

Political Creeping into the Mauaque Resettlement Center Through Dyadic Relationships

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the characteristically dyadic political culture of Mauaque Resettlement Center, a government organized community of disaster victims (1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption). It attempts to trace and understand the resettlers' proclivity for dyadic means of cooperation, dependency and even political action.

The resettlement site is composed basically of three different *barangays* which retained their "sub-cultures," including their political ethos. What manifest at present are the comfortable reciprocal schemes developed by the resettlers and their leaders which inevitably create either positive or negative consequences relative to the political life of the whole community.

To be considered will be the personal followings and system of alliances of the present barangay leaders within the context of the Filipino kinship system. Moreover, the other socio-cultural values and traits of the resettlers which serve as underpinnings for their dyadic relationships will also be discussed.

Interviewing the individuals concerned, particularly the barangay captains, has been the method employed in gathering the information needed for this qualitative study.

Introduction

After the disastrous eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991 most victims sought refuge in resettlement areas. In the case of Pampango resettlers, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the agency in charge of determining the qualifications of lahar victims to be given home units, and the Mount Pinatubo Commission (MPC), the primary agency that addresses as well as monitors the various concerns of government organized resettlement sites, grouped together people coming from the same areas where "as much as practicable, the beneficiaries shall be resettled in a manner that will retain the neighborhood patterns of their community origin" (MPC, 1995:3). This decision was probably based on the assumption that physical displacement would be less traumatic if social dislocation could be avoided. Thus, the government agencies saw to it that in resettler communities, not only families should remain intact but the neighborhood as well. In so doing, the support system needed by the victims could be well provided. The very idea of having the same neighbors in the site would make the resettlers less vulnerable to sociocultural disorientation.

These very practical considerations really made the victims' relocation of great psychological advantage to them. However, in the process of establishing themselves as resettled communities they also carried with them their other baggage which could be easily detected in their dealings and behaviors. Being simply "transplanted" into another setting, these "neighborhoods" retained their "subcultures," so to speak, including their political ethos.

To be mentioned in particular is the aggregation of various *barangay* groups in most MPC resettlement sites. As they resettled, the disaster victims had with them their own political culture which is basically structured by mutual support and relationship between their leaders, the Barangay Captains, and themselves. Obviously, this occasioned dyadic tie originating from their previous system of government is a convenient arrangement, like a built-in psychological hedge identifying, at least, their so called "sphere of influence." Reflecting the Philippine polity as a whole, the leadership-followership system has become apparent in the interaction, degrees of familiarity and partnership being exhibited by leaders and ordinary members of these relocated communities.

Such retention of the dyadic framework of the resettlers political life inevitably creates either positive or negative consequences relative to the microcosmic level of existence of each resettler community as well as to the macrocosmic level of its environment – or the town and province where the resettlement site is found.

Specifically, the Mauaque Resettlement Center, a government organized resettlement community, composed of disaster victims from the different villages (Dolores, Tabun, Cacusud, etc.) of Mabalacat town in the province of Pampanga, is now going through crucial turning points. With the recent major issue regarding the political penetration of a local government official and his direct involvement in a supposedly internal affair between the resettlers and the management of Mt. Pinatubo Commission, namely, the signing of the Contract of Usufruct by the resettlers to legalize the ownership of their housing units, a significant concern may be posed:

How are the dyadic ties among the barangay (village) resettlers in Mauaque Resettlement Center manifested and what are the possible consequences of the prevailing political culture of the community?

To be considered will be the personal system of alliances and the personal followings of the present barangay leaders. These horizontal and vertical dyadic ties will be examined within the context of the Filipino kinship system. An exploration of the positive and negative aspects of the underlying and vast network of patron-client relationships as it shapes the political culture of the resettlers will be presented as well.

In the analysis of the political relationships, background factors will be used as conceptual scheme to trace and understand such proclivity for dyadic means of cooperation, dependency and other behavioral traits among resettlers. Carl Lande's theories (1966) are basically applicable to the prevailing sociopolitical situation in Mauaque Resettlement Center:

1. the tendency of Filipinos' to employ dyadic techniques for the furtherance of their individual interests;
2. the habit of dependency, which is specially widespread among the poor; and
3. the distrust of strangers.

Establishment and composition of the Mauaque Resettlement Center

Located in Mabalacat, Pampanga, the Mauaque Resettlement Center is the first resettlement project of the Mount Pinatubo Commission. The construction and physical development of the site was undertaken by the Task Force Mauaque of the Naval Construction Brigade, Armed Forces of the Philippines Corps of Engineers. Majority of the resettlers came from the different barangays of Mabalacat, buried by lahar in 1992 (MPC, 1994). There are, at present, 3,050 families occupying the housing units.

