

Negrense Reflections on Governance

Zosimo E. Lee*

This is a reading of a 'text.' The 'text' are transcripts of group discussions aired over a radio program in Bacolod. This radio program tackled issues of concern to mostly rural citizens in Negros. The group discussions covered the Estrada presidency, the national policy on the peace agreement with the RPA-ABB, and barangay elections. What come out are insights and reflections on governance and how power should be used. The transcripts reveal a web of principles and concepts that guide communities in their dealings with power and authority, as well as provide clues as to what their views on ideal governance are.

The Filipino masses are not truly seen, much less well understood. While social surveys and polling give a snap shot of what their sentiments and opinions might be on certain matters, much still needs to be done to understand how they think and what their thoughts really are about social issues. Surveys reveal one dimension of people's sentiments, but the statements that people make during surveys have to be understood not only in terms of the words but what are the embedded or presupposed categories or distinctions being made. These also reveal what criteria or

* The main initiative for the endeavor on which this paper is based is Ma. Lourdes Tison's. The analysis and evaluation of the transcripts of the group discussions and the sections on the Negrense concepts was a joint product between this writer and her. The reflections and comments on the concepts in the last part of the paper, as a whole, are mine. I would like to acknowledge the comments of Prof. Carmencita Aguilar and Jose Tomacruz, Jr. I would also like to thank an anonymous reviewer for very helpful critical comments.

inchoate concepts are behind the assessments or judgments. Their thinking has to be made more apparent.

This article is an attempt to understand the articulations on certain social issues of citizens from Negros. There is also theorizing and considerable reflection on events that affect the lives of ordinary citizens. These articulations reveal the thinking and perspective of ordinary Filipinos and their understanding of these events.

These ideas were generated from groups discussions conducted over two years (2000 to 2002) for the weekly radio program "Pungtuan Ta" aired on DYAF (Radio Veritas) in Bacolod City. Persons from different communities all over Negros Occidental (Sipalay, Kabankalan, Cauayan, Pontevedra, Magballo, Magallon, etc.) participated. Many were lay leaders in parishes, most were community leaders who had involved themselves in various issues in the past, and have had considerable experience in political work. The issues for discussion came from the core group of the radio program, who themselves were community leaders¹. The discussions were facilitated by Ma. Lourdes Tison, program host of the "Pungtuan Ta." While the radio station is owned by the Diocese of Bacolod, the radio program is autonomous and independent, and could be said to be a truly civil society initiative.

The group discussions were transcribed and the main issues grouped according to themes earlier evoked by the discussion participants. Further analyses and evaluation by Tison and this writer generated the rubric which gives "shape" to the ideas. This framework will still be given back to a core group of the discussion groups for validation, affirmation, revision or commentary.

These discussions over two years covered historic events as they were transpiring – the Erap impeachment, the EDSA transfer of power, barangay elections, as well as "local" events like the peace agreement between the Revolutionary

Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB) and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. As the events were unfolding the radio program discussion also identified the issues within the historic events which were important to discuss and reflect upon. As much as there is historical contemporaneousness, an attempt to draw more long-ranging ideas and reflections which transcend the specific context, and address larger issues, is made.

The dominant theme that arises from the discussions is power, and relatedly governance. As the transcripts were evaluated for key ideas and general trends of thinking, the following come out as the dominant questions tying together the discussions over two years. Even as the individual participants in the discussions were not constant, the thinking which comes out has echoes and resonances which seem to go beyond particular persons. A certain group consciousness or parallel thinking among different persons is revealed, albeit expressed differently (sometimes more eloquently, sometimes not so) but just the same betraying comparable sentiments. The following text therefore will mainly articulate and expound the statements coming from the group discussion participants themselves. Whenever possible the original Ilonggo statements will be used, translated as loyally as possible.

The rubric used to make sense of the reflections or to put some schema into the many issues which were confronted, analyzed and given focus makes use of power as the key concept and relatedly, governance. The four main questions which become the backbone for organizing these reflections are:

- a) How power has been used? (*Pang-ginahum*)
- b) How should power be used? (*Nagakadapat nga pang-ginahum*)
- c) How people responded to or confronted the situation? (*Pag-atubang sg tawo*)

d) How can the relationship between the governors and the governed be repaired? (*Pag-ayo sg nagakapat nga relasyon sa tunga sg nagadumala kay ginadumala*)

The issues around which these questions will then be "applied" are (a) the Estrada impeachment trial and the consequent EDSA transfer of power, (b) the national policy (as actualized in the peace agreement between the GRP and the RPA-ABB) of dealing with armed conflicts, and (c) the barangay elections of May, 2001. By going through the reflections and insights of the group discussions around these issues, the larger questions of power and governance will be touched.²

Office of the President (Joseph Estrada)

The impeachment trial of Estrada was a historic event. As perceived by the rural population of Negros, articulated by community leaders, the sins of Erap against the people as President include objective acts of wrongdoing including sins of omission like not being able to fulfill his functions as President either through incompetence or because he was devoting more attention and time to his other interests, and also concrete acts of abuse and corruption.

Erap's actions are perceived as sins (*sala*)³ for several reasons. Erap's acts must be seen in relation to the discussants' condition of material poverty, to their perception of themselves as poor, more so since Erap himself constructed himself as "Erap para sa masa." This self-construction of Erap placed a contract between Erap and the poor. The poor were the reason why Erap came to power (because of the vote coming from the majority poor) so his actions carry a particular sense of irony to the poor.

Erap's actions are depicted in terms of *hamungaya* (Erap's abundance) as contrasted with the poor's *pagkamudmud* (deprivation). "We are already poor but all

the more we become poor at the same time that he reaps benefits."⁴ There was *paglimbang* (foolery) and *wasik poder* (waste of power). The discussants maintain that since as President, Erap is viewed as "*Amay sang Pungsod*" (Father of the Nation), his actions have impact on Philippine social institutions and their weakening, and from the international community's perspective. His actions portray the country in a very negative light. As the primary national leader his actions reflect on the rest of the nation, and by being seen as immoral his actions weaken Philippine institutions as well.

When the impeachment trial revealed the extent of Erap's activities, from gambling and womanizing, to his mansions and *jueteng* pay-offs, the real motives of Erap's running for President are revealed. He was not really for the welfare of the Filipino people but had mainly been selfish.⁵ He was able to make people believe in him as their Savior, but in actuality he had mastered the art of conjuring up the illusion of a public image that catered to what the people wanted to believe. The desperate masses wanted to believe in him as Savior. He responded to the public image and made it his own to gain political office.

What were unmasked were his real motives as well as how he viewed the *masa*. He made them believe in his sincerity to serve and improve their lives, that he would save and rescue them from suffering due to their material poverty.

The people in the group discussions realized that Erap considered the poor as *galamiton* (objects to be used), to be duped or taken advantage of (*ginhimuslan*) and, more painfully, to be treated as stupid (*ginhimo gago*). His actions were not meant to improve the lot of the poor (*indi ang pagbangon sa ka-imolon*), on the contrary, the poor were even going to be the source of further wealth through the *jueteng* collections.⁶

There was a betrayal of the relationship established³ between him and the people during the campaign and the actual vote. The campaign and actual vote was viewed as a process of courtship (*nagapangaluyag*) and the implicit norm is that once you have won the heart(s) of those you have courted, you are bound by what you had promised. The discussants say that the actual vote signified the acceptance by the voters of the candidate's pledge, hence by winning Erap was being given not only the mandate to govern but also the acceptance by the voters, in a relationship of trust: The betrayal (through the perceived misuse and abuse of power) was therefore viewed in the light of the bond that had been created, and the implicit promise to fulfill the obligations entered into. A social event, courtship, is used as a prism for understanding a national process like a presidential election. This social process has implications for the elected President and his constituents.

Erap's presidency, and his perceived betrayal of the people's trust, can also be viewed in terms of its implication on the general well-being of the people: the effects on the material conditions of the majority poor and the moral decay caused by a president who abets and even benefits from corruption and abuse of authority. The law was not followed by the very person given the duty of upholding the law, and the over-all effect on Philippine social institutions is that these are weakened and made subject to manipulation and compromise.

In contrast to how Erap actually exercised power, what is the ideal and desirable manner of using power? The people mention that since the president has the political initiative, "*ikaw ang nagadala sang pungsod*" ("you are the one who carries the nation"), he sets the tone. As a model or exemplar to the national, he should be moral in his being as contrasted with (a) having many mistresses (*babae ginahampangan*), (b) engaging in illegal activities (e.g. *jueteng*), (c) manipulating economic institutions (e.g. the stock

market during the BW scandal), and (d) pretending to help the masses but actually fooling them.

