



mabuhay sa pilipinas
welcome to the philippines

This booklet contains some information about the ecological crisis and the struggle against it in the Philippines. Hopefully it is interesting or useful to you. I have tried to make quite a broad overview of the political situation in the Philippines, a report of the understanding I tried to develop in 4 months travelling around the communities of resistance as a visiting western eco-anarchist.

We went to the Philippines as a small group of people connected in various degrees to the Earth First network in the UK. Our initial plan was to spend much of our time involved with one project (Dipunatian – see p. 31). However, before leaving Europe we realised that it was likely that political problems with this project would mean we would not spend so much time there. But by this time we had made links with various anarchist collectives around the Philippines, and were excited to meet them. This all left us with a bit of a lack of focus, but we knew that at least we wanted to try and understand the struggles there with a view to instigating solidarity projects from our own countries in the future.

Certainly I do not claim in those four short months, my first visit to the country, to have really completely understood all the complexities of the situation there. Certainly it became clear that there were many different versions of the truth, and many Filipinos weren't all that bothered by this, and maybe that's OK. Being authoritative is a bit too close to authority for my liking anyway.

So here's my interpretation. The focus is on indigenous people, their lives and struggle, as well as the rampant ecological destruction. After a bit of general history, and overviews of the ecological and social situations in the Philippines, part 2 looks at the particular problems that are driving the destruction of indigenous societies and ecological systems. Then in part 3 an analysis of the resistance movements, followed by 5 case studies of places that we visited, and a bit of personal evaluation to finish off. As much as possible is drawn from first hand conversations with people, but I've added lot of information from books and papers and so on. Especially in the first half there is a lot of information that I have had to take from various NGOs, rather than my personal experiences, and it is inevitable that some of their analysis has crept in to what I write. There's no footnotes, but a list of sources at the end.

I'm writing predominanatly for other ecological activists in the west, to try and give some sort of impression about what ecological struggle means in the third world, both to inspire you in your own action and to motivate specific solidarity action. There is a huge level of struggle there and it is very powerful and inspiring, but one thing I'm not prepared to do is to glamorise or romanticise it, in the way that so often happens to third world struggles in the west. There is nothing sexy about fighting for your land, there is nothing special about the movements in the Philippines – resistance is just a necessity for most of the population of the world. And I feel also that when indigenous resistance is portrayed in such a romanticised way, then it is more difficult to understand and relate to people's motivation for struggle – it becomes something distant, estranged from our own lives and resistance. So if the lack of hype bores you, then sorry.

Maybe I've gone a bit over the top on information for some people. I'm afraid that's just the way I am – I can't bring myself to leave out anything that might be relevant or interesting. But hopefully it is a useful background for anyone who does really want to know what is going on in the Philippines, and if you're thinking of going there, then it's probably a bit more relevant than a Lonely Planet!

Part 1. Seven Thousand Islands

colonial history of the philippines

When the first Europeans arrived in 1521 with Magellan's fleet, and announced conquest of the islands, they were not the first foreign visitors. There had been trading with Chinese merchants in the north for about 5 centuries, and in the south, contact with Arab traders had led to the creation of several powerful sultanates, and the widespread practice of Islam.

Magellan landed in Cebu, and travelled around some local islands, working out what was there and trying to convert the natives to Christianity. He met his timely end on the island of Mactan at the hands of Lapu-Lapu, an early rebel, and the remnants of his expedition fled back to Spain.

It was 43 years before the Spanish returned, under Legaspi, to make another attempt to colonise the archipelago. This time they were more successful and stayed 350 years. It was to a large degree a religious colonisation – at the time of conquest the Spanish Inquisition was still going on, and the Catholic Church was a powerful force in society. The friars from the main religious orders – Dominican, Augustinian, Benedictine, Jesuit, took control over all the land and even had considerable power over the Spanish military. They set to the immense task of conversion and instilling Catholic moral values – a task which met with much resistance from the Filipinos, who had been used to relaxed and liberal sexuality, and a belief system focussed around the environment and healing spirits, where women, including transgender people, took the role of spiritual leaders.

The friars built up huge haciendas in Luzon and the Visayas from which they maintained what was pretty much a rule of terror. There are some indications that all the 'bad elements' in the church were sent to the Philippines, it being very much a backwater of the Spanish empire, and the furthest point from Spain. It wasn't until the 1890s though, that anyone seriously challenged the abuses of the church, and the person who did was Jose Rizal, in his book 'Noli Me Tangere'.

Encouraged by its success, Rizal wrote more books and articles, with progressively more revolutionary themes. This stirred a popular movement for national liberation - the Katipunan - and made Rizal something of a national hero, a reputation that he still holds today. He was thrown into prison, but this did not deter the Katipunan movement, which continued to grow in strength through the mid-1890s. The Spanish started to get worried, and tried to scare the movement by publicly executing Rizal in Luneta Park in 1896. It backfired, the revolutionary movement really kicked off, and two years later the Spanish were on the verge of being defeated, their only real stronghold being the Intramuros, the walled inner city of Manila.

By this time the Americans had just defeated the Spanish in an eight-month war over Cuba, and approached the Katipunan leaders offering to help with their independence movement. Although they were on the verge of victory anyway, the Filipinos accepted the offer. The Americans contributed by sinking the Spanish Navy, but weren't prepared just to leave the spoils of victory to a bunch of revolutionaries. They negotiated with the Spanish, and bought the islands off them for \$20million.

The revolutionary forces were none too happy with this turn of events, as you might imagine. They had just won a revolution, and now ended up with a new colonial power running their country. The Americans tried to hide what they had done under a mask of liberation, but over the next ten years the repression of the revolutionary movement they had betrayed cost between 1 and 2 million lives.

Like the Spanish before them, the Americans used religion as a means of control. They shipped over 1000 young missionaries, known as the Thomasites, to educate the Filipinos and win their loyalty. The Thomasites set up free public schools in many places, and taught children patriotic American literature

and history, requiring them to, for example, learn the Gettysberg address by heart. With such a boring and antagonistic curriculum, it is not surprising that the Thomasites often had to use physical force to bring children to class.

America's push to make money out of their new colony was unprecedented. A raft of new laws gave them overwhelming control, most notably the land act of 1902, which gave title over much of the land surface to the US government. The mining, logging and plantation industries all took off under the Americans, and new roads, bridges and ports were built.

However, it sat somewhat uneasily with the US political system to so blatantly own colonies. In 1935 they finally yielded to nationalist pressure and created the Philippine Commonwealth, designed to be replaced with a fully independent state 10 years later. Like all exiting colonial powers though, this step was only taken when they realised that they would still be able to maintain their economic interests under the form of independence they would grant.

A few years later the Second World War came along, the Japanese invaded and the Filipinos found themselves under a new colonial power. A guerrilla resistance movement, the Hukbalahap, or Huk for short, started fighting in the mountains. But after the war was won, and the Philippines was declared an independent republic in 1946, the Huk rebels were still fighting. They believed that the Philippines was not truly independent, and was still being run in the interest of the old imperial power – a state known as neo-colonialism.

Of course it was true. The Americans still exercised substantial control over the country, administered from their air and naval bases in Clark and Subic. They backed the Philippine army in tracking down the last groups of Huk rebels and quashing their resistance.

It was in 1968 that the next armed rebellion sprung up. A group of radicals set up a new Communist Party of the Philippines along Maoist lines, and their armed wing, the New People's Army, followed soon afterwards. They saw themselves as the successors to the revolutionaries at the turn of the century who had had the victory snatched immediately away from under them, and the more recent Huk rebels. Their program was to fight what they identified as the two faces of oppression in the Philippines, the semi-colonial control that the imperial powers maintained, and the semi-feudal system that was enforced by large landowners. For this reason they identified themselves as nationalists and democrats. Their strategy was one of protracted people's war – gradually building up military strength in the countryside, whilst building up a united front of support in all sectors of society.

In the South, the Moro people, or Muslims were also starting to organise about the same time. They were angry at the way their land had been taken by the Americans, and by the influx of settlers displaced from land on more northerly islands. They also started to engage in armed guerrilla rebellion, under the Moro National Liberation Front, which was politically more orientated towards national liberation than Islamic revolution.

About this time Ferdinand Marcos became president and started consolidating his grip on power, and plundering the Philippine economy for his own personal fortune. That he was a corrupt and authoritarian dictator didn't bother the Americans so much, Marcos made sure that he was always a man that they could do business with. And they were especially pleased when he introduced martial law in 1972 - the Philippines was still their base in a part of the world that was in severe danger of being lost to the communists. Many political opponents and activists were killed or disappeared during the years of martial law, and the ecological systems, particularly the forests, were ravaged yet further.

Marcos was eventually toppled in a popular uprising – the EDSA revolution – in 1986, and replaced with Corazon Aquino, who didn't have the public image of a dictator, but wasn't much less corrupt and did little to sort out the mess of the Marcos years. The three presidents since Aquino have also been

much the same, following whatever policies the USA wants them to.

The US bases were finally closed in 1991, after years of campaigning by a huge social movement demanding their closure, but also after Clark air base was thoroughly looted during a period of evacuation following the eruption of Mount Pinatubo. But the US influence continues: a USAID project AGILE (Accelerated Growth through Investment Liberalisation and Equity), working through a consultants named Development Alternatives Inc, has been working at the heart of Philippine government over the last few years, to rewrite laws and make sure they fit in with the neoliberal aims of the US. Their successes include the Plant Variety Protection Act, which ensures farmers will have to buy seeds from big corporations each year, the commercialisation of genetically modified Bt corn, and the Mining Act of 1995, which allows mining multinationals much greater access to the Philippines.

Of course, the Philippines has not been exempt from the trends towards globalisation over the last few decades, and exploitation does not solely come from the United States any more. Multinational corporations from around the world are joining the plunder, and destructive projects funded by the World Bank and Asian Development bank have many times been resisted. Japanese development money in particular has also been widely criticised for its antisocial role.

And in the hills... the NPA are still fighting 34 years later, the MNLF settled for a role administering a partially autonomous region but the Moro Islamic Liberation Front continue to struggle for independence for the Moro people. There are also many indigenous struggles against large development projects, but how genuinely independent they are of the leftist movement, which after all these years is now very strong, I am not sure.

ecological overview - a story of devastation in statistics

The level of ecological destruction in the Philippines is totally critical – just to give the figures is not the full story, but they are shocking enough...

Forests once covered almost the entirety of the archipelago. Now the forest cover is down to 18.6%. Maybe 3% is old growth virgin rainforest. Despite this the levels of plant and animal biodiversity in these forests are still amongst the highest in the world, including 3,500 species of trees, 2,400 species of fish, 240 different mammals and so on. At least 3000 of these species are endemic, they are not found outside the Philippines. But in the increasingly fragmented habitat, they are disappearing fast.

Forests also support other ecological and social systems around the islands. In particular they control water flow, which can be considerable in the rainy season. Lack of forests to capture water leads to erosion (estimated at 1 billion cubic metres of topsoil a year) and flooding further down the mountain slopes, and the effects can be felt even out to sea where eroded silt from the mountainside destroys coral reefs. Excessive runoff in the wet season can cause a lack of groundwater in the dry season, which creates problems for farmers and other inhabitants of the lowlands. The figure of 18.6% forest cover can be compared against the 54% that studies claim is needed to preserve these other ecosystems. The major cause of forest destruction has been the logging industry.

Out in the sea, the situation is equally bleak. Already in 1977, the last time that a really comprehensive survey was done, only 5% of reefs were estimated as containing over 75% live coral, with another 25% containing over 50% live coral. As well as the siltation already mentioned from logging and mining, coral destruction can be caused by dynamite or cyanide fishing, and changes in water temperature triggered by global climate change.

Mangroves are also critically threatened. This rich littoral ecosystem has been reduced by over three-quarters from the level in 1918. Particular culprits here have been the boom in cultivated prawn farms for the export market, and the destruction of corals causing more fierce waves to break onto the shoreline.

Pollution causes problems in many areas of the country. The quality of the air in Metro Manila is some of the worst in the world, and the water in Manila Bay isn't much better – people are advised against swimming and various toxic algal blooms frequently break out which kill many people who eat shellfish caught in the bay. In the former US bases at Clark and Subic, over 200 people have become ill from the toxic waste left there by the Americans when they left, and mine wastes also cause serious pollution and health problems in various parts of the country.

For all these reasons, several international environmental NGOs put the Philippines pretty much right at the top (sometimes vying with Madagascar) of their lists of 'hotspots', those places in the world where the last remaining biodiversity is being destroyed at the fastest rate. Their formula is a pretty crude method of gauging conservation priority, that is applicable to large companies who are throwing huge sums of money around, and does not bear so much relevance to those fighting ecological struggles on the ground, yet it does give some small indication of just how desperate the Philippine situation is.

peoples of the forests

There are some 30 – 80 tribes in the Philippines; to be more exact than this is not particularly necessary, as how anthropologists classify a tribe does not always agree with how the groups themselves see each other. The estimated number of people who fit into the category 'indigenous people' is around 3 million, out of a total population of the Philippines of 85 million.

The largest concentrations of indigenous communities are on the island of Mindanao in the South, where the non-Muslim tribes are known as Lumads, the Cordillera mountains of northern Luzon, where the people are Igorot, the island of Mindoro south of Manila (Mangyan), and the long far-west island of Palawan. With a few exceptions indigenous communities are now confined to the mountains, or coastlines that have remained undeveloped because of their proximity to mountains, as other lands have been taken over.

Most indigenous groups live traditionally by agricultural means – that is, unless their land has been taken from them. The degree to which this is for subsistence varies, but it is inevitable that for most groups there is some degree of involvement with the lowland economy. Sometimes this can be products gathered from the forest, such as rattan, which can be made into mats and baskets, or orchids, sold for decoration. For many groups the agriculture itself is very integrated with the forest, the much-maligned practice of swidden cultivation or kaingin, ie clearing a small patch of forest for planting and then moving on after few years. The forest can also provide meat for those tribes that continue to hunt, although with such reduced wildlife in the secondary forest that now covers much of the archipelago, scope is limited. But it is definitely the case that, out of all the population of the Philippines, the indigenous peoples are usually the most dependant on the forest, and its ecological integrity, whether for hunting, gathering or farming.

Gatherer-hunter culture is particularly associated with the Negrito tribes, Agta, Aeta, Ati, Dumagat, Mamanuwa – who it is believed were the original inhabitants of the Philippines, arriving some 25–30,000 years ago, as opposed to the Malay-Filipinos who came to the islands just 3000 years ago. These tribes look different to the majority of Filipinos, they have kinky hair and black skin and are very short. Although most of them do some farming, and possibly have done for many generations, if they have forest, they still continue to hunt and gather. What they do seem to be good at, if you believe people who write about them, is diversifying, not being too dependant on any one means of supplying their food needs, and possibly for this reason they are reluctant to become pure agriculturalists. Possibly because they are the least civilised of the indigenous societies, or maybe because they do not have a warrior history, or maybe simply because they have darker skin, it seems they can sometimes be much more easily exploited than others, although blatant discrimination is widespread against all tribes.

talking about tribes

I have been using the terms 'indigenous' and 'tribal' interchangeably so far and will continue to do so as am too lazy to bother with any consistency. Actually I am not too happy with either of these concepts. The distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous is not the same in the Philippines as it would be in, say, Australia or the Americas, where the indigenous people are the original precolonial inhabitants, from before the European invasion. This would describe everybody in the Philippines; the term indigenous is reserved for those who through resistance or remoteness, have managed to avoid assimilation into the mainstream culture. 'Indigenous to a certain place' can also not distinguish the tribes from the mainstream culture, as many in the mainstream have firm local roots going back many generations, as the fact there are so many local languages shows.

The only sense that 'indigenous people' can be distinguished as more 'indigenous' than anybody else is because of an ancestral cultural and spiritual connection to the land they inhabit. The definition in the Indigenous People Rights Act (see p. 19), a piece of law that supposedly advocates for indigenous peoples, gives this sort of sense: "Indigenous People/ Indigenous Cultural Communities refer to a group of people sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilised a territory. These terms shall likewise or in the alternative refer to homogenous societies identified by self-ascription or ascription by others, who have continuously lived as community on community bounded and defined territory, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, and who have, due to resistance to political, social and cultural roads of colonisation, become historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos."

But as that culture is eroded, as is happening to every indigenous group in the Philippines, where do you draw the line and stop giving them the special distinction of being 'indigenous'? After all, the Welsh for example, have special local cultural traditions, but no-one would call them indigenous! What I'm trying to get at is that for those of us who place a value on ways of life that are more ecological and less assimilated into the civilised worldview, and not just wanting to describe ethnicity, the word indigenous is not really good enough.

