A History of Mataw[1] fishing in Batanes, Philippines

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I. Introduction: The Batanes Islands

The ten small islands of the province of Batanes are found just south of Taiwan. Only three of them—Itbayat, Batan and Sabtang—are inhabited. The other islands are Yami, North, Mavudis, Siayan, Ivuhos, Dequey and Balintang. The Ivatans or natives of Batanes number some 15,000 (16,467 as of the most recent census by the National Statistics Office [2002]). The capitol is Basco, on Batan Island, also known as Vasay.

To the west is the South China Sea and to the East the Philippine Sea and the Pacific Ocean. To the south, the very deep and treacherous Balintang Channel, site of many shipsinkings. Beyond this are the Babuyan Islands which are part of Cagayan Province. To the north, the Bashi Channel separates Batanes from the islands within the territory of Taiwan. The Batanes Islands cover a land area of only 230 sq.km. and this makes it the Philippines' smallest province. Its territorial waters however, encompass 4,500 square kilometers.

As is frequently the case among small islands in open ocean, the seas around Batanes are intensely powerful and sometimes unpredictable. Surging currents between the small islands result from the exchange of water between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea. As one of the Spanish Dominican missionaries who came to the islands reported.

[1] Can be spelled either "mataw" or "matao".

> *In one word, it is extremely difficult, not to say impossible to furnish an exact description of the subject. I have frequently observed even the most experienced among the natives hesitate and grow doubtful. I have navigated north between Sabtang and Ibujos against a contrary current, and when, upon reaching the end of the former, I turned south, I still found the current against me. There is a great number of them flowing in opposite direction, the lanes of which are marked like those of the rivers. When the wind is contrary, the result is a highly choppy and turbulent sea.* (Gonzalez 1966: 105)

Accounts of capsizings, shipwreck and drowning, or of boats being carried all the way to Taiwan are spoken of in both the literature and oral history (e.g. Scheerer 1926; Yamada 1995: 507–537). This relationship with the sea entails great care, and the matawfishers act to avoid *disgrasya* or "accidents" among their group (the members of the same *vanua* or "port") through ritual at the start of the fishing season.

The lyrics of a folksong or laji express the emotion from sea mishaps from the point of view of the drowned person:

> *Stub of the torch of the fisherman, bundle me along,*
> *Carry me along and let the current run*
> *Bearing me where it may – it may bear me southward*
> *Or northward to be cast ashore*
> *Upon a field of ferns and vines.*
>
> *I sympathize with you, my mother,*
> *When you weep as you hear*
> *From our Lord God that I do not stay for the night*
> *To keep you company. I feed upon*
> *The sea froth on the shore mixed*
> *With dried camote leaves.*
>
> (Hornedo 1979: 349)

Along the coastline of Batan Island, rocky shorelines, precipitous cliffs, eroding beaches of boulders, and sometimes stretches of white sand meet the sea. As the Dominicans also reported, coming to land in the hostile shoreline is as problematic as navigating in the often rough waters.

> *Ships anchor regularly in front of the towns of Ibanag [Ivana], San Carlos [Mahatao] and Santo Domingo [Basco], but all these places are equally bad. The first one, which is simply the short channel between Sabtang and Ibujos, was usually preferred by the ships that called there, because of the ease of maneuvering. This is a point of paramount importance considering the fact that even with still winds and a calm sea, it is extremely difficult to maintain position due to the shifting currents, and since the bottom is of hard rock, no ropes can last long, unless made of iron chains. Smaller craft find very little convenience here. This part of the coast is fringed with an extensive bank of rocks, which are laid bare at low tide… San Carlos and Santo Domingo are beset with the same defects as anchoring places. Besides, since the coast forms a slight arch, a ship could easily get into trouble if a westerly wind should arise all of a sudden. Ships may also lie to for a short while NE, E, and S of Basay. The rest of the coast is a steep face of rock jutting out of a sea of considerable depth, and hence offers no possibilities for either berthing or anchoring.* (Gonzalez 1966: 105–106)

Fishers in Batanes are identified with the place that they start from to go out to sea and where they come home to shore at. This is their home base, their "port" or *vanua*. Such places are geologic features of the coastline, the unique points that allow of access between sea and land. The "port" is also the unit of organization, and the key to the ritual technology of mataw fishing.

The islands were formed by upliftment, volcanic activity, and continuing coral reef formation. Mt. Iraya, an active volcano with a height 1,009 meters above sea level, dominates the north end of Batan Island. To the south rise the sharp ridges of Mt. Matarem. Strong winds sweep through the

islands. The distinct Batanes landscape is one of hills and valleys checkered by pasturelands and fields with borders of trees or reeds to act as windbreakers. As local scholars convey, it is a place of winds (Hornedo 2000; Maddela 1985).

Because of the wind, rootcrops (especially yams or *uvi* and *dukay*) are more reliable than rice or corn as staple foods. Sugarcane stalks are made to grow bundled in groups of threes or fours to prevent their being blown every which way. (White yams [*uvi],* are the traditional staple and sugarcane wine [*palek*] is the traditional alcoholic beverage.) Erosion is a problem, as are sea salt particles flung against the island by the waves and sea breeze which wither the plants. Today, there have been attempts to recognize the landscape as an international heritage site characterized by the "traditional Ivatan house" that is built low of stone, with small windows and thick *cogon* roofs that would be tied down to withstand the typhoons that pass by on their seasonal route from June to October. There have also been initiatives to tap wind power for electricity.

