

RESOURCE SHARING AMID LIMITED ACCESS: THE CASE OF THE *BARANGEN* CONCESSION IN BOLINAO, PANGASINAN

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This essay documents how a consortium of marginal municipal fishers in the 1990s had managed to participate in the bidding system by banding together seasonally to form a self-regulated, loose social contract among participants to the *barangen* concession, a leased municipal fishery lot. It focuses on the easily overlooked sharing arrangements without romanticizing or discounting the disproportionate appropriation of limited access to the *barangen* (*Siganus fuscescens* or rabbitfish), a major fishery resource in the area. Sharing arrangements among the concessionaires is seen as a realistic group survival strategy in the context of possessing temporary prerogatives in a subsistence economy.

Keywords: *Barangen concession, fishery resource sharing arrangements, marine tenure, community 'management,' economic anthropology, maritime anthropology*

Introduction

The intention in this paper is to examine how a significant fish resource like the *barangen* (*Siganus fuscescens* or rabbitfish) is accessed, appropriated, distributed, and shared by resource users. The *barangen*'s familiar name is *danggit* in many parts of Luzon and the Visayas. The ethnography reveals how a consortium of marginal municipal fishers managed to participate in the bidding system by banding together seasonally. A self-regulated, loose social contract was formed among participants with complex layers of sharing, cooperation, and generosity. Examining how sharing was manifested and expressed among concession participants in a limited access resource system gives insight into the social motivations for cooperation as well as resource and task sharing within the group. Noteworthy in the case of the *barangen*

concession is that it tells of a 'proportional social allocation' or redistribution – equal sharing among equals, and unequal sharing among unequals.

The barangen fishing concession was a significant fishing concession leased out by Bolinao's municipal government to private individuals or groups in a yearly public auction called *piskeria*.¹ The term 'piskeria' was interchangeably used by locals to refer to both the public auction at the municipal office and the Fishery Lot 1 associated with the barangen fishery.

The concession was valued for affording access to the biannual seasonal migration routes of the barangen, a fishery that constituted as much as one-third of total fish catches in Bolinao (McManus et al. 1992). Barangen ranked no lower than third largest in volume of catch in Pangasinan and La Union, and the fish corrals (*pasabing*) used in the concession are listed among the most common fishing gear in Western Pangasinan (McManus & Chua 1990). The *pasabing* was a traditional fishing gear that was considered relatively costly and difficult to maintain, but it provided steady minimal catch for the fisher even during lean fishing season ("*siguradong may pang-ulam ang pamilya*" or a sure meal for the family, fishers would remark). The spawning season of the barangen, however, was compared to a 'jackpot' for the fishers akin to the harvest season of farmers. Winning the public auction to gain control of the concession was the key for marginal fishers to have access to the barangen resources and earn substantially more than other economic activities.

Leasing out of the barangen concession probably followed the enactment of a national and municipal law in the early 1900s, but then ceased in 1997. The reason for the abrupt change was unclear to the villagers. No explanation had been given except that the Fishery Lot 1 would be under direct management by the municipal government and that those who wanted to set up traps or fish in the area had to coordinate with and pay fees directly to the municipal office rather than a *postor*. Coincidentally, the concession for *bangus* (milkfish or *Chanos chanos*) fry gathering was gaining more value due to business interest in the bangus fishpond business prior to the change in system. More wealthy individuals also began exploring fish cage ventures in Bolinao around this time.

There was no opportunity for me to inspect how the sharing arrangements may have changed when the leasing of the concession was

¹ Mangahas (1994) in her study about Batanes also encountered the term *piskeria* to refer to a fishing license or fee for the fishing license. The term has nuanced variation in use, but is somehow related. *Pesqueria* in Spanish means 'fishery' or 'fishing grounds.'

halted and after this study was completed in 1997. As such, the sharing arrangements described in this paper likely no longer represents current practices since its documentation in the 1990s. The intricate sharing observed then may no longer exist today, but the level of complexity of sharing relationships and local regulation in a fishing island are too interesting to be left forgotten.

The initial study had revealed iniquitous relationships within the system. From the point of view of those excluded from participating in the concession, it was seen as unfairly restricting an important fish resource only to 'wealthy' concessionaires (Rodriguez 1997). Inequity was indeed readily recognized. The original study had in fact been cited for pointing out the inequitable arrangements in the concession system (Aguinaldo & McManus 2000). Although many social groups, such as the concession holder or *postor*, the pool of investors who provided funds for the bid, guards, pasabing owners and fishers, fresh and dried fish traders, were involved in the concession, they were observed to differentially benefit from the concession. For instance, the *postor* had the most access to the fish and earned the most compared to any other participant. His kin, friends, and allies had priority in choosing the best fishing grounds or in being allowed to join the workforce during the fish runs. These examples tended to overshadow the practice of sharing that was simultaneously displayed and practiced internally among them. Without discounting the disproportionate appropriation of limited access to the *barangen*, in this paper I focus on the easily overlooked sharing arrangements between and among the concessionaire, employees, and other participants. Such sharing arrangements can be seen as a realistic and complex group survival strategy, which supports a subsistence economy in a context in which only temporary prerogatives to the fishery may be possessed.

Sharing, along with the division of labor, has been seen as a universal adaptive strategy among living hunting-gathering groups. This, however, may be differentially expressed; other authors point out, as I too assert, that obligatory sharing is a survival strategy indicative of subsistence economies yet cross-culturally highly variable (Bogin 1991, Mangahas 2004a). The adaptive benefits of sharing rest on supplying nutritional needs despite unpredictable food supply or varying skills and luck in accessing food (Bogin 1991, McEllroy & Townsend 2008, Magno 2013).

Unlike the quick cut off in opportune moments for sharing fish with others observed in other cases,² sharing fish among the concession participants happened over an extended period during the long production procedure requiring cooperation of a large workforce of people. Sharing fish was observed to occur at many levels found within the productive group, from harvesting to processing. These layers of sharing within the barangen concession system differed because fish harvesting at stationary pasabing structures located relatively close to the village afforded those who cared (or dared) to ask the harvesters for barangen during the three-day nightlong process that fish were hauled in from the sea.

The large volumes of catch during this three- to four-day fish spawning season meant that the concessionaires could earn from their claim and, at the same time, share fish. People did consider the fish run as a gift and blessing from nature. One key informant gave a philosophical view that the fish runs were resources given by God to benefit people. Having this perspective implied a degree of expectation of entitlement to some fish by the villagers and an unspoken motivation, among other social reasons, for the concession holder or postor to share a portion of the barangen harvest.

Despite the complex issue of access and differential benefits by participants, the case of the barangen concession reflected consensual fair shares within the network of people who joined the group. Such sharing arrangements paradoxically transpired within the backdrop of access to an important resource base being limited to the group awarded rights to the fishing concession. This study does not intend to dredge up questions on whether subsistence economies exhibit egalitarianism or inequity, but merely to demonstrate that both disproportionate sharing and equal sharing coexist between and within the group. Disparity in income or access to the barangen resources is inevitably touched on here despite attempts to treat iniquitous arrangements separately.

Research methods. This study of the barengen concession system is based on ethnographic research in Dewey Island, Bolinao, Pangasinan from 1993 to 1996 covering three major migration periods and a minor fish run in 1996. Information came from a combination of secondary materials and primary sources, which included unstructured and semi-structured interviews with key informants and participant observation. Key informants represented the

² For example, in the case of Samal Island fishermen in Davao, sharing fish landings occurred in the brief period between the landing of the catch and the point of weighing the fish (Mangahas 2004b).

different categories of participants to the concession: the concession holder (postor), investors (*kasosyo*), pasabing (fish corral) fishers, fresh and dried fish traders (*tagabiyaha*), dried fish processors (*tagapindang*), and guards (*bantay*) at the fish corrals. The 47 key informants from Dewey had current or past involvement in the concession, and were selected based on their knowledge and on their varying social profiles. Within the community, I interviewed the young and old (ranging from 13 to 72 years old), male and female, those of relatively high and low status, and with little and extensive experience in the concession.

