APPEASING DEPRIVATION : The Meaning of Bandi (Br i deweal th) and Elopement among the Pinatubo Aytas

Shimizu, Hiromu
九州大学

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APPEASING DEPRIVATION

—The Meaning of Bandi (Bridewealth) and Elopement among the Pinatubo Aytas—

SHIMIZU Hiromu

Today I would like to talk about marriage, bandi (bridewealth), and the social organization of the Aytas or Negritos, presently residing in the southwestern foot of Mt. Pinatubo, in western Luzon. In particular I will discuss the meaning of bandi in their society by answering the following questions: why it is given at marriage; why the amount differs so much depending on the socio-psychological distance between the bride's and the groom's familes; and how it works at times to promote and at times to prevent change in the social organization. To be more specific, I will discuss the idea that marriage is essentially felt or thought of as depriving the family of a daughter/sister. Furthermore, I will suggest that elopement, a sudden and extreme form of deprivation, initiates social reorganization when the groom's side succeeds in establishing a new marital tie through the successful payment of a large amount of bandi.

Among the Negritos in the Philippines, the largest and probably the purest group is found in the Zambales mountain range, especially around the Mt. Pinatubo area, in western Luzon. They are the Pinatubo Aytas. The Aytas use the dialect of Sambal spoken by the Sambal People who live in the western coastal plain of Mt. Pinatubo. Although men carry bows and arrows whenever they go out of their villages or camps in order to shoot birds for food, their subsistence economy is shifting cultivation. Some of the groups living in the lower part, who have frequent contacts with their Sambal or Ilocano neighbors, have begun to adopt plow agriculture or wet rice cultivation.

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The data on which this report is based was collected during 20 months of field work in and around Kakilingan village from October 1977 to April 1979. Kakilingan is located on the southwestern slope of Mt. Pinatubo, about 25 kilometers northeast of poblacion of San Marcelino. In and near the southwestern slope of Mt. Pinatubo, which is separated by ridges from the western and the eastern slopes (which they call Villar and Pampanga respectively), about twenty rancherias or small villages are scattered. The population in that area is about 1,000 ~ 2,000.

Kakilingan village was built by the Ecumenical Foundation for Minority Development Inc. in the middle of the 1970's, in order to promote sedentary plow agriculture for the Aytas who practiced shifting cultivation in the surrounding mountains. The Foundation leased one carabao (water buffalo) and one hectare of farm land to each Ayta family that came down from the mountains to settle in the village. It encouraged them to plant sorghum for the first year and then to plant upland rice from the second year. Improving labor quality and acquiring new agricultural techniques are essential if the Aytas are to change their subsistence system. Many Ayta farmers could not adapt to this radical change and had a very poor harvest every year. The Foundation project had not obtained good results, at least by the time I left the village. The Aytas still maintained swidden agriculture.

With this brief introduction, let us return to the subject of bandi.

Bandi does not refer to specific property with symbolic value, but to ordinary goods of any kind, such as pigs, chickens, clothes, radios, knives, and more recently, cash and carabao.

Roughly speaking, there are three traditional approaches to explaining the institution of bridewealth. They are the structural-functional, structural, and symbolic approaches. However, these approaches cannot be applied successfully to understanding the bandi transactions among the Pinatubo Aytas. Bandi items are not given to compensate for the transfer of rights over a woman (Fortes, 1962; 9-10, Goody, 1973; 17, Tambiah, 1973; 61) nor to restore the balance of the cost-benefit ratio at marriage (Spiro, 1975; 89, 107) as the structural-functional approach would explain. They do not serve as a token or a symbolic currency by means of which the exchange of women is guaranteed (Levi-Strauss, 1969; 466-71). Bandi transactions do not constitute a part of the total exchange system by which, structuralists insist, the totality and integration of a whole society is maintained

(Needham, 1962; 93-6, Strathern, 1980; 51-2, Barnes, 1980; 95-6). They are also not meant to put mating into a socially meaningful process, as the symbolic interpretation would suggest (Comaroff, 1980; 87).