The Batanes climate has two main seasons: *Amian* from October to February is characterized by cold and drizzly to rainy weather and strong winds from the north. Intermittently, such bitterly cold weather is experienced that locals would also describe these as "*Siberian winds*", and the season as "*winter*". *Rayon* or "*summer*" is a period of hot sunny weather from March to May. During this season, flying fish *(dibang)* and dorado *(*or *arayu,* sp. *Coryphaena hippurus*) migrate through Batanes waters. This is the traditional high season for fishing, especially by *sumuho* for flying fish at night (scoopfishing using light), and by *mataw* or longline fishing for dorado (by first capturing flying fish by "float" to use as bait), which is done in the daytime and which is the focus of this paper. The rainy season begins in late May, although between September and October is a short period (as short as 2 weeks) called *dekey a rayon* or "*little summer*". The Ivatans are said to be remarkably well-prepared for the seasonal hazards of their environment, among which is the practice of mataw fishing (Blolong 1994).

Mataw fishing is one among many other methods of fishing in Batanes (see e.g. Hornedo 2000: 85–108; Yamada 1967: 178–186). It is distinguished by its being highly seasonal, in fact the fishing season for *arayu* (the fish caught by mataws) is called *paypatawen*[2] (Hornedo 2000: 91). Besides this, of all fishing in Batanes, mataw fishing is characterized by a level of strength, skill and discipline that sets it apart from other methods of fishing. Arayu or dorado is a relatively big strong fish (although not as big as a blue marlin). In the sense that they fish alone on a boat powered mainly by their oars, and because this entails commitment to a whole season of fishing, mataw fishers can be considered the "most serious" fishers in Batanes. Constrained by economic exchange contracts, the mataw fisher leaves much farm work to his family or to hired hands and goes to sea everyday within the summer period with the goal of accumulating a dried catch. The aim is by season's end to have a large pile of dried and smoked fillets of dorado. The value of the catch is for exchange (today especially for land to farm or use as pastureland in Mahatao), to be given in wages (e.g. one fillet is equivalent to a day's work in the fields), for sharing among networks of kin and friends, for storage as "winter" food for the household, some of it for sale, and whatever remains for consumption during uvi planting time (see Mangahas 2004). That mataw fishers may in fact "produce" a significant kind of wealth is also evident in how in some places they were taxed according to their catch by local government.[3]

Mataw fishing has long-standing tradition as a very important seasonal

[2] *Taw* is also the Ivatan word for "seawater". *Pataw* means "float" or "buoy". *Patawen* can specifically refer to the species of flying fish usually caught by matawfishers (which are caught by means of a hook attached to a float), and which they would then use as bait for *arayu*.

[3] The Mahatao municipality was charging license fees depending on the number of arayu caught by a mataw in a season. P30 for 10–50 fish, P50 for 51–100 fish, P100 for 151 or more fish based on Ordinance 17 series 1987, amended on June 18, 1990. I do not think any other kind of small-scale fishing in the Philippines has such a licensing scheme. (Note: I am not sure whether local governments in Batanes continue to enforce this at present.)

activity in some parts of Batanes.[4] Many taboos and restrictions are known to surround its practice—such as, that there can be no distribution or sale of the catch until after the season of fishing. We can tell that the mataw-fishing activity has been going on over several centuries since in 1720 the Dominican priest Fr. Amado reported to his superiors on their food situation:

> *…There is very little fish and that is seasonal, and they did not want to sell it to us because they believe that if they gave us fresh fish they could not catch more fish so that the only fish we obtained was so dry and smoked that it was very difficult to eat. This is what follows from having been sent by God to a land characterized by an abundance of stones…* (Madrigal-Llorente 1983: 200)

The mataw fishers on Batan Island are still fishing in traditional fashion for arayu around Valugan Bay and Mananioy Bay, and are identified by the vanua that they belong to. The number of matawfishers at a vanua may change from season to season. Depending on reasons like convenience of the vanua to borrowed fields or whether they opt to pursue matawfishing for the season, a vanua in any given season may have only a handful of mataws to as many as 20. There are four vanuas or ports of fishers along the eastern coastline of the island that continue to perform the protocols of seasonal ritual for their vanua, as passed down from previous generations of fishers. Mataw fishing takes place in a meaningful seascape where fishing activities and technologies may be perceived as involving sensitive interaction with sentient creatures, and even as sacred or delicate acts conducted within a dangerous landscape charged with power.

II. Timescapes for Mataw Fishing

If one were to do a "history from below" of mataw fishing, then based on the

[4] Another very traditional seasonal fishing technique is *sumuho* or scoopfishing for flying fish at night (using torchlight, *suho*). This has somewhat declined in popularity however with the entrance of new gears for catching flying fish.

discussions of contemporary mataw fishing practice by local fishers and especially the mataw fishers themselves, I received the impression that there are at least two major "timescapes". One I would label "the time/scape of the *anitu*" representing the indigenous world of enchantment, and leadership based on ability or charisma (power to influence both man and nature). Another time/scape is that which would also generally be familiar as the era of "modernity" but which was more often described by the terms: "*civilized*" or "Christian already". There is no clear boundary in time and space between these eras ("anitu" vs. "Christian" or "*civilized*" or "modern"). Rather they are two "realms of power" that have been overlapping or co-existing in opposition to one another, and competing for dominance in practice for some time now, in the way that Aguilar (1998) portrays the cultural ambivalence of living in two colliding worlds that has been experienced by colonized Filipinos (a "Clash of Spirits"). I will endeavor to outline the character of each time/scape as well as relevant turning points in the history of matawfishing.

