8. Conclusion

This book has sought to demonstrate how local fishers in the Calamianes Islands understand the relationship between poverty and the environment, and how those understandings have framed and contributed to the outcomes of marine resource management policies. To support this argument, I have aimed to explicitly link two, related sets of literature. By using the insights of others interested in understanding social relations, reciprocity and cultural patterns in the Philippines, the aim of my book is to highlight the cultural perspective in analysing Philippine environmental politics. There are thus at least three primary themes running through the work. Firstly, I have presented an ethnographic perspective on the poverty-environment relationship. Flowing on from this central theme, I have shown how such a perspective illuminates certain ideas about power and reciprocal relationships in the Philippines, and also how it affects environmental management. In this concluding chapter I analyse these three broad themes in the context of their policy implications.

In contrast to analyses that have concentrated on the objective features of the poverty-environment relationship, I have instead provided an ethnographic account of how some of the subjective features are understood, represented and enacted by local fishers in the Calamianes. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, fishers perceive their relationship with the marine environment to be intimately connected to their own poverty. In this representation, their legal fishing practices are linked with the reproduction of poverty and a minimal impact on the environment; illegal fishing, conversely, is seen as responsible for all environmental degradation while providing a means to accumulate wealth. Illegal fishing and its ability to flourish, (as I showed in Chapter 7), is strongly linked to perceptions that the political elite of the Philippines is corruptly encouraging this behaviour. The poverty-environment relationship is therefore viewed as a strongly political relationship: if we do the right thing and fish legally, we remain poor, the fishers are saying, while those who do the wrong thing and use illegal methods are rewarded. In this way the perspective of fishers closely resembles that of the 'materialist' form of political ecology (outlined in Chapter 1), which tends to argue that poverty is not the primary factor behind environmental degradation.

Nevertheless, conservation organisations in the Calamianes tend to focus much (but not all) of their work on the activities of poor people. While these conservation organisations may not have explicitly subscribed to the 'vicious downwards spiral' model of the Brundtland Report that I introduced in Chapter 1, in practice they have acted upon the implied need to alleviate poverty in order to achieve better environmental outcomes in several ways.

One of the rationales behind the SEMP-NP project, for example, was to provide incentives for poor fishers to stop their presumably harmful fishing practices through the implementation of tourism user fees. The broader partnerships that conservationists were seeking to forge with the tourist industry were in large part justified by the implied need to persuade fishers to adopt an environmentally sustainable alternative livelihood. If fishers can afford to do something else, according to this logic, the pressure that they are placing on marine ecosystems will ease. Although conservation organisations were also trying to reduce illegal fishing and to lessen the impacts of commercial fishing in the Calamianes, they were still acting on their view that poverty and poor fishers were to a considerable extent responsible for environmental degradation.

Such different assumptions about the relationship between poverty and the environment show why the implementation of regulations played out in the way that I described in Chapters Five to Seven. Conservation organisations were acting on a model of the poverty-environment relationship that fishers did not agree with—namely, that poverty and poor people are responsible (even if not exclusively) for environmental degradation. Because of this, they were always going to face difficulties in dealing with the alternative model of environmental degradation espoused by fishers. In this way, I have argued for the value of adopting a cultural and discursive approach when trying to understand the local practices of environmental politics. It has not been my intent in this book to definitively argue whether or to what extent poverty is a driver of environmental degradation in the Calamianes, although I have suggested that environmental degradation was at least partly due to the legal actions of poor fishers. Instead, I have shown how differential constructions of this relationship have informed behaviour that shaped environmental outcomes.

Local Discourses: Their Context and Impact

'Asking for Pity'

A second central theme of the book has been to demonstrate how local conceptualisations of the poverty-environment relationship among fishers resonate with certain notions prevalent among poor people in the Philippines. Such notions, as analysed by Cannell (1999), Kerkvliet (1990), Blanc-Szanton (1972) and others throughout the country, articulate an ethic of fairness and justice for the poor. In the case of Bicol, for example, Cannell (1999: 228) writes:

> The people 'who have nothing' must spend a great deal of time in trying to 'disponir' [borrow money], that is, not only in borrowing money, but also more broadly in convincing other people with more resources and

more power to make available some of what they have, to recognise the existence and the humanity of people poorer and less powerful than themselves.

