conversations and to my attendance of three MMPL-related meetings, all of which came to inform my analysis of the role of different officials and organizations.²⁴ While I never developed the kind of rapport with most officials that I did my Palawan hosts, the interviews helped me understand important differences of

²⁴ My analysis is also informed indirectly by my 2006-7 research, which involved intensive contact with NGOs (see Theriault 2011).

opinion among officials with respect to the rights and obligations of indigenous people in environmental government.

In Tenga't Gebaq and environs, participant observation was by far my most important research method. Helping people with work in their swiddens, accompanying people on outings to the forest, attending wedding negotiations and dispute hearings, spending time in people's homes during rain storms, participating in government tree-planting ceremonies, simply paying close attention whenever government officials came to the village—any number of seemingly unrelated and often spontaneous activities led to invaluable insights. The informal conversations had in the course of these activities did not always yield precise quotes, but they were often the most illuminating. In addition, I conducted many “semi-structured interviews” — more formal, less spontaneous conversations with a partially predetermined set of questions. Finally, I also conducted structured interviews of thirty-nine households in and around Tenga't Gebaq in an effort to verify my impressions about the prevalence of various livelihood activities and variations in people's narratives of change. What I gained from this survey was not ultimately a solid quantitative data set, but instead a number of really enlightening conversations that I may not otherwise have had.

In terms of language abilities, I began fieldwork for this dissertation with fluency in Tagalog. This was extremely helpful in my work with government and NGO personnel and even in my initial work with Palawan since I was not reliant on an interpreter. Still, I had to learn Palawan. The Palawan language is not mutually intelligible with Tagalog and is, in fact, more similar to Visayan and other “meso-Philippine” languages (Macdonald 2007; Revel-Macdonald 1979). When I first began work in Tenga't Gebaq, I had to rely on Tagalog to communicate with

Palawan speakers, virtually all of whom could understand Tagalog even if they were not always very enthusiastic about speaking it themselves. I made learning Palawan my first priority, and by approximately July 2011 I was able to function mainly in Palawan. My abilities developed to a point where I could understand and participate in normal conversations, but never to the point where I could casually follow multiple, overlapping conversations with numerous participants. In such instances, I had to consult with others afterwards to reconstruct things that I did not understand. For this dissertation, I have consciously sought to include only ethnographic content which I feel confident representing and analyzing in light of my linguistic abilities.

Overview of Chapters

Above I proposed that we will better understand interactions between Palawan people and environmental government if we trace the extrahuman “agencies” that shape power relations. In the chapters to follow, I will examine how three different agencies—environmental narratives, invisible forest spirits, and forest commodities—both animate and complicate efforts to make the Palawan themselves agents of government.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I will critique a widely circulating environmental narrative that frames Palawan as the Philippines’ “last frontier.” A common trope among conservationists, indigenous-rights advocates, and eco-tourism promoters, this narrative argues that Palawan must be saved—or, ironically, consumed—before it is lost to the ravages of development. Such imagery suggests that Palawan existed in a state of obscurity and isolation until the mid-twentieth century, when migration, logging, mining, and environmentalism propelled it onto the stage of history. This narrative, I argue, ignores Palawan’s long history of encounters with resource-hungry states and, thus, obscures the ways in which that history prefigures processes

that are unfolding on Palawan today. As antidote to this narrative, I will situate Palawan and my fieldsite within regional history from precolonial times to the present.

Chapter 2 will address the precolonial and colonial periods and Chapter 3 the period from 1946 to the present. I show will that Palawan—and its forests in particular—have been an object of desire, anxiety, and intervention on the part of state societies for more than four centuries. My analysis will reveal how imaginings of Palawan have co-evolved with programs for subjecting the island’s tribal peoples and with plans for commodifying its forests. More than historical precision is at stake in this analysis. Palawan’s mystique as the “last frontier” provides symbolic capital to projects of conservation, indigenous rights, and eco-tourism. But it also naturalizes some of the very processes that those projects so passionately seek to avert. In this way, the “last frontier narrative” constitutes one of the agencies that mobilizes environmental government, but also blinds its proponents to the unintended consequences of expanding governmental power.

In Chapter 4, I will continue my engagement with environmental narratives by tracing their role in both animating and effacing controversies over the integration of ancestral domains into the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape. First, I will identify two prevailing narratives that have come to frame opposing visions of indigenous rights and obligations vis-à-vis the state. The first, said to be a legal legacy of a 1909 U.S. Supreme Court ruling (*Cariño v. Insular Government*), asserts the existence of native title irrespective of the state. The second, believed to be derived from a “mythical” Spanish policy known as the Regalian Doctrine (Lynch 2005), claims state ownership of all land not explicitly titled. These narratives offer conflicting directives for indigenous peoples’ status relative to conservation enclosures. Nevertheless, in the law, such conflicts are effaced by a third narrative—that of indigenous people’s inherent capacity

to cooperate harmoniously with conservation and what I earlier termed eco-governmentality.²⁵

In practice, no one really seems to know with any certainty what “harmony” means. In the case of the MMPL, public performances of the harmony narrative conceal conflict. But, behind the scenes, there are major disagreements both among officials themselves as well as between officials and the Palawan over what status the latter should have in the MMPL (and about role they play in environmental change more generally).

After tracing the circulation of narratives among officials, I will turn to those of the Palawan, who have their own ideas about the causes, effects, and accountabilities of environmental change. Contrary to the notion that environmental narratives are simply the misinformed ideas of elites, I will show that Palawan people cite and rework prevailing narratives about themselves in order both to negotiate competing allegiances with external authorities and to build a critical consciousness of power among themselves. As agencies, narratives enable environmental government to operate in conditions of ambiguity and ignorance. But they also enable people to express and mobilize dissent.

Even as Palawan criticize conservation interventions, they also profess (and often practice) an ethic of restraint in resource use that would seem to favor conservation as a general proposition. Indeed, as we now know, this seeming compatibility is one of the fundamental tenets of both recognition and co-management. In Chapter 5, however, I will argue that Palawan ethics derive from ontological assumptions that differ radically from those of bureaucratic regulation. Palawan believe that they share the landscape with invisible people who have their own claims to resources. To avoid potentially deadly conflicts with their invisible neighbors,

²⁵ One could even argue that the Philippine take on this much vaunted post-structuralist theory is ultimately an attempt to reconcile two opposing ideologies.

Palawan ethics call for restraint in the clearing of forest and the hunting or gathering of particular organisms. But unlike government policies, which aspire to universal compliance with discrete land-use zones, Palawan practice restraint as a pragmatic response to negative feedback received from their invisible counterparts through dreams or divination. Whether or not someone decides to exercise restraint in a given situation depends on a broader pragmatics of negotiation, compensation, and appeasement. This pragmatism, combined with egalitarian practices, leaves relatively wide latitude for individuals to negotiate resource use decisions. There is no place for such variability in the fixed spatial boundaries and inflexible rules of government conservation. By failing to account for Palawan relations with their invisible counterparts, co-management ontologically omits an agency that is critical to the very ecology it seeks to regulate. Under these circumstances, the misrecognition of Palawan ethics may serve to undermine the very ontology on which those ethics depend.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I will examine a dispute over non-timber forest product permits in order to better understand the role that commodification plays in the formation (and deformation) of environmental government. Specifically, I will ask how intensifying participation in commodity markets is shaping Palawan political subjectivities. I will then ask how these emergent political subjectivities compare with the designs of environmental government. Giving indigenous people priority access to NTFP markets is thought to help incentivize and sustain their traditional stewardship practices and, thereby, realize the dual dream of indigenous rights and biodiversity conservation. I will argue, however, that commodity markets actually engender a very different form of political subjectivity than the one envisioned by proponents of environmental government. Therein lies one of the fundamental contradictions of the entire

enterprise and one of the primary reasons its outcomes seem so frequently to deviate from its designs.

CHAPTER TWO

A History of the “Last Frontier,” Part 1: Colonial Antecedents of Environmental Government in Palawan

Documenting Palawan mythology was not a high priority of my research. Even so, I sometimes asked my Palawan friends and acquaintances about what they call the “stories of the ancestors” (*tuturan et kagurangurangan*)—stories about which other scholars had written fascinating accounts.¹ More often than not my queries were unsuccessful: mythological knowledge is in decline, and those who retain it are not always eager to hold forth upon request. Over time, though, I did manage to (over)hear bits and pieces of these stories. One in particular took root in my imagination.

The myth in question is an origin myth of sorts, but it does not resemble the Palawan origin myths that I read in ethnographic texts. Instead, it centers on two historical personages—Lapu-Lapu and Magellan—whose fateful encounter has become one of the most famous episodes in Philippine history. Lapu-Lapu was a native chief on the island of Mactan, a small island in what we now know as the central Philippines or Visayas. In March and April 1521, the Portuguese “explorer” Magellan landed on various Visayan islands while looking for a westward route to the Spice Islands on behalf of the Spanish empire. He and his fleet immediately began trying to convert (and collect tribute from) Visayan chiefs. But Lapu-Lapu refused to cooperate, prompting a battle in which Magellan and a portion of his crew were killed. In the post-independence period, this encounter has become a key episode in the dominant narrative of Philippine national history—the first act of resistance against colonialism.

¹ See, e.g., Macdonald (1988) and Revel-Macdonald (1983).

In the Palawan version, by contrast, Lapu-Lapu and Magellan are allies, at least initially. They join forces and set out in search of wealth in other parts of the archipelago, including Palawan.² When they first encounter Palawan, the island is invisible to outsiders (*kaya megkebiri et dayuhan*), as it always has been. Somehow, though, Magellan and Lapu-Lapu render Palawan visible, perhaps using powerful magic (*kependayan*). Regardless of their methods, they find vast wealth in Palawan, and it is not long before they begin to quarrel over it. In this version of the story, it is in (and over) Palawan that Lapu-Lapu and Magellan fight one another to the death. Ever since then, the myth concludes, the Palawan have faced a continual onslaught of foreigners, including not just the Spanish and Visayans, but also the Muslims and Americans.³

Three Palawan elders told me this story in response to my questions about the origins of the world. It is telling, I think, that they chose not to respond with a “traditional” Palawan origin myth. Instead, they shared their own version of a dominant narrative, reworked so that it speaks to contemporary Palawan experiences. In this mythohistory, we learn that there was a time when Palawan was left alone by outsiders, and its indigenous inhabitants were free to enjoy their island’s abundance. Things changed when powerful foreigners rendered the island visible and thus initiated a process of dispossession and decline that continues to the present. Here the Palawan identify material greed, namely that of ancient foreigners, as the root of their present-day hardships.

² Michael Cullinane pointed out to me that this myth reflects Palawan exposure to the postcolonial Philippine education system (because the Magellan/Lapu-Lapu episode was not widely known in the Philippines until nationalists reformed public-school curriculum in the post-independence period). To me, this makes this myth even more compelling because it suggests a critical reworking of a dominant narrative.

³ Palawan myths and legends also contain accounts of their ancestors’ battles against Muslim traders and raiders whom the Palawan identify by various names. When I asked how those accounts fit into the story about Lapu-Lapu and Magellan, I was told that the Muslims were able to find Palawan thanks to its earlier discovery by the Visayan-Spanish duo.

Palawan also work this moral logic into their more prosaic accounts of social and environmental change, which I heard frequently, including from those who were less inclined to wax mythological. As I will explore further in Chapter 4, virtually all Palawan elders I knew told me that both their environment and their way of life had declined since the time of their ancestors. And most of them attributed these changes to the mass arrival of Christian settlers.⁴ In southwestern Palawan, mass Christian settlement is a relatively recent process, one whose initiation elders locate within living memory. The Lapu-Lapu/Magellan story, by contrast, pushes the historical origins of this process deep into the past.⁵ For the Palawan, who seem almost averse to remembering history in a positivist or genealogical sense, this story serves as a genre of social critique and social memory. On one hand, it interprets ongoing transformations as the latest and most intense phase in a long-term history of foreign encroachment. On the other, it places Palawan at the center of this history rather than at this periphery. In both respects, the Lapu-Lapu/Magellan mythohistory challenges popular narratives of Palawan's history, which, as I will argue below, ignore the island's place in a broader history of colonialism.

But Palawan mythohistory is not, ultimately, the focus of this chapter. The reason I have begun with this excerpt is that it contrasts so starkly with how the Palawan region is portrayed in popular narratives: as the Philippines' "last frontier." This chapter will critique the last-frontier narrative as a form of liberal exceptionalism, which, unlike the myth described above, obscures the region's embedding in long-term of processes of colonization. As noted in the Introduction,

⁴ It also dovetails with the Palawan moral condemnation of greed. In a different myth, greed among the Palawan themselves—specifically a dispute over sago palm—is said to be what led half the population to become visible, while the other half remained invisible and became the *taw't talun* (people of the forest, see Chapter 4).

⁵ No one could say how many generations it had been since Palawan was rendered visible.

Palawan has become an international “hotspot” for struggles between extractive industries like logging and mining, on the one hand, and promoters of biodiversity conservation, indigenous rights, and eco-tourism, on the other. Among the latter in particular, references to Palawan as “the last frontier” are all but universal. Consider the following passages:

- (1) Palawan is the Philippines’ **last frontier**. Its relative isolation from the rest of the archipelago spared many of its resources from the systematic exploitation practiced elsewhere. As the planning and development coordinator for the province phrases it to us, “Palawan has been thrown out to into the China Sea.” Indeed, its closest neighbor is not even another Philippine island, but the Malaysian state of Sabah on the island of Borneo. [...] Until recent decades, the rest of the Philippines viewed Palawan simply in terms of its isolation. As transport costs fell, however, and as the other islands were increasingly overlogged and overfished, it became only a matter of time before Palawan was ‘discovered’ by thousands of poor farmers and fishers from other islands—and by big commercial loggers.
(Broad and Cavanagh 1994: 39, my emphasis)

- (2) Welcome to Rizal – the **last frontier** of Palawan, the country’s last ecological frontier. Though the Municipality is one of the least known among the countless destinations in the Province, it boasts of truly unforgettable sights. Mt. Mantalingahan, Palawan’s highest peak and a veritable paradise of lush virgin forests, home to rare flora and fauna, majestically towers over the Municipality. Spectacular white-sand beaches stretch along the entire coastal length. The Tau’t Bato tribe, a unique group of indigenous people, can be found in Singnapan Valley [...] To those who have experienced its largely unspoilt natural and cultural treasures, Rizal is truly worth the visit, again and again. Its people, representing a diverse combination of different ethno-linguistic groups, have been a showcase of peace and unity. Working in harmony, they have been able to harness the untapped resources in them, and directing these into worthwhile courses of action geared towards the common goal of development.
(Municipality of Rizal 2008: , my emphasis)⁶

- (3) The struggle to save Palawan (known as the Philippines’ **Last Frontier**) is not only about saving trees and rare species. It is also about nourishing the Filipino cultural heritage, so powerfully represented by those indigenous communities that - after escaping Spanish and American colonization (while resisting the new ‘mining imperialism’ now) - continue to represent the ‘living roots’ from which all Filipinos originate. Therefore, environmental plundering by mining companies is not only a crime against nature but it is also a crime against culture, a sort of genocide that annihilates the most profound roots of the Filipino’s history and ultimately plunders the cultural heritage of the whole nation.

⁶ A slightly different version of this same passage is also cited by Fabinyi in his discussion of “last frontier” rhetoric.

(ALDAW 2012: , my emphasis)⁷

The first passage is from *Plundering Paradise*, an award-winning account of Philippine environmental politics written by American University Professor Robin Broad. The second comes from a tourist pamphlet produced by the municipality in which I conducted much of my fieldwork. And the final passage is associated with a video produced by ALDAW, an indigenous-rights organization headed by a Palawan activist and an Italian anthropologist. The sources of these passages vary widely, but in referring to Palawan as the “last frontier” they make use of a common trope. These passages exemplify what has become the standard narrative of Palawan’s history, and with a simple online search, one can easily find legions of similar examples in other published sources.

According to the last-frontier narrative, Palawan existed in a state of obscurity and isolation until the mid-twentieth century when migration, logging, and eventually environmentalism pushed it into the spotlight of history. Today, Palawan is the last vestige of an authentic, precolonial “paradise” that has been lost in other parts of the archipelago. Not only that, but Palawan is unique—a land with “thousands of kilometers of unexplored forests and coastlines” whose “flora and fauna [...] display more affinities with certain islands in Indonesia, especially Borneo, than other islands in the Philippines” (WWF 2010, 2013). Faced with threats from migrant settlers, wildlife poachers, loggers, and miners, Palawan must be saved—or, ironically, consumed—before it is lost to the ravages of development.

⁷ This passage comes from a caption associated with a video documentary that was posted to Youtube.com by Ancestral Land/Domain Watch (ALDAW), a Palawan-based indigenous-rights organization founded in 2009 by Artiso Mandawa, a Palawan activist, and Dario Novellino, an Italian anthropologist. ALDAW’s main activities include opposition to mining and large plantation development on Palawan lands.

My concern here is not what the “last frontier” narrative says, but about what it does not say—about the history it obscures. Calling Palawan “the last frontier” implies that the history of colonialism in the Philippines prior to independence in 1946 is mostly irrelevant for understanding the challenges the Palawan region faces today. Here I challenge this assumption and argue that there is, in fact, significant continuity between dominant imaginings of Palawan in the colonial past and post/neo-colonial present. Palawan has been an object of desire, fascination, and anxiety on the part of imperial states for more than four centuries. Its status as such, I will show, has been underpinned by both the imagined exceptionality of Palawan and by the exceptionalism of colonial self-imaginings. On the one hand, Palawan was not, in fact, ignored by Spanish or American colonial officials. Records kept by both regimes suggest that officials saw Palawan as exceptional and were fully inclined to incorporate it into the colonial system.

On the other hand, flanked respectively by the call of salvation and civilization, both the Spanish and the Americans found moral justification for their own acts of dispossession. This moral exceptionalism was, I would argue, especially pronounced in the case of Palawan because of the island’s interstitial placement betwixt the center of colonial power in Luzon, the Muslim Malay polities (in Sulu, Mindanao, and Borneo), and British trading interests in Sarawak. No state could honestly claim to exercise full sovereignty over Palawan until sometime in the first half of the twentieth century. The Spanish and Americans could, therefore, readily justify their interventions as efforts to protect Palawan’s exceptional features—particularly its forest and “simple, timid” indigenous inhabitants—from marauding Muslims and other nefarious interests.

As I will explain below, Palawan was—and is—exceptional within the Philippines. Because of its location, it is ecologically distinct from the rest of the country, and it emerged from the colonial period with much more of its forest cover remaining than most of the rest of the country. But Palawan is decidedly *not* exceptional if exceptional means that it was simply exempted from colonization. By implying that the Spanish and American colonial regimes largely ignored Palawan or that the region somehow ‘escaped’ colonization, “last frontier” narratives obscure Palawan’s history and make it more difficult to identify the antecedents of present-day problems. Further, the frontier narrative lends itself to a form of liberal exceptionalism that too readily separates contemporary efforts to ‘save’ Palawan, its forests, and indigenous inhabitants from their role in ongoing processes of colonization.⁸

Clearly, then, this is not just a question of academic precision. In fact, my main concern is not with the frontier narrative’s (in)accuracy, but with how its effacement of history naturalizes the type of relations and interventions that emerge in a contested “frontier” landscape. This chapter and the next are intended as much (if not more) for officials and activists as for fellow academics. Even so, it is necessary here to establish a theoretical basis for the argument to follow.

First, following recent work in political ecology, I consider frontier narratives of Palawan’s history to be what political ecologists call *environmental narratives*.⁹ As defined by Forsyth and Walker, “environmental narratives are simplified explanations of environmental cause and effect that emerge in contexts where environmental knowledge and social order are

⁸ I have borrowed the term liberal exceptionalism from Julian Go, for whom it signifies an American ideology which “admits that the United States has been an empire, but insists that the empire has been unique” (cit: 75).

⁹ This is, essentially, Foucault’s concept of discourse in a much-simplified version. (Foucault 1980)

mutually dependent” (2008: 17).¹⁰ We saw above how narratives depicting Palawan as the last frontier do more than just promote simplified understanding of environmental change in the region. They also prescribe identities for indigenous people like the Palawan whose fate is equated with that of the nation’s pre-colonial heritage and for non-indigenous people who have a stake in that fate.

Second, as environmental narratives, frontier narratives produce what Foucault calls a heterotopia.¹¹ That is, in frontier narratives, Palawan is a heterotopia—a real place that can be located on a map, but that is nonetheless “outside of all [known] places.” Heterotopias are hyperreal spaces onto which collective desires and anxieties are projected. They represent the inversion of places familiar to the beholder, and they define what is standard by embodying or containing what is exceptional or deviant. Colonies, according to Foucault, are heterotopic because they can both contain deviants from the metropole and provide a tabula rasa on which to realize a utopic alternative. The Philippines as a whole was and is a heterotopia in the context of Spanish and American imperialism. Both empires treated Palawan as something of a heterotopia within a heterotopia—as, for example, when the island was chosen to host exiles and eventually a penal colony—and it is today reinscribed a frontier heterotopia when severed from its colonial history. Notwithstanding the cumbersome jargon, this is a very important point. Palawan’s status as a frontier heterotopia reflects an elite longing for authenticity that often overshadows local visions of the region’s past, present, and future. In the context of myriad efforts to ‘save’

¹⁰ A similar concept used by other scholars is “regime of nature,” which Haenn, following Escobar, defines as “a story that condenses and attempts to direct the intersection of history, cultural mediation, and ecology” (Escobar 1999 in Haenn 2002: 2).

¹¹ I am indebted here to an essay by Sarah Schneider Kavanagh (2011) for making the connection between Foucault’s concept of heterotopia and what she calls “frontier myths.”

Palawan, identifying Palawan as a heterotopia is another way of asking: “what exactly is being saved and for whom?”

In what follows, I will begin with a brief accounting of how other scholars have dealt with Palawan’s history. Then, I will focus the remainder of the chapter on highlighting, on the one hand, how Palawan’s interstitial geopolitical position made it an elusive but nonetheless integral part of broader Spanish and American colonial projects; and, on the other, how those colonial engagements prefigured present-day circumstances in ways that go completely unrecognized by the frontier narrative. One of the main themes of this dissertation is the complicated entanglement of environmental regulation with the regulation of minority people. In particular, Chapters 4-6 trace some of the complications that have resulted from the Philippine government’s efforts to reconcile institutions meant to promote indigenous resource rights with those intended to protect biodiversity. Chapters 2 and 3 place these complications in a deeper historical context. My hope is to temper the liberal exceptionalism of the present so that all of us who look to Palawan as a place worthy of being saved, protected, or understood will be more aware of the will to control that we share with our colonial predecessors.

“In the end,” writes Neil Smith (1996: xvi), “the frontier discourse serves to rationalize and legitimize a process of conquest, whether in the eighteenth-or-nineteenth-century West, or in the late-twentieth-century inner city.” Or in the contemporary Philippines. If we better understand how Spanish and American colonial authorities imagined and intervened in Palawan, we can better anticipate potential unintended consequences of present-day efforts to “save the last frontier.”

Academics and the Last Frontier

Compared to other parts of the Philippines, and relative to the strong scholarly interest in Palawan in recent years, very little has been written about Palawan's history. This reflects the relative dearth of historical records and the fact that most of those studying Palawan have been anthropologists and geographers rather than historians. Nevertheless, I am by no means the first scholar to cast doubt on frontier narratives of Palawan's history or trace the colonial antecedents of its present-day challenges. Eder (1987, 1999), Dressler (2009), and McDermott (2000) have all done so with respect to the specific sites and issues they were investigating, though none of them has directly interrogated these narratives in relation to the history they occlude. Most recently, Fabinyi (2011: 23) took a step in that direction when he invoked Tsing's treatment of frontiers as "scale-making projects" that "take for granted the existence of [desired] resources." His analysis, though, focused on the ways in which Palawan is today imagined and treated as a resource frontier by various groups rather than on the colonial precedents for the same.

Nilo Ocampo (1985, 1996), a Filipino historian, is the only scholar to have undertaken anything approaching an exhaustive history of Palawan's colonial experience. In his own effort to counter the frontier amnesia, his work self-consciously seeks to bring out Palawan's interstitial positioning between colonial regimes based in Manila and Muslim polities in Sulu, Mindanao, and Borneo. Indeed, it was his work which, in part, inspired me to make the argument I do here. Ocampo notes repeatedly that both Spanish and American officials "gushed" over the riches of Palawan and came to see the island as strategically vital in their effort to establish sovereignty in the archipelago. He writes:

The 'frontier' is there, to be sure, well represented in printed material and, therefore, a historical fact. But it should be pursued with a caveat. Frontier it was for the Spaniards and Americans and Filipinos from other provinces, but it was home for a congerie [*sic*] of local peoples (Batak-Tagbanua-Palawan-Cuyunon-Agutaynen-Cagayanen) and a beachhead for a dominating Muslim presence. The notion of

Palawan-as-frontier is a recurring one, but it is not the crux of the interfacial history that is in order. (Ocampo 1996: 24)

Although much of what I have to say in this chapter derives from Ocampo's account, I also hope to take his argument further. Palawan's status as a frontier is not a potentially misleading fact, but a political project that has its roots in the very same colonial projects that it obscures.

“Just as good as that of Borneo”: Palawan's natural history

A narrow, mountainous island, Palawan cleaves the South China Sea from the Sulu as it traces a line between Mindoro to its northeast and Borneo to its southwest. Shattered into an array of outcroppings and satellite islands, Palawan's northern end abounds in sheltered inlets, while its sharp southern tip points toward Sabah as if to offer the modern historian a clue about its pre-colonial past. Palawan is 425 kilometers long and barely forty across at its widest point, yet it is today the Philippines' fifth largest island and the mainland of its largest province.¹²

Palawan's placement on the northeast extremity of the Sunda Shelf has been decisive in its natural and cultural history. Connected to Sundaland by a land bridge during Pleistocene glaciations, Palawan's flora and fauna are more similar to those of Borneo than to the rest of the Philippines. The peculiarity of the island's biota was not lost on the first European colonials to settle there—a monastic order known as the Augustinian Recollects—who noted in 1624 that its supply of forest products was, unlike most of the Philippines, “just as good as that of Borneo” (Concepcion 1903-1909 [1624]: 310).

¹² The Province of Palawan encompasses some 1800 smaller islands. Some prominent examples include the Calamianes, Coron, Cuyo, Dumarán, Cagayancillo, Balabac, and Bugsuk.

Palawan sits within the intertropical zone, which tends to have “seasonal,” as opposed to “highly seasonal,” rainfall patterns according to Bellwood’s (1999) typology. Within this general pattern, geomorphic and other variables intervene so that the “extreme northern and southern parts of the island as well as the entire northwest coast have six dry months and six wet months, while the rest of the province has a short dry season and no pronounced wet season” (Eder and Fernandez 1996: 2). Palawan as a whole receives an average of 2,607 millimeters of rain per year, while the annual average of 1,600 millimeters on the east coast makes it among the driest areas in the Philippines (Eder 1987: 24). According to Bellwood, regions with reliable dry seasons of at least three months in duration “support more open monsoonal forests with a deciduous tendency during the driest periods” (Bellwood 1999: 6). Compared to the evergreen rainforests of the humid tropics, semi-deciduous monsoonal forests of the type found in Palawan “generally provide more plant food for human consumption” (Eder 1987: 25).

A spine of mountains bisects most of Palawan, dividing the flatter, drier east side from the steeper, wetter west. On the southern half of the island, Mt. Mantalingahan peaks at 2,086 meters and serves as the centerpiece of an impressive forest landscape that constitutes one of the largest tracts of forest cover remaining in the Philippines.¹³ Because Palawan is so narrow and mountainous, most of its rivers are not navigable for any significant distance inland. Its coastal plains are relatively small and prone to flooding, especially on the west coast. The potential benefits of seasonal inundation are limited by the Palawan region’s unusually erratic rainfall patterns.

¹³ Southern Palawan is the only place in the Philippines where Manggis trees (*Koompassia excelsa*)—the tallest trees in Southeast Asia—grow wild. And it is also home to one of the Philippines’ only remaining lowland forests that runs contiguously from the mangroves to the mountains.

Despite their limited utility in terms of transportation, Palawan's rivers are numerous and often separated by steep valley walls that make north-south travel difficult in places. Further, because the island's mountains have not been volcanic during recent millennia, its soils are mostly alluvial or formed from underlying bedrock and, therefore, tend to be nutrient poor (Barrera 1960 in Eder and Fernandez 1996: 2). Combined with the paucity of navigable waterways and the presence of steep gradients, relatively poor soils impose constraints on wet rice cultivation and timber production, thus limiting its potential to support the emergence of a state polity. In addition to its extensive mangrove forests, Palawan's terrestrial forests are of a monsoonal, "molave" type, which include some key hardwood species, but historically have been of less commercial significance than the dipterocarp species found on islands like Luzon and Borneo (Eder 2005; Kummer 1992).

Palawan in the "Sulu Zone"

In part because of its geography, Palawan has never been at the center of a major polity. This does not mean, however, that it was not involved in trade. The earliest evidence for external trade with the Philippines comes from ceramic evidence dating to sometime between the tenth and twelfth centuries CE (Hutterer 1977). By the thirteenth century, Chinese documents begin to indicate well-established trading networks between South China and the Philippines (Scott 1984). Although early Chinese records contain no unequivocal references to Palawan, Kress (1977) dates the region's involvement in Chinese trade to the tenth century or earlier.¹⁴ The earliest unambiguous documentary evidence of Chinese trade with Palawan comes from the Recollect missionaries whom I mentioned above. In 1624, the missionaries reported that forest

¹⁴ See also Eder (1987: 48-51) for a summary.

products, including rattan, beeswax, and edible bird nests, were among the most common exports from the island, while Chinese porcelain and metal work were the main imports (Blair and Robertson 1903-1909: 309-10 in vol. 21, cited in Eder 1987: 49). Though Chinese demand for Palawan's forest products continues to the present, the Chinese themselves have had only a limited physical presence on the island, least of all in the south. Islamic civilization, on the other hand, has had a direct impact. Islam reached what would become the southern Philippines in the thirteenth century, connecting the archipelago to trade networks extending westward to South Asia and beyond. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, seafaring Islamic Sultanates in Borneo, Maguindanao, and Sulu prevented the Spanish from controlling most of the southern part of the archipelago. In Palawan, Spain was limited to little more than a tenuous foothold in northern Palawan (see below). Even in the north, Spanish records indicate frequent attacks and raids by Muslims coming from various points south. It is difficult to say with any certainty which of the Muslim polities controlled southern Palawan at any particular point during this period. What we do know is that Palawan was ceded by different Sultans at different time to both Spain and the East India Company, suggesting that no one state can be said to have "controlled" Palawan in the manner of a territorial sovereign. Nevertheless, we also know that Palawan played an important role in the regional ascendancy of the Sultanate of Sulu, which began in the latter eighteenth century and lasted just over a century.

Long a trading partner of China and other seafaring polities, the Sulu Sea became a pivotal "zone" in the world system as a result of European demand for tea. To meet the insatiable metropolitan demand for tea, European trading companies had to find commodities that the Chinese wanted. Among these, the most important and infamous was of course opium,

but the Europeans also turned to the marine and forest products of Southeast Asia.¹⁵ The Sulu Sultanate—itsself dependent on trade for staple starches, prestige goods, and eventually opium—eventually came to dominate this trade in the Sulu Sea. The Tausug, who comprised the ethnic core of the Sulu Sultanate, obtained the goods for this trade in two ways: (1) through secondary trade with raiding groups like the Iranun and Balangingi, who captured slaves throughout the archipelago and traded them in Sulu, where they were employed in the gathering of goods for trade with the Europeans and Chinese; and (2) the establishment of settlements in outlying islands whence Tausug chiefs, known as *datu*, could collect tribute from native groups. According to sources cited by Warren, both of these methods were used by Muslim traders in Palawan. By the 1780s, there is evidence for Muslim settlements along both the eastern and western coasts of southern Palawan, though their size and duration is uncertain.

Either way, it was during the nineteenth century that the Sulu Sultanate's influence in southern Palawan reached its peak. Warren notes that, by 1857, a single Tausug *datu*, Alimuddin, had all but monopolized trade between Palawan and Britain's ascendant entrepôt in Labuan. Indigenous Palawan traded forest products like edible swallow's nests, rattans, resins, and beeswax for goods they did not manufacture locally, particularly like salt, metal tools, and kiln-fired earthenware items like plates and bowls, the latter being especially important to bridewealth.

The Sulu Sultanate's fortunes began to wane in 1848, when the Spanish started using steam-powered ships to patrol the Sulu Sea. In 1858, Spain managed to establish a permanent garrison on Balabac, a small island placed strategically in the strait between Palawan and

¹⁵ In the Sulu Zone, these products mainly included things like beeswax, trepang, gutta-percha, camphor, rattan, various resins, tortoise shell, pearls, mother of pearl, and edible birds nests (see Warren 1981).

Borneo. This was followed in 1872 by the founding of Puerto Princesa, Palawan's present-day capital. By the late 1870s, Spain had succeeded in blockading most trade in the Sulu zone, forcing the Sultanate to submit itself to Spanish sovereignty.

We can place southern Palawan within this regional history thanks in large part to Warren's (1981, 2002) pioneering work. At the same time, however, we know little about what life was actually like for Palawan's indigenous population during this period. What we do know comes from a handful of European intellectuals who included Palawan in their Philippine expeditions.¹⁶ Only one of them—a British biologist named John Whitehead—wrote in detail about southern Palawan. In 1887, Whitehead spent nearly three months at a site he called Taguso (Tagusao) on the island's southeastern coast. In a brief report published in an ornithological journal, he offers a basic if partial sense of social relations between the Palawan and Muslim settlers:

When we landed in Taguso there were no Spaniards there, and the natives were doing much as they liked. Palawan is notorious for the bad characters which have taken refuge there from the Sulu and other islands [...] In the interior of Palawan is another race, nearly related to the Bornean Dusans and Muruts; these people are under the thumb of the coast Sulus. The Sulus will not allow a Dusan to sell any jungle-produce to the Chinese, but oblige the Chinese to buy from them, as middle men.
(Whitehead 1890: 38)

In an elaborated version of his report, Whitehead (1893) also mentioned the existence of two additional groups of people, whom he referred to as Orang Sungei (“half-cast Sulu Dusuns”) and Orang-Utan (“wild interior tribes”). Whitehead mistakenly used the Bornean demonyms with which he was familiar, but I am in agreement with Macdonald (2007: 13-14), who interprets the distinctions as follows:

¹⁶ Of these, perhaps the most widely known is Dean Worcester, who visited Palawan in 1887 and 1892, was appointed by President McKinley to both Philippine Commissions, and served as Secretary of the Interior for the Insular Government from 1901-1913. However, except for a short stopover in Balabac, Worcester stayed in the vicinity of Puerto Princesa during his initial expeditions.

- (1) “Sulus” referred to Tausugs and other Muslim settlers who lived along the coast, made a living from fishing and trading, and were organized under hereditary *datu* chiefs;
- (2) “Orang Sungei” referred to indigenous Palawan who had converted at least nominally to Islam, settled along the coast, and were analogous to second-class citizens within the *datu* system;¹⁷
- (3) “Dusuns” referred to indigenous Palawan who practiced foraging and shifting agriculture, were influenced by the Muslims but remained largely independent of them, and spent most of their time in the interior; and
- (4) “Orang-Utan” referred to the most remote and least extroverted of the Palawan, who live in the mountains and avoid contact with non-Palawan.

Whitehead provides most detail about the Dusun (i.e., Palawan), whom he describes as: engaging in agriculture on the mountain slopes; living in small, single-family houses; hunting with decorated blow-guns and poison-tip darts; and treasuring “common earthenware plates and bowls” that were used only as bridewealth. As Macdonald (2007) points out, this four-part ethnic typology may lack nuance, but it nevertheless provides a generally accurate description of the socio-politico-ethnic landscape as it existed in southern Palawan until the early twentieth century and whose legacies are still unfolding today (see Chapter 3).

“The promised land”: Palawan during Spanish rule (1565-1898)

Representatives of the Spanish Empire first encountered the archipelago we now know as the Philippines on 7 April 1521 when Ferdinand Magellan’s fleet landed at Cebu.¹⁸ Twenty days

¹⁷ Whitehead (1893: 180-181) describes the Orang Sungei thus: “[They] are settled on the various rivers, and are, like the Sulus, Mohammedans. They work harder than the Sulus, not having the trade monopoly, are dark-skinned, usually ugly, and badly dressed in Sulu fashion, being poor.”

later, Magellan was killed in battle by Lapu-Lapu, a native chieftain, on the island of Mactan. After suffering further losses and abandoning a ship, the surviving members of the fleet followed a circuitous route to the islands of Bohol and Cagayan de Sulu before eventually anchoring off the west coast of Palawan.¹⁹ According to a journal of the voyage kept by Antonio Pigafetta, the crew was practically starving by the time they reached Palawan. Finding the island abundant in food, the Venetian chronicler wrote that “[w]e could well call that land ‘the promised land’ because we suffered great hunger before we found it” (Pigafetta 2007 [1519-1522]: 66). Intriguingly, then, the very first mention of Palawan in Spanish records describes the island as exceptional. Although another century would pass before Spain would officially attempt to colonize Palawan, I cannot help but wonder whether this early description helped to shape later perceptions.

Still eager to find the Spice Islands, the two remaining ships soon left ‘the promised land’ unceremoniously in their wake. Although the fleet did eventually reach Maluku, they were a decade late: the Portuguese were already well established there and would go on to hold a monopoly on the spice trade for the next century (Andaya and Ishii 1999: 13). Despite this fateful setback, Spain pursued colonization of the Philippines, establishing their first permanent settlement at Cebu in 1565. In addition to allure of gold, spices, and trade with China, Spain envisioned an Asian “arsenal and warehouse of the Faith” (quoted in Schurz 1939: 43-44).

¹⁸ Magellan had been commissioned by King Charles V of Spain to find a western route to the Spice Islands.

¹⁹ Toponyms reflect modern usage. With reference to Palawan, Spanish documents alternate between Paragua, which was its official Spanish colonial name, and various iterations of Palawan.

Despite initial hopes that it would develop along the lines of Spain's American colonies²⁰, the Philippines never became a popular destination for European settlers. Instead, the islands were administered as a sub-colony of New Spain. As such, they lacked prestige and had an air of danger and backwardness that kept most Europeans away. This was especially true in the rural areas beyond the walls of Manila, where only representatives of the Church and politico-military establishment had a sustained presence (Bankoff 2007). Colonizing remote areas like Palawan was a collaborative, though often acrimonious, project of the various religious orders and the military (Andaya and Ishii 1999). Once an area had been "pacified" and the locals forcibly resettled into permanent villages, a resident friar would train native priests to conduct evangelization using their own languages. Meanwhile, politico-military officials would select loyal native leaders, called *principales*, to serve as local administrators and landlords. This process, known as *reducción* (reduction), created a rigid social hierarchy with a small class of landed elite at the top and a large mass of dependent peasants at the bottom.

In 1624, the Recollects were sent to reduce the Calamianes and Palawan. At Taytay in northern Palawan, they managed to establish a large village and fort, but only after considerable difficulty:

The people were opposed to living congregated in one settlement, and that was the greatest hindrance; but fathers were able to attain in part, by dint of patience and constancy. The greatest annoyance arose from the Moros, who infested those coasts, and the natives were unwilling to expose themselves to their injuries by establishing themselves on the beach. (Concepcion 1903-1909 [1624]: 315-6)²¹

²⁰ In a 1569 *relación* addressed to King Philip II, Legazpi wrote, "I believe that if the land is settled and peopled by Spaniards, we shall be able to get plenty of gold, pearls, and other valuable articles."

²¹ The term Moro refers to a collection of Muslim ethnic groups indigenous to Mindanao and Sulu. Although the term is of Spanish origin and was imported from Spain to legitimize imperial conquest, it is self-ascribed today. In

With Taytay secured, the Recollects and their military escorts proceeded south, claiming success in establishing a handful of villages in the northern part of Palawan and its satellite islands.