1. The Mythic Origins of Mataw Fishing Technology

When one inquires into when or how mataw fishing started, one is treated to stories of the mythic origins of the mataw technology. The technique to catching arayu or dorado is the use of a baitfish (a flying fish) that is alive. This is what fishermen say, and they tell stories of how dorado will chase the flying fish, overtake it and then execute a quick turn-around to bite it headfirst (which is why they position and tie their large hooks facing forward on the body of the fish). And the way to catch a live flying fish, is by means of a *yuyus*, which is a specially designed "hook". This hook has no barb. In previous times it would have been made of sharpened hard bamboo or goatbone (Hornedo 2000: 92). Attached firmly to a small piece of bamboo strip (so it looks like a sharp needle sticking out of a small piece of serrated wood [see Yamada 1967: 180 for an illustration]), this is in turn attached to a string connected to a buoy. One fisher related to me that the idea for the

hook was once upon a time thought of by a person walking by a thorny pandan plant. When this fisherman's shirt or raincoat (*kanayi*) was caught by this plant (there are thorns along the edge of the leaves), he saw how he could release it without damage. Folklore in Basco however tells that the *yuyus* was a secret technique of mataw fishing that was learned by the ancestors of today's generation of fishers from a strange fisherman named Mayo.

The Story of Mayo

Sabtang is well-known for having skilled makers of tataya (small fishing boat). One day there was a group of people making a tataya. They had cooked an animal and were eating and drinking together. Suddenly they noticed that the ground near the place where they had chopped wood was moving.

"Ready the axe and let us strike whatever comes out", said one.

But the person that emerged from out of the ground, shouted "stop!" And he said, "I am a fisherman like you." So they didn't harm him.

The strange person prepared his gear and looked for a place to fish. He tried all the vanuas of Sabtang. But he found none of them to his liking, so he went to Batan and tried all the places there. Of all the vanuas, he chose Chanpan.

The fishermen wondered at how the stranger's dibang (flying fish) would stay alive after being caught, and could be used as live bait for catching arayu (dorado). He was very good in catching fish (masagal).

They spied on him, trying to learn the secret. But he kept his yuyus [the hook for catching flying fish] hidden in his g-string (sagot). So they never saw it.

They tried getting him to drink wine with them but still could not learn the secret.

Then they wrestled with him (rakup). Finally he showed them the yuyus.

Mayo taught the fishers how to catch arayu and to do the things that they have to do so they would be 'able to catch many fish' (masagal). His 'instructions' (vidin) were that the fishers must 'make the vanua' (mayvanuvanua) before the fishing season begins. He said mataws must choose a leader to make the first fishing trip (umdinaw nu vanua). They must follow what the leader says so that the vanua will be 'clean', so all the fishers will be 'able to catch many fish'. He said that fishermen who do not follow the vidin will not be able to catch many fish and they may also have misfortune.

The next morning all the mataws went out to fish, Mayo among them. They saw him fishing in the open sea, but he never returned to shore.

(Valugan, Basco 1991)

According to this legend, apart from the yuyus, Mayo taught the fishers to do two other things in order to fish effectively. *Mayvanuvanua*, which literally means "making the port", is a sacrificial rite that commences the fishing season in early March. An Ivatan scholar casts it as the "ceremonial and ritual opening of the fishing port to obtain the favors of the spirit-dwellers of the sea" (Hornedo 2000: 110), or "buying the right" to use the port. While *umdinaw nu vanua (*"the launching of the port" in Hornedo's translation [2000: 110]), performed by the lead fisher, is the first boat going out to sea from the vanua after *mayvanuvanua*. As the story states, this leader leads in both senses of "going ahead" and of being the head/leader of the group.[5]

The implication of ritual practice is that a mataw fisher is part of a collective. Mataw fishers are identified with their vanua or port and are concerned with maintaining its "health" and "cleanness" by means of

[5] The words that the *mandinaw nu vanua* says, are to "call" or invite dorado and flying fish (the "fish of summer") to the vanua. The ritual speech lets the fish know that their vanua (as opposed to other vanuas) is "beautiful", "clean" and product of "cooperative" labor (Mangahas 2008).

"cooperation". The vanua is an association (quasi-corporate or seasonal) with a formal leadership structure. The leadfisher negotiates with the spirits; and he lays down the rules for human behavior (during fishing season). The sensitive "fish of summer" are described as fish that are "like anitu" or *machanitu,* and their feelings are easily hurt/"offended". In general, there is the sense that mataw fishing is an ancient way of doing things, and that it has to be done carefully and in consonance with precedents that have been set (imprinted in the landscape) by previous generations of people fishing.

