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RETHINKING REFORESTATION

COUNTERING NATIVE TREE NARRATIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Rethinking Reforestation Through Tree Species

While the Philippines have only 3% primary forest due to immense logging efforts during the 20th century, 86% of the tree species used in re-forestation in the last years are exotic tree species. The 3,600 native tree species, in contrast, have been largely neglected.

The preference for exotic tree species evolved during the U.S. colonial period during which a strong focus on timber as a resource and fast growth as a desired characteristic were introduced.

In conversations with environmental agencies, scientists, and people interested in tree planting, I often heard the same explanations:

Native trees are…

"slow-growing"
"not available"
"complex"
"not suitable"
"not profitable"

3,600
native tree species

Exotic trees are…

"fast-growing"
"available"
"easy to grow"
"tolerant"
"profitable"

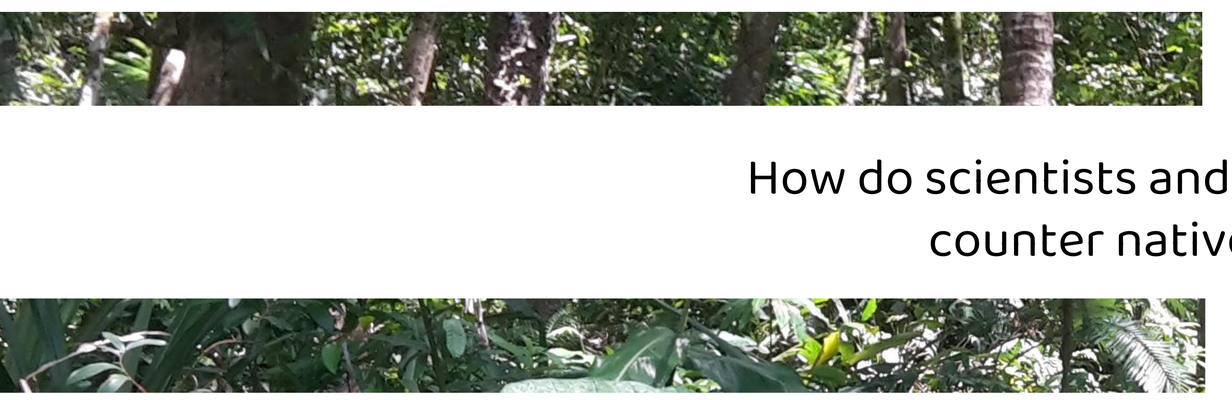
6
exotic tree species

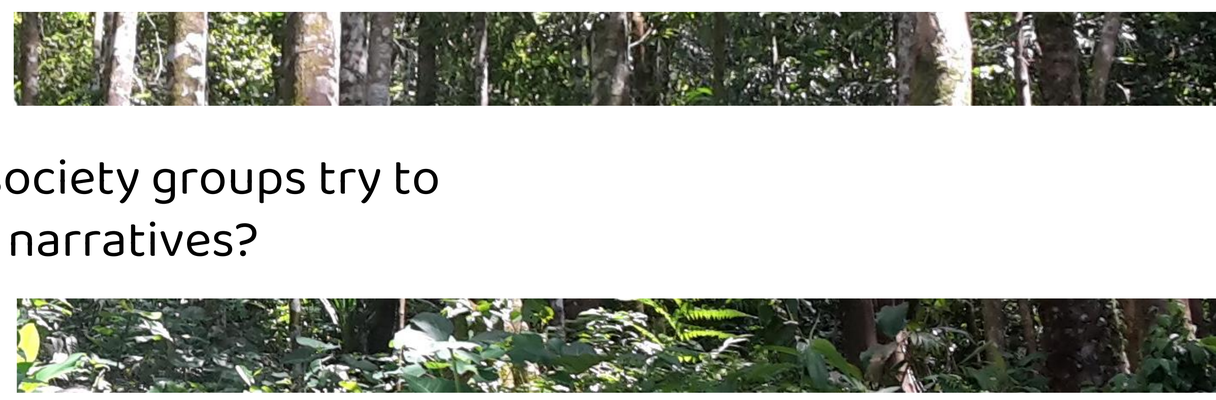
Environmental Narratives

"…are simplified explanations of environmental cause and effect that emerge in contexts where environmental knowledge and social order are mutually dependent." - Forsyth & Walker, 2008

…are used to:

- stabilize discourses
- reflect, and reinforce, different social orders
- give scientific legitimacy to environmental policies
- produce stabilized social categories



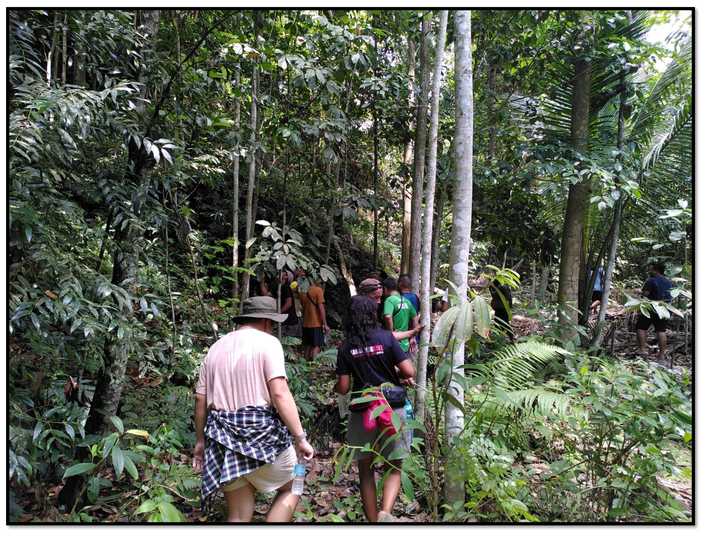


How do scientists and civil society groups try to counter native tree narratives?

By diversifying native tree value

By establishing native tree nurseries and circulating seeds and seedlings

By planting native tree demonstration sites that make native trees tangible



Ambivalent Future Forests

By establishing native tree nurseries and sharing seeds and knowledge, scientists and civil society groups challenge the dominant narratives commonly expressed by state agencies.

However, the growing number of native tree advocates raises a new challenge for the Philippines' future forests as they have contrasting perspectives on what *native* refers to in an archipelago.

References:

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