

# 1. Introduction: Fishing for Fairness

This book is an analysis of how local coastal communities in the Calamianes Islands in the Philippines understand the relationship between power, wealth and the environment, and how this understanding has contributed to the current situation of marine resource management. Unlike perspectives that have sought to establish objective measures of this relationship, I am interested in how it is subjectively understood and represented, by examining how local discourse has shaped a process of contestation over marine resources. Such management contestations are a characteristic feature of the ‘resource frontier’ in the Calamianes Islands, where fishing, conservation and tourism enact competing visions of how to engage with the bounty of marine resources.

Fishers in the Calamianes Islands with whom I have worked represent their fishing traditions as possessing two key features: their fishing methods are harmless to the environment and their use of low technological gear is closely tied to their poverty. Because of this, their practices are imbued with a sense of morality. In contrast, the activities of ‘immoral’ illegal fishers and outsiders are perceived as being responsible for all environmental degradation. From this perspective, it follows that any regulations introduced by government to reduce environmental problems should address those who cause the problems (the illegal fishers) and those who can afford to pay for their amelioration (the illegal fishers and the tourism industry).

This local fisher discourse was expressed, with varying emphases, in a range of contexts concerning marine resource regulation in the Calamianes. Two notable cases in point occurred during the debates on reforming the regulations governing the lucrative live fish trade, and implementing a series of marine protected areas. By adopting this discourse in these debates, fishers contributed greatly to the decisions reached, namely: the overturning of the live fish trade regulations and changes in the proposed implementation for the marine protected areas. Understanding the nature and effects of what I call the discourse of the ‘poor moral fisher’<sup>1</sup> became the primary focus of my research.

While it is possible to argue that this was simply a strategic political ruse by the fishers to avoid any regulation that would affect their fishing practices, here I explore these stated beliefs in greater depth—unraveling their relationship to cultural and social institutions. I found that the discourse of the poor moral fisher is fundamentally embedded within strongly held ideas and practices in

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1 There are two points to clarify about my use of the term, ‘poor moral fisher’. Firstly, by using this term I mean that the discourse emphasises that fishers are poor and moral; not that they have poor morals. Secondly, as will be demonstrated throughout the book, the term is not meant to imply a sense of absoluteness. I use the term more for a sense of narrative clarity, and instead emphasise the varied ways in which it is expressed.

the Philippines. I show how it is intertwined within a 'basic rights discourse' (Kerkvliet 1990: 242–73; Cannell 1999: 231–4) that is commonly expressed in the Philippines, and that it is reflected in particular ideas about reciprocity, social obligations and morality. These local concepts go a great way to explaining the context of the discourse of the poor moral fisher, and the means by which it achieves such resonance.

Such an emphasis on culture and morality draws on two general insights about the value of such topics in political ecology. Firstly, as Brosius has argued, '[w]e have been so fixed on local social movements, transnational NGOs, and globalizing processes that we seem to have forgotten about the need to understand how national political cultures might mediate between these' (Brosius 1999: 285). In the Philippines, the national political culture that I emphasise is that of the 'basic rights discourse', which stresses social obligations and moral relationships between rich and poor. This focus on morality as it is understood in the Philippines engages with Bryant's (2000) broader argument about the relevance of morality in debates over the environment: 'Research in political ecology has paid inadequate attention to the multifaceted cultural politics surrounding discourses of environmental conservation in the developing world. Specifically, it has tended to neglect the rich politicized moral geographies integral to conservation debates' (ibid.: 673, see also Bryant 2005).

In a regional academic context, this book will show how anthropology can make a distinctively cultural contribution to debates about environmental politics in the Philippines. I will do this by using the insights about local conceptions of power, reciprocal relationships and morality in the Philippines to inform my discussion of the politics of environmental management. I shall demonstrate how what may on the surface appear to be straightforward responses to environmental regulations are also about an attempt to modify the social and political relationships that fishers maintain with various other actors: an attempt to 'fish for fairness'. I argue that the responses of fishers to environmental regulations should be understood firmly within the context of these relationships.

By adopting a theoretical framework of a particular form of political ecology that emphasises the role of discourse and culture in environmental politics, the book also aims to extend ways of understanding the poverty-environment relationship. Without ignoring material practices and reality, I show that perceptions of the poverty-environment relationship make an important contribution to material outcomes. Like Brosius, I argue that discourse plays a significant role: 'discourse matters ... environmental discourses are manifestly constitutive of reality (or, rather of a multiplicity of realities)' (Brosius 1999: 278). Discourses about the poverty-environment relationship, I argue, can be seen not only in the words of fishers, but in the broader cultural setting of the Philippines where ideas about

morality and reciprocity are elaborated on and acted out in many contexts. As Hall (1997: 44) has pointed out, '[i]t is important to note that the concept of discourse in this usage [that of Foucault, and of mine in this book] is not purely a "linguistic" concept. It is about language and practice ... his definition of discourse is much broader than language'.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by reviewing the aspects of academic literature and global debate that focus on understanding the relationship between poverty and the environment. Further, I situate my research by introducing the features of post-structural political ecology that have influenced my theoretical perspective. After briefly contextualising my research within other work in the Philippines and within the broader concerns of anthropology, I continue with a discussion of the research methods I used, and then outline the rest of the book.

