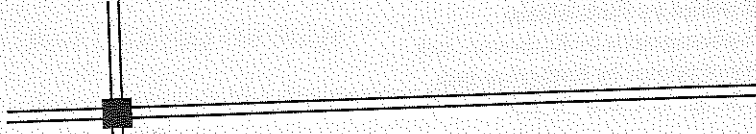


Palawan

and its Global Connections



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Environmental Politics and the Burden of Authenticity¹

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IN JANUARY 2007, Conservation International convened a "stakeholder assembly" on Balabac, an island off the southern tip of Palawan, as part of its trinational Sulu-Sulawesi conservation project. On the second day of the assembly, participants were divided into groups based on their island or barangay of residence.² Each group was given a large, blank map and instructed to fill it with symbols indicating "priority uses" of coastal areas and fishing grounds. For one group, the activity quickly became a heated debate. As one participant sketched a symbol, another questioned its placement. Boundaries were drawn and redrawn. Voices rose, and fingers pounded the table. At the time, I did not speak Tagalog well enough to understand what exactly was being said. Even so, like everyone there, I had seen this confrontation coming.

On one side of the table were officials representing two barangays controlled by a pearl-farming corporation called Jewelmer. They were accompanied by three of Jewelmer's employees, who took notes and made video recordings. On the other side of the table were two men from a neighboring barangay, where residents had joined a movement known as Sambilog in protest against Jewelmer's operation. At issue during the mapping exercise was the precise location and extent of the pearl farm.

Although lacking an entourage, the Sambilog representatives were armed with stacks of legal documentation, which they brandished at every

opportunity. Each time they did so, they were told that the assembly was meant to discuss the "biophysical aspects" of conservation work, not their "socioeconomic issues." But they persisted, making certain their grievances were heard if not addressed. The pair in question differed in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. One was an Ilokano and former Jewelmer employee who had migrated to Palawan in the 1980s. The other was an indigenous Pala'wan whose parents had been displaced by Jewelmer's sister company in the 1970s. Although Sambilog was founded as a movement for indigenous rights, it had clearly evolved into something broader. How it did so and with what consequences are the questions addressed in this chapter.

Introduction

In the Philippines, as in many parts of the world, the rights of indigenous people have become a pivotal issue in environmental politics. This is especially true in Palawan, where debates over development and conservation have engendered conflicting claims to represent the island's indigenous residents. In these struggles, indigeneity often conveys not just a claim to aboriginal status, but also a promise of ecological knowledge and stewardship. This linkage—what I call ecoindigenism—is meant to empower indigenous people in their pursuit of recognition and rights. In effect, however, its consequences are nothing if not complicated.

Just as ecoindigenism suggests that indigenous people should qualify for special rights, it also creates an expectation that they differ from their nonindigenous others in particular ways. This expectation—what I refer to here as the burden of authenticity—can distort indigenous peoples' ambitions and constrain their ability to form alliances with other groups. Unlike the burden of proof, which in courts of law is borne by the prosecution, the burden of authenticity is borne by indigenous groups themselves, whether in courts of law or those of public opinion. This paper asks how ecoindigenism and its burden of authenticity have shaped environmental politics in the Palawan region.

Recently, the conflict over mining in Palawan has thrust indigenous identity politics into the spotlight. In Brooke's Point, for example, the dispute between the antiminining Coalition of Panglima and its promining counterpart, the Brooke's Point Federation of Tribal Councils, has raised

difficult questions about who can legitimately represent indigenous interests and speak on their behalf. But mining is not the only issue to have raised such questions, and we can better address current challenges if we take stock of lessons contained in other recent struggles. Here I focus on a lesser known controversy, which pitted a protest movement known as Sambilog against a corporation and its political allies.

In what follows, I present a detailed narrative of the movement's history and offer a critical assessment of how its strategies, along with those of its opponents, changed over time. In particular, I concentrate on two pivotal developments. One is the movement's shift from a focus on indigenous rights to a more diverse membership with more varied strategies. The other is its opponent's effective co-optation of ecoindigenism as a source of symbolic capital. What tied these developments together is the burden of authenticity, which Sambilog was forced to bear as a condition of invoking indigenous rights.

What is at Stake?

The story of Sambilog offers two main insights of relevance to the present volume. The first concerns the question of how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) shape environmental and cultural politics on the island. On and off Palawan, NGO work has been associated with a number of negative, unintended outcomes—including, for example, depoliticization of environmental campaigns, bureaucratization of community conservation efforts, and reification of ethnic boundaries (Brosius 1999; Chernela 2005; Dressler and Turner 2008; Hearn 2007; Novellino 1999, 2007; Novellino and Dressler 2009). My aim here is not to contradict past critiques. What I present does, however, suggest that such outcomes are far from inevitable. Specifically, I will show how NGO-affiliated activists played a key role in guiding Sambilog's evolution as a more inclusive movement. As they responded to its growing membership and to the strategies of their opponents, these activists ended up downplaying rigid notions of ethnic identity and diversifying their strategies in ways that reflected competing ideas about what the movement represented. Equally important, the Sambilog issue exposed fractures between environmentalists and human rights advocates. These fractures suggest that, contrary to general pronouncements on the role of NGOs, NGO personnel are

embroiled in debates that crosscut Philippine society. Given the vibrancy of socioenvironmental activism on Palawan and the prominent role of "hybrid" NGOs therein (Austin and Eder 2007), I argue that it would be a mistake to treat NGOs operating on the island as if they are an undifferentiated set of actors producing a unitary set of (unintended) consequences. Some NGOs play leading roles in efforts to build locally engaged, inclusive movements for social and environmental justice.