I believe that bandi is given to appease anger or alleviate the bride's family's deprivation, while Aytas themselves explain it either as a custom or as a reimbursement for the costs of bringing up the bride. Seeing it only as a custom does not explain anything. The reimbursement explanation cannot explain the great variety in the amount of bandi actually paid. If the bride's family is being paid for the cost of bringing her up, the amount paid in this rather egalitarian, non-stratified society should be almost equal in every case.

The conventional perspectives on bridewealth, mentioned above, do not apply to the bandi transactions because the socio-cultural system of the Pinatubo Aytas is quite different from the societies on which these perspectives are based.

The subsistence economy of the Aytas is basically the crude shifting cultivation of root crops. The ownership and inheritance of the means of production (i.e. land, farming equipment, and so on) do not have the same importance as in Central Thailand where, Spiro insists, bridewealth "has the function of acquiring the groom, and his descendants, substantial rights (first, of use, and then, ownership) in the property of his wife's family (1975; 98)". In the Ayta society a bolo (long knife) is the most important means of production and every adult male Ayta has at least one. Aytas can build a house or open a field using only bolos. A house, which is usually made of bamboo and cogon grass, is easily built but does not last more than several years. Every Ayta has the right of access to land for cultivation within one's own, one's spouse's or one's close relative's residential area.

As for marriage, virilocal residence upon completion of payment of agreed bandi is desirable, although there are many cases of uxorilocal residence due to the failure to fulfill the bandi agreement. Alternatively, there are other cases in which a couple remains in uxorilocal residence even after the entire amount of bandi is paid.

The kinship of the Aytas is bilateral. There are no descent structures which are tacitly associated with bridewealth transactions by structural-functionalists studying African societies (Comaroff, 1980; 16). The Aytas do not form a corporate group in the strict sense that membership is

determined by definite rules. Two to five, usually three or four, conjugal families bonded by parents-children as well as by sibling relations constitute an extended family, which is the residential unit which lives and moves around together and is also the responsible party in bandi transactions. But the composition of this family is not rigidly fixed over a long period of time. Although the residence of a couple is an important topic at the marriage negotiations, along with the amount and terms of bandi payments, it is possible for a couple to change their residence to the richer family's or to shift their residence between the two families once in a while if the affinal relations are on good terms.

The Aytas do not have a system of prescriptive marriage and total prestations. There is no series of mutual assistance, service, gift exchange and so on prescribed between the affines (Needham, 1962, Barnes, 1980, Strathern, 1980). As the amount of bandi is not fixed by custom but is determined by negotiation, it varies in each case from almost none to three carabaos. The bandi obtained from a daughter's/sister's marriage, therefore, does not necessarily secure a wife for a son/brother.

The amount of bandi itself does not reflect the social status or affiliation of the bride. There is no distinction between a legally or socially recognized marriage and simple cohabitation. The Aytas usually do not hold a wedding ceremony. Premarital labor service and the bandi payments gradually lead to a marital union. It is difficult in the everyday context to tell if a couple is "married" or not. Regardless of the amount of bandi paid, a man can live and sleep with a woman if the woman's family permits him to. On the other hand, if the woman's family is not conciliatory, a man will not be allowed to sleep with the woman even after a big percentage of bandi is paid.

During 20 months of field work in and around Kakilingan village, I collected as much material as possible on the topic of kinship and social organization, subsistence economy, religion, oral literature, and so on. But above all, I was always most concerned with the institution and actual transactions of bandi.