Participant observation compensated for my language limitations and avoided distortions in cultural meanings. I participated in the processing of dried fish for trading, joined the fishers and traders at the fish corrals, helped in listing the catch at the pasabing, and witnessed the actual production and marketing processes as well as the public bidding at the municipal hall. Participant observation complemented the interviews with the key informants in affirming and verifying gathered data.

Dewey Island, Bolinao in the early 1990s. Bolinao has recently been elevated to a third-class municipality (MDCP 2009) from being classified a fourth-class town in the 1990s. It is under the jurisdiction of the first district of Pangasinan northwest of Lingayen Gulf, surrounded by the West Philippine Sea on the north and west, by the Caquiputan Channel on the east, and by the municipality of Bani on the south (Fig. 1). The town is 274 kilometers from Manila via Camiling, Tarlac or 365 kilometers from Manila via Dagupan and is accessible by a five-hour bus ride from Manila (Elegores, Lubusta & Soriano 1992, Ferrer et al. 1994).

Of the 30 barangays in Bolinao, a third were considered coastal villages where close to half of the population of Bolinao converged (Elegores et al. 1992). The population of Bolinao in 1992 was 52,701 or 9,944 families, of which roughly 35-43 percent depended on fishing activities for survival (Elegores et al. 1992, McManus et al. 1993). Farmers used simple technology like *kaingin* (slash-and-burn agriculture) on mostly rain-fed farms. They minimally used mechanized equipment to grow rice, vegetables, peanut, corn, mango, cassava, cashew, maguey, and *ipil-ipil* (*Leucaena leucocephala*). People raised livestock such as carabao, cattle, pigs, goats, and fighting cocks. With few livelihood sources, 87 percent of the population lived below the poverty threshold of ₱4,000.00 monthly, barely enough to sustain the average family size of six (Elegores et al. 1992).

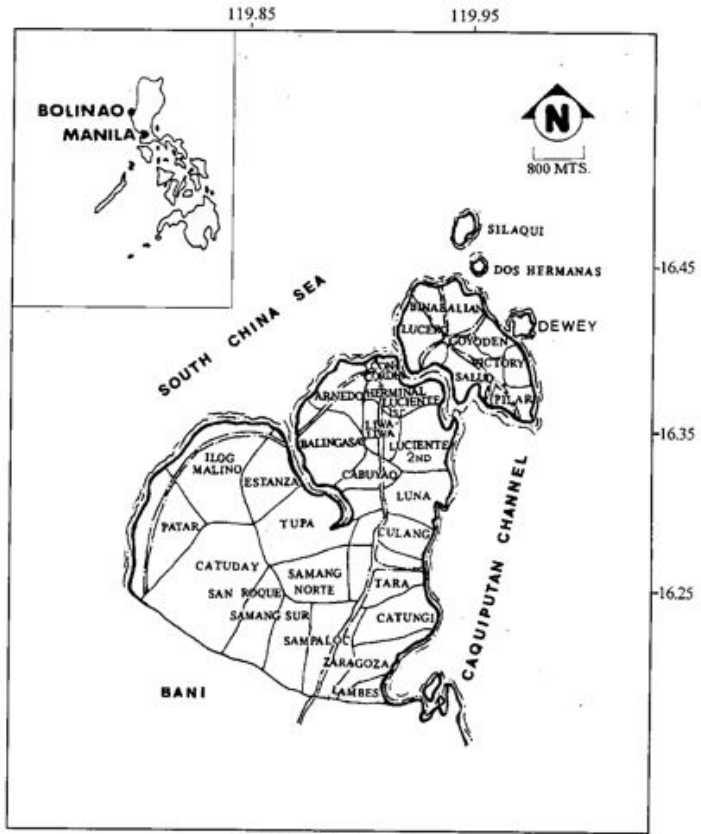


Figure 1. Dewey Island, Bolinao, Pangasinan.

In the 1970s, 90 percent of the people spoke Bolinao and they were also trilingual – speaking Iloko and Pangasinan aside from Bolinao (Legazpi 1974). With in-migration from the northern Ilocos region, there was a shift in ethnic composition. Ilocano speakers surpassed Bolinao speakers in the 1990s. The population remained largely Roman Catholic (given the early evangelization efforts in 1585 a decade after Bolinao was founded). Literacy rate was at 78 percent, and half of students dropped out before graduating from grade school. About one-fourth of elementary graduates continued to

secondary level education, and 10 percent of elementary school graduates reached the tertiary level. Reasons for dropping out were attributed to low finances, lack of schools, transportation difficulties, peer influence, disinterest, early marriage, and the perception that women must stay home (Elegores et al. 1992). Literacy rates improved in the 2000s when more schools were added in the area (MDCP 2009).

Dewey Island, the main field site for the research, sits northeast off Bolinao's town proper, seven kilometers away or about a 30-minute boat ride from the Arosan market (Fig. 2). Dewey is physically separate from Santiago Island, but the fishing village is considered part of Santiago having been once connected by a now denuded mangrove forest. It is the only island *barangay* of Bolinao, with the smallest land area. In 1992, Dewey was quite distinct from the other fishing communities in Bolinao, having the smallest land area of only 13.42 hectares but a high population density of 155 persons per hectare, sharply contrasting with the municipality's two to three persons per hectare density.³ Dewey was home to 2,076⁴ people or about 430 fishing families greatly dependent on the marine resources for survival. Residents here were mostly 3rd to 4th generation of Ilocano migrants who had fled from their original homes to escape the Japanese during the war. Most residents did not own the land they occupied,⁵ and they depended largely on a mix of fishing activities for subsistence unlike those from other villages where there were more alternatives to fishing. Dewey had the highest registered number of motorized boats in Bolinao (Elegores et al. 1992). Other economic activities remained largely fishing-related, such as fish drying, fish vending, seaweed and shell gleaning, and crafting ornaments from shells. Only a few families in the island did not rely on the sea for a living. Some sought opportunities outside the community and country (Alura 1993, Ferrer et al. 1994).

Health services were sorely lacking in the community. Supplies of medicines were inconsistently available at the health center, which was closed most of the time; the health worker visited the village once a month to attend to mothers, infants, and children. The Dewey Elementary School had

³ With a total land area of 23,320 hectares, the population density of Bolinao was recorded at two persons per hectare (Elegores et al. 1992; PDC 1996).

⁴ Dewey's recorded population in 2009 barely changed. If anything, the population has even slightly shrunk to 1,932 (MDCP 2009).

⁵ Ferrer et al. (1994) note that only 12 families owned land in Dewey, while the rest of the residents rented or lived on their relative's land for free. In the course of research, a key informant from the Municipal Office even referred to Dewey residents as 'squatters.'

an enrollment of 381 children encompassing kindergarten to Grade 6 in 1992. For secondary education, students would have to go to either Pilar or the Bolinao town. Pilar in Santiago Island was the closest village to Dewey, and residents had to take a 30-minute boat ride to the town after which they had to take a tricycle ride to either the Cape Bolinao High School or the Bolinao School of Fisheries. More well-off families sent their children to private schools in Dagupan City or Ilocos. Today, high school level education is locally available for its residents (MDCP 2009) through a donation by Plan International initiated concurrently with my field stay. The few who could afford tertiary education sent their children to Baguio, Pangasinan or Manila.



Figure 2. Dewey Island, Bolinao, Pangasinan: top left is a full view of Dewey Island taken from a boat, top right photo is a closer view of Dewey Island, and bottom photo is of a child having a meal in a multipurpose shed.

There was electricity from the Pangasinan Electric Company, and television and radio were the people's main information sources. The mail reached the island at least weekly through the island's commuters who went to the Bolinao town mostly for personal errands, like buying supplies during market day. Water for domestic needs, like laundry and bathing, came from open dug-out wells and was not potable. The villagers had to go to Victory, a village on Santiago Island, in order to buy fresh water; there was also a trader who sold drinking water from Victory daily (see Ferrer et al. 1994).

