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Philippine Agta Forager-Serfs: Commodities and Exploitation

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The Agta are a foraging people of flowing water, of rain forests, and of rugged seacoasts. In the late twentieth century they are among millions of Filipinos struggling under yokes of domination, exploitation and servitude. As long-time members of the absolute bottom of the Philippine status hierarchy, they have endured from both colonial masters and their lighter-skinned compatriots only near-human status and treatment. They are not unique: for centuries—perhaps millenia—groups throughout the archipelago have enjoyed dominance and endured subordination in social, political and economic intercourse with other groups. Indeed, one might argue the pre-colonial world as one of millenia of quests for dominance and struggles to escape it. The tropical forests of insular Southeast Asia may simply parallel, in their ethnic power struggles, such locales as the distant arid tropics of southern Africa [WILMSEN 1989].

Agta culture and society, as seen through the social relations of production and the means of production, are undergoing accelerating change toward a fully subordinated status. Agta are becoming landless, labouring clients, producing and consuming commodities for the benefit of a culturally and genetically different people, a people who consider themselves inherently superior. The process of this acceleration of change is the elaboration, perhaps the exacerbation of traditional means of social and economic intercourse: the subversion of social relations as the larger Philippine society reaches towards its own collapse and reformulation. A principle component of the process is commoditisation working as subversion and control and as economic necessity.

In understanding the changing nature of Agta culture and society in the last years of this century one must consider several foci of the past and of the polymorphic nature of Philippine social relations. First, some Agta may have engaged in exchange as a means of economic viability for millenia. They likely traded at least sporadically with farmers since the days farmers first existed [HEADLAND 1986, 1987], or they may have mixed hunting-gathering with swiddening [GRIFFIN 1984] as well as trading with farmers/merchants. In any case, the Agta perhaps were not a hunting-gathering "primitive isolate" at any time in the known past. They were and are among the multitudes of localised ethnolinguistic groups found from the Batanes Islands through the Sulu Archipelago.

Second, great antiquity may be ascribed to local and regional trade within contexts of dominance and subordination relations. Within the upland and lowland communities the exchange of goods and services has a lengthy history in a context of the superior taking advantage of those who are inferior. Agta are not unique in this centuries old tradition.

Third, the Philippines has, as the 1980s close, endured devastating economic and social degradation. The quality of life has plummeted over the last two decades, a result of a dictator's use of "the system" gone wild, of a population growth and spread equally out of control, and of an export of natural resources in exchange for commodities that can only be called catastrophic. Not only are the rural Filipinos experiencing economic trauma, but the Agta adaptation is changing more rapidly than ever.

We are seeing the Agta lose their viability as a distinctive group as they become impoverished serfs, or clients, serving the peasants and proletariat of rural northeastern Luzon. In the body of the paper an attempt is made to understand the development of the Agta place in the Philippine system and to argue the operation of their present predicament.

The initial control of Agta by non-Agta seems most likely not to lie in a millenia-old exchange of rice and meat (but see Headland [1987], Headland and Reid [1989]), both easily produced by societies in isolation, but by an early monopoly on tobacco production and distribution by the Spanish-favoured lowland farmers. Just as we see Kalahari San being thrust into a client status, bereft of cattle in their own economy in the face of Bantu-speaking pastoralists [WILMSEN 1989], we may see Agta tobacco dependency forcing a whole re-ordering of the social relations. With tobacco dependency, we may hypothesise, Agta began a shift to greater exchange/debt relationships with non-Agta farmers. And, with the interest on the part of the farmers in gaining control over the Agta, we see the ever greater exclusion of Agta from horticultural options. The Agta may have begun their shift to dependence in such a fashion. Part of the process perhaps included the commoditisation of the labour of both farmers and Agta.

The early commoditisation process, that is, the observable Philippine colonial period, has been considered by Thomas Headland, a long-term scholar of the Casiguran Agta. His efforts first considered the Agta as non-hunters-gatherers [HEADLAND 1986]. He advanced the "Competitive Exclusion Principle," which was a conceptual breakthrough in our viewing the Agta and other Philippine Negritos as other than somewhat distressed classic hunters-gatherers. While Headland did not confront the commoditisation issue directly, he argued that many Agta made swidden fields, worked lowlanders' fields, and traded forest products for rice. The Competitive Exclusion Principle, borrowed from ecology, states that if two noninterbreeding groups are in competition for the same resources in the same area, one will either force the other into extinction or into a different resource base. Speaking of the Agta situation, past and present, we see the Agta living among non-Agta farmers, yet excluded from sharing the farming means of

production. The operation of the system may be founded in the remote past—a Proto-Austronesian speakers arrival—or in the arrival of the Spanish. Whatever the case, the process itself has not been easy, and is not easy today.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries conflict as well as cooperation and social intercourse occurred among Agta and farming populations. The level of conflict through raiding, killing, and disruption of activities beyond the homestead suggests that the Competitive Exclusion Principle was in its early stages of operation. If not so, the level of intensity of exclusion was greater than observed in the mid-twentieth century. The process of exclusion was, I suspect, exacerbated over the years to include the progressive exploitation of the Agta foragers. The exploitation took the form of the exclusion of Agta from horticultural efforts of their own and on creating a dependency by the Agta on farmers for their starch foods.

Trade must have operated well before the start of the Christian era, primarily in the new metals of the Philippine Iron Age. The trade relations, as with the possible exchange of rice for forest goods, likely assumed the usual Philippine pattern of superordinate farmers and traders and subordinate foragers and swidden farmers. What was needed to shift the power base of the non-Agta farmers versus the Agta was a new commodity, and a reason for manipulating the means of gaining the commodity. Sweet potato and other American crops may have enhanced population growth; tobacco and its control enabled the capture of one group by the other, further stimulating the dominant group's populations potential. The record of two centuries of conflicts is the record of the non-Agta group's slow climb to a position of numerical dominance and resource control.

POST-WORLD WAR TWO PHILIPPINES

The conditions of the Filipino people have qualitatively changed since mid-century. The 1960s began a period of accelerated change that continues at an extreme rate and form in the late 1980s. These changes centre around population growth, expansion of the lowland farming populations into new domestic territory, natural resource exploitation for participation in the world trade system, and the militarisation of the near and far reaches of the archipelago.

The Philippines, and the remote communities of the Sierra Madre, together experienced an ever greater commoditisation after the war. As the country rebuilt, starting in the 1950s goods accompanied infrastructure development, entrepreneurship, and widespread migration. American political control ceased, at least outwardly, but economic involvement by an exploding American and later Japanese industry, including communication media, created demand for goods in ever more remote locales.