In their report on these activities, the Recollects refer to Palawan as “the famous one [...] a rich and fertile island” (Concepcion 1903-1909: 291). This description is strikingly reminiscent of Pigafetta’s, and it suggests that either the Recollects saw significant economic potential in Palawan or that they were trying to convince the military establishment as much so as to attract its support. In any event, Spain’s interest in Palawan was evidently strong enough to merit this effort, making it difficult to sustain the claim that Palawan remained isolated from the Spanish colonial polity. Still, unparalleled challenges presented themselves in Palawan, and Spain’s subsequent efforts to gain a stronger foothold in the island would mostly end in failure.²²

Circumstances began to change in the nineteenth century when an intersection of political and technological developments led Spain to step up its efforts to harness Palawan’s economic and strategic potential. Throughout its first three hundred years in the Philippines, the Spanish colonial regime made no systematic attempt to study or manage the forests. This does not mean, however, that they did not take an interest in them. As early as 1569, the first Governor General of the Philippines, Miguel de Legazpi, revealed this interest when he wrote to King Philip II describing the great “abundance of timber” observed on many of the islands. When Legazpi and his contemporaries saw these forests, they envisioned building excellent ships for trans-Pacific trade and sturdy homes for Spanish settlers (Legazpi 1903-1909 [1568]: 242). Although most of

the case of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Palawan, the Moros and Sulus in question were most likely of Malay, Tausug, or Samal ethnicity.

²² In 1752, for example, Spain sent a military contingent to secure the island, but it eventually had to turn back due to illness. This expedition is mentioned in the Philippine Commission Report for 1900 as part of a chronological summary of the Spanish period.

these visions never materialized, certain areas did experience significant forest clearance during the first three centuries of Spanish rule (Bankoff 2007). By the late seventeenth century, travelers were already reporting lumber shortages in Manila, and reports of sylvan abundance increasingly refer to places further from the main centers of Spanish settlement (Quirante 1903-1909 [1624]: 267-68). Forest clearance in this era owed in large part to expanding settlements and agriculture, as the archipelago's population grew from fewer than one million in the mid-sixteenth century to around seven million by the end of the nineteenth (Bankoff 2007: 317).

In 1821, the Mexican Revolution forced Madrid to assume direct administration of the colony. Because the Philippines had never been self-sufficient, Spain was faced with a major fiscal problem. Its solution was to push for more intensive commercialization of forest products and other natural resources. By establishing the *Inspección general de Montes* (Forest Inspection) in 1863, colonial authorities sought to determine which state-owned lands were best left forested for reasons of health, hydrology, and climate, and which could be sold for cultivation (Bankoff 2007: 319 citing Jordana y Morera 1891, Vidal y Soler 1874: 67-8). By law, the Forest Inspection controlled all forested lands except for those under communal village tenure. In practice, however, the unregulated timber industry was growing so rapidly in the latter half of the nineteenth century that the Forest Inspection met with staunch resistance from local timber fellers and traders. For its part, the Inspection placed the blame for deforestation on swidden agriculture. Forest inspector Sebastian Vidal y Soler lamented the changes he observed in popular attitudes toward the forests, writing: "it is a common enough opinion that the climatic conditions of the Archipelago improve at the same rate as the forest diminishes, and there is no lack of those [here] who see the tree as the enemy of man" (quoted in Bankoff 2007: 320).

Both the need to liquidate state lands and the push to regulate forest extraction made securing control of Palawan increasingly urgent for the Spanish. These were not, however, the only factors in play. In 1762, the British laid siege to Manila and held the city ransom for two years. This defeat so disrupted colonial administration that it limited Spanish activities in Palawan to a bare minimum for some seventy years (Ocampo 1996). Hoping to prevent a repeat of this humiliating experience, Spain sought to fortify Palawan as a first line of defense against the British in Borneo. As noted above, it took a fortuitous technological development to finally make this possible. In 1848, colonial authorities acquired “steam vessels with maneuverability, speed, and armament [...] able to combat effectively the swift sailing craft of the Moros” (Fox 1982: 22). Armed with this new technology, Manila was able to establish a garrison on the Island of Balabac in 1858 and founded Puerto Princesa, the site of Palawan’s present-day capital, in 1872.

Far from a forgotten backwater, Palawan was the object of much attention and effort on the part of the Spanish. Their relationship with Palawan and its forests was not one of neglect or disinterest. It was, instead, a struggle for control shaped by the same sorts of geographic, political, and technological factors that shaped Spain’s experience in Luzon, Cebu, and elsewhere. Palawan may have been a “frontier” in the sense that it marked the constantly shifting edge of Spain’s territorial power in the Philippines, but it was, in reality, not as isolated from metropolitan affairs as is often assumed.

Spain’s Legacy

In 1898, not long after Whitehead’s visit and barely twenty years since asserting control over trade in the Sulu zone, Spain lost several of its overseas colonies, including the Philippines,

to the United States. As a result, Spain never managed to gain a durable foothold in southern Palawan outside of Balabac Island, and even that was a military garrison and “agricultural reform colony” (*colonia agrícola de refora*) rather than a *reducción*. Puerto Pincesa too was more of a penal colony than a colonial settlement (Worcester 1899: 82). Nevertheless, Spanish colonial policies have had profound consequences for the Palawan.

From the very start, Spanish officials had an extremely difficult time deciphering the ethnolinguistic heterogeneity they encountered in the Philippines. In 1682, after encountering mass resistance to its attempt to ban certain native practices of debt bondage and slavery, the Royal Audience in Manila wrote this to the King Charles II:

For the fact that these islands should not be considered the same as the other kingdoms and provinces of America, where all the slaves are either negroes or mulattos or they are pure indios. Out here, such a diversity of nations is found that it is not easy to comprehend it and impossible to name them, and only by giving the races in general is it possible to form any concept of the many different kinds of slaves that are found in these parts. (quoted in Scott 1991)

What emerged from Spain’s confusion was a tripartite division of the native population into *Indios*, *Paganos*, and *Moros*—Hispanized Indians, uncivilized pagans, and unconquered Muslims. Among the *Indios*, Spain employed a policy of indirect rule that sought to coopt the authority of precolonial chiefs, often known as *datu* as a result of prior Sultanic influence. Chiefs who acquiesced to Spanish rule were appointed to a hereditary noble class known as the *principalía*. Members of the *principalía* were exempt from paying tribute or contributing *polos y servicios* (corvée labor), but were expected to extract the same from their subordinates (Amoroso and Abinales 2005; Phelan 1959; Scott 1991). This system laid the groundwork for the emergence of the so-called “caciques”—a numerically small but politically dominant class of landowners, businesspeople, political bosses, and warlords who assumed control of the state

during the American period and continue to control it to this date (Anderson 1988; McCoy 1993).

The second Spanish category, that of pagans, was a stigmatized one encompassing many of the groups who are today recognized as indigenous people. Then as now, however, the connotations of this designation were ambivalent. Some pagans, such as the Igorot groups in northern Luzon, were seen as a belligerent threat to the realm and thus targeted for pacification by the military. Others, like the Tagbanua and Palawan, were seen as hapless victims of Moro exploitation in need of friary protection. Pagan groups that persisted in the hinterlands of Hispanized settlements were largely exempt from Spanish laws prohibiting bondage (Scott).

In terms of its regulation of the environment and land tenure, Spain's attempt to establish a forestry bureaucracy in the late nineteenth century had no significant impact on southern Palawan. The same, however, cannot be said for Spain's ambivalent treatment of native land tenure. According to Lynch (citing Phelan), King Philip II hoped to avoid repeating the brutal dispossession that had accompanied colonization in the Americas. He thus issued decrees intended to ensure some measure of property rights for all Philippine natives regardless of whether they converted to Catholicism (see Lynch 2005: 397). This policy stood, at least on paper, for more than three hundred years. In 1894, however, colonial authorities enacted the Maura Law, which effectively vested the state with ownership of all untitled lands. This law, along with what Lynch refers to as the "mythical Regalian doctrine" (see Chapter 4), established a precedent of state ownership of forests that has had profound implications up to the present.²³

²³ In Chapter 4, I will address how the legacy of these and other policies live on in contemporary environmental narratives concerning the rights and obligations of indigenous people vis-à-vis the state.

In sum, though Spanish officials never implemented the *principalía* system in southern Palawan, Spain's trifurcation of the archipelago's population has had profound impacts on the imagination and legislation of difference up to the present. Likewise, although Spain never realized its plans for Palawan's forests, it nonetheless laid the groundwork for future processes of dispossession during the American postcolonial periods. Both of these legacies should be clear enough in later parts of this chapter and those to follow.

Palawan under American rule (1898-1946)

Unfortunately for the Spanish, their inroads in Palawan were short lived. In July 1898, an underground movement known as the Katipunan declared Philippine independence from Spain and established a revolutionary government at Malolos. Five months later, Spain accepted defeat in its war with the United States by surrendering possession of the Philippines, Guam, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Instead of recognizing Philippine independence, US President William McKinley launched a brutal anti-insurgency campaign that resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths. At the same time as they were fighting the Katipunan, American officials established a commission to gather information about the new colony and make recommendations for its administration.

The first Philippine Commission issued a comprehensive four-volume report to the President summarizing its interviews, archival research, and first-hand observations. Besides justifying the US occupation as an act of "tutelage," the Commission devoted much attention to determining the extent and location of the new colony's best forests, which were seen as its main source of economic potential. Eager to exploit this potential and concerned about rates of clearance due to shifting agriculture, the commissioners stressed the urgency of completing a

forest assessment and taking measures to prevent “trespassing” on state-owned forest lands (Philippine Commission 1900: 288). Two years later, the Commission established the Bureau of Forestry and, in 1910, founded a Forestry School at Los Baños.²⁴ Meanwhile, the Bureau was actively involved in importing mechanized logging technology and began to grant large logging concessions to American logging companies (Potter 2003; Tucker 2007).

Even in its initial reports, then, the Philippine Commission deemed it urgent to gain a more refined knowledge and control of Philippine forests. On one hand, simple economic logic provided an obvious motive for this urgency: the sooner they controlled the forests, the sooner they could profit from them.²⁵ On the other hand, however, the Americans’ will to control also drew strength from their belief that native land use was both economically wasteful and environmentally destructive.

In its reports, the Commission described all regions with extensive forest cover as “either peopled by wild tribes or [...] uninhabited.” “In many instances,” they observed, “these regions are covered with magnificent timber; in some cases mineral deposits of great wealth lie within their limits, and as a rule their soil is extremely fertile” (Philippine Commission 1900: 159). Put simply, the Americans ignored the possibility that heavily forested areas, such as Palawan, were anthropogenic landscapes shaped by societies that might have a territorial claim to them. This

²⁴ At the time, Bankoff (Bankoff 2009: 486) has written, “the nascent U.S. conservation movement was split between preservationists and the so-called utilitarian conservationists.” The leading exponent of the latter school of thought was Gifford Pinchot. Prior to serving as the first Chief of the US Forest Service from 1905 to 1910, he traveled to his government’s new colony in 1902 to inspect its forests. In addition to vast amounts of commercially valuable timber, Pinchot also saw an opportunity to realize his vision of scientific, utilitarian forestry. Under the leadership of George Ahearn, a close Pinchot associate, the Insular Bureau of Forestry became an experiment in undiluted utilitarian conservation—something that was impossible in the US because of political pressure from preservationists (Bankoff 2009).

²⁵ In 1915, for example, Worcester (1915: 5) wrote in the journal *American Forestry* that “[t]he Philippine forests are like money in the bank.”

argument on the behalf of state control combined political expedience with a deeply ethnocentric worldview.

Although forests covered as much as seventy percent of the archipelago in 1900, the Commission's report repeatedly highlights those of Palawan and a handful of other areas for their exceptional wealth. Echoing earlier Spanish impressions, the Commission wrote that "[t]he island of Paragua is second to none in the wealth of its vegetable kingdom" (Philippine Commission 1900: 122). This evaluation was prefigured by Dean Worcester's scientific expedition to Palawan prior to the American takeover. In 1887-1888 and 1890-1893, Worcester participated in unofficial scientific expeditions to the Philippines that would lead to his becoming a leading expert on the islands, a member of the Philippine Commission, and eventually the Insular Government's Secretary of Interior. In December 1893, Worcester's team, guided by a group of local Tagbanua men, hiked to the top of Mt. Pulgar in central Palawan, whence they hoped to survey the landscape. In his report on the expedition, he wrote the following about their arrival at the mountain's peak:

We had been shut in by dense clouds, but suddenly they broke away, and it was worth all the fatigue of the trip to see the astonishment of those savages. They now realized for the first time that they were *in* the clouds, and we could hardly make out which surprised them most, that fact, or the wonderful view which spread out before them. They had never dreamed of anything like it, nor, for that matter, had we. To the north and south lay absolutely unbroken forest, as far as the eye could reach. To the east we looked over the Mindoro Sea to distant mountain peaks beyond it, and to the west we searched the China Sea in vain for any sign of land; *but our eyes ever came back to that vast expanse of splendid forest, which seemed to stand as it was in the beginning, with never a trace of the marring hand of man.*

(Worcester 1899: 120, my emphasis)

The sense of awe Worcester felt upon seeing Palawan's forests made its way into the Commission's reports and into the Insular Government's subsequent efforts to establish control over the island.



Figure 8: This photograph was taken during a 1906 expedition to the summit of Mt. Pulgar and became part of Worcester's collection. From the Worcester Collection of Philippine Photographs at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology.

Logging proceeded sluggishly in Palawan at first, primarily due to the island's lack of infrastructure and shortage of labor, so the Insular Government initially focused on establishing roads. By 1920, forestry officials reported that loggers on the island had begun operating two saw mills and using tractors to harvest large ipil (*Leucana leucocephala*) and kalantas (*Cedrela calantastrees*). Most of this activity was concentrated in the northern part of the island, where foresters reported shortages of kalantas as early as 1924 (Bureau of Forestry 1915-1924). Although Palawan's forests were becoming an increasingly important source of timber and other

products, they only supplied a fraction of total timber extracted in the pre-war era. In the 1910s and -20s, for example, forestry records indicate that they provided between four and five percent of all lumber extracted from state-owned land.²⁶

If American officials shared their predecessors' impression that Palawan's forests were the best in the archipelago, they also shared an abhorrence for the practice of swidden agriculture or *kaingin* as it is known in Tagalog. Whereas the Spanish typically couched their discussions of *kaingin* in terms of religion or law, the Americans saw it as a matter of civilized enlightenment and rationality. In either case, colonial officials believed that the practice swidden evinced a lack of these attributes and, more importantly, a need for their instillation. "There has been," cautioned the Commission, "much needless destruction of valuable timber in the past." This "needless" destruction, they reasoned, had occurred at the hands of the colony's native inhabitants whose "plantations [...] are speedily invaded by 'cogon' and other strong-growing grasses, which they are powerless to combat with the crude agricultural instruments at present in use, so they simply clear more forest land from time to time, and often burn the felled trees where they lie" (Philippine Commission 1900: 288).

To combat the "cañgin evil," the Bureau of Forestry launched a campaign to "suppress" it in 1921. Suppression involved more intensive enforcement efforts and the granting of *kaingin* permits on land that was then supposed to be converted to permanent agriculture. In Palawan, there were two different types of *kaingin* being practiced, that of Christianized migrants and that of the island's indigenous groups. Compared with the former, the latter was less destructive to

²⁶ According to the Director's Annual Report, 28,642 cubic meters of lumber were "utilized" from Palawan in 1921 accountin for approximately 4.4% of the total utilization that year, 653,944 cubic feet. Numbers for other years suggest that this share remained steady over time—e.g., 4.7% in 1907 and 4.3% in 1923—even as Palawan's logging operations grew, confirming that logging in the colony as a whole was growing during this period. (Bureau of Forestry 1915-1924).

the forests because it involved smaller clearances, longer fallows, and integration with a belief system adapted to the local environment. Although all kaingin was illegal unless permitted by the state on non-commercial forest land, colonial authorities acknowledged the difference and stipulated that non-Christians caught making illegal swiddens should be warned and not arrested on their first offense his leniency had two primary causes (Bureau of Forestry 1915-1924). On one hand, officials saw their relationship with Palawan's indigenous groups in paternalistic terms. On the other, the Americans sought indigenous cooperation in winning control of southern Palawan from the Muslims.

For their part, forestry officials expressed frustration at this policy which, they argued, was easily subverted by the natives. As one exasperated forester wrote,

The destruction of the forest by non-Christians is becoming a serious problem, due to the law requiring that they be warned at the first offense, as these people can rarely be caught a second time, since they are smart enough, should a forest official detect a caiñgin made by a man who has already received his warning, to claim that it is being made by his father or some other relative or friend. (Bureau of Forestry 1916: 17)

The state should, foresters concluded, “put [non-Christians] on an equal footing among their Christian brothers.” Despite its perceived ineffectiveness, the campaign against the “caiñgin menace” led to a dramatic increase in kaingin warnings and arrests, up from six in 1915 to 156 in 1924.

The American “Civilizing” Mission

In their calls for equally strict policing of Christian and non-Christian swiddeners, American foresters were critiquing one of the very basic principles of American government in the Philippines: the exceptional treatment of non-Christian tribes. In 1901, the Philippine Commission established a Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes under the Insular Department of the

Interior.²⁷ Its mission, as stated in its founding circular, included “the investigation of the little known pagans and Mohammedan tribes of the Archipelago, the conduct of systematic work in the anthropology of the Philippines, and the recommendation of legislation in behalf of these uncivilized peoples” (Barrows 1901: 3). As parts its civilizing mission known as “benevolent assimilation” or “benevolent tutelage,” American colonial officials saw themselves as saving the Philippines from the morass of exploitative Spanish misrule, even as they reinscribed the very same social categories and moral impulses with which Spain had legitimized its own colonial enterprise.

Regions populated primarily by non-Christian tribes—including Palawan, Mountain Province in northern Luzon, Moro Province in Mindanao, and Mindoro, among others—were considered “special provinces” and placed under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Non-Christians Tribes. Unlike regular provinces, where most day-to-day administrative functions were handled by Filipinos at the municipal or barrio level, the American governors of non-Christian provinces had special authority to administer non-Christian populations directly. McCoy (2009) has documented how, in Moro Province and Mountain Province in particular, these arrangements basically constituted personal fiefdoms for American officials seeking unfettered access to new resource frontiers. In Palawan, this policy manifested itself in three primary ways, all of which dovetailed with efforts to control the island’s forests: (1) an effort to promote sedentary agriculture among “wild” tribes and (2) a campaign to concentrate and pacify the Muslim Moros in the south; and (3) the classification of forested lands as public domain.

²⁷ The Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes was replaced by the Ethnological Survey of the Philippines, only to be reinstated again in 1917. Throughout this period, “non-Christian provinces” were governed under the supervision of the Department of the Interior (Griffin 1988).

Although American foresters would come to protest the special treatment of non-Christian tribes, the Insular Government's civilizing mission nonetheless went hand-in-hand with its effort to eradicate shifting agriculture and gain control of the forests. Palawan played an important role as a proving ground for these related efforts. In 1905, Palawan's governor established a "reservation" and school for the Tagbanua at Aborlan, intended to teach them superior agriculture methods, give them access to markets for their products, and protect them from the Moros. This reservation was cited as a model for civilizing tribal people in other parts of the colony.²⁸ In the Bureau of Forestry's annual report for fiscal year 1913-14, it noted its experience that criminalizing swidden alone would not effectively suppress this "deep-seated" custom. Instead, citing the results of the Aborlan reservation, the report argued that natives should be taught the virtues of conservation and intensive agriculture while also being "induced or required" to resettle into "permanent homesteads."

No such reservations were established in southern Palawan, where the greater concern was establishing control over the Moros and their trade in forest products. Beginning in 1910, successive governors of Palawan attempted to persuade and, failing that, coerce all Moros to relocate themselves to the jurisdiction of a cooperative Moro leader, Datu Batarasa, on the southeast flank of the island. The administration also established "government exchanges" at which Palawan could sell forest products:

The opening of so-called Government exchanges where the Tagbanuas [Palawan?] can sell their products and can purchase what they need at reasonable prices has greatly pleased them and is bringing about helpful contact between provincial officials and wild men from the most inaccessible regions. (Philippine Commission 1912: 81)

²⁸ This was not the only such experiment in social engineering to be undertaken on Palawan. As Salman (2009) has written, the Iwahig Penal Colony, established near Puerta Princesa in 1904, was an experiment in reformatory penology that predated and helped inform important penal reforms in the United States.

Although these policies sometimes involved armed encounters with uncooperative datu and their followers, they were justified as necessary to protect the Palawan and Tagbanua from the Moros and their exploitative trade practices. The Moros of Palawan, one governor wrote, were known even by fellow Moros in Mindanao to be “renegades” of an “especially treacherous and dangerous” nature (Philippine Commission 1910: 65).

A third and final way in which American treatment of non-Christians dovetailed with its forestry policy was through the classification of lands deemed to be in the public domain. Despite a 1909 US Supreme Court ruling (*Cariño v. Insular Government*, the legacies of which I will address in Chapter 4) recognizing native land title, the Insular Government effectively treated all untitled land as public land. Resource zones, particularly commercially viable forests, were reserved to the public domain, with remaining land eligible for individual title. To that end, the Insular Government instituted a total of eleven forest reserves and national parks throughout the archipelago, while enacting a series of laws predicated on the Torrens title system.

Developed by British colonials in Australia, the Torrens system enabled individuals to gain private title to cultivated parcels of the public domain if they could demonstrate that they were using the land consistently and productively (Dressler 2009: 42-46; Lynch 1982). In forested areas that were deemed alienable and disposable, individuals could apply for free homestead titles of up to twenty-four hectares if they agreed to occupy and develop the land. Combined with the continued disamortization of friary lands, this system both helped to entrench the existing elite and favored Hispanized sedentary agriculturalists. It greatly disadvantaged groups like the Tagbanua and Palawan, whose ancestral lands often included commercially valuable forests, whose system of usufruct tenure was incompatible with individual titles, and whose land uses were seen as the antithesis of consistency and productivity.

The Beginnings of Mass Settlement

Not only did the American occupation mean a ramping up of government regulation, it also marked the beginning of a radically transformative process of migrant settlement. In their reports to the Philippine Commission, successive American governors in Palawan reported chronic labor shortages and suggested the island's settlement by Filipinos from other islands. Although they worried that "simple" and "timid" groups like the Tagbanua and Palawan would be exploited by their Filipino counterparts, bringing sedentary agriculturalists to sparsely populated tribal frontiers would also serve the civilizational mission. As noted above, the free granting of homestead patents encouraged migrants to claim and develop unreserved public land regardless of whether indigenous peoples lived on them.

With or without such policies, migration to Palawan was ultimately driven by a demographic explosion in Hispanized parts of the archipelago. In 1903, the Philippines had approximately seven million residents. Since then, the national population has grown exponentially by an average rate of well over two per cent per year. By 1948, there were some 19 million people in the archipelago; by 1975, 42 million; and in 2010, just over 93 million. Such growth has put tremendous strain on land and resources in Luzon and the Visayas, prompting mass migration to less populated regions like Palawan.

In the early twentieth century, most migrants to Palawan were from Cuyo, a small, Hispanized island about midway between the northern tip of Palawan and Panay. "At midcentury," Eder notes, "immigration was by national standards comparatively limited, and Palawan was not the demographically important settler destination that [various parts of Mindanao] were. The decades following World War II, however, brought a large surge in immigration to Palawan that has continued down to the present" (Eder 1999: 23). In other

words, after effectively filling the frontier in Mindanao, migrants from Luzon and the Visayas turned to Palawan, eventually outnumbering their counterparts from Cuyo. In addition, Muslims from impoverished, politically unstable parts of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago have migrated in significant numbers, particularly to the southern part of Palawan. Though only Balabac today has a Muslim majority, all of the municipalities in southern Palawan, including Rizal, have sizeable and growing Muslim minorities.

Although most of this migration was unregulated, if tacitly encouraged, some was part of an explicit government policy. In 1954, Congress authorized the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA), a relocation program for landless families and those who had joined the anti-Japanese insurgency (which had since evolved into the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines). Through NARRA, thousands of families were given homesteads in Mindanao and Palawan. Thus, like its colonial predecessor, the independent Philippine government has continued to encourage migration to Palawan, using the region as a “politically convenient safety valve to relieve some of the pressures caused by government inability or unwillingness to control population growth or to resolve agrarian problems in the more densely populated lowlands” (Eder 1999: 27). Perhaps more than any other single factor, this influx of settlers has had transformative effects on Palawan’s indigenous people and their environments.

Conclusion

In a first step toward challenging the last-frontier narrative, this chapter has traced the Palawan region’s involvement in centuries of contact, trade, and struggles for control. We saw, in particular, how Spanish and American depictions of Palawan as “a promised land” with “never a trace of the marring hand of man” coincided with their efforts to control the region’s

indigenous inhabitants and profit from its forests. Suggesting that Palawan was peripheral to or somehow “escaped” colonial designs ignores their very real continuities with the processes of dispossession and degradation that are occurring today. In Chapter 3, I will follow the trajectory of these processes in the postcolonial period.

Figures 9 and 10:

		Population Growth in the Palawan Region											Growth Rate (%)		
		Population											1980-2000	2000-10	
	Year	1903	1918	1939	1948	1960	1970	1975	1980	1990	2000	2007	2010		
Palawan		35,369	69,053	93,673	106,269	162,669	236,635	300,065	317,782	528,287	755,412	892,660	994,340	2.90	2.40
Rizal									12,950	16,819	31,745	35,487	42,759	2.96	2.58

Sources: National Statistics Office and Palawan Provincial Development Report (2010)

Population of the Philippines Census Years 1799 to 2010			
Year	Population	Annual growth (%)	Source of data
1799	1,502,574	-	Fr. Buzeta
1800	1,561,251	3.91	Fr. Zuniga
1812	1,933,331	1.8	Cedulas
1819	2,106,230	1.23	Cedulas
1829	2,593,287	2.1	Church
1840	3,096,031	1.62	Local officials
1850	3,857,424	2.22	Fr. Buzeta
1858	4,290,381	1.34	Bowring
1870	4,712,006	0.78	Guia de Manila
1877	5,567,685	2.41	Census
1887	5,984,727	0.72	Census
1896	6,261,339	0.5	Census*
1903	7,635,426	2.87	Census
1918	10,314,310	2.03	Census
1939	16,000,303	2.11	Census
1948	19,234,182	2.07	Census
1960	27,087,685	2.89	Census
1970	36,684,486	3.08	Census
1975	42,070,660	2.78	Census
1980	48,098,460	2.71	Census
1990	60,703,206	2.35	Census
1995	68,616,536	2.32	Census
2000	76,504,077	2.36	Census
2007	88,574,614	2.04	Census
2010	92,337,852	1.9	Census

Source: National Statistical Coordination Board

* = "Prof. Phelan's estimate based on census records"

CHAPTER THREE

A History of the “Last Frontier,” Part 2: Indigenous People and Environmental Government in Palawan

In 1969, famed aviator Charles Lindbergh made the first of several visits to the Philippines as a representative of the World Wildlife Fund and other international conservation organizations. His mission was to galvanize support for protection of the Philippine eagle and other endangered species. During his tour, he visited several “remote” parts of the country, including Palawan, where he “acquired an intimate knowledge” of one of the island’s indigenous groups. The *New York Times* covered Lindbergh’s tour in a front-page profile that quoted him at length explaining his beliefs about conservation.

“I don’t believe,” Lindbergh opined, “[that] our civilization can continue very long out of contact with *the primitive*. [...] I believe that many of the social troubles we face today result from our being already too far removed from our ancestral environment. [...] That is one of the reasons I like to visit the wilderness and sometimes its isolated tribes.” For Lindbergh, preventing the destruction of “primitive” environments and cultures in the Philippines was part of preventing the decline of “civilization” in the West. “The Philippines,” he declared, “are one of the last frontiers of conservation” (Whitman 1969).

Lindbergh’s commentary makes for an interesting comparison against the American colonial imagery we encountered in Chapter 1. On the one hand, he maintains the distinction between civilized people and tribal primitives. On the other hand, he romanticizes “the primitive” and identifies it with “the wilderness,” which he wishes to protect. Lindbergh again: “[...] we can learn a great deal from [tribal people], for they are much closer to the primitive

man than we. They can help us retain contact with the roots of life, to understand the values as well as the hazards of instinct” (Whitman 1969). Although far from new in the West, Lindbergh’s romanticism portended a broader shift in metropolitan imaginings of indigenous people and their role in environmental regulation. One outcome of this shift came, a quarter century later, with the Philippine government’s attachment of indigenous right to conservation.

Picking up where Chapter 2 left off, this chapter will continue tracing the co-evolution of minority-state relations and environmental regulation beginning with the end of American rule, through the authoritarian years that followed Lindbergh’s visit, to the post-1986 reforms and their unfolding. My account will connect events at the national and regional scale to their effects on the lives of people in southwestern Palawan. As in the colonial period, the past six decades have seen intensifying efforts to incorporate Palawan’s forests and peoples into wider networks of regulation and capital. These efforts, as we saw with Lindbergh, are animated by imaginings of Palawan as “the last frontier,” a land that was spared from colonization and now must be saved from destruction by environmental government. This chapter will argue that Palawan’s ongoing portrayal as an exceptional, heterotopic space obscures the ways in which present-day interventions have carried colonial projects into the twenty-first century.

1946-1986: Integration and Authoritarianism

Although the Insular Government underwent “Filipinization” beginning in 1913 and was replaced by a semi-independent Republic in 1935, the Philippines did not officially gain independence until 1946. For the next twenty-seven years, the Philippine government continued to operate under the 1935 Constitution, which contained no specific provisions for the recognition or administration of non-Christian tribes. Although the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes was closed in 1936, its assimilationist mission reemerged in 1957 with the creation of a

Commission on National Integration (CNI) intended to “effectuate in a more rapid and complete manner the economic, social, moral and political advancement of the non-Christian Filipinos or national cultural minorities and to render real, complete, and permanent the integration of all said national cultural minorities into the body politic” (cited in *Cruz and Europa v. DENR*). Despite this ambitious mandate, the CNI was chronically underfunded and thus remained “moribund” (Eder 1987: 170).

This changed under the authoritarian administration of Ferdinand Marcos, who served as President from 1965 until his ouster in 1986. Although the policy remained one of “integration,” Marcos sidelined the CNI and instead appointed Manuel Elizalde, one of his wealthy allies, to head the Office of the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities (PANAMIN).¹ Founded in 1968 as a private foundation, PANAMIN became a government agency when the CNI was shuttered in 1975 (Eder and McKenna 2004: 61). If taken at the word of policy alone, the Marcos administration appears to be the first to legislate special rights for “cultural minorities” as such. Article XV Section 11 of the 1973 Constitution stipulates that “[t]he State shall consider the customs, traditions, beliefs, and interests of national cultural communities in the formulation and implementation of State policies.” A 1974 Presidential Decree explicitly mentioned the right of “national cultural communities” to gain legal recognition of their customary claims to “ancestral lands” then in the public domain (Presidential Decree 410 of 1974). And PANAMIN, for its part, was chartered to “integrate into the mainstream of Philippine society certain ethnic groups who seek full integration into the larger community, and

¹ It was at this point as well that the regulation of non-Christian minorities was bifurcated so that Muslim minority groups were dealt with by one agency (The Southern Philippine Development Authority, which later became the Ministry of Muslim Affairs) and tribal minorities (i.e., those once known as “pagans” by the Spanish and Americans) by another (i.e., PANAMIN).

at the same time protect the rights of those who wish to preserve their original lifeways beside that larger community” (Presidential Decree 1414 of 1978).

In reality, of course, the Marcos administration had a dismal record of dispossessing and oppressing tribal people, with PANAMIN amounting to little more than a fig leaf for Marcos-backed development projects (Griffin 1988; Rocamora 1979).² Rather than any meaningful notion of indigenous rights, Marcos-era policies reflected an authoritarian and nationalist paternalism wherein tribal groups were either to be assimilated or preserved as a sort of living museum of Filipino heritage. PANAMIN, for example, gained international notoriety in 1971 when Elizalde claimed to have discovered the Tasaday, an isolated, “stone age” tribe in western Mindanao. More than a decade later it was revealed that, though the Tasaday were real, much of what Elizalde had said about them was fabricated (Headland 1992). In the interim, Elizalde’s protection of the Tasaday, who by law could not be contacted without PANAMIN’s permission, lent symbolic legitimacy to the Marcos administration at the same time as logging, ranching, hydropower, mining projects, and counterinsurgency campaigns were having devastating impacts on indigenous groups in Luzon and Mindanao. Worse still, some of PANAMIN’s activities involved not just propaganda but direct participation in counterinsurgency (Fay 1987; Griffin 1988; Rocamora 1979). As I will explain below, PANAMIN had a presence in Palawan, including in Rizal.

Marcos also attempted to position himself as an environmentalist. Twenty-one national parks were established during his tenure, including the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in Palawan. In 1967, his administration declared the entirety of Palawan a game

² In the 1974-5, for example, PANAMIN was dispatched to Mountain Province to try and convince the Kalinga and other indigenous groups to cease their tireless opposition to the Chico Dam (Hilhorst 2003: 37-38). Ironically, the movement against the Chico Dam was pivotal to galvanizing support for the legal recognition of indigenous rights in the post-authoritarian period, as I will discuss below.

refuge and bird sanctuary, in which all unauthorized killing of wildlife was prohibited (Presidential Proclamation 219 of 1967). This proclamation could have had devastating implications for Palawan livelihood, which relied heavily on hunting, but like so many such policies it was never really enforced. Finally, in 1975, Marcos issued a Revised Forestry Code, which remains in effect and largely unreformed (Presidential Decree 705 of 1975). PD 705 was meant to gain control over an unbridled post-war logging rush. Its more lasting effect, however, has been to legitimize state dispossession of upland indigenous people: the law makes all lands above 600 meters or with greater than 18 percent slope public domain, and it singles out swiddeners, squatters, and cultural minorities for monitoring and possible expulsion. In Chapter 4, I will address the legacy of this law in more detail.

A final Marcos-era policy worth noting was the establishment, in 1982, of an Integrated Social Forestry Program, which Marcos approved as a condition of development loans from lenders like USAID and the Asian Development Bank (McDermott 2000: 101, cited in Eder and McKenna 2004: 64). Although in practice this policy amounted to “nothing more than a glorified lease contract” for loggers (Gatmaytan 1989: 10, cited in Eder and McKenna 2004: 65), the legal framework it established would provide a legal framework for more meaningful reforms initiated under subsequent administrations.

The Post-War and Marcos Years in Rizal: Logging, Settlement, and Monetization

As I learned during my fieldwork, the post-war years still loom large in the memories of Palawan people in Rizal, but not because of the Marcos’ regimes conservation efforts. In 1945, the US Coast Guard established a LORAN radio navigation station at Tarumpitao Point near the mouth of the Malambunga River. Tenga’t Gebaq, the village where I stayed during most of my fieldwork, is some ten kilometers upstream of Tarumpitao. Even though the dozen or so

Americans stationed there never had administrative authority over the indigenous population, their presence had a definite impact. One elder I knew said her mother was among several Palawan women who lived as the companions of American during their tours there. Several elders reported that their families were first “taught” to wear clothing (as opposed to the traditional *baqag* loin cloth for men and *tapis* skirt for women) by the Americans. Jimi’s father, who passed away in 1996, was said to be among those who first started wearing clothing while working for the Americans in exchange for tobacco, clothing, and salt. His father, Jimi said, loved attending weekly movie screenings at the station and had a particular affinity for a film about a man (Tarzan?) who lived in the jungle and wore a loin cloth. I would not want to overstate the impact of the LORAN station, which was handed over to the Philippine Coast Guard in 1971 and closed six years later. But it came up so frequently in my conversations with people that I feel compelled to mention it here. Perhaps its greatest significance was as a point of cultural contact. The American presence was among the key turning points in Palawan narratives of how they became *sibilais* (civilized), which is a point I will take up again below.

For the people of Malambunga, another very significant development of the post-war years was the advent of commercial logging in Rizal. Prior to the war, American, Filipino, and Japanese companies logged most of the accessible areas along Palawan’s coast, particularly in the northern half of the island (Eder 1999: 31). After the war, Filipino companies backed by domestic and foreign capital set their sights on more remote areas. In the north, Pagdanan Timber Products made a fortune for its owner Jose “Pepito” Alvarez, who remains a key player in Palawan politics today. The first logging company to receive a Timber License Agreement in Rizal, then still part of the municipality of Quezon, was the Aguinaldo Development Corporation (ADECOR). Its operation began ca. 1965 but ended in 1968 when, according to a former

employee, the Marcos administration canceled its Timber License Agreement. In 1974, Western Palawan Timber (WesPal)—a company financed by the Philippines Veterans Development Corporation, a tax-exempt investment fund created by Marcos for military officers—took over ADECOR's concession. I was never able to turn up any government documents related to these companies' activities, but I gather that they had Timber License Agreements to cut select species within five kilometers of the coast. They built a network of roads emanating from loading docks at the coast into the foothills. These roads, though many of them are now little more than unusually wide foot paths, have become an important part of local geography. Tenga't Gebaq, for example, is located at the interior terminus of an abandoned logging road, affording residents maximal access both to the forested interior and to the market at the other end of the road.

Although some Palawan obtained occasional wage work in the logging companies' reforestation projects, virtually all Palawan I asked thought the logging companies had been a menace. I was told repeatedly that the companies had taken tree species they were not permitted to log, including large hardwoods that the Palawan say are home to potentially dangerous spirits (see Chapter 5). Worst of all, however, was the threat the companies posed to the almaciga trees, whose commercially valuable resin Palawan relied on for access to trade goods. In some Palawan accounts of this time, WesPal's encroachment on the almaciga trees was the company's downfall. WesPal's operations in Rizal coincided with the nationwide spread of armed resistance to the faltering Marcos regime, and southern Palawan was no exception. Armed rebel groups, including those affiliated with the New Peoples' Army (a Maoist guerilla movement) and the Moro National Liberation Front (a Muslim separatist group), set up camps in the foothills and mountains of Rizal, including one just downstream of Tenga't Gebaq. This was a frightening time for the Palawan, who say they were caught between the rebels and military. In recounting

this history, however, some Palawan express gratitude to the rebels, for it was the rebels who drove out WesPal. By the early 1980s, the company's loggers had worked their way into the mountains and were starting to cut almaciga trees. But then, purportedly in an act of solidarity with the Palawan, rebels attacked one of WesPal's camps and forced the company to cease its operations.³

During this turbulent period, the quasigovernmental agency PANAMIN, which I introduced above, was active in Rizal and in other parts of Palawan. PANAMIN's field officer in Rizal was a former employee of the logging company ADECOR. When I interviewed him in August 2011, he told me about how he and his colleagues had established "reservations" for Palawan in both Iraan and Ransang (which respectively are north and south of Malambunga). Describing these settlements as an effort to teach Palawan basic literacy and sedentary farming, he denied that they had any relation to logging activities or insurgency. At around that same time, though, a local government official proposed her own version of a PANAMIN reservation in the Malambunga area, and she openly admitted that it was an effort to protect the Palawan from clashes between the rebels and the military. Whatever its motives, PANAMIN was active at a number of other conflict-ridden logging sites in Palawan and, given what we know about the organization's operations in other provinces, it seems reasonable to speculate that the mounting insurgency in Rizal prompted its entry there. By the time of my fieldwork, the land that had been used for its reservations had, I was told, largely been taken over by Christian settlers.

For the Palawan of Malambunga, the logging years were crucial for three additional reasons. The first has to do with the arrival of settlers. Although mass immigration had been underway in more accessible parts of Palawan since immediately after World War II, it was not

³ In Chapter 4, I will offer an analysis of how this episode has become part of Palawan narratives about the accountabilities of environmental change.

until the 1970s and 1980s that large numbers of settlers began arriving in Rizal. In fact, prior to April 1983, Rizal did not even exist as an independent municipality, but was instead part of Quezon to the north.⁴ Official population estimates for Rizal in 1980 and 2010 were 12,950 and 42,759 respectively, which amounts to a stunning 7.67-percent average annual growth rate. For this same period, Palawan's overall growth rate of 4.76 percent was significantly lower, though still extremely high in absolute terms (see Figures 9 and 10 in Chapter 2). In Rizal, logging operations helped fuel this process in two ways. First, they brought most of their employees with them from other areas. Second, in Rizal as in countless other "frontiers," settlers followed on the heels of ADECOR and WesPal because of the infrastructure they built and commerce they generated. Logging has also served as an inducement to pioneering agriculture because logged-over areas are easier to clear, burn, and plant (Dressler 2009; Fox, et al. 2009).

