

Aeta Mag-anchi's Cultural History, Concept of Time and Territoriality: Its Implications to Education

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Abstract-This ethnographic research work is a pioneering attempt at understanding the Aeta Mag-anchi culture in particular, and its relation to their concepts of time and territoriality. The study was conducted among the Aeta Mag-anchi people living at Sitio San Martin and Sitio Burog of Barangay Sto. Niño, and San Vicente, Bamban, Tarlac, Philippines. The research techniques used were semi-structured interviewing, and participant observation. Process documentation, oral testimonies and life histories of men and women were also taken to support the data gathering process. The analysis of data relied much in the application of Phenomenology as its philosophical framework.

Geographically, the Aeta Mag-anchis determine their territory as that area where they have been staying since the time they can remember. It is the area where they have established their swidden farms because they maintain semi-sedentary settlement sites. Boundaries are based on the identified landmarks that the older Mag-anchis can remember. They maintain a non-exclusive concept of territoriality. Territoriality has no specific demarcations but based on land usage. This fluidity in terms of their concept of boundaries is further reflected in their concept of time which is also based on consciousness rather than linear time. It was found out that the Aeta Mag-anchi measures time from his body clock of what we call as human time rather than linear time as what the westernized Filipinos are using. The absence of shared historical consciousness among the Aeta Mag-anchis leads to the absence of shared learning experience as a people thus, their inability to institutionalize their own educational structures. Since their concept of time is based on consciousness, this affects their historicity as a people. It seems that these groups have difficulty in establishing a shared historical experience as people. As they move around, no particular institutions are kept intact as a group.

Keywords-identity; Aeta; Indigenous People

I. INTRODUCTION

This ethnographic research work is a pioneering attempt at understanding the Aeta Mag-anchi culture in particular, and its relation to their concepts of time and territoriality.

The study was conducted among the Aeta Mag-anchi people living at Sitio San Martin and Sitio Burog of Barangay Sto. Niño, and San Vicente, Bamban, Tarlac, Philippines. Since the study made use of ethnography, the whole tribal group was included in the observation.

The research techniques used were semi-structured interviewing, and participant observation. Process documentation, oral testimonies and life histories of men and women were also taken to support the data gathering process. Since time among the Aetas is correlated with the seasons, the researcher experienced living with the group during those particular times in order to further support and understand previously gathered data.

The analysis of data relied much in the application of Phenomenology as its philosophical framework. With this the researcher tried to elevate and reveal structures from the existing culture through explication. The experience that the researcher had was important in bracketing the natural attitude and disposition of the Aeta Mag-anchi people.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study generally focused on the Aeta Mag-anchi concept of time and territoriality and its implications to education. Specifically it sought answers to the following questions:

- Who are the Aeta Mag-anchi in terms of their Cultural History?
- What is the Aeta Mag-anchi concept of time and territoriality and how are these concepts evident in their culture?
- What is the relation of the above mentioned factors to formal education?

III. FINDINGS

Very little mention has been made by early writers about the Aetas. Early writing of Philippine history states that the colonizers knew nothing of them except that they were "small blacks" which roamed in the mountains living on roots and game which they killed with bows and arrows. They were reported to be fierce little savages from whom no danger could come, since they did not leave their mountain vastness, but whose territory none dared enters. (Negrito Aeta Paper No. 84, 1908)

At present though, the Aetas are called by different names: "Ayta", "Agta", "Atta", "Ati" and Ita. These names are usually based on their geographical location, history, or relationship with other people. Spanish records show that they were called "Negritos" or "Little Black One" by the Spanish colonizers. A term they coined from the

word "Negro" meaning dark skinned. In the world ethnographic literature, at present, they are more popularly known as Negrito Pygmy. Approximately, the Negrito Population throughout the Archipelago is roughly 90,000 (NCCP-Pact) they are divided into 25 ethnolinguistic groups dispersed in bands from Luzon to Mindanao. The most numerous are those found in the island of Luzon (Encyclopedia of Phil. Arts, Vol. 1, 1994)

Barrows (1910) further explained that the Negrito is a scattered survivor of the pygmy Negro race, at one time undoubtedly far more important and humerous; brachycephalic, platyrhinian, wooly headed, and when unaffected by the higher culture are forest dwellers.