Mauaque Resettlement Center is considered a "special zone" as it accommodates victims coming from different barangays. As cited previously, the barangays are left intact, maintaining their neighborhood patterns as well as the leaders and the membership of individuals. In the last barangay election, resettlers who did not have barangay leaders were absorbed by the Sapang Biabas Barangay, the host community of the site. The others retained their membership in their previous barangays together with their leaders. The Site Manager, representing MPC, is the present administrator of all the resettlers.

It is worth mentioning that except for one barangay (Tabun) which was completely overtaken by lahar and therefore erased from the map, all the other barangays have remaining portions which are still considered habitable.

The leaders of the three barangays apparently have a peaceful co-existence at present as they all belong to the same political party—the ruling party. At their level, the substantial influence they exert upon their constituents is explained by their common bonds of kinship and the profitable arrangement of dyadic cooperation. The Captain of the Dolores group, for instance, has a good number of relatives among his followers. The Barangay Captains of Tabun and Cacusud, on the other hand, are both re-electionists who still enjoy the loyalty and support of their constituents because of what they call "give and take" relationship.

Significantly enough, the implied promise of favored treatment given such personal and close ties between the leaders and their followers indicates a strong tendency towards segmentation or exclusion and distrust of strangers. The small circle of intimates among relatives or neighbors with a leader who acts like a band conductor willing to play their tune establishes itself as the "in group" and all the rest as "outsiders." (This idea

is demonstrated in the way the Dolores neighborhood at present dissociates themselves from the other resettlers who may even be their literal neighbors in the site because of proximity, such as those from Sta. Rita whose houses are really adjoining the houses of this tightly-knit group).

It is also worth noting that like most disaster victims who decided to be resettled, the Mauaque resettlers are mostly poor. Their socioeconomic profile indicates their very low standing—most are unemployed (Nelson, et.al: 1996, unpub.)—and the reality of their need to get rehabilitated. Most of them are victims who cannot afford to replace their property loss, if at all they did lose any, and are quite satisfied with the MPC housing provision (Ibid.).

That same profile suggests their vulnerability to the habit of dependency and their very strong tendency to succumb to the lure of the bargaining spirit that pervades Philippine politics: the “barter relationship” between the poor and the politicians who promise them material support or other favors in exchange for their loyalty.

By its very nature, Mauaque Resettlement Center is an attractive prospect for political action and participation. To the local politicians (Mayor, etc.), in particular, it appears like a ripe and appetizing mass of electorate waiting to be picked or a fertile ground for cultivating a political domain.

Dyadic ties already established by the three barangay captains

At the very outset, the comfortable sociopolitical scheme as well as survival mechanism developed by the resettlers and their leaders through dyadic ties has been emphasized. To explain this phenomenon, the previously mentioned factors espoused by Carl Lande are quite helpful.

To begin with, an explanation of the concept “dyad” serves as a useful base in the analysis. According to Lande,

the “dyad” is a relationship of mutual aid between individuals. If the relationship arises out of ties, as between two close kinsmen, the choice of dyadic partners may involve little discretion. Where no such primary ties exist, the individual has considerable freedom in his choice of dyadic partners, in

the number of such partners, and in the intensity and endurance with which he will maintain his dyadic relationship.

...Because dyads are fragile their maintenance requires continued cultivation through the exchange of favors (Lande: 1966).

Woven into this system of reciprocity are the complex strands of Filipino values such as "*utang na loob*" (debt of gratitude) "*pakikisama*" (lit. "to join", to get along with, to support someone due to kinship or friendship factors), "*palakasan*," a Filipino version of the spoils system whereby the booty is given to or divided among members, allies or friends of the clique in power (Andres, 1981), "*awa*," a sentiment of compassion or pity, segmentation or regionalism. These elements are evident in the character of the Filipino political culture and they are found as requisites of the bargaining process in all political affairs.

In the case of the three barangays, the hegemonic position of the Captains, even before the displacement of their groups happened, may be assumed. Their being elected in the position marks the formal arrangement of the traditional social and political obligations to their constituents from whom they sought their authority as leaders. Hence, when the Pinatubo calamity struck, their role was of significant value. First, they were authorized to identify and endorse the victims who deserved to be given home units in the resettlement area. Second, they were also given an extension of responsibility as Captains by being in charge of the "peace and order" situation of their own groups.

