SHIFTING LIVELIHOOD AND INTENSIFICATION OF FISHING EFFORT IN A VISAYAN ISLAND IN CENTRAL PHILIPPINES

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Introducing alternative livelihood to fishers has tested the methods of community organizing. The stubborn attitude of fishers with regards to this has only reinforced their negative image to scholars of coastal resource management. A deeper historical analysis to know more about the process of fishery intensification reveals – that fishing cannot be understood apart from agriculture, particularly in the context of peasant household and production. Interviews with families of fishers engaged in small-scale fishery show that both fishing and farming complete the survival techniques of these fishing families, contingent to social relations and networks of each landscape, and external pressures to which they – as peasants – are always vulnerable.

Keywords: *Agrarian change, fishing, Philippines, Visayan Sea*

Introduction

Worldwide interest in coastal resource management (CRM) in the 1990s has momentarily shifted the area of research from agriculture to coastal and island communities. The period produced a bumper amount of literature in fishing and maritime studies.[1] One topic in CRM, which has stayed with me long after my engagement in the study of fishing, is the intensification of fishing effort and the negative image given to fishers. According to the proponents of CRM, either there are too many fishers or fishing effort has become intense as a result of poverty. Scholars of agrarian change, on the one hand, argue that global capitalist penetration drives the shift from

[1] Agriculture/farming has always been a priority over fishing in the Philippines. For the colonial history of this academic bias, see Cannell's *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (1999:3-12, 259-260).

subsistence to intensified commercial agriculture (Dressler & Fabinyi 2011:536).

Fishing is associated more with *kaingin* farming, with resource users claiming use rights for a period of time. Its resource users are viewed as less responsible compared to those given formal land or sea titles. In the case of the Philippines, poverty has turned fishers into greedy, irrational, and rapacious resource users with a goal to increasing production more than managing the fishery that supports them. Earlier, Hardin (1968) pointed out the incentives there are for fishers to catch more fish. One of these incentives is the assumed open-access nature of the sea for them. The same incentives are accessible up to now to Philippine fishers, yet there is a need to examine other factors that propel them to fish more aside from hinging the discussion solely on poverty, as proponents of CRM tend to believe so.

Scientific assessments conducted in Philippine waters claim that fishing effort must be reduced to avert further resource degradation. To meet this target requires the elimination of about 12 per cent of commercial fishers or 38,392 fishers and 40 per cent small-scale fishers or 158,865 fishers (Israel & Banzon 1997). To encourage fishers to shift effort away from the sea, more than a hundred CRM projects in the 1990s devoted their resources to achieving this end (Pomeroy & Carlos 1997). However, fishers do not seem interested or convinced in taking up an alternative livelihood to fishing. And if they do, the initiative is bound to fail (Pollnac et al. 2001). Eder (2003) disagrees with the concept of alternative livelihood, observing that countries, such as the Philippines, have households who employ several activities and are dependent on several resource systems for food and income. Eder argues that an alternative livelihood would be a burden to their existing survival strategies.

This paper offers an ethnographic perspective on why small-scale fishers have intensified their fishing efforts. Central to the discussion is how these fishers access opportunities afforded by a shifting livelihood and an expanding social network as a set of techniques to which they hold on in navigating through risks and uncertainties of a shifting source of food and income. Crucial in the discussion is the close connection shared by the island with institutions physically separate from and distinct to it, particularly the government, local capitalists, middlemen and traders, the international market, among others; and how they impact on the decision making and everyday life of its residents. Analysis centers on how the island residents constantly shift livelihood in responding to historical and contemporary pressures in the process of pursuing their notion of what constitutes a good life.

Methods. Fieldwork on the island of Botlog, northeastern Panay started in 1994 and continued until 1996.[2] The initial visit took place in 1991 when a key informant was interviewed on changes in the island's fishing technology (see Takakuwa & de la Peña 1994). Botlog was chosen as the research site particularly because its residents belong to the category of the *poorest of the poor,* as described by the community organizers. And this is the same category of fishers whom scientists and policy-makers refer to as *rapacious* and driven to behave as such by poverty.

A household survey (n=55) was conducted to determine the household composition and economic activities, and this was followed by key informant interviews. This interview followed the life histories of fishers from different generations in order to know the changes in fishing technology and other related aspects, particularly migration. The life history interview conducted in 1991 framed the succeeding interviews made with two other key informants. Both interview and survey were confined in the *centro* (center) part of the island, and did not include the *sitio* (sub-section of village) where 23 households more stand.

