



REVISITING THE AYTAS OF FLORIDABLANCA

TWO DECADES SINCE PINATUBO

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The current study seeks to document and analyze the changes that have occurred with the Aytas in Barangay Camachiles in Floridablanca, Pampanga since the eruption of the volcano Mt. Pinatubo in June 1991. Through focus group discussions and interviews, the study finds that the Aytas of Camachiles are still in a state of political and economic underdevelopment. Having been awarded 5,000 hectares of land as their ancestral domain, they have expressed their determination to preserve the integrity of their culture, defend their natural resources in the face of threats of mining, and engage the provincial government in a manner whereby they can meaningfully participate in the holistic development of their community.

The eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991 brought to the attention of the world the existence of the Aytas,¹ an ethno-linguistic group thriving in Central Luzon, more commonly referred to in earlier Philippine social science literature as “Negritos”. Before the eruption, it was not quite known that there were 80,000 of them in Central Luzon and 200,000 altogether nationwide. The event sparked renewed interest in this particular ethno-linguistic group. Between the years 1992-1995, this researcher undertook fieldwork in the Ayta community of Barangay Camachiles in Floridablanca, Pampanga. The study resulted in an ethnographic research report, made from a feminist perspective, on how the women of the village coped with

¹Although *Aeta* is the spelling used in mainstream anthropological literature, the author here uses *Ayta*, the spelling preferred by the elders of this indigenous group.



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the aftermath of the eruption.² Subsequently, over the last 20 years, this researcher has maintained close contact and friendship with the leaders of the community through intermittent visits, regular text messaging, and the setting up of a scholarship fund for Ayta teacher education. (To date three Ayta teachers have earned education degrees through this teacher education scholarship program).

Between the years 1992-2012, many changes have taken place: the country has seen several changes of leadership in the national administration, world trade has succumbed to globalization, the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 (RA 8371) has been passed and the previously united community of Aytas in Floridablanca has become politically factionalized. One village, Mawacat, now has gotten a portion of itself collocated with the newly built SCTEX Expressway and is now within earshot of the noise of daily traffic. In 2011, the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) has undergone changes in leadership.

We find it a necessity to revisit the Ayta community at Floridablanca, Pampanga and discover how they have been affected by these changes in the past 20 years, particularly, how they have responded to the challenges of a country opening itself to globalization.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) Looking back at their experience of the Pinatubo volcano eruption, how do the Ayta leaders perceive the gains and losses from that experience? (2) What are the Ayta leaders' perceptions of and feelings about the key changes (geographical, economic, political, cultural) in their lives between the years 1991-2011? (3) To what extent have they responded to these changes? How would they evaluate such responses?

² Victoria Apuan, "Ang Paraan ng Pag-angkop ng mga Kababaihang Ayta ng Barangay Camachiles, Floridablanca, Pampanga sa Pagsabog ng Bulkang Pinatubo," Unpublished masteral thesis, College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines (1993).



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REVISITING THE AYTA HISTORY

Prior to the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, the Aytas of Pampanga have been one of the least studied indigenous groups in the country. An earlier study of this researcher³ confirms the finding that the Aytas of Central Luzon have been living under conditions of marginalization since the Spanish colonial period. Oral accounts of the oldest living men tell of “tall high-nosed armed men in horses” who have driven them from their lowland settlements and farms beside the rivers all the way up to the mountains.⁴ Anthropologists of the American colonial period called them “pygmies” and explored their territory for inventory of natural resources. In the mid-20th century, the Philippine Constabulary, fighting the Huk insurgency in Central Luzon, was a constant unwanted visitor and thus became a disturbing threat to the upland Ayta communities. The Martial Law period ushered in the entry of both the New People’s Army (NPA) and the government’s Armed Forces. Some Ayta men were suspected of sympathizing with the NPAs and were detained for some short period of time.