Given such functions, the "Capitans" could not help but be subject to the dynamics of dyadic political system of leadership and followership. Patterns of expectations sanctioned by certain values of Filipino culture were recognizably at work, like shreds and patches of demands in the tapestry of the victims' impoverished condition. Recreated in the performance of the functions of the barangay Captains were social relationships and old patterns of behavior.

For the Capitan of Dolores community, whose constituents are mostly his relatives or relatives of his, what immediately surfaced was the principle of segmentation (Lynch, 1973) giving preference and loyalty to the first three groups in the following list:

1. Nuclear family over other kinsmen
2. Close relatives over other kinsmen
3. Kinsmen over non-kinsmen
4. Neighbors over other townmates
5. Townmates over outsiders
6. Those with the same mother tongue over those with different mother tongues

Personal obligations to kinsmen from whom comes the greatest help during election times are a "given" that does not have to be explained. It is common knowledge in Mauaque Resettlement site, for instance, that this Captain remains an "unbearable" candidate in his barangay because his relatives comprise an overwhelming majority. Once in power the Captain incurs a "debt of gratitude," a Filipino value which goes even beyond the normal course of simply returning a favor. He is completely under the compulsion to provide the needs of his relatives, including the acquisition of housing units and all the amenities that go with these awards. Moreover, he makes sure that during relief goods distribution, his constituents are prioritized as well.

Relative to these traditional reciprocal behavioral characteristic shown by the Dolores Barangay Captain is the following observation and concept:

All relatives of whatever degree are important in the Philippines where relationships are personalized. In finding a job, borrowing money or getting advice, one works through someone who knows someone. It is not sentimentality alone that preserves the family system but the stern facts of economic and political necessity (Guthrie, 1968).

Since "structurally speaking the social system on the Philippines is the kinship system" (Andres, 1981), individual interests are focused on and subordinated to the members of the family and its extensions. The Barangay Captain, who is subject to this system has the heavy commitment to personal relations rather than to an abstract formal political structure of government.

For the Cacutud and Tabun Barangay Captains, on the other hand, the same principle of segmentation is at work, only in their cases, the

bonding involves the neighbors and barangaymates. Interestingly enough, the Cacutud Captain, who has been re-elected twice, and now in his last term, admits the fact that his bestowal of favors upon his constituents is the main reason for his constant victory. He mentions in particular his "luck" in helping them to acquire more housing units than what is allowed by the rule: 400 units instead of only 260, the latter being the only qualified awardees. This information is supposed to be "off the record" (not to be disclosed) as it entails a little deviation from what is legal (and the Captain justifies his act as a gesture of mercy or "*awa*" and benevolence to the poor neighbors whose previous houses, like the ordinary Filipino family, had literal "extensions" built, i.e., every time a member got married). He believes that his giving in to their "*pakiusap*" (pleas) as they had no other resource and means should not be taken against him. In his Filipino context,

The person or official who denies the pleas or requests made to him is branded as "*walang puso*" (without heart), "*hindi marunong makisama*" (anti-social), "*walang kuwentang tao*" (worthless person). (Andres, 1981)

His being close to the Mayor of Mabalacat town has also earned his "*gracia*" (benefits) since the former grants aid to his ailing relatives or barangaymates, thus, he (the Captain) is able to fulfill his commitment even better to them who continually "put" him in the leadership position.

To be noticed in the previous instance is the multi-tiered structure of the dyadic system, a chain of vertical dyads, the Captain serving as a sub-leader. It also indicates the valued personal "connections" or "influence" of a leader which in the Philippine society is deemed as a form of power—to be used in promoting personal interests. This tiered character of the dyadic system will be referred to again in the later discussion.

The third barangay Captain who is equally popular among his constituents is the Tabun Capitan. Among the three, he has the most stable job, being the Operation Manager of a local company in Mabalacat. As such he has his own mini-truck which, according to him, was "very useful at the height of the calamitous Pinatubo eruption." He was able to rescue hundreds of his people. Since he has the means (he also owns a rice plantation and a little grocery store), he is able to provide the assistance needed by his barangaymates—ranging from payment of hospital bills to a scholarship program for some children. He mentioned specially the badly

needed help he extended to the “squatters” (a slum area) in his former community such as food and other basic commodities.