I stayed on in the island with a couple both in their 60s, Gavino and Diding Dignadice. They were referred to me by the fishery school in the town of Concepcion, which was on the mainland. At the start of research, permission was secured from the mayor of the town, and the *barangay kapitan* (village head) of Botlog. The interview on the island took two years, but it was intermittently conducted. I made sure, however, to observe important seasons particularly *lean* (when the residents subsist on shells alone) and *peak* fishing (time of abundance), the fiesta of the Catholic patron saint, and migration period to other islands. The household survey helped me a lot in introducing myself and my work to the residents.

The interviews were conducted in the early 1990s. Data on the current fishery at that time and previous fisheries, dependent on the experience of the key informant, inform my discussion on the shifting fisheries.

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[2] Assistance to conduct the fieldwork for this research was secured from the Aquaculture Department of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center. The larger paper from which this article was culled out was accepted in 1997 as a master's thesis in sociology by the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman.

What drives fishers to fish more?

Botlog, with a land area of 50 hectares, is one of the smallest islands that dot the Visayan Sea. It is circular in shape, the reason, according to residents, why it has been named Botlog (a Karay-a word, which in English means 'one that bulges'). Other residents narrated that *botlog* is a shell that used to abound in the island's intertidal zone, but which disappeared a long time ago. Gavino, my host, narrated a story for me to know what really happened. Starting with *sang una* or *before*, *sang waay pa ako natawu* or *when I was not yet born*, and continues it with one event, one of those rare moments when God sets the low tide to remain for days:

> It was one of those days when God gives coastal people the chance to gather all kinds of fish, seaweed, and shells, such as *botlog*. There was this young girl who tirelessly gathered all these on the first, second, and the days that followed. After a few days, it seemed evident that God has decided to end it, and the villagers readied themselves to leave the sea for soon the tide will surge.
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> Having filled their baskets, they all returned home one by one. But this young girl, now far from the coast who obviously has noticed the tide coming in, kept on saying to herself, "*isa na lang, isa na lang"* (*just one more, just one more*). Finally, she decided to stop but it was too late, even if she runs. The water moved fast and, in a split second, swallowed her. After the incident, the people stopped experiencing prolonged low tides and were not again given the chance to gather fish and shells as much as they could.[3]

The fishers talk about overfishing in the same manner as fishery scientists explain the phenomenon. The narrative centers on the propensity to fish more for more income that propelled the intensification of fishing efforts. However, such simplicity demands more discussion considering that small-scale fishers remain the most poor and forgotten agricultural sector in our country, and the most vulnerable to economic pressures.

Of the total 55 households in my census, 32 male household heads considered themselves to be engaged both in squid fishing and fishing for demersal species using jig line. The other 21 said they were engaged in squid

[3] The scene is similar to how survivors of a tsunami describe the days before disaster strikes.

fishing together with net fishing for crab. During off-fishing season, some of these men would crew in trawler boats owned by families in the mainland. The number of fishers increased on weekends, particularly teen-age boys undertaking near-shore fishing to add to their school allowance.[4] All 55 households owned a canoe which, at the time of fieldwork, cost around ₱2,000 (₱1.00 = US$23.00).[5] The main catch, a neritic type of squid (*loligo*), dwells inshore, so getting oneself a motorized boat was not really a priority. Squid fishing could be operated simultaneously with line fishing for demersal species, and the one preferred by most fishers.

Dry squid is sold to local agents, also residents of the island, who work for traders based either in the town or the central city. The presence of very few local agents in the value chain of squid fishing testifies to the newness of this network. Fishers have yet to know the traders of dry squid who at the time of fieldwork were based in Iloilo City.[6] The practice of *utang contra isda* (fish is sold to a trader before it is even caught) prevalent throughout Visayan fishing communities, exists in squid fishing. The fisher, following this practice, could get advance payment for the squid yet to be caught. This is one form of securing supply from the point of view of the trader.[7]

Squid fishing could be undertaken several times a day: from four until seven in the morning, continued from eleven to two in the afternoon, and then seven to eleven in the evening.[8] A total of about 11 hours daily were spent for it. However, this schedule was not followed by all fishers. Fishers who were not married at the time of fieldwork, even if they were in their productive age-set of 21-40, did not fish this much. In fact, they considered their fishing trips *hampang* or *game/entertainment* and not *pangabuhi* or *life* as this only applied to married fishers. A good example of such a fisher is Raul. He was 26 years old at the time of fieldwork and he was not yet married. Raul lived with a grandmother who owned a half hectare of coconut farm from where she got their subsistence. Raul's fishing trips were irregular,

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[4] Fishing on the island is small-scale. Following the Fisheries Code of 1998, small-scale utilize boats that are 3.1 gross tons (GT) to 20 GT, medium-scale with boats that are 20.1-150 GT, and large-scale with boats more than 150 GT.

