

The Filipino Peasant in the Modern World: Tradition, Change and Resilience*

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Abstract: *This article examines a traditional upland peasant community subjected to change-oriented interventions from external state and non-state forces. As a result, various modifications took place in the villages with the introduction of new technologies, crop diversification, market contacts, social differentiation, formal governmental structures, decline in the number of farmers, growth of a working class, increased contacts with and knowledge of the non-peasant external world, and physical separation of families. Using various analytical frameworks on the nature of peasant society via a modified peasant essentialist approach, agrarian change, rural development, social movements, everyday resistance, moral economy, and a history from below approach, this article depicts and analyzes how traditional peasant society is able to withstand the changes brought about by external factors and essentially retain its household-based small farm economy, socially-determined norms and practices, and feelings of community and solidarity.*

Key words: *peasant society, agrarian change, small family farms, peasant resistance, history from below, role of the state*

Introduction

This essay starts from the assumption that in the rural areas of developing societies such as the Philippines, a distinct and internally resilient peasant¹ society persists based on smallholder productive activities with its own social, economic, political, and cultural

* This essay is a short and updated version of the author's Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Southeast Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore in December 2005.

** The author also acknowledges the Office of the Chancellor, in collaboration with the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Development of the University of the Philippines-Diliman, for funding support through the Ph.D. Incentive Award. He also wishes to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

characteristics that distinguish it from non-peasant communities. Such a society gives rise to a peasant class with norms and practices that evoke a feeling of community and collectivity that set it apart from non-peasants.

This assumption was brought to bear on a community of three farming villages in an upland area in the Central Luzon region in the Philippines. This community's socio-economic and cultural structures are founded on small farms utilizing family labor and simple technology, are mainly subsistence-oriented, have minimal market contacts and adhere to a set of traditional norms and practices associated with a peasant ethic. The latter included reciprocity, village solidarity, concepts of justice, land and property rights, informal land transactions and ways of settling disputes.

For a period of fifty years from the 1950s to the beginning of a new millennium, the resilience of this peasant community has been tested by a series of interventions from outside forces each with its own agenda for change. The most prominent of these were a government integrated rural development project promising instant prosperity, leftwing rebel insurgents with a Marxist vision of a just society, and "sugar capitalists" offering the lure of market profits. Other external forces were a United States (U.S.) military installation that had legal title over the area and an inept government relocation program in the wake of a volcanic eruption. At present, a new external force has impinged on the community in the form of a special economic zone.

As a result of interactions with these outsiders, changes took place in the villages with the introduction of new agricultural technologies, crop diversification and intensification, increased market contacts, increased knowledge of the non-peasant external world, and the physical separation of families due to urban and foreign migration.

The peasant villagers adapted to these changes as best as they could while at the same time retaining their socially-determined norms, practices, and economic modes. This essay depicts the continuities in traditional peasant society in the midst of changes brought about by external forces.

The main objective of this essay is to look into the nature of peasant society and the peasant class in the three villages to determine the presence of an internal logic and dynamic with specific socio-economic, political and cultural characteristics that would make for a uniquely peasant community.

A specific objective is to reveal the continuities and discontinuities of peasant society in the face of external interventions by reconstructing the historical development of the three rural villages through life histories of the village residents as recounted by them.

The above-mentioned objectives are addressed by focusing on five related theoretical concepts surrounding the research study: (1) the nature of peasant society with respect to socio-economic and class structures; (2) the process of agrarian change; (3) the role of peasants in revolutionary movements; (4) rural development strategies and the role of the state; and (5) history from below, moral economies and everyday forms of resistance.

Nature of Peasant Society, Class and Agrarian Change

Scholarly work on the nature of peasant society can be divided into two major traditions: (1) the peasant "essentialists", (2) the "non-essentialists."

The essentialist view takes off from Chayanov's "theory of peasant behaviour at the level of the individual family farm "which gave rise to an economy "with its own growth dynamic and economic system" that is "akin to a mode of production" (Kerblay 1987:177, Bryceson 2000:11, and Bernstein and Byres 2001). The distinctness of peasant society lies in its family-based labor; production more for subsistence needs than for profit; its kinship social patterns; its self-sufficiency and self-reproduction; the feeling of community in relation to external forces appropriating the farm surplus and exercising hegemony over it; its world view; and its persistence throughout human history.

Non-essentialists deny that there exists a unique peasant mode of production pointing out that while "peasants were found in a variety of pre-capitalist modes of production ... they also operate within the capitalist mode of production which has spread globally and dissolved pre-capitalist modes of production virtually everywhere in the world" (Alavi 1987:186).

This essay basically adopts the essentialist interpretation but complements it with a concept of mode of production (MOP) used in an all embracing sense, i.e., referring to the broad organization of society rather than limited to socio-economic features. A related concept used is that of the "articulation and coexistence of modes of production" (Wolpe 1980):

De Janvry (1981:96) noted that while Marx often used the term "peasant mode of production,"² he never gave a precise and exclusive definition of "mode of production" in his writings.

Instead, he used "mode" to refer to different things according to need – sometimes it refers to the manner (i.e., mode) of material production and sometimes to the broad organization of society; sometimes it is a concrete historical object and other times an abstract model.

The use of "mode of production" to refer to "the broad organization of society" finds resonance with Fine and Harris (1979:12-13) who similarly pointed out that:

Marx uses the concept of mode of production in several senses, sometimes referring specifically to production, sometimes to the economic process as a whole, and sometimes to all social relations which include political and ideological as well as economic relations. ... We adopt the last, all-embracing, concept of a mode of production.³

As for the peasantry, they form "an independent class" with the logic of their "peasantness" unchanging while the forms of their "external

relations are variable and contingent." They are not just a class "in itself" but also a class "for itself" and are "aware of their distinction from, and ... their subalternity to ... the minorities of non-peasants" (Hobsbawm 1998:198-199). Peasants, however, are not confined to soil cultivation and food production but are also engaged in a myriad of household-based productive activities (Elson 1997).

On changes taking place within agrarian society, the classical Marxist notion sees an ascendant capitalism sweeping aside all previous modes of production and transforming them into the new mode. Peasants are dispossessed of their small farms and become a rural proletariat.

