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IMAGES OF COMMUNITY: DISCOURSE AND STRATEGY IN PROPERTY RELATIONS

Tania M. Li

... people may invest in meanings as well as in the means of production - and struggles over meaning are as much a part of the process of resource allocation as are struggles over surplus or the labour process (Berry 1988b:66)

Anthropologists and others have long acknowledged the social nature of property: that it is not a relationship between people and things, but a relationship between people, embedded in a cultural and moral framework, a particular vision of community (MacPherson 1978:3). Recognition of the social nature of property has many implications for practice. These implications are the subject of this paper.

The paper demonstrates the ways in which contests over the distribution of property are articulated in terms of competing representations of community. The purpose of the analysis is not to assess varying representations in terms of accuracy or “truth” but to focus attention upon the political economic contexts in which particular representations are deployed, and the effects that they bring about. Anthropologists, although capable at times of producing simplified synchronic representations of harmonious, timeless “otherworlds”, have a long track-record of producing detailed, nuanced accounts of the multiplicity of interests at stake in the constitution of communities at the local level. They have increasingly acknowledged that ethnographic work, however thorough, is always partial: it is a representation, located in a particular historical and discursive context. They have become particularly sensitive to the political effects that their representations produce and the attendant risks and responsibilities (Asad 1973, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Fox 1991). Yet ethnographic representations of community are not the only type that exists, nor are they the only type that is necessary and useful.

The paper highlights the significance of representations of community produced at a variety of levels and sites, focusing upon those where the distribution of property is at issue. Representations produced in the context of struggles over resources form part of the “practical political economy” through which different parties defend interests and advance

claims. Chambers (1983) coined the term “practical political economy” to refer to the activities of development professionals who “put the poorest first” by designing interventions which confront oppression and inequality but do so indirectly, through the exercise of strategy in the identification of “soft-spots” and opportunities and the attempt to facilitate gains without imposing intolerably high risks. I propose to extend the term to cover the policy arena, in which interventions of a discursive nature can be similarly productive, and the arena of everyday life, in which relatively powerless people demonstrate well-honed analytical skills and strategies as a routine condition of day to day survival and long term advancement.

The first arena investigated here is the discourse of policy interventions which seek to link "sustainable development" to representations of community stressing harmony, equality and tradition. It will be argued that these representations, though idealized, are capable of producing strategic gains, as they counter prevailing development orthodoxies, open up opportunities, and provide a legitimating vocabulary for alternative approaches. However because of their generality, and the necessary simplification of some of the counter-messages they convey, images of community generated in this arena cannot be translated into operational strategies and programs without further work. The second arena is the practical political economy of the rural poor themselves, as they draw upon a range of direct and indirect strategies in their day to day struggles to obtain or retain access to key resources. Identifying sources of power and leverage is an exercise in which relatively powerless people are, of necessity, particularly adept. It is part of their daily work. The indigenous micro political economic knowledge explored here is every bit as important as the indigenous technical and agroecological knowledge that has won international acclaim.¹ The third arena is the practical political economy of program and project interventions designed to bring about rural development. Such interventions, I will argue, are most effective when they are able to take advantage of the space opened up by policy discourse, such as that favouring community based resource management, while also drawing upon the micro political-economic knowledge of rural people. Most, but not all, of the illustrations are drawn from Indonesia, with special reference to Central Sulawesi.

I IMAGES OF COMMUNITY IN THE POLICY ARENA

Images of community occupy a prominent place in the discourse of social change and development, figuring most often as a focus for critique of current patterns and trajectories. A long tradition of enlightenment thought counterposes harmonious communities located elsewhere (in the countryside, in the past, in far off lands), to the rapacious, unequal, modern, urban or capitalist present (Williams 1973 ; O'Brien and Roseberry 1991; Bernstein 1990; Thomson 1963; Hobsbawm 1959). While these conceptualizations of community can be

shown to be idealized, romantic, historically inaccurate or, in current parlance, “invented”, they have nevertheless served the purpose of keeping alternative possibilities alive, at least in the imagination.

The 1980s and 90s have witnessed the adoption of “community-based” approaches to development by donor agencies and NGOs. Proponents of such approaches emphasise that rural or, especially, “traditional” communities are in harmony with the environment and demonstrate long established patterns of sustainable and equitable use of resources (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; Berkes 1987; McKay and Acheson 1987; Korten 1986; Bromley and Cernia 1989; Lynch 1991). They argue that where nation states have stepped in to control natural resources, particularly forests and rangelands, inefficiency and short term profit seeking by the state have caused rapid deterioration. Privatization of common property resources has caused similar environmental and social disruptions. Images of successful intact resource-managing communities are used as a basis to advocate stronger legal rights and government recognition for community based systems, and a shift of resource control away from the state and private capital towards the rural people whose livelihoods depend most directly upon those resources.

The practical political-economic endeavour associated with the community-based management approach at the policy level involves the attempt to create a paradigm shift among scholars, practitioners and, most importantly, decision makers in national and international agencies. Proponents of this approach are writing against currently dominant notions: the tragedy of the commons thesis (Acheson 1989); the assumed ignorance of peasants (Chambers 1983); the assumed managerial capacity and wisdom of governments (Korten 1986); the assumed inevitability of private property and individual acquisitiveness (Berkes 1987, Gibbs and Bromley 1989); and the assumed superiority of western science and management (Chambers 1983). Their purpose is to alter policies in order to “create enabling settings” (Korten 1986) in which community based resource management, and with it more equitable, sustainable rural livelihoods, can occur.

Ethnographic accuracy is not the relevant criterion upon which such representations should be judged. Forward looking in intention, policy advocacy work of this kind sometimes elides the description of known societies, past and present, with description of an ideal type (e.g. Bromley and Cernia 1989:26). The elision makes policy propositions more powerful, since it implies that community based management regimes are not only desirable ideals, but they actually exist or have existed until recently, and therefore have proven to be both viable and valuable. In grand generalizing mode, Berkes and Favar write that “[m]ost cultures - certainly most of those in Third World countries - emphasise responsibility to the community, rather

than the unbridled individualism glorified in some Western industrial cultures. Communalism is an important mode of thinking and of managing resources throughout the world ...[i]t is no accident that traditional resource-management systems are often community based" (1987:3,5). They draw upon (outdated, functionalist) anthropological concepts which envisage tradition as a comprehensive set of binding rules. These rules ensure livelihood security by providing "guaranteed access rights to vital resources [so that] everyone in the community is assured of the opportunity of meeting their basic needs" (1987:11). Mutually agreed rules also "provide mechanisms for the equitable use of resources with a minimum of internal strife or conflict" (1987:11). The communities to which they refers are ideal-types, unlocated in time or space. Their analysis may fail to convince or impress anthropologists, but this is presumably not their goal: simplified representations can be more effective than subtle ones, when deployed in a macro policy context.