These conditions are very relevant for the Sierra Madre, the range of mountains running along the eastern coast of Luzon, and the home of the Agta and their farming and labouring neighbours. I will focus on the changes in Isabela and

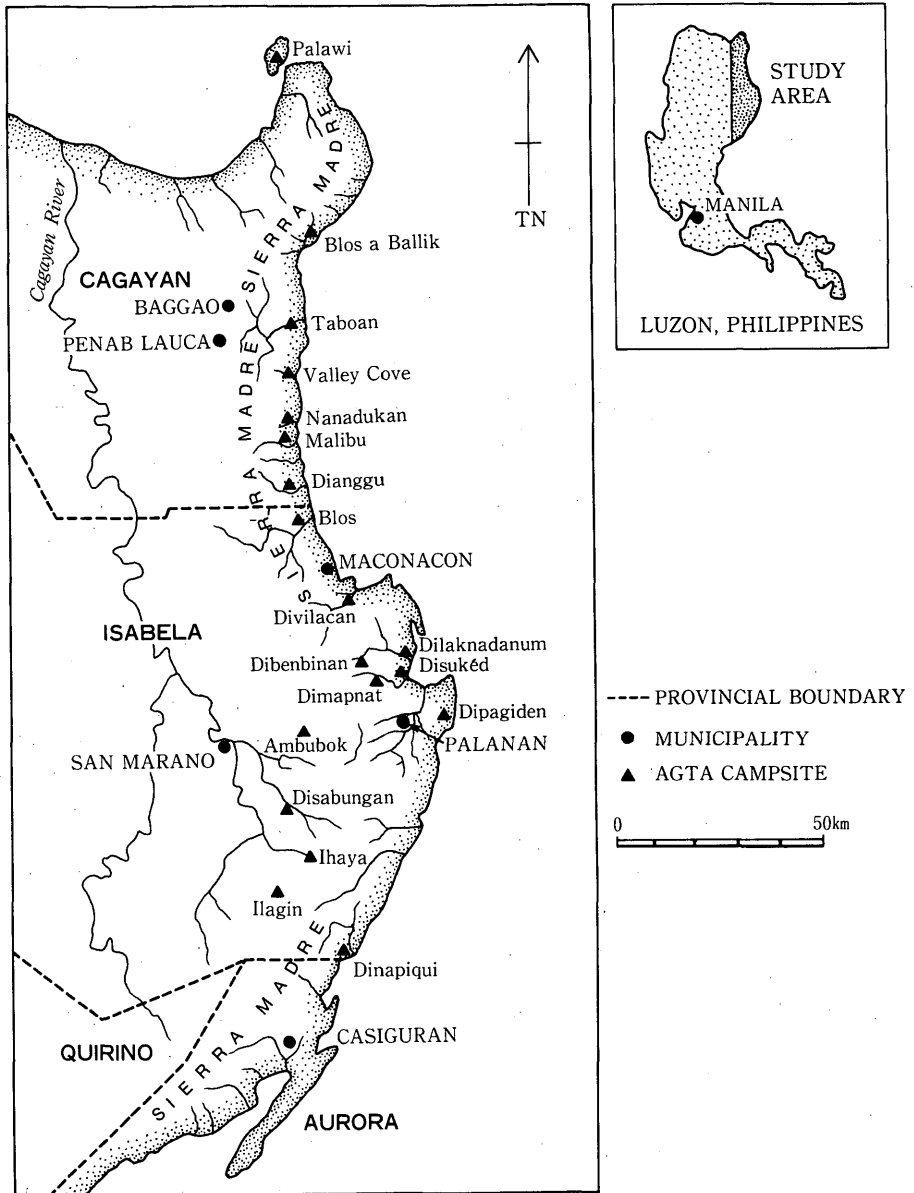


Figure 1. The home area of the Agta.

Cagayan Provinces, with the Ihaya Agta in the municipalities of San Mariano and Palanan, Isabela, and the Agta of Southeastern Cagayan, in the coastal settlements of Penablanca and Baggao, Cagayan.

Populations in the towns of the Sierra Madre began to expand out of the *Poblaciones*, or municipal centres shortly after 1950. In Palanan, according to informants, the river drainages flowing into Palanan Bay were lightly settled by

farmers, being primarily the ranges of Agta, who hunted, fished, and managed small swidden fields of maize, rice, and root crops. Palanan town was a small village of farming families who tended fields as much as an hour's walk from their houses. Agta living on the banks of the Dimapnat, Dibenbinan, Disuked and Dilaknadanum Rivers, as well as upstream on the Palanan River, sporadically traded for commodities, bringing fish, deer and wild pig meat, and labour. San Mariano was similar, although a more complex farmer ethnic mosaic was the case, and an incipient logging industry existed. Maconacon did not exist: two farmers' pioneer homesteads preceded the dramatic 1965 appearance of a complete logging operation. The expansion of the operation, as detailed below, markedly affected the spread of farmers and their subversion of the Agta.

Internal Philippine migration existed before the war, but health care changes and political and economic forces favored widespread population moves starting in the mid-1960s. Ilokanos stepped up their century old tradition of leaving the Ilokos coast for the Cagayan Valley and virgin lands to its west and east. Ilokano farmers moved up the lower river valleys flowing into the Cagayan, impacting the dominant Ibanags and the local swiddeners—Itawi, Yogad, Gaddang, and lesser known groups. They presented Agta with new and harsh social and economic relations.

Others were moving. The "tribal" cultures of the Cordillera Central began sending daughter communities out of their mountains and into the Sierra Madre. Reportedly even more aggressive than Ilokanos in their pioneering efforts, Ifugao soon had clusters of houses scattered deeply in the mountains. The flow of land-poor mountaineers continues: Ifugao into Isabela and Aurora Provinces, Tinggian, Kalinga, Itneg and a few Bontok into Isabela and Cagayan [GRIFFIN 1985].

Local populations increased, both from immigration and from decrease in childhood mortality. South in Casiguran, the lowlander population was, in 1649, 1,560, and only 2,067 around 1900. In 1962 it numbered 9,381, and at present about 35,000 [HEADLAND 1986: 15]. Palanan numbered about 700 in the 1640s, [KEESING 1962: 258] 1,080 in 1903, 2,410 in 1918, 3,109 in 1939, 4,048 in 1948, 5,599 in 1960, 7,518 in 1970 and 10,295 in 1980. San Mariano, founded in 1918, numbered about 2,000, 8,365 in 1948, and 31,839 in 1980. Maconacon counted only 1,390 in 1970 and 4,521 in 1980 [NATIONAL CENSUS AND STATISTICS OFFICE 1980]. Maconacon numbers have risen sharply during the 1980s, reaching close to 10,000 (N. Cerra: personal communication).

Palanan, like Casiguran, is an old town, founded in the first decade of the 1600s by Spanish priests, who attempted to aggregate and Christianise the farming peoples. San Mariano was based on a scattered farming population of Ibanags and Ilokanos. The population fluctuates seasonally, as loggers may leave during the rainy season.