The second main insight that I draw from Sambilog concerns ecoindigenism. Specifically, I examine how the movement's experiences fit within the ongoing debate over the promises and pitfalls of indigeneity as a basis for political mobilization. As suggested above, scholars have argued that ecoindigenism can ultimately prove disempowering because of the burden of authenticity it imposes (see, e.g., Conklin 1997; Conklin and Graham 1995; Doane 2007; Kirsch 2007; Nadasdy 2005). Sambilog's experience adds credence to such concerns, especially since the movement's opponents sponsored a parallel group of "real" indigenous people and successfully reframed the conflict as if it were primarily about biodiversity conservation. Perhaps even more troubling is that even some sympathetic observers have applied the burden of authenticity in their assessments of the movement. This case, then, offers a stark reminder about what Kirsch calls the "risks of counter globalization" (Kirsch 2007) faced by movements like Sambilog when the global identity politics they invoke meet with the complex local realities they inhabit. At the same time, Sambilog also sheds light on how those risks are being confronted. I noted above that internal debates emerged as the movement grew and confronted its opponents' co-optation of eco-indigenism. These debates often revolved tacitly around the burden of authenticity imposed by a sole focus on indigenous rights. That activists are grappling with this burden rather than uncritically accepting it is, I conclude, cause for hope.

Founding, Building, Debating the Movement

Although Sambilog would not emerge until the late 1990s, its story begins in 1972, the year Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law as the first step toward his vision of a "new society." As he moved to crush dissidents, Marcos also began ordering land transfers in the name of agrarian reform. These so-called land swaps enabled his allies to exchange portions

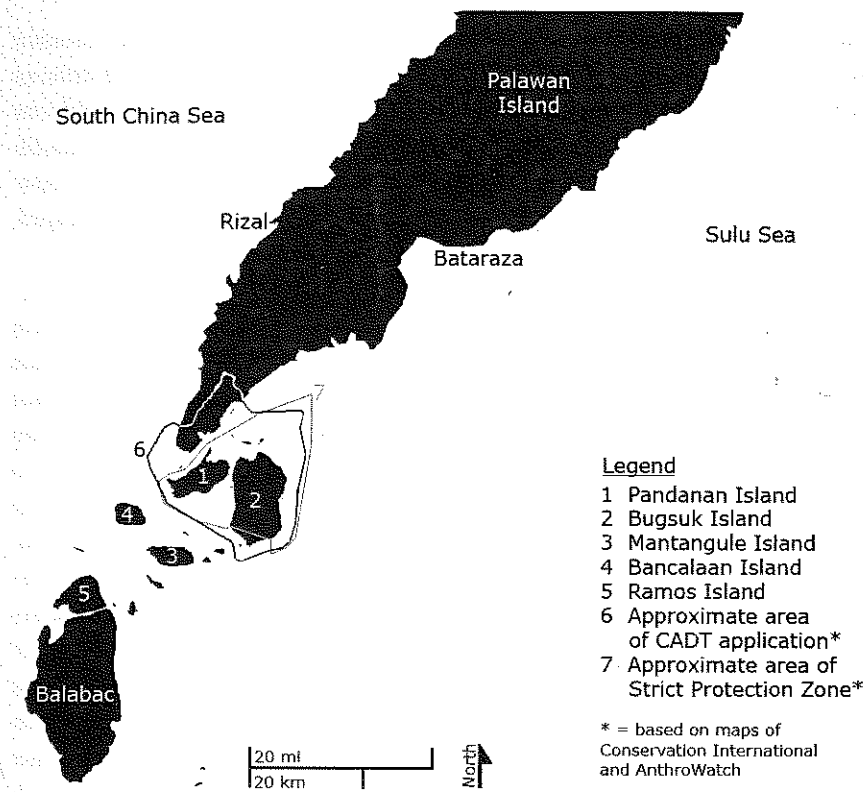


Figure 12.1. Map of the Balabac region

of their vast landholdings for tracts of untitled land in frontier zones like Palawan and Mindanao. Ironically, then, it was through “agrarian reform” that Eduardo “Danding” Cojuangco, a key member of Marcos’ inner circle, acquired two islands off the southern tip of Palawan (see fig. 12.1). That these islands—Bugsuk and Pandanan—were already home to a mix of migrant settlers and indigenous people was no obstacle. The residents were nominally compensated for improvements to their land and then “voluntarily” relocated to other islands by the military. Only four families, all with secure titles to land on the southern flank of Bugsuk, successfully resisted relocation.

