The Visayan Male Barkada: Manly Behavior and Male Identity on a Philippine Island

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As an anthropologist, I have come to Southeast Asia, at least intellectually, from South America. In terms of gender, it would be difficult to find a greater ideological contrast than the one that lies between the displayed, almost theatrical machismo of the Criollos (the Venezuelan peasants) and the seeming unassertiveness, the encouraged shyness and public embarrassment to which, among the Philippine lowland Christians, Tagalog speakers refer as hiya and Cebuano speakers as ka-ulaw.

When actual behavior comes into focus, however, the contrast weakens. As I wrote the first version of this article à chaud, so to speak, in the heat of my latest fieldwork experience in the central Visayas, I was able to point out the discrepancy between ideology and behavior to a couple among my urbanized Boholano informants. I elicited reactions that strikingly differed along gender lines. The man laughed; the woman sighed. And she let escape a sort of resigned "Sus Ginoo!" ("Lord Jesus"), while he—triumphant and tautological—uttered in English an irrefutable "Men are men," that he seemed to propose as both explanation and justification.

Many observers, nonetheless, have noted the relatively favorable position that women enjoy throughout Southeast Asia, in particular "their private and domestic autonomy" (Pertierra 1988, 43). But, once more, this does not translate into the wider political sphere where "men control public affairs" (Pertierra 1988, 43).

But then one can wonder. The "Men are men" of my male informant may not have been as clear a statement as it may have seemed at first. How is it possible for "men to be men" when there seems to be a double cultural and social prevention against it, when on the one hand the ideology is, if not exactly gender-blind, at least myopic and when on the other hand women "often control domestic property and exercise considerable autonomy over their personal
lives and those of their dependents" (Pertierra 1988, 43)? While a full-fledged cultural critique, likely to be enlightening, remains beyond the scope of the present article, one can wonder whether indeed, somewhere along the complex process of enculturation and socialization, something did not come and produce interferences, whether there might not be a sort of supplement, a kind of manhood booster that in males comes and counteracts both the gentlest trends of gender ideology and the sedate double-barrelled teachings of family and school. In the subtle and complex concatenation of social institutions and cultural phenomena that articulate and mold the manhood of men, the male barkada of course, does not constitute the only link, but I am suggesting that it constitutes an important one.

I have a sort of two-tiered understanding of what a Visayan male barkada is, which only reflects the history of my own personal involvement with the central part of the Philippine archipelago known as Region VII or the Central Visayas.

My initial understanding of the barkada derives in large part from my earlier Visayan experience of 1980-81, the bulk of which I gained in the rural environment of a fishing barangay (village) on the island of Siquijor (see Dumont 1992). The word itself was so frequently and casually used then by Siquijorians, irrespective of gender, age, class, residence, religion and politics, that I could hurriedly formulate what a male barkada stood for: Visayan males, first as boys, then as men and well into their old age, belong to and participate actively in such informal, but class-bound and long-lasting gendered groups of coevals.

That was the quiet province-island of Siquijor then. But now, in 1992-93, I have gone back to the field. I have briefly revisited Siquijor. As far as the male barkada is concerned, little has changed there, except that the wheel of time has turned: a new generation has come of age and youngsters who used to call me "Uncle," now opt for "Grand-Pa." But the bulk of my work this time takes place on the province-island of Bohol and in an urban environment, that of the provincial capital, the port city of Tagbilaran, that boasts of some 55,000 permanent residents augmented during daytime by some 30,000 "transients," as one municipal councilor (Kagawad ng Sangguniang Panglungsod) calls the mass of suburban commuters.

As could be expected, there were striking differences between the two islands. On Siquijor, it was specifically the seeming omnipresence of the barkada, the informality of its pervasiveness, its obvious-
ness, its matter-of-fact quality that struck me most. On Bohol, it was the reverse. Looking for data on barkada, I have had difficulties finding persons to talk to me on this topic. Barkada as such has not vanished, but city men remain discreet about this grouping, and the more so as one climbs the social ladder. More disturbingly, when I pressed my informants, I obtained widely differing answers. Some were visibly happy to talk about their involvement in their own barkada. Others however found it a vaguely embarrassing topic of conversation.

Were we speaking of the same thing, of the same cultural entity? The rest of this article is an attempt at comparing the male barkada as social institution and cultural phenomenon in these differing contexts.

The Visayan Male Barkada

Taking a definition of the male barkada as point of departure allows me to realize that, on both islands, we are indeed referring to similar groups of males, in fact of intimate friends, who gathered together regularly and spent an inordinate amount of time together, mostly for the pleasure of it. In the process, not only were long-lasting bonds created between these males but male stereotypes were thoroughly reinforced. Among a multiplicity of possible definitions, this one may guide the early stage of our inquiry.

But let me ponder the very word, barkada. I had heard it repeated again and again on Siquijor and I had presumed that it was a bona fide Visayan word. It appeared indeed in Wolff’s compilation (1972) where it receives a thorough and perhaps overdignified treatment. As a noun, it refers to “people one goes around with,” while as a verb, it is translated as “to go around together.” Had I been a little less unsuspecting in my initial consultation, I would have noticed that Wolff’s examples also gave more alarming glosses, not only “gang mates” but also “cronies,” with whatever supplementary semantic load this latter word might have acquired in the Philippine context during the Marcos years. I should also have noticed under the same rubric Wolff’s (1972) mention of the adjective barkadur, truly a giveaway that he translates as “fond of going around with one’s gang.”

My inability, however, to locate the word in any earlier dictionary of Visayan such as that of the Jesuit Matheo Sanchez (1711) or
of the Augustinian Recollect Juan Félix de la Encarnación (1885) came as a shock. The word was not there simply because it had a triple historical quality that disqualified it as a potential entry: it was a borrowing; it was a slang word; and it developed in the 1950s. It is fair to say that only a select few among educated Visayan speakers seem to be aware of this exogenous past.

As a borrowing, the word has followed a tortuous path, for Cebuano (and its Boholano variant) borrowed it from Tagalog, which had already borrowed it from Spanish. The original Spanish barcada (itself a derivation of the word barco, "boat") is a feminine noun that can be translated either as "passage in a boat" or as "boat-load."

Now two series of events seem to have contributed to the transformation of the Spanish barcada into a Tagalog barkada. The first has to do with criminal justice in the Philippines. Even before the 1950s (and as a matter of fact, still today) men convicted of serious crimes, such as murderers, could not be incarcerated for the duration of their sentence in their respective provinces where correctional facilities often were rudimentary. Regular shipments or barcadas of these heavy offenders were made by province or by region to the National Penitentiary of Muntinlupa at the southernmost confines of Metro Manila. Upon arrival, they were segregated by brigades according to provincial origin, so that members of a same brigade spoke the same language. As anyone can appreciate, this experience was likely to result in a strong male-bonding between the convicts of any given barcada. Upon their release from prison, most ex-cons settled in the Tondo area (near the north harbor of Manila proper) and, unfortunately but not unexpectedly, many among them became gang members. Looking for the company and support of others having had the same life trajectory, they regrouped according to ethnic and linguistic origins, by what had been at one point barcadas (with a c) and had now become barkada (with a k). The word barkada therefore came to designate gangs made up of ex-cons who had been thrown into the same boat together, at first literally by the action of Philippine justice and later metaphorically by fate and inertia. The Sigue-sigue constitute a contemporary Visayan example of such gangs. At the time, however, the word was confined to the argot of the underworld.

Then came the glamorous 1950s. In the United States, for those who can remember, there was a movie cult figure who captured the imagination of the young by expressing the teenage existential angst of the times. With proper Hollywood orchestration, the event did not
remain confined to the American scene, but, with great abandon, spilled over the borders. The Philippine spectators were not last in line, and teenage gangs gave a little zap to the James Dean mood. The Tagalog film industry could not let such an occasion pass without translating such a fever into its own idiom. In a moving "reportage on crime" entitled "Gun duel at LVN," the Philippine novelist and essayist Nick Joaquin (1977, 44-56), writing under the pen name of Quijano de Manila (1977, 48) notes that "the Philippine public had no definite image of the teen-ager until Pablo Santiago made a movie called 'The Lo-Waist Gang' [; that was in 1956." Released in 1957 by Premiere Productions, "The Lo-Waist Gang" was, despite its English title, a Tagalog-speaking film which made its teenage actors famous, not only Fernando Poe Jr., Bobby Gonzales, and the rolypoly and ill-fated Boy Sta. Romana, but above all the James Dean's Filipino look-alike who bore the unlikely name of Zaldy Zshornack. Struck by the permeability between filmic fiction and real life, Nick Joaquin remarks that "off the screen, the Lo-Waisters continued to be a compact gang, together in their drinking, together in their joyriding, together in their brawls" (de Manila 1977, 50).

