

Loci of Greed in a Caribbean Paradise: Land Conflicts in Bocas del Toro, Panama

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The Bocas del Toro archipelago on the Caribbean side of Panama has seen the rise of tourism as the dominant and almost exclusive industry since the early 1990s. The archipelago has been in the national limelight since 2000 due to the abundance of land conflicts sparked by “residential tourism,” resort development and subsequent land speculation. In response, the Panamanian government has attempted to evolve a regulatory system that fosters economic growth through foreign investment in the region while also appeasing and controlling citizen, expatriate retiree, and investor angst due to the burgeoning conflicts. This article examines the motivations behind the regulatory mechanisms enacted, as well as the motivations of various actors involved by identifying various loci of greed that anchor the accusations of greed to particular social actors. In the process, it examines the discourses used by these actors to interpret, ignore, or modify the regulatory framework within the context of the land conflicts in order to serve their interests. I suggest that it is necessary to operationalize the concept of greed to allow for systematic cross-cultural comparisons. Studying narratives of greed and the associated social actors helps us understand how greed is emically defined and allows us to move past subjective moral judgments.

Keywords Greed; Land Tenure; Land Conflicts; Panama; Ngobe; Caribbean

The articles in this volume are an attempt to move past ethnocentric moral judgments implied by the term “greed.” They suggest useful conceptual frameworks for analyzing phenomena that bear “family resemblance” (term borrowed from Dominguez, 2014) to the word “greed”. This article is an effort to “operationalize” the concept of greed by exploring the complex reasons underlying land conflicts in a Caribbean tourist paradise and the local discourses explaining them. These local discourses are intimately tied with accusations of greed leveled by various social actors against one another. I use the term “*loci of greed*” to ground the different prevailing discourses to specific local actors.

In this article, I specify some of these loci of accusations of greed and suggest that accusations of greed may perform either a *control function* or a *regulatory function* depending on who the accusers are. The control functions of greed accusations may be hegemonically employed by elites to justify their accumulation and the denial of resources to others. In response, the subaltern (Spivak) can use accusations of greed to regulate elite accumulation and gain access to valuable resources. I contend that such a regulatory function can be achieved only if the subaltern can arrive at a consensus for a representative narrative, and thereby possess what I will call as “*narrative dominance*.”

Virginia Dominguez (2014) suggests that greed may be interpreted as the “generative mechanism for the production and reproduction” of systems of differentiation. At the same time, she proposes that accusations of greed are “rhetorical acts of criticism” (Dominguez, 2014). I extend this idea to suggest that accusations of greed are used by social actors to tweak the economic system to their advantage

by achieving “narrative dominance.” This in turn shapes the social norms about what is greed. For example, in Durrenberger and Gillogly’s (2014) article, we see that acquisitiveness among the Lisu was not considered as greed during the reciprocity-based opium economy because there were built-in leveling mechanisms. But in the post-opium economy, acquisitiveness that was used for accumulation and investment was defined as greed because of the absence of leveling mechanisms that redistributed the wealth within the community. I propose that such a process of evolving social norms for defining greed in order to achieve narrative dominance indexes one of the driving questions for this volume as defined by Oka and Kuijt: How do we examine greed and excess when groups and societies are not faced with limited resources and have inequalities and hierarchies as the organizing principles of their social and political structure?

As several papers in the volume have suggested (see Oka & Kuijt, 2014; Surowiecki, 2014; Wilk, 2014; Durrenberger, 2014 and Gillogly; & Bosco, 2014) greed is a temporally and spatially situated negative judgment of a behavior that has fallen in disfavor. I also point out that certain behaviors that are usually judged as morally wholesome, such as desire for good health, education, peace of mind, the simple life, or even the eradication of drug addiction (e.g., Durrenberger & Gillogly, 2014) can lead to acquisitive behaviors that can result in accusations of greed. The land conflicts in Bocas del Toro, Panama, are one such example.

Tourism and land conflicts in Bocas del Toro, Panama

Over the last two decades, the Bocas del Toro archipelago (see Figure 1) on the Caribbean side of Panama has seen the rise of tourism as the dominant and almost exclusive industry. In conjunction with neoliberal land reforms aimed at privatizing and titling land, tourism has been actively promoted by the Panamanian government to boost the local economy which had declined following the migration of the banana industry to mainland Panama in the mid-20th century. The archipelago has been in the national limelight since 2000 (e.g., Inwood, 2005; Nadal, 2009; Winner, 2007) due to the abundance of land conflicts sparked by “residential tourism” and resort development. “Residential tourism” refers to retirees, largely from the United States and Europe, who have settled down in homes, condominiums, gated communities, and large estates in Bocas del Toro. The influx of elite retirees promoted by transnational real estate companies and private realtors has resulted in a rush to grab as much land as possible so they can sell it at inflated prices to retirees looking for a cheaper retirement plan.

