The Micropolitics of Indigenous Environmental Movements in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous movements face what Stuart Kirsch has called the 'risks of counterglobalization', which can distort their objectives into an all-or-nothing position with respect to development. In this contribution, I explore a case from the Philippines, where a movement originally conceived in terms of indigenous rights grew to include a more diverse mix of constituents and claims. This trajectory has made the movement vulnerable to charges of inauthenticity, particularly since the corporation it opposes has sponsored a parallel indigenous group and fashioned itself as the noble custodian of a threatened marine ecosystem. Nevertheless, the movement's constituents do not evaluate their activities exclusively in terms of its formal objectives or identity politics. For them, organized protest is entangled with the 'serious games' of everyday life, including, for example, local elections, struggles to achieve upward social mobility and efforts to redefine ethnic identity. As a result, some constituents see their involvement primarily as a claim to socioeconomic parity and others as a pursuit of the exceptional rights that indigeneity confers. Without attention to such local-level variation, we risk obscuring some of the most important motives and outcomes of indigenous movements — and, as a result, we may overlook the alternative visions of socio-environmental justice that emerge from their day-to-day struggles for livelihood, dignity and empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Assertions of indigenous rights have become a salient feature of environmental politics in many parts of the world, especially in struggles over who absorbs the costs and benefits of development projects. Indigenous groups have figured prominently in movements related to logging, mining and dam construction, and they have most recently joined with radical environmentalists to demand inclusion in negotiations regarding global climate change. In these struggles, indigeneity often signifies not simply a claim to aboriginal status, but also a promise of ecological wisdom and stewardship (Dove, 2006).

Observers of this transnational trend have offered differing assessments of its political consequences. Where some see new opportunities for engagement between environmental activists and rural communities (e.g., Li, 2000; Tsing, 1999, 2003, 2005), others fear that pervasive assumptions about indigenous environmentalism are unrealistic and ultimately disempowering (e.g., Brosius, 1997; Conklin, 1997; Conklin and Graham, 1995; Kirsch, 2007; Nadasdy, 2005). On the one hand, it seems, ecologically inflected notions of indigeneity have the potential to inspire new forms of collaboration across difference. On the other, they threaten to bind indigenous movements into straightjackets of eco-authenticity.

Here I argue that both of these perspectives are necessary, but that neither is sufficient. Indigeneity, I agree, entails both promises and pitfalls in terms of its strategic implications for movements seeking social and environmental justice. But to fully understand what motivates these movements — and what consequences they have — we must attend not only to their official objectives, strategies and outcomes, but also to the personal histories, interpersonal relationships and local struggles that animate their constituents' daily lives. Focusing on the former at the expense of the latter overlooks the important ways in which these two dimensions of social life are, in fact, mutually constitutive.[1] Through attention to both, we can better appreciate the productive tension between efforts to achieve exceptional rights for indigenous people and lived experiences that call for broader visions of socio-environmental justice. Rather than a hindrance to social change, this tension is conducive to collectivities that accommodate difference whilst simultaneously contesting common bases of structural subordination (Foster, 2002).

This essay has three main sections. First, I review pivotal theoretical and practical concerns that have prompted recent — and divergent — scholarly perspectives on indigeneity. Then, in a two-part discussion, I present a case drawn from my own ethnographic research in the south-western Philippines, where a movement originally conceived in terms of indigeneity grew to

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1. I am grateful to Wolfram Dressler for pushing me to make this point more explicitly.

include a more diverse mix of constituents and claims.[2] I show first how the movement in question faced charges of inauthenticity, particularly when its corporate opponents sponsored a parallel indigenous group and fashioned themselves as the noble custodians of a threatened marine ecosystem. Ultimately, however, I argue that it would be a mistake to treat the movement solely as a collective entity defined by its ambivalent placement within the 'tribal slot' (Li, 2000). For the movement's constituents, organized protest is entangled with — and at times secondary to — what Sherry Ortner calls the 'serious games' of everyday life, including, for example, local elections, personal struggles to achieve upward social mobility, and efforts to redefine ethnic identity (Ortner, 1996).

In my usage, 'serious games' serves as a heuristic metaphor within a broader approach inspired by 'micropolitical ecology'. Micropolitical ecology, in short, aspires to disentangle 'resource conflicts within and between communities, and between communities and the state, while analyzing these tensions within their broader historical, social and politico-economic context' (Horowitz, 2008b: 261). Patrick Hurley and Yılmaz Arı's contribution to this cluster demonstrates, for example, how micropolitical ecology can reveal often unacknowledged parallels between resource conflicts in the global North and South. For my purposes, this cross-scalar perspective reveals that indigenous environmental movements are shaped by everyday struggles as much as they are, at the same time, products of collective movements to challenge inequities in the broader political economy. Less concretely but no less importantly, micropolitical ecology also illuminates the varied ways in which people occupy and contest the subject positions into which ecologically inflected discourses of indigeneity 'interpellate' them (Althusser, 2001: 115–20; Ewing, 2003).

INDIGENOUS ESSENTIALISMS, STRATEGIC AND SPECIOUS

In a recent intervention, Francesa Merlan points out that 'the term *indigenous* has long been used as a designation distinguishing those who are "native" from their "others" in specific locales'. Only in recent decades, she continues, has '"indigeneity". . . come to also presuppose a sphere of commonality among those who form a world collectivity of "indigenous peoples" in contrast to their various others' (Merlan, 2009: 303). In an era characterized by

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2. The case study is drawn from nine months of ethnographic research carried out between October 2006 and July 2007 primarily in the Palawan region of the southwestern Philippines, but also involving a number of visits to the Philippine capital, Manila. Updates were obtained during subsequent trips to the Philippines in 2008 and 2010. Research methods were qualitative and included: structured and semi-structured interviews, some of which were conducted with the assistance of a translator; analysis of news media and NGO 'grey literature'; and participant observation.

policies favouring multiculturalism and neoliberal governance, conditions have favoured identity-based movements over those based on class or peasant status. Indeed, the transnational indigenous rights movement has drawn institutional support from the United Nations, the World Bank, and a host of NGOs acting across institutional levels (Kuper, 2003; Merlan, 2009; Niezen, 2003).[3]

   As a result of these and other developments, there are now laws granting special recognition and rights to indigenous people not only in settler societies such as Australia or Canada, but in post-colonial nations such as the Philippines, where the settler/aboriginal distinction does not have the same historical provenance.[4] The practical outcomes of such recognition, and of indigenous movements more generally, vary greatly from one national context to another. In Bolivia, for example, decades of organizing and coalition building on the part of indigenous communities culminated in a rejection of neoliberal multiculturalism in favour of what Nancy Postero (2007) calls 'postmulticultural citizenship'. In the Philippines, by contrast, post-authoritarian governments have created new institutions intended to grant indigenous people exceptional rights, but the resulting interventions often serve to further entrench the underlying bases of their disempowerment (Dressler and Turner, 2008; Hirtz, 2003; Li, 2005; McDermott, 2001).