The Negrenses say that as Father of the Nation (*Amay sang Pungsod*) the president should be honest and forthright (*tampad*), take to heart and place first the interests of the citizens more than himself (*interes sang pumuluyo ang gina-una*). The people should not be considered as instruments or objects to be used (*ang tao indi himuon nga instrumento ukon galamiton lamang*) and that the people should not continue to be kept in misery and poverty (*ang tao indi dapat mapuga sa ka-imulon*).

The actions of the Erap presidency placed the country in shame (*kahuluya o kahuy-an ang Pilipinas sa iban nga pungsod*). As President he should not put the country in a situation of losing face or being diminished in the eyes of other countries. The future of the country (*buwas-damlag*) is seriously compromised. The use of power should enhance the future possibilities and not put them in jeopardy. When the President himself violates the law, as Father of the Nation, he weakens the social institutions of that country and puts the country itself in a diminished position.

By submitting himself to the elections, an implicit offer to serve the people is made. If his suit is accepted, using the metaphor of courtship, the President as suitor has an obligation to fulfill his promises. When the implicit social contract (brought about by the elections and the relationship of trust and confidence constructed because of the campaign and subsequent election) between the president and the people is not fulfilled, the citizens have a right to depose the president for failure to live up to his side of the deal. If the social contract is indeed valid, the question that is asked would be, do the actions of the president fit with what the people need, in terms of responding to the situation of material poverty? The people have the duty to bring the officeholder down when his actions are not in consonance with

or fulfill the needs of the people (*"ang tao sa poder o pwesto may katungdanan sa pagpanaog kun indi na nagakabagay o nagasanto ang iya ginhimo sa kinahanglan sang tao."*)

The response of the people to the Erap's failure at effective and proper governance was of course bringing him down. The impeachment process was historical, not only in the sense that for the first time in Philippine history, a president was actually put on trial. The trial tested and challenged the maturity of the political and legal institutions. The impeachment process was a social experience. The whole nation was undergoing a collective experience and an exercise in political education. The trial involved everyone in the whole process of ferreting out the truth, and in coming to grips with the reality and truth of the allegations levied against Estrada.

The impeachment trial required investment not only from the formal institutions (the Senate and the House, as well as the Supreme Court Chief Justice, and the over-all direction of government efforts towards saving Estrada) but also in terms of time, attention and even money provided by the citizens. By listening and following the impeachment proceedings the citizens were being educated to understand how the legal institution was functioning (and that they functioned) as well as in realizing the enormous powers of the presidency. The law was being implemented, and that therefore no one is above the law. The impeachment trial was also significant for the people because it provided them a window to the truth of Erap as President (given his construction of himself, again, as *"Erap para sa mahirap."*).

People invested time, money and energy to the impeachment trial. Instead of devoting time to their farming and other routine activities, for example, rural people took time off to listen to their radios. They also set aside precious pesos to buy batteries when the money could have been used for their more basic needs. The impeachment process

was discussed in many parts of the country – corner sari-sari stores, neighborhoods and the proverbial barbershops. Wherever friends would congregate the inevitable topic would be Estrada and the revelations coming out of the testimonies of witnesses during the trial. These informal discussions were needed to reinforce, validate and deepen their understanding of the truth about Erap, the people reported.

From the radio discussions, the people expressed the feeling that the impeachment trial no doubt prepared the ground and was the necessary preparation for the EDSA II People Power demonstration. The discussants were asked three questions in relation to the EDSA II phenomenon: (a) Did you feel you were part of people power? (*"Nabatyagan nyo bala nga upod kamo sa people power?"*) What are the essential traits of 'people power' (*"Ano ang mga kina-iyang 'people power'?"*), (b) What do you think about the Arroyo administration's stand to run after Estrada (*"Ano ang inyo pagtan-aw sa tindog ng Arroyo administration nga lagson si Estrada?"*), (c) What is the appropriate punishment for Erap if he is found guilty of plunder? Should he avail of presidential pardon or should he be punished according to the law? (*"Ano ang nagakaangay nga silot kay Erap kun mapatud-an nga nangawat gid siya?"*)

The discussants respond, saying that the rationale for public outcry for the removal of Erap from the presidency was objective and based on a process of awareness and reflection. At the same time that the impeachment trial was going on, the evidence presented was being objectively assessed and people's minds were being made up regarding whether indeed Estrada had lost his mandate. For the discussion participants there was the realization and awareness that this president had lost the moral right to remain as president of the Filipino people. The people's sense of righteousness and what is morally upright surfaced and became ground for moral outrage.

The EDSA II therefore did not mean that only those who were present in the public manifestation were the ones involved.⁷ In various parts of the country, there were various forms (as illustrated by actions in Kabankalan and Cauayan) of participation by people. Though not physically present, many of those interviewed participated on the level of sympathy and prayer, by a feeling of being one with the phenomenon being carried out at EDSA. (*"Ginagmay nga mga movements, discussion groups, wala pa nag-abot kay ara sila sa indibidwal nga pagpamalandong. Hindi ka makasiling nga wala o hindi engaged or involved kun wala overt action."*)

The discussants stated that EDSA II was the manifestation or incarnation of the intent and sentiments of the general population aroused by moral outrage. In its essential nature, it could be said, EDSA II was a national expression. There were bases for the assertion of the right to withdraw the mandate (as people from Pontevedra and Cauayan mentioned). For the discussion participants, EDSA II was the recall election of the presidency.

The discussants mention that people power has essential characteristics. Its nature includes a process of discernment, judgment and prayer, translated into marching out into the streets asserting a sovereign right of the people withdrawing the mandate given to a regime. Before going into action there must however be reflection, discernment and prayer so that they are coming from their centers, they are not a mob-rule. The expression of People Power is different from a military take-over. In fact, from the discussants' perception, the military took their cue from the people. Despite the claims that Estrada remains as president and that Macapagal-Arroyo is merely an officer-in-charge, for the discussion participants there was finality in the deposition of Estrada as president. He lost the mandate of the people for him to govern.

In the post-betrayal phase, post-crime commission period that includes the withdrawal of the mandate and the break in relations between Estrada and the electorate, what would the people like to see happen? The discussants say that the trial must push through so that the truth and his real transgressions be known, and to give him an opportunity to answer the charges against him. (*"Paagihon sa isa ka proseso para makin-an ano gid bala ang iya sala. Gusto mabal-an ang kamatuoran, agod makasabat man siya sa mga paratang sa iya, masilotan kag maserbisyuhan ang silot."*)

Several steps follow. First, would be the meting out of the punishment or *silot*. Second, that Erap realize his sins and that he therefore repents, that there is a personal transformation and salvation. Third, given the right conditions, *ang pakig-uli-ay sang nabugto nga relasyon*, the restoration of the relationship that was broken because of the betrayal, the process of reconciliation. Fourth, social institutions are strengthened because the law was fulfilled, the truth was unearthed and punishment served. This paradigm, in my view, except for the last part, seems to have a strong influence coming from Christian metaphors.

Punishment here is not seen as vindictive but rather as an important dimension of the restitution of the relationship between Erap and the people, that he acknowledges his sins (*atubangon ang mga tawo*).⁸ His punishment does not only strengthen the social institutions⁹ (that a wrongdoer must do recompense) but that the punishment is essential for Erap's own salvation, so that he absolves himself, and the people are satisfied (*mahim-usan*). The punishment is also directed against those who have been abusing power with impunity, "*maghalong sila*" (they should watch out). Wrongdoers should be pursued and made accountable.¹⁰

Here we see that two dimensions are targeted, the personal salvation of Erap, and the strengthening of social institutions. The discussions posed questions regarding the

desired aspects of this post-betrayal stage: to look at punishment as revenge (*balos/ pagtimulos*) and restitution (*kabayaran*). Would the punishment be considered as restitution? The people feel that what might be more important though, aside from the formal punishment, would be the personal transformation that Estrada would have to go through to recover the relationship (with the people) that was broken (*para mag-uli-ay ang nabugto nga relasyon*). Through this process (a five-part process for people coming from Cauayan and Pontevedra, focusing mainly on *konsensya*) Estrada may gain salvation for himself. Here the religious paradigm operates strongly.

For the discussants, restitution or recovery of the previous relationship is possible provided the right conditions are satisfied or fulfilled. Since the social institutions were weakened because of the actuations of Estrada as president, restitution and reconciliation with him through the necessary and appropriate processes will also restore and repair the damage done to the social institutions. ("*Diin nangawat? Kun sa tao, ang indibidwal lang ang mapinsala, kun sala sa pungsod, ang tanan ginkawatan.*") Here the personal and the social implications converge.