From the 1980s through the 1990s, a phenomenon that came to be called “development aggression” took place. In essence this phenomenon constituted efforts to modernize indigenous peoples’ ways of life, usually through large-scale industrial projects on indigenous lands. Instead of improving their lives, such projects uprooted people from their communities and drove them into remote unfamiliar areas where their traditional way of life could hardly be sustained. In all these occasions, government agencies and the military have joined forces to forcibly take the resources of these upland communities, both those above-ground and those underground. The most notable martyr of the resistance against development aggression was Macli-ing Dulag of the Cordillera Region. He opposed the building of the Chico River Dam because it was to adversely affect the indigenous communities in the three provinces of the Cordillera Region: Mountain Province, Kalinga and Apayao. Consequently he

³ Ibid.

⁴ Interviews with Apung Dioden and Apung Parham (1992).



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was killed by elements of the Philippine Army in April 1980. Reflecting the indigenous wisdom about the relationship between land and people, Mac-liing Dulag shortly before his death became famous for having said, “How can you own something that has been here before you?”

Even as some erstwhile government agencies have been created in succession to oversee the concerns of the indigenous communities (PANAMIN in the 1970s, Office of Northern Cultural Communities, and later National Commission for Indigenous Peoples), little or only short-lived resistance to such aggression took place. In 1997, the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) was enacted to help promote the concerns and agenda of indigenous peoples.

To prevent the cooptation of indigenous communities by government and mining corporations, militant organizations, such as the federation *Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas* (KAMP) and its member organization, the Central Luzon Ayta Association (CLAA), have led various forms of struggle against this aggression. During the celebration of World Indigenous Peoples Day on August 9, 2011, KAMP decried the use of Indigenous People’s Rights Act and the NCIP to “deceive and appease the indigenous people’s struggle for land and self-determination.”⁵ KAMP noted that award of concession rights to mining and logging contractors always preceded the militarization of those areas concerned. Under the Arroyo regime, 139 indigenous peoples were recorded to have been “salvaged” or killed extra-judicially. Within a year of the Aquino administration, eight had been killed.

Aside from development aggression, indigenous communities have suffered from government neglect. However, after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, a number of NGOs came to the upland communities in Pampanga and Zambales bringing with them various forms of assistance.

Studies have been made on the ways people cope with all these changes in their communities and in the larger society. Several ethnographic studies describe how the Ayta culture and lifestyle have

⁵ Marya Salamat, “Indigenous Peoples’ Groups Decry Use of IPRA and NCIP for Development Aggression,” (12 August 2011) in <http://bulatlat.com/main/2011/08/12/indigenous-peoples%E2%80%99-groups-decry-use-of-ipra-and-ncip-for-development-aggression/> (accessed 08.07.2014).



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been affected by events prior to the Pinatubo eruption;⁶ some others describe their situation after the Pinatubo explosion.⁷ Only one study has adopted a gendered perspective.⁸

This ethnographic study was undertaken within a week-end visit to said community. Qualitative research methods, i.e., interviews with key informants, focus group discussions (FGDs) with three sectors (adult male leaders, adult female leaders, youth leaders), and participant-observation approach were employed. There were two categories of informants – Aytas and non-Aytas. Home visits with selected community members were made; 12 individuals participated in the FGDs. The researcher had known the informants since 1992.

During the field visit, the objectives and procedure for the conduct of the research were explained to the informants. Interviews with the individual respondents were conducted in their homes, while the FGDs were conducted in one particular house. The data were analyzed through content-analysis. Validation of the analysis was done by reporting back the summary to three community leaders after the data had been processed.

Findings from the focus group discussions describe the political, economic, and cultural developments in Barangay Camachiles between the years 1992-2011 and the discussants' thoughts and feelings as they looked back to that period. In terms of these

⁶ Sabino Padilla, "Zambales Aeta: The Fragile Transition of an Egalitarian Society", unpublished paper (n.d.); Hiromu Shimizu, *Pinatubo Aytas: Continuity and change* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1989).

