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## **Illegal Fishing and Masculinity in the Philippines: A Look at the Calamianes Islands in Palawan**

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# **Illegal Fishing and Masculinity in the Philippines**

## **A Look at the Calamianes Islands in Palawan**

The article investigates the attitudes of fishers who use illegal fishing methods in the Calamianes Islands. While studies of illegal fishing have typically concentrated on why it continues to flourish, questions remain unanswered about who specifically participates in illegal fishing, and what their broader motivations might be. The article extends understandings of illegal fishing by considering it as a way in which young men gain status through the demonstration of their masculinity.

**KEYWORDS: DESTRUCTIVE FISHING METHODS · MASCULINITY · LIVE FISH TRADE · PALAWAN · INTEGRATED COASTAL MANAGEMENT**

In the Calamianes Islands of northern Palawan intensive modes of natural resource extraction exist in the form of various fisheries, which are the primary industry of the region. In particular, the trade in live reef fish has been booming for the last decade. Recently attempts at institutionalizing various forms of management and conservation, collectively referred to here as Integrated Coastal Management (ICM), have been promoted by a combination of government and nongovernment agencies. One of the results of ICM has been the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) throughout the Calamianes. Although the impacts of these processes of ICM and intensive resource extraction are varied and complex, one important issue facing the region is the high rate of various illegal fishing methods, which include cyanide fishing, in the case of the live reef fish trade, and fishing within MPAs. These practices have contributed to the rapid decimation of fish stocks and habitat in the Calamianes, and have made it much harder for small-scale fishermen to obtain sufficient catch.

Many studies of illegal fishing have concerned themselves with the policy aspects related to preventing illegal fishing (e.g., Barber and Pratt 1997; Erdmann 2001); however, only a few have examined the comparatively less obvious social and cultural contexts in which illegal fishing takes place (i.e., Galvez et al. 1989; Russell and Alexander 2000; Eder 2003, 2005). Among other concerns, the latter type of studies has shown how illegal fishing is tolerated and why it continues to flourish in the Philippines. They point to broader social problems that hinder the development of ICM in general. Drawing from data gathered in the Calamianes Islands, this article aims to extend such understandings of illegal fishing by considering it as a way in which young men gain status through the demonstration of their masculinity.

The article first provides a background about the live reef fish trade. Then it presents some basic information about the Calamianes Islands, and looks at some of the issues that allow illegal fishing to flourish. Its main section details the writer's own experiences with men participating in illegal fishing, and analyzes their behavior with reference to local understandings of masculinity, livelihood, and status. Thus, the article concentrates not so much on why illegal fishing is tolerated but on why it appeals to certain fishers. A better understanding of some of the complexities behind the motivations of fishers who use destructive fishing practices may help in designing appropriate strategies to deal with the problem.

## The Live Reef Fish Trade

The live reef fish trade is a term that covers two types of fisheries in the Philippines. First, the trade in ornamental aquarium fish deals with small reef fish that are destined for pet shops and aquaria, mostly in the United States. Second, the trade in live reef fish for food deals with larger reef fish, such as groupers (family *Serranidae*), that end up as highly valued dishes in Hong Kong, Taipei, and other Asian cities. Although some of the lower-valued species are eaten in Manila (such as the tiger grouper *Epinephelus fuscoguttatus*), virtually all of the high-end species (such as the leopard coral grouper *Plectropomus leopardus*) go directly overseas. In the Calamianes Islands the live reef food fish trade dominates, and catch is concentrated on the leopard coral grouper, locally known as *señorita* or simply grouper. Responding to growing international demand from the rapidly industrializing regions of Asia, the value of live fish exports in the Philippines has increased from US\$7.2 million per year during the 1990s to a yearly average of around US\$11 million since 2000 (Pomeroy et al. 2005, 15). The trade in live reef food fish began in the Philippines in Guiuan in southern Samar during the 1980s. Following the pattern similar to other live reef fish source countries in Asia, it moved on to other regions as stocks became depleted. Currently, the live fish trade is concentrated in Palawan, which was estimated to have produced 55 percent of the country's live fish in 2002 (Padilla et al. 2003, 7). Within Palawan the town of Coron in the Calamianes Islands is a focal point for the trade. The value of the trade in the Calamianes in 2002 was estimated at P265.1 million, or about US\$5.3 million (Pomeroy et al. 2005, 16).

