

# The Persistence of Social Differentiation in the Philippine Uplands

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*Final version received March 2007*

**ABSTRACT** *Certain drivers of social and economic differences facilitate the reification of ethnic identity between so-called uplanders and lowlanders on Palawan Island in the Philippines. Drawing on case studies, in this paper we examine how two seemingly distinct social groups – Christian migrants and indigenous Tagbanua – use their respective positions in society to mark differences in ethnic identity and livelihoods. We then argue that as non-governmental organisations build on notions of indigeneity as a means to facilitate their programmes, they further reinforce how each group articulates difference. We demonstrate that the tendency of NGOs to construct and reify notions of indigeneity in support of land claims and conservation has in fact polarised ethnic differences and, in turn, reinforced inequality between each group. We conclude that although non-governmental organisations have tried to remedy social and economic disparities between social groups, their simplification of local ways of life reinforces stereotypes of these people and their land uses.*

## I. Introduction

Forest conservation upholds a number of subjective values and assumptions that social norms and political conditions construct, represent and reinforce at different levels of society (Kellert et al., 2000; Wilshusen et al., 2002). Rather than serve as an objective ‘truth’, forest conservation remains discursive in origin, form and practice (Brosius, 1997, 1999). This has become increasingly evident as moves toward devolved conservation in many developing countries now enable members of civil society to support or redirect the role of state agencies (Meyer, 1996; Edwards, 1999). In rural areas removed from state control, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in particular, often forge discursive strategies from ‘official’ discourse and societal constructs as they pursue objectives at the local level. Striking examples of such interventions include NGOs that reproduce conservation discourses according to hybrid notions of indigeneity and sustainability (Bryant, 2000; Rangan, 2000;

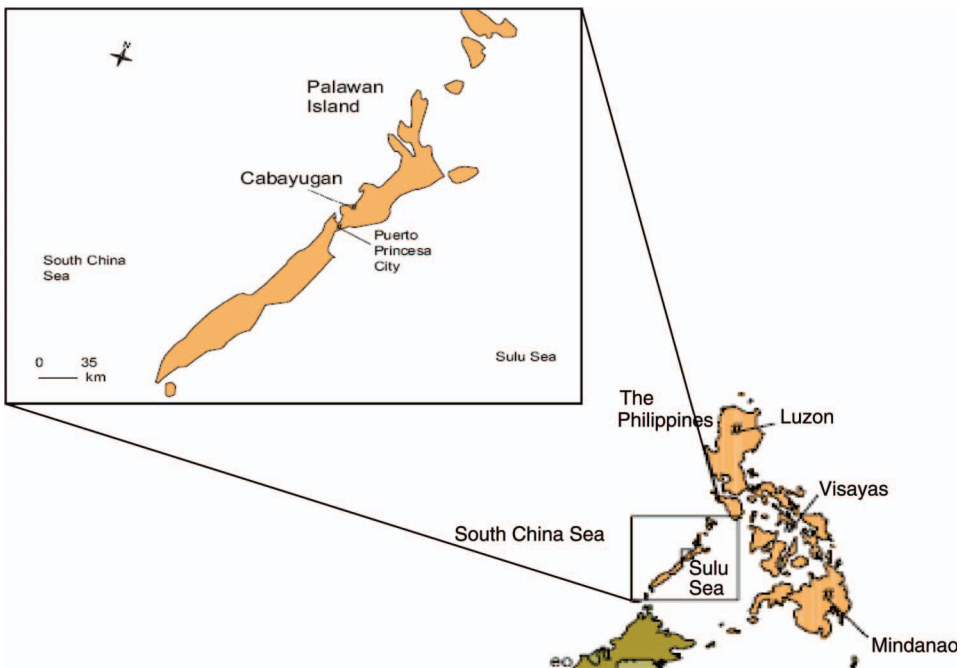
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Agrawal, 2005). Enmeshed with global environmental discourses and human rights agendas, NGOs often ally themselves with indigenous peoples to ensure that the latter internalise and reproduce an ecological ethic, one of awareness and stewardship (Niezen, 2003). By reinforcing 'self-regulation', many NGOs ensure indigenous peoples rekindle a conservation ethic through indigeneity by producing 'subjects that govern their own actions' (Bryant, 2002a: 270).

In this paper we examine how certain NGOs on Palawan island in the Philippines (see Figure 1) embrace the identities and livelihood practices of indigenous peoples, particularly those elements considered unique and sustainable, in order to promote conservation objectives in upland villages. With few exceptions, NGOs now reproduce their subjectivities in discourses that conflate messages of indigeneity and sustainability among indigenous peoples (Contreras, 2000; Bryant, 2002a, 2002b, 2005). In turn, indigenous peoples often adopt similar discourses to strengthen the ways in which they articulate local identities of difference toward neighbouring 'non-indigenous' migrant lowlanders. As NGOs pursue their causes, striving to conserve forest resources and enhance livelihoods, they often influence local disparities and produce differential outcomes that sharpen the ethnic identities of each group.

Since the mid-1980s, moves from punitive to devolved conservation have ensured that actors in civil society are within 'arms reach' of indigenous peoples and migrants in the uplands of Palawan (Eder and Fernandez, 1996; Utting, 2000; McDermott, 2000, 2001). Largely due to local disparities and cultural differences, however, most NGOs work closely with indigenous peoples whose ethnic identities and cultural practices they build on, (re)construct, and represent as unique in order to pursue broader environmental causes (Conklin and Graham, 1995). Local extension officers and organisers, among others in positions of power, build on and/or assign



**Figure 1.** Palawan Island, the Philippines. *Source:* Dressler, 2005a (approx. scale)

indigenous peoples with cultural attributes and stewardship qualities that activists uphold as cornerstones of sustainable practice. As NGOs convey the 'right way' to harvest forest resources, indigenous leaders reinforce 'best practice' among their own who self-identify with and articulate the urgency of that doctrine.

By drawing upon a case where Christian migrants and indigenous Tagbanua co-mingle and compete over upland forest resources in Palawan, we illustrate how local disparities and colonial constructs of ethnicity merge. This affects both how NGOs reproduce 'good' environmental governance and how Tagbanua respond by articulating indigeneity as a social 'position' constructed through, and contingent upon, past and present events (Clifford, 2001). In the Philippines, the uplander–lowlander dichotomy defined during the Spanish (1521–1898) and American (1902–1935) colonial periods still influences the discourses, policies and practices of conservation locally. Colonial institutions simplified complex societies into 'uplander' and 'lowlander' peoples according to ethnicity, agricultural practices and elevation (Zialcita, 2005). This social myth of the colonial era still exists in post-colonial conservation narratives: land titles and legitimacy are reserved for lowland Filipinos who cultivate 'productive' agriculture, while 'tribal' uplanders are considered illegitimate farmers who cultivate 'primitive' agriculture without title (Vandergeest, 2003; Eder, 2004; Zialcita, 2005; Borrás, 2006).