## **Poverty-Environment Relationship: Conceptualisations**

### **Sustainable Development**

Genealogies of debates about the poverty-environment relationship (for example Gray and Moseley 2005) have often started with a reference to the 'sustainable development' discourse, epitomised in the 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), more commonly known as the Brundtland Report. In a frequently quoted passage, the Brundtland Report declared that: 'Many parts of the world are caught in a vicious downwards spiral: poor people are forced to overuse environmental resources to survive from day to day, and their impoverishment of their environment further impoverishes them, making their survival ever more difficult and uncertain' (WCED 1987: 27).

This view of sustainable development attempted to move beyond earlier perspectives that viewed environmental concerns and economic development as fundamentally opposed. It aimed to address both the interests of observers in richer countries concerned about environmental degradation in the developing world and the interests of developing country governments more focused on economic growth. The sustainable development perspective was supported through its appearance in various international conventions and conferences, and by the early 1990s had become the primary view underlying massive funding for integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) by a range of international organisations (Wells et al. 2004: 401). Adopting the

view of poverty and environmental degradation as mutually reinforcing, ICDPs frequently targeted the activities of poor people, assuming that they were the central threat to the environment (ibid.: 406).

A second approach to the poverty-environment relationship has aimed at infusing it with an explicitly political perspective—political ecology. This approach is similar to the perspective of fishers in the Calamianes. This materialist form of political ecology, which emphasises the structures behind poverty and the impact of wealth on environmental degradation, is one which Brosius (1999: 303) describes as ‘representing a fusion of human ecology with political economy’. It tries to explain environmental politics and poverty-environment interactions in terms of empirical factors and causes.

## Materialist Political Ecology

While the field of materialist political ecology has continued to rapidly expand and diverge in terms of its thematic interests (see Bryant 1992; Peet and Watts 1996; Robbins 2004; Paulson and Gezon 2005), one of the core themes has remained its attention to the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation. Robbins characterised the argument formed from the ways these political ecologists have examined this relationship as the ‘degradation and marginalization thesis’ (Robbins 2004: 14). As Robbins described it, the essential feature of this thesis was that ‘[l]and degradation, long blamed on marginal people, is put in its larger political and economic context’ (ibid.). This had the effect of ‘shifting the blame’ from poor people to the things that were making them poor. Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), for example, argued that peoples’ political and social marginalisation correlated with their use of ecologically marginal land, which because of increasing human demands exacerbated environmental degradation. Earlier work by Blaikie (1985: 147) similarly emphasised how soil erosion was inevitably linked with issues underlying poverty and underdevelopment: ‘small-scale land-users often directly cause soil erosion, because they are forced to do so by social relationships involving surplus extraction’. From these works, the forces and social relations behind poverty are seen as the ‘real’ cause of environmental degradation.

Other works in this area of political ecology have continued to focus attention on the theme of poverty-environment interactions, but have taken somewhat different approaches. Gray and Moseley (2005: 19), for example, argue that ‘[w]hile poverty may be an important driving force of environmental degradation ... wealth and economic development are more likely culprits’. This was typified by the situation at Moseley’s fieldsite in Mali where it was found that wealthier cotton farmers had a greater negative environmental impact than the poorer ones (Moseley 2005).

The ‘downward spiral’ model and the materialist political ecology model represent attempts to understand the poverty-environment relationship from two different perspectives. However, as recent models of the relationship such as the ecosystem approach (MEA 2003) and that taken by the United Nations Poverty-Environment Initiative (Comim 2008) suggest, the particular features of the relationship can vary dramatically depending on location, time and scale. This has led to the conclusion expressed in some policy studies that indicators and models must be grounded and developed with local participation (Reed and Tharakan 2004; WVA 2006). As Comim (2008: 21) argues: ‘good poverty and environment indicators need to be integrated and anchored on local values and decision-making processes’. Building on this notion that shifts the focus of study away from some of the empirically measurable features of the poverty-environment relationship, the purpose of this book is to focus instead on the subjective ways in which it is understood, represented and contested among local actors.

## **Situating the Book**

### **Importance of Discourse and Local Values: Post-Structural Political Ecology**

In contrast to previous studies, which have aimed to empirically measure or objectively analyse the poverty-environment relationship, here I consider local perceptions and representations of such a relationship. Ethnography, with its strengths in examining local processes and politics, is particularly well suited to this approach. Its value is that it shows how environmental problems have come to be defined and contested at a local scale. Understanding the discourse of local residents about environmental issues—through an in-depth examination of its cultural and political contexts—goes some way to elucidating the manner in which this discourse has come to shape and influence the marine resource management process in the Calamianes. By showing how the political grievances of fishers are embedded in particular cultural perspectives, I explain the shortcomings of current resource management policies.

This approach draws on the work of Brosius (2001: 151), who emphasises that ‘environmental discourses configure (or are in turn configured by) emerging forms of political agency’. For Brosius, environmental campaigns:

... are not merely the sum total of a series of points of contestation among a range of actors with a diversity of fixed perspectives.... In the process, certain actors have been marginalized, while others have been

privileged. If anthropologists are concerned with understanding the processes by which emerging forms of political agency are constituted and configured, it defeats our purpose to regard these debates in terms of mere polyvocality. In fact, certain voices are able to edge others out, certain voices may be co-opted, certain voices may be dismissed as disruptive, and certain forces may be taken as irrelevant. How does the process of forcing open spaces for newly emerging political agents occur? How or why do such spaces close on others? (ibid.).

