6. Fishing in Marine Protected Areas: Resistance, Youth and Masculinity

In the Calamianes, certain fishers continued to fish within MPAs, and expressed the view that they had a moral right to do so. These fishers represented fishing within MPAs as a form of resistance against unjust regulations, a topic related to the themes of the poor moral fisher. While these fishers did not always present themselves as pitiful, their justification of this form of fishing presented a ‘basic rights discourse’ that emphasised the value of fairness and the right of fishers to fish in all locations. I also argue, however, that only certain fishers deliberately worked inside the MPAs—younger men, whose ideas about fishing involves notions of masculinity and particular economic and personal values. This chapter will analyse fishing within MPAs by examining two related motives: resistance against regulations, and the desire to demonstrate a vision of masculinity that is intertwined with specific notions of personal and economic success.

As I indicated earlier in this book, the term ‘illegal fishing’ covers a wide range of practices. While the type of fishing I focus on in this chapter—fishing within MPAs—is technically illegal, it is not understood as illegal in the same way as cyanide and dynamite fishing. This is an important point because I wish to show in this chapter how the discourse of resistance among those who fished within MPAs emphasises the immorality of cyanide (and dynamite) fishing, as does the discourse of the poor moral fisher. However, the second motivation of these MPA fishers has links with cyanide fishing. Both forms of fishing emphasise high risk and high return, masculinity and the desire for economic success. I will show how fishing within MPAs can be interpreted as a form of fishing that lies between the categories ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’.

The chapter first reviews some of the literature relating to various forms of illegal fishing. Here, I contrast some of the material that has concentrated on understanding why illegal fishing flourishes in the Philippines, with literature from both the Philippines and elsewhere that addresses motivations behind illegal fishing and ‘poaching’. I then detail the discussions I had with those who practiced fishing within MPAs and tease out the links between fishing and masculinity. In the main body of the chapter, I focus on how younger fishers are more likely to take up illegal fishing because of their particular economic and personal values. Younger fishers, I argue, are more interested in higher-risk fishing and ultimately in moving away from fishing itself.
Academic Approaches to Illegal Fishing

Various analysts have looked at why various forms of illegal fishing have continued to flourish in the Philippines. In San Vicente (Palawan), Eder (2003: 214) points out that beach seining, an illegal gear, ‘enjoys considerable local tolerance because even those who do not engage in beach seining themselves may benefit from its presence’. The fish that are caught in beach seining, for example, provide those raising hogs with a useful feed source in the form of fishmeal. Similarly, Russell and Alexander (2000: 33–4) relate how share systems among fishers serve to provide community support for blast fishing in the Lingayen Gulf. There, fishers using dynamite regularly give away portions of their catch to small-scale gillnet fishers. Galvez et al. (1989: 49–50) also demonstrate how various members of the village they studied (also in the Lingayen Gulf area) benefit through blast fishing: either through seasonal employment, or fish giveaways. They also stress the role of local law enforcement agents in exacting bribes, and that of local politicians in suspending specific cases of law enforcement in exchange for political support.

Other writers have looked at the motivations behind illegal fishing in the Philippines. That it clearly appeals as a rapid source of income is obvious: years ago Spoehr (1980: 24) pointed out that ‘[d]ynamite fishing was the quickest and most economical way for small-scale fishermen as well as middle level operators to increase their catches, and fishing communities rapidly adopted dynamiting as a general practice’. Similarly, Szanton (1971: 30) noted that in the northeastern corner of Panay where he worked during the 1960s, the ‘potential earnings ratio [of dynamite fishing] is too high to be ignored by some of the local fishermen even if it means the ultimate destruction of their fishing grounds’.

In addition to the obvious financial motives, however, other writers have suggested that many illegal activities are a form of resistance against unjust regulations (Scott 1985). Lahiri-Dutt (2003) provides an example of such a perspective in the context of illegal small-scale ‘informal’ coal mining in Eastern India. She asks, ‘[w]hat factors force ordinary humans to turn into unlawful citizens or criminals’ (ibid.: 69), and argues that resistance was the key to understanding such activities:

In my view, this practice is one way of re-establishing the lost claims of the local communities over the land and its resources. When the local communities found themselves disempowered by the laws, and

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1 Although Lahiri-Dutt is referring to claims over land, MPAs zone particular spaces according to what sort of fishing is or is not possible and so the comparison is still highly relevant.
disenfranchised by the mining company, they began to extract as much as they could from the same land, the land they can no longer call their own (ibid.: 75).

Similarly in Greece, Bell et al. (2007) observed poaching in a lake and understood it to be a response to a series of environmental regulations that were deemed unfair, hypocritical and benefiting farmers who lived far away while marginalising the livelihoods of local fishers. ‘In this context, poaching becomes emblematic of lost livelihoods and identities and a token of resistance and rebellion’ (ibid.: 401).