   Scholars have observed these developments with a great deal of interest and ambivalence. Indigeneity, they have shown, can be a powerful claim, but it is not always the discursive or legal resource it promises to be. The 'tribal slot', as Li (2000) calls it, can disadvantage not only those who can not or choose not to invoke it, but it can also serve to undermine the political claims of those who do (Brosius, 2003; Conklin, 1997; Conklin and Graham, 1995; Hodgson, 2002; Kirsch, 2007; Sylvain, 2002). In some contexts, indigeneity is institutionalized by NGO advocacy and/or state policies of recognition. The disproportionate power held by NGO and state personnel enables them, even unintentionally, to impose their conceptual frameworks, economic interests, and (anti-)political agendas on the very people whose interests they aim to promote (Brosius, 1999; Chernela, 2005; Doane, 2007; Nadasdy, 2005). As a result, indigenous movements often depend on tenuous political

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3. Key developments in this history include actions of the International Labour Organization in the 1950s (Merlan, 2009), early alliances between the Inuit and the Sierra Club in the late 1960s (Igoe, 2005), the founding of the first international indigenous organizations in the 1970s (Niezen, 2003), and the World Bank's embracing of indigenous knowledge in the 1990s (Dove, 2006).

4. See Brysk (2000), Merlan (2009), Niezen (2003) and Yashar (2007) for analysis of indigeneity's emergence as a global category and different ideas about the causation thereof. The rise of neoliberalism has corresponded with governance decentralization in many parts of the world, and scholars have connected processes of decentralization to, for example, autochthony movements in Africa (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005) and changing patterns of indigenous leadership in Latin American (Lauer, 2006; Postero, 2007). Friedman (1994), meanwhile, offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the global emergence of identity politics more generally.

arrangements, are fractured by the divergent interests of competing groups, and can actually serve to exacerbate existing social tensions, particularly along lines of ethnicity, class, and gender (DeHart, 2008; Hodgson, 2002; Igoe, 2006; Kuper, 2003; Little, 2004; Resurreccion, 2006).

These issues potentially obtain anywhere one finds notions of indigeneity operating as a basis for group identification. Nowhere, however, are they more pervasive than in the realm of environmental politics. Like engagements between indigenous people and environmentalists more generally (Dove, 2006; Nadasdy, 2005), much scholarship in this area reveals the ambivalence of its authors. Some are quite optimistic. Anna Tsing (2003), for example, notes how the changing meaning of 'tribal' identities in Southeast Asia has created new possibilities for connecting rural people now identified as 'indigenous' to environmentally-minded activists, administrators and academics. Unlike the 'rural allegories' of past decades, those that conjure '[t]ribal landscapes seem to offer a promising exception to human–nature incompatibility' (Tsing, 2003: 165). While acknowledging the potential exclusion of peasants and other non-tribals from this new allegory, Tsing predicts that tribals and peasants will each benefit from the political clout that the other has in its respective sphere of prestige — peasants in the sphere of development and populism, tribals in that of conservation and human rights.[5]

Also based on work in Indonesia, Tania Li (2000) offers a similarly optimistic, if more guarded, account of how claims to indigenous identity operate in environmental politics. Despite the Indonesian state's refusal to recognize indigeneity as an exceptional legal status, some communities there have made alliances with NGOs and used the discourse of indigeneity to oppose undesirable interventions, such as a hydro-electric dam in the case of her research. These communities take advantage of what Li calls the 'room for maneuver' available to subaltern groups in contexts shaped by the legacies of colonialism and the contemporary (counter-)currents of global capitalism (Li, 2000). Like Tsing, Li notes the potential for certain 'articulations' of indigeneity to engender new opportunities for collaboration across difference. At the same time, however, she worries that not all rural populations will be deemed worthy of outside support, thus narrowing the scope of alliances (Li, 2000: 151; cf. Sylvain, 2002). This unevenness emerges because articulations of indigeneity are not merely 'invented' *ex nihilio* for instrumental or opportunistic purposes. Instead, Li writes, they '[draw] upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and [emerge] through particular patterns of engagement and struggle' (Li, 2000: 151). In what follows, this notion of 'sedimentation' informs my own thinking on indigeneity as I endeavour to unpack the ways in which

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5. In an earlier essay — entitled 'Becoming a Tribal Elder and Other Green Development Fantasies' (Tsing, 1999) — Tsing provides a concrete account of how new opportunities for tribal–environmentalist collaboration emerge.

it prompts new solidarities and intersects with the struggles of everyday life.

Despite its strengths, Li's analysis does not speak explicitly to the disempowering potential of indigeneity for the groups identified as such. What, then, do indigenous movements risk when they use the ideological and communicational infrastructure of globalization to assert their interests? Referring to such strategies as 'counterglobalization,' Stuart Kirsch (2007: 314) has expressed concern that '[r]eliance on counterglobalization may reduce the outcome of indigenous movements to a binary simplification of either/or choices between the environment and development'.[6] In his research on the ecologically disastrous Ok Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea, Kirsch found that the Yonggom, who sought financial compensation and ecological mitigation from the mining company, did not conceive of their goals in terms of an environment/development dichotomy (Kirsch, 2007). The mining company, however, seized on the nuances of the Yonggoms' ambitions by making their position seem inconsistent. Although often sympathetic to the Yonggom, international media also misinterpreted their goals due to the widespread notion that indigenous people should be motivated exclusively by an impulse toward environmental stewardship. In demonstrating what he calls the 'risks of counterglobalization', Kirsch offers an important reminder that indigeneity, as an ideological basis for collective action against corporations, can impose an unrealistic binary between economic development and environmental protection, increasing the likelihood that the population in question will be left with neither.