In response, the Panamanian government has attempted to evolve a regulatory framework that fosters economic growth through foreign investment in the region while also appeasing and controlling citizen, expatriate retiree and investor angst due to the burgeoning conflicts. Actors in this situation include the Panamanian legislature; various government officials; nongovernmental organizations; foreign corporations; foreign real estate agents; expatriate retirees from the United States and Europe; and local Panamanians including the indigenous Ngöbe, Afro-Caribbeans, and *mestizos*. At stake for the various actors in this spectacle are land for cultivation and subsistence, access to the beach and the sea, land for experiencing aesthetic beauty, livelihood through wage labor, salvaging invested retirement funds, achieving targeted increases in indicators of national economic growth, and the fulfillment of political ambitions.

In this article I explore some of the complex reasons underlying these land conflicts as well as the prevalent local discourses explaining them. Since most of the land conflicts in the archipelago are

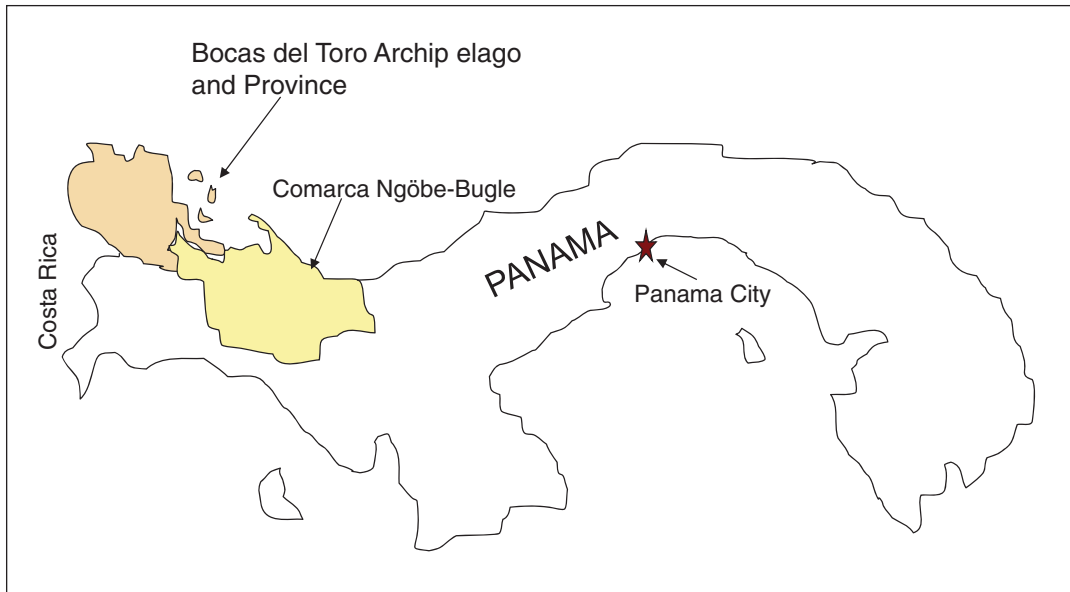


Figure 1 Bocas del Toro Archipelago is located on the Caribbean side of Panama.

between indigenous Ngöbe residents of a location and elite Panamanians or foreign expatriates looking to build homes or resorts, I will focus on these two classes of social actors. Within the context of these discourses, I will address how accusations of greed by these social actors perform either a *control function* or a *regulatory function* in Bocatorenean society.

Study site

The Bocas del Toro archipelago is one of Panama's top tourist destinations. According to St. Louis and Doggett (2004), visitors to the archipelago come to “soak up the laid-back Caribbean vibe that Islas Colón and Bastimentos offer,” including snorkeling, surfing, and sailing. In addition, the abundance of rain forests covering the islands allow for hiking, exploring, eco-tourism and establishment of research institutes such as the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) and the Institute for Tropical Ecology and Conservation (ITEC). The islands, populated by the Teribe, Guaymi, Afro-Caribbeans, Latinos, and Chinese-Panamanians (Guerrón-Montero, 2002; de Samudio, 1992) are also increasingly regarded as a haven for the construction of retirement paradises for American and European retirees (García-Navarro, 2006).

The town of Bocas del Toro, which is also the capital of the province by the same name, is situated on Isla Colón, the largest island in the archipelago (61 km²) (see Figure 2). Bocas del Toro town was the site of one of United Fruit Company's oldest stations, established at the beginning of the 20th century (Gordon, 1982; Guerrón-Montero, 2002). After the Chiriqui Land Company (its local name) moved its headquarters to Almirante on the mainland, Changuinola became its main centre of activity (Gordon, 1982; Guerrón-Montero, 2002) and production in the district of Bocas del Toro declined. Since 1991, the tourism industry has revived the town and brought a boom in commerce and construction. More than 50% of the population of Isla Colón lives in the town.