The word 'tribal' also has its problems, because it has connotations of defined groups, and particularly implies boundaries to those groups, and this is to my mind a simplification. In some, but not all cases, boundaries do exist, but when they do they have a meaning for the groups themselves arising from their culture, traditional economy and history. Other times the boundaries are convenient lines drawn by anthropologists whenever the observed language or customs vary sufficiently to declare a separate ethno-linguistic group.

There is probably an element to which the tribes themselves receive and internalise civilised notions of 'tribalism'. For generations they have been told how they are categorised by outsiders who want to study them and this gradually becomes their own definition. For example, I was told by one negrito chieftain 'here there are two tribes, the Dumagats and the Remontados.' Since Dumagat is the Tagalog (Filipino) word for 'by the sea' and Remontado is Spanish for 'gone back to the hills', it seems unlikely that in precolonial times a distinction was drawn between the two peoples.

To me it is important to clearly distinguish between any traditional indigenous concept of 'tribe' or 'people' that might exist, and those who try and represent such concepts in the western worldview. Many racists justify their ideology with the notion that tribes, (for which we can read races) are a natural state of being. But not coming from tribal groups themselves, they have merely invoked an alienated idea of what a tribe really is in order to fit their dodgy politics.

So, with these major reservations about the words, I will continue to use both the terms indigenous peoples and tribes, for want of anything better. Also you might see written here a few times 'katabubo', the Tagalog term, and also 'IP', the cute Filipino shorthand for indigenous peoples.

ecology and peasant society

Whilst it is the indigenous peoples that tend to be the most closely integrated with, and dependant on, the ecological systems that surround them, other parts of society also have a lot to lose also, and that is why militant ecological struggle does not only come from the indigenous people - many of the resistance groups have come from the mainstream peasant society.

Essentially the problem is that if you are so poor you live on the margin of subsistence, then ecological change can totally destroy your life. Floods can rush off the denuded mountain slopes and destroy your whole crop for a year, maybe your house as well, and then what do you do? There's no insurance policy to claim on, no savings to tide you over to next year. Or if you are a fisher, maybe the same floods bring lots of silt down and smother the coral reefs, again knocking out your source of livelihood in one go.

Clean water is another area of dependence. In the countryside, no-one is paying a water company to ensure the arrival of clean water; most people would not have the money to pay this anyway. Settlements persist when there is water, and if for some reason connected to the logging or mining industries the water dries up, then again what to do is hard to imagine. If the water becomes polluted this is also a big problem. And it is not only in financial terms that people live on the margin - poor diets mean additional changes such as unclean water make people more susceptible to health problems.

Ecological problems also affect the urban poor. Air pollution in Metro Manila is poisoning the thousands of vendors who have to spend all day every day on the streets. Garbage dumps create widespread health problems for the slum dwellers that live around them and also the scavengers who work on them - of the scavengers in Metro Manila, 40% have skin diseases and 70% respiratory illnesses.

Back in Europe, I frequently hear comments like 'I wouldn't swim in that river, it's too polluted' or 'it doesn't matter so much if they destroy this piece of habitat, there's plenty more left'. But in the third world every river and every patch of land is supporting people's existence. The economy is directly connected to the land, rivers and seas in a way that the West has long forgotten about. And the pace at which the ecological systems are degraded or destroyed is faster than we have ever known.

But the general population in the Philippines, even those not directly engaged in struggle, had, in my experience, a much higher consciousness about ecology than anything I have encountered in the West. The importance of forest cover, biodiversity etc. nearly everyone in rural areas is able to explain - often using language that in the west is only heard from academic ecologists. People knew how critically endangered their ecological systems were, and exactly what is destroying them, and the various interconnections between parts of the biosphere, e.g. forests and water. Much of this is from experience of course - the ecological systems are a vital part of their daily life - but many people seem also to have a global consciousness - they know that ecosystems in the Philippines are amongst the most endangered and also the most diverse in the world. In so many places the ecological destruction, and its inevitable continuation into the future, is cause for desperation. However, coming from the west, where ecology is so often perceived as a luxury consumer choice, the widespread consciousness of ecology and its link to social justice is to some degree inspiring.



Part 2. Living in the Forest

The next few pages are a more detailed description of some of the problems facing indigenous people in the Philippines. Included are profiles of the industries which cause major development incursions such as mining, logging, plantations etc. Also included are some effects of coming into contact with civilising influences such as missionaries and lowland settlers. To try and give a broad overview lots of the information here does come from books, other organisations etc, as well as our own experiences.

mining

I'll start by looking at the impacts of mining, as the expansion of the mining industry has been causing some fairly intense confrontations over the last decade. This has resulted from the state's attempt to massively liberalise the mining industry, and make it more enticing to foreign investors. From many local battles, a huge, well organised national movement has developed which has so far had great successes.

The Philippines is one of the most intensely mineralised places on earth, a wide variety of geological features yields reserves of many different minerals. However, throughout history, those that have aroused the most interest from mining companies, and have resulted in the most destructive mines, have been metals, particularly gold, copper and nickel.

The Spanish always had their eyes on the gold reserves of the Philippines, but successive attempts to assert sufficient control over the most well known gold-rich area, the Cordillera, were defeated by the resistance of the Igorot people. Nevertheless some mines were opened, and production greatly increased as the colonial mantle passed from the Spaniards to the Americans. By the 1930s there was a gold boom in place, with hundreds of companies setting out to exploit reserves across the archipelago.

Today, in the neo-colonial era, mining is an industry that remains orientated towards export of unprocessed metal, and is dependant on imports of mining technology. The anti-imperialist movement hold this up as one of their main criticisms of the industry, accusing mining companies of plundering the ecology and communities of the Philippines while the money just flows directly to the West.

The ecological impacts are many. Digging great holes in the countryside to open a mine is one obvious problem, and this is becoming more and more of a major impact as technology makes open pit mining more economic than underground mines. Other impacts of open pit mining include effects on the watershed; groundwater sources, which people rely on for their water supply, can become polluted or even dry up, and the air becomes polluted with dust particles.

Possibly the biggest ecological problems associated with mining arise from the tailings or mine wastes. These can be highly toxic, especially in the case of gold mines, where mercury and cyanide are both used in the extraction process. Mining companies in the Philippines have an appalling history of irresponsibility regarding their tailings. The Benguet Corporation, the Philippines' oldest mining company, has been along with other companies been dumping tailings into the Agno River for the best part of a century. The toxicity combines with the sheer level of silt, to make agricultural lands downstream unusable. 51% of the area irrigated by waters from the Agno has become useless due to these problems.

Some companies do build dams for their tailings, but this is not so great either for they are often poorly maintained, and tend to either overflow during typhoons, or collapse altogether, sending floods of toxic waste downstream. This has happened several times to Lepanto Corporation's Victoria gold mine, poisoning the waters of the Abra River. Marcopper/Placer Dome's mine on the island of Marinduque had also already seen its fair share of tailings spills when in 1996 a huge plug fell out of a dam, allowing

1.6million cubic metres of mine tailings to escape into the Boac River, which a few days later was declared biologically dead. A spit of mine tailings formed, stretching 7 kilometres into the sea.

This was the Philippines' worst mining-related ecological disaster, and also affected the income of 20,000 people. Fisherfolk, in particular, were overnight deprived of their only means of support. Many people were also made ill. Yet the people affected in Marinduque have received not a cent in compensation from the Canadian multinational Placer Dome.

Actually not all of the gold mined in the Philippines comes from large multinationals. In fact, possibly up to 50% comes from the estimated 2-500,000 small-scale miners that exist in the country. Many of these are indigenous people whose ancestors have made a subsistence living from panning for gold for centuries. However the figure also includes the 'gold rush' area of Mount Diwalwal, Mindanao, where individuals or small companies make their own hole in the side of the mountain, hoping to strike it lucky. The first category is totally unpolluting, although the second is a bit of an ecological disaster, due to the prolific use of chemicals and the unplanned excavation of the mountainside.

The role of the corporations with regard to both kinds of small-scale mining is of course problematic. The existence of small-scale mining in an area alerts them that gold reserves exist. Yet in many cases, as soon as they have registered a claim, they ban the subsistence miners from operating on the land.

Incidentally, that so much stress is created about gold mining is kind of ridiculous considering quite how useless a metal it is. Ninety percent of gold produced in the world goes to jewellery and other ornamental items. Or if it is not used for that then it is just something to buy and sell on financial markets... the miners at Lepanto were on strike last winter after they were being forced to work weekends. The reason... the looming war in Iraq pushed the price of gold up as investors looked for a stable investment. Around the world, time and time again, the destructive mines that are destroying communities and ecosystems are doing so for this metal. In 20 years time, half the world's gold production is projected to come from the territories of indigenous people...

In 1995, the government decided that it wasn't doing enough to exploit it's mineral potential and brought in a new neo-liberal mining act. One of the main provisions was that foreign companies could own 100% of the equity in Philippine mines. However, the Philippine constitution was never changed, and it states that foreign companies can only invest 40% equity. Despite the confusion over legalities it was enough to excite the mining companies, and they all moved in to stake their claim. Within 3 years, two-thirds of the land surface of the country was registered under mining claims.

However, eight years later not one single new mine had opened. The mining act, closely followed by the Marcopper disaster, had catalysed a massive resistance movement which would not accept any new mining (or actually, it is important to remember that most people who decided they were spokespeople always emphasised that they were not anti-mining *per se*, but only anti-*imperialist*-mining... oh well). Much of the resistance came from indigenous people as most of the mines were in the mountains where they lived.

How they were won:

➤ **Western Mining Company** of Australia pulled out of their Southern Mindanao plan, which was the most advanced in the country in terms of permissions, after the B'Laan people launched a pangayaw (armed tribal war) against them. They also built barricades and blocked WMCs survey workers.

➤ Another **WMC** mine has been held up at Guihulngan on the island of Negros, with an information caravan, pickets, etc, which continued despite many people involved in the struggle being killed by the military.

›In Mindoro, a huge campaign saw demonstrations of tens of thousands against **Crew Minerals'** proposed nickel mine. Eventually the Secretary of State for the Environment rescinded the permission on ecological grounds and the provincial government passed a 25-year moratorium on large-scale mining (see. p. 41 for more information)

›Provincial governments also passed moratoriums in **Capiz** and **Aurora** provinces.

›There has also been resistance against **Climax-Arimco** in the Cordillera. Since the shooting down of a helicopter killing a Canadian geologist in 1994 there has been a heavy military presence, but opposition locally and internationally has continued. The Australian company's share price plummeting by half caused them to put the project on hold a couple of years ago.

›The Canatuan Gold Project of Canadian Co. **TVI Pacific** has seen barricades put up by small scale miners who have had their tunnels bulldozed. These miners have also refused to sell their ore to the company's cyanide processing plant, ensuring it cannot operate, whilst indigenous protests have also attempted to stop operations on sacred sites. Repression has included shootings and blockades by the company of essential goods, but the Subanen people still refuse to leave their lands. This struggle is by no means over, and is intensifying all the time... for more details see http://www.miningwatch.ca/issues/Subanon/PIPLinks-DCMI_alert.html

›In Benguet Province, the **Benguet Corporation** wanted to expand its Grand Antomok pit. Barricades were set up and more than 500 people were arrested, at which point the people moved to the military barracks to release those arrested. Simultaneously an international court in the Netherlands, the Second International Water Tribunal, ruled against Benguet corporation, and now not only did the extension not open, but the Philippines' oldest mining company eventually ended up with no mines at all.

Most of these victories come at a heavy price however. Almost without exception, the companies have not permanently given up their claim, but are still looking to move in at some point in the future. And because of this, many of the areas are facing heavy militarisation, with corresponding human rights abuses, and killings. Many companies, possibly because they refuse to admit the effectiveness of the resistance, explain that the investment climate is not yet right to inspire confidence, there is still this conflict between the Mining act and the constitution over the issue of how much equity a foreign company can own.

To try and solve this problem and re-inspire confidence by the mining industry, the Philippine government has this year launched a 'National Mineral Policy'. This aims to resolve the confusion over what foreign companies can own, facilitate the development of around 10 "world-class" mineral areas, and also chucks in a heavy dose of greenwash designed to neutralise opposition. It is the opening punch in the next round of the fight – without a doubt the next few years will once again see an intensification of the struggle against mining becoming necessary.

logging

As with mining, forest destruction in the Philippines also has its roots in the colonial era. The primary Spanish economic interest in the Philippines was for many years the galleon trade to Mexico, and many trees were cut down for shipbuilding. Under the Americans, it stepped up a gear with well-known US timber companies moving in to ensure that the Philippines was the biggest exporter of rainforest timber in Asia from the early 1920s until the 1960s.

Then during the Marcos years, handing out logging concessions became a way of rewarding cronies. To give someone a timber licence agreement for a parcel of forest was just like handing them a large envelope of money – all they had to do was to buy some machinery and hire some goons. So people who supported him politically or financially, as well as family and friends, all found themselves making money in the logging business. Marcos also tried to placate Muslim rebels by offering them timber-cutting licences.

The years since Marcos fell have seen successive attempts to transform the logging industry into some sort of sustainable forestry industry, but partly due to corruption at virtually every level, this is not what occurs. Instead of the purely extraction oriented Timber Licence Agreements, now what is usually given to logging companies is a Integrated Forest Management Agreement, in which the company is agrees to maintain the forest over a long period of time, which of course can include regular harvesting, and the planting of tree plantations for timber or non-timber purposes. It certainly does not mean maintaining the forest in its original state.

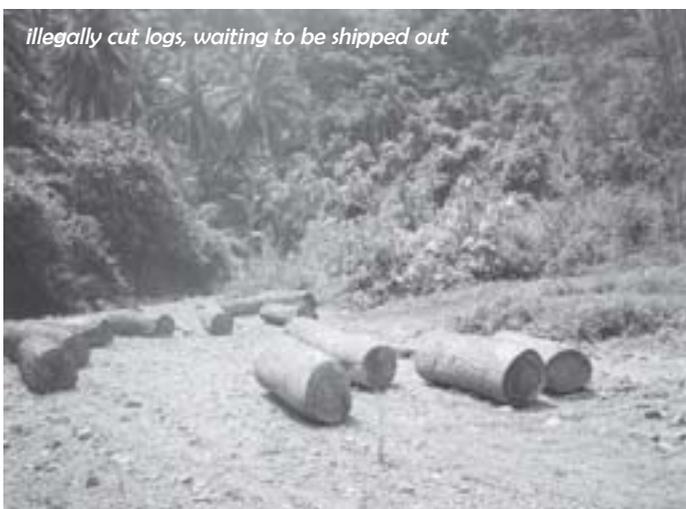
This causes many problems for the indigenous inhabitants of the forest, who depend on it for hunting, gathering and agriculture, as well as protection from floods and drought. According to the rules, logging companies must obtain the free and prior informed consent of any indigenous communities before starting operations, but this can be arranged easily enough by forging signatures, intimidation, or bribing tribal leaders. One common practice is to choose your own tribal leaders, possibly either someone who works for the logging company or an alcoholic who is easier to buy off.

The way in which land is allocated as being suitable for IFMA is also far from ideal, and shows clear signs of corruption. A group of Dumagats, angry at the sudden allocation of a new 50,000ha IFMA on their land without their prior knowledge, let alone consent, told us that large tracts of that land were virgin forest, and certainly not the sort of land that tree plantations should be established on. In the next chunk of forest up the coast, an investigation team had recently found out that all the other rules designed to ensure responsible management are also regularly broken by the loggers there – the minimum size of tree that is allowed to be cut, the areas which you are allowed to cut in, the rare species of trees which should not be cut, cutting on steep riverbanks and valley sides which can lead to erosion and so on. Communities in logging areas know this is normal practice.

The Department of the Environment and Natural Resources is supposed to monitor the practices of the logging industry, but more often than not the DENR employees are happy to instead just take the money and turn a blind eye. The DENR maintains hundreds of roadside checkpoints on roads coming out of forest areas to check for illegally logged forest products, but these seem to cause no major problems for the illegal loggers who are always happy to pay a small bribe in return for passing the control. Illegal logging, as well as illegal sawmills, is quite blatant around the country, despite huge numbers of DENR officials paid to stop them. Almost certainly there is also considerable selling of logs from illegal loggers to legitimate companies, we were told as much by members of the Agta tribe in a logging area – but actually finding proof would be difficult, and getting someone to act on it, impossible.