Although the live fish trade has many direct ecological and social effects, the most commonly cited phenomenon has been the practice of cyanide fishing. Tablets of cyanide are dissolved in a bottle of water and squirted on to reef areas, stunning the fish, which are then easily collected. Cyanide fishing is a far more efficient method of capture than the hook-and-line method, but has many costs. The efficiency of the method has resulted in widespread overfishing and stock depletion. However, perhaps the biggest concern is that cyanide kills the corals as well as other nontargeted species (Cervino et al. 2003). This destruction of the habitat affects all other users of the reef, especially small-scale fishers who depend on it for their livelihood.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the academic literature concerned with the trade in live reef fish has focused on how best to regulate the industry and minimize its negative ecological impacts (i.e., Johannes and Riepen 1995; Barber and Pratt 1997;

Erdmann 2001; Mamauag 2004). Most of these writers have a background in marine biology, conservation, or fisheries, and limit their concerns to practical, policy-oriented discussions. Suggested actions and potential solutions to the problems relating to the live fish trade have included the banning of the trade, the promotion of more marine protected areas, the passage of more legislation against illegal fishing methods, and the creation of more cyanide-testing laboratories. In practice, however, as Celia Lowe (2002) argues with regard to Indonesia, governments and many nongovernment organizations (NGOs) have focused intervention solely at the community level. They have explained environmental degradation as a result of poverty, population growth, and ignorance among small-scale fishers. This conception of illegal fishing, Lowe argues, is too narrow and has resulted in shortsighted solutions that effectively blame local fishers for the problems.

Recently several authors have taken a broader view of the trade, emphasizing “the political, social and economic factors that promote cyanide use” (ibid., 7). Lowe has analyzed the trade from this perspective, arguing that “rather than condemn the industry and its fishers, we should understand who participates in the destructive aspects of live fishing, what structures facilitate participation, and how and why they have come to exist” (ibid., 254). In her analysis of the live fish trade in the Togeian Islands of Indonesia, she concludes that the industry is “organized around making a small number of well-connected officials and entrepreneurs wealthy at the expense of coral reef ecosystems and the local communities that depend on them” (ibid.). Correspondingly, in her analysis of the live fish trade on Cuyo Island in Palawan, Heather D’Agnes (2005, 48) has emphasized that the problems of the live fish industry must be addressed in the context of broad structural issues, such as liberal trade policies and the impunity of live fish trade brokers who supply cyanide and unfettered and unmitigated demand. Let us turn now to the Calamianes and the issues that surround the live reef fish trade there.

## **The Calamianes Fishers**

A group of 160 islands off the northern tip of mainland Palawan form the Calamianes, which is composed of four municipalities—Coron, Culion, Busuanga, and Linapacan. It has a total land area of 194,700 hectares, and a population of approximately 71,000 (Padilla et al. 2003, 15). All of these municipalities are marked by substantial ethnic and linguistic variation, with residents originating from locations throughout the Philippines and reflect-

ing the broad trend of the history of migration to Palawan (see Eder and Fernandez 1996). Because much of the land in the Calamianes is not suited to agriculture, many communities have relied heavily on fishing. The live reef fish industry has been well established in the Calamianes since the early 1990s, and by the late 1990s live reef fish collection was taking place in 60–70 percent of coastal communities (Padilla et al. 2003, 24). The area has about 2,000 live fish collectors accredited by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), but it is likely the actual number is significantly higher than this figure (Dalabajan 2005, 7). The incentives for small-scale fishermen are clear, with prices for individual groupers of a suitable size bringing in more than P2,000 (US\$40), a large amount in a region where fishing households have an average monthly income that is often less than P5,000 (US\$100).

In the Calamianes fishers engaged in the collection of live reef fish are usually involved in an extensive credit system, where either a trader based in Coron town or a middleman out in the islands provides the fisher with a boat, an engine, and the needed supplies. This advance is paid back in installment without interest, but the fisher is expected to bring all of his fish to the trader or middleman. Traders then export the fish directly or sell them to an export office based in Coron. From Coron the fish are flown in plastic bags to Manila before being transported to Hong Kong. Although the traders are all based in Coron, the actual fishing takes place throughout the islands and even as far as the Palawan mainland. Fishing trips can last up to two weeks, and the boats are fitted with special aquaria in order to keep the fish alive during this period.<sup>2</sup>

It was in this setting that, over a period of twelve months between September 2005 and January 2007, I conducted research into the changing social and political relations among various groups involved in marine resource management. I was based mainly in one rural barangay in Coron municipality, Esperanza, but also did research in Coron town and occasionally in other municipalities in the Calamianes. The discussions I held concerning cyanide fishing, however, were held with fishers from Coron town only. My research was based on the typical anthropological practice of observation, complemented by life histories and surveys as well as formal and informal interviews with fishers of all ages and types, government officials, and NGO workers.