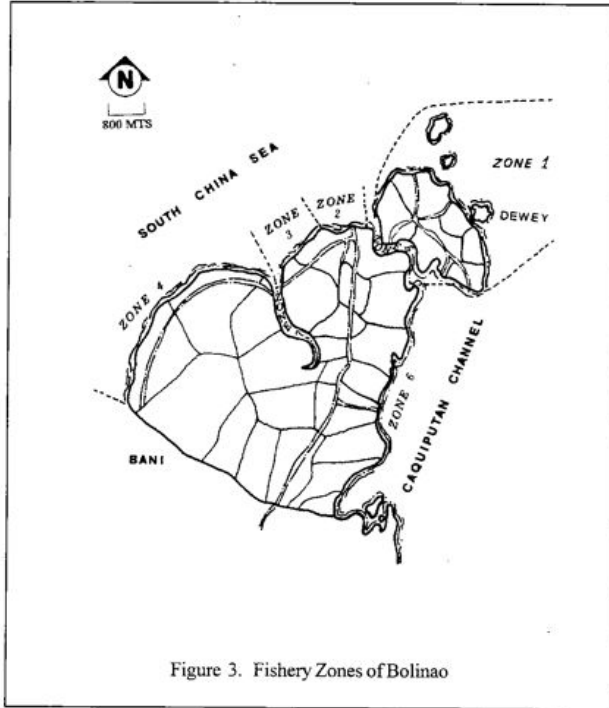
Dewey proved a sound field base for studying the *barangen* concession system since it was directly in front of the Fishery Lot or Zone 1, and nearest the important migration routes of the *barangen* where a number of the pasabang were set up. Seagrass beds found here attracted the migrating *barangen*. Historically, residents from Dewey had been involved in the *barangen* concession. During the fieldwork, most of the participants to the concession were from Dewey. The *barangen* concession had been awarded to one of its residents from 1993 to 1994 and, in 1995 the postor (concession holder) who came from Goyoden, a village in Santiago Island, conveniently delegated the management of the concession to the previous postor from Dewey.

The succeeding section describes in more detail the scope of the *barangen* concession as defined by a municipal ordinance that was patterned after a national law that allowed municipalities to lease out fishery lots for municipal revenue. Dewey fishers attempted to make the most of their purchased claim by possessing knowledge of the *barangen* spawning routes within the concession, being familiar with the spawning seasons as well as having a well-coordinated system and human resource that would harvest, process, and distribute the *barangen* during the fish runs.

Fishery Lot 1 and the *barangen* concession

I distinguish "Fishery Lot 1" as demarcated by municipal law from "barangen concession" to refer to how the resource users saw the concession. The legally defined scope of Fishery Lot 1 was arbitrarily demarcated based on the physical features within the municipal waters of Bolinao (Fig. 3). The resource users, on the other hand, were guided by their resource-based practical experience of where and when *barangen* have been successfully harvested, with priority given to economic viability (Fig. 4). Fishery Lot 1 and the *barangen* concession have to be understood from both the legally defined scope, but with a biased emphasis on how the resource users regarded the concession system and as they actually practiced accessing the *barangen* fishery. The legal framework was loosely the basis for how the

barangen concession was interpreted, elaborated on, and talked about by the resource users themselves.



Legal basis for the piskeria or the concession system. Republic Act 4003, or the Fisheries Act of 1932, enacted during the American Occupation was the first national ordinance that provided for apportioning and designating areas for fish corrals, oyster beds, fishponds, and bangus fry gathering (De Sagun 1993, Dolmendo 1993, 1983). The Fisheries Act was originally legislated to enable a municipality to generate income through a concession bidding system, and many municipalities throughout the country took advantage of its provisions (Torres and Sia 1988). PD 704 or the Fisheries Decree of 1975, the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, and the Local Tax Code, which

was later subsumed into the LGC of 1991, contain provisions that delineate the extent of municipal waters and the municipality's power to grant fishery privileges.



Figure 4. Locations of fishing grounds, *pasabing* structures, and *pasabing* clusters within Fishery Lot 1. [The fishing grounds were plotted with key informants or using information they provided.]

During the field stay, the 1994 Revised Revenue Code of Bolinao was the municipal law that defined the scope of Bolinao's municipal waters extending 15 kilometers from the general coastline. This code provided for leasing out seven delineated fishery lots or zones (Fig. 3), together with ferry boundaries in the *piskeria* or municipal public bidding. The highest bidder among aspirants who submitted sealed bids was granted exclusive right over the fishery lot for the entire year.

The exact moment when the *piskeria* began in Bolinao was unknown because the mayor's predecessor from a different political party left his post without endorsing past records to the sitting mayor. The municipal staff could not locate any old documents prior to 1990 when the mayor assumed office. Many villagers could not recall when the system was instituted either, but they attest that the system documented in this study had been in place as part of people's living memory. Some remembered that it was present in the 1970s during the Marcos regime. The earliest recollection made of the leasing of the fishery lots and payment of fees was way back in the 1940s, alluding to more than a half century of its existence. I suspect that the *barangen* concession may have possibly coincided or shortly followed the enactment of the Fisheries Act of 1932. The specific time frame may not have been exactly determined, but what has been established is that the *barangen* concession was part of a long-standing tradition in their village life. The point remains that the concession system has persisted through time, except that it was abruptly discontinued right after what emerged as this fortuitous 'salvage' ethnography from 1993 to 1996.

The concession system was indeed effective in generating revenue for the municipality as intended by the original 1932 law. Municipal income quadrupled in the available five-year record, increasing from about ₱200,000 in 1990 to over ₱800,000 in 1995 (Rodriguez 1997). However, while the *barangen* concession fees increased, its significance in relation to the entire municipal income decreased. The price paid for the concession lot for milkfish or *bangus* (*Chanos chanos*) fry gathering increased seven-fold, whereas the *barangen* concessions' value only doubled within the same period. These figures reflect the increasing attention and popularity of *bangus* fry gathering for fishponds then, although the *barangen* concession remained an important source of revenue.

The naming of fishing grounds within the barangen concession. The municipal ordinance defined the scope of the *barangen* concession to include the entire municipal waters of Santiago Island and gave concession holders access to the Fishery Lot 1 for the whole year. The seagrass beds north of

Dewey is what concessionaires valued most, particularly during about 25 nights in a year that fish runs occurred. This shallow section of seagrass beds within Fishery Lot No. 1 was where traditional fishing grounds or sea spaces were located. About 25 to 30 pasabing structures (fish corrals) were customarily set up here (Fig. 4).



Figure 5. Names and locations of the traditional fishing grounds [These fishing grounds were plotted with key informants or using information they provided]

The fishing grounds have been surveyed and identified by fishers' ancestors (*ninuno*) as the migration routes of the *barangen* during the seasonal fish runs. Local fishers have ascribed names to each fishing ground, as well as some of the *pasabing* set up there, indicating a well-established

local tradition. The grounds were known as *Sabang*, *Loong*, *Parayray*, *Gimorit*, *Rinumka*, *Paderes*, *Saliputot*, and *Dogodog*. More recent ones were added like *Imbensyon*, *Dalan Ranum*, and *Arosan* (Fig. 5). The time frame for these 'recent' named places is unclear, but fishers emphasized that they were *bago lang* or new. The new named fishing grounds, however, were not as productive as those earlier given names.

These fishing grounds were differently valued based on the accumulated experience of which ones consistently provided the best volume of catch, the largest-sized fish, and regular yields. Pasabing owners vied for assignment to what they believed were the more important fishing grounds, and fish traders likewise queued in these perceived productive pasabing to best access the fish.

If to the municipal office the concession covered the whole fishery lot, the concession holder's main interest was the narrower strip cutting through the fishery lot where barangen fishing grounds were found. In the following discussion, I will shift between "Fishery Lot 1" referring to the entire scope of the concession for the whole year as mapped by the municipal office, and "barangen concession" to mean the fishing grounds valued by the concessionaires during the nights of the barangen migration.