In terms of appropriate punishment for Estrada, while the law stipulates the death penalty as the maximum penalty for plunder, for the discussants it would not actually be sufficient for the healing of the broken relation (*him-us o mahim-usan* being the standard, not so much satisfaction alone but the sense of having one's anger assuaged). The people believe he would not be able to realize his sins and give him the opportunity to transform himself. Besides, the death penalty is not acceptable to their Christian beliefs. For them Estrada's salvation is a major consideration and objective of the punishment, not physical annihilation.¹¹

The range of possible punishment the discussants suggest to be levied on Estrada, and their corresponding rationale, primarily aim to make him realize how it is to be

poor, should he be convicted. He must experience the life the poor live through. The people believe that if he realizes what the poor go through in their daily lives, he will realize how grave his sins were to the poor, and he feels remorse (his conscience will bother him) because of what he did to the poor. Again, given the context that he used the poor to get power ("Erap para sa mahirap") and get rich. The discussants mention that the punishment is intended for Estrada to realize the pain that the people felt due to this betrayal of his duties. That Estrada is bothered by his conscience and that he realizes the effects on the people of his transgressions is now the *balos*, revenge, payment.

The possible forms or kinds of punishment that can be meted out include (a) *obrero sa dalan* (laborer on roads), (b) *patanumon kahoy sa bukid, paumahon sa bukid* (upland farmer), (c) *mamumugon* (landless agricultural worker, "*naga-obra sa initan bilog nga adlaw, gaguluwa ang balhas*", your only capital is your labor and your pay is a pittance). The reasons for these punishments are so that the subjective changes in Estrada will take place, repentance (*paghinulsul*), among others. The realization will only take place when he feels the hardships of the people who he victimized.

That transformation will be done through at least five steps: (a) put him in a situation where he is a *mamumugon* so that (b) he experiences physical labor (*nagapangabudlay, nagapabalhas, nagapa-init, jornal*¹²) so that when he experiences these (c) he will feel the kind of life that the people he betrayed go through, and in the process (d) he realizes what he did, reflects and feels remorse (*maghinulsol*) and (e) he repents.

From the perspective of the discussants, the functions, "value" or *kabilidhon* (or *kabug-aton*) of the punishment would be as (a) *balos sa sala, "bayad" sa pag-antos sang tawo* (payment or compensation for the suffering caused by

the transgressions); (b) as a means of attaining personal transformation or salvation; (c) strengthening of social institutions, that the law can be implemented; (d) the punishment becomes a deterrent and a cautionary warning to other possible political offenses by other office-holders; and (e) demonstration that the law is fair, applied equally to all, including Presidents, and there is no double standard.

The process of reconciliation then has five sequential elements: (a) face the people (*mag-atubang sa tawo*), (b) *magsabat siya*, answer the charges, (c) *mahatagan sang nagaka-igo nga desisyon*, given the right judgment or decision, (d) *masilotan siya santo sa iya sala*, punished appropriately for his sin, and (e) *masebisyonhan niya ang silot*, the punishment is served. Estrada can now be forgiven because the people can now feel "compensated" (*ma-umpawan sang kaugot, mahim-usan*).

For these reasons, the discussants do not consider the death penalty appropriate because it deprives Estrada of the chance for personal transformation, redemption and salvation.

National Policy (GRP-RPA Peace Agreement)

As part of the evaluation of political governance, the next national policy to be considered is the peace agreement forged between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB). The peace agreement was actually signed during the presidency of Estrada. When the new government of Macapagal-Arroyo assumed power, this peace agreement was reviewed to find out whether it should be upheld. While the RPA claims it has forces in other provinces in the Philippines, much of its presence is in Negros Occidental; hence the issue was important for the group discussants. The agreement was the subject of many radio emissions because all the aspects of the peace

agreement were subjected to scrutiny and commentary by the group discussions.

The Review Panel under National Security Adviser Roilo Golez convened a multi-sectoral dialogue in Bacolod City on September 22, 2001. The Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police and the local government chief executives expressed support for the implementation of the Agreement, while the Church and civil society representatives called for the reformulation or renegotiation of the Agreement based on the following grounds:

1. Fast-tracking of the Peace Agreement, as it was signed only three weeks after the assumption of the Angara Panel;
2. The provision on RPM-P/ RPA/ ABB assistance in the maintenance of peace and order may justify their reported assumption of *de facto* police functions;
3. The acknowledgment of RPM-P/ RPA/ ABB "controlled areas";
4. The granting of special licenses and permits to carry firearms for 100 RPA/ ABB members;
5. Dropping of charges filed vs. RPM-P/ RPA/ ABB Panelists and Consultants and 235 Alleged Political Offenders (APOs) in their list;
6. The lack of parameters and guidelines to govern the use of PhP 10 million Reintegration Fund and PhP 500 million Special Development Fund;
7. The number of the Joint Executive Monitoring Committee (JEMC) should be increased from 5 to 9 members; and
8. The role of Mr. Educardo Cojuangco Jr. as "Intervenor for the Peace Process" in view of his business interests in Negros.¹³

A Negros Peace Congress was held by the Church and civil society organizations in December, 2001 in Bacolod City as a culmination of the many consultations on provisions

of the peace agreement, and how the local population felt about these controversial provisions. A consensus was reached in order for a Clarificatory Document to be formulated explaining the contentious provisions of the agreement with the RPA-ABB.

Despite a clamor by various rural communities, church officials and concerned citizens for a deeper review or at least a further consideration of the controversial provisions (because these had implications for many people in the rural communities and the provisions' implications as well for national policies in general), the agreement was reaffirmed by the Arroyo government and the controversial provisions are now being implemented.

The following discussion will cover (again) the questions: how power was used, how power should be used, what the people do to correct the situation and what would be necessary to bring back the broken ties between those in governance and the governed.

Right off the radio discussions question the process through which the peace agreement was forged. The peace process was hidden from the public; there was no conscious process to involve the citizenry in the process of developing the peace agreement. Given the repercussions of such an agreement, should not the people be the ultimate convenor, the discussants say. The substance of the agreement was not based on consultations with the people; hence the agreement does not have a constituency which can support it. ("*Gintago sa publico. Ang kaundan wala nakabase sa konsultasyon sa tawo, wala constituency.*") This is not just an agreement between the government and the rebel group but that it aims to heal a fissure in society. For that fissure to really be healed there must be a constituency which can safeguard the agreement and assure a real resolution of the conflict.

The discussions focused on, why is the participation of civil society important? The government panel cannot presuppose to know what would be in the best interests of the rest of society if there was no process of consultation regarding the main guidelines for such a peace agreement. Furthermore, the group discussants says, if the civil society is not engaged in the forging of the peace agreement, should the peace agreement come to be formalized, without a constituency to support it, that peace agreement would not succeed. The chances of a peace agreement succeeding hinge on whether the majority of civil society supports such a pact.

Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. played an important role in the forging of the peace agreement and the document has him sign as an Intervenor. This is questionable in light of the economic and political interests that Cojuangco has in Negros Occidental. The discussants question why someone who obviously has interests to uphold was given such a prominent role in the peace agreement.

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, the formal government institution assigned to handle peace negotiations with various armed ideological groups in the country was not involved in the formulation of the peace agreement. Manuel Yan, then Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process wrote to peace advocates all over the country politely informing them that OPAPP was not part to the crafting of the agreement, subtly implying that said agreement did not go through the usual procedures that the office follows with regards peace negotiations. Then Executive Secretary Ronaldo Zamora crafted the agreement. Why the peace agreement was not coursed through the OPAPP, remains a mystery.

For the discussants, the contentious provisions of the peace agreement are on (a) whether there are and what would be considered as RPA-controlled areas, (b) what would be considered as hostile acts, (c) the provision to grant the

RPA permits to carry firearms, (d) to give the RPA a role in peace and order functions normally given to the police and military, and (e) the grant of a PhP 500 million development fund.

The criteria the discussants articulated that should be used to assess a peace agreement would have to do with, (a) what will be its effects on the citizens in the contested areas and beyond, (b) what will be the implications, of the provisions of the peace agreement and how it is implemented, for governance and peace negotiations not only with this particular rebel group but for other rebel groups as well.

For the discussants, as an instrument to deal with social and armed conflict, a peace agreement should have the following characteristics:

(A) To be authentic,

1. It should NOT be used as an instrument by vested interests (private or ideological) to expand and consolidate its power base. In the GRP-RPA peace agreement not only do the discussants voice out a suspicion that because of the important role that Cojuangco played, he was very interested that a peace agreement be signed for his own designs but it also so happened that this dovetailed with what the RPA wanted to get. The people conjecture that the RPA benefits a lot from having Cojuangco as a supporter of the peace agreement; it seems that it would insure that, within certain limits, the RPA would be able to get a good deal, rather than to be continually considered as rebel forces. The RPA through the peace agreement consolidates its gains and may even be in a better position to gain further concessions once it has achieved a measure of legitimacy provided in this case again by the peace agreement.