This social dichotomy has been constructed and reinforced through specific historical circumstances during the colonial and post-colonial period of the Philippines (Scott, 1985). Without a Colonial settler society, some contend that all Filipinos were (and are) indigenous to the Archipelago, suggesting that lowland Christian Filipinos are as indigenous as their tribal upland neighbours (Scott, 1985; McKay, 2006). Only as the Spaniards first began prostelyzation campaigns among lowland peoples, and then faced difficulty converting others who upheld their own custom by living in or retreating to the uplands, did divisions between Christian lowlander and 'tribal' uplander become apparent. Spanish colonists assigned ethnic labels according to a social hierarchy of 'primitive', unhispanized tribal, 'pagans' (*Infielos*) to advanced, hispanized 'christians' (*Indios*). The former was reduced to a 'cultural minority', when, in fact, no *significant* 'minority – majority' ethnic division had ever existed (Scott, 1985). Perhaps because of this, the Spaniards became brazen in their attempts to categorise and confine a multiplicity of ethnic identities into broadly defined and manageable social categories, for example all upland peoples of the Cordillera as 'Igorot' (Wurfel, 2004; McKay, 2006). To ensure indirect control, the Spaniards further incorporated traditional indigenous leaders (*datus*) and their community members into the social category of 'productive Filipino Christian' (now *Kristiano*) (Constantino, 1978). This resulted in some indigenous groups forcefully resisting assimilation, while others actually began to resist Spanish colonial rule by expressing a 'supra' ethnic identity of Christian, Hispanic and Tagalog character, otherwise known as 'Filipino'/'Pilipino' (Wurfel, 2004). With American control diminishing in the mid-1930s, this pan-Filipino identity grew strongest among Christian lowlanders, set against the ethnic identity of 'tribal' uplanders (Zialcita, 2005), further blurring the ethnolinguistic diversity. After Independence, then-President Marcos set out to 'reimagine' the Filipino identity as a 'purer form' that drew from pre-Spanish nobility and 'was not contaminated by Spanish and American historical influences' (Yengoyan, 1991: 571).

In many ways, then, as this social dichotomy produces lasting images of 'advanced' and 'primitive', contemporary NGOs build on this narrative vis-à-vis state policy to merge primitive with both traditional and indigenous as essential conditions for successful forest conservation (McDermott, 2001; Hirtz, 2003; McKay, 2006). It follows that by building on state policy and their own mandates, NGO-supported livelihood projects often reproduce these constructs of ethnicity: if you are *katutubo* (innate in Tagalog) and *tribo*, you ought to use forest resources and practice *kaingin* (swidden) sustainably; if you are *dayuhan*, *diwan* (outsider in Tagalog) and *Kristiano*, you ought to practice paddy rice. Maintaining this ethnic bifurcation at various scales in society allows NGOs to pursue goals of good governance and sustainability on the platform of the 'ecologically noble savage' (Redford, 1990).

While conservation agendas build upon and reinforce *pre-existing local constructs* of who is and who is not 'indigenous', supporting stronger articulations of difference, it is important to note that such distinctions are far from absolute. Few, if any, social categories are. In our case, other factors such as class, intermarriage and self-ascription have considerable influence on internal differentiation and identity formation among indigenous peoples and migrants in Palawan (Cocks, 2006). While local notions of indigeneity are clearly upheld, being 'indigenous' often has less to do with blood ties and length of residence, than with a group's past and present social position vis-à-vis civil society and the state (see Kuper, 2003; Igoe, 2006). In light of this, we focus on how a myriad of socio-political and economic cleavages in the uplands are interlinked, boiled down and articulated as ethnic categories with identifiable markers by locals themselves (however thick or thin the veneer). In this sense, past and present socioeconomic disparities reinforce how social groups construct and express even broader identities of difference, while NGOs build on and sharpen local perceptions of social difference as they implement programmes and projects.

We organise our paper in four sections. First, we engage recent literature on ethnic identity and socioeconomic differentiation in order to conceptualise the interrelatedness of how and why local disparities arise to influence the livelihoods and identities of migrants and Tagbanua. Second, a brief history of settlement and trade in Barangay<sup>1</sup> Cabayugan – the case study site of this paper – explores how migrant control over productive resources produced asymmetrical trade relations with Tagbanua during settlement and how the growth of local disparities reinforced differences in ethnic identity. Recent results from fieldwork in Cabayugan reveal how and why some Tagbanua and migrants construct identities according to their assumed livelihood strategies and socio-political position. Third, we examine how NGOs build on local conceptions of indigeneity to sell projects according to 'traditional' life and livelihood, and we offer three case studies of how this process renders social differences more explicit. Finally, we conclude that the practice of NGOs slotting social groups into ethnic categories simplifies local complexities for more effective project implementation. We caution that as NGOs render each group's ethnicity discrete, they only exacerbate differences according to older categories embedded within conservation discourse.

The research methods used for this paper included participant observation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and a livelihood questionnaire conducted among Tagbanua and migrant farmers, NGO leaders and conservation officials during 14 months from 2001–2004. Key informant interviews and focus groups considered how Tagbanua identified themselves in relation to others, degrees of involvement in livelihood programmes, land claim implementation, and different livelihood activities. Interviews were conducted in homes or adjacent to swidden fields, while focus group discussions were held with Tagbanua after local meetings (for example, tribal council) and focused on land use practices and identity. The livelihood questionnaire surveyed all 157 Tagbanua and migrant households in three main *sitios* (villages) of Cabayugan and covered themes such as ‘ethnicity’, land holdings, productive assets, upland and wet rice farming and different forest harvests (see Dressler, 2005).<sup>2</sup>

## II. Conceptualising Ethnic Identity and Socioeconomic Differentiation

The framework for this paper draws upon debates concerning how social and economic differences both drive and arise in relation to the formation of *group identity* and *ethnic identity*. We argue that social and economic factors intersect and interact in ways that ‘co-produce’ social life and identities through societal contexts over time and space (Appadurai, 1996; Anthias, 1998). Social life and identity are mutually reinforcing and expressed as ‘articulated ensembles’ (Clifford, 2001: 478): both are conjoined as sources of symbolic meaning (re)produced through individual sensibilities, agency and physical settings which span local and broader contexts (Appadurai, 1996). We suggest below that the ways in which social and economic differences influence the construction of identity arise through the shifting dialectics of events and situations in particular contexts. Social and economic disparities that intersect and interact at certain conjunctures thus reproduce differentiated social and economic outcomes between migrants and Tagbanua in the uplands of Palawan (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Eder, 2004).

### *Group Identity*

Rather than conceptualise identity as culturally cohesive, or as simply arising out of social organisation (see Barth, 1969; Roosens, 1989), we argue that ‘group identity’ is constructed through fragmented social and political processes informed by situational circumstances (Appadurai, 1996; Li, 2000). Group identity arises through individual engagement(s) in social life and physical spaces that envelop the shared histories and futures of many. The idea that individuals have ‘absolute’ and ‘fixed’ identities is replaced by the understanding that individuals produce identities as fragmented layers constructed in different situations and for different reasons (Eder, 2004). Individuals recreate identity and meaning *in* identity by how they engage their social and physical worlds in broader spheres of political and economic power. Far from being fixed in space with discrete boundaries, identity is formed through clusters of interaction that inform broader categories of group membership (Agnew, 1987; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992).