Barangen spawning seasons. Of central importance for the concession system was the barangen spawning induced by the lunar cycle. Every month on the night of the *lined* (new moon), barangen swim in schools in a northeast direction through the shallow seagrass beds towards their spawning grounds at the deeper seagrass areas in the *bengbeng* (breakwaters) where the seafloor sank to about 20 fathoms deep. There were two pronounced spawning seasons. A major spawning occurred during summer from March to May, and a second minor spawning season happened around August to October.

Given the consistent pattern of the spawning, participants to the concession earnestly tried to predict the major migration season when barangen would be extraordinarily abundant, and good income from fishing could be expected. The second migration season also provided a good haul, but the volume of fish was incomparable with the first migration season. Moreover, the spawning event lasted from three to four nights during the summer fish run, in contrast to only one to two days during the minor run. In anticipation of the major event, participants to the concession consulted their lunar calendars to pinpoint the moment when spawning would exactly occur. They watched out for the schools of barangen on the day of the *lined* to see if the fish were anywhere near the pasabing – their cue to be ready for the fish

harvesting and distribution at the pasabing. The approximate volume of catch listed in the postor's record during one fish run within the barangen concession in 1994 reached about 5.2 tons. This value is a conservative estimate and will be explained with more detail in the discussion of production and distribution of catch.

Roles within the social network

Within the barangen concession system, an elaborate network of people were involved: different participants referred to by the distinct work roles and tasks that each performed, whether in the management, production or distribution of barangen (Fig. 6). Based on my observations, the number of individuals included in the network reached a very conservative figure of 150 individuals. The key and central figure was the postor who managed the operation and coordinated the whole consortia of investors (*kasosyo*), pasabing (fish corral) owners, *bantay* (guards at the *pasabing*), *tagabiyaha* (fresh and dried fish traders), and *tagapindang* (dried fish processors). The succeeding narrative describes the important social roles of, extent of participation by, access of, and benefits derived by the different participants. The dynamism of the barangen concession system is revealed in distinct sharing arrangements.

The postor as a powerful, generous leader. As the concession awardee, the postor enjoyed primary access and exclusive control of the Fishery Lot 1. During the barangen peak months, he received a half share of fish catches or profit from fish sales; as the 'sealord' he also collected fees for subleased fishing grounds as well as fees from municipal fishers for rights to fish within the fishery lot. Demanding fees for the privilege to fish within the fishing lot became an emotional point of contention for excluded groups, but the law gave the postor the right to do so.

The postor particularly exercised his exclusive right during the major fish runs (which took place for only about 25 days in a year), securing traditional fishing grounds and the identified spawning routes against intruders. He oversaw the entire production process, distribution, and marketing of fish hauls, and formulated policies as he deemed fit. Among his management duties included deciding on who could participate in the concession and have access to the barangen. He was particularly watchful over the distribution of the hauls, especially when catch was abundant, and he made sure that the buyers paid their debts by dispatching collectors after the harvest season. He computed the earnings before distributing the investors' prorated income from their investment, settling cash value differences with the pasabing owners, and paying the wages of the *bantay* or 'guards'.

Being a postor was a prestigious and much coveted position accessible only to Bolinao's local elite. Several key informants claimed that the public auctions were rigged in favor of those with strong personal and political affiliations with whoever sat as mayor. Interested parties did not attempt bidding, knowing from history that they had no chance of winning the auction without such ties. Nevertheless, there was also an informal arrangement for 'fair sharing' of the opportunity to access the concession system: the selection of the postor was said to rotate among influential residents of the different island barangays adjacent to the barangen fishery lot by prior verbal agreement. Choosing a postor was a collective decision-making process among potential investors. The major qualities sought after, aside from having the largest chance of winning based on political clout, included the ability to raise capital for the bid, management capabilities, perceived honesty, and, more importantly, the postor's generosity and willingness to share the good income expected from the concession with the social network of participants to the barangen concession.

While several informants spoke of the agreement for rotational leadership from the villages around the fishery lot, there was only one postor during the three-year undertaking of the study, which was considered quite an irregular practice. The villagers, including the postor himself, explained that he kept his post longer than others not just because of his close political affiliation with the elected mayor but primarily for his management ability, and, more significantly, for his honesty and generosity. People appreciated him for being transparent about the actual income earned by the consortia backed by supporting records of catch. To the villagers, his most important quality was having shared the income, or part of the fish harvests with the social network of participants to the concession, even allowing other people not directly involved in the operation to approach the pasabing to ask (*kadya-kadya*) for a kilo or two of the barangen harvested.

The postor could sublease some of the fishing grounds within the concession for a fee negotiated between him and a 'sub-postor' based on the agreed worth of a fishing ground. The fees collected for subleased fishing grounds solely benefited the postor and was not included in computing earnings for the consortia of investors. By having transferred tasks over the subleased fishing grounds to interested individuals willing to act as a sub-postor, the postor was able to focus on the management of known productive fishing grounds to ensure profitability, and on the fishing spaces close to Dewey for easy monitoring during the fish runs.

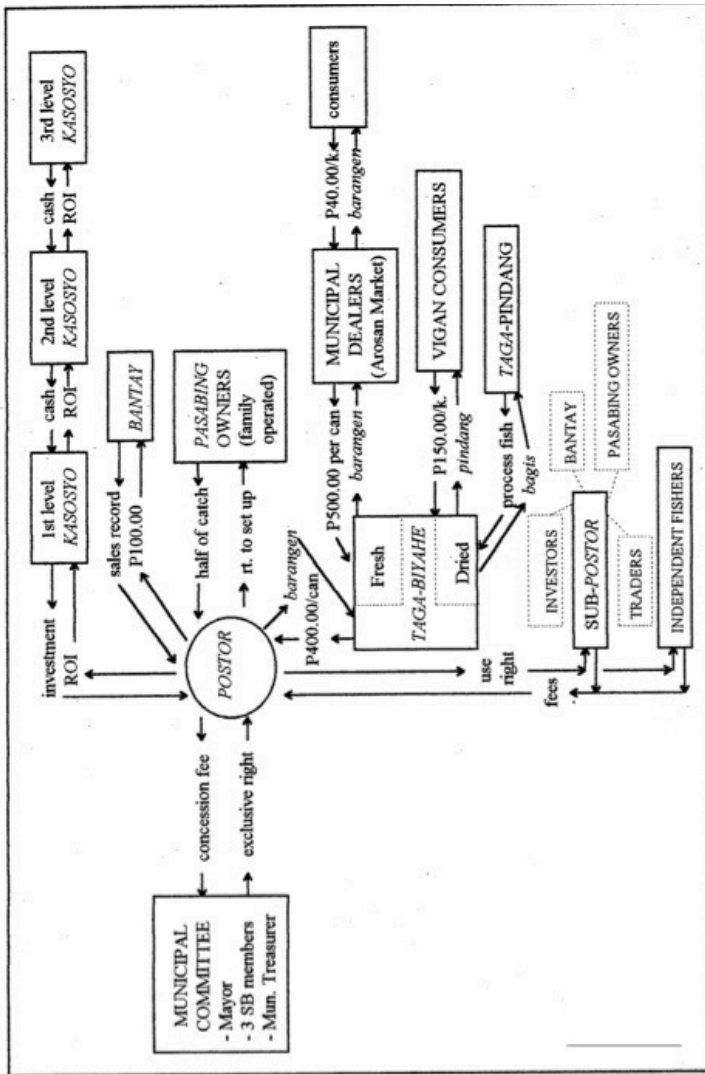


Figure 6. The social network of participants involved in the barangen concession system.

