Ecclesial Opposition to Mining on Mindanao: Neoliberalism Encounters the Church of the Poor in the Land of Promise

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Abstract
In the developing world, environmental issues are often livelihood issues as the poor try to protect resources necessary for their subsistence. This paper examines the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, on the Island of Mindanao, to neoliberal policies designed by the Philippine government to encourage nonferrous metals mining by multinational corporations. Mining is an activity with substantial potential for environmental degradation that can deprive the poor of their livelihood. The Church, demonstrating the influence of liberation theology and its preferential option for the poor, has taken a stance opposing mining as an activity that may harm the poor by degrading the environment upon which they depend for their livelihood and further impoverish them. The paper examines the Church’s efforts to provide alternative development programs for the poor and discusses the potential for more conflict between neoliberalism, and its “top down” methods of implementing policies, and liberation theology with its “bottom up” perspective on achieving development.

Keywords
Philippines; Mindanao, Mining, political ecology, liberation theology

1. Introduction
This paper discusses the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church on the island of Mindanao, in the Philippines, to the efforts of that nation’s government to attract foreign investment by mining corporations. The paper
follows previous investigations in the literature, such as Nadeau (2002a), in that it examines the conflict between state-sponsored neoliberal economic policies and Christian liberation theology. "Liberation theology is a response to the phenomenon of poverty. It works not only to improve the social, economic, and environmental conditions of poor communities [and] to eliminate the structures that produced poverty in the first place" (Nadeau 2002b: 1). A Third World political ecology approach, as outlined by Bryant and Bailey (1997), is utilized and environmental conflict in a developing world context is examined as being predominantly livelihood based (in contrast to the aesthetic concerns that dominate environmental conflicts in the developed world). Third World political ecology “explores the political dimensions of human-environmental interactions” (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 17). Third World political ecology finds its home within the discipline of geography and resonates well with what Pattison (1964: 214) called the “Man-Land Tradition” of geography, “a balanced tracing out of interaction between man and environment.”


The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelago of approximately 7,000 islands located in Southeast Asia. Although geographically situated in Asia, the islands of the Philippines have many parallels, emanating largely from their having also been colonies of Spain, to the countries of Latin America (Gaspar 1994). One of the more pronounced similarities between the Philippines and Latin America is the preponderance of Catholicism in both places. In the Philippines, approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian and the Roman Catholic Church is the most well represented denomination of Christianity representing roughly 80 percent of the residents of the archipelago (Linantud 2005).

The Philippines, like the nations of Latin America, is also a nation belonging to that group of countries referred to as the “developing world” (World Bank 2005). Poverty is a widespread social problem in the Philippines and families suffering from extreme poverty make up between 30 to 60 percent of the total population (Luna 2001). The Philippines, like many countries in the developing world, is heavily indebted to foreign creditors; in 2003, for example, 22 percent of all export revenue was spent on debt service payments (World Bank 2005).
3. Mindanao: the Land of Promise

The island of Mindanao is the southernmost, and second largest, island in the Philippine archipelago containing approximately 43 percent of the land area of the Philippines and 25 percent of the Philippine population (see Figure 1) (IBON 2002). Mindanao is often perceived of as being a “recent addition” to the Philippines. During the Spanish colonial period, the Spanish were unable to control large portions of Mindanao as a result of vigorous resistance from the Muslim, or “Moro,” inhabitants of Mindanao (Abinales 2004). While large portions of northern and eastern Mindanao may have been “in an advanced state of Christianization” by 1860, much of western and southern Mindanao remained inhabited by people practicing Islam and animistic faiths well into the Twentieth Century (Diaz 2003: 66).

The Christianization of all Mindanao began to occur during the early Twentieth Century. During the American colonial period, from 1901 to 1946, the US colonial government facilitated the migration of “landless Christian peasants from the north to Mindanao” (Gaspar et al. 2002: 22). This policy accelerated after the Philippines obtained independence in 1946 as the government of the Philippines, dominated by landlords, acted to forestall unrest among the landless peasants of Luzon and the Visayan Islands by encouraging their relocation to Mindanao, a place touted as “the Land of Promise” (Gaspar et al. 2002). The Philippine government, acting in a manner akin to the governments of Brazil (Amazonia) and Indonesia (Kalimantan), used the “frontier area” of Mindanao as a “political safety-valve” to which “surplus” landless population could be exported, thus “obviating the need for land reform in central areas” (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 61). This migration of Christian settlers to Mindanao was so extensive that, between 1918 and 1990 the proportion of Mindanao’s population that was Christian increased from 22 percent to 82 percent (Gaspar et al. 2002; Rodil, 2004). This increase in the non-Muslim population was felt most significantly in the Cotabato region of Mindanao (Gutierrez and Borras 2004). In the Cotabato region (the current provinces of North

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1) The Muslim inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu islands are called “Moros” because when the Spanish originally encountered them the Spanish were reminded of the Moors of North Africa. The Spanish originally referred to them as “Maurus” or “Mauris” and eventually came to call them “Moros” (Gaspar et al. 2002).
Cotabato and South Cotabato), the composition of the population reversed from there being two Muslims for every non-Muslim in 1918 to there being two non-Muslims for every Muslim in 1960 (Gutierrez and Borras 2004).

Mindanao, like the Philippines as a whole, is a place suffering from extensive poverty (see Figure 1) (Gutierrez and Borras 2004). In fact, poverty in Mindanao is substantially higher than in the rest of the Philippines; the Muslim provinces of Lanao del Sur and Maguindano are among the poorest provinces in the Philippines but such predominantly Christian

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*Figure 1. Mindanao, the land of promise and poverty. Source: United Nations Development Program (2003).*
provinces as Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur have poverty rates well above the poverty rate for the Philippines as a whole.²

4. Mineral Resources and Mining Policy

The Philippines, being located on what geologists call the “orogenic belt of the Pacific ‘rim of fire’” (United States Geological Survey 1997: xl), is well endowed with mineral resources particularly “nonferrous metals” (metals other than iron) or, as they are often called, “hardrock minerals” (the minerals are often found in consolidated rock of igneous origin) such as copper, gold, lead, nickel, silver, and zinc (Jimenez et al. 2002). Mindanao is particularly well endowed with mineral resources. The Zamboanga Peninsula, of western Mindanao, is one of the most promising areas for gold mineralization in the Philippines and eastern Mindanao contains extensive gold deposits (Jimenez et al. 2002; Mitchell and Leach 1991). According to Romie Valerio, Supervising Geologist of the Davao office of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), “Mindanao has the highest mineral potential in the Philippines” (Valerio 2005: interview).

The Philippines has a long history of mining. According to Rovillos et al. (2003), by the Third Century AD Chinese traders were referring to the island of Luzon as *Lusong Dao* (the island of gold) and by the Fourteenth Century AD the Chinese were trading with Filipinos for crudely smelted copper (Mines and Geosciences Bureau 2000). Industrialized mining began in earnest during the American colonial period, when a series of US statutes granted American investors access to the Philippine economy, and, by 1941, the Philippines was the world’s fifth largest gold producer (Oliveros 2002). In 1980, 45 operating mines were responsible for over 20 percent of all export revenue (Rovillos et al. 2003).

By the late 1980s, however, the ability of the Philippine mining industry to act as a mechanism of facilitating economic growth began to become viewed as underutilized (Otto 1992). The Asian Development Bank argued

²) In 2000, 34 percent of the Philippine population was living in poverty, in Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur approximately 50 percent of the population was living in poverty (National Statistical Coordination Board 2006).
that the investment climate in the Philippines was viewed by the global mining industry as negative and called for a liberalization of the nation's mining laws (Rovillos et al. 2003). The Asian Development Bank, specifically, took issue with the provision of Section 2, of Article XII of the Philippine Constitution of 1987 which limited the extent of foreign investment in mining projects to no more than 40 percent of the total investment in the project (Rovillos et al. 2003).

The Philippine government acted upon the Asian Development Bank's advice in 1989 when officials from the MGB participated, along with the World Bank, in a seminar organized by the United Nations Department of Technical Cooperation and Development (Rovillos et al. 2003). The seminar was entitled “Prospects for the Mining Industry to the Year 2000” and it emphasized increasing foreign access to a nation's mineral resources as a method of enhancing foreign direct investment and, consequently, economic growth (Rovillos et al. 2003). In 1991 and 1992 the Mines and Geosciences Bureau held a series of seminars in London, Manila, and Vancouver to encourage foreign mining companies to invest in the Philippines (United States Bureau of Mines 1991; United States Bureau of Mines 1992).