Resistance to logging is certainly widespread, but not so widely publicised as that against the mining industry. I did not hear of any high-profile barricades or blockades that took place in the last few years, but people we met told us of acts of sabotage and intimidation against loggers trying to enter areas, and it is likely that this story is repeated around the country.

In the times when people take



Illegally cut logs, waiting to be shipped out

initiative to defend the forest, they can come off worse. A Bagobo chief who had confiscated a chainsaw from some illegal loggers, found himself with a two-year prison sentence for the theft of the chainsaw! Raul Zapatos was a DENR employee, who actually stopped truckloads of illegally logged timber. But this raised the ire of the local mayor, who was involved in the illegal timber business. As revenge the mayor came with armed bodyguards and police to attack Raul's headquarters. Raul fired back, killing the mayor, and injuring a bodyguard. He was sentenced to life imprisonment 3 years ago, although is confident that this will be overturned on appeal. Raul's prison address is on p. 48

The New People's Army are yet another group who have decided that rather than destroying the logging industry, to profit from it. Their frequent raids on sawmills to extort revolutionary tax are one of their stable sources of income. Demands were typically of the order of \$10,000 in the last figures I saw, which date from 1990. They do occasionally attack the industry – the timber company Pateco has not operated in Aurora province since their sawmill was burnt down a couple of years ago – but who knows whether this was for ecological reasons, or just because the company didn't pay its tax.

The higher levels of political power are still filled with people connected to the logging industry, especially provincial governors and congresspeople. The traditional connection between the political elite and making a quick buck from logging has not disappeared since Marcos' day. It makes life a lot easier for loggers when it is a member of your family signing the permission to cut trees. And of course, for what it's worth, it also ensures that logging and forest conservation laws are always pretty pathetic.

Where the wood ends up, and in what form, I unfortunately don't have so much information about. Furniture and plywood were the products we came across in the areas we visited, and it seemed likely that some was being exported to the US and Japan. In terms of multinational involvement, I did not hear of any foreign-owned logging companies operating in the Philippines in recent times.

plantations



the edge of a banana plantation, which stretches for miles along the mountainside

Huge agribusiness plantations are spreading at an incredible rate across the Philippine landscape, and this is especially the case in Mindanao, which has one of the highest concentrations of indigenous people. Why Mindanao? Partly because it is far enough south to avoid the worst of the typhoons that can ravage agricultural crops. But mainly because when the Americans took control in 1898, and assigned all unclaimed lands to the state in 1902, Mindanao had not been subdivided into private lands as much of the agricultural lands of Luzon and the

Visayas had. Del Monte, in 1926, set up its first pineapple plant, and although only assigned 1024ha by law, it persuaded the US navy to let it lease 20,000ha. The other big name, Dole, entered the Philippines in 1956 and its initial 5500ha plantation was on land partly stolen from the B'laan people. Nowadays, driving through Mindanao, you can see huge expanses of monoculture pineapple, banana, oil palm and rubber plantations, and they are expanding so rapidly that every tribe we visited, or that our friends had visited on the island of Mindanao, were fighting the encroachment of one plantation or another.

Ecologically the plantations are a disaster – aeroplanes fly over the crops, spraying with chemicals, which pollute the water downstream. The health of the workers is seriously affected by the chemicals used. If they get wounds it is not unusual for them never to heal, but instead become progressively more and more infected. When walking through a banana plantation we picked up a few banana hearts (flowers) to eat later, but local people came and told us that they were full of chemicals and shouldn't be eaten. The bananas themselves are only edible because they have skin!

The problems of resistance were explained to us by one tribe. Their lives were completely dominated by the banana plantations of Dole and Davao Fruit Co, and they were very well aware of the effects these plantations were having on the local ecology. And now the company wanted to expand up the mountain. Apparently the Japanese market where the bananas end up is demanding fruit grown at high altitudes – don't ask me why! Of course they wanted to resist the incursion, but nearly everyone in the tribe works on the plantation – although they are paid at a much lower rate than the lowlanders and it is three hours walk down the mountain to get there, they need the work and have no other option – so they may end up having to accept the expansion out of fear for their livelihoods. If they had some resources, for example, a few carabaos (water buffaloes), they would be in a position to viably farm the land around their village, but at the moment they feel that the only option is to accept the plantation. Or publicly in the daytime, at least!

power generation - dams and geothermal

The drive for industrialisation of course leads to a requirement for power, a significant amount of which has come from tapping the resources of the mountainous areas where indigenous people live.

Large hydro-power projects have had massive negative impacts wherever they have been built. The World Commission on Dams, an independent body set up to investigate them, concluded in 2000 that *"in too many cases an unacceptable price has been paid to secure those benefits [from dams], especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and by the natural environment"*.

All of this is certainly true in the cases of the dams built in the Philippines. The successful struggle against the World –Bank funded Chico River Dam in the 1980's catalysed a militant movement for ecology and autonomy in the Cordillera region which has persisted to today, although many people were killed in the resistance. More recent dams have also seen large resistance, but unfortunately have gone ahead. The San Roque dam, which is nearly ready to open, has caused the relocation of around 4,400 people, mainly indigenous farmers, and the Casecan Dam has also forced many Bugalot people to leave their lands.

The problems do not stop at relocation though – in San Roque, for example, floods caused by rock extraction to build the dam already devastated the crops of 162 family farms. Floods are also expected when the dam silts up after a few years, after which during every typhoon the gates would need to be opened, causing floods downstream. Downstream fisherfolk and gold-panners risk losing their livelihoods, and the loss of soil nutrients which would replenish the rice fields could also affect farmers. Upstream there are conditions put on the use of the watershed, which include bans on traditional subsistence practices such as swidden cultivation, timber collection, and subsistence mining. Previous large-scale mining upstream creates another problem; when toxic metals from mine wastes accumulate behind the dam, they can turn the water toxic, killing off aquatic life and ensuring the water is of no use for irrigation or agriculture.

The ludicrous situation at San Roque is that once finished, it might not even be used. There is more than enough power being generated in the Philippines at present, and with privatised power companies such

as the one that built the dam, the government must keep paying for the services once it has entered an agreement with the company. So financially, for the government it makes sense not to use it. Socially and ecologically, of course, the project makes no sense at all.

San Roque, like most Philippine dam projects, has been funded by the Japanese Bank for International Co-operation, a private development bank. The Asian Development Bank also fund dams, but only if there is a substantial non-power component.

Geothermal power is also a potential large and cheap source of energy in the Philippines, due to its many volcanoes. The problem is yet again, that it mainly affects the upland areas which are the areas inhabited by indigenous people, and also those that are covered by forest. The Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) has been at the forefront of developing this potential. Most notorious is the scheme on Mt. Apo, near Davao, which commandeered a large area of virgin forest, ancestral home of the Manobo tribe, in the early 1980s and triggered a huge campaign – see p. 37 for more details.

It is possible that the PNOC might have been responsible for an even more comprehensive ecological disaster – the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991 destroyed the ecology and society of a whole mountain. It was especially a tragedy for the Aeta people of the mountain, many of whom could never go back to the isolated hunting and gathering life they had lived. Of course, volcanic eruptions are normally thought of as unpredictable, natural disasters – but this time, PNOC had been carrying out test drillings for a geothermal plant until a few months before the eruption. The first seismic explosion took place right where their operations had been.

settlement

Another threat to the land and culture of indigenous peoples comes from the influx of lowland settlers to their land. The reason peasants migrate from other parts of the country is often due to the feudal pattern of land ownership where they came from – as large corporations and feudal landlords consolidate their control of land, then poor farmers are displaced and seek a new life elsewhere. The frequently invoked explanation of rising population is no doubt also a factor, but of lesser importance. From Malthus's time to the present day, whenever population is claimed as the cause of a problem, it is usually done by those in whose interest it is to reapportion blame from the exploitation by the ruling class to the sexual habits of the poor.

Migration has been encouraged and facilitated by various government agencies during the colonial and neo-colonial eras, often ignoring the indigenous peoples who hold no legal title to the land. In some places you can hear this in the language spoken – the lingua franca in most of Mindanao for example, has become Visayan (Cebuano) although it does not originate from this island.

When settlers have come to areas inhabited by IPs, land taking can be hostile. But it can also happen that newcomers are made welcome by the tribes, especially when they arrive as individual families. One tribe told us of this; they didn't refuse settlers land when they came, but as more and more came, they started to move themselves further up the mountain in order to preserve their community.

Once the settlers arrive, then assimilation into the lowland economy is almost inevitable. One of the first changes is in the staple food – from various root crops, similar to sweet potatoes, to rice (some Igorot tribes are the only ones to have traditionally cultivated rice, but even this is different from lowland varieties). For some reason rice is preferred to sweet potatoes – but it also needs processing after growing, and is often the first thing that precipitates involvement in the cash economy. Other shop-bought items gradually become necessities – sugar, coffee, tinned fish, cigarettes, gin, television. And it doesn't take too long for the insidious marketing strategies of the multinationals to penetrate – although many tribes grow excellent coffee, for example, instant Nescafe has higher prestige value, and if they have guests they will try and buy a small jar of this, though they cannot afford it. They didn't

believe us when we told them that in the West, instant coffee was thought of as inferior!

Conflicts arise between the political and economic systems of settlers and tribes. Land ownership concepts are different – indigenous lands are only considered owned in the sense of usufruct, that is whoever is cultivating the land has ownership of what it produces while they are cultivating it. Lowlanders are more likely to claim and get title of ownership of land under the legal system. Even if they do not claim land they will settle and set up a farm anywhere that does not strike them as already cultivated land. The clash between these two systems puts pressure on those indigenous people who are nomadic or shifting cultivators to become settled. This means not only changes in agricultural practices but also cultural change.

Structures of leadership also change – for example in Mindanao, each village is controlled by a Datu, a hereditary position of responsibility for the village. But with settlers, the Datu not only finds competition with the elected local government officials, but also an expectation that anyone with power will exploit that power for political gain. Suddenly his position is an opportunity to exploit and profit, should he choose to. And of course some succumb. In some ways it is a dream situation for the capitalist interests who instead of having to convince or buy off a whole community, can just focus all their attention on getting one person to agree to their plans. A system which has worked well since time immemorial becomes dangerous to the tribe when their traditional concepts of leadership start to be replaced by the Western ethic of power and domination.

Settlers often arrive holding prejudices against and fear of indigenous people – their religion has told them they are devil worshippers, they wear strange clothes and have no education. These prejudices cause the IPs to adapt to lowlander customs of dress, religion and diet simply in order to fit in better, with corresponding erosion of their own culture.

In times when the relationship is better, there can also be problems – marriages between tribespeople and lowlanders nearly can result in a dilution of the culture that is passed on to the children. James Eder, an anthropologist working with the Batak of Palawan found that the children of mixed marriages did not tend to speak Batak, wear traditional clothes, hunt with bow and arrow, learn to be shamans or to play musical instruments. If indigenous children go to school with non-indigenous people this is of course another way that they become absorbed into the mainstream culture.

Despite all this, I don't remember having encountered, or even read about, any degree of animosity from the indigenous people towards the settlers, even when they recognise the problems they have cause. Every time indigenous people told us what they thought of their neighbours, it was always within the general context of them being exploited by a different part of the same system, although there were some particular people they could point to as being abusive.

The Philippines are crowded islands now, and there are very few tribal groups who do not have contact with settlers. We didn't visit any groups who maintained isolation; it goes without saying that we would not have done so without a very good reason! But they do exist in places – we heard about one group of wild Agta who fiercely maintain isolation – sometimes they will even chase other more civilised Agta from their land with bows and arrows!

militarisation

Troops of the Armed Forces of the Philippines can be found all on every major island of the country. They claim to be looking for the guerrillas from the NPA or MILF; their presence is also effective in clearing the way for development.

Various aspects of this militarisation impact on indigenous people. Firstly, in clashes between the government and the NPA indigenous people are often displaced from their land for the duration of the fighting, supposedly for their own safety. However, in the refugee camps that are created for this



*Badjao people,
displaced by war, dive
for coins for a living*

purpose, conditions are often very crowded and people have no access to their means of livelihood, therefore malnutrition and disease are common, often resulting in death. This has been the case recently in the town of Pikit, North Cotobato where several people have died following a government offensive against the MILF. For indigenous people, living in a refugee camp also means abandoning traditional values to some extent and accepting the customs of the lowlanders. Many of the Mangyan people evicted from the mountains of Mindoro are currently living in missionary compounds on the

neighbouring island of Luzon.

Around the whole country can be found groups of refugees from the Badjao tribe. These people were once sea-nomads on the far south archipelago of Sulu, living continuously on boats, and having no home on the land, only coming ashore to trade fish for cassava, to repair their boats, or for certain rituals. But they got in the way of the state's successive wars against the Muslims, and were scattered around the country. Many maintain a connection with the sea by diving for coins that passengers throw off ships for them – an impressive skill, but no sort of replacement for their old life.

On top of the effects of displacement is the problem that the motivation for militarisation is often to clear the way for development. People moving home after the situation becomes safe again, often find their homes or farms destroyed or unliveable, a plantation established where their home should be, or construction work already started on some development project.

Often indigenous people are more directly the targets of the military, whenever they oppose development projects. As anyone can join the New People's Army, so can the state claim that anyone it doesn't like is part of the NPA. Of course it is a ludicrous idea that everyone wanting or needing to defend their land is part of the NPA, but nevertheless it is often convenient for the military to say so.

Of course there are also indigenous people in the NPA - we were told by some that they joined because they did not feel strong enough to resist the state on their own.

The military try to set communities against each other by recruiting paramilitary units from the areas they operate. These groups, known as Civillian Armed Forces Geographical Units or CAFGUs, can be even more brutal than the regular military in committing human rights abuses against the population. There are always people prepared to be recruited into these units – it is a job after all. For the state, it is an extremely effective tactic – not only can they divide communities in this way, but they create a force that is not required to show restraint and discipline in the same way as regular soldiers.

On Mindanao, a type of CAFGU has been created aimed especially at indigenous people. The Army have created an organisation called Alamara, which is a Lumad word for massive and extensive tribal war. One aim is to turn Lumads against the NPA – their propaganda capitalises on support for a (incidentally very corrupt) Lumad leader who was once killed by the NPA, and includes phrases such as “the NPA is the real problem of the Lumads in the countryside” and “the Lumads should be kings in their own land”. Another is to divide the Lumads, to make it easier for the state to get control over

ancestral domain with the aim of facilitating logging, plantation and other development projects in the area. Those who the state has chosen to co-opt as Alamara leaders are often Lumads who have control over large areas of land, through ancestral domain claims (see section on IPRA, below)

During 2002, human rights group Karapatan detailed 87 cases of human rights violations involving 625 Lumads by Alamara members. The cases included murders, evacuations, food blockades, torture, illegal detention and hamletting. The climate of fear engendered by the operation prevents Lumads from being able to farm and trade their goods normally. Pressure has been put on many Lumad communities to join the Alamara – if they do not then they are labelled insurgents. And for those who do join, and take the salary, it can be the first step out of a subsistence farming lifestyle into the wage labour economy.

There are many more groups of men with guns roaming the Philippine countryside. Logging, mining and plantation companies invariably employ large private armies. Gangs of right wing vigilantes, financed from who knows where, often do their share of rampaging. Then there's groups like the Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic group that may be Al Qaida terrorists (according to the Americans), CIA goons paid to stir up conflict (according to some on the Philippine left), or just a group of bandits out to kidnap people purely for the ransom money. Plus remnants of ex-revolutionary groups such as the Cordillera People's Revolutionary Army, that end up agitating against the real rebels on behalf of the state. There are so many agendas at work, and all prepared to use violence in large quantities, and they all know how to exploit the confusion to escape blame, and the insignificant people are left to catch the bullets.

state assimilation and ipra

The approach of the Philippine state to indigenous people has varied over the years, but has always been one of domestication. A succession of organisations have emerged; all ostensibly oriented towards the welfare of indigenous peoples, but all contributing to their oppression. Possibly most notorious was PANAMIN, Marcos' Presidential Assistance for National Minorities, headed by one of his cronies, Manuel Elizalde. Using excuses of insurgency, more often than not triggered by a government attack, they were known for forcing thousands of indigenous peoples into reservations, and using armed guards to ensure they stayed there. Meanwhile their land would be opened up to logging or other development – Elizalde cleared large areas for his own logging operations this way. PANAMIN tried to make money out of opening the reserves as tourist attractions, but did little to make self-sufficiency possible amongst the inhabitants, many of who died of starvation.

