

AMIN ITO* : WHO CONTROLS “DISASTER MANAGEMENT”?

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Batay sa aming mga obserbasyon at karanasan sa mga komunidad ng mga Ayta na naging biktima ng pagputok ng Bundok Pinatubo, masasabi na ang mag biktima mismo ay may kakayahang pang-organisasyon at pangkultura na pamahalaan at pangsiwaan ang kanilang sitwasyon. Hindi sila nagiging pala-asa na lamang sa tulong na galing labas. Gayunman, sa umpisa, nangangailangan din sila ng mga tulong materyal: pagkain, damit, gamot at pabahay. Pero naipagtatagumpay lamang nila ang tuluyang rehabilitasyon kung sa umpisa pa lamang ay kontrolado na nila ang pamamahala't pangangasiwa nito.

(Based on our observations and experiences in the Ayta communities hit by the Mt. Pinatubo eruptions, it can be said that victims themselves have the organizational and cultural resources and capability to manage their situation. While victims do need immediate material support such as relief goods, they are able to rehabilitate themselves successfully, if they take control of the disaster management from the beginning.)

Introduction

In 1989, we were involved in the studies conducted by the Legislative-Executive Bases Council to look into the alternative conversion plans for the U.S. bases facilities in Subic and in Clark in the event of pull-out. We worked specifically with Ayta communities and urban poor groups around Clark as well as those around Subic.

* Tagalog for “this is ours.”

In Sapang Bato, Angeles City, many of the Ayta participants in the workshops we conducted said something like this, "*Narito na naman kayo na gumagawa ng research. Ang daming nagpupunta rito na gumagawa ng research pero wala kaming napapala.*" That hit us real hard and we challenged them, "*Ibahin ninyo kami. Kung gusto ninyo kabit na walang pera ang gubyerno pagkatapos ng pag-aaral na ito, mag-uusap tayo uli.*"

Then in 1991 Mt. Pinatubo erupted. *Umalis ang mga Amerikano at hindi na namin nasundan ang mga alternative bases conversion plans.* But because of that dare that the Ayta made and a subsequent invitation from organized Ayta communities in Zambales, we ran a number of leadership training exercises for the Ayta of Yamot, a sitio of Villar in Poon Bato and one of the oldest Ayta settlements, about five to seven kilometers from the Mt. Pinatubo crater. That was March 1991. We left Yamot end of March but returned early April. *Sinalubong kami ng mga ilang Ayta at ang sabi nila ay, "Wala na, wala na ang Yamot,"* meaning that the village of Yamot is already gone. *Akala namin nireyd yung erya kasi pinamumugaran daw ng mga NPA (New People's Army),* which is not true from our investigation except that at that time *pagka mayroong mga nag-organisa komunista na. "Hindi,"* sabi nila, "*yung dating usuk-usok lang, pumutok na.*" *Kasi noong March 1991 pa lang may mga usok na at amoy asupre. Hindi nila alam na bulkan pala ang Mt. Pinatubo. Walang nakakaalam na bulkan ang Mt. Pinatubo.*

Everybody wanted to do some kind of relief work. *Kami naman* plus one international non-governmental organization (NGO), Oxfam UK-Ireland, thought that maybe there must be some other kind of contribution apart from relief work. Uppermost in our minds was the question: after all the relief work, what? And in subsequent discussions, an argument was made that this is the right opportunity to get the scattered Ayta communities organized. At that time when we examined the literature, the usual number of Ayta individuals mentioned was less than 20,000. *Marami na yan. Pero lumabas mas marami pa.* At some point, *sumobra naman ang* estimate like one government agency gave an estimate of about 160,000. As of today, we are working with the figure 65,000. Even so, it is still a lot more than what is cited in the literature which means that the Ayta of Central Luzon has grown. After the volcanic eruption, we heard comments from the wires, Kyodo News Agency in particular, that the Ayta will not survive and that they will become extinct.