Out of a population of 529, Esperanza has 112 full-time fishers. They employ a wide range of fisheries techniques and gears, and often move between different fisheries depending on the time of the year, month, or day.

Generally, they can be divided into hook-and-line fishers and net fishers. Fishing is the primary source of income of most households. Despite the practice of some Christian-derived rituals associated with fishing, such as the baptism of boats, there is little evidence of the use of magical amulets or folk rituals that have been associated with fishing in other parts of the Philippines (see Mangahas 1994, 30–32; Polo 1985; Russell and Alexander 1996, 438). The practitioners of illegal fishing that I observed appear to have little concern for such matters.

Although I was able to gather considerable data about fishing in general, the topic's sensitivity meant that I was unable to get a complete picture of illegal fishing. For example, I was unable to obtain detailed information about the organization and supply of cyanide, or how legal fishers deal with the tension of living with those who practice illegal fishing. However, my data clearly point to younger men as those most closely involved with the illegal fishing trade at the level of collection.

The term “illegal fishing” is very broad and can be used to cover a whole range of activities. In this article I use the term out of mere convenience to refer to two specific types of illegal fishing activities, cyanide fishing and fishing within declared MPAs. Although cyanide fishing is almost always associated with the live reef fish trade, fishing within declared MPAs in the Calamianes can include a number of different types of fishing, including simple hook-and-line fishing. It is not my intention to enter too deeply into debates about the ways that illegality has been defined. Instead I take the notion of illegal fishing as a given and suggest that the two types of fishing practices can be understood within a similar frame of reference.

## **Illegal Fishing and Problems of Law Enforcement**

A study of the sustainability of the live fish industry in the Calamianes in 2003 concluded that, due to overfishing and rampant cyanide use, the industry was “greatly compromising its present and future regenerative capacity” (Padilla et al. 2003, 98). There are signs that the recent push for effective management measures for the industry is gaining pace; nonetheless, illegal fishing is still considered as a large problem facing the Calamianes. Dalabajan, who has analyzed extensively the extent of cyanide fishing in the Calamianes, suggests that more than 250,000 cyanide fishing trips occurred in the islands between 1999 and 2002, but there was not a single conviction for cyanide fishing during this period (Dalabajan 2005, 6).

Padilla et al. (2003) suggest that the failure to curb cyanide fishing can be related to the problems of inequality and corruption inherent within the trade. Similarly, Dalabajan (2005) emphasizes the sociopolitical context of the Calamianes, which makes it very hard to make any inroads against cyanide fishing. He argues that, despite the plethora of laws and prohibitions related to cyanide fishing, the capacity for enforcement in the Calamianes is extremely low. Law enforcement agents, which include the Coast Guard, the Philippine National Police, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, are all hampered by a severe lack of resources, such as personnel, patrol boats, and an efficient communication system. Bribery is alleged to be commonplace. The judge assigned to hear cases in the Calamianes is in the area two weeks every year only, so that any criminal case must be filed in Puerto Princesa, the provincial capital. Finally, Coron has no laboratory to detect cyanide, which means that by the time a sample would have reached Puerto Princesa for testing the cyanide would frequently have worked its way out of the fish. Due to this dysfunctional context, Dalabajan (*ibid.*, 9) points out that “a fisher in the Calamianes would naturally use either cyanide or dynamite in his or her fishing activity for the simple reason that the net value of the deterrent to commit the crime is negative.” Many of these enforcement problems are common throughout the Philippines, and are closely related to other profound problems that plague marine resource use in general (see BFAR 2004).