The municipalities of Baggo and Penablanca have their seats on the western side of the mountains, like San Mariano, but are minimally organised in their *sitios* on the east coast. Excepting Agta, only pioneer farming colonists are found north

of Maconacon. As the all weather, year-round logging road extends north from Maconacon, and as roads cut eastward from the western foothills of the Sierra Madre, immigrants are flooding the coast. Changing from an occasional isolated farmstead in the 1960s, the area will have several politically organised *sitios* and *barangays* in the 1990s.

Military conflict has affected all human settlement throughout the area. The Sierra Madre has been a refuge of anti-government "freedom fighters" for several centuries, but the last two decades have been especially destructive. In late 1988—at the time of this writing—serious warfare is spread throughout the territory under consideration. Maconacon was in 1988 virtually under siege by the insurgents' New Peoples' Army. Much of the rural areas of San Mariano are not in government hands, and the coastal reaches are "no-man's land." Palanan may be an NPA town. The conflict and its participants are part of the process of the destruction of Agta society.

THE LOWLANDER STRATEGY

An old and effective traditional social relationship characterises the exchange of goods and services between the indigenous farmers and Agta of Isabela and Quezon Provinces [HEADLAND 1978; PETERSON 1978]. The *ibay* partnership is based on reciprocal exchange between socially and politically unequal ethnic groups, farmers and foragers, non-Agta and Agta. This partnership seems to have worked for centuries, perhaps longer, although perhaps only in locales where farmers concentrated their settlements. The basis for the relationship is an Agta provisioning of farmers with animal protein and furnishing of labour in agricultural fields. The Agta gained rice or other carbohydrates, plus non-food commodities. Usually farmers were also "middle-men," securing the commodities and selling after a large mark-up. Only sporadically did an outsider by-pass the local lowlander in exchange efforts. For example, in earlier decades most alcoholic beverages were produced by the farmers: later they added Manila-bottled hard liquors. Farmers purchased and resold this liquor. Conversely, most tobacco was grown in the Cagayan Valley. Agta porters usually carried loads of tobacco, plus cloth, metal, and the like, over the mountains. They portered for farmer/entrepreneurs, being paid in rice, maize, and bits of the tobacco they carried. Lacking capital, they could only labour. Details of variation in the two economic groups' relationships follow later.

A majority of the lowlanders are today generally fixed field farmers, only occasionally swiddening new plots. Their strategy of economic relations with Agta varies from non-existent (never trading or interacting with Agta), to mild *ibay* connections with much personal social interaction, to the harshly exploitative efforts of many new immigrant farmers, loggers, and petty capitalists. *Ibay* ties allow Agta to ask foodstuffs from their trade partners, often on credit, to "rent" tools and equipment, and to have assistance in legal, political and medical matters.

The lowlander partners, however, have the advantage in the relationship. First, the Agta commodities are usually not essential; certainly they are inessential for acquisition in a timely fashion. Meat and fish are eaten only sporadically by the peasant populations. Wild protein may be supplemented or replaced by home grown sources, by canned goods, and by sporadic hunting, trapping and fishing by non-Agta. While other Agta-produced products are even less important, their labour as field hands is seasonally important, especially in pioneering contexts where insufficient numbers of surplus labourers is the case. Some farmers may desire Agta field labour, since it is potentially cheap and non-complaining. Again farmers in pioneering situations favour use of Agta, since they are handy and nearby, they are about asking for food anyway and so amenable to working, and clearing new swiddens, harvesting, and processing grains is tedious, time-consuming work.

The goal of the poor, pioneering farmer, or the established "simple technology" farmers, such as those distant from town centres, is to gain as much as possible in commodities and work from the Agta while yielding as little as is possible. The Agta strive, as will be elaborated below, to gain an "in debt" relationship that ensures continued and constant if irregular access to cereal and root crop foods, to tobacco, and to a variety of commodities.

Lowlander strategies for maintaining control of Agta commodities and labour entails a contradiction of ideology and practice, both working to deny Agta an agricultural base and to enforce dependence on non-Agta. The ideology is seated in the cultural theme that permeates the rhetoric of Philippine social relations: the importance of "sacrifice" in the assistance of the less fortunate, knowledgeable, and advanced. The superior, whether in the professions, in business, or in politics, often cast themselves as personally making sacrifices for the well-being of their neighbours, suffering monetary loss for the sake of their efforts to improve the lot of others. Perhaps originating in Christian ethics and similar American colonial discourse, the presentation often masks self-serving gains and aims to put others in one's debt. The rural farmer/proletariat/politician interacting with Agta always uses this theme when dealing with outsiders, especially in public. These people speak of efforts to teach the Agta to farm, to induce them to settle in permanent homesteads, to have children attend school, and to behave as rice cultivating peasant citizens. Never, however, are the means of attaining these states permitted the Agta.

The lowlanders, even poor peasant farmers, are part of the larger Philippine system. They are integrated into the national economy and political structure. They find places within the social hierarchy. Through kinship and alliances they can reach to the region's elite, and they enjoy to some extent due process of law. The Agta do not, and are excluded from all these parts of the fabric of Philippine society. Their exclusion leaves them without recourse to law when exploited by those above. They must accept client status, where their immediate patrons determine much of their access to goods and their economic options.

The means by which the lowlanders subordinate the Agta are based in the traditional dominance-subordinance nature of Philippine exchange, on numbers and on increased power, based in access to cash, commodities, and guns. The procedure operates as follows. Farmers, and others, exhort the Agta to remain sedentary, near the farmers' residences. Either the Agta are forbidden to clear or to plant their own fields, enforcing dependence on purchased food at exorbitant prices, or they are encouraged to develop fields, after which the clearings are taken by theft, force, or purchase at inadequate prices (see Peterson [1984] for specific accounts).

These practices are not new. The process of divesting Agta of goods and lands, either by dubious purchase or force is recorded by Headland [1986]. The American anthropologist William Jones in 1908 recorded that similar predatory practices extended to the Agtas' Ilongot neighbours. Ilokano accompanied raiding government soldiers, stealing all the portable food of the Ilongots. When trading was more advantageous, they met Ilongots (and, we must assume, Agta), trading cloth and salt for fish, chickens, sweet potato and taro [JONES 1907-09 VI: 15]. Agta, as non-horticulturalists, probably only traded meat and fish.

While lamenting their Agta brothers' inability to become farmers, the non-Agta farmers intimidate the Agta and become most offended at suggestions of impropriety. For example, in one of the most blatant cases we observed, an especially abusive farmer told us his intent to help the Agta, while using threat of force and police action to make them leave fields ready to harvest—all the while adjacent to the anthropologists' camp. Only when confronted by superior external force would he relinquish his claims. In another case, Igorot and Ilokano farmers vociferously resisted the logging firm's survey team while it mapped farm lots for Agta at the request of the local missionaries and anthropologists. Headland, working among Casiguran Agta, documents similar actions in great detail. Briefly put, the more numerous the lowlanders and the closer spatially the Agta to lowlanders, the greater the intensity of exploitation and of Agta dependency.