Conceptual Framework

For the framework of the presentation, I draw on the tradition pioneered by Elizabeth Colson (1971) who worked among the Tonga in Africa on the responses of a community to a major resettlement program. She found out that in cases of disaster, the people rely on kinship and other social ties for the continuity of their disrupted lives. For Colson, the essence of disaster is the disruption of the social and cultural fabric. And to survive, the communities draw on their cultural resources.

On the practical side, I quote Torres (1993) who said "Of all the lessons that have been learned about development none is unequivocally clear as this: projects defined and carried out without the active participation of the people rarely produce the expected results. They remain the projects of the outsiders, unsupported and unassimilated. In fact, the poorest people are anything but helpless given the slightest opportunity to help themselves."

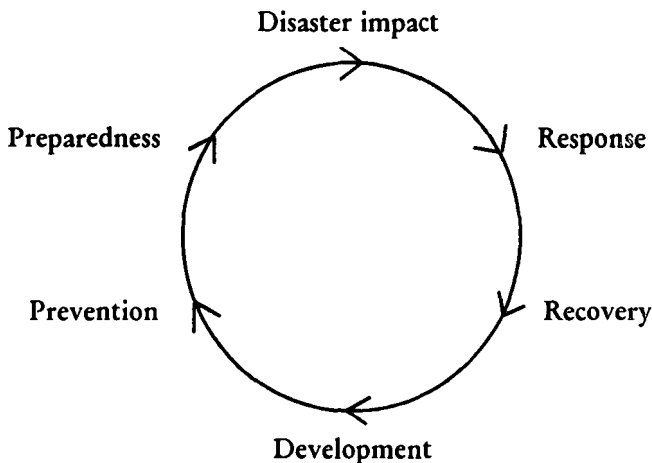
There may be a streak of romanticism here. This is not true in all cases. In severe cases of disruption there is often mass famine leading to mass death. However, the point being made is that without the active participation of the people in disaster management, the projects still belong to outsiders. Worse, there is increasing perception that the NGOs are the ones benefiting from disaster management.

I also draw from the literature on the symbolic construction of the community as aggregates of people trying to evolve their identity from which identity they draw their power to confront all forms of externally induced domination (Cohen, 1985). In this connection, "*amin ito*" is a recurrent phrase that the groups and individuals would say everytime we talked about what needs to be done in the communities. "*Amin*" is not only in terms of material culture but also of processes as well as symbols that emerged out of their struggles. In a sense then, my paper is influenced by property and stewardship theories, which include non-material properties or resources.

Disaster Management

Speaking of images, the illustration below is from a handbook that was prepared under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It shows what is referred to as the Disaster Management Cycle. Because

disaster creates chaos, one imposes some kind of “order.” One source of “order” is outside groups, for example, disaster managers. For those who have had involvement in disaster management, they must have some “ordering devices” on their minds as they move from the outside to the disaster sites, to be imposed on a helpless mass of victims.



DISASTER MANAGEMENT CYCLE

Source: Carter, N. 1991.

Disaster Management: A Disaster Manager's Handbook.

Manila: ADB.

There is, however, an increasing recognition that the so-called victims of disasters are not exactly passive elements but that they react actively to the various impacts of disaster; and in some cases, they successfully subvert the dominant representations and the consequent actions from outside.

Back to 1989: the Ayta communities around Clark said, “*Ang gusto namin ay magkaroon ng isang ganap na pamayanan.*” “*Ganap*” means complete. “*Ganap na pamayanan,*” what is it? Then they ticked off its elements — *lupang ninuno, pangkabuhayan, kalusugan, literacy, paggalang sa aming kultura.* It must be pointed out that these communities were influenced by activist church workers, particularly nuns. Nevertheless, in those parts where the people were not similarly influenced, we got the same response in terms of land in particular. In Subic, especially in Iram (Cabalan, Olongapo) which was not under any organizing force then, they put it this way, “*Gusto naming buuin uli ang aming pamayanan.*” So there is a recognition that their communities were disrupted,

dismembered. "*Buuin uli*" means to make their communities whole again. There is therefore a convergence of a vision of a whole community whether organized or influenced by outsiders with certain ideological programs or not.