As in other parts of Palawan, migrant settlement has led to a radical transformation of the lowlands into a landscape dominated by intensive agriculture, particularly paddy rice and coconut plantations, that increasingly resembles other parts of the Philippines. Though some Palawan have always lived in the mountainous interior, many lived and cut swiddens in forests closer to the shore, where they could rely seasonally on marine food sources. As the lowland population of Rizal has exploded, many Palawan have sold their land near the coast (or in some cases in irrigable areas along rivers) and retreated to the foothills, where they can continue to engage in swidden and other traditional subsistence activities. Others have stayed put but have abandoned swidden in favor of intensive agriculture with varying degrees of success. This process of land privatization and dispossession is dramatically changing how many Palawan conceive of the land and make a living from it, most notably by undermining their traditional

⁴ Covering 125,647 hectares, the new municipality was first named for President Marcos, but then renamed Rizal in 1988

subsistence activities and making them dependent on forest commodities (see below and Chapter 4-6). It has also dramatically changed the landscape. In Rizal, following a pattern begun earlier in the rest of Palawan, much of the coastal plain was cleared of forest and converted to intensive agriculture during this period. Relative to logging, migrant settlement has been the greater cause of deforestation and thus the greater force in undermining Palawan subsistence.

This leads me to the second momentous change that Palawan say accompanied the logging companies: money. Money was certainly in use in Rizal prior to the 1970s, as were commodity monies like tobacco and salt. But the influx of salaried employees and settlers made monetized transactions increasingly common and unavoidable, particularly in the case of land sales. With improved infrastructure in place, the almaciga trade also started to pick up in Rizal at this time. Almaciga is a resin exuded by agathis trees high in the mountains. Palawan use it as a fire accelerant and incense, but it is also used industrially to produce varnish and other products. Along with rattan, almaciga had been big business in the northern parts of Palawan for some time. We know, for example, that the settler-controlled trade in almaciga and rattan had already become a major source of livelihood—and indebtedness—among Tagbanua in Aborlan. In Rizal, Palawan elders consistently told me that their ancestors had long traded almaciga with settlers in exchange for salt and other goods, but it was typically small quantities and rarely resulted in debt. Selling almaciga, they said, had only become the centerpiece of their livelihood within the last generation. This development owed, in part, to the overall intensification of commodity flows as settlers brought Rizal more deeply into the regional economy. But it also owes to a Marcos administration policy that encouraged the commodification of “minor forest products” by rewarding allies with exclusive, territorial concessions. By the 1980s, concessionaires were firmly established in Rizal. In a pattern similar to what Fox described

among the Tagbanua as early as 1950, *almaciga* was then becoming the key source of indigenous income—and debt—among Palawan as well. I will have much more to say about money and the *almaciga* trade below and in Chapter 6.

Finally, the third major change of the post-war years concerned the authority of the Muslim *datu*, a hereditary title indicating a relation to the Sultan and conferring the authority to organize tribute and resolve disputes. Historically, no Palawan ever became a *datu*, though Islamized Palawan women sometimes married *datu* and thus bore heirs to the title. Instead, *datu* appointed Palawan to positions with titles like *panglima*, *satya*, and *maradya*, some of which are of Sanskrit origin but are traced by the Palawan to the Moros. These individuals served as intermediaries between the *datu* and the Palawan, and were the ones who would bring disputes to the *datu* when Palawan dispute mediators (*memimitsara* or *menunukum*) could not resolve them. Although the Sulu Sultanate was dismantled beginning in the late 1870s, *datu* continued to hold a certain degree of moral authority over the Palawan, particularly but not exclusively over those who lived near the coast and were to varying degrees Islamized. Present-day Palawan elders told me that, through midcentury, *datu* continued to serve as an external form of jural authority for certain segments of the Palawan population.

Since midcentury, the number of Islamized Palawan or “Penimusan,” has grown, continuing a process which was foreshadowed in Whitehead’s (1893) account and which Macdonald (2007: 15) characterizes as a long-term process of ethnogenesis. Nevertheless, over this same period, the mass arrival of Christian settlers and the establishment of Philippine government institutions, particularly at the local or *barangay* level, has largely superseded the role of the *datu* as such. The result is that Palawan no longer associate external authority with Muslim *datu* or sultans. Instead, in my conversations with Palawan elders I found that they

associated the *gubyerno* (government) almost exclusively with the Kabisayaan (Christian settlers).⁵ For example, when I asked an elderly shaman what exactly the government was, he replied that I should be asking the Kabisayaan because they are the ones who introduced and control it. At present, to the extent that claimants to the hereditary *datu* title hold political authority, it is primarily as a result of their having taken positions in local government. In the Malambunga area, the descendants of Datu Lamba Kakoy Narrazid, the last *datu* to act as such, remain locally prominent as elected officials and businesspeople. In this respect, their present-day relations with the Palawan largely take the same forms as those of long-settled Christian migrants. “In the past,” Jimi once told me, “the Muslims organized us; today it is the government and NGOs.” Notwithstanding this analogy, Palawan do not equate the present-day government of the Kabisayaan with the authority of the Muslim *datu*. To the contrary, they see the former as much more intensive and transformative. For better or worse, Palawan told me, the Kabisayaan state has not just absorbed that of the Muslims, but far outdone it.

1986-present: Indigenous Rights and Biodiversity

After Marcos’ ouster in 1986, a new constitution was enacted and a process of liberal reforms undertaken. Two of these reforms, themselves connected to broader global trends, have had far-reaching consequences for indigenous people and their environments. I am referring here to the legal recognition of indigenous rights and the institutionalization of biodiversity conservation. Both of these reforms represented hard-fought victories for Filipino reformers and inspired hope around the world that the Philippines was finally transcending its colonial “plunder economy.” Fulfilling this hope has since proven extremely challenging.

Indigenous Recognition and Rights in the Philippines

⁵ Palawan refer to all Christian settlers with the collective demonym for people from the Visayas.

The use of the word “indigenous” in post-1986 reforms was a conscious repudiation of earlier categories (pagans, non-Christian tribes, national minorities) and the ethnocentric, assimilationist policies they underpinned.⁶ Though peoples’ actual belief about indigenous people have retained older prejudices (see Chapter 4), it was no longer politically correct to treat indigenous people as “uncivilized” or “wild” (Erni 2008). Indigeneity was also more inclusive: whatever connotations it might carry, being indigenous does not *denote* the presence or absence of tribal organization or religious affiliation. More concretely, the turn to indigeneity was driven by connections forged between minority groups’ resistance to Marcos-era development aggression and an emerging transnational indigenous-rights movement. The struggle against the Chico Dam was arguably the most consequential. In the 1970s and ‘80s, various Igorot groups in northern Luzon partnered with both Communist rebels and international human-rights activists to protest the World Bank-funded dam project. Hilhorst (2003) writes that mainstream leaders of the movement ended up embracing notions of indigenous self-determination and autonomy as a result of their collaboration with the UN and other proponents of the transnational indigenous movement. Their success in garnering support among Filipino intellectuals and activists played an important role in the constitutional embrace of indigenous rights.

Although indigenous rights had a foothold in the 1987 Constitution, the language used was ambiguous. On the one hand, the Constitution reinscribes the Regalian Doctrine, declaring all non-agricultural as “public domain” under the ownership of the state (Article XII Section 2). On the other hand, the Constitution provides for the creation of two autonomous regions (in the Cordillera and Mindanao) and enjoins the state to protect indigenous rights and wellbeing elsewhere. Article XII Section 5 stipulates:

⁶ “Cultural community” and “tribe” remain in wide usage, but they are now usually modified by “indigenous.” The Tagalog word *katutubo* is considered to be synonymous with indigenous.

The State, subject to the provisions of this Constitution and 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.

With these potentially contradictory constitutional directives, it was left to the bureaucracy and legislature to define indigeneity and the rights it entails. What has ensued has been convoluted to say the least. Initially, the Aquino administration created three subcabinet agencies charged with implementing the indigenous-rights provisions of the constitution: the Office of Southern Cultural Communities, the Office of Northern Cultural Communities, and the Office of Muslim Affairs. While waiting for Congress to pass enabling legislation, they began laying the groundwork for the recognition of ancestral land claims. In Palawan, this involved the appointment of “chieftains” and the establishment of “tribal councils” in each barangay with indigenous residents (more on this below). Beyond this, however, little progress was made. Eder and McKenna (2004: 62) observe that “the local offices of these [...] agencies were lightly staffed and received little regular funding, [...] leaving] members of ethnic minority groups in need of material, legal, or other forms of assistance [...] to turn to a variety of better-staffed and better-funded NGOs [...].”

Meanwhile, the aforementioned enabling legislation was stalled in Congress. This left implementation in the hands of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which had jurisdiction over all public lands eligible for recognition as ancestral lands. Although some within the DENR opposed recognizing customary claims to public lands, the Indigenous Community Affairs Division managed to push a series of policies through the approval process (McDermott 2000: 110). Their efforts culminated with the issuance, in 1993, of a Department Administrative Order (DAO2) that spelled out guidelines for issuing Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADCs). Some indigenous-rights groups opposed the DAO2 guidelines for a

number of reasons.⁷ First, because CADCs were issued only on the basis of a departmental order, they could be overridden by other laws, such as the Mining Act of 1995, under which a CADC would “provide no impediment to the granting of mining exploration leases” (McDermott 2000: 113). Second, CADCs only provided for ancestral domain *claims* and not *titles*, thus perpetuating state ownership of indigenous land. And, third, the DAO2 guidelines included numerous clauses that could compel indigenous groups to cooperate with conservation and other government interventions. I will revisit these and other important features of the guidelines below.⁸ For now, it suffices to say that, whatever their limitations, the DAO2 guidelines enabled the DENR to issue more than one hundred CADCs, covering some 2.546 million hectares in different parts of the country (Eder and McKenna 2004: 66).

One salient and arguably more salutary feature of the DAO2 guidelines was the use of the term “ancestral domain” in addition to “ancestral land.”⁹ The Constitution used both terms, but proponents of indigenous-rights reforms had favored ancestral domain as a more socioculturally inclusive and legally robust concept of territory. Filipino jurist Marvic Leonen, who has been a leading advocate for indigenous rights, traces the use of “ancestral domain” to a 1985 conference of the Anthropological Association of the Philippines. “Advocates,” he recalled, “wanted a common slogan” (pers. comm.).¹⁰ Unlike ancestral land or its Tagalog equivalent (*lupang ninuno*), ancestral domain encompasses the wide range of indigenous conceptions of territory. Gus Gatmaytan (2005), a Filipino anthropologist and attorney who has figured centrally in

⁷ McDermott (2000:110) identifies these groups as the Cordilleran People’s Alliance and the Indigenous People’s Federation of the Philippines

⁸ See McDermott (2000: 109-114) for a detailed account of the CADC’s implementation)

⁹ Under both the DAO02 and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, a distinction is made between ancestral *land* and ancestral *domain*, resulting in CALC and CALT instruments respectively (in addition to CADC and CADT instruments). The difference between ancestral *land* and ancestral *domain* is that the former can be awarded to “individuals, families or class,” while the latter can only be awarded to “indigenous cultural communities.” Land Claims and Land Titles, moreover, only cover the land itself, not the resources contained there.

¹⁰ This personal communication was relayed to me by Maria Paz Luna.

indigenous-rights advocacy, adds that the term “domain” signifies not just land, but all of the dimensions of an indigenous territory, including marine, lacustrine, subterranean, and spiritual spaces and resources.

Never intended to be a permanent arrangement, the DAO2 framework for ancestral domain recognition lasted only five years. In 1997, Congress finally passed the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA), which provided a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of indigenous rights, including an upgraded tenure mechanism called the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT). A new government agency—the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP)—was also created to oversee IPRA’s implementation. As with the DAO2 guidelines, the authors of IPRA faced the politically fraught task of defining indigeneity. The Philippines was never a settler colony, making the question of who is indigenous an even more vexing one than it already is in countries like the United States, Australia, or Mexico. After all, aren’t all Philippine ethnic groups indigenous to the archipelago? In practice, of course, indigeneity does not refer simply to place of origin, but to historical processes of colonization and marginalization.

Faced with this complexity, the authors of IPRA arrived at the following definition:

Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples [...] refer to a group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as **organized community on communally bounded and defined territory**, and who have, under claims of ownership since **time immemorial**, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, become **historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos**. ICCs/IPs shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who **retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political**

institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains.

(IPRA Chapter 2, Section 3, my emphases)

Under IPRA, minority groups who meet these criteria are entitled to special economic, social, political, and cultural rights. IPRA divides these rights into four general categories:

- (1) Rights to “ancestral domains,” including attendant rights to ownership of land and resources, to self-determination in the development and management of the same, to regulate the entry of outsiders, to refuse displacement, and to have certain individually owned agricultural lands classified as alienable and disposable.
- (2) Rights to “self-governance and empowerment,” including attendant rights to maintain customary juridical institutions (within the bounds of national laws and human rights), to form their own local governments in areas where they are the minority, and to participate in political decision-making at all levels (including mandatory indigenous representation in all legislative and policy-making bodies);
- (3) Rights to “social justice and human rights,” including attendant rights to basic services, to culturally appropriate education, to equal opportunity in employment, and to equal opportunity for women and youth;
- (4) Rights to “cultural integrity,” including attendant rights to legal protection of distinctive cultural traditions, knowledge systems, ceremonial practices, and biological and genetic resources.

To help protect these rights, IPRA requires “free and prior informed consent” (FPIC) be obtained under the NCIP’s supervision by anyone hoping to engage indigenous people in business contracts, research activities, or development projects of any kind.¹¹

The passage of IPRA made the Philippines the first country in Asia to adopt international standards for indigenous rights and was hailed around the world as one of the most progressive pieces of legislation of its kind. Immediately, though, several aspects of the law raised concerns. To say nothing of the pitfalls of expecting indigenous people to be culturally distinctive and “homogenous” (see Theriault 2011 and Chapter 6), IPRA stipulates a handful of “responsibilities” that could, under certain circumstances, undermine the very rights the law is meant to protect. These responsibilities center on the expectation that indigenous groups will “maintain an ecological balance” in their ancestral domains “by protecting the flora and fauna, watershed areas, and other reserves.” More specifically, in ancestral domains that the government deems “necessary for critical watersheds, mangroves, wildlife sanctuaries, wilderness, protected areas, forest cover, or reforestation,” indigenous people “shall be given the responsibility to maintain, develop, protect and conserve such areas with the full and effective assistance of government agencies.” To square these expectations with the right to self-determination and development, one must assume, as the authors of IPRA evidently did, that indigenous people’s self-determination will by default lead to ecological balance and environmental conservation. This “eco-indigenism,” as I have argued elsewhere (Theriault 2011), sets up expectations that indigenous people sometimes find very difficult to live up to—

¹¹ FPIC is defined as “consensus of all members of the ICCs/IPs to be determined in accordance with their respective customary laws and practices, free from any external manipulation, interference and coercion, and obtained after fully disclosing the intent and scope of the activity, in a language and process understandable to the community.”

as, for example, when indigenous groups who support or propose particular conservation or development projects find their authenticity challenged.

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, indigenous groups in Palawan and elsewhere have filed hundreds of applications for recognition of their ancestral domains. The application process is a laborious, expensive, and technically complex one that requires the submission of hundreds of pages of documentation. Not only do applicants have to prove they meet the criteria of indigeneity—through the production of maps, ethnographic narratives, kinship diagrams, and oral histories—they have to prepare an Ancestral Domain Management Plan that inventories local resources and established guidelines for their stewardship. In virtually all cases, this requires the technical assistance of NGO and government experts as well as the financial support of foreign or domestic funders. Hirtz (2003) has aptly described this paradoxical situation as a form of “bureaucratic Orientalism,” wherein indigenous groups must employ the tools of modern government and science to demonstrate that they themselves remain outside of modernity.

Even for groups who do manage to obtain a CADC or CADT, recognition is of course no panacea. Neither the CADC nor the CADT can abrogate valid, preexisting claims held by non-indigenous people within an ancestral domain. Nor can these documents simply undo the longstanding structural inequalities that drive dispossession and lead indigenous groups to sell their land or enter into exploitative contracts. For example, one of the main benefits of ancestral domain recognition is priority access to permits for non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Indigenous rights advocates have envisioned indigenous control of local NTFP markets as a crucial step toward long-term tenurial security and sustainable development. However, because NTFP permits are costly to secure and because marketing operations require capital, financiers have used capital advances and resulting cycles of debt to convert ancestral domains into de-

facto private concessions (McDermott 2000; Pinto 2000). As I will explain in Chapter 6, this is precisely what happened with the ancestral domain in which I conducted my fieldwork.

McDermott has eloquently pointed out that, in the rush to establish territorial *boundaries*, the recognition of ancestral domain may overlook the *pathways* of patronage, debt, and exploitation that have the greatest consequences for indigenous rights.

Moreover, due to its chronic underfunding and embroilment in resource politics, the NCIP has struggled to implement the IPRA in an efficient and timely manner. The agency has only just begun to implement the provision requiring indigenous representation in all legislative bodies, and that process seems all but destined to be politically calamitous. As of early 2013, 159 CADTs had been “approved,” covering some 4.4 million hectares and 921,918 indigenous people. But of these only 40 CADTs have actually been awarded, whilst an untold number of applications languish in the pre-approval phase. In Palawan, seven CADTs have been approved since the passage of IPRA, but only one awarded. Meanwhile, the legal status of CADCs remains uncertain, with NCIP guidelines calling for their conversion into CADTs but most CADC holders lacking the resources to apply for conversion. Worse still, the NCIP has been widely criticized by indigenous-rights activists for helping mining companies secure FPIC and mishandling mining royalty funds that it manages on the behalf of indigenous groups.

IPRA and the bureaucracy it created are, simply put, fraught with ambivalences and contradictions. The law grants indigenous people rights to greater self-determination and autonomy, but then makes those rights contingent on more intensive coordination with the central government. Nevertheless, I think it would a mistake to dismiss the ancestral domain system as little more than a project of bureaucratization. In Chapter 6, I will detail a case in which ancestral domain rights have been successfully invoked, but in a way that challenges the

expectations of “bureaucratic Orientalism.” Minority people may come to see themselves as rights-bearing, *indigenous* subjects but, shaped by any number of other discourses and relations, they may also come to enact their rights in the manner not anticipated by bureaucrats.

Protected Areas and Biodiversity

Post-1986 reforms also had profound implications for environmental regulation. Between 1950 and 1987, national forest cover declined from 55 to 22 percent (Kummer 2005), while the country’s fisheries and coral reefs also experienced severe rates of decline (Eder 2008). Bolstered by growing international concern, Filipino reformers were eager to set the nation on a course to sustainable development and to protect what was left of its “natural heritage.” Among the first measures taken by the Aquino administration was a ban on the export of logs in 1986 and then of all timber in 1989. These restrictions have been eased somewhat by subsequent administrations, but nonetheless they have had a real effect: log harvests declined from 6.4 million cubic meters in 1980 to 0.8 million in 1995 (Hammond 1997). Since then production has continued apace, but, according to the DENR, only two percent of logs in 2011 were from wild sources, with the remainder harvested from forest plantations. Also in 2011, in the wake of devastating floods, President Aquino placed a moratorium on logging of natural forests on public land, ordered a comprehensive review of timber licensing policy, and created a special task force to combat illegal logging. Logging interests have charged that the ban favors illegal loggers and corrupt enforcers, the likes of which remain rampant in some areas. Yet, with national forest cover stalled at around 25 percent, with the disastrous effects of deforestation increasingly evident, and with growing incentives to protect forests as carbon sinks, the political will necessary to sustain the ban may prove more forthcoming than it has with similar measures in the past.

Although Philippine law still allows for industrial-scale timber operations, recent reforms have favored the “devolution” and “decentralization” of forest management, part of a global shift in thinking on forest regulation. I have already discussed one outcome of these reforms—ancestral domain policies—which reflect a convergence of decentralized approaches to forest management and the indigenous rights movement (Eder and McKenna 2004: 65). Another outcome of decentralization was the establishment, in 1995, of a community-based forest management (CBFM) program. This program sought to consolidate and expand several existing DENR initiatives, including its supervision of ancestral domain claims and the Integrated Social Forestry Program that it inherited from the Marcos administration. Through CBFM agreements, rural communities can obtain twenty-five-year leases to public forest land in exchange for agreeing to serve as stewards. These agreements rarely allow logging, but they do facilitate access to NTFP permits. As of its 2011 annual report, the DENR recognizes 1,790 CBFM contracts covering some 1.634 million hectares, some of which represent renewals of contracts issued during the Marcos administration. Perhaps not surprisingly, the results of this reform have been mixed. CBFM areas, too, have been coopted by outside interests. And, as with ancestral domains, lax regulation of NTFP markets means that wild stocks of rattan and almaciga are rapidly being depleted in areas covered by CBFM.

Another priority of post-Marcos reformers was the conservation of biodiversity.¹² Their efforts culminated in the formation of the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS), through which the DENR was to “secure for the Filipino people of present and future generations

¹² It is important not to oversimplify the thrust of reforms in the post-1986 period. Though some reforms have favored progressive agendas, such as the recognition of indigenous rights and the conservation of biodiversity, others have continued to favor extractive industries and the powerful vested interests that promote them. In 1995, environmentalists, along with economic nationalists, were outraged when the government passed a Mining Act that encourages large-scale, privately owned mining operations on public land, including by foreign-owned corporations, and imposes relatively low taxes on mining revenue.

the perpetual existence of all native plants and animals through the establishment of a comprehensive system of integrated protected areas within the classification of national park as provided for in the Constitution” (NIPAS Act of 1992). Internationally, this was a time when US and European conservation NGOs, such as the WWF and Conservation International, were learning to tap into global financial markets and emerging as powerful multinational organizations (Igoe, et al. 2010). In the Philippines too, NGOs of all types were enjoying unprecedented influence as a result of liberalization.¹³ Impetus for NIPAS came in large part from the lobbying efforts of two NGOs: the World Wildlife Fund and a Filipino environmentalist organization called Haribon. In collaboration with DENR, they underwrote the first two “phases” of NIPAS’ implementation with a \$2 million “debt-for-nature swap” and a \$16 million grant from the World Bank’s Global Environment Facility (Bryant 2002: 274).

Like IPRA, NIPAS is an ambivalent policy. It aims, on one hand, to unify what had been a chaotic landscape of conservation instruments under the aegis of the DENR and then to expand that unified system over new territories. On the other hand, NIPAS is intended to decentralize and democratize protected area management. Under the NIPAS, there are seven different types of protected areas, as well as an eighth category allowing for the creation of new types. These vary in the extent to which human activity is permitted—from “strict nature preserves” at one extreme to “protected landscapes” at the other—but each of them require the creation of a representative Protected Area Management Board (PAMB). A PAMB, the law states, should consist of representatives from all levels of government (including all *barangay* that overlap with the protected area), from civil society, and from any affected indigenous communities. The PAMB is then entrusted to set policy through majority vote, with provisions of NIPAS as the

¹³ Though I did not mention it above, foreign and domestic NGOs, often supported by international funding, likewise played a pivotal role in lobbying for ancestral domain policy and carrying out its implemented.

basic framework. In practice, PAMBs are composed of a mix of politicians, bureaucrats, and ordinary citizens, who bring very different skills and experiences to the table. Although each member of the board has equal authority, relations among them are shaped by broader structural inequalities that make certain forms of knowledge more authoritative than others. Thus, the “expert” members of a PAMB are legally instructed to assemble its Management Plan for submission to the Board. Likewise, in practice if not in policy, decisions on protected area policy are dominated by those with the technical knowledge and confidence to make their voices heard (more on this below).

Another salient but ambivalent feature of NIPAS is its inclusion of “protected landscapes” alongside more conventional types of protected areas like wildlife sanctuaries and resource reserves. By its very definition, a landscape acknowledges the presence and ecological importance of human communities: “Protected landscapes and seascapes are areas of national significance which are characterized by the harmonious interaction of man and land [...]” Further, NIPAS also contains provisions forbidding the eviction of indigenous people and “tenured migrant communities.” These provisions are a clear attempt to protect the tenurial rights of rural communities, particularly indigenous ones. But here too we encounter ambivalence. Consider this question: do the provisions of IPRA, which protect self-determination, give indigenous people the right to refuse conservation? The legal answer to that question is, quite simply, “no.” NIPAS stipulates that indigenous communities must be included in protected area planning and management, but the DENR has ultimate and unilateral authority to establish conservation enclosures on public lands regardless of whether said land is also an ancestral domain. As we saw above, ancestral domain policies, including IPRA, reconcile with NIPAS by stipulating that indigenous groups “shall be given the responsibility” to manage the

protected area themselves. This reflects the assumption, also built into IPRA, that indigenous communities “maintain an ecological balance” in their ancestral domains. A speciously simple narrative is thus constructed: because indigenous people live in harmony with nature, they will cooperate harmoniously with conservation, as will the various government agencies that supervise them. This narrative effaces tensions between the recognition of indigenous territorial rights and the government’s authority to create conservation enclosures, but it cannot make those tensions disappear entirely.

Indigeneity and Biodiversity in Palawan

Since 1986, Palawan has become a key symbol—and a proving ground of sorts—for the national reforms that I described above. In this section, I will provide a general overview of how national reforms have manifested themselves in the region before sharpening my focus on specific developments in Rizal.

With the global rise of biodiversity conservation, Palawan’s high concentration of endemic species—and the relative health of its marine and terrestrial ecosystems—has attracted a deluge of international attention. In 1991, the province was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and over the following decade two of its protected areas—the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River and the Tubbataha Reef—were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Filipino environmentalists have taken the lead in Palawan’s rise as a “biodiversity hotspot,” but more often than not their initiatives have been backed by internationally funded NGOs rather than by the Philippine state. As a result, the past quarter century has seen a proliferation of conservation and development projects sponsored by international development agencies (UNDP, USAID, DANIDA, EU, etc.) and transnational NGOs (WWF, Helvetas, Conservation

International, World Vision, etc.). Palawan has also become home to an influential community of national and regional NGOs (e.g., Haribon, ELAC, PNNI, NATRIPAL), which often receive foreign funding but have nonetheless demonstrated a significant degree of independence and durability (Austin and Eder 2007). In 1992, for example, they successfully lobbied for a commercial logging ban that has remained in place ever since.

The first centralized, internationally funded effort to coordinate development and conservation in Palawan dates to 1981, when the European Economic Community sponsored the Palawan Integrated Area Development Project (PIADP).¹⁴ The first phase of the PIADP (1981-1990) culminated in the passage of a national law, the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan (SEP), and the creation of a government agency, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), charged with the SEP's implementation. Both the SEP and PCSD are unique—no other province in the country has a special bureaucracy mandated to oversee “sustainable development.”¹⁵ The PCSD's governing board is composed mainly of politicians and bureaucrats, with a couple of seats reserved for civil society representatives.

In addition to serving as a permitting body for development projects and providing legal services for the prosecution of environmental lawbreakers, the cornerstone of the PCSD's mandate is to oversee an exhaustive zoning scheme for the province's terrestrial and marine territory. This scheme, known as the Environmentally Critical Areas Network, proposes to specify which, if any, terrestrial and marine activities are acceptable in every square centimeter

¹⁴ Funding for a second phase of this project (1990-1999) came from the Asian Development Bank.

¹⁵ The SEP defines sustainable development as "Sustainable development" means the improvement in the quality of life of the present and future generations through the complementation of development and environmental protection activities

of the province. ECAN zoning maps are then to be integrated with the planning and regulatory activities by all levels of government, by protected area management boards (see below and Chapter 4), and so on. This ambitious plan calls for a tremendous amount of research, monitoring, and negotiation, which the PCSD has partially devolved to municipal governments. Although very much a process of bureaucratization, ECAN zoning has often been politicized and manipulated by vested interests. In fact, among many Filipino environmentalists, the PCSD has lost much of its credibility due to its perceived bias in favor of the mining industry. Council members, if not as much the agency's staff, have been criticized for voting to adjust ECAN zoning or make other exceptions that allow development projects to proceed. Whatever the PCSD's merits or weaknesses, one undeniable contribution it makes is to add an additional layer of bureaucracy to a highly fragmented regulatory environment—one that sends both government officials and indigenous people conflicting signals about indigenous rights and obligations (see Chapter 4).

Separate from the establishment of the PCSD but driven by the same forces, Palawan has also served as a pivotal site for ancestral domain recognition. In 1989, indigenous leaders in Palawan founded an NGO known in Tagalog as the *Nakakaisang mga Tribu ng Palawan* (NATRIPAL; Eng.: United Tribes of Palawan), which has since remained the only durable indigenous-run NGO in the province. NATRIPAL was (and is) a federation of indigenous people's organizations scattered throughout mainland Palawan, with its staff and board of directors drawn from its constituent organizations. In the early 1990s, as the DENR began issuing guidelines for ancestral domain recognition, NATRIPAL received international funding

to assist its member organizations with applications for CALCs, CADCs, and NTFP permits.¹⁶ CADCs were not designed to be issued to entire ethnolinguistic populations (e.g., the Tagbanua or Palawan), but instead to legally registered people's organizations representing spatially contiguous "communities" within the larger population. Thus, for each of its member organizations that applied for a CADC, NATRIPAL organized a tribal council with a president and other officers bearing titles drawn from the indigenous language. These organizations were essentially constituted as non-profit businesses for the buying and selling of NTFPs, which were envisioned a culturally appropriate form of sustainable development. Efforts to make these operations self-sustaining in the long term accounted for much of the technical support and funding provided by NATRIPAL and its partners (Pinto 2000).

Dozens of CADC applications were initiated, but only seven were ever awarded. (Keep in mind that this number does not include CADT applications that were initiated after 1998 under the aegis of IPRA.) As noted above, the ancestral domain application process, whether for a CADC or a CADT, requires a great deal of time, effort, and technical expertise. Application materials include detailed maps, censuses, ethnographic narratives, genealogies, NTFP inventories, resource management plans, evidence of consultation with non-indigenous residents, and more. And all of this must then be validated in situ by government agencies that charge their per diem and transportation costs to the applicant organization. Simply put, without the technical and financial assistance of NGOs, it was (and is) impossible for indigenous groups in Palawan to apply for ancestral domain recognition.

¹⁶ Several other NGOs, including Legal Assistance for Indigenous Filipinos (PANLIPI), the Indigenous People's Apostolate, and Haribon-Palawan were also involved in ancestral-domain delineation. Funding sources for these activities came from an array of international funders, including USAID (Biodiversity Conservation Network), the Vienna Institute for Development and Cooperation, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and the European Union (Philippine Tropical Forest Protection Program).

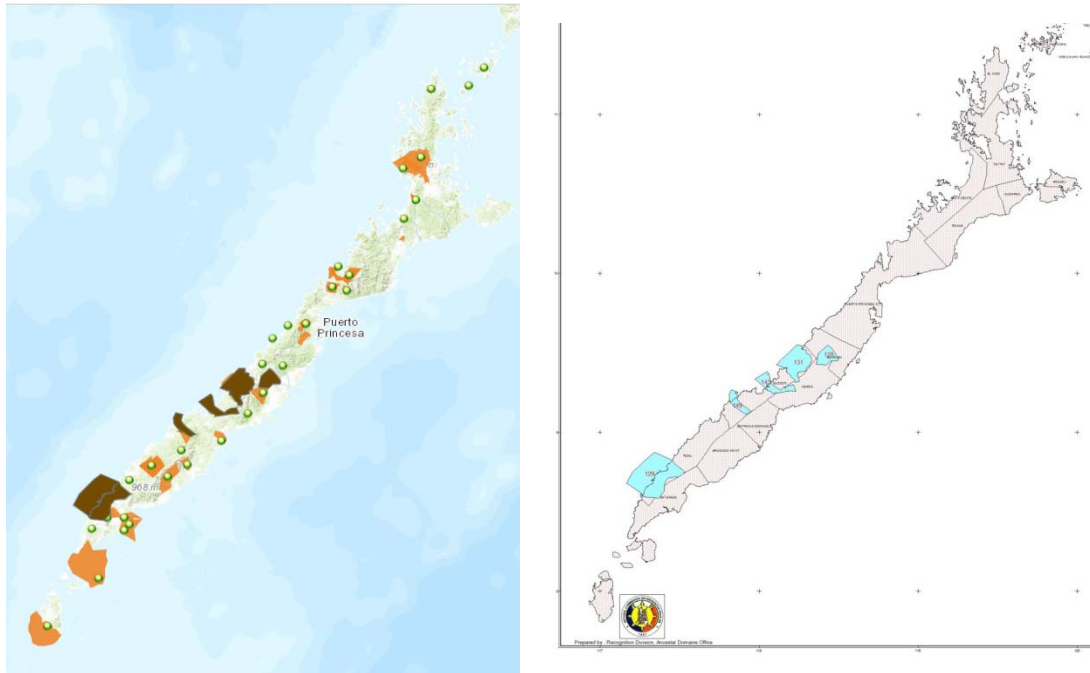


Figure 11: Maps showing pending and approved CADCs and CADTs in Palawan. In the map on the left (sourced from the NGO AnthroWatch), approved CADTs are shown in brown, while pending CADTs and awarded CADCs are shown in orange. The map on the right, sourced from the NCIP, shows only approved CADTs. None of the CADTs shown has been *awarded*. The only awarded CADT in Palawan province is on the island of Coron to the north of Palawan mainland.

In Rizal, NATRIPAL’s original plan was to apply for contiguous CADCs on behalf of Palawan people in all of the municipality’s eleven barangay. This ultimately proved unrealistic, so a combined CADC was instead secured on behalf of Palawan communities in two neighboring barangay—Punta Baja and Campung Ulay—which had been chosen as pilot sites for the aforementioned enterprise development support (Pinto 2000).¹⁷ Tenga’t Gebaq, the village where I lived during the bulk of my fieldwork, was within the resulting ancestral domain. It was then that a man named Bordo became the president or “*satya*” of the people’s organization responsible for the Punta Baja side of the CADC, a position he retained through at least August 2012. Prior to this, beginning in ca. 1987, Bordo had served as the first OSCC-appointed

¹⁷ The combined CADC includes some 15,092.88 hectares.

chieftain in Punta Baja. He held that position until the early 1990s when Jimi's father took the position. Bordo stepped down, he told me, because he preferred to align with the NGOs, i.e., NATRIPAL. It was never clear to me why he saw those positions as mutually exclusive, but indeed I encountered multiple other cases in which the chieftain and the president of the CADC were considered mutually exclusive, if not rival, positions. By the time of my fieldwork, Jimi had himself assumed the role of chieftain, the "*primus inter pares*" of a tribal council recognized by the NCIP and operating separately from that of the CADC. This is but one minor example of the proliferation of externally recognized Palawan leaders that has unfolded since the 1980s. (The situation is actually much worse in areas affected by mining, where mining companies and their opponents often support rival groups of leaders claiming to represent the same area. Those conflicts are why some Palawan activists have recently undertaken an effort to have heredity adopted as the standard for government recognition of indigenous leaders.)

As I will explain in Chapter 6, Jimi declined to sign onto the CADC when it was established. There were a number of reasons for this, but one of them was the fact that Jimi considered Bordo a Penimusan (a Muslim Palawan) and did not want to join an indigenous organization controlled by someone he did not consider a "true Palawan." (Upland Palawan [*taw't daya*] are not generally hostile to Penimusan [*taw't napan*], or vice versa, but their relations are often tinged with distrust.) The other reasons were more practical. Jimi feared that the CADC would become a personal business venture used to enrich its proponents. His concerns were, in part, well founded. Following the pattern I described above, the CADC organization soon became deeply indebted to an almaciga financier and has since operated as a de facto concession. Jimi decided to challenge this arrangement, prompting a prolonged lawsuit that raises fundamental questions about indigeneity and its recognition.

At the same time that NATRIPAL was working to establish ancestral domains in Rizal and other parts of Palawan, the European Union launched a conservation and ancestral domain initiative known as the Palawan Tropical Forest Protection Program (PTFPP). The aim of this program was to create, in cooperation with PCSD, an integrated watershed management system for all of southern Palawan. PTFPP also sponsored the construction of “tribal education centers” in a number of ancestral domains, but by the time of my fieldwork most of these were being used for other purposes. The main outcome of the PTFPP was a set of watershed management plans and the creation of another special government agency, the Southern Palawan Planning Council (SPPC), to execute them. The SPPC had limited resources, so, in 2002, Conservation International (CI) picked up the initiative and shifted the agenda to one of establishing a protected landscape to enclose the SPPC-managed watersheds. This is what, in 2009, became the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape, a 120,457 hectare national park that straddles southern Palawan’s mountainous spine, spanning thirty-four watersheds in five different municipalities.¹⁸ In addition to support from CI, the SPPC eventually received a significant grant from the European Union to aid in the park’s establishment. The ultimate vision is for the park to be self-sustaining through user fees, carbon credits, and other monetization of “ecosystem services.” So far, though, it has been almost completely dependent on international funding and subventions from the five concerned municipalities.

As required by NIPAS, the MMPL’s Management Board is composed of some 70 members, including representatives from all levels of government, a host of bureaucratic agencies, two NGOs, and five indigenous representatives, among others. Although the park’s co-management involves many different “sectors,” indigenous people are expected to play a

¹⁸ Although the SPPC and the DENR are officially the lead agencies responsible for the MMPL, the park’s establishment and early management has depended heavily on the work and funding of Conservation International.

uniquely important part. For one, they comprise an estimate 94 percent of the 12,000 or so people who actually live within its boundaries. Even more importantly, the very existence of ancestral domains and protected landscapes *assumes* the propensity of indigenous people to “maintain the ecological balance” of their territory. Including the CADC where Jimi and Bordo live, fourteen different indigenous tenurial certificates of three different types overlap with the MMPL: eleven Certificates of Ancestral Land Claim (CALC), two Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC), and one Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT). These overlapping claims have forced park officials to grapple with the ambivalences lurking beneath the putative “harmony” of ancestral domains and protected areas (see also Chapter 4).

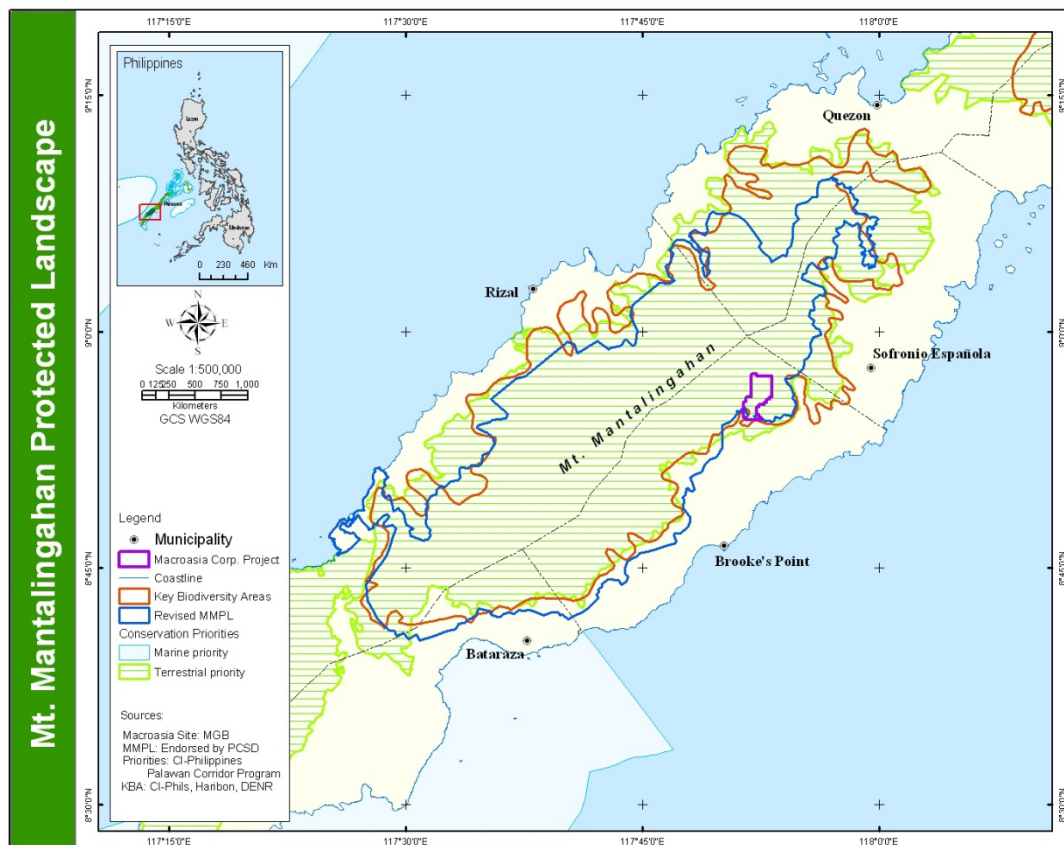


Figure 12: Base map of MMPL showing mining company claim that overlaps with the MMPL and with “prior areas” of CI. Source: Conservation International.