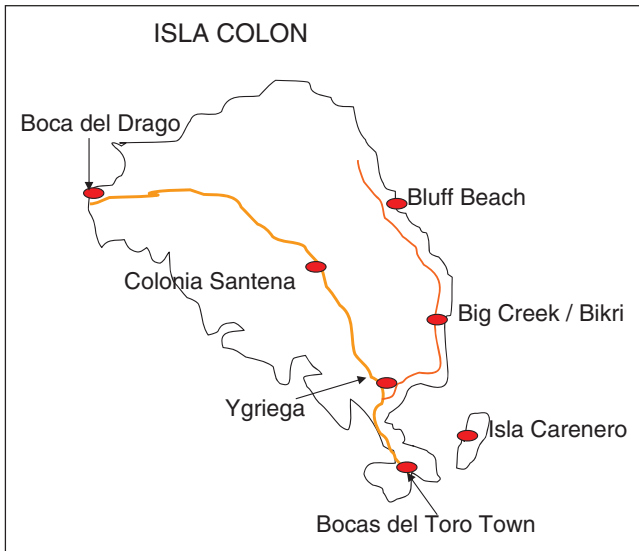


Figure 2 Isla Colón is the largest and most populous island in the archipelago. All of the neighborhoods discussed in the article are located on this island.

A single road connects the town to the interior of the island and ends at the Boca del Drago beach. Socioeconomic characteristics vary as the road proceeds through the town and out of it. Localities of Barriada La Solución, Barriada Loma Espino, and Higüerón (also known as Dijeron) in Isla Colón consist mostly of people who have emigrated from the Comarca Ngöbe-Buglé and the mainland (*Tierra Firme*) (see Figure 3). Some of the residents in these areas are from the archipelago itself, but were displaced from the land they originally cultivated by tourism-related activities. The area consists of swampy ground from recently cut mangroves and is located along the peripheries of Bocas Town. The locality of Colonia Santeña consists of colonists from the Los Santos Province who settled in the archipelago during the 1970s following a government resettlement program. Bikri Arriba and Playa Bluff are populated largely by expatriate residents and a few indigenous Ngöbe families. Bluff Centro is populated by the indigenous Ngöbe, while Saigon and Ygriega are localities with a mix of *mestizo*, Afro-Caribbean, Ngöbe, as well as expatriates. Other prominent islands in the archipelago include the islands of Bastimentos (the second largest in size and population after Isla Colón), Carenero, San Cristobal, Solarte, Cayo Tigre, and Cayo de Agua. Data used in this study were collected during multiple field trips conducted between 2005 and 2009.

Sources of land conflicts and associated discourses

Since the 1990s, the Panamanian government has formulated tourism development strategies and passed laws to attract foreign investment in tourism in the region. Therefore, although the region has had a long history of North American and European migration (Guerrón-Montero, 2002), with the rise of the tourism industry over the last 20 years and its focus on retirement tourism, the region is witnessing a new rush of American, Canadian, European, and Australian expatriates looking to settle in gated retirement communities and vast seaside estates or invest in the construction of multibillion-dollar resorts. This has fueled land speculation as transnational real estate companies like Remax and Century 21, as well as independent real estate agents try to make quick money by buying or appropriating



Figure 3 Houses in the Dijeron locality near Bocas Town. This is one of the recently colonized localities built over mangroves. Most residents are immigrants from the Comarca Ngöbe-Buglé. A few are residents of other islands in the archipelago displaced by residential tourism projects.

land from local subsistence farmers and selling them with over 200% markup¹ to incoming expatriates (Thampy, 2013).

Land conflicts in Bocas del Toro may be ascribed to three main reasons. Some of the blame may be attributed to the legal and bureaucratic confusion arising from a configuration of land tenure laws designed for the agrarian reform era rather than the neoliberal era where the land market is open to the global land market (see Thampy, 2013). Another reason for land conflicts in Bocas can be attributed to multiple claimants to the same property stemming from aforementioned legal and bureaucratic confusion. Finally, differing property norms between the indigenous and the nonindigenous residents and expatriates also contribute to land conflicts in Bocas del Toro.

Land conflicts due to legal and bureaucratic confusion

The bureaucratic and institutional confusion produced by the current configuration of land tenure laws in Panama (see Thampy, 2013) creates a climate ripe for land conflicts. Land reform is a contested political process and extends beyond the state (Forster, 2000; Zoomers & Van der Haar, 2000). State regulations may act upon or interfere with other normative systems, such as customary law or

community regulations (Zoomers & Van der Haar, 2000, p. 24). It should also be noted that the process of land titling often happens very slowly due to economic, managerial and technological constraints (Zoomers & Van der Haar, 2000). The enactment of a land reform at the national level does not automatically transform into a replacement of existing tenure laws at the local level (Jansen & Roquas, 1998). Interpretation of laws is usually multilayered, nested and evolves over time (Griffith, 1986; Ostrom, 1990; de Sousa Santos, 1977). In Bocas del Toro as too, the simultaneous existence of multiple kinds of tenure systems, the recent enactment and subsequent rescinding of different laws aimed at facilitating neoliberal land privatization, and the overlap or “dark areas” of jurisdictional responsibilities pertaining to land administration among several government ministries and agencies produce a climate of confusion and disorientation for Panamanian and expatriate residents (see Thampy, 2013), while working to the advantage of unscrupulous land brokers and elites.

Land conflicts arising from multiple claims to the same property

Another reason for the land conflicts is due to multiple claimants to the same land. These claims arise due to a variety of interesting reasons. These include legal and bureaucratic confusion within government agencies, unscrupulous buyers, sellers and real estate brokers, and differing views of property between the indigenous Ngöbe and the Western expatriates and *mestizo* Panamanians.