Kirsch was not the first to express such concerns. A number of earlier studies call attention to how movements often fail to convey the motives and interests of their indigenous constituents (Brosius, 1997; Conklin, 1997; Conklin and Graham, 1995; Sylvain, 2002). In Amazonia, for example, exoticized self-representations, particularly those conforming to Western aesthetics of native (un)dress, have long constituted an important form of symbolic capital for indigenous Amazonians and, more recently, for the environmental campaigns in which they participate (Conklin, 1997; Turner, 1991). But these representations have left indigenous Amazonians vulnerable to critique when they appear too 'modern' or 'assimilated' in their daily dress and comportment. Beth Conklin (1997: 725), for example, describes how Brazilian journalists sought to discredit Kayapó activists who had been photographed wearing Western garb, eating in restaurants and driving cars. In a classic double standard, indigenous actors who appear to behave like the majority of the population 'are categorized as corrupt and inauthentic, undermining the symbolic values on which their participation in transnational politics is based' (ibid.: 726).

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6. Sylvain (2002) makes a similar point regarding the San of Southern Africa, who found their movement for social, economic and political rights misinterpreted as a movement for 'cultural preservation'.

Moreover, despite their shared success in several environmental campaigns, dramatic differences of power separate populations such as the Kayapó from their environmentalist allies, especially those from the North. This inequality places environmentalists' priorities of conservation and biodiversity over those of their indigenous collaborators, whose interest in such matters may ultimately connect to questions of land tenure and sovereignty in ways that the former deem irrelevant or inimical to conservation (Brosius, 1997, 1999, 2003; Chernela, 2005; Conklin and Graham, 1995; Doane, 2007; Heatherington, 2010).[7] Unequal collaboration can even lead to dependency or conflict when the symbolic capital of indigenous stewardship begins to eclipse statutory entitlements as the primary basis for legitimizing political claims. This dynamic becomes especially troublesome when indigenous groups find themselves delegitimized by a 'nationalist backlash' (Conklin and Graham, 1995) or forced into a subordinate position by their Northern allies (Doane, 2007). A related source of vulnerability is the high visibility of indigenous leaders in transnational forums. Leaders become metonymic and are 'seen not as individual personalities but as representatives of an amorphous, homogeneous, authentic community' (Conklin and Graham, 1995: 704; Lauer, 2006). Because their opponents often have more influence over public discourse, this metonymy exposes indigenous movements to summary dismissal.

If power differences can lead Northern environmentalists to impose unrealistic expectations on their Southern collaborators, it merits asking where these expectations come from in the first place. In an effort to unpack the ideological underpinnings of the 'ecologically noble Indian', Paul Nadasdy (2005) has argued that the debate over the eco-authenticity of indigenous peoples takes place exclusively within a Euro-American cultural framework. This framework assumes that all perspectives on 'the environment' can be placed along a spectrum between radical instrumentalism on one hand and radical environmentalism on the other (Nadasdy, 2005). When environmentalists and planners encounter indigenous people whose practices defy this spectrum, as Nadasdy observed in his work in the southwest Yukon, the perspectives of the latter may become further marginalized. At the same time, however, indigenous groups may genuinely espouse and make strategic use of various aspects of environmentalism, such as notions of their own obligation to stewardship.

In light of these countervailing tendencies, it is no surprise that critical scholars have responded with such ambivalence. My argument here is that our response must go beyond that. Seeing indigeneity solely in terms of the pitfalls it creates would 'ignore the very real clout that its use [offers] in certain political contexts' (Nadasdy, 2005: 312). But doing otherwise risks

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7. Based on research in New Caledonia, Horowitz (in press) has persuasively used actor–network theory to describe this process as a one of 'translation alignment'.

reinscribing essentialized notions of difference that social scientists have
spent decades working to expunge. Anthropologists, in particular, have
struggled with this issue, and some have decided to reject notions of indigene-
ity *prima facie*. Kuper (2003), for example, has argued that widespread in-
terest in indigenous movements reveals the persistence of ideologies formed
during the colonial era. In his view, the 'world collectivity' of indigenous
people described by Merlan (2009), among others, hinges less on any consis-
tent set(s) of membership criteria than on renewed versions of long-standing
Western conceits associating indigeneity with political unity, ecological
nobility, cultural conservatism and 'primitive' lifeways (cf. Fabian, 1983;
Kuper, 1988; Trouillot, 2003; Wolf, 1983).

   While Kuper is right to point out the continuity between the 'primitive'
and the 'indigenous' in certain discourses, his critique forces premature
analytical closure on a form of identity politics that is not yet well understood.
Instead, we should continue to ask why indigeneity emerges in particular
contexts at particular times (Hodgson, 2002). Globally circulating discourses
of indigeneity not only differ from lived experience in profound ways,
but also have the potential — when embraced by states, NGOs and social
movements — to reshape the very socio-environmental relations they purport
to represent and protect (Igoe, 2005; see also Brosius, 1997). Elizabeth
Povinelli has dubbed this paradox of liberal government the 'cunning of
recognition' and, in light of it, argued that scholars must 'look at what
various forms of liberalism do rather than decide to be for or against them
in their abstraction' (Povinelli, 2002: 17). The question, then, is not simply
whether ecologically inflected notions of indigeneity pose opportunities or
dilemmas for indigenous groups as a whole, but how such notions are taken
up by specific actors as they engage with environmentalists, government
officials and others.

   In what follows, I aim to do precisely that: to examine 'indigeneity' not
as an abstract, globally uniform discourse, but rather as a contested remak-
ing of social categories with ambivalent political effects. Further, I aim to
foreground the variable, sometimes contradictory ways in which individual
actors inhabit indigeneity as a subject position from which to assert cul-
tural, political and economic rights (Rosaldo, 2003). Many studies exhibit
what Ortner (1995) has termed 'the ethnographic refusal' in that they tend
to represent indigenous collectivities as if their constituents' interests and
agendas were homogeneous. This tendency springs, according to Ortner,
from a discomfort with exposing the potentially messy internal politics of
disempowered populations. To help avoid this pitfall, I invoke another of
Ortner's (1996) concepts: 'serious games'. Developed as a tool for analysing
gender, 'serious games' has broader applicability because it draws attention
to the multiplicity of priorities and tactics that human actors bring to any
social field (cf. de Certeau, 1988). Especially in the latter part of my case
study, I employ 'serious games' as a heuristic for thinking about how ar-
ticulations of indigeneity become entangled with other meaningful aspects

of everyday life, including personal experiences of social inequality, local politics and ethnic identity.