Importantly for the purposes of my argument with regard to the different ways in which fishing with cyanide and MPA fishing were represented locally, Bell et al. (2007: 399) also argue that ‘[s]ome people who admit undertaking what they perceive as least detrimental (sic) forms of poaching are antagonistic towards what they construe to be truly harmful forms’. Similarly, for fishing in Lithuania, Hampshire et al. (2004: 313) note that ‘[p]oachers occupy different positions along the spectrum, according to their insider/outsider status, their perceived need or greed, the apparent threat posed to fish stocks, and the aesthetics and fairness of their fishing practice’. In a situation similar to what I observed in the Calamianes, they adopt a perspective where local subsistence anglers are contrasted with non-local electro fishers.2 In the Philippines, Russell and Alexander (2000) and Galvez et al. (1989) both report that fishers in the Lingayen Gulf emphasised that blast fishing was relatively harmless compared with illegal commercial trawl fishing, thus justifying their actions. Eder (2008: 112–3) also describes how beach seining is not considered as illegal as cyanide and dynamite fishing in San Vicente.

My understanding of fishing within MPAs resonates with the insights of these writers, who emphasise how these forms of fishing can be understood as resistance against unfair regulations, and are contrasted with other more damaging gears. In a context where restricting the activities of legal fishers is seen as unjust and exploitative (as I have argued in Chapters 4 and 5), fishing within MPAs is one defiant response. Some fishers felt justified in fishing within MPAs, arguing that their gears should not be subject to any restriction (as opposed to the use of cyanide and dynamite).

However, from my limited discussions on the topic to follow, I formed the view that it was definitely only a small minority of fishers who actually fished in these MPAs. Therefore, I also want to examine how and why younger fishers in particular adopted this practice. As I shall show, notions of bravery, status and the pursuit of wealth were also important for those young men. I argue that in

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2 Electrofishing uses electricity to temporarily stun fish.
addition to notions of resistance, fishing within MPAs can also be interpreted in the context of a web of local concerns that encourage young men to demonstrate their masculinity.

On this second point, my understanding corresponds with what Lowe (2000: 246) describes among young cyanide fishers in Indonesia:

Nearly all cyanide practice is carried out by young men, for several reasons. Older people have trouble diving the way younger folks can; it is a physically strenuous activity and older men complain of the cold. High live-fish profits are a way for young men to build houses and establish new, independent families. Cyanide also has a status that is appealing to younger people. Cyanide fishers peacock their wealth and modernity by controlling outboard motors. They also have the money to smoke expensive cigarettes and wear new clothes. That the activity is illegal further demands their daring and indicates their tightness with officials who will protect them from prosecution. In short, cyanide fishing is where it’s at—what’s happening—and this makes it a game young guys want to play.

Fishing within MPAs is an interesting mode of fishing because while those who practiced it contrasted it strongly with cyanide fishing, the visions of masculinity that were articulated are strikingly similar. I suggest therefore that fishing within MPAs occupies a ‘middle ground’ in the spectrum between completely legal fishing and the ‘truly’ illegal fishing such as cyanide and dynamite. It has characteristics that link it with both, so in this chapter I seek to analyse how fishing within MPAs is best understood from perspectives of both resistance and masculinity.

**Fishers in Marine Protected Areas**

**Resistance**

As I introduced in the previous chapter, a majority of the MPAs in the Calamianes are associated with tourism. When discussing fishing within MPAs, fishers emphasised the MPAs that surrounded resorts. When I asked those who admitted to fishing there how law enforcement officials and tourism operators might feel about such activities, they were highly critical of the situation.

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3 See Turton (1986) for a similar discussion of the ‘middle ground’ with regard to everyday peasant resistance.
Operators managing resorts in an MPA were usually described as rich foreign businessmen (or rich businessmen coming from Manila) who made a great deal of money out of the beautiful reefs of the Calamianes. They felt that these businessmen were given preferential treatment by the local government because of their money. Fishers resented the fact that they were denied access to the reefs, which in some cases the resort operators had cordoned off as MPAs. As I argued in the previous chapter, the potential benefits of MPAs for fisheries are not widely understood or accepted among local fishermen. Instead, MPAs were often viewed as further marginalising the meagre livelihood of small fishers. The emphasis devoted to tourism by the local government was seen by many, as a trend that would encourage the development of more MPAs, which would make it harder for them to make a living through fishing. In their view tourists, businessmen, and well-connected officials in the local government were frequently the only people who benefited from the declaration of such protected areas. They felt, therefore, that they were justified in continuing to fish there.

While I did not take notes at these discussions, I recorded my impressions shortly afterwards and comments such as the following give a flavour of the tone:

At Resort X, they banned fishing around the whole island. This is completely unfair.