### *Ethnic Identity*

Ethnicity arises out of the process of identity formation and can be considered ‘a special category of identity’ (McDermott, 2000: 40). In contrast to the earlier theoretical character of ethnic identity – where individuals self-identify with and reaffirm group membership as a means of distinguishing between others (see Barth, 1969) – we argue that ethnicity rests in the experiences of social life and differential access to opportunities that groups in power control and exploit (Wilmsen, 1989). Individuals in a group may construct and self-identify with an ethnic label based on how they bring to ‘particular situations their subjective sense of history and place in society’ (Davies and Harre, 2000: 4). The process by which groups identify as indigenous reflects a ‘positioning’ (Li, 2000: 151), which draws upon the meanings and context of struggles against the ‘positions’ of others in power. It is a process whereby individuals in a group self-identify with the reoccurring experiences, interpretations and re-semblance of assumptions or views about a particular situation in which they find themselves constrained (for example, enduring migrant prejudice of Tagbanua customs) – what Niezen (2003: 10) considers as ‘experiences of oppression [that are] uniquely their own’ that encourage solidarity. In cases where social and economic divisions intersect and interact, new social spaces produce differentiated outcomes in which people often adopt positions with which they self-identify (Eder, 2004). It is at these conjunctures where people who self-identify as ‘indigenous’ begin to express the various elements of their position more explicitly, that is, the process of articulating indigeneity (Clifford, 2001; Damodaran, 2006). The process of articulating indigeneity involves expressing connections between various elements that produce a unified position. It is in this way that social and economic differences can reinforce ethnic identity among different social groups.

### *Socioeconomic Differentiation*

In rural areas in developing countries, the processes by which social and economic differences arise (and are reflected upon and articulated as *ethnic identity*) are often partly due to unequal control over, access to, and use of natural resources between one or more social group. Local differences emerge through ‘cumulative... process[es] of change in the ways in which different groups in rural society... gain access to the products of their own or others’ labour, based on their differential control over production resources...’ (White, 1989: 20). However, while the degree of access to and use of productive resources influences production and exchange, the processes of differentiation are not only economic – they retain a strong socio-political character. The interests of actors are seldom ‘directly derivative of relations of production, [they] must also be grasped in relation to community and life-style... and the identity and commitments they imply’ (Hefner, 1990: 25). The social relations that influence individual livelihoods and wealth thus further shape the ways in which ethnic identity is articulated relative to dominant actors and social institutions in society.

Factors that give rise to social and economic differences often directly influence how and why social groups articulate aspects of ethnic identity. Conversely, how people in groups ascribe to (or are assigned) layers of ethnic identity influences how



social and economic differences are viewed, expressed, and consolidated in local settings. These views and expressions eventually influence resource access and use as they become manifest physically through, for example, zoning boundaries, boundary posts and signage (namely ‘this is ours, not yours’, as the subsequent case of the Tagbanua ancestral domain claim demonstrates). In turn, the livelihood changes arising from restrictions over resource access and use further affect self-identification and political allegiance between groups.

Drawing upon these literatures and key debates, the sections below show how the Tagbanua people have gradually become marginalised by the efforts of migrants to control land and forest resources, and how this has influenced identities of differences – a form of *positioning* – that NGOs have built on and sharpened in support of forest conservation.

### III. The Genealogies of Difference between Tagbanua and Migrants

Tagbanua are an indigenous peoples who claim indigeneity to the south, central and northern portions of Palawan. While many Tagbanua follow traditional customs, the frequency of these rituals and ceremonies is diminishing and often includes aspects of Catholicism.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, despite being nominally westernised, intermarrying with lowland Filipino migrants and adopting aspects of Christian culture, most continue to classify themselves as *katutubo* (Eder, 2005). Other Tagbanua still support local leadership according to inheritance of office through their ‘bloodline’ (*ginu’u*, formerly ‘high blood’, hereditary leaders; or appropriated from the Tagalog word *Gino’o*, Senior Gentleman), which, as we will see, has impacted upon NGO interventions (Fox, 1982).

Travelling north from towns such as Aborlan and Napsa’an,<sup>4</sup> Tagbanua resettled in the well-forested Barangay of Cabayugan (then Buenavista) in central Palawan during the mid-to-late 1800s. Arriving in small clusters, and perhaps as ‘self-contained’ subgroups (Fox, 1982: 27), they cultivated swidden on the flat to undulating fertile valley lands by St. Paul Bay (Marche, 1970). Over time, Tagbanua pioneers cut swiddens near the St. Paul Mountain Chain and assigned place names and meanings to a variegated landscape (KI, 2002).

Tagbanua who had settled in Barangay Cabayugan are known as the central *Apurahano*, due to their state of origin and difference in dialect from northern groups (*Tandulan’en* and *Calamian* Tagbanua) (Fox, 1982). Sourcing their ‘bloodline’ and indigeneity from central Palawan, they are a near-coastal, swidden people who have relied on upland rice and different non-timber forest products for centuries;<sup>5</sup> some pursue seasonal fishing, shallow diving, and the collection of crustaceans; and most, if not all, eventually combined these activities with some form of wage-based employment (see Venturello, 1907; Kress, 1977; Conelly, 1992; McDermott, 2000).<sup>6</sup>

From the 1950s until today, lowland migrants have departed from resource scarce and violent-prone islands such as Luzon and Mindanao to settle at Cabayugan on Palawan (Kerkvliet, 1977; Eder, 1987, 2004; Eder and Fernandez, 1996). Most considered Palawan resource abundant and peaceful, an exception to many other Philippine islands. The original migrant population was relatively homogeneous, with most migrants living among Tagbanua being Bulinao and Iloilo – two ‘bloodlines’ of two families (LQ, summer 2002). Once settled, migrants and

Tagbanua often assisted one another clearing forest and preparing swidden in rotation (the *bayanihan* system), harvesting pig, and sharing food without monetary exchange (Fox, 1982; Connelly, 1983).

In time, however, reciprocal work relations were partly succeeded by commodity relations that began to characterise social and economic differentiation. With pioneer migrants settled, and other migrants following in the late 1970s, gradual changes in trade relations and the conversion of forest into farmland unfolded in Cabayugan. In sequence, migrants cleared forest for swidden by hiring Tagbanua labour (with cash and/or goods) for felling, clearing weeds, sowing seeds and harvesting yields on plots which were converted into paddy fields. Flat alluvial lands flanking the Cabayugan River were well-suited for paddy fields, which were soon expanded and yielded surplus rice. As Tagbanua cleared land of forest and produced goods for migrants, production and exchange relations began to support fledging commodity markets through which trade relations became increasingly asymmetrical (see Eder, 1987 for the Batak; McDermott, 2000 for Tagbanua in Kayasan). New social divisions of labour thus arose as indigenes redirected time to produce commodities for local markets controlled by migrants. Concurrently, Tagbanua increasingly lost control over access to and use of forest resources for subsistence production and ceremonial needs.

Migrants came to claim and control more and more productive resources in Cabayugan. They claimed flat lands through seizure or purchase, converted swidden into paddy fields, and tendered lands as private title. With secure title, a few wealthier migrants easily expanded paddy rice, while Tagbanua (and poorer migrants) cultivated swidden on usufruct plots. As a result, the social, political and economic positions of each group became increasingly differentiated. While most migrants expanded their paddy fields with advanced farming technology (for example, hybrid seeds and water pumps), or were linked in paddy rice production networks, few Tagbanua cultivated paddy fields with great success, opting instead for comparatively low-yielding swiddens (Warner, 1979; Connelly, 1992). The ability of pioneer migrants to claim flat, productive lands and then occasionally register that land as private title with the Land Bureau, afforded them security to produce and sell surplus rice in local and/or city markets. Profits were reinvested in wet rice production, their homestead, and their children's education, which supported their political networks and hold on local power. The ability of migrants to claim productive resources, exploit trade relations, and maintain wealth continues to drive difference and 'ethnic' divisions in Cabayugan today.

