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## **Mobility and Sedentarization among the Philippine Agta**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article provides an ethnography of Agta mobility, based on fieldwork in the northern Philippines conducted over the past decade. The Agta are a population of about 10,000 people, living in small settlements distributed along the coasts and in the mountainous interior of northeastern Luzon. They follow a hunting-fishing and gathering lifestyle, which includes a relatively mobile settlement pattern. First, this article aims to document Agta mobility by exploring its drivers and by showing how it is both facilitated and limited by kinship relations. How mobility varies regionally and seasonally will also be discussed. Second, the article focuses on Agta mobility in relation to Philippine development policies. This includes a discussion of past and recent efforts at sedentarization, as well as the government's misconceptions of Agta mobility in relation to the ongoing ancestral land titling processes. Finally, the article explores the ongoing and future developments likely to influence Agta mobility. These concern Agta parents' recent emphasis on enrolling their children in formal education and the approval of a road construction project that will traverse Agta living areas and the associated claims on coastal land by politically influential outsiders. An underlying question of this article is how anthropological knowledge on mobility could contribute to improving policy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nomadism and sedentarization have long since raised the interest of policy makers, development practitioners and academics. Discussions have, however, focused mostly on pastoralist herders in arid and semi-arid regions of Eurasia and Africa (Khazanov and Wink 2001). The relatively limited literature on the position of tropical rainforest hunter-gatherers in a sedentary world includes studies on the Indonesian Punan (Dounias et al. 2007; Dounias and Froment 2011) and Orang Rimba (previously called Kubu) (Persoon 1989); as well as Central African hunter-gatherers like the Baka (e.g. Hayashi 2008; Kitanishi 2003). These studies focus on a variety of themes, including the health and nutritional consequences of

sedentarization (Dounias et al. 2007), and the continuous importance of logistical mobility with decreasing residential mobility (Binford 1980).

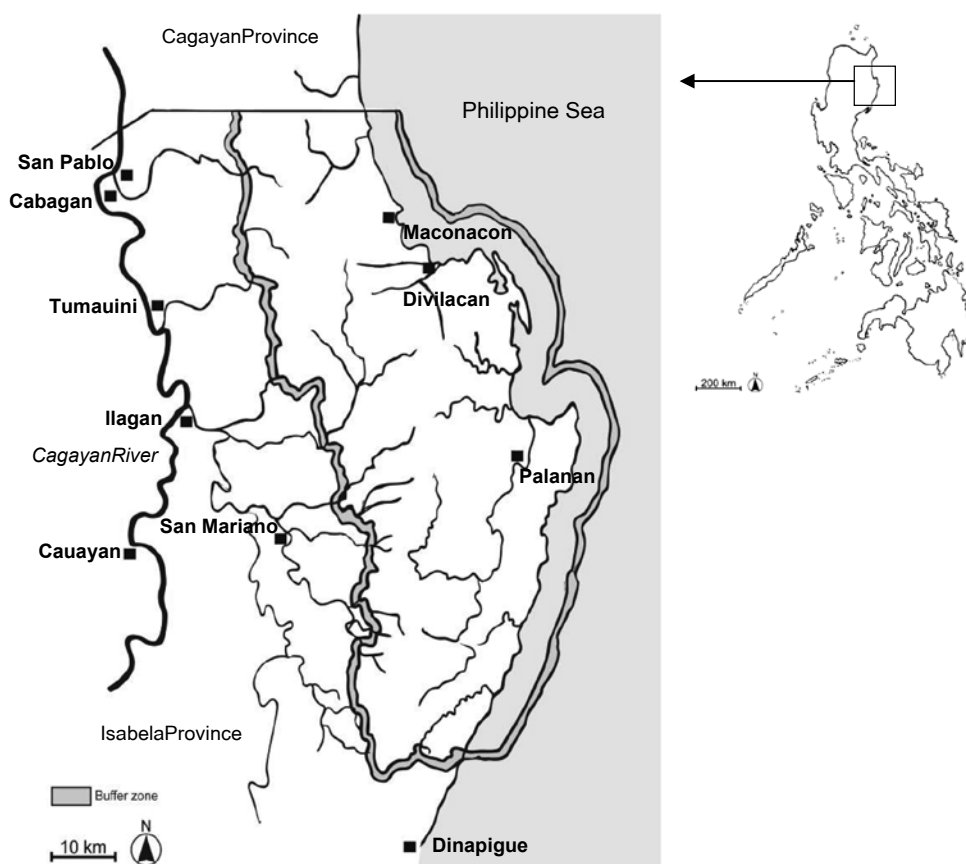
That last aspect is also highlighted by Kelly (1992), whose review on mobility and sedentism rightly reminds us of the arbitrariness with which we have assumed that “all hunter-gatherers move around a lot” and that our conceptualization of mobility has often “blinded us to the fact that mobility is universal [i.e. not at all limited to hunter-gatherers], variable, and multi-dimensional.” However, as Kelly explains, we have “difficulty identifying different forms and levels of mobility. This is especially true in defining and then detecting sedentism (Kelly 1992: 43).”

This article contributes to the literature by highlighting the variability and multidimensional character of mobility within a single population. It does so by providing an ethnographic account of Agta settlement patterns, based on fieldwork the author conducted in the northern Philippines over the past decade.

The Agta are a hunter-gatherer population of about 10,000 persons, living in 16 linguistic groups in different parts of the Sierra Madre Mountain Range (Headland 2003). Anthropological studies of the Agta have been done mostly since the 1970s, and have focused on two main geographical areas associated with different levels of mobility. The long-term and intensive ethnographic research carried out among the Agta of the San Ildefonso Peninsula (municipality of Casiguran, Aurora Province) by Headland & Headland, has shown how this Agta population of less than 300 people has had to adjust its mode of life from being mobile, forest-based hunter-gatherers, to becoming landless, village-based laborers. This change occurred in less than 50 years, and has been the combined result of road-construction, deforestation, immigration and, most recently, land development projects (Headland 1975, 1986; Headland and Headland 1997; Early and Headland 1998; Cruz et al. 2013).

Studies among the Agta living further to the north, in the provinces of Isabela and Cagayan, reveal a different situation. This population consists of around 3,000 people, most of which live in small settlements of between 30–100 people, distributed along the rivers in the mountainous interior of the Northern Sierra Madre, and along the Pacific Coast (Bennagen 1976; Peterson 1978a, b; Griffin and Estioko-Griffin 1985; Griffin, M. 1996; Minter 2009, 2010). Although this population, too, has had to deal with immigration and deforestation, especially on the western flanks of the Northern Sierra Madre, most coastal Agta have until recently been spared the impact of road construction. Also, in 1997 part of Isabela Province was converted into a 360,000 ha protected area, the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park (NSMNP). Although the NSMNP is known to be a ‘paper park’ (van der Ploeg et al. 2011), its establishment has probably slowed the pace with which the Agta resource base has been affected by overexploitation, compared to that of the San Ildefonso population (Figure 1).

This article focuses mainly on the Agta population living in and around the NSMNP, in the Province of Isabela, and on the boundary of Cagayan Province.



**Figure 1** Location of the study area in the Philippines (right) and the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park (left) (Minter 2010: 2)

The Agta are especially interesting because they are not only rainforest hunter-gatherers, but have specialized partly in the exploitation of marine resources. In both coastal and riverine settlements different types of dwellings are used, ranging from temporary to more permanent constructions. These may be alternated depending on the season, or they may be used in combination. The most short-term of these is a lean-to called *pinanahang*, (literally: ‘a place to leave behind’), which is used mostly during the hot, dry months and which is erected on a beach or in a river bed, as close as possible to a fishing ground (Photos 1 and 2). A more permanent dwelling is an open wooden construction without walls with a thatched palm-frond roof and a bamboo floor raised from the ground. Sometimes tarpaulin sheets are used as a roofing material. Agta generally refer to this construction as *bahay* (house) (Photos 3 and 4). In some settlements households may build more enclosed dwellings with walls made of sawn planks and/or galvanized iron roofing (Photo 5). Although these dwellings are also considered



**Photo 1** Temporary settlement at Blos River, Maconacon, April, 2004 (Photograph by the author)



**Photo 2** Temporary settlement along the coast at Dimatog, Palanan, May, 2005 (Photograph by the author)





**Photo 3** Settlement at Diangu River, Maconacon, March, 2004 (Photograph by the author)



**Photo 4** Diangu Agta sheltering from a typhoon, Maconacon, October, 2004 (Photograph by the author)



**Photo 5** Plank house along the Disabungan River at Dipili, San Mariano February, 2007 (Photograph by the author)

*bahay*, they are sometimes more specifically referred to as *bahay-kubu*, which is the ‘typical’ Tagalog house.