I came to have a special interest in bandi at the very initial stages of my field work. Soon after my wife and I had settled down in the village, three elopement attempts occurred one after another. The beginning of the dry season, especially following the harvest, is the best time for marriage affairs to take place. Food is sufficient and the people can easily move

around following the dried mountain trails. Parents try to arrange marriages while young couples attempt to elope. Elopement in Ayta society means that a young couple runs into the mountains and hides for a few days in either a lean-to hut, made on the spot, or in a hut already built for swidden work beside a field. In other cases, a couple might seek refuge with the groom's relatives in another village. Wherever they go, however, they will be easily found and the girl or both will be forced back to the girl's parents. Elopement is not an attempt by the couple to run away never to return. It can be seen as a sort of tacitly recognized or reluctantly permitted institution which urges the parents and senior members of both families to meet and negotiate the possibility of marriage.

At a meeting held to solve one of these elopements, the father and the grandfather of the girl expressed grave anger, saying that the boy's side should take every responsibility for tempting the girl. I was surprised first at the fact that such a young couple, both probably under 15, dared to attempt to elope and second, at the fierceness of the anger expressed by the girl's relatives. I was also astonished to find that once the boy's side reluctantly agreed to pay the entire requested amount of bandi, the girl was allowed to go with the boy's family to stay with them following the meeting. The fury of the girl's family seemed to disappear after the boy's side accepted their demands for bandi, which appeared unpayable for several years. Since this incident, I have wondered why bandi should be given at marriage and why the amount is often far beyond the means of the boy's extended family. Even after asking the Aytas directly and repeatedly for the reasons for bandi, and after collecting numerous case studies on marriage and bandi transactions, I did not get convincing answers.

Fortunately, however, just before finishing my field work, I was finally given permission to tape record the entire procedure of a manganito seance or curing ritual, in which the word bandi was used several times. At that time, I still simply thought of bandi as bridewealth and failed to recognize the significance of the use of the word bandi in this context. Two years later, when I was studying the transcribed text of that seance in order to prepare an article on the manganito seance (Shimizu, 1983), I became aware of the true meaning of bandi. In the seance, bandi was used to refer to gifts which had been prepared for the bad spirits causing the illness. In this case the word bandi did not have anything to do with marriage. It was given to appease the anger and hostility of the bad spirits.

After the field work I got PANAMIN documents on the Ayta massacare, which occured at Mt. Pimmayong on July 24,1976 during a PC-BSDF joint force raid on an Ayta camp. They reported that the bereaved Ayta families were very angry and were trying to exact revenge on lowlander Christians if bandi were not paid. In this case bandi was demanded as compensation for the loss of family members.

Comparing the use of the word bandi in these different contexts, i.e. marriage, the seance and the killings, I found bandi is given to appease anger as well as the cosmological sense of loss or deprivation. The etymological meaning of bandi is " appeasing gift, " which melts a stubborn mind, reconciles a hostile feeling, and pacifies antagonistic relations. This perspective of bandi helped me further my understanding of the institution of marriage as well as the dynamics of the society.

Once we accept that bandi is an appeasing gift, we will come to find that marriage in Ayta society means deprivation, sometimes plunder, of a daughter (sister/niece). Actually, marriage with near kin is prohibited, because it is incestuous. Even a second cousin marriage is sometimes thought of as improper and unacceptable, if the relations between a couple are too close and intimate. It is explained that this kind of marriage would be just like what a bo-et does. A bo-et is an animal with a rabbit-like shape, which, they say, eats its own droppings and has intercourse with itself. Thus marriage must take place outside the extended family and is essentially thought of as depriving the family of a daughter. Ayta marriages, therefors, do not produce a priori alliances or friendly affinal ties. During the process of premarital negotiations or even after marriage, there is the possibility that at any moment the girl's family will get angry with the boy's family because of, for example, an improper approach to a girl, lack of sincerity on the part of the boy's side at the negotiation of bandi and marriage arrangement, delay of bandi payments, and so on. In such cases, relations between the two families easily get tense.