They have banned some of the best fishing grounds…. I used to fish at Donido, that was the best spot to find grouper; but the resort has made it stricter now.

The government is making it harder for us poor fishers but they always benefit the rich. Why should the rich tourism operators be allowed to do this?

Law enforcement officials were routinely described as blatantly corrupt, parasitically seeking to take advantage of poor fishers (see Chapter 7). They were depicted as facilitating cyanide fishing through bribery, and oppressing poorer fishers who practiced legal methods. As I described in Chapter 4, among many fishers there is a broad feeling that they are the poorest of the poor, and have been abandoned by the government. In this way, the activities of people trying to stop fishing within MPAs are delegitimised as corrupt and exploitative.

**Enacting Masculinity**

The context in which discussion of fishing within MPAs was brought up epitomises the ways in which some young men in coastal communities perceived
it. From my experience it was always during a tagay session, when young men sat around in a circle and took shots from whatever alcohol was on hand, usually a bottle of rum (Tanduay) or brandy (Emperador), or less frequently beer. Tagay is a social event that not only reaffirms togetherness (pakikisama) among one’s friends or peer group (barkada), but also reaffirms a sense of manhood or machismo among those who can drink heavily and hold their alcohol. The tagay sessions that I was involved in were usually composed of men only, and the dynamics were usually very jovial and full of laughter, combined with a pervading sense of machismo. The fact that this form of fishing was discussed only within an atmosphere of machismo, such as tagay, suggested a link to be explored.

When fishers did talk about their experiences with fishing inside MPAs, it was referred to very much as an example of strength or bravery. For example, one young man talked with pride of how he was able to avoid the guards deployed at a private, foreign-owned resort island, and fish within the surrounding MPA. Others spoke of their skill in avoiding the state employed guards in other MPAs. All the fishers I spoke to who talked of such fishing declared his practices in terms of a bold, brave act in which he was able to avoid capture; nobody was able to stop him from obtaining a large catch of fish and the ensuing financial rewards. In this sense, the act of fishing within MPAs can be seen as an active ‘gamble’ with the state (Aguilar 1998: 32–62) and outsiders that usually tended to pay off. Importantly, every single person I talked to who was engaged in fishing within MPAs was a young male in his teenage years or in his early twenties. I turn now to a discussion of how fishing generally is intimately linked to notions of masculinity in Esperanza.

Links between Fishing and Masculinity

In Esperanza, fishing can be understood as both a livelihood and a practice that is connected to various ideas surrounding notions of masculinity. Although fishing itself is not an exclusively male affair; men dominated it. Women do not participate in commercial fishing trips, and only rarely are they seen on shorter net-fishing trips. Siar (2003) shows how in Honda Bay, on mainland Palawan, women’s fishing activities are closely associated with the intertidal zone. In Esperanza, similarly, women contribute significantly in practices such as gleaning for shells, catching shrimp, and post-harvest selling of fish and transportation. However, women will often downplay the worth of these
contributions, and indeed are often embarrassed about them.\footnote{Swift (2006: 6–7) suggests that in the case of the seafaring industry in the Philippines, a similar practice of downplaying the worth of women’s economic contributions is related to the potential for capitalistic exploitation of female labour.} So, even if in reality the work of fishing may be shared between the sexes (Weeratunge 2010), the point remains that fishing is associated with an ideology of masculinity.

Like other all-male activities, such as attending a cockfight (Aguilar 1998: 32–62), fishing is a gamble and an opportunity for male fishermen to demonstrate their masculinity, economic prowess, and value.\footnote{Indeed, along with the karaoke den (Plate 6-1), gambling is one of the favoured recreational activities among many fishers when they return to shore. Fishers will not necessarily wager large amounts of money, but will spend a lot of time playing cards or attending cockfights.} Commercial fishing trips in the region last for up to two weeks; during this time up to 30 men will eat, fish, and sleep on the boat together. On their return, the drinks are invariably broken out as soon as the packing and transportation process is completed. As discussed earlier, this is an opportunity to reinforce the comradely male bonds that exist during fishing trips, in an atmosphere pervasive with machismo. Those men who can pull in the biggest or the most fish during these trips are highly respected among their peers. The fishermen who had managed to achieve relative success in their profession and own several commercial boats are the most respected men in Esperanza, the most financially well-off, and hold most positions of political authority. Although in broader Philippine society fishing remains a low-prestige occupation, it is one that can still bring relatively high status within a fishing community (Russell 1997).

