

Negotiation of Identities: The Case of Aeta Ambala's Media Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the impact of media engagement on the identity perceptions of the Aeta Ambala, an indigenous group in the Philippines, particularly after the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption. This catastrophic event led to significant displacement and cultural shifts for the Aeta, who were forced to adapt to urban lifestyles. The study focuses on the differences in identity perceptions between the older and younger generations, with the former holding onto pre-eruption cultural norms and the latter aligning more with urban and resettlement community cultures. Employing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study finds that media representations often negatively portray the Aeta Ambala, leading to discrimination and altering self-perception. Despite this, the community maintains a strong sense of ethnic identity, viewing it as an immutable aspect of their heritage. Media engagement is seen as inevitable for staying informed, particularly in emergencies, but it also influences perceptions of the outside world and reshapes cultural and ethnic identity. Younger generations, more engaged with media, tend to adopt external beauty standards and lifestyles, leading to early marriages and cultural indifference. There is also a noted mistrust towards media organizations due to exploitation concerns. In conclusion, the study highlights the complex relationship between media interaction and self-identification within the Aeta Ambala community, suggesting that while media engagement alters perceptions and behaviors, the core Aeta Ambala culture remains strong and resilient.

Keywords: *Media engagement, ethnic identity, Aeta Ambala, indigenous peoples, identity negotiation.*

INTRODUCTION

It has been more than thirty years since the explosive eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. This explosion has extensively damaged property and disrupted everyday activities. The volcanic materials from Mt. Pinatubo eruption were dispersed over countries and enveloped the earth, causing global temperatures to drop within the following year and earning it a spot in the biggest eruption in history (Mat, 2023).

Well beyond the disruption of daily life are the drastic and devastating changes that this eruption has brought to the Filipinos living within the volcano's vicinity, such as the Aeta, who have always resided around the Mt. Pinatubo area. Arguably one of the most celebrated indigenous peoples of the Philippines, the Aeta were counted among those rendered homeless—with numbers exceeding a million—in the wake of the eruption following Pinatubo's 400-year dormancy (Marler, 2011).

The displacement of the Aeta has forced them to adapt to a life in new places whose demands they were unprepared for given their pre-Pinatubo eruption ways of life. They began to live in urbanised areas, holding menial jobs and participating in extra-legal economic activities, having entered these new environments in a disadvantaged position. Their culture,

deeply rooted in the terrain of their homeland, revolved around the traditional knowledge and use of natural resources (Marler, 2011) and hunter-gatherer systems of living that had no place for the use of money or writing. Thus, the Aeta were unaccustomed to canned food (their first encounter with which was through donated relief goods) and clothing in light of their mountain habitat customs. They were vulnerable to diseases that they had never encountered before. Their unfamiliarity with the mainstream monetary system, language, and system of writing made them susceptible to deceit and exploitation.

Over the years since displacing them initially, many government, non-government, and international organizations have organized efforts, such as education and health programs as well as livelihood initiatives, to aid the Aeta. While a number of them have continued their commune with their new lives within urban areas, others have returned to Pinatubo with the hopes of recovering their old ways of life. As part of the Aeta Resettlement and Rehabilitation Project in Subic, others resettled in the Aeta Village along the Pamulaklakan Trail, a cultural preservation site (Orejas, 2021).

This research explores how media engagement affected the identity perceptions of the Aeta Ambala, particularly after the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption. This catastrophic event led to significant displacement and cultural shifts for the Aeta, who were forced to adapt to urban lifestyles, exposing them to new challenges, including exploitation and unfamiliar cultural practices. The study focuses on the differences in identity perceptions between the older and younger generations, with the former holding onto pre-eruption cultural norms and the latter aligning more with urban and resettlement community cultures.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Identity, Resistance, and Media Technology

The ethnic group's perception of self-identity in the advent of technological and media advancement is an important research topic nowadays (Cleveland et al., 2023; Cottle, 2000; Panagakos, 2003; Tongdhamachart & Alwi, 2023; Omar et al., 2020). As much as this study explores the media uses and dependencies of the Aetas in relation to their perception of identities, the need to conduct a review of existing literature and studies remains, especially in regard to the efforts of some minority groups in the Philippines to maintain and sustain their identity in the face of the strong impact of media advancement and technology.