In a climate of free market mania and structural adjustment at the World Bank during the 1980s, communal land tenure, particularly in Africa, was seen as a major impediment to the development of agriculture. Land privatization was advocated, and with it an image of community in which more efficient commodity producers would displace less efficient ones (Platteau 1992). In this context, Bromley and Cernia (1989) prepared a report for the World Bank which attempted to demonstrate the potential of common property resource management systems. Good social scientists, they were somewhat ambivalent about the idea of community, noting that shared resources and livelihood guarantees are characteristics of small groups, such as small tribes, neighbourhoods or extended families but seldom of whole village communities which tend rather to be heterogeneous, factional and stratified. Once suitably "corporate" property owning social groups had been identified, however, they argued that Bank policy should be to strengthen and support them. The social agenda was explicit: "logic, common sense, and Bank experience, all conspire to show convincingly that 'business as usual' wastes scarce funds, enhances the position of those already quite able to look out for themselves, entrenches the bureaucrats and technocrats of various agencies, and breeds discontent among those at the local level who desperately seek a better life" (1989:59).

I have argued here that there is an important role for generalized representations that open up a space for policy shifts and new program directions. Idealised or simplified images of community are capable of doing damage, however, when translated into more specific policy recommendations. Bromley and Cernia (1989:58), for example, are led by their emphasis on the benefits of community based resource management regimes to recommend that the World Bank make the prior existence of such a regime a condition for Bank rural development assistance. Requiring a pre-formed and preferably "traditional" community as a condition for Bank assistance would leave out many of the world's poorest rural people, who

are distress migrants to marginal areas with little or no community cohesion (Leonard 1989), or who form a disorganized and intimidated underclass within productive agricultural heartlands (Chambers 1983, Breman 1974). Women also find their specific interests submerged by a community focus. Enhancing the resource rights and livelihood security of the community “leaves begging the central question of who is enabled or constrained: whose economic circumstances or security of tenure is at stake” (Leach 1991:18). While indigenous or “tribal” communities are potentially privileged by the discourse on traditional property rights (eg Davis 1993), other groups, perhaps equally poor and deserving, are disadvantaged. Addressing distributional questions adequately and formulating appropriately fine tuned policies and interventions require a closer look at what and who, exactly, is “the community”.

The advantages and disadvantages of highlighting community in the portrayal of rural people’s property systems become particularly evident at the national level. Strategies to influence national policy have to recognise the opportunities and constraints posed by current political and economic conditions in the rural areas potentially affected, as well as the interaction of community focused policy rhetoric with national laws and official perceptions. A comparative example from Southeast Asia will demonstrate this point.

In the Philippines, Owen Lynch and colleagues have been arguing that the ancestral domains of indigenous people in the uplands are communal property which should be clearly delineated and recognised by the government (Lynch and Talbott, 1988; Lynch 1991, Gasgonia 1993). Their emphasis on the communal nature of lands is designed to relieve two serious and immediate threats to the survival of indigenous people and the integrity of their territory: steady migration of impoverished, landless lowlanders into the hills and government allocation of resource extraction licences to lowland entrepreneurs. To counter these threats, strong and broad policy action affecting all indigenous peoples is required, and Lynch makes a correspondingly broad presumption that communal resource management is characteristic of the groups in question (Lynch and Talbott 1988:698). This presumption is supported by a definition in which “the distinguishing characteristic of common property management systems is that their primary legitimacy is drawn from the community in which they operate and not from the nation state in which they are located” (Lynch 1991:9). Strategically, the specification of how hundreds of diverse indigenous groups actually manage resources and balance individual and communal rights through their property institutions is of secondary importance (Lynch 1991:11). “Participants in a common property resource management system are well aware of their rights and duties. The state need not be so familiar” (Lynch 1991:10). Lynch assumes that the communities will make their own arrangements for allocation of resources within the group based upon their existing frameworks (Lynch and Talbott 1988:701) and that the results will be both sustainable and equitable.

Complicating issues, such as the desire of many indigenous people to own privatized rights to land in order to be able to invest in new forms of production (Cornista and Escueta 1990:140-2; Fujisaka 1986:88) are not addressed by Lynch, although no doubt he is aware of them. Three strategic reasons could account for this omission: the value of a powerful, if simplified model when addressing policy issues (Lynch 1991); concern that unless perimeter boundaries to ancestral domains are established immediately, there will be no land left to indigenous people, rendering the issue of intra-communal negotiation and adjustment academic (1991, 1988); and finally, concern to forestall the micro-political processes (e.g. debt, deception) through which indigenous land, once it is individually titled, tends to become alienated from the community (cf Mitchell et al 1990:250, Prill-Brett 1988:23).

In legal terms, Lynch's strategy is to show that Filipino law has always contained within it the recognition of ancestral land rights, although relevant parts of the law have not hitherto been recognised or implemented (Lynch and Talbott 1988:687). Efforts to "identify, and even reinterpret, existing laws for acquiring or gaining recognition of existing property rights" form part of Lynch's broader international strategy for improving the situation of indigenous people (Lynch 1991:23).