\textbf{Plate 6-1: At the karaoke den.}
What I observed in Esperanza is similar to what Russell (1997: 85) has described in a Batangas fishing community, where:

Being captain of a boat provides a man with rich opportunities to demonstrate masculine skills, bravery and ability to attract or manipulate mystical sources of luck and potency.... Boat ownership as a form of symbolic capital transcends its utility as a source of production, since it also expresses a distinctly masculine identity in terms of one’s ability to physically withstand the rigors of a sea-going occupation and lifestyle.

The example of Manuel gives some idea of how fishing is viewed as a vehicle for masculine expression in Esperanza. When talking of his experience as a captain of a fusilier-fishing boat, he described his skills with great animation, hand motions and rhetorical flair:

I am not boasting or being arrogant, but I am the best fusilier-fishing captain in the community. It is true. You ask your kuya [older brother] Bong, he will tell you the same. My catch is always 2200 kg, 2400 kg. Last year my lowest catch for the whole season was 1500 kg! Most of the other captains, they will only catch 1600 kg, 1700 kg, 1800 kg, like that. You see, when I am out there, I don’t waste a single minute. During the day, as soon as the sun is up I make sure everyone is busy fishing. As long as the weather allows, everyone must fish. I don’t stop for food breaks—my crew eats while they fish. During night, ok then they can sleep. But I am the captain and I don’t allow anyone else to pilot the ship during the night, so I travel at night to go to the good fishing grounds. Other captains just anchor at night and then move around to the fishing grounds during the day, so they lose lots of fishing time. When I drive the boat I have a lot of coffee, I turn the radio up loud, I smoke lots of cigarettes to keep me going. Sometimes when I get back to Esperanza people are surprised because I am back so quickly, but I’ve already caught enough fish.

Tall, extremely strong and exuding self-confidence, Manuel was one of the most highly respected fishing captains (in any fishery) in Esperanza. He complemented his fishing exploits with considerable skill as a carpenter, and as a soulful crooner of epic ballads in the videoke den. Other fishers in Esperanza would speak with admiration of the skill and experience of captains like Manuel and Carlos Marquez, the fresh grouper fishery captain whom I have described in earlier chapters.
Kuya Carlos, we call him the ‘Professor of the Sea’ here because he has taught so many of us how to fish. Many of the techniques that we use here in Esperanza were first brought in by Kuya Carlos from his relatives in Mindoro…. Kuya Manuel is really good with fusilier fishing because he knows the currents and the fish better than anyone else. He can predict where the fish will go.

Dumont (1992) describes a similar understanding of fishing in the village on Siquijor where he worked during the 1980s. Stating that ‘[t]he ability to catch fish was an expression and a measure of male success’ (ibid.: 112), Dumont emphasises the ways that men use their fishing success as a way of gaining prestige. Fishermen give away fish in order to support an exchange network, and to be generous is considered ‘compulsory behavior for any fisherman’ (ibid.: 115). Fish is not only good food to eat but

also food with which to play, to display, and to act out a fisherman’s aggressive and competitive buut, his “identity”. For indeed, sending fish here and there constantly to everyone and anyone, generous as it may have been, was in addition, in supplement, a subtle way of showing off, of bragging about the results of one’s efforts’ (ibid.: 115–6).

Dumont went further to suggest that fish was the icon of phallic aggressiveness that ‘pointed up the keen competition that existed among the fishermen’ (ibid.: 116).

This description of the ways in which fish are shared represents similar patterns of social reciprocity in Esperanza. When net fishers arrive in the mornings, the beach is very active as neighbours come by to inspect the catch. Fishermen who bring in a good catch hand out fish to those who pass by: ulam mo (your dish to go with rice) they would say, pointing out particularly fine specimens. Other people, such as elderly men no longer able to fish regularly, frequently help with the processing of the catch and earn themselves a few generously sized pieces of fish for their help. When the time comes for tagay, men will be pleased if they get a chance to provide the food that goes with the drinks (pulutan). This was usually grilled fish (see Plate 6-2). In this fashion, sharing of fish can be viewed as one of the ways that masculinity is enacted in Esperanza.
Plate 6-2: Freshly caught fish to go with drinks.

From such accounts fishing is clearly a practice intimately tied to understandings of prestige and masculinity. However, there is an important variable within the category of ‘males’ that is not always considered when the links between fishing and men are considered—age. The remainder of this chapter argues that age has considerable implications for how fishing within MPAs has been practiced.