Other social scientists have illustrated the powerful factors that continue to underpin the practice of various forms of illegal fishing and undermine many ICM regimes. Elsewhere in Palawan, for example, Eder (2003, 214) points out that beach seining, an illegal gear, “enjoys considerable local tolerance because even those who do not engage in beach seining themselves may benefit from its presence.” In a similar vein, Russell and Alexander (2000, 33–34) relate how share systems among fishers serve to provide community support for blast fishing in the Lingayen Gulf. Russell and Alexander (2000) and Galvez et al. (1989) report that, to justify their actions, fishers in the Lingayen Gulf consider blast fishing as relatively harmless compared with illegal commercial trawl fishing. Galvez et al. (1989) stress the role of local law enforcement agents in exacting bribes, and that of local politicians in suspending specific cases of law enforcement in exchange for political support. Eder (2005) has also emphasized that ICM in general has failed to achieve its aim of community participation, with efforts at implementing



community-based coastal management initiatives in Palawan tending to get absorbed into preexisting social and political inequalities.

As Dalabajan (2005) has detailed, weak law enforcement clearly prevails in the Calamianes. Accusations of corruption in fisheries governance are routine among fishers I have interviewed on the issue. According to Padilla et al. (2003, 87) local fishers “indicated that the reason why illegal activities persist was the strong link between unscrupulous traders/operators and law enforcement agents.” Additionally, some conservationists are concerned that two of the three biggest live fish traders in Coron town are also council members of the municipal government. However, it should be noted that specific cases of corruption are hard to verify, and the limitations of the data I have make it hard to make any strong statements about the ways that community tolerance works with regard to illegal fishing in the Calamianes. From what I understand, illegal fishing in my study area tends to be carried out far more secretly than in the cases described by Russell and Alexander (2000) and Galvez et al. (1989). This is so in the Calamianes in part because of the public hostility commonly expressed toward illegal fishing among legal fishers.

In this context, I have aimed to approach the issue by examining why illegal fishing appeals more to certain fishers than to others. That it clearly appeals as a rapid source of income is obvious: years ago Spoehr (1980, 24) pointed out that “[d]ynamite fishing was the quickest and most economical way for small scale fishermen as well as middle level operators to increase their catches, and fishing communities rapidly adopted dynamiting as a general practice.” Similarly, Szanton (1971, 30) noted that, in the northeastern corner of Panay where he worked during the 1960s, the “potential earnings ratio [of dynamite fishing] is too high to be ignored by some of the local fishermen even if it means the ultimate destruction of their fishing grounds.” In addition to the obvious financial inducements of illegal fishing, questions remain unanswered about who specifically participates in illegal fishing and what their broader motivations might be. The remainder of this article addresses this issue by scrutinizing why young fishers tend to adopt illegal fishing practices more frequently than older fishers.

## **Discussions with Illegal Fishers**

The context in which discussions of illegal fishing are brought up epitomizes the ways in which some young men in coastal communities perceive it. From my experiences it is always during a *tagay* session, when young men

sit around in a circle and take shots from whatever grog is on hand, usually a bottle of cheap gin or brandy. As many people have observed, tagay is a social event that not only reaffirms *pakikisama* (togetherness) among one's friends or *barkada* (peer group) but also reaffirms a sense of manhood or machismo among those who can drink heavily and hold their alcohol. The tagay sessions that I have been involved in are usually composed of men only, and the dynamics are usually very jovial and full of laughter, combined with a pervading sense of machismo. The fact that illegal fishing is usually openly discussed only within an atmosphere of machismo, such as the tagay, suggests a link to be explored.

When fishers do talk about their experiences with illegal fishing, it is referred to very much as an example of strength or bravery. For example, one young man talks with pride of how he was able to avoid the guard set up surrounding a private, foreign-owned resort island, and fish within the surrounding marine protected area. Others speak of their skill in avoiding the state-employed guards in other marine protected areas, or in bribing the guard with a bottle of gin or something similar, thus demonstrating their brave status. With regard to cyanide fishing, fishers similarly talk with pride about evading capture by the Coast Guard or police patrols and obtaining a large catch of live groupers. Every single fisher I have spoken to who talks of his illegal fishing declares his practices in terms of a bold, brave act in which he is able to avoid capture and nobody is able to stop him from obtaining a large catch of fish and the ensuing financial rewards. In this sense, the act of illegal fishing can be seen as an active "gamble" with the state (Aguilar 1998) that usually tends to pay off. Importantly, every single person I have talked to who is engaged in illegal fishing is a young male in his teenage years or in the early twenties. Older men may well have been involved in financing or organizing illegal fishing activities, but at the level of collection illegal fishing is usually undertaken by young men. Other residents in the Calamianes I have spoken to, including NGO workers and other fishers, support this observation.