The postor had subleased Arosan, Imbensyon, Dalan Ranum, and Dogodog in 1994. Except for Dogodog, these more distant fishing grounds were leased out to wealthy individuals or incumbent elected officials, belonging to the postor's political party affiliation, who lived near the leased area. Rights to Imbensyon were sold to a resident of Binabalian. Arosan was subleased to someone from Pilar. The postor preferentially surrendered to a co-barangay his rights, for a negotiated discounted rate, over Dogodog, which was considered a choice fishing ground because of its proximity to the village and being known to give small sized fish hauls consistently. This co-barangay was also his relative and co-political party member. Incidentally, this sub-postor ran and won as the barangay captain of Dewey in 1995. Relinquishing rights to certain spaces earned the postor favor among his constituents.

The postor was indeed a key figure and an informal leader possessing the power to draw compliance among the followers, and whose decisions were deferred to regardless of whether people were amenable to the informal policies instituted. Although this position of exclusive control was legally awarded through a contract by the municipal office, one cannot discount that the postor's leadership role was collectively selected and recognized among the network of resource users first, requiring some level of political savvy to effect social acceptance by a social network of political allies. It mattered that the postor had the ability to facilitate, motivate, and mobilize his socio-political ties in the fish harvesting and production process.

All concession participants accept the postor's right to have the largest-earning capacity within the social network. But such was not a position to be abused as the social network of followers also had the capacity to make life difficult for the postor. Some spoke of a previous case of a postor who did not gain the cooperation of the villagers for displaying unacceptable qualities as a leader.

Kasosyo investors: sharing investments, access, and power. As mentioned, the concession may have been awarded and registered in the name of one postor who represented a consortium of municipal fisherfolk that pooled their investments for the lease. The postor may have contributed the highest investment among the investors, but some investors were potentially just as capable and influential as the collectively appointed postor. Many of them were current and past barangay officials, relatively wealthy and well-connected individuals, either belonging to or supportive of the same political party as that of the postor, and had close personal affiliation with him, being either a relative or close friend of the postor.

Ultimately, the postor decided on who and how much each one could invest: ranging from as low as ₱1,000 to as much as ₱40,000 per investor. In a way, the amounts the *kasosyo* were allowed to give were also related to their degree of ‘closeness’ to the postor. One *kasyoso* who was a former barangay captain of Dewey shared his allocation with his children who contributed varying amounts, depending on their financial capacities, and one of them further split her share with her sister-in-law. (Access to fish for household need was valued more than earning profit in this case.) Satisfying local consumption remained an apparent priority in the framework of the concession, delineating even the participation in investment as an aspect of a subsistence economy.

In 1994, the consortia of investors earned a conservative estimate of 35% return on their varying investments. Their pro-rated earnings were distributed six months after the fish run, when buyers paid the fish. Some of the *kasosyo* opted to get some of their share in harvested barangen for a quicker return on their investment. They were paid their computed share less the value of the fish they had already taken from the pasabing.

It was impossible to foresee the returns on investment from the barangen concession since profit was highly dependent on the unpredictable volume of fish hauls. A past postor who had declared negative income was received with skepticism by the investors and concession participants, who felt that the postor had dishonestly declared bankruptcy and cheated them out of their profit without records to show them. While the postor’s claim went openly unchallenged, he was perceived as greedy. No one bought fish from the concession in the next fish run, and no one helped in marketing fresh fish or processing the barangen into dried fish. The postor was forced to bury the bulk of the fish catch, which ended up as piles of foul-smelling decomposing fish. Although I did not witness this incident in the field, the story indicated some form of ‘third-party punishment’ wherein others extraneous to the transaction would be willing to penalize someone selfish, a phenomenon especially observed in more complex societies (Marlowe 2012). Investors would have been most affected by the income and capital loss. Traders and processors in the barangen social network could still have earned by cooperating with a selfish postor, yet they gave up possible benefit to punish wrong behavior. Sharing access to the fish catch was clearly the unwritten rule if the postor wanted cooperation from co-villagers.

In essence, investors banked on the chance that there would be high fish yields and had no choice other than to trust that the postor divided profits judiciously. Albeit predetermining profit was impossible, investors felt that it was unlikely not to earn anything. While the *kasosyo* relied on the postor to

compute profit, they could also predict a gain or loss even without scrutinizing the records. Some *kasosyo* voluntarily assisted the *postor* in monitoring fish hauls at the *pasabing* to protect their interests and have an idea of possible returns on their investment. The *postor*, granted exclusive use rights by virtue of a concession fee, gave others a chance to invest in the *barangen* concession. One may argue that sharing investment for the concession fee solved limited capital and cushioned risks of poor return in subsistence economies. Good harvest and income, however, normally occurred, and parceling out investments was more aligned with the notion of sharing benefits among the consortia of investors. Beyond the potential income and access to the *barangen* resources, participation in the concession appeased and reassured investors of their socio-political bonds with the *postor* and reinforced previously established social proximity to their consensually appointed informal leader.

The bantay: guarding sharing agreements and fair shares. A *bantay* (guard) was stationed in each *pasabing* with the main responsibility to look out for the interest of the *postor* and implicitly of the *kasosyo*. The *bantay* listed the names of buyers who approached the *pasabing* and the corresponding number of 17-liter ‘cans’ (fishers roughly estimated to about 10 to 15 kilos of fish) that each one bought. This list that the guard submitted to the *postor* was used as basis for the collection of payments from the buyers. Collection took place after the fish run was over when buyers sold the *barangen*. The *bantay* ensured that the *pasabing* owners did not cheat the *postor* out of his half share of fish by getting more than their own half share. Granted with limited discretion to share a kilo or two of fish with those who ask for fish for home consumption in addition to their fish purchases, the *bantay* saw to it that substantial portions of the catch were accounted for. In principle, only the *postor* could give away fish at commercially valuable amounts. In practice, the kilo or two was often exceeded especially when fish catches were abundant.

There was no guarantee that a *bantay* would perform his tasks well or would not connive with the *pasabing* owners in cheating the *postor*. Consequences, such as being reprimanded, dismissed or banned from future participation in the concession, prevented rather than eliminated collaboration between the *pasabing* owner and the *bantay*. One documented case involved an irresponsible *bantay* who was allowed participation in the *barangen* concession being the *postor*’s nephew. The *bantay*-nephew brought spirits to the *pasabing* in excess of what was allowed to keep warm while working. Someone reported that he conspired with the *pasabing* owner by not recording two cans of *barangen* or the equivalent of ₱800-income loss for the

concessionaire. Though without hard proof, the postor believed the negative report on his nephew because of the low production at that fishing area that fell short of the anticipated hauls. Another bantay's own verbal account, as confirmed by a tagabiyah (fish trader), tells of not just two cans but of four cans actually missing. When confronted by the postor, the bantay-nephew vehemently denied any wrongdoing and later continued to plead innocence before the other villagers. He said that he just cared for his wage as bantay and that he thought it unfair for the postor to amass wealth from the concession alone.

I suspect that it was the bantay's non-acceptance within the group that got him into trouble. Had he been able to relate with the other workers, perhaps his transgression may have remained with the group rather than being brought to the attention of the postor. I asked about him during the next fish run in 1995, and an informant told me that he had died in Manila in a matter-of-fact, disinterested tone.

Temptation to earn more was understandably strong for some of the bantay, given their small and fixed income of ₱100 for the crucial role of micromanaging and monitoring the harvesting of fish from dusk to dawn until all fish were harvested. They earned a fixed fee, whether they worked for a few hours when catch was little or if they worked all night long when catch was abundant. The payment was given for completing the job rather than counting the length of time that it took to accomplish tasks. Sometimes, when the tasks in their assigned pasabing were completed, they assisted other bantay in the more productive fish corrals. A greater benefit than their salary was being able to broil fresh fish while working at the pasabing and to bring home some barangen after their work was done.

The postor's appointment of a bantay was clearly based on a high level of trust and confidence to ensure adherence to the sharing agreements among the different concession participants. While the bantay protected the interests of both the postor and the kasosyo primarily, he also judged when and how shares of fish yields were to be allocated, distributed, and apportioned as he thought fit. The bantay saw to it that, in relation to fish yields, all had reasonable access and accountability for fish they took.