Younger and Older Fishers

Hook-and-Line Fishing Versus Net Fishing

In Esperanza there is a marked difference between younger and older men in terms of how they conceive of and approach fishing. This difference can be seen through a brief examination of the different types of fishery that each group favour. Most of the older men in the community (those aged above 40) prefer working on small-scale net-fishing boats. These men have invested considerable money and effort over many years in getting to where they are, with their own motorised boat and gillnet, which they use to catch rabbitfish. They catch these fish in the seagrasses close to shore. As I described in Chapter 3, trips usually only last one day, and the fish are usually sold at the market in Coron town.
In contrast, younger men can be seen commonly on two types of fishery—the hook-and-line fresh grouper fishery, and the live fish or live grouper fishery. The captain and a few select others in positions of relative authority, such as the engine-operator and the ice-hold-packer (Plate 6-3), are usually older and highly experienced in the commercial fishery of fresh grouper; however, the crews of both grouper fisheries are dominated by teenagers and unmarried men in their twenties. Although it is usually only the live grouper fishery that is implicated in fishing within MPAs, such crews are often interchangeable so that a young man may be a crew member of a fresh grouper boat one season, but join the crew of a live grouper boat the next. The point is that it is mostly young men on those hook-and-line boats, and those young men have specifically different ideas about fishing and the financial rewards available to them compared with older men. Such ideas are embodied within the different styles of fishing each group chooses to adopt.

Plate 6-3: The ice-hold packer aboard the fishing boat.

One important difference between the hook-and-line fisheries and net fishers is the level of stress or challenge involved. The hook-and-line grouper fisheries have extended trips of between ten and seventeen days, which can be quite physically and mentally challenging. For example, fishing for fresh grouper involves leaving the mother boat on a small one-person boat, which can be an extremely isolating experience if the fish are a long way out in open seas.
Fishing for live grouper includes the responsibility of looking after the fish after they were caught, and effectively ‘babysitting’ them in the aquariums built into the boat. Crew members cited fundamental hardships, such as being away from the family, lack of sleep, the basic living conditions on the boats, and the danger of heavy seas during rough weather.

Net fishing, in contrast, is considerably more sedate than the hook-and-line fisheries. In response to a question on why he preferred net fishing to fishing on the large commercial boats or on live fish boats, Bong, a fisherman in his early-fifties, pointed out that net fishing was altogether safer and less stressful for him than the commercial grouper fishery or the live reef fishery. It was closer to shore, it was physically less demanding, and the trips were shorter. Bong explained that metaphorically speaking, his life was in the ‘late afternoon’ now (hapon na) and his focus was on spending and enjoying time with his family; he would leave the hard methods of fishing to the younger men, whose lives were still in the ‘morning’ (umaga pa).

Another important difference between net fishing and hook-and-line fishing is the pattern of earnings. Overall, net fishing is regarded as a fairly consistent and reliable method of catching fish, where even a poor catch can still bring in rabbitfish worth ₱100 or so. In contrast, the method of hook-and-line fishing is much more variable, and catches tend to fluctuate erratically. While rabbitfish are easily collected en masse in identifiable habitats that are close to shore (that is the seagrass beds), groupers are brought in one at a time from wide fishing grounds. The fish targeted by the hook-and-line fishermen are known locally as ‘first-class’ fish: groupers, live or dead, are the primary target, but there is often a by-catch composed of other large, well-priced fish such as tuna and snapper. All of these fish tend to be large and impressive looking compared with the smaller, brown, and spiny rabbitfish (Plates 6-4, 6-5, 6-6). The price of live grouper varied markedly each week, but often reached around ₱2000 per piece when sold to the traders in Coron town in 2006–07. The fresh grouper caught on the commercial boats sold for around ₱600 per kg in 2006–07 in Manila, which was significantly higher than the normal price of rabbitfish (around ₱40 per kg in Coron) obtained by net fishers. The potential for high earnings, therefore, is greater in the hook-and-line fisheries, but the income from net fishing is altogether more stable.

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6 This responsibility was explicitly cited by one older fisherman as to why he did not enjoy live grouper fishing: ‘With this sort of fishing you have to babysit the fish! You can’t sleep properly; you always have to be checking to make sure the fish are OK; if one gets sick you have to watch it quickly to make sure the sickness doesn’t spread to the other fish; it is very hard work! I much prefer just to catch the fish and throw it in the hold’.

7 Such a contrast corresponds with what Eder (2008: 75) observed for one fisher in San Vicente. For this fisher, the returns for squid were varied and unpredictable, but sometimes ‘hit the jackpot’. Bream, however, pulled in a lower but steadier income. Eder points out that this fisher had to choose between squid and bream
fishing whenever he decided to fish, and that ‘[i]n making this choice, his main consideration was his ability to tolerate the risk of catching nothing at all’ (ibid.). I would suggest that such a consideration would be influenced heavily by the economic and social values of the individual, as I argue in this chapter.
Plate 6-5: Rabbitfish (Family Siganidae).