⁷ Cynthia B. Bautista, *In the Shadow of the Lingering Mt. Pinatubo Disaster*, University of the Philippines Faculty Book Series No. 2 (Quezon City: College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, 1993); idem, "The Mount Pinatubo Disaster and the People of Central Luzon," in *Fire and Mud: Eruptions and Labars of Mount Pinatubo-Philippines*, eds. Christopher Newhall and Raymundo Punongbayan (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1996); Hiromu Shimizu, "Struggling for Existence after the Pinatubo Eruption 1991: Catastrophe, Suffering and Rebirth of Ayta Communities," Paper presented at the session "The Philippine Negritos: Past, Present and Future," (Inter-congress of IUAES 2002, on September 27, Toshi Center Hotel, Tokyo, Japan), in http://www.scs.kyushu-u.ac.jp/~hs1/shimizu_hp/introduction/essay/Ayta_Struggling.html (accessed 08.17.2011)

⁸ Victoria Apuan, "Ang Paraan ng Pag-angkop ng mga Kababaihang Ayta ng Barangay Camachiles, Floridablanca, Pampanga sa Pagsabog ng Bulkang Pinatubo," Unpublished masteral thesis, College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines (1993).



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developments and their perceptions, the discussants, the Ayta leaders, marked the last 20 years into three periods: (a) 1992-1998 – period of recovery from the eruption; (b) 1999-2008 – period of increasing political marginalization and militarization despite the passage of IPRA; (c) 2009-2011 – period of governance of former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as congresswoman of their district and of Lilia Pineda as Governor of Pampanga.

PERCEIVED GAINS AND LOSSES

Gains. The following have been identified as gains since the eruption of Mount Pinatubo: (a) the recognition of the Aytas as Filipinos; (b) the discovery of other Ayta groups, and; (c) the influx of support groups.

An issue that the core group believed they had to negotiate all these years was the image that non-Aytas (the “*unats*”) would have of them as opposed to their own self-image. Non-Aytas regarded them as helpless and dependent victims whereas Aytas looked at themselves as survivors who were capable of making their own decisions, moving towards autonomy and thus, governing themselves. One important finding of this study is the Aytas’ assertion of their self-image and their determination to work towards the transformation of non-Aytas’ defective image of them.

Aside from “coming out of the shadows,” the Aytas from different parts of Central Luzon also discovered one another. Meetings among Aytas were facilitated by government and non-government organizations. They met their sisters and brothers from nearby Bataan and Zambales Provinces as well as Nueva Ecija Province. Efforts were made to solidify their bonds as they formed people’s organizations like AKAY (*Aguman da reng Katutubo king Floridablanca*) and regional federations like CLAA which in turn was affiliated with the national federation KAMP.

There was an influx of support groups. The Aytas, particularly those in Camachiles, found themselves having to deal with various non-Aytas who wanted to help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Miriam College and PRODEV remained in their communities for at least five years (1991-1996). Later, evangelical groups (Korean



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Methodists, Japanese Service for Peace, among others) went up the mountains to proselytize and establish development projects like scholarships, medical missions, and the like. Similarly, Miriam College helped three Ayta women earn their college degrees in Education. For a brief period, the support groups helped them bring out their feelings, ideas, situation, and demands to the media and to various sectors of the lowland public. As one said in one of the FGDs, “It was as if we had a megaphone so that our voices could be louder and reach more people”.

The main gain was the passage of the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997 and the subsequent awarding to them of the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) in 2009.

Losses. The most evident loss was the momentary destruction of their fertile arable land, of their security of abode, and of their traditional economic environment that used to sustain the community and the family. This led to a disruption of their livelihood activities and, therefore, loss of their economic independence.

The experience of the volcanic eruption was traumatic. The feeling of being displaced led to disorientation and depression for some. Having to live in evacuation centers brought about a sense of increased dependence and loss of the sense of autonomy. For many of the men folk, who used to take charge of their family’s basic needs, it was not a good feeling to have to depend on others for their family’s needs. Ayta pride dictated that one should provide for one’s family. That is why they tried to clear the lahar-covered soil as soon as they could. By November 1991, five months after the eruption, they began returning to their old upland community site.