Lowlanders use three hooks to capture Agta, beyond threat and intimidation. These are tobacco, cereal grains and roots, and liquor. Metal tools, clothing, beads, medicine and luxury items such as radio-phonographs are infrequent although important commodities, often used in exchange, but are less important items of dependence. Agta appear to the casual observer to prefer tobacco over food, and certainly in times of insufficient food (rice, maize, or roots), adult Agta fortify themselves with tobacco, usually taken as part of the betel nut chew. Most Agta adults, in our experience, are thoroughly addicted to tobacco, and refuse to undertake subsistence foraging trips without adequate tobacco. Depletion results in a return to lowlander sources. Rice is important, yet alternatives may be found. Liquor may be nearly as sought after as tobacco, especially in Casiguran, but equally it may be seldom used or even less desirable than coffee. Simply put, Agta cannot get through a day without tobacco. Usually a plant carbohydrate is mandatory, but among some groups one's own plots occasionally may suffice.

Lowlanders who interact with Agta, who gain their commodities or labour, and who have an interest in their use as economic assets generally have tobacco, purchased from traders. Tobacco is difficult to grow, especially along the Pacific coast: Agta may never succeed in its production. They are not given seeds, knowledge is withheld, and their own customs of sharing inhibit a single person's ability to cultivate tobacco.

Lowlanders are themselves completely caught up in the pan-Philippines consumer ethic where display of commodities reflects status and worth. They draw on the same cultural values to convince a very willing clientele to consume industrial goods, many of them so-called luxury goods only briefly operable and useful only as items of conspicuous consumption. Radios and record players are highly desired items, for which the lowlanders ask hugely inflated prices. Agta go deeply into debt in order to gain these goods, further falling under the authority of specific lowlanders. Logging company employees are especially notorious for such tactics, since they are wage earners and able to make initial purchases. When their radios are nearly worn out, a few sell them to Agta for exorbitant prices. Other examples abound.

Thus, generally speaking and allowing for local differences, Agta are heavily indebted to non-Agta. They have been so harassed and intimidated, and so many swidden fields stolen, that they seldom seriously attempt to become farmers.

THE AGTA STRATEGY

Agta know they are in an impossible situation. They frequently articulate the pressures in their social, political and economic lives. They disagree sharply among themselves as to proper courses of action, both for the short and long terms. Their basic strategy is to accommodate themselves to the demands and power of the lowlanders. They have no choice. They cannot refuse: occasionally a family may flee debts or angry lowlanders, but places to take refuge are limited. Opinions and stances concerning tactics and strategies are varied, however. Some Agta, especially the more intelligent and industrious, either angrily condemn the cheating, abuse and domination they experience, or they attempt to "pass" into the dominant society. The former usually maintain an Agta way of life: the latter usually become personally debilitated and fail.

Agta do vary according to circumstances and histories. The four Agta groups studied in detail by anthropologists all differ in their commitments to economic strategies. Their interaction patterns with lowlanders are all, to a degree, different. The Casiguran Agta [HEADLAND 1986] have long histories of contact with and serious exploitation by lowlanders. Palanan Agta [ESTIOKO and GRIFFIN 1975; BENNAGEN 1976; PETERSON 1978] are similar to Casiguran, but have endured less pressure for change. Disabungan, or Ihaya Agta [RAI 1982, 1990; ESTIOKO-GRIFFIN and GRIFFIN 1981; GRIFFIN 1989] resemble the remote Palanan and Casiguran groups, but depend very heavily on trade of meat for most

rice and nearly all other goods. The Agta of Southeast Cagayan [GRIFFIN 1984, 1989; CLARK 1990] have fluctuated over the years, but are tending towards the Palanan/Casiguran model. Until 1983 they remained the most isolated and independent of the known groups.

The patterns of inter-societal trading of services and commodities are worth explicating in some detail. Variation among the various Agta groups will be discussed and selected quantitative data presented. The trading arrangements, partnership structures, and the materials of exchange are reviewed, with an aim to portraying the dynamic nature of the situation and to understanding the deteriorating well-being of all Agta.

The Agta throughout the provinces of Isabela and Cagayan differ in the options they have for provisioning and labouring. The basic pattern, however, is for Agta to collect forest and stream resources such as meat, fish, rattan and Manila copal, or for them to labour in the fields of farmers or provide services such as guiding, soldiering, and logging. The oldest pattern (represented by the Ihaya Agta) entails the Agta in a two-fold provisioning. Wild pig and deer meat, or riverine fish is, ideally, frequently carried to the farmsteads of lowland *ibay* trade partners. A single Agta man or woman would have few, perhaps two or three, trade partners: a farmer might list several Agta as his partners. The farmer exchanges a quantity of usually unhusked rice or maize, sweet potato, or cassava. For honey the Agata may receive home-made rice sweets, coffee beans, or tobacco and manufactured commodities. The *ibay* connection should be congenial and supportive, although the ideal masks the exploitative nature of the system.

Both parties may at times seem to obtain an advantage, but the relationship is long-term, with histories understood by both parties. Special events in a partner's life may require major sacrifice from the other side. Weddings, funerals, and baptisms, illnesses, typhoons, crop failures, and periods of hunting failure all force the extension of credit and of support. An Agta especially may need to be located at the farmer's home to work as a servant-helper in times of crisis. The farmer does not, as a social and economic superior, locate himself at an Agta homesite, except to be certain of obtaining resources as they come into camp, but often has to extend considerable credit. Agta often need carbohydrates when they have no meat to exchange. They may be ill, desire clothing, and especially crave tobacco. A good partner will give what he can to his Agta partners, thereby consolidating a sense of obligation, a debt, that favours his good treatment when Agta have game or fish. In fact, the farmer's ability to take a generous portion in relationship to established rates of exchange is much greater if he has been generous in times of need. The old, long-lasting partnerships were often reasonably equitable, given the points of view of the foragers and the subsistence level farmers involved, and the inter-generational nature of the bonds.

Commodities other than food and tobacco are found in the *ibay* partnerships, and in trading partnerships where the formality of the *ibay* is unknown. Agta women in Ihaya weave pandanus leaf baskets and mats for exchange with their

partners and other farmers. Farmer's wives tend, or tended, to weave a finer, multi-coloured mat, used for special occasion or for market sale, but they may sleep on Agta mats and store grains and clothes in Agta baskets. Tobacco is often a market commodity, although a poor quality leaf can be grown along the eastern coast on the peasant farm.