Plate 6-6: Fresh grouper (Family Serranidae).
Fishers cite these different patterns of earnings as good reasons to fish the way they do. Older net fishers, who have to support a family by bringing in a relatively reliable source of income, state that they prefer the stability and consistency of net fishing. They recognise that hook-and-line fishing can be more lucrative than net fishing, but they stress that, on a bad day, those engaged in the former can come back with very little or no catch at all. ‘They only have jackpots’ (Jackpot-jackpot lang sila), some net fishers say, meaning that the hook-and-line fishers simply obtain bonanzas and have no security. They also note critically that most hook-and-line fishers have to travel further and for a longer time. Thus, expenses are much higher than in net fishing, and so the need to obtain a good catch and the potential for a big loss are greatly heightened. Additionally, they point out that the credit arrangements for the hook-and-line fisheries tend to be onerous (see Chapter 3). Whereas most of the net fishers in Esperanza either own their own boats, or work on boats owned by a close friend or relative, most of the hook-and-line fishers work on boats obtained through a loan. The latter are obligated to supply all their fish to the trader who has loaned the boat to them, and to pay off gradually the debt for the boat and engine. Because of the financial hazards of hook-and-line fishing, therefore, the older men in the community prefer net fishing, which yields a steady and assured income.

Younger fishers, however, point to the potential of getting the ‘windfall’ or ‘jackpot’ through hook-and-line, especially the live grouper fishery: ‘Even if you only catch a few pieces, this is still enough to make a profit if they are kept in good condition. The price is much bigger’. The hook-and-line grouper fisheries can be seen as a far riskier bet than net fishing, but one where the payoffs are potentially much higher.

**Economic and Personal Values**

The different motivations that surrounded earnings from fishing are pointers toward more general understandings of the ways that younger and older men conceptualise the relationship between their livelihood, earnings and personal lives. Many of the older fishermen I interviewed said that their social position as family men had been settled for a long time. Bong, for example, said that while he recognised that he was quite poor relative to many people such as those living in Coron town; he had accepted this situation. The values he held dear and emphasised to me were those of family. Many other older men in Esperanza similarly expressed to me that, although they were poor, they were happy and contented with their families. One episode during my fieldwork illustrates perfectly the differences between older and younger men in regard to attitudes toward money. An older fisherman (a net fisher) told me that he earned about ₱4000 (US$80) per month, which he said was not much, but was enough for
him to raise a family and buy food to eat. In response to the same question on monthly income, his son (a hook-and-line fisher) also quoted a figure similar to that of his father. In contrast to his father, however, he went on to explain how inadequate his income was for the goals he wanted to pursue, such as going to college and finding a good job in Manila. While the older man identified with the notion of being a ‘fisherman’, his son viewed fishing more as a (hopefully temporary) means or standby job to obtain a limited income than as a life calling.

The ways in which a bachelor lifestyle tends to influence the lives of many young men is important in Esperanza. Here, my analysis bears a resemblance to the descriptions of Lewis (1992: 202–4), in his ethnography of vegetable farmers in northern Luzon. Lewis describes a class of young men in terms of a ‘youth culture’ that developed in the wake of the decline of the vegetable industry and the growing scarcity of land. Lewis emphasises the ways in which a boy’s peer group or barkada tends to chart the pattern of his behaviour, so that they begin to become part of the bachelor lifestyle while still in elementary school.

Lewis’s emphasis on the bellicosity of youths in northern Luzon is much stronger than what I saw in Esperanza, where many of the young men continue to live, on the surface at least, nominally respectful lives with their families. However, some of his observations about the ways in which the bachelor lifestyle tends to structure patterns of behaviour certainly hold true for what I observed in Esperanza. For these young men, many of whom have not had the opportunity to get a high level of education, attaining a certain level of status within their peer group is very important. The young men in Esperanza stick together closely, and participate with great enthusiasm in activities like basketball, drinking sessions, and hunting for ‘chicks’. Material objects of status are highly valued in this context, and so income becomes a means to enhance their status within this peer group. Money thus tends to be spent on flashy consumer goods such as motorbikes, alcohol and clothes. This corresponds with the observations made by Galvez et al. (1989: 50), who reported that:

> [t]he very little surplus many fishermen get [through blast fishing] is spent in other “get-rich-quick” schemes similar to blast fishing, such as hueteng (an illegal form of small-town lottery), ending (a form of lottery where the winning combination depends on the results of the national basketball games), and other kinds of gambling activities.

The ability to obtain a relatively high level of income is also of course important for its demonstration effect outside the peer group—especially to potential future life partners.

As is argued elsewhere (Bulloch and Fabinyi 2009), the idea of an attractive male partner for marriage in the rural Philippines tends to be based around a
range of preconceptions and ideals. An unofficial continuum of beauty widely exists among residents in Esperanza and elsewhere in the rural Philippines that strongly correlates with class and race. Pale skin, a prominent nose, straight hair and tall stature are considered attractive, whereas darker skin, a flat nose, curly hair and short stature are held to be unattractive. Therefore, at the bottom of the hierarchy of physical attractiveness are members of indigenous minorities, particularly those groups with especially darker skin and curly hair. Then follow working class Filipinos—fishers and farmers—whose skin is browned from work in the sun. Then, well-off Filipinos with paler skin, Mestizo Filipinos, and Caucasians.