Subsequent presidents created new bodies, which were not so quite so bad as PANAMIN, but of course not great. As the movement for recognition of the historical disenfranchisement of indigenous people grew in the Philippines and around the world, and in response to the resistance of indigenous people to development projects, there was pressure on the state to enact some sort of law in their favour.

The resulting Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA) is a piece of legislation designed to co-opt these movements and distract indigenous people from resistance. It gives a thin veneer of autonomy, whilst actually putting in place systems that will certainly not interfere with the process of land-grabbing, and could actually facilitate it.

The key provision allows groups of indigenous people to file claims for what they see as their ancestral domain. If their claims are approved, they are given some sort of title, which gives them a certain level of control over what goes on on their land. The demand is, that because indigenous people have lived, and built a relationship with the land, since time immemorial, that their rights over that land should be recognised. However, what comes out of IPRA is based on the prevailing land ownership paradigm that has existed since the Spanish era – indigenous notions of land ownership are ignored.

To put in a claim for ancestral domain, indigenous people must define boundaries, delineated on a

map, and some decision-making structure must be put in place to establish who has control over the land and what happens to the land in future. Individual families can claim their own agricultural lands under a provision which entails much stronger power over the land, therefore encouraging de-communalisation of resources. But whatever route people take, the process of applying for ancestral domain claims is a tedious and bureaucratic one, and requires substantial collaboration with state organisations over a period of years.

All these procedures induce changes in the people's relationship with the land. Traditionally land was something sacred to the people, that which supports and provides all essential needs in life. Under IPRA the relationship moves away from this towards one where land is more of a possession; the people assume control over the land, and are given the choice of whether to conserve its resources, or profit financially from their destruction.

Despite this, the protection afforded by the IPRA's ancestral domain is low. Essentially the lands are still public lands, just the indigenous people have priority use of the land's resources. Mining or other development projects can still gain access to the areas with relative ease. The indigenous people have the "right to negotiate the terms and conditions" the entry of the company on their land, but have no right for absolute refusal to negotiate, meaning that keeping the company out is difficult.

Many indigenous people boycott the IPRA, knowing it is not in their interest. Others do get involved in the process, with no real belief that it will make much difference, but thinking that they should take every option open to them to defend their lands. It is easy to envisage a situation in the future when only lands that have been successfully titled will be considered as ancestral domain.

However, there are also those who see an ancestral domain certificate as quite a lucrative possession. If there is a logging or mining company wanting to enter an area then those who hold the title could stand to make quite a lot of money. Sometimes the company encourages some tribesperson amenable to them to actually put in the claim, and this is one reason why there are often competing claims for the same area. This temptation to sell out your land, and divide the tribe, is created by IPRA.

IPRA is administered by the new National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP). The NCIP is a tremendously powerful body, basically having the sole authority on deciding who gets ancestral domain title. It is also totally under-funded, most local offices that we visited not even having sufficient resources to get a telephone. So of course it is completely ripe for corruption. Also amongst its roles is the recording, and hence bureaucratisation, of indigenous social structures – who are the elders, who are the chiefs and so on.

missionaries

There are thousands of missionaries in the Philippines. Many are Filipino, but foreigners also make up a large contingent. Missionaries do not just focus on the tribes, but any sector of Philippine society where they think they can recruit some souls to their church, such as impoverished populations in both urban and rural areas.

The scale of the industry was clear, every time we travelled through rural areas. People would come up to us, and the first question they would ask was almost invariably if we were missionaries. It seems that is what they associate white people with in most places, not tourists.

I believe that a large part of cultural destruction is the replacement of traditional spiritualities and belief systems connected to the earth with Christianity. So I would frequently ask tribespeople and those who work with them what their opinion was of missionaries. But maybe surprisingly, given the number of missionaries in the Philippines, the most usual reaction was a blank face.

The first thing many people would mention would be those progressive missionaries which advocate for

tribes and support them in their struggle. In the Catholic and mainstream Protestant churches (United Church of Christ in the Philippines) there is a very strong 'liberation theology' current. Many priests and nuns explain that their concept of 'social mission' revolves around solidarity and support, education and livelihood building. The only missionaries I actually got a chance to speak to belonged to this school of thought, and they firmly rejected the notion that they were trying to convert people to their faith. They claimed that their job was merely to strengthen the faith of those who already believed in order to help them fight oppression. I have some criticisms of these missionaries later, when I move on to looking at resistance movements, but for now I want to concentrate on those who have a less ambiguous negative role on primitive societies.

There are over 300 Christian denominations in the Philippines, and most of these are looking to expand. Many specifically have strategies for rapid 'church growth'; a policy which may or may not be motivated by religious beliefs, but coincidentally is quite financially profitable for those at the top. This is especially so when they have links to the west – news of 10,000 baptisms of Filipino savages can really bring the donations flooding in back home. Especially notorious are the 'born again' churches, fundamentalist churches that claim you are only saved if you are baptised by them, and use literal readings of obscure sections of the bible to denounce various things as belonging to the devil. They are also very business-orientated, often with a high profile in the west where they get their money, although in their actual field of operations, the missionaries are not anxious to tell you which organisation they belong to. The most well known of these groups is the New Tribes Mission, whose policy is to convert all the remaining unreached tribes in the world by 2025.

As I said, I unfortunately did not manage to find many indigenous people that spoke directly about their experiences with missionaries. The people I met had either accepted missionaries into their community, or had not allowed them in and didn't even know what church they were from. But I did hear some stories, and also many anecdotes second hand from anthropologists, NGOs, priests and nuns and others who have worked with IPs over many years. I include many of these here, conscious that somemight not check out, or are only one side of a complex story. However, I think they are largely true enough, and hopefully give some indication of possible effects of missionaries on tribal societies.

Destroying traditional belief, and sowing fear: Many of the tribes we met, especially on Mindanao had managed to maintain their traditional spirituality, but all had had to fight to do so. Some we were told, had chased missionaries away. Others kept up a pretence of Christianity – in the centre of one Bagobo village was a large wooden cross, but the actual spiritual focus was the traditional 'wishing well', at which they welcomed us with a ritual. We were told that they had to have Christian iconography (eg crosses, pictures of Jesus etc) up or the military would accuse them of being NPA. In Luzon an anthropologist told us of an Ifugao village who carried out their ritual for a good harvest inside one of the houses. When she asked why, she was told that the people were frightened that the missionaries might see. They had told them their practices were from the devil. Also in Luzon, we asked some Agta why they had taken the Christian faith, and also why they wore western clothes. Their answers were nothing to do with a feeling of having found a belief that had meaning to them, but much more pragmatic – they just felt the need to fit in with the settler culture to prevent discrimination. Other tribes considered themselves Christian but also practiced a multitude of rituals and had beliefs that were completely incompatible with Christianity.

Promoting development: One anecdote I really wanted to check out – but didn't have time – was from the recent struggle against the Casecan dam in Nueva Viscaya province. The New Tribes Mission were apparently actively involved in using their privileged status to convince the Bugalot people to accept the project which would eventually displace them. Incidentally, the two missionaries involved, Gloria and Martin Burnham, were later, and presumably unrelatedly, kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf – Martin was killed and Gloria was held hostage for 2 years.

There has always been a drive amongst missionaries to civilise as well as convert. One example in recent decades is that of Father Rex Mannsman and the T'Boli of Lake Sebu in Mindanao. Apparently a charismatic yet domineering personality, over decades his mission built up something of an empire of small enterprises, schools and social projects beside the small lake, much paid for with overseas cash. To do this he had to instigate changes in the way the T'Boli worked, as they tended 'to be improvident, unperservering, inconsistent, more dedicated to freedom than to the responsibility or self discipline'. Father Rex was forced out of the community after allegedly raping a 12-year old girl, but continues to live part-time nearby. A T'Boli girl my friends randomly met on a ferry told them that everyone in the community was sure he was CIA, and also of his history of abusing women from the tribe.

Tribal people do need to fight to resist development – that is the reality of today's Philippines. A progressive, social-action focussed, Catholic missionary told me that they had encountered problems when working in villages that had been missionised by the born-again churches. People there had no drive to resist incursions – they believed they were the chosen ones and Jesus would look after them. After this, he unfortunately used this to claim justification for his own activity, saying "the problem with Catholics is they hardly have the faith. If we don't strengthen them in their faith then they would be more susceptible to born again." Which brings us to the next problem...

Causing Divisions: With so many churches all in competition, the needless and artificial divisions can be created within the tribe, between villages and be between individuals in villages, between denominations or between the Christians and the animists. Remember that certain of the churches are telling their converts that everyone else is worshipping the devil. It was suggested to me a few times that this is actually a strategic ploy by the state/CIA, promoting low level conflict in order to attack the solidarity that would otherwise exist within the tribe. I was told one story about the south of Mindanao, and a lumad who had decided to become Muslim after becoming sick of the tactics of the Christian missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics. One of the Lumad pastors had been going around boasting that they had been getting donations, and would soon have weapons (in order to fight Muslims)

Also divisions are caused within villages as missionaries interfere with political or organisational structures. It is an age-old strategy of missionaries to develop special relationships with one or a few people in order to make their life easier, and to ensure that those people are privileged with positions of power and trust.

Profiting from the Poor: One of the most common criticisms that people I met had of foreign missionaries is that they use indigenous people to secure a comfortable life for themselves. This is a little surprising, knowing that most western missionaries probably consider that they have chosen a life of comparative hardship, but from the indigenous point of view, it makes a lot of sense. Flying in and out in a helicopter may be convenient, but to the people who are watching, it just shows the huge divide between them and the well-resourced missionary. And as they watch, the missionary builds a nice house and then lock themselves in it and only interact with the community they have invaded to preach their faith and tell the people that what they believe is evil. The tribepeople are aware that the missionary gets to live the easy life because of rich Christians in the first world who hear about the heathen savages in the Philippines, yet they see none of this money. It was from someone who had visited some Mamanua people in northern Mindanao that I heard this story of resentment.

Promoting Western Values: It has long been a tactic with missionaries to come bearing gifts from another inaccessible world. It was how the plains Indians were finally subdued in North America, and it still goes on today. The Higaonon people of Mindanao were apparently very pleased with the presents of Raybans, and the trips in the helicopter were very exciting. I wonder if they were told at the same time that if they did really want to enter the capitalist system, their assigned place was right at the very bottom of the pile. And the story that born again Dumagat women were coming to church on Sunday in high heels and lipstick I guess needs no comment from me.

Missionising is resisted in the Philippines – we talked to a few groups who had chased away missionaries from their land – but I'm not sure how widespread this resistance is. However it is almost certain that any group that is not Christian today has only managed this by refusing or resisting the missionaries.

tourism

For some reason the Philippines has not seen a huge tourist boom similar to that in other parts of South East Asia which is strange given its amazing natural beauty, famously hospitable people and so on. But the tourist industry is there, and it is seen as a potential source of economic growth.

The number one tourist attraction is the small Visayan island of Boracay, which with its beautiful white sand beaches, is a paradise for thousands of tourists from all over the world. Yet just forty years ago its only inhabitants were Ati negritos; their version of paradise is forever destroyed. Possibly the number two attraction is the Banuaue Rice terraces, created by Ifugao people over 2000 years and reaching from the mountaintops right down to the valley bottoms. The tourist guides dub them the 8th wonder of the world, but they are also still the source of income for many Ifugao families. However, their traditional co-operative farming method is gradually fall apart, as some people try to make money from the tourist industry, and others are forced from the region due to high prices.

The eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991 made the volcano a famous name worldwide, as well as causing the displacement of thousands of Aeta people, many of whom have not been able to return to their original villages. The government is planning to use both of these facts to lure many tourists to the area, by building a road to the top and converting some of the land in the former Clark Air Base to tourist facilities as well as industry and a new international airport. It is suggested that the Aeta can live in eco-tourism villages along the way, and work out some ways of making money by being cute little black people for the visitors. Aeta groups are determinedly resisting these plans.

A Manobo told us one story which illustrated some of the effect of tourism. A couple of Americans came along – they asked a Manobo woman to dress up in her traditional clothes and dance for them. She did – they gave her the equivalent of \$10. This is of course not so much to an American, but a huge amount of money to the Manobo. If this sort of thing were to become regular then what sort of strange tensions would it create in the community, this unequal access to money? And even more serious, the tribe is working on reclaiming its traditional practices – to trivialise and commodify the dances by performing for others and not themselves is highly destructive in itself. The Manobo were also economically forced into travelling to the cities to perform on certain 'cultural days' promoted by the tourist industry. The datu would have funding and support removed if they didn't participate. Although the events were promoted as an empowering celebration the diverse tribal cultures it was actually degrading for them.

The Tagbanua of Coron Island, Palawan, are fighting against the encroachment of so-called eco-tourism. Living on an island where only they live has left them relatively isolated. Nowadays however they are becoming increasingly besieged by tourists, looking to find some unspoilt nature. One of their favourite unspoilt spots is a lake which is one of the sacred sites of the Tagbanua people. The story is repeated on Mount Apo. A tourist resort has been erected just 100 metres from Lake Agdo, a hot spring which is one of the most sacred sites on the mountain to the Manobo.

eco-protection

Throughout this booklet I have always gone on the general premise that ecological protection and social justice tend to go hand in hand, and for sure in the case of indigenous people. However, certain tribes around the Philippines, and in many places around the world, find themselves having to work against the actions of certain supposedly ecological NGOs, when their ancestral home is declared a priority area for nature conservation.

The organisations involved: The World Wide Fund For Nature, International Union for Conservation of Nature and so on, are essentially multinational corporations whose 'product' is protected areas. They work around the world, always alienated from the messiness of actual local struggles, yet tend to be very much at home in international conferences working with other multinationals to produce business environmental leadership schemes and the like.

There is a long history of working against the interests of indigenous people, as they have been instrumental in setting up reserves around the world. In the Philippines the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) only came into being some ten years ago, but the big NGOs are keen to get involved, as in their crude formula for prioritising global funding – how much biodiversity is there over how much habitat is there left – the Philippines comes out at the top of the list. The second phase of the NIPAS scheme is the creation of ten priority areas for protection, many of these in tribal areas. The World Bank provides much of the funding; a coalition of NGOs called NIPA works on the implementation.

One of the common features of such a protection scheme is a zoning plan, with different restrictions placed on each type of zone. Core zones would not be suitable for human activity at all, whilst other zones might allow traditional religious practices, or some settlement, or tourism or so on. Particularly the ordinance that they cannot live, hunt or gather in the core zone is a big problem for indigenous people. Of course, the implementing bodies do not completely override the wishes of indigenous people – part of designing the site is to work with them to make some accommodations. But in practice it doesn't tend to work out so well.

The ancestors of the Aeta of the Baatan Natural Park have lived in harmony with the forest for 20,000 years. But although the Aeta were involved in designing what would happen when the park became a NIPAS zone, they are increasingly dissatisfied with the deal it gives them. They are banned from practising their traditional gathering methods, the inclusive law makes no distinction between their non-destructive methods and the more harmful methods of the Tagalog population. What's more, the livelihood projects and benefits which are supposed to have been delivered them to compensate for their loss of use of the forest have been continuously delayed, whether due to bureaucracy or corruption. Whatever the reason it is highly offensive to some of the most ecological people on earth that people in offices far away both tell them how to protect nature and force them into starvation.

The Baatan Park was only included in the NIPAS plan after a huge campaign by the Mangyan people which stopped the Mangyan Heritage Nature Park that would have covered most of Mindoro. It again would have denied access for the Mangyans to the forests on which their livelihoods depend, although 'eco'-tourists and multinational pharmaceutical companies would have access. Their demonstrations, pickets and petitions persuaded the World Bank to withdraw support from the project. So the NGOs moved their focus, their cash, and the problems for indigenous people to Bataan. Needless to say, nobody made the effort to come up with any more socially relevant plan to protect Mindoro's forest.

The Manobo of Mount Apo are waiting for the implementation of the NIPAS scheme in their area. Their main concern is the all-powerful nature of the governing body of the park, the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB). The powers they will have in the area are essentially those of a new police force and judicial system – they include catching people who may have contravened some of the rules of the protected area, passing judgement on them and deciding the penalty. All stakeholders are represented on the PAMB, including the PNOC, whose geothermal operations fall into the boundaries of the area, and the Manobo fear that when the PNOC eventually wants to expand, they will find it possibly to persuade, in one way or the other, the PAMB to accept their plans.