Although, Panama did not allow titling of island land, it turns out that briefly, in the early 1900s, it was in fact, possible to purchase titled land from the State. The titles granted during this period were not abolished by the subsequent law that disallowed titled island land. So, a few families in Panama actually have very old titles to land in the archipelago. Until recently nobody cared about these titles since land was not valuable then. With tourism-induced land speculation and high land prices, descendants of these title owners have now swooped down on the islands to stake their claims. However, in the intervening 80 odd years, other families (indigenous/*mestizo*/Afro-Caribbean as well as expatriate residents) settled the land. Some have Rights of Occupation documents, while others have the Rights of Occupation in spirit.

Ideally and legally, the Right of Occupation (usufruct rights) documents would belong to the person who has Right of Occupation in spirit. However, even where there are no title owners to the property, land conflicts have arisen because of different claimants to the same property some of whom possess Right of Occupation in spirit while others were able to obtain Right of Occupation documents. This is caused by lax record-keeping and is a structural issue. For example, in my interview with the Director of the *Reforma Agraria* in Bocas del Toro Province, I was told that one could formalize one's Rights of Possession by applying for a certificate. The application process requires the claimant to produce three witnesses (preferably neighbors) to sign the document testifying to his/her residence and use of said land. The office of the *Reforma Agraria* does not verify this claim or the witnesses with a site visit or even a survey. Given the rampant illiteracy amongst older generation of Bocatoreneans, it is not difficult to imagine that at least some of these witnesses had no idea what they were signing. Thus, even though a particular family may have been residing on a property for decades and consequently has Right of Occupation in spirit, it was possible for a different person not residing there to go to the government agency and claim Right of Occupation and obtain the corresponding documents.

Conflicts also arise because of explicitly unscrupulous dealings. A common one is when a buyer buys a property from a seller who claims ownership of the land. When the buyer arrives on the scene,

he/she find another community already living on the land. After unsuccessfully trying to evict the community, the buyer just sells the land to a second buyer who then goes through the same process. This results in an extremely confusing series of conflicts between the communities residing on the land and the multiple “buyers.”

A more recent development (since about 2002) has been land conflicts among expatriates. This has been due to unscrupulous middle-men and real-estate agents selling land that is not for sale to prospective buyers. In some cases, prospective buyers actually arrived in Bocas to buy a property after seeing its listing online—only to find that the said property had owners living on it who had no idea that their house and land was listed online for sale (one such incident was narrated to me in an interview with an American couple residing in Isla Colón).

Indigenous discourses concerning land tenure laws in Panama

Land tenure laws and their interpretations evolve over centuries. Without formal knowledge of such history, these historical processes may manifest in the national or local collective memory as “the default authority of the state” or as “tradition.” These competing collective memories themselves constitute competing discourses. In Bocas, for example, one may trace the origins of today’s land tenure practices to as far back as the Spanish colonial rule. Under Spanish colonial rule—all land belonged to the king (Heckadon, 1984). Subjects had USE rights to the land, but could not own it. This history underlies the concept of *tierras baldias/tierras nacionales* wherein all land belongs to the nation of Panama by default unless explicitly bought (in the case of titled land) or used (in the case of land with Rights of Occupation or *derrechos posesorios*). However, this interpretation of property rights by the throne and the State has been and still is contested by the indigenous Ngöbe who express shock at the very idea:

“How can the government own ALL the land?” asked one land rights activist in disbelief. “This land was made by God! It was here before the Spanish and before the Government of Panama even existed! And WE were here before any of them arrived!

~ An indigenous land rights activist speaking at a community meeting in 2006.

As another illustration of discourses stemming from memories of historical processes, *asentamientos*, or communal farms were established during the mid-20th century through the Panamanian Agrarian Reforms (Heckadon, 1984). In my interviews, many indigenous people referred to this system as their “*tradición indígena*” or traditional indigenous form of property rights. This discourse of a tradition of communal land holding is often raised by indigenous leaders during public meetings convened to protest a resort development project or during a strike. Such a discourse is used to emphasize that the “indigenous way” is to think of the collective as opposed to the *mestizo*/Western trait of individualism. For example, during a meeting of indigenous Ngöbe convened by land rights activists to educate them about the World Bank’s (2000) Land Administration Project, the implications of various Panamanian laws being debated in the *Asamblea Nacional*, and how these laws trespass on indigenous rights, one of the speakers remarked,

Ellos [the mestizos and Western expatriates] hablan como “Yo,” “Tu,” “El/Ella” ... para la indígena no es así ... es como “nosotros,” “la familia” ... eso es ‘la pensamiento colectivo.’

They [the *mestizos* and Western expatriates] talk in terms of “I,” “you,” “he/she” ... for us indigenous people, it is not so ... we think in terms of “we,” “the family” ... this is the collective way of thinking.

~ An indigenous land rights activist speaking at a community meeting in 2009.