2. The peace agreement should also NOT be used as instrument for state security to co-opt and bait (*paonon*)

the armed movement to give up armed struggle (*magbuhí armas*) to the disadvantage of, and put in peril, the citizens. (From the discussants' perspective, the dominant strategy of the military and government is to mollify the RPA and make them surrender but at the cost of putting in peril the rural poor who are vulnerable and precarious conditions because, with their guns, the RPA can wield force over them.)

3. The peace agreement should instead BE used as an instrument to tackle substantive issues. For the discussants the peace talks should be the opportunity to really discuss, confront, address and respond to the roots or causes of the rebellion, what were the causes of the conflict in the first place? And the most likely root, they believe, is livelihood or quality of life (*kalidad sang pangabuhí*). The government is missing out on the opportunity to undertake serious confrontation and reflection on the structural reasons for the rebellion. But then perhaps government is either unwilling or unable to undertake a reflection of this sort, and would rather be satisfied with tentative solutions.

Some members of the discussions would say, the reflection (should it really be pursued) on the structural reasons for the rebellion can lead to the dis-arming of communities and the rest of society. A reconciliation of the warring parties (*pag-uli-ay*), between the two armed groups (the RPA and the AFP), as well as between the victims and perpetrators of violence (those who inflicted violence on the civilian victims) becomes possible.

The discussants are concerned that the peace agreement should not be motivated or prompted by the demands of counter-insurgency. The RPA cadres, it seems, are being co-opted into the government side so that the main forces of the New People's Army may likewise be enticed to follow, or at least neutralized because now the RPA can also be a foil against them. But the RPA can also be used against the people when, during the implementation of government policies and programs, should local groups oppose the

programs, the rebel group will now be used to quell legitimate opposition. The goal being that the government programs, for example those connected with development aggression like mining, the Community Based Forest Management Agreement, the industrial forest plan, etc. will not be derailed. The RPA can play a strategic role but used by the military or government to enforce possibly unpopular programs, the discussants surmise.

(B) As a policy instrument intended to address social and armed conflict, the peace agreement should NOT result in the following:

1. Government losing the respect of the ordinary citizens because it seems like the government is conceding too much, especially to those very people that tried to topple it. It looks like the government is being duped. The discussants think that the government does not negotiate from a position of strength but rather of fear. The government side comes on as willing to give many things just so that a peace agreement can be signed. It looks like it cannot win against the rebels. It even looks like they are giving favors to those that tried to bring the government down. It does not try to hammer an agreement that will be just and sustainable for the rest of the civilian population. (*"Ang gobyerno manubo sa mata sang tawo kay ma-bribe, ma-into-an, mapahugan lang siya gali, wala ikasarang ang AFP/PNP nga magda-og kontra sa rebelde. May pinili-an, ato pa ang tilaw tumba sa iya ang ginhatagan bili o importansya."*)

2. With such an iniquitous peace agreement (for the citizenry), the conditions of unpeace and social conflict will remain. The conditions include the displacement of the rural population and destruction of their resource base (should development aggression continue and even be abetted), an increase in the strength of armed groups, and the commission of hostile acts against civilian communities.

(Mapahalin o maguba ang palangabuhian, pagsangkad o pagkusog sg fuerza sg armada.)

3. There will be deleterious effects on the citizenry which include (a) confusion (The people will say "should we rebel first so that government will listen to us and even give us what we were asking for in the first place?") [*magtalang-talang sila, ano ni man? Masiling sila nga "magrebelde ta anay kay tamdum ta ka daya."* Ang ila puloy-an madelikado, mabudlay mangita kwarta, ano na subong ang papel sang PNP/AFP kay nagin-amiguhay man sa RPA? Ano ni gobierno ta?] ["This place where we live is full of danger, earning a living is difficult, what now is the role of the PNP/AFP when the soldiers have become friends with the rebels, what has become of our government?"], (b) destruction of organized opposition to projects deemed anti-poor because there are now armed forces which can be used against them when, for example, they oppose the projects of Cojuangco, and therefore (c) the people are terrorized into silence and perhaps passivity (*paghipos...pasuno-sunod na lang*).

4. Weakening or subversion of the military and police institutions (from the discussants' perspective) as well as government authority on the local and barangay levels, because of the perceived collusion with those forces which would seek to do harm to the people.

5. Government conceding that there are 'controlled areas' (what are the indicators for these, what are the characteristics of controlled areas?)¹⁴. The government, the discussants agree, should not be a party to a situation where an area can actually become a controlled area, which would amount to giving up sovereignty over a part of the national territory. (Would there be enabling conditions for this to happen?)¹⁵ The government should also not fall into the trap being set by the RPA (a 'self-fulfilling prophecy') that the government actually becomes the tool for the armed group to become stronger by agreeing to the rebel group's

demands. And finally, by virtue of its role in the peace agreement and the concessions it makes to the RPA, government is perceived to be party to situation where there was coercion and exploitation of the people (*may paghimulos kag may pagpamigos sa tawo*).

(C.) Since the government is considered as parents ('*amay*' or '*tatay*', '*mga ginikanan*'), its actions in relation to the RPA will be perceived as consenting to the errant or weeping child's "*tantrums*" or misbehavior (referring to the RPA). This kind of behavior should not be tolerated by the parents. (*Ginakonsenter and "iya" abilidad. Tinutuyo nga diutay deperensya masunggod. Tapos mangayo, hatagan. "Ang bata naghibi", paghibi hatag ka man. Ari dulce, indi na hibi. Maghibi, paumpawan kaon. Kaunon. Pagdugay-dugay mangaway naman. Magrebelde kay ginakonsenter man ang ina nga ginahimo. Indi mo pag-itolerate ini nga batasan.*)

(D.) Persons carrying weapons in the name of the State should be legitimate and have the proper training and attitude in the carrying of those arms. Those who carry arms must fulfill certain norms.

The discussants ask, who are the ones who are entitled to carry arms in the name of the State? They must understand the goals and purpose of carrying weapons, like understanding as well the use of force. They must be responsible in the use of legitimate force.

The discussants believe that rebels are not prepared to carry arms responsibly. They have come from the experience of being rebels and have used weapons to counter the forces of the State (*may ginhalinan, rebelde sila sang una*). What would it take for them to change their previous attitude and for them to now behave in full cognizance of the new functions they fulfill? Many rebels, according to the discussants, will not be able to understand the attitude and

responsibilities within this new situation. The mind set of a rebel is "*utok pulbura*", use the gun either in offensive operations or as defensive weapons, as a rebel.

More profoundly, according to the discussants, what can be questioned is the rebel group's sincerity in returning to the fold of the law when the conditions which instigated the rebellion in the first place have not been responded to (*sinseridad sa pagbalik kwestionable kay tungod nagabalik sila sa gobierno wala man tuod nga sabat sa conditions of rebellion, kundi may ginapangayo lang sila nga mga pabor, daw indi matuod-tuod nga rebelde. Nga-a conditional ang pagbalik sa sabak sang gobierno ang pag-uyat armas?*) ("The sincerity in returning to the fold of the law is questionable because the rebels were also not able to state clearly their reasons for rebellion. Or if they are sincere in their rebellion why should they be willing to give up their struggle after being given favors by the government. Have the fundamental reasons for their rebellion been responded to?") This seeming insincerity casts doubt on what kinds of rebel they are, when, given control of project funds, they will now give up on the real causes of their rebellion.¹⁶ Finally, given that the RPA has an image problem with the citizenry, there is no confidence that they have good intentions in carrying arms.

How can the broken relationships be healed?

For the discussants, there are two relationships here that need reconciliation. The first would be between the people and the insurgents, the victims of the insurgents' actions directly or indirectly as a result of the rebels' actions (those who suffered in the crossfire between the rebels and the government forces, and those who were victimized by the insurgents themselves directly). The second would be between the government military forces and the insurgents. The third relationship, not considered by the discussants, has to do with the government military forces and the civilian

population, but this is outside the scope of the present discussions.

For the first (*tawo kag ang insurgents, sa nahimuan sang kalapasan ukon ang mga nahalitan*) the discussants felt that the insurgents should surrender their arms. Regardless of the imprimatur and assurances given by the military¹⁷, the RPA with their guns will always be a threat to civilian peace. And given precisely the legalization of their carrying weapons through the peace agreement (100 gun licenses were reportedly given the RPA), the people worry that the rebels will feel emboldened even in using their weapons against "perceived" enemies. And those who were earlier victimized by the RPA will never be able to press their case for fear of retaliation.