The Manobo have a well advanced ancestral domain claim in progress, which when granted will be a form of communal title giving the tribe some degree of control over their ancestral lands (see p. 37). Yet the PAMB will have first say over what goes on in the area. They also don't need the PAMB to police the

mountain – they have a group, the Protection Volunteer Group (a safe sounding name to disguise the fact that they see their role as being tribal fighters), that monitors the activities of illegal loggers, and confiscates their equipment when they encounter them. An innovative idea would be for the state to recognise the legitimacy of this group, and leave conservation in the hands of those who are most experienced at it – the indigenous people!

In the Philippines, I met some visiting indigenous people from Taiwan who had had similar experiences of protected areas. The Taruku people were forcibly evicted from their land when the Taruku national park was created. Yet a decade and a half later, the tourist industry set up to support the park had brought along with it poachers, and several important species have been wiped out on the land. And they are not alone - in every country where people live on the land that is earmarked for protection the story is the same.

Part 3. Resistance - institutionalised

As has hopefully become clear reading this, there is a very high level of struggle in all areas of the archipelago where ancestral domain is invaded by outside capitalist interest, as there has been since the initial Spanish colonisation. For most katatubo groups, resistance is a natural response to threats to their livelihood. They know it may result in death, but giving in is not an option. Ask people why they are prepared to die for the struggle and the answer is the same – without land, and our way of life, we have nothing – land is life.

Resistance can take all forms, many of which we are not so different from what we do in the west. Demonstrations, blockades, and destruction of machinery happen regularly. Armed struggle is also common, be it with guns or bows and arrows. A common strategy is to declare ancestral land off limits to whichever development is being fought, and patrol the areas to enforce this. When tribes have a warrior tradition, they sometimes declare a tribal war against the company involved. It is usual for any logging, mining, plantation or other company entering an area to employ a private army of maybe 100-200 people – and much of the reason for this is the scale of resistance they usually encounter.

However, more and more the desire and need to resist is being co-opted by various institutionalised groups who have other ideological or institutional interests as well as the immediate struggle. Whilst admitting that I am not in a position of being able to gauge the effect of this on the level of the resistance, I want to at least describe these groups and their activities – coming from the particularly coming from the mainstream Maoist left, and the main churches. The following is intended to give as much information as I have, both positive and negative, from which you can form your own judgement.

the legal left

The National Democratic struggle, in its thirty-four years of existence, has put up many fronts. Amongst these are the 100-odd fronts of the New People's Army scattered around the countryside. But during this thirty-four years of strategic planning of how to win the hearts and minds of the masses, the tactics have got more varied. By the mid-1980s there was a clear problem for the movement of how to build a united front while they were constrained by their illegal status to only organise underground. So in 1985 the legal organisation BAYAN, or New Patriotic Alliance, was created, with the aim of being a coordinating body for mass movements. Affiliated to BAYAN is a political party that stands in elections as well as sectoral organisations for peasants, industrial workers, women, teachers, indigenous people and so on. There is no formal connection to the Communist Party of the Philippines / New People's Army, although BAYAN organisations are openly revolutionary and do not hide their support for the illegal groups.

If there is a constituency of struggle that can be identified, then BAYAN will seek involvement. The

strategy is to monopolise all resistance movements, and get support from all activists in order to build a united front, which will eventually support the CPP. For example, I was told that until about a decade ago, homosexuality was condemned by the Maoists, but when it changed its policy then an organisation was founded to campaign for lesbian and gay rights!

All organisations that form part of the legal left must be viewed as having a dual role – that of the actual work they do in direct struggles against oppression, and that of building ideological conformity within the mass movements to support a vanguardist revolutionary organisation. Given the huge amount of commitment to the former role, it is sometimes easy to forget the second, especially for those of us in the West who are used to seeing Trotskyist and other groups parasitically attaching themselves to popular struggles simply in order to build their parties, while taking no constructive role in the struggle at hand.

As far as the national democratic involvement with indigenous people goes – KAMP is a federation of indigenous people's organisations which works closely with TABAK, an organisation of advocates for indigenous people. They are undoubtedly the most militant, and the closest to the grassroots, nationally organised voice for indigenous people. Also important to mention is the Cordillera People's Alliance, which is a broad alliance of groups, including church organisations, in the Cordillera region, where most of the people are indigenous Igorot folk. Over the 20-odd years of their existence they have co-ordinated many big anti-development struggles in the region, and publicly align themselves to the BAYAN movement.

In addition, the left has a policy of frontism – making of or infiltrating existing NGOs in order to control them. Sometimes this is for political reasons, to influence the activists or the direction of the organisation's outputs; at other times it is simply to get their hands on the lucrative foreign funding. Certain US based liberal organisations might be interested to know that their Philippine counterparts are Maoist fronts. Also international Earth First! publications listed for several years the Volunteers for Earth Defence, a Maoist front group that has no connection to the current Earth First! movement in the Philippines (and according to friends never did any earth defence either!). The intention, as those friends who have been inside the left have told me, is to have a presence in all radical and progressive organisations and resistance movements, with the intention of steering sympathies towards the program of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

What's so bad about the national democrats ideologically? First is their commitment to nationalism. Although nominally independent, the Philippines is still run by an elite in the interest of colonial powers. According to the National Democratic Movement, Filipinos need to defeat the imperialist forces and run the Philippines for the Philippines. For me, left wing nationalism and right wing nationalism share many of the same problematic features. Essentially, the only reason why an anti-imperialist standpoint should lead to a nationalist analysis is for a vanguardist party which wants to create power for itself through the promotion of some artificial collective identity. This is a decidedly populist approach, mythologizing the stolen revolution of the 1890s to create a belief that oppression will disappear if Filipino rulers replace Western rulers. It is a work of total invention – even the borders of the Philippine state were decided by the Spanish for fuck's sake.

The nationalist orientation is prioritised by the movement, which rejects even the concept of class struggle in its favour. The revolutionary class will comprise not just the peasants and the proletariat, but also the middle class and even the national bourgeoisie! Only the national elite and the imperialist oppressor are left out. This sort of analysis would seem to presume some sort of natural innate virtue to the Filipino that doesn't exist in the rest of the world's population. The first stage of a revolution would be a nationalised, but still essentially capitalist economy; communism would follow maybe later.

Then there are all the promises of national industrialisation, dreams of a time when Filipino industry is run for the Filipinos and not just by the west, so the country can get richer and industrialise further. This

is presuming that industrialisation is always a good thing, which is obviously quite a huge presumption! I asked one prominent activist from the CPA whether she thought this principle of her movement conflicted with the needs of indigenous peoples. She explained that that was one reason they wanted autonomous administration for the predominantly indigenous Cordillera region, and that most of the development in that region would be agricultural, as that was relevant for the needs of that area. She disappeared before I could ask what would be the implications for IPs in other areas, where they were not the majority.

Always in texts about indigenous people, written by their advocates from the national democratic movement, is some variation on the ambiguous assertion that 'indigenous people want development' (just not imperialist development). Well, one way of interpreting that is of course true – I am sure that nearly all indigenous people are looking for some change in the situation which makes their life so difficult to live currently. However, to me the phrase seems more pointed towards a philosophy of progress, of integration with industrial society whilst maintaining distinct cultural traditions. In my own limited experience in the Philippines, that is what some indigenous people said they wanted. However, many others told us they wished to remain uncivilised (yes, they used that word), and that their ideal life would still be just to be left alone.

Many of the struggles from which the National Democratic movement are now building their support are ecological or indigenous struggles. Yet it was only in the 1980s that ecological concerns entered the program of the National Democratic Front at all. Nowadays BAYAN still makes no reference to ecological matters in its guiding principles, despite the fact that it draws so much support from ecological struggles. It does however, include the principle of self-determination for indigenous people, and the right to own, control, manage and utilize their ancestral lands.

My own experiences with the left were quite limited – our preference was to try and talk to tribes directly whenever possible. My friends in the Philippines are anarchists and some would feel under direct personal threat, should their movement ever be seen of poaching support from the 'united front' which the left has taken so long to build up. This is not unrealistic paranoia; following an ideological split in the left in 1992, there were many killings on both sides.

However, to find out about the resistance that does take place, I needed to meet with several individual activists, and found that many of them were really motivated by a passion for resistance and change. Then there were others who seemed to have much more commitment to preserving the ideology and bureaucracy of their organisation. This acted as some sort of criteria for me, for who I would choose to communicate with. I felt it was important to be cautious, but also that in a country where the non-institutionalised options for resistance are few, it is important not to write off everyone who works within institutions.

I also spent a few days in at one of the National Democratic movement's biggest annual events, just one week before leaving the Philippines. This was Cordillera day, which every year around 3000 people from the various tribes in the six Cordillera provinces attend. It is an annual commemoration of the day 18 years before that one martyr Macliing Dulag was killed trying to stop the construction of a dam on the Chico River. One of the things that was interesting for me was the way it represented the grey area between indigenous struggle and the attempt by the left to consolidate their control over that struggle .

The first thing we were asked for, on arrival, was our name, organisation and 300 pesos (about us\$6) participation fee. We tried to avoid putting an organisation, neither of us feeling we were really representing anyone at that event except ourselves, but we were pressed to, and eventually we put down Earth First!. As we spent more time there, we began to recognise that everybody had an

organisation, no-one was just an independent participant. That there were maybe three thousand people organised in this way gives some indication of the degree to which this movement is structured – unless there were more people like us: not really identifying so clearly with an organisation, but able to come up with a name when one is required. The high participation fee also gives some idea of who the gathering was intended for – although many of the tribal people's organisations can pay in kind and so are exempted, those who did pay would really need to be on an NGO salary – normal workers would find it hard to afford this. But because of the thousands of NGOs that exist in Philippine society today, there are still many takers. It is a clear indication of the hybridisation between 'revolutionary' struggle and NGO culture which seems to have developed in the Philippines. I guess this is a trend around the world these days - I'm thinking of the various social forums and the like - and of course it is not surprising because revolutionary parties and NGOs have the same purpose - to claim to represent the people and control their resistance.

I ended up talking to the handful of other foreigners a fair bit – they were fun to hang out with, and we were always chasing rumours of vegetarian/vegan food together. Many of them were spending a year as interns in NGOs, organised mainly by their churches. One thing that surprised me was how different their experience of the Philippines had been to mine. They talked about 'the struggle', and 'the movement' - told me about this organisation, called PIF I think, that gives orientation and support (ideological guidance??) to those who come to join 'the struggle'. For them, the idea of the 'united front' does not have the sinister edge of ideological conformity that makes me and my anarchist friends shy away – they see a 'progressive movement', an inspiring and practical alliance, working together to defeat the common enemy of imperialism.

This alliance making does happen a lot in the Philippines, in the arena of specific campaigns. BAYAN and its affiliated groups are well respected by the rest of the progressive groups in the Philippines, for their efficient and organised campaigning, but I find it hard to gauge what the level of support for their political position is within the wider movement. I realised early on that to ask people directly about their own politics is not fair – many activists get used to hiding what they really believe, for security reasons. Certainly few will say openly what their opinion is of the illegal left.

At Cordillera Day there are political workshops, on dams, mines, militarisation, inter-tribal conflict or whatever else is a current problem in the region. There are also many cultural performances from indigenous music groups, and theatre collectives, of course punctuated with political speeches and shouts of 'the people, united...' and so on. Yet one of the highlights every year is the ceremony to commemorate the many martyrs that have fallen since the Chico Dam struggle. Neither me, nor my Filipino friend understood the words as they were in the local Ilocano language, but the ceremony itself is very powerful, performed by the families of the martyrs themselves. But there is something very moving about just seeing and hearing, surrounded by the people from a whole region united in ecological resistance. At such a moment, I feel somewhat uncomfortable criticising this amazingly powerful movement.

Likewise, watching all the cultural performances, people reaffirming their culture, not for outsiders, but with and for their own people, had a similar effect. Songs of resistance that do not show a trace of alienation, coming directly from the landscapes which define these people's lives. The sounds reminded me of emotions I had not known since the times when I was also living in resistance every day, defending the land that was my home. But also that I had not ever known the permanent rootedness and connection to the land that these people had. Like the rest of the population of the Western world, that was robbed from me generations before I was born. My culture, experiences and politics are all products of an alienated world, and knowing this it strikes me that although I may have anger towards the authoritarian ideology that is ever present at the gathering, I have no desire to condemn what I see before me. The sense of ecology and freedom soars way above the moribund politics.

Yet I don't believe it is the thoughts of Chairman Mao that are the key passion that motivates indigenous struggle in the Cordillera or elsewhere. The passion surely comes more from the need to fight for land than from any ideological commitment. The National Democratic program is just one promise of a better life. Its goals for social change seem more achievable than anyone's personal utopia. Remember that many of these people do not even know how to read, and certainly are no great experts in politics. So at the level of the NGOs, the campaign materials, the access to information, the national democratic struggle has control. On the ground, taking the acts of resistance, the people are merely doing what they perceive as necessary, for reasons that only they can define. Undoubtedly some are motivated by a desire to escape from the modern world back to their traditional life, others are happy to live in civilisation but need freedom from exploitative development aggression, and yet others do have a revolutionary fervour, and want to work together to build a new society. The individual aspirations of the people, what drives people to resistance, are as diverse as the people themselves, and this is something that no-one should seek to control.

the church

Over recent decades a substantial part of both the Catholic Church, and the UCCP, the mainstream Protestant church, have seen it as part of their mandate to work against abuses of human rights and for social justice. This movement dates from the years of martial law, imposed by the Marcos dictatorship. Church-based organisations, knowing that they were backed by a powerful and popular institution, were the first to express dissent publicly, and started working in monitoring human rights abuses and grassroots support for impoverished communities. During the popular uprising that eventually toppled the Marcos regime, a high percentage of people were brought to the streets by announcements on the Catholic radio station. That tradition has been continued, and although much of the church remains conservative, other sections are proud of their radical role.

In the Philippines, ordained and lay members of the church often take an active role in struggle. Many of the big campaigns have priests or nuns as central figures. This has become such a popular conception that Catholics especially are often assumed by the military to be communists, trying to agitate the people. For example, when a Catholic priest first approached the Manobo of Mt. Apo during the height of the campaign against the PNOC, he was asked to go away, the tribe fearing that his presence would exacerbate conflict yet further. Many Catholic priests get killed because of this alleged communist connection – as happened recently on Negros, when one priest gave a sermon against the proposed mine by Western Mining Company. But although by no means all the progressive clergy are communist, there are certainly many priests and nuns who are. Some are even living in the hills with the New People's Army, and there are several legal Christian organisations in the national democratic movement.

One feature of the progressive Catholic Church over the past few decades has been the development of what are known as Basic Christian Communities, a key feature of liberation theology movements around the world. Essentially it means a shift away from the concept of the church as a distant institution, into a framework where a community is genuinely involved in developing and determining their own spiritual direction. This process of empowerment is often subversive, as there is a natural tendency to shift from taking control over your own faith and belief to taking control over other parts of your life. However, while the process does often lead to social action, it tends to approach this from a theological standpoint.

For this arm of the church, 'evangelisation' and 'mission' lose the connotation of claiming new souls for the church, but instead working for social justice. Many of the main religious orders maintain these social missions, working with the rural and urban poor, as well as with indigenous people. The ones I met were very careful not to be imposing a Catholic belief system or lifestyle on the indigenous people, but focussed more on education, including political education, equipping people to have the skills and

the confidence to resist those who would try to take their land or destroy their culture.

I only met those missionaries that worked with those indigenous people who were already nominally Catholics, I don't know what the nature of missions is amongst tribes that maintain their animist beliefs. But I was told, as I noted earlier, by one such missionary, that they did feel that their role was to strengthen the faith of those who were already Catholic, so that they might use that faith to give them the strength to resist. And to me this is not much less of a cultural assault than is the initial conversion. The act of baptism does not in itself signify a full transition from an indigenous earth-based spirituality to a total embrace of Catholic concepts such as sin, morality, judgement, monotheism, gender hierarchy etc. Many new Christians continue to hold on to certain rituals or beliefs from their old religion, especially those connected to healing or that bring good luck in food production, but as the faith is consolidated, these will also disappear.

Why people who have an anti-imperialist political approach would choose to work from inside the institution that for hundreds of years was the main face of imperialist oppression within the Philippines is a little beyond me. Maybe they would claim that the church has shed its historic oppressive role, and can now be a force for liberation. I certainly don't agree - I never saw a country so completely dominated by repressive Catholic moral values than the Philippines. Attitudes towards sexually active women in particular were really shocking, really stigmatising anything that is seen as promiscuity by women. It is clear that this comes from the Catholic church - at the time of the Spanish invasion reports suggest very few, if any, moral restraints on sexuality. A spiritual connection to the land, which is not part of Catholic dogma, is also something I would see as vital to any liberatory movement. I suppose to rant further about the usual Catholic repressions and hypocrisies is not news to anyone reading this - but it's certainly not what I call liberation anyway!

