



# Institute of Social Studies

**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**STATE DISCOURSE AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
THE CASE OF THE PHILIPPINE AGTA  
NEGRITOS' DISCRIMINATION IN THE CURRENT  
PHILIPPINE STATE POLICY**

A Research Paper presented by

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(Philippines)

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for Obtaining the Degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**Specialization: Politics of Alternative Development Strategies**

Members of the Examining Committee

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The Hague, December 1999

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*d*edication...

*Para sa mga Agta sa Buhi, lalung-lalo na ki Carlotta ag ki Jesus  
na nagtao sakon nin inspirasyon tanganing pag-adalan ana  
sakandang buhay....tibaad man  
magka-agko maray na resulta ading sakon  
na ginibo para sa sakanda....*

(For the Agta people of Buhi, especially to Carlotta and Jesus  
who gave me the inspiration to study their lives....  
I hope that this research will benefit them in  
one way or another...)



1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the shortage of housing in the city of New York.



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Mr. Gandy	Washington, D.C.	Washington	D.C.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have always dreamed of doing something for the Agta people of my country ....something that is within my capability....something for the people who have always puzzled me ever since I was a child. I believe, with this paper, I have somehow realized that dream. For this, I am deeply grateful to some people, whose invaluable support, efforts, care, and love have immensely helped me in realizing this dream...

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, for his perceptive and unsparing criticisms and insights, for sharing his knowledge and experiences, for making sure that I get the necessary reference materials, and for having been available always. It was indeed a valuable and memorable working relationship and research experience that I shall take back home with me to the Philippines, an experience from which I have learned so much and from which I shall draw further insights in my future endeavors.

I am likewise deeply grateful to my second reader, Dr. Rachel Kurian, for her valuable insights, straightforward comments and constructive criticisms, especially with the first draft of this paper.

Dr. Mohamed Salih has likewise been so helpful, lending me some of his books and journals. He once advised me to just be myself in whatever I write, that I should not be ashamed of sharing my own experiences however modest they might seem to be. Moreover, the advice and insights I got from Frank Hirtz proved extremely useful in my research, especially as it deals with indigenous peoples. I also thank Lise, the PADS Programme Coordinator, for the eager and kind help and support. She was definitely instrumental in making my agonizing moments in ISS bearable. I am also grateful to Maggie, whose wholehearted support I shall always remember.

My sincere appreciation also goes to Edsel and Babette, for their enormous help, for sharing their knowledge and expertise, for giving of themselves so generously and unselfishly, and for not giving up on me despite the odds. I think their moral support weighed a lot more than anything else, for it encouraged me even more to go on and not give up. Your kindness will always be remembered...

My appreciation also goes to the following individuals and/or organizations: my friend and officemate, Roy Rosales, for painstakingly gathering some vital documents/materials for this study; Mr. Alejandro V. Ibarbia, the Librarian of the Buhi Municipal Library, for assisting my mother and my brother in procuring data; Mayor Diones Belza, Mayor of Buhi, for allowing my brother to gather data on my behalf; Omar Mercurio, Buhi Municipal Counselor, for the significant information about IPRA implementation in Buhi; Dr. Ulysses Brito Director of NCIP-V for accommodating my brother and ensuring that he gets the necessary data; Dr. Ersil B. Romero, NCIP-V, Planning Head, for giving us some of her time, answering some vital questions; Asisclo Bagaindoc, also of NCIP-V, for assisting my mother in securing some information; Natividad Fabriga, an Agta Chieftain, for sharing with us some very enlightening information about Buhi Agta; Evelyn Quibril and Pedro Arines, two Agta members, for agreeing to be interviewed; Mrs. Carmelita Marquez and Mrs. Emily Nachor for assisting my mother in gathering some data and materials; Danilo Claveria, my cousin, who assisted my brother in the data gathering; and the Kolping Society of the Philippines, Inc., through Mrs. Callo, for sharing with us some vital information about the Agta of Buhi.

I would like to make particular mention of my brother, Ronnie, who made his research debut with this study, even going on leave just to devote time to her sister in need, and who constantly communicated with me through the internet, thereby easing my homesickness; and my mother, Fe, who also made her research debut with this project, and who so lovingly and unselfishly gave of herself and her time so I can have the materials I needed.



I also thank the DIS Family for their support, especially to Dante, Benjie, Edwin and Vickee. My gratitudes also to Elvie and JC, for the e-mails, *tsismis, kuwentong kutsero at iba pa*. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to Joel, my adviser-consultant *na napakamatulungin*.

Likewise, I thank all my Pinoy friends at ISS and "family" in Holland: Helen, Imie, Jenny, Jo, Daphne, Dinty, Onie, Yolly, Malou and Marilen, *sa ating di-malilimutang pagsasamahan at pagbibigayan, party-han, sayawan, kantahan at kainan (siyempre!)*....You are indeed God's blessings to me! Thanks also to Jan and Bennie, for letting me know and experience that Dutch people are really nice people. I am also extremely grateful to all the other Pinoys who made me feel "at home" even in a foreign land: Cynthia and Kuya Nono; Ave and Boyet; Au and Peter; Dimi; Joy; and Tina.

I also cherish the friendships I have shared with my PADS friends and classmates, especially with Kitty, Margarita, Erika, and Panha. I'll surely miss our dinners and chats.... My appreciation also goes to my host family, Marca van Dijk and Hans Goossens as well as Jack Goossens and family, for the warm welcome and nice experiences about Holland.

My special thanks goes to Tan for the inspiration, the moral and prayer support, and for making me realize that somewhere beyond my horizon lies a wonderful place called Thailand...

I am thankful for my beloved siblings who have always been there for me: Rey, Roland, Ronnie, Rosalie, Raquel and Raynor; also to Mercy, my best friend and confidante. Most of all, I express my warmest appreciation and gratitudes to my parents, Mama (Fe) and Papa (Domingo), for all the love, care and support.....truly the best parents a person could ever have in this world!

Lastly, my deep gratitudes to the Philippine Government and to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) for giving me the opportunity to pursue graduate studies in ISS and to the Dutch Government for the Netherlands Fellowship Programme (NFP).

Above all, I thank and praise God, my Refuge and Mentor, the source of all love, knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

To all of you, thank you very much!

*Sa inyong lahat, maraming salamat!*

*Sa sainyo ngamin, mabalos!*

Rosemarie O. Aguilar  
ISS, The Hague, The Netherlands  
November 1999





# STATE DISCOURSE AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Case of the Philippine Agta Negritos' Discrimination  
in the Current Philippine State Policy

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARMM	-	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
CADC	-	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Certificate
CADT	-	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title
CAR	-	Cordillera Administrative Region
CARP	-	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program
CPDF	-	Cordillera Peoples Democratic Front
CPP	-	Communist Party of the Philippines
DAR	-	Department of Agrarian Reform
DENR	-	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
EO	-	Executive Order
GOs	-	government organizations
ha.	-	hectares
Hukbalahap	-	Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon - People's Anti-Japanese Army
ICCs	-	indigenous cultural communities
IPRA	-	Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act
IPs	-	indigenous peoples
LGUs	-	local government units
MILF	-	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	-	Moro National Liberation Front
MTPDP	-	Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan
NCIP	-	National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
NDF	-	National Democratic Front
NEDA	-	National Economic and Development Authority
NFSW	-	National Federation of Sugar Workers
NGO	-	nongovernment organizations
NPA	-	New Peoples Army
NPC	-	National Power Corporation
NSO	-	National Statistics Office
ONCC	-	Office for Northern Cultural Communities
OSCC	-	Office for Southern Cultural Communities
PD	-	Presidential Decree
PKP	-	Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas
PNDP	-	Philippine National Development Plan
POs	-	people's organizations
RA	-	Republic Act
RV	-	Region V
SPCPD	-	Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development
SRA	-	Social Reform Agenda
UN	-	United Nations

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## INTRODUCTION

*"The land belongs to the countless numbers who are dead, the few who are living, and the multitudes of those yet to be born. How then can the government say that all untitled land belongs to itself, when there had been people using the land even before the Government itself existed?"*

--Statement of native elder (quoted from M. Colchester, 1989:21)

Discrimination appears to be a unifying factor among the indigenous peoples around the world (Brolmann and Zieck, 1993:187). In the Philippines, this phenomenon is intertwined with issues which are historical, social, cultural and political in nature. Passing through all these thickets unscathed is practically impossible that any hope of disentangling from it all may exist only in the imagination.

This difficult battle with the odds is highly evident as the country's indigenous peoples (IPs) continue to fight for their rights to ancestral lands/domains. In this fight, issues of power and those who wield it are at the core of the issue. While some of the IPs have somehow already been granted their demands, some, if not most, continue to face uncertainties. Among such people are the Agta Negritos, who used to be, and continue to be, labelled as nomads. When such issues as land rights are in question, being "nomads" can place the people concerned at an extremely disadvantageous position. One might ask: why?

In the Philippines, ancestral domain claims, indigenous land rights, and the associated issue of state's right to eminent domain (the Regalian Doctrine, etc) have been centered on the aspect of occupancy, use, and cultivation of sedentary agriculturist indigenous groups.<sup>1</sup> This conventional view has been carried over in the definition and formulation of ancestral domain and the associate rights of IPs in the recent Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), thus ignoring and effectively excluding the nomadic and semi-nomadic groups such as the Agtas.

State discourse not only simplifies and homogenizes a widely heterogeneous groups of IPs and a variety of their relationships to land and forest resources. It has also reified the IPs

by ignoring the important social reality that various forms of contemporary land occupancy and use and their livelihood situations and activities are outcomes of ongoing changes in their spatial mobility, integration with the market, diversification of occupation, and changing aspirations.

This study deals with the relationship between state discourse and indigenous peoples, with particular focus on the Agta Negritos of the Philippines. Two central questions guided me throughout the research: (1) *How has the development of state legal discourse on ancestral domain excluded the Agta Negritos?*; and (2) *How has the current state legal discourse on the indigenous cultural communities (ICCs)/indigenous peoples (IPs) reified the Agta Negritos?* I have thus structured my paper in such a way that these two basic questions/concerns will be dealt with.

In Chapter One of this paper, I discuss the overview to the research including a theoretical/conceptual discussion relevant to the issues at hand. In Chapter Two, I trace and describe the history, including the various activities--struggles and negotiations--that led to the formation of current state discourse on ancestral lands/domains and the eventual formulation of the IPRA. Here, I present the discourse of the major social movements for autonomy and minorities rights from the Spanish colonial era onwards as well as the state responses that provided the ingredients and political environment that shaped the specific discourse on ancestral domain question in IPRA. This includes the autonomy struggles of the Muslims and the IPs of Cordillera in the 1970s-1980s which, among others, underscored land rights, namely: collective territorial rights and boundaries, and absolute recognition of actual occupancy and land use of sedentary groups. I argue in this chapter that the Muslims and the Igorots were successful in their fight because they were composed of highly literate, and therefore, very politically articulate members. Therefore, the least literate or illiterate IPs become marginalized or ignored in the formation of state discourse since they could not engage the state in this arena.

In Chapter 3, I describe the relation of Agta Negritos to land, where I discuss the diversification of their livelihoods and their changing aspirations. Thus, I argue that the

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<sup>1</sup> This will be explained in Chapter Two.

official state's view that implies and reduces their wants and aspirations as wanting to persist in their 'traditional way of life' in their natural habitat is often unfounded. Likewise, I identify the main elements that determined changes in their economic aspirations, one of which is the inroads of modernization.

In Chapter 4, I argue that the Agta Negritos were never properly and meaningfully represented in the formation of the current state discourse on indigenous peoples. Hence, I look into the politics of the exclusion and/or discrimination of the Agta Negritos by juxtaposing the Agta on the one hand and the Muslims and the Igorots on the other. Here, the wide gap between the Agtas and the more powerful IPs groups as the Muslims and the Igorots is revealed, a gap that led to the exclusion of the Agtas from participation in the state discourse formation.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I summarize the major points of the study and present the implications of this state discourse and the way it was formed, to democratization and development. ●



## Chapter One

# OVERVIEW AND THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

*"Look upon these things descriptively, and you shall see nothing but matter moving instant after instant, each containing in its full description the necessity of passing over into the next .... But look at the whole appreciatively, historically, synthetically, as a musician listens to a symphony, as a spectator watches a drama. Now you shall seem to have seen in phenomenal form a story."*

--Josiah Royce, in Theodore Roszak, 1992:133

### 1.1 Background to the Problem

#### history of ancestral lands/domains

Territorial rights is the most common kind of conflict between indigenous peoples and the state (Eriksen, 1993:126). In the Philippines, "claims on ancestral domain continue to propel the struggles of indigenous peoples [...] and there is perhaps no issue capable of stirring more emotion from them than that of land" (Resurreccion, 1998:90; cf. Materne, 1980:17; cf. Prosterman and Riedinger, 1987:10; cf. Macdonald, 1995:350). Indeed, the concern and the struggle for ancestral lands/domains in the Philippines has its roots in the colonial era.

During the Spanish colonial rule, "most ancestral domains in the Philippines, like those in other Asian colonies, remained beyond colonial control. The farther from Manila, Cebu, or other colonial centers, or the lower the perceived value of the land, the greater the likelihood that indigenous patterns of resource allocation would remain intact" (Lynch and Talbott, 1995:43). But this was never really the case. Spain, already aware of the natives' indigenous concept of ownership,<sup>1</sup> (cf. Barber, 1989 and Peluso, 1992 in Li, 1999:15) issued "Royal Decree of October 15, 1754 stating that 'justified long and continuous possession' by the natives qualified them for the title to their cultivated land. Where such

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<sup>1</sup> "In most Tribal Filipino communities, the property laws of custom are orally transmitted from generation to generation. These custom laws determined individual and communal property rights of ownership, possession, conveyance, marriage and inheritance" (Lynch, 1982:273).

possessors shall not be able to produce title deeds, it shall be sufficient if they shall show possessions as a valid title” (Lynch, 1982:274-275). The indigenous peoples, not knowledgeable about the modern concept of ownership did not apply for land titles. As such, all untitled lands became public lands, and, thus, belonging to the government, thereby rendering the natives landless and/or squatters on lands that have been theirs since time immemorial.

During the American colonial regime, “...a policy of civilizing and formally educating the indigenous peoples of the uplands [was adopted], a marked shift from the cross-and-sword strategy of Spanish colonizers who regarded those resistant to Catholic conversion as ‘pagans and heathens’ deserving of the numerous punitive expeditions into indigenous peoples’ territories” (Sajor, 1998:138). However, “ownership of upland resources remained under the explicit control of the [American] colonial government,” a clear reaffirmation of the “principle of ownership that would later be known as the Regalian Doctrine, i.e. that all lands in the Philippines were supposed to have been under the ownership of the Spanish Crown (unless proof could be shown)” (Sajor, 1998:138). In this case, the lands of Spanish descendants remained intact because their ancestors were wise enough to ensure that they had legal titles to their properties. As a result of the American uplands policy, which mainly reiterated the former colonial regime’s, the indigenous peoples of the uplands suddenly found themselves landless and squatters on lands that used to be theirs even prior to colonial era (cf. Lynch and Talbott, 1995:43&57).<sup>2</sup>

When Presidential Decree (PD) No. 410 was enacted in 1974, during the Marcos regime, many Filipinos hoped that it would alleviate the increasing severe problem of ancestral land security. However, eight years after the promulgation, no Tribal Filipino has acquired title pursuant to the Ancestral Land Decree (Lynch, 1982:291-292).

The historical relationship of the country’s indigenous peoples with land is described by Lynch:

The Filipino people have been developing indigenous property concepts for more than 22,000 years. Pre-conquest societies acknowledged an individual’s

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<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, only in the technical, formal sense.

ownership of long term rights to cultivated land. The Spanish monarchs repeatedly recognized this indigenous custom and ordered that native property rights be protected. The North Americans, likewise, recognized that long term possession and cultivation--as well as custom and long association--results in the acquisition of constitutionally protected ownership. The Supreme Court of the Philippine Republic has reaffirmed that many Tribal Filipinos within the "public" domain are not squatters. They own their ancestral lands. Nevertheless, Tribal Filipinos are not able to record their native titles pursuant to the Property Registration Decree because of statutory misinterpretations and unconstitutionally overbroad provisions in the Revised Forestry Code concerning the classification of "public" land. Attempts to protect tribal lands by qualified restrictions on conveyance and the issuance of government concessions have proven inadequate. The end result is that tribal lands continue to be usurped at an increasing and alarming rate. This in turn disrupts the environmentally stable agricultural systems of many Tribal Filipinos and thereby increases forest denudation (1982:305).

Successive governments witnessed the evolution of issues concerning ancestral lands/domains. During the Aquino administration, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was enacted. It defines ancestral domains as including, but not limited to, "lands in the actual, continuous, and open possession and occupation of [an indigenous] community and its members" (Republic Act No. 6657, Section 9 in Lynch and Talbott, 1995:58). The same section provides that "[i]n line with the principles of self-determination and autonomy, the systems of land ownership, land use, and the modes of settling; land disputes of all these communities must be recognized and respected." Likewise, the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article II, Section 22; Article XII, Section 5; and Article XIV, Section 17, provide the legal framework for the State's policy of recognizing and promoting the rights of indigenous cultural communities (cf. Sajor, 1998:143-144).

More recently, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) was issued and implemented. For the first time in the history of indigenous peoples, ancestral lands/domains claims are being addressed very explicitly. But, what influenced the formation of this fiat? And how was the current Philippine state's discourse on the indigenous peoples been formed? What are the impacts of this state discourse, specifically on the phenotypically different and, thus, racially distinct, indigenous peoples as the Agta Negritos of the Philippines? This paper aims to give light to these perplexing and complex questions that continually bedeviled even the Spanish colonial rule (cf. Lynch and Talbott, 1995:42).

### the vision of Philippines 2000

In the Philippines<sup>3</sup> today, issues about indigenous cultural communities (hereafter: ICCs)/indigenous peoples (hereafter: IPs) especially those which concern their rights to ancestral lands/domains have become a major concern of government (GOs) and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) alike. As never before, “the relationship between the Philippine state and indigenous peoples on the access and management of natural resources has preoccupied government and academe-based policy research in recent years” (Sajor, 1998:136). This growing focus on the need to address ICCs’/IPs’ woes could be traced to the State’s vision of development for the country.

“Our development vision for the 21st century is to create a modern and humane society, raise the quality of life of all Filipinos--children, women and men alike--and bequeath this society in an ecologically healthy state to future generations,” thus states the opening paragraph of the Philippine National Development Plan (PNDP), or Plan 21, the country’s blueprint for the 21st century (NEDA,1998c).

When President Fidel V. Ramos assumed office in 1992, he “launched Philippines 2000, a vision of development based on modernizing society and raising the quality of life of every Filipino” (Philippines 1997a:4). To attain this goal, the Ramos administration espoused five basic principles, the so-called five Ds of development, which are believed to have underpinned the stability and resiliency of the Philippine economy today. These development strategies include: *decentralization, devolution, democratization, deregulation and development that is sustainable or sustainable development.*

In support of these thrusts, the Social Reform Agenda (SRA)<sup>4</sup> was formulated as an “affirmative action package for the disadvantaged Filipinos consisting largely of small farmers and fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, women, elderly and children, and

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix A for the map of the Philippine islands.

<sup>4</sup> The SRA was approved by President Fidel V. Ramos on June 17, 1994 through Memorandum Order No. 213, entitled “Approving and Directing the Implementation of the Social Reform Agenda. In connection with this, Executive Order No. 203, “Creating the Oversight and Executive Committees for the National Government’s Major Social Reform Agenda,” was issued.



handicapped. It is a prioritization of social reforms aimed at alleviating the poverty conditions of the majority of the population, at the same time aiming for the acceleration of countryside development (NEDA, 1994:1; cf. PJPA, 1995a:218).

Today, under the administration of President Joseph Estrada, the Philippines continues to aim for a long-run economic growth and equitable development. Efforts at addressing the poor and marginalized sectors of the society have been intensified. Under the banner: *Erap*<sup>5</sup> *Para sa Mahihirap* (Erap for the Poor), the Estrada Administration's National Anti-Poverty Framework revolves around the concept that poverty is dehumanizing and, as such, the whole Filipino society must unify in waging war against this social ill (NEDA, 1999c:1).<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the current Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP), 1999-2004, nicknamed *Angat Pinoy 2004*, envisions a sustainable development path anchored on growth with social equity or social development, which is "a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development" (Midgley 1995 in Nederveen Pieterse, 1997:129-130). The Plan states: "The overall achievement of this MTPDP vision will be measured in large part by a reduction in poverty especially in the rural areas, and an improvement in the distribution of income [...] Access of the disadvantaged to government institutions must be improved, and rural areas and regions outside the National Capital Region must have a larger contribution to economic growth" (NEDA, 1998:1-3). The MTPDP, 1999-2004 (NEDA, 1999a:1-3; 1999b:3), encapsulizes this goal into one vision: sustainable development and growth with social equity. "The overall achievement of this MTPDP vision will be measured in large part by a reduction in

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<sup>5</sup> President Joseph Ejercito Estrada is more popularly known as *Erap*, a nickname he got while in the showbusiness.