Arguably the mataw ritual technology comprises a system of "indigenous resource management" (Mangahas 1994b, 2006). One example of a traditional "law" (*abtas)* that would relate to today's idea of "resource management" is the one that imposes a maximum quota for mataw fishers—traditionally, at most nine (9) fish per fishing trip can be taken home by any matawfisher. This rule is also phrased as a "taboo" [*dagen]*). It is mentioned below in another story about the origin of mataw fishing rites:

> *Story about the origin of mayvanuvanua in Diora*
>
> *A fisherman dreamt one night that he must visit his field because someone may be stealing from his coconut trees. The next day, he asked his wife to pack him some food. He said he would go to the forest to gather rattan for repairing their farm house (pañisanan). He went to the field and checked on his coconuts, but they were there, none missing.*
>
> *As he stood there, sounds came from the forest—"Teg! Teg!" The sound of hammering. He went closer to have a look. What he saw was a group of people building a tataya, there in the middle of the forest. But he could not recognize any face. He realized they must be anitus!*
>
> *He was afraid. But he thought to himself that he must also show himself since they had shown themselves to him. So he stepped out and let them see him.*
>
> *When they saw him, their leader said "our tataya will be lucky because an unexpected visitor has appeared!" Then the leader of the anitus told the*

people to give the fisherman something to drink. Now the fisherman really loved palek (sugarcane wine), but he was afraid. He sniffed it. It smelled like the real thing! Then he tasted it. It was just like the wine made in town! The anitu then gave him food. He tasted it. It was pork, tasting just like the food prepared in town!

"It seems you are a little bit tipsy already friend," the anitu told him.

"Would you like to use this tataya?"

"Yes!" he answered.

"Alright," they said, "but you will catch many fish, so you might as well start raising many pigs." They also told him, "don't worry about giving us our share (natay), we'll take care of it".

The fisherman was warned not to tell anyone where the tataya came from. And they also told him not to catch more than 9 arayu (dorado) in one fishing trip.

When the fisherman became very drunk already, the leader of the anitus instructed two other anitus to bring him back to where he lives, but they should not to go beyond the edge of the village (pais nu kavahayan). One anitu carried the pieces of pork that they had given to the fisherman, the other one carried the fisherman.

In less than 5 minutes they had reached the edge of the village. They left him there, and he went home. His wife asked him where he got the meat that he brought home. "I met our friends from Ivana planting uvi," he said, "they were feasting, so they gave this to me."

Come summertime the fisherman went down to the vanua and saw that the tataya was already there, with the oars tied, all ready for going out to sea.

The other fishermen wondered why he was so lucky and caught so many fish without much effort. They tried plying him with wine to tell the

secret, but he wouldn't.

One night the fisherman dreamt that he should visit Pandangan, a tall rock at the edge of the bay. So he went there. He was lifted up to the top of the cliff, as if by a crane. There he feasted with the anitu the whole day long. His wife asked him where he got the pork that he brought home afterwards. "I was carried by the current to Itbud, and the people who helped me gave me this," he answered.

But after many years, one day he admitted to his wife that the tataya had come from Mt. Iraya. The next day he found the tataya completely destroyed. He dreamt that the anitu would claim all his pigs, and that afterwards they would take him. All his pigs died. The fisherman was terrified but what could he do. The anitu said, "you are such a pitiful creature, you do not think." So they taught him, they told him that he must do mayvanuvanua using a pig, a motin [an ancient bluegreen bead], and copper or gold. And that is how the vanua was first "sacrificed for" (sinayang).

(narrated by Gregorio Cariaso, Diora, 1992)

The story above conveys many aspects of everyday life which will be found in Batanes to this day, like the culture of drinking and feasting together (and taking home food) on occasions such as building a boat or planting a field; the compulsory "share" (of the catch) for the owner or maker of a boat being used for fishing; the idea that an unexpected visitor may be a sign of good luck; the significance of dreams.

This story states that the instructions for "making the port" (*mayvanuvanua*) came directly from the *anitus*. *Anitus* are local environmental spirits or "ghosts" of the dead that may be present in the landscape. As they can cause misfortune (*disgrasya)* they have to be propitiated by means of sacrifice (a pig is killed during *mayvanuvanua)* which insures against human suffering. There tends to be more anitus in forests and wild places, and any time land is cleared and modified their

"ownership" is acknowledged and symbolically compensated with a share. One would also feel that the "ghosts" are part of every human gathering, because automatically they are always allotted their token share of sugarcane wine (or any alcoholic beverage consumed).[6] Anitus are just like people so friendships or cordial relations can be entered into with them, people can drink and eat with them, then they may help or give favors (under condition of secrecy or proper behavior), they may also take pity on the plight of poor humans that are unable to keep the terms of the deal. But even living people may gain invisible power and be said to be "like anitu" (*machanitu*). Such "knowledge" or *kasulivan,* includes how to perform rites of "cleaning" for collective success and welfare. Such knowledge would be an asset for leadership of the vanua. It may be learned from knowledgeable people or directly from the anitus.