This is where Mariane Umali's (2013) study finds relevance. She explored how a Filipino ethnic group, Kinaray-a appropriated the internet, music, and video production technologies primarily to reinvent their identities and, secondly, to develop their collectivity with an endview of socioeconomic emancipation in the Western Philippines. Through her analysis of the Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM) and a short film entitled *Handum*, she concluded that vernacular mediation practices can facilitate cultural participation by enabling the reconstruction and sharing of expressions and meanings. Umali's study seems to concretize the proposition that ethnic minorities could survive the influx of new media and technology without substantially losing their ethnic identity. Identity, as illustrated in Umali's study, is socially constructed, continuously developed, and cultivated through a dialogical discourse between the past and the present. Thus, identity is not something that can be equated with essence but is rather a product of discourses of history and culture (Badarudin, 1996; Grossberg, 2011; Hall, 1990; So, Kim & Lee, 2012). Hence, identity is not a "fixed essence" (Hall, 1990).

Media and information technology can both challenge and offer opportunities for Philippine ethnic groups to reconstruct, create their own space, and revitalize their identity. According to Longboan (2009), blogs have empowered Igorots to share their own stories and assert their identity, countering the traditional reliance on studies and scholarships conducted by foreigners and/or outsiders to understand indigenous groups in the Philippines. The advent of personal blogging has made cyberspace replete with stories and information about the Igorots, written and told by Igorots themselves. Longboan asserts that the prevailing image peddled by outsiders about the Igorots will soon become irrelevant as the Igorots continue to project their own identity upon the outside world in order to dispel all the negative characteristics and demeaning identities that have been long associated with them.

Longboan asserts that the study of identity would be meaningless if the possibility of active participation by individuals in the making and unmaking of their socially constructed identities were absent in the discourse. In the case of these Igorot bloggers, they actively played major and dominant roles in the crafting of their socially constructed identities through the employment and exploitation of internet technology, which facilitated an understanding of their culture and identity in new ways. While the exclusion of outsiders' discourses in the process would render it incomplete, it effectively illustrates through the reclaiming and reconstruction of their own identities that cultural identity is not a "fixed essence" but is always constructed, fluid, and not some origin that one can always return to.

Similarly, Rose Anne Torres (2012) observed that the influx of new technology and information about medical practices seems not to have affected the ways of healing and beliefs of a particular Aeta ethnic group. Torres (2012) claims that Aeta women healers maintain and continue to adhere to their traditional healing beliefs despite the strong bombardment of current trends in medical and scientific technology. The Aeta's spirituality is rooted in their association and relationship with the environment, and interfering with the environment's well-being results in them alienating themselves from their ancestors, culture, and theology.

Furthermore, power and dominance play a significant role in shaping one's identity. Colonization brought about important changes in the way Filipino lowlanders viewed their Indigenous brothers in the highlands, as power can be used to both destroy and build. However, the recognition of power in the construction of identity does not forget the potent and significant role of reflexivity in self-identity where each person knowingly constructs self-identity. Aeta women healers in the study of Torres tried to maintain and sustain their beliefs despite the strong influence of science and technology, as facilitated by media technology.

Apart from the challenges brought by technology and media, ethnic groups in the Philippines also face other challenges, particularly in the maintenance of self-identity. Balilla et al. (2013) established observations that the economic and physical encroachment of non-Aeta communities in the territories of this marginalized group considerably threatened their self-identity. However, the Aeta (*Magbukun*) have a very strong sense of identity and a strong commitment to uplift their culture and economic lives, which enabled them to survive and maintain cordial relations with non-Aeta communities without conflict.