The only commodities aimed at markets and produced by Agta are Manila copal, a tree resin used in varnish manufacture and rattan, formerly used primarily in split form as lashing material. Manila copal was until recent years gathered by the rice sackful, carried on one's back to an *ibay* or special trader, and exchanged for rice and other necessities. Rattan reached markets through a series of middle men, not unlike Manila copal. Along the eastern coast, occasionally dealers moved north from Baler or south from San Vicente, generally picking up split rattan from regular Agta trade partners, and leaving rice, tobacco and clothing. Rattan dealers could operate only in the dry season and serviced few Agta collectors. Until the 1984 revisions in the laws licensing rattan dealers, they often operated illegally.

Exchange rates in the traditional partnerships and in regular transfers of Manila copal and split rattan are, or really *were* not monetised, instead they were in units of kind, with rough equivalencies established by mutual agreement. The complicating factors, above all others, were histories of debt relations, slights and advantages, and efforts to maintain the partnerships. As the intensity of the indebtedness varied, and as supply and demand fluctuated on both sides, values asked and received moved about central concepts of worth.

Generally speaking, Agta-produced meat is devalued, since it is wild meat, as opposed to that of domesticated hogs, beef and water buffalo. Only during the wet season, when wild pigs are fat, is the product especially appreciated. In addition, peasant farmers have a great capacity for minimal use of meat. Feast days demand meat, but everyday fare suffices with rice and vegetables. Fish are always desired, but lowlanders disparage the catches and kills of Agta on the basis of not involving the "work" inherent in peasant farming and fishing.

Wild pig and deer are butchered in a fashion ready for distribution to lowlanders, with parts set aside for family consumption. On adult pigs, the head is cut off, the organs and intestines removed, slabs of skin and fat cut from the torso, and the legs cut from the pelvis and upper body. Legs, pelvis and strips of skin and fat are the trade choices. A front and rear leg, plus a strip of fat, should bring an amount of rice or other carbohydrate sufficient for as much as two days meals (two main meals per day) by the local cluster, or residential group of the hunter. Four kilos of unhusked rice would be a very rough approximation. A better rule of thumb is that partners get as much as possible and give as little as possible, meeting their immediate subsistence needs and not alienating each other.

The exchanges themselves may often be accompanied by "visiting," or hanging about the host partner's home, getting a free meal for all present, cigarettes shared around, and having an enjoyable visit. Sporadic trade partners, or those who are socially distant, engage in little visiting, extend few amenities, and attempt a



Photo. 1. Agta and *ibay* rattan trader at an Agta campsite.

straightforward exchange of goods. The gift giving (generalised exchanges) among *ibay* is unknown among strangers, unless a lowlander is attempting to create a new debt relationship that can later be exploited.

The patterns of exchange that are found throughout Isabela and Cagayan provinces in the late 1980s are much more variable than those reviewed above. Firstly, the population densities and occupational categories of non-Agta have soared. Secondly, Agta who once lived in areas without farming peoples and hence no close *ibay*, now daily engage in social and economic intercourse with immigrant peasants, proletarians, traders, soldiers, and insurgents. Few of these lowlanders aim for long-term trade partnerships, believing the world to be changing so fast that Agta are a poor investment. Furthermore, many of the immigrants are transitory or come from traditions I interpret as "exploit and be exploited," and "may the hardest man win." Partnerships are built, but some are planned to be brief, or sporadic in operation, and to be explicit in the exchange procedures and obligations. For example, loggers, especially survey crews, may spend months, even a year or two, around the hunting range of a particular Agta group. Friendships and exchange alliances or partnerships are built, but may dissolve with the movement of the loggers. On the other hand, since loggers have "permanent" residences, partners and friends may retain visitation and exchange rights. Agta may stay overnight and be fed when in town, and the loggers may expect to be given meat, fish, orchids and respect by the visitors from the mountains. Such loggers may thus become small time "patrons" for Agta.

In addition to the exchange of meat and fish, the Agta may be asked by petty entrepreneurs to collect orchids and certain sea shells, to help in near-shore ocean fishing, and to harvest rattan. Manila copal has recently declined in market value and has been replaced by rattan collection, which has enjoyed a boom north of

Palanan since 1985 [CLARK 1990]. Furthermore, demand by timber cutters and hauliers has increased pressure for meat and fish in exchange for white factory-milled rice and sundry "company store" goods. These include instant coffee, sugar, sweetened condensed milk, gin, and noodles. Worst perhaps is the militarisation of the Agta, who are forced to join operations with the insurgent New Peoples' Army, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and the Civilian Home Defence Force. Not only must they unwillingly endanger their lives, but their regular acquisition of forest resources is disrupted, their dependence on different incomes and food developed, and their ability to name the prices of their commodities minimised.

In the case of rattan dealers, the scale of operation now far surpasses past efforts. Along coastal northeastern Luzon, dealers arrive by motor boat in the dry season, off-load sacks of rice, sugar, coffee, a few manufactured goods and tobacco. At this time of year the Agta are certain to be low on plant foods and likely lacking in meat, so they usually agree to cut and haul rattan from the adjacent forest. The rattan has to be bundled in specific quantities and lengths, and on an agreed day will be collected by a "mother" boat moving along the coast. The dealer returns with the boat, checking the harvest and leaving additional stores of rice and goods. The provisioning of the Agta is usually well ahead of their harvest obligation, keeping them to the task at hand.

The smaller scale transactions between Agta and farmers may still resemble the *ibay* form but may be more exploitative and socially "harsh" on Agta. Many immigrant peasant farmers disdain Agta, considering the cheating and harassment of Agta as their natural right. Agta, in an environment of diminishing game, fish, and arable land, may have to take whatever they can get. They may be fed as they work farmers' fields, may trade meat for plant food, and may secure goods and materials from the farmers, but without the security of the *ibay* partnership.

The Agta household complex, a unit I have called the residential cluster or the



Photo. 2. Malnourished Agta woman and children taking coffee.

local group is simply a group of from two to six nuclear families, together forming an extended family of a fluid and ill-defined nature. The nuclear families, each typically in its own residential structure, are the basic units of production, yet cannot be isolated from the production efforts of the entire membership of the local cluster. Cooperation, sharing of labour efforts and of acquisitions, and mutual suffering in times of shortage are the norm. The Agta consider the members of a local cluster—and the membership changes frequently—to be all family, either consanguineal or affinal. Cousins, for example, are similar to siblings, and uncles and aunts not unlike mothers and fathers. As a result, to talk about sharing and cooperation within an Agta residential cluster is to talk about behaviours within a family.