In Indonesia, national land law is capable of interpretation in favour of indigenous land rights, but such rights are not regarded as inherent: they exist only so long as they are not in conflict with the national interest as defined by the state (MacAndrews 1986; Dove 1987; Zerner 1990; Hooker 1978). This politico-legal situation makes the strategic issues somewhat different from those in the Philippines. Since the state recognises individual ownership rights as the strongest rights that can exist, arguments in favour of indigenous property rights have tended to stress that these are the type of property rights that indigenous people actually have (Dove 1987; Li 1991; Ruwistuti and Blowfield 1991). Dove (1987:267) has argued that indigenous people such as the Kantu in Kalimantan, hold rights of ownership to fallowed swidden land, while the long-house community holds residual "rights of avail" to the same land. Where commercial trees have been planted, only rights of ownership apply, communal rights of avail being completely extinguished. The use of the term ownership rights (in Dove's text hak milik) to apply to the Kantu and other swidden cultivators is critical to arguments over the status of such rights within Indonesian property law. Any suggestion that the Kantu have only individualised use rights, rather than ownership rights, would invoke the standard official response that use rights are communal rights of avail (hak ulayat) which are recognised only weakly and subject to the national interest. In effect, the state has often treated hak ulayat as tanah negara, state land, collapsing the specific localised community into the community of the whole.

A campaign to shift Indonesian state policy in favour of the recognition of “indigenous community land rights” has been pursued by some Indonesian NGOs (e.g. Skephi 1993) and legal scholars (Moniaga 1993). International activists, particularly environmentalists (Colchester 1994), have argued a similar case. Simplified images of beleaguered tribes have been used with some success to open up possibilities in the policy arena. The World Bank, concerned to deliver on its promises to restrict developments threatening “tribal peoples” (), has supported efforts to map “traditional community lands”. The Government of Indonesia (1992) included clauses recognising traditional land rights in the recent Population Law. Yet here again, in the transition from generalised policy rhetoric about indigenous rights to operational definitions and programs to delineate both communities and lands, there is a serious risk that many people’s interests and claims will be left out of account.

The imagery associated with arguments for “indigenous community rights” is that of the tribe: the timeless, homogenous, bounded community-par-excellence (Skephi 1993; Lim and Gomes 1990; Moniaga 1993). Most of Indonesia’s rural areas, both on and off Java, are complex mosaics of cultural groups and social classes, products of diverse agrarian histories and centuries of interaction with market and state (Hefner 1990; Tsing 1993; Kahn 1993; Bowen 1991; Li, forthcoming).² Communities envisaged as tribes may be quite hard to identify on the ground, where multiple, conflicting discourses arise in the context of struggles over resources and different visions of community are articulated. The attempt to catalogue tradition and locate an authoritative source able to represent “the community” or “the culture” leads to simplifications inevitably ridden with power, as articulate spokesmen, rendered more powerful by state support, overlook ambiguities in the meaning of indigenous terms and practices.³ It should also be noted that discourse and practice in support of community participation, organisation or control remain problematic in Indonesia, where villagers remember the heavy price paid for such activities in 1965 (Barber 1989). Whether “traditional” or newly created, forms of organisation lying outside the official state structure are treated with a general wariness, and information flows are shaped accordingly.

To summarise my argument so far: practical political economy in the policy arena, both national and international, involves countering popular images and official orthodoxies, influencing policies, and working with and around existing laws. These are strategic activities in which notions of community play quite specific roles. Particular representations carry risks as well as promise for parties potentially affected by them. The significance of these arguments and activities should be assessed in terms of their effectiveness in achieving strategic goals, and not merely at the level of conceptual rigour or empirical accuracy. Scholars and practitioners working in this arena might agree that the success of such strategic

discourses and activities should ultimately be measured in terms of actual improvements in the adequacy and security of rural livelihoods, especially those of the poorest. Creating a favourable policy climate is not sufficient in itself, however, to achieve the goals sought. We have already noted problems that can arise from the direct translation of generalised policy positions into programs for action. For beneficial changes to occur, practical political economic initiatives in two other arena are crucial: the arena of the day to day struggles over resources and the arena of program and project design.

2. PRACTICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY AT THE MICRO LEVEL

The term micro political economy (Leach 1991) is a useful shorthand for the day to day discourse and practice through which people seek to gain or defend access to land, labour and other productive resources. The term is embedded in a conceptual framework emphasising human agency or praxis, focusing upon the creative ways in which cultural ideas are adapted to meet new conditions, and culturally informed practices, in turn, structure daily life and shape and reshape institutions at various levels (Giddens 1979, Bourdieu 1977). Rather than the maximising behaviour of free-floating individuals, the approach examines class, gender, and other forms of differentiation which shape the "practices of differently situated and positioned actors within contradictory social relations" (Roseberry 1989:10). Most significantly for the present argument, a micro political economy approach returns "to the concept of community, seen not as a given society -- or culture-outside-of-history but as a political association formed through processes of political and cultural creation and imagination -- the generation of meaning in contexts of unequal power" (Roseberry 1989:14).

Images of community are central to questions of resource access at the local level, not because of guaranteed rights provided by rules and traditions, nor because of any self-evident qualities of moral economy, but as culturally available points of leverage in ongoing processes of negotiation. Particular visions of community, such as those proposing the entitlement of every individual to a livelihood, or requiring kin or neighbours to take care of each other, do not guarantee that such will take place, but they provide a vocabulary of legitimation for requests to be made and pressure to be exerted. Processes of transformation commonly involve contestation and revision of the meanings of key terms (Smith 1989), concepts of property and community foremost among them. While the concept of hegemony would seem to imply that dominant classes define the meaning of key terms in their own interests, class lines in agrarian societies are seldom clearly drawn, and gender and ethnicity provide

crucial dimensions of difference. In rural contexts, the partial overlapping of local history, landscape, kinship and biography provide a richness of shared and separate experience which can be invoked by individuals to achieve specific outcomes, or, more generally, to suggest particular interpretations of cultural ideas. Negotiation in this context is a negotiation of meaning and value, not solely the manoeuvring of individuals within agreed rules. It is a social process which draws upon cultural traditions while in the process transforming them. As Hefner (1990:2) argues, "economic change is never just a matter of technological diffusion, market rationalisation or 'capitalist penetration'. Deep down, it is also a matter of community, morality and power."

Since meanings are subject to renegotiation, overt statements about community may be misleading guides to the current status of social relations. Class formation among peasants can be "masked by solidary ideologies of community, 'tradition', custom etc" (Bernstein 1990:73; Smith 1989). Sometimes, one form or level of discourse, such as that of individual failure, may stand as proxy for overt recognition of the impact of economic differentiation upon previous notions of kinship and community. Moore provides an example from Chagga society in Kenya, where "the downward trajectory of failure of a rejected kinsman is likely to be marked by disputes and accusations. How else is the doing of harm to be legitimated and made acceptable? Allegations of improper behaviour in terms of traditional ideas about reciprocity, cooperativeness, and the like may presage later more serious accusations of financial irresponsibility, bad character, malevolence, and witchcraft..." (1986:308).