In March of 1995, as a constituent of his neoliberal development program “Philippines 2000,” President Ramos signed into law Republic Act 7942 (Pye-Smith 1997; United States Geological Survey 1995; Vidal 2004). This statute, referred to as “the Mining Act of 1995,” had been sought by the Philippine mining industry through the Philippine Chamber of Mines since ratification of the Philippine Constitution in 1987 (Otto 1992; United States Geological Survey 1995). The previous mining “legislation” (the term is being used loosely) in the Philippines was Executive Order No. 211 and Executive Order No. 279 which were issued by President Aquino in 1987 (Otto 1992). These Executive Orders called for the enactment of mining legislation by the Philippine Congress and facilitated the authorization of mining projects by foreign corporations on the precondition that the project involved no more than 40 percent foreign ownership (Otto 1992; Tujan and Guzman 2002). These Executive Orders, specifically their requirement for 60 percent Filipino ownership, were unpopular among the firms of the nonferrous metals mining industry; many mining companies were reluctant to invest their time and money without having the decision-making authority (United States Geological
The Mining Act of 1995 contained several incentives to encourage mining such as: a four year income tax holiday; tax and duty-free capital equipment imports; value-added tax exemptions; income tax deductions where operations are posting losses; and accelerated depreciation (United States Geological Survey 1995). The statute also guaranteed the right of repatriation of the entire profits of the investment as well as freedom from expropriation (United States Geological Survey 1995). However, the most significant aspect of the Mining Act of 1995 was its creation of new types of production agreements that would govern the mineral deposit ownership requirements under which a foreign mining corporation would operate in the Philippines.

The two major types of production agreements under the Mining Act of 1995 are the Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA) and the Financial Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA). The Mineral Production Sharing Agreement is a production agreement which can last for up to 25 years, is approved by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and (in a manner similar to Executive Order No. 211 and Executive Order No. 279) requires that no more than 40 percent of the mineral project be owned by a foreign corporation (Environmental Science for Social Change 1999; United States Geological Survey 1995). The Financial Technical Assistance Agreement is a production agreement that can last for up to 25 years, is approved by the President of the Philippines, and (in stark contrast to the Mineral Production Sharing Agreement) allows 100 percent foreign ownership of the mining property (Environmental Science for Social Change 1999; United States Geological Survey 1995).

The Financial Technical Assistance Agreement became popular with the firms of the nonferrous metals mining industry; the number of foreign mining companies represented in the country increased by four hundred percent between the end of 1994 to the end of 1996 (United States Geological Survey 1996). Indeed, by 1997, the United States Geological Survey went so far as to call the Mining Act of 1995 “one of the most modern in Southeast Asia” (United States Geological Survey 1997: x1). By the mid, to late, 1990s the government of the Philippines seemed to be bent upon a development strategy led by mineral resource extraction. For the locations of major mining project locations on Mindanao see Figure 2.
5. Ecclesial Opposition to Nonferrous Metals Mining

The Church is an extremely influential institution in Mindanawon society. Arthur Neame, the East Asia Program Manager for the British nongovernmental organization (NGO) Christian Aid, described the Roman Catholic
Church as being, “the foremost social institution in the Philippines” (Neame 2005: interview). One writer referred to the Church as “the most trusted non-state and national institution” (Linantud 2005: 94). Indeed, the Filipino NGO Environmental Science for Social Change went so far as to say that the Church “is a vitally important part of the life of and history of the Filipino nation; it is, in a sense, the soul of the nation; more than any other it has shaped the ethos of the nation” (Environmental Science for Social Change 1999: 95). The Philippine Church has shown no shyness, or reluctance, to enter into the civil society realm. One author has described it as having become “one of the country’s most liberal institutions by challenging the state for fair elections, the rule of law, and human rights” (Linantud 2005: 81).

The social activism of the Mindanawon Church has precedents in Filipino history (Agoncillo 1990; Nadeau 2002a; Youngblood 1990). During the World War II Japanese occupation of Mindanao, Jesuit Priests “did much to alleviate the condition of the people suffering from the effects of the war” (Agoncillo 1990: 412). Ecclesial activism, however, began to intensify after the Second Vatican Council’s commitment to social justice in the 1960s (Youngblood 1990). Since then, the Catholic bishops have consistently spoken out in favor of the powerless and disadvantaged in a series of pastoral letters and every diocese in the country has established a social action center to implement projects aimed towards social justice (Gaspar 2004; Youngblood 1990).

The activism of the Church has extended into issues of the environment and natural resource management. In the late 1980s, the “Columban Fathers in Western Mindanao were the first to draw attention to the urgent ecological problems that needed a strong response from the church” (Gaspar 1997: 158). In 1988, “an unprecedented pastoral letter on the ecology was approved by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines” (Lynch and Talbot 1988: 680). The pastoral letter, drafted in the Mindanawon Diocese of Marbel,3 was entitled What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land? In the pastoral letter the bishops asked the government “not to pursue economic gains at the expense of long-term ecological damage” (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines 1988: 9). This

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3) The locations of the ecclesial jurisdictions mentioned in this paper are identified in Figure 3.
emphasis upon ecology continues today in the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines; many diocesan social action centers have an ecology desk within them to advocate environmental issues in their diocese (Catedral 2005: interview).

The Mindanao Church began to directly engage the government’s mining based development paradigm in April 1997 and salient demonstrations of its opposition to mining are displayed in Table 1. Attention now turns to an underlying theme inherent in this ecclesial opposition, the concept of liberation theology, and how liberation theology is intertwined with the specific bases for the Church’s opposition to mining.

Table 1. Ecclesial actions against mining in Mindanao

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 1997</td>
<td>Bishop Zacharias Jimenez, the Bishop of the Diocese of Pagadian, wrote to the shareholders of the British mining company Rio Tinto Zinc asking them to ensure that Rio Tinto Zinc refrained from engaging in mining in the Diocese of Pagadian.¹</td>
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<td>May 1997</td>
<td>Bishop Jimenez followed up his letter to the shareholders of Rio Tinto Zinc with a letter to the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales asking for their assistance in preventing Rio Tinto Zinc from establishing a mine in the Diocese of Pagadian.¹</td>
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<td>May 1997</td>
<td>Priests from the Provinces of North Cotabato and South Cotabato participated in a three day long picket to block the Australian mining company Western Mining Corporation from having access to an exploration site in South Cotabato.²</td>
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<td>October 1997</td>
<td>The archbishop of the Archdiocese of Ozamis and the bishops of the Dioceses of Dipolog, Iligan, Pagadian, and the Prelature of Marawi, collectively wrote President Ramos articulating their opposition to mining in the Zamboanga Peninsula on the island of Mindanao; the bishops also called for a repeal of the Mining Act of 1995.¹</td>
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Table 1. (cont.)

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<th>Date</th>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued a statement of concern on the Mining Act of 1995 wherein they called for the repeal of the Mining Act.³</td>
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<td>June 2002</td>
<td>Bishop Nereo Odchimar, the Bishop of the Diocese of Tandag, issued a pastoral letter opposing mining in the Diocese of Tandag.⁴</td>
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<td>October 2002</td>
<td>An archbishop, three bishops, four priests, and a nun, joined 16 other leading civil society representatives at a meeting in Dapitan, in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, and signed the Dapitan Initiative calling for: the repeal of the Mining Act, the cancellation of all Mineral Production Sharing Agreements and Financial Technical Assistance Agreements, and a moratorium on the issuance of large-scale mining permits for one hundred years.⁵</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Bishop Jose Manguiran, the Bishop of the Diocese of Dipolog, called for the cancellation of the Mineral Production Sharing Agreement held by the Canadian mining company Toronto Ventures Incorporated in the Municipality of Siocon, in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte.⁶</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2005</td>
<td>The Diocese of Kidapawan issued a statement objecting to a December 2004 Supreme Court case that upheld the Financial Technical Assistance Agreement provisions of the Mining Act.⁷</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>The influential CBCP Episcopal Commission on Social Action, Justice, and Peace, issued a statement on the revitalization of mining in the Philippines wherein it reiterated the call of the 1998 CBCP pastoral letter for the repeal of the Mining Act.⁸</td>
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Liberation Theology

Cooper (1996: 156) defines liberation theology as being:

A modern movement in Latin America, which criticizes the Church for being largely concerned with spiritual and moral teaching and ignoring the acute problems of poverty and social injustice. Originating in the climate of extreme poverty and social injustice, it also opposes the oppression of the laity by a rigid sacramental system and the exploitation of the people by oppressive regimes, maintaining that the gospel of Christ is first and foremost concerned with the poor and oppressed.
In the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church engaged in a process of aggiornamento and declared that the Church should become a Church of the poor. "The Council’s repercussions would reverberate throughout the Christian world and influence the lives of an entire generation" (Gaspar 2005: 82). One of the first regions of the world wherein this new found ecclesial focus upon the poor became noticed was Latin America, "the only part of the world in which the majority is both poor and Christian" (Gutierrez 1988: 156).