[5] This exchange rate was true in the early 1990s. Presently, one US dollar has an exchange rate of ₱46.00.

[6] Iloilo City can be reached after three hours of travel from Botlog Island.

[7] I discuss a similar case of Cebuano fishers and Chinese financiers based in my forthcoming paper with Cynthia N. Zayas, titled, "Enduring *amo-sakop* relation in the expanding coral reef fishery of the Visayas, central Philippines."

[8] Squid is readily cleaned and sun-dried. A kilogram of fresh squid can be processed into three kilos in dry form.

and he engaged in it only to support his vices, particularly cigarettes and liquor (interview, 16 April 1995).

For the more 'serious' fishers, an average of 25 kgs of squid could be baited by one fisher in a day during the *kuchicha* or the peak season in August to mid-October and then April until the first weeks of June. On nonpeak season, even the catch of demersal species is very low. But then fishing *is paswerte-swerte* or those for the lucky ones. There was one instance when a group of three fishers in an offshore fishing shoal baited 75 kgs or more in just one trip. The trip was described as *swerte*, or in English 'lucky,' a term which residents of the island used more often as opposed to *malas* or bad luck to describe fishers who come home empty-handed. Elaborate rituals and religious ceremonies, common among fishers utilizing deeper waters, were not observed in the island. In fact, the island did not have a *babaylan/baylan* (shaman) or its lesser form, the *sirhwano/medicu/mereko* (medicine man), to perform rituals and ceremonies. Fishers practised fumigation when their canoe is new. To increase the catch, they had a practice of surreptitiously cutting a piece of cloth from one of the paraded saints during the Lenten Season, and keeping it with their fish hooks. During this Christian celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, fishers believe that the magical potency of the object is much more powerful than in ordinary days.

Squid has its low season, too, the time when, according to fishers, it migrates offshore for cooler waters. However, this time, fishers catch another species of squid, the *sepia* which is found offshore and larger in size than the usual catch of loligo found near-shore. On the island, this season is referred to as *taggurutom* or the 'period of hunger'. Several strategies were devised to follow the squid to outlying waters. The canoe fishers are an interesting example. These fishers grouped themselves into four or six in a system called *tabid* or to be towed by the owner of a motorized boat. A fixed share of the catch, usually in fresh form, of every tabid or the towed one (the canoe) was given to the boat owner as payment for the towing service. In this case, the boat owner also acts as a middleman, later selling the squid in dry form to traders.

The sojourn to offshore fishing grounds would last for at least two weeks, and fishers narrated the experience as one of hardship, insecurity, and loneliness. Only women, children, and the aged were left on the island during this time. With the fishers' absence, those who remained on the island subsisted on shells collected on the intertidal zone. This context meant experience of *taggurutom* or 'period of hunger'. During this time, women sought temporary work as househelp in the mainland.

Squid had been a permanent feature of the island's resources, but dry squid did not have a buyer until 1985. Fishers on the island preferred selling their squid in dry form because of its higher price compared to fresh. At the time of fieldwork, fresh squid in the market cost ₱35/kg, but if dry its price ranged from ₱150/kg to ₱200/kg. Some fishers observed that there had been a recent outburst of squid in their waters, but other fishers believed that the recent shift to squid fishing is a consequence of the proliferation of traders. Based on fish catch data from the Food and Agriculture Organization, worldwide demand for cephalopods has dramatically increased since the early 1980s. Cephalopods, for instance, rank the third among marine species for export. Fishery science has a different view of this phenomenon. Following the *fishing down the web* model, the predominance of squid over other forms of marine species indicates that waters surrounding the island have long been overfished (Christensen & Pauly 1990; Pauly & Palomares 2005). Demersal species subsist on lower forms of life forms, such as squid, and the high supply of squid could only mean that its predators – the large demersals – have been fished out. The absence of large demersals results in the abundance of squid.[9] To add to the discussion, fishers believe that a certain fish species periodically disappears, experience tells them, for about a decade. But then it returns, and such is the nature of the sea.