Because his barangay got completely “washed out” after the volcanic eruption, this Captain had a problem concerning the declared “non-existence” of his territory. His people had to register somewhere if they wanted to vote in the last election—either in Sapang Biabas or in the other barangays. But the close ties between the Capitan and the Tabun people prevented this dissolution of their barangay: their deep roots would render the loss of their community almost unimaginable and their “non-existent” status unacceptable. The Capitan, with the help of the Mayor, appealed to the Commission on Elections. Telling a “white lie”, he risked his integrity when he swore that there were at least 20 families still found in the hilly part of Tabun not overtaken by lahar (when, in fact, there are only 5 families). Apparently, he was convincing enough that an order was issued by the election agency to allow the registration of Tabun voters in their own barangay. (But their polling places were actually moved from one barangay to another, wherever they were given permission). Thus, at present, there is the Tabun barangay with its people minus the geographical location. For them their barangay without a piece of land is still Tabun, no matter what!

It goes without saying that the Capitan’s leadership remained unchallenged. In fact, to verify the loyalty of the people, he told them during the last election that his previously held position was open to anyone whom they would consider deserving. But no one dared to run for the position, so he was automatically re-elected.

Again, it may be observed from the foregoing that the principle of regionalism was valued by both the Captain and the people. The former, in fact, prides himself in the idea that Barangay Tabun would have been totally lost had it not been for his persistence. And the latter gratefully responded by their unanimous decision to elect him again as their leader.

Apparently, the vertical dyad between the Captains and their followers suggests a complex political process in which social attitudes and cultural values are very much integrated. J. Grossholtz states:

The bargaining process that Filipinos have developed as the basis of their political system is rooted in the institutional, emotional, and value orientations that underlie political

behavior. Because of this relationships, the system provides rewards according to criteria the Filipino readily understands. It is these personal commitments to specific conceptions of authority and problem solving that give the political system legitimacy and the ability to perform necessary functions. (Grossholtz, 1964)

The barangay people rely heavily on politics in solving their problems. They perceive the scope of the political process as unlimited. To explain this attitude, Grossholtz is worth quoting again:

The lack of differentiation between political and other spheres is related to the family base. Because family relationships and obligations were the clearest and most meaningful ones the Filipino knew, he sought to transfer the same behavior and obligations required in the family to realms outside the kin group. Philippine barrio society is a reflection of familial behavior, as is the attitude toward and expectations about government officials and politicians (ibid.).

And the Barangay Captains clearly understand such perception as they assume their responsibility. They are ready to lend a hand whenever a member is in need—from employment to medical assistance or to the settling of an argument with one's spouse; or to become defenders of the members' interests—from the right to own a housing unit to the decision not to conform to certain MPC rules.

In addition to the vertical dyadic ties common among the barangay leaders, a horizontal one has been established as well. It has already been mentioned that all three belong to the same political party. There is therefore an existing alliance among them against the "opposition" party or even against the present MPC management in the resettlement site, i.e., whenever resistance is "called for." For one thing, they do not allow the present Barangay Captain (who belongs to the "other" party) of Sapang Biabas (the host community or the actual geographical location of Mauaque Resettlement Site) to intervene in their present set-up. They make sure they have the exclusive influence and that they, together with their barangays, maintain a solid political stand. Thus, the Sapang Biabas Captain complains that these three captains "do not recognize (his) authority" despite what he calls his "territorial jurisdiction."

To be mentioned at this point is a major objective of the MPC regarding resettlement sites: “to assist the local government in its capacity to undertake and administer community development programs” before finally disengaging itself “from the Project” (MPC, 1995). In this regard, the Sapang Biabas Captain, who, by virtue of the aforementioned “territorial jurisdiction,” is supposedly the lawful authority to take over the site. But, at the moment, he has reservations about the submission of the three Captains and even their barangay members. He certainly is aware not only of the strong alliance of the three leaders but also of the barangay people’s distrust of “strangers” or “outsiders.” In other words, a campaign towards the declaration of Mauaque Resettlement Center as another barangay in the future, or probably a move towards the declaration of the present “floating” barangays as autonomous political entities are not remote possibilities, considering the aforementioned “segmentation” as well as the current politicizing that happens in the site.

Another overt manifestation of the alliance of the three leaders is their concerted effort in resisting certain policies of the MPC or some decisions of the Site Manager. One instance was their defiance in paying the increased rate in the site’s water system, imposed by the Cooperative run by “pro” MPC personnel. Oddly enough, the Dolores *Capitan* actually had a heated argument and encounter with an officer of the cooperative who was also his political rival. His first impulse was to seek the transfer of the water system to the Mabalacat water district. But this would entail greater problems on the part of the resettlers due to more expensive rates. Because of “*pakikisama*” (a Filipino value that maintains smooth interpersonal relations or “good feelings and non-stressful relationships” – Guthrie) the two Capitans had to be as discreet as possible in articulating their thoughts as soon as they realized the unwise desire of their colleague. They had to convince him privately and explain the negative effects of his proposal. The consensus was for them to demand better services and an improved water system.