Similarly, in his study of discursive conflict among fishermen in Brazil, Robben (1989) has used discourse analysis to show how 'the economy' is enacted, represented and contested in different ways by different groups of fishermen. Here, various discourses about what is or is not 'economic' among more or less powerful groups have important implications for the distribution of benefits in the fishing sector.

By following this approach to understanding the roles of discourse, this book can therefore be viewed as contributing to the broad strand of literature on the politics of environmental use that has been labelled as 'poststructural political ecology' (for example Peet and Watts 1996). In contrast to the materialist form of political ecology, such literature is characterised by the analysis of both material and discursive contestation, arguing that practical struggles are always simultaneously struggles for 'truth'—struggles that happen in imagination and representation at the same time as they are conducted in the material world (ibid.: 37). This form of political ecology focuses on 'how competing claims to resources are articulated through cultural idioms in the charged contests of local politics' (Moore 1996: 126; see also Alejo 2000; Walley 2004; West 2005). I aim to show how local conceptions of the poverty-environment relationship are manifested in debates about regulation, and are embedded in worldviews and social relations that are specific to the Philippines.

Much could be learned from an integrated study of quantitative and qualitative aspects of the poverty-environment relationship, but my goal here is a preliminary step towards this end. I map out the cultural dimensions in a qualitative way, using some ecological and economic data as a setting to the primary focus on social and political contestation. Similarly, although it would have been useful to include more detailed analyses of other perspectives on environmental degradation, such as from conservationists, local governments or tourism operators, I focus on these attitudes more as they relate to the specific arguments set forth by local fishers. My primary aim is to show how resident fishers understand the various links between power, wealth, and environmental degradation, and how these understandings inform and help shape the outcomes of local debates about regulation of marine resources.

## Approaches in the Philippines

Numerous studies have examined issues relating to the poverty-environment relationship and environmental politics in the Philippines. The large interest in this topic is a function of factors that include the: high levels of biodiversity (Carpenter and Springer 2005); high rate of poverty; and a significant number of donor-funded biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation projects in operation. The Philippines is therefore an excellent site to examine poverty-environment interactions.

One body of literature has analysed the impacts, successes and failures of developments in coastal resource management in the Philippines (for example Courtney and White 2000; Pollnac et al. 2001a; Christie et al. 2005, 2009; White et al. 2005).<sup>2</sup> Aspects of coastal resource management that have been analysed include marine protected areas, legislation to promote decentralised management, and specific project experiences. Several of these researchers participated in a broad study of 'integrated coastal management' (ICM) in the Philippines and Indonesia and published their findings in a special issue of *Ocean and Coastal Management* in 2005. Their aim was to evaluate the sustainability of this form of management in achieving a range of goals. Overall, they found that ICM was rarely self-sustaining and that environmental conditions continued to worsen. They attributed this failure to the difficulties associated with building new institutions in a developing country context such as the Philippines (Christie et al. 2005).

In contrast to this managerial approach, which has had a more explicit focus on policy, other writers have approached issues relating to environmental use in the Philippines from perspectives informed by a more political perspective. Many of the anthropological discussions of environmental politics in the Philippines have come from scholars working on Palawan, because of its unique environmental and historical features. Here I briefly point out some of the main issues they raise and how my research sits in relation to their findings (as further detailed in Chapter 2).

Themes in this literature include the: analysis of conservation as a form of governmentality (Bryant 2002; Seki 2009); strategies used by environmental NGOs (Bryant 2005; Austin and Eder 2007; Novellino and Dressler 2010); impacts of conservation projects (Eder 2005; Dressler 2009); and how environmentalism in Palawan and elsewhere in the Philippines is marked by a simultaneous concern for social justice (Austin 2003; Bryant 2005). Eder's more recently published

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<sup>2</sup> Coastal resource management initiatives in Palawan and elsewhere in the Philippines are reviewed in more detail in Chapters Two and Five.

study of coastal livelihoods and resource management projects in San Vicente Municipality, on mainland Palawan (Eder, 2008) therefore offers a good contrast to the situation in the Calamianes.

This literature has provided detailed and rich accounts of the relationships between local communities and organisations seeking to implement conservation and management programs, as well as addressing a range of other themes. These writers have demonstrated, in particular, a concern for and understanding of local social and political processes; considerations mostly absent in the management-focused literature on coastal resource management. In contrast to the management literature, the socio-political researchers place the experiences and livelihoods of local communities at the centre of their analyses. However, while such analyses have focused on local social and political concerns, there has been little attention as to how environmental politics in the Philippines are tied to the cultural norms of reciprocity; a topic this book aims to redress.

## Fishing for Fairness

The purpose of this research is to build knowledge about local processes through detailing local understandings, attitudes and discourse concerning poverty and the environment. It is my intention to show how the social and political behaviour of local residents is deeply rooted in cultural norms of reciprocity, supported by widely held notions of personal morality and virtue. I will demonstrate how the political grievances of fishers are embedded within particular cultural contexts that determine how environmental politics are played out in the Philippines. A focus on local conceptions of morality among fishers and their relevance to conservation debates is set in a broader context of insights gained by other writers on social life and culture in the Philippines.