Interestingly, in three of the cases of indigenous families embroiled in land conflicts with expatriate residents, all three were extended family households. All three were trying to pool together labor and monetary resources in order to obtain formal papers showing their occupation of the lands involved. And in all the three cases they emphasized that once they obtained the formal papers securing their rights against the expatriates, each nuclear family intended to apply for formal papers separately for separate parcels. When I asked them why they wanted to pursue this noncollective way of thinking about property rights, they said that it was better to avoid future conflicts within the family by delineating each nuclear family’s land parcels. These indigenous families were engaging in strategic essentialism (Spivak). They were claiming the discourse of the selfless indigenous who thinks of the community before family and family before self and advertising it to their advantage. Such discourses create a cultural flower bed within which can grow particular kinds of accusations of greed against particular social actors.

Discourses concerning land conflicts stemming from differing norms about property

The most interesting conflicts are those that arise due to different ideas of property rights. *Mestizo*/Western notions employ the idea of exclusive ownership of the land and everything on it. In Bocas, once an expatriate buys a piece of property, there is an emphasis on building fences to keep people out and bar passage across the property (Figure 4). When land is bought by an expatriate, they assume that all that is on it also transfers ownership.

The indigenous Ngöbe view emphasizes use rights and the idea that land belongs to those who labor on it (Young, 1971). Rights are not exclusive or prohibitory (so there is no restriction on rights of passage for others). The following subset of comments summarizes a feeling of loss and confusion among the indigenous resulting from changes in the landscape due to changing property norms.

Some people want to buy land and live here. So once they have a fence, we cannot pass through that area.

~ Interview with a 34-year-old construction worker in Drago on Isla Colón.

Tourism is partly bad because some people [tourists] buy and limit their boundaries and nobody can then enter their properties. There are boundary limits with closed gates that you can enter only with the permission of the new owners. Even on farms and beaches! Before tourism reached here, there was tranquility and no problems. We were poor, but we lived well and were free to go where we wanted. Since 1990, everything changed. Now we are prohibited from going to various places because they buy up all the property.

~ Interview with a 27-year-old housewife living in Bikri Arriba in Isla Colón and participating in a protest march against the Red Frog Beach Development Project.

They [tourists] come and they buy the land and when they buy they promise to give work to the people and then in the end they don’t do so. Then they privatize everything. It is painful for me and my family because



Figure 4 A high wall encloses this property belonging to an expatriate resident in Bocas del Toro. The wall cuts off access to the sea. Such walls and fences have come to symbolize “tourism” for local Panamanian residents.

we traditionally live freely everywhere in Panama. Our concept of property is more open (*mas abierto*). All pathways are private. All beaches are private. We can't walk anywhere. So this is a big problem for us over here.

~ Interview with a 33-year-old surfing teacher and tourist guide in Bocas Town.

The indigenous Ngöbe also differentiate between land, and the things growing on it (Young, 1971). For example, one indigenous Ngöbe informant who had actually voluntarily sold his land to a Spaniard was shocked that he and his sons could no longer tend his coconuts trees on that land anymore. He complained that the Spanish expatriate he sold it to had security guards posted there to prevent him and his sons from accessing the coconut trees. From his point of view he had only sold the land, not the trees growing on that land.

Loci of greed and the function of accusations

I would like to use the above examples of differing property norms as a point of departure into my discussion on the various loci of greed in the archipelago as well as the control and regulatory functions of greed. First, this narrative of how property rights are viewed itself performs a control or a regulatory

function. I distinguish between the two. I suggest that accusations of greed perform a “control” function when the word is employed by elites who possess the narrative hegemony. In contrast, accusations of greed perform a regulatory function when employed by the masses to limit elite accumulation of wealth. Note that I use the term “elite” to mark people of comparative advantage.

The majority of land conflicts in the archipelago involve the indigenous Ngöbe and expatriate buyers of the land that the Ngöbe reside on. For this reason, I examine the narratives employed by or on behalf of these two groups of social actors in the Bocas archipelago. Their accusations and counter-accusations of greed form some of the “loci” of greed in the archipelago.

While residents of Bocas complain of expat practices concerning fencing, not recognizing right of passage, blocking access to the sea and the beach, etc., in my interviews with expats, I was impressed by the conviction on the part of many expatriate residents that their very presence in Panama and Bocas serves as a catalyst for positive change in Panamanian society. They were persuaded that THEY were bringing in the values of hard work, the sanctity of contracts and titles, and the spirit of entrepreneurship to the legal chaos in this part of the world. Interestingly, a *mestizo* Panamanian lady I talked to commented sympathetically, “after all, they [expats] are just concerned about protecting their 401k investments too.” In contrast to this remark about expatriate ambitions, she was concerned that one of the indigenous land rights activists was trying to befriend her to ask for money.

Narratives pertaining to the indigenous Ngöbe swung between portraying them as noble, environmentally conscious people, and as greedy, naive simpletons — a Rousseau versus Adam Smith caricature. I argue that the first is a narrative of “regulation” that can be used by the indigenous to their advantage to thwart accumulation by elites. The second is a “control” narrative that can be employed by the nonindigenous to control indigenous ambitions.