Their latest resistance is against the signing of the Contract of Usufruct, which according to the Site Manager, legalizes the ownership of housing units. With the help of the Mayor of Mabalacat, the leaders’ “defense” was intensified. This leads the discussion to another dyad—a more complicated system since it is both horizontal and vertical as well as a stronger factor in determining the fate of the site.

A higher tier in the dyadic pyramid

The dynamics of politics in the lives of Filipinos is of utmost significance. Election time, in fact, is most awaited for—like a “fiesta” (feast) celebration involving all sectors of the society. The wealthy use their money to influence everyone; the poor use their voting power to get something in return. Interestingly, candidates are perceived like cocks fighting and the voters betting or shifting choices with the *sa pula, sa puti* mentality (literally “for the red or for the white,” a phrase used by gamblers in the cockfight to indicate the color of the cock on which they put their bets), calculating who can gratify their self-seeking motives. Or as foreigner puts it: “Politics is a year round activity, a consuming passion of the people, a never-ending popularity contest” (Guthrie, 1968).

Furthermore, politics seems to be associated with the world of make-believe as well—so the zest for it! It is not surprising to witness the overwhelming victory of actors or even gambling lords because the idea is for people to escape from the reality of their poverty. For as long as a politician has something to offer, like a knight in shining armour (as in the world of cinema) or a Robin Hood (having a heart for the poor), his chances of winning are almost certain.

The contenders for the position of the Mayor in Mabalacat are both classic politicians and the Mauaque resettlers are typical Filipino voters. The two politicians are, therefore, eyeing dyadic ties as they offer their support for the resettlers’ cause in the site or display their initiative in providing the resettlers’ needs through various projects. And certainly, material inducements cannot be discounted.

Since the incumbent Mayor has already made long-standing and crucial connections with the present Barangay leaders, he seems to have the upper hand. As previously mentioned the three leaders constantly seek his help. In satisfying the needs of their constituents, they do not have all the means (except for the Tabun leader, the two admit that they belong to the “poverty line”: the Cacutud Captain is a jeepney-driver while the Dolores Captain is a “junk” dealer); thus, they cannot help but resort to the Mayor’s patronage. What follows is the expected *quid pro quo*: their delivery of votes.

Quite common in Philippine politics is also the rudimentary character of party machinery which involves the idea of strengthening the hand of grass-root party leaders. The power of these petty politicians

stems from the fact that they are far more able to influence the ordinary voter... due to their ability to create and maintain direct personal ties with (them) These ties are extra political in origin, being based upon kinship connections, compadre ties, personal friendship or landlord-tenant relationship. (Lande, 1966)

As already noted, the Mayor of Mabalacat knows quite well such effective political machinery. First, he has strong primary ties with the barangay leaders: they are all his *compadres*.

The usage of the compadre system in the Philippines is in fact of big magnitude and clearly exploitative. This practice is easily seen in the political, private, and business organizations. A political candidate campaigning for votes in a remote community would always be willing to stand in baptism, confirmation, and matrimony to act as *ninong*, pose for pictures, then go to other communities to perform the same act again because come election day, the compadre and comadre will dutifully elect them. (Andres, 1981)

His incorporation into the leaders' kinship realm, in addition to their being his partymates, makes it so easy for him to penetrate the voting populace. With these petty leaders who are called his *galamays* (tentacles), his own political interest is definitely promoted. For instance, it is not uncommon for these Captains to refer to him whenever they or their constituents have problems. *Takbo sa Mayor* ("Run to the Mayor") is a common expression in the site. To cite an even more specific example: when the three leaders were not allowed to run for office due to the small voting population left in their "mother" barangays (geographical reference), he personally went with them to the Commission on Elections to help in convincing the people in charge about the legitimacy of their candidacy. This benevolent act is perceived by the Captains not just as a form of *pakikisama* and a genuine concern but also a "seed being planted to be harvested" during the election period. These petty politicians' awareness of the almost categorical implications of supposedly expressions of good will and kindness such as the aforesaid keeps them properly grounded in the "game" and "business" of politics.

Another instance in which the Mayor virtually appeared as a vigorous champion of the resettlers' cause was his direct involvement in the issue of the signing of the Contract of Usufruct. Upon learning about this very unpopular and "threatening" measure of the MPC from the barangay leaders, his immediate action was to campaign against it: public announcement was made all over the site, dissuading people from signing the contract and promising them "delivering their goods to them for free!" In other words, people were told about his negotiations with other concerned politicians to have a bill passed in Congress so that all the housing units would be given to the resettlers without cost. This of course, courted negative reactions from the MPC people. *Pumapel si Mayor* (literally, Mayor is "making his presence felt" or He is making his concern known to the people, of course, with an ulterior motive) was a comment from the Mauaque Site Manager and the members of the "opposition" party.