Over subsequent years, Cojuangco established a nursery for hybrid coconut palms on Bugsuk and eventually a pearl farm in the waters surrounding it. Incorporated under the name Agricultural Investors Inc., the coconut nursery has failed to deliver on its promise of widespread benefits for the Philippine copra industry, while the size of the private profits it has yielded remains contested. The pearl farm, known as Jewellmer International Corporation, is managed by Manuel Cojuangco in partnership with a French investor, Jacques Branellec, and is today one of the world’s leading cultivators of South Sea pearls. Both ventures later became the subject of an inconclusive investigation into Cojuangco’s alleged expropriation of hundreds of millions of pesos from a coconut levy fund. Like that investigation, the movement, later known as Sambilog, became part of a broader societal struggle over how to deal with the legacies of the Marcos era.

After the Marcos regime met its demise in 1986, a new Constitution and a spate of democratic reforms enabled Philippine civil society to reemerge from the shadows of authoritarian rule. But these reforms did not in themselves reverse such acts of dispossession as the one that befell the residents of Bugsuk and Pandanan. In fact, the pearl farm continued to expand its concession, eventually enclosing thousands of hectares of sea around the islands.³ Even the narrow channel between them, once a protected passageway for artisanal fishing boats, was declared off limits to local people. Such inequity, residents recall, bred both resentment and spontaneous acts of resistance, even as organized protest seemed beyond the realm of possibility.

That sentiment began to change in the mid-1990s when Aureus Solito, an aspiring filmmaker raised in Manila, traveled to southern Palawan to spend time in his mother’s natal village.⁴ Over a series of extended visits, he immersed himself in his Pala’wan relatives’ cultural practices and learned about their plight. Specifically, Solito learned that some of them had been displaced during martial law and that all had, in more recent times, been denied access by a pearl farm to their traditional fishing ground. Believing that these acts of dispossession 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 what would become an advocacy campaign (Severino 1999).

Calling itself Taskforce Bugsuk, or TFB for short, the loose coalition of advocates assembled by Solito facilitated the establishment of a "people's organization"—Sambilog—which at its peak claimed some six hundred members in five barangay.⁵ Sambilog's initial membership included individuals of two distinct but related ethnolinguistic backgrounds, the Pala'wan and Molbog, some of whom were related to nonindigenous settlers through descent or marriage. Both the Pala'wan and Molbog are internally diverse ethnolinguistic groups indigenous to southern Palawan Island and its satellites in the Balabac Strait, where they have long derived their livelihood from shifting agriculture, hunting, and fishing. The Molbog, as well as some Pala'wan, practice Islam in a highly syncretic fashion. The name "Sambilog," which means "one circle," was meant to signify the unity of these groups—a claim that, despite certain differences, both were comprised of indigenous people facing common hardships. As I will explain below, emphasizing their unity was important in light of Philippine indigenous rights legislation, which includes 'homogeneity' among the traits defining legitimate indigenous groups (Republic of the Philippines 1997).

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-Marcos reforms, particularly the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, 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. At first, the movement focused its efforts on securing a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT; see fig. 12.1). At that time, the CADT was a new and much anticipated collective tenure mechanism designed to challenge the dispossession of indigenous people who even today rarely possess legal titles to the land they live on. To inspire broader support of the CADT application, Solito launched an advocacy campaign involving artists and the media. Characteristic of the movement's initial strategy 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, fish ponds, and the pearl farm. The film closes with a poignant scene of ritual 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. For surreal effect, Solito mixes intense clips from a Pala'wan shamanic ritual with scenes from the delineation of Sambilog's ancestral domain claim.

Notwithstanding these early efforts to generate public support, Sambilog's CADT became mired in the notoriously burdensome application process (see Hirtz 2003). As the process dragged on, the ranks of Sambilog grew to include more people who did not identify as indigenous but who shared the same grievances. TFB also attracted a new cohort of activists who introduced varying ideas about the nature of the struggle and the best strategies for pursuing it. Some continued to see the issue primarily in terms of indigenous rights. As one of the original TFB members told me in January 2007, Sambilog had attracted her attention because it amounted to a "test case" of the new IPRA legislation. In other words, she wanted to know if the IPRA was strong enough to challenge an oligarch like Cojuangco either through the CADT or the provisions requiring "free and prior informed consent" for development projects.

But other TFB activists, particularly those who joined later, emphasized different dimensions of the issue, such as the legally protected rights of peasants or artisanal fishers. Some argued that Sambilog should seek redress through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Act (CARP) while others appealed to the rights of "municipal fisherfolk" as protected under the Fisheries Code (Republic of the Philippines 1988, 1998). Some believed that Sambilog members should declare a hunger strike, as peasants in other provinces had done, while others saw more hope—and less suffering—in the patient pursuit of legal remedies. Although not all of these different ideas were mutually exclusive, they were often the subject of lengthy discussions. At a meeting I attended in late 2006, for example, TFB members discussed so many issues—the next steps of the CADT, a litany of ongoing court cases, the possibility of a hunger strike, the need to establish livelihood projects, plans for the upcoming visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and a proposal to link up

with a transnational workers' rights campaign known as Clean Clothes, among others—that most decisions had to be tabled for the next meeting.