The discussants ask that the RPA ask for forgiveness from the people they did harm to (*pangayo patawad sa tawo nga nahalitan nila.*)

Between the government and the insurgents (which includes all armed groups, not only the RPA), in order to reconcile, first of all, the insurgents must be given livelihood opportunities and most importantly, the agrarian reform program should not be watered down (*"indi pagpaltikon ang programa sa agrarian reform"*) (Agrarian reform should not be eviscerated of its real purpose and value.). There are structural reasons for insurgency, according to the discussants, and the root of it is the lack of fair access to productive resources that assure livelihood.

The stance or attitude that government should have towards insurgents should be that government recognizes that the reasons they rebelled in the first place was because they did not have livelihood, were victims of injustice or governance and management that failed to respond to their needs (*"nagrebeldde ina sila tungod kawsa nila palangabuhian, biktima sang in hustisya, dumalaan nga indi insakto"*). The main item on the agenda towards peace is

really to redress grievances, have effective and efficient governance, and provide livelihood for the poor, the discussants conclude.

And finally, the insurgents must not also be looked at as instruments of the State or private vested interests (*indi sila galamiton sang Estado, kag private vested interests*).

Barangay elections and governance

These exercises of governance on the national level through political and security concerns tie up with how governance is practiced on the barangay level. National and local practices perhaps reinforce each other.

Elections are the formal processes for acquiring political power, so politicians utilize all means at their disposal to be able to secure for themselves the elective positions they aspire for. Aside from vote-buying (sometimes for as little as PhP 20 per voter), various mechanisms are utilized to ensure that the voters will indeed vote for them. The mechanisms include *higot*¹⁸ and *kabalaslan*¹⁹. Various forms of *higot* basically hinge on making the voters recognize that their security of tenure, including access to land, resources and livelihood, are jeopardized if the politician is not elected. The ones who are most vulnerable of course are those that do not any sure or regular means of livelihood. This kind of pressure then makes the voters unfree in their choices and decisions.

Kabalaslan is ironic in the sense that it is used by the more dominant power holder to further consolidate a sense of obligation from the much less powerful. The voter will feel obliged to vote for the politician because of a past or possible service that the politician has rendered or may render, ("*Makahigot gid and utang nga kabalaslan kay ginbuligan ka. Ang politico 'nagadisponer' sang aton kinahanglan.*") When in fact this is what the politician is obliged to render, in the first place, because he is a public

servant. Politicians provide bureaucratic and economic access, which is why they can exercise power and influence over voters. Money and land are sources of these powers too. Social status in the sense of having economic resources translates into political power as well.

The virtue of *kabalaslan* is deeper than *bigot* (*mabudlay bugtuon*). The former is difficult to break or cut. More than the contractual dimension, it is the 'moral' ground that is invoked. Once *konsensya* is invoked, their sense of the value of their word is touched. "*Pagtan-aw sa kaugalingon madula o mawala kun indi ginatan-aw ang kabalaslan*" (Your "proper" view of yourself is lost when you do not recognize your debt of gratitude).

In the discussion in Sipalay, the following question was posed: what does the act of buying your (the citizens') vote say about how the candidate looks at the voters? The discussants said that (a) "*kun ikaw gapabakal, ginatugutan mo ini nga politiko nga himuslan ikaw, gapakita man nga ikaw mismo wala ka respeto sa imo kaugalingon*" (when you sell your vote, you allow the politician to take advantage of you, you also show that you yourself do not have respect for yourself); (b) "*isa ka butang, isa ka bagay nga galamiton niya ang tawo nga ginbakal ya indi na ya siling nga tawo parehas sa iya, isa ka ka butang niya kahayangawan ukon isa ka galamiton sa pagpangabuhi sa iya pagmentinar sang iya nga status*" (an object, the voter that he buys becomes an object that he uses, that person is not the same as him, you are an object that useful or a tool in his business of maintaining his status).

Elections are the formal processes through which politicians acquire legitimate power which then translates into (further) political, economic and social influence, as well as access to (affirmed) social standing and status. Furthermore, they actually acquire the power to dictate on or control the lives of citizens who are most vulnerable, the discussants observe.

From the politicians' perspective, elections are thus viewed as economic and political investments. The possible benefits include access to certain social and public goods. Politicians are thus willing to use all means available, including various forms of social and economic pressure to secure the elective positions for them, knowing that at some point the investment (theirs and their supporters) will pay off. The discussants opine that the fact that others help finance their election campaigns makes the politicians beholden to those who spent money and resources for them to be able to win elections. (*"Kun may ginasaligan (source of campaign funds) hindi na magin fully para sa tawo. Beholden ka na sa saligan, indi na puede madala ang tingog sang tawo."*) The financiers will also get a return on their investments by securing favors and access to public goods, or at least preferential treatment during certain dealings.

At the same time, after elections, the discussants observe, a contractual relationship exists between local officials and citizens. Politicians are perceived as conduits and mediators because they provide access to the local and national bureaucracy. Politicians also mediate between local and national processes. Politicians also view their offices almost as giving them certain birthrights, for example, utilizing public vehicles for private purposes, posing no distinction between personal and public property. All these aside from the predominant view that their office gives them access to public wealth.

The discussants realize of course that a vast contrast exists between the actual holding of elections and the ideal exercise of elections. Ideally, elections are meant to be free exercises, where the citizen does not feel pressured in any manner to vote for a particular candidate. A free exercise of elections means that the voters will base their decisions on the candidates' qualities, merits and qualifications,

including their program of government or the issues they are will to pursue and implement solutions to. Since there is both subtle and overt social and economic pressure (which cannot be withstood without considerable cost to the voter), elections do not lead to the most qualified winners or those who will work for the interest or welfare of the majority. Rather, the cost alone of putting up a candidature means that only those who have resources will be willing to run or those who are supported by vested interests (who definitely will want a return on their investment).

These considerations have implications and consequences for distinguishing between *those who hold formal political authority* and *those who are real or authentic political leaders*. The latter are those who are not only or even concerned with their own or private gain but rather consider the welfare of those they are leading.

The deeper issues, according to the barangay residents, center around the concept of who the real people's leader is. The discussants mention, both the ideal and the true leader are depicted as having authentic concern for his constituents (*may pagkabalaka, nagapamati, nagalibot*). The real leader also elicits and encourages active participation from her constituents. The authentic leaders seems almost Christ-like (in the sense of being caring, forgiving, yet righteous and morally upright) in the eyes of the poor.

How is real concern for the welfare of the poor communicated and how do the poor respond to the authentic leader? The discussions provide a tentative answer. Real concern is communicated through presence (both physical and psychical presence in the sense of 'being-with', accompanies, *naga-upod*). More than that, the authentic leader relates with or interacts with the citizens and is not psychologically and physically aloof. (Although of course, perhaps in the belief that someone is truly being with them, they would be willing to believe in semblances or

credible pretense.) The leader also resonates with the lot and situation of the poor.

What arouses or elicits real participation from barangay members are barangay leaders who listen (*nagapamati*), who become one with the citizens (*may pag-isa sa mga pumuluyo*), who occupy not only one and the same geographical space with the constituents but also the mental space²⁰ with their constituents (*nagalibot*). This type of leader, according to the discussants, tries to find out what the real situation of each and every barangay member and carries these concerns with her, especially for those who have the least resources (*may pagkabalaka*). Such that in dealings with others within and outside the barangay the real leader carries the 'voice of the people' (*tingog sang katawhan*).

In one discussion the participants were asked why they were not acting to make the barangay council more active and dynamic. They then resolved to undertake certain steps, for example, monitoring the barangay council, so that it would become more responsive. A planning session by the barangay council, with the participation of other barangay members, will need to be done so that the management of the barangay will actually be more effective. Because they saw all the "sins" of the local government officials, all stipulated in the Local Government Code, which were not being done, they saw the need to become more vigilant.

The deeper problem, according to the barangay residents, really is that there is no proper consultation and planning regarding the type of projects to be implemented and how these can best be implemented. There is no proper reporting about what is happening in the barangay by the council members. They do not report how the barangay funds have been spent, hence the people suspect that something might be amiss. (*Hindi ginamiting ang barangay development councils, hindi nagadiscuss sang mga ipatindog nga mga projects. Wala ginatawag ang barangay*

assembly. Pero hindi ginapulong kay sukton man sila sang mga tawo. Damo na mang ang mga anomaliya, nga indi magpatawag miting? So indi man maka-consult para sa mga bag-o nga projects, amo nga wala pag-uswag, indi mahimo ang mga nagakaangay nga development projects.”)