In 1968, the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (Latin American Episcopal Council or CELAM) met in Medellin, Colombia. At this meeting, the Latin American Church made a commitment to respond to "contemporary social realities characterized by massive poverty, gross inequalities between the social classes, political repression and sociocultural disenfranchisement" (Gaspar 2004: 153). That same year, in the Peruvian seaport of Chimbote, a priest named Gustavo Gutierrez presented a paper entitled Hacia una Teología de la Liberación (Towards a Theology of Liberation). In this paper, Gutierrez "presented liberation theology as a theological rationale for doing pastoral work among the poor, and as a way of telling the poor that God loves them" (Berryman 1997: 12). In particular, liberation theology "critiqued the existence of massive poverty, and denounced unjust social structures as 'sinful'" (Berryman 1997: 12).

At the center of liberation theology is the concept of the "preferential option for the poor," this is "liberation theology’s key tenet" (Engler 2000: 352). Gustavo Gutierrez referred to the preferential option for the poor as liberation theology’s “central theme” (Gutierrez 1988: xxv). According to the preferential option for the poor, the poor are to be treated with a preference (they are to be taken into account first, before others are to be considered) and they are to be given an option (they are to be afforded a choice about what happens to them).

Given the common colonial heritage shared by the Philippines with Latin America, it did not take long for liberation theology to become influential in the archipelago (Gaspar 1994). Liberation theology became particularly influential in Mindanao when Maryknoll missionaries carried

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4) The term “aggiornamento” is a term used to describe the process of modernization the Roman Catholic Church experienced during the Second Vatican Council.

5) The role of missionaries as a vehicle for the diffusion of liberation theology from Latin America to the Philippines is imminently reasonable. By the end of 1965, there were
the concepts of liberation theology to (what is now) the Diocese of Tagum in southeastern Mindanao (Gaspar 2004). In Davao City, in November 1971, the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) served as a “mini-CELAM” for the Philippines and the Church in Mindanao began to develop a concern for the poor and marginalized similar to that of its counterpart in Latin America (Gaspar 1994; Gaspar 2004; Nadeau 2002a).

Liberation theology found fertile ground in Mindanao as it had a migrant population that was more open to change; Mindanao’s Christians had moved from elsewhere in the Philippines and, as they were willing to move, they became more receptive to new things (Gaspar 2006: interview). Mindanao also had newly established dioceses, which were staffed by younger bishops; these young bishops were receptive to new ideas and they needed priests and, in many cases, they turned to missionaries, such as the Maryknoll missionaries, to staff their parishes (Gaspar 2006: interview).

As the “land frontier” of the “Land of Promise” began to fill up, acute social problems began to occur in Mindanao. Agribusiness corporations owned by wealthy Filipinos appropriated lands, sometimes through the use of violence, occupied by Christian settlers (Gutierrez and Borras 2004). Jones (1989: 204) provides an explanation of this:

A common tactic was to get the Bureau of Forestry to declare an area unoccupied and then obtain a pasture lease on the land for 1 peso per hectare annually. Landowners fenced off their plots and hired armed guards to forcibly evict peasants. If they balked, a landowner might turn his cows loose to eat the settlers’ crops or threaten violence. Occasionally, a landowner’s security guards would kill a defiant peasant, and the others would invariably flee.

As these people lost their lands they were “transformed into a mass of landless peasants and farm workers” (Gutierrez and Borras 2004: 13). According to Abinales (1996: 165):

Everything associated with a frontier “filling up” was in evidence by the late 1960s and early 1970s: increased population density, decline of land to people ratio, and, in settler-dominated areas like southeastern Mindanao, the

more than 4,000 religious from North America serving in Latin America (Smith 1975). By 1978, 68 percent of all priests on Mindanao were from religious orders and the vast majority of these were foreigners (Kinne 1990a).
re-emergence of early stages of land concentration, tenancy, and class stratification. The frontier had not only lost its efficacy as a safety valve because it had reached the limits of its absorptive capacity, it also began to mimic land-related problems in more densely-populated areas with highly skewed land ownership and concentration.

With the closure of the frontier, people could “no longer resort to earlier forms of avoidance protest by moving as a group to another area” (Nadeau 2002c: 75). This closing of the frontier lead to some very stark social issues in Mindanao; missionary priests were open to dealing with these social issues and, it was into this context, that the writings of liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Jose Bonino, Leonardo Boff, Edicio de la Torre, and Mary John Mananzan were introduced (Gaspar 2006: interview; Youngblood 1990). As Brother Karl Gaspar stated, “When liberation theology emerged in the early 1970s, new ideas were becoming transplanted in a fertile ground” (Gaspar 2006: interview). Activist priests and nuns began organizing the poor into small groups known as Basic Christian Communities6 (BCCs). In these BCCs, the method of conscientization, as developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, was implemented (Nadeau 2002a; Youngblood 1990). According to conscientization, the poor were taught to perceive the reality of their oppression “not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (Freire 1970: 34).

Then, after the declaration of martial law in 1972, the worsening deprivations of the Marcos dictatorship served to intensify the advocacy of the Church on the behalf of the poor (Gaspar 2004; Nadeau 2002a; Youngblood 1990). As Gaspar (2004: 98) wrote:

   It was Marcos who ironically pushed the Mindanao Church to get in touch with its roots in the life and witness of Jesus and the early Christian communities. In a curious parallel, Marcos exhibited the characteristics of biblical figures who oppressed God’s people from the Pharaoh to Herod (who also happened to have a scheming wife).

Throughout the martial law period, the Church engaged in activism against the rapacious conjugal dictatorship and some more radical members of the

6) The Basic Christian Communities were the forerunner of today’s Basic Ecclesial Communities.
Church began “to define the Church’s mission as facilitating humankind’s ‘total liberation’” (Jones 1989: 208). In many instances, the Mindanao Church began to act as a resource base for the New Peoples’ Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), in its actions against the Marcos dictatorship. In the words of Abinales (1996: 165):

Party organizing was facilitated when Catholic clergy, nuns and laity began drifting towards a Filipino “theology of struggle” as they sought to protect their flock from an increasingly militarized society. This “religious sector” became the CPP’s biggest resource base as well [as] the foundation upon which an island-wide network of legal and underground organizations was created.

By the early 1980s, however, tension began to develop between the Mindanao bishoprics and the lay secretariat and board of the MSPC (Gaspar 1997; Kinne 1990a; Kinne 1990b; Nadeau 2002a; Youngblood 1990). The bishops began to become concerned about ties between members of the Church and the NPA and the possibility that Church funds were being funneled to the NPA (Kinne 1990a; Kinne 1990b). The Bishops were also concerned about a usurpation of the Church hierarchy in that some priestly roles were being relinquished to members of the laity (Kinne 1990a; Kinne 1990b). Finally, on 9 March 1982 the bishops met apart from the lay board at the MSPC, “in effect closing it down” (Gaspar 1997: 155). This dissociation dramatically slowed down the extent to which the Church formally adopted the principles of liberation theology and caused it to behave in a more traditional manner focusing its institutional concerns on more spiritual matters and less on temporal issues.

Over time, however, three events occurred which solidified the commitment of the Church to the poor. The first was the abrupt end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. “The fall of Marcos was a serious setback to communist organizing efforts within the Church sector. Many priests and nuns, even bishops, who had collaborated to varying degrees with [NPA] elements under Marcos overnight severed their links with the rebels” (Jones 1989: 210). With such a drastic reduction in Church assistance to the NPA, the concern about ties between members of the Church and the NPA (and the possibility that Church funds were being funneled to the NPA) was no longer as serious an issue among the bishops. The second
was the split in the Filipino left between the “reaffirmists” (those who advocated continuing an armed struggle against the state notwithstanding the departure of Marcos) and the “rejectionists” (those who rejected further violence). This split created more democratic space in the Philippines and encouraged more pastoral workers to go back to their roots (Gaspar 1997). The third (and arguably most important) was the 1991 Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II). “The PCP II Acts and Decrees popularized the theological concepts and pastoral thrusts that surfaced in Mindanao in the 1970s. This led to a reminder of the need to take seriously the call to become Church of the poor” (Gaspar 1997: 150).

Today, many in the progressive sector of the Philippine Church (those priests and nuns who live among and work with the poor) have been influenced by the concepts of liberation theology (Gaspar 2006: interview). These people are closer to the ground and they feel the “throbbing of the poor” (Gaspar 2006: interview). Even if these people do not call themselves “liberation theologians,” many of them have been influenced by its concepts (Gaspar 2006: interview). The “liberation theology movement [represents] the people’s church, not necessarily the hierarchical church. It is integrated into the progressive wing of [the church]” (Nadeau 2005: 323). These people are not using the concepts of liberation theology within the context of popular mobilization to replace the government; they are using the concepts of liberation theology in their service of the poor and marginalized. Modern Filipino practitioners of liberation theology “are not blindly calling for the overthrow of society through bloodshed and revolution. Rather, they engage in actively non-violent means of protest” (Nadeau 2005: 320).