"The Lo-Waist Gang" turned out to be a hit, the most popular of the barkada movies. Still in the same author's (de Manila 1997, 48) words,

[. . . a]most at once, what had seemed so mysterious became a cliche.

The movie fixed the type of the Philippine teen-ager. It was all there: the fringe of hair worn like a plume of honor, the low-waist pants, the unlaced rubber shoes with the tongues hanging out. [. . .] And the movie put on record such teen-age practices as the 1-2-3, the rumble, and the gate-crashing at parties.

As an additional consequence to the success of the film, the word barkada sprang out from confinement within the underworld argot of its origins to gain total exposure in the Philippine street slang of the urban youth subculture of the time.

What made all this possible in the Philippines is that it coincided with a massive ideological demobilization of the young. President Magsaysay had then broken the back of the Huk rebellion. Luis Taruc surrendered in 1954 and Ramon Magsaysay met his untimely death in 1957. His dull successor, President Garcia—CPG as my
Boholano friends call him affectionately—was "no more successful in restoring peace in central Luzon than in his attempts to eradicate graft and corruption" (Agoncillo 1975, 273). Alas, there was nothing even remotely charismatic either in his person or in his policies, nothing to rekindle in the eyes of the young the ideological flame. With little to look for and no ideological glow on the political horizon, the young turned inward, to themselves, and their barkada flourished.

Reflecting a few years later on the passage of the word from Spanish to Tagalog, Quijano de Manila (1980, 13) resolutely anchors the phenomenon in the Philippine past, and in so doing interestingly sheds a more symbolic than historical light on the borrowing:

Two of the most characteristic words of the 1950s and '60s—kanto boy and barkada—are both based on Spanish, though Spaniards would be stumped by the meanings those words have for us. Kanto as a word for street corner is almost unknown among modern Spaniards, who say esquina instead. What's revived in barkada is even more bemusing. The Spanish word for gang is pandilla; but when we preferred to adapt barkada, which means boatload, were we consciously moved by the memory of a time when being together in a boat made people not simply co-passengers but near-kinsmen, almost brothers, pledged to live and work together, to fight and die for each other? That was the idea of the barangay; and our young folk have re-expressed, in a Spanish word, an ancient Malay concept. The revival is not merely nominal. Are we not shocked by the fanatic devotion of our boys to their barkada? Have we not heard them say that the barkada is more important than parents or sweetheart or family, and that to fail it is the unpardonable crime? In seeking to understand why our sons place the barkada above home and family, we may have failed to go back far enough for an explanation—back to the barangay where we all began, the barangay that lives again today in the barkada.

This strong sense of group solidarity (alas that it remains only that!) is emphasized in barkada argot, principally in terms like ka-rancho, another Spanish-based word more commonly used now as chokoran, and katatak, which again returns us to the past with its idea of a group identity expressed in identical tattoo markings, a rite Visayans have revived among modern Tagalogs.

Thus, at least in its origin, a barkada is an entirely male institution so that speaking in that early context of a male barkada would be pleonastic. That these early groups were not just tranquil awareness, or sensitivity-raising discussion groups, is made amply clear by
Nick Joaquin (1980, 13) who states a few sentences later in the same essay: "When a barkada has an atrazo, that means trobol ..." and "But a barkada's chief foe is always the law, represented by the policeman, who is known as lespo, alat, or . . . parak" (1980: 14). In short, the early barkada excelled at capturing the perpetually renewed unease du jour with which politically demobilized youth lived their adolescence.10

It took no time at all for the Tagalog barkada to travel south and to reach the Visayan cities. The passage from Tagalog to Cebuano simply followed the distribution of the film. In that passage, however, and in the lengthier process of filtering down from the urban centers to smaller towns and ever deeper into the rural depths of the provinces, the tough-guy aspect of the barkada, its ingredient of deviancy, the social threat of its rebellious content, considerably mellowed. With the cumulative effect of distance and duration, it was difficult to perceive in any barkada observed on Siquijor in the 1980s the imprint of its origins.

I have an unforgettable memory of one of my earliest encounters with the phenomenon. The scene takes place in 1980 on the island of Siquijor. It was a Saturday in the late hours of the morning when two jeeploads of raucous and no longer sober males arrived from the poblacion (the town proper) of Lazi and "took over"—I cannot think of another verb—the beach front in the sitio (hamlet) of Camingawan. Far from being teenaged pranksters, these were paunchy, ordinarily conservative and otherwise respectable, middle-aged, middle-class men, who proceeded for the rest of the day to boss local residents around, dispatching this one for beer and rum, that one for cigarettes and matches, demanding fresh fish that they wanted to eat kinilaw ("raw") and sinugba ("grilled") and a cooking pot for stewing a dog, a sort of semiritual meal that these men seemed to have relished preparing and consuming together, away from their wives, just between men who could tell endlessly endless off-colored jokes, but also could act in a totally unguarded way with each other. As I was to learn soon from my exasperated neighbor in the hamlet, this was Raymund Uy's barkada. Raymund Uy was a wealthy merchant as well as a politically important power-broker in town, about whom my neighbor in the hamlet, Auntie Diding who rarely minced her words, had an altogether low opinion. She did not hold in much better esteem any of his cronies, most of whom held official sinecures in town and spent the most of their afternoons sleeping away their lives or gambling at a mahjong table.
This was what had come of these men who had been young together in the late 1950s. It was the earliest barkada in town, still active. I was told by one of them in English that “they had pledged each other mutual support and friendship,” but could never figure out what this exactly meant nor whether it had a precise meaning for that particular informant. At one level, these people were offensive because of their insensitivity to their lower-class barangay neighbors. At another level, it was amusing to see the persistence of forms whose meaning had long disappeared, even though they maintained, forcefully and noisily, the ideological discourse of their youth. There had been indeed a time when they had learned to establish their solidarity as male teenagers against women and elders, a time when they had manifested partly in fantasy, partly in reality, their temporarily rebellious identity, a time when they had questioned the authority of their family and society from within the securizing togetherness of their barkada. But it was a bit ironical to see them in the 1980s extolling the virtues of barkada solidarity, acting as antifamily family men or as antibourgeois pillars of the establishment, and pooh-poohing the values of which they were by then the main defenders and principal beneficiaries.

What enraged Auntie Diding most, however, was not that these men were making fools of themselves nor that they were setting a bad example for local boys and men, but that she and her neighbors let themselves get involved with the townsmen’s little power games which they would not have been able to get away with in town, in their milieu, in the midst of their family, simply because the authority of their respective wives was much too strong. As a matter of fact, escaping the authority of their wives was indeed the main reason for their male presence in the barangay. Yet it was not enough to place some distance between their female-dominated home and themselves, but in order to assert their maleness they also needed to place behavioral distance, if I may say so. This, of course, implied breaking a number of home taboos: they drank and told dirty jokes, precisely because this would have been intolerable whether with their asawa (wives) or even, although to a lesser extent, with their kabit (mistresses). The clearest way yet for them to ritualize male behavior was in exercising what they would have done only indirectly and with proper restraint in town, namely authority. On the beach, far from their wives whose approval, for once, they did not have to meet, they could boss around to their hearts’ content the local rural proletariat who hurried to comply with the
understandable servility of clients obliging their patrons. Auntie Diding saw that and disliked it.

But she hated even more the other ways in which the townsmen asserted their male identity. Certainly the men were at an age when it was flattering to exhibit to the bedazzled eyes of one's envious friends, the youth, beauty and desirability of one's kabit, also known in local English as "the other woman." But, whether because of passion or reason, the townsmen of Raymund Uy's barkada had come by themselves. They were hungry, however, and this entailed cooking.

While the bulk of daily cooking falls upon women, some specific preparations definitely belong to the male domain. Examples of these male specialties are the kinilaw (a dish of raw foods seasoned with coconut vinegar and spices) or the litson (a pig or chicken roasted whole over charcoals). As for the iro (dog), men often talk about it and it is certainly commonly eaten in other parts of the Philippines, but I have never seen this dish prepared or served in the Visayas in other circumstances than among a group of males, temporarily disengaged from their family commitments. In short, the iro is not part of the ordinary Visayan menu, but is a sort of supermale delicacy, seemingly semiritualized, as its preparation and consumption exclude children and females.