THE CASE OF SAMBILOG

The year was 1972 — the same year President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and launched a brutal campaign against 'subversives' across the archipelago. Despite turmoil in other parts of the country, life remained largely unaffected on Bugsuk, a small island in the southwestern Philippines then inhabited by a small but diverse population of indigenous people and settlers. One day, however, a helicopter landed on the island carrying a team of scientists and soldiers. Although no one knew it at the time, the helicopter was a harbinger of dramatic change — a sign that, despite their remoteness from Manila, Bugsuk's residents were about to experience the transformative potential of state power.

For Sumbiling Arano,[8] a Pala'wan man who witnessed the helicopter's landing, the extraordinary nature of the event remained palpable some thirty-five years later:

> When the helicopter landed, all the *katutubo* (indigenous people) ran off because it was the first time we had seen such a thing and we wondered what could be travelling inside. When we saw that the passengers were people too, some of the locals approached them to find out what they wanted. They said they were taking samples of the soil to Manila to find out if it was good or bad.[9]

Within three years of this initial encounter, almost all the residents of Bugsuk had been dispossessed of their land and relocated to neighbouring islands. Marcos authorized their relocation as part of a so-called 'Agrarian Reform Land Swap'. Ironically, though, it was Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco, a close ally of the dictator and one of the Philippines' most powerful oligarchs, rather than the landless poor, who benefited from this spuriously titled programme. Bugsuk's soil, it seems, proved suitable for growing hybrid coconut palms, and Cojuangco was eager to establish a plantation there.

After acquiring Bugsuk and neighbouring Pandanan Islands, Cojuangco and his business partners immediately established the hybrid coconut plantation as planned. Then, in 1979, the Cojuangcos also partnered with a French expert in South Sea pearl culture to establish a pearl farm in the shallow, protected strait between the islands. Jewelmer, which is the pearl farm's corporate brand name, has since become a major purveyor of South Sea

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8. Except for public officials and other prominent figures, I have replaced personal names with pseudonyms. Some biographical details have been modified to help further ensure confidentiality.

9. Because I was partially dependent on a translator during my research, I present this passage as a paraphrase of Sumbiling's account, rather than a direct quotation.

pearls on the international market. Since its establishment, the pearl farm operations have enclosed between 5,000 and 10,000 hectares of the sea, although its lease agreement with the local government gives the company control of some 28,000 hectares (Luna, 2009).[10] Whatever its precise size, Jewelmer has effectively privatized a large swath of a seascape that was once considered a productive fishing ground and valued as a protected passageway for the small vessels typical among indigenous and other artisanal fishers throughout southern Palawan.

During the two decades following the fateful land swap on Bugsuk and Pandanan, the Marcos regime was ousted by a mass uprising in the streets of Manila, a reformed constitution was enacted, and successive governments adopted legislation to recognize indigenous peoples' tenurial rights (e.g., the Indigenous People's Rights Act).[11] Like those of the 1970s, the ramifications of these political upheavals eventually reached southern Palawan. In the mid-1990s, a young man named Aureus Solito discovered that his mother had 'indigenous Pala'wan blood' and that she was born in a village at the southern tip of Palawan Island. An aspiring artist, Solito was born and raised in Manila and was intrigued to find out his ancestors hailed from such an exotic locale. Hoping to connect with his kin, he set out for his mother's natal village. During his time there, Solito learned that some of his relatives had been displaced by a land swap during the era of martial law and that they had, in more recent times, been denied access by a pearl farm to their traditional fishing ground. Believing that these dislocations were destroying Pala'wan culture, Solito decided that his relatives needed to take action. Following a small demonstration in 1999, he made contact with PAFID, an indigenous rights NGO in Manila, and thus initiated an advocacy campaign (Severino, 1999).

Calling itself Taskforce Bugsuk, or TFB for short, this loose coalition of advocates facilitated the establishment of a 'people's organization' — Sambilog — which as of mid-2007 claimed several hundred constituents.

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10. The size of the pearl farm's enclosure varies depending on whose figures one chooses to believe. The size of the area leased corresponds with a municipally enforced 'strict protection zone', to be discussed below.

11. As part of post-Marcos reforms, the Philippines became the first country in Asia to recognize indigeneity as a legal category. As with the case described by Igoe (2006) for Tanzania, this development had much to do with NGO activity and the influence of foreign development aid (Hilhorst, 2003). But it also reflects the legacies of ethnic categorization imposed during Spanish and American colonial rule (Eder and McKenna, 2004; Erni, 2008; Resurreccion, 2006). Li (2005) offers an important reminder that policies favouring 'local' stewardship of the uplands often appear in the wake of logging activities and serve as a conduit for bureaucratization more than for local empowerment. Although related, the history of Philippine 'tribal' populations should not be conflated with that of Philippine Muslim populations. Both have at times been subject to regulation by the same bureaucratic apparatus, but their relationship with both colonial and post-colonial states has been different. For relevant scholarship, see Blanchetti-Revelli (2003), Eder and McKenna (2004), Gowing (1979), Horvatich (2003), and Majul (1999 [1973]).

Dispersed among five villages (*barangay*) on three islands, Sambilog's constituency comprised indigenous Pala'wan, indigenous Molbog, and settlers from a variety of ethno-linguistic backgrounds.[12] From the beginning, TFB and Sambilog stressed that the loss of ancestral territory was destroying the culture of displaced indigenous people, forcing them into debt, and ultimately undermining their ecologically sustainable livelihood practices. This strategy emerged in the context of post-authoritarian reforms, which established indigeneity as a legal category and created a special process by which recognized indigenous groups could apply for collective titles to their ancestral domains.