In particular, I draw on the work of Cannell (1999), which in turn built on the ideas of Iletto (1979) and Rafael (1988) about conceptualisations of power in the Philippines. Cannell has argued that themes of oppression and power are represented consistently in the Philippines through an idiom of 'pity' (*awa*) (Cannell 1999: 231–4). She shows how different groups of poor people present themselves as 'pitiful' in their relationships with more powerful people in various ways, and that such relationships must be viewed in the context of these ideas. Like Kerkvliet (1990), Blanc-Szanton (1972) and others, Cannell documented the existence of a strong ethic of fairness and justice for the poor.

In the Calamianes, I too noted fishers presenting as 'pitiful' (*kawawa*) specifically for the purposes of establishing reciprocal relations with those more powerful. Here, fishers expect the rich and powerful to recognise their inherent human dignity and treat them with humanity (*makatao*), creating a shared social world. The claims of the poor moral fisher are ultimately about ensuring that



the fundamental bases of the relationships that form their social world are respected. In this regard, I will show how fisher folk responses to environmental regulations can be viewed as an attempt to improve the social and political relationships between fishers and people with more resources. By using the ideas of Cannell (1999) and others who have theorised on social relationships in the Philippines, I aim to bring this element of culture to the forefront of environmental politics discussion in the Philippines.

## Broader Orientations within Anthropology

Such a concentration on discourse, culture and understanding inevitably leads to broader questions and orientations in anthropology—questions about the relationship between: action and understanding, economy and culture, and humans and the environment. Ecological and environmental anthropologists have long debated these questions. Writers in the culturalist tradition of environmental anthropology have emphasised the ways in which culture, ideas, language and the human imagination serve to shape events and outcomes with regard to environmental issues. This tradition encompasses work such as that of Ingold (1993), a body of literature that has been termed ‘symbolic ecology’ (Descola and Pálsson 1996), and those who have written with an explicitly post-structural or Foucauldian perspective (Escobar 1999; Bryant 2002, 2005).

While I have a great deal of sympathy for the culturalist perspective, I also take heed of the critique made by Carrier, who cautions that the culturalist orientation of writers such as Ingold (1993) and Escobar (1999) ‘tends to ignore the possibility that people’s understandings of and actions regarding their natural surroundings may be in a generative, dialectical relationship with each other’ (Carrier 2001: 39). In other words, such models can consider people’s actions as ‘relatively unproblematic reflections’ (ibid.: 27) of their views or perceptions of the natural environment. Similarly, typical criticisms of discourse analysis have noted how it can lead to ‘out-of-touch’ analyses, far removed from the realities of social life (for example Filer 2004: 84).

At the materialist end of the anthropological spectrum, writers emphasise the ways in which social life and culture have been heavily influenced by peoples’ material environments. In maritime anthropology, for example, writers have focused on the commonalities among fishing societies, arguing that they are a response to the physical and social characteristics of most fishing communities (for example (Acheson 1981). From this perspective, the social organisation of fishing communities is a response to the distinctive influences of fishing. Pálsson (1991: 38–42), among others, has persuasively demonstrated the tendencies of this ‘natural model’ of fishing to ignore the many cultural and

social differences between fishing societies. He also highlighted the relationship between the 'natural model' and earlier accounts of cultural ecology (Steward 1955).

In this book I do not intend to enter into detailed discussions of causality; whether the superstructure is determined 'in the last instance' by economic and material forces, or whether economic life is a product of the ways that people understand it—writers have for many years debated these questions with little resolution (as reviewed in Wolf 1999: 21–67). Sahlins, for example, highlights the weaknesses of unbalanced visions of both materialism and idealism:

For materialism, the significance is the direct effect of the objective properties of the happening. This ignores the relative value or meaning given to the happening by the society. For idealism this is simply an effect of its significance. This ignores the burden of 'reality': the forces that have real effects, if always in the terms of some cultural scheme (Sahlins 1985: 154).

Instead, I aim to adopt an approach similar to that of Billig, who has characterised his approach as one which:

view[s] ... symbolic and cultural understandings as resources that are often used strategically to advance or resist "interests" that are themselves culturally constructed in a never-ending chain of mutual and interactive causality. Culture is not a looming, static thing that causes or creates. It is itself always open to negotiation, change, and individual agency (Billig 2000: 782–3).

Writers adopting this perspective, Billig argues, 'view culture within local regional, and global political and economic contexts but appreciate that macro-scale events and effects are always perceived, conceived, and acted upon within culturally constructed meanings' (ibid.: 783). Or as Bertrand Russell (2004 [1946]: 2) suggested perhaps more succinctly: '[t]here is here a reciprocal causation: the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy; but, conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances'. While I recognise the danger of essentialism by adopting an overtly cultural approach in my book, I do not intend to imply that the cultural idioms in this book are unchanging, uncontested, or that they are shared by everyone—simply that they are widely shared and culturally intelligible. The discourse of the poor moral fisher is not some primordial, abstract, cultural system that directs all fishers how to act accordingly; rather, I present it as enacted through aspects of social life and behaviour. As Geertz (1973: 17) stated, 'it is through the flow of behavior—or, more precisely, social action—that cultural forms find articulation' (as cited in Turner 1975: 147). One

of the primary contentions of this book is that the conceptions of fishers, as expressed through the discourse of the poor moral fisher, are important to any understanding of the actual material outcomes of marine resource policy in the Calamianes. As Chapters 5 and 7 will reveal in particular, the ways in which this discourse is expressed hold significant implications for the outcomes of various environmental regulatory interventions.