When the fishermen are asked about how law enforcement officials and resort operators might feel about such activities, they are highly critical. Operators of resorts surrounded by MPAs are usually described as rich foreign businessmen (or rich businessmen coming from Manila) who have made a great deal of money out of the beautiful reefs of the Calamianes. They feel that these businessmen are given preferential treatment by the lo-

cal government because of their money, and the fisherfolks resent that they are denied access to the reefs, which the resort operators have cordoned off as marine protected areas. The potential benefits of MPAs for fisheries are not widely understood among local fishermen. Instead the MPAs are viewed often as further marginalizing the meager livelihood of small fishers. The emphasis devoted to tourism by the local government is seen by many as a trend that will encourage the development of more MPAs, which will make it harder for them to make a living through fishing. In their view tourists, businessmen, and well-connected officials in the local government are the only people who benefit from the declaration of MPAs. They feel, therefore, that they are justified in still fishing within the MPAs.

Law enforcement officials (and just about any other official associated with the local government for that matter) are routinely described as blatantly corrupt, parasitically seeking to take advantage of poor fisherfolk. Consequently the activities of people trying to stop fishing within MPAs are delegitimized as corrupt and exploitative. Among many fisherfolk there is a broad feeling that they are the poorest of the poor and have been abandoned by the government. In mainland Palawan another anthropologist has described a similar perception among small-scale fishermen, who feel powerless to change their lowly status in Philippine society (Austin 2003, 168–69).

Although my understanding of illegal fishing resonates, to some extent, with the insights of writers of resistance and “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985), I feel that this perspective does not adequately take into account the ways that local fishermen themselves understand and view the practice. Certainly the action of sneaking into a MPA to fish may correlate with an understanding of the state and business as unjust and exploitative. However, from my discussions with these fishermen and those who use cyanide, far more prominent than anger against the state and class relations are notions of bravery and status. In this light I feel that illegal fishing can be interpreted effectively against the context of a web of local concerns and practices, which encourage young men to demonstrate their masculinity. The remainder of this article presents an analysis of illegal fishing within this framework.

## **Fishing and Masculinity**

In Esperanza fishing can be understood as both a livelihood and a practice that is connected to various ideas surrounding notions of masculinity. Although not an exclusively male affair, fishing itself is certainly dominated by

men. Women are not allowed to participate in commercial fishing trips, and only rarely are they seen on shorter net-fishing trips. Women do contribute significantly in practices such as gleaning for shells and postharvest selling of fish and transportation. However, women will often downplay the worth of these contributions, and indeed are often embarrassed about them. So, even if in reality the work of fishing may be shared between the sexes, the point remains that fishing is associated with an ideology of masculinity.<sup>3</sup> Like other all-male activities, such as attending a cockfight (see Aguilar 1998, 32–62), fishing is a gamble and an opportunity for male fishermen to demonstrate their masculinity, economic prowess, and value.

Commercial fishing trips in the region last for up to two weeks; during this time up to thirty men will eat, fish, and sleep on the boat together. On their return the drinks are invariably broken out as soon as the packing and transportation process is completed. As discussed earlier, this is an opportunity to reinforce the comradely male bonds that exist during fishing trips in an atmosphere pervaded with machismo. Those men who can pull in the biggest fish during these trips are highly respected among the other men and sought after by unmarried women. The fishermen who have managed to achieve relative success in their profession and own several commercial boats are the most respected men in Esperanza, are the most financially well-off, and hold most positions of political authority. Although in broader Philippine society fishing remains a low-prestige occupation, it is one that can still bring relatively high status in a fishing community. What I observed in Esperanza is similar to what Russell (1997, 85) has described in a Batangas fishing community, where

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

Dumont describes a similar understanding of fishing in the village on Siquijor where he worked during the 1980s. Stating that “[t]he ability to catch fish was an expression and a measure of male success,” Dumont (1992, 112) emphasizes the ways that men use their fishing success as a way of

gaining prestige. Fishermen give away fish in order to support an exchange network, and to be generous is considered “compulsory behavior for any fisherman” (ibid., 115). Fish is not only good food to eat but “also food with which to play, to display, and to act out a fisherman’s aggressive and competitive *buut*, his ‘identity.’ For indeed, sending fish here and there constantly to everyone and anyone, generous as it may have been, was in addition, in supplement, a subtle way of showing off, of bragging about the results of one’s efforts” (ibid., 115–16). Dumont goes further to suggest that fish is the icon of “phallic aggressiveness” that “pointed up the keen competition that existed among the fishermen” (ibid., 116).