These members of the progressive sector are also the same members of the Church most engaged in anti-mining activism (Gaspar 2006: interview). Five examples of such members of the progressive sector of the Mindanao Church who have been influenced by liberation theology are Bishop Juan De Dios Pueblos, Father Medardo Salomia, Father Riolito Ramos, Sister Susan Bolanio, and Brother Karl Gaspar.

7) The Church was by no means the only aspect of Filipino society affected by the split between the “reaffirmists” and “rejectionists.” Hilhorst (2003) attributes much of the profusion of NGOs in the Philippines to this split. As more democratic space opened up, some former revolutionary cadres left the armed movement and began to campaign for change through civil society organizations.
Bishop Juan De Dios Pueblos, the Bishop of the Diocese of Butuan, is a staunch opponent of mining. De Dios Pueblos had read about liberation theology; it gave him more of a love for Filipinos and his country and it made him “become involved with the oppressed people” (De Dios Pueblos 2005: interview). De Dios Pueblos is what Youngblood (1982: 34) would call an “archetype periphery bishop” in that he is “a progressive vicar apostolic in a distant region of the country who holds a ‘community of liberation’ view of the Church and is critical of the civil authorities.”

Father Medardo Salomia, the Pastoral Director of the Diocese of Mati, is an active opponent of mining in the Pujada Bay area of southeast Mindanao (see Figure 2). Father Salomia studied liberation theology while a seminarian and priesthood to him is “to be with the poor because the Church is a church of the poor” (Salomia 2005: interview). It was the social justice aspects of mining that caused Father Medardo to become involved in anti-mining advocacy (Salomia 2005: interview).

Father Riolito Ramos, from St. Joseph’s Parish in the Diocese of Pagadian is active in the Dipolog-Iligan-Ozamis-Pagadian-Ipil-Marawi Committee on Mining Issues (DCMI). Father Ramos stated that “liberation theology was a large influence on him” and that his hero is Che Guevarra because Guevarra “cared for the poor” and because Guevarra “sacrificed his life for the poor” (Ramos 2005: interview).

Sister Susan Bolanio, of the Oblates of Notre Dame, was the Social Action Director of the Diocese of Marbel. Sister Susan was active in opposing the activities of Western Mining Corporation, an Australian mining company. Sister Susan read the works of Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff during her aggiornamento courses and refers to liberation theology as a “progressive understanding of the Bible” (Bolanio 2005: interview). To

A controversial aspect of liberation theology is its Marxist overtones. Much has been written about how liberation theology is Marxist in orientation. A thorough discussion of the relationship between liberation theology and Marxism is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, many liberation theologians deny a relationship between liberation theology and Marxism. Boff (1995: 120) wrote that liberation theology “never opted for Marxism or for socialism; its option was for the poor.” Nadeau (2002a: 73) is of the view that the collapse of the Marxist regimes in the world has made it easier for liberation theology to advance its agenda, as it is now more difficult for elites to “vilify those who would challenge them from below” as being communists. This, in turn, has “enhanced the ability of the poor, the weak and oppressed to challenge the structures of domination that have so adversely influenced their lives” Nadeau (2002a: 73).
Sister Susan, “the poor should be the subjects of engagement in their liberation from injustice” (Bolanio 2005: interview).

Although not currently engaged in anti-mining activism, Karl Gaspar, a Redemptorist Brother (and member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians), is a prominent member of the progressive sector of the Philippine Church (Gaspar 2006: interview). Brother Gaspar was the Executive Secretary of the MSCP from 1977 to 1980, spent 22 months as a political prisoner during martial law, and then became active in anti-logging protests in Bukidnon (see Figure 3) in the late 1980s (Gaspar 2006: interview). Brother Gaspar was “heavily influenced by liberation theology” and his “passion for justice comes from liberation theology” (Gaspar 2006: interview).

Figure 3. Ecclesial jurisdictions referenced in text.
5.2. **The Effects of Mining’s Environmental Impact upon the Poor**

The starting point of the Church’s opposition to mining is the impacts mining’s potential environmental effects may have upon the poor. Hardrock mining is an activity with a unique, and substantial, potential for environmental degradation. “Few, if any, forms of economic development present the array of potential environmental, social, and economic problems of the mining industry” (Pring et al. 1999: 45).

This potential for environmental harm became actualized with the Marcopper tailings spill incident of 1996. The Marcopper mine was located in the north central highlands of the island of Marinduque (see Figure 1) (Plumlee et al. 2000). It was owned by the Marcopper Mining Corporation, which was, in turn, owned (40 percent) by the Canadian mining company Placer Dome and (60 percent) by the Philippine government (Plumlee et al. 2000). Copper began to be extracted from the Tapian pit in 1969 and copper was taken from this pit until 1991, when production switched to the San Antonio pit several kilometers to the north (Plumlee et al. 2000). In 1991, the mined-out Tapian pit had its dewatering drain plugged with concrete and it began to be used as a receptacle for the fine-grained wastes (known as “tailings”) from the newer San Antonio pit (Mines and Geosciences Bureau 2004a; Plumlee et al. 2000). By December 1995, a total of 32,476,841 metric tonnes of tailings were impounded in the Tapian pit (Mines and Geosciences Bureau 2004a). On 24 March 1996, the plug at the bottom of the Tapian pit failed and there was a release of acidic tailings into the Boac River (Mines and Geosciences Bureau 2004a; Plumlee et al. 2000). The actual amount of tailings that was released is a matter of controversy; low-end estimates put the amount at 1.6 million cubic metres (David 2002; David 2003; Mines and Geosciences Bureau 2004a) while high-end estimates put the amount at being up to 3 million cubic metres (Plumlee et al. 2000). While the actual amount of tailings that was released may be a matter of contention its effects were dramatic. A month later, a UN team declared the river “biologically dead” (Mining, Minerals, and Sustainable Development 2002: 208). When the investigative team sent by the United States Geological Survey and the United States Armed Forces Institute of Pathology visited Marinduque in May of 2000 (four years after the tailings release) they reported that there were “still extensive tailings deposits visible in many places along the Boac River streambed” (Plumlee et al. 2000: 22). Their
conclusion was that “the mining-environmental impacts on some parts of Marinduque have been substantial and pose significant long-term challenges for remediation, both from a technological and monetary standpoint” (Plumlee et al. 2000: 41).

Perhaps the most enduring aspect of the tailings spill at the Marcopper mine was its psychological effect. While the Philippine government prefers to refer to the tailings spill as “an incident” (Cabalda 2004: interview) others have referred to it as “the infamous tailings spill incident” (Rovillos et al. 2003: 202) or as a “disaster” (Tujan 2001: 154). Indeed, Chris Hinde, the Editorial Director of the London based Mining Journal (a mining industry publication) went so far as to call the Marcopper tailings spill an “environmental disaster” (Hinde 2004: 1). The tailings release generated a substantial amount of concern among the Philippine people about the environmental effects of nonferrous metals mining. According to Tujan (2001: 154) “the Marcopper accident shocked and traumatized the Philippine nation.” Across the archipelago, “people feel very threatened by mining” (Neame 2005: interview). Michael Cabalda, the Chief of the MGB’s Mining Environment and Safety Division, acknowledged that whenever mining is discussed “it is always Marcopper that is talked about” (Cabalda 2004: interview).

In the Philippines, three-quarters of the poor engage in subsistence agriculture or subsistence aquaculture as a way of providing livelihoods for themselves (Llanto and Ballesteros 2003: 201). Should there be a mining related environmental disruption, such as a tailings spill, these people could be thrust from subsistence into destitution. As Broad (1994: 814) wrote:

In countries such as the Philippines, large subsistence sectors depend primarily on natural resources. To live, poor people eat and sell the fish they catch or the crops they grow—and typically those who manage to subsist in this way do so with very little margin. Natural resource degradation often becomes an immediate and life-and-livelihood-threatening crisis—a question of survival.

Although the discussion of environmental issues in the developing world is often about what Bryant and Bailey (1997: 24) referred to as “the struggle between actors for control over the environment,” this becomes magnified in a Filipino context due to the unique vulnerability of the archipelago to environmental disruptions. “With much mountainous terrain, often-friable soils, and heavy tropical rainfall, the Republic of the Philippines is
unusually susceptible to environmental degradation in the matter of soil erosion and associated disruption of watersheds” (Myers 1988: 303). The fragility of Philippine ecosystems only serves to amplify the vulnerability of the poor to a mining related environmental disruption.