In many contexts, discourse on the distribution of rights to resources gives prominence to egalitarian principles, such as equal inheritance to all children regardless of age and gender, or equal access of all villagers to common lands, but the power to operationalize nominal rights is unevenly distributed. In parts of West Africa, for example, women are effectively excluded from becoming owners of commercial tree gardens not because of formal rules that deny them access to land, but because of the difficulty they have in freeing up their own labour time and their limited access to capital to hire workers (Berry 1988; Leach 1991). It has been noted that the ability of women and certain categories of men to secure favourable settlements in disputes is weak, despite their apparent equality according to the stated "rules" of tradition and custom (Tsing 1990; Berry 1988). Subordinate groups may be more effective in asserting their interests through direct action rather than argumentation: *de facto* claiming and making use of resources, even while their rights to do so may be in dispute. More negatively, they may sabotage the enterprises of those whose visions of community have diverged too far from their own, rationalising their attacks in terms of neglected moralities (Scott 1985). Action and inaction, speech and silence, compliance and resistance are among the strategies employed in the course of day to day struggles over resources (Risseuw 1988).

To illustrate the ways in which contests over resources are played out in terms of divergent images of community I turn to a case study in Central Sulawesi. Lauje swidden farmers cultivating annual food and cash crops have been experiencing a crisis of land degradation and declining productivity due to population pressure on steep and fragile slopes. In response to the need for agricultural intensification and income generation, they are beginning to plant commercial trees such as cocoa and cashew, thereby privatising and effectively enclosing land previously accessible to a wider group (Li 1993, Li forthcoming). Here I examine two dimensions of the ensuing struggles which are redefining the meaning of community and the basis of access to land. These concern the repositioning of individuals in relation to kin and neighbourhood; and the position of hill people in relation to powerful outsiders.

Redefining Community Relations

An indigenous labour theory of value forms the core of Lauje property relations. What a person has worked for belongs to them. A pioneer has permanent rights to the land he cleared from primary forest. If he chooses to sell it to another, he sets the price in terms of the value of the labour expended: it is the price of his exhaustion, and the food used to sustain him while he worked. Although land pioneering is treated as the paradigmatic case of ownership rights established through personal effort, pioneering, like all other forms of labour, is in fact mediated by particular social relations of production which permit an individual to put him or herself to work. It is these social relations of production, which locate the individual in relation to kin and community that are now being renegotiated.⁴

Land pioneers have been most successful in translating the property rights derived from initial land clearing into the undisputed right to plant commercial trees and claim fully private ownership. This has been accomplished without debate, and presented as a continuation of traditional practice. In fact, it is a new development, which selects some elements from tradition and submerges others. Under the swidden cultivation system (still practised, although on reduced areas of land) pioneers' rights are limited in two respects. A land pioneer is expected to freely loan land to kin and neighbours needing a place to farm, and useful products (vines, bamboo) growing naturally on fallow land can be harvested by anyone. These rights of access pertained then to a "community", loosely defined in terms of proximity and need. They were not well-articulated rights, however, and they are now being subsumed through an increased emphasis on pioneers' rights. Land-owners, it is said, only loaned their land because they were not using it themselves. Now that they wish to plant trees there, it is no longer available to others.

In areas of the middle hills farmed for several generations, the original land pioneers, and even those who assisted them, have long since died. In these circumstances, struggles over land must be articulated through a different set of cultural terms, focusing upon notions of inheritance rather than labour investment. When land was used only for shifting cultivation, the notion of inheritance was not culturally elaborated - an Indonesian term is borrowed, since there is no indigenous word. Land continued to be the possession of the ancestors who first cleared it, and all the younger generations effectively borrowed it from them - directly by asking for or being allocated land to farm by the pioneer, and indirectly, by asking permission from living seniors when the pioneer was no longer alive. Regardless of particular lines of descent, then, all the younger generation effectively worked on "borrowed" land.

To legitimate exclusive rights to land for commercial tree planting, people must now trace their descent from the original pioneer who cleared that particular plot, and thereby distinguish themselves and their rights from those of people who were "merely borrowing". Two meanings have shifted here. The principle of inheritance based on descent has become more significant; and the practice of borrowing, once the mode in which most people accessed land from seniors, living or dead, now more clearly distinguishes a particular category of people, non-descendants. The social distinction accomplished, it is widely agreed that borrowers are not entitled to plant trees. They are thus excluded both from the possibilities of subsistence production and from the long term investments in commercial trees in which so many are placing their hopes. They find themselves located outside a reconstituted moral and economic community.

It is among kin, potential co-inheritors, that there are the most active current struggles over land. Siblings and cousins of the same generation, equally distant from the pioneers, have identical claims through inheritance, yet the use of the land by some of them inevitably excludes others. Drawing upon a revised version of the "tradition" stressing the investment of labour in the formation of property rights, enclosures that exclude co-inheritors are defended on the grounds that the person who works hardest and plants trees first acquires the land: others should simply follow the example. Such claims are made through "direct action". If a person has not actually done the work of clearing and planting the land claimed, others may still feel free to step in. Households without access to adult male labour, or to adults of either sex capable of advancing claims among kin, lose out when land enclosure takes place through this process. Women are excluded by the sexual division of labour from felling trees; those with inheritance claims are unable to operationalize them unless they have cash to pay workers, or a husband willing to do the work. The land division process has occasioned rancour, bitterness and some covert sabotage, as kin signal their dissent in principle or in practice to the fact of their exclusion from land they might have been able to make their own.

The result of these struggles over meaning is that the privatisation of land has been highly uneven, but not random. There has been no formal public discussion of the principles for the distribution of land rights, and no orthodoxy proclaimed. The absence of agreed rules and principles signals an arena of opportunity as well as risk: it is still possible to assert rights to gather from fallows; to beg for borrowed land; and to enclose a plot by planting cocoa trees, investing effort in a way that competing claimants will find hard to ignore; and for women to become land and tree owners independently or jointly with their husbands. These then are the discursive and practical strategies that people pursue in their attempts to secure a place for themselves in the new order.