<sup>6</sup> Said Framework also identifies a two-track approach to fighting poverty: (1) growth with equity; and (2) focused targetting. The former adopts such strategies as: rural development, infrastructure, modernization of industry and services, ensuring macroeconomic stability, and effective governance. The latter is the solidarity component of the anti-poverty program, which includes various activities one of which is addressing the particular needs and aspirations of 14 basic sectors--farmers, fisherfolk, urban poor, indigenous peoples, workers in the informal sector, workers in the formal sector, women, youth and students, persons with disabilities, victims of disasters and calamities, senior citizens, non-government organizations, children, and cooperatives.

poverty especially in the rural areas, and an improvement in the distribution of income” (NEDA, 1999a:1-3; 1999:3).<sup>7</sup>

### *Why focus on the iccs/ips?*

In practically all countries of the world, integrating indigenous cultural communities<sup>8</sup>/indigenous peoples or tribal peoples<sup>9</sup> into the dominant state society has become a major development policy (cf. Bodley, 1988:3). This means that for development to be achieved and sustained, ICCs/IPs<sup>10</sup> need to be assimilated (cf. Ortiz, 1984:23).<sup>11</sup> In all instances, the intention is to address basic issues of inequality and inequity. Hence, intensified efforts at equality among citizens and redistributing resources in a more equitable manner has become the primary goal of many states, especially those developing countries, including the democratizing ones. Therefore, the aim, in principle, is for indigenous peoples to be a part of the development process, ensuring that they are not only passive recipients of development but actually take part in the process itself (Young, 1995:39; cf. Anaya, 1996:45-47).

In the Philippines, this particular strategy is called democratization, where the process itself is encountering impediments. Nevertheless, the government is bent on pursuing programs to achieve the goals of development. To start with, it vows to “...resolve the historical injustice to indigenous people by upholding their rights to their ancestral domain” (Philippines, 1998b:32). To concretize this goal, Republic Act (RA) No. 8371

<sup>7</sup> To realize this vision, the social, political, cultural and economic sectors are expected to help strengthen the foundations and facilitate the mobilization of resources and institutions. Therefore, in support of this overarching vision, policies shall be directed towards the following priority areas: (a) acceleration of rural development; (b) delivery of basic social development services; (c) strengthening competitiveness; (d) sustained development of infrastructure; and (e) ensuring macroeconomic stability (NEDA, 1999b:4-5). The achievement of this goal according to MTPDP, 1999-2004, depends upon the following principles: equity, effectiveness and efficiency. Clearly, policies and reforms directed at the ICCs/IPs are blanketed by the main and most immediate issue in the country today: poverty alleviation.

<sup>8</sup> In the Philippines, compared with the term “indigenous peoples”, indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) is considered to be the most “politically correct” term for the country’s tribal or indigenous peoples.

<sup>9</sup> The term “tribal peoples” is used by various other authors such as Lynch (1982:268) and Bodley (1988:3).

<sup>10</sup> In this paper, I shall be using “ICCs/IPs” (the term used in the IPRA) to refer to the Philippine indigenous peoples, except in cases when the term “indigenous peoples” itself is in question, as I shall eventually present particularly in this chapter and/or when specifically used by an author.

<sup>11</sup> Assimilation, according to Young (1995:35), means discarding the people’s former ways in favour of those essential to the industrial way of life (cf. OSCC-V, \_\_\_:2).

was passed and approved by the Senate and House of Representatives on October 29, 1997 (cf. Philippines 1997c).<sup>12</sup>

Addressing the concerns, especially ancestral lands/domains and protecting the rights of the country's ICCs/IPs, is therefore one of the major programs that the Philippine government has identified in order to achieve a development that is characterized by equitable growth and sustainability (cf. Buendia, 1995:247).

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

### the locus of the study: Buhi, Camarines Sur, Philippines<sup>13</sup>

The town of Buhi<sup>14</sup> is found in the province of Camarines Sur,<sup>15</sup> which is located in the southeastern part of Luzon,<sup>16</sup> Philippines. It has a total land area of 22,581 hectares, 1,800 ha.<sup>17</sup> of which comprise the lake. Of the total land area of 19,179 ha., 13,228.20 are classified as alienable and disposable land, 5,950.20 ha. are forest lands and 475.00 ha. are timberlands. Titled agricultural administrative lands total 9,506.58 ha., while the agricultural judicial lands total 2.19 ha. This brings untitled lands to a total of 5,745.23 ha.

Buhi is subdivided into 38 *barangays* or *barrios*. Of the total population of 60,796,<sup>18</sup> most of whom are Roman Catholics, 21.13 percent lives in the poblacion, while 78.87 percent lives in the rural areas or *barangays*. Of this total, only 24,000 (39.48%) are economically productive. This work force are ages 15 to 64 years old. Since 80 percent of this workforce earn less than P3,000.00 a month, with each earner supporting an average of three to six

<sup>12</sup> RA No. 8371 entitled: "An Act to Recognize, Protect and Promote the Rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples, Creating a National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, Establishing Implementing Mechanisms, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and For Other Purposes", otherwise known as "The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997" This statute identifies various rights that the country's indigenous peoples can claim, such as rights to ancestral domains, right to self-governance and empowerment, social justice, and cultural integrity.

<sup>13</sup> Practically all of the data in this section are sourced from the Buhi Annual Report of 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Buhi is likewise known for Buhi Lake, the habitat for the world's smallest commercial fish locally known as *sinarapan* (scientific name: *Mistichthys Luzonensis-Smith*). The Lake is the Buhinon fisherman's primary source of livelihood. Most of the people who live near the lake are fishermen. Also see Appendices C and D.

<sup>15</sup> Camarines Sur is one of the provinces in the Bicol Region or Region V, one of the 16 regions or political subdivisions in the Philippines.

<sup>16</sup> Luzon is one of the three major island groups in the Philippines. It is located in the northern part of the archipelago.

<sup>17</sup> In this paper, I shall use the abbreviation "ha." to mean hectares.

dependents. This data reveals that “more than 50 percent of Buhinon families are estimated to be living below the poverty line” (Buhi 1998).

Buhi is basically an agricultural and fishing town and only a little more than half of the families own their respective home lots, a few are renting and almost one third or 3,042 are squatting on someone else lot.<sup>19</sup>

### **the Philippine Agta Negritos: cultural minorities**

The Philippines is a country well-known for its diverse cultures and ethnolinguistic groups.<sup>20</sup> It has 65 so-called cultural minorities (Bautista, 1999:2). In particular, there are about 7.5 million tribal Filipinos (Lynch, 1982:268) or those considered to be indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities. Among these tribal Filipinos or ICCs/IPs, the Negritos are the most widely distributed. They were forced to flee to the uplands because they refused to be converted to Christianity (cf. Scott, 1998:186). Although there are other “Negrito tribal groups found in Southeast Asia, most of which are classified as hunter-gatherers” (Headland and Headland, 1997:79), most of these populations are found in the Philippines, where their current population is placed at around 30,000 or about 0.05 percent of the nation’s population (Headland and Headland, 1997:79). They are found in greatest concentration in the Zambales mountains on the island of Luzon<sup>21</sup>, where they are also found along the northern and eastern margins of the island (Okir, 1999:2) as well as in the mountainous regions of southeastern Luzon. These Negrito groups living in Luzon island are called *Agta* or *Aeta*. In the Visayas, the Negritos located on the islands of Panay and Negros are called *Atis*, while in Mindanao, where their range is now limited to the northeast region, they are known as *Mamanua*.

<sup>18</sup> It is unclear whether this total includes the Agta population of Buhi, which according to the NCIP-V totals 3,261 as of June 1998 (cf. NCIP-V, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> It is common knowledge, at least among Buhinons, that there are also *Buhinons* who own vast tracts of land. These are those families who have Spanish blood, or, who are Spanish mestizos like my late grandfather. This means that the distribution of lands and resources is quite skewed as far as Buhi is concerned. This inequity is not a new phenomenon. It dates back to the colonial times, starting from the Spanish era. In fact, inequality characterizes land ownership and distribution throughout the country as I shall discuss in Chapter Two of this paper.

<sup>20</sup> The majority of this population, according to Bautista (1999:2), may be classified into eight (8) ethnic groups: the Tagalog, the Ilocano, the Pangasinanian, the Pampangueno, the Bicolano, the Cebuano, the Ilongo, and the Waray-Waray. They comprise more than 90 percent of all Filipinos and are the Christians.

<sup>21</sup> Luzon is the Philippines’ biggest group of islands. It is located at the northern part of the archipelago.

The Spaniards, according to Fernandez (1951:1), called them Negritos “because they were short and black. The men are only about one hundred and forty-five centimeters tall; the women are still shorter. They have dark skins, flat noses, and black hair, which is short and kinky.”<sup>22</sup> The Agta Negritos<sup>23</sup> are considered to be the aborigines of the Philippine Archipelago. This means that they have always lived in these islands (Fernandez, 1951:1) or that they are the first inhabitants of the archipelago (Lynch, 1982:268). They have become “cultural minorities” in the Philippines because of having remained faithful to their cultural heritage while the majority of Filipinos adopted the western culture and lifestyle (OSCC<sup>24</sup>, 1990:1).

The Agta Negritos live in small widely scattered temporary camps in the mountains of eastern and southeastern parts of Luzon (cf. Headland, 1987). Just like most of the world’s indigenous peoples or cultural communities, they live on land to which they do not have legal title. Their humble domiciles are erected on either government-owned or privately-owned lands. They are also marginalized in terms of social services delivery. Extreme poverty (OSCC, \_\_:2) restrains them from availing of at least basic literacy education. Today, their number is reported to be dwindling (Headland and Headland, 1997:79).<sup>25</sup>

This study focuses on the Agta population of Buhi, although certain cases or descriptions will be made of the other Agta population in northern and northeastern Luzon so as to make comparisons where necessary.

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<sup>22</sup> This phenotypic difference is the primary reason why the Negritos gained a minority status (Goodno, 1991:240).

<sup>23</sup> Please see Appendix B for some pictures of Agta Negritos.

<sup>24</sup> OSCC or Office for Southern Cultural Communities was a government agency created through Executive Order No 122-C during the term of President Corazon C. Aquino. When the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) was passed into law, as RA 8371, during the term of President Fidel V. Ramos, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) was created. It subsequently merged the Office for Northern Cultural Communities (ONCC), which was created through Executive Order No. 122-B, and the OSCC. The OSCC’s mandate was to concretize the government’s commitment to protect the rights, uplift the condition and promote the welfare of the tribal Filipinos. It considered itself the tribal people’s link to the outside world (OSCC, \_\_:4).

### 1.3 Central Questions and Objectives

In this paper, I would like to answer two central questions: (1) *How has the development of state legal discourse on ancestral domain excluded the Agta Negritos?*; and (2) *How has the current state legal discourse on the indigenous cultural communities (ICCs)/indigenous peoples (IPs) reified the Agta Negritos?*

Thus, I hope to fulfill the following research objectives:

- a. To trace the history of ancestral lands/domains in the Philippines and how the current State construction of indigenous peoples (IPs) was formulated;
- b. To identify and discuss the reasons for the current State interest in the IPs;
- c. To discuss concepts and theories involving state construction of IPs;
- d. To describe the various activities--struggles and negotiations--that led to formation of state discourse on ancestral lands/domains and the eventual formulation of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA);
- e. To identify the main elements that determined state discourse on ancestral lands/domains and the reification of the Agta Negritos;
- f. To describe the relation of Agta Negritos to land, discuss the diversification of their livelihoods and their changing aspirations;
- g. To identify the main elements that determined changes in economic aspirations of the Agta people;
- h. To identify the reasons behind the exclusion and/or discrimination of the Agta from the current state discourse formation;
- i. To identify the implications of the influences on state discourse formation and the current state discourse itself on democratization and development.

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<sup>25</sup> Table 1, Appendix E, shows that of the 12 Agta groups, one is declared as extinct and the other one is

## 1.4 Theoretical/Conceptual Discussion

### state-society relations and indigenous peoples

“State-society relations have often been cast in an explicit or implicit oppositional model” (cf. Migdal, 1988 in Sajor, 1999:17). Sajor argues that “[t]he state’s capacity to intervene and dominate has been examined in the framework of society’s dogged resistance against intervention and domination. In this model, ‘state-building is depicted as a process in which the state through a combination of coercion and co-optation, must impose its central institutions and cultural/moral values on the recalcitrant local populations found within its boundaries’ (Nugent 1994 in Sajor, 1999:17). He continues: “This model presumes that the ‘state’ and ‘community’ represent independent and opposed essences; state-building is based predominantly on force and what benefits it must somehow do harm to local communities. Another presumption is that states are most fundamentally committed to the elimination of local/regional cultural identities which stand in the way of state centralization (ibid.:357).”

“The oppositional model,” on the other hand, “is particularly highlighted in viewing the relationship of ethnic minorities or indigenous cultural communities with the state held by a dominant ethnic majority group” (cf. Wilmer 1993 in Sajor, 1999:17). This “views the state power as existing exclusively in a repressive negative form, denying its possible enabling and positive form” (Sajor, 1999:17). Indeed, the modern state has been broadly distinguished by most contemporary theories “in terms of whether or not they see the state as an arena, as an instrument of group domination, or as a relatively autonomous entity with interests and strategies of its own” (Brass, 1985:3). Undoubtedly, “prevailing theories of ethnic groups and the state all suffer from one or another of several problems,” such as:

...the reification of either classes or ethnic groups or both; attempts to assert the primacy of one or another line of division, ethnicity or class, and to treat one as mere representation of the other; inadequate treatment of internal divisions within classes and ethnic groups; an excessive concern with the issue of whether or not the state is an instrument of class or ethnic group domination and too little concern with specific state strategies and policies toward ethnic groups (Brass, 1985:24).

In this paper, I shall try to look at the Philippine state-society relations from the colonial to the post-colonial times to the present. I shall do this through a discussion of the state discourse formation on the indigenous peoples, which is itself comprised of diverse ethnolinguistic groups characterized by heterogeneous culture, traditions and practices (cf. Lynch, 1982:270).

*state simplification*

The growing concern to reach as many people as possible and address their most pressing needs has made it to the top of developmental list of most, if not all, modernizing states of the world. In the case of Southeast Asia, for example, this agenda has caused the formation of particular ways to facilitate the process. James Scott (1995:1) calls it 'state simplifications.' Although he claims that simplification "makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision far more legible and, hence, far more susceptible to careful measurement, calculation, and manipulation," (1995:3) he also admits that this very simplification, of adopting a 'one-size-fits-all' formula, negates local adaptive knowledge. Of course, "the very concept of the modern state is inconceivable without a vastly simplified and uniform property regime that is legible, and hence manipulable from the center" (Scott: 1995:9). However, it is in this aspect that states have encountered some difficulties as far as the aim of attaining order within a particular society is concerned. At the heart of every society is a complex skein of human relations. As such, there would always be a danger in any attempt to homogenize a completely heterogeneous society or community.<sup>26</sup>

'State simplifications' has apparently become the major developmental strategy of countries in Southeast Asia (cf. Scott, 1995:1-33). States "observe and assess the life of their society by a series of simplifications [or standardized characteristics] and shorthand fictions that are always some distance from the full reality these abstractions are meant to capture." As such, "the cadastral survey, the title deed and tenure contracts are a very rough, and sometimes misleading, representation of actual existing rights to land use and disposal" (Scott, 1995:13). State simplifications, by their very nature, have a particular character:



Most obviously, they are observations of those aspects, and only those aspects, of social life that are of official interest. They are also, of course, nearly always written or numerical facts recorded in documents. Third, they are typically *static* facts. Even when they appear dynamic, they are typically the result of multiple *static* observations through time. Observation of, say, land records or income figures over two or more points in time may reveal a greater inequality in landownership or an increase in income, but it will not reveal how this new state-of-affairs came about or whether it will persist. Finally, most stylized state facts are aggregate facts. Aggregate facts may be impersonal (e.g., the density of transportation networks) or simply a collection of facts about individuals--e.g., employment rates, literacy rates, residence patterns. For most purposes, state officials need to group citizens in a way that permits them to make a collective assessment (Scott, 1995:13).

Aims at *sedentarizing* the population, or the creation of fixed permanent settlements is based on the notion that “the greater the *concentration* of population, providing they produced an economic surplus, the greater the ease of appropriating grain, labor, and military service” (Scott, 1995:21). In the case of Southeast Asia, according to Scott, both the pre-colonial and the colonial states aspired for this.<sup>27</sup> And this cannot be far from its realization since “the state, of all institutions, is best equipped to *insist* on treating people according to its schema” (Scott, 1995:14). After *sedentarization* and *concentration*, according to Scott, comes *order* and then *legibility*. This schema enables the modern state and its administrator to easily monitor, count, assess, and manage programs and projects and the implementation of policies (cf. Li, 1999:13). Ironically, “the concentration of population in planned settlements may not create exactly what state planners had in mind, but *it has almost always disrupted or destroyed prior communities whose cohesion derived from non-state sources.....*The result, more often than not, is that the planned communities fail their residents in some fundamental ways” (Scott, 1995: 29&32). This simplification, according to Li (1999:23), occurs through the elision of categories. For example, uplands become equated with forests while farms are ignored, especially commercial farms and plantations.

<sup>26</sup> In fact, even the seemingly culturally homogeneous Igorots of the Cordilleras are themselves composed of constellations or tribes which are characterized by a diverse and dynamic culture (cf. Hilhorst, 1997: 121-149).

<sup>27</sup> In the Philippines, even the post-colonial states aspired for this kind of simplification, a schema highly evident in the formulation of its policies on ancestral lands/domains, agrarian reform and others concerning land and mobility. A more profound discussion of this topic will be done in Chapter Two of this paper.

*"Indigenous Peoples": A Matter of Semantics?*

State simplification may be the reason behind the categorization of peoples as indigenous or non-indigenous. Eriksen defines indigenous peoples as "a blanket term for the aboriginal inhabitants of a territory, who are politically relatively powerless and who are only partly integrated into the dominant nation-state" (1993:13). However, the term "indigenous peoples" itself does not escape semantic ambiguity. Even authors find it difficult to define the term and even more to identify who are indigenous and who are not, claiming that not only are the notions surrounding the issue intangible and varied, but also stimulates debate and skepticism (cf. Kingsbury, 1995:40; ILO, 1953:3; Rizvi, 1987:xiv; Barnes, et.al., 1995:1; Maybury-Lewis, 1999:3; Lerner, 1991:100; LCDP, 1997:IV-6; ICIHI, 1987:5; cf. Macdonald, 1995:347).<sup>28</sup> In the case of the Philippines, there have been some debates/discussions about the same issue. Some writers, for example, say that "all Filipinos are indigenous," while others say there are only indigenous ones and others are not. However, amidst some disagreements as to 'who are indigenous' and 'who are not', the IPRA assumes that there is a general agreement, as far as the Philippine society is concerned, to the term *indigenous peoples* as referring to the country's ethnic minorities, notwithstanding sentiments and views of the rest of its populace. I say this on the ground that many Filipinos, who belong to the wider society, consider themselves indigenous as well apparently adopting a different, though not necessarily invalid, criterion to indigeneity. Indeed, so flexible is the term that even Bodley (1988:1-7) uses the terms "tribals" and "indigenous peoples" interchangeably. Let us look at the current discussions on this controversial term.