Knowledge of the mental space of the community and the ability to carry the voice of the people results from having listened and really understood the situation of the community. Hearing the ‘voice of the people’ issues from a process of understanding the ‘shared humanity,’ especially of the resourceless poor who should be the real targets of governance (*ang tingog sang katawhan nag-agi sa proseso*). The real leader must be willing to be ‘converted’ by the situation. (“*Kita sa sitwasyon’, naga-antos, hindi tawhanon, conversion kay nasudlan gid ang sitwasyon. Nakit-an mo gid.*”) Good governance can be achieved if the voice of the people, in this sense, is really listened to.

At the same time that the discussants see the qualities of real leaders, a deeper problem remains. The barangays do not have a sense of their own power and sovereignty. They look up to the local town officials, just the same, for initiative and foresight. The problem seems to redound to the incapacity of handling consultative and participative barangay assemblies by barangay officials. Local governance and empowerment is really demonstrated in the capacity of the barangay to handle their own affairs competently and yet there are deficiencies in being able to do these.

These ideas echo the kind of national leadership being sought, the kind that takes the interests of the poor and powerless to heart. People are suffering and they desperately want and need surcease from that suffering. Hence they look for mediators and ‘saviors’ from that suffering (*pag-antos*).

The norms of governance coming from the barangay experience have to do with issues arising from (a) how power is used (*pagdumala o pag-usar sang gahum/ kagamhanan*) or how political authority is exercised and (b) how the sentiments, concerns and problems of the citizenry or the electorate are carried or brought to the appropriate fora (*pagdala sang tingog sang tawo*). This process (of bringing the people's voice for it to be heard) can actually have two further stages, (a) the decision indeed by the leader to listen, understand and respond to the people's voice, and (b) how the people's sentiments, concerns and problems are actually presented or represented (because how this is carried out leads to empowering the citizens and giving them value).

The latter can only be done if the leaders are able to empathize and the barangay leader can only empathize if he knows the situation of the people because she goes around (*nagalibot*), really talks with the people and perhaps conducts consultations and analyses with barangay members.

Given the actual barangay operations and how the barangay should be governed, what are the barangay members actually doing. For the discussants, the possible responses to governance are:

1. *Mapalayo* (when governance is unresponsive to the actual concerns of the citizens, or even when that governance is even inept and ineffective (*wasik poder*). The barangay members can later realize that there is no point investing time and effort in making the barangay leadership know about their problems because the leadership does not respond or cannot make the appropriate decisions.)

2. *Magrebelde* (as a result not only of government neglect but perhaps because of military abuses, or other forms of injustice. Rebellion can be conceived as a means of rejecting the present dispensation, or as a means to press

hard for certain reforms. Rebellion though has the element of duress and utilizes violence.)

3. Participate in elections (as the only legitimate means of showing opinions, sentiments and preferences of the electorate, and yet knowing as well that this process can be subverted too through vote-buying and other means of compelling voters to support politicians.)

4. *Magsalig* (entrust one's faith and hopes in the honesty and good will of political leaders, to mainly accept and obey the dictates of government, and hope that the present dispensation will take the people's interest to heart.)

These options though seem to rely too much on the initiatives coming from the barangay and other political leaders and does not envision the citizenry themselves taking an active and significant role in articulating, pushing and moving their own political and economic agenda so that the political leaders have to respond competently and efficiently to the initiatives coming from the constituency.

As an observer, from the above it can be inferred that the elements of good governance should include:

1. Articulating a social contract between the people in positions of authority and the governed regarding what should be the purposes and goals of governance,

2. Specifying the norms of good governance from the citizens' perspective (if they are clear what their expectations are, perhaps they will be more assertive and vigilant regarding how politicians should be conducting themselves),

3. Viewing the consequences of how government "constructs" its citizens (or how citizenship is viewed by people in government) and what the implications and consequences are (of this construction) for government's decisions. For

example, how does government construe its responsibility to the poorest of the poor (*nagatalang-talang*)²¹?

4. Understanding citizens' demands (how should these demands be viewed and considered?)

5. Delineating the distinction between violence and force²², what is legitimate violence and who are the legitimate agents of violence?

There are basically two kinds of leaders. The real leader is truly for the poor. His concern for the poor is authentic, and the truly resourceless should be the primary concern of governance. Inevitably this will concern social structures because justice cannot be considered piecemeal but must refer to the fundamental principles of social organization. The other type of leader mainly uses power for private interests and takes advantage of the people.

The ideal characteristics of governance from the discussants' point of view then are:

1. *May pagkabalaka, nagapamati, nagakonsulta, may pagrespeto sa tao, indi dalok* (has concern, listens, consults, has respect for people. not greedy),

2. *Ang nagarebelde kun matuod-tuod gid ang ila pagpaninguha sang hustisya, indi magpadala sa kwarta ukon development projects pero pangitaon gid ang matuod-tuod nga mga pagkambyo sa mga pamaagi. Nagaguwa na lang sa peace agreement sa RPA nga nagapangayo sila sg mga konkreto nga pribileheyo agud may result man ang ila panghimakas, pero indi nga daw ginasakripisyo ang pipila para makakuha kahilwayan pero kahilwayan nga indi nakabase sa kamatuoran o mas mabaskug nga prinsipyo.* (Those who rebel if their search for justice is real, should not be swayed by money or development projects but rather look for real change in ways of doing things. In the peace agreement with the RPA, it

appears, that they ask for concrete privileges so that their struggle will have results but "peace" is achieved by sacrificing some; this is not peace that is based on truth or stronger principles.)

3. *Ini nga mga prinsipyo dapat (a) mapuslan sang tanan, makabulig pagtukod sang mapinadayunon nga kauswagan, kag (b) mabal-an kag ma-eksplikar sa tanan nga pumuluyo.* (These [stronger or truthful] principles should be for the benefit of all, and can help build sustainable and long-term progress, and should be known by and understandable to all the citizens.)

Three paradigms

The above concerns are viewed and experienced by the discussants from within their own perspective and worldview. This worldview can perhaps be understood using three paradigms: (a) kinship ties and relationships, (b) religious metaphors and (c) a modernist-developmental perspective.

A. *Kinship ties and relationships*

The discussants use metaphors, images and language coming from their day-to-day experiences or how they construct their ties within the family, household, rituals of life like courtship, as well as their construction of moral obligations. Kinship ties are also used in viewing or understanding hierarchical relations of power.

There is an appeal to ordinary day-to-day experiences as metaphors for depicting and understanding state policy and practices of governance. So Joseph Estrada is considered as Father of the Nation (*Amay sang Pungsod*) and as such he is under certain obligations to behave and be a model to his "children" (the citizens). So when he does not do his duty as father, he has not fulfilled his obligation, he loses respect as a responsible parent.

At the same time, the national government as a whole is also considered as parent (*Amay* or *naga-alagad*) so that in dealing for example with the RPA rebels, the father should be able to discipline his child and not give in to whatever the "errant child" asks for. The complaining child is not to be given candies to mollify the child. The government, as parent, should not "spoil" one child and lose sight of what the other children deserve or need. The parent should view the whole situation.

Nagadumala, or the person who manages, takes care of, or governs, may be sometimes in reference to how a household is being run but the concept can be enlarged to refer to larger aggrupations including businesses, as well as local and national governments.

The value of *pag-atubang* or even *pag-panaog* also can be used in political affairs. In the context of a courtship, for example, the woman being wooed should face her suitors. She should come down and meet with the visitors. But this is expanded to include a general manner of treating people. By 'facing' the people, for example during the Estrada trial, the former President is recognizing the dignity and personhood of those who are accusing him, and facing the charges means also being man enough to confront the situation in the face. *Pag-atubang* is also significant in the sense of admitting to one's transgressions and not hiding away or sulking away. During the Erap trial, the accused should not hide behind the tricks and machinations of lawyers but rather answer the charges directly. Again, the people found it indicative that when Estrada left Malacañang he left by the backdoor, even if one could argue that because it was for security reasons. For the discussants this meant that he was not man enough to leave by the front door. *Pag-panaog* was not taken in the positive step of coming down to face the visitor or suitor, this time it meant bringing down the person in power.

Another occurrence in the life cycle of communities that had bearing on how the communities view political processes, especially elections, is courtship, *pang-pangluyag*. Similar to the phenomenon of *pag-atubang* mentioned above but this time from the other side, the suitor woos the lady (the citizens) and based on what the suitor promises or gives his word to, the wooed respond. Should the suit be accepted, the suitor is under obligation to fulfill what he promised. This is how the discussants say the people looked at Erap the candidate. When he became president he was now under obligation to fulfill what he had promised. An implicit contract was made between those who voted for Erap and the winning candidate. Even other politicians and election campaigns are viewed in this manner. Although the local politicians are also viewed as resource-holders or important "bridges" when it comes to dealing with the impersonal and overpowering bureaucracy, or as "guarantees" during times of need.