Initially, the movement focused its efforts on securing a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) on behalf of Sambilog's indigenous constituents.[13] To inspire broader support for their application, Solito launched an advocacy campaign involving artists and the media. Characteristic of the movement's initial framing are a documentary entitled *Pagbabalik sa Tribo* (Return to the Tribe) by acclaimed journalist Howie Severino (1999) and an experimental film entitled *Basal Banar: Sacred Ritual of Truth* directed by Solito (2002) himself. *Pagbabalik sa Tribo* follows Solito to southern Palawan, where he introduces Severino to the traditions of his Pala'wan relatives and describes the threats they face due to mining, logging and the pearl farm. The film closes with a poignant scene of dancing that was filmed on a sandbar claimed by the pearl farm. *Basal Banar*, for its part, is a frenetic piece punctuated by time-lapsed sequences. To surreal effect, Solito mixes intense images from a Pala'wan shamanic ritual with scenes from the work of a team of NGO personnel delineating Sambilog's initial CADT claim.

Over the following years, Sambilog's CADT became mired in the notoriously burdensome application process (Hirtz, 2003). As a result, TFB broadened its strategies to include lawsuits, protest marches, rallies and petitions to various branches of government. For example, to mark World Food Day in 2004, they led a 'fluvial parade' of several dozen boats into Jewelmer's concession, and in October 2005, they led a week-long 'solidarity

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12. The local indigenous population includes both Pala'wan- and Molbog-speaking people. Both are internally diverse ethno-linguist groups indigenous to southern Palawan Island and its satellites in the southwestern-most Philippines, where they have long derived their livelihood from shifting agriculture, hunting and fishing. The Molbog and some Pala'wan practise Islam, although in a highly syncretistic fashion. Palawan is considered a 'frontier' province in the sense that the mass arrival of migrants from other parts of the archipelago only began in the mid-twentieth century (Eder and Fernandez, 1996). Recently estimated at upwards of 850,000, the province's population has grown explosively since the middle of the twentieth century when it stood at less than 60,000 (Bureau of Censuses, 2007). For indigenous groups such as the Pala'wan, conditions have grown increasingly dire as the 'frontier' has become populated with migrant settlers, thus constraining their mobile patterns of shifting agriculture and undermining associated ritual practices.

13. The CADT is a collective land tenure mechanism that was institutionalized by the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 (Republic of the Philippines, 1997).

march' some 240 km from the southern tip of Palawan north to the provincial
capital. The former resulted in trespassing charges against a Congressional
delegate who took part in the parade, and the latter in inconclusive meetings
with provincial legislators. Despite these high-profile events, despite being
the subject of Congressional hearings, and despite the intervention of a pres-
idential commission, little progress was made in terms of the movement's
officially stated goals. In fact, things only became more complicated.

   In 2004, Sambilog's first CADT application was rejected because it was
made on behalf of Sambilog, a people's organization that had a mix of in-
digenous and non-indigenous members, and not exclusively on behalf of a
recognized indigenous group. This setback was not catastrophic, but it high-
lighted the legal illegibility of their complex reality and subjected them to
charges of inauthenticity. Later that year, Jewelmer recruited two prominent
conservationists to persuade the municipal government of Balabac — the
municipality under whose jurisdiction Bugsuk falls — to declare the en-
tirety of its territory a 'protected marine eco-region' and to establish a 'strict
protection zone' around the pearl farm's concession (Municipality of Bal-
abac, 2005).[14] Jewelmer also launched a public relations campaign entitled
'The Ultimate Orient', which portrayed pearl farmers as stewards of nature
in its most pristine and idyllic state. The company teamed up with naturalist
photographers to publish a coffee table book that doubled as a celebration
of the company's green credentials and a catalogue for its products. At one
point, the book likens pearl farms to a 'protective blanket' and suggests a
techno-scientific basis for pearl farming as environmental improvement:

> With the sea embracing the pearl oysters as its own, the pearl farm lays out its protective
> blanket of marine cages, sheltering and promoting the breeding of fish and other marine
> species. . . . In the waters where pearl farms are located, the survival rate of a variety of
> marine life is even higher than in nature. (Tuason and Honasan, 2005: preface, 73)

The ordinance creating the protected area in Balabac prompted TFB's
lawyers to seek a court injunction and created a renewed motivation for
protest among the affected communities. Angry about the ordinance, a new
wave of non-indigenous people began to take serious interest, and the over-
all focus of the campaign turned increasingly toward the pearl farm. At
the same time, the reinvigorated movement met with increased opposition.

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14. In 2005, TFB filed a case in the provincial courts seeking an injunction against the en-
    forcement of this 'eco-region'. At the time of writing, the case remains ongoing. In 2005,
    a committee of the provincial legislature reviewed the ordinance, leaving it largely intact
    but ordering the municipality to remove preferential language referring specifically to the
    pearl farm. Further, the municipal ordinance took effect before the Environmentally Crit-
    ical Areas Network (ECAN) zoning for Balabac was finalized. According to the Strategic
    Environmental Plan, which is a national law enacted specifically for Palawan, ECAN zones
    are meant to constitute the definitive environmental regulation in the province and, there-
    fore, are supposed to be harmonized with provincial and municipal codes (Republic of the
    Philippines, 1992).

A prominent indigenous rights advocate reportedly contacted the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to argue that the Sambilog CADT applicants were not in fact authentic indigenous people. Meanwhile, a well-connected NGO in Manila with alleged ties to the pearl farm facilitated the establishment of an indigenous people's organization whose members, they claim, are the true Pala'wan and Molbog representatives in the area. This organization opposes Sambilog's CADT application and is reported to receive material support from the company. Here, by adopting a discourse of stewardship and promoting a parallel indigenous organization, Jewelmer demonstrated the increasing ability of corporations to mimic and thereby undermine the strategies of their opponents (Kirsch, 2007).

Matters became even more complicated in 2004–05 when Conservation International (CI), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and a litany of other conservation NGOs got involved. The Balabac Strait and, therefore, Bugsuk happen to be located in an area known to conservationists as the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Eco-Region. This 'conservation corridor' encompasses some 900,000 km^2 of marine and coastal areas in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, and is believed to be among world's most biodiverse marine eco-regions (WWF-Philippines, 2006). The arrival of 'big conservation' was of complex significance for Sambilog and Taskforce Bugsuk (Alcorn, 1995). On the one hand, the presence of powerful transnational NGOs — and, more specifically, the 'multisectoral stakeholder assemblies' they convened — provided new opportunities for Sambilog constituents to voice their claims in public. On the other hand, these were also venues in which those very claims could be denounced by representatives of the pearl farm and its allies in various NGOs and government agencies. As Alexa Dietrich (this volume) has observed in her work on protests against pharmaceutical contamination in Puerto Rico, treating parties to resource conflicts as 'stakeholders' tends to serve the interests of the more powerful party. Moreover, transnational conservation activities in Balabac leant further moral and scientific credence to Jewelmer's claim to environmental stewardship. Even though both WWF and CI claimed neutrality and cast their interests as purely scientific, both organizations publicly endorsed the spirit of the municipal ordinance, and at least one of them signed a document supporting it.[15] The imperative of protecting biodiversity was given precedent over the need to ensure equity and democracy in socio-ecological planning (Löwy, 2007).