Before the eruption of Pinatubo, no one went hungry. Since their livelihood was based on agriculture, the lahar-covered land led to diminished or no income. It took several months to make the soil ready again for cultivation of bananas and root crops and three years for rice production to resume in full swing. The continuous supply of relief goods and the DSWD’s “Food for Work” programs helped ease somewhat their sense of insecurity and mitigated the threat of starvation.

With the influx of outsiders, the Aytas had to do a delicate balancing act in their relationship with non-Aytas, particularly with



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those of the neighboring barangay, San Ramon. During the evacuation period, many of their produce and wood that used to be stored in their homes “walked away” (got stolen). Furthermore, middlemen paid very low for their agricultural produce. Even during the rehabilitation period when lowland croplands were yet largely unavailable, the Aytas never got to feel that they could effectively command their price. Centuries-old feelings of inferiority were not eradicated in their economic relationships with the non-Aytas. Over the years such kind of an unequal relationship with San Ramon had gone on.

GEOGRAPHICAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Geographical/Ecological Changes

Since the cataclysmic eruption of Mt. Pinatubo more than twenty years ago, the Aytas have become aware of other phenomena that could have large devastating effects beyond their own communities. For instance, they have become familiar and aware of climate change and the running discussion on the subject. They understood how the floods of 2009 and 2011, which submerged some towns of Pampanga, could be effects and indications of this phenomenon. They might have felt some relief that they were spared of the floods because Camachiles was an upland area. But at the same time, they were alarmed that they might not be as lucky the next time around. Furthermore, former president Macapagal-Arroyo built a steel bridge over the Gumain River allowing for an all-weather access to the four Ayta villages from the town proper. The old wood-and-steel bridge built in 1987 that had made for the only route to Camachiles up until the building of the new bridge was now in a bad state of disrepair and therefore barely passable.

Other new infrastructures in the village include bigger/ sturdier houses, churches made of concrete, additional classrooms in the elementary school. Housing materials had been supplied immediately after the eruption on three occasions during the term of President



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Joseph Estrada. In 2011, 350 more houses were to be built under the auspices of VP and Housing Secretary Jejomar Binay.

Of great concern to the Aytas were the efforts of a mining company to do exploration for copper in Mount Negrón (also known as Mount Abo) in near-by community of Camias. Mount Negrón was the source of the water of the Gumain River and other minor streams in Floridablanca. The Aytas were grateful for the support of the inter-faith solidarity groups that launched the campaign “*Ipamingwa* (Save/Defend) Mt. Abo: A Solidarity Trek and Tree Planting Activity to Save the Aetas’ Ancestral Lands from Mining Plunder and Degradation” on September 24, 2012.⁹

Political Development

Concerns about their community organization, peace and order, their struggle to claim their ancestral domain, and their participation in development planning were raised.

The heyday of their organization, the “Samahan”, was during the months immediately following the eruption. Although the Aytas were under great physical and emotional stress, they were able to respond to the challenge of organizing an effective distribution system. Their initial successes fueled the cooperation of others. Their ethic of fairness helped minimize unhealthy competition. As an initial project, *Operasyon Tayong Bahay* (Build your Houses) started in Camachiles, was very successful and spread to the other communities.

Much of the success was also because there was enough support from outside. For over a year, the continuous supply of material goods boosted the morale of the people and made them feel that, indeed, they were not alone in their suffering.

The support from the private sector helped Camachiles gain confidence in staying put in their village and, thus, in deciding not to move to the official Resettlement Site in Nabuclod. Even if they could not access much of government funds for housing, Camachiles residents were able to muster the unity and cooperation to help each

⁹ See http://www.moving-planet.org/events/ph/pampanga_1430 (accessed 08.07.2014)



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other build their homes the *bayanihan* way. Later, during the term of President Joseph Estrada, funds for core houses were made available.

The private sector provided immediate support in relief goods as well as more long-term support in initiatives like agro-forestry (e.g. replanting of trees c/o Prodev and Binhi) and scholarships (c/o Miriam College), and a water project (c/o Magis Deo Marriage Encounter community). By the year 2000, the Aytas could proudly say, “*Nakayanan namin*”. (We were able to do face the challenges.)