Although faced with the rapid destruction of indigenous societies by the onslaught industrial development, I would tend to grudgingly admit that in some circumstances the negative aspects of these social missionaries could possibly be outweighed by the positive. If indigenous people were living lives that were still relatively unassimilated into the mainstream, then it would be clear that any missionary activity at all would be harmful. But at the rate their lands are currently being stolen and their culture destroyed, sometimes they need all the friends they can get, and sometimes educated and worldly-wise friends fill roles that no-one within the indigenous community can. A few introduced Catholic values can pale into insignificance, if the practical help of those introducing them means you get to keep your land! But why does religion have to be part of the deal at all?

Within the institutional framework of the church, there is actually quite a lot of freedom for anyone who wants to 'do their own thing'. Being part of it gives a necessary legitimacy to people who want to go onto the forest and work with indigenous people. Despite the priests=communists connection, the suspicion on anyone else would be far greater. And because of this, it is possible for radical or independent people to do really good work, as part of the church. We even heard of one nun, who became so interested in the spirituality of the people she worked with, she didn't really see herself as Christian any more. Yet she decided to remain within the church because of this reason.

anarchist action

The Philippines is probably one of the few places in the third world, certainly in Asia, where there is a network of anarchist collectives. There are also three Earth First! groups, in Manila, Lucena and Davao, with an eco-anarchist focus. This network has largely come out of the punk scene and has developed in the last few years. The exception to this is in Manila, where many anarchists are not punks, and never have been, but have instead tended towards anarchism as they became disillusioned with the authoritarian left.

The scene is quite small, but active. As I left, the group from Manila was fighting the commercialisation

of Genetically Modified Bt corn, and set up a temporary autonomous zone outside the Department of Agriculture. The Iraq war had also naturally been a major focus for action over the previous months. The Davao group especially have been building solidarity links with local tribes, going to visit them and learning about their situations. The Lucena group has been focussing, amongst other things on challenging the dynamics around gender and sexuality in their scene and wider friendship network. There is also much involvement with food not bombs, which is a much more of a necessity there than in the west. An infoshop has recently been set up in Davao, and plans for one in Manila are already advanced. The level of DIY activity is totally inspiring, with groups discovering and teaching ways to hitchhike, squat, get food for free and so on in the third world context, as well as of course all the punk stuff – gigs, record distros, t-shirts, zines.

In Manila and surrounding areas the various collectives formed the ‘anti-capitalist convergence’ as a network to communicate what’s going on, and make actions together. Just before I left, there was the first national gathering of autonomous collectives, which saw groups from at least 8 cities share their activities and learn from each other. Since then I have heard that the ACC has disbanded as a network due to personal fights, although all the individual collectives are still active.

It is difficult to know how to approach anarchist action in the Philippines, where there are such obvious dangers from the state and also the established left. And most groups are not doing as much direct action as they would like to be – the networks are still young, and everything is a bit disorganised and there’s not been one ‘big thing’ for people to get into. Nevertheless, there are many really great people in the scene over there, very inspiring on both a political and a personal level, and for me great friends. They will always be grateful for news, books and other materials sent over and so on, and visitors also – punk bands on tour especially!

Part 4. Not out of the Woods

ecovillage? dipuntian

As I tried to point out in the introduction, trying to understand what is really going on in the Philippines is never straightforward, and this story of the village Dipuntian, which we visited for a slightly longer time than most places, illustrates it well. Almost every day our understanding of the different players changed completely, and when we left, we still weren’t so sure who were the good guys.

Going to Dipuntian was one of the original reasons why we got inspired to travel to the Philippines. The information we were given from a group called Friends of People Close to Nature told us they had bought some land – just 12 hectares, but big enough to create a village for some Agta people. It gave the impression that they had created a reserve where people who wanted to continue their traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle could continue to do so, surrounded by a rainforest that was full of wildlife. But because of logging incursions, and fighting between the army and NPA guerrillas, they were constantly under threat. Random massacres regularly took place and so the Agta felt safer if there were western observers staying in their village, acting as a deterrent. Also it would be a wonderful opportunity to learn from these wild uncivilised people. We were excited.

The person who had initiated the project was a German guy called Hartmut Heller. He had been described to us by friends as a mad genius, somebody who was totally eccentric but who had nevertheless devoted the last 30 years of his life to the militant defence of hunter-gatherer tribes around the world. Before we left Europe, correspondence with him started to give us a few misgivings. We decided to look into his background a bit more, and came across some of his writings which were clearly and unashamedly racist, sexist, homophobic and anti-Semitic, and these we were not prepared to write off as mere eccentricities.

But we decided to check out his project anyway. Just because we expected to fall out with him didn't mean that it wasn't important to help the Agta. We met at his house first and it took us a few days to travel to the area. We had big arguments with him on the journey, as we had expected – many times he would say outrageous things no doubt to provoke us. We did choose to hold our tongues a little, however, as we were anxious to get there and only he knew the way.

So after 3 days travelling, we arrived by boat, rounding the corner into this amazingly beautiful bay, with forested hills rising behind it and a river easing out past a small patch of mangroves to one side. There was a large roundhouse that had been built a couple of years before as part of Hartmut's project. And before we even got to shore he was excitedly describing his vision for the next phase of the plan, to make it into a tribal school: "Yes, we will concrete the floor over – and buy plastic chairs for the children to sit on, because that will make them feel that they are really at a proper school!" Concrete floor? Plastic chairs? Strange words coming from someone who claims to be so anti-development. But we were getting used to his weird ideas by then, what bothered me more was that he was just making these plans and showing no indication that he was going to consult the people who lived in the village about them at all.

And so we landed and over the next day or so Hartmut sat around in a hammock, and then in the new plastic chairs when they arrived, just being ill and ordering people around. Most of all he ordered his partner around, but also the Agta (although he always paid them) and us. In our group we were five at that time, three men and two women, and it didn't take long before his attitudes towards the women caused a huge row. Knowing that he was already talking about leaving in a few days anyway, they decided to leave until he did. The men chose to stay, not for reasons of being happy around Hartmut, but to explain to the Agta what was going on. Of course, gender divides like this suck, but it's how it happened.

Anyway, we had a very illuminating discussion with a few different people from the Agta community that night. On hearing that we were no friends of Hartmut, they were prepared to open up to us and told us just how near to breaking point with him they were. Although they had been with him at the start of the project, when they saw the reality it was not exactly how they wanted to live. For a start, because he wanted to see them living as hunters and gatherers, he told them off for planting vegetable plots. It is actually not possible to live in this way from the forest anymore – it is only seven years since the forest was last clear-cut, and it now hosts a fraction of the wildlife it once did. Another sore point was that he always forbade non-Agta people from being or living on the land – even when they were living with Agta families, because he wanted to see them preserve their traditional culture, and didn't believe in 'race mixing'. They told us that they hated him, and didn't want their children to grow up learning this attitude from their parents. They were nervous about his ownership of the land, what unpredictable things could this guy do next? Basically they were at the end of their tether – if he wouldn't leave them alone then they were planning to leave the village.

The way he would go about things like this would sometimes be or sometimes not be an absolute order, depending on his mood. For example, I know that he did not really intend to ban agriculture completely, merely discourage it. But for the Agta, who are totally culturally not equipped to assert themselves directly with a dominant person, it was always taken as such. It seems that Hartmut had either never developed, or lost because of his illness, the ability to build up a relationship of understanding with the Agta. Just as he annoyed us by telling us that he had nothing to learn from us, so he tried to impose his politics on the Agta without explanation, as if he were the worst kind of missionary trying to convert the village.

We asked the Agta why they were still friendly towards Hartmut despite hating him. They said partly because he would always give them money for doing jobs for them, but also just because it was what they were used to, it wasn't in their culture to not be pleasant. Which for me was a reminder of just

how much civilisation has cost us... and also raised fears because the kindness and openness of tribal cultures costs them massively: this is one of the main reasons they lose land and liberty and culture - because they cannot say no.

We talked about the tribal school Hartmut had planned. What he had previously told us had sounded good - to build up a tribal school only for Agta, with Agta teachers teaching about Agta culture, how to hunt and gather and so on. This way the local government would stop trying to take Agta children into regular schools. He had got some money off the German government for it. But when we talked to the women who would be teachers, who were excited to tell us about the school, it became clear that it was not Hartmut's school they were talking about - if they knew of that plan at all they were not interested. It was actually some Augustinian nuns who wanted to set up a remarkably similar project - except they had done it the right way. They had sent in some community development worker, who had told them that they would help them to create a school, but basically it had been up to the community to design for themselves, if, how and where they wanted the school to be.

To me, I was thinking, yes, this is a missionary school, and undoubtedly carries some of the missionary ethos with it, but it is at least making great efforts to come from the community. It is a shame that Hartmut, who does have a few good anti-development opinions hidden amongst his many dodgy ones, could not learn to do something so simple as listen to the people he wants to work with and claims we all should learn from. I wonder if things were different at any point during his 30 year crusade for hunters and gatherers, or if it has all been as much of a farce as Dipuntian.

I always want to understand people who try to make you hate them. What kind of fucked up shit was going on inside that man's head? Did he just discover some years ago that the most primitive tribes were the ones that were most likely to take all his bullshit, and would still smile at him after being abused by him all day? Did he really set up Dipuntian because he wanted to help the Agta, or as someone who knew him at the time thought, because it was somewhere nice for him to retire to, a beautiful place by the sea, with lots of Agta-servants running around doing things for him? Or were we just seeing him at his worst, his illness making him disagreeable? At times he did relax, and became a totally different, much more amicable person.

Assuming, however, that he did only have good intentions, and had altruistically devoted his life to the defence of hunter-gatherers, then it's a very sad story. There are very few people in the world who have such a drive for action, and such a firm belief that

development is not the answer. But somehow, these ideas became dogmatic, and compounded with his lack of ability to communicate with the people, he became in their minds the oppressive feudal landowner who was at the root of the community's problems. It is a warning, I guess, to those who eulogise and romanticise the primitive, maybe in a quest for their own personal liberation - that if this is done without prioritising the humanity and concrete needs of the people



The beach at Dipuntian, with large roundhouse built by FPCN

concerned, then it is liberation for nobody.

Anyway, now it's too late to know more. Hartmut is dead now, of a tropical brain disease in June this year. It is important to make clear that despite having such major problems with his project, it does not necessarily imply condemnation of the other members of FPCN, who I understand all work fairly autonomously in different parts of the world.

We left a few days later. It was clear that the story about westerners being needed as a deterrent against aggression was a lie, and our friend who had been translating the Tagalog language from the Agta needed to go home. We did, however, promise to return and came back just over a month later.

When we returned the logging company that operated in the area (Industries Development Corporation) had started to move in. A new road passed through the area owned by Hartmut, and they were proceeding to build further access roads into the forest. We asked the loggers why they had built a road through public land and they answered 'why not – who wouldn't want a new road?' We asked the tribe why the logging company was able to come in when supposedly they need the permission of the local tribal leader. They said that a member of his family had mistakenly signed it away when drunk.

We also saw lots of evidence of illegal logging going on – boats loaded with timber would come down the river fairly often. And we were fairly confident that also some Agta were involved in this business, although when we asked, then of course they made excuses.

An annual 'meet the local council' day took place just after we arrived, a chance for the people of the surrounding villages to put their questions to their elected officials. Here some of the Agta were asking why the local councillors had been so vocally against logging at a previous meeting, yet had clearly given permission for the logging to go ahead in the intervening period. The councillors denied that they had ever been against logging. Throughout the whole meeting most of the people on the panel treated the Agta with ridicule and scorn, and often ignored them completely, only taking questions from the Tagalog villagers.

Aside from logging, there was one other curious situation we were trying to work out. Magda, a non-Agta woman from the local town had started coming to visit virtually every day. She was quite pleasant, but we wondered what she was so interested in. Then we found out that she had helped the Agta set up an organisation, supposedly to help them to be more organised and stand up for themselves better. The group comprised 15 village chiefs from all the Agta villages in about a 30km

radius, and was called Aurora Group of Tribal Aetas, Inc. (AGTA Inc.)

Why 'Inc.' we asked the Agta? Why do you need to be a company? They didn't know. None of them could actually read the document, and couldn't have done even if it had been in Tagalog rather than complicated legal English. 'Whose idea was it to make this group', we asked. 'Magda's, and her uncle, Councillor Reyes', they told us.

We got to ask the councillor about it a few days later. He had a really slimy look about him, the sort of



*Agta kids learning
useful skills*

person you know instantly is up to no good. Yes it had been his idea. His first project was to be getting control of the land away from Hartmut, and into the name of the company, which was obviously a popular move with the Agta. Apparently he had worked out a way to get the land at no cost and without needing the consent of Hartmut, which knowing something of the legal structures that Hartmut had set up to prevent this, I think is unlikely.

I would love to know what Councillor Reyes's plan actually was. For sure it's something dodgy. Almost certainly he intends to get the land for himself eventually – although he is not a director of the company, he is manipulative, and can easily think of some way to trick the uneducated and over-trusting Agta out of their land. But he has undoubtedly already invested a lot of money, and particularly time in all this, and before he came up with this plan, the Agta never knew him.

To add a few more random pieces of information to the mystery: the only connection with their family previously, we were told, had been that the husband of Magda, an employee of IDC at the time, had got one of the Agta women pregnant. Magda told us that she had closed her shop in town and taken her two children out of school in order to spend more time to work on the group, but all that seemed to consist of was sitting around the village chatting everyday.

AGTA, Inc. had a meeting while we were there. It was actually planned to be a big show-down against Hartmut who had promised to be there, but he didn't show, I guess because he was too sick. Now Filipino meetings are often chaos, but this one was really crazy. One of the oldest people in Dipuntian, completely drunk on gin was continuously teasing a blind guy from another village, who wasn't really sure what was going on. It was totally hilarious and got the attention of the audience. This allowed Magda to completely dominate the meeting – she just talked for hours, making up new rules that nobody agreed with, electing her friends (non-Agta) onto the company and so on. Clearly she could control the company to do anything she wanted, against the wishes of the Agta, who would just not assert themselves.

We tried to tell the Agta as best we could about our suspicions and their rights, but they just looked weary, sick of it all. This project they had believed was going to give them real control over their land, and here were we telling them that they were going to be conned yet again. There was no way out – there would always be outsiders, better educated, who would be able to cheat them and profit from them. Both Hartmut and Magda had shown up at the village, promising that they were on their side, and both were causing problems. I started to wonder if we should have just kept quiet, and let them face the inevitable when it came. At least the stress would have been lower for a while. Sometimes I wonder if teaching these traditionally trusting people how to be suspicious is not nearly as destructive as the more obvious assaults.

At the big meeting we met with a chief from a neighbouring village. He took us for a walk in the hills behind his village, and told us stories of how his group had militantly resisted the loggers last time they came, 7 years before. He said that once upon a time Natong, the chief of Dipuntian had also been known for his militancy defending the forest, but he did not know what had happened. He had lost all his fight, and possibly now was even taking bribes from the logging company.

Natong, and other members of the tribe have to put up with a lot of stress – stress coming from the civilised world which has gradually encroached on them over the years, but which they did not grow up with. I did not even mention the problems with a claim for ancestral domain put in by someone connected with the logging company, the need to go out in a boat for several days to look for the body of an Agta that had probably been killed, the NPA making various death threats about people who were visiting Dipuntian, a teacher being kicked off the land for not being Agta, by another European visitor to the land, debt collectors coming round, having to deal with us being there all the time, and so on... all this within 2 weeks. Natong told us that he could still hunt using his nose. But for the Agta, it seems that this old way of life is on the way out.

The Sierra Madre Mountains run along the entire east coast of Luzon, and this barrier has been one of the main reasons why the coastline has never been developed. No roads run along most of its length and boats are often the only way to get around. A few towns have sprung up at intervals, but along the coast and the mountains behind, many of the inhabitants are negrito tribes – Agta, Dumagat, and so on. At Infanta and General Nakar, Quezon Province, the shoreline is only 80 km from Manila, yet here the road stops, and it can take days to travel to villages just a few kilometres further.

Most of these traditionally nomadic people are settled by now, and practicing more agriculture than their hunting-gathering ancestors would have, although they are still largely subsistence based.