Bishop Gutierrez, the Bishop of the Diocese of Marbel (and Chair of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Episcopal Commission on Social Action, Justice, and Peace) is of the view that mining fails to avail a “preferential option for the poor” (Gutierrez 2005: interview). In the Diocese of Dipolog, Bishop Manguiran stated “mining will make poor people poorer as they will be deprived of their access to resources such as water” (Manguiran 2005: interview). “Being the Church of the poor means protecting the resources needed by the poor” (Manguiran 2005: interview). Indeed, “the Church’s role is to make the poor the subject of development” (Manguiran 2005: interview). Father Frank Nally, an Irish Columban missionary (who spent nine years in the Diocese of Pagadian), articulated his concern that “the impact of mining on the poor is to make them poorer as a result” (Nally 2005: interview).

Advocates of mining, such as Romulo Neri, the Secretary of the Philippine government’s National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), are quick to respond to the Church’s argument that mining will make poor people poorer by emphasizing the ability of mining to create jobs (Neri 2005: 17). The Church is skeptical of this and there are indications, in the resources and development literature, that this skepticism is well founded (Bury 2004; Ross 2001). Modern nonferrous metals operations that extract low-grade ore deposits from open pit mines are capital intensive, not labor intensive, operations, that offer little potential for employment creation (Power 2002). Tauli-Corpuz and Alcantara (2004: 101) provide an example of mining’s low potential for employment creation in their discussion of the Taganito nickel laterite mine (see Figure 2) in Barangay Taganito, in the Municipality of Claver, in the Province of Surigao Del Norte. According to Tauli-Corpuz and Alcantara (2004, 101), out of the work force of 350 persons, only 110 are full time employees and the remaining 240 workers are hired only on a casual basis and are paid approximately US$1.50 per day.

Advocates of mining also draw attention to the peripheral benefits that mining projects can provide to communities in their vicinity. According to Neri (2005:16) “communities that play host to mining activities also
benefit from improved infrastructures as well as other livelihood opportunities that these activities bring.” Members of the Church are critical of this view of mining companies as “agents of development.” Sister Susan Bolanio is of the view that “the reliance upon mining companies to act as development agents shows the fact that the government has failed” (Bolanio 2005: interview). Sister Susan feels that touting this aspect of mining’s benefits, particularly in view of mining’s costs, is disingenuous because “the development benefits of mining are a pittance compared to the profits the mining company will make” (Bolanio 2005: interview). Bishop Juan De Dios Pueblos stated, “the benefits mining companies provide do not last long as the minerals will eventually be depleted” (De Dios Pueblos 2005: interview).

The objections of members of the Church to mining due to its potential to adversely affect the poor, perhaps more than anything else, demonstrates the influence of liberation theology upon ecclesial opposition to mining. The view among members of the Church that the government’s aggressive implementation of mining that does not first consider what those affected by the mining projects want, and that does not give those affected by the mining projects a choice about mining, illustrates the influence of the concept of the preferential option for the poor. By advocating against mining and, simultaneously advocating that the poor receive a preferential option, many members of the Church are revealing the extent to which they have been influenced by liberation theology.

5.3. Mining and Corruption

In view of the potential for adverse environmental effects inherent in mining, it is imperative that mining be subject to a through regulatory framework (Hodges 1995: 1309). There are many in the Church, however, who are of the view that the Philippines suffer from a degree of corruption so high as to render such a regulatory framework, effectively, unavailable.

There is a substantial body of literature documenting the extent of corruption in the archipelago (Alternative Law Group 2004; Australian Agency for International Development 2004; Lim and Stern 2002; Linantud 2005). Kirk (2005: 3) described Filipino society as “a society in which nepotism, bribery, gift-giving and exchange of favors are the rule not the exception.” This society is governed by a “thoroughly corrupt ruling class
far more concerned about their intertwining networks of family and friends rather than the needs of a people in distress” (Kirk 2005: 20). The current President of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, is “the daughter of Diosdado Macapagal, the corrupt ex-president notorious for his government’s involvement in smuggling” (Kirk 2005: 34). Macapagal-Arroyo spent much of 2005 embroiled in controversy over allegations that she had cheated in the 2004 Presidential election and that her husband, son, and brother-in-law were receiving kickbacks from illegal gambling (Kirk 2005: xxi).

This corruption is so pervasive many view it is being an impediment to the implementation of responsible mining in the Philippines. Father Albert Alejo, a Jesuit priest (and professor of Development Studies at Ateneo de Davao University), stated, “if the Philippines was not so corrupt, we would probably be giving the government the benefit of the doubt” (Alejo 2005: interview). Father Albert has concerns, in view of the level of corruption in the country, about the trustworthiness of those government officials assigned to monitor mining (Alejo 2005: interview). Father Romeo Catedral, the Social Action Director of the Diocese of Marbel, opined a view that "the Mining Act is problematic given the poor governance in the Philippines" (Catedral 2005: interview). “How can one have faith in the Philippine government to regulate mining given the corruption in the country?” (Catedral 2005: interview). Father Frank Nally echoed these views, stating, “In a corrupt state, you cannot expect mining to be a positive force” (Nally 2005: interview).

Corruption becomes a salient issue whenever consent is required as a precondition of mining from local governments’ units within the aegis of the Local Government Code.10 Arnold Vandenbroeck, the Philippine representative of the Belgian NGO Broederlijk Delen (Brotherly Love), pointed out that a common Filipino euphemism for a bribe is to call it a “standard operating procedure” or “SOP” (Vandenbroeck 2005: interview). When Justina Yu, the Executive Director of the Kalumonan Development Center, an NGO in the Municipality of San Isidro in the Province of Davao Oriental (see Figure 3), was mayor of San Isidro (from 1992 to 2001), she

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9) In the Philippines, the local government units are the Barangay, the Municipality, the City, and the Province. For more information on the specific powers of the local government units see Ocampo-Salvador (1999).
10) Republic Act 7160.
received three helicopter visits from mining engineers employed by foreign mining companies (Yu 2005: interview). During each of these visits, the mining engineers promised her “an SOP for every kilogram extracted” in exchange for the consent of the municipal government to their mining activities (Yu 2005: interview). Such anecdotal evidence of mining project proponents bribing local governments caused Father Romeo Catedral to find it disturbing that the local governments in the vicinity of Sagittarius Mines’ Tampakan property (see Figure 2) provided their consent “in a closed door meeting on mining company property” (Catedral 2005: interview). To Father Catedral, this was an inappropriate and opaque method of obtaining local government consent (Catedral 2005: interview).

Some in the Church adopt the view that corruption in the Philippines is too extensive to allow an activity with as many potential deleterious effects as mining to occur. Instead of trying to promote the entry of foreign mining companies into the country, the national government’s foremost priority should be the elimination of corruption (Bolanio 2005: interview; Catedral 2005: interview; Salomia 2005: interview).

The importance of the preferential option for the poor is evident in the Church’s concerns about attempting to implement a mining based development paradigm in an atmosphere of rampant corruption. If mining companies are able to bribe local government units in order to acquire their consent for mining operations, the poor will not be considered first. If mining companies are able to take control of local government units by bribing them, those local government units will become responsive to the mining companies, not to their constituents; this will cause the poor to lose a choice over what happens to them. According to Father Frank Nally, “Corruption denies the poor of their voice” (Nally 2005: interview).

5.4. Mining and Militarization

To some members of the Church, a particularly troublesome dimension of mining is the militarization of areas where mining projects are located. Many parts of Mindanao are subject to acts of armed violence by the NPA, the Muslim Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and another Muslim group called Abu Sayyaf (bearer of the sword). To provide security for development projects, such as mining, the Philippine army will conduct security operations in the vicinity of the project in advance of its development; in the words of Major Onting Alon, the Civic Affairs Officer
of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Sixth Infantry Division, “the AFP is there to secure” (Alon 2005: interview).

Armed violence is a reality on Mindanao, particularly violence on the behalf of the NPA. The NPA still has a strong presence on Mindanao, where there are as many as 6,000 armed cadres (Linantud 2005). In 2004, there were 52 encounters\(^\text{11}\) between the NPA and the AFP in 16 provinces of Mindanao (see Figure 4) (IBON 2004; IBON 2005). Both Father Romeo Catedral and Father Peter Geremia voiced concern about the NPA going on record stating that it is opposed to mining and will attack mining projects (Catedral 2005: interview; Geremia 2005: interview). These concerns do not appear unfounded when one considers that on 29 March 2005, Rubi Del Mundo, a spokesperson for the NPA’s political wing, the National Democratic Front (NDF) Southern Mindanao Front, declared:

In its fight against US imperialism and war of national liberation, the NPA is ready to launch tactical offensives against the US mercenary army and puppet AFP troops. Its guerilla warfare is directed against the imperialist-capitalist and bourgeois-capitalist plunderers of national patrimony such as foreign-owned large-scale mining firms and logging companies, with the latter now poised to scrape off the remaining forest frontiers in the region. (Del Mundo 2005).