The World Bank today uses the term indigenous peoples as extending to and including tribal peoples and other ethnic minorities (Kingsbury, 1995:17). "The bank used the term tribal people to refer to ethnic groups with stable, low-energy, sustained-yield economic systems such as hunter-gatherers, shifting or semipermanent farmers, herders, or fishermen" (Kingsbury, 1995:22). The bank further states:

Because of the varied and changing contexts in which indigenous peoples are found, no single definition can capture their diversity. Indigenous people are

<sup>28</sup> This also involves issues whereby "...indigenous peoples rejected attempts to equate their rights with those of ethnic minorities," arguing that the "...status of ethnic minorities in integrated national settings is incompatible with their right of self-determination" (Pritchard, 1998:195-196).

commonly among the poorest segments of a population. They engage in economic activities that range from shifting agriculture in or near forests to wage labor or even small-scale market-oriented activities. Indigenous peoples can be identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics: (a) a close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas; (b) self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group; (c) an indigenous language, often different from the national language; (d) presence of customary social and political institutions; and (e) primarily subsistence-oriented production” (in Kingsbury, 1995:23-24).

On the other hand, the final report of the United Nations (UN) subcommission’s Special Rapporteur on the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations, Jose Martinez Cobo, adopts the following definition and criteria:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (Kingsbury 1995:26; Lerner, 1991:100-101).

Kingsbury identifies five definitional criteria which receive particular emphasis in this definition: self-definition, non-dominance, historical continuity with preinvasion or precolonial societies, ancestral territories, and ethnic identity.

Meanwhile, the 1957 ILO Convention (No. 107), Article 1(1)(b), (in Lerner, 1991:101) described indigenous as those populations who

on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization and which, irrespective of their legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time than the institutions of the nation to which they belong.

The 1989 ILO Convention, on the other hand, adopts self-identification as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which it applies (Lerner, 1991:102). It distinguishes between “tribal peoples” and “peoples” in independent countries. Tribal peoples are those

whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations (Article 1(a) (in Lerner, 1991:102).

“Indigenous peoples” are those who are regarded as such

on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (Article 1(b) (in Lerner, 1991:102).

These contentions on the term “indigenous peoples” reveal that its definition itself is evolving. Throughout these evolutions, however, a particular criteria has been retained: “those who have maintained a historical continuity with pre-invasion societies that developed on their territories,” a definition that calls attention to the fact that “indigenous peoples” are a residual category (Rood, 1998:138). Gray blames the ‘incoherence’ of the term *indigenous* to the ‘incoherence’ of the notion of “state”:

The incoherence of the term indigenous reflects the incoherence of the notion of “state,” which is bound up with identify and power. As such, the indigenous movement is a challenge to the state because it argues that the existence of a single inflexible entity is not sufficient reason to take control out of the hands of the people who live within its area. Indeed, indigenous peoples argue for the dissipation and distribution of “people power” from the center into other social sectors of the country. Thus, “indigenous” is as much a concept of political action as it is of semantic reflection (1995:41).

With the differing views on the use of the term “indigenous peoples,” Kingsbury (1995:34) purports that although its use may be appealing and important for political and other purposes, as articulated by Gray, in matters involving human rights claims, the need to prove whether a group is indigenous or not is simply out of the question. “Many issues may be addressed under general human-rights law, under prohibitions of discrimination, slavery, genocide, and other abusive practices, under the existing law, or occasionally under applicable treaties, without formal regard as a legal matter to whether or not the group is indigenous,” he claims. True indeed. But, when applied to specific groups and situations, the use of the category “indigenous” will always matter for both legal and

political purposes. A clear example of this is the case of the Philippines, when the IPRA Law was issued providing certain rights to indigenous peoples alone. Therefore, indigeneity is the primary criterion for availing of the rights and privileges that the IPRA provides. Along the same line, the World Bank 1982a, 1982b, which used to refer to "tribal peoples", has recently adopted the term *indigenous* in its policy documents (Gray, 1991:60). As currently used, "the term indigenous covers indigenous, tribal, low caste and ethnic minority groups. Despite their historical and cultural differences, they often have a limited capacity to participate in the development process because of cultural barriers or low social and political status" (World Bank, 1990 in Gray, 1991:60; cf. Brodmann and Zieck). In the Philippines, however, the following criteria or definition is adopted:<sup>29</sup>

...refer to a group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community or community bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, become historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. ICCS/IPs shall, likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures or the establishment of present state boundaries who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains (IPRA-NCIP, 1998:3).

Although there may be significant differences in the current definition between the World Bank and the IPRA, one of which is the criterion of historical continuity with preinvasion or precolonial societies, it should be noted that the primary reason by which both have been formulated point to the basic argument that the term "indigenous peoples" cannot simply be reduced to pure and simple semantics.

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

Previous studies conducted on the Agta Negritos of the Philippines were purely historical and/or ethnographic accounts. None, so far, has been devoted to an inquiry into

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<sup>29</sup> A closer look at this definition reveals that it is an amalgamated version of the definitions discussed and

whether or not they have meaningful participation and representation in the development process. Moreover, most of the previous studies have not really challenged the previously held views and perceptions of the Agta people. Often, they are reifications of their seemingly homogeneous and static lifestyles, which are actually very diverse, dynamic and evolving as I shall discuss in this paper. This study, therefore, hopes to fill those gaps, and maybe more.

## 1.6 Methodology/Approach

I have known the Agta people for as long as I can remember. Although I was born in the town proper (of Buhi), my family lived afterwards in barangay Monte Calvario.<sup>30</sup> The primary source of income of the *barangay* is agriculture, therefore, practically all of the people here are farmers--men and women alike. I grew up among the prairies, the swamps where the *carabaos*<sup>31</sup> love to immerse, the foothills and mountains, the guava trees and the rice fields. In this growing up process, the Agta and *Tabangnon*<sup>32</sup> people who lived just a few kilometers away from my home, up in the mountains and more remote parts of the *barangay* or *barrio*, figured quite prominently.

My late grandfather,<sup>33</sup> owned several hectares of lands in the mountains of Monte Calvario. As I was growing up, I often went with my father hiking the tracks and climbing the steep slopes leading to his property in the plains where various kinds of crops were grown: *camotes* (or sweet potatoes), peanuts, corns, and even sugar cane. Some Agta people were hired by my late grandfather to work: planting crops, plowing the fields, carrying loads, and others. That is how I came to know the Agta quite well.<sup>34</sup>

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adopted in the UN, the ILO Conventions and the World Bank.

<sup>30</sup> Monte Calvario is one of the 38 barangays in the town of Buhi. It is my father's birthplace and it is also where he grew up and it is where my paternal grandparents and relatives live.

<sup>31</sup> *Carabaos* is the plural form for *carabao*, the Filipino word for water buffalo. Carabao is considered to be the Filipino farmers' beast of burden. Although industrialization has resulted in the influx of various farming equipment and machines, the Filipino peasant, or small-time farmers or small farm holders, still rely on the carabao to do many of the work such as plowing the rice fields as well as transporting heavy loads, like rice, vegetables and other crops, from one place to another where cars and/or jeepneys cannot go.

<sup>32</sup> Agta is the pure-blooded Agta--dark-skinned, curly hair, small and flat-nosed--while a *Tabangnon* is an Agta-Filipino lowlander *mestizo* or *mestiza*, the Spanish term for a person with mixed blood.

<sup>33</sup> a Spanish mestizo.

<sup>34</sup> I must admit though that my initial "encounters" with the Agta were quite unfavourable. As a child, I was afraid of them, just like most of the children I knew back then. And, probably, for a child, it was not without reason. Whenever I refused to take a nap at midday or whenever I misbehaved, my parents would threaten me

All primary data cited in this paper, therefore, are drawn from my accumulated knowledge of a life-long acquaintance with the Agta and *Tabangnon* people of Buhi. I cannot, however, honestly say that I have known all of them. But, I can say that the experiences and accounts of some of them can somehow speak for the rest of the Agta population in Buhi.

In addition to primary data, I have also sent my brother to go and do some random semi-structured interviews with some Agta people and other lowland dwellers sometime in June this year. I also requested him and my mother to gather some supplementary data from both GOs and NGOs. In addition, I have also looked at some documents and publications published by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the government's highest development planning and policy coordinating body, to determine the government's policies and projects directed at improving the quality of lives of the Agta people. The latter's publications, together with other Philippine government documents, are also my basis for determining the development goals of the country and the current state discourse on indigenous peoples. The rest of my data are sourced from other published and unpublished materials--books, journals, magazines, papers, documents, pamphlets, leaflets, and others. I also made use of the internet to supplement my data. ●

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with being given away to an Agta. At that time, I never really knew why I was afraid of the Agta. But, perhaps, it was primarily due to the fact that the Agta is dark-skinned, small, and has curly hair. For me, at that time, they looked ugly. There was even this particular Agta (or Tabangnon) I knew who constantly chewed beetle nuts tinting his teeth dark orange. To a child, he looked wierd and scary, especially when he laughed and all his teeth showed.

At that time, I never cared much about what I felt for them, nor was I aware of how the lowlanders felt towards them and felt for them. As I grew up, however, I became more concerned about this group of people. I started to wonder why they used to frighten me, why I cringed at their sight, and whether there was a need for that. I soon realized that the Agta people were also being discriminated against by the lowlanders. I found out afterwards that they are likewise marginalized in terms of availment of basic social services. My curiosity elevated to a real concern for these people. I wanted to be of help to them, but I didn't know how. Perhaps, this paper will make a little difference to their lives.





## Chapter Two

# THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF STATE DISCOURSE ON IPs Struggles and negotiations

*"...I have once taken as an example a law relating to land tenure and the livelihood of people in remote areas to whom we cannot apply the law because, through the authorities' fault due to their inability to reach them, the people have no means of knowing the law. The fault rests with the law-enforcing side rather than with the one upon which the law is to be enforced. This is quite a substantive point too. Ways must, therefore, be found to implement the law according to the dictates of nature. There is a particular legal matter which I have come across--a rather special one, but all the same, I should like to relate it, because it has given rise to complications. It also has to do with land tenure and people in remote areas. In forests designated and delineated by the authorities as reserved or restricted, there were people there already at the time of the delineation. It seems rather odd for us to enforce the reserved forest law on the people in the forest which became reserved only subsequently by the mere drawing of lines on pieces of paper. The problem arises inasmuch as, with the delineation done, these people became violators of the law. From the viewpoint of law, it is a violation because the law was duly enacted; but according to natural law, the violator of the law is the one who drew the lines, because the people who had been in the forests previously possessed the human rights, meaning that the authorities had encroached upon the individuals and not individuals transgressing the law of the land.*

--H.M. Bhumibol Adulyadej, King of Thailand<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

The formation of the current Philippine State discourse on ICCs/IPs regarding ancestral lands/domains and the reification of their traditional identities has undergone historical labyrinths. It has been moulded and influenced by various organizations, ethnic groups, specifically the more influential or powerful ones, economically and politically elite groups, particularly the landed elites and the *ilustrados*,<sup>2</sup> as well as events that were often associated with certain ideals and battlecries. Hence, in this chapter, I shall attempt to trace and describe the history, including the various activities--struggles and negotiations--that led to the formation of current state discourse on ancestral lands/domains and the eventual formulation of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA).

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<sup>1</sup> quoted from Lynch and Talbott, 1995

<sup>2</sup> the highly educated Spanish and Chinese mestizos.

## 2.2 Tracing History

### landlessness, inequality and poverty

In the Philippines, landlessness and the struggle for equality in the distribution and control of land is not a recent phenomenon. It has always mystified its people and provoked the ire of many, if not all. Although there may be “no conclusive evidence about the correlation of land inequality and poverty in the Philippines [...] the skewed pattern of landownership and control has led to the development of land tenure that appears to contribute not only to poverty but also to a low rate of agricultural productivity” (Putzel, 1992:29; cf. Putzel and Cunnington, 1989:14). Miranda, Jr. (1988:26) supports this viewpoint claiming that: since “poverty is often described in terms of lack of access to basic resources or the means of production,” and that since in the Philippines the “principal means of production is land” and is thus the “primary source of wealth and power,” therefore, “this explains why the incidence of poverty is higher in the countryside” (cf. Smith, 1996:297-298). Moreover, Putzel and Cunnington (1989:1) blame the way the “nation’s primary resource--the land--is used and controlled” for the current poverty problems in the country.

“Proponents of the liberal approach argue that landlessness and poverty provide the breeding grounds for protest and revolution” (Putzel, 1992:13-14; cf. Miranda Jr., 1988:11; Putzel, 1988:54; cf. Shanin, 1982). In the Philippines, where agriculture is the major source of income and livelihood, land is extremely valuable. Ironically, “agricultural land in the Philippines is ... captive to a far smaller percentage of the population” (Putzel, 1992:xx). This is why income distribution is highly skewed and rural, where most agricultural products are sourced, and urban conditions differ considerably (Edillon, et.al., 1998:1). Although there has been a significant improvement in the incidence of poverty--from 35.5 percent in 1994 to 32.1 percent in 1997 (NEDA, 1998d:1)--as well as in the distribution of income by decile, Figures 1 and 2<sup>3</sup> show that such distribution is still highly skewed. This wide gap between the rich and the poor,

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix G.

according to Edillon et.al. (1998:1), has led to a deterioration of social cohesion, making it difficult to implement social and economic reform programs.

The problem of landlessness in the Philippines cannot be contained in simplistic terms. In fact, even those advocating liberal reform may never have truly realized the extent of inequality in landownership in the country, for such issues can almost always be traced to political thickets (cf. Putzel, 1992:33). The complexities of it is highly reflected in Putzel's statement:

While successive governments recognized that landownership was unequal, they appear to have greatly underestimated the extent of inequality. In justifying a call for land redistribution, the government and particularly the Department of Agrarian Reform have often proclaimed that, 'Only 20 per cent of the population owns 80 per cent of the of the land'. In fact, the government's land registration programme in 1988 demonstrated that not more than 5 per cent of all families owned 83 per cent of farm land (1992:27).

#### **land issues and the state: struggles and negotiations**

Successive governments in the Philippines have recognized the need for redistribution of land resources through agrarian reform.<sup>4</sup> But, not before struggles have materialized to the extent that other aspects of the society were threatened. Its history is a long and complex one (Putzel, 1988:49). "Agrarian reform," according to Putzel (1992:xxii), "is a multi-dimensional issue encompassing a wide range of economic, political and social problems." Among these problems, he claims, are "poverty and inequality, which is an economic problem and the concentration of property rights that have contributed to growing landlessness among agricultural tenants, workers, marginal farmers, fisherfolk and other rural poor, as well as the denial of traditional but unrecorded rights of the indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands; monopolies in land, labour and capital markets; the unequal distribution of power in the political system between classes, groups and clans; the problems of finance, bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption in the institutions of the state stretching from central to local village government; and competition for authority and resources between state institutions and among factions within them, not the least of which involve the military."

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<sup>4</sup> even starting from the Spanish Colonial Era.

*the Spanish friars: property acquisitions and formation of elites*

Land issues in the Philippines was recorded to have first started during the Spanish colonial regime, with the Spanish friars figuring prominently. It was sometime in 1559 when the Spanish king granted them the right to acquire some estates on the contention “that there were too many disadvantages in having the friars live alone” (Constantino 1975:66). “Since the pope,” during that time, “exempted them temporarily from their monastic vows so that they could man the parishes until such time as a secular clergy was available in sufficient numbers to take their place, the combination of these two factors provided the religious corporations with the opportunity to amass large tracts of land” (Constantino 1975:67).<sup>5</sup>

Landownership served as the anchor for the formation of the landed elite during the Spanish colonial era. According to Putzel (1992:45), the *peninsulares* or the Iberian-born Spaniards were at the pinnacle of society as they occupied key positions in the state. “They shared authority with the Catholic Church and friar orders. Below them were the *insulares*, or Philippine-born Spaniards. The *datus*, who commanded authority in the barangays were incorporated as local officials, or *cabezas de barangay*, in the colonial state. They collectively became known as the *principalia*, or the ‘prominent ones’, and during the first two centuries of colonial rule these local offices were hereditary.”

Later on, Putzel continues, the “...estancias, or large ranches, which developed from land grants made by the Crown to conquistadores and early settlers, soon passed to the friar orders. They were the first to establish haciendas, or large landed estates, producing grain for both local consumption and for Manila [...] The Jesuits and Augustinians were the first to accumulate *haciendas* [...] The Augustinians ran lands in Cebu from from the end of the 16th century. The Dominicans and Recollects followed, while Franciscans were barred from accumulating lands by their statutes. By the end of the Spanish colonial period these lands totalled some 171,000 hectares [...] Thus the Church owned much of the best land by the end of the colonial period.”

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<sup>5</sup> The friars became wealthy landed proprietors through various means: (a) by royal bequest; (b) buying lands from the state; (c) by buying from the natives with the money they obtained from church fees, from trade, or from the profits gained from the produce of lands which utilized forced labor; (d) through the foreclosure of mortgages; and (e) through outright land-grabbing (Constantino, 1975:67-69). Soon they became landlords--

“In the early colonial period, these *haciendas* were mainly devoted to rice cultivation originally with sharecropping tenants, *casamajan*, or *kasama*. Through these means, the haciendas were able to expand cultivation, encroaching increasingly on lands held by independent barangay communities. This led to a major agrarian revolt in 1745, when peasants<sup>6</sup> in areas surrounding the estates rose up in anger against encroachments upon their land. By the 18th century haciendas were farmed increasingly by *inquilinos*, or tenants who paid a fixed rent in grain” (Putzel, 1992:45).

However, significant changes marked the pattern of colonial life. This included the expropriation of lands of the Jesuits as they were expelled from the colony between 1777-87. Subsequent plans to sell to their cultivators the expropriated Jesuit lands or leased in hereditary tenures, an early version of a liberal approach to reform never materialized as they were eventually auctioned in 1790 to Spaniards and *inquilinos* interested in export production (Putzel, 1992:46-47). Thus, “with the disbandment of the colonial state’s Royal Philippine Company in 1834, its adelantado (governor general), Spanish born Antonio de Ayala, joined with the hacendero Don Domingo Roxas to form the Ayala Corporation, still one of the country’s leading firms.”<sup>7</sup>

“The legacy of colonial rule was an oppressive land tenure system where political and economic authority were largely based on control over the land. While on the friar estates the peasant *kasama* had some common cause with the *ilustrado* tenants, evidence of the divergence of interest between the emergent Filipino elite and the peasantry was already present during the struggle for independence” (Putzel, 1992:49). This divergence of

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abusive landlords (cf. Constantino, 1975:70). This scenario served as precedent for the concentration of lands to certain elite groups in the country.

<sup>6</sup> Ironically, Joel Migdal (1974:33) claims that “peasants have long been subservient to other social classes in society, and their relationship to these classes has often impelled peasants to limit their participation outside the village.”

<sup>7</sup> The latter part of the 19th century saw the rise of some Filipino families in the sugar mill industry owning vast tracts of lands, namely the Benedictos, Montelibanos, Ledesmas, Yulos and the Lopezes. Even the family of Jose Rizal held 389 hectares in Hacienda Calamba along Laguna de Bay. This list became longer with the addition of the Cojuangcos, with the first Jose Cojuangco arriving in 1870 from China, settling in Tarlac and began buying rice and sugar lands. Shortly after, in 1881, the Compañia General de Tabacos de Filipinas, or Tabacalera, through one of its directors, Antonio P. Casal, was able to assemble huge tracts of land in various parts of the country, which by 1882 totalled 14,630 hectares. “In the 1890s in Tarlac, the company established the 10,000 hectare Hacienda Luisita, which would later be acquired by Corazon Cojuangco Aquino’s family.” By the 1860s, the Aquino family were already large landowners in Concepcion, Tarlac (Putzel, 1992:48-49).

interest between the emergent Filipino elite and the peasantry that Putzel is talking about was greatly exhibited during the Revolution in 1896 (cf. Krieger, 1993:787). While the *ilustrados* fought for the curtailment of the power held by the friar orders and the reform of the colony the Katipunan committed itself to full independence from Spanish rule. Thus, the revolution in 1896 saw many peasants joining the Katipunan<sup>8</sup> under the command of their landowning patrons, or encouraged by their Filipino parish priests (Putzel, 1992:49).<sup>9</sup> “The Revolution of 1896 represented a juncture between the animosity of the emerging Filipino *ilustrado* elite against the friar orders and Spanish dominance, and the aspirations of the peasantry for *kalayaan*, or freedom” (Putzel, 1992:50; cf. Smith, 1996:321; cf. Ryan, 1990:xi).<sup>10</sup>

#### *landownership during the American colonial era*

One might presume that the US democratic rule would have led to the resolution of conflicts between the *ilustrados* and the peasants in the Philippines, especially a more equalitarian land tenure and distribution. However, the US government “chose to strike an alliance with the landed elite” although “...it was fully aware of the problems of land concentration in the islands<sup>11</sup>” (cf. Lynch and Talbott, 1995:43 & 57; Putzel, 1992:51). In fact the US policy even reinforced the position of the elite, by building “...upon the economic and political legacy of Spanish rule, shaping both the economic and state structures that would characterize the Philippines for the rest of the century” (Putzel 1992:51). Indeed, not only did the US colonial government forged alliances with the Filipino elite, they also campaigned to wipe out guerrilla resistance by annihilating the peasantry (Putzel, 1992:51).