In Chapters 4-6, I will address some of the specific regulations of the MMPL as they pertain to Palawan. For now, it suffices to say that the park's Management Plan adopts the aforementioned ECAN zoning scheme, with 76.8 percent classified as "core zone" and another 20.4 percent as various types of "buffer zones." Per the SEP, core zones are off limits to all "human disruptions" except for traditional indigenous uses that involve "minimal and soft-impact gathering of forest species for ceremonial and medicinal purposes." The buffer zones offer a bit more leeway, but no one on the ground in villages like Tenga't Gebaq actually knows where one zone ends and the other begins. When I asked officials what exactly the Palawan were permitted to do within the MMPL, most indicated that Palawan were free to engage in "traditional," subsistence-oriented practices. The only exception was the clearing of swiddens in mature forest, which is strictly prohibited. This policy, then, conflates "traditional" practices with sustainable or "soft-impact" ones and is subject to a great deal of subjective interpretation (cf. Minter 2010). Swidden, for example, would definitely qualify as traditional, but most officials see it as anything but "soft-impact." Some would ban it completely from core zones, but at least one official suggested that this might be a violation of IPRA. Not surprisingly, many Palawan I consulted expressed frustration with this lack of clarity (see Chapter 4).

For this reason, and for other reasons that I noted in the Introduction, the Palawan have played a minimal role in the MMPL's management. As Minter (2010) found in her study of the Agta in the North Sierra Madre Natural Park, the legitimacy of the MMPL rests on its claims to fully incorporate a population that is, in reality, largely alienated from it.¹⁹ For their part, MMPL proponents are aware of this alienation. They have tried to address it by offering select Palawan communities livelihood assistance and other incentives in exchange for their agreeing to abide by

¹⁹ In Chapters 4 and 5, I will explore how contrasting notions of accountability and incompatible ontological assumptions help to produce this alienation.

park policies, participate in its activities, and report violators to the authorities. And, in one case, they have helped a Palawan community in southern Rizal successfully apply for a CADT.

Virtually everyone I spoke with, including the Palawan members of the PAMB, expressed a desire for greater Palawan participation. But, as things stood during my fieldwork, the short-term prospects for this seem rather grim. On one hand, as noted, officials themselves do not have a unified vision of the rights and accountabilities the Palawan have as *indigenous* residents of a protected landscape. On the other, many Palawan, to the extent that they are even aware of the park's existence, remain wary of its implications for their livelihood and land tenure. Why, they wonder, should they do the work of conservation when conservation might be but the latest in a long series of efforts to extract wealth from their forests?

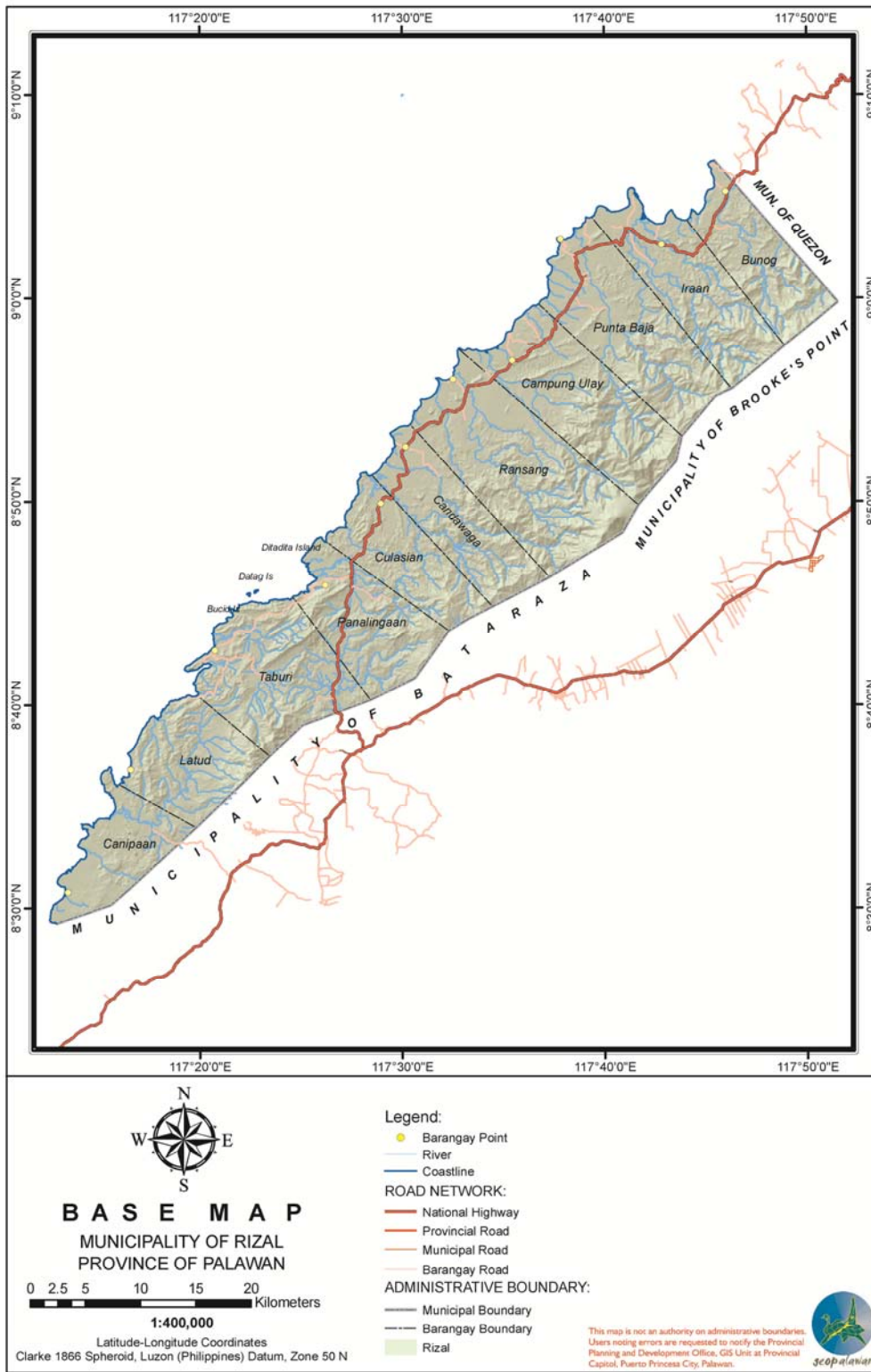


Figure 13: Base map of Municipality of Rizal showing Palawan Circumferential Road. Source: Provincial Planning and Development Office.

As significant as ancestral domain recognition and conservation have been for Palawan in Rizal, ongoing processes of settlement, land conversion, and market intensification are arguably the most vital. I noted above that migrant settlement proceeded at astonishing rates in the 1980s and 1990s. Though these rates may now be slowing, settlement continues to drive dispossession as established settlers expand their land holdings. One momentous development was the extension, in ca. 1992, of the Palawan Circumferential Road connecting Rizal to the northern and eastern portions of the island. The “highway” in Rizal was further developed in the late 1990s, making it much easier and cheaper to bring consumer commodities in and forest commodities out.

During the time of my fieldwork, dramatic processes of land conversion were underway in and around the CADC. Just outside its boundaries, investors were purchasing large tracts of land for conversion to rubber, coconut, pineapple, and cassava plantations (see Figures 20 and 21 in Chapter 4). Because much of the CADC is enclosed within the MMPL, it is unlikely that these plantations will extend into the CADC boundaries in the near term. However, a significant and growing portion of land within the CADC is already owned by non-indigenous absentees. Palawan, too, are increasingly converting former swiddens to permanent plantations both as a way to secure their land tenure and provide for their families.

As a result, most Palawan find themselves increasingly relegated to the foothills and mountains. Very much in line with what Marx called “primitive accumulation,” Palawan who sell their land to settlers and investors often end up working for them at least part time as wage laborers. Nearer the coast, large tracts of land have been reduced to veritable wastelands to meet the growing demand for charcoal and house posts in town. The footprint of this demand, which

does not discriminate between mature and immature trees, is now gradually working its way into the foothills. Meanwhile, a seemingly insatiable demand for NTFPs has led to the severe depletion of rattan at lower elevations and to the overtapping of almaciga trees in a number of areas. The NTFP market, in particular, has become central to Palawan livelihood, but also a common cause of cyclical debt as NTFP collectors accept cash advances from buyers and then never manage to fully repay them.

These transformations are borne on the backs of Palawan laborers whose farm wages, charcoal, house posts, and NTFPs come at astonishingly cheap prices given the onerous work involved.²⁰ Their subsistence activities, by continuing to provide for a significant if declining proportion of their material needs, subsidize the frontier economy even as government policies and deforestation undermine the viability of subsistence activities.

These circumstances, of course, do not apply to all. A small minority of Palawan have successfully established paddy rice fields, coconut plantations, and businesses. Those who live close enough to town and can afford supplies send their children to public schools. Even some families in Tenga't Gebaq did so, which meant either borrowing money for a motorbike or forcing the students to walk more than one hour each way. Palawan from a number of areas have succeeded in completing secondary and even tertiary education, going on to run successful businesses or work for NGOs. But schooling often comes at the cost of having Palawan cultural identity denigrated and missing out on the experience of learning from elders. My “nieces” and “nephews” in Tenga't Gebaq told me that their teacher forbade them from speaking Palawan in

²⁰ In 2012, house posts could be sold for PHP 3.00-20.00 (USD 0.07-0.47) depending on their girth. Charcoal could be sold in town for PHP 45.00-50.00 (USD 1.05-1.16) per sack. A full day's labor earned PHP 100.00-200.00 (USD 2.32-4.65). A kilogram of almaciga (of which a single collection trip could yield 15-50 kilograms) could be sold for PHP 10.00-14.00 (USD 0.23-0.33) depending on the quality and point of sale. Rare finds of “class A” or “export-quality” almaciga could bring up to PHP 20.00 (USD 0.54) per kilogram. Dollar equivalents were approximated based on the prevailing exchange rate at the time: 43.00 PHP = 1.00 USD.

the classroom and often singled them out for lessons on hygiene and proper appearance. Going to school seemed like largely a negative experience for them. And yet, they thought of it as crucial to their future. Some of them told me, in between giggles, that they wanted to be teachers or restaurants owners or BMX racers, rather than swidden famers, when they grew up.

Conclusion

Although one would not know from the *New York Times* report, Charles Lindbergh's trip to the Philippines coincided with a period of unprecedented clearing of the archipelago's forests by logging companies, plantations, and small-scale farmers in search of land. Since Lindbergh's visit, policies in the Philippines have shifted from favoring assimilation of minority groups and top-down environmental management to favoring indigenous rights and cooperative management. This shift has had mixed results, at best, in terms of forest conservation, to say nothing of the ambiguities surrounding indigenous rights.

In 1969, forests covered approximately a third of Philippine territory, down from seventy percent at the turn of the century and ninety percent prior to Spanish colonization 250 years earlier (Kummer 2005).²¹ During the forty years since, clearance of primary forest has continued at an astonishing pace so that, as of 2005, forests covered less than a quarter of the archipelago (Kummer 1992: 62). Today, significant tracts of primary forest remain only in eastern Luzon, central Mindanao, and along Palawan's mountainous spine. But Palawan, too, has experienced dramatic losses. By 1992, when the logging moratorium was declared, only some 52 percent of Palawan remained forested, and, by 2009, that number had fallen further to

²¹ Kummer stresses that estimates of forest cover, particularly for the last twenty years, are very rough estimates. He writes that, "As of 2003, the situation for national forest cover in the Philippines is as follows: 1. it would appear that no one in the world knows how much forest cover there is and whether it is increasing or decreasing; [and] 2. regardless of the first point, everyone involved with environmental issues in the Philippines is convinced that forests are continuing to decrease" (Kummer 2005: 313)

46 percent (PCSD 2010). Since deforestation and detribalization often go hand-in-hand (Eder 1990), indigenous peoples' rights and wellbeing have not, generally speaking, fared better than the forests.

Whether or not the reforms have been effective, the fact that the Philippines has enacted policies favoring conservation does not mean it has stopped allowing large-scale development. In 1995, for example, the Philippine Congress passed a new Mining Act that sought to promote large-scale mining by domestic and international companies. As the global demand for rare earths has spiked, mining operations in the Philippines have expanded accordingly. Policies favorable to foreign investment in monocrop plantations, energy development, and dam construction have also remained intact.

Indeed, at the same time that Palawan was becoming a "frontier" for conservation, it was also becoming a frontier for eco-tourism, mining, biofuel plantations, and offshore energy production. By 2012, for example, more than 354 mining applications were pending in Palawan, in addition to the four large-scale mining operations already active there. Bolstered by a growing national movement against mining, conservationists and indigenous-rights activists have responded vigorously and with a significant degree of success. Indigenous Palawan and Tagbanua activists have played an important role in this movement, and indigenous-rights laws, particularly the requirement of FPIC, are one tool at their disposal. Unfortunately, however, the FPIC process is widely reported to be corrupted by bribes, and indigenous groups faced with the "choice" of whether to endorse mining have found themselves bitterly divided. The other, demonstrably more effective strategy conservationists have is to promote the expansion of conservation enclosures like the MMPL.

Activist accounts of these debates almost invariably invoke the image of Palawan as the “last frontier” and very often reduce the matter to an existential struggle between conservation enclosures and mining. Even among indigenous activists, it seems, less polarized visions for the island’s future seem to be sidelined. Conserving Palawan’s biodiversity is a worthwhile aim, and my point here is not to suggest otherwise. Rather, my point is to highlight how the “last frontier” narrative helps to underpins an environmental politics in which indigenous people are symbolically central to the debate but effectively marginal to the decision making. This paradox, on which I will elaborate in Chapter 4, is a legacy of the colonial era and a reminder that Palawan’s colonization remains ongoing.

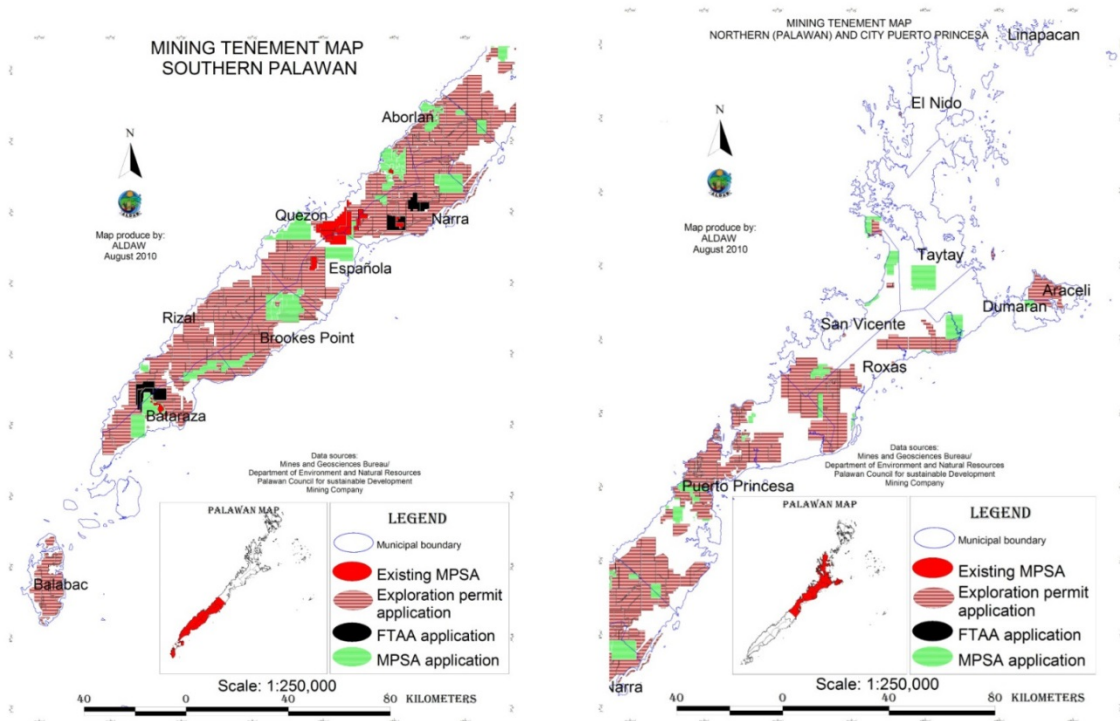


Figure 14: Maps of mining operations and mining applications in Palawan.
 Source: Phelps et al. (2010)



Figure 15: One of many new oil palm plantations in southern Palawan, where some 30,000 hectares have been allocated for oil palm plantations. (photo by author, December 2010)

CHAPTER FOUR

Harmonious Discord: Environmental Narratives and the Paradox of Intermediacy

It was a hot, humid afternoon in late July. I was sitting in the shade with my notebook, wondering how seriously to take the thunder rumbling in the distance. *Barat*, the southwest monsoon, was in full force, but also full of empty threats. A breeze carried the comforting scent of toasted new rice along with the rhythmic thud of its threshing. With most of the children at the river, in the forest, or at school, the village was relatively quiet. We heard the motorcycle announce itself when it was still several hundred yards downstream, its engine revving against the slippery, rocky ascent of the old logging road. Although motorcycles came and went with some frequency, it was something of a local pastime to pause and guess aloud who might be arriving. Palaya, in particular, had a keen ear for predicting arrivals by the sound of their motor. “*Duwa*,” she muttered, discerning not one but two engines struggling up the hill.

As predicted, two motorcycles soon arrived. Astride them were four government employees—one with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and three with the Southern Palawan Planning Council (SPPC), but all involved with overseeing the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL), the new protected area in which the village was located. Even though visits by MMPL personnel were not uncommon, they put everyone on edge. They feared punishment for swidden and other livelihood practices that treaded close to the limits of legality, which seemed to vary with the whims of whoever was enforcing them and had become increasingly ambiguous since the advent of the protected area in 2009. Two things made this official visit unusually nerve-racking. First, one of the motorcycles bore the superintendent of the protected area—a relatively high-status woman who did not usually

accompany her staff in the field. Second, neither of the motorcycles stopped to check in with Jimi, the government-recognized chieftain, proceeding instead directly to the trailheads at end of the old logging road.

Word soon came that the bureaucrats had left their motorbikes at the end of the road and marched off into the forest. Speculation then began about what they were up to—what they might be looking for and who might wind up in trouble with the law. I had been at an upstream hamlet earlier in the day, so Palaya asked me whether the swiddens up there were big this year. I nodded that they were. “They’re dead,” Palaya said dramatically, referring to her cousins upstream. “They’d better run and hide.”

“They don’t know the trails,” Jiha offered, referring to the MMPL personnel. “They won’t find anything.”

“They’ve hiked up there before,” Palaya retorted. And nervous chatter like this continued as we heard conflicting reports about which trail the officials had taken into the forest.

After about an hour, the MMPL staff emerged from the forest, only to disappear once again down a trail leading to the river. That they had yet to explain to anyone what they were doing inspired some grumbling, but no direct confrontation. Eventually they returned from the river and stopped at Jimi and Palaya’s house. Jimi was away at his fields, so they engaged in pleasantries but volunteered nothing about their motives. As the two senior staff waited for their juniors to fetch the motorbikes, they heard a high-pitched cry. It was coming from a wooden cage fastened to the side of Palaya’s kitchen. To me the cry sounded like the call of a monkey as interpreted by a cat. It was, in fact, a juvenile civet, a cat-like mammal endemic to Palawan’s forests (Pal: *masek*; Tgl: *musang*; *Paradoxurus hermaphrodites philippinensis*).



Figure 16: the controversial civet. (photo by author, July 2012)

“Who delivered that?” asked the man from the SPPC, assuming that the animal was part of the illegal trade in exotic wildlife. Palaya explained that the children had found it in the forest and domesticated it. It refused to leave, she added, and had been allowed to roam free until it started terrorizing her chickens. (Indeed, the civet had eaten at least one chick and then caused mayhem when it attacked a group of roosting hens in the middle of the night. It was, moreover, agitated by the sound of sweeping and would climb up the skirt of anyone wielding a broom.) Skeptical of this account, the official suggested that Palaya sell the civet to him so that he could take it to a “reservation” in the provincial capital. Palaya replied that she had no say in the matter: “If it were up to me, I would have killed that thing a long time ago.” A burst of laughter escaped me when I heard this unexpected candor, earning me a stern look from the official. He was not amused. We must, he reminded us in Tagalog, protect wild animals lest we deplete them and thereby destroy nature.¹ His lecture employed the inclusive form of the third person plural

¹ To paraphrase, he said, *dabat natin protektahan ang ating mga hayop para hindi silang maubos. Wag nating sana*

pronoun, emphasizing a collective, societal ownership of the animals, of the forest, and of nature (*mga hayop natin, kalikasan natin*).²

As he and his companions mounted their motorbikes, Jiha attempted to temper her co-wife's defiant remark. "That *animal*," she said, "was killing off our chickens. We had to cage it." She would later scold Palaya for her naïve frankness, reminding her that the official had really wanted to take the civet and use it as "evidence."

Without ever saying why they had come, the visitors headed back to town. It was only later that day that we learned from Jimi, who passed them on the road, what they had come to investigate. They had gotten reports, they said, of swidden being cut in old-growth forest. Jimi was agitated by this investigation, both because he considered swidden a legally protected Palawan tradition and because he suspected that a rival Palawan leader had a hand in it. Reporting swiddens in Jimi's area was retribution, he surmised, for his recent successes in an ongoing legal dispute over forest products. In the following days, MMPL personnel would return three times. It seemed as if they were continuing their investigation, but they gave "tree-planting" and "livelihood project monitoring" as their official reasons. Jimi wondered aloud what the National Commission on Indigenous People—a government agency often at odds with the DENR—would have to say about this turn of events.

Everyday encounters such as the one I just recounted are fraught with highly localized but profound tensions: tensions between officials and farmers, between rival indigenous leaders, between rival bureaucracies, between humans and animals, and between different ways of knowing and valuing the environment. And yet, few if any official policy documents mention the micro-level processes and events from which these tensions arise. Domestication of pesky

² He was speaking Palawan to Palaya. Her responses combined Tagalog and Palawan in a manner she knew he would comprehend because he visited the village regularly.

wildlife, local disputes that manipulate bureaucratic operations, gaps in trust underpinned by differences of culture and power, conflicting visions for role of indigenous people in environmental regulation, and the use of reforestation and livelihood projects as pretexts for surveillance—official accounts of environmental regulation conceal all of these complexities within grander visions of indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and cooperative management. In the age of co-management, conservation projects like the MMPL rest on the imagery of partnership and mutuality. Thus, during the encounter described above, what was initially an investigation also produced photographs of MMPL personnel planting hardwood seedlings alongside their Palawan guides.

In political ecology, the term “environmental narratives” refers to simplistic but authoritative accounts of environmental change.³ In Palawan, as in virtually any place on Earth, there is often a wide gap between the tidy simplicity of official environmental narratives and the messy complexities of everyday life. When simplified narratives of environmental change serve as the basis for government policy, they can further disadvantage already marginalized groups whose role in environmental change is misunderstood. As a result, scholars most often engage with these simplifications as foils for nuanced scholarly arguments or fine-grained, local knowledge. For example, Fairhead and Leach’s now classic study of “forest islands” in West Africa challenged an environmental narrative, then widely accepted among policymakers and ecologists, that rural Guineans were causing desertification. Savannah farmers, Fairhead and Leach showed, were actually agents of afforestation. More recently, Forsyth and Walker have tracked how competing environmental narratives in Thailand alternately portray upland minority

³ Forsyth and Walker define environmental narratives as “simplified explanations of environmental cause and effect that emerge in contexts where environmental knowledge and social order are mutually dependent” (cit).

groups as “guardians” or “destroyers” of the forest, in either case misrepresenting complex local realities and inspiring misguided interventions.

An assumption underlying much of the literature on environmental narratives—and one I find convincing—is that they play a critical role in legitimizing bureaucratic authority along its insecure margins. As I showed in Chapters 2 and 3 regarding portrayals of Palawan as “the last frontier,” the simplistic, selective accounts that often underlie environmental policy are as much about controlling unruly people and places as they are about addressing ecological crises.

But is that all environmental narratives do? Do they simply misapprehend reality and encourage misguided interventions into local affairs? I argue in this chapter that environmental narratives do more than propagate simplified, macro-level accounts of complex, micro-level realities. They also serve as an idiom for cultural politics and, as such, do as much to animate micro-level contestation as to conceal it (Alatout 2006). Similarly on point is the notion, which I paraphrase from Clifford Geertz, that authoritative narratives offer not just competing models of the world, but also competing models *for* it (Geertz 1973: 93). We should, then, think of environmental narratives not only in the negative—as an absence of truth or accuracy—but also as a positive or generative form of agency.

In the encounter I described above, we can readily see how the tense micropolitics of environmental government diverges from the harmonious relations imagined in policy narratives. But we can also see how fragments of those very narratives find their way into micro-level interactions and serve as indices for broader discussions of difference, belonging, and accountability. The official’s reprimand, although very brief, indexed a familiar narrative about the need for indigenous cooperation in protecting the nation’s collective heritage—part of a broader prevailing narrative that I refer to here as the *nationalist narrative*. By contrast, Palaya’s

defiance and Jimi's indignation indexed a counter-narrative emphasizing indigenous autonomy and environmental entitlements—part of what I call the *rights-based narrative*. For the Palawan, these two models for indigeneity—that of obligations on the one hand and rights on the other—are the political stakes of prevailing environmental narratives.

If we can read environmental narratives for differing visions of indigeneity, we can also read them to understand what those visions have in common. Whether framed as an obligation or a right, indigenous cooperation carries important symbolic and legal weight in the post-authoritarian Philippines. As a result, indigenous groups like the Palawan find themselves at the center of environmental politics even as their societal position remains one of marginality. They are constantly asked to cooperate with—and thereby legitimize—environmental projects over which they have little control. The effort to involve Palawan in co-management of the MMPL is a perfect example. I call these circumstances the *paradox of intermediacy* and argue that it simultaneously reproduces subordination and enables challenges to the status quo. My analysis looks to the micro-level circulation of environmental narratives as a cipher for how this paradoxical politics unfolds in practice.

To make this argument, I will begin with an ethnographic vignette drawn from my participation in a reforestation project convened to mark the MMPL's second anniversary. This vignette will illustrate how public performances of environmental narratives conceal profound differences of culture and power. At the same time, though, it will also reveal how competing ideologies *within* government complicate efforts to “harmonize” the different interests that co-management brings together. I will then turn to the circulation of environmental narratives among the Palawan, who have their own ideas about the causes, effects, and accountabilities of environmental change. Contrary to the notion that environmental narratives are simply the

misinformed ideas of elites, Palawan people cite and rework prevailing narratives about themselves in order both to negotiate competing allegiances with external authorities and to build a critical consciousness of power among themselves.

Contrasting Account(abilitie)s

Tenga't Gebaq, the village I called home during much of my fieldwork, was a crossroads of sorts for Palawan headed to the coast or back into the mountains. Visitors bearing goods and gossip were never in short supply. But Tenga't Gegaq was also remote enough that residents very rarely saw an unfamiliar face. By local standards, the 30th of June 2011 was a very eventful day. It was the second anniversary of the MMPL, and to mark the occasion a group of government personnel were touring the protected area and conducting mass tree-planting ceremonies in each of five "key watersheds." Tonga't Gebaq sat in the middle of one of those watersheds and, being somewhat accessible by road, was selected to host one of the ceremonies. For reasons I will explain below, the planting site was just downstream of the village, on a steep mountainside without well-defined trails. Fortunately for the organizers, who were accompanied by the local mayor and more than 100 students, it had not rained for a few days, leaving the soil on that clear, cool morning relatively dry. Their single-file hike up the mountain, seedlings in hand, would not have gone well under less favorable conditions.

We knew about the tree-planting ceremony in advance because organizers had been there preparing for it. My host, Jimi, was the government-recognized "chieftain" in the area, so he knew he would be expected to participate. But he also had errands to run in town that day, so he left early on his motorbike, hoping to make it to the highway before crossing paths with the government caravan. It was too late. By the time he got his things together and left, the horde of clipboard-wielding bureaucrats, photo-snapping students, and M16-toting body guards had

jammed the old logging road just downstream of the village. I arrived on the scene moments after Jimi and could see the surprise in his jittery movements as he worked his way through the crowd and greeted his esteemed guests. With no polite way of leaving, he was obliged to stay and participate.



Figure 17: visitors clogging the old logging road just downstream of Tenga't Gebaq during the tree-planting ceremony. (photo by author, 30 June 2011)

That obligation did not apply, however, to other locals, for whom an unexpected amassing of outsiders was an event to be avoided. Before word had spread upstream, a few men and women came walking down the road only to stop, mumble a curse, and turn back away from the crowd. Besides Jimi and me, not a single resident of the village participated in the ceremony. In the days leading up to it, a few local men had been paid to clear a trail and prepare the ground for seedlings. But none of them showed up for the actual planting. Even so, speeches by the

Mayor and other government officials made mention of cooperating with indigenous communities and thanked Jimi for his support. Jimi too was called on to give remarks, in which he offered his gratitude for the government's help in protecting the environment.⁴ This “public transcript,” as James Scott (1990) might call it, was a pitch-perfect enactment of the MMPL's Management Plan and of reports made about this and other management activities to international funders.



Figure 18: officials gathered around the Mayor of Rizal (in the center with a towel over his shoulder) during the tree-planting ceremony. (photo by author, 30 June 2011)

⁴ During the speeches, I was being questioned by the local police, so unfortunately I was not able to document in detail what was said. The police had heard that a foreigner was living in the village and were taking this opportunity to find out why. I made many, many courtesy calls at the beginning of my research, but I had not visited the police station. Lesson learned.

After the speeches, we each picked up a couple of seedlings and began a halting march up the small mountain. I positioned myself near a cluster of bureaucrats who had positioned themselves near the mayor. Between their laughing at the Mayor's jokes and peppering me with questions about how I could possibly suffer life in the village, I could scarcely get a word in edgewise. When I did manage to ask a question, it was an impatient, leading one that I regretted before it had even left my mouth: "Isn't it great," I said in Tagalog, "that the Palawan here have donated this land for reforestation?" Wiping sweat from my forehead, I prepared myself for a bureaucratically appropriate response—that, indeed, it was generous of them and very much in keeping with local traditions of stewardship. My question piqued the attention of a man named Arnold, an SPPC forester who would also be among the four government employees investigating local swiddens a year later (as described above). After glancing around to make sure Jimi would not hear him, he corrected my misconception. "No," he said, "this is government land—timberland—and it's inside of a protected area. They didn't donate this [land]." Arnold had complained to me before about the difficulties he faced in getting the Palawan to cooperate with the MMPL (see Chapter 5, for example, for his thoughts on charcoal making). But he had never expressed his views on the legalities of land tenure. Before I could press him on what he meant—'what about the ancestral domain claim?!'—we were called to pose for photos with the Mayor and then led back down the hill in a lurching single file.

Arnold's response surprised me because of how starkly it clashed with the narrative of the ceremony and of the MMPL in general. It was true that the village and its environs were inside of a protected area. Likewise, most of the municipality was indeed classified as timberland. But the village was also within an ancestral domain that the DENR itself had established and recognized in the late 1990s. By law, ancestral domains are tantamount to

collective land titles and are not abrogated by protected areas. In this part of Rizal, moreover, the timberland classification is a legal anachronism that clashes with more up-to-date land-classification schemes, including the one according to which the MMPL was managed. So where did Arnold's response come from? Why did he ignore the language of indigenous rights and institutional "harmonization" found in official documents? His response, I believe, was simply an un-euphemized fragment of the nationalist environmental narrative that I introduced above.

Hearing Arnold say this out loud reminded me of the tensions that lie just beneath the surface (and usually go unspoken) in so many interactions between the Palawan and state environmental institutions. I would, of course, be reminded of them once again when MMPL personnel came to investigate swiddens and found the captive civet. In large part, these tensions owe to the vast differences of culture and power that complicate relations between the Palawan and government, as I will show in Chapters 5 and 6. But they also owe to ideological difference *within* government itself. I suggested above that two distinct environmental narratives prevail, one "nationalist" in its orientation and the other "rights-based." In what follows, I will examine how these narratives map onto tensions among government agencies and how Palawan, in turn, engage with them. My analysis will begin by describing these narratives as ideal-types and will then examine how they actually manifest in policy and practice.

Stripped to its essence, the nationalist environmental narrative presents upland-dwelling tribal people, such as the Palawan, as occupants of state-owned land and as potential threats to forest ecosystems. This narrative rests on a colonial ideology called the Regalian Doctrine, which was allegedly established by Spain when it claimed all land in the Philippines as property of the colonial state. Among its numerous legacies, this is interpreted to mean that all lands are

in the public domain unless deemed alienable and disposable by the state. Legal scholar Owen Lynch describes the Regalian Doctrine as “mythical” because, he contends, it did not actually become law until 1894, barely four years before Spain lost control of the islands. Mythical or not, this ideology has become the dominant understanding of Spanish colonial policy and has been used to assert public domain for various purposes, from mining to industrial forestry to biodiversity conservation. In short, what legal scholars call “native title” has no standing in the nationalist environmental narrative.

Likewise, this narrative portrays all upland tribal people, but especially those who practice swidden, as potential antagonists to the goals of environmental regulation, whatever those goals may be. During the Spanish and US colonial periods, as we saw in Chapter 2, the “swidden menace” was primarily seen as a threat to agriculture, logging, and forest products. These concerns persist in present-day iterations of the nationalist narrative. Nonetheless, since the rise of biodiversity conservation in the 1980s and ‘90s, the narrative has also shifted to emphasize biodiversity as part of the nation’s “natural heritage.” Today, rather than being a threat to logging, upland people are more likely to be a threat to “nature [...] in [its] undisturbed state” (NIPAS Act Section 4).⁵

The prevailing alternative to this nationalist narrative is what I referred to above as the rights-based narrative. The rights-based narrative holds, in essence, that indigenous groups have customary rights to their land that exist prior to and irrespective of state recognition. Underlying this narrative is another colonial ideology—the *Cariño Doctrine*—which emerged from a 1909 US Supreme Court ruling (*Cariño v. Insular Government*). Using Spain’s imperial greed and the European settlement of North America as foils for America’s benevolent mission in the

⁵ In Chapter 1, I touched on the global political-economic context of this shift.

Philippines, the Cariño ruling instructed the Insular Government to “do justice to the natives” by recognizing native title (Cuasay 2005). Ultimately, though, this ruling did more to establish US sovereignty than it did to establish native title. US colonial policy and subsequent Philippine Constitutions—even the post-authoritarian Constitution of 1987, which laid the groundwork for indigenous-rights reforms—tended toward the Regalian Doctrine. As a result, up until the post-1986 reform period, the Cariño Doctrine remained a counter-narrative with little practical effect.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the rise of biodiversity conservation in the 1980s and ‘90s was paralleled by the rise of indigenous rights, culminating in the enactment of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997. In the wake of this reform, the rights-based environmental narrative has come to embody not only an assumption of native title (“ancestral domain”), but a further assumption that indigenous people have their own knowledge and customary institutions for regulating the environment.⁶ This narrative, therefore, shifts at least some of the authority over environmental regulation to indigenous people themselves.

In his analysis of Philippine conservation policy, Raymond Bryant draws a similar distinction between what he terms competing “politicized moral geographies.” He renders the distinction thus: “While the latter posits indigenous environmental ignorance to justify curbs on local practices, the former assumes the reverse—indigenous knowledge about conservation—to champion local decision-making in a very different take on social relations” (Bryant 2000: 693). My analysis is indebted to Bryant’s, but also differs from it in that, rather than equating these narratives with policies, I have so far treated them as ideal types. Actual policies and practices, although they may more closely resemble one ideal-type or the other, are always tempered by ambivalence. I have also expanded on Bryant’s distinction by putting it in dialog with Peter

⁶ Comment on origin of “ancestral domain” terminology.

Cuasay's analysis of how opposing doctrines of colonial rule have influenced contemporary Philippine debates over the rights of minority people. For Cuasay (2005), this debate hinges on the recognition of native title, which, in my analysis, is a key distinction between the nationalist narrative and the rights-based narrative.

So far, then, I have discussed the two environmental narratives as ideal-types: one denying native title, the other affirming it. Each constitutes a repurposing of a colonial ideology in an effort to address postcolonial dilemmas of property and accountability, and each points in a very different direction. Actual policies and practices are not identical with the ideal-types, but are instead fraught with the ambivalences and ambiguities that result from their coexistence. Indeed, one should think of these narratives not as discrete alternatives but rather as opposite ends of a continuum onto which one can place actual examples depending on their relative approximation of the ideal-types. Arnold's response to my question during the tree-planting ceremony would place very close to the nationalist pole. In general, though, most policies and practices combine elements of both narratives and thus fall somewhere in between.

Let's begin with policies pertaining to Tenga't Gebq, which was within both a protected area and a recognized ancestral domain claim. Today, as a result of indigenous-rights reforms, hardcore manifestations of the nationalist environmental narrative are limited largely to anachronistic laws and to lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997. Among the former, the most notable is the Forestry Code of 1975, which places all lands over 18 percent slope in the public domain.⁷ Among the latter, the most consequential challenge to IPRA came in a 2000 Supreme Court case, on which I will comment

⁷ Lands that have occupied for more than thirty years prior to the decree's issuance were exempt from the 18% rule; however, the occupant had to be eligible for a free patent under the Public Land Act. Indigenous rights were not a consideration.

below. Instead of laws summarily declaring public ownership, laws favoring the nationalist narrative now make subtler appeals to state ownership.

The clearest example of such a law is the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act, which was passed in 1992. NIPAS established a unified, nation-wide system of standards and rules for classifying and managing protected areas. As such, NIPAS falls closer to the nationalist end of the spectrum for several reasons. For one, it invokes the nation's "natural heritage," implying public (state) ownership of forests and other "natural" landscapes. This notion of national heritage was, I imagine, the inspiration for the official's lecture about the civet. Some of the protected-area categories established by NIPAS (e.g., the Strict Nature Reserve or Natural Park) are supposed to be completely free of human "disturbance," the conceit in such cases being that native title is irrelevant. But the authors of NIPAS also had to reconcile the law with concurrent indigenous-rights reforms, including one put into place by the DENR itself in 1992. Hence the category of a "protected landscape." Protected landscapes, including the MMPL, "are areas of national significance which are characterized by harmonious interaction of man and land."

In spite of this category, the language in NIPAS presents the state, namely the DENR, as the primary agent of environmental regulation. While indigenous people cannot be involuntarily evicted or relocated by the DENR to make way for a protected area, they also appear as nothing more than passive participants in conservation planning. They are part of what needs to be managed, and part of managing them involves giving them "notice and hearing" of conservation regulations. NIPAS serves as the legal basis for the MMPL. Accordingly, the MMPL's Management Plan and Management Board reflect the hybrid-but-mostly-Regalian composition of the law. The Management Plan presents indigenous residents as "partners," but adopts a

zoning scheme in which large portions of the landscape are assumed to be essentially free of human disturbance (more on this in Chapter 5).⁸ It calls for greater integration with “indigenous knowledge and practices” and for “cultural preservation,” but makes no provision for indigenous groups who might wish to exempt their land from the protected landscape as a whole. Finally, the Management Board reserves five seats for indigenous representatives, but they are far outnumbered by non-indigenous members (even though indigenous people make up more than 90% of those who live within the MMPL’s boundaries). In my experience and according to what I have been told by other Board members, their attendance of and participation in meetings is “weak.”