The core of each nuclear family is the husband and wife. Together they decide a day's tactics in obtaining food, and then coordinate loosely with other cluster members. Agta may hunt singly or in teams: the game killer determines the disposition of the kill outside the group, and distributes equal shares of retained meat to each household. A husband and wife often consider each other's opinions in deciding how to sell or trade the meat and fish catches. Any forest product sale can bring, depending on availability, plant foods, subsistence tools, tobacco, money, and assorted luxury goods. Food entering the camp must itself be distributed, even though the animal that procured the rice, for example, was in part shared. So, when a sack of rice, whatever its size, is procured, it is partially divided immediately house by house, and subsequently is portioned out to the same households until exhausted. Other consumables are shared, including batteries used in flashlights for hunting at night. Cash is not shared, although loans are asked which, in effect are gifts. Occasionally a couple may decide to save cash in order to purchase a used radio or radio-phonograph. Once the radio is in hand, its ownership is never disputed but its use becomes general throughout the cluster. Clothing has something of a personal nature to it, especially as consumption of

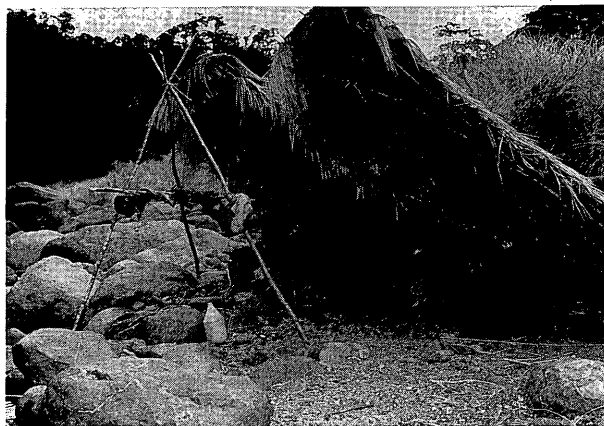


Photo. 3. Traditional Agta campsite, homes and family.

Table 1. Subsistence emphases, Ihaya Agta and Southeast Cagayan Agta.

Ihaya Agta 1979 [Rai 1990: appendix 6]						
	Hunting	Gathering	Fishing	Trading	Swiddening	Other
Men	74.5	0.6	2.5	15.4	0.2	6.8
Women	8.5	24.6	6.0	33.0	1.3	26.5*
Southeast Cagayan Agta 1980-82						
	Hunting	Gathering	Fishing	Trading	Swiddening	Other
	33.0	14.7	16.7	4.5	30.2	0.6
Southeast Cagayan Agta 1983**						
	Hunting	Gathering	Fishing	Trading	Swiddening	Other
	10.0	4.0	36.0	40.0	10.0	0.0

Figures are the percentage of total work efforts on subsistence. Variation in the format of the data is due to varying data collection and analysis histories. The Rai data are approximately the same as could be reported, less accurately, for the Ihaya (Pagsanghan) Agta of 1975.

*Mat and basket weaving, etc., for sale.

**Dry season data only; Clark [1990] (and personal communication) reports a great shift from fishing to rattan collection.

clothing increases. Beadwork is individually owned, although both beads and clothing may be borrowed.

Variation in who produces what, and consumes what, is built around the above norms. As in any society, each person is different, and what each produces reflects personal relationships, their external, non-Agta suppliers, and daily choices in production, consumption and exchange.

Some Agta adults are interested in integrating into the larger Filipino society, and seek consumer goods such as radio-phonographs and good clothing in order to identify with non-Agta consumption styles. These Agta are often the industrious, charismatic, and intelligent leaders who not infrequently turn to alcohol as they fail. Others are relatively less industrious, and as a result produce few commodities, including labour, and hence consume less. In part they live off the more affluent, but in general are considered less favourably by Agta. Household specialisation does not exist, yet differences are noticeable. The characteristics of health, intelligence and industry seem important, and a capacity for dealing with non-Agta critical. Those individuals who are successful in all the traditional domains of subsistence—hunting, fishing, gathering, and horticulture seem also to be those most involved with small scale commodity production, sale and purchase. Some men and women work long hours at rattan collection, mat weaving, and, of course, hunting. Preferences vary, but the experts in one area tend to be good in others.

The Ihaya Agta represent the most traditional exchange patterns, commodity use, and resource base in operation recently (Tables 1-4). They are among the Agta most properly called "commercial hunters" since they gain most of their plant foods and commodities by the exchange of meat and fish. In addition, they expend

minimal effort on horticulture, in certain seasons move residences every few days, and they maintain the traditional group composition and cultural values of sharing, egalitarianism, and immediate consumption.

Ihaya Agta are generally located in the up-river portions of the eastern and western drainages of the Sierra Madre, seldom traveling either to the coast or downriver to town centers. They maintain minimal social intercourse with lowlanders, preferring to restrict most contact to exchanges and related joint foraging trips. Relatively shy, sometimes hostile, they claim to be the "truest" Agta, to not have succumbed to non-Agta pressures and to be primarily hunters, not labourers. Other Agta tend to call them *ebuked*, "of the mountains," or "hillbillies."

The Ihaya Agta of southern Palanan, previously referred to as Dipagsanghan Agta [ESTIOKO and GRIFFIN 1975] differ little from their Disabungan relatives, whether in commodity production, consumption of self—versus outside—produced food, or in relations with non-Agta. Throughout 1975, these Agta maintained a commercial hunting strategy, with meat and fish exchanged for plant foods and other commodities. The two local clusters observed each planted sweet potato plots of only 50 metres by 50 metres, and harvested during the winter rainy season before the roots had reached maturity.

Hunting and fishing generated all animal protein consumed and approximately 95 per cent of plant foods. Sale or exchange of meat, fish, and eel, and collection and sale of the resin Manila copal provided the entire means for purchasing maize, rice, sweet potato, tobacco, and manufactured goods. The anthropologists functioned, in all ill-defined fashion, as both *ibay* trade partners and as a family in the local cluster, generally over-compensating in exchanges. As with the Disabungan Agta, those resident around Dipagsanghan travelled downriver to move their commodities to trade partners and other farmers. Women most frequently carried the meat, fish and plant foods. Men figure most prominently in the procurement.

Men, especially older men less capable at hunting, collect Manila copal tree resin; usually one day's effort can realise a bag approaching fifty kilos in weight. Little skill and much endurance are required, since the collected resin must be carried downriver, either to trade partners or middlemen. Ihaya Agta place a high premium on both tobacco and glass beads. The latter are infrequently gained, but are expensive. Manila copal is often traded for bead and tobacco.