Just as earlier people and ancestors have done, whatever the present generation will do has consequences for the affairs of people coming after

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[6] Even a few drops will do. "These sacrifices and libations were common and frequent practices; no festivity or celebration was considered complete in which the *anitos* had had no part", narrated some of the early visitors to Batanes—Dominican missionaries in the 17th c. (Gonzalez 1966:10). Planting time was a typical occasion, where the repast included the mataw product of dried *arayu* (dorado):

> *The planting season are the happiest days for them: after the farms have been prepared, on the given day, they invite their relatives, butcher a pig or some other animal, and while the old folks cook, the younger set to do the planting, a task that is not difficult and therefore does not take much time to finish; and with the cooked pork and around jars of palec [sugarcane wine] the abandon themselves to merrymaking. It is in such a manner that whole family circles spend some happy time. In ancient times they ate on such occasions the dorado or some other large fish so that the crops would be large like the fish. They also took a piece of sugar cane, and squeezing it, they sprinkled its juice over the newly-planted ube and reciting at the same time a prayer asking that the ube would be sweet as the juice of the sugarcane; and they left a small amount of palec in the farm to propitiate the anitos or duendes who live there. They also had many other superstitions which everyone performed according to his own way.* (Fr. Anastacio Idiogoras, O. P., quoted by Hornedo 1976: 81-82)

The end of the fishing season in June was said to mark the beginning of month-long festivities (Gonzales 1966: 13). See Hornedo (2000: 253-292) for an overview of "the world and the ways of the anitu".

them. Batanes is an "ancient place" whose landscape bears the imprint of the deeds and words of its ancestral inhabitants. Fishers who follow in their paths continue practices that have been repeated every year (per "instructions" rooted in legend) or risk suffering dangerous consequences. But each time tradition is reproduced they also start precedents for the chain of practices for the future. This is why the lead fisher has great power. *Mayvanuvanua,* the ritual to begin the season of fishing is highly charged as a potential turning point where dramatic changes may be instituted. (Some turning points in the history of mataw fishing will be enumerated further below.)

2. Timescapes in Conflict

From my first research visit to Batanes (October–November 1991 and in the summer of 1992), I was engaged in conversations about modernity and achieving the "disenchantment of the world". My inquiries elicited jokes and mixed emotions on the observance of taboos and the performance of ritual.

There was palpable dissonance with regard to the continued relevance of traditional practice. Their basic discomfort had to do with a felt anachronism—it appeared as somehow absurd that the performance of tradition (addressed to fish and to *anitu*) should still be performed today, in "Christian time" or "modern time". My inquiries in 1992 into the particularities of taboos and ritual produced emotional responses (embarassment, mockery) as well as exposed a quite rational discussion among them over the relevance and appropriateness of mataw traditions. The debate turned on suitable actions to take—whether to reproduce the old structures of meaning or not, or to transform them and keep to tradition in an innovative way, to stand by and effect a "great divide" with the past, or to find some other way to bridge "tradition" and "modernity". They did not use these terms though, but echoing the discourse of missionaries and colonial authorities, many fishers stated that the present time is "civilized

already" ("*civilized na"*) or Christianized already ("*Kristiano na"*). Many translated traditional practice, or "*kapatchanitu",* into the English words "*belief*" or "*superstition"*, and there was some ethnocentric comparison with the "backwardness" of the other vanuas. (I would like to say "backward" in the sense that these actions are "outdated" in the way that wearing fashions from our grandparent's time would seem out-of-place and funny in the present.)

The potential power of the anitu was not really in question however. In fact the risk of not reproducing tradition was very seriously considered, tragic accidents at a particular vanua are recalled within living memory which were associated with not following ritual protocols and which reinforce the performance of tradition. As some matawfishers expressed it to me, their problem in their vanua was how to properly effect transition out of traditional practice without drawing catastrophic consequences. This amounted to a delicate transition, or "*phase-out",* between two worlds of meaning and power. If they try to do it carefully, a fisher stated, it is possible to change things or "phase in" to the new time/scape "without the anitu noticing". Stories behind landmarks associated with anitus are still tangible and historical evidence of the power of anitus. Although some also observed that this power seems to be somewhat on the wane. One fisher had put it to me in 1992: "the anitus are growing older, they are becoming forgetful." It is also said that individual fishers are not as "knowledgeable" as before; the *machanitu* are now scarce. Or that the legendary mataw fishers that were famous for possessing certain kinds of knowledge seem to have no clear heirs among the fishers today. Tradition's own demise had been brought about in this manner in at least one vanua by a charismatic First Fisher in the 1970s; in this vanua, tradition came to an abrupt end and on my first meeting with their group I heard locals speak nervously and mockingly of the vanua using "heretical" language.[7]

[7] E.g. that he would dare to "defecate" on the vanua and nothing would happen to his luck in fishing.

It struck me that contemporary fishers were sometimes consciously preparing for moments where they make choices among alternative power realms, and initiate change—sometimes revolutionary change. In fact they evinced awareness of a specific reality as *socially constructed* and maintained by individual and collective action, i.e. the observance of traditional practice, much in the way that paths continue to exist because of the passage of the feet of succeeding generations treading in exactly the same place. As many Ivatans pointed out to me: in the ritual act "things are said", which "do things" to the landscape. I appreciated that ritual traditions maintain on the Ivatan landscape the original imprint of the very first fishers. But what this also means is that tradition itself contains procedures for transition, to routinely set new precedents. It could even be the way to bring about "modern" seascapes (i.e. open-access).

On the other hand, the value of tradition also reemerged in the context of concrete gear conflicts, between mataws and users of newly introduced technology like drift nets, from the experience of which it could be seen how the mataw system of collective ritual technology effectively regulated other fishing methods besides mataw fishing within a particular fishing ground, and did this in a flexible manner adaptive to the specific ecological complexity of fishing in Batanes (see Mangahas 2006).

How "modernity" came to Batanes was through the colonization experience that the Ivatans shared to some extent with other parts of the Philippine archipelago. The outcome was the Batanes province as a place of indigenous, but not minoritized, people.