The physical dispersion of minority ethnic groups brought about by natural calamities also poses threats to the survival of the group as well as their sense of identity. Seitz (1998) noticed that Aeta communities dispersed by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the early 1990s

positively coped with the sudden changes, and self-help activities contributed to their abilities to easily meet their culturally conditioned needs.

Media Engagement of Indigenous Peoples

The socio-economic marginalization of indigenous peoples in the Philippines limits their access to media content and economic opportunities (Longboan, 2009). Access to TV, print media, the internet, radio, and other forms of media requires monetary expense, making it more accessible for those with more money. Monteverde's (2009) research on the relationship between socioeconomic status and media access found that indigenous peoples in Bolivia remain unperturbed by the technology's impact due to its high cost and inaccessibility.

Despite their marginalized status, the Aeta Ambala of Pastolan Village have easy access to media technology such as television, newspapers, cellular phones, and portable wi-fi. This advantage may have been due to the village's proximity to the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), an important economic driver in Central Luzon, Philippines. SBMA provides employment opportunities for the majority of residents, who earn through agriculture, forestry, and wage labor. TV and radio serve as major sources of news and information about strikes, demonstrations, and governmental affairs for the indigenous people of Bolivia, who lack easy access to newspapers. However, the Aeta Ambalas have great access to almost all forms of media, including cable TV, radio, newspapers, TV, and the internet, and use them primarily for entertainment purposes.

Synthesis

The synthesis of various studies reveals a common theme: the role of technology and media in reshaping the identities of different Filipino ethnic groups. Mariane Umali's 2013 research on the Kinaray-a group's appropriation of the internet, music, and video production technologies concluded that vernacular mediation practices can reshape cultural participation and expressions. Similarly, Liezyl Longboan's 2009 study found that Igorot bloggers used the blogging features of the internet to assert and reconstruct their identities, challenging the external perceptions and prevailing scholarship about them.

Rose Anne Torres, in her 2012 study, explored how Aeta women healers sustained their beliefs amidst the influx of medical and scientific technology facilitated by the media. Her conclusion highlighted the spiritual connection of the Aeta community with their environment as a key factor in maintaining their beliefs. In a different vein, the 2013 study by Balilla et al., focused on the impact of physical encroachment by non-Aeta communities on Aeta territories and how the Aeta's strong cultural traits and self-help activities helped them adjust to these changes. Additionally, Monteverde's 2009 study, though centred on Bolivian indigenous peoples, is relevant for its insights into how media consumption affects identity formation, offering applicable lessons for the current study. This body of research collectively underscores the transformative impact of media and technology on ethnic identity and cultural practices.

METHODOLOGY

The research primarily employs a case study approach, utilizing in-depth interviews supported by focus group discussions (FGD) with the informants. The study probed the informants' dependency on media in their everyday lives, investigating how such media dependency

affected their ethnic identity. The narratives shared by the informants comprised the core of this research. In addition, the researchers conducted focus group discussions (FGD) to further support the data generated from the informants. The study used an inductive approach in generating the results, with the narratives of the informants interviewed standing as the main units of analysis.

Informants Sampling Technique

The researchers carried out the selection of informants for the study using a purposive sampling technique, a method where we deliberately chose informants based on specific qualities that align with the study's criteria. This technique, also known as judgment sampling, is a non-random approach that does not necessitate a predetermined number of informants. Instead, it relies on the identification of individuals who possess knowledge or experience relevant to the research questions. The criteria for selecting informants were as follows: they must be members of the Aeta Ambala Tribe, reside in Pastolan Village, and have exposure to or be consumers of various media forms, including TV, radio, print, the Internet, and cellphones.