However, after 2000, there was a waning of support from the outside. While the *Samahan* strived to keep the focus on accessing basic needs, organizing local initiatives and lobbying for the promotion of the ancestral domain directions, personal issues got in the way and weakened the organization. Even the meager government assistance in terms of the Food for Work Program dwindled.

The split in the politically progressive groups affected the NGOs helping the Aytas. To compound the already problematic situation, the 69th Infantry Battalion was assigned to Pampanga. Military personnel with their long firearms began to become visible; their civilian counterparts became even bolder, and there was tension all around. This further worsened when the 72nd Infantry Battalion under General Jovito Palparan was deployed as well in the area. The worst incident happened in 2008 when Rick Guiao, a leading member of the core group, was arrested, detained and tortured. His release was later obtained.

The arrest of Rick Guiao stopped all organizing efforts. People became wary and careful. Looking back, the whole decade of 2000-2009 was a dark period for the Aytas. They felt alone: “*Parang wala kaming kakampi*.” Nowhere to be found were the support groups and organizations that used to visit and help them. It was as if the Aytas no longer had any allies.

On the other hand, however, the eruption of Mount Pinatubo provided the Aytas a new impetus and energy to demand of the government the indigenous peoples’ claim to ancestral domains. They found an ally in Sen. Juan Flavio Velasco who sponsored RA 8371, the Indigenous People’s Rights Act of 1997. In a sense, the passage of that law was a breakthrough because the specific rights of indigenous peoples were outlined. However, immediately there was resistance from the mining companies.



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The climax of this campaign was the actual awarding to the Aytas of the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) by then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in July 2009. Although many of the old people were jubilant, the core group of leaders lamented that from the 10,000 hectares of land that they had identified as their ancestral domain, only 5,000 hectares were awarded to the Aytas. This was just half of what they felt was due them.

Further, the ascent of Lilia Pineda as governor in 2010 initiated a process of development planning. Governor Pineda did not tap any of the existing local peoples' organizations. Instead she encouraged the formation of other organizations that she eventually mobilized for various gift-giving and goat dispersal projects. In time she convened the Technical Working Group that was supposed to advise her regarding issues involving the Aytas. The Group was also supposed to help craft an Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP), which in turn would provide input for an Indigenous People's Action Plan for 2011. The question that continued to fester was, "Who really is in charge?"

Economic Development

The post-eruption period saw a lot of assistance provided for the basic needs of the community members. The rehabilitation of the upland farms and water systems was given priority. So it was a good thing that an agro-forestry project got started: some pieces of equipment were donated and some technical assistance was made available. There were donations of a jeepney for the transport of people and goods, and a tractor for the rehabilitation of farmlands. Along with these donations, a blacksmith training activity was held. Unlike neighboring Nabuclod, which was identified as the official Ayta Resettlement Site, government assistance for Camachiles had been meager. This mostly came in the form of intermittent Food for Work for two decades and, now, the Conditional Cash Transfer.

Since 2000, the Aytas felt that the last two governors had been indifferent towards them. They felt this most during the militarization campaign. While Governor "Among Ed" Panlilio was perceived to be pro-poor, the Aytas believed that P7 million in funds for the



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Aytas needed to be accounted for. The next governor, Lilia Pineda, conducted frequent visits to the communities and gave dole-outs of food, kitchen implements and goats for dispersal. She also established the Technical Working Group for development planning. Between Pineda's proposals of agro-tourism and agro-forestry, the Aytas were more supportive of agro-forestry. They were concerned that agro-tourism would benefit only a few.

Since 2000, assistance from the private sector had been sporadic in coming. Aid had mainly been project-based and short-term. In 2009, when the CADT was given, Barangay Camachiles was supposed to receive 10,000 hectares (as claimed using the 1930 statistics). They received only 5,000 hectares.

With these developments, the Aytas still say "*Eto, hirap pa rin.*" (Until now, we're still hard up!)

Cultural Development

Although there was the desire to preserve the Ayta culture, there had been a lack of a systematic program to pass on traditional songs and dances, philosophies and mores to the Ayta youth. The leaders lamented that although parents were able to pass on the agricultural skills, there was no mentoring program to ensure that the youth should also develop leadership skills.