On the rights-based side of the spectrum, there are even fewer policies that closely resemble the ideal-type. The closest is the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA). Like NIPAS, though, IPRA is fundamentally hybrid. While it provides for collective rights to ancestral domain, it also creates a state agency responsible for validating and administering ancestral domain claims. Protections in the law are meant to apply whether or not an indigenous group has secured a collective land title. But it is the state that ultimately mediates land disputes between indigenous and non-indigenous groups. While indigenous people themselves are meant to formulate a management plan and use customary institutions to regulate their ancestral domains, they are also expected to do so in cooperation with the state and to maintain an “ecological balance.” This is where the IPRA and the NIPAS most obviously overlap. As Peter Cuasay (2005) has argued, this provision converts native title into a form of eco-

⁸ The zoning scheme is called the Environmentally Critical Areas Network. It was established by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), a special regulatory body that was established in 1992 with assistance from the European Union, exists only in Palawan, and duplicates many of the functions of the DENR. As explained in Chapter 1, the PCSD’s role in the MMPL was that it: had to approve the MMPL before it could be declared, provided the zoning scheme, and has had a representative on the Management Board.

governmentality, wherein an indigenous group's recognition depends on its ability to self-regulate in line with conservation.

Given the 1987 Constitution's tendency toward the nationalist/Regalian end of the spectrum, it should come as no surprise that IPRA's constitutionality has been challenged. Barely two years after the law was passed, the Supreme Court declared it constitutional by default when the fourteen-member court reached a seven-to-seven tie. Four separate opinions were issued in that case, some invoking the Regalian Doctrine, others Cariño. Cuasay argues that the split decision effected an ontological split, wherein minerals and other natural resources were separated from the land rights conferred by native title and revested in the public domain. Clearly, there was and is deep ambivalence about whether and to what extent native title exists. Thus, IPRA—a policy whose gravitation toward the rights-based/Cariño narrative was already ambivalent—remained in force, but only after being ambiguously reoriented toward the nationalist/Regalian narrative.

Examples of what Cuasay (2005: 72) calls “postcolonial legal hybridities,” laws like NIPAS and IPRA reflect the dilemmas of Philippine liberalism and of multiculturalism more generally. In Palawan, as I argue throughout this dissertation, these policies have not readily inspired the effective co-management institutions that they envision. Instead, they have fostered deeply ambivalent conditions in which asserting indigenous rights can entail assuming potentially disempowering obligations (Hirtz 2003; Theriault 2011).

If policies like NIPAS and IPRA are fraught with disguised ambivalence, so too are the practices of those responsible for their implementation. This is very evident in the case of the MMPL, which overlaps with fourteen indigenous tenurial certificates of three different types: eleven Certificate of Ancestral Land Claims (CALC), two Certificate of Ancestral Domain

Claims (CADC), and one Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT).⁹ According to the MMPL's Management Plan, these overlapping "tenurial instruments" will be "harmonized" by the Protected Area Management Board, which includes representatives of all concerned "stakeholder" agencies and constituencies. But the Management Plan does not indicate how harmonization should proceed or what exactly harmony entails. In fact, there are no generally accepted guidelines for reconciling indigenous land claims with the restrictions of protected areas; it is simply assumed that harmony is immanent. In practice, officials do grapple with this question, and how each approaches the problem reflects her orientation with respect to the two prevailing environmental narratives (i.e., nationalist or rights-based). This orientation, in turn, depends on her understanding of the law, on the agency she represents, and on struggles within the bureaucracy over authority and resources. Protected areas like the MMPL are legally derived from the NIPAS Act and overseen by the DENR. As a result, the nationalist environmental narrative is built into the very structure of the MMPL and, it seems, taken for granted by most (though not all) of those involved in its implementation.

I came to this conclusion, in part, through spontaneous encounters with officials like Arnold and the man who discovered the caged civet. But I also interviewed many of the government and NGO personnel involved with the MMPL and asked them directly about the status of indigenous rights within protected areas. Not surprisingly, in an interview setting, few

⁹ Of these, four of the CALCs are listed as "pending" in the February 2010 edition of the MMPL Management Plan. The CADT is not listed in the Management, but its status remained pending when I last inquired in August 2012. Legally speaking, ancestral *claims* are different from ancestral *titles* insofar as the former were awarded prior to the passage of IPRA under a 1993 DENR Administrative Order (DENR DAO 02 1993). In 1997, IPRA institutionalized ancestral domain titles, with the expectation that existing CADCs would be converted to CADTs. Generally, that has not happened due to a lack of resources, with CADCs instead being treated as *de facto* CADTs in most instances. Under both the DAO 02 and IPRA, a distinction was made between ancestral *land* and ancestral *domain*, resulting in CALC and CALT instruments respectively. The difference between ancestral *land* and ancestral *domain* is that the former can be awarded to "individuals, families or class," while the latter can only be awarded to "indigenous cultural communities." Land Claims and Land Titles, moreover, only cover the land itself, not the resources contained there.

were as blunt as Arnold. Instead, most appealed to the idea that stewardship is a precondition of indigenous land rights. The management plan for any indigenous land claim¹⁰ should already be “harmonized” with that of a protected area, even if the land claim was granted prior to the protected area’s establishment. But what, I asked, would happen if indigenous people invoked their right to self-determination and simply refused to cooperate with conservation? Most officials dismissed any legal basis for this scenario, suggesting that it might result from indigenous culture, ignorance, or opportunism. Problems like this, I was told, could be avoided by adjusting uncooperative behavior through education and incentives.

Take, for example, the highest-ranking DENR official in Palawan. When I proposed this scenario to him, he laughed knowingly and recounted an experience in another province, where the indigenous residents—whom he referred with the acronym “IPs”—initially resisted a new protected area. They ultimately changed their mind, he explained, after being taught the value of protecting endangered wildlife. In spite of the “nomad character” that leads “IPs” to search for “greener pastures,” indigenous practices can, in his account, be “harmonized” with the rules of the protected area through “frequent dialog.” It is important, he added, to make indigenous people feel that they have priority status in a protected area and to make sure they do not go hungry. Otherwise, there will be “rebellion.” He acknowledged that indigenous practices did not result in “significant destruction” in the past, but still insisted that they should be regulated by government in the present. He gave the examples of hunting and swidden, both of which he said would be forbidden under a strict interpretation of NIPAS. Instead of forbidding them completely, which would run counter to IPRA, he suggested that such “traditional practices” be

¹⁰ Each officially recognized Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim or Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title has a corresponding Ancestral Domain Management Plan or Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan, which codifies customary law and sets out regulations for land tenure and use of natural resources.

allowed in certain zones and regulated. In his account, then, “harmony” entails a modification of indigenous practices to fit the rules of conservation, coupled with a prioritization of indigenous peoples’ subsistence needs.

Similarly, the Superintendent of the MMPL foresaw no such conflicts as long as Palawan residents limited themselves to “traditional” (i.e., subsistence-oriented) practices and avoided cutting large trees for any reason. At the same time, though, she also said it was necessary—and difficult—to “inject” new ideas into indigenous peoples’ minds. An employee of the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, which has a seat on the MMPL Management Board, came to the same conclusion from the opposite direction. He argued that indigenous people have abandoned their traditions of stewardship as a result of being “corrupted” by outside influences. His proposal was to “inculcate” them in the ecologically balanced ways of their own “forefathers.”

This view was echoed, in part, by the Project Director of the SPPC, who described indigenous residents of the MMPL as its “number-one violators.” But he did not necessarily see a return to tradition as the answer. Although he agreed that “traditional,” subsistence-oriented practices were compatible with conservation, he felt that some Palawan abuse the notion of tradition in an effort to have destructive, market-oriented practices exempted from conservation restrictions. Perhaps, he suggested, only Palawan who always wear their traditional loin cloth should have any right to invoke tradition. The rest should obey the law.

When I pressed him on how indigenous rights fit into the MMPL, his patience started to wear thin. The matter was very simple. Exhuming a scrap of blank paper from his cluttered desk, he drew for me a large circle and, within it, another, much smaller circle. The former, he said, represented a protected area like the MMPL, the latter an ancestral domain. Protected

areas, he explained, are part of a national “system”—NIPAS. Ancestral domains can be integrated into that system but not exempted from it. My thought experiment was irksomely naïve. “Who issued their CADT?” he asked, referring to the hypothetical indigenous group. “The government! The land belongs to the state, and it is the state that will prevail.” Customary rights, in his account, are secondary to state ownership of the land.

Though they vary in subtle ways, all of these accounts share a set of assumptions derived from the nationalist environmental narrative. They assume that Palawan living within the MMPL reside on public land and are, therefore, legally obliged to cooperate with conservation, even if that means restricting traditional practices like *swidden* and hunting. And yet it would be unfair to say that MMPL-affiliated personnel disregard indigenous rights. Most, in fact, see their work as entirely compatible with the provisions of IPRA. In these accounts, indigenous rights do not exist *sui generis*, but rather as a condition of Palawan cooperation with environmental government. Resistance thus becomes a negation of this social contract, whereas cooperation is thought to flow from a natural inclination toward stewardship, on the one hand, and from the application of regulatory (dis)incentives, on the other. Questions of power, sovereignty, coercion, and ontology are eclipsed by the narrative of harmony.

In the pursuit of harmony, government and NGO personnel have sought to raise public awareness of the MMPL’s “ecosystem services,” particularly the role that forests play in protecting watersheds from erosion, among those living within and around the protected area. They have provided livelihood incentives and “cultural preservation” resources to select Palawan communities. And, most importantly, they have followed legal guidelines for the protection of indigenous rights: securing “free and prior informed consent” from Palawan residents, exempting some traditional practices from prohibition, and placing Palawan representatives on the

Management Board. These practices correspond with an official narrative of cooperation and harmony—one that tempers the politically untenable implications of the nationalist environmental narrative even as it retains nationalist assumptions about difference, rights, and accountability.

We should not, however, confuse dominance with universality. Even within the bureaucracy, there are those who express opposing views. We have already encountered some who, like Arnold and to a certain extent the SPPC Project Manager, are openly skeptical that cooperation with the Palawan can proceed as imagined in policy. Toward the other end of the spectrum are those whose accounts align more closely with the rights-base narrative. They, in my experience, are mostly indigenous-rights activists and academics. In fact, among non-Palawan officials involved with the MMPL, only one argued that Palawan residents should have greater authority in managing the protected area. Singular though it was, this dissenting voice has important implications for understanding Palawan-government relations.

The voice in question belonged to Provincial Officer of the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), a subcabinet-level government agency that was established in 1997 to oversee the implementation of IPRA. The NCIP Officer felt that the MMPL put indigenous people at a “disadvantage” relative to migrants. They were disadvantaged, he said, for two primary reasons. First is that the Management Board was dominated by non-indigenous people, virtually all of whom live in the lowland towns if not in the provincial capital. Second, and more importantly, is that NIPAS contained provisions protecting the land tenure of migrants.

Recall how the 1975 Forestry Act often figures prominently in the nationalist environmental narrative because it classified much of the uplands as state-owned timberlands, including virtually all of far southwestern Palawan. In an ironic reworking of such thinking, the

NCIP official took this Marcos-era decree to its logical extremis. If, he argued, all the land in southwestern Palawan is timberland, then everyone there is squatting, including elected officials and employees of the municipal government. Here he also noted that the 1975 Forestry Act contained a provision protecting the land tenure of communities who lived on timberland for the thirty years leading up to 1975—a provision that would, in theory, apply to the Palawan. The fact that NIPAS protects migrant tenure is especially problematic, he argued, because migrants were responsible for destroying the forest. Palawan culture is oriented toward subsistence rather than accumulation and, thus, leaves the forest intact. In his mind, then, the best way to protect the forest would be to keep migrants out of it, something for which he saw little political will.

Although he laced his account with sarcasm, the NCIP official made several trenchant points. He highlighted contradictions in how the nationalist narrative invokes the law, found protections for indigenous land tenure even in the most nationalist-oriented of laws, and shifted blame for forest degradation away from indigenous people. And he did not stop there. His account also invoked IPRA and, more specifically, its requirement of “free and prior informed consent” (FPIC). Because the MMPL had met only the “minimum requirements” of FPIC, it had not yet formally transferred management authority currently vested in Palawan ancestral domains over to the MMPL Management Board. This he described as a “policy clash,” in sharp contrast with the language of “harmony” employed by so many other bureaucrats. Despite his strong interpretation of indigenous rights, the NCIP official hesitated when I asked whether the Palawan had a legal right to refuse to cooperate with conservation. He replied, instead, that indigenous groups could insist on managing a protected area themselves or on imposing protections that exceed those of NIPAS, such as demanding the eviction of migrant settlers. That

Palawan rarely assert these rights is not because they have come to a harmonious understanding with conservation, but instead because they are uninformed and intimidated.

If we translate the NCIP official's words into those of social theory, he identified what Laura Nader calls "coercive harmony"—a process by which a dominant ideology of 'harmony' conceals vast differences of power between conflicting interests, enabling the more powerful interests to dominate others. To me, this is a cogent analysis of what the harmony narrative does for the MMPL: it silences the cultural and political tensions that I describe in this chapter (and in Chapters 5 and 6). The rights-based narrative, by contrast, foregrounds them. And yet, the NCIP official's account should not read uncritically, for it too obscures politics in its own way.

Two issues in particular—bureaucratic rivalry and mining—lurked between the lines of his account. The rivalry in question mainly concerns the NCIP and the DENR. In 1993, the DENR began recognizing indigenous ancestral land claims and regulating the use of natural resources therein. Four years later, with the passage of IPRA, the NCIP was created to oversee all aspects of indigenous rights and land claims. I will discuss the ensuing rivalry in more detail in Chapter 6. For now it suffices to say that questions remain over what role each agency is meant to play in the regulation of indigenous environmental practices. This becomes an especially problematic issue when DENR-managed protected areas overlap with NCIP-recognized ancestral domains, as is the case with the MMPL.

NGOs are also implicated in this rivalry. In Chapter 3, I described how NGOs have played major roles in the establishment of both the MMPL and the ancestral domains within its boundaries. The NCIP official expressed his concern that some of the Palawan representatives on the MMPL Management Board were those recognized by NGOs rather than by the NCIP. Further, he accused the NGO Conservation International, which has played an instrumental role

in the MMPL's establishment, of trying to effect "policy change in Third World countries" for its own benefit. He said that CI planned to monetize the MMPL through carbon credits, and he doubted this would benefit indigenous people. For example, he complained, CI had declined his request for use of a vehicle, which would have enabled the NCIP to fully support the MMPL by conducting community-level consultations.

Entangled with these rivalries, mining is the other important subtext of the NCIP official's account. Rising global demand for rare earths has led to a mining rush in Palawan. At the time of my research, mining was among the most politically fraught issues in the province, in large measure because of the mining claims that overlapped both with the MMPL and with ancestral domains. A coalition of NGOs, including some run by indigenous people, has mounted a vigorous anti-mining campaign. For its part, though, the NCIP's Palawan office was widely regarded as supportive of mining. The official I interviewed skirted my question of whether mining would bring greater benefits to indigenous people than would conservation. Instead, he turned the conversation back toward "population pressure" from migrants, which he implied was a much greater threat than mining. He estimated, moreover, that a majority of the province's indigenous population supported mining; it was only a few "loud" individuals whose exposure to NGOs led them to oppose it.

When we take stock of these subtexts, we can better appreciate the multiple, countervailing political concerns embedded in the NCIP official's account. It was at once a robust critique of the nationalist narrative, a jealous assertion of bureaucratic authority, and a cynical co-optation of indigenous rights on behalf of mining. We saw, too, how the accounts that favored the nationalist narrative were fraught with veiled ambivalences as to the meaning of indigenous rights and cooperation. These multiply, at times duplicitously, layered narratives are

ciphers for the dilemmas that the Palawan face as they negotiate relations with competing government agencies and NGOs. Projects of environmental government—and the narratives that flank them—present the Palawan not only with conflicting visions for their accountability and rights, but also with competing efforts to recruit them into struggles over authority and resources. Indeed, regardless of whether officials favored the nationalist narrative or the rights-based narrative, they all seemed to agree that indigenous people like the Palawan were in need of benevolent state intervention. Whether this involves (re)orienting them toward environmental stewardship or emboldening them to assert their legal rights, the Palawan face the dilemma of mediating between institutions that claim to represent them but are dominated by external interests.

Even I had to grapple with this dilemma. In August 2012, I gave a final presentation of my research findings and recommendations to the research committee of the MMPL Management Board. My main recommendation was that Palawan at the local level, including *belyan* (shaman), have a greater say over how land is zoned for use. I expressed concern about the prohibition of swidden in certain areas (more on this in Chapter 5) and questioned the notion that “harmonization” would resolve existing problems with compliance. When asked for his response, an NCIP official in attendance emphatically agreed. He and his colleagues, he said, had received many complaints about the MMPL from indigenous communities who found its regulations on swidden and other practices too restrictive. He suggested, in effect, allowing indigenous groups to opt out of MMPL. What he did not acknowledge was how such a policy change might serve the interests of mining companies eager to operate within the protected area. Instead, echoing the language of the NCIP official I interviewed, he suggested that the DENR concentrate more on the activities of migrants than on those of indigenous people. There was an

awkward silence. Then, with an incredulous smirk, a representative of the DENR responded that her agency had utmost respect for indigenous culture and rights. Nevertheless, she continued, the law was the law, and no one was allowed to cut down large trees inside the MMPL.

In pushing for greater indigenous autonomy, I had positioned my research outside the narrative framing of the MMPL as an institution and risked aligning it with veiled interests whose motives I did not share. My perspective faced polite dismissal on the one hand and cooptation on the other, and I thus found myself in a predicament that the Palawan know all too well.

Narrative Alignments

So far we have seen how policy narratives like those contained in NIPAS, IPRA, and the MMPL Management Plan, along with public performances like the tree-planting ceremony, paper over the tensions of indigenous-state relations. But we have also seen how these tensions reemerge in the practices of individual officials, who are in turn embroiled in the politics of bureaucratic rivalry and resource extraction. This is the complicated political terrain that indigenous groups like the Palawan must negotiate.

With that in mind, I turn now to a brief discussion of how Palawan themselves engage with competing accounts of their rights and accountabilities. We saw above how spontaneous encounters, such as the civet incident, can reveal underlying tensions between MMPL officials and the Palawan. Indeed, in my experience, many Palawan had never heard of the MMPL, but those who had were generally agnostic, if not suspicious, of its professed aims. It was, some said, but the latest in a series of outside interventions that sought control of Palawan land and resources. And yet the Palawan are neither unanimous in their views of government nor passive in their engagements with it. In what follows, we will see how Palawan people approach

government with a shared sense of marginality even as they pursue their own competing agendas.

Let's return for a moment to the tree-planting ceremony I described above. Recall the question I posed to the MMPL official, about how the Palawan had "donated" the mountainside where the ipil saplings were being planted. Although the official rebuffed my question, Jimi and Palaya told me themselves that they were "giving" that land to the government (or, more precisely, that they were doing so on behalf of Palaya's parents). Jimi had even described the mountainside as "*lihyen*," a Palawan category for areas where activities like *swidden* are taboo (see Chapter 5). As I noted above, his selection of this site made for a seamless performance of indigenous-state cooperation. But Jimi was also making strategic use of the government in ways concealed by the performance of harmony.

Jimi had a number of concerns in mind. Many Palawan I knew were wary of government reforestation. Land planted with government-sponsored trees was, in effect, land removed from the *swidden* cycle. To preempt such an outcome, Jimi directed the government toward a mountainside that was, in his mind, already off limits. What's more, this land was at the center of a disagreement between two Palawan couples, who disagreed over whether it was *lihyen*. Jimi's parents-in-law had sold an adjacent plot of land, but had, they thought, retained the mountainside in question. Meanwhile, the couple who had purchased the land from Jimi's in-laws claimed their purchase had included the mountainside. The former saw the land as *lihyen*, the later as a future *swidden*. The resulting dispute put Jimi in an awkward position—between his wife's parents, on one hand, and his brother's wife's parents, on the other. As the most authoritative dispute mediator in Tenga't Gebaq, he could not simply defer the matter to someone else, nor could he show obvious favor to either side. Instead, by guiding the

government to plant hardwood saplings on the land, Jimi deferred the whole affair. As long as the government was protecting the newly planted saplings, no one would try to claim the land for swidden. The couple who had purchased the land were not especially pleased with this outcome, but there was little they could do.

Performances like the tree-planting ceremony are scripted by policy narratives of harmony. As such, they serve to conceal the tensions that participants bring to them. Above we saw how the ceremony papered over tensions both within government as well as between government and the Palawan. Here I have briefly revisited the ceremony to underscore its masking of tensions among the Palawan (even as it was implicated in those tensions). In this brief glimpse into the micro-politics surrounding the ceremony, we can also see some of the ambivalences that the Palawan bring to their encounters with environmental government. Jimi was the only Palawan who participated in the ceremony, and even he tried to avoid doing so. Indeed, many Palawan distrust government conservation and believe that officials, like the one I spoke with that day, see Palawan participation as little more than a formality. And yet, Jimi was far from a passive bystander to this event. Working behind the scenes, he positioned it in a way that he considered most favorable to Palawan interests, including his own. The event enabled him, on one hand, to neutralize a local dispute while deflecting any resulting resentment toward the state. And, on the other, it enabled him to perform harmonious relations with the government without losing clearable land.

Palawan often deal with the state through what James Scott famously termed “weapons of the weak”—foot dragging, minor acts of interference, sheer avoidance—which serve to limit the power of state interventions without recourse to outright resistance. To some extent, this is an accurate portrayal of Jimi’s behind-the-scenes handling of the tree-planting activity. At the

same time, however, his actions went beyond that. He engaged the state in a proactive and indeed calculated way that is not captured by Scott's notion of resistance. By cooperating publicly while pursuing private concerns, Jimi quietly repurposed the authority of the state in a manner he deemed most congenial to local interests. In this sense, even as they suppress tensions, public performances of harmony narratives may also provide a strategic cover for the many competing agendas that Palawan and their government counterparts bring to the table. Harmony, it seems, entails more than a coercive silencing of subordinate interests; it can also provide a convenient subterfuge for their pursuit.

But concealment is not the only role that environmental narratives play in Palawan micro-politics. Palawan also produce their own environmental narratives that rework and challenge official accounts of their role in environmental change. On the one hand, we can read these narratives as a cipher for how tensions among the Palawan map onto their uneven relations with government. On the other, Palawan narratives also reflect a shared sense of ambivalence and distrust with respect to government in general. In my experience, some of the most interesting and telling narrative work took place when externally recognized Palawan leaders were speaking to fellow Palawan about environmental regulation and its relationship to their *keedatan*, a pliable word that roughly translates as custom or tradition.¹¹ Environmental narratives constructed in such contexts are, I would argue, crucial idioms for mediating difference among the Palawan, government agencies, and NGOs. Let's consider this point through a brief anecdote.

¹¹ The root of *keedatan* is *adat*, a term used in different parts of the Malay-speaking world most often in reference to customary law. The Palawan use *adat* and its collective or plural derivation *keedatan* to describe Palawan customary law, Palawan culture in a more general sense, and, when used in the singular, the personality or moral character of an individual.

On another sweltering July afternoon, I joined a group of Palawan men and women who had sought refuge from the sun beneath the thatched roof of a bamboo vending stall. Despite the heat, they had hiked in from their respective villages, some quite distant, to attend the weekly *tabuqan*. The *tabuqan*—an occasion marked as much by socializing and card-playing as by commerce—is the Palawan answer to the intensely commercial “market days” held on a weekly basis in lowland towns. *Tabuqan* also provide convenient venues for informal meetings about whatever problems, events, and gossip are on people’s minds. Concerns over new environmental regulations were the topic of the conversation when I happened upon it that day.

“In the past,” Bordo explained, “there were no laws. Now we have the laws of the DENR, laws of the NCIP, laws of the PCSD, laws of the KSK, even the laws of the PNNI and ELAC.” With this flourish of acronyms, Bordo invoked a series of government agencies, as well as two NGOs, whose enforcement activities have implications for Palawan livelihood practices. To denote government-imposed laws, he used the Tagalog word *batas*, emphasizing their foreignness and distinctiveness from Palawan customary law (*adat* or *keedatan*). “It’s difficult,” he continued, “to know which law to follow. One says we have the right to [practice] our traditional livelihoods like swidden and [hunting of] birds and wild pigs. Another says swidden is forbidden, as are birds and pigs. Which are we supposed to follow?”

An elder recognized as a leader by government and NGOs, Bordo was reacting to a notice that had caught his eye during a recent visit to the municipal hall. The notice, he said, listed the Palawan bearded pig among the species strictly protected and forbidden to hunt. Such a classification came as a shock. According to their understanding of the law, Bordo and his fellow Palawan representatives believe that they are legally entitled to engage in “traditional” livelihood practices, especially within their ancestral domain claim. Pig hunting, unlike practices

tied more directly to commodity markets, is considered a quintessentially traditional pursuit among the Palawan, and legally informed Palawan like Bordo believe that IPRA protects pig hunting as a traditional livelihood. But pig hunting is also banned completely by the Wildlife Act and selectively by zoning scheme used by the MMPL.

Bordo's speech expressed frustration with the many contradictory signals of environmental policy—an observation made frequently not just by Palawan, but also by non-indigenous farmers and even officials at (non)governmental agencies. I had not yet seen the notice in question, so I asked Bordo whether it had something to do with the MMPL. He struggled to remember what the acronym stood for, eventually suggesting that his rival, Jimi, must have given consent for the protected area. He then asked me to inquire into the matter of pig hunting during my upcoming visit to the provincial capital, where I would be attending a meeting regarding the MMPL.¹² Municipal environmental officers, he said, had referred his own queries to officials in the capital.

Bordo might have been unfamiliar with the MMPL, but he was nonetheless fluent in conservation narratives more generally. Besides me, his audience that day included a dozen or so Palawan men and women, most of whom were elders. Lest we mistake his opposition to a hunting ban as a condemnation of *all* environmental regulation, Bordo shifted his tone for the remainder of his impromptu speech. First he publicly scolded his nephew, who had been seen trying to sell myna hatchlings (*Gracula religiosa*). Collecting birds for sale was not, he argued,

¹² I subsequently checked and photographed the notice in the municipal hall. It turned out to be a poster aiming to raise awareness of the Wildlife Act. It did not address indigenous rights or land claims. Officials in the municipal office of the DENR referred me to their provincial-level office, although they said that they thought “traditional” hunting practices were exempted from the Wildlife Act of 2001 (Republic Act 9147). I then asked various members of the MMPL Management Board about the legalities of hunting pig and other game. All of them said, in essence, that Palawan were legally permitted to hunt, as long as they did for subsistence purposes only (i.e., no selling of game) and used traditional equipment (i.e., no firearms or other modern tools). One official said they could hunt for ritual purposes and then imitated Palawan dancing. When I asked her which of their rituals involve pig hunting or pig meat, she referred vaguely to the ritual offering of pig meat.

part of Palawan *keedatan* (customs, traditions, conduct). Did they want, he asked rhetorically, to make others rich at their own expense by depleting all the wild birds? His nephew had to promise not to do anything like that again. Then Bordo offered a cautionary tale of what would happen if his nephew and others did not “follow” their traditions. On his last trip to Manila, he said, what he had encountered was “very bad” (*meyaqat banar*): bald mountains, smoky air, dirty rivers, garbage in the streets. He connected these conditions to the typhoons that frequently cause massive flooding in the national capital. By contrast, Bordo continued, Palawan is still “very good” (*menunga banar*), with intact forests (*tege gebaq nge it kabukidan*), clean water, and no typhoons or floods comparable to those in other parts of the country.¹³ His underlying theory—that environmental degradation is a symptom of moral degradation, which in turn invites punishment in the form of adverse events like typhoons—is one I encountered on multiple occasions in my conversations with Palawan elders.



Figure 19: the posters seen by Bordo at the municipal DENR office in Rizal town. (photo by author, July 2011)

¹³ *Meyaqat* and *menunga*—the terms Bordo used to describe Manila and Palawan respectively—have both aesthetic and moral implications.

To drive his point home, Bordo concluded by invoking a momentous chapter in local history. During the countrywide chaos of the waning Marcos dictatorship, anti-government rebels were encamped in the foothills and mountains of southern Palawan. The rebels, Bordo reminded us, forced the departure of Marcos-affiliated logging companies and thus protected the almaciga trees whose commercially valuable resin is the primary source of local livelihoods. The same rebels who demanded food, recruited local youth against the wishes of their parents, and occasionally killed suspected spies turned out to be allies in the protection of Palawan resources from predatory outsiders. Today, Bordo concluded, their ancestral domain claim (“CADC”) is what keeps outsiders from taking their land—but even the CADC would not have been possible without the assistance of NGOs and government.

In Bordo’s narrative, Palawan’s persistence as a place of ‘goodness’ has depended not only on Palawan *keedatan* but also on alliances, both intentional and involuntary, that have protected Palawan land and resources. Early in his speech, Bordo made a passing reference to mining—an issue that, in other parts of the island, has required Palawan communities to engage in difficult and divisive negotiations with government agencies, NGOs, and corporations. Bordo left it up to his audience to decide what exactly to make of this juxtaposition of pig hunting, bird selling, logging, mining, rebels, and government. But what he seemed to be saying is that interventions by more powerful others are inevitable but not without their advantages.¹⁴ As the rebels did to the loggers of the Marcos era, government conservation may do to the miners of the present. This may seem like a simple truism. For the Palawan, though, the question of how best

¹⁴ I was not the only one who came away with this lesson. After Bordo finished, a couple of men who had been listening (and whom I had not met before) made it a point to speak with me. They told me that Bordo was right about the rebels and the CADC—that it was important to keep outsiders from taking their land and resources. But they also wanted me to know that they did not agree with Bordo’s implied support for a ban on hunting birds. Bordo had spoken against *selling* birds, but he had not defended hunting birds in the same manner as hunting pigs. The men were eager to ensure that I, who had been taking notes, would also record bird hunting as a “traditional” practice, alongside pig hunting.

to navigate the many interventions they face is far from simple. Bordo was grappling with it in his speech, as was Jimi in his participation in the tree-planting ceremony. The paradox of intermediacy, as described above, requires that Palawan act as arbiters of competing environmental projects even as they occupy a position of structural and cultural marginality. How Palawan negotiate this paradox will, in Bordo's narrative, determine their ecological and moral future.

A different form of positionality should be addressed here—both Bordo's and my own. I suspect, first of all, that my presence had some influence on what he chose to say that afternoon. By that time we had developed very good rapport, but I was nonetheless associated with his rival with whom he had an ongoing legal dispute. Bordo may have wanted to ensure that I would not misconstrue his position as one of total opposition to conservation. In addition, Bordo was obliquely defending his record as a Palawan representative and leader. As I will explain in detail in Chapter 6, Bordo had promoted the establishment of the CADC in the 1990s and had been in charge of its management ever since. During his tenure, the association that oversees the CADC had run up massive debts with financiers of the almaciga resing trade and found itself in a prolonged lawsuit that had resulted in the suspension of the association's almaciga permits. Both his allies and opponents had complained to me that the boundaries between his own business pursuits and those of the association had blurred over the years. Bordo was, in other words, an entrepreneur with strong connections to external authorities, including NGOs and government agencies, of which many Palawan are suspicious. It makes sense, then, that he began his impromptu speech with a lament about conflicting environmental regulations, but ended it with an oblique defense of the CADC and its entanglements.

For the Palawan, environmental narratives provide a pliant idiom not only for negotiating relations with competing government agencies, NGOs, and business interests, but also for mediating their own internal alliances and enmities. Jimi, whom I introduced earlier, and Bordo were rivals, enemies even. As I will detail in Chapter 5, their enmity owed, in part, to a bitter legal dispute over almaciga-trading permits, but also to their long-standing competition over externally conferred titles and authority. To make a long story short, Jimi was recognized by the NCIP and the municipal government as a “chieftain,” while Bordo was recognized by an NGO and the DENR as the “president” of the CADC.¹⁵ We saw this pro-CADC alignment at work in Bordo’s narrative. Jimi, by contrast, had refused to sign on to the CADC when it was established due to his distrust of Bordo and the DENR. Jimi infused his own narratives with this distrust while at the same time using parental metaphors to characterize the NCIP’s “protection” of indigenous people. In particular, he liked to contrast the legally guaranteed “freedom” (*kalayaan*) of indigenous people with the DENR’s restrictions on swidden and forest products.

We could, then, read Jimi and Bordo’s narratives as ciphers for conflicting allegiances among the Palawan. Here, however, what most interests me are the patterns that their accounts share. In particular, I noticed that, regardless of their external allegiances, Palawan environmental narratives tended to feature critical commentary on what I referred to above as the paradox of intermediacy (i.e., the paradox that the Palawan are legally positioned as intermediaries for competing visions of environmental regulation even though their societal position remains one of marginality). Like many Palawan elders I knew, both Jimi and Bordo pointed to the irony that conservation projects target the Palawan even though migrant

¹⁵ The NGO that recognized Bordo was NATRIPAL (United Tribes of Palawan), which has been very active in helping its member associations obtain CADCs and CADTs, including the CADC that Bordo’s association oversees. At the time of my research, Bordo still considered himself and his association to be members of NATRIPAL, but key NATRIPAL personnel had distanced themselves from Bordo.

lowlanders are the ones who have most dramatically transformed the landscape. Likewise, Bordo, Jimi, and many of their fellows narrated the Palawan role in environmental change as one that depended not on benevolent government intervention, but on Palawan moral integrity and resourcefulness. In this sense, environmental narratives also serve as idioms of solidarity among the Palawan.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this came in the form of counter-narratives that explicitly challenged the scientific premises of official narratives. For example, I frequently heard Palawan elders discount official claims that swidden, as a cause of deforestation, contributes to floods and landslides. Their counter-narratives defended traditional Palawan practices and placed blame instead on broader changes associated with the mass arrival of Christian migrants (whom the Palawan refer to as “Kabisayaan”).¹⁶ Swidden, they argued, was practiced by the Palawan long before the arrival of the Kabisayaan. Thus, they asked: if swidden caused deforestation, flooding, and landslides, why would such phenomena have been so rare in the past? Rather, torrential rain and other adverse events are said to reflect moral lapses in human conduct (i.e., of *adat* or *keedatan*). That is, when people behave immorally (*ba meyaqat it adat diye*), they risk angering deities and other powerful beings who can afflict calamities, including typhoons and earthquakes.¹⁷ Unpredictable weather is also said to be a result of this process, since the predictable dry and rainy seasons that enable good swidden outcomes are also considered a reflection of the overall moral quality of human behavior.

¹⁶ Kabisayaan is the collective form of the demonym Bisaya, which denotes people from the Visayas region of the central Philippines. Despite denoting a particular ethnolinguistic region, Kabisayaan is the term the Palawan use to refer to all Christian Filipinos regardless of whether they identify with regions other than the Visayas.

¹⁷ The precise identity of these powerful beings varied from one speaker to another. Some said that *Empuq it Nagbaal* (the Creator) would punish Palawan for their transgressions. Others said they did not know or that it could be various deities, such as those that control *barat* (the southwest monsoon) or the wind.

In a variation on this theme, my “uncle” Juhali—a *belyan* who was very critical of government conservation activities—explained to me that the “sweat” of boulders (*linget et kabatuan*) is also a source of water that can cause flooding. When bad conduct makes the earth “hot,” he said, the boulders in the mountains sweat, leading to flooding downstream. (For both the human body and the land, Palawan associate coolness with health and heat with illness.) Immoral behavior, in these narratives, included specific actions like incest, excessive drinking, and interpersonal violence as well as more general attitudinal changes resulting from the “forgetting” of Palawan traditions (lit. “the ways of the ancestors,” *keedatan et kaguranggurangan*).¹⁸ Many elders complained that the Palawan are no longer “following” their own *keedatan*, but rather that of the Kabisayaan, from whom they are adopting not just new morals, but also a radically different lifestyle involving sedentary, intensive agriculture, mass media consumption, and money.¹⁹

As I will explain in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6, Palawan ethics favor reciprocal sharing of swidden cultigens, particularly rice, and wild food sources, particularly honey, while discouraging commodification. Their ethics also call for the redistribution of larger game, particularly wild pigs, which is supposed to be given to a respected elder for division among neighboring households. As Palawan focus less on swidden and hunting and more on cash-generating activities, and as they increasingly break with traditional ethics by commodifying swidden cultigens and wild foods, the attendant decline of reciprocity and redistribution in favor of monetized exchange is frequently cited by elders as a major factor in the broader process of moral and ecological decline.

¹⁸ Palawan morals strongly proscribe incest, particularly when it involves immediate family members and first cousins. Elders claim that their forebears used to kill incestuous couples who refused to separate.

¹⁹ In the process of discounting the association of swidden with flooding, one elder I interviewed associated incest and sexual indiscretion, blaming television in particular for changing sexual mores among the youth.

Also central to this counter-narrative is an irony that Juhali and other elders would highlight with no small measure of resentment. That is, Palawan have never cleared the forest on a scale comparable to what the Kabisayaan have done, and it is the latter who now seek to control swidden and other Palawan uses of the forest. Juhali frequently reminded me and others that the Palawan have their own ways of regulating forest use. Contrary to what outsiders believe, Palawan do not clear the forest wherever they please (“*misan embe lang*”). Instead, he insisted, they practice divination or dream interpretation, which tells them whether it is safe to clear certain areas of forest—that is, whether one has permission from the forest’s invisible occupants (*taw’t talun*, see Chapter 5). Kabisayaan, by contrast, just clear any expanses of land that suit them. Such actions pay no heed to the claims of invisible beings, who then exact their vengeance in the form of illness and poor harvests.



Figure 20: land being cleared and enclosed by Christian settlers, backed by investors from Manila, for coconut and pineapple plantations, a few kilometers downstream of Tenga’t Gebaq. (photo by author, April 2011)



Figure 21: a new rubber tree plantation, owned by a wealthy settler family, a few kilometers downstream of Tenga't Gebaq. (photo by author, August 2012)

This ethical critique fits into a larger moral economy in which the Palawan interpret government conservation as a form of negative reciprocity. As Juhali explained it, the Palawan are being “squeezed” (*nagipit*) further and further into the mountains and then being asked to curtail swidden—the very basis of their way of life—for the sake of lowland agriculture. Meanwhile, forests in the lowlands have been cleared without any regard to their invisible inhabitants. The resulting vengeance, Juhali claimed, is borne disproportionately by the Palawan, most of whom do not have access to the same protective magic (*kependayan*) or medicine (*ubat*) as the Kabisayaan.²⁰

²⁰ Palawan frequently referred to fertilizer and pesticide as examples of the “medicine” (*ubat*) that the Kabisayaan used to protect themselves from the consequences of their own ethical faults. But some also referred to more mysterious forms of “magic” (*kependayan*) that they suspected the Kabisayaan of having.

Likewise, fewer and fewer Palawan are said to take proper “care” (*pang-ipat*) of their swidden rice, which they analogize to the care of children—‘if you care badly for your children, your children will be bad; the same for rice’ (*ba meyaqat it pang-ipat et meraga, meyaqat it meraga; kwantin gasi it pang-ipat et paray*). Building a “seat” (*pinedungan*) for the rice spirit, ritually washing the rice stalks (*pegtipas*), and avoiding work in the swidden during certain phases of the moon—all such practices were said to be in decline. The same is true for post-harvest rituals, including the *basalan* and *pangaw*, at which offerings are made as a form of thanksgiving or recompense to deities, *taw’t talun*, and ancestors. By neglecting such rituals in favor of cash-generating activities, church participation, and other ‘foreign’ practices, Palawan located the decline of the swidden system within broader cultural and environmental changes that have accompanied the arrival of the Kabisayaan.