Kautsky, however, argued that the development of large capitalist farms and their subsequent domination over the small peasant farms merely results in a complementary relationship whereby the existence of the latter provides a supply of cheap labor for the former (Alavi 1987:192). Thus, the peasantry may not disappear at all given the proposition that in the relations and interactions with external forces (e.g. dominant classes and the state), the "various forms of appropriation" are all "external to the inner essence/dynamic of peasant existence," which continue to flourish (Bernstein and Byres 2001:7).

But even in conditions where the majority of rural labor is now wage-earning and do not own any land, "the majority of this group have access to land through their family ties or through ... tenant farming" and thereby "retain their quality of peasants by virtue of their ties with the peasant form of existence of their rural communities" (Harris 1978:8).

To summarize, peasant society, with its family-based labor, production for basic needs (use value) and not for profit (exchange value), kinship social organizational patterns (reciprocity), self-sufficiency and capacity to reproduce itself, feeling of community in relation to external forces appropriating the farm surplus product and exercising political hegemony over, distinct cultural norms, cognitions and practices (world view), and persistence throughout human history all point to a distinct and relatively stable socio-economic system.⁴

Role of Peasants in Revolutionary Movements

Marxist theories depict the peasantry as essentially conservative when it comes to revolutionary change, particularly if this is initiated by non-peasants such as the proletariat. This attitude is rooted in the family-operated and smallholder-based village economy. Capitalism dooms smallholder production, but rather than siding with the proletariat, the peasantry clings to the land and rejects socialist calls for nationalization of the land, which to them means the expropriation of their farms.

History, however, is replete with occurrences of large scale peasant rebellions but in most of these, leadership as well as the guiding ideas come from the ranks of non-peasants. Thus, while the actual role that peasants have played in contemporary revolutionary movements have far exceeded the limitations placed on it by classical Marxist analysis, the latter's view that the peasantry by themselves would be unable to overthrow the existing order has also seen its validation in many instances where revolutionary peasant movements were stimulated through the media of "ideas, men, and organizational forms that came from the cities and industrialized towns"⁵ (Chesneaux 1973:151-152).

Rural Development and the Role of the State

In most post-colonial societies in the post-World War II period, rural change was synonymous with "modernization" which aimed at transforming the non-capitalist and subsistence-oriented sections and bringing them into the world of the modern and market-oriented capitalist sectors using technological and scientific inputs and new social organizations.

The results have been rapid but uneven technological changes, peasant differentiation and marginalization, increasing commercialization of an outward-looking agriculture based on large capitalist farms, increased rural poverty, decline of food crops *vis-à-vis* export crops and increased food imports, land concentration, peasant dislocations, semi-proletarianization

and landlessness, mechanization and unemployment, increased regional disparities, and class inequalities (De Janvry 1981:226-228).

To prevent the situation from further causing economic and political instabilities, government planners repackaged the old rationale under previous equity-oriented programs under the umbrella of "rural development" programs (RDP). Integrated rural development programs (IRDP) are one variant of this repackaged strategy.

IRDPs were to "develop" peasant communities *in situ* with the provision of a range of technological and social services. Rather than separating the direct producer from the means of production, IRDPs were instead to tie peasants to the land under the management and supervision of the state. As peasant households often "resist complete expropriation" or subjugation to "particular modes of (capitalist) regulation and labor discipline," RDPs often took the form of a "pacification" or counter-insurgency campaign (Bernstein 1981:18 and Bello, Kinley and Elinson 1982:70).

State intervention in society also arose from the need for "legibility," a process of making accessible and open to easier manipulation that which had been outside the realm of knowledge and control of the state (Scott 1998:183-191). To assert their authority, states engage in attempts to transform *non-state spaces* into *state spaces* by concentrating populations in permanent settlements and engaging in projects where the government can reconfigure the society and economy of those who are to be "developed."

Social History, History from Below, Moral Economy, and Everyday Resistance

"History from below" is basically "grassroots history," which is an outgrowth of social history, a scholarship that is concerned with the poor and lower classes and their social movements (Hobsbawm 1997a:71-72). Compared to other disciplines, social history deals with various aspects of human beings that can only be studied in relation to

one another — the social, political, religious, economic activities, and ideas and concepts (Ileto 1988:198, Scott 2001:2).

It must also delve into “cultural values and traditions” to “reveal hidden or unarticulated features of society” and “... study the workings and structure of popular reasoning as revealed through local people’s alternative meanings of concepts and practices” (Ileto 1979:10-14).

Technical problems related to the (1) lack of documentation; (2) the “time lag between research and result”; (3) the unreliability of oral accounts; and (4) the danger of “imposing facts and solutions” can be addressed by either (1) determining the respective social constructions of people’s accounts; (2) sociological ingenuity and a bit of psychology; or, (3) constructing a model, a lucid and coherent picture of a system of behaviour and thought (Tilly 2002:37-38 and Hobsbawm 1997b:204).

A useful tool for understanding popular consciousness is the notion of a peasant moral economy based on the subsistence ethic and arising out of poor cultivators “living so close to the margin” (Scott 1976:4-12). This peasant world view consists of (1) the “notion of economic justice,” (2) a working definition of exploitation, (3) application of the “safety first” or “risk avoidance” principle in farm production, and (4) “a set of cultural decencies” that defines what “full citizenship in local society means” (Scott 1985:236-237). Violations of these concepts of social equity and justice could “provoke resentment and resistance.”

Looking at history from the viewpoint of the masses uncovers “everyday forms of peasant resistance” that are part of the day-to-day struggles of the peasantry against external impositions. Also called “weapons of the weak,” they are distinct from outward forms such as rebellions, are passive, spontaneous, stop short of collective outright defiance,” require little or no coordination or planning,” rely on individual actions, and are aimed more at self-help than in achieving reforms (Scott 1985:28-37).

Forms of everyday resistance also carry us into the realm of “everyday politics” or “politics in everyday life” (Kerkvliet 1991). This entails looking

at politics as it pervades the daily lives of people as they interact “in different class and status positions” while making claims on each other in the context of rural inequalities.