Considered even more as direct propaganda was the sudden appearance of big streamers in the site with the message, "*Thanks Mayor M for Opposing the Contract of Usufruct.*" The Site Manager felt that the Mayor's direct political intervention was going overboard and that he capitalized on the ignorance of the resettlers. The fact that the signing of the contract legitimizes the ownership of the housing units—with the supplemental agreement attached to the contract suspending "the payment of housing cost... pending the resolution by congressional action"—should convince the resettlers to act accordingly, but they did not. Although the Manager admitted that information dissemination on her part was rather late, she still was quite offended by the Mayor's intervention in the internal affair of the site. Even before she was able to explain to the people the attempt of MPC to consider their lot favorably, the whole area she said "was saturated" with the Mayor's echoing "advocacy." The result was a little confusion because the people could not figure out which information was true. Moreover, the Manager also noticed the direct impact of the Mayor's action: on the first day of contract signing, 80 people came, but after the public announcement, the signatories trickled down to 10% of the site's total population.

By and large, the Mayor's conditioned political "move" may be understood in the context of personalism which he operationalized to easily attain his goal. By displaying direct patronage through his *pakikisama* (as supporter of the people) and his *palabas* (show), he made it appear that he expended great effort to serve the interests of the resettlers. Relying on his

political connections, he even gave the assurance that the “no cost housing” implementation would be his *pamaskong handog* (Christmas gift) to them (assuming that the congressional bill filed would immediately take effect). This promise is, of course, taken with a pinch of salt by the “opposition” while the rest, including some of his avid followers maintain the “wait and see” attitude. The three barangay leaders continue to support the Mayor’s campaign and they are “hoping for the best,” otherwise, as one admits, “they’ll be in trouble.”

Whatever motives or actions the Mayor may have, people would still perceive him as being governed by accepted patterns of political norms. He has to do early politicking because, sooner or later, he will be pitted against a very wealthy candidate, a Chinese businessman, who also knows how to “play the game” (he has installed a large number of water pumps all over the site, donated several electric fans to the elementary school and bags of cement for the construction of its quadrangle, and is now in the process of providing the site with a telephone system as he is the owner of the local telephone company; he has also formed his dyadic ties with the Sapang Biabas *Capitan* who is at present providing the labor force in the construction of the office of the telephone company in Mauaque Site). Thus, the contender is a force to be reckoned with.

But the leaders of the Mayor are cocksure that their *manok* (cock) is sure to win. Being the incumbent Mayor, he has the advantage due to his *pondo* and the seeds that he has sown are just waiting to be reaped. Once again, their campaign slogan if they talk to their constituents is, “Let’s not forget what he has done for you.” All they have to do is to enumerate the “aids” extended to the people by the Mayor and recall how all their *pakiusap* (pleas and appeals) were heeded and given solutions. A recollection of the resettlers’ “debts of gratitude,” therefore, is a major concern of the leaders’ politics and a forceful bargaining technique. In addition, their appeal to people’s spirit of nationalism, if not regionalism, is reflected in their rhetorical question, “Filipino vs Intsik, whom do you choose?”

However, a Filipino voter may put everything this way, “In politics, money talks.” And the “opposition” leaders believe that because of poverty, for a family to be fed a meal is enough to shift choices. They also believe the saying the “the one who hits the last coin in *teksing* (a coin game) is declared the winner.”

Implications of the dyadic ties

The complex and multidimensional aspects of dyadic politics in Mauaque Resettlement Center have far-reaching implications. To be properly grounded in discussing its effects, whether positive or negative, a reference to the sociocultural milieu of the Mauaque resettlers has to be reiterated.

As previously noted, the Dolores Captain's political survival is dependent on his ability to put into practice the expected kinship system. The expected obligations spread "beyond the nuclear family of parents and children... to others who are made part of the family by such ceremonies as sponsorship at a marriage or baptism.... Each stands ready to give or receive help from members of the group" (Guthrie, 1968). He really has no choice but to be bound to this traditional value. On closer examination, he experiences satisfaction derived from the power vested in him, while, at the same time, uses such power to promote the interests of his kin.

Familism becomes a positive orientation as it assures the individual members of the group that their needs will be provided for as well as a sense of belongingness during difficult times.