Furthermore, the study employed snowball sampling within Pastolan Village in Barangay Tipo, Hermosa, Bataan, to identify informants. Initially, Subic was considered the primary location for the research. Following coordination with the Subic Bay Metropolitan Development Authority Public Relations Department (SBMA PRD), the focus shifted to Pastolan Village. The SBMA-PRD facilitated this shift by endorsing Mr. Gigs Estalilla, a community officer in Pastolan Village, who assisted in liaising with the local chieftain, Mr. Conrado Frenilla. Mr. Frenilla played a pivotal role in coordinating with the informants, ensuring they met the study's criteria. Although the original research site was within the SBMA, Pastolan Village, located in Hermosa, Bataan, became the research locale due to its association with the SBMA and its alignment with the study's needs.

Research Instrumentation

The researchers designed a semi-structured interview guide to generate answers for this study. The researchers designed questions based on the objectives of the study, and encouraged informants to discuss and elaborate on their answers. To better transcribe the answers of the informants, we recorded the interview process through video.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Informants

Inasmuch as there are two ways by which the study derived its data from the conduct of an in-depth interview (IDI) and a focus group discussion (FGD), accordingly, there are two sets of informants' profiles. There had been six informants during the IDI, four of whom are within the age range of 43 to 53 years of age, while the remaining two informants fell within the age range of 15 to 26 years of age. Most of the informants in the IDI are female, except for Barangay Captain Conrado Frenilla. Three of the informants are pure-blooded Aeta Ambala (those whose parents are both Aeta Ambala), while three are considered "not pure" or *mestizo* (those born from the union of an Ambala and a non-Ambala).

The FGD had five participants, all of whom are female, pure Ambalas, and employed. The youngest is 40 years old and the oldest is 73 years of age. As with the informants of the IDI, the FGD participants all had minimal formal education.

Ethnic Affiliations/Association of Self with the Tribe

All informants in the study proudly identified themselves as members of the Aeta Ambala tribe, with some distinguishing themselves as either pure-blooded or mestizo Ambala, and differentiating themselves from other groups like the *Buton*, *Kunana*, *Anianan*, and Aeta Zambal. Rosa, however, preferred to be identified solely as "Ambala". There was a unanimous acknowledgment of their ethnic background among the group. There was a unanimous acknowledgment of their ethnic background among the group.

Marilyn, for instance, was adamant about maintaining her Aeta Ambala identity despite facing discrimination from lowlanders, or *unats*. She emphasized the importance of upholding the traditions and skills taught by elders, like agriculture. For the Ambalas, cultivating the land is their second nature. Not only is an Ambala who despises agriculture seen as someone who has forgotten his roots, but also as a person who has forgotten his soul. Imelda echoed this sentiment, linking her identity to her agricultural lifestyle and history as a forest dweller. Like the older folks in the village, Imelda values a way of life that is anchored on the ground.

Despite changes in physical appearance, dress, housing, and language, the informants unanimously agreed that their Aeta Ambala identity was indelible. Marilyn passionately expressed this, urging her descendants to remember their roots. However, the discrimination faced by the Aeta Ambala sometimes led to challenges in embracing their ethnic identity. Claudine, for example, temporarily altered her appearance to feel like an *unat*, reflecting a momentary desire to fit in with mainstream culture. Claudine, however, realize that her appearance, despite being a cause for bullying, is something that she should be proud of.

This discrimination also impacted their educational experiences. Jennifer recounted the bullying she faced in school due to her ethnicity, leading her to eventually discontinue her education after a confrontation with her tormentors. The study highlighted these varied experiences, illustrating the complexities and challenges the Aeta Ambala face in maintaining and expressing their ethnic identity. The Ambalas manage these kinds of bullying differently from one individual to another. There are some Ambalas who cowered, like Jennifer, but there are also those who managed to fight back by showing their tormentors that their uniqueness should even be a source of pride.

Traditional Ethnic Lifestyle

Despite external influences, the Aeta Ambalas in Pastolan Village maintain distinct ethnic lifestyles, appearances, traditions, beliefs, and relationships. They are known for their physical features, such as their short stature, curly hair, and brown complexion. While traditionally wearing the *bahag* (loincloth), modern influences have led to a mix of traditional and urban clothing, with traditional attire reserved for special occasions and cultural events. Ambalas exposure to media certainly had an influence on why many of them transitioned from their traditional to modern clothing, but most of the participants believe that this clothing style does not have a significant impact on their identity.