Peasant Continuities and Changes

The above theoretical concepts were utilized in looking at the three villages of San Vicente and Santo Niño in the provincial town of Bamban, Tarlac and Calumpang in Mabalacat, Pampanga, 5,612 hectares of rolling hills and mountains in the Central Luzon region. The now famous Mount Pinatubo defined the area’s southwestern boundaries. To the southeast sprawled the American military complex, Clark Air Base, home of the U.S. 13th Air Force (until it was forced to close down in 1992). As tracked in this article, the story begins in the early 1950s and ends at the beginning years of the new millennium or a period of fifty (50) years. Within this time frame, the community’s brief history can be roughly divided into the following:

1. Early 1950s to early 1960s – establishing and building the community
2. Early 1960s – sugar and commercialized agriculture
3. Late 1960s to 1970s – period of left-wing insurgencies
4. 1980s to 1990 – intensive state intervention through a rural development project and when the three barangays became collectively known as Sacobia
5. 1991 to 1992 – devastation from the Mt. Pinatubo eruption
6. 1996 onwards – life under a special economic zone

The external forces and influences which the area’s residents have had to engage with are the following:

1. The U.S. military forces through Clark Air Base
2. Commercialization through the sugar capitalists
3. Left wing insurgents through the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (HMB) and later the New People’s Army (NPA)

4. The Sacobia integrated rural development project
5. The government relocation plan in the wake of the Mt. Pinatubo eruptions
6. The Clark special economic zone

Pre-1950s Period

Before most of the Clark Air Base lands reverted to the Philippine government in 1979, the villages of San Vicente, Sto. Niño and Calumpang were part of the American military base's 63,200-hectare area. Virtually all of these lands occupied by the U.S. military in 1903 are ancestral lands of the indigenous Ayta people. In exchange for their communal lands, the U.S. military offered "presents" to the Aytas such as free education, regular distribution of American foodstuffs, and medicines.

A few Ayta families, however, were allowed to stay on within the base and some were hired as security guards, jungle survival trainers, domestic helpers, or cleaning and maintenance personnel. They were also granted the "privilege" of scavenging at the huge garbage and dump site within the base for any scrap or recyclable material which they could sell in the markets of Angeles or Mabalacat.

In 1944, the hills of Bamban were also the site of a fierce air and land battles between returning American troops and Japanese soldiers who were defending Clark Air Base (Yopez 2003). In the month-long encounter, 30,000 Japanese defenders and 2,500 American and Filipino soldiers died in battles fought in the Bamban and Clark Field areas alone.

The 1950s

In the plains of Tarlac and Pampanga, conditions of the peasantry during the late forties and early fifties were becoming more oppressive. Coming in the wake of the devastation caused by World War II, the peasants resented the reimposed sharing arrangements where one-half of expenses was borne by the tenant in return for keeping only half of

the harvest. Agrarian unrest escalated in the countryside as the People's Liberation Army (HMB), the armed component of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, (PKP, Communist Party of the Philippines) and other radical peasant revolutionary organizations waged an armed struggle against the big landowners and the Philippine government.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, and notwithstanding the military reservation character of the place, the hilly lands just north and northwest of the main Clark perimeter area were virtually open to any settler who wished to clear the area and cultivate crops. Peasants from the lowland areas chose to look for other lands to farm where they would be relatively free to cultivate crops and retain control over the disposition of the produce. Peasants from Pampanga and Tarlac fleeing from oppressive landowners and the increasingly violent encounters between rebels and government fled to the northern upland part of the Clark FieldFort Stotsenburg area.

In the early fifties, more lowland settlers moved into the reservation area. The new entrants bought land rights from the Aytas at give-away prices.⁶ In some instances, Ayta lands could be had in exchange for food stuff, farming implements, tobacco, or even alcohol. Farm parcels were not clearly delineated and the amount of land acquired was often based on the settler-farmer's capacity to work it.

There was not much concern over the fact that such land transactions, operating as it were within an informal market, were not legal. The land was after all classified as a military reservation and therefore was "inalienable and indisposable." These land transactions were binding oral agreements based on customary rural practices handed down through many generations.

In any case, the indigenous Ayta families had to surrender the valleys and move further up the mountains. In what is now San Vicente, a settler community emerged with about fifty farmhouses scattered over a farming area. Later, as word of the new land got around, relatives and friends arrived to join the pioneers.

As the area being settled was part of the Clark Air Base military reservation over which the Americans enjoyed exclusive jurisdiction, permanent cultivation or settlements was prohibited. However, while some older residents reported that neither the Clark Base officials nor the Philippine government interfered with their colonization of the area, others recalled being arrested by horseback-riding American soldiers and brought to the military base for interrogation.⁷

Serious attention by the U.S. military of the settlers' moves was absent, however, and the rural communities continued to grow as a result.⁸ The early lowlander settlers built irrigation canals and cultivated a variety of food crops and planted fruit trees. Though mainly subsistence-based, some of the peasant-settlers produced a modest surplus that was sold in nearby town markets.

The three villages in this study were not immune to the peasant unrest that raged in Central Luzon during the late forties and fifties. The HMB actively operated in the area. The attitude among the residents was "live and let live" with the rebels. Some settlers had relatives who were active in the HMB.

Commercialization and the Coming of Sugar

In the early sixties, commercial agriculture represented by sugar interests entered the area and encouraged cane cultivation among the settlers. This coincided with the establishment of a sugar central in Bamnan. "Sugar capitalists" supplied the financing while the settlers provided the land and labor. The settlers were organized by overseers of the "capitalists" to plant cane sugar. In Calumpang and Sto. Niño, sugar became the main crop while San Vicente farmers intercropped it with palay. Because of its commercial value, sugar occupied the best level lands (*patag*).

The introduction of sugar instituted changes in the subsistence-oriented agriculture that the settler-farmers had earlier established. Only

the Aytas who had been driven to the hinterlands were left to pursue a basically, though not entirely, pre-capitalist mode. A few cane sugar cultivators reported high incomes, but the majority languished in a marginal existence. A classic peasant differentiation pattern was emerging. Some farmers with larger plots and greater surpluses were hiring wage workers and recruiting tenants from among their neighbors.

The family-based peasant production mode, however, persisted and was a source of cheap labor with most cultivators engaging in self-exploitation to supply the cane for the sugar mills. This situation is illustrative of the coexistence between a peasant mode and a capitalist mode. The "sugar capitalists" reaped double profits as responsibility for the land's upkeep remained with the farmers. For most farmers, however, the sugar incomes had to be supplemented by growing food crops to cover their basic subsistence needs.