Movement to the island

Botlog does not figure prominently in the literature as a strategic place for fishing. Its waters, nevertheless, are known as a fishing ground for medium-size trawlers (Flores 1974), and where the first *basnigan* or bag net boats sailed (Spoehr 1980). It is found on the northeastern part of Panay Island where one can also find Estancia, the so-called 'Alaska of the Philippines' (Szanton 1971). The island itself played host to sojourning fishers from Cebu, but these sojourners stopped coming when the island started to bar them off from fishing in their waters.[10]

The island's residents were all migrants from the mainland. There were five family names considered the 'original settlers,' or those who settled first on the island. They were peasants who migrated to the island after finding its land suitable for upland farming and that fishing was readily available. The baptismal registry kept by the parish church of Concepcion, which has jurisdiction over the island, reveals baptized children from Botlog as early as

[9] For a more recent study of this perspective, see Ulman & Pauly (2016).
[10] Interviews with fishers from Quinatarcan Island, Cebu, but who are now living on Gigante Island, confirmed that they fished around the area before.

1899 to fathers who were *pescador* or fishermen. Fishing, however, was not given much weight by informants when they narrated about their earlier experiences on the island. According to Jose Dignadice, who was born in 1907 and 84 years of age at the time of the interview, people then had enough corn for subsistence. Their two-storey houses were built on the hill, and transferred only later to the beach when they intensified their fishing (interview with Jose Dignadice, 1991).

Corn was harvested around August, the period of slack in the mainland, when rice had to wait for two more months to be ready for harvest. During the first four to five months when the rice plant was maturing, there was practically no work in the fields so that many farmers went to upland areas, such as Botlog, where the harvest for corn was done earlier. Gavino, Jose's younger brother, remembers that when he was young, his father conscripted extra labor to help them to harvest their corn. Their relatives from the mainland would usually come to help. Corn was consumed, but a significant part of it was exchanged for rice from the mainland. In the Philippines, rice is staple but corn is consumed part of the year in some places due to the shortage of rice.

Corn farming ceased to be the main livelihood on the island after World War II. Responding to the tremendous export demand for copra, the government in the 1950s embarked on a series of programs to promote growing coconut. The planting of coconut for copra on the island was introduced by an enterprising young man from the capital city. This man bought almost a quarter of the island. He planted coconuts on the beach and on the hill. Seeing good income from copra, the residents shifted to coconut planting. The price of copra then was good and stable, unlike now when farmers regularly experience low price. Eventually, copra lost its importance in the hierarchy of the household economy. According to Gavino Dignadice, it is hard now for them to return to corn planting. Coconut has already destroyed their island's soil.

Gavino's wife, Diding, elaborated on his use of the word *guba* or in English 'destroyed' (interview, 15 November 1994). Roots of the coconut have sipped down the earth, and this makes it difficult for other plants to grow. With corn before, they had practiced mixed planting, but this is impossible with coconut. The loss of corn has affected the supply of rice for inhabitants on the island. There were still others sources, however.

Diding, remembers the time when, together with other women of the island, she would harvest rice in the mainland. Harvesting was confined to areas where she or her companion harvesters from the island has relatives. They would stay in the mainland for a week or two. This happened before the

government's Green Revolution in the 1960s. For seven days of harvesting, Diding could earn around six *libon* or 60 kgs of rice.[11] To complement this income, she brought with her the dry fish from her husband's catch to exchange with rice. A sharing system of 1:4, meaning the fourth or the last unit of share goes to the harvester, was later changed until it reached 1:8. Diding narrated how their island maintained very good relationship with villages in the mainland where they harvested. They participated in each other's fiesta celebrations and merrymaking, specifically by sending a representative to take part in the much celebrated beauty contest. Much later, they had basketball tournaments.

It was not the sharing system, which the women harvesters later found unfair, but the manner in which rice harvesting was done later which cut the practice. With the government's success in promoting the Green Revolution with varieties of a semi-dwarf hybrid rice with long leaves, the harvest tool was changed to the long-bladed sickle or *kayug* ('scythe' in English), which Diding and other women harvesters never learned to use. Only men use the sickle now. Unintentionally, the island's source of rice from the mainland was once again cut off.

The shift to intensified fishing

Spoehr (1980) and Szanton (1971) discuss a flourishing fishing industry in northeast Panay, of which Botlog is a part, at the time of their fieldwork. Zayas (1994) describes the same period using her interview with migrant fishers of Gigante Island. Despite these opportunities, the island never reached the entrepreneurial category for fishing to flourish there (see Zayas & de la Peña 2012). Even if their waters are fishery-rich both for small-scale and commercial fishing, its fishers, however, have not possessed the logistics to fully utilize it. Trawlers from the mainland instead regularly encroached upon their municipal waters.[12]

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[11] One *libon* is equal to 20 *rayna*. One *rayna* is equal to one-half kilogram.