As an example of a narrative of control, the local *mestizo*/expatriate discourse on the mangrove colonies of Dijeron, Barriada de Soluciones, and Barriada Loma Espino in Bocas (see Figure 3) is that the residents in these ghettos ended up there because they sold their land in other parts of the archipelago for money and did not have any other place to go. This middle-class Panamanian discourse of the “greedy Indian” is also reflected in some interesting comments by a couple of Panamanian biologists at the Smithsonian when I showed them a map of the original Ngöbe demand for the Ngöbe Comarca reservation (which included the Bocas archipelago and much of today’s Bocas del Toro province): “They are asking for ALL that Land? Jeez!” Later, one of them remarked to me: “If you leave for Sevilla, you must give up your chair here (*Si va para Sevilla, tiene que quitar su silla aqui*)” implying that the indigenous did not stay and fight for their land against the Spanish invasion and now they want it back for free.

Such narratives of control are also exhibited by actors within the indigenous community who may be slightly relatively advantaged compared to the majority of the Ngöbe. In two of my case studies of land conflicts that certain indigenous families were embroiled in, some Ngöbe families in the community decided to sell their land as well as the land of other families (without their permission) to expatriates and resort developers. In both cases, people signing the papers were illiterate, did not understand what they were doing, were easily misled by the promise of petty sums of money and wage labor on would-be projects, did not have any copies of documents they put their thumb impression on, and did not consult anyone about the deal as they wanted to keep it a secret. They got themselves as well as a whole bunch of other people in trouble. An indigenous land rights activist I talked to about this case held it as an example of indigenous greed—that the indigenous people were now being contaminated by Western values. From the point of view of this indigenous activist, greed—an implicitly Western quality was

now polluting his people's values. Implied in his accusation of greed on these indigenous families, was also an accusation of Western civilization as greedy.

I also found that some indigenous Ngöbe in the Dijeron ghetto in Bocas were unwilling to oppose titling or large-scale projects because they felt that privatization would be more advantageous to them. They were migrants from the Ngöbe Comarca (the indigenous reservation) and had not used their land in the Comarca for many years. By customary law, since they are not using it, they relinquish their rights over it and it belongs to whoever now labors on the land. But these people couch it in *mestizo*/Western terms: that they "left their land in the Comarca to work here; in the mean time, other people moved in and 'robbed' their land; and the Comarca government does not protect them even though it is 'their' land." Therefore they want the neoliberal land privatization reforms to extend to the Comarca too. This is especially interesting given that their living situation in the ghetto in Dijeron would become problematic were the titling program be implemented.

So the indigenous position on the land reforms is heterogeneous. This is often lost in the national discourse where there is a push (on the part of journalists, NGOs, as well as indigenous activists) to show them as the noble Indian close to the land being swindled by unscrupulous Westerners. I contend that these Rousseauvian discourses exhibit the regulatory functions of accusations of greed by shining the spotlight on elite accumulation. It is crucial for such discourses to gain popular acceptance and achieve narrative dominance in order to safe-guard or attain indigenous land rights.

Conclusions

I would like to revisit Oka and Kuijt's (2014) question on how to examine greed and excess when groups and societies are not faced with limited resources and have inequalities and hierarchies as the organizing principles of their social and political structure. I suggest that this question can be boiled down to how to distinguish between *need* and *greed*. I use Robertson's (2001) suggestion that greed can be construed as the desire of the inferior body (e.g., immigrant, female, indigenous, etc.). I apply his definition to the case of the indigenous in Panama where the indigenous is portrayed as greedy for land, but the expatriate is protecting his 401 k. This is similar to American politics today with the anti-public worker and anti-teacher rhetoric versus the pro-Wall Street, pro-corporation discourse on Fox News.

I also argue that greed is the desire of the *unsuccessful body*. For example, the gluttony of the thin person would not be labeled as greed, while that of the obese person is (think about Nathan's hotdog eating contest where contestants are now portrayed as sports persons in a sporting eating). The inflated bonuses of Wall Street executives are not greed, but just rewards for talent. But the 51 k/year salary plus benefits of the school teacher in Ohio or Wisconsin is greed. Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfield (2014) and Wilk (2014) present other similar examples.

Similarly, in my case studies of indigenous families embroiled in land conflicts, had they negotiated an advantageous land sale for themselves, they would NOT have been labeled as greedy. If the ghettos of Soluciones and Dijeron in Bocas were clean and beautiful, there would not have been any discourse about those indigenous residents selling their lands in other parts of the archipelago. In fact, in my survey of these localities, I found that most people were actually migrants from the Ngöbe Reservation who had moved to Bocas to have more access to education for their children, hospitals during episodes of illness in the family, and wage labor. Very few (around five families) met the stereotype of the Indian who foolishly sold away their land and became homeless. Hence, extending Robertson's (2001) conclusion,