Father Peter Geremia also voiced concern about the MILF being opposed to mining (Geremia 2005: interview). These concerns also appear well grounded when one takes into account the fact that Von Al Haq, the Chair of the MILF Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities, stated “the MILF believes that mining managed by multinational corporations is not good” (Al Haq 2005: interview). In Al Haq’s view, “Multinational corporations can help the Bangsamoro\(^\text{12}\) people by not operating in

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\(^{11}\) These 52 encounters between the NPA and the AFP constituted 33 percent of all encounters in the Philippines between the NPA and the AFP during 2004. Mindanao, however, has only 25 percent of the Philippine population so, on a per capita basis, there is a disproportionate amount of NPA activity in Mindanao. When one focuses on where in Mindanao these confrontations occurred one sees that 35 of these encounters occurred in the eastern Mindanao Provinces of Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Davao del Norte, Compostela Valley, and Davao Oriental (IBON 2004; IBON 2005). This means that 22 percent of all encounters in the Philippines between the NPA and the AFP occurred in an area that constituted only 11 percent of the land area of the Philippines.

\(^{12}\) “Bangsamoro” is a moniker used to describe the Muslim inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu islands.
the area” (Al Haq 2005: interview). The Bangsamoro “want to shape their destiny; they do not want foreign corporations to do it for them” (Al Haq 2005: interview).

However, what makes the militarization of mining areas such an intractable issue for many in the Church is a concern that the AFP will be unable to discern between legitimate dissent and insurgency. Father Lauro Mozo, from St. Peter and St. Paul Parish in the Diocese of Surigao, reported “it is common for those who engage in anti-mining campaigns to be accused of being NPA supporters” (Mozo 2004: interview). Karl Gaspar found that “the AFP will militarize an area, even in the absence of NPA activity, if there is social activism in the area” (Gaspar 2006: interview). “Martial law may no longer be in place, but the weak state is still strong in terms of militarization and [will] harass those who remain radically involved with
solidarity work” (Gaspar 2005: 330). These concerns appear valid when one considers that in May of 2005, in the Diocese of Butuan, the AFP charged Sister Mary Donaug, of the order of the Religious of the Good Shepard, with rebellion for her social activism on behalf of the poor (De Dios Pueblos 2005: interview). When asked about the perspective of the AFP with respect to anti-mining activists, Major Alon stated that those who protest are “protesting because they have been influenced by the NPA” (Alon 2005: interview). In Major Alon’s opinion, “the people who are properly informed know about the benefits of the mine” (Alon 2005: interview).

The AFP has a reputation for behaving in an antagonistic manner (Linantud 2005). On Mindanao, the AFP routinely accuses the Church of being infiltrated by communists and of being sympathetic to the NPA (Alejo 2000; Gaspar 2004). The AFP accused Father Riolito Ramos of belonging to the NPA and he was almost salvaged (summarily executed) by the AFP (Ramos 2005: interview). As the Fact Finding Team from the Justice and Peace Desk in the Diocese of Marbel stated:

It is already a historical fact that whenever development projects are to be implemented in the countryside, these will always be preceded or coupled with militarization. And the usual over-used pretext is the government’s counter-insurgency program. Dressed up like local heroes, they claim to be protectors of the people. Yet they are they the ones who create havoc and unrest. (Diocese of Marbel 1999: 4)

Indeed, there are well-documented instances wherein a heavy, and aggressive, AFP presence in advance of development projects (such as forestry projects, geothermal energy projects, and hydroelectric dams) has led to such a high degree of dissatisfaction among those in the vicinity of the project that NPA activity has actually increased as the NPA have found a willing source of recruits among those adversely effected by the project (Alejo 2000; Hilhorst 2003; Sharma 2001; Vidal 2004; Youngblood 1990).

Some in the Church are predicting that this will occur if there is an influx of foreign mining companies into Mindanao. In the words of Father Peter Geremia, “If there was no mining, there would be one less reason for people to join the insurgency” (Geremia 2005: interview). According to Father Riolito Ramos, “the NPA has been providing assistance to those
displaced by mining as a way of encouraging recruitment” (Ramos 2005: interview). Father Albert Alejo stated: “Mining, in its present volume of applications, and in view of the way the government is forcing it, will lead to violence. There will be blood in your gold” (Alejo 2005: interview).

Members of the Church involved in anti-mining advocacy viewed the militarization of mining areas as being another dimension of the denial of a preferential option for the poor. If there is a heavy AFP presence in the vicinity of a mining project, the poor people potentially affected by the project will be intimidated into being quiet; the AFP presence will deter people from being able to express their dislike of the mine and thus it will deny them of a choice over whether or not the mine will be located in the area. According to Bishop De Dios Pueblos, “The military are simply there to intimidate people” (De Dios Pueblos 2005: interview).

5.5. Mining and Indigenous Peoples

Another source of ecclesial opposition to the government’s mining based development paradigm is its potential to displace indigenous peoples. In the Philippines, the indigenous peoples are those peoples who have a historical continuity with the pre-Islamic and pre-Hispanic society of that country (Holden 2005). These peoples constitute approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population; approximately two-thirds of which live on Mindanao, where they are referred to as “Lumads” (Holden 2005). These peoples live primarily in rural areas and in engage in subsistence agriculture and fishing (Holden 2005). In the Philippines, half of all areas identified in mining applications are in areas inhabited by indigenous peoples (Holden 2005). In Mindanao, the high concentrations of indigenous peoples (see Figure 5) and high quality mineralization (see Figure 2) make this a particularly serious concern (Gutierrez and Borras 2004; Rodil 2004; Vidal 2004). Many in the Church worry about this overlap between mineralization and ancestral domain and the consequences this could have upon the indigenous peoples of Mindanao (Bolanio 2005: interview; Geremia 2005: interview).

In Mindanawon society, indigenous peoples are considered to be “the people who are most marginalized” (De Dios Pueblos 2005: interview). Since the abolition of proselytization during Vatican II, the Church’s concern has moved away from a conversion of the indigenous peoples to
Christianity and has, instead, moved towards upholding their basic human rights (Alejo 2005: interview; Gaspar et al. 2002; Nally 2005: interview). Indeed, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippine Church (PCP II) even decreed that the Church should consider engagement with indigenous peoples as a priority apostolate (Gaspar 2004).

Many in the Church are of the view that if there is conflict between the multinational firms of the mining industry and indigenous people, the latter will not be in a good position to seek a favorable outcome. According to Rita Melecio, the Mindanao Regional Coordinator of the Task Force

Figure 5. Indigenous population of Mindanao. Source: United Nations Development Program (2003).
Detainees of the Philippines\(^\text{13}\) (TFDP), “Whenever there are conflicts between indigenous peoples and other groups, the indigenous peoples always end up being the losers” (Melecio 2005: interview).

The government of the Philippines disagrees with these concerns and takes the view that “indigenous peoples can be the main beneficiaries of large mining projects” (Neri 2005: 25). Father Albert Alejo, the holder of a PhD in social anthropology from the University of London, disagrees with this assertion saying, “It is difficult to say that mining is going to help them” (Alejo 2005: interview). At the Mount Apo geothermal project, (a capital intensive activity similar to a modern nonferrous metals mine) on Mindanao, the Philippine National Oil Company promised the Manobo people that they would be priority hires when, in fact, they ended up being the first people fired because they lacked the necessary technical skills (Alejo 2000).

Essential to this concern about the welfare of indigenous peoples is the concept of displacement. Anthropologists have long maintained ancestral lands are essential for tribal survival (Eder 1987). The encroachment of mining on to ancestral lands often results in displacement, particularly if the AFP militarizes the area for security reasons. In the Diocese of Butuan, Bishop De Dios Pueblos reports that the AFP has billeted their troops in the homes of indigenous peoples (De Dios Pueblos 2005: interview). According to Father Peter Geremia, “Mining has become the most traumatic challenge to indigenous peoples” (Geremia 2005: interview). In the words of Sister Susan Bolanio “once indigenous peoples are displaced, their lives will be destroyed; they will have to create a new community and their culture will become extinct” (Bolanio 2005: interview).

This concern for the Mindanao’s indigenous peoples also reveals an influence of liberation theology. Brother Karl Gaspar wrote that “the Lumad are the least of our brothers and sisters” and that Christianity requires that we take care of “the least of our brethren” (Gaspar 2004: 50). According to Gutierrez (1988: xxii) the Church must define a commitment “to races that have for centuries been neglected and mistreated.” The Church must place an emphasis upon “all the needy, whoever they may be, and not only Christians” (Gutierrez 1988: 112). According to Boff (1995: 89):

\(^\text{13}\) The TFDP is a Roman Catholic Church NGO, having been formed by the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines in 1974.
In the sphere of the rights of the environment, we should widen the meaning of the option for the poor to include an option for the most threatened of other beings and species. Here we should begin with the poorest human beings, those whose way of life is threatened with extinction.