Each dwelling is usually inhabited by one nuclear family, which also may include widowed grandparents or adopted children. Between two and 30 such nuclear households stay together. This combination of households in a given settlement at a given time will here be referred to as the “residential group”. Because of the frequent in- and out-migration of nuclear households, residential groups are highly changeable in composition. Rai (1990: 58) found that the Disabungan Agta shifted camp every 18 days in 1979/80, with a mean travel distance of 5 km between settlement sites. The frequency of camp movements differs according to the season. Mobility is highest during the dry summer months (roughly February to June), when residential shifts may take place as often as every few days. Small clusters of households then frequently move between several settlement sites in river valleys or along the coast. The distance over which people move ranges from less than one to about 30 km, depending on the purpose. During the rainy season travel is hampered by swollen rivers and typhoons. Larger clusters of households then tend to aggregate for months on end, before dispersing again when the weather improves.

### **Methodology**

As mentioned above, there have been great difficulties defining ‘nomadism’ and ‘sedentism’ (Kelly 1992). Attempting to come to grips with this problem, terms like ‘semi-mobile’, ‘semi-sedentary’, ‘formerly nomadic’ or ‘increasingly sedentarized’ are used frequently without properly defining the boundaries between these terms. This article will not solve the problem, and the data on which it is based fail to provide a quantitative, longitudinal record from which a long-term trend toward sedentism among the Agta could be detected. However, the qualitative data that the author collected over the past decade (from 2002 onwards) suggest that Agta tend to respond simultaneously to a societal pressure to become sedentary, while finding ways to maintain the much valued freedom to move.

This article is based on the author’s unpublished PhD thesis (Minter 2010), complemented with field data collected during short periods of fieldwork in 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014. Part of the data were collected during a survey the author conducted between 2002 and 2005 among all Agta of the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park, which resulted in a settlement map (Figure 2) and a complete census. In the census questionnaire people were asked for the name of their birthplace, as well as for all other places where they had ever lived up to the moment of the interview. The birthplaces and current location were also asked for the household heads’ parents and siblings. Questions were also asked regarding the place of birth of each child born into the household, and, in case of deceased household members, for the location of death. This method provided a good insight into kinship networks, as well as the geographical range of households’ and individuals’ movements. Mobility data are further based on interviews on residential shifts and kin-connections, as well as on observations of changes over time in camp-composition.

### **Structure of this article**

First, it is demonstrated how contemporary Agta settlement patterns are influenced by three main internal factors: kinship connections, subsistence needs and spiritual needs. Next, the article examines the attempts by government, religious and non-government organizations to convert the Agta into sedentary farmers. Third, case studies of three residential groups’ settlement structures are presented. The article concludes with a discussion of the multidimensional character of Agta settlement patterns.

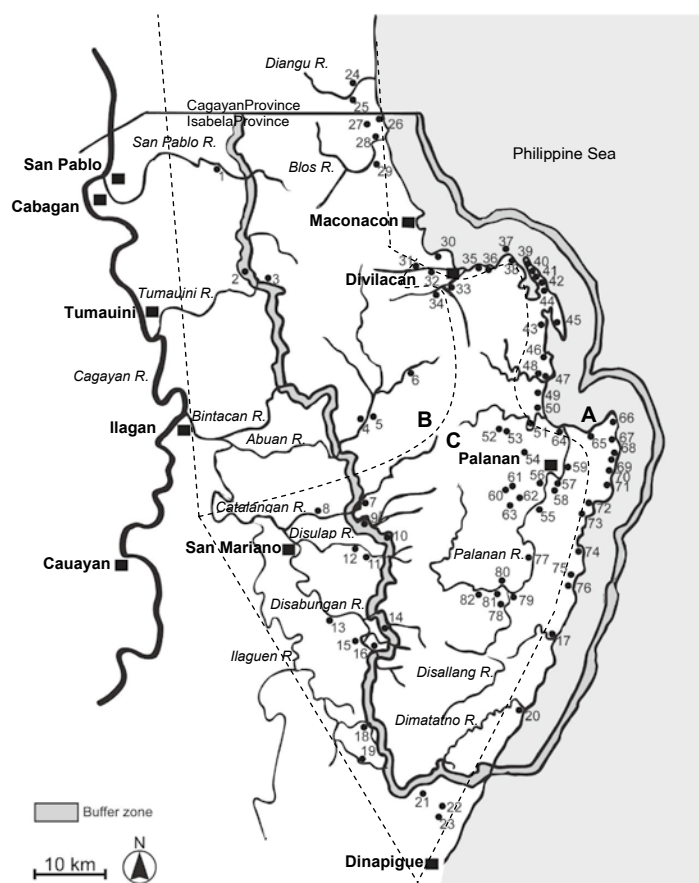
## **PATTERNS AND DRIVERS OF AGTA MOBILITY**

Agta settlement patterns are influenced strongly by kinship relations, livelihood strategies and the fear of roaming spirits of the dead. Each is discussed below.

### **1) Settlement patterns and kinship relations**

Although subsistence opportunities may be the most tangible determinant of Agta





**Figure 2** Distribution of Agta settlements in and around the NSMNP 2002–2005 and location of the coastal (A), northern river-dwelling (B) and southern river-dwelling (C) kinship networks (Minter 2010: 46).

settlement patterns, as M. Griffin (1996) has pointed out so well, *with whom* one works is more important to Agta than the subsistence activity itself. Agta strongly prefer to stay and work with kinsmen, and for that reason understanding settlement patterns requires an understanding of kinship relations.

The nuclear family acts as the basic social unit within Agta social organization (Headland 1987: 262–4), but they never operate alone. Instead, their economic and social behavior depends on that of closely related households, who together form an extended family based on cognatic descent (Griffin, M. 1996: 187; 192–193)<sup>1</sup>. Usually this extended family consists of various siblings and their nuclear families as well as their parents<sup>2</sup>. Each extended family considers a particular river valley or coastal area as its home. This tie with a certain area arises primarily because several generations of forebears originated from it (Griffin, M. 1996: 50). Within this ancestral area, individuals may move freely

among various settlement sites and make use of its natural resources.

A person is not bound to a home area, however. Individuals may also claim membership of various other descent groups through their own parents, and those of their spouse. A person's range of movement generally extends to where kin-connections exist. In practice, this includes a number of adjacent coastal areas or watersheds. The further Agta travel from their own core-area, the less kin connections they have, and the less comfortable they feel. Moreover, beyond certain boundaries they have difficulty understanding another group's language. At least two different Agta languages are spoken within the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park, namely Palanan-Divilacan Agta and Disabungan-Dipagsanghan Agta (Rai 1990: 65; Headland 2003: 9). As a result of these kinship and language limitations, Agta operate mainly within relatively bounded domains. Therefore the author distinguishes between three kinship networks<sup>3)</sup> (see Figure 2) among the Agta population of the Northern Sierra Madre. A case study from each is presented later in this article.

The first kinship network consists of coast-dwelling Agta, whose movements roughly follow the seashore in a north-south direction (group A in Figure 2). The second and third kinship networks both consist of riverine Agta. They move between watersheds on the eastern and western sides of the mountain range (see also Griffin, M. 1996: 37). The northernmost of these river-dwelling populations (group B) extends north into Cagayan Province. The southern riverine population is indicated as group C in Figure 2.