This description of the ways in which fish are shared represents similar patterns of social reciprocity in Esperanza. When net fishers arrive in the mornings, the beach is very active as neighbors come by to inspect the catch. Fishermen who bring in a good catch hand out fish to those who pass by: “*ulam mo*” (your dish to go with rice) they say, pointing out particularly nice specimens. Other people, such as elderly men who cannot go out fishing regularly, frequently help out with the processing of the catch and earn themselves a few generously sized pieces for their trouble. When the time comes for tagay, men will be pleased if they get a chance to provide the *pulután*, the food that goes with the drinks (usually, grilled fish).<sup>4</sup> In this fashion sharing of fish can be viewed as one of the ways that masculinity is enacted in Esperanza.

From these accounts fishing can be considered as a practice intimately tied to understandings of prestige and masculinity. However, there is an important variable within the category of “males” that is not always considered when the links between fishing and men are considered—age. The remainder of this article argues that age has considerable implications for how illegal fishing is practiced.

## **Hook-and-Line Fishing versus Net Fishing**

Lowe (2000, 246), who has studied related issues of marine resource management in Indonesia, reports distinct patterns in terms of the age of cyanide fishers and the attitudes toward cyanide fishing:

Nearly all cyanide practice is carried out by young men, for several reasons. Older people have trouble diving the way younger folks can; it is a physically strenuous activity and older men complain of the cold.

High live-fish profits through cyanide use are a way for young men to build houses and establish new, independent families. Cyanide also has a status that is appealing to younger people. Cyanide fishers peacock their wealth and modernity by controlling outboard motors. They also have to have the money to smoke expensive cigarettes and wear new clothes. That the activity is illegal further demands their daring and indicates their tightness with officials who will protect them from prosecution. In short, cyanide fishing is where it's at— what's happening—and this makes it a game young guys want to play.

Most of Lowe's observations hold true from what I understand of illegal fishing in the Calamianes. Indeed, there are demonstrable links that tie illegal fishing to age and attitudes toward money and lifestyles in the Calamianes.

In Esperanza there is a marked difference between younger and older men in terms of how they conceive and approach fishing. This difference can be seen through a brief examination of the different types of fishery that each group favors. Most of the older men in the community (those aged above forty) prefer working on small-scale net-fishing boats. These men have invested considerable money and effort over many years in getting to where they are now, with their own motorized boat and gillnet, which they use to catch rabbitfish (family *Siganidae*), locally known as *danggit*. They catch these fish in the seagrasses close to shore. Trips are usually completed within one day but can sometimes extend to three days. Fish are usually sold at the market in Coron town.

In contrast, younger men can be seen commonly on two types of fishery—the hook-and-line fresh (i.e., dead) grouper fishery, which is commercial in scale and has a crew of between twenty and thirty; and the live reef fish or live grouper fishery, which has a crew of three or four people. The captain and a few select others in positions of relative authority, such as the engine-man, are usually older and highly experienced in the commercial fishery of fresh grouper; however, the crews of both grouper fisheries are dominated by teenagers and unmarried men in their twenties. Although usually only the live grouper fishery is implicated in the two types of illegal fishing discussed earlier, such crews are often interchangeable so that a young man may be a crew member of a fresh grouper boat one season, but join the crew of a live grouper boat the next. The point is that the mostly young men on these hook-and-line boats have specifically different ideas about fishing and the financial

rewards available to them compared with older men. Such ideas are embodied within the different styles of fishing each group chooses to adopt.

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

Net fishing, in contrast, is considerably more sedate than the hook-and-line fisheries. In response to a question on why he prefers net fishing to fishing on the large commercial boats or on live fish boats, one fisherman in his early fifties points out that net fishing is altogether safer and less stressful than the commercial grouper fishery or the live reef fishery. It is closer to shore, it is physically less demanding, and the trips are shorter. The fisherman explains that, metaphorically speaking, his life is in the late afternoon now and his focus is on spending and enjoying time with his family; he leaves the hard methods of fishing to the younger men, whose lives are still in the “morning.”