Financial security is also extremely important in marriage considerations, as indicated by the common saying in the Philippines ‘no money, no honey’, or as one younger male fisher in Esperanza put it: ‘Here in the Philippines it doesn’t matter if you are ugly. If you have money, many girls will follow you’. It is widely perceived that these physical and economic characteristics of a desirable marriage partner cannot be easily accommodated through a life of fishing.

As well as signifying local status, therefore, high income levels are a way by which young men in these communities can actually move outside the local and access a broader dream of success, such as that described by the young hook-and-line fisher earlier—going to college and getting a nice job in Manila or abroad. Thus, for these young fishers, the practice of fishing within MPAs also offers the potential of moving into a new, empowered space. The promise of high rewards in fishing within MPAs complements perfectly the desire for material status possessed by young men, and at the same time enhances the fishers’ reputation for strength and bravery within the peer group.

From this perspective, fishing within MPAs can be conceived of potentially as a ‘rite of passage’ for some young men in this area, similar to that described by McCoy (1999) in his study of the Philippine Military Academy, where graduates formed close male bonds through the process of military socialisation.\textsuperscript{8} Fishing within MPAs thus appears as a form of group socialisation that celebrates masculine values of courage, independence and bravery. Just as Dumont (1993: 423) states that ‘fishing was the defining feature of an all-male activity’, I argue that fishing within MPAs is an intensified expression of masculinity, with its overtones of high risks and high returns. It would be useful to conduct further detailed research to determine to what extent the internal group dynamics of these fishing

\textsuperscript{8} Other writers have observed similar practices throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Stacey (2007: 42) writes that ‘[s]ailing is almost a rite of passage for many young males’ from Rote in Indonesia. Potter (1997: 301) also describes young Iban males going into the forest to collect natural rubber, ‘testing one’s strength against the perils of the wilderness’; Vayda (1969: 211) notes how young Iban men made various types of extensive journeys for the ‘incentives of material profit and social prestige’.
activities might correlate with other accounts of masculinity in the Philippines, such as Jocano’s (1975) description of gangs in Manila slum communities, or the *barkada* of Siquijor portrayed by Dumont (1993).

### Links to Cyanide Fishing

The links with masculinity I have outlined above bear a significant resemblance to the ways in which cyanide fishing was discussed by those who admitted to using it. As with those who talked of fishing within MPAs, the few discussions I had about the use of cyanide only tended to arise during tagay sessions among young men.\(^9\) While these fishers did not emphasise the values of resistance against the state or against tourism, their language emphasised skill, bravery and strength (*malakas*). For example, some spoke of bribing the Coastguard, or of their skill in evading them completely: ‘We go at night time, when the moon is new, so nobody can see us. There is nothing the Coast Guard can do against us!’ Similarly, Galvez et al. (1989: 50) argue that ‘[n]onblast fishers fear the threat of being arrested more than the possibility of accidents. To a certain degree, we can say that those who engage in blast fishing have bolder personalities’. As with those who fished in MPAs, every fisher I spoke to who admitted using cyanide was a young male. Other residents in the Calamianes I have spoken to, including NGO workers and other fishers, supported this observation. ‘They do it because they have a brave heart’, as one NGO worker described it.

Thus, despite the anger against cyanide expressed among those who fished within MPAs, in its enactment of a specific vision of masculinity there is in fact a significant resemblance. Because of the limited and sensitive nature of the data, it is impossible to speculate about how many people may have actually been involved in both forms of fishing. Here I merely trace one link between the two.

### Modernity, Globalisation and Alternative Futures

I have shown how the attraction of younger residents to fishing within MPAs is related to particular ideas about social and economic empowerment: moving out of poverty and out of fishing. These perceptions resonate with other practices in Esperanza, and can be conceived of as various ways in which residents have attempted to engage more fruitfully with modernity and globalisation.\(^10\)

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\(^9\) It should be emphasised that none of the fishers I spoke to who admitted to using cyanide came from Esperanza; they were groups of young men in Coron town.

\(^10\) In an argument that parallels my own experiences with cyanide fishers in particular, Macintyre (2008: 180) has argued that among young men in Papua New Guinea, ‘aggressive masculine behaviour is implicitly valued as both an expression of engagement with modernity and as an ideal of charismatic self-assertion that is transgressive, audacious and risky’.
In a broad-ranging review of the relationship between rural livelihoods and poverty, Rigg (2006: 189) has argued that in rural Southeast Asia, there has been a significant shift in attitudes towards traditional forms of rural employment such as farming:

Rural existences are becoming almost as monetized in countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia as are urban lives. Farming has become, often in little more than a decade, a low status occupation to be avoided. This view has a marked generational component: it is younger people who most urgently and fervently wish to build futures that avoid farming.