Personality differences alone cannot account for this state of affairs, although the personal priorities of individual TFB members were a factor. Instead, the debates within TFB must be understood in the context of post-1986 government reforms. New laws intended to protect marginalized segments of the population also tended to "sectoralize" them into discrete interest groups—peasants, indigenous people, fisherfolk, and the like—who had mutually exclusive legal remedies at their disposal. When advocates for these reforms went on to found or work for NGOs (Austin and Eder 2007; Bryant 2005; Hilhorst 2003; Rico 2007), they created a division of labor in civil society that largely mirrored that of the new legislation. With all of its members employed by different NGOs, some of them sector-specific, TFB found that it could not always agree on a single course of action.⁶ As its members rummaged around the post-1986 activist toolkit, TFB's singular focus on indigenous rights gave way to a more inclusive, if at times less coherent, set of strategies. In addition to these debates, the increased role of the Palawan NGO Network (PNNI) in TFB favored the movement's diversification. A "hybrid" NGO known for its vocal advocacy on behalf of social and environmental justice (Austin 2003; Austin and Eder 2007), PNNI eventually came to inherit the CADT application from PAFID when the latter could no longer afford to support it.

But shifting TFB membership was not the only factor pushing the movement to change. TFB also had to come to terms with the fact that Sambilog's indigenous members shared many aspects of their disempowerment and hardship with their nonindigenous neighbors. Similarly, with indigenous members married to nonindigenous people and socioeconomic differences within both populations, it was impossible to pretend as if the "homogenous" indigenous group described in IPRA made sense as a basis for the movement. In short, the growing diversity of TFB's strategies paralleled that of Sambilog's membership. Contrary to the notion that NGOs are inclined to impose rigid notions of ethnicity on Palawan's indigenous population (cf. Dressler and Turner 2008; Novellino and Dressler 2009), the history of Sambilog points to a less coherent but potentially more inclusive approach. This approach, moreover, emerged not through top-down imposition, but through ongoing debate and contingent

responses to the actions of the movement's opponents. I will develop this latter point below.

Before moving on with the history of Sambilog, I must first clarify that questions of Philippine law were by no means the only source of strategy and debate within the movement. Although their strategies often appealed to Philippine law, TFB activists were inspired by universal conceptions of human rights, attuned to global identity politics, and connected to transnational activist networks. The latter, in particular, provided access to vital resources, including grants to support Sambilog's activities from the Global Greengrants Fund, the International Society of Ethnobotany, and the Access Initiative. These international allies were not always as diverse in their concerns as TFB was. In fact, many if not most were oriented primarily toward environmental advocacy on behalf of indigenous people. Thus, even as the movement as a whole became more heterogeneous, most of TFB's networking emphasized Sambilog's indigenous constituency and echoed global discourses of ecoindigenism. Ultimately, as I explain below, this strategy would prove something of a liability.

Facing Corporate Counterstrategies

Over the past several decades, indigenous rights movements have spread around the globe, and a number of states, including the Philippines, have responded with new legal protections. As a result, the concept of "indigeneity" no longer refers simply to aboriginal or native status in a particular place, but "has 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).⁷ References to this "world collectivity" often carry connotations of ecoindigenism—that is, valorized notions of traditional ecological knowledge and stewardship. Such ideas were key to the original conception of Sambilog.

Assessments of ecoindigenism have varied. Some scholars see in this ideology the potential for new, successful collaborations between environmental activists and rural people (Li 2000; Tsing 2003). Others, however, have warned that collaborations based on indigeneity, in general, and ecoindigenism, in particular, are often much more complicated. The "tribal slot," as Li (2000) calls it, can disadvantage not only those who cannot 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, including Palawan, indigeneity is institutionalized by NGO interventions and state policies of recognition. The disproportionate power held by such institutions 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 1997, 1999; Chernela 2005; Doane 2007; Nadasdy 2005). As a result, indigenous movements often depend on tenuous political 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).

Of special concern to the present discussion is the tendency of ecoindigenism to distort the aims of indigenous movements, thereby constraining their options and exposing them to charges of inauthenticity (Brosius 1997, 2003; Conklin and Graham 1995; Doane 2007; Kirsch 2007). How did Sambilog fare in this regard? On the one hand, as noted, the movement owed its existence to the circulation of ecoindigenism and related notions of indigenous rights. On the other, as the movement broadened its membership and diversified its strategies, Sambilog bore less and less resemblance to the "homogenous" indigenous community described in IPRA and imagined by many in the Philippines.⁸ This seeming disparity made them vulnerable.