But one man has big plans for the area – an audacious plan from which he would profit immensely. Attorney Romeo Roxas envisions a new megacity arising along this mountainous coastline – a city of some 3 million people to finally catapult the Philippines into line with the tiger economies that exist in other parts of South East Asia, but which it has so far never managed to keep up with. In his book “Dynamics of National Development Planning in the Pacific Coast Cities”, he outlines what he wants to see – luxury tourist facilities will be the first stage, followed by a new international port, a university, an ecumenical religious city and an Olympic city. He also plans that many of the capital functions, as well as large businesses would move here from Metro Manila, the rationale being that the pollution and traffic congestion in the current capital are causing huge efficiency losses. To service the development would be new road and rail links, connecting the area to Manila, the planned international airport at the former Clark Air Base and the east coast town of Baler.

In the middle of all this, annotated on the map but not specifically referred to in the text is a small reservation, designated for ‘cultural minorities’ ie indigenous people.

If the plan goes ahead, then it essentially means that the efforts of one man would lead to the development of the whole eastern seaboard, instantly spelling the end to the traditional way of life of thousands of indigenous people, as well as severely affecting the livelihoods of the many lowlanders, orientated mainly around agriculture and fishing. The varied ecology, which includes virgin forest and coral reef would also be devastated – all for this city designed primarily to serve the elite and middle class.

Trying to find out more details before visiting the area proved difficult. An internet search yielded only newspaper reports of local demonstrations against the project – neither Pacific Coast City itself nor Atty. Roxas’ companies (Green Circle Properties and Resources Inc. and Green Square Development Corporation) have their own website, nor is the plan mentioned in any government structure plans, nor are there reports in the business press about investment opportunities or the future economic prospects of the city. Also talking to NGOs outside the area – very few had even heard of the project. If this project is so crucial to national development, why is it so unknown?

So it is natural to start to wonder whether the whole project is ever really going to happen or if it is just some crazy megalomaniac plan that will never come to fruition? It does start to seem that way. But on the other hand Atty. Roxas’ book is prefaced with letters of commendation from two successive presidents (Ramos and Estrada), declaring their wholehearted support, and proclaiming it a priority project. Given that what follows is a remarkably unprofessional study peppered with outrageous comments that would certainly not give me any confidence if I were an investor, it becomes clear that the only thing that could drive this project forward is the corruption and feudalism that still defines Filipino politics. Unjustifiable by social and ecological criteria, and even economically a dubious prospect, it seems that friends in high places can still get you a long way.

The amount of money Atty. Roxas could make from this project is incredible. He owns a large tract of the land where the city would be built – some 30,000 ha which he bought from a former hacienda, which was given a land title by the Americans in 1912. If fully developed the entire project area would be worth over 3 trillion pesos (= \$60 billion) and in parts each square metre could be worth P8,074. But what is actually going to happen, who knows. I would be completely amazed if the Olympic games were ever held there, if the whole master plan as envisioned in his book is ever realised. Yet, he has already invested enough, and courted enough political favour, that it would be equally surprising if he didn't manage to build some sort of development there. And that initial development, whatever shape it took, would undoubtedly be a base from which infrastructure would surely spread along the whole coast and mountain region.

At present no construction work is going on. Atty. Roxas is concentrating his efforts on his logging operations, and also has a mining claim, which he is likely to pursue. The local government now backs the plan, claiming they have no choice, as do some elements of the church, but the local population is decidedly against.

We did not go to the area of the logging operations, it taking a few days to travel each way, but we did talk to some people from the affected areas, and those who used to visit the area. Apparently Atty. Roxas has a strategy of encouraging Dumagats to cut logs – because they have no other livelihood option – but this strategy of course also has the effect of creating dependence on his operations and causing divisions within the community between those who are not prepared to log and those who will, thereby reducing the likelihood of resistance. A blunter weapon is his 200 person strong private army. Especially in the year 2000-2001 they were actively threatening Dumagats in the Umiray area, that if they do not accept Roxas' plans peacefully they will be beaten and chased from the land. The police turn a blind eye, claiming that they do not know the exact boundary of Roxas' land, and so can't do anything.

When we visited, many people were more concerned about resisting a new Integrated Forest Management Agreement, that covered 50,000ha of forest on land bordering Roxas' land to the south. Suddenly granted just a few months ago to a Wilson Ng, it includes large areas of virgin rainforest. If the efforts to prevent its implementation don't succeed then it will be a very lucrative contract, as Atty Roxas' plans for a new port will provide a cheap route to the export market for plantation products.

One problem in the area seemed to be that the Dumagat people chose loyalties to different institutionalised groups – some were controlled by the 'progressive' Catholic missionaries, some had sympathies to the Balatik (a National Democratic group), and others chose to work closely with the NCIP. The area was well known for having a plethora of organisations, and it seemed when we were there that there was a distinct lack of desire to work together. We weren't really in the area long enough to gauge how the existence of all these different factions was affecting the resistance, but as in other places in the Philippines, I started to get the impression that the organisational self-interest and ideologies of these various groups were being foisted on the indigenous people, and that the splits were created by these outside interests, rather than the indigenous people themselves.

mount apo

Mount Apo was the location, where ten years previously, one of the biggest struggles of indigenous people against development had taken place – the battle against the geothermal power plant of the Philippine National Oil Company. What we saw when we went there was a community having to live with the aftermath of that struggle, as well as the PNOC plant itself, but taking a long term view, and really working within the community to strengthen and in some cases rediscover their tribal identity.

The battle for Mount Apo was not a straightforward case of 'company versus lumads'. The PNOC was very effective in splitting opposition within the various Manobo and Bagobo tribes. Just a few months

after tribal leaders from 9 tribes got together in 1989 to sign a D'yandi or blood pact to defend the sacred mount Apo, other Manobo leaders performed a counter-ritual, called Pamaas, to clear the 'curse' that had been crated by the D'yandi. During the intense conflict surrounding the construction, paramilitary forces drawn from the communities themselves were used – a common government tactic of dividing the indigenous people and setting them against each other. The years that followed did not see the different factions reconciling, but the fight went on – not only curses and counter-curses, but it even got as far as suing one another in the courts!

As the PNOC plant eventually got completed, the tribe came to realise that this divide in the tribe, engineered by outsiders, had been exceedingly destructive. They looked for ways to break down the mistrust that the struggle had left them with. After the Indigenous People's Rights Act was passed in 1997, they decided to use the provisions which allow people to claim land which it is recognised is their ancestral domain. The trouble is, there were three different claims for the Mount Apo area, from the different factions that had emerged.

I am not sure of how it got decided, but by the time we spoke to the tribe, they had not resolved their differences to a sufficient degree to treat the ancestral domain claim as one single area rather than three. However they were using the process of working towards the certificate of ancestral domain title to come together once more as a entire tribe, including both those who had opposed and had been in favour of the PNOC.

The people we talked to, like most indigenous people, had little confidence that gaining ancestral domain title would do much good. Most people are quite aware of the way the Filipino state has always worked, and expect no radical change. Most people who claim ancestral domain, in my experience, are doing it 'just in case' it makes their position just a little bit better. Yet the way the Manobo were approaching it was what was inspiring. During the anti-PNOC struggle, they were continually told that they were a dead tribe, that they had been assimilated into mainstream society. So they were taking the process of making their claim as a chance to regenerate their tribe, to reaffirm their culture before it was lost forever. Their organisation (IBAS-MADC) met regularly, both to discuss the claim and plan cultural activities together.

Part of this was the relearning of traditional skills, such as making musical instruments, traditional clothes and jewellery. We walked up from where we were staying to the higher village, where they showed us some of these things. It was convenient for us to be able to talk about that, since these were the people who were in favour of the PNOC and we had been asked by the anti-PNOC people not to talk politics with them, as they were anxious to avoid causing further rifts. Some of these skills, the patterns for the jewellery, the tunes for the instruments etc. needed to be relearned from the eldest of the elders, but people were clearly keen to learn, and some of the designs were really beautiful.

A communal model farm had also been created as part of the project, where people could share techniques for growing crops, livestock and fruit trees. The methods being used on the farm were organic and aimed at minimising soil loss from erosion. Communal fishponds were another project.

The tribe chose to subdivide itself into clan-based organisations, to recover this traditional extended-family structure. These organisations have regular clan gatherings in order to strengthen the bonds between members and enrich the historical knowledge of the members. A video about the Manobo shows one of these taking place. Young people are being asked questions about their ancestors in a sort of TV game-show format. But the people who are talking to us think this is OK: it makes it fun and people want to take part.

For making decisions in IPAS-MADC, everybody has an equal say. It was felt that the traditional structure where a powerful leader, or Datu made all the decisions, had been abused by the PNOC, who would only have to put effort into winning over the Datu and could be in future by other forces of

development. Although Datus, (and Baís, their female equivalents) were still an important part of Manobo society, in the future everybody would have to learn to take responsibility for defending their land and their culture.

The Datu we stayed with was also elected Barangay (local area) captain, something which is unusual for lumads: even in areas where they are the majority, lowlanders tend to hold the elected post. This gave the opportunity to regenerate another aspect of their heritage: tribal warriors. Given the safe-sounding name of Protection Volunteer Group, they carry out the dangerous job of searching and confronting illegal loggers in the jungle. That the Datu is barangay captain gives them some degree of legal legitimacy – they don't want to see a repeat of the situation the other side of the mountain where a Bagobo Datu got two years in prison for confiscating a chainsaw that was being used illegally.

We learned from them some of the ways their traditional lifestyle is inherently ecological. They still hunt occasionally, but the night before they go hunting they will dream, and in the dream, the spirits will tell them how many animals they are allowed to hunt, and they will never catch more than this, therefore ensuring that the hunting remains at a sustainable level.

For myself, I wonder how much success the Manobo will have in their efforts to reverse their cultural decline. Their efforts are, as they can only be, targeted at tangible aspects of their culture which has declined. We asked ourselves, are they aspiring towards something more than this, escape from the encroaching total assault by civilised values which are progressively eroding their traditional ecological paradigm? Nice as it would be to think this, the answer is probably no – what unifies the movement is more to do with reclaiming pride and self-determination as a tribe than attempted decivilisation. Yet it is also a clear rejection of simply joining the mainstream – it is a reaffirmation of their collective desire to live an ecological, traditional life, unified as a tribe. To me this is totally inspiring and I hope their attempts are successful.

And the PNOC – what has been its legacy? I'm sure we didn't see or hear everything about the effects of what was described in the D'yandi declaration of principles as 'the demon from the north... armed with a moon-shaped cane to whip us away from our land'. We did, however see the rows of concrete houses that people had been resettled into from the PNOC site, with no land or other resources to make a living. We heard about the water that was now polluted, and how the sickness and death of some children was suspected to be due to that water. And we saw the sacred sulphurous lake Agdo that hosted a tourist development and was watched over by the military.

pulangi dam

We wanted to find out more about the Pulangi V dam, in North Cotabato province in Mindanao, which if it was built could be one of the biggest in Asia. The Pulangi I, II, and III dams were all stopped due to resistance in the 1970s, although dam 4 was built. So when we heard that some researchers from the group Masipag (who promote ecological and self-reliant methods of farming) were going to present their report about the agricultural practices of the Manobo in the area, we asked if we could come along.

That was no problem. The only thing was that three days before we were scheduled to go, the government launched an attack on the MILF in Liguasan marsh, near the town of Pikit, in the same province.

We didn't realise quite how close we were getting to the fighting, but when we got there the Manobo told us we would need to take some precautions. We should just stay one night, and leave as early as possible in the morning. We should stay in the back garden and not let ourselves be seen by anyone who might be travelling along the road. White people could be a potential target, especially as the

government was using the supposed presence of a group called the Pentagon Kidnap Gang as an excuse for such a vicious attack on the MILF. The village was expecting to be raided by the MILF within a week, but they thought that that night was pretty safe. And despite never having been in a war zone before, I actually felt safe. These people had needed to live a life of constant vigilance for years and would not be overestimating or underestimating any danger. Yet they spent the night as usual, not sleeping, but patrolling against attacks. And we heard that there was gun-fighting less than 10km away during the night.

With the current critical situation the conversation inevitably focussed on the fighting rather than the dam. Also we were not actually at the dam site - the village we were staying at was some kilometres downstream. Their homes would not be flooded, but their ancestral burial grounds would, which is a serious matter for a tribe that has not let itself become Christian, despite living in the lowlands. But we did learn a few things about the dam. The fighting has put the plans for the dam on hold for several years. It is the National Power Corporation that want to build it. If it is built it will displace 48,000 families. Much of the land is ancestral domain of the Manobo people, who are trying to claim it as such.

What was interesting to learn, both in North Cotabato itself and then later in the safety of Davao City, was the link between the Pulangi Dam and the ongoing military operations against the MILF. The fighting has centred around Liguasan marsh, which is the second biggest wetland area in Asia, and has the unofficial yet hardly secret intention to clear the area in order to develop the marsh. The Pulangi Dam is central to this – the Pulangi River is one of the largest rivers draining into the marsh, and damming it would drain the marsh sufficiently to proceed with development. The electricity generated by the dam would also be useful.

So what's so special about Liguasan Marsh? Ecologically, a lot. The 280,000ha area hosts many rare and endemic plant and animal species. One of the features is huge floating islands of water hyacinths, which can cover an area of up to two hectares, and even provide a base for some marsh dwellers to build their homes on. The area was declared a game reserve and bird sanctuary in 1941, and in 1983 when a comprehensive ecological survey was done was still home to the endangered Philippine monkey-eating eagle. A 30 foot crocodile apparently lives in the marsh and acts as guardian over it.

To the people of Liguasan, the marsh is also special. It is the home to 60,000 of them and a centre for the Moro culture. Most people live by farming and fishing, and have learned to make productive land that is only dry for half the year, after the rains stop. It was the centre of trade for the Moro people before the Spanish era, and also their stronghold to resist assimilation after colonisation.

But the military is not interested in such things. Their goals for clearing the marsh have more to do with what lies under the marsh – that ever-present companion to war: oil, and in this case especially large reserves of natural gas. And not only oil, the mud of the marsh can be sold as a rich natural fertiliser, and big companies have the idea of using the drained marsh for plantations, particularly oil palm. These proposals are all included in the Liguasan Marsh Framework Development Plan 1996-2025, and leaked documents from February 2003 indicate that the government is intent on pushing forward with its implementation as soon as possible.

There is evidence that the government's action is intended to create refugees which will never return to the marsh. The president herself has talked about plantations in neighbouring Maguindanao which will be used to resettle refugees. What's more, every incident of state aggression so far this year has been focussed in the areas of the marsh that are to face development, and also at the site of the Pulangi Dam. The Manobo told us that people living around the dam had been displaced for some time, and when they returned, heavy machinery had been moved in, and that this has been a story repeated often over the decades of fighting.

Oil-palm plantations are planned to be the first phase of development. The development plan

recommends that existing programs be fast-tracked in order to induce acceptance of later stages of the plan. And it seems that some of these plantations will be owned by the Khadaffi Foundation, the company of the Libyan leader's son, possibly as a reward for Libya's role in negotiating successive peace deals, or maybe simply that an Islamic investor is seen as less inflammatory.

But for the present, the war still goes on. It looks likely that much of the ecology of the marsh has been destroyed over the 33 years of sporadic fighting. Toxic chemicals from bombings contaminate certain areas so much that the military are advised not to enter them. Infectious diseases are spreading faster and killing more, to add to the death toll at the refugee camps which I do not have a figure for, but I remember reading regularly about deaths in the daily papers. Even the cows are dying, from internal haemorrhaging, probably caused by damage to their nerves from the bombing.

People trying to build peace oftentalk about the tri-peoples of Mindanao – the Muslim or Moro, the Christian and the Lumad, and sometimes the situation is presented as this unavoidable ethnic clash. But the conflict is magnified many times and complicated by the actions of the state and corporations, who have stolen the land of all three groups. Without this, I am sure solutions would be much easier to find. The Manobo's attitude was not so bad really; they recognised that the MILF was their enemy at the moment, and it was them they feared attack from as they kept watch every night, but when it came to resisting the Pulangi Dam, they were hoping to find ways in the future that they could work with their Muslim 'brothers'.