Mobility is facilitated by kinship relations, but is also necessary to maintain good kin relations. Social tension, both within the group as well as with non-Agta neighbors, is often responded to by moving away (see also Headland 1986: 415; Griffin, M. 2000: 97). When conflict arises, elderly camp members mediate to find a solution. If mediation attempts fail, the group breaks up. Usually, the party with least strong kin-ties to the rest of the group moves away (Griffin, M. 2000: 101). Most group divisions are temporary: depending on the gravity of the conflict the group will reunite after a period. The physical separation has then served to calm everyone's feelings and will enable reconciliation at a later time.

Visiting is another reason why individuals or households relocate. Elderly, widowed people, so long as they are physically fit, are among the most mobile individuals. They move frequently between settlement sites, sometimes over long distances, to visit various family members who reside in different locations. M. Griffin (1996: 50) notes that the advice of these elderly men and women is often especially valued, which is part of the purpose for making visits. Another purpose is courtship travel of unmarried adolescents. Marriage takes place preferably with distant members of the same kinship network. As elderly people are knowledgeable about kin-relations, and sometimes are on a mission to arrange a marriage with specific kinsmen, they often accompany youngsters on courtship expeditions.

## 2) Livelihood strategies

The Agta inhabit an environment that consists of secondary and, to a much lesser extent, primary dipterocarp forests, marine ecosystems and increasingly densely populated agricultural landscapes. Depending on the location of the residential group, they may make use of several or all of these resource bases. Resource competition has increased greatly over the past century as farming communities have expanded rapidly. The Agta respond to this by following a livelihood strategy based on risk reduction through diversification and maximization of opportunities (Minter 2010). Mobility is part of this strategy; settlement sites alternate depending on the subsistence opportunities offered at a particular moment (Photo 6). The nature and duration of the activity determines whether just one or more households, or only particular household members, will relocate their camp.



**Photo 6** Relocation of camp across the Disabungan River at Digud, San Mariano, February, 2001 (Photograph by Persoon)

### Hunting and fishing

Agta hunt wild pig, Philippine deer, macaque, several species of monitor lizard, and a variety of birds. Depending on the residential group and individual hunter, hunting tools may include shot- and air gun, bow-and-arrow, various types of traps and blasts<sup>4)</sup>. Fishing is done in rivers as well as on and behind intertidal reef flats. A wide range of aquatic species is caught, freshwater eel and tilapia being the most important riverine species, whereas octopus, squid and crab are among the main marine resources taken. The spear and spear gun are the most important fishing tools, sometimes complemented by nets, traps or hook-and-line. Fishing with electricity, blasts and natural poisons occurs occasionally, which sometimes leads to dissention over the appropriateness of such methods. Most animal protein consumed by Agta comes from fish, and fish is also an important barter product,

especially on the coast where fishing is most productive. Although hunting is becoming a less important activity in terms of the food supply and cash income, it remains an important part of Agta identity.

Hunting and fishing are associated with considerable mobility, especially during the dry season, when travel in the forest is relatively easy, and the calm seas are best for fishing. During this period, hunting and fishing expeditions lasting from several days to several weeks take place regularly. Locations are chosen based on the abundance of particular valued species. For instance, game animals are known to feed on the seasonally available fruits of particular trees. Temporary hunting camps are then constructed nearby. Similarly, fishers shift among particular stretches of coast where catches are known to be good. Depending on the intended length of a hunting and/or fishing expedition, either groups of men set off alone for a couple days or women and children join them. The women and children may join in fishing, and/or engage in a variety of gathering activities as well.

### **Gathering and barter**

The exploitation of several marine and forest products harvested primarily for trading, causes longer distance mobility. This includes the nests of two species of swiftlet, which are found in caves both along the coast and in the forested interior. The nests are sold to non-Agta middlemen, who usually come to the Agta settlement and sell them on until they end up on the Chinese market, where they are sold as a delicacy. The nests are collected mainly during the dry season, because the caves in which they are found are difficult to access in the rainy season. During this time, entire extended families may settle close to a cave for months on end, or smaller parties of young men go on nest-collecting expeditions that last from several days to three weeks.

Over the past two decades, Agta men have engaged in intensive lobster fishing for specific buyers. Although this is done often near a relatively permanent coastal settlement, sometimes a buyer requests the divers to collect lobsters in more remote locations. In that case several Agta households move to this site for a period that ranges from several days to several months.

Rattan is collected for commercial purposes. Since it has been harvested intensively by both Agta and non-Agta gatherers over the past decades, reaching good rattan gathering grounds requires increasingly longer travel. Sometimes, therefore, a number of households set up temporary collection camps in the forested interior, to cut and clean rattan for up to three weeks.

Trading also requires mobility. Although some of the products mentioned here are collected periodically from Agta settlements by buyers, in many cases small groups of mostly women and children, travel to the nearest *barangays*<sup>5)</sup> or a closer selling point, to sell their products. Most barter trips are completed within a day, but when the product is heavy or bulky, when the selling point is far away, or when traders have to wait for payment, it may take a number of days.

### **Paid labor**

In some areas, Agta work seasonally as laborers on farmers' lands. During the planting and harvesting seasons, Agta households may move closer to or even directly onto the land of the farmer they work for. This often involves the construction of temporary shelters, in which only basic utensils are stored.

Another form of paid labor that induces mobility is company labor in the logging and mining industries. Although some Agta advocate against working for these companies (mainly those that originally settled within the concession areas), others are regularly attracted to the concession areas as temporary workers (see Minter et al. 2012; Buenafe-Ze et al. 2016). This is the case mainly in Dinapigue, where groups of Agta households both from the coastal areas to the north (Palanan), south (Casiguran) and west (San Mariano) settle for a couple of months to engage in company work, after which they move on to other activities.

### **3) Fear of spirits of the dead**

The economic logic of moving to wherever there are livelihood opportunities is regularly overruled by a logic dictated by a fear for the spirits of the dead. With high mortality rates (see Early and Headland 1998; Minter 2010: 53–58), death occurs frequently, and so do the associated camp relocations. Although the distance and length of the camp shifts following a relative's death vary, moving away from the roaming spirit of the deceased cannot be avoided.

Agta believe that when a dead body starts to decay, the soul (*kalidua*) leaves the corpse and becomes a spirit (*anito*). *Anito* roam in the domain of the living, but because they lack their own kinship network (Rai 1985: 36), they feel lonely and abandoned. This fits with the Agta's general feeling of guilt when a person dies. Death is perceived to be caused by the living relatives' failure to keep the dead person alive (Headland 1987: 271; see also Garvan 1963: 170; Schebesta 1957: 282). Therefore, emotions of grief and fear predominate following a death. In its attempt to stay close to the living, the lonely spirit may cause sickness and even death among its close living kin.

Prior to and during the burial, which takes place within a day after death, several measures are taken to protect close relatives from the harmful impact of the deceased's spirit. For instance, the dwelling of the deceased is burnt to the ground, and direct family temporarily move in with other camp members. The dead body is buried with the head facing away from the camp in order for it not to 'see' and yearn for his family. Magaña (2000: 32) notes that footprints leading from the grave are erased to prevent the spirit from following the living home (see Minter 2010: 72–4 for further details).

However, none of this will prevent the spirit from returning to the camp. Because the spirit's ability to roam around progresses as the dead body decays, close relatives usually move camp after one or several offerings have been performed (Photo 7). Depending on the situation, the new camp is built close by or a day's walk away. Absence from the place of death may last from only a few





**Photo 7** Disabungan Agta preparing to relocate camp after the death of a family member, San Mariano, September, 2004 (Photograph by the author)

weeks to several years. In some cases only the closest family members move away, whereas in others entire campsites are abandoned. Moving camp is not only expressed in terms of fear of the *anito*, but as an emotional need as well. “We need to refresh our minds”, “I kept on thinking of my son”, and “I could not stop crying there” are often heard reflections on why people decide to leave a place.

## DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN RELATION TO MOBILITY AND SEDENTARIZATION

### 1) Sedentarization

Government and non-government organizations historically have wanted hunting and gathering peoples to exchange their mobile, and therefore intangible, existence for a settled, agricultural life. This was deemed to be in the interest of the people themselves, and would simultaneously allow government control to be extended in hitherto uncontrolled areas (see Persoon 1989). By focusing on sedentarization and the adoption of agriculture, colonial interventions directed at the Agta thus were a campaign against a hunting and gathering lifestyle (Rai 1982: 7). Despite increased official attention to the Agta’s right to self-determination this classic approach definitely does not belong to the past, as will become clear from the following discussion of government and non-government policies and programs.

### 2) Government

Various government agencies mandated with overseeing what was first called ‘tribal’ and later ‘indigenous’ affairs have succeeded one another. The focus here is on how two of them, PANAMIN and the NCIP, have addressed the question of

mobility among the Agta in the Northern Sierra Madre.

In 1967, the Presidential Assistant for National Minorities (PANAMIN) was mandated to “assist ethnic minorities in their integration into mainstream Filipino society”<sup>6)</sup> (see Eder and McKenna 2004: 61). Although ‘Protecting man’s right to choose’ was PANAMIN’s official policy, little of this choice was reflected in its programs. In the early-1970s the agency forcibly resettled several riverine Agta groups onto two reserves along Palanan River. The purpose was to prevent them from joining the New People’s Army, the armed wing of the communist party. A relatively large number of households had to live together under unhygienic conditions and with no source of livelihood. PANAMIN did not succeed in keeping people there and the situation lasted only briefly.

PANAMIN also established a farming reserve along Dilaknadinum River in 1968 (Estioko-Griffin and P. Griffin 1981: 68). Dilaknadinum is situated off the Palanan coast, upriver from Diaguan (settlement no.49 on Figure 2). The resettlement project aimed to change and eventually stop the mobile life ways of the Agta by resettling them on reserved lands, and through the introduction of modern agricultural and fishing techniques, which were deemed to improve their economic and social well-being (Bennagen 1976: 91–2). The families reacted to PANAMIN’s resettlement plans with mixed feelings: they welcomed the material opportunities the agency offered, but were reluctant to move to the selected site as they considered the steep terrain at Dilaknadinum unsuitable (Bennagen 1976: 93–6). At the moment, nearly half a century later, several households do cultivate swiddens at Dilaknadinum, but they do not stay there.

In 1987 PANAMIN was succeeded by the ONCC and OSCC<sup>7)</sup>, and from 1997 onwards by the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The NCIP is mandated to implement the *Indigenous Peoples Rights Act* (IPRA). Despite the IPRA’s focus on indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determine their chosen path of development (NCIP 1997: sections 13, 17), the NCIP prefers the Agta to become sedentary farmers. This was demonstrated, for example, by the 2004 attempt of the NCIP provincial office to resettle several Agta households from San Mariano. As the chosen site was a grassland area with no water supply, the targeted households stayed in the resettlement area for only a number of weeks, after which they returned to their original settlements. Also, in her speech to an Agta audience from the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park in 2005, NCIP commissioner Espino recognized the Agta’s tendency to ‘move around’, but urged them to settle down in a *barangay* where the NCIP could easily reach them to provide training and support for their agricultural activities (Minter et al. 2005: 70–1).

Municipal and *barangay* governments have a similar preference for the Agta to settle down. Most initiatives to bring this about are, however, relatively unsystematic. *Barangay* officials occasionally approach specific Agta households with whom they maintain trading relations and stimulate them to start a permanent settlement together with the other members of the residential group, preferably

close to the village center. A small number of coastal *barangays* have allotted specific ‘farming reserves’ for the Agta. However, in practice they are used rarely because farming reserves never cover more than a few hectares, and are usually located away from the Agta’s original settlement areas.

In addition to facilitating agricultural development and easier delivery of basic services, governments’ attempts at resettlement also stem partly from rather paternalistic concerns over the Agta’s housing conditions. This is demonstrated by the following examples from Divilacan. In 2002 eight Agta households living along the Dicaroyan River in *barangay* Dicaroyan (Divilacan) were resettled to a small lot in the village center, where a basic house was built for each of them. According to a *barangay* councillor, one purpose of the resettlement project was to “[...] teach them [the Agta] how to live as *Kristyanos*: how to keep their houses and environment clean.” The families returned to their river-site dwellings and adjacent fields within two months. In retrospect the councillor concluded that “[...] the Agta don’t like to stay in the *barrío* [village], they prefer to stay along the river. [...] Their future will only be better if they take the advice of some educated people who can help them improve their lives. But so far they have not taken this advice.”

In its 2007 management plan the municipality mentions that “especially the [Agta [are] suffering from housing problems. [...] Unacceptable housing units exist [...] made of mixed and light materials” (LGU Divilacan 2007: 7). In line with this observation, during an interview in 2005 the municipal mayor, explained his plans to provide several Dimasalansan Agta households with a concrete and galvanized iron shelter, since “[...] their situation is very pathetic. The houses they live in are not fit for them, especially during this *amihan* [rainy] season.” During later visits to this same site in 2007, 2013 and 2014 the planned shelter had indeed been built, but the residents used it to receive visitors and they continued to live in their own dwellings a few hundred meters away.

### 3) Mission

In comparison to government attempts to aggregate the Agta in larger, permanent settlements, similar efforts by the Protestant Born Again Christian mission have been relatively successful. The center of this religious community is Dibungco (settlement no.59 on Figure 2), situated just outside the town of Palanan. Here, about 30 Agta households from coastal areas to the north and south aggregate around a missionary station, led by a Filipino-German couple who are associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and the Christian Mission for the Unreached (CMU). Several neighboring residential groups, notably from Diaguan, Dimapnat, Diagu and Kanaipang (settlements no.49, 51, 66 and 74 on Figure 2) are also strongly oriented toward the activities at Dibungco.

Although the households living in these settlements still move regularly along the coast for economic and social purposes, their conversion does seem to have lessened or even removed the need to relocate following a death. Instead, for the

most active Born Again Christian Agta conversion has brought a new form of mobility. Functioning as pastors, they travel extensively as far as in San Mariano, to read the Bible to fellow Agta.

Whereas SIL/CMU offers farmland, basic but permanent housing and sanitary facilities to resident Agta, the relative permanency at Dibungco and surrounding settlements is probably best explained by the effective extension of education and medical services at the missionary station. The history of another SIL station at *barangay* Reina Mercedes (Maconacon) is illustrative. A large number of Agta households aggregated there until the early-1990s, but dispersed again in northward and southward directions after the missionaries' departure.

#### 4) NGOs: PLAN International

Of the various NGOs that have been engaging with the Agta of the Northern Sierra Madre, the activities of PLAN International have been the most consistent. As PLAN's overall goal in the area was the conservation of the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park, its interventions should be seen in that context. PLAN's 1997 Annual Budget Plan states that the Agta '[...] should be actively involved in non-forest-based livelihood activities in order to significantly reduce their dependence on forest resources' (PLAN 1996: unpaginated).

Like government and missionary programs, the chosen alternative livelihood program focused on agricultural development. It involved the distribution of farming implements and inputs, training, and community organizing. Between June, 1996 and October, 2002 the project provided a total of 84 sets of farm implements and inputs to Agta communities in Palanan, Maconacon, Divilacan, San Mariano and Dinapigue. These consisted of *carabaos* (water buffalo, usually a male and a female), a plow, harrow and shovel, and several machetes, sharpening stones, and planting materials (PLAN 2002a: 69–70). In San Mariano, Agta also received carts to facilitate transport of their agricultural produce to the public market, and in Maconacon two residential groups were given PVC pipes to construct an irrigation system (PLAN 2001: 18; 2002b: 29). Trainings and exchange visits were offered on "demo-farms" in the various coastal municipalities and at farmers' cooperatives elsewhere in North Luzon (PLAN 1999: 31; 2000: 36; 2001: annex 7–I). To ensure that the acquired skills were put into practice, so-called Community Development Facilitators were appointed to provide technical on-farm support.