For the government (GO) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), land was seen as a productive resource and as a commodity. Some of the NGOs fell into the trap — *yun bang gusto na nilang bumili ng lupa* because then, millions of money were pouring in. One support group bought a few hectares of land for one of the organized Ayta. The whole idea was to put order into the chaotic universe. *Sa mga Ayta naman malinaw na lumalabas na ang lupa ay buhay*. Some of their metaphors for land include "*parang magulang, ina*." And, land, therefore, is not supposed to be sold because it is life. It is just like selling your life, your parent. Later on, *pumasok na yung "amin," "amin itong lupa."*

In terms of social organization, some outsiders tended to set up new structures and processes. There was an instance when elements of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) entered one evacuation center and asked the Ayta, "*Anong pwede nating gawin? Gusto ba ninyo itong mga herbal medicine, yung acupressure at acupuncture?*" One Ayta mother who was part of that group we helped train said, "*Marunong na ho kami niyan; mayroon na kaming household-based health program. Amin yung programa.*"

Among the Ayta of Yamot, when Barangay Villar was submerged by lahar, they moved on farther down the coast in Botolan, and then as in other cases of resettlement, regrouped according to their settlement pattern back in the new settlements. The names of places in the settlement were the same names in the new settlement. Families and their relatives grouped together. But to kinship as organizing principle, they added the committee system thus building on their traditional ties, belief, and symbolic systems. Outsiders viewed the Ayta as "victims," "*di sibilisado*," "*mangmang*." Some of the personnel of Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and other line agencies saw the disaster as an opportunity to "civilize" the Ayta. We were told by social workers that no less than the chair of the Mt. Pinatubo Commission declared in one of the evacuation centers in Tarlac, "*Gagawa tayo ng subdivision na mas maganda pa kaysa subdivision namin*", thus imposing that sense of order, the urban grid, on the "chaotic" situation in a resettlement or evacuation center. In the evacuation centers the government created a new version of the plaza complex. They built a miniature Mt. Pinatubo, a tribal

market, offices for Department of Health (DOH) as well as Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) branches, etc., and then houses. Colonization one more time: the urban grid that Spain imposed on the archipelago was reimposed on the Ayta landscape.

Then monetization. People were paid to clear the roads of ashfall. This infused money into the local economy which was probably the right thing to do on the assumption that infusing money into the local economy to perk it up is better than relief goods which may not have any use in fact in the local area. Interestingly enough, we have not heard of Ayta referring to themselves as victims. However, there are descriptions of being "*gutom, may-sakit, may namamatay.*" They view the situation this way: "*Kasi napabayaan natin ang Bundok Pinatubo kaya sinabihan tayo ni Apo Namalyari na hindi dapat natin pinabayaan na pumasok ang mga loggers, mga miners, ang Philippine National Oil Corporation (PNOC).*" This is true for both the organized and the non-organized groups. In Bataan, there were areas where there were very little ashfall and no lahar. When those from Zambales and Pampanga visited some Ayta of Bataan, the latter invited the former to settle in Bataan because there is still enough space. Those from Zambales and Pampanga answered, "*Ayaw namin kasi napakalayo. Gusto namin nakikita namin ang Pinatubo paggising namin sa umaga.*" They also said, "*Mula ngayon pag nakabangon na kami hindi na namin papayagan na sirain pa ang Pinatubo dahil ito ay lupang ninuno, magulang, ina.*"

When it comes to management of disaster, the outsiders think that they should be in control since they usually deliver relief goods and services. There are some developmental NGOs who forge a partnership with government organizations (GOs) and peoples' organizations (POs). On the other hand, the Ayta wish they are the principal actors: "*Kami ang dapat na mamahala at ang may gustong sumuporta, ibigay ang gusto namin.*" What is their basis for saying this? They say, "*Ang tagal na naming nabuhay na walang tulong ang gubyerno.*" One Ayta said, "*Ni isang plastic na plato wala kaming nakuha sa gubyerno.*"