Pasabing owners: designated fishing grounds. Pasabing owners gained the privilege of setting up their fish corrals along traditional barangen routes by giving half of their fish catch to the postor as his share for allowing use of the concession grounds. Several pasabing owners negotiated for the best fishing grounds prior to the fish runs. The postor assigned pasabing owners from among his social circle to specific fishing grounds or at least access was

granted by recommendation for being reputedly honest. The verbal contract between postor and pasabing owner usually applied for the whole year. Given the informal terms of the agreement a postor could replace a pasabing owner he found to be dishonest at any time.

Fishers from Goyoden (Fig. 1) were known fish corral specialists who depended on this fishing technique for their livelihood year-round. Fishing knowledge on this technology had been passed inter-generationally, sons inheriting or buying the fish corrals from their fathers.⁶

Owners installed their pasabing in their assigned fishing ground days before the seasonal fish run (Fig.7). On the actual day, the bantay and pasabing owners involved in the production process went to the pasabing at around 6:00 p.m., having to be in their stations before dusk. The bantay and pasabing fishers did not approach the pasabing in the absence of the other to eschew potential conflicts arising from thefts or accusations of cheating. They waited for each other on boats anchored between pasabing structures until both teams were present to approach the pasabing at the same time, or until a team in the neighboring corral arrived to stand witness. This unwritten rule communicates the respect and cognizance for the pasabing owner's equal claim with the postor to the resources.

A family team of about four individuals typically handled the production process at the pasabing (Fig. 8). A *tagasilaw* manipulated the dim gas lamp used to attract fish into the pasabing, the *tagakarwas* hauled and measured the fish distributed to the buyers, and a *tagasisid* or diver scooped out every remaining fish caught in the *baruyboy* or the last and smallest heart-shaped chamber where fish was harvested. I observed in one pasabing that the *tagasilaw* also acted as the *tagasisid*. Pasabing owners either took their half share of the fish harvests immediately or waited for the postor's computation of net profits from fish sales. The fish or cash proceeds were equally divided

⁶Visayan fishers were said to have introduced pasabing fishing in Goyoden. The technology was easily adopted by fishers because of the abundance of bamboo in Goyoden to construct the corrals. Eventually, pasabing fishing became an established fishing specialization in Goyoden. Pasabing owners tapped for the barangen concession often came from this village. There were few pasabing owners from Dewey who participated in the barangen concession. Unlike those from Goyoden, they did not rely on pasabing fishing year-round. One pasabing owner from Dewey obtained rights to Rinumka (Fig. 5), the most productive fishing ground, because of his close relationship with the postor from Dewey. The pasabing owner was wily enough to first ascertain access to Rinumka before buying a pasabing from a fisher from Goyoden. After the season, he resold the pasabing to liquidate his capital investment for other fishing endeavors and for immediate household needs.

among the fish workers. But the tagasisid kept the last remaining fish he recovered by diving into the ice-cold sea as his additional share for such an arduous task.



Figure 7. *Pasabing* or fish corrals set up along traditional fish routes.

Some pasabing owners from contiguous fishing grounds have devised a system of sharing profits equitably. They pooled their earnings and divided the profits by *conboy*⁷ or cluster of fish corrals (Fig. 4). The sharing system by conboy was a solution to conflicts arising from reaping unequal volumes of barangen from neighboring fish corrals. In the past, some innovative pasabing owners extended the ‘wings’ and the ‘stem’ that lead fish into the corral and were able to increase their fish catch. The other pasabing owners set up beside them protested. To appease the complainants, one postor instituted the sharing arrangement by conboy. The system was acceptable to the pasabing owners since it guaranteed that everyone earned something even if some might be unable to catch any fish.

⁷ The term comes from the word ‘convoy,’ usually referring to a caravan or group.



Figure 8. Clockwise from top left: fishworkers performing different tasks at *the pasabing*; *tagasilaw* luring fish into the *pasabing*; *tagakarwas* harvesting fish; and *tagatakal* measuring fish for distribution using a 17-liter can.

Outside the *barangen* seasons, selected *pasabing* owners were also at liberty to set up *pasabing* anywhere within Fishery Lot 1, unlike excluded *pasabing* owners who had to pay fishing rights fees to the *postor*. Their half share surrendered to the *postor* during the *barangen* runs covered the right to

freely benefit from off-season catches for the year.⁸ Even if fish catch during the barangen off-season may have been small (an estimated ₱100-500 per day), the pasabing fisher was always assured of at least having food on the table. Participation in the barangen fishing concession and access to the important fishing grounds during the migration seasons meant much for the pasabing owner. Their half share computed from field records ranged from slightly under ₱2,000 to almost ₱28,000; it was highly variable yet substantially higher than earning from pasabing fishing outside the concession system.

Recorded and unrecorded catch. During a three-day barangen run, the fish catch from the first night was only sufficient for the worker's food at the pasabing and to take home to their families. The postor said that catch from the first night was usually negligible. He neither supervised operations nor recorded the low yields on the first night, although he had the prerogative to appropriate catch when the entire season's production was low. Harvests would substantially improve on the second night and triple on the third. Comparing the postor's record and my personal tally at the pasabing in 1994, I observed that records of catch were under-reported from 20 to 30 percent (Rodriguez 1997).⁹ This unrecorded portion of the catch was redistributed to the bodyguards of an investor barangay captain, to the buyers as extra fish successfully negotiated for by them, to pasabing fishers who had concealed some of the fish, and given away to other people as instructed by the postor. The recorded catch also excluded fish that had been immediately broiled for eating by people working at the pasabing, traders, and other people who dropped in to ask for fish. I, too, just as the bantay and other participants involved in fish harvesting, received a share of unrecorded fish that was more than the recommended kilo or two for assisting the bantay in listing the amount of fish catches buyers took at the pasabing.¹⁰

⁸ The amount collected was decided at the postor's discretion, reflecting the degree of social relationship with the postor. The postor said he did not collect anything from Dewey fishers, but for fishers from other villages, rates were lower for those he personally knew, and were higher for fishers with whom he was unacquainted.

⁹ The estimated figure is comparable with the observations of Mangahas (2004b) who also computed that a third of fish catches were shared among households bound by neighborly and familial relations in Samal Island, Davao before fish were earmarked for commercial value. She noticed a similar trend of 10 to 30 percent that went to redistribution found by Kendrick's study among the purse seine fishers from Prigi Bay, Java.

¹⁰ I thought this unexpected gift too much and felt guilt for taking from the pot of resources meant for the poor fishers. While I acquiesced to what they saw as my

Unlike the idea of pilferages or 'systems loss' in corporations considered as stealing, the redistribution or sharing of fish was socially acceptable given that the recipients were part of the barangen social network, that they took less than a can of fish considered commercially valuable, and that it had approval from either the postor or the guards. The postor's record of catch was therefore definitely grossly understated, and actual volume and cash value of production from pasabing fishing within the barangen concession system was substantial. In my estimation, the concessionaires recovered 79% of the cost of the lease in one migration season alone, albeit one had to consider the other operational expenses before net profits could be distributed in accordance with internal sharing schemes.

Market distribution and sharing of barangen

Fish harvests during the major migration season were commercially distributed through the *tagabiyah* (fish traders). Other fishers that would buy fish from the pasabing directly sold the fresh fish to retailers waiting at the Arosan town market.¹¹ Established fish traders, who regularly engaged in the commercial fish trade, bought fish from the pasabing for processing into dried fish destined for the market in Vigan, Ilocos Norte. There have been instances when the postor also retailed a few kilos of fresh fish to the villagers.

More interesting than the commercial distribution of fish was non-commercial sharing of barangen. I have already described how surplus fish were shared with people who asked for fish at the pasabing, such as the fish workers, their relatives and friends, or the postor's personal contacts. The succeeding subsection describes simultaneous processes of fish distribution for commercial disposal and other social exchanges beyond cash value.