3. Modern Time/Scape: Ivatans as Filipinos

The history of Batanes parallels the colonial experience in other provinces of the Philippines which resulted in a mainstream or "lowland Filipino culture". Ivatans underwent the transformations of Philippine society under Spanish colonization leading to a predominantly Catholic lowland populace settled "under the church bells". Ivatans have participated in the Philippine

revolution against the Spanish, and in the resistance to the Japanese during World War II.[8]

When the English explorer and privateer William Dampier first came upon the islands in the 17th century, he found there a people inordinately fond of drinking sugarcane wine also called "*bashi*" and forthwith named one of the islands Bashi Island[9] (Dampier 1973). Dampier observed that the people in the islands lived in small villages of low-roofed houses that were built on the steep side and tops of rocky hills. According to his account, they had crops of bananas, pineapples, pumpkins, cotton, sugarcane, and a "great plenty" of yams and rootcrops. They were dressed simply—g-string for men and tube skirt for women—and wore earrings of gold. They knew how to work iron and were interested to trade for it. They had small boats built of narrow planks connected by wooden pins. (This is the basic boat technology of the *tataya* still in use today for mataw fishing [see Yamada 1967: 173].) Among Dampier's observations were the enforcement of a system of laws with severe penalties for crimes like theft.[10]

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[8] Recently an opinion columnist pointed to a Taiwanese academic who has suggested that Batanes was not covered in the Treaty of Paris wherein the Spanish crown ceded its colonial territories to the US (Abaya 2007). Legal experts have taken issue with this suggestion (Batongbacal 2007) most importantly citing the fact that Batanes has always been administered as part of "Philippine" territory and its citizens have participated actively as Filipinos in various historical moments.

[9] The area of islands between Taiwan and Luzon is labeled the "Bashiic" culture area in linguistics. The Bashiic region includes the island known as Botel Tobago, Yami or Orchid Island that came to be within Taiwanese territory. Fishing for migratory fish is also an important part of their culture, where mataw fishing is termed *macharayo* (e.g. Hsu 1982: 121).

[10] Other early accounts report that for stealing the punishment was payment for the stolen property or "if he was unable to do so, he became the slave of the aggrieved party, or of the man who undertook to pay in his stead" (Gonzalez 1966: 11). It was cause for concern for the Dominican missionaries that came later that divorce was allowed, although penalized by loss of property or dowry. Considered a very serious crime was poisoning by witchcraft, which was punishable by death by stoning or hanging. The literature relates that pre-colonial Ivatan society had a social hierarchy of ranks or classes based on wealth. Chiefs called "*manpus*" headed communities, and independent subordinate officials were called "*mapolon*". Sometimes there were inter-village wars wherein the people retreated to hilltop fortresses called *idiang*. The people of Batanes also practiced primary jar burial in

Dominican missionaries came to Batanes starting from 1686 and through persistent efforts (the first batches kept perishing from illness and inability to adjust to harsh conditions) eventually brought about the annexation of the islands by Spain in 1783. It was the last province to be annexed to the Philippines. The subordination of the population was instituted through changes in manner of dressing, settlement, house construction, and the abolition of the old authority structure.[11] Under Spanish rule the Ivatans were forcefully resettled or "reduced" to towns established along coastal plains. However it became evident to the colonial government that there was little to be gleaned for Spain from the islands' limited agricultural production and mineral resources in terms of tribute even as treasury money was being lost on the remote province. At government subsidy, large boats (*pontines)* constructed by the Dominicans in Batanes, with a maximum loading capacity of 300 cavans of palay, made yearly trips to ferry provisions from Manila and Ilocos (Gonzales 1966: 103). The Dominicans tried several times to transfer the inhabitants to areas that were less difficult and easier to supervise. In 1722, after a famine that followed the typhoon season, they attempted to transport 28 people to Calayan Island in the Babuyan Islands but the boat capsized, only two survived. In 1741, they resettled Ivatans in Kamalaniugan, Cagayan; who later all went back to Batanes. Even after 1800, Mindoro was proposed as another possible relocation site. The Dominicans were able to persuade the King to maintain the unprofitable outpost, and this lasted until 1898, as the

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large earthenware jars (Solheim 1960, Manuel 1953). Archaeological studies of many burial sites have recently been conducted by the Archaeological Studies Program in the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Important features of the landscape relate with a pattern of temporary "fieldhouses" and of small settlements on the hills, with access to springs or sources of water, within fleeing distance of the *idiang,* as well as convenient to a port (or *vanua)* (Mangahas 1994a).

[11] Which met with some resistance such as that organized by Aman Dangat of Sabtang in 1791, which was put down and punished by execution and forced labor, and by the resettlement of the entire population of the island of Sabtang in Ivana. These people were allowed to return to Sabtang after some 40 years passed, on the condition that "the houses should not be built on the mountain tops but in the lowlands" (Madrigal-Llorente 1983: 98).

Philippine revolution broke out, Katipuneros landed in Basco and dispatched the priests off to Cagayan (Hornedo 1976: ix).

Under American rule, the Batanes islands were administered as a municipality of Cagayan province. However it was seen that they suffered from neglect in geographic isolation, and so the ten islands were given independent status as a separate province in 1909, which made it the smallest province in the Philippines. The American administration introduced public school education in English, and more transport and communications facilities, including a Long Range navigation base or LORAN station (now dismantled). Batanes was the first area occupied by Japanese forces on the day they declared war on America, December 8, 1941.