The Aeta Mag-anchis belong to this group of indigenous people who inhabit mostly the highlands or mountain regions of the Pampanga - Tarlac area in the Philippines; they have preserved their ethnic identity through their language, belief system and consciousness. Suitably adapted to their ecological niche and environment, the Aeta communities still employ subsistence patterns practiced by their forebears, such as hunting, foraging, and swidden cultivation. In pre-colonial times, their ancestors inhabited the valleys and ridges of the Pinatubo Area, but were driven into the interiors when the western colonizers came. (Cojuangco)

Their practice of swidden cultivation differentiates the Aeta mag-anchis from other aetas in the sense that they do not consider themselves as nomadic. Their movement is only limited within a certain radius in areas which they consider as a part of their territory because they have been cultivating it.

Swidden cultivation further supports their establishment of settlements usually located at the center of their swidden sites. Since this is their main source of livelihood, they are so much dependent on seasonal and ecological changes which further affects their time management. Unlike the mainstream western acculturated Filipino who is dependent on linear time, the Aeta Mag-anchi's concept of time is based on their consciousness despite the presence of clocks that measures linear time.

Territorial boundaries were never defined by the Aetas in terms of concrete boundaries. Again, this is based on their consciousness and is defined with the use of markers such as fruit trees and natural demarcations such as rivers and ridges, whatever is present in the area.

Linguistically, the Summer Institute for Linguistics have identified the Aeta Mag-anchis as those Aetas living at the slopes of Pinatubo particularly on the Pampanga-Tarlac Area. Aeta mag-anchi as stated by Storck (1991) is a dialect prevalent among those Aeta groups which the SIL have said to be unique among these people. It is different from the Aeta Zambal spoken by the Abenlen (Abelling) Aetas since it is Capampangan based and the emphasis on the persistent use of the glottal stop among speakers of the dialect.

Historically, these Aeta Mag-anchis have been exposed to an early acculturation process brought about by the Spanish Catholic missions in the Bamban area as cited in early Spanish documents.

During the American regime, they were considered as a "cultural minority" because they did not easily succumb to

the changes that the Americans were implementing. Among the Filipino Majority population in the area, acculturation process was made possible through the introduction of formal education but the aetas were not educated formally due to the persistent practices of their age old practices.

Time to us lowlanders generally can be measured by a clock, thus translated one day is 24 hours, one hour is 60 minutes and one minute is 60 seconds. Through such measurement, we know when to eat our breakfast, lunch, or dinner. We know the concept of being late because we have the technological awareness. We have time for going to work, to school, to rest and to sleep. We have a measurement of our age because we know that there are 30 days in a month and 12 months or 365 days in a year. More or less we are bounded by schedules that are stuck around time. We are made constantly aware of it because of the technology called clock thus making us conscious of time. Without the clock, time for us could be measured through two points in a distance. Thus, we can never give the exact elapsed time from one point in space through another but instead we state that approximately the distance for example from one house to another is measured through number steps rather than the number of minutes.

Our awareness of our age can only be made possible through our awareness of seasons because it will be difficult to remember the number of nights that you have slept in as you grow older without the calendar. Thus, our awareness of our past is bounded by material correlates such as the calendar and the clock. Without such, people have to contend with whatever it is that the group will be able to institutionalize as time measurement through historical experience. To a western oriented perception, a person has a great preoccupation with records, diaries, calendars, time graphs, etc. To an Aeta mag-anchi this clock consciousness is not present. While the western orientation marks time with a calendar or watch, the Aeta Mag-anchi marks time with his consciousness. Thus, the Aeta remembers the past in terms of consciousness and not in terms of linear time.