For Cannell, the articulation of this ethic is a reflection of the broader Bicolano view of power:

> … Bicolanos tend to see all relationships as dynamic engagements. There are people "who have nothing" and those who have wealth, beauty and power, but there is always potential for negotiation and persuasion, through which the painful gap between the two may be lessened, and the power-deficit of the poor, not eliminated but ameliorated (ibid.: 229).

Similarly, Kerkvliet (1990: 251) discusses the articulation of this ethic in the context of 'everyday politics', where poorer people make claims on richer people in a variety of ways. He argues that on the basis of the ethic of justice and fairness for the poor, poor people in San Ricardo 'frequently make claims on how resources should be used, distributed, and produced'. From this perspective, poor people here 'are neither passive nor mystified' (ibid.: 262). Instead, Kerkvliet interprets poor peoples' actions as a form of resistance against those more powerful than themselves. As Cannell (1999: 227) explains it, the stories told to her by Bicolano people were not told 'pathetically'; rather, they were symptomatic of the desire of poor people to change their relationships with richer people for the better. For Cannell, the fact that this cultural construction of power is so widespread and so broadly consistent in the lowland Philippines—'including both "animist" and Muslim regions' (ibid.: 233)—suggests that it is a coherent approach to power more generally in the Philippines. Patron-client relationships are common in many other poor countries, such as Indonesia. However, the emphasis here on morality may not be found in Indonesia in the same form or to the same extent, and may reflect the pervasive influence of Catholicism in the Philippines.

Certainly, this 'basic rights discourse' and the value of fairness for the poor are not the only values expressed by or about poor people in the Philippines. I have also described various instances in the book where richer people in the Philippines have expressed contempt and fear towards poorer people. Indeed, these discourses are often intertwined (Clarke and Sison 2003). As Pinches (2008) puts it, '[u]rban poor housing in the Philippines is variously looked upon by outsiders with revulsion, fear or sympathy'. The point I make, however, is that the discourse of morality towards the poor is one which poor people will appeal to in particular when faced with hardship.

As I described in Chapter 3, a large part of the everyday economic relations in Esperanza are structured around the notion that people make claims on

relatively richer people—within Esperanza, in Coron town, Manila and elsewhere—for assistance in various ways. Asking a fish trader to finance one's fishing operations when moving to a new fishery, or for a seat as a crew member on a commercial boat, or help for school fees for a child or for medical help for someone who is sick: all these are examples of poorer people making claims on those with more resources in the context of 'everyday politics'. 'Asking for pity' in this context is not viewed in the same way as perhaps the English expression suggests. As Kerkvliet (1990: 263) argues:

> Many villagers deliberately try to attach themselves to richer, more influential individuals in order to improve their chances of dealing with realities they must face. In this way, they purposefully put themselves in deferential relationships. But that does not necessarily mean that they are void of ideas and beliefs, other than those underlying deference, to guide their social actions.

I have argued that the discourse of the poor moral fisher among fishers in the Calamianes should be considered in a similar light. Without trying to impart any artificial coherence to the discourse of the poor moral fisher, or to adopt a romanticised view of this form of resistance, I have demonstrated that fishers look for fairness and justice with regard to marine resource regulation. Their argument that they are not responsible for environmental degradation, and that regulations should not apply to them, can be understood within this context of 'asking for pity' and of making claims on those with more resources. Here, fishers attempt to address inequitable social relations between themselves and those more powerful—namely the government, illegal fishers and those in the tourism industry. Presenting themselves as pitiful in the context of marine resource use and regulation, I argue, is an attempt to reframe the social world of fishers in the Calamianes in a more favourable way. Marine protected areas (MPAs) have been seen as chances to address some of the class relationships with the richer tourism industry, while resistance to the live fish trade regulations has also been driven by a sense that the role of government should be to support and nurture the weaker members of society at critical times. The responses of fishers should therefore not be seen *only* as short-term strategic resistance to environmental regulations, but also as encompassing long-term goals of addressing particular social relationships. Through the discourse of the poor moral fisher, fishers are trying to draw those with more resources into personal exchange relationships.