I also seek where possible to avoid some of the tendencies of political ecology towards strict dichotomies. In particular, I avoid what some writers have chosen to characterise as a 'black and white' relationship between powerful, global or foreign conservationists, and weaker, local and/or indigenous groups (for example Brockington 2004). My book does not focus on one single conservation project or the project workers' interactions with local communities. While critical at times about aspects of marine conservation and regulation, I do not intend for the book to become defined as yet another self-righteous Western critique of how conservation projects have marginalised or disempowered local communities. While such critiques can play a valuable role in highlighting social injustice, on their own they frequently do little either to advance the terms of academic debate, or to assist in understanding or dealing with the practical social and ecological problems at hand. Instead, I view the regulatory regimes I studied—regulations to reform the live fish trade, and the creation of marine protected areas—as contexts where local understandings about the relationship between poverty and the environment have played out. Nor do I intend to imply that these regulatory regimes are necessarily representative of some form of globalisation, instead emphasising the local flavour of conservation in the Philippines (Brosius 1999: 285; Austin 2003; see also Filer 2004 for Papua New Guinea).

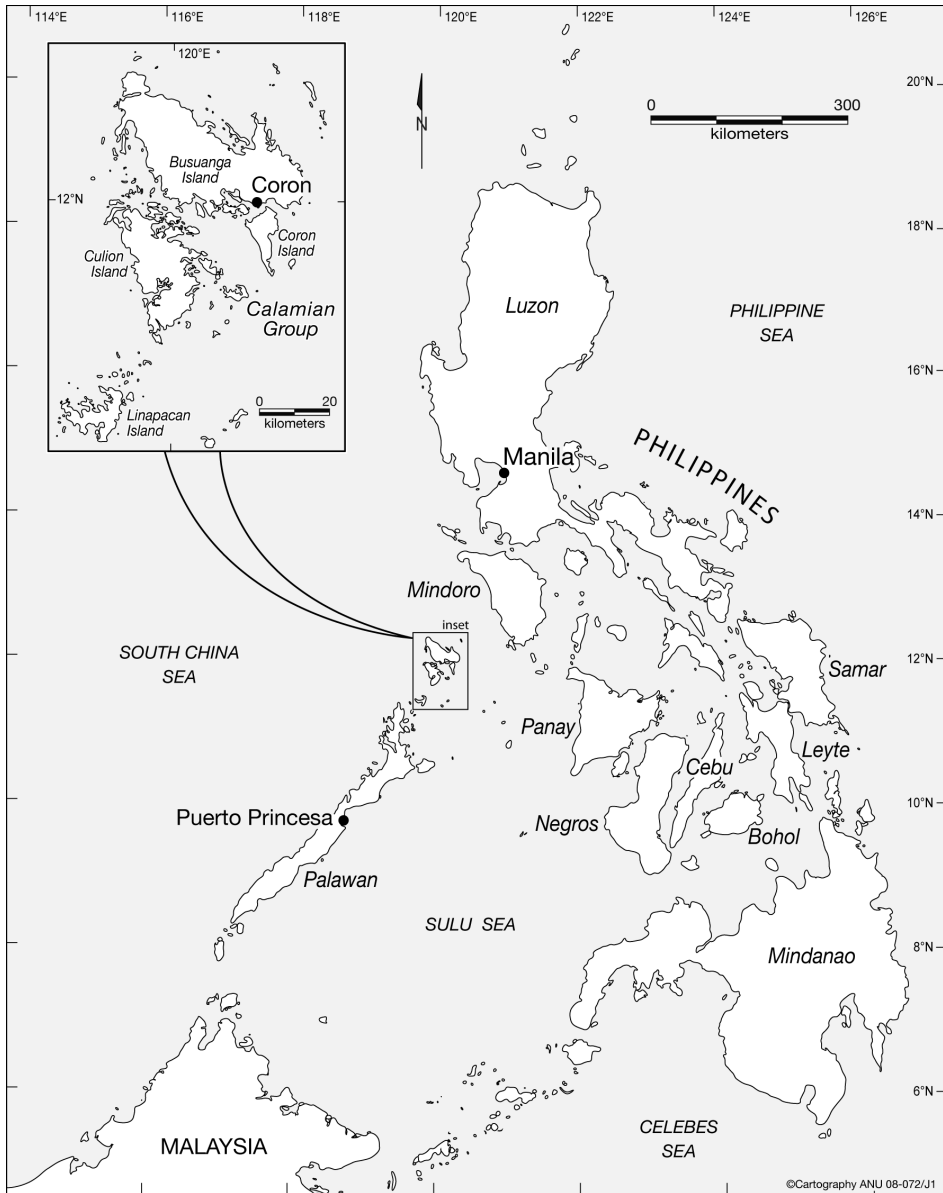
Another dichotomy often used in political ecology is that between community and the state. Such a dichotomy has frequently led to what Brown and Purcell (2005) call 'the local trap', which 'leads researchers to assume that the key to environmental sustainability, social justice, and democracy (commonly desired outcomes among political ecologists) is devolution of power to local-scale actors and organizations' (ibid.: 608). I aim to avoid such explicit valorisation of local groups. Instead, I emphasise the morally difficult nature of many of the problems related to coastal resource use in the Philippines. By this, I simply mean that the solutions to these problems are never simple or clear-cut, and inevitably involve questions related to values and morality. Such a view attempts to acknowledge the complexity of the issues in a way that both radical critiques of Western development—which can tend to romanticise local groups (for example Escobar 1995)—and ecocentric critiques of community-based conservation (for example Soulé and Terborgh 1999) are unable to do.