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<sup>8</sup> When Andres Bonifacio formed the Katipunan in 1892, he envisioned it as a brotherhood anchored on the tradition of revolts for the poor, although he was of course inspired by the writings of Jose Rizal and the other *ilustrados*.

<sup>9</sup> This peasant support of the Katipunan was just part of a long tradition of peasant rebellion in the islands, which was mainly fuelled by their animosity against the demands of the colonial state for forced labour and the head tax, as well as abuses of the friar orders.

<sup>10</sup> Although the 1896 Revolution led to the overthrow of Spanish rule and the curtailment of friar authority, land tenure<sup>10</sup> system remained intact. “The local landed oligarchy that dominated the shortlived Philippine Republic soon came to an understanding with the new colonial authorities” (Putzel, 1992:50-51).

<sup>11</sup> Although the US government was fully aware of the problems of land concentration in the archipelago, one historian argued that ‘they possessed neither the spirit nor the know-how to do it effectively, since agrarian reform had not been one of their recent socioeconomic problems at home’ (in Putzel, 1992:52).

A ray of hope shone when President McKinley's wrote to the Taft Commission, the first colonial administration, a letter that demonstrated Washington's awareness of the land problem in the colony. It contained important instructions, such as: that 'redress of the wrongs which have caused strife and bloodshed in the past,' that 'the principle of our own Government which prohibits the taking of private property without due process of law, shall not be violated,' and that 'private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation' (Putzel, 1992:52). This policy set the limits for agrarian reform.

Putzel describes how the subsequent formulation of land laws was done as well as their main features:

The Philippine Organic Act<sup>12</sup> introduced in 1902 served as the 'constitution' of the colony until 1916. It limited the size of public lands that could be acquired by individuals to 16 hectares (later amended to 100 hectares) and by corporations to 1,024 hectares....In November the Philippine Commission passed a law calling for the issuance of Torrens titles covering private and public lands. These were to provide an absolute proof of ownership, but the law made the titling system 'voluntary'. Small peasants were too ill-informed to benefit from the programme. Virtually all of the titles granted by the Court of Land Registration up to 1910 were for large landholdings, and even these were limited in number since the landowners feared the tax implications of such a measure.

The Public Lands Act passed in October 1903 was supposedly designed to allow the landless and land-poor peasantry to acquire their own farms. Modelled on the legislation used to settle the American west, it allowed anyone to acquire 16 hectares of public lands by establishing a homestead and cultivating it for five consecutive years with payment of a nominal fee. Filipinos had no tradition of living on isolated homestead farms, but rather lived in barrios, or village neighbourhoods, and few had the resources to avail themselves of such a programme (1992:52-53).

### *peasant struggles under the Commonwealth and the Japanese rule*

"By the 1930s, the system of landlord rule and economic depression had given rise to widespread agrarian unrest. Peasant uprisings occurred in many areas, but were particularly strong in the areas of widespread tenancy on the large landed estates in the interior of Central Luzon" (Putzel, 1992:58; cf. Riedinger, 1995:219; cf. Huizer, 1972). During this period, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), or the Communist Party of

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<sup>12</sup> The Organic Act of 1902 created a bicameral assembly, with the Philippine Commission (appointed by the US Governor) acting as the Upper House and an elected Philippine Assembly as the Lower House. The US banned any Filipino party whose platform included a call for independence and endorsed the Federalistas as the party of their choice (Putzel, 1992:55-56).

the Philippines (CPP) and the Socialist Party figured prominently. In an effort to quell the uprisings, the Sugar Cane Tenancy Contract Act was passed in 1933, after which, the Rice Share Tenancy Act, passed two years later, called for a standardization of a 50-50 sharing agreement for tenants and a 10 per cent ceiling on interest rates.

When President Manuel L. Quezon came into power as the first President of the Philippines in 1935, he passed a law to facilitate the redistribution of public lands and created the National Rice and Corn Corporation. However, “the law was ineffectual since no limits were set on the amount of land that could be retained by owners” (Putzel, 1992:59). Therefore, by the outbreak of World War II, while corporate landholdings became more secure, tenancy had become more widespread and landlord power more firmly entrenched in the Philippines than ever before (Putzel, 1992:59).

When the US lost to the Japanese in 1941, the Japanese occupied Manila and just like what happened during the Spanish and US colonization, “the Japanese enlisted the cooperation of Filipino political leaders and left the landlord order basically intact.” And, as before, the peasants carried out the armed struggles against both the invaders and the local landlords. “During this time, the *Hukbalahap* (Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon - People’s Anti-Japanese Army) was formed in the tenant dominated region of Central Luzon in March 1942. By the end of the war, the Huks, as they became known, succeeded in seizing significant areas in Central Luzon and freeing them from the landlord rule. The peasants’ experience in the 1930s, and even more so, in the fight against the Japanese, led them to a new sense of their own power. Their aspirations for rural reform became more focused in demands for agrarian reform after the war” (Putzel, 1992:59-60).

#### *land issues during the Marcos regime*

While the peasant struggles continued even after World War II, there wasn’t significant developments as far as land redistribution is concerned for the simple reason that traditional conservative bias against reform was evident during the US colonial period in the Philippines (Putzel, 1992:101).

“During Marcos’ first term in office (1966-1969), only 12 estates totalling 2,726 hectares were purchased for redistribution to tenant farmers” (Putzel, 1992:120). Moreover, “the



failure of the Agricultural Land Reform Code<sup>13</sup> to achieve any change in the countryside led to increased peasant unrest, as liberal reform advocates had predicted. Organizations sprang up throughout the agricultural sector demanding land reform and improved conditions for agricultural labourers” (Putzel, 1992:121). As a result, several organizations emerged, all fighting for the cause of the poor, the oppressed and the landless. They included: the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) in Negros<sup>14</sup>, the Federation of Free Farmers<sup>15</sup>, and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) <sup>16</sup>-New People’s Army (NPA)<sup>17</sup> (cf. Hilhorst, 1997:121-149).

“In late 1970, as a response to the growing popular clamour for agrarian reform, both chambers of Congress set up committees to conduct hearings that launched the first agrarian reform initiative ever to emerge in Congress rather than the Executive Branch of the state. With peasants and their supporters camping out in front of Congress, by the end of a fifth special session in early September 1971, RA6389 had been passed amending Macapagal’s Code and changing its name to the Code of Agrarian Reforms<sup>18</sup>” (Putzel, 1992:122). With the combined peasant pressure and congressional action, the administration was urged to step up its reform activity (Putzel, 1992:123; cf. Putzel, 1988:54).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Agricultural Land Reform Code was produced by the Presidential Land Reform Committee appointed by then President Diosdado Macapagal (1962-1965). The Code was described as timid compared with the programmes introduced in Taiwan and South Korea, remaining “within the limits of the conservative approach, restricting redistribution to rice and corn lands of 25 hectares of undeveloped public lands from the government” (Putzel, 1992:116).

<sup>14</sup> Negros is a province in Central Visayas area.

<sup>15</sup> The Federation of Free Farmers was even represented (through its leader) at the drafting of the Agricultural Land Reform Code during the time of Macapagal.

<sup>16</sup> The CPP was established in 1968 and it launched the NPA a year later. “It was formed through the merger of a small group of dissident members of the old PKP led by Jose Maria Sison alias Amado Guerrero and a guerilla group of the old HMB led by Bernabe Buscayno, alias Commander Dante” (Putzel, 1992:122).

<sup>17</sup> The NPA, according to Putzel (1992:122), expanded rapidly in numbers and influence was because CPP launched it as a political force, rather than exclusively military force like the old HMB. When it became active in the *barrios* or villages, it taught agricultural skills, provided medical training, set up makeshift irrigation, often more effectively than was done by either local or central government agencies. They even launched their own agrarian reform programme, which involved land rent reduction, limits on usury, and even outright redistribution in more stable guerrilla fronts.

<sup>18</sup> The amended Code included a lowered land retention limit, a measure opposed by the President, and a new Department of Agrarian Reform. The President and those Congressmen opposed to reform did succeed in reducing the original Senate proposal to substantially increase funding for the programme (Putzel, 1992:122).

<sup>19</sup> “At the same time, Marcos used the growing desire for change among both the elite and the popular movement to win allies in his bid to perpetuate his rule. It would soon become clear that Marcos had decided

When Martial Law was declared in September 1972 (just as when Marcos' term was about to end), "he proclaimed 'the whole country as a land reform area' in order to accelerate the implementation of reform both to stimulate agricultural development and to remove the source of rural unrest" (Putzel, 1992:124). A series of projects and schemes to step up implementation of land reform followed. However, "while little land was redistributed to rural producers, a significant amount of land was concentrated in the hands of a small group of families and agribusiness corporations" (Putzel, 1992:137; Putzel and Cunningham, 1989:42-45). Likewise, "the Marcos programme also did not break the dependent relationship between landowners and tenants" (Putzel, 1992:140).<sup>20</sup> The main reason for this was clearly stated by Putzel (1992:146): "It became clear fairly early that although Marcos claimed he would break the oligarchy through martial law, he needed the support of landowners and provincial political clans to enforce his rule throughout the country. Marcos' refusal to challenge the landowners head-on was clear when he restricted reform to rice and corn lands."

*The Cordilleras and the Muslims during and after the Marcos Regime*

The administration of Fidel V. Ramos witnessed the continuing struggles of peasants, rebel groups, such as the National Democratic Front (NDF), with the NPA as the armed component and the CPP as the main ideological influence; the Muslims, represented by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); and the Cordillera People's Democratic Front (CPDF), which is part of the NDF. These are the three main interrelated insurgencies in the Philippines (cf. Canlas, 1988:77; cf Goodno, 1991:240-256; cf Casiño, 1987:231-250).

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to manipulate popular wishes for reform in his plan to extend his tenure in office beyond its constitutional limits" Putzel (1992:123).

<sup>20</sup> The reasons for this failure is explained by Putzel (1992:143): "The low level of accomplishment after thirteen years of programme implementation reflected not only the weakness of the laws passed through presidential decree, but also the DAR approach, which perceived reform as no more than a process of paper work. From Estrella down to the provincial and municipal DAR offices, the bureaucracy was riddled with patronage. By allowing the tenant-landowner relationship to continue, and by relying on central government agencies and government established organizations, the Marcos state prevented the kind of peasant involvement that was needed to implement and maintain redistributive reform, even on the small scale dictated by the scope of PD27. While little progress was made in redistribution, the productivity programmes, which from the conservative perspective offer an alternative path to rural development, failed to improve the lot of the rural poor. Instead, the agrarian reform programme became just one more instrument through which the Marcos state and its civilian supporters augmented their own economic and political position in the country."

The Igorots<sup>21</sup> of the Cordilleras have always been one of the most popularly known among the indigenous peoples of the Philippines, and not just because of the world-famous Banawe Rice Terraces. The event in 1973<sup>22</sup> concerning their successful fight against the government's Chico River Project<sup>23</sup> made them even more well-known (cf. Drucker, 1988:151-163; Rood, 1998:148-151).

The Chico river is the longest and most elaborate river in the Gran Cordillera mountain range that flows through Kalinga and Mountain provinces. "A German contract firm conducted a Worldbank financed pre-feasibility study in 1973, and came up with a proposal to build four dams in the Chico river, simply named Chico I, II, III and IV....The people along the Chico only became aware of the plans when survey teams entered their areas" (Hilhorst, 1997; Drucker, 1988:154-155).<sup>24</sup> The people recognized the threat of the projects to their communities. Thus, the villagers sought the intervention of the President, bringing six petitions to the President in the course of 1974. The costs of each of these petitions were born by the community and church support. Unfortunately, Marcos already made up his mind to continue with the project, even describing the arguments of the Igorots as 'sentimental' and called upon them to 'sacrifice themselves for the sake of the nation' (Anti-Slavery Society 1983 in Hilhorst, 1997).

Eventually, most of the Igorots, not only the people in the village near Chico River, agreed to take 'a completely oppositionist' stand and with the 'enrolment of church people, the struggle started to appeal to outsiders' (Hilhorst, 1997:121-149). Hilhorst quotes at length an open letter addressed to the President in 1975 by the Catholic Bishop Francisco Claver:

Mr. President, [...] I came here because I was summoned by my people. [...] They do not accept your decree - if decree it is. They will not accept it. This is the message they want me to convey to you, with respect, yes, but with firmness, too. Deep down in their guts they know damming the Chico is a decree of death for them as a people. This they cannot, will not accept. [...] My people are giving

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<sup>21</sup> "According to Scott, the name '*Igorot*', which originally stood for 'hill people', later on began to mean 'pagans', and shortly after, took on other derogatory connotations assigned by lowlanders. However, in the aftermath of World War II, the name '*Igorot*' was worn with pride, specially in memory of these people's heroic defense from the Japanese aggression that ultimately drove the Japanese deployed in the Igorot regions of Northern Luzon to surrender" (Resurreccion, 1998:97).

<sup>22</sup> during the time of President Ferdinand Marcos.

<sup>23</sup> The Chico River Struggle was to have triggered the Igorots to claim for autonomy.

<sup>24</sup> The Chico River Project was the government's plan to generate electricity locally in the face of the increasing urbanization and industrialization (cf. Hilhorst, 1997).

serious thought to armed violence and they are asking whom they should approach for arms. Mr. President, when a Bontok has to turn to a people not his own for help, this only means he has tried his supreme best to solve his problem by himself, and he realizes his powerlessness in the face of overwhelming odds. In short, he is desperate. Armed violence is the only answer, and he knows his spear and head-axe are no match for your guns. [...] It is my prayer that their message will get through to you and you will grant them the least of their requests: a hearing, a real hearing at some future date. This is all they ask - for the moment (cited in Anti-Slavery Society 1983).

Shortly after, a peace pact<sup>25</sup> was organized consisting of multiple villages in the area as well as 'outsiders', this marked the institutionalization of the increasingly integrated opposition movement. This instrument, according to Hilhorst, "was developed during a church sponsored conference in Manila that brought 150 village people from the Chico Valley to the capital... Several weeks after the conference, Marcos abruptly ordered the NPC [National Power Corporation] to cease all operations and to withdraw from the area. No explanation was offered, but it was believed that his government, in the light of the Muslim war in the South of the country, wanted to avoid a second front of open rebellion in the North" (Anti-Slavery Society 1983 in Hilhorst, 1997:121-149).

However, the suspension of NPC activities for the Chico River Project was only temporary. It became clear later on that the government wanted to pursue the activity. Eventually, the villagers accepted the NPA's<sup>26</sup> offer of assistance in fighting the dams. "As early as 1971, [therefore], a first NPA group was established in Ifugao and in 1972 a Montañosa Party Branch was formed" (Castro 1987 in Hilhorst, 1997:121-149; Drucker, 1988:157)).

On the other hand, the Muslim struggle has been bedeviling the Philippine government long before the Ramos administration, and even prior to the struggles of the Igorots. While

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<sup>25</sup> "The peace pact, called *Vochong* or *Bodong* among the Kalingas and *Pechen* among the Bontoks is a traditional institution regulating relations between two villages. Although there are many variations, essential elements of such peace pacts are that each village assures the safety of residents of the other village when they come within its boundaries, and that the peace pact holders take responsibility for violence or crimes committed by one of their people against somebody from the other village. One of the implications of village responsibility is that violence can be avenged against any person from the other village (see Benedito 1994, Dozier 1966, Barton 1949 in Hilhorst, 1997:121-149).

The idea of a peace pact, according to Hilhorst, originated from the NPA cadres.

<sup>26</sup> "Following the Chinese example, they envisaged a revolution that was waged from the countryside. From the outset, the Cordillera provinces were considered very suitable for expansion, because of the strategic advantages of a mountainous area" (Castro 1987 in Hilhorst, 1997:121-149).

the Igorots of the Cordilleras were backed by the NPA, the Muslims in the south were backed by the MNLF and MILF. Both groups demanded autonomy from the state (cf. Surendra, 1989:278). The case of the Muslims, however, was quite different as “it highlights a major difference between those types of interethnic struggle in which national territory is involved” (Casiño, 1987:231). Their struggle may be traced to what Casiño labels as ‘logical and psychological determinants.’ Theirs is a struggle to ‘maintain their Islamic identity and culture against a series of outgroups that includes not only foreign powers such as the Spanish, the Japanese, and the Americans, but also against fellow inhabitants of the Philippines, the so-called Christian Filipinos and the Philippine government” (Casiño, 1987:231).<sup>27</sup>

The struggle of the Moros or Muslims in southern Philippines has its roots in the Spanish colonial era when the colonial government initiated actions that resulted in their segregation mainly due to the fact that they decided to retain their Islamic identity and, thus, refused to be converted to Christianity (cf. Abubakar, 1989:110-114). Casiño (1987:232-245) distinguishes three aspects of ethnicity in dealing with the case of the Moros. The *first*, classificatory ethnicity, is exemplified when the Spanish colonial government classified the natives of the colony as *Indios* or second class citizens when compared with the citizens of Spain, after which the *Indios* were reclassified into three exonymic terms: (1) the Christianized *Indios*, (2) the *Moros*, and (3) the *Infieles*, or the pagans. This means that in terms of ethnic ranking/category, the Christianized *Indios* were first, the *Moros*, second and the *Infieles*, third. The *second* aspect, political ethnicity, was displayed by the MNLF-led war in 1968 whose avowed goal was secession from and dismemberment of the Philippines, a supreme political act.<sup>28</sup> The *third*, psychological ethnicity, is exhibited by what Casiño calls as “an internal conflict within the MNLF leadership [itself] mirroring the weakness of the *we-group* notion it used as a basis for the

<sup>27</sup> The government’s conflict with the Muslims in Mindanao dates back to the Spanish colonial era when the “Spaniards used the Christianized *Indios* in their unrelenting attempt to subjugate the Muslims who, in turn, were forced to move farther south of Mindanao. The Indio-Muslim confrontation formed the foundation for the hatred and tension between Christian Filipinos and Muslims” (Aguilar, 1997:9; cf. Fernandez, 1951:87 & 142-144).

<sup>28</sup> Prior to Spanish occupation, there was no such entity as a single Filipino nation or state (cf. Casiño, 1987:237). During the Spanish colonial rule, however, Mindanao and Sulu Muslim territories became under the sovereignty of the Spain. When the Spanish sovereignty was transferred to the United States in 1899, it was “clearly understood that it included the sovereignty over Mindanao and Sulu Muslim territories” and which was later on transferred to the Philippine Republic. The Muslims’ struggle for dismemberment from the archipelago thus started (Casiño, 1987:236-239).

rebellion (Abubakar, 1989:115-116).<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the issue of ethnicity in the case of the Muslims shows the problematique of ethnicity itself as discussed by Nederveen Pieterse (1993:16-18).

### *land issues under the Aquino administration*

The years following the declaration of Martial Law witnessed the increasing support for the CPP-NPA and the burgeoning of various other groups campaigning for far-reaching social reforms. Civic, social and political unrests characterized the Philippine society by mid80s. This was the state of society that Corazon Cojuangco Aquino inherited when she assumed office in 1986, the very same reasons why she gained the support of many at that time.<sup>30</sup>

When Aquino campaigned for presidency, she promised a 'genuine land reform program', among others.<sup>31</sup> However, despite some efforts at achieving the same, her administration failed to fulfill such a promise. First of all, her "first Cabinet was broadly representative of the coalition that brought her to power, and as such was made up primarily of the advocates of the conservative approach to agrarian reform" (Putzel, 1992:193).

Thus, failure to concretize her administration's rhetorics<sup>32</sup> infuriated the peasant movements all over again, especially with the clause in Executive Order 229<sup>33</sup> which "permanently disqualifies from participation in the programme 'all persons, associations,

<sup>29</sup> I can no longer discuss this extensively. For more details, however, please refer to Casiño, 1987:231-252).