As forest dwellers, the Ambalas maintain a cultural connection with their natural habitat. They have a symbiotic relationship with the environment, especially in various aspects of their lifestyle, such as sustenance practices and culinary traditions. Their connection with nature is fundamental to their identity and culture. It is important for them to regularly commune with nature.

The group's main sources of income are farming and agriculture in the mountains. Typically grown in the forest, ambalas cultivate crops such as *buloy*, *yantok* (rattan), and *kamote* (sweet potato). They also anchor their culinary culture in their dwellings. They usually cook their meals using *buho* or *bulo* (a variety of bamboo). They only use ingredients that they get from their mountain dwellings. Claudine, the youngest of the participants, continues to learn and practice this culinary tradition because she believes that this is the very tradition that the Ambalas are known for. Ambalas usually eat *ubod ng yantok* (soft-core rattan), *baboy ramo* (wild boar), fish, prawns, and *suso* (snail). They also have grilled *baging* (a forest or wild vine) and *kamote*. They do not use chemicals or any other inorganic flavors in the preparation of their meals. Ambalas gather and hunt fish, *suso* (snails), and prawns using their bare hands. Furthermore, it is important for Ambala people not to use toxic chemicals in their fishing. These were the words of Conrado: "*humuhuli ng mga hipon, isda sa pamamagitan ng (kuwan lang), mga kamay, at hindi yung gumagamit ng kemikal. para mabilis ang hulihin*" [We use only our hands to catch shrimp and fish. We do not use any tools or equipment to catch shrimp and fish; we rely solely on our hands. We do not use dangerous chemicals].

Ambalas mostly embrace Christianity as one of their religious beliefs. However, many Ambalas still hold on to their traditional religious practices alongside their Christian faith. In other words, the Ambalas have adapted to Christianity while preserving some native beliefs, such as honoring ancestral spirits. During Holy Week, for example, they gather in a specific location to call *Botol*, and they offer prayers to *Apo Bukot*. According to Lourdes, one of the informants, *Apo Bukot* is a mythical creature believed to be the ancestor of all Ambalas.

Community gatherings like *piknikpiknikan* foster strong familial bonds and cultural continuity. During this gathering, the group introduces new or unknown members. Here, the community's cohesion is evident. This gathering promotes respect for elders, the maintenance of peaceful coexistence, cultural preservation, and a sense of unity. The Ambala is a tightly woven ethnolinguistic group. Pastolan Village, composed of approximately three hundred families, maintains a peaceful atmosphere, as barangay captain Conrado explains. The village remains crime-free, with only occasional petty disagreements arising from alcohol intoxication. Since the village consists of families who are usually kin or relatives, no disagreements are irreconcilable.

The sense of community that envelops the village gives comfort to the settlers. Some families that have left the village have found their way back and have resettled in the village after realizing that city life is not suitable for them. They cannot find comfort in the individualistic and fast-paced nature of city life.

Ways of Media Engagement of Ambalas

As for the media engagement of the informants, the data shows that most of the informants consider the use of media as an inevitable circumstance (Monteverde, 2009). Though the village initially wanted to prevent the use of media, most of the informants realized the need to keep

themselves abreast and updated through modern technology and its developments. They realized that the expeditious dispatch of messages and information, especially in times of emergency and want, is becoming a need in more and more everyday situations. This is perhaps the reason why some of the informants still maintain lists of contact information or still watch TV for news and/or significant shows such as the bouts of Manny Pacquiao, even though they do not personally own a cellular phone or TV.