Another important difference between net fishing and hook-and-line fishing is the pattern of earnings. Net fishing is generally regarded as a fairly consistent and reliable method of catching fish, where even a poor catch can still bring in danggit worth P100 or so. In contrast, the method of hook-and-line fishing is much more variable, with catches tending to fluctuate erratically. While danggit are collected en masse in easily identifiable habitats (the seagrasses), groupers are brought in one by one over wide fishing grounds. The fish targeted by the hook-and-line fishermen are known locally as “first-class” fish—groupers, live or dead, are the primary target, but there is often a by-catch composed of other large, well-priced fish such as tuna and snapper. All of these fish tend to be large and impressive looking compared with the smaller, brown, and spiny danggit. Live grouper of a suitable size normally fetches a price of around P2,000 per piece. The fresh grouper caught on the commercial boats currently sell for around P600 per kilogram,

which is significantly higher than the normal price of danggit of around P40 per kilogram obtained by net fishers. The potential for high earnings, therefore, is greater in the hook-and-line fisheries, but the income from net fishing is altogether more stable.

Fishers cite these different patterns of earnings as good reasons to fish the way they do. Older net fishers, who have to support a family by bringing in a relatively reliable source of income, state that they prefer the stability and consistency of net fishing. They recognize that hook-and-line fishing can be more lucrative than net fishing, but they stress that, on a bad day, those engaged in the former can come back with very little or no catch at all. “*Jackpot-jackpot lang sila,*” the net fishers say, meaning that the hook-and-line fishers simply obtain bonanzas and have no security. They also note critically that, because of the length of time and distance that most hook-and-line fishers have to travel, expenses are much higher in that kind of fishing than in net fishing, and so the need to obtain a good catch and the potential for a big loss are greatly heightened. Additionally, they remark that the credit arrangements for the hook-and-line fisheries tend to be onerous. Whereas most of the net fishers in the community I worked in either owned their boats or worked on boats owned by a close friend or relative, most of the hook-and-line fishers worked on boats obtained through a loan. The latter are obligated to supply all their fish to the trader who had loaned the boat to them, and to pay off gradually the debt for the boat and engine. Because of the financial hazards of hook-and-line fishing, therefore, the older men in the community prefer net fishing, which yields a steady and assured income.

Younger fishers, however, point to the potential of getting the “windfall” or “jackpot” through hook-and-line, especially the live grouper fishery. They say that even a poor catch of a few pieces is still enough to make a profit simply because of the extremely high price of groupers. In local understandings, obtaining this jackpot increases one’s value through being lucky. The hook-and-line grouper fisheries can be seen as a far riskier bet than net fishing, but one where the payoffs are potentially much higher.

## **Economic and Personal Values**

The different motivations that surround earnings from fishing are pointers toward more general understandings of the ways that younger and older men in these fishing communities conceptualize the relationship between their livelihoods, earnings, and personal lives. Many of the older fishermen I have



interviewed say that their social position as family men has been settled for a long time. These men say that, while they recognize that they are quite poor relative to many people such as those living in the nearby towns, they have accepted this situation. The values they hold dear and have emphasized to me are those of family—many of these men have expressed to me that, although they are poor, they are happy and contented with their families.

One fieldwork episode illustrates perfectly the differences between older and younger men in regard to attitudes toward money. An older fisherman (a net fisher) tells me that he earns about P4,000 (US\$80) per month, which he says is not much but is enough for him to raise a family and buy food to eat. In response to the same question on monthly income, his son (a hook-and-line fisher) also quotes a figure similar to that of his father. In contrast to his father, however, he goes on to explain how inadequate his income is for the purposes he wants to pursue, such as going to college and finding a good job in Manila. While the older man identifies strongly with the notion of being a “fisherman,” his son views fishing more as a (hopefully temporary) means or standby job to obtain a limited income than as a life calling.

In his ethnography of vegetable farmers in northern Luzon, Martin Lewis (1992, 202) describes a class of young men in terms of a “youth culture” that has developed in the wake of the decline of the vegetable industry and the growing scarcity of land. Lewis emphasizes the ways in which a boy’s peer group or *barkada* tends to chart the pattern of his behavior, so that they begin to become part of the bachelor lifestyle while still in elementary school. This “distinct youth culture,” he argues, is characterized by a lack of ambition and values that embody the “antithesis of the traditionally desired qualities” of adult society (*ibid.*).