I must admit that it was almost comical to see Pidio Igbos, an underling of Raymund Uy's barkada, roaming around the barangay with the gravity of a plenipotentiary minister in quest of a peasant who would sell him a dog to be subsequently butchered, simmered and ingurgitated by his friends on the beach. Auntie Diding vehemently complained that cooked dog was disgusting and left such a stink and aftertaste to her pots that she could not use them for days after. She may have threatened to withdraw her permission, but in the end she was not in a position to refuse to lend her kitchenware to Raymund Uy's men who therefore proceeded with their canine goals. And she certainly hated them for that.

All happened as if the consumption of dog meat was indeed the climax of the male behavior of the townsmen's barkada, as if in sharing in that semiritual meal, each and every member of the barkada had recommitted himself to the shared male identity of their youth that family life in general and their wives in particular constantly undermined. So the men on the beach front behaved as they did mainly—or even perhaps only—to reassert their maleness in a setting in which they were free to do so since they were away from
the domestic authority and surveillance of their wives, and free to play as if they controlled what precisely escaped them most, namely male autonomy.

**Negative Aspects**

Meanwhile in Bohol in the 1990s, the memory of the historical origins of the barkada lingers on, at least among elements of the urban bourgeoisie of that age for whom a male barkada epitomizes everything that is wrong with the lower class, nothing with which a respectable man would either get personally involved or let his children get involved. (Casi)Mero Sarabia is such a man. In his mid-forties, he lives a comfortable city life with his educated and employed wife, (Ro)Sita, and their four children. Himself educated and well-trained, he went several years ago for a well-paid tour of duty abroad and had worked earlier in Manila, but much preferred settling back to calmer Bohol when the opportunity arose. Nowadays, however (in 1992–93), life is hard and the economic crisis keeps him idle much of the time, so that he too often plays mahjong with his friends in the afternoons. On weekends or any time when a cockfighting derby has been scheduled, he can not be found anywhere else than at the bulangan ("cockpit"). He has a low opinion of what a barkada stands for and explains why he does not belong to any:

No, I do not have any barkada, because this can only lead to trouble. The people with whom I play mahjong are not my barkada. They are my mahjong partners, They are friends, higala, but not intimate friends, su-od nga higala, as in a barkada. They are not close to me. I could not play mahjong with the members of my barkada because as true friends, I could not win money from them. It would not be right.

[ Gambling is a competitive activity and Mero plays to win. To win involves competition and this runs strongly against the egalitarian ideology of the barkada. Mero makes then a small concession only to discard it almost immediately, so as to turn to what he holds as his greatest concern.]

A barkada could be for studying, to prepare for an exam, but statistically, it means trouble. I would not let my children belong to any barkada because a barkada goes to bad things. They are associated with vice. A barkada, it consists of just bugoybugoy, you understand bugoybogoy?, just roaming around. It has also to meet regularly; it
enters into conflict with home schedule: I ask my son to run an errand, but he cannot because he has to meet with his barkada. With a barkada, I always stay outside, away from home. I have lost the control of my child because the control is either with the family or with the barkada.

[Mero concedes indeed very little. He perceives the barkada essentially as an institution that competes with and challenges the control of the family. He does not have to turn very far to find an example of the disastrous effect of a barkada.]

This is exactly the problem with Andy, Andy Ceballos, you know, Sita's brother. It was very bad. He was a pantalan boy. All the time, he stayed on the pier with his barkada. It was women, drinking, gambling, and nothing else. What is it in English? To know you, just ask who are your friends!

[What he means by this last statement is "Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are," which is his way of summarizing the sad fate of the youngest of his brothers-in-law.]

Alone among his siblings, Andy has not been pushed enough by his parents to pursue his studies. He dropped out early, never got any steady job, and would live with his wife and children in total poverty, were it not for Mero's and Sita's largesse. In such a totally negative view, the importance of the barkada in the process of enculturation and socialization is clearly recognized, even though lamented. In the end, what is perceived as Andy's social failure results from the weakness of his parents who relinquished their control over their youngest son. They have to take the blame because they let the barkada take over what should have remained the parents' responsibilities. Ultimately, this failure of the family qua institution is also blamed on the exacerbation of male stereotypes through male pressure. And that took place within another institution, the unredeemable male barkada.

As a complementary commentary, Mero offers: "It is all pakikisama." The word can be translated as "togetherness." Borrowed from Tagalog and based on the root sama, "to go with," "to accompany," "to go along," it is by now frequently used by Cebuano speakers. It refers to a pattern of behavior, valued throughout the Philippines, that emphasizes social compliance and conformity as well as consideration for others. As if to clarify what he means, Mero adds: "You are forced to drink to be just like the others, even if you do not feel
like it. Your friends push you to do things you will regret.” Whatever might have been beneficial or merely adaptive in the male barkada is entirely occulted here.

The Transformation of the Barkada

No matter how commonly held this unfavorable view of the male barkada among the Tagbilaran bourgeoisie, it is held in check because an interesting countercurrent has also emerged, but as a sort of historical perversion of the actual origins of the male barkada. With the passage of time the potential of rebellion contained in the male barkada was wearing out fast. By the 1980s, an interesting switch had already occurred as reflected in the literature of the time. For instance, in 1981 in the very middle-class oriented Quezon City weekly Mod that specifically targeted young adults, a certain Dickie Soriano could write a paper entitled “Is being with your barkada good for you?” Clearly, the perception had changed since the sixties, as the author proceeded to assert in a prudently manichean way that the members of a male barkada:

...can influence a member of the group positively or negatively. [..] Sure they taught you and helped you study for your exams. But they were also the very same people who taught you how to drink beer to celebrate the end of the exams. A barkada has its good sides and its bad sides. [..] If the friends which make up the group are mature and responsible enough, they will settle down to talking about the problems they face and try to help each other out. If they are otherwise, they will just turn to ‘wine, women, and weed’ in an effort to forget their difficulties (Soriano 1981, 10-11).

The next issue of the same weekly featured an adolescent barkada, the existence of which the editors of the magazine approved and wished to encourage. The question is no more to give a balanced view, but to praise:

The Dhebhonaires [sic] are a typical example of many an adolescent barkada today, with their quest for adventure, their thirst for excitement, their sense of togetherness, and their search for fun. [..] To these people, being a dhebhonaire entails high standards, especially among themselves. [..] Such qualities as the high regard for friendship, a sense of responsibility, emotional maturity, etc. are considered essential in a dhebhonaire (JRS 1981, 12).
A few years later a Dominican even went further, as he wrote a column on "The theology of barkada" in which he declared that "the word barkada simply means a boatload, and has nothing whatsoever to do with wrongdoing," after which he went as far as proposing "to describe as a barkada the group made up by Jesus and his disciples, especially when they moved about the Sea of Galilee" (Tejon 1986, 32).

By the end of the decade, a total reevaluation had been completed and, in an effort to boost the Filipino self-image, apparently damaged by foreign evaluations of its value system (e.g., Lynch 1962), a renowned Philippine professor of management published a book entitled Positive Filipino values (Andres 1989), the interest of which resides chiefly in the limitless deconstructionist perspectives that it opens up. In a couple of pages that are specifically devoted to "the positive side of 'barkada'" (1989, 155–56), Andres extols its virtues and asserts:

Barkada is a peer group whose members have deep ties of friendship with one another. Bond of friendship is usually developed in the high school years and in the neighborhoods and it continues until adulthood. This bond in the barkada is usually indestructible for it is based on pure and genuine friendship (1989, 156)

Let me turn for a moment to purity and authenticity in friendship or rather to their obverse, impurity and inauthenticity, of which the barkada needed to—and indeed had begun to—rid itself in order to become acceptable in the eyes of the urban bourgeoisie of Bohol. Boholanos, especially members of its urbanized middle class, are prompt at making fun of themselves and fun of their manner of speaking, fun of their sense of identity, fun of their frugality and thrift. The last thing however about which they are likely to joke is their religiosity. It is deeply rooted. Despite the presence of a Muslim ghetto within the limits of Tagbilaran City and despite the visibility of several Protestant groups as well as other sects and cults, Roman Catholicism can still claim more than 85% of the city population as its flock.

Understandably, it fell upon the Roman Catholic clergy to take an active role in promoting the positive aspect of the barkada. This could only be done through a deliberate manipulation of history, a religious coopting of the past, as well as an attempt at social engineering. The Dominican priest whose text I have already mentioned
(Tejon 1986) had well understood the possibilities that the barkada offered, but the limitation of his position was that he had only pointed at the ideological feasibility of passing from bad to good barkada.