#### **IV. Enduring Social and Economic Differences**

Comparing the intergenerational livelihood motives of Tagbanua and migrants offers a clearer picture of the social and economic conditions that reinforce what appear to be 'identities of differences' in Cabayugan. Once relatively homogenous in 1970s, the population of Cabayugan's three main *sitios* had diversified into 13 different migrant ethnicities by 2001, easily out-numbering Tagbanua. In 2001, of 157 households surveyed, 69 per cent were migrant households, with the remaining 31 per cent being Tagbanua households. In this latter figure, however, are



five mixed-marriage 'Tagbanua' households, where the head identified him or herself as Tagbanua via his or her most immediate indigenous ancestor. When the household head's spouse was a migrant, the family's outward, yet emic ethnic label *remained* Tagbanua and thus *katutubo*. As we show later, the growth of 'inter-ethnic' relations now blurs kin lines in ways that suggest neither Tagbanua nor migrants are necessarily solid, unified groups that adhere to *katutubo* and *dayuhan* in absolute terms.

Nevertheless, regular patterns of livelihood and cultural expression do exist. Just like their parents, the offspring of migrant pioneers (20 households, 18% of questionnaire respondents) born in the early 1970s, stated they remained to access a 'better livelihood' (15 households, 14%) and 'get married' (13 households, 12%).<sup>7</sup> Most of these first generation migrants born in Cabayugan were raising children and cultivating irrigated paddy rice on cleared lands inherited from their parents. Since land and ownership rights passed between generations, newly formed households could hold usufruct land and eventually opt for private title. Receiving flat, cleared lands from their parents saved them the time and energy otherwise needed for establishing paddy fields and homesteads. Hence, first generation households were easily incorporated into the well-established paddy rice economy and political networks their parents had set-up earlier among their kin ties. As decades prior, this productive advantage was still sustained by exploiting cheap Tagbanua labour (often Tagbanua of the same generation). Migrants old and new were thus still interested in claiming flat lands for paddy rice farming, which, as 'typical' lowland agriculture, served as a material marker of migrant ethnicity: modern, productive and Christian (LQ, summer 2002).

Another group, recently arrived migrant households (also born in the 1970s), indicated that they had settled due to the small, but growing number of *off-farm* employment opportunities, including part-time health work, teaching, carpentry and machine repair. The motivations and abilities of many younger migrant households to secure 'service sector' employment is characteristic of a strong set of 'access qualifications' maintained by education, political ties and broader social networks (Blaikie, 1985: 7).

In contrast, with limited opportunities to accessing these social networks directly, most Tagbanua of the same age cohort remained because they had fewer opportunities to move beyond forest-based activities (for example, swidden and commercial harvests of *almaciga* resin, *Agathis* spp. and rattan, *Calamusspp.*). Indeed, compared to migrants, recently formed Tagbanua households of the fifth generation stayed put because of degrees of dependency on forest use, and most were very dissatisfied with current livelihood opportunities.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to their parents time, upland rice yields were low because soils were less fertile and the number of pests had increased due to shorter fallows (a fact attested to by the occasional use of '*pagspray*', the local term for insecticide used in swiddens). Moreover, many suggested that limited employment opportunities in Puerto Princesa City and pressing familial obligations kept them in Cabayugan. With little education and fewer political ties, many young Tagbanua worked swidden fields, tended the paddy fields/tree crops of migrants, or undertook manual labour inside (for example, hauling rice for migrants) and outside of Cabayugan (for example, construction in Puerto Princesa City) (LQ, summer 2002).

An unequal distribution of land, different types of agriculture and disparate levels of private title held by each group have further entrenched local differentiation and identities of difference. Since the 1950s, migrants have accumulated 421 ha while Tagbanua only claimed 121.07 ha of agricultural lands prior to 2002 (a total of 542.07 ha).<sup>9,10</sup> In 2001, migrants claimed 191 ha of swidden and 149 ha of paddy rice fields with other plots comprising the remaining 81 ha, while Tagbanua claimed less paddy rice than swidden at 11.75 ha and 74.25 ha, respectively. The remaining 35.07 hectares were cultivated with other crops. Moreover, over 20 of the wealthier migrant households held private title, whereas poorer migrants and Tagbanua held none. Instead, most demonstrated *de facto* ownership by using Tax Certificates as proof that taxes had been paid on cleared and cultivated land. The overall flow of land with secure tenure into the hands of wealthier migrants suggests that their control over productive resources continues to marginalise poor Tagbanua with '*de facto*' tenure. As 'typical' of tenure for upland swiddens, such holdings served as a material marker of Tagbanua ethnicity: primitive, unproductive and tribal (LQ, summer 2002).

## V. Articulating Identities of Difference

While the traits of Tagbanua poverty are similar to those of many poor migrants among them, many Tagbanua now self-identify with traits of poverty and indigeneity – as if both were synonymous and a sign of uniqueness. Since at least the mid-1980s, or perhaps well before then, many Tagbanua have taken to identify with these traits in the context of migrant settlement and NGO interventions, using the term *katutubo* to signify difference in a way that creates space for resistance and opportunity (while other Tagbanua may distance themselves from the label for fear of not conforming to 'modern' migrant culture) (see McDermott, 2000; Eder, 2004). Brandishing their indigeneity card under the fulcrum, *katutubo*, many Tagbanua avail themselves of specific social, political and economic opportunities. Emphasising this, during a focus group discussion on perceptions of poverty and social position, several Tagbanua farmers stated that in spite of migrants belittling them, they retain unique qualities not easily shared with others. One male Tagbanua, Leonardo Maneag, suggested that:

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

The way I see it, I would say there is a big gap between the *katutubo* and the migrants because as *katutubo*, we could not give them our culture, but we could get the migrant's culture from them. They could not get our culture, because we have secrets. (FG, Tagnipa Crossing, 4 May 2002)

At the same meeting, an outspoken Tagbanua elder, Thomas Madarcos, clarified how his social position, imparted by *identifying* with ‘being *katutubo*’, offered a legitimate means to resist migrants claiming his land. Thomas argued:

We used to have a system of *api* [to belittle, humiliate and instill a feeling of shame or disgrace], you are like a slave and people belittle you; no one respects the person when he is humiliated, that is the meaning of *api*. . . the *katutubo* were afraid, they were afraid and they just follow the outsiders/ migrants. They are the ones who used to hold our lives. But really, we *katutubo* have the right to stop people from coming in. I can because I am Tagbanua and this is our land and entire region! (FG, Tagnipa Crossing, 4 May 2002)

Thomas then explained why, as *katutubo*, he needed to defend his lands from outsiders. He pointed out that migrants tried to claim his land and that such actions reinforced the need for him to resist by projecting ‘*being katutubo*’. These sentiments support how ‘being Tagbanua’ and *katutubo* had become an interchangeable ‘expression of ethnicity [that] can be related to expressions of class and political power’ (Eder, 2004: 641). Tagbanua ethnic identity was partly rooted in a position formed and reinforced in opposition to wealthier migrants’ control over social relations and productive resources. By broadcasting difference through ethnic markers, many Tagbanua distanced themselves from migrant ways of life: the term *katutubo* was often used to refer to insiders who could access and use natural resources on ancestral lands in opposition to *dayuhan* (or outsiders) who could be excluded (see below, McDermott, 2000; Eder, 2004). Expressing notions of *katutubo* thus offered a social and political basis for mediating and resisting migrant over-exploitation of resources and marginalisation – ‘a goal oriented strategy’ against those holding them in marginal positions (Li, 2000: 4).