In the area of indigenous health practices, for example, from the five *mag-aanito* (indigenous healer/shaman) practitioners of twenty years ago, only one was now left in the practice. Was it because Western medicine had become the dominant source of cure and relief? Was the "gift" of healing no longer given by the spirits? They could not seem to find a definite explanation for this.

A notable physical presence was that of the Methodists. Most of those in the core group warmed towards the Methodist church. Methodist church members had been consistently active in helping the community since 2006. Compared to the Catholic priest who could come only once a month to say Mass, the Methodist pastor had managed to be present often and long enough to provide formation programs for adults, youth, and children. She was also



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instrumental in finding Rick and giving his family safe refuge for a year. Yet the core group was concerned how the Methodist influence would enhance or alter the indigenous culture.

While the women in the core group claimed that even if the women were not formally organized, they were easy to mobilize. In other words, women were not wanting in leadership qualities. At the same time, however, women were still subordinated at home. It would be interesting to find out further how women were resisting patriarchy in their own way. Opinion leaders like P.S. Santos were then still alive and still continued to declare that women had no business acting as political leaders. Yet the modeling of Mely, Cherry, and Pastor Leslie had come to challenge that idea.

Self-Rated Satisfaction Level

The participants of the FGDs were asked to rate certain aspects of their lives on a scale from one to ten, with ten representing full satisfaction or full support and one representing absence of support or complete dissatisfaction.

Highest satisfaction rating lay in the realm of health (the Department of Health provided monthly immunization), followed by peace and order (“*tabimik naman*”), and the help that the LGU provided. There was moderate satisfaction indicated on the kind of education provided by the public schools. They wished that the private groups should consult them first when providing help. Disunity within the ranks was a source of greatest dissatisfaction. They felt they needed to overcome suspiciousness, petty jealousies, and competition.

One may notice that high levels of satisfaction have been found in the areas of health and “peace and order” at the moment. Moderate satisfaction was felt regarding aid from the government. Lowest satisfaction was indicated on the area of group unity within *Samahan* as well on the economic and education support coming from the private sector.



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Listening to the Ayta Voices

Letting the data speak from the core, several themes emerge as expressed articulation of the Ayta's hopes and fears, realizations and resolutions.

"Nakayanan namin ang naidulot ng pagsabog ng Pinatubo."
(We were able to handle the disaster that was Pinatubo.)

Looking back at the massive destruction wrought by the eruption in 1991, the group marveled how they were able to manage the recovery and rehabilitation challenges of the disaster. They were not formally trained in disaster management (*"Hindi kami nag-aral o naghanda."*) but somehow they were able to rebuild their communities. This was made more significant when they refused to receive the massive aid that they could have received if they had agreed to stay at the official resettlement site at Nabuclod. Instead they made do with their own resources and the resources from the private sector that came in.

"Parang wala kaming kakampi."
(It was as if we did not have any allies; we were alone.)

Despite the initial successes that they achieved in the rebuilding and rehabilitation of their community, these proved inadequate in overcoming the dire challenges provided by the militarization that they experienced. During this episode neither the municipal nor the provincial government unit came to their aid, and assistance from the private sector became scarce and sporadic. They felt helpless and alone. A further aggravating factor was the factionalism that crept into the provincial and national federations of indigenous peoples (CLAA and KAMP) that they were aligned with.



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“Nandito pa rin kami.”
(We’re still here.)

Despite lamenting the fact that the strength of their people’s organization (the *Samahan*) had substantially weakened, the members of the core group felt that their camaraderie and personal relationship with one another had been sustained. Thus, they had never abandoned the community. This researcher could not but sense a tinge of hope that although the memory of the glorious first five years after the Pinatubo eruption could no longer be invoked, the act of coming together for the FGD was a first step towards a renewal.

It is not that no one was politically involved. Carling was part of the Tribung Ayta organization that Governor Lilia Pineda dealt with, while Rick and P.S. were consultants in the Technical Working Group. Mely had a short stint at the national level of the NCIP, while David was a member of the provincial NCIP.