Action, at least in the Central Visayas with which we are concerned here, was to wait for the effort of German Fr. Willi Gantert, SVD, who apparently realized that the name and the forms of the barkada could be kept in order to capture and to tame the adolescent excesses of social energy. The strengths of togetherness, of social conformity, of peer pressure could be redirected away from their apparently antisocial trend and given a new life acceptable to the social establishment. Father Gantert founded the Plus Movement at the end of the 1980s.

I became aware of this movement for the first time through an informant, a Boholano bachelor in his mid-twenties. The young man, Alexar Paumig, had a hard time explaining to me about his barkada because it ran so much against what I had known thus far and what I had expected. In fact, the more I prompted him to talk to me about his barkada, the more he talked about the Plus Movement; and the more he did, the more I tried to redirect him to our mutually agreed topic of conversation on the barkada. A graduate from a local college and visibly proud of the white-collar position that he held in a bank in town, he displayed with me an unusual mix of relaxed patience and exquisite affability. He explained in his own, here uninterrupted, words:

No Sir, the Plus Movement is my barkada. Sir, you write; go ahead. It is an attempt to introduce responsibility to group behavior. You understand? There are now about 400 of us in Bohol now. All members of my barkada. We know each other by 'batch', because we all go through a three-day retreat. For instance, the February 10–12, 1991 batch. There are fifteen people per 'batch'. Sir, am I still going too fast? At the end of the retreat, there is a programa [the word refers to a program of entertainment or to a ceremony] and each batch makes a presentation. At the end of the programa, each member or "mover" receives a number. For instance, "Plus 405."

"Plus Zero" in Bohol, he was a priest from Bohol, Father José Sumampong. He is the one who organized Bohol, the first one. No Sir, I told you, you cannot interview him because he is already abroad; he is a parish priest in the States. No, I do not know where, just there. Of course, we do things together. For instance, we do mission caroling in October [they go around singing mission songs in October be-
cause, in the Philippines, this is the month consecrated to missions); for instance, we do hospital visitations; for instance, we do jail visitations; for instance, we go out together for Bible readings; for instance, we have also an annual evaluation.

No Sir, it is not like the Kiwanis club or the Jaycees. What makes it a barkada, Sir? It is the commitment, the intimacy that we share with each other in the retreat and the trust that we have for each other. Also, we meet regularly. Also, Sir, we call it a barkada.

Although I was now convinced that the word barkada had indeed evolved extensively to the point where it could refer to almost any kind of voluntary association, I also thought his last statement was a trump card, the performative power of which I could never overcome. Nonetheless, I asked him whether he did not belong to any other barkada and elicited this reply:

Yes Sir, I do. I belong also to the Toys Clan. TOYS stands for Talented Outstanding Young Students. Once, we won a school dance competition. Because we had won it, we could not compete the following year. Instead, we decided that we would train the next year winners. They won. It started in 1986. Now, we are fifteen. We are popular, and often we are asked to perform. We dance under the name Toys Clan. We dance at fiestas, at campus prugrama, at parties.

We dance together, but we do not have any intimate relationship with each other. So really we are not a barkada, but people call us a barkada, so we are already a barkada.

But each of us has his own personal barkada. With members of my personal barkada, I can be honest; I do not have to impress them. We are not mischievous. We do not drink. We do not gamble. We do not do drugs. We discuss our sorrows; we talk of our crushes; we go to the movies.

Sir, do you understand, Sir? I have three different barkada.

The three barkadas to which Alexar Paumig stated he belonged all have a positive connotation. All three differed considerably in some important respects. The Toys Clan was tacitly encouraged by the Catholic school system and by the society at large. Even though the Toys Clan was "engineered" into a barkada, as it were, by a fiat from the outside, Alexar and his friends tolerated, even accepted the social manipulation that this entailed. The Plus Movement, as we have seen, was a social engineering thrust by the Roman Catholic Church, and again Alexar and his friends joined. Finally there was his personal barkada which was, of the three of them, the only spon-
taneous grouping and the only one to be exclusively male. In all three cases, Alexar has a pretty good idea of having involved himself with other Roman Catholics, with others whom he perceives as desirable characters. In his own eyes, his triple allegiance is only one, for his three barkadas overlap considerably with each other because several members of the Toys Clan and all the members of his personal barkada are also active members of the Plus Movement. This perhaps only reflects the young man's strong social commitment to Roman Catholicism. According to Alexar, there is no contradiction, only compatibility, in his three distinct social commitments.

Whatever be the case, it would be difficult to have two more contrasted viewpoints than Alexar's and Mero's. Both are urban bourgeois viewpoints of the 1990s, as expressed by two men whom a generation gap of about twenty years separates. I perceive several interrelated reasons for the contrast of their viewpoints. First, Mero, the older man, flanked by a family, is more conservative than Alexar, the younger man who has no such family responsibility and is thus more open to change. In short, their position in their respective life cycle differs. Second, the semantic charge of the barkada has mellowed between the former's and latter's formative years. In short, between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, the notion of barkada has largely lost its antisocial edge. Both men indeed perceive the socializing importance of the barkada, but one fears it while the other one welcomes it. All this happens as if the two men did not live in the same town.

Barkada as Social Event

In the urban environment of Tagbilaran City in the early 1990s, the male barkada appeared only as an option in the process of growing up. It seems to have affected more strongly and more dangerously the lower class people than their bourgeois counterparts, altogether more likely to lead to social trouble than to moral salvation. In other words, belonging to a barkada in Bohol was considered either as a sort of déclassé performance or as an act of redemptive commitment.

This present urban situation strongly contrasts with the even quieter rural context of Siquijor to which I would like now to return. There, observed from the localized circumstances of the rural barangay of Lapyahan in the 1980s, the intense social interaction that a
barkada guaranteed was not by any means the exclusive preroga-
tive either of males or of the town bourgeoisie. In fact, among the
rural proletariat of the barangay of Lapyahan, relatively few people
did not belong to any barkada. Belonging to a barkada was per-
ceived as such an integral part of social life for most inhabitants of
the barangay that they felt a greater need to explain why someone
did not belong to any barkada than the reverse. In that context, male
barkada had little specificity. They appeared as quite innocent groups
of such close friends who (had met and still) met regularly in harm-
less gatherings where they were able to pour their heart out in front
of their peers without feeling embarrassed in the process, a sort of
obligato to what was (or had been) the pains of growing up and fast
became the concerns of aging. Thus the male barkada could not have
slipped further away from the dubious connotations of its under-
ground origins. In the process, however, it becomes increasingly
difficult to disentangle "friendship" from barkada, except in
one formal respect: one could have a friend (i.e., one friend) but a
barkada was always made up of more than two people.

In Lapyahan, as anywhere else in Siquijor, most people who did
not "have" a barkada, did not "have" one yet. They were very
young, in fact too young to have been fully socialized. Younger chil-
dren had not yet developed any consciousness of having peers, or
of being submitted to any kind of peer pressure, as they remained
entirely controled by and dependent on their family and/or school.
The generation of small boys who attended grade school together,
was still at a pre-barkada stage of their social development. Although
they shared with each other many experiences at (and on the way
to and from) school as well as outside of it in their games through-
out the barangay, they remained almost entirely submitted to the
authority of elder females in their household and did not yet feel
any impatience nor discomfort with such a situation, nor had they
yet developed enough social skill to form a barkada.

At the other end of the life cycle, the oldest male resident of si-
tio Camingawan did not seem to have any barkada either, but that
was only another way of enunciating his age. If Andres Sumagang
did not belong to any barkada, it was only because it did not exist
any longer; "wa na," as his daughter put it in the most succint terms.
Death, having already taken its toll, had left him then and there,
since the demise of Tiyoy Dagatan, the lone male survivor of his
cohort. It was perhaps his social misfortune that he had survived
everyone in his cohort. In addition, he was too old technically to
have ever had a barkada since he grew up much before the Lo-Waisters came to the fore of national attention.

There were still a few other people without a barkada, people who suffered from some kind of incapacitating social or mental handicap. With more realism than compassion, but without condemnation either, one of Tropio Quilicot’s sons was reputed to be kulangkulang (i.e., “mentally retarded”) and Tasing Dagatan to be bayut (i.e., “effeminate”). One and the other qualities were perceived in the barangay as objective social disqualifications to normal social interactions.