Most labor was based on a modified daily or piece wage system. Harvesting was based on a contractual type cut-and-carry labor arrangement. The landholder was obliged to provide free food and drinks and the workers brought home whatever fruits they were allowed to gather from the landholder's trees. A form of shared pool labor also existed as when extra labor was needed in the fields.

The settler farmers intensively utilized all available cultivable lands. In many instances, the land especially in the sugar areas, became overutilized. Despite accounts by several longtime residents of good harvests and adequate farm incomes, a 1975 government report also stated that "crop production is below the average production level of the country and even of the region."

From the sixties to the early seventies, sugar was the area's main agricultural crop, covering almost two-thirds of all agricultural cropland. Palay was a distant second with one-fourth of farm area. Sugar, however, started declining when leftwing guerrilla groups started penetrating the villages.

From HMB to NPA

During the late sixties and early seventies, the Bamban-Mabalacat-Angeles area was the scene of intense and bloody confrontations between four armed groups: (1) government troops and its notorious death squad nicknamed the "Monkees"; (2) the renegade ex-HMB Sumulong Group which had degenerated into a criminal syndicate nicknamed the "Beatles"; (3) the Maoist New People's Army (NPA) under Bernabe Buscayno; and (4) the remnants of the PKP-HMB under Mariano "Kumander Diwa" de Guzman. These rivalries were characterized by constant surveillance, street battles, assassinations, harassments, beatings, and kidnappings.

Many town and lowland residents wishing to escape the conflicts and avoid being caught in the crossfire moved to the interior villages of San Vicente, Calumpang, and Sto. Niño, thus further increasing the area's population. But as the conflicts spread, even these communities were not spared.

The HMB, the official armed component of the PKP, had by the mid-sixties declined as an effective revolutionary group. Within the PKP, a major split occurred which saw the establishment in December 1967 of a rival party calling itself the Communist Party of the Philippines Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought (CPPML- MTT). A charismatic former HMB guerrilla leader from Capas, Tarlac, Bernabe "Kumander Dante" Buscayno, founded what was to become the New People's Army (NPA), later to be adopted by the newly-organized CPP as its military wing. In the eyes of the Tarlac and Pampanga peasantry, the NPA would soon take the place of the HMB as the primary radical armed group operating in Central Luzon.

Within this socially volatile situation, peasant unrest in the three villages of this study entered a period of resurgence with the NPA gaining adherents among the peasant-producers. In the mid-seventies, the situation had become too critical for comfort and the "sugar capitalists" started withdrawing from the area. By the late seventies, or just about

the time the integrated rural development (IRD) initiative that was to become known as the Sacobia project was being conceptualized and planned, sugar cane had already been reduced to a secondary crop. The commercialization process was thus reversed and the village economy reverted to its pre-sugar subsistence mode.

The NPA saw the relatively inaccessible barrios of San Vicente, Calumpang, and Sto. Niño as natural sanctuaries. The absence of wealthy landowners who would feel threatened by their presence also aided their entry into the area. NPA leader Buscayno, as well as other NPA units, were frequent visitors where they would sometimes stay for a whole week — helping with housework and in the farmwork. Some barangay residents, including a number of Aytas, joined the NPA.

The NPA practically functioned as the local government. The residents seemed to appreciate the way the rebels managed affairs. When the NPA was in control, the farmers could leave their houses for days, even weeks, and in contrast with the past, nothing would be missing when they returned.

The NPA organized regular three day live-in seminars in Angeles City where San Vicente residents from different barangays and towns would attend. During his visits, Kumander Dante explained to the farmers that the NPA was a movement for equality aimed at ending all oppression. He also described a society where there would be no rich and no poor. A strong sense of voluntarism was imparted among the people as represented by slogans like "Strengthen Our Resolve" and "Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win".

Despite the generally positive attitude the settlers had of the NPA, they were often caught between the two contending forces in the struggle. Although the NPA could enter the area at will, the place was by no means free of encroachments by the Philippine military. On numerous occasions, government troops and NPA guerrillas would miss each other by only a few minutes in some villager's house. There was at least one gun battle between government and NPA forces in San Vicente where a brother of Dante was reported to have been killed.

It could be said that different motivations were at work that made barrio residents lend assistance to the NPA. Certainly, some were genuinely attracted to the NPA's vision of an egalitarian society. But even those who expressed admiration for the rebels' high ethical standards and exemplary behavior also say they thought they would be killed if they did not cooperate. They did compare and contrast the NPA's behavior with that of government troops whom they would also feed but would never pay for what they take. Of course, for those with relatives in the guerrilla movement or had been involved in past agrarian struggles, the motivations were clear. It was a question of family survival and kinship ties. Still, the settlers had to walk a tightrope.

The ambivalent attitude of the settlers toward the NPA was perhaps manifested subconsciously by their reference to the guerrillas as "people from the outside" (*taong labas*) or simply the "armed group" (*hukbo*). One resident thought the promised equality was unattainable because the rich and powerful would always be what they are.

This ambivalence sometimes took the form of everyday resistance as when the NPA was recruiting villagers into their guerrilla army. Some household heads expressed the desire to do so only on condition that the movement would take care of their family while they were away. Since the guerrillas could make no such assurance, that provided the peasants an excuse to decline the invitation.

The Security Problems at Clark Air Base

In the midst of the social unrest that raged in Pampanga and Tarlac, the mammoth and tightly-secured Clark Air Base complex seemed oblivious to the turmoil outside its fences. Clark authorities were concerned not with armed left-wing guerrillas but with security problems the base was experiencing due to the presence of thousands of squatter families around the military base.

Along the fringes of Clark Air Base were two economically-depressed slum communities named Marcos and Macapagal, whose uncomfortably

close existence to the military facility caused worries for the American authorities. Cases of pilferage in Clark Air Base and other security issues were reported. Despite the scavenging rights accorded by American base authorities to Ayta squatter families living around Clark, harassments by armed guards often took place.⁹

Among the many factors rationalizing the establishment of the integrated rural development project in the three villages, it was mainly the problems posed by the slum communities of Marcos and Macapagal in relation to the security of Clark Air Base that set in motion the project's planning process (MHS-IACC 1979). The idea was to relocate the squatter-residents of Marcos and Macapagal to the IRD project area.