“Kelangan na kasi magtulongan sa gobyerno ngayon.”
(We need to help the government now.)

The Aytas grew up with the conviction that they had been neglected by the government sector. This conviction was compounded by the harassment they had experienced in the hands of military authorities before and during Martial Law, and in the first decade of the new millennium under General Jovito Palparan. Hence, they had always been wary of and cautious toward government officials. The mayors varied in their attitude towards them as a group, and the governors were not that interested in them before. Governor Ed Panlilio seemed to have been helpful through some general province-wide projects but not one project particularly aimed at Camachiles was ever implemented. Their level of trust – though still with an ounce of caution – increased during the term of the current governor, Lilia Pineda. Her regular physical presence and dole-outs seemed to assure them that her concern was for the long term. Thus they resolved to be vigilant in following up on her promises. Part of their new dealings with government was to promote better relation and coordination with the military. Rick



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and P.S as members of the core group had begun to foster “good” relationship with the new provincial commander.

The Aytas are a peace-loving people. Unlike the Ilongots of Aurora or the Kalingas of the Cordilleras, the Aytas are not an indigenous group of the “warrior” tradition. They were thus perceived as passive or at least “non-threatening”. This seeming attitude of “not fighting for their rights” has in part led to government’s neglect of them even before the eruption of Pinatubo and their vulnerability to military incursions thereafter.

The inclusion of some Aytas in the Technical Working Group that crafted the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) may be considered mere tokenism, on one hand, or an experiment in participatory development planning, on the other. Along with looming threat of incursion into their ancestral domain from mining companies, IPRA provisions continued to be violated. The militancy that the Aytas learned to assume in their experience as an organized group has been replaced by pragmatic engagement with government. The only overt resistance they manifested in recent months was against the mining of Mount Abo (also known as Mount Hebron). Some Aytas became part of an inter-faith group protesting the violations of the IPRA. This was fairly recent though (2011); although organizing efforts against mining began gaining momentum in 2007.

The Ayta leaders claimed that they wanted to effectively participate in the planning and implementation of development plans, but they also wanted to be further capacitated. They wanted to participate at their own pace and on their own terms. Sadly, the provincial government would not seem to respect the Aytas’ wishes and may simply rush the process. Furthermore, gender inequalities in the development process had to be addressed. So while women were easily mobilized, the consciousness-raising among men and women about women’s rights and the vision of a gender-fair society needed to be intensified.

The eruption of Mount Pinatubo highlighted the experience of the Aytas as an Exodus people in reverse: they moved out of their homeland to unknown, infertile rehabilitation centers but endeavored as soon as they could to return to their homeland. As tribal people, their sense of cultural identity remained strong and their sense of



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what was right in the face of incursions by the non-Aytas into their land and life was clear.

However, they were victims of injustice many times over: centuries-old government neglect, racial discrimination, the violence they had been subjected to. They continued – like the Israelites of the Old Testament – to assert their right to reap and manage the benefits from their God-given land.

The hand of friendship extended to them by government officials could bring both good and harmful effects. On one hand, they received their title to their ancestral land. On the other, they still needed to keep on fighting to reclaim those parts of the land that were not included in the final title. The law gave them around twenty years more to try to realize their claim. Even with IPRA in place, violations were rife. Hence, the Aytas could not yet sing their victory song. They were still struggling; their final victory had yet to come.

CONCLUSION

Who will help them? How shall Yahweh, the God of History, intervene? As they so realized, it will be through their efforts along with the support of solidarity groups that will dare side with and work with them. The inter-faith anti-mining group is a good start. But organizing efforts still need to be done – within and among the Ayta communities and without, including possible support from solidarity groups.

The Aytas of Camachiles are a resilient people. Yet they still need partners to help them fulfill their aspirations. They have identified that they need to be more prepared for productive partnerships. This study has helped them articulate their aspirations and bring to the public their determination to preserve their culture, defend their natural resources in the face of threats of mining, and engage the provincial government in a manner whereby they can meaningfully participate in the holistic development of their community.

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