Like government agencies, PLAN promoted sedentarization as part of its agricultural program. The main argument put forward was that the Agta would be able to protect their farmland effectively from encroachment by non-Agta farmers only if they were based permanently near their fields. As a man from the Disulap watershed in San Mariano recalls. "They [PLAN employees] told us to stay in one place and not migrate to other places like birds."

PLAN withdrew from the project sites at the end of 2002. In the following decade and a half, it became clear that the NGOs' overall aim of bringing about a

shift from forest-based to non-forest-based livelihoods has not been achieved, and forest products still form the basis of Agta livelihood. In as far as the investments in agricultural development have had any substantial impact, this is limited to locations where Agta's involvement in farming predated the arrival of PLAN. This was the case in areas where Agta had already gained extensive farming experience by working as tenants or seasonal laborers on non-Agta farms and where they encountered relatively favorable circumstances in terms of land availability. Here, PLAN's agricultural assistance has had a consolidating and stimulating effect, whereas in all other project sites its impact has been short-lived.

### **5) Collective land rights**

The awarding of collective land rights is the one important exception to the standard package of farming and sedentarization. This government-initiated program takes an intrinsically different approach toward indigenous land use in two respects. First, it departs from the recognition that at least some indigenous peoples may prefer collective over individual land ownership. Second, and most importantly, by definition it does not require or even promote sedentism. In contrast, as is explained below, it has resulted in a policy narrative based on an exaggerated notion of Agta mobility.

It has been possible for Philippine indigenous communities to claim collective land ownership since 1992, when the NIPAS Law was enacted. This law allowed for the awarding of so-called "Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claim" (CADCs) to indigenous groups throughout the country. These certificates provided no legal ownership, but they did offer state recognized usufruct rights to land on the basis of indigenous peoples' identifiable historical relationship with it. From 1992 to 1997, this resulted in the awarding of three CADCs, with a total area of 45,000 ha, to various Agta (Kalinga) groups in the Northern Sierra Madre (Palanan, San Mariano and Maconacon). The process was facilitated jointly by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the government agency mandated to implement the NIPAS Law, and the NGOs PLAN International and NORDECO.

When the IPRA was enacted<sup>8)</sup>, the status of indigenous rights was taken a step further: under this progressive law the usufruct rights that could be claimed in the form of CADCs under the NIPAS Law, could be turned into ownership titles. The responsibility for facilitating this process no longer rested with the DENR, but was given to the newly established NCIP. When the NCIP took up its own ancestral domain titling activities in the Northern Sierra Madre, it did not take the previously awarded CADCs as point of departure (van der Ploeg et al. 2016: 153–154). The NCIP argued that since the Agta have inhabited the entire Sierra Madre Mountain Range since time immemorial it was their legal right to own this entire territory, rather than isolated patches within it. Thus, the NCIP Provincial Office of Isabela proposed to have the entire Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park titled as Agta ancestral domain. After over 15 years of preparations and conflict with several municipalities situated within the area covered by the

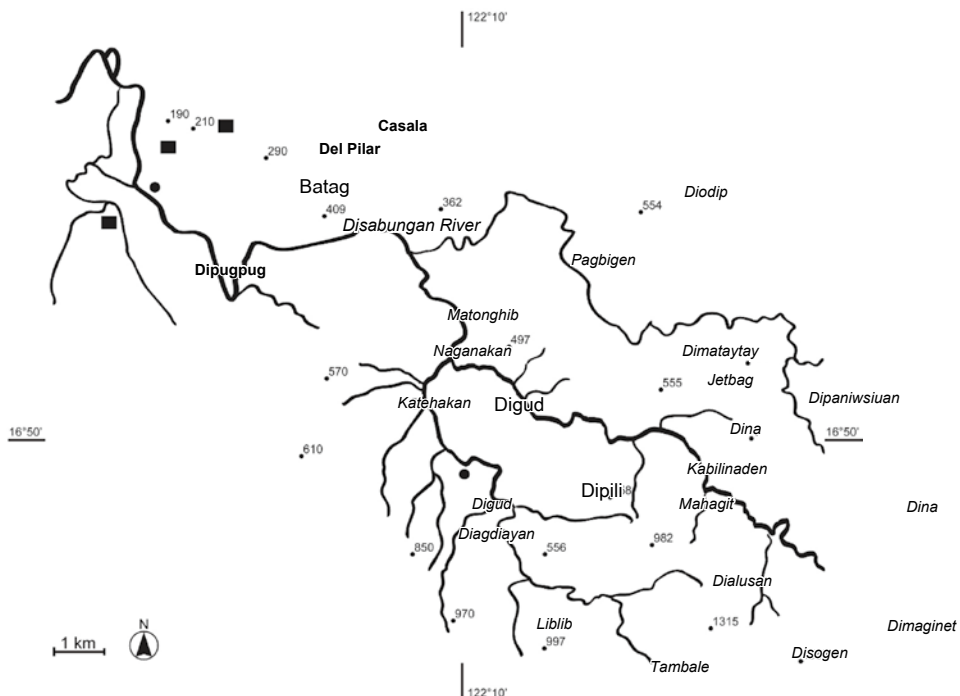


proposed ancestral domain title, the National Office of the NCIP expects the title to be awarded this year (2017). If it is, it will grant an Agta population of some 2,000 individuals with the collective ownership rights to an area of about 250,000 ha falling under the jurisdiction of five municipalities (Pers. Comm. M. van Weerd July 24 2017).

### THREE CASE STUDIES

#### 1) Disabungan

The Disabungan Agta are part of the southern river-dwelling group (group C in Figure 2). They dwell in the interior of the municipality of San Mariano, on the western side of the Northern Sierra Madre, at the forest fringe at an altitude of some 500 m (Figure 3). The nearest village centers, Del Pilar and Casala, are both a three-hour walk away. The Disabungan Agta are surrounded by heavily disturbed secondary forest that was logged intensively until the early-1990s. Clandestine timber extraction replaced corporate logging until at least 2005, after which its intensity was reduced as the result of improved law enforcement. Since then, the importance of rattan gathering has increased in the Disabungan watershed. Thus, groups of loggers and rattan gatherers regularly move into and out of the Disabungan watershed, and the resident Agta settlements form the gateway to the



**Figure 3** Disabungan hunting and fishing grounds (Minter 2010: 106)

forest.

Much more so than for the Diangu and Dimasalansan Agta, whose situations are discussed below, the past and present of the Disabungan Agta is dominated by large-scale immigration, displacement and deforestation. San Mariano is among the most heavily logged municipalities in the study area. Its lowland forest disappeared completely and was replaced by denuded hillsides and farmland. The reason why the Disabungan Agta now live at great distance from non-Agta settlements is not that there are few non-Agta around, on the contrary, the villages of Del Pilar and Casala each already had farming populations of around 1,000 individuals in the late 1990s (NSO 2000), and have grown to 1,600 and 1,500 respectively at the time of writing (PSA 2015). These continuously growing populations consist of both migrants and descendants of migrants who have arrived in various periods since the 1950s. Before their arrival, the Disabungan Agta used to settle where these farming communities are situated at present. Although some migrant settlements retain their original Agta name, no Agta have lived there since the mid-1970s. Instead, as immigration and deforestation transformed their former settlement areas, increasingly they have retreated uphill and upstream to keep up with the forest fringe. As a consequence, they now settle at locations that formerly served only as campsites during hunting and fishing trips.