Except for Zosing Yano to whom I shall come back in a moment, everyone else in sitio Camingawan had his or her barkada. The word itself was frequently uttered in my neighbors’s conversations. I believe I heard it for the first time from Virgie, Dagatan’s mother, Auntie Diding, who explained that her daughter was hanging around somewhere, away from home, with her habitual female friends, three or four other young adults of her age with whom she used to spend her hours of leisure chatting and giggling endlessly, commenting on matters worthy of gossip in the barangay, gently teasing each other, poking fun at others outside her barkada, discussing the sex appeal and marriageability of available men, noticing this one, enticing that other one and still deprecating another, and altogether passing judgments on anyone and everyone in their surroundings, in short sharing the concerns that one would expect persons of her age to share.

Reversing the gender orientation of this description might give a semiaccurate, albeit for the moment convenient, picture of Dadoy Quilicot’s barkada that was entirely made up of unmarried men in their early twenties, who all looked for leadership to Dadoy. The young man, one of Virgie’s male first cousins, was an accomplished instrumentist and a gifted vocalist who used to spend most of his free time playing the guitar and singing with five or six males of his own age. They frequently rehearsed serenades to women whom they were manifestly too shy to court so obviously, although their talent and undeniable charm made them popular at social functions. Whenever possible they hung around together, chatting, gossiping, teasing each other, sizing up visitors and commenting on the desirability—looks and clothes included—of each and every young woman who happened to enter their field of vision. They also occasionally played basketball together, an altogether remarkable feature given that polio had left Dadoy Quilicot with a crippled leg.13

Meanwhile, boys of a younger generation were growing up and rapidly turning into teenyboppers. Already inseparable in what the
youngsters themselves designated as their own barkada, they had already organized their combo, had developed adequate skills and strategies as village peeping toms, played basketball together and mocked discreetly yet fiercely the behavior of their elders whom they so assiduously tried to emulate. This was the barkada of which Diego Quilicot (Dadoy Quilicot’s younger brother) and Soy Duhaylungsod (Virgie Dagatan’s sister’s son) were members.

Belonging to a barkada was not by any means restricted to the unmarried younger people of the sitio, but cohort after cohort of their elders had socially sedimented, so to speak, in the intimate informality of their respective barkada, even the men and women who had grown up at a time anterior to the historical development of barkada, when their families had a much firmer grip on their adolescent behavior than then (in the early 1980s). But in the provincial ambiance of Siquijor, somehow the old had followed the young in this one respect: men or women of whatever age, following the linguistic style, fashion and taste of the day, claimed to have, like everyone else, their own barkada. There were perhaps nuances that differentiated everyone’s expectations in respect to one’s barkada, but the word had been widely accepted as it referred to groups of intimate friends of roughly the same age and condition.

While the most senior manang in sitio Camingawan were still valid enough and in sufficient number to maintain an actively witty, tongue-lashing and often roaring barkada of their own, mature men such as Fidel Mahinay and Ramon Quilicot stood at the core of the barkada they shared with six or seven other hardworking fishermen and jolly tuba (palm toddy) drinkers who all could alternately sing a song, ask a riddle, crack an off-color joke, recite traditional balak (poetry) with passion, or provide commentaries on the current affairs of the village of Lapyahan.

Barkada Cohorts

Undoubtedly, in this Siquijorian barangay, the recruitment principles in the barkada in general and in particular of the male barkada had the uncanny ability to defy a coherent description because of the concatenation of contradictions that it seemed to encompass while deferring or eschewing forever any effort at their resolution. Strongly iconic of the society at large, the barkada thus embodied rather than displayed its own array of unresolved contradictions, and in so doing manifested an incredible resilience.
I would like to illustrate the above assertion, namely the ability of the barkada to turn on its head its own organizing principles, by returning to the case of Zosing Yano that I left in suspense above as an exception, a man without a barkada. At one level, Zosing Yano’s crying absence from any barkada exemplified the freedom with which these informal associations were constituted. After all, barkadas were nothing but groups of rather intimate friends. One thus belonged to a barkada because one wanted to belong to it and also because one was acceptable to its other members. In short, membership was achieved by cooptation.

Focusing however for a brief moment on the simple reality of social life in a rural barangay whose habitat was predominantly dispersed, it takes little time to realize that membership in a barkada was not a matter of achievement but a matter of ascription. One was a member of this or that barkada almost automatically and exclusively in function of one’s age, of one’s sitio of residence and of having shared similarly formative experiences with the other members of that particular barkada. None of these determinants—one’s age, one’s residence and one’s past—were (at all or any more) under one’s control. In this light it is easier to understand that Dadoy Quilicot’s barkada included all the adult single males, age 18 to 24, that sitio Camingawan sheltered. Similarly, Auntie Diding was the youngest member of a barkada where one could find all the manangs of the same sitio, while the boys whose voice was breaking could be found at Diego Quilicot’s and Soy Duhaylungsod’s sides.

The only social choice that seems to have been left to the members of a barkada appears to have been a largely negative one, thus reflecting its members’ social power to ostracize someone, as unacceptable, as deviant, as “othered.” This is in fact what had happened to Auntie Diding’s distant relative, Zosing Yano whose pride and poverty combined in such a defiant mix that the young, poor, yet prolific and dispossessed fisherman had no intimate friend at all, even though he would frequently hang around with other drinkers and gamblers. His occasionally violent fits (he had badly beaten his mother at least once during our stay in his sitio) and his reputation for extreme laziness (he refused to perform any task unrelated to fishing) had given him the local reputation of being rebellious and antisocial. A classical proletarian, he was unhappy, uneducated and unpolticized.

To his fellow residents in the barangay, and a fortiori in the sitio, he appeared only as a man with an attitude, a kind of original, who
did not conform to the prevalent social norms, in short a would-be troublemaker. This was a quality that endeared him very little in the eyes of the local male villagers of his age who were preoccupied with projecting a proper and acceptable image of themselves, people who valued social conformity and the associated smoothness of personal interaction. Although other people interacted with Zosing Yano on specific occasions (mainly for fishing and drinking), everyone seemed to have feared a sustained, intimate, friendly interaction with him. He could have belonged to the barkada of Auntie Diding's youngest son, Berto Dagatan, because of the similarity in their age, in their marital status, in their reproductive fate, but the relationship between the two men remained cool at best.

Perhaps understandably, Zosing Yano himself saw things in a different light. At least consonant with himself and with his own unstable character, the young man at times claimed simultaneous, albeit marginal, membership in a couple of barkadas, that of Berto Dagatan and that of older fishermen who, in truth, did not trust him any more than the younger ones and thus rejected the presence of such a misfit in the midst of their own respective barkada. At any rate, Zosing Yano was or was perceived by those I expected to be his peers as an exception that warranted social distance, if not plain exclusion.

Were it not for the option of rejecting potential members, the concept of barkada in the present context would have become a close approximation of "gendered cohorts." This understanding of barkada as cohorts is consonant indeed with the expressed emphasis placed on the permanency of its members' commitment. In this sense, one could only belong to one barkada at a time and barkadas were thus discrete units. Forceful as this interpretation might have been, it was immediately challenged less by Zosing Yano's phony claims of dual membership as by the evident fluidity with which cohorts were defined and redefined best to suit the contingencies of life's tortuous circumstances. Old members almost carelessly faded away while new members pined with unexpected spontaneity. While membership in a barkada tended to be a long-lasting commitment, as it was meant (or so was it claimed) to entail the permanency of life itself, the engagement as such was, perhaps more often than not, only honored in its breach.

For instance, Fidel Mahinay (born in 1931) and Ramon Quilicot (born in 1926) who had known each other all their life long, now belonged to the same barkada, but they had not always been the close
friends they had later become. In fact, their mere friendship as well as their sharing of the same barkada had resulted from successive readjustments to the death of some and to the migration of others. In the configuration of their common barkada other factors had also had a role. Interpersonal conflicts that had taken the form of witchcraft accusations had ruptured the bonds that once united Ramon Quilocot and Fidel Mahinay's elder brother. In this light, barkadas may be understood better as fuzzy sets than as discrete units.

Understandably, the extension of such cohorts were also modified with the passage of time, so as to adjust not only to the thinning of the ranks (that death and outmigration caused) but also to the changing perception of time in the life cycle of members. For instance, even in Siquior where the notion of seniority was so strongly relevant, a 5-year age difference when one is 15 is bound to appear as more momentous than when one reaches, say, 45).