In 2004, their CADT application was returned for revision because it was made on behalf of Sambilog, a people's organization known to have a mix of indigenous and nonindigenous members, and not exclusively on behalf of a recognized indigenous group. This setback was not catastrophic, but it was financially costly and invited charges of inauthenticity from the movement's opponents. That same year, Jewelmer recruited prominent conservationists to speak before the municipal council of Balabac, which they convinced to declare the entirety of its territory a "protected marine eco-region" and to establish a "strict protection zone" around the pearl farm (Municipality of Balabac 2005; see fig. 12.1). Aware of Sambilog's claim to the area, the conservationists dismissed it out of hand. In an email to TFB, one of them justified his involvement

by implying that Sambilog's claims were contrived and that its members were, in fact, responsible for environmental destruction:

I am proud of what we achieved there. As far as the "social" aspect is concerned, anyone who destroys the sea can rot in hell, and I will provide the fuel and the match. As far as I am concerned, the less people there are—especially of those who use illegal and destructive methods of fishing—the better. And I don't give a damn about bleeding hearts' opinions of social justice.⁹

The author's belief was that Sambilog members were not, in fact, authentically indigenous. He suggests that TFB contact a colleague of his to "arrange for an audience...with the real IPs she is helping." "They are so happy," he wrote, "because they are catching more fish now than ever before." The colleague referenced was a prominent attorney and former Presidential Assistant for Poverty Eradication whose NGO, Earth Rights Peoples Rights (ERPR), was providing livelihood projects in cooperation with Jewelmer (Luna 2009). It seems that the "real IPs" whom ERPR was helping also happened to be those not expressing an interest in applying for a CADT or otherwise seeking the return of their land.

Meanwhile, as it worked to have its concession declared a marine protected area, 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 hardbound catalog that doubled as a celebration of the company's green credentials. The book describes, for example:

a wonderful symbiosis between a pearl farm and its marine environment, with the sea embracing the pearl oysters as its own, while the pearl farm lays out its 'protective blanket' of marine cages, sheltering and promoting the breeding of fish and other marine species. (Tuason and Honasan 2004, foreword)¹⁰

Later the author argues that pearl farming can even enhance the environment in ways that exceed the capacities of "nature":

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 2004, 73].

As an immediate response to Jewelmer's actions, TFB filed a civil complaint seeking nullification of the municipal ordinance and found renewed motivation for protest among the affected communities.¹¹ Angered by the ordinance, a new wave of nonindigenous residents, especially those dependent on fishing for their livelihood, began to take serious interest, and the overall focus of the campaign turned increasingly toward the pearl farm. At the same time, the reinvigorated movement met with increased opposition. The same attorney mentioned above publicly argued that the Sambilog CADT applicants were not in fact authentic indigenous people. Meanwhile, her NGO facilitated the establishment of a parallel organization whose members, they claimed, constituted the true Palawan and Molbog representatives in the area. This group opposed Sambilog's CADT application and appeared at public-relations events alongside Jewelmer and municipal officials. To be sure, some of Jewelmer's tactics involved the classic tools of intimidation, such as the harassment of Sambilog members by armed guards and the filing of libel charges against sympathetic journalists. But their promotion of the protected area, their Ultimate Orient campaign, and their sponsorship of a parallel indigenous group suggest a far more sophisticated strategy. In effect, Jewelmer co-opted the strategy of its opponents. Such tactics, Kirsch (2007) has noted, are proliferating as corporations become increasingly adept at mimicking and thereby undermining the strategies of their opponents.

Matters became even more complicated for Sambilog over the course of 2005 when Conservation International (CI), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and other conservation NGOs entered the fray. The Balabac Strait and, therefore, Bugsuk are located in an area known to conservationists as the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape. This "conservation corridor" encompasses some 900,000 square kilometers of marine and coastal areas in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and is said to be among the world's most biologically diverse marine ecoregions (WWF-Philippines 2006). The arrival of "big conservation" (Alcorn 1995) had both positive and negative impacts on Sambilog and TFB. On the one hand, the presence of powerful

transnational NGOs—and, more specifically, the stakeholder assemblies they convened—provided novel opportunities for Sambilog constituents to present their claims in public venues. On the other hand, these were also venues in which their claims could be countered by representatives of the pearl farm and its allies in various government agencies.

As Dietrich (2011) has observed, treating parties in resource conflicts as "stakeholders" tends to favor the more powerful party. Moreover, transnational conservation activities in Balabac lent 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 endorsed the spirit of the legislation, and at least one of them signed a document supporting it.¹² Both, moreover, excluded Sebaring, the main Sambilog-affiliated barangay in Balabac, from their research activities and livelihood projects. CI and WWF personnel expressed a greater degree of sensitivity to Sambilog's claims than did the conservationists who originally advocated for the protected area. Nevertheless, their actions demonstrated a willingness to advance the protection of biodiversity at the expense of equitable, democratic environmental planning (Löwy 2007; Novellino 1999). With their complicity, Jewelmer reframed the controversy as a struggle over conservation rather than a long-term process of dispossession that initially had nothing to do with conservation. The company became the noble custodian of a marine ecosystem which, along with its "real" indigenous stewards, was being threatened by a group of migrant poachers posing as indigenous people. As a result of this deft maneuver, TFB and Sambilog were left without effective allies in the big conservation NGOs.