Aytas have neither a formal institution of justice nor a chief with compelling force. When serious problems occur between familise, they must be solved through direct negotiations, although a " village captain " is sometimes asked to attend the meeting to give advice. Usually Aytas maintain peace and order by staying away from each other when distrust and hostility exist between people or groups. Avoidance is the most efficient way to prevent a conflict from escalating into a serious problem.

Any attempt at marriage compels two families into inevitable contacts, sometimes confrontations. Without kinship ties, feelings of goodwill are not guaranteed and the relations between the families are often tense and conflict ridden. In particular, elopement produces unavoidable interaction and negotiation between two families which in many cases are leading their everyday lives in different social worlds with rare contacts with each other. By forcing the two families to confront each other in order to settle the case, elopement cannot but disclose the crack between the two social worlds. The further the socio-psychological distance between the two families is, the deeper and wider the crack becomes. If they do not have any kinship or affinal relations which directly or indirectly connect them to each other, the crack might deepen and widen in the process of negotiation and payments of bandi, and might cause the end of marriage attempts.

Parents, therefore, try to arrange a marriage through their own networks which will guarantee goodwill and favor at the negotiation of bandi and in case of delay of its delivery. Children, on the other hand, want to marry by their own will and preference. A young man, especially, does not hesitate to court and propose marriage, even to a girl living socially or geographically outside the already established social circle within which marriage is usually arranged by parents.*1 If he is not allowed to marry, he might persuade her to elope. Elopement evokes anger among the girl's family, who might then demand too big amount of bandi for the boy's family to accept. Once accepted, actual payments of bandi are often delayed and this might cause further anger among the girl's family. Big amounts of bandi, which are usually required by a girl's family after an elopement attempt, often work to separate a couple unless it is delivered according to the agreed upon conditions. Thus bandi works as a conservative institution to prevent all attempts at elopement from becoming successful and to maintain the importance of arranged marriages. On the other hand, if the boy's family can afford to deliver some or most of the required bandi and succeeds in reconcilling the anger of the girl's family by delivering it, even though it may not be fully paid, the couple might proceed to a stable marriage. In this aspect bandi can be an institution that initiates and promotes the reorganization of social groupings through the formation of new relations outside of the already established social circle.

At the first attempt of marriage between two extended families who live in different villages with no kinship or affinal ties nor friendly relations, the girl's side easily gets angry with the boy's side unless the latter approaches modestly and carefully. Even though marriage is not initiated by elopement, the boy's direct courtship to the girl often causes her parents/relatives to be angry. As there is no relationship of goodwill and confidence between the two families, latent distrust and hostility might explode into rage in the girl's family due to any kind of misbehavior on the boy's side. Marriage between non-related families living independently in respective social worlds is nothing but an explicit attempt to deprive a family of a daugher. Therefore at such marriages, the boy's side usually must prepare a big amount of bandi in order to appease hostility, anger and deprivation on the girl's side. Payments of bandi could convert antagonistic relations into friendly ones and establish smooth interactions by filling in a moat lying between the two social worlds of the boy's and girl's extended families.

Thus, only passion and the actual actions of the youth who travels far to meet an attractive girl could initiate and establish new relations, through transactions of bandi and marriage bonds, between previously non-related families in different areas. The new channels of communication formed by this kind of marriage could even expand outside the limits of the everyday-life world of the respective parents and might initiate the reshuffling of group boundaries.*2 Once the affinal relations become intimate and reliable, another marriage might take place between them, or an extended family might even move to a village of affines to seek better living conditions.