<sup>30</sup> The organizations and/or coalitions that figured prominently in the formation of Aquino coalition included: (a) the advocates of the liberal democratic ideals, which included: 'Justice for Aquino, Justice for All' (JAJA) movement, the Coalition for the Restoration of Democracy (CORD), and the BAYAN as the undisputed centre of the entire anti-Marcos opposition; (b) the advocates of the social-democratic ideals, such as the Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSP - Philippine Social Democratic Party), the BISIG, an associate of which was KAAKBAY, a broader nationalist organization which demanded the new government 'the proclamation of a genuine land reform program'; and (c) the 'conservative reformists', which was considered to be at the heart of what was to become the Aquino coalition, and which was figured prominently by business leaders, traditional politicians, and most of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and its associated lay organizations (cf. Putzel, 1992:169-172).

<sup>31</sup> "[L]and reform," according to Putzel, "refers only to the tenurial or ownership status of the land sharecropping, renet tenancy or owner-cultivator farming), while *agrarian* reform refers only to the technical aspects of farming -- methods of cultivation, seed varieties, irrigation, mechanisation--in short, aspects related to the productivity of farming." (1988:48).

<sup>32</sup> When Aquino campaigned for presidency, she promised a "genuined land reform program, among others.

<sup>33</sup> Executive Order (EO) 229 "included concessions on almost every objection raised by the opponents of redistributive reform, and left the centrl issues of defining retention limits and the timetable or 'priorities', of reoform entirely to Congress" (Putzel, 1992:235 & 236).

or entities who prematurely enter land to avail themselves of the rights and benefits' of the programme" (Putzel, 1992:243). With this clause, the government virtually attacked the peasants who were involved in land occupations. Meanwhile, with insurgency (led by the NPA) once again spreading in the countryside due to widespread socio-economic ills, counter-surgency campaigns intensified. Thus, the government began to look at agrarian reform more seriously considering it as 'the anchor of its counter-insurgency campaign' (Putzel, 1992:247; cf. Kay, 1994:8). Ironically, the Aquino administration appeared to delay actual implementation of the same.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the CARP<sup>35</sup> or RA 6657, which became the country's basic law on agrarian reform, shows a 'bias in favour of landowners and agribusiness' (Putzel, 1992:272).

### *negotiations with the Muslims and the Igorots*

Insurgency and armed struggle in Mindanao and the Cordilleras continued during the Aquino and Ramos administrations despite intensified efforts by the government to pacify them (cf. Goodno, 1991:240-256). Thus, while the Muslims' and the Igorots' struggles continued, the government devised ways by which to appease both groups. While peace negotiations in Mindanao were well under way, various policies and laws were being crafted in Malacañang. For example, as part of the peace agreement campaign with the Muslims, Executive Order (EO) No. 371 was issued by President Ramos establishing the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), appointing Nur Misuari, head of MNLF, as Chairman. Moreover,

Popular pressure for autonomy and the Aquino government's peace agenda in conflict-ridden regions of Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera shaped the articulation of the autonomy<sup>36</sup> in the new 1987 Constitution. Article II, Section 22; Article XIV, Section 17; and Article XII, Section 5 provide a clear policy of recognizing and promoting, within the Philippine state's legal framework, the rights of the indigenous peoples to their ancestral domain and the customary laws pertinent to this. Enabling laws were subsequently passed by Congress (for example, the Organic Act of 1989, which provided for the creation of an

<sup>34</sup> One reason for this was the fact that "President Aquino's family, the Cojuangcos set up the tarlac Development Corporation to run its 7,000-hectare Hacienda Luisita devoted mainly to sugar production" (Putzel and Cunningham, 1989:15).

<sup>35</sup> Proclamation 131, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), which would "cover regardless of tenurial arrangement and commodity produced, all public and private agricultural lands as provided in the Constitution" (Putzel, 1992:235 & 236).

<sup>36</sup> "Perhaps the most significant new element confronting contemporary development planners is the directly expressed political demand of indigenous peoples themselves to retain their autonomy and to control their own future development" (Bodley, 1988:4).

autonomous region in the Cordillera and Republic Act 6734, which established the autonomous regional government for Muslim Mindanao) (Sajor, 1998:143-144).

Thus, the creation of autonomous regions, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), was a means to 'enhance the attainment of peace and order, the acceleration of socio-economic development and the resettlement of displaced persons' (Abubakar, 1989:118).

While peace negotiations started even during the Marcos regime, it was only during the Aquino administration when many rebels surrendered due to the amnesty program by the government. Peace negotiations with the Muslims, as represented by the MNLF, continued and it was during the Ramos administration when agreements were finally reached, after three decades of conflict and more than 100,000 lives lost (Ramos, 1996).

### **2.3 The Birth of a Legal Discourse: The IPRA Law**

Aside from the 1987 Constitution, one of the results of the government negotiations with the Igorots and the Muslims during the Aquino and the Ramos administrations was the formulation and enactment of the IPRA or Republic Act (RA) 8371 on October 29, 1997, after being filed initially during the Eighth Congress in 1987 (NEDA, 1998b:21). "Prior to its passing, the bill," according to NEDA, "underwent a series of consultations with indigenous peoples (IPs) nationwide. These consultations include: (a) the IPs of Eastern and Southern Mindanao held in Kidapawan, North Cotabato on 11-12 November 1995; (b) the Cordillera IPs in Baguio City on 14-15 November 1995; (c) the IPs of Central and Southern Luzon in Cabanatuan City on 16-17 November 1995; (d) the IPs of Northern Luzon Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya on 19-20 November 1995; (e) the IPs from Mindoro, Palawan and Panay in Puerto Princesa City on 2-3 December 1995; (f) the IPs of Western and Northern Mindanao in Cagayan de Oro City on 9-10 December 1995; and (g) the National Consultation held in Pagsanjan, Laguna on 15-17 December 1995" (1998b:21). The bill therefore "...most closely represents a consensus on a comprehensive Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples Rights among Indigenous Peoples (IPs) themselves, concerned NGOs, government representatives particularly the sectoral representatives of the IPs in Congress, the Department of



Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the Department of Agrarian Reform, (DAR)” (NEDA, 1998b:21).

### **salient features of the IPRA**

The IPRA (Philippines, 1997c) is an articulation of the State’s response to the IPs’ clamor for the recognition and protection of their rights. Generally, its realization is embedded in what may be called a twin strategy: (a) the recognition of their rights over ancestral lands/domains; and (b) the right to live their lives in accordance with their own indigenous culture, traditions, practices, religions, values and customs.<sup>37</sup>

More specifically, Chapter III stipulates the Ips rights to ancestral domains, which includes not only the physical environment but the total environment including the spiritual and cultural bonds to the areas which the ICCs/IPs posses, occupy and use to which they have claims of ownership.

Chapter IV exemplifies the ICCs/IPs’ rights to self-governance and self-determination and respects the integrity of their values, practices and institutions. It also specifies the right of ICCs/IPs to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Chapter V guarantees the rights of ICCs/IPs as human beings and to be treated as equal citizens of the country. Chapter VI, on the other hand, insitutionalizes cultural integrity, specifically the protection of indigenous culture, traditions and institutions.

Chapter VII stipulates the creation of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the primary government agency responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies, plans and programs to promote and protect the rights and well-being of the ICCs/IPs and the recognition of their ancestral domains as well as their rights thereto. Chapter VIII stipulates the delineation and recognition of ancestral domains, with self-delineation being the guiding principle in the identification and delineation of ancestral domains. Chapters IX and X provides for the procedures for the enforcement of rights and the sources of fund to cover all expenses involving the operationalization of the fiat. Finally, Chapters XI, XII and XIII stipulates the penalties for

any acts of violation of the IPRA, merger of the ONCC and OSCC and the general provisions, respectively.

#### 2.4 Concluding Remarks

The foregoing discussions show that the formation of current state discourse on ancestral lands/domains have been influenced by numerous policies on land and/or agrarian reform, fuelled by certain ideals and by various actors, with the landed elite, clans, transnational corporations, the peasants and armed rebel groups figuring prominently (cf. Canlas, 1988:71, Putzel and Cunnington, 1989:42-50). In a capsule, the formation of the current state discourse on ancestral lands/domains was an ideologically-ridden political process.

During the colonial era, protests and armed struggles were backed by the desire for equality and thus an equitable distribution of resources, particularly land. Peasants were the first to rise against the Spanish rule. A series of struggles occurred afterwards, mostly at the initiative of the peasants as they were the first ones immediately affected by the worsening land ownership conditions mainly due to the overconcentration of lands on the elite families (cf. Riedinger, 1995:219). The attempts, therefore, by the colonial governments--Spain, United States and Japan--to redistribute the lands never really came to fruition as policies were formulated and implemented with caution, careful not to provoke the ire of the powerful landed elite inasmuch as they enlisted the latter's support at the onset of their rule (cf. Riedinger, 1995:220-221). As a consequence, the colonial governments' remarkable array of discourses on land and its distribution and redistribution remained just that: a discourse, confined to pure rhetorics. What was more, there were really no significant achievements at delineating ancestral lands/domains and protecting the indigenous peoples' rights of the same. On the contrary, since the indigenous peoples, at the start of Spanish occupation, never adopted nor understood the modern or western concept of land ownership, the Spanish colonial government declared that all untitled lands are public lands (cf. Lynch, 1982:274-275).

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<sup>37</sup> The passage of the IPRA has, however, triggered debates and criticisms most prominent of which is the

Therefore, the eventual inclusion in the 1987 Constitution of provisions focusing on the indigenous peoples' rights to ancestral domains and the autonomy of Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera, surprised many. But, it is clear that these two groups of indigenous peoples won their battle, somehow. They were powerful, the Muslims backed by the armed groups, MNLF and MILF and the Cordillera people backed by the armed rebel group, CPP-NPA. This indicates that had there been no armed rebellion involved, no clearer policy on the indigenous peoples' rights to ancestral lands/domains would have emerged. Thus, the current legal discourse, the IPRA, is both a product of all the struggles and a means to pacify insurgencies, mainly from these two groups (Maranan, 1989:122).

The question now is: how was representation in the formation of the current discourse on IPs done? Were all ICCs/IPs in the country represented? If not, why? These and other issues will be tackled in the succeeding chapter. ●

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## Chapter Three

### THE BUHI AGTA

#### Diversification of livelihoods and changing aspirations

*"Enforced "primitivism" is a disruptive policy occasionally practised on a reservation. This policy is often followed either to promote tourism...or it is defended as a means of preserving the tribe's cultural identity. However, whereas enforced "primitivism" is always damaging, elective "primitivism" can be beneficial as in the case of the Cunas of Panama. Minority culture never has been a static entity which must be preserved exactly as it is found or as it is believed to have been. Rather it is a dynamic reality which should be provided with conditions adequate for development in a natural and progressive manner. Cultural continuity should be encouraged in all spheres, but the choice of whether to continue to modify old ways should be left to the tribal people themselves and not imposed upon them."*

--The World Bank (IBRD, 1980 in Clad, 1988:327).

#### 3.1 Introduction

“[O]ne of the basic correlations in the Philippines is that indigenous peoples tend to occupy uplands--since the lowlands were hispanized and islamized” (Rood, 1998:138).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the term ‘indigenous peoples’ of the uplands have, more often than not, been equated with such derogatory and/or reifying terms as traditional, backward, savages, forest-dependent people or shifting cultivators, and others (cf. Li, 1999:23-24). It is not surprising, therefore, that a range of discourses have emerged, a substantial portion of which may be totally unfounded. Perhaps, this could be blamed to the considerably detached way by which these information are generated, most of which still cling to the beliefs and assumptions held by people of long ago (cf. LCDP, 1997:IV-6). Current sociological debates, however, are shifting courses. While many state policies may reflect the reification of the indigenous peoples of the uplands, “[r]ecent historical ethnographies have emphasised that the emergence of cultural distinctiveness among upland populations has been a two-way process--not the unilateral product of centralised lowland power, nor the unilateral product of tradition-bound people without history” (Li, 1999:8).

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<sup>1</sup> although discussions in the previous chapter point to the fact that the Islamized Muslims, are themselves indigenous as well.

In this Chapter, I hope to give light to the current state and society discourses on indigenous peoples, with focus on the upland IPs/ICCs as the Agta Negritos of the Philippines. As I have made clear in Chapter One, the primary data that I will cite in this paper, particularly in this chapter, will be about the Buhi Agta, which I hope to supplement with some secondary data about the other Agta groups of Luzon. My task, therefore, is to: (a) describe the relation of Agta Negritos to land, discuss the diversification of their livelihoods and their changing aspirations; and (b) identify the main elements that determined changes in their economic aspirations.

### 3.2 The Buhi Agta

The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)<sup>2</sup> recorded the total number of the country's Agta population<sup>3</sup> to be about 30,000. Of this total, 3,261, or about 11 percent, live in the mountainous regions and remotest parts of the barangays of Buhi, Camarines Sur (NCIP-V, 1999). While the Agta population of the northeastern part of Luzon have already been studied, and literatures published about them, those of the southern part, mainly those from the Bicol Region, remain incognito.<sup>4</sup>

The Buhi Agta may be divided into two groups or classes. The Agta (pure) and the *Tabangnon*. Both classes, however, consider themselves as Agta. I must say that this is not just self-ascription or an "*emic category of ascription*" (Moerman 1965 in Eriksen, 1993:11) but an *etic* category of ascription as well. The Agta (pure) descends from pure-blooded Agta parents. It means that s/he has phenotypic characteristics as the pure Agta. The *Tabangnon*, on the other hand, is *mestiza/o* Agta, meaning either of her parents is a lowlander.<sup>5</sup> When I talk about Agta in this paper, however, I mean the Agta people of Buhi in general, pure or otherwise, unless I specify for purposes of clarity and precision. However, since most of my associations are with the *Tabangnons*, I shall be referring to them more often.

<sup>2</sup> NCIP, according to Republic Act No. 8371, or IPRA, is the primary government agency responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies, plans and programs to promote and protect the rights and well-being of the ICCs/IPs and the recognition of their ancestral domains as well as their rights thereto.

<sup>3</sup> Please see Table 1, Appendix E, for a list of the different Agta groups in Luzon.

<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, aside from some data generated by NCIP-V in the course of its mandate.

<sup>5</sup> As I have mentioned in Chapter One, the word "lowlander" in this paper is used to refer to the non-Agta people.

The current Agta population in Buhi, which is placed at approximately 3,261, is about 5.4 percent of the municipality's total number of population of 60,796. Most of these Agta-Tabangnon people are living in the uplands or in far-flung barangays. These barangays include: (1) Cabatuan; (2) Ipil; (3) Caubasan; (4) Garcia-Salvacion; (5) Malitbog-Inagaet; (6) Paskang; (7) Burocbusoc; (8) Divino Rostro; (9) Caloocan-Iraya; (10) Lourdes; (11) Sta. Isabel; (12) San Ramon; (13) Ibayugan; (14) Igbac; and (15) Itbog. Each of the Agta group living in each of these barangays is considered to be a tribe. In the whole of Camarines Sur province, Mt. Iriga (formerly Mt. Asug) and Mt. Isarog are thickly populated by tribal people, among them the Agta Negritos (NCIP-V, 1999).

### 3.3 The Agta Peoples' Relations to Land

#### **livelihood**

#### ***nomadism--hunting, trapping and gathering***

In general, the pure Agta are those who live in nomadic bands in the forests. They subsist primarily on hunting, trapping and gathering. Game includes deers, wild pigs, birds, bats, snakes and others. For the Agta people, there are several ways to make a catch. One is by bow and arrow or spear. Another is by making traps. This is usually done by digging about two meters of pit, which they afterwards cover with dried leaves and tree branches. Another is by using ropes as *pang-si-od* or trap. This is done by tying one end of the rope to a tree and the other end is held by the trapper. At this stage, the rope is simply allowed to rest on the ground. S/he then waits for a game to come by and once the prey is at the right position, the other end of the rope is quickly pulled and the prey falls to the ground. This technique is usually done with another person-trapper. One holds the rope and the other one goes for the catch. Another way is by setting a *sudyang*. It is done by making pointed pieces of wood, which is about half meter long, sometimes less. These are planted on the ground with the pointed ends facing upwards. Some dried leaves are placed on top to conceal them from the prey. And, still another way is by catching the prey with bare hands just like when catching bats and snakes. This technique requires great skill and agility. It is a skill which most Agta people have already mastered.

Whenever there is a surplus catch, these are traded for other commodities such as rice, salt and sugar in the non-aboriginal market system, usually with the lowland farmers (cf. Griffin, et.al., 1990:1). Some forty years ago, barter was the primary mode of business transaction. About 20 years after, however, buy and sell, with the use of currency, started to be adopted, with about 50 percent or more of them adopting the system.

According to some lowlanders that I've talked to, some forty years ago, the Agta would hardly go down to the lowlands to trade. Today, however, the trend is rapidly changing. More and more Agta are seen having contacts with the lowlanders. One of the reasons for this is the fact that many Agta are becoming *tuma-taos*, or land-caretakers.<sup>6</sup> As *tuma-tao*, an Agta, together with his/her family, takes care of a lowlander's land and all other resources found therein. In return, they are allowed to stay in the land for free, erect their hut and grow their vegetables. Usually, the lands are those with steeper slopes and located in the uplands where coconut trees are grown. Under the coconut trees, they plant their own crops like camotes, beans, squash and others. When the coconuts are already ripe enough for picking, they are harvested and the landowners hire the Agtas to do various tasks involving copra processing.<sup>7</sup>

From what I have observed, the Agta people who become *tuma-taos* start to adopt an altogether different way of life than they used to lead. Nomadism is thus being replaced by a more sedentary mode of living. More often than not, their children will, in future, live this way as well. The same trend was observed in the Agta population of Northeastern Luzon. For example, while hunting used to occupy 50 percent of labour time of an Agta in the 1960s, it has decreased to only 10 percent nowadays (Griffin, et.al, 1990:1). This

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, I wasn't able to conduct a survey to determine the exact number of Agta people who are *tumataos*. I only know of several Agta families, both pure Agta and *Tabangnon*, who are *tumataos* and that the number is increasing. Also, I should mention at this point, however, that the ratio of (pure) Agta becoming a *tuma-tao* is far lower than that of the *Tabangnons*. More *Tabangnons* become *tuma-tao* than (pure) Agta. I shall mention the reason for this in the succeeding paragraph.

<sup>7</sup> The process involves the following steps: (1) harvesting coconuts, a strenuous job which involves climbing the tree, picking the fruits and dropping them on the ground; (2) collecting all coconuts from the ground and transporting them, through a carabao-drawn cart, to the place where the next processes will take place; (3) removing the coconut husks; (4) splitting the coconuts to remove the juice; (5) drying the coconuts, which is done by arranging them alternately, one on top of the other on a giant grill made of bamboos under which charcoals are placed and allowed to burn to produce enough heat to dry up the coconut meat; and (6) extracting the coconut meat from the shell and letting them dry further. One can determine the copra is done when the



phenomenon may be traced to the declining population of wild animals such as, pigs and deers and are even on the verge of extinction. Degradation of forest environment as well as too much hunting are the main causes of the disappearance of game (Griffin, et.al, 1990:1). The problem of environmental degradation and depletion of resources may be blamed on the changing hunting techniques by the Agta, apart from the fact that lowland dwellers also compete for these resources. For example, some thirty years ago, in the northeastern part, Agta hunters relied heavily on bow and arrow and trapping equipment. A decade later, they were already using borrowed guns for hunting pigs, deers and monkeys (cf. Headland and Headland, 1997:81). In fact, “[i]n the late 1970s the Philippine military often transported Agta men to distant forest areas by helicopter to hunt with M16 semi-automatic rifles...” (Headland and Headland, 1997:81). But most of their catch were transported to Manila by the army officers (Headland and Headland, 1997:81), where they profit more.

*semi-sedentary: farming, fishing, hired labor and tuma-tao*

The *Tabangnons* or mestizo Agtas are those Agta people who have already adopted a semi-sedentary mode of life and who associate with the lowlanders more often. Their main source of livelihood is farming, fishing, and hired labor. Sometimes, they also engage in hunting, but, very rarely. Working as *tuma-taos*, however, is increasing among the *Tabangnons*.

Just like the pure Agta people, most, if not all, *Tabangnons* own no land of their own. The duration of their stay in a particular place therefore depends on the landowner or the government, if they happen to be living on government-owned lands. This is primarily the reason why they cannot stay longer in one place even if they wanted to. In fact, all of the Agta people I know expressed their desire to possess their own lands as well. “*Siisay baga ana indi muyang magka-agko sadiring raga?*”<sup>8</sup> (Why? Who doesn’t want to have his/her own land anyway?), one Agta said. In many cases, they are allowed by the owners to stay in the lands where they are currently residing on the condition that they will take care of the land, an agreement that makes the Agta a *tumatao*.