In recent years, ethnic identity has become even more articulated and differentiated by extra-local actors who harness Tagbanua identity and ‘traditional’ livelihoods to support forest conservation in opposition to migrant land use practices and discrimination. Certain NGOs have achieved this by using state policy for land claims (from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR))<sup>11</sup> and the notion of *katutubo* to ‘grease’ projects with social and political currency for ‘sustainable’ livelihoods and delineating Ancestral Domain Claims (ADCs).<sup>12</sup> We suggest that NGO interventions have often done more than state officials alone to reinforce ‘identities of difference’ between these groups on a sustained basis.

## VI. Civil Society Reinforcing Identities of Difference

Although actors in civil society have long contended for state power (Wurfel, 1988; Constantino-David, 1998; Silliman and Noble, 1998), it was from the early 1990s onward that the number of NGOs grew most rapidly throughout the country, especially in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan’s capital (Eder and Fernandez, 1996). After witnessing Marcos’ legacy of forest destruction, with about 19,000 ha of forest logged annually, several NGOs formed under the platform of forest conservation (Broad and Cavanagh, 1993; Vitug, 1993). Others stressed that, because indigenous territory overlapped with mature forests, it was necessary to pursue indigenous rights

and 'sustainable' livelihoods in support of forest conservation (Utting, 2000). Banking on social and political networks, often rooted in trust, mutual moral obligations and associated ideologies (Hilhorst, 2000; Bryant, 2002b, 2005), it was NGO leaders from Manila who set up satellite offices, their own NGOs independently, and village-level organisations on Palawan.

The national and provincial environmental laws and policies these NGOs had originally lobbied the Aquino and Ramos governments for, now supported such initiatives further. The most important of these included the Departmental Administrative Order no. 2 (DAO 2, 1993), the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (1997) and the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) (1992). Partly by working with foresighted state officials, and in other cases pressuring the more reluctant ones, NGOs influenced and built on the DENR's land rights policy, DAO no. 2, and conservation law to facilitate a legal Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC). In 1992, the Legal Assistance Centre for Indigenous Filipinos (PANLI-PI),<sup>13</sup> Indigenous Peoples Apostolate (IPA),<sup>14</sup> United Tribes of Palawan (NATRI-PAL)<sup>15</sup> and state representatives, set out to ensure that Tagbanua received secure land tenure through the CADC. In order to expedite matters, these NGOs formed a consortium to pool their expertise and coordinate projects to facilitate the Tagbanua claim over their ancestral lands by demonstrating indigeneity and tradition. Working with the DENR and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSDs), the consortium tried to fulfill the Administrative Order's requirement that only 'in tact indigenous cultural communities' could occupy the CADC:

[a] homogenous society identified by self ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as a community on communally bounded and defined territory, sharing common bonds of language, customs and traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, and who, through resistance to the political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, became historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. (DAO 2, 1993: Art. I, Sec 1)

NGOs further built on the state's policy classification by 'slotting' Tagbanua as an 'indigenous cultural community' who, as a result of 'shared' features of indigeneity and tenure, could secure an ancestral domain claim. This included 'all land and natural resources occupied or possessed by indigenous cultural communities...in accordance with their customs and traditions since time immemorial' (DAO 2, 1993). Both NGOs and DENR therefore set out to mobilise Tagbanua according to particular 'ethnic' characteristics: bounded, cohesive, communal and traditional people with continuous and discrete kin ties to land. NGOs would soon identify, build on and reinforce these traits during project implementation, further structuring local social organisation.

First, IPA staff worked with Tagbanua leaders (usually from the 'high blood' Morales family) to organise Tagbanua into a Peoples' Organisation (TICKA, the Voices of the Tagbanua in Cabayugan) so they could work effectively with NGOs and the DENR. Second, with the support of the DENR and World Wildlife Fund Philippines, consortium members carried out Tagbanua kinship genealogies, oral histories and ocular inspections in order to tag indigenous 'blood lines' and culture

inside the CADC's boundaries. NGOs traced kinship genealogies in order to determine the spatial extent of 'traditional' occupancy and resource use as the basis for delineating the land claim's boundaries (despite most pioneer Tagbanua coming from Aborlan, Napsa'an and Apurawan). With the eventual release of 5902 hectares (of public domain) for the CADC in 1997, Tagbanua and NGOs articulated claims of indigeneity vis-à-vis the ancestral domain claim's boundaries (Pinto, 1999).

In time, Tagbanua leaders who had first helped create TICKA began to use the organisation as a vehicle for articulating 'collective' claims over ancestral lands. The ability of powerful Tagbanua to advertise claims over resources inside of the land claim increasingly depended upon how well they could use their socio-political status, partly conferred upon them by being 'high-blood' and *ginu'u*, to articulate indigeneity (being *katutubo*) on behalf of their own, in opposition to migrants, and in deference to the NGO consortium. As the NGOs pursued their objectives, they first worked with Tagbanua leaders whose high social status (and bilateral kin of similar status) helped organise TICKA by promoting indigeneity among its members and, as a result, drew considerable support for local enrolment in 'traditional' livelihood projects. In order to sell their projects, NGOs needed local leaders to convey unity in indigeneity, land rights and forest conservation. The results of this process further strengthened the social and political boundaries of Tagbanua – further pitting Tagbanua against migrants.

Attending local meetings, Tagbanua listened to their leaders speak of the importance of being *katutubo* and, as such, the potential of becoming a TICKA and CADC member. Their membership qualified a shared sense of 'Tagbanua-ness', of being *katutubo* (innate) rather than an outsider (*dayuhan*), further defending indigenes' position to access and use forest resources inside the land claim (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Tagbanua ethnicity was now tied to political zones that further defined 'access mechanisms [by]... impart[ing] greater power to individuals by making them members of [a] larger group' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003: 42).