With the CADT application stalled and their appeal to ecoindigenism largely undermined, TFB redoubled its efforts to appeal to more general notions of social and environmental justice, while at the same time continuing to seek redress through IPRA. Above I touched on the differing perspectives and debates through which these strategies emerged. Here it suffices to mention some of the outcomes. Besides the civil case already mentioned, the movement filed two additional lawsuits and engaged in a variety of protest actions.¹³ The latter included protest marches, rallies, and delegations 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. The following year, they led a week-long "solidarity march" some 240 kilometers, from the southern tip of Palawan north to the provincial capital. These events drew much publicity, but they were costly. The former resulted in trespassing charges against several participants, including a congressional delegate who took part in the parade, and the latter in a two-month vigil at the capitol that ended in disappointing hearings with provincial legislators. These actions prompted congressional hearings and an investigation by President Arroyo's Taskforce 63.¹⁴ Ultimately, however, their outcomes have been very limited, and the movement has largely gone dormant in the face of excruciatingly slow legal machinations and a lack of funding for further mobilizations.

Although the last major protest action was in 2005, TFB and its members insist that the movement remains alive through its court cases. They were vindicated in late 2012 by a decision of the Sandiganbayan (a special anticorruption court), which found a former Balabac mayor guilty of violating IPRA in connection with Jewelmer's marine lease agreement (see note 13). The long-term significance of this decision remains to be seen, but it has had no immediate effect on the lives of Sambilog's constituents. Indeed, however significant the movement has been in their everyday lives (see Theriault 2011), it has so far done little to bring them the justice they seek.

Unpacking the Burden of Authenticity

Above I asserted that ecoindigenism became a liability for Sambilog. Here I explain precisely how. To review, notions of ecologically integrated indigenous tradition, however romanticized, were what led Auraeus Solito to found Sambilog. Many of the original members of TFB joined the movement because they were eager to put indigenous rights legislation to the test. In short, then, the movement and the novel form of collaboration it represented were in large measure a product of ecoindigenism. Nevertheless, what gave the movement its appeal as a "test case" for the IPRA was also what made it vulnerable. The assumed homogeneity of indigenous people enabled Sambilog's opponents to challenge its authenticity on the basis that it included nonindigenous members. By aligning itself with the "real IPs" and fashioning a green corporate image,

Jewelmer co-opted ecoindigenism and put the concept to use for its own interest. This move recast the company's conflict with Sambilog as if it were over conservation, thus deflecting attention away from the original act of dispossession and the enduring sociopolitical structures that enabled it.

Jewelmer's counterstrategy was made possible by the ambivalent manner in which the ideology of ecoindigenism operates both in the Philippines and globally (Nadasdy 2005). On the one hand, as both Sambilog and Jewelmer were aware, ecoindigenism is an example of what Bourdieu (1986) calls "symbolic capital," meaning it becomes a source of power for those who successfully invoke it (see also Swartz 1997).¹⁵ On the other, as Sambilog found out, it also amounts to what Laura Nader (1997) calls a "controlling process," meaning that it imposes constraints on what those who invoke it can legitimately say and do.¹⁶ These constraints are what I have been referring to as the burden of authenticity. The crucial point here is that this burden emerges not simply as a result of clever corporate image management, but also as a result of popular assumptions made about indigenous people. In other words, the burden of authenticity is also an effect of a hegemonic ideology—a set of "common sense" ideas and values held uncritically by a large segment of the population—that shapes perceptions of indigenous people and thereby becomes an unintentional means of controlling their actions. For Sambilog and TFB, hegemonic assumptions about the homogeneity of indigenous groups constrained their ability to build alliances. Thus, as the movement became more heterogeneous, its credibility suffered among those who conceived of it solely in terms of indigenous rights.

Some who criticized the movement were allies of Jewelmer and would have done so regardless of its composition. More tellingly, though, a number of sympathetic observers expressed dismay over the manner in which it had strayed from its original focus on protecting indigenous culture. Among them was Auraeus Solito, the movement's founder. Worse still, even the most thoughtful observers struggled to unpack the burden of authenticity and ultimately reproduced it. Maria Paz Luna, for example, is an esteemed environmental attorney who was commissioned by Conservation International to conduct a detailed study of the conflict.¹⁷ She has rejected the notion that Sambilog is inauthentic because it

includes nonindigenous members. She does so, however, *not* because she sees their interests as bound up with those of nonindigenous people, but instead on the basis that welcoming outsiders is an indigenous "cultural trait" (personal communication). In this manner, the notion of tradition becomes the standard for measuring Sambilog's authenticity as a political actor. This standard leads her to the conclusion that the strategies pursued by TFB and Sambilog were a "Western intrusion" incommensurable with indigenous culture. In light of their flexible concept of territory and their tradition of conflict avoidance, Luna argues, Sambilog would have been better off relying on its indigenous members' "age-old wisdom" in their attempt to win concessions from Jewelmer (Luna 2009, 86). Under this logic, the impasse between Jewelmer and Sambilog owes to the latter's confrontational approach. Sambilog appears to have been particularly misguided in light of the fact that its members could have, like other indigenous people in the area, derived benefits from the Jewelmer's ecological ethic by working for it as conservation wardens. The unspoken, likely unintentional, corollary of such logic is that indigenous people lose their legitimacy as political actors when they engage in "modern" forms of protest. This, in essence, is the burden of authenticity faced by indigenous people in Palawan and in many parts of the world. It operates as a controlling process not just through the deliberate machinations of companies like Jewelmer, but also through the hegemonic ideologies that shape sympathetic critique.