A relocation and resettlement plan was finalized in 1979 with the identification of the area occupied by the villages of San Vicente, Sto. Niño and Calumpang as the project site which now became collectively known as Sacobia, after the major river that cuts through the villages. The reversion of 41,000 hectares of Clark lands to the Philippine government in the same year facilitated the process.

Rural Development Imelda-Style

The government agency tasked to implement the development project was the powerful Ministry of Human Settlements (MHS) headed by Imelda Romualdez Marcos.¹⁰ The first item on the IRD agenda was to purge Sacobia of the NPA insurgents and neutralize their mass base. As many as three Army battalions were sent to the area. All known NPAs and their sympathizers were rounded up and many were tortured and subsequently informed on their comrades. The communities were fenced in and military checkpoints set up. Soldiers' camps dotted the area all the way to the mountains. Faced with this massive show of government force, the NPA was forced to abandon the area. With the rebel insurgents out of the picture, the IRD project could now be implemented full scale. Not surprisingly, the SDA was placed under the command of a retired Army major general.

The original settlers were deprived of their landholdings but promised a rapid government-initiated development of their area that was calculated to turn them into self-sufficient and prosperous farmers. In the meantime, the soldiers took over the operation of their farms. Some of the settlers were hired as wage laborers in their own farms.

The SDA Annual Report in 1990 reported that its programs consisted of livelihood projects, community development projects, and infrastructure development. Most of the family livelihood projects, however, such as rice and crop farms were initiatives of the local population with little or no assistance from any government agency. In this manner, the peasant mode of production based on family farms proved resilient notwithstanding the efforts of the rural development project. One tangible though inadequate project was the shelter program which consisted of one hundred (100) cottages in San Vicente and fifty (50) semi-brick cottages constructed for Ayta families.

But as a pet project of Imelda Marcos, Sacobia generated enough showcase projects and was provided with almost unlimited funds estimated to have totaled one billion pesos (U.S.\$100 million in the early eighties). The main showcase was a modern goat breeding, dispersal and dairy farm that imported 1,200 Anglo-Nubian goats from Australia as initial breeding stock.

Social and political problems arose over time. While the farms were eventually returned to the original cultivators after two years, the loss of control over their lands and the insecurity of tenure engendered by the SDA's near absolute authority over the entire area bred discontent and dissatisfaction among the population. Some of the relocatees from Macapagal and Marcos villages were hired as "emergency laborers" but at pitiful wages.

Ayta farmers vividly recall the harshness of the first years of the IRD project with those who refused to give up their farms being threatened with the use of military force. Natives who could neither read nor write were shown copies of an alleged Presidential order that supposedly authorized the land seizures.

Everyday forms of resistance cropped up. The dispossessed farmers resented the alternative offered of converting them into wage workers, a status they considered demeaning. They also complained that the project targeted for development lands which they had already been developing for many years. To dramatize their disgust, some farmers even rejected the offer of housing.

Some of the older residents in San Vicente tried to organize resistance against the SDA incursions by linking up with regional and national peasant organizations. But all they got was moral support and nothing else. They also went to legislators from Pampanga and Tarlac and to other government agencies asking for help in securing titles to their farmlands but got the same answer everywhere: the land was classified as a military reservation and could not be released for distribution.

These instances of resistance can be viewed from the moral economy perspective as the peasant-settlers considered a grave injustice the imposition of the rural development project on their community and the sufferings it caused.

The IRD Agenda Self-Destructs

The high-handed manner of implementation of the Sacobia IRD project, the human rights violations, the top-down administrative procedures, the absence of meaningful participation from the beneficiaries, the patronizing attitude of Sacobia officials towards the farmers, and the worlds-apart gulf in perceptions and expectations between the government authorities and the settler families all conspired to undermine the project and render it virtually ineffectual.

The Sacobia project's problems were aggravated by a serious economic and political crisis that rocked the country in 1983-84 in the wake of the assassination of former Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., a prominent Marcos opponent. The crisis resulted in large budget cuts for the Sacobia project and forced major adjustments. Infrastructure such as housing was scaled down and the major projects including the agro-

industrial estate and the three dendro-thermal plants were canceled. When the livelihood projects "turned over" to the settlers floundered, there was no choice left but to return to the status quo ante of small family farms. The most marginalized settlers even went back to basic subsistence production.

After Imelda's Fall

Under the new administration of Corazon Aquino (1986-1992), the SDA's budget from the central government shrunk to the barest minimum and the agency could barely keep its daily operations going. Moreover, according to SDA household surveys conducted in 1990, the population had declined, illiteracy and unemployment remained high, and household incomes averaged a mere U.S.\$26 a month for half of the families and lower for the other half.

The social composition of residents was changing. While in the pre-LAD period, 66-70 percent consisted of smallholder farmers, this dropped to 31 percent in 1990 while workers and other laborers now comprised 38 percent of the working population.

However, the greater figure for workers is deceptive because of the large numbers employed by the SDA in an emergency status. These wage workers performed menial and low-skilled agro-forestry work with no hope of advancement. Without the SDA jobs, most of them would most likely be participating in farming and other family-based agricultural labor, which is what they eventually did upon the loss of their jobs. In any case, through kinship arrangements, their ties to the family-farms in the area remained. Given this, and taking into account this essay's definition of the peasantry, the peasant mode of production continued to be the dominant mode in the villages.

As it became obvious that the promise of a better life in a modern progressive rural community was turning into an empty hope, many settlers and relocatees started leaving the area. Furthermore, the many restrictions imposed on their lives were getting to be more oppressive. According to one informant, of the original 500 settler-families, 300

eventually left — a classic “flight” syndrome associated with everyday forms of resistance.

In the meantime, the remaining residents continued with their traditional practice of buying and selling land rights. What is remarkable with this customary practice is that despite the now higher prices involved (e.g., PhP150,000 or U.S.\$3,750 for a 2-hectare plot in 1991), the practice of sealing land transactions through verbal agreements continued unchanged.