Throughout these developments, the identity of the Sambilog-TFB movement and its constituency were increasingly subject to negotiation. As I noted earlier, the movement has broadened since its inception in an effort to accommodate the interests and claims of its diverse constituency. Particularly in response to the passing of the municipal ordinance and the arrival

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15. Interestingly, WWF's work in the Balabac Strait was partially funded by the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, which has obvious interests in South Sea pearls such as those cultured by Jewelmer.

of transnational conservation projects in the area, more attention was given to the rights of 'small-scale fisherfolk' to near-shore fishing grounds and safe right-of-way. Agrarian reform, which has been separate historically and legally from indigenous rights issues, became an increasingly salient concern at TFB meetings as peasant-oriented advocates joined and indigenous-oriented ones grew frustrated waiting for the CADT. In short, the movement was partially recast in terms of the basic rights of all marginalized people as recognized by Philippine and international law. I will discuss the factors driving this ad hoc process of change below. For now, it suffices to note that each authorized category of collective identity — whether indigene, peasant, worker or fisher — was only partially suited to the realities of the movement and to the broadening vision of socio-environmental justice that began to emerge, however tacitly, from its constituency (cf. Tsing, 2003).

Despite a growing constituency, Sambilog's shifts in focus and strategy left the movement vulnerable to charges of inauthenticity and opportunism. Even some sympathetic to its cause, such as its founder, were concerned that Sambilog might lose credibility by including non-indigenous people in its struggle. The legalistic logic behind such concerns is that only 'authentic' indigenous people are entitled to make claims to disputed territory based on the notion of prior rights and the promise of stewardship. Along similar lines, one observer wrote that organized protest is incompatible with Pala'wan culture, thereby suggesting that the social movement may ultimately come to transform the very culture it seeks to defend (Luna, 2009).

Ironically, by refusing to depoliticize structural inequality or settle on a single, reified notion of identity, Taskforce Bugsuk and Sambilog exposed themselves to critique from friends and foes alike. In fact, the movement's broadened constituency was not a sign of inauthenticity, but rather a reflection of the political commitments of its TFB advocates and the multifaceted social lives of its Sambilog constituents. There was the potential for exploitation and co-optation as increasing numbers of non-indigenous people, who tend to be in dominant positions of power relative to their indigenous neighbours, became involved. Still, the broadening of the movement reflected an increasing recognition of the common structural inequalities that cut across differences of culture, ethnicity and intra-class differentiation (cf. Dressler and Turner, 2008). I will further develop this point below.

In sum, the history of TFB-Sambilog as a movement offers support for both sides of the debate over the political consequences of indigeneity. On the one hand, in line with Tsing's argument, it represents a new form of collaboration between urban and rural peoples who have come together around a shared notion of social and environmental justice. On the other, the ideological baggage of indigeneity has made the movement vulnerable to attacks on its authenticity, especially as its corporate opponents have adopted the rhetoric of environmental stewardship. In this case, then, we have a clear example of Kirsch's (2007) prediction that the indigenous environmental movements will encounter difficulties articulating their objectives in a politically legible

way, especially as their opponents exploit their vulnerabilities and turn parts of their own strategies against them (cf. Nadasdy, 2005). Still, as I hope to show in the remainder of this contribution, to conceive of phenomena like TFB and Sambilog solely as artifacts of globalization is to obscure how they become implicated in the everyday lives of their members and thus to risk misunderstanding some of their most important motives and outcomes.

THE 'SERIOUS GAMES' OF EVERYDAY LIFE

When I met him in October 2006, Patrik was an up-and-coming leader of Sambilog's indigenous constituency and, at the age of twenty-four, the movement's youngest leader overall. Patrik immediately struck me as an exceptional personality. Unlike virtually all the other Pala'wan in his village, including those involved with Sambilog, Patrik showed no sign of timidity in my presence and, in fact, insisted on being involved in my research. Although I found his assertiveness intrusive at first, the experiences Patrik shared during the course of 'our' research proved extremely insightful.

Patrik vividly recounted, for example, how his encounters with social exclusion had begun in early childhood and persisted throughout his teenage years. Hearing about his experiences confirmed what others had told me in less direct fashion — that, despite recent policy shifts, indigenous people in Palawan continue to face prejudiced ideologies presuming their inferiority in the areas of intelligence, hygiene and respect for the rule of law. Although faced with this discrimination, Patrik became the first among his siblings to attend school on a continuous basis, eventually graduating from high school and later from a government-sponsored technical programme in the provincial capital. But even after acquiring such cultural capital, Patrik still faced a seemingly insurmountable wall of social exclusion based on his ethnicity. He was not, he told me, considered as an eligible suitor by local settler families whose daughters were among the only women in his age cohort to whom he was not related. Nor could he hope to be taken seriously as a business partner or village councillor. Partially in light of these exclusions, Patrik had always planned on joining the military upon completing his technical training. But when his parents came to the provincial capital to attend his graduation, they persuaded him to 'think about a different way of life'.

Determined to use his new skills but lacking the wherewithal for urban living, Patrik returned to his natal village to fish during the day, dive for sea cucumbers at night, and tend his family's seaweed crops until he had saved enough money for a small fishing boat. Proceeds from the resale of the boat covered his fare to Manila, where he held down steady employment until a work-related accident led to his dismissal in mid-2005. Upon his return home, Patrik for the first time felt respected not only by fellow Pala'wan, but by some settlers as well. He had survived Manila, enjoyed the company

of the opposite sex, acquired an urban wardrobe, and learned urban patterns of speech. In the words of some locals, he had become 'civilized.'