Similarly, as Li has argued with reference to the work of Scott (1998), it is important to ‘question the spatial optic of Scott’s account that posits an “up there”, all-seeing state operating as a performed repository of power spread progressively and unproblematically across national terrain, colonizing nonstate spaces and their unruly inhabitants’ (Li 2005: 384). While it would have been useful to conduct a truly ‘multi-scale’ ethnography (Paulson and Gezon 2005) and observe provincial and national political cultures and processes in far greater detail, this was not the focus of my research. Instead, I have aimed to address this issue by drawing particular attention to the ways in which different levels of government are perceived at the local scale (see Chapter 7).

## Research Methods

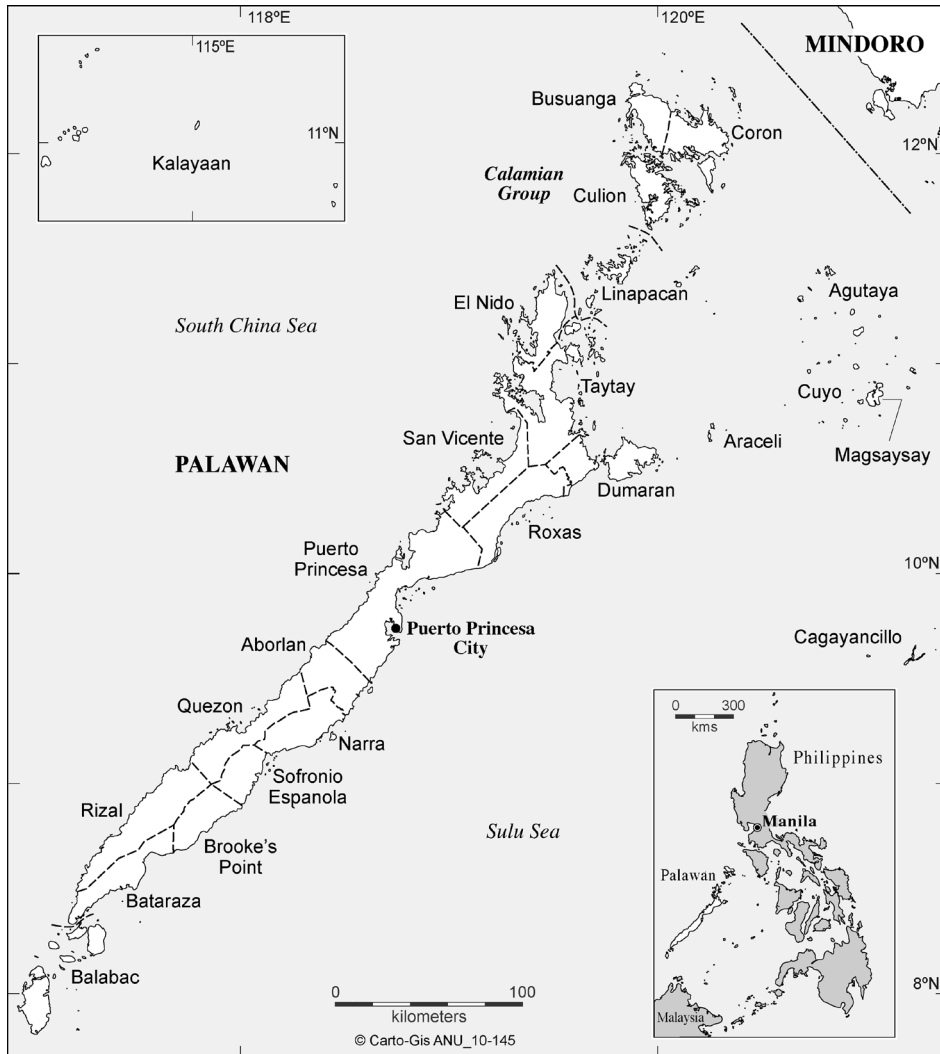
### Informants and Techniques

My research was based primarily in two locations: one in Esperanza (a pseudonym), a small peri-urban *sitio* (an enclave within a *barangay*) several kilometres from Coron town, and Coron town itself—the capital of Coron municipality (see Maps 1-1, 1-2). I visited Coron for one month in September 2005 for a ‘scoping’ trip, and returned in January 2006 to undertake research. Esperanza was a good location for me to work because most of the residents there were fishers, a larger proportion than in other coastal *barangays* in Coron. Of key interest for my research was local responses to conservation and management regulations, and so Esperanza appeared an opportune place to be because of the MPA (Marine Protected Area) recently implemented there. With the assistance of a local resident with whom I had made contact, I moved into the house of a local fishing family in Esperanza at the beginning of March. Except for a month in July when I returned to Australia, I stayed in Esperanza and Coron until the end of January 2007. I have since returned for trips in March and June–July of 2009, and July 2010.



**Map 1-1: Map of the Calamianes Islands.**

Note: for reasons of confidentiality, Esperanza is not marked on the map. Source: Cartography ANU.



**Map 1-2: Map of Palawan Province.**

Source: Cartography ANU.