While the resistance of fishers to regulations in the Calamianes has similarities to the discourses of marginalised fisherfolk in other countries (for example Kurlansky 1999: 219-33), the specific idioms in which it is expressed and the cultural forms in which it is embedded are particular to the Philippines— especially the emphasis on morality and fairness for the poor. I have therefore highlighted the role of culture in this discourse throughout the book, and tried

to avoid characterising it primarily in terms of class relations. Similarly, Cannell argues that a purely economic or capitalist explanation for the cultural idioms of pity she described is implausible, given the 'continuity … with ways of viewing "oppression" in the lowlands historically' (1999: 239). In this sense, responses of fishers to marine resource regulations can be understood less as an example of straightforward class-based resistance, or as a social movement converging around relatively abstract notions of social justice, democracy, or rights as citizens of the Philippine state. Elements of these broader ideas are certainly present, and the work of activist and social justice oriented NGOs in the Philippines (Austin 2003; Bryant 2005) has done much to promote awareness of them among fisherfolk. Similarly, the ways in which fishers use the discourse of 'corruption' (as in Chapter 7) suggests that this is not just about the 'traditional' understandings of Filipinos. However, as I also illustrated in Chapter 7, even when fisherfolk appeal to the state, they tend to do so using the idioms of pity and through the particular patrons with whom they maintain reciprocal relationships. This illustrates how the understandings of social life, reciprocity and governance that I have focused on in this book are still a central part of life for many rural Filipinos.

Obviously, resistance based on promoting an ideal of justice for the poor does not always work. The ways in which the discourse of the poor moral fisher is able to produce beneficial outcomes for fishers appears to depend significantly on the ability of people to establish and maintain reciprocal social relationships with those in greater power. Whether the poorer inland farmers of the Calamianes, with their lack of personal connections to more powerful or rich people in town, could achieve the same sort of outcomes as the fishers is doubtful. Similarly, the discourse of the poor moral fisher does not always produce beneficial outcomes for everyone. In this sense, the discourse of the poor moral fisher is not simply a 'noble' form of resistance to be romanticised (Ortner 1995). As I illustrated in Chapter 5, for example, there are some residents who expressed enthusiasm for the creation of MPAs that would disadvantage their neighbours. In this way, those who are unable to form the social relationships that legitimate them as 'poor' may suffer as a result.

However, the dominance and relative coherence of this discourse is perhaps best explained with reference to Peluso's (1992: 11) analysis of 'village solidarity' among Javanese peasants who resist the state in the context of forest regulation. As Peluso argues, when the enforcement of the state's law impinges upon the 'moral economy' (Scott 1976) of a group of people, 'even a highly differentiated peasantry can mask its class tensions, imparting a Chayanovian solidarity to a normally strained set of social relations' Peluso's (1992: 11). Similarly, while there are different social classes and economic interests in Esperanza, the perspectives of residents tend to converge around the discourse of the poor moral fisher.

Richer fusilier and fresh grouper boat owners were not as affected by the introduction of MPAs because they fished elsewhere, nor by the moratorium on the live fish trade because they were not involved in this fishery. However, many of their crew members were certainly affected by both of these forms of regulation, as they may have fished part-time in the area covered by the MPAs or fished for live grouper during amihan. And, while commercial boat owners themselves may not have been affected as much, often the sons (or the close kin) of a boat owning family were involved in the fisheries that were more affected by regulation. Along with the more general idea that fishing in the Philippines (even as a commercial boat owner) is an extremely low status occupation, this provides additional reasons for boat owners to adopt the discourse of the poor moral fisher. And as I have shown throughout the book, an important component of this discourse is about the obligations of the richer to ensure the wellbeing of those with fewer resources. Richer boat owners in Esperanza therefore have strong material and social motives to support the claims of poorer fishers.

Richer residents outside of Esperanza and others who are typically subject to claims by the discourse of the poor moral fisher—such as the politicians in town who often have to make decisions about whether to punish infractions over incursions into MPAs—also have strong reasons to support and accommodate many of the claims. The discourse offers them an opportunity to be virtuous and respectable, and to gain the support of poorer residents—this is something that is particularly important for those who are involved in local politics. The claims of the poor moral fisher are about ensuring that these people who are more well-off continue to be engaged in a mutually beneficial social relationship. When richer residents try to remove themselves and deny such claims, the potential for conflict occurs (Kerkvliet 1990).