During the summer of 2002, one of the authors attended several TICKA meetings to investigate how Tagbanua ideas of the CADC reinforced their sense of identity in relation to land, forest resources and migrants. During focus group discussions following the meetings, individual responses often centred on the CADC's support of *katutubo* ways of life by protecting forest products against the claims of migrants. One middle-aged Tagbanua, Demetrio, argued that,

The CADC is good. The CADC gives us [Tagbanua] new opportunities to use and save our resources. Other people may not enter unless they have the supporting papers. We will also get our own land soon. By getting our land inside the CADC we defend and manage it also. (FG, Tagnipa Crossing, 17 August 2002)

A Tagbanua woman, Percy, expressed how the CADC provided new freedom to access resources in a relatively unimpeded manner. She stated enthusiastically,

... the CADC is important to use because we are now free to get any type of product inside of it! Before it was difficult to get permits from the Government, but today it is much easier to get permits from our own kind, the Chief. I think

the CADC can keep people outside because we *katutubo* have the right to stop people from coming in. I can because I am Tagbanua and this is our region! (FG, Tagnipa Crossing, 17 August 2002)

Manong Thomas, the Tagbanua elder we met earlier, supported these views in an earlier and separate interview. He pointed out how the CADC supported Tagbanua rattan collectors by keeping migrants out. He explained,

... since we have our CADC the migrants give a little more respect to us. Very few Ilocanos [a migrant group] come to get rattan now. Before they come here to collect rattan, but now they must ask the permission of the CADC holders. If they do not ask permission, then they cannot cut rattan inside the CADC. (KI, Martape, 16 June 2001)

While Tagbanua were hopeful that the CADC would enhance their political and economic security by way of resisting migrants and receiving livelihood support from NGOs (*vis-à-vis* TICKA), initial public consultations that facilitated the claim offered little dialogue for reconciling local disparities. As a result, during the initial phase of boundary delineation, migrant perspectives of the CADC stood in stark contrast to those of Tagbanua (Pinto, 1999; McDermott, 2000).

Public consultations about these boundary delineations began in 1993 with NGOs targeting Tagbanua and migrants leaders in forest villages inside of the CADC. Rather than hear Tagbanua claims in the first instance, *migrants* now expressed intent to defend their land title inside the CADC. Recently settled non-tenured migrants farming *inside* the CADC voiced concern that they might be evicted from their homesteads. Their fears were partly warranted: anyone farming for less than five years on ancestral lands was potentially subject to eviction (Cabayugan Ancestral Domain Management Plan, 1997; Pinto, 1999). The claim boundaries were now reinforcing the insider (*katutubo*) and outsider (*dayuhan*) binary long prevalent in Cabayugan.

Nearly a decade after the initial consultations, the sentiments of pioneer migrant farmers remained the same; most were loathe to accept that the CADC could grant *katutubo* land title. Our key informant interviews revealed that pioneer migrant farmers remained vehemently against the land claim, with many arguing that *katutubo* should not be given land, while their own paddy fields remained untitled due to government inaction (KI, Manturon, Eduardo Castillo, 20 May 2001 and 10 June 2002). Although Tagbanua had settled and cultivated lands well before them, migrants continued to claim and cultivate lands with or without tenurial security – in part because paddy rice was seldom criminalised to the extent that swidden cultivation was.

Other migrants suggested that because Tagbanua were ‘ignorant’ (*mangmang*) or ‘lazy’ (*tamad*), they should not own or even tend flat land (*patag ng lupa*). Some claimed that if Tagbanua received their CADC and eventually titled their lands, they would sell rather than invest in their plots (a transaction that migrants usually carried out themselves). As one migrant, Juan, noted: ‘When their land is already titled, they always sell it. That’s the problem with them. When they have their own land, they will sell it at once. They don’t keep it ...’ (KI, Manturon, Juan Badenas,



Manturon, 20 June 2001). Migrants thus started to redefine *katutubo* in negative terms based on pre-existing social hierarchies, which local NGOs were now reinforcing.

Neither the interviews nor any of the documents reviewed suggested that migrants and Tagbanua were brought together on a sustained basis to discuss how the CADC might affect their livelihoods and perceptions of one another. Rather than heal old wounds, NGO interventions exacerbated the social and economic differences between each group, which only served to reinforce ethnic differences in Cabayugan. Such apparent differences are underscored even more in the three case studies below.

## VII. Three Cases of Civil Society Reifying Indigeneity

The following case studies reveal that as NGOs began working with the Tagbanua to implement the CADC, both supported the notion of being *katutubo*, while migrants began to resent the idea. Each case reveals how project interventions exacerbated local social and economic disparities, which, in turn, reinforced the basis of ethnic difference in Cabayugan.

### *Case One*

In the years leading up to the CADC, the NGO consortium tapped funds from the USAID-sponsored Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN) in order to strengthen NATRIPAL and the organisation of indigenous associations that stood to benefit from the land claim (Pinto, 1999). Part of this strategy involved supporting a 'Community-based Conservation and Enterprise Program (CCEP) for Indigenous Communities in Palawan' in 1995, with a principal focus on the sustainable use of non-timber forest products. The enterprise-based conservation strategy hypothesised that if local people 'benefit from a business that depends on biodiversity at a given site, they should have the incentive to act to protect it against... threats to its destruction' (Biodiversity Support Programme, 1999: 2). The consortium supported this hypothesis with a thematic programme strategy known as the 4Ks: 'Karapatan, Kabuhayan, Kapaligiran/Kalikasan para sa Katutubo ng Palawan,' ('the Rights, Livelihood and Environment/Nature for the Indigenous Peoples of Palawan') (Pinto, 1999: 68). The initiative implied that the ethnicity of Tagbanua and their claims to land were unique and traditional enough to offer them the resource rights and livelihood opportunities of *katutubo* (read: indigenous cultural community vis-à-vis DAO no. 2).

The conflicts arising from migrant encroachment, limited control by Tagbanua over forest trade, and loss of biodiversity made Cabayugan a project 'hot spot'. Moreover, because the Indigenous Peoples Apostolate had already organised TICKA with Tagbanua elite ('high blood'), such as Pedro Morales, BCN managers had fewer difficulties organising Tagbanua rattan collectors (Encarnacion, 1999). Initial project strategies involved determining how resource use could offer incentives for forest conservation. One way of achieving this was to ensure that Tagbanua had priority access over the harvest and sale of non-timber forest products: a task that called for the restructuring of the trade of non-timber forest products and consumer goods so Tagbanua could control the terms of trade with migrants. As *katutubo*,

Tagbanua acquired new rights through external support that sought to redress unequal trade relations through the reinforcement of social, political and economic boundaries (DAO 2, 1993).

To intervene in the trade of non-timber forest products, the consortium's staff coordinated activities with Morales, the former president of TICKA and NATRIPAL Board member. The first step involved building a trading post, the 'Area Servicing Unit (ASU)', on his land for co-operative micro-enterprise development (involving rattan and handicrafts). The servicing unit was to encourage Tagbanua to merchandise household goods amongst themselves at prices lower than those which migrants offered them during everyday transactions. Migrants often sold or provided credit in the form of basic goods to Tagbanua at over-inflated prices or interest levels from their own *sari-sari* store (a small general store) (Key Informant Interview, NATRIPAL, 17 April, 2 May, 6 June 2002). Since few other purchasing options were available, many Tagbanua households had been compelled to buy and borrow from them. The second step involved NATRIPAL using the servicing unit to supply short and long-term credit to Tagbanua rattan collectors in order to remove them from the debt-bondage cycles driven by migrant middlemen (KI, Provincial Project Coordinator, Coastal Resources Management Project, 31 May 2001).