I have chosen to single out Luna's analysis not because I find it especially flawed or hostile to Sambilog's cause. Much to the contrary, it is an example of how even the most insightful and sensitive of observers sometimes bring problematic assumptions into their work with indigenous people. Such assumptions, I submit, are a more subtle but no less significant part of how the burden of authenticity is converted from a common-sense view of the world into a controlling process. Especially when defined in terms of homogeneity, adherence to tradition, or ecological nobility, popular expectations of authenticity can play directly into the hands of the powerful interests with which marginalized people, indigenous and nonindigenous alike, come into conflict. Such expectations were what enabled Jewelmer to capture the symbolic capital of ecoindigenism and reframe the issue in its favor. Put more broadly, they

enabled the company to use its superior economic power in a disguised form, thereby legitimating the acts of dispossession on which its existence depends.¹⁸

We may find comfort in imagining indigenous cultures as inherently inclined to behave as stewards of the environment or as nonconfrontational pacifists. But such images are out of touch with the reality in which many indigenous people live and the heterogeneity that exists among them (Eder 2010a). As Eder (2010b, citing Mitchell 2002) has argued with respect to state classification schemes for indigenous people, the ways in which we imagine ethnic boundaries are not simply models of the world, but models *for* it. Thus, if we cling to romanticized models of indigenous people, we risk distorting their own aspirations and undermining their efforts to join or even lead broader movements for social and environmental justice. This is especially true for those in authority whose views shape policies and their implementation.

In his analysis of Penan resistance to logging in Malaysia, Brosius (2003) describes how the only language the state would understand was that of development, effectively silencing the Penans' morally grounded claims to the forest. In the Philippines, indigenous people seem constrained in a different way—between making wholesale endorsements of development in the name of indigenous rights or wholesale rejections of it in the name of ecological stewardship (Eder 2010b; cf. Kirsch 2007 for Papua New Guinea). This either/or thinking penalizes those who would articulate broader, more nuanced visions of social and environmental justice. Indeed, as the case of Sambilog makes clear, the burden of authenticity can and will be used against indigenous people in the courts of law and public opinion.

Palawan's indigenous populations are culturally distinct, and they have endured experiences of dispossession and marginalization that in certain ways differentiate them from the majority of the population. These differences are pivotal. They underpin the political identity of indigenous Filipinos in law, reflect the socioeconomic position most of them occupy within Philippine society, and can provide a basis for collective struggle. Nevertheless, as the case of Sambilog attests, indigenous people can and do engage in political activities alongside their nonindigenous neighbors. We risk further disempowering them if we insist they do otherwise.

Looking Forward

In conclusion, I would like to suggest briefly how we might avoid imposing the burden of authenticity even as we preserve space for indigenous claims to cultural citizenship and the recognition of prior tenurial rights. Our efforts to promote social and environmental justice on Palawan might, I suggest, look more to the everyday experiences of marginalized people and less to their identification as indigenous or otherwise (see Theriault 2011). This does not mean that notions of indigeneity ought to be expunged, cultural differences ignored, or claims to exceptional rights regarded with suspicion. Instead, it means challenging our own assumptions about what indigenous people aspire to and about how they should achieve their aspirations. We need not look far for new and challenging ideas. NGO personnel, it is true, have at times policed the boundaries of indigeneity on Palawan (Dressler and Turner 2008; Novellino and Dressler 2009). But at least some of them are working with local allies to build more inclusive visions of social and environmental justice grounded in the changing realities of life on the island. Such efforts, if freed from the burden of authenticity, suggest a way forward.

Notes

1. Ethnographic research for this study was conducted between October 2006 and July 2007. I would like to thank the following individuals for their insightful comments on the many incarnations of this paper: Rebecca Austin, Wolfram Dressler, James Eder, Leah Horowitz, Maria Paz Luna, Kirin Narayan, Danielle Theriault, and participants in Dr. Narayan's spring-2008 Ethnographic Writing seminar. Danielle Theriault provided assistance with the maps. Any remaining shortcomings are entirely my own. In addition to those who sat through interviews and provided documents during my research, I am especially grateful to the following individuals and institutions for their assistance: Linda K. Albuero, Carinnes Gonzalez, Aloysius Cañete, Theodore Murnane, Cleofe Pablo, Jojo Ramos, Lizz Rodriguez Ubaldo, members of Taskforce Bugsuk and Sambilog, staff of the Palawan NGO Network, the Palawan Studies Center and the Center for Strategic Policy and Governance at Palawan State University, and various departments at the University of San Carlos. Funding and other support for this research were provided through a Fulbright Fellowship administered by the International Institute of Education and the Philippine-American Educational Foundation. This chapter draws on Theriault 2011.