[12] The Fisheries Code of 1998 defines municipal waters to include not only streams, lakes, inland bodies of water, and tidal waters within the municipality which are not included within the protected areas as defined under Republic Act No. 7586 [The NIPAS Law], public forest, timber lands, forest reserves or fishery reserves, but also marine waters included between two lines drawn perpendicular to the general coastline from points where the boundary lines of the municipality touch the sea at low tide and a third line parallel with the general coastline including offshore islands and 15 kilometers from such coastline.

Crucial to consider also is the peasant character of the island's residents. Traditionally, subsistence was derived from fishing and farming, where both continuously reinforced the social network of the residents with mainland residents as seen in their exchanges of rice, corn, dry fish, and labor. The success of the Green Revolution, however, had a depressing impact on women harvesters whose ability to provide rice to their households was cut by this much applauded government program that promised bountiful rice harvests, thus more rice for the people. Around the late 1960s, there were towns that succeeded in perfectly utilizing the resources of their area, such as the proximity to fishing grounds, the availability of capital, and the supply of skilled fishers, that they developed into what Spoehr (1980) labeled 'fishing towns.' In the Visayas, Estancia used to be a popular fishing town (Szanton 1971, 1972). Other fishing towns that mushroomed included Cadiz in Negros (Spoehr 1980), Cuyo in Palawan (interview with several Visayan fishers), and Bantayan in Cebu (Ushijima 1994). This is not a complete list, and there could be more fishing towns. Owing to the presence of capitalists, mostly Chinese, these fishing towns invested in large fishing boats and recruited crew from coastal and island communities, one of which was Botlog.

There were several pioneering families on the island who moved to Palawan and Zamboanga during this period. Jose and Gavino Dignadice, my informants, have a brother, who opted to stay behind in Palawan. He fished for the biggest fishing entrepreneur, Dr. Uy of Cuyo Island, right after World War II. Dr. Uy's fishing boats operated nationwide and distributed his fish catch to the larger markets of Manila, specifically Navotas in Luzon. Much later, following the opening of the Iloilo Fishing Port Complex in 1985 and the entry of medium-sized commercial boats in the business of fishing, a few men from the island were conscripted to fish and to live in distant fishing towns. It is fishing that led Ilonggo families to build the communities that had already been established at this time, such as in the fishing towns of Zamboanga del Sur and Palawan.

The oldest son of Jose Dignadice, Rudy, started as a crew in a bag-net fishing boat of one capitalist from Cadiz (interview, 9 May 1995 in Victorias, Negros). There were several of them recruited from the island. His father did not approve of the idea, but nevertheless he went. He remembered climbing a short hill in Cadiz on clear days only to see Pan de Azucar, an island wih a mountain beside Botlog. He could not directly see Botlog, but he knew that it is just beside Pan de Azucar. Rudy did not reach the famed fishing shoals of Palawan, unlike his father's brother and other older relatives, but he fished in most parts of the Visayan Sea. Rudy did not stay a crew, but managed to own, at one time, seven small-sized trawlers for shrimp. He was already a resident of Victorias a fishing town in Negros and not Botlog at that time. He

recruited men from the island to fish for him, which was a source of great pride to his family. Only Rudy became a fisher-entrepreneur from Botlog. The rest of the men who crewed for large fishing boats remained such. The same fate was observed of second-generation fishers enlisted into much larger fishing boats, those high-tech boats with fish finders, refrigerated compartments, and dock to sell their catch not in fishing towns but fish ports.

Commercial fishing boats are capital intensive and highly dependent on machine technology. The crew received fixed salaries there instead of fish shares as practiced in smaller fishing boats like bag net, trawlers, and baby purse seine. Enlistment of fishers from islands and coastal areas by commercial boats did not endure and, later on, fishers preferred to work for smaller fishing boats. The sophistication of fishery laws, however, particularly the Fisheries Code of 1998, also outlawed smaller fishing boats from fishing near-shore. Following decreased catch and fish shares, the crew opted to fish at home. The island had many of this type of fisher at the time of fieldwork, and they all turned to squid fishing to support their households.

'*Life is pursued'*.