Their concept of time and territoriality which is both tied to their consciousness largely affect their worldview as a people. Historical consciousness affects the identity of people. Hence, common historical experience molds common identity (Shimizu, 1989). However, since the aeta concept of time is not the same as the mainstream westernized Filipino, a vacuum exist in their historical experience as a people. Meaning, there is no collective recall of the past based on chronological account. Which makes our historical experience different from theirs. This is further affected by the fluidity by which they perceive time. In turn, education is seen to be a vehicle in molding the historical identity of people. Historical consciousness is passed through generation through learning. However, to an aeta Mag-anchi, the absence of historical consciousness means their inability to maintain structures that would transmit historical learning through succeeding generation. Education to an Aeta Mag-anchi is focused only on the ability to maintain day to day survival techniques rather than an institution which could transmit historical consciousness as a people.

In spite of government efforts to respond to the needs of these groups, the education of their children has not been well attended to. The Aeta children have been neglected in terms of education. Only some or a few among them are attending schools or are able to attend school. This has been partly attributed to the fact that barangay schools are usually located in the lowlands and are thus quite remote from the settlement of the tribal communities. Time is mostly used up in going to and from the school. Although public schools are free, parents still cannot send their children because they could not afford to pay the school fees imposed.

These among others have been partly the reason of why the Aeta Mag-anchis despite long exposure to lowland culture have a lot of difficulty in accepting formal education. However, their identity and consciousness as a people can also be used to explain their inability to adapt to formal education.

At present, for an Aeta Mag-anchi, education is seen both as a threat to their existing culture and at the same time a vehicle to a better life. Threat because, those who will be educated will be entirely acculturated to the mainstream population, and vehicle because being educated means being able to facilitate their economic exchange with lowland markets. (Orejas, 1999)

The current educational setup implements the same national curriculum to all schools, private or public, and the tribal communities go through the same system of learning. The curriculum, however, retains its western framework despite efforts to adapt it to a nationalistic consciousness; it is therefore foreign. As a consequence, the children have been experiencing a sort of a cultural shock and have been traumatized. The main problem lies in the fact that the children who attends the same class come from different cultural settings with varied enculturation of socialization, and world-views. Moreover, it is important to learn and understand that the situation in itself is a factor in the negative attitude of the tribal communities.

This being the case, it is therefore important that the curriculum to be used in educating these people should be responsive to their culture and identity as a people.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Aeta Mag-anchi of Sacobia Tarlac belongs to the Pinatubo Ayta Group as identified by Fox in 1943, which settled on the lower slopes of Mt. Pinatubo towards the direction of the Pampanga-Tarlac Area. They are linguistically distinct from other Pinatubo Aytas because of their dialect, Capampangan based rather than Sambali based and uses a glottal stop in between words during pronunciation. Since they are swidden cultivators, their movement is largely determined by change in swidden sites rather than by nomadic shifts.

Long before they were subjected to lowland incursions, the Aeta Mag-anchis held on their notion of territoriality. Subsumed in their practice of land use are the three basic concepts denoted by English terms, habit, custom and law. Among the Aeta Mag-anchi there are no distinction made between the concepts and there is no equivalent term of conquest that denotes acquisition of property. Notions of

homeland are connected to a habitual usage of anything in the surrounding that leads to communal patterns of behavior and customary laws. Territoriality has no specific demarcations but based on land usage.

This fluidity in terms of their concept of boundaries is further reflected in their concept of time which is also based on consciousness rather than linear time. It was found out that the Aeta Mag-anchi measures time from his body clock of what we call as human time rather than linear time as what the westernized Filipino are using.

It should be further stated that due to their fluidity in movement which is usually related to their economic land use which is swidden cultivation, the aeta mag-anchi were unable to maintain established social institutions other than that of the family grouping that will take care more complex needs of the group hence the non-formation of formal educational structures. This emanates from the preliterate concept of education of the aeta Mag-anchi where in they conceptualized education only as a preparation of the young for his future performance of roles as an adult. But then, it is important to note that within their society there are no highly specialized role differentiation except for sex and age roles. This makes their concept of education limited to training the young only in as much as the performance of such roles.

Therefore, upon exposure to lowland incursions and acculturation process, the Aeta Mag-anchi has this inherent inability to adapt to the formalized structure of the classroom mainly because the formalized structure goes against his inherent concept of education. Formal education then is seen as irrelevant in training the young Aeta to serve his family.

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