Most of the informants, at one-point, experienced media exposure both directly and indirectly, which possibly led to various gratifications (See Hamid et.al, 2022). For instance, one or two informants encountered gratifications that they did not expect. One sought to be informed about what is going on in urban cities, with the experience magnifying negative situations and bringing about thoughts of scenarios, leading her to conclude that the world is cruel, scary, and mean. The engagement of Ambalas with the various forms of media certainly affected the way they perceive the outside world and their own world or ethnic group. The data generated provides us with a glimpse of how the Ambalas perceive the world as scary and mean. They cultivate this kind of perception because of their consumption of news reports about crimes, deception, and corruption on either the radio or TV. This is why most of the elder Ambalas are very cautious about almost everything in the outside world. They also harbor negative perceptions of their own cultural and ethnic identity because of exposure to various cultures accessed through the media.

The news Rosa gets from the radio, particularly the crimes, causes her to cultivate very fearful scenarios, and she has become very concerned about her surroundings. "*Natatakot na nga ako minsan sa mga balita. May Pinupugutan ng ulo, may hinoholdap*" [I always feel scared because of the news. There were some beheadings, robberies, and others], she said. On the other hand, Marilyn was so disgusted and stressed by the news about corruption. Marilyn also recalled how, during her childhood, their main source of news was a battery-operated radio. However, Marilyn did not learn about media until she was already an adult.

Marilyn, like Rosa, does not have a cell phone. She only asks her husband to contact others for her through his cell phone. Rosa also depends on her neighbours for cell phone use during emergencies and keeps the numbers of individuals on a piece of paper just in case she needs to ask her neighbours to contact people for important reasons. Personally, Rosa does not really want to have a cell phone. This is something that she really does not want to have. Between Rosa and Marilyn, the latter has more exposure to cell phones as compared to the former. Although Marilyn does not personally own a cell phone, her children and husband know how to use it, and, at times, they even teach her how to receive calls through someone else's phone.

Rosa would have wished to have a TV for her children. She sometimes feels pity for her children because she knows they really want to have TV. However, she was pessimistic about having one. On the other hand, Marilyn watches TV. She likes watching entertainment shows (like Showtime and Eat Bulaga), news, and drama shows.

The barangay hall has a TV set, which was one of the donations their community received from visitors who are well-off. Shows like Manny Pacquiao fights or other programs that either inspire or help the community are aired on the TV in the barangay. The barangay TV also has a cable subscription from Cignal, which is why, despite the fact that most of them own TVs, the villagers still prefer the TV in the barangay hall better because it can access more channels and programs.

Other villagers who do not have their own TVs watch at neighbors' houses or at the barangay hall. Conrado admits that it is important for the Aeta Ambala to access media. People often rely on television to stay updated and informed about new information and knowledge. The Pastolan Village believes as a community that, through media, students or young ones can have easy access to knowledge necessary for education and survival. According to Conrado, the priority of the community is to provide their youth with proper education so they can lead better lives and for the community to benefit from their education and knowledge.

The idea of Conrado as village chief is ideal but realistic. However, most of the youth who engage in the media do not share the same ideals. Claudine and Jennifer, for instance, watch TV for entertainment purposes rather than educational purposes. Claudine admits that she seldom watches the news. She also regularly watches telenovelas. The romantic relationships that these TV programs cultivate are less useful for the community.

The older community members also use TV for entertainment purposes. Marilyn, a 50-year-old pure-blooded Ambala, admitted to the researchers that she usually watches variety shows like Eat Bulaga and Showtime. Like the younger Ambalas, Marilyn also watches dramas and telenovelas.

Villagers in Pastolan actively engage in mobile phone technology, in addition to the radio and TV. Among the participants, Jennifer, Claudine, and Imelda have cellphones. Claudine uses her cell phone not only for calls and texts; she also accesses her Facebook and other social media accounts through her phone. Since she does not know the ins and outs of the internet, Jennifer uses only her cell phone as a tool to call and text her friends and relatives. Imelda also has a cell phone but admits that she seldom uses it.

Lastly, the researchers observed that only the youngest participant, Claudine, has exposure to computer or internet technology. Although their household WI-FI was no longer operational, she shared that she has accounts on social media such as Facebook and knows how to access and use the internet. Other participants do not have the capability to utilize the internet.