Similarly, as Boff (1997: 191) wrote:

To enhance the dignity of all life and promote it, starting with the lives of original peoples and of those who are most threatened, as the liberation church seeks to do with its liberation theology, is an expression of spirituality.

5.6. Mining: A Source of Materialism in Society

The final specific objection of the Church to government efforts to encourage more hardrock mining is the extent to which it is leading to an increase in materialism in Mindanawan society. Mining is leading to an increase in materialism in Mindanao, particularly in areas in close spatial proximity to mining projects. Sagittarius Mines’ Tampakan property (see Figures 2 and 3) straddles the Diocese of Marbel and the Diocese of Kidapawan. In the former, Father Romeo Catedral has noted, “mining is being portrayed as an economic messiah to the Philippines. People need to be educated about materialism; this is not a solution to all problems” (Catedral 2005: interview). In the latter, Father Peter Geremia has observed that the influence of mining companies has changed the community. Young men no longer want to be farmers, they prefer working as tricycle drivers. “People have no idea of how to use money and there has been a noticeable increase in social problems such as drug abuse” (Geremia 2005: interview). Father Riolito Ramos observed, “there is a culture of instant gratification developing because of mining” (Ramos 2005: interview).

The government touts mining as a source of domestic economic activity that can lessen the dependence of the Philippines upon those Filipinos who work overseas; this can serve to solidify families and thus reduce social problems (Galiste 2005: interview). The Church disputes this view, arguing that mining creates social problems such as prostitution, alcoholism, drug abuse and a desire for instant gratification (Geremia 2005: interview). In the opinion of Father Peter Geremia, the government should not be promoting mining by foreign corporations; instead, it should be promoting “alternative education, alternative agriculture, alternative living, and alternative culture” (Geremia 2005: interview). In short, members of
the government should be trying to make the Philippines a better place instead of relying upon foreign mining companies to do it for them (Germia 2005: interview).

The unease among members of the Church that mining is leading to an increase in materialism in Mindanawon society is a further hallmark of liberation theology’s influence. “Liberation theology stands in contradiction to any ideology that fosters greed and acquisitiveness for its own sake” (Nadeau 2002b: 1). Liberation theologians condemn as idolatrous those systems that hold private property, or the laws of the market, to be sacred and inviolable (Engler 2000). These systems, they argue, represent the false god of consumer capitalism and their worshippers are being sinful (Engler 2000). Boff (1995: 34) wrote that under conditions of materialism, “The instinct of ownership is exaggerated and wrongly emphasized so that the accumulation of material goods becomes a virtue.” Similarly, Boff (1997: 192) wrote that human beings “are spiritual beings by the very fact of being human. They have depth, a depth that is lost in mass and consumer culture.”

6. Discussion

6.1. Environmental Issues as Livelihood Issues

The opposition of the Mindanawon Church to mining on the grounds that it may degrade the environment upon which the poor depend for their livelihoods, and thus make them even poorer, is an example of how, in the developing world, environmental issues are livelihood issues. Consider the Municipality of Governor Generoso, in the Province of Davao Oriental (see Figure 3). In Governor Generoso, there are 45,000 people living on a land area of 37,000 square kilometers; this population is split evenly between subsistence farmers and subsistence fisherfolk (De La Cerna 2005: interview). According to Mayor Jerry De La Cerna (a former priest who left the priesthood in order to go into politics to oppose mining) “these

14) Under the leadership of Mayor Jerry De La Cerna, the Municipality of Governor Generoso has passed a resolution (Resolution No. 58-2005) opposing mining. The resolution specifically makes reference to the incident on the island of Marinduque and points out how it has “alarmed the people of Governor Generoso.”
people depend on a quality environment for their livelihood” (De La Cerna 2005: interview). Should something happen that adversely effects the environment, these people will be badly affected and, almost certainly, be made poorer. In the words of Mayor Jerry, “we get our bread from the ocean and our bread from the land; we should protect the ocean and protect the land” (De La Cerna 2005: interview). This concern for the environment is an example of how “in the Philippines environmentalism [is] a demand of the poor, not of the rich” (Broad 1994: 814).

In contrast to this livelihood-based environmentalism of the developing world, environmental issues in the developed world are issues of aesthetic concern. Consider the New World gold mine, which was proposed near Yellowstone National Park in the United States in the 1990s. This mine was successfully opposed by environmentalists on the grounds that it “would drastically alter the recreational use of the immediate area” and that “these changes would make the area less desirable as a backcountry experience” resulting in “a net loss in both the quantity and quality of the local supply of outdoor recreation experiences” (Corkran 1996: 147). Instead of poor people trying to protect their sources of subsistence income, these were rich people (resort and tour operators) arguing with other rich people (the mining project proponent) about their contested access to a source of riches (the landscape of Yellowstone National Park).

It is in the context of this discussion that one often hears the apocryphal that the poor themselves are the source of environmental degradation. As the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987: 28) stated:

Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive. They will cut down forests; their livestock will overgraze grasslands; they will overuse marginal land; and in growing numbers they will crowd into congested cities.

These comments are particularly problematic given that the World Commission on Environment and Development also defined “sustainable development” as being “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 43). If people cannot be poor without sacrificing the environment, then
(according to this view) poor people cannot practice sustainable development. The only solution, therefore, to this “downward spiral” of poverty begetting environmental degradation is economic growth. Indeed, the extreme case is to go so far as to advocate activities, such as nonferrous metals mining, to be used as a means of protecting the environment. If mining takes place (albeit with some short-term environmental degradation) the economy can grow, if the economy grows there will be less poverty, if there is less poverty then (ultimately) there will be less environmental degradation; absent economic growth, however, developing countries cannot afford the “luxury” of discussing environmental protection.

Writers such as Broad (1994) contest this claim. According to Broad (1994), there is substantial evidence of the poor acting, not as environmental degraders, but as environmental sustainers. As Broad (1994: 813) wrote about the Philippines:

All over the country, we found fragile tropical ecosystems in collapse. We lived with and interviewed poor people who were becoming poorer, pushed by ecological collapse below subsistence levels. Yet, in our research, we found many of the poor extremely future oriented—very concerned that the environmental degradation would deprive their children (if not themselves) of their means of livelihood.

This is clearly the case with respect to the residents of Governor Generoso. These people are poor but are struggling to maintain their access to the resources upon which they depended for their livelihoods. It is difficult to imagine how the temporary benefits that may accrue to them from a mining project could make them better off, particularly in view of the permanent environmental degradation that a mining project could impose upon them.

6.2. Environmental Issues as Issues of Power in Society

Environmental issues in the developing world are often issues of power in society. Broad and Cavanagh (1993: 138) attribute environmental problems in the developing world to “a development model that is rooted in inequities and fosters greater inequities.” The poor, dependent upon access to resources for their subsistence income, feel threatened by those (multi-national mining companies and the Philippine state) who have more power
in society. If the poor are deprived of their access to these resources, and are no longer able to live as subsistence farmers or subsistence fisherfolk, they will be forced to seek employment as wage laborers and will become even more dependant upon the rich and powerful. This will exacerbate the power imbalance in society.

According to Broad and Cavanagh (1993: 139), “The struggle for the environment and for control of resources requires a far more participatory notion of development.” The Church’s vehicle for achieving this is its Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) movement. The BEC is a group of between 50 to 100 families organized by the Church on a parish-by-parish basis (Gaspar 2006: interview). BECs engage in sustainable livelihood programs such as organic farming, microfinance projects, marketing cooperatives, herbal medicine projects, and handicraft projects (Gaspar 2006: interview; Nadeau 2002a; Nally 2005, interview). The BEC movement is an attempt to engage in a “bottom up” development paradigm wherein the poor better themselves as opposed to a “top down” development paradigm (such as mining) where external actors (the mining companies) are responsible for the amelioration of the condition of the poor.

Earlier, sustainable development was defined and discussed. According to George (1999), and Martin (2003), sustainable development consists of two components: intergenerational equity (deference to the needs of those in the future- a necessary condition for sustainability) and intragenerational equity (an equitable sharing of benefits among those alive today- a necessary condition for development). Through the BECs, the Church is attempting to achieve sustainable development by improving the conditions of the poor without harming the environment upon which the poor depend for their sustenance (intergenerational equity) and in a manner that fosters social equity (intragenerational equity). “The movement struggles against the entry of destructive mining operations, logging operations, and land conversion programs, calling instead for a new society based on ecologically sustainable modes of production in connection with new forms

15 The term “Basic Ecclesial Community” came to replace the term “Basic Christian Community” as a result of the Bishops dissociating themselves from the MSPC in 1982. “The term ecclesial derives from the root word ecclesia, which refers to the people of God as the body of the Church” (Nadeau 2002a: xvii). PCP II officially endorsed the use of the BEC movement as “the new way of being a church” (Nadeau 2002a: xvii).
of political and social relationships” (Nadeau 2005: 324). The Church on the island of Mindanao has established a vibrant BEC movement. As Gaspar (2005: 324) wrote, “The BECs continue to thrive and more and more dioceses have adopted this pastoral program. Theories and practice of BECs are also taught in many seminaries; seminarians go on exposures to learn how to organize BECs.” The BEC movement is an attempt to provide development for the poor at a local level as opposed to having development come to the poor by abruptly including them into the global economy. As Brother Karl Gaspar said, “A movement of localization is the only alternative to globalization” (Gaspar 2006: interview).