Migrant middlemen managed loans and advances to Tagbanua rattan collectors and then consolidated the rattan on behalf of financiers in Puerto Princesa City. Financiers then re-sold the processed rattan to buyers in Manila (Conelly, 1985; Kilmer, 1994). With debts owing to financiers, middlemen rarely paid collectors the going market value of their rattan, which exacerbated the collector's debt (McDermott, 2000). Consortium staff tried to counter this by having collectors sell locally undervalued rattan, honey and handicrafts to them through the ASU at a fair price, which staff then re-sold with added value in the city to ensure Tagbanua received a fair price (Encarnacion, 1999: 4). By encouraging Tagbanua collectors to exchange NTFPs through the ASU rather than migrant middle men, NGOs upheld the rights and status of Tagbanua livelihoods but only if resources were harvested sustainably.

Despite good intentions, several problems eventually surfaced. First, as Tagbanua traded through the ASU, cash deposits filtered back to TICKA's initial leadership. Receipts from cash transactions at the trading post went missing, suggesting that financial benefits went to TICKA leaders and members, rather than the community (KI, NATRIPAL, 2 August 2002). Second, NGOs had failed to overcome patron-client relations and debt-bondage that caused Tagbanua to continue to sell rattan to middlemen. Overall, the consortium's effort to re-structure the terms of trade between Tagbanua rattan collectors and migrant middlemen only emboldened 'high blood' Tagbanua and exacerbated unequal trade relations (KI, Provincial Project Coordinator, Coastal Resources Management Project, 31 May 2001). The outcomes sharpened locally perceived differences of *katutubo* and *dayuhan* with regards to livelihood and poverty.

### *Case Two*

In 1997, Tagbanua claims to territory and indigeneity were further strengthened (at the expense of outsiders more generally) through the boundaries of the ancestral

domain claim (CADC). Through NGO interventions, Tagbanua rendered their indigeneity explicit as a means of protecting their intellectual property and resources inside of the CADC. The first instance arose when NGOs ‘workshopped’ Tagbanua on indigenous intellectual property rights (IPRs), which empowered Tagbanua leaders to screen entry into the CADC. Powerful Tagbanua in this instance combined their new knowledge of IPRs to assert difference (being *katutubo*) by making a stand on behalf of the community against NGOs and researchers bio-prospecting, despite initially assisting in CADC preparations. Ironically, once Tagbanua leaders sent their charge of biopiracy to NGOs in Puerto Princesa, certain NGOs working in Cabayugan were compelled to leave (KI, Palawan NGO Network Incorporated, 17 April, 18 June 2002). As friction over the case rose, the situation of the so-called ‘problem’ NGOs reached the national newspaper, albeit much to the discontent of Palawan-based NGOs. (Apparently most NGOs were *not* contacted regarding the article and considered it to hold sweeping statements.) In the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (3 August 1997) one journalist cites a local practitioner in the area as stating: ‘Motivating indigenous peoples is one thing, but running their lives is another matter... certain non-government organizations... had been acting like petty dictators’. The end-result was that as NGOs supported the ability of Tagbanua to defend forest resources vis-à-vis the CADC’s boundaries, they effectively emboldened notions of indigeneity in Cabayugan.

### *Case Three*

In 2004, migrants and Tagbanua were brought together to come to terms with their social ‘differences’ during a training session for a UNDP Community-based Sustainable Tourism initiative inside the CADC (UNESCO and UNDP, 2001). The initiative saw Tagbanua indigeneity and ancestral forests as a potential development node for cultural tourism and eco-tourism – with Tagbanua and Batak (a neighbouring ‘hunter and gatherer’ group) serving as archetypal indigenous trekking guides. During the workshops, a migrant community organiser from one of the local NGOs convened a debriefing seminar that sought to educate Tagbanua and migrants on their respective roles in sustainable tourism. During this seminar, the community organiser pointed out why specific legislation, such as the IPRA (1997), protected indigenous peoples rather than migrants during tourism operations. Discussions began with the facilitator asking one Tagbanua to stand up and have the audience/participants show why he was ‘different’ from migrants based on the apparent physical and cultural differences of each group. Those in the audience suggested that the (now rather embarrassed) Tagbanua had darker skin colour and different culture than those migrants in the audience, despite each group’s physical differences being relatively subtle. While the NGO and facilitator had no malicious intentions, the seminar’s outcomes supported local ideas of why indigenes should serve as ‘forest hosts’ and further reinforced local perceptions of ethnic difference (PO, 11 June 2004).

Interventions from projects that ‘demonstrate difference’ for the purpose of advocacy have considerable potential to exacerbate locally perceived social and economic disparities – whether intentional or not. Various agendas driving conservation-livelihood initiatives reproduce and sustain ethnic divisions as

members in each group use their claims of difference as rhetorical devices to sustain particular opportunities. NGOs build on local hierarchies (that is, using local leaders) to spin their conservation rhetoric and broadcast project agendas vis-à-vis local and regional claims of ethnic difference. It is in this context that many Tagbanua now reassert claims to indigeneity independent of, or in ‘collaboration’ with, NGOs as near-absolute categories.

### **VIII. The Relevance of ‘Difference’ in a ‘Frontier’ Setting**

The case studies show that the ways in which NGOs build on indigenous identity and territory for conservation sharpen Tagbanua claims to indigeneity and exacerbate social differences in Cabayugan. By strengthening Tagbanua claims over land and resources to oppose migrants and support conservation, NGOs continue to privilege and reify ethnic differences at the local level.

Embedded within these discourses of engagement are contests between Tagbanua and migrants to construct and adhere to identities that influence degrees of difference between them. Both NGOs and Tagbanua continue to defend and/or gain certain political and economic needs by articulating indigeneity and stewardship through the philosophy and boundaries of the ancestral domain claim. In particular, the domain claim and its projects have propped up Tagbanua indigeneity and supported indigenous claims over resources and political power at the expense of migrant non-members (cf. McDermott, 2000). Tagbanua now use the land claim and the idea of *katutubo* to articulate their social position with greater political assertiveness and socioeconomic exclusiveness. For many this was (and is) justifiable since migrants tended to redefine *katutubo* in negative terms. Migrant prejudice toward indigenes’ resource use and ways of life thus undercuts unequal transactions and reproduces a subordinate and primitive ‘other’, the rights of which NGOs champion as part of their cause. As a result, both NGOs and Tagbanua re-appropriate and reformulate ‘negatively defined social differences’ vis-à-vis *katutubo* and the land claim in ways that offer them political and economic advantages – a fluid but partly ‘transactional’ process (Barth, 1969: 15).

NGOs that attempt to assist Tagbanua by focusing on essential aspects of their identity and livelihoods have exacerbated social and economic differences at the local level – a case repeated in other parts of Palawan and the Philippines (Novellino, 2003; Resurreccion, 2006) and other countries of southeast Asia (Brosius, 1997; Tsing, 1999). While NGO interventions build on locally defined differences – as the above cases demonstrated – the fact they tie into and exacerbate these differences through their projects is due to constructing and representing people and livelihoods as binary opposites by bridging and reinforcing ‘ethnic labels’ (Bryant, 2002a, 2002b). Rarely, however, is such design without problematic outcomes. Parochial policy and practice often avoid local complexity by packaging and simplifying rural change as social binaries that are co-produced through the merger of local and regional ethnic constructs. Simplifying ethnic heterogeneity and competing claims over resources ensures policies cast complex situations as broad and easily managed problems – problems that are set as binaries such as uplanders and lowlanders, *katutubo* and *dayuhan* (Mosse, 1997; Li, 2002). The problem, of course, is that as interventions proceed and reinforce stabilising assumptions, they often allocate

resources to the wrong people, for the wrong purpose. In Cabayugan, where Tagbanua and migrants articulate their ethnicity during unequal production and exchange, NGOs continue to liaise with prominent Tagbanua leaders in order to reduce economic disparities by focusing on difference. In using locally powerful individuals as an outlet for broadcasting information that reinforces indigeneity on behalf of other community members, practitioners and advocates risk reinforcing absolute versions of 'being Tagbanua' according to the individual's own kin ties. For better or worse, migrants, Tagbanua elite and NGOs have strengthened and politicised social, political and economic boundaries according to ethnic labels in Cabayugan.