His emphasis on the bellicosity of youths in northern Luzon is much stronger than what I have seen in Esperanza, where many of the young men continue to live, on the surface at least, nominally respectful lives with their families. However, some of his observations about the ways in which the bachelor lifestyle tends to structure the patterns of behavior certainly hold true for what I have observed in Esperanza. For these young men, many of whom have not had the opportunity to get an education, attaining a certain level of status within their peer group is very important. The young men in Esperanza stick together closely, and participate with great enthusiasm in activities like basketball, drinking sessions, and hunting for “chicks.” Material objects of status are highly valued in this context, and so income becomes a means to enhance

their status within this peer group. Money thus tends to be spent on flashy consumer goods such as motorbikes, alcohol, and clothes. The ability to obtain a relatively high level of income is also of course important for its demonstration effect outside the peer group—especially to potential future life partners.

As well as signifying local status, however, high income levels are a way by which young men in these communities can actually move outside the local and access a broader dream of success, such as that described by the young hook-and-line fisher earlier—going to college and getting a nice job in Manila or abroad. Thus, for these young fishers, the practice of illegal fishing also offers the potential of moving into a new, empowered space. The promise of high rewards in illegal fishing complements perfectly the desire for material status possessed by young men, and at the same time enhances the fishers' reputation for strength and bravery within the peer group. Although considerations of environmental damage may be present, especially among those who use cyanide, they tend to get subsumed under more powerful considerations of economic and social empowerment.

From this perspective, illegal fishing can be conceived of potentially as a “rite of passage” for some young men in this area, similar to that described by McCoy (1999) in his study of the Philippine Military Academy, where graduates form close male bonds through the process of military socialization. Illegal fishing thus appears as a form of group socialization that celebrates masculine values of courage, independence, and bravery. Just as Dumont (1993, 423) states that “fishing was the defining feature of an all-male activity,” I argue that illegal fishing is an intensified expression of masculinity, with its overtones of high risks and high returns. It would be useful to conduct further and more detailed research to determine to what extent internal group dynamics of illegal fishing activities correlate with other accounts of masculinity in the Philippines, such as Jocano's (1975) description of gangs in Manila slum communities or the barkada of Siquijor portrayed by Dumont (1993).

## **Conclusion**

Russell and Alexander (2000), Eder (2003, 2005), and Galvez et al. (1989) all point to significant reasons why illegal fishing of various forms continues, and why ICM is struggling in the Philippines. They specify as important causal factors the share systems within fishing communities, the lack of resources for enforcement, and institutionalized bribery and corruption among law enforcement agents and local politicians. As well as understand-

ing why these problems and weaknesses persist, I have aimed to address the issue by trying to understand why illegal fishing appeals to certain members of the community more than others. I have argued here that two different types of illegal fishing methods prevalent in the Calamianes are almost always undertaken by young men. This is primarily because young men have different aims and motivations with regard to money and, by extension, their lives when compared with older men. Younger men are interested in the “jackpot” that will bring them fast income. This income may give them opportunities to increase their status within their peer group, demonstrate to future partners that they have breadwinning power, and provide a basis for them to move into a different livelihood.

The costs of such practices are enormous, however, both for the marine environment they are destroying and their fellow fisherfolk who depend on it. Russell and Alexander (2000, 38–39) conclude that efforts at ICM are likely to be undermined by factors such as weak enforcement capacity and local share systems, while Eder (2005, 167) has suggested that the lack of any real attempt to devolve power to the weaker groups in Philippine coastal management means that ICM in general is struggling to become institutionalized. Given these deeply ingrained weaknesses, practitioners of ICM may do well to consider, based on insights from this study, alternative ways of approaching the issue to include targeted youth programs.

## Notes

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- 1 The problem of cyanide fishing is just one among many problems surrounding marine resources in the Philippines. A recent overview of Philippine fisheries emphasizes a number of issues that

characterize its current state: depleted fishery resources, poverty among small-scale fishers, inequitable distribution of benefits, and degraded coastal environments and fisheries habitats (BFAR 2004, 345).

- 2 See Padilla et al. 2003 for a detailed description of the live reef fish trade in the Calamianes.
- 3 Swift (2006, 6–7) suggests that, in the case of the seafaring industry, a similar practice of downplaying the value of women's economic contributions is related to the potential for capitalistic exploitation of female labor.
- 4 The alcoholism that sometimes occurs in this context has many consequences, among them, health problems and a lack of worthwhile investments.

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