Tagabiyah ng barangen, tagabiyah ng pindang: trading fresh vs. dried fish. Fishers engaged in varied fishing activities outside the major barangen fish runs were the ones who acted as momentary traders of the barangen

share perhaps for going without sleep with them, my guilt led me to offer some of the fish to our neighbors. My host frantically stopped me from giving away fish and prohibited the neighbors from getting any more than they had already taken. I thought my host wanted the fish for her household. That thought was quickly dispelled when she dried the fish and insisted that I take them all home upon leaving for a field break. As it turns out, she was just acting like a protective host.

¹¹ The town market is located in Barangay Concordia and is the same place where one can hire a 30-minute boat ride to get to Dewey.

caught at the pasabing (Fig. 9). These fish merchants or *taga-biyahe ng barangen* were able to buy from two to 10 cans of fish a night depending on the productivity of the pasabing where they queued for their supply. They sold the barangen to the few fish dealers at the Arosan Municipal Public Market in town. Only after the buyers have disposed of the fish and were paid by the municipal dealers did they actually pay the postor. Fifty pesos worth of gasoline in the early 1990s was all that was required to make trips to the pasabing, the town market, and back to the village. Poor fishermen who did not own a boat could still have access by giving the boat owner a share in their net profit. The boat owner provided both the boat and the gasoline. Being able to get fish on credit and enter into agreements with boat owners in Dewey allowed poor fishermen's involvement in small-scale trading during the barangen season.



Figure 9. Clockwise from top left: (Photos 1, 2, and 3) fish workers and buyers wait for fish to fill up the *pasabing*; and (Photo 4) fresh *barangen* ready for wholesale trading at the Arosan dock.

Most of the fish hauls were traded while fresh (Fig. 9), but a few buyers processed the barangen into dried fish before trading these in Vigan. I could not estimate the exact proportion handled by the dried fish traders for the

entire 300 cans harvested in the March 1994 fish run, but based on observation, the dried fish traders probably bought about 30% of total harvest. In Limansangan where I was stationed for a night in the April fish run, there were two traders (a dried fish trader herself and a buyer for the other known dried fish trader and wife of the postor) who bought barangen for dried fish trading. Both traders obtained 10 cans each, which was the maximum each buyer was allowed to get from one pasabing. The combined 20 cans they accessed were almost half of recorded sale, and more than a third (34%) of total harvest in that pasabing. The dried fish traders either peddled the dried fish themselves at the Vigan public market or sold the dried fish wholesale to their contacts there. In contrast to the part time tagabiyahs of fresh barangen, the *tagabiyahs ng pindang* (dried fish merchants) regularly engaged in dried fish processing and trading, depending on this economic activity as a year-round income source. Dried fish traders were relatively well-off community members.

Significantly, of the 10 fish traders in the village, majority were women. Post fish production activities, such as selling fish in the market and fish processing, were normally associated with women as an extension of their domestic roles in Dewey.¹² Husbands and sons of the female traders assisted them, hauling and transporting the fish by boat from the pasabing to intended market destinations. Daughters cleaned and processed the fish. While the whole family shared tasks in the dried fish trade, the overall management of dried fish production and decision-making roles fell on women.

Apart from fresh fish trading to large-scale fish dealers in the town and dried fish trading in Vigan, 'excess' or less commercially valuable fresh fish were directly retailed to the villagers when there was ample supply. I observed an instance of the postor giving instructions to immediately sell the last 15 kilograms of small-sized fish to neighbors milling about. The few kilograms of small fish were as quickly purchased for household use as the postor's instinctive decision to sell the fish was made. The bigger fish were made into *pindang* (dried fish) as usual.

Equal resource access among buyers, income sharing among traders. At the pasabing, fish distribution was on a first-come, first-served basis. Once in a while, the postor or his buyers would disrupt this order. The postor might drop in and instruct the fish workers to attend to latecomers ahead of buyers who patiently waited for their turn to be given fish. The traders in line

¹² Cf Fish trading in Palawan was associated with males more than females (Fabinyi 2012).

appeared unperturbed with the postor's infrequent interruption for a few kilos of fish handed to important people, such as bodyguards of politicians or the postor's personal visitors. The buyers at the pasabing voluntarily gave way to others with small requirements of, for example, up to two cans even in the absence of the postor. Fishers politely followed this decently ordered system.

Fish distribution depended on fish yield, number of buyers, and their fish requirements. Buyers normally arrived at the pasabing almost simultaneously. I witnessed how the first five cans were given to the first buyer, the next five cans to the second buyer, until all in queue were attended to, and all the fish in the *baruyboy* (collecting pound) had been harvested. If traders' quotas were still unmet, the buyers continued to wait for the *baruyboy* to be filled up again before another round of fish harvesting and distribution of five cans each. Waiting time between harvesting fish lasted about two hours (Fig. 9). Fish traders attempted to get as much as they could, but there was a cap of 10 cans that the buyers could access at a time. One buyer explained that when yield was limited, some buyers unable to get any fish despite the long wait were forced to transfer to another pasabing to wait anew. This system of distribution gave all buyers fair access to the fish.

Fishers received the best price for their catch when there was strong demand for fish in Vigan, a well-known tourist destination, especially popular during Holy Week. Fortunately for the concessionaires (particularly the postor) and *kasosyo*, demand tended to coincide with the *barangen* fish runs in February and March. For the small-scale trader who added a fixed mark-up per can, a good price of fish had no bearing on their income. Good income for the small-scale fish trader depended more on the luck of lining up in a productive fishing ground in order to access more fish for trading. Net earnings were equally split between the small crew of two people per boat with one share allotted for the boat owner.

Spreading goodwill by sharing fish. Apart from commercial trading of fish, there was an unwritten understanding that the pasabing fishers, the *bantay*, and the fish traders could take fish for their families' consumption. Anyone who visited the pasabing asking for fish was usually given a kilogram or two. Sharing of fish harvests increased when there was more fish to go around. The *bantay* became less conscientious in counting catch volumes when yields equaled or exceeded the previous year's harvest. Once the anticipated yield was exceeded, they actually stopped listing the number of cans harvested. The postor would also become more lenient in sharing fish harvests, and people had more liberty to get fish.

Sharing of harvest ensured cooperation (as the case of the withdrawal of support in processing and marketing fish for a selfish postor would prove). Informants explicitly said that a postor who enjoyed a privileged position must be wary of the potential harm that villagers can inflict should one be unwilling to share. People claimed that they could easily take vindictive measures such as destroying the pasabing or cheating the postor of his share. A postor acted generously with substantial portions of the catch as prevention for the more costly repercussions of not sharing. Such sharing was necessary for survival and by no means purely for altruistic intentions alone. The postor also shared barangen with his political associates and the police as a small gratuity for continued political backing and protection from encroachers. Sharing fish was a means to strengthen existing ties and alliances beyond the village in the context of self-preservation.

Considering that inclusion in the concession was largely based on social ties, fish sharing somehow cemented, reinforced, reflected, if not built, on existing relationships or established new alliances to strengthen the social network of barangen concession participants. They strengthened social relationships mainly through group cooperation and fish sharing as a means for group survival in a subsistence economy.

Fish sharing occurred among all participants in the production processes. The labor arrangements were logically ordered, hardly questioned given the collective consensus among group members. Personal sharing of fish with those without economic contribution in the production process possessed underlying social, political, and economic motivations all the same, albeit with varying emphasis.¹³

***Pagpipindang*: dried fish processing**

Pagpipindang, or dried fish processing vital to the barangen fish industry, was a way to market surplus fish without causing a market glut that would have otherwise resulted in a low selling price of barangen. They secured better value for their fish in spite of an oversupply owing to the ready market for dried fish in Vigan during the Lenten season.