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coconut meat is already brown. These are then placed in sacks and transported to the town where the copra buyers are stationed.

<sup>8</sup> This is a Buhinon dialect that is spoken by practically all of the Buhi Agta tribes.

When I interviewed two Agta members, Evelyn and Pedro, both *Tabangnon*, they revealed that their main problem and concern at this time is their landlessness. They shared that their only dream is not necessarily to acquire wealth and/or luxuries in life, but to possess their own lands on which they could build their homes and plant their vegetables. According to Evelyn, she has always dreamed of one day owning her own land to till. She and her husband just “borrows” a portion of a neighboring lowlander’s lot to grow their own vegetables and crops. In the vernacular, this is referred to as ‘*nakikitanom*,’ or sharecropping tenants.

Evelyn’s sentiment is clearly reflected in her statement: “*Para sakon, ana importante nguwan na pimawot ko talaga amo ana magka-agko sadiring raga na indi ako pagpaalinon....ta indi na ako muya nyana magpara-pakitanom na sana...*” (“For me, the most important thing that I really desire right now is to have my own land from where I will not be expelled. I don’t want to remain as “*tumatao*” or land caretaker all my life.”) Natividad Fabriga, the Agta chieftain Iraya, agreed to this statement even adding her own words: “*Ana raga sana ana pinagilaoman namon tanganing mabuway....Tibaad matabangan ninyo kami....*” (“The land is our only hope to survive.... I hope you can help us....”)

The above statement is a clear indication of a desire for a sedentary mode of living, inasmuch as “[c]learing and fencing a plot implies a kind of particularised attachment to land that is different from the more general sense of belonging to a homeland” (Humphrey and Sneath, 1999:192-193). This means that their economic activities are likewise changing. For example, instead of relying on hunting and gathering for livelihood, which require greater mobility, they engage in such static activities as tending pigs, chickens and vegetable gardens (Humphrey and Sneath, 1999:190 & 192).

Many *Tabangnons* live near the rivers, creeks and the lake. When farming proves to be tough, especially when drought or typhoons occur, they rely on whatever the waters can yield. I have seen how the *Tabangnons* catch *ogama* (freshwater crabs), *suso* (freshwater snails), *bugitis* (freshwater clams), fish and eels. Using just a kerosene lamp to light their way, they catch crabs and eels at night because they claim it is easier that way and they

make more catches. They say crabs sleep at night and that means they don't move a lot. I think this is true because I went with them one time. I thought it was exciting, but only when you have to do it for the thrill of it, not for a living. I should say it was hard work. And for the Agta people, they make the catch or they don't survive.

*Suso* and fish are caught at daytime. *Suso* is quite easy to catch. Actually, it doesn't appear like catching at all. They are everywhere near the riverbanks clinging to the rocks. At the sandy parts, *bugitis* are found. But, it is more hardwork than *suso*. One has to use both hands to dig into the sands to find them. When one doesn't want his/her fingernails damaged, one shouldn't go looking for them. The Agta people make use of *sumbiling*<sup>9</sup> to catch fish, which they usually do at nighttime. This is a very traditional way of catching fish. But they don't have much choice since they lack the more advanced fishing implements used by their lowlander counterparts. One Agta once said: "*Kin ako sana agko ikakaya, gusto ko kintana makapangisra uman na arog nyana mga taga-ibaba, tanganing dakol na isra ana sakon na marakop*" (If only I had the means, I'd also want to have fishing equipment like the lowlanders, that way, I'd have more catch").

*Patangran* or hired labor is also common among the Agta people. The pay ranges from P75.00-P100.00 (pesos) per day (fl 4,00-fl5,50 or US\$1.8-US\$2.60), which usually takes about 10 hours of work per day. Often, work involves plowing the rice or corn fields, planting rice, weeding, harvesting rice using scythes, and others. Sometimes, they are also hired to plant camotes, corns, sugarcane, and others. They are well-rounded as far as traditional farming is concerned, but untrained when the more advanced farming methods are concerned. When it involves work in the farm, they usually get the same pay as the lowlanders. But there were cases when some Agta workers have been paid lower than their lowlander counterparts.

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<sup>9</sup> *Sumbiling* is a slim, rounded wood or metal about half meter long with a pointed end. On the blunt end, an elastic band is tightly tied, which is shaped into a loop. Inside the loop, about three fingers are inserted, the thumb on one end and the index and middle fingers at the other end. The wood or metal is then pulled using the other hand subsequently stretching the elastic band. The pointed end is then aimed at the target and, once locked, is released. However, when the target is farther from the *nanunumbiling* (the one catching fish using a *sumbiling*), a different kind of *sumbiling* is used. Instead of tying the looped elastic band at the blunt end of the piece of wood or metal, it is shaped into a bow and the wood or metal is used like an arrow.

In the northeastern part, “the Agtas’ present occupations [include:] selling rattan, orchids, medicinal plants, firewood, wooden posts (construction material), shellfish. More and more often they are employed as labourers (just like the Buhi Agta), as guides by forestry companies or as night watchmen (guarding lorries and machinery for companies” (Griffin, et.al., 1990:1).

Some Agta are now learning other skills aside from farming. The NCIP-V have identified various programs designed for the ICCs/IPs alone. I have seen some of them working as carpenters, but they are assigned simpler tasks. Hence, they get lower pay than the more trained and skilled ones, who are, in almost all cases, the lowlanders.<sup>10</sup>

Some Agta, usually the women, work as househelps.<sup>11</sup> I know of some working in some townpeople’s households. Some of them go to other urban areas, including Metro Manila, to work as househelps (cf. Headland and Headland, 1997:82-83).<sup>12</sup>

#### **food, clothing and shelter**

The Buhi Agta depend heavily on both meat and vegetable products for their daily sustenance (cf. ILO, 1953:104). Their staple foods are rice; root crops, such as *camotes* (sweet potatoes), maize or corn, yams, and peanuts; vegetables, such as *lubi-lubi*,<sup>13</sup> *antak* (housebands), *camote* tops, squash, and others; fruits, such as bananas, *bulala*,<sup>14</sup> *bayawas* (guavas), pili nuts, and other wild fruits; and meat of the wild animals that they catch (cf. Estioko-Griffin and Griffin, 1981:122-125). These are the same food that most of the lowlanders eat.

<sup>10</sup> This is most probably the reason why the government, through the NCIP, has devised skills training programmes, to cater to the indigenous peoples’, especially the upland indigenous peoples as the Agta, changing aspirations and livelihood inclinations. Current skills training programs of the NCIP include bamboo crafts, basket-making, salt making, animal management, goat raising, duck raising, farmers class and bio-intensive gardening, among others.

<sup>11</sup> It is unfortunate that I don’t have even an approximation of the number of Agta working as househelps in the towns and other cities. Most lowlanders are aware that the number is increasing though. For example, the eldest child of Evelyn, one of my interviewees, is in Manila, working as househelp.

<sup>12</sup> Headland and Headland even cited this out-migrations of Agta women as one reason for the Agta population’s decline in Casiguran Agta (1997:82-83).

<sup>13</sup> *Lubi-lubi* is a kind of wild plant/vegetable whose leaves are green and shaped like Chinese paksoi. It is found in the hills and mountains and is usually cooked in coconut milk and grilled fish with a lot of chilli, a typical dish for which the Bicolanos, the people of Bicol, are known for.

The early Agta wore loin cloths. Even today, there are still pure Agta who wear them, but very rarely. In fact, it is only during parades that they are 'requested' to wear their traditional attires.<sup>15</sup> Most of them wear the same kind of clothes as the ones worn by the lowlanders. One lowlander once shared to me: "*Kadaklan nyaan na mga tao aan pitawan sana man nin bado nyana mga taga-ibaba ta kin sira sana, ana ibabakal kuno nira nin bado ibakal na nin kakanon*" ("Most of these people are given clothes by the lowlanders because they [the Agta] would rather spend their money on food than on clothes.")<sup>16</sup>

Most of the (pure) Agtas, don't have permanent houses (cf. Headland, 1987:265). Their dwellings are the simplest huts one could ever find. An Agta hut is made of thatched roofs, usually made of coconut leaves. The floor is made of bamboo and the walls also made from coconut leaves. Since they live in the outdoors most of the time, the hut is very small (cf. ILO, 1953:120). It serves as a kitchen, living room, and bedroom all in one. The purpose is mainly to have a roof over one's head, specifically for shelter in wet weather as well as for sleeping (cf. Headland, 1987:265). I have also seen some Agta huts built on top of trees, among tree branches. I think it is to protect themselves from wild animals that may roam at night. The Agta people, however, avoid deep forests and I surmise this is to avoid increased dampness, dense mosquito populations, and fear of falling trees, just like what Headland (1987:265) observed. I have also observed that the Agta stay in one place for an average of one or two weeks. Two weeks, however, is the longest period of time that they stay in a particular place. I have likewise noticed that this practice has been changing throughout the many years that I've been in association with the Agta people. Although there are still many who live this nomadic or semi-nomadic way, I have observed that many Agta have now adopted a more sedentary lifestyle like the lowlanders.

The *Tabangnons*, on the other hand, have semi-permanent houses. A *Tabangnon* hut looks the same as the lowlanders' living in the rural areas and/or by the foothills. The roof is made of cogon or nipa, the walls are made of *sawali*--which is intricately hand-woven bamboo strips-- the floor, which is made of bamboo, is raised above the ground, and the

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<sup>14</sup> Bulala is the other variety of *rambutan*, a tropical fruit which is hairy and red when ripe. Its meat, which is the edible part, is fleshy, juicy and transparent.

<sup>15</sup> Please see Appendix B.

<sup>16</sup> From my associations with the Agta, this statement reveals more of the lack of resources to spend for basic needs rather than a dislike to buy clothes or possess material wealth.

posts are made of tree trunks. The *Tabangnons*, stay in one place longer than the pure Agtas, maybe months or a year, depending upon the generosity of the owner of the lot on which their houses are erected and on which they grow vegetables and root crops and tend to pigs and chickens. Most of them, however, stay as long as the landowner allow them.

### education and religion

Most of the Buhi Agta are illiterates, as is the case of the other Agta populations in Luzon.<sup>17</sup> They do not go to school. According to Ms. Justina Gabalfin,<sup>18</sup> of her about 40 pupils, the Agta and *Tabangnon* children are often absent because they either assist their parents with the household chores or help them earn money for the family. This usually involves working in the farm or fishing (if they are living near the lake or the creeks and rivers).<sup>19</sup> According to Evelyn, however, the lack of financial resources is the main reason why they don't send their children to school.

Most of the Agta people today who become *tuma-taos* become Catholics. More contact with the lowlanders, especially with the landowners, leads to their conversion. Most Agta who already have surnames<sup>20</sup> are children of Agta families working as *tuma-taos*. The growing trend is that the child, during baptism, gets the surname of the landowner or the godfather/godmother. Although more and more Agtas are becoming Catholics, there are still a considerable number who are considered pagans, especially the pure-blooded ones. They believe in *anitos*, or spirits of the forests. There are times, especially after harvest season, when they make ceremonial food offerings to these *anitos*.

<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, neither the Municipality of Buhi nor the NCIP-V has any record of the literacy or illiteracy rate of the Agta people of Buhi. For an idea of the extent of their illiteracy, however, please refer to Table 1, Appendix

<sup>18</sup> Ms. Gabalfin is a teacher in Hansel and Gretel School, a school constructed very recently in Iraya, Buhi, through the funding of Kolping Society of the Philippines, Inc., a German-funded NGO founded by Father Adolf Kolping in the late 19th century.

<sup>19</sup> It may be interesting to note as well that there have been instances when Agta children were teased and taunted by their lowlander classmates. "Agta, Agta," they would chant. And this only means one thing: if one is an Agta, s/he is ugly because s/he is black or dark-skinned and flat-nosed. When I was in primary school, I had a classmate who was not an Agta, but she was quite dark-skinned, almost like an Agta. She often got into a fight with some of the naughty boys at school because they called her "Agta". The more she got mad, the more the boys taunted her.

### 3.4 Concluding Remarks

Many Agta Negritos today are open in expressing and exhibiting their changing aspirations. As there is an evolving diversification of their livelihoods, their lifestyles likewise change (cf. Headland and Headland, 1997:79-88). This means that they could no longer be confined in compartmentalized boxes and labelled as either *nomads* or *semi-nomads*. As such, they should no longer be stigmatized as clinging to a backward way of life (cf. Maybury-Lewis, 1988:376-377).

As can be gleaned from the descriptions in this chapter, the Agtas as are the other indigenous groups of peoples are no more homogeneous than other categories of people (cf. Eriksen, 1993:143). While some of them may express contentment of living in the rural areas, the others aspire to live in the cities, while still others would dream for advancement in life. In more simplistic terms, for example, the desire to own lands is an outright expression of a desire to live as sedentary people just like the lowland dwellers, and no longer as nomadic people nor as hunter-gatherers. As such, while the observation that the Agta Negritos remain hunter-gatherers (cf. Headland, 1987:261) may be partly true, it should never lead to the negation of contemporary events and their effects on the lives of these people. It is worth noting that while they may appear homogeneous as they are classified under one ethnic category, their varied and evolving lifestyles and aspirations make them a heterogeneous society. In fact, while Barbosa (1985:12) claims that the “[a]gta are not a sedentary people,” he also recognizes the fact that “culture change is occurring.”

The inroads of modernization are undeniably making their impact on the lives of the Agta people. As modernization flourishes in the country, so does the transformation of aspirations, perspectives, beliefs and practices. Undoubtedly, the Agta people are not immune to this. In fact, many welcome these transformations, with some even more eager than the others. In this context, Headland's (1985:109) observation that “Negritos are among the most resistant to change of any of the cultural communities in Southeast Asia”

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<sup>20</sup> Many years ago, according to some informants, an Agta in Buhi had only one name. So, for example, if two Agta are named “Francisco”, they will attach a *bansag*, or alias, to their names for other people to distinguish who is who. Most often than not, however, it is other people who give them the *bansag* and not themselves.

as well as Rai's (1985:34) claim that "the Agta are among the most traditional groups of Philippine Negritos and represent one of the few-surviving hunter-gatherer societies in Asia" and Barbosa's (1985:16) claim that the "Agta are not a sedentary people" including OSCC's (1990:2) claim that they have managed to cling to their indigenous culture "despite the onslaught of western cultural influence" may no longer exactly apply.<sup>21</sup> But the effect of modernization on their lives is two-pronged. *One*, modern ideals reach and influence them as they make more contact with the lowlanders. And, *two*, this increasing contact with the lowlanders, in the Buhi Agta context, can be attributed to the fact that upland resources are continually being depleted, among others, which is highly instrumental in the modified behaviour of the Agta (cf. Headland and Headland, 1997:83).

Moreover, the government's current modernization programmes are highly instrumental in the changing economic activities and aspirations of the Agta people, both in Buhi and those in the northeastern part. For example, infrastructure projects--roads and bridges--not only transport goods from the remote barangays to the town and vice versa, nor does it only equate with a better and increased access to basic social services, it also brings with it the prospects for a "better" life other than living in the rural areas.

Relatedly, adopting a less traditional, or a more modern way of living requires numerous changes as far as the Buhi Agta, and the rest of the Agta Negritos of the Philippines are concerned. And this does not simply concern changing aspirations and diversification of livelihoods. The key to the attainment of their dreams could lie in the primacy of addressing two basic and highly significant aspects: *poverty* and *illiteracy* (cf. NCIP-V, 1999), two very disabling factors as far as social, economic and political development are concerned.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss these two current concerns of the Agta people and how they relate with their exclusion from state discourse formation. ●

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<sup>21</sup> This is understandable as their researches were conducted on the Agta populations on the northeastern part and not those of the Bicol Region.



## Chapter Four

# STATE DISCOURSE AND THE AGTA NEGRITOS

## The politics of discrimination and/or exclusion

*"Ideas cannot digest reality."*  
--Jean-Paul Sartre<sup>1</sup>

*"They would reconstruct society on an imaginary plan, much like the astronomers for their own calculation would make over the system of the universe."* --Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *on the utopian socialists*  
(in Scott, 1998:342).

### 4.1 Introduction

State discourse, in this study, refers to the Philippine state's policy on the country's ICCs/IPs, which specifically focuses on their rights to ancestral lands/domains. It was revealed in Chapter Two of this paper the extent and levels of involvement of various actors in the formation of state discourse on ancestral lands and/or domains, while the preceding chapter shows an evolving cultural and socio-economic practices of the Agta Negritos. The *former* reveals the exclusion of the Agta from the formation of the current state discourse on the IPs and thus shows that "the degree of ethnic difference matters [in the sense that] [t]he degree to which a society is not a level playing field but structured through policies of cultural privileging--privileging a cultural division of labour--is the degree to which the normalization of difference requires as a first step removing institutionalized groups" (Nederveen Pieterse, 1993:18). As such, the degree by which the Igorots in the north and the Muslims in the south, for example, participated in the formation of the current state discourse may lead one to infer that the "state [is] always dominated by particular social forces or ethnic group or combination of classes and/or ethnic groups, or as at most relatively autonomous from the dominant social, economic, or ethnic groups in society" (Brass, 1985:6). An assumption that may not be untrue when applied to the Philippine context.

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<sup>1</sup> quoted from James Scott's (1998:255) *Seeing Like A State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

On the other hand, the *latter* (Chapter Three) demonstrates that culture is evolving, that socio-economic activities are becoming more diversified, and that aspirations are changing, even with a group that used to be considered as traditional and resistant to change (cf. Headland, 1985:109; cf. Rai, 1985:34). In view of this, I have identified various factors that influenced this diversification of livelihoods and changing aspirations.

In this chapter, I argue that the Agta Negritos were never properly and meaningfully represented in the formation of the current state discourse on indigenous peoples. Hence, I hope to look into the politics of the exclusion and/or discrimination of the Agta Negritos. I hope to do this by juxtaposing the Agta on the one hand and the Muslims and the Igorots on the other. I have chosen the latter two among all the other ICCs/IPs in the country due to their major roles in the formation of current state discourse on ICCs/IPs as I have discussed in Chapter Two.

#### 4.2 State Discourse Formation: The Issue of Representation

The exclusion from and/or discrimination of the Agta Negritos in the formation of the current state discourse on ICCs/IPs may be traced to their reification and socioeconomic status. The Agta Negritos have undoubtedly been experiencing discrimination from both the wider society and the government (OSCC, 1990:3; NCIP-V, 1999; cf. Headland and Headland, 1997:84&87). This discrimination cannot only be blamed on racial distinction (Goodno, 1991:240; cf. Lynch, 1982:268; Headland and Headland, 1997:79) and thus, ethnic classification and/or ranking, but also on their socio-economic status.

##### **reification: the disabling factor**

Reification stunts the development of a particular group of people. "Stereotypes can sometimes function as self-fulfilling prophecies. A dominating group can stunt the intellectual development of a dominated group by systematically telling them that they are inferior" (Eriksen, 1993:24).<sup>2</sup> This stereotyping is highly evident in the statement:

<sup>2</sup> When the Spaniards called the Negritos as *Negritos*, it was to tell them that they are of inferior race, because they are black and small, and, thus, confine them to a certain compartment where they should "belong." This segregation and discrimination seems to have been carried on even after centuries of Spanish rule.

While giving land is an option to uplift the economic condition of the tribal people, cultural behavior must be taken into consideration. Since basically they are nomadic people, they might abandon their lot after a short period of time, as what happened in Ilian Settlement Area, Iriga City, where the pure Agta had abandoned their free house and lot given by the OSCC-V, Iriga City and left for the mountains (Mercurio, 1999).

Choosing to ignore evolving culture, diverse livelihoods and continually changing aspirations and, hence, lifestyles, means that they are confined to certain parameters and definitions that may have lost their validity in the course of the people's interactions with the lowlanders, market systems and the effects of modernization, as well as the basic dynamism inherent in ethnicity itself.

Ethnicity is protean. There are as many ethnicities as there are boundaries and frontiers that societies generate, and positions to take along them. Ethnic politics are highly contextual and local because they are affected by so many variables--socioeconomic change, changing centre-local relations, political transformation, historical mortgages (Nederveen Pieterse, 1993:18).