In a society without any exogamous units beyond the extended family, marriages arranged by parents occur within the already established circle and thus strengthen the existing social framework. In other words such marriages result in a tendency towards involution or shrinkage of the social world. Marriage attempts initiated by elopement or by the youth's will, on the other hand, introduce the possibility of breaking the shell of the existing social circle and initiating reorganization by introducing outside relations.*3

I do not intend to raise an objection to Levi-Strauss (1969), who found the prohibition of incest and exchange of woman as the base of social formation. What I am trying to emphasize is the following: Aytas do not

willingly follow the rule of exogamy, i.e. the fundamental order of culture;*4 in other words, every attempt at marriage involves the possibility that it might bring about confrontations between two families, and then the rupture of relations; on the way to a stable marriage which leads to alliance between two extended families, there exists a process of either explicit or implicit instability in the social world caused by the marriage attempt itself, and then restoration of stability by payments of bandi; the various items payed as bandi do not only psychologically appease the anger and sense of deprivation of the girl's family, but cosmologically relieve the tension and friction between the two extended families, and finally restore peace and order in a new dimension; payments of bandi do not locate mating in a universe of relations as Comaroff concludes (1980; 37), but rather, restore order and stability within the universe of relations which is stirred by the marriage attempt; hence in the dynamics which marriage in the Ayta society potentially involves, elopement could create new social ties of affinity and rearrangement of social relations through the process of appeasement and pacification with bandi payments; in this context elopement could be the first step to reorganization of social worlds and sometimes lead to further social change.*5

*1 The elementary school built in Kakilingan provides youths with good chances to know each other and to have love affairs.

*2 Needless to say, acquisition of Pan-Pinatubo-Aytas consciousness and formation of a meta-community covering the Pinatubo area enabled the people to travel freely and safely around the whole area, which became the grounding for reorganization of the society. The following are some of the factors which prompted the emergence of such grounding. In 1894, "authorities of San Marcelino induced a Negrito head man named Layos to come down to the town, - - made him presents, and feasted him for several days. Then they presented him with a gaudy sash and named him Capitan General del Monte. He was given charge of all the Negritos in the district and charged to keep them under control. - - In the same year (1894), all Negritos in Botolan district who would come down from the mountains were fed for five or six months in hope that they would settle down and remain" (Reed, 1904;70-71). In the beginning of this century, Clark Air Base, then known as Fort Stotsenburg, was built at the eastern foot of Mt. Pinatubo, and Fort

Sanchez was built near the summit of Mt. Pinatubo in the mid-1920s. Since the very early days the base has taken conciliatory measures towards the Aytas by giving privileges such as periodic distribution of rations, free entrance and scavenging in the base, as well as employment opportunities (Gaabucayan, 1978;118-136,189-194). Around 1920 an agricultural school was built in Villar on the western slope of Mt. Pinatubo for Ayta children (Pascasio, 1920;7-8, Stewart;101). During world war II, they took refuge in the deep mountains and had close contact each other. In a critical situation, forced with starvation, they developed the same interests and identity against the Japanese soldiers, who fled into the pinatubo area at the end of the war.

*3 Peterson, who did field work among the Agtas in Palanan in Eastern Luzon, also points out the importance of marriage with outside dwellers among three different territories. According to her, territorial exogamy provides "flexibility in terms of alliance offering access to diverse resources necessary to survival on a long-term basis." (1978;63) To meet seasonal fluctuations of food supply, catastorophic occurrences such as typhoons, or other events which might affect food supply over longer periods of time, extraterritorial exploitation of resources is indispensable. This is why Agta parents desire a unions with other terrtories (ibid;56).

*4 An attempt at marriage might provoke a girl's father's anger, even among the Prum who practice prescribed marriage with the "mother's brother's daughter," and a gift is delivered to the girl's father at the proposal of marriage, in order to appease his potential anger. Needham states that "a man wishing to marry his son to a certain girl takes a present of rice beer to the girl's father, begging him not to be "angry" - - "(1962;93). He only sees the status difference between the wife-taker and the wife-giver expressed in the transfer of rice beer, but does not explain anything about the "anger".

*5 Although I developed the above stated perspective based mainly on my own materials and considerations, I cannot claim to be the first one to recognize deprivation in marriage and appeaing power in bridewealth. Radcliffe-Brown gave a similar explanation of marriage and bridewealth in African societies (1950;49-50).

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