The more direct and human considerations condition all the political decisions of the Capitan. Perhaps on the subsistence level, particularly since his relatives are poor, the satisfaction of the basic physiological needs may be met within the political structure, and the mutual-aid is relatively advantageous to all of them. Furthermore, safety and security in the realm of a clannish existence may be achieved without much trouble. Internal stability is ascertained in this closely-knit clan and reciprocity seems to be of much value at their level. Since the interaction is inter-personal, formal structure of government is not really taken absolutely and legal knowledge may not be of great concern for the leader.

From another angle, a strong leverage may be achieved by this small bloc of voters if it acts collectively and influence "selection of candidates or allocation of government outputs" (ibid.).

However, if seen in a wider context, segmentation as already pointed out in the case of Dolores community vs the "outsiders," could result in

extreme parochialism and social myopia. It can also be a source of political exploitation. As Lande puts it:

The interests that unite the leader and his followers are particular rather than categorical: the purpose is not the attainment of a common general objective but the advancement of the leader's and his followers' complementary private interests.

It is particularly the kinship ties that bind these barangay people: their susceptibility to blindly follow their leader is literally one of them, or meekly bow to the tyranny of the relatives who have total control over them by virtue of the "obligation system." The leader may commit them to the wrong candidate. Or they may force their leader to abuse his authority just to satisfy their personal needs. They may employ the familiar *palakasan* method of relationship which is the opposite of the merit system or they may be subject to two behavioral patterns which are basically vicious in nature, namely, favoritism and leniency. "Favoritism is the conviction that one should treat other individuals deferentially, in accordance with their degree of closeness to oneself" (ibid.). Relatives are definitely being more favored than others, so they can count on receiving more benefits, hope to obtain better treatment and may escape even the impositions of the law. Nepotism is also associated with this idea. Leniency, on the other hand, is the "belief that a sympathetic response to appeals for mercy and 'another chance' is more imperative than the strict enforcement of agreements and rules, including the laws of the state" (ibid.).

This implies that relatives may avoid penalties in case they commit offenses by making pleas for leniency. Needless to say, favoritism and leniency may strengthen the dyadic ties between the leader and his followers but may also enhance a distortion of values due to selfish interests.

For the two barangay Captains, their ability to show concern and compassion is, no doubt, a commendable quality. Again, within the context of the catastrophic situation of victims, whose misfortunes are really compounded (they were already poor even before the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, so theirs is a case of "double jeopardy"), acts of mercy and kindness are much needed. To these legitimate human needs, the two barangay Captains responded accordingly: they provided the basic needs of their barangay mates who probably did not have anyone to turn to in their crisis.

However, just like a double-edged sword, the Filipino trait *awa* (pity and compassion) manifested by the leaders may have negative effects. To understand the trait, the following serves as guide:

Awa is a sentiment of sympathy, mercy or pity aroused when someone suffers misfortune or injustice. It is the willingness to be identified with the victim of fate or human cruelty.

... *Awa* used in the name of charity, goodwill, justice, humane treatment, family emergencies, human relations and fair play seeps into practically every phase of Filipino life (Andres: 1981).

From the two Captains' point of view, their compassionate impulse springs from a sincere desire to help their barangaymates, but, as already pointed out, the Cacusud Captain was actually tempted to violate rules as a result of his sympathetic attitude. This single incident may not be the last to be committed in the name of *awa*. Furthermore, Lande's theory on the habit of dependency among the poor who are encouraged to expect something from someone to whom they have shown personal loyalty and obedience is confirmed. In terms of the poor resettlers' established dyadic ties with their leaders, the perception could be that they are entitled to ask for favors and may even manipulate situations or employ emotional blackmail in the form of *awa* to perpetuate their easily earned material subsidy. The *awa* mentality therefore is subject to abuse and overuse, and, in the long run, is really counterproductive. The lack of motivation among the resettlers to have regular employment may be a possible implication to be deduced from this concept of dependency. In fact, a period after the eruption, resettlers got so used to receiving relief goods through their leaders that their daily anticipation of the rationing practically made them escape their responsibility to work. It was during that time when the joke about the meaning of *lahar*, the volcanic debris flowing during rainy days, was cracked in resettlement areas: that it was an acronym for *laging handa sa relief* or "always ready to receive relief (goods)."