As our cases show, in the Philippines the label 'indigenous' has evolved as a matter of political and economic distinction, rather than simply a category of biological relatedness, hence making the label slippery, at once empowering and subjugating. As actors in civil society identify and reify the identities of indigenous peoples according to local constructs and conservation objectives, those who occupy the periphery of this discursive frame try to reposition themselves by self-identifying with meaningful ethnic labels (Li, 2000). Locals who occupy marginal spaces often reposition their ethnicity according to strategic needs and concerns (McDermott, 2000; Eder, 2004).

In the case of Palawan's changing frontier, we now witness how certain individuals (re)negotiate the terms of this social and political binary that so often 'drapes' upland societies. Through in-migration and intermarriage between migrants and Tagbanua, there are now poor migrants who find equal value in expressing their livelihoods and 'ethnic' character in line with *katutubo* lifeways. Their right to retain land and cultivate swidden in the uplands supports their desire to identify with 'poor *katutubo*'. This includes migrants who have married into Tagbanua families, migrants who have lived and worked in the forest for some time, and independent Tagbanua from remote northern areas (LQ, summer 2002). This clearly suggests that identifying with such categories is not fixed, with most categories failing to place each group into fixed, absolute terms.

As such, despite being migrant (*dayuhan*, *diwan*), poor individuals and families are accepted as 'being Tagbanua' and '*katutubo*', which effectively distorts but still generally falls within local and colonial binaries. As Palawan's frontier status becomes 'post frontier' (Eder, 2005), with economies growing and identities in 'flux,' people in 'mixed' households still readily adopt an ethnic label that affords them symbolic value and potential leverage. NGOs that implement projects according to social binaries fail to target and comprehend the levels of complexity driving socio-political and economic difference within and between indigenous peoples and migrants. Simplified management outcomes enable NGOs to extend their power over how people self-identify, which translates into power over people and their resource practices on Palawan (Bryant, 2002a).

## IX. Conclusions

In this paper we have shown that as actors in civil society facilitate devolved conservation independently or on behalf of state agencies, they build on older constructs of people and associated resource uses in order to implement their

objectives. Enmeshed in broader environmental discourses, NGOs in particular continue to forge discursive strategies from official discourse and societal constructs that now frame their advocacy. Perhaps the most pronounced is how NGOs use populist notions of 'indigeneity' and 'stewardship' as a means of enhancing their objectives for forest conservation. They ensure that in the process of forging alliances, indigenous peoples adopt and reproduce an ecological ethic which corresponds to 'custom' and 'tradition'. As a result, indigenous peoples adopt similar discourses through which they articulate claims of indigeneity toward other ethnic groups with whom they compete over forest resources. We have shown that as NGOs support one category of people over another in order to reduce local disparities in support of effective conservation, they invariably produce differential outcomes that sharpen ethnic identity.

The Philippines and Palawan island, in particular, represents a remarkable case where NGO-led conservation initiatives struggle to come to terms with rapid social, political and economic change in the context of progressive environmental decline. Many NGO programmes and projects deal with such complexity by ordering and simplifying how local people self-identify and use forests, building upon colonial and post-colonial constructs of indigenous peoples and migrants. We have shown how, as a result, certain NGOs now consider indigenous identity and livelihoods as essential conditions for successful forest conservation, particularly when non-indigenous groups compete over the same resources. Our case studies offer clear evidence of how recent efforts of NGOs supporting projects with and for indigenous peoples involves appropriating and representing indigeneity as a means of supporting land claims and forest conservation. Rather than produce equitable outcomes, however, we argue that as NGOs idealise the indigeneity of Tagbanua, they make pre-existing social and economic differences more self-evident among local users.

Since NGOs often involve indigenous peoples in programmes that support land rights and livelihoods for conservation, the potential for dialogue to focus on the 'similarities' between social groups diminishes. It is clear that new initiatives are needed that allow individuals to work to identify and build upon common needs and concerns in decision-making arenas that encourage plurality and transparency in dialogue and planning for mutually agreeable solutions.

## Notes

1. The Philippine *Barangay* is a local administrative unit that is similar to a hamlet.
2. We code our methods as follows: participant observations, PO; key informant interviews, KI; focus group discussions, FG; and livelihood questionnaire, LQ. We use pseudonyms throughout.
3. Tagbanua customs involve the 'cult-of-the-dead' in rituals and ceremonies that now include aspects of Christianity, while anthropomorphic deities (for example, *divata* and *panya'en*) continue to influence access to and use of forest resources (Warner, 1979; Fox, 1982).
4. Aborlan lies in south-central Palawan, and is considered the 'cultural cradle' of Tagbanua society (Fox, 1982).
5. These include almaciga resin (*Agathis philippensis; alba*), wild pig (*Sus barbatus*), various types and grades of rattan (mainly *Calamus caesius*), honey, bird eggs and swiftlet nests, and orchids (McDermott, 1994).
6. Tagbanua have traded forest products for commodities with Chinese and Muslim merchants for several centuries (Kress, 1977).



7. Respondents could choose multiple answers to one question.
8. The same can be said of fourth generation Tagbanua surveyed (born between 1940–1950) who confirmed that they ‘stayed put’ because of marriage and forest-based livelihoods (LQ, summer 2002).
9. 542.07 hectares includes the total amount of agricultural land that remained cleared and/or cultivated up until and including 2001 in all three sitios.
10. Responses may have included fields in fallow with primary succession.
11. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is decentralised, from the national to the provincial and community level.
12. The CADC is based on a legal certificate that releases a single ancestral domain claim. We use CADC, domain claim and land claim interchangeably.
13. A Manila-based NGO, PANLIPI stands for *Tanggapan Panligal ng Katutubong Pilipino* – The Legal Assistance Centre for Indigenous Filipinos. PANLIPI-Palawan’s lawyer wore two hats at the time as she also formed the new office of the Environmental Legal Assistance Centre in 1994. (KI, ELAC Staff Member, Puerto Princesa City, 26 April 2002, 14 August 2002 and 1 July 2004).
14. The IPA is an arm of the Episcopostal Commission on Tribal Filipinos of the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines. The IPA was formerly named the Tribal Filipinos Apostolate.
15. A Palawan-based Peoples’ Organization, NATRIPAL is the federation of indigenous peoples on Palawan (the ‘United Tribes of Palawan’) and functions as an NGO, with a broad constituency of indigenous peoples. It is comprised of ‘local associations’ in different indigenous communities, all of whom united in 1989 under NATRIPAL.

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