The Agta residing along the coast north of the Isabela and Cagayan border were, until the mid-1980s, among the most isolated and independent Agta known. For many kilometres few pioneer farmers had established themselves. During the course of the 1980s however, logging roads and rattan traders penetrated more thoroughly, and immigrants moved in in larger numbers. In 1988 open conflict between the Philippine military and the New Peoples' Army brought death and disarray to the Agta. Rattan traders, beginning in 1985, scoured the coast for Agta willing to drag rattan to the beaches in return for rice, coffee, tobacco, liquor and

Table 2. Commodity exchange events: Comparison of Ihaya 1975 and Southeast Cagayan 1980 & 1983.*

Ihaya Agta at Pagsanghan		2-6-75 to 2-25-75	
Commodities traded		Commodities secured	
Fresh fish	7	Dried maize on cob	5
Wild pig	6	Dried shelled maize	9
Deer	7	Ground maize	4
Eel	3	Unhusked rice	5
		Roots	4
Southeast Cagayan Agta at Nanadukan		12-6-80 to 12-25-80	
Commodities traded		Commodities secured	
Sweet potatoes	1	Hulled rice	1
Southeast Cagayan Agta at Malibu		6-6-83 to 6-25-83	
Commodities traded		Commodities secured	
Fresh fish	17	Husked rice	19
Dried fish	4	Cash	15
Cash	3	Batteries	4
Wild pig	3	Metal files	1
Deer	5	Cigarettes	3
Eel	4	Noodles	1
Dried corn	1	Sugar	1
Arrow	1	Coffee	2
		Canned milk	1
		Rice cakes	1
		Cookies & soda	2

*Tobacco was obtained from the anthropologists during these periods: the anthropologists were given meat, fish, and shares of the roots. They also sporadically shared their ground corn and rice with the Agta.

cash. With logging, rattan collection, farmer influx, and warfare pressures, the Agta shifted from relative self-sufficiency to dependence approaching the extremes found in distant Casiguran.

Between late 1980 and early 1982 the Agta resided at Nanadukan, a semi-permanent campsite for one to two local clusters. There are several families (varying from three to nine) cleared and planted fields of sweet potato, cassava (manioc) and upland rice. The produce of these fields provided rice for part of the rainy season months of October, November, and December. The root crops varied in providence throughout the entire year, furnishing supplemental meals once or twice a day, depending on rice supplies.

Hunting was a favoured activity, although a bad year [GRIFFIN 1984] diminished the usual abundance of wild pig and deer. Fishing was important, since three rivers were within one to three hours walking distance. Hunting and fishing procured adequate protein for home consumption, with occasional amounts traded for commodities, including rice. Trade with farmers and loggers, while of long-

Table 3. The range of commodities produced, traded in and traded out, 1975-1984.

Agta produced:	Agta consumed:
1. Deer meat	1. Rice
2. Wild pig meat	2. Roots
3. Riverine fish	3. Maize
4. Littoral fish	4. Tobacco
5. Honey	5. Salt
6. Rattan	6. Batteries
7. Manila copal	7. Fishing gear
8. Sweet potato	8. Metal
9. Orchids	9. Tools*
10. Labour	10. Clothing
11. Mats & baskets	11. Liquor
12. Arrows	12. Sweets
13. Money	13. Coffee
	14. Canned milk
	15. Soap
	16. Medicine
	17. Ammunition
	18. Dinnerware & pots
	19. Matches
	20. Glass beads
	21. Radios and record players
	22. Cosmetics
	23. Money

*Only occasionally bought, but major capital outlay; includes knives, chisels, files, hammers, and metal rods.

standing tradition, was sporadic. Unlike the daily interaction in Casiguran and the every two or three days exchanges in Ihaya, the southeast Cagayan Agta not only avoided purchasing rice for two or three weeks at a time in the rainy season, they sporadically sold sweet potatoes from their own fields to loggers. Equally sporadically, they received money, goods from the company store, and tobacco. Cash, instant coffee and sugar were usual choices, although some white rice and even canned fish might be chosen (Tables 1-4).

By 1983 the Southeast Cagayan Agta under study had completely changed their strategies. Their subsistence ranges were reached by the logging teams, who built a camp and store at the Malibu river. During a three week period of data collection in the dry season, the Agta constantly fished in order to meet the demands forced on them by hungry loggers. Provisioned with white rice, their diets deteriorated. New and ready access to alcohol created social problems which ended only with the death of the local cluster senior male. All Agta at that point dispersed up the coast, re-locating in the vicinity of Ilokano farmers near Valley Cove.

DISCUSSION OF THE TABLES

The Ihaya Agta well exemplify those Agta who traditionally exchange meat and fish for cultivated plant food starches, especially maize, rice and roots (sweet potato and cassava). Their maize, usually unprocessed, came from near-subsistence level farmers, mostly *ibay*. Fish and game were procured nearly daily; only portions of each were traded, and the abundance of meat in relation to peasant-produced maize, plus cheating on exchanges kept the Agta produce devalued. An example of such cheating was revealed when we twice counted lots of unshelled ears of maize. Two hundred piece payments actually totalled 158 and 160, but the Agta cannot or at least do not check by counting. Mats and baskets were exchanged for used clothing. Manila copal bought food or larger items of consumer goods. The Ihaya Agta preferred to trade with established partners and remained aloof from less well known potential traders.

The Agta of southeastern Cagayan, as represented by families resident on the Malibu and Nanadukan Rivers between 1980 and 1983, exhibit the extremes recorded. In late 1980, during a specific two week period, no economic transactions were observed. Possibly unreported exchanges occurred outside the residential area during subsistence forays, but the pattern is clear. These Agta were accustomed to self-sufficiency after their rice harvest. The self-sufficiency ended about the beginning of the new year, when meat would be taken to exchange partners. Many intervening variables might be considered, such as variable relative

Table 4. Commodity values, estimated, in 1989 US dollars or in commodities received. Examples only: list incomplete. Values fluctuate widely.

Ihaya Agta 1975	
Commodity	Value
1-2 kilograms fresh meat, fish	1 kilogram ground maize
5 kilograms meat	150-200 ears dried maize
1 leg (rear) deer or pig	2-3 flashlight batteries
1 leg (rear) deer or pig	1/2-1 bushell roots
1-2 legs deer or pig	app. 1 tablespoon seed beads
1 leg pig or deer, string of fish	3 leaves tobacco
2-4 hours labour pounding maize	app. 2 kilograms maize grd.
Southeast Cagayan Agta 1980-1984	
Commodity	Value
1 leg (rear) deer or pig	3 kilograms white rice
1 kilogram deer meat	.15 dollar
1 leg (front) deer	3 flashlight batteries
1 kilogram fish	1 kilogram white rice or 1 package cigarretes or between .15 and .25 dollar
5-10 dollars	1 adult dog (untrained)
25 dollars +/-	radiophonograph

abundance of prey animals [GRIFFIN 1984], but the Agta were at that time, December 1980, comfortable in their production and consumption of foods.