Another form of everyday resistance carried over from the Marcos years was the disdain with which the residents regarded the SDA’s attempt to formalize farmland and homelot occupancy agreements with them. In an effort to make legible the virtually non-state spaces occupied by the peasant-settlers, agreement forms were distributed among the settlers but only a few signed to indicate their acceptance of the terms offered them. In any case, the issues that bred dissatisfaction and resentment among Sacobia residents continued to linger after the ouster of the Marcos regime and the institution of a new administration.

The Mount Pinatubo Calamity

The destruction wrought by the Mount Pinatubo eruptions of 1991-92 was extensive and highly destructive. Houses and buildings collapsed from the weight of accumulated volcanic sand and ash on their rooftops and farmhouses along the banks of the rivers were swept away by the deadly volcanic flows (*lahar*). Families in San Vicente managed to save their homes by either refusing to evacuate or returning periodically to clean their rooftops. Some fields were buried in one to two meters of volcanic sand and mud. Farm animals drowned and trees were uprooted. Tens of hectares of fruit tree orchards were destroyed.

All bridges crumbled and cut off the entire area for weeks. Heavy rains then turned the rivers into mini lakes that spilled over into the roads whose foundations were eroded by the *lahar*-induced widening of river banks. Deposits of volcanic sand, ash and mud ten to fifteen centimeters

thick quickly hardened when the water receded. The irrigation systems, minidams and deepwells all ceased to operate. During the rainy months of 1992, massive *lahar* flows from Mount Pinatubo caused the waters from the Sacobia River to inundate the valley where half of San Vicente lay, submerging sixty houses under a newly-formed lake.¹¹

What made matters worse was the SDA's lack of initiative in soliciting and coordinating relief operations. On the whole, the people were left to fend for themselves. Other agencies and outside individuals exhibited more concern. The SDA, on the other hand, showed more interest in clearing the roads and rehabilitating its projects than in responding to the immediate needs of the people. The agency relied almost exclusively on an already overburdened Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) whose relief distribution policies discriminated against most of Sacobia's inhabitants.

Relocation and Resettlement after Pinatubo

Despite the dangers of remaining in their homes, many villagers refused to permanently relocate to designated government resettlement sites. Attachment to their lands and houses was strong and they believed that the calamity would pass and the damage to their crop fields would be reversible. The relocation sites, on the other hand, were in areas where sources of livelihood were absent as there were no agricultural lands made available for farming. For many years thereafter, the villagers had to suffer the inconvenience of being moved from one relocation site to another.

Resistance was particularly stronger for the Ayta communities whose attachment to the mountains in general and Mount Pinatubo in particular is spiritual in nature and closely linked to their cultural identity. In temporary evacuation centers where many Aytas for the first time lived together with lowlanders, cultural problems arose, including discrimination from non-Aytas as well as serious medical problems especially for Ayta children. Later, resettlement sites in upland areas were designated exclusively for Ayta families.

Families who agreed to resettle in the permanent sites sometimes kept their homes and lands in the villages. The families were thereby split with the older members staying on in Sacobia and the grown-up children living in the resettlement areas. Needless to say, they kept in touch and regularly paid each other visits. This refusal of residents to permanently relocate to government resettlement sites in the wake of the eruptions could, however, also be construed as a form of everyday resistance.

The Special Economic Zone

After the Americans were expelled from Clark Air Base in 1992, the Philippine government converted the former military facility into the Clark Special Economic Zone under the management of the Clark Development Corporation (CDC). In June 1996, then President Fidel Ramos issued Proclamation 805 and Executive Order 344 which abolished the SDA and transferred its powers and functions to the CDC, thus effectively handing over jurisdiction of the entire Sacobia area to the CDC.

Proclamation 805 envisioned the Sacobia area to be an area for agribusiness investments and to be "a food basin for the CSEZ, the Central Luzon region, and the country in general with its abundant produce feeding other parts of the world to generate dollars for the economy." The CDC would soon realize the impossible mission cut out for it. Subsequently, plans for Sacobia were scaled down to whatever potential investors would be willing to set up in the area. The first and so far the only investor was an orchid farm that took up several hectares of productive farmland in San Vicente and encroached on existing family farms. This generated resentment and protests from the affected farmers prompting the investor to hire private armed guards.

Executive Order 344, on the other hand, contained the ominous provision that "communities and permanent residents of Sacobia may be transferred and resettled by the CDC, at the expense of the BCDA, to give way to development projects in Sacobia." Attempting to exercise its Presidentially-mandated jurisdiction over the three villages, the CDC

issued rules and regulations on housing and land use. As with the late unlamented IRD project, these were conveniently ignored or deliberately violated by the residents. Exasperated by the non-cooperation of the settlers, verbal threats were issued by CDC officials that the corporation would soon displace the settlers to make way for its unnamed plans and projects.

The CDC's jurisdiction over the area, however, was seriously challenged by the Ayta communities of Sacobia. Utilizing provisions in the Philippine Constitution which recognized the "prior rights ... of indigenous communities to their ancestral lands in the disposition or utilization of ... natural resources" and Republic Act No. 7586 of 1992, which provides for "due recognition of ancestral lands and customary rights ... within protected areas,"¹² the Baman Aeta Tribal Association (BATA) filed with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on June 15, 1995 an application claiming the entire Sacobia area as its ancestral domain. Despite objections from CDC officials, DENR Secretary Victor Ramos approved on November 21, 1997 the issuance of Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) No. 107 to the Ayta Abelling tribe covering 5,515 hectares in the three barangays.¹³

The CDC, however, has appealed the DENR's decision and at present the issue remains unresolved with a virtual stalemate in place. The CADC is now to be elevated into a CADT.¹⁴ The CDC continues to treat the area as part of its jurisdiction and openly invites business interests to invest in the place.

Validation of Assumptions

The preceding discussion validates the two major assumptions made at the start of the essay: (1) the existence of a peasant society and a peasant class with unique characteristics and (2) the essential features of such a society have proven to be resilient and adaptive in the midst of change-oriented initiatives by external forces. While certain features and aspects of traditional peasant society have been transformed through increased use of new farm technologies, wider market linkages, growth of a wage-earning working class and corresponding decline in absolute

numbers of full time tillers, the beginnings of social differentiation, declines in the proportion of farm families relative to non-farming households, the physical separation of families, and formal political structures, these have not resulted in the break-up of a small-farm and household-based peasant society nor the disappearance of the peasant class.