Impacts on Environmental Management

As I have shown through Chapters 5 to 7 in particular, the articulation and enactment of this vision for fairness among fishers is extremely important for the outcomes of marine resource management policy in the Calamianes. In Chapter 5, I illustrated the way in which fishers presented their views during debates about the construction of MPAs. Arguing for MPAs that supported the livelihoods of fishers, while taxing the practices of the richer dive tourism sector, fishers here represented the debates as arguments over social fairness. During these planning processes, in many cases fishers were able to incorporate their concerns into the MPAs. As a result, many MPAs in the Calamianes during 2006–07 had smaller core zones than originally planned and were adapted to the locations of fish traps of local residents, buffer zones were adapted to allow the use of many local gears, and enforcement was often lax when it was conducted by local communities.

In this context of lax enforcement, some younger fishers were willing and able to fish within MPA boundaries. In Chapter 6 I detailed how these fishers felt about fishing within MPAs—they believed it was their right to continue to do so, despite the regulations. Such younger fishers felt this way, I demonstrated, because of their particular economic and personal values. The enactment of their visions for the future has had a significant impact on the integrity of many of the MPAs in the Calamianes.

In Chapter 7, I argued that the discourse of the poor moral fisher was also a vital part of the general uproar surrounding the imposition of a moratorium on live fish trading and a series of associated regulations. By appealing to relationships with their wealthier allies, the live fish trading municipal elite, fishers were able to successfully participate in a movement that eventually overturned the moratorium and the essential elements of the regulations. Through these examples of MPAs and the live fish regulations, I have shown the distinctive ways in which marginalised people in the Philippines resist and reframe conservation regulations. In both instances, members of the local government and other key power brokers are typically pressured by social obligations to minimise the impact on local residents, and instead are invited to take part in reciprocal relationships. Because of the impact the discourse of the poor moral fisher has had on the politics of environmental management in the Calamianes, it is worth considering briefly some of the broader implications for policy that have arisen from this study.

Policy Implications

Lastly, I return to the theme of moral difficulty faced by managers that I mentioned at the beginning of the book. As this book has demonstrated, there are no clear or easy solutions to the problems related to marine resource use in the Philippines. From the perspective of the fishers in Esperanza, the 'political economy' of being a poor moral fisher is highly unjust—illegal fishers degrade the environment while getting rich, while poor legal fishers like themselves suffer and live in poverty. As I have shown, this claim is powerfully and successfully articulated in various contexts, in which a 'better deal' for fishers is actively pursued.

As the fishers would see it, these arguments have a moral force lent to them partly because of their poverty. In addition to this ethical question of the need to address poverty, the basic injustice of the issues as the fishers present them is stark. Consider, for example, MPAs. In a context where great damage was being done to the marine environment by outsiders fishing illegally, why was the response of the government to introduce regulations on fishing that

restricted the practices of the 'small people' (*mga maliit*) who had a negligible impact? In the case of the live fish regulations, again it appeared to fishers as if government was ignoring the real problem of cyanide fishing while trying to punish the activities of other hard-working legal fishers. As Li argues with regard to development interventions more broadly, for these fishers, such attempts at regulation would have been seen as illustrating the 'conceit of a will to improve that directs the conduct of "small people" while leaving radical political-economic inequalities unaddressed' (Li 2007: 282).

On the other side of the argument, the need for some form of regulation is clear. As the comprehensive report from BFAR made clear (BFAR 2004), the fishery sector in the Philippines is in deep trouble. In the Calamianes, reports since the late-1990s by a range of national and international organisations have concluded that the live fish trade is unsustainable, and that there is a great need to better manage the various island fisheries. From this perspective, regulations to reform the live fish trade are the painful but necessary action required if the Calamianes are to maintain a future that continues to use marine resources in a productive and sustainable manner. Similarly, MPAs are necessary in certain vital coastal regions of the Calamianes where fish reproduce. From this perspective, simply following the desires of local fishers—who, despite the moral force that is lent their arguments because of their poverty, are still just one sector among other competing voices—and avoiding any form of regulation will ultimately spell disaster, not only for others with interests in marine resources, but also for the fishers themselves.

Tourism is another force driving change and regulation whose interests have to be recognised. Marketed as the 'next big thing', tourism operations in Coron have been competing directly with the fishing sector for access to coral reef ecosystems, and aim to create an economy relying less on resource extraction and more on leisure based on these resources. From this perspective, fishing has to be regulated strongly in order to make room for non-extractive resource uses.