Many scholars working in Palawan have focused on issues to do with indigenous minorities (for example Dressler 2009; Novellino 2007), and this would certainly have been an informative and interesting line of research to adopt in the Calamianes. However as I indicate in Chapter 2, issues to do with indigenous Tagbanua communities of the Calamianes are heavily politicised. This politicisation, the long history of suspicion between many Tagbanua communities and outsiders, and the presence of newer guidelines requiring researchers to work closely with the National Council on Indigenous People,

meant that the practical aspects of doing fieldwork with these communities were always going to be difficult to organise, and any research on them would have faced significant delays. I therefore avoided any explicit study of the Tagbanua communities, although many of the households I visited outside of Esperanza did identify themselves as Tagbanua.

The research methods that I adopted will be familiar to any practitioner of social anthropology, and were based primarily on informal interviews and observations. Early on during my fieldwork, I conducted a household survey of 70 households. Respondents were the husband and/or wife of the household. The questions focused on basic demographic data and also related to fishing and other livelihood practices. Apart from the data that I gathered, much of which was complemented by census data, the survey was a good opportunity for me to introduce myself to many of the people in the community, explain what I was doing there and develop a measure of rapport. As with all of my research in Esperanza, these interviews were conducted in Tagalog. Some more formal interviews were recorded; mostly, however, detailed notes were taken.

Conducting detailed life histories was one of my primary sources of data. Much of my most valuable data from Esperanza derived from informal conversations in the afternoons, as residents stood around socialising, playing basketball or volleyball, gossiping, or sorting through the fish catch. Similarly, when many fishermen were not out fishing they were busy at the local karaoke (*videoke*) house, which was another site of much informal conversation. Other ways in which I learned valuable information came through basic methods of observation, by accompanying fishing household members to the market and observing fish sales on the beach, going on fishing trips with different types of fishers, observing public meetings, participating in public and private social events, and going to church services. People from some households became more familiar than others, of course, and a great deal of information came in particular from those in the house where I was living. This household contained one of the more successful commercial fishing families in Esperanza.

Much of the material in this book deals with politically sensitive issues that are highly contested; themes of illegality and corruption pervade the text. I have used pseudonyms when referring to individuals and specific place names throughout the book, except for public provincial political figures and larger urban spaces like Coron town. While in some parts of Palawan and the Philippines the use of destructive fishing methods such as cyanide and dynamite is quite open (Galvez et al. 1989; Russell and Alexander 2000), in the Calamianes it is definitely conducted far more secretly. Because of the extreme sensitivity of this issue, I did not attempt to document in any detail the practice of illegal fishing. Instead, more importantly with regard to the argument I make in this book, I looked at the way illegal fishing was discursively constructed and

contested. I heard a great many rumours and allegations against various specific individuals in Coron, but it is not the point of this book to provide any sense of an investigative report about who is responsible for illegal fishing. The only people that I refer to as being involved in cyanide fishing, in Chapter 6, are a group of young men who lived in various residences around Coron. I should emphasise that at no point in this book do I refer to anyone in Esperanza as being engaged in cyanide fishing.

Similarly, I would make the point that I am not alleging any specific instances of blatant corruption in the book. Instead, I show how perceptions of corruption among local residents inform their responses to regulatory regimes. As Walley found with regard to similar issues of illegality and corruption surrounding the establishment of a marine park in Tanzania, 'there is no way to make sense of [fishers'] actions without addressing this issue' (Walley 2004: 26) of perceptions about corruption.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, local residents around Coron tend to blame most illegal fishing on outsiders, many of whom are transient fishers. While I was able to meet and talk with these fishers, I found that overall I was not able to get much satisfactory data because of their high level of mobility. Understanding more about transient fishers would contribute greatly to overall understandings of fisheries in the Philippines.

Another key aspect of my research was interviewing relevant informants based in Coron town. One particular informant was well connected and extremely helpful in introducing me to members of the municipal council and the Calamianes Live-Fish Operators Association (CLOA), as well as other fresh fish traders. Through these introductions early in my time in Esperanza, I was able to conduct regular and detailed interviews in formal and informal settings with these 'powerbrokers' of the marine resource policy process, and attended numerous meetings.

By way of personal introduction, I formed close relations with certain members of the tourism industry, which mostly involved sitting around talking to the tourism operators at the local tourism establishments in town and on occasion going for a dive with them. I was able to follow their discussions on local issues, and observe their interactions with local actors. In a similar manner, I was able to meet representatives of all the conservation organisations working in Coron and to observe some of their project activities. Attending various project meetings took me to different locations throughout the Calamianes. On several occasions, I also travelled to Puerto Princesa City, the provincial capital of Palawan, interviewing government officials, NGO workers, live fish traders



and fishers. In Manila, I was also able to interview some of the live and fresh grouper exporters at their aquariums, and to observe the process of sorting the fish when they arrived by boat from Palawan.

## Ethnography and Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue

As I intend this book to be of interest to people from diverse backgrounds, here I briefly address some of the issues related to writing ethnography, and the general methodological approach that I have adopted here. I strongly feel that if we anthropologists want to do more than just talk to each other—if we want to contribute to debates about public policy—then we need to make more of an effort to explain our research and our methods in a clear and credible way.