In addition, while the residents of the hamlet of Camingawan tended to entertain close kinship links and to activate their mutual social links vigorously, the cooptative nature and informality of barkada recruitment was such that it made hamlet divisions and village borders quite irrelevant. As a result, a few men belonged to barkadas which had no other member in Camingawan, while several members of barkadas dominated by Camingawan residents were outsiders to the sitio or even to the barangay. In other words, many a barkada operated astride sitio and barangay limits. Others tended to have a loosely localized core organized around a few key members, but they were all, one way or the other, in a permanent state of flux.

The Male and Female Barkada

In the material that I have introduced so far about Siquior, there is little that would help us in differentiating a male from a female barkada. But seeing each one as a mirror image of the other would be a mistake. Two interrelated factors in particular reinforced mutual interaction within the male barkada to an extent unreachable in its female counterpart. One concerned the assignment of tasks along gender lines; the other was an old-fashioned matter of social structure.

Here as elsewhere, the movements of barangay women were more restricted than those of men. Female activities turned mostly around
Daily waits for the fishermen's return and occasional beachcombing, Saturday morning laundry and Sunday round-trips to the Lazi market, prayer meetings and dominical masses constituted the all too few specific occasions that brought women together on a regular basis. As was clear to everyone in the barangay, a woman who spent too much time away from her home was always running the risk of inviting the unpleasant sanction of gossip (siwitsiwit) and the socially devastating accusation of being "shameless" (walay ulaw).

Men's activities were differently constrained. Most of their culturally significant activities, whether gambling, cockfighting, drinking, or merely socializing, brought them outside of home, toward public places, back into the bosom of their respective barkada. By far their most important activity was fishing. It represented, in their own eyes as well as in everyone else's in the barangay, their main thrust, their constant preoccupation, their key to self-esteem, their claim to desirability, in short, the very justification of their lives. And fishing constantly pulled them away from home and brought them to sea together in a predatory game in which they, at once and endlessly, collaborated and competed for the same morsels of common property resources. Fish was food and discourse. High-stake gambling of a different order, it determined their access to cash and to power and to women. Not only was caught fish emblematic of men's virility, but fishing was the defining feature of an all-male activity.

Rarely was there any need for a whole barkada to act as a unit of production; fishing in Camingawan was not capitalized enough for that. But members of the same barkada were likely to operate on the same schedule and to go to sea together albeit in their separate baroto ("small canoes").

Compared to women, men found themselves in a reverse predicament. The limited time that they spent at home in their respective household was a break in their routine, a time of separation from each other, ultimately a time stolen from fishing. Staying home always exposed a man to the risk of staying in the domestic comfort of his home for too long, thus inviting the most unbecoming backbiting. The accusation of being tapulan ("lazy") was the least offensive.

The second factor that greatly contributed to differentiate male from female barkada derived from the prevailing pattern of postmarital residence. In theory, there was a general sentiment that strongly favored virilocality: men were expected to stay put, while women
were supposed to join their husband’s whereabouts. Had this rule been blindly followed, marriage would have had a devastating effect on any female barkada which it would have systematically dispersed by scattering women around. In contradistinction, and at least at this theoretical level of abstraction, men and male barkada remained unaffected.

What softened in reality the radical aspect of the model was a countercurrent that other sets of expectations provided. For instance, the last child of a couple, whether a daughter or a son, was expected to settle with his/her parents and take care of the aging parents. This was what Virgie Dagatan did. People also recognized easily that the island of Mindanao offered economic opportunities that did not exist on Siquijor and, irrespective of gender and cultural expectations, it was desirable to outmarry there. This is what Dadoy Quilicot ended up doing. In the end, rules and practicalities mixed with great flexibility. Nonetheless the cultural preference and bias of virilocality remained, and more than two-thirds of married couples resided in conformity with the cultural expectation of their society. Men therefore could easily derive a much exaggerated pride from the strength and persistency of their own barkada, which contrasted so strikingly with the weakness and transience of female barkada.

Barkada Severance

Apart from death, only one serious event in the course of a man’s life could, if not really sever a man’s links to his barkada, at least weaken considerably their relevance. That was marriage itself.

Seen in the diachrony of a man’s life cycle, young males were likely to join or to form their own barkada in the early stage of their adolescence. It was then that peerbonding occurred. Social interaction was intense within these peer groups, the existence of which lasted from adolescence to maturity, unless the man married out in which case his links with his original barkada did not disappear, but became dormant while he formed new links by joining another barkada where he could be physically present and active. Many a man who had joined a barkada in Camingawan outmigrated to the island of Mindanao, later in life, in search of better economic opportunities. Despite their physical absence, such men were nonetheless considered to retain membership in their Siquijorian barkada. Conversely, the few men who arrived as inmarrying spouses from
Mindanao retained membership in their home barkada, but were often absorbed into a local barkada, which socialized them more thoroughly into their new environment.

There are several reasons for the weakening of the male barkada by marriage. First, as I have indicated, men who outmarried weakened the barkada in which they used to be active. They retained membership, but it was likely to remain nominal or to become dormant. This is what happened in 1983 to Dadoy Quilicot's barkada when the young man migrated to Mindanao and soon after married a southern belle. In a dynamic perspective, it could be said that such losses of members were compensated by the arrival of active inmarrying men. This was indeed what happened when Sitoy Calibo, who had been born and raised in Mindanao, arrived in Camingawan to marry Virgie Dagatan's and soon got involved with what had been Dadoy Quilicot's barkada. But the exchange was not balanced, as the same barkada lost one of its core members with Dadoy Quilicot, and gained a necessarily peripheral newcomer with Sitoy Calibo whose primary allegiance remained in Mindanao.

Second, marriage, for a while at least, refocused a man's attention, as it were, since the man passed in one day from the prolonged irresponsibility of bachelorhood to the sudden responsibility of raising a family. The wedding itself required the participation of three male sponsors for the groom. In the weddings to which I was invited, the male sponsors were all members of the groom's barkada. It was not infrequent, of course, for a man to marry one of his barkada's other member's sister or more distant relative. In any case, in the rich symbolic coalescence that any wedding entailed, two families were united indeed. In addition, with the effervescent presence of so many ritual assistants (ring bearer, cord holder, etc.), it looked as if the groom's barkada delivered him to his bride (and vice versa) at the altar, in a rite of severance/attachment that marked the peak, in fact the temporary swan song of this man's interaction with his barkada.

The wedding performed, the new husband's involvement with his barkada reached a nadir. With a wife and, soon after, a swarm of children in tow, in short with his family commitments, whether emotional or economic or both, a married man had, for the nonce, much less free time than before to devote merely to socializing with his male friends.

Meanwhile, his entire barkada itself had aged and could not be what it once had been. Since, prior to their marriage, barkada mem-
bers belonged to the same cohort, they all tended to marry within a few years, sometimes a few months from each other. All of a sudden, there was not anyone left with whom to hang around.

The male barkada however did not disappear; it just took a low profile for a while, at least until the novelty of marriage wore off, often until the birth of their first children. Once married, some men (like Oyo Dagatan, Virgie Dagatan’s eldest brother) had kept forever a minimal involvement with their barkada. Others (like Berto Dagatan, Oyo Dagatan’s younger brother or Fidel Mahinay), perhaps more vulnerable to marriage lassitude, had increasingly sought adult male companionship and mutual interaction, away from their children, away from their wives, away from their families. Others still (like Zosing Yano) had attempted through heavy drinking and compulsive gambling to evade reality. Family and barkada were in competition for each married man’s time and involvement.

Contrary to what happened in the barkada of their youth, tempted married men, when pressed, chose family without much hesitation, at least in the barangay. Their occasional meetings were recreational, for drinking, gambling, gossiping, in short for absorbing all kinds of behavior that the family met with disapproval. These meetings were also emotional ones, male events where men could not only reminisce among themselves of the bygone days of their faded youth, but also pretend to still be what they so manifestly were no more. Impunitively, confident in their own rights, comforted by mutual tolerance, sheltered from the negative sanction of the society at large, sheltered also from the possible disapproval and remonstrances of their wives, in short claiming total if fake freedom, they could over-indulge, overeat and overdrink, badmouth anyone and everyone, gamble away the little money they had, behave carelessly, immoderately and irresponsibly. Like old soldiers who are not supposed to die but only fade away, older men’s barkadas did not disappear; their activities just got routinized.

The Results of the Barkada

But what was achieved there? In other words, what did a male barkada in the barangay of Lapyahan accomplish? Hoping to find elements of an answer, I wish to pay closer attention now to the activities of a barkada of younger unmarried men. The dynamism, the effervescence, the ebullience manifested in a developing male
barkada was always striking because the interaction between its members was still fresh, intense and sustained. Every barkada was a new social construction that was also culturally patterned.