The whole Mindanao situation is phenomenally complicated. No-one can really be sure what is going on, and to blame it solely on development by multinational corporations is undoubtedly a simplification. I was there only one month, I do not claim to understand everything about the situation, but neither do people who have lived there all their lives. Who has placed the bombs that have rocked the city of Kidapawan about once a month for the last few years? What about the high-profile bombs at the airport and docks of Davao city, the place that would always feel so safe to me as I sat drinking rum on the streets with my friends every night? The government blames the MILF, and presents some Muslims who have 'confessed' to prove it (although the masks on their faces are surely to hide the signs of torture). Everyone else suspects the state or the CIA, usually without saying it out loud, but the theories over why they would do such things are not so convincing. So many people have died over decades, craziness and killings with no clear motives have become part of life.

mining mindoro

This was the only anti-mining struggle that we were able to visit and find out about in some detail, from people who had spent much of the last few years campaigning against it. It does affect indigenous Mangyan people, although we were not able to travel up the mountain to the tribal areas due to the intense militarisation – more on this later. On the face of it, the situation does look very positive at the moment – the permission for the mine has been cancelled and the provincial government has signed a moratorium banning mining for 25 years. But while celebrating victory, local campaigners are still cautious that the next few years might see them back to square one.

The plan for the mine came from Canadian multinational Crew Development Corporation, who had plans for a 10000 hectare nickel mine covering much of the area between Mount Halcon and Mount Baco, along the central spine of Mindoro. The technique to be employed, laterite mining is essentially strip mining – only the layer between 1 and 6 metres from the surface is mined. Actually, the ten metres below this are richer in nickel, but it is more profitable just to skim the surface layer for some reason.

The area where the mine would be is an important wildlife corridor between the two mountainous areas. It would affect the range of the endangered Tamaraw, a small water-buffalo endemic to the island, and other of this island's estimated 154 endemic species. Pollution would run off into the Mag-asawa Tubig, and eventually could pollute Naujan lake, home to the endangered Mindoro Crocodile,

as well as an important refuge for migratory birds. The large surface exposed by the mine would undoubtedly accentuate flooding in times of heavy rain. Floods already occur much more frequently due to decades of deforestation. The area of the site is also home to several villages of Mangyan people, some of whom are still nomadic and practice swidden, rather than settled agriculture.

The soil and rock mined would be ground up at the mine site and converted to slurry by adding lots of water. Then it would all be sent down a pipeline 43 km to the coastal village of Pili, where on a 150ha processing plant, the nickel would be extracted using a sulphuric acid process. 40,000 tons of nickel would be obtained every year – 4,000,000 tons of waste would be produced, and this would be piped 4 km out to sea, and dumped at a depth of 200m, a technique given the name of Deep Sea Tailings Disposal.

This processing and dumping creates more problems. The company says that at this depth there is no marine life – more than likely this is not true, just people know less about the ecology at these depths. This method of disposal has been banned in most first world countries, including Crew's home country of Canada, yet it is marketed in the third world as environmentally sustainable technology, and is even mentioned in the Philippines new National Mineral Policy as such.

Fisher-folk along the coastline told us how they had already seen yields drop dramatically when Shell laid a gas pipeline close to the coast. They believe the mine waste would end the fishing industry for good in the area. Replacing this would be 1000 jobs in the processing plant – but they would mostly be for skilled people. The character of the village would also change totally with so many newcomers. Crew promises social projects, such as new schools, but the villagers know that these promises are easily broken.

We walked through the village to look at the proposed site of the processing plant. 150 hectares is still a pretty huge area, and it will mean levelling a hillside. There was a beach there, very beautiful, would look good on a postcard... yet it is also standing in the way of progress.

The campaign against the mine came from a broad alliance of groups from all over the province – NGOs, church groups, federations of indigenous people, local government officials, mountaineers and so on. The campaign saw huge demonstrations with tens of thousands of people in the provincial capital. The NPA played some part, by burning down one of the office buildings of the mine site.

The victory came in July 2001 when secretary of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources, Heherson Alvarez, announced that Crew's permission to mine had been revoked. Sneakily, in the same speech, he gave a new permission for a less controversial mine elsewhere in the Philippines. Six months later the provincial board added a further layer of protection for the area by declaring a 25 year ban on large scale mining.

But it really isn't all over yet. On Crew's website it states the clear objective of getting its permission reinstated, and this could happen a number of ways. Alvarez has now been replaced at the DENR, and his successor could grant permission just like that – within a few weeks of office he had already controversially overturned many of Alvarez' decisions. Otherwise, in 2004, the general election comes up, and that is a time when everything is up for sale – the candidates will take bribes from anyone in exchange for promises of support should they get elected. The local activists know that those sitting on the provincial government will all say they are against the mine now, because that is what the people want, but their true allegiances are wherever the money is!

Crew is no stranger to using dubious tactics to get support for the mine. During the consultation, which is necessary to get an environmental compliance certificate, they handed round a questionnaire about the mine, which at the bottom had a space for a signature. So after filling it in, everybody signed. Nobody noticed what was written on the following page, which said 'if you sign this, then you are

giving your consent for the mining operations'. So Crew was able to report nearly 100% support for its plans. This, and variations on the theme, are common practice for mining companies.

To get the 'permission' of the Mangyans, Crew was involved with the NCIP in the setting up of a new Mangyan organisation, which it called Kabilogan. The Mangyan were encouraged to join this organisation, to facilitate their certificate of ancestral domain claim being processed. In the end, only about 50 families were represented, and they were plied with gifts by Crew. The NCIP gave a certificate of free and prior informed consent to Crew in January 1999, although the people who had been talked into joining Kabilogan were angry - they were wanting to get control over their land, not to show support for the mine.

In the last two years, Mindoro has seen some of the largest and most brutal military operations of the country. There are more troops in the province of Oriental Mindoro than any other in the whole country, save Basilan (home of the supposed Al Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf). Whether there was any connection with mining no-one is sure - the actions of the military are never easy to understand. What is known is that there have been many many killings and disappearances of activists belonging to legal organisations, possibly an unprecedented number in recent years. Several prominent members of legal and legitimate left wing organisations have been simply gunned down in the streets. After I had left I heard that the regional leader of Karapatan, a respected human rights group, had been killed whilst investigating other atrocities. Hundreds of Mangyans have been forced off their lands by the military terror, and have ended up inside the compounds of several religious organisations on the mainland of Luzon.

One Catholic priest who was vice-chair of the Alliance Against Mining left the island because he heard that he was on the wanted list in that province. He did not know why. The killings have made it impossible to organise any further mass-based demonstrations against them mine, and have severely limited the possibility for travel to inform communities about the effects of the mine. And many of the activists are very scared - in the chaos that is going on at the moment, no-one knows who could be the next target.

**Much more information about the history of this struggle, contact details etc, can be found on the website of ALAMIN, the umbrella group for the campaign: http://groups.msn.com/ALAMINMAHAL/_whatsnew.mswn, or a comprehensive briefing can be found at <http://www.miningwatch.ca/documents/STD%20Toolkit/02.STDtoolkit.Phil.pdf>*

Part 5. Down from the Mountains

Maybe many people would not feel the need to justify themselves, and maybe I do not either, but since I did travel halfway around the world to get to the Philippines, I was always asking myself 'what am I doing here, was there any point?' and so on. Awareness of the privilege of being able to take such a journey was with me daily. And due to never having been there before, and our initial plans not working out etc, we only had very vague aims of 'building solidarity links' and 'learning about the situation' to go on.

Well, the future will tell if any of the solidarity links prove productive, or even if this simple act of writing about our experiences to spreading information is worthwhile. But I do I want to try and be critical about possible negative effects of being there. Was our presence actually any use to those people, or were we just some new sort of tourist that gets some sort of kick about finding out about those things that are fucking up people's lives?

There were basically two responses to our visits to communities. One was really over-the-top grateful. For example, one community chose to make me a Datu, and my friend a Bai, calling us a bridge

between our group and theirs, that we would be always fighting the same fight as them. Another tribesperson told us that they had dreamed many years ago that white people would come and be the answer to all their problems! The other typical response was 'well, thanks for trying, nice you're interested but we've heard this sort of thing before and won't expect much to come of it'. I felt a lot more comfortable with the second reaction – there's much less responsibility involved! In fact I definitely preferred it when people didn't seem to trust us at all – that is surely a much healthier reaction to outsiders.

Another issue is how to tell people where you are coming from. They are used to missionaries, NGOs, anthropologists and tourists by now, but have almost certainly never come across western eco-anarchists, and we of course did have quite different motivations for being there. One thing I wanted to be careful of was not to be at all evangelical about my opinions, but instead to focus on listening to them. To add our anti-development ideas to the assortment of alien ideologies they already have to contend with did not seem such a constructive way forward, with no time to build up real mutual understanding. Having said this we certainly didn't hide from people what we thought when they were curious – we wanted to make it clear to people that we were inspired by their culture and resistance, and we did try to shatter some myths about life in the West. Many people wanted to know what our background was and it seemed that one thing they did find easy to relate to, however, were stories and pictures of our own resistance to forest destruction and mining in Europe.

Sometimes we were just in communities for two or three days. In this short time our visit is hardly going to be of life-changing significance for good or ill for the communities, but could still add to feelings of stress. The culture of hospitality in both indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the Philippines means that people feel a huge responsibility to make guests welcome, often meaning that they make sacrifices themselves. Some groups have so many outsiders coming along, asking questions, that I start to wonder if this is actually a significant part of assimilation into mainstream culture – working out the various hidden agendas of missionaries, NGOs, anthropologists, tourists and businessmen necessitates adjusting yourself to the values of the mainstream society. On the other hand, some people did tell us they were inspired and strengthened by our visit, and I guess there is no reason not to believe them.

One incident that made an impression on me was a drunk Agta man, previously the chief of the village before he passed the role on to his son, who presumably was in a better position to run the village, not being alcoholic. Anyway this man, wearing only the traditional g-string plus a pair of swimming goggles, came up to us as we were swimming in the sea. He tried to talk to us, but wasn't in the state where he could string a sentence together in any language. We tried to communicate back for a while, but I guess we couldn't really hide our irritation at his drunken pestering. From then on he would alternate between shouting abuse at us and trying to be friendly. Eventually his anger turned on his son, and he found a gun to wave around, threatening to shoot him.

What was really clear was his self-hatred at not being able to deal competently with what was probably quite a significant event, foreign visitors. When he was chief, he would have been the one welcoming us, and our presence was a reminder that he could no longer cope with what the world around him had turned into. I think it is no coincidence that it is so many of the older people that are the worst alcoholics – they have had to change the most during their lifetime, and are the least able to adapt to further changes. Living in a world so estranged from that of his youth, one more new thing just pushed him over the edge.

It is easy to think that once indigenous people are interacting regularly with people from the mainstream culture, or have electricity and even television, that all is lost, they have thrown in their lot with us and become civilised. From the people I met, I don't think that change happens so quickly.

There was something about even the most integrated indigenous people that was still really refreshing. How do you describe it? A love for the land, and for their people certainly, an acceptance of the need to struggle with no bitterness for those that forced them to that life, a way of prioritising what is necessary in life without the confusion that we face.

Another memory – we met one woman again at a lecture in Manila for anthropology students, who had previously told us so much inspiring stuff about reclaiming the tribal culture when we were on Mount Apo. The students stayed as long as they had to for the course requirements, but soon began to drift off. As she remarked to us afterwards, it's so different to tell the story in a place like that, compared to where we heard it, on the mountain itself. Away from the land and the people that make it real, it is just another story, something to study, nothing that needs to be emotionally engaged with.

I don't know, maybe there was something in the lives of those people that gave me a sense of hope. Not in their situation, or the situation of the ecology that supports them, or their prospects for a future – all these are causes for despair. But in the attitudes that I started to get used to, being surrounded by people who other people and nature really mattered to, who never spoke with hate against anyone. These were still in my mind when I got back to England a month later – little bits of culture shock, things I had forgotten quite how bad they were, such as to hitch a lift with a racist truck driver and remember the pointless vitriol and irrelevancy that surround us every day.

There is a tendency of some in radical ecological movements who create as a category 'wild, pristine culture' and who look to hunter-gatherer societies as the last remnants of a pre-civilisation affluence. We came across this in the literature from FPCN about Dipuntian, but such language is also often used in texts coming from the anarcho-primitivist movement. Such wild people are accorded a higher 'value' than the rest of the world's population, being the only ones that did not yet succumb to the 'poison' of settled agriculture that seeped out of the Tigris-Euphrates basin 10,000 years ago, the germ of civilisation that has developed into the monster that blights the world today. and an emphasis is put on the need to preserve their culture rather than others.

This hierarchy of worthiness seems to be based on looking for something pure, untainted, free from any trace of the alienation that has destroyed our potential for true freedom yet which we cannot escape from. Yet this in itself is an alienated concept. It is a response which romanticises those which are seen as totally wild and uncivilised in order to reject what is conceived as the most all-embracing conceptualisation of oppression, the totality of civilisation. As such, it is a politics that is motivated by our desire as civilised humans for our own individual liberation, rather than for the liberation of the people concerned.

A parallel exists with concepts of wilderness in nature, which has been a theme of environmental movements, especially in North America, since the romantic writers of the 19th century (Muir, Thoreau, Whitman etc). The romantic notion of pristine wilderness has, when taken up by capitalist interests has resulted in the 'preservation area and national park' culture which is seen as an form of exploitation by indigenous peoples in the Philippines and around the world. Even amongst radical networks there was a tendency in the 'redneck faction' of US Earth First for years to not be bothered about any politics beyond the wilderness zones, and subsequently, when the environmental justice movement emerged it felt no connection with existing radical networks, perceiving them as misanthropic and elitist.

People wanting to act in solidarity with tribal societies around the world need to squash this romantic ideal. It is firstly not correct to think of groups anywhere in the world as pristine and untouched by civilisation, and if it were possible to find a few such remote groups then they probably wouldn't need our solidarity actions! But moreover it is dangerous, because to take this approach means that instead

of trying to understand the people and support them in their lives and aspirations, it is approaching them with visions of how they should conduct their lives.

Moreover, while it is certainly inspiring to know that there are still groups of people that live from whatever grows wild in the forest, it is strange to try and 'save' them in isolation. The world is a crowded and complicated place nowadays, and it is the same oppressions that face all groups of different people. Any action that is solely focussed on one group, can often be at the expense of others, eg. non-indigenous peasants. It is analogous to creating a nature reserve to protect the flora and fauna whilst ignoring the humans that also form part of the eco-system.

And any implication that it is only the hunter-gatherers are worth fighting for is just misanthropic lunacy, driven solely by ideology. The agricultural tribes are also fighting for the and which they cannot live without. And even the non-indigenous population live their lives in a way that is more connected with the people and environment around them - rather than the meaningless concerns which fill up our empty lives - and I guess this is probably a feature of the whole world except the west.

There is a difference between poverty in the third world and in the west. Nobody in the Philippines could understand why I said there was poverty here, when I explained that very few people couldn't afford food to eat. Likewise, when my friend asked why so many people attempt suicide here, I just didn't know how to explain. To people who have never experienced it, the poverty of our culture is very strange. Yet it is the wealth that can be hidden in the third world. In the Cordillera I asked someone why they were fighting against the pollution of their local river, when it didn't supply their immediate water supply needs, irrigate their fields etc. "Because we know we live in paradise, and we want to keep it that way" was the answer. To focus only on the poverty and not the riches, is to promote the myth that progress brings prosperity.

By the time I was due to leave the Philippines, I was of course sad to leave my friends, but in other ways I was ready to go. In particular I was glad not to have to sit another time, asking questions of people about how their land or livelihood was about to be imminently destroyed. It seemed a bit sadistic, knowing that I was soon to go back to the privileged West, where struggle is more of a choice and less of a necessity.

But although I could ignore it, I do feel these struggles are also mine now. Maybe it is the enchantment in the rituals they performed. But mostly of course, I don't want to fight solely on behalf of these people - it is just as much my battle, for myself. Because when I see them I realise what has always been lost from my life, and always will be, and the craziness that the world I have to live in has become. The anger that causes is my motivation.

Practically, what solidarity means, is less easy to define. There will be points in the future when action is needed in the West targeted at corporations involved in the Philippines, or action in support of prisoners, etc. But that will not be all the time - action from the other side of the world is only effective if it is targeted carefully, and motivated by events on the ground. Solidarity also comes from our own struggles against the institutions of domination that effect the whole world; the corporations, states, international financial institutions, and knowing better what their real impact is gives strength in fighting these.

However, I feel that there is another solidarity that exists at a more fundamental level of struggle. And that is to do with the daily act of living - the struggle against alienation in our own lives. Because when you think about it, even half a world away, life is not so different. Solidarity means to treat the land here as just as sacred as over there; to approach life from a starting point of love, and to enjoy it; not to make things more complicated than they need be. And when you need to do so, resist, but to fight hard, because our lives also do depend on it.