The Disabungan Agta move frequently between Digud and Dipili (settlements no.15–16 in Figure 2), the two main settlement sites along the Disabungan River. Digud was clear-cut and converted into a log pond in the 1970s. It now is a brush land area inhabited and extensively cultivated by up to 10 Agta households. In the period 2010–2011 part of these fields were taken over by two Ilocano brothers. They were the first non-Agta to ever settle in Digud with the intention of staying, so their presence was contested: part of the resident Agta claimed that the Ilocano brothers had illegitimately taken over Agta landholdings. Based on interviews with Agta informants from Digud in 2013, the Ilocano brothers had left the area for reasons that are unclear. This means that Digud had reverted to being inhabited just by Agta.

From Digud, it takes half an hour on foot in an upstream direction to reach Dipili. Dipili is a narrow stretch of logged-over river bank bounded by secondary forest. Some six Agta dwellings are lined up along these banks, with small fields surrounding them. In both Digud and Dipili most households stay for as long as the dry season lasts in lean-to dwellings right at the river's edge. When the rains come, more permanent dwellings are constructed on higher ground.

In addition to Digud and Dipili, part of the Disabungan residential group sometimes settles at Dimabigao (settlement no.14). Also, several previous settlement sites in a downstream direction, closer to the village of Del Pilar, are occasionally inhabited. The most important of these is Batag (settlement no.13), which was inhabited by five Agta households in 2013, for reasons that will be detailed below. Moreover, the Disabungan Agta are in regular contact with related

groups from the neighboring watersheds of Diguse to the south (settlements no.18–19), Disulap and Catalangan to the north (settlements no.7–9 and no.10–12, respectively), and Dipagsanghan across the mountain range to the east (settlements no.77–82).

A total of 18 different nuclear households was encountered in the Disabungan watershed during the study period (with the first visit taking place in February 2003 and the last in August 2013). At any one moment, no more than around 60 individuals in 13 households stayed together in one residential group. All were interrelated either by blood or marriage and formed part of two extended families.

The Disabungan group is characterized by considerable flux, but also has a stable core, consisting of two households, headed by two half-brothers, who were together taking care of their old and sick father. They were almost always encountered at either Digud or Dipili during the eight fieldwork periods that took place between 2002 and 2013. An important exception was an extended stay at Batag in 2004, following the death from a hunting accident of one of these brother's sons. Worth noting is that during the last visit in August 2013, the same brother announced that he and his household intended to soon move across the mountain range to the coast of Palanan, as he expected his old and sick father to die soon.

Most other households encountered at Disabungan moved regularly into and out of the watershed. For instance, in the period 2003–2010 two brothers and their households spent most of their time in Diguse (Dinapigue), with regular, but relatively short, stays in the Disabungan watershed. This pattern changed abruptly in 2011, however. The wife of one of these brothers died in Dinapigue, after which he and his children moved back to his parents' location in the Disabungan watershed.

To facilitate the school enrolment of several Disabungan children, in 2013 three households moved to Batag (settlement no.13). From there the children could walk in about half an hour to the *barangay* school in Del Pilar. At the time of writing however, these households are known to have moved to the Disulap watershed (settlements no.32 and 34), where their children are not going to school (pers. comm. Jan van der Ploeg and Renée Hagen March 2015).

The areas between which the Disabungan Agta move overlap with the areas from which they choose their marriage partners. Structured interviews with Disabungan Agta men and women in the period 2002–2005 revealed that of 28 adults who together formed 14 married couples, 46 percent originate from the Disabungan watershed itself. One fourth of the marriage partners originated from the next watershed to the south, 11 percent came from across the mountain range to the east, whereas 14 percent were from two watersheds to the north. Only one male spouse (4 percent) originated from outside the study area, Casiguran, which is south of Dinapigue in Aurora Province. No Disabungan spouses originate from watersheds north of the Catalangan River, which forms the boundary between the northern and southern river-dwelling domains.

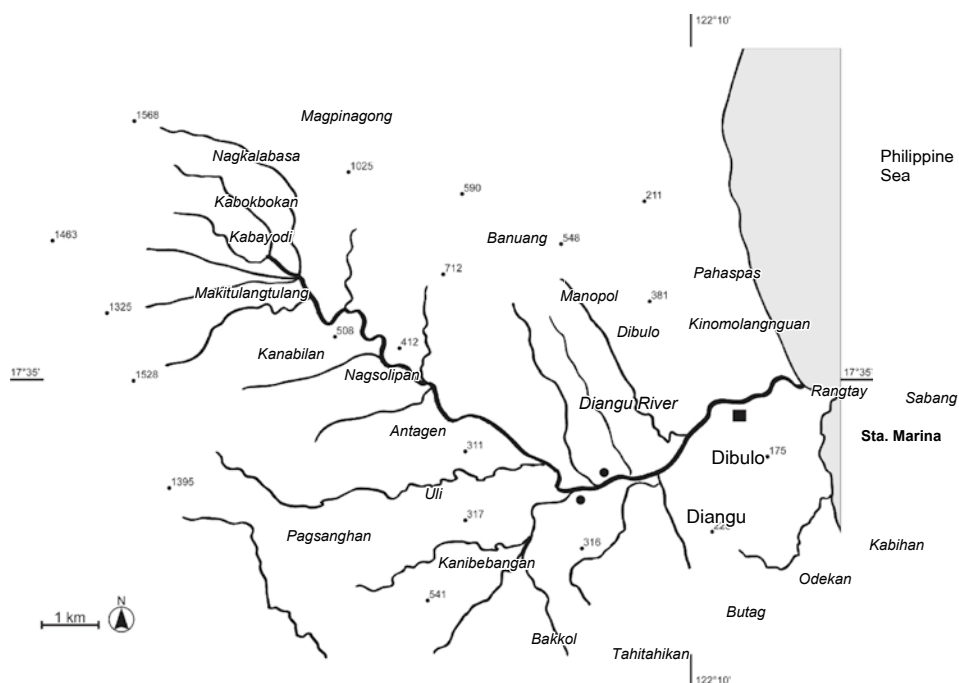
Although hunting and fishing are affected by environmental disturbance that directly and indirectly results from logging, these remain highly important livelihood activities for the Disabungan Agta. Rattan collection and small-scale logging are also important income generating activities. Cultivation is of moderate significance and is conducted mainly by women, who spend considerable time tending fields. When residing in the neighboring Diguse watershed in Dinapigue, the Disabungan Agta often perform wage labor. Until 2010 this involved mostly logging, however since that time logging companies withdrew from the area and mining has become more important (see Minter et al. 2012; Buenafe-Ze et al. 2016).

## 2) Diangu

The Diangu Agta, who live along a river of the same name in the municipality of Maconacon, on the boundary of Isabela and Cagayan provinces, are part of the northern river-dwelling group (group B on Figure 2). Despite residing some 2 km inland from the Pacific coast, they are oriented more toward the forest and farmland, and rarely exploit marine resources. They settle at altitudes of around 100 m above sea level on flat, open brush land, where they tend permanent rice fields and small slash and burn fields (Figure 4).

The history of non-Agta occupation in the Diangu watershed has followed a different pace and pattern to that of the Disabungan watershed. Until the 1960s, other than the Agta hardly anyone inhabited the Diangu valley. This situation changed with the arrival of logging companies and their employees. The immigrant population founded *barangay* Sta. Marina, with some 300 inhabitants. However, although the lowland area between the Pacific coast and the settlements of Diangu and Dibulo has been transformed from primary forest to logged-over land, unlike the Disabungan Agta, the Diangu Agta were not forced to leave this area or pushed into the mountainous hinterland. Notwithstanding the occasional conflict over land, relationships between Agta and non-Agta in this area are relatively amicable. The Diangu Agta live only a short walk from Sta. Marina and visit it on an almost daily to obtain groceries, trade wildlife, inquire about farm labor opportunities, join in a drinking session, or simply for a chat (see also Minter 2009: 213–16).