Concerning resource generation there is now a term that is sometimes referred to as disaster pornography. *Ang halimbawa nito ay yung nakikita ninyo na mga larawan ng mga payat na bata na nilalangaw* just to pry off aid money. The money comes rolling in because of these photos. The Ayta know this: "*Pinagkakakitaan kami.*" Ang term nga nila, "*ginagawang kapital ang aming kulot na buhok.*" "*Dapat kami ay aasa sa aming sariling kakayahan.*"

Let me share with you one experience we had with the Ayta. The Community Chest together with a number of Manila-based NGOs sent rice and plastic drums (container for water). The head of the delegation expressed the wish that they want to hand over the goods to the Ayta themselves. The Community Chest people were friends and we accompanied them to San Fernando to meet with the POs. We introduced them and let them talk with POs because that is what we have been doing — we bring people together but we do not do the talking. Alex, a member of a PO said that "*Kami ho ay mayroon nang sistema kung papaano ibinibigay ang mga donasyon kaya iwanan na lang dito at kami na ang bahala.*" *Ibinigay naman.* I am not sure whether it was because the Manila-based NGOs believed in what Alex was saying or whether because we were there or probably a combination of all different factors. The NGOs proceeded to one of the hillside settlements (not an evacuation center). When a relief agency visits the area, usually, the Ayta are asked to sing and dance first, then pictures are taken and goods distributed. However, since there was a discussion among POs and NGOs about partnership, we said: "*Dito ho iba ang sistema, ang nagdadala ng relief goods ang sumasayaw at kumakanta bago nila ibigay ang dala nilang relief goods!*" So the Manila-based NGOs did their song and dance number and we all sang together and were happy. That is not the important point. *Nang may nagpunta pang NGOs from Don Bosco tumayo ang isang barangay official at sabi, "Mayroon na kaming bagong patakaran; hindi na kami ang sumasayaw at kumakanta, kayo na ho bago namin tanggapin ang dala ninyo."* *Sabi ng mga taga-Don Bosco. "Kailan nagbago ang patakaran ninyo?"*

The contest between representations-actions, between outsiders (State-NGO) and Ayta is summarized as follows:

REPRESENTATIONS/ACTIONS

	State/NGO	Ayta
space: land and its resources	productive resources for market	<i>ang lupa ay buhay:</i> <i>parang magulang</i>
social organization	new structures technocratic-bureaucratic "militarized"	<i>mag-anak</i> + committee system
belief and symbolic systems	<i>biktima</i> <i>di sibilisado</i> <i>mangmang</i> civilizing mission: subdivision plaza complex handicraft mementoes progress development	<i>gutom, sakit</i> <i>busog, bahay</i> <i>pamayanan</i> <i>kulot</i> Mt. Pinatubo <i>Apo Namalyari</i> sharing
control and management of disaster	State, NGO NGO-PO-GO partnership	<i>kami</i> + <i>suporta</i>
resource generation	disaster pornography bleeding hearts charity development aid intermediaries technocratic-bureaucratic	<i>sariling kakayanan</i> food-for-work aid for self-reliance indigenous structures

In the case that we have documented, the dominant representations-actions have been subverted.

This case of subversion, however, may be said to be dependent on at least two things: one, the mediating role of a value-driven NGO and two, the high level of political consciousness of the community which allows it to draw on its own cultural resources.

In the literature I tried to find out if there are documented cases of internally induced resistance of this sort. I have not found any yet but we know of other cases from the communities. We need to document these cases. For clearly, the State efforts to impose its "civilizing" will on indigenous communities have been successfully subverted in an increasing

number of cases; and the responses have been sustained in spite of the increasing pressure coming from the outside. One challenge is how these are to be sustained. For sustainability, there is a need to go into some kind of community organizing that draws on the traditions of the community in such a manner that in the process, the community members can claim their organizations, new skills, and other ways of dealing with new realities as truly their own.

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