Besides his status, Patrik noticed that something else had changed in his village. His cousin and several other Pala'wan men had gotten involved with an organization called Sambilog. Patrik found people in his village somehow 'stronger' than they had been before, no longer afraid to assert their rights in the face of intimidation from the company that had taken their land and sea so many years ago. The local term for this condition is *malakas na loob*, which translates roughly to 'inner strength', 'confidence' or 'courage'. Derived from his experience in Manila, Patrik's own sense of *malakas na loob* made him an apt candidate to lead the indigenous constituency of Sambilog.

A central feature of Patrik's story is the entanglement of his relatively recent experiences with Sambilog with a longer-term process of identity formation. Prior to his involvement with the movement, he had partially managed to extract himself from the stigmatized identity that dominant ideologies carved out for him. But Patrik was still marked as indigenous, and that was not necessarily something to be proud of, let alone a source of empowerment. Since becoming involved with Sambilog, however, Patrik has met a host of prestigious people who espouse a positive, if at times romanticized, view of indigenous people. Patrik and other Sambilog leaders have attended paralegal trainings about new indigenous rights legislation, spoken to law makers on behalf of their community, and completed seminars on how to communicate with those who might otherwise intimidate them.

Through these experiences, Patrik has found an opportunity to redefine his identity in a more positive, empowering light. Not only did he convert being indigenous into a source of *malakas na loob* by virtue of his being an educated, indigenous leader, but he also tapped it as a source of prestige and power that he could access on the behalf of his fellow Pala'wan through contact with NGO personnel and other officials. Whether this access will translate into a meaningful form of empowerment in the long term, I cannot say (cf. Austin, 2003). I can say, however, that in 2007 and again in 2010 Patrik ran a successful campaign for a seat on the village council. Although indigenous councillors are not unheard of in villages with large indigenous populations, Patrik was the first in his settler-dominated village. He has also married a school teacher whose occupation affords the couple relatively high status in the community.

As I noted earlier, for TFB and Sambilog, claiming indigeneity has meant drawing an existential linkage between land tenure, livelihood, cultural traditions and the environment. Patrik comprehended this argument and agreed with it. For him, though, asserting rights to the land was not so much about preserving traditions or protecting the environment as it was about achieving parity in the face of socioeconomic marginalization. These two projects were not, in his view, at odds. Given that Patrik is a self-identified indigenous person, his eager participation in the 'serious games' of social mobility, electoral politics and identity formation have raised doubts among some observers

about the authenticity of Sambilog's claims to indigeneity, tradition and exceptional status. But Patrik's actions make perfect sense when seen as part of a dynamic field of serious games that is co-constituted by a multiplicity of official frameworks for claiming recognition, by strategies of collective action, and by the personal experiences of the individuals who adopt, rework and challenge those frameworks and strategies in their everyday lives.

Patrik's experiences as a participant in Sambilog make a revealing comparison with those of other active Pala'wan constituents, including his cousin, Balong. Balong, in particular, emphasized the sense of strength he derived from being connected to a broader network of Sambilog members and advocates. He and other leaders of the indigenous sector had thrice travelled to Manila and many times to the provincial capital to represent the movement before gatherings of activists, to attend advocacy trainings, and to testify in the many ongoing hearings and legal cases that have been convened on their behalf.

Both Patrik and Balong expressed their frustration with the government's seeming unwillingness to act on their claims. After a two-month-long protest rally outside the Palawan provincial legislature in 2005, they were left feeling 'angry' and discouraged by the legislators' unwillingness to intervene on their behalf. Yet they both continued to talk about Sambilog in terms of the personal sense of empowerment that came with gaining an awareness of indigenous peoples' rights. Before Sambilog, Balong told me, he and his fellow Pala'wan lacked the 'knowledge' (*kaalaman*) with which to challenge their opponents. Despite losing their land and fishing ground, they felt there was nothing they could do. But then, he went on, they found out that the government provided them with rights, and they became more courageous (*malakas na loob*) because of that.

Nevertheless, Balong was less willing than Patrik to associate his claim to indigeneity with an aspiration toward fuller integration in Philippine society. Despite being married to a non-Pala'wan woman, he maintained a sharper distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous Sambilog members. Balong explained that, from his perspective, Sambilog's push to regain lost land was explicitly meant for the natives (*katutubo*) who 'have rights in the land', not for those whose ancestors originated elsewhere. Much more emphatically than Patrik, Balong insisted that the continuity of Pala'wan identity depended on having access to the land. This conviction found expression through his participation in Sambilog and made him an important source of testimony for affidavits in support of the CADT. For Balong, participation in Sambilog was not a means of reconciling his indigenous identity with a 'civilized' status as it was for Patrik. Nor did it primarily mean for him a claim to socioeconomic parity with non-indigenous people. Instead, Balong interpreted his experience of participation in terms of reclaiming the dignity of indigenous people by asserting their distinctive culture, rights and imagined future. To be sure, improving their socioeconomic well-being was

among his goals as well, but the path he saw toward that end ran through exceptionality before reaching parity.

Some of the older Pala'wan men also played important roles as consultants in the CADT process or as representatives before audiences sympathetic to indigenous rights. Sumbiling Arano, a Pala'wan elder whom I quoted earlier, told me he felt a greater sense of pride in his ethnic identity thanks to his involvement with the movement. He thoroughly enjoyed travelling to Puerto Princesa and Manila to take part in rallies, marches and other activities. But he did not identify himself as a leader, nor did he narrate his experience as one that defined his life in a profound way. His focus remained on the events of the 1970s and the personal hardship they caused. Participating in Sambilog offered the possibility of returning to his land and recovering from a deeply felt loss. And yet, even as he and other elders sometimes invoked their status as rightful environmental stewards, they did not pine nostalgically for a return to a simpler time when they lived in harmony with nature as per the recent reimagining of indigeneity in the Philippines. They wanted their land back *not only* because they saw it as a vital part of their identity, *but also* because they were preoccupied with ensuring a better life for up-and-coming generations (cf. Horowitz, 2008a).[16]

CONCLUSION

Even in the brief vignette offered here, we find that Patrik and Balong had subtly divergent perspectives both on indigeneity and on their participation in Sambilog. More than a matter of personality, this divergence is especially meaningful when considered in light of changes the movement has undergone since its founding in 1999. As noted above, the movement's initial focus rested squarely on a frame of indigenous rights and applying for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title. Over time, the focus shifted toward the rights of small-scale fisherfolk to near-shore fishing grounds and safe right-of-way. As the movement broadened to include more non-indigenous participants and its aims were partially recast in terms of the rights of all marginalized people, new leaders emerged, including Patrik and a number of non-indigenous constituents. This shift emerged from strategic responses to moves by Sambilog's opponents, especially the passing of the municipal ordinance and the promotion of a parallel indigenous group. It also reflected growing impatience with existing strategies, most notably the CADT.