In short, Palawan counter-narratives charge the Kabisayaan with driving the dual degradation of the environment and the Palawan way of life—not simply because traditional practices are in decline, but because newly adopted practices are not seen as morally worthy of favorable environmental conditions. By positing themselves as morally superior but political subordinate to the Kabisayaan, Palawan assign themselves a benign role in the drama of environmental and cultural change. By contrast, non-Palawan people in the lowlands are cast both as the leading culprits of environmental degradation and as the primary beneficiaries of restrictions intended to protect watersheds. Such a characterization challenges both the efficacy and the justness of restrictions on Palawan livelihoods. In this way, Palawan incorporate conservation regulations into a moral economy in which they constitute a form of negative reciprocity. As Bordo’s narrative suggested, current government interventions are but the latest in a series of efforts to recruit and/or dispossess the Palawan. Whether driven by rebels, NGOs,

or the state, these interventions may command coercive power, but gain legitimacy only when they are seen as providing something in return for what they demand. The rebels, for instance, were a threatening presence, but Bordo remembered them with respect because they protected Palawan almaciga trees.

We have seen, then, that Palawan use environmental narratives to negotiate their accountabilities to competing outside interests, to their fellows, and to their own personal ambitions. As a result, their narratives reflect heterogeneity and even discord within the Palawan population, particularly when they express conflicting allegiances to competing government institutions or business interests.

More importantly, though, Palawan use environmental narratives to make sense of their shared, often difficult experiences of cultural, social, and ecological change. Some, like Bordo, emphasized the importance of balancing skepticism with strategic cooperation. Others, like Juhali, were more cynical and defiant. In my experience, though, Palawan did not intend their counter-narratives as performances for audiences of government officials. (Such performances took place on occasion and were recounted proudly by Juhali and other outspoken elders. But in face-to-face encounters like the tree-planting ceremony, Palawan were far more likely to perform the harmony narrative even if only as a cover for behind-the-scenes maneuvers.) Rather, Palawan counter-narratives served primarily as an exercise in building critical consciousness among the Palawan themselves. While the scientific claims of official narratives were at stake, even more important were questions of accountability, rights, and obligations. Through their environmental narratives, Palawan demystify the paradox of intermediacy, which the harmony narrative and its performances obscure. Particularly when infused with appeals to indigenous

cultural rights, Palawan narratives offer a cogent critique of regulation and accountability in the contemporary Philippines.

Conclusion

Scholars have developed the concept of “environmental narratives” to describe overly simplistic but politically authoritative accounts of environmental change (e.g., Forsyth and Walker 2008). Such narratives often inform not just policy, but the ideologies of those responsible for implementing it. As scholars like Forsyth and Walker have shown, the danger of environmental narratives is that they inaccurately portray certain groups of people, particularly marginalized groups, and thereby justify misguided interventions that further disadvantage them. Without a doubt, this happens in Philippines. In a pattern similar to what Forsyth and Walker have observed in Thailand, Philippine indigenous groups like the Palawan often find themselves singled out as either “guardians” or “destroyers” of the forest (see Theriault 2011). These narratives rest on contrasting but comparably simplistic assumptions about indigenous peoples’ rights, obligations, and accountabilities, which are in turn reflected in competing policies like NIPAS and IPRA (Bryant 2000). In practice, these competing narratives are reconciled by a third, equally simplistic narrative, that of “harmony,” as I discussed in detail above.

Prevailing environmental narratives in the Philippines, as elsewhere, are overly simplistic and potentially harmful. In this chapter, however, my analysis has been concerned less with correcting their (in)accuracies than with tracing what environmental narratives *do* at the level of micro-politics (cf. Alatout 2006, who argues that they are effects of power that produce difference). Among my primary aims in this dissertation is to uncover some of the unexpected complications that arise when states attempt to incorporate minority populations and their

environments into regulatory institutions. The dissertation's title refers to the sources of these complications ironically as "agencies of the environmental state," suggesting that they can be as important to shaping regulatory outcomes as is "the state" itself. Among these so-called agencies are environmental narratives.

This chapter has examined some of the ways in which environmental narratives serve *at the micro level* to advocate, disguise, and otherwise mediate relationships between the diverse parties to environmental regulation. When we treat environmental narratives solely as macro-scale discourses, we ignore this critical, micro-level work that they do. Likewise, when we see environmental narratives only as a form of (inaccurate) technocratic knowledge, we overlook the way in which actual people—bureaucrats and indigenous farmers alike—re/produce and rework narratives to negotiate competing ideas about environmental change and its accountabilities. Accounts offered by bureaucrats involved with the MMPL differed in revealing ways in terms of how they framed indigenous peoples' rights and obligations, but were united in their naturalizing of government authority. Meanwhile, accounts offered by Palawan living inside the MMPL differed in terms of their allegiances, but shared a moral economy that in turn undergirded a critical orientation toward the power of the Kabsisayaan.

Unlike a focus on knowledge per se, which might posit indigenous "metis" (Scott 1998) in radical alterity to bureaucratic technoscience, environmental narratives are a genre in which epistemologically incongruent visions of the world can intermingle. This is one of the ways in which profound differences of knowledge, culture, and power can be papered over for the sake of performing cooperation and harmony. But it is also through environmental narratives that particular registers of difference are (re)produced and emphasized. Recently, Paul Nadasdy (2003) and Andrew Mathews (2011), among others, have offered contrasting accounts of how

knowledge (or the lack thereof) plays a fundamental role in the operation of environmental government and of governmental power more generally.

In Nadasdy's account, the appropriation and distillation of local knowledge is a crucial dimension of how states come to dominate minority populations and their environments. In Mathew's account, by contrast, it is through selective and at times willful ignorance that bureaucrats extend the reach of their power over unfamiliar terrain. To a certain extent, Nadasdy and Mathews are describing different kinds of states—the liberal, multiculturalist Canadian state, on the one hand, and the more authoritarian, personalistic Mexican state, on the other. Still, their contrasting accounts of how states come to (not) know the people and environments at their margins point us in opposite directions in terms of theorizing the epistemic dimension of regulatory power. Do bureaucracies derive power from their ability to distill complexity or from their ability to simply ignore it? The seeming disconnect between these perspectives can, it seems, be bridged when we take account of how environmental narratives work to mask power differences, on the one hand, and ignorance, on the other.

My analysis differs from Anna Tsing's (2003) account of "agrarian allegories," which she contends have shifted in order to enable new, potentially transformative collaborations between urban environmental activists and rural people. While that may be true in some instances, environmental narratives—including tribal agrarian allegories—perform just as powerful a role in masking the sorts of deep misunderstandings, deficits of trust, ignorance, and "aporia" that so often characterize relations between minority people and the state (Wainwright and Bryan 2009). Likewise, I would oppose seeing environmental narratives primarily as a form of "virtualism" in Carrier's sense of how virtual or theoretical models, such as that of the rational economic actor, become so pervasive that the world is literally remade in their image (Carrier

and Miller 1998). Because urban elites are not alone in constructing environmental narratives, such stories can also be ways in which minority groups advocate for their own autonomy, challenge or remake dominant readings of difference, and offer their own take on the causes, effects, and accountabilities of environmental government.

In the case addressed here, these counter-narratives may not find a sympathetic audience beyond fellow Palawan, and they may at times involve their own deceptions and obfuscations. But they nevertheless play an important role in mediating and shaping Palawan relations with government. Moreover, although Palawan counter-narratives focus largely on lamenting the inequities of the present against the foil of a simpler, more wholesome past, their moral implications largely concern the future. Within their backward-looking moral critique of conservation are alternative visions of accountability and justice. Some, like Bordo, appeal to a sort of “future anterior” (Povinelli 2011: 12-13), in which the critique of government regulation is tempered by the threat of other outside interests. Others, like Juhali, reject such a temporality entirely, calling instead for a retrieval of Palawan traditions from their exile at the margins of the government’s own versions of the future anterior. Either way, as Ken George (1993) has reminded us, narrative performances whose literal content is fixated on the past often speak obliquely to ideals of belonging and citizenship in the future.

In other words, environmental narratives do more than lead policymakers to misguided interventions; they serve as a genre for interpreting those interventions and imagining alternatives to them. Simplified representations of environmental change can convey *both* universalizing, scientific claims to authority *and* place-specific, indigenous counterclaims. Environmental narratives are more than a legitimization of top-down regulation; they are a

vector for positioning and mediating the increasingly central role of indigenous people in environmental politics.

Above I asserted that a “paradox of intermediacy” characterizes contemporary relations between minority/indigenous groups and government in the Philippines. The paradox of intermediacy is one in which indigenous people are at the center of environmental politics even though they remain structurally and culturally marginalized in society as a whole (Tsing 1993). In the Philippines, the Palawan and other indigenous-identified groups are positioned by law, ideology, and often geography to serve as intermediaries between opposing visions for the future of present-day frontiers and, by extension, for the future of society. As will become clear in Chapters 5 and 6, the great irony of this situation is that it contains both the seeds of their empowerment and of their dispossession.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Dreams of Others: Palawan Ontology and the Fantasies of Environmental Government

It was the end of a typical day in the village. As the sun disappeared behind the trees, everyone gathered to watch television together in Jimi and Palaya's house. Jimi and Palaya were the only ones in the village with a generator and TV/DVD set. They were also my hosts, so I too participated in this nightly ritual—no matter how tired I was from a day of fieldwork. We always watched either a Korean soap opera or a Filipino action film. Not a fan of either genre, I often spent this time outside, enjoying the cool night air and chatting with passers-by. Even then, however, I tried to keep an ear tuned to the gasps, laughs, and comments of the audience inside the house. Their reactions to the melodrama of pop culture proved to be a valuable source of insight into Palawan ideas about gender, kinship, and moral conduct.

On the night in question, the TV ritual lasted no more than an hour before the old generator ran dry and sputtered to a stop. Within minutes, everyone had filed out of the house, extracted their cell phones from the tangle of cords around the communal outlet, and walked home in the moonlight. As I settled into my bed, I chatted with Jimi, Palaya, and their kids through the bamboo walls—another regular evening ritual. We covered the usual topics of interest. “Right now it's about six in the morning in America ... I don't know if it's sunny there today, but it's usually hot this time of year ... Yes, tomorrow I need to do more interviews.”

Just as my thoughts were fading to the black of sleep, I heard a rustling somewhere around my bed, then a sinister but indistinct whisper. Before I could react, a bony hand swept across my face and clamped itself over my nose and mouth. Something heavy then set itself

down on my chest, as if someone were sitting astride me. Twitching my arms and legs, I found that I was virtually paralyzed. I cried out for help, but my voice was muffled by the powerful hand. What must have been but a few moments seemed to stretch on for hours.

Then I heard a voice. It was Bina, Palaya and Jimi's daughter. "Mom," she cried, "what's going on?!" Her voice quaked with genuine alarm.

As I lay there in a cold sweat, my heart pounding, I realized that I had been dreaming. I had no idea how long I had been sleeping or how long my dream had lasted in waking time. Clearly, though, I had been loud enough to frighten Bina.

"He was dreaming," Jimi said, with no small measure of alarm in his own voice. "Noah, are you okay?" he asked. "Yes," I replied, "it was a bad dream." Startled but still exhausted, I soon fell back to sleep, only vaguely aware of an owl hooting somewhere nearby.

The next morning, as we sat sipping instant coffee, I apologized to Palaya and Jimi for disturbing them and the kids. I found out that they had not slept well, that poor Bina and her younger sister had been too frightened to sleep alone, and that the several households who had heard my muffled cries had felt an ominous presence in the air afterward. They smiled humanely at my apologies, saying "no, we feel sorry for you, that you experienced such a thing here in our place! We thought you were going to die."

"You thought I was going to... *die*?" My dream, Jimi explained, was what the Palawan call a *deletdet*—a potentially lethal type of nightmare recognized in many East and Southeast Asian societies.¹ Jimi had been rising to intervene when I awoke. If I had not done so on my own, he would have had to fetch a *belyan*, a shaman, to try and prevent my death.

¹ According to Macdonald (n.d.), the Palawan in other areas also use the words *penglek* and *bangunut* to refer to this type of nightmare.

“It was the owl,” Palaya whispered. “The owl?” I asked, confused. Jimi and Palaya elaborated on their theory that the owl had brought the *deletdet* on me. I knew that Palawan considered owls to be bad omens and potentially malevolent, but this was the first I had heard about an owl attacking a person in a dream. Palaya and Jimi would not venture a guess as to *why* the owl had attacked me, and their nervous laughter told me not to pursue the matter further until the danger had passed. Even under normal circumstances, most Palawan are reticent about discussing matters of *kependayan* (magic or sorcery). Over the coming days, however, I would learn that owls are shape-shifters that can attack in various ways, such as by appearing in dreams or by taking the form of trusted familiars in need of a place to stay only to eat one’s flesh while one sleeps.



Figure 22: everyone gathered to watch TV. (photo by author, April 2011)

In short, what for me was a fleeting if intense nightmare (and perhaps a side effect of my anti-malaria medication) was for my Palawan hosts a potentially deadly act of owl sorcery. To

them, it was mysterious and difficult to interpret, yet it was no less “real” or frightening than if it had happened while I was awake. This is because Palawan do not conceive of dreams as fragments of an unconscious mind whose experiences are ontologically segregated from waking life. Rather, dreams are what certain elements of the person do while other elements are asleep.² Dream experiences can, therefore, have direct consequences for the dreamer and the community—as, for example, when one is attacked by an owl or other malevolent being. Or they can serve as omens about future events or actions. My nightmare was interpreted not just as an attack, but also as a warning that I should limit my travel outside the village. This obliged me to postpone a long-awaited trip to villages higher up in the mountains, and thus I learned firsthand how, even for a visiting anthropologist, dreams can have very material consequences.

Dreams are a complex matter in any society, and I cannot claim to have a full understanding of their psychological or social significance among the Palawan. Nevertheless, dreams permeate this chapter both as a source of empirical insight and as a critical metaphor. On the one hand, my analysis looks to dreamlife in pursuit of a broader ontological question: how do Palawan ways of being shape their relationships with the environment? Dreams help to answer this question because they offer insight into Palawan relations with the invisible beings with whom they share the landscape. These relations are empirically elusive but, I argue, far from immaterial in their ecological and political consequences.

On the other hand, this chapter also engages with dreams in a metaphorical sense. My analysis compares Palawan ontology with the “dream” of co-management, represented in this study by the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape. Policymakers in the Philippines have sought to merge bureaucratic conservation regimes with indigenous customary institutions,

² Palawan refer to these personal elements as *kurudwa* or, roughly, souls, of which each person has multiple.

seeing the latter as a natural fit for the former. Efforts to realize this “green development fantasy” (Tsing 1999) have met with unexpected complications (Dressler 2009; McDermott 2000; Minter 2010; Novellino 2007). In Chapters 2 and 3, I critiqued the historical amnesia entailed by this fantasy and highlighted its role in an ongoing process of colonization. I then showed, in Chapter 4, how competing visions of indigenous stewardship both animate and efface an unexpected politicization of environmental knowledge at the local level.

In this chapter, I argue that the complications encountered by co-management are not just ideological or epistemological, but also ontological. As indigenous people, the Palawan are enjoined to manage their land in cooperation with the state, but also entitled to do so “in accordance with their indigenous knowledge, beliefs, systems, and practices.” This policy assumes that indigenous practices are compatible, or at least reconcilable, with government regulation of the environment. In practice, however, it is extremely difficult to reconcile certain aspects of Palawan ontology with that of the bureaucratic state. A major sticking point, I argue, is that the state’s recognition of the Palawan does not extend to the invisible people with whom they share the landscape. If this observation seems absurd, reconsider it as follows: By failing to account for Palawan relations with their invisible counterparts, co-management ontologically omits a critical part of the very ecology it seeks to regulate.

As I will explain in detail below, Palawan uses of land and resources sometimes conflict with those of their invisible neighbors. Because these conflicts can be very dangerous, Palawan ethics call for restraint in the clearing of forest and the hunting or gathering of particular organisms. This ethic may seem well suited for cooperation with government conservation programs. In practice, however, the Palawan ethic of restraint coincides only superficially with the government’s moral-cum-legal code, which aspires to universal compliance with discrete

land-use zoning in order to protect “wild” spaces and species. By contrast, Palawan practice restraint as a pragmatic response to negative feedback from their invisible counterparts. Whether or not someone decides to exercise restraint in a given situation depends on a broader pragmatics of negotiation, compensation, and appeasement. This pragmatism, combined with strongly egalitarian values, leaves relatively wide latitude for individuals to decide for themselves how to make use of particular areas or resources.

Such variation is incompatible with the fixed spatial boundaries and inflexible rules of government conservation. As a result, conservation measures tend to foster mutual sentiments of disappointment and distrust rather than genuine cooperation. This problem, I argue, is not simply a matter of conflicting knowledge or values. Rather, its roots lie in the ontological questions of what constitutes the world and who dwells in it. Palawan answers to these questions differ radically—perhaps incommensurably—from those of government, and in what follows I will examine two specific ways in which these differences complicate co-management. Each will begin with a fragment of Palawan dreamlife. The first example will illustrate (1) the moral economy that arises from Palawan relations with their invisible neighbors and (2) how this moral economy differs from government regulations for the commodification and protection of forest products. The second example will illustrate (1) the situational manner in which Palawan make decisions about forest clearance and (2) how this contingency conflicts with government land classifications. I will conclude by discussing the fleeting recognition of Palawan ontology by non-Palawan and how the general absence of such recognition may undermine the very way of life that co-management purports to rely on and protect.

Palawan Ontology

Before proceeding, I must first specify what I have been referring to as “Palawan ontology.” Despite what this term implies, it is important to state at the outset that the Palawan are not homogenous. My analysis pertains primarily to Palawan who have not converted to Islam or Christianity and who still practice swidden in combination with subsistence- and market-oriented foraging of wild products. Even so, they are by no means representatives of “pure” Palawan cultural traditions, whatever those might be. Islam has had a strong presence in southern Palawan for nearly two centuries, leaving a sizeable population of Muslim Palawan along the coast and exerting many influences on the population as a whole. Christianity has expanded rapidly in recent decades with the mass arrival of migrants from other Philippine regions. An increasing number of Palawan live in lowland towns, attend school, and rely on intensive agriculture or wage labor for their livelihood. Socioeconomic differentiation among Palawan is growing in tandem with monetization and commodification, but remains relatively limited in upland communities like the one I lived in.

Many of these historical and contemporary processes manifested themselves in the village where I lived. My hosts and most important consultants were, for example, strongly suspicious of organized religion even as they attributed some of their own practices to the influence of Islam and even as members of their extended family regularly attended an Adventist church. At the same time, they were more heavily engaged in monetized business than any other family in the immediate vicinity, a situation I will discuss in Chapter 6. In sum, then, even as this chapter emphasizes what one might call “traditional” Palawan culture, two important facts should be kept in mind: (1) the Palawan as a population have never been homogeneous or isolated; and (2) they are currently experiencing cultural and social differentiation at a rapid pace.

One significant change the Palawan have experienced is their erosion of their traditional cosmological beliefs and ritual practices.³ Ethnographic studies by Charles Macdonald and Nicole Revel, who first conducted fieldwork with the Palawan in the 1970s, contain descriptions of an elaborate cosmology, expressed in an extensive tradition of myths (*tuturan et kagurgang-gurangan*), sung epics (*tultul*), and shamanic ritual centered on offerings of rice or honey wine (Macdonald 1977, 1988; Revel-Macdonald 1979, 1983). I concur with Macdonald that cosmological knowledge and ritual practice appear to be in a state of decline, as new religious beliefs, medical practices, and livelihoods all serve to marginalize ritual specialists and their knowledge of the cosmos (Macdonald 2007). As noted in Chapter 4, Palawan often cite the restriction and decline of *swidden* as especially important in this process. Below and in Chapter 6, I will examine the commodification of forest products as another important factor.

One aspect of Palawan culture that remains relatively strong—and the one I focus on here—is their relations with invisible people who live in the environment. My term “invisible people” is a literal translation of the Palawan term “*taw na kaya megkebiri*.” These beings exist in an imprecisely defined invisible realm that overlaps with the visible world and extends into the heavens.⁴ As with Palawan cosmology more generally, accounts of these beings vary significantly. In the myths and legends documented by Macdonald and Revel, some beings within the invisible realm go by special names either as individuals or groups. In my experience,

³ The word “traditional” is problematic to the say the least. I use it here to describe those beliefs and practices that the Palawan present as having existed since time immemorial. Obviously every belief and practice has a history of emergence and change, even if that history is repressed or not recoverable. In fact, in my usage, some Palawan traditions can likely be traced to Muslim influence and, before that, to Indic influence. What “traditional” signifies then is not an essential or unique set of beliefs or practices, but a historical horizon against which Palawan measure beliefs and practices they see as having a more recent provenance.

⁴ Revel presents accounts from the central highlands of Palawan that divide the cosmos into fifteen layers, seven each below and above that of the Palawans’ visible world. Based on his research in five geographically distinct Palawan locales, Macdonald emphasizes variation in the structure of the cosmos.

these specific names are less important than the general categories into which invisible beings fall. My analysis will emphasize these general distinctions.

Outside the realm of invisible humans in the strict sense is a class of invisible beings referred to as “Masters” (*Empuq*)—the Master who Made the Universe (*Empuq it Nagbaal*), the Lady of the Monsoon (*Linamin et Barat*), the Master of Rice (*Empu’t Parey*), etc. These masters are not, in my experience, referred to as humans (*taw*), and they are generally thought to live in the heavens rather than on earth. Macdonald refers to them as “celestial spirits.” I capitalize the names of these beings because, despite uncertainties about their ontology, they are generally referred to as specific entities. In some ways, *Empuq* remain distant from the day-to-day experience of most Palawan—as referents in myths or legends, thanksgiving rituals, and esoteric shamanic interventions. In other ways, their presence has everyday material consequences. For example, Palawan are supposed to build a small bamboo “seat” (*pinedungan*) for the Rice Master in their swiddens and to “care” for their rice as they would their children, including ritual bathing and work restrictions during certain phases of the moon. Ignoring these rules can have short and long-term consequences for rice harvests. Likewise, Palawan are supposed to make offerings to *Empuq* in exchange for healthy and bountiful harvests, and they interpret scarcity or bad weather as a divine punishment for insufficient offerings as well as for moral infractions like incest, animal cruelty, child abuse, or neglect of swidden rice. Because of their general remoteness from daily life, *Empuq* are of less relevance to this chapter than those classes of invisible beings who inhabit the earth.

Next are the *diwata* (or *taw kewasa*), an ambiguous category of invisible beings who are often said to live at the peaks of mountains. Some accounts place *diwata* spatially in the heavens and thus distinguish them from humans in that respect. By all accounts, though, *diwata* are

thought to be essentially good. They are sometimes conflated with the deities of rice, honey, and wild pigs, and can be invoked along with *Empuq* for help with healing. *Diwata* also serve as *gimbaran* or spirit-companions for shaman. Unlike the people of the forest whom I turn to next, *diwata* are not cited neither as givers of illness (or hunters of people). Rather, they are a benevolent if more remote presence. As with all invisible beings, Palawan may lose favor with the *diwata* if they fail to make offerings to them, destroy their dwellings, or otherwise offend them.

The final class of invisible beings comprises the “people of the forest” or *taw’t talun*. The people of the forest are, in truth, not exclusively of the forest. They are the occupants of the *talun*, which the English word forest only partially captures. The *talun* comprises old-growth forests and other spaces that most Westerners would consider to be “wilderness.” Unlike Macdonald, however, I resist this translation. Wilderness implies an absence of humans, while the *talun* is occupied (and, by some accounts, cultivated) by invisible people. *Taw’t talun* are usually said to live in old-growth forest, but they may also live along the banks of rivers and streams and in large trees that are left standing when the forest is cleared. There are different varieties of *taw’t talun*, such as the generically named *lenggam* and *seytan*, who generally live in large trees (e.g., *tegas*, *ginuqu*, *beringin*, *rimaraw*); or the Mengerigen, who live along the banks of rivers, where they cultivate seasonal reeds as their “rice” and hunt Palawan for their meat (see Macdonald 2007: 103). Again, though, these distinctions are of less importance to my analysis than the ontology of *taw’t talun* in general.

Recall the Palawan myth I recounted in Chapter 2, in which Magellan and Lapu Lapu discover Palawan Island, fight over its riches, and render it visible to outsiders. According to one shaman I knew, a subsequent dispute over sago palm (*betbat*) is what led part of the island’s

population to revert to invisibility. Whatever their origin, the *taw't talun* differ from *empuq* and *diwata* in that they are unambiguously human—and prone to human emotions like anger and jealousy. What distinguishes them from visible people is that they hunt other humans, namely the Palawan. Being hunted by *taw't talun* brings illness and death to the Palawan. Further, the *taw't talun* have powerful magic that they can use to attack Palawan by, for example, possessing them or causing one of their *kurudwa* (souls) to go astray.⁵ Although *taw't talun* need not have a specific cause for hunting or attacking, they often do so as retribution for a transgression on the part of Palawan. For example, when Palawan clear a forested area without consent or when they overharvest rattan, they risk bringing illness and even death upon themselves and their communities. This has important implications for their involvement in markets for forest commodities, which I will discuss below and in Chapter 6. Provoking the wrath of the *taw't talun* is an especially salient concern among Palawan as they engage ever more intensively in the marketing of forest products like rattan.

Having outlined these broad categories of invisible beings, I should also highlight some ambiguities related, chiefly, to hunting. These are most apparent for the Master(s) of Wild Pigs, who literally “give(s)” (*begey*) pigs to Palawan hunters and, therefore, have a more immediate, human-like presence than other *Empuq*. Although the ontology of all invisible beings is shrouded in some mystery, these particular Masters seem especially mysterious. My questions about them yielded conflicting or ambiguous responses as to whether they were more like the Master of Rice or more like the *diwata* or *taw't talun*. Macdonald suggests that the master of wild pigs is a “forest spirit,” which he distinguishes from the “celestial spirits.” One source of this uncertainty is that figures bearing names like *Empu't Byek* (Master of the Pig) appear as

⁵ Although I heard varying opinions, some told me that owls like the one that attacked me are one of the forms taken by malevolent *taw't talun*.

individual characters in myths and legends, whereas colloquial references to the invisible master(s) of wild pigs do not necessarily intend to invoke a specific deity. Another uncertainty is that the word *empuq* also denotes ownership of property among both visible and invisible people. For example, when discussing who owns a machete, a piece of land, or anything else, Palawan will refer to its (visible) owner as its *empuq*. But they will also use *empuq* to refer to the invisible owners of trees or rattan. Such *empuq* are not *Empuq* in the sense of the Master of Rice, but rather invisible humans who have ownership claims to the plants in question.

A final uncertainty is that Palawan sometimes conceive of wild pigs as animal doubles for forest spirits (and of chickens as animal doubles for visible people). This means that Palawan who hunt wild pigs are hunting (invisible) humans, which in turn complements the notion that Palawan are hunted, “like white chickens,” by the *taw’t talun* (Macdonald 2007: 97). At the same time, as I will discuss below, wild pigs are also said to be “given” to the Palawan by the pigs’ *empuq*. Among Palawan I knew, this act of giving seemed more salient than the personhood of pigs. For example, the reason given for why they should not wantonly kill pigs or sell pig meat was that the *empuq* of pigs would withhold future gifts. I did not hear the personhood of pigs themselves invoked, except for in reference to a form of sorcery whereby a visible person’s soul could become trapped in a pig. Either way, the notion of pigs as gifts from invisible beings is not mutually exclusive with the personhood of pigs.⁶

⁶ Although I did not document it, it is likely that Palawan experience something similar to the “moral anxiety” that Rane Willerslev observed among Siberian hunters, who treat all animals as having personhood. I did not spend enough time with Palawan who hunt regularly to speak to that question. But the Palawan are not animists, and it seems less important to them that hunted animals may be persons than that hunted animals are given to them by invisible persons. Revel describes Palawan ontology as “*la chasse généralisée*” or generalized hunt, in which human beings are both hunter and hunted. Ultimately, this sense of a generalized hunt involving visible and invisible beings is what my analysis seeks to evoke.

In short, then, the Palawan share the landscape with invisible beings, and these relations are the basis for the Palawan ethic of restraint. Being an ethical person—or, as the Palawan say, having *menungang adat*—depends not just on one’s treatment of one’s fellow visibles, but also on one’s relations with the invisible realm. Whether one behaves ethically in those relations can make the difference between health and sickness, bounty and hunger, even life and death for oneself and one’s family. Accordingly, I have described these relations as a form of ontology rather than as a form of knowledge or ideology. I will now explain what I mean by ontology.

An amorphous but useful concept, ontology refers to the nature of being. Philosophical work on ontology seeks to establish the basic units into which all forms of being are ordered—inanimate objects, sentient subjects, persons, animals, atoms, and so on. Anthropologists have long insisted that societies have different ways of constructing these units, and we have defended these “constructions” as internally coherent, culturally specific forms of “knowledge” and “ideology.” Nevertheless, as several anthropologists have pointed out, even anthropological approaches largely treat indigenous ontological categories as mythological or metaphorical representations (Jackson 1989; Latour 2005; Nadasdy 2007). Rappaport’s (1984) famous formulation, for example, distinguished between the “cognized models” developed by local people and the “operational models” developed by scientists—a distinction between how people imagine things to work on the one hand and how things actually work on the other. Although Rappaport’s brand of functionalism has fallen out of favor, the underlying distinction remains alive and well in environmental anthropology even as the gaze of cultural analysis is increasingly turned back on science itself. Despite our better intentions, we have too often reproduced a hierarchical order in which the ontological categories of Western science ultimately dictate what constitutes “reality” or “nature” (Nadasdy 2007).

To correct this bias, recent interventions have begun to take the ontological premises of non-Western people more seriously. Drawing on an experience he had during fieldwork in the southwestern Yukon, Paul Nadasdy, for example, supports the Kluane proposition that animals intentionally “give” themselves to hunters. He urges us to “acknowledge that [indigenous ontological assumptions] are not just cultural constructions and accept instead the possibility that they may be actually (as well as metaphorically) valid” (Nadasdy 2007: 26). Nadasdy’s argument draws inspiration from Michael Jackson’s writing on “radical empiricism,” which considers all ontological assumptions as potentially valid. Radical empiricism involves not just participant observation, but “radical participation,” so that we can “treat [our] own experiences as primary data” (Nadasdy 2007: 36). In this spirit, I have interpreted my experience with the *deletdet*—as well as the experiences that I describe below—from the perspective of my Palawan hosts, rather than from the perspective of a Western theorist like Freud or Lacan. More generally, I describe Palawan relations with their invisible counterparts not as an ideological or “cognized” model of ecology, but as the way in which ecology actually works.

A major problem with radical empiricism is the premium it places on practical experience. If we are to treat indigenous knowledge as a literal account of ontology rather than just metaphorical ideation, what are we to do with accounts of the same event that rest on conflicting ontological assumptions? Latour’s solution to this problem is one of the most influential. He proposes that analysts “ontologically flatten” the empirical content of their study (Latour 2005). This, he claims, allows every organism and object to be accounted for as an “actant” without imposing on them any single set of culturally biased ontological assumptions. I agree that we can and must abandon “nature” as a yardstick for measuring ecological relations, and I will return to this point in a moment. In my mind, however, it seems incredibly naïve to

suggest that we can simply describe “actants” without recourse to own culturally laden ontological assumptions. Whether those assumptions are the ones into which we are socialized as children or the ones we adopt through training or cultural immersion, we will always make conscious and unconscious assumptions about the ontology of the world we inhabit. These assumptions cannot but shape what we experience and come to hold true.

Following Nadasdy, I deal with this conundrum by emphasizing the notion of ontological *assumptions*. Everyone holds deep-seated assumptions about the constitution of the world in which they live. These assumptions are culturally patterned and shape perception. They can be conscious and explicit, but more often they are embodied and very difficult to articulate. One doesn't just *know* the world to be a certain way; one *feels* and *inhabits* it in that manner. Many Palawan, for example, consider the invisible realm to be very mysterious, and some will even claim to know nothing about it. Nonetheless, under the right circumstances, many of these same individuals will make decisions in response to a dream or seek a shaman's advice about whether to clear a particular area of forest. I mentioned above that a declining number of Palawan command detailed knowledge of their traditional cosmology. Even so, as I will illustrate below, their relations with the invisible realm endure as a powerful, if often ineffable, force in everyday life. These relations are, therefore, a part of the broader ecology. They are no less “real” than relations among visible people or animals and should be treated as such by analysts and policymakers alike. The complexities of this point will be addressed in later sections.

That said, I have not yet fully addressed the theoretical paradox introduced above—that, even as we seek to break down ontological hierarchies, one person's ontology can be another's fairytale. I have offered the notion of *physically and ecologically embodied ontological assumptions*. But does this actually avoid the pitfalls of the “cultural constructions” that I

criticized above? I would argue that it can, provided that we take due account of power. Here Latour is more helpful. As he has argued, knowledge claims acquire authority depending on how effectively they recruit actors willing to adopt and propagate them. The recruitment of actors, in turn, depends in large measure on the social and institutional context in which knowledge claims are produced and propagated. In modern nation-states, actors working in powerful, prestigious institutions produce authoritative knowledge which, in tandem with educational and other regulatory institutions, can define what is “true” for large populations. Likewise, the ontological assumptions that those actors embody come to define the boundaries of reality and nature for everyone else. One need only think of biomedicine to visualize how this process works. It works in essentially the same way for the ontology of environmental regulation in the Philippines. In short, the ontological assumptions that inform government policy constitute a dominant reality.

For marginalized cultural minority groups like the Palawan, knowledge claims and associated ontological assumptions may be authoritative in the local context, but they do not have the backing of powerful government institutions. Palawan ontology constitutes “reality” in its own context. It is known, felt, and experienced to be true by many people who identify as Palawan and are immersed in everyday Palawan life. And yet this reality becomes a set of “supernatural beliefs” about the environment alongside the scientific reality of government policy. Only visible Palawan are ontologically real in the eyes of government. Their invisible neighbors are supernatural and, thus, only achieve official recognition in a form prone to misunderstanding, underestimation, suspicion, and even ridicule. It is at once in spite and because of this misrecognition that the invisible dimensions of Palawan ontology complicate the work of environmental government.

Ontological Conflicts

One of the founding myths of the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL)—a large protected area in which an estimated 12,000 Palawan live—is that the indigenous people living within it have embraced its existence. As required by law, extensive consultations were conducted prior to the MMPL’s proclamation by President Arroyo in 2009. The NGO Conservation International led the consultation process, in which “tribal endorsements” were obtained for each of the thirty-six affected *barangay* and verified by the National Commission on Indigenous People.⁷ In a project report to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, CI wrote that “[t]he multi-sectoral team made sure that majority of the local communities including the indigenous peoples in the uplands were properly informed and fully understand the benefits of establishing a protected area” (Conservation International - Philippines 2007: 4). Indigenous people and their rights also feature prominently in the MMPL’s Management Plan. Five seats on the management board are reserved for Palawan representatives, who are charged with helping ensure that the MMPL’s system of land-use zoning categories is “harmonized” with indigenous land claims.⁸ The fact that many Palawan live within the MMPL’s “core zones”—areas where “human disruption” is strictly prohibited—is not a problem because the law allows “traditional uses of tribal communities for minimal and soft impact gathering of forest species for ceremonial and religious purposes” (PCSD Resolution No. 94-44). Moreover, “[r]efinements [of] zoning [will] take into account indigenous knowledge systems and practices.” On paper, the MMPL is

⁷ A *barangay* is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines. Each province (*probinsiya* or *lalawigan*) is divided into municipalities (*munisipyo* or *bayan*) and/or cities (*siyudad* or *lungsod*), and each municipality and city is divided into *barangay*, for which ward or district is the closest US equivalent.

⁸ A vast majority of the MMPL is classified as “core zone,” in which no human “disruption” is supposed to occur. Another 20.4% is classified as restricted, controlled, or traditional use zone. In Chapter 1, I noted the inherent contradiction in the notion that so much of a “landscape” could be made off limits to “human disruption.”

explicitly designated to protect a *landscape*, and its human residents are supposed to be an integral part of its operation.

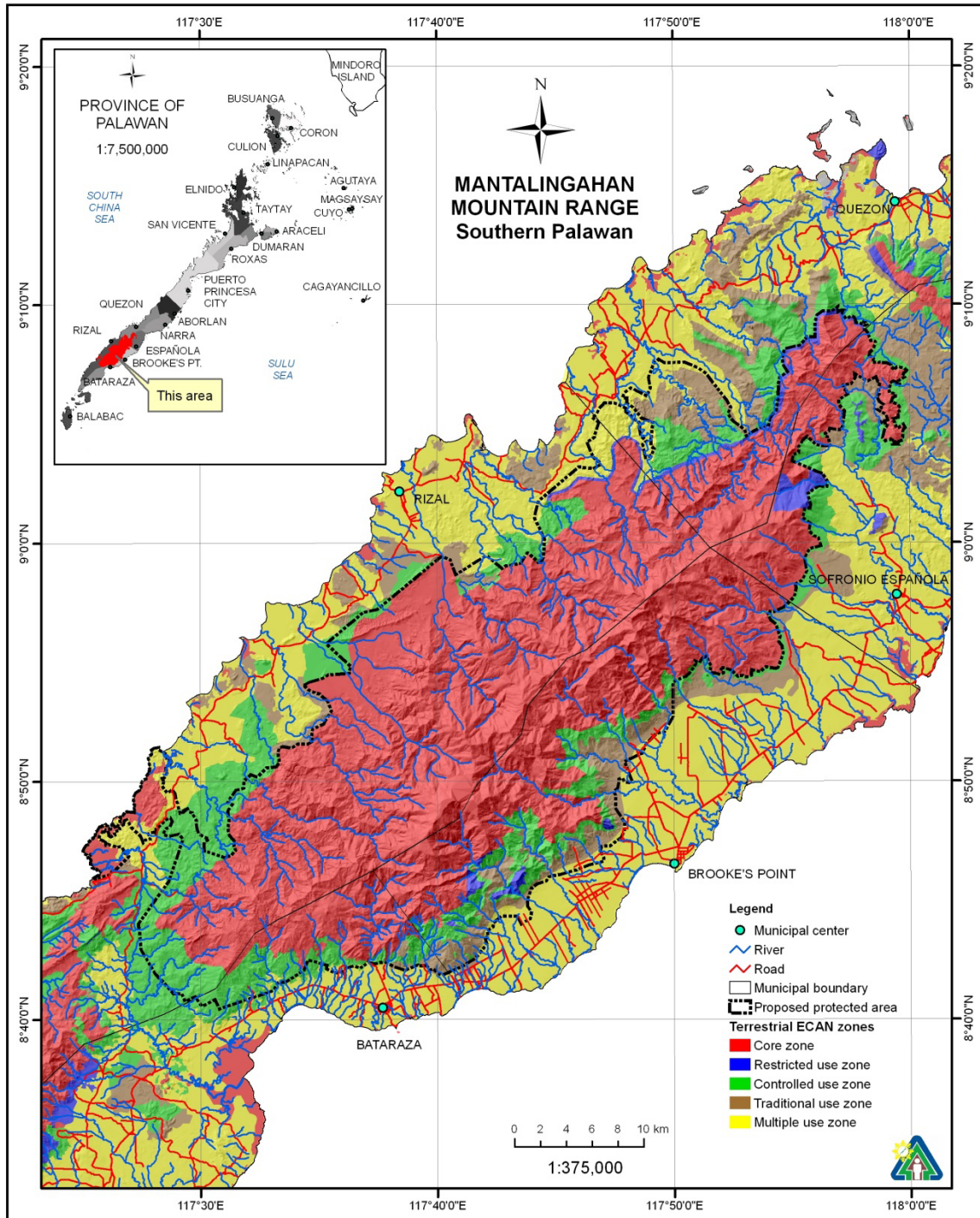


Figure 23: Map of the MMPL showing its boundaries in relation to ECAN zones. Source: PCSD.