Contesting Land and Community in Regional Fields of Power

Outsiders interested in the hillside land occupied by the Lauje include coastal people wanting to plant commercial trees, and government officials with diverse mandates (Li 1993). Each party envisages the Lauje “community” rather differently. The hill Lauje, numbering about 20,000, do not form an administrative unit. All along the narrow peninsula, official village boundaries cut across from the coast to the centre of the mountain range, incorporating coastal and mountain people within each unit. The majority of the coastal people see themselves as Lauje, acknowledging common ancestry with the mountain folk, although greatly embarrassed by their backwardness. According to the interests at stake, the distinction between upland and lowland Lauje can be drawn more or less sharply (Li 1990, Nourse 1989).

One strategy engaged in by coastal elites attempting to legitimise a claim in upland resources has been to assert that mountain Lauje are useless primitives, wandering randomly through the forests with no “real” houses, no settled hamlets, no social organisation and no production. In effect, they deny that the hill people have traditions, territories, or useful indigenous knowledge, precisely those characteristics that the international community-based management/ indigenous rights movement considers both inherent and valuable. The mountain Lauje’s lack of recognisable signs of “community” is translated by coastal people into a denial of their claims to the land. Coastal people are inclined to state that the hillside land is “empty”. Elucidations of the meaning of this emptiness given to me on various occasions include the following list: the hills are mostly uninhabited (in fact, densities reach 50-80 people per sq.km); the living standards (and hence the worth) of the people living there are “less than zero”; there is “nothing growing there, only cassava and corn” (only commercial trees count in this perception); the land is used only once, on a random basis, and then abandoned (fallowing systems are unacknowledged); or, finally, it is acknowledged that the land is indeed used according to a definite system, not at random, but since no papers exist,

and no taxes have been paid, it is used illegally, and can therefore be regarded as "empty" and allocated to others for settlement.

At the level of the potential farm plot itself, other more specific criteria have been proposed to determine whether or not a piece of land can be deemed "empty". Coastal elites claim that these criteria are "official", but this is unconfirmed. Some state that if land has not been farmed for six months it is empty; others place the cut off point at five years; still others use a physical measure - if the forest needs to be cut with an axe rather than a bush knife, it is empty, that is, unencumbered by ownership rights, and available to whoever chooses to plant commercial trees there. The debate spills over into the meaning of terms in the vernacular. The Lauje language distinguishes between doat, which is primary forest, and ulat or secondary forest. Some uplanders argue that doat refers not only to the physical status of the forest, but to its ownership status - doat has never been cleared, and so is not owned, while ulat, however tall the trees, is always encumbered by definite ownership rights. Others argue differently. A debate which ecologists might have over whether secondary forest can ever become primary again is played out in the uplands with significant political and economic implications.

On land matters, uplanders do not speak with one voice. As noted earlier, they are engaged in their own internal struggles over resources, and statements on land rights reputed to have official status are themselves resources, offering potential lines of argumentation apparently backed by the power of the state. A few uplanders who have started to act as brokers finding "empty" land for lowlanders desirous of planting commercial trees have their own interpretation of the meaning of key words and local tradition. Since they are the group most strategically placed to convey "indigenous" meanings to outsiders, their interpretations are especially significant. This is what is meant by the production and negotiation of meaning in the context of unequal power. Yet meaning is not the only relevant dimension: those who dominate the discursive dimension still sometimes find their trees burnt to the ground. Sometimes a more complex interaction or negotiation takes place, with older rules not simply distorted or flouted but rather recognized and affirmed. In the Lauje hills, most of the coastal people who have actually acquired land have done so not by arguing that the land is empty or by threatening to invoke state sanctions, but by purchasing the land from its upland owners. On the ground, coastal people acknowledge the upland "tradition" that the pioneer or his descendants own the land. No longer a generalised other, the hillside hamlets, their members, and their land rights take on quite well defined forms. Newcomers need to be on good terms with their new mountain neighbours, and seek admission to a localised moral community which they hope will ensure the well being of their persons and property.

3 PRACTICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY IN PROGRAM INTERVENTION

The laws, regulations, plans and programs of national or international agencies that enter the local scene in the guise of "development" interact with already contested domains of power and meaning. I would like to suggest that a practical political economy of planned intervention should aim therefore to strengthen (or at least avoid undermining) the position of those who are already struggling on their own behalf, taking operational cues from an understanding of their knowledge and strategies.⁵ It should also make use of the spaces opened up by generalised policy discourse (such as that focusing upon the benefits of community based resource management or the necessity for poverty alleviation), as well as the opportunities presented by specific policies, and by the particular conditions pertaining to the locale in question. Illustration is drawn again from the Sulawesi case.

Policy Spaces, Situational Risks and Opportunities

State frameworks for apprehending the upland Lauje as a community and addressing their relationship to the land are complex. The Basic Agrarian Law of 1945 asserts that the land tenure systems of traditional communities are to be recognised and upheld so long as they are in keeping with the national interest. Yet arriving at an appropriate definition of a "community" and its "tradition" is not simple, as we have seen. The Lauje are one of those groups that do not seem to fit the community-as-tribe model, yet no one disputes that they are thoroughly indigenous to the hillsides they occupy. Definitions of the national interest are sufficiently general to leave space for a range of program initiatives. Some of these definitions would see the Lauje removed from their hill lands, while others would offer them a future in situ. There are a range of program options with diverse potential impacts on the hillside Lauje, a situation with significant scope for the exercise of practical political economy.

Risk of displacement from the hills as a result of state interventions could arise in three main forms. One is the potential enforcement of the Basic Forestry Law of 1967, which defines all people without individual titles as squatters on state forest land (Zerner 1990 ; Barber 1989; Peluso 1992). It seems unlikely, however, that the Forestry Department will give high priority to the enforcement of this Law in the Lauje area, since there is no valuable timber in the immediate vicinity and the peninsula topography is such that there are no downstream erosion or watershed protection issues at stake. The absence of a strong forestry imperative presents an opportunity to investigate and pursue alternative approaches. A second possible program would involve the implementation of a resettlement process by the Department of

Social Affairs. A few resettlements projects have been initiated in the Lauje area over the years, but with little success. Those moved soon returned to their hillside land, and officials acknowledge that the coastal land the resettled households were allocated was small, dry and barren. Moreover, the costs of resettling all 20,000 hillside Lauje would be prohibitive: they are not the kind of small, isolated group for which the resettlement policy was designed. The unattractiveness of the resettlement option again presents an opportunity for exploring alternatives. The Ministry of Social Affairs in Jakarta has begun talking about bringing development to isolated people *in situ*, opening up a space for experimenting with new approaches in the Lauje area, even though some Provincial and District officials still consider that resettlement would be the best solution.