2. Barangay refers to the lowest-level administrative unit in the Philippines. For rural areas, its closest English equivalent is village or town; however, most rural barangay contain multiple types of settlements and are larger in area than what either of those glosses implies.

3. Over the years since its establishment, the pearl farm operations have enclosed between 5000 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). 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.

4. Auraeus Solito's given name is Arturo Calo Solito. He has since become a leading independent filmmaker in the Philippines, and several of his films have been featured in international film festivals. He is currently working on a trilogy of narrative films about life in southern Palawan, the first of which is titled *Busong* and was featured in the 2011 Directors' Fortnight at Cannes.

5. These barangays were Puring, Buliluyan, and Tagnato at the southern tip of Palawan Island within the municipality of Bataraza, as well as Barangays Sebaring and Pandanan on nearby satellite islands in the municipality of Balabac.

6. Among the NGOs represented in the taskforce in 2006–2007 were organizations focused on development (CODE NGO), peasants' rights (PAKISAMA), indigenous livelihood (NTEP-EP), indigenous rights (PANLIPI), and social and environmental justice (PNNI).

7. See Merlan (2009), Niezen (2003), Brysk (2000), 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, including the Philippines, and scholars have connected such 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.

8. As with the case described by Igoe (2006) for Tanzania, the current salience of indigeneity in the Philippines has much to do with civil-society activism and the influence of foreign development aid (Hilhorst 2003; Rico 2007). But it also reflects "sedimented" ideologies of ethnic categorization inherited from Spanish and American colonial rule (Eder and McKenna 2004). Although there are some notable exceptions, such as the Cuyonon (see Eder 2004), ethnic groups now considered indigenous in the Philippines have historically been defined in terms of their otherness vis-à-vis the majority population. Under Spanish rule, the binary lowland/upland division of the population fit hand-in-glove with the colonial practice of selectively recognizing (or ignoring) customary claims to landownership (McDermott 2001).

9. From an email dated 14 July 2006. Spelling and punctuation errors in the original have been corrected.

10. The first sentence of this passage is from the foreword, signed by Manuel Cojuangco.

11. In August 2005, TFB-affiliated attorneys filed Special Civil Action No. 4138 in the Regional Trial Court of Palawan, seeking nullification of the municipal ordinance that created the Strict Protection Zone around Jewelmer's concession. This case was later superseded by "*Jilmani Naseron, et al. v. Municipality of Balabac, et al.*," docketed as Special Civil Action No. 4232 filed on September 14, 2006. This case has since stalled in the courts. 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. See Pamfilo et al. (2006). Further, the municipal ordinance took effect before the Environmentally Critical 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, therefore, are supposed to be harmonized with provincial and municipal codes (Republic of the Philippines 1992).

12. WWF's work in the Balabac Strait was partially funded by the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, which raised some activists' eyebrows given Tiffany & Co.'s interests in South Sea pearls such as those cultured by Jewelmer.

13. In addition to the civil case described in footnote 11, TFB-affiliated attorneys filed a criminal case with the Sandiganbayan anticorruption court ("*People of the Philippines v. Shuaib J. Astami*," SB-08-0377). This criminal complaint invokes Section 59 of IPRA, which requires government agencies, including local-government units, to follow the NCIP-supervised process of obtaining Free and Prior Informed Consent before entering into any lease agreements or other contracts that overlap with indigenous ancestral domains. In an October 2012 decision, the Sandiganbayan found former Balabac mayor Shuaib Astami guilty of violating Section 59 of IPRA when his administration entered into a lease agreement with Jewelmer's parent company (Ecofarm Systems and Resources, Inc.). Astami was ordered to pay a P100,000 penalty or face imprisonment. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether that decision was being appealed. Another case seeking to challenge land titles awarded to Cojuangco associates through the Agrarian Reform Land Swap was planned by TFB attorneys but never filed as far as I am aware. See Pamfilo et al. (2006) for details on the aforementioned criminal and civil cases.

14. Formed by President Arroyo in 2001, Taskforce 63 was a body intended to intervene in "emergency situations" involving indigenous people.

15. Explaining Bourdieu's concept, Swartz writes (1997, 43), "Symbolic capital is a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others. Symbolic capital is a

reformulation of Weber's idea of charismatic authority that legitimates power relations by accentuating selected personal qualities of elites as supposedly superior and natural. Bourdieu, however, does not think of the concept as an ideal type or restrict it to leadership but extends the idea as a *dimension of all legitimation*" (emphasis added).

16. Nader (1997, 711) defines controlling processes as "the mechanisms by which ideas take hold and become institutional in relation to power."

17. Incidentally, Luna is married to Howie Severino, the journalist whose documentary about Sambilog, *Pagbabalik sa Tribo* (1999), was mentioned above.

18. In Bourdieu's terms (1977), the use of symbolic capital to mask or legitimate unequal socioeconomic structures constitutes "symbolic violence."

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