In practice, Palawan involvement in the MMPL remains limited, inconsistent, and fraught with distrust. These challenges came up frequently in my conversations with government and NGO personnel involved with the MMPL. “It is hard to ‘inject’ new ideas into the Palawan,” said one government official. Another observed that the Palawan have been “corrupted” by gambling, drinking, and outside influences, all of which have lead them to clear ever larger areas of the forest without regard for their traditional ethics. Perhaps most common of all was the notion that the Palawan simply lack the will to make long-term investments or commitments. They lack “discipline,” I was told.

Officials had varying views on how faults on the part of the Palawan hindered co-management. But, perhaps predictably, they were less apt to identify the assumptions of co-management itself as a problem. Take, for example, an NGO employee with whom I interacted regularly (and came to respect deeply). Once, during a frank exchange, I expressed my opinion that conflicting views of swidden were the greatest barrier to Palawan cooperation with the MMPL. She countered that the Palawan had, in fact, been eager to forge conservation agreements with her organization. She referred me to a letter from a Palawan elder claiming, in effect, that his community only practiced swidden because they were poor. Palawan are “easily brainwashed,” she explained, but otherwise they are naturally inclined to protect their ancestral domains. I responded by explaining my understanding of Palawan relations with the *taw’t talun*. Palawan would, I said, sometimes seek their permission to clear swiddens in areas that were previously declared taboo. She thought for a moment and then, with an incredulous smile, asked, “But do they *really* believe that?” Her question implied that Palawan might invoke this ‘belief’ as an alibi for disregarding their own tradition of not clearing large trees. She seemed skeptical that invisible beings could actually have an impact on her work.

In what follows, I aim to show why Palawan ontology does indeed impact the operation of environmental government by illustrating two specific ways in which the ontological assumptions of government conflict with those of the Palawan.

An Invisible Moral Economy

Oto was a young bachelor who came and went frequently in Tenga't Gebaq while I lived there. Males of his age, whether married or unmarried, typically remain attached to the households of their parents or parents-in-law, with whom they build adjacent swiddens and exchange labor to varying degrees. But Oto's parents and siblings lived closer to town, in an area that had been hemmed in by migrant plantations and was not suitable for large family swiddens. Instead of trying to attach himself to another household, he instead floated around as a guest in various homes, earning money for food by collecting copal resin and performing wage labor. At one point, Oto teamed up with another young man in the village to make charcoal for sale in the market.

After sharing a couple of charcoal piles with his friend, Oto began to make his own. The process involves felling small-to-medium-sized trees, chopping them into small logs, and then arranging them conically around a cavity so that they will burn slowly from the inside out (see Figure 24). A few days into the process, before he had begun the burn, Oto was confronted in a dream by a pair of angry giants. Though they threatened to kill him if he continued making charcoal, these *taw't talun* did not reveal what specifically had offended them—i.e., whether the charcoal pile was encroaching on their home or was simply a practice they despised. Either way, Oto said, he would not attempt to make charcoal again for a long time, if ever. Even though he needed money, engaging in this “new” activity was not worth the risk.



Figure 24: making charcoal. (photo by author, August 2011)

Not long before I first arrived there, charcoal making had become a source of income for a significant number of households in and near the village. This laborious practice had gradually spread upstream, following the network of old logging roads, as the town's demand for charcoal grew and more accessible sources of wood were depleted. Just downstream of the village, one cluster of households in particular had become heavily involved in charcoal making. They built their piles in plain sight, seemingly unconcerned that charcoal making was forbidden within a protected area like the MMPL. To the MMPL field officer who visited regularly, their behavior was anathema. He said he had considered establishing a biodiversity monitoring project in the village, but changed his mind when residents started making charcoal. This development, to him, signified a loss of tradition. It also made him wonder how much longer he could go without taking punitive actions.

Given Oto's experience, one might expect to find general agreement between the Palawan and the government on the practice of charcoal making. For the Palawan, it can provoke the anger of the *taw't talun* and thus transgress the ethic of restraint. For government

personnel, charcoal making is ecologically destructive and, therefore, forbidden within a protected area like the MMPL. Both see charcoal making as a “non-traditional” or “new” activity. One might note this agreement and conclude, as the MMPL field officer did, that charcoal making constitutes an unambiguous violation of both Palawan ethics and government policy. One might draw a similar conclusion about the clearing of old-growth forest, as was the case with the NGO employee mentioned above. Ultimately, though, these seemingly harmonious values derive from very different ontological assumptions.

Let’s consider more carefully the aversion to “new” or “non-traditional” livelihood activities that Palawan seem to share with government. When Oto told me about his encounter with the *taw’t talun*, I asked him if his experience would deter him from other activities that involve cutting trees, namely *swidden*. “*Kaya* (no),” he replied, exaggerating his intonation to highlight the absurdity of my question. The dream, Oto explained, was not about *swidden*, nor was *swidden*, unlike charcoal making, a new source of livelihood (*bagung usa*). To the rest of my follow-up questions, Oto would only say “*ista ku kediye*” (I don’t know [about] them)—as was often the case when I asked young men and women about *taw’t talun*.⁹

Notwithstanding Oto’s reticence, the newness of charcoal seemed to be the problem in his case. Curious how those involved in charcoal making would interpret Oto’s dream, I described it to Juhali, who was the eldest male in the cluster of charcoal-making households. He was also someone who prided himself on his knowledge of Palawan traditions. Juhali surmised that Oto, by making a charcoal pile near an area of *talun*, had accidentally trespassed on the home of an invisible person. By contrast, Juhali explained, he and his neighbors were making charcoal only in *bengley* (relatively immature secondary growth) and, therefore, not at risk of

⁹ Our conversation was in Palawan except for where I used Tagalog words in place of words I did not know.

trespassing. They would nonetheless take precautions around any large trees in the *bengley* by either leaving them intact or asking their invisible occupants to vacate (more on this practice below).

Was Oto, then, simply more conservative in his ethics than Juhali? Or, put differently, was the field officer correct to see their contrasting behavior as a matter of differential adherence to “tradition”? One can only answer these questions in the affirmative if one discounts Palawan ontology. Even though Juhali did not see charcoal making as inherently risky, he did agree that it was “new” and, thus, ethically uncertain. When Palawan describe an activity like charcoal making as “new,” they are referring not just to its relatively recent arrival, but also to the fact that money is involved. Subsistence activities, particularly *swidden*, hunting and gathering of wild foods, are considered customary sources of livelihood. Anything that involves selling goods or labor, particularly to outsiders, is considered new. Thus, an ostensibly ancient activity like rattan gathering is considered new when the rattan is sold at market. Palawan acknowledged that their forebears have been involved in trade since time immemorial, and elders recalled their parents and grandparents trading forest products, particularly copal resin, for salt, ceramics, and other luxury items. But the exchange of goods and labor for money is considered a new development (and, for many, a troubling one). I will discuss this development in more detail in Chapter 6, focusing here on the question of why monetization creates ethical dilemmas.

The answer to this question lies in the Palawan moral economy and its valorization of reciprocity. In their relations both with each other and with their invisible counterparts, Palawan ethics idealize generalized reciprocity—that is, sharing without a short-term expectation of return. Likewise, they look askance upon accumulation and stinginess, complementing Palawan egalitarianism more generally. Parallel to this visible moral economy, Palawan receive certain

food items—particularly swidden rice, honey, and pig meat—as gifts from invisible people. As such, these items should be consumed moderately and shared among visible people lest the recipient offend the invisible giver.

For example, when an invisible being “shows” or gives one a pig to hunt or a bee hive to collect, one should take the gift to an elder for distribution among nearby households. If one has harvested swidden rice, one should give some of it to neighbors. To be *mepakaan* (generous—literally, prone to feed others) in this manner is considered a great virtue and demonstrates one’s respect for the gift. An offering should likewise be made to the giver, with offerings varying depending on the item in question and the situation. In most instances, offerings are not meant to be a direct replacement of the gift received, but a sign of gratitude and respect—including, for example, one or more batches of rice wine after a good harvest, a pig figurine carved from wood and left in the forest, or a chunk of the bee hive, always presented with words of propitiation. Although compliance with this moral economy has always varied—and, some say, is increasingly rare—it remains the ideal among many Palawan today.



Figure 25: Many Palawan collect honey (*degēs*) for household consumption, but in stark contrast to some other forest commodities, especially almaciga, they often argue that honey should not be commodified.

Both the invisible and visible dimensions of this moral economy depend on sharing. Money is ethically fraught because it discourages sharing. Things purchased with money or acquired with the intention of sale often remain outside the gift economy and, thus, pose a challenge to the moral economy among fellow visible. Between visible and invisibles, monetization leads the former to take in excess of needs and to treat gifts improperly by commodifying them. For example, Palawan I knew frequently gave away significant amounts of the rice harvested from their swiddens, but they were much less enthusiastic about doing so with purchased rice. Palawan elders recounted ruefully how, just a generation ago, sharing was done with greater frequency and enthusiasm. Nowadays, they told me, people share begrudgingly or not at all. Instead, they are tempted to sell forest products and use the money to buy food, which

in turn they are loath to share. Just as generalized reciprocity will break down among Palawan if some parties are seen as taking advantage of it, invisible beings will stop giving pigs and honey if their gifts are excessively commodified. This constitutes an ethic of restraint in the sense that excess violates the moral economy of generalized reciprocity. Whether individuals follow this ethic—and how they define it—are important questions to which I will return below.

Before moving on, it is worthwhile to consider briefly how one additional forest product fits into Palawan ontology. Copal resin I will discuss at length in Chapter 6, so I will leave it aside here in order to focus on rattan. Rattan is distinct from honey and wild pig meat. Among visible Palawan, rattan is not a food item, but is used instead in house construction and for baskets and a wide variety of other portable objects. When Palawan gather rattan, they do not, in my experience, refer to it as a “gift” from invisible beings. Rather, rattan is a crop planted by the *taw’t talun*, who do not give it so much as tolerate its being taken. Thus, if one overharvests rattan in a particular area, the invisible person who planted it is apt to become angry and bring illness upon one or one’s kin. In other words, rattan is not equivalent to pig meat or honey in the Palawan moral economy; as a non-food item, it need not necessarily be shared among visible people. And yet, because *taw’t talun* cause illness or death when angered, the same ethic of restraint is supposed to apply to its gathering. Monetized commodification of rattan is, then, problematic insofar as it involves harvesting in excess of need.

In sum, then, Palawan feel some degree of hesitation over the commodification of swidden rice, forest honey, wild pig meat, and rattan. During my research, I never directly documented a sale of swidden rice, and I documented sales of honey and pig meat on fewer occasions than I saw them consumed and shared. Nevertheless, all three of these foods are considered delicacies in lowland towns, and I have heard of Palawan selling them, particularly

when they live close to families or stores that will buy them. Rattan and copal, on the other hand, are intensively commodified, the latter in particular. Economics account, in part, for this difference—the market demand for copal and rattan is very strong. But the more important factor, in my view, is dual moral economy, which in turn reflects Palawan ontology. The point, then, is not that Palawan uniformly resist selling these items, but rather that their ontology informs the ethical consequences that accompany their (not) doing so.



Figure 26: Offerings. Clockwise from top left: (1) preparing rice for fermentation; (2) preparing flour to make pancakes (*apam*) and other treats; (3) an offering of *tinapey* and *apam*; (4) *belyan* offering rice wine (*tinapey*) to spirits and ancestors. (photos by author, 2011-2012)

Government policy, for its part, treats these items quite differently. The government has no policy on the sale of swidden rice, provided that old-growth forest is not cleared to grow it.

As far as the government is concerned, swidden rice is not a wild organism. It is illegal, however, to sell wild pig meat—but not because doing so will disappoint an invisible being, but because the Palawan bearded pig, like virtually all wild animals, is a protected species that can only be hunted for “traditional” subsistence or ritual purposes. Honey, finally, can be sold with a government permit, and indeed the government and NGOs encourage indigenous groups to sell honey and other “non-timber forest products” (NTFPs) as a form of sustainable development.

Like honey and copal, rattan is among the NTFPs for which the government issues permits. Rattan has become big business in Palawan, so much so that it has been largely depleted in the northern part of the island. In the southwest, the rattan boom did not get under way until the early 2000s. Nevertheless, by the time of my research, rattan had been depleted in many areas downstream of the village and was being harvested with increasing intensity in the forests further upstream. The government has regulations to limit NTFP harvests to sustainable levels, but these limits are often ineffective.

Thus, even though they risk illness by participating in it, ready access to an insatiable market for rattan has been irresistible to many Palawan. And, indeed, I heard regularly of illness attributed to overharvesting. Even if one is careful, as most harvesters claimed they were, one does not usually know if one has run afoul of the *taw't talun* until after the fact—when a *belyan* (shaman) determines the cause of an illness. One man I knew had to go through an elaborate seven-week process—including planting of bamboo in the forest as compensation and a weekly ritual bathing of himself and a chicken—to rid himself of an illness caused by rattan harvesting. Another man had a tooth removed from his leg by a *belyan*, who determined that an invisible dog kept by *taw't talun* had bitten him while he was gathering their rattan. The invisible tooth caused a prolonged illness in the man's toddler son. For the healing ritual, the man had to bring a batch

of rice wine, which was offered to *Empuq*, to the angered *taw't talun*, and for good measure to the ancestors.

The differential regulation of these products by the government seems arbitrary from a Palawan perspective (and vice versa) because the ethics in either case are based on contrasting ontological assumptions. The former revolves around the question of how to protect *wild* organisms from human exploitation, while the latter revolves around how to coexist with one's visible and invisible fellows. In some instances, these ontologies inspire overlapping ethics; in others, they conflict. This ambivalence was clear in the differing responses that Oto, Juhali, and the MMPL field officer had to charcoal making. If we took the Palawan ethic of restraint out of its ontological context, we could conclude not only that government policy agrees with Palawan ethics but also that Oto's response marks him as more "traditional" or "authentic" than Juhali. But when we take ontology into account, we find that their differing responses depend, in part, on relations each has with his invisible neighbors. Palawan navigate these relations as individuals—or, rather, as persons made up of multiple *kurudwa*—on a case by case basis. Although they make seek advice or feel compelled by social pressure, they are not subject to a rigid set of rules akin to government policy. Befitting their egalitarianism, this situational contingency is also important in the context of *swidden*, to which I turn now.

Contingency and Forest Clearance

Co-management requires finding a common language in which to discuss differing ideas about the environment, including different ways of classifying the land (primary forest, secondary forest, *gebaq*, *bengley*, etc.). What typically happens is that the categories of one group are translated into those of the other, with the direction of that translation being dictated by power (Nadasdy 2003). For the Palawan, this means translating their own landscape categories

into the language and categories of the state, which at times means distorting them beyond recognition or making promises that they cannot keep. As with the discussion of forest products, these mistranslations result from tensions between Palawan ontology and that of government environmental regulation. Here as well complications arise when official categories misapprehend the situational manner in which Palawan make decisions about clearing land for swidden.

Take, for example, land that Palawan consider *lihyen* or “taboo”—parts of the *talun* that are off-limits to swidden and potentially to other activities. *Lihyen* most often comprise specific parts of the landscape, such as where certain types of trees grow (e.g., ficus or *nunuk*), along the banks of rivers and streams, in places associated with particular stories, or in places where invisible people have refused requests to vacate.¹⁰ In government and NGO documents, *lihyen* are usually translated as “sacred places.” *Lihyen* are thought to be ideally suited for conservation and are often invoked by both Palawan and non-indigenous activists in efforts to counter outside interests like mining companies. In practice, however, the notion of sacredness provides a potentially misleading translation of *lihyen* because it implies a degree of fixity and consensus not necessarily present among the Palawan and their invisible neighbors (Dove, et al. 2011). As I will show below, places acquire meaning through relations that are ontologically incommensurable with the spatial categories of government.

Near the village where I lived, there was an area that virtually everyone agreed was *lihyen*. Upu Isu, the most influential *belyan* (shaman) in the area considered it *lihyen*, and he said it had been so since his parents’ time, at least. The distinguishing characteristic of this

¹⁰ According to Macdonald, *lihyen* are often associated with a particular type of *taw’t talun*, the Meliwanen, who are “bent on seducing normal people, causing their deaths [... by leading them] to be stricken by thunder or devoured by crocodiles” (Macdonald 2007: 103).

particular area, which was on a small mountain at least seven kilometers inland, was that it contained a grove of a tree species (*buneg* [*Garcinia* sp.]) that Palawan associate with lower elevations. *Taw't talun* must have cultivated these fruit-bearing trees on the mountain and, thus, would be angered if the trees were cut. Over the years, Upu Isu said, the *lihyen* status of this area was confirmed by both dreams and divination. This *lihyen* had wider recognition than any other I heard mentioned during my fieldwork. Even so, its boundaries were subject to micro-level negotiation and interpretation.

My host, Jimi, had experienced this contingency for himself. Once, about ten years before I came to live with him, he had wanted to cut a swidden near the *lihyen* in question. He went to the spots that would have marked the boundaries of the swidden and called upon (*tinkeg*) the invisible occupants of the place to make their will known either in his dream (*peteginep*) or by upsetting a tripod of small branches that he built on the ground (*petendaq*, see Figure 27). A few nights later, he had a mysterious but frightening dream in which his toddler son went missing. He searched desperately in the forest, only to find the boy sitting alone on the opposite side of a rushing river. Jimi reported this dream to Upu Isu, his wife's uncle, who advised him not to clear the area in question because its occupants had threatened to take his son. The area was, evidently, part of the *lihyen*.



Figure 27: an example of a *petendeq* used to divine the will of the *taw't talun*.
(photo by author, July 2012)

Jimi could have asked the *belyan* to try and work out a deal with the invisible occupants, or he could have tried to do so himself (cf. Willerslev 2007: 139).¹¹ For example, one could make the request again, this time accompanied by a promise of, say, seven offerings of rice wine. In such a case, Jimi said, one should try to make at least one of the offerings up front—what he analogized to a “down payment” on a motorbike—and then make the rest of the offerings after the harvest. But such negotiations are not especially common since most people hesitate to make

¹¹ Regarding Yukaghir shamanic practices, Willerslev (2007: 139) has written, “if [...] Yukaghir shamanism is *not* a system of belief but merely a system of techniques for manipulating the environment, and that these techniques, rather than being attributes of shaman alone, are specialized forms of abilities that may be practiced by all members of society to varying degrees, then it follows that we cannot simply judge the legacy of Siberian shamanism by the presence or absence of shamans themselves.” While I hesitate to say that Palawan shamanism does not involve something like a system of belief, I take Willerslev’s point that the presence or absence of shamans should not be taken as an indicator of the presence or absence of the ontological assumptions upon which shamanic is based. One finds a similar egalitarianism of shamanic practice among the Palawan.

commitments without knowing what the harvest will be like. In his own case, Jimi was wary of endangering his son, so he decided not to pursue the matter further.

Translating this *lihyen* as a sacred place would partially encapsulate its significance. But it would also be misleading. By the time of my fieldwork, part of the area in question had been cleared by a related kin group, who had built a half dozen swiddens and houses there. The eldest couple in that group told me that they had called on the invisible occupants before clearing the land and had not cleared anything that was *lihyen*. They did not, for that matter, consider what they cleared to be *gebaq* (old growth), but rather *bengley* (immature secondary growth), which does not typically contain trees large enough to be of interest to *taw't talun*.

Thus, contrary to the notion of sacred places, some *lihyen* are very much subject to interpretations and negotiations at the micro level. *Belyan* have an important role in determining which areas might be *lihyen*, but their classifications can be challenged by others, and they have no power outside their moral authority to compel cooperation with their classifications. It is the *taw't talun* who actually punish Palawan for violating *lihyen*, but whether they will do so in a particular case is difficult to predict. It depends on relations between specific Palawan individuals and specific *taw't talun*. For this reason, Palawan practices around *lihyen* are much less standardized than what the government's land-use zoning maps would indicate. Those maps are based on categories of land use that do not recognize invisible beings as occupants of the land.

As recounted in Chapter 4, I encountered another interesting example of this ontological friction just downstream of the village. There, a couple had purchased land from another Palawan family and started clearing it for swidden. A disagreement then emerged between the families about the precise boundaries of the purchased land. The original family claimed that

they had retained a forested part of the land. When the dispute emerged, the purchasers had not yet cleared the whole lot, but they had started to fell some of the more mature trees. (Prior to this clearing activity, the area was a mix of *bengley* and *tering gebaqan* [moderately mature secondary growth].) When one of the purchasers became seriously ill, her husband blamed it on the sellers for having promised not to clear the land. A *belyan*, he learned in a dream that the sellers had promised only to clear the land up to a certain point (a practice known as “*peseked*”). He then made an offering of rice wine in an attempt to undo the *peseked* and make up for the “debt” (*utang*) owed by the sellers to the area’s invisible occupants. The sellers, for their part, denied that they owed any such “debt.”

This area was not *lihyen* in the sense that a *belyan* had designated it such. Nevertheless, according to at least one family, it was claimed by angry *taw’t talun*. In the end, as we know, the disagreement was not resolved, but neither was the land cleared. Instead, Jimi, who is recognized by the state as a chieftain, donated the area to the government for an ipil (*tegas; Intsia bijuga*) reforestation project. It thus became off limits to all and was slated for inclusion in government and NGO reports as a “sacred place.”



Figure 28: *Belyan* with the tooth of a once-invisible dog that he removed from the leg of a man who'd angered the *taw't talun*. (photo by author, July 2012)

Government and NGO officials have complained to me that the Palawan often fail to follow through on agreements to limit their livelihood activities to particular areas while protecting others. In the case of mining, for example, one Palawan lineage will make an agreement with an NGO to protect an area as a sacred place, while another lineage in the same area will oppose that designation in favor of mining. Officials often attribute this failure to the loss of indigenous traditions due to outside “brainwashing,” to the corrupting influence of money, or to illegitimacy of a particular Palawan leader. It is indeed true that Palawan have faced dramatic social and cultural changes. My research, however, suggests that the root of the misunderstandings and distrust lies more in the assumptions made in policy than in failings on the part of the Palawan.

Four of these assumptions are key. Current Philippine policies tend to assume that indigenous groups: (1) reckon ethnic belonging on a territorial basis, (2) recognize hereditary leaders with clear jurisdiction over discrete territories, (3) manage their land and the resources therein collectively, and (4) have mutually exclusive and temporally durable categories for classifying land. None of these assumptions work particularly well in the case of the Palawan, and it is the fourth one that I have focused on here. Like their use of forest products, Palawan decisions about forest clearance involve relations with invisible beings and a high degree of personal discretion on both sides of the visible/invisible divide. This ontology is an awkward fit for government efforts to establish discrete, enduring use zones that draw on indigenous categories and will be respected by all.

Conclusion: Toward Mutual Recognition or Ontological Aporia?

A *belyan* named Lido loved to tell me about the time a non-Palawan farmer had learned not to discount the *taw't talun*. Before selling his land and moving further into the mountains, Lido used to live on flatter land near the municipal road. Over the years, the land around his house was bought up by migrant settlers so that eventually he was living side by side with a fairly well-off settler who hired him periodically to help clear and plant the land. One night Lido had a dream that prompted him to advise his neighbor against felling a large ficus tree (*beringin*) standing in the middle of what would become a rice paddy. Lido and other Palawan workers refused to clear the tree, but his neighbor dismissed them and said he would do it himself. That night, the man saw a blinding white light appear above the tree and got a call on his cellphone from a “crazy” (*gila*) woman speaking English. Thoroughly disturbed, the man told Lido what he had experienced and that he had changed his mind about the tree.

Lido laughed every time he told this story, recalling proudly how he had pointed at the tree and reminded his neighbor that, “a person lives there even if you can’t see them” (*tege taw dun misan diki diye megkebiri*). When I first heard this story, I asked Lido whether his neighbor had dreamt this experience or whether it had happened while he was awake. Lido hesitated before replying that the man had dreamt it. His hesitation reminded me that, from a Palawan perspective, the answer to this question didn’t really matter. The tree still stands, and the man had learned to take Palawan ontology seriously.

Compelling though it might be, Lido’s story is an uncommon one. Much more common are Palawan complaints about the arbitrariness of government rules and government complaints about the fecklessness of the Palawan. Policymakers and activists, including those who identify as indigenous people, have seen great potential for common ground in the era of indigenous rights, and they have launched well-meaning efforts to unite Palawan ethics with government policy in the form of conservation agreements and ancestral domain management plans. In practice, these efforts often end in misunderstanding and disappointment. I have shown in this chapter how such outcomes owe not to failings on the part of the Palawan or to bad faith on the part of the bureaucracy, but instead to conflicting ontological assumptions that confront one another on unequal footing. Palawan must set aside their very ontology to be understood. Under these circumstances, the misrecognition of Palawan ethics may serve to undermine the very ontology on which those ethics depend.

But my argument does not end there. As Lido’s story suggests, when the forces that guide Palawan ethics insert themselves into the experiences of more powerful others, the effects can be quite profound. The challenge of a truly pluralistic approach to environmental regulation would be to foster that type of mutual understanding as an integral part of the process. In a

recent analysis, geographers Joel Wainwright and Joe Bryan (2009) have pointed to irresolvable “aporia” they see as inherent in the mapping of indigenous lands—in the use, that is, of modern political technologies to represent radically different spatial practices. I agree that such efforts are always complicated and fraught with differences of culture and power. But they need not be doomed to produce distrust or to reproduce inequalities.

Co-management can proceed more equitably, I argue, if government can find a way to acknowledge that differences are ontological. I have, therefore, presented my findings to government and NGO officials in the Philippines. The results of that have been both encouraging and discouraging. On the one hand, there is genuine interest and a genuine desire to do right by the Palawan. On the other hand, there is a sense that my recommendations have already been put into action. At a presentation I gave in August, I made a recommendation based on the analysis offered in this chapter—that officials do more to account for Palawan relations with invisible beings, specifically by working more closely with Palawan ritual specialists and not assuming that a single customary-law specialist can speak for everyone in a given area. One official responded that she and her colleagues share many of their beliefs with the Palawan and, thus, already take into account that Palawan decisions reflect relations with invisible beings. While I appreciated the spirit of this comment, it was not especially convincing, seeing as how it was part of a larger discussion among the officials about the incompatibility of swidden with the conservation of mature forest. That presumed incompatibility has existential implications for the Palawan way of life—in both its visible and invisible dimensions—and those implications go virtually unacknowledged in official plans for cultural preservation through conservation.

I could not help but feel that we had run into just the sort of aporia that Wainwright and Bryan were describing in their work. Well-intentioned policymakers already have more than enough complex factors to deal with without me going on about invisible beings and dreams. I realized then that it is not enough simply to describe such complexities. We must instead confront them by inspiring people to imagine possibilities beyond the confines of their own ontological assumptions. After all, if government fantasies of indigenous stewardship have such a prominent role in environmental regulation, why shouldn't indigenous people's dreams—and the beings who visit them—have a role there as well?

CHAPTER SIX

Free to Be Exploited: Forest Commodities and Indigenous Subjectivities

Early one morning in August 2008, Jimi and I set out on a brisk hike through the forest, hoping to visit his relatives at the base of the mountain and return by the afternoon. Along the way, Jimi patiently indulged my interest in learning local names for wildlife. He smiled warmly, with just a hint of incredulity betrayed in his furrowed brow, when I struggled to distinguish the calls of insects from those of birds. As he helped me navigate the slick, coppery clay of the foot path, I had a chance to ask him some of the interview questions I had prepared for the day. Armed with a wry, cynical sense of humor, Jimi spoke frankly about his experiences dealing with NGOs and government agencies. He recalled meetings, workshops, and photo shoots at which he and fellow Palawan had been instructed to don the traditional *baqag* (loincloth) rather than the shorts and T-shirts they typically wear. These encounters, he complained, had resulted in a multitude of promises, but little else.

After spending a few hours with Jimi's relatives, we headed back toward his house, this time taking a long-abandoned, muddy logging road instead of the slippery forest path. Despite being a good foot shorter than I, Jimi moved much more quickly in this terrain, and I was struggling to keep up. To my relief, we eventually came upon a settlement clustered around a large, ramada-like structure built from wood, bamboo, and nipa palm thatch—a perfect excuse for me to stop, rest, and take some photographs. Nailed to the rafters on one side of the structure was a hand-painted placard, which read:

- NOTICE -

- This is the ancestral domain of the indigenous Palawan of *barangay* Punta Baja in Rizal, Palawan.¹
- Anyone entering this area without the permission of the recognized leader of the community will be punished according to our indigenous laws.
- The purchase of land within our ancestral domain is strictly forbidden.
- Any agreement made without community consultation is invalid.²



Figure 29: Placard posted at the boundary of the Ancestral Domain Claim. (photo by author, July 2012)

As a statement about territoriality, authority, and identity, this placard was a remarkably concise textual artifact of the very social, political, and cultural processes that I was hoping to understand. It claimed the local Palawan “ancestral domain” using the language of government

¹ *Barangay* is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines and translates roughly as village. In rural areas, *barangay* can cover significant territory, often including a main town site and numerous hamlets. Punta Baja is the municipal seat and most populous *barangay* in the municipality of Rizal. Rural municipalities in the Philippines are roughly equivalent to counties in the United States.

² This is my own translation. The original text, in Filipino, was: “Pagpapabatid. – Ito ang lupaing ninuno ng katutubong Pala’wan sa barangay Punta Baja, Rizal, Palawan. – Binabalaan na ang sinomang pumasok na walang pahintulot sa kinikilalang pinuno ng komunidad ay paparusahan ayon sa aming batas katutubo. – Mahigpit na ipinagbabawal ang pagbili ng lupa sa loob ng aming lupaing ninuno. – Ang anomang kasunduan na walang konsultasyon sa komunidad ay walang bisa.”

policy, it referred to a “recognized leader” in the singular, and it used an exclusive pronoun³ in an explicit message to non-indigenous people who might come looking to purchase Palawan land. I planned to ask Jimi about the placard—about whether anyone was ever punished ‘according to indigenous law,’ about the recognition of leaders, etc.—but before I had a chance to do so, these matters came up on their own.

Later that day, as Jimi and I sipped syrupy-sweet instant coffee in front of his house, a man came walking down the dirt road and stopped abruptly when he saw me. Unlike Jimi, who wore old basketball shorts, rubber sandals, and a faded t-shirt, the passerby wore a collared shirt, slacks, and had spectacles hanging from a lanyard around his neck. “Who’s that?” the man asked. Jimi explained who I was and what we had done that day, to which the man responded that I should have gotten his permission. After a brief discussion, the man shot me a final dubious glance and continued on his way. As soon as he was out of earshot, Jimi explained that I did not, in fact, need that man’s permission because he was merely the “president” of an NGO-affiliated group and, unlike Jimi, not recognized as a “chieftain” by the National Commission on Indigenous People. When I asked Jimi to elaborate, he shrugged and said, “In the past, the Muslims organized us. Now it’s the NCIP and NGOs.”⁴ He did, of course, elaborate beyond this. But his laconic, matter-of-fact statement stuck with me because it actually said a great deal about local political history.

This encounter took place the day after I met Jimi for the first time. I had traveled to Rizal—the municipality in which Jimi lived—as part of preliminary research into prospective

³ In Filipino, the plural first-person pronoun has both inclusive and exclusive forms, depending on whether the speaker wishes to include his/her interlocutors in the actions of “we” or “us.” The third line of the placard contains the phrase “*aming lupaing ninuno*,” which in effect means “our, not your, ancestral domain.”

⁴ “Dati, yung mga Islam ang nag-organize sa amin. Ngayon, yung NCIP at mga NGO.”

research sites. Three years later, when I returned for my long-term fieldwork, I found that tensions between Jimi and the other man, whose name was Bordo, had escalated. They were now involved in a prolonged legal dispute over permits to market almaciga (a valuable tree resin; Eng.: Manila copal) extracted within the ancestral domain. Their dispute was a central concern in Jimi's life while I stayed with him and his family and, therefore, one that came to figure even more centrally in my research than I had expected.

In this chapter, I think from Jimi and Bordo's dispute over almaciga permits in order to better understand the role that commodification plays in the assemblage (and dis-assemblage) of environmental government. Jimi and Bordo's dispute is not unique—disputes over almaciga permits were ongoing in a number of different parts of Palawan during my research. My analysis will begin by asking why this was so—what about almaciga favors this dynamic? Then I will ask how intensifying participation in commodity markets for almaciga and other NTFPs is shaping Palawan political subjectivity, by which I mean how they conceive of themselves in relation to the Philippine state and their resulting assumptions about their rights and obligations vis-à-vis others. I will then ask how emergent political subjectivities compare with the designs of environmental government. These are important questions in light of how proponents of ancestral domain and conservation have approached commodification of forest products. Giving indigenous people priority access to markets for non-timber forest products (NTFPs) is thought to help incentivize and sustain their traditional stewardship practices and, thereby, realize the dual dream of indigenous rights and biodiversity conservation. I will argue, however, that commodity markets actually engender a very different form of political subjectivity than the one envisioned by proponents of environmental government.

Background

Two of the assumptions that underlie indigenous recognition are important to keep in mind for the analysis to follow. The first is that indigenous people are members of “homogenous societies.” The second is that they own and manage the resources within their ancestral domain collectively, as common property. Recall that the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) does not confer recognition to individual indigenous citizens, but to collectives with exceptional rights to regulate themselves through customary institutions.⁵ This policy is an example of what Povinelli (2011) has term “governance of the prior”—i.e., how the recognition of prior, indigenous rights comes along with assumptions about the political institutions and subjectivities that existed prior to the colonial state.

The assumptions underlying IPRA and related policies call into being a homogenous, collective indigenous subject that maintains an “ecological balance” in its ancestral domain and resolves disputes through its customary institutions. Affording this collectivity priority access to permits for NTFPs is supposed to reinforce it. Nevertheless, intensive participation in commodity markets actually favors a different type of subjectivity—that of what Macpherson calls the possessive individual (Macpherson 1962). As such, forest commodities—and *almaciga* in particular—constitute “agencies” in the (dis)assembling of environmental government.

⁵ This is not to say that indigenous people are denied recognition as individuals; rather, I am saying that their rights as individual citizens are separate from their collective rights as indigenous people.



Figure 30: A young man collects copal resin in the forests of southern Palawan.
(photos by the author, August 2011)

Forest Commodities at the “Leading Edge”

Almaciga is good. Selling it is not forbidden, unlike honey or wild pig [whose invisible owners are angered by commodification]. It doesn't rot or run out, unlike rattan. As long as you take care of the trees, you won't become ill [i.e., be made ill by their invisible owners, as is the case with over-extraction of rattan]. Our ancestors collected almaciga, and we sell it today to buy rice, salt, clothing, everything. We are grateful to the rebels who drove away the logging companies [in the early 1980s]. Things were better in the past, when people were generous and shared food with each other. If it weren't for almaciga, we Palawan would probably die of starvation.

I paraphrase these thoughts from a conversation I had with an elderly Palawan couple in July 2011. Their unfaltering praise for almaciga echoes what I heard from many Palawan. Although most Palawan describe swidden and hunting as their quintessentially “traditional” livelihood activities, almaciga is a basis of survival at a time when migrant settlement, conservation programs, environmental degradation, and cultural changes are undermining swidden and hunting. Almaciga is among what regulators call non-timber forest products or NTFPs. In Palawan, NTFPs are big business. Since a moratorium was placed on commercial logging in 1992, Palawan’s regional commodity regime has shifted in favor of NTFPs, including both regulated ones like honey, rattan, and almaciga, and banned ones like exotic animals. A perfect fit for environmental government in Palawan, NTFPs are often seen as an incentivizing panacea in efforts to promote local-level cooperation with forest conservation. Unlike the government, however, most Palawan do not consider all types of NTFPs equally suited to commodification (as discussed in Chapter 5). Instead, almaciga stands out for its suitability.



Figure 31: A hand-made backpack (*kiba*) filled with high-quality almaciga.
(photo by the author, April 2011)

Derived from the Nahuatl word for incense, the generic term for almaciga in English is copal, which refers to aromatic exudates of a variety of different tree species found the world over (Arquiza, et al. 2010). Numerous varieties of copal have a long history of circulation in international markets. The variety exported from insular Southeast Asia, known in the industry as Manila copal or almaciga, is exuded by trees of the species *Agathis philippinensis*. In Palawan, almaciga (Pal: *begtik*) can be used along with other exudates and resins as a fire accelerant, insect repellent, sealant, and ritual or medicinal incense. Although many Palawan still use small amounts of *begtik* to get their fires started in the morning, today most of those I consulted see it primarily as a commodity to be collected and sold.

Once it enters international markets, almaciga is used in the production of varnish, sealant, paint, wax, polish, and a number of other industrial products. Because almaciga is

exported as a raw material, its economic importance is said to be small compared to that of rattan furniture (e.g., US\$222,000 for almaciga vs. US\$98.2 million for rattan furniture in 2004 [Arquiza et al. 2010: 158], although a more meaningful comparison would factor in the export value of goods manufactured from almaciga). Recently, anti-mining activists, carbon-credit programmers, and development NGOs have shown growing interest in Palawan's almaciga. They hope almaciga will offer a better source of sustainable upland livelihood than rattan, which has been depleted in many parts of the island and cannot, in the same manner as almaciga, provide a long-term incentive for the protection of old-growth forest. Almaciga can, however, be over-tapped. Over-tapping can and does result in the death of the overexploited tree. Significant rates of almaciga-tree mortality has been scientifically documented in central and northern Palawan and anecdotally reported in the south (McDermott 2000).⁶

⁶ I saw some likely overtapped trees in the relatively accessible almaciga stands near Tenga't Gebaq, but not among the trees higher up in the mountains.



Figure 32: Almaciga collection. Left: A *kiba* next to a freshly cut almaciga tree. Right: a young man climbing an almaciga tree to check for large “flower” or resin (photos by the author, August 2011)

In the old-growth forests along Palawan’s spine one usually finds the towering, almaciga-producing agathis trees at elevations above 750 meters.⁷ Throughout southern Palawan, several hundred thousand kilograms of almaciga are collected every year, much of it by Palawan men and women (Arquiza, et al. 2010). Palawan involvement in the trade is almost exclusively as collectors; although a few act as local middle-people, none controls an operation at the provincial, national, or international levels. A few almaciga traders are said to conduct their business illegally by smuggling to Malaysia or through a combination of legal and illegal means

⁷ Copal-producing agathis trees of the sort found in Palawan can grow up to sixty-five meters tall (Arquiza, et al. 2010). They are coniferous evergreens, but do not have needle-shaped leaves.

involving the fraudulent use of legitimate permits. Most almaciga originates from concessions awarded to individuals or indigenous associations with exclusive rights to buy and sell almaciga collected within a given territory. Typically, these concession holders do not transport the almaciga to external markets, but instead resell it to regional traders who truck the aromatic, crystalline wads of exudate to the provincial capital for transport by ship to Manila and beyond. Regional traders typically live extralocally (in cities) and use debt to forge a patronage network of local middle-people in rural market towns.

Like other NTFPs, then, the extraction and sale of almaciga is subject to a variety of different environmental regulations depending on where the extraction takes place and who carries it out. Unlike other NTFPs, the commodity regime for almaciga consists primarily of a single chain leading out of Palawan, making it especially prone to monopolization.

An indigenous group can be awarded an NTFP concession if it has a recognized ancestral domain claim or title, such as the Ancestral Domain Claim in which Tenga't Gebaq is located. Concessions to indigenous groups, unlike those issued to individuals, come with the condition that the concession and any revenues arising therefrom be managed cooperatively. Historically, the regional trade in forest products has been prone to monopolization, over-extraction, and exploitation of local collectors (Dressler 2009; Eder 2010). Ancestral domain instruments are supposed to make the NTFP trade more beneficial and equitable for indigenous groups. In reality, however, the commodity chain of almaciga is largely the same whether it originates from an individual concession or an ancestral domain. In many cases, the associations that manage ancestral domains limit their dealings to a single external trader, thus becoming in essence an agent of that trader.