Nature of Peasant Society, Class Notions and Agrarian Change. In terms of the economic modes, statistical data from government surveys initially appeared to support the argument that the peasant mode of production had been undermined. The community's peasant population had progressively decreased its share relative to workers and more non-farm activities and sources of livelihood have been introduced. The figures alone, however, do not tell the whole story and need to be interpreted and placed in their proper context.

For one, a majority of those identifying themselves as workers were actually employed in agroforestry projects of the government's integrated rural development (IRD) program in positions which were temporary, unstable and lowly-paid. The work they engaged in was closely related to farmwork and consisted in groundsclearing, weeding, trimming of trees, planting and transplanting, general tree maintenance, and harvesting and transporting of fruit crops.

The below-subsistence wages impelled the workers to retain their economic and social links with the smallholding peasant sector and they often alternated between peasant farming and wage work. They could therefore still be considered part of the peasant mode of production. Separation from the means of production, a prerequisite for capitalist development, was temporary, superficial, tenuous, and reversible.

Villagers actually preferred smallholder farming over the available wage work given its stability and reliability as a subsistence and money income source and the fact that control over the means of production and relative autonomy over economic decisions continued to be exercised by the cultivator.

The class character of the peasant-cultivators gave them a clearly-defined and distinct social identity compared to the worker-laborers or those in service-related work. It was thus the farming sector that served to keep the collective rural identity of the community intact and resilient in the face of the various interventions and adversities that descended on the villages.

The family-run farms in the three villages generally fulfill the characteristics of a peasant mode of production. A subsistence level of livelihood was defined by the small farmplots (0.5 hectare to 3 hectares), limited cultivable area, low productivity, high costs of production and transportation, low market prices, and a scant surplus. There being no landlord class, exploitation took the form of high prices of agricultural inputs, low prices for farm products, and interest rates on loans from informal creditors. Given these, peasant differentiation could not effectively take off. The few better off farmers were, at best, middle peasants who continued to work on the land themselves and had kinship ties with poorer families.

Traditional cultural norms and practices were unhampered such as a customary land market dictated by traditional concepts of land and property rights, modes of settling internal village conflicts and disputes, placing a high value on family and kinship ties, cooperative and reciprocal forms of labor, the special status accorded to village elders, and informal credit systems.

Rural Development and the Role of the State. The resiliency of small family farms received its biggest test with the entry of the government's IRD project in 1979. The project's grand plan was to create an enclave of agroindustrial development in the countryside. The strategy for achieving this was to extinguish subsistence agriculture and organize a government-managed integrated corporate farm ran as a cooperative. Dendrothermal plants, an agroindustrial estate and private investments were to complete the scenario. The government would play the role of a rural capitalist class while the peasantry was to be converted into a wage earning rural proletariat.

In addition to the economic goal of modernizing the peasantry, the IRD project also carried a two-fold political agenda: extending to the American military the favor of resolving its security problems in neighboring Clark Air Base, and purging the area of leftwing rebel influence.

Scott's notion of the need for the state to make "legible" that which had been outside of its realm by transforming "non-state spaces" into "state spaces" clearly applied in the case of the study area. When the IRD project suffered an irreversible economic decline, the government refused to abandon it as the political need for "direct control and discipline" overrode economic considerations.

Peasants, Social Movements and Forms of Resistance. The external intervention in the area by left-wing guerrilla forces, particularly the Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army (CPP-NPA) from 1968 to 1979 heightened the political consciousness of the peasant settlers as some residents were attracted to the vision of an egalitarian and just society and joined as full-fledged cadres. Others lent support because of family and kinship ties. Other residents, on the other hand, went along with the rebels out of fear they would be harmed if they resisted. Ambivalence in the face of threats from the state's military forces and skepticism towards the group's revolutionary goals were also exhibited.

The guerrilla units in the three villages, however, addressed only political concerns, e.g., setting up local governing units and maintaining peace and order, while neglecting economic projects. Thus, the opportunity for a sustainable and lasting leftwing influence among the villagers was passed by.

One theory that was validated was that of revolutionary thought and leadership coming from outside peasant society and representation being made on its behalf by those bearing the ideology of the proletariat even if these actually came mostly from the middle class, e.g., college students and intellectuals.

Conditions in the villages were not exactly conducive to revolutionary work. Solidarity rather than conflict characterized the existing organization of society. No oppressive classes within the villages unjustly extracted the agricultural surplus and kinship ties strengthened the "feeling of community" coupled with a "stubborn" attachment to the land and obsession with its control and ownership.

Attitudes and responses to the rebel group were varied, multiple, and flexible. While there was no display of open hostility to the rebels, neither did the peasants go out of their way to extend unqualified support. What the peasants had instead was the ability to creatively and spontaneously undertake "everyday forms of resistance" to impositions and exactions from outsiders. This was unselectively applied to agents of the state, the left guerrilla groups, or private capitalists.

Peasant Moral Economy and the Subsistence Ethic. From the beginning, a form of peasant moral economy based on the fulfillment of subsistence needs pervaded the three villages. The ethic that accompanied this situation forced most of the settler-peasant families to minimize their risks and generally rely on traditional farming modes. Work sharing and patterns of reciprocity were practiced as applications of concepts of economic justice. The lack of peasant differentiation also meant that notions of social justice were applied more to relations with outsiders.

The "set of cultural decencies" that peasant households strongly feel entitled to was violated when the IRD project deprived the cultivators of their land and forced them to work for a daily wage in their own farms. For several peasants, this was the last straw and they took to flight rather than subject themselves to what they perceived to be a humiliating reversal in their social status.

Social History and History from Below. By taking a "history from below" viewpoint, this study provided an alternative and more grounded view that contrasted with statements in government documents about the three villages. From the start, the state sought to paint a picture

of the area (e.g., describing it as "idle" and "a wasteland") that would justify the interventions that it made. The life histories of peasant settlers and actual conditions on the ground belied the government's claims about the area and of the real status of the IRD project.

Generally, the historical accounts as narrated by the peasants were reliable and corresponded with actual events that were taking place in the Central Luzon region in particular and the country in general. Thus narratives from life histories (with few exceptions) generally blended with "general accounts of social processes." This was evident during sugar commercialization and its later decline and in the activities of the CPP-NPA guerrilla movement.