As such, they may either be excluded from any form of representation in the decision-making process, as is the case of the Agta Negritos, since they are viewed to be extremely traditional and nomads and, as such, uncaring of current political and economic processes and undertakings, or, they are made to undergo integration programs that may no longer be suited to their current aspirations and needs. However, although stereotypes "can justify privileges and differences in access to a society's resources," which may also be "crucial in defining the boundaries of one's own group" (Eriksen, 1993:24), it should be noted that "[c]ultural traits are not absolutes or simply intellectual categories, but are invoked to provide identities which legitimize claims to rights. They are strategies or weapons in competitions over scarce social goods" (Worsley, 1984 in Eriksen, 1993:36). In the competitions for this scarce social goods, as well as for power, certain factors may cause certain groups, such as the Agtas, to lose out in the fighting arena.

#### **power relations: rank and socioeconomic status as defining factors**

The issue of representations in the formation of state discourse involves power relations. Power may be determined by factors, such as ethnic classification and socioeconomic status. In the Philippines, in particular, there are three things from which power

may be derived: (a) the possession of wealth; (b) education; and (c) arms. As discussed in Chapter Two, the *ilustrados* and the landed elite were powerful and hence had more say in the formation and formulation of policies due to their wealth and education. The peasants, on the other hand, possessed no wealth, but they were backed by the armed rebel group, NPA. In the case of the Muslims and the Cordillerans, they had both education and arms. This made them more capable of effectively fighting for their rights and demands.

Moreover, based on the ethnic ranking or classifications as assigned by the Spanish colonial regime, which appears to have continued up to this day, the *Infieles* is “inferior” to the *Moros*. Among the *Infieles*, or the ICCs/IPs, however, the Igorots are considered to occupy the top rank (cf. Casiño, 1987:232-245), while the Negritos belong to the lowest rank, mainly because of their phenotypic differences (cf. Goodno, 1991:240; cf. Lynch, 1982:268; Headland and Headland, 1997:79).

#### *education*

Education is crucial for indigenous peoples to establish a political organization that will enable them to present their demands in an efficient way, consistent with the modern procedures (cf. Eriksen, 1993:127&130). In particular, while the NEDA (1998b:21) reports that IPRA, prior to its passing, underwent a series of consultations with the IPs, it is worth noting that these IPs groups were the more educated IPs<sup>3</sup> in the country, hence, better able to articulate their aspirations and demands from the government. In particular, the list of NEDA shows that no Agta groups from the northern, northeastern and southern regions of Luzon were represented. This means that the Igorots and the Muslims claimed representation. The reason for this is clear. The Agta Negritos are the least educated and thus possibly the IP group in the country with the lowest literacy rate so far.<sup>4</sup> As such, they are not as capable of articulating their demands as the others.

The ILO reports that among the indigenous population in the Philippines, the most numerous and most advanced are the Moro and the Igorot (1953:80). In particular, “[t]he

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Appendix F for the list of indigenous populations in the Philippines.

<sup>4</sup> I'd have wanted to present the literacy rate and/or educational attainments of all the other IPs groups in the country, but there is no available data on it. NEDA and NSO publishes only these kinds of statistics by region and/or by province, and ICCs/IPs belong to a region or province, hence, the absence of specific data. Nevertheless, please refer to Table 1, Appendix E, for an indication of the extent of illiteracy of the Agtas.

indigenous Cordillerans have had a high level of educational achievement..." (LCDP, 1997:IV-6). Figure 3 (Appendix H) shows that although the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has a lower literacy rate, which is 73.5 percent as of 1994, compared with Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), which is 88.8 percent as of 1994, it is still considerably high when compared with that of the Agta Negritos, which is approximately 4.1 percent as of 1995.<sup>5</sup> In fact, NCIP-V considers them to be illiterates (NCIP-V, 1999; cf. Romero, 1991:55).

#### *income, expenditures and savings*

In the Philippines, as is the case in all countries, income is a major determinant of whether or not an individual will get education or not. Subsequently, income has a direct correlation with poverty (cf. Miranda, Jr. 1988:12-15). It may be inferred, therefore, that "poverty has a negative impact on education" (Miranda, Jr., 1988:15), hence, a correlation with illiteracy. As the current economic activities of the Agta indicate, they, "...as are the other Negritos of the Philippines, are at the bottom of the Philippine socio-economic scale..." (Griffin, et.al., 1990:2). They live in "extreme poverty [and] ignorance" (OSCC, \_\_\_:2; Romero, 1991:53).<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, ARMM (Figure 4, Appendix H) and CAR (Figure 5, Appendix I) have been showing an improving economic status as shown by their family income, expenditures and savings record, a record promising enough when compared with that of the national level (Figure 6, Appendix I).

### 4.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I argued that the Agta Negritos have been excluded from the formation of current state discourse for political reasons. They were not organized enough to fight for their own cause due primarily to the fact that they are mostly illiterates and, hence, incapable of articulating their demands as effectively as did the Cordillerans and the Muslims. Power relations, therefore, played a vital role in this representation issue,

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to Table 1, Appendix E.

<sup>6</sup> Tuberculosis, considered to the "poor man's" sickness, is the number one cause of adult deaths among the Agta (Headland and Headland, 1997:82; Griffin, et.al., 1990:2).

which is definitely not a new phenomenon as it traces its roots in the colonial era (cf. Lynch and Talbott, 1995:86).

In this case, there was also the reinforcement of reification and/or stereotypes as systematic differences in access to resources is justified (cf. Eriksen, 1993:25). For “[t]o define particular regions, peoples and practices as marginal, disorderly, traditional, and/or in need of “development” is not simply to describe the social world: it is to deploy a discourse of power” (Li, 1999:11; cf. OSCC; \_\_; OSCC, 1990:3). In this context, the current state discourse on indigenous peoples and the formation of the same is, at the same time, a discourse of power, which is not only historical but political (cf. Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1999:156). ●

## Chapter Five

### CONCLUSION

#### Lessons and challenges

*"The question may be raised as to what the purpose or aim of a 'better comprehension of social transformation is.' The answer is not merely to arrive at a superior intellectual notion of knowing; it is important because how we understand social processes influences the way we look at and are involved in the processes of social transformation. The crying need for certain fundamental social changes that lead to a more humane society, needs no underlining. Human society is not a passive neutral entity on which forces such as modernisation and capitalism act, and where human beings drift towards the future as passive objects being acted upon. The impact of the present economic organisation of society and its perspectives is resulting in greater and greater social anomie and the tearing apart of community. Human beings as subjects of history do not merely react to these processes, but they have acted and do act to change the tide of events. Knowledge and knowledge structures are also part of that change."*

--Lawrence Surendra, 1989:284

State simplification, which started the moment the Filipino natives were classified into ethnic categories, undoubtedly has some advantages on some of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines. However, we cannot overlook the fact that, for some, there have been debilitating effects on their development. For example, being identified as indigenous is itself an act of simplification. The issuance of the IPRA to govern the IPs rights to their ancestral lands/domains is a clear indication of simplifying the management of people. But, what exactly does state simplification do for the people?

State simplifications have at least five characteristics that deserve emphasis. Most obviously, state simplifications are observations of only those aspects of social life that are of official interest. They are *interested*, utilitarian facts. Second, they are also nearly always written (verbal or numerical) *documentary* facts. Third, they are typically *static* facts. Fourth, most stylized state facts are also *aggregate* facts. Aggregate facts may be impersonal (the density of transportation networks) or simply a collection of facts about individuals (employment rates, literacy rates, residence patterns). Finally, for most purposes, state officials need to group citizens in ways that permit them to make a collective assessment. Facts that can be aggregated and presented as averages or distributions must therefore be *standardized* facts. However unique the actual circumstances of the various individuals who make up the aggregate, it is their sameness or, more precisely, their differences along a standardized scale or continuum that are of interest" (Scott, 1998:80).

State simplification, as such, may not be good in the sense that “officials of the modern state are, of necessity, at least one step—and often several steps—removed from the society they are charged with governing. They assess the life of their society by a series of typifications that are always some distance from the full reality these abstractions are meant to capture. Thus the foresters’ charts and tables, despite their synoptic power to distill many individual facts into a larger pattern, do not quite capture (nor are they meant to) the real forest in its full diversity. Thus the cadastral survey and the title deed are a rough, often misleading representation of actual, existing rights to land use and disposal” (Scott, 1998:76). What is more, sometimes, the real, existing relationships and situations within the village or area in question are never really taken into careful consideration, hence, the subsequent cases of problematic plans just like in Buhi, where the DENR<sup>1</sup> delineated about 19,970 ha. of land as ancestral lands/domains within a municipality of only 22,581 ha. (DENR, 1999)<sup>2</sup> whose population totals 60,796.

On the other hand, it may not really be a question of categorizations and/or codifications that matters most in current development plans but a question of how the state deals with such simplifications: whether to suit its own laid out plans or to respond to the more pressing needs of those from below. Nevertheless, one can’t help speculating on the many possibilities by which such simplifications may be utilized. Again, we go back to the issue of power and power relations and, once again, we see two main actors in the picture: one is dominating and the other one being dominated. And, again, we go back to minority-majority issues, black or white, big or small. Paul Brass’ statement is not very comforting either: “Most modern states either select certain categories of the population for favored or protected treatment or select certain areas of life in which inequality will be prohibited or establish rules that distribute inequalities in life impartially, or randomly. They do so for a variety of reasons. The state may be controlled by a class or ethnic group or some combination of classes and/or ethnic groups, whose members it chooses to favor. Or, the dominant groups may seek support among certain categories in the population and may adopt an “equalitarian” policy for that purpose. Or the state may choose a particular

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the agency tasked to issue Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims (CADC).

<sup>2</sup> This is based on CADC No. 097.



equalitarian strategy for its own administrative convenience" (Brass, 1985:7). This may sound pessimistic, but, how can we effectively address these socio-political ills?

The Philippine state identifies democratization as a strategy. Among others, democratization is believed to be an excellent remedy to the overconcentration, not only of resources, but, of decision-making privileges on the few. However, there are certain factors that determine whether or not democratization can thrive: One is "the conditions under which democratization can take place" (Parry and Moran, 1994:10). Another concern is "not analytical understanding, but practical realization" (p.10). And "the third problem in achieving democratization concerns what is happening to 'democratization within democracies'." (Parry and Moran, 1994:11). "[D]emocratization [thus] presents its own independent difficulties both for the scholar and for the practitioner: problems of explanation, realization and of interpretation" (Parry and Moran, 1994:12). Moreover, democracy is seen as an uncertain state despite its triumph as the ideology of the age, which makes democratization an uncertain process (Parry and Moran, 1994:15). In the Philippine context, these uncertainties may be blamed on some factors, most popular of which is that dominant class interests that are represented directly or indirectly in State power are indeed critical in determining the types of policies adopted and their effectiveness (Long, 1988:112). In this sense, "[d]emocracy becomes 'the rule of the politician' (Schumpeter 1943) rather than of the people in any direct sense. The politicians make possible some significant choice between packages of policies" (Parry and Moran, 1994:5).

At this point, we are confronted with the issue of and the complexities of the term "state" itself. "[T]he state is not purely and simply a relationship, or the condensation of a relationship; it is the specific material condensation of a relationship of forces among classes and class fractions" (Poulantzas, 1978:129). Further, Norman Long explains that "the State is essentially made up of a complex set of organisations, backed by executive power, which aims to control territory and people. Since many different social interests are represented which directly or indirectly shape the actions of the State, one cannot argue that State policies are simply deviations of either class relationships and struggles on the logic of capital accumulation" (1988:132). Along this line, "the political dimension of exclusion [...] involves the notion that the state, which grants basic rights and civil

liberties, is not a neutral agency but a vehicle of the dominant classes in a society” (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1999:28).

Nonetheless, a modernizing and democratizing State, whatever the circumstances, is expected to function according to the goals that it has set for itself. Hence, democratization programs are meant to be taken seriously. Paradoxically, the people who really need to be encouraged to participate and to be empowered to do such don't really have the opportunity to exercise their rights, in accordance with the law. Who should be blamed? Or is there a need for blaming? Blaming *per se* may not do anybody any good. However, tracing 'what happened', 'why', 'what could have been done', and 'how could it be done better in future' are evaluative questions that will most probably yield results of constructive character. That way, mistakes of the same nature may be avoided in future. But, how can this be done amidst reifications?

Reification is latent not only in state discourse but even in prevailing theories of ethnic groups and/or indigenous peoples (cf. Brass, 1985:24). They ignore the dynamic nature and changing aspirations of people today, as demonstrated by current socio-economic activities of the Agta people. Worsley, however, claims that “cultural traits are not absolutes or simply intellectual categories, but are invoked to provide identities which legitimize claims to rights. They are strategies or weapons in competitions over scarce social goods” (Eriksen, 1993:36). Indeed, indigenous peoples today simultaneously strive for self-determination and for a higher material standard of living (Eriksen, 1993:152). In a rapidly modernizing country as the Philippines, “indigenous people are compelled to relate to majorities, to states, and to capitalist systems of production and consumption [... As such,] the recodification or reification of culture and self-conscious assertion of identity displayed by some of them cannot be entirely divorced from this historical fact, and their ways of displaying their identities are confined to modern societies” (Eriksen, 1993:144). However, it is worth noting, as discussed in this paper, that “[d]iversity [...] happens to be the essential characteristic of culture throughout human history” (Kothari, 1989:43). Accordingly, Friedman theorizes that “it might seem difficult, if not wrong, to attempt to find unity in a world that is increasingly described in terms of fragmentation, disintegration, meaninglessness and cultural mix” (Friedman, 1991, in Eriksen, 1993:150). Hence, problematizing reification as detrimental to a people's evolutionary

transformation, as in the case of the Agta Negritos, may not be unfounded. For modernization and its impacts can never be simply wished away.

The current state discourse on indigenous peoples came into existence as part of the government's program of focusing on a people-centered development, with the primary goal of addressing inequity, inequality and land insecurity. All of these are crucial for the attainment of development, or the vision of Philippines 2000, strategies of which include democratization, which is defined as making people count in the development process. The ideal scenario is through empowerment and/or giving all people, especially those in the grassroots, the opportunity to participate in decision making. As such, democratization will not only be measured in terms of the right of suffrage, which many politicians and government officials herald as the rule of the people. However, true democratization should not just be taken to mean the right to vote and to be elected to public office. More importantly, it should be taken as an avenue for valuing a nation's citizenry.

Ironically, the case of the Agta Negritos' discrimination from the current state discourse on IPs showed that development can be exclusionary and that in development there is discrimination. That there is poverty amidst plenty. That while the intention was to formulate a policy out of the voice of the people, the truth reverberated however painful it might have been: the Agta, due to factors that set them apart from the rest, was excluded from the decision-making process for reasons that even they may consider perplexing. While democratization is expected to address this deficiency, the process itself is problematic in the sense that certain factors that cannot be simply wished away are too persistent to be simply ignored.

In this paper, I have discussed how discourse formation is inextricably linked to issues of power and control. Power relations is one major obstacle to the flourishing of democratization. And, in the Philippines, issues of power are congruent not only to issues of land rights, but whether or not true democratization will indeed be achieved. History tells us that it will be a long, tough battle, and wishing for it to vanish into oblivion is totally impossible. If this were so, the question now is: Can development be achieved even without democratization?

With this question, we will have to go back to the issue of development itself. Although development is a multi-faceted phenomenon that is amenable to analytical speculation, normative evaluation and practical engagement, it is the connotation of direct intervention through policy-making and implementation that gives it a distinctive meaning (Hall and Midgley, 1988:1-9). In conventional terms, however, development refers to a “strengthening of the material base of the state, mainly through industrialization in a form remarkably similar from one country to another. In this sense, development is identical with modernization”(Bjorn, 1996). But, true development, as desired by the Philippine government is based on a people-centered and participatory approach to development, through democratization. The issuance of the IPRA was a move to advance the process of democratization. Unfortunately, it wasn’t able to enlist the participation of *all* people who are expected to benefit from this law.

In view of this, the formation of discourses as part of a collective action may make a lot of difference as demonstrated in this study, whereby the peasants, the Muslims and the Igorots lobbied and virtually fought for their demands, although it was indeed an uphill battle for them. However, discourse formation on the part of the people may not be as easy. “Development indeed involves communication” (Williams, 1996:45). And, in a world that is becoming more and more globalized and modernized, communication entails more than simply learning to read and write. More than anything else, addressing the problems of today is far more important than addressing the concerns of the future. For the Agta Negritos of the Philippines, the future may look bleak, but there is hope and that is what matters for now. ●

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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions.

2. It is essential to ensure that all entries are supported by appropriate documentation and are entered in a timely manner.

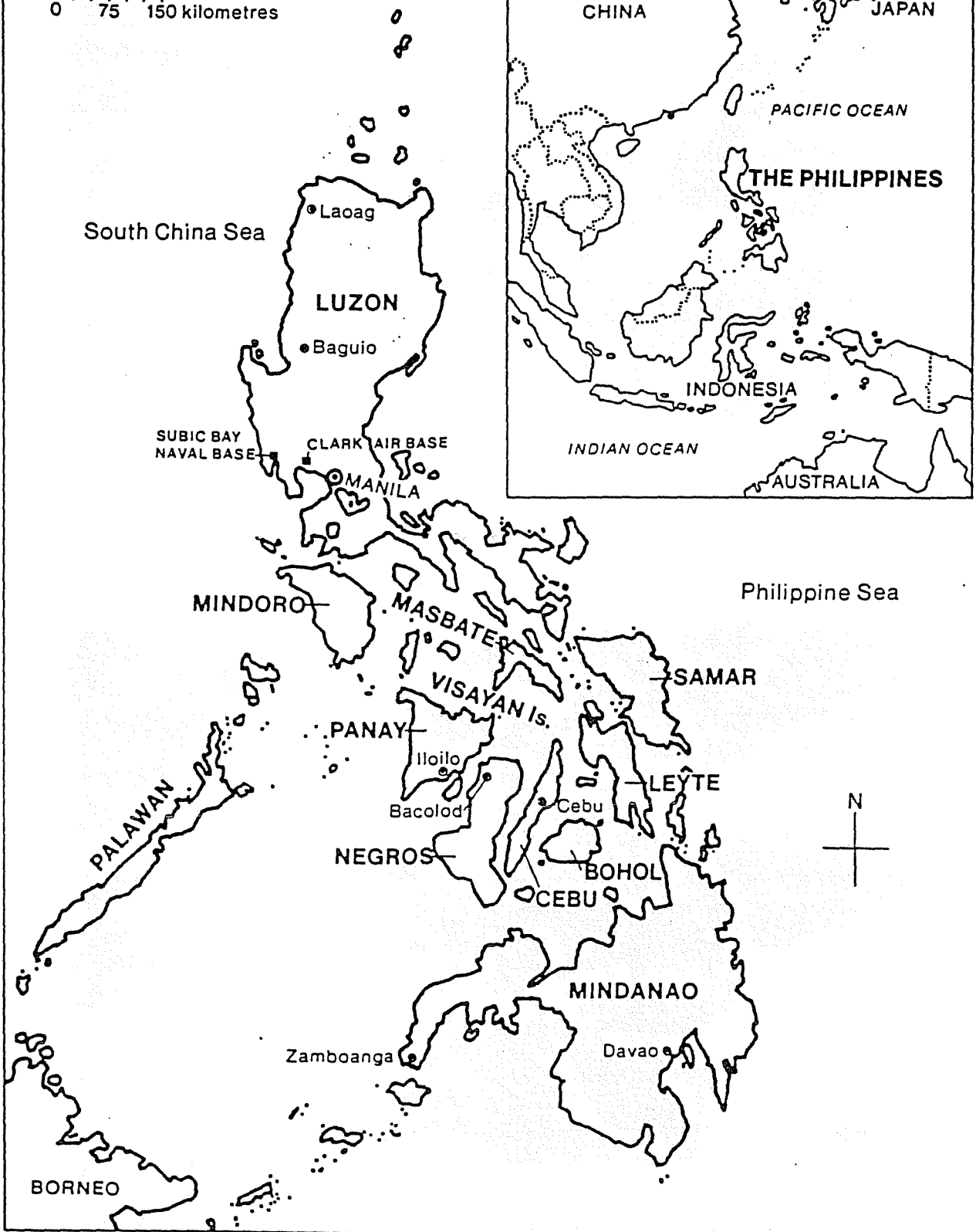
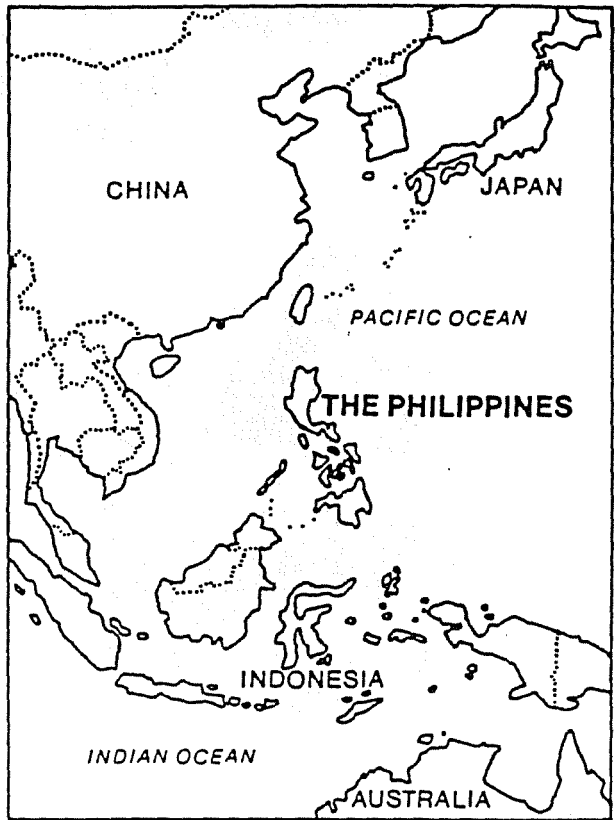
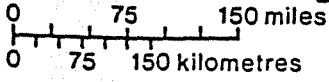
3. The second part of the document outlines the procedures for reconciling bank statements with the company's records.