What, then, about almaciga's materiality has driven its particular course of commodification? On the demand side, there is growing interest worldwide in products that use natural ingredients. NTFPs in Palawan are part of what Anna Tsing (2008: 29) calls "leading edges" of shifting commodity regimes, meaning they are being pursued by capital as other commodity regimes, such as those of logging and mining, have become less profitable due to restrictions. Another important factor in Palawan is that the grooves in the leading edges of NTFPs tend to fit well into those of eco-tourism. It is possible to extract almaciga without altering the landscape aesthetics demanded by conservationists and tourists. Thus, almaciga achieves the increasingly coveted status of a sustainable or renewable commodity. In short, global, "demand-side" factors are vital in producing the materiality of almaciga as a particular class of commodity.

But my main interest here is in almaciga's materiality in relation to local, "supply-side" factors. I noted above that almaciga seems to lend itself well to commodification despite the difficulties associated with collecting and transporting it. Collectors return from their trips haggard—their necks stiff from having supported a *kiba* (rattan backpack) strap across their forehead, their backsides caked in mud from losing their footing on a slick trail, and their hair glistening with tiny, sticky flakes of resin sent flying as larger clots are hacked off the side of the tree. Still, many Palawan assert that they *prefer* almaciga collection to virtually all other possible ways of generating cash income.

The reasons for this preference are many. A vulgar materialist might suggest that, relative to other forest products, almaciga's exchange value exceeds its use value. She might add that almaciga collection likely yields higher returns to labor than other opportunities and presents

fewer risks. There is some truth to both of these statements. Almaciga is inedible, making it more attractive for sale than cassava and other cultigens grown in the swidden. In my experience, Palawan prefer to treat swidden-grown food as a present and future source of sustenance, not cash income. (This does not hold for all forms of agriculture, as growing numbers of Palawan in low-lying areas adopt intensive, cash-crop agriculture.) Compared to rattan collection, almaciga usually yields higher returns to labor because, for the collector, it does not require cleaning or cutting into strips. Unlike rattan and food crops, almaciga cannot be attacked by mold. Although a trader told me that she will not pay as much for almaciga that has been sitting in storage for long periods of time, there is no definite expiration date for its economic value. This durability enables strategic timing of sales and reduces risks. Compared with casual wage labor, moreover, my observations suggest that almaciga offers a higher daily return on average.⁸

Even so, such economic explanations are woefully inadequate on their own. Beyond exchange value and opportunity calculation, Palawan favor almaciga because of the autonomy they feel in deciding where, when, and how much to gather. In general, Palawan consider personal autonomy a basic ethical principle in shaping their decisions and interactions (see Macdonald 2011). This is evident not only in their preference for almaciga collection, but in their reluctance to coerce disobedient children and the casualness with which some allow their debts to go delinquent. Performing wage labor for non-Palawan migrants is something many of them disdain, although the growing sense of need for certain commodities, as noted above, is making it increasingly difficult to turn down any opportunity to make cash.

⁸ This advantage only holds when wage labor is occasional and copal collection trips yield at least fifteen kilos per day of collection. With yields and trip length absolutely limited by what a person can carry and how long they can stay away from home, even maximal copal collection would be less remunerative than steady wage employment over a significant stretch of time.

Many consider converting swidden fallows to wet rice or other monocultures risky because of uncertain land tenure; likewise, some see taking land out of the swidden cycle as inviting retribution from invisible people or as requiring “hot” and therefore unhealthy foreign substances like fertilizer and pesticide. None of these sentiments is universal, but each suggests cultural and social factors that shape the desirability of different cash-oriented activities. In short, household-level collection and sale of NTFPs like almaciga tends to be seen more favorably than most other alternatives.

From the Palawan perspective, however, not all NTFPs are created equal. They have differential standing within Palawan ethics, which I described in Chapter 5. In contrast to the stories I heard about rattan, honey, bush meat, or charcoal making, I never heard anyone spontaneously cite a fear of negative consequences from over-tapping almaciga. Three characteristics of almaciga help to account for this. First, because almaciga can be tapped without causing serious harm to the tree, Palawan tend not to see its collection as requiring the consent of the tree’s invisible owners. Second, because almaciga trees do not thrive at elevations lower than 750 meters, most of them are located far enough away from human settlements to discourage over-tapping by non-locals with less of an interest in taking proper care of the trees.⁹ Third, the resin’s heft makes it difficult to carry down steep, often slippery mountain trails. This factor largely rules out daily collection trips of the sort one might make to collect rattan. Costly transportation also limits the field of potential traders at the regional level, making the market prone to monopolization. Fourth and finally, like other NTFPs, opportunities to collect almaciga vary in relation to the weather and competing labor commitments. However, unlike honey or

⁹ Although this remains true in the far south of Palawan, it is not necessarily the case in the north, where tappers of both migrant and indigenous ethnic backgrounds have caused widespread tree mortality by over-tapping (PCART 2011).

wild fruit, its *availability* does not fluctuate seasonally or annually, making it less likely to be exhausted in a frenzy of collection. Nor, again, is it perishable, reducing the risk that it will rot on the way to market.

Almaciga productivity is high in Palawan because of the relatively dry climate (Arquiza, et al. 2010). Most Palawan I consulted reported that a large, healthy almaciga tree can be gainfully tapped monthly or even biweekly. As long as they practice appropriate “care” (*pang-ipat*) for the tree, they need not worry about attracting the enmity of its owners. Most kin networks, moreover, claim exclusive rights to significant stands of trees through their caretaking activities. At least in the area where I lived, the yields from such stands seemed abundant enough to keep them occupied, if not flush with cash. My consultants acknowledged that killing a tree by over-tapping it would constitute a potentially dangerous transgression. Such danger, however, was usually associated with ethically reckless others who would steal from other peoples’ trees or over-tap trees in areas where claims had become unclear.

In sum, more so than with other marketable NTFPs, the proper care for one’s almaciga trees can mean stable access to cash that neither undermines personal autonomy nor pushes the boundaries of socio-ecological ethics. *Begtik*’s transformation into almaciga, a “leading edge” commodity, is not propelled solely by the external force of global markets. Rather, its materiality operates within an “assemblage” (Latour 2005) that comes together through the ecological and cultural processes of its production. In her efforts to expand on theories of materiality and agency, Jane Bennett writes of commodities as a form of “vitality”—“the capacity of things [...] not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (2010: viii).

Difficulty of access, durability, inedibility, and amenability to care according to Palawan socio-ecological ethics—these and other features assemble *almaciga* as a commodity and make it possible for us to trace its vitality in a broader field of transformations.

This ‘broader field of transformations’ includes processes of territorialization, which scholars have described so well in connection with commodification and bureaucratization in Palawan and elsewhere (McDermott 2001; Novellino 2007; Peluso 1996, 2003; Zanotti 2011). We certainly see emergent forms of territoriality in Palawan as a result of permitting schemes and lineages claiming exclusive access to particular groups of trees. In what follows, however, I am interested in a related but distinct set of transformations—those involving political subjectivity or, in other words, how embodied notions of self, other, belonging, rights, and obligations emerge from and reproduce categories of standing within or against a polity or polities.



Figure 33: A view toward the resin-producing agathis stands (*kebegtikan*) from a mountain to the east of Tenga't Gebaq. (photo by the author, April 2011)

The Veneer of “Freedom”

But do people own money or does money own people? In the past, it seemed like people owned money, but today it seems like money owns people.

Aban offered this observation to his brother Jimi as they squatted in the shade of a mango tree. They were discussing the lawsuit Jimi had filed against Bordo, the tribal council of the ancestral domain, and the DENR for denying him access to almaciga permits. In this and other conversations, Jimi framed his legal struggle as one for the economic freedom to which he was legally entitled as an indigenous person—in Jimi’s words, “the freedom to do business.” But Aban was skeptical. Even with legal protections for indigenous people, whom (or what) did “business” really empower? His doubts echoed those of many others I encountered during my fieldwork. For the Palawan, the recognition of indigeneity has come in tandem with intensified commodification, monetization, and regulation. What all of this means for their “freedom” remains very much in question.

My own engagement with this question departs from Jimi and Bordo’s dispute. To review, permits to extract forest products within a given ancestral domain are issued to the indigenous association that acts as steward of the claim. In the case of interest here, the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim, or CADC, was issued in 1997. Almaciga trading predated the implementation of ancestral domain claims in southern Palawan, as do the tensions underlying the current dispute. At the same time, though, the dispute is very much a product of the form of government one finds in the Philippines—that is, a form of government that ties environmental regulation to the regulation of difference.

Local History

To understand Jimi and Bordo's dispute, it is necessary to understand how the recent history of government recognition has played out locally. I provided a broad sketch of this history in Chapter 3; here I will address it more detail.

Accounts vary as to when the title of "chieftain" first entered into the Palawan repertoire in Rizal. Some Palawan accounts attributed the first appointment of chieftains to PANAMIN, while others cited the Office of Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC). A former PANAMIN field officer I interviewed denied that his employer had appointed chieftains, but a former OSCC official said that the agency had simply carried on a policy begun by PANAMIN. The only documentary evidence I found was an OSCC annual report, which dated the establishment of a tribal council in Punta Baja to 1990. Whatever the precise sequence of events, the first chieftain in the Malambunga area was, in fact, Bordo. At that point, chieftains and other tribal council members were appointed through OSCC-supervised election, though that practice was later abandoned when it was deemed incompatible with local customs.

A few years after being elected chieftain, Bordo resigned, he says, when it became clear that the government was not responsive to Palawan needs. Instead, he aligned himself with the NGO NATRIPAL (United Tribes of Palawan), which at that time was working on securing CADCs for indigenous groups throughout Palawan. As noted in Chapter 3, Palawan was arguably the epicenter for efforts to secure CADCs in the wake of the DENR's issuance of Department Administrative Order 2 (DAO2) in 1992.

Dozens of CADC applications were initiated in the province, with those covering the municipality of Rizal being the most ambitious. Backed with funding from a variety of international funders, NATRIPAL worked in cooperation with several other NGOs to secure a

contiguous string of CADCs that would include Palawan residents living in all eleven barangay in Rizal. Why Rizal was chosen for this ambitious plan is a question to which I have never found a complete answer. Clearly, it was then (and remains) an area with a relatively large Palawan minority and some of the island's most extensive forests. Also, it was (and remains) a "critical area" for indigenous rights. In 1991, for example, the Philippine Marines allegedly intimidated and assaulted members of a Palawan community who had reported illegal logging and timber smuggling to an NGO (Human Rights Watch).¹⁰ Finally, an additional factor likely at play in Rizal's selection was the relatively vast supplies of NTFPs still available there.

Throughout Palawan, a key aim of CADC applications was to gain more control of local NTFP markets that had long been dominated by non-indigenous, often absentee concessionaires. Because NTFP permits are issued on a territorial basis, indigenous groups with recognized ancestral domains would, in effect, take over existing concessions. Not surprisingly, this was not welcome news to NTFP concessionaires or traders, particularly those in the almaciga business, who sought to block the issuance of CADCs (McDermott 2000; Pinto 2000). As McDermott (2000: 94-96), the almaciga traders were especially well connected politically. In one instance, an almaciga trade association (the Palawan Bagtik Association) petitioned the PCSD, arguing that their families had been involved in the trade for generations. Although their protests largely failed, for reasons I will explain below CADCs have done little to give indigenous people any meaningful control over NTFP markets (with the forest honey market as one possible exception).¹¹

¹⁰ The NGO was Haribon-Palawan. Also as a result of this incident, fourteen Haribon-Palawan personnel were detained and investigated for "subversion" (Human Rights Watch 1996).

¹¹ McDermott (2000) points out that NTFP markets in Southeast Asia have for centuries been controlled by regional traders who use middlemen and debt to control local populations of collectors. While she is right in this respect, it is

Ultimately, only one CADC would be awarded in Rizal, covering some 15,092.88 hectares in barangay *Campung Ulay* and barangay *Punta Baja*. (*Tenga't Gebaq* is located near the boundary of *Campung Ulay* and *Punta Baja*.) Because this area was so large and spanned two barangay, two separate tribal councils were organized to oversee it, with their respective jurisdiction corresponding to barangay boundaries. Following an approach favored by its international funders¹², NATRIPAL established what were called CCEPs—Community-Based Conservation and Enterprise Programs—for each of the ancestral domains that it established, including the one in Rizal. According to Pinto's detailed study of this process, the CCEP was intended to test “the hypothesis that if local communities receive sufficient benefits from a biodiversity-linked enterprise, then they will act to conserve the resources it depends on” (Pinto 2000: 71). It was, in other words, an experiment in eco-governmentality.

Each CCEP-based CADC, including the one in Rizal, involved the establishment of a tribal council, an “area servicing unit” to serve as its headquarters, and the preparation of a resource-management plan based on the sustainable harvesting of NTFPs like rattan, honey, *almaciga*, and palm leaves used for thatch (see also Chapter 3). These councils were treated by the DENR as legal entities with priority access to NTFP permits and were supposed to ensure that the management plan was followed. Pinto's study makes clear that this process was fraught with complications from the very beginning, including resistance from NTFP concessionaires and traders, tensions among the various NGOs and government agencies involved, and

important. I would argue, to keep in mind the extent to which more recent changes have undermined traditional subsistence practices and thus made local collectors like the Palawan increasingly dependent on NTFP markets to meet their basic needs. This distinction is also acknowledged by Dove (2011) in his effort to show the ancientness of upland swiddeners' involvement in commodity markets as a supplement to their subsistence practices.

¹² Although several different international funders were sponsoring ancestral domain delineation in Palawan (see Chapter 3), the USAID-affiliated Biodiversity Conservation Network furnished the organizational model employed for the CADC in Rizal and at numerous other sites where NATRIPAL had member organizations.

competing factions within indigenous communities (Pinto 2000: 73-74, 132). The dispute between Jimi and Bordo is a direct legacy of precisely these complications.

To make a long story short, Bordo became the first president or *satya* of the tribal council for the Punta Baja portion of the CADC in Rizal. At the time the CADC was being prepared, Jimi's father was serving as the OSCC-recognized chieftain for Punta Baja. For reasons unknown, OSCC-recognized chieftains were generally not chosen to serve as presidents of the CADC councils whether they supported the CADC effort or not. In fact, the OSCC maintained a tribal council separate from that of the CADC. Jimi and others reported that his father had, in fact, chosen not to endorse the CADC shortly before his death in 1996. The reasons for his reticence remained unclear to me no matter how many people I asked. What is certain, however, is that Jimi sustained his father's suspicion of the CADC and also refused to have any part of it. Jimi's father's successor as chieftain, a Palawan man reportedly brought by the OSCC from a different area, was not hostile to the CADC, but he did not participate in it directly.

After 1997, the OSCC was shuttered, and the administration of indigenous people and ancestral domains was transferred to the NCIP. In 2002, reportedly in response to a petition of the municipal government, the NCIP appointed Jimi as chieftain. The NCIP had adopted a policy favoring indigenous leaders who could claim inheritance, and Jimi had a claim based on his father's having held the position.¹³

¹³ In recent years, the NCIP has moved away from the title of chieftain in favor of *panglima*. Panglima was itself an import from the Sulu Sultanate, but it has since become an indigenous term for experts in customary law, who are also variously referred to as *manunukum* and *memimitsara*. Whatever the title, the role of state-recognized leaders is largely that of a spokesperson and representative who attends meetings, signs documents, and organizes consultations. (I am using male pronouns because at least in Rizal all of the chieftains are male.) When non-Palawan people need to obtain FPIC for a project within an ancestral domain or wish to buy land from a Palawan person, they go to the NCIP-recognized chieftain or panglima for the area in question. Their jurisdiction extends over a particular territorial unit within which they are supposed to organize a tribal council consisting of panglima.

Anatomy of a Dispute

With that local history in mind, I will now turn to a more detailed account of Jimi and Bordo's lawsuit, which involves actors at three different levels. At the local level are Jimi and Bordo—rivals with partially overlapping, ambiguously demarcated groups of followers.¹⁴ Bordo is the president of the tribal council that oversees the CADC. The council stakes its legitimacy on its relationship with the NGO that founded it (NATRIPAL, the United Tribes of Palawan) and with the national government agency that was responsible for recognizing ancestral domains until 1997 (the Department of Environment and Natural Resources). When the CADC was founded, capital for its copal-buying operations was advanced by a regional trader who had already been operating in the area. In exchange for those loans, Bordo signed a contract granting that trader exclusive rights to copal collected in the ancestral domain. That initial advance has never been repaid, growing both in principal and interest over the years and creating a local monopoly. Bordo and his followers, despite nominally controlling the permits, find themselves beholden to a single trader.

Often this unit corresponds with that of the barangay, with each panglima being drawn from a different sitio or village. According to IPRA and derivative administrative guidelines, the NCIP is supposed to recognize indigenous leaders according to the customary laws and practices of the communities they represent. Recognized leaders are not, therefore, supposed to be given authority beyond what they would normally have under their own customary law. Any agreements they make with the government or others are supposed to be valid only insofar as they are made in accordance with customary decision-making procedures. The intention of IPRA, as with many multiculturalist policies of recognition, is to give legal recognition to a political arrangement that already exists in customary form. For the Palawan, however, this presents a real dilemma. Palawan did not traditionally have hereditary leaders with territorial jurisdiction or councils of elders constituted as such. Instead, they had networks of kin among whom particular individuals achieved varying degrees of renown for their expertise in customary law, shamanic healing, or both. One might learn such skills from a parent or elder, but the notion of inherited authority was fundamentally foreign to Palawan egalitarianism. There was no enduring corporate entity (such as a clan system) outside the nuclear household unit. Juridical authority involved persuasion and reconciliation, not punitive rulings.

¹⁴ Both Jimi and Bordo are experts in Palawan customary law (*menunukum* or *memimitsara*), skills that they developed prior to their recognition by the state but that cannot be entirely separated from such externally conferred status.



Figure 34: A stockpile of almaciga resin unable to be shipped because of a dispute among Palawan over permits. (photo by the author, March 2011)

On the other side of the dispute at the local level is Jimi. Bordo’s only real rival when it comes to external recognition, Jimi is recognized as a “chieftain” by the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), which took over the regulation of indigeneity from the DENR in 1997. The ancestral domain was established prior to Jimi’s tenure; however, his father was a former chieftain and ally-cum-rival of Bordo. When the ancestral domain was established, most of Jimi’s lineage declined to endorse it or participate in its activities. They were suspicious, they now say, of Bordo’s motives since he was not originally from the area or a blood member of the

lineages he was now claiming to represent. Also—and this I have gathered by reading between the lines—they did want to have to go through Bordo's association to access regional markets for forest products.

Over subsequent years, tensions simmered, but outright conflict was held at bay by begrudging toleration of the unfavorable contract, on the one hand, and occasional smuggling of forest products, on the other. This *détente* eventually ran its course. Jimi is a small but ambitious man who was not to be denied an opportunity when it came his way. In 2009, he was approached by a different copal trader and decided to try his own luck as a middleman in the regional trade.

This brings us to the second or regional level of the dispute. At the regional level are two competing copal traders. One of them is a Manila-based trader who has dominated the region since the 1990s. She used contracts, sealed with debt, to turn indigenous associations like Bordo's into local fronts for her regional trading operation. Recognizing indigenous land claims was supposed to help indigenous groups derive greater benefits from forest resources, while incentivizing their sustainable management. In reality, however, ancestral domain claims have made it easier for the best capitalized traders to monopolize concessions, particularly those run by capital-poor indigenous associations. The buyer, not the concession holder, thereby dictates the price per kilogram and the allocation of the cost of tariffs and transport. As a result, most concessions, but especially indigenous concessions, end up in a vicious cycle of debt and involuntary patronage (Arquiza, et al. 2010; PCART 2011). In Palawan, the resulting quasi-monopoly went unchallenged until 2009, when one of its most trusted agents decided she wanted

to start her own trading operation.¹⁵ This renegade approached Jimi to become one of her local agents, thus moving us toward the irruption of the dispute over permits.

Because Jimi was already part of the network of middlemen for Bordo's association, he was able to expand his operation without attracting too much attention. He even persuaded the association to let him use its permit on a trial basis in exchange for a share of his revenues. But his efforts were thwarted when the association eventually decided to deny Jimi further access to its permits. By then, Jimi was in deep with the renegade trader, and she urged him to take the matter to court. So Jimi sought redress through the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), which is the agency that recognizes him as a chieftain. The NCIP has "quasi-judicial authority" to intervene in disputes among indigenous people. After a series of failed mediations, the NCIP advised both sides to stop selling copal pending resolution of the dispute. When Bordo's organization failed to comply, the NCIP ceased playing the role of a neutral mediator. It confiscated a large shipment and issued a memo that both questioned the legality of Bordo's association and challenged the DENR's basis for issuing permits to it. Such decisive action escalated the dispute to the national level. At stake now is the long-vexing question of which agency—the DENR or the NCIP—has ultimate authority to regulate indigenous people's environmental activities.

Also at issue are legal ambiguities surrounding the resolution of disputes within the indigenous population. The law favors "customary" dispute resolution among indigenous people but only gives vague guidelines for the NCIP's intervention in cases where customary resolution fails. One could interpret Philippine law either as granting indigenous people special rights and

¹⁵ The regional trader in question was even using permits from Bordo's association to fraudulently certify copal sourced in other areas so as to circumvent the costly permitting process there.

protections or as excluding them from mainstream legal institutions in a manner vaguely reminiscent of nineteenth-century colonial states in Africa (Mamdani 1996). The outcome of the dispute between Bordo and Jimi may set a precedent with profound implications for the legal status of indigenous people within the Philippine polity. Jimi has repeatedly expressed surprise that his case has grown to such proportions. He was, he argues, just defending his legally guaranteed “freedom” (*kalayaan*). That the “freedom” he seeks will almost surely involve an inescapable cycle of debt, accompanied by more intensive contact with government regulation, presents a paradox (cf. Abu-Lughod 1990; Dombrowski 2002; Ortner 1995). This paradox, I contend, offers powerful insights into the role of commodification and subject formation.

When Jimi articulates his position as a matter of “freedom,” he calls forth a classic argument in debates over the role of the state in economic affairs. US Americans, in particular, should find the equation of liberty with free markets a familiar ideological proposition. When I first heard this rhetoric, I wondered whether Jimi was drawing on language used by his NCIP-assigned attorney. After all, he was using a Tagalog word that, while also part of the Palawan lexicon, does not occur with great frequency. The Palawan penchant for personal autonomy is more often expressed in the idioms of desire and refusal than in those of freedom and oppression. From the NCIP’s standpoint, Jimi is standing up for the collective right of his community to make decisions about development under conditions of “free and prior informed consent,” as dictated by law.

I was surprised, therefore, when I heard Jimi correct a non-Palawan man who praised him for standing up for indigenous rights. Even as he warranted his position by citing the Indigenous People’s Rights Act, Jimi made it clear that he did not file his case for the sake of indigenous

rights, but for the sake of his individual freedom to conduct business. This merged with other comments I had noted to form a realization. I realized that, for Jimi and many of his fellows, expressions of state power, including NTFP permits and even NGO projects, do not constitute what most Westerners think of as modern government, with its naturalized status as the keeper of order and its nominally rational institutions. They are, instead, the arbitrary acts of an external authority that exercises its coercive power according to the interests of those who control it (Tsing 1993).

This does not mean that Jimi rules out making strategic alliances with sympathetic actors connected to the state. Nor does it mean that the Palawan do not perceive certain benefits in state rule and seek to capture them. Rather, even with such allies and benefits, the state or “gubyrno” remains a foreign, unpredictable entity, and is not part of the “imponderabilia of everyday life” (Malinowski 1961 [1922]). It exists to carry out the will of the *Kabisayaan*¹⁶, not to ensure the well-being of the population as a whole.

My realization that, from Jimi’s perspective, he was using an alliance with one part of the state to limit intervention by the state as a whole changed my understanding of his perspective. It also prompted me to consider the matter more deeply. Were his efforts to challenge one, very perceptible aspect of the state requiring him to naturalize other, less perceptible aspects of it? Likewise, even as his positive notion of freedom differed from the NCIP’s negative notion of freedom, was his desire to conduct business somehow a result of economic and political processes that ultimately favor bureaucratic control? My answer to these questions is deeply ambivalent.

¹⁶ Palawan refer to any Christian settler as a *Bisaya* (plural: *Kabisayaan*), the demonym for those from the Visayan Islands, regardless of where the settler in question might trace his/her origin.

To explain why, I will turn to Foucault's notion of biopower. Foucault's notion of biopower refers to the exercise of power over populations not through coercing obedience to the law, but through the regulation and cultivation of desire (Foucault 2007; Lemke 2001). I prefer the term governmental power to biopower. By governmental power, I emphasize the point that governmental power is not exercised exclusively by what people often call "the government," but by NGOs, commodity markets, and the very practice of selfhood in governmentalized society.

If we read Jimi's situation through a Foucaultian lens, he is not wrong to see expressions of coercive sovereignty in the acts of the state. But at the same time he seems less concerned with the manner in which his own search for autonomy in relation to the state enacts governmental power. The freedom he seeks is a freedom cultivated through the vitality of a commodity and the environmental regulations that sharpen its "leading edge." In Foucault's words,

freedom no longer [calls forth] the exemptions and privileges attached to a person, but the possibility of movement, change of place, and processes of circulation of both people and things. [I]t is in terms of this option of circulation, that we should understand the word freedom, and understand it as one of the facets, aspects, or dimensions of the deployment of apparatuses of [government]. (2007:48)

As I reflect on this passage in light of Jimi's invocations of freedom, I have found myself wondering: Is Jimi fighting for his own freedom or that of copal? As Pashukanis (Pashukanis 2002) has argued, the liberal legal regimes that so many of us value and fight for owe their very existence to the commodity form.

Conclusion

“Wala na tayong pag-asa. Mali ang witis ko.” We have no hope. My witness was wrong. Unable to read or write, Jimi dictated this text message, in Tagalog rather than Palawan, to a companion during a hearing of his case in the provincial capital. It was sent to his family in the village, where it caused much speculation and alarm. Jimi was two days from coming home, and with such a weak cellphone signal in the village, there was no way to find out what he meant.

At the hearing in question, one of Jimi’s cousins humiliated him by botching his testimony. His cousin failed to realize that, in order to testify successfully as an indigenous person before the NCIP, one must vastly oversimplify one’s life so that it meets the NCIP’s criteria for authentic indigeneity. What is your main source of income, they asked. Well, he said, I sometimes perform wage labor, I sometimes make charcoal, I sometimes collect rattan or copal. Wrong! Indigenous people worthy of controlling NTFP permits do not rely on wage labor or charcoal. If Jimi and his fellows are less adept at performing such an image of indigeneity than Bordo and his, they could lose their case.

What, then, of my argument about commodification shaping subject formation in service to governmental power? How can one reconcile gaps between official expectations and lived realities and still call subject formation? Particularly in the case of minority populations, the magic of governmental power, akin to what Povinelli (2002) has called the “cunning of recognition,” is not that it produces uniform subjectivities. Rather, its magic inheres in the way it draws forth desires that, whether in keeping with the law or not, instantiate regulatory power through their very expression.

Despite this rather bleak, all-encompassing image of governmental power, the bigger picture is actually much less totalizing. Even as Jimi's calls for freedom paradoxically enact governmental power over and through him, they also reveal a paradox at the heart of the nexus between the environmental state and capitalism. Citing Wallerstein, Tsing (2008: 29) points out that capitalist markets can never truly be free because continuous, transparent negotiations would make profit nearly impossible. Thus, commodification is as much a process of creating barriers and exclusions as it is about moving goods and generating flows. Likewise, it is not a process of meeting existing needs, but of creating them. The vital force of capital's expansion—commodities—cannot do their work without the interplay of coercion and desire. Hence the recursive relationship between commodification and subject formation and the tendency for some subjectivities to be oppositional. Jimi reminds us that a radical notion of freedom, in the sense of a world without naturalized systems of subordination, would bring all of this crashing down.

When I left Palawan in August 2012, neither Bordo nor Jimi are able to ship their almaciga stocks as they wait for the NCIP to conduct a "validation" of "traditional" indigenous leadership in the area. Both seem to have legitimate claims to customary leadership, and each has been recognized at different points in time by the state. But because policies give control of ancestral domains and NTFP permits on a territorial basis, only one leader will prevail in the eyes of the state.

Jimi recently received a favorable judgment. Although I promised not to cite court documents until the case is definitely settled, I did interview an NCIP attorney. He told me that the judge sided with Jimi because, the judge reasoned, a CADC is meant to benefit the entire

indigenous group living within it, not a single individual or subgroup. Ironically, as a “possessive individual” engaged in commodity exchange, Jimi has both intentionally and unintentionally distanced himself from the sort of subjectivity invoked in the judge’s ruling (Macpherson 1962). And yet Jimi has deployed the apparatus of recognition in his favor. He may at some point be disadvantaged for resisting the subjectivity favored by the “bureaucratic Orientalism” of multicultural recognition (Hirtz 2003). But in the meantime, his actions speak to what we might call the cunning of the recognized and help lay bare some of the contradictions that make the intersection of indigeneity and environmental regulation such a puzzle for theorists and activists alike.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

One day, not long after I first arrived in Tenga't Gebaq, a meeting was called during the weekly *tabuqan*.¹ The meeting was called by Carlos, a man of Visayan heritage who had migrated to Rizal in the 1990s, married a Palawan woman, and was now living next to the Adventist church about a half-hour's walk downstream of Tenga't Gebaq. He had recently become the Purok President after petitioning the local government to reinstate Tenga't Gebaq as a purok.² Carlos called this meeting because the annual municipal fiesta was coming up, and he was hoping to organize a group to participate in the parade. There would be a prize for the best Palawan group, and to win it they would need not just a strong turn-out, but also a strong display of “*tradisyon*” (tradition). Men would need to wear the traditional *baqag* (loin cloth) and women the *tapis* (sarong skirt).

This proposal prompted much laughter and chatter among the two dozen or so Palawan men and women gathered around him. The prospect of parading through town was mortifying in itself, let alone while wearing garments they knew to be objects of ridicule among the Kabisayaan. Undeterred, Carlos reminded everyone that, as Purok President, he could appeal to the barangay for support by, for example, requesting funds for running a generator at the tabuqan or improving the road to the village. But, for such requests to be effective, “we must show that we are united as a purok.” The parade presented an opportunity to do just that.

¹ See Chapter 4 for a description of the tabuqan.

² See Chapter 3 for a definition of the purok.

Carlos gave his speech in Tagalog, but his audience responded in Palawan. At the time I did not speak Palawan well enough to follow all the commentary, but I did get the gist of one young man's response. Before Carlos finished, the young man stood, bunched up his nylon shorts so as to expose his thighs and buttocks, and then proceeded to gyrate his pelvis in a suggestive manner. The young man's wife sighed as if she had seen this gag one too many times, but most of the rest of the group found the act hilarious. Carlos was starting to look a bit exasperated. He appealed individually to men and women in the group, asking them to promise they would accompany him to town for the parade. After the meeting, I asked several people whether they planned to participate. Some said they would, but no one seemed especially enthusiastic. "They'll probably just laugh at us," one man said, voicing a concern that many seemed to have. "*He* should wear a baqag!" a young woman joked, referring to Carlos.

I ultimately missed the parade because of a meeting I had to attend in the provincial capital. But when I returned to the village a few days later, I learned that a dozen or so men and boys had accompanied Carlos, and a few had even worn the baqag. Had their experience been as humiliating as some had feared? It turned out, to the contrary, that no one had much to say about it. It had been a bit embarrassing, but mostly it was disappointing because they had not won the prize. Their group had been overshadowed by a much larger one organized by a neighboring purok.

A few weeks later, I went to visit the group that had won the prize in the parade and spent the day at their tabuqan. When I returned to Tenga't Gebaq late in the afternoon, Jimi asked me what I had done and seen there. In the course of recounting my day, I mentioned that a trio of men had played gongs for me when I first arrived. "So they performed again?" Jimi replied with

a smile, referring to the fact that the group in question had played the gongs and danced in the municipal parade. Then, without explanation, he started preparing a performance of his own. With the help of his wife, sister, and brother-in-law, Jimi dressed up his son, daughter, niece, and nephew in traditional costumes. The boys were dressed in loincloths and head bands, the girls in sarongs, and each was equipped with “traditional” paraphernalia: baskets for the girls, a rattan backpack for the older boy, and a sprig of basil in the headband of his younger cousin. Their “performance,” which I was instructed to photograph, consisted mostly of the four of them parading around the yard while everyone, including the four performers, laughed hysterically. I joined in the laughter, but I was also puzzled. I knew Jimi had little patience for events like the municipal parade, and so I wondered why he had reenacted it in miniature with the children.

As the setting sun bathed the giggling children in a gentle sepia hue and stretched their shadows further and further across the yard, I asked Jimi what had prompted him to stage this show. “Nothing,” he said, “it’s just for fun.” Eventually, though, our conversation turned to more serious matters, particularly Jimi’s wariness of government officials, NGOs, and other outsiders who ask the Palawan to don traditional garb for public events. Jimi believed that outsiders “used” such images of the Palawan for purposes that rarely benefited the Palawan themselves. Why else would people want Palawan to dress in a manner that his parents’ generation had been pressured to abandon and that continued to be an object of derision in certain contexts?

This performance, then, was neither a simple joke nor a crude act of self-ridicule. Rather, it was a comic satire of how outsiders exoticize the Palawan and of the dilemmas that creates for the Palawan themselves. And it was a cue for me to reflect on my own role as an outsider who

collects and circulates different types of images of the Palawan. Setting aside the deepest epistemological and ethical dilemmas of this perennial concern, I would like to focus here on a more practical question: what can my analysis offer so that I am not simply ‘using’ the Palawan to advance academic debates and my own career? Jimi’s commentary reminded me that ethnographic representations never speak exclusively to questions of theory. Our narratives inevitably have a normative dimension, which we can disclaim or obscure but never expunge. With that in mind, I will in what follows briefly discuss my theoretical contributions, but I will end by focusing on some practical suggestions that I feel Jimi and his fellows in Tenga’t Gebaq would endorse.

Theoretical contributions

At its broadest, this dissertation has examined the fractious confluence of three global forms of liberalism: the recognition of indigenous rights, the decentralization of environmental regulation, and the conservation of biodiversity. I have focused on the Philippines, where indigenous rights have been made all but conditional on cooperation with conservation, and in particular on Palawan Island, where recent years have seen a surge in efforts to realize conservation goals through indigenous ancestral domain instruments. In Palawan, I have shown, these interventions both continue centuries-old processes of colonization and constitute a new, transnational form of environmental government that involves a host of state and non-state actors in the promotion of eco-governmentality.

My ethnographic account has focused on the micropolitics of these interventions as experienced by a subset of the Palawan people. Both theoretical and methodological, this orientation has enabled me to defetishize the state as a unit of analysis and has yielded insights

into some of the unexpected complications that environmental government encounters in practice. My findings suggest that eco-governmentality, even as it remains a powerful global discourse, is not by any means a foregone conclusion on the ground. Lived experience is much more complex and ambivalent.

On the one hand, the Palawan are far from becoming automatons of bureaucratic conservation: they remain critical of external authority (Chapter 4); follow their own, very different ontological assumptions (Chapter 5); and often work behind the scenes to subvert regulation in subtle ways (Chapters 5 and 6). On the other hand, the rise of environmental government means the Palawan are involved, at times due to their own initiative, in ever-more-intensive relations with commodity markets, NGOs, and government agencies. Not all of these relations have the same immediate effect. For example, the expansion of commodity markets often exacerbates broader cycles of debt and dispossession, while strategic alliances with government agencies and NGOs can at times help Palawan defend their land claims. In any case, however, these relations are part of a broader process of colonization through which the Palawan are being incorporated into the socioeconomic, political, and cultural hierarchy of Philippine society.

If not eco-governmentality, then how are we to describe the outcome of environmental government in Palawan? I propose we think of it as an assemblage—an assemblage of disparate actors and agencies that are increasingly integrated into global networks of regulation and capital, but that are not under the control of any centralized bureaucratic authority, least of all the Philippine state. This assemblage is indeed a form of government (in a poststructuralist sense), but it differs in many ways from what its proponents envision.

To better understand what this assemblage entails, my account traced some of the unexpected “agencies” that alternately animate and complicate the work of government. Specifically, my account focused on environmental narratives, invisible forest people, and forest commodities—which I selected, per Latour’s advice, because they are all implicated in one way or another in relevant controversies and uncertainties. My decision to refer to these things as “agencies” was intentionally ironic. We often think of agency in relation to the intentionality of acting subjects. But the outcomes that I have described here in many ways defy the intentions of the people and institutions that are supposed to be in charge. Their designs are partially thwarted by the Palawan, but the Palawan too contend with many forces over which they have no control. Thus, by drawing selectively on actor-network theory, I have looked for agencies that can help to account for these outcomes.

This perspective does not deny agency to humans, whether the Palawan, NGO personnel, or government bureaucrats. Rather, it helps to account for what they do as agents in their own right. One might counter that this is simply a glorified way of doing what social scientists have always done: describing culture, ideology, economics, and all the other factors that shape human decisions and practices. I contend, however, that explicitly examining extrahuman agencies allows for an empirically richer understanding of micropolitics, one not possible if we limit ourselves to conventional ontological assumptions.

Practical Suggestions

Having briefly outlined the theoretical contributions of this dissertation, I will now attempt to honor the unspoken promise I made to Jimi.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I put post-1986 reforms in historical perspective. Despite certain novelties, I argued, environmental government continues a long-term process of colonization that began hundreds of years ago. Recognizing this continuity in an explicit fashion might foster more meaningful reflection on who really benefits from efforts to save the “last frontier.” In particular, we can use this awareness as inspiration for reevaluating the assumptions that attach to recognition and imagining more robust forms of self-determination. Indigenous rights should not be conditional on homogeneity or the internalization of eco-governmentality, but rather inherent in indigenous peoples’ sovereign authority to determine their own priorities for conservation and development.

Reevaluating the assumptions of recognition should also help address the deep ambivalences that undermine clear, consistent, and just expectations for indigenous peoples’ obligations to the state. A main lesson of Chapter 4 was that, at least in the case of the MMPL, no one really seems to know how indigenous rights square with environmental regulation. If the Palawan and other indigenous groups are to have more than a symbolic role in co-management, then they need to have actual authority to determine and enforce their own environmental rules. “Empowering” indigenous people in this manner would not somehow preserve indigenous traditions. But it could relieve indigenous groups from having to navigate the politicized bureaucratic warren that is environmental government in Palawan. And it would give them a chance at building institutions that operate independently of NGOs and government agencies.

Independent institutions could, moreover, help make space for indigenous ontologies that are otherwise incommensurate with standard approaches to co-management. Proponents of co-managed protected areas like the MMPL have assumed that indigenous ethics and practices are

compatible with bureaucratic conservation. In Chapter 5, however, we learned that Palawan relations with their invisible neighbors are a crucial factor in their land-use practices and that those relations are ontologically excluded from bureaucratic policymaking. With greater decision-making authority, indigenous elders, including *belyan*, could work toward land-use regulations that reflect their own ontological assumptions about the land and its occupants.

But greater authority alone is no panacea for the problems faced by indigenous groups like the Palawan. Inequality and debt, in particular, mean that whatever authority the Palawan do have can be coopted by outside interests. We saw, in Chapter 6, how the ancestral domain system has done very little to challenge non-indigenous control of NTFP markets, to the point that some ancestral domains have become *de facto* concessions for NTFP traders. Breaking this cycle would require ending such arrangements and regulating the business practices of NTFP traders. A related problem is overextraction. So far the state has been unable or unwilling to enforce sustainable-yield quotas for NTFPs. If relieved of the pressure of exploitative debt, indigenous groups might be able to enforce such limits at the local level, but they will remain in an extremely weak position as long as enforcement is ineffective at the regional scale.

APPENDIX: PHOTOGRAPHS OF SWIDDEN

All photos by author.



Burning a swidden (April 2011).



Man and woman planting the same swidden pictured above (April 2011).



Young rice shoots in the same swidden pictured above (June 2011).



Women harvesting rice from the swidden pictured above (August 2011).



Sun drying varieties of rice from swidden pictured above (Sept 2011).



Man harvesting Job's tear in a different swidden, with cassava, banana, and sweet potato also visible (Sept. 2011).



Women harvesting rice in a swidden (July 2012).



Man offering rice from the swidden pictured above to rice spirit and ancestors (July 2012).



After the offering, women threshing the rice by hand (July 2012).

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