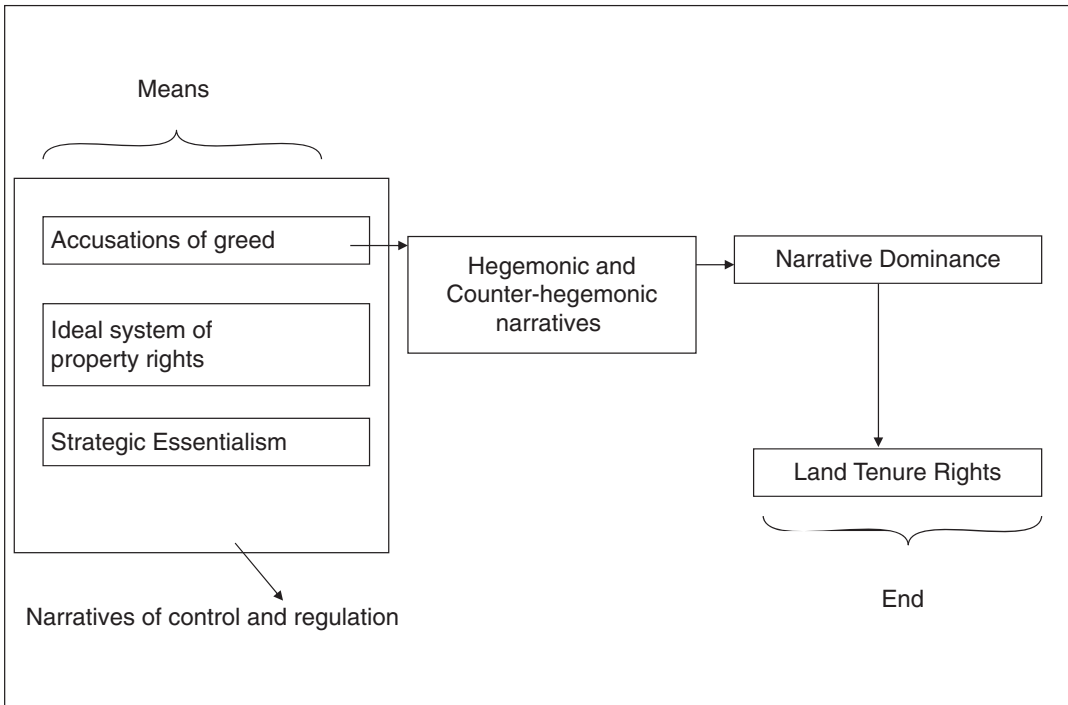


Figure 5 Hegemonic and counterhegemonic narratives of control and regulation may be used for achieving narrative dominance which can aid in securing advantageous land tenure systems.

Table 1 Narratives used for control and regulation

Regulation of elites by masses	Control of resources by elites
Accusations of greed	Accusations of greed
Ideals concerning forms of property rights	Ideals concerning forms of property rights
Defining wants as “needs”	Labeling wants of the masses as “greed”
Indigenous Ngöbe strategically identifying with the Rousseauian stereotype of the “noble savage”	Using the Smithian narrative of the selfish individual to characterize indigenous wants

I argue that *greed* is the desire of the inferior and unsuccessful body. *Need* is the entitlements allowed to the inferior and unsuccessful body by the “body politic” (term from Robertson [2001]). Accusations of greed act as a control mechanism that can be employed by elites to justify their accumulation and denial of access to resources to the majority. And greed acts as a regulatory mechanism only when the masses possess the “narrative dominance.” Thus what is defined as *need*, and what is defined as *greed*, changes with changing narrative dominance.

Antonio Gramsci uses the term “hegemony” as the power exerted by the dominant group over other groups. The term refers to how control is accomplished through the consensus of the dominated groups. I see “narrative dominance” as conceptually separate from hegemony. I propose that the “narrative dominance” swings between the dominated and the dominant class when the dominated classes can arrive at a consensus on a representative narrative that, if deployed effectively, can regulate elite accumulation. Examples of tools used to arrive at such a “narrative dominance” of the