Higot and *kabalaslan* as kinship ties are appropriated by politicians as well to compel voters to support them. What starts out as an important moral practice, the honoring of one's word, the giving of one's promise is used now for ensuring political victory. The ironic thing is that the promisor is tied to his word even when it can become disadvantageous to him, and yet he remains true to his word. And it is important even for his own sense of personhood that he be known as someone who keeps his word. The chain is self-imposed and yet one feels obliged because of *konsensya* (conscience).

B. Religious metaphors

The whole process of transgression, forgiveness, penance, punishment and atonement and then salvation as applied in the case of Erap have religious undertones. These are metaphors of religiosity coming from lowland Christian culture. What the former president did and what

can save him are viewed from this optic. His punishment is not only meant for his personal salvation but through his atonement social institutions can also be strengthened. The forms of punishment suggested are considered as opportunities for personal transformation, redemption and salvation. And there can only be "satisfaction" (*mahim-usan*) for the victims when the transgressor goes through appropriate punishment, when Erap is able to suffer like the poor people that he betrayed.

Even the articulated responses to the question what can restore the situation between the government military forces, the RPA, and the people are also influenced by religious metaphors. Reconciliation can only come after the asking of forgiveness for the hurt that was caused the victims of military actions. There must be atonement and the seeking of pardon. Otherwise the anger or resentment (*pagka-ugot*) remains. Genuine peace can be brought about by a healing of not only of physical wounds but the human ties that bind segments of the national community, especially between those who caused harm and their victims.

The notion of 'redemptive suffering' is implicit in the case of Erap. By suffering through the punishment, Erap redeems himself. Could it be perhaps that the poor also view their situation in this manner? Their suffering has value because it can bring redemption.

The description of the real or true leader has qualities that could be considered Christ-like. Erap was viewed as a Savior from suffering and poverty because he made people believe that he understood and empathized with the situation of the poor. In the description of the real leader is a harkening to a Savior-like political figure even in the sense of 'being-with' (*naga-upod, nagapamati*), one who understands and consoles. The true leader is also one who considers the welfare of the constituents as paramount (*may pagkabalaka*), and not his own selfish ends.

C. *Modernizing-developmental paradigm*

The modernist or formal institutional framework and norms may sometimes set themselves against the embedded power relations or the existing cultural or sociological ties that reinforce the *status quo*. The modernizing framework may include goals of equity and justice and follow processes of consultation and organization. The developmentalist orientation follows a desired pattern of social development. It comes from formal government policies or even a purely institutional framework but operates on themes and assumptions that either may be fictitious or do not have connection or organic links with what supposedly beneficiary communities at the base understand or operate from.

Sometimes the modernizing framework seeks community organizing and empowerment and yet fails to adequately consider the economic, cultural and social context. Sometimes misunderstandings can occur when a development program is understood within a certain rubric (salvation from suffering, coming from a benevolent leader) and yet the mechanism can be "foreign" or unadapted (consultation, cooperative organization, financing, memorandum of agreement).

In the Local Government Code there is a lot of modernizing and developmentalist language (empowerment, participation, consultation, transparency, accountability, etc.). There can be a clash between the formal requirements and processes and the informal compromises and short-cuts. The language of financing and cooperatives, barangay development council, projects and reporting still have to be reformulated or translated in such a manner that they can be understood organically within the lives of the communities.

On the larger scale, there is an articulation of State interests and concerns that may conflict with local economic

and security concerns. The formal institutional framework does not always take into the network or web of social ties that matter to the citizens at the base. Given the complexity and incomprehensibility of national policies sometimes, the local residents do not have any other recourse but go to the political brokers (politicians and local leaders, non-governmental personalities). For the rural communities the political brokers are important. The network or web of social ties becomes the mediating factor so that they can operate within the formal structure.

Just the same the modernizing or developmentalist framework has been able to provide a language that the grassroots communities have also been able to use to their advantage. Not only the language of rights (*kinamatarong*) but also consultation and participation have already permeated their political vocabulary and, with the Local Government Code, they have used these terms and concepts to measure the effectiveness of formal governance. A creative tension exists between the modernizing and developmentalist framework and the more indigenous and local viewpoints.

Further Observations

As regards the main issues of *pang-ginahum*/governance and how power is used, the main questions center on who benefits (at present) and who should benefit most out of the social organization (*pungsod o pagtilipon*). When the collectivity is more useful for some and oppressive for most others, the purposes and goals of that iniquitous arrangement are going to be questioned.

A subsidiary question arising from the discussions would be: how is power organized and institutionalized? On the bases of the insights from the discussions, the instances of power indicate what '*gahum*' means. It is the power to lead, the power to do, the power to compel, the power to use resources, and also the power to organize and the power to

help concretize collective will. This exercise has institutional basis but that it must also have a moral basis in the sense that there have to principles enunciated in and guiding the exercise of that power. These principles cannot justify domination, oppressions and exclusion.

The power that emanates from guns, or power that derives its strength from forms of coercion, also have to be placed under legal and legitimate grounds. Citizens have realized that no violence, in various forms, should be done to them. Violence can be done when their rights are violated, or when they are not respected fully as persons worthy of equal treatment and dignity. They should also not be made subservient and docile, or physically intimidated through withholding access to basic resources. Or, when there is the threat of violence, sufficient safeguards should act as countervailing forces to that threat.

From the discussions it appears that, for the most part, the community members are generally passive when it comes to responding to governance initiatives. It is only when they are really aggrieved or suffering that they take action. And then it is not even evident and clear what it is they do aside from complain.

What are the people willing and able to do to strengthen their own barangay autonomy regardless of whether the barangay officials themselves are able to perform or not? Or what more can the citizens do so that the emerging relationships between governors and governed are not misdirected to other avenues, especially when there are promising opportunities for real progress? (*Ano pa tani ang mas nahimo sang mga tawo para indi mabugto ang nagaluntad nga relasyon sa mga nagadumala kag ginadumala?*) People were perhaps too passive or did not take enough initiative until things had already become difficult for them. Could they have done more in the situations they found themselves? Can there be effective leadership which can enable the communities to be critical and mitigate

the undesirable elements of proposed programs and policies?

What may be behind the relatively passive or weak initiative or ineffective opposition by grassroots groups? There appears to be a demand for 'change' or 'conversion' in the elites but there is no active process even towards this goal. What becomes the criterion of the 'repaired' relationship between the governors and the governed? Or how is the relationship moved from where it is now? The present situation could be described as one where there is exploitation and domination. How can it be transformed into one where people's resistance, albeit passive, is taken into account and the governors are converted? Would this be a realistic and even plausible process? If the present governance is undesirable, how is the ideal process of governance attained?

The citizens construe themselves as having been made into 'objects.' They are used, taken to be stupid; there is no real respect and human consideration. They are not given proper consideration as human beings, and yet they do view themselves as worthy of respect.

The criteria for judging how they are governed are necessarily moral in terms of how persons are viewed and treated, how they are dealt with. The moral norms that ordinary persons require of each other, should also be part of how they would like to be governed, or these become the bases for their expectations of how their governors should behave. A sense of decency and a sense of fairness are fundamentally humanly moral.

In identifying categories or criteria crucial for a government national policy to succeed, a key concept is the treatment of persons. How do the motives and purposes of the program construct its recipients? What are the latent assumptions and presuppositions in the actual implementation and specific provisions of the program

regarding the capabilities and qualities of the presumed beneficiaries of the program?

The directions of governance, from all the reflections, should then be:

1. Provision of basic needs, access to resources, and the legitimate use of authority;

2. Transparency, taking full accountability to people's interests and not those of a few (by implication, that power should not be used by the elite for their own aggrandizement, nor used to dominant and oppress);

3. Sustainable peace based on agreement and consent of the general population which will provide the guarantee of that peace;

4. Governance that provides for those least able to take care of themselves, and the concept of mental space which includes sensitivity to, awareness, and acting in behalf of the least able.

The rural Filipino citizen, instantiated in this case by the Negrense, considers herself deserving of respect, recognition and assistance. He is able to fulfill his side of the bargain; he keeps his obligations, albeit in a diminished or even passive role, not as assertive and as pro-active as might effectively be pursued. Tools for resistance are available, although sometimes passive or when pushed to the wall, violent. But should there be a break in the harmonious relationship, there are also efforts to mediate and even heal that break in the relationship. This desire for reconciliation and repair of the broken relationship gives the Filipino greatness of spirit. ❖

Notes

¹ Around forty discussions were conducted every year, for two years, with twelve to fifteen participants per group interview. Some community leaders would be present in several discussions to provide continuity. When a certain issue (e.g. Erap) would finished and a synthesis discussion held, after several weeks of discussing the issue, some of those who participated in the previous discussions would be invited back to provide a summation. The community leaders themselves would recommend who to invite for the succeeding discussions, or those who they think might have insights to give. While there was no conscious desire to give geographical distribution or "ideological" representativeness in terms of various ideas and perspectives expressed, there was also no intention to highlight only one perspective. What was sought were several "voices." This study does not aim for scientific rigor but perhaps an initial impression.