Effects of Media Engagement to the Ambala Culture

Imelda observes that the media, particularly social media, significantly impacts the youth in Pastolan, linking it to trends like early marriages and a declining interest in traditional culture. She notes that young people are less inclined to preserve their cultural heritage due to media influence, lamenting the fading of traditional language and customs among the pure Aeta youth. Imelda also points out that media exposure has introduced new vices into the community, replacing older habits with more harmful ones like drug use.

Jennifer echoes this sentiment, observing a shift in physical appearance norms among the youth, influenced by media portrayals of beauty. She cites Claudine's decision to rebond her hair to resemble a popular actress as an example. However, Conrado, the village leader, believes that media engagement does not significantly impact the Aeta Ambala culture, asserting that their cultural essence is immutable and inherent in their bloodline.

Jennifer also notes changes in traditional practices, such as the shift from using bamboo for cooking during community gatherings to modern aluminium cookware, suspecting media influence. She observes that cell phone use for photography has become common at events,

altering traditional practices.

Imelda sees no issue with using cell phones and media for constructive purposes, like staying in contact during emergencies. In contrast, Rosa is wary of external media exploitation, citing instances where media personnel profited from portraying their community without benefiting them. Imelda emphasizes the need for parental guidance in young people's media engagement, advocating for the preservation of their culture and traditions amidst the influx of foreign influences.

Two participants, Marilyn and Jennifer, expressed mistrust towards media and technology. Marilyn feels that constant media exposure, particularly news, paints the outside world as dangerous and untrustworthy. She is particularly sceptical about Facebook, seeing it as a potential tool for deception and fraud, although she acknowledges that no such incidents have occurred in Pastolan yet. She advises her grandchildren to be cautious with such technologies. Jennifer shares similar concerns, particularly regarding cell phones, fearing their negative impact on marriages and relationships due to the possibility of infidelity through text messaging.

Imelda, aligning with Marilyn's views, agrees that technology is not inherently harmful but emphasizes that its impact depends on how individuals use it. She believes that there is a need for parents to guide their children, especially in their engagement with the media and modern technology. The immediate family should serve as a source of guidance for young people in their engagement with the media. They should be taught how to maintain and preserve their cultural identity despite the inflow of foreign cultures and beliefs being promoted in the media.

CONCLUSION

The study on the Aeta Ambala's collective identity and media engagement reveals complex interactions between their cultural self-perception and media exposure. The informants, identifying as pure-blooded or mestizo Ambala, differentiate themselves from other groups and recognize the negative portrayal of Aetas in the media, often leading to real-world discrimination and adverse impacts on their self-image. Despite the negative media representations, they remain positive about their ethnic identity, believing it to be an immutable aspect ingrained in their blood and genes.

Many Aeta Ambalas realize the need to stay updated through technology, especially in emergencies, making media engagement inevitable. While some have limited personal access to media devices like cell phones or TVs, they still engage with media indirectly, often gathering for significant broadcasts like Manny Pacquiao fights. However, this engagement has also led to perceptions of the outside world as dangerous and corrupt, largely influenced by crime and corruption news.

The influence of the media on the Ambalas extends to their cultural and ethnic identity. Exposure to different cultures through media leads to a diminishing appreciation of their own traits and a growing admiration for external beauty standards and lifestyles. This is particularly evident in the younger generation, who are more engaged with media and often emulate the appearances and lifestyles of actors they idolize. There's a concern among elders that this media engagement leads to early marriages and relationships, as well as a growing indifference towards their culture and elders.

Additionally, there's a mistrust towards media organizations among the Ambalas, with some suspecting exploitation for personal gain. Although the Ambalas acknowledge the influence of media on relationships, education, and cultural perceptions, Conrado, the village leader, maintains an optimistic stance. He believes that while media engagement alters perceptions and behaviours, it is a necessary tool for staying informed and that the core Aeta Ambala culture, deeply rooted in their heritage, remains strong and unaltered.

BIODATA

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