If the commercial trading of dried fish was a female-dominated activity, *pagpipindang* was also a task generally associated with women, also participated in by a few elderly men who were too old to go fishing

13 Mangahas (2004a) in her work in Batanes distinguished between economic obligation through fish 'share outs' of *arayu* (*Coryphaena hippurus*) for one's economic contribution in the production process against the personal sharing of fish within an individual's social sphere.

themselves. The dried fish traders sought assistance from relatives and friends in processing the fresh *barangen* into dried fish without monetary payment for their services (Fig. 10). While fishermen worked at the pasabing, the women congregated at the house of a dried fish trader in anticipation of the *barangen* delivery. They spent their time loafing, exchanging jokes and stories, and playing card games while waiting for fish hauls. Freshly harvested fish arrived in batches and were dumped into piles. The *tagapindang* – equipped with their implements: knives, chopping boards, platters, bowls and basins – positioned themselves around the fish, sitting on stools, rocks or logs until all the fish were processed. They would work all night until dawn at the tedious and hazardous task that involved avoiding venomous spines. The *tagapindang* cleaned, gutted, salted, and systematically laid the fish out on bamboo mats to be dried under the sun (Figs. 11 and 12). Fish roe salted in clay storage jars were also prepared to be sold separately as a delicacy with good commercial value.



Figure 10. (1) Top left, *tagapindang* women processing *barangen* for the dried fish trade; (2) top right, an economically productive female child cleaning and gutting fish; (3) bottom left, fresh *barangen* for retail at the town market; and (4) bottom right, preparing *barangen* for a home meal.

The dried fish trade was a relatively lucrative income source. One dried fish trader had managed to support the education of her three sons, one of whom was already in college. Certainly, this indicated great privilege in a fishing village where tertiary education was neither available nor readily accessible. In contrast to what the dried fish trader earned, the tagapindang merely got to keep the *bagis* or entrails as their share. They made this into *bagoong* (fish paste) either for their personal consumption or for peddling to other villagers at only ₱10 per bottle.¹⁴ For a nightlong effort, they could come up with five bottles worth ₱50. If they were lucky, the dried fish trader also expressed gratitude with token gifts such as blankets from Vigan or spirits after the tasks were completed. Otherwise, the volunteers were content to know that the dried fish traders would just as readily reciprocate assistance for their future need.



Figure 11. *Barangen, bugi, and bagis* (Fish, roe, and entrails).

¹⁴ A visiting marine biologist then, Danielle Bellefleur, expressed that there might be health risks for human consumption of fish entrails with parasite burdens (Bellefleur 1996 September, personal communication). It is a worthy concern to discern if there are such health risks for consumers to consider.



Figure 12. Left photos show inverted *pasabing* structures being sun-dried in between use; top right photo shows dried fish neatly laid out on a bamboo mat; bottom right are dried *barangen* and *bagoong bagis* (fish paste from entrails) retailed at the town's local public market.

Synthesis

The *barangen* concession may be viewed as inequitable, just like what the initial study had been cited for (Aguinaldo & McManus 2000). A concessionaire was legally granted exclusive access to a highly significant resource base. Participation in the *barangen* concession was made socially exclusive to a social network of those with established relationships with the postor. Those excluded from the postor's socio-political circle had little chance to gain entry into the concession and the benefits thereof. Hierarchical decision making and reaping of economic and extra-economic benefits from the concession existed. People were aware of the postor's advantage and have expressed it. This advantage was rarely questioned because they saw his leadership role as crucial to the concession.

Overall, benefits went to the socially, politically, and economically advantaged. But we cannot dismiss the sharing arrangements that operated on several levels within the system highlighted in this article. Equity was

expressed among potential resource users. The nomination of the postor, inclusion and exclusion from the concession was on a temporary rotational basis through the shifting leadership among various resource users from the fishing villages bordering the Fishery Lot 1. Investors may have shared risks in case of losses, but they more likely parceled out shares of investment in anticipation of good returns according to social ties rather than one enjoying access alone.

The sharing by 'conboy' that allows pasabing owners within contiguous fishing spaces the same benefit from the fish resource attests to the inbuilt equalizing mechanisms within the barangen concession. Fishworkers in one pasabing likewise equally divided profits and tasks among themselves, except for the *tagasisid* or diver who got a little more fish for diving into the icy water and scooping out the last remaining fish from inside the fish corral enclosures. Fish traders in queue all had the same chance to access the fish supply. Among the fresh fish traders, existed task division and profit sharing between the crew. An extra portion was given to the boat owner who also provided the capital input for the trading expedition.

The bantay ensured that the sharing agreements between participants were honored and they assisted co-guards in contiguous pasabing when they completed their work earlier. Noncommercial distribution of the fish was equivalent to 20-30% of total catches, which was observed to increase when there were more resources to go around. Sharing of fish catches was encouraged, demanded even, and this socially tempered individualism within the group of resource users.

Dried fish traders may have earned a lot more than the *tagapindang* or fish processors. However, while the women's practically unpaid work makes inequity apparent, from within the context of the social network, volunteers were enthusiastic and motivated to support the dried fish trader who had the capacity to help them in their overall survival in the fishing village during lean seasons well beyond the barangen migration season. While some may frown upon such patron-client dependency, this form of reciprocity for a future non-immediately measurable exchange made sense to them. The practice presented a picture of group cohesion among familial relations, and thus, reinforced pre-existing social relations. Witnessing the actual fish processing at the village, I felt the festive excitement accompanied by much exchanging stories and jokes especially earlier in the night while energy levels were still high.

Rather than viewing the barangen concession system as simply hierarchical, this ethnography has demonstrated the collective cooperation among participants performing crucial roles. Reciprocal relationships

between the different actors in the concession extended beyond the seasonal barangen runs. More importantly, those who got more were to them just but their fair share.

The Bolinao example demonstrates how resources can be subject to inequitable access and distribution but also equitable sharing.¹⁵ The barangen concession experience can be rooted on limits imposed by the barangen biology and spawning season, the access to capital required to participate in the public bidding process, the knowledge of the fishing grounds, possession and knowledge of fishing gear, managerial and operational abilities, and political and social alliances.

Amid the limited and controlled access to the barangen concession system, and the readily seen iniquitous arrangements of the concession system, sharing also predominantly existed by virtue of several internal mechanisms replete in this paper. These mechanisms include apportioning access to and control over the concession through rotational leadership among potential postor and their collectively raising the investment to benefit from the anticipated good income together. Generosity and fish sharing was an integral requirement for recognition of leadership and for gaining manpower support from the villagers needed for tasks. Recognition and adherence to self-imposed internal sharing arrangements such as sharing by 'conboy,' task sharing by fish workers, rotational distribution of barangen resources, and many more, are guided by resources users' sense of fairness and justice. Resource use and local or internal organizational management has led to relative compliance unlike policies imposed externally as these were based on their self-defined sense of practicality, fairness, justice and regulation.

Compelling from the data was that sharing seemed to occur among those occupying the same positions, roles, or rank within the barangen social network. This can be seen in the rotation of leadership among Bolinao's local elite, the bantay helping each other, pasabing owners dividing harvests regardless of what they catch, and buyers taking turns accessing fish. Significant disparity in benefits on the other hand was obvious between those belonging to unequal status: guards earned a measly salary compared with the incomes received by the investors or pasabing owners; fish processors merely got fish innards in stark contrast to high earnings by the dried fish traders; excluded groups had no access to fish.

15 Sharing can be considered unequal in the same vein that Speth's study on food sharing has dispelled the notion of egalitarianism in simple societies (Speth 1990).

In sum, the barangen concession system had traditionally persisted through time because the loose legal framework allowed room for customary interpretation and elaboration. The guidelines were flexible enough as a basic framework to express communal sharing integral to the survival of the social network of marginal fishers. Sharing among the social network of resource users and looking out for group members within the temporary coalition was integral to the successful access to resources, production, and survival of a subsistence group operating within and linked to a larger economic arena. Participants to the barangen concession system resolved inequities internally among the members, guided by the principle of benefiting from the barangen concession fairly. Attempts to grab a bigger share of the produce were socially hindered.

Acknowledgements for figures

All maps were drawn by Hadji Maguerano based on maps that the author copied from the Marine Science Institute, the Municipal Office of Bolinao, and Barangay Dewey. All photos are by the author.

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