Today the province continues to depend on supplies coming from the mainland for some crucial needs like rice, which has become the staple. National Food Authority (NFA) rice is the main cargo in the hold of commercial and navy boats coming to Batanes in the summer. The province retains self-sufficiency in other foods in the diet especially protein (fish, pigs, cows) but also imports a lot of other things. Notoriously, one of the most important imports is gin.

The Spanish had introduced cattle-raising, and together with garlic and onions, which were first planted in 1786, these became the main sources of cash for Batanes. The first big shipload of garlic sent from Batanes to Manila was in 1892. These are still important exports today, but garlic has been severely affected by globalization and the opening of the Philippines through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which resulted to the flooding of local markets with very cheap garlic (e.g. from Taiwan). As before, most Ivatans are farmers. Yams and other rootcrops, garlic and cattle, sugarcane for wine and vinegar are locally grown. However a high rate of out-migration keeps the population fairly constant or growing only slightly each year. In contemporary population movements, Batanes is more of a point of origin rather than a destination (except for some tourists and government workers assigned there). Most young people of Batanes

eventually leave their islands for Manila or abroad either for further education or to seek other gainful occupations. The literacy rate of the province is high.

4. "Turning Points" in Vanua Histories

With mataw fishing between these two broad eras or "timescapes", attention can be focused on specific cases and events occurring between the 1940s to the present that can be read as "turning points" in the history of specific vanuas of mataws—moments when local agency in response to specific constraints and pressures have enabled innovation within existing structures, modification and reinterpretation of rules or structures, even sometimes nothing less than a revolutionary "paradigm shift". We see here evidence not so much of the "impact" of technological innovation, or commoditization, or the expanding reach of the nation-state, or other similar developments, all of which are relevant processes, but more the way in which local people bring about both change and continuity.

What follows is a list of cases of significant mataw events dating to the following years: 1943, 1960, 1970s, 1989, 1993 and that I have gathered from oral accounts and documents.

(1) March 14, 1943/Manichit vanua mataws affix signatures to a written statement of their laws.

The document is written in Ivatan. March 14 is most likely the day of *mayvanuvanua*. This is evidence of a formal organization of the fishers of the vanua, and one could say that its format is quite "modern". The leader is called the "President".

The document is first concerned to state that:

> *Every year at the beginning of the fishing season, all the members shall meet in order to discuss what is good for the vanua. And after the season is over, there shall be another meeting in order to review the problems or defects that might have occurred. The elected president shall preside over the meeting. [A]nyone who is unable to come should send a*

representative in order to avoid the penalty.

The penalties are money fines (P0.10 for being absent, P0.50 for leaving without permission). Another rule is that it is the duty of members to help other fishers that may be in trouble out at sea. No one may touch the fishing equipment or steal the bait supply of another fisher. The fourth rule forbids placing "dirt" such as money or fish bones on a fisher's boat (these are seen as jinxes). The last rule states that "The President shall say when the vanua shall be dismantled and usually this shall be on the 31st of May." It ends invoking (the Christian) God's help.

(2) March 12, 1960/Revision of March 14, 1943 document in Manichit vanua.

The earlier document is revised. Penalty fine amounts are increased. There is a provision that the mataw's helper (manala—usually he comes to meet a fisher to help carry the catch home), should also help other fishers in case they need help coming ashore. Most of the text is lifted from the 1943 document, plus there is a sentence written in English: "10th of March will be the first meeting of all member of the Manichit."

(3) 1960s/Tragic rockslide at Maratay vanua kills 4 youths waiting for mataws.

Persons in their 60s in Mahatao in the 1990s had very strong memories about this event, which happened when they were perhaps in their 20s. There were several youths hanging around at the vanua, sitting in the shade of the cliff while waiting for the mataws to come home. They were going to help the mataws carry the catch home (*manala*). One of them got something in his eye, so he went to the sea to wash it out. As he was there he heard a rumble, turned and saw just rubble where his friends had been. He was the only one to survive. The townfolk of Mahatao went to the vanua and retrieved the bodies in a long funeral procession back to town. The tragedy was blamed on improper *mayvanuvanua* rites, some even thought the wrong kind of animal was sacrificed that year.

(4) 1970s/President of Itbud vanua discontinues *mayvanuvanua*.

Sometime in the 1970s the mataws of Itbud selected to be *mandinaw nu vanua* or leadfisher a man that had been based for some years in the neighboring island of Sabtang while working as a government employee. Since coming back to Itbud he had been fishing there and because he was a good fisher (*masagal*, able to catch many fish) he was elected to be the *mandinaw nu vanua* or President. As the President, he declared there would be no *Mayvanuvanua* to "make the port" for the season—full stop. Because the fishing turned out to be successful that season and there were no accidents, mayvanuvanua was never held again. The radical landscape change made the way for technological transformations in fishing in Itbud. Now many boats are motorized, some have been enlarged to use for "driftnet" fishing for flying fish while mataw fishing for arayu seems to have declined in popularity. Meanwhile the former leader of the mataws went on to become the Vice-Mayor of Uyugan and is currently still very active in local politics.