Nevertheless, such strategic concerns cannot fully account for the gradual convergence of the movement's original focus on indigenous rights with a broader vision of socio-environmental justice. This broader vision, I would

16. Eder (1994) has found a similar pattern among the Batak, a population indigenous to central Palawan, who, he argues, see themselves both as a minority people whose distinctive culture merits preservation *and* as an oppressed class with upwardly social aspirations.

argue, was immanent all along in the day-to-day struggles of Sambilog's indigenous and non-indigenous constituents. I do not mean to suggest that they were unwittingly pursuing some sort of coherent ecosocialist agenda. My point, rather, is that participating in organized protest inevitably became entangled with village elections, livelihood pursuits and a host of other local-level endeavours that I have described with Ortner's term 'serious games'. Because they faced common oppressors, Sambilog's diverse constituency defied the discrete categories of indigenous rights legislation and called for a more inclusive, if at times incoherent, set of strategies. Even as claims to indigeneity had strategic implications for the movement as a whole, many individual constituents began from the notion that indigenous peoples' aspirations sometimes overlapped with those of their non-indigenous neighbours. At the same time, however, many also maintained that *indigenous* rights merited special recognition. This tension, rather than a contradiction threatening to divide the movement, was inherent in the experience of everyday life, and Sambilog would have been meaningless without it.

Ecosocialist scholar Michael Löwy (2005: 22) has hailed the emergence of movements grounded in what Joan Martínez-Alier calls 'the ecology of the poor', including:

> popular mobilizations in defense of peasant agriculture, communal access to natural resources threatened with destruction by the aggressive expansion of the market (or the state), as well as struggles against the degradation of the local environment caused by unequal exchange, dependent industrialization, genetic modifications and the development of capitalism (agribusiness) in the countrysides.

Löwy (ibid.: 23) goes on to identify resistance to deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon as 'a paradigm of future popular mobilizations in the South'. Populations identified as indigenous have been integral to Amazonian environmental movements and their counterparts across the globe. But indigeneity, like any political identity, is never unproblematic, and its significance is especially fraught in the realm of environmental politics.

What, then, might those who seek to engage indigenous movements in broader struggles for socio-environmental transformation learn from existing scholarship on the promises and pitfalls of indigeneity? As detailed above, some have written optimistically about how indigenous landscapes, associated as they are with local-level stewardship over the long term, encourage novel forms of collaboration between ecologically minded activists and rural populations. But others have cautioned that environmental indigenism can ultimately impose a straightjacket of eco-authenticity. Indeed, major challenges faced by Sambilog were its opponents' adoption of a green corporate identity, promotion of biodiversity conservation, and alignment with a parallel indigenous group. Political ecologists, it seems, are not alone in recognizing the 'second contradiction of capitalism' and the challenges it poses for capitalist hegemony (O'Connor, 1998). Corporations are increasingly adept at 'appropriat[ing] the terms . . . and strategies of [their]

critics' (Kirsch, 2007: 304; see also Dietrich, this volume), leaving diverse constituencies such as Sambilog subject to portrayal as environmentally destructive opportunists. In short, the promise of stewardship, which is often associated with claims to indigeneity, may backfire when not grounded in a broader, widely intelligible movement for socio-environmental justice.

Critical scholarship has an obligation to bring the pitfalls of eco-authenticity to light. Yet, if taken too far, this obligation may prevent us from recognizing that indigenous environmental movements are but one among the many 'serious games' in which their constituencies are involved (Ortner, 1996: 12). 'No analysis of human action is complete', writes Renato Rosaldo, 'unless it attends to people's own notions of what they are doing. Even when they appear most subjective, thought and feeling are always culturally shaped and influenced by one's biography, social situation, and historical context' (Rosaldo, 1993: 103). As the testimonies of Patrik, Balong and other members of Sambilog show, 'taking on big business' is embedded in emotionally charged experiences that transcend and complicate the official objectives of the movement. If we fail to engage with these experiences and focus only on the 'actual' strategies that indigenous movements pursue, we may fail to understand what motivates people to join them in the first place. Such an oversight is most unfortunate considering that individual subjectivities are produced in the same historical context as collective categories such as indigeneity. They are mutually constitutive and, when juxtaposed, reveal their mutual tentativeness.

I would, moreover, broaden Rosaldo's point to include not just scholarly analysis, but also radical praxis. Building alliances with indigenous movements requires seeing beyond the tribal slot even as space is preserved for exceptional claims to cultural citizenship and the recognition of prior rights. Toward that end, proponents of socio-environmental justice will do well if we work more from the everyday lives of prospective allies and less from their identification as indigenous or otherwise. Seeing beyond the tribal slot does not mean that indigeneity should be ignored or claims to exceptional rights seen as a hindrance. Rather, it means setting aside assumptions about what indigenous people want or need and ensuring they have opportunities to represent themselves on their own terms. If we are to avoid 'reducing the field of hope' (Foster, 2002), we must preserve space for the messy, localized visions of socio-environmental justice that exist in day-to-day struggles for livelihood, dignity and empowerment.

In this article, I have spoken to issues of both strategy and representation by juxtaposing a history of Sambilog's collective strategies with the personal narratives of two of its indigenous members. Micropolitical ecologies, such as the one offered here, help to reveal how protest movements are constituted both by the strategic discourses they invoke *and* by the everyday lives of their members. It is, I would argue, through this co-constitutive process that we come to appreciate articulations of indigeneity as 'historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, . . . [shaped]

through particular patterns of engagement and struggle' (Li, 2000: 151). For constituents of Philippine indigenous movements and, I suspect, those in other parts of the world, the 'serious games' of social mobility, identity formation and local politics come together in the same social field as organized pursuits of social and environmental justice. My hope is that we will not lose sight of these important micro-level struggles even as we continue to assess the promises and pitfalls that broader movements entail.

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