I have not adopted the positions taken by the ‘Writing Culture’ school (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and some of the more extreme post-modern writers, such as the dialogism of Dwyer (1987) or the ‘evocation’ of Tyler (1986), which were developed to address concerns over ethnographic authority. The ‘multi-sited ethnography’ advocated by Marcus (1995) is a somewhat more useful way of overcoming some of the limitations of single-sited research.<sup>3</sup> I have explained in the preceding discussion how I had various field sites, and that my argument is based on experiences grounded primarily in Esperanza and Coron town, but also included other locations in the Calamianes, Palawan and the Philippines. And while for anthropologists this has become more the norm over the past several decades and is perhaps simply stating the obvious, it ought to be noted that this is not simply an ethnography of the ‘exotic’ customs and practices of an isolated village. While my book is in many ways a typical village-based study, I instead analyse how local ‘traditional’ ideas and ‘modern’ practices of environmental management are deeply intertwined. In saying this, my point is not to criticise village-based studies, or those that focus on ‘traditional’ anthropological topics, but rather to emphasise that these are not the only sorts of topics anthropologists can, and do study—a point not always appreciated by policymakers and other scientists.

In 1973, Geertz wrote that ‘I have never been impressed by the argument that, as complete objectivity is impossible in these matters (as, of course, it is), one might as well let one’s sentiments run loose’ (ibid.: 30). Certainly, it is important not to let the particularities of the fieldwork experience overwhelm any sense of scientific objectivity based on the careful and thorough analysis of evidence. However, as Li argues, ‘[c]areful study of specific conjunctures—the kind of work conducted by anthropologists and social historians, among others—opens a space for theoretical work of a kind that is rather different from that of scholars

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<sup>3</sup> Although Marcus intended the term ‘multi-sited’ to refer to global cultural formations, not only to ‘two villages’, global formations such as ‘conservation discourse’ were not the prime focus of my research.

engaged in the immanent critique of theoretical texts, or the production of general models' (Li 2007: 30). Ethnography, from this perspective, is undeniably messy, inductive, imperfect and hermeneutic, yet still able to produce valuable analysis and theory.

More broadly, my methodological perspective draws on the work of Flyvbjerg (2001). He has argued that because universal laws cannot be discovered in the study of human affairs, concrete context-dependent knowledge is more valuable, and so the value of the case study should not be underestimated. Case study research offers the ability to explore issues of values and power in a way that more quantitative forms of analysis are unable to do.

I would argue that the reality that ethnographic knowledge is partial and ultimately subjective should not preclude its authority as a form that can produce uniquely situated perspectives. I have tried in this book to produce such a text; one that acknowledges its limitations, but one that is also based on lengthy and diverse interactions with a range of informants that has provided a grounded understanding of local life and culture.

## Outline of the Book

The book can be roughly divided into two parts. Chapters 2–4 set out the context and content of the discourse of the poor moral fisher. Chapters 5–7 then shift the focus from perceptions to practices: these chapters explore how the discourse is expressed in various policy and everyday contexts, and how it has come to influence outcomes relating to marine resource use in the Calamianes.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed background to the rest of the book by examining the historical context through which Palawan has developed as a resource frontier. Conservation, commercial resource extraction and tourism are three forms of resource use contested at multiple scales in Palawan. The chapter analyses each pattern of resource use and the negotiations at three geographical scales: the provincial level; the Calamianes Islands; and within the sitio of Esperanza.

Chapter 3 provides further context by offering a detailed snapshot of the economic, class and status relations in Esperanza, focusing in particular on the social relationships involved in the various fisheries. Here, I describe in detail the economic patterns of the four primary fisheries of Esperanza, emphasising the role of personalised economic relationships.

Chapter 4 narrows the focus to describe the local understandings of the relationship between poverty and the environment that is the main theme of the book; an understanding represented in the discourse of the poor moral fisher. I

show that this discourse depicts fishing as environmentally harmless and that it is closely tied to poverty. Through a detailed ethnographic description focused on the perceptions of fishers about fishing and their everyday lives, I show how this discourse relates to local ideas about fairness and pity.

Chapter 5 reveals how fishers used the discourse of the poor moral fisher during the implementation of a series of marine protected areas (MPAs). Fishers argued that implementing MPAs in their fishing grounds would be unjust, unless they were compensated from the profits of tourism. Here, fishers were able to manipulate these MPAs during planning and implementation, aiming to capture social and economic benefits, while ensuring to minimise their impacts on resource use.

Chapter 6 builds on the previous chapter by focusing on how certain fishers expressed their resistance to MPAs by continuing to fish within them. I found mostly young men participating in this form of fishing and analysed their resolve in terms of their particular economic and personal values. These values inform the practice of high-risk fishing, the need for rapid social and economic empowerment, and a desire to ultimately move out of the fishing sector and out of poverty.

Chapter 7 details the way in which fishers were able to participate in the process that brought about the rejection of regulations to reform the live fish trade by using the discourse of the poor moral fisher. Calamianes fishers argued that imposing a closed season, in particular, would greatly increase poverty, and ignored the 'real' problem of dealing with illegal fishing. In this chapter I analyse how this rejection of the regulations, and the discourse of the poor moral fisher, are deeply embedded within beliefs and attitudes about political life in the Philippines. The concluding chapter then draws all these themes and ideas together, exploring in greater depth the discourse of the poor moral fisher, and the implications that it may hold for alternative policy models for marine resource management in the Philippines.