Besides the concept of *awa*, integrated in the dyadic ties between the leaders and the followers as already shown is regionalism, this time relative to "neighbors over other town mates" rather than to familism. The case of the Tabun members is classic "region." Although the insistence of the Tabun barangay people and their leader to retain their geographical

identity may appear irrational and facetious, the underlying meaning of their corporate decision to remain who they are, even only in principle, is worth considering. First, to be emphasized is the deep roots of Filipinos. Unlike the Americans, they are not a nation of tumble weeds. Mobility is not common among them. Second, regionalism among Filipinos is as ancient as their history. As two Filipino authors put it:

Regionalism is an extension of the closeness of family ties. Invariably, the Filipino believes that the person known to him, no matter how bad is better than the one unknown to him (Agoncillo and Alfonso, quoted by Andres, 1981).

The action of the Captain regarding the retrieval of barangay Tabun and the approval as well as the acceptance by his barangay members of his decision may, therefore, be understood within that framework. For them the question of "name" is opposite the Shakespearean "What's in a name?" The name of their barangay counts so much because it is their common identity. By means of their tenacious psychological entrenchment in Barangay Tabun they could even overcome the disastrous calamity from uprooting them. Poor as they are, their existence revolves around their place of origin, and to take that away from them would render them defenceless.

But then again, like any human frailty, regionalism implies limitation, literally limited space which goes with limited focus. Philippine history, itself reveals the lethal effect of regionalism as this principle, to be traced back to the Spanish colonial policy of "divide, and conquer," resulted in the failure of the Filipinos to consolidate a national revolution and, therefore, their defeat.

Going back to the case of the Tabun people, the decision of the Captain to achieve his end, i.e., to establish the existence of the barangay, even by using dishonest means may be a precedent. His "white lie" is not really an innocuous little deception. Sooner or later, he will be found out and that may mean not only his disgrace but his community's as well because of the latter's support. This leads to another point: If in the name of their barangay they are all willing to collaborate and use whatever means to attain their goal, their capacity to assert themselves would be far from being controlled, and may even be formidable. Their regionalism, therefore, is a source of power, either for good or for evil. If drawn towards a principled

and upright politician, they can be used as a forceful bloc to effect changes and positive results. However, if grabbed by a self-seeking politician, they could be utilized within his narrow political horizons to serve his ends. Also, since regionalism implies distrust of strangers or prejudices against other groups, it is very likely that this factor will be capitalized on by political rivals to stir negative feeling even more, as in the obvious propagandistic and almost racist statement, "Filipino vs. 'Intsik' (Chinese)."

A practical comment is made by Fr. Bulatao regarding regionalism:

... misdirected and excessive regionalism gives rise to many social attitudes which Filipinos should rectify, such as mistrust between co-workers, nepotism, dependency on fellow townmates, graft and corruption, and the fatalistic attitude of the *kababayan* who have fallen into the same rut of misfortune (Fr. Bulatao, quoted by Andres, 1981).

And the Tabun barangay people are not exempted from committing the foregoing.

On a larger scale, questions regarding the fate of Mauaque Resettlement Center when it is turned over to the local government unit—as stipulated in the MPC policies—have to be grappled with, relative to the prevailing political culture of the resettlers. Whoever wins as Mayor, will be confronted with real problems. The following questions may be posed:

1. What will be the future status of the site? Will it remain a "special zone" or will it be declared as another barangay, or will the present barangays retain their autonomy?
2. If it remains a "special zone," what will be the nature of its administrative system?
3. If it is declared as another barangay, who could be an effective leader, considering the present variety of people from different barangays?
4. If the major barangays are retained as autonomous, what would their systems be like, as they still are connected to their "mother barangays" (their original geographical locations)?

In addition to these questions, there are other issues to be speculated on. For one thing, with the previously discussed underpinnings for dyadic relationships, the trend towards graft and corruption in the government of the sites is not a far-fetched idea. For another, the appointment of a site manager (i.e., if the site retains its status), the maintenance of the physical environment as well as peace and order in the community, the leadership of the Homeowners Association, the membership of the present Cooperative—all these are other genuine concerns which cannot be simply shrugged off with the usual vague statement, “We’ll cross the bridge when we get there.”

Comments

Politics has definitely crept into the life of Mauaque Resettlement Center without too much difficulty because of the already existing pseudo-formal structure of the barangay system. Its developing political identity is like a jigsaw puzzle which has been placed in the hands of the barangay captains (including the leader of the opposition party), to piece together through their dyadic ties before coming to a conclusion. But the fragments are still being worked on to fit them into an intelligible political composite. The value system of the resettlers seems to function like an integrative factor, or to state it metaphorically, like a glue that gives their political ethos its final shape.

At this point, the resettlers compose an unsophisticated electorate and employ the traditional means as they articulate their interests in their limited bargaining arena. Whether the political system which they develop will lead them to a never-ending pursuit of self-interests or real public interests remains to be seen.

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Date received: 22 February 2000

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