An Itbud fisher commented, the present period is no longer sensitive, "there are no more taboos". There was a radical "paradigm shift" in local explanatory models for fishing success and misfortune. Comparing the current order in Itbud with that among the Mahatao mataws', in 1995 an Itbud fisher summarized this to me as follows:

> *Here, it is "civilized" already. The old fishers already died, that's why there's no more payañiañitu ["anitu stuff"] in fishing. But in Mahatao it doesn't go away. They even prohibit other fishers from going there to use drift nets. There, if you don't catch anything, you have to talk to the vanua. Here you just were "unlucky" ("malas").*

(5) March 12, 1989/Members of the "Valugan Port Chapter" of the Basco Fishermen-Farmers" Association approve "A resolution prescribing rules and regulations governing fishing operations within the Tudaw-Achip fishing grounds at Valugan, Basco, Batanes and prescribing penalties for violation thereof."

This resolution was aimed at resolving a gear conflict between mataw

fishers and those using drift nets to catch flying fish. Note the date of this document: March 12 (time of *mayvanuvanua*). The "Valugan Port Chapter" of the BFFA is actually the same as the Chan-paan vanua. This document was filed with the Batanes Development Foundation, Inc. (an Non-governmental organizations), which was also advising the association. The whole document is written in English. It states that the association "is committed to preserve harmony among all fishermen fishing in the Rudaw-Achip fishing grounds and thus maintain peace and unity conducive to progress and development". The first rule states that:

> *No fisherman or group of fishermen are allowed to catch flying fish with nets in areas where other fishermen particularly the "mataw" are catching flying fish for dorado (arayu) bait…*

The second rule prohibits fishing with nets beyond the designated area "before May 15 of every year" (Penalty P100.00).

The third rule states, "That all fishermen fishing in the areas shall follow all instructions, or directions given or made by the leading fisherman who was designated to make the first fishing trip mandinaw nu vanua) pursuant to traditional fishing practices in the area."

Lastly the last rule warns that vandalizing a boat or fishing gear will merit a fine of P100.00 or replacement of the gear or both.

(6) May 3, 1993/The Municipality of Mahatao passes Ordinance No. 03-03 "Regulatory Ordinance for the preservation of cultural and traditional method of fishing during the months of March, April and May".

The date of this ordinance is towards the end of the fishing season. It is also intended to address a gear conflict between mataw and drift net fishing in Mananioy Bay. But in this case the driftnet was deployed by a matawfisher also. Fishers from two vanuas in Mahatao (Maratay and Diora) were involved in the conflict. The unanimously passed ordinance (written in English) states that:

> *It is strictly prohibited for any "matao" to use gill nets or any method*

other than the traditional way of catching flying fishes which are being used as baits for the migratory dorados on both sides of the restricted area indicated herein.

Any fishers aside from "mataos" are prohibited to cast their gillnets intended for flying fishes inside the area herein described from Dispo Creek running perpendicular to an intersecting area between Mangavato and Pandangan pts. Gill net restrictions on this area shall be from the month of March, April and May. All other months are not covered by this restriction.

The penalty is P500.00, going up to P2,500 and imprisonment for several offenses.

One will notice that the events above turn on public occasions, as evidenced by the dates, during the *mayvanuvanua* ritual performances.[12]

III. Epilogue

"Development" in Batanes has been fairly rapid since the late 1980s. There was electricity, cable TV, and radio in the 1990s, and today Ivatans also have access to internet and celsites. Batanes is still however somewhat remote in that the only frequent mode of transport into the province is by air (small airplane 3x a week) and summer trips by chartered boats. The provincial governor had to give up his dream of an "all weather port" able to house seagoing vessels year-round and export produce directly to Taiwan. There is increasing mechanization in fishing, however mataw fishing continues to be powered by oars and continues to limit the access of other gears on the east or Valugan side of Batan Island (by right of tradition).

The landscape has also been redefined several times: since 1993 the

[12] Rosaldo (1989: 17) discusses ritual as a 'busy intersection': a point where distinct social processes, historical processes and various 'positioned subjects' meet. This informs and determines how a ritual will be conducted, the way individuals participate, as well as the continuing performance of the ritual itself. Given a longer historical perspective, the performance of a specific (ritual) event at a particular time may also be seen to be a 'pivotal conjuncture' (e.g. Aguilar 1998: 9).

province was declared as the "Batanes Protected Landscapes and Seascapes" under the IPAS (Integrated Protected Area System). With its picturesque old houses of lime and cogon and the villages established during the Spanish colonial time, it had also been vying for recognition as a UNESCO Heritage site. The Ivatans are also recognized as an Indigenous People entitled to claim for Ancestral Domain under the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997. Meanwhile one area being prominently developed is tourism, photographers visit Batanes every summer and its photogenic shorelines each year find their way to the frontpage of national broadsheets. There are also many travel documentaries of Batanes.[13] In fact, *mayvanuvanua* ritual has been featured several times. One established spot for tourists to visit is the "traditional fishing village" of matawfishers. It turns out that tradition has value as a form of capital in the modern time/scape.

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[13] My most recent visit to Batanes was in summer of 2003, I accompanied a TV documentary crew. The documentary *Gintu ng Dagat* (Gold of the Sea) (GMA 7, I-witness) featured the Coastguard patrol catching Taiwanese poachers on highly modernized vessels, juxtaposed with traditional matawfishing on their small boats, using oars and hooks and lines as before.

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