When young adolescents, like Soy Duhaylungsod, Diego Quilicot and others, solidified their mutual friendship into a barkada, nothing tangible occurred at all, since most of them had been friends before. What changed was the way in which they spoke of those who had been so far their higala ("friend") and who now became their barkada, since each individual member of a collective barkada was also called a barkada. In other words, the word designates in general the group, but may be used as well to refer to any and each member of that group. The main transformation resided in the fact, that people did not relate to each other any more as persons but as members of a male barkada, that is, acted as a group. In short, friends had become cronies and their gang existed by virtue of the fact that they said it did.

For this semantic and indeed performative change to have occurred, several other changes had to have taken place. The plain passing of time, of course, brought to these youngsters the discomfort of growing up, not only pagtubo ("physical growth") but the awareness of not being "children" (balanon) any more, albeit not yet quite "mature" (hingkud ang salabutan). The trauma was serious because they were passing rather abruptly from the totally self-indulgent irresponsibility in which males were maintained throughout their childhood into a situation where rather strict social and moral sanctions prevailed. All happened as if the world suddenly caught up with these teenage boys, as if they suddenly realized that there was a social world outside that judged them and judged the way in which they conformed or did not conform to the prevailing cultural assumptions of their society.21

Under such pressure, the young males—not unexpectedly perhaps—responded in a paradoxical manner by conforming and rebelling at once: the more the one, the more the other. On the one hand, they rebelled and rebelled against the only order they knew, that of the(ir) family. They had reached the point where the conjunction of physical and moral growth had brought about in them dissatisfaction against their status quo ante, sufficient to make them eager to reject the total, albeit mild, domestic control that women had exerted over them during their childhood. All along, their fathers had often played with them and had constantly showed them a great deal of affection, but very little authority, only sending them often on small
errands. Any serious matter (e.g., concerning health or education) had been handled by their mothers (*inahan*) or their surrogates such as aunts (*iyaan*), elder sisters, elder female cousins or any other elder female that they befittingly, respectfully and deferentially addressed as *manang*.22

Since the domestic sphere of activities was dominated by women, a revolt, albeit a mild one, against the family was in essence a contestation of female authority. In this rebellious light, the barkada was almost exclusively a male concern, as it offered young, growing men a refuge away from the authority of the arresting females of their household. In the all-male environment of their newly asserted barkada, these young males could at least feel liberated from the physical presence, from the moral authority, from the overwhelming prohibitions, injunctions and suasions of any authoritarian older female.

Most of the activities that took place within this barkada of male youngsters were innocuous enough: mainly a mix of *hugoyhugoy* ug *bugoybugoy* ("loafing and roaming around"). But this was always experienced by everyone, whether inside or outside the barkada, as a transgression in word and in deed. No matter how harmless its activities, a given male barkada was always constituted as an anti-institution, where a reaction to the family qua institution, a rejection of the individual families of each and every member of that barkada as well as a rebellion against female domestic authority, had crystallized. As such, the male barkada had the bad reputation of opening the gate to all kinds of overemphasized evils because it provided to its members a reassuringly institutional framework for their initiation to sex, drinking and gambling.

On the other hand, young males, while rebelling, eagerly conformed to the norms of social behavior that their elders and their parents discreetly but actively promoted. This took place at several levels. First, whatever rebellious character had these young men manifested in trying to escape away from the homey comfort of their families, they were not abandoning home at all, only finding extra comfort and solace elsewhere too, in another ready-made institution that conveniently channelized their emotions and their energies.

Second, in joining a barkada, the youngsters were only mimicking the behavior of their elders, like Dadoy Quilicot and his cronies who rejected them with equal vigor. In the process, the younger men were sharp observers of nuances, developing a great awareness of their elders' manners and style. There was an attractive way of
walking unhurriedly through the hamlet, of hanging fishing goggles on one's forehead, of talking indirectly to others, of avoiding direct confrontation, of ogling young women with discretion and all kinds of other acceptable practices that constituted a desirable manly behavior. All this of course had already been culturally predetermined for them by the succession of their predecessors. They were quick to learn however.

Third, within the male barkada—and this was perhaps its main attraction—a most interesting dialectic was at play among its members. Because they were coevals and all in the same predicament as it were, that is vulnerable in public to the same social embarrassments, they considered their barkada as an egalitarian refuge where they could feel less restricted than usual in their actions, less guarded in expressing their feelings and altogether freer than anywhere else. In a way, this was conducive to some exploratory behavior that comembers of their barkada, ever solicitous with each other, both tolerated and chided on an acceptably reciprocal basis. But a strong countercurrent undermined a genuine exploration of potentially novel behavior among barkada members by strongly discouraging originality and nonconformity to the normal expected behavior of its members.

This of course represented at once the strength and the weakness, not only of that particular barkada, but of any barkada: it promoted and encouraged certain behavior and rather rigorously controlled the fact that its members would maintain themselves within the proper parameters of acceptability. Whatever acceptance there was remained confined to predetermined and unquestionable parameters of behavior. Stated in another way, no male barkada was ever a threat to the society, nor even an instrument to question its assumptions, but only a social instrument to help in a better socialization and integration of its young men.

Fourth, the male barkada was also a microcosm that could not help but reproduce in its very core the social macrocosm from which it emanated. In consequence, although egalitarian in ideology, the barkada offered a much different practice, with the hierarchization of relationships and other interesting patterns of dominance. In short, its proclaimed egalitarian ideology might be maintained but in practice there were core and marginal members and among the core members themselves, there was often a leader and a pecking order. This was not institutionalized, however and because it ran so much
against the dominant barkada ideology, it might even be denied; nonetheless, from the outside at least, it could be striking. For instance, in Dadoy Quilicot’s case, it was clear that he had established his authority over everyone else in his gang. It was so manifest that he was the leader, the center of attention, the one who would be the spokesperson for the gang, that nobody would have referred to his barkada by any other name than Dadoy’s barkada. Part of his ability to lead derived from his personal charisma, reinforced by his charm and his voice; part of it came from the grace and ease with which he appeared in public while others in his entourage, followers in that group, acted in a much more reserved way, always deferring to him. This was obvious to me because Dadoy’s barkada frequently came to loaf under the porch of our hut and we enjoyed their pleasant company. It was more difficult for me however to recognize the hierarchy that dominated the organization of his younger brother’s barkada because a pattern of dominance had not yet fully emerged in it and also because I was much less familiar with its understandably more secretive activities and much less attuned to its younger and thus (to me) more exotic manners.

In a society that was so thoroughly hierarchized, the male barkada on Siquijor provided their members with an apparent haven as well as with an illusion of social harmony and perfect equality.

Because the male barkada expressed a certain unease—which it also prolonged—with (or against) the established order, because the male barkada cemented the masculine intimacy and promoted camaraderie that linked its different members with each other, and because the male barkada gathered together men of a same cohort (even when cohorts had fluctuating boundaries), growing men as well as grown men could experience within such an institution a sense of security, haven and freedom from any other social pressures. There, in the heart of their barkada, men escaped it all. There, there was supposed to be no tension, no confrontation, no competition. There, a reassuring sense of social conformity prevailed. It was a place to experiment with relatively unguarded behavior and to test with relative prudence the limits of what was not socially and culturally acceptable without incurring the embarrassment of any public frown or even judgement. It all remained within the very confines of the barkada itself.

Not the least contradictions of the male barkada were the severe limitations that it placed on the experimental freedom that it gave
to its members. At one level, the triumph of the barkada was manifest, as it was instrumental in defining men, in establishing manly behavior as antithetic to womanly behavior, and in restating that "men are men" by establishing that "a man is what a woman is not." Hence, the constant display of hyperbolized (and normally repressed) macho behavior in every male barkada. Younger or older, males struggled for an impossible autonomy from women, from those who had borne them and from those who had married them.

In all cases, the male barkada promoted among its members the explicit cultural ideal of social and moral conformity. It reinforced behavioral homogeneity among its members and strongly discouraged any kind of originality and any sense of initiative.

Furthermore, despite its sense of intimacy, despite the peer bondage that it openly encouraged among its members, despite the egalitarian relations that it actively promoted, the male barkada created only an illusion of social harmony between males. I have noted already that the male barkada had leaders, and that therefore, among equals, as the saying goes, "some were more equal than others." In effect, all happened as if the male barkada represented a sometimes vigorous, sometimes timid, but always doomed and always renewed effort, if not at counterbalancing, at least at softening the array of social hierarchies that pervaded the entire social texture in Siquijor in particular and in the Visayas in general.