In the peak of the dry season, 1983, roughly these same families were in very different circumstances. Their efforts in swiddening had failed (Table 1) and fishing for food and commodities dominated their activities. Living in cabins provided by loggers, they fished daily and nightly, exchanging the catch immediately. Hunting continued, although considerable consternation occurred due to deterioration of the forest and to intrusion into the hunting range by another group of Agta. Consumption of coffee, cigarettes, and the like was possible and came to be expected. Later, in 1987, we observed these same Agta purchasing home-made sweets, fruits, and vegetables from peasant women "vendors" who came to the Agta camp from their homes. Cash, secured from rattan sale, paid for these new edibles. Consumption of meat killed by Agta was negligible, both for Agta and non-Agta. In this case the Agta were bound by debts to the rattan dealers and by military force to the local politician, who kept Agta men as anti-insurgent commandos. Several of the Agta men subsequently died, ambushed by NPA insurgents. The subordination and dependency of the Agta continues.

THE SHIFTS IN AGTA ORGANISATION

A central argument of this paper is that the lowlanders, the non-Agta Filipinos, organise their relations with the Agta in order that the Agta will remain dependent and hence serfs, providing goods and services to the former. Headland [1986] has adequately demonstrated, through the Competitive Exclusion Principle, the exclusion of Agta from horticultural competition. The case of the Southeast Cagayan Agta at Nanadukan shows the Agta's ability for short term, seasonal independence of lowlanders, but only in a case where adequate distance exists between the Agta farmers and non-Agta farmers. The lowlanders use a strong principle that organises Filipino society in general, the extension of credit, hence debt, to bind Agta to them. By denying a viable economic base, lowlanders ensure Agta client status through dependence. In addition, Agta desire to emulate the higher status of their better-off farmer neighbours, thinking to become true Filipinos themselves, if not by farming, then by consumption. Consumer goods are purchased by the commoditisation of traditional Agta goods—animal protein, forest products, and increasingly by labour. Cash is now as readily given by both Agta and lowlanders, whereas only twenty years ago, few Agta could even recognise bill denominations and few farmers had money.

The strategy of the lowlanders is expectable, given no alternatives on their parts concerning monetisation and commoditisation. Few forest resources are still abundant. Lowlander population numbers climb daily. In the competition to acquire food and capital, lowlanders are more than willing to reduce the freedom of the low status Agta. In a region where the well-to-do traditionally prey upon the weaker, the Agta are the weakest prey.

Agta seek to minimise the damage to their cultural integrity, yet strongly favour locating themselves where they may readily beg, buy or borrow the goods they desire. And, they must commoditise their products, as the non-Agta view the products in no other fashion. The simple *ibay* trade partner exchange system is nearly gone in the face of multitudes of lowlanders. Agta culture and society is, therefore adjusting its basic organisation. Throughout the various groups studied, no one set of changes is the rule: instead variations on the Agta theme are seen.

First, a general deterioration in quality of life seems the case to the external observer. While few individual Agta see the old days as good, nearly all bemoan the lack of meat, the destructive effects of excessive alcoholism, and seemingly constant poor health. Inadequate nutrition, new diseases (tuberculosis especially) and the ever present fear of being killed by soldiers or insurgents add to the list of miseries. These are countered by relatively ready access to tobacco, liquor and rice, according to informants. Intruding, land-stealing farmers are seen as facts of life to be exploited in turn as much as possible. Agta elaboration of credit limits binds the creditor to the debtor as much as the opposite. And, Agta do like the excitement of lowlander activities. They love coffee, candy, cookies, flashy clothes, cosmetics, rock and roll music, and trips to the "big city."

As they adjust to a money economy and to working to produce goods for sale or exchange for other goods, the older patterns and values are undergoing transformation. In particular, these include greater inequality within kinship groups, the emergence of incipient leaders (always men), a decrease in sharing of all produce, and a privatisation of ownership. Size and composition of local clusters has changed little, although much greater contact among once enemy dialect groups has shifted marriage ties, fostered tolerance of non-related Agta, and added a cosmopolitan aspect to Agta culture.

Inequality within groups is evidenced by the entrepreneurship of especially capable Agta men and women, who are able to produce more by their skill and industry. They buy more non-essential items, be it coffee and sweetened milk, or be it radio-phonographs or tape cassette players. Even coffee, once universally shared within a local cluster, may sometimes now be taken within a single household and in full view of others. Meat, fish, rice and roots, should ideally be divided up carefully among local cluster members, but such division is decreasingly important as nuclear families work hard to collect their own rattan, receive payment in cash and kind, and retain use of most of what is acquired. Debts are kept as the responsibility of the debtor, yet creditors often attempt to denigrate relatives and associated Agta, causing ill-will within a cluster of families.

A new inequality is on the horizon as a few capable, intelligent, and charismatic Agta men attempt to better the conditions of their relatives and themselves. These men are interested in integrating the Agta into the Philippine body politic, in gaining access to local and national law, and in improving their economic circumstances. They recognise the discrimination they face, but see no alternative to the cessation of being isolated forest foragers. They want land,

education, and power. They deal with the dominant farmers as well as local elite, and have begun negotiation that will lead to the peasantisation of the Agta. They seem doomed to failure.

The dominant society, in effect, takes the Agta leaders "for a ride." They are used to gain further land concessions, greater work output, greater debts, and to help devalue Agta values. Wined and dined, they have all so far slipped into alcoholism, depression, and death or suicide. Their dispirited kin resist less and less, and their client status becomes more rigid. The rise and fall of Agta leaders is one of the more unhappy parts of the story, and all the sadder since their greatest detractors are other Agta who resist any rise of leadership and inequality among themselves.

Lack of sharing and increased privatisation are the related outcomes of necessarily producing goods for sale to secure necessities and luxury items. Agta continue to share, especially among siblings and parents-siblings, but even among the nuclear families of siblings, rivalries and jealousies are greater than twenty years ago. Periodic residential concentrations of less closely related people exacerbate conflicts of sharing, or lack thereof. New material culture, especially electronics and arms are not viewed as within the domain of shared goods. Jealousies are frequent, and such negative sanctions as gossip, disparagement, and criticism which formerly served to diminish greed and lack of sharing, today go unattended, resulting in an escalation of conflict.

Lowlanders overtly and explicitly foster conflict among Agta. During field research, we constantly encountered rumour and gossip initiated by local farmers and loggers, always designed to agitate the Agta and to cause anger and hard feelings: this usually worked. By keeping the Agta in a constant state of turmoil and fear, the lowlanders better argued the benefits they offered.

Throughout the Sierra Madre the Agta have adopted an increasingly serf-like or client status, bound by debt and intimidation to the local peasant-proletariat lowlanders. Agta are not given the chance to become successful, self-sufficient farmers. They are increasingly slipping to the status of debt-serfs for the benefit of lowland masters, themselves badly exploited by local officials, industry, and the military. Agta can, at best, hope to get by on an ancient tradition of accommodation and subordination.

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