The suggestion to construct "a model – a lucid and coherent picture of a system of behavior and thought" as one way of overcoming the technical limitations of grassroots history was attempted in this study by using the general framework of "change and continuity" and bringing to bear on this process the various theoretical viewpoints related to peasant studies.

The "history from below" perspective as applied in the field study case also uncovered the realm of "everyday politics." These, however, revolved around debates and conflicts between residents enjoying more or less equal social status.

Conclusions

For the three villages in this study, the history of external interventions is continuing via the establishment of a special economic zone where the American air base used to be situated. Tensions are already evident between the villagers and the Clark economic zone as the latter seeks to extend its control over the peasant community that lies just above it.

Agrarian studies and works on the peasantry have become rare in this age of heightened globalization. The peasantry was considered not merely marginalized; worse, its death was also grandly proclaimed (Hobsbawm 1994:289 and Elson 1997). Such declarations, however,

have proven to be premature as peasants and peasant societies have persisted and in some instances have openly challenged the logic of expanded capitalism, the market economy, and globalization in general as seen in the upsurge of agrarian and peasant unrest in Latin America, China, and Vietnam against market-oriented and modernizing regimes.

At this point, since this essay focused on only three villages in one region of the Philippines, it would be difficult to generalize that the peasant mode is resilient in all instances. It could be that the Sacobia villages had specificities that would not be found in other rural villages. In any case, as a future direction in the field of peasant studies, there is need to seek further validation of this essay's findings in other Philippine rural areas and in other countries as well.

However, in a recent global study on farm size, Eastwood, Lipton and Newell (2004) noted that while "in Europe and North America farm sizes have been increasing on average since 1950, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, by contrast, farm sizes seem to have been declining in the late 20th century." The authors noted that "smallholder individual tenure typifies South and East Asia" and that "over 70 per cent of farms are largely family-cultivated" with most having farm areas "below 1 hectare of irrigated land (or 2 hectares of rainfed land)."

Governments and other official institutions have often grossly underestimated the importance of family farms. Yet in 2005, of the 750,000 new jobs created all over the Philippines, 42 percent of these were in unpaid family labor in agriculture (Habito 2006). The implication of the findings in this essay therefore is the need for policy makers and other concerned players to rethink their assumptions about the peasantry and the policies and programs they have imposed on rural communities. Over the past decades, state-led development strategies have been biased towards urban and industrial development premised on the eventual disappearance of the peasantry and the diminution of agriculture's share of the national product. It would, however, appear that, for small family-run farms, and by implication for the peasantry in the greater part of such farms, their predicted end is not yet in sight. ♦

Notes

¹ Based on discussions in various literature, I use the term "peasant" to refer primarily to small and lower middle-sized cultivators who are either share tenants, indentured serfs, leaseholders, owner-cultivators, or any other similar classification. In some cases, it can also refer to those rural wage workers or rural semi-proletariat who either still maintain their small farm holdings or their ties (kinship or otherwise) with small scale rural production units or a rural community in general (Kerblay 1987, Bryceson 2000, Bernstein and Byres 2001, Shanin 1987, De Janvry 1981, Fine and Harris 1979, Marx 1969, Wolpe 1980, and Hobsbawm 1998).

² Instances where Marx referred to peasant economies as a "mode of production" are in *Capital* Vol. I (Chapter 32: "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation") (1967a: 761); *Capital* Vol. III (Chapter 47: "Genesis of Capitalist Ground Rent") (1967b: 807); and "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," *Marx and Engels: Selected Works* Vol. I. (1969: 478).

³ The works cited are: Althusser, Louis and Etienne Balibar. 1970. *Reading "Capital."* London. New Left Books, and Poulantzas, Nikos. 1973. *Political Power and Social Class.* London. New Left Books.

⁴ It would be instructive at this point to state that this essay does not strive for analytical precision or academic rigor in the definition of the peasantry. The author's main interest is to provide a working and practical definition of the peasantry from a modified essentialist standpoint. Given the literature discussed above, constructing a broad and inclusive definition is deemed to be the most appropriate agenda (see footnote no. 1).

⁵ This would be true for the twentieth century revolutions in China, Vietnam, and Cuba (Chesneaux 1973, Moore 1966, Selden 1969, Chaliand 1978, Castro 1969).

⁶ According to the settlers, purchase prices for land rights ranged from Php200 (U.S.\$100) to P800 (U.S.\$400) for lands that covered from 3 to 5 hectares.

⁷ In almost all cases, however, they were released upon giving the American officers assurances that they were simply engaged in gathering food products and had no intention of settling in the area.

⁸ In an e-mail correspondence, retired MSgt. Frederick Scott, a former U.S. serviceman who served three tours of duty at Clark in the seventies and eighties, confirmed that Clark authorities were not particularly interested in exercising sovereignty over reservation areas not within the immediate vicinity of the military base because "it would have been prohibitively expensive and pointless to patrol the thousands of acres outside the perimeter fence." He also alluded to politically sensitive issues having to do with sometimes testy Philippine-American relations.

⁹ Moreover, between 1947 and 1977, about 40 Filipinos were either shot and killed by American guards or had died in U.S. war games (Hutchcroft 1983).

¹⁰ Then President Marcos issued an Executive Order in 1980 creating the Sacobia Development Authority (SDA) as a government corporation to oversee the project's implementation.

¹¹ What made matters worse was the SDA's lack of initiative in soliciting and coordinating relief operations. On the whole, the people were left to fend for themselves. Other agencies and outside individuals exhibited more concern. The SDA, on the other hand, showed more interest in clearing the roads and rehabilitating its projects than in responding to the immediate needs of the people. The agency relied almost exclusively on an already overburdened Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) whose relief distribution policies discriminated against most of Sacobia's inhabitants.

¹² The law further provided that the "DENR shall have no power to evict indigenous communities from their present occupancy nor resettle them to another area without their consent" and "that all rules and regulations, whether adversely affecting said communities or not, shall be subjected to notice and hearing to be participated in by members of concerned indigenous community."

¹³ A CADC is preparatory to the issuance of a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) or Certificate of Ancestral Lands Title (CALT). The DENR order excluded 97 hectares of the original Sacobia area which meant that this was the only part that CDC could retain for its plans and projects.

¹⁴ This was the information shared by officials of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in August 2007.

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