6.3. Neoliberalism Encounters Liberation Theology

The current effort of the Philippine government to accelerate the development of Mindanao by encouraging investment by foreign mining companies is clearly an example of neoliberalism. The Mining Act of 1995 was designed with a view towards adhering to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank model of a liberalized economy (Tauli-Corpuz and Alcantara 2004). Neoliberalism is intimately linked to globalization, as it is a policy based upon liberalizing, deregulating, and privatizing an economy so as to create conditions that will attract multinational corporations into an economy (De Rivero 2001). Multinational corporations have been the “driving force behind the globalization of capitalism” (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 107). These multinational corporations will extract the mineral resources of the Philippines and sell them on global markets.

Many in the Church have been critical of neoliberalism, and its attendant consequence globalization (Gayarre 1994). Father Esmeraldo Reforeal referred to globalization as “a grown-up dragon spewing out fire on everyone, consequently wrecking havoc on the vulnerable and the disadvantaged. The dragon is burning to death communities and individuals” (Reforeal 2005: 104).

The essence of the Church’s objection to neoliberalism, particularly in the case of mining, is that it may lead to economic growth but it does not lead to genuine development. Mining may lead to economic growth in the sense that it may generate capital inflows into Mindanao and it may also generate exports out of the country. On a macro level, attracting mining investment into Mindanao may appear to be an effective vehicle...
for ameliorating the economic problems faced by the impoverished island. On the micro level, however, mining brings numerous problems with it such as the militarization of the area, and the risk of environmental harm that could deprive a local community of its livelihood. Mining, an activity with a substantial potential for environmental harm, is not genuine development. Genuine development "refers to a social and structural process for achieving ecological sustainability and human well being within a community as a whole. It refers to the qualitative improvement of all groups and individuals in a society" (Nadeau 2002a: 32). Mining is what Constantino-David (2001) would call “parasitic development.” A mining based development paradigm “blindly assumes that the human and natural resources are inexhaustible. It sacrifices the poor and the environment at the altar of the market and its promises of economic growth” (Constantino-David 2001: 233). Indeed, many in the progressive sector of the Church view “top-down” development programs, such as mining, as being “development aggression” (see Figure 6). Nadeau (2002a: 102) defines “development aggression” as “the process of displacing people from their land and homes to make way for development schemes that are being imposed from above without consent or public debate.”

The potential for mining to adversely effect the poor, through its environmental effects, displays a new dimension of liberation theology: its awareness of environmental issues. With the notable (and important exception) of Leonardo Boff,16 liberation theology has not always had an interest in ecology and the environment;17 rather, the main focus of liberation theology has been upon the poor. In recent years, however, this has begun to change as liberation theologians have begun to take into account what may be called “the ecology of the poor,” a discussion of how a worsening of the

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16 Leonardo Boff has a well-developed interest in ecology and the environment (Boff 1995; Boff 1997). Karl Gaspar attributes this to Boff having been a Franciscan; the Franciscans have a well-established tradition of environmentalism and St. Francis is well known as the patron saint of animals and ecology (Gaspar 2006: interview).

17 There have also been Catholic writers, who are not liberation theologians, who have displayed a strong environmentalism. A good example would be Father Sean McDonagh, an Irish Columban missionary, who spent time in the Diocese of Marbel on the island of Mindanao. McDonagh discussed the importance of environmental protection in his book The Greening of the Church (McDonagh 1990). Thomas Berry, author of The Dream of the Earth, has also been influential in the Philippines.
environment upon which many poor people rely can further impoverish them (Baltodano 2002; Brackley and Schubeck 2002; Kater 2001; Tombs 2001). Perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of liberation theology’s emphasis upon ecology comes from Gutierrez’s retrospective discussion of the advocacy of the sixteenth-century Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas on behalf of the indigenous inhabitants of the New World. As Gutierrez (1995: 78-79) wrote:

For Las Casas, the defense of the life of the Indians involves the defense of the nature around them, the protection of their entire vital medium. Each individual’s life supposes a context. If he or she is deprived of that context,
especially if this is done violently, the individual perishes. The human being is like a plant: to stay alive, the human being too needs to sink his or her roots in the earth. Today we call it ecological balance.

With its innate potential for environmental harm (as vividly demonstrated on the island of Marinduque) mining poses a substantial threat to the livelihoods of the poor and, consequently, cannot be ignored by a theology that accords a preferential option for the poor.

Will the Church be able to stop the government’s efforts to encourage mining? The answer to this admittedly rhetorical question is unclear (and arguably unimportant).

Some members of the Church are determinedly optimistic about their prospects for success. Bishop Gutierrez is of a view that “the people, and world opinion, will stop mining; the government is impotent to have its way” (Gutierrez 2005: interview). Similarly, Father Romeo Catedral stated:

Ultimately mining will be stopped. The Church’s opposition to mining is not a fad; the Church has made a commitment to this issue. Thousands of lives are affected and this will effect future generations. This is a major issue and the Church must do all that it can to stop mining. (Catedral 2005: interview).

In contrast to these optimists, other members of the Church, such as Father Peter Geremia, convey an opinion that the government will succeed in encouraging more mining but the results will, in the long run, be disastrous. “Today it appears impossible to stop mining. However, the calamities that will beset us will cause reconsideration; there will be more ‘Marcopper’ incidents” (Geremia 2005: interview).

In any event, the opposition of the Church, a prominent institution in Mindanao society, is making it difficult for the government to advocate mining by foreign corporations. The Mindanao Church has the numbers, resources, power, and influence at all levels of society to be a formidable force (Gaspar 1997). The government of the Philippines is unable, for fear of compromising its own political legitimacy, to attack the leadership of the Church (Gaspar 2005). The fact that proponents of mining often mention the opposition of the Church demonstrates their concern about
the position of this important social institution ("Another Philippines Hurdle" 1998; Maglambayan 2001). Indeed, the 29 January 2006 CBCP statement on mining issues led to a noticeable cooling off in mining industry interest in Mindanao. According to Edilberto Arreza, director for the Davao Regional office of the MGB, the CBCP statement "has forced mining applicants here to hesitate pursuing their investment plans" (Cayon 2006).

Ultimately, what is most important is not whether the Church will succeed, or fail, in its efforts to stop mining but the fact that the Church is opposing this variant of neoliberalism. Since the collapse of communism, neoliberalism has become the dominant development paradigm. Multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have adamantly insisted that developing countries adopt neoliberal policies (Bryant and Bailey 1997). "Until a Third World country receives the World Bank’s ‘seal of approval,’ it has virtually no chance of receiving any loans from the First World at all" (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 87). As the Twenty-first century progresses, neoliberal policies will continue to be implemented in the developing world. However, the developing world is also home to seventy percent of all Christians in the world (Boff 2005). There may well be more conflicts between neoliberalism, and its "top down" methods of implementing policies, and liberation theology with its preferential option for the poor and its "bottom up" perspective on achieving development. Indeed there are examples of similar ecclesial opposition to nonferrous metals mining in Latin America, the hearth of liberation theology. In Peru, Father Marco Arana, a priest personally ordained by Gustavo Gutierrez, has been involved in leading opposition to the activities of an American mining company (Arana 2002: interview). In Guatemala, the Church has been involved in opposing the activities of a Canadian mining company (Sullivan 2005). Berryman (1997: 15) may have been prophetic in writing:

The legacy of the progressive church may yet be picked up by a younger generation that has come of age in the world of globalization, and shares a passion for justice.
7. Conclusion

The geography of the Philippines offers great promise and peril for its peoples. Its island environment holds great mineral riches that increasingly draw attention from multinational corporations. Subsistence economies on the island of Mindanao have traditionally relied upon agriculture and fishing. The growth of agribusiness and mining has sparked a movement on behalf of Mindanao’s large poor population. Environmental degradation, particularly due to mining, threatens to thrust masses of Mindanao’s impoverished into utter destitution, as well as further marginalize indigenous communities. Liberation theology, as articulated by Leonardo Boff and others, has inspired the ecclesial community to speak out about its economic and environmental concerns and protest governmental policies that encourage resource exploitation at the expense of the poor.

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