A third program direction which could displace the Lauje is the designation of the area as a zone for estate crop production through large scale plantation or nucleus estate arrangements. This option has not, to my knowledge, been proposed, perhaps because the land is not particularly fertile, or because it is steep and inaccessible, and therefore not attractive to investors who could gain better returns elsewhere. This situation, again, presents an opportunity. As Chamber's notes (1983, 1989) remote, resource-poor, upland regions have the advantage that their resources are still largely in the hands of local people, having been less subject to colonisation and appropriation by commercial interests than those in more fertile, accessible zones. Moreover profits generated within the local production systems tend to be meagre, limiting accumulation and leaving most people with direct access to the means of production. Since class lines are not yet definitively drawn, progress for the poor does not require taking from the rich, a situation with obvious implications for the political feasibility of planned interventions. Yet the Lauje are not in favour of continued isolation, and they are desperately trying to increase the productivity and profitability of their farming system in order to gain access to a higher standard of living. They want better food, clothing, housing, health care, education for children, and other benefits of citizenship currently beyond their reach. The new tree crops seem to offer the prospect of satisfying some of these needs and desires, hence their widespread adoption. In situations where the productivity of a resource (in this case hillside land) is about to be greatly increased, the strategic issue according to Chambers (1983, 1988), is to secure the resource rights of the current users before these resources become attractive to outsiders, or monopolised by insiders who identify new possibilities for profit.

Securing land rights is indeed the key strategic issue in the Lauje case. At any time, the building of roads into the mountains could lead to a rapid influx of city and coastal people looking for commercial farm land. It is the reluctance of such people to climb hills and ford rivers, rather than a recognition of indigenous land rights, that has so far protected the hill

farmers from major land grabbing by outsiders. A large scale estate crop plan could still emerge, and bring with it major gains in productivity, yet the record of such estates in protecting the rights or enhancing the economic well being of those previously utilizing the relevant land and forest resources has not been good (Dove 1987; Skephi and Kiddell-Monroe 1993). Finally, the processes of internal differentiation discussed earlier could result in the displacement of large numbers of Lauje farmers from their land, leaving them to work as wage labourers or forcing them to open up even more fragile and remote hillsides. Practical political economy suggests the need to locate program interventions within this array of opportunities and risks.

Under the aegis of the Directorate General for Regional Development, in collaboration with a Canadian aid program, the Lauje area was flagged for a development boost beginning in 1990. Attention was initially drawn to the area because of the perceived poverty and backwardness of the mountain farmers, the general development deficit of the region when compared with neighbouring transmigration sites, and evidence of environmental degradation in the hills (Strachan et al 1989). Standard approaches to each of these as a separate problem were possible: address backwardness and isolation through resettlement, resuscitate the environment through reforestation, and stimulate development through investment in infrastructure and estate crops. But the conceptual space opened up by the Bruntland Commission's reintegration of environment, poverty and development, the international discourse on community based resource management and indigenous knowledge, and related Indonesian policy positions permitted consideration of other options.

The program that eventually emerged was a fairly novel one. Among its components were an estate crop program offering extension and inputs to hill side farmers in situ; an acknowledgement that short term cash and food crops would continue to be important, even though the slopes were rather steep, and that some attempt to integrate these with trees in a form of agroforestry would be valuable; and an attempt to reorientate health and education delivery systems towards the hill populations. There was also a major program to clarify traditional land rights by listing owners, mapping plots, and eventually issuing letters of acknowledgement which could translate into individual titles. The demand for clarification of tenure issues arose from the Estate Crops Department, unused to dealing with small holders, and aware that a program to assist mountain dwellers in planting trees would have the effect of consolidating their hold over the land (see Babcock, 1994). Once the small holder model rather than large scale approach to Estate Crops was adopted and it became clear that the hill farmers were there to stay, that they were the effective "target group", there was a new interest from the state in regularising their position and making them legitimate beneficiaries and recipients of state development assistance.

Of the various mechanisms for bringing about the regularization of the tenure status of Lauje hillside farmers that were suggested by program planners and consultants, two carried with them significant risks. An emphasis on indigenous communal tenure was considered unwise, as well as being contrary to Lauje traditions and practices. The option of providing official licenses to legalize the people's occupation of state land was also rejected, based on the argument of an Indonesian legal specialist that the hill people already had real, legal, traditional, individualised rights to the land. A reallocation of the land, whether to the current inhabitants or to other parties, would violate these rights, and was anyway unnecessary. The practical risks associated with a major change in the land's status were also acknowledged. As Dove notes, "whenever the government is involved in the devolution (and/or development) of land, an opportunity is created for the economic and political elite to misappropriate it". Dove concludes that "agroforestry programs should focus at the level of the individual farmer on extant holdings. More ambitious programs, involving relocation of peoples and redistribution of land, should be avoided like the plagues they are for the peasants affected" (1987:270; cf Raintree 1987). It was, eventually, a small holder model that was adopted.

Micro-Politics and Program Planning

Divergent images of community were present throughout the process of developing and refining program strategies for the Lauje area. Officials of local government agencies, as well as Canadian project staff and a range of Indonesian and Canadian consultants participated in the process. Before a small holder model could be accepted, the concept of a knowledgeable, hardworking, environmentally benign, stably located, potentially progressive upland farmer had to be planted in the official imagination, displacing the image of the useless wandering primitive that predominates in much official discourse (cf Dove 1985b). The quasi-technical term "agroforestry", once confined to an international academic discourse, had already made its way into the practitioner's repertoire in the Indonesian Department of Agriculture, and offered a framework for thinking about existing and potential crop combinations and cultivation cycles (including burns and fallows) as something other than chaos and destruction. There were sceptics. Some planners, both Canadians and Indonesians, preferred to imagine neat, uninterrupted rows of tree crops, preferably monocultured; household land consolidated into blocks; and orderly rows of houses lined up along a grid of new roads. They imagined new communities modelled, in effect, on transmigration sites, a model in which plans for "development" do not attempt to accommodate the messy realities of pre-existing social and economic relations and specific attachments to the landscape.