The question then is whether it is possible to reframe the sorts of regulation that are clearly required in a way that acknowledges the social and moral claims of fishers in a more tangible way. While the regulation of marine resource use has long had to incorporate people in its management (especially in the Philippines), a more explicit focus on the moral claims of particular people may point the way to better and more equitable forms of management.

Recently, a great deal of academic interest has concentrated on resolving these issues of contesting interests over marine resources with reference to linked 'social-ecological systems' and 'resilience' (for example Berkes et al. 2003). Many analysts have argued strongly for the principles of 'good governance' that promote resilience, as articulated through the themes of adaptive co-

management, polycentric governance, interactive governance and other related terms (Armitage 2008). Lebel et al. (2006), for example, hypothesise that the existence of participation, polycentric and multilayered institutions, and accountable and just authorities can be associated with an increase in resilience for social-ecological systems.

Authors such as these have lauded the potential of good governance to promote resilience and create a situation that will be mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. However, Armitage makes the crucial point that governance attributes such as those described by Lebel et al. (2006) are 'productive and important, but they are circumscribed by context, and … provide only partial direction for governance innovation'. Citing Li (2007), he argues that they represent a set of '"prescribed" and normative governance values or principles' (Armitage 2008: 18). In contrast, perhaps what we need to be more aware of is the inevitability of 'hard choices' in marine resource management (Bailey and Jentoft 1990; McShane et al. 2011). Resilience, like any other concept for ecological management, including those that emphasise good governance— and the policies advocated by the managerial approach to marine resource management in the Philippines that I outlined in Chapter 1—cannot remove the need for political decisions and negotiations among diverse stakeholders to be made in particular local contexts. Any model of institutional arrangements will inevitably be infused with, and have to take account of, local political, economic and social contexts (Flyvbjerg 2001; McCarthy 2006). In many ways this is where the value of ethnographic description lies. Li (2007) has shown how the ethnographic method of asking, 'unlike the managed participation of the Nature Conservancy or the World Bank, is not constrained by the need to devise technical interventions' (ibid.: 280). Instead, with its focus on local processes and practices, ethnographic description can highlight real-world complexities of everyday life in a way that broader generalised models cannot.

The experience in the Calamianes shows clearly how attempts at regulation have been experienced by different groups in different ways, meaning that some groups of people have inevitably felt marginalised. In the case of MPAs, for example, I have argued that the focus on satisfying dive tourism operators, conservationists and fishers all at once did not occur. Instead, a focus should be to either compromise between the different aims and motivations that different sectors bring to MPAs, or to be more explicit about the role of particular MPAs—to define which particular sector the MPA is meant to engage with and satisfy—and go about improving the situation of those worse off in other ways. In the case of the live fish regulations, while proponents of the regulations argued cogently that such reforms were needed to protect both the ecosystems and the communities who used those ecosystems, they failed to allay justifiable fears about the dramatic short-term impact the moratorium and the subsequent

regulations would have on live fish collectors. In the words of Li (2007: 11), these interventions were framed as a 'will to improve', and excluded 'political-economic questions—questions about control over the means of production, and the structures of law and force that support systemic inequalities'. They also excluded the cultural and moral perspectives that I have focused on in this book.

With a similar stress on grounded, 'real-world' complexities, practitioners in the field of integrated conservation and development projects have recently emphasised the need for greater attention to and understanding the goals and interests of all stakeholders around protected areas. They note that win-win solutions are usually unachievable: 'Once these different interests are identified, clarified, and understood', they argue, 'the opportunities for negotiation and tradeoffs can be explored' (Wells et al. 2004: 412; see also McShane et al. 2011). Such a focus on trade-offs does not necessarily make the very real problems of marine resource management that much easier. But it does provide perhaps a more useful way of looking at these issues. Instead of trying to provide solutions that will benefit all people equally, the careful study of particular contexts and interests may serve to highlight the issues of who will win, who will lose, and how to go about dealing with those outcomes.

In this book, I have contended that it is necessary to pay more attention to the interests of fishers with regard to marine resource use. Understanding these interests in greater depth from the outset may help at least to clarify how the process of negotiation over tradeoffs may occur. These perspectives of fishers, I have argued, are deeply entwined with particular locally conceptualised ideas about morality and the relationships of humans with their environment. Local people desire and expect to be treated with humanity, dignity and fairness, and policy that does not engage with these expectations in an explicit way risks being ineffective.