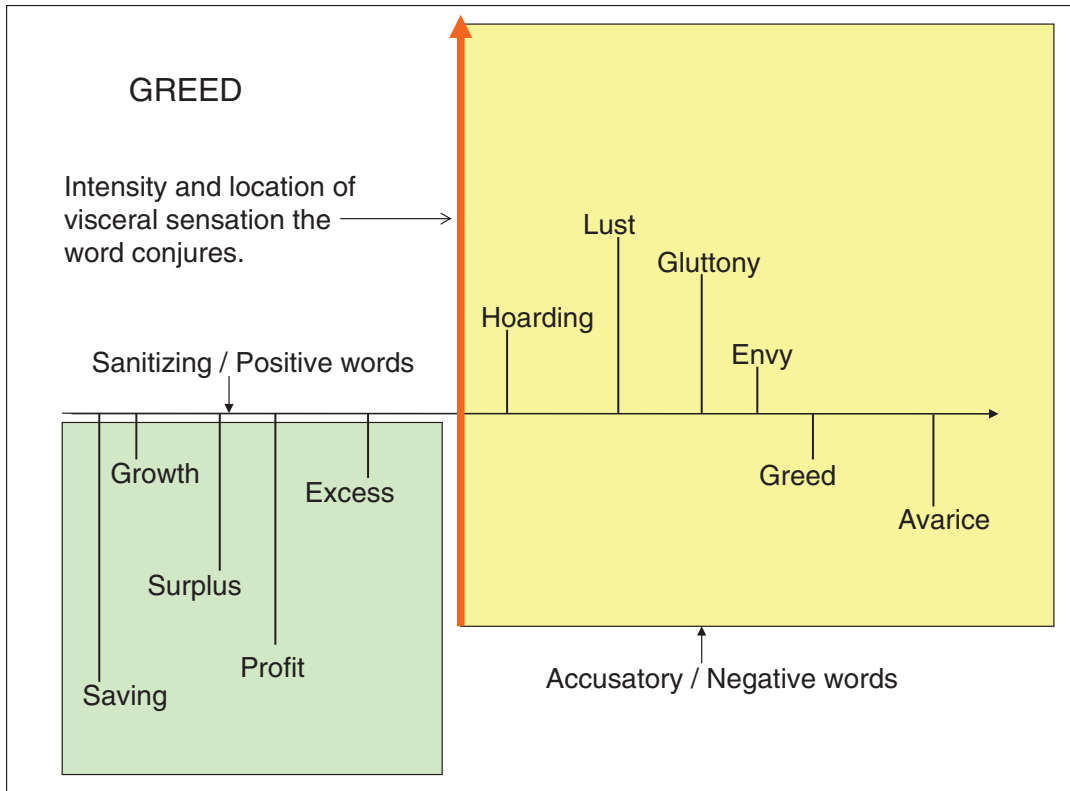


Figure 6 I maintain that the emotion of greed is located in the body and is viscerally experienced. In this diagram I attempt to emically represent the various words associated with greed using a Cartesian schema. Toward the left are sanitizing and emotionless words. Toward the right are words that evoke strong negative emotions. Toward the top are words that (for me) are felt deeper in the body. Toward the bottom are words whose sensations are felt toward the throat and head. The particular diagram may well be ethnocentric. However, the *idea* provides a basis for a cross-cultural study of greed.

masses include religious pronouncements on greed, Dickens's novels, and Bollywood movies depicting the plight of the underdog due to elite greed. In Bocas del Toro, these narratives are used by various social actors to tweak the system of land tenure rights and change it to their advantage (see Figure 5).

I also suggest that it is necessary to operationalize greed to allow for systematic cross-cultural comparisons. Studying narratives of greed and the associated social actors (as I have done in this paper) (see Table 1) help us understand how greed is emically defined and allows us to move past subjective moral judgments. At the same time, I suggest that other modes of representation besides narratives of greed can be useful in cross-cultural studies of greed. For example, careful attention to visual representations such as art, body language, facial expressions and specific words that are used by people allow us to examine how the cultural logic (borrowing a term from Bosco, 2014) of greed is physically experienced by people. I argue that discussions on greed need to be anchored to the social actors involved. Why? Because, I believe that greed is one marker on a spectrum of markers of human behavior. Some of them may be more visceral than others. By collecting folk taxonomies for

greed-related words and feelings in other languages and cultures anthropologists may get pointers to areas of study for cross-cultural comparisons.

Here I present a model for representing one such folk taxonomy of greed-mine (see Figure 6). I do not venture to claim that it is representative of any culture or micro-culture that I identify with. Yet I will contend that it is not completely idiosyncratic. Rather, it has been influenced by the cultures in which I have grown up and to which I have been exposed. I appeal to the reader to attend to the *idea of modeling* greed and contemplate future applications of such models for anthropological studies of greed, rather than to the specifics of where I decided to locate different words pertaining to greed in English.

A point I want to make with this diagram concerns Virginia Dominguez's question (2014) on why anthropologists, although we study extreme forms of inequality in various societies, are not more disgusted and more driven to action. To answer this question, I think it is important to examine the words we employ in our analyses. Are we using the accusatory words that generate bodily sensations? Or are we using the more sanitizing and emotionless words in an effort to seem objective and analytical?

I think it is important to discuss this because it is ultimately the INDIVIDUAL that is greedy. Emotion is culture writ into the body. The physiological manifestation of the emotion in the body is culturally mediated. But the emotion of greed (like all other emotions) is *ultimately* located in the body. The desire to accumulate stems from a desire to satisfy bodily sensations. And it is here *in the body* that economic, biological, and religious (e.g., Catholic/Protestant/Buddhist) judgments on desire intersect. Anthropological studies of *individuals experiencing greed* will give us the key to studying *cultures of greed*.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to all the people of Bocas del Toro for participating in this study and answering a stranger's intrusive questions on the sensitive topic of land tenure rights. I am thankful for several grants that helped me fund this study. These include the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's short-term fellowship, the Tinker Foundation's grant for short-term field research, the Daniel Hughes Memorial Award and the Dissertation Support Grant from the Department of Anthropology at The Ohio State University, the Ray Travel Award from the Council of Graduate Students at The Ohio State University, and the International Affairs Grant from the Office of International Affairs at The Ohio State University.

Note

1 Information about property listings and corresponding property values were obtained from the Remax Panama website http://www.bocasrealestate.net/Real_Estate/Panama/Bocas/home1.php in October 2007. They were then summarized using MS Excel and compared to values that local residents reported to me as having been offered for their land. It should be noted that Remax properties were used solely as an example. Other real estate agents such as Century 21 and Pillar Construction also operate in the region and similar practices have been attributed to most realtors and developers in the region.

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