In order for officials from technical agencies to be able and willing to design programs for hill side farmers *in situ*, the nature and location of target communities had to become better

specified (Li 1992). Village officials, and other members of the coastal elite, were inclined to tell visitors from Provincial agencies that there was “no one up there”, or at least, no one capable of modern farming or “development”, no one deserving to become recipients of state largesse in the form of free seedlings, tools and fertilisers from the estate crops department. Coastal people, they argued, could best bring “development” to the hills and visiting officials, lacking familiarity with the area, had little basis upon which to disagree. Once they began to hike up into the hills, government officials responsible for program planning were better able to conceptualise the hill people as subjects, beneficiaries, or “target groups”. They could imagine them as a community: as individuals and families with definite locations on the social and physical landscape. Working with uplanders *in situ* began to seem somewhat less difficult.

Some officials still doubted that it was really necessary to work with uplanders, or questioned the efficiency of the effort. One official remarked that, as he drove along the coastal road, he had observed many people who were plenty poor enough to merit assistance. There was, he suggested, no need to go into the hills in search of an appropriate “target group”. These perceptions changed as more data became available, and the hillside landscape became more familiar. Direct exposure to everyday life and work in the hills, together with the legal research and advice of the land tenure specialist, helped to strengthen the recognition of hill people’s rights to their land. The idea of sponsoring coastal people to move up into the hills, taking over the land of those who were already there, lost its appeal: the hillside Lauje had become firmly established in the official imagination and in the realm of project plans.

Ensuring that project assistance designed for hillside farmers actually reached them required a further, more detailed specification of community. In the early phase of the small holder tree-crop program, the mechanism for the delivery of farm inputs was the “Farmers Group”. Village officials working with extension officers were given instructions that the poorest were to be included in these groups, but the formulation of lists of member-recipients inevitably reflected local politics. The Farmers Groups, which were imagined by the promoting agency in the Provincial capital to be co-operative, on-the-ground “communities” of poor hill farmers, usually had none of those characteristics. As this problem became evident, a new approach to program delivery was developed. The hillside population was reconceptualised in terms of definite social groups occupying specific areas of the hills. The term “lingsos” (lingkunan sosial) was coined by program planners in to refer to such social/ ecological units. Not only could the hillside Lauje be conceptualised as legitimate beneficiaries of state programs, but they could, by this stage, be imagined as specific “targets”, real people in real places, whose names and locations could now appear on sketched maps and official lists.

The “lingsos” was, in a sense, a new form of community created through a collusion of state and local interests. It was a constructed term for a newly conceptualised entity, yet the entity it attempted to capture promised to be more authentic, more grounded in actual social relationships, than the normal official structure of sub-village units, represented by improbable straight lines on the map on the wall of the village office. The village leadership has long required its designated hamlet chiefs (kepala RT) to keep lists of mountain households, and be ready to mobilise “the community” to undertake labour duties or pay taxes. Yet the results (both the lists themselves, and the readiness) were consistently disappointing. With the new program some hill people, for the first time, anticipated that they would receive some benefits in return for state allegiance, and were therefore willing to be mapped and listed, their communities pinned down on paper. Still, there was considerable flux between one list-making exercise and the next, indicating both the continued mobility of hillside farmers and their reassessments of the costs and benefits of engagements with state authority and “development”.⁶

The focus on the “lingsos” improved the frequency with which state inputs reached the hills, but there were still many inequities in distribution. State bureaucratic procedures interacted with the local class-structuring processes already underway within the hillside hamlets (Li, forthcoming; Hart, 1989). The estate crops program as a whole was not inappropriate: the hill farmers, as noted earlier, were very keen on planting trees, and were already doing so prior to the official program. What the program offered, potentially, was better quality nursery stock, fertilisers, and extension advice sorely needed by farmers new to cocoa growing. Unproductive (and badly eroded) cocoa stands occupying formerly productive swidden fields were to no one’s advantage, yet without assistance, that was the form the new agriculture was taking. The program also offered hillside farmers an opportunity to consolidate their tenure status, both directly through the process of mapping and listing the land holdings of each household, and indirectly, as commercial trees indicate de-facto possession. Yet the hillside communities, the “lingsos”, were still only conceptualised in general terms. At the micro level, there was no agreement on who exactly should plant trees where.

The emphasis placed by the land tenure consultant on the traditional system of individualised heritable rights was effective in protecting the hillside Lauje from external threats capable of displacing them en-masse, and clarified that they were not illegal squatters (Ruwiastuti and Blowfield 1991). The estate crops program further promoted the individualisation of land rights, and helped the hill people as a whole to consolidate their hold vis a vis more powerful parties who might otherwise declare the land “empty”. But neither initiative addressed the micro-political level at which control over resources was being contested. Inadvertently, both the programs weakened the position of some parties: women’s names did not appear on lists of

“target group” members for farm inputs nor in the documents regarding tenure⁷; those who could not demonstrate that they had inherited rights to land were excluded from the estate crop program, and some found that land they hoped to claim and plant had been registered by another, its fate prematurely sealed.

To address the concerns and support the micro-political economic strategies of those struggling to secure a stake in the hillside land, some alternative or supplementary initiatives could have been adopted. For example, the enhancement of individualised land rights could be balanced by the creation of a more explicit commons, designating certain areas for gathering purposes and for use as small temporary gardens. This would require a reconceptualization of community and territory, building upon an internationally validated rhetoric to reinvigorate a submerged text which still exists as a potential within the continuity of Lauje tradition. Program leverage could be used: a “lingsos” would not be allocated its share of farm inputs until it had demonstrated a plan for the designation and management of a commons. Practical needs for fuelwood and housebuilding materials in an increasingly managed landscape suggest the relevance of this idea.