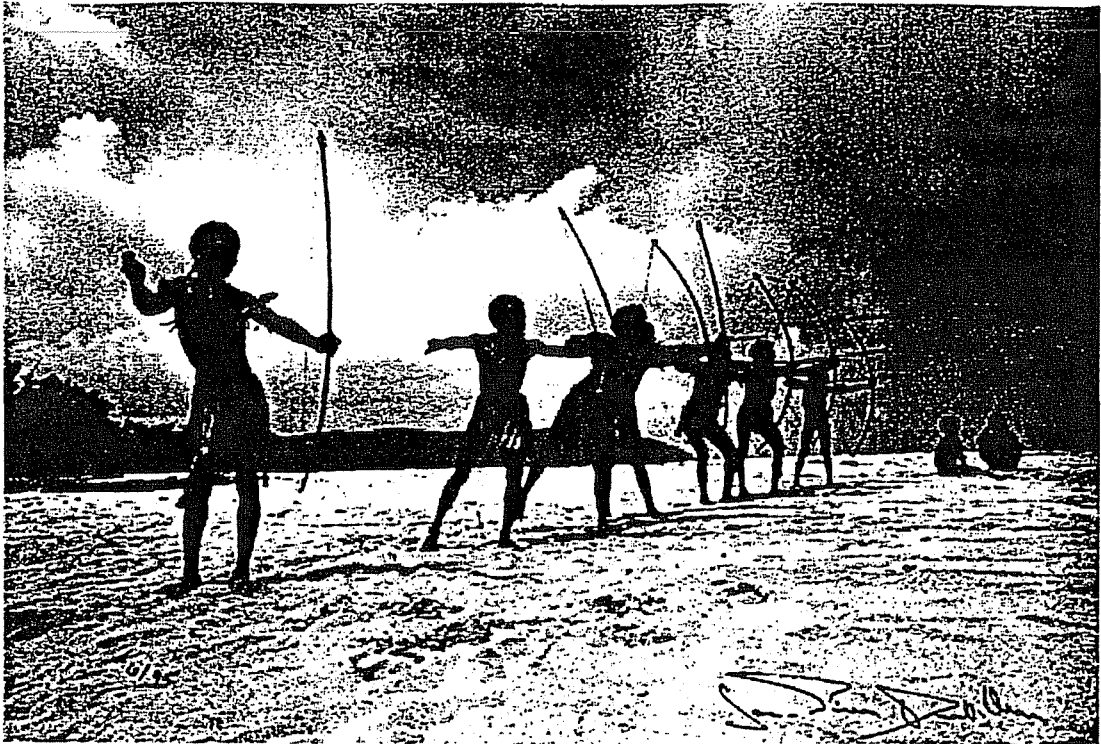
4. This section provides a detailed explanation of the various methods used to verify the accuracy of the financial data.

5. The final part of the document concludes with a summary of the key points and a list of references.

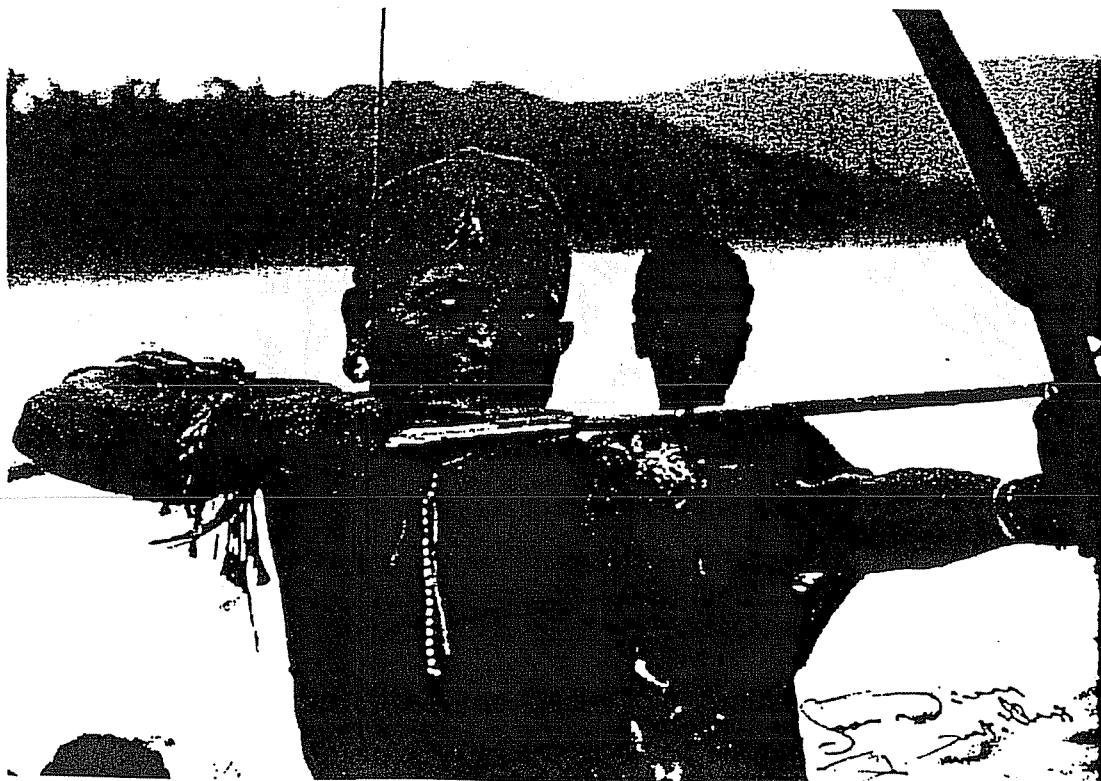


# The Philippines





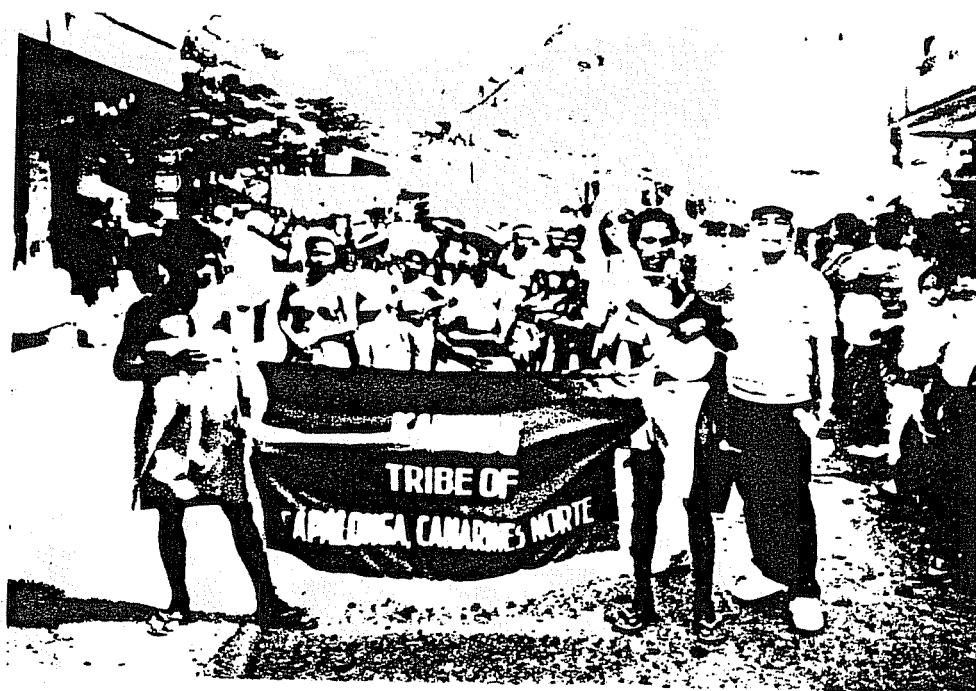
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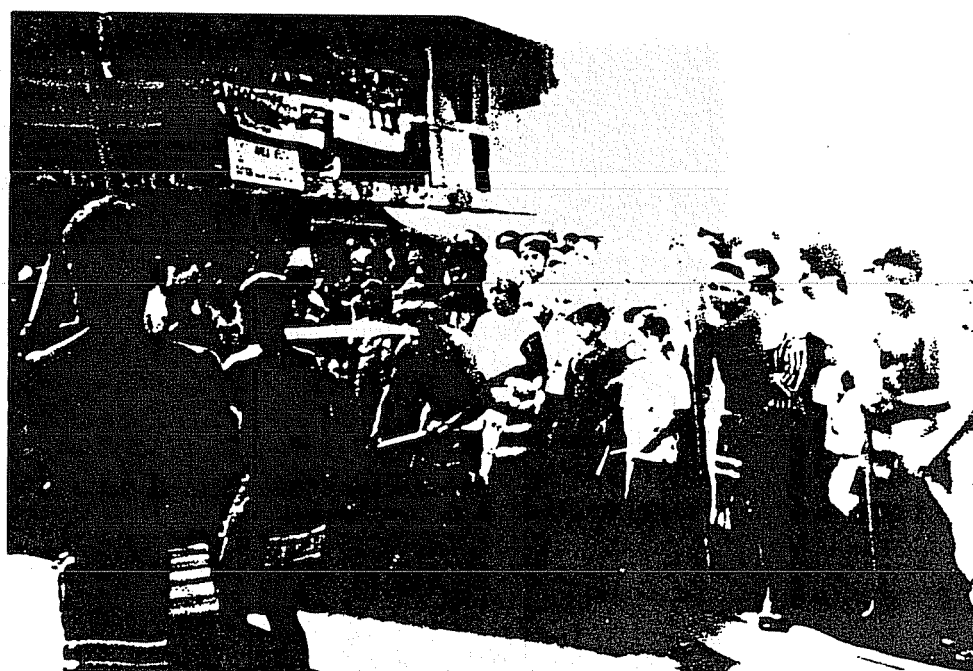


▲  
*The Buhi Agta today*  
▼





▲  
*The Agta during parades and/or special occasions such as "Araw ng mga Katutubo" (Tribal Peoples' Day).*  
▼







<b>Table 1: Philippine Agta Negritos: Group, Location and Literacy Rate</b>			
<b>GROUP</b>	<b>SPECIFIC LOCATION</b>	<b>LITERACY RATE</b>	<b>REMARKS</b>
2. Agta, Camarines Norte	Luzon, Sta. Elena, Labo, Camarines Norte	-do-	Survey needed
3. Agta, Casiguran Dumagat	East Coast of Luzon, north Quezon Province	2.4%	-
4. Agta, Central Cagayan	Northeast Luzon	3%	-
5. Agta, Dupaninan	Northeast Luzon, from below Divilacan Bay in the South to Palau Island in the North	1%	-
6. Agta, Isarog	Mt. Isarog east of naga City, Bicol Province Luzon	No available data	Nearly instinct
7. Agta, Dicomay	Northeast Luzon, Isabela Prov., near Jones	No available data	Extinct
8. Agta, Mt. Iraya (Inagta of Mt. Iraya, Rugnot of Lake Buhi East, Lake Buhi East, Itbog Rugnot)	East of Lake Buhi, Bicol Province, Luzon	No available data	Survey needed
9. Agta, Mt. Iriga (San Ramon Inagta, Lake Buhi West, Mt. Iriga Negrito)	East of Iriga City, west of Lake Buhi, Bicol Province, Luzon	No available data	Survey needed
10. Agta, Remontado (Hatang-Kayey, Sinauna)	Luzon, Sta. Inez, Rizal Province, Paimohuan, General Nakar, Quezon Province	No available data	Survey needed
11. Agta, Umiray Dumaget	Umirey Dumagat, Umiray Agta	5 to 10%	-
12. Agta, Villaviciosa	Luzon, Abra Province	No available data	Survey needed

**LIST OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS OF THE PHILIPPINES<sup>1</sup>**

**Luzon**

1. Agta Cagayan
2. Agta Casiguran
3. Aeta
4. Pakkak Gadang
5. Pugot
6. Pinatubo Negritos
7. Apayao
8. Gaddang
9. Ibanag
10. Ilongot
11. Itneg
12. Malaweg
13. Paranan
14. Bontok
15. Ifugao
16. Igorot
17. Isneg
18. Itneg
19. Kalinga
20. Kankanay
21. Tinggian

**Palawan**

1. Batak
2. Palawan
3. Tagbanwa
4. Taut'batu

**Mindanao**

1. Mangwanga
2. Tasaday
3. Mamanwa
4. Manobo Ata
5. Bagobo
6. Blaan
7. Blit

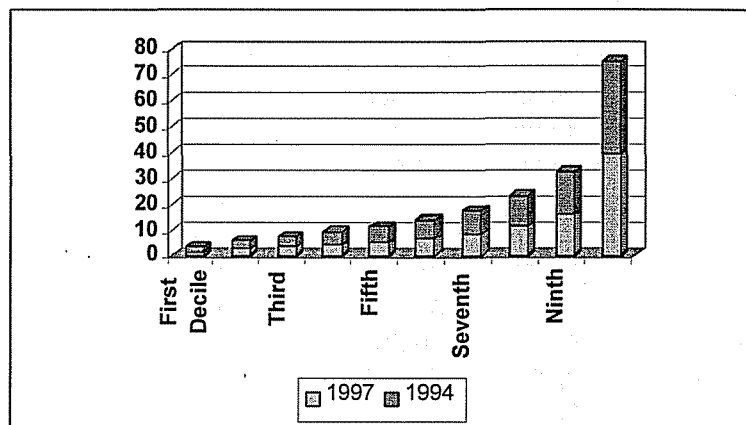
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<sup>1</sup> Source: APET Pilot Report, 1999. <http://www.lucy.ukc.ac.uk/Sonja/RF/Ukpr/Report86.htm>. accessed September 6, 1999.



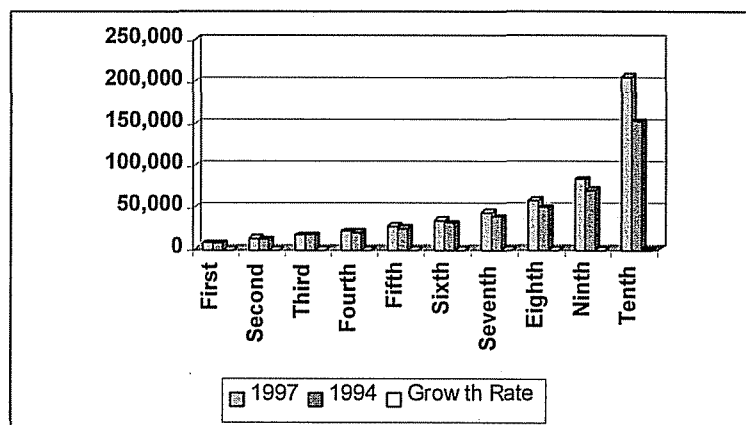
Appendix G

**Figure 1: Income Decile Distribution of Families in the Philippines: 1994, 1997**



Source: National Statistics Office

**Figure 2: Average Family Income at Constant Prices, by Decile: 1994, 1997 (in Pesos)**



Source: National Statistics Office

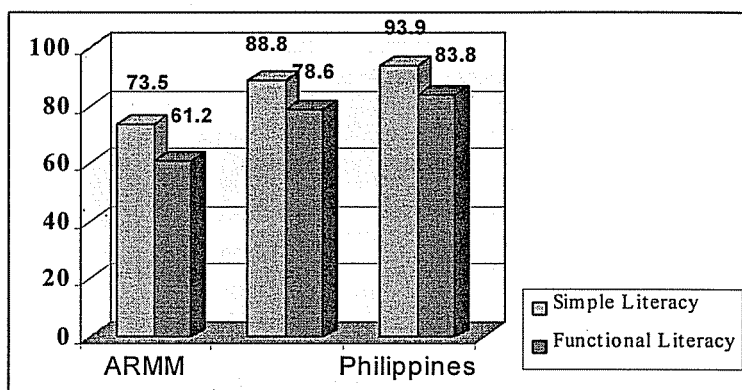
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**Average Family Income at Constant Prices,  
by Decile: 1994, 1997 (In Pesos)**

	1997	1994	Growth Rate
First	8,621	8,040	7.2
Second	13,801	13,002	6.1
Third	17,783	16,839	5.6
Fourth	22,187	20,911	6.1
Fifth	27,676	25,630	8
Sixth	34,751	31,478	10.4
Seventh	44,715	39,062	14.5
Eighth	59,149	50,558	17
Ninth	83,648	70,363	18.9
Tenth	205,543	152,106	35.1

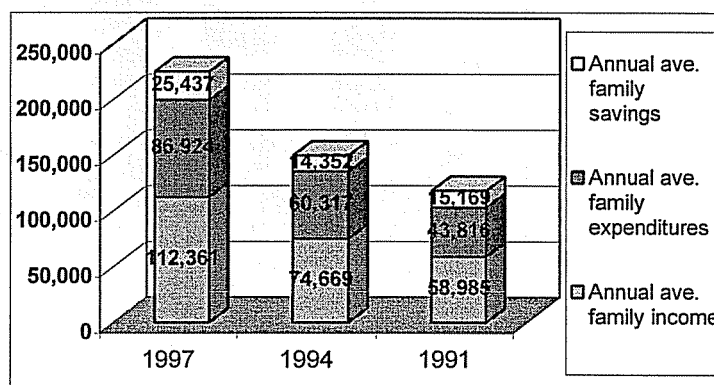
Appendix H

**Figure 3. Literacy Rate: 1994  
ARMM, CAR, Philippines**



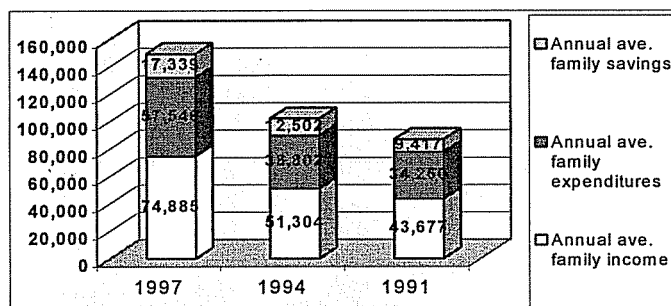
Source: NSO, 1997-1999a, b & c

**Figure 4. ARMM Family Income and Expenditures**



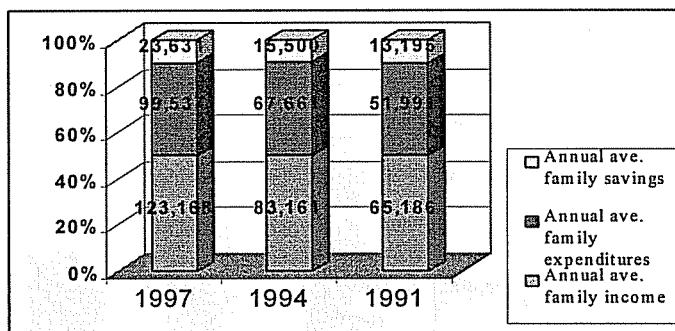
Source: NSO 1997-1999a

**Figure 5: CAR Family Income and Expenditures**



Source: NSO 1997-1999b

**Figure 6: Income and Expenditures, Philippines**



Source: NSO, 1997-1999c