Rigg cites numerous studies from both mainland and island Southeast Asia that demonstrate the prevalence of such a view, arguing that it is due to multiple factors such as education, the media and consumerism. Kelly (2000: 103), for example, reports that in Cavite in Luzon, ‘young people have shifted their aspirations and expectations away from a rural life and towards other forms of work’.

In Esperanza, such a view is consistent with the preferences of younger fishers to avoid long-term investment in fishing and, ultimately, to move out of the fishing sector entirely. As indicated by the response of the young fisher I documented earlier in this chapter, many young people are keen to migrate to Manila, in order to get a good education and, consequently, get a good job. Some young people, supported by their parents, had been able to do this. The Calvino family, whom I described in Chapter 4 as not being able to persuade their older son to move out of fishing, had been able to send their younger son to Manila to enrol in a mechanical course. From this, they hoped he would be able to find a well-paying mechanic’s job in Manila. Similarly, I described also in Chapter 4 the case of Danny, who had migrated to Manila several years earlier, but who had not been able to succeed and came back to work on his father-in-law’s boat as a last resort or ‘plan B’.

While it was young men who spoke to me about fishing within MPAs, and it was young men who are most obviously interested in the trappings of modernity, it would be potentially limiting to say that these are the only people interested in envisioning a future for themselves outside of poverty and fishing. McKay (2003), for example, has shown how older men and women can adopt alternative futures in Ifugao (in Northern Luzon) just as easily. In addition, there may be older people in the region who also engage in fishing within MPAs or other illegal fishing practices; they may be simply more discreet or modest about it. Notwithstanding these speculations, however, the limited data I have
suggests that following Rigg (2006), it is younger people who more often adopt these practices. More strongly influenced by globalisation, younger people are expressing their desire to move out of the fishing sector for a variety of reasons.

**Conclusion**

Fishing within MPAs can thus be seen as a particularly bold and forceful variation on the discourse of the poor moral fisher. Fishers feel strongly about their rights to fish within all areas as long as they used ‘legal’ gears, and some are prepared to break laws regarding MPAs in order to do so. Because of the illegality of such actions, however, mostly only younger, bolder personalities attracted to higher risk are more comfortable with this behaviour. It is not a widespread practice, nor is it publicly acceptable. Indeed, it would be interesting to do further research on the potential inter-generational tensions caused by this form of fishing.

Whether the practice of MPA fishing is something that represents a broader, more significant long-term shift away from fishing in Coron, or a serious challenge to the otherwise dominant discourse of the poor moral fisher, is probably something that can only be completely answered with more long-term fieldwork over many years. It raises interesting questions about globalisation and the long-term future of fishing. Based on the evidence I gathered, however, I would argue that MPA fishing should instead be understood as a practice closely related to the discourse of the poor moral fisher, which is informed by the particular model of masculinity that young men in Coron engage with at this time of their lives. Many of these young men, I would expect, will go on to become more like the older man described earlier, who was more satisfied with his lot in life (whether this was in fishing or working in Manila).

It is young men mostly involved in MPA fishing primarily because they have different aims and motivations with regard to money and, by extension, their lives when compared with older men. Younger men are interested in the ‘jackpot’ that will bring them fast income. This income may give them opportunities to increase their status within their peer group, demonstrate to future partners that they have breadwinning power, and provide a basis for them to move into a different livelihood.

Fishing within MPAs can therefore be viewed as a form of and attitude towards fishing that lies somewhere between legal and illegal fishing. One element of the representations of fishing within MPAs is the insistence that it is not as damaging as the use of truly illegal activities such as cyanide and dynamite, and that fishing within MPAs is a rational and justified response from poor fishers to unfair regulations. These fishers see fishing within MPAs as necessary
to maintain a livelihood in a poor country, while cyanide and dynamite are seen as much more sensitive. This element thus draws on aspects of the discourse of the poor moral fisher in its emphasis on an appeal to fairness and the ‘right to survive’ (Blanc-Szanton 1972). The second element of representations of fishing within MPAs that I have analysed in this chapter has links to a form of masculinity that emphasises bravery and alternative constructions of future livelihoods. Fishing within MPAs, I have suggested, is symptomatic of broader ideals among younger residents to demonstrate masculinity, and to move away from fishing and out of poverty.

Chapter 7 shifts the focus from MPAs to another form of regulation that was contested during the time of fieldwork—a set of measures to reform the live fish trade.