I noted earlier that hill farmers, both men and women, are already using a discourse of kinship and moral community to persuade those who have cleared or inherited large land holdings to recognise that their kin and neighbours also have needs, and, according to some interpretations of tradition, rights to land on which to base their livelihood. Tree seedlings could be used as practical leverage to support those endeavouring to secure their own plots. A person with fifty seedlings in hand that clearly need to be planted somewhere can more easily beg for a little space than someone with a hypothetical, abstract need or right. If moral claims fail, the value of labour and the seedlings themselves can be used to acquire land through a standard local share agreement under which the worker and land owner each end up with twenty five trees. Needless to say, project inputs, seedlings and fenceposts, distributed unevenly, have the potential to speed up the privatisation process, and the exclusion of competing claimants and competing concepts of community.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which contests over the distribution of property are articulated in terms of competing representations of community. My purpose in so doing was to draw attention to the political and material dimensions of such “struggles over meaning” at a variety of levels and sites. I suggested a need for reflexivity and caution, an awareness of the impacts of discourse upon policies, programs and lives. But I also indicated that there exists here a positive domain of opportunity for the exercise of

practical political economy, the effort to create or maintain alternatives to oppressive systems. It is a potential that many practitioners have already identified and incorporated into their strategies, practical and discursive, macro and micro, direct and indirect.

My broader conclusions are located within a growing consensus about the need to re-engage scholarship with real-world problems, integrating political economic analysis with cultural interpretation, and knowledge with practice (Moore 1993:380, Scott 1992, Knauff 1994, Coombe 1991, Povinelli 1993, Roseberry 1989, Moore 1993, Dove 1985b, 1993, Bryant 1992).

Acknowledging the politics of representation does not imply that the practice of representation should or could cease. Post-modern insights into systems of meaning and power can help to suggest answers to practical questions about what is to be done to secure a better world. Micro-level ethnographic research, currently much maligned, can help to suggest answers to the same questions. A scholar who produces or counters particular images of community is, like it or not, also a practitioner. There is, as many have noted, no pure space from which to speak or write, and no avoiding the consequences. Rather than dwelling on the politics of representation as an unfortunate or perhaps incapacitating fact, I have suggested that the political potential of representation be embraced and deployed strategically to achieve positive effects, or at least to mitigate negative ones. Finally, I have suggested that a heightened awareness of the positions and strategies of others is necessary in order to lend support to their causes and avoid inadvertent damage stemming from certitudes pursued in isolation.⁸ Divergent images of community result not from inadequate knowledge or confusion of purpose, but from the location of discourse and action in the context of specific struggles and dilemmas.

Field research drawn upon in this paper was carried out between 1990 - 94, over a total period of six months. Funding was provided by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Environmental Management Development in Indonesia Project (Dalhousie University and the Indonesian Ministry of State for Population and Environment). Research findings were shared with the Sulawesi Regional Development Project (Guelph University and Directorate General of Regional Development). Staff of that project and various government agencies at the provincial, district and sub district levels offered insights into the processes and dilemmas of program design. Preliminary versions of this paper were presented in 1992 at the Seminar on Global Transformations and Property Rights, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at the meeting of the International Association for the Study of Common Property, Washington.

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¹ Underestimation of the extent and significance of this knowledge and the practical political economic strategies associated with it, leads to attempts to “empower” which inadvertently eradicate sources of strength along with sources of oppression. See Rahnema 1990; Nandy 1989; Chambers 1983.

² Romantic images of community espoused by outsiders have endangered livelihood concerns in at least one South Asian context. According to Rangan (1993), the Chipko movement in the Garhwal Himalayas, beloved of environmentalists and much cited internationally, has long since lost the support of local residents who see their livelihood concerns subsumed in a fairy tale serving interests not their own. "Obsessed with images of self-contained village communities living in harmonious ecological utopias, activists espousing this vision overlook the fact that most communities in Garhwal have been involved in a well-established economy based on commercial extraction of forest resources, agriculture, livestock rearing, and regional trade for more than two centuries" (1993:162). Excluded by state protection regulations from the forests that once sustained them, the local residents are ready to axe the trees.

³ Dutch colonial authorities and associated scholars engaged in a major program of cataloguing the traditions (adat) of Indonesia's indigenous communities, as part of a program to strengthen their control over the countryside. There is little doubt that community and tradition have been used quite directly as languages of power. See discussion in Kahn 1993.

⁴ There is a rich empirical literature on the relationship between individual and community in the constitution of property rights and their development in particular historical, political and economic contexts in Southeast Asia. Sources include Tsing 1984, Appell 1986, 1991, Dove 1985a, Jessup and Peluso 1986, Bowen 1988, Benda-Beckmann F. and K. 1985, Benda-Beckmann K. unpub, Weinstock 1986, Schlegel 1981, Freeman 1970, Prill-Brett 1988, Ter Haar 1948, Hooker 1978, Gomez 1986, Zerner 1990, Olofson 1981, Kunstadter 1978.

⁵ Obtaining information and identifying actual and potential strategies present some challenges, since these strategies are often tacit, tentative and subtle, if not actually covert. Popular short cut methods such as “rapid appraisal” or “gender analysis” (Cernia 1985; Overholt et al 1985; Chambers 1985) produce lists of typical assets, tasks, rights and responsibilities but are likely to miss the subtleties of relationships and processes. To obtain this type of data and understanding, longer term collaborations appear to be necessary.

⁶ Lists and maps have been recognized as instruments for the extension and intensification of state powers of surveillance and control (Foucault 1977; Peluso and Vandergeest 1995). While I acknowledged the potential risks and losses associated with increased state presence and with the entire enterprise of “development” (c.f. Ferguson 1990), I would also argue that, in some situations, citizens are not demanding autarchy and isolation, a reduced state, but rather a better state, one which is more responsive to their needs and offers them access to the services and facilities they associate with modernity (c.f. Schuurman 1993:27). Practical political economy suggests taking cues from the discourse and strategies of those who stand to lose or gain from increased engagement with the state, rather than taking an abstract, generalized position.

⁷ Clearly women need to be supported, or at least not undermined, in their struggle to translate pre-existing rights into fully privatized rights to land with trees. Programs to formalize land rights, with or without a corresponding change in land use, are notorious for their tendency to trivialize, informalize and eventually eradicate women's independent claims (Rocheleau 1987).

⁸ As Friedman (1992) points out, when anthropologists write, in their still authoritative voices, about “imagined communities” and “invented traditions”, they intervene in political struggles with major consequences for those whose certainties are thereby called into question.