² In each case there was an exercise of power and people's lives were affected. There are commonalities as well as differences in how power was exercised and the people whose lives were affected responded to that exercise of power.

³ The word may also mean error or misdemeanor but here it is used in terms of a grave sin or misconduct.

⁴ *"Nagahamungaya pero ang iya mga ginapuslan nagamudmud sang aton pagpangabuhì tungod sa kapigaduhun."*

⁵ *"Ang ginaakigan sang mga pumuluyo ang bisyo, panahor, malapalasyo nga balay nga ginapatindog para sa iya nga babae...."*

⁶ "What is basically wrong with Jueteng? There are very disturbing facts about it. One: It is mostly the poor people whose precisely little money are gambled away. Two: there are but very few so called "winners" compared to the thousands of bettors. Three: Only about 15% of every peso is given as prizes, with the big 85% remaining portion mostly destined for the pockets of the Jueteng operators. Four: The numbers that win are drawn with neither fixed nor regulated norms, with deceit or misdeed, if not determined simply through the mental choice of the operators. Five: The criminal syndication of this supposedly "lowly" game of the poor and simple tao is now in the hands of hierarchically organized operators. See, *Krusadang Bayan Laban sa Jueteng. Catechism on Gambling*. Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan, December 2002, 2.

⁷ The Social weather Stations February 7, 2001 national survey reveals that fully 84% were aware of the January 16, 2001 Senate decision on the second envelope during the impeachment trial. 72% said that it was unjust not to open the second envelope. When asked "How acceptable

to the public was the replacement of Joseph Estrada with Macapagal-Arroyo as President of the Philippines?" 61% were for Very/Somewhat Acceptable. When asked whether "What was expressed at EDSA People Power II was the sentiment of the majority?" 71% said the revolution was the will of the majority, and 61% agreed that People Power II which forced Estrada out of office was just. See, Dennis M. Arroyo, "EDSA II: How acceptable was Gloria?" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 19, 2003.

⁸ It is significant for the people that when Erap left Malacañang, he left through the back. "Para sa tawo, nanaog si Erap sa likod. Nag-agi sa atubangan, ginahadlukan ang mga tawo. Kay ang atubangan ang 'puerta major', kun naga-agi sa luyo buot hambalon nga naga-abandonar." 'Panaog' in the context of family or household. Ginpanaog o manaog, either forced to face the visitor, or to come down and face the suitor. Also in the sense of being made to come down and meet people as people. What is also important is the concept of *pag-atubang*, to face, to confront, to also treat the accuser as worthy of being responded to.

⁹ "Makapataas sang moral sang Pilipino kay kita mismo kabalo magsilot sa mga Pilipino nga wala nagahimo sang insakto?" (In response to the question, what is the value of our being able to punish Erap?) But Denis Murphy in *The Manila Chronicle*, January 4, 1993 says "No elite anywhere in the world has pardoned so many of its errant members as the Philippine elite. Despite all the financial corruption, political mayhem, personal violence, and treason of the last 45 years, few if any members of the elite have been punished – not even martial law torturers, the coup leaders who nearly wrecked the country in 1987 and 1989, not the contractors who stole from the Mt. Pinatubo rehabilitation funds."

¹⁰ The public image that Estrada still had even after he was deposed was such that people felt pity and sympathy for him. The identification of his being an underdog, as being oppressed (*kinakawawa*) or as having become worthy of pity *translated into votes*. Prof. Felipe Miranda mentions in conversation, February 4, 2003 in Naga City, that there was somehow a sense that people felt Erap- was being unjustly treated such that when he was arrested *before* the senatorial elections of 2001, this feeling that Erap was being unjustly treated translated into the opposition being able to win two more slots in the senatorial race, compared to if he was arrested *after* the elections.

¹¹ "Importante nga mabal-an ni Erap kun ano ang buot hambalon sang pagka-imol para mabal-an niya kun ano ang iya ginbuhat sa tawo para marealizar niya kun ano ang iya nangin sala. Mabatyagan niya/ pabatyagon siya kun paano ang kabuhi sang pigado, makita niya kun paano gaguluwa ang balhas sang pigado. Imbis nga patyon, tagaan anay ligwa paano niya hinulsulan ang iya kabuki. Ang him-us, madulaan sang kaugot, may proseso nga naga-kaigo, kun mahim-usan sila sang ila kaugot."

¹² Laborer for daily wages, pejorative term for the lowest kind of laborer. According to Jose Tomacruz, Jr., "*Jornales* were actually itinerant *sacadas* (sugarcane cutters). Basically they were then coming from the Cebuano-speaking areas of the Visayas. The cultural nuance is very important because for Ilonggos (of Negros and Iloilo) to be called "Cebuano" is pejorative. It means "baduy", gauche, uneducated. I suspect that this view also has its origins in the fact that Cebuano-speaking people encountered by Negrenses from the earlier days of the hacienda system were the *jornales*, the itinerant *sacadas*. We have to remember that even among the hacienda workers there has always existed a stratification. And the *jornales* were at the last rung. Indeed if *jornales* became equivalent to lowest-paid workers, it is also because they are the lowest-rung *sacadas*. Another thing, among the biting, pejorative terms used by old people to censure children was to tell them "daw jornal ka!")

¹³ Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Semi-Annual Accomplishment Report, First Semester of 2002, 34-35.

¹⁴ While there are no real RPA controlled areas now, the government is allowing for the conditions of what a controlled area is, to be actualized. In a controlled area, what the rebel group commands is followed, the people lose their rights. The rebel group can do whatever they want, the people have to follow whatever the rebel group commands. The people lose their ability to voice out their opposition. All major decisions will now depend on the armed group, among others. The people will not just be unable to speak their minds, they will also be forced to follow rules that will be imposed on them, which then they have to fulfill on pain of punishment or retribution.

¹⁵ Enabling conditions include: using a livelihood project to be able to control a community and then the community becomes beholden to them (e.g. the PhP 500 million development fund), the presence itself of the armed group will instill fear among communities. Since there will be no dis-arming of the RPA soldiers as part of the peace agreement (in fact they will have licenses to carry arms) and more so since they will have roles in maintaining the peace and order situation in cooperation with the PNP/AFP, the people are made to believe that the armed group is their protector. And due to failure of national and local governance, the people will cling to the armed group.

¹⁶ It should be mentioned that from the perspective of Eduardo Ermita, the present Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, in remarks given to the Negros Peace congress, December 12, 2001, the rebels should not have to "surrender" without honor, that there should be no sign of "capitulation" in the peace agreement, but that the concerns of the rebels should be addressed, and if that means giving concessions to them which will make the RPA feel that they have gotten a good deal, for the sake of peace, Ermita says, it will be worth taking that path. But, this

attitude does affirm the perception of the communities that concessions were given to "pacify" and "errant child."

¹⁷ (Satur) Ocampo said it was widely reported in December 2000 that the RPA-ABB met with then Pres. Joseph Estrada and his police chief, now Sen. Panfilo Lacson at the Mansion House in Baguio City to sell an agreement under which the hit squad would "assist" the PNP in enforcing peace and order." See, Julie Labor-Javellana and TJ Burgonio, "Satur: Gov't provoking war with the Left" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 26, 2003, A6. Ocampo's remarks imply that the RPA is being used for counter-insurgency.

¹⁸ The concept can best be understood in terms of pressure, direct or indirect, which almost "chains" the person to limited options, and makes him subject to another's will.

¹⁹ Would be equivalent to the Tagalog "utang na loob" but can actually be different in certain instances because the debtor sometimes does not have to ask but there is already implied obligation because certain services were given or offered and accepted, or were very necessary and the obligation to repay is taken upon voluntarily.

²⁰ 'Mental space.' "Gina-updan ko bala ang sitwasyon sang tawo (their oppression, poverty, pagka-pigado). Ano na ang akon ginahimo para masolvar ang sitwasyon? Ano ang akon sabat sa "Ga-upod ka sa amon?" "

²¹ A verb that denotes utter confusion. The colloquial picture used by Ilonggos is the chicken being chased, scampering in various directions so as to save itself.

²² Violence is unregulated by law, whereas force is legitimated by law and backed up by values. See, Sergio Cotta. *Why Violence? A Philosophical Interpretation*. University of Florida Press: Gainesville, Fla., 1978, 83.