The Diangu Agta do not settle in Sta. Marina, however. Instead they move between various settlements along either side of the Diangu River. The most important of these are Dibulo and Diangu (settlements no.24–25 on Figure 2) which are a 15 minutes walk apart. Both these settlements are bounded by secondary forest to the north, west and south. To the east, a 30 minute walk through brush- and farmland leads to the village center of Sta. Marina. A third, coastal settlement (near no.26) had been established during a visit in 2014. To enable Diangu children to go to elementary school in the *barangay* of Reina Mercedes, a couple of mothers had set up camp on the beach, from where the children can walk to school. The husbands and adolescents remained in Diangu



**Figure 4** Diangu hunting and fishing grounds (Minter 2010: 108)

and Dibulo where they continued business as usual, waiting for the women and children to come home on weekends.

In addition to frequent shifts between these main settlements, several households move regularly across the mountain range to the western watersheds in the municipalities of San Pablo, Tumauni and Ilagan (settlements no.1–3). From Diangu, it takes about four days of travel on foot to reach these places. Closer by, related households from Blos, the next watershed to the south (settlements no.26–29), and Likiden, the next watershed to the north (which falls outside the study area) regularly move in and out of the Diangu residential group.

At its maximum, the Diangu residential group numbers around 60 individuals, living in 14 closely related households. Together they form two extended families, most of which were constantly present in one of the main settlements sites during the research period. Three households moved regularly back and forth between the Diangu and Blos watersheds, whereas another four stayed periodically in watersheds across the mountain range. Shorter visits were made to relatives in watersheds further to the north in Cagayan Province.

The settlement patterns of the Diangu Agta are consistent with their choice of marriage partners. In a sample of 30 living adults belonging to 15 married couples, 100 percent originated from one of the watersheds mentioned above. Nearly half originate from the Diangu watershed itself. None of these married



other Agta originating from Diangu. Instead, half chose marriage partners from the Abuan watershed, two rivers south from Diangu. Most remaining marriage partners originated from either the adjacent watersheds across the mountain range (in Tumauni and San Pablo), or from one of the next watersheds to the north. No marriages took place with Agta south of Abuan River (Ilagan) and therefore hardly any kinship ties exist beyond that point.

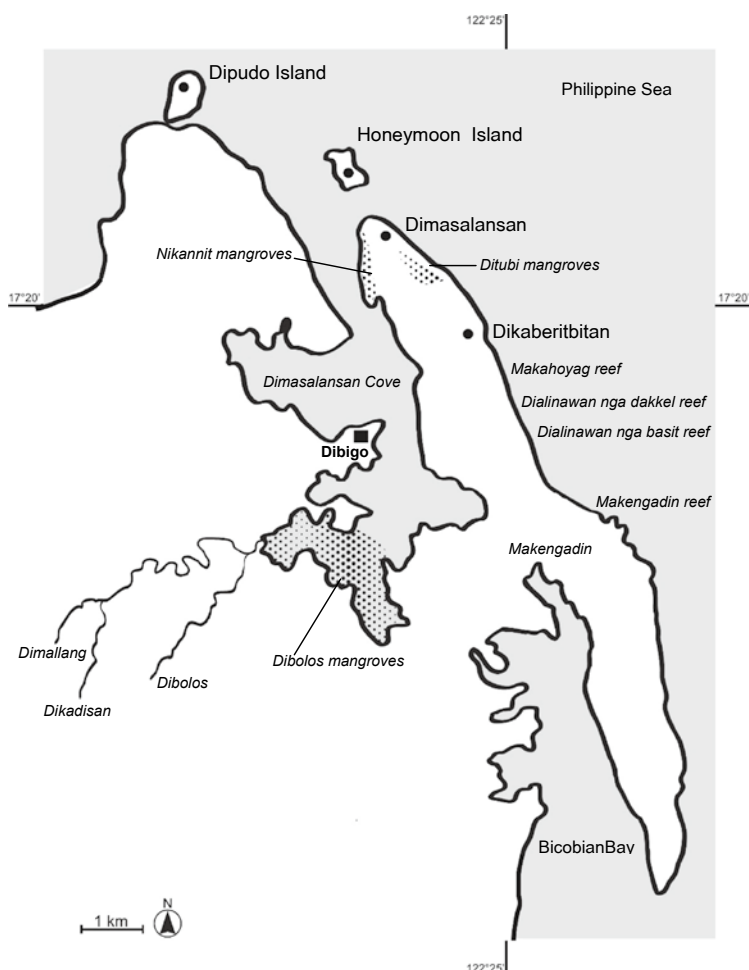
The Diangu residential group follows a livelihood system that consists mainly of paid farm labor, irrigated rice farming, hunting and fishing. At the same time, fishing and hunting remain important. Fishing activity peaks during the dry season, and is done by both men and women. Hunting, which is an exclusively male activity, is more emphasized when the rains arrive. Women are responsible mainly for acquiring credit and trading meat, fish and other products in the village center. When visiting adjacent watersheds households tend to conduct other livelihood activities. For instance, those moving to the watersheds to the south engage regularly in the commercial gathering of rattan and the collection of scrap metal. For households periodically residing in watersheds across the mountain range, the collection and trade of rattan and timber is important.

Their commitment to permanent rice cultivation is a remarkable aspect of the Diangu Agta, especially in comparison to other river-dwelling groups, like the Disabungan Agta. Diangu Agta cultivate an annual average of two irrigated rice crops. On a superficial level at least this seems to be also influencing the character of their settlements. That is, unlike most other riverine groups, the Diangu Agta rarely build lean-to dwellings, but live mainly in huts of a rather permanent character, constructed between the river and the rice fields<sup>9</sup>). However, their engagement in rice farming does not completely inhibit mobility. Although Diangu informants consistently emphasized the importance of ‘guarding one’s land’, both to maximize its productivity and to avoid it is being taken over by non-Agta, this does not imply that it is always done by the same person. In Diangu, closely related households often agree to take care of the land alternately when others move elsewhere.

### 3) Dimasalansan

The Dimasalansan Agta settle along the coast of the municipality of Divilacan, along a peninsula that extends some 10 km in a north-south direction from Dimasalansan Bay. Their most important settlement sites along the peninsula are Dimasalansan, Kabiritbitan, Makahoyag, Dialinawan nga Dakkel and Makengaden and, until recently, it also included Honeymoon Island (settlements no.39-44 on Figure 2, see also Figure 5). Inside the bay, several Agta households settle immediately across from the *barangay* center of Dibigo.

At its maximum size, the Dimasalansan residential group numbers around 100 people, living in some 25 households. These households are part of three main extended families. Again, the group shows considerable flux, and only seven of the above mentioned households were consistently present at or near Dimasalansan



**Figure 5** Dimasalansan fishing and hunting grounds (Minter 2010: 110)

during the study period. All others resided regularly elsewhere. However, it should be noted that their movements took place mainly along the Divilacan and Palanan coasts.

Again, residential movements occur largely within the range from which marriage partners are chosen. In a sample of 50 adults surveyed in 2004–2005, who together form 25 married couples, 76 percent originated from coastal settlements, whereas 20 percent originated from a river-mouth settlement at or near the coast. Only two young individuals (4 percent) come from riverine areas in San Mariano. This means that 96 percent of all Dimasalansan Agta have married other coast-dwelling Agta. Further, it is noteworthy that whereas two of them found their spouses as far away as Casiguran, all other marriage partners came from nearby Divilacan and Palanan.

Like other coast-dwelling residential groups, the Dimasalansan Agta depend mainly on marine fisheries for their subsistence. In addition to fishing, the commercial collection of rattan and scrap-metal are an important source of livelihood for both men and women. Time spent in agriculture is limited, and no formal land ownership rights are held. Nonetheless, the root crops planted in small fields behind the beach front provide an important source of food, especially during the food-short rainy months. Hunting is of almost negligible importance to the Dimasalansan Agta, and takes place only in the rainy season. The stretch of coast that the Dimasalansan Agta regard as their home is sparsely populated. The nearest non-Agta village center, Dibigo, has a population of just over 200. In addition to the village population, a handful of non-Agta households live along the peninsula inhabited by the Dimasalansan Agta. All are immigrants who arrived in the area around the 1960s from the provinces of Cagayan and Ilocos. They came to work for logging companies that operated in Divilacan at the time.