In my interviews with Visayan fishers, the proverbial adage *ginalagas ang kabuhi* ('life is pursued') is frequently mentioned. Similar to their lifestyle of pursuing fish and moving around the Visayan Sea is the experience of chasing after life. The verb *lagas* is powerful in conveying the arduous and difficult situation of the one doing the action. The interviews with the island's residents attest to it. Their life stories reveal a variety of shifting landscapes, strategies, social networks, resources, and hard decisions made. Pressures beyond their control, however, are inherent to every livelihood into which they enter. Dressler and Fabinyi (2011) noted the same thing of the Tagbanua of Palawan, whose shift from swidden agriculture to grouper fishing has not been easy, and will continue to be difficult considering the power and authority present in the value chain of grouper fisheries, namely the 'upper-level' financiers, buyers, and wealthier fishers.

For the residents of the island community of Botlog, shifting to another livelihood is a product of decision-making to gain the best there is from all available options. Converting their corn farms to coconut is one example, and so was engaging in other livelihoods that followed. The small parcel of land that each family owned became too small for them to earn from copra. The women stopped periodic harvesting in the mainland because of a national program for new rice varieties. Men, too, contended with fish shares that varied with large-scale developments in technology, market, and fishery legislations. For these residents, vulnerability to pressures was high also

because of their status in society. They also lack savings to finance the periodic shift to other forms of livelihood. The absence of capital, primarily, to sustain oneself in the activity was not present in the island. Elsewhere in other parts of the Visayan Sea, the fishers of Quintarcan Island in Cebu, for example, have sustained themselves in the business of reef fishery for two generations due primarily to the financing of their *amo* (patron), a Chinese from Carbon market (see Zayas & de la Peña 2012). This has not happened in Botlog.

Before, with dry fish as product to *barter* (exchange) with rice, women from the island continued to visit their relatives from the mainland. The exchange, somehow, minimized the effects of an altered island economy, particularly when they shifted to coconut and later to intensified fishing. Crucial to the set of survival techniques of the island residents were social networks shared with mainland relatives who supplied them the much-needed rice. This network has always been a part of the decision to try another livelihood. Over time, this network was nourished by visits and tournaments shared especially during summer. The mainland became a source of marriage partners for people on the island, too.

Squid fishing offered a new set of experiences. The high price of dry squid rendered it too valuable to exchange with vegetables and root crops, the available items for exchange. Rice has ceased to become a main exchange item in cases of mainland-island barter also because of its high cost. The women of the island instead sold their dry squid in order to buy rice and other household necessities. Presently, squid fishing supports all this. Crucial in this narrative is the demise of the island's active social network with mainland relatives.

The mainland-town of the island has a long history of active barter or exchange of products with the nearby towns and between its coastal and island communities. At the time of fieldwork, in the 1990s, the barter place was still there but sustained by the wives of fishers enlisted in small-scale commercial fishing outfits. Their husband's catch of pelagic species were dried and exchanged for the produce from the mainland of vegetables and root crops. With stricter fishing ordinances on fishing near-shore however, it is probable that even this direct exchange has ended.

The value chain of squid fishing requires the fishers and their families to connect with traders of dry squid. Presently, this link is being managed by local agents secured by the traders. Dry squid is very important in the household economy of the island. Dry squid is not consumed, even if there is no fish catch. It is not bartered either. Because of its high value, it is solely for sale. This is not to draw a conclusion that networking with mainland

relatives has ended because blood, they say, 'sticks'. The rise of commercial fishing has made everyone think that development will follow a unilineal trajectory. Yet fishers of the island have opted to return to their canoe and to small-scale fishing. Indeed, what remain significant above all else in the process of pursuing life are social relations and networks.

Recent studies on fishery science reveal continuing interest in the phenomenon of shifting fisheries (Ulman & Pauly 2016). The fishers of Botlog, for some years now, have shifted from squid fishing to gathering shellfish. Such is the nature of the sea, according to my informants. The lost species will appear again after ten or so years. For fishery science, however, a shifting fisheries reflects a depleted ecosystem. Management of the ecosystem is recommended in the form of fishery ban or closure. But community organizers in the country, especially at the time of fieldwork, suggested the adoption of an alternative livelihood, specifically away from the sea.

The life stories of fishers reveal intensification in fishing, on the contrary, following depressed and weakened opportunities from land. Previous utilization of land and sea was as a form of alternate livelihood source. Indeed, fishing efforts have intensified with squid fishing, but certain networks, those crucial to household maintenance, are nonfunctioning in its context. The binary construct of farming/agriculture as opposed to fishing/sea becomes fragile in the context of how fishers and their families pursued life.

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