In the harsh reality of their respective life experiences, men, in particular men who belonged to the same cohort and who were thus likely members of the same barkada, were also keen competitors, especially but not exclusively over political influence, over economic advantages, and over women's favors. Members of the same barkada may have declared and considered themselves to be intimate friends, but they were nonetheless preassigned each a different status in their barangay by virtue of their relative age, of their occupation, of their family influence, of their social class, of their position on the patron/client grid, of their political and religious affiliation and so on. Despite claims to the contrary, membership in the same barkada did not erase the markings on the social slate. Although membership in the same barkada guaranteed its own modest yet real betterment in the smoothness of interpersonal relationships, it did not prevent rivalries, jealousies, accusations of witchcraft and little murders from taking place between such peers. In the end, and in the longer course of a life cycle, the greatest contribution of the male
barkada was to be found elsewhere. It derived from its ability to bond males together against women and to cement the social construction of a male identity.

To summarize at this point, the barkada on Siquijor took the appearance of a cultural institution that was meant to help the socialization of individual men. The barkada absorbed, hid and silenced the social tensions that pulled apart the variety of inhabitants, males in particular, who, one way or the other, and despite their individual disparities, managed to (in fact, had to) share the same barangay. In short, the barkada functioned as ideology. It offered the attractive platitudes of a tale of social harmony, equality, and smoothness. But in so doing, it eschewed more unpleasant realities: social discrepancies and interpersonal conflicts could—and occasionally did—tear up the very social fabric of the society.

Conclusion

In all cases and despite the disparity of the contexts in which the barkada appear, it is a convenient social and cultural tag. It designates a strong social bond reinforced by peer pressure that unites especially younger males together, whether for bad, for good or for indifferent purposes. Its enormous success as a form largely derives from its versatility. In short, it is a social form that is largely indifferent to its cultural content.

In other words, when seen in historical perspective, the barkada almost seems to dissolve into the plurality of its components. The etymological image that it evokes, that of fellow passengers bound on the same ship, for the same trip states little however of the nature of the trip. A trip of settlers at the dawn of Philippine history, a trip of convicts in troubled Philippine waters, a trip of mischievous and rebellious youngsters trying to sail away on their own or a trip of redemptive responsibility in quieter waters, the barkada signifies and foretells of all this, at once. Part of its cultural appeal resides in its polysemy. It irrupts on the Philippine scene at a given concrete moment as a convenient tag for the rebellion of youth. But the young of yesteryear, forgetful and forgotten, have aged; the tag has worn out and, for the young of today, has barely retained the trace of its past. In short, the barkada has become its own simulacrum.
Notes

1. Fieldwork in the central Philippines was conducted in 1979 thanks to a summer grant from the Graduate School Research Fund of the University of Washington (Seattle); in 1980–81 and again in 1992–93 under Fulbright-Hays Senior Fellowships administered by the Philippine-American Educational Foundation (Manila), complemented in 1992–93 by a sabbatical leave of absence from George Mason University (Fairfax, Va). The Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Silliman University (Dumaguete) in 1980–81, the Research Office of the Divine World College (Tagbilaran City) in 1992–93, and the Cebuano Studies Center at University of San Carlos (Cebu City) have greatly facilitated my field research. I acknowledge with gratefulness the generous support of all these institutions. To Dr. Resil B. Mojares, I am afraid I owe more than I can ever repay for his considerable hospitality, sustained friendship, moral support and intellectual stimulation. An earlier version of the first part of this article was presented in a symposium on Filipino males, past and present at the 45th Annual Meetings of The Association for Asian Studies held in Los Angeles, CA, 24–28 March 1993.

2. Of course, one may have the strong suspicion that, at least in the Central Visayan context, despite appearances to the contrary, neither the dominant sociocultural ideology nor the enculturation and socialization processes that families and schools control, focus on gender any less for doing it in more subtle and indirect ways.

3. An overwhelming majority of school teachers were women (see Dumont 1991).

4. Fieldwork in Siquijor took place in the municipality of Lazi. Following current ethnographic practice, the names of barangay Lapyahan and of sitio Camingawan are fictitious. Personal names of Siquijorians are the same pseudonyms as used in Dumont 1992. Personal names of Boholanos are pseudonyms as well.

5. In the city of Tagbilaran, interviews with lower class people are conducted in Visayan. Although the local weekly The Bohol Chronicle in an unsigned article entitled "US anthropologist here in Tagbilaran" flatteringly wrote that "he [Dumont] now speaks the Cebuano dialect intelligibly" (1992, 48), members of the bourgeoisie insist on speaking to me in English and thus interviews with them are perforce conducted in this language.

6. The LVN movie studios were located in Quezon City.

7. Nick Joaquin wrote under this name his works of fiction; as a columnist, however, he has consistently used the pen name of Quijano de Manila.

8. Primitivo "Boy" Sta. Romana died at age 23 under circumstances that Quijano de Manila (1977) analyzes and summarizes with poignant concision:

   it may be that he was carrying over into real life the attitudes learned in the world of make-believe.

   Anyway he drew and fired and was himself shot, and was presently lying, face down, in the mud of the movie studio, not under a noon sun but under a rainy night sky.

   That was one gun duel he lost, though he was quicker on the draw.

9. I am once more indebted to Resil B. Mojares who physically placed this and the previous Quijano de Manila's text into my hands.

10. This begs the question of knowing what was taking place before the emergence of the barkada. Apparently nothing, if I believe those among my informants...
who went through adolescence before the Lo-Waisters. The unease that the former may have experienced was muted because, as one of them put it, "in these days, the authority of our parents was absolute," before adding nostalgically "families were strong then." This of course may have to be taken *cum grano salis.* And yet it is certain that in prior generations teenagers did not have the freedom they acquired later in expressing with manifest abandon and in socially ostentatious ways the torment of growing up. In short, the unease of adolescents in earlier generations received a different cultural treatment as its cultural expression was more subtle, softer and altogether quieter. Evidently, the emergence of the barkada was a historical event that burst as a dramatic irruption on the scene of Philippine adolescence.

11. Since I did not know what a mission song was, I was given the example of which I give here the lyrics:

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Maybe you and I can’t do great things
We may not change the world in one day
But we can still can change some things today
In our small way.
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12. As far as barkadas are concerned in barangay Lapyahan on the island of Siquijor, very little—apart of course from the age of each character—seemed to have changed between my early visit in 1980 and my latest visit in 1993. Unless otherwise specified, I am referring in this section to events that occurred in 1980–81.

13. Different physical qualities would have led to different responses. Too dark or too pale skin colors led to discrimination. Young people, concerned with their looks, sheltered themselves whenever they could so as not to tan. As for people affected by albinism, they were not entirely considered to be human, as they had been conceived by a spirit. But neither poliomyelitis nor any limb amputation were social disqualifiers.

14. *Manang* is used as a respectful term of address for older women. Strictly speaking it is supposed to be used as a term of address for any female older than oneself, whether relatives (e.g., any older sister, an aunt) or strangers (i.e., anyone who visibly belongs to an older generation than the speaker).

15. Arguably, resilience is a central feature of Visayan culture. Sally Ness (1992) has offered a particularly penetrating analysis of kinesthetic resilience in Cebu.

16. The relevance of the concept of "cohort" in the Philippines (more specifically in the tribal context of the Ilongot) was elaborated with persuasive elegance by Renato Rosaldo (1980).

17. Each *barangay* had an administratively official existence. Some of its constitutive clusters of houses were names *sito* but receive no official recognition.

18. For many different reasons, the geographical spread of female *barkada* members was even more striking.

19. Under normal circumstances, among females, only schoolgirls could spend a vast amount of time with each other, not only when at school but also on their way to and from school. Younger and single women visited each other on their leisure time and gathered near the artesian well for that purpose. In general, married women could only briefly leave their household to visit someone else.

20. In addition, theoretical abstraction is one thing; ethnographic reality a different one. Marriage indeed weakened the male barkada because the newly formed family competes for attention with the husband’s barkada. A male barkada is always
a reaction against family, against the mother and the family of procreation at first (that is before marriage), against the wife and the family of orientation later (that is later, years after marriage).

21. As for actual behavioral responsibility, it eluded these youngsters practically until their marriage or the death of their parents, whichever came first.

22. See note 14 above.

23. Because men have managed to keep a firm grip on political control of the society, it is their barkadas that were perforce the most active.

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