The Dimasalansan Agta frequently visit the village of Dibigo. For several years they have access to outrigger boats, some of which are motorized. These boats have been acquired through government- and non-government programs and permit travel from Dimasalansan to Dibigo in about 15 minutes. Visits to the village center occur mainly for trading. During the time of research three children attended the elementary school in Dibigo.

Recent events have begun to influence and will likely continue to influence the settlement patterns of the Dimasalansan Agta. In 2014 a contested plan to construct a road connecting Divilacan to the inland municipality of Ilagan was approved. Simultaneously, some of the coastal land on which the Agta have historically settled has been claimed by politically influential people from outside the municipality, in the expectation that tourism development in this remote and inaccessible area may become viable once the road is in place. Indeed, the construction of the first resort is now underway and this is in some cases accompanied by a sense of insecurity among the Agta, some of whom have been denied access to their former settlement areas. Thus, the earlier discussed Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act, in general, and the associated collective land titling program, in particular, has so far not protected the Agta's settlement rights. In contrast, the NCIP has taken a passive position on the matter during the many years of political discussion that preceded the eventual decision to approve the road's construction.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Philippine policy narratives with respect to mobility and sedentism are becoming ever more confusing. On the one hand, societal pressure on the Agta to settle in a single place persists. Despite talk of self-determination, development planners still invest much time and money in replacing a mobile hunting and gathering way of life by a sedentary, agricultural existence. The official policy of the protection of

free choice that government agencies like NCIP claim to strive for, contradicts their tendency to promote sedentarization. The culturally dominant preference for forms of social organization that are based on sedentism and hierarchical political structures are too deeply ingrained in the political system and in the individual officials who are mandated to implement these policies, to accept mobility as an alternative. However, not only does this approach represent a radical break with the Agta's cultural past, there is mounting evidence that this focus on sedentarization has negative consequences for the Agta's health (Page et al. 2016).

On the other hand, this difficulty of thinking outside dominant cultural frames of reference is contrasted by another extreme in the context of the ongoing process of ancestral domain titling. The NCIP's aim to provide one overall ancestral domain title to all Agta living in the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park does indeed recognize the Agta's mobility. However, as this approach is based on the misconception that the Agta wander randomly throughout the Sierra Madre, it misses the point. Granting one collective land title to an Agta population composed of much smaller social units with no overall political structure may provide some symbolic value to the outside world. However, it will not offer a practical basis for managing the negotiations with that outside world about gaining access to this area (see also van der Ploeg et al. 2016).

At the same time a number of developments may be starting to have an impact on Agta settlement patterns. The first is Agta parents' increasing interest in enrolling their children in primary education, which has come about as the combined result of several international and national social welfare programs that started in 2012 (Hagen et al. 2016). It is too early to say whether this trend will last, but if it does it may have both short- and long-term effects on Agta society, including on settlement patterns. As was shown for the Diangu Agta, it does result at present in altered settlement structures, with mothers moving with their school-going children and men and adolescents staying behind. The Disabungan case has, however, also shown how short-lived such developments may be: children that were enrolled in primary school in Del Pilar in 2013 had one year later moved several watersheds northward, and they no longer attended school.

A second trend is born more out of defense than opportunity: in some sites Agta increasingly consider the need to 'guard their land' a reason to stay put in one place. Throughout the study area Agta feel strongly that they are the rightful owners of the coastal and forest land on which they settle, forage and in some cases farm. There is growing awareness that, if they are not around, their land may be considered 'vacant'. Such considerations must also be seen in a historical context of involuntary settlement shifts, where Agta have abandoned completely their previous settlement sites to give way to expanding farming populations. Some residential groups, like the Disabungan group, have over the past century, abandoned previous settlements in favor of upslope locations, to keep up with the retreating forest boundary and stay ahead of down slope agricultural communities.

Whether all of this will lead the Agta to become sedentary is unpredictable.

The insights presented in this article are largely qualitative because of a lack of quantitative, longitudinal data on changes in the frequency and distance of residential shifts. It is therefore impossible to draw conclusions on the intensity of mobility in Agta society, both relative to the Agta's own past and to other hunter-gatherer groups.

The available qualitative evidence points in different directions, underpinning Kelly's emphasis on the multidimensional nature of mobility (1992: 43). Although statements by some Agta informants that they "have now started to settle in one place permanently" may appear to indicate decreasing mobility, they certainly do not fully prove it. Such claims must also be seen in the light of societal pressure on the Agta to settle down and often contradict empirical observations on their movements. Likewise, the relatively intensive engagement in irrigation agriculture by some Agta groups, of which the Diangu group presents an example, or an increase in the use of construction materials like galvanized iron and wooden planks, might be taken as a sign of increasing residential permanency. Yet, such facts may be deceiving, since even Diangu Agta who have invested heavily in the development of irrigated rice fields may move elsewhere for extended periods, leaving their fields and harvests under the guardianship of close relatives. Also, making use of available new construction materials is certainly an indication of an interest in new opportunities, but it does not necessarily preclude the option of moving elsewhere.

In attempting to understand the changing nature of Agta settlement behavior it is further important to distinguish between mobility at different scales. It is possible that settlements as a whole are more permanently inhabited than in former times because Agta increasingly avoid leaving a settlement site, its surrounding fields and foraging grounds unattended for extensive periods. This does not mean, however, that all households or individual members of an extended family are there all the time. Even if a settlement is continuously inhabited, the residential group may show considerable flux. As demonstrated by the case studies presented above, some individuals or households are more or less consistently present in specific settlement sites, whereas others move more regularly between sites. These individual differences may be attributable to characteristics like economic (in) dependency on relatives, physical fitness, household composition or marital status, but may also be the result of more personal motivations like a preference for farming or the need to look for a spouse.

Whether Agta will eventually settle in larger permanent settlements is neither an answerable question, nor the most important one. It is more relevant to ask how much freedom of choice Agta individuals, households and extended families are being given to make that decision for themselves. A number of issues highlighted in this article, including ongoing environmental degradation, road construction and aggressive claims to coastal land that has historically been the Agta's domain, give rise to great concern. These circumstances may result in the involuntary resettlement of Agta into new, more permanent and possibly larger



aggregations away from their original settlement areas. One only has to travel a little further south to the Casiguran Peninsula, to be reminded of how highly undesirable is this scenario.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

- 1) Cognatic descent is traced through kin relations with a common ancestor from either the mother’s or father’s side, or both (Rosman and Rubel 1995: 90). For the Agta, this common ancestor is not a mythological figure which represents the first Agta, or first human. Instead, it usually is an elderly couple that is considered to have primary rights to a certain area because they were the first to hunt, fish or farm there.
- 2) There is no such thing as an extended family head in that one person extends control over the others. However, certain elderly people do have ‘stronger voices’ than others (Griffin, M. 1996: 50), meaning that their opinion is much valued and their advice usually followed.
- 3) While I support M. Griffin’s (1996: 40–1) warning that we should be careful that classifications of Agta sub-groups become overly typological, I do consider it useful to think about the Agta in terms of various kinship networks because, as I will show, there is much more residential mobility and social interaction within than between them.
- 4) Blasts are small hand-made explosives wrapped in bait and buried in the ground to attract wild pig.
- 5) *Barangay* refers to the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines and roughly translates as village in a rural setting, and as neighborhood in an urban setting.
- 6) Presidential Decree No.1414 ‘Further defining the powers, functions and duties of the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities and for other purposes.’
- 7) Office of the Northern Cultural Communities and Office of the Southern Cultural Communities.
- 8) While the IPRA was enacted in 1997 it took until 2000 for it to take effect, due to contestations over its constitutionality.
- 9) Interestingly, one of the few times that a Diangu household was seen constructing a lean-to

was when this household temporarily resided on the land of a neighboring farmer to perform seasonal labor.

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